Point of View

By now you will have noticed the resemblance of the 3+3 model to the general structure of experience, whereby the distance constructed to take a point of view and hold the world at a slight distance is based on the possibility of two kinds of experiences. The first is a synchrony to the expected, the normal. This is the background against which any difference or change stands out as interesting, defective, or dangerous. The second is an openness to something that lies beyond appearances, some revelation, something that seems to be personally sent, although this possibility is, in the normal cause-and-effect world, ruled out.

The first synchronous view we get as a result of our POV is an objective set of objects; the second element of revelation converts what we see into potentially subjective objects — something meant for us, personally. This is our "investment" in the scene, what makes some views more attractive than others; it is what makes our POV and the imaginary frame that limits the scene like a picture purposefully chosen from nature or invented from the imagination.

The six terms from Bloom's poetic vocabulary are "disaggregated." They are not grouped. They do not form any kind of a system except as a way of completing Bloom's account of the function of the poet's anxiety about the past in relation to the present and his/her own work. Even when they are grouped, the terms maintain a certain independence. Each could be the starting point or the center of the system of sixes. It is impossible, however, to talk about time without choosing one term as "first" and relating the others to it as if they constructed some kind of event.

The first term is in some sense "let off the hook," no longer put to the test or forced to explain its existence. *Askesis* as the point of view loses a bit of its multi-dimensionality. The function of distance is associated so closely with the "step back" that we mentally and perceptually take in the appreciation of some scene (the analogy of taking a photo or making a movie) that we associate askesis's discipline and self-imposed isolation with the mechanical apparatus of the production. Like the film crew on location, with sound equipment, cables, lights, caterers, etc. on one side of the camera and the actors and set on the other, we assume that askesis is more like the production equipment that will be invisible in the finished product: thus a means to an end, but only a means.

Askesis constructs a distance, imposes an element of isolation. It disciplines the senses. It limits the view. But, because this happens in what we construct to be "the first step," we should not ignore the fact that POVs exist in the scene as well; that in fact much of what we see on the other side of the camera, so to speak, is the result of multiple POVs and their interactions. Perhaps no more ambitious attempt to organize these effects can be cited than the painter Cezanne's series of "bathers," subjects at a river or pond, undressed, arranged in informal groupings, internally framed by trees and edges in the landscape. As art historians have pointed out, Cezanne used specific gestures and groupings as a chemist might use specific ingredients to create a new polymer. He was aware of the exact shape and quality of the "long-chain molecules" and their potential interactions. Each subject and group of subjects was built around the idea of the point of view as a collective, dynamic set. *Our* point of view, and the painter's, includes the discipline of this idea. The point of view is looking at itself, in all its variety.

Other paintings have involved the same idea, even more intensely, but few have paired down the scene to the point that there is little else going on. Nature has been simplified; the human subjects have been asked to remove whatever might make them appear different from their colleagues. All we have left are bodies of the same skin color and general age and shape. No children, no old people, no sports equipment, no furniture, no hats, scarves, or clothes. This economy and limitation is askesis at its best. Because we see subjects in a natural setting, we can't ignore the fact that each subject has its own POV, each constructs a scene from the inside, looking at some, turning away from others, locking each other into sub-scenes by means of gestures and positions. *The one thing they do not do is look back at us*, on the other side of the "fourth wall" that has allowed us to join their group as long as we sit quietly and invisibly on the other side of the picture plane.

When the American painter Nicolas Carone (1917–2010) undertook Cezanne's logic, he made even more intensive use of the fact that bodies themselves work as framing devices at several scales. Arms, hands, and even fingers can be objects or enclose objects and spaces. Legs and torsos can be at the edge or center of attention. Because bodies and limbs can point as well as frame, they remind us that the frame has two modalities, one identified with pointing (the "sagittal") and another with the frame (formal shaping of the cone of vision).

When we see POVs on the other side of the screen we construct thanks to our own POV, it is a bit like looking in a mirror, and the more artists abstract and thoughtfully rework that mirror image, the more it becomes like a treatise in the physics of looking. Gestures and shapes are pared-down; the physics acquires the efficiency of mathematical formulas, no spare parts left over. This is where we can use *kenosis* and *clinamen* to expose the circuitry of the visible scene. And, because putting the POV inside as well as outside the scene, we can add *dæmon*, the function of inside-outside (extimity) and its two modalities, *tessera* (part objects) and *apophrades* (voice, especially the "off-stage," "acousmatic," voice of the dead).

Just as askesis works through two kinds of "economies" or "mechanics," *dæmon* has its two component parts, voice (the more subjective of the two), and the more objective part-object, or fragment. Dæmon/askesis have a kind of priority, in that they more easily construct centers that work as pivot points. "Ask and it shall be given" is the formula of dæmon/askesis. Call out and something will respond, but just what that something is is "demonic" in its ambiguity and complexity. Like the Chinese saying, "Be careful what you wish for," our own desires are not fully known to us. Our fantasies are borrowed: someone else's properties, not our own inventions. When we use desire to acquire, convert, possess, etc. we often reap an unexpected and sometimes *un*desirable result. "Getting what we want" in this case is correct. We got what we *wanted* but were not aware of the true nature of our desire, until we saw the unexpected results.

In the example of the ancient practice of divination, a truly pure form of "call and response," ritual, fasting, and sacred formulas tightened up the protocol of askesis to insure an authentic *dæmon*, a clear omen or sign. In the famous cases of the oracles at the Shrine of Apollo at Delphi in ancient Greece, answers to questions reflected back on the questioner. When Croesus, the King of Lydia, provided gifts and performed the necessary purification procedures, asked the Pythia, the oracle at Delphi, about his upcoming battle with the Persions, she responded, demonically, that "If you cross the river, a great army will be destroyed." Thinking she meant, by great army, the Persions, he crossed the river but found out that the army the Pythia had meant was his own. True to the inside-out logic of *dæmon*, the key of one part is the broken edge that is completed by the absent piece. The fit between the two parts, unknown until it actually happens, is perfect. With the proper askesis, dæmon never fails.