TV/Series

Hors séries 1 | 2016
Lost: (re)garder l'île

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/tvseries/4982>

DOI: 10.4000/tvseries.4982

ISSN: 2266-0909

Publisher

GRIC - Groupe de recherche Identités et Cultures

Electronic reference

Louis-Paul Willis, « Conceptualizing Otherness with *Lost*: Foucault, Lacan, and the Mediation of the Gaze », *TV/Series* [Online], Hors séries 1 | 2016, Online since 01 December 2020, connection on 05 December 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/tvseries/4982> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/tvseries.4982>

This text was automatically generated on 5 December 2020.

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Conceptualizing Otherness with *Lost*: Foucault, Lacan, and the Mediation of the Gaze

Louis-Paul Willis

Translation : Chloe Farrell

- 1 It goes without saying that the television series *Lost* has left significant repercussions in its wake. Following in the footsteps of various other contemporary TV series, *Lost* had a significant impact on the possibilities that the medium's form offers in terms of narrative, aesthetic, and subject matter. When it comes to narrative form, it seems that *Lost* demonstrates a general tendency toward narrative forms that can be qualified as complex¹; indeed, the show proposes a narrative in which the audience must mentally invest if they hope to piece together the meaning of the show's events. These events fall simultaneously within the scope of the diegetic present, past, and future, as well as the parallel present. The show was also innovative in terms of metanarrative—using online content and a gaming universe to set in motion a diegetic universe that is both fascinating and complex. These innovative spaces developed by the show's creators have continued to attract attention since the show's initial airing in 2004, and much remains to be done to understand the impact that this narrative has had both on the public and on the history of television.
- 2 The impact that the show has on audiences plays out on multiple levels. Notably, *Lost* makes extensive use of philosophical references, which in turn deepen an informed audience's experience of the show. For example, character names are often used to evoke existential conflicts between different belief systems. Although the link between *Lost* and philosophy has already been analyzed at length, there has been little study of the show in terms of psychoanalytical theory. More specifically, it must be noted that the question of the eye that looks and the gaze, as well as their role in the reception of the show, remain largely unexplored, despite their overwhelming presence in the show's narrative structure. Of course, the show's references to the philosophical ideas of Michel Foucault did not go unnoticed, especially when thinking of surveillance and

the panoptic gaze². It may be tempting to leave the exploration of the question of the gaze at this Foucauldian dimension, yet this outlook disregards the more radical aspects of the theorization of the gaze that is offered by psychoanalysis. Considering that one of *Lost*'s central themes is that of an otherness that takes on multiple forms, it seems appropriate to turn toward the reflection of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, especially given that the relationship between the subject and the Other plays a central role in the series.

- 3 With this in mind, what remains is to examine the impact that the representation of the gaze has on audiences throughout the show's six seasons, in order to form a more complete understanding of how the dynamic of the gaze determines some of *Lost*'s most radical aspects and—above all—of the way it is received by the audience. To start with, we will put the idea of the panoptic gaze in conversation with the gaze in its Lacanian psychoanalytic conception. From there, we will analyze *Lost* as a televisual discourse that explores the very nature of subjective existence in the panoptic era. By examining the show through its depiction of these concepts, it will become possible to identify the radical discourse that it articulates in relation to otherness. This radicality is communicated through the representation of the media's gaze with which the show confronts its audience. Consequently, the goal of this article is to analyze the show through the audience's reception of it—an audience that is itself faced with a subjective existence marked by otherness.

The Gaze, the Look

- 4 Before diving into our discussion of the mediation of the gaze in the series, we must first take a moment to establish an understanding of the gaze from a psychoanalytic perspective. The following section thus aims to familiarize the reader with the theoretical stakes that surround the idea of the gaze, as well as with the range of visual dynamics present in contemporary media, since, up until now, some of these ideas have been absent from discussions about *Lost*³. In psychoanalysis, the gaze is theorized quite differently from the conception attributed to it in our day-to-day use of language. Indeed, the gaze must be differentiated from the eye that looks. More specifically, in psychoanalysis, the gaze is defined as being the opposite, or antithesis, of this looking eye. Freud's ideas clarify the distinction between active scopophilia⁴ and passive scopophilia—indeed, the subject can derive pleasure from the act of looking *and* from the act of being looked at⁵. Historically, cinematographic and media studies have concentrated uniquely on the idea of an active scopophilia. This approach can be traced back to the first reflections on visual pleasure introduced by the feminist thinker Laura Mulvey in 1975. In this example, the audience was conceived as a group of voyeurs who derived pleasure from prying into private scenes from a perspective of an omnipotent observer who holds visual mastery over the object of their eye that looks⁶. Typical Hollywood cinema—with its static shots and calculated framing—imparts a sense of realism to the audience during scenes of observation, while simultaneously showing an image that lacks realism because it does not show them their own subjective vision. Through a purely realist use of the cinematic model, mainstream cinema works to immerse the audience in a perspective that aims to be "all-perceiving"⁷—a perspective that is, of course, impossible. Indeed, to conceptualize the gaze of the audience as simply that of a voyeur inevitably neglects the much more radical dimension of that

which escapes the look: Every field of vision contains a blind spot—something that can be seen, yet remains inaccessible. While the majority of mainstream cinematographic and televisual productions avoid revealing this blind spot in the visual field, certain forms of visual media aim to reveal its presence in order to confront the audience with a more radical experience of spectatorship. As we will explore in depth later on, *Lost* plays precisely with this lesser-known visual dynamic.

- 5 By basing itself on the conception of the gaze that Lacan proposes, as well as on its opposition to the mere look, the radical potential of the audiovisual medium highlighted in *Lost* gains traction. Indeed, Lacan places the gaze within the act of being seen and being looked at, rather than the act of seeing and looking. Lacan calls upon Freud's idea of passive scopophilia to suggest that the gaze unleashes the desire that is characteristic of the scopic field, considering that, "The gaze I encounter... is, not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other."⁸ Feminist theorist Elizabeth Cowie makes a Lacanian distinction between the gaze and the look, specifying that "the gaze is not the look, for to look is merely to see whereas the gaze is to be posed by oneself in a field of vision."⁹ This distinction leads to the affirmation that "the pleasure of the scopic drive is first and foremost passive—the wish to be seen (in one's sex, finally)."¹⁰ The scopic desire—and thus the desire that motivates cinematic and televisual audiences—is thus built upon an impossibility, rather than on the control that an omniscient and panoptic point of view supplies. To continue with Cowie's theory, "Desire here is not the wish to see some particular thing, or even just to *see*, but to see what is being shown, what I cannot yet see but know is there to see."¹¹ The gaze brings the subject back to the radical and elusive nature of any field of vision; it is impossible to see everything, and this impossibility leaves the impression of a perspective that is slippery and convergent, and that ultimately upends the observing subject's sense of control. As we will come to see, this is a sensation that is regularly present in the series *Lost*. As Todd McGowan suggests, the Lacanian gaze "is not the look of the subject at the object, but the point at which the object looks back."¹² In other words, for Lacan, the gaze is a blind spot in the visual field. This blind spot allows the subject to see their own position as an object from a perspective exterior to themselves. This conception of the gaze thus establishes itself as the antithesis of a purely omniscient look, thus changing our ideas on film and television's reception.
- 6 At this point, we must highlight the tension between this Lacanian conception of the gaze and Foucault's ideas on the panoptic because, from the outset, a large number of analyses of *Lost* are based upon the apparent similarity between the survivor's experience on the island and the panoptic experience. Furthermore, although we no longer need to prove Foucault's importance in analyses of *Lost*, the same can not be said of the importance of Lacan's ideas in analyzing the series. Yet the question of otherness and its connection with the gaze are present in both theorist's work. The Lacanian gaze is based on the existence of what Lacan calls the big Other, which is to say, an exterior, omniscient entity that attests to the existence of the subject, of language, and of the culture. At the same time, the gaze in Foucault's theories is also based on one of omniscience, carrying out a constant surveillance on the subject. Indeed, Foucault illustrates the omnipresence of this surveillance through his analysis of the panopticon—a prison imagined by British philosopher Jeremy Bentham. In this prison, the cells are arranged in a circle and face toward an interior space that is dominated by a central watch tower. The tower's blinds make it impossible for the prisoners to know when

they are being watched by the guards, creating a sensation of constant surveillance. In order to function, the panoptic power must be simultaneously visible and impossible to verify. While the prisoners must always see the tower that is potentially observing them, they must never know if or when they are being watched. In this respect, as Foucault notes so well, "The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen,"¹³ a binary that reminds us of the difference that Lacan notes between the look and the gaze. For Lacan, as for Foucault, the gaze positions itself as the *possibility* of being seen by an elusive, external entity.

- 7 In one of the few articles that aim to demonstrate the common political power that these two conceptions of the gaze share, Henry Krips draws connections that are important to emphasize. Krips's starting point is that of the anti-Foucauldian sentiment of contemporary Lacanian theorists in the context of film and media studies. According to him, the gaze in its Lacanian conception has more points in common with that of Foucault than is generally recognized. To illustrate the connection between these two concepts, the author alludes to an anecdote from *Seminar XI* which leads us to the Lacanian conception of the gaze. Young Lacan is out on a boat with a group of fisherfolk when one of them—a man by the name of Little John—points to an object floating farther out. The sun glances off of the object: a can of sardines. Little John asks the young Lacan, "You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!"¹⁴ which creates a sensation of discomfort and anxiety within Lacan. This feeling stems in part from the incongruity of the situation in which Lacan finds himself—the young, privileged intellectual with a family of fisherfolk arduously working for their livelihood. Aside from its blinding appearance, the reflection on the sardine can creates a psychological discomfort associated with the revelation of a scrutinizing external perspective. Thinking back to Freudian scopophilia, which is simultaneously active and passive, it can be argued that the look that Lacan directs at its exterior is met with resistance from the dazzling light created by the metal tin. In a reflexive manner, the look is directed back at Lacan, shifting from active to passive and changing the "I look" to "I am looked at."¹⁵ As Lacan states, "I am not simply that punctiform being located at the geometral point from which the perspective is grasped. No doubt, in the depths of my eye, the picture is painted. The picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I am not in the picture."¹⁶ For Lacan, the gaze is a product of the subject's position in a field of vision that escapes their control, and from within which they can be seen from a convergent perspective.
- 8 In its psychoanalytic, Lacanian conception, the gaze thus represents an external perspective that is imposed upon the subject. As Krips reminds us, it is neither an eye that watches the subject nor a mirror in which the subject looks at themselves looking. On the contrary, "It is a point of failure in the visual field—in the case of the tin can, a point where perception breaks down and the stuff out of which perceptions are constituted, namely light, becomes visible."¹⁷ As McGowan notes, the conception of this notion of the gaze can be traced back to Jean-Paul Sartre insofar as it is the point at which the gaze and the absent big Other meet¹⁸. "The gaze sees itself—to be precise, the gaze of which Sartre speaks, the gaze that surprises me and reduces me to shame... The gaze I encounter... is, not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other."¹⁹ It is here that Krips draws the connection between the Lacanian gaze and the Foucauldian gaze, noting that in Lacan's work, the point from which the external perspective can be grasped is elusive and evades us. This elusiveness results from the fact that the big Other does not exist and, consequently, that there is no specific point

toward which the gaze gravitates—a problem that, as we will note, is articulated by *Lost*. For Krips, this aspect of Lacanian reflection aligns with that of Foucault, because in the context of the panoptic, everyone is under surveillance, even the guards: "There is no absolute certainty, no God's eye point of view from which a trustworthy picture is revealed²⁰." The two thinkers thus imagine an example of surveillance in the field of the Other. Overall, the gaze is a site of tension between the act of looking (active scopophilia) and the act of being looked at (passive scopophilia). Although susceptible to critique by Lacanians and Foucauldians, the comparison proposed by Krips highlights certain similarities that may prove useful in studying *Lost*—a show committed to exploring the themes of identity and otherness. By reviewing the concept of the gaze, we are able to understand that it is impossible to hold an omniscient spectatorial position. The so-called panoptic look is an illusion that conceals the fact that it is turned back toward us. Having established this theoretical basis, we may now take a closer look at the show and at its reception more specifically, a reception that hinges upon a certain radicality that can be conceptualized from both a philosophical and psychoanalytic perspective.

***Lost* and Subjectivity in the Panoptic Era**

- 9 In *Lost*, these two notions of the gaze work together to create the spectatorial experience that is particular to the show. Indeed, the characters are constantly confronted with a specific form of otherness that takes on multiple forms and that evolves through the many plot twists present throughout the show's six seasons. At the same time, starting in the moment in which the survivors meet the "Others," they are subject to various forms of power whose common denominator is that of surveillance and the panoptic dynamic. The question of power and the gaze can easily be approached through three aspects of the show: its articulation of otherness, its use of the panoptic in narrative, and its problematization of the impossible position of the big Other.

1. Otherness

- 10 As we established previously, the concept of the gaze implies the presence of the Other in the work of both Lacan and Foucault. Our task is now to center our analysis on the various forms of otherness in *Lost* as they manifest through the mediation offered by the show of the notion of the gaze. Starting in the very first episode, otherness proves to be an important driving force in the narrative framework of the show. Indeed, the smoke monster—a central figure of otherness within the series—appears in the pilot episode, when the survivors are readying themselves to spend their first night sleeping on the beach. Moreover, throughout the first season, the survivors will come to realize that they are not the only inhabitants of the island and will have multiple run-ins with various forms of otherness. Although from the first episode on, the noises made by the smoke monster may provoke a feeling of anxiety for the survivors, and the pilot's death may reveal to certain characters the strangeness of the place their plane crashed, it is nevertheless late in the first season that otherness is definitively established as one of the show's themes. This is most notably the case in the episode entitled "Solitary" (S01E09), in which Sayid is confronted with the presence of Danielle Rousseau, who takes him prisoner. This first encounter between one of the survivors and an outsider is

crucial, because from this moment on, the survivors must concretely address the presence of the other—a presence that was previously conveyed to the audience through the mediation of the gaze and through an exterior perspective observing the characters. Indeed, Rousseau is the first character to evoke the existence of the "Others." She states that she had never seen them, but had heard them whispering in the jungle. As the episodes progress, the otherness of the Others is highlighted, through both their whispering and their elusive presence, and ultimately through their actions and surveillance of the survivors.

- 11 Their whispering plays an important role in the sensation of otherness that emerges from the series. The fact that the Others are ultimately not at the source of the whispering is less important than the anxiety they provoke. They place the audience within an overt tension between the Lacanian conception of the gaze and the relationship with the Other. Indeed, the whispering forces the characters to confront the presence of the Other and, at the same time, confront the audience with the fact that the field of vision offered to them is incomplete and inevitably conceals a blind spot. When he references Sartre to elucidate his idea of an imagined gaze in relation to the Other, Lacan specifies that the manifestation of this gaze transcends the visual dimension, allowing us to theorize the possibility of an aural dimension. As he says, "The gaze in question is certainly the presence of others as such."²¹ This presence can appear outside of the visual field. By drawing upon this idea, Krips clarifies that through these aural occurrences "the gaze corresponds to a point of failure in the field of the visible not because (as in the case of the tin can) it dazzles the eye, but rather because the subject becomes aware of it aurally rather than visually."²² He continues his reflection by adding that an aural representation of the gaze reminds the subject that even if there is nothing to be seen, there is still something present. "Thus, by *totally non-visual means*, the subject is brought to recognize that there is a hole, a lack, in his visual field—a something that, because it is present but cannot be seen, functions as a point of failure of the visual field."²³ Thus, whether it is through the noises made by the monster or through the whispering throughout the jungle, the first encounter with otherness in *Lost* occurs on an aural level, leading to a radicalization of the scope of the Other for both the audience *and* the characters. Despite the narrative revelations that punctuate the show, the fascinating consistency of this theme throughout the show's evolution cannot be ignored. The actantial position of otherness within the show is consistently illustrated in relation to the narrative throughline, making it so that the audience is constantly aware of it.
- 12 At the same moment in which Sayid discovers the existence of the Others on the island, Hurley finishes his inventory and discovers that one of the group's members was not on flight 815. From this moment on (halfway through the first season), the theme of otherness irrevocably infuses the narrative throughline. Otherness first manifests in the survivors themselves through Sayid and Locke, both of whom are represented as Others in relation to the group. While Sayid represents the Other because he comes from a different culture, Locke embodies a certain mysterious and enigmatic quality throughout the first season, especially when it comes to his relationship with Walt and Michael. The first encounter with the survivors of the tail of the plane also occurs under the auspices of otherness. When the two groups of survivors join together, the fight against the Others continues, as does the evolution of the figure of the Other. Ultimately, the relationship with the Other continues to hinge upon radicality—a result

of the evanescence of the Other's position itself. Indeed, otherness assumes multiple identities through the show's six seasons, and the terminology used implies what feminist thinker Ann Kaplan refers to as the imperial gaze. In Kaplan's conception, the colonial discourse is inherently colored by a gaze imposed on the Other using a value system that is foreign to them. Otherness is thus assigned from the subject position of the observer, and not from that of the person being observed. As she explains, "Looking relations are never innocent. They are always determined by the cultural systems people travelling bring with them."²⁴ Ben's group is referred to as the "Others," although Ben himself grew up inside the Dharma Initiative, for whom the existing inhabitants of the island were designated as either the Natives or the Hostiles. These inhabitants' Roman origins are themselves founded on otherness, considering that Jacob's mother told her sons to be wary of the other inhabitants of the island. In all of these instances, hostile relationships are preceded by the hostile reactions felt when confronted with the Other in all their alterity and difference. As Sarah Hatchuel notes, "The show reveals the social construction and ideology of otherness... asking us to share the perspective of the Others and reveals that the survivors are the 'others' for the Others: The other is never other 'by nature,' but rather because they have been labeled and stigmatized as such."²⁵ With this in mind, Juliet's statement in which she confesses that it is "very stressful being an Other" should be taken at face value. *Lost* offers an innovative perspective on the way in which the imperial gaze functions, because the series allows this gaze to be directed back toward the post-colonial observer.

- 13 *Lost* even goes as far as to confront us with the idea that each of us is an Other for someone. In the series, as soon as an Other becomes known, they cease to be menacing, and alterity manifests in a new form that is continually transmitted to the audience through a deft mediation of the gaze. In this regard, we are at times given the opportunity to see the perspective of the Other, which allows us to note that the characters with whom we identify also hold a form of otherness. While almost all of the survivors have crossed paths with one another in their previous lives, the renewal of alterity continues until the survivors themselves become the Others, the foreigners, in the "parallel" narrative throughline in the sixth season. At this point in the narrative, the show highlights the radicality of otherness in its most commonplace form: in the other that we could know, or that we could have known in another combination of circumstances.

2. Panoptic Surveillance

- 14 In addition, if the gaze occupies a pivotal position in determining otherness in the show, this same gaze also established an important panoptic dynamic that structures the narrative and our spectatorial relationship to it. The study of panoptic dynamics within cinematic and televisual narratives is at the heart of Sébastien Lefait's book *Surveillance on Screen*. This book is built upon the quite accurate idea that the fundamental relationship between surveillance and the spectator merits a more in-depth study in the context of scholarly writing²⁶. Lefait defines a type of "surveillance cinema" that he conceives of as a cinematic form that proposes a reflection on cinema itself²⁷. Although it is not overtly discussed in the book, the reflexive aspect of surveillance narratives is based upon, among others things, the representation of the dynamics of the gaze and its opposition to the eye that looks. The analytic perspective

that *Lefait* offers can therefore be deepened by the relationship between the Foucauldian and Lacanian conceptions of the gaze. Indeed, in this case, *Lost* seems to want to create a tension for its audience between the fundamentally voyeuristic eye that looks of cinematic and televisual mediums, and the manifestation of the gaze in all its radicality. By opening with Jack's eye as he wakes up in the aftermath of the crash, as well as by filming the eyes of characters during the opening sequences of a substantial number of episodes, the series creators highlight the eye that looks from the very beginning. This eye that looks is reflected in those of the audience through their identification with the show's characters; from then on, one can feel an omniscient gaze focused on the survivors from an external and furtive perspective. Whether it be through an external perspective filmed with a hand-held camera or through an aural presence making the existence of an esoteric external perspective known, the presence of the gaze that we have discussed in the previous sections relies on the panoptic dynamic that is present throughout the show. Very quickly, it becomes clear that the survivors are under surveillance, but we do not know by whom. As Locke says, "We're not the only ones on this island and we all know it." Of course, the presence of the Others' apparent omniscience creates a form of surveillance, but Locke is also one of the first to notice a big Other that surveils them and structures their existences on the island. After his encounter with the monster in the episode entitled "Walkabout" (S01E04), in the episode "White Rabbit" (S01E05) Locke tells Jack, "I've looked into the eye of this island, and what I saw... was beautiful." This statement is far from insignificant: Locke confirms that he has seen the means through which the island surveils; he has been in contact with the impossible perspective of the gaze, which is felt in the first season and which will remain present throughout the entire show. He himself will become an Other in the eyes of his peers because of this perspective offered to him. Thus, beginning in the fifth episode of the first season, we are confronted with the idea of an entity that surveils. This entity itself generates a troubling otherness that leads to various encounters with the gaze.

- 15 Throughout the second season, the link between the show and the panoptic gaze intensifies with the gradual discovery of the Dharma stations. Starting with the very first sequence of the second season, when Desmond's routine is suddenly interrupted by an explosion at the station's hatch, it is through a complex arrangement of mirrors that our own eye that looks is able to see Jack and Locke. Even the cursor in the stations old computer seems to evoke a surveilling gaze. Little by little, as the survivors and the audience discover the secrets of the Dharma stations, the links formed between *Lost* and the panoptic gaze unfurl and become more complex. Even the arrangement of the Dharma stations on the island, as well as their elaborate relationships based on surveillance, seem to evoke Bentham's panopticon²⁸. Additionally, the surveillance felt throughout the first season becomes more deeply ingrained in the narrative beginning in the second season. As Amy Bauer notes, "Season 2 of *Lost* appears to move beyond the Panopticon as metaphor, adopting Foucault's expansion of Bentham's structure as both a structural and dramatic device."²⁹ Thus, the importance of surveillance within the narrative structure of the show itself takes on a newfound importance in conjunction with our deepened understanding of the island, the Other, and the Dharma Initiative. The murky relationship between the Others and the Dharma Initiative allows them to maintain an otherness and a disconcerting possibility of omniscience from the perspective of the survivors and of the audience; at the same time, the nature of the island as a panoptic structure is explored and complexified.

- 16 The discovery of station #5, the Pearl, is involved in the complexification of the panoptic dynamic. Making an initial appearance on the map drawn by Stuart Radzinsky (S02E17, "Lockdown"), the Pearl seems to be located at the heart of the island, beneath an enormous question mark drawn on the ground. Not only does the question mark remind us of the map drawn in the Swan, but it is also mentioned in Mr. Eko's dream in the beginning of the episode entitled "?" (S02E21), in which the Pearl station is finally uncovered. The Dharma logo is present from the very first moments in the station. Nevertheless, although other stations have logos with specific images at their centers (a flame, a swan, etc.), the Pearl's logo—although quite appropriate given the station's name—appears to be empty. It is here that the crucial similarity between the Dharma logo and the panopticon comes to light: We can consider that the center is empty. As Sébastien Lefait notes, "What makes *Lost* particularly relevant in the field of surveillance studies... is not the way it includes surveillance as a diegetic element, but the way this diegetic element is turned into an extradiegetic, reflexive tool."³⁰ This reflexivity is compounded by our continually deepening knowledge of the Pearl station, which characterizes seasons two and three.
- 17 As Locke and Eko come to discover, the Pearl is a station used for panoptic surveillance in its most literal sense. The orientation video confirms the panoptic role of the television and of our own spectatorial position, as the two partners working in the Pearl find themselves comfortably seated in front of a wall of screens. Of course, the status of surveillance is immediately undermined by the ensuing antagonism between Locke and Eko, and even more so when we understand that the experiment was not carried out at the expense of those being observed, but at the expense of the observers themselves. Ultimately, "with the intervention of the Pearl station as proof that some characters on the island are under watch without knowing they are, the island appears as diegetically surveilled for the purpose of an experiment,"³¹ a statement that reminds us of the Foulcauldian position, which states that, "The Panopticon is a privileged place for experiments on men..."³² Located at the very heart of the island and following the example of the panoptic surveillance tower, the Pearl proves to be the central point around which the other stations are arranged in a circular pattern—at least this is the case on the map drawn by Radzinsky. The Pearl, which is designated by a question mark that inevitably implies the unknown—and potentially nonexistent—identity of the observer, represents the show's problematization of the panoptic position. This station confirms the idea that there is no absolute panoptic position—there is only illusion. This observation station's presence thus additionally problematizes the audience's position in relation to the show, once again portraying a meditation of the gaze that brings a highly innovative spectatorial position to the fore.
- 18 Nevertheless, this hazy panoptic position is called into question even more when, in the third season, some of the characters return to the Pearl to attempt to communicate with other stations. Believing themselves to be in the position of the observer, the characters successfully access the images from station #4 (the Flame). A panoramic tracking shot shifts to focus in on the troubling face of Mikhaïl, who gazes back at them with his one eye. The traditional panoptic perspective is turned on its head, and the question of who enacts surveillance and who is subject to it returns with force. To borrow Sarah Hatchuel's words, "In *Lost*, the characters are under surveillance, spied upon, manipulated by images; others carry out the surveillance, are the spies, do the manipulating, in a constant confusion of who observes whom and to what end."³³ In

this snowball effect of surveillance, we also see Ben in front of a similar device observing Jack, Kate, and Sawyer. For a time, we are under the impression that Ben is the ultimate observer, the incarnation of panoptic authority—he who controls both actions and events. Yet if the panoptic gaze creates an illusion of power for the person who wields it, it is Ben who is the first victim of this illusion, as he tries desperately to maintain a power that constantly eludes him. The same applies to the disconcerting spectatorial position portrayed by the constantly changing structure of the show, that denies us an omniscient perspective. If Foucault studies the panoptic to strengthen his concept of a disciplinary society, the many tricks and illusions used by the Others in order to control the survivors employ this same idea of discipline. Take, for example, the disguises and fake encampments they use to make it seem as though they have a primitive way of life, or the black smoke they used in order to announce their arrival. These mechanisms affect the behavior of the survivors. The pacemaker that Ben says he installed in Sawyer's chest in order to impose calm and control is another example of discipline that relies on panoptic surveillance. Just as the panoptic gaze originates from an Other that ultimately does not exist, the pacemaker was never installed. The power is derived from the mechanism's *effect* and not from the mechanism itself, whether it be cardiac or panoptic. From this perspective, the show puts forward a complex and thorough discourse on subjectivity, in which the panoptic dimension of the gaze blends with the radical nature of this imagined gaze's position when it comes to the Other.

3. Jacob and the Death of the Big Other

- 19 If the island is a complex form of panopticon—simultaneously a "laboratory of power" and a "a privileged place for experiments on men³⁴"—we must admit that there is a blind spot regarding the panoptic when it comes to analyses of *Lost*. This is where employing the psychoanalytic perspective deepens the Foucauldian analysis most notably highlighted by Sébastien Lefait. Indeed, the show's position as a surveillance narrative allows us to understand its philosophical nuance, but this alone cannot explain the show's reception. As we noted earlier, the mediation of the gaze in its Lacanian sense operates within this reception, in the process making the show's discourse on otherness more radical. In the relationships among characters in *Lost*, the Other's past deconstructs the notion of otherness itself, because each character is an Other for the other characters. Within the Dharma Initiative, the mystery revolves around what takes place in the other stations or entities; all of this leads to the palpable presence of what Lacan calls the big Other. This presence is assured by the mediation of the gaze offered by the show, which provides a point from which a perspective that conflates the audience and the show's characters can operate. Eventually, this big Other is given a name: Jacob. And, although Jacob may only be mentioned for the first time in the third season, the idea of the big Other runs throughout the entirety of the show itself. Even if a higher being comes into play only part way through *Lost*'s trajectory, its presence can be felt from the show's very beginning. Right away, the survivors are followed by the weight of their pasts, acting as stains on their existences—some more than others when we think of Kate, or even Jin or Ben. They find themselves stuck between an ideal of who they should/would like to be and who they are in reality. A contrast of this sort inevitably confronts the subjects with the basis of the ideals they hope to attain, which do not come from them but from what Lacan calls

the symbolic order—in other words, the cultural dimension of our existence that hinges upon signification, Law, and the big Other.

- 20 From the first season on, this Lacanian logic manifests palpably in Jack's statement regarding the necessity of coexistence, without which the survivors will die alone. In Lacanian theory, the big Other guarantees the existence of the subject. In other words, if the subject exists, it is because the big Other wants something from them—a situation that proves to be unsustainable and thus creates desire. Lacan illustrates the subject's position in this impasse through the question in Italian, "*Che vuoi?*" which means, "What do you want from me?"—a question which, when left unanswered, generates desire. The subject structures their desire around this mystery, convinced that the big Other expects something of them—that they exist for a reason or to accomplish something. In *Lost*, the survivors could easily project this question onto Jacob, as he clearly wants something from them. In a striking manner, Jack does precisely this in the episode entitled "Lighthouse" (S06E05), when he comes to understand that Jacob has been observing him throughout his entire life, and that Jacob deliberately brought him to the island for an unknown reason. The lighthouse—a veritable panoptic watchtower—places Jack in the impossible position of the Other who observes, making this sequence particularly important for the show as a whole, and more specifically for the dynamic of the gaze, which is present from the very beginning, and which reveals itself in this culminating sequence. When faced with the fact that he had been observed by Jacob all his life and with his desire to know why he was under this sort of surveillance, Jack asks Hurley, "What does he want from me?"³⁵ In the absence of a response to this fundamental question, Jack proceeds to destroy all of the mirrors in the lighthouse, through which he was supplied the impossible perspective of the big Other. Jack wants explanations, but he will not get them, much like Ben who, before killing Jacob, tries one last time to discover the meaning of his existence by asking, "What about me?" to which Jacob's response is, "What about you?" This response immediately reminds us of the randomness of existence, because the Lacanian "*Che vuoi?*" obtains no satisfying response.
- 21 Yet the central feature that structures the big Other in Lacanian theory is that it does not exist. From this comes the idea of coexistence, because when death inevitably strikes, it strikes us in total solitude.³⁶ The logic of fantasy fills the void generated by the lack of response to the question "*Che vuoi?*" by offering other possible answers. Fantasies thus offer themselves up as solutions to the mystery; the subject exists because their parents wanted them, for example, or because they are destined to accomplish great things. Here, the role of fantasy is to offer the subject a glimmer of hope of receiving a response to that unanswerable question; it thus provides an escape route to the subject faced with the roadblock of their own existence. With this in mind, the logic of fantasy is at the heart of the conflict between Jack and Locke. Jack advocates for a scientific and empirical approach to all the strange events that occur in life on the island. He refuses the logic of fantasy, whereas Locke allows himself to be guided by this logic, convinced that there is a big Other who wants something from him. While Jack is certain of the necessity of communal life because death will inevitably strike the subject in their solitude, Locke is not afraid of solitude, as he is convinced that he exists for a reason. *Lost*'s strength lies in the ambiguous position it takes when confronted with the dead end that "*Che vuoi?*" represents. Jacob does indeed act as a sort of big Other—reassuring the survivors that their existence is based

on a desire, that they are there for a reason. But ultimately, Jacob is a human being who has made his own mistakes, and who himself is subject to the weight of the past and his beginnings. He is not capable of predicting his own death and must endure the repercussions of his errors and the insufficiencies of his existence. Thus, he reveals the fault line in the impossible position that the big Other occupies.

- 22 It is through this problematization of the position of the big Other that the show reveals its most radical psychoanalytic aspects. The series seems to suggest that it is vain to try to find the big Other outside of the self and that it is more useful to accept the contingency of our own existences. It is important to note that this insinuation is transmitted through the deployment of the gaze in all its radicality—a deployment that manifests in a particularly striking way when our relationship with the gaze is altered. This alteration, which manifests many times over in the repositioning of perspectives, can be seen most notably in the moment in which Sawyer witnesses the birth of Aaron (S05E04). The scene—gleaned from a series of flashes which propel him through time—is deeply moving for him, and for the audience as well. Of course, it is because of his feelings for Kate, but the radicality of this scene stems from another source: It comes from the unnatural aspect of being privy to a moment such as this—a moment that is not meant for him to see. For a moment, he adopts the impossible position of the "imagined gaze in the field of the Other." In other words, Sawyer adopts Jacob's position, even as Jacob's omniscience and omnipotence turn out to be an illusion. Of course, this dynamic is expressed in the way the show is received, confronting us with the most radical aspects of our own relationship to otherness. With this in mind, we can confirm that *Lost*'s title is well suited to the show; we as subjects are constantly "lost" in the labyrinth of our relationships. As we have established, the mediation of the gaze allows us to call into question our own perspectives regarding relationships and otherness. *Lost* will therefore inevitably pave the way for future reflections on media, as well as on our relationship to the gaze and its origins.

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NOTES

1. By the term "complex narratives," we are thinking of a body of contemporary films that reject the conventional linear narratives characteristic of Hollywood film in order to submerge the audience in non-linear, fragmented stories made up of multiple narrative frameworks. Increasingly popular since the 1990s, complex narratives have been studied for the last twelve or so years. See also, Warren, Buckland (ed.), *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*, Malden (MA), Wiley-Blackwell, 2009; Richard Denby, "The New Disorder: Adventures in Film Narrative," *The New Yorker*, March 5, 2007; Cornelia Klecker, "Mind-Tricking Narratives: Between Classical and Art-Cinema Narration," *Poetics Today* 34.2, 2013, pp. 119-146; and Louis-Paul Willis, "Vers un 'Nouveau Hollywood' ? Considérations sur la métalepse dans le cinéma populaire contemporain," *Kinephanos* 2.1, 2011, pp. 67-88.
2. There are a great many works that explore the similarity between the panopticon and the *Lost* universe. In the following discussion, we will touch upon some of these reflections, thinking specifically of the work of Amy Bauer, "Discipline & Punish: The Lost Experience as Panopticon," *Lost Online Studies* 1.2, 2006, <http://loststudies.com/1.2/discipline.html>; Giancarlo Lombardi, "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About *Lost* but Were Afraid to Ask Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault," in *Looking for Lost: Critical Essays on the Enigmatic Series*, ed. Randy Laist, Jefferson, McFarland, 2011, pp. 90-104; and Sébastien Lefait, *Surveillance On Screen: Monitoring Contemporary Films and Television Programs*, Toronto (ON), Scarecrow Press, 2013.
3. Of course, although the viewer is almost certainly not aware of these ideas, they determine nevertheless the radical nature of the experience of watching a television series such as *Lost*. It is

thus important to elucidate these ideas in order to understand the ways in which they can influence our analysis of the show.

4. A form of pleasure linked to looking and monstration.
5. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud relates the scopic drive to the "looking and being looked at" (p. 157) and delineates the two sides to scopophilia: voyeurism and exhibitionism.
6. Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen*, 16.3, 1975, p. 9.
7. The idea of a spectatorial position that is "all-perceiving" is that of Christian Metz, who proposes a psychoanalytic reflection on cinema in *Le Signifiant imaginaire*.
8. Lacan, Jacques, and Jacques-Alain Miller. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. W. W. Norton & Company, 1977, p. 84.
9. Cowie, Elizabeth. *Representing the Woman: Cinema and Psychoanalysis*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 288.
10. Idem.
11. Idem.
12. McGowan, Todd. "Looking for the Gaze: Lacanian Film Theory and Its Vicissitudes," *Cinema Journal* 42.3, 2003, pp. 28-29.
13. Originally: Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Paris, Gallimard, 1975, p. 235. Excerpt from: Foucault, Michel. "Panopticism." In *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by A. Sheridan, 195-228. Vintage Books, 1995.
14. Lacan, p. 95.
15. Henry Krips, "The Politics of the Gaze: Foucault, Lacan, Žižek", *Culture Unbound* 2, 2010, p. 93.
16. Lacan, p. 97.
17. Krips, p. 93.
18. For a thorough analysis of the gaze and its role within film studies, see Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan*, New York, SUNY Press, 2007.
19. Lacan, p. 84.
20. Krips, p. 97
21. Lacan, p. 84.
22. Krips, p. 94.
23. Idem.
24. Ann E. Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze*, New York, Routledge, 1997, p. 6.
25. Hatchuel, Sarah, *Lost : Fiction vitale*. Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2013, p. 106. (My translation.)
26. Lefait, Sébastien, *Surveillance on Screen: Monitoring Contemporary Film and Television Programs*, Toronto, Scarecrow Press, 2013, p. vii.
27. Lefait, p. xiv.
28. See also Lombardi, pp. 90-104.
29. Bauer, Amy, "Discipline & Punish: The Lost Experience as Panopticon", *Lost Online Studies* 1.2, 2006, <http://loststudies.com/1.2/discipline.html>.
30. Lefait, pp. 118-119.
31. Lefait, p. 121.
32. Foucault, p. 204.
33. Hatchuel, p. 29.
34. Foucault, p. 204.
35. This question is strikingly similar to the Lacanian "*che vuoi ?*"
36. In the show, Jack often repeats the phrase, "Live together, die alone".

ABSTRACTS

Among the numerous references to philosophy that permeate its narrative universe, *Lost* seems to be predominantly traversed by Foucauldian themes, mostly related to articulations of looking dynamics and surveillance. Themes related to panopticism and discipline constitute notable underpinnings for the series' plot, as several previous analyses have pertinently demonstrated. This article proposes an examination of the spectatorial repercussions related to this facet of *Lost*, most importantly by establishing ties between the panoptic gaze and the gaze in its psychoanalytic conception, elaborated by Jacques Lacan. By examining both these concepts of a gaze deployed around the position of the Other, this article focuses on the series' exploration of subjectivity in the era of panopticism. By exploring the importance and narrative deployment of these notions of the gaze within *Lost*, it is suggested that the series articulates a certain radicality around the notion of Otherness, as well as its expression through the televisual mediation of the gaze.

Parmi les nombreuses références à la philosophie qui se déclinent au sein de son univers narratif, *Lost* est notamment traversé par une thématique prédominante pouvant être rattachée à la pensée de Michel Foucault, la dynamique du regard et de la surveillance marquant l'un des aspects les plus notoires de la série. Les thèmes propres au panoptisme et aux sociétés disciplinaires fondent effectivement plusieurs pans cruciaux de l'intrigue, et plusieurs analyses de la série en font aisément la démonstration. Cet article se propose pour sa part d'examiner les répercussions spectatorielles liées à cette thématique, qui traverse les six saisons de *Lost*, en tissant des liens entre le regard panoptique et le regard dans sa conception psychanalytique, élaborée par Jacques Lacan. En analysant ces deux regards déployés au champ de l'Autre, il est ensuite possible d'aborder *Lost* comme un discours télévisuel qui explore la nature même de l'existence subjective à l'ère du panoptisme. En explorant l'importance et le déploiement de ces concepts dans la série, il s'avère possible de constater la radicalité qu'elle articule autour de la notion de l'altérité, ainsi que son expression par le biais de la médiation du regard.

INDEX

Keywords: *Lost*, gaze, otherness, Lacan Jacques, Foucault Michel, psychoanalysis, media

Mots-clés: *Lost*, regard, altérité, Lacan Jacques, Foucault Michel, psychanalyse, médias

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