

Conclusion: the spectator makes the picture

Without wishing either to repeat what has gone before or to force a coherence at this stage, especially given that this part of the text will be followed by a section devoted to my own visual work, I would like to finish by briefly summarizing what has been achieved. This text was researched and written from the particular perspective of my own practice and throughout this process, I have been drawn to specific arguments and examples of others' work which seem to resonate with the thinking and methods behind my own work. Broadly speaking, each of the preceding chapters has attempted to articulate particular aspects of the relationship between viewer and picture, and to address the nature of subjectivity as it applies to art and spectatorship. I have regarded spectatorship as a process of constructing a meaning, a world or a story from a fragment and as an activity which is essentially *private*, where misapprehension, misreading or misprision, to use Harold Bloom's term, may be as important and valuable as an apparently accurate reading.¹ Or as Gilles Deleuze asks, "Does not the paradox of repetition lie in the fact that one can speak of repetition only by virtue of the change or difference that it introduces into the mind which contemplates it?"²

1. see Harold Bloom *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* London & New York: Oxford University Press 1973, pp19-45.

2. Gilles Deleuze *Difference and Repetition* (trans. Paul Patton), London: Athlone Press 1994 (1968), p70.

3. Nelson Goodman *Languages of Art*, p14.

4. see Damisch *The Origin of Perspective*, p xxi.

Linear perspective has been regarded as a key to the consideration of the problem of the image/viewer relationship. Given that any representational act is to some extent, conventional, in that it involves considerations of intention, construction, recognition and interpretation - these being shared between artist and spectator - a perspective schema presents an image to the eye which is geometrically *correct* in that it yields a perception which would accord with a perception of the represented world or object when seen from *precisely the same point*. This does not require, however, that the representation should necessarily resemble the object in terms of the visual identity established by linear perspective. For a representation to be successful, it is more important that we recognize what is being denoted over and above how that thing is denoted: as Goodman states, it is "not a matter of copying but of conveying."³ Perspective, however, *does* offer a robust, faithful and pragmatic means of representation in that it yields an image which generally accords with how we see whilst not claiming to represent how we see. Aside from the arguments over its historical development and specific use, the system of linear perspective to the contemporary observer can be both an object of apparent truth and an "expressive apparatus".⁴

In its classic definition, perspective is predicated on the notion of a spectator situated at a specific point in front of the picture plane from which the represented world becomes sensible. Such a picture, however, is also robust in that

we do not necessarily have to perceive it from this ideal point in order to understand what is pictured. Indeed, the fact that we have two eyes contributes to the efficacy of perspective as this enables us to perceive the picture as a *surface* and not merely as that which it represents. Stereoscopy, on the other hand, whilst revealing the artifice of its illusion, renders the picture plane transparent. Moreover, the perception of three dimensional volume in such a picture occurs more tangibly *within* the viewer's psychophysiological system. That is, rather than unambiguously referring to a world 'out there', the stereoscopic picture *incorporates* the spectator. It is a form whereby the spectator as much creates or constructs and participates in the illusion as they do regard it from an external point of view.

The viewpoint implied in the perspective schema not only frames a particular view, it also necessitates the exclusion of other views and other viewpoints. As a result there is a tension between the notion of an infinite, unbounded and a-centric space and a bounded frame and centred spectator, between the 'here' of the viewer and the 'there' of the picture. Depending on the disposition of the space and objects within the frame, this viewpoint may have varying implications for the picture's meaning in a narrative sense. Movement of the frame due either to any movement in the viewpoint itself or in its orientation to the depicted scene - which, it could be said, is brought into being through the dual processes of depiction and perception - suggests a movement of the viewer themselves and with it, a shift in the psychological implications of the picture. In this sense, representation can be understood as a dynamic process of *becoming*. Is this a first-person viewpoint? Whose viewpoint are we adopting? To what extent are we implicated in the picture? Such questions inevitably occur to the film spectator in response to a film's narrative but perhaps are less apparent to the viewer of still pictures, particularly those images which are synthetically constructed, for example, a representational painting or computer-generated picture.

Changes in a viewpoint along an axis similarly change the apparent spatial disposition of a scene. We may see objects or parts of objects which were not visible before and may not be visible in the future if the viewpoint subsequently alters again. Stereoscopy is founded on this principle (of motion parallax) where the 'repetition of difference' effects a perceptual shift and so a perception of depth. Its *raison d'être* relies on our experience of being-in-the-world, on our constant experience of the unfolding of space in conjunction with the unfolding of time. In the fiction film, these shifts in viewpoint enable the construction of a fictive space over time and similarly necessitate the spectator's involvement. This space is constructed within the spectator's cognitive apparatus and is determined by narrative and by the desire to extract sense, logic or significance from

a sequence of more or less disparate images. As visual perception involves the constant positing of hypotheses regarding what is or what might be seen, what could be called *narrative perception* similarly builds on and orders - in an intentional manner - perceived details, differences and cues or clues to what is represented. Fictional narrative can be described as having two levels, of story and of plot, where the latter provides a means of revealing or indeed *constructing* the former over time. Narrative itself, like vision, could in this sense be regarded as a form of cognition, a 'thinking-through' as in a 'seeing-through'.

5. Bertrand Russell *Human Knowledge*, pp100-108.

The notion of the reciprocal gaze highlights an aspect of subjectivity which 20th Century philosophy has explored in detail, namely the problem of other people and other minds. We are used to seeing the world from a particular point of view and commonly use particular words - I, this, here, now - to define our relationship to this world, words which Bertrand Russell calls "egocentric particulars" and whose "shifting subjectivity" he is at pains to dissect.⁵ Such terms find a visual analogy in the system of perspectival representation where the subject is inevitably positioned at the centre of a world: I-see-this-here-now. In certain pictures the centred self implied by the perspective schema may be disrupted by the gaze of a character in the picture or, indeed, the picture itself may appear to return our gaze, as if it had been lying in wait, anticipating an object to 'trap', as Lacan put it. But just as a dialogue between people is an exchange, so both the picture (or film) and, by extension, the artist are involved in an exchange with their spectator through which a meaning is created. And, bearing in mind Duchamp's 'art-coefficient', for each different viewer, there will be a different exchange, a different detail perceived and so a different interpretation.

6. D.N. Rodowick *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, p7.

In a discussion of Gilles Deleuze's writings on cinema, D.N. Rodowick maintains that the appeal for Deleuze of thinking and writing about cinema from a background of philosophy was that it could help him understand "how the possibilities of thought are renewed by artistic practice."⁶ This project has aimed to explore the possibilities arising from the conjunction of two apparently distinct activities - writing and making - within the perspective of art practice, specifically my own practice. It could be argued that anyone involved in art as a practitioner is by necessity also involved in thinking and researching (and sometimes writing), and applying ideas generated through this research to the realization of visual work. The difference here is that an area of exploration is, to an extent, mapped out in advance. That is, research is the means of orienting oneself in relation to the surrounding terrain. It is also the process through which one searches for and identifies relevant material and precedents within the constellation of ideas which are of necessity external and prior to one's own project. Bearing in mind

7. Victor Willing 'Travel by Bus' (1954), *Victor Willing: A Retrospective Exhibition 1952-85* London: Whitechapel Art Gallery 1986, p60.

my discussion of narrative, the two activities - writing and making - have offered different means of plotting a course through the material covered in the sense that the notion of *plot* as a means of relating a *story* implies a process of navigation, where one plot may differ from another. If the process of writing involves to some extent the crystallization of a set of ideas in a particular external form (a text) those ideas may also be clarified in other ways. That is, the thought processes articulated in a textual form may also be proposed, realized or articulated in a visual form. (In a general sense, this is what is intriguing - from the perspective of my own visual practice - about Panofsky's essay on perspective, a central tenet of this being that the process of visual representation may reflect an underlying process or system of thought.) The implication is that behind this realization or proposition - be it textual or visual - there is a mind which contemplates and that the activity of contemplating somehow precedes the expression of that contemplation. We commonly understand the expression 'to visualize' to indicate the process by which a thing, concept or feeling is made visible to the eye and/or the mind. In the contexts of both visual and textual practice, this process is as much an activity of clarifying and focusing the thing, concept or feeling as it is of simply translating, transferring or transposing that thing onto or into an external object. As the painter Victor Willing put it, the realization of an idea - in a gesture or response to a situation - is simultaneously an act of both discovery and communication: "The thought is made in the mouth."⁷ But whereas a still picture presents something to be seen and *possibly* interpreted over time, a text involves a sequential reading where a description or argument is *necessarily* developed over time. It would therefore be useful to distinguish between the realization of a thing in either visual or textual terms, that is, between its visualization and what could be called its *textualization*. Both may refer to the same set of ideas but our experience of them is necessarily of a different order. By positioning both visual and textual work under the same umbrella, one is required (or one is inviting oneself) to account for the relationship between the two. But whereas texts are useful for the development of an argument and the drawing of conclusions through reasoning, visual work (art) is less suited to such a process and, indeed, cannot properly be seen as a means of communicating a conclusion or summary.

As I have shown with regard to narrative theory, the viewer/reader's contribution to the sense of a narrative work is paramount. A proposition is described in philosophical terms as a statement which contains a subject and a predicate that is subject to proof or disproof. Where a text is adept at leading the reader through an argument and, as a result of this journey, enables them to arrive at a conclusion, a visual work can more appropriately act as a kind of proposition.

That is, it is something which is of necessity open-ended or open to interpretation within the constellation of ideas developed by an artistic discourse. In this sense, it seems more appropriate to speak of the visual work which follows as *propositions* based on related ideas and observations than of conclusions as such.