4

The limits of visualization

Ocularcentrism and organization

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Introduction

We live in a spectatorial society, where we are bombarded by visual images, and where conversations are littered with visual metaphors. This chapter seeks to ground this empirical reality through considering the position in discourse of visual or ocular metaphors. Succinctly, it seeks to understand ocularcentrism – a paradigm or epistemology based on visual or ocular metaphors – and its limits. The chapter begins by outlining the characteristics and development of the paradigm, and the different ways in which it has been critiqued by philosophers, social theorists and political scientists. These critiques are classified into three trajectories which, informed by the original paradigm, constitute a 'meta-theoretical' framework – schematically depicted in Figure 4.1.

The bulk of the chapter considers the three different trajectories that the critiques of ocularcentrism have taken. The first consists of writers who have critiqued the vision metaphor by taking it to its extreme, but who also, somewhat paradoxically, retain the metaphor's central position in their own texts. This trajectory is referred to as *ocularcentrism extended*. The second trajectory seeks to excoriate the root metaphor, and *ocularcentrism displaced* traces the metaphoric redescriptions and displacements that have been effected through this approach. The third

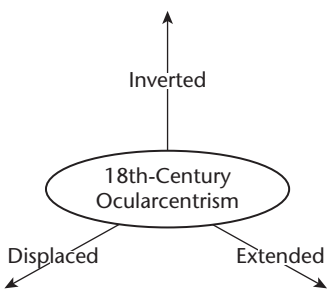

Figure 4.1 Metatheoretical trajectories

trajectory, *ocularcentrism inverted*, effectively inverts some of the categorical distinctions on which ocularcentrism is founded, in particular the understanding that theory is pure, in contrast to the impurity of the 'real' world. Together, these three trajectories provide a frame for organizing how we might think about visualization, while it also frames limits on what visual organization might, or might not, mean.

The ascendancy of the eye

With considerable justification, we can characterize Western culture as an ocularcentric paradigm, based as it is on a vision-generated, vision-centred interpretation of knowledge, truth and reality. At the outset, it is worth summarizing the key contributions to the ocularcentric paradigm made by Plato, Descartes and the philosophers of the Enlightenment (for more extensive discussions on the philosophical roots of ocularcentrism, see Jay 1993a; Levin 1993b; Jonas 1966).

Plato made the important distinction between the sense of sight, which he grouped with the creation of human intelligence and soul, and that of the other senses, which he placed with man's material being. Not only was sight 'by far the most costly and complex piece of workmanship which the artificer of the senses ever contrived' (Plato 1974: VII/S507), but also sight, unlike the other senses, had a theological dimension as it was directly connected, via light, to the sun deity: 'the sun is not sight, but the author of sight who is recognised by sight' (ibid.: VII/S508). Plato also made the critical division between the visible world and the intelligible world (ibid.: VII/S509–10), although his description of the latter is always based on ocular metaphors: for him, the 'soul is like the eye' (ibid.: VII/S508) and things in the intelligible domain 'can only be seen with the eye of the mind' (ibid.: VII/S510). His well-known myth of the cave was especially important in the development of the ocularcentric paradigm because it demonstrated how the immediately experienced sight of one's eyes (the visible world) is impure, in contrast to the pure Truth that is only attainable through the speculative ability of the mind's eye (the intelligible world). Plato's interpretation of the allegory is that 'the prison-house is the world of sight, the light of the fire is the sun, and…the journey upwards [is] the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world', which, importantly, he always describes using light, sight, shadows and vision, for example:

> the world of knowledge…[which] when seen is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.
>
> *(ibid.: VII/S517)*

Because ocular metaphors are primordial in both the visible and intelligible worlds, we will restate Plato's demarcation as a distinction between the 'eyes on one's head' (which we will refer to as *e-vision*) and the 'eye in one's mind' (*m-vision*). Ever since, the ocularcentric paradigm has been driven by a constant play between these different 'eyes'. This distinction, as depicted in Figure 4.2, came to be foundational in modern thought.

So impressed was Democritus by Plato's reasoning that he supposedly blinded himself in order to better 'see' with his intellect and thus discern truths denied to his normal vision. Likewise, Plato's suspicion of e-vision was the reason for his hostility to all mimetic arts, which he saw as a form of deception. Many centuries later, Descartes was equally distrustful of what he saw and, like Plato, he rejected the visible world (e-vision) as a potential or actual illusion. Ironically, his alternative – the sovereign power of reason – was essentially a model based on the

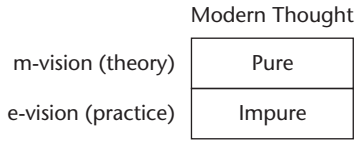

Figure 4.2 The categorical distinction between m-vision and e-vision

metaphorics of vision (the mind's eye) in which the properties of the visible were transferred into the mental domain. The ocular paradigm was further enhanced by the discovery of perspectivism in the sixteenth century and Newton's work on optics in the seventeenth century. As Berger put it:

> [p]erspective makes the single eye the center of the visible world. Everything converges on to the eye as to the vanishing point of infinity. The visible world is arranged for the spectator as the universe was once thought to be arranged for God.
>
> *(1972: 16)*

In time, the modern individual (the 'I') came to be centred on, if not abbreviated to, the eye ('I' = eye).

This infatuation with the visual reached a new zenith during the Enlightenment – a term that is itself based on an ocular metaphor – when the rationalist understanding that the mind's eye (Reason) could potentially 'see' the Truth came to dominate intellectual thought. For rationalists, 'a certain class of reasons…carry their own credibility with them: they will be visible because they glow by their own light' (Barnes and Bloor 1982: 29). What is interesting for our purposes is that many of the Enlightenment's central precepts, such as objectivism, reflection, critical rationality and subjectivism, are fundamentally based on the primacy accorded to the visual. In particular, the dominant ocularcentric paradigm promulgated during the Enlightenment worked to elevate static Being over dynamic Becoming and fixed essences over ephemeral appearances. This ontological consequence is because, as Jonas (1966) has explained, sight is essentially the sense of simultaneity, of seeing a wide field at one moment, while hearing is significantly more temporal because it operates through intertwining past, present and future into a meaningful whole. And sight, unlike hearing, leaves the visible undiminished by its action, creating a unique sense of otherness. Moreover, the phenomenon of distancing, which is the most basic function of sight, helps create the belief that objects are distant from and neutrally apprehended by sovereign subjects, which, in turn, provides the basis for the subject–object dualism that is so typical of Greek and Western metaphysics.

The dominance of visual metaphors continues to this day in contemporary academic discourse: in conceptualizing, we seek insight and illumination; we speculate, inspect, focus and reflect; and, when we speak of points of view, synopsis and evidence, we may forget or be unaware of these concepts' sight-based etymology. The 'spectatorial' nature of modern epistemology is also evident when we consider that the word theory has the same root as the Greek word for 'theatre', *theoria*, meaning to look at attentively, or to behold. Likewise, writing is largely a visual exercise, in contrast to speaking, which is centred on the sense of hearing. Thus, in modern philosophy, the eye is the hinge point between the subjective and the objective, the window to the world and the mirror of the soul. In this spectatorial epistemology, the ocular subject has become the ultimate source of all being, with 'the world' being seen, reflected in, represented by, objectified and instrumentalized by the sovereign subjective self. As Derrida put it:

> the metaphor of darkness and light (of self-revelation and self-concealment) [is the] founding metaphor of Western philosophy as metaphysics…[I]n this respect the entire history of our philosophy is a photology, the name given to a history of, or treatise on, light.
>
> *(1978: 27)*

Ocularcentrism extended

If rationalism reached its high-water mark in the eighteenth century, it was subsequently critiqued by both Romantics and conservatives in the nineteenth century, and by most everyone else in the twentieth century. However, with respect to the root ocular metaphor of rationalism, it is useful to distinguish between those critiques that seek to displace the metaphor and those that retain it. In this section, we consider the latter, namely the Romantics (including Nationalists and Socialists) who concoct and follow utopian visions, and the postmodern counter-visionaries who, while they critique ocularcentrism, still remain within its thrall.

In their attempt to move away from Enlightenment rationality, the Romantics of the nineteenth century stressed the imaginative, the irrational and fantastic aspects of the human creative mind. Yet, insofar as Romanticism retains the primordial position of the human mind, it is best seen as an extension and deepening of the Enlightenment rather than an alternative philosophy. Thus, the Romantics presented mental pictures of what the world *might be* like – instead of the Rationalist picture of what the world *was* like. To emphasize the difference, Abrams (1953) used the metaphors of mirror and lamp to distinguish between the two movements. For Abrams, the rationalist mind is a 'reflector of external objects,' while the Romantic mind is:

> a radiant projector which makes a contribution to the objects it perceives. The [mirror metaphor] was characteristic of much of the thinking from Plato to the eighteenth century; the [lamp metaphor] typifies the prevailing romantic conception of the poetic mind.
>
> *(1953: viii)*

While Abrams asserts that the two metaphors are 'antithetic' to one another, for us, they are both fundamentally ocular, or sight based. Moreover, the Romantics followed in the tradition of the rationalists by invariably presenting optimistic, progressive – and one might say innocent – visions of the future. Prototypical of these creative and imaginative visions was the nineteenth-century catalogue of utopian texts that provided a life-force and inspiration for many subsequent political and social movements.

The Romantic movement of the early nineteenth century provided an important philosophical basis for both socialism and nationalism, the two primary movements of radical political change in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century (Jones 1974). In particular, Romantic literature, with its celebration of the vernacular and folk traditions, certainly inspired nationalistic feeling throughout Europe in the nineteenth century. Moreover, in terms of ocular metaphors, both nationalism and socialism were still founded on a 'fixed point of view', or what Trimble (1998) refers to as 'the Platonic pursuit of abstract perfection'.

Marshall McLuhan identified a further connection between ocularcentrism and nationalism when he noted the important role played by print technology during the nineteenth century: 'by print a people *sees* itself for the first time. The vernacular in appearing in high visual definition affords a glimpse of social unity co-extensive with vernacular boundaries' (McLuhan 1962: 217, original emphasis). Elsewhere, he reiterated the link when he asserted that '[n]ationalism depends upon or derives from the "fixed point of view" that arrives with print, perspective, and visual quantification' (ibid.: 220).

While the Romantics of the early nineteenth century critiqued Enlightenment rationality, Nietzsche was perhaps the first writer to attack *ocularcentrism* when he argued against the philosopher's presupposition of an eye outside time and history, 'an eye that no living being can imagine, an eye required to have no direction, to abrogate its active and interpretative powers' (1969 [1887]: 255). As early as the eighteenth century, the import of an individual historian's perspective on history was well understood, but Nietzsche took this further by asserting that *every* discourse could only be understood as a perspective – 'all seeing is essentially perspective and so is all knowing' (ibid.) – and he developed this insight to present a radical critique of both philosophy and science. Nietzsche's rhetorical device was to subvert the visual by turning it in on itself through extending and multiplying its logic. As Jay put it: 'Plato's singular sun of truth illuminating a reality of forms was replaced by a thousand and one suns shining on a multitude of different realities' (1993a: 190). What is important for our purposes is that the visual metaphor is still central in Nietzschean multi-perspectivalism.

Foucault was just as averse to the 'spectator' theory of knowledge, but his line of argument was quite different. Foucault's insight was that, while the subject was constituted as a detached, contemplative, disinterested, autonomous entity in a spectatorial epistemology, his historical studies showed how the subject was better understood as being incarcerated and indeed constituted by various technologies of visualization. For him, vision becomes supervision: 'the gaze that sees is the gaze that dominates' (Foucault 1973: 39). In other words, the power to see, to make visible, is the power to control, which is why Foucault sees knowledge and power as fundamentally indwelling. In the *Birth of the Clinic* (subtitled *An Archaeology of Medical Perception*), he argued that the medical gaze took hold once pathological anatomy and the autopsy – which was essentially a project of spatializing disease – came to be accorded central status in medical practice after 1800. In *Discipline and Punish*, he mapped out the nineteenth-century shift from sovereign to disciplinary power: the shift from 'governmentality organized around the gaze of the sovereign to governmentality organized by surveillance, panopticism, the normalizing gaze dispersed throughout the social system, maintaining civil order' (Levin 1993a: 20–21). In a disciplinary regime, 'power is exercised by virtue of things being known and people being seen… by surveillance rather than ceremonies' (Foucault and Gordon 1980: 154), and, in this regime, individuals are no longer autonomous entities, but are better understood as being constituted by technologies of visualization, such as the examination, which, in turn, includes self-observation, self-examination and self-monitoring. Notwithstanding Foucault's antipathy to vision, his archaeological and genealogical methods are fundamentally ocular – insofar as they make visible the correlations between vision and truth, and vision and power, respectively – and he makes generous use of spatial metaphors throughout his writings.

Other writers have also followed a similar path, critiquing modern epistemology but still retaining the ocular metaphor as central to their 'new' paradigm. Typical of this approach would be the so-called 'reflexive turn' taken by many sociologists of science during the 1980s on the back of the postmodern critique of modern epistemology (see, for example, Woolgar 1988). One difficulty with this project is that the concept of reflection is itself based on an ocular metaphor, which is precisely why Winner dismissed the reflexive turn as 'that endlessly enchanting hall of mirrors' (1993: 373). Within this group, we might also locate the more self-indulgent and self-centred of the postmoderns.

Ocularcentrism displaced

Writers in this category are equally hostile to Enlightenment rationality, but what makes them more radical than those in the previous category is that not only do they reject the ocular

metaphor but they also attempt to replace it with different metaphors and vocabulary. We begin by summarizing the more significant endeavours to place other senses – especially hearing but also the sense of touch – at the centre of philosophical discourse. The chapter then proceeds to explain why it is appropriate, if paradoxical, to place conservatives and postmodern radicals within this category on the basis that they both seek to jettison the visual metaphor from political discourse.

The linguistic turn: from sight to sound

Over the last century or so, a succession of philosophers have revolted against the legacy of Cartesianism and the Enlightenment, and have denounced the 'spectatorial and intellectualist epistemology based on a subjective self reflecting on an objective world exterior to it' (Jay 1993b: 143). One of the most significant shifts occurred in the early part of the twentieth century with the development of structuralism. In particular, the contribution of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure proved hugely influential as it marked a profound shift towards language and narrative. Since language is fundamentally about speaking – and hearing – structuralism constitutes a 'metaphorical redescription' from a paradigm based on vision and sight to one based on speaking and hearing (even if language and communication is not exclusively based on speech).

Others soon applied Saussure's ideas beyond the domain language. Indeed, what links the various forms of structuralism is the common use of Saussure's ideas to study a variety of symbolic relations – understood as an underlying system of differences – whether these be structured by language, class or whatever. So, for instance, Hans-Georg Gadamer argued for a shift from seeing to a conversation-based hermeneutics, while Jürgen Habermas' work can similarly be interpreted as a project to move from a rationality grounded in a detached-spectator paradigm to one based on communication, speech and democratic participation. Centrally, the subject in Habermas' philosophy is neither the dominating observer nor an observed subject, but a speaking, listening subject participating in democratic practices. The same theme is to be found in the so-called 'voice discourse', which asserts the primacy of speech (experience) over writing (theory) and which counters knowledge claims based on a spectatorial epistemology with narratives of the silenced and excluded (see, for example, Spivak 1988 [1985]). Likewise, the American pragmatist Richard Rorty (1979) has rigorously refuted the picture of the mind as a mirror of theoretical reflection. Instead of ocular theories of truth that make truth a matter of correspondence, he proposed a conception of truth and mind based on discourse. And, if we see, as Rorty does, 'the history of language, and thus of the arts, the sciences, and the moral sense, as the history of metaphor' 1989: xvi), then we can understand the profound shift in philosophical discourse away from theory and towards narrative as a move in metaphorics from sight to hearing.

One of the significant limitations of structuralism, and it is a limitation that the post-structuralists have sought to transcend, is its tendency to focus on the *synchronic* aspects of linguistic difference at the expense of the more processual, *diachronic* elements. This critique led to an increasing and ongoing engagement, throughout the century, with processual understandings. This shift, in our sense-based framework, can be seen as a shift towards the senses of hearing and touch, since these senses necessarily involve change over time.

The process philosophers

One of the first modern philosophers to dispute the noble position accorded to sight was Henri Bergson, writing around the same time as Saussure. Bergson asserted that both idealists

and materialists, the massive polar anchors of philosophical debate, were both too cognitive, and were incapable of appreciating that the body was not just an object of contemplation but was actually the primary site of lived action. Hannah Arendt set the measure of Bergson's influence when she asserted that, '[s]ince Bergson, the use of the sight metaphor in philosophy has kept dwindling, not unsurprisingly, as emphasis and interest has shifted entirely from contemplating to speech, from *nous* [mind] to *logos* [word]' (1978: 122). In particular, Bergson railed against the spatialization of time and the profound mistake of reducing the *qualitative* difference between past, present and future to a simple *quantitative* distinction. The particular problem with reducing temporality to a number-line was that it privileged sight, since 'every clear idea of number implies a visual image in space' (Bergson and Pogson 1971 [1889]: 79). This was hugely important to Bergson because, for him, experienced time depended more on the non-visual senses, such as hearing and touch, which intertwine past, present and future into a meaningful whole.

Contemporaneous with Bergson, the American pragmatists (Peirce, Dewey, James) also celebrated action, change, negotiation and the 'plastic' nature of reality over fixed principles, abstractions and essentialist beliefs. A.N. Whitehead was another 'process philosopher' who drew the various strands of this emergent philosophy together in his vast book *Process and Reality* (1929). Around the same time, Martin Heidegger published *Being and Time* and he continued to make sustained attacks on the ocularcentrism of Greek and Western philosophy throughout his career. His language and vocabulary were different but his central point was that ocularcentrism had reduced being to being-represented or being-imaged. In other words, the very being of the world had come to be equated with our images and representations, which, for him, was an inauthentic existence:

> Metaphysics thinks about beings as beings. Whenever the question is asked what beings are, beings as such are in sight. Metaphysical representation owes this sight to the light of Being. The light itself, i.e., that which such thinking experiences as light, does not come within the range of metaphysical thinking.… Metaphysics, insofar as it always represents only beings as beings, does not recall Being itself.
>
> *(1975: 207–208)*

Heidegger was extremely critical of the visually orientated Greek notion of *theoria*, and he lamented the reduction of *theoria* to observation in modern empiricism. He contested the privileging of a spectatorial vision that made subject and object distant and estranged from one another, and, like Bergson, he repudiated ontologies that made spatial existence prior to temporality. He also contrasted the early Greek attitude of *wonder* – which lets things be – with the modern sense of *curiosity* – which is symptomatic of a predatory possessiveness and a calculating, self-interested will to power. Instead, Heidegger preferred to give ontological primacy to 'speaking', 'listening to' and 'silence': 'listening to…is Dasein's existential way of Being-open as Being-with for Others. Indeed hearing constitutes the primary and authentic way in which Dasein is open for its ownmost potentiality for Being' (1962 [1927]: 206); 'language stands in essential relation to the uniqueness of being…Being is the most said and at the same time a keeping silent' (ibid. 1993 [1981]: 54).

Heidegger employed novel linguistic and hermeneutical techniques, coining new words at will to aid his attempt at comprehending being in new ways. Other philosophers have continued this tradition, which we can now see as a metaphoric revolt against the dominant ocular metaphor in Western philosophy. In organization theory, this turn to process is also evident in, for instance, the influence of constructivism, actor-network theory and the more philosophical writings of Chia (1995) and Cooper and Law (1995) to name but three of the more prominent

writers. More broadly, this interest in process (means) rather than ends (visions, utopias) is a feature of contemporary political discourse, whether it be articulated by conservatives or what we might refer to as postmodern radicals.

The displacement of vision in political discourse

Vision, and especially any form of radical vision, has been shunted to the margins of political discourse. Many in society, it seems, are at one with David Trimble (1998), who, on receiving the Nobel Peace, stated that '[i]nstinctively, I identify with the person who said that when he heard a politician talk of his vision, he recommended him to consult an optician'. In his Nobel speech, David Trimble drew extensively on Edmund Burke's conservative thesis that the pursuit of 'abstract perfection' had to be rejected, for the simple reason that humans are imperfect. In terms of the ocularcentric paradigm, we can understand Burkean conservatives as *radical* insofar as they reject the vision metaphor that underpins both Rationalism and Romanticism (and, in turn, socialism and nationalism). Burke's (and Trimble's) philosophy was to remain true to tradition and the status quo, imperfect and all as it might be. Of course, some might say that the ruling 'caste', because of their standpoint, will be blind to the problems that others can see all too clearly: namely differential relations of power and equality.

In many respects, Burkean conservatism has been the dominant political movement in the second half of the twentieth century. The success of conservatism and the reluctance to extol alternative visions of the future is understandable, since many have linked the totalitarianism and fascism, which have punctuated the twentieth century, with the Romantic pursuit of utopian visions. The compelling conservative argument is that Romanticism leads not to utopia but instead creates Hitlers and the dystopias of Nazi Germany, ethnically cleansed of those that don't fit the perfect vision.

Such antipathy to visionary thinking is maybe to be expected from conservatives who axiomatically reject any alternatives to the status quo, but today even socialists seem unable to articulate a clear vision of what society should be like, having largely lost faith in the utopian beliefs that propelled their common projects for over a century. As Giddens put it, 'the hopes of radicals for a society in which, as Marx said, human beings could be "truly free" seem to have turned out to be empty reveries' (1994: 1). This eclipse of past visions now leaves the Left unsure and tentative, and few today, even those that still claim to be radicals, believe in revolutionary change towards a socialist ideal of what society should be like. Donna Haraway, one of the more radical thinkers of our age, summed up the situation when she admitted that: 'I think that the most difficult problem that I face, if I own up to it, is I have almost lost the imagination of what a world that isn't capitalist could look like. And that scares me' (Harvey and Haraway 1995: 519). Moreover, what it means to be radical is further obscured by the fact that conservatism has become radical, under Thatcher's neoliberal reforms, while socialism has become conservative, insofar as socialism's practical activity is now largely centred on maintaining the welfare state (Giddens 1994, 1998).

Notwithstanding the threat of implosion, some have sought to continue the tradition of radical socialist thinking, while being careful to avoid the problems with utopian, vision-centred teleologies or grand narratives. We refer to these writers as 'postmodern radicals' because of the uneasy conjunction that they straddle. The 'post-Marxist' scholars Laclau and Mouffe are representative of this position.

Following in the tradition of Lyotard and Foucault, the postmodern radicals reject metanarratives or big teleological stories, and hence have little truck with either Romantic utopias or political ideologies as a basis for understanding social change. For example, Laclau and Mouffe

(1985) have critiqued the eschatological dimension in Marxist thought as a 'dangerous illusion' and likewise they reject the myth of social progress towards some great vision. They stress the importance of the chance event and the contingent, or, as Smith has put it, 'instead of an end-point, we have an infinite series of contestations, and the role of the theorist is to incite these' (1998: 23). Thus, radical democratic theory, which might traditionally have been associated with utopian thinking and social engineering, now 'rejects teleologies, "scientific" predictions and eschatological prophecies' (ibid.: 24). Where Laclau and Mouffe differ from Lyotard is that they advocate a linking of different language games into a 'hegemony'.

Ocularcentrism inverted

In this section, we introduce a framework that provides a useful understanding of how one strand of postmodernism has effected a profound change in the relative understanding of the Platonic–Cartesian distinction between the world as seen by the eyes on one's head (e-vision) and the world of the mind's eye (m-vision). In the modern period, which we can approximate as spanning from 1600 to 1900, m-vision (which loosely equates to the theoretical world) was understood as pure in contrast to the impurity of the visual world, e-vision (see Figure 4.2).

As Figure 4.3 shows, postmodernity is characterized by an interesting double inversion (shown as 1 and 2 in the figure). In this section, we will briefly discuss each of these.

The first inversion shows how the modern understanding of theoretical purity – which we can trace to Platonic idealism – has effectively been replaced to the point where clarity of thought is no longer afforded primacy in theoretical discourse. Symptomatic of this shift is the introduction of a large catalogue of terms that emphasize impurity and the repudiation of any theory based on fixed essences or pure Truth. Thus, Derrida has employed a vocabulary of terms like 'difference', 'supplementarity', 'trace', 'deconstruction' and 'decentring' to emphasize the instability, ambiguity or impurity of language. Likewise, Rorty (1989) uses the concept of 'irony' to stress the contingency of all beliefs and concepts, while Foucault and others have shown how the project of modernity, far from creating a society that was transparent to its members, has actually created a carceral, irrational society. The cumulative effect of these and other writings is that we now have, in terms of theory, what Habermas (1989) refers to as a 'new obscurity'.

The second inversion is the translation of e-vision, the world of practice, from the impurity of the modern era to the purity of the postmodern (shown as translation 2 in Figure 4.3). As discussed earlier, the moderns were hostile to the illusory nature of the visible world (i.e. they understood it as imperfect), and consequently their utopias were very much fictions, located in the imaginary (m-vision). In contrast, what might be called a postmodern argument is that the history project (as a singular project) has ended, and that we now live in a postmodern meta-utopia (a meta-utopia being an environment wherein different utopian visions are permitted). According to some marketing scholars (see, for instance, the collection edited by Brown *et al.* 1998), marketing has been central to this project of creating contemporary utopias, since its very essence is the development, dissemination and manipulation of image:

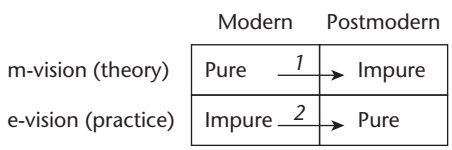

Figure 4.3 The double inversion of ocularcentrism

> With its boundless ability to invent 'imaginary worlds of perfect appearances, perfect personal relationships, perfect families, perfect personalities, perfect careers, perfect holidays, perfect pizzas, perfect personalities and perfect imperfections' (Brown 1995: 137), marketing, more than any other contemporary cultural institution, is arguably the keeper of the late-twentieth-century utopian flame.
>
> *(Brown and Maclaran 1996: 266)*

Martins makes much the same point when she says that, 'in the absence of stronger illusions, the public needs to invest its dreams somewhere. Replacing other vendors of illusions that progress has dislodged from their traditional positions, advertising appears at the right time to fill the vacuum' (1995: 51).

Thus, we can understand postmodernism as Romanticism without vision (Livingston 1997; Power and Stern 1998). Similarly, Belk asserts that '[o]ur primary source of hope has shifted from religion, to art and science, and finally to consumption' (1996: 93) and that 'we must face the fact that for many of us, perhaps all of us in one way or another, some of our strongest and most readily available hopes for transcendent and transformational experiences lie in consumer goods and services' (ibid.: 102). According to Baudrillard, America is the ultimate consumer world, which he, appropriately, sees as a 'paradise', albeit a 'mournful, monotonous and superficial' paradise (1989: 98). In this non-teleological world, we have no future vision but live instead in the perpetual present: like the traffic on America's freeways we are 'coming from nowhere, going nowhere' (ibid.: 125). Elsewhere, Baudrillard argues that, as we draw upon and use all of our resources, we only end up destroying 'metaphors, dreams, illusions and utopias by their absolute realization' (1994: 102). For Baudrillard, the complete clarity of the postmodern world, where everything is filmed, broadcast, videotaped, etc., is *obscene*, because it leaves the totality of the world exhibited and visible. Instead, he prefers the *scene* that involves both absence and illusion: '[f]or something to be meaningful, there has to be a scene, there has to be an illusion, a minimum of illusion, of imaginary moment, of defiance of the real, which carries you off, seduces or revolts you' (Baudrillard and Fleming 1990: 65).

Reflections

Notwithstanding the extensive criticisms of Enlightenment rationality and ocularcentrism, summarized above, the evidence is that the ocularcentric paradigm continues. New information and communication technologies permit spectacularizations that have not been possible before (Debord 1983 [1967]; Baudrillard 1983; Vattimo 1992). Globalization and just-in-time production, which are both predicated on the existence of intensive surveillance and supervisory technologies, constitute a new form of electronic panoptica. Vision continues to be privileged across domains, from strategic management to fervent nationalism, indicating that teleological metanarratives based on a 'fixed point of view' still provide a pervasive and potent organizing logic across the world. And Western thought has colonized new locales and discourses, creating an *audit society* that seeks to make everything visible (Power 1999). It is clear that, no more than nuclear technology can be 'unlearned', one cannot simply drop-kick Western philosophy into oblivion because one is uneasy about its ocularcentrism. Likewise, this text is peppered with the language of a spectatorial epistemology – aspect, insight, points of view, perspective, clear, see, focus, etc. – although, if we were to dispense with this language totally, we would probably be either silent or unintelligible. The lesson, maybe, is that it is just as inappropriate to dismiss the vision metaphor – which would be impossible anyway – as to be transfixed by it.

Ocular metaphors are privileged in organizational discourse, not just in terms of epistemology and methodology, but also in terms of constructs that filter through to management thinking (for example, the notion of organizational vision). This way of thinking about the world is not so much deficient, as necessarily partial. The implication is that there is significant potential for the other senses to contribute, in terms of pedagogy, research methods and modes of results dissemination, to organization studies. This echoes similar calls in the nascent literature of organizational aesthetics – where Antonio Strati has suggested that 'smell sheds light [*sic*] on an aspect that the organizational literature habitually ignores' (2000: 17) – and in the literature on emotion and organizations – where emotion is presented as a more sensual mode of enquiry that is at odds with the cognitivist paradigm in organization studies (Fineman 2000). Likewise, the recent turn to 'sensory marketing' and 'sensory branding' (Lindstrom 2005; Hultén *et al.* 2009; Krishna 2010) may indicate a growing challenge to the hegemony of the ocular paradigm. According to Lindstrom, '99 percent of all brand communication today is focused on our two senses: what we hear and see. In sharp contrast, 75 percent of our emotions are generated by what we in fact smell' (2005: 85). Even if one might be sceptical of this claim, it is typical of the rhetoric that companies use when highlighting the limits of visualization and the need to use scent, sound and texture when building brand identity. Beyond the world of branding, touch, smell and sound seem to have regained some lost status within the hierarchy of senses that constitute the human condition. Most obviously, perhaps, the personal computer has evolved from an almost exclusively visual interface into a multi-sensory environment. In particular, the design of Apple's iPod was premised on the simple idea that touch matters and that 'computing' could – and perhaps should – be a viscerally tactile experience. Similarly, many of the most recent advances in the computer gaming industry, such as the Xbox and Wii, are centred on somatic rather than visual technologies. More broadly, our own lived experiences remind us how limiting it is to reduce the human condition to the sense of sight, and that our more intimate human relations typically revolve around senses other than the sense of sight.

This is an important cautionary note in a book on visual organization, written by academics for academics, who tend to valorize the creation of texts and visual representations of the world. Yiannis Gabriel (2005) has famously invoked the alluring metaphor of the 'glass cage' to capture much of what it means to live in late modernity, where we are surrounded, if not constituted, by visual images and spectacle. Yet, it is important to remember that, while alluring, this and other ocular metaphors can never shed light on that which is lost to sight. Which is a lot. The glass cage that is the ocular world *is* a prison that contains us, but there is also a world beyond the cage, beyond the visual, beyond the text.

At the very least, the ideas and framework introduced in this chapter should stimulate a deeper understanding of debates and positions in organization theory, and the limitations and exclusions created by the ocular metaphors on which our own contribution to discourse is based. Of course, one should not expect radical change, at least in the short term, since our current practices and preferred meta-metaphors are the sedimented effect of ancient institutionalizing practices. Nevertheless, the conjunction of similar arguments across disparate discourses suggests that metaphors based on sight and light will have a diminished role in the future of our discipline. We shall see.

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