



Fig. 1—Monkey line-up at Gibraltar. From Google-search with the prompt 'Monkeys and people Gibraltar'. Mirroring moment at (what one could call) a *touch-screen's distance*. Curatorial idea of this selection: the monkeys feature as *familiar strangers* (Christian Sanbye, MA1 2024), the hands w/mobiles as *strange familiars* (cf, Ingeveig Nodland, MA1 2024)

What?—In one of his apologues called *The grape-painting*, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan refers to a legend from [Pliny the Elder](#). In a competition, two painters—Zeuxis and Parrhasios—compared their paintings outdoors: Zeuxis made a [painting of grapes](#), so that the birds of the field mistook them for real; Parrhasios has made a painting of a veil on a wall of bricks so real that Zeuxis asks “well, show me [the painting behind that curtain](#).” Parrhasios won the competition as he managed to dupe his colleague, while Zeuxis had “only” succeeded in duping the birds.

Why? —Lacan’s errand with illusion, playing tricks on the human *psyche*, leaves the *door* to Pliny’s story *ajar*, by simply pointing out *illusion* at two levels: the illusion of the desired object (Zeuxis) and the illusion of the desiring subject (Parrhasios). He is interested in the moment where the *gaze* takes *off* from the observer (the subject) and it is as if the painting *looks back*. The nature of the painting as *illusion* will reveal itself *as such*, as we move our heads and *it remains unchanged*. At which point it becomes *a world unto itself that contains its own reality*: a [Platonic idea](#) (Lacan).

How?—By moving from these outer limits of realistic painting, to modern and contemporary art, in which the illusion of painting is incorporated conceptually *into* a problem of painting (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2): artistic excellence here moves *from illusion to fiction*. The *story* of the painting related by the *materiality* of the painting *itself*: the painting is no longer *transparent*—we do not look *past it* caught by an illusion—but contemplating an negotiated *outcome*, emerging from between the materiality of the *painting itself*, and a complex work of mark-making pointing back to the *artist*.

In the expanded field—we record the usership of current social media, mobile snapshots that regularly combine some sensational motif from a *site*, with the story of someone having been *there*. At face value, narrative fiction meets optical illusion. But which one is being served: the *story*, the *trompe l’œil* or a more/less intended *mix*? In Fig. 1, the tangle of desires is made to

appear from *two* elements added to a relatively known/neutral motif of grooming monkeys: a) the mobile snap-shooting hands [*desire*]; b) the dark-furred baby-monkey, with its back turned to the crowd [*gaze*]. Once seen it cannot be unseen.



Fig. 2—Peter Doig, *Black Curtain (Towards Monkey Island)*, 2004. Oil on Canvas. © Peter Doig. All Rights Reserved, DACS/Artimage 2022. A combination between a window and a mirror?

The gaze from the *dark furry spot* in the middle, enhanced by the branches of the trees, in the background: the gaze is turned to the mobile cameras, and by extension to us (what we see is what appears on a screen S_1 of someone’s camera). The hands w/ mobiles, caught in the act, can be analysed as *signifiers* S_2 derived from the *signifier* S_1 : which, in effect, is the illusion of a window. But what kind of window? Most likely a combination of a window *and* a [mirror](#).

In the narrow field—once the gaze emanating from the *dark* baby primate (at the centre of the photograph in **Fig. 1**) becomes a *key* to the readability of the image, that we can no longer unsee, the question no one has asked will eventually emerge: *who is the monkey?* Not in the sense of Peter, Paul, Mary or little Jim, but in the sense of—*whose portrait is this?* Is it a portrait of a group of Monkeys in Gibraltar, or a portraiture of the people gathering at this moment of *crossing* snap-shots? What sort of monkey-business is the small crowd inadvertently/awkwardly involved in? Big time!

Fig. 1 therefore serves to illustrate some points relating to another of Jacques Lacan's apologies: referring to the fable *The blind and the paralytic* (from [The fables of Florian](#)). Applied narrowly to the case at hand, we may be keenly aware of—and embarrassed by—the question asked on the preceding paragraph. But there is little/nothing we can do about it (we are, in a sense, *paralysed*). And before we know it, we are in precisely the same/similar situation ourselves: gathering alongside fellow-minded people, caught in the act of snapping motifs of which we have *seen nothing*.

Hindsight and purpose—being blind in the *act* and lucid only in *retrospective* (or, in hindsight) is reflected in a common experience: we come up with a bright idea which, at the spur of the moment, seems bright and talented, only to discover that we have been working on it (*blindly*) for quite some time. Alternatively, we may discover quite soon, after the inspired flash, that the idea has been more clearly/succinctly expressed by *someone else* (often many years, even hundreds or thousands, ago). How is it possible to have knowledge with a) *no* mind to it; b) an *excess* of mind?

If 1) *love* is blind, and 2) *reason* is paralytic can he hope to somehow educate ourselves to either incorporate, or at least access, a *third* vantage point which is *neither* blind *nor* paralytic? Maybe there is hope. But it doesn't come without a foundation—i.e. working with the question: if the *third* vantage point is 3) *language*—which, according to Lacan, is oriented to the *cause of desire* (called **object a**, or *objet petit a*)—does this language extend *beyond* oral and written language, to a relation between any signifiers S_1 and S_2 (one *blind* and one *paralysed*): such as *doing* and *seeing*?

The [learning theatre](#) is a design—between the dramatic- and the anatomical theatre—in which practical instructions (*doing*) and viewing protocols (*seeing*) are conjoint, or rather constrained alongside (at first by the space of the theatre, and then [with learning] by the performance of the practitioner) in ways that do *not* come along *automatically*, as Lacan has shown, to any each of us. We have to work for it: by nature we are [dividuals](#), but as we acquiring a practice of conjointly a) retracing our *steps* and b) reviewing our *outcomes*, we can move *beyond* blindness and paralysis.

Discussion/debate—yet, in Yohani Pallasmaa's book [The eyes of the skin](#) *alternative* 3rd vantage point may be identified in the sense of *touch*: as a relay, or intermediary, *between* doing *and* seeing. Here we find touch differentiated in several modes: 1) the [haptic](#) mode [touch in the narrow sense]; 2) the [kinaesthetic](#) mode [touch in the sense of the body-moving-on-itself, as in any kind of body-work]; 3) the [proprioceptive](#) mode [the sense of movement and position in space, walking/dancing]. Here we can find our way from the *tap* on a mobile-phone, to the sense of *bodies* moving on themselves and their *movement* from the dark furry middle.



Fig. 3—Cézanne on Cézanne—emphasising the 'tipping point' that takes over from the 'laws of perspective' in renaissance painting. By working with the illusion of a vertical drop he take the painting a step further from the play of the same, similar and different in his motifs, to the inclusion of the *other* as a sculptural object

So, it applies to the study of our case (**Fig. 1**). It also applies to the alternatives to the traditional laws of perspective (from the renaissance) ventured by Paul Cézanne by bending the laws of *gravity*, in his painting, and letting the viewer intercept physical painting by conveying a sense of the motif *tilting*/falling towards the viewer, out of the frame. This sense is enhanced in **Fig. 3**, by juxtaposing a still-life with grapes with a table from another painting. In this imposed relation between signifiers S_1 and S_2 , the illusion of a vertical drop, primes us to the physical presence of the painting as a *sculptural object*.