

The ‘execution of the image’

Véronique Voruz

First of all, I want to express my delight at being here today to open this year’s programme at ICLO. It is a great honour to have been invited to do so, and a real pleasure to work once more with old friends and colleagues, and to meet newcomers, in what is the year of ICLO’s 15th anniversary – 15 years dedicated to building a community of work, of reflection, of research, and indeed, of friendship. Thank you to all of you who give so much of your energy to make this community exist, and thank you very much to the Bureau, to Caroline, Sheila, Claire and Florencia for entrusting me with the task of speaking to the theme of the Congress of the NLS – as you know, it will be held here in Dublin in May 2024.

I had, to guide my intervention today, ICLO’s very precise axis of work for the year, and Daniel Roy’s somewhat condensed presentation of the theme of the Congress, “The Clinic of the Gaze”. I will try to speak to their themes, and to pose some questions in the process.

Learning from Analysand Speech¹

When I was preparing for this event during the week – I find the theme very challenging and am not coming to you with answers but with reflections inspired by analysands’ speech – an analysand, someone who has just started an FtoM transition process after two years of analysis, employed the expression I am using as a title today, *the execution of the image*. They used it to specify their experience of having to conform to the signifier of her assigned gender: having to *execute* [perform] the image of a woman. In their experience, there is no longer any freedom in how to represent oneself with the signifier ‘woman’, for its significations have been saturated with a variety of extremely codified images that suture the gap between a signifier and its possible significations. Hence their choice in *executing* [doing away with] the image of a woman that they experienced as an *imperative determination*, rather than as a *representation* allowing for a sliding along the signifying chain [S]. For this particular subject, the resultant masculinisation of her image is less important than the act of refusing to ‘be essentialised’ as a ‘girl/woman’ by reason of her feminine parts.

At the heart of this refusal of a gendered assignation, lies a more fundamental rejection: a refusal of the *ordering* power of language, in both senses of the word ‘ordering’. This refusal is a protestation against symbolic violence, a violence in the name of which all manners of segregation have been perpetrated since time immemorial. Today, language is under suspicion, both its xenopathic effects and its effects of domination out in the open after half a century or more of what I’ll loosely call *deconstruction*: a series of intellectual and militant movements that undermined the previous world order by destabilising language from within, turning language against itself to lay its hegemonies to waste. This is the context in which, to echo the question posed in ICLO’s programme for the year, we can ask ourselves what will hold RSI if not a master-signifier.

Curated Images

As well as resonating with worldwide protestations against the Other’s power of nomination, my analysand is also capturing something of the predicament of speaking beings in a century inundated both with names for every little quirk of behaviour, and flooded with images. Leaving aside the question of the ‘eye of language’ for now, let us focus on images. Most of the population under a certain age

¹ The symptom is an « Irruption of a truth in the fault of a knowledge », Laurent É. In Laurent É. and Miller J.-A., « L’Orientation lacanienne. L’autre qui n’existe pas et ses comités d’éthique », 5 March 1997, unpublished.

constantly oscillates between *voyeuristic* and *exhibitionist* positions on social media. In the exhibitionist position, subjects produce themselves as *images* and seek to capture a gaze – or catch an eye? – that would validate their existence; in the voyeuristic position, those that occupy the position of the gaze pass judgement on the images curated for universal consumption. But does the voyeur/exhibitionist pair still hold the weight that it used to, as paradigmatic of perversion? Does it still produce the gaze as a separable object, extracted from the visual field? We rather have invisible watchers consuming the images that those on display turn themselves into – the two positions being interchangeable for some. At one end of the spectrum, there are those that cannot represent themselves with a solid enough image to bear the ineluctable *comparison* that ‘organises’ the imaginary register [a-a’] – as we will see with Amanda’s case this afternoon – ; at the other, those that live and die by the number of followers registering their existence: invisibility/hypervisibility. Two sides of the same coin?

What gives a body its consistency?

Let us introduce some theoretical markers to situate the clinical consequences of this prevalence of images: as a first point, we can recall that in his commentary on *Seminar X*, Miller noted that the scopic field was the most propitious to precluding anxiety. Why? Because the perceptual world of the subject is modelled on the “specular body, that of the mirror stage, as a whole, apprehended as a form, a good form, and even, the best of all forms, since, if we are to believe in its construction, for the speaking being it imposes itself to the perceptual world of his objects.”² So the form, *the good form*, operates what Lacan would later call a ‘scopic regulation of the drive’ (*Seminar XX*). Or again, in *Seminar XI*, human reality is draped over the world in the guise of Euclidian – or three-dimensional – space, with form taking on a “regulatory function” (*Sem. XI* p. 68 fr.ed.). So if it is the case that our world is obsessed with images, why does it also generate so much anxiety? Shouldn’t these images provide us with ontological security?

It would be forgetting that the mirror stage only fully functions, in Lacan’s construction, because of the *unary trait* that extracts (and therefore *precipitates*) the image of the subject’s body from the chaos that the imaginary is; it makes of the image an “imaginary signifier”³ or an *element* of the imaginary (this is why Daniel Roy’s concluding orientation speaks of the necessity, in our practice, of being attentive to these unary traits in adolescents). Lacan develops what we call *symbolic identification* in his *Seminar IX on Identification*, extracting identification from the dimension of sameness that operates in the imaginary register, for it leads to mirroring, rivalry, aggressivity etc. – the other always being in my place, as we see in many clinical pictures. Identification with a unary trait introduces the differential structure of the symbolic into the imaginary register and allows a subject to find a place by virtue of the *mark* that he has identified with. It leads us to deduce that in the end, for psychoanalysis, there cannot be an image, in the sense of a *discrete* element, without it being significantised: it is the signifier that produces *de l’Un* – something of the One.

By contrast to an image functioning as One, having acquired “a unitary value” [*IR*], the proliferation of pictures, selfies etc. accentuates a sense of inconsistency. As Barthes was already pointing out in his landmark essay on photography, *Camera Lucida*, photographic portraits allowed for the disassembling of the face: mother’s nose, father’s eyes, granny’s chin etc, would jump out of the portrait while in the living face, these traits would be unified by the person’s *air*, their *soul*. According to the Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han,⁴ the passage to *digital* photography further exacerbated the *de-realising*, *virtualising* effect of the self-image: it converts the light emanating from the photographed object into data, analogous in nature to the mass of *information* available today at the touch of a finger, *disposable* and without the ability to evoke a *beyond of the image* (as the *punctum* did, for Barthes: *ce qui dans*

² Miller J.-A., « Introduction à la lecture du Séminaire L’Angoisse », *La Cause freudienne* n° 59, pp. 85-86.

³ Miller J.-A., « L’image reine », *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁴ Byung-Chul Han, *La fin des choses : Bouversements du monde de la vie*, Actes Sud, 2022, p. 50.

une image nous regarde). In the argentic process, it was the rays of light emanating from a person, retained in little silver grains, that produced the image: the process remained mysterious, magical. But, for Han, “digital photography is *not an emanation, but an elimination of the referent*. It has no intense, intimate bond with the object... *Vision itself is delegated* to the camera [you can see this at beauty spots, most people don’t watch and will look at their pictures later] ...photography becomes self-referential. Artificial intelligence generates a new reality, an extended reality which does not exist, a hyperreality without correspondence to reality, to the real referent.”

The fragmented, virtualised nature of the body itself is also exponentially accentuated by the multiplication of signifiers that take the form of the body apart: neurotransmitters, meridians, chakras, organs, hormones, gametes, stem cells, genes, etc, each with their dedicated medical or paramedical speciality, their own set of beliefs, their own mythology... Foucault already pointed out the sadistic component of the epistemic drive, of the clinical gaze, of the ‘absolute eye of language’ that suffers no opacity, that takes the body apart to satisfy its curiosity. But this is what the Miller quote placed as epigraph to your programme also points to, more in the register of subjective effects: “The symbolic will print semantic representations onto the imaginary body, which the speaking body then weaves and unweaves.”⁵ Dispersed between plethoric semantic representations and infinite numbers of pictures – doctored or not – , the body struggles to acquire an image in the sense of an “element of the imaginary” – one that would provide the subject with a consistency as One.

Overexposure

In the context of relentless self-publication, the very notion of privacy is defunct. It has given way to a new series of rights: the right to be visible, the right to see it all, the right to transparency. I am entitled to the intimate details of the lives of others, they concern me: *ils me regardent*. Everything is pre-seen, pre-rated, pre-ranked, pre-scribed: we travel the world, its beauty spots and its museums not to be surprised by what we encounter but to recognise what we already saw, and to show others that we, too, have seen *all that there is to see*. Much in the manner of Borges’ College of Cartographers⁶ that aspired to produce a map the same size as the territory it represented, the visual field is devouring the world: there are satellites that can read your newspaper, drones filming the most secluded places, CCTV in every public space, cameras in every device etc. **It is the end of mystery**. The eye, relayed by technology, misses nothing, and the *hole of the gaze* [IR] is stuffed with it.

As always, the dystopian anticipation series *Black Mirror*, in its 2014 episode *White Christmas*, captures something of our epoch. This particular episode stages our dependency on, or even addiction to, the field of the visible: in this episode, people have ‘Z-eyes’ implanted, which upload the user’s vision and hearing for others to watch and comment upon. I won’t narrate the episode, but it also stages a form of punishment for the Z-eyers that have infringed social rules: they are blocked both from seeing others and be seen by others. All other humans are perceptible only as blurry shapes and muffled voices; the offender himself become invisible as anything other than a ‘blot on the landscape’ – a radicalised version of ‘ghosting’ (for indeed, how to make anything disappear in a world without shade, without an *elsewhere?*).

Expunged from the visible, does one still exist?

⁵ Miller J.-A., “The Unconscious and the Speaking Body”, online [here](#).

⁶ .. In that Empire, the Art of Cartography reached such perfection that the map of one Province alone took up the whole of a City, and the map of the empire, the whole of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps did not satisfy and the Colleges of Cartographers set up a Map of the Empire which had the size of the Empire itself and coincided with it point by point. Less Addicted to the Study of Cartography, Succeeding Generations understood that this Widespread Map was Useless and not without Impiety they abandoned it to the Inclemencies of the Sun and of the Winters. In the deserts of the West some mangled Ruins of the Maps lasted on, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in the whole Country there are no other relics of the Disciplines of Geography. Suarez Miranda, in Borges J.L., *Dreamtigers*, New York: Dutton & Co. 1963.

All the World's a Stage

For the 'generation of extreme zapping', to quote the words of another analysand, one's existence depends upon one's visibility on the virtual stage of social media, where all and sundry *compete* for attention and relentlessly *compare* one another. We feed ourselves as curated images to an invisible audience passing judgement. This is an *instantaneous* process, with no *duration*: the gaze of the watcher fleets from one attraction to the next, one's existence is suspended to the audience's attention span. Writing in 1979, Barthes had already foreseen the consequences of the advent of photography on the experience of *time*: « *La Photographie est un témoignage sûr, mais fugace ; en sorte que tout, aujourd'hui, prépare notre espèce à cette impuissance : ne pouvoir plus, bientôt, concevoir, affectivement ou symboliquement, la durée.* »⁷ His prediction has come to pass: we now live in a civilisation of the instant, without there being the "time for understanding" necessary to the process of subjectivation. I won't develop the aspect of time here, although it is fundamental, simply to say that *logical time is the time of the unconscious*, and that without it, there is no longer *an unconscious that interprets*. It's no wonder that the symptomatology named by the labels ADHD and ASD have come to the fore as responses to overstimulation, devoid of any interpretation.

Shakespeare's famous line, *All the world's a stage*, still fits the TikTok generation, but the stage is no longer there where the Other scene plays itself out : the virtual stage is a visual, informational field in which the subject desperately seeks to catch the eye of an invisible other: I exist! I matter! I am different! Unique! Here I think of the work of art of another analysand who, after the breakup of his relationship, filmed himself for hours covering an entire wall with his minute writing of the same two lines: *I am alive I am online I am alive I am online I am alive I am online....* – a Story on Instagram, to not disappear into the void.

I will now try to further articulate these reflections, drawn from my practice, with the theme of ICLO for this year of work, and with the theme of the NLS Congress to be held in Dublin in May 2024, "The Clinic of the Gaze".

Variations on the theme: LOOK NORMAL ! Psychoanalysis < > Depathologisation

What becomes of the clinical field in our epoch? Though psychiatric enquiry was once premised upon the notion of pathology, a partition between the normal and the sick, we know that with DSM-psychiatry the difference between the normal and the pathological is now not one of *structure* but one of *threshold* [*i.e.* the same clinical picture will be normal if the symptomatology is relatively innocuous and pathological if the subject's life is unduly disrupted by the same symptomatology].

The binary normal/pathological has a long and chequered history whose meandering significations we find genealogised and problematised in Foucault's work, inspired in this pursuit by his mentor Georges Canguilhem, and continued by generations of critical theorists. The insane, vagrants, criminals, racialised others, hysterical women, delinquents, idiots, perverts have fascinated the human sciences since life became a matter for politics. Given its genocidal proclivities, the 20th century was somewhat obsessed with the question of the norm and its deviants: were the *abnormal* mere effects of discourses of power-knowledge which were producing them as their objects – the madman, a mere performance for the asylum, the delinquent, a necessary figure for the growth of capital? Were they a side-effect of the new dominance of the norm from the end of the 19th century onwards, with *abnormal* naming those that failed to fall within the average of a Gauss curve? Or again, were they the non-governable residues of any human institution, ordered through practices of segregation in distinct categories

⁷ At 146.

requiring tailored government? These interpretations vied for the status of truth for much of the past century.

Today, it's impossible to tell whether it is the normal that has absorbed the pathological, or the other way round. On the one hand, we find a demand that all differences, including neurodivergence, be respected, depathologized, afforded equal treatment – this position is enshrined in the UNCRPD, an international instrument which states that disability is a consequence of being discriminated against rather than a condition inherent to a person. On the other, DSM-psychiatry has provided the language through which a multitude of people seek to apprehend something of the malaise they experience in their lived experience of having a body. ADHD and ASD top the charts, providing a medical-like explanation for agitation, lack of focus, disconnection etc., but many other words such as dissociation, anxiety, bipolarity, OCD etc are also frequently used as self-diagnoses.

What is the connection between the two parts of ICLO's title? Look normal! is presented in the form of a social imperative: to fit the expected image of a normal life, a programme that substitutes for the absence of the compass of desire? To hide's one's sense of being weird with the right image? To use one's image as a disguise for one's abnormality? Perhaps Florencia, who wrote the argument, can say a bit more about this point. In any case, it points to an idea that treatment of what does not work is expected to take place in the *register of the visible*. Your programme of research for this year will elicit the specificity of a psychoanalytic response which sidesteps ideology and orients itself on *what is said* within the analytic dispositif. The quote from Miller which opens ICLO's argument – "You wonder how someone who has done an analysis can still imagine themselves to be normal" – is a resounding reminder of the disharmony inherent to the human condition – there is no normalising human desire.

I will now try to say a few things on the relation between the gaze and the scopic field, to continue trying to circumscribe the present moment.

The Imaginary Reversibility of Perception

In a lesson of the course *Silet*, published in French under the title of "D'un regard, l'étrangeté", Miller opposed perception (the scopic field, thus) to the gaze in a manner which I found very helpful. Starting from a precise reading of Merleau-Ponty's works, he shows that for the phenomenologist, there is a process of ontological adaptation between *perceptum* and *percipiens*, a co-belonging of the world and being. Miller summarises this position with the term of imaginary reversibility (the relation a-a'), to contrast it with that Lacan introduces. I quote, in my own translation: "The object *a*, the barred subject produce a hole in relation to this imaginary reversibility. .. Lacan .. always introduces, with object *a*, a dissymmetry which objects to reversibility and, with the barred subject, an imbalance, a tear – dissymmetry and imbalance always call for the function of a veil that conceals." (*RE*, 45) for Lacan, the accent is not on harmony but on "dissonance, anxiety ... culpability, panic, paroxysm." For Merleau-Ponty, the subjective experience reaches for homeostasis, while Lacan focuses on what defies it. To summarise this point, we can say that there are two radically opposed versions of the human experience here: one presumes an objective reality knowable through sense perception, the other insists on the psychical reality of the Other scene, which can be glimpsed when there is *disharmony* (Miller then goes on to read Freud's *Acropolis* text which seeks to account precisely for such a disharmony, something in excess).

To write the opposition in Lacanian mathemes, the first insists that reality takes place in the register of a-a', giving no place to the function of the Other, whereas the other insists that a subject's life plays itself out in the register of \$, *a*: two effects of the function of A on the speaking being: \$ notes a subject divided by the Other of language, *a* is an elusive object articulated to the body, cause of desire. Or again, an evanescent subject, defined as what is represented by a signifier for another [lack-of-being,

with desire becoming the metonymy of the want-to-be], and a non-specularisable object constructed in *Seminar X* in the successive registers of I, S, R. These two functions, $\$$ and a , foreground psychological reality against the illusion of a shared, common, objective reality, and an analysis seeks to engage these two functions of the subject, leaving the register $a-a'$ aside as far as is possible. Interestingly, in this text, Miller points out with his customary rigour that “homeostasis is verified in perception”.⁸ We can paraphrase this somewhat pithy statement as follows: there can only be perception, a perceptual reality, on condition that there is homeostasis (such is the lesson of Freud’s *Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis*: the gaze of Freud’s father returns to prohibit the sons’ excessive enjoyment of a beautiful landscape⁹). Perceptual reality is therefore a veil that conceals the subject’s real stakes in the registers of the drive, desire, the fantasy.

What is object a and why is the gaze paradigmatic of it?

What is the gaze? Daniel Roy gives us a few concise examples of its manifestations in clinical practice: I(A), the point from which I can see myself as Vx , the fantasy, in which the subject is the gaze that stages and enjoys the ‘phrase-image’ of the elective scenario, the gaze of the Other called to witness the PPS, the delocalised, persecutory gaze which sees the subject from everywhere, the gaze that holds up and tears down $i(a)$... It is no surprise that its relations to the field of perception, to images and to the fantasy are easily misconstrued, as the gaze can readily be assimilated to the scopical drive. But even in the few examples that Roy provides, we see that the gaze takes on functions related not to *perceptual* reality but to *psychical* reality: call to the function of A, fixation of the barred subject, delocalised self-observation, function of judgement...

In a lesson of his course *Les divins détails*, published in French under the title “L’objet jouissance”, Miller takes issue with a misunderstanding of object a that besets psychoanalysis: object a is not its semblants: it is not the faeces, the breast, the phallus, the eye, the voice, though these objects are amenable to saturate the topological hole that object a properly inscribes in the subjective structure. What, then, is object a ? Miller builds on Freud’s very precise formulation of the drive in *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes*, where Freud distinguishes the external aim of the drive (the object that it seeks to satisfy itself) and its internal aim (the change in the body experienced as satisfaction). Having restated this well-known formulation of Freud’s, Miller deduces a formulation of object a which is congruent with the Freudian text: “The object a is nothing other, it seems to me, than the satisfaction of the drive as an object” (*OJ*, 101). He further elucidates: “that is to say, not what is sought after by the drive as object in the outside world, what the drive requires from this outside world, but precisely *what occurs*, Freud indicates, *on the path that goes from the source of the drive to its aim*.” To put it another way, object a as satisfaction is produced by the trajectory of the drive as surplus enjoyment, the object being circumscribed by the trajectory of the drive being indifferent: the quest is for surplus-enjoyment.

The gaze is the most elusive of all the forms supposed to object a because it cannot be seen. This was illustrated perfectly clearly by Miller in his early text on Bentham’s Panopticon: the central tower of the architectural dispositif contains the invisible gaze of the prison guard; its effects are felt on the inmates whether the tower is occupied or not because *the gaze is a function pertaining not to objective reality but to psychical reality*. It is precisely by reason of its invisibility that the gaze is paradigmatic of object a , as it is much harder to mistake it for its semblants. As Daniel Roy put it in his argument, by placing his patients on the couch, Freud did away with the duality of the imaginary relation $a-a'$. In so doing, he sought to make $\$$ speak through the device of free association and learn of the analysand what it was that regarded them: *ce qui les regarde*.

⁸ Miller J.-A., « L’image reine » (trans. TLR 5), *La Cause du désir* n° 94 : 2016, p. 25.

⁹ Miller J.-A., « D’un regard, l’étrangeté », *La Cause du désir* n° 102 : 2019.

How do we accord the clinical manifestations/irruptions of the gaze with the definition of object *a* as a hole, “a structural elision” [IR, 28]? Concluding his text on the sovereign image with a comment on the end of analysis, Miller says: “As a hole, object *a* can be equivalent to the frame, the window, opposed to the mirror. Object *a* doesn’t let itself be captured, especially in the mirror... it rather is the window that we ourselves constitute, in opening our eyes. It is not a substantial object that is involved, but rather a pure formula.” It follows that the trajectory of an analysis will lead to the fall of object *a*, which “should not be conceived as a renunciation to a substantial having. It is not a question of renunciation, nor of resignation. The pass as fall of the object *a* concerns being, and what you are as window onto the real. The pass means something like seeing the window and knowing oneself as subject of the drive, that is, what you enjoy by circling around it in a perpetual failure.” In this sense, an analysis taken to its end will reveal the hole of the gaze and allow the subject to see in which way his/her jouissance was captured in the ‘story’ of their life.

Returning to today’s context, I will simply make one more reference to Barthes, and one comment on the psychoanalytic orientation before concluding for this morning.

Becoming-image

La jouissance passe par l’image : voilà la grande mutation.¹⁰

[Jouissance goes by way of the image: such is the great mutation]

Roland Barthes, 1979

I now briefly return to the quote from Roland Barthes that I used in my argument: “jouissance goes by way of the image: such is the great mutation.” I’ll rapidly develop what Barthes is saying here. Having noted, at the beginning of his book on photography, that being photographed required of the subject that he turn himself into an image, at the end of the book he takes the example of the US where everything is transformed into images: I will reproduce his example here: “Extreme example: if you were to go to a porn club in New York, you would not encounter vice, but merely its living portraits ... it seems that the anonymous individual (in no way an actor) who is chained and whipped there only conceives of his pleasure if this pleasure converges with the stereotypical (worn out) image of the sadomasochist: *jouissance goes by way of the image*, such is the great mutation.” This reminded me of what one analysand once told me: she could only reach orgasm if, during the sexual act, she could coincide with her ideal image. Barthes continues: “Generalised, the image completely de-realises the human world of conflicts and desires under the pretence of illustrating it... it is as if the image, universalising itself, was producing a world without differences (indifferent).”

It seems to me that the mediation of desire by the becoming image of the self entraps the subject in the visible register, structured by *a-a’*. Fantasies are no longer secret imaginings but actualised practices that call for the subject to mediate his jouissance through his image.

An Orientation

Faced with this visual overload, what orientation can psychoanalysis provide? I relay here a long quote by Miller, for I find it very useful:...*the analytic operation, in its way of proceeding, seems adequate to undoing what James Joyce in Ulysses calls ‘the ineluctable modality of the visible’¹¹.... In truth, in a psychoanalysis there is nothing to see and everything to say. Even if carried out face to face, it is always an invitation for the subject to abstract himself from the ineluctable modality of the visible and renounce the image in favour of the signifier.* Miller J.-A., « L’image reine », LCD n° 94 p. 20/TLR 5.

In other words, where possible an analysis needs to direct a subject back to the signifiers that have marked them and away from the visible, a register in which there is no solution other than to normalize

¹⁰ Barthes R., *La chambre claire : note sur la photographie*, Gallimard, Le Seuil : 1980, p. 182.

¹¹ Joyce, J., *Ulysses*, Dover Publications, New York, p. 37.

the pathological, an impossible feat. As the analysis I opened the paper with told me, as soon as what I ask for [e.g. *they, trans...*] will be recognized as the norm, it will no longer serve the function I require it to, which is to protest against the normalizing power of language. Against the recognition of particularities, psychoanalysis bets on the subject facing up to the exigencies of the drive and accommodating his weirdness to the world.

Conclusion : *Quel est ce contemporain qui nous regarde?*¹²

In his presentation of this year's programme at the theatre he directs in Paris, Franco—Lebanese playwright Wadji Mouawad shares a few of his post-pandemic reflections, noting that people seem increasingly crushed by the weight of the world, its relentless news cycles of climatic catastrophes, wars, famine, drowning migrants: "slave to the incommensurable weight of the world", turning to "consummation as consolation for an incurable ill". He then asks the question: *Quel est ce contemporain qui nous regarde ?*

His formulation made me think of the oddity of the gaze that Lacan tries to point to with his well-known anecdote of the sardine can adrift at sea: Lacan as a young man had gone fishing with proper fishermen, childhood playmates whose lives had taken on drastically different courses to his. This was the context: Lacan was a young bourgeois intellectual sharing a day's work with men whose rough lives ended on average at 30. As such, he was very much a *stain* in the picture, the odd one out. A fisherman Lacan calls Petit-Jean in *Sem. X* and Petit-Louis in *Sem. XVI* pointed to something floating on the surface of the waves. It was a sardine can. Floating there in the sun, it was "a witness to the canning industry." The sardine can, the intruder of industry spoiling nature, mirrors Lacan, the bourgeois intruder in the world of working men. Hailing Lacan, Petit-Jean said, "You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!" (p. 89 ed.fr). The can is in the place of the gaze as **blind spot** in the picture: from where I am being seen, it doesn't see me: I am elided as subject. The French expression "ça me regarde" is adequate to translating the non-representability of the gaze ("the gaze is properly speaking what is "without image", JAM *IR* 22), that which eludes, precisely, the field of representation, and disturbs the scopic reality that veils the libidinal world of the subject.

To return to Mouawad's question, what is "the contemporary that regards me", can we not say that we are, to an extent, in the position of the tin can, the human species feeling increasingly like a stain in the universe, a spoiler of nature, a destroyer of worlds? Recall the other quote which I used for my abstract: **Au regard s'attache toujours un affect de reproche.**¹³ [An affect of reproach always comes with the gaze].

¹² Mouawad W., "Anatomie de l'épreuve", in *Almanach 2023-24 de La Colline*, p. 10.

¹³ Miller J.-A., "D'un regard, l'étrangeté", *La Cause du désir* n° 102 : 2019, p. 45.