7. Seeing as a Political Resource in Visual Culture Studies

Visual culture studies has become a sprawling field. Every conceivable discipline is now making links to visual culture, from art history to art education, film, media and theatre studies, literary theory, and the other usual suspects, through to anthropology, history, sociology, jurisprudence, theology and even computer science, neurobiology, medicine, and other natural sciences. In 2006, Marquard Smith remarked: "the huge number of books [about visual culture] tells us that the phrase 'visual culture' is becoming ubiquitous, omnipresent, that it can and is being used to signify works or artefacts or spaces from *any* historical period, geographical location, thematic concern, or combination of methodological practices. Because of this, the phrase visual culture conveys little that is specific to our past or present visual culture per se. It seems that visual culture is everywhere, and thus nowhere, wholly overdetermined and almost meaningless simultaneously."[1] In the same spirit, visual culture was often included in the titles and introductions of publications to give conventional takes on subject matter from all manner of disciplines an aura of topicality.

Eleven years after being cited by Mitchell in 1995 as prospects, the themes, objects and methodologies listed by Smith give a picture of the field that is every bit as vague as Mitchell's attempt to characterize visual culture without restrictive definitions. The thematic framework of the publications may be historically synchronous or diachronic, regional or national; it may orient

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1   Marquard Smith, "Visual Culture Studies: Questions of History, Theory, and Practice" in Amelia Jones (ed.), *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945* (Oxford 2006), 471-489: 473. Over a few pages, Smith also offers a survey of the publishing history to date that tries to tackle the full breadth of applications, as well as his version of a possible genealogy for visual culture studies.

itself towards themes of race, class, gender and sexuality that emerged from the political agenda of recent decades and which shaped visual culture studies as a "political and ethical field of study".[2] Smith also notes that most of these books with "visual culture" in the title are readers and introductions for a student readership. He describes them as "methodological inquiries, cabinets of curiosity" that deal on the one hand with the production, circulation and consumption of pictures and the "changing nature of subjectivity" and, on the other, with gazes, visual practices and technologies. What they all have in common is that they identify the points where "images and objects and subjects and environments overlap, blur and converge with and mediate one another";[3] using a metaphor from digital culture, these points could also be referred to as interfaces.

To come to terms with this wealth of material beyond Smith's loose structuring, I will therefore examine three strategies used in studies of the gaze to deal with concepts of seeing in their specific application to visual objects. The main question here is that of how the concept of the gaze is linked with the problems inherent in the category of identity. As examples I have chosen two texts that represent opposite extremes. In both cases, it is a matter of how to deal with the discriminating gazes in such a way that the discriminated groups in question might transform their situation within this field of discriminatory visual practices and arrive at pictures of their "own" identity. These are: gay and lesbian in the case of Norman Bryson's "Todd Haynes's *Poison* and Queer Cinema", and Afro-American female in the case of bell hooks' "The Oppositional Gaze – Black Female Spectators". A third text by Martin A. Berger serves as an example of how evidence of a normative visuality is defined, based not on discriminatory stereotypes but on visual representations of the world, in this case the American West, seen once through the eyes of the conquering "white man" and once through those of the "native". For Bryson and hooks, the political agenda of visual culture studies is the driving force, claiming recognition for the identity of discriminated groups. Berger, on the other hand, links the academic perspective (with its critique of one-point perspective as a figure of power and logocentrism) with the political agenda.

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2   Smith, "Visual Culture Studies", 472.
3   Ibid., 473.

The stigmatizing gaze – 'Integration and positive revaluation' – Norman Bryson

Norman Bryson's text *Todd Haynes's* Poison *and Queer Cinema* from 1999[4] exemplifies the transformation of the evil eye into the metaphor of the socially controlling and repressive gaze, as outlined not only by Martin Jay but also by Margaret Olin.[5] Based on his critique of gay and lesbian studies, Bryson combines the model of the gaze with the heteronormativity of society. In Bryson's view, gay and lesbian studies have a problem similar to that faced more than two decades previously by feminist art historians: it could not be merely a matter of healing the discrimination of women/lesbians/gays by discovering the forgotten heroes of these "minorities" and making them public. Around 1970, feminist art history began with the objective of expanding the conventional canon to include forgotten and repressed "female" artists, only to discover that this resulted in neither a critique nor a disempowerment of the patriarchy. And in the late 1980s, the art historical branch of the gay and lesbian movement, that wanted to canonize Leonardo, Michelangelo, David Hockney or Robert Mapplethorpe as gay artists, came to similar conclusions, accentuated by the political experience of being made responsible for the AIDS epidemic.

Bryson seeks to respond to this "minoritarian" strategy with a "majoritarian position"[6] along the lines of queer studies: the stigmatization of gay and lesbian people and their culture is not a local problem that could be dealt with via a politics of inclusion. Instead, it is linked to all of the various dimensions of cultural normativity. Which is why it cannot be a matter of adding gay and lesbian positions to the "normal" canon to gain access to "the club". Instead, one must study the structures of coercive heteronormativity which shape the cultural canon and its organization – while bearing in mind that this same coercive heteronormativity also permeates the visual field of the homosexual scene.

With this argument, Bryson achieves two things: he declares the "visual field" to be the central element of heteronormative coercion and culture, and

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4   Norman Bryson, "Todd Haynes's *Poison* and Queer Cinema" in *Invisible Culture. An Electronic Journal for Visual Studies*, 1999, http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/issue1/bryson (accessed 26 Sept 2016).

5   See chapter 5, *The evil eye and a counter-model – Margaret Olin*, in this book.

6   Bryson, "Todd Haynes's *Poison*", 2.

he makes it clear that the task of queer art history and visual culture studies consists in studying this visual field with its preordained structures for heteronormative inclusion and exclusion. This in turn has further consequences, since the assumption of a heteronormative structuring of society depends on the assumption of social and cultural constructivism. This implies a critique of the identity politics of "minorities" that is already familiar: "An acute problem within minoritarian cultural politics is the tendency to dramatize and to valorize authentic expressions of the minority in question: the minority is thought of as embodied in a particularly radical or foundational way,"[7] a position also known as essentialism that insists on authenticity of identity beyond the shaping influence of culture – identity in aspic, as Gayatri Spivak has called it.

For Bryson, then, it cannot be a question of looking for visual evidence of gay and lesbian "authenticity". Instead, it is about examining coercively heteronormative structures since it is they that produce not only the subjects included in heteronormativity but also those it excludes. For both, this process is crucially accompanied by desire and the denial of desire, as expressed, among others, in homophobia. At this point in Bryson's argument, the gaze comes into play, as homophobia is a "visual operation".[8] The precondition for this is the historical shift, described by Foucault, from the sodomite act to the homosexual *type* as the basic marker for homosexuality and its punishment.[9] Since the early 19th century, techniques of visual taxonomy such as photography made it possible to catalogue, archive and manage what was considered socially, ethnically, racially and sexually "abnormal" – from criminals, the insane and the ill, through to Jews, homosexuals, and so forth. Abnormality is thus produced in a form "that manifests it directly to the naked eye: deviance or degeneration as a *face*".[10] But the homosexual was a "notoriously elusive type"; the signs of homosexuality were "penumbral and deceptive"[11] and mostly only decipherable by members of the scene themselves. "Among the myriad forms of deviancy, it is homosexuality, in fact, that tests *the powers of the normalizing gaze* to its limits."[12]

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7   Ibid.
8   Ibid., 5.
9   See Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge* (*Histoire de la sexualité, I: La volonté de savoir*, Paris 1976).
10   Bryson, "Todd Haynes's *Poison*", 7.
11   Ibid., 8.
12   Ibid., 9, (my italics).

The 'normalizing gaze', the 'homophobic gaze', the 'gaze of the stigma-tizor', the 'diagnostic gaze' – with these variants, Bryson creates pointed metaphors in his description of the visualization strategies of heteronorma-tive taxonomy. This gaze is not a simple look; it stares, bores, penetrates to the stigmatized body's most intimate places to shed light on the "penumbra" of the elusive homosexual "type" and render it visible. This "gaze seeks out its enemies"; the stigmatizor must get dangerously close to the deviant body in order to even find out whether/that it is indeed deviant. "From the stigmatizor's viewpoint the stigma is intended as a *brand*, an inscription of the sign of criminality; but at the same time the stigma is the very point closest to desire, where complicity becomes inescapable, and alien desire irrupts *into* the visual field of the stigmatizor."[13]

At this point, the stigmatizor is gripped by a visual panic, a "disruption of the visual field that lies at the foundation of heteronormative visuality". The diagnostic gaze is contradictory, it is a sadistic, invasive procedure likened to branding the deviant body, but at the moment of applying the hot iron "the whole visual field suddenly buckles and bends around".[14] In ever more metaphorically charged language, Bryson describes how a secretion oozes through stigmata from the deviant side to the "normal" side of the stigma-tizor, "the secretion of a secret". The stigma, inflicted by the invasive gaze, becomes the membrane that overcomes, or at least jeopardizes, the division between deviance and normality. The "brand-become-infection" defines ho-mophobic panic as a visual field.[15] This gaze is closely related to the evil eye. One key difference results from its link to the construction of identity – both "normal" identity as secured via a distinction based on visual evidence and "deviant" identity established by inflicting a mark by which such an 'identity' will be recognized.

Bryson turns the tables and asks how a reversal of this stigmatization might look. If we follow Bryson's version of the gaze, cast by the stigmatizor onto the deviant subject (it remains unclear whether the stigmatizor is meant as a subject or as a Foucauldian *dispositif*), then it must involve, I suggest, turning the gaze from the deviant back onto the stigmatizor. Bryson makes another proposal that adopts the strategies of the lesbian and gay subculture: those who have been socially nullified and rendered invisible by this stigma

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13   All quotations in this paragraph, ibid, 9-10.
14   Ibid., 10.
15   Ibid., 11.

reclaim it, making it their own in erotic and critical terms. I suggest a de-
scription of this process as a libidinous reconfiguration. "The stigmatization
could itself be treated as a modality of desire, whose origins lay ultimately in
the brand, the mark, the seal."[16] In Bryson's model, the stigma becomes *the*
site of queer desire.

Gay subculture in particular offers countless examples of this tactic.
Bryson chooses Todd Haynes's film *Poison*. He is especially interested in
the film's plot, whereas he devotes little attention to the way it is made in
terms of the gaze, although such a focus would bring cinema itself as a
visual apparatus and scopic regime into play, allowing the theoretical concept
of the gaze to be adequately applied to the film (it is worth recalling that
in her analysis of Fassbinder's film based on the same material by Genet,
Kaja Silverman deals with the gaze entirely on this level.[17]) Instead, Bryson
focuses on Haynes's stylistic use of parody and the artificiality which, he
claims, produces a Brechtian alienation effect, preventing identification.
In this way, *Poison* is reduced to the function of evidence for Bryson's pro-
posal to recode the stigma into a marking of gay identity that is positively
coded in terms of "deviant" desire – an identity that also has a supposedly
critical quality (via alienation).[18] For my questions on the practice of visual
culture studies, Bryson's remarks are interesting because they introduce the
concept of the gaze into visual culture studies in connection with a specific
identity politics. He does so via a rhetoric whose persuasive power derives
from metaphors of the visual: visual panic, visual field, visual operation,
homophobic, diagnostic, medico-juridical gaze.

In his discussion of *Poison* Bryson's gaze goes in one direction only. The
stigmatizor looks, the person looked at does not look back, but appropriates
the look and integrates it into the structure of his own desire. This gay tactic
is the most radical manifestation of the issue raised by identity politics of
visibility, whatever their strategic limitations: the appropriation of external
images as self-images in groups whose internal structures of belonging are
also determined via these images. This tactic is also radical in its narcissistic

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16   Ibid., 12.

17   Silverman, "Fassbinder and Lacan". It is also surprising that Bryson doesn't even men-
      tion this fundamental text, in spite of its thematic and theoretical relevance, and in
      spite of the fact that it was published under his editorship.

18   In 1999, such a claim is more the re-enactment of an already established practice that
      can only be seen as politically urgent if one takes gay AIDS activism into account (which
      had been ongoing outside universities since the mid-1980s).

structure. Such attempts to force recognition of deviance within a normative
framework by recognizing oneself in the image of this deviance may have the
short-term success of shifting the borders of what is recognized, but the price
is high: for one thing, these images will have to be internalized to a certain
degree and, for another, the groups showing themselves in this way not only
become visible, but their distinctive markings become consumable.

How can Bryson's view of the relationship between gaze and object be
summed up? The gaze produces the stigma (it remains unclear whether this
gaze is meant to stand for the social discourse of homophobia in general or a
characterization of the homophobic activity of a perpetrator, the stigmatizor
– probably both); the visual *representation* of the stigma becomes the thing that
is sought out in the object (in this case the film). What can be considered or
referred to as such a representation is a matter of interpretation. We could
also say that the stigma is Bryson's main aim of inquiry, which in turn struc-
tures both his use of the gaze concept and his pinpointing of the stigma in
specific iconographic and narrative elements of the film. The interpretative
tools of his approach, then, are iconography/motifs and content/plot, rather
than any focus on media-specific characteristics of film itself, shot and edited
using specific technologies and procedures with regard to gazes both within
the film and between film and viewer. The potential for such a dialogical ap-
proach to the film medium (an exchange of gazes between film and viewer
forms the basis for interpretation) is demonstrated by Silverman's Fassbinder
essay. For Bryson, the film is not a counterpart of the viewer/interpreter in
the sense of dialogical seeing, but a reservoir of evidence (in the form of mo-
tifs and storylines) for the detection of a homophobic stigma and its inversion
into homosexual desire.

For Bryson, at the time of its publication in 1999 at least, this text was
programmatic – politically for the queer movement and academically for vi-
sual culture studies and art history. With regard to my examination of visual
culture studies, I consider Bryson's text to be symptomatic and thus impor-
tant. And my reading of it is guided not only by the questions I address to
visual culture studies, but also by my own experience as a feminist activist
and intellectual since the 1970s, when I was soon confronted with the pitfalls
of identity politics. The text shows how an intensely identity-focused agenda
based on visuality impacts on the process of interpretation. By 1999, the tactic
of integrating discriminatory stereotypes into the self-image of discriminated
groups, a tactic radically demonstrated by Bryson here, had already been the
subject of critical discussion in political circles for years – highlighting the

way academic agendas tend to lag behind political activism. The essay is also symptomatic in what I see as its narcissistic tautologization of the exchange of glances between film and viewer. By this I mean a closed circuit established between the gaze of the viewer, in this case the interpreter and – that same viewer. The film itself is but the trigger for this tautology of the gaze. In what follows I will examine a position that responds to the discriminating gaze not with integration, but with opposition.

The discriminating and the oppositional gaze – bell hooks

On account of the word's double meaning ("degrading or excluding individuals or groups" but also "capable of making fine distinctions") a "discriminating" gaze may be about selecting nuances of colour for sofa cushions, but also about using socially constructed markers to make distinctions that play a crucial role in determining whether or not a person belongs to a discriminated group. Bryson's stigma is a metaphor for such markers, adding a subtext charged with Christian associations of suffering, sacrifice and desire. The gaze produces the stigma, seeks it out and finds it in a circular movement, as a productive and reproductive part of visual discourses. In Bryson's version, as in that of Laura Mulvey, for example, this gaze falls on a passive object that is ultimately the victim of this gaze and the discourses in which it partakes. Many texts in visual culture studies follow this pattern when they study the stereotypes with which discriminated groups are visualised. This research was and is important in order to render the history of such stereotyping visible and thus to underline the visual dimension of both manifest and, more especially, latent racism in all its manifold cultural symptoms. But it does also have its strategic pitfalls: when the concept of the gaze is used in this way, the gaze is identical with the images it has produced. Put another way: the images of racism give a transparent view of the discriminating gaze, of which they are also evidence. Such an approach to visual culture cannot escape a politics of the victim, since the possibility of looking back is not considered. The master-servant relationship is unambiguous. In methodological terms, the result of deploying the gaze in this way, in the study of racist, sexist, ethnic and other stereotypes, is closely related to art-historical iconography: pictures and their components are viewed as representations of something else. Unlike in art history, however, such gathering of visual evidence of social discrimination is

underpinned here by an openly articulated agenda that is highly dramatic in political terms.

In 1992, early in the history of visual culture studies (but 17 years after Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* claimed the impossibility of active looking for women in Hollywood movies), the African-American theorist, film critic and artist bell hooks made a counterproposal, opposing a strategy of resistance to the passivity of those touched by the gaze.[19] Her essay was titled "The Oppositional Gaze – Black Female Spectators". It came neither from art history nor from visual culture studies itself, but, once again, from film studies which, since Mulvey if not before, had been strongly shaped by feminist ideas and engaged intensively with questions of viewer positions and the gaze. In hooks' text, gaze, identity, agency, gender and race are dealt with together.

Like Bryson, hooks proposes countering the discriminating gaze. But there is a radical difference between their positions: rather than the discriminated appropriating the stereotypical image produced by this gaze and integrating it into their own desire (as with Bryson's stigma), her strategy involves staring back. Rather than establishing it as something that must first be established, hooks derives this "oppositional gaze" (that seems to be the exact opposite of the "stigmatizing gaze") from a way of looking already practised by slaves. The ban on looking to which they were subjected (looking back was punished) produced in them an overwhelming desire "to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze".[20] Even in situations of the worst oppression, the ability to manipulate one's own gaze in the face of structures of power that seek to restrict it opens up the possibility of agency, a key concept in the debate on poststructuralist critiques of the subject and their impact on thinking about the subject's scope for action in the political struggles since the 1970s. In the texts on gaze and visuality discussed above, this concept played no part; this may have to do with the passive-paranoid readings of the concepts of the gaze which (as the example of Bryson shows)

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19   bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze – Black Female Spectators" in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston 1992), 115-131. I do not mean to suggest that there were no previous critical responses to Mulvey's text; other feminist film critics criticized Mulvey's gender-specific distinction between an active male position of visual pleasure and a passive female one of being looked at, the earliest such critique coming from Kaja Silverman, "Masochism and Subjectivity" in *Framework* 12 (1980). 2-9.

20   hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze", 116.

lead to a victimization of the subject by the gaze. It is this that hooks is writing against.

hooks wants to take a practice of looking that emerged in a situation of oppression and update it for use in resistance to power. She refers not to Lacan but to Foucault, according to whom the potential for resistance exists within all relations of power; critical thinkers must seek out the "margins, gaps and locations on and through the body where agency can be found".[21] For hooks, the gaze is one such location: "Subordinates in relations of power learn experientially that there is a critical gaze, one that 'looks' to document, one that is oppositional." African Americans, then, derive this specific gaze from the experience of slavery. For the current media situation this entails a special experience of looking: "To stare at television, or mainstream movies, to engage its images, was to engage its negation of black representation."[22] Resistance, she argues, thus takes the form of rejecting a certain identity-based representation in the narrative medium. The oppositional black gaze responded to this by developing independent black cinema; the progress of the political movements for racial equality could be gauged by the construction of new images of black identity.

hooks' construction of a "black female spectatorship"[23] that resists the white mainstream is framed by three concepts: agency, narration and representation. Quoting Manthia Diawara, she asserts that "every narration places the spectator in a position of agency," especially at moments of "rupture" when the viewer resists identification with the film's discourse.[24] Unlike Mulvey, however, hooks sees such "ruptures" not in the filmic mode itself, as when a plot is interrupted, fragmented or undermined, but in the narrative treatment of stereotypes of race and gender. In other words: not the formal structure,[25] but the plot, and especially the use of characterization (a typical example being the matronly black servant who can only stand in for the white children's mother because she is not allowed to have children herself), give rise to the kind of experience that brings forth the oppositional gaze: the negative or withheld representation of an identity that is both black and female, as hooks focuses on this double discrimination. The paradigm of representation as the

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21   Ibid.
22   Ibid., 117.
23   Ibid., 118.
24   Ibid., 117.
25   Here I would refer again to Mulvey's call for an avant-garde aesthetic of fragmentation as a weapon against the identificatory pull of narrative Hollywood cinema.

key element of identity politics, on the other hand, is something hooks borrows from Stuart Hall.

So what does the oppositional gaze do? "Within my family's southern black working-class home, located in a racially segregated neighborhood, watching television was one way to develop critical spectatorship. Unless you went to work in the white world, across the tracks, you learned to look at white people by staring at them on the screen. … Before racial integration, black viewers of movies and television experienced visual pleasure in a context where looking was also about contestation and confrontation."[26] The oppositional gaze overcomes the pain of being confronted with humiliating portrayals of black female stereotypes in the film by learning how racism determines the visual construction of gender in cinema. While Mulvey, for example, situates female criticality in a position "outside that pleasure of looking", in hooks' model the black female viewers actively refuse to identify with the "imaginary subjects" of the film because "such identification was disenabling".[27] Mulvey's distinction between active/male and passive/female becomes irrelevant for the oppositional gaze of the black female viewers insofar as they refuse to identify with the film representation of white womanhood that forms the passive pole in Mulvey's model. "Black female spectators, who refused to identify with white womanhood, who would not take on the phallocentric gaze of desire and possession, created a critical space where the binary opposition Mulvey posits of 'woman as image, man as bearer of the look' was continually deconstructed."[28] hooks thus identifies specific differences between the viewer positions of black and white women that are the result of lived, historically determined experience with the socio-cultural conditions and effects of racism. For Mulvey, the strategic goal is a feminist "disaffection" with Hollywood cinema, whereas for hooks resistance to the role models for black women presented in films is the "starting point for many black women approaching cinema within the lived harsh reality of racism".[29] This is also the starting point for hooks' critique of feminist film criticism's blindness to racism, as black women viewers identify with none of the postulated viewer positions – neither with the phallocentric gaze nor with the construction of white womanhood as a lack. Critical "black female

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26   hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze", 117.
27   Ibid., 122.
28   Ibid., 122-123.
29   Ibid., 125.

spectators construct a theory of looking relations where cinematic visual delight is the pleasure of interrogation".[30] For hooks, this practice of critical questioning then gives rise to the discursive space that makes it possible for black women directors to formulate narratives with different representations of black womanhood; the aim is to find new transgressive possibilities for the formulation of identity and "new points of recognition", thus helping to construct a radical black female subjectivity. The examples given by hooks for such moments describe eye contact between black characters in films, a "shared gaze" that testifies to solidarity between women[31] and to their subjecthood.

hooks' use of the gaze is ambivalent – besides the oppositional gaze, there is also the repressive gaze that makes women the victims of looking and of male desire. hooks uses the terms gaze and look with no clear theoretical distinction, more on the basis of mood: the gaze is either discriminating, making victims, or it is actively turned against this dominant gaze by the victim, a gaze that stares back – in both cases, it implies a form of aggressiveness and a corresponding directedness; the look, on the other hand, comes into play when it is a question of the investigative, analytical, learning visual mode which, in hooks' view, characterizes the visual pleasure of black women in particular, including their enjoyment of Hollywood movies.[32] Seeing relates here on the one hand to a discursive, critical practice of watching and, on the other, to glances exchanged within the film narrative. Critical spectatorship in turn focuses on unmasking stereotypes, but also on recognizing and acknowledging counter-models of identity devised by the narratives in films by black women directors. In both cases, the narrative is the object of seeing.

For hooks, the pleasure of the critical gaze derives from the contrary movements of unmasking negative identity models and the construction and perception of new, positive identities. This pleasure arises not in individual, isolated seeing but in a political context of community, discussion and awareness. While this seeing itself can therefore not be described as dialogical with regard to its object (film), the context of this seeing is distinctly dialogical. This is also apparent in hooks' descriptions of specific, shared moments of such visual experience and the ways they are dealt with. What is actually

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30   Ibid., 126.
31   Ibid., 129-130.
32   By contrast, Mulvey opposes Hollywood films with avant-garde strategies to aesthetically thwart all visual pleasure.

being looked at and discussed here are identity models as represented in film. These models become visible in the (film) narrative, in turn offering the spectator scope for agency. The aim is the construction of new, politically resistant identity models whose visibility is considered as a political resource. This follows the above-mentioned political agenda of visual culture studies, with a terminology drawn from cultural studies, especially that of Stuart Hall.

For all the differences between their positions, hooks and Bryson both take their evidence from the elements of narrative, of filmic plot. This is a common methodological consequence of the focus on identity politics within visual culture studies. The theoretical basis for this focus, formulated in the writings of Stuart Hall, is the equation of culture with the production of meaning and of visual objects as sites of representation of such meaning. This in turn leads to what might loosely be termed a "content-focused" position with regard to the objects under interpretation.

An attempt at integration from art history – Lisa Bloom

The stigmatizing and the oppositional gaze are each used to construct a different model of the *acting* political subject. The evil, dominating, heteronormative, racist gaze is one side of this construction; this is countered by strategies of the resisting gaze that are intended to foster and safeguard the agency of discriminated subjects. These gazes are both directed at identifying external images of stereotypes which, in a second step, evoke identity-based self-images. This second step takes different forms: while the stigmatizing gaze is integrated into the self-image of the political subject in a narcissistic loop, the model of the oppositional gaze describes the acting subject as one that looks back critically, deriving a newly constructed self-image from this interaction in opposition to the external image. These models show the extremes between which discriminatory stereotypes are mostly dealt with: integration and resistance, masochism and combativeness.

One of the early readers on visual culture studies, *With Other Eyes: Looking at Race and Gender in Visual Culture*, edited by Lisa Bloom and published in 1999,[33] can be used to explore briefly attempts to transfer such concepts into

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33   Lisa Bloom (ed.), *With Other Eyes: Looking at Race and Gender in Visual Culture* (Minneapolis, London 1999).

art history, revealing parallels with the academic perspective of visual culture studies. The book's stated aim was to revitalize art history, which clings to an "idea of innocent vision as simple perception",[34] by using concepts of the gaze from visual culture studies. The texts, all written since the mid-1980s, bring together the main themes of the political agenda as it affects art history: feminist and antiracist criticism, expanding the discipline's brief to cover media and the products of popular culture, visual representations of discriminated and marginalized identities, critiques of nationalistic visual discourses. Bloom presents a rigid and ultimately clichéd version of "traditional" art history based on "innocent vision" as a negative foil for her aims. But art history certainly does not work on the basis of an innocent vision, in fact it could not even have come into existence on such grounds: a historically informed vision cannot be innocent. As Otto Pächt's treatise on art historical method has shown, it involves the situatedness of the object of investigation as well as the situatedness of the interpreter's gaze.[35] Bloom, however, uses "innocent vision" to describe the gaze of the male art historian as normative practice in the discipline. Of interest here is not only that Bloom uses this model of innocent vision to describe art history as a discipline in need of renewal,[36] but also what alternatives she brings into play – alternatives that blend metaphors of the gaze from the political and academic discourses of visual culture studies.[37]

Bloom speaks from the position of a feminist critique of the universalizing, objectifying male gaze that the "pure seeing" of traditional art history reveals itself to be. This gaze is prolonged and contemplative; it takes as long as it needs to coax the secrets from the artwork, since a great work of art "does not spontaneously lay itself open to us", as she quotes her chief witness Mark Roskill,[38] before laying her critical finger in the wound of this chauvinistic metaphor that draws its vividness from a patriarchal semantics of gender relationships. For Bloom, this seeing that is supposedly so pure is constructed "as an ordinary part of the development of a craft or skill in which an opposition between woman as image and man as bearer of the look is nat-

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34   Lisa Bloom, "Introducing With Other Eyes" in: Lisa Bloom (ed.): *With Other Eyes*, 2-18: 2.
35   See chapter 3, first section, in this book.
36   She uses a model of "pure vision" that would be easy to refute, but that is not my point here.
37   As described in chapter 4 of this book.
38   Mark Roskill, *What is Art History?* (Amherst 1989), 9, quoted from Bloom, "Introducing With Other Eyes", 2.

uralized as part of an apprenticeship that leads to art historical mastery".[39] This echoes Mulvey's division of the gaze into active-male and passive-female, which Bloom, too, criticizes as overly monolithic. In Bloom's view, the feminist critique of this gaze as an art-historical practice that defines the discipline's "gendered process of investigation"[40] must be expanded to include a critique of racism, thus also thwarting monolithic identity constructions of the female.

As alternative practices of looking, Bloom offers two examples: one is bell hooks' oppositional gaze, that makes the gaze the site of resistance, while the other is based on imitation and parody, suggesting a process of seeing in which the meaning of race and ethnicity is not uniform, since race, ethnicity and sexuality vary between ethnic and social groups and within those groups themselves. With this position, Bloom also articulates criticism of identity-based essentializations within the groups. Her specific example of such a practice is from outside art history: the Jewish lesbian performer Sandra Bernhardt imitated black singers as a parody of her inability "to translate herself across racial boundaries".[41] For Bloom, this is the third possible position that corresponds neither to the universalizing gaze of art history, nor to the oppositional gaze of hooks that still runs the risk of fixing identities.

So much for the political agenda proposed by Bloom for traditional art history. It intersects with the academic agenda insofar as she relates the universalizing gaze of art history to a general critique of science as formulated by Donna Haraway. Science as hegemonic knowledge, she argues, is characterized by "disengagement" and "detachment", both of which imply a "gendered privilege of knowing no bodies"[42] via what Haraway calls a "conquering gaze from nowhere"[43] that has the power to see without being seen. In the critical discourse of academic visual culture against art history, this kind of gaze is epitomized by body-denying, predictable and static one-point perspective; proposed alternatives pin their hopes on the multi-perspectival art of the Baroque or the descriptive art of Dutch painting. For Bloom's political agenda, however, I assume that this would be too rooted in the conventional framework of the discipline; instead she refers to a demand made by Haraway:

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39   Bloom, "Introducing With Other Eyes", 2.
40   Ibid.
41   Ibid., 4.
42   Ibid., 5.
43   Haraway, "Situated Knowledges", 188, quoted from Bloom, "Introducing With Other Eyes", 5.

"feminists should work from their embodied perspectives in order to produce what she [Haraway] calls 'situated knowledges'".[44] These "embodied perspectives" form the basis for Bloom's project of changing art history in a way that makes it compatible with "feminist cultural studies but with an emphasis on the visual arts".[45]

Where does she locate this knowledge via embodied perspectives? Bloom speaks of an autobiographical turn; not as a return to authorship deconstructed by Barthes et al, but based on the assumption of a subject "as an embodied individual within the process of cultural interpretation".[46] And this subject – both artist and viewer – is situated within the categories of gender, race, class and sexual orientation. Bloom's own contribution to the reader, "Ghosts of Ethnicity: Rethinking Art Discourses of the 1940s and 1980s"[47] looks at the way "even the most formalist aesthetic positions are inescapably imbricated by the politics of identity".[48] Her approach, the discourse analysis she applies to the texts of art criticism, makes it clear that she uses the concept of perspective not in relation to seeing as a physical and mental act or socio-cultural practice, but as a metaphor for the position from which questions are formulated and discourses interpreted. This perspective, which in Bloom's writing corresponds to the political agenda of visual culture studies, is thus the place from which the epistemes of traditional art history (the questioning of which Foster had announced as early as 1988[49] on the basis of new problematizations of seeing) must be attacked and changed. What this might mean for the relationship between the interpretative act of seeing and its object remains unclear.

Evidence

Having looked at concepts of the gaze in the political agenda of visual culture studies and the impact of this agenda on the search for a revised art

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44   Bloom, "Introducing With Other Eyes", 5. See Haraway, "Situated Knowledges".
45   Bloom, "Introducing With Other Eyes", 5.
46   Ibid., 6. However, Bloom's reception of Haraway's critique of science does not uphold the dialectic between the positioning of the scientist and the objectivity of her object of study, a dialectic on which Haraway insists, see chapter 8 in this book.
47   In Bloom (ed.), *With Other Eyes*.
48   Bloom, "Introducing With Other Eyes", 10.
49   In Foster, *Vision and Visuality*, see chapter 4 of this book.

history, I want to turn now to a problem that Bloom clearly did not ask herself: What is used as evidence? Which kinds of evidence can be found for questions concerning new political subjects and the visual representations of their identities? Where and how should such evidence be looked for?

The question of evidence can be asked independently of the object of visual culture studies – since, as we have seen, the question of the object of visual culture studies is an open one. For Mitchell, this undefined, open quality constitutes the pioneering character of visual culture studies as an "indiscipline". As Marquard Smith said, "whether we are discussing objects or subjects or media or environments or ways of seeing and practices of looking, the visual, or visuality, visual culture studies as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry has the potential *to create new objects of study*, and it does so specifically by *not determining them in advance*".[50] These "new objects of study" are taken almost word-for-word from a text on interdisciplinarity by Roland Barthes frequently quoted in theoretical texts seeking to underpin and legitimize visual culture studies,[51] a quotation that has clearly become so canonical as no longer to be labelled as a quotation or reference: "In order to do interdisciplinary work it is not enough to take a 'subject' (a theme) and to arrange two or three sciences around it. Interdisciplinary study consists in creating a new object, which belongs to no one."[52]

Whereas Barthes was interested in freeing interdisciplinary work from the constraints of institutionalized disciplines, his statement is used by Smith to give visual culture studies a unifying foundation – a paradoxical move that uses a statement of radical interdisciplinarity to found a discipline. As a result, visual culture studies inhabits the tension between its academic institutionalization and its claim to create something which, in terms of academic politics, "belongs to no one". This has consequences for the question of evidence. The use of evidence, as proof, is part of the register of scientific *ob-*

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50   Smith, "Visual Culture Studies", 479.
51   As for example in the work of Bal and Mitchell.
52   Roland Barthes, "Research: The Young" in *The Rustle of Language* (Berkeley, Los Angeles 1989), 69-75: 72. Barthes continues: "The Text is, I believe, one such object." Original quote from "Jeunes Chercheurs" in *Communications* 19, no. 19 (1972), 1-5: 3: "L'interdisciplinaire, dont on parle beaucoup, ne consiste pas à confronter des disciplines déjà constituées (dont, en fait, aucune ne consent à s'abandonner). Pour faire de l'interdisciplinaire, il ne suffit pas de prendre un 'sujet' (un thème) et de convoquer autour deux ou trois sciences. L'interdisciplinaire consiste à créer un objet nouveau, qui n'appartienne à personne. Le Texte est, je crois, l'un de ces objets."

*jecti*vity; but how does such an object of investigation take shape when visual culture studies does not have a defined, concrete object (in the sense that the object of art history is art)? Or should visual culture studies itself, by analogy with Barthes's *Text* (capitalized in the original) be classified as an "object which belongs to no one"? But studies cannot be equated with their object of study. So could *visual culture* be analogous to Barthes's *Text* as the object of visual culture *studies*? Then visual culture would be to visual culture studies what text is to semiotics, an analogy that fails in my opinion because visual culture studies is not secured by a theoretical framework comparable to that possessed by the *Text* in Barthes. Visual culture was born as a combination of concepts (vision and culture) that are not capable (individually or together) of bringing forth a coherent theoretical framework, being shaped instead by a diversity of positions, interests and discourse histories. Conversely, this makes visual culture studies more flexible than semiotics as it has not only produced no coherent theory, but also no method. As a result, unlike semiotics as the study of text, visual culture studies cannot be criticized as a totalizing interpretative model. Visual culture studies lives as long as its theoretical and methodological eclecticism can react to historically evolving issues.

Evidence in visual culture studies, then, must relate not to a single object (as in the case of art history, which has art as its object of inquiry) but to many. Object and evidence alike result from the specific line of inquiry, and not vice versa. Neither is *objective* in the sense of pre-existing as things; they are extremely discourse-dependent and must be *constructed*. In view of the diversity of themes and approaches in visual culture studies, I will now read a text whose academic research comes from the political agenda of visual culture studies not only in terms of its position with regard to seeing, but also concerning its construction of visual evidence, which in turn follows the academic discourse of visual culture studies with its negative view of one-point perspective.

Evidence of the non-visible – Martin A. Berger

In *Sight Unseen. Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (2005), Martin A. Berger studies "the links between racial identification and vision".[53] His book re-

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53   Martin A. Berger, *Sight Unseen. Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (Berkeley, Los Angeles 2005), 1.

sponds to problems resulting from research into the visual "politics of rep-resentation"[54] on race and racism in the United States. He gives a precise analysis of the dilemmas faced by white scholars wishing to work on race, the first and most difficult being that in their attempts to study visualiza-tions of race, and in their desire to shed light on racist stereotypes, they risk not only consolidating such images of the "racially" Other, but also, in pos-itive terms, sexualizing, idealizing and romanticizing them. "In critiquing the dominant construction of black, brown, or red identity, such studies have had an undeniable impact on the material conditions of nonwhite peoples. Yet in the light of the pernicious legacy of whites' taking both vicarious and physical pleasure in the bodies of nonwhites, it seems prudent to consider the investment of whites in producing even the most progressive analyses of nonwhite representations."[55] Berger doubts that well-meaning whites are ca-pable of transcending "their race's investment in depictions of nonwhites".[56] From this he draws the logical conclusion: since even progressive whites are still white, those interested in "racial justice" should study the ways that *white* identity influenced the lives of white and non-white peoples. The first step would be for "European-American scholars"[57] to shift their primary evidence for race from black to white representations. Here he quotes bell hooks, who made this demand as early as 1995: it is time, she writes, for "righteous white people, to begin to fully explore the way white supremacy determines how we see the world, even as their actions are not informed by the type of racial prejudice that promotes overt discrimination and separation".[58] In connec-tion with the visual conditions and effects of racism, the visual metaphor *how we see the world* (recalling but not identical with the concept of *worldview*) takes on a particular weight, as it highlights the dramatic importance of visual rep-resentations of race not only in the history of racism in the United States, but for American culture in the broadest sense. Visuality and race also have a special connection via racist metaphors of colour.

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54   Smith, "Visual Culture Studies", 476.
55   Berger, *Sight Unseen*, 2.
56   Ibid., 4.
57   Berger, ibid., introduces this category as a parallel to the way whites name non-white population groups in the United States (Afro-American, Asian American, Native Ameri-can), labelling whites as one group among many, countering implicit racial hierarchies.
58   bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* (New York 1995), 188, quoted from Berger, *Sight Unseen*, 4.

With regard to evidence, Berger draws a seemingly paradoxical conclusion. He selects his materials "for their conspicuous distance from the politics of race. This book not only shuns artworks containing obvious racial themes or tropes, but also avoids analyzing images that include nonwhites." His theory is that "a decidedly racialized perspective animated even those cultural products most removed from racial concerns".[59] The "unseen" in his book's title refers to his basic theory that the power and omnipresence of race conditions the meaning of American culture as a whole; his aim is to demonstrate this using those visual artefacts that do not visibly point to racism. In this way, he avoids not only the trap of an "insatiable white desire for racial others"[60] but also the risk of duplicating or even consolidating the obvious (racist stereotypes) in his interpretation, even if this is done with informative intent. But where does he see this unseen becoming visible? Which objects does he consult in his search for evidence? Since he assumes the cultural omnipresence of the racial paradigm, the question is not whether but only how the paradigm of race "hides" in the visual "texts" in which he will discover it.

Berger's strategy, then, consists on the one hand of shifting the focus of attention to "white" representations and on the other of selecting material in which the racial paradigm is not present as a theme or motif (unlike in the portrayal of stereotypes). What does he class as "white" representations? The answer to this question lies in his quotation from bell hooks: how we see the world, or in the corresponding metaphor of perspective. Berger finds his evidence in representations of how whites see the world – representations based on "racialized viewing practices of which European Americans were utterly unaware".[61] Berger describes his turning away from obviously racist themes as a radical shifting of the borders of what is considered "racial". Since changes in the representation of whites and non-whites neither cause nor heal racial inequalities, which are rooted in structural and discursive systems, he argues that it is of central importance to look beneath the narrative surface of images. He speaks of an "operational logic of race and its manner of guiding the interpretation of our visual world". He sees his task as "excavating" this logic, for only in this way can its power in American culture be understood and

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59   Ibid., 2.
60   Ibid., 3.
61   Ibid., 8.

eliminated[62] – a strong programmatic statement with which he positions his methodological approach.

As an example of Berger's analysis, let us consider his chapter on "Landscape Photography and the White Gaze". He begins by explaining the theoretical basis for his choice of landscape photography as an object for racism research into "white" identity. Unlike landscape painting, landscape photographs from the American West show no human figures, thus ruling out the narrativity that characterizes history and genre painting. In spite of this, Berger argues, pure landscape photography is still involved in the racial politics of its time since the cultural values active within it are the same as those shaping the production and reception of narrative painting. He also rebuts objections that the contemporary audience of landscape photography around 1860 viewed photographs as faithful records of reality: photographs appear less real when the viewers perceive a discrepancy between their values and what the photograph shows. Conversely, they appear more real when the photograph reflects the ideologies of the viewers. From this, Berger concludes that photographs accepted as true by a society have a unique potential to reveal that society's values.[63] He also assumes that images do not shape discourse but affirm it. In other words, he constructs a chain of causality, with ideology/discourse (Berger treats the two terms as synonyms) as the cause and the image as the effect.[64]

Which characteristics of landscape photography does Berger cite as evidence of the white gaze? As specific examples he takes Carleton Watson's photographs of the Yosemite Valley taken during a surveying expedition in 1866. Berger names two kinds of photographic gaze: "tightly focused close-ups of monumental geological features and distant overview shots".[65] One such distant overview shot became famous under the title *The Yosemite Valley from the Best General View*.[66] For Berger, this "best general view" is evidence of the white way of looking at the nature of the American West. How does Berger construct this evidence? In a first step, he asks what it means to produce the best general view of an amorphous object like a rugged valley seven miles long and two miles wide. He argues that a belief in the best view of

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62   Ibid.

63   Ibid., 44.

64   See ibid., 1. I see this very differently. For me, visual artefacts (not just pictures) are part of discourse history as both producers and effects.

65   Ibid., 46.

66   See illustration, ibid., 45.

the valley implies that its component parts can be quantified, and it is true that the photograph highlights a fixed number of landmarks that have become the standard repertoire of postcards and tourist guides on Yosemite. In this process, the detailed views of individual landmarks and the general view interlock: the individual images of rocks, mountains and waterfalls "provided the visual and ideological building blocks out of which the 'general' vistas were created".[67] The result is a "value system" that notes the valley's natural wonders in numbers that are talked up in tourist guides and integrated into the corresponding maps. Berger's description of this value system makes clear what he considers to be specifically white: quantification, control over nature via panoramic views, touristic exploitation by limitation to an unchanging set of attractions, cartographic measurement. Although these are characteristics commonly attributed to modern western culture, they do not yet specifically imply the category of whiteness: this is focused by Berger in a further step by introducing the "racially other"[68] of the "white man", the Native American, in the form of a comparison: "We can gain a sense of the visual and cultural bias of Watkins and his white contemporaries by considering how indigenous peoples viewed their environment." He then compares the "white" cartography of Yosemite with maps made by the region's indigenous population, of which only a few are documented. His example, drawn on birch bark, was found in 1841 by an officer of the Royal Engineers, fixed to stiff paper, copied and annotated, and is now in the British Library in London.[69] The map was fastened by two Native American travellers to a tree along their route to give those who came after them information about the route. Unlike "white" maps, it represents not a large section of the area but just a thin strip marking daily stages with no differentiation between types of terrain. The map thus shows only the traveller's immediate surroundings, it follows no cartographic scale and is not aligned with the compass. The size of natural phenomena is adapted to the shape of the medium on which they are marked (in this case the piece of bark).

It is not hard to imagine the conclusions Berger draws from the extreme differences between these two examples: while 'white' cartography fulfils the requirements of objectivizing western science, the other map shows no interest in scale; it adheres only to criteria that result from the "personal experi-

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ence"⁷⁰ of the travellers. A mountain was interesting because of its connection with the history of the community, to the spirits and ancestors, and to usable natural resources. Unsurprisingly, then, objectivity (however constructed the concept may be) was not a criterion for the Native Americans, and nor was a comprehensive, panoramic view of the region. Berger's argument has two strands: first, he shows that the objectivity of 'white' maps and of landscape photography is illusory, that the representational systems of cartography and photography help to shape the way society sees the world; second, he frames this gaze, beyond its categorization as western and rationalist, as white, by contrasting it with the gaze of the Native American as the 'racially other', less a view of the world than a view of his/her world. Furthermore, he situates the categories of gender and class in the hierarchy of the dominant 'white' system of representation: "In the symbolic system applied to Yosemite, race always trumped gender and class." He continues: "There are obvious social and political drawbacks inherent in any attempt to establish a hierarchy of suffering, but it remains important to appreciate how individuals who depart from religious, gendered, racial, sexual, political, or class norms pay unequal prices for their outsider status."⁷¹ This passage highlights the huge difficulty of an argument that moves between the proliferating categories of marginalized or oppressed minorities within the political project of visual culture studies.

In this argument, for all its attempts at precision, and in particular its efforts to avoid essentializing the category of race, the category of 'white' remains unclear, which also has to do with the problematic fact that this category usually remains unnamed in the cultural system as the denomination of the dominant group with regard to racial others, just as other normative and hegemonic categories (masculinity, heterosexuality, etc.) remain unnamed with regard to the deviations from them. In the course of the argument, however, it becomes clear that Berger is speaking of the whites as the dominant group that shapes and imposes its worldview in accordance with its interests. This prompts him to conclude the following on different ways of seeing nature among whites: "if a white gaze might usefully be said to exist, it constitutes a common interest, stemming from often distinct ways of looking, rather than a shared view of – in this case – the landscape."⁷² It is unclear, however, what can be meant by "racialized meanings of the images"

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70   Ibid., 54.
71   Ibid., 58.
72   Ibid., 67.

other than a representation that corresponds to such interests (exploitation and protection of nature, for example). Or, conversely: "Landscapes advancing a white perspective promote the varied interests of whites rather than depict particular forms in regularized arrangements,"[73] by which he presumably means that, where the "white gaze" is concerned, the interests are more important than the form, and that therefore the forms have no determining role when it comes to diagnosing this white gaze on the basis of images. Berger formulates a layering of the constitution of meaning with regard to whiteness: in Watkins's photographs meanings are "circumscribed by the invisible discourse of whiteness (residing in viewers), then particularized by the visible discourse of nature (suggested by the subject matter of the works), and ultimately refined ... by formal evidence".[74] The pictures, then, are sources of evidence (forms) for the invisible discourse of whiteness that must be separated out from the forms as a visible and thus assailable identity of whiteness with its various interests. *The Yosemite Valley from the Best General View*, which according to Berger was seen and produced through the lens of whiteness, thus offers him a model for the westward spread of European-American society into surroundings that the whites would alter irrevocably.

In Berger's terminology, gaze and perspective are used interchangeably as metaphors for the ideology, discourse and interests of the dominant group, and they are evidenced and thus made visible in the forms of image production. These forms presented by Berger as evidence (panoramic view and cartography as gazes of power and exploitation) are indebted to the academic discourse of visual culture studies (with its roots in critiques of one-point perspective as a rationalist-objectivizing gaze). In Berger's analysis, beyond their association with modern western culture, they now become representations of whiteness. At this point, the political and the academic discourses of visual culture studies intersect, combined in the figure of representation: rather than racist stereotypes, here it is ideologies, discourses and interests that are visually represented as self- or external image. In methodological terms, however, an aporia appears which originates in visual culture studies' academic discourse,[75] and whose ubiquity in visual culture studies tends to reduce it to the status of a prejudice: one-point perspective as the gaze of the powerful, objectified in the photographic apparatus.

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73   Ibid., 68.
74   Ibid.
75   See chapter 4, last section, of this book.

The utopian gaze and its failure – Nicholas Mirzoeff

In the texts from visual culture studies that we have examined so far, concepts of the gaze move between a critique of representations of the Others of the dominant norm on the one hand and, on the other, positive turns given to constructions of self from a position of alterity. The examples deal with gender, sex and race – to which other categories of alterity could be added. The following readings explore two concepts of the gaze that go beyond these positions, displaying a utopian character. They are closely linked with the claim to push visual culture studies beyond academia towards a political impact. The author of both concepts is Nicholas Mirzoeff whose definition of visual culture studies as a tactic in the political struggle against the "society of control" we have already encountered.[76] Rather than attempting any in-depth portrayal of the political agendas associated with these concepts, my reading concentrates on uncovering their methodological status.

The Multiple Viewpoint. *Diaspora and Visual Culture*

In 1998, Mirzoeff edited *The Visual Culture Reader*. The book contained his essay "The Multiple Viewpoint. Diaspora and Visual Culture" that he used the following year as the introduction to *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews*, which he also edited.[77] In this text, he uses the concept of the diaspora and its representation as the focus of a program for visual culture studies that aims to point the way forward, captured metaphorically in the terms multiple viewpoint and intervisuality. Thirteen years later, in 2011, Mirzoeff published a new proposal for a general political criticality in visual culture studies under the title *The Right to Look. A Counterhistory of Visuality*.[78]

The Multiple Viewpoint is an attempt to transfer the theoretical approaches of post-colonialism with its concepts of hybridity and créolité, as developed by writers including Arjun Appadurai, Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall,[79] to the field of visual culture. The concept of diaspora, that draws on

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76   See chapter 6 of this book, the section on Nicholas Mirzoeff.

77   See Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Multiple Viewpoint. Diaspora and Visual Culture" in Mirzoeff (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader*, 204-213; and Mirzoeff (ed.), *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews* (London, New York 1999), 1-13.

78   Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look. A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham, NC 2011).

79   See Patrick Williams, Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse & Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (New York 1994).

these approaches, is summarized by Hall as follows: "The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference."[80] In contrast to more conventional notions of diaspora, as with regard to the Jews, rather than a culturally and ethnically fixed identity that is inclined to shield itself from external influence in the diaspora (or obliged to do so, as in the case of ghettos), the focus here is on a diasporic identity that is constantly changing as a result of diverse migratory movements in the course of globalization, a development that also breaks down the hierarchy between centre (the West) and periphery (all other parts of the world). For my reading, what is important is why and how Mirzoeff relates these ideas to seeing and its theoretical derivatives such as visuality and perspective. The why is best explained in terms of Mirzoeff's opponents, first and foremost the nation state, that he contrasts (in the same apodictic style he applied to his underpinning of visual culture: "Modern life takes place on screen."[81]) with the post-national world: whereas the diasporas of the 19th century "revealed interconnected nations, our current experience is of an increasingly interdependent planet".[82] This means that the culture that had been installed over centuries by (colonialist) western nation states and that was meant to prove their "superiority" is now obsolete, including, for example, national museums and national styles, as constructed by traditional art history to demonstrate an essentialist vision of national identity. The essence of these styles was "of course, race".[83] Mirzoeff thus frames the project of a history of "diaspora visual cultures"[84] as a critique of the now obsolete culture of dominance by western-colonialist nation states; and he sees art history as their accomplice. This also means integrating a notion of future into the "diaspora identity" which in the 19th-century model was still fixed on the search for roots. If it were possible to rethink diaspora today as "an

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80   Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in Williams, Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse & Postcolonial Theory*, 392-403: 401-402. Essay first published in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London 1990), 222-237.

81   Mirzoeff, "An Introduction to Visual Culture", 1.

82   Mirzoeff, "The Multiple Viewpoint", 205.

83   Ibid., 206.

84   Ibid.

indeterminate future to come" then, according to Mirzoeff, this could result in "a significant reevaluation of diasporas past, present and future".[85]

In order properly to represent post-national diasporas, national culture, metaphorically linked by Mirzoeff to "one-point perspective",[86] must be countered by the titular "multiple viewpoint". Such a multiple viewpoint is important not only as a critique of national cultures with their implications of essentialist identities, but also as the condition for a dialogical relationship *between* diasporic groups that often inhabit the same geopolitical context but that often fight each other. Mirzoeff cites the example of conflicts between the Jewish and African diasporas in the United States in which backward-looking identity definitions based on origins (what he calls a one-point perspective) were used by each group to contest the status of diasporic chosenness. Mirzoeff thus uses visual metaphors to develop political arguments. One-point perspective as a scopic regime of western-rationalist power is contrasted with multiple perspective as both a critique and a vision for the future: "The multiple viewpoint moves beyond the one-point perspective of Cartesian rationalism in the search for a forward-looking, transcultural and transitive place from which to look and be seen."[87] In this model, looking and being seen correspond to the theoretical concepts of the gaze and spectatorship, which Mirzoeff argues could also benefit from this new viewpoint.

Here, once again, the theoretical foundations of visual culture studies give reason to investigate the discipline's position on seeing concrete objects. "To look and to be seen" refers exclusively to structures of the gaze between subjects in society; what remains unclear is how these concepts might be transferred to relationships with the visual artefacts that enter into this visual relationship as a third party. Do they feature in visual culture studies only as evidence of seeing and being seen? We have encountered this question several times already, mainly as the problem of a narcissistic-tautological relationship between the interpreting subject (viewer) and the object under interpretation. In most cases, the filter or medium of this relationship is representation, its result is meaning (the meaning of this representation), while this meaning in turn refers to the complex of identity constructions. But can or must this be the only way for the subjects practising visual culture studies to relate visually to the objects of the world?

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85   Ibid., 207.
86   Ibid., 205.
87   Ibid., 208.

Which relationship with objects does Mirzoeff propose in the context of a visual culture studies diasporically renewed by the multiple viewpoint? He notes that the diaspora as he conceives of it generates a multiple viewpoint in every diasporic image. This viewpoint, he claims, incorporates both what Derrida called *différance* and "polycentric vision", as defined by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam in their essay in the same book (*The Visual Culture Reader* edited by Mirzoeff) where the visual is situated between individuals and communities in the process of dialogical interaction.[88] Mirzoeff then claims that "changing the way in which people see themselves is in all senses a critical activity".[89] As this once again makes clear, the focus here is on identity constructions that may lead to conflicts between communities. Mirzoeff's utopia thus appears to involve the possibility of positively influencing the process of negotiation between these communities by working on a new understanding of diasporic identities in their visual representation, understood as a critical activity. In methodological terms, this prompts him to propose transferring intertextuality as "a matter of interlocking texts" to the "interacting and interdependent modes of visuality that I shall call intervisuality".[90] Surprisingly, his concrete example for this comes not from the visual but from the auditory field: the yodelling of the Pygmies, "gateway to a multiple viewpoint on the African diaspora", points to Congolese music and the blues of the Mississippi Delta, from there to the whistling of steam trains and the migration of black former slaves from the south to the north of the United States.[91] The yodel becomes a *hyperquote* with multiple intertextual references. In the objects of visual culture, Mirzoeff looks for "polyvalent symbols"[92] as transcultural evidence for diasporic cultures. These symbols cannot be reduced to static constructions of identity, and in their hybridity they represent post-national diaspora as a now global condition of life. The polysemy of these symbols through historical and transcultural change is referred to by Mirzoeff as intervisual.

In this way, concepts like the gaze or visuality lose their specifically *visual* quality: the gaze loses itself in the symbol, and intervisuality has little to do with a gaze between individuals or communities, instead closely resembling the polysemia of the open artwork in the writings of Umberto Eco. Ultimately,

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88   Ella Shohat, Robert Stam, "Narrativizing Visual Culture: Towards a Polycentric Aesthetics" in Mirzoeff (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader*, 37-59.
89   Mirzoeff, "The Multiple Viewpoint", 208.
90   Ibid., 209.
91   Ibid., 209-210.
92   Ibid., 210.

where the relationship between visual culture studies and the object is concerned, Mirzoeff's focus is on finding iconographic elements in which the shifts of cultural meaning related to identities that mix and change via processes of migration become tangible. A political agenda that brings forth new subjects is allied here with an old method from art history, namely iconography. Paradoxically, however, the visual metaphors in which this alliance is clothed – viewpoint, intervisuality, "to look and to be seen" – refer neither to the visual object nor to the relationship between viewer/interpreter and object, but to the diasporic agenda.

Another link to traditional art history, on the other hand, is rigorously cut off by Mirzoeff for political reasons: as mentioned above, he places the category of style in the enemy camp, in the discourse of the national, and he further sharpens this verdict by describing style as visual evidence of this national character. Thus, while giving the legibility of pictures a figurative level by adopting iconography, which can in turn quite naturally be linked to an agenda-driven search for identity-based meaning, the category of style, which is essentially an aesthetic category calling for a way of seeing the object other than that practised by iconography, is accused of formalism. Mirzoeff's visuality already reflects the above-mentioned movement of visual culture studies away from the formalist tradition of American art history.[93]

It is the figurative iconography – foremost the human figure itself – that visual culture studies looks for because this iconography, far more readily than aesthetic qualities, facilitates a reading in terms of recognizably coded signs of identity. It is also the gateway to what I call the narcissistic circle of interpretation, where the figure (and its gaze) may serve as a mirror for interpretive projections (which results, as described above, from an affirmative transcription of the Lacanian model of the gaze).[94] Within visual culture studies, iconography's figurative relationship to the visual object thus facilitates a trend towards narcissistic, identity-based interpretations that could not be arrived at via the observation of formal properties.

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93   See, among others, the introduction to this book.
94   For the reception of the Lacanian gaze see Chapter 5. For examples of narcissistic interpretations see also Chapter 7. For a critique of the narcissistic circle, see Chapter 8.

Counter visuality: *The Right to Look*

Between Mirzoeff's utopia of the diasporically multiplied gaze and his book *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (2011) came the September 11 attacks and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan – the first decade of the 21st century, marked by America's "global war on terror". This may explain why in this book Mirzoeff changes his strategy: he abandons the ideal of multiple viewpoints that he formulated as his conclusion from the debates on ethnic identities in the age of post-national migratory movements, and returns to the binarism of a friend-foe perspective. The conflict between postmodern capitalism and the consumer from Mirzoeff's introduction to *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (1999)[95] has given way to that between repression and rebellion. Mirzoeff tells the story of repression and rebellion, slavery and emancipation, as the history and genealogy of modernity, structured around the nucleus of the dialectic of colony/plantation and colonising empires/nations. This history is not hard to understand. Mirzoeff brings together an impressive quantity of research literature, mainly from colonial studies;[96] he is also a good storyteller. More difficult to understand, however, is how visuality is or should be the key to this story. As early reviews show,[97] the book raised hopes of a more systematic orientation within visual culture studies that was felt to be somewhat "every which way"[98] on account of its diffusion across disciplines and themes.

The cover of *The Right to Look* already signals its departure from the multiple viewpoint. The circles of the two Os of *Look* contain details from graphics[99] showing the heads of a white man with a late 18th-century hairstyle and of a Maori, both in side profile, their gazes fixed on each other. One white, one

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95   Mirzoeff, "An Introduction to Visual Culture", see also chapter 6 in this book.

96   Here he seems to have drawn in particular on Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago 2002), as in his contrasting of metropole and plantation and his discussion of the colonial imagination.

97   T.H. Milbrandt in *Surveillance & Society* 9, no. 4 (2012), 459-461, http://www.surveil-lance-and-society.org (accessed 26 Sept 2016); Jan Baetens in *Leonardo online*, http://leonardo.info/reviews/may2012/mirzoeff-baetens.php (accessed 26 Sept 2016); Terry Smith, "If Looks Could Kill Empires" (18 July 2012), www.publicbooks.org/nonfiction/if-looks-could-kill-empires (accessed 26 Sept 2016).

98   Smith, "If Looks Could Kill Empires". Terry Smith is Professor of Contemporary Art History and Theory at the University of Pittsburgh.

99   Detail of Maori from Anonymous, *Johnny Heke (I.E. Hone Heke)* (1856), reproduced in Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, Plate 1.

"indigenous" – it looks like a warlike clash, and that is what the book describes. Contrary to what the image suggests, however, this white man is not a coloniser but a revolutionary from the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution, when slavery was briefly abolished.[100] The glances exchanged by the two men thus stand not for a confrontation between colonizer and slave, but for an encounter between two political subjects who share a rebellion against those in power. The cover image uses the gaze to present a non-hierarchical relationship between the "native" and the white; and this also characterizes the right to look postulated by Mirzoeff in the title: "Because the right to look is a consenting exchange between two (or more) it is by definition non-hierarchical."[101]

Mirzoeff's "counter-history of visuality" is based on a notion of visuality that differs from that previously current within visual culture studies. Mirzoeff's 2006 article "On Visuality" forms the basis for his definition: in it, he attempts to redraw the genealogy of the concept, tracing its origins to Thomas Carlyle.[102] Reading the article, which already contains the book's concerns and concepts in embryonic form, gave me a better insight into the inner structures of a book often driven more by associations than by arguments. Firstly, then, a few words about "On Visuality".

Having named visuality as an epoch-specific phenomenon of postmodernity in 1999, Mirzoeff now notes that it is not a poststructuralist term, but one coined, along with other related concepts such as "visualize", by the Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle and later forgotten when Carlyle was branded anti-democratic and racist, vanishing from discussions of visual culture. As an opponent of all of the emancipatory movements that emerged from the French Revolution, Mirzoeff writes, Carlyle devised the visualized narrative of a moral imperialism led by "great men" that resonated both with his contemporaries and with later generations. But for "many key figures in the emancipatory movements of the period, Carlyle's vision of the hero had to be stood on its head, as Marx did to Hegel, in order to create a sense of possibility."

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100 Detail from the pamphlet *La Chute en Masse* (Paris 1793) reproduced in Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 43. Mirzoeff refers to the man as a *sans-culotte*.

101 From Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Will to Justice", posted on 3 September 2012 as part of his blog about the Occupy movement: http://www.nicholasmirzoeff.com/O2012/2012/09/03/the-will-to-justice/ (accessed 26 Sept 2016).

102 Mirzoeff, "On Visuality" and Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, chapter 3, 123-146. Carlyle's version of visuality is briefly mentioned in chapter 4 of this book.

Mirzoeff sees this manoeuvre of "reverse appropriation" as part of the modern production of the "visual subject, a person who is both the agent of sight (regardless of biological ability to see) and the object of discourses of visuality".[103] Furthermore, he argues, Carlyle's discourse of visualized heroism was so central for Anglophone imperial culture that any claim to such a subject status had to be made in terms of such visuality – a theory with far-reaching theoretical implications. Basically, Mirzoeff is claiming that such a subject status is inconceivable without visuality. Or, to put it another way: the formation of the western-imperial subject in the 19th century (and thereafter) took place primarily through this visuality.

What does this visuality have to do with seeing, whether as a biological or a sociocultural practice? Little or nothing. In *The Right to Look*, Mirzoeff begins by noting: "The right to look is not about seeing."[104] He develops the concept "by thinking how it emerged into Western discourse at a specific and charged moment of modernity *as a conservative critique of Enlightenment and its emancipations*".[105] In a counter-movement, it was appropriated, inverted and disguised by subcultural practices as a strategy of emancipation – in *The Right to Look* he calls the result countervisuality.

To return now to Mirzoeff's reading of Carlyle, he borrows the highly metaphorical language of the period 1837-1841, as when he speaks of the "eye of history" as the embodiment of historiography, referring not to the objectivity of a source-based science of facts but to an "idea of the whole" that Carlyle sought to portray in a "succession of vivid pictures".[106] This in turn recalls the then highly appreciated large-format history paintings like those commissioned by Carlyle's hero Napoleon I for his imperial propaganda. If that were all, however, it would be no more than the description or justification of a pictorial narrative style in historiography. Carlyle, and with him Mirzoeff, goes far beyond this: the historian is a visionary, seeing history with his inner eye, as if from a "Mount of Vision", gaining an overview not accessible to historical figures themselves – although Carlyle named one exception: the hero. Only the hero was able to *see* history as it unfolded. The Mount of Vision, affording the hero a historical overview, invites a contemporary analogy: the military commander positioned on a piece of high ground as portrayed in

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103   Mirzoeff, "On Visuality", 54.
104   Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 1.
105   Mirzoeff, "On Visuality", 55, my italics.
106   For this abridged account of Carlyle, see Mirzoeff, "On Visuality", 55ff.

battle pictures of the period and in topographical portrayals of battles since the Baroque.

Carlyle wrote his history as a heroic story; he "imagined the eye of history sweeping across what he called 'clear visuality', 'visualizing' what could not be seen by the minor actors of history themselves. Visuality was, then, the clear picture of history available to the hero as it happens and to the historian in retrospect." The simple observations of simple people, on the other hand, "did not constitute visuality".[107] And what was expected of these simple people was not visuality but hero-worship, "a proper submission to the quasi-divine authority of the hero".[108]

At the end of the 18th century, Jeremy Bentham sought to reform prisons using the model of the panopticon; he also wrote a pamphlet against Britain's penal colonies in Australia. Carlyle rejected the model of the panopticon, and he also favoured the penal colonies because, as Mirzoeff deduces, "a world dominated by heroes required that its anti-heroes be treated with severity".[109] Mirzoeff now links Carlyle's heroic visuality with his rejection of Bentham's panoptic gaze (that was meant to replace the previous draconian measures used to control prisoners) and with his advocacy of deportation and penal colonies, thus making visuality a key category in the imperial structures of power and repression in the modern world. In *The Right to Look*, he extends this right up to the current imperial behaviour of the United States, allowing his narrative, that begins in the 17th century with references back to antiquity, to be read, in a reflexive movement, as a genealogy of America's current global policy.

In very general terms, therefore, this visuality has something to do with the actions of political subjects. The implications of this broad description are diverse and in some cases contradictory. One such contradiction concerns the concept of representation. At one point, Mirzoeff defines visuality as "a point of contestation in political and cultural discourse over the very meaning of representation". Is this political or symbolic representation? He continues by asking: "Was representation possible only through a heroic male body or could others represent? Must others be individuals or could there be a collective representation? How, then, might the subaltern and subcultural groups

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107   Ibid., 57.
108   Ibid., 58.
109   See ibid., 59.

in the metropole and the colonies come to representation?"[110] The way these questions are formulated brings no real clarity; the reference to the "heroic male body" makes it probable that the focus is once more on visibility and the right to visibility, on the kind of symbolic-visual representation we know from the political agenda of visual culture studies. This is confirmed by another definition of visuality: "Visuality, far from being a postmodern solution predicated by contemporary visual culture to the problems of medium-based visual disciplines, is therefore a problem of the conceptual scheme of modernity and representation that underlies it."[111] In this way, he departs from the two definitions we have already encountered (visuality as a mode of technological postmodernity and as a diasporic, multiperspectival gaze), ending up with the confrontation between ruling subjects and the representations that legitimize them, and subaltern subjects to whom representation is denied. This, too, is already familiar; the stigmatizing and the oppositional gaze also draw on this struggle for recognition via visibility. Which is why, for Mirzoeff, visuality has "very much to do with picturing and nothing to do with vision, if by vision we understand how an individual person registers visual sensory impressions".[112] In this light, his apodictic claim that "the right to look is not about seeing" is easier to understand: he is rejecting seeing as a sensory activity. But this draws a clear line between the two factors of the visual that Mitchell, for example, does not want to separate: the nature and culture of seeing. It also raises the question of how this negation of the act of seeing influences the treatment of the objects of analysis (e.g. their form and mediality) through which Mirzoeff intends to study the genealogy of modernity: "For contemporary critics, then, visuality has a complex and challenging genealogy. Rather than lead us into the complexities and redundancies of 19th- and early 20th-century optical sciences, visuality implies an engagement with the politics of representation in transnational and transcultural form."[113]

This program, formulated in 2006, is surely what gave rise to Mirzoeff's broad-based counterhistory of visuality, *The Right to Look*, in 2011. Having taken Carlyle's concept of visuality as his point of departure for a politicization of the term as an imperial practice of power and authorization in "On Visuality", here Mirzoeff writes the decolonial genealogy of this visuality. In doing

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110   Ibid., 65f.
111   Ibid., 67.
112   Ibid.
113   Ibid., 76.

so, he assumes that the current policy of global counterinsurgency (George W. Bush's "post 9/11 war on terrorism" that was ongoing under Obama) is being implemented with practices of "post-panoptical" visuality that can be traced back to the oppressive practices of slavery in the 17th and 18th centuries and to the colonial politics of imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries. These practices include control, surveillance and classification as well as killing in the name of freedom and democracy, the most striking example of this being visual technologies for remote-controlled killing with no risk to the killer (drone warfare).

Visuality is contrasted here with countervisuality. This is Mirzoeff's term for resistance against this visuality by subalterns (slaves, workers, the populations of colonized countries). It manifests itself in practices of self-empowerment that are developed in the places where visuality is deployed against those slaves and workers: on the plantations in the colonies, on the streets of the metropoles. The history of visuality and countervisuality since the 17th century as a history of western dominance and resistance to that dominance is subdivided by Mirzoeff into three phases: the 'plantation complex' (1660-1860), the 'imperial complex' (1860-1945) and the 'military-industrial complex' (1945 onwards), with 'complex' referring both to the production of structures of social organization that shape a specific complex like the 'plantation complex', and to the mental economy of individuals, like the Oedipus complex. "The resulting imbrication of mentality and organization produces a visualized deployment of bodies and a training of minds, organized so as to sustain both physical segregation between rulers and ruled, and mental compliance with those arrangements."[114]

Here, Mirzoeff describes technologies of power as discussed by Foucault in his lectures of 1975/76: "in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we saw the emergence of techniques of power that were essentially centred on the body, on the individual body. They included all devices that were used to ensure the spatial distribution of individual bodies (their separation, their alignment, their serialization, and their surveillance) and the organization, around those individuals, of a whole field of visibility. They were also techniques that could be used to take control over bodies. Attempts were made to increase their productive force through exercise, drill, and so on. They were also techniques for rationalizing and strictly economizing on a power that had

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114   Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 5.

to be used in the least costly way possible, thanks to a whole system of surveillance, hierarchies, inspections, bookkeeping, and reports: all this technology can be described as the disciplinary technology of labour. It was established at the end of the seventeenth century, and in the course of the eighteenth."[115] As the primal scene for these technologies, Mirzoeff sees the organization of the slave plantation. And, unlike Foucault, he places the entire genealogy of modernity under the paradigm of Carlyle's visuality. This creates a peculiar tension between Bentham's panoptic gaze that served Foucault as an example and metaphor for the mechanisms of control in the late 18th century, and Carlyle's visuality. Bentham was among the reformers of the late Enlightenment, while Carlyle, as described above, vehemently resisted the Enlightenment's emancipatory consequences. This tension between an enlightened and a reactionary gaze, both of which are described as technologies of power (by Foucault and Mirzoeff respectively) repeatedly frustrates Mirzoeff's attempts to describe an order of visuality and countervisuality with the corresponding practices of dominance and revolution.[116]

Let us return now to the three complexes and the practices and agents of their visuality: The *plantation complex* is represented by the forms of classification, segregation, legislation, control and organized labour, especially on the British and French slave plantations of the Caribbean. All of these factors are underpinned by visuality. First, the 'slave' is classified as a species on the basis of 'natural history' before being separated from 'free' space by means of cartography. The slaves' work was monitored by the overseer and misconduct was punished with violence. Special laws declared all of this legal and, in Mirzoeff's argument, thus 'aestheticized' it. The key figure in these practices and their visuality was the overseer who – not unlike Carlyle's example of a hero of history, the military commander – has an overview of what is happening from a piece of higher ground. This order was confronted via slave rebellions and the struggle for freedom, which Mirzoeff classifies under the heading countervisuality. According to Mirzoeff, this organization of the plantations on the basis of visuality exerted a key influence on the use of visuality and visual technologies in western societies.[117]

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115   Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended". Lectures at the Collège de France (1975-76)* (New York 2003), 242.

116   This remark is made in passing only, since it is not my aim here to mine Mirzoeff's wealth of sometimes associative and metaphor-laden arguments for potential internal incoherencies in his theoretical references.

117   See Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 48-49.

"In a sense, all visuality was and is imperial visuality, the shaping of modernity from the point of view of the imperial powers." This definition of visuality opens the chapter on the 'imperial complex', dated between 1860 and 1945, which covers the strategies of dominance of the colonial powers at home and in the colonies. Having shown how western empires shaped their technologies of power outside their 'own' countries, the focus here is on the blending of colonial plantation and home city as sites of orders of bio-power where colonizing authority is crossed with the "hierarchy of the 'civilized' and the 'primitive'".[118] The slaves on the plantations corresponded to the workers in the cities, except that the latter were not pseudo-scientifically classified as a separate species. Thus, although the dividing line between rulers and proletariat was not drawn by a racially implemented hierarchy, workers and slaves shared a lack of rights, as reflected, for example, in the practice of deportation. For Mirzoeff, missionaries were the key figures or agents of the spread of western modernity to non-western societies, as well as being "products of its [modernity's] emerging hegemony".[119] As an example, Mirzoeff names the missionaries in the British crown colony of New Zealand, whose activities he contrasts with the resistance of the Maori that led to an "indigenous countervisuality".[120] Immediately after this he discusses proletarian countervisuality in the cities of England and France, by which he means primarily the forms of self-organization in the workers' movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries and their symbolic representation, as expressed in the general strike and the May Day festivities. For Mirzoeff, the general strike is a "counterpoint to the hierarchy of imperial visuality", "a tactic for visualizing the contemporary by creating a general image of the social". This chapter clearly presented considerable structural problems, as the imperial visuality he postulates is conceived of in historical and territorial terms that are very broad. The history of discourse, decades of theory, and historical research are woven together to construct exemplary moments of countervisuality. The examples for the 20th century are the former colonies' struggle for liberation, illustrated by visual evidence such as the 1955 *Paris Match* cover photograph portraying a young black soldier saluting as a French

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118   Both quotes, ibid., 196.

119   Ibid., 198. Here he is quoting Ryan Dunch, "Beyond Cultural Imperialism" in *History and Theory* 41 (2002), 301-325: 318.

120   Ibid., 199.

patriot (an image made famous by Roland Barthes's analysis[121]) and the film *The Battle of Algiers*.

In his chapter on the period since 1945, Mirzoeff refers to Dwight Eisenhower's famous warning about the total influence – "economic, political, even spiritual" – of the constellations of power that brought forth the Cold War arms race and which he called the 'military-industrial complex'.[122] Mirzoeff describes the technology of this period as "aerial visualization", which has grown since 1989, and especially since 9/11, into a "post-panoptic visuality" that brings together electronic and digital technologies in the global war on terror. This post-panoptic visuality is based on the assumption that "anywhere may be the site for an insurgency, so everywhere needs to be watched from multiple locations".[123] The 'military-industrial complex' is marked by a "global counterinsurgency as the hegemonic complex of Western visuality".[124] Mirzoeff's main examples here are the Algerian War and the War on Terrorism.

Here, in post-panoptic visuality, the parallels between the concept of visuality and the visual technologies of power that are actually used are obvious: closed-circuit television surveillance, satellite images, infrared and other technologies render visible what was previously unseen. They are joined by military technologies like armed drones that can be operated from locations far away from the theatre of war. Mirzoeff also combines these effects with Carlyle's visuality as a producer of authority: "The post-panoptic visuality of global counterinsurgency produces a visualized authority whose location not only cannot be determined from the visual technologies being used but may itself be invisible."[125] For the current situation, Mirzoeff uses the term 'neovisuality': "Neovisuality is a doctrine for the preservation of authority by means of permanent surveillance of all realms of life, a *Gesamtkunstwerk* of necropolitics."[126]

In the face of such conditions, it is hard to define a corresponding countervisuality of resistance. According to Mirzoeff, the counterinsurgency's striving for a "totalizing vision" has the effect that "no countervisualization can damage its claim to totality".[127] Furthermore, the objective upheld by the ter-

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121   See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York 2012), 225ff. French: *Mythologies* (Paris 1957).
122   Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 19.
123   Ibid.
124   Ibid., 18.
125   Ibid., 20.
126   Ibid., 34.
127   Ibid., 296.

ror against which this neovisuality is directed is hardly the kind of power-free society dreamed of by Mirzoeff with his metaphor of the "right to look". On the contrary, both sides, insurgency and counterinsurgency, continually rearm their respective "necropolitics", meaning they are inseparably intertwined. But, Mirzoeff hopes, precisely this intensifying of visuality will lead to its crisis. For him, the Arab Spring – unfolding as he was finishing his book – is a sign of this; and one year later, he supported the Occupy movement with a daily blog on his website.

What does Mirzoeff's concept of visuality involve? Two poles can be named to which this visuality obviously refers: firstly, representation (of power, of the hero, of history) for the purpose of legitimating power, and secondly the kind of practices, technologies and cultures of power discussed by Foucault under the heading of bio-power (surveillance, violence, segregation, legislation, classification). Countervisuality responds to the representation of those in power with strategies of self-empowerment via representations that may also appropriate the patterns used by those in power. One example of this is the hero of the Haitian revolution, Toussaint L'Ouverture, represented as a military commander on horseback modelled after Jacques-Louis David's equestrian portrait of Napoleon.[128] Mirzoeff also sees the responses of resistance to practices of power that constitute countervisuality (general strike, May Day, forms of self-organization, liberation struggle) as forms of representation in the sense of visibility. But if visibility is ultimately equated with the political in the broadest sense, then (in the light of the all-explaining claim of Mirzoeff's project) this begs the question of whether and why the concept of visuality is supposed to be able to deliver this, and whether we might not be dealing, conversely, with a piece of sophistry or circular reasoning (the visual is always political, ergo the political is always visual) that reduces the political to the visual.

Mirzoeff's approach to visual objects also manifests his fixation on representation in a double sense: of portrayal and of political representation. The former is most obvious in the "Visual Guide" that opens the book and that is intended to promote a systematic overview. It contains examples of the categories and practices of visuality and countervisuality. An engraving from the 17th century shows the layout of a plantation with the work routines and the overseer at his raised post; he represents surveillance and a commanding position. A battle plan from Waterloo shows the central role of visuality

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128   See illustration in ibid., 42.

for warfare in the form of cartography and overview; a panoramic bird's eye view as an example of imperial visuality shows a battle zone region during the American Civil War; military-industrial visuality is represented by a technical diagram on the production of aerial photographs and their use in the preparation of aerial warfare; and a photograph of soldiers sitting in front of screens like videogame players, steering surveillance drones on the US-Mexico border, stands for post-panoptic visuality. The examples of countervisuality show the revolutionary hero: the Haitian revolutionary leader on horseback and a pamphlet with a sans-culotte toppling despots; a photograph of slaves gathering stands for the general strike against slavery in South Carolina; Emilio Longoni's painting *L'Oratore dello Sciopero* from 1891, that shows a speaker stirring up demonstrating workers, stands for general strikes in major cities.

This image material does not go beyond the function of evidence, being essentially self-explanatory. Mirzoeff writes: "I have used images – or sometimes even the knowledge that there were images which have been lost – as a form of evidence." He thus deals with images as a historian would; they are sources that he takes from the "visual archive".[129] And he treats them indiscriminately; the important thing is what they show, regardless of medium or genre, regardless of whether or not they are art. They are summoned as witnesses who Mirzoeff, like an attorney, presents as part of his case. In methodological terms, this hardly matches up to a conventional political iconography.

When, in his call for a "right to look", Mirzoeff says that "my right to look depends on your recognition of me, and vice versa",[130] one might think that his political agenda would be a good match for the ethics of a dialogical seeing formulated by Margaret Olin with regard to art history. But Mirzoeff formulates it as an appeal against a ban on seeing, imposed by visuality and manifested by the policeman who sends us on our way: "Move on, there's nothing to see here."[131] This seeing is a metaphor for another right – "the right to the real" – in an "attempt to shape an autonomous realism that is not only outside authority's process but antagonistic to it". This right to perceive the real is meant to prevent the dominant authority from legitimizing and naturalizing its interpretation of the world via visuality. It thus has less to do with dialogical-communicative seeing and more with recognizing the reality of power which, in Marxist terminology (not used by Mirzoeff), is veiled by ideology –

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129   Ibid., XV.
130   Ibid., 25.
131   Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 1.

a realization on the part of those being ruled that is meant to be prevented by the visuality of those in power. The question of the relationship between object and interpreter/viewer plays no part here. And nor does the question of the Ones recognizing the discriminated identities of the Others that was (and still is?) central to visual culture studies, because for Mirzoeff the Ones are the abstraction of power (of the imperial or military-industrial complex). They are not able to recognize those they rule over without losing this very power. It is thus a matter of struggle, not dialogue. Representations are tools in this struggle – instruments of power or rebellion.

Mirzoeff's is a radical departure from the political theories of the 1990s that espoused the approach of a dialogical seeing by discussing societal processes of negotiating difference as part of the conflict between universalism and particularism – I am thinking above all of Ernesto Laclau.[132] Ultimately, he revives the binary structure of class struggle, clad in the terminologies of Foucault, Rancière and Negri/Hardt, in updated, decolonial guise. For him, today's revolutions are the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement. In his attempt to draw up a genealogy of modernity, Mirzoeff has taken the current eminence of visual media in the dissemination of the political as his benchmark, and projected this back onto the last three centuries. But he does so, and I see this as another "birth defect" of his model, through the lens (to stick with the optical metaphors) of the visuality of Carlyle, a 19th-century antirevolutionary racist. In this way, Carlyle's friend/foe dynamic structures the genealogical model. Or, put differently: not only is the view of the past determined by today (a basic theoretical assumption now taken for granted in historiography) but a conservative perspective from the 19th century determines the view of today. Mirzoeff elevates Carlyle's visuality to the status of an episteme of modernity, then writes against it with a 'Counterhistory of Visuality'.

For Terry Smith, Mirzoeff's book marks "a coming of age that has brought cultural studies past the variability and the enchantments of its postmodern moment. It highlights the need for responsibility toward actual pasts, and the actual demand of contemporary realities."[133] I do not share this view. To me, invoking political responsibility as a rejection of postmodern arbitrariness seems too heavily indebted to a theoretical cluelessness in the face of the

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132   See for example Ernesto Laclau, "Universalism, Particularism, and the Question of Identity" in *October* 61 (1992), 83-90.
133   Smith, "If Looks Could Kill Empires".

ideological rearmament of the West in the wake of 9/11, resulting in a hasty retreat to an interpretative framework of the present that is no less totalizing than Hegel's vision of history. The result is an actual dedifferentiation in the sense of a loss of difference. One example is the way Mirzoeff deals with fascism: "The work of genocide was to make the Other permanently invisible."[134] Visuality in this account becomes *the* key to understanding – even to understanding the Shoah. What new knowledge does this bring? To me it seems too rash, too reductive, too in love with its own model. As a result, antifascism is no more than an antifascist countervisuality that demands a place "from which there is a right to look, not just behold the leader".[135] And that, to my European-German ears at least, sounds naïve. For me, the idea that such a one-dimensional model should be able to capture historical and political reality at the same time as formulating the utopia of a non-hegemonic space (that of the right to look) does not add up.

I have no answer to the question of what the benefits of such an extensive definition of visuality might be. Overstretching the concept in this way does not strike me as a valid strategy against the postmodern "every which way" of visual culture studies; on the contrary, it looks like a symptom of a crisis in the field rather than a remedy. This totalization of visuality can also be read as a symptom of a paradox that seems to have accompanied seeing from the outset: the belief in the visual as an anthropologically founding force, and its opposite, demonization: "The evil eye emerged from the realm of superstition to become the ruling metaphor of social control and political oppression at its most insidious."[136]

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134   Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 231. See also 229f.
135   Ibid., 232.
136   Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 378. This sentence of Jay's pointedly sums up the critique of "ocularcentrism" by Lacan, Foucault and Debord.