

THE GAZE IN THE EXPANDED FIELD

I

In this paper I will be examining a term that has become important in contemporary discussions of painting and of visuality: *le regard*, "the Gaze." First of all I will do what I can to trace the concept of the Gaze as it passes from Sartre to Lacan, from Sartre's description of the Gaze of the other in *Being and Nothingness* to Lacan's reworking of that description in the first two sections of *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*. To some this will be familiar territory, to others it will be less familiar; I will do my best to proceed as clearly as I can. But once that account of *le regard*, the Gaze, is stated I want to move to what may seem at first sight a quite unconnected account of vision, the one that emerges in the meditation on Western philosophy conducted in Japan principally by Kitarō Nishida and then by Nishida's student Keiji Nishitani. The reason I wish to invoke Nishida and Nishitani is that their theoretical development seems in many respects to go further than Sartre and Lacan towards a radical reformulation of our thought on visuality, and as a consequence of this our thought on painting.

My argument will be that the line of thinking that passes from Sartre to Lacan in crucial respects remains held within a conceptual enclosure, where vision is still theorized from the standpoint of a subject placed at the center of a world. Although that centralized subject is progressively dismantled by Sartre and Lacan—and the direction of their thought is unmistakably towards a radical decentering of the subject—there seem to me to be areas in which the standpoint of the subject as center is actu-



Figure 1. Jiun. The character "Man."

ally retained; the result of that residual centering upon the standpoint of the subject is that vision is portrayed as menaced at that vestigial center, threatened from without, and in some sense *persecuted*, in the visual domain, by the *regard* or Gaze. The direction of thought that passes from Nishida to Nishitani undertakes a much more thoroughgoing displacement of the subject in the field of vision, which finds expression in a term so far largely neglected in the Western discussion of visuality, *śūnyatā*, translated as "blankness," "emptiness," or "nihility." The concept of blankness, as it evolves in the thought of Nishida and then of Nishitani, relocates the Gaze, *le regard*, in an expanded field where a number of conceptual transformations become necessary and urgent: notably concerning the aspect of *menace* which still colors Lacan's account of the subject's visual experience; concerning the question of *where the subject resides*, under the Gaze and in the expanded field of *śūnyatā* or "blankness"; and concerning, in the practice of painting, the repercussions of the structures of *le regard*, the Gaze, and *śūnyatā*, blankness or emptiness, at the level of brush, pigment, and frame.

II

Sartre's conception of the gaze of the other is clearest in his story or scenario of the watcher in the park.¹ Sartre's narrative involves two stages. In its first movement, Sartre enters a park and discovers that he is alone: everything in the park is there for him to regard from an unchallenged center of the visual field. All of the park unfolds before this absolute center of a lived horizon: the subject resides at the still point of the turning world, master of its prospects, sovereign surveyor of the scene. In this initial exhilaration of self-possession, nothing threatens the occupancy of the self as focus of its visual kingdom. But in Sartre's second movement, this reign of plenitude and luminous peace is brought abruptly to an end: into the park and into the

watcher's solitary domain there enters another, whose intrusion breaks the peace and fractures the watcher's self-enclosure. The watcher is in turn watched: observed of all observers, the viewer becomes spectacle to another's sight. Now all the lines of force which had converged on the center of the watcher's lived horizon turn, reverse, and reconverge on the space of the intruder and his irruption. Before, all of the perspective lines had run in from the horizon towards the watcher in the park; now another perspective opens up, and the lines of flight race away from the watcher self to meet this new point of entry. For the intruder himself stands at his own center of things, and draws towards and into himself everything he sees; the watcher self is now a tangent, not a center, a vanishing point, not a viewing point, an opacity on the other's distant horizon. Everything reconverges on this intrusive center where the watcher self is *not*: the intruder becomes a kind of drain which sucks in all of the former plenitude, a black hole pulling the scene away from the watcher self into an engulfing void.

Were we to represent Sartre's scenario in terms of a picture, the Raphael *Sposalizio* would illustrate its general formation (Figure 2). In one sense all of the architectural spaces turn towards the viewer, displaying their advertent aspects to one who stands at the place of masterly overview, with every line of flight across the cornices, flagstones, and arcades traveling in towards the sovereign spectator. But in another sense the architecture of the piazza turns towards a place where the viewer does not and cannot exist. The moment the viewer appears and takes up position at the viewpoint, he or she comes face to face with another term that is the negative counterpart to the viewing position: the vanishing point. All of the orthogonal lines across windows, doors, pavements converge there at the vanishing point where, *par excellence*, the viewer is not. The lines of the piazza race away towards this drain or black hole of otherness placed at the horizon, in a decentering that destroys the subject's unitary self-pos-



Figure 2. Raphael. *Marriage of the Virgin* (*Sposalizio della Madonna*), 1504. Brera, Pinacoteca. (Courtesy Alinari/Art Resource, N.Y.)

session. The viewpoint and the vanishing point are inseparable: there is no viewpoint without vanishing point, and no vanishing point without viewing point. The self-possession of the viewing subject has built into it, therefore, the principle of its own abolition: annihilation of the subject as center is a condition of the very moment of the look.

This pictorial example is perhaps closer to Lacan than to Sartre, for in Sartre the agent that accomplishes the reversal of the visual field, its peripeteia, is personal: another being, before whom I become opaque, abject, in a dialectic of master and slave. Lacan's reworking of Sartre's scenario dispenses with this personalized other.² His story is a good deal stranger. Lacan is away from Paris, in Brittany, out with fishermen on the open sea. On the surface of the sea are pieces of flotsam, in particular a sardine can, to which one of the men reacts by saying to Lacan: "You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!"³ The remark disturbs Lacan because he can sense a perspective in which it is untrue: the world of inanimate objects to some extent always looks back on the perceiver. What is the source of this strangely empowered *look back*? Lacan's account depends, not on the irruption of another personal viewer but the irruption, in the visual field, of the Signifier. When I look, what I see is not simply light but intelligible form: the *rays* of light are caught in a *rets*, a network of meanings, in the same way that flotsam is caught in the net of the fishermen. For human beings collectively to orchestrate their visual experience together it is required that each submit his or her retinal experience to the socially agreed description(s) of an intelligible world. Vision is socialized, and thereafter deviation from this social construction of visual reality can be measured and named, variously, as hallucination, misrecognition, or "visual disturbance." Between the subject and the world is inserted the entire sum of discourses which make up visuality, that cultural construct, and make visuality different from vision, the notion of

unmediated visual experience. Between retina and world is inserted a *screen* of signs, a screen consisting of all the multiple discourses on vision built into the social arena.

This screen casts a shadow: sometimes Lacan calls it a scotoma, sometimes a stain. For when we look through the screen, what we see is caught up in a network that comes to us from the outside: mobile tesserae of signification, a mosaic that moves. This network is greater than its individual agents or operators. When I learn to speak, I am inserted into systems of discourse that were there before I was, and will remain after I am gone. Similarly when I learn to see socially, that is, when I begin to articulate my retinal experience with the codes of recognition that come to me from my social milieu(s), I am inserted into systems of visual discourse that saw the world before I did, and will go on seeing after I see no longer. The screen casts a shadow of death. Everything I see is orchestrated with a cultural production of seeing that exists independently of my life and outside it: my individual discoveries, the findings of my eye as it probes through the world, come to unfold in terms not of my making, and indifferent to my mortality. The screen *mortifies* sight. Its terms are points of signification, chains of signifiers, that of themselves have no light. The signifier operates on light and with light, but has no light of itself, or only the light it borrows from my eye. The signifier casts its shadow of darkness across my vision, and because of that darkness I am no longer bathed in the lustre of a luminous plenitude. Into my visual field something cuts, cuts across, namely the network of signifiers. To illustrate in pictorial terms what that something is, Lacan provides his example from Holbein.⁴ The ambassadors are masters of learning, in possession of all the codes of knowledge, of science and art, fashioned in their social milieu; but their visual field is cut across by something they cannot master, the skull which casts itself sideways across their space, through anamorphosis (Figure 3).

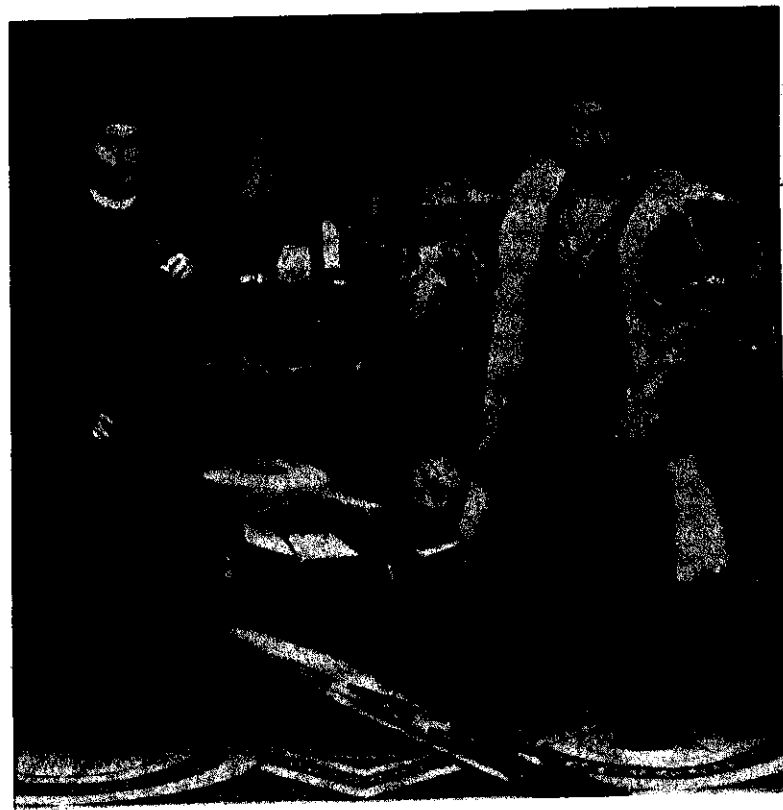


Figure 3. Hans Holbein. *The Ambassadors*, 1533. London, National Gallery of Art. (Courtesy SNARK/Art Resource, N.Y.)

The effect of this insertion of the screen, or skull, or scotoma, is that the subject who sees is no more the center of visual experience than the subject of language is at the center of speech. When I speak, I may try to fill each word I utter with the full meaning of my unique thought. But the fact remains that, in the social arena where I speak, the words I utter have to follow paths or networks laid down before I entered their terrain. The speaker did not create these, nor does the speaker control them. In the same way, when I see, *what* I see is formed by paths or networks laid down in advance of my seeing. It may be the case that I feel myself to inhabit some kind of center in my speech, but what decenters me is the network of language. It

may similarly be that I always feel myself to live at the center of my vision—somewhere (where?) behind my eyes; but, again, that vision is decentered by the network of signifiers that come to me from the social milieu.

Lacan pushes this description further. In place of the speaker in ordinary conversation, he invites us to consider the speech of the analysand. The experience of analysis, as Lacan defines it, forces the speaker to recognize that the words she or he utters have their own perturbing life; that they follow paths and chains unknown in advance, in movements that circle round yet never reach the locus of desire or fear. Psychoanalysis is that experience of speaking on the field of the other. The analysand does not stand at the center of control over these motions of the signifier; he or she is more like their bewildered observer.

Lacan's analysis of vision unfolds in the same terms: the viewing subject does not stand at the center of a perceptual horizon, and cannot command the chains and series of signifiers passing across the visual domain. Vision unfolds to the side of, in tangent to, the field of the other. And to that form of seeing Lacan gives a name: seeing on the field of the other, seeing under the Gaze.

III

I want now to pass from the current of thought of Sartre and Lacan to another current, the one which passes from Europe into Japan by way of the most influential Japanese philosopher of the twentieth century, Nishida, and which passes on from Nishida to the writer who, at the level of translation, is much more accessible to Western readers than Nishida himself, Keiji Nishitani.⁵ Nishitani's critique of Sartre occupies a crucial section of Nishitani's book *Religion and Nothingness*, and it bases itself on the observation that with Sartre there is no radical overturning of the enclosure of thought which treats the ques-

tions of ontology, of subject and object, from *within the standpoint of the subject*.⁶ Nishitani remarks that the Sartrean *je* is capable of reaching a level of nihility in which everything that exists is cast into doubt, except the fundamental irreducibility of the *je* which does the doubting. For example, when the *je* fully understands the death of God and comes to doubt the viability of an ethics imposed on the subject from the outside, the Sartrean *je* reacts by falling back in on itself, and by struggling to locate an authenticity of the self from which ethical action can emanate directly: when the forms of ethics pass into the field of nihility and are annulled there, that annihilation is overcome by the *je*'s assertion of itself as authentic core of moral agency. The passing of ethical forms into the field of annihilation dismantles *them*, but does not dismantle the *je*, the self which reacts by redoubling the force of the self as it operates on the nothingness outside it. For Nishitani, Sartre's nihilism is half-hearted: Sartre places the universe around the self on the field of nihility, yet the self gathers force there, and uses the blankness surrounding it as, so to speak, a springboard from which to launch its own authentic operations.⁷ This is to treat the field of nihility, Nishitani observes, as though it were something *against which* the self reacts—in this case by multiplying its efforts and solidifying its centeredness. What does *not* happen in Sartre's work, as Nishitani sees it, is the placing of the *je* itself on the field of nihility or emptiness: the *je* reemerges from its encounter with nihility, *reinforced* in its position as the center of its experience.

So it is with Sartre's description of vision, and the scenario of the watcher in the park. The intrusion of the other makes of the self a spectacle or object in relation to that other: the self is threatened with annihilation by that irruption of alterity on the subject's horizon. But Sartre's analysis in fact stops a long way short of the stage at which this *menace* to the subject would pass on to the field of nihility and become a full *decentering* of the

subject. Sartre's watcher is objectified by the other's gaze, just as that other is objectified by *his* gaze: but the fundamental terms, of subject and object, remain intact throughout the encounter. It is as though both the watcher in the park and the intruder who disturbs its peace were supplied with optical frames—binoculars, telescopes, viewfinders—which restricted the surrounding world to just these two poles, the watcher (now threatened by the other's gaze) and the intruder (similarly threatened). Though menaced by each other, neither is *fundamentally* challenged: the subject can *survive* such a gaze, and survive more strongly for being exposed to this "alterity" which may menace the subject but which does not in any sense actually dissolve or annihilate it. The subject's sense of being a subject is heightened, not undone: and this, following Nishitani's argument, is because the entire scenario is restricted to its twin poles of subject and object. What is not thought through is the question of vision's *wider frame*.

IV

Like Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, Nishitani's *Religion and Nothingness* sets out to criticize the Cartesian self-enclosure of the *cogito*. In the *cogito* the subject conceives of itself as universal center, surrounded by the stable plenitude of an object world. Both subject and object exist in a state of mutual confirmation and fixity. The subject, from its position of center amidst the world of things, looks out on its objects and perceives them as separate *entities*. That is, objects manifest to the subject as complete beings having (i) stable location in a single place; (ii) independent self-existence (requiring the existence of nothing else in order to exist); (iii) permanent or enduring form. The subject looking out upon the world of entities finds itself to be an entity symmetrical with them. Like them, the subject exists (i) in one

place and one place only. It exists (ii) independently of the objects around it, whose existence the subject is free to doubt, without that doubt entailing that the subject come to doubt its *own* existence. And the subject (iii) remains itself despite transformation in the material world. In addition to these qualities of the entity which the subject shares with its object world, the subject of the *cogito* has a further characteristic which the objects of the world do not share: (iv) a position of universal center, around which the object world clusters or converges as the subject's experiential horizon.

Like Sartre and like Lacan, Nishitani's aim is to dismantle this anthropocentric subject, but his critique differs from theirs in his insistence on the term *śūnyatā*, translated as "emptiness," "radical impermanence," "blankness," and "nihility."⁸ The entity, as a conceptual category, is found unable to withstand the critique of *śūnyatā*, and transposed to the field of *śūnyatā* both the subject-entity and the object-entity literally break up. Stabilizing the entity as a fixed Form, with a bounded outline, is possible only if the universe surrounding the entity is screened out and the entity withdrawn from the universal field of transformations. The concept of the entity can be preserved only by an optic that casts around each entity a perceptual frame that makes a *cut* from the field and immobilizes the cut within the static framework. But as soon as that frame is withdrawn, the object is found to exist as part of a mobile continuum that cannot be cut anywhere. If the object is, say, a flower, its existence is only as a *phase* of incremental transformations between seed and dust, in a continuous exfoliation or perturbation of matter: at no point does the object come under an arrest that would immobilize it as Form or *eidos*. Moved on to the field of *śūnyatā* or radical impermanence, the entity comes apart. It cannot be said to occupy a *single* location, since its locus is always the universal field of transformations: it cannot achieve separation from that

field or acquire any kind of bounded outline. Because of its inseparability from the field of impermanence it cannot be said to enjoy independent self-existence, since the ground of its being is the existence of everything else. And it cannot present itself in the guise of an enduring Form.

In Nishitani's description, an object's presence can be defined only in negative terms. Since there is no way of singling out an object *x* without at the same time including it in the global field of transformations, what appears as the object *x* is only the *difference* between *x* and the total surrounding field. Similarly what appears as "the surrounding field" is only its difference from the object *x*. Nishitani's thinking is morphologically close to Saussure's account of the location of an individual word in a language. The word, Saussure maintains, is nothing in itself: it lacks all the properties of the entity. Rather, the word is constituted "diacritically" in its difference from its surrounding field, in this case all the other words in the language. In the same way, Nishitani argues for the diacritical existence of objects: the system of objects "knows no positive terms." Moreover, since the object field is a continuous mobility, individual objects are constituted by *différance*, deferral in time, as well. Nishitani's thinking here is close to Derrida's portrayal of *différance* in language. The meaning of a word never stands forth in full array. If we want to know the meaning of an individual word, and look it up in a dictionary, what the dictionary gives is not the meaning of that one word, but *other* words, synonyms. As one reads a sentence, one does not know what a word in mid-sentence means until one reaches the end of the sentence, and that sentence in turn changes as one moves to the next sentence, or paragraph, or page. Meaning in a sense never arrives; and in the same way, for Nishitani, being never arrives (beings never arrive). The form of the seed is already turning into the

form of the flower, and the flower is already becoming dust. The present state of the object appearing as the flower is inhabited by its past as seed and its future as dust, in a continuous motion of postponement, whose effect is that the flower is never presently *there*, any more than seed or dust are there.

Nishitani sums up the deferred/differed presence of (what had been) the entity in a series of aphoristic flashes that illuminate his text in the same way that the parables of the invaded park and the floating sardine can illuminate the texts of Sartre and Lacan (if one "gets" the aphorisms one has grasped the core argument). Two key aphorisms are: "fire does not burn fire," and "water does not wash water."⁹

It would seem to be the essence of fire that it burns; if it does not burn it is not fire. Yet fire cannot burn itself; it cannot exist in self-enclosure. Fire can burn everything that can be burned, but the one thing fire cannot burn is fire. For fire to be fire it must extend out of the enclosure of flame into the surrounding field, and only when its roots travel into its surround can it burn. Similarly, it is of the essence of water that it can wash everything that exists, and if it does not wash it is not water. Yet the one thing water cannot wash is water: it cannot exist inside the self-enclosure of the entity, circumscribed by a boundary or outline, in a single location that excludes the surrounding field. For water to be water it must percolate through that boundary and infiltrate the entity's dry surround, enter into the surrounding field across the porous filters of irrigation: only when it does so, when it leaves the self-enclosure of water, can it become water. Its existence comes to it when it has left water behind it and entered what is not itself. Its being is interpenetrated by what it is not: which is to say that things exist in the ways they do exist, under a mode of constitutive negativity or emptiness, *śūnyatā*.

V

Nishitani's analysis of vision works in terms that are very different from those of Sartre. In Sartre, the object is what appears to a subject, so to speak at the end of a viewfinder. The viewfinder or legitimate construction creates a kind of tunnel vision in which all of the surrounding field is screened out. Only that which appears within the framing apparatus—perspective, picture frame, camera—exists: the viewer on one side, the object on the other. Nishitani's move is to dissolve the apparatus of framing which always *produces* an object for a subject and a subject for an object. Passing on to the field of *sūnyatā* the object is found to exist, not at the other end of tunnel vision, but in the total field of the universal remainder. The object opens out *omnidirectionally* on to the universal surround, against which it defines itself negatively and diacritically. The viewer who looks out at the object sees only one angle of the global field where the object resides, one single tangent of the 360 degrees of the circle, and of the 360 degrees in all directions of the radiating sphere of light spreading out from the object into the global envelopment.

In the same way that Nishitani takes the object away from the framing apparatus—the picture frame, the legitimate construction—and places it on the expanded field of blankness or *sūnyatā*, so the viewer is pulled away from the aperture of the viewfinder or lens and redefined as radically dis-framed. The viewer still has his or her eyes open: the universe does not disappear. But the viewer is now a being that exists through the existence of everything else in the universal field, and not just as the subject-effect of the object that appears at the end of the viewing tunnel. Let us say that the viewer's eyes look out at a segment of the total field that surrounds the viewer omnidirectionally. This small section (or cone, or pyramid) is in fact only a fraction of the field of universal surround; this partial view can-

not be cut out of the total surround, singled out, and be made to represent the totality of the viewer's being. What enabled that narrow cone or pyramid to feature as the visual field was exactly the enclosure of the frame—the tunnel, the viewfinder, the legitimate construction. But once that frame is dissolved on the field of *sūnyatā* or emptiness, that narrow angle is found to be enveloped on all sides by a surround of invisibility. Once dis-framed, the brightly luminous segment is found actually to be constituted *within* the invisible, the dark or unmarked remainder that extends beyond the edge of peripheral vision into the space that wraps its way round behind the spectator's head and behind the eyes. What can be seen is supported and interpenetrated by what is outside sight, a Gaze of the other enveloping sight on all sides.

How can such a Gaze be represented? For surely we now stand at the very limits of representation. From this point on, only a technique which undermines the frame can stand in for the invisible which the frame excludes. And if we try to picture to ourselves the Gaze of *sūnyatā* or blankness, it must be in terms of the nonrepresentational or the anti-representational. Perhaps the clearest image of this comes from the technique which sets out both to assert and to undermine representational practice, the technique known in Japan as "flung ink."

The fullest expression of *sūnyatā* in the visual field is undoubtedly the practice that immerses itself in this concept, Ch'an painting. The landscape by Sesshū (1420–1506) is a framed image (Figure 4), and as such might suggest that we are still in the orbit of the framing apparatus—the tunneling of vision that fixes a tiny segment of the object world at one end, for a segmented viewing subject at the other. And in fact the image has no wish to transcend the facts of ordinary vision, inasmuch as these facts involve looking at the object in the form of a section or profile of the object's being. When we look at things, we do see only a tangent, and not the full radiation of light emitted



Figure 4. Sesshū. *Landscape* (detail). Tokyo, National Museum.

omnidirectionally: Ch'an does not dispute that. What Ch'an does dispute is that the profile which thus appears can be identified with the object itself, as it exists in the field of emptiness. What the image needs to include is the fact of *the object's remainder*, the other views which pass out from the object to all those uncountable places where the viewer is not. And what the image also has to acknowledge, even while it records the narrow passage of light that travels to an empirical observer, is *the viewer's remainder*, the sum of other views that the viewer excludes by assuming *this* view, the surrounding envelope of invisibility. What painting risks, in the Ch'an perspective, is the production of a false ontology in which the seer and the seen commune in tunnel vision: the subject mistaking what is only a profile of the object for the object itself; the profile, thus cut out, creating for itself a hypostasized viewing subject, pinned at the other end of the tunnel.

In the case of the flung-ink painting, Ch'an's solution is to disfigure the image, the bipolar view, by opening on to the whole force of randomness. As the ink is cast, it flies out of the enclosure or tunnel of the frame, and opens the image on to the field of material transformations that constitutes the universal surround. The flinging of ink marks the surrender of the fixed form of the image to the global configuration of force that subtends it. *Eidos* is scattered to the four winds. The image is made to float on the forces which lie outside the frame; it is *thrown*, as one throws dice. What breaks *into* the image is the rest of the universe, everything outside of the frame.

It is the same with the flung ink of Ch'an calligraphy, so rapid that the ink cannot be contained by the system of script (Figure 1). When the graphic gesture is slow, deliberate, the traces can still be held within a framework of control. The calligrapher operates *on* the character, and the character *dictates* the movements of the brush. Accelerated, the gesture comes loose from this bipolar structure of holding-in-place: the ink flies

faster than the hand can control it, and to areas of the paper or silk beyond the sway of the character's prescribed structure. It breaks free from the subject who controls it, and from scriptural form. The framework of script and calligrapher is cut across by another term that stands for everything outside their circumscribed enclosure: the rest of the universe, the field of emptiness that subtends the entities of scribe and script and annihilates them as freestanding and independent forms.

Something cuts across the field of vision, and invades it from the outside. Vision is traversed by something wholly ungovernable by the subject, something that harbors within it the force of everything outside the visual dyad. Let us call it the Gaze. But it is hardly the Gaze of Sartre, or even of Lacan.

VI

In Lacan, something cuts across the space of sight and darkens it: the Gaze. And in the flying of the inks there is an entry into the visual field of something totally dark and opaque that stands for absolute alterity: the otherness of the rest of the universe, a surrounding field that decenters the subject and the subject's vision completely. When the painter or calligrapher throws the ink, there is renunciation of all claim to act as universal center, and at the same time (*pace* Sartre) renunciation of the object as *alternative* universal center. Yet these abolitions of self and center are not accompanied by any apparent sense of menace, which may indicate ways in which Sartre and Lacan still operate from within a certain intellectual enclosure.

What seems questionable in Lacan's account of vision and painting is the paranoid coloration given to the Gaze. The Ch'an examples point to regimes of visibility in which the decentering of the subject may be thought in terms that are not essentially catastrophic. And this in turn prompts the question: if, in certain "alternative" scopic regimes, decentering is unaccompanied

by the sense of menace or persecution, why does Lacan provide only one model of vision and of painting, that of the negative or terrorizing gaze?

There seem to me two, related answers. The first concerns a rather deep uncertainty in Lacan concerning the role of cultural variation in the construction of subjectivity. Lacan's description of how the subject is formed unfolds in terms of culture: it is in the irruption of the symbolic order and of signification that human subjectivity is precipitated, and since the composition of the symbolic order and of the codes of signification are historically and culturally variable, the subject in Lacan is given by culture and history, not by nature. Nevertheless, Lacan says far more about the subject's initial insertion into the symbolic than about the subject's subsequent life there. That subsequent existence is where the variables of history, culture, and class operate, and construct the subject across the enormous array of local discourses through which the subject moves: in the workplace and the family, in the institutions of education, medicine, law, property, religion, government, and all the diverse cultural arenas of the social formation. We are certainly invited to think of Lacan's terms, the Symbolic and the Imaginary, as operating in all of these adult arenas, and not only at the stage of the subject's initial formation (in childhood). Yet Lacan's descriptions tend to privilege the genetic and formative moment, not the long and diverse elaborations of adult life. This concentration on subjective genesis and installation makes it difficult to think through the question of cultural variation. As part of this, it is difficult to think through to the cultural diversity of visual regimes, some of which may view the decentering of the subject in terms other than those of menace.

The second answer is an extension of the first: that Lacan's portrayal of the Imaginary gives a centrality to his argument that is culturally specific, not universal. Nishitani's analysis of vision is of interest because its terms are so close to Lacan: like Lacan,

Nishitani engages with Sartre as a precursor, and both regard the centering of the universe around the sovereign subject as illusion. In the field of *śūnyatā* the centralized subject falls apart; its boundary dissolves, together with the consoling boundary of the object. Nihilism and blankness undo the subject's centering of the world upon itself; and, radically decentered, the subject comes to know itself in noncentered terms, as inhabiting and inhabited by a constitutive emptiness. Such decentering is a central theme in Lacan and in Nishitani; and yet their approaches are quite different. Perhaps one can illustrate their divergence by way of the skull in the Holbein, and the flung ink in Ch'an. The skull appears in and as the *protest* of the Imaginary against its own decentering, as the menace of death; the flung ink figures instead the subject's *acceptance* of decentering. The skull represents the subject's fear of dissolution, the flung ink embodies instead the subject's renunciation of a central subject position, on a field of radical emptiness where the last remains of the *cogito* are rendered null and void, literally cast out on empty air. What changes between them is the cultural construction of the Imaginary. Which suggests, finally, that Lacan's account of vision as persecuted by the Gaze, like Sartre's, itself unfolds *within the Imaginary*, an Imaginary constructed in a culturally and historically specific fashion. If so, then it is that analysis which itself needs to experience some cultural and historical decentering.

Why should I or anyone spend time wrangling over Lacan's concept of the Gaze? My own answer must be that, although I obviously have reservations about a certain paranoid coloration within it, nevertheless Lacan's account of visuality seems to me historically extremely important. It marks a fundamental shift away from the ground on which vision has been previously thought. The nineteenth century saw the rise of a theory of vision in which the truth of vision lay in the retina, in the physiology of the eye and the neurology of the optical apparatus. In the twentieth century the conception of vision as primarily a

domain of retina and light has subtended a number of key activities: in art history, formalism; in art theory, the approach to art via the psychology of perception, in the work of Gombrich or Arnheim; in the construction of museums and exhibition spaces premised on the practice of decontextualizing the image in order to permit unmediated communion between the viewer's eye and pure form. From these and related activities has emerged the notion of art as a matter of perceptual purity: timeless, sequestered from the social domain, universal. Post-modernism has entailed moving beyond this episteme and acknowledging the fact that the visual field we inhabit is one of meanings and not just shapes, that it is permeated by verbal and visual discourses, by signs; and that these signs are socially constructed, as are we.

The real discovery here is that things we took to be private, secluded, and inward—perception, art, the perception of art in the museum—are created socially. What is at stake is the discovery of a politics of vision. Which is finally why one might want to query the paranoid or terrorist coloration that Lacan gives the Gaze. Let us say that it is a bit easier, since Lacan, to think of visuality as something built cooperatively, over time; that we are therefore responsible for it, ethically accountable. Yet Lacan seems to me, at least, to view the subject's entry into the social arena of visuality as intrinsically disastrous: the vocabulary is one of capture, annexation, death. Against this someone else might say: the degree of terror depends on how power is distributed within that construct once it is built, and on where one is made to stand inside it. Under a voyeuristic male gaze, a woman might well experience terror. And what of the beggar in the street, or of a Third World rendered trivial and picturesque under the gaze of colonialism? Terror comes from the way that sight is constructed in relation to power, and powerlessness. To think of a terror intrinsic to sight makes it harder to think what *makes* sight terroristic, or otherwise. It naturalizes terror, and

that is of course what is terrifying. But what should ensue from Lacan's portrayal of the terror of sight is analysis, analyses, many of them, of how power uses the social construct of vision, visibility. And also of how power disguises and conceals its operations in visibility, in myths of pure form, pure perception, and culturally universal vision.

Notes

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), Chapter 1, section 4, pp. 254-302.
2. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1978), sections 6-9.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 85-90.
5. Works by Kitarō Nishida (1870-1945) available in English include: *Intelligibility and the Philosophy of Nothingness*, trans. Robert Schinzinger (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1958); *A Study of Good*, trans. V. H. Viglielmo (Tokyo: Printing Bureau of the Japanese Government, 1960); and *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, trans. David A. Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987). On the relevance of Nishida in the context of poststructuralism and postmodernism, see William Haver, "The Body of this Death: Alterity in Nishida-Philosophy and Post-Marxism," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1987.
6. Keiji Nishitani (b. 1914), *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 30-45.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
8. On *śūnyatā*, see *ibid.*, chapters 4-6.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

Norman Bryson I should clarify one thing. The Ch'an examples, by Sesshū and Murata Shukō, date from the fifteenth century—I wasn't making an historical connection between the paintings and Nishitani. The illustrations I used are simply diagrams of arguments; I'm not making historical claims about the East and the West and their traditions. But since Sartre uses the visual scenario of the park and Lacan involves Holbein to diagrammatize his argument, I thought Ch'an painting might provide a visual form for Nishitani's ideas.

Rosalind Krauss When you described the gaze of *śūnyatā*, particularly in relation to the notion of framing developed by Nishitani, you said it has to do with the dark, unmarked remainder—the things that fall outside the frame of vision in its Western perspectival sense. I immediately thought of the notion developed by Merleau-Ponty in *The Phenomenology of Perception* that vision is constituted precisely by what goes on behind the head and in the body—all those perspectives that are the perspectives of the world. It is precisely his account of the phenomenology of vision that it is dependent on the sum of other views excluded by the position of the viewer, an account that he develops specifically in relation to Cézanne. I wonder—and this may be pure projection on my part—if there is not an echo of *The Phenomenology of Perception* in Nishitani.

Bryson It seems to me that Nishitani does draw on Merleau-Ponty, but the practice of flung-ink painting is obviously different from that of Cézanne. The emphasis is far more on a radical decentering of the subject, and I think that points to a difference between Nishitani and Merleau-Ponty, although in the thematic of the invisible they are close. In Merleau-Ponty there seems to be not only a desocialization of the body but also a simplification of the body—a simplification because it is still regarded as the center from which one looks out onto the world, and it is exactly this center that is cast out in Nishitani.

This leads to the question of the difference between Merleau-Ponty and Lacan. At certain points Lacan is asked if his position is like Merleau-Ponty's and, curiously enough, he says that it is. But it obviously can't be because the body in Merleau-Ponty is a unified, untroubled place of acrobatic grace and perceptual accord between subject-world and object-world, an exact fit of the incarnated subject inside the flesh of the world. And such harmony of the body in its world is precisely what *isn't* present in any theory in which the sign is seen to trouble this union. Now when I invoked my Oriental example—even though it is the only appropriate one for an argument that is in articulation with the West from the outside—it might have seemed as though I was invoking a purely gestural painting, but my point is not the pure gesturality of the Japanese work but rather the renunciation of gesturality in the flinging of ink: the gesture of the Merleau-Pontyan body, centralized in its world, is also thrown out by this flinging of ink.

Martin Jay I think it is crucial to recognize the existence in this Japanese discourse of a Heideggerian motif even more than a Merleau-Pontyan one. When Heidegger talks about the notion of *Umsicht*, of a circumspect vision, he means a vision that doesn't have any one particular vector. And when he contests the notion of enframing as part of the *Gestell* of Western science, he attacks the same thing the Japanese thinkers are attacking. His notion of *Lichtung*, of a clearing, is also the notion of a place in which truth is revealed—but not necessarily to any one eye or two eyes in any one body. The truth is revealed, and the eye is simply there to bear witness to it; this happens in precisely the way you described it in Japanese painting. Now Heidegger had an extraordinary impact in Japan from the 1920s to 1940s, and I am interested to know whether or not the figures you discussed were consciously indebted to him.

My second question concerns the issue that Rosalind just

raised about Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty seems to me to be a very important transitional figure between Sartre and Lacan, not only because he is more interested in the body and the crossing of gazes, but also because he is more interested in signs. I think it would be wrong to say that, unlike Lacan, Merleau-Ponty only talks about the body. In his last writings he actually cites Lacan ("the unconscious is structured like a language"), and there are at least gropings toward a structuralist view of language. I do, however, agree that the later Merleau-Ponty is much more optimistic about visual interaction than Lacan, who shares with Sartre a much more pessimistic, perhaps even paranoid view. But Merleau-Ponty also introduces elements which lead us toward Lacan, including the linguistic mediation of the viewer and the viewed in the flesh of the world.

Bryson I would agree with both those emphases. About the connection between Nishitani and Heidegger: it is via Nishida, more than twenty of whose students, including Nishitani, went to study with Heidegger. But actually I have a question for you. It has been very much on my mind—this issue of the paranoid coloration given to visuality in different French traditions of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and twentieth centuries. I am impressed by what you write about this tradition in the twentieth century [in "In the Empire of the Gaze"], though I also have reservations, especially in relation to Foucault. Nevertheless, I wonder whether Lacan's rhetoric of decentering as paranoid and terroristic does not participate in that tradition.

Jay I think his early discussion of the "mirror stage" as the source of a false notion of the integrity of the ego does reflect a general hostility to the gaze as a source of ideological notions of selfhood. But in the later *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, a very difficult text, Lacan perhaps moves away from an idea of vision as strictly paranoid and terroristic, and this may be why he draws on Merleau-Ponty—to nuance the problem

somewhat. I agree that Foucault can also be seen to nuance the simply hostile tradition; Merleau-Ponty obviously does. One has to avoid making it black and white. But I think that Lacan must be understood largely in the tradition critical of vision. Althusser, too, when he talks about ideology as produced by the gaze, by the mirror stage, draws on Lacan and attacks vision. Christian Metz, when he talks about the scopic regime of the cinema, also draws on Lacan to denigrate vision as well. So I think they are all part of a larger story. Lacan gets it, as you said, to a great extent from Sartre; Sartre's view of vision is very seminal for a lot of these thinkers. One might also mention Bataille—there are many interesting connections between Bataille and Lacan—and Bataille has a fascinating critique of the primacy of sight in such works as his pornographic novel *L'histoire de l'oeil* and his essays on vision. That would have to be part of the story of Lacan's attitude toward vision as well.

Jonathan Crary Norman, could you clarify something for me? Initially you said you didn't want to set up an opposition between a Western and a non-Western tradition, and then you said you could only have picked a Japanese example to incarnate this other tradition. Would it have been possible for you to have chosen an example from, say, twentieth-century Western modernist art practice, or is it *a priori* impossible?

Bryson No, it's not a matter of impossibility; it was just a question of what images could give the best form to these arguments. There is no cultural enclosure that makes it impossible for a Western art practice to embody the concepts Nishitani works with.

Crary Let me then pose a rather crude, formalist-type question. If a Franz Kline had been shown, what would one have said?

Bryson I was thinking more of Pollock's work, but I couldn't use it. There is an essential difference between Pollock and the flung ink

of Ch'an painting, and it is important to get it right. Although there is a renunciation of control over form in an image that involves randomness, it is nevertheless recuperated in Pollock's painting: central subject positions return in so many ways—for example, in the way randomness becomes his style, so that exactly at the point where self-control is abandoned it is reinscribed as his personal style. That is one place in which there is a recentering at the very moment of a decentering. Another way is the manner in which Pollock drips paint: the drips overlay one another to produce eidetic depth—one looks at Pollock as if through various screens—and it is exactly that eidetic depth within the frame that is interrupted and broken by flung-ink. So for those reasons—but not because of any uncrossable cultural enclosure—it seemed more sensible to choose Sesshū rather than Pollock.

Jacqueline Rose I have a reply to Martin, one that relates to questions I have about a number of things we have discussed so far today. I want briefly to historicize Lacan's hostility to vision: it needs to be located in the very origins of psychoanalysis, in the images of Charcot's hysterics at the clinic of the Salpêtrière. It is a perhaps overworked example but one that, especially in the context of the images of women shown to us by Rosalind, may reinvolve the importance of questioning the immediacy and availability of the image as the immediacy and availability of the body of the woman.

My second point is in response to Norman regarding the paranoia of Lacan's model: I'd like to historicize that as well. What Norman calls the terror or paranoia of vision again comes in response to a specific historical moment. That moment is perhaps best summed up in the concept of "genital oblativity," which (to quote Lacan) is "now being struck up everywhere to the tune of salvationist choirs." That is, the negativity of the visual and the negativity of the psychic were part of a critique not only of ego psychology but also of a social demand of the couple on the couple to be *the* couple.

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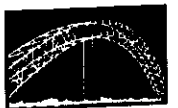
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11

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