

UNDER MASKS, MASQUERADES AND MIMICRY

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF FEMININE GAZE IN EARLY MODERN LITERATURE



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A few years after that, another person began to devote himself to this young girl and her ideas. He taught her to grow up in her work with severity, honesty and courage. His name is Michele.

Today a young scholar dedicates this research to them, hoping her ideas are grown-up enough.

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INTRODUCTION

A LOOK TOWARD THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF FEMININE GAZE

A first glance over the gaze

Vision has always had a double value in western culture: at the same time primary means among the other senses of knowledge, and means of sin and mistake. Science, aesthetics and also technology have always been fascinated by the mechanism that allows the eye to connect the mind to the outside world, and by the power of imagination which is still difficult to understand if related to vision or not.

The fascination with vision in western culture was born with Plato and the strict relation among the eye, light and the sun it comes from, which is the supreme knowledge that men once belonged to and some of them can still reach. This fascination, however, became problematic during the seventeenth century, particularly thanks to Descartes study on *Optics*. Here the severing between the sensory eye and the eye of the mind was introduced, leading at once to the separation between the subject and the object of knowledge, but also to the separation between the pure intellect and illusory perception.

This fascination never fell down, and the studies on gaze carried out in the twentieth century are one of the most interesting research fields within visual culture and, more in general, cultural studies, considering all the complex mechanisms that trigger from the practices of the gaze in terms of power, gender and social conditioning.

In introducing *Techniques of the Observer* Cray provokes the question on how the definition of “the observer of 19th century” can be posed, wondering, at the same time, if such a large generality can be defined for the 19th or any other century. Of course, the answer is implicit in the purpose he explains: to study not a

single kind or model of observer (and not of a spectator¹) individuated in a space and in a time, but a field of forces, rules and arrangements that all together shape an observer in a defined society. Thus, claims Crary, a «self-present beholder to whom a world is transparently evident»², never existed, he can “only” suggest some of the conditions which allow the foundation of a dominant model by which vision has been «discussed, controlled and incarnated in cultural and scientific practices»³.

Precisely the question of a dominant model will be at stake in this research, which will try to provoke other questions on the ways in which non-dominant models of vision have tried to spread out in a historical and social period, as dramatic as the 19th century was, and as revolutionary as it still appears. This century is the 17th, and the non-dominant model of vision⁴ is that of the female gaze.

Some of the same tools proposed by Crary will help us in achieving this goal. I mean the tools necessary to detect the breaks, the ruptures in an established visual culture⁵: the significance of some optical devices, and the interlocking of literary and scientific knowledge and practices. As Crary has already pointed out, optical devices are significant not only as material objects of a history of technology, or for the models of representation they imply, but mostly, for what concerns us, as «points of intersection where philosophical, scientific, and

¹ Crary makes clear the reason why he chose the term “observer” instead of “spectator”: «Unlike *spectare*, the latin root for “spectator”, the root for “observe” does not really mean “to look at”[...] In a sense more pertinent to my study, *observare* means “conform one’s action, to comply with”, as in observing rules, codes, regulations and practices. Though obviously one who sees, an observer is more importantly one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations», Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge-London, MIT Press, 1992, pp. 5-6.

² Ivi, p. 6.

³ Ibidem.

⁴ Ivi, p. 7.

⁵ The first treatment of this term in the sense we nowadays intend was in *The Art of Describing* by Svetlana Alpers. She took the term from Michael Baxandall, and used it to show how «in Holland the visual culture was central to the life of the society. One might say that the eye was a central means of self-representation and visual experience a central mode of self-consciousness. If the theater was the arena in which the England of Elizabeth most fully represented itself to itself, images played that role for the Dutch. The difference between the forms this took reveals much about the difference between these two societies. In Holland, if we look beyond what is normally considered to be art, we find that images proliferate everywhere. They are printed in books, woven into the cloth of tapestries or table linens, painted onto tiles, and of course framed on walls. And everything is pictured-from insects and flowers to Brazilian natives in full life-size to the domestic arrangements of the Amsterdammers. The maps printed in Holland describe the world and Europe to itself», Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in The Seventeenth Century*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983, p. XXV.

aesthetics discourses overlap with mechanical techniques, institutional requirements, and socioeconomic forces. Each of them is understandable not simply as the material object in question [...] but for the way in which it is embedded in a much larger assemblage of events and powers»⁶. The very accurate example taken by Crary is that of the camera obscura «as paradigmatic of the dominant status of the observer in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries»⁷. It produces an objective, almost disembodied vision that, as we will see, puts the observer at a distance from “his” object, and is supposed to give no chance of acting on it. A dominating, scientific and uncontested gaze operating through microscope and telescope as well. We should wait till the romantic thought and the nineteenth century discussions on it to discover a new priority for the subjectivity of vision, anyway related only to poets and artists, and still excluded by empiricists and positivists.

Furthermore, even a feminist position such as that of Donna Haraway stresses the importance the analysis of technology can take in order to understand how ways of life, social orders and practices of seeing effect our knowledge and intervention in the world⁸. In Haraway’s opinion, not only the “histories” of science are all “histories” of technology, but they are about skilled practices: «How to see? Where to see from? What limits to vision? What to see for? Whom to see with? Who gets to have more than one point of view? Who gets blinkered? Who wears blinkers? Who interprets the visual field? What other sensory powers do we wish to cultivate besides vision? Moral and political discourse should be the paradigm of rational discourse in the imagery and technologies of vision»⁹. All these questions put at stake many of the most important issues about vision, especially for what concerns the gender matter implied in it: the situating of the view, the reason why we see or, moreover, the reason why we care so much about vision, and, even, the chances we can or can not offer to the other senses. However, the most important questions expressed by Haraway are those that introduce the uncanny possibility of unequal positions within the same field of vision, in which someone can wear the blinkers, someone else can hold the blinkers, and yet

⁶ Jonathan Crary, op. cit. p. 8.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Donna J. Haraway, *Situated Knowledges. The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, in Muriel Lederman, Ingrid Bartsch (ed.), *The Gender and Science Reader*, London-New York, Routledge, 2001, pp. 169-188.

⁹ Ivi, p. 177.

someone else, perhaps from a higher point of view than all others, can interpret the whole field of vision, that is the complex and contested terrain in which subjects, objects and instruments act from different points of view. That is why we need a political and moral paradigm to analyze vision rather than a scientific one. First of all, continuing in Haraway's discussion, the instruments of vision are probably the main responsibilities of compounding the meanings of disembodied vision. In fact, that is the primary characteristic of the capitalistic, colonialistic, masculinist power that accords to vision as a means of knowledge no apparent limits, or, at least, limits that can be easily and increasingly exceeded thanks to the optics technologies themselves. In this way, supported by optical devices, vision becomes an "unregulated gluttony" of the infinity of visibility gradually evolving from divine myth – or, at least, a "god-trick" – to an ordinary practice, from the illusion of seeing everything from nowhere to the form of a «cannibal-eye of masculinist extra-terrestrial project»¹⁰. This means in no way, as we will soon see, that a feminist discussion should abandon any project about vision or about analysis and use of optics. On the contrary it could well represent a politics of positioning, since it mediates standpoints, making us aware of the mediated nature of vision. This gives light to a new imagery of vision in which privileged and subjugated positions unveil their cultural, social, historical construction.

Another tool, a very significant one, is delineating the way a particular visual culture shapes different kinds of observers. It stays in the interrelation between art and science and in the ways they condition the observer – which little by little is becoming more instable than we presumed at first – through new forms of experiment in visual representation, not only in terms of institutional and economic requirements, but also in symbolic and psychological ones. This is the way in which material objects or technological discourses affect literary and artistic expressions, shaping their topics and their structures¹¹. Thus, new observers are

¹⁰ Zoe Sofoulis, *Through the Lumen: Frankenstein and the Optics of Reorigination*, Santa Cruz, University of California at Santa Cruz, 1998 (Phd Thesis).

¹¹ Fundamental studies of the relation between the structure of a scopic regime and that of a contemporary form of literature – which is called structural homology – are those of Phillippe Hamon and Max Milner. Hamon studied the homology between the scopic regime of world's fairs and the nineteenth-century French fiction in P. Hamon, *Expositions, littérature et architecture au XIXe siècle*, Paris, José Corti, 1989, and that between the scopic regime of photography and the French narrative of the same period in P. Hamon, *Imageries. Littérature et image au XIXe siècle*, Paris, José Corti, 2001. Milner is the author of the study on the phantasmagoric imaginary and the fantastic in nineteenth-century, M. Milner, *La fantasmagorie. Essai sur l'optique fantastique*, Paris, PUF, 1982.

created not only by lenses but also by the pages of books celebrating or contesting them.

Not too surprising, the question of the non-dominant model is what Crary will not examine: «What is not addressed in this study are the marginal and local forms by which dominant practices of vision were resisted, deflected, or imperfectly constituted. The history of such oppositional moments needs to be written, but it only becomes legible against the more hegemonic set of discourses and practices in which vision took shape»¹².

The claim of hegemony cannot pass unobserved in a field research as that of cultural studies. Such a central term has been coined by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*, especially in the sections devoted to the role of intellectual in modern society¹³. Hegemony is one of the forms that power can assume in opposition, or better in cooperation, to dominion. While the latter acts by means of dictatorship – and it is operated by political society – the former is the function of organizing consent assigned to civil society, particularly the organic intellectuals. Cultural hegemony is thus definable as the organization of consent through ideological structures and their institutions. Power is not expressed through force, rather through a rational and sentimental influence leading to persuasion. In this way it affects thought and the whole way of life. This is precisely the point in which the dream of Marxist revolution failed: in not having fully comprehended the extent of the cultural instruments of control – school, media and religion. Through these media the workers have been manipulated in accepting dominant ideology, being that of the bourgeois or the religious, without being conscious of that.

If it is true that some intellectuals become organic to the structure, others maintain their traditional role of the outsider, independent by dominant group. Moreover every man is an intellectual, because he (or she) has a proper worldview, and can provoke new ways of thinking. He or she can do that by means of language, for example, that is a crystallized manifestation of a worldview and thus both means of hegemony and of subaltern. Every man and woman, then, has in him(her)self the means to resist to this hegemony, even using the same material

¹² Jonathan Crary, op. cit., p. 7.

¹³ Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere*, a cura di Valentino Gerratana, Edizione critica dell'Istituto Gramsci, Torino, Einaudi, 1975, trans. J. A. Buttigieg, *Prison Notebooks*, New York, University of Columbia Press, 1996, vol. II, pp. 201-202.

instruments of dominating class. Revolution is no longer something to be a struggle with violence, but with a systematic opposition.

Quite twenty years later in translating Binswanger's *Dreams and Existence*¹⁴, Foucault defined image as a crystallization that prevents reason from going beyond perceptual aspects of form. It is, as well as Gramsci's language, a crystallized worldview. In fact, the production, the distribution and the consumption of images are part of cultural hegemony, particularly in our age. They seem to be particularly dangerous when they are supposed to be neutral, an objective representation of reality.

One of the main points of focus of this project will be to demonstrate how images have always been instruments of hegemony's propagation. Especially during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, when scientific images encountered non-scientific worlds, producing wonder and new knowledge, and vision was at the beginning of its "mechanical" age. Some outsider intellectuals foresaw the danger in which the non-dominant classes could have been incurring if they did not apprehend what these images really were and how did they work. Among these intellectuals there were some as marginal as women.

Subjects and objects

As we have already seen throughout these first lines, two terms are constantly recurring, those of subject and object, which could seem obvious at a first glance over the gaze. But the question is far from being obvious or still foreseen, being founded on all the deeper questions teasing visual culture and not only.

First of all, the question of the relationship between subject and object produces a strong impact when we focus on who the subject is, meaning the active part of the process of vision, and, on the other hand, who or what the object is, meaning the passive part of the game. In so speaking we are already playing in a very contested terrain leading to such cultural and political topics as those related, for instance, to the colonial gaze and to gender questions, in as much as western culture is fundamentally based on a male subject, often colonialist, and on a

¹⁴ Michele Foucault, Ludwig Binswanger, *Dream and Existence*, Atlantic Highlands NJ, Humanities Press, 1985.

female object, often colonized. This is the way in which western gaze used to act, almost since the Renaissance till the nineteenth century, holding a central perspective by which mastering at a distance all the history and nature belonging to him, female nature included.

The distance between observer and observed is exactly the topic on which the claim of objectiveness, mostly in science, has been funded, and has covered the techniques of observing throughout the modernity. Just this claim of objectiveness has been questioned by the philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth century, that from different points of view has unveiled the constructiveness and the partiality of this model, and has revised five hundreds years of western culture.

Particularly the question related to gender is one of the most debated within this topic, because of the difficulties experienced by psychoanalytic theories first, and then by feminine critics in defying the nature and the action of female gaze.

Field

The complex mechanisms, we have already talked about, are set in motion by the social arrangements and relationships in which gaze usually acts, that is, in one word, the scopic regimes that, from cartesian view on, have influenced the operation of the gaze¹⁵.

Each scopic regime is somehow a more complex version of Alberti's visual pyramid which connects the eye of the painter, the subject of the picture and the eye of the observer through the painting, considered as an open *window*, and insofar nearly transparent.

In modern theories the field of investigation extends from the arts and cinema, to scientific, ethno-anthropological or pornographic observations. In this enlargement and this multiplication the same scopic regimes seem to be profoundly changed and analysis should focus on each of the elements that constitute them: perceiving **subject** – and not only a creative one –; perceived **object** – being it more or less able to return the gaze of the subject –; the **medium** by which one perceives – that is, the device that allows the perception, directing,

¹⁵ Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of Gaze*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1983.

and thus characterizing the gaze –; the **environment** in which visual process happens, and finally the **image**, as the product of the cooperation or fight among these elements.

One of the fundamental assumptions of contemporary visual culture is that each of these elements can change the entire structure of vision, producing different and often competing regimes. Indeed, in Martin Jay words «the scopic regime of modernity may best be understood as a contested terrain, rather than a harmoniously integrated complex of visual subcultures, whose separation has allowed us to understand the multiple implications of sight»¹⁶. The most significant implications arise, as we have already seen, from the relationship between the subject (active) and object (passive) of sight, depending on the type of regime: the relationship between doctor and patient, in fact, is different from that which is established between the biologist and his test sample, or between the painter and his model, or even between the colonizer and the colonized.

Recent theories in visual culture have found general agreement in defining the operation of the Western gaze as sexually oriented, that is made to conform to the male model. In *Ways of Seeing* John Berger defines in this way the male/female relationship in gaze practices: «Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at [and become] an object of vision a sight»¹⁷.

Subsequent arguments of Foucault, made in *Surveiller et punir*¹⁸, on the power relations established in prison, but also educational and health regime of the panopticon, have supported the hypothesis of a coercive power of the sight, generally if not exclusively exercised by man.

Not only visual culture

The issue affects many areas of investigation typical of cultural studies, in addition to the aforementioned visual studies. Many disciplines have been, in fact, interested in the elements and mechanisms of scopic regimes: psychoanalysis, by Lacan onwards interested in the functioning of the gaze in particular during

¹⁶ Martin Jay, *Scopic Regimes of Modernity*, in N. Mirzoeff, a cura di, *Visual Culture Reader*, London and New York, Routledge, 2001, pp. 66-67.

¹⁷ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, New York, Penguin Group, 1972, p. 47.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, Gallimard, Paris, 1975.

childhood mirror stage, philosophy, especially in French philosophy of twentieth century, but also post-colonial studies interested in human exotic objects of the Western gaze.

However, the approach most affecting this research is that related to gender and women's studies, of those disciplines, namely, that especially in the twentieth century have undermined the patriarchal structure of society and of Western culture in all ages, showing how the male/female opposition is culturally and not naturally determined. Starting from these studies, articulating the concept of *gender* either as an issue to «track, discuss, criticize, deconstruct» or as a «tool that allows the focus of the relationship between a woman and another»¹⁹, we can now review not only the operation of the Western gaze – so far monopolized by a male vision in which the woman remains desperately object – but the whole story of the woman as the subject of *another* sight, not only independent observer of a visual object, but also a producer of visual objects other than those of men and of equal dignity.

In an attempt to examine the female gaze, and identify with, rather than differentiate from, the male one, and to liberate women from their objectification, the gender scholars have turned their attention to different fields where the modern gaze, of male and female, acts. The most interesting studies are split between the fields of film studies, art history and science studies.

Studies analyzing the operation of the gaze in cinematographic regime are generally based on the themes of psychoanalysis. The fundamental contribution, which is now a classic on the subject, is certainly *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), in which Laura Mulvey, analyzing Hollywood films, found a conventional presentation of woman as object of male gaze²⁰. This is a convention so rooted in Western culture practices that woman herself ends up being conditioned, and realizing, through the phenomenon of identification, a reductive exhibitionist position, rather than a rebellion against the sadistic male gaze. The male/female dichotomy in American cinema would, thus, confine itself to the connection look/to be looked, the concept of female *to-be-looked-at-ness* in the words of Laura Mulvey.

¹⁹ A. Taronna, *Women's Studies*, in M. Cometa, R. Coglitore, F. Mazzara, a cura di, *Dizionario degli studi culturali*, Meltemi, Roma, 2004, p. 530, my transl.

²⁰ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in «Screen», n. 3, 1975, pp. 6-18.

These conclusions on the female role in the mechanism of the gaze, have given rise to controversy within and outside the feminist community. First of all Mary Ann Doane tried to oppose the study of Mulvey on male cinema through a study of films made for female spectators in the '40s²¹. In an attempt to transform woman from a passive object to an active subject, Doane studied the way in which the objectness of woman, often seen as source of her own masochism, does not propose the same male model, but resists it through its own tools. As we will see, using the masks white men attributed to blacks and women, is a common strategy between these two marginal “subjects”.

One of the most important contributions within this research field, and more specifically, within the perspective of gender history, is given by the reinterpretation of art history through the lens of feminism of Griselda Pollock. The author of *Vision and Difference* seeks to define the specific vision of women in history from the creative potential of women, even able to change the history of art. If this discipline has never considered the contribution of women in Western art it is because even it pursues the patriarchal model, and, moreover, because women were forbidden to access places of artistic canonization, which have always been considered unsuitable to women. Confined in closed areas of domestic life, and forced to address their artistic skills on subjects of secondary value, women were excluded from art history and included in the category of the *curious*, as subjects who showed artistic skills, although not in the biological and intellectual conditions suitable to do that. Despite the enslavement of their intelligence and their creativity, women have in every age tried to fight their condition. It is the task of modern women historians to reconstruct the history from the perspective of these few but important artists. Adopting a Marxist view of the study of history and society Pollock says:

To know that society has been patriarchal and sexist means that you reject the idea that the oppression of women is divinely ordained, or biologically, psychologically inevitable. (To know that society is capitalistic means that you reject the inevitability of wage labour and capitalists' profits). In studying art we want refined understanding of relation to and positions on that knowledge or social experience.²²

²¹ See Mary Ann Doane, *Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator*, in «Screen», n. 3, 1982, pp. 74-87, e id, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s*, Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1984.

²² Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, London and New York, Routledge, 2003, p. 41.

Another field which could well work in analyzing feminine gaze is that one related to the studies on science and gender, or more precisely, related to both feminist theories and social studies of science. The connection between these two different fields of analysis has been conducted by Evelyn Fox Keller – from a scientific point of view – and Carolyn Merchant – from an historical point of view –, trying to identify the relationships between science, society, gender:

Such a venture come into being with the meeting of two apparent independent development in recent scholarship: feminist theory and the social studies of science. The second has changed our thinking about the relation between science and society – without however considering the role of gender – and the first has changing our way of thinking about the relation between gender and society but has been only peripherally concerned with science.²³

However what I would stress here is the way in which these approaches all move within a particular notion of vision, the same notion that brings some thinkers, such as Sartre and Lacan, to demonize it, others, such as Merleau-Ponty, to defend its nobility, or to criticize and denigrate it, as Foucault and Jay do. The point of view that will lead this project will be divergent in attempting to delineate the possibility of a different notion of vision, in the way some new frontiers of gender and visual studies are doing, and in the way some previously have done. I am here referring to the study of vision in science, anthropology and society, which the three thinkers we will focus on throughout this research, did in an unexpected period, the early modernity.

Corpus, horizons and objectives

To understand the relationships and conditions relating to such a cultural and social experience waiting to be reviewed through the female perspective, next to the study of art history it will be useful to examine other fields of culture where the contribution of women has been underestimated if not finally forgotten.

In this sense it is interesting to observe how, during the period of scientific and political revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the *Second Sex*

²³ Evelin Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1985, p. 4.

has been able to take advantage of small spaces left by a cultural structure in crisis. In fact, there seems to be a female contribution to the rewriting of history through a research on the scientific vision of women, in the era in which the same oppressive patriarchal model faltered, because of new findings under the microscope and the telescope, and women curiosity was allowed, just for pleasure, access to the same tools that would build the modern science.

At the end of the seventeenth century, in fact, a strange participation of women in the cultural climate that would produce a new discipline spread, natural philosophy, a scientific approach that was born from the collaboration between empirical observation and philosophical speculation. It is the time when the Copernican revolution is being imposed through the studies of Galileo and Kepler, and in which the microcosm enter into debate on the plurality of worlds through studies by Leeuwenhoek and disclosures by Hooke.

The new interests and new questions, lead the discussions outside the scientific and philosophical academies and scientific societies, and, through magazines and works of disclosure, reach wider layers of amateurs who dabble in physics, astronomy, micrographs, opening up new horizons and themes for literature.

This is the age in which the Scientific Lady was born:

By the late seventeenth century, upper-class English women were noticing and reacting to the economic and educational advances men had made...they argued that differences in male and female achievement stemmed not from female intellectual inferiority, but from differences in childreading practices, educational opportunities, and social position...leading the way towards recognition of women as student of the new philosophy was Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle.²⁴

The end of this period seems to be particularly interesting in the words of Donna Haraway, because:

Feminism as western political theory can be said to begin at the same historical moment and for the same historical reason as the discourse of biology and anthropology, with roots in the eighteenth century and flowering in the nineteenth

²⁴ Caroline Merchant, *The Death of Nature. Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, San Francisco, Harper & Row publishers, 1983, p. 269-270. On the topic of Scientific Lady see also Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *De Nobilitate et Praecellentia foeminei sexus* (1525), english translation, *The Glory of Women: or a Looking-glasse for Ladies*, London, 1652; H. C. Agrippa, *Female Pre-eminence: or the Dignity and Excellency of that Sex, Above the Male*, London 1670; François Poulain de la Barre, *The Women as Good as the Man: or Equality of Both Sex*, (trans.) London 1677 (first publ. 1673); M. A. Seidel, "The Woman as Good as the Man", «Journal of the History of Ideas» 35 (1974), pp. 499-508.

century. In this period the organism – animal, personal and social – became the privileged natural-technical object of knowledge. Organisms were structured by the principles of the division of labor. The special efficiencies derived from the separations and functional management of the new scientific entities called race, sex, class had particularly strong effects.²⁵

Among the amateurs, travelers, and the "journalists" who lived and spread this revolution, especially in England, three women seem to have contributed to modern European culture. They are the poet and natural philosopher Margaret Cavendish, the traveler Aphra Ben, and Eliza Haywood, the sole curator of *Female Spectator* between 1744 and 1746.

The Duchess of Newcastle, Margaret Cavendish is a prime example of active participation in the scientific discussion of her contemporary. In 1666, a year after the publication of Sir Robert Hooke's *Micrographia*, a member emeritus of the Royal Society, Duchess published, with the help of her husband, a treatise entitled *Observations on Experimental Philosophy*, as opposed to the theories recognized by the Royal Society and contesting them, although with some ingenuity. What makes this work a strong affirmation of a female point of view, completely opposite to the male and socially shared one, is the novel that follows the philosophical treatise: *The Description of a New World Called The Blazing-World*, was written to amuse the scientific thoughts and to cheer the readers with a «variety of shapes». Through this appendix Cavendish proves to be something more than an author of modern times. Her new world, in fact, is not just a fantastic building, but a real building: against society and science, against ancient and modern. If through the new instruments men had an opportunity to change the structures of the world a till then known, reconsidering their own position and that of the "others", women also seem to profit from this. Thus, our author shows her worldview, an upside down world, where the exterior becomes interior. Her world is bright because the light comes from within the stars: the sky is in the innermost room of the kingdom. In such a continuous short circuit between different levels of reality, the author identifies herself so closely with her heroine that her real soul is embodied in the unreal body of the protagonist. A possession, however, that doesn't become total control of the life of the other, but complete sharing, as if two different beings, but of the same gender, could coexist in the same body. Patriarchal and phallogocentric

²⁵ Donna J. Haraway (ed.), *Primate Visions. Gender, Race, And Nature In The World Of Modern Science*, New York-London, Routledge, 1989, p. 289.

society is hurt again when the two female souls end up owning the real body of the Duke of Newcastle, husband of the author. The continuous reversal of reality made by this extraordinary thinker, placed on the sidelines of a scientific treatise, is in itself a meaningful sample by which to investigate the ways in which the gaze of women on the same objects, through the same tools used by men, could produce completely different universes.

At the same time Margaret Cavendish was writing and around the same cultural environment, Aphra Ben was publishing her literary works and her scientific and ethnological treatises. The approach of these two women to the male power, however, is radically different. Very close to the Royal Society, with which she collaborated as translator and editor of one of the most authoritative editions of the *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* by Fontenelle, Aphra Behn can be considered one of the first scientist travelers, an etno-anthropologist ante litteram. The scientific, political and literary activity, seems to suggest that the author had completely married male model. One of the most interesting instances is undoubtedly the short novel *Oroonoko* (1688) which tells the unfortunate story of a noble African and his wife, enslaved and deported to the American plantations. Here the young aristocrat tries to organize a revolt that will end in tragedy and that will force him to kill his wife, waiting for their heir, to avoid her worst punishments. The protagonist, however, fail to survive and be dismembered alive. The story is very raw, not only because of the events narrated, but even of the precision with which the author describes the scenes of massacre and, especially, the dismemberment of the young. This novel is a veritable archive for the study of the Western gaze, male and female: Behn has on his characters a **colonial gaze** – she did in fact use as sadistic descriptions as she did not if it were a white and European body – a **pornographic gaze** – nothing of the bodies of the male protagonist and his partner are rescued from voyeuristic gaze of the colonizer –, a **scientific gaze** – the dissection of the African prince is definitely the result of careful reading of the manuals of anatomy. While these images that are so violent, even more because so realistic, seem to bring the author to the male gaze, on the other hand cultural reversal of a female look that violent a male body, can be subject to careful analysis in terms of gender studies.

The final example is Eliza Haywood, sole curator of *Female Spectator*, first women's magazine to address, not only education and behavior of women, but

even their scientific update. Haywood seems to be an author aware of the difficulties she faces in the patriarchal society she lives in, therefore she is also concerned about instructing the women on the correct works that, with a reasonable level of education, may be able to gain some personal power. Haywood edited the magazine, which had a large distribution, for about two years, while remaining anonymous and in the literary shape of four different women: a woman full of wit and humor married to a man worthy of her company, with whom she lives in harmony; a wise widow, custodian of female honor and innocence; the daughter of a wealthy merchant, a beautiful girl with so many qualities that beauty seems to be but the last of these; finally, the spectator herself. Although the affairs of men, like war and politics, are not allowed to be debated by women, a little flattery from a man, especially if addressed not only to physical, but even to moral qualities of women, is granted. This is the case of the letter sent to authors, April 27, 1745, by a mysterious Philonaturae, that encourages the study of women's natural philosophy, presenting the authors and readers to the wonders of nature revealed by the microscope and the telescope and citing the ubiquitous image of insects by Hooke. Some have seen this admirer of women as another pseudonym of the author itself.

My purpose will be that of analyzing the way in which the gaze of the Scientific Ladies was formed between the seventeenth and eighteenth century, among these three writing ladies, identifying the similarities and the differences between each of them, and between them and male writings of the period according to three issues, to whom every chapter will be devoted.

Indeed, after having briefly analyzed the history of modern sight in chapter I, I'll analyze the question of the personal implication of the observer, which is the deepest feature of feminist perspective on the ways of seeing. It is rooted into the mythic distinction between the male traits of objectivity, reason, and mind, in spite of the female subjectivity, feeling, and nature, which I argue, with E. Fox Keller, were already working during the scientific revolution, and the women writings were not afraid to recognize them or, even, to use them. It also brought the private, the emotional, the sexual into the social, anthropological and scientific observation. In recognizing the actual influence of the beholder in scientific as well as in social fields, women destabilize the myth of an un-personal perception of the world

through lenses. The *Blazing World*²⁶ will prove as even the same purpose to know the outside world can never be separated by the notion of inner world, through which we primary perceive. *The Emperor of the Moone*²⁷, by Aphra Behn is truly a caricature of the figure of virtuoso, the man who in the late seventeenth century dedicated his entire life to scientific observation. Through a masquerade – which we will see as a primary means of visual culture resistance – Behn will “unveil” the real peeping purpose that is below many observations through the telescope. Finally the *Invisible Spy*²⁸, by Eliza Haywood, will present one of the first characters created by a woman in order to picture a different kind of observer who, despite the title, has no intention either of controlling or intervening in the life of his (or her) objects.

The third chapter will be devoted to the power of control, by which I mean the consciousness the subject (male/female) has of manipulating the object of the gaze. It is, of course, strictly connected with the concepts of activeness/passiveness-male/female, and with the conception of dominating nature. What primarily characterizes this study is the consciousness of the three writers of the “objectness” they represent as women, and the way they try to act with and against this objectness. Again the mask seems to be the fundamental tool of this fight, this time, however, used in the sense of mimicry, rather than in that of masquerade. Thus they try to enter the field of vision in a more and more active way, not only destabilizing the entire field. Margaret Cavendish will do that through her own aesthetics, as the visit at the Royal Society will show, and through the heroine of *Bell in Campo*²⁹, who will reach such a victory during war that the King will be constrained to give her and her female army all the major honors usually attributed to men. *Oroonoko*³⁰ is probably the most known work by Aphra Behn, who used the figure of her hero in order to unmask the constructed categories of whiteness and blackness. She will also show that the pretended

²⁶ Margaret Cavendish, *The Description of A New World Called the Blazing World*, London, A. Maxwell, 1668, now in K. Liley (ed.), *The Blazing World And Other Writings*, London, Penguin, 1994.

²⁷ Aphra Behn *The Emperor of The Moon*, London 1687, new edition Cambridge, Chadwyck-Healey, 1996.

²⁸ Eliza Haywood, *The Invisible Spy*, London, Gardner, 1759.

²⁹ Margaret Cavendish, *Bell in Campo*, in id, *Playes Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle*, London, A. Warren, for John Martyn, James Allestry, and Tho. Dicas [etc.], 1662.

³⁰ Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko: Or, The Royal Slave*, in Id, *Three Histories*, London, Printed for W. Canning, 1688.

subject of all these gazes, the white man, can easily become an object of vision, as curious and explorable as blacks and women are for him. Eliza Haywood will stage *Fantomina*³¹ a woman who will secretly be as many women as her man desire. But the end of the story will demonstrate how her final aim was not to possess him but to create a woman free of patriarchy.

The fourth and final chapter will explore the relation between facts and fiction, i.e. the relation between the “objective” interpretation of scientific facts and the “storytelling” connected with the popularizing task. The women of that period seem to be particularly conscious of the thin border between telling facts and telling stories. Moreover they will show how ironically the presumed objective science will produce, thanks to its popularized images, the opposite effects: wonder and imagination. This period, in fact, has been seen as the origin of Science Fiction. Thus we will examine *Natures Pictures*³² by Cavendish, to see how she considered imagination a pure rational method of inquiring or inspiring knowledge. Aphra Behn is well known also for the translation of Fontenelle’s *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*³³, which she translated as *A Discovery of New Worlds*, entering the field of public discussion on one of the most popular philosophical debates. Her translation, however, was not a faithful mediation between French and English, rather a real critic of the fancy by which men of science conceive false images as scientific, thus excluding popular audience from real reflections, just while they think they are enjoying it. Finally Haywood, with her most popular work, the magazine *Female Spectator*³⁴, will actively work against cultural hegemony, forbidding women of true education, by instilling in their minds, and in those of their husbands and parents, the danger of knowledge. She will argue that knowledge will favor the same structures of patriarchal society, but then she will educate ladies to taste for their interior value rather than the outer appearance.

These three points are direct offspring of the gender reflection in science and social science. However, they seem to be useful tools in analyzing other fields of vision as well, first of all that of media studies. As we shall see, indeed, the three

³¹ Eliza Haywood, *Fantomina: or Love in A Maze*, in id, *Secret Histories, Novels and Poems*. In Four Volumes, Cambridge, Chadwyck-Healey, 1996, pp. 257-291.

³² Margaret Cavendish, *Natures Pictures Drawn by Fancies Pencil to The Life*, London, Maxwell, 1671 (second edition).

³³ Bernard le Bovier Fontenelle *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, Paris, 1687, M. Guerout, trans. Aphra Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds* London, William Canning, 1688.

³⁴ Eliza Haywood, *The Female Spectator*, ed. by Patricia Meyer Spacks, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 1999.

writing women we have taken as samples declined their own theory of vision in different media, according, I shall argue, the medium to the message and to the audience or spectatorship. It is not for a chance that Cavendish and Behn and Haywood were working on both the sides of print and scenic representation, accordingly modulating their own gaze and that of their audience. It is already clear how questions such as corporality, licit and illicit gaze, fiction and truth through vision are here at stake, brought about by such a cultural revolution which affected not only science but, in a more spread way, the system of representation in theatre as well as in printing. Moreover, such fields of culture began to be interested in topics such as those of gender, race and class, as never before.

The male faith on the obedience or even narrowness of women's scientific observation was not ever rewarded, and what they saw through lenses, in scientific translations or in popularizing writings, seemed to not fit with male order.

Brief history of the gaze

The Copernican revolution has yet to have
its final effects in the male imaginary.
L. Irigaray

It is hard to decide whether to describe the relation between human kind and vision as a history, tracing the roots of a reflection of humans on their own means of knowledge, or a story, telling the aspirations they have nourished to the distances these means can reach.

Commonly this history or story is assumed to begin with Plato's discourses about the senses, from *Timaeus* to *Phaedrus* and *Republic*. What is less common and shared is to glimpse an end, for this plot seems to become increasingly complicated. As Evelyn Fox Keller has pointed out, from the very beginning it seems to be grounded on a paradoxical dichotomy between two functions of the sight: a connective versus a dissociative one. On one hand vision has been seen, throughout the history of western thought, as a means to connect us to the truth, on the other, but not in contrast with it, it seems to act as a distancing between the subject and its own corporality. Originally intertwined these two functions were gradually parted until a final separation between a "body's eye" and a "mind's eye"¹.

What is clear is the close relation that has always linked knowledge to vision more than any other sense, at least in western culture that considers it such an evident matter not needed to argue anymore, from Plato on. On this basic assumption has been founded the human thought that over the last 2500 years of

¹ Evelyn Fox Keller, Christine Gronkowski, *The Mind's Eye*, in Sandra Harding, Merrill B. Hintikka, edited by, *Discovering Reality. Feminist perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, Dordrecht-Boston-London, D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1983, pp. 207-224.

history has led to individualization rather than identification, analysis rather than resemblance, abstract rather than concrete, logos rather than mythos. As Havelock claims in *Preface to Plato*, as the eye grows up the “I” must be born².

This path was already clear when Plato described the creation of the sense of sight and of the other senses. Indeed, while the first is described in *Timaeus*³ as the first gift gods gave us (eventually noticing in *Republic*⁴ how lavish they were in giving us this sense) all the others are described as parts of the material nature of men. It is further interesting to notice how the use of eye as a metaphor of knowledge is carried out under the explanation of the way light itself acts, as a medium of perception. The model Plato designed for the process of knowledge is that which links through sameness the eye to the intellect and, by means of the light, to the sun, in turn linked to goodness⁵. This is probably the reason why vision has been able to reach such a prominent place: because of its distance from the world it acts in, in order to supremely know, to work outside the time, in such a disembodied way as to promote the primary illusion of disengagement and, therefore, objectification. Even though it was not difficult for Plato to understand the incorporeity of the sight and the communion with the knowledge as not conflicting, this will become the Gordian knot of all classic and modern philosophy.

Particularly in the modern theories of optics, the eye has become a mere, even if useful, lens, thus increasing its objectifying power, but losing its suitability in terms of non-material knowledge. The strongest suspicion on the senses, and among these even the sight in spite of mental intellection, comes from Descartes who definitely detached the sight of intellect from physical seeing. If the senses belong to the soul, then the soul is the one that sees, the eyes are its mere means⁶. Keller argues that since the knowing agent has lost his connection with his own percipient organism – for his senses are relegated to the realm of the pure

² Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, Cambridge MASS., Harvard University Press, 1963.

³ Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. by Francis M. Cornford, Edited by Oskar Pietsch, New York, Liberal Arts Press, 1959.

⁴ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. (with an introduction) by Desmond Lee, Harmondsworth-Baltimore, Penguin, 1974.

⁵ Plato, *Timaeus*, quoted The light is here the medium, emitted from within the eye, for soul meeting soul.

⁶ René Descartes, *Dioptrics*, in id *Philosophical Writings*, trans Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter T. Geach, London, Library of Liberal arts, 1954, pp. 239-256.

materiality –, the eye becomes one of these passive means, while the pure intellectual activity is reserved to the “I”⁷.

The more science and philosophy evolve along the route of knowing the eye and its functioning, particularly thanks to optics technology, the more the concern about the sight grows. Newton, one of the main characters of the revolution of modern science, deeply knew the way physical eye worked as the primary medium of his experiments. Still he felt the uncomfortable awareness of not completely comprehending how the “inner eye” worked. That eye which would allow him to see what God saw, that is «things themselves intimately»⁸, beyond their appearance. The divine vision, a vision over infinite time and space in which things are seen in a definitive way that we can only perceive through our visual imaginary, still passed through the eyes elaborating images.

A certain sort of communion between physical and mental eye still stands, but the subsequent history of science will travel more and more distant from physical knowledge:

Where Kepler experienced science as an opportunity to grasp God as it were, with his hand, it was Newton’s ambition to “see” as God “saw”, Einstein perhaps came closest to the ancient ideal when he concluded “I hold it true that pure thought can grasp reality” [...] the dual paradigm behind the promise of the visual – clarity and communion – survives as the root of aspiration behind the dual tenets of modern science. In *objectifiability* the world is severed from the observer [...] it was thought without contaminating. In *knowability*, communion is re-established, mediated by a now-submerged but still evident dimension of the same sense.⁹

Precisely the recurring characters of this history create the plot of the complex story that implicates men and the “others”. The detachment between the subject and the object, the not always recognized bias implicated in this same distinction, the suspicion on the fallacy of sight, the human hubris in trying to overcome this fallacy by every means in order to master the nature and world (being those visible or invisible) are all still at stake.

Something happens when new doubts come on stage: that the vision is not so incorporeal as we thought, that it could influence the object which is seen, and,

⁷ Evelyn Fox Keller, op. cit., p. 215.

⁸ Isaac Newton, *Opticks: or, A treatise of the reflexions, refractions, inflexions and colours of light. Also two treatises of the species and magnitude of curvilinear figures*, London, Printed for S. Smith, and B. Walford, 1704, new edition ed. by Bernard Cohen, New York, Dover Publication, 1979, p. 370.

⁹ Evelyn Fox Keller, op. cit., p. 218.

moreover, that this object could break the screen dividing the two spaces of the sight and that it may return the gaze. These doubts did not rise in a precise moment of this history, but surely the most dramatic moment was at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the following. Many questions were at this moment implicated: the way the gaze of the “other” (woman, colonized, object of experiment) works, the dangers related to the gaze (surveilling, suppressive or violent), the different kinds of gaze that can exist (sexual, medical, cinematographic, etc), the means by which analyzing them (from gender/neutral, photographic/cinematographic, artistic/scientific points of view, etc). After almost 2000 years of reflections the territory of vision is still mostly unknown. In fact, many “dark continents” are now emerging, the most enigmatic of those being that of women.

The gender matter

In his essay on femininity of 1932, Freud proposes to investigate not what a woman is but how the feminine personality is formed, and he suffered some discomfort in dealing with an enigma who has committed "people" throughout the history of humanity¹⁰.

That there is a difference between the sexes is indisputable both from the anatomical, and from the mental and behavioral point of view. Yet, Freud says, especially this second aspect of the matter is far more steeped in cultural and social "superimpositions" than one might imagine at first sight. An example might be, if nothing else, the equation in the relationship between male and female and between active and passive. As Freud said this proportion is only valid in some cases of life (for example, it does not apply in the growth of the offspring) and is not attributable to all animals.

Beyond these considerations, however, the father of psychoanalysis conducted an investigation on the sexual development of women starting from two basic assumptions: that this development is conflictual – even more than in the case of

¹⁰ The issue of female sexuality was discussed for the first time in 1905 in *Three Essays on Sexuality*, then again in *Some Psychological Consequences of The Anatomical Distinction Between The Sexes* in 1925 and in *Female Sexuality*, 1931. Finally, the topic will be included in the seventh chapter of *Results of Psychoanalysis*, published posthumously in 1940. It is not possible, however, to trace any evolution of Freudian thought in this field along this timeframe.

men – and that some turning points of this evolution are already inherent in the premise of childhood. In essence, the baby-girl will have much more difficulties in dealing with the three stages of sexual development because each of the changes she will pass through will not reach a final stage, but only a temporary one: the anatomical source of her desire, to be replaced several times, not excluding problematic returns especially in the phase of penis envy; the object of her desire (love) for the mother to be abandoned, to be hardly recaptured only when she becomes mother in turn. In these circumstances, the formation of the female super-ego faces great difficulties: «It cannot attain the strength and the independence which gave it its cultural significance; and feminist are not pleased when we point out to them the effect of this factor upon the average feminine character»¹¹. This is why a woman's sexuality will remain marked by a fundamental bisexuality, an inherent narcissism and a desperate desire to be loved rather than loving.

It is, Freud himself admits, a partial analysis, valid only in regards to the development of sexuality, but that has no validity in other areas which express the “humanity” of women: «If you want to know more about femininity, enquire from your own experiences of life, or turn to poets, or wait until science can give you deeper and more coherent information»¹².

Analyzing the overall long and rich work of Freud, we cannot escape a certain difference in treatment or, in other words, a flaw in its complex system. What is immediately evident, in fact, is the absolute lack of a female variation of issues related to sight which also has an important part not only in Freud's psychoanalytic, but also in his humanistic studies, that help him in finding a basis for arts and literature, linked to the trauma of sexuality.

Although he never built a structured theory of the gaze, his own sensitivity to the problem is reflected in many writings in which, very often, the word of the

¹¹ Sigmund Freud, *Über Weiblichkeit*, in *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*, Wien, Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1933, trans. J. Strachey, *Femininity*, in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, New York, W.W. Norton&co, 1964, p. 129. The veiled attack on the newborn feminist movement does not appear here for the first time. Already in *Some Psychological Consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes*, Freud had criticized the attempt, made by the movement, to make the difference between the sexes uniform.

¹² Ivi, p. 135.

psychoanalyst is behind that of the art critic¹³: the fear of castration is symbolically staged in *Medusa* by Caravaggio, the admonition of idolatry in *Moses* by Michelangelo. Further we should not forget that fetishism, one of the sexual perversions, is linked precisely with a visual process, and that all sexual child development is linked to the fluctuating fortunes of voyeurism and scopophilia, that is the sexual pleasure in subjecting the other to one's own gaze, leading or not to a perversion¹⁴. But if all these visions and these images are inextricably linked to sexuality, this is definitely a masculine sexuality.

There is no doubt that Freud was aware of the importance that artworks probably have for the female psyche as well, condensing in an image a sexual trauma, a perversion, a repressed instinct, most often a phobia. This applies, for example, to one of his patients, the most famous, known under the pseudonym of Dora. In analyzing the second dream of the eighteen years old girl – who will be in care by the analyst for only a few months, leaving her orphan of a promising study on hysteria through the interpretation of dreams – the analyst reconstructs the real-life experiences that led to the setting of the dream¹⁵. The unknown city, probably a German one, is traced back to a series of different images: the postcards a young suitor sent her from this mysterious city; the city of Vienna that Dora had to show to her cousin, the resemblance of this city to Dresden, that Dora had visited some time before. The visual experience made in this city, shared with almost all visitors who have traveled there over centuries, is marked by a visit to the famous gallery that houses the *Madonna Sistina*. The girl tells Freud she stayed in contemplation of the image for two hours, but she was unable to describe her feelings, even less than she can explain what struck her about this image, except «the Madonna».

¹³ One of the earliest and most famous studies in art history, on the *Moses* by Michelangelo, is written under a pseudonym.

¹⁴ «Visual impressions remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused [...] It is usual for most normal people to linger to some extent over the intermediate sexual aim of a looking that has a sexual tinge to it. On the other hand, this pleasure in looking (scopophilia) becomes a perversion (a) if it is restricted exclusively to the genitals, or (b) if it is connected with overriding disgust [...], or (c), if, instead of being *preparatory* to the normal sexual aim, it supplants it [...] In the perversions which are directed towards looking and being looked at, we come across a very remarkable characteristic [...] in these perversions the sexual aim occurs in two forms, an *active* and a *passive* one», Freud, *Three Essays*, 7: 156–157. As we will see in the paragraph about gender studies on gaze, precisely the active and passive concern about the look and the to-be-look-at will be central especially in the studies on gaze within film studies.

¹⁵ In this dream she was in a strange city where, it seems, she lived. Here she was informed by the mother of her father's death through a letter inviting her to the funeral. Dora, however, could not arrive in time because nobody could point the way to the station.

Freud interprets this figure as the condensation of early motherhood and virginity:

The “Madonna” was obviously Dora herself; in the first place because of the “adorer” who had sent her the pictures, in the second place because she had won Herr K.’s love chiefly by the motherliness she had shown towards his children, and lastly because she had had a childish thought she was still a girl [...] Moreover, the notion of “Madonna” is a favorite counter-idea in the mind of the girls who feel themselves oppressed by imputations of sexual guilt, – which was the case with Dora.¹⁶

The experience of this vision and the break, not only ecstatic, that it produces are not new to Freud who had been there before in 1883, and had not been able to resist writing to Martha Bernays:

You are sure to know her, the Sistine. My thoughts as I sat there were: Oh, if only you were with me! The Madonna stands there surrounded by clouds made up of innumerable little angel heads, a spirited-looking child on her arm, St. Sixtus (or is it the Pope Sixtus?) looking up on one side, St. Barbara on the other gazing down on the two lovely little angels who are sitting low down on the edge of the picture. The painting emanates a magic beauty that is inescapable, and yet I have a serious objection to rise against the Madonna herself. [Raphael's Madonna] is a girl, say sixteen years old; she gazes out on the world with such a fresh and innocent expression, half against my will she suggested to me a charming, sympathetic nursemaid, not from the celestial world but from ours. My Viennese friends reject this opinion of mine as heresy and refer to a superb feature round the eyes making her a Madonna; this I must have missed during my brief inspection.¹⁷

The unique similarities of the two experiences, that of the doctor and of the patient, do not lead, however, to any theoretical elaboration and the issue regarding feminine gaze, though it begins to appear in all its problematic nature, will not meet any medical or philosophical awareness.

In spite of Freud’s lack of position on Dora’s gaze, feminist critics, particularly during the seventies of nineteenth century, looked at her as an example of the objectification of the female body by a male, even though medical, gaze. The “illness” itself of hysteria became a way in which the female body reacts against social and masculine constrictions to silence. Dora herself became the main character of her own drama in more than one reflection by Hélène Cixous, who in

¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Bruchstück einer Hysterie-Analyse*, in «Monatsschr. für Psychiatrie und Neurologie», n. 4, 1905, trans. Ph. Rieff, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, New York, Simon&Schuster, 1997, p. 96.

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Letter from Sigmund Freud to Martha Bernays, December 20, 1883*, in *Letters of Sigmund Freud 1873-1939*, London, The Hogarth Press, 1961, pp. 81-84.

1974 wrote a *piece* called *Portrait of Dora*¹⁸. What Cixous got interested in was the special interplay between the dreaming work and the stage work. The former operates so well in Dora's case as a system combining images in which is difficult to say what is true and what is not. The latter is a system producing images. The two both project desires into space by means of words or gestures: «The stage is the reflecting surface of a dream, a deferred dream»¹⁹, that is a place in which to analyze once again Dora's drama. Starting from Freud's analysis itself, Cixous definitely criticizes the way in which he interpreted the young lady's story, and unveiled the gender and social overtones he, after all, employed. Through this new point of view, Dora appeared as a "subversive force" operating against "the united force of social class" and against the sexual commerce the new century is carrying out. In Cixous play, the point of view is constantly contrasted, depending on if we are on a dream, on a memory or on a fantasy level: between Dora's eyes, Freud's eyes, or the other character's ones. Anyway the main character never appears as a victim. In fact, the victim is Mrs K, who is a woman unable of fighting the system of bourgeois lies Dora rejects. However, what is deeply important for our discourse is the way in which Cixous looks at Dora's experience before the *Madonna Sistina*. Where Freud saw a desire of identification with the virgin, Cixous sees a sexual desire more or less similar to what Freud himself experienced before the picture. For Dora identifies the Madonna with the same whiteness of Mrs K who, Freud agrees, the girl looked at as such charming lady since she was a fourteen years old girl. Her desire is to be the child in her harms, and she wants to be kept by the mature woman gaze: «look at me! I would like to step into your eyes. I want you to close your eyes. Her way of looking at herself. Of loving herself. Of not suffering. Of not looking at me. Of looking at me so calmly, with that smile»²⁰. This is without a doubt a case in which the scopophilic desire is steeped into a sexual one, and this matches very well with Freud's thoughts, even though he was unable to conduct them on a female ground.

Thus the criticism of the twentieth century is still tied to the theoretical reflections on the gaze matured at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century. We are at the dawn of the century, that is the dawn of the new Western image

¹⁸ H el ene Cixous, *Portrait de Dora*, Paris, Editions des femmes, 1976, trans. A. Barrows, *Portrait of Dora*, London, John Calder, 1979.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 9.

²⁰ Ivi, p. 41.

society. The gaze that until then had been the object of investigation of aesthetics, circumscribed within a specific fee or a specific scopic regime, that of the perspective first and of the darkroom after, was now put in a new contested terrain not only in an analytical sense, but also in a historical one, at the crossroads of four major cultural revolutions: the birth of cinema, the birth of psychoanalysis (and biology), the consolidation of colonial institutions. The perspective and uniqueness of the view that since the Renaissance had characterized Western culture was being questioned. It was no longer possible to think of a single divine sight, but at least four different points of view came up on stage. New objects of study, hardly adaptable to what previously known: a fixed look at moving images (film gaze), a legitimized and deep gaze onto an animate or inanimate object (the gaze of the biologist who replaced the naturalist), a gaze supposed to be culturally superior onto an object less than desperate (the colonial gaze).

Jonathan Crary has shown how precisely the science of the nineteenth century has brought the issue of the gaze back to the physicality of human vision and, therefore, to an individual and temporal instability that made seeing much more volatile than the Renaissance had expected²¹.

The distinction between “gaze” and “glance” introduced by Norman Bryson had also added a spatial and a temporal dimension to the issue, stressing that the technological revolutions related to photography – as well as to the stereoscope, the panorama, the magic lantern, and, prior to the microscope and the telescope – had placed before the human eye new images at the same time evanescent and desirable: «A division separates the activity of the gaze, prolonged, contemplative, yet regarding the field with a certain aloofness and disengagement – from that of a glance, a furtive or sideways look – carrying messages of hostility, collusion, rebellion and lust»²². In studying the ways in which seeing operates in art history, Bryson stresses the cultural value added to this process, and the different changes it gains. Thus, the gaze is a concentrated way of seeing, even a forceful one, while the glance is a distracted, furtive and often illicit one. This produces also moral and political implications, for the division doesn't stay on a temporal level only. The first is related to the intention of the viewer, that is the subject of the vision, and on

²¹ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge MASS, MIT Press, 1990.

²² Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*, New Haven, Yale University Press 1983, p. 94.

the cultural and translating techniques it will adopt in order to understand the object of its own look, since two persons could not have the same vision of the same object. Thus the gaze is a political channel of power on which the relationship between the author, the artwork and the viewer of the artwork is grounded, in the case of art history; between the subject, the object and the image between them in almost all the different settings of vision. This relationship changes as changes the role of the subject performing its gaze. A new form of vision affected the entire body of the observer, whose intentions, memories and desires project his or her internal *stimuli* onto the object of the gaze²³.

Carrying this reasoning to the extreme, we can say that from the very first moment in which human vision passed through a lens, the image became an object of desire, the look became sexual, and optics gave way to aesthetics and psychological survey. From the moment the gaze becomes problematic it can be questioned from both the points of view, of the subject and of the objects.

In this sense Derrida, in *Memories of The Blind Man*, invokes the "blindness revelatory, apocalyptic blindness, one that reveals the most profound truth of the eyes, this would be the look veiled in tears"²⁴, specific of female gaze. If according to Freud, for what concerns the male gaze, the blindness is closely linked with castration, according to Derrida it cannot be more excited if not by tears, related instead to female gaze and to the purely human eye. What differentiates our vision from that of animals is, in fact, according to the deconstructionist philosopher, the ability to go beyond what the eye captures, that is, the ability to recognize the limits of the look itself, an awareness that is expressed precisely through tears. If then the tears are women's own blindness, as an expression of the tragic limitations of human sight, only a feminist theory, flattening the dominant scopic regime, can save us from the hierarchical we see in.

We are now in the twentieth century. The crisis of the "*ancien scopic régime*", as Jay described the regime of the Cartesian view, has not yet completed its course and, indeed, continues to work on three philosophical fronts: the "detranscendentalization" of perspective, the "recorporealization" of the cognitive

²³ Cfr. M. Jay, quoted.

²⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Memoires d'aveugle: L'autoportait et autres ruines*, Paris, 1991, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault & Michael Naas, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 128.

subject, the revalorization of time over space²⁵. Questioning the very existence of an unique, natural and historical reality, philosophy and art of the period break the linear perspective that had allowed Descartes and Alberti to ensure the “mind’s eye” to a superior and unique human-divine eye, figuring out the ideas in the world: «The death of God meant the end of a God’s eye view. The very distinction between an illusory appearance present to the fallible senses of the observing subject and a deeper, essential truth available to the intellect or reason (there to be “seen” by the “mind’s eye”) collapsed»²⁶.

What the nineteenth century had questioned, the twentieth century will complex. In fact, not only the neutrality of observation had already been questioned by Nietzsche, Marx and Feuerbach, but with Bergson the physicality of the looking subject has acquired its full rights: «as my body moves in the space, all other images vary, while that image, my body, remains available. I must therefore make it a center, to which I refer all the others images...*My body* is that which stands out at the center of these perceptions»²⁷. Thus, not only the static and the synchronicity of the look and of the image are questioned, but the error is also revealed that commonly leads to think of a coincidence between the images made by the subject, even of himself, and how others see it.

Another typical issue of this crisis of vision will be the discovery that the looking subject can be in turn "re-watched". The last stronghold of the Cartesian view was so low: there is no longer a self-reflective subject on the outside world, a primary look that invisibly dominates reality, but subject and object of vision, whatever they are, live in an adversarial relationship in which each one tries to impose its own vision. The concept of 'being watched' is perhaps one of the most characteristic figures of twentieth-century philosophy of the crisis – especially, as we will see, in its feminist declination. It was born with a very problematic personality with regard to the eye, constantly driven by a double pulse, the obsessive desire of the vision and the fear of the dangers associated with it: Jean-Paul Sartre.

²⁵ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration Of Vision In Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994, p. 187.

²⁶ M. Jay, op. cit., p. 190.

²⁷ Henri Bergson, *Matière et Mémoire. Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit*, Paris, Les Presses universitaires de France, 1896, trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer, *Matter and Memory*, New York, 1985, p. 46/47.

Inspired, as Merleau-Ponty, by the anti-Cartesian suspicion of German phenomenology²⁸, hating the illusion of transcendence by Bergson, Sartre focuses especially on the question implied by relational vision. The hegemony of the sight, in which a distant subject dominates the world, leads Sartre to a pessimistic theory of the subject/object relationship within the dynamics of the vision (and more). In a desperately hostile environment the object of the gaze cannot be but its victim, as "to-be-looked-at" precludes the chance of returning the gaze. Not only that, but the freedom of the object, once it comes within the range of action of the "other", is threatened by the imposition of a spatial and a temporal position of the subject, and also by the risk of self-identification with the image processed by the subject. Even the look of love doesn't escape this conflictual perspective. Indeed, since it is based, perhaps more than others, on desire, it submits the object of love to its carnal desire of appropriation. The political implication of such a perspective does not hesitate²⁹. Anticipating, as Jay noted, the critique of imperialism and racism on the power of the gaze made by Said, in *Black Orpheus* Sartre gives to the white man a kind of gaze that for centuries has been privileged, that is free of moving on the surface of black skin in a non problematic way, authorized by the clarity (purity, virtue, genetic superiority) of his own skin. Now, however, blacks have begun to

²⁸ Especially the remarks of Husserl and Heidegger influenced the philosophy of the two French philosophers and most of the twentieth-century philosophy. More closely to our matter, it is worthwhile to note the convergence of interests on the question of the dualism between observing subject and observed image. In fact, in the "eidetic science" by Husserl a new way of looking at the relationship between subject and object of observation is revolutionizing the traditional Cartesian dualism, and brings the mind to a new closeness with the image, see Edmund Husserl: *The Crisis Of European Sciences And Transcendental Phenomenology*. Martin Heidegger, on the other side, distinguishes an attitude, typical of Greek thought, to wonder (which leaves things as they are), from curiosity, connected to a "hypertrophy of the vision", that is a desire to investigate thoroughly the "wonders" sight offers in order to understand the innermost workings. In particular, Heidegger raises the problematic issue of the role of vision technologies, real responsible, he said, for the birth of the question by Descartes on, as they led the subject to a relational change with the object, simply placed, at first, before the eyes of the observer in order to be studied (*Verhandenheit*), now at its fingertips without the need of investigation (*Zuhandenheit*). See Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* ed. W. Lovitt, New York, Garland Publishers, 1977, p. 71. In Levin's critique of the two possibilities of vision, the one tied to classical times is defined as assertive (monocular, rigid, exclusive, ego-logic), while the modern as *Aleteia* (multiple, contextualized, inclusive).

²⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le néant. Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1943, trans. Hazel E. Barnes, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, New York, Washington Square Press, 1966.

return the gaze, and the experience, never felt before of "being-looked-at" exposes us «to the bone»³⁰.

If the object of the gaze, so described, is distressed because of his "to-be-looked-at-ness" it is because, according to Merleau-Ponty, Sartre made him forget his own body, made him believe that what he sees is always elsewhere, it is never his being, so it is nothing, or rather, it is a pure vision. The subject in Sartre is thus a visionary. Trying instead to recover a different embodiment, Maurice Merleau-Ponty tries to give credit to the nobility of vision, building it on a ground completely different from the Cartesian one: the vision is no longer a mechanism of objectification, which exists only at the conceptual level, but an intersubjective relationship.

The main feature of this vision, that will be especially useful in the analysis of a feminine gaze, lies in the body, even in the flesh of perception, which is translated into a "chasm" between the visible and invisible. The vision Merleau-Ponty refers to, is not the scientific vision, the vision from "above", the vision imposed, as Sartre said, that distances the subject from the object putting them in a hierarchical situation³¹. This is a "narcissism of vision" as the subject wishes to enter a world that was made of his own flesh³². The flesh itself, neither fully opaque nor fully transparent, is the place of exchange between the visible and invisible. This is where the single *punctum caecum* is created: the being, the corporality is the means by which the world becomes visible, but is also what is not visible to the subject. Just giving the same ontological status to the visible and invisible, and somehow wiring invisible to the same known subject, leads Merleau-Ponty's vision back to the Freudian unconscious, permeating it of psychoanalysis. Especially since, in 1960, he devoted an essay to child cognitive development, where it is impossible not to see the seeds of what will then be the mirror stage of

³⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Orphée noir*, Préface à *l'Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1948, trans. S.W. Allen, *Black Orpheus*, *Presence Africaine*, 1963.

³¹ It is known that this Merleau-Ponty's overview has been inspired by Gestalt theories, which link the figures to their context and give to the visual apparatus not a contemplative but an active nature, as we saw in Bergson. The key point for the theory of Merleau-Ponty, however, is in attributing the structure, to which the object of perception is led, not to a pre-established order but to the will of the subject. However, the French philosopher adds, away from the Gestalt, the unawareness of the subject, who thinks the vision as a project independent of him.

³² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'esprit*, Paris, Gallimard, 1961, trans. Carleton Dallery, 'Eye and Mind', in *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, The Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics.*, ed. by James Edie, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1964, 159-190.

Lacan. The external perception of the self, the “autoscopy”, as defined by the same Merleau-Ponty, allows the individual in training to create a homogeneous configuration of space³³. This necessarily leads the author to open a hole in his system, since the mirror stage, as in Lacan, implies some conflicts between the image inside and the image outside this self, so reinstating, as Jay argues, the dialectic of Sartre's vision. Merleau-Ponty's vision remains, however, an optimistic vision in which the relationship between the two parties needn't be a conflict.

No reflection in the twentieth century will be equally positive and, indeed, many will see in the forming self a germ of conflict, even for Merleau-Ponty.

Precisely the psychoanalytic implications have inspired the theories of Lacan, who in some way seems to occupy a central point between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. On one hand, his studies on the formation of the self are based on a constitutive transitivity – the confusion between self-image and the image of the other, or the image out of the mind – bridging with the conflicted theory of Sartre. On the other hand, however, the evolution of the (dyadic) stadium of the mirror stage in the (triadic) Oedipal drama opens the possibility of a non narcissistic intersubjective relationship, even if still conflicting.

It is no doubt that the Lacanian theory, particularly in regards to the distinction between eye and gaze, was indebted to Merleau-Ponty and its position on the relationship between visible and invisible. In fact, it is not for a chance that Lacan devoted the chapter entitled *The Split Between The Eye and The Gaze* within the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, to Merleau-Ponty, addressing his thought, particularly that one expressed in *The Visible and The Invisible*, as

the moment of arrival of the philosophical tradition – the tradition that begins with Plato with the promulgation of the idea, of which one may say that, setting out from an aesthetic world, it is determined by an end given to being as sovereign good, thus attaining a beauty that is also its limit. And it is not by chance that Merleau-Ponty recognized his guide in the eye.³⁴

What Merleau-Ponty calls eye, Lacan calls the “seer's shoot”, something prior to eye, for «I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked from all

³³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Les relations avec autrui chez l'enfant*, Paris, Centre de Documentation Universitaire, 1975, trans. *The Child Relation with Others*, in id, *The Primacy of Perception*, quoted pp. 107-119.

³⁴ Jacques Lacan, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, in id *Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1973, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, *The four fundamental concepts of psycho-analysis*, New York-London, Norton, 1998, p. 71.

sides»³⁵. Reinterpreting both Merleau-Ponty phenomenology and Freud psychoanalysis, Lacan found the place of the question no longer in the passage between the visible and the invisible, but in the scopic field itself, with all its limits. In fact, in *Of the Gaze as Objet Petit* and in his survey about the mirror stage, the “anamorphic scopic relations”³⁶ established within this field make the object and the subject involved by means of a first medium: the eye. It is connected to other forms of media: the screens on which the images are projected. In this relation the distinction between the subject and the object is no longer defined, for it is now founded the subject illusion to be able to see the self.

As we will soon see these observations by Lacan are fundamental for the most part of visual culture thought, for what concerns both terminology and topics. Almost the whole critique within this field – post-colonial gaze, women gaze, studies on cinema and photography – regards questions such as the scopic regimes and the problematic relations among all the characters taking part: subjects, objects, images, media and the different kinds of seeing.

Foucault immediately caught the psychological implications of the forms of seeing in Lacan. Especially their variations of *pouvoir* and *savoir* became tools for the analysis of the phenomena of surveillance and punishment.

Still moving in a non-reciprocal and asymmetrical sight, Foucault brings to the extreme the positions of Sartre. The subject of vision becomes relative, even more than in Merleau-Ponty, being transcendent only in relation to a specific scopic regime. The scopic regime itself is not given once and for all, but it changes as all the other components of the system change. There can be no more, then, an ideal spectator, because we can no longer believe in an objective reality. There is only an epistemic reality, which is linguistically constructed and, above all, visually, and closely contextualized.

Consider, for example, Foucault says, the medical gaze, irreducible - like any kind of look - to all other kinds: the subject in it has become a totality of observers who exercise the "sovereign power of the empirical gaze", onto the solidity opacity

³⁵ Ivi, p. 72.

³⁶ Lacan referred to the *Ambassadors* by Holbein to point out how a particular dimension of the invisible is shown to the observer. It is not the epiphany of a hidden object, but a specific deformation of visibility, that is “the invisible object of the desiring gaze”.

of the patient's bodies³⁷. On the other hand the history of mental illness, taking place completely within the fields of observation and classification, has showed how the patient is the victim of the ocular inspection, at least in the classical age, before Pinel reform, that gave the gaze of madness to madness itself³⁸. Moreover, Foucault does not exclude forms of "heterotypic", i.e. forms of resistance to the dominant scopic regime, through forms of ambiguity and disorder.

Rather than seek alternative forms, Foucault is interested in the genealogical reconstruction of the problem. It is in fact, the historic aim of his work that has tried to trace the roots of every form of power linked to the eye: from the beginning – before the end of the sixteenth century in which word and image coincide with and believed in the ability to know a real world – to the advent of the classical period – which goes from the birth of modern philosophy to the Enlightenment, and is shaped by the condemnation Bacon and Descartes made of the fallibility and limitations of human knowledge. This is also the age of great technological revolutions and of new confidence in the possibilities they open for exceeding these limits.

Retracing the terms of the issue to the field of scientific observation – from the birth of Natural History until his replacement by the nineteenth-century biology – and to its unexpected political and cultural implications, will be fundamental for our research. Above all, the merit of Foucault, for what concerns us, lies in defining in a new way the problematic question of the gaze. With the closure of the classical period it will stay no longer, as Sartre had suggested, in the privacy of the individual observer but, in an even more problematic way, in its replacement by an observed spectator, at the same time subject of observation and its own object. It is the ultimate sign of the crisis of ocularcentrism.

Precisely the destabilization of the central point of view was, as we will attempt to demonstrate, the heterotypic resistance range constructed by female "objects" of each scopic regime. Already in the seventeenth century women staged a confused field of vision, in which it was more difficult than the science of time not

³⁷ Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique. Une archéologie du regard médical*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1963, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, *The birth of the Clinic. An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1973, p. XIII.

³⁸ Michel Foucault, *Folie et déraison. Histoire de la folie*, Paris, Librairie Plon, 1961, trans. Richard Howard, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in The Age Of Reason*, New York, Vintage Books, 1973, p. 70.

to admit to distinguish the knower from the known and, moreover, isolate their mutual physicality.

On the other hand, Foucault himself would have preferred a phenomenological implication in the psychoanalysis of vision. It is a fundamental implication without which we could not take into account the spatial dimension related to the gaze, that is the interrelationship of the body with the world it observes. Already at the origins of scientific observation, proclaimed the most objective that had ever existed, women scientists warned this arrogant visuality and proposed a model of vision that only three hundred years later would have reached its full consciousness.

The reconstruction of the path of a crisis that we have so retraced, and for which we are indebted to the study by Martin Jay, allows us to isolate the issue between the two poles in which it appears to be fully understood, two poles whose paternity, in my opinion, should be given to Sartre and Merleau-Ponty: the power of the gaze and the paradoxical interplay between visible and invisible. As we have seen all theories that have followed these ones, have done nothing but question, historicize or report these two issues within different visual fields.

The power of the gaze, the twentieth century is analytically and historically aware of this, is malicious, since the relationship between the two sides of the gaze is always unbalanced. Against the desperately pessimistic and violent vision by Sartre, who sees in vision nothing but a process of objectification, little can be done by the optimistic reflection by Merleau-Ponty. In order to make this relationship intersubjective, he ends with destabilizing the most powerful part of the process, that of the viewer, posing it before the limits of invisibility, but, in so doing, going back to the mistrust of the twentieth century with the eyes. A combination of the constraints of an outsider vision and the escape routes, on one hand, and the dangers associated with them, on the other, reports the matter to a psychoanalytic dimension, which is based on the study of the formation of the self by Lacan. But perhaps more important for the last century was the deepening reflection by Foucault, who translated the power of the gaze into specific scopic regimes, and their relative impact on the cultural categories and the corresponding social arrangements, such as prisons, hospitals or schools. In so doing he has revealed the full political extent that the question has always hidden, from the sixteenth century onwards.

The other side of the question, the limits of visibility and invisibility, has seen a variety of forms, for which the two terms have taken on different nuances. Sartre assigns somehow the quality of invisibility to the subject of the gaze. This invisibility allows him to exercise his scopic dominion, in such a way as the jailer of Bentham's Panopticon, or the kings in Velazquez's *Las Meninas* - both analyzed by Foucault - that can only be inferred, but that are the only ones to actually dominate the visual field of representation.

The Race and the Gaze

The problematic relation between knowledge and the physical experience, the power of the gaze acting onto the Other, the consciousness the Other has of that gaze and of that power, the interiorization and the institutionalization of this looking power, are all questions at stake in the nineteenth conception of "thinking the difference", especially when this difference is placed within the field of race difference. Even if, as we have just seen, phenomenology seems to have a difficult relation with bodily experience, in different ways and degree, some feminist scholars have proposed to rethink the possible link between the studies of the difference and the study of visual perception as concerned within phenomenologist reflection³⁹.

Within this field of studies, particularly oriented by post-colonial studies, a fruitful encounter, a critical one, seems to be that between the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, and the studies on race of Frantz Fanon.

It is commonly accepted to trace the reflection of Fanon back to the influence of Sartre, especially for what concerns the pessimistic concepts of authenticity and bad faith, but also the power of the "to-be-looked". The problematic link built by Fanon between the "different subject" of the gaze and the historical environment in which it, as a body, acts, reminds us of Merleau-Ponty. However struck differences

³⁹ See for instance, Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1994 and Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality*, London-New York Routledge, 1999.

have to be stressed, as Jeremy Weate points out⁴⁰. If, on one hand, in Merleau-Ponty's opinion the body acts within and on the world thanks to corporeal schema, and vice versa, on the other hand, and in Fanon's point of view, this body's agency is not always as open as he thought. If nothing else it doesn't work if the body is a black body, for, in this case, it is neither a subject nor a participant at the surrounding historical settings, rather they are imposed upon it.

This is why Fanon talks about a triple mechanism of the "black gaze": as a subject, moving in the space looking at the world from inside; as an object being seen from outside, and forced to be aware of this sight; as an object aware of the opposition of the two sights, neither having means to making his own sight to coincide with the other's, nor being able to resist to this sight⁴¹.

In recollecting the *corporeal schema* proposed by Merleau Ponty, Fanon makes the process of vision act between the *historic-racial schema* and the one he calls *epidermal schema*. Come first the historical scheme and the mythological narratives, which introduce the black skin within a defined and alien (European) framework. Even the self-image of the object is constrained within this framework. With the fixation of this historical framework within social categories and habit, scientific discourses, cultural practices, the historical leaves place to the *epidermal schema*, which now appears as naturalized: the color of the skin loses its original space and becomes significant *per se* and, for the other, it becomes the "fact of blackness".

Now that the "all pervasiveness" of white gaze has been hidden under an appearance of science and biology, and the black has become an object rather than a subject of the visual communication, it works like the foucaultian Panopticon, keeping the object under constant surveillance, so that it itself interiorizes the power of this control, making the surveillance itself no longer necessary⁴². This is why, Fanon claims, the black interiorizes his own model designed by white men, by means of an act of mimicry.

⁴⁰ Jeremy Weate, *Fanon, Merleau-Ponty and The Difference of Phenomenology*, in R. Bernasconi (edited) *Race*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2001.

⁴¹ "I existed in triplicate: I was occupying space. I moved toward the other... and the evanescent other, hostile yet not opaque, transparent, absent, disappeared. Nausea", Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noir, Masques Blancs*, Paris, Seuil, 1952, transl. Ch. Lam Markmann, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York, Grove Press, 1967, p. 112.

⁴² Cynthia R. Nielsen, F. *Foucault and the Interiorization of a Panoptic Gaze*, in *percaritatem.com*.

Edward Said has stressed the panoptical disposition of white gaze upon non-white bodies as well, posing it as a tension between a *synchronic panoptical vision of domination* – which acts by stasis and identity – and a *diachronic* history – which asks for change and difference⁴³. Between these two positions, Homi Bhabha argues, there is the place of an *ironic compromise*, which acts through *mimicry*⁴⁴. The mimicry is an uncertain terrain in which the colonial object is fixed as a “partial presence” at once incomplete and virtual, depending on his own representation upon the limitation of the authoritative discourse, which by means of visual power regulates, reforms and disciplines the other, making him recognizable «as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite»⁴⁵.

He does not perfectly agree with the vision of Fanon that a black man stops being an actual man, for the mimicry, like the *camouflage* in Lacan, doesn't tend to harmonize or repress the different, rather it forms a resemblance that Bhabha calls *metonymy of presence*: «Black skin splits under the racist gaze, displaced into signs of bestiality, genitalia, grotesquerie, which reveal the phobic myth of the undifferentiated whole white body»⁴⁶. This partiality of the presence of both the subject and the object of vision has much to do, in Bhabha's opinion, with the fetish that rearticulates the values of the interdict within western culture.

The black, or any “Other” body evaluated as a marginal object, “not-quite/not white”, dissected as “part-object”, or *objects trouvés*, of colonial discourses, enters the place of the spectator, of the not-forbidden gaze on which white gaze was not allowed to cast on. The Victorian society, at the apex of colonial power, is the principal spectator of such a kind of entertainment, which displays sexual abnormality and exotic curiosities. However, as this work will demonstrate, a parallel phenomenon was already settled in the young colonial societies of the late seventeenth century, when the delight for the exotic, being it human or not, was spreading and the curious gaze on these “objects” was already paving the way to the mimicry.

⁴³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1978.

⁴⁴ Homi Bhabha, *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse*, in Michelson, Krauss, Crimp, & Copjec (ed), *OCTOBER The First Decade, 1976 - 1986*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1987, pp. 317-325.

⁴⁵ Ivi, p. 318.

⁴⁶ Ivi, p. 325.

The immediate reference here is at the colonial gaze a writing woman such as Aphra Behn put on the scene of her *Oroonoko*, playing her colonial and female desire over a black body, object of female sexual desire, and male colonial violence, in such a way that lead us to wonder whether the female always acts like the male does or not.

Gender and visual studies

In twentieth-century philosophy of vision, mostly lead on by men, the interest in the possibility of a visual difference related to gender has been addressed only laterally.

After the promise by Lacan to make free women desire from phallic desire or envy, and from the Oedipal stage Freud had relegated it, a new way seemed to be opened for the concern about the female gaze and the contested nature of the whole gender. That is why Simone de Beauvoir herself decided to include the mirror stage within the process of women development⁴⁷. The 1970's feminist studies in psychoanalysis saw a certain step back toward Freud in Lacan's writings and work, mostly because of his insistence on the patriarchal metaphor and his final ignoring of a different kind of motherhood beyond the pre-Oedipal stage. However, it was the concept of a gaze, expressed in the mirror stage (analogous between men and women) that interested the most part of the critics, coming from his own school. It is the case of Luce Irigaray.

Foucault, instead, deeply convinced of the fallacy of any essential immediacy, attributed low value to the attempts of feminism of his time, which sought an alternative to the hegemony of vision taking into account sexual specificity, or turning to alternative means of knowledge such as that of touch or smell. Moreover, he was not interested in looking for an escape from the dominant scopic regime.

Only one philosopher seems to trust in a possible alternative *differance*, he is Jaques Derrida. It could seem curious to start with the critic Derrida move to feminism, but what he didn't accept was its inner tentative to turning the female

⁴⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *Deuxième sexe*, Paris, Gallimard, 1949, trans. H.M. Parshley, *The Second Sex*, New York, Vintage Paperback, 1952, p. 313.

difference into a male model, both on a philosophical level – in which dogmatism would impose the power of truth, science and objectivity – and on a mental one – which recollects the virile desire and the fear of castration. In Derrida’s opinion, the ground on which feminism can really fight this phallogocentric point of view is that of the *differance*, that is the struggle against the phenomenological reliance on the primacy of perception, the reliance in its immediacy, the primacy of presence onto temporal modes.

What does Derrida mean with this term? The concept or term of *différance* allows him to put into question some concepts of both ontology and linguistics, but it is interesting for what concerns our research as well, under several aspects: the *intelligibility* of the *différance*; the enclosure under a term of *two different meanings* for difference; the *temporalization/spatialization* of the question; the *active/passive* process of “differentiation”⁴⁸; the relation between *subject/language* (whatever kind it is). The neologism itself found the issue of intelligibility. In writing the French word, that is usually written with *e* instead than *a*, Derrida sets a first linguistic problem, since the *e* is pronounced like an *a*. This means that, from a phonological point of view, we can’t perceive any difference:

Here, therefore, we must let ourselves refer to an order that resists the oppositions of philosophy, between the sensible and the intelligible [...] between speech and writing, and beyond the quiet familiarity which links us to one and the other, occasionally reassuring us in our illusion that they are two.⁴⁹

Proceeding in his analysis of this new concept Derrida retrace it to its etymological history, as related to the Latin *differre*. It includes both the action of «putting off until later, taking into account» – which is an action of suspension, of temporalization –, and the more common sense of being other, being non identical. The question of identity is of course the most interesting for us, moreover since Derrida specifies that this “division” is neither simply definable as active nor as passive:

⁴⁸ What I mean here for *differentiation* is only a term “ready to use”, as the process connected to the difference. I do not forget that Derrida warns about this term which he choose to use besides the organic sense it carries on.

⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Différance*, in *Marges de la philosophie*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1972, trans. A Bass, *Margins of Philosophy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 5.

This does not mean that the *différance* that produces differences is somehow before them, in a simple and unmodified presence. *Différance* is not full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. Thus, the name “origin” no longer suits it.⁵⁰

This only term, thus, allows Derrida to introduce one of his most important outcomes: in this semiological differentiation once more it is clear how the language (verbal, visual, written, etc) is not a function of a speaking subject, but the speaking subject is a “function” of the language, since he moves in the world being inscribed in the rules of (more than) a language.

Once we get conscious of the materiality of sign, being textual or visual, and of the mental, symbolic world our culture lives in, and we get conscious of the relativity of our sensual media, we can regret any univocal point of view that so many damages carried into the last two centuries. The imposition of male gaze onto women’s, the superimposition of a white mythology onto rhetoric and philosophy, are all forms of the appropriation of a point of view, which, as we have already seen, is a form of possession «negotiated through the right of inspection»⁵¹. The way out from this *arche-écriture* – the infrastructure always operating, and invisible to the eye – is not, however, another main point of view, but the politics of the fragment, denying any view of the whole⁵².

A trend towards equality rather than towards difference, or we could now say *différance*, has always been typical of some kind of feminism from the origin until the mid-20th century. Even though the aims were very different between the original *vindications* of Mary Wollstonecraft and those of Simone de Beauvoir, still quite two hundreds years of feminism revolved round an ocularcentric model of sight, the same in which Wollstonecraft suggested women writers to adopt a “God’s eye view”, and in which de Beauvoir suggested women to rebel against the active gazer by destroying the passive object itself, i.e. the female body, in order to emerge in the light of transcendence⁵³. Even if they share a great force in making women aware of the passive status in which men put them, and in introducing new

⁵⁰ Ivi, p. 11.

⁵¹ Jacques Derrida, Marie-François Plissart, *Droit de regard*, Paris, Editions de minuit, 1985, trans. D. Wills, *Right of Inspection*, New York, The Monacelli Press, 1989, p. 35. In this paper Derrida brings the question back to the scopic regime of photography, so that who holds the right of inspection is the one who holds the camera, and the camera itself.

⁵² Derrida doesn’t miss to note that the fragment itself could be dangerous if understood as the sign of a loss unity.

⁵³ Simon de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, quoted.

ways of struggle, they, by the way, accept this model as true, only trying to overthrow the place where women occupy in, and not to overthrow the model itself. We have to wait for the post-1968 debate to find an attempt to escape from this ocularcentric/phallogocentric model. But still it would be difficult to discover a new model for female gaze.

It wouldn't be possible to speak of feminine gaze without mentioning Laura Mulvey, for her *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*⁵⁴ represents the first introduction of the question of a female gaze within the field of film studies. In her work she attempts to discover what the specific pleasures of cinematic gaze are by means of the "weapons" offered by psychoanalysis. The kinds of pleasure she detected posed her speculation within the patriarchal structures she is attaining to unveil, they are the pleasures of scopophilia and narcissism, defined as two opposite movements one of separation, the former, one of identification, the latter. Indeed, in avoiding the «surreptitious observation of an unknowing and unwilling object» thanks to darkness and the separation from this object, cinema acts a *voyeuristic separation*. On the other hand by focusing the attempt of the spectator on human forms, questioning the recognition of the image, that of the star, as self-image, cinema stimulates an identification of the subject and the object on the screen. But where is the place of woman in this structure? It is in the peculiar place of the image itself, it is in the object of male gaze defined as the "bearer of the looking". In this way the reproduction of the concordance between the two couples of opposite male/female and active/passive is reassured. At the matching point of two gazes, that of the character and that of the spectator, both of which are erotic, the woman perpetrates her traditional exhibitionist role, that of the *to-be-looked-at-ness*.

This theory provoked, of course, a wide critic response both in feminist circles and not. If it was acceptable at the end of seventies to consider the gaze working within cultural and political situations, it could be less acceptable to consider a gender positioning of the gaze, especially if it was reduced only to a heterosexual condition. What was most striking was the omission of the reasons of a female spectator.

⁵⁴ Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, in «Screen», n. 3, 1975, pp. 6-18.

Many other feminist critics of film studies tried to rearrange Mulvey's work, which had the merit to have questioned the cinematic gaze as a *mise en scene* of cultural and political stereotypes. In 1980, Mary Ann Doane responded to Mulvey's statements specifically on the matter of identification and, moreover, of mis-identification. In *Misrecognition and identity*⁵⁵, Doane stresses how identification, instead of collapsing the spectator onto character, creates and maintains a distance. In popular cinema, indeed, three different kinds of identification are operating: the identification with a person – at once star and character –; the identification of pretended objects, actions and persons, with actual objects, actions and persons; and the identification of the spectator with his own act of looking. This is the identification Metz called the *primary*, while the *secondary* is due to the awareness of identifying himself no longer with a real person, but with a “super-person”. At this point the film theory of Metz, and of Doane as well, returns to the mirror stage of Lacan, being this “super-person” to identify with the better version of the subject of vision. What Doane critiques to Mulvey is the lack of distinction between the primary and the secondary identification. Doane leads the question back to the feminist reading of this mirror stage, which discovers woman as the mirror of man, especially in Irigaray's opinion, as we will soon see. The study Doane conducts on the films of the forties and the fifties in American Cinema, seems anyway to stop once again at the lack of a definition of female spectator.

In 2007, quite ten years later the first edition of *Visual Pleasure*, Mulvey tries to response to the critic, focusing, this time, no more on the pleasure of cinema, above the sexual differences within the spectatorship, rather to the female spectator as such⁵⁶. Anyway, since a hidden definition of female gaze doesn't exist, at least within the psychoanalytic terms, by Freud on, beyond the unique male model, Mulvey remains constricted within the polar distinction of active and passive that we have already encountered. She will try to overcome it in *Death 24 frames at seconds*⁵⁷, in which by analyzing the new frontiers offered to the spectator by new digital cinematographic means, she tried to point out the

⁵⁵ Mary Ann Doane, “Misrecognition and Identity”, in «Ciné-tracts» 3 (1980), pp. 25-32.

⁵⁶ Laura Mulvey, “Afterthoughts on “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” Inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)”, in « Framework» 15-16-17, (1981), pp 12-15.

⁵⁷ Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, London, Reaktion Books, 2006.

changed relation of spectatorship now mastering the “narrative continuity” and “the cinema time”. Between the Medusa gaze – that freezes the moving image – and the Pygmalion desire – that makes the image moving – acting in these new ways of consuming films, it doesn’t seem possible to discover a new role for a free female spectatorship.

Probably the most successful reflection on female gaze as contrasting its own objectification, within film studies, is that by Mary Ann Doane, and of her study on masquerade⁵⁸. Rejecting the limited definition of the female as the image, and therefore only able of a narcissistic look, Doane recollects the last feminine specificity discovered by French feminist, that of proximity against discontinuity. The primary exemplification of this positioning within a territory of representation such as that of Cinema, is that of transvestitism, which not only put on the stage a confusion in the sexual differences but allows the woman to keep the role of mastering. By the way, if transvestitism reduces once again women as the object of desire, as Marlene Dietrich demonstrated, the masquerade will be something different. It is, in fact, a new awareness of the construction of femininity as a mask, under which there is no identity. As Joan Riviere has already demonstrated, this trans-sex identification is, for what concerns women, a two steps process: first the woman assumes the position of the subject, then compensates the lack of masculinity with an overdoing of feminine gestures⁵⁹. To masquerade is, thus, «to manufacture a lack in the distance between oneself and one’s image»⁶⁰. It doesn’t mean to include herself as an object of desire, rather to separate the cause of desire and oneself: «the woman uses her own body as a disguise»⁶¹. This anti-hysterical separation falls into line with the *femme fatale* representation, for the two both double the representation: the woman demonstrates the representation of a female body. But till this moment the masquerade is working on the side of making an image. What about looking at an image? Is it possible to consider a

⁵⁸ Mary Ann Doane, “Film and The Masquerade: Theorising The Female Spectator”, in «Screen» 23, (1982), 74-88.

⁵⁹ Joan Riviere, “Womanliness as a Masquerade”, in Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek ed, *Psychoanalysis and Female Sexuality*, New Haven, College and University Press, 1966, pp. 209-220. A fundamental account of masquerade as a strategy destabilizing male representation of femininity is made by Luce Irigaray, who stresses: « that the “femininity” is a role, an image, a value, imposed upon women by male systems of representation. In this masquerade of femininity, the woman loses herself, and loses herself by playing on her femininity», Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, quoted, p. 84.

⁶⁰ Mary Ann Doane, “Film and The Masquerade: Theorising The Female Spectator”, quoted, p. 82.

⁶¹ Michele Montrelay, “Inquiry into Femininity”, in «m/f» 1 (1978), pp 91-92, p. 93.

masking counter seeing? Doane protests for the existence of an active female gaze, a gaze anyway disassociated from mastery, just breaking the patriarchal system of correspondences. This lack is operated by a new character that of the looking woman, an uncanny character operating under the means of the glasses: «the man with binocular is countered by the woman with glasses»⁶². No longer the object of desire she opens the chance for the reconsidering of the female exhibitionism⁶³.

Outside the field of film studies it will be within the intellectual turmoil of 1968 in France that the feminism debate evolved from the liberal original forms to the new ones, steeped in Marxist theories, in structural and post-structural suggestions, in a new anthropology of Patriarchy. In this cultural climate new contributions to the cause came from Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous – who we have already quoted – and moreover from Luce Irigaray, who focused on the vision as a means of patriarchal uncontested control.

Being quite indifferent to Marxist approach – which cost her the heaviest criticism of the feminists themselves –, she referred to Nietzsche and Derrida critique to feminism and definitely linked the ocularcentrism to the phallogentrism, tracing the origin of the concept of femininity as a lack in the old idealistic illusion of an eidetic truth. As far as the “optics of truth” forgets the materiality of our sight and, moreover, the mediation of any kind we constantly and unconsciously use, visual experience remains dialectic of domination of the gazer over the gazed. But the philosophy of *différance* provides Irigaray the means against «the blind spot of the old dream of symmetry»⁶⁴ which affected not only Freud but also even Lacan theories.

The entire theory of Freud is full of an economy of presence, itself producing all phobias of lack and absence, i.e. castration, penis envy, and of course the anxiety caused by the enigma of woman. But even the mirror stage, theorized by Lacan,

⁶² Mary Ann Doane, “Film and The Masquerade: Theorising The Female Spectator”, quoted, p. 83.

⁶³ As we will see at the end of this chapter and, more diffusely, in the next chapters, both the phenomenon of the Masquerade and of the lens-looking woman were raising during the seventeenth century, showing the same resisting character Doane individuates in '40-'50 American movies. All the three women writing we will analyze, Cavedish, Behn, Haywood have been primary instances on both the fields.

⁶⁴ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l'autre femme*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, trans. Gillian G. Gill, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985.

moves within the same Cartesian perspectivalism he supposes to challenge⁶⁵, by founding the personal development of male and female children on a field of sameness. In fact, Irigaray says, women look from behind the male representation onto the mirror screen, and what belongs to them is a non categorized gaze, made of *mysterique*, that is the fusion of four elements: mysticism, mystery, hysteria and femaleness. This *mysterique* place is the deep and dark place of the female being, and of the female way of seeing, but it can in such a way be shared with the male being, for it is the proper place of the soul⁶⁶:

La mystérique: this is how one might refer to what, within a still theological onto-logical perspective is called mystic language of discourse [...] This is the place where consciousness is no longer master, where, to its extreme confusion, it sinks into a dark night that is also fire and flames. This is the place where “she” – and in some case he, if he follows her lead – speaks about the dazzling glare which comes from the source of light that has been logically repressed, about “subject” and “Other” flowing out into an embrace of fire that mingles one term into another, about contempt for form as such, about mistrust for the dry desolation of reason. Also about a burning glass. This is the only place in the History of the West in which woman speaks and act so publicly.⁶⁷

Being the place of the soul, this is a spiritual place, but being the only place in western culture in which a woman can speak and act so publicly, this is as well the place of woman’s madness, or at least the place of a knowledge in which «the subject can no longer find himself as a subject [...] where it will already been noted that the poorest in science and the most ignorant were the most eloquent, the richest in revelations»⁶⁸. Finally, this is the place that men have more comfortably addressed as that of the hysteric, or of the mystic saints.

Thus, the counterpart of the ocularcentrism is a gaze made of both material and spiritual contemplation, neither predatory nor specular⁶⁹, and a new awareness of a different notion of vision, beyond phallogentrism. A new dimension in which the subject is not so far from its object, considering all the participants so far misrecognized by philosophy of vision: air, light and, it might seem ironic after Freud, touch.

⁶⁵ This deep critique, or rebellion to the paternal authority, cost her the dismissal from the Department of Psychoanalysis, Paris VIII, and from Lacan’s seminar.

⁶⁶ In French the soul, *l’âme*, is a female noun, which allows Irigaray to use the pronoun she, in a confusing way, making it shared between the female and the soul.

⁶⁷ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l’autre femme*, quoted p. 191.

⁶⁸ Ivi, p. 192.

⁶⁹ Luce Irigaray, “Love Between Us”, in E. Cadava, P. Conner, J-L. Nancy, *Who Comes After the Subject?*, New York, Routledge, 1991.

All phobias produced by the male notion of vision – lack, castration, alienation, but also domination of gaze over the eye – and, above all, the vision of always struggling intersubjective relations, come from the assumption of the emptiness of the space of vision, that vision cannot always traverse. But what all the philosophers we have so far studied forgot is that the space between the subject and the world, between the subject and the object and, also, between different subjects, has never been empty. In fact, we are all connected by such elements we cannot see, but thanks to that we stay alive and perceive: air, light, matter.

Irigaray wrote *Forgetting the Air* after the death of Heidegger, who thought of the air as “the side watching at us, already, open, that surrounds us, [...] the country, the space in which the man acts and knows taking things at a distance. This is the place of his existence, at once as primary detachment, which makes the thing appearing as ob-jects, and *Gestell*, roots within the being»⁷⁰. From Heidegger’s point of view this “openness” is what reassures man about his own existence, needing himself. From Irigaray’s point of view it is the primary forgetting of air, the element which funds and surrounds man, not needing man action, in fact neither needing nor being able to be mapped.

All male western thought is funded on a language of *caesura*, of hate by which, since Empedocles, air has been condensed in the vitreous sky, and from a dynamic and fluid being in transformation, we moved to an ontological and epistemological predominance of solid. Thus man will be born detached, will exist at a distance from his origin and his end, and will only know what is in front of him, and only by entering the other’s territory, conquering it. By forgetting air, men forget what is the natural medium of all their way of living, knowing, seeing: medium of logos, medium of language, medium of voice, that all acts through air, not passing through, but by exchanging, melting, sharing. This “sensible transcendence” is the *tertium datur*, the medium in which “subject” and “object”, if we can continue in so speaking, can approach without sacrificing their own identities.

Thus, it is no longer possible to talk about a single subject, insofar as the sensible is not one but, at least, it is divided into two. The whole human nature is

⁷⁰ Luce Irigaray, *Oubli de l'air chez Martin Heidegger*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1983, trans. Mary Beth Mader, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1999, p. 163.

double, even though men are not always aware of their own incompleteness, for what they only know is one part of this nature. Irigaray claims, according with Hegel, that man is living in a philosophical state of somnambulism, living in a “pseudo-nature” between reality and spirituality, in a state of unity with nature which is nothing but himself, «so he dreams to be a whole»⁷¹. However, neither air itself is simple or universal, it has different states according, for instance, with density or heat: «air and sexual difference may be the two dimensions vital for/to life». That is the way we have to go beyond the deep teleology that the whole western philosophy is grounded on. It is, in Irigaray’s words, the mastery of direction of will and thought by the subject, this subject being a historical man. The task of women must be to pose the question on a different level, in order to find harmony between activity and passivity, between subjectivity and objectivity, a new state of mind no more needing to dominate neither the nature nor the other. Beyond the object submission there is no more a slavery economy, but an exchange economy with no preconceived object.

There is something else within the pretended *vacuum* in which man has so long thought to see: it is the light, which according to Irigaray represents the first step of human being into philosophy. It is quite foreseen to recollect reason to light, from Plato on, but in order to reach what has been conceived more as a metaphorical matter than as a means, philosophy itself has constructed a «system of mirrors» by which light is indirectly observed, and, in so doing, avoid the «consuming contact» with it⁷². In this way men used to know through forms alone, or through optical apparatuses, paying attention to “ideas” according to the light they are able to stop, to hold. Not only light has been considered dangerous – according to a relation with the sun, benevolent and malevolent father at a time – but «the impact, the contact, of light is – at least implicitly – considered to be too close to the senses and to matter to constitute the main source of profit for the intelligible. Light

⁷¹ Luce Irigaray, *J'aime à toi. Esquisse d'une félicité dans l'histoire*, Paris, B. Grasset, 1992, trans. Alison Martin, *I Love to You: Sketch of A Possible Felicity in History*, new York-London, Routledge, 1996, p. 40.

⁷² The ironical reference to mirrors, as a system designed to protect from the fear of truth, is a not too much veiled critic Irigaray moves to his master, Jaques Lacan, and his famous theory of mirror stage, which she has early accused of partiality. This critic, which led to a definitive break between the two psychoanalysts, clearly appear in more than a passage of *Speculum of the other woman*: «This is not to say that men will have no distrust of the properties of mirrors. That anyone playing with mirrors to create “false” beings, “illusions of reality”, will not be accused of forgery. It will be made perfectly clear that the one may be confused with the other as a result of the *inversion* that mirrors effect», Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l'autre femme*, quoted p. 149.

is too corruptible, too shifting and inconstant to form the basis of the relationship to the self and to the All»⁷³. Irigaray doesn't miss the ambivalent relation western culture has with light. It remains, at least as a metaphor, a founding image of our culture, as Derrida has pointed out as well. The myth of the cave in Plato's 6th book from *Republic* is the most famous example of the true light, the light of the sun, as both real and good knowledge, and dangerous source for human senses, so that only few men can reach it, by risking their own safety and their joining the society. This is why Irigaray calls Western society the society of "photology", but her aim is quite different from that of Derrida. She won't reconcile the metaphor of light to the concept of knowledge, rather she is recollecting the complicity between "photology", or the language of metaphysics, and "phonocentrism", or the language of man body. The metaphor made by Plato seems to Irigaray to convey a dominating sunlight in which all sexual differences have been erased, and in which all the feminine metaphors – such as that of womb, easily referable to the cave – seem to be connoted in a way of fallacy and inadequacy.

Should, thus, the vision and all its metaphors, once again be referred to "phallogocentrism"? Irigaray finds the way out in an engagement of light as a texture rather than as a medium. Reducing the distance between subject and object, filling this space, once pretended to be empty, with changeable air and shadowing light, crumbling the power of the subject and multiplying his ways to know, as well as those of the object, Irigaray reconceived the materiality of knowing to recollect the gaze and the touch. This is why Irigaray's point of view seems to go in the direction of a "denigration of vision", as Martin Jay has pointed out, as a means of the western male ocular centric culture. In spite of the phallogocentrism, Irigaray proposes a new weight to be pointed to the other senses, mainly the touch.

In the study about the relationship between vision and touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty, Cathryn Vasseleu tries a different interpretation⁷⁴. Challenging the usual way in which the "photologic" western culture interprets light, and making of it both an ideal and a physical medium, Irigaray denies any transparency of sight and vision themselves. This is why we can talk about "texture of light",

⁷³ Ivi p. 148.

⁷⁴ Cathryn Vasseleu, *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty*, London-New York, Routledge, 1998.

meaning «a fabrication, a surface of a depth that also spills over and passes through the interstices of the fabric [...] as a texture, the naturalness of light cannot be divorced from its historical and embodied circumstances. It is neither visible nor invisible, neither metaphoric nor metaphysical. It is both the language and material of visual practices, or the invisible interweaving of differences that form the fabric of the visible»⁷⁵. In this way, Irigaray is also challenging the classical division among senses, a fundamental binary in photological culture, and also the illusion of objectiveness residing, as we have already seen, in the illusion of distance. The interweaving of material and ideal, insofar referred to a touching vision, can be seen as a return to the erotic seeing of Freud. In assigning the responsibility of the impoverishment of bodily relations to vision, Irigaray is not renouncing to any such good power of the gaze. In fact, she is acting in the same way Merleau-Ponty intended the fruitful relation between the visible and the invisible. Otherwise his concept of a vision incorporating tactile, within an ethics of sexual difference, would be annihilated by a disembodied vision. This carnal dimension of sight realizes itself by means of color in Merleau-Ponty's opinion, and by means of the light in Irigaray's opinion, which is not anymore a unique means of vision, but also a means of touch: «I see only by the touch of light».

What a new design for female gaze should realize is that there's no "immediate subject", that it is a conceptual mistake for no one can be neither identical nor equal or similar to anyone else. We can now understand how all our relations – being them love relations, knowing relations, etc – can only be relations of indirection, that is mediated relations. This is what *I love to you* means, this *to* being just the medium which prevents transitivity, working as a barrier against the alienation of the other in a subjectivity, in a proper world, in a language.

This is the proper way in which women act, know, see, by privileging relations between subjects, rather than relations to an object by conferring «transcendence upon horizontality»⁷⁶, which is at a time a philosophical and a political task overcoming any opposition between particularity and universality. This means that in no way can we act in a spiritual, disembodied world with no differences. Claiming that, for example, there's no difference between man and woman, is, in Irigaray's theory, a "serious ethical mistake". Actually, as the subject is no longer

⁷⁵ Ivi, p. 12.

⁷⁶ Ivi, p. 144.

unique, but rather multiplying, his/her ways of knowing have to be multiple as well, working by a concentration of senses that can only integrate the multiplicity, and remedy the fragmentation. In doing so, we also will remedy the desire of what we perceive, especially by means of the gaze. This is the Buddha's gazing at the flower which: «is not an inattentive or predatory gaze, nor the decline of the speculative into flesh. It is both material and spiritual contemplation, furnishing thought with an already sublimated energy. This contemplation is also training in finding pleasure while respecting what does not belong to me. Indeed, Buddha [...] gazes at what is other to him without uprooting it»⁷⁷.

By recollecting the female/male sense of sight to that of touch, Irigaray makes it suitable to a new pleasure of seeing no longer funded on the distance between the two subjects in question, rather on their continuity and on their reciprocal respect.

The need Irigaray and others felt to mitigate the sight with the touch, provoked many feminist scientists, who criticize these as anti-visual sentiments through a deeper analysis of the association between scientific vision and philosophical truth. This is an approach that seems to de-eroticize vision by means of the act of building metaphors.

Gender and science studies

Trying to build a bridge between the different waves of feminism thought and their impact onto the concept of female gaze, we can, by a simplification, outline three moments or focuses⁷⁸. A first focus is related to the very first moment of

⁷⁷ Ivi, p. 24.

⁷⁸ It really is a simplification, since feminism or women's studies in general are hardly affordable within a singular framework. Indeed, as Sue V. Rosser has pointed out, if it is true that all these studies place the question of the gender as the main topic of their researches, the fields in which these researches are conducted are different one from the other and are all characterized by a very deep interaction, at least, among gender itself, race and class: «however, using the lens of gender to view the world results in diverse images or theories: liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, socialist feminism, African-american feminism, lesbian separatist feminism, conservative or essential feminism, existential feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, and radical feminism», Sue V. Rosser, *Are there Feminist Methodologies Appropriate for the Natural Sciences and Do They Make a Difference?*, in Muriel Lederman, Ingrid Bartsch (edidit by), *The Gender and Science Reader*, London-New York, Routledge, 2001, pp. 123-144. It would be too broad and far from my purpose to examine here each of these contexts. However, it could be not unnecessary to stress once again the territory in which we are moving, since it is not a research on the theory of feminism, but more specifically a women's study within the field of the theories on the gaze according to the methodology of cultural and visual studies. And even this particular choice, as we have already

feminist reflection, in which women attempted to gain an equal dignity to that of men and, therefore, attempted to conform their own position and their own gaze to masculine gaze: a central point of view, distanced from the world it is looking at, a mastering and unequivocal perspective gaze. In a second moment, more or less detectable between 1960-1980, feminist critics, focused on the liberation of women from the patriarchal model, unveiling the sexist matrix that had formed the whole western culture paradigm, from science to psychoanalysis, from philosophy to art: the predominance of view among the other senses is now seen as a metaphor of the penetrating male model over the whole nature, that included women themselves. They had, therefore, to react to this cultural construction passed off as real, and to rediscover an alternative sense, closer to their thought – i.e. touch – or at least rediscover a multiple way of knowing, founded on a mixture of senses rather than on their division. During the last years of the twentieth century, a new approach to feminism critiques took place within a specific field of research, that of “hard” science, a usually male oriented territory. Many women scientists – a lot of who eventually changed their field of investigation from precisely scientific to cultural analysis – challenged the consideration of vision as a patriarchal sense. According to this opinion, considering the whole sense of vision as a model of purely masculine knowledge means reducing the discussion within the same patriarchal stereotypes women are trying to fight, rather than to create a new model supplanting all the forms of sex supremacies within this sense. New feminism is, finally, trying to restart the study of female vision in its own *difference*, from a scientific point of view, giving back the vision to women.

A close relation between the practices and the politics of gender, especially of female gender, and the practices and politics of science has been made by Donna J. Haraway, who posed the raising of feminism as a western political theory at the same historical moment and reason of the raising of biology and anthropology, i.e., in the nineteenth century, with very deep roots in the eighteenth century, or even before as this research is attempting to demonstrate:

in this period the organism – animal, personal and social – became the privileged natural-technical object of knowledge. Organisms were structured by the principles of the division of labor. The special efficiencies derived from the separations and

seen, involves a significant interdisciplinary character between psychoanalysis, literature, science and social studies.

functional management of the new scientific entities called race, sex, class had particularly strong effects⁷⁹.

Once the biological organism has been historically defined, even the human body becomes «a particular cultural form of appropriation-conversation, not the unmediated natural truth of the body»⁸⁰.

The female body, in particular – so long a desired object –, becomes a condensed focus of medical and psychoanalytic practices – as we have already seen at the beginning of this chapter – and of the social theory of the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

A new way of describing the world as separation and functional management was emerging, anyway it was still a work of men, made from their own point of view and confused as the absolute truth.

“Science feminism” would challenge such a claim, not in believing in a real objective science free of any gender-class-race orientation, rather by describing the science as a socially constructed category, as well as gender, class and race. Thus, if we assume that women are made and not born, the same should be, Keller claims, for what concerns men, and for what concerns science as well. This last point could be the most difficult to accept within a culture that relies on science, the faith of its own ability of mastering, or at least describing the world. How could we by now describe science, if it is no more the faithful mirror of nature? Keller proposes that «science is the name we give to a set of practices and a body of knowledge delineated by a community, not simply defined by the exigencies of logical proof and experimental verification. Similarly masculine and feminine are categories defined by a culture, not by biological necessity»⁸¹.

Thus, being scientific knowledge no longer a pure neutrality, rather a local shared ideology, we need to ask when and how this mirror of the nature was broken. Keller has no doubt, this change depends on two different and apparently independent turns in scholarship: the social studies of science, and the feminist theory. The first has pointed out the unexpected relations between science and society, but also the impact society can act on science and vice versa, even

⁷⁹ Donna Haraway (ed.), *Women's Place is in Jungle*, in id (ed.), *Primate Visions. Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*, New York-London, Routledge 1989, p. 289.

⁸⁰ Ibidem.

⁸¹ Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1985, p. 4.

though without considering the role of gender. The second has pointed out the relation between gender and society, even though without concerning the role of science. Three turns – Kuhn’s paradigm, social studies of science, feminist study of society – have brought a deep concerning in the world view as no longer grounded on a collection of facts organized within an inner logic, rather as the representations in which different scientific points of view (philosophical, theological or teleological), different interpretations of the world (for instance considering it the centre of the universe rather than one of the other stars rotating around the sun), and mostly different organizations of knowledge (the separation among the ways of knowing or their integration) can define what we call science. Briefly, deciding what kind of phenomena are worth studying and which form of data is significant in these phenomena or at least adequate, depend on the social, linguistic, and, of course, scientific grounds on which this decision was taken.

In Haraway’s critic this is exactly what leads to a new consideration of the assumed distinction between fact and fiction, a distinction belonging to science, in dividing its own territory from that of popular culture. A fact should be what has actually and independently happened, and what has been known by direct experience, by testimony, and by interrogation⁸². On the other hand fiction is what has no objective status or no meaning in the growing of knowledge even if it can be in such way connected with the “real”: «Fiction can be imagined as a derivative, fabricated version of the world and experience, as a kind of perverse double for the fact or an escape through fantasy into a better world [...] tones of meaning in fiction make us hear its origin in vision, inspiration, insight, genius»⁸³. The etymologic study of Haraway shows how both fact and fiction stay in the territory dealing with the action of man: «facts are opposed to opinion, prejudice, and not to fiction». This will be a main focus of the distinction between female and male vision in the following chapters. In this moment, it would be only necessary to point out how the discussion of science seems to be grounded on a linguistic and culture territory, no less than other narratives.

This, of course, can in no way mean that we do not need to take into account the successes science has achieved, even though in such a structured way. What we need to do is understand how these successes have been affected by the

⁸² See Donna J. Haraway, quoted.

⁸³ Ivi, p. 3.

political, social, historical, in one world cultural, commitments of individuals or groups, consciously or not. A feminist perspective can help us to unveil the popular mythology that usually distinguish the objectivity as an intellectual work grounded on mind, reason and male gender, from the subjectivity, as an emotional work grounded on emotional, natural and in so far feminine gender. It is the same distinction we have already seen carrying all the western discussion about vision, as a main means of knowledge, i.e. science, from Plato on. In this division between emotional and intellectual labor, Keller claims, «women have been the guarantors and protectors of the personal, the emotional, the particular, whereas science – the province *par excellence* of the impersonal, the rational, and the general – has been the preserve of men»⁸⁴.

As we have already seen, the social study of science has partly rejected the assumed “neutrality of science” on behalf of a more shared agreement within a scientific community⁸⁵. However, this turn in the history of science does not mean a radical protest of the gender and social oriented organization of science and of its commitments, rather a shift from a division between subjectivity and objectivity to a division between private and public, personal and impersonal, that leads to an already known division between feminine and masculine, thus ensuring once again the autonomy of science. A further step towards a greater awareness of the influence of gender on science and vice versa, could be made by the feminist side of this new critics, by providing a new subject to analyze and a new way of analyzing it, that is by using the expertise usually belonging to women, rather than trying to erase this “otherness”: «not simply as a woman’s perspective, but as a critical instrument for examining the roots of those dichotomies that isolate this perspective and deny its legitimacy [...] understanding of the history, philosophy, and sociology of science through the inclusion [...] of those domains of human experience that have been relegated to women: namely, the personal, the emotional, and the sexual»⁸⁶.

⁸⁴ Ivi, p. 7.

⁸⁵ Donna Haraway has stressed how «The only people who end up believing and, goddess forbid, acting on the ideological doctrines of disembodied scientific objectivity enshrined in elementary textbooks and technoscience booster literature are nonscientists, including a few very trusting philosophers», Donna J. Haraway, *Situated Knowledges. The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, in Muriel Lederman, Ingrid Bartsch (ed.), *The Gender and Science Reader*, London-New York, Routledge, 2001, p.170.

⁸⁶ Ivi, p. 9.

The status of outsider now becomes a privilege, or at least a provocative point of view, in the twentieth century as well as in the seventeenth century. And if Keller «began to see the network of gender associations in the characteristic language of science as neither natural nor self-evident, but as contingent, and dismaying»⁸⁷ so had Cavendish, Behn and Haywood. Anyway, Haraway warns against the romanticizing in appropriating the point of view of the subjected. Even this kind of vision is neither innocent nor unproblematic, and, beyond this, it needs to be critically examined, interpreted or even deconstructed. Even “seeing from below” is a learned skill, formed by means of the language and of the whole culture, more or less as the highest techno-scientific visualization. Haraway agrees with Keller in considering this extraordinary point of view as a useful point of view for feminist re-appropriation of vision, for it cannot consider its own vision neither as unique nor as unmediated, and, moreover, it works beyond the definition of an identity, mostly a self-identity: «Only those occupying the positions of dominators are self-identical, unmarked, disembodied, unmediated, transcendent»⁸⁸. Now, since no kind of identity produces knowledge, but only objectivity, and only (self)critical positioning, therefore only a position from below is productive, for it is aware of the embodiment, and therefore particularity, of its own sight.

In discussing the cardinal points on which the modern western canon is founded, Keller leads a precise reflection on the vision as a model of supreme knowledge. She found three fundamental points, that in different ways we have already encountered during our discussion: the simultaneity of presence, the dynamic neutrality and the objectifying dependence on distance⁸⁹. The simultaneity of vision reveals the peculiar character of spatiality, rather than temporality related to vision and to its eternal sense: «Indeed only the simultaneity of sight, with its extended “present” of enduring objects, allows the distinction between change and the unchanging and therefore between being and becoming. All the other senses operate by registering change and cannot make that distinction. Only sight therefore provides the sensual basis on which the mind can conceive the idea of the eternal, that which never changes and is always

⁸⁷ Ivi, p. 12.

⁸⁸ Donna J. Haraway, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

⁸⁹ These are the three points of residence of the supposed “nobility of sight”, according to Hans Jonas, *The Nobility of Sight*, in «Philosophy and Phenomenological Research» 14 (1954), pp. 507–519.

present»⁹⁰. The dynamic neutrality is the most shared aspect of vision, as well as for those resulting directly from it, the lack of engagement and the absence of intercourse: «I see without the object is doing anything [...] I have nothing to do but to look and the object is not affected by that [...] and I am not affected by that»⁹¹. This is the main point to affirm the objectivity of sight in spite of all the other senses that always imply a sort of modification whether in the object or in the subject, and what distinguishes the theory from the practice. But the most determining source of objectivity stays in the dependence of sight on distance: «to get the proper view we get the proper distance»⁹², this is the *motto* of the whole perspective scopic regime. This is precisely the aspect Keller, together with Irigaray, Haraway and others, pointed out. The expected distance of the object from the subject, as well as the resulting objectivity, neutrality and eternal simultaneity, represents, if not just simulates, only one of the possible models of sight. A model that is not able to neither explain nor to understand the mechanism, for instance, of the looking into eyes, or of the locking eyes: «a visual experience not centrally contained in the experience of looking at or surveying [...] a form of communication and communion [...] in direct eye contact, we have a visual experience quite different from and in many ways even opposed to the sense of distance and objectivity evoked by merely looking at an object»⁹³. In unveiling the constructed model of vision as a distanced and painless process for both the subject and the object, Evelyn Fox Keller shares the same instances which feminists like Laura Mulvey had already pointed out about the pleasure of cinematographic male gaze, and, as a result, the violence that can be felt by the object of a gaze, as Sartre had pointed out in his theory of the “to-be-looked-at-ness” that inspired Mulvey research.

However, the point Keller wants to stress is a point, in such a way connecting with Cixous’s legacy, about the voyeurism. In catching the latent eroticism, veiled by the expected total disembodied of the gaze, both Cixous and Keller discover the main aim of feminist re-appropriation of the visual, by de-erotizing it. A vision with no expansionistic or sexual will, with no desire to possess or univocal reason to apply, it is a new model to oppose to patriarchal model, once the visual appears

⁹⁰ Ivi, p. 513.

⁹¹ Ivi, pp. 514-515.

⁹² Ivi, p. 518.

⁹³ Evelyn Fox Keller, op. cit. p. 220.

as inescapable and new concepts of vision and light in physics and optics leave no more temporality neither neutrality to the means of philosophy and scientists.

What is, then, the way for analyzing and re-appropriating the vision from a feminine point of view? In attempting a propose Donna Haraway talks about the “persistence of vision”⁹⁴. In this metaphorical reliance on the “maligned sensory system in feminist discourse”, precisely the vision, Haraway focuses, once again, on the fantasy of objectivity doctrines on which the hierarchical systematization of knowledge has been funded, even by feminist approaches. This is the way in which the sight has been designed as “a perverse capacity” of distancing from the object of its own power in very different contexts, such as capitalistic, colonialist, gendered and, even, military. Once this supremacy is posed, amplified by the prosthetic instruments of vision, the vision has become the infinitely mobile sense we already know, able to reach everything and everywhere. A feminist writing on the vision should, therefore, insist on the particularity and the embodiment of all kinds of vision, overcoming the “partial perspective” that has brought all modern sciences to believe in a false transcendent vision and in the promise of objectivity.

A new feminist objectivity is still possible. It stays in a limited location, and in a situated knowledge, aware of the responsibility of its visual practices, and of the power exercised through them. This is a new way to learn how we see in our body and, therefore, in a particular way, neither unmediated nor passive, rather in highly specific visual possibilities, partial ways of organizing the world. Difference (or *differance*, once again), is the new key word: «that’s not alienating distance; that’s a possible allegory for feminist version of objectivity. Understanding how these visual systems work, technically, socially, and psychically ought to be a way of embodying feminist objectivity»⁹⁵. In re-appropriating not only vision but more in general objectivity, Haraway avoids to fall in the trap of relativism that, as she herself claims, is a perfect “mirror twin of totalization”, since both deny localization, embodiment and the partiality of their own perspective. The new model of sight is no more that of organized axes, such as that of the dichotomy, that leads to the illusion of symmetry in which any position is alternative and mutually exclusive with

⁹⁴ Explicitly talking about the persistence of vision Haraway is quoting the science fiction short story by John Varley precisely entitled *The Persistence of Vision*. In this story the author describes a society of deaf-blind people and the technologies they develop in order to communicate or keep in relation with sighted children or visitors. John Varley, *The Persistence of Vision*, in «The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction», March 1978.

⁹⁵ Donna J. Haraway, quoted, p. 175.

the other, but that of the web, of nodes of fields, in which the new subject – no more self confident, as self identity is a bad visual system, or fused, as fusion is a bad strategy of positioning – is shaped in a non isomorphic form, that is constantly ready to position subjects in perspectives never known in advance, nor being predictable. This implies a really important task for «the sciences and politics of interpretation, translation, and the partly understood»⁹⁶. There is no longer a single way to view, and the images we see are to be interpreted, considering all the variables of gender, class, race, and so on implying. Optics is no longer sufficient in educating our sight, what we need are new ways of “visual literacy”, made of interpretation and re-interpretation. These are the sciences of a multiple subject, seeing in double ways. These are the sciences of a critical vision no more positioned in a “homogeneous gendered social space”:

So location is about vulnerability; location resists the politics of closure, finality [...] feminist objectivity resists simplification [...] that is because feminist embodiment resists fixation and is insatiably curious about the webs of differential positioning. There is no single feminist standpoint because our maps require too many dimensions for that metaphor to ground our vision.⁹⁷

The challenge to phallogocentrism is therefore the position of a partial sight and a limited voice. In this position partiality has no importance in itself, but in the disclosure of unexpected connections that a situated knowledge can reach. Haraway says that «the only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular». This is not the perspective from above, the one that overcome the limits of the subject, rather the joining of many particular, different points of view, and positioning them in a collective – still multiple and non-homogeneous – subject.

Trying to sum up what this history/story of the gaze – however partial, or, we can now affirm, just because partial – has taught us, we can say that since its origin the human concern about sight has always been linked with the concerning about objectivity in such a way that the latter, in all its little differing positions, seems to be a litmus test of the sight, in all its great differing images. Precisely the question of objectivity with all the leading dichotomies it carries out – subject/object, activeness/passiveness, etc – has created the fundamental

⁹⁶ Ivi, p. 179.

⁹⁷ Ibidem.

detachment and a feeling of absence in the western male theory of vision. Once this empty space has been filled with air, matter and light, and the two parts playing the match have been reconnected by paradoxically multiplying the points of view of the two both, even the concept of objectivity has been changed as well as that of the two poles of destroyed dichotomy.

Starting from these points an increasing complication of the gaze has been triggered, in which the sexual racial and cultural implications, i.e. the subject of election of the twentieth-century philosophy, made it an object more and more misunderstood, so that few philosophers believed it could still be trusted.

The history of modern vision is so built on endless attempts of domination and resistance, on cross directions, hazards and new ways out. Above all, in spite of the "surrender" of Freud, we have probably come a little further towards the explanation of how the feminine side of the eye works, a phenomenon as complex as, for so long, underestimated that it is actually difficult to become aware of.

After renouncing any form of schematization, we have here a new target: to propose a different perspective, to turn the telescope of modernity upside down, as Benjamin has taught us, using the critical tools to investigate the archeology of this issue. Studying the place, time and manner in which the female gaze was born, or at least in which it began its process of individualization, may contribute if not to define the structure, at least to order the components; if not to find an alternative to the dominant scopic regimes, at least to build a genealogy of the issues.

So let's get back to the moment when for the first time the gaze of the woman passed through a lens and let's see what she saw and how she did it (in spite of man).

Con-texts

In his research on *The order of Things* devoted to the origins on which grounds the positivist of the western *episteme*, Foucault affirms that his work is not an attempt to manifest a history of growing perfection towards the target of objectivity, as many may think, rather a history of the conditions of that possibility⁹⁸. This

⁹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Le mots et le chose*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, trans. *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1970.

archaeological excavation brought into light two fundamental discontinuities in this episteme, one detectable in the seventeenth century, which he called the “Classical Age”, the other during the nineteenth century, the “Modern Age” of knowledge. The two ages are presented as the two poles of a non linear evolution of the concern of human beings with their own faculties of knowing, an evolution starting with a certain coherence between the theory of representation and the theories of language, natural order, wealth and value, and arriving to a deep crisis of the representation that loses its task of foundation of all possibly knowable things, thus leading into an increasingly inner-reflexivity (or hidden-reflexivity) that took the place of out-observation. In this perspective the history of human sciences seems to be a history of resemblance, of what were the conditions in classical thought for reflecting the relations of similarity or equivalence between things. Up to the end of the sixteenth century resemblance was a means of knowing visible and invisible things, as the universe was «folded in upon itself, earth echoing sky»⁹⁹. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, however, knowledge ceased to move within this territory, similarity was no more a form of knowledge rather a source of error or illusion, at least since Descartes and Bacon were warned by idols that made people believe things resembling what they learned and that things are connected to each other. This is the rising of rationalism, that is of the abandoning of old superstitions or magical belief in signs, and the «entry of nature into scientific order»¹⁰⁰.

But what happened that provoked this revolution that, as we will see, will be not only scientific but also cultural? What made the seventeenth century such a turning moment that gave origins to a new deal for science? And could that be the origin of what we are looking for, the female gaze?

The discovery and development of lenses, their evolution in the instruments of the telescope and microscope, and especially the observations they permitted during the early seventeenth century represented the cornerstone of the cultural revolution that would bring the new approach for the study of nature Foucault was talking about. An innovative approach both for what concerns science and for what concerns philosophy, which began to evolve from metaphysical studies towards the way already glimpsed by Copernicus and now paved by Kepler's theories and

⁹⁹ Ivi, p. 19.

¹⁰⁰ Ivi p. 54.

Galileo's studies. Thus was born the *natural philosophy*, a term that replaced, in the present century, the anachronistic and now unsatisfactory term of *scientia*. Scientists became in this way *natural philosophers*, thereby making explicit the inevitable scientific conditions on philosophical speculations.

While on one side, the new perception of the world through these tools encouraged confidence in the new horizons reached by the human intellect, on the other it put a strain on certainties and points of reference for thousands of years leading the knowledge and consciousness of men, who found themselves increasingly competing with worlds imponderable for their vastness or minuteness.

As new discoveries and the resulting speculation spread from laboratories, academies and scientific societies throughout amateur studios, magazines, more or less scientific publications, new worlds penetrated the everyday imaginary also reflecting through imagination, critique, and humor in the seventeenth century literature and the following century. Western man was now fully aware that the Earth and the Universe known so far were only a small portion of the newly revealed reality. Time and space exploded in front of the new fields of vision offered by the microscope and the telescope, and the plurality of worlds became a doctrine increasingly discussed between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries¹⁰¹.

Since western amateurs were neither aware of what they had seen till this moment, nor of the correspondence of our world with the sky, the *resemblance* – that was the main system of knowledge during the sixteenth century, relating human skill to know not in seeing or demonstrating but in interpretation – was about to be replaced with *analysis*, that is the task of finding relations between beings in form, order and measurement. This is, therefore, a form of knowledge grounded on identity and difference, having by now, nothing to do with *divination*, since it resided no more in a discovery of signs. Signs were present, and no longer precedent, to the process of knowledge itself.

¹⁰¹ One of the most popular books in France and England in the late seventeenth century was *Conversations on the plurality of the Worlds (Entretiens sur la plurality des mondes)*, in which Fontenelle introduced an as intelligent as uneducated Marquise to the new discoveries of astronomy with some references to the new horizons of microscopy. This text written in 1686 is one of the first in which it has made clear that the boundary between the professional scientist, or should I say the natural philosopher, and the *amateur* will go by more and more indefinite. Even the ladies, in the opinion of some authors, should have been encouraged to study science which, by their natural curiosity and their indifference to the practical life, seemed to show a particular propensity. This will be, of course, a primary point for our discussion.

Not that our senses were now considered infinitely powerful, rather they were inevitable, however partial, kinds of knowledge. If observation became the privileged tool of science, it is because of the technical improvements introduced by the optical devices of the time, and because it allowed natural philosophers to see at a glance of the new comparative tables all the history of the living being they were looking at. Science now matched with history, not meaning that we see what others have seen, what others have imagined, but in the sense of a purified document resulting by meticulous observation and eventual transcription in “neutralized words”, as signs were no longer a part of things themselves rather modes of representation. Thus, we are looking at a double character of the newly born natural history: a new faith in the progress of technology of vision, and a clash with a reality far from our intellect and only partially knowing through senses.

Indeed, not everything that comes in contact with us can become an object of scientific observation. The new science seems to exclude the other senses, because of their variability and their incapability of knowing things by means of systematic separations of components and reorganization as a whole. Thus, hearsay, taste and smell are excluded, and touch is limited only to few lateral observations – such as smoothness instead of roughness. Linnaeus noticed: «we should reject ... all accidental notes that do not exist in the Plant either for the eye or for the touch»¹⁰².

If the privilege of vision acts through a sensory restriction, on the other hand, it extends towards new objects, thanks to the optical devices that compensate for these restrictions. But, was sight enough to transmit observations from generation to generation? That is, was it a good conductor of history? Natural historians were not sure about that. In fact microscope and telescope were created precisely to overcome this limitation: «the use of microscope was based upon a non-instrumental relation between things and the human eye – a relation that defines natural history»¹⁰³. That is why observation needs a structure to make its

¹⁰² Charles Linné, *Philosophie botanique de Charles Linné, dans laquelle sont expliqués les fondements de la botanique: avec les définitions de ses parties, les exemples des termes, des observations sur les plus rares*, traduite du Latin par Fr.-A. Quesné, Paris – Rouen, Cailleau, Leboucher, 1788, section 258, my eng. trans..

¹⁰³ Michel Foucault, quoted, p. 133.

purification possible: «Structure is that designation of the visible which, by means of a kind of pre-linguistic sifting, enables it to be transcribed into language»¹⁰⁴.

Thus, among the scientific and technological discoveries that contributed to the development of the new philosophy, a primary role is that of the lenses and of their development and specialization. If the use of the telescope has enabled the full affirmation of the Copernican theory and rekindled interest in theories about the large number of extraterrestrial worlds, the subsequent evolution of the microscope opened a new window on what until now had remained invisible. The *subvisilia*, on one hand, seemed to encourage the human aspiration to unveiling the secrets of nature and the pursuit of knowledge in the world as it is, on the other hand, they expanded, out of all proportion, to the perception of different planets with respect to which the man could no longer consider himself as a measurement. Through the telescope the fixed stars showed quite a different nature from that of pure delight for human eyes. There was the scene of distant solar systems totally independent from life on Earth. While many did not want to accept it, man and Earth were no longer the center of the universe. Through the microscope complex social structures, beings endowed with great physical skills, and possibly intellectual skills, filled the empty spaces of nature so far considered.

The cultural upheaval brought by revolution, at the basis of our own conception of the world and nature, was very explosive in society at the time, a crucial specimen of which was the restriction of benchmarks in human measures. In the relativization that followed the development of modern science, the new perception of space and time, due to enlargement or shrinking of dimensions of reality, was the *trait d'union* of scientific writings. The measurement of large and small could no longer aspire to any absolute value. It had become a mere result of comparative mechanism, so that even the measurements of space and time had to be conditioned. Not only, therefore, man lost his confidence in being the measurement of the universe, in learning about space through absolute measurements, but the immediate perception of time itself - that which governs the rhythms of animal life even more than human, not subject to social conventions - came back in what must have seemed to many like a whirlwind comparison¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰⁴ Ivi, p. 138.

¹⁰⁵ The origin of this difficult awareness is *Recherche de la vérité. Oy l'on traite de la nature de l'esprit de l'homme et de l'usage qu'il en doit faire pour éviter l'erreur dans les sciences* (1675), in

The transition from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century witnessed the clash between a conception of human knowledge based on reason, in an *a priori* unique position in knowing the surrounding world, and one based on the senses, the only means of empirical knowledge and therefore limited to the perceptions of those experiences. The English empiricism provoked some skepticism based on the limit of the human senses, but the dissemination of contemporary technological tools such as the telescope and microscope, and above all the revolutionary scientific discoveries related to them, seemed to open new horizons for scientists and philosophers. If the human mind remains, at least until Kant, an instrument linked to concepts such as those of space and time, the amplification of sensory skills, especially related to sight, will seem to restore some confidence in human knowledge, sometimes even releasing it from the influence of God.

Philosophers and writers were involved in a new speculative horizon, along with science and philosophy - that of natural philosophy – that hid a danger of confusion and threatened the impossibility of action for the human mind and soul. Indeed, the new worlds with whom humankind came in contact, did not correspond to anything in previous human knowledge, and, while the multiplication of worlds - microscopic and macroscopic - excited the imagination of those who thought they could project positivity and genuineness onto these characters, the lenses seemed to show with indisputable clarity how limited was the world of man.

Among these were even those who saw the new revolutionary optical devices as entertainment opportunities and embryonic forms of spectacle. New seeds began to spread among scientific laboratories, magazines and fictional inventions, starting a contagion. The lenses of microscopes and telescopes, screens that put the subject of research away from its object, would soon become thresholds through which not only humans would be able to unlock the hidden treasures of nature, but also the most hidden secrets of creation could invade his world in the balance between microcosm and macrocosm.

From an art-historian point of view, William Irving identifies this period as that of the “rationalization of sight” triggered by two motors: the impact of linear or one-point perspective on the visual culture of post-Renaissance Europe, and the

which Nicolas Malebranche envisaged the possibility that there were creatures for which half an hour amounted to a human thousand years and others for which one of our minutes worth one hour, one week, month, an entire era.

establishment of a new basis for vision grounded on the aims of objectivity which led visual perception to a perfect match with natural reality or external fact. As both Foucault's historical reconstruction and ours have showed, neither was the vision conceived as capable of knowing everything that came into contact with it, nor the observation was useful by itself, if not regimented within a specific structure. Moreover, what the eye saw through lenses was in no way safely or securingly correspondent to what could be expected or even hoped. Even Stuart Clark in *Vanities of the Eye* claims that «during the early modern period, and more especially between the Reformation and Scientific Revolution, vision was anything but objectively established or secure in its supposed relationship to external fact»¹⁰⁶.

Precisely the question of objectivity is central to the question of vision in the early modern period and, as we have already seen, it will remain central in the history of vision till nowadays¹⁰⁷. It has to do not only with regard to the philosophical separation between matter to be known and mind to be knower, but also with the socially constructed ways in which sight works. It is, as Norman Bryson has already claimed, the collective visual experience of human beings submitting retinal experience to the social description of an intelligible world. It is in some way connected to the structure of scientific discourse Foucault described, not even taking up space to “visual disturbance”, to the deviation from this social construction¹⁰⁸.

Again, what is the form itself of a precise period thought if not the relation between a culture and its representations? Or between a culture and the limits of what is thinkable or not within that system, and the ways to go beyond those limits

¹⁰⁶ Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Cassirer had already pointed out as the central problem of that period was the subject-object problem, tracing this dichotomy within the question of another dichotomy between mind and matter, or spirit and substance: «matter is no longer conceived of as the mere opposite of form [...] instead, matter is that which all activity of form must begin and through which the form must realize itself», Ernst Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buch Gesellschaft, 1927, trans. Mario Domandi, *The Individual and The Cosmos*, New York, Harper & Row, 2000, p. 133. This is a period of a great debate between those who would reduce matter to spirit and those who would do exactly at the contrary. The combination of both instances might be realized not in science but in art where the laws of nature and the actions of mind achieve an agreement.

¹⁰⁸ «Between retina and world is inserted a screen of signs, a screen consisting of all multiple discourses on vision built into the social arena», Norman Bryson, *The Gaze in The Expanded Field*, in Hal Foster, *Vision and Visuality*, Seattle, Bay Press, 1988, p. 91-92.

themselves¹⁰⁹? In such a way the mechanism of vision becomes a political matter of visual protocols, particularly interesting when they have to deal with a period of shock and dislocation, as did the period between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries, suffering a visual paradox for distinguishing between the true or false was possible only on a visual ground. Even though the works of Descartes and Hobbes, among others, could be seen as an attempt to restore visual rationality on to new philosophical principles, still in the early modern period, visual experience began to be built as a cultural rather than natural experience.

Science and human observation were led to a reality that was dealing not only with dis-embodied natural phenomena, but also with social and material elements. Early modern scientists or natural philosophers, seemed to be conscious of the dangerous path this instable reality could have reduced the prestige of their studies to, and precisely for this reason tried to define the offspring of their observation within a precise and finite space, that of the experiment, whose precise rules and instruments worked on two fronts, that of learning and that of persuasion. Thus, not only the instruments, which we have already talked about, served as a means to extend senses, but on them, perhaps more than on the experimenter himself, resided the reliability of the experiment: «in this sense the experimenter is constrained by the instrument used»¹¹⁰.

Once again the importance of optical devices in working science but also in cultural concerning of sight is stressed. That is why nowadays many studies are devoted to the material history of the instruments that surrounded the scientific revolution, such as those of Willem Hackmann and of Simon Shaffer.

In his works Hackmann tries to go beyond the conventional distinction of scientific instruments as mathematical, optical and natural-philosophical by concerning them as alternately “active” or “passive” devices, with respect to the interaction with the experimenter. The formers were used to produce new phenomena by actively interacting with nature, that is isolating phenomena in a controlled environment, it was the case of air pump¹¹¹ or of electrical machines.

¹⁰⁹ Leonard Barkan, Bradin Cormack, Sean Keilen, ed. by, *The forms of Renaissance thought: new essays in literature and culture*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

¹¹⁰ David Gooding, Trevor Pinch, Simon Schaffer, edited by, *The Uses of Experiment in the Natural Sciences*, Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 1.

¹¹¹ The case of Air-pump is particularly interesting as it ended up taking a double value, first of all as a main instrument that allowed some of the most important discoveries and studies on vacuum made by Robert Boyle, and second because it has been recently viewed as the counterpart of

The latter were those ones used for measurement and observation. Of course this distinction is only given to orientate since, as Hackman himself claims, it hardly could define the position of such important devices such as the telescope or microscope, being them passive, as they don't actually interact with nature, but active as they revealed unexpected phenomena and allow the observation of things, as well as beings, which the naked eye would never be able to perceive¹¹². However, the most interesting offspring of these researches is the relation they founded between the spreading of the optical devices in early modern period and the different communities participating in this spreading, and the ways in these communities, each for its part, influenced scientific thought sharing: «more than one community was involved in the production and the use of instruments. A community of makers and salesman interacted with the experimenters in complex ways, and this market place was a site of key importance for the establishment of the authority and repute of the various devices of experimental sciences»¹¹³.

Thus, not only knowledge needs instruments to affirm its credibility in replicability and “transparency”¹¹⁴ – in such a way that leads Bachelard to talk of phenomenon techniques¹¹⁵ – but also these instruments need to be standardized and commonly agreed, since they do not enter the laboratory being ready made.

another emblem of that period thought, the Leviathan by Thomas Hobbes. The controversy between the two scholars animated the scientific and cultural debate in England in the decade between 1660 and 1670, that is the immediate aftermath of English Civil War. Briefly they represented the two opposite sides of the question related to the authority of science, trying to establish a knowledge that could not decay in a new political division. Robert Boyle, being one of the most important and assiduous experimenter, was a strong supporter of the use of instruments in natural philosophy. In his perspective, the use of manufactured machines making gentlemen witness of a phenomenon happening under their eyes, could guarantee a knowledge agreeable by everyone. Thomas Hobbes, on the other hand, was one of his stronger opponents, publicly sustaining why the experimentation could not produce the knowledge Boyle supposed. Indeed, Hobbes so deeply concerned with natural law, saw at instrumental could not forbear noticing the artificiality of experimental program, and how much it belonged to a guild rather than a mostly shared community. See Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life, Including a Translation of Thomas Hobbes, Dialogus Physicus De Natura Aeris*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1985.

¹¹² W. D. Hackmann, *Scientific Instruments, models of Brass and Aids to Discover*, in David Gooding, Trevor J. Pinch, Simon Schaffer, op. cit., pp. 31-65.

¹¹³ David Gooding, Trevor J. Pinch, Simon Schaffer, op. cit., p. 2.

¹¹⁴ The concept of transparency related to scientific optical devices is a fundamental concept on what resides the faith in a “neutral” observation, but also the main point of attack from opponent. Simon Shaffer, referring to Newton's prism glass as well as to Bennet's and Herschel's telescope, defines it as the character of an «instrument when it is treated as a reliable transmitter of nature's message [it] become transparent when it reaches agreement», *ivi*, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ By means of this term Gaston Bachelard refers to the effects produced not by a “all-powerful nature” and recollected by a passive observer, rather those actually “realized” through an active instrumental working. In so doing instruments themselves embodied theories they are used to support, Gaston Bachelard, *La formation de l'esprit Scientifique*, Paris, Vrin, 1938.

In fact, the great dissemination of devices brought out the necessity to asset public standards both for instruments and for instrumental performances. This led, as a consequence to the development, to the survival and the growth of experimental communities communicating with each other. Curiously, parts of these communities were considered lens makers, who in turn, had to reach a standard or to fix one against which all the glasses belonging to scientific communities of the time were to be compared¹¹⁶. The significance of an experiment also resided on the glassmaker who made the instrument adopted in it.

As the studies on the uses of experiments in natural philosophy, made by Simon Shaffer, have demonstrated, all this artifice didn't seem neither to go against the principles of nature itself that is the object of study, nor to violate it with instruments made outside its system. In fact, a new relation was founded between nature and the "gentlemen", thanks to the "inscription devices"¹¹⁷, i.e. the means of scriptural interpretations made by experimental works. This is the point of view most shared among scientists of the period. Galileo for instance considered nature as «a divinely authored book written in mathematical language» to be read, or better, opened by natural philosophy and its instruments, precisely in the way Bacon claimed that nature should be interpreted through the senses, aided by experiment fit and opposite¹¹⁸. The validity, however limited, of sense experience is again on stage so that Bacon felt the need to distinguish between what was directly experienced and the invisible phenomena that could only be evoked. A kind of magic in the interpretation of nature again threatened the scientific revolution that had just released the resemblance of the baroque age. This is probably why Newton tries to fix another difference between a mathematical formulation and the creation of a completely new model, as a kind of physical and not verbal, in his opinion was too human, explanation. Thus *Optics*, probably the most followed writings in the following eighteenth century, is characterized by an astonishing sequence of experimental proofs, models of "real" natural process. Reproduction still stayed there, but it was no longer made directly by the human

¹¹⁶ In the middle of the seventeenth century Venice was still representing this standard, but also in London a guild of glass maker was growing up, significantly represented by Christopher Cock, one of the main contributor to Newton's works.

¹¹⁷ Bruno Latour, Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts*, Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, 1979.

¹¹⁸ Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum: or, True Suggestions for The Interpretation of Nature*, London, 1620, ed. by Lisa Jardine, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

hand, or at least so appeared to Galileo who insisted that the images “revealed” by his telescope existed in the real world and were not artifacts of the instruments or infringements of imagination.

The period we are analyzing is that one in which epistemic values seem to be closely linked to scientific visualization, a visualization that by means of the standardization of its own instruments and process could provide a guarantee of objectivity. Indeed, if according to Foucault the history of human sciences can be represented as a history of resemblance, according to Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison¹¹⁹ it can be represented precisely as a history of objectivity. This is a primary point, since the reliance on the possibility of a mechanical objectivity, born with the scientific revolution in early modern period, would even affect nineteenth century science very heavily, and part of the twentieth century. But what did science mean by the term “objectivity” throughout these three hundred years of history? The most common and continuous character of this concept, in Daston’s view, seems to rely on a kind of self-denying passivity, as an automatism or even a blind sight of the experimenter in conducting his observations and the deriving interpretations. From seventeenth century on, this kind of self-restraint achieved a moral value or, should I say, epistemic virtue in the faithful reading of the nature books. Here stays, as Foucault noticed, the shift from the statements’ authority of scholasticism to the most impersonal statements of the matter of fact in new science¹²⁰.

As Simon Shaffer again has pointed out, the original ideology of natural philosophy seems to stay all in the Royal Society motto: “Nullius in verba”. Indeed Robert Boyle, doyen of the experimental philosophers within that society, was one of the strongest supporters of faith in laboratory objects rather than in untrustworthy men, and right in his *Occasional Reflections upon Several Subjects*, written in 1665, the origin of this trust in objectivity can be found. It sums up two notions, that of «evidence as a gesture beyond the fact to some other state of affaire», as Hacking noticed¹²¹, and that which «carries the rhetorical sense of vividness, a gesture which refers to the immediate appeal of the fact itself», as

¹¹⁹ Lorraine Daston, Peter Galison, *Objectivity*, New York - Cambridge, MASS, MIT Press, 2007.

¹²⁰ See Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours. Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France prononcée le 2 décembre 1970*, Paris, Gallimard, 1971.

¹²¹ Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability: A Philosophical Study of Early Ideas about Probability, Induction and Statistical Inference*, London-New York, Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Shaffer added¹²². The program Boyle realized in this work, and in the entire research he did, is a very particular scientific program, for his end is that of transcribing his witness of artificial experiences. Transcribing has here a particular meaning, inasmuch it assumes the value of creating an emblem in the metaphor of inscription for, in the solitude of his laboratory, the scientist reads and then re-writes the secret's of God's nature. In so doing he achieves a double end, that of disclosing the secret signs of nature, and that of shaping his own moral character. The word of the scientist becomes in this way self-evident, not because of its authority, but because of his own skills to distract his observation from the limits of the human body and to make them pure and neutral.

But mostly he is trustworthy because he, as well as own body, belongs to the collective body of scientific communion. A guild, Hobbes would have said, equipped with instrumental technology, literary reportage, and, moreover, a social organization defining the way in which he reports his practical experiences. It is what Shaffer calls the "evidential context", that is the power and the authority of a corporation of experimental philosophers. As we have already seen: «new experimental regimes were designed to distract attention from the person of the experimenter by making instruments into inscription devices and by automating the experimental process. New scientific disciplines needed disciplined instrumental techniques and docile bodies. Self-registration became a key goal for modern instrumental design»¹²³. The body became at the same time the object of experimenter's surveys and for the collectiveness that gave them authority. This is the way in which knowledge invested the body and determined the forms it was subject to, that is the "political anatomy" of experimental philosophy¹²⁴.

One interesting matter leading with this is how social issues of difference, such as gender, class and race, could affect this epistemic value of objectivity, from seventeenth century on. This, of course, could not have any impact on the design of the norms and standards still operating through nineteenth century science. Many scholars, such as Donna Haraway, Londa Schiebinger, Rusty Shteir, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Daston and Galison themselves, have demonstrated how it is a

¹²² Simon Schaffer, *Self Evidence*, Critical Inquiry, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Winter, 1992), pp. 327-362.

¹²³ Simon Shaffer, *ivi*, p. 362. Again, Daston stresses how this early modern confidence in instrumental equipment, would have led to the belief in mechanical images, and therefore mechanical objectivity, of photography in the nineteenth century science.

¹²⁴ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Paris, Gallimard, 1975, trans. Alan Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York, Vintage Books, 1995.

value created within a particular circle of persons: male, white, middle-class, “men of science”. Among these diverse points of view, all agreeing on the partiality rather than neutrality of the concept of objectivity, Keller insists on objectivity as an illusion reflecting an image of the self (the experimenter), autonomous and himself objectified. He is severed from outside world of objects, not being the objects of his laboratory, and, at the same time, severed from his own subject, since he must be a passive register.

On the other side, however, this supposed neutrality conflicts with the ideology of detachment, perfectly fitting with the Baconian vision. A vision, on which natural philosophy is grounded, that more or less consciously conceives knowledge as power, at least power to know the hidden connections in the world, and to the highest degree, that of dominating nature. This kind of knowledge seems to have a certain relation with sexuality as well, and it is not a case that often metaphors of sexual discovers were used in describing natural discovers. Keller argues that this is an emotionally constituted connection deriving from the lack of continuity between subject and object of experimentation, and it represents a risk for objectivity to be contaminated with domination¹²⁵.

This point of view makes, obviously, not only the experimenter a dominative, rather than neutral, observer, who can reach all the deepest secrets of a feminized nature, even with the help of objectifying instruments, but also of the object of his penetrating gaze, an actually passive object. The metaphorical and ideological male dominating observation is underlined in the foundation of natural philosophy itself and of the primary representative institution, the Royal Society. Indeed Henry Oldenburg, Secretary of the Society, condensed the aims of the society in the intention of raising a Masculine Philosophy. Thus, it is clear how the intention of the new science was no longer the metaphysical union of mind and nature, rather the establishment of the empire of man over nature.

The dominion project so clearly explained in the foundation of natural philosophy, was, of course, not only a prerogative of science, but an emblem of the entire whole asset of the seventeenth century, a century of great social, economic, political and also cultural upheaval. The same definition of male and female assumed a polarized form as, probably never before, somehow linked to

¹²⁵ Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1985.

the objectification of science. This is why many feminist critiques recognize in the dualistic reason of Descartes, the origin of modern gender difference:

[Descartes] treats objectivity and reason as male, and feeling, the body, and nature as female. Cultural and literary critics denounce the Cartesian mechanization of nature for its drive to exploit a passive and limitlessly productive nature or its technocratic and totalitarian urge to extend the reach of scientific rationality into every corner of society. Regarded as synonymous with the rise of modern philosophy, Descartes bears the onus for relegating women to a realm of physicality and affect and for making disembodied consciousness the human essence¹²⁶

Even though the civil war seemed to have brought a push towards a certain sexual freedom and towards universal education, so that women were a visible presence even in radical aspects, the restoration, and the scientific revolution along with it, ended in reconsidering the economic, social and intellectual authority women could reach. They were finally relegated to a closed part of the society, that of a motherhood more debased in spite of the reverence it had acquainted during the past century, and denying them large access to education. Still the instable climate, the struggle of former hierarchies, even a new kind of relation between State and Church, somehow allowed the creation of however limited places of free-space, no man's land, or places with no or little control, where women acted in such a way we could today call strategic resistance.

During the whole seventeenth century some upper-class English women tried to participate in the intellectual progress men were reaching. They rejected the alleged inferiority of female intellect and inclination towards science and observation, by retracing it back to the inferior education and social position they were constrained to. Many writers such as Hannah Wooley, Bathsua Makin, Mary Astell, used their writings to gain women back the right to study philosophy, foreign languages, medical care, and writing itself, going even beyond the rights that characterized manuscript women education during The Renaissance.

Even though educated ladies partially joined science and mathematics since the earliest of times, this period saw the raising of the “scientific lady”. As Londa Schiebinger has noticed¹²⁷, it is hard to fix an image of women in a period like this in which great revolutions take place in turns. Indeed, science emerged somehow

¹²⁶ Alvin Snider, *Cartesian Bodies*, in *Modern Philology*, Vol. 98, No. 2, (2000), p. 300.

¹²⁷ Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex: Women In The Origins Of Modern Science*, London-Cambridge MASS, Harvard University Press, 1989.

from a former social setting that it had in Renaissance courts its precedent form, which constituted both the political and intellectual centre of power. Within this “institution” high-ranked women boasted a certain privilege, which they maintained for a while even out of the courts. However, as the century went on nobility waned and gentlewomen lost their place in scientific settings. The founding of the academies system in Europe was one of the most decisive acts of exclusion of women from science, even if at the beginning of this foundation it was not that clear, for at least in principle they were supposed to be opened to a wide range of people, in fact this openness was never actual. Even though these noblewomen were not admitted in the academies, it doesn’t mean that they didn’t participate in scientific works, outside these institutions. They were active holders or partners of scientific cabinets or private salons, or great supporters of the same academies where they were excluded as illustrators or translators.

A primary case is, of course, Aphra Behn, translator for the Royal Academy of Fontenelle, and other scientific works, spy for the King Charles II, politically influent and one of the first women to gain from her own writing works, but without an official role within the male system. By the way, the “intellectual rank” she obtained, being the most prolific dramatis in England after John Dryden, allowed her to express her opinion against male dominating culture. Her critics were addressed to scientific concepts in natural philosophy, still almost influenced by the Cartesian mechanism, and, moreover, too affected by the illusion of objectivity we have so long discussed. Precisely Behn didn’t miss this objectification and the relative passive role it attributes to object, women and nature¹²⁸. In fact, this is the main point that she critiques in her writings: seriously addressing the male chauvinism system (she was even working for), the patronizing approach to women of Fontenelle, unveiling the “virtuoso’s” gaze¹²⁹ of its political speculation, accusing the colonial gaze upon savages of the same sexual desire addressed to women. Moreover, she wasn’t afraid to put on the scene of her dramas the feminine (sexual) desire, in all its active and also perverse character. This is why as Virginia Woolf noticed: «All women together, ought to let flowers fall upon the

¹²⁸ See Alvin Snider, quoted.

¹²⁹ Al Coppola, *Retraining the Virtuoso’s Gaze: Behn’s Emperor of the Moon, The Royal Society, and the Spectacles of Science and Politics*, in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, n. 4, Summer 2008, pp. 481-506.

grave of Aphra Behn [...] for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds»¹³⁰.

Another side of the scientific revolution opened a little place in which women immediately found their own place in science. With the circulation of new optical devices, as we have already seen, and the new fashion of popularized optics studies, a new way of conceiving observation spread out. Looking through microscope and telescope was no longer a purely scientific activity, but also a source of honest amusement. Thus, not only gentlewomen were instructed in peering at the skies or at worms, but also suddenly they achieve a certain acquaintance in experimental physics or astronomic calculations. In these very years also writings devoted to the popularization of science for women became a primary industry and, alongside with male writings – such as that of Fontenelle and Algarotti – women themselves wrote to instruct other women. It is of primary importance to remember what Londa Schiebinger points out:

Historians tend to take the case of women as authors of and audience for popular science as the paradigmatic example of women's participation in modern science. Yet [...] relegating women to the status of amateur diminishes the contributions that women like Margaret Cavendish or Emilie du Châtelet made to science. Popular science was not sharply divided from professional science as it is today. Though today it would be difficult for anyone barred from university education to work in science, this was not the case in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when few men or women were full-time or salaried scientists. Some, like Galileo, were resident astronomers at a princely court; Bacon and Leibniz were government ministers, as well as men of letters [...] this looser organization of science was one factor allowing those barred from universities and academies to find their ways into scientific circles.¹³¹

The case of Margaret Cavendish, who tried both with philosophical observation and with fancies to customize women to science, is particularly significant. She was mainly interested in philosophy, in such a deep way that no other woman of that time was. She devoted a large part of her prolific scientific production to the critiques to Hobbes's *Leviathan*, the theory of vortex by Descartes, the proof of God by More, Helmot's chemistry, etc. Anyway, the Duchess of Newcastle is interested in our discussion because of her strategy to gain knowledge in the society she lived in. She was well conscious that women could hardly be admitted in education, let alone in scientific institution. What they had to do, therefore, was

¹³⁰ Woolf, Virginia, *A Room of One's Own*, London, Hogarth Press, 1929, ed. by Susan Gubar, New York, Harcourt, 2005, p. 65.

¹³¹ Londa Shiebinger, quoted p. 44.

to take advantage of the male system itself, for only by marrying wealth and educated men could they share a high education and join the most influential intellectual circles. This is just the way she did, marrying William Cavendish, founder of the Newcastle circle, joined by Thomas Hobbes, Gassendi, Descartes, to name a few. This system left aside all the other women of lower rank or not in the possibility to join such a prestigious circle. That is why she remained almost isolated especially from women companionship, and she was the object of such deep critique by feminist writers throughout the century:

Garish in her dress, eccentric in her habits, chaste in her conduct, coarse in her speech, she succeeded during her lifetime in drawing upon herself the ridicule of the great and the applause of the learned. But the last echoes of that clamor have now all died away; she lives only in the few splendid phrases that Lamb scattered upon her tomb; her poems, her plays, her philosophies, her orations, her discourses—all those folios and quartos in which, she protested, her real life was shrined—moulder in the gloom of public libraries, or are decanted into tiny thimbles which hold six drops of their profusion.¹³²

As the enthusiasm for new science grew women took advantage of a certain permissiveness in letting them studying the things of nature, still considered the book coming from a divine order, and thus, not conflicting with the principle of religious virtue women had to hold since Renaissance on.

This phenomenon of the Scientific Lady lasted very long time, for it continued to populate the scenes of English culture till the next century, which was characterized by a particular form of women popularized science and culture, that of the magazine. Along with male magazines, customized almost large parts by gentlemen, many female magazines were spread, and of diverse topics. At the beginning of the century, for example, the *Ladies Diary* was published with the aim to teach women “Writing, Arithmetic, Geometry, Trigonometry, the doctrine of the sphere, Astronomy, Algebra, with their Dependants, viz. Surveying, Gaugin, Dialling, Navigation, and all Mathematical Sciences”¹³³. It provided a large amount of scientific and everyday life suggestions: chronologies of famous women, articles regarding Robert Boyle’s experiment, advises on marriage. The more the magazine spread the more the editor, John Trippe, had to focus more on

¹³² Virginia Woolf, *The Duchess of Newcastle*, in id, *Collected Essays*, Vol. III, Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1925, p. 51.

¹³³ John Tripper, eds, *The Ladies’ Diary*, London, 1706, advertising.

mathematics than on cookery, since women reading seemed to prefer "enigmas and arithmetical questions".

From 1744 to 1746 another magazine as popular as the precedent was published. It was the *Female Spectator*. Its editor was anonymous but was first known that it was by Eliza Haywood. Actress, dramatist and prolific writer, she has only recently been recognized within the "Fair Triumvirate of Wit", together with Delarivier Manley and Aphra Behn. When the *Female Spectator* was published the Scientific Revolution hadn't completed its course, but some points of its paradigm, mostly the question regarding the gaze could now be seen in a more conscious way. Moreover, restoration was complete and, thus, not all the conditions of the previous century were still operating. The distinction between the role of men and women got exacerbated, and what was previously accepted as an adorable eccentricity was now considered as immoral. That is why all the work of Eliza Haywood, mostly that done within the periodical, seems to have a particular value. What is particularly interesting for our discussion is just the consciousness the author held about the political impact of the gaze, mostly on a gendered ground. Probably her experience on the stage had an important role on this kind of thought, but it will be astonishing to notice, in the further chapters, how the author pioneered the comments on the look that, we saw, lead the nineteenth and twentieth century. It will be enough for the moment to stress that in questioning the male privilege of her time Haywood chose to struggle in a precise field: the privilege of observation, which in turn she tried to appropriate. It is immediately clear, indeed, the strategy by which she appropriated for the "Mr Spectator" model but in a specular way. Thus, she tried not to reverse male privilege by posing herself as a male observer, but by assuming the weight of male stereotypes, the mask of the *coquette* in her case, however reporting an unexpected look: «As a coquette the Female Spectator had deliberately inserted herself into a specular field, seeking opportunities to "show" herself. Ingeniously, her experience as an object, a position assumed to have epistemological limits, forms the basis for her knowledge and authority»¹³⁴. As Merritt has argued, this strategy not only gave women the chance to find a new model to confront with, but, moreover, it showed a way by which the distance between subject and object could be overcome and

¹³⁴ Juliette Merritt, *Beyond Spectacle: Eliza Haywood's Femal Spectator*, Toronto-Buffalo-London, University of Toronto Press, 2004, p. 11.

women could exchange the desire to be looked at with that to look at: «while the “all-seeing” nature of the world may create the human subject, it is also true that the embodied gaze that constitutes regimes of sight and seeing is not neutral or benign – women do experience, disproportionately to men, the adverse effects of an oppressive ocular regime»¹³⁵.

The contested terrain of early modern visual culture – intended as the complex system involving «vision (the mechanism of the eye), image-making devices (the microscope, the camera obscura), and visual skills (map-making, but also experimenting) as cultural resources»¹³⁶ – is not confined only to the field of scientific revolution. Other great changes took place in a more broad and popular cultural related with theatrical representation. This long period, indeed, witnessed the whole course of the early modern English theatre, from the Jacobean and Caroline theatre to the Restoration theatre, beginning even before, with the court Masque, and ending with the Reformation society and the seventeenth century theatre. This complex course put on the stage a various number of changes in culture, both from a “material” point of view, dealing with the new architectural apparatus and new mechanisms for the scenes, and with the less material but equally important new concerns about characters, players, writers and topics.

On the side of the “material point of view”, concerns had to do with the making of new theatrical images. It must be noticed how the period we are considering is that of a turn from the court masque and the institutionalization of specific places outside the court, open to nobles as well as to other sections of the population, assisting the same play in the same place. This institutionalization established also a new and more stable corporatism and a legal recognition of the theatre companies, which managed and fought for public appreciation. Theatre entertainment, thus, turned from a court affair to a popular public matter, carrying many political effects as we will soon see.

The masque was a particular kind of court entertainment that blended different kinds of performances, dance, music, acting, and it provided also precise and elaborate customs and framing architecture. In England it was particularly

¹³⁵ Ivi, p. 12.

¹³⁶ Svetlana Alpers; Emily Apter; Carol Armstrong; Susan Buck-Morss; Tom Conley; Jonathan Crary; Thomas Crow; Tom Gunning; Michael Ann Holly; Martin Jay; Thomas Dacosta Kaufmann; Silvia Kolbowski; Sylvia Lavin; Stephen Melville; Helen Molesworth; Keith Moxey; D. N. Rodowick; Geoff Waite; Christopher Wood, “Visual Culture Questionnaire”, in «October», 77. (1996), pp. 25-70, p. 25.

welcomed in the court of King James I and, moreover, by her consort Queen Ann of Denmark. Both of them used to participate in these performances held in their court to celebrate particular events for the crown, or, even, as a means of publication of personal agenda. The central aspect of the masque consisted, as it is simply arguable, in the concealed identity of the character who started the performance and who revealed his or her identity only at the end of it.

Recent studies within New History fields, such as those of David Bevington, have stressed the political importance of such performances¹³⁷. To afford this question Bevington and Holbrook begin by quoting the statements of two main characters of the period, Francis Bacon and Ben Jonson, the first retraining the masques as well as the triumphs back to toys¹³⁸, the second as the impossible work of amusing the audience of a divided court with political entertainment¹³⁹. These two statements question a central matter, that of the triflingness or the seriousness of the genre, or better the medium, of masque. Indeed, as the two scholars claim, to define what is serious and what is not in the small closed society of the court is not so simple, for all the interpersonal relations were based on the appearance of gestures, manners and even dressing. In this contest the celebration of festivities of diverse sorts was a real training ground for power and standing, both of which being posed on “public” display.

Another important matter to be questioned is that of the masque in respect with its audience, questioning in which remains the deepest political meaning of this kind of representation. As New Historicism has already pointed out, especially in the study of Orgel on the *Illusion of Power*¹⁴⁰, masque not only put on stage the embodiment of the will of the sovereign, but also the competition for power. Thus, it is definable as a true symbolic form of negotiation, in the sense Greenblatt describes the term: the masque is then the expression of conflicting voices rather than the definitive *mise en scène* of monarchic power. At this point the politics of the masque becomes clearer, standing not only in the “political theology” of the

¹³⁷ David Bevington, Peter Holbrook, ed., *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque*, Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

¹³⁸ Francis Bacon, *Of Masques and Triumphs*, in id *Essays and New Atlantis*, New York, W.J. Black, 1942, pp. 159- 162.

¹³⁹ Ben Jonson, *Neptune's Triumph For the Returne of Albion*, London, 1624.

¹⁴⁰ Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in Renaissance*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975.

monarch but also in the «actual political processes through which things happened»¹⁴¹.

In this court system, that now appears less organic than previously expected, even women gain a “spatial arrangement” particularly significant in the encoding at once of the spectacle and of the power. It is particularly clear within the court of James I, especially concerning the role his consort, Queen Ann of Denmark, played not only metaphorically, together with her loyal courtesans, and the intellectual following her, a primary place occupying Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones who carried out her projects. In particular the masques she commissioned to both the play writer and the architect are striking for the unconventional model of woman they conceive, an astonishing femininity provoking anxiety in the male audience, still presenting herself as fashionable¹⁴².

The fixed gender opposition of male and female continues to be challenged even in the period following Jacobean theatre, in which the masque results however changed. It is the period of reign of Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria, the glory of the restored reign is no way contested in the Caroline masque that epitomizes the power of monarchy as harmonizing over the commonwealth and the whole universe. It is in this context that Margaret Cavendish creates her writing, experiencing the influence of the visual regime still working. Not only, indeed, as part of the Queen court she had surely witnessed and perhaps participated to masques, but her husband, one of Jonson’s patrons, had commissioned to the play writer two (expensive) masques for the pleasure of the King and Queen. When Margaret began to write the course of the masque was almost fading, and she couldn’t be defined as a masque play writer. However, the cultural influence this kind of representation had played in early modern England was still acting on her work, especially concerning the challenging of the role of woman and the ambiguous effect the dress had and the role playing. Instances in this respect are *the Convent of Pleasure*, written in 1668, and the *Blazing World*, which although not a theatre work creates customizing effect as played on a

¹⁴¹ David Bevington, Peter Holbrook, op. cit. p. 9.

¹⁴² It is precisely the case of two of these plays, *The Masque of Blackness* and *Hymenaey*, in which the Queen playing with her ladies and gentlemen puts at stake the role of her consort himself and presents her agenda. It is impossible at this point not recollect this kind of woman self-representation to the reflection on masquerade and femme fatale already discussed with Mary Ann Doane.

masque stage¹⁴³. What is more interesting to note is how the techniques and the effects of the masque, as a means not only of cultural representation but also of political expression, were used by Cavendish as forms of personal positioning against the role women had to occupy during her age. In this way we can interpret her “playing” during the visit at the Royal Society, when, wearing the masque for her own Empress, acted in the same way in which Queen Ann had acted within her court, astonishing and disorienting the male spectators with a performed femininity.

As the century went on, however, a changing social order took place stimulating the already present need of negotiation. The rivalry within the court was now accompanied by the rivalry between the court and the city. The theatre was again the elected arena of this new tension, acting now between the public shows of London companies and the private masque of the sovereign court. The raising of the puritan movement and, moreover, the breaking out of the Civil War brought to the closures of the theatre, which were flourishing in London from Elizabethan age on. Public stages were closed in 1642 and would be reopened only 18 years later, with the restoration and the advent to the throne of Charles II, who acted personally for funding a new age of theatre.

This new age was not only characterized by a new recognized settlement of the theatre companies, growing more and more under the royal protection, even if not in a peaceful surrounding, but also by new experiments in genres, roles and technology. The restoration theatre, indeed, witnessed a revolutionary gender turn realized in two striking phenomena like the “she-tragedy” and the “breeches role”. Since the feminine characters were now allowed to be acted by actresses rather than by actors, for the very first time in the history of theatre, the subjects and the topics of drama were to be changed, thus creating stories in which the main character, formerly a hero, was replaced by a heroine, even mirroring the popular consideration of the new Queen Mary II, who ruled actively at the end of seventeenth century.

¹⁴³ This case is specifically observable in a passage in which the Empress appeared as an Angel walking on the sea water. However, this image, quoting the spectacular *mis en scène* of the court masque, is used by Cavendish not to embrace the astonishing effect, rather to denounce the fallacy of the image in this way displayed, revealing the trick: she own no super power, simply she has been accompanied by the “fishmen” coming from the blazing world.

This first step towards a realignment of gender role was accompanied with the raising of the breeching roles, in which the ambiguity in the identity of character, already experienced within the masque was amplified creating roles in which a female actress had to wear male costumes.

The novelty of the women on “public display” produced a growing curiosity in the audience, amused by the chance of “watching and re-watching” again the actresses on the stage. However, this was not only the age of women on the stage but also beyond the stage, as the case of Aphra Behn demonstrates, being one of the most fruitful play writers of the century.

Behn devoted the most part of her work to theatre, showing a particular attitude in the visual aspects of narration and in the way in which they could influence the audience. In this sense she played onto different fields: on one hand paying particular attention to the visual details of costumes, in order to carry the topics of misrecognition in vogue at that time; on the other experiencing all the visual opportunities offered by the early experiments made by William Davenant, especially in the period between 1661 and 1671. That was, indeed, a period of great development for theatrical techniques devoted to grasp new ways of putting on the scene eccentric spaces and times. This was the reason why new machineries and new assisting went on the scene, such as the sliding shutters, and the action space on the scene was spread around and behind the forestage. All these experiments were the result of the developments already brought by the stage architecture of Inigo Jones within the court masque, especially aware of the great chances, in terms of changes for actors and actions, offered by the rear stage.

Many dramatists used the new devices to suggest simultaneously rather than sequencing, but Behn was particularly ingenious in producing a new sense of spatial relationship between the actors and the audience, manipulating it by widening or narrowing the limits of intimacy between the spectator and the observed scene.

In the early eighteenth century the power of controlling the gaze, by making fun of it, was still at work. It is clearly showed by the works of Eliza Haywood who, as we have already seen, was very aware of the power of the gaze within theatre and who decided to bring her acquainted power throughout all her works. In fact all her works are characterized by a manipulation of the classical distinction among the

different gazes present in the narration. What she precisely does is, most often, to blend her own authorial point of view with that of the spectator, which not always is a visual spectator, but it is pretended to be. Confusing the levels of discursive authority Haywood put at stake the patriarchal visual dominance and performs an enchantment for female control on the gaze.

Spaces of cultural resistance, within a system in crisis, were thus acting not only in the field of scientific revolution, questioning the goodness and the objectivity of human and mechanical vision, but another field opened the opportunity to challenge a (not too much different) kind of male vision: that of popular culture and politics. As Alpers has already showed, indeed, the practices of looking or, alternately, of making images are cultural resources that imply not only the images showed but also the ways in which they are showed, who show them, to whom, and especially why. The long lasting life of masque as a theatrical genre and as a means of representation of symbolic meaning, is the clearest example of the woman appropriation of a male sight in order to prove to himself how partial and dangerous it is, and how she can well manipulate it.

The objectivity of sight was already in jeopardy, and the primary issues of a specular feminist vision were rising. No doubt the period between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century was that of the privileged sight, but a disturbing female point of view was already passing through the looking glass, undermining the foundations of this faith. Men would have to wait until the nineteenth century to comprehend this uncomfortable illusion. Women seem to be aware neither of their original intuition nor of their different sight.

II

Explicit and implicit observers

The observer with its more or less perceptible presence is one of the most crucial concerns of any research in visual culture. This is because, as Crary has pointed out, it represents in every scopic regime an element at times evident and problematic. The evidence in accounting it is a result of the legacy coming from the classical age of knowledge, as Foucault defined it, and stays in a precise system of perception grounded in Renaissance perspective. The subject of vision is, in this model, a central point of view dominating a restricted space in which its vision can reach every point. It was the result of the faith in sight promoted by the scientific and technological revolution that made this model fit throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, simply expanding the horizon of perception.

As we have already seen in the previous chapter, the diffusion of optical devices during the whole early modern period produced not only the address at sight as the principle sense among others, but made it the foundation of a new science and of its pretended objectivity. Vision was the only means by which scientific observation could not alter either the subject or the object, and by which man could escape his carnality and reach a pure spiritual vision, that of the eye of the mind. It is quite obvious to remember how this conviction was rooted on the philosophical theories, from Descartes on, according to which the subject of knowledge was definitely divided by its object, and by his own corporality. Once vision was limited to individual space and purified from the fallacy of human limits, including space and time, objectivity was reached as the natural habitat of reason and mind, and the exclusive domain of male gaze. It was unrelated to subjectivity, feeling and nature, which were the attributes of the woman, i.e. the objects of this gaze. This schematic model, however, did not survive this period. It exploded in its complexity between the nineteenth and twentieth century, when new technological and cultural revolutions, primary that of psychoanalysis, unveiled the social mechanism under vision. The observer himself resulted in a model created by the force fields, rules and arrangements, «discussed, controlled and incarnated in

cultural and scientific practices»¹. Thus, as Jonathan Crary claims again, a univocal observer never existed, but only a dominant model to which all the others had to attain. The primary result of this statement is that as the rules, arrangements and social practices change, so does the model of the observer. That is why the objectivity model, so much acclaimed between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, couldn't work anymore in an age in which all the parts playing in the field of vision are contested and modified in their own place and their own role. That is why, as Foucault demonstrated, an idle spectator doesn't exist anymore, for no objective reality exists anymore. We now move within an epistemic world, or a symbolic one, in Derrida's opinion, ruled by the relativity of sensual media. The most affecting matter in this modern age of knowledge is that of an object that is no longer passive and subjected to the observer, which has already lost his own singularity. Not only, in fact, this object is now able to return the gaze or, at least, is aware of the gaze addressed to it, but it (she or he) needs more and more qualities to be defined, and still escape a unique definition.

One of the fundamental properties of the object is that of gender, which makes the field of vision more and more complex, harder to define than previously imagined. According to feminist critics, overall Donna Haraway, including the feminine in this discussion means fundamentally entering the point of view of the outsider, with all his/her rules and codes socially constructed as well as the insider's one. But it also means another affirmation of the embodiment of vision and knowledge, still strictly connected, instead of the objectivity of the two processes. Going further Cixous, together with the feminist critics of film studies, unveils the resulting voyeuristic character of vision, till now masqueraded under the pretended disembodiment. The excursus through all the different declinations of this gender discussion on vision has already been done in the previous chapter. Here I want only to remind you how the twentieth century debates on the question, recovering the awareness of the embodiment of sight and of the gendered differences thus carried, has led to a new consciousness of the responsibility of the observer addressing his or her gaze onto all the different kinds of object: scientific, sexual or exotic.

¹ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge-London, MIT Press, 1992, p. 8.

As a result, another crucial question raising from all these new consciousnesses concerns the private or public situation in which this gaze is cast, for from this precise aspect derives the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the sight and all the resulting questions, such as the place the observer can or can't occupy, the modes and the means he or she can use, etc. But also the visibility or the invisibility of his/her point of view, since most often the dominant gaze is that exerted in the invisible cell of the prison – as Foucault argued – or in the darkness of the cinema – from Mulvey's point of view. Still, even the objects of the vision can manage their own space of vision, for instance casting their own gaze back under a mask, protecting themselves more than the observer, as we will soon see.

The matter appears particularly interesting in the age of the affirmation of the Experimental Philosophy, during which, as Simon Shaffer shows, the rhetoric of evidence did at once involve both the vividness of the fact and its appeal, both on the experimenter and its public. Even if the institutionalization of the new science, according with the philosophy of the time, brought a growing disembodiment of the scientist, it, on the other hand, posed the body, as a privileged object of knowledge. On this body the collectiveness of practitioners exercised the power and the authority of an "evidential context", in such a way as the totality of observers worked behind the medical gaze. This phenomenon, that Foucault calls "political anatomy"², showed a switch from the privacy of the laboratories to the showing of public displays. Public scientific representations, as well as theatrical ones³, stimulated two kinds of response: on one hand they irritated some intellectuals such as Samuel Richardson, on the other they seemed to be well accepted to the commercial economy of the institutions themselves. The first among these was the Royal Society that planned a precise and organized system of publicity (and advertisement). Except for some intellectual concerned about the superficiality of a so wide audience, the society of that age provided more and more sites where to practice public demonstrations, not only scientific but also political, and where to show their different objects, subjecting them to public gazes.

² Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Paris, Gallimard, 1975, trans. A. Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York, Vintage Book, 1979, p. 28.

³ Simon Schaffer, "Self Evidence", in «Critical Inquiry» 18 (1992), pp. 327-362.

The question of the “anatomical appointing” of object’s body, meanwhile disembodied the observer, had even from that age a gender and sexual meaning which, however, differs in some contents to that of the modern age. In fact, the question of polarized genders, between male and female, was hardly definable, since the years between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century when an endemic instability in the matter was witnessed. Scientific experiments, or at least observations onto subject neither completely female nor male, such as hermaphrodites, provoked a spread curiosity somehow allowed by the social codes in the name of the science. The acceptance of this phenomenon, particularly in British society as a natural phenomenon, produced a wide range of cultural effects: first of all the pretended hermaphroditism as a justification for homosexual relationships; secondly, but no less important, a flickering position of gender performances within the spectacle society of the period, characterized, as we have already seen, by the raising of more and more complex new subjects and actors. Justified by science, private questions became matters of a new “publicly private mode”⁴, new market places in which sexually curious images were legitimized as well as the gaze on them. It is not an accident that this is the period of the breeching roles for female actresses, roles that represent the complication of what masquerades were at the beginning of the seventeenth century. All these movements were obviously used as means of legitimated subversion of the codes, at the same time exposing their own arbitrariness⁵.

What I am trying to prove is that the most part of the concerns raised in the twentieth century debate about the gaze and the observer were already at stake during the seventeenth century. Indeed, in the age in which faith in mechanical vision began to raise, someone questioned the invisibility and supremacy of the subject bringing on the literary scenes “non-isomorphic”⁶ points of view, not matching the dominant model, yet challenging it in the matter of stability. Optics was no more sufficient in instructing or aiding vision, but a more complex visual literacy was even then necessary.

⁴ Roberta C. Martin, "Beauteous Wonder of a Different Kind: Aphra Behn's Destabilization of Sexual Categories", in «College English» 61 (1998), pp. 192-210, p. 193.

⁵ Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1986, p. 57.

⁶ This is a term, which we have already met, proposed by Donna Haraway in *Situated Knowledges. The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, in Muriel Lederman, Ingrid Bartsch (ed.), *The Gender and Science Reader*, London-New York, Routledge, 2001.

The disembodiment of the observer, subject of the scientific experiment, and the authority that derives from it, is somehow connected with a contemporary notion of the disembodiment of the writer, i.e. the subject and therefore the authority of the literary observation, sometimes turning to anonymity.

This is a matter which particularly affects all three writers that we are examining, but in very different ways. Primarily with Cavendish, who definitely affirmed the corporality of the observer, and especially, of the writer. That is the result of her particular consideration of her own literary creations, at the same time physical instruments of resistance, proud and magnificent surrogate of her bashful and sick body, substitute for physical offspring (as she referred in *Poems and fancies*), physical means by which making her resistance. She referred to all this by calling her writings as *Paper bodies*⁷. As we will see, Margaret Cavendish escaped her *dressage* by both not being the kind of body that cultural control supposed she had to be, and by making discourses radically different from those that were allowed. Both her bodily and literary experiments seem to be oriented to a freeing of human beings, mostly women, from the social, psychological and gender constraints by means of self-transformation, and by reasserting a new women's "monarchy" and government⁸ over their own bodies and their own writings, claiming their right to the authorship and the "observership".

A different opinion was that of Aphra Behn, who was particularly fascinated by the question of writer not only as a literary artifice but also as a more metaphorical representation of the «gap between the physical act of writing and the immaterial

⁷ This is the way she referred to her writings lost in fire during the return journey from France, Margaret Cavendish, *Letter CXLIII*, in id, *CCXI Sociable Letters*, London, William Wilson, 1664, p. 154.

⁸ Compare the vindication to the right of authorship in the *The Preface to The Reader*, in Margaret Cavendish, *The Worlds Olio*, London, S. Martin & S. Allestrye, 1655: «IT cannot be expected I should write so wisely or wittily as Men, being of the Effeminate Sex, whose Brains Nature hath mix'd with the coldest and softest Elements; and to give my Reason why we cannot be so wise as Men, I take leave and ask Pardon of my own Sex, and present my Reasons to the Judgement of Truth; [...]rue it is, our Sex make great complaints, that men from their first Creation usurped a Supremacy to themselves, although we were made equal by Nature, which Tyrannical Government they have kept ever since, so that we could never come to be free, but rather more and more enslaved, using us either like Children, Fools, or Subjects, that is, to flatter or threaten us, to allure or force us to obey, and will not let us divide the World equally with them, as to Govern and Command, to direct and Dispose as they do; which Slavery hath so dejected our spirits, as we are become so stupid, that Beasts are but a Degree below us, and Men use us but a Degree above Beasts; whereas in Nature we have as clear an understanding as Men, if we were bred in Schools to mature our Brains, and to manure our Understandings, that we might bring forth the Fruits of Knowledge», p. 4.

result»⁹. This effect is more and more amplified by the print that increased the anonymity while increasing standardization: in the serial reproduction of identical copies the text loses its particular location being disseminated, mimicking the erasure of the writer. This is an outrage to the (not only literary) authority of patriarchal society.

Time going on, the place of female authorship seems to gain more and more consciousness, even though the evolution towards a social recognition, or at least acceptance, has never been linear. Thus, between the beginning and the half of eighteenth century, women writers were occupying an authorized place, as long as they positioned themselves within the rules of the contemporary society, especially concerning the gender roles and values¹⁰. As Eliza Haywood soon realized, being the acceptance of these codes needed for women to publicly express their voice, they became a primary tool for their aims. Not only, in fact, codes allowed them to write their works, but by handling much more than the society accepted, or seemed to accept, they gave a more precise ground on which to play, and more definite goals to threaten the rules themselves. The new self-consciousness as a writer, thus, makes many critics, especially in twentieth century, recognize in Haywood one of the first real and original figures of female authorship. Moreover, for what attains our discourse, her concern of the authorial role is deeply woven with that of the observer, signing the highest point of the course we are following, from the seventeenth to eighteenth century, from Cavendish to Haywood, passing through Behn. The form of authorship staged by Haywood is, indeed, of a peculiar kind, in spite of the other authors. In her writings the author assumed simultaneously the role of writer and that of observer, leading to three different ways of looking: that of the “scientific” or critical observer, that of the eye witness, and that of the spy. This is the special feature that makes her an author of “spectator texts”, in which the writer/ beholder makes a promise, that «seeing and writing, two forms of witnessing, can be united to buttress the authority of each other»¹¹. Thus, the link between the linguistic and the visual forms of knowledge and of expression are not working together in order to attain a larger amount of

⁹ Catherine Gallagher, *Oroonoko's Blakness*, in Janet Todd ed., *Aphra Behn studies*, Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 236.

¹⁰ Compare Juliett Meritt, *Beyond Spectacle: Eliza Haywood's Female Spectator*, Toronto-Buffalo-London, University of Toronto Press, 2004, p. 5.

¹¹ Ivi, p. 9.

consciousness over the world and over other people. Seeing is no longer the action of making something clear to the mind. It is an obscure process, made, most of the time, by a silent looker-on, exercising the gaze as a form of power on an unaware observer. The writer is a witness no more than he/she is a spy, over the private and public life of contemporary society.

No surprise then if the widest and the most famous magazine of the time was *The Spectator*, and its editors, Addison and Steele, were concerned, as well as Haywood, about the relation between the means of sight and the power of the gaze, as well as between the means of writing and the power of the authorship. Two relations were linking a human activity and the implicit power coming from it, that not everybody was conscious of. The silent looker, exerting his or her gaze upon individuals, science and society is, anyway, in the two authors' point of view, a male privileged spectatorship. As we will soon see, this will be the point of view Haywood started from in order to treat and destroy it, assuming the point of view of a political outsider actor, in such a way as only recently Haraway addressed.

The resulting questions related to the matters of power of this observer and of the narration of this vision will be the object of the next chapters. What now is interesting to our discourse is the way in which this sovereign subjectivity is argued and unveiled in the returning gazes of Cavendish, Behn and Haywood.

Another gaze through the Microscope

The scientific and technological revolution that took place in the seventeenth century, brought to the forefront of the scientific and literary narratives new and submicroscopic size and, especially on the level of individual experience, the interior. The visions of worlds, bodies and realities never before perceived by human senses made man understand how, on the one hand, observation serves to imagine and describe new dimensions, new worlds on other planets, but, on the other hand, to imagine and describe other worlds invisible but actually existing in our own planet, or even in our own body.

Although Robert Hooke was not the first natural philosopher to describe what he saw through the microscope, his *Micrographia* was the first and most important work, published at the height of the devastating revolution. So even though

Margaret Cavendish was not the first to set a story inside the human body, the *Description of a New World Called The Blazing World* was the first fancy setting a complex interior and articulated world not as a solely symbolic plot of psychological experience¹².

In whole her life, Margaret Cavendish wrote about thirteen books, half of which were devoted to scientific observations. From her first writing, *Poems, and Fancies* (1653), it was clear enough how she was embedded of the atomistic thought, but moreover that her scientific research was not seen as a controlling and powering knowledge, rather as a new expression and at times knowledge of the self. The topic will become more and more conscious, and the *Observation upon experimental Philosophy* as well as *The Description of a New World Called The Blazing World*, are the higher part of this course.

A comparative reading of the two plays, *Micrographia* and *Blazing World*, so dissimilar, but having much in common, allows us to examine simultaneously two characteristics of the culture of the scientific revolution: first, the new frontiers of narrative description of the performance in scientific prose, but also in political imaginary; then, the different dialects and the emergence of gender division in the perspectives applied to the construction or literary description of the material or intangible world.

The Description of a New World Called The Blazing World by Margaret Cavendish was first published in 1666 and then in 1688 as an appendix to *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, and both works were written in opposition to the work of Hooke and the methods of the Royal Society. The two works are somehow one that mirrors the other. They represent the two poles at times adjacent and parallel by which simplify and reflect on the ambitions, errors and naiveté that allow men to believe to have or to be able to acquire absolute and incontrovertible knowledge.

The novel tells the story of a young lady who during a trip remains the victim of a shipwreck and finds herself lost in a strange land in another dimension. The story is written on the model of the voyages to other worlds, very popular in that century and in the next, after the *plurality of worlds* of Fontenelle, Wilkins, Godwin

¹² Cfr. Mary Baine Campbell, *Outside in. Hooke, Cavendish and the Invisible Worlds*, in Id., *Wonder and Science. Imagining Worlds Early Modern Europe*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca-London 1999, pp. 181-218.

and a rediscovered Lucian. As expected in this literary-philosophical genre, the “new world” is a mirror for the “old” one, allowing the protagonist, and the writer herself – the two often coinciding – to reflect about the limits of her contemporary society and on the improvements it could gain and how. It is exactly what happens to the woman who, welcomed in the *Blazing World*, suddenly becomes the empress. The first difference between the two societies she can experience is quite an absolute equality between the two sexes. As a governor of an Empire, the protagonist – which somehow represents Cavendish’s desire of (not only literary) authorship – she immediately devotes her activity to better know the social, political and, moreover, cultural assets of her reign. She is particularly interested in knowing how the cultural and scientific activities of the intellectual are managed and work, and how she can improve it. What she found is a system very similar to that of “our” world, in which the sciences are divided between natural science, philosophical science, astronomy, physics, chemistry, anatomy, logic etc, leading to a conflicting rather than a shared system of knowledge. Thus, some of these are too devoted to material instruments by which knowing, some others are too confident on the mental and abstract processes of knowledge. The scientific society, however, used to practice also another way of knowledge, very popular in the period in which Cavendish lived, the esoteric model of Kabbalah. Thanks to that the Empress can encounter the biggest souls of human knowledge and decides to establish a philosophical method on herself, but with the help of some other’s mental support, being that dead or still alive. The wise souls of the blazing world don’t suggest to her neither Gassendi, or Kepler or Galilei, rather a more humble but still witty living soul, that of the Duchess of Newcastle. The author enters, in second degree, in the story showing a split of personality that she has already showed in *Sociable Letters*. Not only will the two women share their philosophical reflections, but they will also amuse themselves by constructing interior worlds, no less real than the exterior, where to set in practice their ideas and manage them. The story ends with the description of the funny life the two noble women lived together with “the most noble Sir William Cavendish”. In the *Epilogue to the Reader*, the author explains how to interpret the whole fancy, making explicit what we have already argued:

By this Poetical Description, you may perceive, that my ambition is not only to be Empress, but

Authoress of a whole World; and that the Worlds I have made, both the *Blazing*- and the other *Philosophical* World, mentioned in the first part of this description, are framed and composed of the most pure, that is, the rational parts of matter, which are the parts of my mind.¹³

The whole literary-philosophical system attempts to refute the empirical source of the observations made by Hooke, absolutely confident in the possibilities offered by optical instruments that, as indicated by the Baconian thinking, would allow the «sincere hand and faithful eye to examine and record things as they themselves appear to be»¹⁴, finally making natural science free from the products of the mind and imagination. Rejecting this kind of mechanistic system - which makes the cycle of scientific observation work like to the bloodstream through the hands to the eye, then to the memory and reason - Margaret Cavendish proposes instead an essentially rationalistic system based on speech, intended as a witty exercise of the mind or as a rational inquiry in the causes of natural effects, the most honest source of knowledge. In fact, according to the author, this genuine knowledge does not seem to arise from the consideration of a deeper and objective ability of the rational method, rather from the recognition of the individual and unavoidable role of the subject observer who is both the limit and the wealth of experimental observation.

From this diversity of opinion stems of course, a different horizon of research.

Hooke, in fact, analyzed the interior as well as she did, but the optical instruments he used deconstructed and fragmented, while Cavendish was still interested in describing its whole nature, an intangible and elusive one, but one that could still be representable.

The work of Robert Hooke, with its attention to details and his very explicit language, is a full-fledged model of the narrative in science and its popularization in Europe in the seventeenth century, whose main characteristic is the likelihood. The detail seems to respond to two seemingly different goals: on one side an epistemological need, on the other a taste for the sensationalism. Data derived from the fragment, although never entirely free from theoretical context of analysis, were the starting point for the reform of the entire epistemological system, which

¹³ Margaret Cavendish, *The Epilogue to The Reader*, in *The Description of A New World Called the Blazing World*, London, A. Maxwell, 1668, now in K. Liley (ed.), *The Blazing World Aand Other Writings*, London, Penguin, 1994, p. 224.

¹⁴ Robert Hooke, *Preface*, in id *Micrographia: or some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses. With Observations and Inquiries thereupon*, Jo. Martyn and Ja. Allestry Printers to the Royal Society, London 1665, p. 10.

increasingly sought to draw attention to the material rather than the metaphysical. In order to reach a certain popularity, the more or less scientific work and even the new scientific guidelines had to promise realistic effect as well as a visual pleasure or a literary leisure, as Hooke openly claims: «I do not only propose this kind of Experimental Philosophy as a matter of high rapture and delight of the mind, but even as a material and sensible pleasure»¹⁵. In describing minute details belonging to plants, animals or minerals, in narrating of precise experiments that could be repeated at the close of private cabinets, he was participating at the process of the “eroticization vision”, Haraway and Keller denounced, that was addressing under different purposes also different objects, such as women sexual objects¹⁶. In the Preface to *Micrographia* Hooke expressed this interest - we would now call fetishistic - especially demanding to no longer compare his book to other publications of natural philosophy, but rather to compare “his” small objects to larger and beautiful Works of Nature. The entire preface is modeled on an adventure story in which a hero (the scientist), compared to Alexander the Great, is about to commence an achievement, through the description of the tools that will allow him to push the boundaries of his senses, and will not only penetrate the already visible World, but also those who are, so far, invisible:

to promote the use of Mechanical helps for the Senses, both in the Surveying of the already visible World, and for the discovery of many others hitherto unknown, and to make us, with the great Conqueror [Alexander], to be affected that we have not yet overcome one World when there are so many others to be discovered, every considerable improvement of Telescopes and Microscopes producing new Worlds and Terra Incognita's to our view¹⁷

The trip staged by Hooke not only travels to the discovery of distant and unknown lands, but also to the penetration and appropriation items of a higher female figure, that of Nature, whose "body" is «to be traced, not only in her ordinary course, but when she seems to be put to her shifts, to make many

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 21.

¹⁶ M.B. Campbell, *Outside in. Hooke, Cavendish and the Invisible Worlds*, in Id., *Wonder and Science. Imagining Worlds Early Modern Europe*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca-London 1999, p. 184. As we have already seen, nearly three centuries later Freud would have noticed that the eroticization of view is often accompanied by a parallel eroticization of the sense of touch. It is explicitly linked, Hooke agreed, to the experience of vision through the microscope: «the roughness and the smoothness of a body is made much more sensible by the help of a microscope, then by the most tender and delicate Hand», ivi, p. 18.

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 22.

doublings and turnings, and to use some kind of art in endeavoring to avoid our discovery»¹⁸. The scientific male literature, therefore, proposes the categories that are typical of the entire social structure and culture of the time: the growing materialism of the trade, colonialism of a restored monarchy, the supremacy of the male erotic gaze on the female body.

While remaining at a similar level for what concerns proportions, as we said Margaret Cavendish wrote a work that allows her to distance herself not only from Sir Robert Hooke, but from the entire male tradition, both scientific and literary. The Duchess of Newcastle begins the description of her new world by distinguishing her work from the genre of lunar travel, very popular at the time, not only according to a strong sense of originality, which also characterizes her life and her work, but also because of what she intends to achieve with this novel. More than with the scientific treatise, is the invention, namely, of a new world, rather than the fantasy projection on it of an already existing world, such as that of the European science and culture. The moon, in fact, in fantastic literature, has always been the mirror or the utopian opposition to the real world. For years, then, it had come to coincide with the hyperbolic representation of America and, quite often, its inhabitants were described as descendants of human beings. This is precisely the mimetic character that Cavendish contrasts with her work. Unlike the utopian fiction - and its educational objectives - the *Blazing World* meets the need for something different, not necessarily better, as was in the intention of the patriarchal literature, but simply the need to represent the category of the "other", which belonged to her gender and her history. The world she created on the basis of a long professed atomistic theory, is a world that sets new boundaries, not between America and Europe, between good government and bad government, but between inner and outer, between the self and the rest.

Precisely the polarization between inside and outside generates the entire structure and the atmosphere of the novel. From the very beginning - from when the protagonist is shipwrecked in the cold polar ice and is then escorted into the blazing new world - we are led through devious and often labyrinthine passages from an external reality, recognizable and known, to one internal, unknown but bright, varied and reassuring. Throughout the novel, as well as in the scientific and

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 9.

philosophical discussion that precedes it, visionary Cavendish - who conceives nature as a single organism whose parts are living an independent life and, simultaneously, repeat the characteristics of all - never divides sharply the two domains, but rather builds continuous short circuits between the most distinctive parts. So it is for the description of the Emperor's palace, which occupies the innermost part of the strange new world of labyrinthine topography. In turn the inner room of the inner palace - no coincidence that it's the emperor's bedroom -, replicates the dazzling night sky that gives name to the whole wonderful world: «The walls whereof were of jet, and the floor of black marble; the roof was of mother of pearl, where the moon and blazing stars were represented by white diamonds, and his bed was made of diamonds and carbuncles»¹⁹. The same rotation of external and internal is repeated at the level of the individual, for example, when the soul is visited by the author herself, the Duchess of Newcastle, or when the souls of both move in the body of the Duke of Newcastle, intertwining a genuine platonic *menage a trois*.

These are the mental representations which Margaret Cavendish will make us used to, amusing in complicating them. But they are still part of her philosophical ideas that bind outside organs with internal perceptual capacities²⁰.

The fantasy characterizing the whole novel doesn't exclude, in any way, an ironic gaze on her contemporary society. That is why she presents an initial organization of intellectuals, the Empress herself promoted in the form of the Royal Society:

The Bear-men were to be her Experimental Philosophers, the Bird-men her Astronomers, the Fly-wormers and Fish-men her Natural Philosophers, the Ape-men her Chymists, the Satyrs her Galenick Physicians, the Fox-men her Politicians, the Spider- and Lice-men her Mathematicians, the Jackdaw- Magpie- and Parrot-men her Orators and Logicians, the Gyants her Architects²¹

This organization is not very productive for the development of knowledge, because the fragmentation of science and the subjectivism disguised as

¹⁹ Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World and Other Writing*, cit., p. 132.

²⁰ «The perception of Sight, when awake, is made on the outside of the Eye, but in sleep on the inside; and as for some sorts of Thought or Conception [...] they are to my apprehension made in the inner part of the head [...] for there are Perception of interior parts, as well as of exterior», Margaret Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, ed. by Eileen O'Neill, Cambridge University Press, New York 2001, p. 187.

²¹ Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World and Other Writing*, cit., p. 140.

empiricism produce nothing but constant clashes and disagreements between the various scientists, but also because of the constant codification of the process of scientific observation in order to gain the perfect objectivity. Cavendish as well as the other two writers doesn't believe in the value of this principle, since, in her opinion, the subjective influence of the observer can't be avoided. That is why she said, about microscopists: «They could as yet by no means contrive such glasses, by the help of which they could spy out a vacuum, with all its dimensions, nor immaterial substances, non-beings, and mixed beings, or such as are between something and nothing»²².

The constant upheaval between inner and outer reality does not stop there to produce implications whose modernity continually surprises. Possibly the most revealing is the complex explosion of boundaries staged by Cavendish, which is carried out when the identity of the author meets that of the heroine, in order to reflect and write together about their own scientific and political observation from two different points of view. It is, thus, not a case of simple mirroring or identification with one's alter ego in the diegetic territory, but they are two distinct moments of meeting and separation. As we have already seen, the author presents herself as a genuine representative of rationalism and begins a journey through alternative methods of investigation in search of the more effective for the blazing world and the real.

If the desire of knowledge is often connected to the desire of possessing, governing or dominating the world known, *the blazing World*, at the contrary is the demonstration of what a female scientist would gain: the dominion of a world, but of an interior world. It is precisely what the Duchess before and the Empress later aspire to do: to well know and well govern themselves. Knowledge is, in their/her opinion, the perfect management of own knowledge, perception, conviction, being the human "body" constituted like the body of a society, needing science, religion and politics. Thus the two women start to build up worlds of their own, testing which of the systems proposed by the most respectable political and philosophical observations best fitted. The first almost successful attempt, after the model of the ancients from Thales to Aristotle, will try to build a world from the immaterial

²² Ivi, p. 145. Concepts such as non-beings, mixed-beings are concepts that anticipate at least three hundred years the themes of cultural studies, particularly gender and queer studies in all their broader aspects, but also cyborg studies by Shirley Jackson. It is a broad topic that does not have space here to deal with but that would represent insights for the future development of research.

Cartesian:

But when she had made the Aethernal Globules, and set them a moving by a strong and lively imagination, her mind became so dizzy with their extraordinary swift turning around, that it almost put her into a swoon; for her thoughts, by their constant tottering, did so stagger, as if they had all been drunk: wherefore she dissolved that World, and began to make another²³

Then proceeding in an attempt according to the doctrine of Hobbes:

But when all parts of this Imaginary World came to press and drive each other, they seemed like a company of Wolves that worry Sheep, or like so many Dogs that hunt after Hares; and when she found a reaction equal to those pressures, her mind was so squeezed together, that her thoughts could neither move forward nor backward, which caused such a horrible pain in her head, that although she had dissolved that World, yet she could not, without much difficulty, settle her mind, and free it from that pain which those pressures and reactions had caused in it.²⁴

Finally, since no model seems to work well for her cause, she eventually decided to create a world of “her own invention”:

And this world was composed of sensitive and rational self-moving Matter; indeed, it was composed only of the rational, which is the subtlest and purest degree of Matter; for as the sensitive did move and act both to the perception and consistency of the body, so this degree of matter at the same point of time (for though the degrees are mixt, yet the several parts may move several ways at one time) did move to the Creation of the Imaginary World; which World after it was made, appear'd so curious and full of variety, so well order'd and wisely govern'd, that it cannot possibly be expressed by words, nor the delight and pleasure which the Duchess took in making this world of her own²⁵

In the essay *Embracing the Absolute* Catherine Gallagher interprets this complex fragmentation of reality and identity, and the structure of the inner world as a manifestation of the desire of the Duchess to be the absolute monarch of herself - both the real and the literary self - but also as the image of an infinite regression. The self is therefore seen as the sovereign of a microcosm that is itself the representation of a single part of this multiple self. So other microcosms are needed, which will be controlled by “absolutist” author. That is why Gallagher talks

²³ Ivi, p. 187.

²⁴ Ivi, p. 188.

²⁵ Ibidem.

about the «*Mis en abyme* of the seventeenth century»²⁶.

The world, or better the worlds, constructed by the narration of Cavendish are so complex as to be once again a challenge to the impotence perspective of (male) experimental science in front of the multiplicity of plans of the *invisibilia*. Not only will the microscopists be subjected to the criticism of the Duchess, but also the similar category of astronomers and, moreover, their instruments will not be spared from her irony and that of her protagonist.

To avoid hereafter tedious disputes, and have the truth of the Phenomena's of Celestial bodies more exactly known, commanded the Bear-men, which were her Experimental Philosophers, to observe them through such Instruments as called Telescopes, which they did according to her Majesties Command; but these Telescopes caused more differences and divisions amongst them, the ever they had before.²⁷

Despite her clear desire to become a celestial object²⁸, the Empress's comments on Astronomers are severe and negative enough to push her to wish that all the telescopes of the empire be destroyed. The reason for this aversion comes from the disappointment in the conduct of these scientists, which are unable to reach an agreement on the most relevant questions put to them, for example if the twinkling stars in the firmament are single stars that rise and rapidly decline, or whether the three separate stars could be observed with a favorable prospect:

After they had thus argued, the Empress began to grow angry at their Telescopes, that they could give no better Intelligence; for she said, no I do plainly perceive, that your Glasses are false Informers, and instead of discovering the Truth, delude your senses; Wherefore I Command you to break them, and let the Bird-men trust only to their natural eyes, and examine Celestial objects by the motion of their own sense and reason²⁹

²⁶ C. Gallagher, *Embracing the Absolute: The Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England*, «Genders» 1 (1998), pp. 24-39.

²⁷ Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World and Other Writing*, cit., p. 140.

²⁸ This aspiration is made clear from the picture that Cavendish paints on the clothing of the Empress, and its symbolism, while questioning virtuosos of the kingdom (of course doubles the Royal Society): «On her head she wore a cap of pearl, and a half-moon of diamonds just before it; on the top of her crown came spreading over a broad carbuncle, cut in the form of the sun; her coat was of pearl, mixed with blue diamonds, and fringed with red ones; her buskins and sandals were made of green diamonds: in her left hand she held a buckler, to signify the defense of her dominions; which buckler was made of that sort of diamonds as has several colours; and being cut and made in form of an arch, showed like a rainbow; in her right hand she carried a spear made of white diamond, cut like the tail of a blazing star, which signified that she was ready to assault those that proved her enemies», Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World and Other Writing*, cit., p. 133.

²⁹ Ivi, p. 141

The confusion attributed to these men of science, unable to effectively describe a phenomenon, is explained, according to the philosophy of Cavendish, with the myopia of the natural philosophers who do not realize that an image is not an object but an event and, therefore, by its nature unstable. Or better, seems to suggest Cavendish, they probably do realize, but they are so fully embedded by the pleasure to see for itself that they don't want to renounce their instruments anymore, even though realizing their falsehood:

The Bear-men being exceedingly troubled at her Majesties displeasure concerning their Telescopes, kneel'd down, and in the humblest manner petitioned that they might not be broken; for, said they, we take more delight in Artificial delusions, then in natural truths. Besides, we shall want employments for our senses, and subjects for arguments; for were there nothing but truth, and no falsehood, there would be no occasion for to dispute³⁰

Our extraordinary thinker realizes that this event does not attend once and for all, and that the eye that is watching is not an "absolute eye." In fact, the beholder is a particular individual, who not only works with his or her own eyes, but with the deepest part of his or her mind.

The scientists try to remedy the disappointment of the Empress by offering her different kinds of "artificial lenses" including also different types of microscopes. These tools are used to stage performances of lice and other insects, enlarged so much as to reach the size of elephants. These images are taken directly from Hooke's *Micrographia*. Of course the Empress dislikes these "distorted images", and at the sight of the huge flea does not think of anything but the poor beggars who, while having nothing to eat, have to sustain the useless parasites of their own flesh and their blood. Once again, therefore, the author opposes the deathly image of the scientist with the vivid images of the individual.

Margaret Cavendish takes, therefore, the distance from the world of new scientists, like Hooke, who operate within the confines of his laboratory, on dead natural objects, by means that seem to guarantee the objectivity of the observations and the certainty of the result. If, according to their opinion, microscopic nature is an unknown territory to be won for subsequent fragmentation, to be dominated from a point of view superior in proportion,

³⁰ Ivi, p. 142

technology and intellect, and if nature in general is a body to be penetrated into its individual parts, then according to Cavendish new methods of experimental philosophy have already failed in their premises. Individuals “shooting” through special optical instruments are likely to lose sight of the wider horizon which not only the observed object but the same observer belong to. Precisely the separation between observer and observed object and the alleged transparency of the medium of vision are other critical points on which our writer expresses opinions that are, once again, of an extraordinary modernity:

When I say that the Exterior Object is the Agent, and the Sentient Body the Patient [...] I retain only those words, because they are used in Schools; But as for their Actions, I am quite of a contrary Opinion, that the sentient body is the principal Agent, and the external Body the Patient; for the motions of the sentient in act of perception, do figure out or imitate the motions of the object, so that the object is but a Copy that is [...] imitated by the sentient, which is the chiefly Agent in all transforming and perceptive actions.³¹

Margaret Cavendish was passionate about the new horizon offered by new optical devices, as well as Hooke was. However, the character of the two enthusiastic positions were different: the latter looking at these new horizons like at space of self-affirmation and growing power, the former as an occasion to recognize and to free all microcosms of her own identity³².

Improper spectator

Aphra Behn was an uncomfortable character in the culture and politics of her age for her shameless display of gender overturning, played on the stages of social rules by incorporating male codes and demonstrating their own arbitrariness

³¹ Ivi, p. 18.

³² It is amazing to notice how this propose for a female poetics seems to match with the women's writing manifesto of Hélène Cixous and with her reflections about women hidden richness and aesthetic: «I have been amazed more than once by a description a woman gave me of a world all her own which she had been secretly haunting since early childhood. A world of searching, the elaboration of a knowledge, on the basis of a systematic experimentation with the bodily functions, a passionate and precise interrogation of her erotogeneity. This practice, extraordinarily rich and inventive, in particular as concerns masturbation, is prolonged or accompanied by a production of forms, a veritable aesthetic activity, each stage of rapture inscribing a resonant vision, a composition, something beautiful. Beauty will no longer be forbidden. I wished that that woman would write and proclaim this unique empire so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns», Hélène Cixous, “Le Rire de la Meduse”, in «L'Arc» 45 (1975), pp. 39-54, trans. Keith Cohen, Paula Cohen, “The Laugh of the Medusa”, in «Signs» vol. 1 (1976), pp. 875-893, p. 876

and reversibility. As a spy and a professional play-writer she immediately appeared as a shattered identity challenging the gender division both in social and in cultural affairs. She decided not by accident to fight this battle on the ground of vision, as showed in the prologue of her first play:

Women those charming Victors, in whose Eyes
Lie all their Arts, and their Artilleries,
Not being contended with the Wounds they made
Would by new Stratagems our Lives invade³³

Precisely this way of playing on the gender roles not denying, but rather using them in a subversive way, scaring the same ones who invented the codes, brings us back to the question of Masquerade, which we have already met as a question of both female image and female spectatorship in the films studies debate. Tracing the question back to the historical situation in which Behn wrote, and using the interpretation Heate made of the Masquerade as a disruptive entering in patriarchal representation³⁴, Salzman somehow reassures feminist debate on the disturbing rather than accepting use of the medium, showing how Behn's dramatic plays, but not only those, are full of precisely constructed transpositions of voices, of gazes, of rules between the two sexes which are no more so definable³⁵.

The transposition of voices is played through her own activity as a writer, an activity usually inscribed in male wit or in indecent women. In introducing herself in this adverse world, or we had better say market-place, Behn decides to make a mimicry of the masculine world while metamorphosing it in a feminine perspective. Thus many of her poems, such as those collected in *Poems on Several Occasions*, put on stage a relation seducer/seduced turned upside down within the gender field, making her female characters speaking in male terms, terms of desiring, conquering, invasive drives like in *The Reflection: A Song*:

³³ Aphra Behn, *The Forc'd Marriage*, in Montague Summers, ed. *The Works of Aphra Behn*, London, William Heineman 1915, vol. 3, p. 285.

³⁴ Stephen Heat, "Joan Riviere and the Masquerade", in Victor Burgin, James Donald, Cora Kaplan (ed.), *Formation of Fantasy*, London and New York, Methuen, 1986, p. 49: «She puts on a show of the femininity they demand, but inappropriately, keeping her distance, and returns masculinity to them as equally unreal, another act, a charade power».

³⁵ Paul Salzman, *Poetry and Masquerade*, in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, cit. pp. 109-129.

Alas how long in vain you strove
My coldness to divert!
How long besieg'd it round with Love
Before you won the Hearth.
What Arts you us'd what Presents made,
What sings, what Letters writ:
And left no Charm that sou'd invade,
Or with your Eyes or Wit.³⁶

Since the seducer is no more the man but the woman, Behn produces poems articulating a negotiation between male and female desire. Woman is no more, or not only, an exclusively passive object of this desire, but also an active temptress, turning back the male gaze. This is how her gaze addresses the body of a young boy:

It was too much, ye Gods, to see and hear;
Receiving wounds both from the eye and ear:
....

I saw the Softness that compos'd
While your attention heighten'd every grace:
Your mouth all full of sweetness and content,
And your fine killing eyes of languishment:
Your bosom now and then a sigh wou'd move,
(For Music has the same effects with Love)
Your body easy and all tempting lay,
Inspiring wishes which the eyes betray,
In all that have the fate to glance that way:
A careless and a lovely negligence,
Did a new charm to every limb dispense³⁷

More than this, what is astonishing is the way in which her reversal of gender categories affects and also strikes the political matters. The transposing of roles Behn acted, indeed, wasn't realized only in masquerade and diverse sorts of plays, but much more in the poems she dedicated to the different monarchs succeeding once during her life, with a particular regard to the Queens. Even in different occasions, in fact, Behn always decided to focus her attention on the female monarch in two different but contemporary manners: addressing her official role and presence, that of sovereignty, and to her corporeal and, mostly, female body. Sovereignty and femininity are thus displayed in the Pindaric poem written on occasion of the death of Charles II, but addressed to Queen Catherine:

³⁶ Aphra Behn, *The Reflection: A Song*, in id., *The Works of Aphra Behn*, cit., p. 75.

³⁷ Aphra Behn, *To Lysander at the Music-Meeting*, in id., *The Works of Aphra Behn*, cit., p. 94.

Your *Valu'd* Loss a *Noysey Grief* disdain'd
Fixt you *heart*, no outward sign remain'd;
Though the *soft Woman* bow'd and dy'd within;
Without, *Majestock Grace* maintain'd the *Queen*³⁸

Once the monarch changed, the gender interest of Behn didn't change and in occasion of the coronation of James II, the poet turns the attention again from the King to his consort, imagined as a Muse, fully seducing and inspiring:

Bless the *soft Muse* that cou'd express
Beauty and *Majesty* in such a dress,
As all the World *Adoring* shall confess!
Oh *fond seducer* of my *Noble part*,
Thou soft insinuating *Muse*³⁹

In spite of the cultural trend dividing the body and the mind, the sovereignty embodied by women is at once symbolic and carnal, reconciling, in a troubled moment, different multitudes.

From masquerade to sovereignty womanliness is always challenging men roles and authority. Indeed, her political involvement was not restrained to the poems we have talked about, but it is more spread and deep, for, as Al Coppola claims, her purpose was that of provoking her audience – otherwise uncritical – on several fronts, from the aesthetic to the scientific, from the political to the most material culture.

Probably the most famous example of a play staging all these issues under the most critical aspect is one of the late work by Aphra Behn, *The Emperor of The Moon*, written in 1684, but staged only three years later, during which many significant changes had taken place affecting the transmission of the text. The plot is about a solitary scholar, Doctor Baliardo, passionate about astronomy and collector of the most recent optical devices, especially telescopes as big as he can buy. His passion for his studies, mostly devoted to the Moon, makes him neglect the world surrounding him, especially the two young ladies, his daughter and his niece, Elaria and Bellamante, who he should be taking care of. The two ladies, desperate to realize their amorous projects, architect together with Scaramouch,

³⁸ Ivi, p. 198.

³⁹ Ivi, p. 201.

the servant of Doctor Baliardo, and their lovers, Cinthio and Charmante, a true Masquerade – actually more than one – to convince Baliardo that the two guys are princes from the Moon, and to let them marry the two young ladies. The play is a typical comedy inspired by the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte*, in which the action is carried on by a sequence of betrayal leading to a happy ending in which the deception is revealed and harmony is established.

As Aphra Behn herself claims in the dedication to Lord Marques Of Worcester, the play was inspired by a previous work played in Paris by Giuseppe Domenico Biancolelli first and Evaristo Gherardi later, between 1660 and 1688. It was *Harlequin roi dans la Lune*, a play that even Goldoni talked about in his *Memories* and worked on. It was one of the typical adventures of Harlequin, who was in love with Colombine, and tried several tricks and transvestitism, such as that of the Emperor of the Moon. This last character creates a place, like always in this genre, to criticize the way of life and habits of the contemporaries.

In readapting the sketch of the comedy Behn extends and defines the actions, paying particular attention to the question of the gaze, creating an illuminated critique of the misplaced spectatorship and the enthusiastic credulity of the now born society of spectacle, intended in a broad sense. Indeed, as Coppola suggests in his study on the play⁴⁰, the plain project of Behn can be fully understood only by considering the precise historical moment in which it was written and staged.

It was a very difficult political moment for England, just exiting the Civil War, resetting the political power now shared between the restored sovereign and the parliament, trying to make peaceful contacts between Anglican and Catholic movements. In particular the years between 1678 and 1685 were crossed by very striking political events, which affected social assets for many years to come. In 1678, the group of Titus Oates leaded a conspiracy arguing that a group of Roman Catholic subversives would try to assassinate King Charles II. The web invented and woven by Oates lasted for three years bringing out dangerous phobia against catholic people. Eventually, once discovered the plot, Oates was arrested for perjury. The political climate didn't calm down, and the Whigs plotted a new mischief between 1681 and 1682, trying to exclude James II from the throne

⁴⁰ Al Coppola, "Retraining the Virtuoso's Gaze: Behn's Emperor of the Moon, The Royal Society, and the Spectacles of Science and Politics", in «Eighteenth-Century Studies» 41 (2008), pp. 481-506.

because of his catholic faith. Charles II opposed the complot known as The Exclusion Crisis. Finally in 1685, one year later Behn had written *The Emperor of the Moon*, Charles II died and James II accessed the throne.

This historical setting full of plot and conspiracy, in which adverse political powers tried to resist the opposite by manipulating the thrust of the people from one side to another, worried Behn, whose political involvement was well known, particularly for what concerns the recent ways of conducting political affairs.

Thus the *Emperor of the Moon* was created as an education for the audience, to wake up their trustworthiness. She intended to unveiling the spectacular character politics was adopting, not only in conspiracy but, from Charles II on, in the public conducting of the court work, more and more characterized by royal ceremonies and public display of power and harmony, in such a way that we could today see as a Hegemonic apparatus. The play is the result of an interrogation on improper spectatorship not only for what concerns the political field but a much broader question on spectatorship, dealing with enthusiasm in optical devises and, accordingly, with vision; with the ludicrous or dishonest rather than scientific background vision; and with the manipulation of a passive audience.

The enthusiasm involved in the diffusion of optical devices together with the raising of Natural Philosophy, gradually changed science from an exclusive art to a popular entertainment. Even an institution like the Royal Society, in order to amplify the number of its member in a period of crisis, promoted a sequence of works not addressed to the same circle of the society, rather to a wider circle of “curious” who in that period organized physical cabinets in private houses or public space. Even though this project was intended, or at least was pretended, to discipline the correct use of devices and the faithful reproduction of experiment, it ended up, and it was the strongest fear of many scholars of the time, producing a “spectacular science” with no or poor development in knowledge.

This was exactly one of the primary points of Behn’s worry against the indiscriminate popularization especially of optics in people who didn’t have any skill to well understand what they were doing or assisting on, producing false faith and wrong visions. This is precisely what is embodied in the main character of *The Emperor*, who is so much devoted to the observation of the moon as to become victim of his own convictions and, thus, manipulable in the most unbelievable fantasies.

At the beginning of the play, indeed, the doctor is showed as a “lunatic” not to say a maniac:

Scar. You must know, Madam, your Father (my Master, the Doctor) is a little whimsical, romantick, or Don-Quicksottish, or so.

Ela. Or rather mad.

Scar. That were uncivil to be supposed by me; but lunatic we may call him, without breaking the Decorum of good Manners; for he is always travelling to the Moon.

Ela. And so religiously believes there is a World there, that he Discourses as gravely of the People, their Government, Institutions, Laws, Manners, Religion, and Constitution, as if he had been bred a *Machiavel* there.

Scar. How came he thus infected first?

Ela. With reading foolish Books, *Lucian's Dialogue of the Lofty Traveller*, who flew up to the Moon, and thence to Heaven; an heroick Business, call'd *The Man in the Moon*, if you'll believe a *Spaniard*, who was carried thither, upon an Engine drawn by wild Geese; with another Philosophical Piece, *A Discourse of the World in the Moon*; with a thousand other ridiculous Volumes, too hard to name.⁴¹

Thus not only the Doctor is showed as a mad man or a visionary, believing in stories he himself created, adapting the social structures of his world to those of another supposedly better, but making him the object of a not too much respectful mirth. This is why the company will be able to convince him of the most incredible things, such as the visit of aliens from the moon and their interest in marrying the two young ladies. Primarily responsible for this growing credulity is a particular genre of literature very spread at the time, which Elaria shows to be accustomed to. This very popular literature begins with the work of Lucian *Icaromenippus*, *The Man in the Moon*, and lead to more recent works such as *The Man in the Moon*, by Francis Godwin and, moreover, *The Discovery of A World in The Moone*, first published in London in 1638, and some other less philosophical but also well known literary fancies such as *A Discourse of The World in The Moon*, by Cyrano de Bergerac, not to mention the *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686) by Fontenelle, that Behn will translate the following year. Offspring of the speculations brought about the believing in sight and its microscopic and telescopic media, the literature on *new worlds* penetrated the imagination of the seventeenth century and the next, when the belief was widespread that the Earth and the Universe known so far were only a small portion of a reality soon revealed. Time and space exploded in front of the new fields of vision offered by the microscope and the telescope, and the plurality of worlds was a doctrine increasingly discussed

⁴¹ Aphra Behn, *The Emperor of The Moon*, in id *The Works of Aphra Behn*, cit., p. 399.

between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. In Behn's opinion, this is that kind of popular literature that, being woven of fantasies rather than scientific or philosophical arguments, makes people believe in extra-terrestrial worlds more than in the one they live in, losing any contact with reality. The irony Behn addressed to the matter is clearer and clearer, this time through the voice of Mopsophil, Governess to the young Ladies:

Mop. Run, run, *Scaramouch*, my Master's conjuring for you like mad below, he calls up all his little Devils with horrid Names, his Microscope, his Horoscope, his Telescope, and all his Scopes.⁴²

When the "credulous Master" enters the second scene the audience is ready to see clumsy rather than a self-confident scholar. Indeed;

Enter Doctor, with all manner of Mathematical Instruments hanging at his Girdle; Scaramouch bearing a Telescope twenty (or more) Foot long.

[...]

Doct.: Set down the Telescope.—Let me see, what Hour is it?

Scar.: About six a Clock, Sir.

Doct.: Then 'tis about the Hour that the great Monarch of the Upper World enters into his Closet; Mount, mount the Telescope.

Scar. What to do, Sir?

Doct. I understand, at certain moments critical, one may be snatch'd of such a mighty consequence, to let the Sight into the Secret Closet.⁴³

The notation on the size of the telescope is not an accident. It responded to a fashion at the time to own great telescopes, mostly produced in Italy, becoming in such a way a status symbol. Since Baliardo enters the scene for the very first time it is immediately clear how his main interest isn't in scientific observations, rather in the research, or better peeping, of titillating secrets dealing with sexual pleasure and political implication. That is why young men are architecting a way to attract the doctor's trust, or Behn would better say to manipulate it, showing him a sexy image to peer, precisely facing the audience, thus directly addressed, with the ludicrous and misogynous character of his gaze. Being a man of science, not made for mortal women, he will be allowed to "try his purity" about the world of the Moon and, moreover, the people populating it, by seeing them as nobody before:

⁴² Ivi, p. 400.

⁴³ Ivi, p. 402.

Char. The most beautiful of all the Sons and Daughters of the Universe: Fancy, Imagination is not half so charming

[...]

Doct. Ay, Sir, what Virtues or what Merits can accomplish me for that great Honour?

Char. An absolute abstinence from carnal thought, devout and pure of Spirit; free from Sin.

[...]

Char. Kneel then, and try your strength of Virtue. Sir,—Keep your Eye fix'd and open.

[*He looks in the Telescope. While he is looking, Charmante goes to the Door to Scaramouch, who waited on purpose without, and takes a Glass with a Picture of a Nymph on it, and a Light behind it; that as he brings it, it shews to the Audience. Goes to the end of the Telescope.*]

—Can you discern, Sir?

Doct. Methinks, I see a kind of glorious Cloud drawn up—and now, 'tis gone again.

Char. Saw you no Fuger?

Doct. None.

Char. Then make a short Prayer to *Alikin*, the Spirit of the East; shake off all earthly Thoughts, and look again.

[*He prays. Charmante puts the Glass into the Mouth of the Telescope.*]

Doct.—Astonish'd, ravish'd with Delight, I see a Beauty young and Angel-like, leaning upon a Cloud.

Char. Seems she on a Bed? Then she's reposing, and you must not gaze.

Doct. Now a Cloud veils her from me.

Char. She saw you peeping then, and drew the Curtain of the Air between.⁴⁴

In this single scene Behn achieves a double end: on one side she clearly shows how what is seen through such instruments as the telescope is not always the pure reality, but it depends on how the instrument is used, and also why, and by whom. Making Charmante more aware of the technology and of its modifiability, so that the telescope is transformed into a magic lantern, makes him believe an image to be reality. On the other hand much irony is devoted in constantly showing the voyeuristic pleasure leading the doctor gaze, of which he is the only unconscious. So if Charmante claims that the only one who may look deeply is the one without sin, the illuminated beholder, purged from vice, it is immediately clear how only the vice is pushing him as Charmante first suggests - «Seems she on a Bed? Then she's reposing, and you must not gaze»⁴⁵ - and then clearly declares – «She saw you peeping then, and drew the Curtain of the Air between»⁴⁶. The disembodied vision all philosophers and scientists were preaching is thus reduced

⁴⁴ Ivi, pp. 404-405.

⁴⁵ Ivi, p. 405.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

by Behn's irony in screen, justifying vision otherwise forbidden. However, this maniacal pleasure in seeing could become something really dangerous if it reduces all the pleasure a man can enjoy in the laboratories, scientific or not.

Baliardo, closed in his room alone with his long telescope, interested only in what it can see, and in nothing else perceivable by other senses, so far to be interested more in the image of a nymph on the moon than in a "mortal woman", is full of all the sexual deviations linked to vision that only the twentieth century reflection would bring to light. It wouldn't seem too risky to bring this subject back to those Laura Mulvey argued in the visual pleasure of Hitchcock cinema. The character of the doctor is, in fact, somehow reliable to that of Jeffreys in *Rear Window*, equally affected of a pushed voyeurism, being both on the right way to become "peeping toms", as the two servants seem to say, just with a distance of three hundred years. Even the same misogyny is acting on both stages:

Doct. Let not thy female Ignorance profane the highest Mysteries of natural Philosophy: To Fools it seems Inchantment—but I've a Sense can reach it—sit and expect the Event.—Hark, I am amaz'd, but must conceal my Wonder, that Joy of Fools—and appear wise in Gravity.

Which is particularly ironic since all the audience is looking at him as a profane ignorant being constantly manipulated by women, through his own means.⁴⁷

The most dangerous way in which vision can be used for is in spying or influencing the political life of a nation. Behn, having lived through the years of the The Popish Plot and of The Exclusion Crisis, and living now the spectacle mediation in Charles II reign, is fully aware of the risk one can encounter. Thus her laugh on the doctor reveals a little bitter in unveiling dark business:

Doct. Then 'tis about the Hour that the great Monarch of the Upper World enters into his Closet; Mount, mount the Telescope.

Scar. What to do, Sir?

Doct. I understand, at certain moments critical, one may be snatch'd of such a mighty consequence, to let the Sight into the Secret Closet.

Scar. How, Sir, peep into the King's Closet! under favour, Sir, that will be something uncivil.

Doct. Uncivil! it were flat Treason if it should be known; but thus unseen, and as wise Politicians shou'd, I take survey of all: This is the Statesman's Peeping-hole, thorow which he steals the Secrets of his King, and seems to wink at distance.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 453.

⁴⁸ Ivi, p. 402.

This passage is evidently full of the political awareness of Aphra Behn, who is not only showing an idiot character embedded by false beliefs, manipulable and dishonest, but, moreover, he has become a means for those who want to destabilize a state through the new media created for science. These media divorced from their original context become means of political control. The Doctor has till now interiorized the scopophilic activity which is now the clear example of that implicit observer that, staying hidden behind his telescope, presumes to be in a controlling position. To the contrary, Behn's play, as well as Hitchcock's film, demonstrates how dangerous the gaze can be for the subject itself. The gaze can always come back, or at least be discovered and in turn displayed, becoming the object of many different gazes.

As Bergson has observed we look from a single point of view but we are looked-at from several points of view. Thus, the credulous doctor in the last scene – not by chance the scene of a masquerade where everyone is wearing a mask but the Beholder – is looked at by all the possible points of view: that of the two young ladies, using his own means for liberating from their captivity; the two young men, facing the man with all his credulity; even the viceroy and the servants are judging him. The privacy of individual observer has been metamorphosed into the observed spectator. He can't do anything else but accept his idiocy and his defeat:

Doct. Are not you then the Emperor of the Moon? And you the Prince of *Thunderland*?
Cin. There's no such Person, Sir. These Stories are the Fantoms of mad Brains, To puzzle Fools withal—the Wise laugh at 'em— Come, Sir, you shall no longer be impos'd upon.

Doct. No Emperor of the Moon, and no Moon World!

Char. Ridiculous Inventions. If we 'ad not lov'd you you'ad been still impos'd on; You had brought a Scandal on your learned Name, And all succeeding Ages had despis'd it.

[...]

Doct. Burn all my Books and let my study blaze, Burn all to Ashes, and be sure the Wind Scatter the vile contagious monstrous Lyes. —Most Noble Youths—you've honour'd me with your Alliance, and you, and all your Friends, Assistances in this glorious Miracle, I invite to Night to revel with me.—Come all and see my happy Recantation of all the Follies, Fables have inspir'd till now. Be pleasant to repeat your Story, to tell me by what kind degrees you cozen'd me. I see there's nothing in Philosophy—⁴⁹

The phantoms of folly made people laugh, and Behn's audience is now laughing. But after this “laughing cure”, the spectators must be aware and identify

⁴⁹ Ivi, p. 461.

themselves with the same character they were most distant from during all the play. The ridiculous inventions have been built up to make him and them aware of the risks of the new spectacle society, mostly controlled by the unseen politics, both Whigs and the court, trying to make people believe in the images they construct in order to reach power. But as Baliardo has been reeducated so the audience looking through her play can challenge its own passivity.

Outsider gaze

After Cavendish, who tried to manage vision on the same field of the male gaze even though showing its unconscious subjectivity, and Behn, who denounced the ludicrous character of this gaze, Eliza Haywood wrote her plays in order to subvert the male model of vision and to reappropriate a female point of view. Female authorship, first considered, with Cavendish, as harmless madness, and then, with Behn, uncomfortable expression of otherness, becomes with Haywood a threatening denounce to male authority as a whole, but such a popular one to be hardly opposed.

Eliza (Flower) Haywood was represented as ambiguous to her contemporaries, divided between the coquette and social critics, that is between a performing character and an “authorial persona”, and she still represents a double problem nowadays. She began her work as self-standing woman as an actress, eventually devoting her work to editing and writing. She wrote her first novel, *Love in Excess*, in 1715, it was the first of a long series of amatory fiction, leading to a spread account on her as essentially an amorous stories writer. Only in the twentieth century have literary and feminist critics discovered a more social implication in her writings than priorly expected, even though some critiques still position her as a love stories teller⁵⁰. The largest part of critics agree nowadays in attributing her a role as a deep observer of her contemporary society even overturning the traditional division of her work in three phases: an amatory phase – characterized

⁵⁰ See for example Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992; William Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998; John Richetti, *Popular Fiction before Richardson: Narrative Patterns, 1700-1739*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992; quite all agree to focus on the amatory nature or her fiction, besides only the last part of her life and work.

by titillating works, during the first years of 1720s –, a political phase – focusing on questions of social rights, mostly women rights, about 1730 – and a domestic fictions phase – in which a wiser Haywood makes different recommendation to young ladies and sees marriage as a good chance for self expression, between 1740-1750⁵¹. However, many critics, such as Marta Kvande, suggest how these phases are really reductive if considering how, in one way or another, all her works are embedded in social and political concerns. In her work on the “outsider narrator”, Kvande notes that two main points are made about her amatory fiction: the self presentation of the narrator (he or she) as a political figure, and the display the strict influence of the private sphere on the public one, one affecting the other in reason of morals, corruption, self interest and economic as well as sex business. In introducing herself (not being seen) within the private place in which social destiny is discussed and managed no less then in the houses of the parliament, Haywood discovered and denounced the ambiguous and immoral character of politics in her age, a very difficult one and particularly affecting the Tory party she belonged to as well as Behn before her.

In fact, in 1715, exactly the year in which Haywood started her work, after the House of Hannover gained the throne, the Jacobian rebellion, already existing since 1688, exploded in the First Jacobite Rebellion. After this attempt in favor of Stuart house, the Tories lose much of their power by getting into an opposition role. Between 1720 and 1721, a speculation scandal known as the South Sea Scandal implied Robert Walpole First Lord of the Treasury, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons, probably the most powerful man of the age, member of the Whig party. Accused to have avoided the economic disaster dealing with the bankruptcy of the South Sea Company, he was addressed of a conspiracy by a coalition of both Tories and disempowered Whigs.

Both the real facts and the general humor of the age were reported by Haywood, who depicted the corruption style and the conspiracy ways of managing politics during those years. Thus in *Memoirs of a Certain Island*, she explicitly makes references to the South Sea Company, and in *Invisible Spy* shows how private houses, coffee houses and the parliament houses, were all places of

⁵¹ This vision appears partial if we consider the novel we are starting to analyze, *The Invisible Spy*, which was written in 1755 and presents marriage under different aspects, but never as a good choice.

private and public dominion. The point of view she assumes is not merged with that of the Tory's party, she somehow belonged to, for if they occupied by that time a role of opposition it was anyway an opposition ruled on the same ground of the opponents, and by the same means of lies, conspiracy and cheat. This, Haywood denounces, is the male way to look at politics in a personal way. Women, on the contrary look at it from the point of view of the outsider, of course because they are not allowed to do any other way. By the way, even this same role assigned to them by men can be a useful means and a good point of view to act politically through literature. A really modern argument, especially considered by a cultural studies point of view, which seems very fitting especially with the accounts of feminist visual culture we have examined, such as the reflections made by Donna Haraway, Evelyn Fox Keller and Hel ne Cixous.

If the *Memoirs of a Certain Island*⁵² and *The Court of Caramania*⁵³, because of the utopian genre Haywood choose, represent a distant discussion of a whole political and social asset, and the role of the outsider is peculiarly narrative, another work, one of the last she wrote, represents a closer framing, addressing specific political matter, public and private, where the role of outsider merges both the writer and the observer in a double challenge, which is peculiar in Haywood's literature: this is *The invisible Spy*⁵⁴.

The novel was published under the pseudonym of Exploralibus, in 1755, just a year before Haywood's death, and, just because of this late period it is usually linked to the "domestic phase", in which a much wiser Haywood, according to some critics, kept her writings far from the sexual scenes she was once used to and adopted a "moral" behavior. This depiction is however reductive if considering, as we will soon do, all the political and moral implication expressively addressed by the author. It was a great success being republished in four successive editions. This great success is most probably due to the sensational and scandal mongering subject it proposes, making still more difficult to accept the nexus between the last period of Haywood's work with a more domestic interest. In fact, the protagonist of the story, the invisible spy, doesn't act in an imaginary or

⁵² Eliza Fowler Haywood, *Memoirs of A Certain Island Adjacent to The Kingdom of Utopia*, London, Bookseller of London and Westmister, 1726.

⁵³ Eliza Fowler Haywood, *The Secret History of The Present Intrigues of The Court of Caramania*, London, Booksellers of London and Westminister, 1727.

⁵⁴ Eliza Fowler Haywood, *The Invisible Spy*, London, Gardner, 1759.

utopian world, rather in a very well recognizable London, and in a precise social and, moreover, political asset, when the parliament, with or without people in agreement, was involved in promulgating such laws, which would have serious repercussions on citizens and British culture, as the Jews Naturalization Act (1753) – by which Jews even though forbidden of English citizenship, could anyway gain the status of “naturalized” – and the Marriage Bill (1755) – by which any woman should obey not only to the will of the father for her marriage but to that of any tutor in case of the father’s death. As a consequence almost all the characters who encounter the invisible spy are real and covered only by fictitious names, since the protagonist will not attend affairs dealing within halls of justice or meeting for election, neither cabinets of princes or ministers of state, but wholly private places, as private houses, and semi-public places, such as coffee-houses.

The four volumes long story, begins with the introduction, made by the narrator, within the *cabinets of curiosities*, of a very wise man, and friend of the eventual spy, who, at death’s door, wants to give his last gifts to his friend, gifts to be chosen within this cabinet. This is a place in which all the very curiosities of man, especially of that period, were placed: telescopes, horoscopes, microscopes, talismans, multipliers, magnifiers of all degree, but also “The Illusive powder” – able to generate splendid visions or universal terror and dismay –, “The simpathetic Bell”, the “Salts of Meditation”, correcting the «vague and wandering thoughts»⁵⁵, “The Shrinking Cap” – making persons «small enough to enter into the mouth of a lady’s tea-pot»⁵⁶. None of these wonders, anyway, attracts our narrator, who judges the majority of them as amusing or astonishing rather than useful tools. But two other wonders make his curiosity finally raise: “The Belt of Invisibility” and “The wonderful Tablet”. The first, which «fastened round the body next the skin, no sooner becomes warm than it renders the party invisible to all human eyes»⁵⁷, amuses his fancy with all the «promises discoveries highly flattering to the inquisitiveness of [...] humor»⁵⁸. The second, which «in whatever place it is spread open, receives the impression of every word that is spoken»⁵⁹,

⁵⁵ Ivi, vol. 1, p. 6.

⁵⁶ Ivi, vol. 1, p. 8.

⁵⁷ Ivi, vol. 1, p. 10.

⁵⁸ ibidem.

⁵⁹ ibidem.

amuses his memory. The choice doesn't surprise the old friend already aware that «curiosity is the most prevailing passion of the human mind»⁶⁰.

Now that these two devices are attained our character, whose sex will remain obscure for the entire first book, can begin his inspections, being able of invisibly seeing and translating images into words in order to remember them better, just like a modern spy.

Being an invisible observer, seeing more or less private scenes, his activities are surely voyeuristic, constructing an asymmetrical observer/observed relation, putting in a public display private affairs. In so doing the invisible spy, from the second book on discovered as a man, seems to represent all the three elements distinguishing the male objectivity oriented vision, which Keller suggested⁶¹: a dynamic neutrality, by which observation is not affected by the subject gaze; a dependence on distance, here sharpened by the visible/invisible relation that divided the different objects from the subject; a simultaneity of vision, which extends the presence of the object particularly amplified by the device of the tablet.

Thus, Haywood seems to stage a purely male gaze. But a closer reading of the text will show that, even if every one of these elements belongs to the male way of seeing, they are not employed in a faithful way. The question of voyeurism, indeed, is showed in a completely different way, first of all being completely devoid from any sexual meaning. The numerous chances in which the spy exits the scenes becoming too private, demonstrate his distance from any power intents. If, indeed, he is surely in a privileged position, to see without being seen, he never acts in order to obtain knowledge to be used against someone. Most of the time he uses his recorded visions to redeem the reputation of the innocent, or to unmask the bad faith of the dishonest:

I have it in my power to pluck off the mask of hypocrisy from the seeming saint, – to expose vice and folly in all their various modes and attitudes; to strip a bad action of all the specious pretences made to conceal or palliate it, and shew it in its native ugliness. – At the same time, I have also the means to rescue injur'd innocence from the cruel attacks begun by envy and scandal, and propagated by prejudice and ill-nature. – In fine, I am enabled, by this precious gift, to set both things and persons in their proper

⁶⁰ Ivi, vol. 1, p. 12.

⁶¹ infra cap. 1

colours; and not in such as either, thro' malice, or partial favour, they are frequently made to appear.⁶²

The neutrality of his vision, however, confirms even that neither the distance from the object is due to a desire to better control of his objects, in front of activities in which he remains as an innocent witness never interfering with them. In fact he quite never intervenes, manipulates or acts to change the course of the events. His objectives indeed are no way related to action, rather to report the scenes he had witnessed and the reflection about human nature he always derives from them:

I should never have ventur'd to speak so positively in many things as I have done, if the gift of Invisibility had not offered me an opportunity of accompanying them when they thought themselves entirely alone, and of beholding them in those unguarded attitudes which are the best, and, indeed, the only certain discoverers of the inward workings of the human mind.⁶³

The final end to which his entire project is devoted is to reveal the disparity of the behavior people, of the highest or lowest level of society, mask, and moreover to denounce the lack of connection between the public appearance and the private substance, which is not always very welcome: «Yet, I know not how it is, but the title of this work has, by some means or other, taken air, and I perceive has sounded an alarm in the ears of those who blush to be told of what they do not blush to act»⁶⁴. The letters the author receives, which he shows us in the third volumes, are all evidence of the uncomfortable reactions and the warnings he (or she) caused:

Human prudence has taught us to elude the scrutiny of all known examiners; but who can guard against they do not see? – You may be at our very elbows without our knowing you are; – you may explore all the necessary arts and mysteries of our several avocations, without our having it in our power to tribe you to secrecy: – What therefore can you expect, as there is no other way of dealing with you, but to have your book damn'd.⁶⁵

The quotation above and the one below, are also evidences of how his own activity in instructing on the dangers of modern society put him in a position far from, or at least uncomfortable for, the society, which makes us reflect on how

⁶² *lvi*, vol. 1, p. 23.

⁶³ *lvi*, vol 2, p. 282.

⁶⁴ *lvi*, vol. 2, p. 2

⁶⁵ *lvi*, vol 3, p. 8

vision can barely be innocent, all depending on who, why and by what means it is exercised:

There are a lot of men about this town who pick up a pretty tolerable living by inspecting into the secrets of the press; – they are a sort of Spies as well as yourself, and as Invisible as you can pretend to be; – they find means to steal the title of every new book long before it is advertised, and almost as soon as the letters which form it are put together by the compositor it is by one of those very useful persons I am informed of your work.⁶⁶

The invisibility of the spy has produced the visibility of all the citizens of London who, now, feel a sort of threat in being in the possibility to be seen without permission and without seeing in their turn. He acts, therefore, as the jailer of the Panopticon in Foucault's reflection about discipline and punishment. His physical presence is no more needed, in this case it has never existed, because the effects of his vision have already been interiorized. But a great difference divided the spy from the jailer. The former is not an acting legal power, is not casting a gaze by law, for he is not performing a control prescribed by power, not assuming a point of view inner to power. He is completely outside, and therefore he is showing no real power having direct consequences.

This is the point of view of what we have called the outsider, and we have now to relate to the observer more than to the writer, even though the two are often connected. As we have already seen in the previous chapter, both Haraway and Keller agree in discovering the peculiar female point of view in that of the outsider, that is someone who, having been marginalized, sees from below, making of this disadvantaged vision a way to discover the lacks of the dominating gaze. Such lacks reside in precise points of the visual process: in the pretension of dominating an immediate, transcendent and disembodied vision, and, as a result, in the lack of responsibility in vision and its effects.

Eliza Haywood, created in the eighteenth century a character who, even though under male shape, responds point by point to this model. Both the true author and the fictitious narrator, indeed, cast marginal gazes: the first being a woman in a fully patriarchal society, the second being a character somehow distant from the society of which he can neither stand vices nor recognize virtues.

Thus if Haywood seems to accept a needed distance between the subject and

⁶⁶ Ivi, vol. 3, p. 4.

the object of observation, it is not to be intended in a male way. That is, it is not to better control her object that the narrator detached him/herself from the object and the entire world it belonged to, but rather to reach an outsider point of view. The outsider in Haywood is not someone who chooses a definitive separation to the world, no longer participating in its activities. It is rather someone who has been excluded, against his or her will, from public discourses by corrupted forms of power. Anyway, he or she doesn't accept this exile and takes place, a little from the central scene, in order to better observe, witness and then denounce the corruption, not only of power, but of morals and customs, in public as well as in private circumstances, being the two places not detached one from another.

Moreover, both of them are far aware of the embodied and mediate nature of their vision. The invisible spy, in fact, stresses more than once on the character of his vision being strictly linked to the means he adopts to see that way, the invisible coat as well as the one devoted to register what memory couldn't resume with no adjunction or subtraction. Without the two means he would have never been able to make us these accounts. However, they never put him in a superior position in which his gaze and his own body are safe. He is always at stake, always liable to be discovered, because the medium of invisibility doesn't erase his own corporality. It is shown both in a metaphoric and a material way. The first is, in fact, the cause of his choice of the places where he exerts his activities:

They would in vain seek me at court-balls, city-feasts, the halls of justice, or meetings for elections - a nor do I much haunt the opera or play-houses: in fine, I avoid all crouds, all mix'd assemblies, except the masquerade and Venetian balls [...] I revere regal authority, but seldom visit the cabinet of princes, because they are generally so filled with a thick fog, that the christaline texture of my Tablets could not receive what was said there, so as to be read distinctly; nor do I much care to venture myself among their ministers of state, or any of their underworking tools; the floors of their rooms, in which their cabals are held, are composed of such slippery materials that the least *faux pas* might endanger my Invisibility, if not my neck.⁶⁷

The risks a spy takes, or even any other kind of observer, in endeavoring such a survey, are not only metaphoric, involving question of morality and corruption in the rooms of political power, but also physical since the observer, being in the right place in which phenomena is to happen, can always find himself involved in accident or unpredictable reactions. This is what happened when our spy assists

⁶⁷ Ivi, vol. 1, pp. 16-17.

the plain project by a grenadier in defending the honor of his wife from his seductive officer attacks:

My leader had not advanced above five or six steps of the stairs, when he receiv'd a violent blow on the head, which, together with the surprise it gave him, made him reel back and like to fall on poor Invisible; but I hastily and prudently withdrew to the middle of the entry, and stood aloof to hear, at a more safe distance, what would be the end of this affair [...] for my own part, after I got home, the satisfaction of finding myself safe from the dangers into which my curiosity had brought me, was succeeded by some considerations on the passages I had been witness of.⁶⁸

The project of the invisible spy is fated to the end, when the last innocent remaining in the city, and guarded by him, loses her own innocence. The label on the wonderful tablet, indeed, said that it couldn't «be expunged, but by the breath of a virgin, of so pure an innocence as not to have even thought on the difference of sexes»⁶⁹. The only way to obtain such a pure woman was to raise a girl preserving her innocence. But this task was much too difficult, or rather impossible for the protagonist. The innocence has to end sooner or later, and having been lost by his girl, his tablet, no more “expungable”, puts an end to his reports. Nature, or may be society, never falls under the uncontrolled gaze of individuals, being them curious or wise.

Conclusion

Within the first question of vision, that of the positioning and construction of the observer, the three writers of the period we are analyzing, pose themselves in not homogeneous but coherent positions, presenting interesting points in common with the critics of twentieth century.

The first point is that concerning the distance patriarchal society poses between the subject and the object of vision, and not only of that. As *The Blazing World* of Margaret Cavendish showed us, it is an unacceptable model for the vision of women and scientific research. In her point of view the subject and the object of the research coincide, Behn and Haywood agreed, not only because the subject is anyway affecting the object through his or her gaze, but primarily because the first

⁶⁸ Ivi, vol. 2, pp. 240-244.

⁶⁹ Ivi, vol. 1, p. 10.

target of this research is the subject him- or herself. It produces a double result. First of all, all the most blazing wonders that man can discover are inside and not only outside himself, which also means that the primary means of knowledge is the reason more than the senses and the witty exercise of the mind. It doesn't mean that Cavendish is returning in a Cartesian disjunction of the body and the soul, the inner mind and the outer one, for the two work together, as the blending of the Empress's body and of the Author's soul, and vice versa. Cavendish, being a Natural Philosopher, knows very well the importance that optical devices represent for human knowledge, and she is not criticizing them. Rather she is warning about an excessive faith in what the nineteenth century will suppose to be "mechanical vision". Because, for what man can do to avoid his personal influence in observation, his eye, meaning a biological and not divine eye, is his primary and inescapable medium.

These statements lead immediately to the other two results from our research in this chapter: the pretension of objectivity, and the invisible place of female beholder.

As *the Emperor of the Moon* has showed us, the objective target of scientific surveys, is a coverage for the real ends of mediated looking. What is man peeping at through the lenses, addressing gazes to the secrets of nature (and not only of nature)? He is trying to affirm once again his power, over nature, penetrated in every part, and within the society of the seventeenth century, in which spying and constructing false images were becoming the new trend in political affairs. Closing his observation to those aims, brings this observer to the sole result of an auto-infatuation, in which the mind, lost in the infinite worlds achievable thanks to the devices invented by itself, becomes the first victim of an illusionary system, in which everything can be trusted and every link with the real world is broken.

But, when the spy is not a member of the dominating part of society, rather an outcast and silenced object forced to become a beholder "from above", he or she can also represent a threat for the same system that created him or her. If the outsider, as Keller and Haraway argue, is him- or herself produced by the same linguistic and culture codes of the insider, then it is not a romantic character, rather a possible thief of the secrets of this system, able to understand where to look for its weaknesses, and how to denounce them. His or her invisibility is the first arm to be used, as Foucault and Haywood have demonstrated.

How can we describe, therefore, the observer of this primary female gaze?

He or she seems to me a subjective observer, by which I mean an observer conscious of his or her own embodiment, carnality and mediacy:

Listen to a woman [...] it's with her body that she vitally supports the "logic" of her speech. Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare. In fact, she physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body. In a certain way she inscribes what she's saying, because she doesn't deny her drives the intractable and impassioned part they have in speaking. Her speech, even when "theoretical" or political, is never simple or linear or "objectified," generalized: she draws her story into history.⁷⁰

The target of this "discourse" is not that of empowering rather to free, not to catch rather to report, not to distance the point of view rather to experience what she is looking for, not being afraid to be scared.

⁷⁰ Hélène Cixous, op. cit., p. 881.

III

Displaying Objects

There will have been the long history of gynocide.

H. Cixous

According to the theory about scopic regimes by Jonathan Crary¹ and the related “observations on the observer” by Martin Jay², the beholder is the product of the cultural system of vision, being related to the practices, the rules, the means, and the targets involved. As a first result it is also the producer of the object of his or her own gaze, that is the responsible of the resulting image, which, in turn, is inserted in the same processes, practices, rules, means, etc. Thus, if the shape of the subject changes as the scopic regime changes, also the object changes accordingly. As a second result, but primarily for our research, the shape of the observer resulting from the practices of looking between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century leads us to the second matter of our project, that of the observed and the ways in which it is controlled, manipulated and, on the other hand, the tactics he/she/it tries to resist.

Even though all the elements of the regime are strictly connected, this process, as we are trying to demonstrate, is never stable or univocal. In fact, as the analysis conducted in the previous chapter shows, the same possibility of a determinable system of vision has always been at stake, from the very moment of its birth. The shape of the beholder in all three examples by Cavendish, Behn and Haywood is that of a system already in crisis on three different grounds: the distance between the subject and the object of vision; the turning roles of observer and observed; the corporality of the process of vision.

¹ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge-London, MIT Press, 1992.

² Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993.

The first attack against the stability of any scopic regime is the confutation of the distance between the object and the subject of vision, which was born with the perspective regime and pretended to work till the nineteenth century. We have seen this issue to be contested in Cavendish because of a supposed coincidence of the two opposite sites of vision, something we could nowadays refer to as a sort of “autoscopy”, in the words of Merleau-Ponty and his further discussion on the “narcissism of vision”³. This is no longer a dominant vision, a vision from above, just distancing the subject from the object, but rather pushing the desire of this subject into entering a world made of his own flesh, a flesh that is not perfectly opaque or totally transparent. This encounter happens in a precise *punctum caecum* in which the visible meets the invisible. This looks exactly like the description of what Cavendish made happen in the encounter between the author herself and her protagonist, the Empress, in *The Blazing World*.

This reduction or even abolition of distance produces also an overturn in which the observer becomes the observed, and this is the second ground of crisis for the beholder. The observed spectator, as Foucault has already argued⁴, is the primary sign of the crisis of the ocularcentrism, by which the privacy of observation is no longer guaranteed. Thus, since the points of view have been multiplied, the observer becomes his own or other’s object. What happens to Doctor Baliardo, in Behn’s *The Emperor of the Moon*, is the downfall of the whole Cartesian system. Vision becomes an adversarial relation among all the elements, in which each of them can take over the others, and put the subject in front of his own illusory authority⁵.

Probably the most decisive turning point in this reflection is the third ground, that is the awareness of the corporality of both the object and the subject involved in a process that, as we can now see, is affecting the two. Not only the elements the beholder is looking at – being those a specimen, an actress, an “Other” – but the beholder him- or herself is implied in the process of vision as a body, a surface on which the signs of difference are inscribed, traced by the gaze(s). They are

³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'esprit*, Paris, Gallimard, 1961, trans. Carleton Dallery, 'Eye and Mind', in *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, The Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics.*, ed. by James Edie, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1964.

⁴ See Chap. 1, p. 35.

⁵ Henri Bergson, *Matière et Mémoire. Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit*, Paris, Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1896, trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer, *Matter and Memory*, New York, 1985.

both engaged and endangered in a process of vision that can always be inverted, but moreover, in which the incorporated observer must realize the responsibility his position attributes to him. Like *The Invisible Spy* of Haywood, the subject must consider the responsibility deriving from the lack of permission in which she or, mostly, he is acting. A lack that can only be accepted, if ever it can be accepted, because of noble aims, contributing to general safeness or social improvement, such as the discovery of physical defects, or defective social dynamics. Thus, Haywood seems to have already tried to fill the vacuum between subject and object, realizing the individuation of a historical subject that Irigaray proposed as the female way of seeing⁶. Through the pens of these three writers the subject has been historicized, that is traced back to a precise moment and in a precise material place, thus reducing his or her horizon of action as well. Also, the true means of his or her vision has been circumstantiated, threatening any reasonable chance of mechanic observation, and, therefore, of absolute objectivity.

The question or, better, the questionability of the objectiveness was at stake in the early modern period thanks to great revolutions that took place in science, spectacle, and print. The first of which was a new, even though not completely aware, consideration of the power of vision, in controlling objects such as a specimen in the laboratory through new microscopes, a character on the stage through new theatrical mechanisms, a topic in printing through literature or magazines. The instrumental aids to vision, considered as fundamental improvements without which knowledge would not have reached the level it is at, are not sufficient, according to our authors, to construct the true image of reality. In fact, as Cavendish first argued, the optical devices often become the target themselves of observation, or the sufficient reason to make that vision authoritative. This leads, most of the time, to “artificial illusion” that has nothing to do with a true understanding of mind. Behn pictured these instruments as peeping tools that don’t always help in distinguishing reality from fiction, both being, as Haywood added, liable of punishment⁷.

This is neither the worst threat the beholder can afford, for what can really be most dangerous is the control of vision, and of its power, shifting under the control

⁶ Luce Irigaray, *J'aime à toi. Esquisse d'une félicité dans l'histoire*, Paris, B. Grasset, 1992, trans. Alison Martin, *I Love to You: Sketch of A Possible Felicity in History*, new York-London, Routledge, 1996, p. 40. See pages 27-33 of first chapter for a broader account.

⁷ See, Eliza Haywood, *The Invisible Spy*, London, Gardner, 1759, vol. 2, p. 9.

of the observed, making the beholder become beheld. In this case many things could be unmasked: scientific fictions under scientific facts, political conspiracies under innocent observations and publications, social hypocrisies under respectable appearances.

Thus depicting the characters and the process taking part in vision, the power related to it seems no more to reside above the lens of vision, but neither entirely below. It doesn't seem to stay in a precise point at all. It is now seen as a power to be negotiated when not to be conquered, for if the perspective regime supposed the dominating eye to be able to define, once and for all, the objects to be penetrated in the whole of their bodies – being those the body of nature, the body of the woman, the body of the Other – it wasn't be able to predict, and then to control, the casting back of all those eyes toward the subject.

Fortunately for this subject this process backwards, going up the tube of the microscope, wasn't so simple or immediate, in so far as it has not yet been finally completed. It is a process played by multiple subjects, or better said, objects, the same the phallogocentric⁸ regime had created and had simplified in the category of otherness. All these "othernesses", being conscious of their multiple differences, have been played not on the basis of a strategy, rather on that of single and multiple tactics, in order both to free their subjected bodies and their denied gaze. These "othernesses", are those of women, of colonial subjects, and of all the marginalized voices that the dominating models of vision have always casted outside. But, what all these nodes of the web have in common is not only the attempt of turning the microscope upside down, but also to be aware of their own otherness, which allows them to construct scopic regimes completely different from that of colonizing man. Analyzing the tactics of one of these nodes⁹, therefore, could help us to open the route of a better comprehension of many other ways of seeing.

These are all subjects of the contemporary debate about the different speaking, but also looking, identities, especially within cultural studies. Yet, once again, the debate on looking, and be-looked seems to be rooted in the early modern period,

⁸ Luce Irigaray, *Interview*, in M-F. Hans and G. Lapouge ed., *Les femmes, la pornographie et l'erotisme*, Paris, Seuil, 1978, p. 50.

⁹ Donna J. Haraway, *Situated Knowledges. The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, in Muriel Lederman, Ingrid Bartsch (ed.), *The Gender and Science Reader*, London-New York, Routledge, 2001.

and the three writers we are analyzing can offer a good perspective on the fighting scopic regimes between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Two of these strategies have already been detected in the previous chapter, and consist in the appropriation of a particular point of view and on the resulting manipulation of the related scopic regime. The third strategy will be the subject matter of this chapter.

Mimicry and mask

The inspecting and controlling power of vision has always been exerted on the body of the object – being that the body of nature, the body of woman, the body of the colonized. As Foucault argued, it assumed two different peculiarities between the two ages of knowledge: a conquering power over the body's surface in classical age, and a penetrating one during the modern age¹⁰. It is not by coincidence that Bacon spoke about science as a conquering activity over nature: «for you have but to follow and as it were hound nature in her wanderings, and you will be able, when you like, to lead and drive her afterwards to the same place again»¹¹. To know, thus, means primarily to discover nature's secrets in order to control and manage them according to human will.

This scientific aim becomes an ordinary practice of looking, by which all the objects of male curiosity are observed and displayed, justifying this intimate survey with the goal of knowledge. This goal allowed the gaze to wander over the surfaces of these bodies because of their innate inferiority. The first to fall under the gaze of “science” were the “inferior men” of the colonies, and the women sharing a natural passivity, and being introduced in scopic regimes under the common roles of the “to-be-look-at ness”, because of the color of their skin or because of their sex. Neither the former nor the latter seemed to accept this position, and they started to use these same roles to fight or reinvent their marginal positions.

¹⁰ Foucault, M., *Naissance de la clinique. Une archéologie du regard médical*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1963, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, *The birth of the Clinic. An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1973.

¹¹ Francis Bacon, *The Augmentis Scientiarum*, in id, *The Philosophical Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. by Ellis and Spedding, London, Routledge, 1905, p. 428.

Throughout this research the medium of the masquerade has been cited more than once as a very popular genre of public entertainment in the English court in the first half of the seventeenth century, and later even out of the court in English theatre till the eighteenth century. It was a peculiar form of *mis en scene* playing with the subversion of roles, even gender roles, especially appreciated by women. In twentieth-century film studies, scholars such as Mary Ann Doane have detected this kind of transvestitism as a particular means of disturbance¹². This female tactic is somehow linked to the question of *mimicry*. This is a question discussed in two different ways by Homi Bhabha, who defined it as an “ironic compromise”¹³, and by Luce Irigaray, who defined it as an interim strategy for dealing with the realm of the discourse¹⁴. Both the female and the black objects, indeed can be defined as “locus of a legitimate form of ownership”¹⁵, and share a triple kind of gaze: that of a subject, that of an object, and that of a double character being aware both of his/her “look” and the “to-be-looked”.

Within this compromise the “Other” is recognized as a “subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite”¹⁶. On the other hand, the she-subject is a hysterical subject, staging the disbelief and the oppression, while exiting the censorship of the “master” beholder¹⁷. Assuming the masks attributed by the dominant visual regime doesn’t mean, for the two both, simply accepting to be an object, rather to use the resulting partiality and the virtuality as a means of resistance, with no intention of harmonizing the differences. Under the mask of desiring gazes, objects do not stop to be looked at, but what is really looked at is the image already made by the observers. The real subject with all his or her peculiarities is (more or less) safe under this image and he/she is returning the gaze, even though the beholder doesn’t know it, or at least he or she is somewhere else.

Although made similar by the same hidden phallogularcentric gaze, mimicry and masquerade, as means of using this apparatus to unmask its own attempt to homologate the differences, differ in something. Irigaray defines the masquerade

¹² See Chap. 1, p. 45.

¹³ Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse”, in «October» 28 (1984), pp. 125-133.

¹⁴ Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas une*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1977, trans. C. Porter and C. Burke, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985.

¹⁵ Homi Bhabha, quoted, p. 126.

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 127.

¹⁷ Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas une*, quoted, p. 168.

in a more diffident way: «an alienated or false version of femininity arising from the woman's awareness of the man's desire for her to be his other, the masquerade permits woman to experience desire not in her own right but as the man's desire situates her»¹⁸. I propose, somehow not agreeing with Irigaray, to distinguish the two terms on the basis of three fundamental differences: the space of action, the trend towards similarity or towards difference, the related gain to be seen or to be not seen.

As Doane showed, women within the medium of masquerade act in the same way but also in the same space in which dominant men act. The peculiarity of these spectacles is, indeed, the complete abolition of the space between actors and the audience. It is exactly this lack of distance that makes the masquerade a preferred terrain for making a different scopic regime, because it's difficult to define who is looking at whom. This chance was offered by the overturning of roles, which was supposed to be under control. As it is showed by its use within the court of King James I¹⁹, the political use of the masquerade was already clear at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and also questions of gender were staged in public. Under the masks women were giving back their gaze in ways they couldn't otherwise, but playing by the rules. On the contrary the mimicry doesn't act on the same stage as the "original" shape, since only one of the two parts involved wear, in this case the mask. It can still be seen as a means of putting the dominant vision in front of the screen on which the image of the other is projected, leaving out all its differences, barely leading to a crossing of the roles or an overturning of the rules. More than a performance made with political effects, it is an accusation with social purposes.

The second point of difference has to do with the orientation of the mask, being devoted to a differentiation, in the first case, and to the "similarization" in the second case, although both the two instances are faded. By wearing the mask, women never stopped being women, but they were the true women they used to be. The function of the masquerade resides precisely in that everybody knows that the pretended character is not real, which means that he or she is allowed just for

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 220.

¹⁹ For a wider discussion about the seventeenth and eighteenth century masquerade see Chap. I, pp. 63-66.

that moment to break the rules²⁰. The mask of womanliness or of blackness, at the contrary, has not been freely chosen, and it isn't allowed to break any rules, or to enter any forbidden space. In mimicry what happens is the conflagration between difference, "naturally" inscribed onto the black skin and the female sex, and similarity, artificially superimposed to make that difference acceptable.

The ultimate aim, then, is different. While the aim of the masquerade is to attract the gaze of the master observer, even though with a "medusan" intent – that is to threaten that gaze and show how it can be dismissed and substituted – that of mimicry is not to be seen any longer – that is to erase from the black skin or the female body all the historical categories which have now become naturalized epidermal schema²¹.

The two models of mimicry and masquerade have been already tested by Cavendish, Behn, and Haywood, putting on stage not only their own marginality but also that of the others.

A queer masquerade

In *Le rire de la Meduse*, written in 1975, Hélène Cixous invites women to the re-appropriation at once of their own writing and of their own body, being those carried off by male phallogocentrism, «for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal»²². Their body has been divided from their expression to become the pure object of male gaze, staged as the place itself of sin, mistake or sexual desire. Now women need to create a new language, a new weapon to contrast their own imprisonment, and this language is the language of flesh. It is a very meaningful language, whose end is neither that of generalization or objectification, nor that of internalization or manipulation, but rather that of

²⁰ It is clear in the observation Haywood makes the Invisible spy to express about masquerade: «among all the numerous Modes which the wantonnels of luxury has of late years introduced into this kingdom for the destroying of time, I know of none more fatal to the virtue and reputation of the female sex than Masquerades [sic] so that none will venture to talk or act beneath a vizard in such a manner, as when he stands reveal'd, will either reflect shame on himself, or give offence to those he has been entertaining», even though further affirming that they are anyway « not only innocent but laudable amusements, as they serve to whet the wit and exhilarate the mind», Eliza Haywood, *The Invisible Spy*, London, Gardner, 1759, vol. III, pp. 169-170.

²¹ See Chap. I, p. 38.

²² Hélène Cixous, "Le Rire de la Meduse", in «L'Arc» 45 (1975), pp. 39-54, trans. Keith Cohen, Paula Cohen, "The Laugh of the Medusa", in «Signs» vol. 1 (1976), pp. 875-893, p. 875.

freedom. A new space is now opened, a space in-between where identities are not defined once and for ever, but where the “Others” are welcomed not only as objects but as shifting subjects, for what really interests this new language is the process that leads from the same to the other.

Re-appropriating her female body and her female writing was the essential plan of Margaret Cavendish who seems to have anticipated Cixous by three centuries. In her plays she attempted to stage the female subject by showing not only her “natural” corporality but also the masks she can wear, either chosen by her own will or not. For this reason Joyce Devlin Mosher refers to her strategy as that of the female spectacle in which the power of dressing and the display of masks, more or less fitting the male apparatus, serve her desire of self-realization. It is the precise aesthetics that shaped her personal life and her works as well.

It is well known how she designed her physical presence as a structured demonstration of her elusive identity, described by her contemporaries under the simplified category of “bizarre and garish”. From a less myopic point of view, we can nowadays see the design under this personal masquerade as an assumption of «the artificial in order to transcend it»²³. In this case the artificial was the constructed fashion she produced for herself – with jewels, dressing and all kinds of accessories – and for her feminine characters, which had something more than the pure desire to be addressed by the gazes of everyone as a goal, for the crowd addressed their mask and not their self.

It has been long debated the apparent discrepancy between her innate shyness and this kind of showing off, staged for example during the visit of the Duchess to the Royal Society. Lisa T. Sarasohn frames this visit within the consideration that age had of female writing: a queer phenomenon considered as unnatural and curious as the monstrous, the hermafroditism, in short the in-between. An undefined object Cavendish took advantage of, not only in order to manage it as a new subject, not yet enclosed within dominant categories, but also as a mirror reflecting the same spectacularity under which the Royal scientists masked their activity, thus manipulating the audience. The spectacle by which Cavendish showed the Royal society her “self” was, then, the mirror of the Royal Society

²³Joyce Devlin Mosher, "Female Spectacle as Liberation in Margaret Cavendish's Plays", in «Early Modern Literary Studies» 11(2005), pp. 1-28, p. 3.

Spectacle itself²⁴, although most of the audience didn't realize it. The popular ballad by John Evelyn thus describe the event:

But Jo her headgear was so pretty
I ne'er saw anything so witty
Tho I was half a feard
God bless us when I first did see her
She looked so like a Cavalier
But that she had no beard.²⁵

While being the first woman to enter the Royal Society sessions, Cavendish, who used to wear extra-feminine dress, decided to show herself in male clothing and performed a parade with pages and maids accompanying her. This is a performance that we will soon see in one of her plays, acting like Irigaray supposes the woman to act within mimicry: laying the sexual nature bare, which at the same time prevented her "self" from being absorbed. In doing so Cavendish reached a triple target: to make visible what was suppose to be and to stay invisible; to "jam" the theoretical machinery, which manages both this visibility and invisibility; to suspend the pretended truth which masks the univocal meanings this machinery produces²⁶.

Far from being a passive observer of Boyle's "spectacles", since in this way his displayed experiments were defined by the society itself, Cavendish was converting the planes of representation. Diverting the gazes from the supposed spectacle to herself, she became the object of vision, rather than the spectator, but a specific kind of object, since the body addressed was not her true body, the one she refers to as a defective one, but a masked one, the blazing body of her empress/knight to be adored and worshiped.

No longer a passive object or a controlled one, rather an object conscious of being looked at, she used and manipulated the whole system included in the

²⁴ «By exhibiting herself as a spectacle in visiting the Royal Society, she diverted the public gaze from the sober scientists of the society, implicatinng that they were as such mountebanks as the hucksters Newcastle though should entertain the masses», Lisa T. Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish: Reason and Fancy During the Scientific Revolution*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 2010, p. 25.

²⁵ John Evelyn, *Ballad "I'll Tell Thee Jo"*, London, National Archives, PRO State Papers 29/450/102, fo 164, see also, Joyce Devlin Mosher, op. cit., « When Margaret Cavendish visited the Royal Society in London in 1667, she was wearing a gown with an eight-foot train borne by six waiting-women. Some in the crowd mistook her for a young man, though, because she also wore a wide-brimmed cavalier hat and a knee-length riding coat», p. 1.

²⁶ See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is not One*, quoted p. 78.

general visual regime. She was not only conscious of the way in which the most acclaimed scientists were making science spectacular – i.e. an amusement rather than a profession –, but she was also very well acquainted with the whole visual society, which staged diverse sorts of bodies involving both the subjects displaying and the objects displayed. These confused stages were multiplied as well as the audiences, for the seventeenth century, as Rebecca D'Montè argued²⁷, was a period of “endemic performances”: masquerades, overturning class and gender rules; circuses and fairs, showing wonders and bestialities; museums and curious cabinets of private gentlemen, displaying desire and voyeurism; parades «used by Kings and lord mayors to present their sanctified selves to the gaze of adoring public»²⁸.

Understanding what was the “provided place” of women is not so simple. They, of course, were neither the directing subjects of these spectacles, but often, nor were they the object, such as during the public parade. Moreover, Burke argued, they were neither part of the intellectual elite, being “semi-educated”, or part of the social non-elite, being part of the upper-class. Women were somehow the “mediators” between the former, who managed their own spectacles, and the latter, who assisted adoring these spectacles²⁹.

Not satisfied of this frame Cavendish decided to use it in order to subvert it, through a complex, articulated and long lasting design, which was perfectly manifested in a curious debate within *Female Orations* between women who accepted the author's invitation to make a «Frequentation, Association, and Combination amongst our Selves and Free, Happy, and Famous as Men»³⁰. The main topic of this debate is whether women should aspire to be similar or different than men, in order to gain freedom and happiness. This is how the question is conducted between the lady in oration number IV and that in oration number V:

Wherefore my advise is we should imitate men, so will our bodies and minds appear more masculine and our power will increase by our actions.

²⁷ Rebecca D'Montè, *Mirroring Female Power: Separatist Spaces in the Plays of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle*, in Rebecca D'Monté and Nicole Pohl, ed., *Female Communities, 1600-1800: Literary Visions and Cultural Realities*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 2000, pp. 93-110.

²⁸ Lisa T. Sarasohn, quoted, pp. 25-26.

²⁹ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Burlington, Ashgate, 2009.

³⁰ Margaret Cavendish, *Orations of Divers Sorts Accomodated to Divers Places*, London, [s.n.], 1663, p. 225.

[...]

To have female bodies, and yet to act masculine, will be very preposterous and unnatural; in truth, we shall make ourselves like as defects of nature, as to be hermaphoditical, as neither to be perfect women nor perfect men, but corrupt and imperfect creatures³¹

Cavendish seems to turn her tactic from a mimicry of male customs to a masquerade, with the same mask men attribute to women. She did subversively appropriate her defective body, a body on which cultural schemes seemed to be unable to have control, but on which she studied to have control because «although her body is barren and incapacitated, her mind is industrious and restless to live»³². As all of her work shows, this was a life-long project of discovering and inventing a new version of herself, a version by which rejecting the social categories, which radically differentiated the male body from the female body and constrained the female body to a repression and a devaluation. This big project was led by means of both her life and habits and her work.

By means of self-fashioning, Margaret Cavendish communicated not only her distance and her difference from the society she belonged to, enjoying herself in creating her own clothes and jewelry, but even that of her heroines and characters, always distinguished in the symbolism of their majestic dressing – such as that of the Empress of *The Blazing World* – or in the masculine habits; criticizing the fixed gender polarity between male and female – such as those of multiple faces heroine in *The Convent of Pleasure*.

In this play the heroine Lady Happy, refuses her feminine role and builds up a feminine reign in which there's no place for men. In this safe enclosure the twenty-one women discover a new freedom recognizing the relativity of gender roles and having new experiences which step by step repudiate heterosexuality and reinvented new gendered politics «joining in the experimental pleasures of erotic friendship, cross-dressing, and role playing, the category of woman does not stand as a single uncontested constant; its cultural meaning is explored, destabilized and challenged»³³.

³¹ Ivi, pp. 228-229.

³² Sylvia Bowerbank, Sara Mendelson, op. cit, p. 14.

³³ Ivi, p. 20.

The play in which more than in others Margaret Cavendish displays the female object as an excessive femininity, in the reversal of gender and the appropriation of the roles, is *Bell in Campo*, published in 1662³⁴. It narrates two, or even more, different kinds of femininity within the frame of the war between the “Kingdome of Reformation” and the “Kingdome of Faction”. As the man of the Kingdome of Reformation are preparing everything to go to battle, their woman react in different ways: Lady Victoria, the real main character and possibly the alter ego of Cavendish, asks her husband the Lord General to carry her with him, finally succeeding in convincing him; Madam Whiffell convinces her husband Captain Whiffell that she is too tender to effort the fatigues of war; the young and virtuous Madame Jantil, doesn’t succeed in making her husband, Seigneur Valoroso, carry her with him; and finally the aged Madam Passionate, who doesn’t succeed in convincing her husband, Monsieur la Hardy, not to go to the war because he is of age and she wouldn’t survive their separation. Lady Victoria’s example is followed by many ladies, who march together with their husband. Just before arriving to the camp the male council decides to leave all the women in a Garrison Town, and continues towards the borders of the kingdom. The ladies don’t agree with this decision and decide in their turn to put together an army of their own, headed by Lady Victoria. She convinces them all, manages the rules, and plans the strategy to go and help their men, husbands, fathers, brothers, friends, lovers. The plan remain secret till the ladies rise to conquest the power of the town they have been left in, conquering the arms kept there and the horses of the peasants living around the town. Now their project is discovered and, although the “male army” tries to convince them to desist they keep on organizing their strategy and managing their martial new life with exercises and ceremonies, deciding to demonstrate how they can assume even male roles, and how much they can help men, despite the marginal roles they have reserved to their women. In the meantime bad news arrives about the war to both the female army and the women who stay at home, among which only Madame Jantil and Madame Passionate really seem to suffer. The army of the Kingdome of Restoration suffers from heavy defeats, during which Seigneur Valoroso is killed and Monsieur la Hardy is made

³⁴ Margaret Cavendish, *Bell in campo*, in id, *Playes Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle*, London, A. Warren, for John Martyn, James Allestry, and Tho. Dicas [etc.], 1662.

prisoner and badly wounded. Thus the female army decides to intervene before a second attack, while the two ladies at home react in completely different ways: the young lady with a profound but dignified melancholy, and the older with theatrical and expectable swoons. Although men order the Female army to stop its march, it keeps on and defeats the army of the Kingdom of Faction, eventually even conquering some new places. In the meantime the melancholic lady, soon after burying her husband, dies of a broken heart, while the aged woman, whose husband is finally died, is ready to accept new proposals in marriage.

At this point Cavendish can unmask how the Female army has to fight not only with the opposing army but also with the allied one. Once the enemy has definitely been defeated, men want to reassume the command and to come back home victorious. Otherwise the entire army and the whole country should accept the primary role of female and the whole social asset should be modified. Of course the women are not disposed to do that and even the King must surrender to the evident equality, even superiority, of women in all fields of civil and military life. A great parade is organized to celebrate the victory, to recognize the merit of a new knight, Lady Victoria, and to make the Female Army official.

The war allowed the whole kingdom to discover many masked realities, all sharing a common principle that not all women are equal and that the vices of some of them can't obscure the great value of all the others. Not even men can obscure it. In moving her thousand women army, whose ranks will be enriched as they met other noble women not along their way, Lady Victoria, alias Margaret Cavendish, proclaims the manifest of her (their) true fight, that won against the devaluation of female virtue. If all their unlucky fate derives from the delicacy and softness of their appearance, the first step must be to change it, to re-appropriate the body men have transformed in a text on which to write a story by their will and their fancy. This text can be erased and built up again, in order to change the plot and the end of this story:

our Bodies seem weak, being delicate and beautiful, and our minds seem fearful, being compassionate and gentle natured, but if we were both weak and fearful, as they imagine us to be, yet custom which is a second Nature will encourage the one and strengthen the other, and had our educations been answerable to theirs, we might have proved as good Soldiers and Privy Counselors, Rulers and Commanders, Navigators and Architects, and as learned Sholars both in Arts and Sciences, as men are; for Time and Custom is the Father and Mother of Strength

and Knowledge, they make all things easy and facil, clear and prospitious; they bring acquaintance, and make friendship of everything; they make Courage and Fear, Strength and Weakness, Difficulty and Facility, Dangers and Securities, Labors and Receptions, Life and Death, all to take and shake as it were hands together; wherefore if we would but accustom our selves we may do such actions, as may gain us such a reputation, as men might change their opinions, insomuch as to believe we are fit to be Copartners in their Governments, and to help to rule the World, where now we are kept as Slaves forced to obey³⁵

The real goal of this fight, is not exclusively a military one, in fact this army doesn't move like the male. The areas they want to conquer are those of art, and science, of government and freedom, and mostly that of the authorship of their own reputation. If most of the time, as the study conducted by Riviere has demonstrated, womanliness means to wear the mask of perfection, as man created it, than it is first of all by wearing a different mask that women can free themselves. However in Cavendish's opinion, it can't be without an audience: it is by strongly showing this astonishing or even uncomfortable presence that women can claim a social role, being neither marginal nor secondary, nor subjected.

The required and not simply exhibitionistic ostentation of their new aspect, between male and female, is a recurrent motif of the whole play, and begins with the ritual ceremonies in which Lady Victoria inserts the rules of the new army. As the male army uses ceremonies, parade, songs and instrumental music in order to enforce the will of its officer, so will the female army, but creating songs, ceremonies and even deities precisely suited on their characters.

Fighting the gender structures of the patriarchal gaze was her primary end, pursued by means of a self-representation as excessive femininity, but also through the representation of disorienting feminine characters – in great part queer characters – whose sex is not always defined nor definable within the traditional categories, all playing in a continuous gender crossing. What seems more interesting is that in this way – which we could call a masquerade way – not only the gender categories are confused but the same mastery position of man is threatened. All this is not left to the personal feelings and behaviors of individuals, for women don't act, as men think, only by feelings and instincts, but also by reason and rules. But women themselves found these rules on their own models. In fact, the ceremonial is instituted by the further rules:

³⁵ Ivi, pp. 589-590.

Reader: Twelfthly, Be it known, observed and practised, that when the Army marches, that the Souldiers shall sing in their march the heroical actions done in former times by heroical women.

Lady Victoria: The reason of this is, that the remembrance of the actions of gallant persons inflames the Spirit to the like, and begets a courage to a like action, and the reason of singing of heroical actions only of women, is that we are women our selves³⁶.

The changing of roles implies also an inversion in the matter of discipline and attention. Thus all the vain characters usually attributed to women is now projected over men. In fact, they could be more dangerous acting on women's minds than vice versa, because they could claim the power of their social roles:

Reader: Fourteenthly, Be it known, observed and practised, that none of this Effeminate Army admits of the Company of men, whilst they are in Arms or Warlike actions, not so much as to exchange words, without the Generalless her leave or privilege thereto.

Lady Victoria: The reason of this is, that men are apt to corrupt the noble minds of women, and to alter their gallant, worthy, and wise resolutions, with their flattering words, and pleasing and subtle insinuations, and if they have any Authority over them, as Husbands, Fathers, Brothers, or the like, they are apt to fright them with threats into a slavish obedience; yet there shall be chosen some of the most inferior of this Female Army, to go into the Masculine Army, to learn their designs, and give us intelligence of their removals, that we may order our incampings and removings according as we shall think best; but these women shall neither be of the Body of our Army, nor keep amongst the Army, nor come within the Trenches, but ly without the works in Huts, which shall be set up for that purpose³⁷

Now that the female martial discipline and symbolism has been founded, the amazons can enter the scene and show themselves to male eyes, through a not reassuring difference. It is not by chance that Cavendish creates the scene to be described by a male voice, playing the role of audience:

upon this defeat came in the Female Army, in the time that some of the Enemy was busy in gathering up the Conquered spoils, others in persuit of the remainders of our men, others were binding up the Prisoners, [...]but when the Female Army came to encounter them, they found their charge so hot and furious as made them give place, which advantage they took with that prudence and dexterity, as they did not only rout this Army of Faction, killing and wounding many, and set their own Countrymen at liberty, and recovered their losses, and gained many spoils, and took numbers of Prisoners of their Enemies with Bag and Baggage, but they pursued those that fled into their Trenches, and beat them out of their works, and took possession thereof, where they found much riches; these Trenches being taken, the *Lady Victoria* took possession, and made them her Quarters, calling all her Female Soldiers to enter therein by the sound of Flutes, which they always used instead of Trumpets, and their

³⁶ Ivi, p. 593.

³⁷ Ivi, p. 594.

Drums were Kettel-Drums³⁸

This new female role is so uncomfortable and threatening that the male army perceives it as a double defeat:

the Masculine Sex of the Army of Reformation was much out of Countenance, being doubly or trebly overcome, twice by their Enemy, and then by the gallant actions of the Females which out-did them, yet they thought it best to take their advantage whilst the Victory was fresh and flourishing, and their Enemies weak and fearful, to lay siege to the next Towns in the Enemies Country³⁹

Unfortunately for them the ladies are now well acquainted with military affairs, but not well disposed in losing the power they have conquered:

whereupon the Lady *Victoria* and her Female Soldiers hearing of the Army of Reformations designs, for they had sent the men to their own Quarters as soon as the Battel was won and Victory got [...] whereupon they sent a Messenger like as an Embassadour to tell the Masculine Army they did wonder at their ingratitude, that they should forget so much their relievers as to go upon any Warlike design without making them acquainted therewith, striving as it were to steal the Victory out of their hands, but said they, since we are become victorious over our Enemies, and Masters, and Mistresses of the Field, by our own valiant actions and prudent conducts, we will maintain our power by our own strengths, for our Army is become now numerous, full and flourishing, formed, and conformable by our Discipline, skilful by our practice, valiant by our resolutions, powerful by our victory, terrible to our Enemies, honourable to our Friends, and a subject of Envy to the Masculine Sex; but your Army is weak and decrepid, fitter for an Hospital than for a Field of War, your power is lost, your courage is cold, your discipline disorderous, and your command sleighted, despised by your Enemies, pittied by your Friends, forsaken of good Fortune, and made subject unto our Effeminate Sex, which we will use by our power like Slaves.⁴⁰

The letter of apology men are eventually constrained to send to Lady Victoria is thus commented: «All the women fall into a great laughter, ha, ha, ha, ha»⁴¹, which sounds a little bit like the laugh of Medusa.

A new main stage is now set for the definitive triumph of the Ladies' army, Lady Victoria being the protagonist of this spectacular masqueraded parade:

Enter many Prisoners which march by two and two, then enter many that carry the Conquered spoils, then enters the Lady Victoria in a gilt Chariot drawn with eight white Horses, four on a breast, the Horses covered with Cloth of gold, and great plumes of feathers on their heads.

The Lady *Victoria* was adorned after this manner; she had a Coat on all imbrodered

³⁸ Ivi, p. 612.

³⁹ Ivi, p. 613.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Ivi, p. 618.

with silver and gold, which Coat reach'd no further than the Calfs of her leggs, and on her leggs and feet she had Buskins and Sandals imbroidered suitable to her Coat; on her head she had a Wreath or Garland of Lawrel, and her hair curl'd and loosely flowing; in her hand a Crystall Bolt headed with gold at each end, and after the Chariot marched all her Female Officers with Lawrel Branches in their hands, and after them the inferiour she Souldiers, then going through the Stage, as through the City, and so entring again, where on the midst of the Stage as if it were the midst of the City, the Magistrates meet her, so her Chariot makes a stand, and one as the Recorder speaks a Speech to her.⁴²

The costume worn by Lady Victoria looks very much like that worn by Margaret Cavendish during the visit to the Royal Society, and, since we know very well how symbolic and meaningful dressing is for Cavendish, we can attribute the words of the amazon, moving her ladies towards the fight, to the author moving all women towards writing:

for shall Men only sit in Honours chair, and Women stand as waiters by? shall only Men in Triumphant Chariots ride, and Women run as Captives by? shall only men be Conquerors, and women Slaves? shall only men live by Fame, and women dy in Oblivion? no, no, gallant Heroicks raise your Spirits to a noble pitch, to a deaticall height, to get an everlasting Renown, and infinite praises, by honourable, but unusual actions: for honourable Fame is not got only by contemplating thoughts which lie lasily in the Womb of the Mind, and prove Abortive, if not brought forth in living deeds; but worthy Heroickesses, at this time Fortune desires to be the Midwife, and if the Gods and Goddesses did not intend to favour our proceedings with a safe deliverance, they would not have offered us so fair and fit an opportunity to be the Mothers of glorious Actions, and everlasting Fame, which if you be so unnatural to strangle in the Birth by fearfull Cowardize, may you be blasted with Infamy, which is worse than to dye and be forgotten⁴³

Four years after this play was written, the architecture of the *Blazing World* seems to pursue the same aim, with the settlement of the female power, the sapphic relationship between the Empress and the Duchess herself, and the pushed spectacle. But it is not a single case. *The Convent of Pleasure*, for instance, plays on the same ground, with continuing transvestitism. However *Bell in Campo* remains the play that best designs this project. That is the literary construction of a contrasting straight female (queer) identity, placed on the stage as a dangerous and subversive femininity to be looked at as the Medusa's head.

⁴² Ivi, p. 632.

⁴³ Ivi, p. 610.

Black Heroes, White Savages

The openness in indefinite places within male definite structures, the over turnings of social, gender and even race roles, and, moreover the re-appropriation of body and meaningful corporality, disclose, in women's writings, an open space to other differences, using their own speech for another discourse and vice versa.

This is exactly what happens in many of Behn's works in which the voices differently marginalized speak one for the other in order to subvert the stereotypes in which they are inscribed, and to make cultural, social, gender, racial differences instruments of dramatic narrative. The aim of this project is that to construct a harmonious discourse between differences, in which, however the single peculiarities are not erased, for they are not defined once and for all⁴⁴. The narration or the stage of race is always told through the visual and cultural categories of white male dominant regime, but it is not in order to make the two coincide, rather to demonstrate the arbitrariness of these categories. In short, as the female subjects react to gender roles by means of the masquerade – that is not by excluding the gaze, but by making it work for their goals – the “black” subjects react to racial roles by means of the mimicry – that is creating subjects that, although look similar are actually different, and, moreover, are different both from white identities and from black identities as constructed by white men. This is precisely what happens in particular in *Oroonoko, Or The Royal Slave*, in which Behn uses racial categories, or racist categories, to build up a terrain of shattering identities in order to prove their artificiality, reversing and recreating them as in-between. This “in-betweenness” is of a particular materiality. It is hidden in the body, which is not only natural but cultural as well. It is just in vindicating the artificiality of their own body that marginalized blacks and women can realize a true re-appropriation. But, they have to be aware that the signs inscribed in their skin are mostly produced by others.

⁴⁴ See Jaqueline Pearson, *Slave Princes and Lady Monsters: Gender and Ethnic Difference in The Work of Aphra Behn*, in Janet Todd, ed., *Aphra Behn Studies*, Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 219-234.

After what we have already seen, the question of re-vindication in the field of post colonial studies, from Fanon to Bhabha, seems to be played between two opposite demands of identity – as stasis within a synchronic vision – and of difference – as change throughout the diachronic history. What these two instances have in common is a shared problem of authority, in which the black man cannot ever act as an auto-representation, since he is always an “object of information”, and never a “subject of communication”⁴⁵. This difference in authority remains, in Fanon’s opinion, in the corporeal schema of knowledge, which we have already seen in the first chapter working in Merleau-Ponty’s account of vision. According to the French philosopher, indeed, vision is a full corporeal sense, which allows the body to interact with its historical world in a mutual interchange of knowledge and modifications. What Fanon opposes to Merleau-Ponty is that this scheme works only with the white subject, and not with the black one, who experiences a screen between his own body and the external world, being it represented by white mythos. In order, then, to overcome this obstacle, the black subject can only adopt the agency of the other. This is the mimicry in Fanon’s point of view, a mimicry losing much more self-agency and the peculiarity of identity, than the one proposed by Bhabha.

The pessimistic vision of Fanon is based on the visual signification of black skin that has been superimposed by the white gaze. Under this gaze historical and mythological narratives are inscribed on the black bodies. They have no means of changing these narratives that have become the textual surface on which whites write their “epidermal racial schema”⁴⁶.

Already in 1668, Aphra Behn seems to be aware of the naturalization of such cultural superimpositions, and denounces their supposed self evidence with the novel *Oroonoko*, in which these epidermal schema are not only subverted, but moreover scattered in multiple definitions of multiple characters, according to different categories. In fact, the protagonist of the novel, the unique hero of the plot, is a man showed as “very, very black”, “more black” than all the others, a man who in all his blackness must be seen and cannot be erased under any of the white categories.

⁴⁵ See, Franz Fanon, *Peau Noir, Masques Blancs*, Paris, Seuil, 1952, transl. Ch. Lam Markmann, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York, Grove Press, 1967.

⁴⁶ Ivi, p. 112.

This novel allows Behn to talk about many of the racial-gendered structures on which occidental culture is grounded, especially those that subjected marginalized individuals, blacks as well as women, to their gaze. A gaze pretended to be objective, impartial and only devoted to disembodied observation useful to the society and the economy. This supposed honesty, however, is repeatedly unmasked, especially for what concerns the binary and simplistic opposition between civilized white and uncivilized black. In fact, the whole plot reverses this opposition on three grounds. First of all the barbarity, that is the cruelty and the lack of human nature, a “very, very black” characteristic Oroonoko never falls into. Then the fine culture, which is no longer prerogative of white men, since the black prince has been educated by the most illuminated European masters. Finally the facial features, which show how racist schemes have no evidence or foundation, being the aspect of the main character and that of his spouse Imoinda more similar to Greek divinities than many English people. While Oroonoko never loses his principles of sincerity and honesty, white men are always showed like dishonest and faithless, ready to sacrifice the friendship with a honorable and precious man in order to gain more money and manage better commercial affairs.

Another way in which the narration of Aphra Behn turns racial schemes upside down is in multiplying and spreading out different points of view within different cultures, making the whites be in turn the observer and the observed, thus showing how the subject of vision is always a historical and cultural subject as well as the images he or she produces through his or her vision, or by through other gazes.

This question is immediately related to that of the distinction of what is natural and what is cultural, for white men usually depicted themselves as the cultural side of the discussion, while representing the black men as the voice of nature, curiously as well as women. This perspective may affect even the overturned portrait made by our author, through which one can easily see the blacks, both men and women, not being naturally barbaric, cruel or inferior, but naturally human, educated and honest. Behn is very clear in individuating just in this supposed “naturalness” the key role for the oppression of blacks, and women. The whole novel, in fact, is constructed to demonstrate how culture is not prerogative of white man, and that white culture is not the only possible culture in this world.

Thus as we look at others by means of our culture's lens, the others look at us by means of their culture's lens that make us appear as an "other".

The last feature of this novel, we have to discuss before presenting the plot and its visual characteristics, is the role of the author herself. Indeed, Behn presents herself not only as the authoritative, because she is a well known writer, but also as the eye witness of the vicissitudes, who has assisted the scenes not from above, but from a very close point of view. This closeness implies not only a more reliable and plausible description, but, moreover, a personal implication in the story as a member, by the way, of white culture, of which she often has to complain.

The well known plot of the brief novel narrates the unlucky vicissitudes of two noble young Africans, the prince Oroonoko and Imoinda, the daughter of the mayor general of the King. A history which Behn pretends to have been witness of during a trip in Suriname with her family. Both Oroonoko and Imoinda are remarkable for their beauty, and not only Oroonoko falls in love with her, but even the king can't resist her beauty, and constrains her to become one of the women of his harem. The two young guys, plan an escape, but the king eventually discovers it and sells Imoinda as a slave. Even Oroonoko, victim of a trap ordered by the English captain, once his friend, is sold as a slave and is delivered to a sugar plantation in Suriname, the same place where Imoinda lives. The two, now renamed with the European names of Caesar and Clemene, can marry even though in slave conditions. Over time his status becomes unbearable to Oroonoko especially when Clemene discovers to be pregnant, although he conducts a life of liberal man in the plantation, as a friend of whites rather than as a slave,. Therefore he plans a rebellion among all black people. Unfortunately it does not succeed, and for fear that Clemene could fall under the violent white men while he is killed, Oroonoko kills his wife with her consent. He remains there watching her body for three days till white men discover and punish him by dismemberment.

As this brief summary shows the novel is full of racial questions related to the gaze. In fact, the plea to the reader is both dedicated to the curiosity of the reader gaze – «but all you can see, you see at once, and every moment see; and where there is no novelty, there can be no curiosity»⁴⁷ – and an advocacy of authoritative

⁴⁷ Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko: Or, The Royal Slave*, in Id, *Three Histories*, London, Printed for W. Canning, 1688, p. 21.

voice as an eye witness. Not only that, but the eyes are protagonists of many important events of the plot, such as the death of the valorous general, Imoinda's father, killed by an arrow in his eye, and the falling in love of Oroonoko with Imoinda:

this fair Queen of Night, whose face and person was so exceeding all he had ever beheld, that lovely modesty with which she received him, that softness in her look and sighs [...] he told her with his eyes that he was not insensible of her charms; while Imoinda, who wished for nothing more than so glorious a conquest, was pleased to believe she understood that silent language of new-born love; and, from that moment, put on all her additions to beauty⁴⁸

Anyway, the primary characteristic of the novel is the introduction of Oroonoko, as an example of all European cultural, political and even physical values, which are incorporated in a black body. This ends up with subverting, for difference, the values of real European behavior:

He had nothing of barbarity in his nature, but in all points addressed himself as if his education had been in some European court [...] He was pretty tall, but of a shape the most exact that can be fancied: the most famous statuary could not form the figure of a man more admirably turned from head to foot. His face was not of that brown rusty black which most of that nation are, but of perfect ebony, or polished jet. His eyes were the most awful that could be seen, and very piercing; the white of 'em being like snow, as were his teeth. His nose was rising and Roman, instead of African and flat. His mouth the finest shaped that could be seen; far from those great turned lips which are so natural to the rest of the negroes. The whole proportion and air of his face was so nobly and exactly formed that, bating his color, there could be nothing in nature more beautiful, agreeable, and handsome. There was no one grace wanting that bears the standard of true beauty. His hair came down to his shoulders, by the aids of art, which was by pulling it out with a quill, and keeping it combed; of which he took particular care.⁴⁹

Thus, the first introduction of the hero with all the characteristics of a good European man, seems to respond to that kind of mimicry Fanon talks about, in which the black subject, if he is never a subject, must assume the categories of whiteness in order to become an agency or, at least, not to be seen as different. This difference, which mimicry tends to lose, is somehow overturned by the most important attribute Behn gives her hero, that of blazing blackness, a kind of blackness that distinguishes him not only from white, but also from the other

⁴⁸ Ivi, p. 37.

⁴⁹ Ivi, pp. 32-34.

“brown negroes”, making of him, thus, something different somehow as Bhabha’s mimicry seems to suggest. Just this “in-betweenness”, makes Catherine Gallagher talk about a blackness that has to be seen as «authentically and unnaturally African»⁵⁰, because there is no doubt he is African but not in the way white people intend. In fact:

Nor did the perfections of his mind come short of those of his person; for his discourse was admirable upon almost any subject: and whoever had heard him speak would have been convinced of their errors, that all fine wit is confined to the white men, especially to those of Christendom; and would have confessed that Oroonoko was as capable even of reigning well, and of governing as wisely, had as great a soul, as politic maxims, and was as sensible of power, as any prince civilized in the most refined schools of humanity and learning, or the most illustrious courts⁵¹

The un-naturalness Gallagher individuates is not only made up of a missing correspondence with white categories, but also of the opposite characteristics to the naturalness, that of artificiality, that is culture. Both the body of Oroonoko and of Imoinda, indeed, are bodies that not only carry the masks of blackness, constructed by whites, but also the inscription of their own culture. By means of those “proper” signs they seem to re-appropriate these bodies, and discover definitely their identity:

from her being carv'd in fine Flowers and Birds all over her Body, we took her to be of Quality before, yet, when we knew Clemene was Imoinda, we cou'd not enough admire her. I had forgot to tell you, that those who are Nobly born of that Country, are so delicately Cut and Rac'd all over the fore-part of the Trunk of their Bodies, that it looks as if it were Japan'd; the Works being raised like high Poynt round the Edges of the Flowers: Some are only Carv'd with a little Flower, or Bird, at the Sides of the Temples, as was Cæsar; and those who are so Carv'd over the Body, resemble our Ancient Picts, that are figur'd in the Chronicles, but these Carvings are more delicate.⁵²

This consideration produces a domino effect over the white bodies as well, since, in fact, the blackness has been discovered not to be a natural category, but a cultural one, and since even the cultural category can't define a man or each of his peculiarities in a definitive way. Then neither is the “whiteness” a natural

⁵⁰ Catherine Gallagher, *Oroonoko's Blackness*, in Janet Todd, quoted, p. 241.

⁵¹ Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko*, quoted, p. 35.

⁵² Ivi, pp. 135-136. These bodies as black surfaces inscribed of inner meaning and outer representation have often been seen as a metaphor as a metaphor of textuality: «We can read Oroonoko's gleaming blackness, then, as a celebration of inscription without turning it into a self-reflective modern text», Catherine Gallagher, op. cit, p. 240.

category nor a definitive one. Behn demonstrates this by turning the places of white, who from being the observer of blacks and Indians, become observed from both black and Indians, who judge them in physical and moral aspects. This occurs when a delegacy of whites, even the narrator joining it, leaves the plantation and encounters an Indian population. An encounter Behn describes as a double difference encounter:

Now none of us speaking the Language of the People, and imagining we shou'd have a half Diversion in Gazing only; and not knowing what they said, we took a Fisherman that liv'd at the Mouth of the River, who had been a long Inhabitant there, and oblig'd him to go with us: But because he was known to the Indians, as trading among 'em; and being, by long Living there, become a perfect Indian in Colour [...]They were all Naked, and we were Dress'd, so as is most, comode for the hot Countries, very Glittering and Rich [...]taking their Hair up in their Hands, and spreading it wide to those they call'd out too; as if they would say (as indeed it signify'd) Numberless Wonders , or not to be recounted, no more than to number the Hair of their Heads. By degrees they grew more bold, and from gazing upon us round, they touch'd us; laving their Hands upon all the Features of our Faces, feeling our Breasts and Arms, taking up one Petticoat, then wondering to see another; admiring our Shooes and Stockings, but more our Garters, which we gave 'em [...]cry'd, Amora Tiguamy , which is as much as, How do you , or Welcome Friend; and all, with one din, began to gabble to him, and ask'd, If we had Sense, and Wit? if we cou'd talk of affairs of Life, and War, as they cou'd do? if we cou'd Hunt, Swim, and do a thousand things they use? He answer'd 'em, We cou'd.⁵³

The novel, however, is not an utopian one, and Behn knows that subverting points of view can help in denouncing the power related to the male gaze, which imprints meanings over the Others' bodies, but it can scarcely subvert the power it already owns. Thus, in order to make his wife free from this white power, that possesses the commodity of her and his body, he can only kill her:

All that Love cou'd say in such cases, being ended; and all the intermitting Irresolutions being adjusted, the Lovely, Young, and Ador'd Victim lays her self down, before the Sacrificer; while he, with a Hand resolv'd, and a Heart breaking within, gave the Fatal Stroke; first, cutting her Throat, and then severing her, yet Smiling, Face from that Delicate Body, pregnant as it was with Fruits of tend'rest Love. As soon as he had done, he laid the Body decently on Leaves and Flowers; of which he made a Bed, and conceal'd it under the same cover-lid of Nature; only her Face he left yet bare to look on: But when he found she was Dead, and past all Retrieve, never more to bless him with her Eyes, and soft Language; his Grief swell'd up to Rage⁵⁴

⁵³ Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko*, quoted, pp. 165-169.

⁵⁴ *Ivi*, pp. 220-221.

Severing the face from that body that neither she nor he owned any longer is the only way to make not only her soul free but also the only carnal thing she still possesses. The noble prince, instead, will never re-appropriate his body. That text on which were inscribed the signs of his nobility, and then those of his slavery, will become the whole sign of his punishment, perpetrated by whom now possesses that body:

He had learn'd to take Tobacco; and when he was assur'd he should Dye, he desir'd they would give him a Pipe in his Mouth, ready Lighted, which they did; and the Executioner came, and first cut off his Members, and threw them into the Fire; after that, with an ill-favoured Knife, they cut his Ears, and his Nose, and burn'd them; he still Smoak'd on, as if nothing had touch'd him; then they hack'd off one of his Arms, and still he bore up, and held his Pipe; but at the cutting off the other Arm, his Head sunk, and his Pipe drop'd; and he gave up the Ghost, without a Groan, or a Reproach. My Mother and Sister were by him all the while, but not suffer'd to save him; so rude and wild were the Rabble, and so inhumane were the Justices, who stood by to see the Execution, who after paid dearly enough for their Insolence. They cut Cæsar in Quarters, and sent them to several of the chief Plantations: One Quarter was sent to Colonel Martin, who refus'd it; and swore, he had rather see the Quarters of Banister, and the Governor himself, than those of Cæsar, on his Plantations; and that he cou'd govern his Negroes without Terrifying and Grieving them with frightful Spectacles of a mangl'd King.⁵⁵

The punishment is barbaric, cruel and inhuman, all characteristics that fit very well with white men, Behn thinks. They would never celebrate the man who was about to subvert not only their economic power, but also their cultural dominance. Only a woman, from a closer marginalized point of view could devote her pen to this hero, hoping her reputation would be enough for his greatness:

Thus Dy'd this Great Man; worthy of a better Fate, and a more sublime Wit than mine to write his Praise; yet, I hope, the Reputation of my Pen is considerable enough to make his Glorious Name to survive to all Ages; with that of the Brave, the Beautiful, and the Constant Imoinda.⁵⁶

In presenting her hero, Behn has to mimic features that white eyes could recognize as virtues, so Oroonoko had to mimic white virtues. But, Behn seems to ask, are the white men, in dismembering Oroonoko, mimicking the vices usually inscribed on black skin? Finally everyone seems to mimic himself, according to the power he or she possesses.

⁵⁵ Ivi, pp. 234-236.

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

Thus, black men and women have recognized themselves as the objects of white gaze, a gaze that has constructed them as an image, or better as a screen onto which to project the product of their imagery. But, in mimicking this model they can appropriate this screen and discover it to be a mirror. Actually this is the action Behn does with *Oroonoko*, a novel of course not written for black people but for white colonialists that are now looking at an uncanny image by themselves. It is an image, which has everything they supposed it must have: white humanity, white education, even a white profile face. But what makes the uncanny emerges is the very, very black surface on which these features are woven. The black skin, usually bearing completely opposite epidermal schema, is now giving back the look through the looking glass. And what he or she is looking at is a monster, full of cruelty, uneducated in meeting the others' culture, only interested in material affairs, in short a myopic. In this crossing gaze, white man hadn't foreseen that the one that is more afraid is the white side. If blacks, and also women, become aware of the arbitrariness again of the visual regime, which provides who must be the subject and who must be the object, the rules are overwhelmed, and they could lose the slaving power of their own gaze.

This is the way in which Bhabha intended mimicry, not as a passive coincidence of an object to the subject model, erasing all the differences even though in the name of freedom, but as a strategy of appropriation as the subject weapon to use against white gaze power. Moreover, in posing herself as the authoritative writer, white but woman, Behn plays the role of a witness for the blacks. She is a medium point between the reversing points of the subject and the objects gaze, testifying not only their arbitrariness but also their reversibility. It is another point in which male vision is attacked: after having demonstrated that scientific vision is subject oriented, she demonstrates that black inferiority is as well a product of the same partial vision. Once again, as Burke showed, the seventeenth century woman plays the role of a medium, accepting her non-elite place, but finding it to be fruitful, even though not comfortable, to give voice to herself and others, and to give light to their gaze.

Mimicry and masquerade, then, seem to be her weapon, and the seventeenth century will refine the technique.

Masking desire, unmasking possession

Another space, after the political and the colonial, waiting for a reversal, not completely erasing the codes of male representation, is the space of the representation of female body as a sexual desire object. If the political reversal has turned the women from an undefended object to a defender subject, the colonial reversal has made blackness the place of human values, we cannot expect anything less than the reversal desire that makes women the active manager of sexual addresses.

As we have already seen in the previous chapter, the desire writer for excellence, within our triad, is Eliza Haywood, that being intended in two ways: as a superficial and commercial vendor of popular writing, or as a sincere denouncer of private and public blanks in *pruderie*. In this case Haywood shows us the novel that has been considered as a «greater threat to patriarchal order than perhaps any other masquerade text of the early eighteenth century»⁵⁷, *Fantomina: or Love in A Maze*⁵⁸. Although definitely ascribable within the genre of novel, it is also a real masquerade, for the plot is completely focused on the disguises of a woman stages in order to obtain and maintain the “favors” of her preferred, Beauplaisir. We don’t know her real name, what we only know is that she is «A young Lady of distinguished Birth, Beauty, Wit, and Spirit»⁵⁹.

If the political reversal in Cavendish is acted by means of a hysterical mimicry, the desire reversal is here acted by means of the masquerade. It means that the mask, or better the masks, woman will put on her face is not that resembling male roles, pretending to stay in his play, rather and probably in a subtler way, the mask of femininity man has shaped for woman. It is, thus, through her artifact image that the unnamed woman of the novel acts against this system. I argue, then, that by using the means of her oppression, that one that made of her a passive object of the male sexual gaze, she plays the role of the sexual choicer, the one that somehow renounces her role of choosing who has already chosen her, making the one who doesn’t chose her own choice. It is in fact not meaningless that the man

⁵⁷ Catherine Craft-Fairchild, *Masquerade and Gender. Disguise and Female Identity in Eighteenth-century Fictions by Women*, University Park, PA, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993, p. 65.

⁵⁸ Eliza Haywood, *Fantomina: or Love in A Maze*, in id, *Secret Histories, Novels and Poems*. In Four Volumes, Cambridge, Chadwyck-Healey, 1996, pp. 257-291.

⁵⁹ Ivi, p. 257.

for who our heroine plays the masquerade is someone who isn't interested in her. This makes her the actor of the relationship, the one who chooses and forces the other sharing her choice, even more unmasking as predictable as men choices are, and how simply and funny women can play with them. What is more fun, in Haywood's heroine continually clapping at her own games, is that everything is played by the rules of the male chauvinistic society. Its constraints end up disclosing her multiple ways of playing.

Once again, the, womanliness is seen as a mask, and her only way to act is that of the masquerade. Precisely this enclosure within the space of the camouflage has been object of different critiques, especially within feminist studies, between those who saw the danger for women to lose her own identity, and those who, conversely focus on the distance between the mask and person under it, found in it a tactic of both defense and control.

On the "dark side" of masquerade seems to be Luce Irigaray who, in her arguments in *This Sex Which Is Not One*⁶⁰, defines the masquerade in a double way, on one hand as the attempt of woman to recuperate her desire, and on the other, as the attempt to participate in man's desire, which finally means «renouncing their own»⁶¹. Entering the space of the masquerade of femininity means accepting to become, or better to stay, as the object of male desire, of sexual enjoyment in which she is never the subject or, in Irigaray's opinions, the one who enjoys.

But is this really the only way in which she can act within the masquerade? Isn't any deviant way provided or discovered to become the actor of this play?

Terry Castle individuates the characteristics of the eighteenth century masquerade in three elements: the voyeurism, i.e. the pleasure one takes in look; the exhibitionism or, how Castle says, the self-display, i.e. the pleasure one takes in being looked; and the anonymity of the subject is wearing the mask⁶². This last characteristic is particularly fitting with the masquerade Haywood stages, as for the example we have already seen in *The Invisible Spy*, in which it was described as the world upside-down, everyone feeling free to act in a way the unmasked version of him or herself would never allow. We have also seen that it could be

⁶⁰ Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas une*, quoted, pp. 133-134

⁶¹ Ibidem.

⁶² Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-century English Culture and Fiction*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1986.

even very dangerous. But in this new diverted realm one can no longer say who is looked at, who is displayed, who is the subject and who is the object of vision. The phallogocentrism is threatened, and women can both exit from sexual domination or enter the realm of their own desiring influence.

This invisibility, so dear to Haywood, produces another effect on identity, in Castle's opinion, that of alienating the inner identity from the outer aspect. This is precisely what happens in *Fantomina* in which the main character is unknown to both the other main character and the reader himself. This allows her both to defend her identity from the risk of being the object of man's desire, and to be uncensored by the patriarchal rules.

Helen Thompson argues how Haywood's heroine unmasks the invisibility of patriarchal rules, without going out of these same laws while, somehow observing them. Actually the way in which *Fantomina* seems to act is not easily definable since she at once observes and attacks patriarchal laws, she is at once constrained within this system and free to move within this same system. This is what Thompson defines as "the power of deception", which accounts this heroine's power not just in «a theory of disguise that corroborates her narrative, but one of performance»⁶³. Her masquerade, indeed, is not limited to the "change of dress" but it is acted in a more complex way, implying even a fine work of gestures and accent, in so far as the narrator stresses how she was able to embody every kind of subject.

Her masquerades, are more than "simple" transvestitism, they are plain examples of performances, thus able of action rather than absorption. Moreover the fact that these performances are repeated, makes this kind of masquerade closer to the "playful repetition" Irigaray talks about as the assumption of a sexual gesture in order to discover a sexual difference rather than a sexual indifference. This also means that the provided feminine role is assumed, but in a deliberate way, in order to force the same male system to admit its own consequences⁶⁴.

Drawing attention to the female sex role, and to its own difference to be discovered, leads Irigaray to account just this difference that resides in a particular characteristic, that of plurality. Female sex is not one, thus neither her pleasure

⁶³ Helen Thompson, "Plotting Materialism: W. Charleton's *The Ephesian Matron*, E. Haywood's *Fantomina*, and Feminine Consistency", in «Eighteenth-Century Studies» 35 (2002), pp. 195-214, p. 204.

⁶⁴ Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas une*, quoted, p. 76.

can be one. In face of this plurality phallogentrism can say nothing but erase this plurality in nullity. This plurality, however, can always return, like everything that is repressed. In fact, rather than see *Fantomina's* protagonist as playing undifferentiated objects, Thompson proposes to see her masquerades as the embodiment of whole bodies, and we can add, together with Irigaray, multiple female pleasure. In this way the masquerade is closer than we previously expected to Irigaray's mimicry, and moreover the persisting density of the same subject, unwavering in the pursuit of her pleasure, makes consistency rather than fragility her primary feature⁶⁵. Indeed, the change of dress and so even of identities is not endless, and does not even end with the absorption of the protagonist into the patriarchal system of marriage. The young lady will finally reproduce another woman again, who isn't herself, rather a daughter. She will keep this daughter without a father, thus producing an outsider woman in front of patriarchy, and installed within a matrilineal system.

Let's analyze this novel in detail.

The story begins with the brief presentation of the young well educate lady who, attending a theatre play, notes how men that night, especially Beauplaisir who she likes in turn, seem to all be attracted to a prostitute, and wonders how it is possible that those gentlemen would enjoy company like that. Pushed from this wondering the lady decides to make a sort of experiment: she will disguise herself as a prostitute the next night. Under that appearance she goes to the theatre and, as was predictable, she becomes the focus of the attentions of all men, and especially of those of Beauplaisir, who barely noticed her the night before. Now the "virtuous" young⁶⁶ seems to be falling in love with the young prostitute Fantomina, who continues the masquerade to maintain his interest, even though it means to lose her honor. But since her true identity will remain a secret, and she will maintain faithful to one man, her honor is not threatened, she argues. However, after a while the courtesies of Fantomina end up with boring Beauplaisir, who justifying with the bath's season and with how improper it would be to be accompanied by a prostitute, convince Fantomina to not follow him. Or at least this is what he thinks. In fact, the young lady architects a new disguise: this time she

⁶⁵ Compare Helen Thompson, quoted.

⁶⁶ Haywood never stops to stress, probably ironically, how the male character is one of the best as a specimen of his sex.

will be Celia, the mistress of the Bath's house where he will lodge during his trip. Once again her disguise is successful, and he immediately seems to be in love with her. But once again he will show his inconstancy, and a few weeks later he will be ready to leave her. But the inverse is not true. Changing dress again she is sure to obtain his attention again. In fact the young widow Bloomer will attract him during the trip back to the city, and he affirms to be ready to enjoy her company until she leaves the city in order to take care of her husband's fortune. But his constancy will not last so long. Tired of changing again and again, and struck by the undifferentiated focus of his attention, she decides to stage the vanity itself of his loves, and seduces him as an anonymous girl disguised under a mask, and once again she wins. But something happens that stops this performance, her mother is back in the city, and the young lady must return to her original house and dress. She will eventually discover to be pregnant. Together with her mother she decides to go away from the city that gave her no more fun but suffering, but she will enjoy the last ball. During the feast, with no mask protecting her she experiences for the first time the heaviness of male gaze onto her body: now acting the role prescribed for her, she has no means to escape or at least manage her "objectness". The shock, together with the first pains of labor, makes her swoon. While delivering "the fine girl" all her architecture has to be unveiled, and her mother requires the man responsible to be called. The deception by which he has been seduced surprises him, who not being due to marry the lady, anyway offers himself to take care of the baby girl. But that girl is only the daughter of the young lady and she will carry her far from the city, in a convent under the cares of a French Abbess, the mother's dearest friend.

From the very first time in which the young lady disguises herself, it seems clear that her intent is that of showing how sexual categories, that the male society has constructed to enclose the female sexuality and desire, are the first means by which women can deceive men rather than vice versa. All the plot goes on overturning the desiring categories of objects and subjects: she is the first desiring character who gives life to the plot of masquerades and disguise, and Beauplaisir is the real object of her feminine desire that satisfies her pleasure playing with the social categories in first place. All the social categories of women, in fact, that she chooses are wise games of social balance and personal confusion.

The first dress she wears is, not by chance that of prostitute, because this character, at the same time marginal and central in social life, represents someone who, although addressed with moral blame of dishonor and perdition, is actually the only category of women to be free to express her own desires and pleasures. Of course this freedom leads to the contemporary freedom of men in approaching them. But, as our author will soon demonstrate, they rarely use better kindness to more honest women. Indeed, it is under this mask that the young lady can better observe “this kind” of man:

A Crowd of Purchasers of all Degrees and Capacities were in a Moment gather'd about her, each endeavouring to out-bid the other, in offering her a Price for her Embraces. She listen'd to 'em all, and was not a little diverted in her Mind at the Disappointment she shou'd give to so many, each of which thought himself secure of gaining her [...] She was naturally vain, and receiv'd no small Pleasure in hearing herself prais'd, tho' in the Person of another, and a suppos'd Prostitute; but she dispatch'd as soon as she cou'd all that had hitherto attack'd her, when she saw the accomplish'd *Beauplaisir* was making his Way thro' the Crowd as fast as he was able, to reach the Bench she sat on. She had often seen him in the Drawing-Room, had talk'd with him; but then her Quality and reputed Virtue kept him from using her with that Freedom she now expected he wou'd do, and had discover'd something in him, which had made her often think she shou'd not be displeas'd, if he wou'd abate some Part of his Reserve.⁶⁷

The first concerns *Fantomina* is interested in are those of morality and decency, and immediately patriarchal codes fall down under the pressure of male desire. Thus it is interesting to notice how the same woman who the day before didn't interest Beauplaisir, as a honest woman, now immediately attracts his attention as a prostitute. Further in the text, when *Fantomina* abandons herself to her pleasure, risking losing her honor, she wonders what is it in her that is wrong? What in her behavior could really allow her think of herself as a prostitute: she doesn't accept any money from Beauplaisir; she cedes only blandishments of love to Beauplaisir. Actually his behavior seems to fit better in this category: he changes the person with whom he shares his love very often; he doesn't seem to fall in love with any of the women he meets; neither does he want to renounce any of them:

But he varied not so much from his Sex as to be able to prolong Desire, to any great Length after Possession [...]but with her Sex's Modesty, she had not also thrown off another Virtue equally valuable, tho' generally unfortunate, *Constancy* : She loved *Beauplaisir* ; it was only he whose Solicitations could give her Pleasure; and had she seen the whole Species despairing, dying for her sake, it might, perhaps, have been a

⁶⁷ Eliza Haywood, *Fantomina*, cit., p. 258-259.

Satisfaction to her Pride, but none to her more tender Inclination.⁶⁸

Even if she wears the mask of a mistress, she is by the way the same woman who enjoys Beauplaisir in her fictive lodging, and then attends the Royal chapel, or the Opera, but he is not able to recognize her: «adorn'd with all the Blaze of Jewels, has he, in less than an Hour after, beheld at the Royal Chapel, the Palace Gardens, Drawing-Room, Opera, or Play, the Haughty Awe-inspiring Lady»⁶⁹.

In order to maintain his desire, as we have already seen, she will change many dresses, and the narrator tries to explain how it is possible that he never recognizes the same woman. The explanation attributes to her performance ability the reason of this credulity, even if with a little bit of irony, which sounds more like a reinsurance for all men rather than as a reasonable enlightenment:

I know there are Men who will swear it is an Impossibility, and that no Disguise could hinder them from knowing a Woman they had once enjoy'd. In answer to these Scruples, I can only say, that besides the Alteration which the Change of Dress made in her, she was so admirably skill'd in the Art of feigning, that she had the Power of putting on almost what Face she pleas'd, and knew so exactly how to form her Behaviour to the Character she represented, that all the Comedians at both Playhouses are infinitely short of her Performances: She, could vary her very Glances, tune her Voice to Accents the most different imaginable from those in which she spoke when she appear'd herself.⁷⁰

Once she has repeatedly proven his faithless, and what risks she has preserved herself thanks to her disguises, she threatens his self-confidence in making coincide the desires of two of her women, the widow and the prostitute. Finding himself in an embarrassing situation, in which honesty could not represent a way out, he tries to deceive both the women, but she argues «while he thinks to fool me, is himself the only beguiled Person [...] which led her again into Reflections on the Unaccountableness of Men's Fancies, who still prefer the last Conquest, only because it is the last»⁷¹.

This she will prove unequivocally with the last mask, this time a true mask. If this man is interested in no woman, but in every woman, no matter what census, what morality, probably neither what shape, she could be able to seduce him, without neither pretending an identity. She is quite right even in this case. But this

⁶⁸ Ivi, p. 266-267.

⁶⁹ Ivi, p. 265.

⁷⁰ Ivi, p. 274.

⁷¹ Ivi, p. 277.

time there's a very significant difference. Keeping her identity completely unknown to him and to everyone else, gives her a dominant position, knowing very well all the others, but being known from no one, which means also that she looks at everyone but she is not looked at by anyone. This position of inferiority is unbearable for Beauplaisir who, after only a night with Incognita, refuses to see her again.

Paradoxically, as Castle imagined, this masked female power has as a counterpart the weakness of the unmasked young and wealthy woman at the ball:

It was there she was seiz'd with those Pangs, which none in her Condition are exempt from: She could not conceal the sudden Rack which all at once invaded her; or had her Tongue been mute, her wildly rolling Eyes, the Distortion of her Features, and the Convulsione [sic] which shook her whole Frame, in spite of her, would have reveal'd she labour'd under some terrible Shock of Nature. Every Body was surpris'd, every Body was concern'd, but few guessed at the Occasion⁷²

Haywood, of course, comprehends very well that a woman who is free only under a mask is not a free woman in any way. Indeed, the final destiny of the young lady will be in a convent, for shame has fallen over her. But if the faith for a free woman doesn't reside neither in Fantomina, nor in Celia, nor in Widow Bloomer or in Incognita, not all hopes are lost for the little girl, born with no patriarchy.

Conclusion

In the constitution of a female gaze we are attending to, the second step after having destabilized the male subject of the vision is, thus, scattering the object of this process that, thanks to a series of displacing and disguising, becomes less definable, detectable and, thus controllable.

As we have seen within this chapter, the patriarchal power of gaze has been threatened while practicing his own political power, which had destined women in a marginal position on the basis of a supposed physical inferiority, making them unable for political government and military conquest. As Cavendish's Lady Victoria showed, this inferiority is only a result of the exercise and the custom

⁷² Ivi, p. 288.

women had been forbidden to. In fact, since they decided to react to this situation and to wear similar habits they succeed in male roles, or even excel in their opposite league.

If women, therefore, are considered objects of the male gaze, it only depends on the point of view. It suffices to put on the male rules mask to turn the dominating point of view upside down, to see with a new sense of proportion its subject and, thus, even its object. In order to construct, once again, a new concept of scopic regime, historically and materially defined, women have to use the same system of codes which has marginalized them, but never renouncing to their and others' masked differences.

Once the primary role of male gaze has been affected, and its female object has discovered her body to be a written text and read by the same look, the path is open to other objects discovering the artificiality of their subjected position, depending only on a particular asset of the scopic regime.

The gaze can be rejected or at least returned. In this process women have often been mediators to others' instances, as Behn's *Oroonoko* demonstrates. Epidermal schemes are other texts marked by white male, which made black skin the sign of bad values. But in overturning and re-appropriating these schemes themselves the point of view of blacks faces the reversal of the mirror and the discovery of the whites as to be the cruel one. And women are their witnesses. Once again the mask designed by whites while covering the real aspect of the marginal, guarantees him or her a favorable and secret point of view that attacks the same auto-perception of white man.

More than one scheme, however, is impressed on the female body: that of the prostitute, that of the maid, that of the widow, and that of wealthy and well educated women. Each of these is also provided with specific rules, all however enclosed in the sphere of man's desire. And the more these roles go toward upper places in society, the more strict their constraints seem to be. But, what patriarchal society has not considered is how hard it is to hide a pleasure that is so multiple, and that will do nothing less than overwhelm the borders once again, even though not breaking any constituted rule, which is even worse. That is why, in *Fantomina*, the protagonist, instead of accepting to be refused by the man she likes, uses all these codes to gain her own pleasure and a new genre of woman free of men.

The male pleasure and the dominating scopic regime has once again been turned upside down, and the masks man had designed to lock his objects in their passive roles have become the hiding-place of uncanny observing objects.

IV
FACTS AND FICTIONS

A painting is immediately formed [...] on the inner surface of the brain that looks towards his concavities
R. Descartes

The relativization of the point of view, to whom female gaze participated in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, has produced the multiplication and the diffraction of the subject and the object of vision. In fact, the two instances have become confused once the observer has discovered to be looked at, and the observed has started to look back at him or her. The highest product of these fragmentary visions has been the scattering of the third element of the scopic regime: the image. Since, in fact, subject and object are no more defined either in their place or in their actions, neither can the image be seen as fixed and univocal. Many questions derive from this third problematic point. Who produces this image? Is it the subject, the object or the medium? Is there something beyond this image? Is it the object, or do image and object differ? Is the image itself the object of vision? Or there is something beyond the image? Could the image be the meeting point between subject and object?

These questions seem to be implied in all the discourses Cavendish, Behn and Haywood have until now had. From the images of outer and inner of *The Blazing World* to the masks of femininity and masculinity of *Bell in Campo*, the point of Cavendish is the mediating (and sometimes distorting) value of the object's image built by subjects. Between *The Emperor of The Moon* and *Oroonoko*, Behn built up a theory of image as a text on which subjects write their beliefs making them coincide with the object, while the objects try to use it to reveal the illusion of the

subject. Finally Haywood has demonstrated, with her *Invisible Spy* and *Fantomina*, how hard it is to see what is behind the image, and how little men seem to be interested in this kind of survey.

Once again the questions of our triad are striking for their modernity. In fact, we are still questioning on what images are, and how they work.

W.J.T. Mitchell has demonstrated how difficult is to define what images are and how problematic it could be both from a historical and an epistemological point of view¹. First of all Mitchell faces the complexity of images species, designing a family tree that allows us to define our territory between the perceptual, the verbal and the mental images. The first kind of image occupies a border place between physical and psychological imagery. This is the space of action of the «"species" or "sensible forms" which (according to Aristotle) emanate from objects and imprint themselves on the waxlike receptacles of our senses like a signet ring»². This is the region in which scientists, psychologists, art historians, literary critics and philosophers work, more or less together, on sense data, species and appearances. The combination of these three "members of the family" is at risk in our discussion, starting from female (but not only) relativization of faith in sense data and arriving to the question of appearances, i.e. of what fits between the individual and reality, which is commonly conceived as image. Verbal images are the precise matter of literary critic, interested in metaphors, descriptions and writing. They are, thus, the fields in which the critic of vision of our triad is more concentrated, especially when they set the goal of unveiling the false images of male power of vision, or when they try to convey difficult scientific images to uneducated audience, especially female audience. Mental images, which "belong" to epistemology and psychology, comprehend dreams, memories, ideas and *fantasmata*. These last ones are the «revived versions of those impressions called up by the imagination in the absence of the objects that originally stimulated them»³. Imagination and the impressions it produces are the focal point of this chapter.

According to Mitchell imagination is a member of this family not only insofar it belongs to mental images, but also to verbal images. Especially in the seventeenth

¹ W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Is An Image*, in «New Literary History» 15 (1984), pp. 503-537.

² *Ivi*, p. 505.

³ *Ibidem*.

and eighteenth century, in fact, the consideration of verbal activity in producing “sincere” images, even more vividly than nature could do, was very wide spread. It derives as well that verbal images as related to the production of mental images, within imagination, were considered a good means to introduce not very educated people to notions of natural philosophy or to some scientific observation.

In the introduction to the French edition of Binswanger’s *Dream and Existence*, Foucault warns about the similarity between image and imagination. In his opinion, image, as a crystallized form, is just the renouncement to imagination, which is not reduced to the space of the image. Imagination is the process by which any single identity found deep below the perceptual world⁴. It is not perfectly clear, however what kind of image Foucault means.

Going beyond perceptual world, imagination seems to have played a particular role in the age we are focusing on. On one hand it might be seen as what moves to overcome what is already known, “imaging” something deeper or higher; on the other hand it produced, thanks to unimaginable discoveries reached by New Science, the fruitful effect of wonder. In this sense wonder is not only an aesthetic experience but also a more historically funded phenomenon. Many scholars such as Mary Campbell and Lorraine Daston have argued that the astonishing facts of New Science could have conversely produced the insurgence of wonderful fictions, differently considered as a positive alternative way of knowing or as “a broken knowledge”⁵. Whatever is the consideration of wonder this phenomenon was considered in a double way: as a dangerous way through which the disciplines of the scientific discourse can lose themselves; or as a way to attract a broader audience and amateurs to the knowledge of Natural Philosophy. While literates, philosophers and scientists discussed about that, a new cultural effect was produced, between scientific amusement and wild fancy, the science fiction.

Daston and Campbell have traced the issue to its historical roots. Indeed, if “science fiction” genre can be studied starting from its medieval origins, and if the writings by Thomas More⁶, Giordano Bruno⁷ and Francis Bacon⁸ can be seen as a

⁴ Michele Foucault, Ludwig Binswanger, *Dream and Existence*, Atlantic Highlands NJ, Humanities Press, 1985.

⁵ Francis Bacon, *The Advance of Learning*, London 1605, ed. by F.G. Selby, M.A. Oxon, London and New York, Mac Millan, 1895.

⁶ Thomas More, *Libellus vere aureus, nec minus salutaris quam festivus, de optimo rei publicae statu deque nova insula Utopia*, Leuve, 1516.

following step, the connection between the imagination of new and different worlds with the new and different discoveries in astronomy, microscopy and geography, witnesses the most important cultural impact in early modern society. The supposed objectivity of the New Science is thus once again threatened.

The new approach to Natural Philosophy developed mainly in a new field of investigation that divides and joins together the scientific empiricism and metaphysical question, thus giving a rather ambiguous role to human senses, first and foremost that of sight.

As we have already seen, despite Descartes attributing a servile and minor role compared to the horizons of human knowledge, he argued, in *Dioptrics (Dioptrice)* that how we conduct our lives depends in large part by these same senses, among which that of sight is the most noble and universal. The French philosopher deduced, then, that inventions aimed at strengthening this sense would have been the most useful to human progress. This statement reflects the ambition of the century, oriented to an extension of knowledge in this world, rather than to the liberation from the sensory world. These ambitions were oriented not only to the borders of the natural view of man, but also to horizons that the human imagination had ever achieved. As new discoveries and the resulting speculations spread from laboratories, academies and scientific societies in the cabinets of amateurs, magazines, and popularizing literature, new worlds penetrated the common imagery also reflecting through the imagination, the humor and the critique of literature of the seventeenth century and the next. Now the awareness that the Earth and the Universe known so far were only a small portion of the newly revealed reality was complete. Time and space exploded in front of the new fields of vision offered by the microscope and the telescope, and the plurality of worlds was a doctrine increasingly discussed between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

European literature of the eighteenth century showed, therefore, an extraordinary sensitivity to new theories that placed the man in a precarious balance between the infinitely distant and the infinitely small, reducing it as an

⁷ Giordano Bruno, *De l'infinito, universo e mondi*, Venezia, 1584.

⁸ Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis, A Poem*, London, 1684.

insignificant speck of sand in an endless universe⁹. In early literature about the microscope and telescope two different characters could then be distinguished: on the one hand the exaltation of the glory of God, revealed by the magnificence of the universe through the new instruments; on the other hand, especially by non-scientific authors, the resizing of the nature of man in his relationship with God in a universe in which, as Addison says, if the entire solar system were to be annihilated, nothing would change in the universal order¹⁰.

Witnesses of this revolution are observers of society as Fontenelle and Addison, who, with their non-scientific publications facilitated the widest dissemination of new ideas. One of the more common treatise for the popularization of the late seventeenth century philosophy was in fact *Conversations on The Plurality of Worlds*, which we have already mentioned, in which Fontenelle enjoyed his student lady, promising the possibility of extraterrestrial life to be logically and empirically acceptable. After the observations of Bishop Cassini, new instruments had already allowed us to find on the moon something similar to our mountains and our seas. Why, then, not think that those territories were inhabited like ours? Resizing the human point of view is the thread that weaves all the work of Fontenelle, who goes so far as to imagine what may be the opinions of the inhabitants of the moon about the solar system, which they also belong to, and on our planet:

I would give any thing that I could possibly divine the awkward Reasonings of the Philosophers of their World, upon our Earth's appearing immoveable to them, when all the other Celestial Bodies rise and set over their Heads, within the Compass of fifteen Days. 'Tis plain they attribute this Immobility to her Bigness, for she is forty times bigger than the Moon, and when their Poets are in the mind to extol unactive and indolent Princes, I doubt not but they take care to compare their Inactivity to this Majestic Repose of the Earth.¹¹

The Earth thus became not only one of many stars in the sky, but also a source of poetic inspiration and, above all (less easy to accept at that time) a source of entertainment and pleasure:

⁹ Addison J., Steele R., 1967, *The Spectator*, ed.by C. Gregory Smith, 4 voll., London, J.M. Dent & Sons Edition vol. IV, p. 280.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Ibidem.

They must very sensibly perceive in the Moon, that our Earth turns upon her own Center. For Instance, imagine that our Europe, Asia, and America present themselves one after another to them in little, and in different Shapes and Figures, almost as we see them upon our Maps. Now this Sight must be a Novelty to such Travelers as pass from that Moiety of the Moon which never sees us, to that which always does.

These conversations, halfway between astronomy, philosophy and fantasy show the disappointment of the French philosopher about the short-sighted humanity, whose greatest folly is to believe that all of nature without exception has been created for its exclusive use. In that century, however, evidences of the exact opposite flourished abundantly, which revealed how reality goes far beyond the borders of human senses. The human power with regard to creation, both in terms of domination and in terms of knowledge, appears limited also on another front:

For do you believe we discover (as I may say) all the Inhabitants of The Earth? There are as many Kinds of Invisible, as visible Creatures; we see from the Elephant to the very Hand-Worm, beyond which our Sight fails us, and yet counting from that minute Creature, there are an infinity of lesser Animals, which would be imperceptible, without the aid of Glasses. We see with Magnifying Glasses that the least Drops of Rain Water, Vinegar, and all other liquids, are full of little Fishes, or Serpents, which we could never have suspected there.¹²

Through the microscope, complex social structures, living beings endowed with great physical skills, and possibly intellectual, filled the empty spaces of the vacuum so far considered. The cultural upheaval caused by this revolution, which is at the basis of our own conception of the world and nature, was really explosive in society at the time, a specimen of a crucial relativization of the landmarks and human measurements. In the relativizing climate that followed the development of modern science, even the perception of space and time, due to the enlargement or the shrinking of the dimensions of reality, was the *trait d'union* of the (scientific) writings of the era.

If the measurement of the large and small could no longer aspire to any absolute value, in fact it had become a mere result of comparative mechanism, then the measurement of space and time were affected accordingly. Thus the different shapes of creatures that inhabit possible worlds, which is slowly becoming familiar to men, necessarily leads to a different perception and

¹² Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, Paris, 1687, M. Guerout, trans. Aphra Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds* London, William Canning, 1688, p. 75.

knowledge of the surrounding space according to the proportions of the creature that is experiencing it. Not only, therefore, man lost his confidence to be the measure of the universe, to learn about space through absolute measures, but the immediate perception of time itself - that which governs the rhythms of animal life even more than human, that is free from social conventions - came back in what must have seemed to many like a whirlwind comparison.

The origin of this difficult awareness is *The Search After Truth (Recherche de la vérité. Oy l'on traite de la nature de l'esprit de l'homme et de l'usage qu'il en doit faire pour éviter l'erreur dans les sciences)* (1675) in which Nicolas Malebranche envisaged the possibility that there were creatures for which half an hour amounted to a thousand of "human years" and others for which one of our minutes was worth one hour, a week, a month, an entire era.

The philosophical theory of a new conception of time and duration that would have permanently changed the way of thinking was, however, that presented by John Locke in *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690), that definitively sanctioned the derivation of the perception of time by the speed of succession of the ideas formulated by the perceiving mind. Not only, therefore, it was explained how the same individual could perceive differently the passage of time – being the speed directly proportional to the number of ideas that occupy his mind – but, deducting even more attractively the landscape that we are observing, we assume that creatures of different mental faculties could feel the life in a completely different time.

The transition from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century witnessed the clash between a conception of human knowledge based on reason, being able *a priori* to know the surrounding world, and one based on the senses, the only means of empirical knowledge and therefore limited to the perceptions of those experiences. The English empiricism provoked some skepticism based on the limit of the human senses, but the dissemination of contemporary technological tools such as the telescope and microscope, and above all the revolutionary scientific discoveries related to them, seemed to open new horizons for scientists and philosophers.

This whole panorama depicts this cultural revolution as the foreground of the science fiction, that is a literature in which imagination is not simply an amusement

that entertains and distracts, but an aesthetic rooted on scientific observation. One of the peculiarities of literature between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century is just this complex union of knowledge, through emphasized senses, and imagination in which narrative sometimes accompanied science, sometimes overcame it. It is, indeed, the age in which Galilei and Kepler wrote amusing narrations besides scientific treatise. It is sufficient to think about *Somnium* by Kepler, in which a voyage to the moon becomes the occasion of a full description of Moon's geography, and the asset of time. However, the world showed in this fiction has no aims to make people believe in the possibility of an extra-terrestrial world, rather those to explain Galilei's and Tycho Brahe's observations. Imagination has here only a pretext reason, since it is dangerous to talk to uneducated people too deep in reason. The voyage on the moon is a way to make them accustomed to such questions, without confusing them: «The purpose of my Dream is to use the example of the moon to build up an argument in favor of the motion of the earth, or rather to overcome objections taken from the universal opposition of mankind»¹³. The purpose of Kepler is, thus, a scientific-pedagogical one. Imagination is not a kind of knowledge, but rather a medium.

When Francis Godwin wrote his *Man in the Moone*, in 1638, something happened. In the preface authored by a certain E. M., the aim of verisimilitude seems to be primary. While Kepler never expected his dream to be acquainted as real, Godwin, writing in an age in which Copernican Revolution was already spread, wants his reader to suspend his disbelief. The aim is that of imagination and entertainment, still funded on scientific grounds, but somehow going further in demonstrating how something previously unbelievable could be scientifically possible:

To the Ingenious Reader. Thou hast here an essay of Fancy, where Invention is shewed with Judgment. It was not the Author's intention (I presume) to discourse thee into a beliefe of each particular circumstance. Tis fit thou allow him a liberty of conceive where thou takest to thy selfe a liberty of judgment. In substance thou hast here a new discovery of a new world, which perchance may finde little better entertainment in thy opinion, than that of Columbus at first, in the esteeme of all men [...] But the knowledge of this may seeme more properly reserv'd for this our discovering age: In which our Galilaeusses, can by advantage of their spectacles gaze the Sunne into spots, &

¹³ Johannes Kepler, *Somnium: the Dream, or Posthumous Work on Lunar Astronomy*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 2003, p. 36.

descry mountaines in the Moon. But this, and more in the ensuing discourse I leave to thy candid censure, & the faithful relation of the little eye-witnesse, our great discoverer.¹⁴

Thus, imagination doesn't need science anymore, but can even go further. This is why Arthur B. Evans distinguishes two different kinds of fiction in that period, which he agrees to detect as the origin of modern science fiction:

It is not unreasonable to discern in these two "ur-texts" of science fiction criticism the origins of two distinct but interwoven traditions in the history of science fiction itself: "didactic science fiction," which is pedagogical by design and gives primacy to scientific exposition over the fictional narrative [...] versus "romance science fiction" which is more visionary by nature and gives primacy to the fiction over the science-or pseudo-science-embedded within it.¹⁵

All this leads our discourse to a comparison between the objective New Science expected to achieve and the space it opened to imagination, its precise opposite, because of the innumerable wonders it discovered. It was, indeed, a period not only of astronomic and microscopic discovery, but also of geographical endeavors. Thus the encounter with new world was not only imaginative, but also real, as, for example, the analysis of Behn's *Oroonoko* showed us.

It was, therefore, not only a question of imagination, but rather a question of wonder, that is a suspension of our normal way of reacting in front of something we didn't know before. In other words it is a way of reacting to knowledge when it isn't reliable to anything known before. It is in this sense that Mary B. Campbell talks about it as a state whose symptoms are speechless and a kind of paralysis: «It arrests the gaze, the intellect, the emotions, because (consciously at least) it leads nowhere, reminds us of nothing. It has no use value. As a result, wonder is a form of perception now mostly associated with innocence: with children, the uneducated (that is, the poor), women, lunatics, and non-Western cultures»¹⁶. This passage explains the problems very well connected with such an experience which Bacon referred to as the "art of inquiry and invention", as a part of man's

¹⁴ Francis Godwin, *The Man in The Moone: or A Discourse of A Voyage Thither by Domingo Gonsales: The Speedy Messenger*, London, John Norton, 1638, p. 4.

¹⁵ Arthur B. Evans, "The Origins of Science Fiction Criticism: From Kepler to Wells", in « Science Fiction Studies» 26 (1999), pp. 163-186, p. 167.

¹⁶ Mary B. Campbell, *Wonder and Science. Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1999, pp. 4-5.

labor for knowledge that comes first from the invention of what he is seeking. At a first glance, then, imagination seems to be the first promoter of human knowledge, especially of scientific knowledge since it is what Bacon is analyzing. Bacon goes on demonstrating that the invention both of science and of art is a deficient knowledge, since it is founded by chance¹⁷. But chance and the suspension of activity related to wonder and imagination are two characteristics a man of science can't accept, especially in a period when the activity of the human mind seemed to achieve borders beyond any suspicion. That is why it is confined to marginal subjects such as women or different cultures.

Anyway the cultural revolution of the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, with the encounters with real new societies and cultures, the philosophy of multiple worlds within and outside our world, the new heliocentric system, and the related thrust towards discovering, understanding, penetrating these abnormalities, could hardly propose a total refusal of the wonder however produced. In fact, it was not only a conscious way of producing narrative unreality but also another way of inquiry and represent by means of the fictional. Thus, as Campbell demonstrates, together with the literary work mentioned above, which were somehow conscious of the imaginative effects it would produce, other works with less fancy aims produced a wide imagery none the less powerful. It suffices to mention *Micrographia*, by Robert Hooke, and *Sidereus Nuncius*, by Galilei, which anyway stimulate not only curiosity but also a complex cultural wonder about the invisible worlds represented with unprecedented vividness.

This consciousness of the unavoidable wonder produced by New Science, and the frightening inventions it could produce in uneducated or not fully educated subjects, was probably one of the reasons that produced the institutionalization of science within precise places, such as academies, and the division into compartments of the intelligible world, which in this way could be controlled and possessed better.

It is, ultimately, a kind of awareness of the limits of vision itself, for what we see through telescope and microscope is at once to be reduced to that tool. Different means produce different images and thus different objects, irreducible to them.

¹⁷ Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, vol II, New York, MacMillian and Co, 1895.

Thus, the images produced in laboratory never arrest within that space, in fact they start to re-produce themselves in an uncontrollable way.

The question opened about imagination leads back to our first problem, that of images. If what appears through the most sophisticated optical devices is not a univocally interpretable sign, rather something that can be read in different ways according to the system to which it is related, and, moreover, if this same sign can be brought equally to scientific observation or to fantastic invention, then we may affirm that these images, at least, do not seem to exist by their own. In fact they are to be interpreted like any other human sign.

A different way of dealing with the issue was that of a different popular literature, particularly that of magazine. The genre of this literature could be defined, in opposition to science fiction, as educational fiction. As we have already showed in the first chapter, especially during the shifting between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century the great popularization of magazine raised. It was devoted to the education of “large” parts of population. The *Tatler* (1709-1711) and the *Spectator* (1711-1712), edited by Addison and Steele were devoted to the education of men who weren't used to the principles of new science and philosophy, from which the new imagery came from. This imagery we have analyzed – made of magnified images of bugs, and reduced images of a plurality of worlds – was, in fact, leaving academies, willy-nilly, and the effect it could produce was worrying intellectual circles. The audience to be educated, in order to be protected, by this wonderful imagery comprehended even women, the least part of English education, in the seventeenth as well as in the eighteenth century. This is why some of these educators or popularizers devoted their work specifically to them. It is the case of John Dutton who edited the issues of both *Athenian Mercury* and *Ladies' Mercury*.

The education of women in such matters as Experimental Philosophy, but also Politics and other sciences was controversial. *Ladies' Mercury* is just a proof of the fact that very often the public intent of educating women was led more by an intent of managing the chance of knowledge opened by the new, amusing science. Thus Dutton pretends to be a woman speaking to other women erasing the possibility of a female authorship, and attributing to women the place of a passive comprehension of what men would transmit to them. It was more or less the same

vision governing Fontenelle's *Entretiens*, a vision neither Behn appreciated, as we will soon see, nor Haywood completely accepted. In fact she founded the first woman magazine, addressed only to women, issued only by women. Both women writers made a re-appropriation of the female right to authorship to make the free knowledge available then to any possible patriarchal control. What they especially criticize was just the fictional images often used to vehicle complex scientific topics. Their opinion about the wonderful semi-scientific images then circulating was almost similar: images such as those proposed by *Micrographia* could be useful to better conceive questions hard to be taught to not well educated people, including women, but false images, flourished by fancy in so far as to forget the origin of their own reason, could only confuse those people, and thus have to be avoided for educational purposes. That is why especially Haywood tried to make a proposal for women's education, especially for what concerns natural philosophy, based on a strict observation, rather than on abstract speculations.

Diversely interested in this deviant production of "imagined images" are our triad's writings, which articulated in different ways the relation between facts and fictions.

Cavendish probably more than others was particularly sensible to the fascination of imagination, or as she said fancy, considering it as full means not only of knowledge, but properly of perception, the unmediated perception she was looking for. If, as she has already argued, human beings see not only with physical eyes but also with mind, then there is a link between imagination and reason, a link which women are very acquainted to. This internalization of knowledge and perception makes vision work in two different ways, according to the Cavendish's *Natural Philosophy*: the first is the route vision traveled in *The Blazing World*, in which the vision was projected onto an internal and personal world; the second is the opposite mechanism that makes the external world be known thanks to internal, spiritual and imaginative properties the subject moves. These two passages seem to make Cavendish's considerations close to those of Irigaray's observation upon female gaze. Indeed, Irigaray finds the proper place of female understanding and expression in what she calls *mysterique*, a spiritual place in which the undeniable mystery of every knowledge process, the mystic as the precisely female experience of this encounter, and the hysteric, the peculiar

female expression as defined by men, produce a way of seeing not reducible to the male phallogocentrism. This is why, first of all, the knowledge in Cavendish, as well as in Irigaray, doesn't work through fragmented means, but both material and immaterial tools work in a mixing experience of both the subject and the object of vision. Now since vision has been introjected, making sensual perception work together with internal cogitations, that is making the internal subject world encounter the external object world, a new role for imagination has to be founded. Or even for illusion as Irigaray pointed out: «And what if illusion were constitutive of thinking not in the sense that the cogitations “fail” to correspond to (their) objective reality, but in that whereby illusion would serve as fiction of proof of the cogitatum itself, as coming to the same thing as the entity who is now thinking (himself)»¹⁸. In this reduction of the space between the knower and known imagination is not a mere distraction of reason, as Bacon argued, but rather the proof of the existence of the viewer who is not only assisting an image, but producing it. This insight is probably the primary awareness of the whole Cavendish's philosophy, especially as she presented in her *Natures Pictures Drawn by Fancies Pencil to The Life*¹⁹.

The question of wonder and imagination is more complex in Aphra Behn, who declines the matter in different ways according to the kind of text, literary scientific or philosophical, she is producing. *Oroonoko* has already showed some of the characteristic wonder can assume in Behn's literature. It was the case of the wonder produced by the encounter with a different, but real, culture. But what Oroonoko represented was a particular kind of wonder both for who belongs to his culture, and for who belongs to another culture. His dark blackness, as we have already seen, makes him extraordinary, which means beyond any “natural” definition of racial identity or physical difference. The wonder he produced, not only because of his skin, but also because of his education and morality, was of a good kind. It served the author to demonstrate to all of her audience how the fixed categories of human and not human, and the images of white man and black man,

¹⁸ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l'autre femme*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, trans. Gillian G. Gill *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 182.

¹⁹ Margaret Cavendish, *Natures Pictures Drawn by Fancies Pencil to The Life*, London, Maxwell, 1671 (second edition).

were only images constructed by a single point of view, and thus neither universal nor irreversible.

She has a different consideration of wonder for what concerns the popularization of science. As she showed in *The Emperor of Moone*, in fact, the simplified version of scientific notions could produce a double effect: it can open the door to new classes of audience, offering them the opportunity to learn something previously forbidden because of their education, but it can also produce wrong scientific ideas in them. Imagination and wonder are not bad tools *per se*, but they need to be followed by deeper knowledge. Imagination, thus, might be a good medium of knowledge, but it cannot be the only one.

Aphra Behn didn't deny the opportunity of imagination, also as a literary genre, for women, but she considered it more suitable to the image of fancy than to that of direct observation. Her critique, indeed, is addressed to the fashion of popularizing science in her period. In her opinion it was moreover an attempt to gain more audience for a New Science already in crisis, than a democratization of knowledge. Most of all she wanted, probably, to make her audience aware that what was presented to them was a fancy image. Reality, if it was, was elsewhere. It is in this sense that we will read her translation of *The Plurality of World* by Fontenelle, and moreover the introductory essay she wrote on it. Thus she not only demonstrated how far women can go, participating in cultural debates through works by others if they can't by themselves, but she also showed that a woman can find the difference between fancy narration and faithful report, and to unveil, once again, the tricks of male images.

A third point of view, once again different is that of Eliza Haywood, who became interested in the topic especially during the last part of her life, when, as she herself affirms, all the adventures and follies of her youth passed and a new consciousness of chances and opportunities for women was raised. This period was particularly characterized by the task of the education of women. Not considering herself as a superior in knowledge or intelligence, rather only experienced, she devoted her last lines in a strong and very witty struggle for women's emancipation. In order to realize this she didn't renounce to use some of patriarchal concepts. This is a tactic she already used in passed years, assuring a good audience to her writing and less problems with male censors. In this case the

example we will analyze is the editing of *Female Spectator*, the magazine she issued from 1744 till 1746, after Addison and Steele's *Spectator*, which she often refers to as her «learned Brother of ever precious Memory»²⁰. In this work the task of education is led in a quite invisible but coherent way, passing through the education of taste, history, love and also science. A precise concern of fancy is declared clearly throughout the work, and is quite negative. Her pessimistic account of fiction in particular is based on two grounds: the corruption of the mind it can produce and its ambiguous relation of truth. Relating real facts by means of fiction is a confusing rather than an informing means, and even more dangerous when it is applied to a non literary work. In fact, while the "title" of a romance warns about the fictive events explained, the fiction, for example the scientific fiction, might let the audience believe in facts that are not effective, even though inspired by scientific principles or, more often, philosophical speculation. Fiction, therefore, has a relation to truth similar to that of faith. In the two both truth is modified by means of flourishes that make it more desirable and more impressive, since impression is the main goal of both faith and fiction. What is worse is that the convictions achieved in this way produce prejudice, i.e. ideas we learn when we aren't really conscious of it.

Wonder and Reason

As Sarasohn has argued Margaret Cavendish was herself a wonder for her time, both because of her literary and scientific works, and for her personal aesthetic, which never stopped to astonish her contemporaries. Not only, in fact, it was already wonderful that a woman worked in specific male fields, but she also considered wonder itself as a fundamental means of literature and philosophy, of experimental work and knowledge. Wonder is, evidently, the first amusing motor of human knowledge, even though men of science in her age wouldn't accept it. In

²⁰ Eliza Haywood, *The Female Spectator*, ed. by Patricia Meyer Spacks, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 3.

her opinion, on the contrary, wonder is part of the “performatory nature” of experimental science²¹.

Her building of a natural philosophical system – according to which world is made of both internal and external matter in motion –, and the skepticism she owned about the faculty of sensory means in plainly knowing nature – since her mysteries are too deep to be known – led her to a consideration of a “finer perception”, particularly suitable to the feminine imagination. This conception makes vision, and all different kinds of knowledge as well, work by means of three different mechanisms: the unmediated observation, the rational abstraction and the imaginative speculation. The first, as we have already seen, was one of the main concerns of the triad of women writers, because it poses a risk dealing with the optical devices which could both become the end in themselves of the pleasure of seeing, and they could be forgotten as a medium, as for example what usually happens with the forgotten medium of body. The second was one of the most debated questions of the time, when the power of reason was still working under the disembodiment process of sight, connected more and more with an internal and superior eye. Finally the third was probably the most dangerous concept for the Royal Society’s age, in which everything related to the process of knowledge and experimentation had to be coded, mostly of course language and form of expression, where imagination could open some uncontrollable doors.

For Cavendish believing in imagination, by the way, doesn’t mean to completely abandon the concern with matter, because it is precisely in rational matter that human takes knowledge by means of two tools: reason, that is the qualities of intellect in searching the causes of material effects; and fancy, which is a voluntary creation of the mind, thus a “stylistic aesthetics” as Sarasohn defined it²².

This complex system produces an ambiguous way of writing about science that lets us define Cavendish as a cultural hermaphrodite, who wasn’t afraid of confusing languages of literature, gender and science. Thus fancy could become an expression of the knowledge of nature, as well as speculation.

In the “rhetoric orthodoxy” of Royal Society the transformation of experiment into an amusement was unacceptable. However as Sarasohn and Shaffer

²¹ Lisa T. Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish: Reason and Fancy During the Scientific Revolution*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 2010.

²² Lisa T. Sarasohn, quoted, p. 18.

demonstrated, the Royal Society was the first director of popularization of science not only thanks to some editorial enterprises but also in the spectacular ways in which experiments were presented to members themselves of society. Of course most of the prominent members justify this kind of presentation as a way to stimulate curiosity in further and most complex field of studies, as for example Boyle and Hooke claimed. But the masqueraded visit Cavendish performed at Royal Society²³ just denounced this innate characteristic of new science. Her way of facing scientists with a way of expression they used on their own without accepting the imagery weight it bared, was more stressed by her unique and repeated observation: "I'm full of admiration", which is at first sight only a superficial observation. In fact, admiration was for Boyle the most dangerous effect science could produce in human intellect, arresting it in its knowledge.

The image of science produces, willy-nilly, imagination. Instead of being refused it should be exploited in order to achieve a larger part of audience. This is exactly the aim of many of Cavendish's writings, such as *The Blazing World*, as we have already seen, which not by chance was attached to a philosophical treatise:

If you wonder, that I join a work of Fancy to my serious Philosophical Contemplations; think not that it is out of a disparagement to Philosophy; or out of an opinion, as if this noble study were but a Fiction of the Mind; for though Philosophers may err in searching and enquiring after the Causes of Natural Effects, and many times embrace falshoods for Truths; yet this doth not prove, that the Ground of Philosophy is meerly Fiction, but the error proceeds from the different motions of Reason, which cause different Opinions in different parts [...] And this is the reason, why I added this Piece of Fancy to my Philosophical Observations, and joined them as two Worlds at the ends of their Poles; both for my own sake, to divert my studious thoughts, which I employed in the Contemplation thereof, and to delight the Reader with variety, which is always pleasing.²⁴

The study of the anti-platonic line in Cavendish's work, led on by Gabrielle Starr, explains the theoretical and philosophical foreground of this aesthetic²⁵. In many of her works, such as *Poems and fancies*, *A World in an Ear-ring* and *Of Many Worlds in This World*, Cavendish founded her materialistic view with the encounter of three different instances, those of perception, imagination and form.

²³ See chap. II, p.

²⁴ Maragret Cavendish, Cavendish, M., *The Description of A New World Called the Blazing World*, London, A. Maxwell, 1668, now in K. Liley (ed.), *The Blazing World Aand Other Writings*, London, Penguin, 1994, p. 152-153.

²⁵ Gabrielle G. Starr, Cavendish, Aesthetics, and the Anti-Platonic Line, in «Eighteenth-Century Studies» 39 (2006), pp. 295-308.

Starting from a Lucretian atomism, Cavendish sees the entire world consisting of material atoms, which give form not only to the external world but also to mental processes, first of all those of imagination. Fancy and imagination, thus, are creative tools of knowledge, by which the mind can apprehend form. In fact, our knowledge is, according to Cavendish, the knowledge of images, *eidola*. Of course senses are the first means through which we come in contact with these images, but «imaginative vision brings them into light»²⁶, being mind and forms made of the same atoms:

In every *Braine loose Atomes* do lye,
Those which are *Sharpe*, from them do *Fancies* flye,
Those that are long, and *Aiery*, nimble be.
But *Atomes Round*, and *Square*, are dull, and sleepe.²⁷

Sensory is, then, limited and cannot bring us to a broader knowledge. Imagination, on the contrary, makes us discover what might exist beyond these limits. Otherwise how could have we discovered unimaginable things such as microcosm and macrocosm, other worlds in this world, atoms or air? Imagination is not considered as a free movement of the mind. It, belonging to the same brain material, is not fantastic and needs to be educated both with Natural Philosophy and Poetry, the first leading its orientation to significant forms, the second making form and beauty recognizable.

The work that however seems to fully comprehend this aesthetic system, for what concerns the role of poetry, the role of form in knowledge and representation, the boundaries fancy can reach, is *Natures Pictures*, a collection of poems and prose, diversely arranged in matters, such as war, marriage, passion beauty and of course philosophy.

The plain title of the works *Natures Pictures Drawn by Fancies Pencil to The Life*, introduce the aim of this writing which is certainly made clear in the preface:

I have described in this Work many sorts of Passions, Humors, Behaviours, Actions, Accidents, Governments, Laws, Customs, Peace, Warrs, Climates, Arts and Sciences; but have not Painted them all alike, some being done with Oily-colours of Poetry, others with Water-colours of Prose: some upon dark Grounds of Tragedy, and others

²⁶ Ivi, p. 299.

²⁷ Margaret Cavendish, *Poems and Facies*, London 1653, p. 10

upon light grounds of Comedy. Nor are those Descriptions so lively express by my Pen, as Sir *Anthony Vandike's* Pictures by his Pencil, being rather form'd by Fancy, than copied from true Originals of immediate Action²⁸

The first aim of Margaret Cavendish, thus, seems to be that of combining the pleasure of Arts with the pleasure of Science, not being afraid of portraying diverse matters such as passions, laws or science, with the vivid colors of poetry and prose, and moreover, of imagination. It is, however, a different imagination from that of a pure fancy amusement, deriving, instead, from those "originals of immediate action", even though this action is not immediately visible, as we have already seen. It is not the free and wild fancy that leads these writings, rather the educated and creative one, which pushes the mind beyond the sensual limits and makes "imagine" other territories where to expand the action of knowledge.

All these narrations, differing in matter and form, are framed within a cordial setting around the home fire of the Newcastle circle. None of the fancies here built, however, is presented as true, since fancy has no need to be hidden. Thus Cavendish reveals how this setting and the characters populating it are produced by her own fancy. The friendly company decides to amuse in telling stories of diverse sort about love, passions, war and, of course, fantastic adventures, which are the ones we are interested in.

The fantastic *voyage to the center of earth*, the fancy monarchy of poetry, the imaginary indispositions of mind, the observation of a speculator, are probably the most fruitful means by which Cavendish tries to explain her natural philosophy to a broader audience. That is why we could link this work to the fashion of literary popularizing scientific or philosophical discoveries, like Fontenelle and Algarotti did in that century and many others would do in the next one.

The theme of poetry and of its close relation to the matter of reason and knowledge is explained in the prose entitled *Fancy Monarchy in the Land of Poetry*. This fancy depicts a monarchy in which the king is Reason, tall and strong, while the free and sweet Wit, is the Queen; Faith and Zeal the Arch-bishops; Study and Practice the Universities. In this realm where only profitable laws, strict rules and good rules are held, what is most important for our matter is what part senses

²⁸ Margaret Cavendish, *Natures Pictures Drawn by Fancy to the Life*, London, A. Maxwell, 1671 (second edition), p. IV-V.

have. They are, in fact, the “ports” of the kingdom, while Heart plays the rule of magazine.

Each of these ports has different businesses and managements, and different commanders. Thus, the port of Ears, whose commanders are Judgment and Understanding, is prescribed to not allow any «Sound but Harmony, no reports but Truth, no Discourses but rational or Witty; and they should shut the Gates against Flattery, Falshood, Discord, harsh loud Strains, Scraping, Creaking, Squealing Noises»²⁹.

In the port of eyes the governors are Love and Skill, which allow to enter nothing but uniform beauty, graceful motions, light and well mixed colors. What is forbidden is deformity, monstrosity, rude and cruel actions, and, moreover, false shadow and darkness. The two governors, then have to «set up the light of Dreams when they [eyes] are shut. Also to let no Tears pass through the Eyes, but those that have a Pass-port from the Governour of the Heart»³⁰.

Like and Dislike are the governors of the Nostrils, in which nothing is allowed to go in but sweet smells to refresh the brain. It is almost curious that the governors of “Mouth” are Truth and Pleasure. The first manages word, and allows no lies or lascivious words to enter its port. The second manages taste, which stops the passage of anything being too sharp, bitter, salty or sweet. Finally Touch is ruled by pain and pleasure, both of which «let in none but nourishing Warmth, soft Rubbing, gentle Scartching, refreshing Colds, and the like. And upon pain of Death, or at least high Displeasure, these Rules were to be kept»³¹.

In this imaginative social asset, both Imagination and Invention play important and creative roles. The first represents the class of Merchants, which trade and traffic all over the world. The second are the handcrafts-men, and labourers.

The introduction of something wrong in this fancy realm prevents us to define it as an utopian, or even a naïve Work. Indeed, not only Cavendish warns us about the corruptibility of the commanders of the ports, sometimes seduced by Bribery, but she designs the citizens as Appetites. The role of science, than, is very ironic: it represents the class of nobles used to amuse the citizens of the realm with Masques, Plays, and so on.

²⁹ Ivi, p. 228.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ Ivi, p. 230.

Summing up, human activities are described by Cavendish as mediated by sense, oriented to appetites and managed by diverse passions, all governed by Reason and Wit. But what is particularly interesting is that this whole realm is sustained by Imagination and Inventions, which with their fruitful traffics and creative productions assure the richness. Science, instead, as a pure diverting role, played by means of tricks such as Masques and Plays. In this way Cavendish is, of course, making a metaphorical critique to the social asset of societies and academies, which deny the role of imagination and rely on much faith in senses, without considering that they are only channels to be controlled and managed.

This critical point of view continues with the tale titled *Indisposition of Mind*, which shows how both “divines” and “moral philosopher” are not able either to define what indispositions are affecting mind, whether they are caused by envy, the cancer of the mind, or hate, his apoplexy, or imagination and strange opinions, his wind colic. That is why they are not successful in defining the right cure.

Poor mind, affected by unbearable pains, decides to cure himself, becoming at once his own apothecary, physician and “surgeon”, and finding the suitable cures:

First, He left himself Blood, opening the willful Vein, taking out the obstinate Blood. Then he did take Pills made of Society and Mirth, and hose purged all strange and vain Conceits. Also the Mind eat every morning Mess of Broth, wherein was Herbs of Grace, Fruit of Justice, Spice of Prudence, Bread of Fortitude; these were boiled with the Flesh of Judgement, in the Water of Temperance. This breakfast as a Sovereign Remedy against the malignant Passions; for it did temper Heat, qualifie Sharpness, allay Vapours, and mollifie obdurate Passions, and foolish Affections.³²

But what makes this cure really work is the care all the five senses covered on him, giving in turn intelligence, news, recreation.

Once again, thus, the mind seems to work better by “his” own activities, and by the fundamental support of senses. The support of moral philosophers can be barely useful. They seem not to comprehend how “he” works and whether his own activities are good or not, and proposing cures that seem to convince them of the moral value rather than the actual one. Just in this way we can explain how “noises and company” could help the mind in restoring better than free imagination.

³² Ivi, pp. 245-246.

Imagination, in fact, is the first step the mind makes towards new knowledge, or even towards the comprehension of discoveries made by someone else. This is the true aim of Cavendish work, which is devoted to the simple and funny explanation of her philosophical and scientific work, by means of fancy amusement.

This is precisely the case of the fancy *The Speculators*, which talks about the observation of the deep secrets of nature.

The story begins with a knight who, along his way, perceives with his naked eyes something vain in the air. Once dismounted, he lies on the ground trying to sharpen his sight, even though he doesn't know precisely on what object. While he is so lying an old man approaches him, asking what he is doing. The knight answers that in trying to keep the vision of he doesn't know exactly what, he has almost lost not only the vision, but also the sight. The old man explains to him the reason:

The Body is like Mind, whereinto if you take more Learning than the Understanding can discuss, it overwhelms it, and knocks Reason on the head; as if you take more meat into the Stomack than it can digest, it surfeits; if the Ear receives too swift or harsh a Sound, it makes it deaf, smothering the distinct notes. Likewise, if you draw more Species than can pass through the Eye, in order to the Optick Nerve, it's like a Croud of People at a narrow pass [...] just so some the Eyes to be dimmed or obstructed.³³

Thus eyes are means of a sense that has no privilege in spite of the other. As all everything else it is limited, it can be wrong, and it can be managed. It cannot reach all the borders it presumes. This is also due to the self-asset of nature, who veils the plain figure of herself, obscures deeply her secrets, and makes one of her parts not known to the others:

Besides, said the old man, Nature is not only curious in her workings, but secrets in her Works: for, none of her Works know themselves perfectly; not Man, who seems to have the best Understanding; because Nature governs her Creatures by Ignorance; and if any had perfect Knowledge, they would be as great as She.³⁴

Even though Nature prefers to be admired than to be known, she appreciates men who research her paths, that is why she lets the experimenters go a little

³³ Ivi, p. 260.

³⁴ Ivi, p. 261.

deeper into her secrets. Which they can do thanks to some instruments that sharpen their eyes.

Thus the old man gives the knight three magic glasses that allow him to see three different dimensions: the lower region, the second region, the upper region.

Looking through the first glass the Knight sees Winds and the way they are created. He first sees Vapors growing from the Earth as if they were an ascending rain, then transforming themselves into spongy clouds shaped like Honey-combs, in every cell there was a drop of water. All the drops being squeezed by the agitation of Air, or heated by the Sun, bubble out and fall down to the Earth again. The same glass allows the knight to observe the two poles and the relative winds. These winds appear through the glass made of the same substance of the drops in the Honey-comb, sucked and spout with such a force that it becomes very small, thin and quick. Then looking to the "Torrid Zone", between the East and the West, here a "Cymbal" digests air, because of the heat, transforms it into winds. But it is a different kind of wind, more gentle than the previous.

In the second region the Knight observed several waves of air, within each were cities, flowers, vegetables, and people. These people were shaped as fishes, so that they swam into the air, and their cities are built with snowy houses and Hail-stones. The ray of sun causes both the snow and the Hail fall down to the Earth. During the winter this causes the street to be dry and the Horse steps to be noisy. This noise is what we perceive as Thunder, and the heat of Horses' Nostrils the Lightening.

Finally, in the upper region, through the third glass, he sees six moving circle cities, called planets. In the midst of which is a "metropolitan city" called Sun, peopled by Salamanders, who live in heat as fishes live in water. They produce and sell the light to all the other planets and their shape is that of angels. Thus men can't perceive them without the help of "Miraculous Glasses". On the contrary they can perceive men, and, in fact, they discover our knight peeping at them. The King of the Sun raged at this, casting a ray of light to his glass, dissolving the lens by the heat and blinding the man by the light.

More than the other stories, this one very well explains not only the natural philosophy of the young Margaret Cavendish, but especially describes the way in which knowledge can be gained by means of vision, through which means and at

what risks. It is clear, throughout all these stories, that man cannot reach the deepest secrets of nature, or either of himself, with the help of naked senses. They are too limited in spite of his desire of knowledge. So he has to ask the help of both optical devices and imagination, the first working together with the second, inspiring and challenging each other.

What the two both can perceive, anyway, is not the pure reality, but images, such as those of the people within the waves of air, which allow men to comprehend realms of nature too distant from him, by making them similar to what it knows and to what he can understand.

Optical devices, as well as eyes themselves, are a limited means of knowledge. Only reason can overwhelm these limits with the help of imagination and its images.

Women of quality and plurality of worlds

Aphra Behn's concerns about imagination were very different from those of Margaret Cavendish. More worried about the social impact of knowledge, dealing especially with the way in which knowledge was spread, Behn remained critical, as we have already seen, about the opportunity of publishing scientific works under the image of fancy.

When Behn wrote, the academic system – that by the time of Margaret Cavendish was struggling against the undisciplined conduction of science – was already in crisis. Thus it starts different strategies to reach larger audience. Behn had already criticized this misconduct of science, on one hand carefully not to let marginal classes, such women, enter the sacred rooms of the Royal Society, on the other acquiescent to sell images and spectacles originally intended as studies and experiments. According to Aphra Behn, in doing so they stimulated the pleasure of seeing, more than the pleasure of knowing.

More or less in the same period in which Aphra Behn published *The Emperor of The Moone*, the French philosopher Fontenelle published the *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, which represented one of the most popular writings of the time. Through this work, that was neither a treatise nor precisely a fancy, he

wanted to explain the Copernican theories and the philosophy of the plurality of worlds to an audience broader than the educated gentlemen who used to read about those questions. His end was not only that to educate this uneducated audience, but also to amuse them. Nature works, as Hooke had already showed with his *Micrographia*, are so wonderful that he can't resist on making everyone, even women, know them. To this end he built a nice frame to his explanation adopting a "woman of quality" as an interlocutor of his protagonist. The marquise was a perfect character representing the natural curiosities of the uneducated and the female inclination for wonder more than for serious observations. This is why he represents the whole project of Nature he is about to explain as a spectacle:

Nature is a great Scene, or Representation, much like one of our *Opera's*; for, from the place where you sit to behold the *Opera*, you do not see the Stage, as it really is, since every thing is disposed there for the representing agreeable Objects to your sight, from a large distance, while wheels & weights, which move and counterpoise the Machines are all concealed from our view; nor do we trouble our selves so much to find out how all those Motions that we see there, are performed; and it may be among so vast a number of Spectators, there is not above one Enginier in the whole Pit, that troubles himself with the consideration of how those flights are managed that seem so new and so extraordinary to him, and who resolves at any rate to find out the contrivance of them: You cannot but guess, Madam, that this Enginier is not unlike a Philosopher.³⁵

Nature is thus like an Opera, in which everything is staged for the pleasure of the spectators. But these spectators are distinguished between those who can only assist to the displayed images, and those who wonder what the mechanisms animating the movements are and the changing of these images. The protagonist might, then, be the "Engineer", while the marquise the simple spectator. Fontenelle will open the curtain for her to the wonder of nature.

The *Entretiens* were not impeded in the publication of this book, which was already well known among educated people, even though this kind of popularization of science might be considered a risk for the Royal Society, who tried to codify all the processes of philosophical observation in order to transform it

³⁵ Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, Paris, 1687, M. Guerout, trans. Aphra Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds* London, William Canning, 1688, pp. 9–10.

into science. In fact the Royal Society sponsored the translation made by Aphra Behn.

This translation represented a unique opportunity for Aphra Behn, for diverse reasons. First of all because it was a public recognition of her authority, being the first official translator of such an important and popular work. Moreover this kind of work was particularly intriguing for Behn, because it was written in vulgar, thus resolving the problem of the lack of education of women in Latin. The character of the Marquise was not a secondary reason for her interest, in which she hoped to find the example of an intelligent and literate woman, able to understand even the most difficult principles of astronomy, geography, philosophy.

The consideration she had of her authorial position, even though always within a patriarchal society, led Behn to take her own authoritative space within a preface that looks more like a critical essay than a formal introduction by the translator.

After beginning with the central question of translation, regarding the difference between languages, the choice between a more or less faithful or literal translation, Behn allows the question relating to the topic of the book. She shows her appreciation for a work whose aim is to make more popular, especially to women, subjects such as the plurality of world and the Copernican system.

The Design of the Author is to treat of this part of Natural Philosophy in a more familiar Way than any other hath done, and to make every body understand him: For this End, he introduce a Woman of Quality whom he feigns never to have heard of any such thing as Philosophy before.³⁶

But she can observe that this end is not perfectly reached. And this is because of the extreme fancy and the funny standard he tries to manage all the work, thus affecting the entire book with an inconstant style. It is particularly true for what concerns the matter of the Plurality of world:

for endeavouring to render this part of Natural Philosophy familiar, he hath turned it into Ridicule he hath pushed his wild Notion of the Plurality of Worlds to that height of Extravagancy, that he most certainly will confound those Readers, who have not Judgment and Wit to distinguish between what is truly solid (or, at least, probable) and what is trifling and airy: and there is no less Skill and Understanding required in this, than in comprehending the whole Subject he treats of.³⁷

³⁶ Ivi, *Preface*, pages not printed.

³⁷ Ivi, *Preface*, pages not printed.

It is thus clear how Behn's concern about reliability, is not founded on a question of authority or consent, as it was for the Royal Society, rather to the question of a true popularization. This translation, as all her works did, had the primary aims to instruct her public, making them aware of the mistakes of society, especially those that affect the free life or persons, especially woman. It was then a great chance to introduce to women, among others, such important and crucial questions of society at the time. But discovering that popularization had a different meaning for academics like Fontelle, disappointed her. If images produced by Fontelle are not agreeable, or worse they might confuse the public now, first coming to these matters, then popularization has no real meaning. Science is reduced to a common amusement.

The denouncement against Fontenelle's ambiguity is led in different ways.

First she stresses the ambiguity of the co-protagonist character, sometimes appearing as particularly witty, sometimes making stupid observations. It demonstrates in Behn's opinion the artificiality of the character: «Lady Marquiese, he makes her say a great many very silly things, tho' sometimes she makes Observations so learned, that the greatest Philosophers in Europe could make no better»³⁸. Then she demonstrates how his fancy might gain the opposite effect his science expected, that of ridicule:

How well he hath performed his Undertaking you will best judge when you have perused the Book: But if you would know before-hand my Thoughts, I must tell you freely, he hath failed in his Design; for endeavouring to render this part of Natural Philosophy familiar, he hath turned it into Ridicule; he hath pushed his wild Notion of the Plurality of Worlds to that height of Extravagancy, that he most certainly will confound those Readers, who have not Judgment and Wit to distinguish between what is truly solid (or, at least, probable) and what is trifling and airy: and there is no less Skill and Understanding required in this, than in comprehending the whole Subject he treats of.³⁹

Behn is clear, in making people understand such complex systems as those he is presenting, there is no other way than tell the truth, even if in a funny way. But to

³⁸ Ivi, *Preface*, pages not printed.

³⁹ Ivi, *Preface*, pages not printed.

have more care in amusement than of truth is not work by Natural Philosophers and the effect can only be that of confusing his audience.

Below the extreme creations of Fontenelle's fancy, however, Behn is still able to apprehend and appreciate the real matters of the book. But it only demonstrates her education on the topic rather than his ability as popularizer:

He endeavours chiefly two things; one is, that there are thousands of Worlds inhabited by Animals, besides our Earth, and hath urged this Fancy too far: I shall not presume to defend his Opinion, but one may make a very good use of many things he hath expressed very finely, in endeavouring to assist his wild Fancy; for he gives a magnificent Idea of the vastness of the Universe, and of the almighty and infinite Power of the Creator, to be comprehended by the meanest Capacity. This he proves judiciously, by the Appearances and Distances of the Planets and fixed Stars and if he had let alone his learned Men, Philosophical Transactions, and Telescopes in the Planet Jupiter, and his Inhabitants not only there, but in all the fixed Stars, and even in the Milky-Way, and only stuck to the greatness of the Universe, he had deserved much more Praise.⁴⁰

If she is able to unveil the useless excess of his prose, under which magnificent ideas reside, then she, like probably many other women, could be able to understand the same things with no distraction by fancy.

What applies to this kind of treatment of the plurality of world, applies also to the treatment of the Copernican system:

The other thing he endeavours to defend and assert, is, the System of Copernicus. As to this, I cannot but take his part as far as a Woman's Reasoning can go. I shall not venture upon the Astronomical part, but leave that to the Mathematicians; but because I know, that when this Opinion of Copernicus (as to the Motion of the *Earth*, and the *Sun's* being fixed in the Centre of the Universe, without any other Motion, but upon his own Axis) was first heard of in the World, those who neither understood the old System of Ptolemy, nor the new one of Copernicus, said, That this new Opinion was expressly contrary to the holy Scriptures, and therefore not to be embraced; nay, it was condemned as Heretical⁴¹

At this point pretending to be a honorable women, as society at time prescribed, Behn plays the modest role of who cannot say anything about such an important and male question. Nevertheless, she will decisively enter the question neither demonstrating Copernican system by means of the mathematical comments nor precisely by refusing it through the Holy Scriptures. But what she really does is

⁴⁰ Ivi, *Preface*, pages not printed.

⁴¹ Ivi, *Preface*, pages not printed.

prove how foolish it is to try to compare a scientific treatise with a religious one, which as Behn demonstrates is written with no intentions of empirical demonstration. *The Bible* in Behn's opinion has been written with the same intent as Fontenelle, that to be understood by its audience. The verbal images there contained and the mental they produce, are not there to be intended as a faithful description of reality, but rather a means to communicate with people who, otherwise, could not have understood those words.

Imagination and the virtual images it produces are not absolutely negative, provided that these images are not devoted to creating illusion rather than provoking knowledge.

The question of popularization, so spread in that period as Shaffer has demonstrated, is not so simply to define. It is a noble aim, but not necessarily it produces good effects. It is not like in Cavendish, for whom imagination is a material tool of knowledge exactly like the mind or the senses. The difference between the two writers is, probably, in the horizon they addressed to: a well educated the Duchess, a more popular Behn. It is thus in this optic that the difference between the two concerns of imagination seems to be interpreted.

As Sarah Goodfellow⁴² has pointed out this *Preface* shows the role of Aphra Behn as a translator, but not only in a linguistic way. She is a translator, namely a mediator, between Copernican and Ptolemaic system, between secular and religious, between male and female instances. This mediation intent is the basis where Behn's suspicion over imagination resides.

The mirror of true beauty

The didactic task of the *Female Specator* is made immediately clear by the author from the first book, as well as the way in which it will be pursued. The task, indeed, is not only that of giving a new chance to semi-educated women, but rather that of changing women's mind as well as men's on the opportunity of female education. This is why I don't completely agree with the most of literary

⁴² Sarah Goodfellow, "Such Masculine Strokes": Aphra Behn as Translator of "A Discovery of New Worlds", in «Albino» 28 (1996), pp. 229-250.

critics who affirm that this magazine be addressed only to women, because it sometimes seems to speak more to men, responsible for the marginality of women. That is why the first attack Haywood launches is to the image of ignorance as related to innocence, and to its immediate result: the preservation of women acted by men, “preserving” them from education and thus from knowledge. All the issues of this magazine, indeed, will be devoted to disrupt this conviction, first in women’s minds then in male’s, showing that knowledge could never be negative. The task of knowledge is not that to destroy the order of patriarchal society, in fact women of knowledge can easily represent a worthy resource in family management, in the husband’s cure, in breeding children but also in social events, when they are educated more than when they are not. For, as Haywood firmly believes, it is better for every husband to hear that his wife is so well educated, than to hear that she too foolish or stupid. This statement seems to be more of a provocation than a conviction.

In this optic we should, thus, analyze the way in which this educational project is pursued, that is all within the acceptance of the male system. Throughout the twenty-four books of the magazine, indeed, Haywood never attacks the system nor provokes women to revolutionize against the order. The institution of marriage, for example, is never really criticized in itself, nor is a different end proposed for women. As well as no other serious activities are presented to them besides home keeping. She tries simply to convince both men and women that little changes, within this same system, could be productive for all. In short reassuring men that educated women will not threaten neither marriage nor family, is the first step Haywood has to do in order to make her model of education agreeable to men before to women. It doesn’t mean that men are adulated or not addressed by any critique. Instead one of the first charges is that of the direct responsibility of women’s ignorance and sometimes stupidity, which they often complain about.

Both the style and the topics of Haywood are never simplistic, even though the discussions are not always on serious matter. The whole project is conducted according to precise code, the first of which is, in fact, to avoid simplistic figures of discussion, for what concerns both the structure of any single issue and its main topic. Thus any issue will be presented with an introduction letter or reflection a

little narrative by the author or discussion, ending with the result of an exchange of ideas.

The first result of this plan is the figure of the author, which according to a complex task, could not be simply an author. Indeed, as the problems according to this project will be interested in are not at all simple, a single point of view would be not sufficient. Thus Haywood creates not an author alter ego, rather a real circle of four women, each of which will represent a different stage in a woman's life, coordinated, but not presided, by the most mature of all the female spectators in person. Haywood immediately presents each component of the circle, in their virtues and vices, to the reader, which is a male reader. First of all the narrator herself appears:

As a Proof of my Sincerity, I shall, in the first place, assure him, that for my own part I never was a Beauty, and am now very far from being young [...] I shall also acknowledge, that I have run through as many Scenes of my Vanity and Folly as the greatest Coquet of them all. Dress, Equipage, and Flattery, were the Idols of my Heart [...] But whatever Inconveniences such a manner of Conduct has brought upon myself, I have this Consolation, to think that the Public may reap some Benefit from it.⁴³

As anticipated, the authorship Haywood reserves to herself is no more that of an authoritative subject who can cast her secure gaze upon the facts of woman life, and decide what Womankind is and how it acts or should act. Rather she is fully part of that world. And this is coherent with all poetic, which is characterized, as the previous chapter has showed, by a vision which is not from above. Womankind, is not her object or, at least is not in the sense in which men usually consider it: she herself is the subject, or conversely we can say that the object has become the author and thus the subject. Subject and object together cooperate in order to construct a different image of women, not a crystallized image, but rather a dynamic and multiple one.

This explains why Haywood decided to pretend that her work be written by other three women. These are obviously three points of view differing not only in the age they represent, but also their relation with the main social question for women, that of marriage. Thus the young girl is:

⁴³ Eliza Haywood, *The Female Spectator*, cit., p. 8.

The Daughter of a wealthy Merchant, charming as an Angel, but endued with so many Accomplishments, that to those who know her truly, her Beauty is the least distinguished Part of her. The fine young Creature I shall call *Euphrosine*, since she as all the Cheerfulness and Sweetness ascribed to that Goddess⁴⁴

The necessity of assistance, by which the female spectator justifies the introduction of this quadruple author, brought Mira as her first choice:

A Lady descended from a Family to which Wit seems hereditary, married to a Gentleman every way worthy of so excellent a Wife, and with whom she lives in so perfect a Harmony, that having nothing to ruffle the Composure of her Soul, or disturb those sparkling Ideas she received from Nature and Education, left me no room to doubt if was she favoured me with would be acceptable to the public⁴⁵

It is worthy to stress that it is the first time the education of women is introduced, and it is presented as a result of both nature and education. Haywood presents, already, her opinion according to which women are endowed by nature of the same intellectual skills of men. The difference in attitudes is caused by the difference in education, as Cavendish has already argued. This is demonstrated by those few women who had the occasion to study like men did and who gained good results in philosophy and in science.

After the young beauty of Euphrosine and the mature consciousness of Mira, the Widow of quality should represent the austerity fitting with her status and her advanced age. However her showing is not so predictable:

Not having buried her Vivacity in the Tomb of her Lord, continues to make one in all the modish Diversions of the Times, so far I mean, as she finds them consistent with Innocence and Honour; and as she is far from having the least Austerity in her Behaviour, nor is rigid to the Failings she is wholly free from herself⁴⁶

This introduction makes the four authors appear more as characters than as editors of the magazine. Indeed they are immediately significant within the whole project. First of all they appear as characters perfectly organic to the society they belong to. Yet at the same time they demonstrate something we could refer to as uncanny. Because besides this perfect adherence to patriarchal system they present something not perfectly matching: the young lady, who is supposed to be

⁴⁴ Ivi, p. 10.

⁴⁵ Ivi, p. 9.

⁴⁶ Ivi, p. 10.

interested mostly in her beauty – her means to find a husband – is more notable for her personality; the married woman, who is supposed to have found her fortune in marriage, is presented as a fortune for her husband, and conveys the image of a lucky marriage, as it has not deprived her of her “natural and educated” qualities; finally the widow, yet conducting her life in a not dishonorable way, doesn’t renounce her life and some diversion decency offers her.

To present her authors in an uncanny way is, in my opinion, the precise intent of Haywood who after having depicted them so acutely, lets them vanish in a confused authorship in which it could no longer be understood who is writing in turn. After all it doesn’t matter. Haywood’s goal is that of writing from multiple points of view at once, and not to choose a single one for each occasion. In this way her observer ends up vanishing, or better becoming indistinguishable, invisible, as it was in the *Invisible Spy*, which is somehow mentioned in the first book: «to secure an eternal Fund of Intelligence, Spies are placed not only in all Places of Resort in and about this great Metropolis [...] so that nothing curious or worthy of Remark can escape me»⁴⁷. No one, however, should feel in danger, for her intention «being only to expose the Vice, not the Person»⁴⁸.

Her educative project is spread over all the volumes of the magazine, but in a way that makes it very recognizable. I think we can find the beginning point, more or less, in the explanation of the importance of individual thinking. Then it proceeds first with the program of women’s educational rights, and then with the proposals made by the only man of the magazine, a certain *Philonaturae*. Finally, it ends with the allegoric image of the “mirror of true beauty”.

The first point is discussed in Book IV, which is devoted primarily in the education of what are the best employments for mind. Haywood’s opinion is not too restrictive, and we couldn’t expect anything different in a woman with her past. Indeed she suggests reaching a good balance between the company of other people and the time needed to take care of own personality, besides her own person. Because conversation is not negative, it can furnish new matter of observation. However, to pursue only company, and have no other interest

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

besides that, would produce an individual living like “clock-work” in which no component of the mechanism can work without the other working. Thus:

A real fine Genius can never want Matter to entertain itself, and tho' on the Top of a Mountain without Society, and without Books, or any exterior Means of Employment, will always find that within which will keep it from being idle: *Memory* and *Recollection* will bring the Transactions of *past* Times to View; *Observation* and *Discernment* point out the *present* with their *Causes*; and *Fancy*, temper'd with *Judgement*, anticipate the *Future*. This Power of Contemplation and Reflection it is that chiefly distinguishes the *Human* from the *Brute* Creation.⁴⁹

It is curious to note how on the same question of the difference between the human and the “brute”, and on the responsibility this superiority brings, the consideration of men accused for female un-education is found. It is showed in an issue that seems to be definable like the first manifesto of women’s educational right. In Book X we find the letter of a certain Cleora, who complains about the charges that are always addressed to women because of their vanity and their scarce interest in serious matter such as those which men are interested in. Cleora clearly claims that those who should be charged of this guilt are the same men who joke women, because it is their fault if women are forbidden to study and are relegated to marginal works. Their guilt is much heavier because they suppose themselves to be the highest level of all Creation, and, therefore, their mistakes can’t be founded on their limits but completely on their malice. This is the inspiration that provokes one of the most intense issues of the whole magazine. The female spectator starts by agreeing with Cleora, but she addresses this charge not only to men as husband, but in a larger way to the parents, both mother and father, who should take care of their growing child not only in a physical way, but also in a mental one. She suggests that the study of philosophy, correcting the vices of mind, inspiring it with virtues, bringing a new self-acquaintance, is particularly suitable for female minds that are often considered so volatile that the reflection on philosophical inquiry could be the best medicine, at whatever level it is conducted:

Whether our Speculations extend to the greatest and most tremendous Objects, or pry into the smallest Works of the Creation, New Scenes of Wonder every Moment open to

⁴⁹ Ivi, p. 55.

our Eyes; and as Love and Reverence to the Deity is by every one allowed to be the Ground-Work of all Virtues and Religion, it is, methinks, no less impolitick than unjust to deny us the Means of becoming more good as well as more wise. From the Brute creation we may learn Industry, Patience, Tenderness, and a Thousand Qualities.⁵⁰

The main character of this discussion seems to me to be ironic, which will grow as the chapter goes on. In fact, she proceeds by mentioning some of the most enlightened female minds that from classicism to her days have demonstrated how far woman's minds can go, in spite of the difficulties and the obstacles posed by men. Two names are sufficient Hypatia, philosopher in Alexandria killed by St. Cyrill for her irreverent education and intelligence, and Donna Lawra, who is Laura Bassi, professor of Anatomy at the University of Bologna, master of Lazzaro Spallanzani, «who has not only disputed with, but also confuted the most learned Doctors in Italy, in those Points on which they happen'd to differ from her»⁵¹. Then she continues suggesting also some branches of Mathematics and Geography, a true amazement for ladies. At the end of this excursus, irony seems to grow more and more:

The Ladies Themselves, methinks, begin to seem sensible of the Injustice which has long been done them, and find a Vacuum in their Minds, which, to fill up, they, of their own accord, invented the way of sticking little Pictures on Cabinets, Screens, Dressing-table [...] There is no doubt but a Pair of Globes will make a better figure in their Anti-Chambers than the Vice and Wheel; but great revolutions are not to be expected at once, and if they once take it in their Heads to prefer Works of Ingenuity, tho' in the most trifling Matters, to Dress, Gaming, and rambling Abroad, they will, it is to be hop'd, proceed to more noble and elevated studies.⁵²

Starting from an innocent, even naïve point the question becomes more dangerous, and it seems to see the sign of an upcoming revolution. But it is a revolution that doesn't have men's world as a target, but rather the women's mind. In fact, she goes on, once the married women amuse themselves with this studies even the young ladies will desire to do the same. And once the mother has obtained this task, they will teach it to their daughters, and the revolution will be done from generation to generation.

⁵⁰ Ivi, p. 129.

⁵¹ Ivi, p. 132.

⁵² Ivi, p. 34.

What, then, still remains against women education? It is men's arrogance, and the supposed visionary by which these statements seems to be written:

But all this, I doubt, will be look'd upon as visionary, and my readers will cry, that my Business, as a Spectator, is to report such Things as I see, and am convinced of the Truth of, not present them with Ideas of my own Formation, and which as the World now is, can never be reduc'd to Practice; To which I beg leave to reply, that the Impossibility lies only in the *Will*; much may be done by a steady Resolution, without it nothing.⁵³

The author, whoever of the four it is, will have to wait till the fifteenth Book to find another visionary like her, and, what is more interesting, he is a man. His supposed name is Philonaturae, and he writes a letter in which invites women to the pleasure of the natural observation, that is in a more deep contemplation of nature rather than the simple beholding. The studies of Natural Philosophy are not so far from their skills, since they have no need to publish treatise and discuss them in academies. However once they are acquainted with the use of microscope, which is now so small becoming a nice object to bring with them during their trips, they will discover how many wonders Nature can disclose to their eyes, aided by the art of magnifying glasses⁵⁴. Thus, they will discover what wonderful metamorphosis their dear silk comes from, and how even the black and common fly⁵⁵ can reveal astonishing eyes, and how industrious ants are. This kind of observation is not only pleasing, but can also improve moral virtues, and not only provide nice inspirations for new conversations. In Philonaturae's opinion, therefore, women observing nature would be useful for themselves, for their society, but they also could do something interesting for the Royal Society as well:

As Ladies frequently walk out in the Country in little Troops, if every one of them would take with her a Magnifying Glass, what a pretty Emulation there would be among them, to make fresh Discoveries? They would doubtless perceive Animals which are not to be found in the most accurate Volumes of Natural Philosophy; and the Royal Society might be indebted to every fair Columbus for a new World to employ their Speculation.⁵⁶

⁵³ Ivi, p. 138.

⁵⁴ Ivi, p. 191.

⁵⁵ The images of fly Haywood uses in this case, as well as all the other verbal images she conveys in this issue are evidently inspired by Hooke's *Micrographia*.

⁵⁶ Eliza Haywood, *The Female Spectator*, cit., p. 195.

Philonaturae's councils have the hoped effects, and the portable microscope becomes immediately a fashion and educational toy. But deeper effects will be produced in the nineteenth book, in which the female spectator suggests some more precise observations, perfectly suitable for women. She talks for example about the observation of vegetables and curative plants, an amusing and useful observation especially for mothers, who should know these plants better, to help their children when doctors aren't available. But even the observation of vessels in bugs, and the comparison with vegetable vessels, should be of a certain interest. After all this amusement, an observation closes the issue that makes clear what a great consideration Haywood had of vision, if only women were allowed:

It is our Reason, and the Power of contemplating on the Blessings we receive, that the chief Happiness of possessing them consists. It is that, more than his outward Form, which distinguishes Man from the rest of sublunary Beings: it is that which crowns him Lord of all; and if he willfully degrades himself, and puts himself on a Level with his Subjects, he is unworthy of the Honour conferred upon his Species, and ungrateful to the Divine Bestower. Can it be supposed that the Almighty Wisdom gave such a Profusion of Varieties merely to feast the Senses of Mankind! [...] They were, without all Question, destined for a much nobler and exalted Purpose, to convey Instruction through the Canal of Pleasure; to inspire us with the highest Ideas Human Nature is capable of conceiving, of that Divine Bounty to which we are indebted for them; to harmonize the Soul, and at the same Time to enable it to pour forth a due Tribute of Praise and Adoration.⁵⁷

In discovering the power of the art of vision, thanks to the ratified instruments that men and women have known, all the female spectators are invited to admire to what extent it can reach and what pleasure it can give. But what is important to stress is how this great power provokes a desire of admiration in Haywood, and a movement toward what she is looking at. There is no desire to hold, to penetrate or to conquest, as it was in almost all men observers, from Hooke to Baker. Rather, what mostly strikes our spectators is to discover that what was previously believed empty is a full, admirable universe, as complex as those Fontenelle and Behn showed. If there is no vacuum around us, then these new discovered senses should lead us to the desire of harmonization with what is in front of us, with a fully

⁵⁷ Ivi, p. 250.

de-erotized gaze. It is the Buddha's gaze at the flower Luce Irigaray will theorize two hundred fifty years later⁵⁸, but Haywood couldn't have known that.

Finally, how does all this new knowledge act on female spectators, both authors and readers? The final effect is showed in one of the final images of the entire magazine, not a fantastic image but a metaphoric one, extraordinarily suitable for women beholders, both seen by men and by themselves. In Book XX, a certain Philoctetes donates a mirror to all women. But he warns them that it is not a common mirror, for it doesn't show women as they could expect. A beautiful woman could appear distorted and horrible, while a face ruined by Small Pox could be reflected as the most amiable. The mirror then has another peculiarity:

It is not like other Glasses daubed on one Side with Quicksilver, but clear, transparent as Innocence and Truth: It not only shews the Person who looks into it herself, such as she is in reality; but displays impartially every Charm or Imperfection to those who stand on the other Side, and even at a very great Distance from her.⁵⁹

A strange sort of uncanniness overwhelms us. This image seems to condensate some of the most important questions on vision in twentieth century philosophy. In the mirror in which we see ourselves, not only from our point of view but also from that of the other, we re-encounter obviously the mirror stage of Lacan. But it is inverse for two reasons. First, the image does not represent a more perfect being than the subject is supposed to be. On the contrary it could be even worse. Second, the screen on which this image is projected is no more opaque. It is transparent, and someone is looking behind the mirror. It is no more a screen, something dividing us from our image and from someone else.

This new image of the self seems to be shared between two beholders, in such a deep way that physical appearance does not matter anymore.

To reach this end, only one is the way:

But I have already [...] taken Notice, that of we took but half of the Care of embellishing our intellectual Part as we do of setting off our Persons, both would appear to much more Advantage.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ See Luce Irigaray, *Essere due*, Torino, Bollati-Boringhieri, 1994, trans. *To Be Two*, New York, Routledge, 2001, especially p. 23, and id., *J'aime à toi. Esquisse d'une félicité dans l'histoire*, Paris, B. Grasset, 1992, trans. Alison Martin, *I Love to You: Sketch of A Possible Felicity in History*, New York-London, Routledge, 1996. But also our previous discussion in chapter I, pp. 51-52.

⁵⁹ Eliza Haywood, *The Female Spectator*, cit. p. 25.

⁶⁰ Ivi, p. 258.

Conclusion

This could be considered the conclusion of our research, at least for what concerns Haywood who, in this chapter seems to have reached the most modern point of view on the question of female gaze.

At the beginning Cavendish showed us a phantasmagoria of images that being inspired by science arrived to the wonder and then to the fancy. It was an educated and controlled fancy that allowed those images to come back to science once they had overcome previous borders and discovered new frontiers. If “men of science” like Bacon discredited imagination as a rupture of knowledge, Cavendish re-vindicated it as a peculiar form of female knowledge. It is hard to decide whether this statement was based on a personal observation or on the historical situation in which this observation was held. Since it was actually patriarchal society that forbade women from high educated levels and allowed them only marginal and fictional spaces of observation. That of Cavendish, therefore should be considered as a tactic, using the enemy’s armies to fight a struggle even if on a fictional field.

Aphra Behn, on the contrary, seems to entirely reject the reduction of female observation within a fictitious, and thus false, dimension. She wants women to access scientific and philosophical studies plainly. But to well understand these matters and reason in the right way, they don’t need any fancy just truth, and they need to be explained in a more sincere way. Neither Bible nor Fontenelle are enough any longer.

Finally Haywood, seems to have come to a longer and harder road. Her observations came in an age in which the Scientific Lady was in crisis, and women’s space in science seemed to have been reduced, rather than increased. She is no longer allowed to attack phallogocentrism as Cavendish and Behn did. Her young fame and the new reformed society would censor her images and her educational plan would have been lost. Thus it is necessary to convey these verbal images, hoping they will be transformed into mental images, little by little. Because, as she herself said, revolutions do not happen at once. It is worth it to

convey to women an image of themselves that is different from what men and themselves can expect. At the same time it is necessary to convey to men an image of an educated woman who is exactly like the re-assuring woman they expect. This would give women time to enter in a different world of vision in which their image is no longer that of an ornament or of a commodity, but it would depend on what they are inside. This inside is no longer only the realm of love, pity and grace, but that of awareness, knowledge, reason, judgment and taste. Once the metamorphosis, as the chrysalis of *Philonaturae*, is completed they can look at themselves in the mirror of true beauty, and let others look through that mirror, without be scared of the image which he or she will see.

CONCLUSIONS

Indefinite gaze

Two parallel, but somehow, opposing movements between cultural and historical situations and the female reflection on gaze have been observed in the examined historical period. These movements seem somehow paradoxical. The seventeenth century had witnessed the opening of a gap in the practices of looking in England. This opened up new chances to feminine gaze that, thanks to the political and cultural revolution, could participate in public discussion, even though outside of academic institutions. Conversely the seventeenth century, especially since the second half, witnessed the enclosing of spaces in which the eyes and the pen of the women found less freedom of movement. Yet the awareness of the cultural and social power that gaze can give or take, became more and more secure. Indeed, among the three reference points that we have examined, chronologically the closest to us, that of Eliza Haywood, is also the most conscious.

At the end of this research we can draw a line in which the first point is represented by the figure of Margaret Cavendish, who in the middle of the seventeenth century, and therefore also in the midst of cultural and political revolution, looks curiously at the new borders of vision, remaining, however, still anchored to traditionalistic positions. These positions are suspicious of new technological discoveries that, in her view, lead to a dangerous isolation of the subject. While less confident about his or her own perception, if not helped by optical devices, and increasingly at odds with other areas of learning more and more fragmented, this subject ends up abandoning the practice of genuine rational thought. The inner and mental activity of the individual has no part in the observation of the new philosophy, especially in the experimental one, which takes a completely disembodied subject holding a position of absolute dominion and control over the object to be observed. Nature becomes increasingly distant from man, and the desire to penetrate her more urgent, to become and end in itself. In short, as feared by Evelyn Fox Keller, the observer, at least the scientific one is

simultaneously severed from the object of his gaze and from his own subjectivity and becomes, or wants to become, a pure mechanical eye. In this view women try to find their own authorship, where granted, and to propose an entirely different rationality. It is mainly established in the awareness of the inevitable influence of the subject, with his or her beliefs, with his or her inevitable point of view, and with his or her own bodily, exercised if nothing else by manipulating the object. This period of great cultural movements, turns and reversals paradoxically represents the most difficult for a liberal women's reflection on vision, as demonstrated by the isolation in which Cavendish stayed. She never joined the public debates if not through a masquerade.

The second point of the line is represented by the more decisive role occupied by Aphra Behn. Her situation looks different. The restoration defined a new asset that looked back at the roles and the dynamics not only between political arts but also genres. More space for public debate is given, allowing Behn to stage several times the critique of the politics of the gaze. She had also some applause from the public, although we cannot determine with certainty whether it was caused by curiosity or by the desire of enjoying a new phenomenon. The focus of the female gaze has shifted from the experimental side to the more generally social, from the attempts to participate in new visual activities – though always from the point of view of an outsider – to the attempt to uncover the tricks of power hiding behind the new practices of the look and performance, especially political performance.

If Behn warned a wide audience from passivity in which the beholder positioned it, in the following century Haywood would be devoted to a more specific audience, denouncing as the defined structure of the patriarchal gaze had defined once and for all the role of women as well. The role was that of the object of a look now definitely portrayed as a sexual one, and so encoded to be internalized by women themselves. They not only give pleasure to the viewer but feel pleasure in being watched, rather they build themselves to be looked-at. They are so manipulated as to really believe in the power of the glance that kills, and that more and more relegate to the territory of isolation, marginalization, and silence.

The awareness of the disparity of the gaze, especially as a gender issue, has grown and looks remarkably like the twentieth century reflections that made of this crisis its precise mark on the look, often forgetting how far the origin of this crisis were, even involved in the very birth of the modern gaze. Yet the horizon of action

of the female authorship, if it ever actually existed, was first granted, then punished, and finally accepted in new and narrower terms, ending up being governed by the Augustan milieu¹.

This appears to be a female analysis on the gaze of the other, or rather on the dominant eye that creates the other, even others. But the question that kicked off the research is another: is there, within this same critical reflection on the observer, a parallel observation about how the person who sees is seen?

Fortunately, the answer is yes.

First of all it is necessary to define the object of vision within the contingent panorama in which these three women act. The question of vision is today hardly incorporated in a binary relation that divides the two poles between male and female, active and passive. Still more complex appears the horizon of the seventeenth and the eighteenth century². We have already seen that the categories of sexual identity were almost shaded, as matter such as hermaphrodite demonstrates. This shifting of fuzzy identities, in which the subject is not perfectly definable as man or woman, produced or influenced somehow the fashion of masquerade in which also defined identities were allowed to cross their roles, even gender roles. This shifting of roles cannot be intended as a related confusion of existing roles. In fact, they were fixed and held by the dominant male position. That is precisely why this gap in the system represented a unique chance for women to change their point of view positioning themselves on the other side of the field. Thus, wearing the dresses of man, or a mask different from her identity she could reach an active role, or at least experience a different being. But at best she could also transform herself in a beholder, and transform man in a beheld.

Here at stake was not merely the question of gender, but properly the question of power founded on gender. Once they can demonstrate that gender is not a fixed category but that it can be reversed within masquerade, women understood that this tool could be transferred outside the court ballad and the theatre stages. Loosing the control of this medium men experienced, probably for the first time, the elusive character of image, that, even in that century, was so plastic to

¹ See Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986.

² Roberta C. Martin, "Beauteous Wonder of a Different Kind: Aphra Behn's Destabilization of Sexual Categories", in «College English» 61 (1998), pp. 192-210.

transform the subject into object, but also to transform itself under different aspects, for example shifting from the status of science to that of imagination.

The passage from the seventeenth century and the next was, therefore, particularly characterized by political, social and cultural confusion, which women tried to take advantage of.

The three points through which we have analyzed their work, inspired by the contemporary study in science studies, have demonstrated their particular suitability with our purpose. The first point of the research was the implication of the viewer in the process of observation, by which I mean, according to Evelyn Fox Keller, the contemporary process of disembodiment of the viewer and of embodying the viewed. The disembodied gaze was fixed in the perspective regime, in which an invisible eye dominated the world. As Shaffer demonstrated this process of disembodiment was amplified by the new diffusion of optical devices, which proposed a new distancing between subject and object, even more by putting a physical screen between them. This is the origin of the ambition to a mechanized vision that science has continued to pursue till the invention of photography. But it is also the origin of the "optics of truth"³. According to Irigaray, it is the consideration of vision forgetting its materiality and its mediation. It leads also to the phobia of the absence, lack, and castration that characterizes male vision. This phenomenon, according to Irigaray, is in turn caused by the male belief in the vacuum that divides the subject from the object of vision.

The common characteristic of the twentieth century discussion about the subject of vision has been the destabilization of this symmetric project unveiling this partiality. First of all Irigaray has remembered how subject and object are not divided since the space between them is not empty. In fact it is full of all those elements that allow men to communicate with the outer world, such as for example the air and the light⁴. Convicted of the embodied and mediated character of male vision is also Donna Haraway who instead of an objective vision, and of the contemplative vision proposed by Irigaray, found a new form of situated vision. It is a vision aware of its partiality, which means that it takes into account the situation in which the process takes place, and the media used to observe. It is a situation

³ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l'autre femme*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, trans. Gillian G. Gill, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985.

⁴ Luce Irigaray, *Oubli de l'air chez Martin Heidegger*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1983, trans. Mary Beth Mader, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1999.

in which subject and object are closer and both perceive through their own bodies⁵. A vision from below in which the two parts are conscious of the reciprocal difference, is the proposal of Keller who identifies a new kind of subject, that of the outsider. This outsider acts within the same scopic regime of phallogocentrism, being constructed by the same cultural mechanisms of the insider, but he/she/it breaks the barriers of the detached points and sees in a different way.

The subject is thus criticized in three points: the distancing between subject and object; the forgetting of the space in which the two both move; the point of view and its extent. It is striking to see how all these three points are central in the poetic of vision we have till now analyzed.

The spatiality of every scopic regime till now considered is refused by Cavendish, Behn and Haywood. But after our analysis we can well see that this principle carries out a lot of secondary effects. If, indeed, the abolition of distance and also distinction between the subject and the object is a metaphysical instance in the fancy of Cavendish, the deflagration of the two levels has more and heavier effects in the colonial setting of *Oroonoko*. Here the distance between the subject and object of vision is no longer an abstract one, rather a cultural one. It is the product of a cultural hegemony that has fixed some categories by which declaring what is white and what is black. But exactly how the natural philosopher discovers that what he or she is looking for in the secrets of nature is only a projection of what he or she has inside, in the same way the colonial white man discovers that the characteristic of cruelty, infidelity, ignorance and inhumanity are no more black than white. It is uncanny that what demonstrates it is an extraordinary blackness, more black than black. What, then, is the female spectator if not an oxymoron of vision? How can a woman, who is the most volatile being on Earth, be a spectator of society assuming the role of an impartial observer? Actually she doesn't want to do that. It is not impartiality what she is looking for. What she is looking at is herself as a woman, and other women as herself. Individuals who need to be educated especially in the process of vision, that is not limited to the "objectness" they are till now confined. They now need to be aware of the roles they can in turn assume, sometimes objects, sometimes subjects, sometimes images.

⁵ Donna J. Haraway, *Situated Knowledges. The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, in Muriel Lederman, Ingrid Bartsch (ed.), *The Gender and Science Reader*, London-New York, Routledge, 2001.

In the same way, even though *the Emperor of the Moone* is an exemplary specimen for the male “forgetting of the air”, whose immediate consequence is that of a mediation and embodiment of vision, even other works presented in this research could be eligible for the same reason. It is for instance the case of *The Invisible Spy*, which plays the role of a fully carnal observer implied in the scenes he assists on, and aware of both the possibility that he has to manipulate these events and the deriving responsibility. Another enlightening example is that of *The Speculators*, one of the fancies of Cavendish’s *Poems and fancies*, for it shows vision in all its mediation. The speculator could not be able to deeply comprehend natural phenomena without glasses. Actually he couldn’t either exactly perceive them. Ironically, then, it ended dazzled by the light, which melted even his glass.

We have individuated the exemplar role of an outsider observer in the *Invisible Spy* of Haywood, but this probably more than all the other principles, is shared among all the characters we have encountered. The outsider is Lady Victoria in *Bell in Campo*, and a very proud one. The outsider is *Fantomina* and in a very “organic” way, that is using the very same tools of male voyeurism for unveiling it. But moreover the outsiders are all the three writers: Cavendish, in her writings and mostly in her visit to the Royal Society; Behn in translating Fontenelle, and in working as a spy for the King; Haywood as a coquette and a journalist in turn.

At the same time in which the observer becomes disembodied, the observed is imprisoned in his or her body to be written, read, and penetrated in the name of science and progress. The objects are subjected to medical eyes, colonial eyes, prison eyes, which not only control them, but also transform their privacy in publicly. This is the phenomenon Foucault calls “political anatomy”⁶, which posed under public gaze the body of the observed, and covered under the pursuit of science a sexual pleasure destined to grow all the centuries long. Moreover Schaffer has showed how, just in the period we have analyzed, another drive toward the publicity of more or less scientific observations was carrying experiments out of private cabinets or laboratories, and was transforming them into public spectacle⁷. Under the lens of this “scientific” gaze Nature fell down and all the ones closer to her, namely women and other inferior beings, whose bodies

⁶ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Paris, Gallimard, 1975, trans. A. Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York, Vintage Book, 1979, p. 28.

⁷ Simon Schaffer, “Self Evidence”, in «Critical Inquiry» 18 (1992), pp. 327-362.

were shaped by this gaze as well as their intellectual and moral values. This process will last long, in fact the questions regarding gender and race in visual studies is still very important.

At the beginning of this process as well as at the end of it an image was produced in which the observer crystallized his view of the object, but in which the different objects could not recognize themselves. This is what Fanon intends by "mask"⁸. As oppressive as these masks could be (or can be), the different subjects behind them started at a certain point to discover that these things could become a resource beyond slavery. If the phallogocentrism constructed a visual regime in hopeless objects, they could have the chance to build up new regimes in which the directions are multiple and the objects, at least, are scattered. These are the scopic regimes of masquerade and mimicry.

The first is a regime particularly related to women, which has been studied by many feminist critics, especially in psychoanalysis and in film studies⁹. Both psychoanalysts and film scholars almost agree in defining femininity as an image, full of roles, rules and values, imposed to women. In what they do not agree is the value this mask can assume once the woman decides to wear it. Doane sees in it a chance to separate the cause of desire and oneself, distracting the gaze on a false image, while the subject is kept safe. Irigaray, conversely, sees in it the female surrender to the "objectness" of their status.

The second term has usually been attributed to the subaltern races, but even Irigaray uses it as an interim strategy for dealing with the realm of the discourse¹⁰. However the specific field of this term is the colonial one. Even within this field the opinions do not always agree. Bhabha¹¹ considers it as a tendency not to harmonize or repress the different, but rather to form a resemblance, which is similar but not exactly the same. It is a contested terrain in which the subject

⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noir, Masques Blancs*, Paris, Seuil, 1952, transl. Ch. Lam Markmann, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York, Grove Press, 1967.

⁹ See Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade", in Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek ed, *Psychoanalysis and Female Sexuality*, New Haven, College and University Press, 1966, pp. 209-220; Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas une*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1977, trans. C. Porter and C. Burke, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985; Doane, M. A., "Film and The Masquerade: Theorising The Female Spectator", in «Screen» 23, (1982), 74-88.

¹⁰ Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas une*, quoted.

¹¹ Homi Bhabha, *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse*, in Michelson, Krauss, Crimp, & Copjec (ed), *OCTOBER The First Decade, 1976 - 1986*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1987, pp. 317-325.

encounters the object. Fanon, somehow like Irigaray, sees in this phenomenon the loss of the black man as an actual man.

The question is really difficult to solve, especially for the effects it has had and still has in the twentieth century. Surely the two categories have demonstrated certain utilities in the analysis of a different female gaze during the early modern period. Masquerade and mimicry are two different forms¹² of the “other’s” recognition of his or her own bodily, on which are inscribed the signs of difference and subalternity. Once these objects discover their subalternity they have two choices: to refuse their “objectness” and reach the same role of the observer; or to refuse them both, and decide to be a different subject, a non dominant one. If in choosing the last one they weren’t to be successful they had at least scattered their own image, becoming elusive objects.

This is the way in which our writers act, sometimes through mimicry, assuming the same characteristic of maleness in order to demonstrate its debatably, sometimes through masquerade, assuming the image of womanliness that men attributed to them but in an exaggerated, “medusan” way. Through the mask of mimicry Cavendish moved her attack to predominant male knowledge. By wearing the male dress of lady Victoria during the visit at the Royal Society, she was mimicking a female who mimicked a male, disappointing a male Society threatened by her showed femininity. Adopting the tactic of confusing the enemy seems to be the choice of Cavendish.

Behn, instead, adopts a completely different point of view, because under her masquerade staged in the *Emperor of Moone*, she does not put any objects, rather subjects. The point of view of the masks is that of the wise observers, who looks at the crazy peeping, putting him in front of his-self madness. In this way the one who pretended to be the perfect natural observer realizes not only the foolishness of his observation, but mostly the fact that everyone has already realized it.

Haywood, finally, assumes all the objectness of the female masks, both in *Fantomina* and in the *Female Spectator*, but she cannot be said to be the object of the male gaze. In fact, if the women of the two fictions are aware of the masks they wear, men are not always aware of the masks they have made up.

¹² For a broader discussion of the difference between the two terms see pp. 130-131.

After having made explicit the implicit observer – reducing the distances between subject and object – and having hidden the gazes of the observed, all that remains is the image. Just at a first glance the images produced within the works we have analyzed are very confusing: they are never univocal or predictable. In fact, they are the images of an uncertain realm, neither surely factual, nor definitely fictional. In recollecting the image of science to that of fancy, Cavendish, Behn and Haywood are denouncing a real phenomenon that of the popularization of science, due more to economical reasons than to enlightened democracy. The relation between image and imagination is very dangerous in Foucault's¹³ opinion, who sees in the image the surrender of imagination, that is the deepest way of reasoning that leads beyond the space of perceptual reality.

The confusion between science and fiction, however, was already broken and a new genre was founded thanks to the imagination of new and different worlds dealing with the new and different discoveries in astronomy, microscopy and geography. But it is hard to decide whether the curiosity they provoked went behind the images showed or mostly ended in them.

The verbal images coming from the pages of the three female observers are very different. Cavendish is enthusiastic with the images of fancy, for, in her materialistic view, imagination is made up of the same matter of mind, and thus it is an actual way of reasoning. This can make science more amusing, but imagination always needs to be educated in order to imagine new borders that reason alone could not reach. Conversely Behn, while translating Fontenelle, refuses any kind of false image, even if under the pretext of popularization. In her opinion, popularization has no value if its object is false. The value of popularization has been showed by the *Female Spectator* who, within a fictional frame does not conceive any image, if not a true image. Popularization does not necessarily mean to joke. What women want is not amusement as men believe, but true knowledge. And they do not need to be accomplished with dreams and fairs, because they are aware of having the same intellectual skills as men.

The age between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century was dominated by epochal images: that of Hobbes' Leviathan, and that of Boyle's Air Pump. The first was the emblem of rational knowledge supposing not to need material means

¹³ Michele Foucault, Ludwig Binswanger, *Dream and Existence*, Atlantic Highlands NJ, Humanities Press, 1985.

or public spectacle, in order to assert the veracity of its statements. It seemed to find in reason itself matter of research and discovery. The second was the emblem of the new science supposing to reach the full objectivity of knowledge, beyond any human limits, beyond human imagination. It was the science of The Royal Society, guarantor of science and of the elite. Between these two images a third one circulated very much during that century and a half: the flea of Robert Hooke. It was the symbol of a new way of conceiving new science, inside and outside the Royal Society, by provoking wonder, by stimulating fancy, by selling culture. But it is also an image out of control whose extent goes far, towards the continent, until romanticism and the birth of the fantastic.

These images suddenly reached a great popularity going beyond the limits their author had foreseen. It was the beginning of a new age of images, an age in which they started to have their own life, like the new discovered animal they represented. They were now able to reproduce, to clone themselves, to invade space and time, to free themselves.

At the same time new observers were rising. They did not believe in their own superiority in vision, nor in that of others'. They were not seeking objects to manipulate, to conquest, to penetrate, but to meet, to share with undefined points of view. They were starting to apprehend a new visual literacy under their masks.

That training has not yet ended, and images are still alive. But the masks are still on, waiting for their persons to be safe enough to remove them.

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