Discernment

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In *Traité du trait*, the catalogue accompanying his contribution to a very distinguished series of exhibitions mounted by the Département des Arts Graphiques at the Louvre, Hubert Damisch asserts (not for the first or last time) that we always and inevitably see works of the past with our own eyes, those of our time.[1] The question of the *trait*, he argues, owes some of its present relevance to artistic practice in our own era (he opens his text by discussing a Fontana and ends with a Barnett Newman drawing), and it is by way of this present concern that he approaches a range of drawings from earlier centuries, selected from the Louvre's collections. While Damisch's assertion strikes me as certainly defensible (and not, these days, unusual), I am not concerned for now with either sustaining or faulting it (though it will be clear that I agree with him), but rather with investigating what it might mean to take it in literal terms. Damisch's usage is clearly figurative: he writes that, far from considering the works discussed 'with the eyes of' viewers of an earlier period, it will be important to 'be clear about what the gaze we bring to bear on them (even when we adopt the perspective of a Diderot or a Baudelaire, or follow the thought of Pliny or Alberti) owes to our own time...'[2] 'With the eyes of' and 'gaze we bring to bear' are obviously meant to refer to past or present conceptual frameworks, whether constituted by critical ideas or by artistic conventions and prejudices, rather than bearing a literal meaning. I, on the other hand, will in part be concerned with the question of what actually does go on in the act of looking, and with the question of whether we can indeed, in literal terms and also productively, give a present attention to work of the past. If so, can this be a seeing that is neither wilfully ignorant, nor merely 'personal' in some narrow and trivial sense?

This is not Damisch's question, it seems to me, nor is it particularly that of any other art historian, although it hovers around much that is written on the question of spectatorship.[3] It is answered in the negative (with qualifications) by Michael Baxandall, in his resourceful efforts to define, for various contexts, a 'period gaze.'[4] Baxandall is exceptional among art historians in going to the lengths he does to suggest that we can see, or learn to see, past works with eyes of the past – and in his case (with respect to Chardin for example) it indeed comes down to seeing in the literal sense.[5] For the majority of period specialists, by contrast, the attention we give to art is not in itself a matter for enquiry. Where it does come into art-historical literature, it does so usually under the auspices of present-day critical concerns (as is the case to some extent with Baxandall). Thus for example the critical impetus driving Michael Fried's historical studies of 'beholding' remains the one originally set out in *Art and Objecthood*.[6] Similarly, Jonathan Crary, Griselda Pollock, Norman Bryson, and T. J. Clark each, in different ways, address questions of spectatorship in terms of theoretical and political commitments that belong to the present. Less frequently cited, but not less important, is the work of historians who argue that the perceptual immediacy of visual art may be misleading,

1. *Traité du trait: Tractatus tractus* (Réunion des Musées Nationaux: Paris, 1995), p. 18. The title plays on the various connotations and affiliations of the word 'trait,' whose richness is lost in the English adoption.

2. Damisch, *Traité* (1995), p. 18: 'd'être au clair sur ce que le regard que nous portons sur elles [les productions graphiques du passé] (fût-ce en chaussant les lunettes d'un Diderot ou celles d'un Baudelaire, ou s'essayant à penser avec Pline ou Alberti) doit au temps qui est le nôtre...'

3. For example, Margaret Iversen, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* (MIT: Cambridge, MA and London, 1993) and Wolfgang Kemp, 'The Work of Art and its Beholder: Methodology of the Aesthetic of Reception', in Mark Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey, eds, *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspective* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998), pp. 180–96. What the literature on spectatorship and reception aesthetics tends not to capture is the interdependence obtaining between the acts respectively of painter and viewer, which will concern me here.

4. I have in mind particularly his *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1980), Chapter VI, 'The Period Eye', pp. 143–53; and *Patterns of Intention: on the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (Yale Univesity Press: New Haven and London, 1985). For Baxandall, see Adrian Rifkin ed., *About Michael Baxandall* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1999).

5. *Patterns of Intention* (1985), Chapter III, pp. 74–99. 'Pictures and Ideas: Chardin's *A Lady Taking Tea*". Puzzling or incongruous aspects of Chardin's painting come to be explained in terms of the wide cultural dissemination, in the eighteenth century, of a Lockean theory of perception. Baxandall's arguments are disputed by Colin Bailey in 'Anglo-Saxon Attitudes: Recent Writings on Chardin', in *Chardin* (Royal Academy of Arts: London, 2000), pp. 77–97; see p. 84 ff. Most closely comparable to Baxandall is Svetlana Alpers, in *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1983). Among the works inspired by Alpers, a distinguished recent example in Martha Hollander's *An Entrance for the Eyes: Space and Meaning in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2001).

6. *Artforum* 5 (June 1967), pp. 12–23, and much republished, most recently in Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 1998), pp. 148–72.

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and show how the 'purely visual' aspects of art of the past may have meanings proper to their time.[7]

In most of these cases, the act of seeing painting is set in the past, despite the more or less evident present-day perspective and notwithstanding the manifest acuity of observation on the part of each writer. It is when philosophers write on spectatorship, on the other hand (and art historians too insofar as they move onto the terrain of philosophy) that the concern to refer the act of looking to the past may diminish.[8] There are various reasons for this, one being that philosophers may reflect on art in terms of questions or problems that do not, so to speak, have a date. This is not to assert that philosophy is concerned with timeless truths or is less historical in constitution than any other field of enquiry, but rather to recognise that its questions remain always to be reconsidered or reformulated. A philosopher writing now about Descartes may well want to reflect on ways in which Descartes was in dialogue with his time and (almost certainly) might wish to show how 'Cartesianism' is to be repudiated; yet Descartes will remain an interlocutor, a present voice, and Cartesian propositions will remain to be examined, on their present merits (even if they could only have been formulated in the place and time that they were).

This brings me back to Damisch, upon whose work this essay pivots, an art historian who trained first as a philosopher (he was a student of Merleau-Ponty) and whose writing is singularly balanced between the respective fields. In the preface to *The Origin of Perspective* (the other of the two works of his that I will draw on here) he writes of his impatience with scholarly studies of perspective that fail to deal with relevant philosophical issues.[9] At the end of the book, he attributes to Svetlana Alpers the view that since the 'most ... penetrating description of *Las Meninas* to appear for some time was penned by a philosopher,' this must 'indicate that the standard interpretive methods of art history are *structurally* inadequate to deal with such a painting.'[10] Such a painting? Particular paintings, certain practices and conventions – including those concerning perspective – may respond, it is to be supposed, to a philosophically informed approach. It is certainly instructive to reflect on Damisch's approach to the cultural past in *The Origin of Perspective*. The fact that the title alludes to Edmund Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry* is significant, even if Damisch makes relatively little direct reference to this text.[11] While Husserl is of course of general importance for the French phenomenological and structuralist traditions that have shaped Damisch's thought, this short, late text has a special relevance here, not only on account of its subject but also in methodological terms, for its view of history, and so I will summarise one or two of its main theses.

Husserl's overarching theme (as in *The Crisis of European Sciences*) concerns a 'forgetting' of the past, of origins, entailed by the progress of science and particularly consequent upon the Galilean 'mathematisation' of nature. In this connection, Husserl emphasises the need to bring history and epistemology into association with each other, postulating a 'historical a priori': 'what is historically primary in itself is our present. We always already know our present world and that we live in it, always surrounded by an openly endless horizon of unknown actualities.' This 'horizon-certainty ... is already presupposed in order that we can seek to know what we do not know.'[12]

In enquiring into the cultural past we encounter a series of 'past presents,' each with its 'horizon,' its 'life-world.' It is in terms of this structure that

7. Jonathan Crary's discussion of the politics of attention in his *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, and London, 1999); T. J. Clark's reference to the Situationist concept of 'spectacle' in *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Thames and Hudson: London, 1985); Griselda Pollock's feminist analyses of spectatorship in *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininty and the Histories of Art* (Routledge: London, 1988), and elsewhere; Norman Bryson's critique of the gaze, beginning with his *Vision and Painting: the Logic of the Gaze* (Macmillan: London, 1985). John Shearman's *Mannerism* (Penguin Books: Harmondsworth, 1967) was influential in arguing that we should adjust our perceptions according to critical terminology and values of the period in question, so as not to be deceived as to what we think we see. For a forthright and revealing recent venture in this spirit, see Paul Taylor, *Dutch Flower Painting* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1995).

8. In addition to Damisch himself, I here have in mind not only Damisch's French precursors and contemporaries in writing philosophically on art (especially Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida), but also for example Richard Wollheim, Michael Podro and Margaret Iversen. The art-historical book that has had the greatest influence on philosophically based discussion of art has been of course E.H. Gombrich's *Art and Illusion*, (Phaidon: London, 1960).

9. Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. John Goodman (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, and London, 1994), p. xiii. (The French text was published in 1987.)

10. Damisch, *Origin* (1994), pp. 430–1. He is referring to Alpers's 'Interpretation without representation, or the viewing of *Las Meninas*', in *Representations* no 1 (February 1985), pp. 31–42.

11. Translated and introduced by David Carr in Peter McCormick and Frederick A Elliston, eds, *Husserl: Shorter Works* (University of Notre Dame Press and The Harvester Press: Notre Dame and Brighton, 1981), pp. 251–70. The manuscript, written in 1936, was probably intended for *The Crisis in European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, an Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, originally published in German in 1936. An edited version was published in 1939 by Eugen Fink, who chose the expression 'the origin of geometry' from the text to serve as part of the title ('Ursprung der Geometrie als intentional-historisches Problem'). Carr's English version was originally published as an appendix to his translation of *The Crisis* (Northwestern University Press: Evanston, 1970). Jacques Derrida translated

Husserl explains the disjunction, within a 'tradition' (of geometry, in this case) between what he calls original self-evidence and the successive inventions made by scientists in communication with each other through a shared language (-world), this being the means whereby geometry develops over time. Thus arises what he calls 'sedimentation': a tradition develops through a building-up of layers, a passing-on of formulae or findings, such that, for each successive present, axioms are handed down that permit the further development of geometry but not 'the capacity for reactivating the primal beginnings, i.e., the source of meaning for everything that comes later.'[13] These 'sources' will have been buried, so to speak, by generations of custom and use. Damisch does not himself particularly take up this latter theme (primary source of meaning), unlike his early mentor Merleau-Ponty, but Husserl's remarks on history are highly relevant for his general approach. It is worth particularly noting two points for later reference: the closing-off of each historical 'world,' in its 'horizon,' from later ones; and the progressive loss of meaning in cultural traditions, through 'sedimentation.'

Damisch is a critical historian of an artistic tradition. Certainly not a 'traditionalist,' he is concerned, as was Husserl, although in different terms,[14] to elicit structural principles not discernible through historical scholarship alone (which he is of course far from scorning), the structures in question having been tacit or unexpressed. Thus in *Traité du trait*, the *trait* (a word which the English 'trait' does not translate) emerges as a structural principle, characteristic of a Western tradition, which he defines partly in contrast to a different one, that of Chinese brush drawing. His approach is at once speculative, historically informed and acutely observant, so that, in his chapter on 'contour' (one of the traits of *le trait)*, he refers to Pliny's myth of the origin of depiction (as the outlining of a shadow), contrasts this with Chinese shadow-painting, and comments on the separation of contours and shadow in drawings by Leonardo.[15]

Some of his most direct remarks on historical method (in *The Origin*) come through his comments not on Husserl but on one of Merleau-Ponty's 'working notes' for *The Visible and the Invisible*. Merleau-Ponty writes: '...a philosophy, like a work of art, is an object that can arouse more thoughts than those that are "contained" in it (can one enumerate them? can one count up a language?), one that retains a meaning outside of its historical context, even *has* a meaning only outside of that context. Give an example of this vertical or philosophical history: Descartes, Malebranche. Is it not necessary to distinguish their problems such as they thought them and the problems that really move them, and that *we* formulate...?'[16] Damisch comments that the phrase 'even *has* a meaning' is crucial here, 'namely a meaning that is its *own*, as opposed to being borrowed from the context.' In affirming 'Merleau-Ponty's 'sedimentary' or 'vertical' history,' he insists both on the importance of this principle and on the importance of proceeding in a way 'that does not preclude our doing history, in the conventional meaning of this term.'[17]

Husserl had called, comparably, for a speculative history. We are not limited by context, since 'thought and phantasy' give us the tranforming power of free variation: by ranging through all possibilities, we arrive at the invariants. Thus 'even if we knew almost nothing about the historical surrounding world of the first geometers, this much is certain as an invariant, essential structure: that it was a world of "things"...; that

'The Origin of Geometry' into French in 1962, and wrote an introduction. Damisch refers to Husserl's essay on pp 84–5 of *The Origin of Perspective*.

12. p. 264. Presupposed, and not consciously posited.

13. p. 263.

14. Damisch (*Origin of Perspective* (1994), p. 85) remarks that, while his work is phenomenological in inspiration, he must proceed in a way diametrically opposite to Husserl, aligning himself with the experimentalism of Brunelleschi, rather than the idealism of Thales.

15. *Traité du trait* (1995), 'Contour', pp. 41–76.

16. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible, followed by working notes*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Northwestern University Press: Evanston, 1968), pp. 199–200; *Le visible et l'invisible* (Gallimard: Paris, 1964), p. 253. The passage is quoted by Damisch on p. 38 of *The Origin* (1994).

17. Damisch, *The Origin* (1994), p. 38. The respective approaches of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Damisch are divergent, as I have noted above with respect to Damisch and Husserl. Here, Damisch's confirming gloss on Merleau-Ponty does not quite capture the latter's point that we see now what Descartes and Malebranche meant, but did not know they meant. This does not make 'us' omniscient, for our efforts are subject to the same condition in our own time: it is not given to us to grasp the full sense of our acts; and yet our acts do have a sense – or a 'style' – which may be more evident to others than to ourselves, and to those who come later. Merleau-Ponty applies this principle (which put like this sounds like a commonplace, but has a deep and subtle presence in his thought) to his own discussion of Husserl, and extends it to painting as well. See Sean Dorrance Kelly, 'Seeing Things in Merleau-Ponty', in Taylor Carman and Mark B.N. Hansen, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2004), pp. 74–110.

all things necessarily had to have a bodily character....'[18] He goes on to develop the theme of praxis, defining what may have been buried or left unremarked in the sedimentary development of successive historical life-worlds, or 'contexts.'

A Husserlian thematics of 'return' – to retrieve what had thus been 'forgotten' – is prominent in passages Damisch quotes from Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible* in the second chapter of *The Origin of Geometry*. The paradoxical or aporetic character of Merleau-Ponty's formulations is well known, but a particular strand of paradox, of questioning, emerges in Damisch's selection of passages. Prompted by his reading of Panofsky (whose *Perspective as Symbolic Form* he urged the young Damisch to read), Merleau-Ponty asserts that 'Renaissance perspective is a cultural fact, that perception itself is polymorphic and that if it becomes Euclidean, this is because it allows itself to be oriented by the system.'[19] From this proposition that perception is modelled by culture, he passes to a question, 'how can one return from this perception fashioned by culture to "brute" or "wild" [*sauvage*] perception?' – taking up the Husserlian theme in his own terms. He does not, however, hold out the prospect that 'wild perception' can become a conscious possession. Indeed, the 'key' to 'natural' perception's loss of its domain, so to speak, '*is in this idea that perception qua wild perception is of itself ignorance of itself, imperception*.'[20]

The questions, the paradoxes, arise partly through Merleau-Ponty's reflections on Saussure and on the role of language (and the principle of difference, *écart*) in relation to perception. A month earlier, in a note headed 'Perceiving subject, speaking subject, thinking subject,' he had written: 'The perceiving subject as a tacit, silent, *Being-at* (*Etre-à*), which returns from the thing itself blindly identified, which is only a separation (*écart)* with respect to it – the *self* of perception as "nobody" in the sense of Ulysses, as the anonymous one buried in the world, and that has not yet traced its path. Perception as imperception, evidence in non-possession...'[21] His subsequent reflection on 'the speaking subject' leads him to a further question: 'Is it the same being that perceives and that speaks? Impossible that it is not the same. And if it is the same, is this not to re-establish the "thought of seeing and feeling", the Cogito, the "consciousness of...?"'[22] – precisely what he had been seeking to surpass. The question is left unanswered; earlier, he had admitted that the notion he had developed in *Phenomenology of Perception* of a 'prereflective contact of self with self' was invalid: 'What I call the tacit cogito is impossible. To have the idea of "thinking" (in the sense of the "thought of seeing and feeling"), to make the "reduction", to return to immanence and to the consciousness of ... it is necessary to have words...' Nonetheless, 'there is a world of silence, the perceived world, at least, is an order where there are non-language significations – yes, non-language significations, but they are not accordingly *positive*. There is for example no flux of singular *Erlebnisse*; there are fields and a field of fields...'[23]

Such formulations as 'perception as imperception' caused even a leading Merleau-Ponty scholar to complain of the philosopher's seeming violation of the principle of contradiction.[24] The paradoxes are, however, motivated by a genuine concern. Merleau-Ponty, like Husserl before him, wants not so much to resist as to think counter to the processes of 'sedimentation' and 'forgetting' inherent in the progress of modern (Western) culture. Just as Husserl recognised that the hypothetical 'origin' of geometry cannot be located, Merleau-Ponty, in his late writing, accepts that the

18. Husserl, 'The Origin of Geometry', p. 267. Husserl holds against upholders of 'factual history' that 'the human surrounding world is the same today as always' (p. 269) and that this makes it possible to ground meanings on what he calls 'internal history.' Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'vertical history' doubtless corresponds to this, but replaces Husserl's pursuit of science as '*aeterna veritas*' (*loc. cit.*) with the project of an 'expanded reason.'.

19. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), p. 212 (French text, p. 265); cf Damisch pp. 31–2.

20. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), p. 213 (266–7) his italics; quoted Damisch, *Origin*, p. 32.

21. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), p. 201 (254); quoted in part by Damisch, *Origin*, p. 32.

22. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), p. 202 (255).

23. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), p. 171 (224–5), passage referred to by Damisch, *Origin*, p. 33 n. 20; Damisch observes that the 'tacit cogito' 'is a notion that is implicitly a contradiction in terms, as Merleau-Ponty himself noted after Ludwig Wittgenstein.'

24. See James M Edie, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Language: Structuralism and Dialectics* (Washington, 1987), p. 66 ff. Derrida refers to Merleau-Ponty on the blind spot, the *punctum caecum*, also from the 'working notes,' in *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, the catalogue for the first (1990) in the series of exhibitions that also included Damisch's. See pp. 52–3 (trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 1993). His text also deconstructively explores the *trait* (see especially pp. 37–57). In *Traité du trait*, pp. 80–1, Damisch refers to Derrida's essay in touching on the theme of blindness as the principle of drawing.

rational cogito cannot be tied back to a 'tacit' cogito, identified with 'mute' perception. Instead, both philosophers seek to characterise that which is presupposed but not acknowledged in scientific rationality, in conscious perception. Here it is relevant to mention that, when Damisch knew him, Merleau-Ponty had become involved in the beginnings of structuralism, via his interest in Saussure and his friendships with Lévi-Strauss and Lacan.[25] In the philosopher's late writing, there is less appeal to lived experience (thus avoiding the lure of the 'tacit cogito') and instead a restless elaboration of transpersonal, quasi-structural concepts like 'flesh' and the 'chiasm.'

What these concepts or formulations most obviously have in common is their ambiguity (or contradictoriness), and this takes us back to the question of specifically philosophical approaches to painting. In *Traité du trait* Damisch, who continues to count himself a structuralist (he does not regard 'post-structuralism' as a meaningful term) sees in what he calls the 'aspect' the (ambiguous) 'condition structurale' for the activity of looking at drawings. The issue of the inherent ambiguity of depiction has been a principal stimulus for recent philosophically informed inquiry into painting. It was not a phenomenologist, but E. H. Gombrich, a successor to 'the critical historians of art,' who did so much to set in train the modern debate on painting and perception in the English-speaking world.[26] Central to this has been his contention that we cannot simultaneously see both the marked pictorial surface and the depicted image. Damisch, in the chapter of *Traité du trait* entitled 'L'Aspect,' draws on two strands of modern philosophy to focus on precisely this question, juxtaposing and comparing the respective views of Sartre (in *L'Imaginaire*) and Wittgenstein.[27] He moves from Sartre's idea of imagining an *irréel* beyond the material signs, to Wittgenstein's inherently ambivalent notion of the aspect (both take portraiture as an example, considering how mere marks can be seen as a person).

The aspect, in Wittgenstein's account, could be said to structure our looking, without being itself present to vision. It is correlative to our looking, related to it reciprocally: 'In a temporal sense the aspect is only the kind of way in which we again and again treat the picture.'[28] Looking at a picture is something we *do*, and Wittgenstein's investigations of language are driven by a sense of the primacy of action: 'Language – I want to say – is a refinement. "In the beginning was the deed."'[29] But deeds as such cannot be directly investigated, only our descriptions of them; with respect to pictures, '"Seeing the figure as..." has something occult, something ungraspable about it...But don't try to explain it! Better look at the rest of seeing as something occult too.'[30]

We have blindness again, and a curiosity about, a reflection upon, the tacit. Wittgenstein's preoccupations are tantalisingly close to Merleau-Ponty's (another example, in *Philosophical Investigations*: 'When I raise my arm I do not usually *try* to raise it'),[31] even if their respective approaches are utterly different. What particularly comes into the foreground with Wittgenstein's discussion of the aspect is the factor of temporality, of 'deed.' The aspect is the correlate of change: 'We become conscious of the aspect only when it changes.'[32] The aspect arises in the moment of discernment, but we do not see it and we know the moment only in its passing.

2

I have been opening certain of Damisch's themes into the field of thought suggested by some of his principal philosophical sources. I now want to

25. Lévi-Strauss dedicated *The Savage Mind* to the memory of Merleau-Ponty (*La Pensée sauvage*, Librairie Plon: Paris, 1962; English translation published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 1966). The title echoes expressions that recur in the 'working notes': *être sauvage, perception sauvage.*

26. Michael Podro, in his book *The Critical Historians of Art* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1982) notes Gombrich's role in effecting a 'shift in perspective from that of the critical historians.' (p. 215). Like his German precursors, Gombrich was concerned to address relevant critical and philosophical questions.

27. *Traité du trait* (1995), pp. 79–90. Referring to Roland Barthes's dedication of *La Chambre claire* (*Camera Obscura*) to *L'Imaginaire*, Damisch notes how Sartre's book 'marked, informed, worked on an entire generation' (p. 83). Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Imaginaire, psychologie phénoménologique de l'imagination* (Gallimard: Paris, 1940); *The Imaginary*, revised by Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre, trans. Jonathan Webber (Routledge: London and New York, 2004).

28. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol 1, eds G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H.von Wright, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Blackwell: Oxford, 1980) 1022, p. 177); quoted Damisch, *Traité*, p. 90.

29. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G.H.von Wright in collaboration with H.Nyman, trans. P.Winch (Blackwell: Oxford, 1980), p. 31. 'In the beginning was the deed' is a quotation from Goethe's *Faust.*

30. Wittgenstein, *Remarks* (1980), vol.1, 966, p. 170, quoted Damisch, *Traité*, p. 87.

31. *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Blackwell: Oxford, 1968), 622, p.161. For a discussion of parallels between Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein, see Philip Dwyer, *Sense and Subjectivity: a Study of Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty* (E.J. Brill Leiden: New York, 1990). As Merleau-Ponty notes in 'Eye and Mind', Descartes himself makes this (seemingly un-Cartesian) kind of observation.

32. Wittgenstein, *Remarks* (1980), vol. 1, 1034, p. 179. Wittgenstein's most concerted discussion of the aspect comes in part xi of the *Philosophical Investigations*, which includes the duck-rabbit figure. Stephen Mulhall draws parallels between Wittgenstein and Heidegger with respect to this concept in his *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects* (Routledge: London and New York, 1990). See in particular his chapter on art, p. 156 ff.

move from exposition to a sort of improvisation on his topic of the *trait* (and aspect), adapted to painting. I will focus in particular on two paintings by Velázquez. What I want to show is both that a present attention to past painting is possible, and that the paintings in question specifically invite such an attention without, so to speak, departing from their time. The condition for this, I will argue, is the kind of blindness alluded to by Wittgenstein (seeing as occult) and by Merleau-Ponty: the viewer, and in different terms the painter, are like '"Nobody", in the sense of Ulysses,' voyaging in the unknown.

What this entails, as the name Ulysses suggests, is action and perhaps cunning, tacit skill. Wittgenstein emphasises the deed. His arguments and concepts would on the face of it apply for any kind of depiction; however, the experience that gave rise to his questioning (seeing marks on a surface as a person) is associable historically with the development of illusionistic methods in painting. It was, as noted, Gombrich's analysis of this that initiated a debate on the relationship between mark and image in the viewing of painting. Velázquez is particularly relevant in this connection, since comment on his paintings from the seventeenth century to the present has repeatedly returned to the perceptual dilemmas his later paintings present, between inchoate marks and compelling illusion.

Here, as with the 'aspect,' there could be a hint of mere mechanism, of a kind of perceptual switching. Damisch follows Wittgenstein in avoiding any such suggestion, arguing that treating the *trait* as correlative to the 'aspect' 'entails operating at the hinge [*charnière*] of two registers, of form and meaning, of the graphic and the linguistic.'[33] This does not mean being in both registers simultaneously, he continues, but it does entail an uncertainty as to which register is in play, or as to which is which: 'An aspect is entirely the opposite of a thing, caught as it is in a mesh of forces [*réseau de déterminations*] in which it is impossible to distinguish between that which is of the order of "seeing" ["*voir*"] and that of imagination, of "seeing" and of interpretation, of "seeing" and knowing [*du "voir" et du savoir*] of "seeing" and concept.'[34]

Now one well-known kind of alliance of *voir* and *savoir* is exemplified in the figure of the connoisseur and it is apposite to mention this because Damisch, for the exhibition associated with *Traité du trait*, had placed himself among the connoisseurs. He depended on the expertise of curators for advice and suggestions. He drew on collections formed by earlier connoisseurs and indeed, the drawings collection of the Louvre is an archive of drawing connoisseurship as such, going back to its Renaissance beginnings. Here precisely is a case of cultural sedimentation, not only with respect to the much-studied subject of museum collections, but in relation to the very figure of the connoisseur. We can trace this archetype of discernment, of an informed attention, to the historical milieux in which art came to be counted a learned practice. In seventeenth-century Spain, Velázquez's father-in-law Francisco Pacheco, a painter himself and motivating force of the Seville Academy, was a key figure in raising the standing of his art, as author of *Arte de la pintura*, a mixture of biography and art theory on the model of Vasari. Both he and Velázquez's later biographer Palomino testify to the painter's learnedness.[35] The situation here was not the same as with the scholar-painters of China, as discussed by Damisch, not only because of the intimate connection between brush-drawing and writing in China (which Damisch signals by referring to the *lettré*, the scholarly or lettered

33. Damisch, *Traité* (1995), p. 89. Merleau-Ponty uses the same word, charnière, at one point in his discussion of the chiasm of the sensing/sensible in *Le Visible et l'Invisible* (p. 194; p. 148 in English text). There are affinities between his (and Husserl's) term 'horizon' and Wittgenstein's 'aspect.'

34. Damisch, *Traité* (1995), p. 89.

35. Francisco Pacheco, *Arte de la pintura*, Seville 1649. A translation of the biography of Velázquez and some other sections is in Enriqueta Harris, *Velázquez* (Phaidon: Oxford, 1982), Appendix I, pp. 191–5. In Appendix II, pp. 196–224, is a translation of Antonio Palomino's *Life of Velázquez*, first published in 1724. For another translation, see Antonio Palomino, *Lives of the Eminent Spanish Painters and Sculptors*, trans. Nina Ayala Mallory (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1987). The inventory of Velázquez's rooms in the palace in Madrid, made after his death, listed a library of 154 books, large for the time and mainly devoted to mathematical and scientific subjects and to art theory. First published by Sánchez Cantón in 1925, the inventory has been variously analysed in the literature on Velázquez. See for example Jonathan Brown, *Velázquez, Painter and Courtier* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1986), pp. 265–6, and Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical themes in western art from Brunelleschi to Seurat* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1990), pp. 104–5. Kemp notes the listing of what was probably a camera obscura, and also ten mirrors.

artist), but also because the practice of ink drawing was the enactment, so to speak, of a religious or metaphysical apprehension of the universe.[36]

While religion may certainly have informed Velázquez's paintings beyond those with manifestly religious subjects, religious meaning was not tied (at least in explicit terms) to any aspect of his technical practice. Furthermore, his technique underwent drastic change, as is evident in the difference between the early and late painting discussed here.[37] Nor is this a simple case of 'development.' From *The Waterseller of Seville*, c.1620 (Fig. 1) to *The Fable of Arachne (The Spinners)*, c.1656–8 (Fig. 2), Velázquez moves from a Caravaggist practice to a quite different one, modelled on Venetian painting. The paintings were made for reception in disparate, though not unrelated, social milieux. In Seville, Velázquez's patrons would have taken a learned and cultivated interest in his vivid depiction of lower-class subjects, or *bodegones*.[38] In Madrid, Velázquez was principally a portrait painter for the court, and became himself a courtier.[39] Beyond the orientation given by art theory, a viewer would have been guided in either case by wider cultural knowledge. Thus Velázquez scholars discussing *The Waterseller* often refer to contemporary picaresque literature, in which the waterseller is a well-known character. In the case of the court paintings, Gridley McKim-Smith has invoked, beyond subject-matter and other manifest factors, a background of implicit understanding. She discusses the possible 'connotation or sensation of value' suggested to contemporary viewers by such purely sensory aspects of Velázquez's paintings as the colour and texture of fabrics.[40]

Insofar as, in this and other comparable cases, paintings were made and viewed within what Husserl called historical life-worlds, their meaning, it could be argued, was disclosed only within those worlds. Historians who take this view try to find out what would have been evident only to those who would have been the anticipated viewers of the painting in its own time. While this line of investigation would obviously be applicable for human artefacts of any kind, from any time or culture, it has a particular urgency or aptness for Western, post-Renaissance painting, to the extent that this increasingly came to be understood as reflecting values and concerns formulated in the milieu of its making, among the connoisseurs. There is a concomitant sense of addressing the present, which emerges perhaps in more complex ways in Velázquez's work than in that of any other painter.

Velázquez developed to a high degree the ability to suggest that what the viewer sees is present in the moment of seeing it and exists in reciprocal relation to the act of looking. This made him a supreme portraitist, in a tradition where apparent reciprocation of the viewer's passing attention by the person portrayed was the central and structuring conceit. *Las Meninas* is of course a culminating achievement in this respect (with a special and complicating uncertainty as to the subject of reciprocation). Writers on Velázquez have continued to single out for comment his command of the momentary. This bears somewhat ironically on my question as to whether we can give a present attention to works of the past, in as much as Velázquez's paintings were made so pointedly for a present attention: to what extent must this remain for us a past present?

The Waterseller is the earliest of his paintings to convey the sense of a suspended moment. A contemporary of the painter, such as its original owner Juan de Fonseca y Figueroa,[41] would certainly have appreciated the vivid reality of the scene, taking it not merely as a spectacle but as an

36. Damisch, *Traité* (1995), p. 31 ff. Discussing the principle of change in Taoism, Damisch (*Traité*, p. 37) observes that Shitao made a parallel between the '*Single* Brushstroke' ('*L'Unique* Trait de Pinceau') and the first emblem of the *I Ching*, a horizontal bar.

37. David Davies has emphasised the changes that take place even within the Sevilian period. See Davies, 'Velázquez's Bodegones', in Michael Clark ed., *Velázquez in Seville* (National Gallery of Scotland, 1996), pp. 51–65; see the comparisons on p. 59. Davies' general argument concerns the bearing contemporary religious attitudes had on the early genre paintings, which are far from presenting the caricatures that picaresque sources might lead us to expect.

38. So called after the wine-vault cellar where menials took their meals (see Davies, 'Velázquez's Bodegones', p. 51). It was a commonplace of art theory to refer to celebrated cases of illusionism in classical antiquity in order to reconcile 'low' realism with Renaissance aesthetic principles. See for example Palomino, *Lives*, trans. Mallory, p. 142; Harris, p. 197.

39. The two most prominent themes in Palomino's life of the painter concern his practice of painting as a liberal art and his rise in social status; the latter is evidenced by the King's respectful treatment of him, his rooms in the royal palace, and the high appointments that became demanding of his time.

40. Gridley McKim-Smith, Greta Anderson-Bergdoll, Richard Newman, *Examining Velázquez* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1988), p. 69.

41. Fonseca, whom the painter had known in Seville and who was the King's chaplain, was instrumental in gaining Velázquez a place at court. It has therefore been suggested that *The Waterseller* was painted as a demonstration of skill (see Brown, *Velázquez*, p. 12 and p. 285, n. 31.

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Fig. 1. Diego Velázquez, *The Waterseller of Seville*, c. 1620, oil on canvas, 106 x 81 cm (including a 4 cm strip added at the top). Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Wellington Museum, Apsley House.

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Fig. 2. Diego Velázquez, *The Fable of Arachne* (*The Spinners*), c. 1656–8, oil on canvas, 167 x 252 cm; with additions (not shown here) 220 x 289 cm. Madrid, Museo del Prado.

attainment worthy of painting as a liberal art. The contrasted features of boy and waterseller might have engaged the sympathy of such a viewer, and perhaps have brought to mind the characters of picaresque literature. He would have appreciated its visual immediacy and would have recognised the illusionistic use of dark ground painting with strong tonal contrast as showing high accomplishment in a very recent (Caravaggesque) manner.[42]

The illusion is just as persuasive now as it was then and it might therefore seem that my question concerning the historicity of vision is so easily answered as to be redundant. What is not obvious, however, is what gives the painting its ability to suggest that what we see in the painted surface is present *as we look*. The crucial factor, I think, is in the way the painting affords the viewer a continual opening of aspects. This is a function of the visual isolation of the distinct and mostly static elements that comprise the painting, and here it is relevant to bear in mind the technical constraints by which the painter was bound. He constructed the painting part by part and correspondingly we find our gaze dwelling on isolated details: objects, faces, patches of light paint, areas of darkness. Because the portrayal of action is so restricted, with the waterseller as still as the urn, this piecemeal construction yields no incongruity, save for the hands on either side of the exchanged glass, which tend to appear as objects appended to the glass itself (the inclining of the boy's head suggests movement more successfully).[43]

The only vertical canvas among the *bodegones, The Waterseller* is by design an aggregation of the still and the standing. Our attention, isolating elements in turn, opens the painting up through its aspects ('the kind of way in which we again and again treat the picture'). In this, no order is prescribed, nor can it be, since although we can hardly avoid looking from the oldest to the

42. See Zahira Veliz, 'Velázquez's Early Technique', in Michael Clark ed., *Velázquez in Seville* (National Gallery of Scotland, 1996), pp. 79–84.

43. On the painter's part by part method here, see Veliz, 'Velázquez's Early Technique' (1996), p. 83. She also discusses physical changes that have taken place over time, so that *The Waterseller*, for example, is probably darker now than it would have been originally. The creation of visual 'islands' was of course inherent in Caravaggism, which was criticised for that reason by classicist theorists.

youngest face, our gaze might also shift in less predictable ways: from the depressions in the jug on the table to the creased sunken cheek of the waterseller; from the shallow grooves in the surface of the urn where his hand rests to the similar brushstrokes that comprise the furrows of his brow; from the water drops on the surface of the urn whose dark interior we cannot see to the transparent glass illuminated in the dark with a deeper darkness at its bottom.[44]

The painting has often been seen as mysterious, with allegorical and other interpretations being proposed. Whatever might be the legitimacy of the various readings, it seems to me that it is the structuring of our perceptual engagement with the painting, as proposed here, that gives us both our conviction of meaning and the emotional means of access to it: our feeling of meaning. Literally as to feeling, there are further aspects that might open to our awareness beyond the strict limits of vision itself, in the domain of touch. The urns are manifestly hand-made things that bear the marks both of the craftsman's work and of the painter's.[45] The waterseller's hand resting on the urn in the immediate foreground presents it as something imminent to our touch as much as to sight: more to touch, in so far as its substance and coolness might in reality only be felt, blood-warmth on a surface cooled by water. As our attention shifts from one visual island to another, it may lose itself and also lose its confidence in overt identities, in distinctions as to nature and substance. The painting offers cues for this, in the traces of transformation, whether lines on a forehead or creases in what was once moist clay, or in the difference between the 'low' materiality of the depicted scene and the skin of oil-paint itself, the transforming and self-transforming medium.[46]

The aspect – and this is particularly crucial for Velázquez's strategy at all stages – is not something that is in the painting. As Damisch says, it is not a thing. The features I described in *The Waterseller* reflect only a possible pattern of attention. However, it does not follow from the fact of its being a function of my engagement with the painting that I can grasp the aspect in action, through introspection. Insofar as it is indeed a function of my attention, the aspect is a point not of arrival or rest, but of change: a 'hinge,' as Damisch says.[47] As he also insists, it is between 'voir' and 'savoir,' so that with reference to the play of the aspect, our perception is in a state of uncertainty. We might say it is wandering, adrift. This suggests Merleau-Ponty's idea of a 'wild' perception: perception as something that we direct presupposes a wider and more inchoate process that persists without deliberation.

I do not try to raise my arm, but I do sometimes 'try' to see. This is the focusing activity of discernment, an alliance of 'voir' and 'savoir.' However, discernment in a more rudimentary sense means something less assured, since as the most primitive registering of difference, it operates always at boundaries, at the manifold limits of the discernible. The peculiarly tantalising quality of *The Waterseller* arises from the fact that its boundaries are given with great clarity and yet in terms of a continual referring-on from one visual island to another, so that the searching, anxious undercurrent of our deliberate attention can never be brought to the rest it is at each point promised.[48]

More than any other painter, Velázquez continues to give us the feeling, in ceaselessly inventive ways, that there is more to see, and that what we see is there in the moment we look. Yet the 'more' is not there to be seen and the

44. It seems that this area is likely to represent not a fig, as had been thought, but a bubble of blue glass. See the catalogue entry by David Davies and Enriqueta Harris in *Velázquez in Seville* (1996), p. 152.

45. Velázquez's inclination to the plastic and sculptural is evident in all the bodegones, with their arrays of objects. Even a religious painting, *The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception* (National Gallery: London) has been shown to have affinities with the contemporary wood sculpture of Juan Martínez Montañes (see *Velázquez in Seville*, 1966, pp. 154–7, entries by Marjorie Trusted and by Davies and Harris). In the eyes of the connoisseur, the work of the artist is elevated here over that of the craftsman (as is the invisible hand of the painter over the hand of the labourer that it has depicted, at rest on the craftsman's handiwork). However, the painting itself cannot enforce this hierarchy, for in counterposing the terms it has necessarily also brought them into association. Here David Davies' careful discussion of the attitude implicit in these paintings is relevant: he shows that Velázquez tends to reduce the emotional and social distance between viewer and depicted subject (which historical circumstances nonetheless entailed).

46. Movement of attention between visual 'islands' is a tendency in all Caravaggism, but usually with ends in view: the card-sharp's hidden hand, the face lit by a candle. In its endless character *The Waterseller* shows its singularity – and also its kinship with still-life.

47. Damisch's idea of a 'hinge' is his own adaptation of Wittgenstein (and Merleau-Ponty: see n. 33, above). As Mulhall shows, Wittgenstein's 'aspect' takes two forms: 'seeing-as,' or what Mulhall calls 'continuous aspect perception,' and 'aspect-dawning.' In his chapter on art, he shows how the latter concept is central to Wittgenstein's aesthetics, and 'hinging' obviously relates to this. Wittgenstein adds an important rider to his account of 'dawning': 'I might say a picture does not always live for me while I am seeing it. "Her picture smiles down on me from the wall." It need not always do so, whenever my gaze lights on it.' (PI p. 205, quoted Mulhall, p. 179).

48. I discuss the movement of attention between limits in 'Seurat and the Act of Sensing: Perception as Artefact', in Therese Fischer-Seidel, Suzanne Peters and Alex Potts, eds, *Perception and the Senses/Sinneswahrnehmung* (Francke Verlag: Tübingen and Basel, 2004), pp. 165–87.

moment cannot be caught. While this may be the inescapable entailment of pictorial illusion, it is Velázquez alone who repeatedly grounds the illusion in the entailment. The naked woman in *The Rokeby Venus* turns away from the viewer and her face looks back as a distant reflection: what appears as a hint at disclosure is also a double evasion. The illusion of living presence rests on this evasion, which sustains the paradox of an actual (hence living) woman who is a goddess. While some of his paradoxes might in principle be resolved (what is on the canvas turned from us in *Las Meninas*?) Velázquez's methods generally defy logical synthesis. Accept defeat, endure suspense. Only this artist could have painted, in *The Surrender of Breda*, a military subject on the theme of surrender, where the victor gives up victory and onlookers ignore the main event.[49]

In Velázquez's allegory of painting, *The Fable of Arachne*, otherwise known as *The Spinners*, the weaving contest between Minerva and Arachne is represented in the background, while the work of spinning is done in the foreground. The region of refined work and materials, seen in scintillating light, is contrasted with the plain fabrics and manual labour of the foreground, which is mainly in shadow. The scene on the tapestry glimpsed on the far wall replicates Titian's *Rape of Europa*, thus linking Arachne's challenge to the Gods with Titian's painterly skill, which, with Venetian technique generally, was so important for Velázquez's later practice. To a discerning contemporary viewer the painting would have presented a contrast between manual labour and the art of the painter, as figured in the background and manifested in the painting itself. The spinner's invisible hand behind the turning wheel is the counterpart of another unseen hand.[50] The division into near and far views, which has precedents in Velázquez (including the *Surrender*), also insinuates a painterly thematic of nearness and distance associated with the use of Venetian-inspired cursive brushstrokes – in Spanish *manchas* and *borrones*.[51] Vasari's observation that Titian painted in 'bold, sweeping strokes, and in patches of colour, with the result that they cannot be viewed from near by, but appear perfect at a distance'[52] was adapted to describe Velázquez's painting in the literature of connoisseurship, as the painter might well have intended.

In terms of technique, the painting could not be more different from *The Waterseller*, in its portrayal of movement, its blurring of contours, the openness of its paint texture. The degree of mobility and the supple painterly illusionism are exceptional in the context of seventeenth-century genre painting (*The Spinners* is of course an allegory, but it is framed in terms of genre). The portrayal of 'real' things and persons in genre scenes needed to conform to two inherently static conditions: the objective materiality of the painting itself, and the recessive space portrayed in it. This favoured the representation of scenes in which the action is naturally self-contained and the figures as still as the objects, so as not to conflict with the perspectival illusion (as with *The Waterseller*, or Vermeer's women reading letters).[53] Inside the perspective box people and things are equalised as static objects of vision. By contrast, the spinning wheel in the foreground of *The Spinners* is a new refinement: an object that eludes vision. Here, Velázquez is a painter of impossible objects.

This is not to overlook the Gombrichian point that Velázquez invented pictorial conventions to stand for movement; it is rather to urge that this invention is by itself a necessary but not sufficient condition for our

49. Mulhall, *On Being in the World* (1990) (p. 151) notes that 'aspect-dawning' translates a German expression (in Wittgenstein) more literally rendered as 'the lighting-up of an aspect.' This is particularly appropriate for the *Surrender*, whose foreground screens (and thus invites attention to) a landscape whose luminosity is enhanced by the use of a white ground specifically for that area. Attention hinges between, loses and returns to, the glimpsed field of battle and the scene of surrender: what 'lights up' is reprieve from war, a release into open space.

50. The spinner is using a wheel of the Picardy type, and would be moving the driving wheel by hand. See Patricia Baines, *Spinning Wheels: Spinners and Spinning* (Batsford: London, 1977), pp. 112–13.

51. See McKim-Smith *et al., Examining Velázquez* (1988), p. 17 ff. For viewing distance and connoisseurship, see p. 27.

52. 'Life of Titian', in Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, trans. and ed. George Bull (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1965), p. 458.

53. The obvious exceptions are Caravaggio's dramatised early subjects and caricatural scenes in the Brueghelesque tradition. More relevantly, there is a restraint of action in de Hooch, who uses light to soften architectural features into an atmosphere accommodating to the figures and imparting an overall mobility (people in doorways, in transitional postures). Martin Kemp observes that in *Las Meninas* the play of light permitted greater scope to 'the subtle processes of vision. . . than was possible with the drier mechanisms of linear perspective and geometrical shadow projection' (*The Science of Art*, 1998, p. 108). In *The Spinners*, all transitions are relatively blurred, whereas in most of his painterly works Velázquez modulates between the crisp and the soft. This helps the sense of steady movement, as similarly with the stealth of *Mercury and Argus* (Prado). We may feel more than we see, and the mobility we feel is that of our vision.

experiencing an illusion. Instead of a false certainty (taking paint traces as a spinning wheel) it may be a question of doubt (as to whether the wheel is 'there' in the same way as the – also illusionistic – frame that supports it). The blurrings are not merely piecemeal renderings of motion, taken in turn; they are caught up in a network of evasions whereby attention is kept forever in suspense, caught in dilemmas. The distant scene is the more important, and yet we cannot make it out; the foreground fills our view, but is subordinate. The spinner, turned towards us, has shadowy features; the woman who winds is in the light, but turns away. The woman in the centre, carding wool, is a mere blurred silhouette against the scene beyond, which is illuminated yet of uncertain reality. Velázquez, who differentiates focus in much of his work, like no other painter before or since, here gives the eye no resting-point at all. The eye's adaptiveness, its ongoing labour of discernment, is appealed to at every point.

The thread held by the spinner is a *trait* of the brush, as we are surely meant to see (it bears out the analogy between painting and weaving). We are meant not to resolve the perceptual dilemma as between brushstroke and image. Between the two lies our moment of blindness, of doubt. A blindness on the painter's part also attaches to the *trait*, since what he paints is to be completed, transformed, by vision. He paints *towards* vision, his activity adumbrates the eye's agency. What was a brushstroke will become a thread. He can stand back and gauge the effect, but not when he is in the act of painting, which must to that extent be a blind venture. That he did feel his way in painting (rather than drawing on a repertory of well-rehearsed moves) is evident from his many pentimenti, his very marked technical experimentation.[54] The structure of the *trait*, for both painter and viewer is *painted*: *seen*, and for neither is it to be synthesized into a simple union (as in the notion of a perfect viewing distance). It is the caesura that is crucial; the blind point, the hinge. In *Las Meninas* he pauses, brush in hand to look before, not looking, he will paint.[55] He is always at the hinge between painting and seeing, a voyager in the unknown, the uncapturable present, working always at the outermost edge of his skill, and never losing the daring and perhaps the trepidation of the bold beginner.[56] The viewer is in this position too, faced with a few bare notations that will become a wheel in motion only through the occult work of attention, and only fleetingly. In this temporal diagram of painting, the work of the painter, which bears a date, calls forth that of the viewer, which remains always to be done.

As a pictorial invention, Velázquez's spinning wheel is inseparable from its time and takes its place in the sedimented history of successive inventions.[57] The ostensible meanings and practices that the painting comprises belong to the *Lebenswelt* within and for which it was created; the present moment it addresses is a past present. To what extent must this remain for us a past present? Insofar as the present moment it offers is ungraspable, it was as remote from the viewers of its own time as it is from us. The answer to my question then is that we can see the painting in the present insofar as it has always eluded any attempt to 'see' it at all, quite strategically. This is the work of the trait, the impossible object of discernment.

54. The literature on Velázquez's technique gives many instances of his innovative unorthodoxy in the still-experimental practice of oil painting: his varying of grounds, use of very dilute paint and even at times admixture of dried paint fragments to catch the light. In addition to *Examining Velázquez*, see Gridley McKim-Smith, 'On Velázquez's Working Method', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 61, 1979, pp. 589–603, and Jonathan Brown and Carmen Garrido, *Velázquez, the Technique of Genius* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1998).

55. I obviously do not mean that he did not watch what he did, but neither do I believe, for example, that he used exceptionally long brushes, to retain a commanding view, as has sometimes been suggested. For vision and touch in the painter's practice, see Richard Shiff, 'Cézanne's physicality: the politics of touch', in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell, eds, *The Language of Art History* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1991), pp. 129–80.

56. It is the creative practitioner who retains this trepidation. In *Traité*, p. 69, Damisch refers to the forger in Welles's *F is for Fake* who boasts of being able to draw like Matisse but without his hesitations. The 'scruples of the hand' in question were unconscious waverings in drawing that showed up on a film of Matisse at work. There is a sense in which the forger, but not Matisse, could see what he was doing. In a quite different context Anton Ehrenzweig, in an argument concerning 'dedifferentiated' states of perception, asserts that an artist 'has to forego the wish to visualise precisely the final appearance of [the] work.' He recalls Bridget Riley saying that her 'impatience to visualize the total impression while she was shaping the transformation of single elements' once caused a temporary failure of eyesight; *The Hidden Order of Art: a Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 1967), pp. 88–9.

57. See Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (1960), p. 192: 'it needed the imagination and skill of a Velázquez to invent a means of suggesting . . . the so-called "stereoscopic effect"'; and Julián Gallego's entry on *Las hilanderas* in Antonio Dominguez Ortiz, Alfonso E. Perez Sánchez and Julián Gallego, *Velázquez* (Museo del Prado: Madrid, 1990), p. 367: he comments on the painter's achievement two and a half centuries in advance of Futurism.