



The Style of Hawthorne's Gaze

Regarding Subjectivity

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For Agnes McNeill Donohue

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Provision

In Retrospect:
Looking A/head

This book assumes a certain familiarity with continental thinking, its figures and configurations. In this context, "Hawthorne" will figure forth against and beyond the four sides of a (theoretical) frame: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Lacan, Martin Heidegger, and Jacques Derrida. Some, of course, will object to this. For certain reasons (methodology, chauvinism, ignorance, IQ), they don't wish to see Hawthorne keep such company. Such people would rather starve than eat a meal with "outsiders," "foreigners" who don't belong (Brillat-Savarin, forgive them). Some will further object to the configuration itself, the eclecticism of this dinner party. They would *exclude* mon-sewer Derrida for the sake of conversation, the flow of things around the table that is, for the sake of consistency, on behalf of (a) system: one that might *include*, perhaps, the pre-reflexive. Others, still, would stage a different scene, would cut out Merleau-Ponty, delete him from the guest list, so that this opening now removes, perhaps, its strongest link to (the) tradition what the "Language Club" critiques. Such people would also remove Christ from the scene of Leonardo's "Last Supper" (look at that gathering): he's simply in the way (go ahead: take another look). In this case, the exclusion of a figure for the sake of the view could only be (taken as) a frame-up. In either case, the figures of Merleau-Ponty and Derrida would seem to represent a scenario at odds with itSelf. In any case, perception and reflection are the antagonists.

In his later works, Merleau-Ponty foresees this problem, critiques this scene, the place of perception in his earlier thinking: "If my left hand is touching my right hand, and if I should suddenly wish to apprehend with my right hand the work of my left hand as it touches, this reflection of the body upon itself always miscarries at the last moment: the moment I feel my left hand with my right hand, I correspondingly cease touching my right hand with my left hand." 1 Perception erases its subject (self-perception) as the failure of perception itself: "if it is true that my body as an opacity opens up the space of my glance, then this condition of possibility of all perception also entails the impossibility of self-perception." 2 Merleau-Ponty's notion of a *hyper-reflection* will subsequently seek to fill the space of this void. As a "dialectic without synthesis," this "hyperdialectic" anticipates the operation of deconstruction, as Gasché observes; and yet the thrust of its desire would recuperate "the being that lies before the cleavage operated by reflection" in other words, the One, Being as a whole. 3

Derrida's early thinking begins upon this threshold; he will dismantle its frame, recite it at the site of auto-affection itSelf: "auto-affection must either pass through what is outside the sphere of 'ownness' or forego any claim to universality. When I see myself, either because I gaze upon a limited region of my body or because it is reflected in a mirror, what is outside the sphere of 'my own' has already entered the field of this auto-affection, with the result that it is no longer pure. In the experience of touching and being touched, the same thing happens. In both cases, the surface of my body, as something external, must begin by being exposed in the world." 4 Here, Derrida critiques that One-ness of Being (what Merleau-Ponty would recover) as it appears in Husserl: the desire for a reflection coincident with itSelf. For Husserl, the "voice" provides this "medium of universal signification"; it "meets no obstacle to its emission in the world precisely because it is produced *as pure auto-affection*. This auto-affection is no doubt the possibility for what is called *subjectivity* or the *for-itself*."5 Derrida will subsequently disrupt the scene of this phantasy, subvert it with the structure of the sign. The meaning of the percept, as such, cannot be prior to reflection.

Between these two "antagonists" emerges a third: Jean-François Lyotard. His notion of the *figural* retrieves the space of Merleau-Ponty's *hyper-reflection*, but in the form of deconstruction.⁶ We've neither time nor space to trace the various shapes of this configuration.⁷ Suffice it to say that the figure of Lyotard provides the fifth side of that theoretical frame through which my gaze at "Hawthorne" will pass. Thus, were I to exclude either (Merleau-Ponty or Derrida) from the party, Lyotard would take that place. Let it be. He is the fifth side of the framesilent, but there. You may not always see him.

At any rate, the "Hawthorne" set forth in this book explodes whatever frame appears to surround it, confine it exceeds, in fact, (the view of Hawthorne) itSelf. For "Hawthorne" is a configuration of texts (so designated by the name) *further complicated* by the fact that, in those very texts, Hawthorne frequently (mis)places himSelf (puts himSelf in place, puts in place [*mise-en-scène*] himSelf, puts Hawthorne in "Hawthorne") as one of its (own) figures and often, moreover, ahead of itSelf, beside itSelf, at the head of its self: prior to the text as its pretext (preface). This configuration of texts called "Hawthorne" is itSelf abysmal (*mise-en-abyme*). Hawthorne puts "Hawthorne" in (the) place of itSelf: "Hawthorne" puts Hawthorne in (the) place of itSelf. Thus, for the sake of a certain economy, I will for the most part remove the quotes that frame him. Hawthorne will speak for itSelf, will

be, indeed, an envoy shuttling back and forth in the post that would send him hither, thither, and beyond (himSelf). Along the way, "Hawthorne" (now how did that

frame get back in here/[there]?) will resonate those figures with whom he is invited to play. These playmates will volley a barrage of signs to which others might (co)respond: *Augenblick* (the blink of an eye), *Bestand* (standing-reserve, standing by for duty), *bord* (border, edge, margin), *coup* (cut, the "wound" [*blesure*] of desire), *das Ereignis* (the event), *das Man* (One, the "they-self"), *Dasein* (there being/being there), *eidos* (the idea[1], pure form, absolute referent), *envoi* (envoy, message, relay), *fort-da* (gone-here/there [it is], Freudian repetition), *Geist* (mind, spirit), *Ge(schick)sal* (fate, destiny, destination, sender/sent, post), *Ge-stell* (frame), *(Holz)weg* ([forest]path), *Kern* (kernel, heart, center), *mise-en-abyme* (put-in-abys, abysmal), *mise-en-scène* (put-in-place, set-up, staging/staged), *objet petit a* (the "other" [small (*a*)*utre*], object of desire: to be distinguished from the "Other" [capital (*A*)*utre*]i.e., let's make no bones about this: Language), *parergon* (frame), *pli* (fold, gap, nothing), *poiesis* * (making, gathering, "poetry"), *poste* (postal system, post office, station, position), *regard* (look, glance, gaze), *subjectum* (subject, [world]view, subject in subjection to its view, the world subjected to the view of a subject), *techne** (making, craft, technique [to be distinguished from technology]). The effect is often dizzying: signs playing off one another like the reflections in Hawthorne's mirrors, bouncing (things) around, a playground of echoes, vertigo, the abyss. To this montage of signs, I'll add but one of my own. I've coined it purely for the sake of economy. Whenever I use the term "itSelf," I specifically call your attention to a certain doubling, duplicity, reflexivity within the word to which it refers. For instance, "narration itSelf" refers to the "self" of narration, the very self narration constitutes. Regarding the play of this proliferation of signs, I can't go (back) over this (play)ground (*Ab-grund*), here, in detail; I can only suggest its terrain, territory, its topography, the lay of the land. I've yet another tract to get through before we arrive at the *word* ("Hawthorne") *as such*. Should we lose the way, however, I recall you to Izaak Walton regarding a favorite conceit of the angler. One cannot lose what he never had to begin.

I leave you hovering around the table, awaiting the body of "Hawthorne," anxious for the provision(s) to be (re)past, to be under way, on the way (*weg*). A word of caution, however: what lies (up) ahead will take some time. It's not a fish fry. The regalement will proceed as follows: an apéritif, three main courses (concluding with Hen), dessert, and a digestif. The course (of these courses) may (re)turn upon itself (*Holzweg*): some will go back for seconds. Those impatient to finish must leave the pleasure of these delays behind. I'm

behind you in this. In any case, there's no clean getaway, no bib. From here on, things get messy. Finger food is first. Bon *a(p)pétit!*

Prologue

Perspective and Frame: The Daguerreotype

The Middle Ages had conceived of a picture as "a material, impenetrable surface *on* which figures and things are depicted"; similarly, what it had called *perspectiva* was merely optics that is, "an elaborate theory of vision which attempted to determine the structure of the natural visual image by mathematical means but did not attempt to teach the artist how to reproduce this image in a painting or drawing." 1 It was not until about 1420 that Brunelleschi defined the painting as "a plane cross section through the pencil of rays connecting the eye of the painter (and the beholder) with the object or objects seen," so that by around 1435 Alberti was able to formulate the picture as a *pariete di vetro* or "an imaginary window pane *through* which we look out into a section of space." 2 Because the Renaissance predicated its new approach to the visible upon this revolutionary definition of artistic construction (*techne**) and representation, (the space of) "the world" itself was uniformly that is, geometrically put in (its) place: *mis-en-scène*. Above all, this new pictorial or "artificial" perspective enabled the science of anatomy to explore the interior space of the human body with an objective precision hitherto impossible. Leonardo's *Situs* drawings, for example, not only correlate perspective images with vertical and horizontal sections, but also demonstrate the internal organs in transparency; his "serial sections" represent "a concrete, surgical application of a method of geometrical projection developed by Piero della Francesca and later adopted by Dürer: the plotting of a series of cross-sections through the human body preparatory to exact perspective construction"; in this respect, Andreas Vesalius' *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543) marks the inception of a new epoch in anatomical investigation. 3 Science had securely commenced its transparent mission: seeing *through* the world.

At the same time, another science was breaking fresh ground on a reciprocal front. In the very year Vesalius published his *Fabrica*, Copernicus had formulated the new astronomy; by placing the earth in (proper) perspective, he set up the "correct" space of the world. And like the human body, the external world demonstrated its own theory of proportions which would henceforth locate the *res extensa* within a transparent view uniformly ingressive to all by virtue of its technological constitution. To the degree that "the world" had become geometrically spatial, the subject had become an observer the disinterested spectator of its view. And this technique

instrumentality of a uniform spacesends science on its way (*Bestimmung*). For what, after all, constitutes scientific observation,

its *destinée*, but an attitude that varies the point of view while keeping the object fixed? 4 Subject and object now rendezvous at the very point upon which they vanish. I needn't recall the "psychology" of this event. Suffice it to say that the rhetoric of alienation extends as "far back" as the Renaissance: witness Hamlet or Lear.⁵ Perspective thus transposes a transparent consciousness onto "the world": the means of seeing through it. Poised "outside," the view itself hands over to the subject a picture of the whole. Copernicus' view affirms as much. Let's not be deceived by the "illusion" of displacement. For its ironic moment merely puts the subject in the center of the picture *as* its very framewhat has been "missing" from (the center) itSelf.⁶ It remained for Kepler to establish this new world picture, in (the) light of its technology, with finality. But that's another story (*récit*).

Here's the one whose path (*weg*) I track. Writing to Francis Bacon in 1620, Sir Henry Wotton told of a visit to Kepler, where he saw a "draft of a landscape on a piece of paper, methought masterly done"; and to Wotton's surprise, Kepler remarked that he had made the picture from "a little black tent . . . exactly close and dark, save at one hole, about an inch and a half in the diameter, to which he applies a long perspective trunk, with a convex glass fitted to the said hole, and the concave taken out at the other end . . . through which the visible radiations of all the objects without are intromitted, falling upon a paper . . . and so he traceth them with his pen in their natural appearance."⁷ Kepler's "little black tent" was, of course, a *camera obscura*, and it became his visible model for the human eye. Although Giambattista della Porta had popularized it in the sixteenth century, the first (published) account appeared in Vitruvius' *Architecture* (1521). While others before Kepler had remarked its analogies to the human eye, Kepler was the first to fully demonstrate its resemblance to vision; and it remained for Scheiner to prove the hypothesis at his exhibition in Rome, 1625, where he "cut away the coats of the back parts of eyes of sheep and oxen, and, holding objects before them, saw the images of the objects clearly and distinctly inverted upon the naked retina."⁸ Descartes' geometrical vision was thus substantiated by these "pictures" painted on the eye. And many thinkers of the period entertained the notion that in the structure of the eye could be found that intermediary term, the missing link, between *cogito* and *res extensa* a "sophisticated" rendition of the Cartesian pineal gland.

In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke's darkroom analogy extends this (im)position toward the epistemological domain: the

subject (of knowledge) itSelfthat is, "the Subject who is Supposed to Know."⁹
His famous "closet-simile" recites the place of its inversion (neither-
nor/neuter), the legacy to which it has always already

been dispatched, posted: this "little black tent" (read, instead, its lips: this little black "box") become phallus. Here's Locke: "methinks, the *Understanding* is not much unlike a Closet wholly shut from light, with only some little opening left, to let in external visible Resemblances, or *Ideas* of things without; would the Pictures coming into such a dark Room but stay there, and lie so orderly as to be found upon occasion, it would very much resemble the Understanding of a Man, in reference to all Objects of sight, and the *Ideas* of them." 10 Leibniz, on the other hand, will have no problem with this shadow (*obscura*) in whose room (*camera*) will be enacted the (*mis en*) scene (of a crime: a body is missing). The *Discourse on Metaphysics* (1686) shows nothing but light.¹¹ It will require but the stroke (*coup*) of Hume to change the face of this picture once and for all, to set in (the) place of understanding imagination as the site of all future sights regarding the *camera obscura*.

Hume "draws" his distinction between memory and imagination in terms of their respective representational ability to produce a lively "image" or picture, to *paint* their objects.¹² Consistent with this painting metaphor, he attributes to imagination, vis-à-vis its facility to grasp the object, a certain ability to position the subject itself, a position, for the moment, contingent upon both time and space. The *camera obscura* is here; imagination always relates its object to the "present" (time and space). The more remote the object in time or space, the more difficult is the task for imagination, and the greater the pleasure we derive from its use. And though Hume admits "the consequences of a removal in *space* are much inferior to those of a removal in *time*," he nevertheless conceives the function of imagination primordially in spatial terms; for the removal in time is thought as a *distance* between individual successive moments; in effect, imagination positions the subject with respect to its object as a relation of perspective.¹³ Something is already sliding, slipping away from sight: fading from (the) view.

Now here's the coup (de grâce), the rub (out), the prestidigitation: before our very eyes the object disappears (a body is missing). For the greater the distance between subject and object, the nearer we approach the sublime.¹⁴ The sublime itself recedes indeed, will come to inhabit the "vanishing point" of the subject. The death of the object is the birth of the subject. We're but a (side) step away from Kant, whose track we follow, and in whose image (make no mistake: this "Copernican revolution" is square, not round) "the world" will be framed that is, made immanent in the subject, as Husserl