

Some secret involuntary encounters:
A quarter century after *Downcast Eyes*

Yuichi Sato *

Introduction

The true problem is to understand why such different cultures become involved in the same search and have the same task in view (and when the opportunity arises, encounter the same modes of expression). We must understand why what one culture produces has meaning for another culture, even if it is not its original meaning (*Signes*, 84, *PM*, 111)

This question appears in an article written by Maurice Merleau-Ponty about André Malraux's imaginary museum. In this article Merleau-Ponty discusses the institution of a painter's work, or of a style in the history of painting. Institution can be understood as "the events which deposit a sense in me, not just as something surviving or as a residue, but as the call to follow, the demand of a future" (*IP*, 124), that is, the "internal circulation between the past and the future" (*IP*, 125). The efforts and the interests of the painter are prospective, but there are the "resumption(s) [*reprise(s)*]" (Cf., *Signes*, 73) of his own past works or those of other painters.

Works that were created in the past seem to shut out the future, but in actuality, they wish to continue into the future. Martin Jay's *Downcast Eyes* also has its resumptions, and still call for them. As Jay mentioned, there have

* Associate Professor, National Institute of Technology, Fukui College

been numerous responses to this book in the quarter century since it appeared,¹⁾ but beneath the direct responses there is growing silence. *Downcast Eyes* still opens up many fields of investigations that escapes the view of the author or the thinkers mentioned by the author. In this paper, I consider these secret involuntary encounters of philosophers which are similar to Malraux's confrontation of metamorphoses or Merleau-Ponty's institution.

1. Lumen and Lux

In *Downcast Eyes*, Jay saw the history of visibility from the cartographic viewpoint of a "high-flying balloon" (*DE*, 70,587), that is, from the position of overview (*survol*), and discusses about the ocularcentrism of European philosophy since ancient Greek and about the antiocularcentric movement in twentieth-century French thought. To clarify this feature of Jay's thought, I will focus on the words *lumen* and *lux* that he borrows from Vasco Ronchi's *Optics*. Both *lumen* and *lux* are Latin words for "light." Although Jay thinks about light in a variety of ways (passage, illumination, exhibition, film etc.), he uses the words *lumen* and *lux* only in relation to history of thought. In *Downcast Eyes*, light understood according to the "model of geometric rays that Greek optics had privileged" (*DE*, 29) is called *lumen*, and light emphasizing the "actual experience of human sight" (*DE*, 29) is called *lux*. For Jay, this dual light complements the "tradition of *speculation* with the eye of the mind" (*DE*, 29) and that of "*observation* with the two eyes of the body" (*DE*, 29), while on the other hand, Ronchi mentions *lumen/lux* in his *Optics* as follows:

Light, what we see when we say "It isn't dark" is a purely subjective

phenomenon, (...) Since Latin was then used as the language of science, the term by which that light was plainly denoted was *lux*. The first fifteen of the twenty centuries in question talked only about this *lux*. If necessary, they added that *color* also had the same subjective nature. (*Optics*, 14)

Ronchi argues that “(t)he first fifteen of the twenty centuries” talked about subjective *lux* and that the last five centuries---since Alhazen (Ibn al-Haitham), and especially Johannes Kepler’s seventeenth century---talked about the objective *lumen*. Ronchi’s *Optics* makes Kepler an influential figure in geometric optics, as the title of Chapter 2 “The Basis of Seventeenth-Century Optics” suggests. For Ronchi, Kepler’s theory of the inverted and reversed image on the retina means the full appearance of objective lumen in physics. Kepler denies the theory of the perspectivists (Alhazen, Al-Kindi, Vitello, Roger Bacon, etc.) who explained the process behind the retina linearly and optically. Referring to reports of anatomists (Felix Plater, Johannes Jessenius, etc.), he points out that the nerves associated with sight are curved. However, for Ronchi, Kepler’s “pictura” is focused on the retinal screen and his ignorance of “the physiologico-psychological aspects of vision” (*Optics*, 50) behind the retina is accountable for “the disappearance of two fundamental distinctions, that between *lumen* and *lux*, and that between ‘images of things’ and ‘pictures’” (*Optics*, 50).

Although Ronchi emphasizes the break between the lux of Middle Ages and the lumen of the Modern Age (*Optics*, 17), Jay insists on continuity from ancient Greece to the seventeenth century. The neo-Platonic tradition of speculation with the eye of the mind is referred to as lumen in *Downcast Eyes*. This tradition converges with the “scopic regime” called “Cartesian

perspectivalism”

La Dioptrique was, however, concerned primarily with lumen, the transmission of light, rather than lux, although certainly Descartes hoped to explicate the link between them. (*DE*, 73)

In Ronchi's *Optics*, we cannot find a chapter of Greek optics and a chapter of Descartes's. While Ronchi insists that the change from lux to lumen occurred during the later Middle Ages, Jay suggests that the change from lumen to lux occurred among twentieth century's antioculocentric French philosopher such as Merleau-Ponty.

The Structure of Behavior began with an account of the distinction between the scientific understanding of light, which he[Merleau-Ponty] called “real light” and which the medieval world knew as lumen, and the qualitative experience of light in naive consciousness, which he termed “phenomenal light” and the medieval thinkers lux. (*DE*, 303)

2. The intervention of language and the cry of light

Comparing Jay's usage of the words *lumen* and *lux* with Ronchi's, we clarify one feature of *Downcast Eyes*. Jay discusses modern scopic regimes as “Cartesian perspectivalism” and “the denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought” using the difference between *lumen* and *lux*, yet this is just one of the features of *Downcast Eye*. The high-flying balloon of this work is also a discussion of the things that deviate from such schema – three scopic regimes of modern thought, another aspect of Cartesian perspectivalism, and

the possibility of a visual antidote that twentieth-century French thought cannot see, etc.

Although we tend to think of the modern era as a hegemony of linear perspective (Leon Battista Alberti) and geometric optics (Kepler and Descartes), Jay pluralizes the scopic regimes of modernity: Cartesian perspectivalism, the Dutch “art of describing” and “baroque reason.” Interestingly, Jay classifies Kepler into the scopic regime of “art of describing” with reference to Svetlana Alpers. Kepler’s optics, which regards the eye itself as a mechanical maker of “pictura” and his use of the camera obscura to create a landscape pictures are passive and empiricist “describing” of the world. Like a cartographic painting in the northern Renaissance, Kepler’s pictura is the epitome of the world on a small retina or a small paper.

In contrast to Kepler, who remains on the passivity of the retinal image, Descartes goes to “the physiological cum psychological processes which “read”” (*DE*, 7) the reversed image. The forms that light inscribes upon our eyes and brain do not resemble the visible world, in contrast to the medieval theory of “intentional species.” For Descartes, the retinal images and the perspective images of copper engravings are “signs,” — so images do not resemble the visible world just as signs do not correspond to meanings. Furthermore, we can “read” signs with “the eye of the mind.” Descartes and Nicolas de Malebranche called such processes of perception “*géométrie naturelle*,” “*jugement naturel*,” or “*institution de la nature*.” *Jugement naturel* shows us the bilateral character of Descartes. On the one hand, it is based on the Platonic “traditions of speculation with the eye of the mind” (*DE*, 29) ; that is, lumen. On the other hand, it appears as another aspect of Cartesian perspectivalism. Although the Greek privileging of vision involved “the denigration of language” (*DE*, 33), Descartes’s images in the mind involve

“the intervention of language” (*DE*, 79); that is, commensurability between lumen and lux (Cf., *FF*, 131).

To think about the intertwining between vision (or other senses) and language is one of features of *Downcast Eyes*, along with the plurality of scopic regimes. In the introduction of his book, Jay embeds twenty-one metaphors. He uses the term *describing* to refer to Kepler’s optics, and discusses the interpenetration between discourse and figure in the scopic regime, called *baroque reason*. Jay attempts to clarify the attitudes that discourses in various eras had about “light as a metaphor of truth” in terms of vision and language. This attempt meets Merleau-Ponty’s effort in unexpected way.

In *Downcast Eyes*, Merleau-Ponty characterizes the twentieth century French philosopher who does not enter fully into the antiocularcentric movement and does not search for the gap between vision and language. Yet in the quarter century after *Downcast Eyes*, many of Merleau-Ponty’s documents (course notes and unedited documents) and interpretations appeared. Referring to these documents, we recognize that Jay and Merleau-Ponty participate in the same field of investigations and see each other again. References of *jugement naturel* continued to emerge in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty throughout his life²⁾. In the course note called “L’ontologie cartésienne et l’ontologie d’aujourd’hui”³⁾ (1960-1961) which was published in 1996, referring to Martial Gueroult’s *Descartes’ Philosophy Interpreted according to the Order of Reasons*, Merleau-Ponty deals with Descartes’s *lumen/lux*, which Jay also points out. In this sense, *Downcast Eyes* will contribute to the research of Merleau-Ponty’s later philosophy as well.

Recently, referring to “L’ontologie cartésienne et l’ontologie d’aujourd’hui” which deals with the expression of ontological changes in modern art and literature, as well as in other texts published after *Downcast Eyes*, new

researches has appeared: Takashi KAKUNI discusses about the reversibility that neither the accordance nor the division between visibility and language is realized; that is the *logos* of which the “flesh of the world” is a preliminary stage⁴). Mauro Carbone addresses film and images concerning the “cry of light,” (*NC*, 182) or the “inarticulate cry...which seemed to be the voice of the light” (*OE*, 70) which Merleau-Ponty quotes in his course from Robert Delaunay and Hérmes Trismégiste.⁵)

Regarding the film, I will add another encounter. In *Downcast Eyes*, Jay mentions Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* and his film; Jay continues to encourage us to think about film in his line of thinking (for example Chapter 8 of *Refractions of Violence*). After *Downcast Eyes*, Giorgio Agamben mentioned Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* and film in his *Means without End* (1996), *Profanations* (2005), and *Nymphs* (2014). In front of *Downcast Eyes*’ balloon, there are horizons that should be explored.

3. Baroque and Icarus’s vision

Features of *Downcast Eyes* are useful for thinking about interculturality. We can see the intercultural implication in the plurality of scopic regimes. Jay himself said that “the universality of visual experience cannot be automatically assumed, if that experience is in part mediated linguistically” (*DE*, 9). His investigation about the intertwinement between vision and language has possibilities to change the orientation of *Downcast Eyes*’ high-flying balloon’s view to the perspective of other cultures. To address the problem of interculturality, we will examine another encounter between Jay and Cristine Buci-Glucksmann.

When Jay clarifies the modern scopic regime called *baroque reason*, he

refers to neither Heinrich Wölfflin, nor Eugenio d'Ors, nor Gilles Deleuze. Instead, he refers to Buci-Glucksmann's *The Madness of Vision* and *Baroque Reason*. For her, baroque spatiality differs from Cartesian perspectivalism.

Distinct from a homogeneous, geometrical and substantialist Cartesian space, the open, serial, baroque spatiality, in the process of becoming and in a metamorphosis of forms, derives from recovery, coexistence the play of light and forces, the engendering of beings from the undulating line (la ligne serpentine) and the ellipse. (*FV*, 76)

In this quotation, the word “*ellipse*” indicates Kepler’s cosmology which Severo Sarduy regards as the typical example of baroque in his *Barocco*⁶⁾. The ellipse with double foci is a baroque anamorphosis of the perfect circle. Interestingly, in this sense, without Jay realizing it, Kepler is a figure who belongs to all of Jay’s three modern scopic regimes. Furthermore, the term “*la ligne serpentine*” indicates Merleau-Ponty’s ontology. Buci-Glucksmann clarifies the topological space of baroque using Merleau-Ponty’s terms such as encroachment, veins, flesh, and *ligne serpentine*. The vision of baroque as a “madness of vision”⁷⁾ counters the “survol global” (*FV*, 84), just as Merleau-Ponty.

If intercultural phenomenology means the effort to see the things from the inside of one’s experience, Merleau-Ponty’s and Buci-Glucksmann’s efforts of the “madness of vision” — to explore the encroachment between the self and others from the standpoint of the painter at work — suited to think about the interculturality. In fact, the works of Buci-Glucksmann after the 2000s center on the investigation of the Orient, including the Japanese “*Ma* (*espacement, intervalley, vide*),” “*Uki-yo* (*mondes flottants*),” “*Shunga*,” “*Mono-no-*

aware,” “*Mu-jyo* (impermanence),” “*Jibun-no-hana* (*la fleur du temps*)” of Zeami, and “*Iki*” of Shuzo Kuki. Such works also examine the relationship between the Orient and the Occident⁸). Moreover, after *Downcast Eyes*, Buci-Glucksmann takes the cartographique gaze of Icarus, which extends the madness of vision⁹).

Downcast Eyes’ high-flying balloon’s view also seems appropriate for thinking about interculturality. One can realize “fusion — or at least the interaction — of horizons” (*DE*, 18) like Japanese traditional pictures such as *Tale of Genji Pictures* (*Genji-e*), *Scenes in and around Kyoto* (*Rakuchurakugai-zu*), and *Scenes of European visitors to Japan* (*Nanban-zu*). The perspectives of these traditional pictures, that is, *Yamato-e* (Japanese-painting) are seen from the position of overview (*survol*), travel lineally from right to left, and interact in various horizons (interpenetration of the four seasons, of the flow of times, of stories, of figures and of nature). These pictures are cartographique, but we can participate in them immersively.

Yamato-e is canonic but decentralized. Artists overstepped from canons in the sens that Baroque artists appeared in many different eras. Hokusai is one of these artists. To draw scenes with a sense of reality, he both deviates from and conforms to the norms. In fact, the last works of Hokusai did not reject the traditional panoramic view. On the other hand, as you know, he overstepped both Japanese art and Western art, importing the technique of perspective. His influence became a norm in these arts. In front of painters at work, there are fields or horizons of investigation that unexpectedly meet their onetime efforts, traditional painter’s efforts, or foreign painter’s efforts. We can see this in traditional Japanese pictures. As you know, *yamato-e* which is not pure Japanese painting, it is already mixed and hybrid of Chinese techniques and antecedences’ efforts. We can see these secret, involuntary encounters both in

survol and immersive viewpoints.

In the end, to think about the problem of interculturality, we lean both *survol* and the madness of vision, as well as distance and intimacy. The important thing is to reciprocate them like blinks. The words of Jean Starobinski, which quoted *Downcast Eyes*, are very suggestive.

The complete critique is perhaps not one that aims at totality (as does le regard surplombant) nor that which aims at intimacy (as does identifying intuition), it is the look that knows how to demand, in their turn, distance and intimacy, knowing in advance that the truth lies not in one or the other attempt, but in the movement that passes indefatigably from one to the other. One must refuse neither the vertigo of distance nor that of proximity; one must desire that double excess where the look is always near to losing all its powers. (*DE*, 19-20) ¹⁰⁾

Abbreviations

■ Martin Jay

[*DE*]= *Downcast Eyes: The denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought*, University of California Press, 1994.

[*FF*]= *Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique*, Routledge, 1993.

■ Vasco Ronchi

[*Optics*]= *Optics: The Science of Vision*, Dover Publications, 1991.

■ Maurice Merleau-Ponty

[*Signes*]= *Signes*, Gallimard, 1960.

[OE]= *L'Œil et l'esprit*, Gallimard, 1964.

[PM]= *La Prose du monde*, Gallimard, 1969.

[NC]= *Notes de cours 1959-1961*, Gallimard, 1996.

[IP]= *L'Institution, la passivité Notes de cours au Collège de France (1954-1955)*, Belin, 2003.

■ Cristine Buci-Glucksmann,

[FV]= *La Folie du voir: De l'esthétique baroque*, Galilée, 1986.

Notes

- 1) See Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity Revisited," in *Essays from the Edge: Parerga and Paralipomena* (University of virginia press, 2011). It republished in *Handbook of visual culture* (Berg, 2012).
- 2) For Merleau-Ponty, Malebranche is an antecedent to the notion of "the world as perceived" and "institution" as history that should be explored in twentieth century's philosophy.
- 3) NC, 159-268. The German edition of the copytext is student's notes and the extracted English edition appeared in 1973.
- 4) Takashi KAKUNI, *Chinmoku-no-shiho (Poetic art of Silence)*, Koyo-shobo, 2016.
- 5) Mauro Carbone, *La Chair des images : Merleau-Ponty entre peinture et cinéma*, J.Vrin, 2011
- 6) Severo Sarduy, *Barroco*, traduit [du manuscrit] espagnol par Jacques Henric et l'auteur, Éditions du seuil, 1975, pp.9-10, 57-90.
- 7) This word was borrowed from Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and Invisible*.
- 8) Cristine Buci-Glucksmann, *L'esthétique du temps au Japon : Du zen au virtuel*, Galilée, 2001 ; *Modernités Chinoises*, Skira, 2003 ; *Philosophie de l'Ornement : D'Orient en Occident*, Galilée, 2008 ; *Les Voix de l'orient*, Galilée, 2014.
- 9) Cristine Buci-Glucksmann, *L'Œil cartographique de l'art*, Galilée, 1996.
- 10) Jean Starobinski, *L'œil vivant: Essais*, Gallimard, 1961, p. 27.

