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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. Murgent, 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).