"What contribution can Freudian psychoanalysis make to the knowledge of the cinematic signifier?" – that was the question-dream I posed (the scientific imaginary wishing to be symbolised), and it seems to me that I have now more or less unwound it; unwound but no more; I have not given it an answer. I have simply paid attention to what it was I wished to say (one never knows this until one has written it down), I have only questioned my question: this unanswered character is one that has to be deliberately accepted, it is constitutive of any epistemological approach.

Since I have wished to mark the places (as empty boxes some of which are beginning to fill without waiting for me, and so much the better), the places of different directions of work, and particularly of the last, the psychoanalytic exploration of the signifier, which concerns me especially, I must now begin to inscribe something in this last box; must take further, and more plainly in the direction of the unconscious, the analysis of the investigator’s desire that makes me write. And to start with this certainly means asking a new question: among the specific features of the cinematic signifier that distinguish the cinema from literature, painting, etc., which ones by nature call most directly on the type of knowledge that psychoanalysis alone can provide?

III.1 Perception, imaginary
The cinema’s signifier is perceptual (visual and auditory). So is that of literature, since the written chain has to be read, but it involves a more restricted perceptual register: only graphemes, writing. So too are those of painting, sculpture, architecture, photography, but still within limits, and different ones; absence of auditory perception, absence in the visual itself of certain important dimensions such as time and movement (obviously there is the time of the look, but the object looked at is not inscribed in a precise and ordered time sequence forced on the spectator from outside). Music’s signifier is perceptual as well, but, like the others, less extensive than that of the cinema: here it is vision which is absent, and even in the auditory, extended speech (except in song). What first strikes one then is that the cinema is more perceptual, if the phrase is allowable, than many other means of expression; it mobilises a larger number of the axes of perception. (That is why the cinema has sometimes been presented as a ‘synthesis of all the arts’; which does not mean very much, but considering the quantititative tally of the registers of perception, it is true that the cinema ‘englobes’ in itself the signifiers of other arts: it can present pictures to us, make us hear music, it is made of photographs, etc.)

Nevertheless, this as it were numerical ‘superiority’ disappears
if the cinema is compared with the theatre, the opera and other spectacles of the same type. The latter too involve sight and hearing simultaneously, linguistic audition and non-linguistic audition, movement, real temporal progression. Their difference from the cinema lies elsewhere: they do not consist of images, the perceptions they offer to the eye and the ear are inscribed in a true space (not a photographed one), the same one as that occupied by the public during the performance; everything the audience hear and see is actively produced in their presence, by human beings or props which are themselves present. This is not the problem of fiction but that of the definitional characteristics of the signifier: whether or no the theatrical play mimes a fable, its action, if need be mimetic, is still managed by real persons evolving in real time and space, on the same stage or 'scene' as the public. The 'other scene', which is precisely not so called, is the cinematic screen (closer to fantasy from the outset): what unfolds there may, as before, be more or less fictional, but the unfolding itself is fictive: the actor, the 'décor', the words one hears are all absent, everything is recorded (as a memory trace which is immediately so, without having been something else before), and this is still true if what is recorded is not a 'story' and does not aim for the fictional illusion proper. For it is the signifier itself, and as a whole, that is recorded, that is absence: a little rolled up perforated strip which 'contains' vast landscapes, fixed battles, the melting of the ice on the River Neva, and whole life-times, and yet can be enclosed in the familiar round metal tin, of modest dimensions, clear proof that it does not 'really' contain all that.

At the theatre, Sarah Bernhardt may tell me she is Phèdre or, if the play were from another period and rejected the figurative regime, she might say, as in a type of modern theatre, that she is Sarah Bernhardt. But at any rate, I should see Sarah Bernhardt. At the cinema, she could make the same two kinds of speeches too, but it would be her shadow that would be offering them to me (or she would be offering them in her own absence). Every film is a fiction film.

What is at issue is not just the actor. Today there are a theatre and a cinema without actors, or in which they have at least ceased to take on the full and exclusive function which characterises them in classical spectacles. But what is true of Sarah Bernhardt is just as true of an object, a prop, a chair for example. On the theatre stage, this chair may, as in Chekhov, pretend to be the chair in which the melancholy Russian nobleman sits every evening; on the contrary (in Ionesco), it can explain to me that it is a theatre chair. But in the end it is a chair. In the cinema, it will have to choose between a similar two attitudes (and many other intermediate or more tricky ones), but it will not be there when the spectators see it, when they have to recognise the choice; it will have delegated its reflection to them.
Characteristic of the cinema is not the imaginary that it may happen to represent, it is the imaginary that it is from the start, the imaginary that constitutes it as a signifier (the two are not unrelated; it is so apt to represent it because it is it; however, it is still it when it no longer represents it). The (possible) reduplication inaugurating the intention of fiction is preceded in the cinema by a first reduplication, always-already achieved, which inaugurates the signifier. The imaginary, by definition, combines within it a certain presence and a certain absence. In the cinema it is not just the fictional signified, if there is one, that is thus made present in the mode of absence, it is from the outset the signifier.

Thus the cinema, 'more perceptual' than certain arts according to the list of its sensory registers, is also 'less perceptual' than others once the status of these perceptions is envisaged rather than their number or diversity: for its perceptions are all in a sense 'false'. Or rather, the activity of perception in it is real (the cinema is not a fantasy), but the perceived is not really the object, it is its shade, its phantom, its double, its replica in a new kind of mirror. – It will be said that literature, after all, is itself only made of replicas (written words, presenting absent objects). But at least it does not present them to us with all the really perceived detail that the screen does (giving more and taking the same, i.e. taking more). – The unique position of the cinema lies in this dual character of its signifier: unaccustomed perceptual wealth, but unusually profoundly stamped with unreality, from its very beginning. More that the other arts, or in a more unique way, the cinema involves us in the imaginary: it drums up all perception, but to switch it immediately over into its own absence, which is none-theless the only signifier present.

III.2 The all-perceiving subject
Thus film is like the mirror. But it differs from the primordial mirror in one essential point: although, as in the latter, everything may come to be projected, there is one thing, and one thing only that is never reflected in it: the spectator's own body. In a certain emplacement, the mirror suddenly becomes clear glass.

In the mirror the child perceives the familiar household objects, and also its object par excellence, its mother, who holds it up in her arms to the glass. But above all it perceives its own image. This is where primary identification (the formation of the ego) gets certain of its main characteristics: the child sees itself as an other, and beside an other. This other other is its guarantee that the first is really it: by her authority, her sanction, in the register of the symbolic, subsequently by the resemblance between her mirror image and the child's (both have a human form). Thus the child's ego is formed by identification with its like, and this in two senses simultaneously, metonymically and metaphorically: the
other human being who is in the glass, the own reflection which is and is not the body, which is like it. The child identifies with itself as an object.

In the cinema, the object remains: fiction or no, there is always something on the screen. But the reflection of the own body has disappeared. The cinema spectator is not a child and the child really at the mirror stage (from around six to around eighteen months) would certainly be incapable of 'following' the simplest of films. Thus, what makes possible the spectator's absence from the screen – or rather the intelligible unfolding of the film despite that absence – is the fact that the spectator has already known the experience of the mirror (of the true mirror), and is thus able to constitute a world of objects without having first to recognise himself within it. In this respect, the cinema is already on the side of the symbolic (which is only to be expected): the spectator know that objects exist, that he himself exists as a subject, that he becomes an object for others: he knows himself and he knows his like: it is no longer necessary that this similarity be literally depicted for him on the screen, as it was in the mirror of his childhood. Like every other broadly 'secondary' activity, the practice of the cinema presupposes that the primitive undifferentiation of the ego and the non-ego has been overcome.

But with what, then, does the spectator identify during the projection of the film? For he certainly has to identify: identification in its primal form has ceased to be a current necessity for him, but – on pain of the film becoming incomprehensible, considerably more incomprehensible than the most incomprehensible films – he continues to depend in the cinema on that permanent play of identification without which there would be no social life (thus, the simplest conversation presupposes the alternation of the I and the you, hence the aptitude of the two interlocutors for a mutual and reversible identification). What form does this continued identification, whose essential role Lacan has demonstrated even in the most abstract reasoning ('Le temps logique et l'assertion de certitude anticipée,' Ecrits, op cit, pp 197-213), and which constituted the 'social sentiment' for Freud (= the sublimation of a homosexual libido, itself a reaction to the aggressive rivalry of the members of a single generation after the murder of the father).23 take in the special case of one social practice among others, cinematic projection?

Obviously the spectator has the opportunity to identify with the character of the fiction. But there still has to be one. This is thus only valid for the narrative-representational film, and not for the psychoanalytic constitution of the signifier of the cinema as such.

The spectator can also identify with the actor, in more or less ‘afictional’ films in which the latter is represented as an actor, not a character, but is still offered thereby as a human being (as a perceived human being) and thus allows identification. However this factor (even added to the previous one and thus covering a very large number of films) cannot suffice. It only designates secondary identification in certain of its forms (secondary in the cinematic process itself, since in any other sense all identification except that of the mirror can be regarded as secondary).

An insufficient explanation, and for two reasons, the first of which is only the intermittent, anecdotal and superficial consequence of the second (but for that reason more visible, and that is why I call it the first). The cinema deviates from the theatre in an important point that has often been emphasised: it often presents us with long sequences that can (literally) be called ‘inhuman’ – the familiar theme of cinematic ‘cosmomorphism’ developed by many film theorists – sequences in which only inanimate objects, landscapes, etc., appear and which for minutes at a time offer no human form for spectator identification: yet the latter must be supposed to remain intact in its deep structure, since at such moments the film works just as well as it does at others, and whole films (geographical documentaries, for example) unfold intelligibly in such conditions. – The second, more radical reason is that identification with the human form appearing on the screen, even when it occurs, still tells us nothing about the place of the spectator’s ego in the inauguration of the signifier. As I have just pointed out, this ego is already formed. But since it exists, the question arises precisely of where it is during the projection of the film (the true primary identification, that of the mirror, forms the ego, but all other identifications presuppose, on the contrary, that it has been formed and can be ‘exchanged’ for the object or the fellow subject). Thus when I ‘recognise’ my like on the screen, and even more when I do not recognise it, where am I? Where is that someone who is capable of self-recognition when need be?

It is not enough to answer that the cinema, like every social practice, demands that the psychological apparatus of its participants be fully constituted, and that the question is thus the concern of general psychoanalytic theory and not of that of the cinema proper. For my where is it? does not claim to go so far, or more precisely tries to go slightly further: it is a question of the point occupied by this already constituted ego, occupied during the cinema showing and not in social life in general.

The spectator is absent from the screen: contrary to the child in the mirror, he cannot identify with himself as an object, but only with some objects which are there without him. In this sense the
screen is not a mirror. This time the perceived is entirely on the side of the object, and there is no longer any equivalent of the own image, of that unique mix of perceived and subject (of other and I) which was precisely the figure necessary to disengage the one from the other. At the cinema, it is always the other who is on the screen; as for me, I am there to look at him. I take no part in the perceived, on the contrary, I am all-perceiving. All-perceiving as one says all-powerful (this is the famous gift of 'ubiquity' the film makes its spectator); all-perceiving, too, because I am entirely on the side of the perceiving instance: absent from the screen, but certainly present in the auditorium, a great eye and ear without which the perceived would have no one to perceive it, the constitutive instance, in other words, of the cinema signifier (it is I who make the film). If the most extravagant spectacles and sounds or their most improbable assembly, the one most remote from all real experience, do not prevent the constitution of meaning (and to begin with do not astonish the spectator, do not really astonish him, not in spirit: he simply judges the film as strange) — that is because he knows he is at the cinema.

In the cinema the subject's knowledge takes a very precise form without which no film would be possible. This knowledge is dual (but unique). I know I am perceiving something imaginary (and that is why its absurdities, even if they are extreme, do not seriously disturb me), and I know that it is I who am perceiving it. This second knowledge divides in turn: I know that I am really perceiving, that my sense organs are physically affected, that I am not fantasising, that the fourth wall of the auditorium (the screen) is really different from the other three, that there is a projector facing it (and thus it is not I who am projecting, or at least not all alone) — and I also know that it is I who am perceiving all this, that this perceived-imaginary material is deposited in me as if on a second screen, that it is in me that it forms up into an organised sequence, that therefore I am myself the place where this really perceived imaginary accedes to the symbolic by its inauguration as the signifier of a certain type of institutionalised social activity called the 'cinema'.

In other words, the spectator identifies with himself, with himself as a pure act of perception (as wakefulness, alertness): as condition of possibility of the perceived and hence as a kind of transcendental subject, anterior to every there is.

A strange mirror, very like that of childhood, and very different. Very like, as Jean-Louis Baudry has emphasised (see p 17 above), because during the showing we are, like the child, in a sub-motor and super-perceptive state; because, like the child again, we are prey to the imaginary, the double, and are so paradoxically through a real perception. Very different, because this mirror returns us everything but ourselves, because we are wholly outside it, whereas the child is both in it and in front of it. As an arrangement (and
in a very topographical sense of the word), the cinema is more involved on the flank of the symbolic, and hence of secondariness, than is the mirror of childhood. This is not surprising, since it comes long after it, but what is more important to me is the fact that it is inscribed in its wake with as direct and as staggered an incidence without precise equivalent in other apparatuses of signification.

III.3 Identification with the camera
The preceding analysis coincides in places with others which have already been proposed and which I shall not repeat: analyses of quattrocento painting or of the cinema itself which insist on the role of monocular perspective (hence of the camera) and the 'vanishing point' that inscribes an empty emplacement for the spectator-subject, an all-powerful position which is that of God himself, or more broadly of some ultimate signified. And it is true that as he identifies with himself as look, the spectator can do no other than identify with the camera, too, which has looked before him at what he is now looking at and whose post (= framing) determines the vanishing point. During the projection this camera is absent, but it has a representative consisting of another apparatus, called precisely a 'projector'. An apparatus the spectator has behind him, at the back of his head,24 that is, precisely where fantasy locates the 'focus' of all vision. All of us have experienced our own look, even outside the supposedly obscure chamber, as a kind of searchlight turning on the axis of our own necks (like a pan) and shifting when we shift (a tracking shot now): as a cone of light (without the microscopic dust scattered through it and streaking it in the cinema) whose vicariousness draws successive and variable slices of obscurity from nothing wherever and whenever it comes to rest. (And in a double sense that is what perception and consciousness are, a light, as Freud put it,25 in the double sense of an illumination and an opening, as in the arrangement of the cinema, which contains both, a limited and fabulous light that only attains a small part of the real, but in return possesses the gift of

24. [Derrière la tête means 'at the back of one's mind' as well as 'behind one's head'.] See André Green: 'L'Ecran bi-face, un oeil derrière la tête,' Psychanalyse et cinéma n 1, January 1970 (no further issues appeared), pp 15-22. It will be clear that in the passage that follows my analysis coincides in places with that of André Green. 25. 'The Ego and the Id,' Standard Edition, op cit, Vol XIX, p 18; 'The Interpretation of Dreams,' ibid, Vol V, p 615 (= consciousness as a sense organ) and p 574 (= consciousness as a dual recording surface, internal and external); 'The Unconscious,' ibid, Vol XIV, p 171 (psychical processes are unconscious in themselves, consciousness is a function that perceives a small proportion of them), etc.
casting light on it.) Without this identification with the camera certain facts could not be understood, though they are constant ones: the fact, for example, that the spectator is not amazed when the image 'rotates' (= pan) and yet he knows he has not turned his head. The explanation is that he has no need to turn it really, he has turned it as the all-seeing, as identified with the movement of the camera, as a transcendental, not an empirical subject.

All vision consists of a double movement: projective (the 'sweeping' searchlight) and introjective: consciousness as a sensitive recording surface (as a screen). I have the impression at once that, to use a common expression, I am 'casting' my eyes on to things, and that the latter, thus illuminated, arrive to be deposited within me (we then declare that it is these things that have been 'projected', on to my retina, say). A sort of stream called the look, and explaining all the myths of magnetism, has to be pumped into the world, so that objects can come back up this stream in the opposite direction (but using it to find their way), arriving at last at our perception, which is now soft wax and no longer an emitting source.

The technology of photography carefully conforms to this fantasy accompanying perception, despite its banality. The camera is 'trained' on the object like a fire-arm (= projection) and the object arrives to make an imprint, a trace on the receptive surface of the film-strip (= introjection). The spectator himself does not escape these pinchers, for he is part of the apparatus, and also because pinchers, on the imaginary plane (Melanie Klein), mark our relation to the world as a whole and are rooted in the primary figures of orality. During the performance the spectator is the searchlight I have described, duplicating the projector, which itself duplicates the camera, and he is also the sensitive surface duplicating the screen, which itself duplicates the film-strip. There are two cones in the auditorium: one ending on the screen and starting both in the projection box and in the spectator's vision insofar as it is projective, and one starting from the screen and 'deposited' in the spectator's perception insofar as it is introjective (on the retina, a second screen). When I say that 'I see' the film, I mean thereby a unique mixture of two contrary currents: the film is what I receive, and it is also what I release, since it does not pre-exist my entering the auditorium and I only need close my eyes to suppress it. Releasing it, I am the projector, receiving it, I am the screen; in both these figures together, I am the camera, pointed yet recording.

Thus the constitution of the signifier in the cinema depends on a series of mirror-effects organised in a chain, and not on a single reduplication. In this the cinema as a topography resembles that other 'space' the technical equipment (camera, projector, film-strip, screen, etc), the objective precondition of the whole institution: as we know, the apparatuses too contain a series of mirrors, lenses, apertures and shutters, ground glasses, through which passes the cone of light: a further reduplication in which the equipment
becomes a metaphor (as well as the real source) for the mental process instituted. Further on we shall see that it is also its fetish.

In the cinema, as elsewhere, the constitution of the symbolic is only achieved through and above the play of the imaginary: projection-introjection, presence-absence, fantasies accompanying perception, etc. Even when acquired, the ego still depends in its underside on the fabulous figures thanks to which it has 'been acquired and which have marked it lastingly with the stamp of the lure. The secondary process does no more than 'cover' (and not always hermetically) the primary process which is still constantly present and conditions the very possibility of what covers it.

Chain of many mirrors, the cinema is at once a weak and a robust mechanism: like the human body, like a precision tool, like a social institution. Which is to say that it is really all of these at the same time.

And I, at this moment, what am I doing if not to add to all these reduplications one more whereby theory is attempting to set itself up? Am I not looking at myself looking at the film? This passion for seeing (and also hearing), the foundation of the whole edifice, am I not turning it, too, on (against) that edifice? Am I not still the voyeur I was in front of the screen, now that it is this voyeur who is being seen, thus postulating a second voyeur, the one writing at present, myself again?

III.4 On the idealist theory of the cinema

The place of the ego in the institution of the signifier, as transcendental yet radically deluded subject, since it is the institution (and even the equipment) that give it this place, surely provides us with an appreciable opportunity the better to understand and judge the precise epistemological import of the idealist theory of the cinema which culminates in the remarkable works of André Bazin. Before reflecting frontally on their validity, but simply reading texts of this kind, one cannot but be struck by the great precision, the acute and directly sensitive intelligence that they often demonstrate; at the same time they give the diffuse impression of a permanent ill-foundedness (which affects nothing and yet affects everything), they suggest that somewhere they contain something like a weak point at which the whole might be overturned.

It is certainly no accident that the main form of idealism in cinematic theory has been phenomenology. Bazin and other writers of the same period explicitly appealed to it, and more implicitly (but in a more generalised fashion) all conceptions of the cinema as a mystical revelation, as 'truth' or 'reality' unfolded by full right, as the apparition of what is (l'étant), as an epiphany, derive from it. We all know that the cinema has the gift of sending some of its lovers into prophetic trances. However, these cosmophanic
must first of all have known the primordial mirror. But as the latter 
instituted the ego very largely in the imaginary, the second mirror 
of the screen, a symbolic apparatus, itself in turn depends on 
reflection and lack. However, it is not fantasy, a 'purely' symbolic-
imaginary site, for the absence of the object and the codes of that 
absence are really produced in it by the physis of an equipment: 
the cinema is a body (a corpus for the semiologist), a fetish that 
can be loved.

IV The Passion for perceiving

Cinema practice is only possible through the perceptual passions: 
the desire to see (= scopic drive, scopophilia, voyeurism), acting 
alone in the art of the silent film, the desire to hear which has been 
added to it in the sound cinema (this is the 'pulsion invocante' the 
invoking drive, one of the four main sexual drives for Lacan – see 
Le Séminaire tome XI: Les Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la 
psychoanalyse, Editions du Seuil, Paris 1973, especially pp 164 and 
178; it is well known that Freud isolated it less clearly and hardly 
deals with it as such).

These two sexual drives are distinguished from the others in that 
they are more dependent on a lack, or at least dependent on it 
in a more precise, more unique manner, which marks them from 
the outset, even more than the others, as on the side of the 
imaginary.

However, this characteristic is to a greater or lesser degree proper 
to all the sexual drives insofar as they differ from purely organic 
instincts or needs (Lacan), or in Freud from the self-preservation 
drives (the 'ego drives' which he tended subsequently to annex to 
narcissism, a tendency he could never quite bring himself to pursue 
to its conclusion). The sexual drive does not have so stable and 
strong a relationship with its 'object' as do for example hunger 
and thirst. Hunger can only be satisfied by food, but food is quite 
certain to satisfy it; thus instincts are simultaneously more and less 
difficult to satisfy than drives; they depend on a perfectly real 
object that cannot be depoliticised, but they depend on nothing else. 
Drives, on the contrary, can be satisfied up to a point outside their 
objects (this is sublimation, or else, in another way, masturbation) 
and are initially capable of doing without them without putting the 
organism into immediate danger (hence repression). The needs of 
self-preservation can neither be repressed nor sublimated; the sexual 
drives are more labile and more accommodating, as Freud insisted26

and their Vicissitudes,' ibid, pp 122 and 134n; 'The Ego and the 
Id,' ibid, Vol XIX, p 30; 'On Narcissism: an Introduction,' ibid, 
Vol XIV, p 94, etc.
(more radically perverse, says Lacan). Inversely, they always remain more or less unsatisfied, even when their object has been attained; desire is very quickly reborn after the brief vertigo of its apparent extinction, it is largely sustained by itself as desire, it has its own rhythms, often quite independent of those of the pleasure obtained (which seemed nonetheless its specific aim); the lack is what it wishes to fill, and at the same time what it is always careful to leave gaping, in order to survive as desire. In the end it has no object, at any rate no real object; through real objects which are all substitutes (and all the more multiple and interchangeable for that), it pursues an imaginary object (a 'lost object') which is its truest object, an object that has always been lost and is always desired as such.

How, then, can one say that the visual and auditory drives have a stronger or more special relationship with the absence of their object, with the infinite pursuit of the imaginary? Because, as opposed to other sexual drives, the 'perceiving drive'—combining into one the scopic drive and the invoking drive—concretely represents the absence of its object in the distance at which it maintains it and which is part of its very definition: distance of the look, distance of listening. Psychophysiology makes a classic distinction between the 'senses at a distance' (sight and hearing) and the others all of which are exchanges between immediate neighbours and which it calls 'senses of contact' (Pradines): touch, taste, smell, coenaesthetic sense, etc. Freud notes that voyeurism, like sadism in this respect, always keeps apart the object (here the object looked at) and the source of the drive, i.e., the generative organ (the eye); the voyeur does not look at his eye ('Instincts and their Vicissitudes', *Standard Edition*, op cit, Vol XIV, pp 129-30). With orality and anality, on the contrary, the exercise of the drive inaugurates a certain degree of partial fusion, coincidence (= contact, tendential abolition of distance) of source and aim, for the aim is to obtain pleasure at the level of the source organ (= 'organ pleasure'—ibid, p 138): eg what is called 'mouth pleasure' (see Lacan: *Le Séminaire* tome XI, op cit, p 153).

It is no accident that the main socially acceptable arts are based on the senses at a distance, and that those which depend on the senses of contact are often regarded as 'minor' arts (= culinary arts, art of perfumes, etc). Nor is it an accident that the visual or auditory imaginaries have played a more important part in the histories of societies than the tactile or olfactory imaginaries.

The voyeur is very careful to maintain a gulf, an empty space, between the object and the eye, the object and his own body: his

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27. More precisely: lending themselves through their peculiar characteristics to a perversion which is not the drive itself, but the subject's position with respect to it (*Le Séminaire*, tome XI, op cit, pp 165-6). Remember that for Freud as well as for Lacan, the drive is always 'componential' (the child is polymorphously perverse, etc).
look fastens the object at the right distance, as with those cinema spectators who take care to avoid being too close to or too far from the screen. The voyeur represents in space the fracture which for ever separates him from the object; he represents his very dissatisfaction (which is precisely what he needs as a voyeur), and thus also his 'satisfaction' insofar as it is of a specifically voyeuristic type. To fill in this distance would threaten to overwhelm the subject, to bring him to orgasm and the pleasure of his own body, hence to the exercise of other drives, mobilising the senses of contact and putting an end to the scopic arrangement. Retention is fully part of perceptual pleasure, which is thereby often coloured with anality. Orgasm is the object rediscovered in a state of momentary illusion; it is the fantasy suppression of the gap between object and subject (hence the amorous myths of 'fusion'). The looking drive, except when it is exceptionally well developed, is less directly related to orgasm than are the other component drives; it favours it by its excitatory action, but it is not generally sufficient to produce it by its figures alone, which thus belong to the realm of 'preparatives'. In it we do not find that illusion, however brief, of a lack filled, of a non-imaginary, of a full relation to the object, better established in other drives. If it is true of all desire that it depends on the infinite pursuit of its absent object, voyeuristic desire, along with certain forms of sadism, is the only desire whose principle of distance symbolically and spatially evokes this fundamental rent.

The same could be said, making the necessary modifications of course, about the invocating (auditory) drive, less closely studied by psychoanalysis hitherto, with the exception of writers like Lacan and Guy Rosolato. I shall merely recall that of all hallucinations — and what reveals the dissociation of desire and real object better than the hallucination? — the main ones by far are visual and auditory hallucinations, those of the senses at a distance (this is also true of the dream, another form of hallucination).

However, although this set of features seems to me to be important, it does not yet characterise the signifier of the cinema proper, but rather that of all means of expression based on sight or hearing, and hence, among other 'languages', of practically all the arts (painting, sculpture, architecture, music, opera, theatre, etc). What distinguishes the cinema is an extra reduplication, a supplementary and specific turn to the screw bolting desire to the lack. First because the spectacles and sounds the cinema 'offers' us (offers us at a distance, hence as much steals from us) are especially rich and varied here: a mere difference of degree, but already one that counts: the screen presents to our apprehension, but absents from our grasp, more 'things'. (The mechanism of the perceiving drive is identical for the moment but its object is more endowed with
matter; this is one of the reasons why the cinema is very suitable for handling 'erotic scenes' which depend on direct, non-sublimated voyeurism.) In the second place (and more decisive), the specific affinity between the cinematic signifier and the imaginary persists when film is compared with arts such as the theatre in which the audio-visual given is as rich as it is on the screen in the number of perceptual axes involved. Indeed, the theatre really does 'give' this given, or at least slightly more really: it is physically present, in the same space as the spectator. The cinema only gives it in effigy, inaccessible from the outset, in a primordial elsewhere, infinitely desirable (= never possessible), on another scene which is that of absence and which nonetheless represents the absent in detail, thus making it very present, but by a different itinerary. Not only am I at a distance from the object, as in the theatre, but what remains in that distance is now no longer the object itself, it is a delegate it has sent me while itself withdrawing. A double withdrawal.

What defines the specifically cinematic scopic regime is not so much the distance kept, the 'keeping' itself (first figure of the lack, common to all voyeurism), as the absence of the object seen. Here the cinema is profoundly different from the theatre as also from more intimate voyeuristic activities with a specifically erotic aim (there are intermediate genres, moreover: certain cabaret acts, strip-tease, etc): cases where voyeurism remains linked to exhibitionism, where the two faces, active and passive, of the component drive are by no means so dissociated; where the object seen is present and hence presumably complicit; where the perverse activity – aided if need be by a certain dose of bad faith and happy illusion, varying from case to case, moreover, and sometimes reducible to very little, as in true perverse couples – is rehabilitated and reconciled with itself by being as it were undividedly taken in charge by two actors assuming its constitutive poles (the corresponding fantasies, in the absence of the actions, thus becoming interchangeable and shared by the play of reciprocal identification). In the theatre, as in domestic voyeurism, the passive actor (the one seen), simply because he is bodily present, because he does not go away, is presumed to consent, to cooperate deliberately. It may be that he really does, as exhibitionists in the clinical sense do, or as, in a sublimated fashion, does that oft noted triumphant exhibitionism characteristic of theatrical acting, counterposed even by Bazin to cinematic representation. It may also be that the object seen has only accepted this condition (thus becoming an 'object' in the ordinary sense of the word, and no longer in the Freudian sense) under the pressure of more or less powerful external constraints, economic ones for example with certain poor strippers. (However, they must have consented at some point; rarely is the degree of acceptance zero, except in the case of victimisation, eg when a fascist militia strips its prisoners: the specific characteristics of the scopic arrangements are then distorted by the over powerful intervention of another
element, sadism.) Voyeurism which is not too sadistic (there is none which is not so at all) rests on a kind of fiction, more or less justified in the order of the real, sometimes institutionalised as in the theatre or strip-tease, a fiction that stipulates that the object 'agrees', that it is therefore exhibitionist. Or more precisely, what is necessary in this fiction for the establishment of potency and desire is presumed to be sufficiently guaranteed by the physical presence of the object: 'Since it is there, it must like it', such, hypocritical or no, deluded or no, is the retrenchment needed by the voyeur so long as sadistic infiltrations are insufficient to make the object's refusal and constraint necessary to him. — Thus, despite the distance inaugurated by the look — which transforms the object into a picture (a 'tableau vivant') and thus tips it over into the imaginary, even in its real presence — that presence which persists and the active consent which is its real or mythical correlate (but always real as myth) re-establish in the scopic space, momentarily at least, the illusion of a fullness of the object relation, of a state of desire which is not just imaginary.

It is this last recess that is attacked by the cinema signifier, it is in its precise emplacement (in its place, in both senses of the word) that it installs a new figure of the lack, the physical absence of the object seen. In the theatre, actors and spectators are present at the same time and in the same location, hence present one to another, as the two protagonists of an authentic perverse couple. But in the cinema, the actor was present when the spectator was not (= shooting), and the spectator is present when the actor is no longer (= projection): a failure to meet of the voyeur and the exhibitionist whose approaches no longer coincide (they have 'missed' one another). The cinema's voyeurism must (of necessity) do without any very clear mark of consent on the part of the object. There is no equivalent here of the theatre actors' final 'bow'. And then the latter could see their voyeurs, the game was less unilateral, slightly better distributed. In the darkened hall, the voyeur is really left alone (with other voyeurs, which is worse), deprived of his other half in the mythical hermaphrodite (a hermaphrodite not necessarily constituted by the distribution of the sexes but rather by that of the active and passive poles in the exercise of the drive). Yet still a voyeur, since there is something to see, called the film, but something in whose definition there is a great deal of 'flight': not precisely something that hides, rather something that lets itself be seen without presenting itself to be seen, which has gone out of the room before leaving only its trace visible there. This is the origin in particular of that 'recipe' of the classical cinema that the actor should never look directly at the audience (= the camera).

Thus deprived of rehabilitatory agreement, of a real or supposed consensus with the other (which was also the Other, for it had the status of a sanction on the plane of the symbolic), cinematic voyeurism, unauthorised scopophilia, is from the outset more strongly established than that of the theatre in direct line from the primal scene. Certain precise features of the institution contribute to this affinity: the obscurity surrounding the onlooker, the aperture of the screen with its inevitable keyhole effect. But the affinity is more profound. It lies first in the spectator’s solitude in the cinema: those attending a cinematic projection do not, as in the theatre, constitute a true ‘audience’, a temporary collectivity; they are an accumulation of individuals who, despite appearances, more closely resemble the fragmented group of readers of a novel. It lies on the other hand in the fact that the filmic spectacle, the object seen, is more radically ignorant of its spectator, since he is not there, than the theatrical spectacle can ever be. A third factor, closely linked to the other two, also plays a part: the segregation of spaces that characterises a cinema performance and not a theatrical one. The ‘stage’ and the auditorium are no longer two polar selections made in a single space; the space of the film, represented by the screen, is utterly heterogeneous, it no longer communicates with that of the auditorium: one is real, the other perspective: a stronger break than any line of footlights. For its spectator the film unfolds in that simultaneously quite close and definitively inaccessible ‘elsewhere’ in which the child sees the gambols of the parental couple, who are similarly ignorant of it and leave it alone, a pure onlooker whose participation is inconceivable. In this respect the cinematic signifier is Œdipal in type.

In the set of differences between the cinema and the theatre, it is difficult to be precise about the relative importance of two sorts of conditioning facts, and yet they are definitely distinct: on the one hand the characteristics of the signifier (alone envisaged here), ie the supplementary degree of absence that I have analysed, and on the other the socio-ideological circumstances that have marked the historical birth of the two arts in a divergent manner. I have broached the latter topic elsewhere in my contribution to the Hommage à Émile Benveniste, and I shall only recall that the cinema was born in the midst of the capitalist epoch in a largely antagonistic and fragmented society, based on individualism and the restricted family (= father-mother-children), in an especially super-egotistic bourgeois society, especially concerned with ‘elevation’ (or façade), especially opaque to itself. The theatre is a very ancient art, one which saw the light in more authentically ceremonial societies, in more integrated human groups (even if sometimes, as in Ancient Greece, the cost of this integration was the rejection into a non-human exterior of a whole social category, that of the slaves).