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Nishida and Merleau-Ponty

Art, "Depth," and "Seeing without a Seer"

This paper sets Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Nishida Kitarō in dialogue and explore the interpretations of artistic expression, which inform their similar phenomenological accounts of perception. I discuss how both philosophers look to artistic practice to reveal multi-perspectival aspects of vision. They do so, I argue, by going beyond a "positivist" representational under-standing of perception and by including negative aspects of visual experience (the invisible, absent, unseen) as constitutive of vision. Following this account, I interpret artworks by Cézanne, Guo Xi, Rodin, and Hasegawa according to the versions of multi-perspectival vision articulated by Nishida and Merleau-Ponty. I conclude by highlighting a difference between Merleau-Ponty's "depth" and Nishida's "seeing without a seer" regarding the extent to which each of their philosophies de-substantialize and de-localize human vision.

keywords: Nishida Kitarō—Maurice Merleau-Ponty—aesthetics—phenomenology—vision—perception—multi-perspectivalism—expression—GuoXi—Rodin—Raphael—Hasegawa Tōhaku—Seeing without a seer—depth

The different ways of depicting the human body, its flesh, anatomy, and movement are perennial subjects of artistic investigation, yet the body is not treated the same way in all aesthetic traditions. The body as studied by way of the nude—a foundation of Western art practice—is relatively absent from East-Asian art history. If there is a corresponding tendency in Chinese and Japanese art it is to minimize the body's presence in favor of depicting the mountains, trees, and waters that surround the body and constitute its natural environment. Consequently, landscape painting entered art practice in East Asia almost one thousand years before it was taken up in Europe and North America.

The means of representation in art practice are reflected in philosophies that are likewise geo-historic. Striving to depict the ideal human body or landscape might not have been thinkable without ideas of transcendence, permanence, belief in an ideal realm and perfect forms; ideas associated with Greek culture in general, and Platonism in particular. In the East-Asian tradition, where philosophico-religious ideas of immanence, impermanence, and aesthetic ideas of imperfection, asymmetry, and transience informed art practice, representing the ideal body or landscape have not been major fixations to the extent they have been in the West.

One tendency that is common in both eastern and western traditions is a sustained interest in the complexities of visual experience, and particularly vision as it obtains beyond a limited uni-perspectival framework. While thinkers and artists in both traditions explore multi-perspectival aspects of vision, as I will discuss in this essay, historically eastern and western approaches have differed quite significantly. In the early-to-mid 20th century, however, two philosophers at the forefront of both of these lineages moved towards a remarkably similar understanding of visual experience. Nishida Kitarō and Maurice Merleau-Ponty both articulate a multi-perspec-

tival form of vision based on comparable ontologies of the perceptual body, and both do so by exploring artworks and the intricacies of the artistic practices that create them. This essay places these two philosophers in dialogue regarding their ideas of multi-perspectival vision and offers new interpretations of several eastern and western artworks according to their theories.

Multi-perspectival vision

Nishida's and Merleau-Ponty's theories of vision and artistic expression are based on some of the most sophisticated accounts of the perceptual body put forth in the eastern and western philosophic traditions. Because of the originality of their ideas, and because of the sometimes difficult idiom they are expressed in, it is difficult to understand their philosophies on their own, and even more difficult to compare the two. When Merleau-Ponty writes, "It is the mountain which from out there makes itself seen by the painter,"[1] and Nishida alleges that, "the mountains and rivers must also be expressive,"[2] it can be tempting to read these and other similar passages as metaphorical or as poetically suggestive, and difficult to see how they imply a concrete ontology of the visual world or the artist's body. Contrary to this, in comparing these philosophers, I interpret these and other similar passages as concrete descriptions of visual and artistic experience, as put forth in an idiom, which is appropriate to the ambiguity both philosophers find at the heart of the relation of body and world.

While these two thinkers challenge many philosophical assumptions regarding vision, much of what they take issue with is embodied in what has come to be known as the "representational" understanding of perception. While there is no single "representational" theory, the various offspring of this framework (also called "indirect perception") share the common assumption that there is a metaphysical discontinuity between the perceiver and that which is perceived. To see is to receive visual data that cause mental images in consciousness, which are copies discontinuous with the objects perceived. I will argue that to adhere to these particular assumptions is to remain limited to a uni-perspectival account of vision, and to miss the rich

1. Merleau-Ponty 1993b, 128.
2. Nishida 1970, 35.

complexity possible when going beyond this framework, as I will show Merleau-Ponty and Nishida do.

The representational assumption excludes the multi-perspectival aspects of visual experience because of an underlying "positivist" ontology. I use "positivist" in the sense that vision is explained only by what is observable, measurable, quantifiable, etc., which in this case means vision is explained solely by sense-data impacting the human perceptual apparatus. This framework leaves no room for the negative, for the invisible, the un-seen, or the perceptually absent features, such as memories, imaginings, fears, anticipations or desires to be included as part of the visual. A positivist might agree that these elements are *related to* or *impinge upon* the visual or perceptual, but because they do not arrive as positive sense-data, they are not counted as part of the visual or perceptual itself.

With this division between the perceptual subject and non-perceptual object the dilemma remains regarding how the two interact.[3] Four further entailments of the representational assumption, which I will discuss, include, (1) upholding a strict dualism between the perceptual and non-perceptual, (2) affirming an unambiguous relation between distance and touch, (3) understanding vision as limited to the surface of objects, and, as mentioned, (4) explaining vision as constituted by a uni-perspectival and frontal vantage point. In the following discussion I show how Nishida and Merleau-Ponty, as well as several artists, overturn all of these assumptions to go beyond representational positivism. In so doing they affirm on the contrary that (1) there is no non-perceptual anything; (2) distance and touch are ambiguous; (3) visual experience is ambiguous regarding surface and depth; and (4) vision is always multi-perspectival.

3. Instead of trying to explain how the visual and non-visual interact, both Nishida and Merleau-Ponty conceive of all entities as ambiguously constituted by perceptual negativity and positivity. Subject and object can neither be completely continuous nor discontinuous, and as such Nishida proposes a "continuity of discontinuity" to explain perceptual encounter, while Merleau-Ponty refers to this relation variously as "chiasm" and "intertwining." As Merleau-Ponty writes, "there is not identity, nor non-identity, or non-coincidence, there is inside and outside turning about one another" (1968). Similarly Nishida writes, "For in order for there to be the mutual determination of individuals, the external must be internal and the internal must be external" (1970).

Representation and Positivity: Platonism and the "Three Graces"

Beginning with Greek epistemology and metaphysics, there has been a sustained attempt in western philosophy to go beyond the limitations of a uni-perspectival account of vision. According to Plato's theory of forms, true vision of an entity was non-spatial; that is, not knowledge of an object from a single perspective, or a situated and limited spatial location, but a view, in a sense, from everywhere and, therefore, from no-where. To know something is to know its form, and Platonic forms are non-, or what amounts to the same thing, *all*-perspectival. While this might appear similar to multi-perspectival vision, it is importantly distinct: As I will discuss, this account remains positivist and excludes the *body's* vision as a source of knowledge. Knowledge of platonic forms was an intellectual not a bodily or even a fully visual way of seeing.

As classical learning re-emerged in the Renaissance, various artistic strategies followed these Greek assumptions in seeking to go beyond uni-perspectivalism. Artists and theoreticians participated in *paragone*, competitions and debates that questioned which artistic medium offered the best depiction of the body, judged primarily on how many different points of view could be represented. Another strategy of the time, perhaps better known, as it is still used today, is the motif of the *Three Graces*. One of the earliest examples is Raphael's rendition. This particular arrangement of bodies in space—employed by among others: Boccioni, Rubens, Cranach, Botticelli, Canova and Rodin—intends to overcome the poverty of a single and incomplete point of view. Three bodies appear, yet they are meant to be a single body revealing three different perspectives. The Graces stand together but

Raphael, *The Three Graces* (1505). Reproduction courtesy of Château de Chantilly. Chantilly, France.

in various poses and angles such that any one perspective on the group transcends the singularity of that vantage point and offers a more complete grasp of the body being depicted. An onlooker standing in any position can see not only the front of the torso, its flesh, and curves, but also how these relate to the tightness of muscles in the back, and flexing tendons in the neck and legs. One can stand face-to-face meeting one of the bodies' gazes head-on while from the same position seeing another body from profile staring out at another onlooker.

The Three Graces arrangement does offer more perspectives on the body being depicted, nevertheless its assumptions regarding perception fall short of multi-perspectival vision as articulated by later philosophers and artists. The Three Graces motif strives towards multi-perspectivalism, yet in triplicating the body the underlying theory of vision remains uni-perspectival. The additional perspectives are not found through expanding the singular vantage point, but by adding additional vantage points. Multiple perspectives are therefore given by way of the artist's tricks, but no advances towards multi-perspectivalism itself are actually achieved. The Three Graces realize extra perspectives by adding one and one and one discrete positive uni-perspectival views. Instead of finding the *many* perspectives within the *single* vantage point—as we will see with Nishida and Merleau-Ponty—the Three Graces gives many perspectives through many vantage points. Its metaphysics of vision, therefore, remains uni-perspectival according to positivist and representational assumptions.

The Negative and Invisible: Daoism and Guo Xi

Throughout East-Asian art history there were techniques that sought to overcome the uni-perspectival vantage point, yet their philosophic underpinnings are quite distinct from those in the West, and quite distinct from the positivist representational framework. Experiments aiming at expanding our understanding of vision are particularly prevalent where they were brought to their highest articulation, in the Northern Song Chinese landscape painting tradition. Guo Xi 郭熙 (1020–1090) was one of the greatest masters of landscape painting, and his *Early Spring* 早春圖 is arguably the masterpiece of Chinese art. One of the painter's strategies, called the "angle of totality" or "floating perspective," depicted the landscape in multiple perspectives. The painter would not seek to make a representation of

Guo Xi, *Early Spring* (1072). Reproduction courtesy of the National Palace Museum, Taipei.

the mountains or waters as though vision were constituted only by the single perspective he had while putting brush to silk, but instead depicted the landscape as it existed throughout time and from multiple perspectives: As it would look to a monk wandering through its paths, a fisherman docked on its banks, a farmer working on the tiny features of the ground, or a surveyor taking the perspective of the whole. In his work *The Great Image Has No Form, or The Non-object Through Painting*, Francois Jullien describes this multi-perspectivalism:

> To paint the mountain will be to paint it as a "total" (*hun*) image, in its plenitude and compossibility: "high-low," "great-small," "turning toward-turning its back," and so on, rather than to paint merely "three or five mountaintops."... To paint is not to apprehend the mountain "in one locale" and from a "single corner" (Shitao, chap. 6). It is to paint the mountain after climbing many a hill and sketching many a varied mountaintop, after having one's fill of hikes and vistas, after letting the infinite forms and resources of the mountain ripen in one's spirit.[4]

The multi-perspectivalism arrived at by such a practice is importantly different from that which Raphael sought with his Three Graces. Prefiguring Merleau-Ponty's critique of the representational or "camera" understanding of perception by almost nine hundred years, Guo Xi's *Early Spring* reveals that vision is not constituted by a single positive perspective, but includes multiple perspectives arrived at by the ambiguity of positivity and negativity, visibility and invisibility, presence and absence. Guo Xi does not require many mountains as Raphael needed many bodies. The many are seen in the one. A single mountain is "the form of one mountain and, at the same time, of tens and hundreds of mountains.... A single mountain unites within

4. Jullien 2009, 55.

itself the aspect of several tens or hundreds of mountains," writes Guo Xi.[5] The painter achieves multi-perspectivalism without having to multiply the object being depicted.

Daoist principles explain why and how painters such as Guo Xi explored vision beyond the uni-perspectival, and beyond representational positivism. Mutual-negation between being and nothingness is at the center of the Daoist worldview. For those Song dynasty artists and literati steeped in this worldview, it is not surprising that their works take an ambiguous approach to binaries such as the positive and negative, present and absent, visible and invisible. These Chinese painters knew that, "presence must give way to absence, that the visible turns inside out to become the invisible."[6] Like Merleau-Ponty and Nishida, Jullien frames the relation between the visible and the invisible not as one of duality, not as one standing beside or opposed to the other, not as visible here and invisible there, but as an ambiguous kinship where the invisible is woven into the visible.[7] Painters therefore "do not paint distinctive, much less disjunctive, aspects.... Rather, they paint them between "there is" and "there is not," present-absent, half-light, half-dark, at once light-at once dark."[8]

This aesthetic orientation towards ambiguous presence and absence, visibility and invisibility is consonant with one of the most basic tenets of Daoist philosophy derived from the well-known *yin yang* 阴阳 structure and its iconography. Traditional Chinese philosophy, aesthetics, medicine, martial arts, and science are based on this dynamic structure, which describes nature as constituted by an ambiguous relation between presence and absence. The complementary black and white forms of the symbol seem to suggest duality, or a strict distinction between presence and absence, light and dark, yet the small dot of the opposing shade in each form desubstantializes that form, negates it, permeates it with its opposite, and maintains an ambiguous multi-stability between the two. The white is not perceived simply as white, nor is the black seen as exclusively black. The shades of both shapes are negated by their opposites, yet resist being unified into a single

5. Ibid., 3.
6. Ibid., 14.
7. Merleau-Ponty says that the visible is "lined" (*tapissé*) by the invisible. (1993b 147)
8. Jullien 2009, 4.

order. Yin and yang are not opposing forces but are in a "complementary opposition" representing the movement and harmony of nature.

Daoist philosophico-aesthetic principles are well illustrated in the Japanese painter Hasegawa's famous *Pine Trees* (1593). There is an immediate striking contrast between what are taken to be the positive and negative spaces in this work, yet, as it is with the daoist yin-yang principle, the parts of the screen that are empty should not be thought of as pure absence or negativity while the dark trees are unambiguous presence and positivity. The fullness (*you*) is not separate from the emptiness (*wu*) anymore than the emptiness is divided away and remains opposed to the fullness, rather both "co-evolve" according to a mutual interpenetration and negation. Jullien explains that in such paintings presence is not *beside* absence, "presence is diluted and permeated by absence."[9] One is not opposed to the other: "presence and absence mingle continually, and that presence, far from aspiring to stand apart from absence, extends further and becomes distilled by virtue of it."[10]

Nishida's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies of perception and related philosophies of art are much more in line with this interpretation of Hasegawa's work and much closer to the basic daoist approach to multi-perspectivalism than they are with the western positivist representational model. This is because they arrive at multi-perspectivalism from within an ambiguous relation between positivity and negativity, the visible and the invisible and therefore construe vision beyond the positivist representational framework. I will show in the next subsection, how this multi-perspectivalism obtains as a seeing-seen relation *between humans*, and in the following subsection how it also obtains *between humans and objects*, finishing in Section 4, with a discussion of how this ambiguity likewise holds for the supposed non-perceptual space thought to separate subject and object.

Depth: Multi-Perspectivalism as Seeing-Seen

Merleau-Ponty was already exploring multi-perspectival aspects of vision in *Phenomenology of Perception*,[11] yet in his later works, particularly with his

9. Jullien 2009, 2.
10. Jullien 2009, 11.
11. Merleau-Ponty 2003, 78.

Hasegawa, *Pine Trees* (1593), left panel.

concept "depth" (*profondeur*), he develops the full implications of vision beyond the singular point of view. As he writes in *Eye and Mind*: "What I call depth is either nothing, or else it is in my participation in a Being without restriction, first and foremost a participation in the being of space beyond every particular point of view."[12]

If we take the camera model of vision to be the standard from which we understand human vision, then we only account for the perceptually positive and remain within the uni-perspectival. What is negative is simply what the camera does not "see." Yet, because, as Merleau-Ponty claims, the visible is "lined" (*tapisser*) with the invisible, humans have the possibility of a multi-perspectival form of vision, which includes the visually positive as well as the negative. The negative of human vision is not a simple lack of vision or where vision does not reach. The negative, the unseen or the invisible constitutes the visible.

One way the invisible implicates itself in the visible is through the perspective others have on the world or on oneself. In a strictly representational approach, the vision we have of other bodies is understood only in terms of its positive visual-data, and, therefore, perceptual encounters between people are understood as two related but ultimately separate visual phenomena. Yet, how we see things cannot be fully explained by the perceptual data we receive through *our* perceptual openness, because as Merleau-Ponty asserts,

12. Merleau-Ponty 1993b, 134.

Hasegawa, *Pine Trees*, right panel. Reproduction courtesy of Tokyo National Museum.

"the other's gaze on things is a second openness."[13] Included in our perception is an aspect of how we would be seen from the other's point of view. Merleau-Ponty explains that,

> the invisible of my body can invest its psychic energy in the other bodies I see. Hence my body can include elements drawn from the body of another, just as my substance passes into them; man is a mirror for man.[14]

Similarly, Nishida claims that "even our own bodies are seen from the outside... our body is that which sees as well as that which is seen."[15] Vision is multi-perspectival because, as Merleau-Ponty writes, we have "access to the very world the others perceive."[16]

Both Nishida and Merleau-Ponty are united in conceiving of vision as ambiguously constituted by seeing and being-seen. The being-seen—in this case, the other's gaze—counts in our vision but does not do so by being positively visible. If we could supplement our visual stream with a video-feed of another's visual stream we would have multiple perspectives by the addition of the positive and the positive. This hypothetical form of multi-perspectival vision would remain positivist and would remain limited to seeing only. As seeing-seen, however, the other's vision is implicated in my positive visual

13. Merleau-Ponty 1968, 59.
14. Merleau-Ponty 1993b, 130.
15. NKZ 8: 328.
16. Merleau-Ponty 1968, 57.

experience as negative, as absent, invisible, but nevertheless constitutive of my experience. The invisible is not added to the visible; invisibility "lines" the visible. As such the body does not simply have vision, it does not just pick up sensory data, it never simply sees, it is always ambiguously situated between seeing and being seen from multiple-vantage points.

Multi-perspectivalism as seeing-seen occurring between humans is one step closer to the account of vision Nishida and Merleau-Ponty put forth. To follow the full implications of their perceptual ontologies, however, this multi-perspectivalism must not only obtain between humans, while objects are taken to be non-perceptual. We must show how all of phenomenal reality is part of the perceptual fabric, and how this further obscures the distinction between visible and the invisible, positive and negative. Turning then to Rosalind Krauss's interpretation of Rodin, we must show how multi-perspectival vision also muddies the binary opposition between surface and depth.

Rodin's *The Three Shades*

In 1899 Auguste Rodin cast an over life-size version of *The Three Shades* (*Les trois ombres*): the centerpiece of his life's masterwork *The Gates of Hell* (*La porte de l'enfer*). Arranged according to the *Three Graces* motif, its three identical but counterposed figures offer multiple perspectives on the contorted bodies. In her work *Passages of Modern Sculpture*, one of the 21st century's most celebrated art-historians, Rosalind Krauss traces the history of sculpture and argues that one of the major concerns preoccupying practitioners before Rodin was the attempt to make the external surface of the body evince a properly proportioned internal configuration. "Surface," she adequately writes, "in traditional sculpture is understood to be a reflection of a pre-existent, internal armature or structure."[17] Krauss claims that although there is no actual skel-

Rodin, *The Three Shades* (1886). Reproduction courtesy of the Musée Rodin, Paris.

17. Krauss 1981, 267.

etal morphology or underlying musculature, the perfection of the external surface of a sculpture is nevertheless judged based on how it suggests proper proportion, symmetry, and harmony between the internal and external. Krauss situates Rodin as a turning point in this tradition insofar as his sculptures present bodies whose external structures are distorted such that they change the way vision operates regarding interiority and exteriority, surface and depth. "It is this communication between the surface and the anatomical depths that Rodin aborts,"[18] writes Krauss. Our vision of *Gates of Hell*, she claims, "is stopped at the surface."[19] Krauss goes on to interpret a great deal of those western artists working in the wake of Rodin—from Brancusi, the Futurists, to Picasso, Philip King, Robert Morris and Richard Serra—as exploiting a "unitary volume which dispenses with an internal armature, forcing all attention on the elaboration of its surface."[20] The forces these artists work with, she writes, act "over the surface of matter. Shaping those substances from the outside, these forces act with no regard to the intrinsic structure of the material on which they work."[21]

Krauss' conclusions are, however, in quite direct conflict with how the artist conceived of the relation between surface and depth in his work. Rodin claims that,

> Instead of imagining the various parts of the body as more or less flat surfaces, I represented them as projections of interior volumes. I endeavored to express in each swelling of the torso or the limbs the presence of a muscle or a bone that continued deep beneath the skin.[22]

Rodin's understanding of his work is much more in line with the ambiguity of surface and depth found in Nishida and Merleau-Ponty's writings. Despite her citing Merleau-Ponty, the claims she develops regarding vision and surfaces fail to consider the implications of his notion of depth and his wider theory of vision. Although she does not consider Nishida's writings, his concepts of "external perception" and "internal perception," to be discussed, likewise provide a counterpoint to her representational and positivist assumptions.

18. Ibid., 27.
19. Ibid., 29.
20. Ibid., 181.
21. Ibid., 33.
22. Rodin and Gsell 1984, 25.

Nishida and Merleau-Ponty offer a different way for understanding vision in relation to surface and depth, and Rodin's work—and his own thinking about that work—are all very well articulated for helping to overcome the representational framework, which Krauss remains confined to. Before re-engaging Krauss' claims, I would like to further explore how Nishida and Merleau-Ponty go beyond the representational and positivist framework toward multi-perspectivalism, and beyond the surface-depth binary.

Seeing-seen and internal-external-perception

One might accept the earlier proposal that the seeing-seen dynamic obtains in visual encounters between human beings, but it is more difficult to show how it is at work between human bodies and objects. Even though Rodin's *Three Shades* present a likeness of human bodies, which represent perceptual beings, we think the three bodies of the sculpture only participate in the perceptual in a metaphorical sense or in so far as they refer to perceptual beings. Yet, going further with our philosophers in comparison, we come to understand that human vision is not exhaustively definitive of the visual. Because the whole world is perceptual, it is not just that we see trees, for example, but that, as Merleau-Ponty explains, quoting André Marchand, the artist feels as though the trees looked back at him.[23] The visual is a perceptual fabric not limited to human vision. Thus Nishida thinks of human vision as only part of the worlds' own "self seeing."[24]

To include objects as part of the visual, both Nishida and Merleau-Ponty develop alternatives to the positivist conception of vision and objecthood. In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty gives an account of a reversible multi-perspectivalism regarding objects. Reading the following passage while keeping in mind multi-perspectival perception constituted by positive and negative visual aspects, one can feel the richness of human vision, and the radical conception of perceptual objecthood that follows.

> To see is to enter a universe of beings... to look at an object is to inhabit it, and from this habitation to grasp all things in terms of the aspect which they present to it. But in so far as I see those things too, they remain abodes open

23. Merleau-Ponty 1993b, 129.
24. Nishida 2012b.

> to my gaze, and, being potentially lodged in them, I already perceive from various angles the central object of my present vision. Thus every object is the mirror of all others. When I look at the lamp on my table, I attribute to it not only the qualities visible from where I am, but also those which the chimney, the walls, the table can "see"; but back of my lamp is nothing but the face which it "shows" to the chimney. I can therefore see an object in so far as objects form a system or a world, and in so far as each one treats the others round it as spectators of its hidden aspects and as guarantee of the permanence of those aspects. Any seeing of an object by me is instantaneously reiterated among all those objects in the world which are apprehended as coexistent, because each of them is all that the others "see" of it. Our previous formula must therefore be modified; the house itself is not the house seen from nowhere, but the house seen from everywhere. The completed object is translucent, being shot through from all sides by an infinite number of present scrutinies, which intersect in its depths leaving nothing hidden.[25]

Things are not opaque objects indifferent to perception. Because "things and my body are made of the same stuff," Merleau-Ponty claims that vision does not just come about in me, but "vision must somehow come about in them."[26] Humans do not, therefore, introduce vision into the world all by themselves. Because all the world is visual, all entities are in a relation of perceptual "donation and reception."[27] Likewise for Nishida, objecthood is far from the positivist understanding that frames it merely as extended matter. Objecthood for Nishida is something we as visual beings can lodge ourselves in and see the world from. "To view a thing aesthetically," he maintains, "must mean to submerge the self within the thing in itself. In abandoning the self, one conforms to objectivity itself."[28] Objects are not experienced as mere light-reflecting matter but are perceptual entities with which our perceptual bodies intertwine and see the world from.

Nishida's concepts "internal-perception" (内部知覚) and "external-perception" (外部知覚) give an account of perceptual objecthood that explains this intertwining as an ambiguous surface-depth relation. While these concepts initially seem to uphold an internal-external binary, Nishida writes,

25. Merleau-Ponty 2003, 79.
26. Merleau-Ponty 1993b, 125.
27. Stevens 2009, 138.
28. Nishida 1973, 101.

"there is no internal perception apart from external perception… the world of perception exists as internal-qua-external perception and vice versa."[29]

Nishida approaches the issue of multi-perspectival vision from the point of view of what he believes to be an invalid distinction between "direct" and "indirect" perception. This is a distinction he thinks is wrongly indexed to perception and memory respectively. The positivist representationalist would define sensory-data received in the present as the only "direct" form of perception. Memories, imaginings, desires would be "indirect" and therefore not perceptual. Regarding the inside of an object—a dimension we might remember or imagine—the common assumption would be that because it is "not directly an object of consciousness must mean that it is not directly in sensory consciousness."[30] Yet, Nishida asserts that "there is no way for consciousness, which is not direct to exist."[31] Any type of conscious activity, thought, or memory "must be direct for us,"[32] and therefore perceptual. Because all conscious activity is a part of sensation,

> when we see the exterior of a box it cannot be said that its interior is not directly an object of consciousness. For it cannot be said that in the present the facts of the past are not manifested in consciousness.… Moreover, it cannot be said that the consciousness of thought, in comparison to sensory consciousness, is necessarily indirect sensation.[33]

There are three possible counter-arguments to these conclusions that are important to consider. First, one could argue that we do not necessarily have accurate representations of the inside of objects, and therefore an unambiguous distinction between surface and depth remains. No doubt we can always be mistaken or inaccurate, however the question is not whether the negative corresponds to the positive, but how it constitutes it. While we could be wrong about whether Rodin's *Three Shades* are hollow or completely solid, our vision is nevertheless reaching below the surface with expectations that determine how the surface is perceived. One's vision is always determined by intentionality exceeding what can be explained by the surface of objects or

29. Nishida 1970, 189.
30. NKZ 3: 214.
31. NKZ 3: 210 (emphasis added).
32. NKZ 3: 210.
33. NKZ 3: 214.

by positive visual data. We could be wrong about this, but most of us would nevertheless be surprised if we scratched the surface of Rodin's sculpture to reveal blue or red matter underneath. If it turns out that we are wrong about the inside, the surprise does not refute but actually evinces the internal-external ambiguity of visual experience. If vision were not ambiguous regarding surface and depth there would be nothing to be surprised about, and the object would not appear different when we make a discovery contrary to our expectations: Expectations are part of the visual and part of the way we reach behind, around and within objects.

A second possible challenge to the idea that vision includes these negative, invisible aspects could be that multiple perspectives, or sensing absent aspects of an object, are achieved by remembering, imagining or modifying experiences after-the-fact, and adding these to positive visual experience. The important thing to keep in mind is that—and in this sense both Nishida and Merleau-Ponty follow Husserl's insight—the negative aspects are not re-presented or re-called into consciousness to gain a fuller multi-perspectival picture of what initially hits the eyeballs as a single perspective.[34] Nishida refutes the idea that thoughts or memories are non-perceptual aspects that are simply "connectable" to perception through second-order acts of cognition or reflection. "Concrete consciousness," Nishida writes: "is not a union of independent sensations, but is rather continuous. This kind of continuous unity is precisely the activity of visual perception."[35] Likewise Merleau-Ponty ex-plains:

> My present vision is not restricted to what my visual field actually presents to me, for the next room, the landscape behind that hill and the inside or the back of that object are not recalled or represented. My point of view is for me not so much a limitation of my experience as a way I have of infiltrating into the world in its entirety.[36]

34. Husserl refutes the idea that vision is first frontally constituted and only following willed cognitive acts filled out by other perspectives. His response, and likewise Nishida's and Merleau-Ponty's, is that there is no object that is not constituted by the "retended" past and "protended" future, by co-subjects and in co-intentionality. The multiple perspectives are included in the original presentation; in the immediate present the object is constituted with this horizon of multi-perspectivalism, without the need to recall or *re*-present anything.

35. NKZ 3: 146.

36. Merleau-Ponty 2003, 384.

Vision is not a "pure" perception constituted first exclusively by what reaches the eyes only later to be added to by memory or imagination of other views of an object. It is not that the uni-perspectival is given and the multi-perspectival is constructed: Perception is originally multi-perspectival. It is the uni-perspectival that is the artificial, second-order perceptual state achieved after-the-fact by cognitive acts that abstract from the original multi-perspectival view. To assume otherwise is to treat both memory and imagination as entirely distinct from the perceptual.

Because the negative—including memories, imaginings, fears, desires, anticipations, etc.—as well as the vantage point of others are included within the visual, our vision is always constituted by multiple perspectives. Therefore, when we see a house, Merleau-Ponty writes that,

> The house itself is not the house seen from nowhere, but the house seen from everywhere. The completed object is translucent, being shot through from all sides by an infinite number of present scrutinies, which intersect in its depths leaving nothing hidden.[37]

A final objection could be that Nishida and Merleau-Ponty are promoting a version of the positivist goal of non-situated total vision from nowhere/everywhere. The essential point is that according to both of their philosophies, the object is "shot through" not by an intellectual form of vision but by the body's vision. The "infinite scrutinies" are not achieved through intellection, nor are they had by adding up many singular perspectives. Without needing to see the entire object—because negative and positive aspects are included in all perception—the single vantage point expands to multiple vantage points. One need not triplicate a sculpted body, or even walk around to see different sides of an object, because from within every vantage point there are multiple views. "Every view of what is seen from the front is also a view of a hidden other side,"[38] writes De Waelhens. The single vantage point gives multi-perspectives because, while the missing sides are absent, they nevertheless count in the perception of the visible sides. Whereas the positivist, the Greek, and Renaissance approaches achieve multi-perspectival vision by adding up several positive representations, Nishida and

37. Merleau-Ponty 2003, 79.
38. De Waelhens 1973, 190.

Merleau-Ponty achieve multi-perspectival vision by revealing the negative within the positive.

Surface-Depth: The Three Shades as Perceptual Objects

Rodin's *Three Shades* are exemplary works for demonstrating the complexities of vision Nishida and Merleau-Ponty put forth. While Krauss does a great deal to illuminate sculpture in her writings, she remains within the representational understanding of vision and its various dualisms in claiming that Rodin's work holds vision on the surface of the Shades' bodies. Far from halting vision on the surface, Rodin's sculpture, its material, the texture of its flesh, its tormented musculature and contorted postures, and our bodily response to them, make palpable how vision goes far beyond what can be explained by light reflecting off of the surface of bodies.

The dark bronze surface of the Shades has an ambiguous relation to the light that touches its surface, taking it all in while giving it all back. Wrought in what appears to be endless layers of pitch-black lacquer, the bodies completely absorb and nullify the light they receive, pulling one's vision deep below the surface of their massive bodies, making one's own body feel light in comparison. It feels as though their bodies have a depth where they are just as black in every particle all the way to their core. And while the tar-like surface takes in all the light, absorbing and nullifying it, that shiny surface at the same moment reflects back bright whites, making the bodies appear partly invisible, see-through, insubstantial and luminous. Their flesh returns a white that can only be so white because it negates the blackest blacks. The Shades' flesh is by no means a simple "surface" nor is it simply dark as opposed to bright, heavy as opposed to light. There is no unambiguous visual exterior, but a dynamic between light and dark, surface and depth, perceiver and body perceived.

One of the most prominent features of *The Three Shades* is their painfully elongated and contorted necks. This pain is significant because seeing the sculpture reveals that the discomfort is not simply perceived as located external to one's own body nor is it simply within the Shades' bodies. Seeing a body includes a reiteration of how one would feel in those positions. In the case of the Shades' contortions, we do not simply have a positive representation of their pain. Because, as Nishida believes, the "visual act [is] accompanied

by its own muscular sensation,"[39] my feeling is more than a representation of another body. One does not merely see the necks painfully elongated as though the pain were situated only in their bodies, without any implications for one's own. As Merleau-Ponty claims, our bodies can include "elements drawn from the body of another."[40] The feeling given back to me by these contorted figures reconstitutes my body as it is projected beyond its own surface into the postures and pain the sculpture elicits. As the surface and depth of the Shades' bodies are render ambiguous, so too is the relation between the bodies seeing and the bodies of the sculpture. One does not simply see and recognize their pain: An echo of one's own body, its internal structure, its visibility and its vulnerability are felt when looking at Rodin's bodies.

Implicit in Krauss' understanding is the idea that the visual is limited to humans, and she therefore limits our encounter with this Shades' to the visual data reflecting off of its surface, thus excluding many of the rich visual aspects from the encounter with this great work. To do so is to reduce human vision to the level of mere physiological mechanism, and to bring it down to the level of a camera's apparatus, and to reduce the world to positivist conceptions of objecthood. The amazing thing about Rodin's work is how well it allows us to feel many of the seeing-seen multi-perspectival aspects the positivist account excludes. One can be quite overwhelmed and go through a multitude of sensations, emotions, desires and cognitions all of which arise from within the visual. We desire to inhabit the bodies, we feel an anxious compulsion to touch the bronze, to see the bodies in motion and to see what they see. We feel at once elevated by their beauty, but feel the painful limits of our own bodies in the face of the genius that brought these works about. We suffer the inability to perceive such depth in the world or in bodies we look at. We want to see every gesture that went into the works while at the same time taking in the whole in one unmediated perception. These art-works would look different if these negative invisible aspects were not lining the visible.

Because human perception includes the visible and invisible, positive and negative, sculpted bodies, or any object, are not perceived as "hard cores"

39. Nishida 1973, 26.
40. Merleau-Ponty 1993b, 130.

of positivity but experienced as "shot through from all sides."[41] Objects are not perceived as the terminus of vision but "abodes" open to our gaze, and ambiguous regarding surface and depth and internal and external vantage points.

Rodin's success is, therefore, not had by making vision remain on the surface of the bodies he sculpts. The external surface of his sculpture makes palpable internal deformations that force us to feel their crippling pain inside our own bodies, or more properly speaking, feel a pain not located exclusively in either body, but traversing the ambiguity of the internal and external aspects of our body and the sculpted bodies. If vision rested on surfaces one would not have feelings of discomfort in one's own body when seeing other contorted or disabled bodies, whether sculptured or human.

"Non-perceptual" space: distance-proximity, visual-tactile

Artworks such as Rodin's, and others Nishida and Merleau-Ponty discuss, are particularly useful for exploring perception, yet artworks are not the only site. The entire perceptual world affords such a visual experience. The final reversal that constitutes the full multi-perspectival form of vision is the inclusion of the world as a constitutive and active part of the visible. We have discussed how multi-perspectivalism obtains between humans, and between humans and objects. Now to explore the full ontological implications of Nishida's and Merleau-Ponty's accounts of vision, we are left to consider the space mediating between body and world in perceptual encounter.

Although both Aristotle's and Plato's understanding of vision have interesting exceptions to contemporary representational theory,[42] they set western

41. Merleau-Ponty 2003, 79.

42. In his *Theatetus* Plato develops his "activist" theory of perception where vision is so bound up as an essential way of world-revealing that he tries at every turn to avoid the unacceptable conclusion that knowledge could be perception. Far from conceiving perception as the mere passive reception of sensory data, his activist model has it that vision extends out through the eyes into the perceptual field to meet the object. Perception is a "birth" not in the head, but at the juncture of the emanations arising from both the perceived object and perceiving subject. This model put forth in the *Theatetus* also called an 'emission' theory of vision holds that it is not just the fire outside the head that is responsible for vision but that there is fire inside the eyes themselves that goes out to meet the world. This notion of perception is far removed from the

thinking on the path of understanding vision as cutting across a non-perceptual intervening medium, which is distinct from the perceiving subject and the object perceived. Bodies are thought to be at a distance from each other, and vision somehow travels across non-perceptual space while the bodies perceiving remain at a distance, not touching. To challenge these representational assumptions we must question one last set of binaries, those separating distance and proximity, vision and touch.

Bodies appear to be dispersed throughout our perceptual field, some touching and others at various distances from each other. One sees another body, a painting or sculpture across a room, and assumes that visual data is traveling between discrete bodies through non-perceptual space, and further assumes that this relation remains visual and at a distance unless one eliminates all of the intervening space by touching the object. This distance-proximity binary is one of the most basic assumptions structuring how we distinguish visual from tactile experience, yet neither Nishida nor Merleau-Ponty make such a simple distinction. In his essay "Logic and Life" (1936) Nishida holds that, "we can probably consider the tactile, however, to be what is most real to us. Our world of sensory perception is constituted where visual and tactile sensations come together."[43] Similarly Merleau-Ponty writes:

> We must habituate ourselves to think that every visible is cut out in the tangible, every tactile being in some manner promised to visibility, and that there is encroachment, infringement, not only between the touched and the touching, but also between the tangible and the visible, which is encrusted in it, as, conversely, the tangible itself is not a nothingness of visibility, is not without visual existence. Since the same body sees and touches, visible and tangible belong to the same world.[44]

If the visual and the tactile are related in this way, then the unambiguous distinction between distance and proximity is problematic. To see is not

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modern empiricists' representational assumptions, and like Merleau-Ponty and Nishida, Plato did not conceive of perception as the reception of mere sensory data, but involved the body extending into the visual world. The notion of a passive object being perceived and represented by an active perceiver was also foreign to Aristotle's thinking. According to him, perception was the simultaneous actualization of both the perceiver and the thing perceived.

43. Nishida 2012b, 234.

44. Merleau-Ponty 1968, 134.

to be at a simple distance from the object but is a way of being in contact with it. To see is to touch, it is "palpation with the look," and to "have at a distance."[45] If when I touch something with my hand I have eliminated all the distance between my body and it, and if to see is a way of touching, then to see something cannot be to remain at an unambiguous distance. It is not the case that there are perceiving bodies here, perceived objects there, and a non-perceptual medium between the two. Yet, neither are the spatial distances between beings completely eliminated. We must not overcome the representational assumption that treats bodies as absolutely perceptually discrete by going to the opposite extreme to posit pure continuity. Merleau-Ponty approaches this problem by conceiving of the relation between bodies as "distanceless distance," and invoking the same spatial-ambiguity, Nishida posits a "continuity of discontinuity"[46] (非連続の連続). To this effect Nishida writes: "A continuity of discontinuity is not simply a continuity, nor is it simply a discontinuity; and again, neither is it simply a jump from individual to individual; also, it does not mean that there is no connection between them."[47] Instead of non-perceptual space, the world is a "mass without gaps."[48] As Merleau-Ponty alludes to in a very East-Asian manner, there is not a collapse of identity between bodies: "there is not identity, nor non-identity, or non-coincidence, there is inside and outside turning about one another."[49]

This position between perceptual continuity and discontinuity affords further comparison with Merleau-Ponty's understanding of perceptual relationality as "chiasm." Although Nishida did not refer specifically to a chiasmatic structure, several commentators observe that the logic of chi-

45. Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," 127.

46. While Nishida uses this term mostly regarding time, Krummel and Nagatomo read it more broadly as a general ontological principle arrived at through self-negation. As they write:

> self-negation (自己否定), which [Nishida] also considers a "continuity of discontinuity" (非連続の連続).... We find that this dialectic [of self-negation] involves a *chiasma* of vertical and horizontal interrelations manifest in various types of relations—such as individual-environment, person-person, subject-object, etc. (Nishida 2012b, 47)

47. NKZ 8: 257.

48. Merleau-Ponty 1993a, 65.

49. Merleau-Ponty 1968, 264.

asmatic relationality is reflected in his thinking, particularly regarding his notion of "continuity of discontinuity."[50]

The western tendency is to distinguish entities, to say where bodies begin and end, to circumscribe an organism and define it separate from its environment, to eliminate ambiguity and uphold duality by identifying where bodies are continuous and where they are discontinuous. Within this framework vision and touch will inevitably maintain the binary of distance and proximity, yet if we go beyond the idea of a simple intervening non-perceptual space, the idea of an unambiguous distance between bodies is likewise overcome.

Multi-perspectivalism resolved: art as "seeing without a seer"

Both philosophers have similar accounts of the perceiver's ambiguous relation with the visible, yet it can appear questionable whether Nishida goes as far as Merleau-Ponty regarding one last aspect of multi-perspectival vision, and regarding developing a fully perceptual ontology. Nishida does posit that the external vision of an object includes a non-present but nonetheless perceptual aspect of its inside, and does claim that "even our own bodies are seen from the outside,"[51] yet initially at least, it appears that Merleau-Ponty goes one step further when he describes vision not just intertwining with but actually coming about from objects. He suggests this when he describes the painter's feeling of being looked back upon by the forest, and when he writes that "if things and my body are made of the same stuff, vision must somehow come about in them."[52]

50. As several scholars have pointed out (Krummel 2015, Krummel and Nagatomo in Nishida 2012, Kazashi 1999, Stevens 2009, Brubaker 2009, Cipriani 2009), many of Nishida's concepts are based on the same chiasmatic structure Merleau-Ponty employs, in that they instantiate various aspects of the ambiguity between identity and difference. He does so regarding temporality with his concept "continuity of discontinuity," regarding the relation of the "historical body" (歴史的身体) to the "historical world" (歴史的世界), regarding logic with "self-identity of absolute contradictories" (絶対矛盾的自己同一), regarding motor-perception with his concept "acting-intuition" (動的直感), and regarding expression with "interexpression" (絶対に相反するものの相互関係は、表現的でなければならない).

51. NKZ 8: 328.

52. Merleau-Ponty 1993b, 125 (emphasis added).

Exploring this possible discrepancy in the comparison we can, however, see that while Nishida does not posit specific objects in the perceptual field from which vision emanates, it might be that this absence is actually evidence of his attempting to push multi-perspectivalism to a deeper level. Nishida does not posit any particular objects from which vision arises, but does conceive of vision beyond the subject-object distinction with his concept "seeing without a seer" (見るものなくして見ること).[53] This is Nishida's attempt to give a truly non-psychologistic and non-internalist account of perception where vision arises in the world, yet is not localizable in either a subject or object. In this account of perception vision is not a human action but an event of a broader perceptual fabric. To posit "seeing without a seer" is to retain the event of vision (seeing), and the fabric in which it arises, but to drop the centralized subject (seer) as the exclusive node to which vision is attributed, or an object to which vision is received. Seeing is not a subject's act defined in opposition to an object, but is an event prior to the distinction between the two. When vision is conceived of without a subject as the entity in which it begins, this absence constitutes a thorough de-substantialization and de-localization of the perceiving subject, which conceives of multi-perspectivalism without discrete visual entities in which sight would originate: a reversibility so complete that there is no fixed locale from which perception emanates. In their commentary Krummel and Nagatomo explain, "here the meaning of 'seeing' extends beyond merely humans to encompass life or world in general."[54]

Merleau-Ponty also seeks to explore vision prior to the subject-object distinction, and also speaks of vision not as a feature exclusive to the human body, but as "a vision that we do not make but is made in us."[55] Yet, unlike Nishida Merleau-Ponty appears to want to maintain some minimal localization of the perceiving subject. As he says in *The Visible and the Invisible*, "I am always on the same side of my own body."[56] Brook Ziporyn points to this passage and to Merleau-Ponty's claim regarding Marchand, that the painter

53. NKZ 3:2 55.
54. Nishida 2012b, 360.
55. Merleau-Ponty 2007, 358.
56. Merleau-Ponty 1968, 81.

wants to be "penetrated by the universe, and not want to penetrate it,"[57] as evidence that the reversibility of Merleau-Ponty's account of vision stops short of a full "reversibility of reversibility"[58] and therefore remains a prioritization on the subject of vision. In conceiving of vision as the world's "self-seeing," it appears that Nishida does want to take this extra step towards a fully reversible form of reversibility. For him, vision is an event of the perceptual fabric of which body and world are co-constituted. It is the world, Nishida writes, that,

> constantly itself sees itself. Thus we are able to say that it itself determines itself in custom. What, being passive, is dynamic is custom. All things are inert. But in the historical world, the concrete is not merely inert; it is what actively forms things, what sees things.[59]

Whereas there is a discrepancy in the extent to which the philosophers want to take multi-perspectivalism, both conceive of this type of seeing as related to a de-localized form of motor-perception as exhibited in artistic expression. The world "at its root, is also a world whereby historical nature sees by making,"[60] writes Nishida. And because "making is seeing and seeing is making" it is not only that the historical world sees by making, but the world "makes continuously via seeing; to make is simultaneously to see. Life in this sense must be formatively (造形) artistic."[61] The movements of history, of which the painter's body and its expressive motions are one instance, are an exemplar of this type of "seeing." One way of being an artist is to engage the world as it determines itself through its self-seeing. Cézanne is Merleau-Ponty's exemplar because in his expressive gestures he likewise demonstrates a de-localized form of motor-perception where the artist is not the sole moving or seeing entity, and, therefore, in his practice a body-world ambiguity obtains where "it becomes impossible to distinguish between who sees and who is seen, who paints and what is painted."[62]

57. Merleau-Ponty 1993b, 129.
58. Ziporyn 2009, 80.
59. Nishida 2012a, 135.
60. Nishida 2012b, 255.
61. Ibid.
62. Merleau-Ponty 1993b, 129.

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Abbreviation

NKZ 『西田幾多郎全集』[Collected works of Nishida Kitarō]. Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, 1978, 19 vols.

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