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The Seen – Le Vu



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The Seen – Le Vu

The seen is something that the moving eye can glance or gaze at. It captures our visual attention, and although senses other than sight may be engaged, we are usually aware only of the latter.

The increased presence of visual culture in the last few decades coincides with the expansion of postmodern art and the aestheticization of everyday life and the environment. In the last decade this process has spread from the First and Third World countries also to those of the Second World, therefore becoming a global phenomenon of late capitalism.

In such a situation new questions have to be posed and new theoretical answers are warranted. Here are a few possible questions:

– It has been diagnosed that the 'linguistic turn' is a consequence of the 'pictorial turn' (W. J. T. Mitchell), that the predominant part of philosophy of our century is anti-ocularcentric (M. Jay), and that at least since the sixties society is increasingly becoming that of the spectacle (G. Debord), mass media and of the aestheticized environment. What kind of theoretical discourse do such altered cultural circumstances require?

– The culture industry received its first thorough critique in the sixties. Since then not only has the relationship between elite art and mass culture changed, but visual culture is, in many respects, replacing the written one. What consequences do such changes have if they are really as profound as implied here?

– The presence of the visual has varied in different cultures. What are these differences and how can they be discerned today? What is the relationship between mass communication and the proliferation of visual culture? In which respects does the situation differ when comparing First, Second and Third World countries and cultures?

– Sight hardly ever functions alone. In recent art as well as in theory attempts have been made to stress other senses and features (audial and haptic), and hence to balance the preponderance of vision. In which ways has this process been carried out and what is its artistic and cultural significance?

– It has been claimed that the present culture and art are in the process of 'de-differentiation', of 'reenchantment', 'disturbation', etc. To what extent does the visual nature of much of this art and culture support such claims?

– In which way do new technologies affect our perception of the lived world as compared to representational painting or photography? How is what and how we 'see' determined or influenced by our contemporary circumstances?

Aleš Erjavec

Lars-Olof Åhlberg
Modernity and Ocularcentrism
A Second Look at Descartes and Heidegger

I

A host of idioms and metaphors – both dead and alive – in every-day language as well as in philosophical parlance bears witness to the importance of sight and vision as a source of knowledge and experience: we speak of *seeing*, in the sense of understanding, we have *views* about this or that, poets and philosophers have formulated *visions* of reality, we can be *clear-sighted*, *far-sighted* or *short-sighted*, we can gain *insight* into things or we can be *blind* to certain things, we *visualize* things we have not seen, we sometimes *overlook* things, we sometimes *see through* the invalid reasoning of others, and we hope that our own reasoning is *perceptive* and *perspicuous*.

Sight and vision as a source of knowledge or illusion is a cardinal theme in the philosophical tradition from Plato to the present time. The hegemony of vision, »the noblest of the senses«, is deeply ingrained in our Western ways of thinking, feeling and acting. The precedence given to the eye, to vision and to the visual has recently come under attack from various quarters; the critique of ocularcentrism is intended to supplement and reinforce the critique of logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence.

Although the prevalence of ocularcentric thinking and of visual metaphors is frequently associated with Descartes and the rise of modern scientific thinking, ocularcentrism does not seem to be a particularly modern phenomenon nor specifically Western. Visual and ocularcentric metaphors abound in various cultural settings, perhaps because »[i]n their expressive power and subtle capacity to change, metaphors of light are incomparable«, as Hans Blumenberg puts it.¹ The fact that the Sanskrit word »veda« (which means knowledge and transmitted wisdom) has given the holy scriptures of Indian religion, *The Vedas*, their name, bears witness to the intimate connection between vision and knowledge assumed in most, if not all, cultures. The Greek word »οἶδα«, meaning »I know«, is the perfect tense of »εἶδω« and

¹ Hans Blumenberg, »Light as a Metaphor for Truth: At the Preliminary Stage of Philosophical Concept Formation«, in David Michael Levin (Ed.), *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1993, p. 31.

means literally »I have seen« and the noun » εἶδος » (means that which is seen, as well as form, shape, figure, class or kind.

Light as opposed to darkness and vision as opposed to blindness play a fundamental role in ancient religious thinking and experience: »[light] has certainly been one of the things in the physical environment of man which, from the earliest times we know of, has peculiarly impressed him and been most closely associated with his thoughts of the Divine«, says the theologian Edwyn Bevan in his work *Symbolism and Belief*.² »In all great religions of antiquity,« he notes, »the chief gods are characterized by their connexion with light«. ³ In Judaism, for example, »[l]ight in an extreme degree, splendour, is the normal characteristic of Divine manifestations«, ⁴ and in *The New Testament* we read that »God dwelleth in light which cannot be approached« (1 Tim. VI. 16). In the Nicene Creed (325) we find a fusion of platonizing themes with an ancient metaphoric of light: Christ is hailed as »Light from Light, true God from true God«. The association of the godhead with light and splendour seems to be ubiquitous; at any rate, it is a common Indo-European habit of thought as the Sanskrit word »deva« (derived from »to shine«) which becomes »deus« in Latin seems to indicate.⁵

In the present paper I shall discuss some features of ocularcentrism and some aspects of the critique of ocularcentrism analyzed and documented in Martin Jay's magisterial *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (1993) and in the essays in David Michael Levin's *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (1993). Ocularcentrism is frequently regarded as a variety of logocentrism and as a form of essentialism: it can be regarded as an expression of the seemingly interminable search for secure foundations, a search that cannot but result in failure according to the poststructuralist and postmodernist critics of Enlightenment rationality.

Martin Jay's claim that »[d]isillusionment with the project of illumination [i.e. Enlightenment] is now so widespread that it has become the new conventional wisdom«⁶ seems to me to be correct, provided it is suitably qualified. For although the disillusionment with the Enlightenment and reason and the repudiation of universal standards of rationality is widespread, it is not universal. The anti-enlightenment stance dominates contemporary

² Edwyn Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief*, 1938, Fontana, London 1962, p. 111.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁵ M. Hiriyana, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, George Allen & Unwin, London 1932, pp. 31-2.

⁶ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1993, p. 592.

cultural studies and much literary theory and can also be found in much contemporary Anglo-Saxon and French sociology and philosophy. In the natural sciences and in many other areas of intellectual activity and research, this situation does not obtain. A majority of economists in the United States, for example, and I suspect also elsewhere, support so-called rational choice or public choice theories⁷ which have their roots in the utilitarian tradition, and are therefore firmly anchored within the rationalistic Enlightenment tradition.

The new conventional wisdom that Jay speaks of and which we encounter in cultural studies and in much contemporary social and humanistic thought, is open to serious objections on several accounts. Critics of Enlightenment thought are prone to embrace, implicitly or explicitly, relativistic doctrines which are deeply problematic, both theoretically and politically. I hasten to add that I am not objecting to relativism as such; there are, to be sure, a bewildering variety of positions that are considered relativist, not all of which are self-refuting or pernicious. The relativism of the so-called Edinburgh school is different from the relativism espoused by Joseph Margolis, Paul Feyerabend's relativistic philosophy of science is different from the standard postmodernist »constructivist« relativism, which again differs from the cultural relativism of many anthropologists. What I object to is the ease and sometimes also the naïveté with which cognitive relativism is accepted as a matter of course.

The critique of ocularcentrism is graphically expressed by Levin who claims that vision is »the most reifying of all our perceptual modalities«. There is, he claims, a »power drive inherent in vision«⁸ – an inherent drive toward domination and control over objects and persons, and a desire for total visibility and a complete overview of reality. The relevant question that needs to be asked (but which is seldom put) is: is this really true?, or, as Stephen Houlgate puts it in his contribution to Levin's book, »Vision, Reflection, and Openness«: »Is vision (and the mode of thinking which is modeled on vision) inherently oriented toward surveying and dominating objects?«⁹

I think that the anti-enlightenment critique, as it appears in Jay's work and in various essays in Levin's collection, overshoots the mark in certain fundamental respects. In particular I shall argue that the anti-ocularcentrists'

⁷ See *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, February 17, 1995, p. 15.

⁸ David Levin, *The Opening of Vision*, Routledge, New York 1988, p. 65.

⁹ Stephen Houlgate, »Vision, Reflection, and Openness: The 'Hegemony of Vision' from a Hegelian Point of View«, in *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, p. 98.

appeal to Heidegger, whose thinking is hailed as a radical alternative to ocularcentrism and essentialism, is dubious.

To begin with I shall consider some aspects of Descartes's philosophy that betoken his modernity and his ocularcentrism. In the second section I shall discuss Heidegger's critique of modernity.

II

According to the traditional and somewhat self-congratulatory narrative, as recounted and criticized by Stephen Toulmin in his perceptive work, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (1990), the »twin founding pillars of modern thought« are modern science, with its first hero Isaac Newton and modern philosophy, initiated by René Descartes. Modern science and modern philosophy are thus considered to be paradigmatic examples of reason and rationality.¹⁰

If we wish to play the game of who-came-first we could easily think of other candidates for the title of founding father of modern philosophy: Francis Bacon, David Hume and Immanuel Kant spring to mind, but Descartes is as good a candidate as any. It is therefore not surprising that Descartes has become the favourite target of recent critiques of the Enlightenment, of rationalism and of scientism. Descartes's philosophy is also one of the main targets of Heidegger's deconstruction (*Abbau*) of Western metaphysics, while Cartesian foundationalism and dualism are similarly central to Rorty's critique of philosophy as a quasi-scientific enterprise aiming at mirroring nature. Wittgenstein's later philosophy is of course also decidedly anti-Cartesian and anti-foundationalist in intent.

» 'Cartesian perspectivalism'«, Martin Jays says, »may nicely serve as a shorthand way to characterize the dominant scopic regime of the modern era«. ¹¹ But if Descartes is an ocularcentric thinker, he is not ocularcentric in the way that the British empiricists are. Unlike Locke Descartes did not espouse a representative theory of perception and knowledge: he did not believe that our perception of the qualities of objects resembles the qualities of the objects perceived, nor did he think that words and signs resemble the things they signify (the view that the linguistic sign is arbitrary does not originate with de Saussure as is sometimes supposed). Sense perception in itself is

¹⁰ Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, The Free Press, New York 1990, p. ix.

¹¹ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, pp. 69-70.

neither the source nor the criterion of certainty and knowledge: »it is the mind which senses, not the body«, as Descartes puts it in his *Optics*.¹²

Cartesian dualism between mind and matter became influential, Jay argues, because of »its valorization of the disembodied eye ... shared by modern science and Albertian art«. ¹³ It justified and privileged the objective, and disembodied gaze at the expense of the active and embodied look.

What makes Descartes a modern thinker is not so much his ocularcentrism as his conception of thought and knowledge, or as Blumenberg points out: »The demand for the *presence* of the object under study is the point of departure for the modern idea of science, and in Bacon and Descartes, this demand is formulated in opposition to the validity of *auctoritas*«. ¹⁴ Instead it is the internalization of light and vision, the reliance on the eye of the mind and the stress on intellectual perception and conception as well as the rejection of tradition that weds Descartes with ocularcentrism. Jay distinguishes between two varieties of ocularcentrism: the »traditions of *speculation* with the eye of the mind and *observation* with the two eyes of the body«. ¹⁵ Descartes, being a rationalist, belongs to the first group whereas the British empiricists and the sensualists of the French Enlightenment belong to the second.

In his *Discourse on Method* Descartes formulates the principle which informs his philosophical project: »We ought never to allow ourselves to be persuaded of the truth of anything unless on the evidence of our reason.« ¹⁶ For Descartes the authority of tradition is the main source of error and folly: we should be sceptical of everything that is accepted on the authority of example and custom, he says. Descartes's outlook has been aptly summarized by Ernest Gellner: »it is individual reason versus collective culture. Truth can be secured only by stepping outside prejudice and accumulated custom, and refashioning one's world«. ¹⁷ Descartes's individualism, his anti-authoritarianism and his anti-traditionalism extend to all spheres of life, even to town-planning. In a Corbusieresque passage in the *Discourse on Method* he says that »ancient cities ... are usually but ill laid out compared with the regularly

¹² Quoted from Jay, p. 75.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹⁴ Blumenberg, »Light as a Metaphor for Truth«, p. 48.

¹⁵ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p. 29.

¹⁶ Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff & D. Murdoch, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1985, part IV.

¹⁷ Ernest Gellner, *Reason and Culture: The Historic Role of Rationality and Rationalism*, Blackwell, London 1992, p. 8.

constructed towns which a professional architect has freely planned on an open plain«. ¹⁸

Descartes's problem, which he passed on to Hume and Kant, was how the human mind could arrive at justifiable and secure knowledge of the world from its own resources without relying on tradition and authority. ¹⁹ Descartes is something of a philosophical *Faust*, but he failed in his enterprise since he did not succeed in throwing off his scholastic baggage completely, but that is another story.

Descartes's starting point is universal doubt – theoretical doubt, if you like, since his doubt is hyperbolic – an intellectual and rhetorical device, since nobody in his or her senses can consistently live up to the standards of Cartesian doubt.

Descartes's celebrated *cogito ergo sum* was intended to provide a firm and indubitable ground for our knowledge of the world, thereby meeting the sceptical challenge. Descartes is after absolute, or, as he calls it, metaphysical certainty. His methodical doubt is expressed in the following manner in the second *Meditation (Mediationes de prima philosophiae)*: »I shall proceed by setting aside all that in which the least doubt could be supposed to exist, just as if I had discovered that it was absolutely false«. ²⁰ Descartes considers something metaphysically certain if it is impossible to conceive of any ground for doubt and if it is impossible to be deceived or mistaken about the truth of what one is certain about. The only thing that is metaphysically certain is one's own existence, for, according to Descartes, the statement »I doubt, but I do not exist«, is contradictory. One cannot, he claims, consistently deny one's own existence: it is metaphysically certain that the conscious, thinking subject exists. In *Principia Philosophiae* Descartes claims that »we cannot doubt our existence without existing while we doubt; and this is the first knowledge that we obtain when we philosophize in an orderly way«. ²¹

It should be borne in mind that Descartes's *cogito*, »I think« includes all conscious experience and not only what we normally would call thinking. It includes willing, understanding, imagining, and perceiving. Therefore we might just as well say »percipio, ergo sum« (I perceive, therefore I am), or, if we regard intentional actions as conscious in some sense, we might say »bibo, ergo sum« (I drink, therefore I am) to quote the student song.

¹⁸ Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, part II.

¹⁹ Cf. Gellner, *Reason and Culture*, ch. 1.

²⁰ *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. E. S. Haldane & G.R.T. Ross, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1972, vol. 1, p. 149.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

Having established a firm ground for human knowledge, Descartes then formulates his famous criterion of truth: the criterion of clear and distinct ideas, which however appears to be presupposed in the *cogito-ergo-sum* proof. But the criterion of truth is reliable, it seems, only if it is guaranteed by the existence of a non-deceiving God and Descartes's ontological proof of the existence of God relies on the criterion of clear and distinct ideas, so »Descartes is in the impossible predicament of trying to hoist himself by his own bootstraps« as Norman Malcolm puts it.²²

A recurrent theme in epistemology since Descartes is that the foundation of knowledge is to be sought in subjective self-certainty. Within this epistemological tradition there is agreement concerning the principal task: to construct human knowledge out of the contents of consciousness. The disagreement concerns the exact nature of the elements of consciousness. The last and most consistent (and perhaps most heroic) off-shoot of this tradition was the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle, which attempted to construct the world out of sense-data, the postulated »atoms« of experience.

The presupposition or the grand premise of this epistemological tradition, viz. that the consciousness of the individual human subject is the natural point of departure for epistemology, is rejected by Hegelians, by Heidegger, by the later Wittgenstein and by the pragmatists in favour of a communal, collective and practical conception of the nature of human knowledge. A corollary of the rejection of the grand epistemological premise is the rejection of Cartesian and empiricist foundationalism, and by implication all varieties of ocularcentrism associated with rationalism and empiricism.

Cartesian rationalism can be interpreted as an existential response to a personal and cultural crisis. As Toulmin points out, Cartesian philosophy matured during an extremely turbulent and violent period in European history: the Thirty Years' War was ravaging the Continent, the major European powers, with the exception of the Netherlands, were suffering a severe economic depression and religious intolerance and persecution was on the increase.²³ The present-day rift between the two cultures, the scientific and technological culture and the humanistic and social culture is prefigured in the formation of modernity, Toulmin argues. »Modernity«, he claims, »had two distinct starting points, a humanistic one grounded in classical literature, and a scientific one rooted in 17th-century natural philosophy«. ²⁴ Galileo, Descartes and Newton represent the scientific tendency in modernity while

²² Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: Nothing is Hidden*, Blackwell, Oxford 1986, p. 206.

²³ Cf. Toulmin, *Cosmopolis*, pp. 13 ff.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Erasmus, Rabelais, Shakespeare and Montaigne personify the other face of modernity. Needless to say, it was the scientific and rationalistic version of modernity that prevailed at the expense of the humanistic and sceptical variety. As a consequence, logic was favoured at the expense of rhetoric, the universal at the expense of the particular, the general at the expense of the local and the timeless at the expense of the transitory.²⁵ «The God-eye's view of reality» as opposed to the embodied subject's historically situated vision of reality and the disinterested and theoretical gaze as opposed to the interested and practical look could also be added to Toulmin's list.

III

Heidegger is often regarded, rightly or wrongly, as the most radical and consistent critic of Western metaphysics and Enlightenment rationality, whose most spectacular manifestation is modern science and technology. The critique of ocularcentrism is an integral part of Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics, but, as Jay notes, Heidegger »was never simply hostile to vision *per se*, but only to the variant that had dominated Western metaphysics for millennia.«²⁶ David Levin argues in his essay, »Decline and Fall: Ocularcentrism in Heidegger's Reading of the History of Metaphysics« that Heidegger's thinking is *the* antidote to an oppressive and domineering ocularcentrism. Heidegger's thinking provides us with »a hermeneutical gaze that recollects the unconcealment of being«, he claims:

the »truthful« gaze is thus a gaze that would hold itself open to the interplay of the visible and the invisible, the present and the absent – an interplay that is also made visible as the gift of the ontological difference, opening up a field of illumination for the enactment of human vision.²⁷

Levin believes that Heidegger's thinking encourages »resistance to all forms of reification, totalization, and reductionism« and promotes »epistemological humility, a rigorously experimental attitude, always provisional, always questioning«.²⁸ In Levin's view Heidegger stands for »a consistent perspectivism, truth without certainty, the end of essentialism, an uncompro-

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-35.

²⁶ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p. 275.

²⁷ David Michael Levin, »Decline and Fall: Ocularcentrism in Heidegger's Reading of the History of Metaphysics«, in Levin, *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, p. 212.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

mising break with foundationalism, and a renunciation of the metaphysics of presence«. ²⁹

I wish to question Levin's assessment of Heidegger as a critic of modernity; I disagree in particular with his view that Heidegger's thinking is radically anti-essentialist and anti-foundationalist. It is, of course, true that Heidegger is a fervent critic of modernity, but his critique, as I shall try to show, bears the stamp of the sinister background – both philosophical and political – against which it unfolds.

Firstly, I shall comment on Heidegger's alleged anti-essentialism. One thing is beyond doubt: Heidegger's texts, both the early and the late works, bristle with essentialist language. In his essay from 1938, »The Age of the World Picture« [»Die Zeit des Weltbildes«], an essay to which I shall return in a moment, Heidegger considers among other things the essence of modern science (das Wesen der neuzeitlichen Wissenschaft), which is an aspect of the essence of modernity (das Wesen der Neuzeit). Heidegger further declares that the essence of science is research and goes on to ask what the essence of research and what the essence of mathematics is (das Wesen der Forschung, das Wesen des Mathematischen). In his *Introduction to Metaphysics* [*Einführung in die Metaphysik*] from 1935 but not published until 1953), Heidegger even speaks of the essence of Being (Das Wesen des Seins) and characterizes the essence of spirit (das Wesen des Geistes) as »the originary and knowing attunement to and the determination for the essence of being«. ³⁰ Many more examples could be given. Some of Heidegger's writings even have the word »essence« in their titles: *On the Essence of Truth*, *On the Essence of the Ground* [*Vom Wesen der Wahrheit, Vom Wesen des Grundes*].

The frequent use of the word »essence«, however, is perhaps not conclusive, although it is significant. We must therefore consider how »essence« is actually used in Heidegger's work and scrutinize what he says about essences, a Herculean task that for obvious reasons cannot be undertaken here, so I shall have to confine myself to a few suggestions. It seems to me that Heidegger's whole way of philosophizing, both in the early and the late works, is informed by a quasi-platonic style of thinking. In the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, for example, Heidegger introduces the question of Being by citing a few examples of things that exist, of things he would call beings with a small b: a building (exists) *is*, there *is* a thunderstorm in the mountains, there *is* a

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ My transl. of the German original: »Geist ist ursprünglich gestimmte, wissende Entschlossenheit zum Wesen des Seins«, Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 1935, 2nd ed., Niemeyer, Tübingen 1958, pp. 37-8.

gateway at the front of the Romanesque church, the state *is* something real, there *is* something in van Gogh's painting of a pair of peasant shoes.³¹ Heidegger then proceeds to ask what the Being of these beings is, assuming that there is something unitary hiding behind phenomena that »exist«, phenomena that »are«, namely the Being of beings or Being itself. It seems to me that Ernst Tugendhat, the renegade Heideggerian, is right in saying that Heidegger assumes that the different meanings and uses of the word »to be« are unitary, or, that they can be reduced to a unitary concept.³² This mode of reasoning, the postulation of »hidden« phenomena and processes from which the visible and tangible phenomena emanate as it were, is omnipresent in Heidegger's thinking. A spectacular example is Heidegger's introduction of »nothing« as a noun in the lecture *What is Metaphysics?* [*Was ist Metaphysik?*] (1929). Science, he says, investigates what is, in other words beings (Seiendes) and nothing else. He then immediately proceeds to ask the question what this nothing with a capital N is, and claims that the Nothing (das Nichts) is more fundamental than negation and our use of the words »no« and »not«.³³ Heidegger believes that the everyday use as well as the logical use of negation is possible only because of the Nothing. In other words, we can negate statements and say no only because of the Nothing. If this is not essentialism and Platonism, then nothing is!

As for Heidegger's alleged anti-foundationalism, I will confine myself to a short and arresting passage from *What is Metaphysics*, in which Heidegger claims that although science does not wish to have anything to do with the Nothing, science is in fact only possible because it is grounded in the Nothing. »Only because the Nothing is manifest is it possible for science to investigate beings«, Heidegger declares.³⁴ For Heidegger scientific inquiry is always founded on metaphysical presuppositions. Therefore I consider that is incorrect to regard him as a radical anti-foundationalist.

I now turn to Heidegger's critique of modernity as it is expressed in his essay »The Age of the World Picture« and in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Metaphysics, Heidegger says, provides the foundations for an age and confers upon it its essential *gestalt*, because metaphysics furnishes a particular

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

³² Ernst Tugendhat, *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die sprachanalytische Philosophie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/Main 1976, p. 91.

³³ Martin Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik?*, 1929, 9th ed., Klostermann, Frankfurt/Main 1965, pp. 26-8.

³⁴ My translation of the German original: »Nur weil das Nichts offenbar ist, kann die Wissenschaft das Seiende selbst zum Gegenstand der Untersuchung machen«, Martin Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik?*, p. 40.

interpretation of being and a specific conception of truth. Every phenomenon that is characteristic of an age is permeated by the metaphysical foundation of the age, Heidegger claims. According to Heidegger the following phenomena constitute the essential characteristics of the modern age: the dominance of natural science and technology; the aesthetization of art, that is, the fact that the work of art becomes an object of aesthetic experience and is viewed as an expression of human life; the fact that human action is interpreted in terms of culture and value and the »de-deification« (Entgötterung) of the world. All these phenomena contribute to the domination of the world as picture, by which he means that the world has become a picture, a representation, something reified which man can dispose of at will. The fact that the world has become a picture, a representation is an essential characteristic of modernity (Neuzeit). For Heidegger modernity is the latest stage in the history of the forgetfulness of Being that set in after the Pre-Socratic period in philosophy.

Basically, the same analysis is found in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, but with stronger political and historicist overtones. European culture is decaying, Europe »lies in the giant pincers between Russia and America«, which from the metaphysical point of view are identical: the same »dismal rage of unchained technology« and the same »appalling organizing of the average man« (die bodenlose Organisation des Normalmenschen). Heidegger dreads the time when the whole world has been conquered technically and economically and when »every event is accessible at all times everywhere«. ³⁵ The darkening of the world (Weltverdüstörung) is in progress: the gods have fled, the earth is being exploited, the collectivization of man (Vermassung des Menschen) is proceeding and mediocrity is rife. ³⁶ The Germans are a metaphysical people, Heidegger says, and although Germany is surrounded by neighbours on all sides and is therefore in a vulnerable position, she can, Heidegger claims, become the source of the renewal of Europe, bringing Europe back into contact with the powers of Being. ³⁷ Levin no doubt has similar passages in mind to the ones I have paraphrased when he writes:

Heidegger might seem to be telling the very *same* story that so many reactionary thinkers in Europe had been telling and repeating since the closing years of the nineteenth century: a story which, let us say, begins in nostalgia and concludes with a condemnation of modernity. ³⁸

³⁵ Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, pp. 28-9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁸ Levin, »Decline and Fall«, p. 187.

Although Levin admits that there are, »some deep and profoundly disturbing affinities between Heidegger's account and the narratives in circulation among the forces of the German right«, he nevertheless believes that we can find hints of a new beginning which is very different from the ideals of Heidegger's conservative contemporaries or from the new beginning proclaimed by National Socialism.³⁹ I do not wish to enlarge on the so-called Heidegger affaire, which concerns the nature and extent of Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism, but a few comments may be in place since Heidegger's critique of modernity inevitably raises political and historical issues. The real question is not whether Heidegger had National Socialist sympathies (that question has been settled long ago); the real issue concerns the relationship between Heidegger's philosophy and the politics of National Socialism.⁴⁰ It seems to me that in some of his writings from the thirties Heidegger comes perilously near to identifying the »fate of being« and »the powers of Being« with the German revolution. Karl Löwith, Heidegger's one-time student and a philosopher and historian of ideas in his own right, recalls that after hearing Heidegger's notorious »Rektoratsrede« in 1933 he didn't know whether Heidegger meant that one should go home and read the pre-Socratics or that one should join the storm troops.⁴¹ Löwith also recalls that Heidegger concurred in Löwith's opinion that Heidegger's political commitment was founded on his philosophy and that Heidegger told him that his political intervention was based on his concept of historicity.⁴²

In Heidegger's writings after the war his invocations of Being are considerably more quietist. His pronouncements on Being assume an increasingly mystical, or should I say quasi-mystical, quality. The thinking of Being transcends both theoretical and practical thinking. It is purely a remembrance of Being and nothing else, it lets Being be, Heidegger says in his *Letter on Humanism* (1946) [*Brief über den Humanismus*]. This ordinary thinking is »an

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Heidegger's refusal after the war to disassociate himself unequivocally from the politics of the Nazi period and his persistent silence about the holocaust are surely relevant in this context. In the exchange of letters with Herbert Marcuse in 1947 Heidegger compares the fate of the Jews with the expulsion of Germans from the eastern territories awarded to Poland after the war. The philosopher of ontological difference was blind to some very real ontic differences. (See Bernd Martin, *Martin Heidegger und das »Dritte Reich«: Ein Kompendium*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1989, p. 157.)

⁴¹ Rüdiger Safranski, *Ein Meister aus Deutschland: Heidegger und seine Zeit*, Hanser, München 1994, p. 292.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 371.

echo of the favour of Being«,⁴³ as Heidegger puts it and presumably can only be practised by the elect. Those of us who have not heard the call of the pathway in the Black Forest may be forgiven for thinking that Heidegger has abandoned rational thought and communicative rationality. The impression that Heidegger is attempting to express the unsayable in his works after *Time and Being* (*Sein und Zeit*) is strengthened by the fact that there has not been (and, as far as I can see, there cannot) be any real development of Heideggerian philosophy. Heideggerians are in the habit of producing more or less readable paraphrases of the master. In the final analysis Heidegger's thinking is religious. Heidegger's influence seems to be steadily decreasing in France and Germany, whereas he has a considerable following in America, arguably the most secularized country in the world. The non-confessional religious quality of his thinking may paradoxically help to explain his appeal in a world from which the gods have fled and where technoscience reigns supreme.

For the reasons indicated I cannot agree with Levin's appraisal of Heidegger as a critic of modernity and of ocularcentrism. I do not believe that Heidegger is a radical anti-essentialist and anti-foundationalist thinker, although his essentialism and foundationalism is admittedly somewhat outlandish.

The concept of theory, inherited from Greek philosophy, and the theoretical attitude is often made responsible for the prevalence of ocularcentrism in our culture. Theory implies generality in philosophy as well as in science. Heidegger is critical of the claims of both philosophical and scientific theory. Science does not think, science is not the revelation of truth, it can only attain »rightness« Heidegger says in his essay »What is thinking?« [*Was heißt Denken?*«]. To say that Heidegger is right in saying that science does not think, since only scientists think, is perhaps a petty response. Nevertheless such a response points to an important aspect of Heidegger's attitude toward science: his total disregard for differences and for specific cases.

I think there are some fundamental similarities between Heidegger's and Derrida's attitude toward science in spite of the fact that Derrida is no uncritical admirer of Heidegger's. Derrida's pronouncements on science and scientific thinking seem to me to be essentialist in some peculiar way. It may be naïve, or perverse (or both) to accuse Derrida of essentialism. The fact that there are many passages in his writings where he uses »essentialist« language is not in itself proof of essentialist thinking. Conversely, the absence of essen-

⁴³ »das anfängliche Denken ist der Wiederhall der Gunst des Seins«, *Was ist Metaphysik?*, p. 49.

tialist language is not conclusive evidence of the absence of essentialism. But what are we to make of the following striking passage from Derrida's work *Mémoires d'aveugle*, quoted and commented on in Jay's work:

If the eyes of all animals are destined for sight, and perhaps from there to the scopic knowledge of the *animale rationale*, only man knows how to go beyond seeing and knowing because he knows how to cry ... Only he knows that tears are the essence of the eye – and not sight ... Revelatory blindness, apocalyptic blindness, that which reveals the very truth of the eyes, this would be the gaze veiled by tears.⁴⁴

The quoted passage may strike us as poignant or pathetic as the case may be, but one thing at least seems to me to be clear: Derrida is making the valid point that eyes are not only for seeing and looking, they have an expressive potential that other sense-organs lack. It is surely significant that we cry with our eyes, and not, say with our noses or our ears. Nevertheless, the view that tears are the essence of the eye and that the gaze veiled by tears reveals the very truth of the eyes is puzzling. I think we should be grateful that our mathematicians and engineers are not struck by apocalyptic blindness while doing sums or when designing airplanes and computers, even if they thereby prove that they are using their eyes in a »scopic« and non-essential way.

A final point about Derrida and essentialism: in an interview in 1984 Derrida delineated the task of philosophy as follows:

Philosophy, as logocentrism, is present in every scientific discipline and the only justification for transforming philosophy into a specialized discipline is the necessity to render explicit and thematic the philosophical subtext in every discourse.⁴⁵

To render explicit the »philosophical subtext« in the sense of uncovering the hidden logical and non-logical presuppositions in various theories and discourses is in my view an important philosophical task, albeit not the only one. But Derrida actually says that the exposure of logocentrism is the *only* justification for philosophy. His view that logocentrism is present in every scientific discipline is a surprisingly general and unspecific claim. In what manner, we may ask, is logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence active in mathematics or palaeontology, in geology or quantum chemistry, in computer science or theoretical cosmology? Is it present in all the sciences in the

⁴⁴ Quoted from Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p. 523.

⁴⁵ »Dialogue with Jacques Derrida« in R. Kearney, (Ed.), *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1984, p. 110.

same way, and if so, does it affect the validity and fruitfulness of the theories and the results achieved in those fields of scientific inquiry? Derrida's attitude seems to me somewhat high-handed, because I do not believe that these important questions can be answered without a systematic analysis of the methods and conceptual frameworks of specific sciences. Is there not more than a trace of essentialism in his thinking about science and does not the philosopher of *différance* display a remarkable disregard for the multifarious differences between the aims, methods and theories of different scientific disciplines? To ask what the purpose or the function of science is is like asking what the purpose and the function of art is. In both cases the answer is the same: they have many different purposes and functions and no general theory can do justice to the multiplicity of the sciences or the arts.

Wittgenstein, a very different philosopher of difference, who once told his seminar: »I'll teach you differences«, writes in the *Blue Book* that

Our craving for generality has another main source: our preoccupation with the method of science. I mean the method of reducing the explanation of natural phenomena to the smallest possible number of primitive natural laws; and, in mathematics, of unifying the treatment of different topics by using generalization. Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness ... Instead of »craving for generality« I could also have said »the contemptuous attitude towards the particular case«. ⁴⁶

It would of course be ridiculous to suggest that Heidegger or Derrida were influenced by the methods of science, or that they »constantly see the method of science before their eyes«. But there is »a craving for generality« and a »contemptuous attitude toward the particular case« in their thinking, not because they adore scientific rationality, but because they are enamoured with a certain conception of philosophy as a *theoretical* enterprise, theoretical in the sense of providing a profound vision and an extensive interpretation of the world which is more fundamental and general than anything envisaged in everyday life or in science.

The critique of ocularcentrism aims at exposing the totalizing and generalizing nature of the modern, scientific, scopic regime. But if the critique itself is totalizing and if it relies on unwarranted generalizations it quite literally loses sight of its target.

⁴⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, 1958, Blackwell, Oxford 1964, p. 18.

Aleš Erjavec
Seeing, Painting and Art

I

In his now already classical book *Vision and Painting* from 1983 Norman Bryson disputed what he saw as some of the standard tenets of art history. His opening argument concerning traditional art history was that from their very beginning in antiquity Western views on painting consist of the desire to create a »perfect copy«: from Pliny through renaissance and Dante to Ernst Gombrich Bryson detected this desire to create a painting – and, to do this, to discover the perfect technique for its execution – that would enable us to reproduce the perceived in a truthful way. From the times of Zeuxis's pictorial rendering of grapes which misled the birds into believing they were real to the modern age, painting is »thought of as a rivalry between technicians for the production of a replica so perfect that art will take the palm from nature. (...) The difficulties confronted by the painter are executive and concern the fidelity of his registration of the world before him.«¹ The painter's task is to mirror the reality before him, to carry out in painting what in geometry and in optics the renaissance development – or, in accordance with such thinking, »discovery« – of perspective offered to the painter. It is understandable that within such a context painting is a craft, and that the notion of creation is reserved for the divine being. The perceived and the represented are one and the same. All human beings possess in principle the same perceptual faculties and share the same visual field, a common technique of rendering a representation of the perceived is therefore possible. Renaissance developments in the arts and sciences, the latter offering the former tools for a truthful rendition of the perceived world, for the so-called »*costruzione legittima*, the perspective called 'correct' or 'exact',«² offer the hope of the further diminution of the chasm between the painting and what Bryson calls »the Essential Copy« – the perfect replica.

For Bryson the problem with art history was the holding on to opinions

¹ Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting. The Logic of the Gaze*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1983, pp. 1 and 3.

² Hubert Damisch, *L'origine de la perspective*, Flammarion, Paris 1993, p. 107.

such as the ones presented above. Illustrating this with the work of Ernst Gombrich (although at the same time presenting the latter's writings as »a transitional aesthetics«) Bryson pointed out that Gombrich was, by accepting as his epistemological credo Popper's theory of verification and falsification, effectively ascribing to, or developing, an art history which found its evaluative criterion in a hypothesis of a continued progress towards the Essential Copy, a progress driven by novel demands upon schematic conventions of image-making,³ and hence a »provisional and interim improvement on the existing corpus of hypotheses or schemata, improved because tested against the world, through falsification«.⁴

Art history is firmly rooted within the modern epistemological horizon. It also ascribes to an Aristotelian poetics which is also visible from resemblances between Aristotle's and Gombrich's presentation of mimesis: for Aristotle mimesis is one of the features that distinguish humans from beasts, by mimetic activity we learn, and »a reproduced object invokes pleasure in all people«.⁵ Gombrich expresses the same thought: »The pleasure is in recognition.«⁶

Problems concerning art history, such as those discussed by Bryson, are related to its epistemological status since its constitution a century ago and its inclusion into a modernist scheme of reflective thinking. In other words, art history has probably, just as traditional aesthetics, as a modernist discipline emptied itself in the form we have become used to in the first half of this century and has been, just as rationalist philosophy, caught in that same tradition which is most often identified with Cartesian perspectivalism and its dependency upon monocular and abstract vision and optics, not to mention its philosophical dualism. Since the aim of painting under discussion is primarily cognitive – the rendering of a representation in such a way that a recognized meaning is established, since Alberti this being accomplished with the use of perspectival mechanisms – the aim of the artist is to accomplish a pictorial technique which will be, as a *procedure*, hidden from our scrutinizing eyes and will offer to our gaze only the picture itself as a complete whole. What is then called »perspectiva artificialis«, the »perspective of the painters as it is distinguished from the *perspectiva naturalis* of authors of the Middle Ages, the theory of direct vision, reflected or refracted (...), is as such confused with that of optics.«⁷ Nonetheless, *perspectiva artificialis* had to be as-

³ Cf. Bryson, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448b.

⁶ E.H. Gombrich, *The Image and the Eye*, Phaidon, Oxford 1982, p. 122.

⁷ Damisch, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

sisted by the two-point perspective (or »*costruzione legittima*«) for it was found insufficient by itself, when confronted with continuous attempts to appropriate it within the conceptual field of the monocular and static eye of optics. Hence even Descartes himself in *Dioptrics* pays special attention to visual errors, mentioning that often circles are better represented by ovals and that »often to be more perfect as concerns the quality of images and to better represent an object, they must not resemble it.«⁸ A related story is recounted by Pliny in connection with a competition between Alcamenes and Phidias for a sculpture of Minerva which was to sit on top of a tall pillar. »Alcamenes sculpted a harmonious sculpture and Phidias a figure with deformed limbs, with a gaping mouth and a stretched neck. On the day of the exhibition the first received the votes, while his rival was stoned. But the situation was reversed when the sculptures were put in their place. Installed on top of the pillar, Phidias's statue acquired great beauty, while the other became an object of derision.«⁹ As even a hasty glance upon the elevated sculptures and facades of churches and medieval towns attests, the practicing sculptors and architects were very conscious of the need to accommodate the observer's gaze and its peculiarities, which often diverged from the geometrical and optical laws imposed by the monocular static gaze and even from the two-point perspective. The limitations of the »perfect copy« were imposed also by the intrusion of the body.

In paintings, engravings or drawings a special case were the anamorphoses, today the best-known among them certainly being that of a skull on Hans Holbein's »Two Ambassadors«. Anamorphism is a case of pictorial representation requiring a different perspectival vantage point. Other »scopic regimes« range from Dutch and baroque painting to El Lissitzky.¹⁰

Examples such as anamorphoses witness that perceived objects, if they are to offer »true« representations, i.e. such that our perception will accept them as such, must often resort to devices that visibly diverge from rules that are in accordance with the monocular static gaze. Artists have to resort to all kinds of gimmicks to make adjustments for the pair of human eyes which

⁸ Descartes, *La Dioptrique (Oeuvres et lettres)*, Gallimard, Paris 1952, p. 204.

⁹ Quoted in Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Anamorphoses. Les perspectives dépravées - II*, Flammarion, Paris 1996, p. 19.

¹⁰ This topic was most fully developed by Martin Jay in the essay »Scopic Regimes of Modernity« in *Force Fields*, Routledge, London 1993; cf. also Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1993; Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Painting in the Seventeenth Century*, Chicago University Press, Chicago 1983; Christine Buci-Glucksmann *La folie de voir: De l'esthétique baroque*, Flammarion, Paris 1986; on Lissitzky see Damisch, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

gaze at their works from various positions, distances and angles: heads of sculptures lowered more or less than normally, eyes in different positions within the face, taller or shorter figures, adjustments for different vantage points, etc. – these are all compensations artists have to make for the fact that human sight is not a mechanic optical instrument, but an integral part of the human *body*.

Bryson based his critique of the »natural attitude« – the belief that perspectival painting is through most of history of painting considered the most appropriate, exact, scientific and true – on Husserl's description of such an attitude within sciences.¹¹ Husserl's attempt to retract the Cartesian dualism and »return to things themselves« was related to his belief that philosophy is essentially seeing. *Wesensschau*, intuition, is visual, although it is far removed from ocularcentrism of modern science and Cartesianism. Instead, phenomenology wants to regain the unity of the object and the subject which was obliterated by that very same Cartesianism and which, furthermore, caused also the emergence of the »natural attitude« of modern sciences criticized by Husserl.

What Bryson seems to have offered as an alternative to the art of Western art history as a history of the development of the »Essential Copy«, was a history of art as that »of painting as a *material practice*«. ¹² If, pointed out Bryson, art history, or any theory for that matter, were to be able to attain this aim, it should have taken into consideration the role of the human body in the execution of a painting: it no longer suffices for us to perceive a painting as a *result*, ignoring at the same time the procedure (»material practice«) that led to it. Instead, we should heed this practice as well as the bodily framework within which and with the visible help of which this deed is accomplished. Bryson suggests traditional Chinese painting as a positive example of the way in which the bodily determination of a painting is to be perceived: the visible way in which brushstrokes were executed and the fact that the strokes are not only vehicles of a technique but are simultaneously also directly the expressive means of painting as such. Western painting is instead purportedly essentially offered to our gaze as a static scene, presented to our monocular vision. Classical painting, executed in accordance with the perspectival rules, furthermore offers what Kaja Silverman ascribes to still photograph: »Whereas the moving image consigns what it depicts to oblivion, the still photograph gives us access to a stable and durable image of self.«¹³ It is this feature of

¹¹ Cf. Bryson, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5 et passim.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹³ Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, Routledge, New York 1996, p. 198.

painting as well, i.e., the representational stability which it can offer to the subject, that precludes classical Western painting to tread the same path as its Chinese counterpart. Bryson argues that European painting disclaims what he called »deictic markers«,¹⁴ marks of the bodily inscription into the representation: »Western painting is predicated on *the disavowal of deictic reference*, on the disappearance of the body as site of the image; and this twice over: for the painter, and for the viewing subject. (...) [I]f China and Europe possess the two most ancient traditions of representational painting, the traditions nevertheless bifurcate, from the beginning, at the point of deixis.«¹⁵

If, then, one of Chinese painting's salient features is the visible trace of the existence of the artist's body within the picture itself, from where does then this feature arise? Why is it that »[t]he work of production is constantly displayed in the wake of its traces; [that] in this tradition the body of labour is on constant display, just as it is judged in terms which, in the West, would apply only to a *performing art*«?¹⁶ Far from wishing to engage in a discussion concerning Chinese art, I would nevertheless like to point out that obviously the European tradition, or at least its more recent part, is not necessarily thus far removed from the kind of painting that Bryson is here opposing to the more classical Western painting. I shall develop this argument in Parts II and IV.

As François Cheng explains, the Chinese art »always tends to recreate a total macrocosm where the prime unificatory action of the Breath-Spirit, or the Emptiness itself, far from being synonymous with the vague or arbitrary, is the internal place where the grid of vital breaths is established. We witness here a system which proceeds more by integration of successive contributions than by ruptures. The Stroke of the Brush, the art of which is carried by painters to an extreme degree of refinement, incarnating the One and the Multiple in the measure in which it is identified with the original Breath and with all of its metamorphoses, contributes no less to this permanence of a tirelessly pursued signifying practice.«¹⁷ Since a painting is a microcosm related to the macrocosm and is simultaneously its integral part, the emptiness within a painting is not »an inert presence [but] is traversed by breaths linking the visible world [the painted space] with the invisible one«.¹⁸ As the author explains, the empty space of the picture mediates between its various

¹⁴ Bryson, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁷ François Cheng, *Vide et plein. Le langage pictural chinois*, Seuil, Paris 1991, p. 10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

elements – between the Mountain and the Water for example, the relation between which would otherwise appear rigid and static. An additional element is brought into the picture since the T'ang dynasty (618-907), when painters commenced to introduce poems into the white empty space of their pictures. The poem »is not a simple, artificially added commentary; it inhabits a real space (there is no hiatus between the calligraphed signs and the painted elements, for they both come from the same brush), introducing into the picture a living dimension, that of Time.«¹⁹ The world is a whole, therefore the emptiness in the picture, which depicts a fragmentary part of this wholeness, represents the invisible which structures relations within the visible itself, and is consequently just as crucial as the painted surfaces. In this way painting witnesses to the cosmological unity; it is hence no wonder that »[i]n China, of all the arts, painting occupies the supreme place.«²⁰

II

Reading Bryson, especially his book *Vision and Painting* from which I quoted above, as well as *Tradition and Desire* (1984), and hence his critique of art history and some of its tenets, arguing for a painting and theory thereof which would not only, at most, take into consideration the optically »deficient« gaze of the viewer but also corporeal marks of the painter (illustrating the two sides by classical European painting on the one hand and Chinese on the other), one is continuously reminded of a philosopher and a painter who both pursued a similar aim. The pair of course is that of Merleau-Ponty and Cézanne. As in the case of Bryson, Merleau-Ponty too criticizes the »natural attitude« admonished by Husserl and carries this out not only in the realm of science but foremostly in the realm of painting²¹ which he sees not only as

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²⁰ Cf. Cheng, *op. cit.*, p. 11n.

²¹ »[T]he classical perspective is only one of the ways humanity has invented for projecting the perceived world before itself, and not the copy of that world. The classical perspective is an optional interpretation of spontaneous vision, not because the perceived world contradicts the laws of classical perspective and imposes others, but rather because it does not require any particular one, and is not of the order of laws.« – Merleau-Ponty, »Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence«, in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader. Philosophy and Painting* (ed. and intr. by Galen A. Johnson), Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Ill. 1993, p. 86.

A perhaps even more revealing passage concerning *perspectiva artificialis* can be found in the »Eye and Mind« essay: »[T]he painters knew from experience that no technique of perspective is an exact solution and there is no projection of the existing

related to the first, but as showing its inherent truth, a truth which was distorted in the renaissance artistic tradition. Merleau-Ponty's aim was – and remained – Husserl's credo to »return to things themselves«: »To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the country-side in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.«²² For Merleau-Ponty it is foremost painting which offers a privileged access to what he will later start calling Being. Although philosophy is, like art »the act of bringing truth into being«,²³ art, especially painting, draws upon this fabric of brute meaning which operationalism would prefer to ignore. Art and only art does so in full innocence. (...) [We want] the writer and the philosopher (...) to take a stand; they cannot waive the responsibilities of humans who speak.«²⁴

It was very consistent with such views that Merleau-Ponty's (as well as Heidegger's) existential phenomenology had to end in a poeticized discourse which attempted to emulate the world, to avoid the »abstract and derivative sign-language« which is always a discourse *on* the world. What philosophy can do is open our eyes to the world and make us conscious of its own limitations and limits: »A philosophy becomes transcendental, or radical, not by taking its place in absolute consciousness without mentioning the ways by which this is reached, but by considering itself as a problem; not by postulating a knowledge rendered totally explicit, but by recognizing as its fundamental transcendental philosophic problem this *presumption* on reason's part.«²⁵ A part of this »presumption on reason's part« is also the belief into

world which respects it in all aspects and deserves to become the fundamental law of painting. For example, the Italians took the way of representing the object, but the Northern painters discovered and worked out the formal technique of *Hochraum*, *Nahraum*, and *Schrägraum*. Thus plane projection does not always stimulate our thought to rediscover the true form of things, as Descartes believed. Beyond a certain degree of deformation, it refers us back, on the contrary to our own vantage point; as for the things, they flee into a remoteness out of reach of all thought. Something about space evades our attempts to survey it from above.« (»Eye and Mind«, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, p. 135.) An analysis of the decentralized organization of visual space of the »Northern painters«, implying links between such painting and optical developments of the time, is offered by Svetlana Alpers in her book *The Art of Describing: Dutch Painting in the Seventeenth Century* (cf. note 10).

²² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Preface), Routledge, London 1995, p. ix.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. xx.

²⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, »Eye and Mind«, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, p. 123.

²⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 63.

what Bryson will later call the »Essential Copy«, a belief that an authentic and universally valid rendering of the perceived world is possible through pictorial representation. To constrain the attempts of reason to distance itself, as absolute consciousness, from the perceived world which not only surrounds it but of which it is, itself, an integral part, philosophy must start at the closest possible starting point, which is one's own body. Contrary to Descartes, who established an infinite distance between the *res extensa* and the *res cogitans*, Merleau-Ponty is one of the first philosophers not only to emphasize the necessity of theorizing consciousness as a part of our corporeal being (such views abound already in the nineteenth century, in Marx, among others) – incessantly presenting this argument throughout most of his *oeuvre* – but, furthermore, to »embody« his views within his interpretations of the works of painters (and occasionally sculptors), hence arguing for a perceptual and corporeal inscription of a painter within his picture and, also, of its viewer with whom the painter purportedly shares the visual field.

As in Chinese culture, in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy too, painting is a privileged art form. As Merleau-Ponty argues in the *Preface to Phenomenology of Perception*, »[t]o seek the essence of perception is to declare that perception is, not presumed true, but defined as access to truth. (...) We must not (...) wonder whether we really perceive a world, we must instead say: the world is what we perceive.«²⁶ A privileged form of perception is vision. In this respect Merleau-Ponty follows in Husserl's steps and shares certain traits of Heidegger's philosophy. Although Heidegger criticizes in 1938, in the essay by the same name, the modern »time of the world picture« and privileges the word and hearing over the image and vision, a few years earlier he not only uses a picture – a van Gogh painting – to explain his understanding of an artwork, but generally regards the Greek cultural universe as that of an unsurpassed existential authenticity – with this same world also being that within which commenced the *ocularcentrism* of the Western civilization. Still, for Heidegger, the word (language) nevertheless remains the most authentic form of communication and, of course, the precondition of thought. In Merleau-Ponty's similar, but differently oriented philosophy, an authenticity such as that which Heidegger finds in poetry, is revealed in painting. It is not the language which is »the house of Being«; instead »[t]he eye lives in this texture [of Being] as a man in his house«.²⁷

Both in the case of Chinese painting and in Cézanne's case (as interpreted by Merleau-Ponty, but often explicitly supported by citations from

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

²⁷ Merleau-Ponty, »Eye and Mind«, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, p. 127.

Cézanne's own statements) the painter is someone who strives to present and represent the holistic unity of the invisible and the visible, the presence of a temporal or spatial absence in what is perceived as presence – this also being the reason for Merleau-Ponty's disavowal of photography.²⁸ When Bryson discovers in a Chinese landscape painting the landscape to be the subject and, equally, the subject to be »the work of the brush in 'real time' and (...) a[n] extension of the painter's own body«,²⁹ may we not say that something similar is true of Cézanne's juxtaposition of individual brush strokes³⁰ or Rodin's practice of rendering visible the connecting welds of his sculptures? It would seem that Merleau-Ponty's presentation of Cézanne's paintings (as well as Rodin's or Giacometti's sculptures) shows certain similarities with that which Bryson offers in connection with Chinese painting and which he simultaneously presents as a positive alternative to the stance of traditional art history and of classical perspectival painting in Europe, an alternative he tries to complement with a different reflective vantage point, one which will accentuate the »deictic reference«, and therefore the body as an uncircumventable theoretic subject. It would therefore seem that (at least in the 1983 book) what Bryson attempts to propose or defend, is to a large extent already present in Merleau-Ponty's own early work.

It may be that although Merleau-Ponty has adumbrated many of Lacan's theses in his *Seminar XI* and elsewhere, his philosophical stature may have been reduced by the poeticized language (or what Bryson called the »heights

²⁸ The most explicit disclaimer of Marey's photography as a prototype of photography as such is probably that from the »Eye and Mind« essay. It could be argued though that Merleau-Ponty does a disservice to photography, for he views it only as an impartial (»scientific«) visual recording device, hence ignoring the fact that in his own time (the essay was written in August 1960) photography surpassed the perceptual (and creative) horizon of Marey's photographic experiments and that it was therefore rather simplistic to reduce it to the stature of Descartes's engravings and camera obscura.

²⁹ Bryson, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

³⁰ Bryson's accentuation of the traces of the brush strokes perhaps warrants a comment, for while in European painting the »deictic markers« may not be as omnipresent as in the Chinese one, it is nonetheless true that the artist's *style* or painterly writing is often quite unique. Merleau-Ponty thus mentions that »[t]he writing of Michelangelo is attributed to Raphael in 36 cases, but is correctly identified in 221 cases. We therefore recognize a certain structure which is common to voice, to physiognomy, to gestures and to the walk of each person, each person is for us nothing but this structure or this manner of being in the world.« – Maurice Merleau-Ponty, »Le cinéma et la nouvelle psychologie«, in *Sens et non-sens*, Gallimard, Paris 1996, p. 68.

of lyricism³¹) of his late writings and, finally, by the waning of interest in phenomenological aesthetics or philosophy of art in recent decades. A good case in point may be Lyotard's early phenomenological work *Discours, figure* (1971) whose aim was, as Lyotard explains much later, primarily to challenge the onslaught of Lacanian privileging of the Symbolic and of relegating all art to the domain of the Imaginary³² and hence ideology. Lyotard later abandoned phenomenology, obviously sensing that it doesn't offer the appropriate theoretical apparatus for analysis of radical artists of our century, such as Duchamp. As Forrest Williams writes in 1954, »[d]ue to whatever common cultural formations that may serve to link philosophical thought and artistic insight, the dominant philosophical system in France today known as 'phenomenology', and in particular, that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, on the one hand, and the art of Cézanne, on the other hand, appear to agree in origin, method and outcome. Their common origin was a response to a certain subjectivism of much of nineteenth-century art and philosophy; their common method, to search by minute scrutiny of their own experience for the outwardly given, objectively real; and their common achievement, to have avoided the opposite of extreme subjectivism, by discovering the real as the invariant structure of a given appearance.«³³ Nonetheless, while Cézanne retained his place in contemporary art history, Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of him, his work, as well as his own philosophy of the perceived and the seen, both appear problematic, for they offer an analysis and a presentation that increasingly appear caught within the confines and limitations of its own (phenomenological) framework. After initial ingenious applications of Husserl's (and partly Heidegger's) phenomenology to the realms of perception, combined with perceptive insights into the logic of painting and the gaze, the late Merleau-Ponty increasingly strove to attain the impossible discursive articulation of Being, drifting in this way into the direction of a potential silence.³⁴ His discourse on Cézanne often appears caught within the realm of that very same undifferentiated framework of the Cartesian subject and, consequently, within the discourse on the artistic genius of the first half of this

³¹ Norman Bryson, *Tradition and Desire. From David to Delacroix*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1984, p. 65.

³² Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *Peregrinations. Law, Form, Event*, Columbia University Press, New York 1988, pp. 10-11.

³³ Forrest Williams, »Cézanne, Phenomenology, and Merleau-Ponty«, in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, p. 165.

³⁴ For a discussion of this issue in Merleau-Ponty and its relations to Schelling, see Robert Burch, *op. cit.*, esp. p. 353 *et passim*, as well as Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, Verso, London 1996, esp. pp. 50-51.

century that preceded psychoanalysis.³⁵ Merleau-Ponty's privileging of the body and of the corporeal features of the act of painting appears insufficient when confronted with the formidable task of presenting the absolute, for all he seems to have at his disposal – or offers – is a philosophy which privileges the visual as presented to us mainly through the pictorial representations of a modernist painter. With his late, especially the posthumously published writings, he furthermore gives the impression, just as the late Heidegger, of his discourse closing upon itself: his Being is static, his rejection of science universal, his discourse intentionally more and more ambiguous and cryptic, while the previously conceptually clear notions related to perception, painting, visibility and the gaze, although perhaps burdened with a »metaphysics of presence« when endowed with an ontological status and transposed into extra-perceptual realms, are replaced by those of the flesh, with philosophy becoming »Being speaking in us«, and literature being analyzed as an »inscription of Being«. ³⁶ How can »a meaningful human world be constituted out of pure visibility«³⁷ and how can the quest for the reunification of the subject and object, devoid of an historical perspective as it is, transgress the limits of existentially designated artistic and aesthetic experience? I shall return to this topic in the closing part of this paper.

III

In March 1945 Merleau-Ponty held a lecture on the »Cinema and the New Psychology«, which he ended with an observation similar to that made in 1954 by Forrest Williams; it concerned not Cézanne but the cinema: »If (...) philosophy and the cinema are in agreement, if reflection and technical work go in the same direction, this is so because the philosopher and the cinema maker share a certain manner of being, a certain view of the world

³⁵ In Merleau-Ponty's late writings such – and similar – issues appear obfuscated, such as in the following note from October 1959: »[T]o paint, draw, is not to produce something from nothing, the trace, the touch of the brush, and the visible work are but a trace of a total movement of the Speech, which comes from the total Being and this movement embraces expression by strokes, as well as expression by colors, as well as *my* expression and that of other painters.« – Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, Gallimard, Paris 1964, p. 265.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 250-251.

³⁷ Robert Burch, »On the Topic of Art and Truth«, in *Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, p. 367.

which is that of the same generation.«³⁸ The »new psychology« from the title of the lecture is equal, or essentially related, to Merleau-Ponty's own philosophical work, for in his early work both psychology and philosophy constitute the same phenomenology. The »philosopher« mentioned at the end is therefore Merleau-Ponty the phenomenologist who finds congeniality with Cézanne, Matisse, Paul Klee or Rodin whose works exemplify in the highest degree his views on perception, with this perception being our venue into the lived world of which we are an indissociable organic part.

What the art of these artists has in common with the cinema is that now they both represent *traditional art forms*. The cinema today is one of the very few art forms that retains its technically and ontologically distinct status, just as does classical sculpture and easel painting. Much of visual art or visual culture today is incessantly disrupting our established notions of art, limiting the unreserved ascription of the status of »art« primarily to the art of the pre-modernist and modernist period. In *such* art it is not difficult to discover the existential attributes perceived and described by Merleau-Ponty in paintings, sculptures or even cinema. In modernism and high modernism the seen – although in certain cases criticized or opposed, as in Duchamp or conceptual art – is not yet problematic. »Anti-ocular« discourse is only emerging and Merleau-Ponty's »celebration of vision«, supported with concrete psychological analyses and experiments, is a helpful theory which attracts and influences aestheticians and philosophers as well as painters and sculptors. His theory in this respect shares the special place phenomenology in general and existential phenomenology in particular occupies until the advent of structuralism, for the existential phenomenology in particular not only views art as an exemplary but also as a privileged eruption of authenticity in the modern technological world.³⁹ It hence answers to a deeper need of artists and their public for a discourse that pays attention to what could be called the »specificity of art«: it assigns to art works either a central ontological position or an independent ontological status – a designation of a paramount importance in a century of ideological master narratives. Phenomenology furthermore acknowledges the interchanging role of experience and talent, the interplay between consciousness and subconsciousness and the driftings of the mind between the future, the past, the present and fantasy, the latter being conflated

³⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, »Le cinéma et la nouvelle psychologie«, *Sens et non-sens*, p. 75.

³⁹ A similar position, but emerging from a very different background, is that of Adorno, Marcuse and the line of defenders of avant-garde and neo-avant-garde art in post-war Germany, who all view art as a unique locus of authenticity in an otherwise commodified world.

in Merleau-Ponty's notion of the static »Being«. The location of this »primordial« exchange is what is now usually described as the domain of the Imaginary, a distinction which effectively relegated the whole realm of art to this domain. A good example of perception that Merleau-Ponty has in mind and on which he bases the privileged status of painting, is an example he offers in »Eye and Mind«: »When through the water's thickness I see the tiled bottom of the pool, I do not see it *despite* the water and the reflections; I see it through them and because of them. If there were no distortions, no ripples of sunlight, if it were without that flesh that I saw the geometry of the tiles, then I would cease to see it *as* it is and where it is – which is to say, beyond any identical, specific place.«⁴⁰ It is such scenes that the painter paints and understands beneath the words *depth*, *space* and *color*, continues Merleau-Ponty. How to capture such a vivid presentation with theoretical notions? It is obvious that the only possibility open to us is to emulate the very nature of such an image, that is to say, render it poetically, »lyrically«, non-theoretically, in short, proving by this very gesture Merleau-Ponty's thesis about the totalizing nature of our experience and showing that the cogito can never exist within the same reflective framework as the perceptual experience just offered by Merleau-Ponty. The opposition to a purely scientific description of this view draws him into a defense of art and into an attack on the Cartesian tradition which would see in the above scene the refraction of light as the only relevant aspect.

It was the advent of Derrida's criticism of an ahistorical »presence«, on which hinged phenomenological tradition, and of psychoanalysis, which deconstructed the relatively stable transcendental nature of noematic reflection, which signalled the decline of phenomenology and its privileging of art, be it poetry or painting. As mentioned, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology contained an inbuilt self-destructing mechanism which emerged only slowly from his early works which offered an insightful analysis of perception and deficiencies of its past theories (and sometimes practices). It is only later, and especially in the posthumous works, that the need of clarifying perception and the overcoming of Cartesian dualism is replaced with an explicit aim of overcoming the split between the authentically experienced and its philosophical reflection – but without offering any historically, socially, empirically and therefore extra-artistically determined reality as its final aim and, at the same time, increasingly revealing itself as a pure form of transcendental philosophy. It is to the discourse of philosophy that is assigned the difficult and yet limited task of endowing the direct and primitive contact with the world (as it existed before the split into subject and object) with a philosophi-

⁴⁰ Merleau-Ponty, »Eye and Mind«, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, p. 142.

cal status. »I found«, writes Merleau-Ponty in 1952, »in the experience of the perceived world a new type of relation between the mind [*esprit*] and truth. The evidence of the perceived thing lies in its concrete aspect, in the very texture of its qualities, and in the equivalence among all its sensible properties – which caused Cézanne to say that one should be able to paint even odors.«⁴¹ It appears as if here Merleau-Ponty is primarily concerned with a novel approach to perception. It needs nonetheless be mentioned that this perception is first and foremost experience and that through this notion Merleau-Ponty at the same time introduces phenomenology into his discourse on perception, while simultaneously distinguishing himself from Husserl; for the former experience of phenomena is an evidently empirical and embodied »experience of the perceived world« and its phenomena, while for Husserl phenomena come »from within the immanent history of consciousness«.⁴² In his late writings the phenomenological analysis of perception, especially in its relation to painting, is (with a few exceptions, such as most of the »Eye and Mind«, essay) almost wholly replaced by an existential phenomenology in which the author's discourse strives to express the unsayable.

IV

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in practice never disclaimed the traditional belief into a unified subject; although it was not cogito, it remained transcendently conceived. The problem as such could not really arise within such a philosophical framework, since in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology Husserl's noematic reflection, which the former wholeheartedly accepted, »remains within the object and, instead of begetting it, brings to light its fundamental unity«.⁴³ The problem of the subject is hence dissolved in the eternal transcendental unity of the subject and the object, a unity, in Merleau-Ponty's view, so well carried out by painting. It is up to philosophy to reveal it, bring this unity to light and continually keep our eyes open to it. Nonetheless, the person perceiving is an empirical and an embodied subject, who retains his/her psychological unity of the *Gestalt*. It is here that psychoanalysis stepped in and deconstructed the actual transcendental ego of Merleau-Pontyan phenomenology: even if Merleau-Ponty enthusiastically quoted

⁴¹ Quoted in Burch, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, p. 357.

⁴² Galen A. Johnson, »Introduction to Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Painting«, in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, p. 8.

⁴³ Merleau-Ponty, »Preface«, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. x.

Cézanne or Klee saying, »Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me«,⁴⁴ Jacques Lacan interpreted the relation between the gaze and the perceived world very differently, arguing in the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (Seminar XI)*, applying the same Sartre's metaphor of the voyeur which Merleau-Ponty also used, that the gaze and the look are in an incessant exchange, causing the subject to be an unstable and continuously deconstructed and reconstructed entity and that it is the mediating role of language, of the Symbolic, which also determines the visible and the gaze.⁴⁵

Lacan's interpretation of the gaze and the look from this 1964 seminar has been subjected to innumerable and divergent interpretations. In it Lacan gives his due to Merleau-Ponty and to his insistence that objects return the gaze, but he ascribes to the object the function of the »look« which imaginarily looks at us from the position of the Other. Lacan furthermore points out what Merleau-Ponty has also insisted upon, that is, that the geometrical space of our perception – not necessarily a visual one – differs from that of our gaze which conceives its specific visual field on the basis of which we perceive the world and objects in it. It is for this reason that, as Merleau-Ponty shows on innumerable occasions, in paintings the visual field causes Cézanne's tables to spread out or curve, or that the painter shows to us the interior of an ashtray, although normally it would be invisible to us, etc. The picture, to represent in such a way that our visual perception will abide by perception proffered by language, must show presence through absence, must represent or render it visible indirectly. Merleau-Ponty twice⁴⁶ approvingly cites Cézanne explaining how he must paint a motif from Balzac's novel: not by showing the most eye-catching element and its traits, but those that surround it. The invisibility thus rendered, will bring forth the »tablecloth white as a layer of fresh-fallen snow«. This may be the same kind of mediating visibility as that to which François Cheng was referring.⁴⁷ In other words, and as already observed, Cézanne's or Rodin's works (or those of Francis Bacon, for example), reveal similar »deictic markers« as those that Bryson pointed to in the case of Chinese brush painting. This similarity points to a changed relation between the world and the transcendental ego than was the one that existed within the Cartesian tradition. In other words, the previously mentioned similarity be-

⁴⁴ Merleau-Ponty, »Eye and Mind«, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, p. 129.

⁴⁵ Cf. also Bryson, *Tradition and Desire*, pp. 66-67.

⁴⁶ *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. 197-198; »Cézanne's Doubt«, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, p. 66.

⁴⁷ Cf. above, note 18.

tween Cézanne's work and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology reveals a deeper similarity between the work of some of the key figures of modern European art and phenomenology to which Bryson ascribes »the greatest maturity«⁴⁸ when it comes to what he calls »the *human* dimension of visuality«. The reason for Merleau-Ponty's description of Cézanne's work in terms which so much resemble those of Chinese painting, is his understanding of the relation between the transcendental ego and the world, for they both represent a whole which is, at least in this respect, very similar to the Chinese perception of the world and of our own place within it. It therefore appears that Bryson could well discover examples of art as »material practice« already within the modern and modernist tradition of European painting and sculpture.

It is at this point that I would like to introduce the question of authenticity of seeing. Bryson is correct in stressing the »Western myth of seeing«⁴⁹ and its historical construction, which were both also so forcefully criticized by Merleau-Ponty. What Bryson finds lacking in Merleau-Ponty is what Lacan introduced into his analysis of the gaze, namely the social dimension of seeing, the vehicle of which is language. »We can never directly experience the visual field of another human being – that much is certain: the only knowledge of another visual field, which we are able to acquire, is that which comes through *description*. Such description proves that others also see what we see, but the definition of what *is* seen originates, therefore, not in the visual field itself, but in language: originates outside sight, in the signs of the description (...).«⁵⁰ The »conscious experience ha[s] a strictly *individual* character, in the double sense that it is the experience of a situated and dated individual, and that it is itself an experience which cannot be reproduced.«⁵¹ Could not the desire to achieve a perfect copy, to achieve »the pleasure of recognition« be at least partly explained also by the consciousness of the impossibility to achieve such an aim? The inability to »directly experience the visual field of another human being« in no way prevents identification and an essentially similar or »shared« experience. What I therefore see with my own eyes is even within my own experience a fleeting event, but one which can nonetheless be, within such an individual or even collective experience, immediately and eternally *recognizable*. The gaze or the glance of my own eyes is determined by the specific features of sight and our shared visual history. It is within these that our common experience – of painting, for example – is

⁴⁸ Bryson, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *Phenomenology*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1991, p. 77.

perhaps, when it comes to more recent art, not dissimilar to that offered for example by Chinese art. If this is true, this signifies some broader common denominator which transgresses culturally determined borders. It may be time, once again, instead of seeing differences, to distinguish certain common features in art.

Merleau-Ponty's account of painting leaves one thing unaccounted for and that is how to establish any qualitative relationship within the fine arts or painting as such, even when it comes to an individual painter. Since he ignores the historical and the social dimensions of art, the only aesthetic evaluation possible is one that is based on existential experience of us being one with the world. For this reason, and since in his works he mostly talks about art either in very general terms or comments upon individual artists, mostly when they support his phenomenology of perception and related philosophical theses, it would be actually difficult to call his phenomenology aesthetics in the traditional sense. We cannot dispute though, that his presentation of visual and pictorial representation and perception strongly influenced artists and aestheticians (from early Lyotard to Mikel Dufrenne) and that in spite of his theory being mainly concerned with art as a means of accentuating his philosophical theses, and his statements about the unique place of art within the lived world being primarily statements to be accepted at their face value, his theory remains strongly dependent upon perception of art as a paramount example and venue of begetting the consciousness of our place in the world and our embodiment therein. But, again, this is done by hypothesizing the existence of a unified subject – or transcendental ego – which perceives art. While Merleau-Ponty strongly admonishes the thesis of classical perspective being the most appropriate one,⁵² he nevertheless puts forth the claim that it »is nonetheless possible that Cézanne conceived a form of art which, while occasioned by his nervous condition, is valid for everyone«. ⁵³ It remains open what weight this statement carries and in which ways can it be universalized as I suggested above, but it does reveal that Merleau-Ponty had in mind a unified subject as a prototype of the perceiving transcendental ego. Lacanian psychoanalysis thoroughly deconstructs the notion of such a unified subject. Or as Jean Hyppolite has commented in Lacan's seminar in 1954/55 about the Gestalt when discussing Merleau-Ponty, this is, »basically a phenomenology of the imaginary in the sense in which we employ the term.«⁵⁴ No won-

⁵² Cf. *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, p. 86 and above, note 21.

⁵³ »Cézanne's Doubt«, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, p. 61.

⁵⁴ Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire II. Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse*, Seuil, Paris 1978, p. 100.

der, therefore, that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological interpretation of the transcendental ego, in spite of it being conflated with the world in its different guises, suffered the same destiny as the notion of art itself, i.e., being proclaimed to be a remnant of humanist (and basically ideological – or »idealist«) way of thinking.

Does the fact that Merleau-Ponty never attempted to establish any normative hierarchy within art which would exceed that which is common to existential phenomenology as a whole, represent a deficiency of his philosophy or, to the contrary, a consciousness of the impossibility or obsolescence of such an endeavor? Or does his incessant linkage of the perceptual and the artistic (the visually perceived and painting) simply show that art is but a special or privileged aspect of the lived world as such? Does the fact that Lyotard in his 1971 book *Discours, figure* attempted to continue Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological presentation of art and of the visible, so as to counter Lacan's privileging of the Symbolic at the expense of the Imaginary, but then gave up such an endeavor, witness to its impossibility?

All of these questions require complex answers, all of which are crucial not only for a theory of perception, but especially for any contemporary discussion of art. Authors in other areas have come to the conclusion that some of the traditionally »unscientific« and disregarded notions, similar to those of art, not only deserve but warrant scrutiny. One such notion is that of »love« which Kaja Silverman has recently put forth as a notion worth revisiting from a new perspective, that of idealization. Although art falls within a very different category from love, they both are related to the Imaginary and to idealization. Love has been declared, in various moments of history, to be defunct or to be a transient category. It has furthermore »always seemed to lack respectability as an object of intellectual inquiry – to represent the very quintessence of kitsch.«⁵⁵

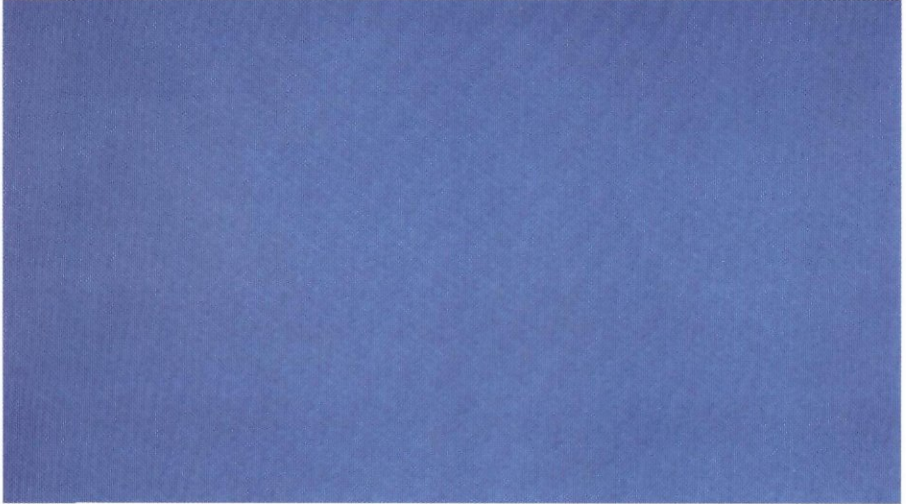
From our contemporary perspective it may be theoretically valid and practically relevant to reexamine the notions of aesthetic and artistic experience and to reevaluate the notion of art – not as an ontological entity but as a part of continued human practice and need. By arguing for such a reintroduction of a rather traditional notion I don't intend to disclaim distinctions and notions introduced primarily by psychoanalysis (and then applied or transposed into other realms mainly by various theories of ideology), but would like instead to point out that art, and the experience it offers, possess an important place in our lived world. While their continuous emergence may be contingent, this contingency in no way diminishes their relevance, as

⁵⁵ Silverman, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

the aforementioned comparisons of Chinese art and that championed by Merleau-Ponty show. From this perspective (and this is a perspective determined also by the »postmodern« turn toward art which excludes the premodernist as well as modernist belief into a unified subject) the need to reevaluate the Imaginary and reevaluate art as a crucial human activity and value appears increasingly warranted.

Marina Gržinić

*Hysteria: Physical Presence and Juridical Absence &
AIDS: Physical Absence and Juridical Presence*



Derek Jarman, *Blue* (1993)

In the following essay I will examine the terms »presence« and its counterpart »absence« from two perspectives.¹ First, from a historical perspective, as historical constructions situated within the framework of contemporary discourses, practices, and applications. My question is how this binary pair (which has played one of the key roles in post-structuralist theory) is to be conceived today and to what extent it differs from that of the 19th century? I will approach these binary terms within the discursive contexts and representational systems of the 19th and 20th century in order to better grasp the roll they play, the assumptions they have fostered, and the belief systems they have confirmed. What is important is to determine to what scope were/are the representational politics of presence/absence used in the past and present.

¹ Cf. Abigail Solomon-Godeau, »Who is Speaking Thus? Some Questions about Documentary Photography«, in Lorne Falk and Barbara Fischer (Eds.), *The Event Horizon*, The Coach House Press & Walter Philips Gallery, Banff and Toronto 1985, pp. 195-196.

Second, I will approach the duality of presence and absence semiotically, as part of a larger system of visual and representational communication, as both a conduit and an agent of ideologies, as a sign system which contains a contingency of visual and signifying codes which in turn determine reception and instrumentality. The »aesthetics and politics of presence/absence« is (if we refer to Victor Burgin) fundamentally concerned with the articulation of representational politics.² If we are trying to answer these questions we have to ask what is the »real of representation«?³ We can claim that the binary terms of absence/presence function to ratify and affirm the complex ideological web that, at any moment in historical time, is perceived as reality *tout court*. This is also the reason why there is an initial aforementioned reference to semiotics. According to Julia Kristeva, »what semiotics had discovered is the fact that there is a general social law, that this law is the symbolic dimension which is given in language and that every social practice offers a specific expression of that law«. ⁴ Kristeva »links semiotics to the social. She calls societal law the 'symbolic', which is deeply embedded in language; the task of semiotics is to study the various social practices which express this social law«. ⁵ Thus, the function of semiotics is to »establish a heterogeneous logic of signifying practices and locate them by way of their subject in the historically determined relations of productions«. ⁶

To grasp the politics of representation of presence/absence I will relocate it within the discursive contexts and representational systems of two illnesses: hysteria and AIDS, each of these representing the illness *par excellence* of a specific century (19th the former and 20th the latter). These illnesses function, as I intend to show, not only in relation to the duality of presence and absence, but moreover through specific ways of their representational politics, as a part of a larger visual-communication and social system. Two other important implications are present in my decision as to why hysteria and AIDS were chosen. First, I chose hysteria because of the association of

² This term was suggested by Abigail Solomon-Godeau when she referred to Victor Burgin's essays »Looking at Photographs« (1977) and »Photography, Phantasy, Function« (1980). Cf. Solomon-Godeau, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁴ *The Kristeva Reader*, Toril Moi (Ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford 1986, p. 25. For a helpful account on Kristeva's general approach to semiotic issues, see Heinz Paetzold, *The Discourse of the Postmodern and the Discourse of the Avant-Garde*, Jan van Eyck Akademie, Maastricht 1994, pp. 58-70.

⁵ Paetzold, *op. cit.*, p. 58; cf. also Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur. Essai sur l'abjection*, Editions du Seuil, Paris 1980.

⁶ *The Kristeva Reader*, p. 32.

this illness to women – hysteria embodied the mainstream male image of a woman,⁷ while AIDS is overtly connected to another discrimination mainstream image, to that of homosexuals. Both illnesses are used to describe fantasmatic and marginalized correspondences, acknowledging also specific historical conditions. Second, because of my interest to analyze the binary terms of presence/absence in connection with the way in which these terms correspond with a specific representational strategy, one representing the human body (i.e. representations of historically, gender and class-determined bodies). Hysteria, the illness of incongruence of image and thought, was recognized as an illness only through making visible the woman's hysterical body. AIDS, the disease *par excellence* of our times, because of specific representational techniques practiced in the media for the general public, coincides with new media technologies, virtual environments and/or cyberspace. All of them appear to be insisting on and fostering the erasure of the body. My thesis is that the mass media techniques of representations of AIDS are fostering the absence of the »real« sick body, similarly to the way contemporaneity is fostering the disembodiment of the subject within new media technologies. Never or rarely is it possible to see film documentaries of persons suffering from or dying of AIDS. This process has gone so far today that one of the theoretical options of investigation of the politics of representation of our present is to find ways of putting the body back into the picture.⁸

In the last part of this essay I will try to synthesize different interplays between presence/absence and hysteria/AIDS by using the semiotic square, a technique of discursive analysis developed by A. J. Greimas. The semiotic square was designed to disclose the implications inherent in such binary relationships, thus helping to make explicit the »hidden« meanings which »stabilize« and generate significance.

I. Hysteria: Physical Presence and Juridical Absence

The first part of the title of this essay refers to a formulation which appears in Norman Bryson's study *The Logic of the Gaze*. There Bryson is interpreting the work of Theodore Géricault, who, in the beginning of the 19th century (1822-23), studied the influence of mental states on the human face

⁷ Cf. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1985.

⁸ Cf. N. Katherine Hayles, »Embodied Virtuality: Or How to Put Bodies Back into the Picture«, in Mary Anne Moser and Douglas MacLoed (Eds.), *Immersed in Technology: Art and Virtual Environments*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. & London 1996, p. 4.

and believed that the face accurately revealed the inner character, particularly in dementia and in cases of instant death. He made studies of inmates in hospitals and institutions for the criminally insane, where he himself spent time as a patient. Bryson claimed that if the historic purpose of the portrait genre is to record a precise social position, a particular instance of status in the hierarchy of power, then Géricault's portraits of insane people, from the first moment, exhibited a contradiction. For Bryson the portrait of the insane is, therefore, an impossible object, a categorical scandal, since the insane are those who have been displaced from any social hierarchy, who cannot be located on a social map, and whose portraits consequently cannot be painted. Bryson concluded that Géricault fused the categories of privilege and social void, society and asylum, and physical presence and juridical absence.⁹

Martin Charcot's photographs of the hysterical patients taken at Salpêtrière hospital (1877-80) had the same purpose.¹⁰ Because the underlying pathology of hysteria is invisible, Charcot doubted that hysteria was a disease at all. In contrast to Pierre Janet, one of the early explorers of hysteria who believed that paralysis occurred in the hysteric because he was unable to form an image of his limbs and therefore was unable to move them, Charcot thought that hysterics were unable to obliterate the pre-existing images of paralysis. For both, hysteria was a problem of representation – the incongruence of image and thought, a disease occasioned by a problem of representation. To anchor this mobile disease Charcot enlisted the aid of photography. With photographs of the hysterics Charcot attempted to make visible this disease that could not be acknowledged except through behaviour or representations.¹¹ Just like Charcot's photographs, Géricault's previous studies functioned »as the institution of the subject, in this case of the insane persons, within the visible«.¹²

This institution of the subject within the visible was done according to a precisely chosen representational mode of the epoch – photography – therefore using modes and techniques that overdetermined visibility in a more general way within the period discussed. The categories of absence and presence are therefore in a dual relation to the institution of the subject within the visible. Joan Copjec points out that hysteria, an illness of the imagination,

⁹ Cf. Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*, Yale University Press, London and New Haven 1983, p. 143.

¹⁰ Cf. Jo Anna Issak, »Mapping the Imaginary«, in *The Event Horizon*, p. 137. In this first section of my essay I am following and reconsidering Issak's thesis about hysteria and representation from her essay »Mapping the Imaginary«.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 139.



Jean Martin Charcot, «Attitudes Passionelles: Menace» from *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière, 1877-80*.

threatened knowledge, and in confusing categories of real and unreal illnesses, true perception and false images, made the physician a potential victim of trickery and deception, casting doubt on his senses that were the foundation of his knowledge.¹³ The issue therefore was not only to discover the relation between representations and hysteria, but to use the most appropriate regime of representation for this kind of instauration.

Charcot who was an adherent of Géricault's theories, learned from his works, such as the *Insane Woman, Envy* (1822-23), »not how malicious mischief or envy would manifest itself on the human face, but what the photographs taken at Salpêtrière hospital 50 years after Géricault should look like«.¹⁴

¹³ Cf. Joan Copjec, »Flavet et Dissipati Sunt«, *October* 18 (Autumn 1981), p. 23.

¹⁴ Cf. Isaak, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

When looking at Géricault's *Envy* series, the art historian Gardner argued that Géricault's *Insane Women* had a peculiar hypnotic power as well as an astonishing authenticity in the presentation of the psychic facts. For Gardner *The Insane Women* are another example of the increasingly realistic core of Romantic painting. The closer the Romantic involved himself with nature, sane or insane, the more clarity he gained, thus moving closer to the »truth«. Increasingly, this would mean for painting the optical truth, as well as truth with regard to »the way things are«. ¹⁵ What Charcot learned from Géricault was not the »authenticity in presentation of psychic fact«, but the Renaissance notion of the artist who is instituting the visible within a rationalized system of perceptual codes. ¹⁶ Photography, then being theorized as both the outcome and in the service of positivism – objective, unmediated, actually imprinted by the light rays of the original form – was the ideal representational mode to be used in bringing the disease into a discursive construction. ¹⁷

In summarizing Charcot's and Géricault's methodologies, I would conclude first that a physical presence was not a question of authenticity in the presentation of psychic facts, but was, in the 19th century, a process of instituting the visible within a rationalized system of perceptual codes. In the case of Charcot this was a Renaissance notion; of the artist as a *quantifier* within the medium of photography, the latter being theorized as both the product of and subordinate to positivism. If the reference to hysteria is understood to be a blind spot in the positivist genealogy of illnesses, then we can theorize Charcot's attempt through the way he tried to bring something, which previously had not been subject to the rules of visibility, into the system of »presence« and representation. Jo Anna Isaak argues that Charcot was doing this through his reference to Renaissance paintings, utilizing Renaissance perceptual codes, such as linear perspective. Linear perspective was used to facilitate impersonal objective statements producing identical meanings within all viewers, referring to the cumulative and repeatable effects. ¹⁸ It is unnecessary to go into detail concerning the Renaissance perspective system. However, I would like to add, as Isaak implies, that perspective was extremely useful to Europeans who needed to develop a visual language of and for the property of newly discovered territories.

¹⁵ Cf. Louise Gardner, *Art Through the Ages*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York 1980, p. 737.

¹⁶ Cf. Isaak, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

¹⁸ Cf. Samuel Edgerton, »The Renaissance Artist as Quantifier«, in Margaret A. Hagen (Ed.), *The Perception of Pictures*, Vol. I., Academic Press, New York 1980, p. 182.

But this was happening in the 19th century, so what are these processes like today? I will make a parallel between the categories of absence/presence and different systems of representation with regard to AIDS, the disease *par excellence* of our time, attempting in this way to chart the process of the institution of the subject within the visible. AIDS also presents the problem of homogenous representation and depiction – the incongruence of both the image and the gaze. In the case of AIDS, in opposition to hysteria, the underlying pathology of the disease is horribly visible, and the whole process of representation and visibility therefore operates differently, trying to erase and/or conceal the conspicuous nature of the disease. The »identification« of the spectator with a sick person or with the AIDS disease is transferred to a metonymy, whose purpose is to hide the presence of the »real« sick body. Those persons who are afflicted with AIDS are, in general, listened to rather than looked at.

An artistic articulation of the above thesis is the feature film *Blue* directed by Derek Jarman in 1993. For 75 minutes a blue screen is shown in front of the spectator. It is the sole image throughout the film, which provides a canvas for the audience, listening to evocative words, music and sounds. There are various ways of displaying the text in the film: inner speech, repetitious preoccupying phrases, or unconscious spoken thoughts.¹⁹ But my interest here lies not in a sociological reading or reinterpretation of the text in the film, but in the representational system superimposing and depicting the text in the film on the blue coloured canvas.²⁰

In Jarman's film the institution of the subject within the visible is presented by the disembodied voice of an ill person who is deliriously speaking throughout the film, anchoring the disease into the field of discourse. If we make a parallel between this regime and the one depicting hysteria, we can state that AIDS is represented with the physical absence of an actually sick

¹⁹ The text in the film is about AIDS, about dying from AIDS and the inner feelings of a sick person knowing exactly that his/her end is near. On the one hand, Jarman develops a strong critique about the hospitalization process of a person suffering from AIDS, about the amount of drugs needed to slow down not the disease but the process of dying, and, last but not least, about the whole societal system (medical, social, legal) which is unfavourable to persons affected by AIDS. On the other hand, Jarman meticulously describes the whole personal drama of a sick person, especially the loss of vision, of becoming blind: »My retina is a distant planet. I played this scenario for the last six years. ... My vision will never come back... The virus rages, I have no friends now. I lost the sight... I shall not win the battle with the virus....« – Citation from the film *Blue*.

²⁰ Jarman: »I am helpless. I can't see him. Just the sound. In the pandemonium of the image I present you the universe of blue.« – Citation from the film *Blue*.

body, yet with a strong request through the text in the film for the juridical (judicial) presence and for the legal rights in different sections of society which are crossing or bordering the sick body. Another such example is a mainstream film about AIDS – *Philadelphia* (directed by Jonathan Demme in 1994). In it Tom Hanks portrays a character who is a pale image of a real AIDS patient. In spite of having on the level of presentation the absence of an »authentically sick body«, we nevertheless see, on the other hand, in this particular film a clear fight for a juridical presence and for the rights pertaining to juridical proceedings of the persons inflicted with AIDS, especially homosexuals.²¹

The binary terms of presence-absence in relation to the representation of the body and its social counterpart in the juridical system culminate in two ways simultaneously: through technological interventions and discursive practices. It is possible though, to conceive the relation of a social area in which the collision of bodies and reproduction technology (photography, film) takes place within the politics of power as it functions through the juridical system. Such a relation is also that between the invention/discovery of photography and the logic of the photograph's regime of representation and hysteria, on the one side, and the invention of new technologies and media and its regimes of representation and AIDS, on the other. What I am proposing here is not to recuperate some notion of pure investment of the category of absence and its counterpart – presence, but to outline the discursive-visual terrain in

²¹ Andrew Beckett (Tom Hanks) is a young lawyer with a splendid career in front of him, who is suddenly found incompetent by the law firm for which he works. Beckett knows that the real reason is him being gay and having AIDS. Beckett decides to fight and to defend his professional reputation and through this the rights of other gay people with AIDS. Joe Miller (Denzel Washington), a black lawyer of high reputation, at first decides not to take the case because of his personal prejudices against people who are gay and HIV positive, but finally accepts the case. One of the most striking conclusions of the trial is, resulting from Miller's way of conducting the affair in court, that gay people AIDS are submitted to a double process of injustice and that the fight for juridical rights in the case of gay people AIDS is, more generally speaking, also a fight for gay rights against society's strong prejudices.

Joe Miller: »The people with AIDS are submitted to social death which precedes the physical death ... What is it all about? ...About our fears of homosexuals.« The judge: »Mr. Miller, justice is blind regarding race and sex in this courtroom!« Miller: »But your Honor, we are not living in this courtroom.« – Citation from the film *Philadelphia*.

This specific situation recalls that modernity as a cultural and social project brought about the distinction between law and morality. It makes sense to measure the legal and political acts of the state against the criteria of morality, but it is not possible to conflate them into one sphere.

which such issues have functioned, both in the past and in the present. In both cases the camera, photography and film, produce representations – iconic signs – translating the actual into the representational with the categories of absence/presence. The meanings ascribed to the categories of absence and presence, sometimes inconsistent, amorphous and epistemologically vague, are constantly in flux, repositioned and reoriented and involve larger discourses which engender them. The photographs of incarcerated hysterics commissioned by Dr. Charcot, »prove and demonstrate the speculative nature and morphology of hysteria«.²² The success of photography as a technology for and of image-making in anchoring the disease had to do precisely with its confirmatory aspects. The latter enabled photography to succeed in the rapid expansion and assimilation within the discourses of knowledge and power. This structural congruence of different viewpoints (the eye of the photographer, the eye of the camera, and the spectator's eye) in photography covers the quality of pure, but delusory presence.²³ Gardner spoke of Géricault's increasingly realistic core of representation, that is, of the obsessionally intentional and representational methods of acquiring the optical truth, the truth of the way things »were«. When Abigail Solomon-Godeau is analyzing the mechanisms internal to the media apparatus in question – photography – she claims that the most important is the »reality effect« and that »a further structuring instance lies in the perspective system of representation built into camera optics in photography's infancy«.²⁴ Modelled on the classical system of the single point monocular perspective invented in the Renaissance, camera optics were designed to yield an analogous pictorial structure. As Abigail Solomon-Godeau argued, natural vision and perception have no vanishing point, are binocular, without boundaries, in constant motion and marked by the loss of clarity in the periphery. The camera image, like much of Renaissance paintings, offers a static, uniform field in which orthogonals converge at a single vanishing point.²⁵ »The world is no longer an 'open and unbound horizon'. Limited by the framing, lined up, put at the proper distance, the world offers itself up as an object endowed with meaning, an intentional object, implied by and implying the action of the 'subject' which sights it.«²⁶

²² Cf. Solomon-Godeau, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 208-209.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Jean-Louis Baudry, »Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus«, in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (Ed.), *Apparatus*, Tanam Press, New York 1980, p. 26.

Furthermore, if we consider the act of looking at a photograph with respect to gender or the operations of the psyche – the complex acts of projection, voyeurism, fantasy and desires that inform our seeing, we cannot, as Salomon-Godeau argued, abandon the earlier, innocent belief that the camera presents us with visual facts that are simply »out there« and which we now disinterestedly observe and register. We have to accept that there are ideological effects inherent to the photographic apparatus, and that these effects influence relations, scopic commands, and the confirmation or displacement of subject positions.

In conclusion to the first established connection between representation, photography and hysteria, we can state that the fusion of physical presence and juridical absence in the photographs of the hysterics also offers a counter-reading. On the one hand, this specific institution of the subject within the visible was possible or was the result of the specific ideological mechanisms of the optical truth intrinsic to the photographic apparatus. On the other hand, this same apparatus reinforced the position of juridical absence of the insane person. As Pierre Bourdieu commented, discussing the social uses of photography: »In stamping photography with the patent of realism, society does nothing but confirm itself in the tautological certainty that an image of reality that conforms to its own representation of objectivity is truly objective.«²⁷

II. AIDS: Physical Absence and Juridical Presence

I have presented, referring to Jo Anna Issak and Abigail Solomon-Godeau, the relationships between the invention and discovery of photography, hysteria and the notions of absence/presence as those of physical presence and juridical absence. I shall proceed to the relationships between the logic of representation of new technologies and media and the representation of AIDS.

The persons afflicted with AIDS show horrible visual signs of bodily deterioration: the disintegration of the skin, sarcomas, blindness and the degeneration of the body as a whole. Jarman has incorporated into the film his personal blindness, the consequences of him dying of AIDS, depicting this with the blue canvas; the zero degree of representation. Jarman moved from the disintegration of film structure to that of the viewer's sight. The institution

²⁷ Cited in Rosalind Krauss, »A note on Photography and the Simulacra«, in *October* 31 (Winter 1984), p. 57.

of the subject ill with AIDS within the visible is carried out by the absence of a »truly sick body«. Moreover, Derek Jarman not only refused to reiterate the conventional pieties surrounding representations of an HIV positive person, but brought to light, paraphrasing Sally Stein, the hidden agendas inscribed in the particular mode of representation of our culture and times.²⁸ In the film *Blue* this is carried out less by the aid of the medium used – the film, than with the strategically incorporated logic of the visualization of new media and of the regime of visibility carried out by new media technologies.

In the film *Blue*, Jarman successfully conveys the complexities underpinning information systems and various subject positions with the way in which meaning and identities are constructed and endlessly re-negotiated. With the instauration of blindness in the film as the zero degree of representation, Jarman subverts some of the basic parameters of the new paradigm of visuality produced by the new technology and the position of the eyewitness within it. Today all methods of proving a statement depend on technological instruments and tools, and the constitution of scientific »truth« is, to a profound degree, mediated by technology.²⁹ Pragmatic acceptance of axioms and specific methods of proof have entered a variety of sciences. Scientific statements have to be effectuated and are thus decisively mediated by technology. Pragmatic performativity is the postmodern sense of truth.³⁰ Lyotard emphasizes repeatedly the increase of scientific knowledge through its mediation with technology. The whole process of seeing through lies in its mediation through technology.³¹

Let me clarify this process »of seeing through its mediation through technology« by returning for a moment to photography – summarizing its inner principle by relying on Paul Virilio, despite the fact that he was not referring to photography: »Everything I see is in principle within my reach, at least within reach of my sight, marked on the map of the 'can'.«³² Photography enables the encoding of a topographical memory by establishing a dialectical loop between seeing and mapping. As Virilio claims, it is possible to speak of generations of vision and even of visual heredity from one generation to the

²⁸ Cf. Sally Stein, »Making Connections With The Camera: Photography and Social Mobility in the Career of Jacob Riis«, in *Afterimage*, Vol. 10, No. 10, (May 1983), p. 14.

²⁹ Cf. Paetzold, »Lyotard's Definitions of the Postmodern Status of Knowledge«, in Paetzold, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-21.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³¹ Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1984, pp. 42-52.

³² Paul Virilio, *Vision Machine*, British Film Institute and Indiana University Press, London and Bloomington, Indiana 1994, p. 7.

next. But, following Virilio³³ the perception developed by new media and technologies (which is called the »logistics of perception«), destroyed these earlier modes of representation preserved in the »I can« of seeing. The logistics of perception inaugurates the production of a vision machine and though the possibility of achieving sightless vision, whereby the video camera or virtual technology would be controlled by a computer. Today new media apparatuses (from virtual reality to cyberspace) confer upon us a whole range of visual prosthetics which confront us with an ever-changing positioning of the subject with his/her body along with the systematic »production« of blindness, and of the absence of certainty (of the naked human eye) within the visibility of our world. As Virilio would say, the bulk of what I see is no longer within my reach. We have to ask ourselves: What does one see when one's eyes, depending on such instruments, are reduced to a state of rigid and practically invariable structural immobility? However, this is only one side of the paradigm of the new media technology. On the other side, in the 20th century, the sciences are increasingly permeated with technology. »Technological instruments and apparatuses hold a central role within scientific research processes. These technological tools, however, cost huge amounts of money. Consequently, the state and political institutions function as important and decisive mediators in the accomplishment of scientific knowledge. The process of knowledge is increasingly judged in terms of input (quantity) and output (quality). Science is linked to the system of political power.«³⁴

The blindness of the naked human eye is thus paradoxically reinforced by the growing tendency of using increasingly sophisticated electronic technologies, not only in science, but also in the leading ideological and repressive state apparatuses, particularly within the legal system and the police. Virilio is speaking of hyper-realist representational models within the police and legal systems to the extent that human witnesses are losing their credibility: the human eye no longer remains an eyewitness. On the one side of the paradigm of new media technology we are witnessing the systematic production of blindness, and on the other, the frightening hyper-realism of a system of total visibility, which is particularly reinforced in legal and police procedures. The tendency of the leading scopic regime of the new media technologies is to produce blindness while, simultaneously, creating a whole range of techniques to produce the credibility of the presence of objects and humans, instead of trying to demonstrate their real existence. Today this latter process can be illustrated by military and espionage strategies: »It is more vital to

³³ Cf. *Ibid.*, Chapters 1 and 2.

³⁴ Paetzold, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

trick the enemy about the virtuality of the missile's passage, about the very credibility of its presence, than to confuse him about the reality of its existence.«³⁵

Main features which are currently produced by new media technology (blindness of the natural human eye, hyper-realism in legal and police procedures and the whole range of techniques for producing the credibility of the presence of objects, humans, etc.) are strategically incorporated and subverted in the film *Blue*. With the instauration of blindness in the film via the blue canvas as the zero degree of representation Jarman emphasizes this duality. The absence of the sick body and, last but not least, of any physical body in the film, creates the illusion of total disembodiment, and is paradoxically a subversive answer to the constant production of disembodiment through new technologies.

The created illusion of disembodiment thus raises the question, which I posed in the beginning of this essay, i.e., »how to put bodies back into the picture«?³⁶ – As juridical presence! The body of the HIV infected person, an »object« already lost, is shaped by its very absence. On the other hand, with the text heard throughout the film, which is so detailed in existential, medical and legal particularities about the postmodern condition of persons suffering from HIV, a clear demand for the juridical presence and the rights of those afflicted with AIDS within the structures of power in contemporary society is made. Through this relationship between the logic of representation of new technologies and media and the representation of AIDS, it is therefore possible to elaborate a different logic of representations of absence/presence as were previously proposed in the case of hysteria. Instead of physical presence and juridical absence, physical absence and legal presence is produced. Physical absence and legal presence, as proposed by Jarman, subvert the logic of a mass-produced simulated presence on the one side, and a mass blindness of the »natural« human eye on the other.

Looking to the binary pair of presence/absence in connection with the film *Blue* and with the new media/virtual environments, it is also possible to argue that the common characteristics of emerging technologies and virtual environments are the elimination of duration: the collapse of time into real time. In the film *Blue* these characteristics serve as reminders of the dimension of time, which as Paul Virilio suggests, is under siege by real time technologies: »They kill 'present' time by isolating its presence here and now for the sake of another commutative space that is no longer composed of our

³⁵ Cf. Virilio, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-44.

³⁶ Cf. Hayles, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

'concrete presence' in the world, but of a 'discrete telepresence' whose enigma remains forever intact.«³⁷

III. *The Experiential Reception of the Image*

If a »bounded image is seen from a distance (...) it exists unto itself and offers a perceptual experience. Images that implicate the viewer in some way, however, as is the case with interactive or immersive media, are unbounded. They require experiential cognition. The latter puts the critical viewer in an untenable position: one must assimilate an image to comprehend it, yet it must also be dismantled in order to reflect upon it.«³⁸ For Druckrey the discursive operations of the late 20th century informational systems as proffered through cyberspace are characterized by going beyond identity and meaning formations to provide a catalyst for agency and therefore empowerment. The creative potential of different visual systems is represented through an interface or »connections«.³⁹ Meaning and phenomenology, representation and perception are merged. The moment of reading an image within such a system has the effect »not as a navigation of the image, but of a lived moment, so that the efficacy of an image is equal to the experience of it«;⁴⁰ thus it is the lived moment of being connected which is charged with possibilities. »It is the passion of this lived moment of connection between the user, part of the real world and the controlled system of predictable outcomes encoded into the software of the symbolic, accessed through the hardware, which offers scope for disruptive nihilistic behaviour.«⁴¹ The film *Blue* introduces these questions of the re-examination of the human body experientiality in an age of virtuality which is concerned with the apparent de-materialization of experience. Looking in more detail at the reception of *Blue*'s blue canvas, we can argue that it is framed as a film screen, but due to its insistent and suspended

³⁷ Paul Virilio, »The Third Interval: A Critical Transition«, in Verena Andermatt Conley (Ed.), *Rethinking Technologies*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1993, p. 4.

³⁸ Timothy Druckrey, »The Transient Image«, in *A Symposium on the Changing Status of the Image*, Banff, Canada, November 4 and 5, 1994, quoted in Mary Anne Moser, »Introduction«, in *Immersed in Technology: Art and Virtual Environments*, p. XVIII.

³⁹ I am referring here to Helen Cadwallder's report and evaluation of the presentation of Timothy Druckrey's paper »Crash, Crisis, Containment and Cyberia«, at the *5th International Conference on Cyberspace*, Cyberconf, Madrid, June 1996, in Helen Cadwallder, »5th International Conference on Cyberspace«, in *Mute*, No. 6, London 1996, p. 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

immateriality, which lasts for more than an hour, the blue canvas functions as an immersive spatial container, which slowly forces the viewer into a specific interactivity, in an immersion of sight and body. The film confirms Druckrey's statement regarding the reception of the cinematic image by the viewer that has not only the effect of navigation by the image, but of a lived moment. The effect of the image is an experience of the encounter not simply with the blue space, but with a person who is dying of AIDS, embodied through his proper experientiality within the blue canvas in front of us. This question can be rephrased and we can therefore ask how this specific practice of text/image relates to society? The practical dimension is found in emphasizing the practical impact which includes, first and foremost, a strengthening of experience centered in personal subjectivity. There is a demand for a »subjectivity« which perceives the contradictions within the social body because this subjectivity explores its own desires and drives.⁴²

Implications of this shift to the experiential from the perceptual reception of the image can be drawn from Gianni Vattimo's juxtaposing of Walter Benjamin and Martin Heidegger. Vattimo tried to explain the essence of Benjamin's essay »The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction« (1936) through Heidegger's »The Origin of the Work of Art« (1936), emphasizing that both accentuate the disorientation in the contemporary perceptions of art as the direct result of contemporary art works. For Heidegger as well as for Benjamin the essence of technology is the manipulation of all things. Technology expresses simultaneously the completion and the end of metaphysics. Benjamin as seen through Heidegger, and Heidegger interpreted via Benjamin, offers new aesthetic concepts that can and will take on the challenges of a postmodern society which is a society of mass media conglomeration. Benjamin purportedly links the experience of art within the media society, with the experience of a »shock«, while Heidegger makes use of the term »Stoss« (blow). »Shock« and »Stoss« mirror the urbanite nervous and intellectual fluctuations, inconstancies and hypersensitivity. Vattimo argues that in aesthetics a shift from the focus on work to a focus on experience must occur.⁴³ This is just what we are witnessing in the film *Blue*, Jarman's dismantling of the image, resulting in its zero point, causes an overlapping of the experience of a person with AIDS with the viewer's experience of immersion in the blue canvas. Art offers a privileged position for the experience of an alternative countryside, of an alternative wilderness or terrain.

⁴² Cf. Paetzold, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁴³ Cf. Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, Oxford University Press, Cambridge and Oxford 1992, p. 58.

IV. *The Semiotic Square*

In this final section I am using the semiotic square to re-examine the implications inherent in binary pairs by making explicit the hidden terms that help to stabilize meaning and generate significance, and I am, to a large extent, relying on a similar application of A. J. Greimas's semiotic square developed by N. Katherine Hayles.⁴⁴ The semiotic square is a technique of discursive analysis which begins with the choice of a binary pair. Presence and absence can form a pair and the primary duality of such a square. The duality of presence and absence in the semiotic square signifies concepts in dynamic interplay with each other rather than as independently existing terms. The purpose of choosing the second duality is to detect the implications contained in the first pair. Since my interest lies in representations of the body in relation to presence-absence within the juridical terrain, I will choose hysteria (its physical presence, juridical absence) as the third term. The fourth term is generated by taking the negative of hysteria: AIDS (its physical absence, juridical presence).

Since the interplay between presence and absence generates a specific material inscription in the social-political context (through the juridical system and other apparatuses connected with law), the axis connecting these terms should be a juridical (material) inscription:

juridical (material) inscription
 Presence \longleftrightarrow Absence

The interplay between hysteria and AIDS generates different representational inscriptions, with the axis connecting these terms forming representational regimes:

representational regimes
 AIDS \longleftrightarrow Hysteria

Now that both sets of duality are in place, the semiotic square can be used to investigate the implications of the shift from the real effect of photography to the impact of the virtuality of new media and technology to different systems of representation, moreover, onto different ways of inscribing the body within the visible and the political context.

⁴⁴ Cf. N. Katherine Hayles, »Embodied Virtuality: Or How to Put Bodies Back into the Picture«, pp. 7-10.

generated by absence of the positive first term – presence. The fourth term, AIDS, is produced by the negative of the third term, hysteria, which is already marked by negativity. »Thus the fourth term represents a negation of negation. Because of this double negation, it is the least explicitly specified of all the four terms and therefore the most productive of new complications and insights.«⁴⁸ It is from the double (elusive) negativity of the fourth term that the »new« is likely to emerge, for the fourth term carries within it the most open and critical potentiality.⁴⁹

The same semiotic square was used by Donna Haraway to travel to Virtual Space: »To get through the artifactual to elsewhere, it would help to have a little travel machine that also functions as a map«:⁵⁰ A. J. Greimas's »infamous« (Haraway's term) semiotic square. The semiotic square, so subtle in the hands of Frederic Jameson, was used in a more rigid and literal way in her essay just to keep four spaces in differential and relational separation, while she explored how certain local/global struggles for meanings and embodiments of nature occur within them. The four regions through which Haraway moved were: (A) Real Space or Earth; (B) Outer Space or the Extra-terrestrial; (not-B) Inner Space or the Body; and finally, (not –A) Virtual Space or the SF world.⁵¹ Virtual Space takes the same position as AIDS in my semiotic square.

What can we learn from such an application of the semiotic square? It schematically shows possible relations that can emerge when the juridical realm and representation influence each other, thus providing a theoretical framework in which such apparently diverse ideas can be understood as different manifestations of the same underlying phenomena. The devastating effects this interplay between AIDS and presence within the realm of representation can have on traditional concepts of identity appears in different modes, one of them being that the physical durability of the body is just an illusion. On the one hand, the specific institution of the subject within the visible established in hysteria was possible or at least was the result of a specific ideological mechanism of the optical »truth« which is intrinsic to the photographic apparatus. On the other hand, this same apparatus reinforced the position of juridical absence of the insane person. The disruption of the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Cf. Donna Haraway, »The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others«, in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula A. Treichler (Eds.), *Cultural Studies*, Routledge, New York and London 1992, p. 304.

⁵¹ Cf. Haraway, *op. cit.*, p. 305. See also Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1972.

visibility of hysteria by AIDS is therefore as inevitable as the linkage of AIDS with death.

No person in the film *Blue*, including the narrator, is seen on screen. As viewers we are eavesdroppers on a one-sided conversation from a place and person totally outside the depicted fictitious space of the film, a space both familiar and alien to that occupied by the audience. The viewer's initial *jouissance* or sense of wholeness is disrupted when it becomes evident that the camera, not the viewer, controls the gaze. In the film *Blue*, this is happening from the first moment. Throughout the film we are waiting for the point of subversion, for the unmasking by the camera – but only the colour blue remains there. Thus the highlighting of the information which the camera controls causes intense displeasure for the viewer. The narrative authority, often signified by the soundtrack of a voice-over, is displaced from its naturalized associations to the Other by a radical dispersion of narrative space. This radical decentralization of the narrative space is produced by the absence of a visible physical presence. In a traditional narrative form the speaker would most likely be shown. The film *Blue* forces the viewer to ask »who is speaking« and dismantles traditional hegemonic narrative structures. The speaker, of whom the film is about, does not emerge as a subject, but is referred to indirectly, and is therefore present by his absence, existing as a void in the text. Maybe this alternating identification is what Jarman was implying with *Blue's* extreme immersion into discursivity, which allows people afflicted with AIDS not only to be represented, but also to be the ones who will participate in the production and articulation and of new meanings concerning their own condition.

Martin Jay
Must Justice Be Blind?
The Challenge of Images to the Law

Allegorical images of Justice, historians of iconography tell us,¹ did not always cover the eyes of the goddess, Justitia. In its earliest Roman incarnations, preserved on the coins of Tiberius' reign, the woman with the sword in one hand, representing the power of the state, and the scales in the other, derived from the weighing of souls in the Egyptian Book of the Dead,² was depicted as clear-sightedly considering the merits of the cases before her (fig. 7). Medieval images of justice based on figures of Christ, St. Michael, or secu-



Fig. 1: Roman coins dedicated to Justice and Impartiality. Justitia's sword is not yet in place in these images, which show her with a staff instead.

(1) Dupondius of Tiberius (22-23);
(2) Dupondius of Vespasian (77-78);
(3) Aureus of Marcus Aurelius (168)

¹ O. E. von Möller, »Die Augenbinde der Justitia,« *Zeitschrift für christliche Kunst*, 18 (1905), pp. 107-122, 141-152; Otto R. Kissel, *Die Justitia: Reflexionen über ein Symbol und seine Darstellung in der bildenden Kunst*, Beck, Munich 1984; Dennis E. Curtis and Judith Resnik, »Images of Justice,« *Yale Law Journal*, 1727 (1987); Christian-Nils Robert, *La justice, vertu, courtisane et bourreau*, Georg, Geneva 1993; Robert Jacob, *Images de la justice: Essai sur l'iconographie judiciaire du Moyen Age à l'âge classique*, Léopard d'or, Paris 1994.

² Herman Bianchi, »The Scales of Justice as Represented in Engravings, Emblems, Reliefs and Sculptures in Early Modern Europe,« in G. Lamoine (Ed.), *Images et représentation de la justice du XVIe au XIXe siècle*, University of Toulouse-Le Mirail, Toulouse, 13, p. 8.

lar rulers likewise provided them with the ability to make their judgments on the basis of visual evidence (fig. 2).

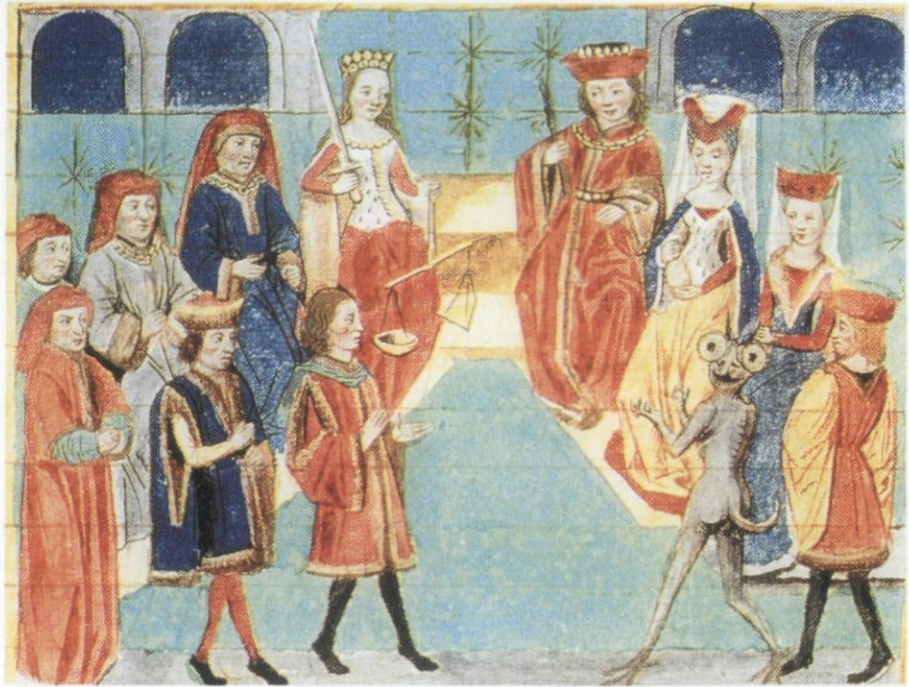


Fig. 2: The eruption of Justice in imaginary causes. The trial of Satan and the queen Ratio. *The book of the king Modus and of the queen Ratio*.

But suddenly at the end of the 15th century, a blindfold began to be placed over the goddess's eyes, producing what has rightly been called »the most enigmatic of the attributes of Justice.«³ Perhaps the earliest image showing the change is a 1494 wood engraving of a Fool covering the eyes of Justice, illustrating Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff* (*Ship of Fools*), which was rapidly reproduced in translations throughout Europe (fig. 3). Initially, as this engraving suggests, the blindfold implies that Justice has been robbed of her ability to get things straight, unable to wield her sword effectively or see what is balanced on her scales. Other medieval and Renaissance allegories of oc-

³ Robert, *La Justice*, p. 13.



*Fig. 3: The fool ties the eyes of Justice. S. Brant, *La nef des folz du monde*; French transl., Lyon 1497.*



cluded vision, such as those of Death, Ambition, Cupidity, Ignorance or Anger, were, in fact, uniformly negative. The figure of the nude child Cupid, as Erwin Panofsky pointed out many years ago, was depicted blindfolded not merely because love clouds judgment, but also because »he was on the wrong side of the moral world.«⁴

By 1530, however, this satirical implication seems to have lost its power and the blindfold was transformed instead into a positive emblem of impartiality and equality before the law. Perhaps because of traditions transmitted by Plutarch and Diodore of Sicily from ancient Egypt that had depicted judges as blind or handless, the blindfold, like the scales, came to imply neutrality rather than helplessness. According to the French scholar Robert Jacob,⁵ the explanation may also have something to do with the reversal of fortunes experienced by the symbol of the Synagogue in medieval Christian iconography. Traditionally shown as blindfolded – as well as with a bro-

Fig. 4: The Synagogue with the broken lance and tied eyes. A sculpture of the Strasbourg Cathedral, XIIIth Century.

⁴ Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanist Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, Harper and Row, New York 1967, p. 109.

⁵ Jacob, *Images de la Justice*, p. 234f.

ken lance – to symbolize her resistance to the illumination of divine light, the Synagogue was negatively contrasted with the open-eyed Church as in the famous early fourteenth-century statue on the south gate of Strasbourg Cathedral (fig. 4).

What had been a sign of inferiority was, however, dramatically reversed when the iconophobic Reformation took seriously the Hebrew interdiction of images, the second of the Commandments Moses brought down from Mount Sinai. Now it was once again a virtue to resist what Augustine had famously called the »lust of the eyes.« A blindfolded justice could thus avoid the seductions of images and achieve the necessary dispassionate distance to render verdicts impartially, an argument advanced as early as the jurist Andrea Alciati's influential compendium of emblems, the *Emblemata* of 1531.⁶ According to Christian-Nils Robert, this impartiality was required by the new urban, secular, bourgeois culture of the early modern period, which left behind the personalism of private, feudal justice. It was not by chance that many statues or fountains of blindfolded Justitia were placed in town squares in Northern Europe next to newly erected civic buildings, in which a nascent public sphere was in the process of emerging.⁷ Even in Catholic countries like France, where churches remained flooded with images, secular edifices began to grow more austere.

The law was now to be presented entirely in language and justice dispensed only through language, necessitating discussion and persuasion, rather than appearing in images, which might overwhelm through dazzlement. Along with the iconoclastic purification of courtrooms of their artworks and lawbooks of their illustrations, at least in countries influenced by Reformation iconophobia, went the frequent robing of judges in sober black and white and the replacement of colorful seals by simple signatures on legal documents.⁸ No longer would signs from heaven, like those informing medieval ordeals, be sufficient; now the words of men giving testimony about what they knew or had witnessed and then arguing about what rule might be violated would in most instances suffice. Although it is true that law was to be increasingly codified and preserved in written form, which has been interpreted by some as reflecting the modern privileging of sight because of its

⁶ Andrea Alciati, *Emblemata cum Commentariis*, Garland, New York 1976.

⁷ Robert, *La Justice*, p. 37f.

⁸ Bernard J. Hibbitts, »Making Sense of Metaphors: Visuality, Aurality, and the Reconfiguration of American Legal Discourse,« *Cardozo Law Review*, 16, 2 (December, 1994), p. 255-56. He interprets these changes in terms of the growing ascendancy of an abstract, Cartesian visuality over the more concrete variant that reigned in the Middle Ages.

frequent use of visual metaphors,⁹ the non-hieroglyphic script of Western languages meant that visual revelations of the truth, illuminations of divine will, were no longer relevant to the decision-making process. Along with the invisible »hidden God« of the Jansenists, who increasingly left the world to its own devices, went a justice that applied general rules and norms rather than looked for indications of divine dispensation. As with the later prohibition of laws referring to specific people with proper names, famously banned in the American Constitution as »bills of attainder,« so too the interdiction on images was designed to thwart favoritism or personal vengeance. With the blind-folding of Justitia, we are well along the road to the modern cult of the abstract norm in juridical positivism.

*

If that road is paved with the prohibition of concrete images, we have to ask, however, whether or not building it had hidden costs, which we may still be paying today. In what follows, it is precisely this question that will occupy us. One place to begin an answer would be Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's celebrated accusation in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that the modern notion of justice was still beholden to a mythic assumption: the fetish of equivalence, the desire for perfect commensurability, the domination of the exchange principle:

For mythic and enlightened justice, guilt and atonement, happiness and unhappiness were sides of an equation. Justice is subsumed in law...The blind-fold over Justitia's eyes does not only mean there should be no assault on justice, but that justice does not originate in freedom.¹⁰

Unexpectedly, in the light of the Frankfurt School's often-remarked embrace of the Jewish taboo on idolatrous images as a mark of resistance to a prematurely positive utopian thought, Horkheimer and Adorno here register a protest against the complete banishment of images. The preservation of the ability to see they cryptically associate with freedom, a freedom that is threatened when justice is reduced to law. What, it has to be asked, is this freedom

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 241. Hibbits, however, acknowledges that in the early modern period, when most people were still illiterate, texts were meant mainly to be read aloud rather than silently (p. 256).

¹⁰ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, Continuum, New York 1972, p. 16-17.

which the blindfolding of Justitia denies? How does the reduction of justice to law threaten its very existence?

One explanation is suggested by the famous argument developed by Lessing in his classical treatise on aesthetics, *Laocoon*, in favor of the Greek regulation of images, an argument drawing the critical attention of W.J.T. Mitchell in his influential study of images, texts and ideologies, *Iconology*.¹¹ According to Lessing, images should be kept under legal control because of their capacity to depict monsters, those indecorous amalgams of the human and divine or the human and the bestial that are a scandal to the alleged order of nature. Mitchell interprets Lessing's iconophobia as symptomatic of an anxiety over proper sex roles and adulterous fantasies, but it might be just as plausible to see it as a fear of boundary transgression in general, especially the boundaries that define and circumscribe our bodies. Lessing's visual monsters are an affront to the law because they depart from the assumption that the bounded categories we use to order the world are ones under which all its particulars can be subsumed. The image of a hybridized creature, at once man and beast, divine and human, male and female, confounds our reliance on conceptual subsumption by refusing to be an exemplar of a general rule.

The freedom of which Horkheimer and Adorno speak is thus the ability of the particular, the unique, the incommensurable, the improper to escape from the dominating power of the exchange principle that is manifested in universalizing concepts and in the reduction of justice to the law of equivalents. The eye, by far the most discriminating of the senses in its ability to register minute differences, must therefore be closed to produce this reduction. Justitia's vision is veiled so that she is able to maintain the fiction that each judgment before her can be understood as nothing more than a »case« of something more general, equivalent to other like cases, and subsumable under a general principle that need only be applied without regard for individual uniqueness. That general principle is understood to hover somewhere above specific cases, recalling the origin of the word justice in the Latin *iubeo* (to command). This is a version of justice, as Vassilis Lambropoulos has recently pointed out, that can be understood as »the right command, the command that rightfully deserves obedience. What is right is what is decreed as straight, the line of the ruler and the regime directing from above, the regal control, the reign of the supreme direction.... 'Justice' comes from above, from the realm of certainty.«¹² It is thus unlike the Greek notion of *Dike*, which in

¹¹ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, University of Chicago, Chicago 1986, p. 108f.

¹² Vassilis Lambropoulos, »The Rule of Justice,« *Thesis Eleven*, 40 (1995), p. 18.

certain of its acceptations involved a dynamic, polemical balance between contraries, an agonistic ethos based on proportion and analogy that could not be subsumed under a single *nomos* or law.¹³

It will doubtless have occurred to many of you that achieving this effect of regal control required not merely a blindfold, but also one placed over the eyes of a specifically female deity. Granted, as Christian-Nils Robert has argued,¹⁴ *Justitia* may be a somewhat androgynous figure, at least to the extent that she wields a powerful symbol of coercive authority, a sword fit for swift decapitations. Traditional religious iconography had, in fact, permitted its use only infrequently to women, the most notable instance being Judith, the slayer of Holofernes, in the Old Testament. The stern and vaguely menacing statues of *Justitia* in front of the Palaces of Justice in early modern Europe were certainly a far cry from the maternal images of the forgiving, mediating Madonna that populated so many medieval churches. Nor were they reminiscent of so many sainted, suffering female martyrs, whose assigned role was that of passive victim bearing witness to their faith, even if one might detect a certain symmetry between the blindfolded criminal condemned to die and the image of blindfolded executioner.¹⁵ As a result, *Justitia* may plausibly be interpreted as a symbol of the very temporal power, firmly in male hands, that sought to displace the spiritual power that had accrued to the cult of Mary in the late Middle Ages. Neo-classical images with martial overtones were, after all, the source of this allegory, not religious ones.

And yet, it must be acknowledged that blindfolded *Justitia*, with all of her warlike attributes, was still primarily a female figure, as had been the Egyptian *Maat* (not only the Goddess of justice, but also of truth and order) and the Greek *Dike*, who was the daughter of Zeus. Male images of divine justice, such as that of God at the Last Judgment or St. Michael, had not been prevented from exercising the power of vision. Solomon famously could see how the two contesting mothers felt about the dividing of the child they both claimed as their own. What was the implication of preventing a female judge from seeing? What power might still be lurking beneath her blindfold, which, after all, does not permanently rob the Goddess of her sight?

What that power may be is suggested by the traditional reading of another image from a slightly later era, Jan Vermeer's »Woman Weighing Pearls«

¹³ See the entry on *Dike* in F. E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon*, New York 1967. For more sustained discussions, see Eric Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice: From Its Shadow in Homer to its Substance in Plato*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard 1978; Michael Gagarin, *Early Greek Law*, University of California, Berkeley 1986.

¹⁴ Robert, *La Justice*, p. 65f.

¹⁵ For a comparison, see Robert, *La Justice*, p. 92.

of 1662-1663 (*fig. 5*). Depicted in front of a picture of the Last Judgment, thought to be by Cornelisz Enhelbreecht, the woman with the delicate scales in her hands appears to be looking soberly and carefully at the individual pearls in each tray, as if she were contemplatively pondering their particular value. Or at least so the traditional interpretation of the canvas has assumed. Whether or not she is actually doing so is a question to which I will return shortly. But whatever the target of her gaze, there is no trace of judgmental harshness or vindictiveness in her visage; indeed these seem to be traits that the blissfully serene Vermeer was simply incapable of depicting. As with the souls whose salvation is judged in the scene behind her, each pearl, that precious object mirroring the world around it so often at the symbolic center of Vermeer's paintings, seems worth careful, deliberate scrutiny. The setting, moreover, is a typical Vermeer interior, a private, intimate, humble realm, far from the public space of the early modern statues of *Justitia*.

The goddess's gender as mediated by this comparison with Vermeer's painting is relevant here if we recall the contrast between male and female variants of moral reasoning posited by feminists like Carol Gilligan and Seyla Benhabib against moral theorists like Lawrence Kohlberg and John Rawls.¹⁶



Fig. 5: Jan Vermeer van Deft, *Woman Weighing Pearls* (1662-1663)

¹⁶ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Harvard,

Whereas male judgment often tends to be abstractly universalist, decontextualized, and formalistic, its female counterpart, they tell us, is more frequently sensitive to individual detail, narrative uniqueness, and specific contexts. Instead of acknowledging only an imagined »generalized other,« it focuses instead on the actual »concrete other« before it. The blindfolding of Justitia is thus not a thwarting of the gaze *per se*, but of the specifically female gaze, or at least of those qualities that have been associated with it in our culture.¹⁷ It is thus ultimately in the service of the disembodiment, disembodyedness, and decontextualization that a legalistic justice based on the reductive equivalence of the exchange principle requires.

The complete victory of what has recently been dubbed »algorithmic justice«¹⁸ because it involves following binding rules decreed from above is, to be sure, substantially modified in a legal system such as the Anglo-American, in which concrete precedent is often as important as statute as the basis for judgment. Here Kant's well-known contrast between reflective and determinant judgments, the former applied to aesthetic issues, the latter to cognitive and moral ones, might be invoked to justify the paradigmatic value of prior specific examples over abstract rules that are universally binding. But there is still in the law of precedent the presupposition of at least analogical commensurability from case to case. Even reflective judgments, after all, draw on the presumption of a »sensus communis,« a shared sentiment that goes beyond the arbitrary whim of idiosyncratic taste. If not by subsumption, then by analogy, what is different is somehow compelled to become similar through resemblance. In addition, the common law of precedent can be said to col-

Cambridge, Mass. 1982; Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Theory*, Routledge, New York 1992.

¹⁷ Hibbitts cites certain feminists scholars who claim that the power of the gaze is inherently male, whereas women's culture is more aural, and uses their arguments to buttress his claim that at least the American legal order until only recently was both ocularcentric and phallogocentric (p. 267). I would qualify this generalization to the extent that a female gaze is not a contradiction in terms and it is precisely its occlusion that may be complicitous with the type of visual regime that he shows dominated American legal theory. That is, without essentializing the gender differences, there may be a link between realizing the abstracting potential in vision and patriarchal domination, which functions by repressing the more concretizing alternative latent in the »female gaze« denied Justitia.

¹⁸ Alan Wolfe, »Algorithmic Justice,« in Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson (eds.), *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, Routledge, New York 1992. He criticizes it for lacking an appreciation for »the rule-making, rule-applying, rule-interpreting capacities of human beings and an emphasis instead on the rule-following character« (p. 366).

lapse the temporal difference between past and present in its search for a replicable standard of measurement.

Although images can, of course, themselves be the object of such judgments, their initial, brute impact on the beholder's sense of sight may well be prior to any evaluation, reflective or determinant, of their meaning. Even Kant's a priori categories do not, after all, include a necessary mechanism of cultural, symbolic commensuration. If Horkheimer and Adorno are right, mute visuality retains traces of a mode of interaction between humans and the world which is prior to conceptual subsumption or the rule of common sense, a mode they call mimetic. This is not the place to launch a full-fledged analysis of the vexed concept of mimesis in their work, an analysis I have tentatively attempted to make elsewhere.¹⁹ Suffice it to say that they understood mimesis to involve a non-dominating relationship between subjects and objects in which the world was not »subjected« to categorical determination or even intersubjective consensus. Mimesis meant a more passive affinity between perceiver and perceived rather than a hierarchical control by one over the other. Affinity, it should immediately be noted, does not mean identity or equivalence, as the mimesis between subject and object maintains a certain, irreducible difference between them. Insofar as images and their referents, representations and originals, perceptions and objects, may be similar, but not ontologically identical, they resist the full power of the exchange principle. Thus the image need not be of an imaginary monster, transgressing natural boundaries, to do its work of resistance; it need merely evoke the primal power of mimetic affinity, which acknowledges differences even as it seeks similarities, against the counter-power of conceptual subsumption, which seeks to suppress the remainder left behind in the act of subsuming.

What ultimately distinguishes mimetic from conceptual behavior, according to this argument, is the absence of violence in the former, the symbolic violence, that is, of categorical subsumption, which finds an echo in the potential for literal force heard in the phrase to »enforce the law.« Justitia, it should be remembered, is never depicted without her unsheathed sword.²⁰ As Jacques Derrida has recently pointed out in his meditation on Walter

¹⁹ Martin Jay, »Mimesis und Mimetologie: Adorno und Lacoue-Labarthe,« in Gertrud Koch (ed.), *Auge und Affekt: Wahrnehmung und Interaktion*, Fischer, Frankfurt 1995.

²⁰ This raises the question of the status of images or representations of violence (or threatened violence, as in the case of the brandished sword). If they are understood as more mimetic than conceptual, does this mean that the violence in them is modified or even cancelled? Or can images participate in another kind of violence beyond that of subsumption? For a consideration of this theme, see Paul Crowther, »Violence in Painting,« in *Critical Aesthetics and Postmodernism*, Oxford University, Oxford 1993.

Benjamin's famous essay »Critique of Violence,« there may well be a moment of originary violence or brute force in the foundation of even the most legitimate of laws: »Applicability, 'enforceability,' is not an exterior or secondary possibility that may or may not be added as a supplement to law,« he writes. »It is the force essentially implied in the very concept of *justice as law*.«²¹ »Here we can detect an echo of the argument from Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: that a justice reduced to a law of equivalence based on the subsumption of individual cases under a general rule, the »algorithmic justice« produced by commands from above, involves violence and restricts freedom. A different justice that would evade the binding force of the algorithm would follow instead the logic of the gratuitous gift, bestowed without an expectation of reciprocity, rather than that of the debt paid to even out a score, the primitive act of vengeance that Nietzsche famously saw at the root of modern notions of exchange.²² It would be incalculable, impossible to capture in definitions, irreducibly aporetic, perhaps even dangerously mad. Always either a memory of what may have been or a hope for a future that can perhaps be, but never actually is, it haunts the project of fully realized justice in the present, a justice based on blinding one's eyes to the absolute alterity of each of its alleged cases, a justice reduced to nothing but the positive, formal, abstract law. As such, it is the basis not only of religious notions of divine justice, but also of every defense of a revolutionary »political justice« that can claim the right to suspend the laws prevailing in a system that can itself be deemed unjust.²³

But both dialectical and deconstructionist modes of thinking, as we know, resist simple binary oppositions, and so too this overly abstract dichotomy must itself be shaken. Allegedly non-violent, gratuitous justice based on respect for absolute particularity and the benign mimesis of nature cannot be placed entirely on the other side of a divide from the putatively sinister, coercive force of law as command from above. In »Critique of Violence,« Benjamin had in fact juxtaposed a divine violence, which destroys laws and transgresses

²¹ Jacques Derrida, »Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority',« in Cornell et al. (eds.), *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, p. 5.

²² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing, Doubleday, Garden City, N. Y. 1956.

²³ For a classic account of the dilemmas of political justice, see Otto Kirchheimer, *Political Justice: The Use of Legal Procedure for Political Ends*, Princeton University, Princeton 1961. For a more recent discussion, which considers Kirchheimer's position with relation to Carl Schmitt, see William E. Scheuerman, *Between the Norm and the Exception: The Frankfurt School and the Rule of Law*, MIT, Cambridge, Mass. 1994.

boundaries, to a mythical one that makes and conserves them.²⁴ Although he cryptically described the former as »lethal without spilling blood,«²⁵ the troubling implication was that a justice beyond the law of formal equivalence, the life-affirming justice of absolute qualitative singularity based on the logic of the gift, was not itself somehow beyond coercion. For without any rules or criteria at all, what was to prevent a *soi-disant* divine justice from descending into nothing more than the principle »might makes right.« As Derrida himself uneasily concludes, »in one form or another, the undecidable is on each side, and is the violent condition of knowledge or action.«²⁶

Similarly, Horkheimer and Adorno were never willing to pit mimetic affinity against conceptual reflection as if they were simple opposites, one inherently superior to the other, one the singular locus of freedom, the other of mere repression. Discussing the residue of mimetic behavior that can be found in the work of art in his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno wrote,

The desideratum of visuality seeks to preserve the mimetic moment of art. What this view does not realize is that mimesis only goes on living through its antithesis, which is rational control by art works over all that is heterogeneous to them. If this is ignored, visuality becomes a fetish.²⁷

In art, he argued, it was important to avoid the either/or of sensuality vs. spirituality, which simply repeats the alienation characteristic of modern life. Instead, the paradoxical mixture of the two must be preserved, for

What lurks behind the false synthesis called aesthetic vision is a rigid polarity between spirit and sensuality which is inadequate. At the center of the aesthetic of vision is the false, thing-like notion that in the aesthetic artifact tensions have been synthesized into a state of rest, whereas in fact those tensions are essential to the work.²⁸

²⁴ Walter Benjamin, »Critique of Violence,« *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, Peter Demetz (ed.), Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York 1978, p. 297.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Derrida, »Force of Law,« p. 56. At the end of his piece, Derrida acknowledges the frightening potential in Benjamin's attraction to divine violence, an annihilating, expiatory violence, to become a perverted justification for the Holocaust. For differing opinions of how successful Derrida himself has been in thwarting this potential, see Dominick LaCapra, »Violence, Justice, and the Force of Law,« *Cardozo Law Review*, II, 6-6 (1990), Drucilla Cornell, *The Philosophy of the Limit*, Routledge, New York 1992, chapter 6, and Gillian Rose, *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays*, Blackwell, Oxford 1993, chapter 7.

²⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, C. Lenhardt trans., Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (eds.), RKP, London 1984, p. 141.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

If we return to our point of departure, the blindfolding of Justitia, we can now understand that it was perhaps not entirely without some reason that vision was denied even to a female gaze in the name of impartiality and the banishment of monsters. Like the other »fools« in medieval tales, who often speak a higher truth, the fool who blindfolds the goddess on Sebastian Brant's ship may have known what he was doing after all. For like the false synthesis of the aesthetic artifact, a practice of judgment based solely on the power of an immediate visual apprehension of irreducible singularity risks succumbing to the illusory potential that always accompanies sensual perception, however acute.

There is also another powerful justification for the allegorical image of the blindfold. Because her eyes are covered, Justitia must walk cautiously into the future, not rushing headlong to judgment.²⁹ Vermeer's open-eyed, female weigher of pearls can be shown without a blindfold because her judgment is allegorically linked to that of the Last Judgment in the canvas depicted behind her. But a secular judgment that is anything but the last, a justice of mere mortals, cannot pretend to possess so clear-sighted a sense of whose soul merits salvation and whose does not. It must acknowledge that imperfect general laws and the concrete judgments of those who apply them somehow always fall short of an absolute and final justice, and yet that both are necessary means in the endless struggle to realize that unrealizable goal.

It must furthermore accept the fact that even the most comprehensive notion of justice contains within it a pluralism of distinct logics that may sometimes be in conflict.³⁰ Procedural notions of justice within an established order, those that subordinate it to positive law, are likely to be in tension with compensatory, distributive, restitutive and retributive alternatives that may well point beyond that order. A justice that remembers and tries to redress the wrongs of the past and one that hopes to create a truly just society in the future can easily be at odds with formal procedures in the present, as any observer of the heated debate over affirmative action in the United States can well attest. Rather than a single over-arching criterion, there may be several that cannot be perfectly reconciled, but this does not mean that it is better to throw out general considerations altogether and judge decisionistically.

Unexpectedly, this point is suggested in visual terms by the same Vermeer

²⁹ This metaphor of blindfolded Justice walking cautiously is taken from M. Petitjean, »Un homme de loi semurois: l'avocat P. Lemulier,« *Annales de Bourgogne*, LXII, 245, cited in Robert, *La Justice*, p. 130.

³⁰ In this issue, see Michel Rosenfeld, »Restitution, Retribution, Political Justice and the Rule of Law,« *Constellations*, II, 3 (January, 1996), pp. 309-332.

painting discussed earlier as an example of a benign woman's gaze at concrete particulars. For recent scientific analysis of the pigments on the canvas has revealed that the scales do not, in fact, contain pearls, as has traditionally been thought, but are empty instead.³¹ What shines is apparently only the light reflecting off the trays. Rather than directed at individual cases, the woman's contemplative gaze, we now can appreciate, falls on the apparatus itself, as if she were weighing its merits as an impartial mechanism of fairness, albeit one then used to judge the worth of each pearl.

A justice, in other words, that tries to see only concrete, contingent, incommensurable particularity and judge without *any* abstract prescriptive criteria whatsoever – such as that recently defended, for example, by Jean-François Lyotard in *Just Gaming*³² – may paradoxically be as blind as one that pretends to be entirely algorithmic. What is needed, as Adorno points out in the case of aesthetic judgment, is a creative tension between the two, a justice that can temper the rigor of conceptual subsumption, or more precisely, several such subsumptions, with a sensitivity to individual particularity. The unresolvable paradox of the relationship between law and justice, as the Slovenian philosopher Jelica Šumič-Riha has recently argued, may, in fact, require a certain measure of blindness. »We know,« she writes,

that law as such is not and cannot be just. However, if we accept that and behave according to this knowledge, we will have lost not only justice, but also law. Law is namely conceived as an instance that appeals to justice which means that a law that does not refer to justice is simply not a law. It is therefore in some way necessary to blind ourselves to this knowledge. In Derrida's terms: even if justice cannot be reduced to rule-governed activity we must respect rules. We must respect them because in the very undecidability of justice on the one hand and the groundlessness of law on the other lies the danger that the right to do justice can be usurped by bad legislators.³³

Perhaps it is best, therefore, to imagine the Goddess Justitia neither as fully sighted nor as blindfolded, but rather as she was once visually depicted at the threshold of the modern world, in a mid-sixteenth century frontispiece to J. De Damhoudere's *Praxis rerum civilium*: Justitia, that is, as a goddess with not one face, but two. The first has eyes that are wide open, able to discern difference, alterity, and non-identity, looking in the direction of the hand that

³¹ Arthur J. Wheelock, Jr., and Ben Broos, *Johannes Vermeer*, Yale University, New Haven 1996, p. 141-142.

³² Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis 1985.

³³ Jelica Šumič-Riha, »Fictions of Justice,« *Filozofski Vestnik*, 2 (1994), p. 80.



Fig. 6: Justice with two faces, one veiled and the other with open eyes. Frontispiece of J. De Damhoudere, *Praxis rerum civilium...*, Anvers 1567.

wields her sword, while the second, facing the other hand with the calculating scales of rule-governed impartiality, has eyes that are veiled (*fig. 6*). For only the image of a two-faced deity, a hybrid, monstrous creature which we can in fact see, an allegory that resists subsumption under a general concept, only such an image can do, as it were, justice to the negative, even perhaps aporetic, dialectic that entangles law and justice itself.

Eva K. W. Man

Experimental Painting and Painting Theories in Colonial Hong Kong (1940-1980): Reflection on Cultural Identity

During the past fifty years the art of painting in Hong Kong has distinguished itself from other art forms, undergoing a metamorphosis in both concept and style. Conceptually, many Hong Kong painters have developed meaningful and systematic theories of painting and aesthetics which reflect a concern for cultural identity. In doing so, they have revealed the conflict that they as painters have encountered – a conflict between traditional Chinese aesthetics and modern Western aesthetics. Further, they have given expression to this in their paintings and experimental work. This article will illustrate the development of the conceptual and aesthetic transformation that took place in Hong Kong between 1940 and 1980 by examining the aesthetics and artistic experiments of several representative painters. In addition, this article will provide a critical discussion of this aesthetic development and investigate if art and cultural discussions in contemporary post-colonial discourse can be applied to the situation of Hong Kong.

Painting in Hong Kong: 1940 –1980

Scholars agree that, since the mid-nineteenth century, Hong Kong has experienced more cultural interchange than any other Chinese city. This is largely due to its colonial heritage and its geographical position as the southern outlet of China. In the pre-war period of the 1940s, Hong Kong's painting scene was dominated by Western painting, and local art organizations were run by Westerners who outnumbered Chinese painters creating traditional Chinese art. This situation continued until masses of Chinese painters immigrated to Hong Kong from Southern China during the Japanese invasion of China in World War II.¹ Yet still it took years before Chinese painters could bring in more Chinese influences to painting.

The dominance of Western artistic methods in Hong Kong continued for several years after World War II as Western painting – still life and real-

¹ Wucius Wong, »The Development of Hong Kong Art in the Recent Ten Years«, *Ming Pao Monthly*, Hong Kong, (1/1976), p. 169.

ism in particular – flourished in galleries and museums.² The work of local painters was not of the highest quality at that time, because they had only minimal exposure to the great masterpieces as well as to intellectual discourse regarding »foreign« art. The only painting classes offered to Hong Kong artists were taught by a few Chinese painters who had returned from Western art studies abroad.³ As a result, Hong Kong artists still did not get as much recognition as Western painters in the years immediately after World War II.

Yet the neglect of Chinese artistry was soon to be remedied. Cultural modernization accompanied a period of intense industrialization in Hong Kong in the post-war era. Painters in the colony were introduced to a number of new Western modern art movements. In addition, the government of Hong Kong established new and innovative art colleges offering courses that reflected the rapidly changing art scene. In 1958, the »Modern Literature and Art Association« was established by a group of young, prominent local artists such as Lu Shoukun, Zhang Yi, Wen Lou, Wucius Wong, and Han Zhixun. The association organized prominent art exhibitions, such as the »Hong Kong International Salon of Paintings« in the early 1960s. The exhibit included modern abstract works by both local and foreign artists, and, typical of the modern art movement in Hong Kong at the time, was a bold reaction against the traditional Western artistic practices of the 1940s and the 1950s in the colony. New developments like the International Salon were reinforced by the opening of Hong Kong City Hall in 1962, which soon became the main venue for art museums, exhibition galleries, art courses, and other events involving art.

Still, in the early 1960s, Hong Kong's local artistic identity had not been fully established, and the art work produced continued to reflect Western influence. Six years after its founding in 1964, the »Modern Literature and Art Association« dissolved, and some of its members founded the »*In Tao* Painters Society«. This group consisted of experimental artists attempting to integrate Chinese and Western styles by using a wide range of forms and materials. The members of *In Tao* juxtaposed traditional Chinese techniques and materials – calligraphy and silk, for example – and novel Western methods, such as print, spray-gun painting, and aesthetically progressive concepts included abstract and optical art of the West in three-dimensional works and

² According to *Hong Kong Artists* (vol. 1), the last art exhibition prior to World War II was »Exhibition of Western Paintings« held at a library in the Hong Kong University. Cf. Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Hong Kong Artists*, vol. 1, The Urban Council of Hong Kong, Hong Kong 1995, p. 13.

³ Cf. Wong, [1/1976], p. 170.

sculpture, as well as painting. This served to introduce an entirely fresh, though not uncontroversial, set of creative media. The mid-1960s, then, marked the beginning of Hong Kong art. This coincided with a period of rapid economic growth and a move toward localization policies instituted by the British government in the colony, which was intended to nurture a Hong Kong identity.⁴

Hong Kong's artistic rejuvenation was just underway when political riots were sparked in 1967 by local leftists objecting to British rule. During this time of rapid change and political upheaval came the call for a return to Chinese traditional art and the creation of forms of art that Hong Kong could call its own. The trend was led by Lu Shoukun, who, since the mid-1950s had promoted a »root-finding« process for local Chinese painters. He called on painters to first grasp the spirit of traditional painting and then turn to new developments once the proper tools were securely in hand. An accomplished painter himself, Lu combined Western styles – Fauvism, Cubism, Surrealism and Abstractionism – with traditional Chinese painting in his experimental work. He later created the unique »Zen« style of painting. Lu's Zen painting integrated traditional Chinese ink painting with modern Abstractionism and served to convey Buddhist principles. Lu also launched one of Hong Kong's most notable movements in painting in the 1970s, which came to be known as the »New Ink Movement.« Members of this movement drew on traditional Chinese ink painting techniques and transformed them, yielding various new forms of expression. A number of Hong Kong's young artists were at the forefront of the movement, incorporating concepts from Western modern art, abstract expressionism, for the most part. The New Ink movement in the colony marked the end of the dominance of Western academic oil painting and gave rise to »Hong Kong Painting«, which aims at the founding of local artistic identity.

In the 1970s, more and more local artists devoted themselves to creating their own individual styles instead of conforming to Western artistic practice. In 1975, the Urban Council organized the first »Contemporary Hong Kong Art Biennial Exhibition« at the Hong Kong Museum of Art, a milestone in exhibiting modern paintings created by local artists. The government sponsored the exhibition, reflecting its support of local artists. The opening of the Hong Kong Arts Center in 1977 and the founding of the Fine Arts Department at Hong Kong University further promoted art education in the colony. Finally, in 1978, the »Exhibition of Hong Kong Artists: the Early

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

Generation« was organized by the Hong Kong Museum of Art. This exhibition gave a retrospective of the artistic performance of local painters in earlier years, demonstrated Hong Kong's commitment to developing a local artistic identity, and encouraged a historical awareness of the talent within its border.

Communist Influences

In 1946, during the civil war in Mainland China between the Communist party and the National party, Hong Kong became a sanctuary for left-wing artists from the mainland. While their stay in the colony was temporary, these artists-in-exile founded the »*Yen Kan* Painting Society«. With the freedom and stability Hong Kong provided for them, the members of »*Yen Kan*« used art to promote their socialist political views explicitly. »*Yen Kan*«, which means »the living of the proletarians,« gave a strong socialist message to a colony in which the very rich and the very poor were living side by side; the contrasts were obvious and *Yen Kan's* message clear. The society held exhibitions and produced publication that also expressed their philosophy of art and aesthetics. While the *Yen Kan* was in existence only four years, before it was dissolved in 1950, it attempted to exert socialist influences on aesthetics in Hong Kong.

The founder of *Yen Kan*, Huang Xinbo, also organized artists who had immigrated from the mainland regions of Kunming, Chunking, and Quilin to the British colony and arranged for them to be members of the society. *Yen Kan* also used a social club for Westerners as its activity venue, and in this capacity masked the Communist identities of its members. Soon the Society's art projects became very political. Its exhibitions displayed cartoon and woodcraft that symbolically demonstrated first the failure of the military, and second the shortcomings of the political and economic projects of the National Party in China.⁵ In another bold move, the *Yen Kan* issued political statements that linked art with socialist theory. At the close of the civil war, the Communist Party was victorious, and the New China was founded by Mao Tse Tung. The society then busied itself by producing war cartoons and huge portraits of Mao, the new and promising ruler. In the end, it sent nearly all of its members back to the mainland where they took up government

⁵ Cf. Tan Shuetsung, »Memory of the Revolutionary Art Body who Fought in the South – The Yan Ken Painting Society«, *Meixu*, Renmin Meixu Press, Peking, 2, 1984, unpaginated.

positions related to art. The society's dissolution was complete by 1950, with high hopes pinned on the promises offered by the New China.

During *Yen Kan's* four years in Hong Kong, its members actively promoted Mao's aesthetic ideology, as expressed in his speech, »The Yen On Art and Literary Discussion,« delivered in 1942. A long article in a Hong Kong newspaper by the founder of the society, Huang Xinbo, in May 1949, revealed not only *Yen Kan's* vision of art, but also its political agenda for Hong Kong.⁶ In the first part of the article, Huang severely criticized the artistic community under the National Party in China, including particular local artists and groups that promoted Western paintings. Western painting, in *Yen Kan's* view was produced by and displayed for the rich only. Further, the paintings failed to express concern for the social conditions of the poor, nor did the artists themselves denounce the political policies that perpetuated that poverty. The article identified by name Shanghai artists guilty of these charges, among them Liu Haixu and Tsu Baixiung and accused their art of discriminating against the proletariat. Huang also claimed these artists either uncritically revered Western art and blindly followed modern Western painting or tried to please foreigners with traditional Chinese art – merely a leftover from a feudal society of days gone by. Huang's declaration defined the »New Art« he and his colleagues promoted as neo-democratic art. New Art was to depict the lives of the masses who, according to Mao, were the soldiers, farmers and factory workers. Huang and the New Artists insisted that art should offer serious reflection on existing social conditions, addressing the themes of anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism. It should also take a realistic approach to solutions to these issues, based on that reflection. Huang's article also identified two missions for artists: first, use art as a tool for education; second, retrieve art from the hands of the privileged class. It insisted that art should be concerned with content but not with form, and that artists should depict what people were familiar with in everyday life. Furthermore, the society believed that both the style and the content of painting should change with the times, as the lives and ideologies of people change over time. It should be noted that *Yen Kan*, in its public declaration, did not try to eliminate the art of the bourgeois because it realized that Hong Kong was quite different from mainland China. Hong Kong's masses were fueled by the corporate interests of capitalism. The society believed that the bourgeois could advance along with the proletariat, but that members of the bourgeoisie needed to practice »self-correction«. Obviously, *Yen Kan* ultimately failed to sway the

⁶ Huang Xinbo, »Our Opinions in the Establishment of New Art«, *Wen Wui Pao*, Hong Kong, May 20, 1949.

political opinions of the majority of people in the British colony, who so eagerly followed Western colonial values. By 1950, at the end of their time in Hong Kong, *Yen Kan* had won few converts to their politico-artistic theory, although their social and artist influence was certainly notable.

Other artists groups and art organizations took a favorable view of Western painting and were also active in the years of *Yen Kan*. Luis Chan, Lee Byng and Yee Bon, local painters who were famous at the time, produced Western-style paintings. Both Lee and Yee had studied in North America and returned to the colony to found their own studios. Though Chan had not traveled to the West, he became acquainted with both Lee and Yee. Apparently proving Huang's charges accurate, many of those who gathered in the studios of Chan, Lee, and Yee were indeed quite well-to-do. The three also offered lessons in Western painting to these same patrons. These artists were so devoted to Western Classical painting that local artistic identity was not of particular concern to them. Thus, as will be discussed later, their influence took on a very different character from that of the *Yen Kan*.

The Local Spirit

There were a few painters whose art not only reflected the history of painting in Hong Kong in the 20th century, but also represented the colony's spirit of experimentation. Luis Chan, a painter in Western classical painting, was one of the most prominent figures in this era. As noted above, Chan had never been to Europe or North America for formal artistic training, but instead was a self-trained artist. He developed the style he came to call his own through exchanging ideas with other local painters who had studied abroad. Making the most of his keen artistic sensibility, his fluency in English, and an indisputably charming personality, Chan created a large circle of friends. These strengths in combination raised him to a prominent position in Hong Kong's art community.

Luis Chan was also one of few local artists to cross the boundaries of social class and race and had established friendships with a number of European and American celebrities in the colony. This played in his favor among his local friends and followers as well, ranking him among the most popular of cultural leaders in Hong Kong. But Chan's acquisition of the public attention was gained over time. By organizing fund-raising balls to benefit the arts and holding large art openings and parties, Chan created opportunities to exhibit work of his own and later founded art societies of his own as well.

In 1934, at the age of 29, Chan was introduced to the Hong Kong Art

Club by the wealthy Lady Shenton. Soon the club granted him executive member status and sponsored exhibition of Chan's work in water colors the following year. This was Chan's first solo exhibit and one that placed him firmly in the center of Hong Kong's art circles.

While Chan continued to paint, he earned his living by running the family business before the war. His work in these years included Western academic paintings, primarily landscapes in water colors and oil. After the war, Chan started to concentrate on oil painting. His strong relationship with the colonial governor, Grantham, helped to enhance his artistic influence.⁷ Meanwhile, the civil war in China between the Communists and the National party, as mentioned earlier, had fueled the passions of the *Yen Kan* Painting Society whose socialist orientation was very different from that of Chan. In the view of *Yen Kan* members, and other left-leaning artists groups in Hong Kong, Chan was as guilty as other local artists blasted in Huang's article of representing the »bourgeois« in art and were regarded as art elites in the colony. Moreover, the British colonialists were enthusiastic over Chan's promotion of Western painting, and formed an alliance which did not share *Yen Kan's* nationalism, further fueling the antagonistic relationship between these opposing local visions.

While Chan was a skilled organizer, he was also, quite simply, a great painter. Early in his career, Chan was influenced by other young painters who had returned from abroad and who had promoted the Realist tradition of Western academic painting. Yet Chan did not really embrace Realism. In the foreword of his book, *Treatise on Art* (1953), he described art as »creative imagination« and saw beauty as »the expression of consciousness and emotion.«⁸ Although he adhered to the practical principles of painting in accordance with Western academic techniques, Chan had more regard for creativity than for imitation. Creativity, for Chan, was the spontaneous outgrowth of the artist's communication with Nature or objects, an idea he borrowed from Constable whom he quoted in his writings. Chan expressed this same idea in a discussion in 1954 of portrait painting:

... the most successful painting of a portrait, or for that matter, a figure subject, requires observant understanding and sympathy before full expression of the artist can be adequately made.⁹

⁷ See the introduction written by governor Grantham to Luis Chan's, *How to Paint A Portrait*, Ming Sang Printing Co., Hong Kong 1954, p. 1.

⁸ Luis Chan, *Treatise on Art*, Ming Sang Printing Co., Hong Kong 1953, p. 1.

⁹ Chan, 1954, p. 21.

Similarly, Chan expressed his sense of aesthetics in the preface to his book, *The Art of Drawing* (1955):

(The) ultimate technical accomplishment lies rather in artists' success in their adoption coupled with their imaginative and creative powers that may be developed by experience and endless experiments.¹⁰

One's style, according to Chan, is the way to create one's artistic symbols. His quotation from Kandinsky summed up Chan's own sense of aesthetics:

To any question beginning with 'must', there is no 'must' in art, because art is always free ... from the point of view of an inner need, no limitation can be made. The artist may use any form which his expression demands; his inner impulse must find suitable form ... The general relationship with which these works of art through the centuries are always more strengthened does not lie in the 'external' but in the roots of mystical inner content.¹¹

Chan's stress on free creativity and the mystical inner workings of artistic expression contrasted sharply with *Yen Kan's* sense of art as political manifesto.

Although Chan had seldom practiced traditional Chinese painting, he had written a related book, *A Survey of Chinese Painting* (1954), in an attempt to examine the development of Eastern painting theories and to compare these to developments in the West. A representative example is his reading of the notion of »spiritual resonance« (the first of the famous Six Ways in Chinese painting), based on Harold Speed's analysis. Spiritual resonance is a term used to describe the artistic process as a kind of musical movement.¹² Chan's interpretation, unfortunately, incorporated too many Western ideas of art and thus showed limited understanding in Chinese aesthetics, for he underestimated its metaphysical implications. Chan had also severely criticized imitative practices in the Chinese artistic tradition, which, to him, should serve as an introduction to painting only. Chan favored a stress on creativity and on Speed's notion of »internal musical movement« instead.

By the mid-1950s, Hong Kong artists had begun to join in on the West's modern art movement. In 1955, Lu Shoukun founded the Hong Kong Artists Association. This marked the beginning of the modern art movement in Hong

¹⁰ Luis Chan, *The Art of Drawing*, The Artland Co. Ltd., Hong Kong 1955, p. I.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹² Luis Chan, *A Survey of Chinese Painting*, Ming Sang Printing Co., Hong Kong 1954, pp. 27-28.

Kong. The new movement threatened Chan's position as the spokesman of an older generation immersed in the Western academic tradition. At this time, Chan actively engaged in debates on modern art in newspapers and in his own writings to defend his position. Meanwhile, the New Ink Movement emerged as a major local art movement during this period. New ink, a style launched by Lu Shoukun, sought to modernize traditional Chinese art. New Ink's challenges to the old order meant that the traditional Realist/Impressionist school of

Western art, which Chan had represented so faithfully and so well, was facing severe challenges. Later, however, he started to experiment with modern art, following his desire to explore this new and provocative style.

Chan tried a wide range of styles. His motivation to explore modern art was heightened in 1962 after a rejection of his work by the curators of »Exhibition of Hong Kong Art Today«, an event promoting the local Modern art movement. This led him to begin an exploration of a number of schools of modern painting including Cubism, Expressionism, Abstractionism, as well as a number of novel techniques, such as monotype printing, hard-edged colored-field landscape, and spray-gun painting. In 1962, Chan explained his transition from Realism to Abstractionism:

(This) has been a natural part of my self-learning process. I have been making art in both directions for a while, and I have no intention to give up either one of them. ... When I first attempted to make 'new style' art, I was exploring Cubism and Surrealism, but I found them too limiting in form. Then I decided to go fully abstract. Meanwhile I wanted to continue my realist style, but added a touch of Fauvist modification.¹³

Chan dabbled in many different forms at this time and came up with new questions about art:

Why should we accept abstract art? That is because in our everyday experience, there is more than physical reality. We have thought, feeling and imagination and we cannot escape from abstract illusion. Realistic painting shows us physical reality, and abstract painting the mental and the emotional world. An abstract painter is someone who expresses emotion with his imagination as abstraction links with illusion and fantasy which exist in our daily life, only if we care to look for it.¹⁴

Through these explorations, Chan developed a theory of individual

¹³ Luis Chan, »From Realism to Abstractionism«, publication information unknown, 1962.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

perception, of how artists view the world and how their expressions are outlets for their deep emotions:

When one needs to deal with the complexity of the world, they could either be optimistic or pessimistic. My abstract art is born in pessimistic mood. Whenever I am depressed I turn to art, for it takes away my sadness and depression. In the world of my own creation, I am God, and I deliver all my sorrow to the universe I create. The abstract art I create is the voice from my heart which tries to make people understand emotion and life. ... Rhythm is the spirit of my abstract art, I create it in my own symbols and illusions, and successfully form a distinctive style.¹⁵

Based on these writings, it is clear that Chan's immersion in this new art form, led him along a path in which he was discovering his inner self. Art is not just simply representation of form, as he always realized, but also of the inner workings of the artist's own internal core.

After years of experimentation, abstract art became Chan's main vehicle of expression, and Western aesthetics remained his main references. Unlike other local artists of his period, Chan insisted on absolute freedom in artistic expression, and this freed him from the burdens of both cultural heritage and nationalism. Both personally and in his work as an artist, Chan thrived in the colony, a bi-lingual and bi-cultural space where East and West merged. Questions of cultural identity and Chinese tradition very seldom affected him as all he asked for was a »free soul.«

After another decade of searching, Chan revitalized his art through the playful and skillful use of the subconscious, producing distinctive surrealistic landscapes mixed with personal fantasy and illusion. His work included portraits and animal paintings in a unique and childlike style, revealing only his own humor (*fig. 7*). During the 1970s and 1980s, Chan once again emerged as an outstanding creative figure. Upon his death in 1995, he was described as:

Questions of cultural identity and Chinese tradition have never been burdens to the creative activity of Luis Chan who advocates absolute freedom in painting. Chan's fish paintings in later period reflect an unique and child-like style.

One of the outstanding figures in the history of Hong Kong art, and an artist who, through boundless imagination and endless creative energy, was able to keep up with the rapid pace of development of Hong Kong.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Hong Kong Arts Centre, exhibition notes of »Retrospectives of Luis Chan, 1905-1995«, Hong Kong Arts Centre, Hong Kong 1995.



Fig. 1: Luis Chan, Kau Yu Tao (Nine things in harmony), 1980

Chan's adaptive and creative spirit, his association with the West, and his unique process of self-exploration parallel the development of modern art in Hong Kong.

The New Ink Movement

The New Ink Movement, led by Lu Shoukun, usurped Chan's eminence in the 1960s. At the time, Lu was a very influential figure in the local art community, as he promoted modernization of traditional Chinese painting and related it to a Hong Kong cultural identity. His views helped emerging Hong Kong artists address an existential crisis in the British colony – a crisis that became more serious when political tension finally grew into riots and street demonstrations in 1967 as Hong Kong's leftists protested against British colonial rule.¹⁷

¹⁷ The radical political tensions emerged between the British government and the Chinese leftists in the colony in the 60's was initiated by a group of factory workers on strike in San Po Kong which resulted in the 1967's riot. Thousands of workers joined

While Chan tended to interpret Chinese aesthetics according to the Western scheme, Lu absorbed Western ideas into the Chinese tradition. Lu, born in Canton, learned Chinese painting from his father. He also learned by copying ancient Chinese scrolls and pictures in his father's antique shop. Lu moved to Hong Kong in 1948 where he impressed the art community with his work and his teachings. Amazingly, he could reproduce at will every traditional style. However, his desire for individual expression caused him to become an experimentalist in what may be termed »Chinese art with a Western approach.«¹⁸ Lu was keen on ink painting, which he later mixed with his experimental ideas. Eventually, this led him to 'Zen' painting, the style for which he was most famous in his later development.

Ink painting, developed during the *Tang* Dynasty in the eighth century, emphasized individual and spiritual expression. The original concept was to create an alternative to the strict outline and the splendid, colorful treatment that had been very popular in *Tang*. The New Ink Movement, introduced in Hong Kong in the 1960s, revised traditional Chinese ink painting. Via New Ink techniques, ink painting went through revolutionary changes and was experimented with, using various Western modern art forms and styles. Lu's intent in beginning the New Ink movement was to fill a need Hong Kong painters had to establish an artistic identity for Hong Kong. This group of young artists found traditional Chinese paintings repetitive and felt it failed to express feeling related to their living and times. At the same time, these painters were not satisfied with Western academic paintings, as they found them unimaginative. In Lu's view, new ink painting was a reform of the old Chinese tradition, as well as an embellishment to the Western academic tradition. He also took into account the social environment of the post-war era which encouraged, not only freedom of expression, but intense competition as well. So then, for Lu the spirit of new ink paintings offered a mental balance to people living in a colony which was overrun with material and technological advancements.

Lu regarded the tradition of ink painting as manifesting the spiritual principle of traditional Chinese aesthetics, which connected artistic content and form to personal spiritual and ethical cultivation. Lu believed that the growing prosperity of Hong Kong, which by the 1960s had become an inter-

in the riot which led to injuries. The riot was read as a local rebellion against the colonial government. After the riot, localization policy was promoted by the colonial government to build up a sense of belonging and local awareness among Hong Kong citizens.

¹⁸ Cf. Lee Ying Ho, (ed.), *Modern Edition*, Hong Kong Modern Literature and Art Association, Hong Kong, No. 4, September 1963, p. 14.

national and commercial city, provided some favorable conditions for the ink painting movement. First, according to Lu, the Hong Kong Chinese people could relate to ink painting; they felt closer to ink painting than to Western painting. Secondly, the international art community was more interested in a new genre of work that grew out of local cultural innovations more than it in imitations of Western schools. Finally, combining Chinese ink painting with Western materials and techniques, produced intriguing artistic effects. Lu's views were reflected in the work of young artists who mixed ink with fluorescent colors or printing oil and utilized ink with concepts of Western design. He classified modern ideas combined with tradition as »adaptation« which should not be separated from the »root« or foundation, which, in traditional Chinese aesthetics, is the spiritual cultivation of the artist.¹⁹ The »root« of painting, according to Lu, was based on ancient Confucian principles and teachings such as *Chung Yung (The Doctrines of the Means)* and *Da Xua (The Teachings)* both of which promote self-cultivation and self-discovery. Lu drew on these teachings to urge artists to return to the »root« – i.e. the inner self – and nourish it, to find the wisdom to incorporate new forms of painting. By returning to the root, painters could find their own style which would also reflect their own personality and ways of existence. According to old Confucian teachings, this return to one's root, or inner self, could also transcend temporal, spacial, and cultural differences.

Critics tended to read Taoist and Buddhist messages into Lu's paintings, especially in his 'Zen' paintings which reflected life attitudes of the two teachings via brush strokes in ink and abstract expressionism in style (fig. 2). Lu explained his style in Taoist and Buddhist terms and said it reflected styles of living and the relationship between an individual and society. His vision offered solutions to artists struggling with a crisis of cultural identity in Hong Kong, who often found themselves feeling confused and ungrounded in their hybrid cultural situation. While Lu asked his students to follow traditional ways of learning and to copy traditional paintings, he regarded the practice of imitation as an introduction to the idea and skill of painting only. There was much to learn from the tradition, like the principles of brush strokes and symbols. Once painting students mastered these, and only then, could they establish their own definitive style. In other words, Lu believed that artists should be able to break with tradition only after they have a good foundation and knowledge of the tradition.

Lu saw plenty of possibilities in merging the Chinese and Western styles

¹⁹ Lu Shoukun, *Sui Mo Hua Jiang*, notes of Lu's lectures recorded by a group of his students and published by them, Hong Kong 1972, pp. 31-33.



Fig. 2: Lu Shoukun, *Chuang Tze by himself*, 1974

A representative work of Lu's »Zen« painting and the New Ink movement. Critics tended to read Taoist and Buddhist messages into his »Zen« paintings which are mainly experimental work in ink strokes in a style of Western abstract expressionism.

of painting. He believed that by combining the artistic treatment and technology of the West with the spiritual temperament and ink brush strokes of the Chinese tradition one could create a whole new visual experience. The most important goal, he believed, was self-discovery. For, only through self-discovery could one form original ideas, and this process should always come before artistic form. Lu saw a need for a new form of expression in Hong Kong which was becoming a place so »foreign« to the peasant society of China. To achieve innovation in art, as he always insisted, was to seek self-knowledge in one's tradition, a foundation which artists could build on later.

Lu's own experimental work paralleled his teaching. His attempts to modernize ink painting had been controversial as conservative attitudes resisted his push for innovative experiments in painting, which the following excerpt from a critique of his exhibition demonstrates.

(Lu's) new approach is almost entirely Western and it would, indeed, be hard to differentiate where Chinese painting ends and Western painting begins. However, his conception, technique and execution remain Chinese. ... I do think, though, that it is dangerous for Mr. Lui to assimilate a phase of Western art which I consider undesirable – that is vista or perspective painting. It has taken the Western artist hundreds of years up to our time to discover the disadvantage of making a hole in the canvas, thereby breaking the unity of the picture.²⁰

Nevertheless, throughout the struggle for a new art form, Lu's was a strong voice in favor of nurturing a cultural identity in the Chinese artistic tradition.

From Traditionalism to Creative Freedom

Lu's influence through his work and his articles in various newspapers and magazines was significant to Hong Kong art circle in the 1960s. While involved with the New Ink Movement, Lu was also curator of the Hong Kong Museum of Art in the 1970s where he oversaw many important art exhibitions and events. After his sudden death in 1975 at the age of fifty-six, his efforts were carried on by his student, Wucius Wong.

Wong had studied Chinese painting under Lu in 1958 and became his close follower. With his provocative views on art and his call to return to

²⁰ K. C. Wong, »Impressive Exhibition«, *South China Morning Post*, Hong Kong, March 5, 1957.

Chinese tradition, Lu inspired Wong to a great extent. Wong studied art in the U.S. in the early 1960s and was struck by what he saw of Western artistic culture. In 1966, a year after returning to Hong Kong, Wong chronicled this experience, describing life as a young artist in Hong Kong and outlining his struggles between the influences of East and West, modernism and traditionalism.²¹ According to Wong's description, prior to the 1950s Western art was available in Hong Kong only as low-quality reproductions in art books. It was not until the 1960s that Wong had the chance to see genuine Western work when he studied in the U.S. This experience also raised questions about cultural differences in artistic expression and an artist's relation to tradition. The West had not completely displaced Wong's Chinese roots, instead he was integrating the two influences, though not without struggle. He had also found that Westerners held two common attitudes toward Eastern art: one asked that what is essentially Eastern be preserved; the other insisted that Eastern artists should learn from the West. According to Wong, both revealed nothing but ignorance of Eastern art. Wong's reflection is reminiscent of Edward Said's notion of »Orientalism« and the problem of the »Otherness« in contemporary post-colonial discourse. As Wong said in 1966:

Some Westerners tend to look for their notion of the Eastern tradition in our work and make elaborate significance out of it, they disregard our creativity and our relations to the contemporary world. The others only read our work from their own aesthetics, values and modes of perception which finally repel them from really entering into our world of painting.²²

Wong regarded the »Eastern identity« of young Hong Kong artists as the language they learned as they grew. Chinese ways of living, thinking, and visual habits are all related to the Chinese tradition. This identity, becomes »the other« in a foreign context and can result in an impetus for artistic experimentation. Wong himself had attempted to give up the traditional lines in Chinese painting and painted landscapes in oil and the human figure in ink. But no matter how hard he tried to combine the East and the West, the former was still his base and structure. Soon he decided to return, both to his homeland in Hong Kong and to his Chinese painting tradition in order to have, in his own words »a greater freedom in creativity.«²³

²¹ Wucius Wong, »Return to the East and Get Set...«, newspaper article, publication information unknown, Hong Kong 1966.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

Wong's idea of return is similar to Lu's notion of return, except Wong elaborated more explicitly on the existential experience as a Hong Kong artist.

A return to the East does not mean just a return to the tradition or to cut oneself off from the West, both are impossible. We are living in a place where the East meets the West; we grow in our tradition while our way of living is under the influence of the West. To escape would only mean to limit one's creativity.²⁴

In a 1963 article entitled, »The Reconstruction of the East,« Wong described the aesthetics of Eastern painting as disinterestedness, and as embracing a harmonious relation with Nature.²⁵ Instead of following the rules of perspective in Western painting, Wong saw Eastern painting as reflecting the principle of »spiritual resonance,« which transcends »style« or »technique,« as well as the bounds of nationality and culture. The only absolute, Wong said, is artistic freedom. This total freedom allows for the final transcendence of the East itself. In this sense, the incorporation of Western influences into Eastern art is certainly acceptable; it is always beneficial to learn from the West's forms of expression and materials and its developments in artistic movements. Wong's experimental painting, which merged the Western and Chinese ways, expresses his sense of the complementarity of the two cultures. One example in particular is his painting of a Chinese landscape, entitled »Purification #2« from 1979, using the form and texture of Western painting (*fig. 3*).

It should be noted that Wong was highly concerned about the role of the Hong Kong artist. For such artist, he said,

Rebellion is necessary when he wishes to break through the confines of his predecessors to make way for something new, personal... What is around him is vague, fluctuating, and shapeless. He has no sense of belonging; he lacks identity. However, with exceptional determination and conviction, he has an ample opportunity to mold the future.²⁶

Wong was skeptical of Western art vogues and wondered if modern art

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Wucius Wong, »Reconstruction of the East«, newspaper article, publication information unknown, Hong Kong 1963.

²⁶ Wucius Wong, »Foreword to the Second Exhibition of the *In Tao* Painters«, catalogue of the 2nd exhibition of the *In Tao* painters, publication information unavailable, Hong Kong 1970.



Fig. 3: Wucius Wong, *Purification #2*, 1979

Wong's experimental painting expresses his sense of the complementarity of the Western and Chinese aesthetic principles. This is an example of his painting of a Chinese landscape in the form and texture of Western painting.

movements like Pop art had anything to relate or contribute to the living reality of Hong Kong artists.

In the 1960s and the 1970s, when Hong Kong artists' identity was being constructed in part by modernization and economic growth, the New Ink movement called for a return to the past. Distinction between Chinese and Western paintings produced by local painters was unnecessary, according to Wong, because in his view *all* artistic expressions produced by Chinese painters – no matter what their form – were still Chinese paintings. However, he admitted that it was difficult to identify »Hong Kong painting« because it was ambiguous, contradictory, and contained split elements. The most important thing, he said, was to return to tradition for spiritual identification, which, according to Wong, should be the harmonious relation of man and Nature.

For various reasons, beginning in the 1980s, the »Chinese complex« of the younger Hong Kong artists had lost its vigor. As the colony progressed to become a thriving international and commercial center, these artists preferred to follow artistic developments in the international community rather than remain within the Chinese tradition. The younger artists had more freedom to create, ironically, in a state of »rootlessness« than the generation of artists before them. Chinese tradition was one of the young generation's options, yet they preferred the artistic vision in the West.²⁷ This movement can be viewed as a phenomenon of late capitalism which happened to parallel the early stages of colonial independence. The mass culture and entertainment industries had distracted people's reflections on problems of cultural identity, power structure in colonial rule, race, and social class. Furthermore, the planned return of Hong Kong to China in 1997 did not create a real sense of colonial independence, especially in terms of cultural influences. As a result of commercialization, art education curriculum in Hong Kong came to focus on Western techniques and concepts during the 1980s, and the trend continues today.

Post-Colonial Discourse and Painting Theories

It is said that pre-colonial cultural purity can never be fully recovered, because colonial cultures are inevitably hybridized. Colonial cultures have developed a dialectical relationship between the world view and epistemol-

²⁷ David Clarke, »Hong Kongness: Chineseness and Modernity: Issues of Identity in Hong Kong Art«, *Hong Kong Cultural Studies Bulletin*, CUHK, Hong Kong, Winter (4/1995), pp. 82-84.

ogy of the colonizers and have developed an impulse to reconstruct an independent local identity. As pointed out by Helen Tiffin, the so called »decolonisation« process invokes a continuous dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and a peripheral subversion of these systems.²⁸ The painters discussed in this essay, along with their painting theories regarding the problems of cultural identity, correspond to some of the main issues in contemporary post-colonial discourse in the West.

The aesthetics of painting in Hong Kong, reflected by groups such as *Yen Kan* and individuals such as Chan, Lu, Wong, and the younger artists of the 1980s, reflect quite different values and perspectives. This is due to differences in personal background, education, class, political consciousness, and ideologies – especially regarding their views of the Chinese tradition. Each manifested their views in their art and unique styles. One common view expressed in post-colonial discourse is that hegemonic systems exert forms of control on colonized culture. This was not the case in Hong Kong. After political upheaval in the 1960s, the localization policy promoted by the government aimed to avoid further rebellions against the colonial rule. This policy greatly encouraged freedom of expression within the Hong Kong artistic community and thus a sense of belonging. The new aesthetics and artistic movements that grew as a result can be interpreted as a search for an artistic identity, instead of as merely resistance to cultural suppression. However, these views and activities can also be perceived as a particular manifestation of the process of decolonisation. This process is dynamic: it does not seek to subvert the dominant colonial ideology, but to promote textual strategies as they substitute the dominant discourse.²⁹

It cannot be denied, however, that a power structure still existed, even within the localization policy. In the absence of a critical awareness of colonialism's ideological effects on the culture of Hong Kong, power and control were in the hands of local Chinese art authorities. All too easily, these authorities could have served the institutional function of ensuring that the dominant force's preferences in art were maintained. However, hegemonic projects were not undertaken by the colonialists themselves. The instance in which Luis Chan's work was rejected by curators of the »Exhibition of Hong Kong Art Today« in 1962 is one example.

²⁸ Helen Tiffin, »Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse«, in Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin (Eds.), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, Routledge, London 1993, p. 95.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Conclusion: »Chineseness« and the »Third Space«

It is apparent that some painters had fewer problems with the colonial culture than others. Luis Chan, discussed earlier, is one example. He was buoyed by his fluency in English and his relationship with colonial celebrities who helped to build his reputation and sphere of influence in the local art field. He promoted basically Western academic paintings in his earlier years and introduced traditional Chinese painting under the interpretation of Western aesthetics. Chan was free of the psychological complex of »Chineseness« that plagued other painters. That is, he was not critical of Western aesthetics, nor did he have a prescription for Hong Kong art, instead, he embodied the spirit of Hong Kong itself – a truly multicultural society – by expressing and experimenting in great enthusiasm and freedom.

In contrast Lu Shoukun, a native of Mainland China, called for a return to the traditional and promoted the notions of »root« and »adaptation.« Hong Kong painters, according to Lu, are rooted in traditional Chinese aesthetics which serves as a foundation for both content and technique. He claimed that knowledge of one's history and tradition are the keys to self-realization, and he called for expansion and development of local art. Lu's aesthetics thus was founded on traditionalism.

Wucius Wong's vision, as analyzed here, resembled Lu's, but offered a more elaborate notion of tradition. He discussed the conflicts between the aesthetics and traditions of the East and the West from his own experience of living and studying in the West. He also encouraged young artists to embrace Eastern traditions as a means to discover their true artistic ability or identity.

While Hong Kong painters' artistic identity was based on traditionalism and nationalism, these emerging young artists were also pushing forward and making important artistic innovations. Daring experiments like the New Ink and other modern movements – what one post-colonial discourse described as the liberation processes in colonial territories – emerged during a time of uncertainty and of signficatory or representational undecidability.³⁰ These changes arose out of a context in which most Hong Kong painters were busy producing works intended to meet Westerners' expectations of »Chinese art.« However, while a grand tradition which many regarded as the primary source of creativity, Chinese traditional art had come to be seen as a limited source of inspiration years later. This was because its »root« had been seriously damaged during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in Communist China. Thus its influence in the colony had slowly diminished. In addition, Hong Kong's

³⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, »Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences« in *ibid.*, p. 206.

intense modernization process was a constant reminder to young artists that they were not living in old China, which made the work of what seemed a distant homeland seem less than relevant to their present context.

As Homi Bhabha has pointed out, the sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by an originary past and kept alive in traditions of a culture, was greatly challenged in the so-called »third space« in which the colonized group is caught between the traditional culture to which it had once belonged and the new colonial culture. Looking at it in the most positive light, this means that the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew.³¹ This happened in Hong Kong because of converging social, economic, and cultural forces. Again, as described by Homi Bhabha:

assimilation of contraries, the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an inter-national culture, based on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity.³²

And in fact, emerging from the reflections on cultural identity by local painters is the search for an artistic identity for Hong Kong itself that is different from that of either East or West. Hong Kong identity has become, instead, an integration of concepts, styles, and visual symbols of both parts of the globe.

The colonial government's localization policy after the leftist political riots against British rule in 1967 was originally tied in with promotion, even propaganda, for a growing and modernized Hong Kong, yet it laid the groundwork for the search for Hong Kong identity through art. It should be noted that, generally speaking, people in Hong Kong find it more difficult to identify themselves with Communist China (this was especially true immediately following the Cultural Revolution) than with China in a national sense. On the other hand, they do not regard themselves as British people. The situation again reminds us of the so-called »third space« in post-colonial discourse. The notion of »third space« has been described as

the 'inter', the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between, the space of what Derrida has opened up in writing itself that carries the burden of the meaning of culture.³³

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 209.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

In essence, those living under colonial power have taken on a hybrid identity. Under this new identity, they must ensure that traditional signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew. The return to the traditional may be a strategy to establish a cultural identity that does not advocate an irreversible or essential history of culture.³⁴ With this understanding, assimilation of Chinese and Western traditions into a new modern tradition becomes a useful strategy and is a natural outcome of the hybrid identity of Hong Kong artists. Luis Chan, for example, whose life and work represented the spirit of Hong Kong, served to help define the colony's artistic identity. Lu believed that Hong Kong's artistic style would depend on the freedom of the individual artist to develop whatever they wished, unrestricted, as long as they had good a traditional foundation. To modern artists like Wucius Wong, there is a strong historical dynamic in the art of Hong Kong. As Wong once said, its past is in China, its present is in Hong Kong, and its future lies in the whole world.³⁵

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 208-209.

³⁵ Wucius Wong, »Hong Kong Art Today«, *Nan Bei Gi*, Hong Kong, 58 (3/1975), p. 49.

Jos de Mul
*Disavowal and Representation
in Magritte's »La trahison des images«*



*Nothing is true about psycho-analysis
except its exaggeration.*
Theodor Adorno

*Perhaps psycho-analysis itself is the most
suitable case for treatment by psycho-analysis.*
René Magritte

The work of the Belgian Surrealist René Magritte takes us to the boundaries of the aesthetics' domain. It forces the observer to abandon his attitude of passive viewing and invites him to reflect upon those questions which, precisely because of their everyday-ness and banality, generally escape our observation. Among such questions is that of visual representation and the relationship between the visual signifier (*signifiant*) and the signified (*signifié*). This epistemological connotation of Magritte's work has not escaped philosophical interest. Most especially, the painting *La trahison des images* from 1929 has elicited a large number of commentaries, of which Foucault's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (Foucault, 1973) is perhaps the most well known.

That which strikes the reader in the various interpretations is that the title of *La trahison des images* rarely enters into the discussion. This is remarkable because the titles of Magritte's works deliver a valuable contribution to the question at issue and for precisely this reason they demand their share in the interpretation. However, because of their puzzling character the titles conjure up considerable resistance against their inclusion in the philosophical discussion. Magritte, commenting about this, said: »The titles of the paintings are not explanations and the paintings themselves are not mere illustrations of the titles. The relationship is poetic, that is, it merely illuminates a number of the characteristics of the objects involved, characteristics which are generally ignored by consciousness« (Magritte, 1979, 259). For an analysis which is directed at the reception accorded to Magritte's work, the titles offer a tempting starting-point precisely because they reveal something about that which remains unconscious in perception. This is especially relevant for

La trahison des images because the title points to a problem which appears to be closely connected to that of representation. The title of the painting of a pipe which appears not to be a pipe brings us onto the terrain of disavowal: a disavowal of the images is pointed at.¹

The close connection between representation and disavowal, and the fact that these activities extend themselves to the boundaries of our thinking, makes them exceptionally difficult to 'master'. We exist in the fortunate circumstances, however, of being able to make an appeal to psychoanalytic theory, in which the entanglement of disavowal and representation have a privileged position, for our studies of the relationship. The texts in which Freud, and in his footsteps the French psychoanalyst Mannoni, dealt with disavowal (*Verleugnung*) in the context of fetishism especially deserve our attention.² These texts will function as a guiding thread in the following study of the expressive commentary which *La trahison des images* provides of the relationship between disavowal and representation in the experience of mimetic fine arts.³ Further, an inverse movement will be initiated from the beginning of my argument by my use of Magritte's commentary to interrogate the psychoanalytic conception of this relationship from within. My interpretation of *La trahison des images* also bears traces of texts by Derrida, Barthes, and Irigaray concerning the question of representation. And, just as *La trahison des images* has unavoidably inserted itself into the ordering of language, these spores have carved themselves into the effective history of the painting, the never drying veneer of the aesthetic image which the painting embodies.⁴

¹ *La trahison des images*, sometimes referred to by Magritte as *L'usage de la parole*, is usually translated as *The treachery of images*. In the original, however, the French verb *trahir* also has the meaning of *disavowal*. Given that, in my subsequent argument, Freud's theory of disavowal is central, I have chosen to use the second translation.

² Those texts of Freud to which I refer here are *Fetishism* (SE XXI, 147-57), *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis* (SE XXIII, 139-207), and *Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence* (SE XXIII, 271-8). Those works of Mannoni which are especially important are *Je sais bien, mais quand même ...* and *L'illusion comique ou le théâtre du point de vue de l'imaginaire*, both published in Mannoni, 1969.

³ Used here the word 'mimetic' is taken in its broadest meaning as the representation of material and immaterial objects. In this sense, a part of abstract art (Mondriaan and Kandinsky, for example) also exhibits a mimetic character to the extent that it points to some kind of reality outside the painted surface.

⁴ The interpretation nonetheless remains incomplete and imperfect. Imperfect because the context from within which the interpretation occurs constantly remains in movement; incomplete because aesthetic ideas which are representations of the power of imagination give much food for thought without being able to be fully expressed and capable of providing insights by our concepts (Kant, 1968, 193).

1. *Magritte's pipe: Yes, I know, but still ...*

In their texts both Freud and Mannoni stand still for a moment when considering the remarkable feelings they experienced when, for the first time, they were confronted in their psychoanalytic practice with the phenomenon of disavowal. Freud begins one of the articles he wrote about this phenomenon with the words: »I find myself for a moment in the interesting position of not knowing whether what I have to say should be regarded as something long familiar and obvious or as something entirely new and puzzling« (SE XXIII, 275). Mannoni expresses the same mood when, in *Je sais bien, mais quand même ...*, he maintains that, confronted with the phenomenon of disavowal, one »feels oneself catapulted between a feeling of banality and a feeling of extreme surprise« (Mannoni, 1969, 11). It is precisely this feeling we experience when we are confronted with *La trahison des images* for the first time. The naive style shows us an unmistakable representation of a pipe, with a text underneath it reading »This is not a pipe«. The shock occasioned when we perceive this similarity carries us into the remarkable borders of extreme banality and alienation.⁵ The shock, namely, resides not only in the first banal amazement concerning the apparent contradiction (that is, that a painted pipe is actually not a pipe), but it also concerns the fact that we were amazed, that, despite our knowledge of the fact that a painted pipe is not actually a pipe, we were nonetheless shocked at the moment that the painting made us aware of this knowledge.⁶ Without the annotation, we realize in surprise, we would believe that what we observe really is a pipe.

The experience of *La trahison des images* makes us conscious of a characteristic which we must assume is inherent to every aesthetic observation of a mimetic work of art, namely, the simultaneous existence of two mutually exclusive mental attitudes. In the aesthetic observation of these objects we

⁵ The term 'shocking' might appear too emotionally laden in relation to the observation of a painting. However, I use it with the special meaning with which Kaulingfreks accredited it in his book about Magritte: »That which is unexpected about the shock is its quality as a Trojan Horse within the fortress of intellect. The intellect becomes unsettled but recovers and adjusts itself to the disturbance. Thereby, it forgets that the violence of the shift and the events, from their existing character, are gradually and repeatedly set into an hierarchy ... However, the shock as a means of consciousness requires the intellect in order that it remains both unknown and new. It is only shocking in relation to a situation wherein it does not fit, and can only be shocking if there is a rational hierarchy« (Kaulingfreks, 1984, 133-4).

⁶ Cf. the following comment from Magritte: »It isn't about amazing someone, but, rather, about the fact, for example, that one is amazed by one's amazement« (Magritte, 1979, 435).

know that what we are seeing is unreal, that it is a fiction: simultaneously, we deny this knowledge and abandon ourselves to the reality of that which we are observing. This disavowal of the images (in favour of the real object they signify) brings us to the *sine qua non* of the mimetic experience. Without the mechanism of the simultaneous existence of a quantum of knowledge and a belief which is irreconcilable with that knowledge (that is: a particular form of not-knowing), the mimetic experience appears to be impossible. If the knowledge component is lacking, then we find ourselves in the legendary situation of the observers of the first film performance in Paris' *Grand Café* who ran in panic from the approaching train which they saw on the screen. The knowledge component appears in this instance to have been completely absorbed in the affective component. If the affective component is lacking, then we can equally not speak of an aesthetic experience. In Mannoni's words: »Anyone who, unprepared, attends a Chinese performance runs the risk of seeing the play as it is and the actors as they are. Viewed objectively, it is certainly theatre, but it is without the theatrical effect« (Mannoni, 1969, 161).

An important part of 20th Century fine arts, especially that part such as abstract non-figurative art which reject the mimetic, appears to unconsciously remove itself from the boundaries of the hybrid relationship of believing and knowing. The strength of *La trahison des images* resides in the fact that it makes us conscious of this simultaneous existence of the knowledge and faith components, and, what is perhaps an even more important effect, it saturates us with the complete not-self-evidentness of this relationship. After all, we are confronted with the question as to how it is possible that two mutually exclusive attitudes can be simultaneously present in our minds.

La trahison des images does not provide an answer to this question. The pleasure which the painting affords us cannot really be described as anything other than an especially perverse and subversive pleasure. It is a shocking pleasure which does not intend to please and to explain, but, rather, to disturb (a pleasure that may be called characteristic for the entire tradition of the no-longer-fine-arts). Magritte's painting is directed at a *Verwindung* of the mimetic tradition. It is a deconstructivist practice which, in a shocking manner, makes us conscious of that which must remain partially unconscious in the mimetic experience: the very process of representation. The unreflected continuity of presenting the presence of an absent object by means of a sign forms the condition of the possibility for every mimetic experience. The subversive character of Magritte's deconstructivist labour lies in becoming conscious of this disavowal of representation which is so necessary for the mimetic experience. In this becoming conscious, wherein the two mutually exclusive attitudes are brought together in one movement of thought, the repre-

sentative appearance of the mimetic experience is withdrawn.⁷ The mimetic experience becomes – and this differentiates Magritte's work from non-figurative art wherein the mimesis were 'simply' abandoned – enervated from within.⁸

The fact that *La trahison des images* provides the observer with a certain desire, despite this *Verwindung* of mimetic experience, constitutes its perverse character. This pleasure forms an indication of the existence of another aesthetic 'space' on both sides of traditional representation. It is this space, revealed by desire, which intrigues me.

2. *Sexual and aesthetic disavowal*

Is it pure coincidence that Freud, when speaking about perversion, also bumps up against the entanglement of disavowal and representation? He worked out several aspects of this relationship more closely in his analysis of fetishism. Fetishism, in Freud's view, is based upon the fact that the analysand, almost always male, »does not acknowledge that a woman does not have a penis, something which, as proof of the possibility of being himself castrated, is most unwelcome« (SE XXIII, 203). The analysand, for this reason, denies his sensory perception that the female does not possess a phallus and maintains a firm grip on the contrary conviction. According to Freud, however, the denied perception continues to be influential and, for this reason, the fetishist attributes the role of the phallus to something else, another bodily part or an article of clothing. We could express it as follows: the fetish presents the phallus as being present. In this connection, Freud speaks about the formation of a compromise between two contradictory attitudes which is related to dream labour. The fetish forms a compromise between the sensory

⁷ Here, the word 'representative' is conceived in a double meaning: not only is the mechanism of visual representation enervated from within, but, in addition, it thereby simultaneously loses its exemplary character within the aesthetic domain. Concerning the relationship of these different connotations of the term 'representation', see Derrida, 1982.

⁸ The subversive character of this assault on representation is even more shocking because in *La trahison des images* »commonsense is raped in broad daylight« (Thrall-Soby, 1965, 15). Magritte's preference carrying out his subversive activities in »broad daylight« distinguishes him from the French Surrealists who demonstrated a preference for the night and the occult. In this connection it speaks volumes that Magritte gave the title *Le surréalisme en plein soleil* to the manifestos he published in 1946. Cf. how this imagery of light and darkness also appears in Mannoni when he speaks of denial.

perception which establishes the female's absence of a phallus and the wish to preserve this phallus for perception. The fetish makes it possible that the belief in the presence of a female phallus is »maintained, but also given up« (SE XXI, 154).

Octave Mannoni offered the assumption that this fetishization of the absent female (mother) phallus stands »for all forms of belief which, despite falsification by reality, remain intact« (Mannoni, 1969, 12). The structural agreement between sexual and aesthetic disavowal is indeed remarkable. After all, in aesthetic perception, one of the forms of belief to which Mannoni refers, an object is by a sign equally posited as present on the grounds of its absence. A painted object (for example the pipe in *La trahison des images*) forms an aesthetic 'fetish', a compromise form between knowledge of an object's absence and the disavowal of this knowledge, and thereby makes it possible to preserve the absent object for perception. In the case of both sexual and aesthetic disavowal we travel – the term 'fetish' does not appear to have been arbitrarily chosen – in the terrain of the magical (or, more rigorously: that of the 'magic of belief' which precedes the 'belief in magic' – Mannoni, 1969, 29). What is remarkable is that in both instances disavowal, despite its irrational character, plays itself out »in full daylight« (Mannoni, 1969, 30). Neither the sexual fetish nor the painted object possess anything mysterious; at the same time, they are able to carry us into a magical experience.

In the foregoing comments I remarked, and this appears to call a halt to the specified analogy between sexual and aesthetic disavowal, that, in aesthetic perception and simultaneously with the experience of disavowal (the magical compromise between knowing and wishing), we have access to knowledge of the object's absence. In the case of *La trahison des images* this is the absence of the real pipe. This knowledge, as I also remarked, does not in any way effect aesthetic disavowal. This appears to distinguish aesthetic disavowal from sexual disavowal wherein this knowledge-component is absent. In *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, however, Freud points to a simultaneous existence of disavowal and knowledge in sexual fetishism: »The creation of the fetish emerged from the intention to destroy the evidence of possible castration so that one could avoid the fear of castration. When the woman, just as other living beings, possesses a penis, then one does not have to fear the further possession of one's own penis. Now, we encounter fetishists who have developed the same fear of castration as non-fetishists and who thus react in the same manner. In their behaviour they thus express two mutually exclusive attitudes: on the one hand they deny the reality of their perception of no penis being present with female genitals, and, on the other hand, they ac-

knowledge a woman's lack of a penis and draw the correct conclusion from this acknowledgement. Both attitudes exist side-by-side for an entire life without their influencing each other« (SE XXIII, 203).

The phenomenon of the mutual existence of two mutually exclusive attitudes is presented by Freud with the term 'Ego-splitting' (*Ich-spaltung*). The emergence of Ego-splitting shows that the disavowal of perception by the fetishist is not complete; the acknowledgement is, after all, present in consciousness. In this case, the fetish(ism) is only partially developed: »It does not control the object-choice with exclusion of everything else, but, rather, leaves room for a more or less normal behaviour and sometimes even reduces itself to a modest role or a simple announcement of its presence. The distinction between the Ego and reality is, accordingly, never completely successful for the fetishist« (SE XXIII, 203). Aesthetic perception is capable of a similar description. The observer of *La trahison des images* surrenders to the imaginary presence of the object but, simultaneously, he realizes this surrender and precisely thereby elevates the experience to an aesthetic one. Just as, according to Freud, sexual fetishism mostly reduces itself to a modest role or simple announcement of itself (and the sexual goal of genital reproduction is preserved), so does the observer who is captured by the aesthetic experience leave open a path for a complete reproduction of knowledge. In this manner, both forms of fetishism remain under the domination of instrumental representation which is in the service of the reality-principle (see SE XII, 213-226). The shock which *La trahison des images* engenders is only abrupt: the trusted frameworks of perception quickly recover. Awakened from his aesthetic 'dream' the hand faultlessly goes to the ash-tray and the observer smokes his pipe with satisfaction.

When fetishism becomes acute, sexual activity removes itself from reproduction. The fetishist pulls himself free from the dominance of the sexual goal. In analogous fashion, the aesthetic observer, when he finds himself in the same situation of acute fetishism, retreats into his 'unselfish pleasure' and thereby escapes from the domination of instrumental representation. In both cases, *fore-play* overmasters *after-play* and the perception becomes *perverse* (for the italicized terms, see Freud, SE VII, 209 ff; in relation to the aesthetic *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, SE VIII). In both cases we can therefore speak of an acute *aestheticism*. That is: that the pleasure of looking becomes a goal in itself, cut off from the everyday practice of looking which is guided by the demands of sexual reproduction and utilitarian representation.

A description of these forms of fetishism which, as in the case of Freud, finds its ultimate criterion in the demands of the reality-principle, cannot veil its pejorative tone. However, the pleasure which the fetishist experiences in

the sexual and aesthetic game can equally not be hidden. But it is a pleasure that cannot be represented in an order wherein sexual reproduction and utilitarian representation are the central terms. It is, in the different meanings of the word, a non-representative pleasure. A theoretical approach – assuming, that is, just as Nietzsche argued, that it always finds its origin in the ‘factories of use’ (KSA 1, 299) – can situate this pleasure at best in an a-topos. The theory is here made into a detour, perverted by its object it can only evoke the pleasure at the moment that it stumbles and sets its understanding teeth into its own tail. Is it only irony that *La trahison des images* hereby indicates its own tail to theory?

3. *The perversion of aestheticism*

The subversive character of *La trahison des images* is formed by the fact that the painting breaks through mimetic pleasure. Starting from the order of the representation, it is shown that that order is empty. By no longer permitting word and image to support each other, the naive-realistic conceptualization of the representation is raped from within and »in broad daylight«. The signifiers (the image of the pipe, the painted text) only point in a negative manner to each other, and, thereby, they become, as it were, meaningless. The painted sentence does not only make us realize that the image of the pipe is not really a pipe, but, at the same time, it makes us realize that the sentence refers to itself: the painted sentence, too, is not a real pipe. The signified (the ‘real’ pipe) disappears completely from the field of view. Foucault, in his essay concerning Magritte, formulates this as follows: »Magritte permits the old space of the exhibition dominate, but only on the surface because it is no more than a flat surface which bears words and images; there is nothing underneath it« (Foucault, 1973, 25).

La trahison des images shows us a remarkable characteristic of the sign, about which in structuralist semiology after Saussure, too, there has been substantial speculation. The language-sign was conceived by Saussure as a relation between sound (the signifier) and concept (the signified): the meaning-content of a sound is determined by the relation which it maintains with the other sounds which belong to the same system. The definition which Saussure gives can be called differential because he conceives of the sign as an internal and external difference: internally, the sign is determined by the difference between the signifier (*signifiant*) and the signified (*signifié*); externally, it is determined by the difference between the signifiers and the signifieds themselves. Radicalizing this differential language-definition from Saussure,

post-structuralists such as Derrida, Lacan, and Barthes postulate that the signifier and the signified do not form a fundamental unity of sign, but, rather, that the signified emerged from the articulation (that is: combination and substitution) of the signifiers. A signified, it is maintained, always points to other elements and thereby also always finds itself in the position of signifier. A consequence of this point is that the signified always postpones itself: every signified is part of a referential game which never comes to rest. In contrast to what the traditional 'metaphysics of the sign' argues, the signifier, according to post-structuralists, does not represent a signified which already contains meaning within itself, but, rather, it is a derived phenomenon, an effect of the systemic play of signifiers.⁹

In *La trahison des images* one could express this by saying that this referential game becomes frantic, as it were. In the negative reference the referential function of the representation, which, following Saussure, is placed in parentheses by the post-structuralists, is completely removed.¹⁰ The referential game becomes an endless repetition without originality, a simulacrum. The observer is involved in a domain from which it is impossible to escape. On a psychic level, this is expressed in the simultaneous experience of the attitudes, necessarily separated for the aesthetic experience, of knowing and believing. The observer becomes conscious of his Ego-splitting. Nonetheless, and this is precisely that which is remarkable about the experience, this becoming conscious is not, as one would expect, combined with pain or fear. The 'threat of castration' which, in this instance, concerns the object of our experience (the 'real' pipe), is, after all, acute in the experience of the short-circuit of the signifiers in *La trahison des images*. In contrast to this, the deconstruction delivers a certain desire, a form of desire with which perhaps only perversion can provide us.

Derrida maintains: »At the moment a signifier stops imitating the danger of perversion is immediately acute« (1968, 291). When the signifiers no longer represent the signified, but, rather, only and purely signify each other (that is, are prisoners in a pure inter-textuality), then they become self-lovers, a fetish. Magritte, in *La trahison des images*, completes the transition from a

⁹ See for a critical evaluation of this poststructuralist credo: J. de Mul, 1997b, chapter 8.

¹⁰ Because structuralist linguistics directs itself at the linguistic system (*langue*) and abstracts from concrete speech (*parole*) Saussure can, on methodological grounds, leave the referential function of language out of consideration. Among the post-structuralists, the referential function of language as such appears sometimes to be called into question. This is combined with the ambiguity of the term *signifié*: on the one hand, this term refers to a (mental) concept; on the other hand, it can also refer to the signified object to which the sign as a totality (sound + concept) refers.

partial fetishism of the aesthetic experience to a total fetishism of aestheticism. The belief-component is eliminated in favour of a special desire for knowledge of »the slippage (glissement) of meaning under the signifier« (Lacan, E 502). The dominance of the signified, which is intrinsic to naive realism, is here forsaken in favour of a desire for the dominance of the signifiers. Speaking in the context of a literary text concerning pleasure (the sexual *jouissance*) of a game wherein the ultimate meaning continuously retreats, Barthes in *De l'œuvre au texte* says: »The Text, on the contrary, practices the infinite deferment of the signified, is delatory; its field is that of the signifier and the signifier must not be conceived of as 'the first stage of meaning', its material vestibule, but, in complete opposition to this, as its *deferred action*. Similarly, the *infinity* of the signifiers refers not to some idea of the ineffable (the unnameable signified) but to that of a *playing*« (Barthes, 1982, 158)

On the terrain of visual signifiers, *La trahison des images* refers to the extreme limits of this game, this *jouissance*: the imaginary turning-point wherein that which is signified (*signifiante*) becomes submerged in showing the senselessness of the representation. The mimetic-aesthetic experience, which necessarily involves a belief-component, is here abandoned in order that the path be made free for the knowledge of an aestheticism which concerns itself with all signifiers. Not only the signifiers which are traditionally presented as imaginary or artistic are dragged into this aestheticism: the pipe in the ash-tray, too, is made into an element of a referential game without any basis.

4. The phallus as transcendental signifier

In the foregoing I have been guided by the analogy Mannoni noted between sexual and aesthetic disavowal. Through this reasoning, I came upon the trail of a mysterious relationship between sexual and epistemological representation. This relationship, which continues to emerge in unexpected places in modern philosophy,¹¹ is also argued by Lacan, with a reference to the

¹¹ In the first place I am thinking here of the in every way bizarre *Geschlecht und Charakter* by Otto Weininger (1980; first published in 1903). But with Nietzsche, too, sexual metaphors play a constant role (cf., for example, KSA 5, 11; cf. the occasionally dizzying commentary which Derrida (1978) makes of this work). Derrida, incidentally, points to the fact that in Heidegger's painstaking interpretation of Nietzsche's *Wie die Wahre Welt endlich zur Fabel wurde* the passages dealing with the feminine character of the Christian metaphysics belong to the few to which he does not address himself. In his Nietzschean-inspired deconstruction of Heidegger's *Verwindung*, Derrida makes this unconsidered metaphor one of his entry-points.

post-structuralist reading of Freud, on more theoretical grounds. We should briefly follow this detour because it makes it possible to approach *La trahison des images* from a rather different perspective, in the hope that a combination of these perspectives will provide more 'depth' to the image with which we are concerned.

Lacan's return to Freud is strongly influenced by Saussure's structuralist linguistics. This led Lacan to interpret the problematics of castration as a complex which marks the entrance of the individual into the symbolic order. In Lacan's view, the individual, who initially exists in an imaginary order of immediate experience, only receives the status of subject when he enters into the symbolic order. In this chain of terms, the individual and the objects of his experience are represented, proposed as present in their absence. The narcissistic identification with the mirror-image (which ensures that in an imaginary manner one continues to coincide with the Other) is thereby relieved by the acknowledgement of the other-ness of the (symbolically articulated) Other. The reality (*réalité*) of the subject is thus already a symbolically marked reality. From this, the post-structuralist character of Lacan's position is apparent: the meaning of an experience is not given in advance, but, rather, it is an effect, a 'precipitation' of the chain of signifiers. The meaning slips, as we have already seen, into the *jeu de signifiants*, the infinite game of the signifiers.

Just like Freud, Lacan, too, puts a strong emphasis on the role which the phallus plays in the transition from the imaginary to the symbolic stage. However, he thereby firmly resists a possibly naturalistic interpretation of the castration complex. For Lacan, the phallus is »not a phantasy ... equally not an object ... and even less the organ which it symbolizes« (Lacan, E 690). For him, the phallus is actually the signifier which pre-eminently marks the transition from the imaginary to the symbolic stage. According to him, this is also the reason that Freud chose a term for this signifier which points to the simulacrum which, in Antiquity, was the phallus: »After all, it is the signifier, to the extent that it constitutes their possibility-conditions, which is destined to indicate the effects of the signified in their totality« (E 690).

The phallus forms the third term which transforms the combatitive relationship of the mirror-stage, which is characteristic of the imaginary order, into the triangular relationship which is characteristic of the symbolic order. It is 'the tiniest difference' which indicates »that which the child is not, what the mother does not have and the father (presumably) does have« (Mooij, 1975, 142). In Mooij's words, a double distancing emerges: »In the first place, there arises a separation from the initial two-in-one whereby a chasm (*une béance*) appears between what are now two relations, two terms, and whereby a void (*un vide*) emerges in the place where originally the two-in-one existed

(*une place vide*). Hereby, the lack (*le manque*) emerges which is introduced by the insatiability of desire. In the second place, a separation emerges between what is now a relationship between two terms and that which names this relationship. The third term therefore creates a double distinction, internally between the two relations, and externally between the relation and its symbolic representation. We can summarize this function as: differentiating representation« (Mooij, 1975, 142).

Thus, with Lacan, the phallus functions as a transcendental signifier, that is, as the necessary possibility-condition for every production of meaning. It is the signifier which unlocks the entrance to the (symbolic) order of representation and thereby introduces a desire which cannot be satisfied. But, simultaneously, for Lacan the phallus also remains the specific symbolic signifier which indicates the penis (cf. Weber, 1978). This explains why Freud – and Lacan with him – gives a privileged role to the castration complex in relation to entering into the symbolic order. Moreover, it explains why, in psychoanalytic theory, the representation of both sexes and the representation of meaning in general cannot be separated from one another.

5. *Postmodern schizizophrenia*

Now we return to the pleasure of fetishizing the signifiers. This has become clear: it is a paradoxical pleasure. The insight that the signifiers only cherish themselves, that every access to the signified is cut off ('castrated'), really makes us suspect the opposite: a cutting pain. To place this pleasure we should first actually – a new detour – more closely delineate the distinction between aesthetic belief and aesthetic knowledge.

Here, too, it is Mannoni who suggests the direction we should take. He maintains, associating himself with Lacanian topology, that belief continuously assumes »the support of the Other« (Mannoni, 1969, 33). In *L'illusion comique ou le théâtre du point de vue de l'imaginaire* he explicates this through an analysis of the 'primitive' belief in masks and theatrical illusion. In the theatre, he argues, everything is done to maintain the theatrical illusion while everyone knows that it is an illusion. Here, the issue is thus one of 'classic' aesthetic disavowal: an 'imaginary credulity' is always present.

Concerning this point, Mannoni remarks: »Even though we are not ourselves the victim of a theatrical illusion or of the illusion of masks, it nonetheless appears that we gladly see someone who believes in such illusion. Everything appears to be done to produce this illusion, but it must be by someone else. As if we should conspire with the actors. Here, we see who the 'you' was

in 'you could say' whereby the playful illusion is expressed. After all: formerly, 'one believed in the masks' ... 'Formerly' means, as we could suspect, 'as a child'. An explanation, perhaps rather simplistic but not therefore completely inaccurate, now imposes itself as it were. Something, something from that child that we once were, still lives on in us, somewhere hidden within the Ego, perhaps in that place which Freud, following Fechner, correctly calls the theatre of the dream (and why precisely this metaphor?). This hidden part of our Self could thus be the place of the illusion, that which we actually do not yet really know what it is« (Mannoni, 1969, 164).

Although Mannoni here explicitly speaks of the theatre, his description can, without too many problems, be applied to the illusion which appears in the perception of mimetic fine arts. Belief in representation, that is, in the possibility to immediately perceive reality itself through the transparent window of the painting, rests equally upon the credulity of an Other. Of course we know that a painting constitutes an imaginary representation of reality, but we conspire with the painter, as it were, to lead this Other up the garden path, or better: to lead him behind the window. Once again, an irrational process which occurs in broad daylight.

If this explanation is correct, then it offers us the opportunity to more closely present the transition from the hybrid coincidence of belief and knowledge in aesthetic perception to the 'absolute' knowledge of aestheticism. This transition would occur at the moment that the observer himself takes the place of the Other. Mannoni describes this transition by reference to a passage from Casanova's biography. It is the story of a person who believes in his own fabrications, someone who no longer possesses the phallus by magic but, rather, by deception. According to Mannoni it is precisely here that the transition to complete fetishism occurs and knowledge is completely abandoned: »We can actually see that the place of the Other is now occupied by the fetish. If this is missing it creates unrest, as occurred with Casanova, when credulity goes by default. But Casanova imagines that he knows who believes and who does not believe. Even if he actually makes a mistake, the problem can still be posed in terms of belief. After the fetish has been established, belief disappears. We then no longer know how the question sounds and we could say that it is precisely the goal of the fetishist to escape from every question. While everyone enters the terrain of belief with the *Verleugnung*, it is precisely this terrain which those who become fetishists, at least insofar as it involves their fetish, leave« (Mannoni, 1969, 32).

We may assume that the perverse power now rests upon the fact that the painting brings the observer into the position wherein he realizes that he is himself credulous. He coincides in an imaginary manner, as it were, with the

Other to whom he originally ascribed belief and thereby causes the implementation of the fetishism of the signifiers. The signifiers cease to mean the Other. If we remain within Freudian terminology then we cannot fail to conclude that psychosis is hereby quite close. We surrender ourselves to an unverifiable and uncontrollable process of meaning which must lack an ultimate signified (*signifié transcendantal*). We are confronted with that which Moyaert presented as a schizophrenic discourse: »The schizophrenic discourse cruelly teaches us that our discourse does not derive its support or its meaning from the presence of a final signified or an ideal semantic form which can unite all discourse. In a confrontation with schizophrenia our discourse, too, is in its turn pulled along with and written into a game of signifiers without any ultimate basis or sense. In this manner, each of his discourses loses every foundation or point of reference. Knowing my discourse collides with a radical not-knowing which ridicules my certainties: the schizophrenic 'futilizes' my knowledge to a game of signifiers« (Moyaert, 1982, 151).

In an analogous manner, Magritte's *La trahison des images* could be called a schizophrenic metaphor. In the circular play of the signifiers (the words and the image), every access to the Other of the signifiers (the signified, the 'real' pipe) is cut off. To use another of Moyaert's terms, a *de-metaphoricization* occurs (Moyaert, 1982, 142). The circular play of the signifiers, the purely negative reference to the words and the image, creates a vacuum where previously belief pointed the Other to 'his' place. Where first a metaphorical leap to the other side of the signifiers stood, there now only exists the endless metonymy of signifiers. In other words, *La trahison des images* surprises us with the realization that the painting (and mimetic art in general) is not a window through which we can gaze at the Other, but, rather, a glass stained by signifiers which betrays nothing except its one-dimensional surface.

With the help of what we have learned so far, let us approach more closely the pleasure of complete fetishism, the aestheticism wherein the observer of *La trahison des images* finds himself. The aestheticism, which permits us once again to coincide with the imaginary Other, removes the fear of castration because thereby the signified disappears completely from view and thereby can no longer be experienced as a loss. In this context, with respect to the analogous position wherein schizophrenia finds itself, Moyaert remarks: »Every possible vulnerability occasioned by the indestructible presence of the Other (or the other) disappears given that his discourse is just as much a code of the message as a message of the code; and this has as consequence the fact that the subject of the psychosis himself takes the place of the Other and thus himself becomes the Other. The schizophrenic can peacefully maintain himself in a world of signifiers which, in his narcissistically inflated om-

nipotence, he can manipulate freely and without any risk (Moyaert, 1982, 151).¹²

Complete fetishism appears in this manner to be characterized by a double pleasure. In the first place, fetishism has the freedom of the metaphorical leap in the dark: it remains on the surface, escaping from the fear of the loss, the defect (*le manque*). Here, pleasure is essentially negative, based upon the absence of fear. But, at the same time, there is the other pleasure of manipulation. It coincides with the Other, dominates the game from within because the fetishist has himself become part of it. Expressed in a classic Freudian image: he experiences an oceanic relation with the Other. A return to 'the paradise of pure immediacy' takes place.

The observer of *La trahison des images* finds himself equally, even if only temporarily, in this circular play of the signifiers. He becomes, as it were, absorbed into the surface of the canvass. His belief in the signified makes way for an absorption in the process of meaning (*signifiante*). The knowledge-component takes the place of believing, but it is a knowledge of a special sort wherein the negation (the not-knowing of belief) is eliminated. This lack of the negation constitutes the radical being-Other of pleasure which reveals *La trahison des images*. In Barthes' words, it is »a pleasure without separation« (Barthes, 1982, 164). However, in terms of psychoanalysis, it is also therefore continuously an imaginary pleasure. For the same reason, it is a pleasure that can never be adequately contained within the schemas of representation, just as ultimately the pleasure of sexual fetishism can never be adequately understood from within the schemata of sexual reproduction. Although postmodern experience is a parasite upon modern experience, it reveals a pleasure which is never completely understandable from within the perspective of the reality-principle.

¹² One could refer to this schizophrenic discourse as the post-modern variant of passive nihilism. In my opinion, it is pre-eminently expressed in the writings of Baudrillard. At a theoretical level irony receives here the complete dominance over what, in this context, I would like to call 'the enthusiasm of the signified'. In a recent reading, the American psychiatrist-philosopher Sass has made an interesting attempt to show schizophrenia, from within Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, as a radicalized 'theoretical' assessment of Being whereby everything (including persons) can be conceived as merely manipulable, immediately available objects. One way of summarizing Sass's argument is to say that the schizophrenic suffers from an extremely deficient mode of understanding Being. Baudrillard's thesis of the obscene transparency of objects appears to me to be an affirmation of that which is criticized with regard to Heidegger: the technical articulation of Being (Heidegger, 1962, 14).

6. *Superficiality from depth*

With this last remark we have returned to a place where the detours had already brought me, something which makes clear the circular character of these paths. We have to confirm that, in our attempts to bring it under the dominance of our theoretical *Bemächtigungstrieb*, we have constantly and repetitively pushed the pleasure from the other – postulated – aesthetic order out in front of us. Examining it from the order of the representation, that which falls outside is literally non-representative.¹³ The image which *La trahison des images* presents to us appears at this point to converge with the imaginary constructs of the post-structuralists who have crossed our paths. After all, the post-structuralists postulate that an immediate experience – and must it not be admitted that this experience is the imaginary travel-goal of my wanderings? – is impossible within the symbolic order. Hereby, in the last analysis, the fetishistic pleasure is only comprehensible as a regression to an imaginary past. Lacan does speak, perhaps, about a third order, that of the real (*le réel*), but it is conceived by him as the impossible: it is impossible to reach or take on and is ultimately inaccessible. Does not Magritte appear to say the same when he magically removes the ‘real pipe’ right in front of our eyes?

Nonetheless, this ‘psychoanalytic’ interpretation does not appear to agree with the light-footed pleasure which *La trahison des images* awakens in me. Does not the pipe appear predominantly to succumb under the weight of these sombre theories concerning the Defect? It is a charged interpretation. For this reason it is tempting, having arrived at this point, to continue the reverse movement – with Magritte towards psychoanalysis –, to ensconce ourselves in the experience which *La trahison des images* offers us, and from this position to question theory. In the foregoing I called *La trahison des images* the embodiment of the limit of the game of signifiers. This limit forms the boundary between the three-dimensional space of the *signifiance* (which is constantly characterized by the metaphorical leap towards the other of the signifiers) and the flat surface of the circular (metonymical) dominance of the signifiers. Magritte shows us, where post-structuralism criticizes the dominance of the transcendental signified, that the ‘chain of signifiers’ is the rattling herald of a new dominance: that of the transcendental signifier and the Eternal Defect. The legitimate question which *La trahison des images* presents

¹³ This is what Friedrich Schlegel presents as a ‘cyclical progression’. We return to the place from whence we came, but we now see this place from an ironic distance (see De Mul, 1997a).

to us is whether making the signifier absolute is not a new prison, a new columbarium built with the rubble of the old dungeon?¹⁴

The paths of the different post-structuralists (whom I have previously too simplistically summarized under one heading) appear here to separate. If Magritte here stands opposite Lacan, then Derrida and Barthes find themselves on his side. Samuel Weber, in his commentary concerning the meaning of the phallus in Lacan's work, points, following Derrida, to the danger of making the signifier absolute: »Making the signifier absolute ... removes at the same time, however, its specific and determining difference, and thereby makes it a signified« (Weber, 1978, 124). The phallus, the Eternal Defect, moreover emerges as a signified to which every signifier ultimately refers. One way of putting this is to say that at this point Lacan's sexual metaphor fossilizes and access to every space outside the phallic representation is made theoretically impossible. Put another way: when the phallus disappears as a specific signifier because it is made absolute, then the other of the phallus also disappears: desire. And it is precisely this desire around which the circular movement of Magritte's *La trahison des images* 'revolves'.

But how should this desire be evoked? In any case, Magritte does not have the destruction of representation as his goal. In *La trahison des images* it remains demonstratively present – after all, does the naive-realistically presented pipe not always remain a pipe? It appears that Magritte here tries to support Derrida's comment that it is not possible »to articulate a deconstructivist proposition which has not already secretly taken over the form, the logic, and the implicit postulates of precisely that which is being attacked« (Derrida, 1981, 280-1). Magritte's strategy is different: he permits the instrumentalist representation to stumble in favour of the acute shock which momentarily isolates the image from the differentiating chain of signifiers.¹⁵ At those moments the thing, as Kaulingfreks expresses it in his

¹⁴ Owens, in an article concerning the relation between feminism and post-modernism, comes to the same conclusion when he maintains that: »post-modernism unveils the tyranny of the signifier and the violent character of its law« (1983, 59). Given the phallogocentric character of Lacan's theory, it is not surprising that this critique is primarily expressed by feminist theorists.

¹⁵ There is a remarkable parallel here with the tactics which a feminist such as Irigaray uses against Lacan phallogocentrism. She, too, in Derrida's line, maintains that every critique absorbs the postulates of that which is criticized: »If it was only her intention to inverse the order of things – if, indeed, that were possible – then ultimately history would arrive at the same point: phallogocentrism. Neither her gender, nor her imaginary desires, nor her language would therein (re-)find there place« (Irigaray, 1977, 32). A similar tactic would result in »a new dungeon, a new monastery which she would build for herself« (32). The alternative is to sabotage the phallic order from

study of Magritte, is »undifferentiatedly present, without determination. It just is there, and hereby, as it were, it is no longer a thing. In its conveyed isolation, in the presence, it emerges as a mystery« (Kaulingfreks, 1984, 111). Shocked by the negative references of image and caption in *La trahison des images* (cf. note 5, above), we learn during a moment the mystery of »the experiential grounds of pure presence« of the pipe (Kaulingfreks, 1984, 45). This mystery forms, to use Heidegger's notions, the »miracle of miracles: that Being exists« (Heidegger, 1955, 47).¹⁶ Magritte himself commented about this mystery: »The mystery is not *one* of the possibilities of reality. The mystery is that which is absolutely necessary if reality is to exist« (quoted by Kaulingfreks, 1984, 46).

Hereby, if I may permit myself such an expression, representation momentarily 'gets wasted'. Or, as one can express it in French, »*la représentation casse sa pipe*«. Although it is pre-eminently art which provides us with this mysterious experience, it is not restricted to art: »... the thought whereof a pipe and the caption 'this is not a pipe' are the terms ... Such thoughts evoke 'de iure' the mystery, while 'de facto' the mystery is evoked by a pipe in an ash-tray« (Magritte, 1979, 530). The pipe is at that moment Lacan's *objet petit a*, the first lost partial-object, the – according to Lacan – 'forbidden' last link in the chain of desire. Against this, in the experience of the mystery there is no question of a Lack, but, rather, of an abundance (*a plus-de-jour*). The desire is not primarily the result of an unremovable Lack, but, rather, the transcendent openness or quality of being resolved (*Entschlossenheit*) wherein the world, the Being of being, appears to us. This desire constitutes the possibility-conditions of the neighbourliness of things wherever Nietzsche speaks (KSA 8, 588). Breton, at least with respect to this point, was correct: Magritte gives *lessons in things*.

All of this appears remarkably superficial and banal. But it is perhaps for precisely this reason that it escapes from 'depth-psychology'. The remarks concerning banality and alienation by Freud and Mannoni are an indication of this point. Magritte explicates far more explicitly his view that psychoanalysis is not able to explain the mystery: »Art, to the extent that I understand it, removes itself from psychoanalysis: it evokes that mystery without which the world would not be able to exist, that is, the mystery which one

within, comparable with the manner whereby Magritte permits the order of representation to stumble.

¹⁶ The connection which, following Kaulingfreks, I make here between Magritte's view of the mystery and Heidegger's hermeneutic is also discernible in Magritte's texts. Kaulingfreks points to the fact that Magritte knew Heidegger's work and corresponded with Heidegger-experts such as De Waelhens (Kaulingfreks, 1984, 47, note 26).

must not confuse with any problem, no matter how difficult. No sane person believes that psychoanalysis can explain the mystery of the world. The nature of the mystery destroys curiosity. Psychoanalysis has just as little to say about works of art which evoke the mystery of the world« (Magritte, 1979, 558).

If this analysis remains on the surface then this is because things show themselves precisely at this point. Perhaps we should also interpret the title of the painting from this thought. That which Magritte makes an issue of in *La trahison des image* is the disavowal of immediate experience, the disavowal of appearance as lustre, as the tempting appearance of being. But, and this too makes the painting clear: afterwards, when theory dominates this experience, the experience is denied and understood as a regression, as a return to an imaginary past. A similar wilful 'superficial' reading of *La trahison des images* reminds us of Nietzsche's hymn to the Greeks: »O, the Greeks! They knew how to live: therefore the issue is to remain by the superficial, to worship the appearance, to belief in the forms, the sounds, the words, the entire Olympus of appearance! The Greeks were superficial – from depth! And don't we come, daredevils of the spirit who have climbed the highest and most dangerous top of current thinking and, looking around from that height, have looked down, there from anything new? In this respect, are we not simply – Greeks? Worshippers of forms, of sounds, of words? Not just for this reason – artists?« (KSA 3, 352). Perhaps the greatest achievement of *La trahison des images* resides in its boundless superficiality – in depth.

Translation from Dutch by Allen Reeve and Jos de Mul

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Mikhail Ryklin
The Collapse of the Statues
or What Can & What Cannot Be Buried?

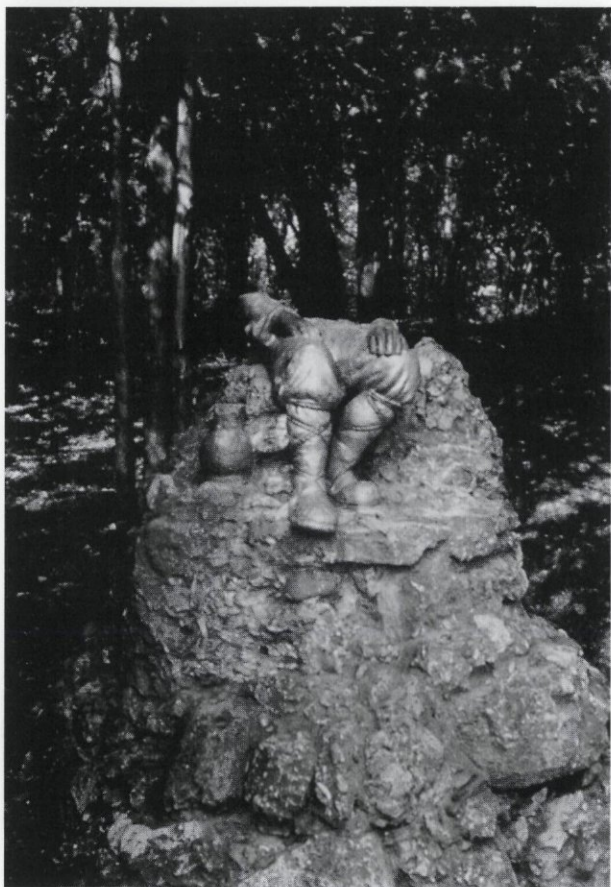
The Soviet Union provides an example of a state that, for more than seventy years, carried out a distinct policy of representation, i.e. it controlled and decorated public spaces according to a plan. Initially, Lenin signed the decree »On the Monuments of the Republic« on April 12, 1918. It is not accidental that the founder of the first socialist state valued monumental propaganda so much – more than 80% of the population was at the time illiterate, so that, along with cinema, monuments seemed crucial for the reeducation of the masses in a new socialist spirit.

In the thirties, under Stalin, monumental propaganda acquired a more illusionary dimension, especially with the Palace of the Soviets, which was supposed to have been built near the Kremlin and to surpass it in its size and decor. It was so huge that the architects failed to build it. Instead, seven skyscrapers were erected in Moscow after the war which still dominate the city and remind us of the unfulfilled dream of communism.



Throughout Soviet rule, there existed a list of leaders whose images were first to be immortalized by well-known sculptors and then copied and dispersed (in *replicas*) all over the country. Lenin invariably remained at the top of the list. Stalin also remained number one for about thirty years followed by Sverdlov, Dzerzhinsky, Kalinin, Voroshilov, Frunze and other other, less distinguished personalities. Each new reign, up to Gorbachev's, was, as a rule, accompanied by the destruction of monuments honouring the immediate predecessor as well as the whole visual and literary archive, including books, albums, etc. It happened to Stalin and his condemned comrades under Khrushchev. At the beginning of the Brezhnev era Khrushchev shared the same fate.

It seems that Soviet society aspired more to oblivion than to memory, scrapping most of its monuments instead of storing them, like many other societies do. I vividly remember how, in the early sixties, in the Crimea, I



witnessed as a child the »execution« of a Stalin statue: a bulldozer pulled up and instantly it dragged the former god away, a hoop over its neck.

So, there was a kind of continuity in what took place in Moscow in August 1991, after the *coup d'état* had failed, that is in the demolition of the statues which were toppled from their pedestals. The difference, however, should not be underestimated because this time it was the crowd that resorted to the acts of violence against the monuments without any instructions from above.

I cannot resist the temptation to quote a passage from an essay of mine written the next day after the *coup*:

A secure old age was certainly not to be the destiny of many Stalin-era statues. Those who were in downtown Moscow on August 22, 1991, could witness agitated iconoclasts chipping pieces off the pedestals of the overthrown monuments to Dzerzhinsky and Sverdlov, throngs of people posing at the feet of former citadels.

Those were the days of the downfall of statues. The goal of the crowd that attacked the statue was clear; to allow the totalitarian spaces of Moscow to acquire a new aesthetic status, to become, irreversibly, spaces of exposition. Unsuccessful »rainmakers« during a drought, these idols were humiliated, knocked down and secretly dumped up in the backyard of some garage. Destruction, as we know, is the highest form of worship; it is not just an expression of moral illiteracy but of an unresolved feeling of guilt spilling out and clamoring for immediate victims.

On Dzerzhinsky Square without Dzerzhinsky and on Sverdlov Square without Sverdlov, I physically sensed that now, from this moment on, every one of us had become an agent of terror. The internalisation of guilt was complete; that is why the crowd itself assumed repressive functions. On the empty pedestals reigned the final, non-anthropomorphic referent of Terror, the people itself.

The Sverdlov monument was the hang-out for the the mute. In total silence, the mutes had climbed onto the pillar and chipped off chunks of stone. The crowbars sent sparks flying.

The exultation was chilling. (Ryklin 1992:49)

After the events of August 1991 an international team of artists inspired by the New-York-based founders of Sots-art Komar & Melamid, came up with the idea of temporarily transforming Moscow, or at least a section of it, into a »garden of totalitarian sculpture«. It would have given the artists the possibility of turning the sculptures into a kind of history lesson, performing on them, for instance, turning them upside down, painting on their surface, enacting their destruction and so on. In fact, artists were urged to »behave like angels« without being such. The question that naturally arises is as fol-

lows: are we sufficiently removed from the age of Terror to play innocently with its referents? Is it not an obvious narcissistic attitude that holds the artists within the confines of the imaginary?

These doubts are justified and shared by many art historians. Let me make reference to one of them, F.S. Licht:

On the face of it, the idea is admirable. It neutralizes the monuments potentially damaging propaganda while salvaging the monuments' themselves, conferring on them an archival status. It also produces a spate of new works. And yet there remains a nagging doubt: is emasculation by aestheticisation as defensible as it seems to be?... Can we justify our right to deal with the monuments of a past epoch in such a high-handed manner? Are we sufficiently free of fanaticisms, of the hypocrisies and manipulatory strategies that lie behind the monuments to point an accusing finger?... Monuments have behind them impulses of generosity that cannot be utterly discounted... (Licht 1995:55)

There is another problem that remains unresolved, thus making any possible »garden of totalitarian sculpture« desperately incomplete. I have in mind the fact that at the very top of the Soviet hierarchy of stone, bronze and marble monuments, indeed crowning them, there is a mummy, the »undead« body of Lenin, and this »monument of monuments«, providing for them their very possibility, still lies in the Mausoleum in the Red Square. It is there despite the fact that since 1991 the Damocles' sword of destruction has been hanging over it (or, if one prefers, he) too.

Komar and Melamid themselves do not even doubt the key importance of the mummy; in their letter to the President of Russia they playfully propose to incorporate it in their project:

For us, the most important monument is Lenin's mausoleum. We propose adding a mere three letters - 'ISM' - to the leader's name. So doing, we would save this 20-century masterpiece and transform it into a symbolic grave of Leninist theory and practice. Perhaps pink flamingos could be allowed to wander about the tribunal from which the leaders greeted people on the state holidays. (Komar & Melamid 1995:5)

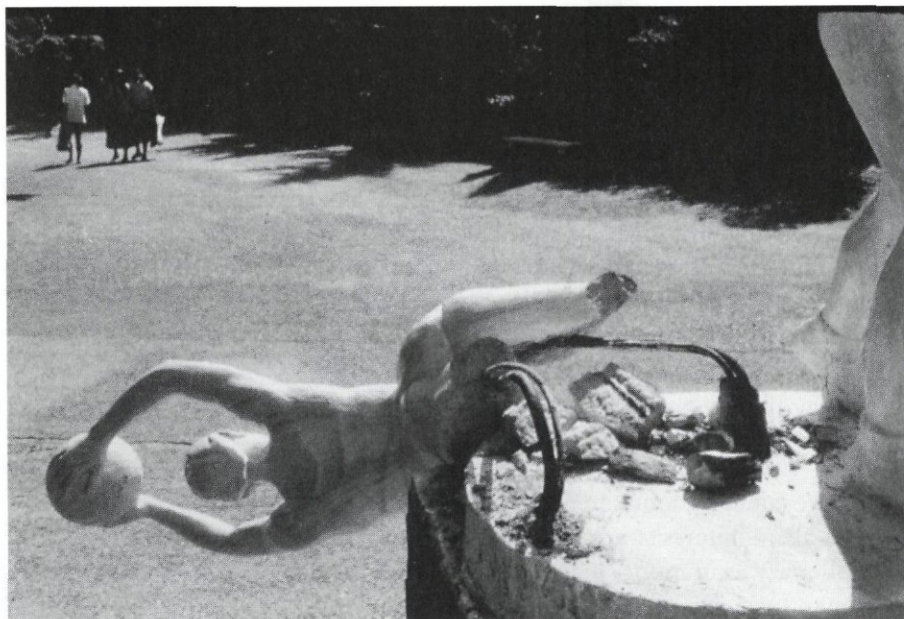
They are not the only ones who believe in the crucial role of Lenin's body for the whole mythology of communism. Some emphasize it even more strongly. V. Todorov, for example, writes:

Although justified by science, pre-planned and pre-rationalized, communism had to be authorized by allegorical images, visions, ceremonies, monuments. In its center was laid the mummy of the leader...The mummy is the

materialized spectre of communism which advertises its imaginary space; it is its real political body. If the teaching of the leader is the rational motive of communism then his corpse is its irrational one. Thus communism transformed both the rational and the irrational into a political mode of life, where both coincide. (Todorov 1993:252-253)

If we earnestly accept these statements, they will force us to recognize that while Lenin's dead body remains where it was, communism is still in its place, even though less essential communist *insignia* had undergone destruction. It means that we are not allowed to »behave like angels« in relation to the material remnants of the past. Trying to »behave like angels«, engaging ourselves in a playful demolition of the left-overs of the previous period of history, we do nothing else but reproduce the vicious circle of violence inherited from it.

In other words, the time is not yet ripe for »the garden of totalitarian sculpture« to be created in Moscow. Although rumors constantly circulate in the Russian press about the necessity of burying Lenin like a Christian and the leader himself is quoted as having said that he would like to be buried near his mother's tomb, the mummy is still in its shrine and one cannot say whether communism, like Kafka's hunter Grachus, is alive or dead. At least its definitive, its final burial is constantly adjourned until a later time which fails to come.



I do not share the view of those who believe that, once Lenin's mummified corpse finds its last abode, everything else will automatically change, and the transition will be seen as completed. Moreover, nothing will change before we change ourselves enough to let »the dead bury their dead« without disturbing our lives to the present extent.

In his book on Marx Jacques Derrida uses the word »*hantologie*« to define *la science des revenants*, the science of phantoms, ghosts, shadows and other ephemeral phenomena whose main property is to haunt, returning from beyond the grave. »Good« ghosts may at any moment become »bad« ones, as has recently happened to Lenin.

But statues are not ghosts, they are neither good nor bad, instead, if we do not imbue them with our own pathos, they are neutral. The capacity to become excited by them belongs to us and not to them. Once we recognize them as *neutral* witnesses and learn to bear their glance, they will become completely harmless, devoid of either »impulses of generosity« or »natural depravity«. What has brought them to life is one thing, whereas statues are quite another. They have nothing to do with the bitter fact that somebody's past has not yet turned into »past perfect«, *un fait accompli*. A witty person once remarked that theft is the best compliment one can pay to a thing: in much the same way demolition is the best declaration of love, dependence and guilt in relation to things demolished. This urge is rooted in us, it is not theirs, and the only cure is simply to become aware of the logic of the situation.

In the final account, monuments belong to an immense family of neutral mnemonic traces and in that capacity they can be arbitrarily ascribed the qualities of being either revolutionary or reactionary (depending on who judges). But glorified or debased, in due time they start to resemble each other. Some believe that democracy is in principle incompatible with monumental commemorations but that does not prevent democracies from erecting monuments. If we single out monuments separating them – as self-contained entities – from other traces, we shall be at a loss thinking of how to get rid of them:

...we cannot but deplore the monumental mode. Yet much as we hate, fear or mock monuments, it seems we cannot do without them...we inadvertently erect monuments of our own. (Licht 1995:57)

If we conceive monuments as unavoidable traces, it will make little sense to say »all monuments are reactionary« or »by definition they are against revolutionary aspirations« or, on the contrary, »they contribute to the progress of humanity«.



Traces are by nature different from the manner in which they may be defined, they repeat themselves before any definition whatsoever and are still interchangeable within it.

However, *revenons à nos moutons*. Russian politicians do not pay much attention to the monuments of the Soviet epoch. Some of them remain where they were, others have either ceased to exist or are kept in storage spaces. Any comparison with *nazi* symbols does not hold true, for communism suffered no military defeat with its habitual consequence – a formal prohibition on the part of the winners on the display of the symbols of the conquered enemy. In our case the Russian people has to cope all by itself with its positive and negative memories, its reactions ranging from adoration to destruction, from »joyful irresponsibility« to evident figures of guilt. It happens some-



times that statues are involved in this process as hostages, witnesses or in some other similar capacity.

The situation is much like the one from a story told by Walter Benjamin in *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. What I have in mind is the opening story about an automaton that never lost a single game of chess. But the real player was hidden behind »a system of mirrors« and »guided the puppet's hand by means of strings« (Benjamin 1969:253). It was »a little hunchback (Zwerg)« who responded to each of his opponent's moves with a countermove. Benjamin continues:

One can imagine a philosophical counterpart of this device. The puppet called 'historical materialism' is to win all the time.
(Benjamin 1969:253)

From his Moscow trip in 1926-1927 Benjamin knew what kind of game was played behind the screen under the name of historical materialism and whose personal interest was a factor in transforming privileged »little hunchbacks« into a neutral »system of mirrors« posing as automatic historical necessity. From 1991 on, since the time the *USSR enacted its own disappearance*, it has become clear that it was not a materialist automaton constantly winning, but that dwarfs or hunchbacks guided its lucky hand. Having destroyed the »system of mirrors creating the illusion that the table was transparent from all sides« (Benjamin 1969:253) they emerged – well, not as former hunchbacks, but as ... experts in a new game of capitalism. They are the first to hate the dirty tricks that permitted old hunchbacks to win; they are leading others to a new, no less radiant future, the outlines of which are already discernible behind a new system of mirrors that is claimed to ensure true transparency, this time without deceiving anyone. And it is hard to prove that these characters are the same »little hunchbacks« from Benjamin's tale, for nobody saw them emerging from behind »a puppet in Turkish attire« as clandestine chess players. As for the former *system of mirrors*, they tell everyone that it became quite rotten naturally through expecting one good kick to collapse. They themselves, of course, were the those who gave the first kick.

These are just well-known *ruses* on the part of those who want to cross out their past. What is really important is the fact that the little old hunchback did not lose a single game of chess to the other, more expert player. He lost at best to historical necessity, the nature of which remains to be defined.

The idea of »a garden of totalitarian sculpture« (considered by both the Moscow authorities and international artists in 1992-1993) has yet another drawback: it encompasses a small group of *elite* Moscow monuments, a kind

of statuesque *nomenklatura*; made of bronze and marble they were meant to last for centuries. But during more than seventy years of its existence monumental propaganda has produced millions of such statues, busts, mosaics and *bas-reliefs*. In most cases their destruction is not ideologically motivated and results from bad climatic conditions, spontaneous acts of barbarism on the part of the local populace (made mostly of clay and plaster, they are easily destroyed) and a whole range of other unpredictable circumstances including natural decay. They seal the fate of the socialist visual archive in a way that no articulated position or deliberately chosen attitude does.

There are artists who try to document the process of decay at the grass-roots level travelling all over the country. A vivid example of a modest and yet essential effort of the kind is provided by the Moscow photographer Igor Mukhin whose extensive project known as *»Empty spaces«* carried out persistently for several years (since the late eighties) aims at preserving the remaining traces of what used to be one of the biggest plastic archives on Earth. He collected a considerable body of evidence testifying to the actual state of the archive and dismissed a largely shared illusion that what really matters is nothing but Lenin's mummy and a number of related monuments.

Another of Mukhin's discoveries is the mainly apolitical nature of decay, as distinguished from deliberate destruction or decreed demolition. Millions of gypsum young pioneers with drums or trumpets and girls with oars simply decompose in parks, squares and elsewhere because of the lack of public interest, poor maintenance etc. It does not matter in whose honour they were erected; Pushkin, the eternal favorite of the Russian public, equally praised by Dostoevsky and by Zhdanov, is sharing now the fate of numerous Gorkys, Unknown Soldiers and Motherland images of. Hardships currently suffered by the people make them indifferent to the remnants of the past; as for the State, it is notorious for its lack of resources and inability to cover even the basic needs.

Most of my compatriots possess a superficial impression of living in such a hurry that they simply have no time for the rites of mourning. Perhaps, however, they live like that precisely because of a constant mourning, so deep and suppressed in them that they simply cannot allow themselves to notice it? They suffer badly from *»the present moment«* perceived and described by most of them as something unheard – of and unique.

But they are mistaken. Benjamin once remarked that the lower classes permanently live in a state of emergency which is the only *etat de la nature* known to them. In this respect Russian history is hopelessly repetitious.

In his *Russian Journal* John Steinbeck recalls a game that was popular among the American journalists in Moscow in the late forties: somebody

read out a text declaring, for instance, that Russians were afraid to meet foreigners because they were constantly watched after by the police, that they »refused to answer any questions on their life« and so on. But how, exclaimed a correspondent, evidently a new-comer, are you hoping to get it through the censorship, you will simply not be allowed! A burst of general laughter followed, for the text in question happened to be written in the 17-th century by, say, a Dutch merchant or an Italian ambassador.

The vicious circle of the same, of what is supposed to be the same seems to give memory no chance, it erases, deletes everything as always-already having taken place. The inscription automatically becomes a palimpsest and is doomed to fall victim to the next inscription and so on. Or, to put it differently, too much of a presence creates a gap, an enormous absence under the dictatorship of »present moment«.

Can one be a historian of the potential? The answer to this question is crucial for everyone who studies the archives of the Revolution or of other no less violent events. For it may happen that archives contain more blanks than information, and who can guarantee that what one takes for information has not been many times sifted, rarefied, if not indeed annulled? The notion of a zero archive does not at all seem too extravagant with respect to such events. The question then would be: how does one deal with proteic beings who regularly suppress their past?

By being a witnesses to an absence, to the loss of memory (mostly an ontological loss that does not involve oblivion or forgetfulness, but is, perhaps, the only form of survival for catastrophic events). By memorizing the immemorial, by reading texts that were written in order not to leave traces, being such traces themselves. By reading them, so to say, against the grain, *à rebours*. Then we shall probably see how the revolutionary *arches* transform themselves into traces, strange ones, no doubt, but still traces, belonging to a whole family.

Gathering traces is not the same thing as taking a stance or systematically explaining something. Benjamin's »Moscow Diary« is itself the best example of how to assemble traces without providing their systematic explanation or, in other words, a theory. From the very beginning of his stay in Moscow, then the epicenter of the Great Revolution, he keeps repeating that »the present moment« here is so charged with unpredictable possibilities that an outsider must refrain from judging. Several times he calls Moscow »an impregnable fortress« and, unable to pass a verdict, confines himself to the closest possible observation. Here is a quotation from his letter to his friend, sculptress Julia Radt, sent to her from Moscow:

I cannot assess all of this; basically, the situation here enables and requires one to take on a position within it ... from an outside, all you can do is observe it. It is totally impossible to predict what's going to come of all this in Russia. Perhaps a truly socialist community, perhaps something entirely different. The battle that is going to decide this is still in progress. (Benjamin 1985:127)

This passage draws a distinction between collecting traces (Benjamin himself was a collector, and the list of things he bought in Moscow, mostly hand-made objects, is truly impressive), observing things from the outside and taking a position or theorizing the situation that he deems fundamentally uncertain both from within and from without. As Derrida remarks in his text *Back from Moscow, in the USSR* written in 1990 after his first voyage to Moscow, the »phenomenological motive« in the »Moscow Diary« is inseparable from the fact that here, in this particular place, i.e. in postrevolutionary Moscow, each fact is always-already a theory (Derrida 1995:74-75). A hermeneutics, as it is practiced elsewhere, is always blocked here by the privilege of »the present moment«, unique to the degree of becoming totally unclear and thus undecipherable. Phenomena brought into being by the Revolution are too extreme to be seized by normal means.

Despite such facts as Benjamin's unfortunate love, his unborn child and the unfulfilled revolutionary promise, Derrida insists on the irreducible na-



ture of his *Diary* as a collection of traces in its own right. This text along with other texts is the only remnant and survivor of his stay at the epicentre of the World Revolution (Derrida 1995:74-94).

I took this example in order to show that the uniqueness of »the present moment« is a recurrent theme in Russian history, so that we should not entertain any illusions concerning the epistemological privilege of *our own* present moment and the status of some »unheard-of« that we arbitrarily ascribe to it. By doing so we simply rationalize our traumas.

For this is the main reason why, not without some hesitation, Derrida finally refused to equate *perestroyka* (which almost literally means »deconstruction«) with deconstruction proper: *perestroyka* is a promise postponed until some more or less remote and hazy »after«, it is imbued with potentiality, it points to still another kind of radiant future, whereas deconstruction deals with traces of something that has already happened, that has definitely taken place. The combination »presence-absence«, with inevitable reversibility it entails, cannot directly be applied to traces that are irreversibly there. Nothing is more human than our desire to go beyond traces, nothing is less possible than that.

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All photos are from Igor Mukhin's project »*Empty Spaces*«.

Maryvonne Saison
De la nostalgie à l'art: voir de tout son corps

«... *Regarder*, s'enfoncer dans les choses sans en rien attendre que la vérité»¹: telle serait l'intention de Cézanne, et ce propos décelé dissuade Merleau-Ponty de chercher le sens de l'œuvre dans la vie du peintre ou dans sa «constitution nerveuse». La réflexion du philosophe appelle de multiples commentaires: je propose tout d'abord de souligner la constance des thèmes développés par Merleau-Ponty; s'il est certes possible de chercher le dernier état de la réflexion du philosophe dans les textes inachevés et de dresser à partir de leur silence les ultimes voies d'une pensée en évolution, il est souhaitable également de dégager dans les premières œuvres les germes ultérieurement développés. Or la philosophie de la perception élaborée par Merleau-Ponty dès 1945 permet de déceler l'importance de l'expérience vécue avant même la constitution du sujet comme tel.

Si l'on est capable de regarder comme l'a fait Cézanne, c'est parce que l'on a d'emblée été un corps enfoncé dans les choses avant de s'en différencier comme sujet conscient et connaissant. C'est un originaire vécu par chacun dans son histoire individuelle, qui scelle à jamais l'entente avec le monde et la proximité avec autrui. Je le désignerai comme le moment de l'anonymat; il est vécu par le corps et décrit par Merleau-Ponty sous des couleurs paradisiaques ses traces persistantes témoignent d'une nostalgie profonde. Or la nostalgie, figure de la mélancolie, ne cesse que par le retour au pays natal².

Seul l'art peut répondre à un tel désir, après l'avoir réélaboré, et, en retour, il s'en trouvera profondément et durablement transformé dans son propos. L'artiste ne se soucie plus de promouvoir une représentation ni de viser une ressemblance: «peindre le monde» selon Cézanne, c'est «faire *voir* comment il nous *touche*.» Un tel «voir» renvoie à une expérience primordiale qui ne concerne pas l'opération de l'organe des sens dans son usage coutumier:

¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, «Le doute de Cézanne», in *Sens et Non-sens*, Nagel, Paris 1948, p. 28.

² Cf. le travail de doctorat, à ce jour inédit, soutenu par le metteur en scène Olivier Besson en décembre 1993: «Histoires d'instant passés: le travail théâtral».

il appartient à un corps défini par la motricité et la multisensorialité; un corps cosmique en quelque sorte, participant fusionnellement d'un monde dans lequel aucune conscience n'a introduit de différenciation. La tâche assignée à cet art issu de la nostalgie est ontologique. Merleau-Ponty indique la voie pour toute la réflexion phénoménologique ultérieure sur l'art.

Le pays natal

Dès 1945, dans la *Phénoménologie de la perception*³, Merleau-Ponty montre que la production individualisée de pensées et d'œuvres réalisée par un sujet au faîte de ses moyens, repose sur une relation au monde dont la description reste à faire. Il évoque alors un étrange sujet non cartésien qui par son corps individué et concret s'accorde au murmure du monde.

Le premier anonymat

L'analyse et la description de la perception permettent à Merleau-Ponty de rectifier la doxa cartésienne sur laquelle nous reposons, de mettre à jour un niveau primitif et primordial d'expérience dans lequel on découvre une «subjectivité finie», la subjectivité vouée à la «sensorialité» (278). Un «autre moi» apparaît (250), le «sujet sentant» de la sensation (249), qui constitue avec le sensible deux faces d'une opération unique (248); la sensation n'est pas le propre d'un sujet qui naît et meurt avec elle, «elle relève d'une *sensibilité* qui l'a précédée et qui lui survivra» (250). Avec la sensibilité surgissent donc des «horizons prépersonnels» (250); («toute sensation, dit encore Merleau-Ponty, p. 249, comporte un germe de rêve ou de dépersonnalisation», ou encore, p. 251, «la vision est prépersonnelle.»). La sensorialité immerge l'individu dans la généralité et l'anonymat: «toute perception a lieu dans une atmosphère de généralité et se donne à nous comme anonyme», commente Merleau-Ponty, p. 249. Un peu plus loin, il écrit encore: «la sensation s'apparaît nécessairement à elle-même dans un milieu de généralité, elle vient d'en-deçà de moi-même, elle relève d'une *sensibilité* qui l'a précédée et qui lui survivra, comme ma naissance et ma mort appartiennent à une natalité et à une mortalité anonymes» (250).

Loin que la perception installe un sujet cartésien dans le monde, elle est

³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Gallimard, Paris 1945.

La pagination indiquée entre parenthèses dans les pages qui suivent renvoie au même texte.

le lieu où disparaît le sujet dans l'anonymat: «toute perception a quelque chose d'anonyme» (275). Il faudrait même que la grammaire prenne acte de cette évidence peu à peu obliérée en substituant au «je» du sujet le «on» de l'anonymat: «si je voulais traduire exactement l'expérience perceptive, je devrais dire qu'*on* perçoit en moi et non pas que je perçois» (249). Parce que le sujet n'est pas constituant, la sensation le renvoie à l'anonymat et à une existence qui n'est plus individuée: «j'éprouve la sensation comme modalité d'une existence générale, déjà vouée à un monde physique et qui fuse à travers moi sans que j'en sois l'auteur.» (250). Par rapport à la généralité de l'existence et à la profondeur du monde, le sujet sentant est spécialisé et la sensation partielle et limitée.

L'examen phénoménologique de la perception signe donc l'acte de décès du sujet autonome: «la perception est toujours dans le mode du «on». Ce n'est pas un acte personnel par lequel je donnerais moi-même un sens neuf à ma vie. Celui qui, dans l'exploration sensorielle, donne un passé au présent et l'oriente vers un avenir, ce n'est pas moi comme sujet autonome, c'est moi en tant que j'ai un corps et que je sais «regarder». Plutôt qu'elle n'est une histoire véritable, la perception atteste et renouvelle en nous une 'préhistoire'» (277). Lorsqu'il perçoit sur le mode du on, le sujet sentant a élargi son existence au-delà de ses limites corporelles propres, la synthèse qu'il effectue n'est pas intellectuelle, elle est «effectuée par le corps phénoménal» (269). On voit se préfigurer le concept de «chair» qui dissout le sujet: «mon corps, écrit Merleau-Ponty (272), est la texture commune de tous les objets.» Certes, cette expérience pré-réflexive sera transformée par l'attitude critique: «l'analyse parviendra à l'objet de science, à la sensation comme phénomène privé, et au sujet pur qui pose l'un et l'autre. Ces trois termes sont à l'horizon de l'expérience primordiale» (279), mais le sujet autonome ne pourra plus jamais feindre de croire qu'il est constituant et premier. «L'autre moi», synchrone avec le monde constitue pour toujours la part obscure et anonyme de «l'être propre» que Merleau-Ponty définit, à l'opposé, comme «celui dont je suis responsable et dont je décide» (250).

Plus avant, dans la *Phénoménologie de la perception*, le philosophe retrouve les mêmes accents: il ne faut pas concevoir la conscience comme «conscience constituante», comme «un pur-être-pour-soi», «mais comme une conscience perceptive, comme le sujet d'un comportement, comme être au monde ou existence» (404). L'individu est individu-dans-la nature avant de devenir sujet conscient séparé, autonome, responsable: la «vie anonyme première» pose ensemble nature et individu: «la conscience découvre en elle-même avec les champs sensoriels et avec le monde comme champ de tous les champs, l'opacité d'un passé originaire» (403).

L'être-dans-le-monde ainsi découvert, sol préréflexif de mon existence subjective future, inscrit l'individu et son corps dans la continuité d'un monde avec lequel il ne fait qu'un et auquel il est adapté: dans la foulée, Merleau-Ponty poursuit «le sujet percevant apparaît pourvu d'un montage primordial à l'égard du monde»(404). Ceci correspond aux remarques émises préalablement: «je suis, comme sujet sentant, tout plein de pouvoirs naturels» (249). La foi originare contemporaine de la perception témoigne pour une harmonie vécue par le corps (278). Lorsque, dans l'expérience de la perception rendue à sa vérité, on renonce à une conception de la subjectivité comme non être absolu de toute inhérence corporelle, on fait surgir un niveau de coexistence et de communion qui signe la remise en cause radicale de l'alternative du pour soi et de l'en soi (247): «ni l'objet ni le sujet ne sont posés» (279).

Subjectivité et temporalité

Une fois mise en évidence la perception, et à ce seul niveau, Merleau-Ponty fait intervenir la subjectivité sans trop d'artifice par l'intermédiaire du temps. La seule véritable caractéristique et prérogative du sujet, c'est la temporalité: «la subjectivité, au niveau de la perception n'est rien d'autre que la temporalité» (276). L'histoire et le sujet ont la même naissance, l'anonymat ne renvoie qu'à une préhistoire. Temporalité et subjectivité désignent le même événement: «le temps n'est que pour une subjectivité» et cette subjectivité est le temps lui-même» (278). Les trois figures du temps présent passé et avenir n'existent que pour un sujet ou sont les modalités d'existence du sujet. Sur un fond adamique se profile une rupture et le sujet naît dans un désir de connaître et une attitude critique, qui font surgir sujet et objet, en soi et pour soi: «je pose une matière de la connaissance lorsque, rompant avec la foi originare de la perception, j'adopte à son égard une attitude critique et que je me demande 'ce que je vois vraiment'» (278).

Le second anonymat

Peut-on désormais ouvrir l'examen de l'existence subjective? Ce serait aller trop vite: non seulement le sujet est lesté d'une conscience perceptive qui lui donne à tout jamais le poids d'une existence phénoménale, non seulement donc, nous avons définitivement perdu le sujet cartésien, mais tout se passe comme si ce qui avait été établi au niveau du corps et de la chair se

devait aussi d'être dit au niveau de ce qui n'est pas matériel: au niveau de la pensée. Je ne suis pas un sujet autonome et libre de la liberté absolue et radicale exigée par Sartre, ma liberté est inscrite dans un contexte et je l'infléchis de mes parcours antérieurs; mais ma pensée elle-même n'indique pas une direction dans laquelle il faudrait inscrire la subjectivité; deux anonymats se superposent dans la *Phénoménologie* qui contestent l'hégémonie du sujet; le premier subordonne le «je» à un «on», dans le contexte d'un monde «matériel» dont font partie les corps; à ce niveau le corps d'autrui rentre dans le même anonymat que mon corps, les corps et les choses font en quelque sorte le tissu du monde: «le corps d'autrui et le mien sont un seul tout, l'envers et l'endroit d'un seul phénomène et l'existence anonyme dont mon corps est à chaque moment la trace habite désormais ces deux corps à la fois» (406).

Mais Merleau-Ponty ne met pas vraiment sur le même plan les choses et les corps ni les choses et les objets nés d'une volonté humaine. Un monde humain se profile qui prolonge et complète le monde naturel tout en s'en distinguant. Tout se passe comme si un second anonymat subordonnait le «je» à un monde «social», formant avec le monde naturel un «champ permanent», «une dimension d'existence» (406). Le «je» est subordonné dans cette dimension sociale à un «je en général». Le pronom indéfini «on» peut encore désigner l'anonymat, mais il ne recouvre que des caractéristiques humaines et sociales: «dans l'objet culturel, écrit Merleau-Ponty, j'éprouve la présence prochaine d'autrui sous un voile d'anonymat. On se sert de la pipe. Comment une action ou une pensée humaine peut-elle être saisie dans le mode du «on», puisque, par principe, elle est une opération en première personne, inséparable d'un Je? Le pronom indéfini n'est ici qu'une formule vague pour désigner une multiplicité de Je ou encore un Je en général» (400).

L'harmonie primordiale

Une harmonie fondamentale caractérise le monde social, comme elle caractérisait le monde naturel: le corps absorbe le culturel «à travers un comportement adéquat adopté par mimétisme et manipulandum» (407). Si l'on fait intervenir la césure que représente «l'irruption du langage» (407), rien ne semble vraiment transformé en ce qui concerne les deux caractéristiques qui nous intéressent: une existence anonyme préexiste à une conscience subjective et cette existence anonyme semble harmonieuse.

Les pages dans lesquelles Merleau-Ponty décrit le dialogue font écho à celles qui décrivent le corps sentant: «dans l'expérience du dialogue, il se

constitue entre autrui et moi un terrain commun, ma pensée et la sienne ne font qu'un seul tissu, mes propos et ceux de l'interlocuteur sont appelés par l'état de la discussion, ils s'insèrent dans une opération commune dont aucun de nous n'est le créateur» (407). De même que mon corps est fait de l'étoffe des choses, mes propos sont faits de l'étoffe de la pensée. La symbiose et l'harmonie sont égales à celles qui scellent mon accord avec le monde matériel ou naturel: «il y a là un être à deux (...) nous sommes l'un pour l'autre collaborateurs dans une réciprocité parfaite, nos perspectives glissent l'une dans l'autre, nous coexistons à travers un même monde» (407).

Alors que le corps limite le point de vue, la pensée ouvre même un monde plus large qui ne pâtit plus de telles astreintes: «dans le dialogue présent, je suis libéré de moi-même, les pensées d'autrui sont bien des pensées siennes, ce n'est pas moi qui les forme, bien que je les saisisse aussitôt nées ou que je les devance, et même, l'objection que me fait l'interlocuteur m'arrache des pensées que je ne savais pas posséder, de sorte que si je lui prête des pensées, il me fait penser en retour» (407). Le «je en général» formule donc de la pensée et construit un monde humain sans qu'aucune assignation ne rompe l'anonymat. De fait, nous sommes toujours, pour emprunter des termes auxquels Michel Foucault donnera de l'éclat, dans un monde sans auteur⁴. Merleau-Ponty décrit ce monde comme un monde harmonieux au fonctionnement adéquat.

L'exil

A ce double anonymat correspond une double cassure, vécue à chaque fois comme un drame aussi bref qu'intense. Le sujet individuel conscient naît de ces ruptures.

L'inhumanité du réel

Considérons d'abord la cassure qui sépare le corps et les choses. Elle intervient après des pages lyriques dans lesquelles Merleau-Ponty a célébré les épousailles du sujet-sentant et du monde, retrouvant des accents proches de ceux de Camus⁵. C'est p. 372, lorsque la «pensée objective» et ses préjugés

⁴ Michel Foucault, conférence du 22-XI-1969: «Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?» in *Dits et Ecrits*, Gallimard, Paris 1994, t. 1, p. 811.

⁵ Albert Camus, *Noces*, Gallimard, Paris 1950, pp. 19, 23, 25, 35, 78, 80, 90.

rompent l'harmonie: «elle a pour fonction constante de réduire tous les phénomènes qui attestent l'union du sujet et du monde et de leur substituer l'idée claire de l'objet comme en soi et du sujet comme pure conscience. Elle coupe donc les liens qui réunissent la chose et le sujet incarné » (370). A feindre de n'être plus corps, la conscience crée les conditions du malheur et la possibilité de l'altérité: «on ne peut, disions-nous, concevoir de chose perçue sans quelqu'un qui la perçoive. Mais encore est-il que la chose se présente à celui-là même qui la perçoit comme chose en soi et qu'elle pose le problème d'un véritable en-soi-pour-nous. Nous ne nous en avisons pas d'ordinaire parce que notre perception, dans le contexte de nos occupations, se pose sur les choses juste assez pour retrouver leur présence familière et pas assez pour redécouvrir ce qui s'y cache d'inhumain. Mais la chose nous ignore, elle repose en soi. Nous le verrons si nous mettons en suspens nos occupations et portons sur elle une attention métaphysique et désintéressée. Elle est alors hostile et étrangère, elle n'est plus pour nous un interlocuteur, mais un Autre résolument silencieux, un soi qui nous échappe autant que l'intimité d'une conscience étrangère» (372). Alors que la perception quotidienne finalisée et superficielle nous préserve de sentir l'altérité du réel (375), la perception objectivante et réflexive constitue le réel en son altérité et en son inhumanité, et celle-ci, rétrospectivement, se donne comme hostilité. Le travail de la rupture produit la perte d'une harmonie; l'autonomie se découvre dans la séparation et se paie de la constitution de l'en soi comme altérité. La dichotomie sujet/objet fait lever le spectre de l'inimitié des choses et de leur résistance.

L'hostilité d'autrui

Si le corps, devenu conscient a perdu son entente avec le monde et trouvé l'absence de statut qui le caractérise dans la philosophie classique, une mésaventure parallèle advient à la pensée. Après l'harmonie et le bonheur du dialogue producteur de pensée anonyme, la subjectivité dans sa dimension temporelle est capable de réflexion; le scénario de la rupture donnant naissance à l'altérité et à l'hostilité se renouvelle; «c'est seulement après coup, quand je me suis retiré du dialogue et m'en ressouviens, que je puis le réintégrer à ma vie, en faire l'épisode de mon histoire privée et qu'autrui rentre dans son absence, ou, dans la mesure où il reste présent, est senti comme une menace pour moi» (407).

Le cogito sous la forme d'un «je me souviens» n'est pas originaire; il génère une appropriation de la pensée solidaire de la représentation d'un autrui hostile et menaçant. Autrui devient hostile en premier lieu en son ab-

sence, alors que, dans l'anonymat des présences, on connaissait une coexistence paisible. La conscience comme conscience privée, désincarnée et revendiquant la propriété de la pensée est à l'origine des luttes et des rivalités.

On peut sans doute se demander si une telle appropriation de la pensée par un sujet qui se veut progressivement indépendant du monde et d'autrui est inévitable. La rupture du second anonymat n'est pas le prix à payer de la pensée mais du désir de s'approprier la pensée. Merleau-Ponty, à sa manière, prépare la possibilité, pour Foucault, Barthes et Lacan d'affirmer qu'une pensée libre de toute assignation peut circuler sans auteur et que délivrée de la subjectivité une telle pensée ne saurait que proliférer.

La résistance

La subjectivation désignerait-elle alors un processus qui mène au malheur et contre lequel il serait judicieux de faire acte de résistance?

Les réflexions précédentes nous fondent à coup sûr à faire l'hypothèse d'un rousseauisme de Merleau-Ponty. Comment n'y pas penser en évoquant après l'harmonie et le bonheur de l'existence originaire dénuée des notions de subjectivité et de propriété (même au regard de la pensée), la solitude, le malheur et les effets nocifs de l'appropriation? Ce qui est particulièrement intéressant chez Merleau-Ponty, c'est la place faite à une appropriation fondamentale qui est celle du nom. L'anonymat prépersonnel est plus riche que l'existence nominale, plus heureux aussi. L'assignation et la revendication d'un nom «propre» signent l'apparition d'une personne séparée, soumise avec la conscience du temps qui la caractérise, à la réflexivité, tout à la fois menacée et menaçante dans son isolement artificiel. L'autonomie du sujet, établie au terme d'un long processus de subjectivation, passe par la rupture de l'anonymat et la perte du bonheur dans l'expérience de la solitude. Le langage est au centre de la chaîne des ruptures successives et dans le cadre du monde social, on passe du «je en général», d'une «conscience silencieuse», à une conscience explicite (463): c'est la distinction introduite par Merleau-Ponty entre un cogito tacite et un cogito parlé (462). Tout laisse pourtant à penser que Merleau-Ponty ne renonce pas à trouver une forme de pensée qui échappe aux errances du cogito parlé, qui résiste à l'appropriation et à la rupture de l'anonymat.

Ce reste d'utopie est possible grâce aux effets de l'entente originaire: le bonheur laisse des traces silencieuses qui rendent sensible son absence ultérieure, lorsque la rupture est consommée. La marque négative prend alors la tonalité du remords: «l'objectivation de chacun par le regard de l'autre,

écrit Merleau-Ponty, n'est ressentie comme pénible que parce qu'elle prend la place d'une communication possible» (414).

La dimension nostalgique

C'est sous le signe de la nostalgie que se profile la résistance aux méfaits de la subjectivation. L'art y a sa place comme manifestation nostalgique. La nostalgie marque sans doute l'impulsion même qui donne naissance à la *Phénoménologie*: dégager le moment perceptif et substituer le sujet sentant au sujet «propre», c'est faire retour aux origines du sujet et au fond dont elles surgissent. Alors que notre naissance et notre mort nous échappent («ni ma naissance ni ma mort ne peuvent m'apparaître comme des expériences miennes» (249)), la question du commencement garde son acuité: «pour faire apparaître la réflexion comme une possibilité de mon être», il faut partir de «l'expérience irréfléchie du monde» et placer le processus de subjectivation en regard de la généralité et de l'anonymat premiers: «Qu'avons-nous donc au commencement?» demande le philosophe (279). Si la réponse oriente le sujet vers ses origines prépersonnelles et vers sa préhistoire, comme nous l'avons vu, elle met à jour un passé qualifié d'«originel» (280) ou d'«originaire» (403). La curiosité et la quête des origines ne peut néanmoins générer qu'un échec: ce fond qui se profile lors du retour réflexif n'a jamais été présent au sens où il n'a jamais fait l'objet d'une conscience réflexive. Ce qui se découvre n'a jamais été pleinement vécu puisque la réflexivité et le langage faisaient défaut. L'expérience primitive est ainsi en tant que telle inaccessible à jamais. Cela redouble la nostalgie, puisque retrouver le passé permettrait cette fois de le vivre pleinement.

Le paradis perdu

Un autre passé semble pourtant plus proche et plus accessible, c'est mon propre passé individuel, tel qu'il est évoqué dans la deuxième partie de la *Phénoménologie*. Les mondes naturels (381) et sociaux (407) sont effectivement vécus comme tels par l'enfant avant qu'il n'occupe de plein droit sa position de sujet. La perception originaire est sans doute proche de celle de l'enfant: du moins de celle effectivement vécue par l'enfant avant qu'il ne se découvre comme conscience sensible et conscience intellectuelle, dans le drame d'une rupture qui se présente alors comme un sevrage (408). Jusque là, «l'enfant vit dans un monde qu'il croit d'emblée accessible à tous ceux qui l'entourent, il

n'a aucune conscience de lui-même ni d'ailleurs des autres, comme subjectivités privées, il ne soupçonne pas que nous soyons tous et qu'il soit lui-même limité à un certain point de vue sur le monde» (407).

Si Merleau-Ponty est un psychologue trop compétent pour prétendre que la perception primitive renvoie à la perception de l'enfant, il la réfère néanmoins sans doute à une enfance de la perception qui n'est pas sans lien avec mon enfance réelle. L'intérêt du retour à l'enfance est double: non seulement on y retrouve un climat protégé et chaleureux, mais on y décèle une moindre influence des schèmes culturels qui aveuglent l'adulte. La proximité de l'enfance par rapport à l'originaire (et non au primitif, comme le précise Merleau-Ponty dans ses cours⁶), est telle que «l'enfant laisse mieux voir un certain fond commun à toute l'humanité». Ce qui caractérise le sujet-sentant qui a remplacé le sujet désincarné, c'est que ce «sujet se sent coextensif à l'être» et que cette croyance très forte chez l'enfant «subsiste chez l'adulte» (202). Ainsi un acquis restera à l'adulte d'avoir été enfant: «la certitude primordiale de toucher l'être même», de participer à un monde intersubjectif de coexistence paisible (408).

C'est parce que Merleau-Ponty retrouve la trace de l'originaire dans notre histoire personnelle, dans notre enfance réelle, qu'il peut faire apparaître sa persistance affective et son inscription dans notre corps: c'est ce qui génère et autorise la dimension nostalgique. Il ne s'agit pas d'un mythe des origines mais d'une enfance perdue que le philosophe revêt de couleurs paradisiaques.⁷ La structure unique de la présence est renvoyée au passé (492). Seule la nostalgie la garde vivante en moi. Le philosophe, pris d'une veine autobiographique laisse même paraître l'individu dans un «je» qui ne vaut plus que pour lui: «c'est à présent que je comprends mes vingt-cinq premières années comme une enfance prolongée qui devait être suivie d'un sevrage difficile pour aboutir enfin à l'autonomie» (398).

Certaines analyses interprètent la position de Merleau-Ponty à partir d'éléments biographiques livrés par le philosophe lui-même; dans un article des *Temps Modernes*⁸, Sartre brosse le portrait d'un «jeune Œdipe retourné sur ses origines»: «la Nature qui l'enveloppa tout d'abord, ce fut la Déesse Mère, sa mère, dont les yeux lui donnaient à voir ce qu'il voyait; elle fut l'*alter ego*.». Je ne crois pas que l'on puisse réduire la pensée de Merleau-Ponty à cet

⁶ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Bulletin de psychologie*, novembre 1964, p. 173.

⁷ On pourrait ici ouvrir une parenthèse et montrer comment la *Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique* de Mikel Dufrenne réfère ces bonheurs premiers non à un paradis perdu, mais à un âge d'or (p. 426-427).

⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, «Merleau-Ponty vivant» in *Les Temps Modernes*, n° 184/185, 1961, p. 309/310.

attachement: l'ontologie était présente dès *La Phénoménologie de la Perception*, au niveau du premier anonymat. Le retour nostalgique dont nous avons parlé englobe la mère, mais ne s'y résout pas. Par ailleurs, l'art répond à la nostalgie en infirmant l'idée naïve selon laquelle un simple retour à l'enfance aurait été souhaité par Merleau-Ponty.

J'espère avoir fait apparaître la motivation qui donne impulsion à la recherche du paradis perdu et des valeurs qui lui étaient attachées: la non personnalisation, la non rivalité, l'absence de propriété, le bonheur fusionnel dans un monde et dans une culture encore intacts de toute subjectivation. Pour cette quête là, le concept ne sera d'aucun recours (408); la place structurelle de l'intervention du langage dans le processus de maturation et de subjectivation est telle que seuls des recours très particuliers au langage pourront répondre à la motivation nostalgique du philosophe: retrouver un état qui n'a jamais été vécu comme tel et le réinscrire dans mon histoire, faire acte de résistance contre la subjectivation dans l'impossible désir de vivre en sujet ce contre quoi le sujet s'est défini. On se rend compte ici que la proximité avec le projet proustien est extrêmement importante et que les nombreuses références à Proust dans la *Phénoménologie* n'ont rien d'arbitraire

L'art comme ressourcement

Le langage particulier qui répond à ce désir irréalisable, c'est celui de l'art. L'art ne recourt pas au concept et prend d'emblée la voix (terme que l'on pourrait indifféremment écrire avec x ou avec e) de la poésie. Dans «Le langage indirect et les voix du silence»⁹, Merleau-Ponty oppose au parler quotidien le «langage authentique» ou la «parole vraie» qui correspond à «l'usage créateur» du langage (LS 56). Il invoque Mallarmé et ajoute: «la parole vraie, celle qui signifie, qui rend enfin présente l'absente de tous bouquets» et délivre le sens captif de la chose, elle n'est, au regard de l'usage empirique, que silence, puisqu'elle ne va pas jusqu'au nom commun.» C'est encore une fois autant que le concept, le nom qui est responsable de la déchirure dans le tissu du monde. Et l'écrivain qui sait trouver au-delà du «langage empirique» «un langage à la seconde puissance» retrouve une opération analogue à celle du peintre: «les signes mènent la vie vague des couleurs, et (...) les significations ne se libèrent pas tout à fait du commerce des signes» (LS 56-57).

⁹ M. Merleau-Ponty, «Le langage indirect et les voix du silence» in *Signes*, Gallimard, Paris 1960. Dans le texte, les références à cet article seront précédées de LS.

La modestie

L'art capable de répondre au besoin de régénération que nous avons fait apparaître a dû opérer certains renoncements et se priver de recours installés par la tradition. Il a été amené, en particulier, à refuser toute figuration d'une perception factice liée à la représentation d'une perspective unique: «en précipitant sur le papier l'étroit secteur d'une perspective, je cesse aussi de voir comme un homme, qui est ouvert au monde parce qu'il y est situé.(...) Tout le tableau est dans le mode du révolu ou de l'éternité; tout prend un air de décence et de discrétion; les choses ne m'interpellent plus et je ne suis plus compromis par elles» (LS 62-63). L'artiste qui peint «d'un certain point de station», «l'œil immobile fixé sur un certain 'point de fuite' d'une certaine 'ligne d'horizon', perd, en sacrifiant à la convenance, l'ubiquité qui lui est naturelle: le regard non entravé artificiellement parcourt 'librement la profondeur, la hauteur et la largeur' sans être 'assujéti à un point de vue' parce qu'il les adopte et les rejette tour à tour.

La perspective classique apparaît ainsi comme «l'invention d'un monde dominé». Par bonheur, l'histoire de la peinture montre que le grand artiste échappe à la logique unitaire qu'il croit instaurer: «les visages du portrait classique, toujours au service d'un caractère, d'une passion ou d'une humeur, – toujours signifiants, – les bébés et les animaux de la peinture classique, si désireux d'entrer dans le monde humain, si peu soucieux de le récuser, manifestent le même rapport «adulte» de l'homme au monde, si ce n'est quand, cédant à son bienheureux démon, le grand peintre ajoute une nouvelle dimension à ce monde trop sûr de soi en y faisant vibrer la contingence...» (LS 63).

Le peintre d'aujourd'hui, conscient de la véritable tâche de l'art, vise à provoquer grâce au tableau une expérience perceptive pure, dégagée de la doxa et des concepts qui dénaturent la perception; il ne cherche plus «la présentation objective et convaincante pour *les sens*», «parce que l'expression désormais va de l'homme à l'homme à travers le monde commun qu'ils *vivent*, sans passer par le domaine anonyme des *sens* ou de la Nature» (LS 64). Ainsi l'œuvre, qui n'existe pas en soi comme une chose, invite-t-elle le spectateur «à reprendre le geste qui l'a créée» «sans autre guide qu'un mouvement de la ligne inventée» (LS 64): «Pourquoi, poursuit Merleau-Ponty un peu plus loin, l'expression du monde serait-elle assujétiée à la prose des *sens* ou du concept? Il faut qu'elle soit poésie, c'est-à-dire qu'elle réveille et reconvoque en entier notre pur pouvoir d'exprimer, au-delà des choses déjà dites ou vues» (LS 65). Nous devons donc faire disparaître, pour penser l'art, tout rapport à un individu (contrairement à la théorie de l'expression développée par Malraux): «la

peinture moderne pose un tout autre problème que celui du retour à l'individu: le problème de savoir comment on peut communiquer sans le secours d'une Nature préétablie et sur laquelle nos sens à tous ouvriraient, comment nous sommes entés sur l'universel par ce que nous avons de plus propre.»

Le témoin instituant

Ce que l'artiste possède en propre, «ce n'est pas le soi immédiat, la nuance même du sentir» (LS 65), c'est ce que Merleau-Ponty nomme son «style», et qu'il lui faut conquérir; le style ramène au sujet concret, puisqu'il correspond à un schéma intérieur» (LS 66) et que, comme le suggère une remarque de Malraux, que cette fois Merleau-Ponty reprend à son compte, tel tableau, par exemple *La Chaise* pour Van Gogh, devient «un brutal idéogramme du nom même de Van Gogh». Le style nous ramène à une existence originaire qui chercherait à se saisir et se communiquer par le langage artistique: le schéma intérieur, précise encore Merleau-Ponty, «est cette vie même en tant qu'elle sort de son inhérence, cesse de jouir d'elle-même, et devient moyen universel de comprendre et de faire comprendre, de voir et de donner à voir, –non pas donc renfermé aux tréfonds de l'individu muet, mais diffus dans tout ce qu'il voit» (LS 66).

Le style, et là Merleau-Ponty se sépare de nouveau de Malraux, n'est pas recherché par l'artiste, il est découvert par l'analyste: «le peintre au travail» «est bien trop occupé d'exprimer son commerce avec le monde pour s'enorgueillir d'un style qui naît comme à son insu.» Et un peu plus loin, du style: «il faut le voir apparaître au creux de la perception du peintre comme peintre: c'est une exigence issue d'elle» (LS 67). Le style s'ébauche donc pour l'artiste dès qu'il perçoit, il est ensuite «le système d'équivalences que (le peintre) se constitue pour cette œuvre de manifestation, l'indice universel de la «déformation cohérente» par laquelle il concentre le sens encore épars dans sa perception et le fait exister expressément» (LS 68).

L'artiste est donc toujours ramené à ce commerce initial qui le fascine et le retient: «comment le peintre, demande Merleau-Ponty, ou le poète diraient-ils autre chose que leur rencontre avec le monde?» (LS 70). De fait, pas plus que le peintre classique ne se contente de représenter le monde, le peintre moderne ne cherche à s'exprimer à travers les choses: «quand une zébrure du pinceau remplace la reconstitution en principe complète des apparences pour nous introduire à la laine ou à la chair, ce qui remplace l'objet, ce n'est pas le sujet, c'est la logique allusive du monde perçu» (LS 71). C'est le rapport du sujet au monde qui est l'enjeu du tableau: «la rencontre du regard avec les

choses qui le sollicitent, de celui qui a à être avec ce qui est» (LS 71). Le peintre ne se dit pas: il faut le remettre «au contact de son monde» (LS 72). Il poursuit un travail jamais clos, sans que lui-même «puisse jamais dire, parce que la distinction n'a pas de sens, ce qui est de lui et ce qui est des choses, ce que le nouvel ouvrage ajoute aux anciens, ce qu'il a pris aux autres et ce qui est sien» (LS 73). Le peintre n'est pas devenu le sujet que d'autres sont devenus, il reste toujours soumis à cette «triple reprise»; son attachement aux origines l'incite à opérer une transmutation telle que l'expérience en soit donnée: «c'est ainsi que le monde dès qu'il l'a vu, ses premières tentatives de peinture et tout le passé de la peinture livrent au peintre une *tradition, c'est-à-dire* commente Husserl, *le pouvoir d'oublier les origines* et de donner au passé, non pas une survie qui est la forme hypocrite de l'oubli, mais une nouvelle vie, qui est la forme noble de la mémoire» (LS 74).

L'art occupe une place très particulière puisqu'il est une réponse nostalgique au bonheur des origines alors qu'il ne tombe jamais dans le propos naïf de simple retour aux origines. Il ne s'agit pas de retrouver ce qui a été vraiment présent (280), mais de vivre avec conscience, après avoir reconnu l'illusion qui nous a amenés à méconnaître le sujet concret que nous sommes, ce qui nous rattache à un monde naturel et culturel, à un être et à une tradition. L'artiste fait donc fondamentalement œuvre de mémoire en thématissant un passé qui, sans lui, n'appartiendrait pas au sujet qu'il est devenu. Le noyau fondamental d'une subjectivité non constituante est bien le temps. L'artiste reste toujours le témoin des origines perdues et oubliées (232). Ce témoin est instituant: «si le sujet était instituant, non constituant, on comprendrait (...) qu'il ne soit pas instantané, et qu'autrui ne soit pas seulement le négatif de moi-même. Ce que j'ai commencé à certains moments décisifs ne serait ni au loin, ni dans le passé, comme souvenir objectif, ni actuel comme souvenir assumé, mais vraiment dans l'entre-deux, comme champ de mon devenir pendant cette période. (...) On entendait donc ici par institution ces événements d'une expérience qui la dotent de dimensions durables, par rapport auxquelles toute une série d'autres expériences auront sens, formeront une suite pensable ou une histoire, – ou encore les événements qui déposent en moi un sens, non pas à titre de survivance et de résidu, mais comme appel à une suite, exigence d'un avenir.»¹⁰

¹⁰ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Résumés de cours*, Gallimard, Paris 1968, p. 60/61.

Le style

L'individualité de l'artiste ne peut donc pas être pensée à travers la subjectivation mais contre elle, et telle est la finalité du concept de style: «c'est que le nom de Vermeer et celui de chaque grand peintre en vient à désigner quelque chose comme une institution (...) Une vraie histoire de la peinture devrait rechercher, à travers l'aspect immédiat des toiles dites de Vermeer, une structure, un style, un sens contre lesquels ne peuvent prévaloir, s'il en est, les détails discordants arrachés à son pinceau par la fatigue, la circonstance ou l'imitation de soi-même» (LS 76-77). Certes, il faut s'insurger contre toute idée de peinture objective: ne pas feindre de croire, comme Descartes¹¹, que nous pourrions produire «méthodiquement de parfaites images du monde, une peinture universelle délivrée de l'art personnel, comme la langue universelle nous délivrerait de tous les rapports confus qui traînent dans les langues existantes « Mais il faut également éviter de réduire l'œuvre à une interprétation en termes de personne. Le style vit en chaque peintre comme «la pulsation de son cœur» (LS 78), les œuvres «sont nées de la chaleur d'une vie», elles constituent une réponse à des données très singulières (LS 80), mais si l'artiste met «sa marque» sur les choses, ce n'est pas en tant que sujet, c'est en tant qu'être de perception et de langage. On vit dans «le langage», «le premier dessin aux murs des cavernes ne fondait une tradition que parce qu'il en recueillait une autre: celle de la perception» (LS 87). Un peu plus loin, on lit: «les mots, même dans l'art de la prose, transportent celui qui parle et celui qui les entend dans un univers commun. (...) Cette spontanéité du langage qui nous unit (...) est nous-mêmes avec nos racines, notre poussée et, comme on dit, les fruits de notre travail» (LS 94). Le style permet de passer de l'individuel à l'universel en faisant l'économie du sujet: «l'intimité de toute expression à toute expression, leur appartenance commune à un seul ordre que le premier acte d'expression a institué, réalisent par le fait la jonction de l'individuel et de l'universel, et l'expression, le langage, par exemple, est bien ce que nous avons de plus individuel, en même temps que s'adressant aux autres, il le fait valoir comme universel.»¹²

Nous œuvrons sur un double fond unitaire, celui de la nature et celui de la culture: Merleau-Ponty décèle une «unité du style humain qui rassemble les gestes de tous les peintres en une seule tentative, leurs productions en une seule histoire cumulative, en un seul art. L'unité de la culture étend au-delà

¹¹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *L'œil et l'Esprit*, Gallimard, Paris 1994, p. 44. Les références à cet ouvrage seront précédées de OE.

¹² M. Merleau-Ponty, *La prose du monde*, Gallimard, Paris 1969, p. 120.

des limites d'une vie individuelle le même genre d'enveloppement qui réunit par avance tous les moments de celle-ci à l'instant de son institution ou de sa naissance» (LS 86).

Il faut affirmer que l'artiste rend sensible «l'étoffe commune» dont sont faits «les choses et mon corps» (OE 21), qu'il fait retour sur ce qui scelle notre entente commune: ainsi Cézanne s'intéresse-t-il à «la matière en train de se donner forme, l'ordre naissant par une organisation spontanée»; «nous percevons des choses, nous nous entendons sur elles, nous sommes ancrés en elles et c'est sur ce socle de 'nature' que nous construisons des sciences. C'est ce monde primordial que Cézanne a voulu peindre, et voilà pourquoi ses tableaux donnent l'impression de la nature à son origine»¹³. Il n'est pas contradictoire de penser qu'alors, réalisant une *epoche* qui met en suspens nos habitudes, l'artiste «révèle le fond de nature inhumaine sur lequel l'homme s'installe», ce que Merleau-Ponty désigne encore comme un «monde sans familiarité» (DC 28). Le paradoxe apparent ne tient qu'à des points de vue différents: la familiarité est donnée lorsque l'artiste renonce à la perspective cartésienne pour retrouver une «profondeur» ontologique, lorsqu'il remet le sujet en son corps et ce dernier au monde: «l'interrogation de la peinture vise en tout cas cette genèse secrète et fiévreuse des choses dans notre corps» (OE 30), «la vision du peintre est une naissance continuée» (OE 32). L'inhumanité, elle, apparaît au sujet parlant qui fait la distinction entre l'humain et l'inhumain et découvre dans l'affinité qui le lie au «on» humain, l'étrangeté radicale du monde inanimé.

La peinture a donc au sein des arts une position privilégiée puisqu'elle nous situe au croisement de l'humain et de l'inanimé, entre les deux mondes naturel et social, entre les choses et les hommes. C'est sur ce terrain qu'éclôt peu à peu l'idée de la réversibilité: le paysage, disait Cézanne «se pense en moi et je suis sa conscience» (DC 30), ou encore: «l'énigme tient en ceci que mon corps est à la fois voyant et visible» (OE 18). Toute autre préoccupation pour la peinture lui apparaîtrait comme anecdotique: «la peinture ne célèbre jamais d'autre énigme que celle de la visibilité» (OE 26). Voir n'est donc pas un pouvoir à porter à l'actif d'un sujet: «la vision n'est pas un certain mode de la pensée ou présence à soi: c'est le moyen qui m'est donné d'être absent de moi-même, d'assister du dedans à la fission de l'Être, au terme de laquelle seulement je me ferme sur moi» (OE 81).

¹³ M. Merleau-Ponty, «Le doute de Cézanne», in *Sens et non-sens*, Gallimard, Paris 1963, p. 23. Les références à ce texte seront précédées de (DC).

L'art et la philosophie

De la philosophie à l'art, les apports deviennent indissociables: dans une circularité infrangible, le renouvellement de la théorie de la perception par le philosophe a pour effet de «réinstaller le peintre dans le monde visible et retrouver le corps comme expression spontanée» (LS 81) et la peinture témoigne pour une «profondeur» définie comme «ma participation à un Etre sans restriction» (OE 46); elle cherche la «déflagration de l'Etre» (OE 65). La seule différence entre le philosophe et l'artiste reste la spontanéité de ce dernier, laquelle, à coup sûr, est étrangère au philosophe: «l'art et notamment la peinture puisent à cette nappe de sens brut dont l'activisme ne veut rien savoir. Ils sont même seuls à le faire en toute innocence» (OE 13).

Philosophe et artiste par contre se retrouvent à s'adresser au même interlocuteur: le sujet incarné que chacun recèle en soi. Ce qu'ils visent, c'est l'éveil chez l'interlocuteur d'une mémoire des origines: «un peintre comme Cézanne, un artiste, un philosophe, doivent non seulement créer et exprimer une idée, mais encore réveiller les expériences qui l'enracineront dans les autres consciences» (DC 33). Nostalgique en son impulsion, l'œuvre ne l'est pas dans sa réalisation et ne l'est plus dans son effet, lorsqu'elle opère comme medium d'accès à la mémoire: «alors l'œuvre d'art aura joint ces vies séparées, elle n'existera plus seulement en l'une d'elles comme un rêve tenace ou un délire persistant, ou dans l'espace comme une toile coloriée, elle habitera indivise dans plusieurs esprits, présomptivement dans tout esprit possible, comme une acquisition pour toujours» (DC 34). L'unité de la peinture repose sur l'unicité de la «tâche du peintre» à travers l'espace et le temps (LS 75) et renvoie à une origine commune: c'est à propos du romancier cette fois que Merleau-Ponty écrit: «le romancier tient à son lecteur, et tout homme à tout homme, un langage d'initiés: initiés au monde, à l'univers de possibles que détient un corps humain, une vie humaine» (LS 95).

Le poète peut écrire en son nom et au nom du philosophe «le je qui parle dans mes récits n'est pas une voix personnelle.»¹⁴ Les difficultés éprouvées par Merleau-Ponty à échapper à une philosophie de la conscience, à penser un sujet instituant et une subjectivité réduite à un processus de subjectivation, ont été telles que sa plus grande lucidité se manifesta dans sa pensée de l'art comme espace alternatif de réponse à la nostalgie.

¹⁴ Louis-René des Forêts, *Voies et détours de la fiction*, Fata Morgana, Paris 1985, p. 31-32.

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Ken-ichi Sasaki
The Sexiness of Visuality
A Semantic Analysis of the Japanese Words: Eye and Seeing

0. The Scrutinizing Eye of Modern Western Culture

It is an undeniable fact that visuality dominates modern Western aesthetics. For a start, the crystallization of the modern generic concept of art was made possible by the canonization of visual arts. The notion of »beaux-arts« is symbolic: although art was differentiated from other arts (knowledge and powers of making) by beauty as its differentia, the name »beaux-arts« was and is particularly given to the visual arts.¹ Indeed, the beautiful belongs above all to the eye, as Thomas Aquinas says in his famous formulation.² Aesthetics as philosophy of art that insists on the beautiful implies, therefore, a tendency to promote visuality.

The privileged place of visuality in modern aesthetics is confirmed through some basic concepts of this discipline other than the beautiful. Such concepts as *form, representation, symbol, image, imagination, figure, schema*, etc. are in themselves visual notions. The French word »ouvrage«, which was used at the beginning of modern times for the art work, originally meant architectural construction. The word *expression* also became a technical term in aesthetics, firstly in the field of painting.³

This importance of visuality in modern aesthetics was supported by some other considerations. The first belongs to nature: among the five senses vision is by far the most important and useful for our survival. Living without sight for one hour would probably be more difficult than living without hearing for one day. This does not necessarily mean, however, that vision is also the most important sense for our spiritual and intellectual life: everyone would

¹ Cf. Paul O. Kristeller, »The Modern System of the Arts«, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vols. XII-XIII (1951-52).

² »...we call beautiful things which give pleasure when they are seen«. (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I q. 5 a 4 ad 1, in Wladislaw Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, II, Mouton, The Hague 1970, p. 257.

³ The most basic text on this subject is: Charles Le Brun, *Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière des passions* (1668). Cf. *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, No. 21, printemps 1980.

hesitate to say that a painting is by its own nature more profound than a piece of music or a novel.⁴

There is another reason, peculiar to Western culture, for the predominance of visuality in aesthetics. The catastrophe of the tragedy *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles is often cited as a symbol of the visual inclination that characterizes Western civilization. Oedipus, who, after a zealous pursuit of the murderer of the previous King Laius, discovered the cruel truth concerning his own birth and past, puts out his own eyes. The eye and sight being symbols of human understanding, this act is interpreted as the punishment Oedipus bestows upon his pretentious desire to know. Here, the intellectual side of human nature is identified with the eye which seeks to see everything despite its own weakness. We find a similar action also in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Indeed, in Japanese also, 'eye' signifies by synecdoche insight. But we are unaware of any instance of such a punitive action against the eye in Japanese theater or literature, so that I myself was at first shocked by this theatrical *topos* because of its strange cruelty.

In the third and last place, we must take into consideration the basic tendency of theories of art of the 18th century when modern aesthetics took shape as a philosophical discipline. It was, indeed, a century of painting from the viewpoint of the history of aesthetics, not that of art history. It was painting that theoreticians took as the paradigm of every art: it included literature (Marmontel), theater (Diderot), dance (Noverre), gardening (Girardin) and music (Couperin and Cahusac).⁵ In the 18th century painting was regarded as important because it enables us to experience in a quasi-real manner an imaginative world. Typical is the case of Diderot, a critic of the Salon exhibitions. When looking at a masterpiece, he forgot the fact that he was looking at a painting in a hall of the Louvre and felt as if entering into the painted scene, like moving in its space and joining in the action of the painted characters. His description was not focused upon the surface of the canvas but on the represented world.⁶ He was concerned with that power of involving specta-

⁴ I find the following thought of J.-B. Dubos exceptional: »The sight has a much greater empire over the soul than any of the other senses. ... We may say here, metaphorically speaking, that the eye is nearer to the soul than the ear.« (*Critical Reflections on Poetry and Music*, translated by Th. Muent, vol. I, London 1748. (Reprint: AMS Press, New York 1978), pp. 321-22.)

⁵ Cf. my paper: »Le Dix-huitième siècle comme ère de la peinture«, *XVIIIe Siècle*, No. 27, 1995, pp. 481-502.

⁶ Another Diderot's example of aesthetic experiences of this kind, is the description he gives of the painting of Le Prince entitled *Pastoral Russe*, in *Salons de 1765 (Oeuvres Complètes)*, t. 14, Hermann, Paris 1984, p. 226.

tor, which radiated from the part of the work, that was called its »*intéressant*« or »*intérêt*«. ⁷

This inclination towards visuality was so striking a feature in the aesthetics of the 18th century, that it was natural for the formation of modern aesthetics to be elaborated on that basis. But the kind of involvement found in the writings of Diderot was kept away from the field of art experience by the more recent aesthetics of disinterestedness established by Kant. In his »*Analytic of Aesthetic Judgement*« concerning the beautiful, Kant searches for the conditions of correct judgement. His claim is well known. A genuine aesthetic judgement is one which is given immediately by our feeling of pleasure/displeasure, that is: without any commitment of our »*interest*«, nor mediation of »*concept*«, and independent of any »*emotion*«. Modern visuality was thus purified and sterilized through this notion of aesthetics.

Here in this paper, by means of a semantic analysis of Japanese words, we are going to try to restore to eye and seeing their original impurity and richness: the sexiness of visuality. I am not however thinking of an aestheticized sexiness as described by Roland Barthes:

Different from secondary sexuality, the sexiness of a body (which is not its beauty) inheres in the fact that it is possible to discern (to fantasize) in it the erotic practice to which one subjects it in thought (I conceive of this particular practice, specifically, and of no other). Similarly, distinguished within the text, one might say that there are *sexy sentences*: disturbing by their very isolation, as if they possessed the promise which is made to us, the readers, by a linguistic practice, as if we were to seek them out by virtue of a pleasure. ⁸

It seems to me that this aphorism betrays the limited nature of modern sensibility. Originally, the sexiness of body or sentence must have been an eloquent charm casting a spell over us. Here, on the contrary, it is something 'sought out' and 'discerned' by the delicate sense of a semiotician. We shall now go back to primitive sensibility and rediscover the vigour of visuality in the semantics of the Japanese, which preserves, I think, archaic layers of sensibility.

The main body of this paper is divided into two parts. In the first part, we shall discuss the active character of seeing, so active that it involves all our being in the experiential field. In the second, on the contrary, it is the active

⁷ Cf. my paper: »L'Esthétique de l'intérêt – De d'Aubignac à Sulzer«, *JTLA (Journal of the Faculty of Letters, The University of Tokyo, Aesthetics)*, Vol. 10 (1985), pp. 29-50.

⁸ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, translated by R. Howard, in: *Roland Barthes Reader*, S. Sontag (ed.), Hill & Wang, New York 1982, p. 422.

power of the world which shall be underlined: the dense phenomenon endowed with this strong appeal is also called »eye« in Japanese, just like the visual organ. After these analyses, we shall refer to the specificity of sight among the five senses.

1. *The Gorgons' Eyes*

In Western civilization, the Greek myth of the Gorgons concerns the active power of the eye. It concerns three terrifying maidens who turned into stone anyone who looked upon them. The petrifying power of the Gorgons comes from their eyes,⁹ because the eye is the only organ that can make a psychic assault. Wittgenstein knew this ability of the eye:

We do not see the human eye as a receiver, it appears not to let anything in, but to send something out. The ear receives; the eye looks. (It casts glances, it flashes, radiates, gleams.) One can terrify with one's eyes, not with one's ear or nose. When you see the eye you see something going out from it. You see the look in the eye.¹⁰

If we find our philosopher saying a smart thing, it must come from the fact that we are too much accustomed to a superficially rationalistic manner of thinking to be sensitive to and able to notice the psychic power emanating from the eye, which is taken for a receptive organ. When I read this paragraph for the first time, I felt it to be somewhat forced. In the context of daily life, however, I not only understand this manner of thinking well, but have also lived this situation since the Japanese language (as my intellectual element) incorporates this world view.

In Japanese the verb *miru* (to see) and the noun *me* (eye) have a common root. Seeing is lexically described as an operation of the eye and the eye reciprocally as the organ of seeing. I would therefore like to use the expression »seeing/eye« in order to designate this amalgamated state of seeing and

⁹ Some dictionaries, including *Encyclopedia Americana*, *A Classical Dictionary of Classical Antiquities* (by Seyffert/Nettleship/Sandys) and *An Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, do not explicitly attribute this power to the eye. For example, the *Oxford Companion* says: »The Gorgon's head turned to stone anything that meets its gaze« (my emphasis); »its gaze« being the occasion, the effect comes from her »head«. According to *Der kleine Pauly*, however, the name »Gorgon« means etymologically »schrecklich für Blick und Anblick«.

¹⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (eds.), Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1967, p. 40e.

eye. The Japanese »seeing/eye« is not so dreadful as the eyes of the Gorgons. All the same, the expression implies not receptivity but positive activity. I think we Japanese did not have even the slightest notion of *seeing/eye* as a receptive process before being taught the Western theory of perception. Let me present three basic aspects of *seeing/eye* – experiment, the erotic and physical involvement – through which I shall try to make some general remarks on the influential power of *seeing/eye*.

(A) *Seeing/eye* as experiment

Apart from its use in the plain sense of »to see«, one of the most frequent uses of the verb *miru* is as an auxiliary verb in the sense of »try to«. We have another verb signifying »to try«: *kokoromiru*, which, although so perfectly amalgamated into one word that we ordinarily do not think of decomposing it, is in fact made from two words: *kokoro* (»heart« or »mind«) and *miru*. We can hence gloss it as follows: »to try« is conceived in Japanese as effectuating something in order to »see« the result in the »mind«; in short, it concerns mental experiment. This meaning is originally imported into the verb *miru* (to see) itself in its above mentioned use as an auxiliary verb. In this case, the main verb joined to *miru* must be given in its perfective aspect. For example, »Disney land e itte-miru« (word by word: »to Disney-land/have gone/see« in the sense of »try to visit Disney-land«), which, putting a stress on the perfective aspect, I may gloss as: »try anyway to visit Disney-land in order to see with one's own eyes how it is (or would have been) in fact«.

We Japanese use very often this *miru* phrase, which seems to betray a particular side of our mentality. We seem to like to do something tentatively in order to see the result afterwards, much more than to make first of all a detailed examination and judgement in order to do it well. This is at least what the *miru* phrase implies. In this phrase, strictly speaking, the moment of trial belongs to the perfective aspect of the verb joined to *miru*; *miru*, on the contrary, expresses the judgement given to the result of that trial. In fact, however, I prefer to think that the perfective aspect of the main verb is rather claimed by the auxiliary verb *miru* which has another sense of »having a real experience«. Wishing a judgement to be based upon a real experience, we choose first of all to effectuate it until it is ended. Let us examine an example in an old short poem:

Shinobu-yama, shinobite kayou michi-mo gana,
hito-no kokoro-no oku-mo miru beku.

(Just as the name of Mount Shinobu [to hide oneself, or to endure] suggests, I should like to have a secret path leading to your house in order to reach the depths of your heart.)

This poem (my emphasis) is woven into the *Tale of Ise* (Section 15) which combines this kind of short poem with short love stories, all attributed to a single hero Narihira, the famous playboy-poet.¹¹ The scene is a northern Province very far from the capital. On his journey Narihira meets a beautiful woman, the ill-matched wife of a country-man. He sends her this love poem. In it, »to see (*miru*) the depths of her heart« means »to know it«; connoting »through their sexual relation«. Interesting is the phrase following the poem in the *Tale of Ise* which describes the reaction of the woman, since we find there a contrast between *miru* and *omou* (= think, consider, believe, judge etc.). The woman finds (*omou*) it extremely pleasing, but, being afraid that Narihira, coming from the Capital, would see (*miru*) her heart as so rustic, she could not send him back her answer. Here both *omou* and *miru* concern a cognition, but not of the same form. *Omou* designates a judgement made on the love poem. So she keeps a certain distance from the object of her *omoi* (= nominal form of *omou*); in fact, *omou* and *omoi* imply a free space for the mind to move around. Her thought (*omoi*) is, therefore, more or less disinterested and aesthetic. By contrast, she lacks completely this kind of composure in her fear that the playboy from the capital would see (*miru*) her rustic mind. Her fear is concerned with the knowledge that the man seeks to advance a relation with this woman, and from which the woman is anxious to keep her rustic mind. In short, when *miru* signifies not a simple visual perception but a cognition, it concerns one which involves our existence. It is exactly this implication that makes it possible for *miru* to mean »try to«.

(B) The erotic meaning of *seeing*

The example given above has already suggested the connection of *miru* (to see) with the erotic – »to see (*miru*) the depths of her heart« presupposes a sexual relation. Indeed, the verb *miru* not only presupposes but also sometimes means »to enter into the relation of man and woman« in ancient or medieval Japanese.¹² Japanese *miru* was also used to mean just »to see a person«,¹³ and in its form as a »spontaneous verb«¹⁴ *mieru* (or *miyu*) can signify »someone appears/comes«. Japanese seeing hence privileges the personal

¹¹ Poet of the 9th century, famous for his handsomeness and many love affairs. *Tale of Ise* is one of the »*uta monogatari*«, stories constructed on the basis of poems. Most of the linguistic and the literary materials are taken from: *Nohon Kokugo Daijiten (Grand Dictionary of Japanese)*, 10 vols., Shogakkan Publisher, Tokyo 1972-76.

¹² The English phrase »Jack is seeing Betty« can imply that they are sleeping together. But it concerns not a lexical meaning but a figurative meaning. A figurative manner of speech represents a particular way of understanding of its subject person, and not that of people as such.

relation: the sexual relation is its extreme case. We have nowadays lost this use except in a few compound words like: *misomeru* (v. literally first to see: to fall in love at first sight) and *miai* (n. literally seeing one another: arranging a meeting of a man and a woman in view of their marriage). It was, however, very frequently used in ancient and medieval times in certain situations. Here again, I choose an example of *miru* used with *omu*. I find such a phrase in the first chapter of the *Tale of Genji*. I shall give it first in the English translation made by Seidensticker, and shall then try more literally to translate the original text. According to Seidensticker's translation, »Fujitsubo was for him (= Genji) a vision of sublime beauty. If he could have someone like her...«. ¹⁵ Genji is a young Prince, about twelve years old and just married, who will be an outstanding playboy as the hero of the novel. Fujitsubo is a Princess of the former Emperor and all the people of the court find her looking very much like the dead mother of Genji who begins to yearn for her. I will now translate more literally the same part of the text:

Genji thought in his mind (*omou*) that Fujitsubo's figure was unequaled, and wished to see (*miru*) such a woman as her...

Here, indeed *miru* means »to have a love relation with someone«. And this love relation is a real one, differentiated from the institutional relation of marriage. So when Genji wishes to *see* her, his aspiration goes beyond mere seeing to touching and holding her, and even further. It is a euphemistic synecdoche. Being, however, a lexical item, it reflects a way of feeling peculiar to the people. In other words, this »part« which is *miru* (to see) contains a dynamism expanding to a »totality« (love relation).

(C) Seeing/eye involving the whole person

We have now demonstrated that in seeing/eye we meet with the world or see someone *directly, in person*, and get an otherwise unattainable cognition of *the depth* of the world or mind. Eye is the place where this condensed

¹³ As we shall see later, modern Japanese uses different verb for »see an object/scene etc.« (*miru*) and for »see a person« (*au*).

¹⁴ Japanese grammar adopts the Western terms of »transitive verb« and »intransitive verb«, but the concepts are different. In the grammar of Western languages, these notions are defined in terms of syntax: »transitive verb« is a verb that takes a direct object; »intransitive« is one without a direct object. In Japanese grammar, on the contrary, these notions are defined in terms of the mode of action: hence an »intransitive verb« describes a spontaneous act.

¹⁵ Murasaki-Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, translated by E. G. Seidensticker, vol. 1, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1977, p. 18.

experience happens, and »to see« designates this activated state of mutual communication we have with the world or another person. Seeing as power is in fact quite a familiar phenomenon. The Japanese expression »*me de korosu* (to kill with the eye)« corresponds exactly to the English idiom »the killing eye«. And another one, »*me-ni mono iwasu* (word by word: to the eye/something/let say = »let the eye transmit a message)« compounds to the similar notion of »the eloquent eye« in Western languages. Let me quote here three sets of examples.

The English idiom »to have an eye for something« (for example painting) concerns the power of the eye as insight; in Japanese, we say »*miru me ga aru* (word by word: seeing/eye/have = »have an eye which has insight)«. Typical is the case of a doctor who »*kanja-o miru* (= sees the patient)«. As in modern Japanese we do not use the verb *miru* (to see) in the sense of »to see someone«, but the verb »*au*«, this turn of the phrase »to see the patient« is striking. The expressive use of the verb *miru* seems to underline the active aspect of the doctor's examination. I find the most impressive description of the penetrating power of the eye in a proverbial expression: »*Gankô shihai ni tessuru.*« (= »The rays of the eye pierce the sheet to its backside.) *Gankô* (the rays of the eye) means the penetrating insight, and the phrase speaks of the insight of an excellent reader sufficiently penetrating as to catch the hidden meaning of the text (or to read between the lines).

As for the second set of examples, I find the most straightforward way of expressing the active power of the eye in the interjection »*Me!*«, which is used to put a stop to an act, generally addressed to a child with a gentle staring expression. It is so familiar an expression that we no longer notice in it the meaning of eye, although it is in fact the same word as »eye«. I even feel in it something like a spell, for it was the primitive mind that cast a spell from the eye in pronouncing the interjection »*Me!*« As to the magic power of the seeing/eye, I should like to call attention to the compound verb »*mi-iru*« (literally: »seeing-enter«). Generally, this verb is glossed as »seeing-in«. But we have another gloss which relates this seeing-in with the stem »*mi*« meaning »spectre«, so that the verb is understood as implying »to possess, or to charm«. I think we have here the most archaic layer of the semantics of the word »seeing«.

The last set of examples, concerns a very peculiar expression: »~*me-o miru* (word by word: to see such and such an eye = to have such and such an experience)«. Here »to see such and such an eye« does not mean »to look someone straight in the eyes«. The »eye« signifies here not the visual organ but the existential situation. Hence seeing and the eye designate an existential experience. Of prime importance here is the fact that when we use this

phrase it always concerns a very intense experience. In general, it is a difficult one: »*uki-me-o miru* (to have a very sad experience)«, »*tsurai-me-o miru* (to have a painful experience)«, and »*kakaru-me-o miru* (to have such an experience = to have such a 'hard' experience)«. We occasionally encounter a positive case: »*yoi-me-o miru* (to have a good experience = to have an extraordinarily happy experience)«. These formulations signify, therefore, an exceptionally intense experience.

With this last case, we have already entered into the problematics of the second part of the paper, for we are not concerned with our own perceiving eye but with the eye which encounters or even attacks us. It is not the plain metaphor based upon the similarity of shape such as »the eye of the storm« or »the eye of a needle«. It is difficult to form an image of this eye situation: I interpret this expression as a projection of the notion of the seeing/eye as a dense experience to the aspect of the world which brings us such experiences.

2. Eye of the World

Seeing/eye is located within a dense phenomenon which we experience. As far as we dominate the object, we can say that we look at it. But when the object or the world becomes overwhelming, the situation becomes inverted: we are now looked at by it. This is exactly what Merleau-Ponty sought to describe, calling on a painter to testify:

Inevitably the roles between him (the painter) and the visible are reversed. That is why so many painters have said that things look at them. As André Marchand says, after Klee: »In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me... I was there, listening... I think that the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it... I expect to be inwardly submerged, buried. Perhaps I paint to break out.« We speak of »inspiration«, and the word should be taken literally. There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that it becomes impossible to distinguish between what sees and what is seen, what paints and what is painted.¹⁶

According to the archaic sensibility evidenced in the Japanese vocabulary, not only painters but everyone was aware of such a mutual communica-

¹⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, »Eye and Mind«, translated by Carleton Dallery, in Harold Osborne (ed.), *Aesthetics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1972, p. 63.

tion with the world, resulting in an exceptionally intense experience. But how is it possible to represent the density of an experience or a situation as an eye? To tell the truth, it is difficult even for someone like me for whom the Japanese language is his native tongue to have an image of this »eye«: Japanese speaking people in general take the *me* of »uki-me-o miru« as a completely different word from the *me* of eye. But I wish to interpret it as eye. In order to do so, I begin with another ancient poem, sung by a Prince for his mother the Empress, who has just died:

*Kimi-ga-me-o, koishiki-kara-ni, htete ite,
kakuya koimu-mo kimi-ga me-o hori.*

(Longing for your eyes, I have spent the night here with you:
it is out of the desire for your eyes that I love you so.)¹⁷

The love of the poet for his dead mother is focussed on her eyes so that he even says he loves her because of her eyes. Needless to say the poet loves all of his mother and not just her eyes; only, to see her in person is naturally represented with a special connection to the image of the eyes. Merleau-Ponty talks of the »inspiration and expiration of Being«; I prefer here to speak of »dilatation of being«. For the consciousness of the poet, the eye of his mother dilates its being so as to cover her entire being. Eye has, thus, a privileged quality as the dilating power of being. The Japanese language stresses this so as to establish lexicographically that the dilated being in someone's experience is called *me* (eye). This is the above mentioned case of »uki-me-o miru« or »yoi-me-o miru«.

Now if I may enter onto unsure ground, I should like to refer to the etymological opinion which relates the »me« as eye to »me« as a »bud«. This opinion is plausible not only because of the similarity of their shapes, but also because a »bud« shows typically the dilatation of being, or becoming or change. If we may thus relate the eye to becoming or with a changing phenomenon, we can also explain another type of use of the word *me* such as in »shini-me«, »ochi-me« and »kawari-me«. According to our dictionary, in this group *me* means a critical situation, but there is no further explanation. For example, »shini-me (me of dying)« refers to the last minutes or hours when someone is dying; »ochi-me (me of falling)« is declining luck; »kawari-me (me of changing)« is the turning point, for example of a season. These uses of *me* resemble those of »uki-me« or »yoi-me« because they designate a situation. But unlike the *me* of

¹⁷ My emphasis. The poem appears in *Nihon Shoki*, one of the most ancient in Japanese history. The mother-Empress is Saimei-Tenno (594-661), who died in Kyūshū, far from the capital, and the Prince went to Kyūshū in order to accompany the body of his mother.

»uki-me« or »yoi-me«, they cannot be used with the verb *miru* (to see). This use of *me* with *miru* underlines the close connection of those situations to the subject person: it concerns his/her own situation. On the contrary, our more recent *me* such as »shini-me«, »ochi-me« and »kawari-me« which cannot be used with the verb *miru* (to see) represents an objective situation.

I can conceive with little difficulty this *me* as a becoming or a changing phenomenon in terms of visuality, because it hits us between the eyes, though it concerns not our seeing/eye but the striking phenomenon. I think that now we have access to our last set of *me* examples such as »ori-me« (»ori« is »to fold«; crease, fold), »kiri-me« (»kire« is »to be cut«; rift, gap, pause), »sakai-me« (»sakai« is »border«, »boundary«, »frontier« or borderline). It no longer concerns a situation but the line differentiating two areas. Nevertheless, we might designate it as a certain critical situation; the objective *me* (eye) indicates a changing and critical situation that catches the eye.

3. Vision Among the Five Senses

We have examined the Japanese seeing/eye in two respects: the first is that of experiences called *miru* (to see), and the second concerns *me* (eye), not seeing but the seen one which refers to a certain situation. We also encountered an intermediate case »~me-o miru« (to see such and such an eye = to have such and such an experience). Summarizing these analyses, we can say that *miru* (to see) is characterized by the intensity of an experience affecting directly our existence, so that *me* (eye) is also attributed to our experience or even projected into some situations when these experiences or situations show a critical character or a somehow condensed meaning.

Most remarkable in this semantic analysis is the intensity of the amalgamation of the subject and the world, including the projection of the *me* (eye) into the world. The fact is all the more striking since vision as well as hearing are remote perceptions, unlike smell, taste and the sense of touch. The case of taste is suggestive. The English word as well as the equivalents in other Western languages were taken as basic technical terms in modern aesthetics signifying the faculty of aesthetic judgement. It was especially the reflexive and appreciative way of functioning peculiar to taste that was underlined in this use. The word taste is furthermore used to designate the stylistic character of an art work. This double use as faculty and style¹⁸ corresponds to the

¹⁸ Taste as a faculty was based upon a »good taste«, which referred to the taste of the period of the Louis XIV. Cf. Trübners *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, art. »Geschmack«, vol. 3, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin 1939, p. 128 b.

fact that taste is a contact sense: we cannot distinguish clearly the subject and the object. From the viewpoint of the subject-object relation in vision and taste, what we have discovered above in the Japanese words seeing/eye appears paradoxical: how is it possible for a remote perceptive sense such as vision to achieve an intense fusion of subject and object?

The answer to this question is simple: it is the intense experience which fuses the subject with a distant object in the case of vision. On the contrary, the subject-object fusion in taste is simply based on the physical fact of contact and not on the power of the object. On this point I find the Japanese lexicon very suggestive: Japanese has no special verb taking the name of food as a subject of phrase in the meaning of »having the taste of«, unlike for the other four senses.¹⁹ We have just one verb »*ajiwau*« (to taste) for the sense of taste which indicates the act or attitude of a person. The fact that modern Western aesthetics adopted taste as one of the basic notions is symbolic: it was not the power of the object but the appreciative attitude of person which was the basic element for this aesthetic. It is unsurprising that under such influence people have forgotten the primitive vividness of visuality.

¹⁹ The intransitive (spontaneous) verb of the four other senses are: *mieru* (sight), *kikoeru* (hearing), *kaoru/niou* (smell), and *sawaru* (touch).

Richard Shusterman
Urban Scenes and Unseens

I

Celebrated already in Plato and Aristotle, the city seems a symbolic solution to one of philosophy's most central problems – the many and the one. This problem is at once metaphysical and epistemological, as well as ethical, political and aesthetic: the unity of substance in change, of truth in the manifold of appearance, of the self in plurality of action, of the unified polis with its many citizens and households, of beauty as unity in variety. The city symbolizes the embracing of multiplicity and diversity within a single unit, often concretely represented by their collection within city walls. Rather than dividing the city (as in Berlin), such encompassing walls aimed at asserting the city's integrity as a clear unit with definite limits, distinct from the indefinite sprawl of the surrounding countryside. The Greeks saw definite limits as essential to the values of clarity, rationality, and beautiful form. But when modern urbanization overwhelmed the old city-walls, the charm and power of the cities was not thereby destroyed. For romantic thought intervened to privilege the infinite and unlimited. Though poets like Blake and Wordsworth attacked the city (in their poems on »London«) for its grimy grid of oppressive political limits, the small-minded greed of narrow »chartered« streets in contrast to Nature's vast bounty, the city could nonetheless be valorized as a site of unlimited growth, endless activity, boundless variety, and infinite possibilities. Logically, a town or village would lose its status by growing too large and thus becoming a city. But the city, at least in principle, knows no limits to growth and variety.

All the world, it seemed, could be experienced in the single city. Its dense wealthy population enabled the bringing of even the most remotely produced and costly products to the city shops and museums. Too vast and varied to be captured or viewed from a single main street or square, the city's promise of ever new discoveries through its seemingly endless web of streets, set the *flâneur* in constant motion. Huge parks and zoos provided the modern metropolis with varieties of even country and jungle life, while urban commuter trains showed that the city could also allow its residents to travel extensively without ever having to leave the city at all. Circumscribed infinity is a

powerful, though paradoxical image. So thoughtful theorists of city life, like Georg Simmel, insist that part of the city's distinctive liberating power is in transcending its physical boundaries, thus providing not only a means but a symbol of boundless freedom.

It is not only the immediate size of the area and the number of persons which ... has made the metropolis the locale of freedom. It is rather in transcending this visible expanse that any given city becomes the seat of cosmopolitanism. ... The sphere of life of the small town is, in the main, self-contained and autarchic ... The most significant characteristic of the metropolis is the functional extension beyond its physical boundaries.¹

Simmel's solution to the logical problem of city-infinity is thus by appeal to what is absent from the physical site with which the city is identified and has its center; it is only »in transcending this visible expanse that any given city becomes the seat of cosmopolitanism« (ibid.).

Urbanists like Simmel were, however, not concerned with the logic of infinity. They were preoccupied by the concrete problems resulting from city plenty, where overwhelming quantities of people, products, and activities could overstrain and endanger the very quality of human experience, of personal and social life. This painful paradox of more meaning less is a leitmotif in urban criticism from Friedrich Engels, through Baudelaire, Valéry, Simmel, Benjamin, and Mumford, and still extending into the postmodern hip-hop of Grandmaster Flash, whose 1983 classic »New York, New York« bears the blunt refrain: »Too much, too many people, too much!«

Such critics did not deplore the multitudinous variety of city life per se; they relished it. What they instead attacked was the threat of disorientating, dehumanizing, shocking chaos (symbolized by the formless crowd) which resulted from the enormous urban bustle of quantities, complexities, and diversities overwhelming our human powers of assimilation. In Benjamin's terms we thus have the fragmented shock of *Erlebnis*, something lived through, rather than the funded, ordered, convergent assimilation of experience. The urbanist's aim is not to decrease the rich bustling variety of city life, but to order it so that it would no longer be threateningly overwhelming and unmanageable. The problem, then, is one of *Ordnung*, as other German urbanists would concur.

Friedrich Engels, for example, marvelled at London's vastness and achievements but found »the bustle of the streets« »distasteful« and »abhor-

¹ George Simmel, »The Metropolis and Mental Life«, *The Sociology of George Simmel*, Free Press, New York 1950, p. 419.

rent to human nature« through its lack of structuring social relations. The only redeeming relation, he (perhaps ironically) notes, is a tacit one of ordered non-contact: »that everyone should keep to the right of the pavement, so as not to impede the stream of people moving in the opposite direction.«²

Developing the ancient trope that contrasted the city as developed *mind* to the less conscious, more corporeal country *body*, Simmel regarded the complex multiplicities and sensory intensities of city life as the stimulus that necessitated »a heightened awareness and predominance of intelligence in metropolitan man«. To protect his psyche, he »reacts with his head instead of his heart«, with intellectual order rather than spontaneous feeling. Though this weakens affective social bonds, it is a »necessity ... brought about by the aggregation of so many people with such differentiated interests, who must integrate their relations and activities into a highly complex organism«. Otherwise, Simmel warns, »the whole structure would break down into an inextricable chaos«.

What would such a nightmare be, for Simmel the urban *Ordner*? »If all clocks and watches in Berlin would suddenly go wrong in different ways, even if only by an hour, all economic life and communication of the city would be disrupted for a long time ... [and] long distances would make waiting and broken-appointments result in an ill-afforded waste of time.« »Metropolitan life« he concludes (with apparent disregard of Naples, Marseille, or Marrakech) »is unimaginable without the most punctual integration of all activities and mutual relations into a stable and impersonal time schedule« (412-13).

This means suppressing the individual's personal inclinations which threaten the clockwork unity of the whole: Hence »the exclusion of those irrational, instinctive, sovereign traits and impulses which aim at determining the mode of life from within, instead of receiving the general and precisely schematized form of life from without« (412-13). Yet despite this impersonal order, the city for Simmel remains the site of the greatest »personal freedom« and »personal subjectivity«; indeed it becomes so through the very factors that necessitate its impersonality (413, 415). The deepest principle of order that permits this paradox, one which Simmel only faintly recognizes and fails to name, is the economy of absence, which also underlies the urban aesthetics of Benjamin and Baudelaire.

Before considering how the ordering economy of absence works in their theories, let me note its role in American urbanist Lewis Mumford, whose

² Friedrich Engels, *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*, cited in Walter Benjamin, »On Some Motifs in Baudelaire« in *Illuminations*, Schocken, New York 1988, p. 167.

vision of the city can be usefully contrasted with Simmel's.³ Mumford's »principles of urban order« insist on picturing the city in more humanly biological, affectively social, and aesthetic terms. Rather than Simmel's view of the city as »a social-technical mechanism« with its model of mechanical clockwork unity and its images of »punctuality, calculability, and exactness« suggesting that social connections are best modeled on rigid, time-efficient train connections (409, 413), Mumford speaks of an anti-mechanical »bio-technic« approach emphasizing the dynamic »flexibility« of »organic plans« that can better cope with change so as »to create a new biological and social environment in which the highest possibilities of human existence will be realized« (381, 478, 492). This is symbolized by the dynamic unity of aesthetic experience.

The city, he argues, is »an esthetic symbol of collective unity«; it not only fosters art by creating a complex, demanding stage for personal expression (as Simmel also notes) but the city also »is art« (480, 492). As art is communicatively social, »social needs are primary in urban planning; rather than the physical plant or transport system, »the social nucleus [is] the essential element in every valid city plan: the spotting and inter-relationships of schools, libraries, theatres, community centres« (483). If the traditional undifferentiated social bonds of the small town are lost, one should seek a more multi-form cable through the weaving of partially linking bonds to produce »a more complex and many-colored strand«. Urban planning's aesthetic »aim is the adequate dramatization of communal life« so that individual and group activity become more meaningful (481, 485).

Whatever the practical viability of Mumford's program, certain interesting conclusions are suggested by the logic of his biological and aesthetic metaphors. First, life and aesthetic experience imply the need for change and conflict as well as harmony. Without space for change and conflict, there can be no human growth nor aesthetic drama. The flawless regularity of clockwork mechanism does not provide this; its smooth-running harmony would stultify. The planning of urban aesthetic unity thus requires its spots of absence: its disharmonious conflicts its disruptions, what today Richard Sennett calls its »discontinuity and disorientation«. ⁴ As pragmatist and postmodern, I would add that the city, like art and life, also needs spots of contingency, absences of the planned and predetermined, gaps for us to interpret and fill with significance.

Another conclusion to be drawn from analogy with biological organ-

³ Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, Harcourt Brace, New York 1971.

⁴ Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*, Knopf, New York 1990, p. 225.

isms and artworks is the limitation of city size. Deploring the bloated, suburb-swallowing megalopolis, Mumford insists that good city life requires respecting and nurturing what lies outside it. This absence is essential to the city not simply as structuring other and breathing space, but as source of new resources, different attitudes and ways of life that can both challenge city ideas and enrich them through incorporation. Mumford's key unit of planning is not simply the city but the region, in which the city functions as a nucleus which respects its limits, neither overwhelming the space nor functions of its environing cell. Even within the city, Mumford advocates functional gaps or absences to balance density. Hence rather than an urbanism of dense, centralized spreading, he favors a poly-nucleated city of distributed functions that involves spacing and gaps. In urbanism as in regionalism, Mumford calls this logic »spotting«; and it suggests the functional play of presence and absence that gives life greater meaning and aesthetic power, while also making it more manageable.⁵

⁵ Another crucial use of absence as a tool of order for coping with urban complexities should here be mentioned: the use of empty forms or matrices as a way of organizing, rationalizing, and so better managing the city's variety and complex flux. The rectangular street-grid is one such empty form for ordering; so is the individual street format, so salient in Berlin, of parallel strips respectively devoted to the pedestrian, the cyclist, the dog in need of a line of trees to do his business, and the motorist lanes for parking and travel. This format of empty, parallel ordering strips defining the types of movement and their limits can also be seen in the layout of concentration camps like Sachsenhausen with the distinctions between prisoner walking space (including a lane marked for the work of testing shoe durability through ceaseless walking), the »no man's land« danger strip, and the wall and patrol areas.

Richard Sennett, who notes the city grid's »logic of emptiness«, relates it to the temporal emptiness of mechanical time »an empty volume« through which time could be made objective and visual thus allowing diverse activities to be more easily ordered. Like Simmel he sees the invention of the mechanical clock in the Renaissance as central to the emergence of the modern metropolis, and he remarks that often old buildings were torn down so as to allow distant vision of the city's central clocks (Sennett, 176-180). Here, as it were, an abstract form of absence creates a concrete one.

This seems a good occasion to insist that in describing the varieties of absence and its uses in urban life, I am not insisting that there is any substantive essence common to them all or that there must be a fixed meaning to the concept of absence for it to be usefully used in theoretical discourse like mine.

II

Absence as a tool for urban coping centrally structures Simmel's case for the unmatched personal freedom of city life, though his argument lacks clarity and stumbles in many details. One major axis of argument is that urban freedom comes through greater intellectualism. Modern urban life is praised for sharpening mental faculties and higher consciousness, because this is required for coping with the greater »intensification of nervous stimulation« resulting from the city's distinctive richness of sensory stimuli, jolts, and irregularities. But don't we also find this jostling overload of stimuli in a bedouin camel market, a suburban amusement park, or a savage jungle – the paradigmatic trope of the fearful complexity and sudden, violent jolts of city life? Moreover, if dealing with complexities of vivid sensory stimuli helps improve our mental powers, why then should Simmel posit perfectly smooth-functioning order posited as the ideal of city organization? Wouldn't its realization dull the minds of city dwellers? Whose consciousness is lower than the urban subway rider, who in daily hypnotic habit takes the same train and makes the same connection, whose disciplined habit of muscle memory leads him mindlessly *to* work just as an assembly line could lead him mindlessly through it?

Leaving these troubling questions aside, we note that Simmel describes the higher urban consciousness in two related ways. First, by curbing »irrational, instinctive ... impulses« and »emotional relations«, it constitutes a more intellectual attitude of »calculability«, »exactness«, and »quantitative« values that Simmel relates not only to the system of money but to »the universal diffusion of pocket watches« (411-13). Secondly, urban mentality is characterized as »the blasé attitude«. This attitude, which Simmel says is »unconditionally reserved to the metropolis«, results from the same »rapidly changing and closely compressed contrasting stimulations of the nerves« that promote cold urban intellectualism. The nerves are so spent that they fail »to react to new sensations with the appropriate energy«; »the essence of the blasé attitude consists in the bluntness of discrimination ... the meaning and differing values of things and thereby the things themselves, are experienced as insubstantial. They appear to the blasé person in an evenly flat and gray tone; no one object deserves preference over any other« (414).

Here again Simmel seems confused. First, physiologically speaking, contrasting stimulations tire and blunt the nerves far less than sustained identical sensations. More importantly, the blasé type attitude of levelling indifference can be found outside the bustling sensorium of the metropolis. In fact, one classic site for its emergence is the empty desert. As an intelligence officer

long stationed in the Sinai, I had to alert myself and my soldiers to this danger, diagnosed by the Israeli medical corps as »apathia«. The term is instructive: absence of feeling, absence of affective investment, leads to lack of discrimination; we do not see or react to differences because we simply don't care; we mentally withdraw ourselves in pathological disinterest; we are absent.

For us reluctant desert dwellers, absence of affective investment derived from the absence of things to care about in the landscape. But in the metropolis, the absence of feeling in the blasé attitude becomes a necessary withdrawal of feeling, since there are too many people, products, and activities to which our heart would instinctively turn. (Just think of the dozens of beggars or buskers that one must learn to coldly pass by in everyday city life.) This protective taking of distance, of affective absence, is the deep logic common to Simmel's urban intellectualism and *Blasiertheit*.

Such absence also constitutes the mechanism of Simmel's other main argument for the greater personal freedom of city life: the dissolution of traditionally strong social bonds which, though constructing and empowering the individual, also greatly constrain him. The wider circle of urban life involves too many different people in too many different, quickly changing relationships for the forming of strong affective bonds with fellow residents to be psychologically healthy or even possible. Hence, an attitude Simmel calls »reserve« and »indifference« arises, which frees the urbanite from social obligations of courteous concern (and socially entrenched prejudices) that centripetally »hem in« the narrower circle of »small-town« life. This reserved attitude, argues Simmel, is »never felt more strongly« than in the individual's »independence [and loneliness] ... in the thickest crowd of the big city ... because the bodily proximity and narrowness of space make the mental distance only the more visible«, and psychically necessary (418). This withdrawal of the self through mental distance underlies the crucial point of urban absence I have been stressing: its redemptive role in coping with the bursting saturation of city presence, a cure not immune from possible unhappy side-effects – as the threat of urban loneliness and callousness makes clear.

Absence is also the motivating fulcrum of Simmel's final argument for the personal freedom of urban life. Having robbed the individual of traditionally subjective spontaneity, affective impulse, and personally meaningful social bonds, the overwhelming organization of city life threatens the utter extinction of personality, reducing the individual (in Simmel's words) to a »*quantité négligeable*«, a »mere cog« in the enormous municipal machine. Spurred by this personal void and fear of total nullity, the individual responds by »summoning the utmost in uniqueness and particularization, in order to

preserve his most personal core« (422). The modern metropolis thus provokes a new model of personal freedom: not mere individual independence from oppressive social bonds, but »the elaboration of individuality« as »qualitative uniqueness« so as to survive the conformist pressure of city crowds where individuality and qualitative difference are drowned (423).

We see here the Baudelairean figures of the *dandy* and *flâneur* who try to defy the utilitarian uniformity of urban life. For Walter Benjamin and his political vision of the »streets ... as the dwelling place of the collective«, the *flâneur* is especially important in defining himself not only against but *through* the conformist crowd and the city streets they share. Benjamin is more careful than Baudelaire to distinguish the *flâneur* from »the man of the crowd«. Resisting the »manic behavior« of »metropolitan masses« hectically bent on their practical pursuits, the *flâneur* distances himself from the crowd by his absence of practical purpose and urgency. He demands his »leisure« and »elbow room«, so as not to be »jostled« and overwhelmed by the crowd. But in contrast to provincials and fastidious aristocrats, the *flâneur* could also enjoy »the temptation to lose himself« in the crowd, to savor a momentary absence of selfhood's pressures.⁶ Linked to the crowd yet somehow absent from it, the *flâneur* is like the streets of Baudelaire's verse whose beauty derives from suggesting the crowd yet providing a deserted expanse for free movement and exploration. The same strategy of aesthetic absence can be seen in those photos of Prague's enchanting empty streets, whose magic dissolves once the streets are actually brimming with the city's swarming crowds.

Neither at home in the bustling crowd nor »in an atmosphere of complete leisure«, the *flâneur* of Benjamin is characterized by being essentially »out of place« (172-3). This absence of proper place or purpose keeps him moving through the city streets, resisting the seductive presences that could arrest him, driving him on toward the ever more distant places and possibilities that the metropolis promises endlessly to offer. Consider the defining absences in the following description of Benjaminian *flânerie* from the *Passagen-Werk*:

An intoxication comes over the person who trudges through the streets for a long time and without a goal. The going wins a growing power with every step, Ever narrower grow the seduction of the stores, the bistros, the smiling women; ever more irresistible the magnetism of the next street corner, a distant mass of foliage, a street name. Then comes the hunger. He desires to know nothing of the hundred possibilities to still it. Like an ascetic animal, he strides

⁶ Walter Benjamin, »On Some Motifs in Baudelaire«, pp. 162, 172-3.

through unknown quarters until finally in his room, which strange to him, lets him in coldly, he collapses into the deepest exhaustion.⁷

Absence of goal, a preference for the unseen »next street corner« and »distant mass of foliage« over those present to hand, direct the *flâneur's* movement; the mere »name« of a street, signaling new spaces to explore, thus draws him more than the actual charms of stores, bistros, and women on the present street. The *flâneur's* defining hunger marks the presence of an absence that he does not wish to fill, for it provides its own intoxication; so does his lack of reassuring knowledge of the »unknown quarter« of his *flânerie* as well as his ever waning energy. Even his own room is defined by the absence of familiarity and warmth that characterize one's home.

If Benjamin's *flâneur* seems a modern symbol for the mythical utopian quester, searching the nocturnal urban wasteland for a vision of an ideal city forever unseen but ever inspiring, we must ask if this figure is by now as altogether dated and *aufgehoben* as Benjamin's Paris. Does the unseen still hold the aura of utopian promise or merely offer a relief from the painful ugliness of the city seen.

⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1983, vol. 1, p. 525.



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Johan Snyman
Suffering and the Politics of Memory *

1. The social function of the war memorial

What is the function of public art in society? What is the role of war monuments and war memorials? According to Arthur C. Danto, there are »tacit rules that govern the distinction between monuments and memorials« (Danto, 1987: 115), and which amount to the following:

We erect monuments so that we shall always remember, and build memorials so that we shall never forget. ... Monuments commemorate the memorable and embody the myths of beginnings. Memorials ritualize remembrance and mark the reality of ends. The Washington Monument, vertical, is a celebration, like fireworks. The Lincoln Memorial, even if on a rise, presses down and is a meditation in stone. Very few nations erect monuments to their defeats, but many set up memorials to the defeated dead. Monuments make heroes and triumphs, victories and conquests, perpetually present and part of life. The memorial is a special precinct, extruded from life, a segregated enclave where we honor the dead. With monuments we honor ourselves (*ibid.*, 112).

The fact that in the post-war Federal Republic of Germany (and even in the German Democratic Republic) no monument to the German defeat was *erected*, not even a memorial to the German dead, seems to accord with Danto's

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view. The Germans (at least the former West-Germans) inaugurated a new kinds of memorials instead. One kind is the shelled remains of some prominent pre-war public building as *Mahnmal*, as a perpetual sign of warning against the horrors of war. One could wonder whether the *Mahnmal* succeeds in making its point as time lapses. In the minds of the second and third generation, the scarred *Mahnmal* easily becomes a scar in the mind. The ever-present sign of warning turns into the ominous sign of humiliation – unless the *Mahnmal* is regularly attended with the ritual of remembrance and mourning of *all* the unnamed victims, and unless this occurs in such a way that the present generation can empathize with the victims by considering the paradoxical and remote possibility that they themselves might fall victim to some ineffable and as yet unforeseeable catastrophe.

The other kind of war memorial is the so-called countermonument. Reacting against the various meanings that can become inscribed in the memorial due to changing politico-historical circumstances, the countermonument destroys itself as a spatio-temporal edifice. It is either »buried« over time (like the *Monument against Fascism* in Hamburg), or it consists of »the disruption of a public space« by colour slides of documents of the Second World War projected on a public building whenever a member of the public crosses a certain light beam which then activates a hidden projector (Young 1993: 27-48).

2. *The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*

Arthur Danto makes a very poignant distinction between a memorial and a monument: with the memorial we honour the dead, with the monument we honour ourselves. The memorial asks for sobriety and humility on the part of the survivors and the living. The monument, by contrast, is a license for self-indulgence, for aggrandized vanity. This distinction may be true if one considers the differences between the Washington Monument as an obelisk, »a monumental form with connotations of the trophy in Western art« (ibid., 113) and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial »which carries no explicit art-historical references« (ibid.). The Veterans Memorial (in its original conception by Maya Ying Lin and dedicated in 1982) consists of two black granite walls holding back the sides of a pointed 132° depression in the ground. The walls of the monument contain only the names of the more than 58,000 dead Americans of the Vietnam War in order of the dates of their deaths. To this »special precinct, extruded from life, a segregated enclave where we honor the dead,« a bronze statue of three servicemen by Frederik Hart was added as

a concession to part of the public who demanded some kind of »exacting« heroic realism as intrinsic to war memorials in general. Danto describes the Veterans Memorial thus:

Like innocents ... [the three servicemen] see only rows and columns of names. They are dazed and stunned. The walls reflect their obsessed gaze ... The gently flexed pair of walls, polished black, is like the back of Plato's cave, a reflecting surface, a dark mirror. The reflections in it of the servicemen ... are appearances of appearances. It also reflects us, the visitors, as it does the trees. Still, the living are in it only as appearances. Only the names of the dead, on the surface, are real (ibid., 113-4). (fig. 1.)

If one disregarded the bronze statue for one moment, this memorial as an instance of minimalist art is apposite to its purpose. Structurally, it is nearly the exact opposite of the obelisk. Its principal axis is horizontal instead of vertical (cf. Beardsley, 1989: 124-5). Instead of soaring up into the limitless sky, it descends into the earth, obstructing the descent with two walls meeting in a corner in which the names of the first and the last fatal casualty of that war are juxtaposed on two separate panels. According to Lin, »thus the war's beginning and end meet; the war is 'complete' ... yet broken by the earth that bounds the angle's open side, and contained by the earth itself« (quoted in



Fig. 1: Maya Lin. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial. 1982. (Reproduced in Danto, 1987: 101.)

Beardsley, 1989: 124). As such, the idea of walls with the names of the deceased engraved on them is a fairly common memorial strategy. One comes across this way of memorializing all over the world.

Initially, the Vietnam memorial commemorates no heroes and no heroic event. With its present overall form, situated as it is between the Washington monument and the Lincoln memorial, the American public can have it both ways. On the one hand, the memorial serves a »cathartic function,« »easing trauma into memory. In this, especially, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is a stunning success. It is the continual witness of tearful homages to the deceased. Flowers and mementoes are regularly left there. These visible expressions of grief are eloquent demonstrations that the individual and collective wounds of Vietnam are still raw, and in need of remedy« (Beardsley, 1989: 125). On the other hand, this memorial confronts the visitor with the stark results of war: people reduced to cold statistics, columns of faceless names of dead people. The memorial itself mourns the fate of the dead. Small wonder it evoked such controversy before its dedication. As anti-representational, conceptual art it indicts the wielders of political and military power to think on the wages of war. I do not know of any other memorial which underscores the tragedy of war so effectively by its understatement of grief and its stubborn, even iconoclastic abstinence of heroism. 58,000 meticulously recorded war casualties overwhelm the spectator. The magnitude of this visual record incites the viewer to produce an imaginative representation of the face of each single victim – an impossible task, which quickly stuns the imagination. Each name then becomes an abstract, de-personalized instance of the universal voiceless victim of the modern war-industry.

3. The Dachau Memorial

The Dachau Memorial by Glid Nandor in the late Sixties also fits Danto's »tacit rules that govern the distinction between monuments and memorials,« but for different reasons from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Although it shares the Veteran Memorial's decided anti-monumentalism, it is not as iconoclastic. Similar to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial the founders of this memorial are the people who survived the events commemorated here and organized themselves in the Comité International de Dachau. Money was raised internationally, and the former West German government contributed DM 300,000 towards the memorial. And like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial this memorial commemorates something which did not take place on the exact spot of the memorial.

The memorial is in the form of a camp fence, but the barbed wire is

formed by the grotesque and partially dismembered skeletons of Nazi concentration camp victims (*fig. 2*). The original design wanted the visitor to approach the memorial from the right or the eastern side, where a wall bearing an inscription from Job 38 would have been erected. Passing this wall, the visitor descends into an excavated space, flanked on the one side by the memorial. After coming to the central feature of the memorial, namely the group of emaciated and contorted figures which the visitor views from underneath, one ascends to a wall on the left where an urn with the ashes of the Nameless Prisoner has been interred.

The original design was only partially realised. The flanking walls (with the inscription and the urn with the ashes) were left out. And although the inscription from Job 38 is absent from the present precinct, it remains an important key to understand and experience the edifice. The inscription should have read as follows (Job 38, 16-17):

...[H]ast thou walked in search of the depth?
Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? or hast thou seen the doors
of the shadow of death?

This quotation from Job constitutes the framework of reference, namely of a descent into a valley of death, invoking associations of a trench, a mass

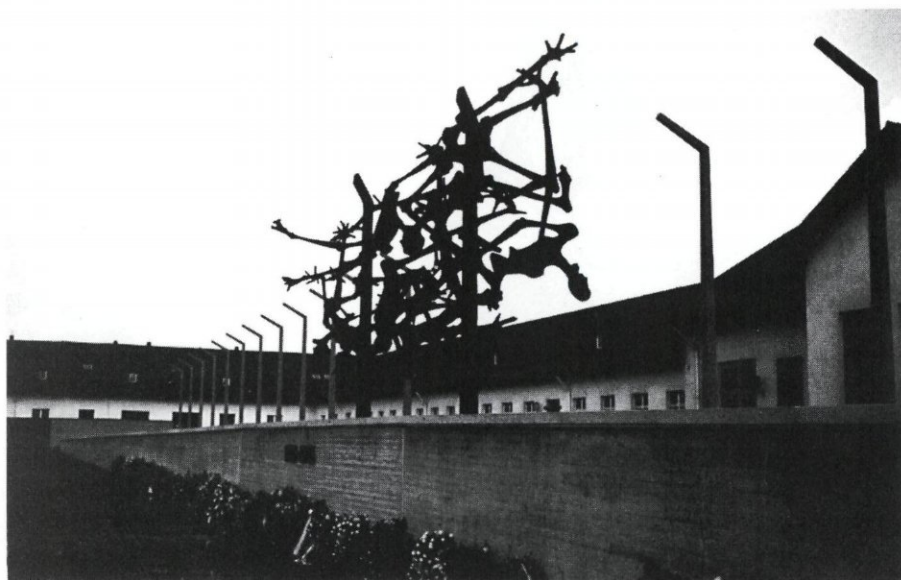


Fig. 2: Glid Nandor. The Dachau Memorial. 1960. (Photo: Johan Snyman.)

grave and the pits where murdered victims of Nazi gas chambers were cremated. At the same time an expectation of or a longing for redemption from above is suggested. How does this dialectic of threat and redemption work in this memorial?

The visitor descends into the depths of despair, to be confronted and overwhelmed by the suffering victims of the Nazi system. The presentation of the victims follows the medieval tradition of the triptych, with the centerpiece alluding to the Crucifixion. The portrayal of suffering is grotesque: victim and instrument of torture are fused into one. The skeletons are the barbed wire. Nandor's sculpture is expressive of the unthinkable horror of the Holocaust – the co-optation of the victims in their process of destruction (cf. Bauman, 1989: 117-150). In this sense this memorial has to witness for the suffering in *all* Nazi concentration camps. The location as well as the styling of the sculpture alienates the visitor from the portrayed victims. The victims are barely recognizable as human shapes. Not only are they (and were they, once upon



Fig. 3: Jean Vebér. *Les Camps de Concentration*. 1901. (Reproduced in Vebér 1901: 414.)

a time, in the past) physically maimed, but they are also sculpturally mangled. Empathizing with the victims is prevented by showing them stripped of their humanity and dignity – their suffering is complete, beyond comprehension even in the portrayal thereof. Not a semblance of human dignity remains. In front of this memorial one can only mourn the ineffable suffering. As Adorno intimated, to accord the suffering of these victims any positive meaning, would have amounted to an insult (Adorno, 1966: 352).

An interesting feature of Nandor's work is the treatment of the crucifixion motif. The figures in his sculpture refer to incidents which occurred in the concentration camps when prisoners committed suicide by falling onto the electrified camp fence, electrocuting themselves. The few photos of such incidents have become icons of Nazi atrocities. Nandor stylized these incidents to a unity of victim and instrument of torture. Iconographically, Nandor has his precursor in Jean Vebér, a French caricaturist at the beginning of this century. Vebér drew political cartoons for a French newspaper of the British war effort to conquer the two Boer republics in South Africa. Because he did not report on site, but rather commented on events, he chose to portray his views of the progress of the war in terms of well known works of art. Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa* was »quoted« and graphically inverted by Vebér (fig. 3) to

LES PROGRÈS DE LA SCIENCE



Fig. 4: Jean Vebér. *Les Progrès de la Science*. 1901. (Reproduced in Vebér 1901: 396.)

invoke the utter sense of despair which had to befall the victims of the Anglo-Boer War. One of Vebér's portrayals of British war strategy under the heading *Le Progrès de la Science* shows Boer prisoners of war trying to escape but becoming crucified in a camp fence (Vebér, 1901: 396) (fig. 4). Art historically, this is the first transposition of the crucifixion motif to a part of modern industrialized warfare. (This distinguished Vebér's from Goya's portrayals of impalements in the latter's *Los Desastres de la Guerra*.) As far as can be ascertained, Nandor was not acquainted with Vebér's specific portrayal. When one looks back from Nandor's work to Vebér's cartoon, the latter becomes part of the preceding history of the Dachau memorial and represents a step in the process of creating icons of suffering by connecting portrayal of the sufferings of war with the well established tradition of the crucifixion motif, illiciting the same reverence for victims of war as the crucified Christ.

4. *The Women's Memorial*

As a memorial for (some of) the victims of the Anglo-Boer War the Women's Memorial was informed by a different iconographical and iconological tradition. In stead of the crucifixion motif, the Women's Memorial utilized the motif of the Pietà. Several reasons, from the history of this monument, amongst others, can be adduced for this preference in motif.

Danto's »tacit rules« seem not to have existed or not to have been acknowledged in the construction of the Women's Memorial in Bloemfontein, unveiled in 1913 (fig. 5). Like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, it was funded by public donations. The driving force behind the completion of the memorial was a foreigner, Emily Hobhouse. »That Englishwoman« was a vociferous member of an anti-war, mainly Whig-inspired faction of the British public during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902. She did much to alleviate the suffering of Boer people during the war, involving herself very closely with relief aid in the former Boer republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, much to the ire of the British colonial and military authorities and much of the British public. The design that won the public competition was by the German architect, Frans Soff. His design was for a monumental obelisk to be erected on a hillside outside Bloemfontein. The obelisk would be adorned by a bronze statue of a Boer woman with two children. The original maquette did not satisfy Emily Hobhouse, and she was entrusted to supervise the making of the statue by the Dutch-South African sculptor, Anton van Wouw, who was sent to Rome for that purpose. Van Wouw made the statue under Emily Hobhouse's supervision: not only had Van Wouw to tear his

own work down several times, but »that Englishwoman« insisted on Van Wouw changing his whole original concept

Her final judgment was expressed in a letter dated April 5, 1912: The standing woman seems to me very good, full of feeling and the sitting mother is better, though still far from satisfactory. The child on her knee is nicely modelled though still only appears to me a *sleeping* child and neither sick nor dead. I suggested he should get leave to go to a hospital and study one or two dead figures (*ibid.*, 513-514),

and (from a memoir):

Mr. Van Wouw as you know reproduced the scene in bronze. Had he seen it with his own eyes, the child would have borne more directly the aspect of emaciation and death (*ibid.*, 112).



Fig. 5: Frans Soff and Anton van Wouw. The Women's Memorial. 1913. (Photo: War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein.)

What is the point about the Women's Memorial then? Should one regard it as an unsuccessful attempt at a memorial, unsuccessful in more than one sense of the word, namely executed by an incompetent sculptor, and blurring the borders between a monument and a memorial?

Let us attend to the second problem first. The sandstone obelisk, situated on a hillside as it is, conveys something dignified, heroic, and celebratory. The sculpture's placement on a four-metre-high pedestal in front of the obelisk transforms the tragic group into something heroic, something elevated above the ordinary. It aggrandizes suffering.

This is not so much a memorial dedicated to the suffering of the dead, as a monument for the grief of those left behind. The facial expressions of the two women are not properly visible because of the elevation of the statue. So they do not communicate with any onlooker. And, as Emily Hobhouse correctly observed, the child does not »directly [bear] the aspect of emaciation and death«. The statue does not confront one with the suffering of victims of war, but rather conveys the longing for an abstract restitution. The elevation of the group alienates them from a public.

The bas-relief side panels bear this out. The right hand panel portrays the chaos of the destruction of farms and forced removals to concentration camps. The composition has no focal point, which underscores iconographically the experience of displacement it portrays. In a certain sense the panel itself is perpetually displaced: being on the right hand side of the major group of the memorial it is not in the favoured »reading position«, whereas, if one should have »read« the depiction of war suffering in a chronological sense, this panel should have been to the left of the main group, and the death scene should have come »later« in the spatio-temporal sequence. Furthermore, this panel is most of the time literally in the shadow of the rest of the memorial (*fig. 6*).

The composition of the left hand panel is intriguingly classical: it has a receding focal point in low relief (the dying child in the tent), with the foreground figures, the survivors, in high relief and framing the picture. There is a spatial continuity between the onlooker outside the picture and the spectators outside the tent in the picture: both categories of »public« partake in the grievous event of a child dying in a concentration camp (*fig. 7*). But, once again, the emaciation of the dying child is not clear to see. For all the uninformed visitor might know, people are just looking at a sleeping child in a tent. What is sculpturally emphasized, however, is the grief-strickenness of the onlookers. They stand immobilized, they can only look on, they cannot relieve anything. The spatial continuity between the onlooker and the figures in the bas-relief (linked with the chronological continuity between the on-

“VOOR VRYHEID VOLK EN VADERLAND”



Fig. 6: Anton van Wouw: Right bas relief of *The Women's Memorial*. 1913.
(Photo: War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein.)



Fig. 7: Anton van Wouw: Left bas relief of *The Women's Memorial*. 1913.
(Photo: War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein.)

lookers and the figures in the picture at the time of the unveiling of the memorial), taken together with the elevation of the main statue, makes this memorial to »broken-hearted womanhood« and »perishing childhood« a monument to endurance through and in spite of grief. It is a monument not only to, but also *for* the grief-stricken survivors.

This becomes clear when one reflects on the so-called incompetence of the sculptor. If Rodin could have carried out the commission for this memorial, the sculpture would not have landed on a pedestal. As in *The Burghers of Calais*, the onlooker would have confronted at eye-level the expression of various dimensions of human suffering. To achieve this communication of the expression of suffering, Rodin's figures would have been more dynamic (instead of being completely immobile like Van Wouw's), utilizing the expressive features of the anatomy of the body in different kinds of postures. Rodin's figures would have been less heavily clad and much more tense. (That is, if one takes it for granted that he would not employ a similar approach to this topic as he did for the Balzac Memorial.)

Van Wouw's alleged inability to render suffering in such terms as Rodin's accorded well with the cultural background of the public for whom this memorial was commissioned. If Rodin's Balzac memorial caused an outrage in France, and if his Calais memorial was controversial, his possible portrayal of Boer suffering would not have been acceptable in South Africa at that time. A significant reason was the conflict of interest between Emily Hobhouse's urge to commemorate the victims, and the Boer people's need for a monument. A tug of war, so to speak, ensued: to whom did (the recollection of) the dead belong? Where should they be located in history – on the side of the Boer people, or on the side of humanity? For what cause did they die?

Emily Hobhouse was, for her time, a very emancipated woman and, although from a religious background (she was the daughter of an Anglican vicar), a free thinker. Knowing that the practice of concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer War contravened the Hague Convention of 1899, and that the British military authority was covering up many of the atrocities and committing many other atrocities unwittingly through neglect and logistical incompetence, she recorded meticulously incidents and even statistics about the camps. She could be called the initiator of investigative journalism in South Africa for having photographs taken to record the extent of famine and illness in the camps. Having them published in Britain could persuade the British electorate to press for an early end to the war (*fig. 8*). In the course of the war, approximately 26,000 women and children died in these concentration camps – that is approximately 10% of the white population of the former Boer republics at the time. Emily Hobhouse also started to keep record

of concentration camps for blacks, but, under colonialist (i.e., racist) rule, the facts were inaccurate and very hard to come by.

The Boer women, acting against an unwritten rule of Victorian society to have respect for the dead and make no effigy of them, also had photographs taken of their dead children, but only if they were not emaciated. The purpose of these photographs was to preserve a recollection of the child, especially for the father and husband who was fighting on commando or was in exile in Bermuda, St. Helena, India or Ceylon. Understandably, the women wanted to retain the most positive recollection of the children that was possible under the circumstances (*fig. 9 & 10*).

Victorian composure prevailed in grief, as is also evident from many letters from the concentration camps. Most letters illustrate the fact that the



Fig. 8: Abraham Carl Wessels photographed in the Bloemfontein Concentration Camp. (Photo: War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein.)

Boer people were by and large an agricultural, non-urbanized community who could not avail themselves of the amenities of urban culture such as artistically appropriate expressions of emotions. That accounts for the fact that there are virtually no artistic renditions or representations of concentration camp experiences by the victims themselves. One has also to take into account the effect of military censorship on letters from the concentration camps: the precise conditions of these camps were forbidden topics to mention to the outside world. Therefore the letters were very stereotyped, and conceived only as a form of rudimentary communication. The rhetoric of Victorian society dominated the letters, some of them with excruciatingly sad news. In a sense the form of the letter suppressed the content. The first page was usually framed in black, so the addressee knew he (usually he) was receiving bad tidings. But the greater part of the letter was taken up by writerly



Fig. 9: An unidentified occupant of the Bloemfontein Concentration Camp. (Photo: War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein.)

formalities. A letter from a concentration camp sounded much like the following (in translated form):

My beloved and never forgotten husband,
I am allowing myself to take up the pen to inform you about the well-being of all our beloved ones, hoping to hear the same from you. Thank you for your last letter which reached us two months after you wrote. (Alternatively: I have not heard anything from you since ..., but got some news about you from Uncle X who saw you last at ...) Do you still have enough money? There is not much news to relate from the camp. (What followed then was usually an extensive report on the health and well-being of relatives and friends. On the last page of the letter the real news was broken:!) A week ago our little son/daughter/children/old father/old mother died after a terrible suffering of inflammation. Now I must say good bye with the pen, but never with the heart, and with a kiss of love.

Your never forgetting wife/mother/aunt. (In the Dutch-Afrikaans of the time



Fig. 10: Photo of a girl aged 18 who died in the Bloemfontein Concentration Camp. It was her last wish that a ribbon embroidered by herself with the flag of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (Transvaal) be tied to her breast, and that her corpse be photographed in this way. The photo had to be sent to her exiled father in Ceylon. (Photo: War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein.)

this was written in the formal mode, and the letter was signed formally with initials and surname.)

The inability to express their grief in an appropriate form was substituted by the apparently trivial but very minute recreation of a once habitable geography by musing about the whereabouts of relatives. That served as a restitution of a lost everyday world. On the other hand, the inability to give rhetorically appropriate expression to grief was enhanced by the pervasiveness of a very pious, albeit fatalistic, religiosity amongst the Boer population. The news in the letters is regularly interspersed with phrases interpreting their fate as a punishment from God for unspecified sins, acquiescing like Job in their fate: »The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the Lord,« or »Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?«

It is safe to conclude that grief and mourning was suppressed rather than vented in the Calvinist Boer culture of the times. What remained and was fostered, especially after the war, was a sense of injustice and humiliation. Under the reconciliation policy of Louis Botha, the former Boer general who became Prime Minister of the newly created Union of South Africa in 1910, this sense of loss developed into a subterranean eternal grudge: instead of being used to inculcate remembrance of the dead, the war experience of the Boer people was politicized and transformed into an index of indelible harm done by the imperialistic British, extolling therefore a terrible price for the country. The idea, then, of a memorial to the women and children who »paid« with their lives in the concentration camps was received favourably as an opportunity for the survivors to »pay« their »debts« to the perished generation. One way of »making good« to those who had lost their lives was to elevate them to the rank of martyrs for freedom, and thereby alleviate (at least for the survivors) the inflicted humiliation of being robbed of everything dear. Tormented and emaciated figures confronting one at a memorial would have offended the taste of the public who supported the erection of this edifice. In a very short time the memorial was converted, in spite of a pervasive iconoclastic Calvinism, into a shrine: not only were the ashes of Emily Hobhouse interred at the foot of the obelisk, but the »father of the nation« (the last president of the Orange Free State, Marthinus Theunis Steyn), the »hero of the war« (General Christiaan de Wet), as well as the »man of God« (Reverend J.D. Kestell) were buried within the precincts of the memorial. Their graves, and the authentic presence of their remains, serve to remind the visitor of a trinity of civil virtues: love of the fatherland, braveness, and unwavering faith. The lives of the people commemorated are enshrined in

the memorial as the ideals of the survivors. The survivors participate in the lives and deaths of the people commemorated by having the latter re-presented and re-cast in the image of their experience of hardship. Thus is the experience of hardship transformed *ex post factum* into the virtues of endurance, of hope, and of restitution. The memorial becomes a nationalist shrine.

5. From aesthetic ideology to moral imperative: Saving the Women's Memorial from its institutionalization

I mentioned previously a clash of interests between Emily Hobhouse and the Boer people. She wanted a memorial to »broken-hearted womanhood« and »perishing childhood,« they wanted a vehicle of restitution. Emily Hobhouse understood this well. In her dedication speech she mentioned compassionately »the supreme offering [that] was made, the supreme price [that] was paid«. »[The Dead] will live within us *not* as memories of sorrow, but of *heroic inspiration*.« And she exhorted the Boer people: »When you remember the ill done, remember also the atonement made« (Hobhouse, 1984: 404-5). Her text, for the occasion, allowed for popular sentiments.

But her text conveyed other sentiments as well. The climax of her speech contains these words:

»Your visible monument will serve to this great end – becoming an inspiration to all South Africans and to the women in particular. ...

For remember, these dead women were not great as the world counts greatness; some of them were quite poor women who had laboured much. Yet they have become a moral force in your land. ...

And their influence will travel further. They have shown *the world* that never again can it be said that woman deserves no rights as Citizen because she takes no part in war. This statue stands as a denial of that assertion. ...

My Friends: Throughout the world the Woman's day approaches; her era dawns. Proudly I unveil this Monument to the brave South African Women, who, sharing the danger that beset their land and dying for it, affirmed for all times and for all peoples the power of Woman to sacrifice life and more than life for the common weal« (Hobhouse, 1984: 406-7).

What strikes one as remarkable is the elegant, unabashed feminism of Emily Hobhouse, and the consequent direction of her particularization and universalization. Although hardly anything novel, that is philosophically the interesting point about her interpretation of the history of the suffering of the Boer women and children. Emily Hobhouse elevates the Boer woman to the ranks of the Universal Woman's struggle for recognition. And the Boer woman forms part of a whole which transcends herself: she fights along with other women in that part of the world. The meaning of her struggle is not parochial, but universal. It is a contribution towards a greater solidarity of human-

kind. That is what makes her struggle moral, and allows the Boer woman to teach others a lesson in history which speaks across the political divide between Boer and British, between white and black. But it is exactly this point that has, very significantly, been censored – omitted – in later commemorative issues of Miss Hobhouse's dedication speech. I quote the censored passages (indicated by []) at length:

»In your hands and those of your children lie the power and freedom won; you must not merely maintain but increase the sacred gift. Be merciful towards the weak, the down-trodden, the stranger. Do not open your gates to those worst foes of freedom – tyranny and selfishness. [Are not these the withholding from others in your control, the very liberties and rights which you have valued and won for yourselves? ...]

... [We in England are ourselves still but dunces in the great world-school, our leaders still struggling with the unlearned lesson, that liberty is the equal right and heritage of every child of man, without distinction of race, colour or sex. A community that lacks the courage to found its citizenship on this broad base becomes a 'city divided against itself, which cannot stand'.]

[We too, the great civilized nations of the world, are still but barbarians in our degree, so long as we continue to spend vast sums in killing or planning to kill each other for greed of land and gold. Does not justice bid us remember today how many thousands of the dark race perished also in Concentration Camps in a quarrel which was not theirs? Did they not thus redeem the past? Was it not an instance of that community of interest, which binding all in one, roots out racial animosity? ...]

Philosophically speaking, Emily Hobhouse takes the stand of a moral universalist. There are universal moral principles which imbue human actions in time and in places with moral meaning when the actions contribute towards the eventual realization of these principles (cf. Roberts 1991: 273). Such principles are, amongst others, the great ideals of the Enlightenment, including liberty as an equal right. This morality legitimizes itself through its purported moral weight, its capacity to extend itself unreservedly. No exception should be allowed. What is good for the particular can only be good if it would be good for all. The morality of one specific event or action is contingent upon its relationship with the universal principle, i.e. whether it can be an instance, an exemplary embodiment, of that principle. When the action is without precedent, or unrelated to any universal principle, its moral relevancy (if at all) is difficult to assess. But when the action in its uniqueness sets an example which should be imitated, it embodies the moral principle in an original sense. This explains the preponderance of the hero as a cultural topos in Emily Hobhouse's thinking and in the culture of war memorials until after World War I. The idea of the hero embodies moral and aesthetic principles

at the same time. Perhaps it is at this juncture that feminist readings of the Women's Memorial (cf. Cloete 1992, Landman 1994) have a point, but, then, I think, for the wrong reason. The Women's Memorial – from Emily Hobhouse's viewpoint – was not to enshrine the Afrikaner nationalist male perception of the *volksmoeder*. Feminists would have a point, however, if they raise the issue of the honouring of the memory of Emily Hobhouse. It is definitely a travesty to have had the name of a moral universalist, and a pacifist at that, bestowed on a Daphne fighter class submarine of the South African Navy. It is a telling instance of the deafness of the Afrikaans dominated political establishment to the principles of Emily Hobhouse, a deafness that was even intellectually engineered – by politicians who extolled the virtues of Jan F.E. Celliers' *man wat sy man kan staan*.

The thrust of Emily Hobhouse's interpretation of the Boer woman's suffering as a symbol of the universal woman is to hold the Boer woman up as an example not only for the surviving Boer people but also for the world to emulate, should similar circumstances obtain. True to the classical conception of the sublime, her aestheticizing conception of tragic heroism assumes a strength of the individual, the perseverance of the subject, despite the »irresistible power« of the »general«. The individual – the hero – embodies a far greater and exalted substance which can transcend its own historical limitations.

But there is something ambivalent in the idealist conception of the hero (something Beethoven realized with the dedication of his Third Symphony and the subsequent revision of that dedication). Does the hero represent the attainment of universality, or is the hero only a symbolical embodiment of the universal? In the first instance the hero is monumentalized, in the second instance the hero is functional for the commemoration of the universal significance of a historical action. The reception of the Women's Memorial under the circumstances of 1913, and the subsequent institutionalization of that reception in Afrikaner culture, favoured the trend of monumentalizing the suffering of the Boer women and children, turning it into a metaphor of sacrifice that gives the descendants a right to claim the land:

If one could call it sweat for the hero to fight for the fatherland, and, loaded with fame, sacrifice himself for freedom, nation and country, what respect does the tender woman command who, herself already in the claws of death, sees one beloved after the other entering their graves! And yet, she exhorts her husband and sons proudly not to be concerned about her, but to persist in the struggle! (Pres. M.T. Steyn, quoted in Van der Merwe, s.a. [but probably written between 1926 and 1941]:6.)

In this way the Women's Memorial expresses a universalized impera-

tive: it mobilizes the Boer people to see a particularized significance in the suffering of their kin. This is an understandable reaction, and did indeed serve as a consolation, especially in 1913. But it is clear how this interpretation of the meaning of historical suffering is immediately restricted: it ignores the recorded fact (by Emily Hobhouse, in her war diaries, and explicitly referred to in her dedication speech) that according to official figures, 13 315 Africans also died in English concentration camps (Spies, 1977: 266; cf. Hobhouse 1902: 350-355), and it blots out the moral dimension of this commemorative sign, i.e. to remind people of the horror that once was and that may never occur again, not only *to* them but also never *by* them. The censored reprint of Emily Hobhouse's dedication speech in 1963 thus confirms a tendency that was started by the process of the institutionalization of the Women's Memorial, i.e. to monopolize the meaning of the suffering of the war for whites only. Evidence for this can be found in Van der Merwe's undated brochure, written some time between 1926 and 1941: even the latter shuns all references to the suffering of black people during the Anglo-Boer War. By disavowing the memory of 13 000 black concentration camp victims, the Afrikaner circumvented the issue of black sacrifice for the sake of soil and freedom. By the same token Afrikaner nationalism internalized imperialism, rather than expurgating it. That would also be the reason why many Afrikaners would still insist on the uniqueness of the Boer concentration camp trauma – it affords them a claim to political power which they have earned collectively through the suffering of (some of) their forebears. It usually comes as a shock to them to hear of black concentration camp victims, as well as the record of even greater sufferings not so long after the Anglo-Boer War and not so far removed from the former Boer republics. The mortality figures on the side of the indigenous population of the Boer republics is nearly eclipsed by the death toll of the genocide on the Herero and Nama in German West Africa (today's Namibia). From 1904 to 1907 65 000 Herero and 10 000 Nama were driven into the desert by the colonial German authority, to die there of hunger and thirst. That was the colonialist response to an uprising (Chalk & Jonassohn 1990: 230-248). And the concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War had their precursors in the *reconcentrados* of the Spanish-Cuban War of 1896, in which more than 100 000 Cubans lost their lives (Spies 1977: 148). To wrest the meaning of the concentration camp history from its nationalist mould may offer a way to the search for justice. Instead of fetishizing a historical instance of suffering by elevating it to the ultimate instance of suffering in a limited universe of suffering and injustice, war memorials should facilitate the ability to recognize suffering whenever and wherever it may occur.

It is for the sake of the search for justice that the true war memorial functions as *Mahnmal*. It speaks silently on behalf of a »we« regardless of gender, class or race, and it seems to say that as a particular people we have come to know what suffering entails, and we shall never let it happen again, neither to ourselves *nor to any other human being*. The future course of history has to be different from what is commemorated by this monument.

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Miško Šuvaković
Asymmetries of Language and Sight
Introduction to a Philosophy of Art

0. The Basic Postulate

My basic postulate is: view, seeing and the seen in painting can be studied through indirect forms of representation. The mediation of sight points to the intentional nature of artificial optical and visual phenomena of art. Intentionality makes visual and linguistic effects comparable. Potential asymmetry of the sight scene and the language scene of art (painting) is the problem which I propose to elaborate.

1. Representation

Representation is a structural, epistemological, semantic and technical method of creating or producing a work of art, which visually and optically refers to a real or fictional object, being, situation or event. Note: (1) phenomena perceived by the sense of sight are termed visual, whereas (2) facts related to light, whose aspects are dependent upon physical laws of transmission of light and not the receptive faculties of the subject of perception are termed optical.

In a stricter theoretical sense a visual work is said to represent something if it is its reference (external to the work, what the work refers to in its appearance, structural relationships of elements and potential meanings). A reference can be a real reference (object from the real world) or a fictional reference (fictional object of fantasy, text, film, theatre, theory). A painting represents a real or fictional object, being, situation or event by showing, describing or signifying it.

A painting shows an object by being its visual analogy or representation of its visual appearance. The visual aspects of an object's appearance and its representation in a representational work of art are congruent. At least some of the visual aspects of object representation are congruent with the usual analogous object representation in culture, science, art, religion. The relationship between a painting and the object it visually depicts is asymmetrical, since the painting visually and optically depict the object but the object never

depicts the painting. It is necessary to distinguish between the similarity of two objects and the similarity of their appearance or the similarity of their features. One must distinguish the optical similarity from the visual, and the visual similarity from that of signification.

Any discursive representation of an object is a description, since one does not see the appearance of an object from signification effects of a linguistic language. Language states and explains its properties and appearance. Non-analogous linguistic signs or texts are ascribed to visual aspects. A painting describes an object not when it shows the appearance of the object by its symbolic aspects, but when it indirectly points to its properties.

A painting signifies: (1) by naming the object (by stating that a certain object is designated as X – the role of the title or inscription in a painting), (2) by defining the named object as a sign by which it represents the object in language or in visual and pictorial expression by creating a kind of an alphabet, and (3) by using the visual sign as a literal showing of an object (iconic and allusive sign), as a standardized language sign (sign in ideographic or phonetic alphabets) and as a basis for non-literal symbolic, metaphorical and allegorical representation. The abstract paintings of Barnett Newman (»The Stations of the Cross«, 1966) represent crucifixion by arbitrarily, but intentionally, signifying (suggesting) the state of crucifixion. The state is not literally seen, it is suggested by the relationship of pictorial meanings of the painting and the linguistic meanings of its title. If the idea of signification is radicalized, one may say that Newman's painting does not correspond (does not refer) to the historical state of crucifixion, but corresponds with the texts which represent Christ's crucifixion. The painting does not refer to reality, but to the textual production of meaning, sense and value. Reference is established as an exchange between the pictorial text of painting and the linguistic religious text.

The idea of representation is based on four semiotic-media levels of painting determination (its visual horizon): (1) group of beliefs and concepts (superdetermination, ideological or spiritual horizon, metatext of culture) which form the framework of signification and sense of a work of art, which is expected to represent something (e.g. the theory of mimesis in the Western tradition, the theories of Realism in the 19th century, the theories of mechanical reproduction in Modernism, the theories of mimesis of mimesis in Postmodernism), (2) group of techniques and media procedures by which a painting is created and by which, in a potential literal or non-literal way, the painting refers to the object represented (the mirroring principle, print, trace, visual similitude, index signs, fine art illusionism, linguistic-semantic reference, usage of forms of expression which serve for representation in a given

culture, visualization of textual representation), (3) appearance of the work which refers to the object of representation by its visual similitude (analogous iconic representation), its physical-phenomenal characteristics (the index character of representation) and on the basis of expressing rules, habits or agreements (symbolic level of representation), and (4) preparedness (habits, customs, rules, convictions) of the viewer to regard a painting as a representation and not a decoration, an abstract, expressive or fictional composition.

Two opposed conceptions of representation can be singled out: (A) essentialist and (B) relativist theory of representation.

The essentialist ontological theory of representation is based on the view that the notion of an artistic painting derives from the notion of mirroring image and reflection (*Abbild*). A surface is a painting if it represents something, if by its appearance (referentially) it refers to something in the world. It represents something because it is in an ontological relationship with the object of representation. This relationship is based on reflection (literal mediation of the observed). Reflection is recognized as a painting because between the painting and the object which it represents there is an optical or visual similitude, and frequently also the intention to achieve an illusionist visual congruity. A painting is a painting because it contains within itself (i.e. the ontological dimension) its archetype (*Urbild*) or at least some of its properties. Between the painting and the object, according to Hans Georg Gadamer, there is a relationship of mutual belonging, since in the painting only the being of the represented object appears. According to ontological essentialist theories, the development of painting and sculpture as art arises through the evolution and transformations of the basic mirroring image model (from reflection to an artistic painting). Western painting can be regarded as a multitude of transformational lines from objectual-optical necessity (reflection, invariant, literal visual information) to visual overdetermination (ideology, the theory and the practice of mimesis) and visual arbitrariness (significational interpretation by pictorial means).

As opposed to the ontological essentialist theories, the relativist theories are formulated around the interpretation of representation as a practice of signification, conventional reference and symbolization. The starting point is that representation is not based on the mirroring principle. The visual similitude between the painting and the object (the appearance of the painting and the object) represented is not sufficient in order to establish whether or not the painting represents something. Similitude is a symmetrical relationship, and visual similitude of the image and the object it represents is asymmetrical. The critique of the notion of similitude results in the attitude that recognition of the structure of paint blots on a surface represents shoes (Van Gogh),

a bouquet of flowers (Cézanne) and human figures (Picasso) depends on the rules (convictions, ideologies) of signification (representation) which a society accepts as their presentation of the world.

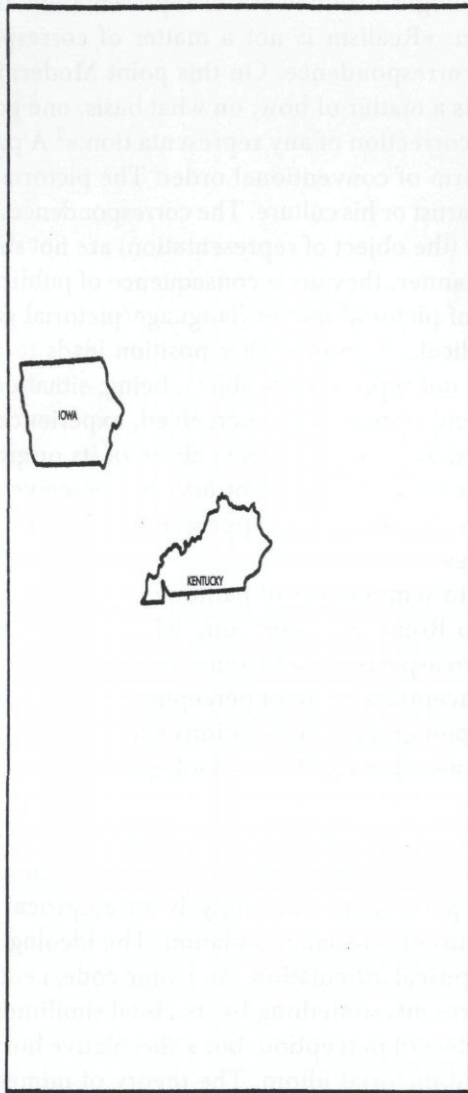
Nelson Goodman demonstrates that a painting depicts an object and that the pictorial form configured in the painting is recognized as a depiction of the object by the rules of representation and the according convictions shared by the painter and the viewer of the painting. The ontological essentialist answer to the question »Why do we see an object in a painting?« is »Because the painting imitates the object« or »Because the painting imitates our experience of the object« or »Because the painting establishes an optical order which imitates the optical order of the sight«. The relativist answer would be »Because the painting belongs to a certain form of representation (symbolic and ideological expressions) which we are accustomed to read as pictorial representations of such-and-such an object.« Goodman does not interpret the recognition of an object in a painting by a literal connexion between the painting and the object, but by establishing an arbitrary classificational relationship. There is no such thing as an innocent eye which would perceive the thing itself independently of our system of classification (convictions, knowledge, values). The eye does not perceive the thing itself, the eye always perceives an object. The similitude between a painting and an object is not determined by a congruence of the visual properties of the painting's appearance and the properties of the object's appearance, but by a system of classification and nomenclature, i.e. artistic practice (or Artworld, according to Arthur Danto, or ideology, according to Althusser, Schefer, Rotar, Devade). According to Goodman: (1) every painting is more similar to any other painting throughout the history of art than to the external object it represents, and (2) art does not imitate nature, since nature (what is experienced, perceived, understood and presented as nature) is a product of art, science, religion and everyday customs. The relativist concept of a painting is founded upon conventions of fine art representation and the phenomenological arbitrariness (openness) of visual perception. It is on these grounds that Goodman rejects the notion of a painting as a copy of reality, maintaining a symbolic signification character of depiction or painting. Realistic representation is not based on the quantity of optical and visual information about the world, but on simplicity and availability, which depends on the observer's degree of being accustomed to certain forms of representation. The style of representation to which an observer is accustomed is regarded as more realistic, and such paintings are considered more similar to reality: »If representation is a matter of choice, regularity a matter of information, realism is a matter of habit.«¹ Charles Harrison and Fred Orton regard realism in paint-

ing as a methodological framework of representation and critique of modes of representation: »Realism is not a matter of correspondence, or even of conventions of correspondence. On this point Modernist theory has always been correct. It is a matter of how, on what basis, one goes about the process of criticism and correction of any representation.«² A painting can always be shown to be a form of conventional order. The pictorial order expresses the viewpoint of the artist or his culture. The correspondences between the painting and its reference (the object of representation) are not simply given to the eye in a mirroring manner; they are a consequence of public and tacit rules of the symbolic order of pictorial matter (language/pictorial games within painting as an art). A radicalization of such a position leads to the standpoint that a work of art does not represent an object, being, situation or event in a literal way, but represents how they are perceived, experienced, expressed, understood, interpreted and valued in the culture of its origin. A painting is not a trace of the perceived, on the contrary, the perceived is the effect (trace, result) not only of the painting's appearance, but also its pictorial and semiological meanings.

According to semiologists of painting such as Umberto Eco, Jean-Louis Schefer or Braco Rotar an iconic code (characteristic visual order of representation) has two aspects: (1) an iconic code is a system of iconic signs which result from a conceptualization of perception, and (2) an iconic code is a sign order realized upon graphic conventions which belong to the order of visual rhetoric. Schefer and Rotar in their semiologies of painting show the connexion between the empirical plane of the visual and the ideological overdetermination which transforms the visual into a text (system of meaning, effects of sense and potential values of communication, appreciation, knowledge and possession). Visuality is an empirical horizon or painting achieved by means of sensual articulation. The ideological articulation of art is built upon empirical articulation. An iconic code, i.e. the characteristic sign order which represents something by its visual similitude, is not a naive (mirroring, literal) effect of perception, but a speculative horizon of painting as an art and rhetorical pictorial idiom. The theory of mimesis is therefore not to be regarded solely as a model of creating a painting and a perception of the relationship between the painting and the world, but also as a form of ideological superstructure (superdetermination) by which perception (view, the

¹ Nelson Goodman, »Reality Remade«, in Joseph Margolis, *Philosophy Looks at Art*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1987, p. 300.

² Charles Harrison, Fred Orton (eds.), *Modernism, Criticism, Realism – Alternative Context For Art*, Harper and Row, London 1984, p. xix.



Map to not indicate: CANADA, JAMES BAY, ONTARIO, QUEBEC, ST. LAWRENCE RIVER, NEW BRUNSWICK, MANITIBA, AKIMISKI ISLAND, LAKE WINNIPEG, LAKE OF THE WOODS, LAKE NIPIGON, LAKE SUPERIOR, LAKE HURON, LAKE MICHIGAN, LAKE ONTARIO, LAKE ERIE, MAINE, NEW HAMPSHIRE, MASSACHUSETTS, VERMONT, CONNECTICUT, RHODE ISLAND, NEW YORK, NEW JERSEY, PENNSYLVANIA, DELAWARE, MARYLAND, WEST VIRGINIA, VIRGINIA, OHIO, MICHIGAN, WISCONSIN, MINNESOTA, EASTERN BORDERS OF NORTH DAKOTA, SOUTH DAKOTA, NEBRASKA, KANSAS, OKLAHOMA, TEXAS, MISSOURI, ILLINOIS, INDIANA, TENNESSEE, ARKANSAS, LOUISIANA, MISSISSIPPI, ALABAMA, GEORGIA, NORTH CAROLINA, SOUTH CAROLINA, FLORIDA, CUBA, BAHAMAS, ATLANTIC OCEAN, ANDROS ISLANDS, GULF OF MEXICO, STRAITS OF FLORIDA.

Art & Language (Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin), *Map* (1967)

perceived, experience) and understanding of a painting are limited and directed. A pictorial representation has a general epistemological value which can be described as an archeological structure of knowledge, in fact, it points to the proximity (interweaving, link) between the perceived and the linguistic in the constitution of knowledge.

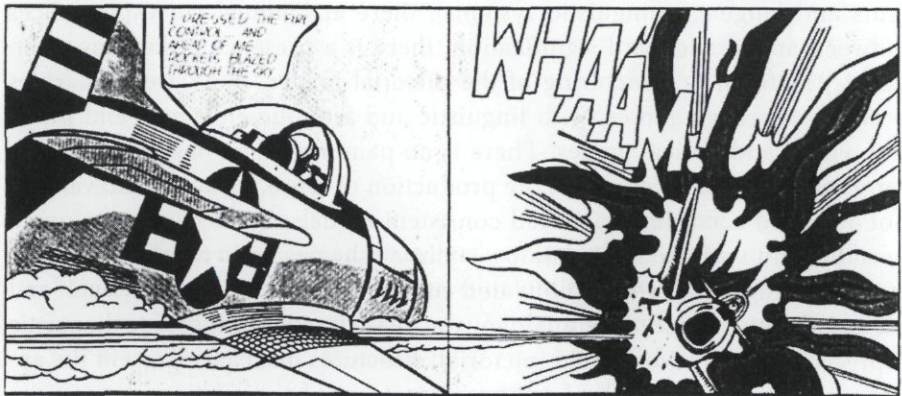
Representational pictorial systems are determined by the following characteristics: (1) painting is a technique which aims to produce an effect for the eye (body, look, seeing, placing the perceived into a language), i.e. to produce itself as something entirely subordinate to the economy of visual production of effects, (2) the function of a representational painting is in covering up the material morphology of the pictorial: to mark the departure from the material literal appearance of the surface by simulation, to start the game of differences, to remove from it the literal nature of the significationality of the surface, (3) one system of representation is read from other systems (the criterion of interpictoriality, analogous to intertextuality), in other words, it is impossible to read a system of a visual (pictorial) representation on its own basis. A painting does not represent by simply (optically) existing or by literally referring to the objects of the world, but by motivatedly or conventionally referring to the objects of the world pointing to other paintings and texts in the history of painting and culture (religious, ideological, sexual text).

2. Visual Meta-Language

There is no general system of visual and pictorial representation which could be described by the terms visual language or, in a narrower sense, pictorial language. There are certain analogies between visual (pictorial) systems and language (linguistic systems), there are mutual correspondences between appearance and signification, there is a presence of language (linguistic) material in structuring of the pictorial matter, there are similarities between language games (with linguistic and semiotic elements) and pictorial, visual and optical games. There is no painting which does not produce sense, meaning and value. But the production of sense, meaning and value is not achieved according to closed consistent models, but according to open, unstable and variable formulations (stylistic schemes, individual poetics, historical coding, arbitrary or motivated combinations or games). If visual (and pictorial) representation is analogous at least in some aspects to linguistic representation, then by visual (pictorial) structures one can represent the appearance of another work of art, i.e. its concept of constitution, appearance and functioning as a presentation, expression or construction.

Visual meta-language is the structural and signification order of a visual work of art by means of which other works of art are shown and represented, as well as aspects of Artworld, stylistic patterns, genre rules and schemes, ways of setting up meaning in a work of fine art, language-pictorial games, visual properties of a work of art, conceptual and ideological overdeterminations. A work of art or an aspect of Artworld which is shown or represented is a first degree work of art, and the work of art which represents it is a second degree work of art or visual, more strictly speaking pictorial, meta-language.

Some examples of visual meta-language in painting are neo-Dadaistic and the early proto-Pop Art paintings of Jasper Johns such as »Flag« (1954-55), »By the Sea« (1961) or »Fool's House« (1962). The painting »Flag« is a meta-example of literal representation showing a cultural artefact (flag). The painting is realized in such a way that it covers the canvas from edge to edge, and is thus simultaneously a concrete flag and a painting (representation) of a flag. The painting »Fool's House« is an example of visual meta-language because it demonstrates language games in the relationships of the elements of the painting, objects and words. The idea of language game is taken from Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. Roy Lichtenstein's Pop Art paintings based on representation of comic frames or comic-like paraphrases of Picasso's portraits and Leger's scenes are meta-visual examples. His idea of visual meta-language is inter-pictorial. It is based on a transfer of subject matter and iconographic solutions from one stylistic or cultural system of representation into another (from popular mass culture or French post-cubist modernism into American high modernism). With the painting »Whaam!« Lichtenstein shows how comic sequences are literally transferred from the



Roy Lichtenstein, *Whaam!* (1963)

world of popular culture into the world of high modernism. The representation of Picasso's portrait has a more complex function: (1) the post-cubist portrait is realised in the way of comic (transfer from the high art of modernism into the popular culture of the comic), and (2) the comic-like form is effected as an artistic painting, whereby the transfer from one context into another is reduced to a hermeneutical absurdity (by pictorial means high art is interpreted as an expression of popular culture, and an icon of popular culture is realized and exhibited as an example of high art).

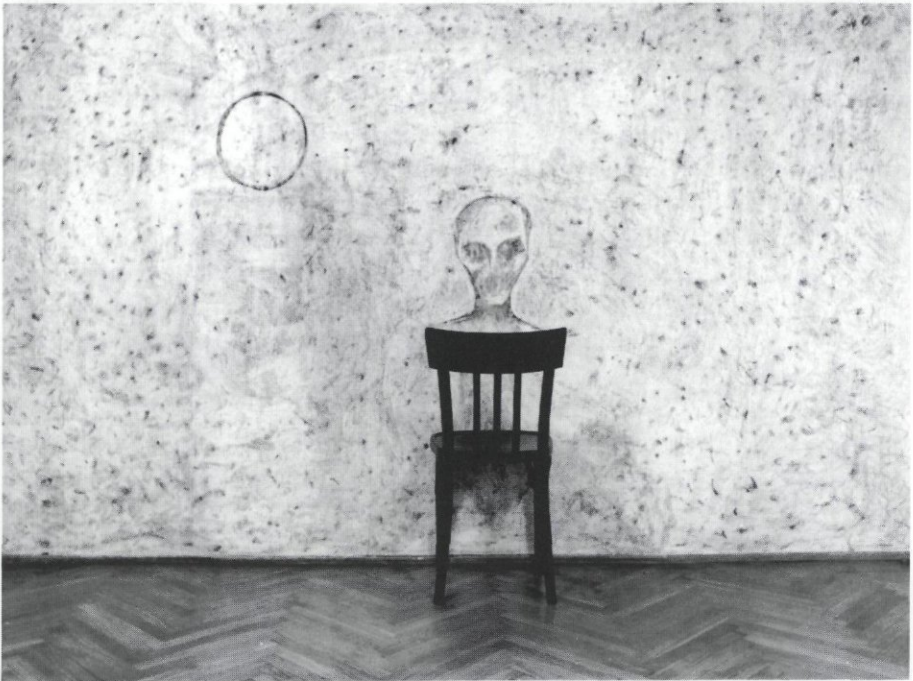
In conceptual art the idea of visual meta-language is most often integrated with the effects of linguistic meta-language. For conceptual art any seeing means reading. For instance, in the work of the group Art & Language »Map to not indicate...« (1967) the visual scheme of the map is not there to represent the North American continent, but to represent an anomalous look of the map, i.e. the anomalous relationship between the text and the map. Visual elements are a support for meta-linguistic intentions of the artist to bring linguistic and visual language, paradoxically and anomalously, into the same plane of representation (semantic interchangeability). Let us consider another example. The concept of analytical proposition was introduced into art practice by Joseph Kosuth in his text »Art after Philosophy« (1969). According to Kosuth, works of art are analytical propositions because they do not supply information on facts, but show the artist's intention. A work of art understood as an analytical proposition does not describe the behaviour of physical or mental objects, but expresses formal definitions of art or formal consequences of that definition. Kosuth's work »One and Three Chairs« (1965) is an example of artistic work as an expression of an analytical proposition. To the proposition »chair« correspond: the visual expression (the photograph representing the chair), the expression of the chair as a three-dimensional object, and the linguistic expression (a dictionary definition of the term »chair«). The expression of proposition can be seen (photograph), utilized (object – chair) or read (text of the dictionary definition).

3. Mimesis of Mimesis

The mimesis of mimesis (representation of the represented) is a Postmodernist eclectic (postmetaphysical, posthistorical) conception of art. A painting does not represent reality, the original essence of art or the artist's direct emotion. A painting represents historical or current forms of representation of reality, fantasies or language games.

Mimesis is interpreted as the ideology and the art of imitation, emula-

tion and illusionist representation of appearance of real or fictional objects, situations, events and beings. The concept of mimesis has been exposed to criticism and destruction in modern art, from post-impressionism to minimal and conceptual art. In abstract constructivist, concretist and formalist art it is rejected as historically superfluous. In surrealism and fantastic painting the principle of mimesis is applied as a stylistic pattern, i.e. impossible, fantastic and fictional events, situations and beings are represented in the way the real world is represented in mimetic art. In hyperrealism the forms of imitation, emulation and illusionist representation are rhetorically perfected and supported by contemporary technological devices. The result of hyperrealism is not the realization of the ideas of traditional mimesis, since hyperrealist painting and sculpture are representations of photography. The works of hyperrealism are paradoxically a double mimesis: representations of the depicted object and representations of the effects of technical media by which the object was represented in the first instance and on whose basis the hyperrealist work was effected. Chuck Close's portraits are pictorial representations of photography with all the sharpness and non-sharpness found in photographic copies and blow-ups.



Neša Paripović, *Self-Portrait* (1989)

With the postmodernist revival of representation the idea (technique and ideology) of mimesis regained attention. Mimesis of mimesis can be interpreted as a visual deconstruction of pictorial metaphysics. Whereas philosophical deconstruction shows and disjoins the entire body of Western metaphysics (deconstruction of logocentrism in philosophy, literature, ideology), mimesis of mimesis is a citational-collage-montage production of a visual work of art which disjoins visual metaphysics (anomalous nodes of logocentrism – Derrida, ocularcentrism – Jay, euclidocentrism – Deleuze).

A Postmodernist painting is an ecstatic and obscene reflection and simulation of other works of art, symbolic scenes, aspects of Artworld, culture and society. According to Postmodernist theory every work in the history of art was created by representation (expression, transformation) of existing models of representation, but only the art and theory of Postmodernism set this principle as a poetic foundation of art production. In Postmodernist painting of the eighties, trans-avantgarde (Clemente), neoexpressionist (Kiefer), anachronistic (Mariani) or retrograde (Irwin) paintings are based on eclectic representation, citation, collage and montage of traces of scenes, expressions, iconographies and genre models of traditional European, antimodernist and modernist art. They are no longer meta-linguistic and not in the sense in which the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan claims that there is no meta-language! For instance, David Salle's painting »Doors with Light« (1989) has a seeming structure of visual meta-language since it simultaneously represents various forms of representation in high art and popular culture. However, it does not have the legitimacy of meta-language, since it introduces the schemes of visual meta-linguistic scenes into an expressively subjective and arbitrary (expressive, eroticized, entropic, non-motivated) painting. It is demonstrated that subjectivity (fragmentariness) and visual arbitrariness penetrate the objectivity of meta-language, transforming it into a reflection of reflection (mimesis of mimesis).

Neša Paripović, in his series of works completed between 1988 and 1993, represents a painting (painting on a wall, graffiti, drawing on paper, ambient-sculptural arrangement in front of a painting) by a photograph. The established method is the mimesis of mimesis (representation of the represented), whereby painting as representation of a manual expressive iconic trace is deconstructed to a luminous photographic print. The tactile direct expression of painting traces on the wall cools down to the luminous (alienated print). Paripović shows that a photograph represents the represented and expressed painting by becoming a visual and polysemantic interpretation of what cannot be subjected to discourse interpretation (pictorial signifier). By imposing a visual voice (the voice of photography) the manual character of

painting is reduced to the shown skeleton of a painting which is seductively and fatally immersed in the language of photography. His works are intervisual since they show how the objectual, the optical, the visual, the pictorial, the semiological and the linguistic confront each other (transfigure) institutionally (in media) by various forms of visual representation (the difference between the power of representation in painting and in photography). Transfiguration is a method of transferring one visual order with all its optical, visual and signification-ideological characteristics into another visual system. This involves a change of sensual effects, meanings, sense and values of the transferred material, as well as of the system into which the elements of another system are inserted (photography rhetorically masks the body of painting, whereas painting penetrates the semantic effects of photography).

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ABSTRACTS

Lars-Olof Åhlberg

Modernost in okularocentrizem. Ponoven pogled na Descartesa in Heideggra

Kritika okularocentrizma, prevladujoče težnje privilegirati vid na račun drugih čutnih modalnosti v zahodnem (in morda ne le zahodnem) mišljenju, je pred nedavnim postala predmet napada poststrukturalističnih in postfenomenoloških mislecev. Kritika okularocentrizma (ki jo je dokumentiral Martin Jay v knjigi *Sklonjeni pogled: Zavračanje vida v francoski misli dvajsetega stoletja*) naj bi okrepila in dopolnila kritiko logo-centrizma in metafizike navzočnosti. Povedano drugače, ta kritika tvori del kritike razsvetljenske racionalnosti. V članku zagovarjam mnenje, da kritika razsvetljenstva pogosto cilja višje kot pa leži njena tarča. Heideggrova kritika »skopične« racionalnosti naše kulture naj bi služila kot radikalna alternativa okularocentričnemu mišljenju. Pokazati skušam, da Heideggrova kritika razsvetljenske racionalnosti in modernosti ni radikalno antiesencialistična in antifundacionalistična, kot trdijo njegovi učenci. Pokazati tudi skušam, da je Heidegger, zaradi svoje problematične politične preteklosti in kritike modernosti, v najboljšem primeru dvomljiv zaveznik v boju proti zatiralski »skopični« racionalnosti.

Lars-Olof Åhlberg

Modernity and Ocularcentrism. A Second Look at Descartes and Heidegger

The critique of ocularcentrism, the dominant tendency in Western (and perhaps not only Western) thinking to favour sight at the expense of other sense modalities, has recently come under attack from post-structuralist and post-phenomenological thinkers. The critique of ocularcentrism (documented in Martin Jay's work *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*) is intended to reinforce and supplement the critique of logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence, in other words, it forms part of the critique of Enlightenment rationality. I argue that the critique of Enlightenment rationality frequently overshoots its target. Heidegger's critique of the »scopic« rationality of our culture has been invoked as a radical alternative to ocularcentric thinking. I attempt to show that Heidegger's critique of Enlightenment rationality and of modernity is not radically anti-essentialist and anti-foundationalist, as his followers maintain. I also try to show that Heidegger is at best a dubious ally in the fight against an oppressive »scopic« rationality because of the sinister political background of his critique of modernity.

Aleš Erjavec

Videnje, slikarstvo in umetnost

Avtor najprej prikaže nekaj problemov, ki so lastni kartezijaskemu perspekti-valizmu ter pri tem uporablja nekatere argumente, ki jih je ponudil N. Bryson. Čeprav soglašja z Brysonovo kritiko »esencialne kopije«, vseeno trdi, da vsaj del moderne evropske umetnosti vsebuje podobne značilnosti kot so one, ki jih Bryson odkriva v klasični kitajski umetnosti. Primeri takšne umetnosti so dela Cézanna ali Rodina, pri čemer Merleau-Pontyjeva filozofija percepcije in eksistencialna fenomenologija nudita teoretsko razdelavo njenih bistvenih potez. Merleau-Pontyjeva filozofija videnega in vidnega je vseeno pomanjkljiva, saj ostaja ujetnik fenomenološkega transcendentalnega ega, ki ga preseže J. Lacan. V zaključnem delu članka avtor trdi, da bi morali, če hočemo ohraniti pojem umetnosti, pripisati večji pomen Imaginarnemu. Po njegovem mnenju bi pojem umetniškega izkustva lahko premostil zev med »epistemološko« in fenomenološko interpretacijo umetnosti.

Aleš Erjavec

Seeing, Painting and Art

The author first sketches some of the problems inherent to Cartesian perspectivalism, following certain arguments offered by N. Bryson. While agreeing with Bryson's critique of the »Essential Copy«, he nonetheless argues that at least a part of modern European art contains similar features to those that Bryson discovers in classical Chinese art. Examples of such art are the works of Cézanne or Rodin, with Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of perception and existential phenomenology offering a theoretical elaboration of its essential traits. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the seen and the visible is nevertheless found wanting, for it remains captive of the phenomenological transcendental ego which is overcome in J. Lacan. In the concluding part of the paper the author argues that if we want to retain the notion of art, we should, at the same time, ascribe more relevance to the Imaginary. In his view the notion of artistic experience could bridge the gap between the »epistemological« and the phenomenological interpretation of art.

Marina Gržinić

Histerija: fizična prisotnost in pravna odsotnost ter AIDS: fizična odsotnost in pravna prisotnost

Avtorica analizira v članku izraza »prisotnost« in »odsotnost«. Analizo tega binarnega para umesti v diskurzivne okvire in reprezentacijske sisteme devetnajstega in dvajsetega stoletja. Da bi bolje dojeli »politiko reprezentacije« prisotnosti in odsotnosti, le-to poveže z diskurzivnimi okviri in reprezentacijskimi sistemi dveh bolezni, emblematičnih za devetnajsto in dvajseto stoletje, s histerijo in z AIDSom. Po avtoričinem mnenju histerija in AIDS nista samo v tesni povezavi z dvojico prisotnost/odsotnost, temveč tudi s politiko reprezentacije.

Marina Gržinić

Hysteria: Physical Presence and Juridical Absence & AIDS: Physical Absence and Juridical Presence

In the essay the authoress examines the terms »presence« and its counterpart »absence« and approaches these binary terms within the discursive contexts and representational systems of the 19th and 20th century. To grasp the »politics of representation« of presence/absence she relates it to the discursive contexts and representational systems of two illnesses: hysteria and AIDS, each of these representing the illness *par excellence* of a specific century. In her view these illnesses function not only in relation to the duality of presence and absence, but also through specific ways of representational politics.

Martin Jay

Mar mora biti pravica slepa? Izziv podob zakonu

Zavezane oči alegorije boginje Pravice v zgodnji modernosti so navadno razlagali kot znak novega poudarka sodniške nepristranskosti, ki je vodila do modernega kulta abstraktne norme v juridičnem pozitivizmu. V tem članku se sprašujemo, kakšna je bila cena zanikanja podob v očeh resnice. V njem proučujemo odgovore, ki jih nakazujejo dela Horkheimerja in Adorna, Derridaja ter nekaterih feminističnih teoretičark. Čeprav priznavamo argumentiranost njihovega nasprotovanja abstraktnim pojmom nepri-stranske pravice, v zaključku ponudimo nekatera opravičila za vsaj začasno ukinitvev zmožnosti videti vidne razlike pri uveljavljanju zakona.

Martin Jay

Must Justice Be Blind? The Challenge of Images to the Law

The blindfolding of the allegorical goddess of Justice in the early modern period has been generally understood as a mark of the new stress on judicial impartiality, which led to the modern cult of the abstract norm in juridical positivism. This paper asks the question, what were the costs of denying images to the eyes of justice? It explores answers suggested by the work of Horkheimer and Adorno, Derrida and several feminist theorists. Although acknowledging the power of their argument against abstract notions of impartial justice, it concludes by proposing certain justifications for at least a temporary suspension of the ability to see visible differences in applying the law.

Eva K.W. Man

Eksperimentalno slikarstvo in slikarske teorije v kolonialnem Hong Kongu (1940-1980): premislek o kulturni identiteti

Članek nudi kratek opis zanimive zgodovine slikarstva in slikarskih teorij v hitro razvijajočem se Hong Kongu od l. 1940 do l. 1980, tako da poudari delo in estetiko večih reprezentativnih lokalnih kitajskih slikarjev in umetniških smeri. Ta oris zgodovine prikazuje iskanje kulturne identitete in različne drže med kitajskimi slikarji, ki so bili boj med moderniziranimi in zahodnimi vplivi v umetnosti ter svojim kitajskim izročilom. Avtorica primerja to slikarstvo z državami mlajše generacije osemdesetih let, ki odseva kapitalistične vplive pri iskanju umetniške identitete. Zaključni del vsebuje kritično primerjavo umetnosti in teorij kulture v sodobnem postkolonialnem diskurzu glede na njihovo aplikacijo na razmere v Hong Kongu.

Eva K. W. Man

Experimental Painting and Painting Theories in Colonial Hong Kong (1940-1980): Reflection on Cultural Identity

The article provides a brief description of the fabulous history of painting and painting theories in the rapidly developing Hong Kong from 1940 to 1980 by highlighting the work and aesthetics of several representative local Chinese painters and art institutions. This outline of history reflects a search for cultural identity and the different attitudes among Chinese painters who struggled between modernized and Western influences in art and their Chinese tradition. Comparison is made with the attitudes of the younger generation in the 80's, which reflects the capitalist influences on the search for an artistic identity. Finally, art and cultural theories in a contemporary post-colonial discourse are critically examined in view of their application to the present situation in Hong Kong.

Jos de Mul

Zatajitev in reprezentacija v Magrittovi sliki »Izdajstvo podob«

Izhodišče eseja je slika Renéja Magritta »Izdajstvo podob«. Avtor prouči vlogo, ki jo zatajitev (*Verleugung*) igra v estetskem izkustvu vizualnih reprezentacij. Avtor trdi, da je estetska zatajitev ozko povezana s spolno zatajitvijo, kot jo razlagata Freud in Mannonijeva v svojih besedilih o fetišizmu. Ta razlaga estetske zatajitve je nato povezana s poststrukturalističnimi teorijami reprezentacije kot jih najdemo pri Lacanu, Barthesu in Derridaju, kar rezultira v nadrealistični »dekonstrukciji« psihoanalitičnih in post-strukturalističnih teorij reprezentacije.

Jos de Mul

Disavowal and Representation in Magritte's »La trahison des images«

Taking René Magritte's painting *La trahison des images* as a starting point, this essay examines the role disavowal (*Verleugnung*) plays in the aesthetic experience of visual representations. It argues that aesthetic disavowal is closely related to sexual disavowal, as it is interpreted by Freud and Mannoni in their texts on fetishism. Next, this interpretation of aesthetic disavowal is related to the poststructuralist theories of representation of Lacan, Barthes and Derrida, resulting in a surrealist 'deconstruction' of the psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theories of representation.

Mikhail Ryklin

Propad spomenikov ali: kaj lahko in česa ne moremo pokopati

Članek je posvečen usodi spomenikov sovjetske dobe v letih 1991-1996.

Po neuspelem državnem udaru avgustu 1991 so množice jeznih ikonoklastov zmetale s podstavkov vrsto najbolj znanih moskovskih spomenikov. Ta dogodek je spodbudil mednarodno skupino umetnikov, da so predlagali spremeniti Moskvo v »vrt totalitarne kiparstva«, s čimer bi poprejšnjim propagandnim delom dali nekakšen arhivski status. Zaradi večih razlogov se je zamisel na prvi pogled zdela imenitna. Njena edina pomanjkljivost je bila, da je tistim, ki so izvajali projekt, primanjkovalo distance, ki bi jim omogočila poigravati se s Terorjem in njegovimi referenti. Projekt so umaknili.

V Moskvi delujoči fotograf Igor Muhin je nasprotno pričel dokumentirati propad tisočev in tisočev podeželskih spomenikov na terenu. Izkazalo se je, da so bolj podlegali slabim vremenskim razmeram, spontanemu vandalizmu ter pomanjkanju skrbi kakor pa globokim političnim razlogom.

Avtor uporabi Benjaminova in Derridajeva besedila o Moskvi, da bi definiral status »sedanjega trenutka« v ruski zgodovini (močno ponavljajoči se v svoji domnevni enkratnosti). »Nezaslišane« lastnosti sedanosti se izkažejo kot še ena zbirka sledov.

Mikhail Ryklin

The Collapse of the Statues or What Can & What Cannot Be Buried?

This article is devoted to the fate of monumental works of the Soviet period in the years 1991-96.

In August 1991, after the abortive coup, a number of the best-known Moscow monuments were knocked off their pedestals by crowds of angry iconoclasts. This event prompted an international team of artists to come up with the idea of transforming Moscow into a »garden of totalitarian sculpture«, thus conferring on former works of propaganda a kind of archival status. On the face of it, the idea seemed excellent for many reasons. Its only drawback was that those involved in the project lacked the distance that would permit them to toy with terror and its referents. The project was shelved.

Moscow-based photographer Igor Mukhin, on the contrary, started documenting the decay of thousands upon thousands of provincial monuments at the grass-root level. It turned out that they were succumbing to bad weather conditions, spontaneous acts of barbarism and lack of care more than to a deep political considerations.

Benjamin's and Derrida's texts on Moscow are put to use in order to define the status of the »present moment« in Russian history (highly repetitive in its alleged uniqueness). The »unheard-of« quality of the present proves to be one more collection of traces.

Maryvonne Saison

Od nostalgije k umetnosti: videti z vsem svojim telesom

Filozofija percepcije, ki jo je razvijal Merleau-Ponty od l. 1945 dalje, kaže pomen izvornega izkustva: vsi smo bili telo med rečmi, preden smo se pričeli od njih razlikovati kot zavedajoči se in spoznavajoči subjekt.

Ta izvornost, ki jo vsakdo doživi v svoji individualni zgodovini in je zastavljena kot moment anonimnosti, je doživljena kot nekakšen paradiz in njeni vztrajajoči sledovi so povezani z globoko nostalgijo.

Edino umetnost se odziva tej nostalgiji: od svojih prvih besedil dalje pripisuje Merleau-Ponty umetnosti ontološki cilj, s čimer nakazuje pot vsemu nadaljnjemu fenomenološkemu razmišljanju.

Maryvonne Saison

De la nostalgie à l'art: voir de tout son corps

La philosophie de la perception élaborée par Merleau-Ponty dès 1945 montre l'importance de l'expérience originaire: nous avons tous été un corps parmi les choses avant de nous en différencier comme sujet conscient et connaissant.

Cet originaire vécu par chacun dans son histoire individuelle, désigné comme le moment de l'anonymat, est vécu sous des couleurs paradisiaques et ses traces persistantes sont à l'origine d'une nostalgie profonde.

Seul l'art peut répondre à cette nostalgie: dès ses premiers textes, Merleau-Ponty assigne à l'art une tâche ontologique, indiquant la voie pour toute la réflexion phénoménologique ultérieure.

Ken-ichi Sasaki

Erotičnost vizualnosti. Semantična analiza japonskih besed »oko« in »videnje«

Članek je razdeljen na dva dela. V prvem delu je obravnavan aktivni značaj gledanja. Ta je tako aktiven, da angažira naše celotno bitje v izkustvenem polju. V drugem delu je nasprotno poudarjena aktivna moč sveta: neprosojni pojav, ki poseduje to močno privlačnost, se imenuje v japonščini »oko« – ravno tako kot organ vida. Po teh analizah je obravnavana specifičnost vida med petimi čutili.

Ken-ichi Sasaki

The Sexiness of Visuality. A Semantic Analysis of the Japanese Words: Eye and Seeing

The paper is divided into two parts. In the first part, we discuss the active character of seeing, so active that it involves all our being in the experiential field. In the second, on the contrary, it is the active power of the world which is underlined: the dense phenomenon endowed with this strong appeal is also called »eye« in Japanese, just like the visual organ. After these analyses we refer to the specificity of sight among the five senses.

Richard Shusterman

Urbani prizori in nevideno

Avtor analizira zgodovinske, teoretske in metaforične pomene »mesta«, pri čemer opira svoja stališča na poglede G. Simmla, F. Engelsa, W. Benjamina, L. Mumforda, R. Sennetta in

C. Baudelaire. Svojo razpravo osredotoča predvsem na Berlin ter ponudi pragmatistično branje tega mesta.

Richard Shusterman
Urban Scenes and Unseens

The author analyses the historical, theoretical and metaphorical meanings of the »city«, supporting or illustrating his views with those of G. Simmel, F. Engels, W. Benjamin, L. Mumford, R. Sennett and C. Baudelaire. He focuses his discussion mostly on Berlin and offers a pragmatist reading of this city.

Johan Snyman
Trpljenje in politika spomina

Avtor se loteva postapartheidovskega branja »spomenika ženskam«, ki so ga leta 1913 odkrili v Južni Afriki. Oris družbene funkcije podobnih spomenikov (npr. »Spomenika vietnamskim veteranom« v Washingtonu in »Dachauskega spomenika« blizu Münchna) služi, da bi poudarili estetsko ideologijo »Spomenika ženskam«. Avtor meni, da bi spomenik, takšnega kot je, lahko rehabilitirali v postapartheidovski družbi, če bi njegovo percepcijo dopolnjevalo širše poznavanje vojnega trpljenja. Spomenik bi lahko rekontekstualizirali tako, da bi omogočili slišanje drugih glasov, tj. glasov ženskih in črnih žrtev davnega spopada med Buri in Britanci.

Johan Snyman
Suffering and the Politics of Memory

The paper attempts a post apartheid reading of the Women's memorial, unveiled in 1913, in South Africa. The social function of comparable memorials (eg. the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, and the Dachau memorial near Munich) is outlined in order to highlight the aesthetic ideology of the Women's Memorial. It is suggested that the Women's Memorial, as it stands, can be rehabilitated in a post apartheid society, if its perception can be informed by a wider knowledge of the sufferings of war. The memorial can be recontextualized so that the voices of the other, i.e. women and black victims of the long gone conflict between Boer and British, can become audible.

Miško Šuvaković
Asimetrije jezika in vida. Uvod v filozofijo umetnosti

0. Temeljna trditev: gledanje in videno v slikarstvu lahko proučujemo prek posrednih oblik reprezentacije. Posredovanje vida kaže na intencionalno naravo umetnih optičnih in vidnih pojavov umetnosti. Intencionalnost omogoča primerjavo vizualnih in lingvističnih učinkov. Potencialna asimetrija vizualnega in lingvističnega vidika umetnosti (slikarstva) je problem, ki ga obravnavamo v članku.

1. Reprezentacija je strukturalna, epistemološka, semantična in tehnična metoda ustvarjanja ali proizvajanja umetniškega dela, ki se vizualno in optično referira na dejanski ali fikijski predmet, bitje, situacijo ali dogodek.

2. Vizualni metajezik je pomenjanje in strukturalni red vizualnega umetniškega dela, s pomočjo katerega so druga umetniška dela prikazana in reprezentirana, kot tudi vidiki umetniškega sveta, stilski vzorci, žanrska pravila in tipizirane sheme, načini vzpostavljanja pomena v delu likovne umetnosti, jezikovno-slikovne igre, vizualne lastnosti umetniškega dela ter konceptualne in ideološke naddoločenosti.

3. Mimesis mimesisa (reprezentacija reprezentiranega) je postmodernistična (postmetafizična, postzgodovinska) koncepcija umetnosti. Slikarstvo ne reprezentira realnosti, izvornega bistva umetnosti ali neposrednih umetnikovih čustev.

Miško Šuvaković

Asymmetries of Language and Sight. Introduction to a Philosophy of Art

0. The basic postulate is: seeing and the seen in painting can be studied through indirect forms of representation. The mediation of sight points to the intentional nature of artificial optical and visual phenomena of art. Intentionality enables a comparison of visual and linguistic effects. Potential asymmetry of the visual and the linguistic aspect of art (painting) is the problem which is elaborated in the paper.

1. Representation is a structural, epistemological, semantic and technical method of creating or producing a work of art which visually and optically refers to a real or fictional object, being, situation, or event.

2. Visual meta-language is the signification and structural order of a visual work of art by means of which other works of art are shown and represented, as well as aspects of the artworld, stylistic patterns, genre rules and typified schemes, ways of establishing meaning in a work of art, language-pictorial games, visual properties of a work of art, and conceptual and ideological overdeterminations.

3. The mimesis of mimesis (representation of the represented) is a Post-modernist eclectic (post-metaphysical, post-historical) conception of art whereby a painting does not represent reality, the original essence of art, or the direct emotions of the artist.

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Notes and references will be printed as footnotes. They should be typed (double-spaced) on a separate sheet and numbered consecutively. Note numbers should be referred in the text by superscripts.

Citations should be presented as follows:

1. Gilles-Gaston Granger, *Pour la connaissance philosophique*, Odile Jacob, Paris 1988, p. 123.
2. Cf. Charles Taylor, "Rationality", in M. Hollis, S. Lukes (Eds.), *Rationality and Relativism*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1983, pp. 87-105.
3. Granger, *op. cit.*, p.31.
4. *Ibid.*, p.49.
5. Friedrich Rapp, "Observational Data and Scientific Progress", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, Oxford, 11 (2/1980), p. 153.

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