Preface

Argumentum: Exposition, account, summary, plot outline, invented narrative.

The argumentation I attempt to elaborate in what follows is close to the exposition of an invented narrative. That is to say that it is not a systematic scholarly account of Berkeley's theory of vision and still less of Berkeley's philosophy. Rather, I have used (and therefore misused) a set of claims and utterances "belonging" to Berkeley in order to develop a narration of what I call "the passive synthesis of exhaustion or iconographic subjectivity." Iconographic subjectivity could be conceived of as a possible way out of the concept of subjectivity developed by Descartes and its strategy of subjectivation rooted in the active labor of self-appropriation and self-distancing. It could be conceived of as a radical deappropriation, as the absence of any work, as an unheard-of passivity incapable of distance, incapable of any subjectivized point of view. That is why iconographic subjectivity has to be related to the problem of the eye and the gaze.

If it is possible for there to be a subject that does not know distance or any determined point of view, what then would its relation to the world be, what does it see when it sees the "world," and how is the difference between interiority and exteriority to be established at all? All of Berkeley's theses on distance, depth, and surface have helped me to elaborate the concept of the passive eye as the eye of an iconographic, exhausted subjectivity. And even though Berkeley himself never used the term "iconographic subjectivity" or "the passive synthesis of exhaustion," or, for that matter, many other concepts I have relied on in the interpretation of certain aspects of his theory of vision, concepts like simulacrum, copy, "yesbody," unconscious God, and so on, I can nevertheless imagine that if one fine day he were to walk into my room asking for an explanation of my interpretation of some of his theses, I would be able to say: "Look, George, here is the thing, this is why I did it. . . . " And I can see us spending the night discussing his philosophy and, come the morning, he would leave my

room joyful and convinced that he had not talked about anything other than iconographic subjectivity.

I am trying to say that my argumentation here is faithful to Berkeley's philosophy insofar as to be faithful to the other means (among other things) to accept his/her words and to take them to their extreme, even to the extent of accepting also their possible radicality, or indeed their madness. That was my aim here: to try to take some of Berkeley's theses to their extreme. It was my aim for at least two reasons. First, because it is a "substantially" philosophical gesture to take things to their extreme. One could say that philosophy is precisely that thinking that takes the "thought" of common sense to its extreme. What, for example, is Descartes's "evil demon" if not the trivial thought of common sense that senses can sometimes deceive us, taken to its extreme? That is why what separates common sense and philosophy is fear: common sense is afraid to go as far as philosophy goes.

Second, it seems to me that some of Berkeley's theses, precisely insofar as they are taken to their extreme, could provide a significant voice to the contemporary debate over subjectivity and its subjectivation. My effort to draw from Berkeley's philosophy some conclusions and concepts that were not explicitly formulated in it was supported by the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. It could be shown that Deleuze's philosophy is totally permeated by the experience of British empiricism—that is, by pluralism. My readings of Berkeley's philosophies were, therefore, guided by Deleuze's thesis from *Dialogues* that "the essential thing, from the point of view of empiricism, is the noun *multiplicity*, which designates a set of lines or dimensions which are irreducible to one another." In that sense, Deleuze's philosophy functions as the background to the whole argumentation I have tried to develop in this book.

Which explains the strategy I have used. Very often I quote Deleuze without warning the reader in advance that it is no longer Berkeley who is speaking, but Deleuze (or, more correctly, that it is now Deleuze who is speaking through the voice of Bishop Berkeley). I do that not only because of the "hidden" harmony that I detect between their philosophies, but also for two other reasons. First, because sometimes both philosophers use the same concepts: assemblage, collection, fire, becoming animal, and so on. Second, because by omitting to warn the reader that the proper name of a voice that speaks has changed, I was trying to develop *one* argument in the multiplicity of its voices. However, for those who think that the exact same sentence cannot be said through a seductive clamor (that is to say harmony) of different voices, that it cannot be at the same time said by the voices of different philosophers, there is always the possibility

of recourse to my notes, where each voice is carefully and formally distinguished.

This is even more so because the voices of diverse philosophers (but of course, especially those of Berkeley and Deleuze) are connected in my analyses through the gaze of Samuel Beckett's camera. The whole screenplay of Beckett's "Film" is guided by Berkeley's thesis "*esse est percipii.*" One could argue that everything Beckett tried to achieve in his "Film" (everything he wanted to "gain" by what he called "the angle of immunity," for example) constitutes a remarkable interpretation of Berkeley's theory of vision. (Which points to the relevance of Berkeley's theory for film and especially for the structure of what Deleuze called "the affection-image.") That is why each chapter dedicated to Berkeley's theory of vision begins with reference to Beckett's "Film," and that is why references to Beckett's "Film" serve less as "examples" than as the most important interpretations of Berkeley's theory of vision. The whole text of the Beckett screenplay is provided as an appendix to the book.

My first chapter, "The Passive Synthesis of Contemplation," is an outline of the relations between gaze, eye, and "subjectivity" as they are elaborated in the philosophy of Giordano Bruno. My aim in this chapter is to give some of the main features of one form of passive subjectivity so that it can be compared to Berkeley's. I do not seek to develop or analyze Bruno's philosophy—that is why it is only an outline. The second chapter, "The Active Synthesis of Reflection," is dedicated to Descartes's "Optics," to his effort to subvert passive subjectivity and introduce active, reflexive, laborious subjectivity, and to his way of seeing as the means of appropriation of the visible. The third chapter, "The Passive Synthesis of Exhaustion" (divided into three subchapters), is an analysis of Berkeley's "resistance" to Descartes's optics, which resulted in a different possibility of subjectivation, one that may be determined as "the anti-Cartesian" revolution that I call "the passive synthesis of exhaustion."

Commenting on his book on Kafka, Deleuze once said that while writing it, he was thinking about what kind of interpretation would make Kafka happy. This was my aim in writing this book: I wanted to give joy to Bishop Berkeley.