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VISION AND VISUALITY

EDITED BY

Hal Foster

DISCUSSIONS IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

SCOPIC REGIMES OF MODERNITY



Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. *The World Pays Homage to Spain*, 1762–64. Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art, Samuel H. Kress Collection. (Courtesy National Gallery of Art)

The modern era, it is often alleged,¹ has been dominated by the sense of sight in a way that set it apart from its premodern predecessors and possibly its postmodern successor. Beginning with the Renaissance and the scientific revolution, modernity has been normally considered resolutely ocularcentric. The invention of printing, according to the familiar argument of McLuhan and Ong,² reinforced the privileging of the visual abetted by such inventions as the telescope and the microscope. “The perceptual field thus constituted,” concludes a typical account, “was fundamentally nonreflexive, visual and quantitative.”³

Although the implied characterization of different eras in this generalization as more favorably inclined to other senses should not be taken at face value,⁴ it is difficult to deny that the visual has been dominant in modern Western culture in a wide variety of ways. Whether we focus on “the mirror of nature” metaphor in philosophy with Richard Rorty or emphasize the prevalence of surveillance with Michel Foucault or bemoan the society of the spectacle with Guy Debord,⁵ we confront again and again the ubiquity of vision as the master sense of the modern era.

But what precisely constitutes the visual culture of this era is not so readily apparent. Indeed, we might well ask, borrowing Christian Metz’s term, is there one unified “scopic regime”⁶ of the modern or are there several, perhaps competing ones? For, as Jacqueline Rose has recently reminded us, “our previous history is not the petrified block of a single visual space since, looked at obliquely, it can always be seen to contain its moment

of unease."⁷ In fact, may there possibly be several such moments, which can be discerned, if often in repressed form, in the modern era? If so, the scopic regime of modernity may best be understood as a contested terrain, rather than a harmoniously integrated complex of visual theories and practices. It may, in fact, be characterized by a differentiation of visual subcultures, whose separation has allowed us to understand the multiple implications of sight in ways that are now only beginning to be appreciated. That new understanding, I want to suggest, may well be the product of a radical reversal in the hierarchy of visual subcultures in the modern scopic regime.

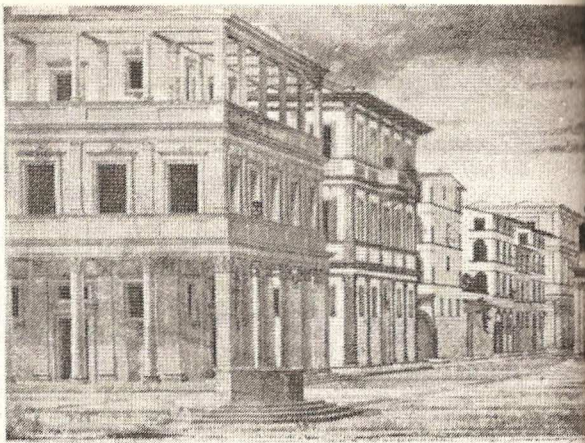
Before spelling out the competing ocular fields in the modern era as I understand them, I want to make clear that I am presenting only very crude ideal typical characterizations, which can easily be faulted for their obvious distance from the complex realities they seek to approximate. I am also not suggesting that the three main visual subcultures I single out for special attention exhaust all those that might be discerned in the lengthy and loosely defined epoch we call modernity. But, as will soon become apparent, it will be challenging enough to try to do justice in the limited space I have to those I do want to highlight as most significant.

Let me begin by turning to what is normally claimed to be the dominant, even totally hegemonic, visual model of the modern era, that which we can identify with Renaissance notions of perspective in the visual arts and Cartesian ideas of subjective rationality in philosophy. For convenience, it can be called Cartesian perspectivalism. That it is often assumed to be equivalent to the modern scopic regime per se is illustrated by two remarks from prominent commentators. The first is the claim made by the art historian William Ivins, Jr., in his *Art and Geometry* of 1946 that "the history of art during the five hundred years that have elapsed since Alberti wrote has been little more than the story of the slow diffusion of his ideas through the artists and

peoples of Europe."⁸ The second is from Richard Rorty's widely discussed *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, published in 1979: "in the Cartesian model the intellect *inspects* entities modeled on retinal images. . . . In Descartes' conception—the one that became the basis for 'modern' epistemology—it is *representations* which are in the 'mind.'"⁹ The assumption expressed in these citations that Cartesian perspectivalism is *the* reigning visual model of modernity is often tied to the further contention that it succeeded in becoming so because it best expressed the "natural" experience of sight valorized by the scientific world view. When the assumed equivalence between scientific observation and the natural world was disputed, so too was the domination of this visual subculture, a salient instance being Erwin Panofsky's celebrated critique of perspective as merely a conventional symbolic form.¹⁰

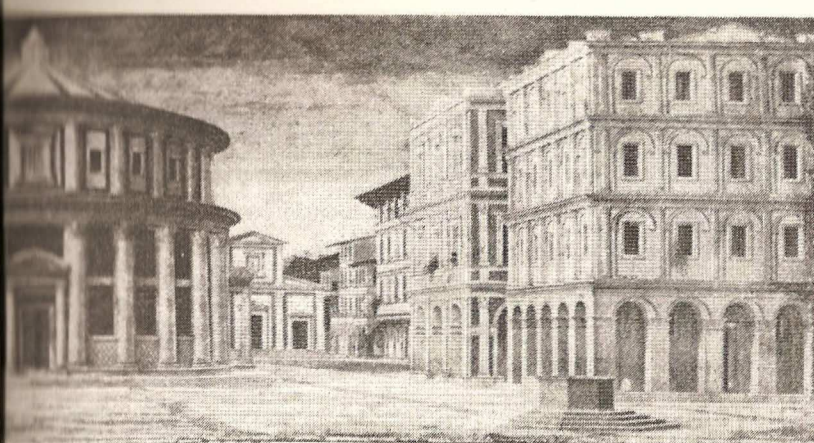
But for a very long time Cartesian perspectivalism was identified with the modern scopic regime *tout court*. With full awareness of the schematic nature of what follows, let me try to establish its most important characteristics. There is, of course, an immense literature on the discovery, rediscovery, or invention of perspective—all three terms are used depending on the writer's interpretation of ancient visual knowledge—in the Italian Quattrocento. Brunelleschi is traditionally accorded the honor of being its practical inventor or discoverer, while Alberti is almost universally acknowledged as its first theoretical interpreter. From Ivins, Panofsky, and Krautheimer to Edgerton, White, and Kubovy,¹¹ scholars have investigated virtually every aspect of the perspectivalist revolution, technical, aesthetic, psychological, religious, even economic and political.

Despite many still disputed issues, a rough consensus seems to have emerged around the following points. Growing out of the late medieval fascination with the metaphysical implications of light—light as divine *lux* rather than perceived *lumen*—linear perspective came to symbolize a harmony between the mathe-



mathematical regularities in optics and God's will. Even after the religious underpinnings of this equation were eroded, the favorable connotations surrounding the allegedly objective optical order remained powerfully in place. These positive associations had been displaced from the objects, often religious in content, depicted in earlier painting to the spatial relations of the perspectival canvas themselves. This new concept of space was geometrically isotropic, rectilinear, abstract, and uniform. The *velo* or veil of threads Alberti used to depict it conventionalized that space in a way that anticipated the grids so characteristic of twentieth-century art, although, as Rosalind Krauss has reminded us, Alberti's veil was assumed to correspond to external reality in a way that its modernist successor did not.¹²

The three-dimensional, rationalized space of perspectival vision could be rendered on a two-dimensional surface by following all of the transformational rules spelled out in Alberti's *De Pittura* and later treatises by Viator, Dürer, and others. The basic device was the idea of symmetrical visual pyramids or cones with one of their apexes the receding vanishing or centric point in the painting, the other the eye of the painter or the beholder. The transparent window that was the canvas, in Alberti's



School of Piero della Francesca. *View of an Ideal City*, 1470(?). Urbino, Palazzo Ducale. (Courtesy Art Resource, N.Y.)

famous metaphor, could also be understood as a flat mirror reflecting the geometricalized space of the scene depicted back onto the no less geometricalized space radiating out from the viewing eye.

Significantly, that eye was singular, rather than the two eyes of normal binocular vision. It was conceived in the manner of a lone eye looking through a peephole at the scene in front of it. Such an eye was, moreover, understood to be static, unblinking, and fixated, rather than dynamic, moving with what later scientists would call "saccadic" jumps from one focal point to another. In Norman Bryson's terms, it followed the logic of the Gaze rather than the Glance, thus producing a visual take that was eternalized, reduced to one "point of view," and disembodied. In what Bryson calls the "Founding Perception" of the Cartesian perspectivalist tradition,

*the gaze of the painter arrests the flux of phenomena, contemplates the visual field from a vantage-point outside the mobility of duration, in an eternal moment of disclosed presence; while in the moment of viewing, the viewing subject unites his gaze with the Founding Perception, in a moment of perfect recreation of that first epiphany.*¹³

A number of implications followed from the adoption of this visual order. The abstract coldness of the perspectival gaze meant the withdrawal of the painter's emotional entanglement with the objects depicted in geometricalized space. The participatory involvement of more absorptive visual modes was diminished, if not entirely suppressed, as the gap between spectator and spectacle widened. The moment of erotic projection in vision—what St. Augustine had anxiously condemned as “ocular desire”¹⁴—was lost as the bodies of the painter and viewer were forgotten in the name of an allegedly disincarnated, absolute eye. Although such a gaze could, of course, still fall on objects of desire—think, for example, of the female nude in Dürer's famous print of a draftsman drawing her through a screen of perspectival threads¹⁵—it did so largely in the service of a reifying male look that turned its targets into stone. The marmoreal nude drained of its capacity to arouse desire was at least tendentially the outcome of this development. Despite important exceptions, such as Caravaggio's seductive boys or Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, the nudes themselves fail to look out at the viewer, radiating no erotic energy in the other direction. Only much later in the history of Western art, with the brazenly shocking nudes in Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and *Olympia*, did the crossing of the viewer's gaze with that of the subject finally occur. By then the rationalized visual order of Cartesian perspectivalism was already coming under attack in other ways as well.

In addition to its de-eroticizing of the visual order, it had also fostered what might be called de-narrativization or de-textualization. That is, as abstract, quantitatively conceptualized space became more interesting to the artist than the qualitatively differentiated subjects painted within it, the rendering of the scene became an end in itself. Alberti, to be sure, had emphasized the use of perspective to depict *istoria*, ennobling stories, but in time they seemed less important than the visual skill shown in depicting them. Thus the abstraction of artistic form

from any substantive content, which is part of the clichéd history of twentieth-century modernism, was already prepared by the perspectival revolution five centuries earlier. What Bryson in his book *Word and Image* calls the diminution of the discursive function of painting, its telling a story to the unlettered masses, in favor of its figural function,¹⁶ meant the increasing autonomy of the image from any extrinsic purpose, religious or otherwise. The effect of realism was consequently enhanced as canvases were filled with more and more information that seemed unrelated to any narrative or textual function. Cartesian perspectivalism was thus in league with a scientific world view that no longer hermeneutically read the world as a divine text, but rather saw it as situated in a mathematically regular spatio-temporal order filled with natural objects that could only be observed from without by the dispassionate eye of the neutral researcher.

It was also complicitous, so many commentators have claimed, with the fundamentally bourgeois ethic of the modern world. According to Edgerton, Florentine businessmen with their newly invented technique of double-entry bookkeeping may have been “more and more disposed to a visual order that would accord with the tidy principles of mathematical order that they applied to their bank ledgers.”¹⁷ John Berger goes so far as to claim that more appropriate than the Albertian metaphor of the window on the world is that of “a safe let into a wall, a safe in which the visible has been deposited.”¹⁸ It was, he contends, no accident that the invention (or rediscovery) of perspective virtually coincided with the emergence of the oil painting detached from its context and available for buying and selling. Separate from the painter and the viewer, the visual field depicted on the other side of the canvas could become a portable commodity able to enter the circulation of capitalist exchange. At the same time, if philosophers like Martin Heidegger are correct, the natural world was transformed through the technological world

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view into a "standing reserve" for the surveillance and manipulation of a dominating subject.¹⁹

Cartesian perspectivalism has, in fact, been the target of a widespread philosophical critique, which has denounced its privileging of an ahistorical, disinterested, disembodied subject entirely outside of the world it claims to know only from afar. The questionable assumption of a transcendental subjectivity characteristic of universalist humanism, which ignores our embeddedness in what Maurice Merleau-Ponty liked to call the flesh of the world, is thus tied to the "high altitude" thinking characteristic of this scopic regime. In many accounts, this entire tradition has thus been subjected to wholesale condemnation as both false and pernicious.

Looked at more closely, however, it is possible to discern internal tensions in Cartesian perspectivalism itself that suggest it was not quite as uniformly coercive as is sometimes assumed. Thus, for example, John White distinguishes between what he terms "artificial perspective," in which the mirror held up to nature is flat, and "synthetic perspective," in which that mirror is presumed to be concave, thus producing a curved rather than planar space on the canvas. Here, according to White, Paolo Uccello and Leonardo da Vinci were the major innovators, offering a "spherical space which is homogeneous, but by no means simple, and which possesses some of the qualities of Einstein's finite infinity."²⁰ Although artificial perspective was the dominant model, its competitor was never entirely forgotten.

Michael Kubovy has recently added the observation that what he calls the "robustness of perspective"²¹ meant that Renaissance canvases could be successfully viewed from more than the imagined apex of the beholder's visual pyramid. He criticizes those who naively identify the rules of perspective established by its theoretical champions with the actual practice of the artists themselves. Rather than a procrustean bed, they were practically subordinated to the exigencies of perception, which means that

denunciations of their failings are often directed at a straw man (or at least his straw eye).

Equally problematic is the subject position in the Cartesian perspectivalist epistemology. For the monocular eye at the apex of beholder's pyramid could be construed as transcendental and universal—that is, exactly the same for any human viewer occupying the same point in time and space—or contingent—solely dependent on the particular, individual vision of distinct beholders, with their own concrete relations to the scene in front of them. When the former was explicitly transformed into the latter, the relativistic implications of perspectivalism could be easily drawn. Even in the nineteenth century, this potential was apparent to thinkers like Leibniz, although he generally sought to escape its more troubling implications. These were not explicitly stressed and then praised until the late nineteenth century by such thinkers as Nietzsche. If everyone had his or her own camera obscura with a distinctly different peephole, he gleefully concluded, then no transcendental world view was possible.²²

Finally, the Cartesian perspectivalist tradition contained a potential for internal contestation in the possible uncoupling of the painter's view of the scene from that of the presumed beholder. Interestingly, Bryson identifies this development with Vermeer, who represents for him a second state of perspectivalism even more disincarnated than that of Alberti. "The bond with the viewer's physique is broken and the viewing subject," he writes, "is now proposed and assumed as a notional point, a non-empirical Gaze."²³

What makes this last observation so suggestive is the opening it provides for a consideration of an alternative scopic regime that may be understood as more than a subvariant of Cartesian perspectivalism. Although I cannot pretend to be a serious student of Vermeer able to quarrel with Bryson's interpretation of his work, it might be useful to situate the painter in a different

context from the one we have been discussing. That is, we might include him and the Dutch seventeenth-century art of which he was so great an exemplar in a visual culture very different from that we associate with Renaissance perspective, one which Svetlana Alpers has recently called *The Art of Describing*.²⁴

According to Alpers, the hegemonic role of Italian painting in art history has occluded an appreciation of a second tradition, which flourished in the seventeenth-century Low Countries. Borrowing Georg Lukács's distinction between narration and description, which he used to contrast realist and naturalist fiction, she argues that Italian Renaissance art, for all its fascination with the techniques of perspective, still held fast to the storytelling function for which they were used. In the Renaissance, the world on the other side of Alberti's window, she writes, "was a stage in which human figures performed significant actions based on the texts of the poets. It is a narrative art."²⁵ Northern art, in contrast, suppresses narrative and textual reference in favor of description and visual surface. Rejecting the privileged, constitutive role of the monocular subject, it emphasizes instead the prior existence of a world of objects depicted on the flat canvas, a world indifferent to the beholder's position in front of it. This world, moreover, is not contained entirely within the frame of the Albertian window, but seems instead to extend beyond it. Frames do exist around Dutch pictures, but they are arbitrary and without the totalizing function they serve in Southern art. If there is a model for Dutch art, it is the map with its unapologetically flat surface and its willingness to include words as well as objects in its visual space. Summarizing the difference between the art of describing and Cartesian perspectivalism, Alpers posits the following oppositions:

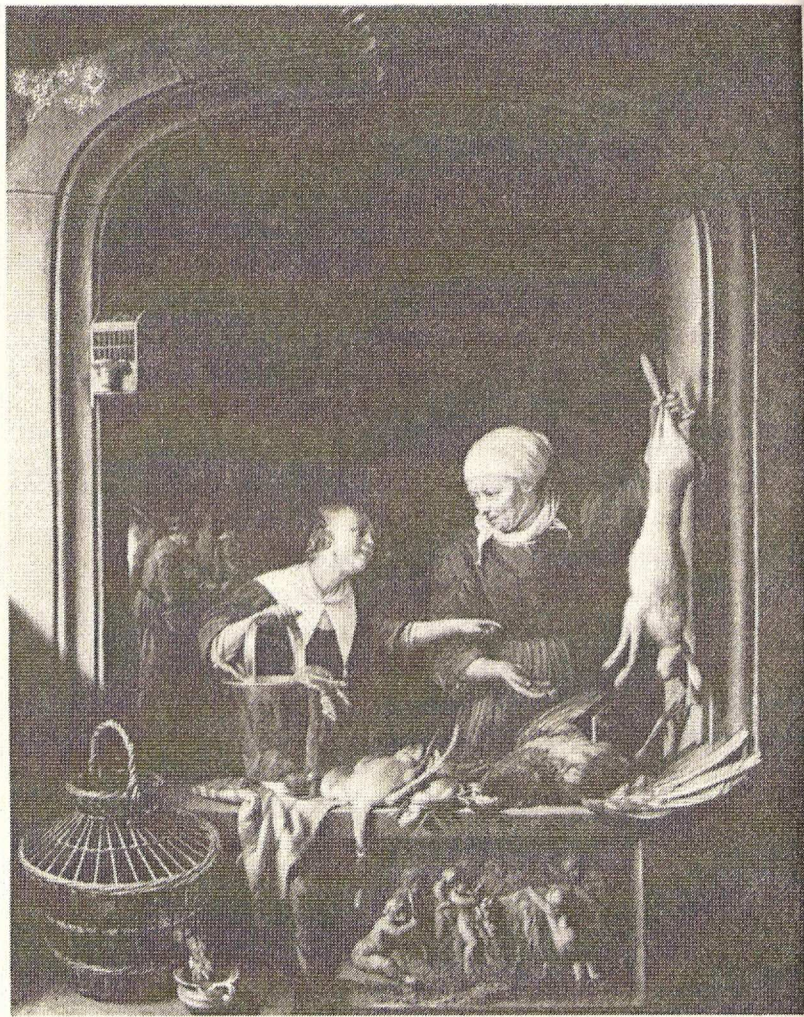
attention to many small things versus a few large ones; light reflected off objects versus objects modeled by light and shadow; the surface of objects, their colors and textures, dealt with rather than their place-

*ment in a legible space; an unframed image versus one that is clearly framed; one with no clearly situated viewer compared to one with such a viewer. The distinction follows a hierarchical model of distinguishing between phenomena commonly referred to as primary and secondary: objects and space versus the surfaces, forms versus the textures of the world.*²⁶

• If there is a philosophical correlate to Northern art, it is not Cartesianism with its faith in a geometricalized, rationalized, essentially intellectual concept of space but rather the more empirical visual experience of observationally oriented Baconian empiricism. In the Dutch context Alpers identifies it with Constantin Huygens. The nonmathematical impulse of this tradition accords well with the indifference to hierarchy, proportion, and analogical resemblances characteristic of Cartesian perspectivalism. Instead, it casts its attentive eye on the fragmentary, detailed, and richly articulated surface of a world it is content to describe rather than explain. Like the microscopist of the seventeenth century—Leeuwenhoek is her prime example—Dutch art savors the discrete particularity of visual experience and resists the temptation to allegorize or typologize what it sees, a temptation to which she claims Southern art readily succumbs.

In two significant ways, the art of describing can be said to have anticipated later visual models, however much it was subordinated to its Cartesian perspectivalist rival. As we have already noted, a direct filiation between Alberti's *velo* and the grids of modernist art is problematic because, as Rosalind Krauss has argued, the former assumed a three-dimensional world out there in nature, whereas the latter did not. A more likely predecessor can thus be located in the Dutch art based on the mapping impulse. As Alpers notes,

Although the grid that Ptolemy proposed, and those that Mercator later imposed, share the mathematical uniformity of the Renaissance perspective grid, they do not share the positioned viewer, the frame, and the



Gerrit Dou. *A Poulterer's Shop*, c. 1617. London, National Gallery of Art. (Courtesy of the Trustees, The National Gallery, London)

definition of the picture as a window through which an external viewer looks. On these accounts the Ptolemaic grid, indeed cartographic grids in general, must be distinguished from, not confused with, the perspectival grid. The projection is, one might say, viewed from nowhere. Nor is it to be looked through. It assumes a flat working surface.²⁷

Secondly, the art of describing also anticipates the visual experience produced by the nineteenth-century invention of photography. Both share a number of salient features: "fragmentariness, arbitrary frames, the immediacy that the first practitioners expressed by claiming that the photograph gave Nature the power to reproduce herself directly unaided by man."²⁸ The parallel frequently drawn between photography and the anti-perspectivalism of impressionist art, made for example by Aaron Scharf in his discussion of Degas,²⁹ should thus be extended to include the Dutch art of the seventeenth century. And if Peter Galassi is correct in *Before Photography*, there was also a tradition of topographical painting—landscape sketches of a fragment of reality—that resisted Cartesian perspectivalism and thus prepared the way both for photography and the impressionist return to two-dimensional canvases.³⁰ How widespread or self-consciously oppositional such a tradition was I will leave to experts in art history to decide. What is important for our purposes is simply to register the existence of an alternative scopic regime even during the heyday of the dominant tradition.

Alpers's attempt to characterize it is, of course, open to possible criticisms. The strong opposition between narration and description she posits may seem less firm if we recall the de-narrativizing impulse in perspectival art itself mentioned above. And if we can detect a certain fit between the exchange principle of capitalism and the abstract relational space of perspective, we might also discern a complementary fit between the valorization of material surfaces in Dutch art and the fetishism of commodities no less characteristic of a market economy. In this

sense, both scopic regimes can be said to reveal different aspects of a complex but unified phenomenon, just as Cartesian and Baconian philosophies can be said to be consonant, if in different ways, with the scientific world view.

If, however, we turn to a third model of vision, or what can be called the second moment of unease in the dominant model, the possibilities for an even more radical alternative can be discerned. This third model is perhaps best identified with the baroque. At least as early as 1888 and Heinrich Wölfflin's epochal study, *Renaissance and Baroque*, art historians have been tempted to postulate a perennial oscillation between two styles in both painting and architecture.³¹ In opposition to the lucid, linear, solid, fixed, planimetric, closed form of the Renaissance, or as Wölfflin later called it, the classical style, the baroque was painterly, recessional, soft-focused, multiple, and open. Derived, at least according to one standard etymology, from the Portuguese word for an irregular, oddly shaped pearl, the baroque connoted the bizarre and peculiar, traits which were normally disdained by champions of clarity and transparency of form.

Although it may be prudent to confine the baroque largely to the seventeenth century and link it with the Catholic Counter Reformation or the manipulation of popular culture by the newly ascendant absolutist state—as has, for example, the Spanish historian José Antonio Maravall³²—it may also be possible to see it as a permanent, if often repressed, visual possibility throughout the entire modern era. In the recent work of the French philosopher Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *La raison baroque* of 1984 and *La folie du voir* of 1986,³³ it is precisely the explosive power of baroque vision that is seen as the most significant alternative to the hegemonic visual style we have called Cartesian perspectivalism. Celebrating the dazzling, disorienting, ecstatic surplus of images in baroque visual experience, she emphasizes its rejection of the monocular geometricalization of the Cartesian tradition, with its illusion of homogeneous three-dimen-

sional space seen with a God's-eye-view from afar. She also tacitly contrasts the Dutch art of describing, with its belief in legible surfaces and faith in the material solidity of the world its paintings map, with the baroque fascination for opacity, unreadability, and the indecipherability of the reality it depicts.

For Buci-Glucksmann, the baroque self-consciously revels in the contradictions between surface and depth, disparaging as a result any attempt to reduce the multiplicity of visual spaces into any one coherent essence. Significantly, the mirror that it holds up to nature is not the flat reflecting glass that commentators like Edgerton and White see as vital in the development of rationalized or "analytic" perspective, but rather the anamorphic mirror, either concave or convex, that distorts the visual image—or, more precisely, reveals the conventional rather than natural quality of "normal" specularly by showing its dependence on the materiality of the medium of reflection. In fact, because of its greater awareness of that materiality—what a recent commentator, Rodolphe Gasché, has drawn attention to as the "tain of the mirror"³⁴—baroque visual experience has a strongly tactile or haptic quality, which prevents it from turning into the absolute ocularcentrism of its Cartesian perspectivalist rival.

In philosophical terms, although no one system can be seen as its correlate, Leibniz's pluralism of monadic viewpoints,³⁵ Pascal's meditations on paradox, and the Counter Reformation mystics' submission to vertiginous experiences of rapture might all be seen as related to baroque vision. Moreover, the philosophy it favored self-consciously eschewed the model of intellectual clarity expressed in a literal language purified of ambiguity. Instead, it recognized the inextricability of rhetoric and vision, which meant that images were signs and that concepts always contained an irreducibly imagistic component.

Baroque vision, Buci-Glucksmann also suggests, sought to represent the unrepresentable and, necessarily failing, produced the melancholy that Walter Benjamin in particular saw as

characteristic of the baroque sensibility. As such, it was closer to what a long tradition of aesthetics called the sublime, in contrast to the beautiful, because of its yearning for a presence that can never be fulfilled. Indeed, desire, in its erotic as well as metaphysical forms, courses through the baroque scopic regime. The body returns to dethrone the disinterested gaze of the disincarnated Cartesian spectator. But unlike the return of the body celebrated in such twentieth-century philosophies of vision as Merleau-Ponty's, with its dream of meaning-laden imbrication of the viewer and the viewed in the flesh of the world, here it generates only allegories of obscurity and opacity. Thus it truly produces one of those "moments of unease" which Jacqueline Rose sees challenging the petrification of the dominant visual order (the art of describing seeming in fact far more at ease in the world).

A great deal more might be said about these three ideal typical visual cultures, but let me conclude by offering a few speculations, if I can use so visual a term, on their current status. First, it seems undeniable that we have witnessed in the twentieth century a remarkable challenge to the hierarchical order of the three regimes. Although it would be foolish to claim that Cartesian perspectivalism has been driven from the field, the extent to which it has been denaturalized and vigorously contested, in philosophy as well as in the visual arts, is truly remarkable. The rise of hermeneutics, the return of pragmatism, the profusion of linguistically oriented structuralist and poststructuralist modes of thought have all put the epistemological tradition derived largely from Descartes very much on the defensive. And, of course, the alternative of Baconian observation, which periodically resurfaces in variants of positivistic thought, has been no less vulnerable to attack, although one might argue that the visual practice with which it had an elective affinity has shown remarkable resilience with the growing status of photography as a nonperspectival art form (or, if you

prefer, counter-art form). There are as well contemporary artists like the German Jewish, now Israeli painter Joshua Neustein, whose fascination with the flat materiality of maps has recently earned a comparison with Alpers's seventeenth-century Dutchmen.³⁶

Still, if one had to single out the scopic regime that has finally come into its own in our time, it would be the "madness of vision" Buci-Glucksmann identifies with the baroque. Even photography, if Rosalind Krauss's recent work on the Surrealists is any indication,³⁷ can lend itself to purposes more in line with this visual impulse than the art of mere describing. In the postmodern discourse that elevates the sublime to a position of superiority over the beautiful, it is surely the "palimpsests of the unseeable,"³⁸ as Buci-Glucksmann calls baroque vision, that seem most compelling. And if we add the current imperative to restore rhetoric to its rightful place and accept the irreducible linguistic moment in vision and the equally insistent visual moment in language, the timeliness of the baroque alternative once again seems obvious.

In fact, if I may conclude on a somewhat perverse note, the radical dethroning of Cartesian perspectivalism may have gone a bit too far. In our haste to denaturalize it and debunk its claims to represent vision *per se*, we may be tempted to forget that the other scopic regimes I have quickly sketched are themselves no more natural or closer to a "true" vision. Glancing is not somehow innately superior to gazing; vision hostage to desire is not necessarily always better than casting a cold eye; a sight from the situated context of a body in the world may not always see things that are visible to a "high-altitude" or "God's-eye-view." However we may regret the excesses of scientism, the Western scientific tradition may have only been made possible by Cartesian perspectivalism or its complement, the Baconian art of describing. There may well have been some link between the absence of such scopic regimes in Eastern cultures, especially the

former, and their general lack of indigenous scientific revolutions. In our scramble to scrap the rationalization of sight as a pernicious reification of visual fluidity, we need to ask what the costs of too uncritical an embrace of its alternatives may be. In the case of the art of describing, we might see another reification at work, that which makes a fetish of the material surface instead of the three-dimensional depths. Lukács's critique of naturalist description in literature, unmentioned by Alpers, might be applied to painting as well. In the case of baroque vision, we might wonder about the celebration of ocular madness, which may produce ecstasy in some, but bewilderment and confusion in others. As historians like Maravall have darkly warned, the phantasmagoria of baroque spectacle was easily used to manipulate those who were subjected to it. The current vision of "the culture industry," to use the term Maravall borrows from Horkheimer and Adorno in his account of the seventeenth century, does not seem very threatened by postmodernist visual experiments in "la folie du voir." In fact, the opposite may well be the case.

Rather than erect another hierarchy, it may therefore be more useful to acknowledge the plurality of scopic regimes now available to us. Rather than demonize one or another, it may be less dangerous to explore the implications, both positive and negative, of each. In so doing, we won't lose entirely the sense of unease that has so long haunted the visual culture of the West, but we may learn to see the virtues of differentiated ocular experiences. We may learn to wean ourselves from the fiction of a "true" vision and revel instead in the possibilities opened up by the scopic regimes we have already invented and the ones, now so hard to envision, that are doubtless to come.

Notes

1. See, for example, Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, trans. Beatrice Gottlieb (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982) and Robert Mandrou, *Introduction to Modern France, 1500-1640: An Essay in Historical Psychology*, trans. R. E. Hallmark (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1975).
2. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964); Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); see also Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
3. Donald M. Lowe, *History of Bourgeois Perception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 26.
4. For an account of the positive attitude towards vision in the medieval church, see Margaret R. Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985). Contrary to the argument of Febvre and Mandrou, which has been very influential, she shows the extent to which sight was by no means widely demeaned in the Middle Ages.
5. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, rev. ed. (Detroit: Black and Red, 1977).
6. Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 61.
7. Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986), pp. 232-233.
8. William M. Ivins, Jr., *Art and Geometry: A Study in Space Intuitions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1946), p. 81.
9. Rorty, p. 45.
10. Erwin Panofsky, "Die Perspektive als 'symbolischen Form,'" *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg* 4 (1924-1925): 258-331.
11. William M. Ivins, Jr., *On the Rationalization of Sight* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1938); Panofsky, "Die Perspektive als 'symbolischen Form'"; Richard Krautheimer, "Brunelleschi and Linear Perspective," in *Brunelleschi in Perspective*, comp. Isabelle Hyman (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974); Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr., *The Renaissance Discovery of Linear Perspective* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); John White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1987); Michael Kubovy, *The Psychology of Perspective and Renaissance Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

12. Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1985), p. 10.
13. Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 94.
14. Augustine discusses ocular desire in Chapter 35 of the *Confessions*.
15. For a discussion of the gender implications of this work, see Svetlana Alpers, "Art History and its Exclusions," in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), p. 187.
16. Norman Bryson, *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), chapter I.
17. Edgerton, p. 39.
18. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC, 1972), p. 109.
19. Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977). Heidegger's most extensive critique of Cartesian perspectivalism can be found in his essay "The Age of the World Picture," in the same volume.
20. White, p. 208.
21. Kubovy, chapter IV.
22. Sarah Kofman, *Camera Obscura, de l'idéologie* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1973), treats this theme in Nietzsche.
23. Bryson, *Vision and Painting*, p. 112.
24. Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
25. *Ibid.*, p. xix.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
29. Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography* (London: Allen Lane, 1968; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1986), chapter VIII.
30. Peter Galassi, *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1981).
31. Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*, trans. Kathrin Simon (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1966). See also the systematic development of the contrast in *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*, trans. M. D. Hottinger (London: G. Bell & Sons, Ltd., 1932).
32. José Antonio Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure*, trans. Terry Cochran (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
33. Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *La raison baroque: de Baudelaire à Benjamin* (Paris:

Éditions Galilée, 1984) and *La folie du voir: de l'esthétique baroque* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1986).

34. Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986).

35. As Buci-Glucksmann recognizes, Leibnizian pluralism retains a faith in the harmonizing of perspectives that is absent from the more radically Nietzschean impulse in the baroque. See *La folie du voir*, p. 80, where she identifies that impulse with Gracián and Pascal.

36. See Irit Rogoff, "Mapping Out Strategies of Dislocation," in the catalogue for Neustein's October 24–November 26, 1987 show at the Exit Art gallery in New York.

37. Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*. See also her work with Jane Livingston, *L'amour fou: Photography and Surrealism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985).

38. Buci-Glucksmann, *La folie du voir*, chapter VI.