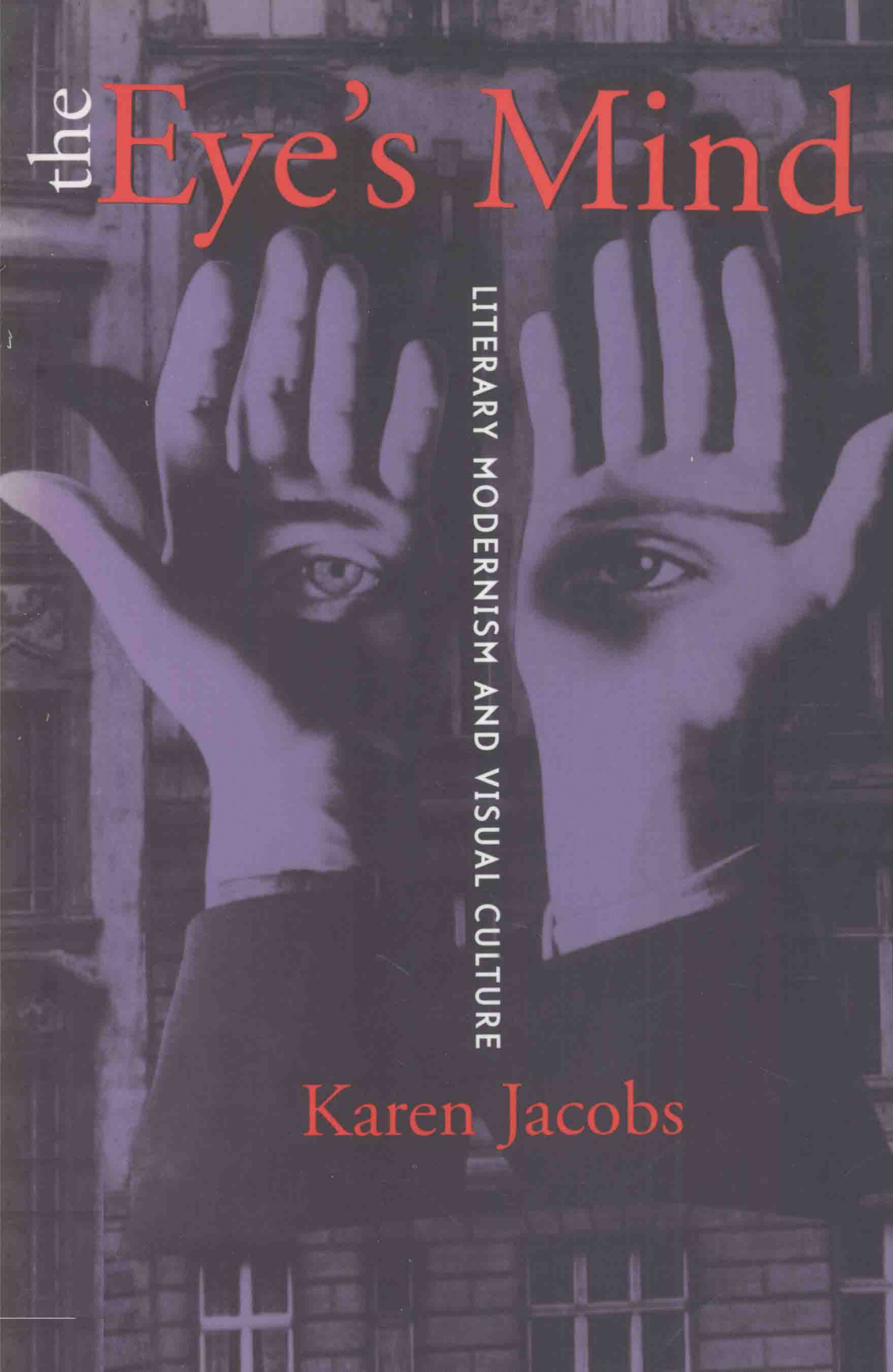
the Eye's Mind
LITERARY MODERNISM AND VISUAL CULTURE
Karen Jacobs

The Eye's Mind

Literary Modernism and Visual Culture

KAREN IACOBS

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Contents

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Modernism and the Body as Afterimage

"The act of writing begins with Orpheus's gaze"—so contends Maurice Blanchot at the close of his 1955 essay, "The Gaze of Orpheus," about the backward glance which condemns Orpheus's bride, Eurydice, to the underworld for the second and final time (1981, 140). As a late-modernist portrait of a gendered and visual economy leading inevitably, it seems, to the production of literary texts, Blanchot's essay can be understood as a kind of retrospective metanarrative, encapsulating the ways in which the gaze and its objects collude to produce meaning in many modernist texts. On the one side resides the subject lens, whose cultural transparency and symbolic agency are conjoined in the union of look and word;[1] on the other side lingers the silent object to which it is wedded, the precarious but necessary body destined to disappear. The gaze deployed in this relation may be characterized at once as a means of knowing and as a weapon of embodiment, suggesting an anxious recognition of the fundamental dependency and antipathy between the two. Within the long Western tradition of the disembodied observer dating from Descartes,[2] seers, and the knowers into whom they seem effortlessly to evolve, have been defined by their transcendence of the body—a body which, however, it remains their chief object to discover beyond themselves in another. The observer's claim to a transparent body is predicated, in other words, on the disavowal of its own embodiment along with the production of a reviled cor-

[1] I follow Homi Bhabha in equating "transparency" with the successful naturalization of a discourse of power; see Bhabha 1994, 109–11.

[2] Richard Rorty has supplied perhaps the most sustained analysis of this tradition in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Rorty 1979).

poreality in the Other, whose embodiment at once qualifies it as an object of knowledge and disqualifies it from epistemological possibility and subjective complexity itself. By the turn of the twentieth century, however, lines of fracture in this fantasy of the transparent subject—lines which were perhaps always visible[3]—begin to deepen and multiply, a phenomenon which coincides with the escalating dominance of the image and a growing uneasiness about its penetration and mediation of every sphere of social life. The modernist period is remarkable for its increasing cognizance of the body, itself grasped as an image, behind the neutral lens of the observer; the period may be understood as registering the emergence of that body as a kind of afterimage, exposed in repeated betrayals of its situated partiality, its culturally determined distortions, its will to dominance and even violence, that cumulatively have became the basis for anti-Enlightenment critique.[4] Yet if the modernist period marks a moment of eroding faith in epistemological prerogatives for those privileged, observing subjects most identified with them, it may equally be regarded as a moment when those Others who had been historically conceived as cultural bodies or objects sought to realign themselves with a viable, "pure," subject gaze.

The Eye's Mind explores the emergence of these new kinds of visual relations as they are represented in American, British, and French modernist texts from 1900 to 1955. It does so through an engagement with three related cultural developments contemporary with the rise of modernism: the first, the impact of newly skeptical philosophical discourses of vision in the first half of the twentieth century (those encompassed by psychoanalysis, Marxism, and existential philosophy, among others) which lead to what Martin Jay has called a "crisis in ocularcentrism"; second, the accelerating impact of visual technologies, such as photography and film, which intersect with the development of consumer culture and alter the ways in which perception was conceptualized, produced, and exploited; and third, the emergence of anthropology and sociology as academic disciplines at the turn of the century, which together consolidate new visual techniques and ways of knowing, most notably, through the participant-

[3] Slavoj Žižek has restated this point with special emphasis, arguing that "The point, of course, is not to return to the *cogito* in the guise in which this notion has dominated modern thought (the self-transparent thinking subject) but to bring to light its forgotten obverse, the excessive, unacknowledged kernel of the *cogito*, which is far from the image of the transparent Self." While my own argument strives to excavate this "forgotten obverse" in modernist fictions, I continue to use Cartesianism as a shorthand for the dominant model of subjective transparency with which Descartes is chiefly associated. See Žižek 1999, 2; and, for Žižek's more expanded comments on the fantasy formations that have arisen from the *cogito*, see "Cogito: The Void Called Subject," in Žižek 1993, 9–82.

[4] Horkheimer and Adorno may be the first to systematically level such a critique in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and the critique has become the standard jumping off point for distinguishing postmodernist positions from those of their modernist forbears.

observer method. I follow a materialist methodology by presuming that such new visual discourses, techniques, and technologies lead, in the modernist period, to the emergence of new, distinctly modernist kinds of observers and visual relationships. My eight chapters are linked by an argument about the diminished faith these otherwise disparate writers share regarding the capacity of vision to deliver reliable knowledge, as they critique the forms of violence that vision inevitably seems to entail. As the modernist observer's posture of neutral detachment is continually denaturalized and subjectivized from the beginnings of the twentieth century, and the realist novel is gradually overtaken by the rise of modernism, I ask, how does "the eye in the text" renegotiate its relation to forms of knowledge and power?

It is in the context of intellectual history and material culture, and the growing interdisciplinary consensus that the modern observer is distinguishable in significant ways from its predecessors, that I situate the modernist novel and its epistemological commitments. Reconceiving modernist fiction as an intimate participant in the period's broad and ambivalent preoccupation with visual perception opens up a wide range of writers publishing in the modernist period whose work can fruitfully be understood within an expanded conception of modernist cultures, a representative sample of which I will examine here.[5] The book addresses, then, both the work of "high modernists" such as Vladimir Nabokov, Virginia Woolf, and (more distantly) Ralph Ellison and Maurice Blanchot and the work of others such as Henry James, Zora Neale Hurston, and Nathanael West, who have occupied a somewhat ambiguous position relative to the modernist canon for lack of the full-blown experimental narrative techniques often seen as synonymous with modernist practice. By creating a dialogue between American, French, and British modernisms, I aim to foreground the affinities between traditions typically considered in isolation, thereby challenging the trend in which modernism is acknowledged as an international movement but nonetheless analyzed in strictly nationalist terms.[6] While this book provides new perspectives on literary texts, more broadly it distinguishes forms of viewing distinctive to mod-

[5] Other subgenres that fruitfully may be examined within an analysis of modernism and visual culture are modernist detective fictions, such as Faulkner's *Sanctuary*; modernist pornographic texts, such as Bataille's *Story of the Eye*; the entirety of modernist literature on passing; and those modernist works self-consciously mimicking "visual" techniques, such as Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives*.

[6] As Astradur Eysteinsson has argued, "While everyone seems to agree that as a phenomenon modernism is radically 'international' (although admittedly in the limited Western sense of that word), constantly cutting across national boundaries, this quality is certainly not reflected in the majority of critical studies of modernism. Such studies are mostly restricted to the very national categories modernism is calling into question, or they are confined to the (only slightly wider) Anglo-American sphere"; see Eysteinsson 1991, 89; Williams 1989.

ernism as a literary movement and considers them in light of ongoing debates about the "gendering" and "racing" of modernism, asking how the diverse constructions of modernist observers are imbricated in the production of Others.

Whereas many previous book-length literary studies of the primacy of the visual in modernism have focused on the perceived special relationship between literature and the visual arts (through movements such as Cubism), whether through analyses of its imagery or through formal comparisons of aesthetic technique,[7] none explores the emergence and representations of the new kinds of observers created by changing cultural conditions. While "visual culture"[8] has come into rapid prominence in the last decade as an area of study through attention to visual paradigms in philosophy, science, cultural studies, and critical theory, there is still no study that looks comprehensively at the impact and representations of visual culture in arguably the most synthesizing of all discourses, and in a period which witnessed such a confluence of significant changes—that is, the literature of modernism.[9] This approach is crucial because it allows us

[7] See, for example, Caws 1981, 1989; Schwarz 1997; Sitney 1990; Steiner 1982; Torgovnick 1985.

[8] The term "visual culture" has become the accepted designation for the visual character and preoccupations of the modern period, encompassing a broad range of social and cultural processes, relations, and representational forms. W. J. T. Mitchell provides a useful definition of visual culture as a "new social/political/communicational order that employs mass spectacle and technologies of visual and auditory stimulation in radically new ways" (1995, 207). The field engages new philosophies of representation, as well as developments in literary theory and art history toward the construction of new ways of thinking about visual relations, including habits of perception and the cultural construction of vision. Despite this inclusive approach, anthologies that invoke the term have had a tendency to privilege visual objects over visual discourses, but this likely reflects disciplinary habits rather than arguments. I understand the scope and aims of this study, therefore, to be consistent with those included within visual culture, broadly defined. See Mitchell 1995; Walker and Chaplin 1997; Bird et al. 1996; Jenks 1995; Mirzoeff 1998; Heywood and Sandywell 1999.

[9] There are several interdisciplinary anthologies as well as book-length works that devote limited attention to modernist literature in relation to visual culture, but their overall focus is not literary. See, for example, Allert 1996; Brennan and Jay 1996; Jay 1993; Jenks 1995; Krauss 1993; and Levin 1993.

There is now also a very useful book on the politics of seeing in postmodern American writing by Josh Cohen. However, in his effort to distinguish the "spectacular culture" of the postmodern from its modernist predecessors, Cohen overlooks the significant presence *within* modernist literature of the attributes he isolates—from the crisis of perceptual mastery, and the "discovery" of the situatedness of vision within the body, to the linkage of the feminine with a culture of the image which disrupts masculine perception. Moreover, Cohen's emphasis on gender divisions to the exclusion of other subject/object divisions (such as those produced by race), as I hope to show, obscures a more fundamental split between embodiment and transparency which underlies them all. This more primary divide incarnates itself in the displacement of embodiment onto a range of gendered and racial others by those seeking to align themselves with a jeopardized philosophical tradition of subjective transparency. The "*reversible* relations between masculine subject and feminine object in the field of vision" that Cohen identifies with the "encroaching hegemony of spectacle" (Cohen 1998, 7) in postmodern American fiction are not only visible, I argue, in James's turn of the century novels, but are also regularly reconstituted within a racialized matrix in such later modernist works as Hurston's and Ellison's. Although I share Cohen's larger sense of the di-

to see literature as responsive to a broader set of influences than the narrow and often purely formally conceived aesthetic sphere. Determinations about modernist politics have often been predicated on assessments of its form, equating its opacity with elitism and solipsism or, conversely, with the progressive project of defamiliarization and subversion.[10] Feminist assessments have also tended to divide along Manichean lines, with some of them understanding male modernist form as a strategy of detachment from the feminine while others, notably Kristeva, see in it a challenge to linguistic coherence, a repository of feminine excess.[11] These various valorizations of form, I believe, threaten to obscure equally important assessments of the ideological content of modernist texts. As Andreas Huyssen points out with reference to Kristeva, "Even though the French readings of modernism's 'feminine' side have opened up fascinating questions about gender and sexuality which can be turned critically against more dominant accounts of modernism, it seems fairly obvious that the wholesale theorization of modernist writing as feminine simply ignores the powerful masculinist and misogynist current within the trajectory of modernism" (Huyssen 1986, 49). I will be centrally concerned, therefore, with the ideological investments of narrative representations themselves.[12] Nevertheless, form will be of significant interest here: by reframing the question of modernist form in the larger context of developments in visual culture, this book rephrases at least one part of the question of modernist politics, asking whether and how we can see modernist experiments with form—in particular, the varied forms of the modernist novel—as an outcome of its perspectival commitments.

Why the novel? Because it is "popular"—by which I mean to convey several things. Of course, it would be specious to suggest that given the

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visibility of modernist from postmodern visual subcultures, my argument about their differences here stresses their disparate imaginations of subjectivity, particularly in relation to the regulatory forces of surveillance and spectacle: whereas modernist fictions retain a concept of the subject as basically intact and available—although *subject to* a range of disciplinary and imagistic "internalizations"—postmodern works such as Blanchot's and the later Nabokov's regard the subject as a system of signs. The permeable and secondary nature of this new subject relative to the primacy of signs renders the very idea of an interior questionable. Postmodern texts part ways with their modernist forbearers, then, not simply because of the escalating culture of the image (which Nathanael West bemoaned long before Mailer), but because of the erosion of an interiorized account of the subject in favor of one conceived of as an effect of signifying practices.

[10] New Critics and Marxists too numerous to mention have come down on both sides of this issue. For useful summaries of these debates, see DeKoven 1991; Eysteinsson 1991.

[11] See, for example, Felski 1995; Gilbert and Gubar 1988; Kristeva 1980.

[12] Alice Jardine provides an important model for this approach in her analysis of the ways French theorists have employed notions of "the feminine" to describe a "space of otherness" elided by monologic thinking. As Jardine defines it, " 'woman' [is] that *process* diagnosed in France as intrinsic to the condition of modernity; indeed, the valorization of the feminine, woman, and her obligatory, that is, historical connotations, as somehow intrinsic to new and necessary modes of thinking, writing, speaking"—and, I would add, viewing; see Jardine 1985, 25.

novel's unrivaled supremacy as a popular form since the turn of the century, one must simply bow to the enormity of its influence and grant it commensurable weight. Most of the novels under discussion here were not in fact popular, either in a statistical sense or as an indicator of their accessibility. I understand the significance of the novel's popularity more narrowly as an index of its ideological typicality.[13] I am persuaded first of all by a conception of the novel as a kind of vast discursive container, filled with semiautonomous, contradictory languages derived from diverse social strata. These heterogeneous linguistic characteristics resist the connotative stripping and compression of poetic language which, as M. M. Bakhtin has expressed it, "*must immerse itself in Lethe, and forget its previous life in any other contexts*" (Bakhtin 1981, 297). Even those modernist novelists who make conspicuous use of poetic compression, spatial form, even a contempt for the popular—here, James, Nabokov, Woolf, and Ellison, preeminently—neither overcome the traces of popular idioms and discourses in their work nor strive to overcome them, reliant as they are on such popular genres as detective fiction, the diary, the case history, and the newspaper for their materials, as well as for the narrative tensions born of such genres' varied rules of recognition. For all of "the modernist novel's" frequently vaunted formal innovations, difficulty, and aspiration to stylistic singularity, it's necessary to acknowledge how historically situated the well of discourses from which it draws remains, without reducing the huge range of its particular incarnations to an unlikely monolith. Whatever their individual ambitions to achieve an ideal unity of form, modernist novels, like other novels, must be understood as an arena in which discursive battles inevitably are being waged. Perhaps uniquely among literary genres, then, the novel may be read symptomatically.

To speak of the novel in this way, as a linguistic *reflection* of a social world and, through the possibilities of individual accent and inflection, as a potential innovator of language, is to beg a political question about its location within discourses of power. Is it possible or desirable, in other words, to place the novel's linguistic practices politically? It seems worth heeding David Minter's warning against a critical approach to the modernist novel intent upon "forc[ing] works of art back into the nexus of power relations from which they come . . . as tools of the status quo" (Minter 1994, xvii).[14] Equally worth recalling is D. A. Miller's memorable referendum on a style of reading the Victorian novel he calls "the subver-

[13] I don't mean to suggest that a comparable study of modernist poetry would not reveal important facets of modernist visual culture, but only that the novel offers some formal advantages for the discrimination of social discourses. For an outstanding survey of twentieth-century theory on the novel, see Hale 1998.

[14] Although Minter avoids the term "modernist," he is writing about novels from 1890 to 1940; see Minter 1994.

sive hypothesis": "even if it were true that literature exercises a destabilizing function in our culture," Miller contends, "the current consensus that it does so does not" (Miller 1988, xi). The goal of comprehending the novel's hybrid languages through the crude lenses of complicity or critique may be less valuable, I would suggest, than the attempt to track the myriad, irreducible ways cultural and technological changes are processed into its symbolic form. Such caution seems all the more imperative for this project given the range of novelistic subgenres I'm clustering under the umbrella of modernism, each of which may claim distinctive historical, formal, and in some cases national trajectories that complexly intersect with modernism as a literary dominant: the detective novel (James, Nabokov); the dialect novel (Hurston); the symbolist novel (Ellison); the experimental novel (Woolf); the satiric novel (West); the postmodernist novel (late Nabokov); and the postnovelistic récit (Blanchot).

In order to chart the territory encompassed by "the eye's mind" and its bodily byproducts, I want to begin, in the first part of this Introduction, by sketching the hallmarks of the dominant account of vision's key role in the unfolding narrative of modernity: the consolidation, beginning in the seventeenth century, of the "scopic regime" that Martin Jay has called "Cartesian perspectivalism" (Jay 1988a) and its gradual erosion—a process which acquires a decisive momentum in the twentieth century. Taking its bearings from art and philosophical history and, specifically, from challenges to Renaissance notions of perspective and Cartesian ideas of subjective rationality, Cartesian perspectivalism is characterized by a monocular, disembodied, objective, and ahistorical vision. From the nineteenth century onward, Cartesian perspectivalism comes under increasing assault, its assumption of a detached, neutral observer discredited by a competing scopic regime traceable to the Baroque. This Baroque model, or what has been called *la folie du voir*, takes a distorting, "anamorphosistic" mirror as its visual figure and privileges unreadability and impenetrability; it is this model of compromised transparency which comes to achieve dominance in the twentieth century. Revealing the conventional rather than natural status of vision, the ascendancy of this model precipitated a widespread distrust of a sense heretofore regarded as "the noblest of senses," and from which we derive our most powerful cultural metaphors for knowing.[15] As David Michael Levin has expressed it in one of the more pessimistic constructions of twentieth-century visuality, "every presence manifesting in the field of vision is essentially reduced to the ontology of a mere thing," making vision both an instrument of domination and "the most reifying of all our perceptual modalities" (1988, 65).[16]

[15] Descartes so designates vision (1965, 65); see also Jonas 1966.

[16] The question of whether there is anything inherently dominating about vision is, of course, a matter of some dispute. For an argument against such a position, see Houlgate

Historians have debated whether discoveries in philosophy and optical research (with their affiliated origins) or the technological multiplication of images were chiefly responsible for this Western crisis of confidence in the eye; my approach here is to attend to both. In the second and third parts of this Introduction I ground the intellectual history of Cartesian perspectivalism and its undoing in the specific material cultural forms—chiefly photography and ethnographic film—which provide selective windows into the production of new visual practices. Although photography was invented in 1839 and therefore predates the modernist period, I privilege it here over other visual technologies more strictly contemporary with modernism because its dissemination—as a technology, and ultimately, as an epistemology and ontology—is critical to our understanding of virtually every other twentieth-century form of visual culture. Photography is central to a comprehension of the rise of film, advertising, photojournalism, and amateur photography, which together expand the production and circulation of its techniques; it is pivotal to the history of modern painting, whose redirection away from realism is typically regarded as a response, in part, to photography; it is imbricated in the practices of the social and hard sciences and the shaping of disciplinary institutions as they each attempt to penetrate and quantify the body through photo technologies and their analogues; and it informs the configurations of social spectacle and the consumer marketplace according to the new forms of hypervisibility to which it contributed. Any genealogy of the twentieth-century observer, furthermore, must take account of the recodifications of subject/object relations made possible by their reification in photographic images which, from the medical to the pornographic, collectively work to redefine the truth of the body as a sight.[17] I pursue the vi-

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1993, 87–123. Paul Virilio offers a suggestive material reference for this perspective by marking the parallel and interdependent developments of the technologies sustaining warfare and cinema, in an analysis which effectively projects the gaze-as-weapon beyond the realm of metaphor; see Virilio 1989.

[17] For further discussion of this transformation effected by photography and its associations with eroticism, see "Reconsidering Erotic Photography" (Solomon-Godeau 1991).

It's not entirely incidental that nearly all of the writers I discuss in this book were engaged in some way with photographic/cinematic technologies. Sara Blair has argued that James's "documentary stance" was strongly informed by photography and stereographic technology and, in particular, the photographs of Lewis Wickes Hine (Blair 1996, 163–210). Hurston included photographs in her ethnography of Haiti and Jamaica, *Tell My Horse*, and she was employed as a story consultant for Paramount Pictures in 1941–42. Ellison worked as a freelance photographer during a portion of the composition of *Invisible Man*, and he uses the photographic lens as an image of his complex subjectivity (see Chapter 5). The first edition of Woolf's *Three Guineas* included, in addition to frequent references to photographs of mutilated bodies and destroyed houses, actual photos of English judges and other figures of patriarchal power (see Carlston 1998, 158ff.); and in the essay "Gold and Iron" (1919) Woolf uses the image of the developing photograph as an analogy for the writing process. Benjamin also employs photographic development as a key metaphor for his project of reencountering the past, suggesting that the past "has left images of itself in literary texts that are comparable to those which light imprints on a photosensitive plate. Only the future pos-

sual construction of subject/object relations further in the third part of the Introduction by exploring the parallel historical development of the social sciences with photography and film, paying particular attention to the development of ethnographic cinema and the ways in which such films schooled Western spectators in the conventions of seeing Others as racialized, feminized, dehistoricized bodies. I conclude, in the fourth part, with a précis of the following chapters and a brief characterization of their interrelations.

Through the joint investigation of intellectual history and material culture, I seek to provide contexts for grasping the epistemological postures of viewing that are adopted and represented in modernist texts. Understanding the discourses surrounding photography and its offspring in the modernist period assists in grasping the representational strategies of modernist writers, whose presentation of narrative "vision" must be understood pictorially as well as abstractly, within a spectrum of possibilities inevitably delimited by culture. Whereas naturalist and realist texts, with their disembodied narrative omniscience inseparable from an allegiance to a universal and accessible visual language, typically are legible within a positivist epistemology consistent with mainstream photographic discourse, modernist texts depart from this positivist faith. While in its most extreme incarnation, the modernist observance of the embodied and partial nature of vision takes the form of multiperspectivalism, with its implicit acknowledgment of the limits of isolated points of view, in the majority of cases that I examine here we find a confrontation with the situated confines of the visual, along with compensatory forms of linguistic excess though which these texts aim to repair visual deficits, coinciding with relatively conventional strategies of narration and representation. Like their realist and naturalist counterparts, then, modernist novelists use the metaphor of the lens as a means of conceptualizing the relations between seeing and knowing, self and Other; but unlike realists and naturalists, they continually betray their veiled cognizance of the constructed character of the visual and its seductive power through its affiliations with the image.

The Body under Erasure: Historicizing the Transparent Gaze

I want to dwell for a moment on the philosophical point of origin of this argument in order to fix more precisely the valence of the scopic

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sesses developers active enough to bring these plates out perfectly" (quoted in Buck-Morss 1991, 250). As I will explore in later chapters, West and Nabokov extensively reference photography and film in their novels. West, of course, wrote screenplays for Hollywood in the 1930s; and *The Day of the Locust* and *Lolita* were themselves made into films, Nabokov collaborating on the screenplay.

regime encompassed by Cartesian perspectivalism and its attendant epistemologies. My interest in Cartesianism as a scene of discursive origins, beyond its utility as a heuristic device, lies in its defining engagement with the constellation of vision, reason, and embodiment that continues to have resonance for modernism. The term "Cartesian perspectivalism," which, to recall, joins Renaissance notions of perspective with Cartesian ideas of subjective rationality, is, as Martin Jay is careful to note, only a shorthand for the dominant scopic regime of the modern era (Jay 1993, 69–70). Both qualifications—the shorthand and the fact that it is the *dominant* but not exclusive regime—deserve notice, since together they suggest both a strategic simplification of Descartes and an acknowledgment of the broader spectrum of visual regimes in play during the period. The genuine complexity of Descartes's views, beyond the schematic of monocular and detached neutrality for which they are usually invoked, is arguably responsible for the remarkable diversity of philosophical positions which find their ancestry there. Jay has indicated many of the reference points for the myriad and, in some cases, outright contradictory views that Descartes's visual emphasis has yielded:

> Descartes may thus not only be responsible for providing a philosophical justification for the modern epistemological habit of "seeing" ideas in the mind, but may also have been the founder of the speculative tradition of identitarian reflexivity, in which the subject is certain only of its mirror image. . . . If, as is often claimed, Descartes could become the warrant for rationalist and sensationalist philosophies, claimed by idealists and materialists alike, he was no less able to give encouragement to both speculative and empirical concepts of vision. (Jay 1993, 70, 80)

Alternatively, Dalia Judovitz has argued that Descartes, despite his interest in the science of optics, otherwise undermined the role of vision in his writings in response to a distrust of illusion so abiding that it extended to "the visible world as a whole"; Descartes, she suggests, experienced the deceptiveness of vision as incompatible with his commitment to rationality (Judovitz 1993).

I draw attention to this conceptual latitude in order to recall the otherwise occluded fact that among the foundational positions that may be unearthed from Cartesian dualism is a bedrock ambiguity about the status of the body. Descartes's infamous assertion of the division between mind and body is arguably far less stable and certain than is typically acknowledged. From the beginning, that is, we might understand the specter haunting Cartesian rationality to be a primary question: as the eye inspects the reflections of nature that have come to reside within the

mind,[18] is it the *mind*'s eye that sees or the *body*'s? Descartes's rather desperate expedient, the pineal gland, which he regarded as mediating between these two poles, is clearly an imaginary solution to the otherwise intractable ambiguity of the immaterial gaze. Yet his account of the function of this mysterious gland is instructive for tracking the shadow of embodiment in his argument. In the Fifth Discourse of *La Dioptrique* (1637), Descartes describes the moment when the eye sees a painting:

> It is manifest that a painting is immediately formed . . . on the inner surface of the brain that looks towards its concavities. And from there I could easily take that picture as far as a certain little gland . . . [which] may at times pass from there along the arteries of a pregnant woman into some determined member of the child in her womb and form there those birthmarks which are the cause of such wonderment to all Learned Men. (Descartes 1965, 100)[19]

The products of the eye would seem to be made flesh here, both in their transitional form as the traveling "picture" and in their destination as "birthmark." The gaze functions then as an instrument of embodiment, literally leaving its (dark) mark on the Other who, residing in the body of a pregnant woman, is simultaneously a hidden part of the self. It seems consistent with the equivocal effort to represent and repress embodiment in this passage that Descartes should choose a pregnant woman—the most emphatically embodied of subjects—as his prototype, whose body serves, moreover, as an "object lesson" for the delectation of male expertise. The passage provides a succinct encapsulation of the equivocal terms of bodily suppression in Descartes, where the embodiment of the gaze, however seemingly overcome by the faculties of mind, is likely to resurface elsewhere and is, indeed, lodged in and as the body from the start. Read as a narrative of subjective transparency predicated not only upon bodily suppression but also bodily *production*, we can find in Descartes the antecedents for contemporary visual paradigms in which the bodily presences of self and Other are more fully acknowledged.

Revisiting the scene of Cartesian doubt portrayed in the *Meditations* (1641), Susan Bordo attempts to historicize Descartes's dream of absolute epistemic objectivity within the cultural turmoil of the seventeenth century, in an argument that offers a broader cultural context for the relations between vision and embodiment in Descartes (Bordo 1987). As-

[18] This particular description is Richard Rorty's (Rorty 1979, 45). For an overview of the role visual metaphor has played in the genealogy of modern philosophies of self-reflection, see Sandywell 1999.

[19] Although Luce Irigaray and Martin Jay both quote this passage (Irigaray using it as an epigraph), neither comments on the arguments implicit in Descartes's imagery. Jay notes that *La Dioptrique* was left unpublished because of the Church's condemnation of Galileo in 1633. See Irigaray 1985, 180–90; Jay 1993, 71, 76–77.