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Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover
Monash University, Australia
millicent.vladivglover@monash.edu

Wittgenstein's "Simple Object", The Phenomenological Gaze and the Representation of Spatial 'Things' in Modernism/Postmodernism

Abstract: By examining a series of paintings by Magritte and etchings by Escher, with reference to several literary texts, this article traces the aesthetic function of the representation of space and silence in Modernist art at the beginning of the 20th century. In reading the Modernist work of art against the theory of language proposed by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his 1921 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, this article also suggests that the representation of objects testifies to a paradigm shift in European aesthetics at the beginning of the 20th century which involves a repudiation of affectivity as a mode of experience and expression prevailing as far back as Classical Antiquity, and a move into the orbit of the phenomenological *gaze* which shifts the space of representation beyond the actually *visible* or *representable*. This shift makes experience into an experience of language or of the process of signification, which has the effect of symbolic 'castration' (Freud), bringing into existence the 'split' subject (Lacan). The alienating split of the subject by the signifier ('the object') is thematised as violence (cannibalism) in modernism and inhertited by postmodernism, as demonstrated by critical reference to Maurice Blanchot's *Thomas the Obscure* (1932), Patrick Sűskin'd *Perfume,* and Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars*.

Keywords: affectivity, space, silence, *the ineffable*, the *as if* of signification, violence of thought

When one looks at a painting such as Magritte's *The Lost Jockey* (either the 1940 or 1942 version), or a print by Escher, such as *Depth* (1955), one has a palpable impression of *space* as distinct from any other possible content or symbolism of these pictures. Concomitant with space is another quality, which jumps off the screens or canvases of many modernist paintings to hit the onlooker with perceptible sensory force, is *silence*. The Escher print as well as Magritte's *jockey* share this quality, just as Salvador Dali's Surrealist landscapes and Paul Delvaux's *Venus* pictures (*Les Belles de Nuit*, 1936, *Venus Asleep*, 1944, *The Night Train*, 1947, and *The Public Voice*, 1948).

The representation of space and silence in Modernist art at the beginning of the 20th century was not a fad. Both these qualities were raised into aesthetic dominants that reflected the ever-firmer contouring of the Modernist cultural paradigm, forcing out 19th century positivist concepts about the nature of reality and the 'Realist aesthetics' of 'mirroring' reality *as it really was*.

If one wanted to bring space and silence under a common denominator, then one could say that these qualities represent or are *states of affairs*. The representation of *states of affairs* as structures, irrespective of any other symbolic content or meaning of the picture, is a radical departure from the representation of reality, life, man and the world on display in Western European art since the Hellenic times to the end of the 19th century. If one were to isolate the driving force (as opposed to subject matter) generating pre-20th century art and literature, and if one were to bring this long period of 'evolution' in aesthetics under a common denominator, one could call this force *affectivity*.

The dynamics of Greek drama is located in the process of catharsis. Catharsis is perceived as a kind of transference between the audience and the suffering tragic hero, brought about through the complex emotions of pity and fear (identification and alienation). Fear, terror and suffering are constituent elements in the drama of Euripides. But all we can say positively (and without Aristotle) when looking at Euripdes' *The Trojan Women* today, is that fear and terror are *emotions* which represent powerful, even overpowering, *affects* woven into the communicative structure of the play.

Affect continues to dominate literary discourse as a prime mover of narrative and as the axis of the text/reader relationship right up to the 19th century. Tolstoy, in his aesthetic manifesto *What is Art?* (1898), which points in the direction of the new poetics of 'popular culture' thirty years before Walter Benjamin's thesis on the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, saw *affectivity* (or "infectiousness" as he called it) as the primary structural feature of all art and its *raison d'être*. *Anna Karenina* represents the high point of this form of affectivity (one can cry at least while reading the scene of Anna visiting her estranged household on the morning of her son's birthday) while at the same time constituting the new Modernist poetics of the *gaze*. The same is true of the Russian *Itinerant* painters (Repin, Surikov, Vasnetsov). Repin's 1884 painting *They Did Not Expect Him*, capturing the affect of surprise in all its temporal concreteness, is a reverberation of similar contents in Realist painting in France (Gustave Courbet's *The Meeting* 1854) and even Australia (Frederick McCubbin's *Home Again*). But unlike in *Anna Karenina*, in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the affectivity of the work no longer projects *outside* the work, to reach out to an audience. It is now a pure function of narrative, propelling the narrative forward without reference to anyone outside the speaking subject, even though this speaking subject is facing an almost mute and perfunctory interlocutor, who is an accidental recipient of the narrator's (Pozdnyshev's) confession in a railway carriage during a three-day train journey. The narrator-hero's heightened emotional state is

hysteria – it is the only thing determining this protracted confession, consisting of his shocking, capriciously one-sided, almost demented view of the bourgeois institution of marriage. The hysteria which grounds this confession belongs to the new model of subjectivity, grounded in the production and structure of meaning or the gaze. This is the gaze at work, not in a work of Tolstoy 'the Realist', but Tolstoy the experimenter whose quest for a new model of perception and new means of artistic expression form the new metatextuality of his later (post-*Anna Karenina*) writings.
The aesthetics of affectivity comes to an almost abrupt end in European art and literature in the early 20th century.

Already the portrayal of *chaste passion* in the pictures of Gustav Klimt (*Kiss*, *Judith*), or Alastair's and Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations to Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, with the death-mask expressions on the faces of lovers caught in the act (either actually dead ones, as in the case of John the Baptist and Holofernes, or alive, as in Klimt's *Kiss* or *The Virgin*), shifts the space of representation beyond the actually *visible* or *representable*, into a *beyond*, which is at first not fully defined except as a Schopenhauerian metaphor for *the will* – the ultimate or transcendental *phenomenon*. The 'death-mask' expression of the lovers pre-empts the representation of *silence* in later surrealist art – the silence of that which cannot be couched in language or discourse. This is at the core of the poetics of *the ineffable*, which structures the formative phase of the Modernist paradigm.

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus:* names and objects

The displacement of affectivity as a constituent element of pre-20th century Western art and literature coincides with a revolution in perception and the theory of meaning, which comes to a head in the philosophies of being or *givenness* in the early 20th century – Husserl, Heidegger and Wittgenstein – with its apotheosis in Marcel Duchamp's last installation, installation *Étant donnés.*[1]

There are many starting points for this revolution, but the one which I have selected as being best able to illuminate the Modernist aesthetics viewed through a semiotics, is the point provided by Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of meaning as it is embodied in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, published in German in 1921. It took Wittgenstein seven years to write it, between the ages of 24 and 31. The work was immediately translated into English by C. K. Ogden (the author, with A.I. Richards, of *The Meaning of Meaning*) and published at Cambridge. Wittgenstein's theory of meaning is compressed into seven paragraphs, containing aphoristic statements that reflect the lucidity and compactness of the logical system they serve to expound. In the German original, *The Tractatus* reads like Nietzsche's aesthetico-anthropological,

[1] *Étant donnés*: *1. La chute d'eau*; 2. *Le gaz d'éclairage*. This is the title of Marcel Duchamp's installation, constructed between 1946 and 1966 in New York. It is considered the last great work of the father of the ready-made object in Surrealism.

equally aphoristic writings, but without the density of Nietzsche's metaphoric language. Despite the technicalities of symbolic logic, *The Tractatus* reads more or less like beautifully construed Kafkaesque or post-modern prose.

In setting out to write this book, Wittgenstein states in the preface that his only aim is to provide *pleasure* for the reader who might have read it with understanding, and who might have entertained the same or similar thoughts himself before coming to Wittgenstein's book. The book, Wittgenstein claims, does not have a didactic or pedagogic aim. He therefore does not intend 'to persuade' or influence the reader, any more than (post)-modern literature intends to teach or convert, but only to fascinate and seduce.

Another stated aim in Wittgenstein's *The Preface* is this book's task of: "[…] setting (drawing) a limit to thought, or rather – not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts: for in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e. we should be able to think what cannot be thought). It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be drawn, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense."[2] Contrary to the opinion of some commentators,[3] or even Bertrand Russell, who, to Wittgenstein's chagrin, misunderstood *The Tractatus*, Wittgenstein does not privilege metaphysics or fulfil a Modernist project of searching for the *ineffable*. Nor does *The Tractatus* deal in representational theory of knowledge, despite the fact that Wittgenstein speaks of the *mirroring* of that which exists *in language*. What he does can only be inferred from a close reading of his text. Let us therefore hone in on some of Wittgenstein's concepts at close range.

The Tractatus is a description and ultimately a concrete example (or a model) of the structure of language, language being synonymous with meaning and discourse. The *Tractatus* is thus a model of the structure of meaning. Central to this model are three interrelated concepts: that of *object* ("Gegenstand"); that of *fact* ("Tatsache"); and that of *states of affairs* ("Sachverhalte", "Sachlagen"). The relationships between these three concepts make up the abstract grid ("scaffolding" or "Rűstung" is a word used in *T.)*, located in *logical space*, which constitutes the locus where language or meaning is produced. The structure of this *grid* is as follows: "The world divides into facts." (1.2) Facts constitute *states of affairs* or *what is the case*. States of affairs are relationships between *things* or *objects* ("Gegenstände", "Sachen", "Dinge", 2.01). "It is immanent to a thing [Ding] that it should be able to be a constituent of a state of affairs." (2.011) ("Es ist dem Ding wesentlich, der Bestandteil eines Sachverhaltes sein zu kőnnen." (2.011). And finally: this *thing* or *object* is of necessity *simple*: "Der Gegenstand ist einfach." (2.02)

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[2] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* London, Routledge, 1974 (First published in German 1921, in English 1922). All quotations are from this edition, with indication of the paragraph in brackets.

[3] For example: Allen Thiher, *Words in Reflection: Modern Language Theory and Postmodern Fiction*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984.

It is a mistake of many commentators to have taken *thing* or *object* in the literal meaning, despite the fact that Wittgenstein offers no example of a "simple object". It would not be consistent with the abstract (logical or symbolic, that is, purely ideational) nature of Wittgenstein's model to invest *thing* with any concrete meaning. Or one might end up speaking about "the thing in itself" ("das Ding an sich"), and be catapulted out of the 20th century, back into German idealist philosophy.

When Wittgenstein uses the term "Ding" or "Gegenstand", he is merely trying to invest an abstract concept with maximum tangible sense. In this respect, "thing" or "object" can be said to be metaphors for a *minimal* sense unit, which is the starting point in Wittgensetin's relational, spatial thinking. In fact, Wittgenstein places the "object into correlation with *the sign*, by saying that: "Identity of object I express by identity of sign, and not by using a sign for identity. Difference of objects I express by difference of signs." (5.53)

Consistent with his spatial model of sense or meaning is Wittgensetin's assertion that *logic is before experience*, and knowledge is *not sensory knowledge*. This is consistent with Hegel's analytic of the subject and object which mediate each other through/in language. Wittgenstein's model of language fits strictly into the framework of phenomenology.

Wittgenstein establishes a clear correlation between *the object* and *space*: "Each thing is, as it were, in a space of possible states of affairs. This space I can imagine empty, but I cannot imagine the thing without the space." (2.013) Objects have the potential to occur in all states of affairs and this potential is the *form* of *objects*: "Objects contain the possibility of all situations (Sachlagen)" (2.014) and "the possibility of its occurring in states of affairs is the form of an object." (2.0141)

At one point in *The Tractatus*, Wittgenstein does come to speak about objects in the everyday sense of the term. The objects he speaks about are such mundane ones as "tables, chairs, and book." But he uses these real objects as analogies to illustrate or dramatise (as in a maquette) how the *sense* of a proposition is expressed through *spatial arrangement* of the *propositional sign*. In order to understand the status of *objects* in Wittgenstein's theory of meaning, it is also necessary to understand how thought comes to be expressed in propositions: "A logical picture of facts is a thought." This statement has prompted commentators to infer that Wittgenstein's theory of meaning accords primacy to the visual. The visual is, however, once again the closest metaphoric approximation to the process of *conceptualisation* per se. Whether this *inner eye*, which structures relationships in a logical grid, is an actual "eye" is questionable. After all, there is no such internal organ in the human body. The gaze, which structures perception through selection and substitution according to the psychoanalytic model of perception, is radically distinct from "the eye" (Lacan). With this provision, we can move onto the next statement about thought and its conceptualising or *modelling* (*picturing*) ability: "'A state of affairs is thinkable.' What this means is that we can picture it to ourselves." (3.001) Wittgenstein gives the key to this concept of the visual when he states: "A picture is a model of reality." (2.12) This modelling is accomplished

through the correlation of a picture (model) and the object (always already 'abstract') it represents through logical form (2.18).

In *The Tractatus*, Wittgenstein offers two more assumptions about language, which are particularly significant in relation to 20th century representations of the world of objects. Wittgensetin states that language functions as a kind of image: "A logical picture of facts is a thought." (3). ("Das logische Bild der Tatsachen ist der Gedanke.") But the German word "Bild" means more than "picture". It also means "model". Thus language can be said to model the world and not just to mirror it. Wittgensetin himself states this in paragraph 2.12: "A picture is a model of reality." ("Das Bild ist ein Modell der Wirklichkeit.") The *visual* is, once again, the closest metaphoric approximation to the process of *conceptualisation* as such. This 'inner eye' which structures logical relationships in a logical grid is not an actual 'eye' but the gaze as posited in psychoanalytic theory (Lacan).[4]

The other assumption concerns the observer or the *picturing subject*. Wittgenstein excludes the *knowing self* from the world, since no *self* needs to be presupposed for propositions to function: It is clear that "*A* believes that *p*" and "*A* has the thought *p*", and "*A* says *p*" are of the form of "*p* says *p*": and this does not involve a correlation of a fact with an object, but rather the correlation of facts by means of the correlation of their objects. (5.542) Hence the *knowing self* is a transcendental eye (or gaze) that sees its world but cannot see itself seeing. Or, as Wittgensetin puts it: "This shows, too, that there is no such thing as the soul – the subject etc. – as it is conceived in superficial psychology of the day." (5.5421)

There is according to Wittgensetin's model of language and meaning (discourse) no world of private, inner experience. What we 'experience' is language, the process of signification, which has effects. One of the foundational effects is symbolic 'castration' (according to Freud) or the emergence of the 'split' subject (Lacan) – the subject split by the signifier. Therefore, no metaphysical *self* is to be found in the world: "The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world." (5.632) Consequently, the "I": "shrinks to an extensionless point, and there remains the reality that is coordinated with it." (5.64)

Wittgenstein denies that there is any metaphysics in his model of language, for in the last paragraph of *The Tractatus*, he says jocosely: "... throw away the ladder ..." This is a metaphor, or at least as close to a metaphor as one finds in Wittgenstein's minimalist text. What this metaphor expresses is that the mind is not an arbitrary producer of meanings even if meaning itself is indeterminate – it may occur or it may not occur in a given moment, in a given situation. It is the *world's facts* that are

[4] See, for example, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's essay "Cezanne's Doubt", in: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense (Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy),* Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1964, 9–25. See also Jacques Lacan, "The Split between the Eye and the Gaze", in: Jacques-Alain Miller (ed.), *Jacques Lacan: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* New York–London, W. W. Norton & Company, 1981, 67–78. Compare also Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind", in: James M. Edie (ed.), *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1964, 159–189.

reproduced as an *image in thought*: "A logical picture is a thought." (3) Meaning starts in the world of objects, which are condensed (Freud's term for dream thoughts) into "facts" of logic or meaning. This is known as the process of substitution in Lacan's theory of the signifier.

Wittgensetin's logical space and the psychoanalytic gaze

Wittgenstein's model of logical space as a site of the production of meaning in perception is supplemented by the phenomenology of the gaze. The gaze in psychoanalytic and phenomenological theory is an agency of symbolization that is quite distinct from the organ of the eye and of the action of ordinary vision. The gaze is 'revelational' in that it segments and sorts; it thus transforms the world it perceives into discrete and meaningful signs or images. The function of the *gaze* is fundamental to perception and to the formation or structure of meaning. The *gaze* in Lacan's psychoanalytic model of the subject – the subject of knowledge, the subject of perception, the subject of the unconscious and of desire – is affiliated with the originary 'gap' or 'lack'. Lacan starts his exploration of the *gaze* with an homage to Merleau-Ponty's posthumously published work, *The Visible and the Invisible* (written 1959–1961). Lacan evaluates this work as forming a dividing line in contemporary philosophy on the subject of perception: "This work, *Le Visible et l'invisible,* may indicate for us the moment of arrival of the philosophical tradition – the tradition that begins with Plato with the promulgation of the idea, of which one may say that, setting out from an aesthetic world, it is determined by an end given to being as sovereign good, thus attaining a beauty that is also its limit. And it is not by chance that Merleau-Ponty recognised its guide in the eye."[5]

The phenomenological principle, which addresses Lacan so powerfully, is Merleau-Ponty's rediscovery of "the dependence of the visible on that which places us under the eye of the seer."[1] Extending the path proposed by Merleau-Ponty, Lacan goes on to establish that there is something 'prior' to the seer's *eye* – this is the seer's *shoot (pousse)* – or the *gaze,* which pre-exists the *eye* as organ. This pre-existence of the *gaze* is established through the double perspective that governs seeing, namely: "I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides." Thus, "we are beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world."[6]

In answer to the implied question of what is contained in or apprised by the *gaze* in the act of *gazing*, and, by extension, what the *gaze* does to help us organize what we perceive, Maurice Merleau-Ponty gives us the following (fragmented) formulation in the *Working Notes* of his *The Visible and the Invisible*: "It is the idea not of a slice of the objective world between me and the horizon, and not of an objective ensemble organized synthetically (under an idea), but of an axis of equivalencies – of

[5] Jacques Lacan, *"The Split between the Eye and the Gaze", op. cit.,* 71.

[6] Ibid, 74–75.

an axis upon which all the perceptions that can be met with there are equivalent, not with respect to the objective conclusion they authorize (for in this respect they are quite different) but in that they are all under the power of my vision of the moment [sic] elementary example: all the perceptions are implicated in my actual I can – what is seen can be an object near and small or large and far-off. [...] what I represent here is a series of "visual pictures" and their law ... It is the gaze within which they are all simultaneous, fruits of my I can – It is the very vision of depth ..."[7]

The *gaze* thus establishes a *synchronicity* in perception. This transposition of the process of perception into the present *moment* imparts *power* to the *gaze* and renders the *gaze* part of *experience*. It is the fact that all the visual pictures are brought into a state of equivalence under the category of *synchronicity* that endows vision with a kind of 'objectivity'. Extrapolating from Merleau-Ponty's theses, we can say that it is this 'objectivity', established through 'equivalencies' in time, to which the *gaze* adds the dimension of 'depth' (which is 'space'), which structures *appearances*. The category of time is, according to Merleau-Ponty's conception, "a series of *Erlebnisse*."[8] Thus, we can conclude, *appearances* are a series of *experiences* in time.

The object in Modernism as a fact of the world: representation of space in Magritte and Escher

The work of René Magritte and M. C. Escher correlates well in its aesthetics with Wittgenstein's *relational thinking* as well as the phenomenology of the gaze. For both artists, the representation of space as depth or reverse perspective ("*обратная перспектива*")[9] is at the centre of their *procédé*. There is no evidence that Magritte knew Wittgenstein's theory of meaning,[10] yet the correspondence between the latter and Magritte's images is striking. It is a curious coincidence that Wittgenstein's lectures at Cambridge in 1933-34, which became known as *The Blue Book*, were contemporaneous with Magritte's completion of *The Human Condition I* (1933). In 1960, Magritte produced a film script (actually made into a film by Luc de Heusch), entitled *Magritte, or, the Lesson of Objects*.[11] In this film, Magritte himself plays the narrator, while the theme of the film is Magritte's artistic *procédé*, in particular his treatment of *objects*. The commentary of the narrator is as follows:

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[7] Claude Lefort (ed.), *Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1968, 241–242.

[8] Ibid, 243.

[9] Pavel Florensky, "Obratnaia perspektiva," in: Sv. Pavel Florensky, *Sobrabie sochinenii I: Stat'i po iskusstvu*, Paris, YMCA Press, 1985, 117–192; also in an abridged English version, entitled "The Point", *Geo-Graffity*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1993, 29–39.

[10] Suzi Gablik, *Magritte*, Boston, New York Graphic Society, 1971.

[11] "'Magritte, or, the Lesson of Objects' (A Luc de Heusch film, 1960, with Rene Magritte)", in: Harry Torczyner, *Magritte: Ideas and Images*, New York, Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1977, 46. Compare also Suzi Gablik, op. cit., 102.

"Then I dreamed that objects themselves should eloquently reveal their existence, and I researched how I might make what is called reality manifest. Reality ... Many people confidently speak of it as if they knew it.

For me, it's a word as devoid of meaning as, for example, the words God or Matter. [Magritte lifts glass cover on cheese dish].

Have some cheese, some Brie. If I paint it, can we still say 'This is a piece of cheese?' [Substitute picture representing cheese for real cheese].

Try to eat some to see!

So there is no necessary connection between a thing, an object, or even its name... [...]

Objects can change their names. We can also place them where they are never found, upset the usual order."

Magritte's *procédé* consist of just such a practice of placing familiar (simple) objects in places (or in combinations) in which they are never found. With this procedure, Magritte does not engage simply in defamiliarising the familiar (an early Futurist device). What he does is visually demonstrate that objects can occur in any possible or imagined states of affairs. Thus the picture *La durée poignardée* (*Time Transfixei*, 1939) represents two perfectly familiar (simple) objects, but their unfamiliar (imagined) combination becomes a proposition about "objects contain[ing] the possibility of all situations (Sachlagen)." (2.014) What is of interest to Magritte is neither the mantelpiece nor the locomotive nor the mirror, all of which are mundane objects portrayed with provocative conventionality and almost photographic realism, but the relational, combinatorial potential of these. In that sense, and since the three or four objects represent nothing revelational in themselves, one could say that *the objects* in their concrete meaning and function are irrelevant. What is relevant is precisely their essence of being able to appear in any and hence all imagined states of affairs. The 'simple' objects thus transcend their simplicity to become parts of a new whole: a new meaning about objects and their transformation in the process of perception.

In Escher's prints, the object is likewise represented in its formal essence (or essence as form), echoing Wittgensetin's propositions about objects almost literally. For instance: "In a state of affairs, objects fit into one another like links in a chain." (2.03) Compare this proposition with prints such as *Study of Regular Division of the Plane with Reptiles* (1939) *or Study of Regular Division of the Plane with Birds* (1955) and many others. Escher is also a master at representing spatiality. In a print such as *Depth* (1955) or *Puddle* (1952), the latter representing height through an inversion of familiar space coordinates (literally inversing the position of earth and sky), the illusion of space is achieved through a prismatic multiplication of the object or, as said, inversion of vision. But in a wood engraving such as *Dream* (1935), the quality of space is evoked with more symbolic means.

Dream by Escher

At first glance, this engraving startles us with the apparent familiarity of the individual objects depicted in it, but shocks us at the same time with the unfamiliar proportions or combinations in which these objects are represented. If we are to take the title seriously, then what we have here is the representation of dreaming. But who is the dreaming subject? The stone statue of the bishop is the image of what was once an animate being. But this being is now inanimate matter, stone. The praying mantis is an animate being, but as part of the world of insects, the lowest form of animate life, it cannot dream or have access to meaning or the process of signification. Another contradiction is the representation of hardness or softness of matter. The sarcophagus, although presumably carved in stone, looks *as if* it were made of soft material and padded like the inside of a coffin. Yet another puzzling aspect of the picture is the fact that even the statue looks *as if* it were asleep, particularly if we look at the hands. All these contradictions eliminate the possibility of referential meaning. Nothing relates the objects to meanings outside the objects themselves. Added to that is the vault setting of the dream, which also points to the self-referential nature of the meaning of the dream. The dream, or the process of signification, is thus represented from inside the dream. This is confirmed by Freud's analysis of the syntax of the dream mechanism, which is dominated by the *as if* structure. This provides a symbolic pictorial analogy to Wittgenstein's proposition that we can only perceive reality through language and that language is limited through its own rules of the game.

This wood engraving also correlates with Wittgenstein's proposition about the seeing or knowing subject, or Self, who is not part of the world, but who as it were delimits the world by being beyond the boundary of meaning: "The subject does not belong to the world; rather it is a limit of the world." (5.632) And finally, on the knowing subject becoming "an extensionless point", beyond which there is only "the reality that it coordinates" (5.64), Escher presents us with *Hand with Reflecting Sphere* (1935).

Escher's *Dream* with its representation of death as a metaphor for the space beyond language to which the thinking subject has been banned is echoed in the situation (one could tentatively say plot situation) of much of postmodern prose. Thus, for example, in Maurice Blanchot's *Thomas the Obscure* (1932), the hero, Thomas, goes on experiencing diffuse sensations like *pain, cold, fear, absence of water, a sense of foreignness* of his limbs, while at the same time being *deprived of taste and sight, but experiencing negative desire*, like the "desire not to walk", or like that of his "will, which was fiercely determined to let him sleep there in a passivity exactly like death." All of these states of *lack* are the reverse of states of affect. The same kind of lack of affectivity characterises the content of Blanchot's narrative and Escher's *Dream* woodcarving. Moreover, Thomas' body is turned into a *site*, a *space*, just like an object. At this *site*, meaning (or thought) performs a furious, almost cannibalistic activity of signification: "Around his body, he knew that his thought, mingled with the night, kept watch. He knew with terrible certainty that it, too, was looking for a way to enter into

him. Against his lips, in his mouth, it was forcing itself towards a monstrous union. Beneath his eyelids, it created a necessary sight. And at the same time it was furiously destroying the face it kissed. Prodigious cities, ruined fortresses disappeared. The stones were tossed outside. The trees were transplanted. Hands and corpses were taken away. Alone, the body of Thomas remained, deprived of its senses. And thought, having entered him again, exchanged contact with the void."[12]

This passage pre-empts similar *sujets* in more recent postmodern texts. One instance is Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars*. In a scene between two grotesquely hyperreal lovers, the homunculus-like-like Petkutin is devoured by his wife Kalina, after kissing a drop of blood off his lips. She herself is, at this point, a ghost, having been torn up, limb from limb, and devoured by an amphitheatre full of the dead. Similarly, in Patrick Sűskind's *Perfume*, the retard Grenouille is devoured by a cemetery full of strays and vagabonds, "out of love", induced by a perfume Grenouille had invented. All these are variations on the same symbolic theme. Death is the embodiment of a state, in which the subject is alienated from himself, that is, from the only referent of reality. The external world is perceived by this subject *as if* it were on a different plane of existence from the subject. Signification, represented by thought, acting independently of the subject and *as if* in an adversarial relation to the subject, is perceived as *violence*, embodied in forceful penetration, or dismemberment or the act of cannibalism. Such reification of the means of signification (thought) is the ultimate metaphoric espousal of Wittgenstein's notion of the *simple object* as the paradoxically *concrete* and *firm* foundation of the system of meaning and signification.

[12] Maurice Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, New York, Station Hill Press, 1981, 16.