Perspective, far from being the ‘way that we naturally see’, is a highly constructed set of visual conventions that charges the visual field — in and out of graphic representation occasions — with ideological mandates and presuppositions. Through the ‘instructive’ function of perspectival scenery in popular culture (print, film, photography, etc.), everyday visual perception carries over the habits introduced by graphic convention. Trained to ‘see’ through ideology, perception creates the categories and identities that are readily filled in sense encounters, ‘proving’ the ideological basis to be ‘empirically valid’ although the ‘data’ has been ‘fixed from the start’. It is possible to use Lacan’s L-scheme to recover the forensic pattern of ideological structuring that creates the ‘uncanny’ reversal of cause and effect so that perception appears to ‘endorse’ ideological significations.

1. the cone of vision

In the consolidation of ‘rules of perspective’ for application in draughting and painting, the model of the cone of vision was used to demonstrate how visual rays emanating from the single, fixed, open eye (binocularity would not work in perspective) could ‘cut’ through an imaginary or actual picture plane to mark the relative position of objects lying beyond. In this way, objects actually did represent accurately the spherical quality of the visual field, where ‘straight’ edges appeared to be curved, as they actually were on the surface of the retina. Geometric perspective was used to ‘correct’ this curvature and, by projecting parallel straight lines, locate vanishing points that could subsequently be used to regulate other lines parallel to the first. Vanishing points of horizontal lines always lay on the ‘horizon’, an imaginary line at the infinite end of the visible, unreachable but asymptotically approachable. The vanishing point ‘moved’ as the point of view moved, an infinitely distant back to the point of view that was the invisible front. The vanishing point established the role of motion in the perspectival representation: any movement would result in a slight shift of view, a partial revelation of the sides that had been previously hidden behind edges of objects that did not move as the viewer DID move.

2. the invisible in the visible

Ideology becomes effective when it becomes a part of the ‘invisible’ artifact, supporting conscious representation ‘from behind’. In the cone of vision set-up, there are two principal zones of invisibility: (1) the implied limit of visibility at, near, or behind the horizon, and all those spaces shadowed by opaque objects lying in the visual field; and (2) the zone in front of the picture plane, analogous to the space in front of the graphic surface, which belongs to the viewing subject. These two zones are coordinated and implied by each other. As the subject moves, remote objects “move along with him/her” — the phenomenon of a foreground moving against a background that stands still. The closest and the most remote are correlated; we can say that the vanishing point “interpellates” or binds the subject, hence the line drawn through the ‘$S$’ for subject ($S$). This becomes important when we calculate how an unseen side comes into view for an observer ($f$) standing nearby. The limit of the subject is extra-polated to the position of $f$.

3. the master signifier effect

Ideology is made effective through a ‘syllogistic’ arrangement of cause and effect. In ‘transitive’ conditions, conditions serve as causes that lead to effects. In the case of the master signifier, a group of ‘effects’ is summarized and collated. One effect is selected as a cause, although the real cause remains unstaned/unfound and the ‘cause’ is really ‘an effect of itself’. The irrationality of the master signifier is concealed by creating a mirror condition that continually recirculates the question of cause. A short-circuit is created that continually re-packages the effect as a cause. In the case of perception, the effect that becomes the cause, the ‘master signifier’, is the symmetry created by the ‘externally remote’ horizon and vanishing point and the ‘internally remote’ fixed/interpellated subject. Because the subject is ‘supplemented’ by the imaginary alternative position ($f$), the vanishing point is supplemented by another vanishing point (belonging to $f$) that is both ‘the same’ and ‘different from’ $S$’s vanishing point. The perspectival scene, calculated from a specific viewpoint, is nonetheless ‘good for all viewpoints’ — an ideological representation of ‘all possible views’ even though (and because of) its specific optical limitations.