

CENTRE, PERIPHERY, AND EYE IN THE LATE ROMAN EMPIRE

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The all-seeing eye made it impossible for Arsenius to hide successfully.¹

When the central institutional system becomes more comprehensive and inclusive so that a larger proportion of the life of the population comes within its scope, the tension between the center and periphery, as well as the consensus, tends to increase.²

The title and the above quotations may give some idea of the scope of this article. Other major themes that will be pursued are the effects of literacy on a culture and the problems of maintaining sensory equilibrium and a sense of identity in a society which had a number of totalitarian characteristics.

Late Roman society was one which highly valued writing and books. St. Jerome (A.D. 348-420) could write: "But as we do not envy what is written, so we do reject what is not written. We believe that God was born of the Virgin because we read it. That Mary was married after she brought forth we do not believe because we do not read it" (*In Helvidium* 21). In the prologue to his *Ecclesiastical History* Theodoret declared: "When artists paint on panels and on walls the events of ancient history, they alike delight the eye and keep bright for many a year the memory of

the past. Historians substitute books for panels, bright description for pigments and thus render the memory of past events both stronger and more permanent, for the painters' art is ruined by time."³

Such faith in the trustworthiness and endurance of the written word is a far cry from Homeric belief through hearing and reliance on *fama*, being talked about, to ensure immortality.⁴

This faith in optical evidence apart, the visual stress of late antiquity manifested itself in a variety of ways: fascination with the light-effects of interiors and decorations; representations in paintings, coins, mosaics, and sculptures of men and women with massive staring eyes which often appear to be gazing upon a heavenly source of light; and gigantic buildings, statues, and designs, which appealed to the sense best able to comprehend them, vision. The tactility of sculpture declined in favour of the glitter of mosaic. Compared with earlier centuries clothing was bright, variegated, ornate. In literature there are more references to glittering, sparkling eyes, to the way people stare and glare, and to delight in gazing.⁵ Third- and fourth-century panegyrics emphasize the value of seeing the emperor do things, not just hearing about them. Cultures and periods vary in the importance they attach to the visual world. St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430) can muse on the way that vision has asserted its sensory primacy: he notes that "seeing" can embrace perception by means of hearing, smell, taste, and touch.⁶ However, visual perception is a complex process and is determined to a considerable extent by cultural forces. Examination of the way men used their eyes in late antiquity should tell us something about the forces at work.

Alphabetic literacy puts a premium on acquiring information through the eye. Books store static symbols. What is the effect on a culture of a millenium's experience of this? What was the effect on the host culture of a technology of acuity, regularity, linearity, fixity, and expungement of wandering error? Late antiquity was a time when the book was venerated as an icon and storehouse of authority, power, and inspiration. The environment came to be conceived of as a book full of legible signs, only awaiting decipherment to provide knowledge and understanding.⁷

In writing, lead discs were rolled along the edge of a ruler to provide straight furrows on the surface for the pen to travel within. Pens

were periodically sharpened. Sponges removed errors. A sixth-century Byzantine dedication illustrates these features:

Callimenes, resting from its long labour his sluggish hand that trembles with age, dedicates to Hermes his disk of lead that running correctly close to the straight ruler can deftly mark its track, the hard steel that eats the pens, the ruler itself, too, guide of the undeviating line, the rough stone on which the double tooth of the pen is sharpened when blunted by long use, the sponge, wandering Triton's couch in the deep, healer of the pen's errors, and the ink-box with many cavities that holds in one all the implements of calligraphy.⁸

If one thinks of the human senses arranged along a spectrum, at one end will be vision, the most detached and distancing mode of perception. The eye cannot see clearly something held against it but needs a certain intervening distance. At the other end of the spectrum will be touch and taste, the proximate, contacting senses. In the middle will be hearing and smell, modes which allow some distance in detecting stimuli but whose pick-up range is much less than for vision. Men try to support a degree of equilibrium among the senses as they perceive the phenomenal world. Thus sight, to compensate for its deficiencies (it lacks intimacy), powerfully and persistently evokes tactility: it tries to stay in touch, as it were. Vision interprets at a distance information about spatial extent, shape, size, texture, heat, and moisture gained from earlier tactile experience. "Sight is a privileged sense which endows our world with a kind of structure which establishes intelligible distances and which leaves things in their place. But . . . the sense of sight isolates details, thus falsifies their position so that absurdity is not far away. And absurdity can bring on a feeling of nausea."⁹ It is however the *focused* eye of central vision which isolates and detaches. If objects within the field are to be focused upon, measured and analyzed (or, to put it another way, are to be isolated or distinguished from their ground or field), the observer's body must be felt as separated from that field. As will be stressed later, unfocused, peripheral vision conveys a field much more intimately connected with the viewer. It emanates in an obvious way from the viewer who is

centered and balanced within it, not reaching out for something separate and distinct: it promotes psychic fusion with the object.¹⁰ If the focused eye, with its sensitivity to texture and the specific/particular, can be likened to the finger-tips that reach out and touch something, the unfocused eye is like the arms that stem from the torso, bridge the space between subject and object and embrace the general/universal.

Touch provides the ultimate confirmation and reassurance. To touch is also to be touched. The grounding, relaxing, eupeptic function of touch is most important, and deprivation of sufficient tactile experience from an early age produces anxious, tense, emotionally unstable or inhibited individuals, uncertain of their psychic and somatic boundaries, out of touch, socially gauche, tactless.¹¹ Part of the range of sensory experience covered by touch is kinaesthesia and proprioception, the awareness of internal muscular movements and states that tell where one's centre of gravity lies. This, too, sight seeks to recover in various ways, notably by its appetite for regular rhythmic patterns. A regular visual pattern may evoke a regular muscular activity such as walking. And as it scans a picture or object, the eye is like a finger moving over a differentiated surface and registering a series of touches.¹²

The more the input from one sense is isolated, the more intense are the thereby isolated stimuli and the more effort there is by the other senses to neutralize the dominance, relieve the tension, and provide a balanced sensory diet. The sharpening of one sense sharpens the others. The late Roman world provides a fascinating instance of effort after sensory equilibrium. If the trend towards visual intensity and towards regarding the environment as a picture-book reaches a peak at that time, so do the equilibrating trends; and within the intensified world of vision, there is an equilibrating interplay between focused and unfocused vision.

The activity of late Roman government, like that of Achaemenid Persia with its King's Eye, may be likened to a big eye scanning a wide area, having to respond to and counter pressures towards decentralization and seeking to convey a sense of divine ubiquity.¹³ It sought to achieve this through a cosmopolitan administrative hierarchy and senate, imperial peregrinations, moving courts nearer to the empire's frontiers, periodically dividing the emperor's job among two, three or four men, equipping and

encouraging local communities to withstand long sieges by providing strong fortifications, by encouraging provincial assemblies and self-reliance in local defence, and by combining this self-help with at least the promise of eventual aid from the centre via an increased network of communications. The government strove to impress the vigour of the centre upon its subjects as administration decentralized. The greater the proportion of the popular attention that was turned towards the centre, the more easily the population could be kept under scrutiny by the central eye. An attractive ideal had to be provided and an insistence that subjects focus frequently on the centre, lest attention wander elsewhere and the central figure become blurred. The ideal of central authority was expressed through coins, literature, legislation, art, architecture, ceremonial, and ecclesiastical policy. A stiff, stereotyped language of gesture was developed that signalled the confinement of the personality and restricted emotional and physical expression. This "script for the illiterate" was oriented towards simplicity, clarity, and the present, affirming the superfluity of allusiveness, of the resonant past, of being soaked in the cultural tradition.¹⁴ Panegyrists likewise strove for clarity and simplicity, exalting the symmetry and beauty of centralized order that triumphs over peripheral usurpation.¹⁵ In coinage there was increased central control of the provincial mints and less diversity of coin-types. In ceremonial, the emperors wore rich clothing and stood immobile and silent, the point of stillness at the hub of the government machine, their features mask-like, rigid, fixed.¹⁶ The emperor lay at the centre of an information-web that relied on spies and specialists and which spawned corruption, deceit, and hypocrisy. This occurred as individual morality and conscience gave way to a numbing corporate morality, to a cult of bigness, and to an effort to mirror on earth the celestial ideal of ordered centrality. As a means towards achieving this goal, the ideal of the dutiful servant was, as one fourth-century emperor (Constantius) said, to be kept "fixed in our sight and mind."¹⁷

In legislation, one of our best sources for the government's ideal is the *Theodosian Code*, the codification of Roman law completed under the emperor Theodosius II around A.D. 435. The authors declared that, "This Code shall permit no error, no ambiguities . . . and shall show what must

be followed and what must be avoided by all."¹⁸ The Code contains a great deal of fourth-century legislation and was part of an effort to increase speed and efficiency in administration by gathering together the many scattered imperial edicts and records of imperial legislation into one coherent whole. It provides abundant evidence for both the nature of the centripetal ideal and the nature of the centrifugal forces the government tried to combat. A few examples: in 370 a ban, on pain of death, on provincials marrying barbarians, for thereby they blurred divisions, upset categories and encouraged peripheral or extra-imperial allegiances; in 383, a requirement that applicants for imperial service be carefully checked, so that their home, family, and parents could not be misrepresented, for every would-be cog must be accurately described and labelled; in 372, a fine for private persons employing imperial weavers, thereby diverting their services from the central employer.¹⁹

The Latin word *acies* means both sharp, focused vision, and a line of battle. Uniforms are imposed when a group or government wishes to harness corporate energies for sharply defined objectives. Uniforms have the power to transform humans into mask-faced automatons, their eyes fixed on some distant goal. Notions of uniformity and order at the centre are inherent in a series of laws that were issued from 382 to 416 regulating the garb worn by various ranks within the city of Rome. Stern warnings went out to those subjects who sought to dilute the distinctiveness of the imperial purple by using it themselves.²⁰ If this were to occur emperors might become unspectacular, peripheral, unauthoritative figures. There insistently appears in much of the ideology of the time a belief that deeds should match appearances, clothes match character and that component units remain stable.²¹

The panoramic, unfocused vision of an infant makes no distinction between centre and periphery, figure and ground, self and environment, I and not-I. Primitive adults tend to perceive the visual world as one of dynamic movement. All forms are perceived as doing or feeling something, and as moving, being about to move, or having just stopped moving. There is a strong urge to imitate all perceived movement and identify with objects. Perceiving form as a static phenomenon is a later development. Even then, although the drive to empathize and identify and imitate by

bodily movements may weaken, it does not disappear. It persists largely at an unconscious level, and any forced attention or inhibition of body and eye movement (staring) causes tension.²²

As noted earlier, to notice and understand one's environment, one has to distance oneself from it, and the focused eye is crucial to this process. Focusing on a segment of the environment and studying its peculiar properties develops a sense of difference between seer and seen. The classical Greeks objectified and analyzed a hitherto diffuse, intermingling environment, calling it *Physis* or Nature. At the same time they diminished empathy with it, since a static, held-in-focus form is less obviously animate, less inviting of identification and imitative movement. The more precisely something is measured, the more it is isolated and a sense of interconnectedness lost. People are reduced to objects by being stared at. Objectifying time, the Greeks developed historiography, chronology, and the study of cause and effect. Time itself shifted from being cyclic and intangible to being a linear, segmented commodity.²³

Alphabetic writing fertilized this visual education and emphasis.²⁴ Homeric, preliterate, oral man had a hazy sense of his distinct identity. He was embedded in a dynamic, wraparound, infusing world of tactile and aural space, and he scanned with criss-cross eye movements his visual panorama for movements that threatened his survival.²⁵ Reading requires a special type of linear, regular, sequential scanning that has to be learnt. Writing, that is, the representation of sound by abstract visual symbols marked on a surface, greatly extends the range of human intercourse in time and space, an intercourse which is in part aided by the very discipline of writing, for, as Plato observed, writing between lines was a training for staying within rules/laws, which training in turn fostered the spread of civilization.²⁶ Writing induces a split between the worlds of sight and sound, and renders words, the clothes of thought, static and objective, capable of scrutiny and rescruity, cognition and recognition.²⁷ Words, thoughts, and parts of the environment become locked in time and space, a technical feat still considered wondrous in the fourth century A.D.²⁸ Reading elevates vision as a source of information vis-à-vis hearing and touch. If one swims in the tactile and aural environment, one stands before script, confronting it and separate from it. The eye facilitates

measurement and spatial judgments, and confers detachment from the proximate world of touch, feeling, and emotion.²⁹ It also brings isolation, an increased sense of separate identity, and the potentially unnerving loss of contact with the environment. The Platonic ideal of the focused, detached philosopher, ennobled by steady contemplation of ideal, fixed, eternal forms, receiving wisdom from direct vision and undecieved by the other senses, is a markedly visual one. It was an ideal that may appeal to rulers and priests in any age and certainly did in late antiquity. If reason or intellect is the sixth or common sense that synthesizes the input from the five "lower" senses, then vision acts as a kind of threshold to the intellect by, in turn, synthesizing the input from the other four. Hence a marriage between vision and reason, and semi-divine status at least for the role of vision, the second most intelligent sense and one with the capacity to discern wood from trees and to free the mind from the body's reflexes. The exalted marriage of vision and reason was subsequently endorsed by the likes of Aristotle, Cicero, and Horace.

Speaking generally, the period from the introduction of the alphabet (circa 700 B.C.) to late antiquity shows an undulating rise in visuality, objectivity, literacy, and linearity. As they sought to dissect, to classify, and to establish causation, pre-Socratic philosophers, Hippocratic physicians, and the sophists showed many signs of a new inquiring attitude towards the increasingly objectified environment. In many ways, Aristotle and the Hellenistic investigators, whether technical innovators like Archimedes and Hiero, or observers of optical and geographic phenomena such as Euclid, Aristarchus, Posidonius, and Eratosthenes, mark the apogee of this scrutiny because, however literate the ancient world became, it was still by modern standards an overwhelmingly oral/aural world where most people were willing to accept the verbal authority of someone who had undertaken the somewhat unnatural, tension-ridden task of focusing hard and long on something. The Hellenistic period was when pictorial poetry first flourished and when the impact of literacy on Greek civilization was most fully felt.³⁰ Then began explorations (which were enthusiastically pursued in late antiquity) of the spatial possibilities of words laid on surfaces, palindromes, vertical writing, and visual mnemonic devices such as acrostics. Stenography widened the sight/sound split.

Whether it was something innate or whether it was because they experienced a compressed literary development through exposure to the literate Greeks, the Romans were a more vision- and book-oriented people than the Greeks. The Roman cosmos was more ordered, objectified, and spatial; their literature was more marked by light, dark, and colour, and their architecture more concerned to bound space.³¹ They intensified Greek visual-rational space with an extensive empire that featured the exercising of power at a distance, impersonal communication, settlement grids, repeatable, axial structures, and straight roads that ignored natural irregularities.³² The crisis of the late Republic was, in one respect, a clash between the Italian, small-thinking, non-intellectual world of local ties and of the ear, and the Hellenized, big-thinking, intellectual, bureaucratic world of the eye, which could, via script, centralize power and wield it at a distance over secure lines of communication.³³ The climax of organized empire in the second century A.D. provoked an alienation and reaction that erupted in the third century. This chaotic, cacophonous period brought on a re-affirmation of the visual-rational values of order, linear arrangement, clear definition, and bureaucratic power. Public libraries, which at Rome increased from two under Augustus to twenty-eight in the fourth century, and archives were the nodes in the network of power. They proliferated in the provinces. Stenography and the public post quickened the accumulation, processing, and transmission of information and ideas. Stenography appears to have been more widely used in late antiquity than ever before.³⁴ The public post, by the ruinous burdens it imposed on provincials, illustrates how speedier communications and the technology which produces them delight governments, with their spatial preoccupations, more than subjects.³⁵ In most languages the word "speed" is intimately connected or interchangeable with "space" and "success."³⁶

Late classical antiquity is an especially interesting period for the study of visual perception not only because the effects of the mutually reinforcing forces of bureaucracy and literacy are so evident but also because Christianity, although influenced by this nexus, made an important contribution from its own particular area of concern. Christianity's emphasis on the absolute value of the individual heightened self-awareness and brought, for many, a frightening detachment and isolation from the

environment. More non-political autobiographies survive from the century-and-a-half after A.D. 360 than from all preceding classical antiquity.³⁷

The trend to asceticism and rejection of the body led to a preference for the distancing perception of the eye, although it was recognized that even the eye could provide temptations that were more easily avoided by transfer to the desert periphery.³⁸ The Neoplatonism evident in upper ecclesiastical echelons reinforced the ideal of the controlled and controlling eye as the highest, most spiritual way of relating to the environment. The other senses were distrusted as irrational, debasing snares. Although the ultimate reality was invisible, visual perception offered the nearest approach to divine experience.³⁹

At the centre of the retina is a small indentation known as the "fovea." It covers only two degrees of the retinal arc and is very rich in receptors known as "cones." These cones supply information about colour, give great acuity to the foveal image, and are comparatively scarce outside the fovea. Surrounding the fovea are receptors known as "rods." They are sensitive to light and dark. They are most dense immediately next to the fovea and thin out gradually towards the periphery, but remain far more numerous than cones anywhere outside the fovea. Because they are attached to the fibres of the optic nerve in a different way from the cones, rods are far more sensitive to movement than cones.⁴⁰ Given the narrowness of human foveal vision (particularly when compared with that of other species), peripheral vision is essential for men's survival.

The periphery offers an array of objects for the eye to bring on to the fovea should it be allowed to do so. Even if the eye is focused on one object, other unfocused, peripheral objects are noticed, especially if moving, and may subsequently be focused upon. When foveal vision isolates a figure, it may be labelled, categorized, and then quickly dropped below the threshold of interest and attention. Though the eye may appear stationary when staring at an object, it is in fact making minute criss-cross movements, imperceptibly scanning the periphery and looking for new figures. It has to be constantly recentred so long as conscious attention wishes to keep the object in focus. Movement of a figure across a background most naturally offers objects for the eye to focus upon. If an object is fixated, the eye is forced to regard it as the figure. Since

constant shifting is the natural tendency of the eye, maintaining an object in prolonged focus and frustrating the eye's interest in discerning moving figures requires effort, concentration, and a comparatively high level of awareness and arousal. It may cause considerable tension. There is always much less tension if the eye can roam freely and keep the relationship between figure and ground fluid and flexible.⁴¹

Visual acuity drops 50% for an object one degree horizontally from the centre of the fovea, 85% if eight degrees away. Peripheral vision, especially in unfamiliar surroundings, conveys a world of ill-defined movement, of low definition, two-dimensional, ambiguous shapes and blobs of light, of gaps and intervals. It has the properties of primitive organization, diffuse and lacking in distinction between subject and object.⁴² It is also the best means of seeing in the dark. Foveal vision conveys a world of static, discrete objects, of clear, high definition, substantial, three-dimensional forms, of sharp colours, continuous lines and coherent patterns. Imagery is undistorted and mirror-like. Given good light, central vision permits the most accurate judgements about distance and clearly distinguishes subject and object (or, ruler and ruled).

If, to venture an analogy, late antique man is thought of as groping in a strange and often gloomy world, the necessity to use peripheral vision, his affinity for such a way of seeing and the prominence of peripheral-type imagery in his consciousness might be explained. The dialogue between the foveal figure and peripheral ground, and the constant urge of the eye (which expresses the wavering attention of the mind) to seek new figures in the ground, provides an insight into the tensions of late-Roman society. On the one hand, there were the centralizing, differentiating, focusing drives in art, architecture, literature, church, and government to create solid, structured, focused figures, sharply set off from the vague, filmy ground. To maintain, in consequence, a high state of tension and arousal amongst its subjects and to discourage new, alien, alternative foci from entering the attention field (or from being attended to if they did), the government, working on a large scale, employed spies, army recruiters, bureaucrats, tax-collectors, roads, coins, censuses, and the standardizing forces of written language. The apparatus of culture was employed to manipulate and supply stimuli, to work on individuals from

outside. On the other hand, there were in play the decentralizing forces that sought intimacy and comfort in motivation from within and in haphazard, intermingling movement: barbarian migrations and enclaves, monasteries and manors, pilgrimages and peregrinations, local schisms, the revival of provincial cultures, and the growth of vernaculars.⁴³

In a way, the relationship between central figure and peripheral ground is the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious, logic and imagination, intellect and intuition. A healthy, balanced relationship exists when these contrasting aspects seek to complement and not dominate each other. The centre is associated with awareness, control, rationality, and visual comprehension, the periphery with subliminal input, dreams, reveries, and symbols. There is a fine concrete illustration of the links between centrality and consciousness in one of Carl Jung's works.⁴⁴ Five Roman coins are placed in a line according to how far from the capital they were minted. The heads on the obverses progressively disintegrate and become indefinite and symbolic, more open to discussion and different interpretations. Below this is a series of five drawings of a head by an artist in progressive stages of influence by LSD. The drawings become more metaphoric as conscious control is overcome by the unconscious, as awareness relaxes and diffuses.

The prevalence of metaphor and symbolism in late antiquity has often been noted. A satisfying symbol is one that evokes many associations and promotes imaginative scanning into its peripheral aura. Things in isolation do not make symbols. They have to be related and juxtaposed.⁴⁵ The function of symbolism is to go beyond the limitation of the fragment and link different parts of the whole. An unsatisfying symbol is more like a foveal mirror -- explicit, sterile, static, detached, leaving little to the imagination, offering matter without spirit, like a harlot.⁴⁶ Essentially, the contrast between foveal and peripheral imagery is between the degree of participation required of the observer. The prevalence of symbolism in late antiquity is part of a massive effort to reduce alienation and step up involvement.

Rutilius Namatianus was Prefect of the City of Rome in 412. Focused and fixated on the city of Rome, he hated barbarians and Christian ascetics. For all the digressions in his poem *De Reditu* (perhaps representing

involuntary peripheral scanning), Rutilius' account of his journey from Rome to Gaul is a linear, time- and space-segmented progression, proceeding by a series of jerks, like eyes traversing a line of script. Contrast the contemporary Christian pilgrim Etheria.⁴⁷ Her zig-zag travels represent a freer peripheral scanning as she sought to satisfy her sensory hunger by roaming the empire and gazing upon the numerous foci of holy power.⁴⁸ The effort to achieve sensory equilibrium could take a different form. When someone like Jerome delineates in loving detail the sensuality and vice he professes to abhor, he allows himself to focus on normally forbidden peripheral images and thus express some repressed tactile urges.

The variegated nature of late Roman art and architecture makes generalization difficult. Nevertheless, there is general agreement that there existed in the various artistic media a trend towards two dimensional insubstantiality and a fascination with light-effects. Such a trend is heralded by the Neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus (A.D. 205-270) when he advocates viewing the world from the inside instead of objectively and from the outside. Subjectivity, inverse perspective, and simultaneity are affirmed, and three-dimensional space and logical perspective denied, when he says that the background of an image to be contemplated should be replaced by an arrangement of the component parts of the image side-by-side in a single plane.⁴⁹ There existed a counter-trend towards solidity and rational organization of space which was at its strongest in the late third and early fourth centuries but waned appreciably in the fifth and sixth centuries. Much of the art, especially the "official" art, was characterized by features that facilitate perception of the figure from the ground, such as symmetry, brightness, unidirectional continuous lines, and closed (as distinct from open, imperfectly bounded) areas. Indeed, this tendency was so strong at times that the ground was virtually abolished, reflecting the establishment's concern with the distracting qualities of the periphery. But what happened was a fulfillment of the principle that extremes turn most easily into each other. Isolated figures take on many features of two-dimensional imagery because communication of three-dimensional weight and depth depends on a syntactic relationship between figure and ground. Thus the colours of Diocletianic painting, for example, became unrealistic in the sense that they bore little relationship to nature

and the environment but became mere areas, arbitrary, hard, fixed, and gem-like.⁵⁰

The popularity of the various media relative to each other is suggestive. Three-dimensional sculpture declines and two-dimensional wall-mosaic grows in popularity. In ivory and jewel-work, no less than in mosaics, there is commonly an indefiniteness of outline and pattern that invites observer participation. The complexity of the overall artistic scene is, in part, a consequence of a resurgence of provincial styles, especially in the West. Political decentralization and artistic inexplicitness were both more marked in the West. Regionalism, the inexplicit, and declining interest in Euclidean space had a strong anti-rational, anti-idealistic, anti-Hellenic quality.⁵¹

Within the relatively tactile medium of sculpture, sculpture-in-the-round became much rarer than reliefs by the fifth century. Even by A.D. 300 there is evident a general flattening of form from rounded fullness to planes emphasizing verticals and horizontals. Frontality became an increasingly dominant characteristic.⁵² When considered necessary, such as in scenes portraying an Emperor, the dominance of the central figure is achieved not by a harmonious, synthesizing relationship between figure and ground but by such crude devices as enlargement, pyramidal composition, strong axes, symmetry of movement, rhythmically arrayed rows of uniform figures that flank the central figure, and a stereotyped, easily recognizable gestural language. "The gesturing hand and the radiant head of the great man held the concern of the artist and the eye of the spectator in an exclusive grasp."⁵³ Subsidiary figures gaze at the main subject and provide the eye with a rhythmic pattern to follow, like the columns of the nave in a basilica, which lead towards the throne or altar. By providing the eye with a rhythmic pattern to follow, kinaesthetic stimulus and satisfaction are offered, but not arresting alternative foci of attention. It was as if there had been a widespread loss of desire or capacity for foveal focusing so that artists, like the government, had to use somewhat unsubtle methods to get attention to centre. However, the steady shift from carving and moulding to drawing and engraving, and greater use of the drill over the chisel worked against easy foveal appeal and the preservation of form. "The chisel works out the tangible form, it follows flexibly all

the ridges and hollows, all the ripples of the plastic surface. The drill, on the other hand, works illusionally, it does not follow the tangible form but leaves a glimmer of lighted marble edges between sharp, shadow-dark drill grooves. With this technique the body loses its substantiality, it disintegrates: *we are anxious lest it shrink to nothing and vanish.*"⁵⁴ One of the achievements of Greek rationalism was the releasing of sculpture from the flat surface to emerge into the focused world of the third dimension. The resultant tension-laden figures have several times in European sculpture relapsed into the relieving peripheral ground:⁵⁵ it was statues in the round that sixth-century Gallic iconoclasts particularly objected to.⁵⁶

The wall mosaic was an important medium for relief of tension. The indirect lighting in churches and the unending restless movements of diffused light and colour of mosaics evoke the peripheral way of seeing and the metaphoric mind, suggesting magic and intangible, subliminal presence. The size of the mosaic and the arrangement of objects within the design encourage extensive scanning to form some impression of the whole. The gaps between the individual *tesserae* of the mosaic produce low definition, weightless imagery akin to that of peripheral imagery. The very lack of acuity and definition invites participation in supplying meaning. In an unauthoritarian, relaxed, personal, non-threatening way, the viewer is invited to draw on his own resources and fill out the design, to bridge the gaps and to interpret the blobs of colour. There is a more fruitful and satisfying interplay between reason and imagination when the individual is left to construct the figure from the ground.⁵⁷ The carpet-designs of third-century floor-mosaics in the East strove to create an illusion of depth by receding planes and inert three-dimensionality. But in the fifth century, while there is some effort to centre the wandering eye by means of strong central foci and boundaries, the two-dimensional surface predominates.⁵⁸

In the order-emphasizing medium of architecture, concrete had paved the way for the vault, the three-dimensional curve and a further stress on spatial definition. Roman urban planning constantly produced an avenue leading to the eye-catching monument, such as a triumphal arch. In fourth-century basilicas the altar or throne sited in front of the decorated

apse was a powerful aid to centralized vision, while the decorated proscenium arch before it helped further to channel attention and reduce the range of involuntary peripheral scanning. Yet the wandering attention was increasingly catered for by windows that no longer served as openings but as attracting areas of colour grafted onto the interior surface of the walls.⁵⁹ In the circular, centralized-plan churches that tended to supplant the rectangular basilicas in the fifth century, a central point was emphasized and the effort to behold the dome from inside required an intensity of effort akin to focusing. But it became far harder to take in most of the decorated interior with one glance. One had to walk around and view from a number of perspectives the ever changing interior landscape; and the dome compelled upward and circular head-movement. The feet had to move and respond to the requirement for a variety of standpoints. The content of the interior scenery could not express itself in a single explicit manner to a static observer. The centralized plan gave great scope for light-effects and the dissolution of solids, and the dome incarnated and fostered the kinaesthesia, resonance, associations, and diffuseness that counters the clarity, linearity, and stillness of mirror-reflection and single perspective.⁶⁰ Throughout much of literate classical antiquity, the main aim of the sub-genre of *ekphrasis* was to convey via words as exact and faithful a description as possible of a figure, its size and the spatial relationships of its parts. Evocation of sound- and light-effects was not ignored, but by the sixth century interest had shifted heavily to this and to evoking the ground. There was an insistence that the mind should not fixate upon the visualized decoration, surface or space, but wander eurhythmically over or through it.⁶¹

As the Christian church in the fourth century moved from the periphery to the centre of power, the tension between centripetalism and centrifugalism within the church became acute. The early hermits of the third and fourth centuries asserted peripheral individualism and freedom from conscription and other authoritarian demands by physical relocation to society's periphery. The frequent ecclesiastical councils were efforts by a Caesaropapist church to achieve uniformity and assert centralizing authority. The church, acceding to and perpetuating Constantine's insistence on dogmatic unity -- quite inappropriately in view of the ethnic

heterogeneity of the empire --, inflamed and extended heresies that might otherwise have simmered gently in small localities. Although scriptural study became an important eremitic activity, the pioneering St. Antony (A.D. 251-356) clung tenaciously to the decentralizing oral tradition, eschewing books and relying on his ears and memory.⁶² The subsequent grouping of many ascetics into monasteries provided numerous scattered foci of Christian power that were to help in the preservation of the eastern empire as a political unit and which helped preserve cultural unity in the disintegrating western half.

Many of the doctrinal disputes which were such a feature of Christianity at this time were about what figure the eye and mind should focus upon and what figures should not be attended to. Orthodoxy means, literally, straight, linear, clear-cut thinking. The church proclaimed the universality of its message and role. It claimed to speak and know best for all the empire's Christians. Many heresies and schisms (such as the Donatism of North Africa, which had a tradition of being anti-central authority and which backed native rebellions in 372-5 and 397-8) were associated with geographic as well as religious centrifugalism. Others such as Pelagianism did not have this regionalist element but based their theological opposition to the Catholic (universal) church on the right and need of the individual to be free to determine his own destiny. They rejected an ideology of imposed values and direction from the centre.⁶³ Also, within the church was a tension between public (and therefore controllable) worship and private worship. Private adoration of icons and local saints threatened the centralizing power of the urban ecclesiastical and imperial hierarchy, and the eighth-century Iconoclast controversy was largely about loci and foci of power.⁶⁴

Christianity's struggle with paganism also has the aspect of a contest between centripetalism and centrifugalism. Christianity grew as a predominantly urban religion of the book and even in the fifth-century paganism and its oral traditions were strong in rural areas. "To abandon paganism . . . was to forget the formulae and liturgies of one's ancient tongue and expose oneself to the uniformity of a written book,"⁶⁵ and to have one's sense of a holy, living landscape replaced by a pleasing visual prospect.⁶⁶ The further afield missionaries took Christianity, the stronger

were the local influences in producing a diluted, less anthropomorphic, Christianity, very different from the orthodox ideal at the centre. The Christian struggle with the pagans blended with that against the demons, the pagan gods, and the irrational forces of darkness. With so much emphasis upon keeping the eye and reason fixed on the goal straight ahead and avoiding error (literally, "wandering" -- heretics as well as pagans were frequently assumed to be in the service of demons), it is not surprising that magical, fantastic, irrational, peripheral, elusive, dream-like, Protean creatures arose so persistently in the mass consciousness, particularly in the guise of sensory seducers. The Christian poet Prudentius (b. 348) refers to these "roaming, violent, filthy spirits" and, in a moment of doubt, wonders: "Is our doctrine true? To Thee, the Master, I appeal. Are we keeping the right faith, or from want of guarding against venomous teachings are we slipping unawares? Hard is it to discern the narrow way of salvation amid twisting paths. So many cross-roads meet us, which have been trodden smooth by the misguided straying of the faithless; so many side-roads join together, where tracks intertwine on this hand and on that; and if, wandering at random, a man follows them, leaving the straight path, he will plunge into the snare of a hidden pitfall which a band of enemies have dug, a band of robbers who beset travellers when they follow the byway."⁶⁷

Victims of demonic possession do not calmly stare but roll their eyes wildly. The relationship that many new Christians had with the old unseen numinous powers of polytheism was imperfectly overlaid by monotheism. Try as they might they could not easily drop the old habits of scattered, diffuse perception and keep the One God in focus. Yet if one was to achieve a clean, guilt-free severance from old allegiances, a ferocious effort to focus was necessary; otherwise one might succumb to the jilted denizens of the resonant oral periphery, who wailed, bleated, lowed, roared, and lamented. It was as well for one of Jerome's ascetic heroes, Hilarion, that his eyes were bright with the gleams and sparks of faith when he heard the echoing voices of demons from a ruined temple and when he encountered Satan. Satan, we are told, struck the first blow by tickling Hilarion's senses and setting lust afire: repressed sensory urges and habits asserted themselves as demons.⁶⁸ Augustine's *City of God*, begun

after the sack of Rome in 410, provided a goal for fixating upon, a haven of ordered certainty set amid what he saw as pagan irrationality, a goal to which the reader is led, incidentally, only after much peripheral digression.

One of the most interesting and comprehensive responses to the problems of living in the late Roman Empire is contained in the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus, a Hellenized Egyptian poet of the fifth century. His mammoth epic poem in forty-eight books on the pagan god of non-rationality and supra-rationality is highly representative of the age, containing as it does a vision of life as an endless series of transformations, where events and actions both constantly scratch and engrave surfaces like a pen on papyrus or parchment, and defy rational planning; an awareness of the significance of literacy and the impact of technological innovation; an absorption in the interpretation of symbols; and a fascination with colour and light-effects.⁶⁹

The conflict between the controlling, centralizing, aware, absolutist figure of Zeus and the decentralized, diffused, wandering, unaware, spontaneous, submerged-in-the-ground monster, Typhon, in Books I and II initiates a theme that broadens and runs through the poem as the tension between all-seeing government, surface rationalizations, order and authoritarian impositions on the one hand, and the chaotic, contradictory, assertive explosions of noise from the endlessly dancing, spiralling men, animals and plants on the other.⁷⁰ The liberating, Protean Dionysus himself has an Apollonian side -- imperial conqueror and imposer of order, organizer of men to fight in armies and not as a rabble of individuals. In the poem assertion of individuality and involvement is not offered by touch or by dialogue, but by movement, dancing, and singing. One repeatedly finds in the *Dionysiaca* scenes of remote staring, wordless gestures, focusing silences, self-absorbed trances, isolated and self-centred monologues, or else, exasperated, alienated jeering, further tokens of a failure in communication. Nonnus' characters appear to have an ascetic fear of touch. Even people in water can remain untouched by wetness, and human touch, to be permissible, must seem accidental. Voyeurism is a visual and psychological fixation, a greedy gazing, a substitute for taste and touch, a safe way of studying and describing in detail people reduced to

passive objects.⁷¹ Voyeurs fear touch and close contact and being seen as they stare. Voyeuristic scenes abound in Nonnus.⁷² In the more fully described scenes, the observer's eye roams over the naked bodies of the observed like fingers, scanning, pausing, relieving tension, and refocusing, but avoiding the genitalia and leaving that detail to the reader's imagination. The intensification of visual input gives the experience a trance-like quality, accompanied by a silence so deep that, for example, waves make no sound.

Seeking involvement through the incomplete images of peripheral vision⁷³ or through dancing are two possible responses to the alienation induced by the logical, objective world. Dancing, spinning round on one's own axis, integrates body and mind, and counteracts fragmenting depersonalization as the dancer seeks to capture and express the harmony and rhythm of the ever-moving universe. Dancing, via intrinsic motivation, can socialize and fuse individuals into harmonious groups in a very different manner from that of written laws, which apply extrinsic stimulation. Furthermore, movement integrates the various sensory modalities and enhances capacity for absorbing input.⁷⁴

A third, mimetic response to being regarded as an object is offered through central vision. You stare back at the figure who stares at you, subjecting him to the same dehumanizing treatment.⁷⁵ In effect, you obediently mirror the behaviour of the man of power, identifying with the aggressive model. Voyeurism is a kind of visual rape. Nonnus is well aware of the force that flows from the focused eye, the "channel of desire," as he calls it. However, when it manifests itself as a desire to know of the scandalous or undignified behaviour of the mighty, it is more subtle and generalized than the behaviour of a Peeping Tom. It is a furtive, vengeful challenge to authority.⁷⁶ Blending with the obscurity of the periphery, invisible and safe in a hiding place, proof against the all-seeing X-ray vision of the paternal government (voyeurs often report a sense of being constantly watched by their fathers), the voyeur can revel in forbidden activity, defiantly enjoy being the spy rather than the espied, and securely watch the secret vulnerability of the unclothed power. Seeing what is not meant to be seen degrades the seen. Failing the actual experience, fantasies about seeing the normally all-seeing one without clothes was a

delicious substitute revenge for men stripped of their individuality and left naked by inquisitory power. In the following example from Nonnus, Actaeon is the voyeur and ultimate victim. Artemis' response to Actaeon's temerity is to dehumanize him by turning him into a faun. Appropriately he is then torn to pieces, fragmented by his hunting dogs. This short passage contains, in fact, at least four instances of unsuspected surveillance:

Never a bear escaped him on the hills; not even the baneful eye of the lioness with young could make his heart flutter. Many a time he lay in wait for the panther, and laid her low as she leapt on him high in the air. Shepherd Pan would ever gaze at him over the bushes with wondering eyes, while he outstripped the running of the swift stag. But his running feet availed him nothing, his quiver helped him not, nor the straight shot, the cunning of the chase; but the Portioner destroyed him, a scampering faun worried by dogs, while still breathing battle after the Indian war. For as he sat up in a tall oak tree amid the spreading boughs, he had seen the whole body of the Archeress bathing; and gazing greedily on the goddess that none may see, he surveyed inch by inch the holy body of the unwedded virgin close at hand. A Naiad nymph unveiled espied him from afar with a sidelong look, as he stared with stolen glances on the unclothed shape of her queen, and shrieked in horror, telling her queen the wild daring of the lovesick man. Artemis half revealed caught up her dress and encircling shawl, and covered her modest breasts with the maiden zone in shame, and sank with gliding limbs into the water, until little by little all her form was hidden.⁷⁷

If voyeurism is less overt and dominant in the work of the greatest historian of the age, Ammianus Marcellinus (b. circa 330), he nevertheless supplies a corroborating world of sometimes kindly but usually malign surveillance, of spying and savage inquisitions. Literacy fosters individuality, a sense of elevation from the ground of tribal consciousness and a greater sensitivity to surveillance and intrusions upon privacy, which is

a burgeoning concept. Late Roman emperors tried to distance themselves from the common view by ceremonial, deportment and insignia that suggested divinity, by making themselves comparatively inaccessible and by encouraging and employing more spies and investigators. Governments have an inherent tendency to amass information about those they seek to serve and control, and the bureaucratic apparatus fostered by late Roman emperors had plenty of scope to satisfy and ramify its hunger for facts. Just as Nonnus stresses the function of clothing as a defence against prying eyes, so Ammianus' interest in clothing stems to a considerable degree from such concern. Ammianus' world of discrete, isolated objects is full of people who gaze from behind metaphorical masks and who live in an environment that discourages unguarded removal of masks. Barbarians and Romans, as groups or individuals, plot, pry, spy, hide, and lurk in ambush, watching and reporting on their victims⁷⁸ -- victims who are often unsuspecting but are also often aware of their vulnerability and nakedness, of the poor protection offered by their heavy, ornate clothing, and who strive for privacy. Through his agents the emperor becomes like Zeus, Apollo, Helios, or Argus. Secrets whispered in a wife's ear could reach the emperor's the next day (Ammianus 14.1.7). Nonnus seems thankful that, with careful preparation, sexual intercourse can be enjoyed unseen -- some secrets, some dignity can be kept.⁷⁹

In conclusion: written words are a medium external to man himself and with their high degree of denotation can kill connotation and thus restrict feeling, instinct, song, and the preserving of a sense of harmony and unity. A mutually reinforcing array of literacy, bureaucracy, and changes in perceptual habits towards an elevation of three-dimensional figures developed throughout classical antiquity.⁸⁰ There also existed an ambient and, during the late Roman Empire, stronger counter-array which valued freedom from interference and organization, and which appreciated the value of orality, symbols, sensory equilibrium, peripheral imagery, vernaculars, communes, barter, self-sufficiency, low technology, and keeping away from major highways. To put it another way, more people opted for the broad and diffuse view as against the clear and narrow one, and many valued the multiple, holistic processing of input over the sequential and fragmentary. As the Western empire decentralized into political

disintegration, the East rearranged its spatial and sensory priorities, giving greater prominence to waves of light, resonant domes, and a more rhythmic and instrumental liturgical chanting.⁸¹ The focused vision that fixes events in time as well as space declined in intensity, so that the sixth-century Byzantine historian Zosimus gives only one precise date in his whole work. But if the prestige of the book was challenged in late antiquity, it was by no means vanquished. For example, the form which housed much late antique script, the codex, had a demonstrable artistic influence in the popularity of the diptych, balancing panel mosaics and the bilateral symmetry of many paintings, manuscript illuminations, and carvings.

There are two other factors which may help to explain the rise of a decentralized way of seeing. One is information and memory overload. The memory of a purely oral people is adaptive. By a process known as structural amnesia, what is no longer needed or consonant with current tribal concerns is unconsciously forgotten or modified, and there is no written record to index the process. The production and survival of books in Greece and Rome continuously added to the burden of cultural history that required exact memorization. Epitomes and visual mnemonic devices were aids in the effort to keep the hallowed cultural heritage in focus, but by late antiquity one strategy (as mentioned on p. 76) was simply to give up trying to do this and to seek to communicate present concerns by the medium of unambiguous, completed artefacts instead of impressionistic, incomplete processes, to stress "what" rather than "how." But another strategy was to reject the tunnel-vision and the environmental impoverishment that such a response to information-overload can induce, and to mobilize all the body's sensory modalities, to seek a more holistic way of seeing, and to call on peripheral and subliminal resources, on the realms of allusion, and on symbolistic *pars pro toto* thinking whereby a process or a complex of ideas or an activity can be evoked by a single component. For example, a net can stand for all that is associated with fishes and fishing.⁸² The other factor also concerns coping with and surviving change. Christians and barbarians had seen to it that fourth-century Rome could not hope to mirror the past classical ideal. The past was a fossilized sign-system. Whereas the Apollonian, logical centre is apt to

develop established sequential lines to perfection and absurdity, the Dionysian, dynamic periphery, dwelling at the frontiers and interfaces, is more likely to experience simultaneity, perceive interconnections, and come up with solutions to new and old problems. "Thinking and seeing in terms of static, isolated things identical only with themselves have an initial inertia which cannot keep pace with the stride of life,"⁸³ whereas the mobile world of associations provides an inexhaustible supply of creative energy.⁸⁴

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NOTES

¹ Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.28 (written in the mid-fifth century A.D.). Arsenius was a heterodox bishop who went into hiding as part of a plot against the orthodox bishop Athanasius.

² E. Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology* (Chicago 1975) 13.

³ *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* III, trans. B. Jackson (Oxford 1892).

⁴ See W.J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (Yale 1967) 111 ff.

⁵ One of the themes of the present article is the recrudescence of "primitive" traits and habits in late antiquity. It is interesting to note that the Homeric words for seeing each emphasize *how* one looks at or is looked at; see B. Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind* (Oxford 1953) 2 ff. I have produced some quantitative evidence for the visual stress of late Latin literature and attempted some discussion of the phenomenon in my article, "Perception and Sensory Awareness among Latin Writers in Late Antiquity," to appear in *Classica et Mediaevalia*.

⁶ "We not only say, 'See how it shines' . . . but we also say, 'See

how loud it is,' 'See how it smells,' 'See how it tastes,' and 'See how hard it is'," *Confessions* 10.35, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London 1961). Cf. M. Wober, "Sensotypes," *Journal of Social Psychology* 70 (1966) 181 ff.

⁷ See C.J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* (Berkeley 1967) 203 ff.

⁸ *Greek Anthology* 6.65, trans. W. Paton (London 1916); cf. 6.67.

⁹ W. Sypher, *Literature and Technology* (New York 1968) 75.

¹⁰ See K.C. Bloomer and C.W. Moore, *Body, Memory and Architecture* (Yale 1977) 43 ff., 58 ff.

¹¹ See A. Montagu, *Touching* (New York 1971) 13 ff., 35 ff., 63 ff. Despite themselves, late Roman ascetics gained a measure of tactile experience and somatic reassurance from itchy, unwashed skins, hair shirts, and flagellation.

¹² See J.J. Gibson, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* (London 1968) 250.

¹³ Cf. C. Geertz, "Centers, Kings and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power," in J. Ben-David and T.N. Clark, edd., *Culture and its Creators* (Chicago 1977) 150 ff.

¹⁴ See E.H. Gombrich, "Art and Expression in Western Art," in R.A. Hinde, ed., *Non-Verbal Communication* (Cambridge 1972) 373 ff.

¹⁵ See S. McCormack, "Latin Prose Panegyriés," in T.A. Dorey, ed., *Empire and Aftermath*, II (London 1975) 143 ff.

¹⁶ See R. McMullen, "Some Pictures in Ammianus," *Art Bulletin* 46 (1964), 433 ff., esp 438 ff. Ceremonial needs to be slow and colourful to stay easily in focus and embody centrality; cf. Ammianus 16.10.12 on the emperor Constantius' refusal to share the focus of attention with anyone.

¹⁷ Cited by McMullen (at n. 16) 436. N.K. Chadwick, *Poetry and Letters in Christian Gaul* (London 1954) 133, has suggested that Rutilius' *De Reditu* (see below, p. 83-4) with its emphasis on dignity, service and duty, could be entitled *A Mirror for Magistrates*. Emperors meted out justice. Vision, measurement, and justice are connected by many strands. See J. Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge 1977) 123 ff.

¹⁸ *The Theodosian Code*, trans. C. Pharr (New York 1952) 1.1.5.

¹⁹ The respective references are: 3.14; 7.2.1; 10.20.6.

²⁰ *Theodosian Code* 14.10; 10.20.12, 13, 18.

²¹ On the perceived necessity for clothing to correspond to character, conduct and station in life, see e.g. Libanius, *Or.* 13.8; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Duo Gallieni* 16; Ammianus 14.9.5; Jerome *Ep.* 54.7; Claudian *In Eutrop.* 1.300-9.

²² See H. and S. Kreidler, *Psychology of the Arts* (Durham, N.C. 1972) 117, 383 n. 3; H. Werner, *Comparative Psychology of Mental Development* (New York 1961) 104 ff.; D. Morris, *Manwatching* (London 1978) 19 ff.

²³ In that it could be scheduled, saved, spent, or lost. See E.T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York 1976) 14 ff.

²⁴ Pictographic script, by contrast, because it is less abstract, more concrete, evokes the other senses to a greater degree. See H.M. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto 1962) 47: "picture writing of all kinds is a ballet of postures," and T.F. Carney and B. Zajac, *Communications and Society*, part 1, *From Fable to Cable* (Winnipeg 1977) 30.

²⁵ A generalization, obviously. Homeric man was intermittently capable of comparative detachment. But cf. H. Read, *Icon and Idea* (London 1955) 31: "Professor Jung once told me how, in his travels in the African bush, he had noticed the quivering eyeballs of his native guides: not the steady gaze of the European, but a darting restlessness of vision due perhaps to the constant expectation of danger. Such eye movements must be co-ordinated with a mental alertness and a swiftly changing imagery that allow little opportunity for contemplation and comparison."

²⁶ *Protog.* 326c-e. For discussion of this passage in Plato, see F.D. Harvey, "Greeks and Romans Learn to Write," in E.A. Havelock and J.P. Hershbell, edd., *Communication Arts in the Ancient World* (Toronto 1978) 63 ff.

²⁷ See J. Goody, ed., *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge 1968) 27 ff.; E. Havelock, *Origins of Western Literacy* (Toronto 1976) 1 ff.

²⁸ See Ausonius *Eph.* 8.

²⁹ See A. Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art* (London 1967) 74 ff., 87 ff.; R. Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (London 1970) 5 ff.

³⁰ See J. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts* (Chicago 1958) 1 ff.; J. White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space* (2nd ed., London 1967) 250 ff.

³¹ See R. Scranton, *Aesthetic Aspects of Ancient Art* (Chicago 1964) 283 ff., 309 ff., 333 ff.

³² See H. Innis, *Empire and Communications* (Toronto 1972) 84 ff., 103 ff.

³³ Innis (at n. 32) 98-101. Cf. the insights of C. Konigsberg, "Eskimo Culture at the Crossroads," *Ekistics* 36 (1973) 85 ff.

³⁴ H. Hagedahl, "Die Bedeutung der Stenographie für die spätlateinische Christliche Literatur," *JAC* 14 (1971) 24 ff.

³⁵ The ancient telegraph was likewise of special appeal to governments. A close connection between this form of transmission and the rise of literacy is argued by Hershbell (at n. 26) 81 ff.

³⁶ G. Kepes, *Language of Vision* (Chicago 1951) 177. On the burdens of the public post in the fourth century see Ammianus 19.11.3.

³⁷ G. Misch, *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*, II (London 1950) 543.

³⁸ See e.g. P. Antin, "La ville chez saint Jerome," *Latomus* 20 (1961) 298 ff.

³⁹ See e.g. Paulinus of Nola, *Ep.* 8; Prudentius, *Harm.* 870 ff. -- souls have great visual powers.

⁴⁰ A full explanation can be found in R. Haber and M. Hershenson, *The Psychology of Visual Perception* (New York 1973) 23 ff. Briefly, each cone is attached to a separate optic nerve by a single bipolar cell. This gives the foveal image its acuity. Rods, sometimes in hundreds, have to share a common bipolar cell. This pooling effect means that just a few rods per cell need to be stimulated to get a message to the brain. This gives peripheral vision its sensitivity to movement and light.

⁴¹ See A. Reber, ed., *Towards a Psychology of Reading*, (New Jersey 1977) 3 ff.; Arnheim (at n. 29) 18.

⁴² Werner (at n. 22) 104 ff.

⁴³ For an illuminating discussion of culture and extrinsic stimulation versus nature and intrinsic motivation, see B. Samples, *The Metaphoric Mind* (London 1976) 125 ff.

⁴⁴ *Man and his Symbols* (London 1964) 259. The trend from central precision to peripheral vagueness is nicely illustrated, too, by the observations of R. McMullen, *Roman Government's Response to Crisis A.D. 235-*

337 (Yale 1976) 59, on the length of lives recorded in epitaphs. Imprecision increases "not only as one moves from the center of a city into its suburbs and then into the countryside, but also as one passes in time from the earlier to the late Principate. And in the latter period cities gradually sink toward the level of rural areas. Knowledge or ignorance of age may fairly be taken as an indication of people's general accessibility to control, that is, of their knowing-being known to the operations of government."

⁴⁵ See H.M. McLuhan, *From Cliché to Archetype* (New York 1970) 36. Symbol is from the Greek *syballein* "to throw together."

⁴⁶ As Arnheim (at n. 29) 140, puts it.

⁴⁷ See A. Laugesen, "Deux récits de voyage du debut V^e siècle," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 22 (1961) 54 ff.

⁴⁸ Another devout Christian and traveller, the elder Melania, was frank, however, about wanting to kiss, touch, lick, and thus confirm, all that her prodigious reading had conjured up for her. See A. Yarborough, "Christianisation in the Fourth Century: the Example of Roman Women," *Church History* 45 (1976) 149 ff.

⁴⁹ See A. Grabar, *The Beginnings of Christian Art* (London 1966) 54 ff.; W. Dorigo, *Late Roman Painting* (London 1970) 297 ff.

⁵⁰ See S. Bettini in Dorigo (at n. 49) xxi; R. Brilliant, *Roman Art* (London 1974) 152; H. L'Orange, *Art Forms and Civic Life in the Late Roman Empire* (Princeton 1965) 1 ff.

⁵¹ See e.g. Brilliant (at n. 50) 17, 250, 266; R. Bandinelli, *Rome. The Late Empire* (London 1971) 375. The expressionism and emotionality so often referred to and contrasted with the countertrend towards static idealism in discussions of late Roman art are, in part, kinaesthetic assertions of identity on the part of the creators.

⁵² See R. Brilliant, "Gesture and Rank in Roman Art," *Mem. Conn. Acad. Art and Sci.* 14 (1963) 54 ff., 103 ff., 201 ff.

⁵³ Brilliant (at n. 52) 213

⁵⁴ L'Orange (at n. 50) 22, my italics. Many who experienced anxiety as they reacquainted themselves with the nature of peripheral vagueness would welcome such sharp definition and aids to focusing that could be supplied. See further below, pp. 88-9. On late Roman sculpture, see

also Scranton (at n. 31) 323 f; A. Hoxie, in L. White, ed., *The Transformation of the Roman World* (Los Angeles 1966) 277 ff.

⁵⁵ Kreitler (at n. 22) 198 ff.; Kepes (at n. 36) 98 ff. The heightened visuality of the statue in the round virtually compels a kinaesthetic response -- walking around it. Exercise relieves tension. Tension is also reduced by rendering the image less explicit and defined through the series of overlapping perspectives that are revealed from a succession of viewpoints as one walks round. Since stimulation by and reaction to reliefs is less intense, the maintenance of sensory equilibrium through the eye is more easily achieved as the eye roams freely over the scene.

⁵⁶ See R. Markus, "The Cult of Icons in Sixth Century Gaul," *JThS* 29 (1978) 79 ff.

⁵⁷ Cf. G. Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics* (Norwich 1963) 35. The transient visual rays "touch the surfaces of matter; yet from the shifting data, the [rational, focused] mind can construct a single vision and hold it temporarily immobile." As Mathew points out, Byzantine theory of vision depended heavily on the idea that vision resulted from rays from the eyes illuminating an object and touching it as if with extended, invisible fingers.

⁵⁸ See E. Kitzinger, *The Art of Byzantium* (Indiana 1976) 25 ff. It is no surprise to learn that at the chief focus of power in the fifth century (i.e. the imperial palace at Constantinople) there is some additional attempt to suggest the third dimension by means of colour gradations. See D. Strong, *Roman Art* (London 1976) 172.

⁵⁹ Dorigo (at n. 49) xxi f.

⁶⁰ The shimmering light effects of the interiors of those basilicas built in the fifth century were no less attractive to peripheral attention. See R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* (London 1965) 126.

⁶¹ See D. Carne-Ross, "Ekphrasis: Lights in Santa Sophia from Paul the Silentiary," *Arion* 4 (1965) 563 ff.; Mathew (at n. 57) 30; and Procopius *De Aedificiis* 1.1.47-8 on the way of looking that the interior of Hagia Sophia compels.

⁶² Athanasius *Vita Antoni* 1-3.

⁶³ When the city of Rome was sacked in 410 the forces of centrifugalism seem to have triumphed. The regrouping centripetal forces discerned

in Pelagianism a key target for concentrated assault and intensified their persecution of the sect.

⁶⁴ See P. Brown, "A Dark Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclast Controversy," *EHR* 87 (1973) 1 ff. Belief in reincarnation, with its concomitant karmic idea of individuals determining their own destiny, also rendered priestly intermediaries largely redundant. The doctrine was declared anathema by highly irregular procedures in 553.

⁶⁵ P. Brown, "Christianity and Local Culture in Late Roman Africa," *JRS* 58 (1968) 90.

⁶⁶ P.W. English and R.C. Mayfield, edd., *Man, Space and Environment* (London 1972) 69 ff.

⁶⁷ *Apoth. praef.* 1-16, trans. H.J. Thomson (London 1953); cf. *Peristeph.* 5.73-84.

⁶⁸ *Vita Hilarionis* 4-6, 43.

⁶⁹ On literacy see *Dion.* 4.252-84 (Cadmus and the introduction of the new and mysterious technology of script); cf. 36.434 ff. The idea of the environment as a repository of legible signs awaiting decipherment is very evident in Nonnus. Insofar as the poem is about the introduction of wine, wine brings what the government machine often requires and induces -- "stupor in the face of morality" (G. Braden, "Nonnus' Typhoon: *Dionysiaca* Books I and II," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 15 [1974] 853). Cf. J. Lindsay, *Life and Leisure in Roman Egypt* (London 1965) 362.

⁷⁰ Braden (at n. 69) 851 ff. and esp. 879: insofar as the struggle with Zeus is told from Typhon's side, "We see things filtered through a consciousness highly sensitive to the forces that impinge upon it and quite capable of generating counterforces of its own, but in no way inclined to analyse or manipulate or organise. If we have no clear idea what Typhon looks like, it may be because he has never bothered to find out himself: his self-consciousness is wholly proprioceptive." When Typhon is hypnotized (l.524-34) it is, predictably, by sound, not sight. On the dominance of the spiral motif in Nonnus see Lindsay (at n. 69) 358, 377. Krietler (at n. 22) 119 speaks of the tension evoked by the contrast between centrifugality and centripetality in a spiral. A spiral has the potential for simultaneous movement to its two extremities of centre and

periphery. It can go in and up to order and consciousness or down and out to chaos and unconsciousness.

⁷¹ By "displacement upwards" the eye becomes like a penis, distending towards and fixating upon the object of desire in an endless, insatiable (because non-orgasmic) sensual delight. Cf. too with our earlier remarks on fixed gazing (p. 81) this description of how Nonnus' voyeurs gaze: "The eye-motion is directed fixedly at one object. So in one sense it is unmoving (the attention does not wander to other objects) as well as ceaselessly moving (gazing along the lines and contours of the body). Thus Poseidon stares at Beroê 'with unwandering eyes' (42.450) and also 'moving in spirals the lust-mad eye of his face' (42.454)," in J.J. Winkler, *In Pursuit of the Nymphs: Comedy and Sex in Nonnus' Tales of Dionysus*, U. Texas Diss. (1974) 57.

⁷² For discussion and references see Winkler (at n. 71) 1 ff.

⁷³ See Winkler (at n. 71) 78 and 37 ff. Winkler observes the combination of staticity and restless linearity and of clarity and vagueness in Nonnus' pictures. Cf. p. 9: "the reader himself must continually and very actively adjust the words he reads to make a conceivable visible picture. The participation elicited from the reader of the *Dionysiaca* is something like the skill required of a mosaic worker fitting bright and oddly shaped pieces into a recognisable representation."

⁷⁴ R. Laban, *The Language of Movement* (Boston 1966) 112 ff.; H. Ellis, *The Dance of Life* (London 1923) 58 ff.; and cf. Samples (at n. 43).

⁷⁵ Cf. L. Bonfante, "Emperor, God and Man in the Fourth Century," *Parola del Passato* 99 (1964) 427: "The converse tendency [to dehumanization of the human figure] is for the inanimate objects to assume a life of their own." That is to say, they become assertive and vital as a reaction against rigidity.

⁷⁶ Cf. E. Shils (at n. 2) 317 ff.

⁷⁷ *Dion* 5.293-305, trans. H. Rose (London 1940).

⁷⁸ E.g. 15.2.4 (Arbitio, like an underground serpent, lurking beneath the hidden entrance to its hole, watching each passer-by and attacking with a sudden spring); 26.6.10 (Procopius observes, hiding like a beast of prey); 27.2.2 (a voyeuristic ambush); 28.3.5 (Valentinian looking about secretly); 31.7.6 (Roman surveillance of the Goths). On clothing

and the porosity of the protective barriers that were frantically erected by men in late antiquity, see my article, "Boundaries and Bodies in Late Antiquity," *Arethusa* 12 (1979) 93 ff.

⁷⁹ E.g. 12.349-57, 22.76-97, 47.456-7.

⁸⁰ For the influence of literacy in favouring three-dimensional rather than two-dimensional perception see M. Segall, D. Campbell and M. Herkovitz, *The Influence of Culture on Visual Perception* (1966) 60 ff.

⁸¹ On Eastern and Western late Roman music see W. Wiora, *The Four Ages of Music* (New York 1965) 87 ff.

⁸² See Werner (at n. 22) 135 ff. I have discussed memory overload in late antiquity more fully in my article cited at n. 5. The *Dionysiaca* is much more concerned with the problem, as some excerpts from Braden's article (at n. 69) may make clear (p. 851-3): "the *Dionysiaca* is the classical epic on the point of turning into something else . . . attempting metamorphosis in sheer density of rubbish . . . its every move cloyed with the memory of a thousand good and bad poems . . . a rising sense of the absurd . . . what it all adds up to is not so much a statement as a style, a way of *handling received material*" (my italics).

⁸³ Kepes (at n. 36) 201.

⁸⁴ My thanks to the referee for *Florilegium* whose comments on an earlier version of this article have, I believe, helped to improve it.