Dictionary of Visual Discourse

A Dialectical Lexicon of Terms

Barry Sandywell

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For Isabel Lavín Garzón

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in paperback 2017

First published 2011
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Sandywell, Barry.
Dictionary of visual discourse : a dialectical lexicon of terms.
1. Aesthetics—Dictionaries. 2. Visualization—Dictionaries.
I. Title
121.3'5'03-dc22

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Sandywell, Barry
Dictionary of visual discourse : a dialectical lexicon of terms / Barry Sandywell.
p.cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-4094-0188-9 (hardcover) – ISBN 978-1-4094-0198-6 (ebook)
1. Aesthetics—Dictionaries. 2. Vision—Dictionaries. 3. Hermaneutics—Dictionaries. 4. Image (Philosophy)—Dictionaries. I. Title

BH39.S257 2009
111'85—dc22

ISBN: 978-1-409-40188-9 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-138-10240-8 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-57709-8 (ebk)

Typeset in Constantia
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

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Acknowledgements

My greatest debt is to Isabel Lavín Garzón; if it was possible I would like to acknowledge her presence in every word, line and page of this work. Whatever illumination I have found in the researches that inform this book has been made possible by her unfailing love, friendship and support.

I would like to acknowledge a number of people involved in bringing the *Dictionary of Visual Discourse* into the public domain. I wish to extend my thanks to Dymphna Evans, Publisher at Ashgate, for supporting this project and providing timely advice and encouragement throughout the production process, Pam Bertram, Senior Editor, for efficiently managing the text through the production stages, and Patrick Cole for his keen copy-editor's eye and probing questions. All their help has been much appreciated.

List of Lexicon Terms

Introduction

'Words have created the world'
Aphorism

'The world is the signature of the Word'
Heinrich Heine, *The Poetry and Prose of Heinrich Heine*, 1948: 651

'Every word was once a poem ... The poets made all the words, and therefore language is the archives of history, and, if we must say it, a sort of tomb of the muses. For, though the origin of most of our words is forgotten, each word was at first a stroke of genius, and obtained currency, because for the moment it symbolized the world to the first speaker and to the hearer ... Language is fossil poetry'
Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The Poet', 1993: 72–3; also 1981: 311–13

'It has caused me the greatest trouble, and for ever causes me the greatest trouble, to perceive that unspeakably more depends upon what things are called, than on what they are'
Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 1974 §58

'Being that can be understood is language'
Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 1975, xxii–xxiii; also 1977: 103

Part One: Prologues

'Wittgenstein once said that a serious and good philosophical work could be written that would consist entirely of jokes'
Norman Malcolm, 1966: 29

'Lexicographer. A writer of dictionaries, a harmless drudge'
Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language*

'Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine; they are the life, the soul of reading'
Laurence Sterne, 1967, Book 1, chapter 22

EXPERIENCE IN A THANATONIC AGE

'A word is worth a thousand pictures'

There is a growing consensus among commentators across the sciences, arts and humanities that we live in an advanced technological-industrial age driven by an insatiable appetite for images and visual forms of knowledge. Some describe this situation as the 'hegemony of the visual'. Others speak of a pervasive 'ocularcentrism' within Western culture. For yet others, 'culture' is tacitly understood as shorthand for *visual culture* or even the 'mass culture' promoted by the global culture industries. All of these descriptions recognize that while human beings have always created images and reflected upon their creations, today we are moving toward a global society structured around the corporate production, dissemination and conspicuous consumption of images.

Whatever our explanations of this situation – and we have no dearth of historical and sociological speculations – critical discourse is obliged to come to terms with an unprecedented condition where every social world – and perhaps every social relationship – is now image-mediated. We live in an era where the 'imagification' of the world and everyday life proceeds on a planetary scale. We live in societies where *commodity imagineering* dominates all other social relationships and institutions.

In the following introductory 'Prologues' I wish to take a preliminary sounding of some of the names that have been given and that might be given to articulate the visual culture of late modern societies. We need to ask: How should we *reflect* upon and understand the terms of vision? Is it possible to disclose the hidden order behind the new visual culture? How, in other words, should we *think* the visual? To understand the singularity of this cultural condition we require something like a genealogy and

critique of the deep structures of Western visuality. It will soon be evident that such a genealogy will necessarily involve a history of self-reflection and its institutions; it is also a political project as we are immediately confronted by the semantic constellation of image, language and violence as these enter the flesh of ordinary life.

The first name we meet in these speculations is 'the West' or the older term, 'Europe'. What contemporaries call *globalization* (or *mondialization*) is possibly one of the last phases of the Westernization of the world. The project of Westernization has its origins in the quest to build empires crafted in the *images* of an idealized European identity – among these, Hebraic prophecy and theocentric communality, Greek universality and cosmopolitanism, the Roman imperium and rationalized legal system, universal Christianity, scientific rationality, Cartesian reason, Enlightenment liberalism and democratic revolution. Each of these cultural forms crystallized around an image-complex – each constellation having a universalizing *visual* paradigm as its radiating core. A philosopher of the stature of Jan Patočka (1907–77) could thus claim that the distinctiveness of Europe lies in the fact that 'European civilization has insight into the nature of things, while all others have tradition as their foundation' (2002: 221). By inventing the idea of rational *insight* – the *idea of the Idea* and the disinterested pursuit of *truth* – Europe makes generalization and universality possible and upon this regime of truth constructs worlds of science, mathematics, physics, political philosophy, technology, literacy, universal education (the university), and so forth. The European invention of the *Idea* – the Platonic way of thinking – is coeval with the invention of the idea constellation we call 'Europe'.

But clearly such an 'image of the West', in its sweeping generality, is an inadequate formulation – an abstract *idealization* – for what was in reality a disjunctive and heterogeneous series of histories constructed from discontinuous vectors that were simultaneously paths of violence and struggle as well as paths of thought. The construction of European *self-images* was in fact the outcome of centuries of imaginative experiments, innovations and passions that have criss-crossed the boundaries of 'West' and 'East' from the very beginning. 'Europe' can therefore never name a pure essence. Europe is first a matrix of questions and transformational forces. It is also a name with a thousand facets. For example, the appropriation and re-naming of non-European Others – as alterities that were either liquidated or incorporated in the long march of Western progress – was decisively determined by speculative visions of civilization, religious orthodoxies and the violent dissemination of universalist ideologies, literatures and sciences (Wallerstein, 2006). From the very beginning Europe's war on traditions and localisms was advanced by framing the horizon of possibilities so that only *Western* conceptions of life and knowledge – perhaps only the European 'love of truth' – would be countenanced as viable and normative forms of existence (Patočka's 'history is the history of Europe', *op. cit.*: 222 or Husserl, in the *Crisis*, celebrating the infinite *telos* of European humanity). In the history of Western philosophy this struggle is recurrently dramatized as the war against *mythos* conducted through *logos*, forgetting that *logos* itself harbours a new *mythos*. While the monopoly of truth and transcendence could never be realized, its unintended outcome is a situation where contemporary life is now saturated with images drawn from the depths of a triumphant European culture (if there is such a thing). *Logos* became the new *mythos*. But as we will see below, *logos* is now retreating before the new *mythos* of the image.

Whatever the complex antecedents of Westernization, we now inhabit a planetary society with a passion for sights and spectacles that has redefined the very landscape of modern experience. Being born into an image-saturated world, we forget how previous societies were visually impoverished – where even simple signs and visual symbols were relatively rare phenomena. In these postmetaphysical times, however, even our social identities, moral criteria and political self-understandings are largely drawn from visual media. Every possible surface is covered with representations; the plane of manifestation has itself relinquished its ontological privileges to simulacra. Coming to the end of this long process of imagification, we might justifiably call the social orders of the highly industrialized societies, *videological* cultures. The supreme ruse of universalization was to convince myriad others that their indigenous knowledges and sensory worlds must be surrendered in the name of progress – the *idea* of progress – and that once underway the 'forces of progress' would brook no alternatives (ancient traditions would be subsumed under one universal *Culture*, the galaxy of languages made subservient to the monolingual discourse of representational *knowledge*). And where the force of argument proved impotent, there was always the argument of force.

If not handled with great care, this picture of 'Western hegemony' lures us into false conclusions. Like the monolithic concepts of 'East' and 'West', the dominion of the logos was always more dream than reality. Yet the abstract *image* of Western universality conceals a very real history of violent destruction, colonization and imperial conquest. Each step on this path is marked by crisis. In this sense the empire of the sign preserves a series of local truths, each symbolized by a historical injustice. Non-Western space proved to be intractable and recalcitrant, ensuring that the Europeanization of the world would be deflected and disempowered in its campaigns against its manifold 'others' (recall that one 'trajectory' of Westernization was Russia's nineteenth-century adventures into the east of the European continent). In fact European 'visions' (of life, politics, moral order, democracy, language, art, philosophy, and so on) had to be forcibly imposed, carved into hearts and minds through state apparatuses, and reproduced through coercive social systems. European colonization invariably resulted in a clash of cultures and the export of conflict throughout the non-Western world.

Sociologists have graced this deadly process with the title *modernity* (*la modernité*). But the word 'modernity' also names the epoch of world wars, 'ethnic cleansing' and mass slaughter carried out in the name of competing *visions* of a Eurocentred world order. The trail of genocides runs from Greek slave mines and Roman *latifundia* to the Spanish conquest of the Americas, the Black Atlantic slave trade, the ruthless elimination of native peoples in North America, Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand and beyond. The long history of these civilizing passions and global genocides prepared the way for the industrialization of death that punctuates both the beginning and the end of the twentieth century. In the aftermath of bureaucratically planned mass death, powdered cities and blasted lives, we could describe the present historical epoch as a *thanatonic age*. Its most visible aspect is the total militarization of life on earth. Its most threatening prospect is the death of nature itself. The growing body of historical knowledge suggests that these periodic bouts of collective self-destruction have a long history as the very engine of Western modernity.

We now understand that such 'visions' were also inevitably *languages* – rhetorics, events, *discourses of power*. To this day global visuality is still pervaded by the signs and languages that evolved over centuries of expansion and conquest. These symbolisms of crisis are deposited, so to speak, in the cultural unconscious of contemporary life. Martin Heidegger, for example, speaks of the end or 'closure' of philosophy as 'the beginning of the world civilization based upon Western European thinking' ('The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking', 1978: 377). But we should also note that the repressed 'others' created by Western rationalization remain stubbornly embedded in its most celebrated practices and discourses. The alterities that disappeared in this process are preserved like archaeological layers in language. This is what we 'own' when speaking of 'our Western culture'. While the putative lords of the earth have long since vanished, their ghosts live on in our forms of thought, writing and language. We continue to speak of 'philosophy', 'democracy', 'freedom', and so on, and still imagine history as the *actualization* of thought (if, today, technoscientific thought). We still *write* under the auspices of scientific paradigms.

There is, then, *contra* Marx, more than one spectre that continues to haunt Europe. The processes which sociologists call 'hybridization', 'indigenization' and 'syncretism' are ineradicable effects of these ghostly machinations, as is the very *idea* of a tradition of critical thought, literature, political philosophy and social theorizing (the culture that made slavery its watchword also produced universalist discourses of justice, human rights and political freedom). The mind-set and thought worlds underlying these deadly processes belong to a class of terms we might call *fatal concepts*. It is these terministic screens that we need to deconstruct.

On a more immediate level, the visions imposed by Western technologies – and here we would include alphabetic writing, political machinery, religious apparatuses and other spiritual technologies – were inevitably bound up with other senses and with practices authorized by concrete sensory experiences. To understand the project of modernity, then, it is necessary to grasp both the creativity and the destructiveness of these sensory, social and technological mutations. For example, in the long history of European languages, the 'masculine' eye has fought a continuous war against the 'feminine' ear. In the name of reason, an idealized 'spirit' claimed dominion over profane 'material' embodiments. The life of the senses had to make way for reflections on the sense of life. Analytic reason dominated synoptic intuition. Modern scientificity, in its remarkable development, willingly sacrificed oral traditions and everyday practical reasoning for the utopia of universal legality. Formal clarity and measure – the mathematization of the world – were secured at the expense of concrete experience. Sensory *doxa* and *phronesis* would be replaced by replicable algorithms and verifiable theory. *Mythos* was to be overthrown by *logos*. By neglecting the primacy of everyday praxis and an ancient multi-sensorialism, modern science relinquished ancient languages articulating auditory, olfactory, haptic and kinaesthetic experience. Fixated upon the visual, Western culture neglected a much older dialogue of word and image. Secure in its foundations and energized by the Faustian promise to construct a 'man-made' civilization, modernity's obsession with formal codes and visual closure necessarily excluded the lived experiences of women, children and other marginalized groups. Modernity's wake takes on the appearance of a vast swathe of lost knowledge.

THE EMPIRE OF THE VISUAL

Westernization, then, was certainly no dream. Modernization operates as a machinery of forgetting. The whole earth has been materially shaped by the impress of brutal visions of order, rule and empire with European credentials. At the risk of flattening the complexities involved, we can still speak of vision-fuelled violence, the utopian fantasies that propelled Europeans across the globe, the imperial eye and the bureaucratic gaze of administrative imperatives. As the German sociologist Max Weber taught, the rationalized machine of bureaucracy is one of the most decisive exports of European culture. But Weber elided the fact that bureaucracy is itself a force of violence rather than being a neutral instrument of administration. Weber died before the epoch of industrialized world wars and bureaucratic totalitarianism swept through Europe. The European expansion into non-Western space, with all its contradictory consequences, has been *the* fundamental historical event of the last half millennium. Viewed retrospectively, the industrialization of the world can now be seen as a thanatonic project predicated upon the systematic exploitation of congealed 'light' (in the form of fossil fuels or 'dead energy') to liberate and harness 'live energy' as the material condition of capitalist social relations and expansionary production systems. While the dream of civilization was terminally wounded in the catastrophe of the 'Great War' of 1914–18 and effectively disintegrated after Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Treblinka and the onset of the nuclear age, the machineries unleashed by the West continue to dominate millions of lives across the globe. European modernity takes the form of a blood-drenched one-way street.

Let us provisionally accept the broad sociological thesis that we live in a global culture dominated by the 'military-industrial-infotainment' complex. The unholy alliance of empire, military power and industrialized culture forged in the nineteenth century is now the inescapable reality of the present age. These changes precipitated seismic shifts in social relationships and cultural forms. Centuries-old traditions were forced to mutate and re-envision themselves. Ancient status orders gave way to new class formations. The ascetic, rationalized and ideological capitalism described by Marx and Weber has long since been eclipsed. The 'national capitalisms' that motivated the great efforts of social theory in the nineteenth century have dissolved into air and been replaced by interlocking systems promising infinite profit-opportunities, geo-political conquest, and mutually assured destruction. Nationally bounded urbanization has been replaced by the uncontrollable sprawl of mega-cities. Old-style colonialism has given way to technological and cultural neo-colonialism. Local industrial transformations have been incorporated into networks of global industrialization. Low-tech production is displaced by high-tech electronics, computing and digital media. Hence the truth content of the adjective 'global' in contemporary critical discourse. But 'global' also signifies the violent collisions of worlds and cultures. In long-durational terms, these momentous events and unprecedented mutations cost the lives of hundreds of millions of people, a mortal audit of oppression and alienation that casts a dark shadow over contemporary history. To borrow Hegel's observation, history – and he is primarily speaking of *Western* history – assumes the appearance of a slaughter-bench 'at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states, and the virtue of individuals have been victimized' (1956: 21). And behind the bloodletting we find the visual technologies and

marmoreal forms of Graeco-Latin-Christian culture. The distance between Hegel and the present generation can be measured by the fact that we can no longer meaningfully ask 'to what principle, to what final aim these enormous sacrifices have been offered' (1956: 21). In a world without God, the cunning of history, Spirit's ulterior manipulation of evil, and the theodicy of a rational historical *telos* are simply empty phrases.

Today the imagineering industries of late modernity operate as an armature of collective forgetting on a global scale. What once passed for popular culture has been literally saturated by the products of the new culture industries (from television to digital film, gaming, mobile telephony, and so on). And it would seem that all of these media are in flight from coming to terms with the slaughterhouse of European history. The Progress of Reason and Universal Emancipation ring hollow when lined up against the imaginative forms of harm and destruction thought up by human beings over the past two centuries. While large parts of the earth have been turned into toxic dumps and war-zones, the business of finance capitalism continues as *show* business. Correspondingly, modern politics has become the politics of immediate visibility and staged re-presentation, a politics of managed impressions and sound bytes and, increasingly, a politics of celebrity, exposure and scandal. In reality there is no longer any meaningful separation between mediated culture, politics and everyday life. In one generation we have witnessed the almost total 'culturalization of daily life' (Jameson, 1994: 147). What passes for 'history' are distorted facsimiles and sanitized versions of an imagined past. History is laundered of its savagery and horror. Just as we live designer lives, so we have air-brushed histories, politically correct language, 'national curricula' and just plain-old repression of the facts.

It seems that the world has been turned upside-down. Everything 'real' has to be *on show*. What was once called *reality* becomes 'other' than itself. Everywhere we witness the recession and disappearance of the real. What was traditionally known as 'national security' is replaced by the balance of terror. Place proliferates into endless virtual 'spaces'. Time itself must be abolished. Fantasy becomes a powerful force in the corporate metamorphosis of the real. The repetition engines of controlled imagination are securely in the driving seat of economic growth. Idealized body images and aspirational self-representations are modelled upon the digitally perfect air-brushed exemplars of screen beauty. The new icons of beauty have themselves become an integral part of the ubiquitous entertainment media of global capitalism. Thus one recent survey claimed that the larger part of the female population of the advanced societies actively hate their bodies and aspire to change their appearance to bring it in line with aspirational media icons. Body dissatisfaction and self-hatred lead to such pernicious 'civilizational' syndromes as anorexia and bulimia that rob individuals of self-respect and a sense of identity. In the interlocking markets that now constitute contemporary economic life, 'looking good' and fulfilling the demands of idealized beauty becomes a basic entry qualification. Susie Orbach has observed that the 'cosmetic industry, which is nominally medical, is a growth industry. The worldwide market for cosmetic surgery and facial cosmetic rejuvenation was valued at nearly $14 billion in sales for 2007 and is growing at $1 billion a year' (2009: 85). Body transformation is the Ovidian promise of hyperconsumerism. It is, then, no exaggeration to say that global consumer culture is dominated by visual simulacra.

Celebrity culture has taken as its own maxim the Berkeleyan adage, *esse est percipi*: '*To exist is to be seen*'. Mass entertainment structured around visual fantasies has become a vehicle for a new kind of body politics. The cult of celebrity 'has brought us an invidious version of sharing. By creating internationally recognizable iconic figures, it appears to be inclusive and democratic. In reality the visual nature of our world sucks out variety and replaces it with a vision that is narrow and limited as far as age, body type and ethnicity are concerned' (Orbach, 2009: 145). In a globally commodified world, visual paradigms of life, success and the 'good life' are inevitably hyper-sexualized: 'The sexualisation of our children's world is caught up with consumerism and a false erotic, leaving them as confused about the sexual as they are about where their bodies and their body-based needs begin and end' (*ibid*.: 145). Such is the postmodern condition of total media visibility and the continuous, if unannounced, war against the realms of pre-videological sensory experience and cultural difference. The governing idea behind these regimes is the almost uncontested thesis that if the world is not visible it is not intelligible and, perhaps, non-existent. History's invisibility conspires with the more general cultural amnesia to ensure its own demise. In a perverse popularized Kantianism, if we cannot present the object visually it has no meaning; if we cannot re-present the subject it has no existence.

In such a theatricalized world we are no longer insulated from civil conflicts, wars, atrocities and natural disasters. The *Wille zur Macht* continues, but we now experience violence against others in a continuous loop of repetitive images. Images of war and unremitting violence have framed the popular history of the past century. Networked television has brought these atrocious events into our homes. Like a macabre ritual we gather each night before the daily news of violent death (we also recall the cliché that the American invasion of Vietnam was the first media war and that it was television that played the critical role in turning public opinion against the war). These changes have transformed every viewer of digital media into silent witnesses of global events. Digitalized images of destruction blur with computer-generated war games as we passively follow the trajectory of Tomahawk cruise missiles and cluster bombs liquidating human beings across the many theatres of war (the list is almost endless: Hiroshima, Korea, Cambodia, Liberia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Rwanda, Iraq, Afghanistan, and so on). Each viewer becomes the embodiment of the will of the state.

IMAGINEERING THE MODERN *THEATRUM MUNDI*

To pursue the vocation of critical discourse and progressive transformation in these circumstances is to believe in a future global dispensation liberated from the destructive forms of the past. The first step is to return to the roots of this cultural condition, by recalling that none of these modern marvels would be possible without the resources of language and the rhetorical creativity that modern visual culture has hijacked for its own ends. The catastrophic events we have mentioned have left a detritus of words, symbols and ideologies that are still indispensable to critical thought – freedom, democratic rights, justice, education, truth, 'crimes against humanity', and so on. In this sense the Westernization of the world was as much a *language revolution* as a radical transformation of economic and political institutions. If there is no escape from

modernity, we perhaps need to turn back to the words, forms of writing and thoughtful practices that made modernity possible. If the language-games of the new media have the unintended effect of underlining the sad reflection that every culture gets the language it deserves, it also salvages the modest insight that words and language remain the only secure windows into the past, the only medium left to explain how we have ended up in this thanatonic condition. If it is true that a dominant *form* of visual knowledge – one shaped by an essentially atomistic and monadological conception of mental life – has been elevated to a universal condition of intelligibility, we need to ask how this abstract and alienated *ideology of seeing* has come to shape every form of life in contemporary society. This is one of the urgent tasks of critical self-reflection. We need, in other words, to engage in a radical re-thinking of the constitutive grounds of the thanatonic age.

Of course it is possible that most, if not all, societies have been shaped by symbolic displays and conspicuous spectacles as a collective means of establishing public order and normative identity. Visuality is clearly not an invention of modernity. Some of the oldest works of European culture – the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Oresteia* and *Bible* among these – are *visual* epics. Indeed how a society or whole civilization organizes its visual life – how it *objectifies* visuality in language – is directly implicated in its power relationships and political orderings. Conspicuous displays of political allegiance and symbolic identification – what we might call political aesthetics – provide the necessary instruments by which every preceding social order has celebrated itself and maintained its legitimacy. While a final assessment of these claims must await the evidence of detailed comparative historical and sociological research, in what follows I will pursue the hypothesis that while visual experience appears to be a natural order, upon further reflection it turns out to be a highly complex and culturally variable socio-historical formation. As individuals we enter a social-symbolic order of known and knowable things. We are subject to the dominant norms and values that define spaces of appearance. We 'meet' the world through the lenses of beliefs, religious images and symbolisms – in sum through *imaginary* formations. Here language and communication play a truly fundamental role.

This idea of social, linguistic and cultural constitution comes close to the sociological truism that every society must imaginatively re-present itself to itself as a condition of its existence. Understood correctly this is another way of saying that every society must *think*. Every social order must enact a form of *self-thinking* (minimally it must be aware of itself *as* a social order). As members of a community, we find ourselves not only within the fabric of an existing 'body politic' but within a *regime of truth*. In this context, 'thinking' needs to be approached as a *world-constituting* process. 'Thinking' is first collective and then individual. Such 'spaces' are primarily sites of aesthetic performances, 'stagings' of truthful possibilities that frame everyday behaviour. I will argue in what follows that images (and more generally, systems of information) play a critical role in constructing such regimes of truth.

On a collective level, every visual regime must also operate as an economy of pleasure, a distribution of desires that functions as a lever of identity formation and socialization (and, of course, regimes of truth and pleasure interact in complex ways). A society's affective economy articulates practices and institutions whose primary concern is with the idealized representation of core identities and dominant values. Cultural

systems also organize themselves by visibilizing recurrent threats to the established reality principles. Individuals need to be taught who their adversaries are, who they are struggling *against* and where the boundaries between 'us' and 'them' are to be drawn. Whether they are recognized as such, all of this society-forming work involves institutional modes of thinking and speech. If every society must 'account' for itself, such accounting practices operate like normative apparatuses through which social life makes itself symbolically visible and reportable. When institutionalized, these 'identity machines' – as apparatuses of recognition – become part of the general cultural *habitus*, inseparable from the image flesh of the social body. We might even hypothesize that every social order produces its own unique *theatrum mundi*. Like the performative scenarios presupposed by individual self-awareness, a society generates collective images of its idealized self *and* agonistic others as instruments of self-understanding. Such truth machines function as the public repertoires of societal self-reflection (we can then speak about the moral order – an order which has largely consisted of visible paradigms of virtue and vice, good and evil, normal and abnormal, and so on). In this way social institutions both reproduce the ruling political system but also come to articulate the imaginary structure of ideological threats to that order. In what follows it will be important to distinguish between four imaginary functions: (1) images *in* the world; (2) images *of* the world; (3) images *for* the world; and (4) images *as* the world. While these are analytically distinct functions, a fully institutionalized 'imaginary' will combine all four components (for example, the stage of advanced 'culturalization' or 'hyperreality' begins where image-economies effectively displace the real).

If every society secretes a collective imaginary, the mutations and transformations of this image constellation – for example, in its forms of everyday speech and language – provide an invaluable clue to the historical dynamics of a whole culture. How a society or civilization symbolically constructs its self-image, how it manages its visual topography, projects normative roles and body ideals and performatively organizes the economy of images become fundamental questions for social inquiry. Why one regime of truth prevails over others takes centre-stage in accounting for cultural change. One central component of such a political aesthetics is the analysis of the 'information media' and technological apparatuses available to secure and reproduce symbolic visibilizations. In this context we simply note that historical forms of visual pleasure are directly dependent upon the existing 'staging' technologies available to a regime of truth. These apparatuses become particularly crucial when a social order is expanding into larger ecologies, especially in social systems that aspire to be 'empires' and 'civilizations' (phases of cultural expansion reflected in the identity-forming machinery of Athenian tragedy, the theatre of Calderon and Lope de Vega, and Shakespearian drama). As war and violence have played a fundamental role in this 'civilizing process', the visual dramaturgy of life and death frequently survives as a kind of virtual matrix of past political systems.

FROM RITUAL TO POLITICAL AESTHETICS

We can briefly sketch the functions of image construction in general terms. In archaic and pre-modern societies, public spectacles tended to be sporadic and evanescent. The

theatrum mundi of image performances was highly localized around periodic festivals. Images of the 'body politic' appeared as singular events – localized occasions – rather than recoverable objects or repeatable commodities. Iconic spectacles were constructed as transitory displays of carefully managed public dramas. Witnessing involved participation in the 'enacted truths' embodied in their *dramatis personae*. Everything was geared to identification with archetypal and mythical figures (in shamanism, cultic celebrations, folk-dance, and so on). The scenarios of pleasure were, so to speak, exhausted in their enactment; the 'power of the image' consummated in particular performances.

Wherever such ephemeral performances became regulated and codified, we find the beginnings of *ritual* and with ritual, public forms of cultural memory as vehicles of important social 'truths'. 'Ritual' here is a generic term for events deemed to be 'sacred' by particular social orders (and, of course, 'the sacred' might also include some extreme and violent practices). Emblematic, punctuated events are repetitive acts worth recollecting; these, in turn, may function self-reflexively as moral and political paradigms of virtuous social conduct. The recourse to repetition and the institutionalization of recognizable, recursive acts, while already partially developed in everyday social intercourse, created the public categories of ritual and ritual art. In pre-modern cultures, figurations of power and authority and sacred imagery are fused. Memorial functions were primarily enacted through oral/aural media accepted by the community as a whole (where the 'memorable' is constituted in the enactment). Crafted artefacts and emblematic images were wholly ancillary to the ritual spectacle. The realm of the political and the realm of the aesthetic were inseparable from ritual performatives (in Austin's sense).

Pre-modern public spaces were thus predominantly sites where powerful individuals and groups came to see and be seen (a material constraint that forced those seeking power to create pleasure domes of public scenarios, games, funerals, court spectacles, ritual processions, cyclical festivals, monumental buildings, and so on). Places were primarily sites of societal 'truths' (what Durkheimian sociology calls 'collective representations'). In such a world, places were to be lived not consumed.

Conspicuous spectacles tended to be confined to well-defined arenas – such as cultic celebrations, ceremonial redistributions, military triumphs, popular festivals, inauguration ceremonies, the theatre, games, processions and public executions. All of these belong to the sociological category of *institutional performatives*, that is, intensely visible actions that *create* the phenomena they represent. While subject to the constraints of non-reproductive technologies, such sites were, of course, rich with sensory and symbolic significance and with practical consequences ('We deem you to be a traitor', 'You are ostracized', 'This is the blood of Christ', and so on, are consequential assertions). Until quite recently, public executions were staged as collective dramas – performative dramaturgies of right and wrong – as much as instrumental ways of dispatching criminals.

We hypothesize that in pre-modern societies, 'seeing' was primarily understood as a multi-sensorial *performance*. Power had to be conspicuously displayed, its enactment actively transforming its context (for example, the public announcement of a new law or a declaration of war). Once enacted, the performance disappeared (or was 'archived' in oral laws or verse forms – the Pindaric ode being the most striking example of such commemorative discourses in the ancient Greek world). In its ephemerality, the pre-

modern festival is, so to speak, consumed by its own energies and leaves little or no trace or record (what we knew of the games in ancient Rome was until recently largely derived from Roman poets and writers). The lived experiences provided by such organized spectacles were concrete, multi-sensory events – the audience itself being an integral part of the performance. The imagery of these performances weakly survives as echoes and rumours in everyday language. In such an ideal-typical oral/aural society, no, or at least minimal, *representation* took place. The choreography of power and authority was something to be witnessed in the here-and-now rather than preserved and replicated for posterity. In the public space of the agora, forum or city piazza, rituals of visible presence formed the key to the pre-modern imaginary (for example, in the public acts of gratuitous expenditure analysed by Bataille). Even the great antinomian cycles of carnivalesque 'festivities' described by Mikhail Bakhtin and others do not break the hold of centralized power (the festivity in which the world is turned upside down being itself an affirmation of the status quo in the very act of its ceremonial inversion). The 'archiving' of such events was primarily a task for poetry, ritual language and vernacular discourse.

All of this changes with the invention of the technical means of image production and reproduction. With the appropriate reproductive technologies, non-localizable and de-territorialized sites become technically possible. Orally transmitted images of the Other could be rendered 'objective' in writing (a condition that also accelerated the spread of misinformation about other peoples and cultures). The invention of writing and codifiable scripts such as cuneiform and hieroglyphics played a fundamental role in this process of sensory dissociation. Unsurprisingly, the earliest forms of writing tended to be monopolized by the powerful and used to inscribe images and symbols of their authority and leadership (in monumental architecture, law tablets, temple decoration, funereal inscriptions, and so forth). In this way writing systems were appropriated by powerful groups and scribal professions (even the three-dimensional *quipu* (*quipus*) or 'knot language' of pre-modern Peruvian civilization was essentially an instrument of war). Where the events of the popular carnival and festival were previously accorded no public language, now the concrete singularities of multi-sensory practices could be codified in the 'cool' medium of two-dimensional and three-dimensional graphic inscriptions. The public sphere and possible forms of civil association became increasingly 'stretched' in time and space. Extended chains of command and power were now possible so that whoever controlled the 'means of administration' (including writing and the professions it requires) could act at a distance. As a machine of institutionalized repetition, writing formed one of the necessary conditions of large-scale expansion and imperial conflicts. With the transmutation of sound into visual forms, image performances could be stored and replicated in memorial archives. Written codes require public space for their enunciation and recognition. Acts of poetic commemoration – including the great collective performances of epic poetry – morphed into *civic* archiving (which, true to the etymology of the word, are primarily concerned with rule and order). While such archives frequently traced their history back to oral memories, they could now be reflexively folded into the new possibilities of urban life and city-spaces (the Inca of pre-conquest Peru could manage without the wheel, but the calculii of government, tax collection and administration were dependent upon the knotted threads of the *quipu*). In many respects the public arenas of city life came

to depend upon the institution of writing and the collective memory made possible by extended image infrastructures. We should also emphasize that such scripts are paradigmatically *visible* technologies (and often objects of beauty in their own right – as with Egyptian hieroglyphs and the cuneiform scripts of the civilizational complexes of Mesopotamia). With these new 'information machines', qualitatively different kinds of social organization became possible – many of these systems extending through space and dependent upon complex relays of information and message transmission (for example, more rational systems of tax accounting and transformations of the arts of war that presuppose scriptural archiving practices).

With the new visibilization techniques made possible by inscription, sensory enactments and performances could be codified and inspected as 'records' (public objects like the legal code of Hammurabi inscribed upon a massive stone stele, the wall carvings commemorating the military successes of Ramesses II, or the great cylindrical monument documenting Trajan's conquests in Dacia are paradigm cases). Something approximating 'civic memory' emerged as the events and histories of a community became recordable and publicly visible. Even 'anti-social' events like natural catastrophes and war would create their chroniclers – a process that led to the birth of 'history' in its modern sense (as Nietzsche observed, war was also the father of good prose (1974: 145)). The oral/aural agora is 'doubled' as both a collective event witnessed by citizens and as an archive of deliberations, judgements and audits (thus even lists of notables – kings, dynastic succession, games – are proto-histories). Historically, alphabetic literacy and print culture are the decisive communications technologies that were crucial for the construction of such extended social-imaginary forms and practices. What we would now recognize as 'libraries' – essentially inscription archives – became active agents in the process of urban expansion, juridical codification, taxation, the forging of political alliances and sanctionable conquests. Here the development of writing, visibilization machines and the imaginary projects of empire are dialectically interwoven (a complex social apparatus like the Roman Colosseum was in effect an 'empire machine').

THE UNIVERSE OF UBIQUITOUS MEDIA

The history of the visual regimes of modernity begins when the senses are disassociated and visuality is differentiated from the sensory plenum as *the* privileged sensory modality. Many see the rise of visual machines as the defining point where human beings become totally alienated from nature. 'Nature' then became a visible domain of systematic research. Building on the ruins of the specular culture of the ancient and medieval world, modern visual culture has become continuous, ubiquitous and global. This democratizing process has created a 24/7 seamless image screen, a phantasmagoric stream of incident and instruction, amusement and entertainment, horror and attraction. We are speaking of the industrialized field of mass-produced images – the modern televisual universe – that some theorists have called 'hyperreality'. Expressed in an older idiom, the cultural industries that now dominate global capitalism have created a transnational economy that diverts vast material resources to the production and reproduction of images and associated forms of information. 'Media' are no longer 'intermediaries' between significant social agents, no longer 'channels' or conduits of

meaning; rather, they transmute into generative social apparatuses, machines that produce 'the social'. Digitalization – the displacement of analogue technologies by digital technologies – places this new global order of the cloned image within the reach of everyone. We live in an age of the 24/7 news cycle.

The phenomenology of the new political aesthetics is well known. Visual images are created, transmitted, disseminated and appropriated almost instantaneously. The 'gap' between the conditions of production and consumption is abolished. Where we once had audiences who independently accessed media, today we have media that create audiences. Where the body was the locus of meaning, now information is the site of embodiment. 'Pleasure' shifts from the individual recipients to the collective design offices of the imagineering industries. Audiences are no longer the passive recipients of media messages; rather they are increasingly implicated in the flow of signs and mediated communications (for example, in the spread of interactive formats). The new technologies create something like a global pleasure-scape (a space of desire filled by televisual imagery, continuous 'news', advertising logos, sound bites, video-conferencing, and so forth). As the new information technologies are designed for a borderless world, the images of life, nature and relationships that they promulgate tend to take a quasi-universal form. Idealized symbols of beauty, sexuality and power are among the most prominent image repertoires. Celebrity culture is 'a culture of surface relations' (Rojek, 2001: 46).

This is the well-known phenomenon of non-verbal immediacy and the 'global village' of image homogenization: 'Globalism brings uniformity to visual culture so that what we see in London is not so different from what the billboards display in Rio, Shanghai or Accra' (Orbach, 2009: 88). It is not merely that individuals in the so-called developed world are inundated with advertising logos and brand imagery (Klein, 1999). The more fundamental issue is that the overwhelming reliance upon visual media is transforming human consciousness and cultural memory (creating 'metacultures' that prefigure a genuinely global dissociation of sensibility). The operation of such planetary inscription apparatuses like the World Wide Web and the Internet raises fundamental questions about the meaning of the senses and the place of human perception in contemporary life (along with anxieties about mass consumption, dumbing down, the decline of the public sphere, the death of the printed book, the fate of reading and literacy, the end of philosophy, and so forth).

The global iconosphere has distinctive properties. On the one side individual sensibilities become dependent upon the unprecedented velocities of image economies; on the other, people gain access to image spheres that were unimaginable with the older analogue technologies. No other culture has been able to examine the infinitesimally small and the immensely large. This in turn has produced entirely new 'knowledges' and 'sciences', the most radical of which – for example, bioengineering and nanoscience – promise to transform our relationship with organic and inorganic life. Even *phusis* does not escape the new technosciences. For its users, tele-presence creates a global universe of affects and impulses. Televisuality organizes new writing-affectivites as the different sensory modalities are reconfigured into multi-media formats. The world appears as an endless panorama of interweaving visual sites: the beauty industry, tourist sites, style and fashion displays, the diet industry, stardom, and so on. Such designer platforms have real-world consequences in changing the terms of social identities, relations and

interactions. The general trend is to move away from the 'public commonwealth' toward market-driven systems. Autonomous cultural spheres are eroded, clearing the ground for virulent forms of corporate 'culture'. New possibilities of pleasure flow from these transformations. Generalized impatience and boredom replaces the arts of slow reading and reflective consideration. Thus the globalized visual sense, in John Urry's words, 'enables people to take possession of objects and environments, often at a distance ... It facilitates the world of the 'other' to be controlled from afar, combining detachment and mastery' (2002: 147). Change is increasingly 'managed' by corporate organizations. For example, the fashion industry today is 'the most developed form of built-in obsolescence, the driving force behind cultural change' (Sudjic, 2008: 165). Here globalization takes the form of pseudo-diversification as consumption is satisfied by functionally identical corporate logics: corporate education, corporate entertainment, corporate sport, corporate pleasure, and so on. Cyberspace also amplifies the possibilities of standardized sexual experience (with the long-recognized observation that pornography and related sex-based websites are the most accessed domains of the World Wide Web and also the fastest-growing global businesses of the modern world). The pornographic eye – and the global sex industry that sustains it – reaches into every domain of life.

In all of these respects, global modernity – across every institutional sphere – is impossible without an interlocking system of visual logics. This multi-media generalization of the visible concentrates the ownership and control of communication media and digital culture into a handful of corporate conglomerates that increasingly manage, reflexively monitor and control the empire of the visible. While the digital grammars of visibility anticipate the commodification of all values on a truly planetary scale, the actual uses and appropriations of visual objects remain diverse and unpredictable. Here, of course, we find new types of exclusion that build upon earlier forms of social stratification. We can, however, safely say that with the advent of global mass media the new communication technologies have begun to play a truly fundamental role in shaping the rhythms of contemporary life. Such visual engineering is not without cost – in fact it may be the leading agent of global pollution and the destruction of natural resources. Descartes' dream that human beings could be *les maîtres et possesseurs de la nature* has turned into our nightmare.

INSIDE THE LIGHT ECONOMY OF CYBERSPACE

> *'Photons, in contrast to electrons, are perfect messengers'*
>
> Nolte, 2001: 32

Another name has appeared – *cyberspace* – as luminous as it is misleading. Cyberspace is today the real-imaginary domain, the new *theatrum mundi* of global capital dominated by cybernetic sciences. We increasingly carry out our everyday activities through technical and social systems dominated by *tele*-technologies. The pre-modern apparatuses of tele-presence have today been digitalized and now function as active creators of worlds. And at their core we find iconic writing operating as the cellular form of all the new graphic media. Access to these new mediated worlds now occurs through networked screens and interfaces (the televisual 'event' of the destruction of the Twin

Towers in New York in 2001 remains the most haunting example of this phenomenon). At this murderous juncture of the *fin de siècle*, the pre-modern distinction between the real and the virtual disintegrates and the real becomes virtual just as the virtual operates as the new reality (we might symbolize this as the transformation from 'virtual reality' to 'real virtuality'). We seem to be living on the cusp of two worlds where the production, circulation, dissemination and choreography of images has become digitally mobile – a process accelerated by the advent of mobile telephone-video machines and Internet downloading platforms. Every mobile phone user unknowingly celebrates the remarkable mathematics of digital coding.

If we understand this situation as the first phase of an age of ubiquitous media, we enter a universe that is increasingly defined by lifestyles made possible by new forms of writing. As individuals with a unique biographical situation and identity, we continue to look into each other's eyes, but we increasingly see and interpret the 'other' through the multiple-coding techniques and interpretive systems supplied by private and public screens. Corporate telepresence displaces co-presence as a preferred interactional space. Conversation and physical encounters are replaced by web-talk and virtual relationships. Or, expressed more dialectically, telepresence creates its own forms and modalities of co-presence and temporality associated with cyberspace and 'real virtuality' (benignly in the remarkable spread of the virtual community *Second Life*, tragically in the digitalized last messages of terrorist victims).

Even the apparently solid realms of the material environment and architecture are now subject to image-morphing practices. Where and how we live, our news, information, entertainment and everyday knowledge are increasingly mediated by instantaneous graphic texts and screening devices. With advances in portable wireless technology these machineries are now modular and mobile. Images operate as fluid bearers of information, instantly transposable and disseminated through what was previously considered to be fixed or static 'spaces'. The core processes theorized by classical sociology – industrialization, urbanization, modernization – have been morphed together under the promiscuous problematics of 'globalization', 'liquid modernity' and 'cyberspace'. The metaphors of 'process' and 'liquidity' shared by these outlooks capture something of these seismic mutations in social life. Even everyday signing (advertising, public information, motorway instructions, and so forth) are no longer static forms but fluctuate in response to centralized directives and collective databases (the rapid shifts in motorway signage in recent years is an example of this kind of computer-mediated information). Computerization accelerates the industrialization of shopping in a movement from self-service supermarkets to vast, prefabricated mega-stores (mass commodity emporia saturated with signs and texts). With the spread of affordable microelectronics and computer-based communication systems, cyber-media like mobile television, the Internet and cyberspace itself have become both everyday tools and the medium of globalized consumption.

We might name this *optical regime* the new *light economy* of planetary capitalism. Its correlate is a digital aesthetic bound up with the transnational industries of tele-imagineering. Old-style media entertainment is reconfigured by a new professional class who are technical specialists in engineering desire (where the mega-store addresses the needs of mass consumption, the multiplex provides similar services in the sphere of mass entertainment). A key theme here is the idea of ubiquitous

digital coding (neither supermarket nor multiplex is possible without digitalization). Another is the phenomenon of permanent change and revolution. A third is the reflexive impact of information imagineering upon every aspect of daily life (for example, with the restructuring of educational priorities and programmes at both secondary and tertiary levels). Yet another is the spread of centralized surveillance and instantaneous monitoring of distant places and spaces. As Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin observe, 'ubiquitous computing means the constant monitoring of the quotidian ... Ubiquitous computing therefore insists even more aggressively on the reality of media in our social and physical world' (2002: 219). Where media take the upper hand in reconfiguring the demographic structures and social worlds, we may legitimately speak of 'the information society'. Everyday things and artefacts are downgraded as the mere 'carriers' of digital codes, relays in complex networks, nodes in the interminable transmission of information. Objects themselves become crystals of coded information. Indeed for the generation born into the era of cyberspace, the message relays of electronic culture – bar-coding, visual displays, computer gaming, simulated experiences, digitalized film and music videos, global tourism, heritage consumption, and the like – have become as normal and mundane as the telephone and television were to an earlier generation. We could say that in an age of permanent change the very fabric and rhythms of everyday life have been mobilized and liquefied (enabling a theorist like Zygmunt Bauman to describe late modernity *tout court* as *liquid modernity*). It is perhaps not surprising that cultural critics from Walter Benjamin and Marshall McLuhan to Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virilio have reacted to these changes by speaking in apocalyptical tones of a civilization dominated by the gaze of images. This perhaps is what led some to envisage the present as a civilization contemplating the end of history.

A CIVILIZATION OF THE SPECTACLE?

Even if we are justifiably sceptical of the hyperbole of postmodern cultural criticism and attentive to the diverse ways in which the new media are used and appropriated, it certainly appears that visual representations, symbolic appearances, simulation technologies and image-based mobile sign systems have systematically colonized the central object domains and practices of contemporary life. Human connectivity across every domain of space and time is today overwhelmingly mediated and reshaped by the new digitial machineries.

This is part of the postmodern contract we enter by living in an age of intelligent machines. In fact what is called 'ordinary life' for large sectors of the developed world is now inseparable from the functionality of image machines and the differential infrastructure of extended *writing technologies* that form their strategic condition. Comparable to the print revolution in early modern Europe, cyberspace brings with it a distinctive phenomenology of space-time, a transformation of previously ordered structures and social relationships to create a disorganized world of interfaces and networks reflected in the barbarous language of dream-merchants: cybernetics, simulacral culture, network society, globalization, viral hypertextuality, hyperreality, deterritorialization, rhyzomatic culture, hybridization, digital morphing, fractalization,

dissemination, intertextuality, and so on. Here the proliferation of concepts reveals language struggling to catch up with real historical transformations.

In this way the new digital regimes promise to transform consciousness in their own image. What poetry and philosophy undertook as a millennial project, the media will effect in a decade. We are effectively engulfed by new modes of experiencing the world that are unrestricted in time or place (the 24/7 economy of global capitalism reorganizes the 24/7 economy of lived experience). The virtual inscriptions of cyberspace create new forms of pleasure, new work patterns, new passions and new kinds of 'imagined community'. With these come qualitatively new experiences, intellectual connections and forms of thought that have no parallels in earlier analogical cultures. In the sphere of art and visual culture, for example, the pictorial realism and naturalism of the past century has been morphed into the generalized multi-media imagineering of digital aesthetics (a process that is reflected in the movement from modernist to postmodernist, post-photographic aesthetic ensembles). If we wish to take the temperature of postmodern aesthetics, it might be better to turn from the official art world and explore the impact of digital imaging in commercial advertising, music production and special-effects film-making. Here the self-proclaimed 'artifice' of digitalized style overdetermines all considerations of substance (where, for example, multi-million dollar films are produced around a limited palette of digitally engineered effects – the re-invention of the animated feature film is one example of the global impact of digital technologies in the field of mass entertainment). The precursor art form was, of course, the Pop Art movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Today digital imagineering generates new forms of art (and with these new economic zones for speculative capital – witness the growth of Sony, Dreamworks, Disney, Microsoft, and so on). At the level of production, individual creativity is increasingly replaced by collective networks of distributed creativity (in effect there are no single 'authors' of digitally animated video games and films). The rhythms of personal innovation and creativity (an early age of signed 'works') have been reconfigured around the organized dynamics of collaborative image production and anonymous writing (alongside 'Wikinomics', we now have 'Wikiart', 'Wikicinema', and so on). It is as though Western culture had to wait several millennia to fully realize what was implicated in the simplest acts of spectating, image-making and visualization.

In these dialectical mutations we find no simple 'hegemony of vision' or 'death of representation', but rather a complex, multi-dimensional field of *contesting and contested visualities* fluctuating across the media topography of photography, film, television, digital art, animation, literature, and so forth. As Gary Shapiro has observed, 'it is not a question of denigrating vision; it is rather a question of being alert to the different visual practices, often quite conflicting, that operate in the same cultural space and sorting out their specific structures and effects' (2003: 9). In essence: what was once called 'everyday life' (and how everyday life *represented* itself) is undergoing a radical process of deconstruction and restructuring prompted, if not led, by the new inscription technologies. What was traditionally called 'world', 'society', 'identity' and 'self' have been reconfigured as the effect of digital symbolism. Commodities become 'sign values' and conspicuous status symbols. Individuals are both more individualized and more integrated into larger systems of commercial life. Design, stylized advertising

and the branding of commodities are today multi-million dollar businesses in their own right. Whatever claims to be real appears framed within this general economy of electronically programmed representations and spectacular media events. In short: the electronic languages created by multi-media technologies are well on the way to becoming the universal ideological form and medium of contemporary experience (cf. Postrel, 2003).

Given these revolutionary changes, it is no accident that the concept of 'event' or 'event-horizon' – the immediate sensation, fragmentary moment, look, glance, incident, happening, performance, installation, situation, passage, project, and so on – has been elevated to the status of the sovereign category of hypermodernity (as if what passes for knowledge today derived its leading stories from the world of News Actuality or MTV). In such a world our received concepts of inert 'substances', 'things', 'immobile objects', 'structures' and 'representations' become completely redundant.

In this respect we are justified in describing the process of specular globalization as the digital *aestheticization* of contemporary culture, politics and society. Its outcome is an increasingly globalized social order driven by neoliberal economics and reconfigured under the empire of the electronic gaze. By this tripartite formula, we emphasize the fact that those subject to these new socio-logics do not merely produce and consume spectacles on a global scale but also relate to others and define their personal existence, their presence in the world, in and through the perceptual logics of the new image systems.

Yet even in the face of the globalization of visual culture, it also has to be said that we live in a civilization increasingly bereft of vision. The 'empire of the gaze' and the economic infrastructure of electronic visibility remains profoundly Euro-American in derivation, language and orientation. We have already mentioned the darker side of global industrialization, with its endless disruption of social relations and destruction of ecologies. Intent on celebrating the novelty of cyberspace, existing theories of the digital revolution tend to neglect the complicated institutional processes of globalization, hybridization and diasporic experience. In this way they ignore the fact that digitalized culture is also prone to the same contradictory extremes and endemic conflicts of earlier cultural formations (although any lazy parallels with the aftermath of the pre-modern print revolution should be treated with extreme caution). We can say, however, that despite their scale and velocity, the forces of hypermodernity are contested and resisted by those subjected to their operations.

One of the unintended effects of graphic technologies like the World Wide Web and the Internet is to project an image of the world as a memory-free screen, a hypertext of visual texts and de-narrativized citations that conflate the orders of reality and fiction, life and image, actuality and artifice. Here we face changes that are almost without precedent: in the space of one generation we have experienced the erosion of some of the oldest sense-making practices and their replacement by visual narratives (indeed some claim that the 'crisis of representation' means that narrative discourse *per se* – and with it principled judgement, evaluative criticism, coherent discourse and criticism – has been replaced by image-based information). In a more dystopian mood we might view this disintegration of experience as cultural amnesia. Where pre-modern forms of memory – myth, religion, poetry, philosophy, narrative, literature, history, and so forth – have been discredited, the modes of experience associated with the coming of

modernity – print-based science, literature and technology – can no longer contain visual technoculture and its intrinsically relativizing operations. The demands of instantaneous pleasure, in other words, begin to dictate the terms of memory and experience. Thus the Internet – as it has mutated into Web 2.0, Facebook, YouTube and beyond – has elevated the mobile fragmentation of images into a metaphysical principle – unintentionally prefiguring the posthistorical ontology of differends, extremes, multiplicities, manifolds, chance and randomness (cf. Lyotard, 1988).

For some this digital deconstruction of the past leaves human beings speechless, thoughtless and visionless in a high-tech wasteland. As William Gibson had already anticipated in his 1984 novel *Neuromancer*, global telecommunications aestheticizes the real as an infinite array of possible panoramas, eliminating the relevance and perhaps possibility of critical comparison, historical analysis and ethicopolitical judgement. We have looked into the 'heart of darkness' and seen our own future image. If memory survives this deformation, it is episodic and short-term. Even collective violence and mass death are transmuted into scenes and scenarios (war planners speak of *theatres* of destruction and body counts). Bereft of historical measure and the durational requirements of concrete experience, we turn to Wikipedia for instant definition and illumination.

With the new information machines, literally 'anything goes', or rather 'anything goes anywhere'. For the first time in human history, 'information' is instantaneously accessible at any point on the globe. De-territorialization is our contextless context. From the commercial practices and institutional fields of advertising, design and media to the conduct of war and international relations, we engage with the real through the 'windows' of technically constructed icon-worlds (video war-gaming and the actual reporting of wars blur into one another). We could imagine the end of the world – the destruction of mankind – as a theatrical spectacle to which we – or our avatars – are invited as spectators (in fact, the exterminist logic of the Cold War and the postmodern warfare of the post-Cold War era have made this experience a daily reality for a whole generation). Is this perhaps the significance of Jean-François Lyotard's gnomic formula that postmodernism is not modernism at its end, but in a nascent state (adding 'and this state is recurrent', 1992: 22)? In becoming spectators and consumers in a global marketplace of images, we have lost the taste for the intangible, the invisible and the transcendent. Experience has been flattened and disembodied into vision bytes and consumer utopias. Faced with the probability of total dehumanization, we settle back to be terminally entertained (cf. Postman, 1985).

HYPERREALITY AND THE AGE OF THE PAPARAZZI

A striking example of the emergence of cultural markets for instantaneous celebrity and extreme experience is the appearance of 'paparazzi culture' in the last decades of the last and first decade of the present century. Driven by the monetary value placed on images of celebrities, the economics of photography has given rise to a nomadic band of mercenary commercial photographers who stalk celebrities in order to steal their images and sell these on the open market. Here commodification, image obsession, celebrity culture and mobile media coalesce into the emergent phenomenon of *image*

capitalism. The 'hounding' and dramatic death of Diana Spencer, Princess of Wales in August 1997 has become a tragic parable of the end of the most photographed person in the world. The commodity sold by mercenary photography is, of course, itself an indispensable element of the new global entertainment industries (symbolically expressed by magazines like *Cosmopolitan*, *Hello Magazine*, *Hola!*, and the like). Terminal entertainment is, in fact, an exemplary category of the new morphology of extreme experiences promised and demanded by the logic of the new global media. The future promises to deliver a seamless web interweaving global imagineering, celebrity culture and planetary-wide entertainment industries.

In the context of these cultural and technological changes, we need to understand the implications of the claim that we live in a society where every possible experience – every lived relation – has been rendered spectacular, creating a culture where anything might – at least for 15 minutes – become an event. Corporate advertising has made specularization into a new law of capital accumulation: the more extreme, the greater the audience and the promise of an endless income stream. This is where the advertising budgets associated with global mega-events such as the Olympic Games, European and World Football now reach figures far beyond the GNP of Third-World countries. If celebrity culture is essentially life in the lens, such exploitable lives have become lucrative sources of capital in an age of citizen media.

It is certainly not hyperbole to speak of these developments as 'revolutionary'. In the condensed period of two decades the world has been transformed through new light-machineries. The velocity of change needs to be borne in mind. As David Nolte has summarized this process: 'The first generation of these machines, born with the diode laser and optical fiber, uses electronics and optics together. The second generation dispenses with electronics, and it is just beginning at the dawn of the twenty-first century. The third generation, which harnesses quantum optics, has not quite begun – but it will. The three generations of the machines of light are the technologies that will support the new kind of intelligence based on light' (2001: 31).

With the advent of hypermodernity, what used to be called reality has been progressively transformed into a series of fragmented, decontextualized, decentralized display sites constructed from layers of *simulacra*. The French theorist Jean Baudrillard described this process as *hyperreality*. The term is a useful polemical label for a heterogeneous set of processes that generate extreme versions of the real without any origin or stable ground. In their social effects, simulacra become more real than the real. Sanitized versions of the past are substituted for the actuality. In this displacement the concreteness and persistence of the past disappears. 'Substitutes' of reality now replace the real. Where the ancient Greeks celebrated their gods at the Games, we now have international festivals designed as mass investment opportunities. What once was a principle of archiving and museum displays now functions as a general cultural law. With the archiving potential of the new communication technologies (ICTs) we can now access realms of visual culture that were completely unknown to earlier societies and civilizations (the transformation of modern museum structures and practices into multi-media interactive sites of virtual experience is a case in point). The possibilities of the visible have been linked up with commercial interests and advanced 'vision technologies' (scanning, imaging, electro-magnetic photography, and so forth). It is not only the case, to extend Guy Debord's well-known thesis, that the universe of those

societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails now presents itself as an immense accumulation of images (*Society of the Spectacle*, Thesis 1). Rather, the empire of the visible now reaches into the microscopically small and the unimaginably large (instruction in science today takes the form of guided tours through the sub-atomic world disclosed by electronic microscopy and of the cosmically violent galactic worlds revealed by radio-telescopy). We have moved from the society of the spectacle to the imagineered universes of cyberspace.

One psychological correlate of this new order is the cultivation of personal and collective mind-sets defined predominantly in apparitional terms: the development of character formations tuned to the demands of mobile, ephemeral appearances, status image, promotional staging, consumer identification, branding, image-pleasures and instant gratification. The time of experience is reduced to the dictates of the image economy. In ontological terms, durational continuity – the temporality of narrative – collapses into instantaneous event – the time of the image. Decisions that were previously grounded in public discussion and sustained reflection are now based on information audits by 'think tanks' and 'ginger groups'. Subjects become spectators with cameraphones. Students are now clients. 'Futures' are scenarios of speculative investment. Political decisions are hollowed out as the province of fiscal planners and corporate engineers. Somewhat ironically, the form of life of the tourist – gazing, camera in hand, at exotic things and places – becomes a general cultural condition. Everything from presidential elections to terrorist atrocities and global sports now competes for 'video-space' and is forced to comply with spectatorial logics. Where travel is no longer possible, looking becomes sightseeing. The most striking instance of this process in popular culture is the spread and international dominance of the culture of celebrity (and increasingly of media-made 'celebrities' in the context of so-called Reality television). A closely related phenomenon is the blurring of the boundary between real and virtual reality (making a movie like *The Truman Show* (1998) an illuminating allegory of late modern social life). Yet another psychological tendency is the increasing preference for more and more extreme forms of distraction. 'Reality TV' – a product of 1990s global media – has become a fixed feature of mass television entertainment, with the corresponding overproduction of 'instant celebrities'. At the beginning of the third millennium we might reasonably claim that the image-commodity, as the cellular form of the new photomediated consumer culture, is rapidly becoming the dominant form of representation of modern specularity.

The simulation of reality through digitalized information technologies has become the most capital-intensive corporate business sector in the world economy. If mass culture has reconfigured every sphere of experience into the staged spectral logics of visual multi-media, it is not surprising that traditional sites of meaning and memory have been morphed into the language-games of visuality (where, for example, collective memory – collective commemoration – increasingly takes the form of archives of the moving image). In such an advanced state of dispersion, what passes for the established socio-symbolic order is literally driven by visual logics and their sustaining apparatuses. This colonization and transformation of previous visual technologies and spaces has been called 'remediation' (Bolter and Grusin, 2002). Digitalization re-configures previous visual spaces and media: 'what is new about digital media lies in their particular strategies for remediating television, film, photography, and painting' (Bolter and

Grusin, 2002: 50). If there is no cave in the world that can escape the reach of digitalized media, can we still invoke the edifying or disruptive power of visual experience? Can we even imagine an anti-aesthetic aesthetics and a subversive politics of the image? Is there any form of imagination that can escape the reach of commodity aesthetics? Can the democratic potential of these new formations be exploited?

REVERSE ENGINEERING CULTURE

> *'There is no self-knowledge except historical self-knowledge'*
> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Ideas' (1800) section 139, in Bernstein, ed., 2003: 267

In what follows we are not concerned with names and representations *per se* but with their work as traces of world images and with the imaginary experiences and construction of social worlds that they make possible. The general theorem underlying this approach is that there are no metahistorical objects or knowledges. As a technique of reverse engineering, the logological perspective proposes that unacknowledged symbolisms, images and other prosthetic cultural technologies, along with the anonymous histories of actual and potential experience, are sedimented in the practices that shape everyday experience (Sandywell, 1996, 2004, 2006). Visuality – here provisionally defined as the omnipresent work of visual apparatuses – appears coeval with the organized field of social practices that shape the dominant social relations and ideologies of an epoch.

It has been well documented that powerful visual technologies such as print, the telescope, photography, cinema, television and the Internet incorporate definite modes of constructing, interpreting and acting within the world (Green-Lewis, 1996; Mander, 1978; Meyrowitz, 1985; McLuhan, 1964; Postman, 1985; Virilio, 1989, 1995). Visual media in particular have been linked to the invention and extension of abstract 'theoretical' activities and such spatially extended sociocultural forms as institutionalized science and the widescale dissemination of texts. By distancing the 'subject' from the 'object', such technologies actively mediate experience, shaping its terms to the logics of their diverse operations. Indeed from the vantage point of a digitalized culture saturated by advanced teletechnologies, we need little persuasion to recognize that without these prosthetic systems no contemporary form of social life or societal organization would be possible. From a historical and critical perspective we need to understand how forms of world-experience have come to be constructed through the techniques prescribed by a society's self-imaging apparatus (embodied in and activated through specific discourse networks, information systems and social institutions).

To this end we propose a socio-analytical methodology for unravelling the institutions of seeing. Thus objects as self-evident as the microscope, telescope, photographic apparatuses, digital imaging systems, computerized re-ordering of commodities by retailers, and the like are no longer approached as simple material artefacts for extending perception (disaggregated into tube, lenses, mounting frame, computer programs, and so on). Rather the technical objects we call 'microscopes', 'telescopes', 'digital cameras', 'cameraphones', 'mega-stores', and so on are historically embedded in a rich ideological matrix of symbols, strategic narratives and discourses.

What we lazily call 'the Internet', for example, is in reality a complex series of historical transformations of computer-based networking technologies. Internet software and hardware are inseparable from the creative language of 'Internet discourse'. Moreover, these are all machineries that both presuppose and reflexively project definite social relations. Even the most technical and formalized systems of computerized imagineering remain embedded in a multi-dimensional order of narrative processes. In other words, such apparatuses need to be seen as congealed *technopoieic* activities that help shape social practices and contexts. Apparatuses like microscopes and telescopes can only accomplish their work within an established world-view, inside the practical space of an established imaginary ontology (consider also the advances in astronomy and cosmology today that are only possible through automated photographic technologies) embedded in particular forms of social life. In itself a computer, or even a complex web of computers, *does* nothing. We thus need to both disconnect and re-embody such obvious material artefacts and instruments within their specific technical, interpersonal, discursive and sociocultural matrices (cf. Ihde, 1990, 1993; Hayles, 1999; Kittler, 1999; Manovich, 2001; Schivelbusch, 1995; Turkle, 1984, 1996).

Symbolpoiesis

> *'Everything is a symbol'*
> Goethe, cited by Gadamer, 1977: 103

The dialectical interweaving of intentionality, technics and expressive materiality supports the idea that the basic physiognomy of human experience is historically contingent and, at any one point in the continuum of time, can be seen to be technically, socially and symbolically formed from a wider range of voices, conflictual relations and agonistic force-fields. This in turn gives central prominence to historical research in exploring the genesis and dynamics of social formations.

By stressing the interpretive character of praxis, we are not canvassing for an ahistorical semiotics or structural linguistics; rather we are concerned with the concrete dialectics of sense-making experiences that actively constitute social worlds in specific historical periods (and with contested sites where 'dominant', 'residual' and 'emergent' forces intersect). What we have hitherto represented as 'symbolism', 'media' and 'culture' turns out to be force-fields subject to complex historical, social and linguistic determinations. As a heuristic concept, *symbolpoiesis* can function as a generic term for world-making *practices*. Language is not a reflection or relay of some pre-formed reality, but rather a realm of performances and constructive differences that symbolically shape the human condition. And among the most powerful of these world-making apparatuses is the intellectual machinery of texts and writing as these are embodied in particular social organizations, disciplines and disciplinary practices (consider, for example, the interdependent networks of diverse textual skills, crafts and practices involved in the production of a contemporary film).

Understood as ontopoiesis, image practices *create* a world, or, expressed more precisely, constitute a determinate world, under a specific interpretive description of the real. The imaginary praxis of language brings universes of significance into being

'in their own image'. And such 'universes' in practice are socially determinative (to enter their spaces we have to *comply* with their rules). We then approach language as both a machinery of thought and as interpretively engaged experience. If we are inevitably subject to the web of words that shape our actions, senses, identities and forms of life, to ask other questions, to acquire another way of speaking or language-game is to open *pragmatic* possibilities of other ways of seeing and acting. This is essentially a corollary of the hermeneutic insight into the 'fundamentally linguistic character of our experience of the world' (Gadamer, 1977: 77–8). With the coming of mass media, what the Greeks called '*techne*' and '*poiesis*' are fully revealed as inseparable moments of everyday experience. The technopoieic principle today extends to the image realms of visual culture and their diverse modes of analogue and digital representation. In this sense 'the world' is quite literally a historical *multiverse*.

World-making

The last thing orthodox science and philosophy will admit is that they are telling stories and constructing worlds. To confess this would, philosophers believe, degrade their practices to the teeming marketplace of 'fictions' and 'narratives'. Philosophy after all is not screenwriting. In what follows we draw parallels between these different practices – in a literal sense a large part of Western philosophy has indeed been 'screen' writing. Philosophical and scientific theories embody traditions of world-making in their ways of 'writing'/'righting' existence. Every theoretical proposition and philosophical system secretes a representational diagram with implied narrator(s), privileged speech acts, implicit language community and imaginary audience. Even the simplest act of perception turns out to be a phase in a more comprehensive choreography of moral persuasion.

Words and representations more generally only have meaning as *acts* within the flow of life (Wittgenstein, 1982: 118e; 1967b: 31e). The guiding idea here is the thesis that all mimesis is praxis – every sign and representation presupposes action and, thereby, some determinate pragmatic context: 'Nur in dem Fluss der Gedanken und des Lebens haben die Worte Bedeutung' ('Only in the stream of thought and life do words have meaning', Wittgenstein, 1967b: 31/31e). Thus every commonplace word began life as a figurative schema, a poem (that is, as an event-like disruption of existing ways of seeing, thinking and relating). Paradoxically, concepts never originate *as* concepts; rather they emerge as orientational ideas or what an earlier tradition called *notions* (figures, schema, metaphors, analogies, digressions, supplements, scandals, and so on). Only intersubjective speech acts can crystallize a concept, giving it a body, and send it into conversational space. But expressed inversely: as every new relation is a new word (Emerson, 1993: 72) or a new *use* of a word, we should also pursue the parallel thesis that the stream of life is itself always-already linguistically, symbolically and culturally mediated. In what follows we stress the primacy of *performances* and *praxis* in social life, expressing the fact that words and concepts have to be used, applied, extended, criticized, reformulated, and so forth, by individual speakers in the contexts of their myriad activities. Words are moves in a sequence of actions. 'Words are also actions, and actions are a kind of words' (Emerson, 1981: 306). It follows that excavating the subterranean work of words –

especially metaphoric terms – becomes a fundamental requirement of every reflexive investigation of the social life of language.

Powerful symbolisms and semiotic practices invest the visible world with significance for particular groups, with specific interests defined by definite historical contexts and concerns. And as word-images seed the germ-form of cultural forms, the history of material interests are inevitably traced in a society's stock of operative concepts. The same principle applies *mutatis mutandis* to the material and technological resources – the technical capital – available to a given community. Just as there is no 'freedom at large', so there is no perspective-neutral, immaculate perception of things available before or beyond the interminable work of metaphor and symbolism. From this perspective, images are not dispensable vehicles or adjuncts to otherwise independent experiences, just as language is not simply a *channel* or *vehicle* of communication; in fact we can no more take-or-leave the operative societal images of the world than we can escape our own skin, time and place. Our lived experience, our ways of being-embodied, our forms of life are radically mediated by these symbolic forms. It is in this context that we claim that *all* experience is already semiotically ordered and that whatever passes for knowledge necessarily remains tentative and conjectural. To reveal the work of community in every act of understanding we must problematize the very idea of *representation* and *mirroring* that pervades European culture.

Technopoiesis

The point where these theses intersect defines the performative zones of a culture's repertoire of meaningful action and self-understanding (the interweaving vocabularies, self-understandings, technical discourses and practical methodologies that constitute an operative field of *technopoiesis*). We are thus not dealing with communication *media* or *channels* in the abstract but with signifying energies and force-fields of meaning that shape concrete life. This is also the theoretical juncture where every phenomenology of experience gives way to a historically oriented hermeneutics of human practices, technical prosthetics and media-ted experience (Sandywell, 1996, volume 1; Derrida once referred to this as 'a pragrammatology (to come)', 1988: note 16, p. 159).

Language *is* hermeneutic praxis, a force of *symbolic action*, a doing things with words, in Austin's memorable phrase. Once more, Emerson and Peirce were prescient in commending the counterintuitive idea that we *are* first and foremost symbols and inhabit symbolic worlds (Emerson, 1993: 72; cf. 1981: 312). We do not enter a life-world where experience and language stand apart, reflecting each other like images in a mirror. As we will later argue, this is an essentially *metaphysical* picture of the world. Rather we always find ourselves within the texture of languaged life-worlds, as agents in ongoing social scenarios that have been shaped by past discourses and cultural conversations. What we have been calling 'media' ('language', 'discourse', 'forms of communication', 'culture', and so on) are code names for intertextual apparatuses of symbolic transcendence. This is where the term 'media', with its connotations of stable transmission of preformed messages, is wholly inadequate (or more precisely, where it displays its own metaphysical origins in a very narrow representational semantics). Hopefully it will become clear that using expressions like 'media', 'images

of the world', 'force-fields' or 'representations of society' already locates our thinking in metaphysical space.

In what follows we extend the general idea of symbolpoiesis in constructive, social-theoretical directions: all societies define their spheres of relevance and normative activity through symbolic media – among the most important being the realms of art, religion and related visual symbolisms and, today, virtual, multi-media technologies and computer systems. Language, as Emerson observed, is fossil poetry. This working principle also entails the corollary thesis that any genealogy of a culture's own everyday forms of understanding and thinking practices – including its procedures of practical inference, proof and formal reasoning – must also delve into its ways of misunderstanding and oversights, any account of knowledge must also be a story of failed conjectures, misrecognition, absences and even the social and polemical functions of ignorance, deception and stupidity that accompany different cultural forms (Garfinkel, 1967; Popper, 1990; van Boxsel, 2003). The appropriate general strategy here would be to suspend judgement about these forms of vernacular reasoning and epistemic claims and treat them all as methodologically strange, anthropologically complex and discursively problematic performances.

Unfortunately, the first effect of the citational form of a dictionary compilation is to violate this contextual principle, by isolating and abstracting words from their social and historical contexts in order to re-assemble them in the interest of other aims and objectives – more precisely, with the aim of defamiliarizing their conventional functions in order to examine how their semantic resonances have been forged into meanings that have come to underwrite definite social and cultural identities. Dictionaries operate through citational violence that freezes the living movement of language (Ambrose Bierce's entry under 'dictionary' reads: a malevolent literary device for cramping the growth of a language and making it hard and inelastic' (Bierce, 1985)). In heeding Bierce's warning, we require something like an anti-dictionary, a deconstructive lexicon that incites contention and reactivates fossilized modes of thinking.

We can shed some light on the paradox of quotational violence by scanning the inventory of terms of visibility listed above, a series of linguistic snapshots that assumes the form of an encyclopaedic inventory, a typographic construct with manifest verbal and visual aspects. Typography (like photography) is, of course, itself a specular allegory of seeing, an instance of the word made visible through the writing-machines of scribal and literate cultures – and, like any other sense-making machinery, typographic systems need to be subject to historical archaeology, deconstructive criticism and sociocultural analysis. For example, how much of what we now call 'identity' or 'the self' has been shaped by contingent diagrammatic choices embedded in the long history of punctuation? How have our common-sense ideas about space and community been shaped by the typographical spacing of print culture? How have our ways of thinking and images of inquiry themselves been predefined by the print revolution? How much of what we assume is native to healthy common sense has been created by the technologies of art, graphic depiction, photography and film? How have well-established aesthetic norms and conventions been transformed by the new specular topographies of digital media? (Crary, 1990, 1999; Eisenstein, 1979; Manguel, 1997; Sacks, 2003; Sturken and Cartwright, 2001). What if something as apparently innocent as layout and typography turns out to be the vital clue to the inner workings of a whole epoch?

We soon realize that the vast universe of symbolic media and everyday practical reasoning – the field of intelligent praxis and its variable techniques and instrumentation – is still a relatively unexplored continent. As a sketch-book of verbal watchwords, the present lexicon not only signals its own schematic inadequacy before the proliferating networks of linguistic usage and culture mediated by visual tropes, but hopefully marks out possible sites for more detailed lexical, semantic and logological investigations for a future pragrammatology of the language-games of visuality and visual cultures (enlarging our received definitions of language to include the whole gamut of words, visual images, and symbolically coded representations that form and inform a culture's self-experience and self-understandings). Of course, the latter task requires much more than a lexicon of visual terms; it requires an extensive research programme investigating the full range of human visual practices and technologies through which individuals and communities make sense of their worlds.

What follows, then, is a lexicon with a difference. I have already described this *Dictionary of Visual Discourse* as an exercise in hypertextuality. The epigrams that head this text may well lead you to think that this dictionary of visual terms will be largely an introduction to words, language and symbolism (and other dangerous things). It is certainly important to continually remind ourselves that words and vocabularies have their natural habitat in the social life of language, among the interminable – and often arbitrary and undisciplined – fantasies and controversies of everyday life, part of the unnoticed graffiti of ordinary experience. It seems patently obvious that if we are to understand the ideological work of words, we need to understand the changing social, cultural and historical circumstances in which terms originate, function and change (this is now basically accepted as the minimal contextual and hermeneutic principle of all social inquiry). As the cellular building blocks of cultural semantics, words need to be approached rhetorically as performatively imbricated in the very forms of experience which they themselves index and articulate. Words understood as image constellations bear a reflexive relationship to the social orderings and constructs they make possible and must be explained in both psychogenetic and sociogenetic terms. In other words, there is a thoroughgoing dialectic between thought and action, self-interpretation and self-transformation. This is the sense in which words belong to a multiplicity of language-games, and to remind us that 'speaking a language is part of an activity, or of a form of life (*Lebensform*)' (Wittgenstein, 1953/1958: 199). In the idiom of speech act theory, there is a performative relationship between the rhetorics of vision and the visual practices and representations they constitute (as an exercise, consider the dialectical mutations associated with the term 'art' that trace semantic transformations marking decisive periods across two to three millennia of Western culture).

What I am searching for here is a non-form or hybrid artefact – a lexical equivalent of the *Galerie von Bildern*, *photomontage*, *tableau vivan*t or *diorama*. Viewed as questions, the dioramas formed by each entry in this lexicon should also be considered, along with the words on the page, as a kind of complex rebus or calligram. The alphabet itself is a fossil record of such rebus-compositions (we know that many of the letters of the alphabet began life as pictograms). And as we have already suggested, even the *linear* form of a written text is not ideologically neutral, and conveys a particular view of the world as structured in readily perceptible 'predicates' and 'propositional' series (many

cultures have not followed the linear 'left-to-right' sequence rules of Western alphabet texts). There is thus an implicit *diagrammatics* embedded in the syntax of writing and normal forms of textual reading and understanding that have developed from Graeco-Latin alphabetic culture. Once denaturalized, the linear typographic text appears as a practical sociological apparatus that renders the world meaningful for a specific community of readers. Understood as a persuasive diagram, alphabetic linearity entails a politics of experience.

In principle any constellation of signs that presents itself as a set of verbal entries is a visual artefact and by admitting this we draw attention to non-linear networks that make this and any dictionary a self-deconstructing ensemble. But also note that, like other cryptograms, the significance of many of these verbal scenes and images invariably lies elsewhere, in other parts of the text which are not, at the moment, visible, in allusions, absences, lacunae and oppositional links to other texts both written and unwritten. Like language itself, visual vocabularies assume a rhyzomatic form, a process of dissemination that practically demonstrates the impossibility of fulfilling the encyclopaedic quest. No text or corpus of texts can hope to be a panorama, *encyclopédie pittoresque*, or 'picture of its age', or, for that matter, an unmediated image of anything beyond the semantic space of its constitutive practices. Each effort at encyclopaedic closure actually produces a kind of phantasmagoria of supplementary words and images, a diagram of its own impossibility.

WESTERN OCULARCENTRISM?

> *'A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably'*
> Wittgenstein, 1953/1958, section 115

All of these reflections lead back to the problem of *language*. Despite these caveats and provisos, I have come to the conclusion that the terms gathered together here, while acknowledging all their obvious sea-changes, are unified by at least one dominant *leitmotif*, if that is the right expression. They plot a tangled tale that can be provisionally defined as the ubiquitous place of visual tropes in the rhetorics of Judaeo-Christian-Modern thought, religion, politics and cultural experience. Expressed somewhat brutally: the *quest for total visibility* – and thereby the language-games of purity, logical clarity, certainty and rational determination – is the single most important underground force at work in the engines of Western European culture. Despite the many attempts to proscribe images and figurality, visuality, or, more precisely, a pervasive *ideology* of the visual, has been elevated to the canonical form of representation of human experience. Our thinking is saturated with visual conceits: we are held captive to the picture of *picturing* or *representation*, forgetting that representation is itself only one kind of diagrammatic depiction.

This may explain why we spontaneously adopt ocularcentric stances toward the work of language and discursive thought. Even such indispensable practices as sentence-making, narrative, storytelling and conversation have been colonized by visual imperatives and tacitly thought in diagrammatic terms (for example, the copula

'is' that ties together 'subject' and 'predicate' in a linear sequence is the simplest picture of how assertion and judgement are thought to work). What we take to be 'thought' has itself been deformed by the dominant logic of representation and the diagrammatic model of linear visual displays (as a comparative hypothesis we might expect very different grammatical and logical functions in agglutinative languages like Hungarian or Japanese).

I would go further and suggest that an idealized model of visuality operates within the filmic or cinematic *motif* that *precedes* the technology of popular film by several millennia. The Platonic imaginary of the Cave uncannily prepared a *chora* for our modern image culture. It is as if the long history of Western European culture had been dreaming of the cinematic machine from its very inception in the Platonic Cave. Even the alphabet is a technology constructed from *images* of language; perhaps the Western phonetic alphabet should be recognized as the most striking aesthetic machine ever invented (even a minimal acquaintance with Greek and Latin inscriptions reveals the sculptural beauty of these scripts). In effect, the ideological fabric of what is now called modern culture has been woven from words of light and as a consequence the archives of its forms of reasoning, its epistemological obsessions and dominant anxieties are saturated with ocularcentric imagery, representations, apparatuses and aesthetic techniques (Cadava, 1997: xvii; cf. Alpers, 1983; Benjamin, 1999; Crary, 1990, 1999; Jay, 1993a; Manovich, 2001; Macphee, 2002; Sacks, 2003; Levin, 1997, 1999; Tagg, 1988).

What, then, are we to make of this 'ocularcentric hegemony', this power of images? How have we become complicit with the magic of seeing? The ancient obsession with absolute phenomenality might account for what Luce Irigaray calls 'the exorbitant privileging of vision in our culture' (in Burke and Gill, 1993). Recall that the primary Greek word for truth (*aletheia*) has a root meaning of 'revelation' or 'disclosure'. Even birth is troped in visual terms (as in the Spanish expression *dar a luz*, that plays on the act of giving birth and the 'gift' of light). Seeing, being seen, appearing and disappearing, viewing and witnessing, representing and modelling, seeking visibility or desiring anonymity have become routinized experiences of modern life dominated by the new electronic technologies. It would follow that whoever controls a society's optical media has a privileged position with regard to mastery and control of other social arrangements. The reach of the visual, however, is even more profound than the surface ideologies of vision and, in fact, extends to the very presuppositions and ground rules of our most fundamental forms of consciousness and identity (behind every possible logic and grammar we find a diagram). Thus the larger part of what we call theoretical reasoning (as perhaps also of 'practical reasoning') consists of the application of visual schemas, images and apparatuses to what is already pre-conceptualized as direct, unmediated experience. This in turn is part of the deep cultural obsession with alphabetic order, visual labelling, stable forms of identity and self-authorizing systems of identification (finally realized in the phantasmagoria of perfect cinematic presence). As Michel Serres observes: 'Language is threefold dominant: administrations rule through the performative dimension of the word; the media dominate through its seductive dimension; the sciences enjoy mastery through its truth dimension' (2008: 234).

When the earliest Europeans looked at the world, they looked through image-machines of their own creation. We inherit their discovery: to *view* the world through discourse. The greatest invention of the human species was the creation of the idea

of an envisioned future or the representation of virtual states that might be realized through concrete praxis. The traces of these collective imaginings are still embedded in the language-games we have inherited from long-vanished forms of Indo-European culture. The day that nature became a sight/site of future action was the day that marked the origin of the European world-view. That day *mythos* retreated before *logos*. Modernity itself has essentially consolidated and continued this videological quest for total visuality (to the extent that, in a world of multi-media conglomerates, the phrase 'visual culture' has become pleonastic). Not surprisingly, the story of visual hegemony is necessarily an amnesic history, a tale of loss and forgetting (or, if you like, of a selective remembering dominated by abstract visual languages and narratives). Here, of course, we are guided by Walter Benjamin's insight that all forms of experience have been mediated through visual technologies. When the world has been translated into the idioms of rectilinear vision with its 'rays', 'vectors', 'orientations', 'intentions', and so forth, we necessarily downgrade and neglect realms of non-visual experience that do not comply with the received visual templates. What is today accepted as 'experience' is shaped by the stock of knowledge that has been recovered and archived in visual machines (again *alphabetic* archives and digital databanks are the most obvious example). In the long-durational repression of the tactile body and devaluation of oral, olfactory, textual and technical media, we have come to inhabit what can only be called a hypertheorized culture, a disembodied universe dominated by light apparatuses (alphabetic and ideographic writing, print, photography, televisual media, video, digital media, cybertechnologies, and so on), fixated upon modes of pictorial representation, linear textuality and metaphors of optical simulation, representation and surface depiction.

What began as a query about the dominance of visuality in modern newsprint and advertising, digital media and consumer culture begins to expand into foundational questions that implicate the fundamental language-games of identity and difference. In watching and viewing the world as a skein of events, we are also necessarily commending powerful forms of privileged selfhood. The design of a whole culture is placed into question. Our senses have been instructed and reconfigured through the cultural powers of envisioning. The spontaneous metaphysics of the visual – with its accent upon directness and immediacy – produces a version of 'world' seen as an endless series of planar surfaces. The new media materialize what Hegel's speculative logic described as an epistemology of 'bad infinity'. Yet as an integral and 'invisible' component of our own dominant ideology, visuality in all its tele-mediated forms performs a collective work of identification, translation and archivization with deep roots into the distant past. In thinking that we access the 'real' beyond all mediation, we necessarily fall under the spell of a particular axiological system that has passed itself off as the face of reality (a virtual presence that has been grouped under the polysemic term 'hyperreality').

VISUALITY AND THE 'DEATH OF EXPERIENCE'

A related theorem is that the remarkable evolutionary functions of visuality and light-inscription technologies have increased exponentially over the last 500 years to the detriment of other corporeal modalities. In the late modern world of computer-

generated digital media, *all* our experiences are mediated through visual machines of one kind or another. There is thus an experiential cost incurred in the very globalization of image-mediated cultures. For example, with the decay of the spoken and written word, *viewing* images has remorselessly displaced *reading* as a privileged form of representation. Today 'imaging' (and all the arts and techniques of 'imagineering') displaces without replacing reading (and critique that depends upon reading). Not surprisingly, some of our contemporaries claim that we live in a world duped by the idea that television – or perhaps televisuality – provides an adequate picture of the world. Others decry the manipulative powers of advertising and the media's manufacturing of consent. Yet others question and reject the very idea of *perfectly* representing the world as an unfortunate consequence of videological culture – with the corresponding deprecation of auditory, tactile and gustatory experience. At the most apocalyptical end of the spectrum, all that we are left with is a totally 'integral reality' created by simulacra industries. Independent thought and action are rendered impossible by the logic of *obscene* hyperrealism (Baudrillard, 2005).

In the main text I will explore the thesis that the development of Western secular notions of logic, science, reason, coherence, truth, and so on was inseparable from the simultaneous unfolding of a distinctive visual culture and its material armatures. It appears that the West has literally 'seen off' the realm of the Gods and the divine for more disengaged and disinterested forms of representation and self-understanding. Paradoxically, ancient myths and theologies went under to be replaced by new heliocentric mythologies. The generative logic at work behind our own global social organizations, economic forms and cultural apparatuses remains videological. If technology is in the driving seat of secularization and globalization, its success is validated by the fact that it forces its users to inhabit a *theoreticized* mindset that provides the generative terms for new forms of transnational capital. The universal reach of digital simulacral machines as a kind of global 'optical unconscious' in this brave new world has, by way of reaction, occasioned a powerful resistance to theory and theorizing that has itself now become part of the mythology of contemporary intellectual life. Not surprisingly, this oscillation between the primacy of the theoretical and the resistance to theorizing in turn becomes a major *topos* within contemporary critical discourse (the intense debates about the possibility or failure of theoretical representation is one indicator of this unresolved issue). These tensions and their institutional ramifications certainly present themselves as themes for further thought about the rhetorical roots of our language-games. As information machineries – themselves embodiments of advanced light technologies – have reshaped every aspect of life at the turn of the twentieth century, it appears that any *Dictionnaire philosophique* – any grammatology of light, any *photology* – is now unthinkable in abstraction from the technology, politics and ethics of global seeing and its extensive metaphorical protocol and armatures. What began with the enigmatic Platonic allegory of the Cave culminates in the global reach of cyberculture. The full implications of digital visuality undoubtedly lie well in the future: the working through of the Homeric dream of an all-seeing vantage point on things awaits its final consummation in a truly universal symbolism promulgated by the new media apparatuses. We do not have to accept every line of McLuhan's assessment to understand that what we now call politics and the social are inseparable from these technical apparatuses and their reconfiguration

of the human sensorium. As Heidegger noted, 'one is in the theoretical always and already' (2002: 74).

METAPHORS OF BEING AND SEEING

How, then, have we come to interpret being through seeing? How have our most basic language-games been shaped by theoretical concerns with accurate representation? Why was the sense of sight – the theoretical sense *par excellence* – granted sovereign status in our discourses and intellectual systems? What kind of desire drives the quest for total visibility implicit in photographic and cinematic culture?

We have extensive evidence that the hegemony of the theoretical – the rule of the sovereign eye and vision-centred discourse – has very ancient roots. The constellation of visual images is, in fact, as old as the core languages of intelligibility and meaning found at the beginnings of European culture. As some of the oldest religions and metaphysical systems taught, whatever exists must first make its appearance, be present or 'manifest' as an order before the knowing mind.

To summarize a long story, the historiography of the discourses of being, truth and the metaphorics of general visibility came to be interwoven into the pursuit of the essential *What* revealed to the witnessing eye of knowledge. As inheritors of the founding light *motif*, if it is such, we still believe that for understanding to be secure things must appear before us with their true faces. This is the desire that is still coded in the Latin *essentia*, the English *essence* and the German *Wesen*. *Whatness* here roughly translates the word *Wesen*, one of the most complex words in philosophical German (a term related etymologically to *wissen*, 'to know'). Essence designates 'what a being is' in its *whatness*, its immobile 'idea' (*ti estin*, *ousia*, *idea*, *form*). What is real – the existent – is real only as the incarnation of form. Being becomes thinkable as in-*form*-ation. Animated by this desire, *theoria* was invariably framed as the pure medium of presence and pure manifestation. We might reverse engineer this powerful metaphor: behind the concrete appearances of things lies a sphere of pure *whatness*, of immutable and intangible *Ideas*. When we unconsciously speak and think of *being* in this quasi-religious manner, we are already locked into visual stories of disengaged seeing and being seen, indebted to images of the *cogito* gazing out upon a landscape of independent *things* liberated from all materiality, ambiguity and historicity. As 'theorists', we find ourselves centre-stage in a theatre where the world has acquired an arcane significance that is only decipherable by pure thought. We are literally the prisoners of ideas. Correlatively, inquirers committed to this gnostic vision of the world are necessarily animated by a videological conception of knowledge understood as the disclosure of the deep structure of its essential appearances. Whoever speaks of *theory* already speaks the language of *objectification* and *recognition*, *recollection* and *overseeing*, *presence* and *representation*. Recognition, in the act of seeing into the essence of things; objectification, in equating essence with objecthood; recollection, in restoring things to their superintendent eidos; overseeing, in being able to anticipate, predict and manipulate the field of visible things.

This ancient picture of the world has been so influential that it now appears as if the very language of truth and objectivity naturally gravitates to the metaphor of panoptical, transparent seeing – to know the world rightly, to grasp its proper forms, is to *see it*

correctly, to dig beneath its surfaces and formulate it once and for all in a privileged mode of representation that transcends the noise and distraction of materiality. At source this gnostic flight from the erotic body into the arms of the ethereal Idea lies at the root of the dream of a universal language of knowledge.

With the wisdom of hindsight, we now know that this quest for an unalloyed and total Truth has been both inspiring and illusory, an amazing and historically effective metaphor that elides its own presuppositions and origins from within a specific cultural value system. As unconscious inheritors of this profoundly *theoretical* view of experience, we have unintentionally become complicit subjects of the illusion of pure envisioning. In the traditional grammar of visibility, the supreme object of cognition, 'Being', is dirempted into its categorial sites and seeing is conceptualized as the privileged organon of divine comprehension (in classical thought, the supreme object of the *bios theoretikos*; in modern thought, the Hegelian dream of 'absolute knowledge'). In the beginning, of course, the supreme 'seer' – the omniscient spectator – is identified as God. Recall that in the Judaic tradition, or at least in the ur-language of ancient Hebrew, being is created in the primal act of an intangible Spirit that showers the world in light, a gratuitous act that is equiprimordial with Yahweh's *naming* of Being and beings as a created whole. Here messianic rhetoric, ontotheology and the project of knowledge converge to create an integrated light rhetoric. The dark void of non-being – the nonexistence of the world – is rent by the light of the divine Word. From this point onward reality can be absolutely known only as the artefactual universe actively envisioned by a creative author and activity ('And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good' (*Genesis* 1.31)). The ancient mytheme of the all-seeing divinity anticipates a complex future history of modular subjectivity, with each variant of subjectivity aspiring to the status of pure seeing (or in later variations, as pure *gnosis*, *sophia*, *scientia*, *veda*, *knowledge*, *intuition*, *insight*, and, eventually, *science*).

Where *philosophia* understood its vocation as the pursuit of wisdom, it was first and foremost the desire to achieve the sovereign consciousness we recognize as the cognitive spectating of Being. Observing and spectating – overseeing – henceforth assume a magical significance. The 'man of knowledge' – in the Greek tradition exemplified by the philosopher aspiring to divinity – is now both *friend* and *seer* of the blue sky of existence, a self committed to uncover the essential Truth of Being 'once and for all' in full self-presence (in more theological language, to name the nature of God, self-subsisting substance and creator of existence in a language that complies with the transparency of the original act of creation). For the contemplative seer, whether poet or philosopher, the inscriptions of being necessarily unfold in the tropes of vision. *Being* – in its endless cultural variations – becomes a watchword for the lucid work of signification that makes things appear and draws reality into the circle of intelligibility. Thus for the master thinkers of classical Greece, the name 'being' (*to on*) signifies whatever is eternal and unchanging Reality (hence whatever is absolutely present and free from material contingency and determination). In this way the hegemony of the visual projects a frame of temporality in the mode of timelessness (archetypally in the Aristotelian image of the deity as God's motionless self-spectating) as it commends cognitive selfhood in the mode of disembodiment.

The proto-ontological story remains invariant: in the material world of everyday life we are tied to the Many, but authentic knowledge aspires to a state of essentiality

in which we authentically 'see' – with the disincarnate eye of the soul – the face of the One. The first philosophers recognized that poor forked creatures are denizens of the Cave – the original and primordial *camera obscura* – and that the given necessarily appears in the clouded opinions and distracting dance of fluctuating appearances. But along with appearances and opinions, we have intimations of aspects of things that decline to appear, that simmer in the darkness as the roots of the really real. We cleave to the poetic idea that what is most essential loves to hide (a disturbing thought that can be traced to Heraclitus' notion that *phusis* loves to hide). On the basis of this spectral schema of surface (appearances) and depth (being), we are then obliged to search for the *essence* of appearance in an underlying and arcane language far removed from the concerns and idioms of quotidian life. This old grammatical desire – the ancient root of myth, poetry and *philosophia* – explains the persistence of *videology*: light metaphysics, optical epistemology, illuminist ethics, ocularcentrism become identical with thinking itself.

The paradox of immediacy is that while all of these ideas and passions are made possible by particular historical sense-making *machines*, their material origins are immediately effaced in the logocentric desire for purity, presence and essence. We not only have a long history of sensuous deprivation, but a history of machinic and technical devaluation: the hegemony of theorizing is accompanied step by step by the demise of *Technik*. As auditory, tactile and olfactory experiences are denigrated, the artefactual status of what we call 'reality' and 'being' is occluded and replaced by a vision of the world where everything lies on the surface for inspection. We are by now fully cognizant of Heidegger's deconstruction of the Greek concept of truth as *aletheia* or unconcealment. In Heidegger's reading, Western philosophy has covered up the idea of truth as an interweaving of concealment and unconcealment for the more accessible imagery of visual seeing. At root, however, we still have two different versions of *unveiling*. Being is understood in visual terms as revelation, unveiling, illumination (*Lichtung*). By unconsciously assimilating these ancient terms of reference, we also accept that the tasks of articulating how anything-whatsoever can be said to 'be' and enumerating the forms of being becomes the business of a spectral science (of ontology understood as a foundational or suprarational science of appearances that would have the last word on the 'manifestations-of-being').

We now recognize that this Platonic revelation without the mediation of the word and other technical media is illusory. Indeed the very idea of an absolutely transparent language of things (perfectly corresponding with the language of Ideas) implicates reflection in the realm of hypostatized metaphors and metaphors of metaphors. Perhaps the whole complex image system has been founded upon a systematic misunderstanding of human incarnation and materialized language? Its construction was premised upon a silencing of language understood as situated *voice* (rather than perfect depiction). It is also premised upon an amnesic disregard of the rich density of tactile, material and technical existence that sustains and animates *surfaces*. Reflection reveals, however, that powerful machines and material processes (including the technologies of speech and writing) intrude everywhere in this marmoreal vision of calm essence. If the last word is a *seeing* of Being in its transparency, then there can be no last word. To loosen the grip of monologic spectrality, I will suggest that even acts of seeing, however fragmented and evanescent, are indebted to prior acts of saying and their implicated discursive

practices: the sensible is made possible and intertwined with the intelligible, but the two are not coextensive. Outside of periodic reigns of terror, there can be no simple paradigm of identity for the sensible and the intelligible (and for this reason things do not appear and *then* surrender for interpretation – things are already citizens of an interpreted world, actors in a theatre of discourse). There is, in effect, no perfectly objective language of being.

INTERTWINING

> *'... objects have languages; to know objects you must be able to translate their languages'*
>
> Lyotard, 1992: 32

It takes but a little further reflection to see that the intelligible infrastructure of *logos* – perhaps the most consequential philosopheme – is itself indebted to an unacknowledged gift of sense and figuration that opens a site for something like seeing, listening, speaking and thinking to flourish (close to the embodied *praxis* of Marx's early theorizing, the *es gibt Sein* in Heidegger's vocabulary, the *il y a* in Levinas or the *chiasm* of reflexive flesh in Merleau-Ponty's late writings). Whatever is *there* to be seen is always-already unveiled in its practical intelligibility and technically mediated being-present. Prior to all talk of subject and object, act and being, self and world, the practical orderings of everyday language (*Alltagssprache*) are already interwoven into the fabric of experience. The 'it' in *es gibt* gifts Being. In short, a *site of immanence* always precedes any and every form of transcendence (the self-giving that opens such a site is Being itself; cf. Heidegger, 1978: 214).

For example, the interpretive traditions in which we practically live are indebted to the unacknowledged incarnations, instruments and machineries by which things first surrender to collective appropriation and interpretation. Human social practices thus colonize an already operative hermeneutic field. This is what we commonly refer to as the world of everyday life, the organizations of human experience that go unnoticed in their very familiarity and banality. This is much more consequential than simply recognizing the hermeneutic complexity of everydayness. It is to grasp the idea that the underlying logics of visuality facilitate specific systems of action, thought and being that have shaped the institutional order of whole cultures. The field of everyday hermeneutics is also a field of power relations. With this insight we may see that the realms of the visible and the legible are imbricated in a complex series of institutional *histories*. In returning to the realm of *Technik*, we enter the dialectic or word and image, the incessant 'intertextuality' of our ways of saying and seeing, or what Maurice Merleau-Ponty once called the reflexivity of the touch, of sight and the touch-vision ensemble: 'This new reversibility and the emergence of the flesh as expression are the point of insertion of speaking and thinking in the world of silence' (1968: 144–5). More importantly, we question our spontaneous machinism and begin to understand inscription machines – the whole spectrum of material inscription, writing and painting, for example – as creative modalities of human coexistence, forms that have actively shaped what we now call experience.

RHETORICS OF SEEING

It has become a truism to claim that ways of *seeing* and ways of *saying* are interwoven in the social forms that shape our experience of life. But *seeing* and *saying* as figures of presence still tend to be abstracted from their material and technological inscriptions. One of the oldest forms of amnesia is our forgetting of the millennial-long work of the machineries of perception and knowledge (an elision that occludes the elementary fact that speech and language are themselves machine-like technologies bound up with material practices). We still view experience as a wordless realm abstracted from *logos* and *technopoiesis*. To remedy this occlusion, we should counter our native empiricism by pursuing the hypothesis that acts of perception are necessarily articulated in semiotic media – and that the reach of semiosis extends beyond the verbal into the non-verbal realms of practices and sociotechnological systems. We see things only on the condition that we can first *read* things (and the dialectics of reading/writing suggests itself as a more instructive model of technically mediated modes of being-in-the-world).

Guided by this hypothesis, I will pursue the thought that the larger part of what we commonsensically call *knowledge* and *truth* are derived from *rhetorics of seeing* and in particular the visual tropes and embodied technologies of everyday life. From this standpoint, *praxical* experience is the true organ of sight, not the eyes. It is the situated *person* – the *social* agent – not the *eye*, that sees. Seeing is an educated and thereby communal faculty. It is a lifelong task of the body's spiritual education, not a sudden illumination. In other words, we adhere to the principle that it is a community of speakers organized politically who 'mean' and not language as an order *sui generis*. (cf. Bakhtin, 1993; Vygotsky, 1962; Wittgenstein, 1953/1958; Gadamer, 1977). The curious fact that common sense commends the opposite standpoint – celebrating the outlook of immaculate perception – is, perhaps, symptomatic of the way in which we have been misled by linguistic pictures. Another way of describing these connections is to say that seeing and sight in their *cultural* meanings presuppose corporeal and rhetorical conditions that are not in themselves visual – that the manifestation of being is not itself another event or being understood concretely. Expressed as a general thesis: the conditions of phenomenality are not themselves 'phenomena'. Heidegger has expressed this idea as follows: 'In order to bring into view what resides in a visual field, the visual field itself must precisely light up first, so that it might illuminate what resides within it; however, it cannot and may not be seen explicitly. The field of view, *aletheia*, must in a certain sense be overlooked' (1994: 127–8).

Seeing is bodied forth in its cultural instrumentalities. This is the hypothesis informing the following lexicon. By accenting the rhetorical realms of language and discourse, we are inevitably plunged into reflexive universes of metaphor and symbolic fabrication – which is to say, into the rhetorical sites of self figuration – signatures of the visible (Jameson, 1992, 1994; Agamben, 1993; Cadava, 1997; Stam, 1989) – which encode some of the oldest pulses of Classical and Judaic-Christian metaphysics. Hence we should immediately recognize and problematize the *Eurocentric* focus of the contents of this lexicon. The almost exclusive focus upon European cultural forms, however, should not be taken as the effect of an unconscious 'imperialism' or 'neo-colonialist' bias. Rather, it reflects the material limitations and inherent fault lines of this kind of introductory project. As we fundamentally agree that the world is a mosaic of visions (Crystal, 2004:

59; Sorensen, 2000), we can make no claim to exhaustive, comparative range. Rather this dictionary assembles a series of fragmentary 'takes' from the history of Western visual culture assembled with limited pedagogic objectives. A future task remains of conducting further and more extensive investigations of non-Western cultural worlds along similar lines (cf. Arnold, 1965; Classen, 1993; Coomaraswamy, 1985; Win-Cheuk Chan, 1985; Lane, 1962; Lin Yutang, 1967; Mitter, 1994; Needham, 1969).

To speak more responsibly, I will suggest that one of the conditions of the possibility of modern *Western* visual culture lies in a constellation of technical, linguistic, political and ideological inscriptions that are of a much more ancient provenance – these constructions point to orders of inscription that antedate all the schemas of poetry, science and philosophy; and, further, that this archaic order of 'writing' indexes a complex field of problems that are routinely ignored by traditional semiotic and cultural analysis. For example, it has been often noted that the grand narratives of modernity – and the sources of modern social theory, political philosophy and research – were forged within a machinery of social, cultural and political traditions concerned with the domestication and rationalization of embodied experience and the downgrading of the everyday material fabric of pre-theoretical existence that resisted binary categories and linear logics (and, even more consequentially, that these formations were structured into exclusionary, objectifying, phallogocentric categories along class, gender, ethnic and 'racial' lines). To qualify this sweeping generalization, we note that in the making of the modern world everyday experience has not only been disenchanted, but has been periodically reordered and subjected to definite visual regimes linked to changing patterns of work, forms of desire, consumption patterns, economic regimes, and so forth. What we call 'history' turns out to be a punctuated, discontinuous and nonsynchronic process. It is not only the work of art that has been transformed and absorbed into the visual spectacle by the technologies of mechanical reproduction.

The contention in the following texts is that the totality of possible experience in the late twentieth century has been radically reorganized through new forms of electronic technology and associated modes of digital inscription and language-games; further, that this hegemony of the technical is itself ground in a particular space of being, a particular way of relating to being that is unique to globalized Western civilization. For example, it is becoming clear that the localized objectifications of the visual gaze are being generalized across the surface of the globe by means of the transnational instrumentation of electronic media, surveillance systems, the Internet and the World Wide Web. Colonizing earlier modes of visual reproduction, telecommunications and informatics creates a new regime of instantaneous, global visibility. The older modernist technologies of photography and film have been grafted into the machinery of the digital revolution to create singular structures of seeing and experience correlated to new forms of technological praxis. The self-constitution of modernity was also achieved on the basis of the projection of 'non-European' space as a site of subservience to the imperial centre and 'otherness' to the dominant Same. These exclusionary forms were directly legitimated by the 'whiteness' of the European gaze and its obsession with escaping the darkness of *doxa* into the light of absolute truth. Given this hypothesis, one of the central tasks of critical cultural analysis is to trace the material and cultural technologies of modernity into the very sinews

of valuation and perception as these have been subject to global forces of imperial domination, control and commodification. Here, Benjamin's seminal essay retains its significance as a reminder that we have only just taken the first bite from the apple of technological knowledge. Benjamin, of course, was unaware of the fact that it would be digital writing/visuality and not photography that was destined to become the paradigmatic technology of the modern age.

To pursue this thesis as a programme of historical research requires an approach to the languages of consciousness as material signatures that create new social relations and sediment into structural forms to form a world that is always-already-said. For the so-called advanced industrial societies of the West, a complex array of sense-making machineries and associated rhetorical practices needed to be established before the differentiation and rationalization of experiential and social spheres could be practically implemented (for example, in socializing the mind to the visual idea that history develops for some purpose or through determinable linear sequences and developmental stages in which the 'rise of the West' was sanctioned and legitimated). We begin to see that how we have come to envision our 'place' in the world and history is the outcome of complex systems of visual metaphors and rhetorics – the product of ways of seeing 'otherness' that are today continued through the global media of digital image production and mass communication. The five pillars of the digital-communications revolution have been summarized as: numbers can represent all information; these numbers are made up of 1s and 0s; computers transform information by doing arithmetic on these 1s and 0s; information is communicated by shipping 1s and 0s across space; and computer networks are formed by combining computers and communications (Dertouzos, 1997: 328). It is these digital information archives that have now been expanded through electronic media and digital computation to achieve a planetary significance (cf. Clark, 1997; Crystal, 2004).

At strategic places in the texts that follow, I will suggest that some of the foundational rhetorics of visual being operate prior to any distinction between different modes of thought, the stances of particular thinkers, the theorizing of academic philosophies, or the voices that organize the programmes of individual disciplines. These rhetorics form something like a 'popular epistemology' or cultural unconscious that is already presupposed by more explicit research programmes (think, for example, of the taken-for-granted categories and metaphorical schemas which order the way in which we establish identities, divide up space and time, construct calendars, narrate stories of historical emergence, order our moral relationships, imagine transcendence, beginnings and endings, and so on). Thus we often find that the thought of two apparently very different thinkers (and bodies of thought) will be unified by their common reliance upon a shared – if unacknowledged – visual ontology. The schema of this ontology operates as a tacit horizon for a disparate range of scientific and philosophical practices. Where this ontology has been institutionalized, it is appropriate to speak of a common way of seeing, 'scopic regime', or shared ideology. And of course there are complex interchanges between the interpretive repertoires of everyday language, scientific theorizing and technoscientific practices (witness the emergence of advanced digital global communication systems and how they still implicate particular forms of visual perception). Often under further analysis the surface differences between practices turn out to be much less significant than the unavowed similarities, the latter often

dictated by an unconscious commitment to an unacknowledged rhetorical schema. This is particularly true for the semantics of visuality in the world transformations that we conveniently group under the title of *modernity* (cf. Blumenberg, 1983). Retaining the archaeological metaphor, we can say that the 'excavation' of the tropological presuppositions of different social practices constitutes the first step in any radical appraisal of different ways of speaking, thinking and theorizing.

LOGOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

The genealogy of operative presuppositions forms the theme of what I have elsewhere called logological investigations (1996, Volume 1). Such inquiries explore the involvement of language (and more generally, of cultural practices) in human activities. Of course because of our own entanglement in visual language and its wayward symbolisms, we can only recover the operations of metaphorical schemas in our beliefs and relations by resorting to other – equally mediated – metaphors and discursive procedures. This hermeneutic circularity contains an important lesson about the reflexivity of reflective language (suggesting the logical impossibility of a rhetoric-free metalanguage and directing our attention to the dialectical relationships between so-called first-order and second-order discourses). The rehabilitation of rhetoric and metaphor in both everyday language and technical discourse leads us back to the task of rethinking the fundamental origins, motives and projects of the Western cultural tradition (which insistently projected itself under the auspices of the phrase 'In the beginning was the Word'). What are the rhetorical sources of our dominant conceptual systems? What are the long-durational implications of privileging the grammar and rhetorics of visuality as universal tropes of knowledge and value? How have videological tropes informed the will to truth in Western culture? How and through what media has Western culture delimited and represented its own identity and self-conception? How do we visualize our own origins, prospects and telos? Clearly we need to keep our eyes peeled.

The figure of 'delimitation' also helps to initiate a constructive criticism of the will-to-truth. Radical reflection in this context refers to the process of self-reflection where received ideas and their limited assumptions are drawn into the orbit of critical thought. To assay the limits and mediations of a practice may be regarded as the first gesture toward a critique of the grounds of that practice. Thus recognizing the cultural mediations of profane interests in the will-to-knowledge (a strategy shared by Nietzsche, James, Benjamin, Foucault and Derrida) or the sociopolitical in figures of seeing (for example, Berger, 1972; Berger and Mohr, 1975; Fuller, 1988) or the presence of visible ontology in figures of sociality (Benjamin, 1999; Heidegger, 1994; Derrida, 1987b; Levinas, 1996) are but first steps towards a critique of the received ontological paradigms and underlying metaphoric and interpretive rhetorics of powerful visual cultures. In place of the *naiveté* and unreflective continuity of thought and its traditions, we uncover discontinuities and ruptures, liquefying sedimented pasts and predictable futures by the force of what Walter Benjamin called 'dialectical images'.

But to go beyond these philosophemes, we need to excavate the material *contents* and energizing *social* life of these diverse optical regimes, to analyse the specific ideological processes, interests and social organizations that have shaped visual

culture into its recognizable forms. It is not enough to foreground the insistent *fact* of the hegemony of visual terminology in our everyday thinking and across a wide range of specialized vocabularies of reflection and self-reflection. A more fine-grained and nuanced sociology must attend to the local uses and appropriations of visual practices. This is the task of a reflexive sociology of visual experience and its attendant social relations and sustaining technologies (cf. Jay, 1993a; Jenks, 1995, 1–25; Heywood and Sandywell, 1998; Mitchell, 1994a, 1994b). We also need to return to the founding acts and self-interpretations of whole civilizations, particularly the ways in which metaphors and ways of talking have been taken up in social practices and institutionalized into the forms of life through which our basic patterns of identity and difference are established and reproduced. Although we need to return, as thinkers like Heidegger and Derrida remind us, to questions of the origins and ends of Western modes of thought, we also need to think sociologically and politically – in the style of the critical thinking espoused by Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin (and continued today by philosophers like Peter Slotderdijk and Slavoj Žižek).

We might suggest that future research will need to explore the nexus of powerful interests and technological apparatuses that have configured the diverse realms of culture in their own image (for example, in understanding the profound role of visual imagery in the identitarian discourses of Western cosmology and, more particularly, in the development of technoscientific thinking about nature and human experience from the seventeenth century to the epoch of the Net). We would be less interested in the workings of ideological presuppositions and metaphoric infrastructures as an end in itself, and more as an occasion for a radical questioning of the dominant discursive regimes of seeing, identity and knowledge in modern society, an interrogation of the discursive systems which make certain contingent social and cultural arrangements appear inevitable (for example, the cosmological images of time and destiny that sustain linear, apocalyptical and millennial images of change; see Gould, 1997). But we need to recognize that these investigations are themselves part of the necessary groundwork for inventing other beginnings and alternative ways of thinking and seeing, particularly in asking how we might move beyond the binary categories that have become unquestioned frames of reference for thinking about self, language and culture in our image-dominated society. Could we not, for instance, disrupt imagism by redrawing the lines between *thinking* and *listening*? Heidegger observes, for example, that: '[If] Plato named what constitutes the genuine element of beings *idea* – the face of beings and that which is viewed by us; if, still earlier, Heraclitus named what constituted the genuine element in being *logos* – the locution of beings to which we respond in hearing – then these both serve us notice that thinking is a hearing and a seeing' (1996: 47).

RE-INVENTING VISUAL CULTURE

Friends have suggested that this *Dictionary* is a metatheoretical lexicon searching for a discipline (or disciplines) that does not yet exist. The analogy drawn here is to the metafictional sub-genre of reviews of non-existent books, for example, the reflexive experiments in Walter Savage Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* (1824), Stanislav Lem's *A Perfect Vacuum* (1979), Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary*

of the Khazars (1988), and the *ficciones* of Jorge Luis Borges (1970) and Italo Calvino (1993). To a degree this is true (and the parallel flattering). But for those who require precedents unencumbered by too many hermeneutical circles, I would simply refer you to a range of 'meta-sciences' concerned with excavating the presuppositions of 'first-order practices' (many of which have a highly tenuous 'fictional' status). I have already suggested a parallel between a culture's imaginary presuppositions and the Freudian idea of 'the unconscious'. The *cultural* unconscious, however, resides in the taken-for-granted symbolisms and rhetorical schemas which enable whole communities to construct practical understandings of their workaday worlds. Finally, we think of the project of 'deconstructive thinking' that attempts to excavate the origins and genesis of a culture's relation to alterity and difference. By tracing these discursive networks (both actual and virtual), we are engaged in something like a genealogy of everyday life and what passes for knowledge in everyday life.

I already hear the reader asking: How can you speak of vision without assuming the inherited terms and metaphors which have shaped its forms through the long history of Western metaphysics? Is this not to labour under a circuitiously extended *petitio principii*?

While accepting the logic of ideological dependency and the circularity it entails, I would make a case for the powers of virtuous circularity and the imaginative leverage of critical reflection. The attentive reader should first note that the tropological history of visuality – what has been called the *metaphysics of presence* – has been decisively marked by the history of gendered power and patriarchal studies that now order the field of modern experience. Let us then provisionally say that the content of a large part of modern visual space has been shaped by the conflicts and contradictions of gendered power relations. The male 'I' has fabricated a female opposite as its 'Other'. 'Occidental thinking' is certainly striated by violent social and ideological differences along the lines of class, gender and race (Fanon, 1967; Said, 1978, 1994; Spivak, 1987; Sturken and Cartwright, 2001; Young, 1990). For real material reasons, ordinary consciousness – as a product of a fragmented ideological history – is also striated and heteroglossial in its forms and configurations. We often fail to appreciate the extent to which our language-games – like our everyday beliefs and moral codes – are rich in ambiguities, loopholes and lacunae. We thus anticipate that the domain of the visible – the discursive topography in which the visual came to be articulated into image sites – will be fractured and displaced along the fault-lines of ancient historical and ideological conflicts. And this is indeed what we find if we turn to the symptomatic texts of contemporary visual culture. These lines of stress are also places that foster critical reflection (hence the following dictionary contains a number of other dictionaries when read from different interests and perspectives).

To express this in another idiom: the metaphors and terminologies of visual culture are woven from the dominant phallogocentric articulation of values and ethicopolitical relations of modern culture. A second reminder becomes necessary here. Because of these complicit relationships, we need to foreground the interconnections between semiotic codes, political cultures, moral evaluations and everyday experience (this point will hardly need making for those currently caught up in such modern information technologies as computing, cable television and digital recording, new machineries that are in the business of revolutionizing established ideas and visual culture). How we

have discursively constructed seeing (and visual experience more generally) is bound up with the will to truth and, thereby, with the will to power in our culture (where theory and theorizing are themselves still profoundly gender blind). I will return to the theme of the will-to-power in different visual regimes throughout the texts assembled in this lexicon. To provisionally indicate the kind of phenomena I have in mind, I ask the reader to consider the pervasive hold of the Cartesian tradition in contemporary thought by tracing the network of themes traversing the entries 'Cartesian', 'Cartesian dualism', 'Cartesian neurosis', 'mind', 'mind/body', 'mirror' and 'subject' in the following lexicon. Or, if the interest is in epistemology and ontology, to follow the network linked to 'presence', 'representation', 'science' and their relatives.

But visual tropes and metaphors are not the only (nor perhaps the most significant) semiotic basis for theoretical ideologies and world-views; even that most videological of cultures – ancient Greece – contained *other* currents and *countervailing* ideas – for example, modes of thought which draw upon musical tropes, dance and auditory phenomena as a way of schematizing and interpreting experience (cf. Barker, 1989; Campbell, 1983; Derrida, 1982; Hallyn, 1993; Serres, 2008). By exercising what Keats called 'negative capability', the reader will soon realize that the metaphoric figures of light, eyes, vision, seeing, perceptual sensations and their family variants do not form a single, unified family; in reality, these figures are themselves striated by differences and hybrid mutations that implicate other forms of experience and other possible histories. It will soon become obvious that a lot more needs to be said about these monstrous complications and subversive possibilities, and happily a wide range of thinkers have already contributed to this teratological tradition – the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Mikhail Bakhtin, Stanley Cavell, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Félix Guattari, Jean-Luc Nancy, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Jean-Pierre Vernant and Paul Virilio, among others, spring to mind. (In modern letters, of course, we think of Laurence Sterne, Alfred Jarry, Guillaume Apollinaire, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Jorge Luis Borges, Thomas Pynchon, Michel Leiris, Michel Serres, Raymond Roussell, Maurice Blanchot, W.G. Sebald, among many other luminaries.)

To get a taste for the occluded, uncertain and fluid dimensions of our predominantly visual culture, we need only think of the non-visual codes and rhetorics that have been manipulated to organize the realms of affective and erotic life (research upon auditory, olfactory and tactile sensory systems indicates that there are histories of repressed discourses behind the ways in which we order our thoughts about the body, sexuality and affective social relations). We need to simultaneously construct programmatic frameworks to overcome the 'denigration of the voice' in modern culture (Appelbaum, 1990) and to begin the systematic investigation of the many 'worlds of sense' (Classen, 1993) that have been neglected by contemporary scholarship. If metaphysics labours under the auspices of the abstract eye, perhaps we had better turn attention to the imbrications of meaning and language in the overlooked auditory, olfactory and tactile words and practices of our tradition?

If the dominant philosophy is sublimated aggression, a counter-tradition might be premised upon the *metaphorics of the ear and listening*. Rather than defeating an opponent with axioms and arguments, this tradition opens up the possibility of attentive,

non-belligerent dialogical thinking (with counterpoint as the musical equivalent of dialectic). This, for example, is how Gadamer defines the task of hermeneutic praxis, placing *auditory* experience at the heart of all education – 'what one has to exercise above all is the ear, the sensitivity for perceiving prior determinations, anticipations, and imprints that reside in concepts' (1997: 17). Before him Nietzsche tried to teach his readers the art of *slow reading* – in effect a slow 'listening' to the rhythms of language – an art acquired through his training as a philologist. What Gadamer, Nietzsche and others point toward – the revision of experience through the metaphors of the ear rather than the eye – in fact already exists and is found in the most ancient texts and practices of Jewish culture. As Jonathan Sacks acutely observes: '*Judaism is not a religion of seeing, but of listening*' (2009: 191). We need to take seriously the older idea of conversation and dialogue as reciprocal listening, a respecting of differences through oral-aural attentiveness. The philosophy of the future requires a renewed *listening* to the polyphony of life. With Sacks we have to ask the radical question: What would a society and culture be like that was founded upon *active listening*? What kind of non-videological paradigms must be invented to restore the dignity of the voice? What kind of 'educational system' and 'university' could be built around the ethic of listening, conversation and *being-in-dialogue*?

An idea of the philological tasks involved in exploring the generative tropes of gendered vision can also be gauged by turning more critically to the categories and texts put into play by the project of psychoanalysts or the explosion of specialist texts in the history and theory of the body, affectivity, emotional expression and wilful embodiment in contemporary cultural analysis. The difficulties incurred by psychoanalysis' attempt to go beyond the culturally prescribed terminologies of *eros* and *libido* in making sexual life a topic of intellectual concern might bridle any uncritical optimism about the work involved in deconstructing traditional rhetorical schemata. The careful analysis of only one small part of one outlying suburb of this discourse would fill many substantial volumes – as illustrated by, for example, Gordon Williams' three-volume work, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature* (1994), Bruce R. Smith's *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (1991), the entry on Shakespeare in Thomas O. Sloane's edited *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* (2001), Helen Vendler's *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1997) or Janet Adelman's study of the role of maternal fantasies in her *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays* (1992). If we delve further back, we might consult Christopher Cannon's *The Making of Chaucer's English: A Study of Words* (1998) and his *Middle English Literature: A Cultural History* (2008).

CAVEATS

> *'Nicht Exaktheit strebe ich an, sondern Übersichtlichkeit'*
> *('I strive not after exactness, but after a synoptic view')*
> Wittgenstein, 1967b: 83/83e

In limiting this lexicon to the compass of a single volume I have, with some regret, been forced to omit large stretches of the complex history of sexuality, sexual identity

and erotic life that have a direct bearing on videological themes (see, for example, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (1973), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men* (1985) and her *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), or browse in J.N. Adams' *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (1982), E. Lucie-Smith's *Sexuality in Western Art* (1991) or Mary Daly's *Webster's First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (1987)). I have also neglected the graphic visual imagery of sexuality in the locutions of slang (for those who are interested, see Jonathon Green's *Slang Down the Ages* (2005) and Geoffrey Hughes' *Swearing: A Social History of Foul Language* (1998). A related absence is the visual imagery in the language of children (along the lines of Iona and Peter Opie's *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (1959)). Another glaring omission is the vast literature on visual architecture, landscaping, interior and external design. Thus those interested, for example, in the philosophy of landscaping and gardening as these bear upon visual culture will have to look elsewhere (or apply some of the methodological principles embedded in these essays to their own research).

I have also done faint justice to the revolutionary transformations in the visual field precipitated by the technologies of the information age (which involve, to say the least, a profoundly *acoustic* or *acoustic-visual* revolution in scopic regimes, mass media and associated modes of experience). We need hardly note that the modern ear – and the hermeneutics of modern auditory experience – have been profoundly reconfigured by the digital revolution. The complex and hybrid phenomena constituted by the intersection of these problematics indexes a rich field of inquiry for future logological research (cf. Danesi, 2000). What I have attempted here is to travel some of the paths in the empire of the senses, to trace out relations and constellations in what one writer has called 'the commonwealth of the senses' (Ings, 2008, chapter 2).

THE FUTURE

In these opening *Prologues* I have restricted my observations to the claim that a large part of our inherited intellectual vocabulary incorporates a dense network of visual terminology which we inherit from phallocentric forms of thought that can be traced back to the ancient Near East, ancient Greece, and even further afield (leading back into distant regions known only to specialists in Indo-European languages and culture – Old Sumerian, ancient Akkadian, Sanskrit and Pali, the language of the Chaldeans, the proto-Greek dialects, and so on (cf. Barfield, 1967; Benveniste, 1973; Hughes, 2000; Shipley, 1967, 1984; Pritchard, 1969).

In the light of these reflections it follows that further efforts of this kind will need to explore not only the etymology and semantics of the visual field (for example, the Indo-European roots of important visual words and expressions) but also the interactions between visuality and other sensory modalities and their technological armatures at different points in the long development of European culture (cf. Sweetser, 1990). The ancient conflict between videological and oral/aural culture has already been noted. The archaeology of this conversation of the senses is particularly urgent with respect to two further claims made in the text: namely that historically our terms for mind and intelligence have been based upon generalizations of terms for the body and bodily functions and that a structure of occlusion (involving mechanisms of marginalization,

forgetting and repression) has operated in securing the imperial position of visual paradigms in contemporary discourse (I will suggest that this form of structural occlusion is one where the dark zones – for example, non-visual metaphors and subversive vocabularies – are indelibly traced in the elided mode of 'absence' within the language-games of videological culture).

This is another way of saying that our preliminary reconstruction of the image-systems and grammars of visual culture should not pre-empt a dialectical exploration of the non-visual fields that are implicated in the historical processes which led to the hegemony of visual terminology, or in detailed historical, sociological and philosophical explorations of the vicissitudes of the verbal/visual configurations that shape particular historical, social and technological systems.

The fact that such studies are not centrally represented in this introduction should not be understood as a tacit recognition of their unimportance. In fact, while assembling these fragments I have become increasingly aware of the impossibility of separating the rhetorics of seeing and visuality from other, non-visual modes of troping experience (an awareness of the impress of social and technological processes that has reinforced the importance of seeing male-dominated social arrangements in terms of dialectical configurations and 'constellations' and of embracing something like the deterritorializing practices of *écriture féminine* in attempting to articulate types of mobile, fluid and heterological semantic structures appropriate to open-ended differential processes). I think of these limited studies as first introductions to a dialectical analysis of visual culture which must in future be pursued in a more systematic and historical fashion for each field of human experience.

What follows, then, are necessarily 'unfinished surveys' in interfacing with future forms of oral/auditory and olfactory analysis that are not focally explored (for the phenomenon of taste and other alimentary matters, we are still indebted to the remarkable writings of Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1755–1826); why his book *The Physiology of Taste; or, Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy* (1825, 2004, 2007) has not encouraged others to pursue similar phenomenological studies is perhaps symptomatic of the occlusive practices at work in modern intellectual culture). A parallel lexicon could be easily constructed using auditory and gustatory metaphors (think of the history embodied in the gastronomic rhetorics associated with the word 'taste' (for example, the derivation of *sapienta* ('wisdom') from *sapere*, to taste) or the sensuous grammars of hearing, listening and attending in both Western and non-Western traditions of thought). In passing, we can observe that the critical analysis of such corporeal metaphors of eating, ingestion, digestion, satiety, evacuation, waste, and so on, might be one place to begin such a study (see Hamacher, 1997; cf. Sweetser, 1990; Williams, 1997). At the very least such culinary, carnal and scatological matters can be expected to form an important domain within the expanding field of logological analysis – the interplay between cultural representations of food, consumption patterns and radical thought is still largely unexplored territory (Brown, 1988; Grimm, 1996; Spencer, 1993). Perhaps Nietzsche was the first serious philosopher of the diet and Mikhail Bakhtin the first celebrant of a culinary philosophy of the carnivalesque (1984b). Nietzsche at least asks: 'What are the moral effects of different foods? Is there any philosophy of nutrition?' (1974: 81–2). To what literature should we look for serious thinking around the corporeal senses of taste and smell (and their

development into terms of choice, enjoyment and discriminatory practices)? Or even more widely: 'Where could you find a history of love, of avarice, of envy, of conscience, of pious respect for tradition, or of cruelty? Even a comparative history of law or at least of punishment is so far lacking completely' (1974: 81). Whatever direction these investigations may ultimately take, the future of such 'transcendental studies' requires corresponding reflexive explorations of the organization of the sensorium in its *rhetorical* and *ideological* functions in different historical and cultural spheres (we foresee generations of scholars working collaboratively on what we might call *the critique of pure information* and the rehabilitation of the corporeal facts of life as an indispensable element in reconstructing the educational practices and institutions of a future culture).

High on the agenda in this respect is the interaction between visual cosmologies, ethical regimes and the cultural organization of space and time into different practical regimes (from this point of view architecture and the built environment can be approached as the visible correlate of powerful value commitments, political symbolisms and utopian discourses). We might investigate the social relations and modes of affectivity embedded in alternative ways of seeing, and how these affectivities are mediated through status and class, ethnicity, race and gender. We need to analyse the gendered dimensions of our language-games of reflection and their sustaining epistemological metaphors (for important advances in this area, see Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985a), *The Sex Which Is Not One* (1985b) and *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993)). As contemporary second-wave feminism has insisted, each of these creative acts of phallocentric definition and enclosure is also an index of exclusion for forms of life that fall beyond the Law of the Father (Wright, 1992). The studies we already have demonstrate that the 'field of vision' is chronically striated by issues of power, interests and ideology (Castle, 1986; Cavell, 1976, 1979a; Guillory, 1993; Schama, 1988; Stallybrass and White, 1986; Žižek, 1989).

Pulling at the thread of patriarchy in different semiotic and textual regimes, for example, leads directly to the violent workings of phallocentric cultures in everyday life (including the 'ordinary cultures' of the built environment, architecture, landscape gardening, ornamentation and decorative art, fashion, interior design, book illustration, calligraphy, coinage, and so on). Even the history of mirrors – and the mirror as image system and metaphor – in the subterranean life of civilizations would repay detailed and comparative investigation. Of course, the *desideratum* here is for a comprehensive, transdisciplinary research programme investigating the layers of ideology and forms of imaginary textuality at work in a class-organized and male-dominated civilization (cf. Irigaray, 1985a, 1998; Jameson, 1981, 1992; Jardine, 1985; Spivak, 1987; Pollock, 1988, 1993; Nochlin, 1989, 1991; Young, 1990, 1995, 1999). And to meet more critical criteria, such a programme would need to be grounded in differentiated empirical and conceptual investigations of different scopic regimes, cultural practices and social formations (cf. Berger, 1972; Jay, 1994; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Johnson, 1987).

In the following *Dictionary* I have set my sights much lower. The objective is simply to initiate a general exploration of the more obvious terms of vision that inform many of the theoretical references in the arts, social sciences and philosophy – dwelling, for example, on the implicit logic of identity which posits the 'object' or 'other' of theoretical cognition as a passive term of aggressive perception – as the feminized correlate

of an essentially patriarchal way of seeing (mastering, getting straight, grasping, penetrating, revealing, digesting, codifying, legislating, and so on). In the aftermath of the linguistic, semiotic and hermeneutic turn in modern thought, it is a commonplace that speaking a common language means sharing a great deal more than words and utterances. Words, as many schools of contemporary philosophy teach, do things to those who use them in the business of everyday communication. Words handed down to us from the distant past are not merely phonetic tokens governed by syntactical and semantic rules, but social forces and symbolic actions that reproduce ideologies and social arrangements. Words, in Wittgenstein's well-known phrase, belong with forms of life. They constitute the material armature of dominant social and cultural practices (consider, for example, the phallogocentric logics which organize the *grand récits* of the Enlightenment tradition or the formalized rhetorics of courtly culture). In general the symbolic order traces a history of social relationships and institutions (of stratification, marginalization, authority, domination, and so on). Occasionally the presence or absence of a single word or part of a word – the humble *iota* that divides *homoousion* ('of one substance') from *homoiousion* ('of like substance') – can lead to violence and large-scale social conflicts that lead to the recasting of whole ways of life and institutional frameworks (consider, for example, the consequences of the idea of purification as a 'mortification of the flesh' in the history of Western Christianity). We should not be surprised to find that the history of words is littered with the ruins of past social and political experience – both joyous and terrible. But since words migrate and wander in unpredictable ways, a comprehensive treatment of even a single important issue (for example, the interminable complex of problems indexed by the terms 'experience' and 'perception' themselves) presupposes encyclopaedic knowledge of nearly every discipline that is connected with perceptual consciousness, among these experimental sciences, aesthetics, literature, literary theory, social theory and philosophy).

Part Two: Preview and Methodology

'Grammar tells what kind of object anything is'
Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1953/1958: 373

GENEALOGICAL PERSPECTIVES: FROM WAYS OF SEEING TO PRACTICES OF LOOKING

If we are to understand the complexities of visual experience, why begin with terminology and language at all? What have words and linguistic representations to do with the rhythms of vision as a concrete intuition of the real? At this point we can only respond to this question very schematically. The most insistent reason is that every act of 'seeing' (and therefore every theory of seeing) is an interpretation of the world. From this point of view, all perception is an embodied reading of experience from within the framework structuring that seeing (and thereby by techniques and technologies of seeing embodied in everyday language).

It follows that to deconstruct any experiential topic we must proceed dialectically and implicate both the 'objects' and 'subjects' of experience as co-constitutive moments of meaning creation. This dialectic of subject and object points toward a deeper grounding of sense-making in human praxis: 'man is not lost in his object only when the object becomes for him a *human* object or objective man. This is possible only when the object becomes for him a *social* object, he himself for himself a social being, just as society becomes a being for him in this object' (Marx, 1967: 100). In other words, to see anything as an 'object' and to understand the praxis of looking as the activity of a subject is already a particular interpretation of experience. Indeed an interpretation of experience that has its roots in a particular historical *version* of perceptual life. The grammar of 'seeing' has from the very beginning been involved in diverse social processes of re-mediation and metaphoric extension. And here technologies of visibilization have played a fundamental role.

The concepts assembled in this lexicon suggest that we live in a protean world, a world that is progressively being remade by the imagineering industries. We do not simply open our eyes and see; rather we learn to see through socially prescribed *practices of looking*. We see through male eyes, we gaze through colonial lenses, we perceive through the optics associated with an occupation, age-cohort, social class, and so on. Today we have expanded our practices of looking through the prostheses of new information technologies, video, digital television and cinema. And clearly these differential 'practices', 'mediums' and 'interpretations' also involve the orchestration of other sensory modes and the interpretive schemes these incorporate. Indeed in our electronically mediated ways of seeing there is never simply 'seeing'; rather 'seeing' is

itself one moment of a multi-media configuration (the electron microscope is densely embedded in a more encompassing nexus of material and technological apparatuses). From the simple idea of 'ways of seeing', we need to move to the grammatically more reflexive idea of 'practices of looking' (increasingly exemplified by such technological forms as biotechnological engineering, MP3 players, iPods and pod-casting, Web-casting, Internet blogging, computer gaming, digital graphics, 3-D cinema, robotic sensing, and the like).

Hans-Georg Gadamer once reminded his readers that every linguistic experience is primarily experience of the world, not experience of language (1989: 546). Learning to speak a language 'does not mean learning to use a pre-existent tool for designating a world already somehow familiar to us; it means acquiring a familiarity and acquaintance with the world itself and how it confronts us' (1977: 63). Even earlier, Nietzsche had proposed that all forms of existence (*Dasein*) are actively engaged in *interpretation* mediated by language (1974, section 374). We can go further by envisioning 'experience' as always-already 'experience constructed by media'. What is called 'experience' is already indebted to its sustaining material activities, technological mediations and discursive forms of life (hence the apposite phrase 'practices of looking'). Thus the new digital media are both *extensions* of human experience and *transformations* of our being-in-the-world. From this post-phenomenological standpoint language can no longer be regarded as a closed totality of signs, but must rather be viewed as an open dialogue with things. The *possible worlds* correlated with diverse languages are local manifolds that predelineate actual and possible dialogues with others. For competent agents, to speak is to speak about the world with others. But 'speaking' here refers to a multiplicity of different activities. Every speech community represents an historical articulation of meaning that constitute universes of relevance and significance. Every community is at base a form of human belonging-together.

By generalizing this insight, we hypothesize that human perception is always in-formed seeing, a seeing-through-sounds that is necessarily interwoven into other sense-making practices. Language is always-already *world-directed*. In our intensely literate and visual age we tend to forget that the world is still first experienced as an *acoustic* universe crafted through *dialogical* exchanges between people. The first stratum of social relations and moral obligations are acquired through the *voices* of others. Even a single word – perhaps even a single sound – is a palimpsest of lost worlds (Hitchings, 2008, chapter 2). A word is a sonorous image in flight to its referent. Speech, the site of meaning, is an integral part of the flesh of the world. In dialogical terms, the human voice is an articulation of organic materiality directed toward other embodied speaking agents (in this sense we could say that it is the body that speaks). We can then define language as a reciprocal dialectic between language and embodied agents that is simultaneously a disclosure of multiple objectivities. This basic hermeneutic principle is itself informed by the historicizing turn of modern thought, with its imperative to examine the instruments and techniques of world-directedness as social, cultural and historical constructions. New instruments, novel experiences; new technologies, new intentionalities, new ways of being; new technoscientific apparatuses, new forms of life.