

Journal of Visual Culture

<http://vcu.sagepub.com/>

On Visuality

Nicholas Mirzoeff

Journal of Visual Culture 2006 5: 53

DOI: 10.1177/1470412906062285

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://vcu.sagepub.com/content/5/1/53>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Journal of Visual Culture* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://vcu.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://vcu.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

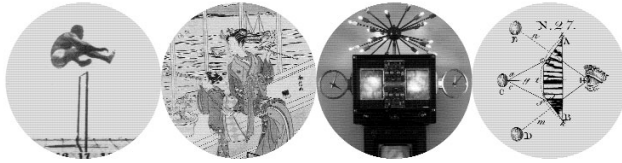
Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://vcu.sagepub.com/content/5/1/53.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Apr 13, 2006

[What is This?](#)

journal of visual culture



On Visuality

Nicholas Mirzoeff

Abstract

Visuality has become a keyword for the field of visual culture. However, while many assume that it is a postmodern theoretical term, the word was coined by the Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle in his lectures *On Heroes* (1841). The centrality of Carlyle's discourse of visualized heroism to Anglophone imperial culture was such that any claim to subjectivity had to pass by visuality. Here lies the contradictory source of the resonance of 'visuality' as a keyword for visual culture as both a mode of representing imperial culture and a means of resisting it by means of reverse appropriation. Reading Carlyle in the imperial context leads to a distinction between Visuality 1, which is proper to modernity, and a Visuality 2 that exceeds or precedes the commodification of vision. This tension was played out in the work of Carlyle's admirers Oscar Wilde and W.E.B. Du Bois and in the politics surrounding the abolition of slavery.

Keywords

Thomas Carlyle • W.E.B. Du Bois • slavery • Sojourner Truth • Joseph Turner • visuality • Oscar Wilde.

The field of critical practice that has come to be known as visual culture gained one of its signature impulses from Hal Foster's (1988) edited collection *Vision and Visuality*, now 18 years old. Taking the two terms of the title to refer to the physical processes of sight and the 'social fact' of visuality respectively, Foster nonetheless argued that they could not be simply distinguished. Rather he proposed a dialectical interface between the two that could rework then widespread models of a single dominant or bourgeois culture. To do so, the various contributors used tools from poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, art history and history, generating an

journal of visual culture [<http://vcu.sagepub.com>]

Copyright © 2006 SAGE Publications (London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi)

Vol 5(1): 53–79 [1470-4129(200604)5:1]10.1177/1470412906062285

ambitious project for the situation of vision and visuality within Western modernity. One of the few stones left unturned was the key term *visuality* itself. Far from being a poststructuralist term of art, *visuality* together with other related terms like *visualize* was in fact coined by the complex and controversial Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) in the late 1830s. Although Foster's account did acknowledge the importance of historical predecessors like Panofsky (Foster, 1988: xiv), it is hardly surprising that Carlyle did not feature in the discussion at that time. As one typical description by a leading Carlyle critic ran: 'Carlyle's unequivocally antidemocratic spirit, stylistic self-indulgence, shameless racism and deeply felt sexism have dropped him almost absolutely from favor at the moment' (Levine, 1997: 45). In recent years, however, 19th-century studies have reconfigured both its sense of the period in general and Carlyle in particular. Rather than concentrating on the critique of a dominant bourgeoisie, studies of the period now emphasize its complexity (Joyce, 1994), with debates over the status of key terms such as representation (Plotz, 2000), and with all of this understood above all in relation to imperialism (Hall, 2002). Carlyle has emerged in this context as a key figure. Opposed to Chartism, panopticism and all the emancipatory movements that stemmed from the French Revolution, Carlyle imagined a moral imperialism led by great men in a visualized narrative that came to have considerable resonance in the period. Indeed, in this era of Christian-inspired imperial ventures, his ideas do not sound altogether unfamiliar today. For many key figures in emancipatory movements of the period, Carlyle's vision of the hero had to be stood on its head, as Marx did to Hegel, in order to create a sense of possibility. These strategies can be seen as part of the modern production of what I will here call the visual subject, a person who is both the agent of sight (regardless of biological ability to see) and the object of discourses of *visuality*. In many instances, the claim to visual subjectivity was part of a general claim to majoritarian status within Western nations for those like women, the enslaved and their free descendants, and people of alternative sexuality. The centrality of Carlyle's discourse of visualized heroism to Anglophone imperial culture was such that any claim to such subjectivity had to pass by *visuality*. Here lies the contradictory source of the resonance of 'visuality' as a keyword for visual culture as both a mode of representing imperial culture and a means of resisting it by means of reverse appropriation.

Visuality (1988)

The introduction to Foster's 1988 volume continues to be widely cited as it is one of the few efforts to define the term (Rose, 2003), so his formulas are still of importance. In the opening paragraph, Foster (1988) proposed that: 'Although vision suggests sight as a physical operation, and *visuality* sight as a social fact, the two are not opposed as nature to culture' (p. ix). Now that the critical work of Judith Butler and others has so effectively reduced the nature/culture divide (Butler, 1990; Halberstam, 1998), it is all the more apparent that in dealing with vision and *visuality*:

the difference between the terms signals a difference within the visual . . . a difference, many differences, among how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing or the unseen therein. (Foster, 1988: ix)

These differences are, however, seen as being regulated by each 'scopic regime' into 'one essential vision'. *Vision and Visuality* sought to disrupt this homogenizing process by discussing the physiology of vision and its psychic import, and to 'socialize this vision' and its production of subjectivity. By placing this individual visuality into tension with 'its own production as intersubjectivity', one would arrive at an understanding of the 'dialectic of the gaze'. The project in general sought to 'historicize modern vision', a history that needed to be defined, determined and questioned. This was an ambitious project indeed, and its continued importance is clear. Yet as the slippage over the nature/culture divide shows, the critical apparatus used to support it often elides conceptual difficulties. Martin Jay adopted the notion that a given 'scopic regime' was hegemonic in a particular period of time from the film theorist Christian Metz (Jay, 1988: 3; Metz, 1982: 61). Against what he saw as a dominant tradition of Cartesian perspective, Jay (1988) argued that Western modernity should be 'understood as a contested terrain, rather than as a harmoniously integrated complex of visual theories and practices' (p. 4). Jay named these competitive visualities 'visual subcultures', borrowing a term from the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies. It would be particularly appropriate for visuality as Raymond Williams devoted a section of his classic *Culture and Society* (1958) to Carlyle. Thinking of vision in terms of subcultures is a provocative idea that would suggest an examination of vision and visuality as what Paul Gilroy (1993), himself following Williams, called in a different context 'structures of feeling, producing, communicating and remembering' (p. 3). In fact, Jay proposed a scheme, which he acknowledged to be provisional, opposing Renaissance and Baroque ways of seeing, with the 'Renaissance' being subdivided into 'perspectival' and 'descriptive' modes. Using similar language, Jonathan Crary (1988) introduced his now familiar theory of the collapse of the *camera obscura* as a model of vision in terms of a discontinuity within 'a dominant Western speculative or scopic tradition of vision' (p. 29). This essay develops the idea of visuality by thinking about how it emerged into Western discourse at a specific and charged moment of modernity as a conservative critique of Enlightenment and its emancipations. It then shows how subcultural practice appropriated, reversed and veiled that idea as a means of attaining precisely those emancipations.

Revolution and Revelation

Thomas Carlyle coined both 'visuality' and the verb 'visualizing' in a series of writings between 1837 and 1841 designed to create a spiritual antidote to modernity that was nonetheless strongly supportive of imperialism. The terms followed from his sense of his work as embodying the 'eye of history'

(1989[1837]: 8). By this he certainly did not mean the objectivity promoted both by modern historians and Carlyle's own contemporaries like Leopold von Ranke. Like his otherwise opposed contemporary Macaulay, he refused the technical apparatus of historical research such as archives or even libraries (Rigney, 1996: 348–9; Schoch, 1999: 27–30), seeing them as the product of 'Mr Dryasdust' (Carlyle, 1843). History was far more than the accumulation of facts and historians themselves were often questionable for Carlyle because they presented events as '*successive*', while the things done were often '*simultaneous*' (Schoch, 1999: 29). To capture this simultaneous quality, Carlyle wanted to convey an 'Idea of the whole' (Rigney, 1996: 344), which he rendered by means of what he called 'a succession of vivid pictures' (Schoch, 1999: 38). These pictures were, it might be said, History paintings that had long been celebrated for their ability to sustain a narrative within a single frame. Visuality, then, ordered and narrated the chaotic events of modern life in intelligible, visualized fashion. It is important to note that Carlyle was explicitly opposed to the new physiology of vision (Crary, 1988, 1991) in which seeing and understanding were the same process. For example, the British scientist David Brewster explained in 1832:

that the 'mind's eye' is actually the body's eye and that the retina is the common tablet on which both classes of impressions are painted, and by means of which they receive their visual existence according to the same optical laws. (Smajic, 2003: 1115)

Following the convention in British letters of the period, Carlyle distinguished between 'inward' and 'outward' visual impressions, holding that both were meaningless unless motivated by the inner or spiritual eye, which, once opened, renders the observer into a 'Seer' (Smajic, 2003: 1118). The homonym between see-er and Seer was part of Carlyle's intent to stress a spiritually motivated vision of history.

This visualized history can be seen in his discussion of the storming of the Bastille by the *sans-culottes* of the faubourg Saint-Antoine on July 14, 1789. Carlyle used his 'eye of history' to make events clear to a minor historical actor, the elector Thuriot:

But outwards, behold, O Thuriot, how the multitude flows on, welling through every street: tocsin furiously pealing, all drums beating the *générale*: the Suburb Saint-Antoine rolling hitherward, wholly as one man! Such vision (spectral yet real), thou, O Thuriot, as from thy Mount of Vision, beholdest in this moment: prophetic of what other Phantasmagories, and loud-gibbering Spectral Realities, which thou yet beholdest not, but shalt! (Carlyle, 1989[1837]: 198)

From his Mount of Vision, the historian can see the 'future' that the historical actor of course could not. His Revolution was visualized into a picture, complete with sound effects, as a drama of spectral realities. His

contemporaries recognized the unusual nature of Carlyle's writing. In a letter to Carlyle written in 1837, his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson praised his new style, asserting that: 'I think you see in pictures.' Emerson's remark implied that it was possible to see otherwise than in pictures, meaning as a series of unconnected images or impressions. Mere sensory data did not form pictures in this view that seems to be a proleptic anticipation of Heidegger's declaration of the 'age of the world-picture'. Musing on the effect of Carlyle's pictorial writing, Emerson intriguingly continued that 'it has the aroma of Babylon', by which he meant the complexity of the modern metropolis (Lavally, 1968: 12). This pictorial vision that Carlyle would come to call *visuality* is, then, at once pre-historic and utterly modern, a modernity that opens to the abyss.

Carlyle's pictorial history was reacting to what he called 'the loud-roaring Loom of Time with all its French Revolutions, Jewish Revelations' (Carlyle, 1989[1837]: ix), linking the French Revolution to its emancipation of French Jews. This sense of modernity as mechanized chaos was deeply antithetical to his beliefs in a patriarchal Tradition but he nonetheless recognized that he must respond to it. Political revolution and emancipated revelation were so intertwined as to weave 'the deranged condition of our affairs' (Carlyle, 1855: 2), thereby suggesting that Enlightenment had in fact ushered in an age of unreason, rather than exert its claim to enact rationality. In counterpoint to this spectral reality of everyday people, with their eternal tendency to amalgamate as Revolution, Carlyle constructed a visualized form of history, dominated by heroes. In his lectures *On Heroes*, Carlyle argued that only the hero had the vision to see history as it happened, a viewpoint that was obscured for the ordinary person by the specters and phantasmagorias of emancipation. Carlyle imagined the eye of history sweeping across what he called 'clear *visuality*', 'visualizing' what could not be seen by the minor actors of history themselves (Carlyle, 1993[1841]): hereafter *OH*). *Visuality* was, then, the clear picture of history available to the hero as it happens and the historian in retrospect. It was not visible to the ordinary person whose simple observation of events did not constitute *visuality*. Consequently, Carlyle's new language of *visuality* was explicitly opposed to the Benthamite theory of reform that has come to be epitomized in the visual technology of the panopticon (Foucault, 1977). Carlyle's concern was to provide a history and theory for his conservative mode of anti-emancipation, resistant to what he later called 'Bethamee [sic] constitutions', Chartism and the emancipation of the enslaved. In Carlyle's view, the Hero that stood against the modern tide of darkness as:

the living light-fountain, which it is good and pleasant to be near. The light which enlightens, which has enlightened the darkness of the world: and this not as a kindled lamp only, but rather as a natural luminary shining by the gift of Heaven; a flowing light-fountain, as I say, of native original insight, of manhood and heroic nobleness; in whose radiance all souls feel that it is well with them. (*OH*: 2–3)

The visualized Hero was both the true source of Enlightenment and its primordial origin, a temporal jump that only could be understood in a visualized form of writing as picture.

Enlightenment was reversed in Carlyle's view of history to become the anti-rational, following his assertion that the world is '*magical* and more to whosoever will *think* of it'. The Hero wrestled with 'that great mystery of TIME . . . a force that is not we' (p. 9). For even as he described his work as history, Carlyle's genealogy of the hero ignored standard chronology and revered 'Tradition' over '*theorizing*'. Writing just after Louis Daguerre and William Henry Fox Talbot had announced the success of their photographic devices, Carlyle declared:

What an enormous *camera-obscura* magnifier is Tradition! . . . Enough for us to discern, far in the uttermost distance, some gleam as of a small real light shining in the centre of that enormous *camera-obscura* image; to discern that the centre of it all was not a madness and nothing, but a sanity and something. (p. 23).

This passage was more prescient than one might at first think, as photographic enlargement was a technological development that was yet to come. Even if it was now outdated as a physiological model of perception (Crary, 1991), the *camera obscura* revealed rather than obscured those truths inherent in Time that Carlyle called Tradition. This anti-theoretical, anti-chronological History is a light penetrating the darkness of the camera in the hope of preserving sanity, a tradition that ran from the Norse gods, via Shakespeare, Dante and Goethe (Carlyle's anachronistic order) to *The Twilight of the Gods*.

In his evaluation of the heroism of Dante, he argued that the Divine Comedy was a 'Song' in which 'every compartment of it is worked out, with intense earnestness, into truth, into clear visuality' that became a 'painting' (OH: 79). Interestingly, then, from its very conception visuality was a multi-media term, connecting art, literature and music, as Carlyle insisted that 'Dante's painting was not graphic only, brief, true, and of a vividness as of fire in dark night' (p. 80). This form of language offered clear visual metaphors, even as its meaning was opaque, perhaps unknowable, because of its spiritual form. Carlyle created a visual Platonism in which the shadows on the cave wall are as much as mere humans can be expected to see against 'the great deep sacred infinitude of Nescience, whither we can never penetrate, on which all science swims as a mere superficial film' (p. 80). Not for the last time Carlyle offers here what appears to be a proleptic anticipation of cinema as theorized by Baudry and others, indicating the extent to which modernity instantiated what Walter Benjamin was to call the 'optical unconscious'. Carlyle offered a dialectic of pessimism in which only the Hero stands against the 'cries of Democracy, Liberty and Equality, and I know not what—the notes being all false' (p. 12). What is required of the ordinary person is not visuality but hero-worship, a proper submission to the quasi-divine authority of the hero.

Heroism was, inevitably enough, gendered as vigorously masculine in keeping with colonial views of proper masculinity (Levine, 2003: 258–9; Wilson, 2003). As Pam Morris (1999) has argued: ‘the hero embodies a specifically masculine national ideal; the virility of the hero holds at bay threats of cultural effeminacy and racial degeneration’ (p. 288). Embodiment was not denied by Carlyle’s theory of visuality but rendered into a very specific form of heroic vigor. Implicit in this view is a parallel between the hero and the historian, who both stand against the chaos of modernity (Rigney, 1996: 351). When Carlyle spoke of the hero and hero-worship as ‘the one fixed point in modern revolutionary history’ (*OH*: 15) he had in fact doubled that point so that it represented both the hero and his worshipper, the historian. The imperial viewpoint was complex, even paradoxical. Carlyle’s work on heroism was well received except for the question of his new language, which would include the terminology of visuality under discussion here. In one typical notice in *The Monthly Review*, Carlyle’s writing was held to be excessive and German: ‘a more dangerous model than Mr. Carlyle as regards style of composition, could not be chosen. Were the majority of our writers to ape him, our language would soon be *un-Englished*’ (Barrett, 1997[1841]: 97). A number of threads of imperial disdain are mingled in this remark. The reviewer, Joseph Barrett, calls attention to the alien terminology of Carlyle’s writing, while no doubt reminding his readers that Carlyle was himself un-English, that is to say, Scottish. In 1835 Carlyle’s rival historian Thomas Babbington MacCauley had defined the proper imperial subject as a mimic man (Bhabha, 1994: 81) but Carlyle was reviewed as being ‘an originalist of a very high order’ (Barrett, 1997[1841]: 97). For the suspicious imperial mind, the British empire was properly the English empire and its Celtic fringe remained un-English, a stage closer to the ‘ape’ of more recently acquired colonies that the reviewer evokes for his readers. This tension within the presumed homogeneity of ‘Englishness’ requires, as Gilroy (1993) has argued, an engagement ‘with the supra-national and imperial world’ (p. 11). Specifically, it will mean thinking about visuality as a counterpoint between the abolition of slavery and the ‘condition of England’ that is developed below.

The Anti-Heroes

Certainly Carlyle always thought in terms of a hero located in a complex imperial system. His heroic vision of the impossibility of emancipation challenged the Benthamite model of the reform prison that has subsequently been enshrined by Foucault and others as the hegemonic mode of visual order in the 19th century. For a world dominated by heroes required that its anti-heroes be treated with severity. This contest marked, for example, the colonial history of Australia with its competing visions of punishment and reform as what has been called the ‘gulag continent’ (Perera, 2002: #9). The penal colony explicitly refused Benthamite panopticism, despite Bentham’s 100-page pamphlet *The Panopticon vs. New South Wales* advocating the building of panopticons in Australia. Deportation was, however, perceived

and enacted as the opposite to the reforming prison. Once in Australia, convicts were expected to labor for the government with the ultimate goal of becoming emancipists, a legal category that allowed the status of felon to be set aside for that of citizen, albeit under permanent threat of withdrawal for any breach of the law. At the same time, because emancipation had been the goal for the white convicts, it was impossible for the indigenous population. In 1860 the newly established Board for the Protection of Aboriginals created internment camps for Aboriginals in order to dislocate the category of the native from that of the citizen (Perera, 2002: #18). These camps placed people from different language groups and different parts of the country in one place, behind cattle fences. The official expectation was that so-called 'full-blood' Aboriginals would simply die out. Emancipation was conditional for some but impossible for others, who were then compelled to become invisible. It is, then, no surprise to read Carlyle's opinion that criminals, 'the Devil's regiments of the line', were not to be dealt with domestically. A proper prison governor 'will sweep them pretty rapidly into some Norfolk Island, into some special Convict Colony or remote domestic Moorland, into some stone-walled Silent System' (Carlyle, 1855: 14). Norfolk Island was a penal colony within the penal colony, an island off the coast of New South Wales where truly draconian measures were applied to discipline recalcitrant convicts from 1825 onwards. The 'silent system' was the regime of compulsory silence in prison introduced in the 19th century over Bentham's vigorous objections:

In a state of solitude, infantine superstitions, ghosts, and specters, recur to the imagination. This, of itself, forms a sufficient reason for not prolonging this species of punishment, which may overthrow the powers of the mind, and produce incurable melancholy. (Semple, 1993: 132)

What Bentham saw as an occasional punishment came to be adopted as a system, endorsed by Carlyle and other conservatives. Carlyle's visuality was, then, opposed to panopticism as a mode of visual order and as a specific system of controlling punishment. Hostile to social reform and emancipation, it offered a modern mode of picturing history, which contested panopticism and liberalism throughout the 19th century with practical as well as theoretical results.

The Heroic Observer

Carlyle's anti-emancipatory definition of visuality recalls Crary's widely cited history of observation, which posits a radical transition from the '*camera obscura* model' to that of the embodied observer. Carlyle, as we have seen, imagined the embodied Hero as the agent of visuality, located within the camera obscura of tradition. This intersection between the putatively distinct models was epitomized by the case of Goethe, Carlyle's greatest influence. Crary represented Goethe's *Theory of Color* marking the break between the

old and new models, the very ‘threshold of our modernity’ (Crary, 1991: 71). At the same time, Goethe was Carlyle’s ‘chosen specimen of the Hero as Literary Man’, whom he visualized as having a ‘vision of the inward divine mystery: and strangely, out of his books, the world rises imaged once more as godlike, the workmanship and temple of a God’ (OH: 136). This description might bring to mind J.M.W. Turner’s *Light and Colour (Goethe’s Theory) – The Morning After the Deluge – Moses Writing the Book of Genesis* (1843), an image of the newly risen world after the Flood (see Figure 1). The same painting is cited by Crary as evidence of the ‘new status of the observer’. One might also make a case that this picture, painted two years after the publication of *On Heroes*, illustrates Carlyle’s Hero within the *camera-obscura* theory of tradition and his vision of Goethe’s ‘mild celestial radiance’ (OH: 136).



Figure 1 J.M.W. Turner, *Light and Colour (Goethe’s Theory) – The Morning After the Deluge – Moses Writing the Book of Genesis* (1843). © Tate, London 2005.

Rather than forcing Turner's painting into one experimental classification or another, it might be preferable to see it as a struggle with visibility. The scholarly literature on *Light and Colour* and its pendant *Shade and Darkness: The Evening of the Deluge* (1843) (see Figure 2) is dense with learned readings of Newton, Goethe and Turner's notebooks. In their extended convolutions, it sometimes seems impossible to ascribe any definitive meaning to the painting at all (Finley, 1999: 200–8; Gage, 1969: 173–88). The circle that dominates *Light and Colour*, taken by Crary to be the sun, is instead read by Gerard Finley to be a demonstration of Goethe's theory 'of prismatic bubbles "emulous of light"' (Finley, 1999: 203). The figurative elements of the painting have been less carefully worked over, perhaps because of their curiously ambivalent status. *Light and Colour* represents that moment of prehistory just after the Flood from which History begins again. Unlike the later *Angel Standing in the Sun* (1846) (see Figure 3), cited by Crary, the figure at the center of the 1843 painting is hard to see, challenging vision and visibility alike by its refusal of clarity. It is in fact Moses writing the book of Genesis, an anachronism within the picture itself because the moment after the Flood long precedes the period of Moses. The painting places Moses in the future perfect tense that Derrida has described as being that of the specter, as if to say 'Moses will have written the book of Genesis'. Reinforcing that spectrality is the crowd of drowned ghosts at the bottom right, who also predict the Day of Judgement that is yet to come. These drowned shades – recalling that 'shade' was also a term for ghost in the period – also make a visual connection to Turner's *The Slave Ship* (1839), whose drowning Africans recalled an altogether different Fall and migration (Gilroy, 1993: 13–14). In the margins of his copy of Goethe's color theory, Turner noted: 'Nothing about shadow or Shade as Shade and Shadow Pictorially or Optically' (Finley, 1999: 203). Turner held that darkness was an active optical force in tension with light, rather than being the simple absence of light. So as much as *Light and Colour* is clearly about light, it also finds a place for shades, literally and pictorially. Writing on Goethe, Carlyle observed that: 'Everywhere the human soul stands between a hemisphere of light and another of darkness', following Goethe's own aphorism on the impossibility of disowning the 'shadow of ourselves' (Harris, 1978: 80, 62). Turner's poetic epigram for the picture came from his poem *The Fallacies of Hope*, a title that belies the redemptive promise of the morning after the Flood in Christian eschatology:

The ark stood firm on Ararat; th' returning sun
Exhaled earth's humid bubbles, and emulous of light,
Reflected her lost forms, each in prismatic guise
Hope's harbinger, ephemeral as the summer fly
Which rises, flits, expands and dies.

The ghosts are these 'lost forms' of the epigram, which come and go like the flies of summer. It may be that these figurative and anachronistic elements in the painting have received less attention precisely because to do so appears to diminish its Enlightened modernity and call attention to its superstitious

and supra-rational dimensions. Rather than solving the disputes between Goethe and Newton, Romanticism and Enlightenment, or Religion and Reason, the painting dazzlingly represents the temporal and spatial instabilities of modernity, haunted by the ghosts of the Atlantic slave trade and the Enlightenment.



Figure 2 J.M.W. Turner, *Shade and Darkness: The Evening of the Deluge* (1843). © Tate, London 2005.



Figure 3 J.M.W. Turner, *The Angel Standing in the Sun* (1846). © Tate, London 2005.

Double Visuality

Turner's refusal to adjudicate between what is seen, what is invisible, what is in shade and what is imagined complicates the opposition between vision and visuality posited by Foster's volume. In concluding his *Techniques of the Observer*, Jonathan Crary (1991) offered us a choice of two modes of observation:

one led toward all the multiple affirmations of the sovereignty and autonomy of vision derived from this newly empowered body, in modernism and elsewhere. The other path was toward the increasing standardization of and regulation of the observer that issued from knowledge of the visionary body, toward forms of power that depended on the abstraction and formalization of vision. (p. 150)

What is striking about this distinction for the purposes of this discussion is that it is a tension within vision that effectively displaces visuality. On the one hand, there was an embodied vision that would come to be epitomized by the 'sovereign' power of the modern *flâneur*, Baudelaire's 'prince everywhere in possession of his incognito'. On the other, the formal organization of knowledge derived from that vision into abstract schemas was at the heart of modern science. Visuality, being neither a property of the body nor quantifiable as an abstract quality, has disappeared. That elides a central political and cultural debate in the decade following Carlyle's lectures as to who or what might be seen to be the Hero. In the 1840s, all political tendencies in Britain from Chartism to patrician aristocracy negotiated their strategies in relationship to the discourse of Carlyle's visualized heroism (Morris, 1999: 287). In other words, this was not a debate about vision at all but about representation, now conceived in visualized terms. The key question about heroic leadership and the visuality it deployed was who was best able to deploy it. For Charlotte Brontë, a critical admirer of Carlyle's theory, it followed that, in her novel *Shirley* (1849), the Tory prime minister 'Wellington is the soul of England . . . the fit representative of a powerful, a resolute, a sensible, and an honest nation' (Morris, 1999: 288). In similar but opposed fashion, Thomas Attwood declared on presenting the first Chartist petition in July 1839: 'They would prove that the men of Birmingham *were* England' (Plotz, 2000: 88). That is to say, the Chartists and other radicals claimed that their political demonstrations represented a clear statement of their desires and goals to which the nation must respond because the Chartists were the nation. The most devastating response to that argument came from Carlyle in his rapidly written book *Chartism* (1839). Carlyle argued that 'the deep dumb inarticulate' crowds of Chartist demonstrations were manifesting something but that they had no means to articulate what it was (Plotz, 2000: 97). The crowd was simply a manifestation of a 'disease' within what Carlyle famously called 'the condition of England'. As we might expect, Carlyle's solution to the problem of the working classes was that they should emigrate to the colonies (Carlyle, 1915[1839]: 234–8). Empire became the cure to the disease of England. It was the impact of Chartism that led Carlyle to his theory of visualized heroism. He asserted that the problem was caused by a *laissez-faire* approach, whereas 'the Working Classes cannot any longer go on without government; without being *actually* guided and governed' (p. 197). The provisional solution he arrived at was a return to a 'real Aristocracy' formed of 'the Best and the Bravest' (p. 201). This was an imperial question, as Carlyle emphasized. For, having conquered the world, the second task of the 'English People in World-History', as Carlyle put it, was how to share the 'fruit of said conquest'. The way not to accomplish it was such 'Benthamee' ideas as 'elective franchise, ballot-box, representative assembly' (p. 214). In short, the discourse of heroic visuality and its world-picture was a specific response to the imperial task assigned to the English by world history, designed to forestall democracy and enhance a Platonic meritocracy of a small elite. Visuality was a point of contestation in political and cultural discourse over the very meaning of representation. Was representation possible only through a heroic male body or could others

represent? Must those others be individuals or could there be a collective representation? How, then, might the subaltern and subcultural groups in the metropole and the colonies come to representation?

Similar questions have been asked of modernity by the collective project of subaltern studies. Taking the term 'subaltern' from the work of Antonio Gramsci, this approach asks how history can approach those often thought to be 'outside' history, such as the peasants and Dalits of colonial India. In his study of Marx's theory of capital, emergent in the same period as the figure of visuality, Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) has described two modes of history. History 1 is that history predicated by capital for itself 'as a precondition' to its own existence, whereas History 2 is that which cannot be written into the history of capital even as prefiguration and so has to be excluded (pp. 63–4). Chakrabarty has sought to recover that History 2 without privileging it either as the new dominant mode of History, or as the dialectical other to History 1. Rather, he suggests, 'History 2 is better thought of as a category charged with the function of constantly interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History 1' (p. 66). This doubled interaction offers a mode of thinking about visuality that incorporates its embodied dimension at an individual and collective level, together with visuality as cultural and political representation. In these terms, Visuality 1 would be that narrative that concentrates on the formation of a coherent and intelligible picture of modernity that allowed for practical, even heroic, action. In this sense, photography, for example, contributed to Visuality 1 in the manner famously critiqued by Baudelaire as the tool of commerce, science and industry. More important to the form of visuality that was proper to capital were the new means of disciplining vision, such as the color-blindness tests that were introduced for industrial workers in the 1840s, regardless of their efficacy by modern standards. Consequently, the modern production process that culminated in Taylor's and Ford's systems came to rely on a reflexive hand-eye co-ordination, trained in sport, managed by the distribution of corrective lenses, and controlled with sight tests (Smith, 1993). Visuality 2 would be that picturing of the self or collective that exceeds or precedes that incorporation into the commodification of vision by capital and empire. One version of this mode of visuality was that 'irrational modernism . . . that escapes . . . appropriative logic' (Jones, 2004: 24), such as certain forms of Dada. As Carlyle's exaltation of it makes clear, this characterization does not necessarily imply that Visuality 2 is necessarily politically radical or progressive, only that it is not part of capital's 'life process'. There are multiple forms of Visuality 2, such that difference 'lives in intimate and plural relationships to capital, ranging from opposition to neutrality' (Chakrabarty, 2000: 66). The two modes of visuality are not opposed in a binary system but operate in deconstruction, as a relation of difference that is always deferred.

In this sense, visual culture would be the product of the collision, intersection and interaction of Visuality 1 and Visuality 2, between capital's picturing of the world and that which cannot be commodified or disciplined. 'Culture' is used in the charged sense that it had in the 19th century as defining the possibilities of representation (Williams, 1958). This drama was

affirmatively described by Marx as 'all that is solid melts into air' and, conversely, by Carlyle as 'chaos' that left open the struggle to be represented in a constantly changing environment. While they placed different values on that constant mobility, both agreed it was caused by what Carlyle called 'Industrialism', its 'cash nexus' and the resultant 'nomadism'. To adapt the tag of the Frankfurt school, the visual culture industry might be described as that process by which the excess of visuality in Visuality 2 is made available as part of the modernizing process to Visuality 1. Visuality, far from being a postmodern solution predicated by contemporary visual culture to the problems of medium-based visual disciplines, is then a problem of the conceptual scheme of modernity and representation that underlies it. Visuality is very much to do with picturing and nothing to do with vision, if by vision we understand how an individual person registers visual sensory impressions. Writing of the 19th-century democratic subject, Patrick Joyce (1994) has described this mode of imagination as being 'an imaginary that is not the image of something else, but without which there cannot be something else' (p. 4). Instances of such imagination might be the representation of the working class, or women, or African diaspora people, who had no place in the extant political system but were demanding one. It was precisely such ideas that haunted Carlyle from his history of the French Revolution, where he saw that 'The Wonted tumbles down; by imitation, by invention, the Unwonted hastily builds itself up', leading to such 'unpremeditated outbursts of Nature, such as an Insurrection of Women' (Lee, 2004: 110, 127). Carlyle's system of the hero and hero-worship was designed precisely to prevent such insurrections of Visuality 2 but was never adequate to the task.

It might seem overly academic to speak of two forms of visuality in this fashion. But the 19th-century experience of the dramas of modernity did frame it in this fashion. For example, in Edward Gosse's (1963[1907]) classic *Father and Son*, his father, a member of the Plymouth Brethren sect of Christianity, struggled to resolve his interior sense of self with the external observations he made as a fossil scientist during the debates over evolution. Gosse senior refused to subscribe to Darwinism, even as he also declined to abandon his research. Writing long after the event, Gosse reconstructed his father's internal struggle as incommensurable:

Through my Father's brain, in that year of scientific crisis, 1857, there rushed two kinds of thought, each absorbing, each convincing, yet totally irreconcilable. There is a peculiar agony in the paradox that truth has two forms, each of them indisputable, yet each antagonistic to the other. (p. 84).

For Gosse the younger, there was no real dispute between what he termed 'superstition' and the conquering tide of 'reason'. Gosse senior held that 'when the catastrophic act of creation took place, the world presented, instantly, the structural appearance of a planet on which life had long existed' (p. 87). The theory failed with geologists and Christians alike, casting its author into ridicule. Yet a web search today throws up dozens of such

accounts of creation (see www.creationism.org) and a poll in February 2003 suggested that only 28 percent of United States' citizens were persuaded by the theory of evolution, while 63 percent were convinced of the existence of the devil. While I have no desire to support such ideas, it is also clear that the narrative of modernization offered in *Father and Son* has not dispelled them. No sooner had George W. Bush won re-election in 2004 than the Georgia school board attempted to place a sticker on the front of its biology textbooks, claiming that evolution was only a theory not a scientific fact.¹

Chaos Unbound

Indeed, although Carlyle's views became yet more pessimistic as he grew older, his influence continued to grow, giving him a 'long (and largely unremarked) legacy in reactionary thought' (Plotz, 2000: 95). Carlyle's bombast would be of merely antiquarian interest had it not been so widely influential in the 19th century, as a source of positive and negative inspiration. If Carlyle's first thoughts on visuality were prompted by the memory of the French Revolution and the recent experience of the emancipation of the enslaved, British and European history in the 1840s served to reinforce his pessimism as to the possibility of maintaining a glimpse of the truth. After the decade of Chartism culminated in the revolutions of 1848, Carlyle turned his attention to the state of the British Empire in a series of essays published in 1855 as *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. The eschatological tenor of his title was reflected in the tragic structure of modernity presented in the essays. Carlyle presented a titanic struggle between the forces of 'Cosmos, of God and Human Virtue' and those of 'Chaos' (p. 16). Explicitly rejecting the 'Benthamee Constitutions' (p. 26) of reform, Carlyle denied the possibility of reform and emancipation: 'Yes, my friends, a scoundrel is a scoundrel: that remains forever a fact' (p. 42). This tone led to a good deal of public criticism from Anthony Trollope among others (Heffer, 1995: 12) but on the key issue of emancipation, Carlyle's position was to gain more adherents over time. In his notorious 1849 essay in *Fraser's Magazine*, reprinted as a pamphlet under the title *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question* (1869[1853]), Carlyle reiterated the impossibility of emancipation. The essay has been widely cited for its revolting depiction of the emancipated Africans in Jamaica idling the day away 'with their beautiful muzzles up to the ears in pumpkins' (p. 295). Without mitigating this racism for a moment, it served as Carlyle's exemplary moment of the failure of what he called the 'Emancipation-principle'. Abolition of slavery was, in this view, but the 'first handled and if possible the first settled' in a series of reforms that had turned 'the West Indies into a *Black Ireland*' (p. 298). Along with many other commentators in the period, Carlyle insisted that emancipation had failed to create a black working-class in the Caribbean and had instead produced lazy and immoral individuals. From the decline of the Jamaica plantations (Holt, 1992) and the experience of the 1823 Demerara rebellion of the enslaved (Da Costa, 1994) Carlyle (1869[1853]) concluded:

except by Mastership and Servantship, there is no conceivable deliverance from Tyranny and Slavery. Cosmos is not Chaos, simply by this one quality, That it is governed. Where wisdom, even approximately, can contrive to govern, all is right, or is ever striving to become so; where folly is 'emancipated,' and gets to govern, as it soon will, all is wrong. (p. 26)

The perpetuation of mastership required permanence and stability, rather than movement and change. He appropriated Hamlet's formula to complain that 'in these days, the relation of master to servant, and of superior to inferior, in all stages of it, is fallen sadly out of joint' (p. 306). Consequently, Carlyle insisted that in all human relations '*nomadism* is the bad plan and continuance the good' (p. 311).

The language used in the *Occasional Discourse* was explicitly Hegelian and Shakespearian at once, creating a spectral genealogy of modern anti-emancipation discourse, couched both in the classical language of aesthetics and the modern neologisms of visuality. Its publication marked a transition in British public opinion in which, as Catherine Hall (2002) has put it, 'the tide was running against abolitionist truths' (p. 353).² This shift had important political consequences in the aftermath of the Morant Bay uprising of 1865: 'months of tension between black people and white over land, labour and law erupted after an unpopular verdict from magistrates led to a demonstration and attempted arrests' (p. 23). In the ensuing violence, 18 officials and members of the militia were killed, leading to Governor Edward John Eyre calling out troops. More than 400 people were executed, another 600 flogged and 1,000 homes were destroyed. In the ensuing furore, an Eyre Defence Committee was established in Britain, with Carlyle being joined by such leading cultural figures as Charles Dickens, Alfred Lord Tennyson and John Ruskin, the champion of Turner's work. The Committee made its case so well that Eyre was never prosecuted for his actions and Jamaican home rule was rescinded in favor of direct governance from Britain. Carlyle's view of the necessity of mastery, far from being marginal, was now imperial policy.

Carlyle's work and ideas were imported into the United States by Emerson, who both acted as his agent and drew inspiration from his writings. Emerson responded to *On Heroes* with his own tract *Representative Men*, also first given as lectures in 1849, and then published in 1850. Although Emerson by no means simply parroted Carlyle's opinions, neither did he create a democratic alternative to the Great Men view of history (Harris, 1978: 46–96). He assumed that 'every child of the Saxon race is educated to wish to be first' (Emerson, 1987: 13) a system that he endorsed despite its racialized divisions. Although since 1844 he had supported the abolition of slavery, it was precisely because he judged that emancipated slaves did in fact work properly. So his dispute with Carlyle was over the empirical results of emancipation rather than as to what response was required from the emancipated. His description of the great man used the visual vocabulary of Carlyle, without explicitly organizing a visual theory of history, which is nonetheless implied – he may perhaps have assumed that his readers would

infer it from Carlyle. He asserted that 'great men are thus a collyrium to clear our eyes from egotism and enable us to see other people and their works' (p. 15), claiming that by contrast 'it is the delight of the vulgar to dazzle and blind the beholder' (p. 11). Emerson thus directly articulated the distinction between Visuality 1 as a world picture and Visuality 2 as the excess of visibility that refuses to cohere to that picture.

Inverse Visuality

Now it becomes both possible and necessary to explore the counterpoint between Carlyle's heroic imperial visibility and that other visibility he so disliked, invoked by the abolition of slavery. Abolition was the key contradiction within Carlyle's thought, perhaps epitomized by his spurning a delegation of American women to the world congress on the abolition of slavery in September 1840 (Heller, 1995: 208). They had thought that the author of *On Heroes* must be a supporter of their cause but Carlyle insisted it was nothing to do with him, even as he also disparaged emancipation as a failure. So central was Carlyle's visualized heroics to the period that those seeking emancipation nonetheless passed by it, creating an inverse or veiled visibility to respond to the masculine imperial hero. Inverse visibility is any moment of visual experience in which the subjectivity of the viewer is called into question by the density or opacity of what he or she sees. These flickering, excessive, hyperreal, overlaid, pixelated, disjunctive and distracting moments are spectral dust in the eyes of visibility that cause it to blink and become momentarily unsighted. Veiled visibility performs a similar function by dividing visibility into two by means of the veil that is both visible and invisible at once. These refigured modes of visibility can be traced from an apparently unlikely example (which is not proposed as a cause or origin): the figure of Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederacy. In 1865, Carlyle considered writing a pamphlet in defense of Davis as a heroic figure, a choice he for once rejected as being too outrageous even for him (Harris, 1978: 186, n. 60). Both Oscar Wilde and W.E.B. Du Bois pursued this untaken road, with different intent but finally similar consequences. Of course, these complex figures cannot be fully understood simply with reference to their response to Carlyle and Emerson's theory of the hero, but as a line of inquiry it has much to say about both of them. According to W.B. Yeats, Carlyle was the 'chief inspirer of self-educated men in the "eighties" and early "nineties"' (*OH*: lxiv). Wilde, prime mover of such figures, was taken by the 'stormy rhetoric' of Carlyle, whom he met in 1874 and whose writing table he later purchased for his own use. Wilde was able to quote long passages of *The French Revolution* by heart and his own writing bears the marks of Carlyle's influence. On his 1882 tour of America, Wilde appeared as an Elizabethan aesthete, as photographed by Napoleon Sarony. His pose was that of a member of 'a race once the most aristocratic in Europe', namely the Irish (Lewis and Smith, 1936: 225). Wilde assumed that this heroism would deflect any other criticism but his gender and sexual difference were clear to all. The sympathetic Anna, Comtesse de Brémont, noted 'his feminine soul, a

suffering prisoner in the wrong brain-house', a text book definition of the 'invert', while the Boston minister Thomas Wentworth Higginson, dismissed his act as 'unmanly manhood' (Burns, 1996: 94–5). The *Washington Post* invited its readers of January 22, 1882 to consider 'How Far Is It From This to This?', captioning two drawings: one of the legendary Wild Man of Borneo, the other of Wilde holding a sunflower. This pseudo-Darwinian fear of so-called reverse evolution was collapsed into a composite visual symbol the next week by *Harper's Weekly* as a monkey admiring a sunflower (Blanchard, 1998: 33). Far from seeming heroic, Wilde's aestheticism was perceived as a reverse or inverted effeminacy that was figured as racial degeneration. Accordingly, in Rochester, New York, students hired a laborer to parody Wilde as a blackface minstrel, as if to suggest that his whiteness was forfeited by his effeminacy (Lewis and Smith, 1936: 157). This caricature persisted throughout his career, as in Pellegrino's 1884 caricature of him as 'The Ape' and an 1893 *Punch* cartoon depicting the 'Christy Minstrels of No Importance' at the time of *A Woman of No Importance*. (O'Toole, 1998: 80). Like Carlyle before him, Wilde found that being a white British colonial subject was forgotten when questions of difference were being put. Wilde responded, as if reinventing himself as Carlyle, by making a public visit to none other than Jefferson Davis in June 1882, where he compared the struggles of the Irish for independence within the British Empire to that of the Confederacy:

The case of the South in the Civil War was to my mind much like that of Ireland today. It was not a struggle to see the empire dismembered, but only to see the Irish people free, and Ireland still as a willing and integral part of the British Empire.

Wilde repeated the remark several days later in more emphatic form: 'We in Ireland are fighting for the principle of autonomy against empire, for independence against centralization, for the principles for which the South fought' (Lewis and Smith, 1936: 366, 372). If being Irish could not be posed as heroic aristocracy because of his perceived gender difference, Wilde repositioned it as a form of heroic resistance to tyranny that nonetheless endorsed the continuance of the British Empire.

It was only when he inverted the hero itself that Wilde came to personify *à rebours*, to quote the title of J.-K. Huysmans' book that Lord Henry Wotton gave to Dorian Gray, what Emerson (1987) called the 'great average man, one who, to the best thinking adds a proportion and equality in his faculties, so that men see in him their own dreams and glimpses made available, and made to pass for what they are' (p. 34). In 1894, Wilde wrote to Lord Alfred Douglas in similarly reversed Carlyle language that 'I am inclined to think that Chaos is a stronger evidence for an Intelligent Creator than Kosmos is: the view might be expanded' (Wilde, 2000: 602). The idea that Chaos, the very modern quality that Carlyle had so feared might destroy the Kosmos was upheld by Wilde as proof of divinity itself. Wilde's coded language suggests that his own intelligent creation was the product of a certain chaos that distracted attention and allowed him to 'pass' in a different sense than that

used by Emerson. Wilde made himself the Hero of that 'Dandiacal sect' whom, together with the poor, Carlyle had accused of dividing Britain (Lee, 2004: 116). Creating an extravagance of signs that eluded identification, Wilde performed a phantom of free imagination around Victorian London. Dazzled by the apparition into a form of fetishistic acceptance of his persona, British high society was in a certain sense hypnotized by Wilde and his fellows. What was so evident to American audiences in 1882 became undecidable in the moment of Wilde's inverse heroism from 1890 to 1895. For example, Wilde took to wearing a green carnation in his buttonhole, a deliberately artificial accessory, that was widely adopted by his circle to general mystification elsewhere. Max Nordau disapprovingly noted in his text *Degeneration* that Wilde's 'strange costume excites disapproval instead of approbation' but could not quite say why (Sinfield, 1994: 96). As an inverted hero, Wilde dispersed radiance rather than being the object of clear visibility and paradoxically became hard to see. The carnation was later 'outed' by Robert Hichens in his parodic novel *The Green Carnation*, leading it to be cited in evidence against Wilde at the first of his trials in 1895. The observation of such minute detail was the mainstay of the 19th-century detective method that has subsequently been adopted by historians of the period. In Wilde's model of the inverted hero, his green carnation became undecidable, rather than objective evidence, flickering in and out of view.

This inverse visibility was also deployed by women in the creation of heroines. One striking example was Sojourner Truth, who, as Nell Irvin Painter has pointed out, was the only woman who had been enslaved to take an active role in the emancipation movement (Harriet Tubman's work being of a different character) (Painter, 1996: 1–3). Part of Truth's power as a spokesperson for emancipation was her visual presence, as Olive Gilbert, who wrote her celebrated *Narrative* (1993), emphasized:

The impressions made by Isabella on her auditors, when moved by lofty or deep feeling, can never be transmitted to paper, (to use the words of another), till by some Daguerrian act, we are enabled to transfer the look, the gesture, the tones of voice, in connection with the quaint yet fit expressions used, and the spirit-stirring animation that, at such a time, pervades all she says. (p. 31)

Naming Truth by her slave-owner given name of Isabella van Wagenen rather than her self-named appellation Sojourner Truth from 1843, Gilbert again anticipates cinema in her desire to transfer Truth's 'look' to others. Truth herself was skilled in deploying both 'the shadow and the substance' of that look by using photographs of herself to fund her activities. In these carefully posed images, Truth sought to counter the ambivalence of earlier abolitionist photography with a series of carefully chosen signs. Dressed in respectable middle-class attire, Truth posed as if caught in the middle of knitting. Her gender-appropriate activity and dress allowed her to signify her engagement with ideas and learning, shown by her glasses and the open book. The caption that she provided for the cards showed her awareness of the

ambivalences of photography: 'I sell the shadow to support the substance.' Photography is represented as a mere shadow, rather than the Truth that is the subject herself, the substance. Here the emancipated woman makes her image the object of financial exchange in place of the substance, her whole person that had once been for sale. That commodification was justified by the substantive use to which their sale was to be put, namely abolishing the ownership of people. At the same time, by insisting on her own control over the financial process, Truth asserted a proper freedom that the 'emancipated' did not quite fully possess (Hartman, 1997: 115–24). As Kenneth S. Greenberg (1996) argues, 'an emancipation that assumed the form of a gift from the master could only be partial' (p. 66). It was for that reason that W.E.B. Du Bois later insisted that the enslaved had freed themselves and it is why Truth put her image into the world in this way, claiming to own not just her person but the substance of freedom.

Truth performed this freedom at an abolitionist meeting in Indiana in 1858. The men in the audience claimed that Truth was a man and demanded to see her breasts. Following a voice vote that upheld the doubters, according to the contemporary account of the *Boston Liberator*:

Sojourner told them that her breasts had suckled many a white babe, to the exclusion of her own offspring; that some of these white babies had grown to man's estate; that, although they had suckled her colored breasts, they were, in her estimation, far more manly than they (her persecutors) appeared to be; and she quietly asked them as she disrobed her bosom, if they too wished to suck! (Painter, 1996: 139)

With considerable bravery, Truth reclaimed her own physical body as exhibiting what Judith Halberstam (1998) has called in a different context 'female masculinity'. Truth's black female body was better able to engender manliness than those men around her, whom she reduced to infants by offering them her breast. This deployment of the body further contested anthropological ideas that the breasts might index racial difference (Wilson, 2003: 177–89), white notions of beauty (Dyer, 1997), and the symbolically revealed breasts of the revolutionary figure of Liberty (Pointon, 1990). For Liberty nurtures the nation at her symbolic breast, whereas Truth claimed that enslaved African women actually nurtured more 'manly' men than her detractors, despite the fact that their black breasts were taken as signs of degeneracy and ugliness. Truth was constantly nomadic, always in pursuit of emancipation, generating a complex, even chaotic, visibility out of the stale clichés of her time.

Veiled Visuality

For W.E.B. Du Bois, the legacy of Carlyle's visualized hero had to be veiled rather than inverted. As a student at Fisk, Du Bois was much taken with Carlyle's writing and *The French Revolution* remained a stylistic influence

throughout his long career. As editor of the *Herald*, the student newspaper at Fisk, Du Bois urged his readers to adopt Carlyle's viewpoint and even to take Bismarck as their Hero (Lewis, 1993: 74–5, 115–16; Zamir, 1995: 23–67). Once at Harvard, Du Bois absorbed a further espousal of Carlyle's views on the Hero from William James. In 1890, he wrote both an essay on Carlyle and a commencement speech for Harvard on the apparently Emersonian topic 'Jefferson Davis as a Representative of Civilization' (Du Bois, 1986[1890]: 811–14), that in fact used the Hero as a figure of failure rather than triumph. He noted that Davis's militarism and love of adventure made him 'a typical Teutonic hero'. Yet as a 'type of civilization', Davis's vision of the 'Strong Man' had ultimately led to 'absurdity, the peculiar champion of a people fighting to be free in order that another people should not be free'. This was the step that Wilde had failed to make eight years previously and it led Du Bois to reconsider the entire system of the Hero. In casting himself as a Hero, Davis – and by extension white culture as a whole – had come to adopt 'the overweening sense of the I and the consequent forgetting of the Thou'. In historical terms, the result had been the crushing of the Negro by the Teuton. Du Bois argued, however, that the role of the Negro was not simply to provide grist for the world-historical mill but to challenge the Strong Man thesis with that of the 'Submissive Man', exemplified by the Negro. The result would be 'the submission of the strength of the Strong to the advance of all', a more perfect individualism that would assert the contribution of even 'the very least of nations' to civilization. This interaction would prevent the disastrous extremes of despotism and slavery. Rather than being a simple refutation of Carlyle, Du Bois was attempting to meld his discussion of the 'I' and the 'Thou' from *Sartor Resartus* with the Great Men thesis of *On Heroes*. As Shamoon Zamir (1995) has pointed out, Du Bois' speech on Carlyle from the same year championed 'not only the admirer of Bismarck and the author of *Hero Worship*, but also the critic of industrialization and the advocate of ethical culture' (p. 65). Du Bois further drew from Carlyle a sense of the necessary entanglement of past and present, but he arrived at a very different conception of the intertwining of what he later called, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, 'the Old and the New', which made him 'glad, very glad, and yet –' (Du Bois, 1986[1903]: 412). His highly influential solution to the need for African-American representative men was to hail the leadership of those he called 'The Talented Tenth'. Following Emerson's definition of the 'Representative', Du Bois held that 'an aristocracy of talent and character' was to perform a necessary action on behalf of their fellows: 'The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men' (pp. 847, 842). This formula was strongly derivative of Carlyle and Emerson's hero theory, even if the former at least might have rejected this application (Zamir, 1995: 65). By rethinking the hero within the frame of the 'race', Du Bois restated the tension between the individual and the collective that he had highlighted in the Jefferson Davis speech, but now as an exchange within his own community.

In his later writings, Du Bois came to figure this internal and external tension in terms of visibility. In the famous opening to *The Souls of Black Folk*

(1986[1903]), Du Bois defined the 'Negro' as 'a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world, – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world' (p. 365). This 'double-consciousness' restated the position of both the Talented Tenth and their fellows by dividing Carlyle's 'clear visuality' into two. At the same time, he recalled the hybridity of visuality by highlighting the artistry of African-American music, just as Carlyle had evoked the 'song' of Dante. Du Bois' key visual metaphor for divided visuality was the veil, a visual device that traditionally allows women to see without being seen, while being constrained to that viewing position by men. For Du Bois, the veil keeps the African American divided from his white peers but also prevents him from seeing himself except from that dominant point of view. This white view is a 'revelation', another favorite Carlyle word, rather than a place of observation or spectatorship. In this way, Du Bois suggests that the veil prevents the possibility of clear visuality for white and black alike, forcing the African American to resort to 'second sight'. At the end of his chapter on the Freedmen's Bureau (1986[1901]), Du Bois visualized the drama of the failure of emancipation in terms of the veil:

I have seen a land right merry with the sun, where children sing, and rolling hills lie like passionate women wanton with harvest. And there in the King's Highway sat and sits a figure veiled and bowed, by which travellers' footsteps hasten as they go. On the tainted air broods fear. Three centuries' thought has been the raising and unveiling of that bowed human heart, and now behold a century new for the duty and the deed. The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line. (p. 391)

Du Bois blended Old and New in deliberate anachronism, even as he addressed his contemporaries with their present and future duty to address the problem of the color line.

In later writings, Du Bois continued to develop and extend his theory of veiled visuality, noting in a 1913 paper on 'The Negro in Literature in Art' that 'the Negro is primarily an artist', a talent realized for the most part in music (1986: 862). During the Harlem Renaissance, he returned to these issues that he framed in terms of his argument in *Souls*. In a 1926 essay on 'Criteria of Negro Art', he argued that simply becoming 'full-fledged Americans' was insufficient: 'We who are dark can see America in a way that white Americans can not. And seeing our country thus, are we satisfied with its present goals and ideals?' (p. 993). He asked his audience to imagine that the goal of racial equality had suddenly been achieved and that they had also attained wealth. He drew a picture of the purchase of new cars, clothes and homes but then, using Carlyle's language, he asserted: 'Even as you visualize such ideals you know in your hearts that these are not the things you really want.' Rather, Du Bois held out the vision of a 'beautiful world', enabled by hard work, but lived 'where men create, where they realize themselves'. Beauty, for Du Bois,

was the contrapuntal pairing of Cologne Cathedral with the village of Veys in West Africa; or of the Venus de Milo with ‘a single phrase of music in the Southern South – utter melody, haunting and appealing’. Far from evoking a counterpoint formalism, Du Bois quickly added that any concept of Beauty that he might use was inseparable from his pursuit of Truth and Right. While still making use of Carlyle’s vocabulary and his disjunctured temporality, Du Bois had developed the theory of veiled visibility as a means to demand that very emancipation that Carlyle had sought to prevent. He now saw veiled visibility as a place of greater insight than the clear visibility offered to the hegemonic groups in society and in so doing sketched a radical transcultural pedagogy.

For contemporary critics, then, visibility has a complex and challenging genealogy. Rather than lead us into the complexities and redundancies of 19th- and early 20th-century optical science, visibility implies an engagement with the politics of representation in transnational and transcultural form. The politics of emancipation in the Anglophone world divided Carlyle’s ‘clear visibility’ of the always already white male hero into fragments, cut by the color line, as well as lines of gender and sexuality. Such lines did not always intersect, although they often did, as we have seen, precisely because the imperial subject relied so strongly on a certain vision of the ‘strong, silent man’. Returning to my earlier formula of the visual subject being constituted by the intersection between the agent of sight and discourses of visibility, it now appears that such an encounter is not a geometric figure, such as that famously drawn by Jacques Lacan, so much as a space or area. That area is not bounded by constant time but rather ‘*time as lived*, not synchronically or diachronically, but in its multiplicities and simultaneities, its presences and absences’ (Mbembe, 2001: 8, original emphasis). In dealing with this complexity, ‘the writing of history must implicitly assume a plurality of times existing together, a disjuncture of the present with itself’ (Chakrabarty, 2000: 109). Visibility is in this sense, to use current terminology, a time-based medium. This series of connected and dispersed lines, crossing time and space, is a network. At the same time, it has recently been asserted that the idea of collective (let alone the universal) identities has been diminished by identity politics. This account suggests rather that the very notion of the representative or representation embodied a struggle over who is to be represented, which Jacques Rancière has called ‘the division of the sensible’, a sharing and dividing that is political and aesthetic at once (Rancière, 2004: 12). The limited and conditional emancipations of the 19th century were specifically designed to prevent open access to what has become known as the ‘bourgeois public sphere’, a controlled area of space in a specific time that is in tension with networked visibility. Clearly, the idea of a single hero or heroine as the agent of visibility, or even of an elite minority within a given group, is unsustainable in a networked context. Recast as the possibility of a politics of representation, negotiating the veiled lines of color, gender and sexuality that are both invisible and all too visible in our own time, visibility remains of central importance.

Notes

1. Many other school districts from notionally 'blue' states like Wisconsin and Pennsylvania as well as Southern 'red' states are pursuing similar strategies, (*New York Times*, 17 January 2005: A1).
2. See also Hall's (2002: 347–53) analysis of the interplay of race and colonial masculinity in the *Occasional Discourse*.

References

- Barrett, Joseph H. (1997([1841]) Review of Carlyle's *On Heroes*. Reprinted in D.J. Trela and Rodger L. Tarr (eds) *The Critical Response to Thomas Carlyle's Major Works*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Bhabha, Homi (1994) *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Blanchard, Mary Warner (1998) *Oscar Wilde's America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Burns, Sarah (1996) *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Butler, Judith (1990) *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge.
- Carlyle, Thomas (1989([1837]) *The French Revolution*, ed. K.J. Fielding. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carlyle, Thomas (1915[1839]) 'Chartism', in *English and Other Critical Essays*. London: J.M. Dent.
- Carlyle, Thomas (1993[1841]) *The Norman and Charlotte Strouse Edition of the Writings of Thomas Carlyle: On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, notes and introduction by Michael K. Goldberg, text established by Michael K. Goldberg, Joel J. Brattin and Mark Engel. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Carlyle, Thomas (1843) *Past and Present*. London.
- Carlyle, Thomas (1869[1853]) 'Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question'. Reprinted in *Critical Memorial Edition of the Works of Thomas Carlyle*, vol. 18, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*. Boston: Dana Estes, 1869.
- Carlyle, Thomas (1855) 'Model Prisons', pub. March 1850. Reprinted in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. London: Chapman Hall.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh (2000) *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Crary, Jonathan (1988) 'Modernizing Vision', in Hal Foster (ed.) *Vision and Visuality*. Seattle, WA: Bay Press.
- Crary, Jonathan (1991) *Techniques of the Observer*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Da Costa, Emilia Viotti (1994) *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. (1986) *Du Bois: Writings*. New York: The Library of America.
- Dyer, Richard (1997) *White*. London: Routledge.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo (1987) *Representative Men: Seven Lectures in The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol. IV, introduction by Wallace E. Williams, text established by Douglas Emory Wilson. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Finley, Gerard (1999) *Angel in the Sun: Turner's Vision of History*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Foster, Hal (ed.) (1988) *Vision and Visuality*. Seattle, WA: Bay Press.
- Foucault, Michel (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage.
- Gage, John (1969) *Color in Turner: Poetry and Truth*. New York: Praeger.

- Gilbert, Olive (1993) *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, ed. Margaret Washington. New York: Vintage Classics.
- Gilroy, Paul (1993) *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gosse, Edmund (1963[1907]) *Father and Son*. New York: WW Norton.
- Greenberg, Kenneth S. (1996) *Honor & Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Halberstam, Judith (1998) *Female Masculinity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hall, Catherine (2002) *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Harris, Kenneth Marc (1978) *Carlyle and Emerson: Their Long Debate*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hartman, Saidiya V. (1997) *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heffer, Simon (1995) *Moral Desperado: A Life of Thomas Carlyle*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Holt, Thomas (1992) *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Jay, Martin (1988) 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity', in Hal Foster (ed.) *Vision and Visuality*. Seattle, WA: Bay Press.
- Jones, Amelia (2004) *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Joyce, Patrick (1994) *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lavally, Albert J. (1968) *Carlyle and the Idea of the Modern: Studies in Carlyle's Prophetic Literature and its Relation to Blake, Nietzsche, Marx and Others*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Lee, Yoon Sun (2004) *Nationalism and Irony: Burke, Scott, Carlyle*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Levine, George (1997) 'Carlyle, Descartes and Objectivity', *Raritan* 17 (Summer): 45–58.
- Levine, Philippa (2003) *Prostitution, Race & Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire*. New York: Routledge.
- Lewis, David Levering (1993) *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868–1919*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Lewis, Lloyd and Smith, Henry Justin (1936) *Oscar Wilde Discovers America (1882)*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company.
- Mbembe, Achille (2001), *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Metz, Christian (1982) *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Morris, Pam (1999) 'Heroes and Hero-Worship in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 54(3): 285–307.
- O'Toole, Fintan (1998) 'Venus in Blue Jeans: Oscar Wilde, Jesse James, Crime and Fame', in Jerusha McCormack (ed.) *Wilde the Irishman*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Painter, Nell Irvin (1996) *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Perera, Suvendrini (2002) 'What Is a Camp...?' *borderlands* 1(1) at [www.borderlandsejournal.adelaide.edu.au]
- Plotz, John (2000) 'Crowd Power: Chartism, Thomas Carlyle and the Victorian Public Sphere', *Representations* 70 (Spring): 87–114.

- Pointon, Marcia (1990) *Naked Authority: The Body in Western Art 1830–1908*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rancière, Jacques (2004) *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill. London: Continuum.
- Rigney, Ann (1996) 'The Untenanted Places of the Past: Thomas Carlyle and the Varieties of Historical Ignorance', *History and Theory* 35(3), October: 338–57.
- Rose, Gillian (2003) 'On the Need to Ask How, Exactly, Is Geography "Visual"?', *Antipode* 35(2): 212–21.
- Schoch, Richard W. (1999) "'We Do Nothing But Enact History": Thomas Carlyle Stages the Past', *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 54(1), June: 27–52.
- Semple, Janet (1993) *Bentham's Prison: A Study of the Panopticon Penitentiary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Sinfield, Alan (1994) *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Smajic, Srdjan (2003) 'The Trouble with Ghost-Seeing: Vision, Ideology, and Genre in the Victorian Ghost Story', *ELH* 70(4): 1107–35.
- Smith, Terry (1993) *Making the Modern: Industry, Art and Design in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wilde, Merlin Holland and Hart-Davis, Rupert (eds) (2000) *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*. London: Fourth Estate.
- Williams, Raymond (1958) *Culture and Society 1780–1950*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Wilson, Kathleen (2003) *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Routledge.
- Zamir, Shamoon (1995) *Dark Voices: W.E.B. Du Bois and American Thought, 1888–1903*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nicholas Mirzoeff is Professor of Art and Art Professions at New York University. He is the author of *Watching Babylon: The War in Iraq and Global Visual Culture* (Routledge, 2005).

Address: Department of Art and Art Professions, New York University, 34 Stuyvesant Street, 3rd floor, New York, NY 10003, USA. [email: nicholas.mirzoeff@nyu.edu]