— Chapter 1 > The Paradox of Post-Dramatic Subjectivity
We can never understand a picture unless we grasp the ways in which it shows what cannot be seen. One thing that cannot be seen in an illusionistic picture, or which tends to conceal itself, is precisely its own artificiality. The whole system of assumptions about the innate rationality of the mind and the mathematical character of space is like the grammar which allows us to make or recognize a proposition — (W.J.T. Mitchell 1986: 39).

Mitchell makes this remark in the context of a discussion about the way perspective produces an image of the visible world, an image that is constructed according to a particular logic and as seen from a specific point of view. This construction is explicitly visible in perspectival drawings, in which receding lines serve to constitute unity as a result of which all elements appear as part of a meaningful totality. The point where receding lines meet (the vanishing point) mirrors the vantage point, the point from where the scene depicted is seen. The scene reaches out to the viewer, inviting him or her to occupy the vantage point. By taking up this position as implied by the construction of the image, the viewer is granted a perfect view from where everything looks the way it should. Seen from this point, the image is, to borrow Alberti’s famous metaphor, like a finestra aperta, a window opening on the world.2

The point of view as implied by the perspectival image, Mitchell argues, does not only mark a location in actual space from where the scene depicted is seen. It also marks a point of view implied in the symbolic spaces opened up by discourse. I use ‘discourse’ here to refer to the semiotic habits that enable us to communicate and think, and at the same time, prescribe ways of doing so. Discourse entails epistemological attitudes as well as unexamined assumptions about meaning and about the world. Language can be part of discourse but discourse is certainly not limited to language.3

The signifying systems that make up discourse pre-exist any individual. They present a ‘making possible,’ an opening up of fields in which certain kinds of action and production are brought about. The very utility of discourse makes it both functional and regulative. As individuals, we learn to participate in discourses and in this way we learn to make sense of the world. In participating, we learn to see the world according to the attitudes and assumptions as they are part of these discourses. These attitudes and assumptions become part of our vision of the world: a vision that we find (or do not find) reflected in the representations we are confronted with. Therefore, showing a scene from a particular point of view, an image shows more than what can actually be seen.

This intertwining of what is seen with what is not seen, Mitchell argues, brings about the attractiveness and even the credibility of the perspective image. As Mitchell puts it, ‘[p]art of the power of perspectival illusionism was that it seemed to reveal not just the outward visible world
but the very nature of the rational soul whose vision is represented” (Mitchell 1986: 39). With this observation, Mitchell draws attention to perspective as a definition of the relationship between what is seen and the point of view from where it is seen as such, as well as to the complex character of this relationship as it is defined in perspectival illusionism. For, as Mitchell remarks, if there is one thing that cannot be seen in an illusionistic picture, or which at least tends to conceal itself, it is precisely its artificiality (Mitchell 1986: 39).

The power of an illusionistic picture is that it is convincing as an image of ‘how things are’ independent of any particular observer, rather than a particular way of seeing or depicting these things. Recognizing this ambiguity is of vital importance to understand the impact that the invention of artificial perspective – first systematized by Alberti in 1435 – has made on the development of the modern, scientific world view. According to Mitchell,

The effect of this invention was nothing less than to convince an entire civilization that it possessed an infallible method of representation, a system for the automatic and mechanical production of truths about both the material and the mental worlds [...]. Aided by the political and economic ascendance of Western Europe, artificial perspective conquered the world of representation under the banner of reason, science and objectivity [...]. And the invention of a machine (the camera) built to produce this sort of images has, ironically, only reinforced the conviction that this is the natural mode of representation. What is natural is, evidently, what we can build a machine to do for us (Mitchell 1986: 37).

With these remarks, Mitchell brings to mind how, in the modern period, conceptions of seeing became tied up with perspective so that perspectival vision appears to be ‘natural’ vision and the perspectival image a representation of the world ‘as it is,’ or ‘as we really see it.’ Descartes is commonly considered to be the founding father of this modern visual paradigm and frequently ‘Cartesian perspectivalism’ serves as a shorthand way of characterizing it.

This modern visual paradigm is, as Martin Jay puts it “a contested terrain rather than a harmoniously integrated complex of visual theories and practices” (Jay 1988: 4). The domination of Cartesianism did not mean uniformity. Jay refers to the baroque ocular regime as the uncanny double of the dominant scientific or rationalized visual order, to Norman Bryson’s analysis of Vermeer, and to what Svetlana Alpers has called The Art of Describing typical of Dutch art of the 17th century. The dominant position of Cartesian perspectivalism is not the consequence of a lack of alternatives, nor of its superior capacity to represent the world ‘as it is.’ Rather, this dominant position is a consequence of the way perspective shows the world according to particular ideas about ‘how it is’ and about how this world can be known. The dominance of Cartesianism, Jay argues, is a consequence of the way Renaissance perspective got linked with Cartesian notions of rationality in philosophy.
In *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (1993), Jay describes how the arrival of this visual paradigm was prepared by a constellation of social, political, aesthetic and technical innovations in the early modern era, which combined to produce what in retrospect has been called 'the rationalization of sight.' One of the sources of this rationalization was the increasingly formalized and distant social space of the courtly societies in the 17th century. Jay refers to sociologist Norbert Elias who has argued that elaborate courtly rituals of display, devised to mark the articulations of social hierarchy, led to a devaluation of the more intimate senses of smell and touch in favor of a more remote sense of vision. The political function of courtly spectacle reached its climax in the Versailles of Sun King Louis XIV, to be transformed shortly thereafter into a more mechanical apparatus in which the power of the visual to control behavior was depersonalized and transformed into a vast network of visual channels through which the subjects were perpetually on view. Some centuries later, this development would become a favorite subject of analysis for Michel Foucault.

Jay observes how increased reliance on visually defined behavior in social and political terms reinforced a second development which he terms the "de-narrativization of the ocular" (Jay 1993: 51), a development that supported the shift from reading the world as intelligible text (the 'book of nature') to 'just looking' at it as an observable but meaningless object. This object, as Foucault and others have argued, was the emblem of the modern epistemological order. This transformation opened up the way for the mechanization of the world picture so essential to the modern scientific worldview. Jay also observes how this process of de-narrativization was helped on its way by the great innovation of Renaissance art, which is variously referred to as the invention, discovery or re-discovery of perspective, the technique for rendering three-dimensional space onto the two dimensions of flat canvas.

**Perspective as Key to the Locks of Our Senses** — The invention of perspective involves more than what meets the eye. Far more than being just another technique of rendering images, perspective has considerably effected conceptions of the visible world, the relationship between this world and observers, as well as conceptions of what it means to see and how seeing is related (or not) to the other senses and to the body.

Vision as presented by the perspectival image is based on what Norman Bryson has termed the differentiation of the corporeal glance from the idealized, disembodied and monocular gaze.
The logic of the Gaze is therefore subject to two great laws: the body (of the painter, of the viewer) is reduced to a single point, the *macula* of the retinal surface; and the moment of the Gaze (for the painter, for the viewer) is placed outside duration. Spatially and temporally, the act of viewing is constructed as the removal of the dimensions of space and time, as the disappearance of the body; the construction of an *acies mentis*, the punctual viewing subject (Bryson 1983: 96, italics in the text).

Perspectivalism turns the seer into a spectator rather than an actor in the visible world. This spectator is reduced to a single point (instead of two stereoscopic eyes) in a fixed position outside time and space and separated from the living body. This reduction involves an invisible logic according to which the perceptual field appears as a homogeneous, regularly ordered space, there to be duplicated by the extension of a grid-like network of coordinates. This grid that is space is opposed to an extension-less point of view from which it seems to emanate. This point is placed outside time and space, separated from it, as a result of which time and space appear as objects for observation by a seer who is placed outside, separated from what is observed and reduced to an eye without a body. Altogether, this results in what might be called a manifestation of the metaphysics of presence in the visual field.

In the founding perception, the gaze of the painter arrests the flux of phenomena, contemplates the visual field from a vantage – point outside the mobility of duration, in an eternal moment of disclosed presence; while in the moment of viewing, the viewing subject unites his gaze with the Founding Perception, in a perfect recreation of the first epiphany (Bryson 1983: 94).

The perspectival image presents an illusion of timelessness and instantaneousness that, as Bryson observes, results from the specific qualities of the address presented to a viewer. This viewer is offered a position to take up from where the image produces this "eternal moment of disclosed presence" (Bryson) as an effect. This presence-effect – and not correspondences between image and reality depicted – turns the image into a convincing representation of 'how it is.'

With his analysis, Bryson argues against the persistent notion of the perspectival painting as a copy of reality and linear perspective as a technique developed to capture a natural perspective, perceived in the world seen around us. More precisely, he uses his analysis to criticize art historian E.H. Gombrich's conception of a painting as a record of perception in his *Art and Illusion* (1960). What is suppressed by such an account of painting as the record of a perception is the social character of the image, and its reality as a sign (Bryson 1983: xii).

Bryson does acknowledge Gombrich's importance in rethinking painting from being a mere copy of reality towards a painting as a representation involving a subjective point of view. In *Art and Illusion*, Gombrich presents
overwhelming evidence to show how the way we see and depict depends upon and varies with experience, practice, interest and attitudes. On the matter of perspective, however, Gombrich seems to take a position at odds with such relativity. Gombrich opposes the idea that perspective is merely a convention and does not represent the world as it looks (Gombrich 1960: 254).  

What is overlooked this way, as Bryson points out, is that the world ‘as it looks’ is itself subject to convention. How we see is subject to social conditioning and perspective is part of the way we are conditioned to see. Gombrich’s conception of painting as a record of perception, Bryson argues, is itself a product of the Renaissance treatises that inaugurated a tradition of presenting perspective as a way to represent the world according to laws of nature and perception. Considering a perspectival painting as a record of perception means overlooking cultural logic, the social character of the image, and its reality as a sign. The impact of the painting as a sign cannot be understood solely from the relationship with what it is thought to represent. In this way, what is left out is how the painting as a sign presents an address to a seer.

Today, rather than promising a finestra aperta on the world, the artificial perspective of the early Renaissance is clearly visible as a technique of producing images. Moreover, this is a technique that can be located in time and place, and that can be historicized. It appears to be much harder to see the notion of perspective itself as a historical invention, and to grasp the ways in which this invention has pervaded our conception of the visible world. At this point, Mitchell likewise reminds us of Gombrich and his conception of pictorial illusionism as providing ‘keys to the locks of our senses.’ Mitchell argues that if vision itself is to be understood as a product of experience and acculturation, then what we are matching against pictorial representations cannot be any sort of naked reality. Instead it must be “a world already clothed in our systems of representations” (Mitchell 1995: 38).

This means that perspective, rather than providing the key to the locks of our senses, must itself be understood as part and parcel of the way our senses are locked in. However, as I will argue, this also means that perspective might prove to be useful as a key after all, namely in understanding how our senses are cultured to perceive certain privileged modes of representation as more natural, real, objective, or convincing than others, and to relate these effects to the discourses which mediate in what we think we see, even given those cases that make us imagine that what we think we see is unmediated.

The Perspective Paradigm — In The Origin of Perspective (1995), Hubert Damisch retraces the various ways in which perspective has become completely integrated into our knowledge of the world as a world of objects, an objective world, and our understanding of ourselves as subjects in opposition to this world of objects:
As a paradigm or regulatory structure, perspective is sometimes in operation precisely where one least expects it, where its intervention is least visible (Damish 1995: 25).

Damish observes a great danger in understanding perspective as just one object among others, a sign, simple product or effect. Thus what is overlooked is that perspective is productive of effects, and that “its power to inform extends well beyond the limits of the era in which it was born” (Damish 1995:28). Perspective is not a technique that enables us to produce representations of the visible world ‘as it is’ or ‘as we really see it,’ nor is it just a conventional form suited to the times in which it was devised. Rather, Damish argues, perspective has to be understood as a *symbolic form*, expressive of, as well as productive of, a particular conception of the world. As such, its function is not specular or passive, but constitutive within the register of representation, of the order and meaning of things, and of the ‘world of objects.’ Perspective is informing perception rather than corresponding to it. For this reason, Damish proposes to speak of perspective as a *paradigm*: a constellation of ideas, beliefs and prejudices that imposes their law in a given period on thought as it is expressed in art and science (Damish 1995: 26).

Damish takes this idea of perspective a symbolic form from Erwin Panofsky, who, in his turn, bases his notion of symbolic form on Ernst Cassirer.8 Perspective, according to Damish, is symbolic precisely in the sense that the subject is absorbed in it and produced by it (Damish 1995: 19–20). As a result, perspective is integrated into our knowledge at the most implicit or unconscious level. In order to understand its effects, we must turn to another kind of knowledge and embark on what Damish calls an “anamnestic project designed to recover it from the technological oblivion into which it has been plunged by ideology” (Damish: 1995: 52).

The word *anamnestic* might suggest, to someone who had not read Damish’ book, that the perspective paradigm is a disease, that needs to be cured in order to restore perception to its natural condition. This is not what Damish is proposing. His anamnastic project, like Foucault’s *genealogy*, describes a practice of exposing the historicity of what seems to be ‘natural’ or ‘given,’ and understand this being ‘natural’ or ‘given’ in relation to a historical subject, while at the same time this subject to whom the world appears as ‘natural’ or ‘given’ is itself understood as a the effect of the very same practices that make the world appear ‘as such.’

Genealogy describes events as transformations of other events from the vantage point of the present and its needs. Genealogy shows how these transformations have no causal or historical necessity; they are not ‘natural.’ In this process of description and criticism, genealogy also engages in intellectual struggle with the major forms of explanatory discourse in modernity. It does so not simply to oppose to them, but rather to ask the question of how these discourses have become authoritative and productive and to what effect? How did they shape the fields that make up today’s academic, artistic
and everyday reality? How have they come to define what is natural? How did they become psychologically and epistemologically internalized? How do they contribute to what appears to be the world ‘as it is?’

Like Foucault’s genealogy, Damish’ anamnestic project of exposing instances of the perspective paradigm starts from the presumption that there is no such thing as a natural or objective world against which we can match the various representations with which we are confronted. Instead, the ‘natural’ world is product of a historical process that produced it as such. Since it is impossible to perceive the world ‘as it is,’ that is, independent from the physiological and psychological constitution of the observer as formed by knowledge, experience, culture and history, what we are matching against our representations is (as Mitchell quoted above puts it) “a world already clothed in our systems of representation” (Mitchell 1986: 38).

These clothes do not cover any sort of naked reality that could be laid bare by stripping the clothes away. Rather, to simplify and follow Judith Butler’s argument in her Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex (1993), the world only materializes in these systems of representation. Therefore, instead of opposing representations to the reality of matter, or asking what this matter is ‘in itself,’ we should question whose interest is served by this opposition of matter and meaning in the first place. Whose perspective is involved here and how can it be seen at work in what we think we see?

Since the world ‘as it is,’ is itself a product of the perspective paradigm, its most powerful expression perhaps, an anamnestic project as proposed by Damish, cannot take place from any objective position outside systems of representation. In order to “recover from the technological oblivion into which it has been plunged by ideology” (Damish 1995: 52), and to expose the paradoxical relationship between seer and seen, what is needed is an approach that allows us to start ‘from within.’ In what follows, I will demonstrate how the model of artificial perspective – precisely in its quality of a model – clarifies how we see what we see, and why some things we see appear to be more convincing, impressive or disturbing than others.

Furthermore, I will show how perspective as a model helps to relate these perspectival effects to discourses that mediate in what we think we see, even in those cases in which what we see seems to be unmediated. Brought to bear on instances of ‘the world as it is,’ perspective as a model can turn the apparent absence of perspective into meaningful pointers, not only in visual images but also in the theatre.

This is not to say that vision as it ‘takes place’ in the theatre is the same as vision that ‘takes place’ in paintings or drawings. It is not my intention to reduce one to the other. I propose the alternative of taking perspective in painting as a model, a conceptual metaphor, or a ‘searchlight’ that helps me to ‘see’ vision as it takes place in the theatre anew (Bal 1994: 40). My starting point will be a comparison of dramatic structure with perspective in painting as made by Hans-Thies Lehmann in his Postdramatisches Theater (1999).
Post-Dramatic Theatre — Hans-Thies Lehmann introduces the term *post-dramatic* to denote a wide range of phenomena that have shaped new Western European theatre since the 1970s. Post-dramatic indicates that this new theatre presents a move beyond the dramatic theatre of the past, while at the same time it presupposes dramatic theatre as the backdrop against which it is conceived by both makers and audiences. The prefix ‘post’ in post-dramatic indicates a certain distance, not only between the theatrical events on the post-dramatic stage and the dramatic theatre of the past, but also between theatre and drama. This distance is important to Lehmann’s conception of the post-dramatic theatre.

Often, the terms drama and theatre are used interchangeably, which is no surprise considering the fact that Western theatre has been dominated by drama as a means of structuring both texts and performances for several centuries. With his notion of post-dramatic theatre, Lehmann asks for a separation of drama and theatre. This separation implies a reconsideration not only of the relation between drama and theatre, but also of the notion of drama itself.

Patrice Pavis points out that the term ‘drama,’ derived from the Greek *drama* (meaning action) gave rise to similar terms in many European languages and is used to refer to both theatrical work and written texts. In French, it refers only to a specific genre, namely the bourgeois drama of the 18th century and then Romantic lyrical drama in the 19th century (Pavis 1998: 112).

Peter Szondi, in his influential *Theorie des modernen Dramas* (1880–1950) also takes this French tradition as the example of drama in its most pure form. For Szondi too, the distinction between drama and theatre is ambiguous. At the beginning of his text, he defines drama as a type of writing for the stage [*eine bestimmte Form von Bühnendichtung*] (Szondi 1963: 13), which seems to suggest that drama refers to a specific type of written texts. However, in his explanation of what drama is, he speaks of spectators [*Zuschauer*] rather than readers. His description of the essential characteristics of drama is a description of how it works when it is performed. It is a description of a performance of a drama in the theatre.

Typical of drama is what Szondi terms its ‘absoluteness.’ Drama is ‘absolute’ in that it presents itself as a coherent, unitary world that seems to exist separately and independently from the spectator. This ‘other world’ shows no traces of an author: it appears as a self-contained unity. The Aristotelian unities, as they are part of the classicist tradition of dramatic writing, contribute to enforcing this illusion of a self-contained world.

Audience and drama live in separate worlds. It is, according to Szondi, precisely for this reason that the audience can be completely drawn into the world of drama. This ambiguous relationship finds its most perfect expression in the so-called box-set stage [*Guckkastenbühne*] in which audience and performance are clearly separated. The audience looks into the world of the drama from a position outside it. When the drama begins, the attention of the
audience is directed away from its own presence in the auditorium and drawn
towards or even into the world on stage. Only when the curtain closes does
the audience find itself in the auditorium again (Szondi 1963: 16).

In Szondi's description, drama and theatre are indistinguishable.
Theatre is defined by drama and shaped according to it. In his *Postdramatisches Theater*, Lehmann argues for more space between the two. This is not
just because there are other types of theatre than the one defined by drama.
Szondi is well aware of this too. Szondi's book is an attempt to theorize
changes that have occurred in dramatic form with the emergence of what
he calls the 'epic I' opening up the absoluteness of the drama. With his
separation of theatre and drama, however, Lehmann argues for an undoing
of the conflation of drama and text. His argument is directed not only against
the conflation of drama and staging practices, but also against the conflation
drama and *Bühnendichtung*. Lehmann wants to separate drama from both
theatre and text in order to renegotiate the relationships between these three
terms.

The central opposition in Lehmann's text is not drama versus theatre,
but dramatic theatre versus post-dramatic theatre. Dramatic theatre is theatre
structured by drama. Post-dramatic theatre is beyond drama. The difference
between the two, according to Lehmann, manifests itself in a different
aesthetic logic underlying the constellation of elements that together make
up the theatrical event (Lehmann 1999: 27).

**Drama is Perspective** — Drama is neither text nor performance but rather
denotes a specific logic that can be seen at work in both texts and perform-
ances. To explain this aesthetic organizing principle operative in dramatic
theatre, Lehmann introduces a comparison of drama with perspective in
painting.

The dramatic theatre, in which the scene stands for the world, can be compared to
*perspective*: space here is both technically and mentally a window and a symbol, an
analogy to the reality 'behind.' Like the *finestra aperta* presented by the Renaissance
painting, it offers what might be called an equivalent to the scale of the world, a
metaphorical likeness obtained though abstraction and accentuation (Lehmann 1999:
288, my translation).\(^\text{11}\)

Like Damish, Lehmann understands the perspective presented by the drama
as a symbolic function, and he explains this function in terms of framing
[*Rahmung*]. As a result of this symbolic function of the dramatic frame, the
world on stage appears as a totality, a complete world in itself that we can
enter as through the window offered by perspective painting. The dramatic
frame helps to understand everything seen on stage as part of a meaningful
totality existing independently from the world around it and from the
spectator.
This inner order resting on the well-known unities seals off hermetically from reality the symbolic artifact that is tragedy, while at the same time internally it constructs it [the artifact tragedy] as a seamless unity and totality (Lehmann 1999: 61, my translation).  

Drama, therefore, is not something that is framed by, for example, the proscenium arch of the box-set stage separating audience and spectacle. Rather, it is the dramatic logic that frames what is seen, inviting the spectator to see what is presented before his or her eyes as symbol of a unitary and complete world, even if what is presented is highly abstracted or consists of fragments only (Lehmann 1999: 288).

Lehmann characterizes the invisible logic at work in dramatic theatre as teleological. The dramatic frame provides unity and coherence in view of purpose and reason. The drama provides order in view of a telos, or goal, as given within the dramatic construction. In doing so, dramatic theatre shows the world according to invisible beliefs about world order, history and reality. These beliefs are not represented on stage in the sense that they are being made present or visible by means of theatre signs. Instead, they speak through, or are implicated within, the structure of the representation itself. As Mitchell suggested above, they are the nature of the soul whose vision is represented.

**Perspective as Metaphor** — In *Postdramatisches Theater*, the comparison ‘drama is perspective’ functions as a metaphor in at least four ways. First, the comparison draws attention to similarities between perspective painting and dramatic structure in the theatre, and does so without saying that they are the same. As with a metaphor, the combination of similarities and differences makes the comparison productive of new insights that could not be expressed before the metaphor.

Second, the comparison of drama with perspective displaces meaning and redirects attention as a result of which formerly unseen elements of the first term come to the fore. The comparison helps Lehmann to look at dramatic theatre as through ‘different glasses,’ and brings him to a new conceptualization not only of contemporary post-dramatic theatre but also of the relationship between theatre and drama in the past. With his account, he presents a critique of Peter Szondi’s *Theorie des Modernen Dramas*.

Towards the end of the 19th century, manifestations of what Szondi calls an ‘epic I’ begin to undermine the absolute character of the drama and disturb the way it unfolds itself in the dialectic of dramatic dialogue. This ‘epic I’ manifests itself in a variety of phenomena, such as an increasing tendency towards monologues at the cost of dramatic dialogue, a subjective perspective on events presented instead of the illusion of objective vision, direct address to an audience instead of the fourth wall, and the undermining of the unities that guarantee the suggestion of a self-unfolding dramatic world. As a result of the epic tendencies the merging of subject and object typical of the drama is replaced by a subject/object opposition.
Lehmann subscribes to Szondi’s observation that, over the course of the 20th century, the closed world of the drama becomes increasingly more open and that this causes radical changes in how the audience finds itself addressed on stage. In this process, epic theatre presents an important move. However, despite all the differences between epic and dramatic theatre as pointed out by Szondi, there are, according to Lehmann, also important similarities as a result of which the development of the epic theatre has to be understood as still being part of the paradigm of dramatic theatre, or, as Lehmann argues, its renewal [Erneuerung] and completion or perfection [Vollendung] (Lehmann 1999: 48).

According to Lehmann, Szondi fails to see the similarities between the dramatic and the epic because he fails to answer the questions of why and to what ends the ‘absolute’ world of the drama is opened. He fails to answer the question why a new aesthetic was needed (Lehmann 1999: 44). Szondi does observe the relationship between the shift from drama to epic and the rise of the scientific worldview characterized by the opposition of subject and object. When Brechtian distanciation replaces the merging of subject and object typical of the dramatic theatre, this, according to Szondi, marks the moment at which scientific objectivity has come to pervade all aspects of theatre. However, as Lehmann points out, what Szondi fails to notice is that this scientific objectivity characterized by a subject/object opposition serves a purpose similar to the merging that is typical of drama.

Lehmann points out that, like drama, epic theatre too is organized as a function of telos or goal. What has changed is only the nature of the telos that holds together the vision presented on stage and gives direction to the interpretative activities of the viewer. Epic theatre presents the world on stage explicitly as a symbol rather than the world itself. Gaps are enlarged and the audience is explicitly invited to fill in what is left out, to see for themselves. At the same time, the perspective implied in the construction of the performance guarantees that the audience will see for themselves in an appropriate manner. This is especially clear in Brechtian epic theatre where explicit theatricality is used to construct an opposition between theatre and reality that on the one hand helps the audience to see what is shown on stage to be ‘just’ theatre, while on the other hand the opposition of ‘just’ theatre to something that seems to be more like ‘reality’ helps the audience to make the right interpretation.

With his comparison of drama and perspective, Lehmann brings in a second discourse within which the first term can be placed and explained. This second discourse brought in by perspective allows for an understanding of drama as itself a symbolic form analogous to Damish’s account of perspective as a symbolic form. This is the third way in which perspective functions as a metaphor in Lehmann’s text. The comparison of drama with perspective brings him to an understanding of drama as one of the structuring principles at work in both theatrical representations and the realities represented by them.
Whereas Szondi explains the success of epic theatre from the way it presents a convincing representation of a reality outside, Lehmann presents an approach in which theatre and reality are understood as parallel constructions rather than in terms of original and copy, reality and representation. Lehmann does not start from the opposition of theatre and reality but from conceptions of theatre and conceptions of reality as parallel developments. With this account, Lehmann presents a way to go beyond representational thinking in which the power of persuasion, of theatrical (re)presentation, is understood to result from an accurate representation of 'how it is.' Instead, he argues, this quality of being able to convince as an accurate representation is the effect of its being structured according to a logic similar to those at work in conceptions of reality.

**Always Already** — On the post-dramatic stage, dramatic perspective gives way to what Lehmann describes as 'multiplication of frames.'

The multiplication of frames virtually cancels out the operation of one single frame: the singular is extricated from the unitary field provided by the frame that encloses it. The singular loses its connection with the totality that made the sensory meaningful. Instead, the multiplication of frames return the singular to itself as here and now and intensifies the presence and essence of its sensory qualities or, seen from the other side, increases its perceptibility (Lehmann 1999: 290, my translation). 14

Apprehending these performances and the effects they evoke can no longer be about understanding the meaning of the theatrical signs as they are presented within the framework of dramatic structure. Often such a perspective seems to be absent altogether or it appears only to be deconstructed, replaced by other frames or rejected in order to open to what seems to be a more direct contact with what is actually present on stage. This causes ambiguous and confusing experiences, which Lehmann proposes to understand in terms of a political deed. Political not because of what is represented on stage, but because the ways in which the strategies implied in the artistic logic underlying the post-dramatic theatrical event, draw attention to the problem of representation, of representational forms and of how they are perceived, or not. This is a micropolitics that deals with invisible patterns on the scale of bodily awareness (Lehmann 1999: 449–473, see also Oosterling 2001).

The analytical and theoretical discourse surrounding this new theatre often evokes the old and by now doubtful opposition of theatre and performance, where theatre is understood in terms of conventions, representation and mediation, while performance acts as the other of theatre, undoing conventions, and promising unmediated presence. In this discourse, as Elin Diamond puts it in a 1996 retrospect: “theatre was charged with obeisance to the playwright’s authority, with actors disciplined to the referential task of
representing fictional entities" while spectators are similarly disciplined and "duped into identifying with the psychological problems of individual egos and ensnared in a unique temporal-spatial world whose suspense, reversals and deferrals they can more or less comfortably decode" (Diamond 1996: 3).

Performance, on the other hand has been honored with "dismantling textual authority, illusionism, and the canonical actor in favor of the polymorphous body of the performer. Refusing the conventions of role-playing, the performer presents her/himself as a sexual, permeable, tactile body, scourging audience narrativity along with the barrier between stage and spectator" (Ibid.).

Diamond's description is ironic and indicates that she does in fact understand that today we tend to take a certain distance from this celebration of unmediated presence and directness as it characterized early performance theory. To quote Diamond again: "In line with poststructuralists' claims of the death of the author, the focus in performance today has shifted from authority to effect, from text to body, to the spectator's freedom to make and transform meanings" (Diamond 1996: 3). The current notion of presence, when used at all, is placed between quotation marks or replaced by notions like 'presence effect.' 'Presence,' now, is understood as necessarily rhetorical and always relying on representation, that is, relying on other signifiers and thus as remaining within the realm of the already constructed. Derrida's 'always already' has left deep marks.

With his relentless deconstruction of metaphysical plenitude, Derrida unMASKs the illusionary metaphysical belief that signs are grounded in some ultimate origin experienced as full, self-validating presence. This illusion can be seen at work in the opposition of speech as originating self-confirming palpability versus writing as secondary, posterior activity, an activity that comes after, represents, or transcribes. This opposition of speech and writing is paralleled by oppositions like identity/difference, presence/absence, reality/image, thing/sign, and literal/metaphorical. In each of these categories there is assumed to be a degree zero: one of the terms is privileged as original, generic, and primary, the other is considered to be subsidiary and specified in relation to it.

Derrida's strategy is to deconstruct each of these oppositions by showing that what appears as the privileged originating term is as secondary and dependent as the minor term it supposedly gives rise to. The originating 'real to itself' without the agency of signs, the ultimate presence, the world before signs, is itself always already preceded by other signs. This originating 'real to itself' is constituted by these signs. At the same, time this means that secondary signs like texts representing a prior world cease to be secondary. Instead, they become items in a world where signs can never be absent. Their 'meaning' to be delivered up as a relation to that sign-less world becomes a phantom, a reification of an illusory presence.15

And yet, notwithstanding the fact that we presently are only too aware that the Real will remain forever outside our reach, that bodies matter in and through performance, and that nature is a product of culture rather than a
given, it is hard to avoid conceptual oppositions like representation and
presence, meaning and materiality (and all the others that come with it)
when confronted with strategies used on the contemporary post-dramatic
stage. Not the least because these strategies seem to go right into the heart
of such oppositions, playing with them, and diametrically playing out opposed
terms against one another. Although any ontological foundation for these
oppositions may have become highly problematic, as effects they are most
present, and most impressive. Their power can be seen at work in Lehmann's
account of the post-dramatic theatre as well.

On the one hand, his analysis of the deconstruction of dramatic
structure bears witness to a Derridean critique of logocentrism. The decon-
struction of the teleological perspective as given within the dramatic frame-
work, Lehmann argues, does not result in the absence of frames and direct
access to the plenitude of being. Instead, he understands the result of this
deconstruction in terms of a multiplication of frames. The multiplication of
frames undermines the effect of one single frame and this way suspends the
logocentric meaning making function of the unitary dramatic frame. The
deconstruction of the drama as unitary framework undermines the effect
typical of dramatic theatre: the illusory merging of subject and object,
showing it to be illusionary and an effect of framing.

At the same time does Lehmann's description of the effects of this
multiplication in terms of "increased perceptibility" [gesteigerte
Wahrnehmbarkeit], "intensified presence and essence of its sensory quali-
ties" [gesteigertes Hier- und Sosein seiner sinnlichen Beschaffenheit] and
"the singular lead back to itself" [das Einzelne auf sich zurückgeführt] seem
to suggest that, no longer guided by the telos of the dramatic perspective,
the spectator is granted a more direct access to the things as they are in
themselves; that the source of the confusing experiences is located firmly in
the thing as given over there (Lehmann 1999: 290). Seen this way, the effect
of multiplication of frames seems (at least in some respects) to equal the
absence of frames. The result is that perception on the post-dramatic stage
manifests itself in a paradox: the multiplication of frames manifests itself in
increased perceptibility of the thing in itself.

This paradox becomes no less paradoxical, nevertheless less confusing,
when understood not as the effect of deconstruction or absence of perspec-
tive, but, on the contrary, as the effect or indicator of perspective at work.
For the paradox in Lehmann's account of post-dramatic theatre is inherent to
perspective: it is the paradox that is perspective. This brings me to the fourth
way in which perspective functions as a metaphor in Lehmann's text, namely
as a concept replacing a story. This story is a narration in the precise sense
of being subjective, i.e. emanating from a particular subject.
The Paradox of Post-Dramatic Subjectivity — I take this idea of the concept as a metaphor that replaces a story from Mieke Bal (1994). According to Bal, concepts are metaphors and these metaphors mediate because of the way the world comes to be constituted through them. With her idea of the concept as a metaphor she presents an argument similar to the one presented by Lakoff and Johnson in their *Metaphors We Live By* (1980).

Lakoff and Johnson argue that the way we think about, interact with, and imagine the world around us, is organized around metaphors. These metaphors are so deeply integrated in our thinking that they are not frequently recognized as such. They present us with basic cognitive categories that organize thought and structure how we act think, and imagine. As a result, these metaphors are constitutive of how the world, as well as our position in it, appears to us. For example, the metaphor *Argument is War* is more than a manner of speaking about war.

It is important to see that we don’t just talk about arguments in terms of war. We can actually win or lose arguments. We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack his positions and defend our own. We gain and lose ground. We plan and use strategies. If we find a position indefensible, we can abandon it and take a new line of attack. Many of the things we do in arguing are partially structured by the concept of war. [...]. It is in this sense that the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor is one that we ‘live by’ in this culture; it structures the actions we perform in arguing (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 4, italics in the text).

Similarly, Bal argues that concepts are not simply a neutral way of naming things since they influence the way the world gets constituted through them. Concepts are metaphorical in the sense that they help to understand the things that they name and through this naming concepts embed that which they name in a network of already existing meanings. From the moment of naming, this ‘something’ will be lived through these meanings.

However, there is an important difference between Lakoff and Johnson’s account and Bal’s. Through this notion of story, Bal links up the concept as metaphor with a subjective point of view. Whereas Lakoff and Johnson merely observe that the metaphor *ARGUMENT IS WAR* structures the way we think and argue, Bal’s notion of the concept as substitute for a story allows me to question who this we thinking and arguing is. Whose desires, interests and expectations are involved in thinking argument in terms of war? Or, to return to the case of perspective as it functions in Lehmann’s argument about post-dramatic theatre, whose desires, interests and expectations are involved in the concept of perspective as a historical, artificial construction, currently undermined and deconstructed to expose ‘the singular led back to itself’?

In Lehmann’s argument, drama stands in the place of a historical form that is no longer convincing as a representation of the world ‘as it is.’ Drama, now, appears as artificial and historical, just as perspective in painting can
no longer offer the illusion of a window opening up on the world. With this
equation, Lehmann delegates both perspective and drama to the past and
opposes this past to a present in which both drama and perspective in
painting appear as artificial.

Part of Lehmann's argument, however, grounds the notion that once
upon a time both dramatic structure and perspective in painting did convince
as adequate representational strategies. (Here, I am not interested in whether
or not this is actually the case. For now, I want to focus on the logic of his
argument and what it can tell me about the story/subject involved here). Seen
from this point of view in the past – the moment that both dramatic structure
and perspective were convincing as adequate representational strategies –
the comparison of drama and perspective still holds, but has a completely
different meaning. Seen from the past, the metaphor 'drama is like perspec-
tive' does not equal artificiality, but the world 'as it is.' What the equation
signifies, therefore, depends upon one's point of view. Furthermore, both
drama and perspective can only signify the world 'as it is,' as long as the
artificiality of their construction remains concealed. This is what Evelyn
Fox Keller has termed 'the paradox of scientific subjectivity,' of which the
perspectival image presents the image *par excellence*.

The power of a perspectival image is that it appears to be a convincing
image of 'how things are' – independent of any particular observer – rather
than a particular way of seeing or depicting these things, while at the same
time this is achieved through framing what is seen in a highly specific way.
This paradox is neatly expressed in Albrecht Dürer's woodcut *Unterweisung
der Messung* (1525, fig. 1, see inside of flap left).

On the right, one can see the construction used to produce the image
and to fix the eye on one very specific point. By taking up this position, the
image in its turn suggests a vision of the world 'as it is,' independent of any
particular observer. The woodcut thus illustrates how the practice of perspec-
tive explicitly inscribes the point of view from which an observation is
made and accordingly makes evident the need to recognize the difference
a change in viewpoint makes. At the same time, the image presented by
the perspectival construction invites the claim that faithful obedience to
specified rules will result in an image for which nature, not the individual
observer is responsible. In this way, out of its very contingency, perspective
extracts a new kind of veridicality: it locates in the vantage point of a
particular somewhere the tacit promise of a view from nowhere.

Taken as a metaphor for the identity and location of the subject/author of scientific
representations, one could almost say that the contradiction embedded in this dual
semiotics of classical perspective was the problem that modern science needed to solve:
in order to generate a representation of the world in its entirety [...] the task of modern
science was to eradicate his presence as an external observer, and to fill in the lacuna
created by his absence (Fox Keller 1994: 314–315).
In perspective, the observer is simultaneously named by his or her location and made anonymous and disembodied by his or her adherence to specified rules. Bodily attached to this viewpoint, he or she is, at the same time, released from him or herself and invested in a technique.

This contradiction, still clearly manifest in the composition of artificial perspective, as well as in Düer's visual account of the production of such images, was the problem that modern scientific subjectivity needed to solve. And eradicating the right side of the Düer image, including the screen in the middle, was what solved the problem, or at least, provided the illusion of having done so.

Fox Keller describes this history of eradication as a process of "semiotic repositioning" in which the embodied encafter, interpreter or observer is replaced by a meta-subject, who is invisible, autonomous and virtual (Fox Keller 1994: 321). This was accomplished through a wide variety of practices including the erasure of traces of perspectival construction or framing, the development of more complicated pictorial techniques, as well as the standardization of instruments as a result of which the original observer need no longer be identified. These practices also included the replacement of the first person pronoun narrator in scientific texts with the abstract 'scientist' who could speak for every man but was 'no man.'

The effect of these strategies is that of the disappearance of consciousness of representation qua representation as perspective and point of view become invisible. In the process, subjectivity is relocated in discourse to an effect comparable to that of the perspectival image. This invisibility, rather than the absence of any point of view, is according to Fox Keller constitutive of objectivity, of representations of the world 'as it is.'

In the following, I will take Fox Keller's analysis of the relationship between perspective and modern scientific world view as a starting point for retracing the subjective story involved in vision as it takes place in both dramatic and post-dramatic theatre. Her reading of the relationship between perspective and the scientific subject helps to link up the Derridean deconstruction of metaphysics of presence, as this has been important to the deconstruction of dramatic theatre, with a critique of vision as subjective.

I will demonstrate how perspective, when used as a model to describe the relationship between sees and seen, presents an alternative to the binary opposition of representation and presence as it is still visibly in many accounts of contemporary theatre. As a model, perspective specifies how 'presence' and representation, as well as the way in which they are opposed, come into being in relation to a specific point of view. In this way, perspective may help us to become aware of some of the limitations of the "spectator's freedom to make and transform meaning" (Diamond) by making visible the invisible cultural logic underlying our conception of the visible world, and show this logic at work even in cases where perspective seems to be absent or deconstructed to give way to what is simply 'there to be seen.'
This perspective is not like a framework that can be taken away in order to gain more direct access to what is actually there to be seen. Nevertheless, as Fox Keller’s deconstructive reading of scientific subjectivity suggests, this invisibility of perspective can be denaturalized by showing that what seems to be just ‘there to be seen’ is as secondary as what clearly manifests itself as a sign. Such a denaturalization does not result in direct access to the world ‘as it is,’ but instead presents a critique in line with postmodern, feminist and postcolonial critique of unified point of view as it is implied in grand narratives. Critiques that have taught us that the deconstruction of unitary perspective does not result in the absence of point of view or perspective *per se*, but rather in a multiplication of viewpoints. This, however, requires a shift in perspective on the notion of perspective itself, from perspective in terms of framing, towards perspective in terms of an address, an address that presents a viewer with a point of view as to what is there to be seen.

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1 — Kijk. Ik vind het ook niet leuk, dat slappe verhaaltje van de mens die in een grot de schaduw van de werkelijkheid zit te bekijken, ik vind het een rotverhaal. Dan zie ik altijd een soort holbewoners met lange haren en plakkerige baarden die beesten op een muur schilderen, daar wil ik niets mee te maken hebben. Of Diogenes met allemaal wijze mannen die de hele dag in een ton zitten te babbelen over het leven, getver, dat lijkt me vreselijk. Maar zonder die grot, en zonder Diogenes, klopt het net zo goed, denk ik. De waarheid is een flits, die altijd achter je blijft. Dus wat zie je dan voor je. Niets meer dan de schaduw van jezelf. Je zit het beeld van de werkelijkheid ook nog eens behoorlijk in de weg. (Jeroen van den Berg: *Sailors on a Bus.* English translation: Michael Burke.)

*Sailors on a Bus* is a play by Dutch playwright and director Jeroen van den Berg. A collection of his plays will be published by the International Theatre and Film Bookshop (Amsterdam). The premiere of *Sailors on a Bus* took place in the Grand Theatre in Groningen (The Netherlands), October 14, 1999.

2 — Although point of view coincides in terms of projection with the vanishing point, this does not mean that there is symmetry between them. As Damisch points out, strictly speaking vanishing point and point of view are situated, in three dimensional space, on a line perpendicular to the picture plane. But whereas the image of the point of view should be inscribed on the painting — at a virtual distance corresponding to that separating the spectator from the plane of projection — the vanishing point will be thrown far behind the image of the observer, who will have it, so to speak, at his back (1995: 120–121). This ambiguity is crucial for the seductive appeal presented by perspective, an appeal to a desire for a stable and detached point of view outside what is seen that at the same time seems not to be outside at all.

4 — The division of Western history into the three ages Antiquity, Middle Ages and Modernity itself dates from the early Renaissance. Matei Calinescu traces the history of the concepts of the modern and modernity, and the complexities in the various ways they are used. (Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism, Durham: Duke University Press, 1987)

Although the idea of modernity has come to be associated almost automatically with secularism, its main constitutive element is, as Calinescu points out, a sense of unrepeatable time. The idea of modernity could be conceived only within the framework of a specific time-awareness, namely that of historical time, linear and irreversible, flowing irresistibly onwards. This idea can be seen reflected in the OED definition of the modern as (1) being at this time; now existing, and (2) of or pertaining to the present and recent times, as distinguished from the remote past; pertaining to originating in the current age or period ('modern' The Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

Calinescu describes how, at a certain point during the first half of the 19th century, a split occurred between modernity as a stage in the history of Western civilization – understood as a product of scientific and technological progress, of the industrial revolution, of the sweeping economic and social changes brought about by capitalism – and modernity as an aesthetic concept. The first, bourgeois idea of modernity is characterized by the doctrine of progress, confidence in the beneficial possibilities of science and technology, of reason, of pragmatism and of action and of freedom defined within the framework of an abstract humanism. Characterized as well by a concern with time as measurable time, a time that can be bought and sold and therefore has, like any other commodity, a calculable equivalent in money. By contrast, the aesthetic concept of modernity was from its romantic beginnings inclined towards radical anti-bourgeois attitudes. What defines cultural modernity is its rejection of bourgeois modernity.

The bourgeois idea of modernity and the aesthetic idea of modernity share a sharp sense of historical relativism. In aesthetic modernity this can be seen to manifest itself in a preoccupation with the present, with irresistible transitoriness, but also with the pursuit of immediacy.


9 – In Power/Knowledge, Foucault writes:

One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that is to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework. And this is what I would call genealogy, that is, a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to a field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history (Foucault 1980: 117).

Genealogists are opposed to the idea of history as a teleological process that can be understood by retracing its development from its embryonic beginning towards a goal projected in the future. Instead, genealogy is the practice of charting processes that, by contingent confluence, produce a contemporary result. The critical nature of genealogy is directed against ahistorical interpretations and towards undermining the myths and mystifications that a particular contemporary perspective may entertain about itself. This means that those practicing genealogy must accept that they too are engaged in a practice which has a history, which expresses various pragmatic interests, which are perspectival.


16 — The history of this task over the centuries that followed bears a close resemblance to what Lorraine Daston calls the ‘history of objectivity.’ This is not a linear story, but a multi-layered and entangled one, accompanied by complex resistances and anxieties and by radical changes in the very meaning of the term objective. It is still, according to Fox Keller, possible to trace a distinctly linear arc in this non-linear story, a story line that is rooted in the very logic of scientific representation. This story line closely parallels the history traced by Brian Rotman in his Signifying Nothing, The Semiotics of Zero (1987): it is a history of erasure, of the progressive disembodiment and dislocation of the scientific observer that ultimately became sufficiently complete to permit a comprehensive and apparently subjectless representation of the world.

Daston points out that the term ‘objective’ had a very different – effectively opposite – meaning in the 17th century from what it has today. ‘It referred neither to a state of mind, nor to a mode of perception, but to the objects of thought and perception, or to what Hobbes has called the ‘effects of nature.’ Only in the 19th century did the term ‘objective’ acquire the current meaning of a-perspectival – a ‘view from nowhere, knowledge without a knower’ (Daston in fox Keller 1994: 315);