

§1 Looking at

Being the object of a gaze, look, inspection, or surveillance; taking pleasure or displeasure at objectification; OR: being the agent of a gaze, look, inspection, or surveillance, knowing that the object will be reduced.

Ultimately, what I am seeking in the photograph taken of me (the “intention” according to which I look at it) is Death: Death is the *eidos* of that Photograph. Hence, strangely, the only thing that I tolerate, that I like, that is familiar to me, when I am photographed, is the sound of the camera. For me, the Photographer's organ is not his eye (which terrifies me) but his finger: what is linked to the trigger of the lens, to the metallic shifting of the plates (when the camera still has such things).

—Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 1980

Vision, even when defective or missing altogether, involves arrows (vectors) that cannot quite fit within the program of perspective, where there is an origin and destination (target). Looking *at* implies this merger of temporality and spatiality, an arrow shot *from* somewhere *to* somewhere, in an instant that is nonetheless a short *durée* that is time enough for the target to move out of the way and let something else take its place. Scooting off to the side may be the target's way of saying that it doesn't want the objectification that comes with being a destination. It rejects definition as a command to stay put, hold still. “The way you look at me” features in so many song lyrics that the connection to love is unavoidable. The vector is thus a message about failure or success, its point points both ways or, rather, the shaft is double-tipped and the shot out is simultaneously a shot back, like the trick gun that goes off to kill the shooter.

“At,” like all the prepositions that imply that we have loaded map data into our brain's hard drive, doesn't bother to specify more than necessary. It says “space” without saying how space works, or what kind of space, or how space and time are related, or how space and space-*ing* are related but not the same, like order and order-*ing*. Even as ideas, there is resistance to merger that fails to give an answer to the question raised but immediately silenced. If “at” seems unambiguous, there is a plan afoot to make it seem so, and the plan is hidden to the same eye that is cheered by the idea that it can look *at* something with impunity. “No charge” doesn't mean you won't get a bill later for “services rendered.” The costs of shooting something through perspectival space and time accumulate in the ledgers of a two-column account book, where every act, term, idea, emotion, and form have a double (contronym). Back at you.

Looking at something on the sphere often confused with the anthropocene (a human time, which must be at the same time a human space, an anthroposphere) aims to conceal what it pretends to reveal. The issue of truth is held in reserve: Lacan's “alethosphere.” Furrows wrinkle the smooth curved ether that supports looking-at with a refraction that, with every look out to an object, gives the object the privilege and power to look back. The arrows/eros/rose slightly miss each other in this round trip (clinamen, hysteresis) so between the two curves (every motion must be curved to align with the sphere of truth) there is an area requiring a calculus to measure. Should this be numerical or non-numerical? Given the irrationality of looking in the first place, the number should involve infinite regression, such as the Fibonacci ϕ or circle's π . At the same time, these irrational “numbers” (can they still be called that?) will show off their credentials as ratios, meaning that they are “pure relations” and “purely relational.” They are

the one thing between the two things, larger/smaller, happier/sadder, hateful/friendly, sleepy/awake, deadly/lively, dead/alive. Between suggests a middle but the point of the infinite series past the decimal point is to say how there is nothing between, *a nothing*, only the *jouissance* of looking for something and finding something else, or perhaps a “calling card” left by the thief (a glove, *The Pink Panther*, 1963; a Joker playing card, *The Batman*; a calling card, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, 1905; an instruction, Borges’ “Death and the Compass”; etc.).ⁿ

The scientific aspect of this vector disappointed by the vanishing target is its rule of reverse commutation. The “purely relational” component of looking–at denies both scale and direction. The Golden Ratio doesn’t care whether something is small or large, the issue is how the smaller–to–the–larger relates. Can the altar at Delos be doubled to end the plague in Athens? Can the love of a couple be used to save the world? Can the (stolen) plans of an aircraft engine assure allied victory (*The 39 Steps*, 1935)? The calling card crime is a silent trade. The thief or killer has taken something but left something in return. The implication is that the thing left has a value equivalent to the thing taken, *if and only if*, it can be understood. But, this repayment involves delay, and in the time interval of delay, expectation is held in place by an imagined contract, an implied pledge, an I. O. U. This prevents looking–at from being what is called bijective. In bijective sets, each element in one set relates to a unique counterpart in the other: A to 1, B to 2, C to 3, D to 4. In bijection, each looking–at expects a return, “what you see is what you get.” In the case of the “calling card,” delay is the permutation of bijection that scrambles the return results to form a puzzle challenging the looker. This commutation is “polythetic.” Both the order and the genre may be varied. X plus Y = ... what? It may be a Z or a zebra. In Borges’ mystery story, “The Aleph,” what began as a random typographical error was converted into clue that, extended through a succession of murders that had not been intended until the conversion. The succession (order) resulted from a change of genre (accident to clue).

The delayed return on looking at is the truth of the looking–at vectors confined to the sphere of the earth, where every horizon is an early advance payment on the geometral infinity of the flat plane. Thus, looking–at creates an overlap of projective geometry (the use of the horizon at infinity as a circular array of points belonging to families of parallel lines, equivalent to a single point bundling all possible lines) across Euclidean geometry, which presumes but cannot feature this flatness, which is different from the planes generated by lines, in turn generated by points. The sequence of point–line–plane–solid produces perspectival space, where solids and shadows are able to hide spaces from the project of looking–at. In projective geometry, “the hidden” is over–present — produceable at any point, at any time — because it is a property of space that is present “already and always” before the eye has shot its look at some objective. The “fix,” the curve of space, is already there, converting the aim to the goal, the object to a subject who flees the scene before it can be trapped (Apollo’s version of the story). At the same time, the subject in flight cannot escape the 2-d surface that comes into being as soon as the intention to flee occurs: a self–generating space (Daphne’s version). There will be, thus, a gap between the Apollo and Daphne of the vector of looking–at, a place of silent trade. In place of the bijective looked–for will be ... a calling card.

DK

ⁿNote

ⁿ“Calling Card (Crime),” *Wikipedia* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calling_card_\(crime\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calling_card_(crime))