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Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight

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It is common in the literature of visual theory to invoke the Enlightenment as some kind of ground upon which modern conceptions of the visual field are constructed. In part this invocation derives from a certain philosophical inheritance that we might describe in shorthand as the line of sight between Hegel and Lacan via Sartre. This inheritance has it that the philosophical project of the modern, that is, enlightenment, is intimately caught up with and deeply implicated in the conceptual field of the visual. Insofar as this idea goes, and like all broad characterizations of a difficult set of arguments it goes only a very small way, it is correct. However, what is glaringly missing from this telescoped account is a specifically nuanced historical perspective on Enlightenment modes and modalities of visuality. This absence is compounded by the fact that where attention has been drawn to the general area of the visual it has either surfaced in the philosophy and history of science, a discipline that has not sought to investigate the sociocultural nose that colors and distorts vision in its construction of visuality, or in the history of philosophical discussions of optics. In both the history of science and philosophical treatments of the visual field, therefore, we find optics taking center stage, as one might argue it did for the Enlightenment itself.

My purpose, however, is to move away from optics toward the more amorphous cultural domain in order to focus on the visual field, or visuality. Throughout I shall take it as axiomatic that visuality encompasses social and cultural productions and practices as well as philosophical and technical descriptions of optics. This larger focus is particularly helpful in regard to the Enlightenment since visuality, for this period, is not only located in the virtual spaces created by cultural forms; it also tropologically determines the landscape upon which concepts are mapped. Vision is not only literally a topic of great concern to Enlightenment thought; it also furnishes, via an entire tropological field, some of the grounding figures of conceptualization in general. In this sense one might say that vision figures Enlightenment thought.

Consequently visuality is both literally a topic under investigation during the Enlightenment and the name we might give to a figurative spacing that opens up, controls, or legislates the terrain upon which a large number of concepts are articulated. In this sense visuality is certainly not confined to the visible. These comments clearly point toward a very large topic for inquiry that could not conceivably be covered in the space of a chapter. I shall, therefore, limit my remarks to a very small corner of this larger field. Essentially I shall be attempting to suggest a way in which the work of historicizing visuality might begin, and I shall do this by approaching an archival account of the society of the spectacle.

In order to read that archive we shall need to address the specific frames we bring to bear upon the object investigated. In other words we cannot imagine that we see with disinterested eyes, nor indeed that the period in question was able to see "purely" through the lens of optical science. My archival account, therefore, shall be doubly subjected to "theoretical" framings: the first will take its cue from our own historical viewpoint, and the second will be derived from an eighteenth-century source.
In relation to the first frame, our own contemporary moment, we should acknowledge the debt we owe to the philosophical inheritance toward which I gestured in my opening; this philosophical discussion has been substantially attenuated by the work of psychoanalysis. It is, perhaps, in film theory that we currently find the most active engagement with concepts of visuality, and within that debate the work of Jacques Lacan has been extraordinarily influential. I do not wish to rehearse some now well-worn arguments about the gaze and the subject found in Lacan’s reformulations of Freud; to do so would be redundant in this collection. It is, however, important to acknowledge the persistence and penetration of the Lacanian account since we cannot turn a blind eye to a model of vision that has substantially determined how we see the interconnections between the subject and the visual field. In this sense we are unable to extricate ourselves from Lacan’s gaze. Part of my purpose in this chapter will be to expose that gaze to a historicizing stare: in so doing, I hope to insert a historical account within a theoretical one.

Consequently, while I shall endeavor to keep “history” separate from “theory” in order to stall the point at which Enlightenment modes of visuality are read through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis, such disinteractions of history from theory are more likely to be announced than fully realized. Thus, though it may be tempting to read the Enlightenment as if it produced Lacanian theory as jon tautla lettre, I shall struggle to hold the two frames apart in the hope that a more complex historicizing analytic will emerge.

LACAN AND THE GAZE

Lacan’s interest in the visual and the gaze more specifically is, of course, tied up with a much larger and more complex topic: the formation of the subject. On a number of occasions this subject formation is explicitly referred to in visual terms, as in the Lacanian “becoming censure” of the mirror stage. But it is the use of the term “gaze” that I shall focus upon since this use will provide us with the articulation point between the present of analysis and my historical example; the purpose of so doing will be to bring some historical depth to the concept of the gaze. More specifically it is the intersections of gender, which are taken to be articulated in and through the concept of the gaze, that I shall concentrate upon.

In what might now be called the classic account the gaze is taken to objectify what it gazes upon, and as such it is understood in terms of the masculine objectification of women. This statement certainly puts the matter simply and crudely and distorts both the Lacanian model and those developed within film theory. Nevertheless it provides us with a point of departure since it signals the specific topic of concern in the following argument. The most sustained Lacanian account of the gaze is to be found in The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, where Lacan explicitly situates his own model of vision within the philosophical tradition inherited by Sartre. He writes: “The gaze, as conceived by Sartre, is the gaze by which I am surprised—surprised in so far as it changes all the perspectives, the lines of force, of my world, orders it, from the point of nothingness where I am, in a sort of radiated reticulation of organisms… In so far as I am under the gaze, Sartre writes, I no longer see the eye that looks at me and, if I see the eye, the gaze disappears.”

Lacan asks at this point: “Is this a correct phenomenological analysis?” and he answers “No.” There then follows an extremely important moment in this chapter on the gaze in which the following is stated: “It is not true that, when I am under the gaze, when I solicit a gaze, when I obtain it, I do not see it as a gaze. Painters, above all, have grasped this gaze as such in the mask and I have only to remind you of Goya, for example, for you to realize this.

“...The gaze sees itself... The gaze I encounter...is not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the other” (p. 84). In my historical theoretical text, Adam Smith’s The Theory of Moral Sentiments, we will encounter so strong a prefiguration of this analysis that questions of
chronological priority will seem irresistible. Let us dwell a moment longer, however, with the Lacanian argument, in which the gaze is also imbricated within questions of voyeurism. As Lacan writes:

A gaze surprises him in the function of voyeur, disturbs him, overpowers him and reduces him to a feeling of shame. The gaze in question is certainly the presence of others as such. But does this mean that originally it is in the relation of subject to subject, in the function of the existence of others as looking at me, that we apprehend what the gaze really is? Is it not clear that the gaze intervenes here only in as much as it is not the annihilating subject, correlative of the world of objectivity, who feels himself surprised, but the subject sustaining himself in a function of desire? (pp. 84-85)

Here Lacan is at pains to disentangle the gaze from the economies of desire, to reimpose the boundary of interiority/exteriority in order spatially to orient the relations between the look and the gaze. This spatial construction is perhaps best exemplified in the three diagrams Lacan uses to illustrate the relationships between the subject, gaze, and look.6

The first diagram has the look of familiarity about it; indeed, Leon Battista Alberti would have recognized it as an account of unilinear perspective. The "geometrical point" corresponds to the place occupied by the artist who surveys the object to be depicted through the mediating frame of the image. In Alberti's time this mediating point would have been the transparent pane of glass through which the Renaissance artist saw the object and onto which, as the glass turned into canvas, he was to paint it. In this diagram the position of the eye is superimposed upon the position of the gaze: eye and gaze work in unison just as the Renaissance artist masters the world he surveys through the mechanical-conceptual apparatus of the camera obscura.7

Lacan, however, wishes to disrupt this rather cozy arrangement and to claim that the geometrical point is only a "partial dimension in the field of the gaze" (p. 88). In fact Lacan understands this diagrammation of geometric perspective as primarily addressing space, not vision, and in support of this he cites the famous eighteenth-century debates concerning the abilities of a blind man...
correctly to read such spaces. The purpose of this attack is to deny the inherent Cartesianism in the model, that which precisely equates seeing with being. Lacan's rather neat destruction of this position is to show how, in unilinear perspective, the viewer, in his or her immersion in the image through the sightlines that converge on the vanishing point, is in effect "vanished away." The only way back from this point is through an inversion of the triangle, so that the viewer, who now finds himself or herself in the position of the object, has to retrace the trajectory initially followed in order to occupy the position of mastery from which it departed. In this way the viewing subject becomes merely a function of the visual field.

Figure 5.2 represents the subject not as the master of the visual field but as the object of the gaze, as precisely the picture. The triangle has been inverted, and the means by which the subject (now objectified as that which is seen) enters the visual field is through the deliberately disembodied or inanimate "point of light." This inversion, in effect, strips intention out of the activity of looking. In this way the gaze is figured as irrecoverably external to the subject and the visual field is divested of its problematic of mastery; in its place the dominating viewer of the first diagram becomes the object in and of a spectacle.

In the midpoint of Figure 5.2 we find the "screen," which, Lacan insists, is opaque. Consequently the subject who occupies the position of the picture can only do so by way of being projected onto the screen. In this sense the second diagram attempts to convey how a subject becomes a picture—as Lacan writes: "I must, to begin with, insist on the following: in the scopic field, the gaze is outside. I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture" (p. 106). The third figure conflates the other two and makes the point even more strongly that it is only through what is called the "image" or the "screen" that subjectivity is constituted. Furthermore, the gaze is now explicitly in the position of the object looked at in Figure 5.1 so that the location for the activity of seeing is constantly shuttling back and forth between the thing made object in the visual field and the thing making it object. It should be clear by now that the subject is unable to occupy either of these positions with any stability. In this way the third figure pictures to us a schematization of the "spectacle of the world," and it is that world, appearing to us as spectacle, that provides the location for the subject-seeing, or subject-in-sight. As Lacan writes: "What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects" (p. 106). Before exploring this entry into light, an entry into the domain of visibility, I shall return to my companion theoretical text, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, to situate Smith's account of spectatorial subjectivity within the visual culture of mid-eighteenth-century Britain.

THE VISUAL CULTURE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

If we are to take it as axiomatic that visibility is as much constructed in and through social, cultural, and discursive forms as those things that we might loosely and anachronistically take to be self-evidently visible, then we shall need to examine the nuances of the range of possible activities within the visual field that might have been available for any period. More specifically we need to investigate the differences between, say, looking or surveying, watching or spectating, that are articulated in Enlightenment discussions of viewing practice. This investigation is not only to point to the semantic differences that are delimited by these words in our lexicon and that are, therefore, to some extent coextensive with the nuances of these terms in our own period but also to a fully articulated and articulable grammar of forms that constitute visibility in and for the Enlightenment. Individuals, insofar as they are constituted as subjects by this grammar of forms, take on specific roles such as "viewers" or "spectators," and these positionalities within the discursive dispersal of subjectivity are far from inert in relation to other definitional criteria surrounding the subject, such
as class, social standing, and gender. A viewer in mid-eighteenth-century England had very precise contours: he or she was positioned by an activity, say looking, and was thereby situated in relation to a social and cultural topography that inflected specific social, economic, and gendered descriptions of the individual.

In point of fact looking represents just one option within the range of possible insertions into visuality; other activities within the domain of the scopic are delimited by terms such as "gazing" or "glancing." The period in question worked out an entire metaphorics of the eye in which these different activities were distinguished. For example, in the activity of viewing a landscape the eye might be "cast" to a particular point or "thrown" toward an object in the landscape known as an "eye-catcher." The eye might become "exhausted" or "sated"; sometimes it is described as being "hungry," at others "restless." Equally it might become fatigued as the eye becomes tired of too much visual stimulation. In all these cases eighteenth-century culture images to itself the organ of sight as both actively participating in the visual field and as its passive recorder. It is, then, not the subject who becomes sated but the organ of sight. I do not want to press this point in relation to the foregoing discussion of the Lacanian scheme, but it is worth noting since the culture we are now beginning to examine also figures subjectivity in complex ways.

Eighteenth-century modes of understanding this metaphoric of the eye reach toward the specifics involved in particular instances of our encounter with the visual field. Thus, for example, viewing the landscape park and viewing in the landscape park have a different set of governing frames to the inspection of pictures in a gallery or a single room. These different locations and activities generate different modes and purposes for the eye and demand different somatic insertions within the spacings of the social and visual, or sociospectaculism. And further to qualify the circumstances, of course not all physical environments at all times demand and constitute precisely identical forms of viewing activity; not all gardens require the same modes of visual address and even one garden may demand different modes at different times or at different locations within it. Clearly what is needed here is a precise example, which I shall present in conclusion.

Visual culture for the period, as for our period, comprised a specifiable set of objects, activities, structures of consumption, and the production of representations which particular arguments needed to be made and on whose behalf particular policing activities needed to be set in motion. In making these arguments and policing this site of public production and display, a whole range of ideological commitments were either silently or openly articulated. We shall follow through a number of these arguments; in shorthand the division of opinion can be understood in ways that are familiar to our period in terms of the distinction between high and low, or popular, culture. For the period in question this distinction is particularly fraught since the concept of the cultural domain was only beginning to be hesitantly articulated at this time. Thus, where we might describe certain forms as "popular" (without perhaps fully understanding why we do so), such a demarcation would have been almost unthinkable for eighteenth-century commentators since what was at stake was precisely the formation of something that might in the first place be called "culture."

It is, then, more helpful to understand the division of opinion as falling between the requirement that one be educated in some shape or form in order to be able to "see" the works of culture and the notion that any response as long as it be in some sense "genuine" is as valid as any other. This kind of argument also has a familiar ring because it has dominated discussions of philosophical aesthetics ever since: it is the kind of argument one finds obsessively repeated in the face of nonrepresentational art in which the viewer has no ground of semblance to stand upon in order to direct the eye. The point of division, then, occurs around an affective response, however this is made apparent, versus an educated and usually classifying gaze: the regime of the eye versus the regime of the picture.

In the case of the former the mid-decades of the eighteenth century witnessed an extraordin-
nary experiment in grounding affective vision, or what might also be termed “sentimental vision.” It is far from coincidental that this experiment coincides with the vast increase in volume of activity around the display, production, and marketing of paintings. But it would be wrong to assume that the socioscopic is focused exclusively upon high-art images, most especially painting, for the purview of sentimental vision is far broader than that. It includes, for example, the varieties of visual and visualizing activity found in surveying land, an activity that is itself divided into various techniques or technologies depending upon the specific functional requirements that motivate the survey. Landscape aesthetics, for example, in which a very carefully demarcated set of responses is outlined and regulated, determines one form of looking at the land, which is to be strenuously distinguished from those forms that motivate, for example, the agricultural survey. In both cases the visual is open to both regimes, the one leaning toward the affective registers of response, the other toward the categorizing impulses of taxonomy, but it is clear that function will determine the extent to which these different technologies of the look are activated.

Furthermore, there is considerably more at stake in the entry into visuality than just different modes of looking, for the activity of looking says something about the looker. It is precisely because of this that the experiment of sentimental vision holds out such interest, both for the period and for us, since it is based in a leveling and potentially democratic conceptual fold: all who have eyes to see are able to experience an affective response, to “feel,” as an eighteenth-century theorist would have it. Throughout the mid-decades of the century, say between 1755 and the early 1780s, there were countless rehearsals of the arguments around this point. Thus John Shebbeare, writing in 1755, makes the case for the eye: “...the true taste in gardens is formed on what we feel in ourselves, at the sight of different scenes in nature.”

The case for the picture, for the educated eye, is here put by Mathew Pilkington:

As Painting is the representation of nature, every Spectator, whether judicious or otherwise, will derive a certain degree of pleasure, from seeing nature happily and beautifully imitated; but, where taste and judgment are combined in a spectator, who examines a design conceived by the genius of a Raphael, and touched into life by his hand; such a spectator feels a superior, an enthusiastic, a sublime pleasure, whilst he minutely traces the merits of the work; and the eye of such a connoisseur wanders from beauty to beauty, till he feels himself rising gradually from admiration to ecstasy.

There are clear distinctions here between activities of slightly different sorts: looking in the garden is not identical to gazing at painted representations (although the latter may take place within the context of the former): in both cases it is the education of the eye that determines the different modes and modalities of looking, and such modalities are not exclusively focused upon the correct visual address to objects as such; since they are also deeply imbricated within images and representations of self. Consequently the incredible pressure around mid-century to work out, precisely to figure a way of representing, the composure and compass of the public sphere and to conceptualize this new cultural domain in terms of visuality, necessarily involved questions of propriety, of gender and class affiliation, which all bear upon subject definition. In brief the question that arises is, Who will be allowed into the domain of the visual, allowed in so that they might see the images in the gallery but also so that they might be seen looking at those representations?

Of course another possibility exists in relation to the fine arts, namely: that the arts themselves “educate” the viewer. At a time when increasing numbers of “common” people began to figure more forcibly within the public sphere, such arguments were inevitably made on behalf of certain ideological beliefs. Such beliefs might have it that everyone is capable of education, or alternatively the opposite view might be held, in which only those who already have entry tickets to the
mental vision, your audience will be able to "see." Here is the eighteenth-century argument made in a nonelite discursive realm in a primer on the art intended for wide circulation:

This is the Progress of Taste: By little and little the Public are caught by Examples. By seeing, they (even without taking notice of it) insensibly form themselves upon what they have seen. Great Artists produce in their Works the most elegant strokes of Nature; Those who have had some Education, immediately applaud them, even the common people are struck: \[ Interdum Vulgaris rectum videt. \] They apply the Model without thinking of it. Then by degrees retrench what is luxurious in themselves, and add what is wanting. Their Manners, Discourse, and outward Appearance, all seem to be reforming, and this Reformation passes even into their Souls.\(^\text{10}\)

This form of argument concerning the beneficial effects of "polite arts" is, of course, one of the ways in which the early modern period attempted to justify the expense of investing in nonproductive luxuries and the pursuit of leisure-time activities. The argument runs thus: where good household management leads to economic benefits, so the support of the arts leads to a more humane society. As our writer explains: "... the Polite Man shall shine forth and show himself by a lively and graceful Expression, equally remote from Rudeness and Affectation: two Vices as contrary to Taste in Society, as they are in the \textit{Polite Arts}" (p. 5).

These and other advertisements for the beneficial effects of artistic production can be found throughout the Enlightenment. Joshua Reynolds was making such an argument, albeit in a rather elitist manner, in his \textit{Discourses} when he proposed that painting should depict the general rather than the particular, the ideal rather than the specific, since these forms are relatively context-insensitive and therefore "educate" the viewer and improve society through time and across social boundaries. Reynolds was all for what John Stedman called "beauties of the understanding" and rather against the more affective response "beauties of the eye": "those beauties which, by the means of vision, strike the sensory with little, perhaps without any reflection of the mind."\(^\text{11}\)

For similar reasons the high cultural theory of the arts at this time legislated the hierarchy of representations. This hierarchy has traditionally been understood exclusively in terms of academic painting: the ordering of genres that insists on history painting as being the most elevated, precisely a beauty for the understanding. However, arguments concerning the genres constituted only one part of a general cultural eruption in which a range of objects and practices, of looking and production, burst upon the scene and justified for attention in a variety of modes. This high cultural theory was closely linked to certain political and social goals: expressed most succinctly in the term "civic humanism," and its ambitions were clearly focused on the stratification of the visual domain into a series of hierarchized forms and practices requiring a range of skills and competences that one needed to acquire, either by dint of birth or through some kind of educative labor.

This high-cultural argument has been well documented and deeply researched so that now we are in a position to begin situating such arguments within a wider sphere.\(^\text{12}\) More specifically we can begin to piece together the contextually constructed in which these arguments were made: a context in which a professional or bourgeois culture competed with elite culture, sometimes as a parasite upon the body of the public and at other times as an alternative to it. The lines of battle can be seen quite clearly in relation to a common thread running through arguments within high culture about the hierarchy of genres. In these arguments portraiture was understood to have a lower position in the hierarchy than history painting.

A large number of strands make up this argument, which is certainly concerned with issues of nationalism and individualism as well as more technical debates about oil painting. Whatever
the high-cultural argument asserted, it is nevertheless remained the case that mid-eighteenth-century Britain was overwhelmed with the production and circulation of portraits. Indeed, if one tabulates the number of successful submissions to the Royal Academy exhibitions throughout this period it becomes clear that even the Academy itself, prime mover in academic art theory and the hierarchy of the genres, was dependent upon the craze for and booming economy in portraits. In point of fact Sir Joshua Reynolds, the Academy’s first president, exhibited vastly more portraits than any other genre throughout his tenure of office.

The fashion for portraits can be taken as emblematic for my argument since it demonstrates the heterogeneity of visual culture: it points up the question of how much the entry to visuality should cost. On the one hand, for example, painters who wished to make a living from painting might paint a likeness of a fashionable and important person without that person having sat for the portrait. If the painter was skillful enough the likeness would be applauded and custom would follow (indeed, the person represented might even commission a “real” portrait and sit for it). Here the value of the image lies precisely in its vecsemblance: but on the other hand, arguments about “true likeness” become redundant when one does not know the sitter. When this argument is extended over time and in relation to a national school of painting it becomes clear that portraiture is unlikely to maintain a high value, both in the sense of its position within the hierarchy and in straight economic terms of the price one might realize for the picture over time. Consequently, while the professional and aspiring middling sorts were advocating the commissioning and exchange of likenesses, high cultural theory was doing its best to trash what was by a very long way the predominant artistic form of the day.

The pleasure of portraiture is often thought to lie in the experience of recognition: we are thrilled by the art that renders a likeness. This thrill is clearly muted, if not eradicated, in the case of a representation of someone we have never seen, but it is equally intensified if the subject happens to be ourselves. It is this second case rather than the first that I shall dwell upon since the period we are investigating has an obsessive relationship to self-image. This obsession exists not merely in the literal case of portraits of oneself but also in the philosophical accounts of a well-regulated and mutually profitable society. The culture of visuality places a high premium on visibility.

In the case of the image we need to explore the specific culture of portrait production and consumption. Rouquet’s commentary gives us some first impressions: he tells us: “It is amazing how fond the English are of having their pictures drawn.” Such images came, of course, in a variety of forms: the high art social portrait by an academician was only one of the many possibilities. Others included miniature representations, silhouettes, or drawings in media other than oil. These less grand images would circulate almost like our own business cards, as Rouquet notes: “Portraiture is the kind of painting the most encouraged, and consequently the most followed in England: it is the polite custom, even for men to present one another with their pictures” (p. 33).

The culture we are becoming to get in focus is suffused with the desire to see oneself and to exchange such self-images as a form of social practice; that is what being polite entails. In sitting for a portrait this fascination with seeing oneself is also evident since at least one handbook on painting in the early decades of the century suggests that portraits are most effectively accomplished by looking at the image in a mirror. Thomas Page instructs the painter: “… you must always have a Looking-Glass behind you, wherein at times you must look to behold your Work, for that will show you your faults; whether the Masses of the Lights and Shadows, and the Bodies of the Colours be well distributed, and are all of one Piece.” This, an instruction for the painter, implicates the sitter to only a small degree in the reflective surfaces of the culture of visuality. Reynolds’s practice, however, brings the sitter into the catoptric look very forcefully indeed. We learn from Charles Leslie’s Life that Reynolds commonly set up his studio so that the sitter could see him or herself coming into representation by the simple expedient of placing a mirror obliquely to the canvas.
Leslie is quoting Beattie, who sat for Reynolds on August 16, 1773: "I sat to him five hours. in which time he finished my head and sketched out the rest of my figure. The likeness is most striking, and the execution most masterly. The figure is as large as life. Though I sat five hours, I was not in the least fatigued. for, by placing a large mirror opposite to my face, Sir Joshua Reynolds put it in my power to see every stroke of his pencil; and I was greatly entertained to observe the progress of the work, and the easy and masterly manner of the artist."15

Beattie, who claims this is an unusual practice, is corrected by Leslie, who notes: "In reality, Sir Joshua was painting from the reflection in the glass—his usual practice" (p. 33). This little anecdote points toward the fascination with coming into representation: seeing oneself made the object of the look.

Such objectification is accompanied by problematic aspects of being looked at, most obviously those concerned with the erotics of the situation. Self-regard is, perhaps, always caught up in an erotics of visualization; but in the case of having one's picture "taken" there are clear indicators of propriety. It was for this reason that women portraitists were strongly discouraged since it was believed that a woman painting a man would necessarily involve a scene of seduction. It is noteworthy that commentators on the practice of portraiture did not find the opposite situation, in which a man "takes" a likeness of a woman, equally problematic.

Similarly, it is clear from Leslie's Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds that portraits could often be realized with an audience of onlookers present there to witness the sitter's likeness appearing, as if by magic, in front of their eyes. The experience of sitting for a portrait, then, was one in which spectators' activities infused the scene of representation, and such spectatorship might be autovoyeuristic as well as simply voyeuristic. Perhaps this invasion of what we would understand as a private space is more troubling to our own notions of propriety than it was to a culture in which spectating was an obsessive practice. Nevertheless, there are clearly problematic issues over the public nature of the space.

A visit to a portrait painter, depending of course upon one's particular station in life, would most likely be undertaken within the view of others. Studios were equipped with waiting rooms specifically to cater for the frequent arrival of clients who would pass the time by inspecting the wares displayed by the artist: those portraits he chose to advertise his skill and promote the idea that he was well connected. Thus, not only would one be able to note who had sat for this particular artist, one would also be seen by others in the "gallery" or waiting room who might themselves be contemplating having their portrait done. As Rouquet notes: "Every portrait painter in England has a room to show his pictures, separate from that in which he works. People who have nothing to do, make it one of their morning amusements, to go and see these collections" (pp. 42-3).

As fashions came and went different artists would become more or less in demand and well-to-do sitters would make it their business to have a likeness taken by the current favorite portraitist. This practice might lead to problems for the artist, since his business would suddenly expand at such a rate that his pictures would need to be completed at great speed. The problem is described by Rouquet:

A portrait painter in England makes his fortune in a very extraordinary manner. As soon as he has attained a certain degree of reputation, he hires a house fit for a person of distinction; then he assumes an air of importance and superiority over the rest of his profession.... His aim then is not so much to paint well, as to paint a great deal: his design is to be in vogue, one of those exclusive vogue which for a while shall throw into his hands all the principal portraits that are to be drawn in England. If he obtains this vogue, to make proper use of it, he is obliged to work extremely quick, consequently he draws a great deal worse, by having a great deal more business. Fashion, whose empire has long ago subverted
that of reason, requires that he should paint every face in the island, as it were, against their will, and that he should be obliged to paint much worse than he would really choose, even by those who employ him. (pp. 38–9)

If this is the unhappy lot of the portraitist, his sitter is not in much better shape since fashion demands that once one artist has slipped from favor another must replace him; hence the need to have one’s portrait painted once again. Furthermore, the public nature of this coming into the visual is compounded by the fact that an ambitious artist would have been likely to submit his canvas for one of the many yearly exhibitions. Hence the prospect of being seen not only at the studio or in the process of having one’s likeness taken but also on the walls of the exhibition room, where the public would be none too reluctant to judge the various performances (and by implication the sitters depicted).

The period is suffused with concerns about visibility; indeed, entry into this cultural domain can be described in terms of becoming a portrait: an image subject to the various exchanges surrounding the production and consumption of pictures. These images of persons are at some extent implicated within the closed discourse of the history of painting; portraiture has an internal history as well as relations to the other genres. But the more general embedding of self-image in a culture determined by the visibility and visualization of the subject requires more detailed archival elaboration. It is with this aim that I turn to a “theoretical” account of the spacings of the socioscopic within eighteenth-century culture in order to approach this issue from a slightly different angle. Essentially what I will be doing is asking how far we can explore the visual culture of a past epoch through its own systematic and conscious accounts of the visual field.

A D A M  S M I T H :
T H E  T H E O R Y  O F  S P E C T A T O R I A L  S U B J E C T I V I T Y

My text is Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759),¹⁶ perhaps the most significant work of Scottish philosophy in the second half of the century. Throughout this exhaustive text of moral philosophy there runs a pretty continuous address to a concept that Smith labels the “impartial spectator.” On account of this concept, there is a marked attention to matters concerning spectacle and spectacle, terms for which we will need to add nuance in relation to the specifics of their use in Smith’s text. The period in question was, of course, obsessed with questions concerning spectatorial comportment and behavior. This was a culture in which one of the most significant publications was entitled *The Spectator*, and in all manner of public events, from hangings to masked balls, were deeply implicated within the conceptual forms of the spectacle. Smith’s text, then, is not so much emblematic as reflective, not merely responsive but also foundational.

Smith is primarily concerned with demonstrating how one might derive an ethics, that is, a mode of assessing and policing one’s actions, from the simple observation that if all members of society acted solely upon the information they derive as individuals from their own experience, then the social would collapse as self-interest overrides all impulses toward benevolent action on behalf of others. Smith comes up with a solution to this problem through his appeal to the imaginative imputation of what another might feel, based on the evidence of our own experience. This, the doctrine of sympathy, is the motor that governs a just and ethically correct society.

This sympathetic imagination is not only focused on others who might lead lives more miserable than our own; in an extraordinary conceptual concatenation it is also focused upon the subject itself. So it is that the society of spectacle in which one sees others through the prism of sympathetic imagination is warped into a self-regarding spectator sport in the production of subjectivity itself. It is worthwhile following this argument in some detail, since it will illustrate the
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1 ethics, that is, if all members of own experience, volent action on seal to the imagination: experience. This is the very morose upon the subdue through the prism of aduction of sub
will illustrate the complexity of the visual field as it is addressed by Smith's ethics.

On the opening page of the treatise Smith explains the first tenet of the doctrine of sympathy: "By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them" (p. 9). This passage describes the imaginative leap we make when confronted with others, which makes us resonate sympathetically to the plight of other individuals. Such sympathetic reactions are primarily governed by what we see. From the first, then, the visual is crucial in determining the entire system. Smith writes, "When we see a stroke aimed and just ready to fall upon the leg or arm of another person, we naturally shrink and draw back our own leg or our own arm; and when it does fall, we feel it in some measure, and are hurt by it as well as the sufferer. The mob, when they are gazing at a dancer on the slack rope, naturally writhe and twist and balance their own bodies, as they see him do, and as they feel that they themselves must do if in his situation" (p. 10). This observation is made on the second page of the treatise and is crucial in regard to almost all that follows, for what it makes absolutely clear is the reflective nature of this visual field: what one sees in the place of the other is translated by precise reflection into the body of the spectator. From this somatic reflection of the visual field in the body of the spectator it is a very small step to the rational nativ or imaginative re-creation of the sensations and feelings experienced by the observed: "...the spectator must, first of all, endeavor, as much as he can, to put himself in the situation of the other, and to bring home to himself every little circumstance of distress which can possibly occur to the sufferer" (p. 21).

Smith makes it clear that the spectator will never quite manage to reproduce at the same intensity those feelings of the other since sympathetic sentiment is, in the last analysis, "imaginary" (p. 22). However, this difference leads the spectator to notice a tension within himself between the feelings he experiences in his own right and those he experiences through this imaginative projection onto the observed. It is this tension that leads the spectator to ponder not only what it might be like to be the afflicted person but also what it might be like to be spectated upon. In an extremely important sentence Smith writes: "As they are constantly considering what they themselves would feel, if they actually were the sufferers, so he is as constantly led to imagine in what manner he would be affected if he was only one of the spectators of his own situation" (p. 22). Here the catoptric nature of the society of spectacle begins to be fully and sophisticatedly articulated. Not only does the spectator in Adam Smith's theater of morality look upon others with imaginative sympathy: he also looks upon himself in the same manner. In this sense subjectivity is precisely not positioned in the eye of the beholder but, rather, in the exchanges that occur in the phantasmic projection of what it might feel like to be constituted as a subject by looking on the onlookers of our selves. The moral agent in Smith views himself in the light in which he is conscious that others will view him (p. 83); hence, we must "imagine ourselves not the actors but the spectators of our own character and conduct" (p. 111). This extraordinary note continues: "[W]e must consider how these would affect us when viewed from this new station, in which their excellencies and imperfections can alone be discovered. We must enter, in short, either into what are, or into what ought to be, or into what, if the whole circumstances of our conduct were known, we imagine would be the sentiments of others, before we can applaud or condemn it" (p. 111).

Agency here takes on a very indirect form, essentially being translated into spectatorial sympathy for ourselves. The full extent of this society of the spectacle is to turn even the subject as agent into the object of the gaze: we locate ourselves, or come to self-description, through the agency of a sympathetic fantasy projection in which we image to ourselves what we would look like were we the spectator looking upon us as we are looked upon. This reflection to the power of three is figured as a triangulation of the visual field, which might well be imaged in the form of Loccit's
third diagram discussed earlier.

Smith, however, does not leave things there since he turns the figure one more time in his attempt to account for this overly voyeuristic scheme. It is in this respect that the infamous "impartial spectator" comes to the rescue. This idealized position: the spectator who is never locatable within a specific individual, within a real person, represents the best-case scenario: the spectator as the projection of every individual who aspires to the condition of the ethically sound. This idealized person must be internalized within the breast of every man who would be judged according to the precepts he holds dear. Smith writes,

The man of real constancy and firmness... has never dared to forget for one moment the judgment which the impartial spectator would pass upon his sentiments and conduct. He has never dared to suffer the man within the breast to be absent one moment from his attention... With the eyes of this great inmate he has always been accustomed to regard whatever relates to himself. This habit has become perfectly familiar to him. He has been in the constant practice, and indeed, under the constant necessity, of modelling, or of endeavoring to model, not only his outward conduct and behavior, but, as much as he can,... even his inward sentiments and feelings, according to those of this awful and respectable judge. He does not merely affect the sentiments of this impartial spectator. He really adopts them. He almost identifies himself with him; he almost becomes himself that impartial spectator, and scarce even feels but as that great arbiter of his conduct directs him to feel: (pp. 146-7)

The result is a society in which one's sense of self and indeed one's actions are entirely regulated through the triangulation of the gaze: one looks at oneself as if one were a spectator for another. Above all else it is a society predicated upon the correct insertion of the subject into visibility: into the visual field constructed according to the phantasmic projection of an imaginary third person. Autovoyeurism might perhaps be what this insertion feels like, and it should be acknowledged here that given its sociocultural determinants, this mapping of visibility cannot remain inert in regard to markers of subjectivity such as economic status, class, or gender.

I want to pass on quickly now to an example, since what I have said so far remains pretty much at a theoretical level. If, as I have suggested, Smith articulates a position for spectatorship that not only relies upon the phantasmic projection of a third person who enables and enacts the visual, who makes visibility visible, but also in some curious manner erases the possibility of seeing with one's own eyes (a project, for example, explicitly launched in Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty*, which constructs a model of visibility based upon the phantasmic projection of seeing from within the object out onto its surface—another form of the visual that also locates the gaze outside the body of the viewer)—if this is the position created by Smith, then what are its effects in the cultural realm?

Smith essentially claims that within the obsessively spectatorial culture of the Enlightenment the spectator is precisely constructed in and through fantasy. As such the position occupied by the real spectator is constantly produced as a site of contest: a contest in regard to one's social definition as either masculine or effeminate, ethically sanctioned or reprimanded, a man of retirement or a man of the world. We can see how these specifics of the site of contest are ranged by taking a very brief example in which the gender of the site of sight, the gender of the look, is clearly an issue.

THE VISIBILITY OF VISUALITY:
VAUXHALL GARDENS

Vauxhall Gardens might be termed the *locus classicus* for a detailed investigation into the British eighteenth-century culture of the visibility of visibility. Here in these pleasure gardens the theory of
spectatorial subjectivity was literally paraded in front of one’s eyes; here one paid an entry fee in
order to gain access to the spacings of a publicly visible culture of visibility. It was more than
fitting, then, that in a garden where above all else one went to look at others looking at oneself, to
indulge in the delights of voyeurism through the eidotropic glance, the following contest around
the gender of the look was staged.

My example illustrates the difficulty of unpacking something as complex as visuality when it
is read historically, since the case I am going to present is not only folded into the contestatory
spaces of the visual field and the ways that gender is constructed in such spaces, it is also deeply
embedded within the larger sociocultural operations of gender itself. We cannot really speak of the
visual without also speaking of the period’s alignment of gender specificities. This is to signal that
gender, for the period, is far from a binary division. the masculine and the feminine, but is con-
structed in a range of discourses that lay claim to determining status in regard to the question of
sexuality and at the same time resist penetration by and register the impermeability of certain forms
of the subject that encode specific gender assignations. I hope this range will become more clear in
my example, an intricate account of an incident that took place in Vauxhall Gardens. The text was
published in 1773 and is titled The Vauxhall Affray: or, the Macaronies Defeated.

The text is a collection of letters and reports of an incident that allegedly took place in the
gardens in which a clergyman named Bate and an actress named Hartley were supposedly accosted
by a group of macaronies. those strange effeminate creatures who were fashionable at the time. The
so-called affray is quite explicitly the result of a contest over the gaze: Bate, the clergyman, claimed
that he was made to feel so uncomfortable by the young men ogling the actress that he challenged
one of them, a certain Fitz-Geral. The ensuing argument was very clearly one over the spectatorial
rights of the two men and, it should be made clear, was foregrounded by the specific location:
Vauxhall Gardens, the place above all others in which the sitting of the viewer was made so public,
in which visuality was made so visible. The question in the dispute between the two men was, then,
who should have power within the visual: the upstanding clergyman occupying the traditional
position of the masculine spectator or the effeminate beau whose gender identity was less certain
and viewing position less unambiguous.

We must note that the position of the spectator object, the woman Hartley hardly figures in the
affray and that the politics of the gaze are contested by males occupying differing positions
within the spectrum of eighteenth-century modes of masculinity. Bate, in his description, marshals
the cultural disapprobation in calling the macaronies, “these pretty beings” who stare “at her with that
kind of petit-maitre audacity, which no language, but the modern French, can possibly describe” (p.
11). Here Bate is attempting to disempower his rivals in the spectatorial contest: the beau, while
laying claim to the position of the spectator, are in fact a spectacle, objectified by Bate’s gaze upon
them as “pretty beings.” Such objectification is intensified through the use of the term of abuse,
“French,” which for a certain part of this culture represents not only all that is other but all that is
objectizable.

The question over the triangulation of the spectatorial position is explicitly raised by Bate in
his comment that “to be a silent spectator of such insolence, would be tacitly to countenance it,”
that is, to occupy the position of the impartial spectator would leave the question of male gender
undecided and the vectorial direction of the gaze ambiguous. Consequently Bate enters into the
exchange of looks and therefore the contestatory spacings of visuality: “I became now the subject
of their loud horse-laughs and wise remarks. Thus unpleasantly circumstanced, I thought it better
to face these desperadoes, and therefore turned about and looked them, in my turn, full in the face;
in consequence of which, some distortions of features, I believe, passed on both sides” (pp. 10–11).

What is happening here is a face-off in which each party attempts to master and control the
site of spectatorial authority and in so doing make of the opponent not, as we saw in Adam Smith,
the catoptric other who gives back self-image but the object of the look: the spectacle we witness. In this case the question of gender becomes extremely fraught since what these two differently inflected gendered men are fighting over is both the right to look at another object: the woman who occupies the picture plane upon which the spectator wishes to gaze, and the right to make a spectacle of oneself. This question is explicitly stated by Fitz-Gerall, who asks Bate "whether any man had not a right to look at a fine woman" (p. 13). Of course Bate believes the problem lies precisely in "any man," since some men occupy the powerful masculine position of the gaze whereas others do not and should not. Bate says in reply that he "despised the man who did not look at a fine woman" while going on to assert that Fitz-Gerall and his macaronies look at Hartley in the wrong way (p. 14). What we see going on here is a homosocial contest over the right to spectatorial authority.

The power relation does not flow only in one direction, however, since Bate, the "correct" male, admits the possibility that he might be seduced out of his upstanding masculinity when he claims that Fitz-Gerall's presence "of aerial divinity courted my thoughts from manhood, to a silent contemplation of the progressive beauties of the pygmy system" (p. 35). Here Bate comes close to expressing homophobia when faced with the demand that he articulate his own form of manhood, a feature of the encounter that is intensified by the inclusion of a poem in the text called The Macaroniad, which explicitly states that the macaroni occupies an ambiguous and disturbing mixed-gender position:

But Macaronis are a sex
Which do philosophers perplex.
The' all the priests of VENUS' rites
Agree they are Hermaphrodites. (p. 59)

Although this corroborates of Bate's "normalizing" masculinity and the objectification of the female by the gaze is pretty clear, an even more forceful policing of masculinity is performed by a so-called impartial spectator who writes a letter. In this contribution to the text Fitz-Gerall is advised to appear only in petticoats at Vauxhall for the remainder of the season, as the most likely method of escaping the chastisement due for his late unmanly and senseless conduct" (pp. 71–72).

So it comes about that the position of the spectator whereby one form of the male gaze makes into another a spectacle is asserted as heterosexually normalized. The macaroni is removed from the possibility of acting as the other, the phantasmic projection of oneself as an onlooker, since he becomes objectified in the guise of an abnormal, effeminate male who nevertheless also strives to occupy the empowered position of the male gaze that objectifies the feminine. In the example, then, the gaze is not held to be monolithic, in one stable position, clearly defined and operating without causing disturbance within the visual field. On the contrary, it is shown to be mobile, a site of contest in which competing versions of masculinity attempt to render each other a spectacle to themselves. The moral of the story, then, is that it better to be a spectator than a spectacle.

This point is made explicit in another "letter to the editor" in which someone claiming to have overheard the conversation at the time of the fray sends in a report as follows:

Vauxhall Intelligence Extraordinary

Some part of the conversation between the rioters of this place being omitted in other papers, we insert it here for the entertainment of our readers.

Mr. Bate: Why do you, Sir, thrust yourself into this quarrel?
Mr. Fitz-Gerall: I would always be forward to assist my injured friend.
Mr. Bate: Forward enough—but would you defend him right or wrong? Has he not insulted a fine woman?
Mr. Fitz-Gerall: Insulted, Sir! I always thought a fine woman was only made to be looked at.
Mr. Bate: Just sentiments of a macaroni. You judge of the fair sex as you do of your own doubtful gender, which aims only to be looked at and admired.
Mr. Fitz-Gerall: I have as great a love for a fine woman as any man.
Mr. Bate: Psha! Lupus tute es et putamen region quaeris?
Mr. Fitz-Gerall: What do you say, Parson?
Mr. Bate: I cry you mercy, Sir. I am talking heathen Greek to you. In plain English I say, A macaroni you, and love a woman?
Mr. Fitz-Gerall: I love the ladies, for the ladies love me.
Mr. Bate: Yes, as their pantie, their play-thing, their harmless bauble, to treat as you do them, merely to look at; but pray, Sir, what have you to do in the present dispute?
Mr. Fitz-Gerall: To support my friend, and prove myself a man.
Mr. Bate: God help the friend who stands in need of such support; and as to your manhood, Sir, you had better secure yourself under your acknowledged neutrality, or you may feel the weight of my resentment.
Mr. Fitz-Gerall: I see you are a bruiser, I shall answer you by my servant.
Mr. Bate: You speak like yourself, Sir; macaroni like, you do everything by proxy; whether you quarrel, or make love, you answer proxy. (p. 100)

With my example, I have endeavored to demonstrate the extent to which gender and the gaze are both concepts of considerable elasticity. Unlike the contemporary theoretical account, which tends to impose a rigidly schematic version of the male gaze, the Enlightenment example demonstrates the complexity of the socioscopic. In *The Vassall Affair* this complexity is brought to light in a kind of contest staged between competing versions of masculinity and the gaze. Where Bate stands for a "normalizing" masculinity, his opponent Fitz-Gerall is painted as a self-regarding deviant, precisely the "pretty creature" whose "snow-white bosom is decorated with the miniature resemblance of his own sweet person" (p. 72). Though I have characterized these different positions as constituting some form of contest, it might also be relevant to note that a less conflictual possibility is imagined by the period in which something like a heterocritics of the visual field emerges. Perhaps it is this less conflictual form of our being in visuality that contemporary theory might profitably explore.

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