5. Visual Culture Studies' Foundational Concept
The Gaze – Looking and Power

The model of the gaze

The model of the gaze is perhaps the most important gift from French poststructuralism to those Anglo-American art historians who from the early 1980s were becoming increasingly discontented with the state of art history as a discipline. Their aim was to fundamentally revise the discipline, or, as Hal Foster put it in 1988, to critique perspectivism "as its natural epistemological grounds". According to Foster, the disembodied, abstract eye of art history needed to take on a "semiological sensitivity to the visual as a field of signs produced in difference and riven by desire."[1] And this is where the concept of the gaze came into play, introducing psychological, sexual and gender-critical dimensions into the apparatus of art history. And then the exact thing Foster had warned of in 1988 in *Vision and Visuality* happened:[2] a counter-model to one-point perspective was fielded and it became dominant from 1990, although less so in art history than in visual culture studies. The Lacanian concept, evolved from Sartre, provided the necessary theory. As well as involving the body and the unconscious in the act of seeing, it also addressed the relationship between seeing and signs. This concept, most usually reduced to the term "mirror stage", manifests itself primarily in

1 Hal Foster "Preface" in Foster (ed.), *Vision and Visuality*, xiii.

2 Foster, "Preface", xiv.

two texts: *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience*[3] and *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*.[4]

Lacan's model has become something akin to a founding theorem of visual culture studies. It is responsible (and provides academic legitimacy) for the above-described political agenda of visibility as a strategy and badge of social recognition. This already points to what I will deal with in more detail later: as received within visual culture studies, Lacan's model of the gaze, which conceives of subjective identity as an *illusion*, becomes a model forming the basis for the recognition and hence the *affirmation* of the identity of the subject. I begin by offering a brief prehistory of this model.

Sartre: being-looked-at

The story begins with Sartre, but it could be traced back further to the early days of western philosophy, as Martin Jay does in his history of the denigration of vision in 20th-century French thought.[5] *Being and Nothingness* contains the famous scene in which Sartre explains his model using the example of the voyeur. While looking through a keyhole, he is caught by someone else's gaze: "I hear footsteps in the hall. Someone is looking at me!"[6] The result is shame and a sensation of being-as-object for the Other. More critically, he now sees himself *because* someone else sees *him*. The gaze of the other alienates him from himself and takes away his freedom. This gaze does not have to be an actual look; aware of being looked at, the subject becomes aware of itself – and alien to itself. Moreover, "the alienation of myself, which is the act of *being-looked-at*, involves at once the alienation of the world which I organize."[7] This gaze, then, is threatening to the subject precisely in its subject-founding quality; it cannot be returned, it must be repaid in kind so as to avoid becoming

3 Jacques Lacan, "*Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je: telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique*" in Revue française de psychanalyse 13, no. 4 (1949), 449-455. English translation in *Écrits*, Vol.1 (New York 2006), 75-80. On the complicated publication history, see Jane Gallop, "Lacan's Mirror Stage: Where to Begin" in *SubStance* 37+38 (1983), 118-128.

4 Jacques Lacan, *Seminar*, Vol XI (1964), in English, *The Seminar, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York 1998).

5 Jay, *Downcast Eyes*.

6 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York/London 2003), 284.

7 Ibid., 287.

an object oneself. A dialogical encounter of gazes between human individuals is impossible, replaced by a "hostile contest of wills between competing subjects".[8] This threatening feeling of being looked at resembles the always-already-looked-at subject in Lacan's *Four Fundamental Concepts* (discussed below under the heading "Gaze, Screen, Identity").

Lacan: the mirror stage

Sartre began work on *Being and Nothingness* in 1939, publishing it in 1943. Three years previously, Jacques Lacan had given his lecture on the mirror stage that was published in 1949 in reworked form under the title *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,* going on to make waves, decades later, first in film theory and then in visual culture studies. In the phase referred to by Lacan as the mirror stage, the child reacts to its own image in the mirror. Samuel Weber offers a concise outline: "The mirror stage described by Lacan can be briefly summarized as follows: between the ages of six and eighteen months a child displays a reaction to its mirror image that strikingly distinguishes it from other creatures such as chimpanzees. The chimpanzee loses interest in its mirror-image as soon as it recognizes it to be an *image*; a child, on the contrary, displays a jubilant reaction when it recognizes its own reflection. From this jubilant acknowledgement of one's mirror-image, Lacan does nothing less than to derive the constitution – and above all: the destiny – of the ego. At this point in time, the child is not yet in control of its body and finds itself in a state of total helplessness and dependency. This situation is an effect of the 'premature' birth peculiar to human beings, a consequence of which is that visual perception is much more highly developed than the motor function. A human being is thus able at a much earlier stage to *perceive* the unity of an image than it is to produce this unity in its own body. The look of another human being, be it the mother, nanny, or even one's own mirror-image, becomes the *matrix* of a sense of unity, identity and continuity which the child's bodily existence is incapable of providing. … The jubilant reaction of a child that has recognized its mirror image is a sign not of the recognition of the subject's identity but of its constitution."[9]

8 Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 287.

9 Samuel Weber, *Return to Freud. Jacques Lacan's Dislocation of Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge 1991), 12-13. Originally published in German as *Rückkehr zu Freud* (Frankfurt 1978). Minor alterations made to published translation, NG.

According to Lacan, the child reacts "in a flutter of jubilant activity" because it wishes to "take in an instantaneous view of the image in order to fix it in his mind". This activity "reveals both a libidinal dynamism … and an ontological structure of the human world that fits in with my reflections on paranoiac knowledge. It suffices to understand the mirror stage in this context *as an identification*, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes [*assume*] an image. […] The jubilant assumption [*assomption*] of his specular image by the kind of being—still trapped in his motor impotence and nursling dependence—the little man is at the *infans* stage thus seems to me to manifest in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated into a primordial form, prior to being objectified in its function as subject. […] But the important point is that this form situates the agency known as the ego, prior to its social determination, in a fictional direction that will forever remain irreducible for any single individual or, rather, that will only asymptotically approach the subject's becoming, no matter how successful the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve, as *I*, his discordance with his own reality."[10]

Reception of the mirror stage in film studies and later in visual culture studies centres on the mirror that shows the baby an image with which it identifies. The mirror becomes a metaphor for the relationship between subject and society, as well as being equated with the visual media under discussion, such as the film screen. In visual culture studies, this model came to be read as an affirmation of the subject: the mirror becomes a self-image to whose visibility within society the subject has a right. Not only does the subject feel him/herself to be represented by this image, this actually is the case. It is worth noting, however, that although the mirror offers the baby a jubilant self-image that glosses over its "motor impotence", the baby identifies with a *fiction*, resulting in a lifelong struggle with the discrepancy between this triumphant fiction and its actual reality, creating a feeling of inadequacy. This is the starting point for my critique of the identity model of affirmative representation on which the political agenda of visual culture studies is based – more on which later.

With the mirror stage, parallels between Lacan and Sartre are already apparent: both use visual metaphors to show that ego identity is an illusory representation. The proximity between Lacan's approach and Sartre's being-

10 Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I", 76.

looked-at becomes clearer still in Lacan's later model of a gaze that is often conflated with the mirror stage. Weber thus introduces the gaze of an other, "the mother, nanny, or even one's own mirror-image", that is not (yet) mentioned in *The Mirror Stage*, that becomes the "matrix" of the child's "sense of unity, identity and continuity". Here, then, a third party is involved – appearing in Lacan's text not as someone looking but only as a person or device (the French *trotte-bébé*) that supports and surrounds the infant that cannot yet walk or stand. Weber thus integrates the *gaze of the Other* into the mirror stage – something that takes a central position in Lacan's later model of the gaze from the 1960s. Here is the often-cited passage that incorporates the gaze of the other into the mirror stage: "For the Other where discourse is situated, which is always latent in the triangulation that consecrates this distance, is not latent as long as it extends all the way to the purest moment of the spectacular relation: to the gesture by which the child at the mirror turns toward the person who is carrying him and appeals with a look to this witness."[11] The fundamental fragility of the ego function achieved by looking in the mirror is underlined again when Weber makes the gaze of this other overlap with the gaze of "one's own mirror-image": Is the figure in the mirror I or an Other?

Gaze, screen, identity – Lacan in film studies and visual culture studies

The mirror stage is still relatively simple in structure;[12] and, according to Margaret Iversen and Stephen Melville, it was mainly to the mirror stage that models of the gaze in the film theory of the 1970s and '80s referred.[13] But two metaphors that were to be important for film studies and later visual culture studies come from the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, a long, highly complex work published three decades later; Jacqueline Rose and

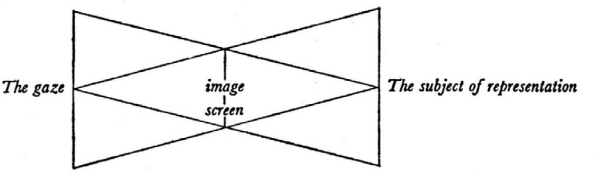
11 Jacques Lacan, "Remarque sur le rapport de Daniel Lagache: Psychoanalyse et structure de la personnalité" in Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris 1966), 647-684: 678. In English, "Remarks on Daniel Lagache's Presentation: Psychanalysis and personality Structure" in *Écrits*, 543-574: 568.

12 It was based on experiments conducted by the psychologist Henri Wallon to compare the reactions of animals and human infants to their image in the mirror. See Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 343.

13 Margaret Iversen, Stephen Melville, *Writing Art History. Disciplinary Departures* (Chicago 2010), 119. On film theory, see above all Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975), 6-18; Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier. Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (London, Bloomington, 1982).

Kaja Silverman in particular engaged intensively with the *Four Fundamental Concepts*.[14] The theoretical fabric woven by Lacan here is highly complicated and his use of meandering chains of association and metaphor to avoid clarity does not make things any easier. Interpretations of Lacan are marked by the temptations or projection traps laid by his metaphorical language. This is especially true of *gaze* and *screen*, two metaphors that seem to invite direct application to the concepts and media of the disciplines under discussion here – the extent to which this was a matter of projection will become clear below.

Lacan's famous diagram of interlocking triangles illustrates the relationship between "the gaze", "the subject of representation" and the "image/screen".[15]



The screen (*écran* in French) forms the vertical line that links the intersections of the two triangles. Each triangle's point bisects the other's base, labelled "the gaze" and "the subject of representation". This diagram shows the interlocking of seeing and being seen, thus displaying parallels with Sartre's model of being-looked-at.[16] But however simple this diagram may appear, the possible interpretations are unlimited. I associate the vertical line between the two points/layers of gaze and subject with the figure of a filter that sieves the information passing between these two points (gaze and subject), thus "formatting" it, to use a metaphor from the digital realm.

14 In *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London 1986) Jacqueline Rose offers an immensely precise and intensive analysis of Lacan's models of the gaze in connection with film theory, especially in the book's second section under the heading "The Imaginary" (167-197). See also Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York, London 1992).

15 To be found in Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 106.

16 On these parallels, but also on Lacan's critique of Sartre's notion of an autonomy of the subject, see Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, especially chapter 6.

Now for the explanatory descriptions of the diagram's elements:[17] "Images are a result of projection. This is especially true of the images to which Lacan attributes a role in the genesis of the subject. These include the prototype of the Lacanian concept of the image, the mirror-image (l'image speculaire)"[18] with which the baby reassures itself of its own body in the mirror stage. According to Lacan, this "emerging subject" (that cannot yet speak) is subject to the "predominance of the visual".[19] In the diagram, image and screen lie on the same line, leading to many interpretations where they are equated with one another. "The image as screen frames the subject's perception. In a first approximation, it can be seen as the basis of cultural standards that allows individual experience to become understandable. […] The screen points to the Other, allows access to the discourse of the Other, and thus to the unconscious."[20] For Lacan, image and screen are "sites of an immobilization" of memory, but the screen is also "the site of mediation [between subject and world]. It serves to overcome an innate solipsism by offering a path to intersubjectivity."[21] But like the image, the screen is subject to Lacan's anti-ocular verdict: "An image always blocks the truth."[22]

Beginning in the 1970s, it was film studies that received and transformed Lacan's models of the gaze in a way that significantly aided their transfer into visual culture studies, in particular in the form of apparatus theory that relates the setting of the cinema to Lacan's mirror stage and connects it with Althusser's concept of ideology. "During this period, the cinema appeared as *the* place to illustrate the ideological construction of the subject", as Marie-Luise Angerer remarks.[23] In *Fassbinder and Lacan: A Reconsideration of Gaze, Look, and Image,*[24] Kaja Silverman, whose analyses are a frequent point of reference in

17 I have based my brief outline of the theoretical network established by Lacan around the gaze on the remarks of the Lacanian psychoanalyst Ulrike Kadi: Ulrike Kadi: "'… Nicht so einen geordneten Blick'. Bild, Schirm und drittes Auge" in Claudia Blümle, Anne von der Heiden (ed.), *Blickzähmung und Augentäuschung. Zu Jacques Lacans Bildtheorie* (Berlin, Zurich 2005), 249-264.

18 Kadi, 253.

19 Ibid., 254.

20 Ibid., 256/257.

21 Ibid., 259.

22 "Une image bloque toujours la vérité." Jacques Lacan, "Yale University: Kanzer Seminar" in *Scilicet* 6+7 (1975), 7-37: 22.

23 Marie-Luise Angerer, *Desire After Affect* (London, New York, 2015), 5.

24 Kaja Silverman, "Fassbinder and Lacan: A Reconsideration of Gaze, Look, and Image," in Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York, London 1992), 125-156, slightly

the reception of Lacan in film studies, links the concept of *identity* (central to the agenda of visual culture studies) with the gaze in specifically filmic terms. In the *mirror stage*, she argues, Lacan highlights the significance of internalizing things external to the subject in the process of identity formation, first in the guise of a mirror image, then in the form of parental imagoes, and later still "in the shape of a whole range of cultural representations, the *moi* becoming over time more and more explicitly dependent upon that which might be said to be 'alien' or 'other'. What Lacan designates as the 'gaze' also manifests itself initially within a space external to the subject, first through the mother's look as it facilitates the 'join' of infant and mirror image [the same moment referred to by Weber in his account], and later through all of the many other actual looks with which it is confused. It is only at a second remove that the subject might be said to assume responsibility for 'operating' the gaze by 'seeing' itself being seen, even when no pair of eyes are trained upon it – by taking not so much the gaze as its effects within the self."[25]

Here, then, identity is the internalization of the external gaze, with the gaze taking on a relatively specific formulation as the gaze of the other. In Silverman's model, the screen is responsible for filtering the "whole range of cultural representations" with which the subject is confronted after its entry into language. This model of the screen is important for the reception of Lacan in visual culture studies.

By focusing on the *identity-fixing internalization* of the gaze in this way, Silverman obscures the flipside – the *destabilizing effect* of the gaze on this same identity. In *The Threshold of the Visible World* (1996), she goes further still in this positive recasting of the gaze in the context of what Mieke Bal calls her utopian project of an "ethics of vision" – utopian in its desire to find a dimension of love in the narcissistic constellation of Lacan's gaze, in order to postulate utopian potential for visual representations such as those of film

---

reworked version published in Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, Keith Moxey (eds.), *Visual Culture – Images and Interpretations* (Hanover, London 1994), 273-301, on the Lacanian model of the gaze see in particular 286-294. I refer in the following to the 1994 version, as it appeared in the context of the debate on visual culture. In terms of cultural images of identities, Silverman's focus shares the horizon of visual culture studies to a different extent than the earlier texts by Rose that respond to the poststructuralist and feminist debates on film.

25 Silverman, "Fassbinder and Lacan". Here Silverman links Lacan's early *Mirror Stage* with his later *Four Fundamental Concepts*.

and photography.[26] This has consequences for Silverman's rewritings of the screen, which are now even more specifically linked to its analogy with the film projection screen. The screen renders culturally determined images and ideal images visible to the gaze, enabling the subject to read them, and in its media structure, film is "almost an embodiment – at least a metaphor – of the screen".[27] The film as screen is now the site for Silverman's utopia of the gaze. Bal welcomes this clarification of the screen as a utopian reworking of Lacan: "For a feminist film theory that wishes to move beyond the critique of what is damaging in dominant culture, that wishes to understand how film works and how effects other than the usual ones can be achieved, the screen is the workshop or arena or stadium in the middle of the visual field."[28] But this analogizing of the screen with the film projection screen, the founding trope of psychoanalytical film theory since Christian Metz's *Psychoanalysis and Cinema. The Imaginary Signifier*,[29] was also criticized, in particular by Anglo-American feminist film theorists, including Mary Ann Doane in 1980 and Joan Copjec in 1989.[30] Doane criticizes the analogizing of mirror stage and cinema in Metz: because the movie does not show a mirror image, Metz concludes that the spectator identifies with his own gaze and thus *with* the camera. Doane criticizes this notion of identification on the part of the spectator subject on the grounds that it implies a coherence of the gaze in the sense of a "guarantee of the untroubled centrality and unity of the subject".[31] But this, she points out, no longer corresponds with Lacanian theory. Copjec, too, criticizes film theory for analogizing the screen (in this case the cinema projection screen as well as the Lacanian *écran*) and the mirror of the mirror stage, thus founding its conception of the cinematic apparatus on a misunderstanding of Lacan. The critique levelled by Doane and Copjec basically concerns a tendency to take Lacan's metaphors of the gaze literally,[32] thus rendering them one-di-

26 Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*. Cf. Mieke Bal, "Looking at Love. An Ethics of Vision" in *Diacritics* 27, no. 1 (1997), 59-72.

27 Bal, "Looking at Love", 65.

28 Ibid.

29 Originally published in Paris in 1977 as *Le signifiant imaginaire. Psychanalyse et cinéma*.

30 See Mary Ann Doane, "Misrecognition and Identity" in *cine-tracts* 3, no. 3 (1980), 25-32; Joan Copjec, "The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan" in *October* 49 (1989), 53-71.

31 Mary Ann Doane, "Misrecognition and Identity", 27-28.

32 The urge to over-clarify not only Lacan's linguistic metaphors but also his use of images and diagrams has also been remarked on by Claudia Blümle and Anne von der Heiden, who write that he seduces the reader "into wanting to understand him in strictly sys-

mensional. In contrast, Doane and Copjec wish to preserve the complexity and unsettling potential of Lacanian theory, in particular for film theory. Silverman goes beyond a critique and tries to rewrite Lacan's models of the gaze for her utopia of a positive identification of the subject.

To sum up, there are two contrary effects of the gaze on the "function of the I": on the one hand, the attempt to internalize the gaze to achieve "the agency known as the ego", and on the other a threatening quality, an awareness of lack. These contrary effects are given very different weightings in reception, especially with regard to visuality as a factor in identity. As will be seen later, the way visual culture studies have taken up the Lacanian model of the gaze is indebted to its one-dimensional reception by film studies in so far as it, too, tends to take Lacan's metaphors of the gaze literally. The reason for this may well be the political agenda of visual culture studies with regard to identity politics. Identities cannot be affirmed and reassured through an awareness of lack in the subject; on the contrary, the strategy of identity politics needs to reinforce the "agency known as the ego". The critique articulated by Doane and Copjec in the decade before visual culture studies was established could also be levelled against the new discipline's version of the gaze.

The threatened subject – Norman Bryson

One of the first to introduce Lacan's model into art history, mainly via his readings of film theory in the 1980s, was the literary theorist Norman Bryson, who was also involved in the academic establishment of visual culture studies at universities in the United States and who features in *Vision and Visuality* with his essay "The Gaze in the Expanded Field".[33] This and one other text by Bryson, his introduction to the anthology *Calligram. Essays in New Art History from France*,[34] deal with the model of the gaze, and they can also be read

---

thematic terms, but this is constantly thwarted by his discourse". Claudia Blümle, Anne von der Heiden (eds.), *Blickzähmung und Augentäuschung. Zu Jacques Lacans Bildtheorie* (Berlin, Zurich 2005), 10.

33 Norman Bryson, "The Gaze in the Expanded Field" in Foster, *Vision and Visuality*, 87-108.

34 Norman Bryson, "Introduction" in Norman Bryson (ed.), *Calligram. Essays in New Art History from France* (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne 1988), xiii-xxix. In this volume, Bryson published essays not by art historians but by French poststructuralist theorists like Julia Kristeva, Michel Serres, Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard and Michel Foucault, grouped under the label of "New Art History" with Louis Marin, Jean-Claude Leben-

as a deliberate effort to make this model appeal to his colleagues in art history. These texts are rhetorical feats designed irrefutably to show the heuristic benefit of the model for art history, a discipline Bryson claimed had grown tired; in terms of a history of discourse, I see them occupying a position at the interface of art history and visual culture studies.

A little detective work shows that in his first book, *Word and Image. French Painting of the Ancien Régime* (1981), the literary scholar Bryson referred to seeing as looking, discussing it in connection with gender.[35] Two years later, in *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*,[36] he tried to bring seeing and sign together through his reception of Lacan's model of the gaze. His aim was to create a theoretical basis for the assumption of textual structures for the field of the visual, thus radically altering the foundations of art-historical interpretation. In his texts for *Vision and Visuality* and *Calligram*, both published in 1988, these positions were further radicalized and focused.

In *The Gaze in the Expanded Field*, Bryson's programmatic point of departure is the "radical decentering of the subject".[37] This leads logically to a dethroning of perspective as a model which constructs seeing from the position of a subject that forms the centre of the world. This "self as focus of its visual kingdom"[38] and one-point perspective belong together, and both must therefore be rethought. According to Bryson, Sartre and Lacan, too, were influenced by this model. A "residual centering upon the standpoint of the subject"[39] can be detected, he argues, in the way they conceived of seeing as being threatened,

---

sztejn and Yves Bonnefois (who were art historians, but not exclusively) on the grounds that "recent innovation has taken place extra-territorially". (ibid., xii).

35 For Fragonard's *The Swing*, he (rather mechanically) borrows the feminist model from Laura Mulvey's famous essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975): "Within a 'heterosexual' optic where specialised functions are assigned to each sex, pleasure in looking is broken between active (male) and passive (female)." Bryson, *Word and Image*, 98. Cf. Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". In her model of the gaze, Mulvey refers to Freud's concept of scopophilia, combining it with Lacan's model of "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function"; she uses the term *looking; gaze* only appears as a generalizing noun ("the male gaze") corresponding to its character as a theoretical model that does not refer to the factual activity of individual seeing. Mulvey's essay broke new ground in two ways: it made seeing a matter of (patriarchal) power, and it offered a psychoanalytical model for this.

36 Bryson, *Vision and Painting*.

37 Bryson, "The Gaze", S. 87.

38 Ibid., 88.

39 Ibid.

even persecuted, at this centre (the site of the subject) by the gaze. Here we find a first vagueness in Bryson's formulation that renders seeing and the subject indistinct because what is under threat and what is decentred by the gaze of an (imagined) outside is primarily the subject. In *The Gaze in the Expanded Field*, Bryson proposes a radical alternative model. It is taken from the culture of Japan, from the religious philosophers of the Kyoto School who combined eastern concepts of the void and the non-ego with European existentialism.[40] And, compared to Lacan, it represents a "much more thoroughgoing displacement of the subject in the field of vision".[41] As a theoretical strategy, this approach is strange: Lacan's thinking (and that of other poststructuralist theorists like Foucault) did involve a critique of the humanist model of the subject, but in spite of this (or precisely because of this) there can be no question of the subject having the alternative of simply leaving its symbolic order and language. This seems to be Bryson's wish, however, when he replaces the western model with one from an entirely different culture, thus attempting to shake off the "paranoid" Lacanian construct of the gaze[42] and its threat to the ego.

Let us take a brief look at Bryson's account of Lacan's model of the gaze,[43] which he contrasts starkly in its threat to the I with the positive example of the Japanese model. According to Bryson, in Lacan – unlike in Sartre – it is not the gaze of the other that thwarts and threatens the autonomy of the subject in the visual field, but "the irruption, in the visual field, of the Signifier. When I look, what I see is not simply light but intelligible form: the *rays* of light are caught in a *rets*, a network of meanings."[44] As such, seeing is socialized: "For human beings collectively to orchestrate their visual experience together it is required that each submit his or her retinal experience to the socially agreed description(s) of an intelligible world." Deviations from this

40 See Bret W. Davis, "The Kyoto School", especially paragraph 3.7: "The 'Self that is not a Self' and the Nothingness of Radical Subjectivity" in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, first published Feb 27, 2006; substantive revision May 6, 2010 (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kyoto-school/, accessed 26 Sept 2016).

41 Bryson, "The Gaze", 88.

42 See Jacqueline Rose's contribution to the discussion of his text, in which Rosalind Krauss, Martin Jay and Jonathan Crary also took part. In Foster (ed.), *Vision and Visuality*, 109-113.

43 Beyond Bryson's, one of the most accessible accounts of this confusing model is Kaja Silverman's essay "Fassbinder and Lacan".

44 Bryson, "The Gaze", 91.

"social construction of visual reality" can be measured and named as disruptions.[45] Here, a concept comes into play that was to take a central place in theoretical debates surrounding visual culture: visuality. "Between the subject and the world is inserted the entire sum of discourses which make up visuality, that cultural construct, and make visuality different from vision, the notion of unmediated visual experience." Bryson gives another description of this visuality in Lacanian terms, in particular the screen that stands between the subject/retina and the world: "Between retina and world is inserted a screen of signs, a screen consisting of all the multiple discourses on vision built into the social arena."[46] Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors*[47] with the anamorphically distorted skull in the foreground becomes Bryson's example for the effect of this screen: the seeing subject (by which he means the viewer who cannot identify the skull as such from the usual position in front of the picture dictated by one-point perspective, but only by viewing the painting at an angle while standing to the right of the frame) is as little the centre of its visual experience as it is the centre of its speaking. This screen, a central concept in the film theory of those years, introduces the sign into the visual field, supplying the tool for semiological interpretations.[48] With this approach, which uses Lacan's linking of semiotics and psychoanalysis, thinking about seeing can now be freed from the inadequacies of perceptualist definitions that understand the image only as a perfect reproduction of the perception of a prior reality.

Bryson used this, for example, as the basis for his attack in *Vision and Painting* on Ernst Gombrich's "mimetic doctrine",[49] contrasting the view of painting as the replication of a perception of external reality, that takes place

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 92.

47 1533, National Gallery, London. See Jacques Lacan, "Anamorphosis" in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 79-90. Many writers have discussed Lacan's reference to Holbein for his model of situating the subject in the visual field; to mention just two from art history: Hubert Damisch, *L'origine de la perspective* (Paris 1987); Tom Conley, "The Wit of the Letter: Holbein's Lacan" in Teresa Brennan, Martin Jay (eds.), *Vision in Context. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight* (New York 1996), 47-61.

48 Seminal books in the fields of film theory, semiotics and feminist theory have been written by the theorists Kaja Silverman (until 1988, especially: *The Subject of Semiotics*, 1983, and *The Acoustic Mirror*, 1988) and Teresa de Lauretis (until 1988, especially: *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, 1987, and *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, 1984), neither of whom is mentioned by Bryson.

49 Bryson, *Vision and Painting*, 50.

independently of social and cultural contexts, with the character of the image as a sign. In other words: for Bryson, the entry of the social (and thus of meaning) into the picture and its interpretation is only possible via the assumption of the image as a sign.[50] Ultimately, Bryson equates the physical picture with the Lacanian screen. He takes Lacan's metaphor of the screen literally.[51] A strangely retrogressive consequence of this kind of transfer is that by equating it with the Lacanian screen, the picture/painting is fixed to the model of one-point perspective that imagines the picture as a section through this perspective – the model of painting as an Albertian window.[52] With this literal transfer, then, art is taken back to the very model of perception that Bryson criticizes so vehemently in *Vision and Painting*: Gombrich's perspectivism. More problematic, however, is another consequence of this position. The concrete object of interpretation disappears for the interpreting subject in the mirroring function of the screen. In this way, a strangely paradoxical effect occurs: the viewer/subject who in the Lacanian model is not autonomous (and this aspect is crucial to the critical force of this model) re-autonomizes itself from the outside world in a kind of narcissistic circular reasoning.

Before outlining the Japanese alternative, Bryson again summarizes the threatening consequences of the Lacanian model of the gaze: "the viewing subject does not stand at the center of a perceptual horizon, and cannot command the chains and series of signifiers passing across the visual domain. Vision unfolds to the side of, in tangent to, the field of the other. And to that form of seeing Lacan gives a name: seeing on the field of the other, seeing under the Gaze."[53] Under the gaze of the other as the social field (unlike in the model of one-point perspective, which in this theoretical context is also identified with the Cartesian "cogito ergo sum"), the subject is not the centre of its field of vision, fittingly referred to here as the "visual domain". At this

50 On its publication, the books was criticized, among other things, for over-simplifying Gombrich's position. See David Ebitz, "*Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* by Norman Bryson" in *The Art Bulletin* (69:1, 1987), 155-158; Alex Potts, "Difficult Meanings. *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* by Norman Bryson" in *The Burlington Magazine* (129:1006, 1987), 29-32.

51 This problem with the treatment of Lacan's theoretical language is familiar from the much-practised and much-criticized identification of Lacan's phallus-metaphor with the actual, physical penis.

52 Lacan himself reinforced this, however, since his example of anamorphosis in Holbein's *The Ambassadors* reads a *deviation* from this model as a symptom, thus confirming the normativity of one-point perspective *beyond* the historical evolution of scopic regimes.

53 Bryson, "The Gaze", 94.

point, Bryson's basic claim is that the Cartesian model implies and produces nothing but power and control of the subject over the world. What he doesn't even consider as a possibility is dialogue, as a relation of the subject to the outside world, or communication.

As a solution to the "Cartesian self-enclosure of the *cogito*,"[54] Bryson proposes the model of the Japanese philosopher Nishitani from the Kyoto School, whose aim is "to dismantle this anthropocentric subject" – and to do so more radically than Sartre and Lacan with their threatening scenarios. With reference to Buddhist teachings, this involves the concept of *shunyata*, translated as emptiness, radical impermanence, blankness, nihility,[55] which is intended to override the subject-object problem of western philosophy at a single stroke. On this basis, Bryson develops a model of the gaze that is more like a promise – and which remains without consequence in his own work and in the subsequent debate. But Bryson clearly sees in it a force that is more positive than the "negative or terrorizing gaze"[56] of Lacan. For him, precisely this "paranoid coloration given to the Gaze" is an indication that Lacan is still thinking from the position of a certain "intellectual enclosure",[57] by which he means the above-mentioned residual subject-centeredness.

Nonetheless, Bryson comes to a point where he needs Lacan's version of visuality precisely for its critical negativity, since it is capable of doing something the positive promise of the Buddhist model cannot, that is, offering a critique of previous models of the gaze and their political consequences. Among these he counts: for the 19th century, the "truth of vision" in the physiology of the eye and the neurology of the optical apparatus; in the art history of the 20th century, he argues, this truth of the retina gave rise to formalism, in art theory to the positions of Gombrich und Arnheim based on a psychology of perception, and in the exhibition policies of museums to the decontextualization of pictures to achieve direct communication between the viewer's eye and pure form. In short, art as a matter of pure perception, timeless, "sequestered from the social domain, universal".[58] This is the art history soon to be taken on by visual culture studies – or, to be more precise, a simplified and in many ways abbreviated version of that art history, especially with regard to the German practice oriented towards cultural history and to books like

54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., 97.
56 Ibid., 105.
57 Ibid., 104.
58 Ibid., 107.

Baxandall's *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* and Alpers' *The Art of Describing*.

As a key element for Bryson, Lacan's model brings culture into the field of visuality, or rather, it is culture that turns pure seeing into a visual field consisting not only of forms but of meanings "permeated by verbal and visual discourses, by signs". This also brings the dimensions of the social and of power into play: "What is at stake is the discovery of a politics of vision." In this way, Bryson gives Lacan's gaze a political turn that in a certain way disarms its "paranoid or terrorist coloration" by transporting the gaze away from the subject into the field of power: "it is a bit easier, since Lacan, to think of visuality as something built cooperatively, over time; that we are therefore responsible for it, ethically accountable."[59] As examples he cites the voyeuristic male gaze and the colonialist gaze, structured by power and powerlessness. Now, Bryson concludes, it is a matter of analysing how power uses the social construction of seeing and how it hides its manoeuvres in the field of visuality "in myths of pure form, pure perception, and culturally universal vision".[60]

What role does art history play here? This question takes us away from the gaze. Bryson's answer would probably be as follows: were it to radically revise its basic assumptions, art history could become a kind of auxiliary discipline for the analysis of social power relations to the extent that they are represented in visual culture. It could unmask what the image conceals – the exercise of power. This is strongly reminiscent of a vulgar Marxist notion of ideology as the masking of power relations, which is based on a concept of power as repression and which falls behind the concept of power proposed by Foucault as not only repressive but productive and as being active throughout the social body. Moreover, this notion is exceedingly hostile to images, casting them as lies that help to shape a visuality that also acts in the service of power. The lack that constitutes the Lacanian subject (and which, in a terminological shift, "threatens" the Brysonian) is thus wholly repositioned in a political outside. In Bryson's view, this outside in turn manifests itself in the art-historical myths of purity and universality of form and perception – a rather restricted understanding of the political that seems paradoxically linked to the notion of visual immanence. This relationship between the inside of a subject and its outside, less fraught than unclear, obscures another important tension within the triad of artist/work/viewer that is key to the status of seeing in art history

59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 108.

and visual culture studies: that between subject, be it artist or recipient, and object. Will the object (here the object of art history) become another mirror of the subject? In Bryson's model, will it coincide indistinguishably with the screen of the network of signs (which he sees as a threat to the subject)? Is it ultimately a matter of contesting the myth of the autonomy of the object/artwork that results from the myth of purity? What importance does this "battle" against the concept of autonomous art still have at the end of the 1980s? For the time being, I only have a clear answer to the last of these questions. With the discourses and art practices of postmodernism, such as appropriation, and essentially already with the neo-avant-gardes of fluxus, land art, body and performance art or happenings in the 1960s and '70s, this battle was over (at least in the absolute, either/or terms of autonomy on the one hand and a dissolution of the object in its context on the other). This is also true within art history as a discipline, where the autonomy of art in relation to sociality and/or function is no longer the founding principle for a definition of art as the discipline's object.

In all fairness, it must be said that Bryson's main focus in *The Gaze in the Expanded Field* was not on art history but on a discussion of the gaze in connection with an expanded concept of the visual field. In his editor's introduction to the *Calligram* anthology, on the other hand, he positions his collection of (post)structuralist texts "from France" clearly against "official art history".[61] There is an attack on Gombrich's perceptualism[62] and a critique of so-called social art history that follows the Marxist distinction of base and superstructure, assigning art to the latter, unable to connect it with the former except as an illustration. To both, perspectivism and social art history, Bryson prescribes the insight that painting is an art of signs, as a cure for the isolation of art from the social.

What interests me about this text is the construction of the nexus between sign, historicization and interpretation that can be isolated within it – which bears on central issues of art-historical practice that also determine the status of seeing in the discipline (and vice versa). Bryson claims that: "Prevailing art history famously insists on limiting itself to 'what was possible in the period': its historicism demands a purity or puritanism of perspective in which

61 Bryson, "Introduction" in *Calligram*, xv-xvi.

62 An interesting comment on Bryson's restricted reception of Gombrich as exclusively perceptualist is to be found in Christopher S. Wood, "Art History Reviewed VI".

'leakage' from the present into the past is viewed with suspicion and alarm."[63] Although art history insists on the present of the artwork in question, it is not, Bryson argues, interested in its own present. Consequently, art history must adopt the theory of French (post)structuralism that has "a far more sophisticated understanding of the relations of signs to history". The question, he claims, is why "we, in England and America" choose to work within self-imposed theoretical limits when literary criticism has broadened its theoretical horizons, "so self-aware in methodology, so confident in its right to read from the present?"[64] I am interested in this idea of "confident in its right to read from the present". The implications are many and varied. Bryson's focus is clearly on the *right* to interpret from the present, and less on explaining the theoretical necessity of doing so. This is an interesting take on the postmodern critique of objectivism that highlighted the latency of position and thus the presence of the viewer in the act of interpretation. Bryson's take on this approach turns the negativity of critique into a positive right – the right of the viewer, that is, Bryson's right to read the work from his present. This is not just a critique of the supposed objectivity of art-historical fact-production – a critique I share; Bryson goes further, shifting the weight within the triad of artist/work/viewer in favour of the last in a way that largely abolishes not only the relation between viewer/present and work/past, but also the relational tension between all three poles. To my mind, this shift goes so far as to suggest that the author disempowered by poststructuralism has been replaced by (the power of) the interpreter.

How does Bryson connect this argument with the sign? Here, too, he opens up a polarizing battleground: art history "reacts to the image by seeking documentation" (he always refers to the object of art history as "the image"); to date it has not conceived of the image "in terms of signs", "as something to be interpreted".[65] The new art history he is presenting in *Calligram*, on the other hand, "reacts to the image as to any other work of signs. It is naturally hermeneutic, and it knows reading to be as complex and intricate a process as, for academic or Warburg iconology, it is the comparatively simple decoding of emblems and motifs."[66] This is a highly polemical view of iconology which Bryson claims is not a hermeneutic activity.

63 Bryson, "Introduction", *Calligram*, xvi.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., xvii.

Apart from the fact that using the word "naturally" in the context of poststructuralist theory feels strange, the problem with this attitude is the mix of general accusations and simplification, as reflected in the reviews of *Vision and Painting*.[67] Particularly annoying is the way Bryson's very simple view of art history seems to be guided by a tactical ignorance that aims to present the discipline of literary criticism, from which he comes, as a methodological role model so that it remains unclear, looking back, how much of his polemic is motivated by academic politics. So why do I take it seriously? Bryson is not the only literary critic/theorist who switched to art history, and he exerted a major influence on the academic context in which the first university course on visual culture was founded soon after. More interestingly, Bryson's formulations also seem to express a desire that was also crucial to the founding and the programs of visual culture studies: with the overly one-sided shift in emphasis to the viewer/interpreter within the triad of artist/work/viewer, the author, at least theoretically abolished by poststructuralism in favour of textual interdependence, is replaced by the viewer, who according to Bryson now has the right to interpret, independently of the historical unfamiliarity (and other unfamiliarities) of the object. But what is the nature of an interpretation that does not acknowledge its object as Other? Does this object then take on the function of a mirror for the viewer?

Another revealing choice of words, offering an insight into the role of the gaze, comes in Bryson's arguments against the "perceptualist account",[68] where he speaks of recognition (a word whose meanings range from cognition to identification, and to approval). To refute Gombrich's method of a perceptual comparison between a painting and reality outside the picture, Bryson examines picture-making from the position of the "viewer's gaze," using the example of a particularly realistic representation. In this case, he writes, it is possible for the viewer to re-experience "the original vision, retinal or imaginary, of its creator". But such matching, he argues, can hardly be a necessary criterion for the "recognition of a painting" since the viewer knows nothing of the original intention or vision of the painting. From this he concludes that the "act of perception in the viewing gaze cannot of itself provide criteria of recognition". The examples given for what he understands by recognition are the ability to comprehend mathematic formulae and a child's learning to

67 Especially Potts, Difficult Meanings.

68 Bryson, "Introduction", *Calligram*, xix.

read. His conclusion: not only mathematics and learning to read are "activities of the sign", but also painting. Recognition of a painting calls for skills in "social codes of recognition".[69] Here, then, perception is replaced by recognition as the term for the viewer's act of seeing. In this way, seeing as the form of perception specific to the sense of sight becomes the act of cognition via the recognition of social codes – an act that reads signs to derive meaning from them. Elsewhere, he takes this distinction one step further, describing purely perceptive seeing as an individually isolated act, contrasting it with the recognition of signs as social interaction: "It takes one person to experience a sensation; it takes (at least) two to recognize a sign."[70]

By basing his argument on an isolation of the act of seeing as (pure) perception in this way, he contradicts his own claim that no such thing as pure seeing exists. At the same time he asserts that the formal properties of the object that are perceived by "pure" seeing are not socially and historically coded, that is to say, they lie below the threshold of legibility or encoding (and thus of the social). These would be, for example, those elements grouped together by conventional art history under the heading of style, from ways of applying paint, to palettes, and to modes of composition. Studies exist, however, even for non-representational painting of the 20th century, which analyse these factors of painting – often labelled as "formalism" and treated with suspicion – as socially, culturally and historically structured. Dealing with such painting though involves using a descriptive vocabulary other than that found in conventional art-historical accounts of style.[71]

In brief, this is the package offered by Bryson: with the gaze, the sign enters art (interpretation), bringing with it power and the social; the social is identical with the screen, which in turn coincides with the image; the gaze becomes an act of reading, based on the social codes circulating in the present of the viewer/interpreter. What Bryson then fails to address, however, is the restricted authorial autonomy of the viewer/interpreter within the coding of his/her *own* present. He limits himself to deducing the right to interpretation. The latent desire that speaks through his text is, I propose, as follows: the interpreter takes on the position of the author/artist as criticized by poststructuralism, and the object of interpretation is reduced to an outside, present and ahistorical, whose existence does not go beyond its own interpretation.

69 All quotations from Bryson, The Gaze, xix-xx.

70 Ibid., xxi.

71 For painting, see, for example, Yves-Alain Bois,*Painting as Model* (Boston 1993).

Similar to the mirror in Lacan's model of the mirror stage as formative of the function of the I, it serves to show the viewer/interpreter a self-image via whose recognition the plausibility of the viewer-ego/I is secured. Moreover this model collapses the tension, or relationship, between the elements involved in art-historical seeing (the triad of artist, object/work and viewer/interpreter) because the element artist no longer features, while object/work and viewer/interpreter collapse into the interpreter-I. When the viewer has no counterpart, all that remains is the viewer him/herself. Why is this? Four basic factors come together in Bryson's position: 1) the gaze is understood as a threat to the I; 2) for this reason it is pushed away from the I into an outside; 3) the Lacanian screen is literally equated with the art image; 4) the I, which in the Lacanian model can only deceive itself about its own wholeness, seems to be salvaged in an interpreting I whose irreparable lack is not open to debate. This is the effect of equating screen and viewer/interpreter in the act of interpreting.

The evil eye and a counter-model – Margaret Olin

"There is usually something negative about the gaze as used in art theory", writes Margaret Olin in her article "Gaze", included in *Critical Terms for Art History* (1996), a handbook on new concepts "in the late twentieth century"[72] including those borrowed from poststructuralist, feminist and psychoanalytical theory like sign, representation, simulacrum, fetish, gaze and gender.

Olin places the negative reading of the gaze at the centre of her text: "the notion of the pernicious power of the gaze. The gaze, it seems, destroys." In her view, there are historical antecedents, like the myth of Medusa or a belief in the power of the gaze as manifested in the "evil eye", but also cultural rules like asking someone before taking their picture. In 20th-century discourse, "the gaze has taken on new villainous qualities":[73] Hitler's "hypnotic" gaze could have played a part when Sartre was writing *Being and Nothingness* during the German occupation of France; Foucault linked the gaze with the apparatus of surveillance, and Guy Debord warned of the "dehumanizing aspect of being a spectator". The key point in Lacan, she remarks, is that the eye

72 Robert S. Nelson, "At the Place of a Foreword: Someone Looking, Reading, and Writing" in *Critical Terms*, ix.

73 Margaret Olin, "Gaze" in *Critical Terms*, 208-219: 214.

and the gaze, although separate, are parts of the same person because "the gaze is projected, imagined. It is not the gaze of a real person who wishes malevolently to deprive us of our independence as subjects, but the result of our own struggle for self-mastery."[74] Precisely this aspect of the function of the viewer/interpreter is what is lost in Bryson's approach, as the gaze, separated from the eye, that goes hand in hand with the "desire for self-completion through another",[75] is relocated within this very Other/outside.

Olin aptly sums up the dimension of power in the gaze: "There is a struggle over the gaze: one gets to look, to be master of the gaze; the other (or Other) is looked at."[76] This struggle involves a clash of gazes each based on the desire to complete the self. It goes beyond the struggle between the sexes; it concerns the relations between majority and minority, between the West and the so-called Global South, "whose inhabitants can be the object of the gaze because they are viewed as exotic … The subject-turned-object sees itself as the other sees it: it internalizes the gaze. Thus the poor self-image and limited sense of one's own possibilities that result when women see themselves as men see them, when minority groups see themselves as the majority sees them."[77]

This brings us back to the problem described above with reference to the identity politics of these minorities: how can this power relation and this gaze be altered? Can it be achieved by giving the cliché, the stereotype, resulting from such a gaze, a positive turn, continuing to relate it to oneself – a strategy that has been both used and contested by all minorities, both ethnic groups and women, gays and lesbians? Is it possible to exit this dynamic by creating a "new" self-image? This in turn recalls Bryson's manoeuvre of avoiding the gaze's threat to the self by adopting a model from a non-western culture based on a non-I – what Olin calls an attempt "to find an alternative to the notion of the subjugating look in other cultures".[78]

Olin herself has another proposal that departs from the "paranoid" Lacanian model. She suggests a positive rewriting of the gaze of the kind already conceived of in other theories. One example she gives is Martin Buber: in his thinking, she writes, there is an attempt to replace the I-it with an I-Thou relationship; something similar is to be found, she adds, in Mikhail Bakhtin's heteroglossia (multiple voices, equally weighted). What these models have in

74 Ibid., 215.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 216.

common is that they take dialogue as the basis for thinking relations. The gaze that is returned in the dialogical model rescues the sense of self of the one being looked at. "If you can look back, you cannot be possessed by the gaze of the other. What is proposed is not a stare-down. It is a shared gaze. Rather than emphasizing the power of the gazing one to make the one gazed at into an object, this idea suggests responsibility toward the person looking back at one."[79] This model is ethically founded and as such highly volitional. It appears as optimistic regarding the possibilities of human communication as Lacan's model is pessimistic. What remains intact here is the relation between the looking subject and what is being looked at, be it artist and work or work and viewer/interpreter. With this model there is no need to deny the unfamiliarity of the other. In this it resembles Pächt's approach; but it describes more of an attitude than a method – an attitude that may colour both cognitive aim and methodology, just as a "paranoid" attitude does. In both models, the dialogical and the Lacanian, the emphasis is on recognition, but with one key difference: in the Lacanian model, it is (self-)recognition of the I, in Buber and Bakhtin the recognition of the Other. The Lacanian model has been adopted much more frequently than Buber's or Bakhtin's – which is hardly surprising; for with this model, it is possible to pose the question of power relations within the gaze that is not possible with the dialogical model, as it postulates a form of communication without a hierarchic divide.

Olin's article on the gaze has just a single illustration: Walker Evans' photographic portrait of Annie Mae Gudger, the wife of a tenant farmer. It shows the face of a white woman, her hair parted and pulled back, looking straight at the photographer, and thus the viewer, with a frown. Any further characterization of her gaze would be interpretation. Annie Mae Gudger and the picture look at the viewer – a picture that looks back, in the most obvious way imaginable: the person in the picture looks back, which means: "Our gaze does not hit the side of her face but the front" – an allusion to Barbara Kruger's work entitled *Your gaze hits the side of my face*.[80] "She looks at us and we meet her gaze directly."[81] This portrait could thus become a concrete example of the dialogical constellation of gazes proposed by Olin.

In western art since the Renaissance, figures looking out of the picture at the viewer have not been the rule, especially where female figures are con-

79 Ibid., 217.
80 Title of a photo collage by Barbara Kruger (1981).
81 Olin, "Gaze", 216.

cerned, which brings us to art history as a discipline and the way it has dealt with this problem. Famous exceptions include Tizian's *Venus of Urbino*, Goya's *Nude* and *Clothed Maja* and Manet's *Olympia*, all from the genre of the female nude. For this genre, the rule was that the nude does not look at the viewer, casting her eyes instead discretely and modestly to one side. And the *Majas* and *Olympia* were often the focus of scandalized outrage on account of their "obscene" character. In most cases, this was the effect of a naked woman looking at those looking at her – an unwelcome, disturbing dialogical exchange of gazes that startled the viewer out of his position of a gaze that controls its object. Elsewhere, another remarkable effect can be observed: some critics seem to forget that they are looking at a picture, speaking of the image of a female body looking at them as a subject: this Maja "is aware of power and her entirely unsentimental, even aggressive gaze definitively turns her into a subject, even as an unclad woman".[82] T.J. Clark is not the only one to see in the gaze of *Olympia* the self-determined desire "of the female subject herself".[83] This raises the question of how such a neutral, indifferent gaze becomes, in the eye of the (male) viewer, a signifier of self-determined female desire, and whether it is perhaps this gaze that causes the medium of representation, the painting, the canvas, the pictorial codes, to become invisible, allowing the woman portrayed to achieve a presence in the present and in the perceptive space of the viewer.[84]

According to Olin, the eyes of Anna Mae Gudger are "meant to urge us into a relation. … We are asked to be her partner, to offer her 'respect', which means literally a returned look. Her look is intended to empower her."[85] Unlike the above-quoted interpreters of the *Majas* and *Olympia*, Olin does not fall into the trap of presence. Instead, she understands the woman's gaze clearly

82 Werner Busch, "Goyas 'Nackte und Bekleidete Maja'" in Claudia von Braunmühl (ed.), *Etablierte Wissenschaft und feministische Theorie im Dialog* (Berlin 2003), 113-124: 121.

83 Timothy J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (London 1984), 131. Besides Busch and Clark, it is also worth mentioning Charles Bernheimer, "Manets Olympia: Der Skandal auf der Leinwand" in Weissberg, *Weiblichkeit als Maskerade*, 148-176, especially 158.

84 See Susanne von Falkenhausen, "Maja und Olympia: Der Streit um den weiblichen Akt" in von Braunmühl(ed.), *Etablierte Wissenschaft und feministische Theorie*, 125-133. Foucault takes a different approach to viewer positions with regard to *Olympia*, see ibid., 130, and Michel Foucault, *Manet and the Object of Painting* (lecture originally delivered in 1971), 63-66.

85 Olin, "Gaze", 217.

as a strategy on the part of the photographer that is often seen in documentary photography with a social agenda. And she finds fitting words for this "perceptive phenomenon" of the tension between the presence of the person portrayed, occasioned or reinforced by his/her gaze out of the picture, and this representation in its quality as a media artefact: "Depiction of eyes looking out from the image is only one way to seek to achieve such a presence." For today's viewers, she continues, the powerful presence of the photographer might actually seem stronger than that of the woman – a remark that brings the artist back into play via the reality of the photograph, rendering the triad of artist/object/viewer complete again in its communication *through the picture*. In a nutshell: "It is the sense of a human presence who is alive to our own presence that constitutes the encounter theorized as the gaze."[86]

Olin's model of a dialogical exchange of looks draws on her study of Alois Riegl's concept of attentiveness, on which he founded his pictorial analyses above all in *The Group Portraiture of Holland* (1902/1931).[87] For Riegl, the attentiveness of the figures inside the picture towards one another, perceivable in the form of exchanged looks and facial expressions, generates an empathetic attentiveness in the viewer. This attentiveness is based on respect for the other – be it someone else portrayed in the same picture or the picture itself, or rather what is portrayed in the picture. In a broader sense, it is an ethically motivated concept for intersubjective communication. In any case, it is firmly rooted in the picture, making it reminiscent of Wolfgang Kemp's reception aesthetics that is not ethically founded but whose model of reception is also based on the object.[88] Another link to Riegl is found in Alpers when she describes the visual culture of the Netherlands in the 17th century as a culture of visual attentiveness. But there is one key difference: while Alpers identifies description as a structural characteristic of Dutch painting, in Riegl's model, as interpreted by Olin, attentiveness has a narrative structure.[89]

In conclusion, the positions of Bryson and Olin on the gaze can be differentiated on the basis of their respective weighting of the communication

86 Olin, "Gaze", 218.

87 Margaret Olin, "Forms of Respect: Alois Riegl's Concept of Attentiveness" in *The Art Bulletin* 71, no. 2 (1989), 285-299. She also embeds this concept in the intellectual currents of turn-of-the-century Vienna, examines its adoption by Bakhtin and Buber, and situates it within the modern discussion of the theatricality of art initiated by Michael Fried.

88 Kemp, too, refers to Riegl.

89 Olin, "Forms of Respect", here, for example, 287.

triangle artist/object/viewer: while Bryson centres this relational structure on the viewer, Olin seeks a dialogical structure that focuses on the object but connects it with artist and viewer. In this way, Olin also postulates a communication between producer and viewer via the object.

Bryson's model of the role of the viewer depends on the character of the picture as sign; as well as being the precondition for interpretation, this quality also turns the act of perception into an act of reading. For Olin, on the other hand, this act can be described as a dialogical exchange of looks with the object. This also permits a recognition of the object as Other, in turn allowing the historically unfamiliar to be integrated not into the interpreting subject but into relations within the communicative triangle. Bryson, by contrast, must deny this unfamiliarity as it cannot be integrated into the viewer.

A comparison between the two positions is more difficult on the question of the power of the gaze. Bryson situates it twice: in the gaze of the person who crosses one's own gaze and threatens the subject, and as an imbalance of power in the social field. These sites of power have two things in common: both endanger identities, that of the individual and that of the social group, and in both cases those endangered are the objects of the gaze. In this light, interpretation becomes something like a struggle for recognition of the self/group in the eyes of the other.

With her dialogical model, on the other hand, Olin offers an ethical solution to the problem of identity in confrontation with the Other. It calls for a conscious positioning of the viewer towards the Other and therefore implies the volitional agency of the viewer. The dialogical model demands the acknowledgement of the Other, but without demanding one's own recognition in the eyes of the Other – a model of nonviolent communication that recalls the ideals of Gandhi or Martin Luther King, but that seems hardly capable of doing justice either to the realities of a political struggle between identity-based forces, or to those of a paranoid subject.

Comparing these concepts of the gaze highlights the dynamic of political thinking associated with them. As we will see, however, the question of how this dynamic shapes the practices and methods of visual culture studies and art history is easier to answer for visual culture studies than it is for art history.