THEORIZING IMAGES

EDITED BY
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Dedicated to the memory of Goran Starčević.

Žarko Paić

Dedicated to Lydia and Hans, who helped me more than they can possibly imagine.

Krešimir Purgar

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Jointly organized by the Center for Visual Studies in Zagreb and the Journal for Theory and Visual Arts TVRĐA, the conference came out of the activities of the workgroup *Visual Culture in Europe,* and was the fourth such event, following those held in London (2010), Barcelona (2011) and Trondheim (2012). Thus, our thanks go to the founder of the workgroup, Marquard Smith, not only for the plenary address he delivered at the conference but, to an even greater extent, for his activities in encouraging people from different parts of Europe to work and think together. It is largely because of him that *Visual Culture in Europe* comprises scholars from countries as diverse as England, Norway, Denmark, Lithuania, Spain, Macedonia, Italy and Croatia, while presenters at the conference also came from Israel, the United States, Austria, Bulgaria, France and other countries.

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—Žarko Paić and Krešimir Purgar

INTRODUCTION

ŽARKO PAIĆ AND KREŠIMIR PURGAR

If somebody in the foreseeable future decides to write what then might be called a history of visual studies, he or she will probably soon come to the conclusion that notions of "time" and "history" do not play the same role in the discipline they are about to discuss as they do in *other* disciplines, in which timelines, resemblances and influences constitute the very foundation of their specific knowledge. Introducing the present book, we will argue, drawing on numerous extremely knowledgeable and insightful opinions voiced and research projects undertaken in the study of visual culture, that there is a problematic relationship between the study of images through history on the one hand and the relatively recent phenomenon called *visual studies* on the other. We will argue as well that this relationship is the cause of the still contestable academic status of the new discipline, although its becoming rapidly established in universities worldwide may prove the opposite. The problem, which will be discussed by the contributors throughout this edition, consists of the fact that the study of images, representations and visual phenomena in the widest sense was the subject of human interest for more than two millennia before a group of respectable scholars started a conceptual and institutional demarcation of the area of visual studies (or visual culture, or *Bildwissenschaft* for that matter), an area growing so rapidly that it has easily outgrown, at least in scope, all other visual epistemologies confined within the theoretical boundaries of the philosophy of the image, art history, semiotics or any other discipline systematically related to the visual field.

One should say from the outset that the differentiation between modern and contemporary art in terms of the gap between the aestheticism of the artwork and the aestheticism of the event loses the significance of an epistemological turn. What one today calls "the visual arts" refers for pragmatic reasons merely to a multitude of artistic directions, strategies, and techniques, from painting, photography, and cinema to the body as an idea in the space and time of its performance. To be sure, modern art disappeared when one could no longer define the borders of modernity. This disappearance occurred in the shifts and turns within the notion of the new.

The programme of phenomenology occurred under the motto: back to the actual things! It is known that "return to the image" was a motto of another programme beside phenomenology, albeit close to it. This was an interdisciplinary movement during the 1990s, with two different currents: (1) visual studies and the "pictorial turn" of W.J.T. Mitchell and (2) research on the image and the "iconic turn" of Gottfried Boehm. Briefly, the return to the image meant liberating its pictorial quality from the power and domination of language. In modern art, that freedom proved an irreducible difference. Contrary to the path that the image took after the historical avant–garde movements, namely in the direction of a performative–conceptual turn, painting remained the last domain of "nature". Another current today relies on various attempts at thinking of the corporeality of the body and its environment in the techno–sphere (from the philosophy of the media to neuroscience, bio–cybernetics, post–humanism, and trans–humanism). The image as color and the body as performance intersect in the digital era of constructing composition itself. In other words, the new nature of the image is no longer elementary. The image generates itself technically, which creates a technological–aesthetical experience of its hyper–reality. Experience and appearance, the traditional categories of early modern aestheticism, have now turned into new categories of approaching the event as a work of reproduction. In the digital setting, experience has turned into the appearance of the real, and appearance into the experience of the hyper–real. Thus, the return to the image seems to have launched it far beyond language, into the black holes of dematerialization. It is for this reason that we must again forget what is supposed to be inherent to the image, what seems to resist any penetration of the linguistic riddle in its search for meaning. It is impossible to return to the image as a "thing" without also returning to language as a thing in itself. Without its language, the image exists only virtually, like a line and a surface in the desert.

This is why visual studies is not a history of anything in particular, but still fundamentally depends on everything that has been discussed with regards to images in the past, or, as Marquard Smith puts it, "while visual culture studies as an academic, professional, and bureaucratic area of study may have emerged only recently, the study of visual culture, to say nothing of visual culture itself, has a much longer history" (Smith, 2008a: X). Studies on cult images "in the era before art", as remarkably explained by Hans Belting, the recent trans–historical connections made between the functions of images in Byzantium and of those of contemporary times made by Marie–José Mondzain and Emmanuel Alloa, the seminal thesis promoted by W.J.T. Mitchell that the pictorial turn is a recurring phenom-

enon attributable to many periods in the cultural history of mankind – all these testify to the fact that images were always here. But visual studies was not.

There are many books and articles on historical concepts and ideas about the image, as well as many writers who aim to explain different theories of the image, many of whom absolutely correctly position reflection on images as early as in the *Book of Genesis* in the *Old Testament*, subsequently making references to the theoretical origins of simulacra and representation in Plato and Aristotle respectively. Some authors rightly draw attention to the surprisingly modern idea proposed by John of Damascus in the eighth century on the difference between the carrier of the image on the one hand and what the image stands for on the other – a historical fact invaluable for the understanding of images today. Speaking of precursors to the iconic turn, that is, to the idea offered by Gottfried Boehm that images are substantially different in nature from what they represent, both Mondzain and Alloa explain that it is crucial that John of Damascus not only distinguishes the *invisible prototype*, meaning the deity or God, from the *visible type* (its representation in image), but that he also transposes the difference between the two into the realm of the visible: "The image is one thing and its depiction another; a difference can always be seen between the two" (Alloa, 2013: 19).

In their analysis of the uses and philosophy of images in Byzantium, both Alloa, in "Visual Studies in Byzantium", and Mondzain, in her book *Image, Icon, Economy. The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary,* assert that, in many regards, the dispute that was going on during the 8th and 9th centuries between advocates of the image on the one hand and iconoclasts on the other is a kind of a theoretical prelude to contemporary debates held around the nature and functions of images, a dispute Alloa appropriately calls "a pictorial turn *avant la lettre*" (23). It turns out that the iconophilic struggle for the understanding of images as entities separate from the material presence of the *thing* (or Idol) is not substantially dissimilar from our contemporary understanding of images as something distinct from the reality they refer to, cut–outs from the continuity, as Jean–Luc Nancy defines it: "such is the image: it must be detached, placed outside and before one's eyes (...) and it must be different from the thing. The image is a thing that is not the thing: it distinguishes itself from it, essentially" (Nancy, 1995: 2).

These evident trans–historical connections, which enable us to understand the past as if it were happening right now, are the origin of the paradoxical aspect of visual studies, still one of its most valuable methodological contributions: on the one hand, there is the intrinsic synchronicity of its

theoretical insights, with images treated as momentarily existing objects; on the other, as will be remarked several times here, images themselves are non–synchronous phenomena because we can only think about them *after* they are made. Sometimes it is days or months after, sometimes it is centuries after. So, visual studies offers a synchronical account of something that is non–synchronical in itself. But the paradox of time that visual studies has become entangled in is not meant to dismiss historical time, but rather to affirm the existence of what we would like to call *iconic simultaneity*: the radical contemporaneity of all visual artefacts, events and spectators in a networked society, the sort of ultimate present that might in some borderline cases make our understanding of images as representations obsolescent.

The concept of *iconic simultaneity*, or the radical contemporaneity of all visual phenomena, that visual studies is trying to master consists of both *heterochrony* and *anachrony*, the concepts that Keith Moxey assigns in turn to the approach that art history must acquire should it wish to overcome the normative time of Eurocentric art–historical thinking articulated in timelines, chronologies and teleological thinking. He wonders whether art history can conceive of time in any other terms, in a sense that would divorce chronology from its identification with a motivated temporal trajectory whose significance is restricted to Euro–American culture. On the other hand, as he puts it,

> if the time of the work is not to be restricted to the horizon of its creation, then its status as an agent in the creation of its own reception, its anachronic power, shines through. The "presence" of the work of art—its ontological existence, the ways it both escapes meaning yet repeatedly provokes and determines its own interpretation—comes to the fore (Moxey, 2013: 2–5).

The way Moxey sees new art history, as methodologically re–shaped and as a place for the "production of meaning", not bound to the teleological, linear notion of time, is in many ways similar to how visual studies understands negotiations between artifacts and spectators. The only difference (albeit not so small) between the two disciplines is art history's innate interest in the aesthetic qualifications of the object of study, however these qualifications might be constructed, while visual studies has no preference for objects based on aesthetic discriminations. This claim, though, will prove to be less true if we come to agree with some of the prospects for visual studies and image theory at large offered in this book.

The study of images with the presumption that all visual phenomena are to be treated as simultaneously present, and trying to come to terms

with our contemporary visual culture "as it takes place" (Smith: IX) in an ever–changing global context, has attached to visual studies not just the proverbial accusation of its neglect of the historical context in which art was produced (as presented in the "Questionnaire on visual culture" in the magazine *October*, no. 77, 1996); recently the list has been updated with an accusation of "ontogenetic fallacy" – an even more dangerous neglect visual studies has supposedly been promoting: neglect of the artwork *as such*, which will also be referred to in this book. The question arises of whether the aura of uncertainty or inadequacy surrounding visual studies will affect the integrity of our reflection on images, or whether we will handle them with more ease now that we have a dedicated visual discipline, one that is not bound by ideologies, the politics of identity or *connoisseurship*. Michele Cometa once commented that those looking for the truth in images have faced a resounding failure, either because of the prejudices of western philosophy or because of its fundamentalist statements. At the same time, those who were resistant to acknowledging in images any meaning or power have condemned themselves to a life in a kind of "absolute reality" (Cometa, 2008: 49). To put this blatant dichotomy of belief in and fear of images on the level of visual theory, retaining both opposing sides, we could also refer to Keith Moxey, who claimed that there have been moments when art history was about to drown in a swamp of "contextual detail" that surrounded discourses of art, and there have been times when all that mattered was "an internal history of the object that insisted on its freedom from cultural entanglement" (Smith, 2008: 167). What should be of common and utmost concern, therefore, is an attempt to answer the following questions: are these times now over and are those who uncritically adore or despise images finally coming to terms with reality in its multifaceted and multimodal, let alone multimedia, forms?

Cometa and Moxey imply that there is evidence of the highly disputable topic of the powers and weaknesses of images on the one hand and of their respective theories on the other. There is also a dispute over the role images should play in contemporary society and consequently over their values and purposes. Two decades after the concepts of the *pictorial* and the *iconic* turn changed our vernacular involvement in regard to images, it has become clear that it was not only a newly discovered social, political or sexual construction of the visual field that brought turbulence into disciplinary knowledge, but that images have their own "pictorial logic" with powers exceeding those purely iconic or visually discernible. The turn towards images (Mitchell, 1994; Boehm, 1995) is a turn towards acceptance of the proposition that images can *speak* and *tell* as much as they can

show and *represent*. On the other hand, if we consider the pictorial turn to be only a reaction to the linguistic turn (Rorty, 1967) that is now giving way to the domination of images, we must refer to Jacques Rancière, who challenged the whole idea of *turns,* which inevitably led to the pictorial turn acquiring a controversial twofold nature: firstly, it represented "the challenge to the metaphysics that underpinned the linguistic turn" and, secondly, "it became the nihilist demonstration of the illusions of a world in which, since everything is an image, the denunciation of images is itself deprived of all effectiveness" (Rancière, 2009: 124).

What Rancière is really clarifying by asking "do pictures really want to live?", fifteen years after Mitchell's seminal text, is how to situate the philosophy of the pictorial turn within a much wider frame of dialectical reversal, where not only the old dichotomy of the text–image relationship matters, but now also a whole new epistemology, underway with "a machine that transforms images and life into coded language" (Rancière: 127). What is this machine? According to Rancière, it is a metaphorical device that produces all the artificial and digitally created life around us with the inevitable consequence that it also produces a new kind of image and a new kind of power altogether. This is a very clear reference to Mitchell's later books, *The Last Dinosaur Book* and *What do Pictures Want* (Mitchell, 1998 and 2005), where the consequences of the pictorial turn started to assume a much more dramatic aspect and in which the dialectical nature of images provoked a definition radically different from that of the "original" turn towards images. What is at stake here, after we have come to an understanding that images can speak and show on equal terms, is the new discourse of the power that images have gained thanks to new technologies and particularly thanks to the *abuse* of these new technologies. Following Rancière, this is what we would also subscribe to in regard to the pictorial turn twenty years later.

Starting from the famous exchange of letters between Thomas Mitchell and Gottfried Boehm, where the two fathers of the visual turn decided to enrich their already seminal thesis, eventually it became clear that questions of image were not so much issues of a purely philosophical nature as of a practical coming to terms with a reality dominated by visual phenomena of all kinds. In one of his assessments in his letter, Gottfried Boehm proposed the idea of *the iconic turn* in the wider context of classical philosophy and the philosophy of language of Ludwig Wittgenstein, as well as making a reference to how philosophy conceived of the term *logos*. In so doing he claimed that his concept of the iconic turn inevitably started to acquire a broader importance, tending towards a "meaning–generating process". According to Boehm, the genealogy of the signification proces-

ses of images in the form of a "non–verbal, iconic *logos*" was also to be found in comparable ways in meaning–creating processes in verbal communication (Boehm and Mitchell, 2009: 105). In addition to this, Boehm completely acknowledges that it is "the *history* of images that motivates the question 'what and when is an image'", allowing for the *paradigm* to be made out of the image in the first place (107). What the *iconic turn* ultimately meant, then, was an acknowledgement of and giving name to this on–going process inherent to both iconic and verbal texts, which must not be confused, as Boehm puts it, with the identification of images with iconological references or with *ekphrasis,* for they "do not illustrate the difference between the speakable and the visible" (110).

This is probably the reason why Boehm, in spite of initially calling this new understanding of how images work *the iconic turn*, does not see it as a turn in its own right but rather as a "vacillation between what Thomas Kuhn termed a 'paradigm shift' and the attitude of a 'rhetorical twist' that recalls last fall's fashions" (114). Not contesting the *meritum* of Boehm's theoretical position, Thomas Mitchell has pointed out that questions of style and fashion in regard to contemporary theory should probably be of equal importance, asking "are the emotions of iconoclasm and iconophilia confined only to the popular, mass–culture version of the pictorial turn, or do they also appear within philosophical discourse itself, from Plato's suspicion of the arts, to Wittgenstein's anxiety over the 'picture' that held us captive?" (115). In other words, should theory not become impure in order to comply better with the impurity of artifacts themselves, as well as to cope more successfully with contemporary discourses on art and images in general? If the answer to this question is *no*, then visual studies might easily find itself in the center of turbulence that will shake the disciplinary borders of all the traditional visual disciplines while problems regarding the nature, function and philosophy of images will start to create massive responses all across the humanities. If the answer is *yes*, then a more structured disciplinary formation will probably be required from visual studies, with the possibility of it developing into just another "knowledge project". While certainly not giving priority to "purity" of theory, the authors in this book inevitably take into account both possibilities.

Over the years, issues of disciplinary borders and, more precisely, of the particular *object* of visual studies have become salient in the process of the discipline's self–legitimization. Should visual studies as a comprehensive approach to images engage with existing objects that have already gained prominence within the concept of western culture—such as artworks, exemplary pieces of architecture and, sometimes, on very rare occasions, even pieces of industrial, graphic or fashion design—or should it

radically broaden visual epistemology, consecrating images of virtually all kinds? In our opinion, artistic and media practice resolved this dilemma long before practitioners of visual studies or new art history or critical iconology (however we want to refer to them) started to engage with it. The inclusion of non–artistic objects in the making of art, like that of Andy Warhol, and the adoption of vernacular visual language, like snap-shot photography or multimedia installations done using basic video tech-nologies, to which Nicholas Mirzoeff, for example, makes particular refer-ence (Mirzoeff, 2009), are all evidence of "premature" answers that art gave before theory had even posed the questions. At some point, it was easier to establish a new discipline altogether than to re–invent the older one. The difficult relation of art history to visual studies comes to the fore especially at those spectacular moments of breakthrough when contempo-rary art tries to redefine itself and, consequently, its accompanying theory.

Visual studies, as an emergent discipline, has taken advantage of one of these moments, allowing for the proliferation of images to take part in the continual processes of the discipline's legitimization, no matter from what kind of institutional or media background its new visual objects have been taken (from museums, from street art, from virtual communication space, etc). In relation to the acceptance of new visual hermeneutics, Dutch theoretician Ernst van Alphen has noted that "the difficult insertion" of Andy Warhol into the domain covered by art history makes it clear that cultural and visual studies are not restricted, as is often believed, to privileg-ing objects or practices from popular or mass culture. It is not that visual studies privileges certain types of objects and practices, but rather that it does not automatically exclude all other types. Both are symptoms of similar circumstances and therefore raise similar questions, which transgress the restricted scope of the singular genealogy of either class of objects (Alphen, 2005: 192). Following this argument, we may come to an assertion that what has been happening during the two decades since the advent of the pictorial turn is the twofold process that was mentioned at the beginning: images have been trying to conquer new space within our imagination while theory has been struggling to understand and explain the potentialities and conse-quences of new imagination–making techniques.

So, what about the object of visual studies? Is visual studies just broa-dening the disciplinary territories of art history, film and media studies to encompass the totality of both fields of art and popular culture, or is the new visual epistemology undermining the very possibility of retaining any kind of disciplinary borders? In order to be able to answer this question, we must understand *why* and *if* the question matters at all. Why does this question not have the same ideological and political weight in, let us say,

Anglophone visual theory on the one hand and German *Bildwissenschaft* on the other? Most certainly because the disciplinary genealogies of visual studies and its actual practices differ depending on the particular histories that the scholars in question have had to deal with. In our opinion, art history and visual studies are inevitably bound to undergo a divorce, but not because their respective objects of study do not converge, for, on the contrary, they sometimes do; however, it is an unequal relationship, as visual studies will always rely more on art historical insights than the other way round. This is simply because the art historical agenda has already been set and even though it encompasses an enormous quantity of presumably valuable objects, it is still a *definite* quantity of objects. Listing possible points of fracture between art history and visual studies, James Elkins stated that "from a visual–culture standpoint, art history can appear disconnected from contemporary life, essentially or even prototypically elitist, politically naïve, bound by older methodologies, wedded to the art market, or hypnotized by the allure of a limited set of artists and artworks" (Elkins, 2003a: 23).

We may concur that some of these fears and fallacies still exist, but the real issue would be the presumable *value* of the things that different disciplines devote their attention to. Why should art history be involved with objects that are *not art*, to begin with? The fact that it deals with only a small fraction of artifacts created by humankind simply cannot be considered a disciplinary drawback, but rather an academic straightforwardness. In his book *The Domain of Images,* from 2001, James Elkins draws a parallel between art history and the natural sciences, coming to the reasonable conclusion that, unlike biology, which treats its objects of study as all equally worthy of our interest, the deliberate discrimination of visual artifacts performed by art history is a consequence of how these objects have been *evaluated,* not by art history alone but by aesthetics, philosophy of art and other value–oriented disciplines. Elkins' example is particularly convincing, especially as it may apply, even though in reverse order, to visual studies as well:

> The Manets and Picassos of the world are like the spectacular large mammals that capture everyone's attention, but things like insects and protozoa and bacteria are *most* of life, outnumbering large mammals millions of times over. A field that aspires to look as broadly as possible at images has come to terms with its own limiting interests, just as conservators who fight to save the panda have to realize they are saving it, in large measure, because it is impossibly cute and cuddly, not because it is more biologically important or complex than paramecium (Elkins, 2003a: 85–86; 2001: 251).

Although James Elkins has invested enormous intellectual effort in breaking down the boundaries between "Picassos" and "bacteria", in one of his more recent comments on the subject he states that "the reason why it continues to make sense to think of art history as a source for a wide visual studies (...) is that art history has one of the richest and deepest histories of encounters with historically embedded objects" (Elkins, 2003b: 236). In this mega– or trans–discipline in which art history would take a lead, other disciplines are welcome too, in order to produce, as Elkins puts it, a "productive iconoclash", in the manner that Bruno Latour referred to this concept in his seminal project on the war of images (Latour, 2002).

But it seems the war of images exploded into a war of disciplinary epistemologies and their respective objects of study. We are referring here to a heated discussion that, ten years ago, provoked quite a stir in Anglophone visual theory. It all started with a very thoughtful article written by Mieke Bal for the then only emergent Journal for Visual Culture. Mieke Bal's article was entitled "Visual essentialism and the object of visual culture", which was in itself already a programmatic statement in relation to how visual studies as a discipline should be approached and what kind of intellectual insights it should deliver. The Dutch author started her argumentation in a dialectical fashion, voting against visual culture as a discipline "because its object cannot be studied within the paradigms of any discipline presently in place", but standing against art history too, as it is equally incapable of embracing the totality of the visual field: "it has failed to deal with both the visuality of its objects and the openness of the collection of those objects – due to the established meaning of 'art'" (Bal, 2003: 5). So, according to Mieke Bal, visual culture was not yet capable of being a discipline because it lacked a specific paradigm, but further on, she acknowledges that visual culture "lays claim to a specific object and raises specific questions about that object" (Bal, 6). In other words, we knew *what* to talk about but we still did not know *how*.

Another question that she raises regards what she calls *visual essentialism*, the term vehemently commented on and sometimes highly contested by other participants in this discussion, like Nicholas Mirzoeff, Keith Moxey, Norman Bryson, Thomas Mitchell and others. For Mieke Bal, the essentialist nature of images means, primarily, two equally problematic things: one being images' claim to an authentic difference from other phenomena and the other being the authoritarian stance of visual culture towards the domain of images, something it has acquired from the analogous authoritarian position of art history (Bal, 6). It is very interesting to note that an endeavor aiming at a definition of what visual studies is or should be about ends up with a fear of the essential (or even essentialist) charac-

teristics of theoretical objects that the discipline has as its main target of interest. If we try to find reasons for such a twist, we will probably find it in the dramatic change of the notion or concept of the *object* itself. Mieke Bal proposes as the new object of visual culture not any kind of artistic or profane artifact, but *visuality* as a consequence of the ever–changing contexts in which the *viewing subjects* happen to be, in the sense used by Norman Bryson in his seminal text "The gaze in the expanded field":

> Between the subject and the world is inserted the entire sum of discourses which make up visuality, that cultural construct, and make visuality different from vision, the notion of unmediated visual experience. Between retina and world is inserted a *screen* of signs, a screen consisting of all the multiple discourses on vision built into the social arena (Bryson, 1988: 91–92).

This Lacanian–sounding distinction between the physical *act of looking* while perceiving material objects on the one hand and visuality as *cultural construction of reality* on the other was both a theoretical and a practical insight that drew our attention to image–producing techniques and not just to the reception of images. The site of looking was exactly in–between: it was Jonathan Crary who made us understand that objects are sites at which discursive formation intersects with material properties (Crary, 1990: 31), followed by Mieke Bal who, on the same path, argued that "visuality as an object of study requires that we focus on the relationship between the seen and the seer" (Bal, 2003: 14). From such a perspective, visual studies becomes a discipline with a specific methodology of scrutinizing *series of events*, rather than *physical entities*, which makes of the discipline itself a sort of living theory, capable of interacting with its objects–turned–events.

The object of visual studies, together with its actual position as an academic discipline, may thus seem even more problematic and inexpressible than it was two decades ago. In our opinion it would be wrong to assume that this has something to do with the sheer theoretical divergences among members of various learned communities; it probably has more to do with technological changes in contemporary societies (Žarko Paić refers to it as *technosphere*), changes that none of the current visual theories was able to comprehend. By invoking technological changes, we do not imply that singular disciplines within the humanities should demonstrate a particular understanding of, for instance, information or computer technologies, at least no more than any of us needs them in his or her regular life. On the contrary, we are relating here more to a distinct kind of theory that sees the human body as a central technological medium of experience in the way

that Hans Belting is probably referring to when, in his *Anthropology of Images,* he speaks of a new kind of iconology in which images and their respective media are no longer separated from individuals as image–perceiving bodies; rather, the two become interdependent: represented object and perceiving subject in his theory become the unique body/media of an image–making process. To claim such an anthropological turn in visual theory, Belting needed to go to ancient times to remind us what purpose images served in the first place; why people invented them and why they treated them as if they were living beings:

> Images, preferably three–dimensional ones, replaced the bodies of the dead, who had lost their visible presence along with their bodies (...) The dead, as a result, were kept as present and visible in the ranks of the living via their images. But images did not exist by themselves. They, in turn, were in need of an embodiment, which means in need of an agent or a medium resembling a body. This need was met by the invention of visual media, which not only embodied images but resembled living bodies in their own ways (Belting, 2005: 307).

In a different, still comparably "animistic" manner, W.J.T. Mitchell ascribed images a life of their own, with qualities possessed only by desiring subjects. This coming to life was, in his account, grounded on basically the same premise as Belting's: that it is *people* who create images, only to get something in return from them. When Belting's historical terms, under which images that were created "in the era before art" as replacements for the missing subjects of cult (Belting, 1997), are applied in a more secular fashion, as they were by Mitchell, then this primordial urge to receive pleasure, fear and religious comfort from images explodes in a historically and theoretically distinctive manner: we then speak of the pictorial turn or the increased level of activity that images have taken on.

* * *

This collection of essays has been prompted by this same "primordial" urge and, while acknowledging the limits of any such endeavor, it tries to follow as many paths, uncovered by some of the most prominent figures in image theory today, as it possibly can. The initial idea for this book came from several exceptional presentations given at the conference "Visual Studies as Academic Discipline" held in Zagreb in November 2013. The book is, however, in many respects different from the conference insofar as it includes articles by scholars not present in Zagreb, as well as articles by scholars who were present but who have completely revised and ex-

tended their papers for this publication. This is why we consider *Theorizing Images* to be even more insightful and engaging: as the title indicates, this book *theorizes* images, but it is not a theory *of* images because, as stated in the first part of the introduction, visual studies cannot lead to a unified theory of images unless we agree upfront upon a unified *ontology* of images. Although that would be a different task altogether, we believe that all the contributions in this book (in different ways and at different pace), by theorizing images in their aesthetic, historical, media and technological guises, pave the way for the future of visual culture and for the image science that will make this future more comprehensible.

Michele Cometa thinks it is not at all paradoxical to look back at the history of cave art in order to understand what the future of our visually constructed world might look like. In his article "The Challenge of Cave Art. On the Future of Visual Culture" he builds an argument based on the understanding of images as a specifically human endeavor which has characterized all historical epochs going back to the most ancient times of human activity, already discernible in drawings left by *Homo sapiens sapiens* on the rocks inside caves. Here, Cometa not only follows the intellectual path established by Hans Belting and W.J.T. Mitchell in his understanding of the urge to make images as universal principle of humankind, but also argues that the study of cave art may lead to a better understanding of *all* pictures. What is particularly interesting is how he structures his argumentation, posing ontological dilemmas concerning images: the *what*, *when*, *how* and *where* of an image provides useful links to the history, present and future of image studies. Likewise, Cometa shows to what extent art history, anthropology and visual studies must be intertwined should we wish to understand the activity of images in all their historical, artistic and media incarnations.

Keith Moxey, in his article "Material Time, Images and Art History", argues that the ontological foundation of images is perhaps best looked for neither in their "social" function nor in what images "naturally" are. Traditional humanistic disciplines have tended to approach images either as if they possessed some objective meaning or as if they were carriers of subjective messages, provided by spectators instead of artists/creators. Moxey asks what happens if we approach images as if they were neither subjects nor objects, but belonged in a continuum between these poles. What, then, is this point of transcendence beyond which the subject/object opposition turns into something more pertinent to images and their meaning? According to Moxey, artistic or pictorial artifacts do not just occur *within* time, but also create time as their vital and inherent propositions. From the Mayan depictions in Bonampak as early as the eighth century B.C. all the way

up to contemporary art, only by grasping the presence of time in the particular artwork can we become capable of transcending our habitual subject/object oppositions and therefore eventually of uncovering radically new image ontologies. Moxey describes the presence of time in various artworks not just by directing our attention to their historical time, but to the sort of intellectual time that is inscribed both into their formal and material qualities. Most importantly, he engages with time because "what strikes a viewer as significant in one moment will not perform the same function in another. One form of time can only be activated by its encounter with another".

Many contributions in this book show that, in the emergent field of visual studies (and to a certain extent in the German *Bildwissenschaft* as well), it is not just a discussion on the ontology of images that has been regularly addressed; the very ontological foundation of the discipline *as such* is still open. While there is an unequivocal agreement that it should deal with visual phenomena in full spectrum, from pictorial representations to phenomenal experiences, probably exactly because of the vast range of possible objects there is still an air of indetermination as to the scope visual studies should have and methodology to be adopted. At the same time, for some researchers, the more than two–decade–long dispute visual studies had with art history—and objects (artworks) that the older discipline traditionally claimed—is still a fundamental topic. The article by Krešimir Purgar analyzes some of the most recent interventions related to the new discipline that might reveal old controversies in a new light or open the way, as Barry Sandywell suggests, for a "new visual studies" altogether. In his text "Coming to Terms with Images. Visual Studies and Beyond", Purgar traces uncertainties regarding what visual studies does or should do and discusses propositions and possible directions offered by some authors deeply involved in questions of both the ontological and disciplinary nature of images. What Purgar gradually uncovers are the specific dynamics inherent to both the problematics of the image and the field of visual studies; these dynamics render both of them ontologically and disciplinarily undefined, yet surprisingly vital.

After discussing the historical, ontological and disciplinary concerns pertinent to images and visual culture, the book proceeds to the relationship between images, technology and media. We thought it would be best introduced through a sort of archeology of contemporary media studies, which is masterfully provided by Antonio Somaini in "The '*Medium* of Perception'. Walter Benjamin's Media Theory and the Tradition of the *Media Diaphana*". The article aims to make us familiar with the complex notion of *medium* in Benjamin's theoretical writings, of which the essay

The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility is certainly the best known. But Somaini's analysis operates in a direction that will uncover *medium* as "the spatially extended environment, the *milieu*, the *Umwelt* in which perception occurs". In doing so, the author will bring us closer to an understanding of contemporary media, because today, as several following contributions will show, the medium is no longer just a connection between sender and recipient, but a complex networked system, precisely the *milieu*, the *Umwelt*. Antonio Somaini makes his point by approaching Benjamin from three different perspectives: analyzing the historical dimension of perception, disentangling different meanings of the term medium and, finally, putting Benjamin's thought into the context of the post–Aristotelian tradition of the so–called *media diaphana*: a tradition of texts that focuses on the role played by diaphanous substances such as air, vapor, smoke and clouds – "the environment in which our sensory experience takes place".

In his article "Eyes in the Window. Intermedial Reconfiguration of TV in the Context of Digital Public Spheres", Stefan Münker explains the changing nature of the classic visual media of the twentieth century—television—showing how it evolved during the last few decades and how it has gone through substantial changes in the twenty–first century, eventually to become much more than just "window to the world", as media theorist Thomas Hutchinson called it almost seventy years ago. Münker explains that new digital and network platforms open new possibilities for this "old new medium", because it paradoxically renders technology more human than "new new media". Thanks to its adoption of digital broadcasting, television is no longer technologically inferior to other digital media; on the contrary, says Münker, as a reaction to the digital revolution and the consequent changes in user expectations, the medium of television has developed a broad range of (inter)medial strategies. Four of these strategies he discusses in this book: 1) the online presence of the various broadcasting corporations and the program–related internet offers on their respective websites; 2) the online presence of the channels in the form of online media libraries; 3) the adaptations of internet–specific medialities in television programming, and 4) the integration of genuinely web–produced content into programming.

Adriano Fabris, in "Philosophy, Image and the Mirror of Machines", claims that new technologies have the power to erase the traditional distinction between theory and practice, because they now allow people to achieve all their goals that previously belonged to either theory or practice. Borders between the two become invisible and our need to make a distinction between them becomes obsolescent. But what is even more important,

Fabris suggests, is our inability to distinguish between what has been created "naturally" and what has been created "artificially". It transpires that, even if people generally feel discomfort when faced with interventions in natural order—like genetic experiments with plants or the cloning of the human genome—concepts such as *nature* and *reality* and their deployment as control mechanisms have already been lost. Fabris believes there *is* a solution through which human beings can regain this division: people must either always be reminiscent of the times when they had control over machines that worked for them or they have to find *in machines* the perfection they have always aspired to. When it comes to the understanding of images, this means that people must always be aware of the "traditional" power of images on the one hand (as insightfully demonstrated by David Freedberg almost three decades ago) and of the new power of *imaging technologies* on the other.

The consequences of the Heideggerian concept of technology in the age of digital communication is shown in the next article, "Technosphere – A New Digital Aesthetics? The Body as Event, Interactivity and Visualization of Ideas" by Žarko Paić. Here the author takes very wide perspective on the outcomes of modern society after the end of metaphysics and at the beginning of the era of computation, screens, immateriality and illusion. It is a radically new situation for human beings because now, Paić suggests, they must adapt to a new speed of digital streams, emanating at all times, while their visual field is surrounded by intermittently pulsating video screens fed by digitally created images and simulacra of all kinds. To make us understand fully this radical shift, Paić makes a distinction between technique and technology: "Technique belongs to computer–based thinking in natural sciences, e.g. mathematics and physics. Digital design, on the other hand, refers to the technology of the transfer of information. It is a feature of the computer method of generating reality". The article discusses the philosophical (cognitive) and material (bodily) consequences of this fracture, claiming that technique was always tied to the analog system of nature, but technology intends to open the digital network order beyond the differences between nature and culture.

The contributions that follow by Klaus Sachs–Hombach, Dieter Mersch and Sybille Krämer can be considered classic "bildwissenschaftliche Untersuchungen" (image science analysis) in the theory of pictures. In "Pictorial Act Theory. Images as Communicative Media", Klaus Sachs–Hombach contends that pictures are predicative entities capable of acts of showing and communicating and therefore able to convey meanings both similar to and different from natural language. However, the similarities should be looked for on a very general level of communication, because

both pictures and texts always convey meanings by mediating messages or creating some *object* of communication. Where pictures differ from spoken language is in *how* those messages are mediated and *what* this object of communication looks like. With this in mind, Sachs–Hombach's predicative image theory departs from similarities between pictorial and verbal communication, because the analogy between the two no longer works when specific "communicative acts" are concerned. He distinguishes four basic levels of complexity in predicative theory: 1) an image merely illustrates properties; 2) an image serves as a visual pattern of certain classes of objects; 3) an image indicates that the illustration depicts a particular individual object that is meant to be a reference to particular properties, and 4) an image is linked to an assertion or an appeal, i.e. it can generally convey an attitude towards an object.

On the other hand, Dieter Mersch, in his "Pictorial Thinking. On the 'Logic' of Iconic Structures", establishes a different kind of theory, in which images are generated by "thinking pictorially" in a way that engages one's visual sensory apparatus and many other visual–cognitive capacities that Mersch explains in detail in the text. For example, he starts from the insights of Maurice Merleau–Ponty, according to which images are ambiguous entities that exist only if a gaze is thrown upon them. So images, without having somebody looking at them, may only "half" take place, so to speak. Their objective properties cannot be determined in absolute terms insofar as there is no possibility of directing a permanent gaze that could turn images into absolute things. Mersch says that this impossibility or lack of vision should be addressed in detail because it is a constituent part of a media process in the first place. He calls this process "double vision", and for him it becomes the very subject of the interplay between visibility and invisibility in multiple ways. "If one wants to decipher the mediality of the pictorial and its structure", Mersch argues, "then one needs to proceed from this double gaze and its multiple interlacing between 'withdrawal' and 'excess'".

Yet another insightful variant of theorizing pictures is to be found in the engaging prose by Sybille Krämer. Her text titled "Point, Line, Surface as Plane. From Notational Iconicity to Diagrammatology" states from the outset that, although we live in a three–dimensional world, the invention of the two–dimensional flat picture surface was one of the greatest cultural achievements. What may appear as a downsizing or diminishing of our spatial experience of the world is, according to Krämer, an overcoming of our natural cognitive borders. In the text she focuses on unveiling how, on a surface covered with diagrammatical symbols, *spatial relations* can take our interest over more common *epistemic tasks*; in other words, how to

learn to see characters by *gazing* at them, instead of *reading* them. She systematizes artifacts such as scripts, graphs, diagrams, maps etc. under the common denominator of *inscriptions,* i.e. *the diagrammatic*, and differentiates them from images of art on the one hand and the instrumental images of science on the other. Her concept of *notational iconicity* will eventually be employed to work against the traditional "blindness" of graphic texts, and what makes inscriptions different from ordinary images is what Krämer calls "operative iconicity" [operative Bildlichkeit].

Contrary to the belief that the human race is inevitably striving towards the utmost visibility and ultimate transparency of all media it uses for everyday communication (or exactly because of that), Asbjørn Grønstad claims that there is a tendency in contemporary video art and movie–making that *can* and *will* make no use of high definition, 4K television technology or the technical perfecting of images aimed at crystal–clear screens, purity and clarity of vision. What Grønstad gradually uncovers in his text "Impaired Images and the Boundaries of Discernibility" is a kind of "rhetoric of impurity" that is built on the notion of opacity and other theories of filmic post–representation. He examines "the strange and optically regenerative practices by which materially impaired images exploit their own opacity to attain a new modality of existing as a visual artifact". Drawing mostly on examples taken from Bill Morrison's found footage film *Decasia* (2002), Grønstad will make reference to numerous precursors to Morrison's "aesthetics of precarity", finding them both in other directors, like Walt Disney and Jean–Luc Godard, and in visual arts at large, for example in Kasimir Malevich and Mark Wallinger. In his article, the author systematically foregrounds this newly uncovered attraction for low visibility in images, and for their *beautiful* formlessness and impenetrability.

The last two contributions are dedicated to the emerging field of fashion studies and its relation to a society permeated with images. Alicia Irena Mihalić makes an important observation which relates not only to the world of fashion, but also to art and media: she contends that the concept of temporal gaps, which were previously considered a key element in the functioning of trend mechanisms, has today been challenged by the mixing up of all historical styles, eventually turning the contemporary visual arena into a permanent showcase of all known artifacts. What comes out of her widely encompassing text "Protean Images of Fashion. Revaluation of Past Styles in New Settings" is that it is not only fashion that seems a trivial phenomenon full of short–term creations that are able to grab our attention only for a season or two; this principle of "fashionability" and constant change may be ascribed to all images of media, art and culture. This is implied in Mihalić's statement that "fashion did not only arise from one

central origin, but was built from various sources that were equally in-
volved in the development of trends". In her analysis, as well as taking
into consideration theorists of fashion in a more narrow sense, Mihalić
makes reference to media and image theorists such as Roland Barthes,
Jean Baudrillard, Fredric Jameson and Gilles Lipovetsky.

Katarina Nina Simončič, in her cultural–historical analysis of ways of
dressing, traces the origins of the contemporary blurring of boundaries bet-
ween images of genders. Based on archival work and numerous referen-
ces throughout history up until today, she concludes, first, that both skirts
and trousers in western culture have been symbols of gender and sexual
affiliation, and second, that from the fourteenth century all the way up to
the 1960s, the distinction in fashion according to gender was very clear.
Finally, Simončič argues that both historical and contemporary attempts at
the transformation of these differences—trousers for men (power) and
skirts for women (feminine)—were clearly indicators of social, cultural
and political transformations that influenced the relationship between the
two genders. She unveils processes that demonstrate the overcoming of the
boundaries of gender identification and birth stereotypes, presenting them
as an incessant aspiration to freedom of expression. From Simončič's in-
tervention, we learn that probably the best known example of this way of
thinking is represented in popular culture imagery, and again, by one im-
age: on the cover of his 1970/71 album *The Man Who Sold the World,* we
see David Bowie lying on a couch wearing a sumptuous Michael Fish de-
signed gown. It comes as no surprise that Bowie later commented on the
subject: "It's not a woman's dress. It's a man's dress."

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CHAPTER ONE

THE CHALLENGE OF CAVE ART:
ON THE FUTURE OF VISUAL CULTURE

MICHELE COMETA

I'm going to begin my discussion by posing a question. Does it make sense to consider cave art—the art of an ancient past—a challenge for visual culture as an academic discipline and as a research field? It might seem an oxymoron, or rather a *boutade*, a paradox. Yet there are many reasons to believe that this dive into the past in the age of new media, of digital literacy, can show us a way to the future of our discipline and that it can give us new energy for research. It certainly helps us to answer some fundamental questions that contemporary visual culture has faced in recent years—mostly in connection with its stepmother, traditional art history—if only because *cave art studies* inevitably shifts the research focus from the issue of *Art* to the issue of *Image*. Whatever we may think about cave art—by which I mean the parietal art of the caves, as well as the global rock art, the petroglyphs, the so–called "portable art" and all the "signs" that cover thousands of years of human artifacts and of surfaces around the world—it is clear that a comparison with these expressive forms made by *Homo sapiens* forces us to reiterate four fundamental questions. These are the questions through which—albeit in short sketches—I shall articulate this argument: *What* is an image? *When* is an image? *How* is an image? *Where* is an image? I am aware that these are ambitious questions, but the purpose of this article is simply to show a relationship: that between cave art studies and visual culture, which allows us to put these questions into the right perspective, so as to imagine future visual culture studies.

1. *What* is an image?

Cave art studies, at least since Abbé Henri Breuil founded it as a scientific discipline, discusses this form of art starting from a radical question: what

is an image? From Breuil's perspective, the design of cave art studies is clear from the beginning and the development of twentieth–century research still seems to confirm one of his intuitions: "Prehistory will ask comparative ethnography to reconstruct the economic, social, industrial, even *mental* life of the ancient men at every stage of their development" (Breuil, 1987: 15). The history of the scientific interpretation of cave art—from Breuil to Leroi–Gourhan, from Max Raphael to Jean Clottes—has in fact variously applied Breuil's program, focusing in turn on the social, religious, technological, and today the cognitive aspects of image–making by *Homo sapiens*. Cave art studies question what image–making is. But they also question the "pictures" beyond art, or at least at the origins of art, if not quite "non–art images", as James Elkins would define them.

These are pictures (not necessarily images!), however, that stimulate the fundamental question posed by Tom Mitchell: "what do or, in this case, what *did* pictures want?" from us humans, or which "ways of world–making" do they show us? *Devant l'image* (as Didi–Huberman put it), we are probably not very different from our ancestors of the Upper Paleolithic; *confronting images,* we are not modern at all (Latour); confronting the pictures of cave art can little help language, which perhaps was experiencing its first faltering steps at that time. The projection of our ecphrastic hopes (Mitchell) onto cave art, more than a century old, remains a fascinating exercise. Maybe it is helpful in understanding the narrative dimensions of our modern mind, but we cannot be sure that our ancestors had the same narrative skills, likely as it is that we belong to the same cognitive revolution.

Some images—such as the famous Lascaux scene of the ithyphallic man with a bird's head at the foot of a bison, stabbed to death, or the unicorn that has fired the imagination of Georges Bataille—seem to show not only the beginning of a narrative dimension but also the idea of a bundle, which certainly presides over symbolic thought and which is also the original cell of a micro–narrative. It is quite possible, therefore, that the narrative analysis of cave pictures—whether it be driven by André Leroi–Gourhan's mythograms or by the elementary structures of the mind investigated by cognitive archeology today—can help us to understand the mystery of cave art. However, these very images/pictures advocate a great caution in the application of our ecphrastic hopes and fears.

These brief remarks reveal, however, that we are already applying the methods of modern visual culture to the study of cave art. It is not a coincidence that from within our discipline the issue of a "paleolithic visual culture" has already been raised. Art historians such as Whitney Davis, archaeologists such as Margaret W. Conkey and Steven Mithen, and an-

thropologists like Randall White and April Novell stressed, as early as the 1980s, the need to study the "Pleistocene visual cultures" with methods that have a double meaning: they emancipate cave art studies from the paradigms of art history and theory, which is definitely western and totally sunk in post–colonial and gender prejudices; but, on the other hand, it is precisely this contact with these forms of expression "beyond art" (Conkey, 1997; White, 1992) that raises the issue of the Paleolithic image in a completely new perspective, certainly a more useful one for the development of contemporary visual culture. Applying visual culture methods means addressing the problem of the gaze and therefore of the beholder even in a prehistoric context, and studying cave art media and material culture.

Becoming more and more necessary, therefore, are a "cultural history" of cave art interpretations (Moro Abadia–González Morales, 2013) and an "archeology of cave art archeology", as Margaret W. Conkey has recently confirmed in the prestigious Journal of Visual Culture (Conkey, 2010), which is obviously a way to question—as David Freedberg (2002) would say—the "visual encyclopaedia(s)" of us moderns. It is an encyclopedia written by the best twentieth–century minds in anthropology and visual culture *avant la lettre*: Henri Breuil, André Leroi–Gourhan, Max Raphael, Georges Bataille, André Malraux, not to mention those further away from us.

But even more important is the contribution that this modern passion for origins gives us, just emancipating ourselves from the simplifications of post–Hegelian historicism, especially from the rhetorical trivialization of the total originality of recent "pictorial turn(s)" promoted by the development of media and vision technologies. However, a second fundamental question immediately stands out. It is a question on the origins and the duration of images: "*when* is an image?"

2. *When* is an image?

Once again, it is undoubtedly thanks to Tom Mitchell that this issue has been raised on its own terms. He did this particularly in *The Last Dinosaur Book* (1998), whose significance for the development of future visual culture is yet to be discovered; a book all the more extraordinary because while apparently engaged in the analysis of a pop culture phenomenon— the passion for dinosaurs—it is also a foreword to an anthropology of art and to an investigation into the meaning of images for *Homo sapiens*. This research lies at the beginning of a sequence of other extraordinary studies into the anthropology of images/pictures. I am referring to books such as

Bild–Anthropologie (2001) by Hans Belting or, more recently, *Theorie des Bildaktes* (2010) by Horst Bredekamp, where the production of images is no longer considered an "aesthetic surplus"—"eine ästhetische Zutat" as Bredekamp writes (32)—but picture appears wherever "the smallest trace of human processing" (35), as in "primitive" tools, is perceptible, as Leon Battista Alberti had already understood.

From this point of view—which is also the point of view of western aesthetics *tout court*—the picture "occurs" where there is a human gesture which makes it exist. Therefore the space for "images beyond art" or for "non–art images" suggested by many scholars tends to diminish dramatically. Today, for example, it is assumed that the so–called *Makapansgat jasperite cobble*, dating back three million years, attracted the gaze of an *Austrolopithecus africanus* thanks to the "face" that can be recognized on the stone. So our anonymous ancestor, although unable to produce such a picture because of the limits to his/her cognitive abilities, had to consider it so meaningful and "beautiful" as to carry it with him/her for many miles. Mitchell's book raises the question of origin in the following terms: after Darwin, the issue of the past of the images, the origin of the images, is first of all the issue of the evolution of images and humankind. The discourse on images is thus imprinted with dynamics which inevitably lead to the modern and perhaps to the postmodern as part of an evolution—that of *Homo sapiens*—which can be read in terms of continuity, at least since the so–called Upper Paleolithic Revolution, about 45,000–35,000 years ago.

Confronting images, we are little more than Upper Paleolithic men. This implies that all the relations with images that modern man can imagine do not go far beyond the behavior of Chauvet or Lascaux men, continuing to be explained in terms of either totemism, animism or—following the interpretation of Jean Clottes and David Lewis–Williams—of shamanism. This is not an occasion to remember all the numerous good insights in Mitchell's book. I can only invite you to carefully read again the arguments of the chapters entitled *The Animal Totem of Modernity* and *On the Evolution of Images*. But let me quote something from this last chapter: "The very concept of an 'evolution of images' is an ideal place to try out such a synthesis of Marx, Freud, and Darwin. Images are (…) a kind of artificial species. The dinosaur's image is the intersection of cultural and natural determinants, a crossroad of scientific knowledge, social interests, and psychological desires" (Mitchell, 1998: 107). Thus speaks the most advanced scholar in cognitive archeology today; this is his agenda. To this synthesis are devoted the most important chapters of a later book, *What do pictures want?* in which Mitchell implicitly responds to the question "*when* are images?", beginning from the modern interpretations by Marx,

Freud and Darwin of the core concepts of twentieth–century anthropology, such as fetishism, idolatry and totemism.

Regardless of the results obtained and of the suggestions that the author's extraordinary systematic effort affords us—especially with the famous table attached to the essay *Totemism, Fetishism, Idolatry* (Mitchell, 2005: 195)—Mitchell's thesis is clear: if "when are images?" is a question about origin, then the answer is "from the beginning"; if "when are images?" is a question about duration after origin, then the answer is "forever", that is, for the whole duration of human evolution, which is still in progress, and in absolute terms, we are still implicated in the network of relationships that our ancestors established with images/pictures. Indeed, it is perhaps to be noted that the evolutionary distance between the first non–figurative records and the Lascaux cave men, the period of the birth of symbolic thought and perhaps of art, is equal to or perhaps greater than the time which separates Lascaux cave men from us. It is not so weird to think that our artistic skills—at least since the time of Lascaux, about 22,000–17,000 years ago—are characterized by a single *Kunstwollen*, whether it is based on religious or social forms or on the development of language and brain. Between the nave of Lascaux and the nave of the first Christian or civil basilicas there is really very little difference, and even less difference exists between the nave of the basilicas and us.

Not surprisingly, Mitchell insists on a complex phenomenology of the relationships that we establish with images/pictures and with which we have been living for thousands of years:

> First, just to reinforce a few key claims: totemism, fetishism, and idolatry are not to be regarded as discrete, essential categories of objects, as if one could provide a description that would allow one to sort images and works of art in three different bins on the basis of their visual, semiotic or material features. They are rather to be understood as the names of three different relations to things, three forms of "object relations" (...) that we can form with an infinite variety of concrete entities (including words and concepts) in our experience. It is therefore important to stress that one and the same object (a golden calf, for instance) could functions as a totem, a fetish, or an idol depending on the social practices and narratives that surround it" (188).

I have no doubt that if these positions of modern visual culture were applied in the interpretation of cave art images—instead of trying, as Didi–Huberman would say, the all–image, the exclusive image (Didi–Huberman, 2012)—paleontological disciplines would greatly benefit. For what concerns us, it is clear that focusing on the relationships that *Homo sapi-*

ens establishes with his images/pictures marks the road map of any future anthropology of images: "Idolatry, iconoclasm, iconophilia, and fetishism are not uniquely 'postmodern' phenomena", Mitchell wrote as early as at the beginning of *Picture Theory* (1994: 15). Small details in new acquisitions of totemic and animist systems—as proposed by Philippe Descola (2005, 2006, 2010)—will force us to revise the categories elaborated by nineteenth– and twentieth–century anthropology.

Confronting images triggers forms of relationship that Tom Mitchell— and a prestigious anthropological tradition before him—has reasonably traced back to these three human attitudes: *totemism*, *fetishism* and *idolatry*. And there are reasons to believe that these are the forms of relationship with images that are likely to be reconsidered within a single "animistic" attitude. As *ékphrasis* shows, for instance, men have never ceased to "animate images" (Cometa, 2012); as noted by Mitchell, they have never stopped "projecting" their "life histories" onto fossils and cult pictures (Mitchell, 2005: 1998).

The issue of the evolution of images, therefore, makes it necessary for contemporary visual culture to be compared with disciplines such as cognitive archeology, evolutionary biology and cultural anthropology. In fact, it is a matter of reconstructing the "life histories" of images/pictures as if they were living beings. This "as if" is certainly the basic assumption of a history of metaphors, as cultural history would build it, but it ceases to be a metaphor when it comes to determining whether there is room for a "natural history of forms", or, more exactly, for a "biology of images", as was imagined in Germany and in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century, starting from an investigation of "primitive art". So we come to the third question that visual culture has certainly placed at the center of the debate on the image: *how* is an image? Or, more exactly, *how* is a picture? as, since *Picture Theory* (16), we know that the issue of the device, the medium, is one of the essential components of the interplay that lies between the theoretical fundamentals of the discipline: between image, gaze and, of course, device.

3. *How* is an image?

It is not necessary here to recall the theories on the device developed by contemporary visual culture. Nor it is necessary to reiterate, with Belting, that there is an essential link between the medium and the human body in the image–making process. Conversely, it is worth noting that this emphasis on the *object* and on *objecthood*, the "material culture" and the resulting "social construction of meaning"—in the words of the anthropologist

and expert on cave art Randall White—is very important. White—an "un-witting" member of the "material turn" within cultural studies—rightly questions the "material construction and representation of art" (White, 1992: 538), especially insisting on the materiality of the media on which early artistic expressions were "imprinted". Being aware that the body—as Belting and Terence T. Turner have explained—is the first medium, and that it is at the center of each communication, Randall White tends to interpret the material supports, the objects, as the product of cultural representations, as the external prostheses in which we intend to survive, to communicate ourselves, to make ourselves interpretable and, perhaps, even to reconnect ourselves to our ancestors. The objects are *metaphors* (but also *metonyms* and *synecdoches*) of the self or of the individual who creates them. So we can imagine a "rhetoric" of prehistoric signs. The world–famous vulvas that inspired the acute and witty reaction of Paul G. Bahn, *No Sex, Please, We're Aurignacians* (1986), can indeed be interpreted as metonymic images, as well as the "cupoles" and the "handprints" of the caves. Inevitably following from this is the theory of the "social life of things" (Appadurai, 1986), which is valid for modern productions as well as for Upper Palaeolithic tools.

What resonates here, after more than a century, is the interpretative attitudes—often the literary recollections—of the so–called biology of images, as it developed in Germany and the United States at the turn of the twentieth century.

Today the recent achievements of cave art studies on the relationship between the images of cave art, the portable art, petroglyphs, cupolas, fingerprints, handprints and their material supports (rock, bone, ivory etc.) recall the morphological interpretation that the "biology of images" has made of "tools", considering them: 1) a space of "projection" of a subjective imagination (the nineteenth century German *visual empathy*) (Pinotti, 2011, and in a more modern context, Freedberg, 2007); 2) the embodiment of a non–utilitarian way of thinking, and 3) a technology of memory.

If we can imagine a "dialogue between the gaze and the natural form" (Severi, 2004), as repeatedly stressed by the tradition of the "biology of art" (Pitt Rivers, Haddon, Holmes, Stolpe) and by the psychological and ethnological tradition of late nineteenth century German aesthetics (R. Vischer, Semper, Riegl, Grosse, Waitz, Bastian, Warburg), then it is necessary to reconsider the shape of the rocks in Paleolithic caves and the forms of portable art as the projection space of a kind of "active imagination", which presides over the birth of art or image–making. It is now an indisputable assumption of cave art studies that the rocky support inspires various forms. On the one hand, they fit to the shape of the walls; on the

other hand, they enhance the gestalt potential "preserved" in the rock. Da-vid Lewis–Williams, also interested in an eminently "spiritual" interpreta-tion of the images of cave art, could not but insist on the enormous mean-ing of the "interaction between the depiction and the rock formation" (Lewis–Williams, 2002: 37): "The wall itself was given significance, it was not simply a neutral support for the image" (37).

Thus, it is a matter of studying the "object" and the material on which any single act of imagination is practiced. Needless to say, even this "ma-terial turn" in the study of Paleolithic art(s) affects the current debate and the art historical writing positions, as well as those of contemporary visual culture, and moves towards an analysis of a "material construction and representation of art" (White, 1992), constantly changing and challenging the traditional notions of canon, value and "objecthood". In short, it is a matter of studying cave art not starting from the question "*why* images?" or "*when* images?", but from the question "*how* images?", that is, focusing on the moment in which an "image" becomes a "picture" (Belting, 2001; Mitchell, 1994).

4. *Where* is an image?

The last question, "*where* is an image?", is perhaps the one that has most concerned those scholars who have promoted a transition from traditional art history to contemporary visual culture. Born in the wake of interna-tional cultural studies, visual culture has posed from the very beginning—as is indeed shown by some sections of the conference "Visual Studies as Academic Discipline" (Zagreb, 2013)—the question of "who speaks", and especially "where he/she talks from", i.e. from where he/she produces the picture. It is therefore a matter of taking into account the specific locations (not necessarily geographic: think of gender or class) of the subjects in-volved, but also the "colonial" and global dislocations of ancient and mo-dern visual culture.

A particular aspect of the joint variation of *global* and *local* is, as is well known, that of so–called "world art studies" in its different configura-tions (Davis, 2010; Elkins, 2007; Onians, 2006; Zijlmans and van Damme, 2008), especially in the version offered by Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme. Such studies have in fact stressed the need to start again from the "visual artistic behavior that emerges in the evolution of *Homo Sapi-ens*" (Zijlmans and van Damme, 2008: 4) and, consequently, from "cave art studies", in order to provide a theoretical basis for a global approach to images and art. It is not a coincidence that Whitney Davis recalled, in the essay *Present and Future Directions in the Study of Rock Art* (1985), that

"the specifically bioevolutionary and neuropsychological concerns of world art studies (two of its inevitable moments as a multidisciplinary project) have met stiff resistance" (Davis, 2009: 711).

I shall only list here the obvious advantages that the study of cave art can offer to the establishment of a "world art history" and "theory", benefits arising again from distant genealogies going back—as demonstrated by Ulrich Pfisterer and Marlite Halbertsma—to late nineteenth century German theories on the origin of art (Pfisterer, 2007; Pfisterer, 2008; Halbertsma, 2008).The study of cave art represents an important corrective, if not an effective antidote, to three fundamental issues of human image–making:

a) it abolishes the Eurocentrism of western history and theory of art (and of image), but at the same time, it helps us to consider the local (biological, social, environmental) constraints of different expressive forms scattered all over the globe. Appropriately, Whitney Davis has spoken of an "environmental turn in the study of art" (Davis, 2010: 714);
b) it releases art history and aesthetics from disciplinary isolation, forcing them into a confrontation with evolutionary biology, with neuropsychology, with cognitivism;
c) and finally it achieves a place for the image in the history of evolution, insisting on the adaptive function of image–making, the same as that of "story–making", on which some American proponents of literary Darwinism have been working for years, not without troubling contradictions, as have authors free from any fundamentalist drift, such as Winfried Menninghaus (2001) and Karl Eibl (2004). These are two roads that—as I mentioned at the beginning—might even merge again, should the narrative substance of primitive imagination be determined.

Here the discussion on the contribution of cave art studies to a theory of the image reconnects—and at a more specific level—to what has been argued about the origins of art. Even Zijlmans and van Damme, just in defining the paradigm of "World Art Studies", write:

> *When* and *where* did visual artistic behaviour first emerge in the evolution of *Homo sapiens*? What conditions made this behaviour possible – physical, mental, social, cultural? Why has the making and using of visual art been retained in the evolution of our species? After decades of relative neglect, the issue of art's origins is today hotly debated by specialists from an ever growing range of disciplines, including not only archaeology and art history, but cultural anthropology, evolutionary biology and neuroscience. One important impetus to rejuvenating the study of the origins of art is the archaeological discoveries that have recently been made in Africa. These

discoveries prompt us completely to reconsider early artistic behaviour in terms of both time and place. Indeed, it is now known that, rather than in Europe some 35,000 years ago, the oldest known types of visual artistic behaviour, in the form of bead production and the creation of geometric patterns, are to be found in Africa some 100,000 years ago. There are even indications that anatomically modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) may have already created sculptures and paintings before they left Africa to colonize the rest of the world perhaps some 65,000 years ago. Adding excitement to the field are various new, multidisciplinary theories attempting to explain the emergence of human art–making. These include David Lewis–Williams's neuropsychological theory suggesting that the first images were created to record hallucinations of geometric patterns and animals as experienced by shamans in a state of trance. An alternative account of Palaeolithic animal imagery has recently been provided by R. Dale Guthrie, who argues that such imagery resulted from their creators' profanely inspired fascination with the local wildlife (Zijmans and van Damme, 2008: 5).

That is to say, with landscape, environment and totemism! It is not a coincidence that the two editors of *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches* called an entire section of the anthology *The Arts and Our Shared Humanity: The Basis of Bioevolutionary Making Art and Perception*. Nor is it a coincidence that they hosted scholars such as Ellen Dissanayake, who moves in the context of a general anthropology of art oriented to the ontogenetic development of the child (and of the mother–child relationship), and John Onians, more interested in the foundation of a "neuroarthistory", which is at the basis of his successful *Atlas of World Art* (2004).

Today, the most recent acquisitions in evolutionary aesthetics (Menninghaus, 2011; Eibl, 2004) and cognitive archeology (Mithen, 1996; Renfrew–Zubrow, 1994) suggest also a revision of reflection on cave art. This image production—i.e. the art before and beyond art or, better, at the beginnings of symbolic thought in *Homo sapiens*—would allow a reflection potentially free from the categorizations of art theory/history and of the history of aesthetic ideas as we have known them to date. This task is much more stimulating today, as the comparison between the traditional disciplines dealing with images and the new perspectives opened by international visual culture, by recent global/world art studies, as well as by neuropsychology and evolutionary biology, has become urgent and not to be deferred. If it is true that research on Paleolithic art(s) still has "obscure" points (Davis, 1985: 6), what is not at all obscure is the path of its conceptualization and the influence it still exerts on contemporary visual culture studies. We know how frustrating research on the origins of art can be, but we also know that the question of the origin and evolution of ima-

ges/pictures is a question about our evolutionary history and therefore the question of our future as humans and as scholars.

The challenge that nineteenth, twentieth and, especially, twentyfirst century cave art studies pose to contemporary visual culture, therefore, has a double meaning. First of all, it enhances those theories and interpretations of images that contribute to a redefinition of the canons and values of our discourse on arts and visualities, and—not to be underestimated—of pictures (i.e. objects that are images) *tout court*. The echo of these theories was heard in twentieth–century aesthetics and art history, as well as in philosophy and literature. On another, more abstract, level, it aims at a consistent application of cognitive studies and evolutionary aesthetics and biology in order to rethink the origins of the visual arts and—this is the first aim of our discipline—the role of images/pictures during the contemporary evolution of *Homo sapiens*.

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CHAPTER TWO

MATERIAL TIME, IMAGES AND ART HISTORY

KEITH MOXEY

The historiography of visual studies so far offers two broadly different kinds of approach to the study of images.[1] On the one hand, there are those who study images for the ideological commitments that spur their production and with a concern for analyzing and defining their social function. This way of thinking, the heir to the cultural studies movement that swept British and American academia in the 1980s and 90s, often depends on Marxist theory. On the other hand, there are scholars more interested in studying the nature of imagery, how it works, and how it differs from the word. This less explicitly political and more philosophical tendency is indebted to phenomenological thinking of the kind associated with Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau–Ponty. Having spent time earlier in my career attending to the ideological function of images,[2] this article, by contrast, concerns the intrinsic nature of visual objects and argues that their fascination, as well as their power, lies in the ways in which their objective nature engages and occasionally fuses with our own experience.

My argument depends on what has become somewhat commonplace among those who think about our relation to objects: it relies on a critique of the subject/object distinction while maintaining it for heuristic reasons. In order to understand how objects intrude on consciousness and initiate interactions with them, we need to blur the distinction between "us" and "them". What happens if we approach things as if they were neither subjects nor objects, but belonged in a continuum between these poles? What if the distinction "human/non–human" is arbitrary and objects have many of the characteristics of subjects and vice–versa? In these matters I tend to follow Bruno Latour when he writes: "The name of the game is not to ex-

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[1] For an excellent introduction to the subject, see Elkins, J. (2003). *Visual Studies. A Skeptical Introduction.* New York: Routledge.
[2] Moxey, K. (1989). *Peasants, Warriors and Wives: Popular Imagery in the Reformation.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

tend subjectivity to things, to treat humans like objects, to take machines for social actors, but to *avoid using* the subject–object distinction *at all* in order to talk about the folding of humans and non–humans".[3] My argument? Visual images, like objects, do not merely occur *within* time; they *possess* and *actively engender* it as they cross our paths and enliven our days.

We conventionally speak of objects, things, works of art, and other images as if they were different from one another. So they are. Yet in this article, I want to focus more on the way in which we experience them and how we respond to their material and immaterial existence. In doing so, I want to emphasize the temporal nature of that encounter so as to "catch" the varieties of time contained within them, as well as the forms of time we bring to that exchange. If I continue to invoke the distinction between subjects and objects, it will be to try to think about the instant when they meet, the time when experience blurs one into another.

What has this to do with visual studies? The moment when an object, a work of art, or an image impinges on human consciousness is an unavoidably temporal one. The meeting does not occur on neutral ground, but on ground that is inevitably colored by both the times inherent in the object and those that constitute the subject. Chronological time, the time of the clock, is one of the ways in which we keep things in their place. Chronology orders the transience of events according to a preordained temporal framework so that things exist within time rather than outside it. The immediacy and personal appeal of certain objects, works, and images indicate that they have significance and that they belong to a different register of temporality, one that exceeds the parameters of chronology.[4]

Time encourages us to think about objects, just as objects provoke reflections about time. We are surrounded by different forms of time, just as we ourselves are composed of varied and competing temporalities. How can the innate circadian rhythms that coordinate bodily schedules of waking and sleeping, raising and lowering blood pressure, and elevating and lowering bodily temperature, or the life of the unconscious that determines fears and desires and shapes social behavior, be related to the universal but highly artificial demands of chronology? Determined by genetic, psychological, cultural, and social, not to mention gendered and ethnic considerations, human time depends upon intensely particularized coordinates. Objects only complicate the situation by intersecting with human times at

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[3] Latour, B. (1999). *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, 193–194.
[4] Heidegger, M. (1967; lecture 1935–36). *What is a Thing?* Trans. W.B. Barton and Vera Deutsch. Chicago: Regnery and Co.

acutely different angles. Material time has the potential to make chronological time stand still. Experience, the moment when consciousness encounters that which serves to define it as such, is the moment when epistemology (the theory of knowledge) and ontology (the materiality of the world) collide.

1. Objects

Let's look at an object (Fig. 2–1). In bringing to mind nature rather than culture, I don't intend to step outside of time. Far from it. The nature/culture distinction is, in fact, my target. These objects matter precisely because of their capacity both to illustrate and to contain time. Rather than belonging to no particular temporality, it is their age that makes them fascinating. Knowing little or nothing about geology, I have nevertheless always been enchanted by the rocky record of ages past. On many hikes I pick up these remnants of geological events transpiring millions of years ago into which I have no possible insight. Time, that most indiscernible yet persistent aspect of everyday life, is suspended and sedimented in rocks. Rocks bear not only the traces of time's passage, the form, substance, and texture that record its relentless movement, but also—being objects in which time has become concrete—they actively exude time as well. Possessing both representational *and* ontological status, they simultaneously illustrate and embody their own temporality.

Natural forces of breathtaking intensity and violence have left their traces in the stunningly varied shapes and colors that constitute the stratigraphic record. Are the rocks that surround us the result of convulsive energies bursting from the earth's mysterious interior, *or* the gentle action of ocean currents and the lives and deaths of countless sea creatures laid down on the placid beds of warm seas, *or* evidence of the unimaginable pressures of continental drift, of the upsurge and down draft of entire geological formations, continents, that bend and twist existing rocks into fantastic shapes and substances? What stories do the rocks convey, prompting the very narratives we spin about them?

Here is a piece of petrified wood from the Petrified Forest in California (Fig. 2–2) that sits on my mantle. About 3.4 million years ago, a volcanic explosion buried a giant redwood (sequoia) forest in volcanic ash. Originally preserved because a lack of oxygen prevented its aerobic decomposition, over the course of hundreds of thousands of years, water seeped through the ash, replacing the organic material of the trees cell by cell with crystallized minerals (Fig. 2–3, cross–sections of petrified wood). Quartz, calcite, pyrite, iron carbonate and calcium phosphate now fill the pores of

Fig. 2–1: Rocks and shells: remnants of geological events transpiring millions of years ago.

the wood's tissues. Elements such as manganese, iron, and copper stain the petrified wood in a variety of colors. When contaminants are added, quartz crystals take on yellow, red, and other bright hues.

Fig. 2–2: Piece of petrified wood from the Petrified Forest in California.

The object bespeaks the temporal process to which it has been subjected. Some of the trees destroyed by the volcano were 2,000 years old when they fell, but their own time is then inscribed by the time of the water that slowly substituted minerals for their original organic material. Can we distinguish the temporal process of petrifaction from the object itself? My own piece of the object is too intricately rendered, too finely crafted, to be reduced to the status of a scientific phenomenon or an aspect of an unconscious "natural" world. I can only remotely sense the intensity of the temporalities that formed it, the violence of the volcano, the death of the forest, the mountain of ash, the seepage of water, the crystallization of quartz, and the color of dissolving iron oxide. The moment of the "now" confronts another moment 3.4 million years ago, two horizons that chronology dictates are inconceivably distant, but which nevertheless meld in my hand. Time becomes so recognizably familiar, yet so impossibly opaque.

Among the many shells in my collection (Fig. 2–4) there are also some examples of coral. This branch coral from Lizard Island in the Great Barrier Reef, for example, is formed from the tiny calcium carbonate deposits left by thousands of coral polyps over hundreds of years. Coral fossils date from the Devonian period, 600 million years ago, so they are one of the
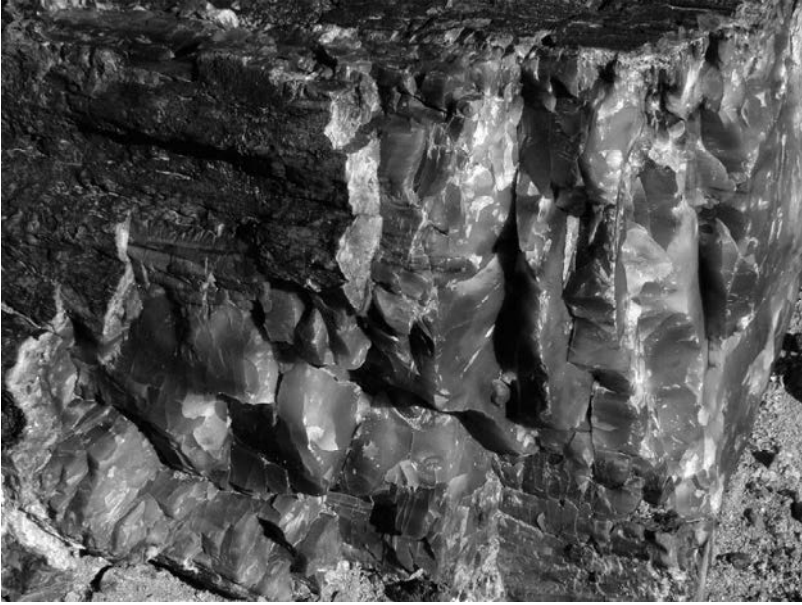
Fig. 2–3: Cross–section of petrified wood.

Fig. 2–4: Branch coral from Lizard Island in the Great Barrier Reef.
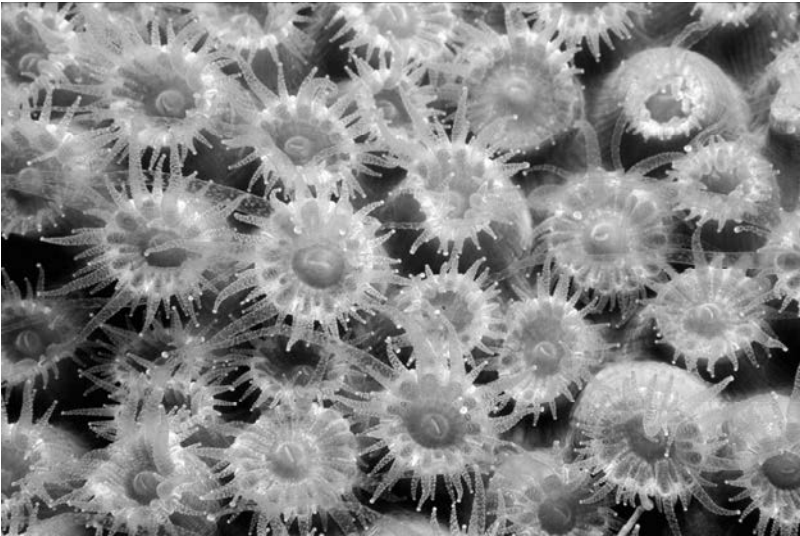
Fig. 2–5: A symbiotic relation of *zooxanthellae* and coral polyps.

most ancient forms of life on earth. These simple creatures have a symbi-otic relationship with the single–cell algae that live within them. Receiving protection from the stony skeleton of the polyp and food from its digestive process, these *zooxanthellae* provide their host with food in return (Fig. 2–5, coral polyps). Where the algae obtain carbon dioxide and water from the polyp's cellular respiration, the coral polyp receives sugars, fats and oxygen from the algae's photosynthesis. Something about the simplicity, juxtaposed with the massive scale on which this process takes place, dramatizes the passage of time. It is perhaps no accident that Charles Darwin drew the shape of branching coral to visualize his theory of evolution (Fig. 2–6, Dar-win's sketch).[5] Substituting the image of branches of coral for the more tra-ditional image of a tree in which the development of living forms is con-ceived as teleological in nature, he argues that life proceeds in many direc-tions at once. Time, that is, serves no purpose and has no function. It flows through matter in the same way as the polyp's respiration is exchanged for the algae's photosynthesis. Opportunistic and protean in its energy, time, like life, is both as accessible and unknowable as this small piece of coral.

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[5] Horst Bredekamp (2005). *Darwins Korallen: Die frühen Evolutionsdiagramme und die Tradition der Naturgeschichte.* Berlin: Wagenbach, 2005, 11.
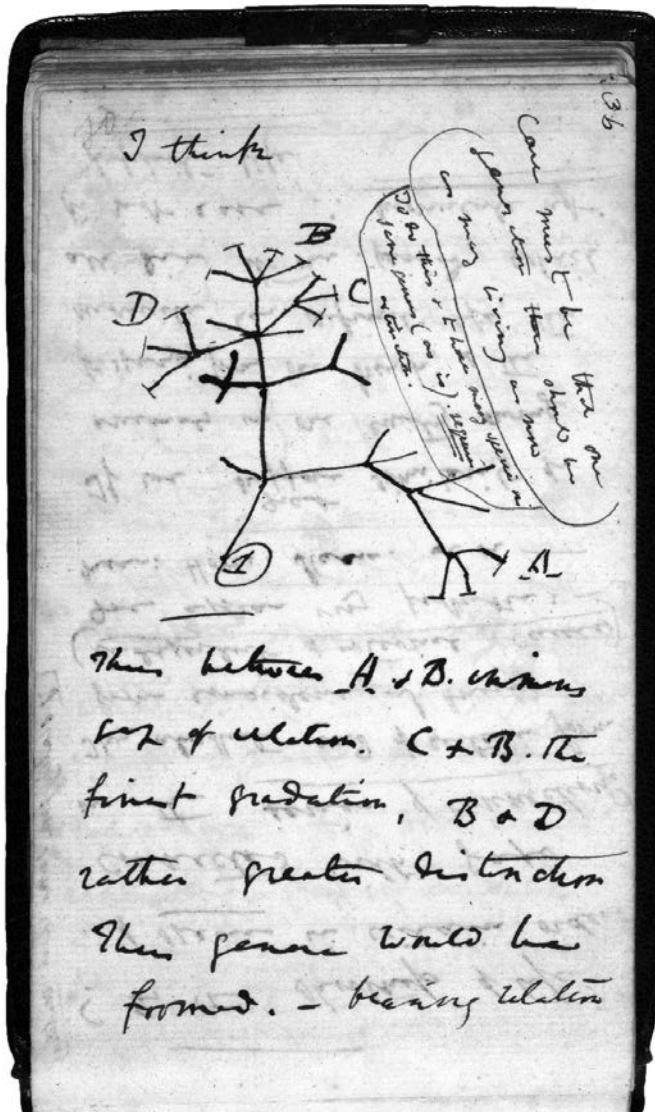
Fig. 2–6: Darwin's drawing of branching coral as s visualization of his theory of evolution.

2. Images

And what about works of art (Fig 2–7, Maya stele)? The information gleaned from the glyphs of stele 1 at the Maya site of Bonampak in southern Mexico states that it depicts the ruler Chaan Muan II, who acceded to the throne of this city in A.D. 776. The stele, whose monumental form was employed by the Maya as early as the eighth century B.C., depends on an aesthetic in which words and images work in concert. The figural carving is meant to be read together with the glyphs, and the stele depends on being understood as a representation, as a stand–in for something else. The figure of the king, however, *is* the king. Stele and king are a conjunctive unit that actualizes his invisible presence (Fig 2–8, king).[6] The Maya believed that figures of royalty were in some sense the same as the rulers themselves, a conviction that often led to acts of iconoclasm and even the burial of their sculptures. The elaborately outfitted figure of this ruler, with his ornamental scepter as an attribute, is carved into a limestone block that is eighteen feet high and weighs several tons. Not only the material, but also the scale of the figure is designed to impress. Standing before it, the viewer is duly dwarfed by this claim to significance.

If the image and its glyphs record the importance of a particular ruler at a specific moment in chronological time and intimate a world in which such sculptures had ontological as well as representational status, the reliefs at his feet add another temporal dimension (Fig. 2–9, relief with maize god). Here, one form of time is embedded in, or allegorized by, another. In this panel, the maize god rises from the mouth of an earth monster. Often identified with rulers, the maize god's emergence from the earth signals that the ruler has the power of eternal life. Stele I at Bonampak thus mixes mortal time, the accession of a particular king, with divine time, the fusion of the stele with an individual, as well with the endless cycle of birth and rebirth associated with the cult of the god (Fig. 2–10, sarcophagus lid and mask of Pakal I from the Temple of the Inscriptions, Palenque, ca. 683 A.D., Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City). The eternal life of the king, and by implication his kingdom, is guaranteed by the identification with a deity who possesses the power to transcend death.

Can any description capture what the sculpture might have meant to those who first beheld it? Hardly. Mine is merely a historical distancing device, and one that falls under the rubric of iconography. The meanings

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[6] Miller, M. and Brittenham, C. (2013) *The Spectacle of the Late Maya Court*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013, 151; Houston, S., Stuart, D., and Taube, K. (2006). *The Memory of Bones: Body, Being, and Experience among the Classic Maya*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 74.

Fig. 2–7: Stele 1 at the Maya site of Bonampak in Southern Mexico, eighth century B.C.

attached to the duality of "mortal time" and "divine time," are only part of the story. George Kubler, the most articulate and poetic art historian to write on time, called the intrinsic properties of works of art "self–signals".[7] Among the work's essential properties is the age of the lime-

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[7] Kubler, G. (1963). *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*, New

Fig. 2–8: The figure of the king depicted on the Stele 1, eighth century B.C.

stone itself (Fig. 2–11). The limestone of the Yucatan Peninsula dates from the Cretaceous period, 145–66 million years ago, a period which ended dramatically with the impact of what was probably the largest asteroid ever to hit the planet. Landing in the sea just off the eastern coast of the Yucatan, it is thought that the cloud dust and debris produced by this explosion blotted out the sun, producing a prolonged winter that led to the extinction of the dinosaurs. Another layer of limestone was deposited in the Tertiary period (66–2.5 million years ago). Lime, the remains of billions of tiny sea creatures laid down in shallow seas over millions of years, lends this rock its texture, malleability, and color, all of which testify to that temporal process. Adrian Stokes once argued that sedimentary rock encourages the observer to actually feel the passage of water, the hardest of materials bearing testimony to its fluid and fleeting origins.[8] This petrified "water" thus creates an impression of infinite time, time that eludes the capacity of either the Maya or the western calendar to order.

Then there is the low relief carving (Fig. 2–8, king). Line dominates here as it does in the glyphs. The temptation to equate drawing with wri-

Haven: Yale University Press.
[8] Adrian Stokes, A. (2002; first ed. 1934). *The Quattro Cento and The Stones of Rimini*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 15–24.

Fig. 2–9: Relief with maize god on the Stele 1, eighth century B.C.

Fig. 2–10: Mask of Pakal I from the Temple of the Inscriptions, Palenque (left), and sarcophagus lid from the Temple of the Inscriptions, Palenque (right). Both ca. 683 AD, Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City.

ting is nigh–on irresistible. Both depend on manual operations, and both are employed in the creation of meaning. Separate but related, the visual and the textual are inextricably entangled yet indelibly distinct. The king's figure (or presence), realized by an elaborate costume and by the scepter in his hand, is rendered in low relief by a linear grid. Flattened against the plane, king and costume are represented as a series of varied textures that change according to the passage of the sun and its accompanying shadows. Despite the figure's two–dimensionality, the artist conveys a sense of motion. The raised left shoulder is a common Maya foreshortening device deemed closer to the viewer than the right as he leans over to place the scepter firmly on the ground. This convention, rendered by line, echoes the graphic nature of the texts at his feet. Both gestures, outlines and glyphs, conventional and contingent, enabled as well as betrayed by their materiality, forever falling short of their signifieds, remind us of the time–bound nature of communication. Many of the glyphs have been so weathered that they can no longer be deciphered.
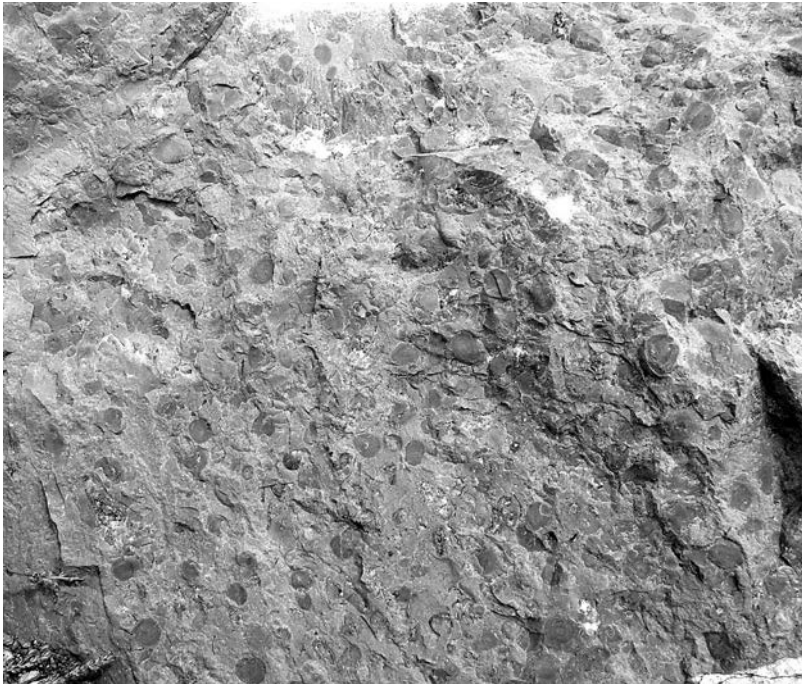
Fig. 2–11: Slice of limestone.

Only those aspects of the stele that eluded the work of the elements by falling face down on the ground are still legible. In an important essay on historical time, Alois Riegl once called such temporal scars "age value" and described their role in coloring our aesthetic, and therefore our immediate or anachronic encounter with past monuments.[9] The uneven weathering of the monument, water's encounter with its surface, traces of erased glyphs and disfigured figuration all speak to us as compellingly about times past as anything we can decipher of the stele's meaning.

Stele I at Bonampak is clearly filled with different forms and stratifications of time. To which of these does its viewer pay attention and for what purpose? Can we articulate the projective process by which meaning is either unwittingly (or wittingly) created? Do we reduce the work to the representation of a historical ruler, do we become absorbed in the details of the costume and what it might tell us about Maya clothing, or are we fascinated by the abrasive action of water on stone? In choosing one set of times we clearly neglect others. Treated as a representation, the stele becomes a useful record of a particular historical moment. Treated as an ontological presence, its reception varies according to the perceptual skills, desires, and needs of the beholder.

All works of art from all times and places *conjugate* time. Filled with teeming temporal potential, they activate responses that depend on certain aspects of their complex plenitude and not others. Here's a simple example of conjugation drawn from linguistics thanks to Wikipedia: the conjugation of the Spanish verb *correr*, "to run". Red represents the speaker [work of art], purple the second person [spectator], and teal the third person [multiple temporalities]. Dawn represents the past, noon the present and night the future. Like the changing nature of the verb's conjugation, so the formal properties of objects—in this case stele 1; its material, its size, the relation of figure to glyphs, etc.—are activated to create meaning in the mind of the spectator. If this little diagram focuses on the life of linguistic forms, it also includes references to those who make them come alive. The form of the verb corresponds to the number and temporality of the person who uses it. Form and figure are related, even if the meaning of that relation remains unspecified. I know too little about Maya art to persist in describing the sequence of forms that led to this masterful example, as well as those that were to lead from it into the future, but the work potentially contains within it all of these temporal tenses. The work itself has the capacity to work in different times, just as potential viewers belong not just

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[9] Riegl, A. (1982; first published 1903). "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Origin," Trans. Kurt Forster and Diane Ghirardo, *Oppositions* 25, 20–51.
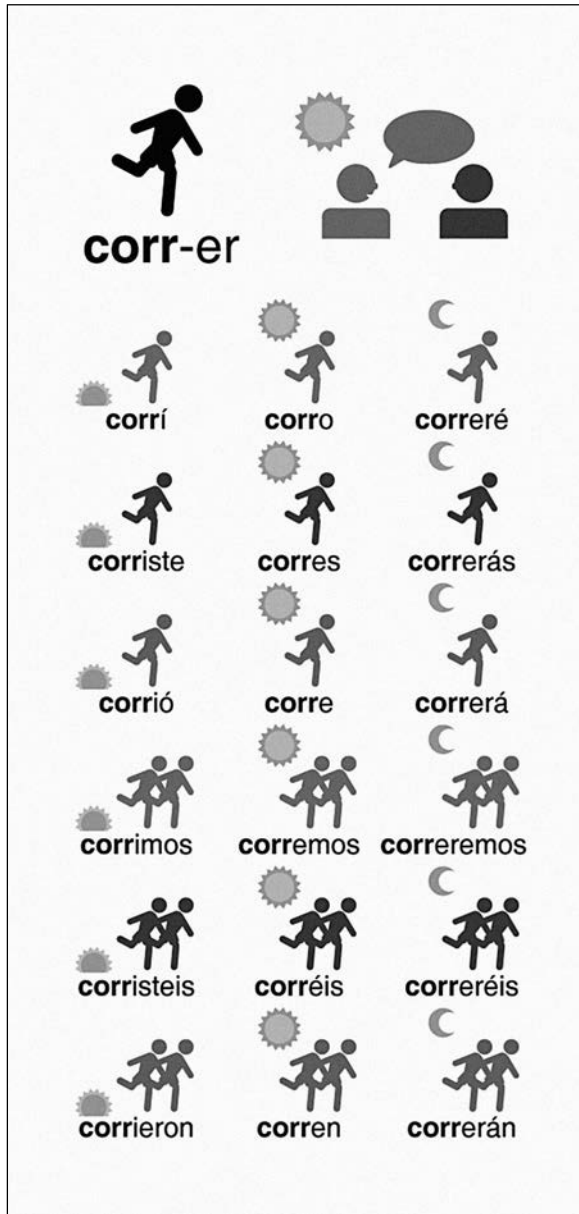
Fig. 2–12: Illustration of the conjugation of the Spanish verb *correr*, "to run".

to one time but many. What strikes a viewer as significant in one moment will not perform the same function in another. One form of time can only be activated by its encounter with another.

Of course, there are many, many other kinds of time that works of art might embody, such as the temporal attention played out in the compositional choices that constitute a work's facture. Some artists are more clearly interested in the potential of formal displays as markers of artistic intervention than others. To what extent is the exploration of pictorial motifs for their own sake meaningful, and to what extent is it not? Why do some artists foreground the act of creation and others focus on the finished product? Why do some art objects appear to belong to the instant and others to the ages? The sixteenth–century German artist Albrecht Altdorfer dwells upon the performance of the handling of his pen as it makes its way across paper.[10] This drawing is not preparatory to any other work, and Altdorfer follows the example of late fifteenth–century Italian artists, who had begun to treat drawings as works of art in their own right. His drawing *Dead Pyramus,* of about 1510, is typical (Fig. 2–13, Altdorfer, *Dead Pyramus*). Characteristically laconic in its treatment of subject matter, Altdorfer's interest in the narrative is as original as is his treatment of the landscape. If the vitality of the white ink as it traverses the blue paper calls attention to itself rather than to the subject matter, Altdorfer also edits Ovid's story of star–crossed lovers in a novel way.

Arranging to meet outside their city of Babylon, Thisbe arrives first, yet frightened by the sight of a lion with a bloody mouth, she flees, but not before dropping her veil. Pyramus arrives later to find Thisbe gone and nothing but her veil on the ground. Concluding that she has been slain by the lion, he commits suicide by throwing himself on his sword. Thisbe subsequently returns, and seeing her beloved's bloody body, grabs his sword and joins him in death. This complex temporal sequence is reduced to a single male figure lying dead on the forest floor with a sword projecting from his chest. Narrative time is frozen at its tragic climax, the moment when Thisbe discovers Pyramus's body.

Rendering the narrative schematic and incomplete, Altdorfer delivers the visual story back into the hands of its beholder with a pyrotechnic display of virtuoso draftsmanship. Invoking the nocturnal scene by means of a fierce play of white ink against the darker blue of the prepared paper, the artist replaces content (the narrative) with form (the drawn line). Narrative movement stands still as the white ink loops and winds through what the

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[10] For a sensitive account of the dramatization of authorial presence in Altdorfer's drawings, see Christopher Wood (1993). *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape*. London: Reaktion, and Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

viewer must imagine are the trees and shrubs that fill the background. Severing the link between illusionistic representation and perception, Altdorfer actually deconstructs the kind of illusionism that characterized the

Fig. 2–13: Albecht Altdorfer, *Dead Pyramus*, drawing, pen and white ink on blue prepared paper, 1510, Berlin, Kupferstichkabinet.

art of his time. This artist has less interest in representing a well–known narrative as he does in calling attention to the dazzling means by which he does so. An interesting distinction characterizes the use of black and white pens: whereas the sober blacks cling close to the enveloping textual time of the story, the whites bear no allegiance to either the narrative or the principle of mimesis in rendering its setting.

Altdorfer's display of skill freezes the narrative of the image. In what sense? No longer a mere illustration of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, but rather a creative rethinking, the drawing eludes an immediate recognition of its familiar subject. Halted on the threshold of meaning, it engages its spectator as its representational artifice emerges. Slowing the pace of interpretation draws attention to its facture, the way the work is put together rather than what it depicts. Rather than belonging to Ovid's narrative, the time of the work—the moment of our aesthetic engagement with it—belongs to the piece of paper that has been so genially manipulated. It is difficult to say which is more compelling. Is it the disintegration of the mimetic enterprise, the transformation of recognizable trees into swirling lines of ink, or is it the reduction of a tale of romance to a dead body? Whichever one we choose, Altdorfer has managed to write himself into the script.

Turning and twisting a literary text by means of visual narrative is also the theme of Pieter Bruegel's painting *The Fall of Icarus* of ca. 1565 (Fig. 2–14, Bruegel, *The Fall of Icarus*). This familiar story, also taken from Ovid, involves the renowned inventor Daedalus and his son Icarus. Incarcerated on the island of Crete, the ingenious Daedalus fashions wings of wax and feathers with which to escape their prison. Failing to heed his father's advice not to fly too close to the sun because the intensity of the heat will melt his wings, Icarus climbs higher and higher until the inevitable happens, and he plummets into the sea. According to Ovid, the tragedy is witnessed by those on the shore.

At first glance it is difficult to discern the classic Ovidian narrative. The foreground yields a plowman working his field, a shepherd with his flock, and a man fishing. It is only in focusing on the background that one can make out poor Icarus's legs as he disappears beneath the waves. In another version of the work, the figure of Daedalus, high in the sky, looks down at his son's distress, but contrary to Ovid's poem, in neither version do the figures in the foreground pause to look at this remarkable thing, a boy plunging into the sea. The ancient narrative occupies an insignificant place in the background, while the thoroughly quotidian tasks of the anonymous figures dominate the foreground. Because the contrast appears deliberate, it has often been given moralizing significance. Read as an alle-

Fig. 2–14: Pieter Bruegel, *The Fall of Icarus*, Museum of Fine Arts, Brussels, ca. 1559.

gory of pride, the violent death of Icarus is juxtaposed to the labors of the ordinary occupational actions of the foreground figures. Satisfying as this interpretation might appear, there is something repetitive about the furrows created by the plow, something somnolent about the pose of the shepherd, and something boringly deliberate about the attitude of the fisherman, however, that provokes another conclusion. The poet W. H. Auden proposes that the psychic distinction between foreground and background constitutes a meditation on the lack of justice or redemption in the circumstances in which human destiny is played out.[11] None of the figures, neither the country folk on land nor the sailors at sea, pay the slightest attention to Icarus's plight. Bruegel allows the viewer to see what the represented figures cannot, thus appealing for the spectator's involvement in understanding the painting. For Auden, writing in 1938, after his experiences in the Sino–Japanese war and just before the outbreak of World War II, the painting possesses special meaning. Investing its forms with the pathos of the moment, he writes of nature's indifference to suffering humanity. Where is the time of the image, on the canvas, or in Auden's mind? Time, of course, is not only folded into the materials contemporary artists manipulate: they often make its passage their theme.

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[11] Cited by Nemerov, A. (2005). "The Flight of Form: Auden, Bruegel, and the Turn to Abstraction in the 1940's", *Critical Inquiry* 31, 780–810, 783–784.

Fig. 2–15: Spencer Finch, *Sunlight in an Empty Room (Passing Cloud for Emily Dickinson, Amherst, MA, August 28, 2004)*.

The American artist Spencer Finch employs it in his *Sunlight in an Empty Room (Passing Cloud for Emily Dickinson, Amherst, MA, August 28, 2004).* An acute analyst of visual experience, Finch set himself the task of recreating the quality of light streaming from the sky that he recorded during a visit to the poet Emily Dickinson's house in Amherst, Massachusetts. In doing so, he was undoubtedly responding to the role played by the importance of time in the poet's work. A number of her poems invoke the passage of light as a temporal metaphor, for example:

> There's a certain slant of light,
> On winter afternoons,
> That oppresses, like the heft
> Of cathedral tunes.
> Heavenly hurt it gives us;
> We can find no scar,
> But internal difference
> Where the meanings are.[12]

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[12] Emily Dickinson, E. (2003). *Selected Poems*, Ann Arbor: Borders Classics, 68.

Using a colorimeter, Finch took readings of the effects of light and shade he witnessed in this one special afternoon, and then sought to reproduce them by hanging an exquisite "cloud" of blue, grey, and violet filters with filament and clothespins in front of a bank of fluorescent tubes of varying color temperatures under which viewers can circulate. The homespun quality of this stunning installation nevertheless calls attention to its artificiality. Each element emerges from a time of its own. The industrial lighting emphasizes the unpretentious nature of the illusion, while the clothespins invoke the world of backyard domesticity. These everyday materials, and the resolutely workmanlike approach to their treatment, defy any temptation to view the work as an exercise in mimesis. They are put to work in the translation of a literary precedent into a new and evanescent visual poetry. They also gesture towards the great chronological myths of the modernist age – its faith that the passage of time is purposeful.

3. Object/Image

Back to my collection (Fig. 2–1, mantelpiece) and to the rocks whose presence provokes a response, I argue, that is similar to that prompted by images. Thinkers across a number of disciplines now argue that the natural world, from which we have imperiously excluded ourselves, is actually as conscious and animate as we are. Latour's notion of the "collective" serves as a way to acknowledge that humans do not act upon an inert non–human universe, but that they are in turn acted upon by it.[13] The subject/object distinction has become a heuristic device that necessarily misconstrues the hybrid unity that binds these concepts together. Even if it is, as he argues, only language that creates the distinction in the first place, can we actually avoid making it?[14] Can we avoid distinguishing between subjects and objects when attempting to come to terms with the natural world that surrounds us? Latour's position finds adherents and critics across the spectrum of those engaged in material studies. Less radical than Latour, for example, are the positions of Lorraine Daston, from the philosophy of science, Arjun Appadurai and Alfred Gell, from anthropology, and W.J.T. Mitchell, from literary and visual theory. Rather than dissolve the subject

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[13] Latour, B. (2004). *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press.
[14] Latour, B. (1988). *The Pasteurization of France*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 155. "Are words forces? Are they capable of fighting, revolting, betraying, playing, or killing? Yes, indeed, like all materials, they may resist or give way. It is materials that divide us, not what we do with them".

/object divide, Gell argues that humans invest objects with a "secondary agency" that reflects their own,[15] while Appadurai and Mitchell ask us to approach them "as if" they had lives of their own, even if they actually do not.[16] None of these authors is an animist, however, and therefore the actual "life" of objects is never in question. Rather, they understand objects as an integral aspect of the human experience and ascribe them a status that might be described as a shadowy "subjectivity".

Daniel Miller, another anthropologist and materials studies theorist, offers an attractive model with which to understand the continuing fascination of objects in a situation where their relation to humanity is acknowledged as hybrid. Following Hegel, he bases his account of subject formation on the principle of projection, arguing that our encounters with objects are analogous to our encounters with other human beings. Meeting another human, or another "thing", is a process in which the subject projects its own ideas on to the "other" in order to understand what it encounters. Ever more perceptive projections are then absorbed back into the subject by means of sublation or introjection so that the subject is itself transformed. There is, therefore, no absolute distinction between subject and object but a spectrum of shared subjectivities and objectivities.[17]

What we meet when we encounter material things, as well as visual images of things, is among other "things" time. The "otherness" of the object's time dramatizes our own tenuous and uncertain location within it. As Kubler reminds us, the present remains as unknown as the intervals between the flashes of light emitted from a lighthouse.[18] The meeting of temporalities encourages an appreciation of their mysteries. We are caught up in the same enigmatic process to which everything else in the world is subject. The time of volcanoes, ash, and minerals, of polyps and algae, of Yucatan limestone, of sixteenth–century ink on paper, of fluorescent lighting, appears before us, intimating that the inexorable forces that resulted in petrified wood, branch coral, Maya monuments, Altdorfer's drawings, Bruegel's paintings, and Finch's installations are those that course through and determine the shapes of our own lives.

The Enlightenment still casts its long shadow across both the sciences and humanities, but the utopian project of rendering humans and the world

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[15] Gell, Alfred (1998). *Art and Agency*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[16] Appadurai, A. (1986). *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, New York: Cambridge University Press; Mitchell, W.J.T. (2005) *What Do Pictures Want?*; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
[17] Miller, D. (1987). *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, New York: Blackwell.
[18] Kubler, 17.

they inhabit transparent to one another is increasingly acknowledged to be a dream. Attention is now directed towards those parts of experience that resist codification and comprehension and to the ways in which they engage our perception, if not our understanding. For visual studies, so recently aware of the "agency" and "life" of images, attention to their time serves to complicate and enrich an appreciation of our response to them. A crucial dimension of the unknown that fills our consciousness while simultaneously hiding its identity is nothing other than time–the time of the object, *material time*.

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CHAPTER THREE

COMING TO TERMS WITH IMAGES:
VISUAL STUDIES AND BEYOND

KREŠIMIR PURGAR

1. Visual studies as a *place* for the theory of images

At the very beginning of the first chapter of his seminal book *Iconology,*
W.J.T. Mitchell asserts that "there have been times when the question
'what is an image' was a matter of some urgency", referring to the diffe-
rent levels of importance that images had in different historical periods as
well as pointing to the unequal kind of power that images exerted over
people (Mitchell, 1986: 7). What we came to understand from all the sub-
sequent Mitchell books, especially from *Picture Theory* (1994) and *What
do Pictures Want* (2005), is that the question of image/power is today
more "urgent" than ever before and "even if the stakes seem a bit lower in
asking what images are today, it is not because they have lost their power
over us, and certainly not because their nature is now clearly understood"
(Mitchell, 1986). It is very well known that the pictorial turn represents for
him not the final stage of spectacularized societies, where everything has
come to be measured as in favor of or against images (as was the case dur-
ing the iconoclasm in eighth– and ninth–century Byzantium), but more a
kind of uncertainty as to how pictures should be properly understood today
and, basically, what is to be done with them. That is why he did not assign
to images a newly established paradigmatic status according to which all
contemporary phenomena would then normally have to be assessed, but
gave them an air of uncertainty and put them somewhere between what
Thomas Kuhn called "paradigm" and "anomaly" (Mitchell, 1994: 13).[1]

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[1] It is interesting that Gottfried Boehm in the famous exchange of letters with
Mitchell made an analogous reference to Thomas Kuhn's concept of *paradigm*
when he expressed his scepticism whether the notions of the pictorial/iconic turn
had any substantial meaning. Although he was one of its founders, in this letter

But, it is not just the discourse on images as such that is "somewhere between", in need of a structurally and ontologically more plausible theory; such an uncertainty applies also to visual studies as a new discipline insofar as it is more and more apparently going to refute positions of critical theory and situate itself "somewhere between" ideological norms and the politics of identity. What is this "in between" position, why would we need a special kind of theory for whatever happens in this interim area and how can the changes in urgency and the constantly shifting notions of the image be accounted for in the form of a discipline? Here we are dealing with two different but equally fundamental topics: images as objects of cultural production and visual studies as a *place* for the theory of images. In spite of drawing our attention to the predominance of images and the reborn interest in them shown by "non–visual" disciplines like philosophy, sociology and narratology, the pictorial turn has brought to the fore the fact that we basically do not have a clear account of what an image is to begin with and that disciplines historically bound to images, like art history and semiotics, either relate only to what is believed to be a specific kind of images or deal with them necessarily as signs and representations. The indisputable cultural importance of the mentioned disciplines notwithstanding, the term "art" has proven to be too narrow a denominator for art history to retain its status as the master of visual disciplines in contemporary times, while the semiotic concept of "representation" is of very problematic theoretical value when it comes to, for instance, images that are signs of "nothing" in virtual reality.

We must keep in mind that none of the disciplines is aware of its own "shortcomings" or perceives them as an obstacle to maintaining theoretical rigor. Art history, with its fully developed tools of formal analysis and consistent meta–language, is perfectly capable of dealing with both Caravaggio's *Deposition of Saint Paul* and an advertisement for Versace's new line of women's shoes. Of course, having adequate tools to deal with particular phenomena most likely leads to an increased sensitivity to discrimination between the particularities of their purposes, qualities and ontologies. It is a common thing within the humanities to believe that whenever a certain set of images fails to fit into existent disciplinary frames, it is because the social, political and cultural constructedness of the visual field has played a decisive role in this game of power.

Boehm lamented the seemingly protean nature of *turns*: "Although quickly proclaimed, it is yet to be determined how much this new kind of scientific questioning [...] is actually worth. The 'turn' vacillates between what Thomas S. Kuhn termed a 'paradigm' and the attitude of a rhetorical twist that recalls last fall's fashions" (See: Gottfried Boehm and W.J.T. Mitchell, 2009).

While it is impossible to deny this ideological framing, in the following pages I will argue that the recent interventions and theses related to visual studies proposed by Nicholas Davey, Barry Sandywell, Antonio Somaini, Horst Bredekamp, Sebastian Egenhofer, Klaus Sachs–Hombach, Emmanuel Alloa and several others either come from unconvincing principles for which visual studies allegedly stand (ideological framing included) or recognize its strengths exactly in what is believed to be a lack of firm ideological and disciplinary demarcation. Proposed by authors belonging to Anglophone, German and Italian tradition and exposed through a variety of argumentative and theoretical claims, these positions show, on the one end of the spectrum, the still troubled relationship of visual studies to art history and, on the other, belief in the transformative power of its shifting methodologies. In the already established field of visual studies, a discussion on the very ontological foundation of the discipline is still open. While there is an unequivocal agreement that it should deal with the broadest spectrum of visual phenomena, there is still an air of indetermination as to the scope it should have and the methodology to be adopted. At the same time, for some researchers, the more than two–decade–long dispute visual studies had with art history and the objects (artworks) that the older discipline traditionally claimed is still a fundamental topic. This article will analyze a few of the most recent interventions related to the new discipline, which might reveal old controversies in a new light or open the way for a "new visual studies" altogether.

2. What art has to do with visual studies: an *ontogenetic fallacy*?

A notable difference among various kinds of visual object that consists not so much of how they look as of what they mean to us, Nicholas Davey explains as "ontogenetically" motivated: according to this thesis, the artistic image would be a paradigmatic image, while everything visual outside the realm of art qualifies as a non–paradigmatic image – an anomaly to the norms of value and distinction. Nicholas Davey recently presented the concept of the "ontogeny of the visual", which should, in his opinion, be fundamentally accounted for in the "turn to the ontological which causes problems for the methodological inclusivity of visual studies" (Davey, 2013: 132). In this way he joins the debate on the archetypal question *what should visual studies do?* and thus enters into a more general discussion on the sense people make of particular kinds of image, a discussion that will later in our survey prove to be symptomatic of both the value of images and the disciplinary status of visual studies at large.

While acknowledging visual studies for its "clear strength" in the de-mystification of artwork, looking for dialogical interactions with it and striving towards "a wider consensus of judgmental norms", Davey claims that it "has neglected a fundamental distinction between the ontogenetic characteristics of the designed object and the artwork", which is a failure that "not only threatens the variety of study within visual culture but also disrupts the possibility of radical critique within aesthetic experience" (132). On the other hand, "hermeneutical aesthetics is of strategic impor-tance for bringing to light what is at stake within the study of visual cul-ture" because "hermeneutical aesthetics insists on making an important ontological distinction within visual discourse between a designed object and an artwork" (132–133). Davey thinks that visual studies as a discipline overrides this essential distinction, which eventually and regrettably leads to a dissolution of the very concept of art. In his assessment, the case has been made for two types of object: *artistic* objects and *designed* objects, where the latter seem to have been deployed metonymically to represent all non–artistic visual artifacts.

Davey contends that although many visual artifacts of different histori-cal and cultural provenances may be perceived, described and judged in aesthetic terms, it will do no justice to any of them if we do not make a fundamental ontological distinction between art and non–art, that is, we always have to take into consideration, prior to any aesthetic judgment, the *purpose* for which something has been made and not primarily the social *interactions* of (artistic and non–artistic) signs.

Davey makes a very good point, drawing on Nietzsche and Heidegger, who both believed that the function of art was to withhold something from the viewer in a fashion not dissimilar to that of *camouflage,* where produc-ing convincing effects of make–believe leads to a purposeful deception of a higher degree: in military practice this higher degree consists of the suc-cessful deception of an enemy on the battlefield, while in art this deception is to be found in the concealed "message" of the artwork (137–138). There is a huge difference, though, between ordinary and artistic camouflage in-asmuch as, according to Davey, "the visual logic of the hidden code must be consistent with that of the surface code or else the implicit meaning cannot announce itself from within the explicit meaning" (138). In other words, the actual visual code of a painting connects explicit and implicit meanings, serving as a sort of token for the meaning of the artwork as a whole. The code is consistent with the artwork: if the visual code changes, the whole artwork changes with it. So, the ontological position of any artistic object is to *be* and to *remain* an artistic object, because its purpose not to serve any other purpose than that of an artistic object is undisputable.

As far as visual studies is concerned, the ontogenesis of the work of art as an object created for different purposes than, let us say, a photograph for a book of culinary recipes, is undeniable. I cannot think of any scholar of visual studies who would contradict this perfectly plausible argument, which basically only confirms the ontological distinction between art objects and non–art objects as a historically and functionally inherited distinction of value and status. The problem that visual studies is particularly focused on is what happens when artifacts at some point enter into a different kind of existence: for example, when culinary recipes become important formal and structural elements in an artistic performance, or inversely, when pictures like *Mona Lisa* or Warhol's silk prints enter into the vernacular context of global visual culture, when the use of a once ontogenetically pure artifact gets "out of control". At this point an art historian loses his or her priority of overseeing the aesthetic value of a painting, because the time and space of social interactions have attached to it a different sort of value altogether. This does not mean that the ontogenetic code of the artwork has been lost, just that several of its "genes" (to make an appropriate metaphor) have been passed on to different species of objects. The role of art history or hermeneutical aesthetics may be to either create sub–disciplinary discourses capable of dealing with genetically impure objects—as was much earlier envisioned by Aby Warburg, Erwin Panofsky and Ernst Gombrich—or to create a new image theory, regardless of its name, that would deal critically with semiotically or commercially inherited meanings and offer a counterposition to dichotomous (art/non–art) systems of value.[2] Mentioning the role of art history in a world dominated by non–artistic images, W.J.T. Mitchel says:

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[2] It is interesting to note that Keith Moxey attributes to Erwin Panofsky a different role in the development of the contemporary study of visual culture than that attributed to him by Antonio Somaini (2006) or Horst Bredekamp (2003), as we shall see a little later. The paradigm shift, according to Moxey, can be discerned much later, with art historians like Georges Didi–Huberman: "Whereas Panofsky and Baxandall set the work against, or into, the context in which it was produced—approaching the object of analysis as if it were inert and in need of 'explanation' through reference to circumstance that are more stable and less opaque—Didi–Huberman regards the work as an active principle, one capable of generating its own significance" (Moxey, 2008: 135). To this end, Moxey quotes Didi–Huberman, from a passage where the French philosopher clearly takes on what we may call "visual studies attitude": "One must not claim that there are historical objects relevant to this or that duration: one must understand that in each historical object, all times encounter one another, collide, or base themselves plastically on one another, bifurcate, or even become entangled with one another" (Didi–Huberman, 2003: 131).

if a pictorial turn is indeed occurring in the human sciences, art history could very well find its theoretical marginality transformed into a position of intellectual centrality, in the form of a challenge to offer an account of its principal theoretical object—visual representation—that will be usable by other disciplines in the human sciences. Tending to the masterpieces of Western painting will clearly not be enough (Mitchell, 1994: 15).

Art history has lost its exclusivity over the interpretation of paintings and sculptures because, during the second half of the twentieth century, artworks started to become part of vernacular culture—of the domain for which they were not intended. This happened not as a consequence of the problematic methodologies of visual studies or any other established or emergent theory, but because art history dealt with historically important objects that popular culture could not or would not do without. Even if Davey did not come to the conclusion that it was not for visual studies to undermine the ontogenetic specificity of artistic objects,[3] I think his insight that artwork needs to speak hermeneutically for itself while addressing the fact that the spectator deserves attention. I also find interesting his

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[3] The concept of ontogenetic difference between artistic objects and non–artistic objects comes eventually down to the most elementary and the most difficult question, "impossible" to answer: *what is art?* An even more complex question is *what is contemporary art?* Moreover, how do we make aesthetical distinctions between different types of object, not just inside and outside the realm of art, but between various objects that unequivocally qualify to carry that label? The criterion of "intended purpose" that Nicholas Davey proposes is universal and one of the most accepted distinctions between art and non–art objects. One improvised definition might then be: *If it is created to be art, then it is art. If it is created to be something else, then it can't be art*. But the institutional theory of art, with George Dickie as one of its most important representatives, puts the definition of art differently: "A work of art in a classificatory sense is (1) an artifact (2) a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution. The second condition of the definition makes use of four variously interconnected notions: (1) acting on behalf of institution, (2) conferring of status, (3) being a candidate, and (4) appreciation." (Dickie, 2007: 431). Dickie's definition does not disqualify the criterion of the intended purpose, but shows that the status of art can be *institutionally* established just as it can be *individually* proclaimed. But it can be neither established nor denigrated *disciplinarily*. Disciplinary analysis of an object *as* artwork (in art history, feminist theory, postcolonial studies, etc.) comes only *after* any particular object has already been accredited with the status of art object. So, its status as art object cannot depend on how it is valued *within* or *by* any single discipline. In other words, the intended purpose—taken as the classificatory term— cannot be undone.

admonition that visual studies may fall victim to its unconstrained faith in the power of subjectivity. He writes:

> In the case of the artwork, the spectator is subject to its address. In contrast, the designed object if treated as a sign or symptom of visual culture is subject to the methodological regime of the spectator. The question then arises as to how critical of reflexive methodology visual studies can be? (Davey, 146).

For one thing, Davey has certainly helped practitioners of visual studies to reflect more on the ontological fundamentals of their own discipline, or at least to be acquainted with what never really seemed its most contestable ground. Let us deal with the possible consequences of his last assertion: it implies that it is a regular procedure in visual studies, firstly, to dismiss the difference between incommensurable types of visual artefacts ("the ontogenetic fallacy"); secondly, once that has been done, every visual object becomes part of (a presumably indiscriminating) visual culture and thirdly, having entered into the domain of visual culture, artifacts are being subjected to the free will of the spectator. Accepting the possibility that different scholars may and will have different understandings of what visual studies is or should be, my opinion is that this emerging discipline can account for the second stage of the mentioned process only, namely that every visual artifact is inevitably part of visual culture conceived in the broadest sense.

The problem with the third stage, the primacy of the spectator, is not that it is wrong as such, but that it does not apply to visual studies insofar as the new discipline specifically questions what Keith Moxey subsumes under the term "politics of identity" (2011: 121), positioning itself between the artifact and the scopic regime understood as ideological construct. It was the intention of poststructuralism to equate subjectivity, identity and gaze in order to empower specific groups within contemporary societies so that they could reject normative or prescriptive theories and behaviors. The pioneering work in different areas of thought performed in this respect by Michel Foucault, Laura Mulvey, Judith Butler and many others is all too familiar. The question is whether visual studies subscribes to the politics of identity and spectatorship as a presumption of the ideological, sexual or geographical determination of the given artifact or differs from critical theory inasmuch as it is very "visual studies" to reject such presumptions?

3. Can visual studies become a new *philosophy* of the visual?

Now we necessarily arrive at the point when some disciplinary, methodological and even ethical terms of visual studies should be explicated. Barry Sandywell, a British scholar of visual culture, has recently proposed the very extensive "Seven Theses on Visual Culture: Towards a Critical–Reflexive Paradigm for the New Visual Studies", in which he elaborates the possibility of some kind of philosophy of visual studies as an already seasoned discipline, which may seem to some to be a follow–up to the more "practical" insights offered by W.J.T. Mitchell in his "Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture" (Sandywell, 2013; Mitchell, 2005). Even though they are not a direct answer to any of them, in Sandywell's theses we may find a reflection of many of the "fears and fallacies" that have accompanied visual studies from its institutional inception to the present day, as well as the philosophical pillars on which he thinks the new study of the visual should be based.[4] In doing so he very generally but recognizably draws upon the research and heritage of authors from numerous disciplines within the humanities, like Jonathan Crary, Martin Jay, Jacques Derrida, Norman Bryson, Walter Benjamin and Marshal McLuhan, covering altogether seven fundamental topics that "the new visual studies" should depart from: history, artifact, language, technopoiesis, social culture, politics and reflexive praxis. When he speaks of "the historicity thesis", he offers counter–contestant opinions in what seems to be an answer to the decades–old question of whether visual studies is "ahistorical" and how its supposed contention of "the radical presence" can be accounted for.[5] Because "each act of perception depends on prior contexts of mean-

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[4] To understand fully the scope of what is apparently a very lengthy text, it may be helpful to note that Sandywell's theses appear as the final text in a book he himself coedited with Richard Heywood and in which Davey's article also appears. In this way we may read Sandywell's thesis not just as individual assertions on the fate and future of the discipline of visual studies, but also as a sort of a game inspired by sometimes more implicit and other times less implicit commentaries to the theses of other authors presented in the collection.

[5] The context of Sandywell's "historicity thesis" has certainly contributed to the vivid discussion of some time ago on whether art history and accompanying sub–disciplines (like the traditional "discursive" variant of iconology) should be held responsible for what has been happening in the field of visual culture or the newly recognized field should have its own dedicated theory. Together with certain firm beliefs that insisted on visual studies remaining linked with art history in some respects (Hal Foster, in Smith, 2008a), it was almost unanimously claimed (Mitchell, 1994; Elkins, 2003a; Bal, 2003, among others) that leaving art history out of

ing, forms and rituals that are destined to be overtaken by future, hitherto unanticipated acts of meaning" (Sandywell: 650), the notion of any kind of unification of knowledge, let alone universalist epistemes based on the traditional demarcation between disciplines, is highly problematic. In spite of that, the modern history of humanities "reveals how every discipline that has tried to conceptually delimit vision—philosophy, aesthetics, psychology, sociology, poetics, phenomenology and so on—implicitly draws upon particular images of *imageing* and thereby imagination" (651). Sandywell argues, following very clearly the fundamental paths of the social–critical wing of visual studies (Mirzoeff, 2002; 2011a; 2011b; Sturken and Cartwright, 2006) that any critically engaged programme of visual studies must recognize the "plurality and heterogeneity of *practices of seeing*"; insofar as "individuals *see* with their senses, cultures 'envision' through their collective memories, metaphors and technical diagrams. Rather than naturalizing 'seeing' we should think in terms of changing 'scopic regimes'" (Sandywell: 651–2).

On the same path, but with the inclusion of the deeper historical timeline, is the standpoint of Antonio Somaini, who thinks that study of visual culture should not be confused with its imminent effects—spectacularization, simulation, panopticism, control society—even though their discernment and analytical elaboration are, not without reason, almost automatically attributed to the disciplinary field of visual studies (Somaini, 2006: 27). According to him, visual studies should be "a genealogical enterprise", because everything that enters into its analytical scope has a history of its own, the contemporary transformations and epistemological ruptures that inevitably occur in transhistorical enterprises notwithstanding. Pointing to a historical timeline on which contemporary visual culture can be defined as year zero, he traces the origins of the interdisciplinary study of the visual as far back as modern art history—to an era when discourses on the regimes of visibility had been established:

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visual studies has led to a kind of visual essentialism—the primacy of the visual in itself—that has consequently drawn particular attention to many non–artistic objects and therefore dismissed the importance of (art) history. The consequences of such a move, though, remained open, with differing conclusions. Mieke Bal, in her text "Visual essentialism and the object of visual culture", says that "rather than describing concrete artefacts and their provenance, as art history would do, or describing whole cultures, as anthropology would, visual culture studies must critically analyse the junctures and articulations of visual culture and undermine their natural persistence" (Bal, 2003: 18–19). At the same time, she argues against "visual essentialism", or the tendency in visual culture studies "that either proclaims the visual 'difference'—read 'purity'—of images or expresses a desire to stake out the turf of visuality against media or semiotic systems" (Bal: 3).

> A significant aspect of researches of the art historians between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, in fact, was dedicated to the project of a history of styles conceived as directly correlated to a history of perception and of vision in particular. The idea of the historical nature of perception and vision is constantly reformulated within the writings of Riegl, Wölfflin, Panofsky and Benjamin. By referring to the essay "The problem of form" (1893) by Hildebrand, both Riegl and Wölfflin tried to root their "art history without names" within the sphere of the conditions of possibility of experience and of seeing in particular. Such conditions of possibility, though, are not related to a Kantian a–historical transcendental subject but are a domain of constant transformation (Somaini: 29).

In this respect, we must mention the assertion that Horst Bredekamp made about a commentary by Erwin Panofsky, from his essay, written in 1930, about the difference between the original and a facsimile reproduction. Panofsky claims that reproductions are not to be judged in terms of "right" and "wrong", but that we must accept the reality in which many more things—as reproductions—will become available. We must sharpen our capacities to make meaningful distinctions between them as the line that separates originals and reproductions becomes less and less visible (Bredekamp, 2003: 421). Andrea Pinotti uses a similar disciplinary "reshuffling" to see the role of Alois Riegl in the contemporary understanding of art. Pinotti says that Riegl was the first to conceive of artistic style not in terms of something naturally given or intended to look natural (as in realistic styles), but rather as an autonomous construction of reality in which the painterly image is just a tool that makes any construction possible (Pinotti, 2008: 2).

The small but prominent group of fathers of art history to which Somaini, Bredekamp and Pinotti make reference have transmitted their understanding of the unstable nature of the artwork to the present time, which has helped to shape not just visual studies or *Bildwissenschaft* in the narrow sense, but also what is known as *Kunstwissenschaft* in the German–speaking world and "the new art history" in the Anglophone tradition. All this testifies to the fact that visual objects change over time, not only by becoming naturally old but also by becoming "new" again through numerous contemporary revisitings, reassessments, analytical reconsiderations and clarifications.[6] This is the reason why the world presents to us as

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[6] In the study of images, numerous attempts have been made in order to better grasp their manifold nature. The "new art history", as one of the pioneering efforts made in that direction, provoked significant turbulence in the discipline of art history and proved to be a successful attempt to "modernize vision" within the established politics of artistic value. Although never officially proclaimed as a distinct

"always already been seen" and why, according to Sandywell, the new visual studies promises to become an exemplary site of both the radical social and hermeneutic turns, because "the systemic deconstruction of institutional formations as 'canonicity', 'genre', 'disciplinarity', 'normal inquiry', 'methodic perspective' and the like now takes centre–stage as part of a radically reflective hermeneutics of cultural orderings" (Sandywell: 655).

The crucial point, then, of understanding what visual studies is and which epistemological direction it is going to take would be to try to answer the question of *on behalf of whom* this new discipline is speaking, or rather *who is speaking through it*: is it a spectator who is always, as Nicholas Davey contends, under the influence of various determinants that exist independently of the object of study and therefore make it impossible for him (the spectator) to grasp the artwork's address (Davey: 147)? Is it composed of social and cultural formations, that are historically unstable and that ask us to constantly shift from the Cartesian belief in the power of images and visibility at large to the contemporary fear of images and of their power to control and monitor us (Jay: 1993)? Or is it the image or artifact itself (whether "artistic" or "designed") that we should mainly account for whenever there is a dispute over meanings and interpretations? Concerning the last question, we should bear in mind that Mitchell's typology of images, from his *Iconology* (1986), as well as the concept of "metapictures" from *Picture Theory* (1994), were both attempts at paving the way for the new hermeneutics of seeing, where images alone would have the necessary abilities to not just address the spectator, but to "speak" for themselves.

The position that visual studies has eventually taken is based on the assumption that images speak through themselves as well as emanating meaning through the spectator and the culture that he or she is immersed in. The project of visual studies aims at clarifying the radical impossibility of either subsuming the shifting notions of contemporary visual epistemologies in a single disciplinary frame or taking immutable sides in the discussion of how images generate meaning.

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sub–discipline within traditional art history, the inclusivity of its methods, which embraced the emergent understanding that all visual phenomena influence art to some extent, meant the new art history was far from not being recognized or meta–theoretically acknowledged. The best approach to its differences and specificities in comparison to traditional methods within the discipline is through individual authors' approaches, as in Baxandall (1972), Alpers (1983) or Moxey (1991, 1994, 2001 and 2013). Excellent attempts to conceptualize and delimit the field are to be found in Bal and Bryson (1991) and Harris (2001).

4. The concepts of images: natural consciousness
and critical discourse

However, there is a much greater problem regarding the priorities and types of the questions to be answered: the disciplinary question comes only *after* the ontological question; not the one that would draw a distinction between "artistic" and "designed" objects, which (far from being irrelevant) seems not that complicated, but that of the nature of the image itself. Even though I argue throughout this text that the study of images and the notion of the image as a visual and cultural phenomenon are inextricably linked, for methodological reasons it is necessary to presume that the occurrence of a phenomenon precedes reflection on it. Drawing on Mitchell's distinction between the meanings of the words *image* and *picture*, Sebastian Egenhofer states that a "picture *exists* or, rather, *persists* through time. The image, however, is always only given in the present of the beholder. It is the beholder's gaze that awakens the phenomenon in the existing material" which is the reason why images (in the widest sense) are ontologically settled in a kind of twofold "scandalous" and constantly shifting mode of being characterized by "nonsynchronicity" (Egenhofer, 2013: 190). This nonsynchronicity means that images can only be comprehended taking into account the historical and conceptual gap existing between the time of the construction of the singular image and the time of the perception of it. Since we are never able to grasp an image's "immediate present" and its "sensual evidence", this shifting character, this "incommensurability", is for Egenhofer the true nature of the image, definitely something more like a *happening* than "only" a being. Keith Moxey points to the same thing, stating that

> the experience of the image is distinct from the time that surrounds it. A work can stop us in our tracks, so to speak, and insist that we acknowledge a form of perception that differs from that of the context in which it appears. [the idea of] *Difference* thus attempts to capture the perceptual awareness that temporalities precede our presence and depend on it (Moxey, 2013: 5).

The faculty of images to produce meaning for us *now*, as a dialectical kind of knowledge created of both the terms of production and the terms of perception, speaks for their *heterochrony*. In the same way, their capacity to *always* produce new meanings over time speaks for their *historicality*. The most important consequence of both Egenhofer's and Moxey's insights is, in my opinion, threefold: firstly, that a possible understanding of images lies in the deconstruction of this paradoxical shifting ontology;

secondly, that images cannot be defined as such, that is, as entities extra-polated from a complex entanglement of materiality, temporality and per-ception; thirdly, and probably most importantly for the future assignments of new visual studies, images are neither a reflection nor a product of any kind of "natural consciousness" or metaphysics. Moreover, Egenhofer contends that

> even if we allow ourselves to think of the image's relation to its world in the most naïve and crudest sense—as a similarity based, for example, on physico–physiological relations between surfaces of things and space, the human retina, and a painted surface—this is no way a guarantee of some-thing like the *truth* of the image" (Egenhofer: 188).

We may therefore understand his thesis not just as a critique of natural consciousness, which is more often than not attributed to images on the basis of their resemblance to natural objects or phenomena, but also as a critique of the current sciences of images, especially of methodologies based on semiotics and phenomenology.

In what follows I would like to extend the argument and point to some other promising efforts that have recently been made (the differing theo-retical widths of the single concept notwithstanding) in order to comple-ment the traditional disciplinary structuring of images as sometimes natu-ral and at other times consensual signs of visible phenomena, or, if we prefer, as phenomenology and semiotics. In this respect, Neal Curtis ob-served that despite the advances made in visual studies and in the more traditional area occupied by aesthetics, in both academic and popular dis-course, images are still valued as a resemblance or copy of something that preceded them, something material that, by the sheer virtue of temporal priority, gains an aura of authenticity insofar as the realm of images re-mains a world of appearances of the second order, of copies that lack the substance of the original thing or phenomenon (Curtis, 2011: 1090). This is probably true not just in the Platonic sense of images as simulacra of reality, but in the paradoxically opposite way as well: as has been shown by Oliver Grau, in virtual reality we have to deal with images that are rep-resentations of nothing, even if we may sense in them representational qualities.

The effect that they have over us in terms of both their production as technically generated appearances *and* of the immersive quality of the experiences they create is of a completely different order (Grau, 2003). Drawing on Cornelius Castoriadis (1987) and Jacques Lacan (1977a and b), Curtis develops a triadic distinction of sorts of images, which are not to be confused with typology of any kind, but are more like conditions of the

creation, production and consumption/circulation of visual things. Presented with (admittedly Lacanian) linear logic, images, for Curtis, may be subsumed under the notions of *imagination*, *imaginary* and *imagery*. Ontological questions like those posed in a very diverse manner, as we have seen, by Nicholas Davey or Sebastian Egenhofer, for instance, are left aside in favor of a concept that should engage with a somewhat different set of constituent elements in pictures.

What are these elements and in what way may they show us an exit from paradigmatic discourses? For one thing, all of the three instances are etymologically anchored in both material practice and phenomenal experience, connected to important moments in which images play a decisive role in life, an idea similar to the causal structuring of the visual sense of the world we saw earlier, in Sandywell's thesis, according to which every human science conceptualizes its own "images of *imaging* and thereby imagination".

For Curtis, the first realm, *imagination,* refers to the single moment of creation that differentiates all produced artifacts and enables them to be discernible. This instance both refers to the moment of the singularity of artistic revelation (*instituting* or *radical imagination*) and to the industrial production of pre–established images (*instituted imagination*) (Curtis: 1097; Castoriadis, 1987). The second realm, the *imaginary,* is the space in which imagination acquires a different meaning, leading to a different kind of image altogether:

> In some respects the antithesis of the instituting imagination, the imaginary is the realm in which a particular social–historical or political form is maintained. If the imagination is the realm of radical creativity in which new images are continually being brought forth, the imaginary is the realm in which they are ideologically reproduced" (Curtis: 1101).

Finally, *imagery,* for Curtis, in spite of being linguistically no more than a collective noun for images, is a metonymically charged word that stands for the social interactions and political economy of the visual field. The realm of *imagery* is the "place" where *imagination* as "radical creation", under the influence of the social interactions of the *imaginary,* usually gets subdued and transformed into fetishes, brands and "symbolically exchangeable" goods. It is the realm of confrontations, displacements and ideological struggles. However, Curtis asserts that the realm of *imagery* (that is, impure images contaminated by the political economy of the sign) is "integral to both the dissemination of a specific ideology and the instigation of a new distribution that is potentially transformative if not revolutionary" (1096). While it goes without saying that (almost) every image

traverses all three realms in a linear fashion, necessarily acquiring different meanings and statuses along the way from "imagination" to "imagery", it is highly disputable whether images could ever acquire a "revolutionary" potential, given the fact that this traversing is always irreversible and exclusively one–directional, meaning that, for instance, an artifact created as a fruit of "radical imagination" may, in the realm of imagery, easily find itself transformed into a status different from that of radical imagination (such as newly acquired political significance, iconic meaning, a better price...) and, once the invisible line that separates individual realms is crossed, the transformed artifact can never lose this new status and restore itself to an unadulterated state of either pure imagination or pure image. If we would like to retain the possibility of the revolutionary power of images, then their cultural meaning in the last stage of "imagery" must not follow the path established by the linear logic from creation to consumption, as consumption is a feature of "symbolic exchange", in which the difference between objects (whether "artistic" or "designed") is replaced with their semiotic equivalents (Baudrillard, 1976). Signs cannot exit the semiotic order and regain the status they had prior to meaning generating processes. This linear development of the qualities of images is clearly absent from the "Seven Theses on Visual Culture" proposed by Barry Sandywell, making their fragmentary structure a more nuanced theoretical tool. However, what is shared by Curtis and Sandywell is their insistence on the unstable character of the artifact, its susceptibility to various determinants of culture, geography and time. In both approaches, images and artifacts are explained more like receptors of different influences than emanators of specific intrinsic qualities, thus sharing a firm anti–essentialist stance.

The problem, then, is how we conceptualize and make use of these mechanisms of transaction, which are capable of transforming any kind of visual communication into politically charged utterances understandable to all. One of the functions of visual studies should be precisely to uncover "conditions of visibility [that] are not themselves visible" (Sandywell: 656), because knowing how cultural formations are made, how they transform vision into visuality, how one has to deal with the everyday transactions of images/artifacts, are all symptoms of the economy of pleasure and should be dealt with in political as much as in artistic or aesthetic terms. Sandywell shows a great deal of faith in visual studies' ability to perform precisely this kind of social anamnesis, where visual artifacts should take the role of the main antagonist and allow us to know not primarily what and how we see—as this has already been performed by other disciplines, such as psychoanalytic theory, semiotics or cognitive sciences—but how we *come to see* and *not to see* the realities of everyday life.

The crucial problem for visual studies, then, as I stated earlier, is the following: should it let images and artifacts speak for themselves,[7] or should it speak on behalf of them with fully developed theoretical apparatus? Do the images *alone*, or does the *study* of images, have the potentiality for the new visual rhetoric that Sandywell envisions as one of the key transdisciplinary domains within the new visual studies?

5. Images and the power of critique: intensity instead of essence

In the context of the previous discussions to which I have made reference in this text regarding historicity, (anti)essentialism, relation to other disciplines, the role of vernacular visuality and the like, once more the paradoxical status of images and artifacts in visual studies comes to the fore: if this discipline, as I argue, claims to have retained what Nicholas Davey calls the "ontogeny of the visual", and if images flow in a linear fashion from the moment of creation to the moment of their immersion into the socially determined realm of "imagery", where they become open to every possible interpretation—as Curtis contends—how exactly can "what has been made socially and historically be 'unmade' through critique and social transformation", as Sandywell would like it to? Is it not perhaps the case that the process of the unmaking of the meanings and statuses of the image or artifact can only be carried out by dismissing the ontogenetic difference between art and non–art, a difference visual studies should subscribe to unless it wants to be accused of the "ontogenetic fallacy"?

The paradox is contained in the following: on the one hand visual studies contends that images should freely cross disciplinary boundaries, that popular TV series and masterpieces of art should be explained in the same context of contemporary visuality (Elkins, 2003a) and that meaning is not intrinsic to any visual artifact, and hence cannot be explained in terms of "natural consciousness", as Egenhofer has demonstrated. But at the same time, it is not the artifact itself that can perform this multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary critique, hidden within the contingent power of images that visual studies wishes to awake. The meanings of images *could* maybe be undone, reversed, reformulated or situated in a completely different location within the fabric of social interactions, but the operations required to activate these mechanisms cannot come from *within* images themselves,

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[7] One of the possibilities for images to theorize about their own conditions of visuality and to "speak for themselves" is provided, for example, by W.J.T. Mitchell in his anti–semiotic concept of *metapictures*. (See in: Mitchell, 1994: 35–82).

as it is not they that are able to start the operation of reformulation: it is the power of *critique* of images that ignites the power of images.

In my opinion, this statement is not just the foundation of the new visual studies, but also of the pictorial turn and several theoretical approaches that have gained prominence over the last couple of decades. The only response to the admonition of Nicholas Davey about the methodology of visual studies and its general neglect of differences in the values and epistemological levels of images is to face visual studies with its own genealogies and the ideologies that have shaped over time what still seems to be contestable or at least unknown territory. One of the recurring topics in relation to the self–legitimization and self–reflection of visual studies is the question *what is an image?* The paradoxical nature of the discipline contained in the mentioned twofold parallel process developed out of the attempt to demarcate the area of study on the one hand, together with an attempt to define the principal objects of study on the other. It was argued during the Stone Summer Seminar, organized by James Elkins in Chicago in 2008, that, in order to resolve this parallelism, in which the discipline and its object may never come to terms with each other, continuing to deal with strictly separate sets of problems, it would be necessary, if not plausible, to answer the essential or essentialist questions about images, then at least to create a sort of taxonomical grid in which different kinds of image would strive to find their ontological ground.[8]

One of the assessors of the seminar's discussions, Klaus Sachs–Hombach, himself an author of different attempts to classify images and an initiator of the extremely influential German wing of the general theory of images, commented that nobody would doubt that it is quite impossible to

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[8] One of the most recent attempts (one of enviable breadth) to tackle those issues was the seminar organized by James Elkins within the activities of the Stone Summer Institute in Chicago in 2008, titled interrogatively *What is an Image?* Over seven days, the most prominent scholars from the theory and history of art, philosophy and other related disciplines gathered to discuss the proverbial cluster of questions on the ontologies and modes of being of images. The subsequently published volume (*What is an Image*, edited by James Elkins, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011) gathered the standpoints of the participants (Mitchell, Boehm, Mondzain etc.) and was accompanied by various assessments from theorists who were not present at the seminar but later on made their commentaries on topics raised during discussion and also presented additional theoretical opinions on issues not always directly raised by the participants in the seminar. Incredibly heterogeneous in viewpoints and scope, but still extremely informative, the volume has proven to be a veridical reflection of the basic impossibility of answering the question of the ontology of images and, in my opinion, remains a good example of fluidity in theoretical conceptions *within* and *about* visual studies.

differentiate and classify images according to clear–cut metalevel catego-
ries and asked: why would we need such categories to begin with? Sachs–
Hombach points to what I consider to be a very symptomatic issue in rela-
tion to the doubts existing around visual studies when he says that "within
art history we have different theories of art, but we do not question the
status of art history or art science". The reason why the lack of a consistent
taxonomy of images is still considered to be a problem has to do with the
fact that "image science is not yet established as a proper academic sci-
ence" (Sachs–Hombach, 2011: 229). He then enlists "five tentative theses"
that may help to institute a viable image science (*Bildwissenschaft*), and
which I give here in a very digested form:

1) The absence of taxonomy within the theories of images reflects "politi-
   cal interests", which at the moment insist on visual studies remaining
   in the status of what Thomas Kuhn calls "preparadigmatic science";
2) While there cannot be an equation between "art" and "image", image
   science is still dominated by art history, which inevitably favors the
   analysis and interpretation of only one specific type of image;
3) Image science does not have to give answers to all possible questions
   regarding images, but must possess "a conceptual determination" that
   would be capable of making distinctions between different sets of ob-
   jects;
4) There have to be two general directions within image science: one to
   deal with historical issues, the other to deal with the functions, contexts
   and specific uses of images;
5) A general science of images should start from the features of images
   that are not "controversial" and therefore can be used as theoretical
   common ground. Two of these features may be *anti–essentialism* and
   representationalism.

Even though they are more elaborate in the original form, if still admit-
tedly "sketchy", to use Sachs–Hombach's own word, there is a line of
thought discernible in the five statements that points to the conception of
image studies as a kind of anti–theory, one that is left to be shaped and
paradoxically explained by what it studies instead of trying to conceptual-
ize its object in the tradition of critical theory and the identity politics that
flourished along its path. Few questions appear immediately: what theory
would not want to at least address, if not fully explain, every phenomenon
that it may find interesting? What epistemology would deliberately con-
fine its universe to the restricted horizon of knowledge only because a
more established discipline already claims some of the objects that a new-
er discipline wants to account for? What discipline would introduce itself

without a disruptive redefinition of existing theoretical and terminological apparatuses? Or, are precisely these tactics of indetermination the only way to establish a new structure of knowledge with the image as a constitutive element, an element that every ideology, artistic style, fashion trend and visual artifact whatsoever claims as its own?

To deal properly with what appears to be the ontological ground of image science, we must recall the already foundational *in–disciplinarity* of visual studies that Thomas Mitchell opted for in his text "Interdiscplinarity and Visual Culture", where he stated that we must make a distinction between "top–down" interdisciplinarity, a "comparative, structural formation that aims to know the overarching system or conceptual totality within which all the disciplines are related" and the kind of "compulsory" interdisciplinarity characteristic of studies in gender, sexuality and ethnicity that is "improvised out of a new theoretical object and a political project with its attendant urgencies. They are knowledge projects, but they also have more or less explicit moral and political agendas" (Mitchell, 1995: 540–44). In his more recent, reassessed idea of it he stated that, no matter which of the above one falls into,

> interdisciplinarity turns out to be as nonthreatening to the disciplines as it is to corporate capitalism. It just reinstalls the same old disciplinary values of rigorous normativity, productivity, originality, and explanatory power at a higher level. Fate turns into providential design, and the breakup of the disciplines is rectified by their convergence at a higher level – the emergent program, the conglomerate or consortium, or a humanities institute, a kind of hothouse for testing out new hybridizations of professional and disciplinary discourses (Mitchell, 2009: 1026).

In this light, the five tentative theses by Klaus Sachs–Hombach, which may have seemed like an unexpectedly defensive theoretical agenda of image science, clearly appear more like an admonition against the construction of yet another "knowledge project" with "political agendas" that is bound to be "as nonthreatening to the disciplines as it is to corporate capitalism". While it is not likely that any discipline within the humanities will ever pose a threat to corporate capitalism, whether it is methodologically nomadic or politically instrumentalized, it cannot be utterly irrelevant who is in control of the regimes of visibility, who creates the ontogenetic predisposition for various types of artifacts and who is, in turn, "only" capable of discerning the paradoxical inextricability of images as *objects* of study and the *study* of images as such. If image science concentrated on both, the *what* and the *how*, then object and study would likely become even more intertwined, as fundamental questions on the specific

nature of images would continue to be posed together with efforts to de-marcate the still contestable ground of visual studies. In an attempt to an-swer the question of *what visual studies want*, I think the most correct or the least "controversial" answer would be that it wants to *come to terms with images*. But in the circularity of ontological determination of both object and discipline, it is still unclear which one will follow the lead of the other. Maybe it is the fate of the discipline of visual studies to be con-stantly haunted by the essentialist dilemma, prompted by images and their particular "wishes".

On the other hand, following the proposal made by Gottfried Boehm, the whole essentialist idea that we believed existed around the secret of the image may fall apart should we come to an understanding that "iconicity is not a question of essence, but of degree" (Boehm, 2006: 248). By the same token, if visual studies is still burdened by the ontology of image, might we then envision image science too in terms of degree rather than essence? First and foremost, this would signify the definitive failure of disciplinary knowledge to provide an answer to what we believed were essential pillars of every traditional visual theory. Moreover, "intensity" as a theoretical presumption has already begun appearing, in one form or another, in new art history, "new iconology" and visual studies: if, following Mitchell, we just take the pictorial turn as an example of different levels of "urgency" in our relation to images, the whole epistemology of turns (linguistic turn, pictorial turn, spatial turn etc.) can already be understood as a matter of intensity due to the fact that, for instance, images were always present, to some extent, within language and literary texts, in the form of metaphors or ekphrastic descriptions. Intensity, in this case, may be a consequence of two necessarily related phenomena that were among the fundamental "ev-idence" of the occurrence of the pictorial turn: first, of our increased *inter-est* in visual matters as a society as a whole (literature and cultural "texts" included), and second, of the more and more prominent actual *presence* of visually motivated concepts (Mitchell, 1986 and 1994; Derrida, 1978).

This shifted sensitivity to visual impulses provoked by both changes in the material world—*images*, *imagination*, *imagery* (Curtis, 2011)—and our recently acquired susceptibility to the neuro–cognitivist construction of the visual field—mental images, matrixes, virtual realities—could also be explained precisely in terms of the reborn popularity of phenomenolog-ical reasoning. Following the trail marked by Gottfried Boehm, Emmanuel Alloa is among those authors who have pointed to interesting develop-ments in the field of visual/image studies, especially when he observes that the phenomenological tradition, from Husserl and Sartre to Merleau–Ponty, must be credited with the important insight that

iconicity is not a quality of the object, but of a way of looking at the world which not only implies that any object can possibly become an image, but also—inversely— that every image we are looking at can only be seen as an image because it is rooted in a pervasive iconicity which serves as a matrix for potential images to come (Alloa, 2011: 149).

If this is true, he adds, then the classical distinction that ruled western ontology, the distinction between a difference in degree and a difference in essence, will effectively collapse. From the point of such a "phenomenological turn", this would not raise just the problem of philosophy losing its foundation and firm theoretical ground; the whole modern project of images, informed by functions, meanings and concepts of representation, would then lose its specificity, its "sovereign realm", a domain where the rules of iconicity alone once governed and where the idea of a universal science of images once existed (Alloa: 150).[9]

Valuing images by degree instead of essence, or, to put it differently, by how we *come to see* and *not to see* the realities of everyday life, instead of based on their ontological ground, would mean that neither "the new visual studies" proposed by Barry Sandywell nor "the new image science" sketched by Klaus Sachs–Hombach can have either firm disciplinary ground or a definite set of theoretical objects. The reason why it is more promising to look at *when* and *how* images take place instead of *what* they are, then, is because "images have no domain nor realm of their own, they are fundamentally pervasive and always essentially out of their place [...] so the fundamental 'atopia' of the image relation dismantles a logic of localization and opens up perspective of an iconic force field" (Alloa: 150–151).

Thinking in intensities would mean that, for example, images of art were not to be judged in terms of exclusive belonging to the aesthetic domain, just as images of non–art would not be excluded from participating in this domain. While in this case it might be more difficult to discern the demarcation lines on which the ontogenetical difference between *art* and

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[9] Emanuel Alloa has subsequently elaborated more on his thesis on "intensities" in an article where this new theoretical urgency is explained in continuation of a discourse about three possible impulses inherent to the iconic turn: archeological, poetical and epistemic. In this way, he suggests that the need for the re–working of traditional concepts of the image has to be part of the parallel process of the re–working of image theories as well. According to Alloa, such a process may consist of the redefinition of iconology as "symptomatology", and analysis based on the disciplinary "extensity" of visual phenomena may become an exercise in "intensities", while firm indications and values may be better explained as contingencies, as in the relation of "indicative" and "subjunctive" (Alloa, 2012: 144–159).

other is based, thinking in intensities would certainly not erase them, just, maybe, pose questions of aesthetics more urgently in the discussion of art today. Visual studies would then easily find itself acquitted of the accusation of confusing objects with absolute value with those of relative or circumstantial value, but at the same time, it would find itself in a radically new situation in which it would have to engage with the intensities of the aesthetic value of images—the only thing it deliberately left to art history. What any contemporary science of images can do in this respect is to try to conceptualize intensities, levels, localizations, modalities and circumstances. Whether this might lead to a new kind of revolutionary interdisciplinarity of levels, statuses and topographies instead of disciplines and how that would affect our visual communication and understanding of images is yet to be imagined.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE "*MEDIUM* OF PERCEPTION":
WALTER BENJAMIN'S MEDIA THEORY
AND THE TRADITION OF THE *MEDIA DIAPHANA*[1]

ANTONIO SOMAINI

1. *Medium,* *Apparat*

Die Stimme der Freiheit in deutscher Nacht—auf Welle 29.8 [*The Voice of Freedom in the German Night—on Radio Wave 29.8*] (Fig. 4–1) is the title of a photomontage published by John Heartfield on April 21st, 1937, in *Die Volks–Illustrierte*: a weekly German–language paper that was the continuation in exile of the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* [AIZ], whose editorial staff had fled to Prague in 1933. John Heartfield had been publishing his political photomontages in the *AIZ* since 1930, attacking both Weimar capitalism (Thyssen, Krupp) and the rising National Socialist party through the use of photography "as a weapon", as he had stated in an announcement of one of his exhibitions published in 1929 in the *AIZ* with the title *Benütze Foto als Waffe!*[2]

In this article dedicated to an analysis of the role played by the concept of the "*Medium* of perception" and by the centuries–long, post–Aristotelian tradition of the *media diaphana* in Walter Benjamin's media theory, I would like to suggest the possibility of interpreting *Die Stimme der Freiheit in deutscher Nacht* as a sort of unintentional emblem or visual synthesis of such a theory. As we will see, one of the cornerstones of Benjamin's

[1] This article was written during a research fellowship at the IKKM—International Research Institute for Cultural Technologies and Media Philosophy in Weimar. It is forthcoming in the *Zeitschrift für Medien– und Kulturforschung* and, in a different and longer version, in the journal *Grey Room*, n. 62 (2016), pp. 6–41.
[2] See *John Heartfield. Photomontages politiques 1930–1938*, éd. par Emmanuel Guigon et Franck Knoery, Strasbourg: Éditions des Musées de Strasbourg, 2006, p. 32.

Fig. 4–1: John Heartfield, *Die Stimme der Freiheit in deutscher Nacht – auf Welle 29.8*. Copper–plate photogravure from *Die Volks–Illustrierte* (April 21, 1937), no. 16, p. 245.

understanding of media is the idea that human experience is never imme-
diate, but rather always configured and organized by different forms of
material and technical mediation that change through history. Benjamin
was convinced, in particular, that sensory experience—the forms and
rhythms of perception, the extension and the coordinates of the visible, the
audible, the tactile, etc.—had a history, and that this history was deter-
mined by the different ways in which a historically evolving set of tech-
nical *Apparate* was acting on the human "sensorium",[3] configuring and
organizing what he calls, in the essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Its
Technological Reproducibility* (five versions, 1935–36), "the *Medium* of
perception" [Medium der Wahrnehmung].[4] If, on the one hand, the term
Apparat (which becomes *Apparate* in the plural, and *Apparatur* if taken as
a collective singular) indicates in Benjamin the various material and tech-
nical artifacts—architectural constructions, technical instruments, sound
and optical devices, means of (mass) communication—that contribute,
through their various operations, to the organization of the field in which

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[3] The term *Sensorium* is used by Walter Benjamin in his essay *On Some Motifs in
Baudelaire*, in *Selected Writings*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Volume 4 (1938–
40) (from now on indicated as SW4), p. 328.

[4] In commenting on this well–known and widely studied text, we will refer here
both to the existing English translations and to the new critical edition that was
published by the German publisher Suhrkamp in 2012: a volume edited by Burk-
hardt Lindner which gathers all the textual materials related to this essay and intro-
duces a previously unknown, first version of the text (*Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter
seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, hrsg. von Burkhardt Lindner, unter Mi-
tarbeit von Simon Broll und Jessica Nitsche, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2012). Accord-
ing to this new critical edition, there are actually five versions of the artwork essay:
the *erste Fassung* is the previously unpublished one; the *zweite Fassung* is the one
known in the English translations as the "first version"; the *dritte Fassung* is the
"second version"; the *vierte Fassung* is the 1936 French translation by Pierre Klos-
sowski; finally, the *fünfte Fassung* is the "third version". Together with the vari-
ous, fragmentary texts that accompany them, the five versions of the essay have to
be considered as the textual body of one evolving and unfinished project entitled
The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, on which Benja-
min worked between 1935 and 1939. The English translations of three of the five
versions of this text are the following: the "first version" (*zweite Fassung*) was
translated by Michael W. Jennings and published in *Grey Room*, 39 (Spring 2010),
pp. 11–37; the "second version" (*dritte Fassung*) in Walter Benjamin, *The Work of
Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, in Id., *Selected Writings*, ed. by
Michael W. Jennings, Volume 3 (1935–38) (from now on referred to as SW3), pp.
101–133, and the "third version" (*fünfte Fassung*), in Id., *Selected Writings*, ed. by
Michael W. Jennings, Volume 4 (1938–40) (from now on referred to as SW4), pp.
251–283.

sensory experience takes place, the term *Medium* (a term that I will always write with the German spelling, with the capital "M" and in italics, whenever I refer specifically to its meanings in Benjamin's writings and in German literature) indicates precisely such a field: the spatially extended environment, the *milieu*, the *Umwelt* in which perception occurs. What we may consider as Benjamin's "media theory" is therefore the study of the interplay between the historically–evolving domain of the technical *Apparate* and the "*Medium* of perception" in which they operate.

John Heartfield's photomontage offers us a compelling, synthetic visualization of this interplay, with all its different sensorial, epistemic, anthropological and political implications. What we see in *Die Stimme der Freiheit in der deutschen Nacht* is a raised arm and a clenched fist which have turned into a radio antenna or radio tower—two *Apparate* whose presence in the 1920s German mediascape had strongly increased following the rapid development of radio as a mass medium. The antenna transmits circular waves that spread like lightning across a cloudy, stormy night sky. This sky can be considered the "*Medium* of perception" which—even though it is already crossed by cloud formations, stormy winds, and electric currents—is further altered and transformed by the waves propagated by the radio antenna. The presence of such an *Apparat* changes this *Medium*, reconfiguring our perception of it. The raised arm and the clenched fist, a clear reference to the Communist salute that appears in other photomontages by Heartfield,[5] reminds us that the interplay between *Apparate* and the *Medium* always has a political dimension, while the fact that it is an arm that acts as an antenna points to the idea that technical *Apparate* may act like prostheses that are grafted onto the human sensory organs, according to the idea of "innervation" that plays a prominent role in Benjamin's understanding of media.[6]

As I will try to show in the following pages, Benjamin's understanding of the relationship between *Apparate* and the "*Medium* of perception" may be better understood if we approach it from three different perspectives:

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[5] See, for example, the photomontage published in *AIZ* n. 40 (1934) with the title *Alle Fäuste zu einer geballt!* [All fists united in one!]: *John Heartfield. Photomontages politiques 1930–1938*, cit., p. 98.

[6] On the concept of "innervation", see especially note n. 10 of the "second version" of the artwork essay (SW3, p. 124) and the fragment entitled "The Formula in Which the Dialectical Structure of Film Finds Expression", in which Chaplin's "way of moving", his "*Gestus*", is described as "a series of minute innervations" (SW3, p. 94). For an in–depth interpretation of this concept, see the chapter entitled "Mistaking the Moon for a Ball" in Miriam Bratu Hansen's *Cinema and Experience. Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno*, Berkeley—Los Angeles—London: University of California Press, 2012, pp. 132–162.

first, by analyzing the role played by this relationship within the context of his general thesis that perception, sensory experience, has a history; then, by reconstructing some of the different meanings that Benjamin assigned to the concept of *Medium* in his writings of the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, before using it in the artwork essay in 1935–36; finally, by considering Benjamin's concept of the "*Medium* of perception" within the context of the long, post–Aristotelian tradition of the so–called *media diaphana*: a tradition of texts that, beginning with Aristotle's *De anima*, focuses on the role played by material, intermediary, diaphanous substances such as air, vapour, smoke, clouds, water, crystal, and glass in configuring—with their different consistencies and their different degrees of transparency and opaqueness—the environment in which our sensory experience takes place. Traces of such a tradition, as we will see, can be found throughout Romantic literature and philosophy and during the first decades of the twentieth century, and I am convinced that Benjamin was influenced by this tradition in his use of the term *Medium*. These three interconnected perspectives will allow us, hopefully, to shed new light on a topic—Walter Benjamin's media theory—that, even though widely and often very effectively studied,[7] has not been analysed so far from the starting point of a close analysis of all the passages in which Benjamin uses the term *Medium* in his writings.[8]

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[7] See, for example, the excellent anthology of Benjamin's essays on media edited by Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, which underlines, from the very beginning, how the one main goal of Benjamin's media theory was the analysis of "technologies that produced changes in, and served as virtual or actual prostheses for, human perception" (Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Essay on Media*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008, "Editors' introduction", p. 1). The special issue of *Grey Room* dedicated to *Walter Benjamin's Media Tactics: Optics, Perception, and the Work of Art* also takes as a starting point the fact that "while [Benjamin] never formulated a universal 'theory of media', his theoretical engagement with various kinds of mediality reveals, as its constant guiding thread, a distinct emphasis on the question of media's function within more comprehensive economies of perception." (Michael W. Jennings and Tobias Wilke, "Editor's Introduction. Walter Benjamin's Media Tactics: Optics, Perception, and the Work of Art", *Grey Room* 39, Spring 2010, pp. 7–8). A close analysis of the meanings Benjamin assigned to the terms *Medium* and *Apparat* served as a basis for the organization of the following Italian anthology of Benjamin's writings on media: Walter Benjamin, *Aura e choc. Saggi sulla teoria dei media*, ed. by Andrea Pinotti and Antonio Somaini, Torino: Einaudi 2012.

[8] Among the few, important exceptions: Tobias Wilke, "Tacti(ca)lity Reclaimed: Benjamin's Medium, the Avant–Garde, and the Politics of the Senses", in *Grey*

2. The historicity of perception

The idea that perception has a history, and that this history is determined by the way in which a steadily evolving set of technical *Apparate* keeps on reorganizing the "*Medium* of perception", is at the center of Benjamin's artwork essay. In a passage that appears in all the versions of the text except for the first (the *erste Fassung*, not translated into English),[9] Benjamin writes that "just as the entire mode of existence of human collectives changes over long historical periods, so too does their mode of perception. The way in which human perception is organized—the *Medium* in which it occurs [das Medium, in dem sie erfolgt]—is conditioned not only by nature but by history".[10] The goal of the artwork essay, continues the same passage, is to understand "the changes in the medium of present–day perception" [die Veränderungen im Medium der Wahrnehmung deren Zeitgenossen wir sind], and in particular those produced by *Apparate* such as photography and cinema. Benjamin's media theory is therefore conceived as an "aesthetics" that studies the historical transformations of a sensory experience that is *always* somehow technically mediated. Cinema was for Benjamin "the most important subject matter at present" for such an "aesthetics",[11] since it showed in the clearest way how, during the first few decades of the twentieth century, the "*Medium* of perception" had being entirely reorganized by a new generation of technical *Apparate*.[12]

Two years later, the idea of the historicity of perception is mentioned again with great emphasis in a review of Dolf Sternberger's *Panorama, or*

Room, 39 (2010), pp. 39–55; Markus Bauer, "Die Mitte der Mitteilung. Walter Benjamin Begriff des Mediums", in Christian Schulte (hg.), *Walter Benjamins Medientheorie*, Konstanz: UVK, 2005, pp. 39–47. Some brief remarks on the meaning of the term *Medium* in Benjamin's writings can also be found in Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Cinema and Experience. Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press, 2012, p. 108.

[9] For the different versions of the text, see above, n. 4.

[10] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproduction*: "second version", SW3 p. 104, and "third version", SW4 p. 255.

[11] SW3, p. 120.

[12] We may refer here to Lorenz Engell's idea, according to which media theories are always influenced by the specific medium they choose as a reference or vantage point: from this perspective, the artwork essay can be considered a media theory formulated from the vantage point of cinema (see Lorenz Engell, "Affinität, Eintrübung, Plastizität. Drei Figuren der Medialität aus der Sicht des Kinematographen", in *Was ist ein Medium?*, hrsg. von Stefan Münker und Alexander Roesler, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2008, pp. 185–210.)

Views of the Nineteenth Century (1938), in which we read that "the question of whether people's visual impressions are determined only by natural constants, or additionally by historical variables, is at the very leading edge of research. To move an inch closer to an answer is a hard–won advance".[13] Benjamin adds in the same text that "light impinges on human experience only in a manner permitted by the historical constellation",[14] and in his *Letter on Georges Salles' "Le Regard"* (1940), "the history of human perception" is presented as "not only one of our most subtle temptations, but also one of our most arduous attempts".[15] There can be no doubt, therefore, that Benjamin considered the study of the interplay between technical *Apparate* and the "*Medium* of perception", in order to fully understand the historically evolving conditions of our sensory experience, a crucial task of his media theory.

The artwork essay, in its different versions, together with the fragments of the *Arcades Project* as well as the various texts concerning nineteenth–century French culture written by Benjamin between 1938 and 1940 in connection to the project of a book on Baudelaire,[16] can be considered a combined way of completing this task. In these, Benjamin deals with the historicity of perception from a double perspective: on the one hand, by analyzing the changes in perception caused by a series of technical *Apparate* that had become widespread during the first three decades of the twentieth century (besides photography and cinema, daily newspapers, street advertising, the telephone, the gramophone, the microphone, and the radio), and on the other, by searching for the first signs of these changes in the technical and material culture of the nineteenth century, choosing Paris as the main site of a vast media–archaeological excavation.[17]

This double approach was based on the observation that, beginning in the mid–nineteenth century and then increasingly during the first decades

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[13] Walter Benjamin, "Review of Sternberger's *Panorama*", SW4, p. 146.

[14] Ibid.

[15] *Une lettre de Walter Benjamin au sujet de* Le Regard *de Georges Salles* [zweite Fassung], in GS III, p. 595.

[16] *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire* (1938), SW4, pp. 3–92; *Central Park* (1939), SW4, pp. 161–1999; *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire* (1939–1940), SW4, pp. 313–355. The texts related to Benjamin's project of a book on Baudelaire have been recently published in a volume edited in French and Italian by Giorgio Agamben: for the French edition see Walter Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, édition établie par Giorgio Agamben, Barbara Chitussi et Clemens–Carl Härle, Paris: La Fabrique, 2013.

[17] An analysis of Benjamin's *Arcades Project* in terms of media archaeology can be found in Knut Ebeling, *Wilde Archäologien. Theorien materieller Kultur von Kant bis Kittler*, Berlin: Kadmos, 2012.

of the twentieth, the human "sensorium" or "apparatus of perception" [Wahrnehmungsapparat][18] had been more and more exposed to the action of a whole new generation of technical *Apparate* which had reorganized completely the "*Medium* of perception". The use of the term *Apparat* in order to indicate both the *sensory* and the *technical* apparatuses involved in the different forms of technically mediated experience—a use that can be found also in Freud, who in *A Note upon the Mystic Writing Pad* (1925) discusses the relations between our "perceptual apparatus" [Wahrnehmungs-sapparat] and "all the forms of auxiliary apparatuses [Hilfsapparate] we have invented for the improvement or intensification of our sensory functions", such as "spectacles, photographic cameras, ear–trumpets", and, of course, the "mystic writing pad"[19] – seems to indicate a certain predisposition of the human sensory organs to the encounter with technology. Subjected to an endless series of "performances", "tests", and "tasks" that resembled the ones executed by athletes in sport competitions and by industry workers in a context heavily influenced by Taylorism, the modern individual had to undergo a particular form of "training", whose aims are described by Benjamin with terms related to physiology, psychology, and psychotechnics: the "innervation" and "incorporation" of the technical *Apparate* into the individual and the collective body, the "adaptation" of the sensory organs to the new rhythms of perception and attention,[20] the "exercise" and "schooling" of a "sense perception altered by technology"[21] in order "to establish an equilibrium between human beings and the apparatus"[22] within the "*Medium* of perception". But how did Benjamin come to use this last expression? In order to properly understand the use of the

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[18] On Benjamin's use of these two terms, see *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, SW4, p. 328, and *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit, dritte Fassung*, cit., p. 138.

[19] *Notiz über den "Wunderblock"*. First published simultaneously in Int. Z. Psychoanal., 11 (1925), 1, and in Ges. Schr., 6, 415; reprinted Ges. W., 14, 3. Translation, reprinted from Int. l. Psycho–Anal., 21 (1940), 469, by James Strachey. On the role of technical media in Freud's interpretation of memory in the *Note upon the "Mystic Writing Pad"*, see Thomas Elsaesser, "Freud and the Technical Media: The Enduring Magic of the Wunderblock", in Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (eds.), *Media Archaeology. Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press, 2011, pp. 95–118.

[20] On "adaptation" and "innervation", see note n. 10 of the "second version" of the artwork essay (SW3, p.124); the fragment entitled "The Formula in Which the Dialectical Structure of Film Finds Expression", in which Chaplin's "way of moving", his "*Gestus*", is described as "a series of minute innervations" (SW3, p. 94).

[21] "Second version", SW3, p. 122; "third version", SW4, p. 270.

[22] "Second version", SW3, p. 117.

term *Medium* that we find in the artwork essay, we need to look back at
how this same term was used by Benjamin in previous writings, beginning
with his early writing on color from the mid–1910s.

3. The meanings of *Medium* in Benjamin's writings

Benjamin's idea that the "*Medium* of perception" is the spatially extended
environment in which sensory experience takes place may be better under-
stood if compared with the various other meanings that he assigns to the
term *Medium* in his writings, spanning from his early writings on color,
such as *The Rainbow: A Dialogue on Imagination* (1915), to the late the-
ses *On the Concept of History* (1940). In all these texts, the term *Medium*
indicates a constellation of different *in–between entities and domains*
within which different forms of mediation—be they material, technical or
discursive—take place. Such entities and domains include—in the chrono-
logical order of their appearances in Benjamin's writings—"color" (*The
Rainbow: A Conversation About Imagination*, 1915), as a realm in con-
stant transformation, a "homeland of clouds" (*The Soaked Magic Wand*,
1934) through which one enters another intermediary realm, the one of
"imagination" [Phantasie];[23] the pictorial "mark" [Mal], as opposed to the
graphic "sign" [Zeichen] (*Painting, or Signs and Marks*, 1917);[24] "lan-
guage", intended not as a "means" [Mittel] of "communication" [Mittei-
lung], but rather as the realm within which things are created through the
act of naming (*On Language as Such and on the Language of Man*,
1917);[25] the "criticism of art" [Kunstkritik] as a "*Medium* of reflection"
[Reflexionsmedium], a vast realm of "mediation" [Vermittlung] within
which thought may unfold the infinite "connections" [Zusammenhänge]
that link every artwork to all other artworks (*The Concept of Criticism in
German Romanticism*, 1919);[26] the historically changing "*Medium* through
which works of art continue to influence later ages" (in a fragment dated
1920), a *Medium* which is dense and opaque for those who are contempo-
rary with a given work, and that becomes fainter and more transparent
with the passing of time;[27] "aura" as a *Medium* in the sense of a diapha-

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[23] Walter Benjamin, *The Rainbow: A Conversation about Imagination*, in *Early
Writings 1910–1917*, transl. by Howard Eiland and Others, Cambridge (Mass.) –
London (England): 2011, pp. 214–223; Id. *Der eingetunkte Zauberstab*, GS III p.
417.
[24] Id., *Painting, or Signs and Marks*, SW1, pp. 83–86.
[25] Id., *On Language as Such and on the Language of Man*, SW1, pp. 62–74.
[26] Id., *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism*, SW1, pp. 116–200.
[27] Id., *The Medium through Which Works of Art Continue to Influence Later Ages*,

nous halo surrounding the human beings and objects portrayed in early nineteenth–century photographs (*Little History of Photography*, 1931);[28] "memory" as "the *Medium* of that which is experienced [Medium des Erlebten], just as the earth is the *Medium* in which ancient cities lie buried" (*Excavation and Memory*, 1932);[29] "language" as "an archive of non-sensuous similarities", "the *Medium* in which objects encounter and come into relation with one another" (*On the Mimetic Faculty* and *Doctrine of the Similar*, both 1933);[30] "fashion", "the market", and "the crowd" as different aspects of the *Medium* in which the urban experience of the inhabitants of nineteenth–century Paris took place,[31] and finally, "time", which in the theses *On the Concept of History* (1940) is conceived not as an "empty *Medium*", but rather as a "*Medium* filled by now–time [Jetztzeit]".[32]

Since an in–depth analysis of all these meanings of the term *Medium* in Benjamin's writings is not possible in the context of this article,[33] I will focus on two meanings that are particularly important in order to understand the "*Medium* of perception" mentioned in the artwork essay: the idea of *color* as a *Medium* in *The Rainbow: A Conversation about Imagination* (1915), and the interpretation of *aura* as a *Medium* in the *Little History of Photography* (1931). In the early text *The Rainbow: A Conversation about Imagination* (ca. 1915), and in a series of fragments on color from the

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SW1, p. 235.

[28] Id., *Little History of Photography*, SW2.2, pp. 507–530.

[29] This short essay was written by Benjamin in two different versions: one as an isolated, unpublished fragment entitled *Excavation and Memory* (SW2.2, p. 576), which was published in the *Gesammelte Schriften* as part of a series of short texts entitled *Denkbilder*, and one as part of *Berlin Chronicle* (Ibid., p. 611).

[30] Id., *Doctrine of the Similar*, SW2.2, pp. 6 94–698; *On the Mimetic Faculty*, SW2.2, pp. 720–722.

[31] Id., *The Arcades Project*, (from now on *AP*), transl. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, prepared on the basis of the German volume edited by Rolf Tiedemann, Cambridge (Mass.)—London (England): The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999, fragments B 1a, 2, p. 64; B3, 8, p. 70. Id., *Central Park*, SW4, p. 168.

[32] The term *Medium* appears in section XII of the "Hannah Arendt Manuskript" of the *Theses on the Concept of History*: see Walter Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, herausgegeben von Gérard Raulet, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2012, p. 25. In later manuscripts of the *Theses*, the term *Medium* is replaced by the term *Ort*, translated in English as "site" (see SW4, p. 395). This passage from *Medium* to *Ort* confirms the idea that Benjamin conceived the *Medium* in spatial terms.

[33] An analysis of each one of the passages in which Benjamin uses the term *Medium* will be presented in the longer version of this article forthcoming in the journal *Grey Room* with the title "Walter Benjamin's media theory: the *Medium* and the *Apparat*".

same period,[34] both "color" and "imagination" [Phantasie] are presented as
Medium. Color is treated here as a diffused, fluid, unstable, volatile entity:
"a home among clouds" [ein Wolkenheimat], as Benjamin would write in
later texts, such as *A Glimpse into the World of Children's Books* (1926)
and *The Soaked Magic Wand* (1934).[35] Color is "quality alone", a "pure
quality of no substance" that reveals itself in the "colored glow", the "col-
ored brilliance" of "soap bubbles, parlor games, the watery color of the
magic lantern, watercolor paintings, decals".[36] The transparent colors of
the rainbow are described as "the purest manifestation of the color that
spiritualizes and animates nature throughout", while the true experience of
color, which happens in a state of "intoxication" [Rausch] like that of a
dream, is presented as a "pure reception in self–forgetting" before whatev-
er shades "appear".[37]

The experience of being in the *Medium* of color is here described as a
state in which one abandons oneself to a suspended world in which there
are no sharp distinctions between subject and object, seer and seen: "Col-
ors see themselves; in them is the pure seeing, and they are its object and
organ at the same time." In describing the experience of color in these
terms, one of the two protagonists of the dialogue, Margarethe, refers to
"the sphere of innocence of children and artists", a sphere which is that of
"imagination […] the *Medium* in which they conceive and create", and she
adds: "only children dwell entirely in innocence, and in blushing they
themselves relapse into the existence of color".[38] In later writings on the
role of color in children's literature, Benjamin will further develop this
idea of color as an atmospheric *Medium* through which the child enters
and inhabits the world that is represented in pictures. In the essay *A
Glimpse Into the World of Children's Books* (1926), the image of the cloud

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[34] Walter Benjamin, *The Rainbow: A Conversation about Imagination*, in *Early
Writings 1910–1917*, transl. by Howard Eiland and Others, Cambridge (Mass.)—
London (England): 2011, pp. 214–223. The fragments on color and imagination
are published in the section "Zur Ästhetik" of the sixth volume of Benjamin's
Gesammelte Schriften, pp. 109–129.

[35] Id., *A Glimpse into the World of Children's Books*, in *The Work of Art in the Age
of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, cit., p. 234; Id.
Der eingetunkte Zauberstab, GS III p. 417. On the role of clouds as "*Medium*" in
Benjamin's writings, see Wolfgang Bock, "Dialektik des Nebels. Zu den Motiven
der Wolken und des Wetters bei Walter Benjamin", in *Archiv für Mediengeschich-
te – Wolken*, hrsg. von Lorenz Engell, Bernhard Siegert und Joseph Vogl, Weimar:
Verlag der Bauhaus–Universität Weimar, 2005, pp. 41–56.

[36] Id. *A Glimpse into the World of Children's Books*, cit., p. 234.

[37] Id., *The Rainbow*, op. cit., pp. 218–220.

[38] Ibid., pp. 218–219.

that we find in *The Soaked Magic Wand* comes up again when Benjamin describes the relationship between the child and "an open, color–bedecked world where everything shifts at every step":

> Things do not come out to meet the picturing child from the pages of the book. Instead, in looking, the child enters into them as a cloud that becomes suffused with the riotous colors of the world of pictures. Sitting before his painted book, he makes the Taoist vision of perfection come true: he overcomes the illusory barrier of the book's surface and passes through colored textures [zwischen farbigen Geweben] and brightly painted partitions to enter a stage in which the fairy tale lives.[39]

According to Benjamin in these early texts, the eye belongs to the realm of color because it is itself colored: "our eye is colored, color is generated from seeing and it colors pure seeing",[40] says Margarethe in *The Rainbow*, adding a quote from a poem by a friend of Benjamin, Christoph Friedrich Heinle, that reads: "If I were made of fabric, I would color myself."[41] The *Medium* of color—a misty, "haloed" realm in which the subject loses its separateness and dissolves itself ("I myself was a quality of the world and floated over it. It was filled with me as though with color")[42]—is here understood as a "*Medium* of all changes" [Medium aller Veränderungen], a "realm of transformation", a diaphanous world in which forms dissolve and reappear, perpetually blurring every fixed contour and producing "endless nuances"[43] in a continuous process of "formation" and "deformation", *Gestaltung* and *Entstaltung*,[44] offering themselves as materials to be worked upon by "imagination", itself a *Medium* in which artistic creation takes place.

This idea of the *Medium* of color as a diffused, cloud–like, diaphanous entity finds an echo in an unpublished fragment from 1920. With clear anticipation of the concept of *Medium* as "aura" that we will find in the *Little History of Photography*, the *Medium* is here presented as a sort of atmospheric halo that surrounds every work of art and that conditions its reception through its changing degrees of density and transparency: "The

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[39] Id., *A Glimpse into the World of Children's Books*, cit., p. 226. On the motif of crossing the surface of representation in Benjamin's writings, see Andrea Pinotti, "The Painter Through the Fourth Wall of China. Benjamin and the Threshold of the Image", cit.
[40] Id., *The Rainbow*, cit., p. 218.
[41] Ibid., p. 219.
[42] Ibid., p. 215.
[43] "Die Farbe vom Kinde aus betrachtet", GS VI, p. 110.
[44] "Phantasie", GS VI, p. 114.

Medium through which works of art continue to influence later ages is always different from the one in which they affect their own age. Moreover, in those later times its impact on older works constantly changes, too. Nevertheless, this *Medium* is always relatively fainter than what influenced contemporaries at the time it was created".[45]

The beginning of the *Little History of Photography* is directly connected with the idea of the *Medium* as a historically changing diaphanous halo that we find in this unpublished fragment. Just as in a letter written in 1935 to Werner Kraft Benjamin would describe the artwork essay as a "Teleskop" through which one could try to penetrate the "blood fog" [Blutnebel] hovering over the culture of the nineteenth century,[46] in the opening lines of the *Little History of Photography,* Benjamin mentions again the different densities of the "fog" [Nebel] that conditions the view a modern historian may have of the beginnings of technical *Apparate* such as photography or printing: "The fog that surrounds the beginnings of photography is not quite as thick as that which shrouds the early days of printing."[47] The world of early photographs, Benjamin continues, was a world of auratic images wrapped up in protecting, enveloping materials, recording a reality that seemed to be surrounded by a diaphanous, haloed atmosphere. Daguerreotypes were precious, "one of a kind" images, which were kept in "cases" in order to protect them.[48] The "countenance" of the human beings represented in the early photographs "had a silence about it in which the gaze rested":[49] "there was an aura about them, a *Medium* [es war ein Aura um sie, ein Medium] that lent fullness and security to their gaze even as it penetrated that *Medium.*"[50]

In this very important passage, Benjamin considers the terms *Aura* and *Medium* to be equivalent:[51] they both indicate the specific density of the

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[45] Walter Benjamin, *The Medium through Which Works of Art Continue to Influence Later Ages*, SW1 p. 235. An interpretation of this fragment in connection to the issue of the current transformations of cinema as a medium is given by Francesco Casetti in the last chapter of his *The Lumière Galaxy: 7 Keywords for the Cinema to Come*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, pp. 206–208 ("The Fainting of the Medium").

[46] Letter to Werner Kraft, October 1935, quoted in Burkhardt Lindner, "Kommentar" to *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reprouzierbarkeit*, op. cit., p. 323.

[47] Walter Benjamin, *Little History of Photography*, SW2.2, p. 507.

[48] Ibid., p. 508.

[49] Ibid., p. 512.

[50] Ibid., pp. 515–517.

[51] Miriam Bratu Hansen comments on this equivalence between "aura" and "*Medium*" in the chapter "Aura: the Appropriation of a Concept" of her book *Cinema*

diaphanous halo, the atmosphere that surrounds the material world of the nineteenth century as it is represented through photography, and that conditions the possibility of the modern spectator having access to it. According to Benjamin, such density had become visible thanks to the specific technical properties—and limitations—of early photographic techniques: in this case, there was a clear "technical determinedness of the auratic appearance";[52] the technical cause of the absorbed attitude of the represented subjects and the *sfumato* atmosphere ("the absolute continuum from brightest light to darkest shadow"[53]) that surrounded them was found in the long exposures demanded by the low sensitivity of early photographic plates. This atmosphere would later be intentionally enhanced by pictorialist photographers, who "saw as their task to simulate the aura using all the arts of retouching, and especially the so–called gum print".[54]

The photographs of Eugène Atget, discovered and publicized at the end of the 1920s by Man Ray and then published by Berenice Abbott, opened the path for a radical break with the auratic atmosphere of pictorialist photography. Just as "an actor who, disgusted with the profession, wiped off the mask and then set about removing the makeup from reality too", Atget is presented by Benjamin as a photographer who begins to "disinfect the stifling atmosphere generated by conventional portrait photography in the age of the decline. He cleanses this atmosphere—indeed, he dispels it altogether: he initiates the emancipation of object from aura, which is the most signal achievement of the latest school of photography".[55] Atget's photographs, representing the empty, unadorned spaces of the streets and squares of Paris without the typical *sfumato* of pictorialist photography, "suck the aura out of reality like water from a sinking ship":[56] in this way, they contributed to "the peeling away of the object's shell, the destruction of the aura", which opened the path for a new political "education" of the gaze that would be further pursued by the Surrealists and by photographers such as August Sander, with his "training manual"—the actual term used

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and Experience, cit.: "the aura is not an inherent property of persons or objects, but pertains to the *medium* of perception, naming a particular structure of vision (though one not limited to the visual). More precisely, aura is itself a medium that defines the gaze of the human beings portrayed" (p. 107).

[52] Ibid., p. 517.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid. On the *sfumato* techniques of pictorialist photography as part of a longer history of blurred images, see Wolfgang Ullrich's *Geschichte der Unschärfe*, Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 2009.

[55] Ibid., p. 518.

[56] Ibid.

by Benjamin is *Übungsatlas*—entitled *Antlitz der Zeit*.[57] What emerges from the *Little History of Photography* is an idea of the *Medium* as an environmental, atmospheric space which can be altered by different technical *Apparate* or by different uses of the same *Apparat*: on the one hand, the low sensitivity of the photographic plates used in mid–nineteenth century photography and the *sfumato* aesthetics of pictorialism emphasize the density and the opaqueness of the *Medium*; on the other, Atget's photographs, followed later by the aesthetics of precision and detail developed by the *Neue Vision* of László Moholy–Nagy and the *Neue Sachlichkeit* of Albert Renger–Patzsch, used the photographic apparatus in a different way, emphasizing the transparency of the *Medium* in which visual experience takes place.

Benjamin's writings on hashish, a body of texts written in connection to a series of drug experiments that took place between 1927 and 1934, play an important role in underlining the different densities and degrees of transparency of the *Medium*. These texts—in which one hears the echo of a whole tradition of French literature on hashish, ranging from Théophile Gautier's *Le Club de Hachichins* (1846) to Baudelaire's *Les Paradis artificiels* (1860)[58]—are extremely important for the perspective on Benjamin's media theory that we are developing in this essay, since it is in them that one can find the origins of the idea of the aura as one of the densities of the "*Medium* of perception". Benjamin considered the state of "intoxication" [Rausch][59] produced by hashish a state that profoundly altered the spatio–temporal coordinates of sensory perception, greatly enhancing our capacity to perceive the aura. This is presented as an atmospheric halo that surrounds all things, including one's own body, as we read in the text entitled *Main Features of My Second Impression of Hashish* (1928), in which Benjamin describes the feeling he experienced when, at some point, his

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[57] Ibid., p. 520. On Benjamin's interpretation of Sander's project *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts*, part of which was published in 1929 in the volume *Antlitz der Zeit*, see Antonio Somaini, "Übungsatlas. The Picture Atlas and the Training of the Gaze in Benjamin and Sander," in Mira Fliescher, Fabian Goppelsröder, Dieter Mersch (Hg.), *Sichtbarkeiten. Praktiken visuellen Denkens*, Diaphanes: Berlin 2016 (forthcoming).

[58] Charles Baudelaire, *Les Paradis artificiels, Précédé de "La Pipe d'opium", "Le Hachich" et "Le Club des Hachichins" par Théophile Gautier*, Paris: Gallimard, 1977. On literature and drugs in the nineteenth and early twentieth century see Alberto Castoldi, *Il testo drogato. Letteratura e droga tra Ottocento e Novecento*, Torino: Einaudi, 1994, pp. 57–85 ("L'haschisch").

[59] A term which, as we have seen, had already appeared in the early text *The Rainbow: A Dialogue of Imagination* in order to indicate the state of mind in which one of the two characters, Margarete, perceives the true nature of color as a *Medium*.

friend the philosopher Ernst Bloch, who was participating in the same experiments, wanted to touch his knee gently: "I could feel the contact long before it actually reached me. I felt it as a highly repugnant violation of my aura."[60] Under the effects of hashish, that specific density of the "*Medium* of perception" that is the aura surrounding the body becomes a sort of extension of the body itself—another way of interpreting the *Medium* as an "extension of man"—and the contact between one's own aura and an external object can be felt even before the actual surface of the skin is reached. In the text *Hashish, Beginning of March 1930* we find a long passage in which Benjamin recalls a number of conclusions he had come to concerning the nature of the aura during one of his drug experiments, distancing himself from the way in which such a notion had been used by "theosophists" and "spiritualists":

> These statements concerned the nature of aura. Everything I said on the subject was directed polemically against the theosophists, whose inexperience and ignorance I found highly repugnant.[61] And I contrasted three aspects of genuine aura—though by no means schematically—with the conventional and banal ideas of the theosophists. First, genuine aura appears in all things, not just in certain kinds of things, as people imagine. Second, the aura undergoes changes, which can be quite fundamental, with every movement the aura–wreathed object makes. Third, genuine aura can in no sense be thought of as a spruced–up version of the magic rays beloved of spiritualists and described and illustrated in vulgar works of mysticism. On the contrary, the characteristic feature of genuine aura is ornament, an ornamental halo [*eine ornamentale Umzirkung*], in which the object or being is enclosed as in a case. Perhaps nothing gives such a clear idea of aura as Van Gogh's late paintings, in which one could say that the aura appears to have been painted together with the various objects.[62]

Hashish—presented by Benjamin as a "preparation", a *Präparat*,[63] a term very close to *Apparat*—plays a crucial role in this perspective. The state of intoxication it induces, the heightened sensibility one acquires

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[60] Walter Benjamin, *Main Features of My Second Impression of Hashish*, in Id., *On Hashish*, transl. by Howard Eiland and Others, with an introductory essay by Marcus Boon, Cambridge (Mass.)—London (England): The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006, p. 27.
[61] On Benjamin's views on theosophy and occultism, see *Light from Obscurantists* (1932), a review of Hans Liebstoeckl's *Die Geheimwissenschaften im Lichte unserer Zeit*: SW2.2, pp. 653–655.
[62] Id., *Hashish, Beginning of March 1930*, in *On Hashish,* cit., p. 58 (also SW2.1, pp. 327–28).
[63] Walter Benjamin, *Hashish, Beginning of March 1930*, in *On Hashish*, cit., p. 57.

under its effects, alter the spatio–temporal coordinates of our sensory per-
ception and make us aware of that specific atmospheric *density* of the *Me-
dium* that is the aura. If the *Medium* is the *milieu* in which sensory percep-
tion "occurs and is organized", and if the aura is "a strange tissue (or
weave, *Gespinst*) of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance,
however near it may be"—as we read, with slight variations, in the *Little
History of Photography* and in the different versions of the artwork essay,
in which the definition of aura is presented in reference to a meditative
experience of nature, the experience of an atmosphere through "breathing"
and distant viewing[64]—then the intoxication produced by hashish is a way
of discovering new coordinates and new layers of this spatially extended
Medium. Just like Gautier and Baudelaire in the mid–nineteenth century,
in his writings on hashish, Benjamin insists on the fact that the drug leads
us into an "intermediate realm" [Zwischenreich] that changes profoundly
our experience of time and space: under its effects, "you start to play with
spaces in general",[65] objects are "loosened […] and lured […] from their
accustomed world […] and inserted […] quickly in a new one".[66] Percep-
tion is "more stratified and richer in spaces",[67] and one experiences the
strange feeling that Benjamin calls "the colportage phenomenon of space:
we simultaneously perceive all the events that might conceivably have
taken place" in a determinate space.[68]

   All these effects are similar to what Benjamin describes in the artwork
essay as the "optical unconscious", and this confirms the legitimate pres-
ence of hashish among the entities capable of altering the "*Medium* of per-

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[64] "While resting on a summer afternoon, to trace a range of mountains on the
horizon, or a branch that throws its shadow on the observer—this is what it means
to breathe the aura of those mountains, that branch": *Little History of Photography*,
SW2.2 p. 518; "second version", SW3, pp. 104–105; "third version", p. 255.

[65] Id., *Main Features of My Second Impression of Hashish*, in *On Hashish*, cit., p.
23.

[66] Ibid., p. 27. The fact that hashish changes our perception of time and space is
underlined both by Gautier and by Baudelaire, who in *Les Paradis artificiels* wri-
tes that "le haschisch crée l'exagération non seulement de l'individu, mais aussi de
la circonstance et du milieu", the "milieu ambiant" and adds that under the effects
of the drug one feels a state of slow "evaporation" that diffuses the subject in space
(Œuvres complètes, p. 571, 575). Diaphanous materials and substances like "nu-
ages", "vapeurs", "atmosphères", "trames de gaze" and "eaux fuyantes" are men-
tioned by Baudelaire throughout his essay in order to describe the state of intoxica-
tion produced by hashish.

[67] Id., *Arcades Project*, fragment P1a, 2, p. 518.

[68] Id., *Main Features of My Second Impression of Hashish*, in *On Hashish*, cit., p.
27.

ception". Just as the *Apparate* of photography and cinema are capable of unveiling, through techniques such as the close–up and the *ralenti*, a "space informed by the unconscious",[69] the *Präparat* of hashish alters our sensory experience and enhances our capacity for feeling the different densities of the *Medium*. Hashish is therefore a crucial element of Benjamin's media theory, just like photography and cinema.

4. Benjamin's concept of *Medium* and the tradition of the *media diaphana*

The conclusion we may draw at the end of this synthetic review of the different meanings that Benjamin assigns to the term *Medium* is that in his writings the term indicates neither a technical instrument, nor a form of representation, nor a means of communication, nor the vast domain that since the early 1920s has been defined with the English term "mass media"—radio, film, television, newspapers, the press.[70] Instead the term *Medium* indicates in Benjamin first, a series of different realms (color, the pictorial mark, language, criticism, memory) in which some kind of material, cognitive, or discursive mediation occurs, and then, in the unpublished fragment from 1920, the *Little History of Photography*, and the artwork essay, the "*Medium* of perception": the environment, the *milieu*, the *Umwelt* in which perception is configured and organized by a series of steadily evolving technical *Apparate*.[71]

Benjamin's understanding of *Medium* is similar to the way in which the term was used by other authors writing during the 1920s and 1930s, and differs sharply from the meaning the English term "medium" acqui-

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[69] "Second version", SW3, p. 117; "third version", SW4, p. 266.

[70] The first occurrence of the term "mass media", according to the Oxford English Dictionary, can be found in Noble T. Praigg, *Advertising and Selling*, London: William Heinemann, 1923. The use of the term became widespread in sociologically oriented communication studies only during the second half of the 1940s: see *Medienkultur der 50er Jahre. Diskursgeschichte der Medien nach 1945*, hg. von Irmela Schneider und Peter Spangenberg, Opladen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002.

[71] As Miriam Bratu Hansen writes: "Benjamin's concept of medium […] cannot be conflated with the post–McLuhan equation of the term with technological medium, let alone with a means of communication. Rather, it proceeds from an older philosophical usage (at least since Hegel and Herder) referring to an in–between substance or agency—such as language, writing, thinking, memory—that mediates and constitutes meaning; it resonates no less with esoteric and spiritualist conocations pivoting on an embodied medium's capacity of communing with the dead" (*Cinema and Experience*, cit., p. 108)

red, between the 1930s and the 1940s, in the writings of authors theorizing the *medium specificity* of art forms such as painting and cinema. If Rudolf Arnheim, in the English translation of his *Film als Kunst*, can develop his theory of film as an artistic form on the basis of an analysis of the "basic elements of the film medium",[72] which are different from those of other "media" such as painting, music, literature, and dance, and if Clement Greenberg, in his *Towards a Newer Laocoön* (1940), can define "purity" in painting as "the willing acceptance of the limitations of the medium",[73] it is because in both authors, the English term "medium" is used in order to indicate the physical properties of a material support and the representational possibilities considered to be *specific* to that support and its related techniques.[74]

Authors such as László Moholy–Nagy and Béla Balázs, meanwhile, never used the German term *Medium* in order to indicate photography or cinema. These are referred to in their writings through terms such as *Apparat* (apparatus, device), *Mittel* (means), *Technik* (technique), and *Maschine* (machine), while *Medium* has the same spatial, environmental, atmospheric meaning that we find in Benjamin.

In Béla Balázs' *Der sichtbare Mensch* [Visible Man] (1924), for example, cinema is presented as an *Apparat* (the *Kinoapparat*), a *Mittel*, a *Maschine*, an "art", even a new "sense organ", but never as a *Medium*. This term, instead, is used by Balázs to refer to those "atmospheres", those "affective tonalities" (the untranslatable *Stimmungen*) or even that *Aura* that only cinema can record and reveal on the screen:

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[72] Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* [first translated in 1933 in a shorter version entitled *Film*], Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press, 1957, p. 9 (significantly, the term "medium" does not appear in the original German, in which the phrase reads as such: "*die elementare Materialeigenschaften des Filmbildes*"; see *Film als Kunst*, mit einem Nachwort von Kalr Prümm und zeitgenössichen Rezensionen, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2002, p. 24).

[73] See, for ex., Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art*, Berkeley—Los Angeles—London: University of California Press, p. 127. Clement Greenberg, *Towards a Newer Laocoon* (1940), in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4 vol., ed. by John O'Brian, Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986, vol. I (1939–1944), pp. 23–41.

[74] Rosalind Krauss sums up the normative dimension of such a theory of medium specificity in her *A Voyage on the North Sea*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1999, p. 26: "in order to sustain artistic practice, a medium must be a supporting structure, generative of a set of conventions, some of which, in assuming the medium itself as their subject, will be wholly 'specific' to it, thus producing an experience of their own necessity."

> Atmosphere is to be sure the soul of every art. It is the air and the aroma that pervade every work of art, and that lend distinctiveness to a medium [*Medium*] and a world. This atmosphere is like the nebulous primal matter that condenses into individual shapes. It is the substance common to the most disparate works, the ultimate reality of every art. Once atmosphere is present, specific defects in individual works cannot do fundamental damage. The question of the 'origins' of this special atmosphere is thus always the question of the deep source of every art.[75]

We find a similar understanding of *Medium* and *Apparat* in the writings of László Moholy–Nagy. In *Malerei Fotografie Film* [Painting Photography Film] (1925, 1927), photography and film are presented as *Apparate,* whose aim is that of configuring in different ways that essential "compositional means" or "factor" that is light in order to produce different forms of "light composition" [Lichtgestaltung]. The term "medium" appears in a prominent position in an article published two years earlier, in English, in the journal *Broom*. The article is entitled *Light: A Medium of Plastic Expression*, and in it, Moholy–Nagy uses the term "apparatus" to refer to the "photographic apparatus"—the series of material and technical elements (sensitive plate, lenses, mirror arrangements, etc.) that allow for the production of photographic images, with or without a camera—while the term "medium" is used in order to indicate light as a "plastic medium" that can be moulded, configured, and recorded in different ways by the photographic apparatus. Even though Moholy–Nagy wrote this article in English and not in German, the distinction between "apparatus" and "medium" is clearly based on the same distinction between *Apparat* and *Medium* that we have found in Benjamin and Balázs, and light, a spatially extended, atmospheric entity, is here presented as a "medium of expression", or "medium of composition", that can be "filtered, reflected or refracted" through different materials such as "water, oil, acids, crystal, metal, glass, tissue, etc".[76] In the later *Von Material zu Architektur* (1929), conceived as a presentation of Moholy–Nagy's teaching methods at the Bauhaus, light is presented as a material that can connect the surface of representation with the surrounding atmosphere:

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[75] Béla Balázs, *Der sichtbare Mensch, oder die Kultur des Films* (1924), Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2001, p. 30. On the concept of "atmosphere" in Béla Balázs' *Visible Man*, see Antonio Somaini, "Il volto delle cose. *Physiognomie, Stimmung* e *Atmosphäre* nella teoria del cinema di Béla Balázs", in Tonino Griffero – Antonio Somaini, *Atmosfere*, "Rivista di Estetica", n. 33 (2006), pp. 143–162.
[76] László Moholy–Nagy, *Light: A Medium of Plastic Expression*, *Broom*, New York, IV, n. 4, March 1923, pp. 283–284. See also the later *Light: A New Medium of Expression*, *Architectural Forum*, Chicago, May 1939.

the reflections and refractions bring the surroundings into the picture sur-
face, attaining the surface flexibility striven for ever since the first days of
impressionism. […]

The surface becomes a part of the atmosphere [atmosfäre], of the at-
mospheric background, in that it sucks up the light phenomena produced
outside itself—a vivid contrast to the classical conception of the picture:
the illusion of an open window.

This stage in a manner marks the close of impressionism; it represents
the mastery of the surface, not for plastic but for clearly spatial ends.[77]

The use of *Medium* by authors such as Balázs, Moholy–Nagy and Ben-
jamin is similar to that which we find in other German authors writing
during the 1920s and 1930s about the nature of our sensory experience of
space outside the field of photography, film, and art theory. We may men-
tion here the biologist and zoologist Jakob Johann von Uexküll who, in his
Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere (1909, 1921), uses the term *Medium* to
refer to the spatial configurations (material articulations, atmospheric den-
sities, fluid currents) of the *Umwelt*, the living environment in which every
animal perceives and acts;[78] the philosopher and graphologist Ludwig Kla-
ges, who in his *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* writes about "the *Me-
dium* of the perceptual space";[79] the neurologist, psychiatrist, and phenom-
enologist Erwin Straus, who in his *Vom Sinn der Sinne* (1935) uses the
term *Medium* in order to distinguish the geometrically organized "objec-
tive *Medium*" of "perception" from the loosely structured, lived space of
"sensation",[80] and finally, the *Gestalt* psychologist Fritz Heider, who in
1926 published an essay entitled *Ding und Medium* [Thing and Medium]
that plays a major role in this perspective.[81] In it, he uses the term *Medium*

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[77] Id., *Von Material zu Architektur* (1929), hrsg. von Hans M. Wingler, Berlin:
Gebr. Mann 2001, p. 90 (English translation *The New Vision* (1938), Mineola
(N.Y.): Dover, 1975, p. 86).
[78] Jakob Johann von Uexküll, *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere* (1921), hrsg. von
Florian Mildenberger und Bernd Herrmann, Berlin – Heidelberg: Springer, 2014,
pp. 63 and 187. (I thank Birgit Schneider for having pointed out to me von
Uexküll's use of *Medium*). Von Uexküll distinguishes between two aspects of the
Umwelt, the "perceptual world" [*Merkwelt*] and the "action world" [*Wirkungs-
welt*], and Benjamin's use of the term *Merkwelt* in his *Doctrine of the Similar* (see
above, n.116) may be considered a reference to this distinction.
[79] Ludwig Klages, *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele*, cit., p. 633 and 1025.
[80] Erwin Straus, *Vom Sinn der Sinne* (1935), Berlin – Heidelberg: Springer, 1956,
pp. 332–335.
[81] Fritz Heider, *Ding und Medium*, mit einem Vorwort von Dirk Baecker, Berlin:
Kadmos, 2005 (English translation *Thing and Medium*, in *On Perception, Event,
Structure, and Psychological Environment: Selected Papers*, Madison (CT): Inter-

to explain how we identify causal relations in the world surrounding us by freely distinguishing between what we perceive as a *loosely structured* "ground"—the *Medium*—and the more *strictly structured* configurations that we consider as *Dinge*, "things". In this constructivist approach to our perception of the world around us, light and sound waves, water, glass, fog, and air are indicated by Heider as examples of the different *mediating* substances that constitute the general *Medium*, the "sphere"[82] in which our experience takes place. According to Heider's perspective—which in many ways can be compared with Benjamin's—the *Medium* is a dynamic, plastic *sensorium*, within which "things" appear and disappear according to the different viewpoints and intentions that structure our interaction with the material world.

Examples like these show how in the German context—in a similar way to what was happening in the English one, if we consider the meaning of *medium* in the writings of authors such as T.S. Eliot, John Dewey, and William James, who in his *The Meaning of Truth* (1914) defines the "medium" as the "experienceable environment […] connecting knower with known"[83]—the term *Medium* was still associated with a long, post–Aristotelian tradition that interpreted the Latin term *medium* as indicating both the intermediary realm in which our sensory experience takes place and the different in–between substances that, with their various densities and various degrees of transparency, constitute this realm.[84]

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national Universities Press, 1959).

[82] Ibid., p. 51.

[83] On the meaning of *medium* in T.S. Eliot and William James, see David W. Trotter, "Eliot and the Idea of 'Media'", in *The Edinburgh Companion to T.S. Eliot and the Arts*, ed. Francis Dickey and John Morgenstern, forthcoming from Edinburgh University Press in 2016 (I thank David W. Trotter for his insightful suggestions on this subject). The passage by William James on "medium" as "experienceable environment" is in William James, "The Function of Cognition", *The Meaning of Truth: A Sequel to 'Pragmatism'* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1914), 1–42, p. 41. On the meaning of "medium" in John Dewey, see the chapter "The Common Substance of the Arts" of his *Art and Experience*, in which the "media" are the sensory organs (e.g. the eye) and the substances (e.g. the colors) through which we "touch the world", as if through some kind of "tentacle" (*Art as Experience* (1934) New York: Perigee, 1980, pp. 195–197).

[84] For the use of *Medium* in the German domain, see *Medientheorie 1888–1933*, cit. In their introduction (p.12), the editors confirm how the German concept of *Medium* was never used in the 1920s and 1930s in order to indicate what today we consider as "media", so much so that for the period they analyze (1888–1933) one can only speak of "*Medientheorien avant la lettre*" (p.16). Significantly, the definition of *Medium* given by the dictionary *Der Große Brockhaus* in 1932 does not mention media of communication, but only physical *Medien* such as "rays of light"

The history of this idea of *medium* begins with the notions of *diaphanes* and *metaxy* in Aristotle's treatise *De Anima*.[85] According to Aristotle, vision cannot happen in a void: in order for vision to be possible, there has to be an intermediary substance between the human body and the objects perceived, the *diaphanes*, which is colorless and not visible *per se*. Once the *diaphanes* passes from the state of potency to that of act, it moves from darkness to light, and it can be activated by color, then transmitting the action of color towards the human sensorium [aistheterion].[86] The *diaphanes* involved in the process of vision is just one of the several manifestations of the *metaxy*,[87] a term with which Aristotle refers to all those necessary, intermediary entities that make sensory experience possible by transmitting the forms of external objects to the sensory organs: diaphanous substances like air and water, for example, can be a *metaxy* for seeing, hearing, and smelling; saliva and other liquids can be a *metaxy* for tasting, while the flesh of the human body is a *metaxy* for touching. The Greek term *metaxy* would be later translated into Latin as *medium* by Michael Scotus in his translation, around 1225, of Averroes' *Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis De Anima*: a treatise in which the *medium* becomes the condition of possibility not only of sensation, but also of thought. This passage is crucial, because the *medium* becomes now the realm in which *experience* in its entirety takes place.[88]

In Medieval and Modern optics, the Aristotelian theory of the *diaphanes* developed into the theory of the so–called *media diaphana*: the various diaphanous substances, like air, clouds, smoke, water, fluids, glass,

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and spiritualist or occultist *Medien* performing parapsychological activities.

[85] On the history of the concept of *Medium* up to the beginning of the twentieth century, see Stefan Hoffmann, *Geschichte des Medienbegriffs*, Hamburg: Meiner, 2002; Id., "Medienbegriff", in Jens Schröter (hrsg.), *Handbuch Medienwissenschaft*, Stuttgart – Weimar: Metzler, 2014, pp. 13–20.

[86] Aristotle, *De anima*, B 7, 418 b, 5–6, and 419 a, 15.

[87] Ibid., 419 a, 20–21. For an analysis of the different "figures of mediality" in Aristotle (indicated by terms such as *mesotēs*, *meson*, and *metaxy* in the different fields of ethics, physics, biology, logic, and the theory of knowledge), see Emmanuel Alloa, *Metaxu. Figures de la médialité chez Aristote*, in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 2009/02, n° 62, pp. 247–262.

[88] I thank Emanuele Coccia for his insightful suggestions on this topic. On Averroes' understanding of the *medium*, see Emanuele Coccia, *La trasparenza delle immagini. Averroè e l'averroismo,* introduzione di Giorgio Agamben, Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2005. For a contemporary reinterpretation of this idea of *medium*, see Emanuele Coccia, *La vie sensible*, French transl. by M. Rueff, Paris: Payot et Rivages, 2010 (English transl. forthcoming: *The Sensible Life*, transl. by Stuart Scott, New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

and crystals, that—with all their different states and their different degrees of transparency and consistency—condition our sensory perception. In the case of vision, the *media diaphana* allow the passage of light rays entering the eye or projected out of the eye, according to the different theories of vision, but also influence their trajectory, giving place to the different phenomena of reflection and refraction. The *medium* is therefore not a neutral, intermediary realm, but rather a diversified and *active* spatial environment that configures in different ways our sensory experience. It is from this perspective that, in his *Opticks* (1704), Newton distinguishes between different types of "aethereal" or "ambient medium"—"transparent", "pellucid", "elastick", "fluid", "quiescent", "vibrating", "uniform", "refracting" or "reflecting"—up to the point of identifying the "aethereal medium" as the "sensorium of God".[89] Throughout the nineteenth century, traces of the idea of *media diaphana* can be found in authors writing in English, French, and German. To name just a few examples, in 1816 the English critic William Hazlitt wrote of Turner's paintings that they were "representations not properly of the objects of nature, as of the *medium* through which they are seen… they are pictures of the elements of air, earth, and water".[90] In France, the term *milieu* and the expressions *ambiance* or *milieu ambiant*, closely connected to *medium* and *ambient medium*, are used by authors such as Taine, Geoffroy Saint–Hilaire, Balzac and Zola in order to indicate different kinds of social, biological, or atmospheric environment,[91] while Bergson uses *milieu* to describe the relation between the body and its surroundings.

In Germany, authors writing within the context of Idealist philosophy and Romanticism use the term *Medium* in a sense that is particularly important in order to understand the meaning assigned to it by Benjamin. While Hegel develops his entire philosophical system around the idea that every historical or gnoseological process unfolds dialectically through some kind of "mediation"— "sublation", *Aufhebung*, is a form of "mediation", *Vermittlung*—in the writings of authors such as Schiller, Herder, Novalis, Brentano, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Wieland, Ritter, Fichte, Schelling, Feuerbach, and Schleiermacher, the term *Medium* appears in a series of expressions and metaphors that refer back to the tradition of *media di-*

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[89] On the history of the notions of *medium*, *milieu*, and *ambiance,* and on Newton's *sensorium Dei*, see L. Spitzer, "*Milieu* and *Ambiance*. An Essay in Historical Semantics*"*, in "Philosophy and Phenomenological Research", vol.3, n.1 (September 1942), pp. 1–42; vol. 3, n.2 (December 1942), pp. 169–218.

[90] William Hazlitt, "On Imitation", in *The Round Table*, Introduction by Catherine MacDonald MacLean, London: Dent, 1969, p. 76.

[91] See Leo Spitzer, "Milieu and Ambiance", cit.

aphana and describe the variability of the conditions in which perception takes place.[92] The *Medium* is here a substance analogous to clear air or fog, a smooth glass or a refracting prism, a deforming lens or a colored filter, a shining crystal or a viscous fluid, a chemical substance or an invisible (electro)–magnetic field. It may be either transparent or opaque, bright or dark, colored or colorless, pure or impure, but its nature is always somehow *active*: it is an instrument or a source of clarification or confusion, illumination or disruption, truth or falsehood. To mention just a few examples, Herder, in his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–91), revives the ancient theory of the "ether" and describes a world in which "the *Medium* of the air" [das Medium der Luft] is the space–filling "general vehicle of things" and of "spiritual forces", so much so that human beings are, bodily and spiritually, "pupils of the air" who live in air as if it were "the organ of deity", a notion that clearly refers to Newton's *sensorium Dei.*[93] A few years later Schelling, in his *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* (1797), theorizes an active nature moved by the forces of magnetism, electricity, and chemical processes**,** and postulates the existence of elastic and omnipresent "fluids" that carry such forces and are "the *Medium* in which we all live, that surrounds and penetrates everything, and that is everywhere present".[94]

A different, metaphorical use of *Medium* can be found in Clemens von Brentano's novel *Godwi* (1800), in which the metaphor of *media diaphana* is employed to define the essence of the "romantic", a "mediated" attitude towards the world that can be compared to the function carried out by the lenses of binoculars [Perspectiv] equipped with "colored glass", bringing objects closer yet imbuing them with their own color: "Everything that acts as a mediator [Mittler] between our gaze and a distant object, everything that brings the distant object closer while bestowing on it something that is his, is romantic. […] Romantic is therefore the binocular, or even more the color of the glass, and the determination of the object through the form of the glass".[95]

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[92] See Stefann Hoffmann, *Geschichte des Medienbegriffs*, cit., pp. 56–107.

[93] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, in Id., *Werke in zehn Bänden*, hrsg. von Martin Bollacher und Günter Arnold, Bd. 6, Frankfurt a/M: 1989, pp. 37–38 (quoted in S. Hoffmann, *Geschichte des Medienbegriffs*, pp. 74–75).

[94] Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling, *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur*, in Id., *Werke,* Bd. 5, Historisch–Kritische Ausgabe, Hans Michael Baumgartner (Hg.), Stuttgart: 1994, pp. 177 (in S. Hoffmann, *Geschichte des Medienbegriffs*, cit., p. 78).

[95] C. Brentano, *Godwi*, in *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, J. Behrens (Hg.), Bd. 16 (Stuttgart 1978), p. 314 (in S. Hoffmann, *Geschichte des Medienbegriffs*, p. 98).

Benjamin's concept of the "*Medium* of perception" needs to be interpreted within the context of the centuries–long tradition of the *media diaphana*, a tradition which continued in the second half of the twentieth century, intertwining and overlapping in different ways with the theories that dealt with media as technical instruments performing different operations (recording, storing, transmitting, etc.), or as means of (mass) communication. We find elements of this tradition in studies that emphasize the material, spatial, environmental, geological, meteorological, atmospheric, "aesthetic"[96] dimension of media: in Gilbert Simondon's idea of a *milieu associé*;[97] in Marshall McLuhan's understanding of "media" as an "environment" with different hot and cold temperatures, a vast realm in which human sensory organs are extended through a technical *sensorium*;[98] in Foucault's idea, in "L'Archéologie du savoir" (1969), that every field of knowledge is constituted by a set of discourses and techniques that produce some form of *quadrillage*, of "partitioning" of the perceptual field;[99] in Niklas Luhmann's distinction between *Medium* and *Form*, directly inspired by Fritz Heider;[100] in Jacques Rancière's notion of *partage du sensible*,[101] and finally, in the various, contemporary investigations on media environments, "media geology", "media meteorology", or "mediarology",[102] a vast research field which appears to be connected in various

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[96] Both Stefan Hoffmann ("Medienbegriff", cit., and *Geschichte des Medienbegriffs*, cit.) and Dieter Mersch (*Medientheorie. Zur Einführung*) refer to the tradition of the *media diaphana* as to the tradition of an "aisthetischer Medienbegriff".

[97] On Gilbert Simondon's idea of *"milieu associé"*, see his *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (1958), Paris: Aubier, 1989, in particular pp. 61–65 ("L'individuation technique").

[98] See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man* (1964), critical edition ed. by W. Terrence Gordon, Berkeley (CA): Gingko Press, 2011; Id. – Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (1967), produced by Jerom Agel, Berkeley (CA.): Gingko Press, 1996.

[99] Michel Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir* (1969), Paris: Gallimard, 1969, p. 50.

[100] N. Luhmann, *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt a. M.: 1995, pp. 165–214.

[101] Jacques Rancière, *Le Partage du sensible: esthétique et politique*, Paris: La Fabrique, 2000. See also *Le Malaise dans l'esthétique*, Paris: Galilée, 2004.

[102] On the role of *media environments* defining different forms of moving image viewing, see Francesco Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy*, cit. On *media geology*, see Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015; on *media meteorology* or "mediarology", see *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, ed. by W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. vii–xxii ("Introduction"). For an interpretation of "cultural technologies" in relation to Benjamin's *Medium/Apparat* dynamics, see Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*, trans. by Geoffrey Winthrop–Young, New York: Fordham UP, 2015.

ways to the same tradition of the *media diaphana* to which belongs Benjamin's concept of a "*Medium* of perception".

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CHAPTER FIVE

PHILOSOPHY, IMAGE AND THE MIRROR OF MACHINES

ADRIANO FABRIS

1. Thought and image

First, a word about the title of this essay. It makes a (quite explicit) reference to Richard Rorty's famous work *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, in which the American philosopher radically questions an idea that has animated the philosophical debate since antiquity, namely, that thinking performs its function by representing the world, i.e. by providing an adequate image of the world.[1] In critiquing the notion of thought as representation, Rorty not only gets to grips with some of the presuppositions of empiricism, but also draws on issues raised by continental hermeneutics. In fact, it is no coincidence that as early as 1938 Heidegger made a series of critical observations on the "age of the world picture".[2] In this essay I will move in the opposite direction and distance myself from the line of thought developed by Heidegger and Rorty. The reference to images can by no means be seen as a negative element as far as the elaboration of philosophy is concerned. Philosophical research has always availed itself of metaphors and images for expressing its process of thinking. In fact, the elaboration of a philosophical position cannot do without images, it cannot avoid relying on them.

The very word "concept" (in German, *Begriff*)—the concept which, according to Hegel absorbs within itself, by means of the power of thinking, every form of representation—refers in its turn to something which

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[1] R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), Princeton U.P., Princeton, NJ, 2009. On this subject see also J. Tartaglia, *Rorty and the Mirror of Nature*, Routledge Philosophy Guidebooks, Routledge, New York 2007.
[2] M. Heidegger, *Die Zeit des Weltbildes*, now in *Holzwege (1935–1946)*, Gesamtausgabe 5, hrsg. v. F.–W. von Herrmann, Klostermann, Frankfurt a. M. 1977.

can be represented: the gesture of holding together, of embracing, of grabbing [Greifen].

Therefore, it is not true that *logos* has gained mastery over *mythos* and dispensed with it.[3] This is far from true, even in an age of technological dominance such as ours. Of course, it has attempted to do so since its origins, since the birth of philosophy in classical antiquity. On many occasions in the history of thinking it actually appeared that *logos* was winning out. But this was only an illusion. Images continue to guide our thinking. What is needed, therefore, is a critique of these images and not their elimination. The formulation of such a critique should place us in the position to make a more conscious use of images. This also is one of philosophy's goals.

When Wittgenstein, in his *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, makes the famous claim that the aim of his philosophy is to contribute to the liberation of thinking from the captivating power and influence of certain conceptions, he speaks about the need to show the fly (philosophy) the way out of the bottle (the representations which are likely to mislead it).[4] Even Wittgenstein, it turns out, uses metaphors. It appears that he cannot avoid doing so. He creates an image in the self–same moment in which he defends the capacity of philosophy to assume a critical stance towards all images in order to free itself from them. So it seems we are unable to find our way out of images, of our relationship with them, of the role they play in our thinking and conversations.

2. The image of machines as a mirror

However, once an explanation of my approach has been provided, it is still necessary to ask another question: what, exactly, is the relationship between the machines we can build and the world we can represent? The an-

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[3] On this topic see the following essays, which draw on Hans Blumenberg's monumental works: A. Fabris, P. Lanceros (eds.), *Filosofie dell'immagine*, "Teoria" (with essays by F. Duque, V. Vitiello, A. Leyte, U. Perone, P. Lanceros, A. Ortiz-Osés, F. Vercellone, J.L. Villacañas, F. Bayón), Edizioni ETS, Pisa 2010; A. Fabris, A. Lossi, U. Perone (Hrsg.), *Bild als Prozess. Neue Perspektiven einer Phänomenologie des Sehens* (with contributions by U. Perone, H.R. Sepp, V. Vitiello, A. Hilt, A. Lossi, C. Nielsen, O. Breidbach, A. Leyte, H. Vetter, D. Barbarić, F. Duque, P. Lanceros, A. Fabris, L. Wiesing), Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 2011; G. Cantillo, C. Ciancio, A. Trione, F. Vercellone (eds.), *Ontologia dell'immagine*, Aracne, Rome 2012.

[4] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Suhrkamp. Frankfurt am Main. 2003, 309.

swer becomes clear as soon as we pause to consider the issue. If technology is one of the ways in which the human being interacts with the world,[5] and if machines are the instruments of this technological agency, then the self–same machines can also be viewed as modes, forms, even as symbols of human expression; in a word, as something which reflects our image and projects it onto the world.

In this perspective, machines are considered an expression of the human being's thinking and agency. This, precisely, is the reason why humanity is able to reflect itself in machines, that is to say, to better understand its own nature through the machines it is capable of producing and putting to use. From this point of view, machines are images which have to be decoded: images of what the human being is and wants to be. Bearing these features in mind, we could attempt to write a history of machines. The plough, the clock, the steam engine, the car, the computer: all can be viewed as increasingly complex examples of what the human being does and is. Each instrument corresponds to an image of the human being and of the world. It is precisely this image that is reflected and objectified in machines.[6]

But this is only one side of the problem. Actually, the relation of mirroring is rather more complex. I will return to this later. First, it is necessary to understand what characterises machines as such; that is to say, insofar as they are manifestations of technology. In order to do so, I will initially draw on Ortega y Gasset. As is well known, the Spanish philosopher divides the history of technology into three main periods which respectively refer to the technology of chance, the technology of the craftsman, and the technology of the technician. The first refers to casual discoveries made while using or creating specific tools. The second is related to the ability to organise and foresee—by means of technology—the productive abilities of human beings. In the third, a symptomatic inversion takes place: instead of viewing tools as extensions of the human being (who is responsible for the way they are used), it is the human being that helps the machine and depends on it.[7]

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[5] The human being does so in a way which differentiates it radically from all other animals, as explained in the last century by Arnold Gehlen and Helmut Plessner. See, for instance, Gehlen's *Der Mensch. Seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt*, Gesamtausgabe 1, Klostermann, Frankfurt a/M. 1990 and Plessner's *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, De Gruyter, Berlin 1975.

[6] See V. Marchis, *Storia delle macchine. Tre millenni di cultura tecnologica*, Laterza, Roma–Bari 2010.

[7] J. Ortega y Gasset, *Meditación de la técnica y otros ensayos sobre ciencia y filosofía*, Alianza, Madrid 1982.

On closer inspection, we see that Ortega still presupposes a model of knowledge which is grounded in Aristotle's first book of *Metaphysics*.[8] In this work, Aristotle theorises the subordination of technological knowledge to science and, consequently, of the technician to the scientist. Today, however, things are very different. What we are facing today are "new technologies", or, to be precise, something which is qualitatively new. Today, the very same relationship between thinking and the technological image of the world has undergone a thorough transformation. The reason for this is that technique, having been transmuted into technology, has achieved a previously unknown autonomy. Let us now examine these aspects in depth.

3. Why do we consider new technology something "new"?

In what sense does technology allow us to really experience newness and face the emergence of something radically different from anything else in the history of technique? Why do we speak today about "new technologies"? By "new technologies" I do not mean the ones which emerge and impose themselves upon our lives merely as linear developments of previous techniques, but rather the ones which represent real qualitative improvement. In this respect, I would like to foreground four major issues.

The first issue concerns the fact that the newness of new technologies reveals a feature of today's technological world; namely, that it overthrows the traditional relationship between science and technique as it was conceived in antiquity. Today—and this has been increasingly so throughout the modern age—technology does not merely present itself as a practical, applicative consequence of a scientific, autonomously formulated doctrine. Rather, it is something which defines the field of science, which orients and guides its development. In short, the very same technologies provide the sciences with perspectives for in–depth understanding and with the resources for realising their desired objectives. This allows for no distinction between "theory" and "practice", between a theoretical stage and a consequent period of practical application, because technological practice itself embodies theoretical reasoning. These two fields of human reflection and human activity are interlinked through a specific circularity. The Aristotelian model of the relationship between science and technology, to which I referred earlier in this essay, is no longer functional. Technology has become autonomous. I will shortly return to this point.

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[8] See in particular *Metaphysics* A 1.

The second issue, the fact that we speak about "newness" when referring to "new technologies" draws attention to the power these technologies have in terms of their ability to render indistinguishable "natural" from "artificial". As a point of fact, the new technologies aim to make everything artificial and, thus, controllable and open to manipulation. This condition presupposes a reductionist perspective, a unitary framework such as the one provided by cybernetics. According to this perspective, the human can be reduced to the animal; the animal can be correlated—as far as its structure is concerned—to a reproducible and controllable mechanism. Indeed, since its beginning with Norbert Wiener, cybernetics has attempted to carry out this project.[9] In other words, what is at stake here is the very notion of the "natural". The natural, as such, loses its consistency; it is bound to turn into something else. It matters only insofar as it can be manipulated. Hence, what is delineated is a state of *indifference* between the natural and the artificial.

As a third point, it should be noted that the practice of applying the adjective "new" to "new technologies" reveals their ambition to exercise full control over nature. What is more, it reflects the possibility that this could really happen. What emerges here, precisely in relation to the need—embodied by technology—to exercise control, is the problem of responsibility. Who is responsible for what is entailed in the use of technology? The answer must be formulated on various levels. It is a question of individual and collective responsibility; a responsibility belonging to different competence levels (e.g. of scientists and professionals); a responsibility associated with the various ways in which a specific technology is put to use. However, once we introduce the topic of responsibility, there arises an ethical question.[10] The paradox we are faced with is that the more technological potential increases—together with its claim to control specific processes—the less it is possible to completely control its consequences. Indeed, this is one of the reasons for the origin of applied ethics. In short: the predominance of new technologies, which are born of the need to exercise full control over the processes of concern to us and to thoroughly foresee them (something for which we are ready to abdicate our initiative and even to support machines, becoming thus a mere tool that enables their functioning), generates the *paradox* of losing control and of increasing the aleatoriness of chance.

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[9] N. Wiener, *Cybernetics: Or the Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (1948; 1961), Martino Publishing, Eastford, CT, 2013.

[10] I cannot go into this at length here. I have examined the issue in detail in my *Etica delle nuove tecnologie*, La Scuola, Brescia 2012, by referring to Roboethics and Internet Ethics.

This brings us to the fourth and last aspect that I wish to stress. The most specific characteristics of new technologies, the feature that really differentiates them from the techniques of the past, consists, as a point of fact, in their autonomy. Whereas technical tools cannot perform their functions without human agents and their use depends on whether a human being employs them or not (they are, therefore, controlled by and depend on the human being), new technologies are able to power themselves, to regulate themselves, to interact autonomously with their respective environments. Since they are in every way analogous to systems, they are able to incorporate into themselves and join together—in order to reach a specific goal—not only various technical tools, but also the self–same agency of human beings.

The difference between technique and technology lies in the fact that the former depends on the human being, as far as its activation and use is concerned, whereas the latter interacts autonomously with its environment and is able to make the action of the human being part of its own activities. That is why it is now possible to develop an ethics of technological artefacts such as, for instance, robots. And yet, in this way, the machine stops being a mere extension or reflection of the human being and becomes, in turn, a model: something the human being might wish to comply with.

4. Alice's looking glass

This is the crucial point. It is precisely because of its autonomous nature, its pretence of self–sufficiency and its ability to self–organise that technology has become something in which the human being can find its *Doppelgänger*.[11] In fact, what we are facing is not merely something created by us in our own image, but a reality which—precisely because it has emancipated itself and precisely because it is characterised by an autonomous structure—presents itself as a model for us to follow. Indeed, one could argue that today, machines have actually become our mirror. They perform this role in many different ways. Sometimes they reflect an image in which we can recognise ourselves. At other times they present us with a deformed image, which only produces anxiety and in which we cannot recognise ourselves at all. In a more constructive way, they can also drive

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[11] This aspect and the identification mechanisms it presupposes have been examined from a Freudian perspective, with a specific focus on the relationship between human beings and robots, in F. Scalzone and G. Tamburrini's essay *Human–robot Interaction and Psychoanalysis*, in "AI & Society. International Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Communication", 24, 1, August 2009.

us to improve our performance, to go through the mirror and enter into a world of wonders that is far more complex than the one depicted in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in order to reach a post–human dimension where improvement is not only grounded upon interaction, but on real integration between the living being and the technological apparatus.[12] Finally, machines are something which represents us only insofar as they assume a human form, as is the case with Disney's animated cartoons or Sony's robots.

So there are basically two ways in which a specular relationship between human beings and machines can be established. We can move in two directions in order to go through Alice's looking glass. The presupposition of this mirroring consists of the fact that human beings are viewed on the same plane as technologies. So, the unit of measurement with which the new devices must comply can, on the one hand, be represented by *us*: a reminiscence of the times when it was human beings who built them and used them for attaining their goals. On the other hand, we can *find in them* the perfection that we ourselves have not achieved and, by developing this relationship, aspire to do so.

Let us now attempt to examine these two aspects concurrently. In the first place, as we have already seen, machines are something in which we see the reflection of our image. We can mirror ourselves in them because we have built them and consider them to be at our service. Indeed, it is precisely because they are at our service that they have to be made in our own likeness. Now, I do not believe it is necessary to provide many examples of the trend to humanise—even if just to make them appear more friendly—the technological devices that we use: from the ornamentation that embellishes our mobile phones to the "faces" we think we recognise when we look at the nose of a car. If technique is one of the ways in which human beings express themselves and their relationship to the world and if machines are the means for this expression, then they can also embody the forms and symbols of various human expressions. They make manifest and reveal the thinking of men and women. This is precisely the reason why humanity is able to mirror itself, that is to say, to understand itself better through the machinery it builds.

However, this is only one aspect of the question. In this case, we see reflections on both sides of the mirror. In fact, we can both see ourselves in the machines (reading them as material images of the human) and experience the machines inside us, understand ourselves through the machines we build. We can do this because machines are not only made in our own

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[12] The post–human perspective is examined, for instance, in C. Wolfe, *What is Post–humanism?* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2010.

"image and likeness" as an extension and enhancement of human power, but they also have their own domain, are able to interact autonomously with us and can even be implanted in our body. It happens quite frequently nowadays. Think, for instance, about bypass surgery or other forms of implant material.

We are faced with ambiguity. On the one hand, machines reveal what we are: our tastes, our preferences, our unattainable hopes. On the other hand, technique, and technology even more so, changes the way we perceive the world: it changes the possibilities we have to experience it. The second case, the second way in which we can direct our gaze towards the mirror, the second perspective from which we can understand our relationship with technological tools, implies, as a prerequisite, a specific interpretative process, namely, that the characteristics of the human being are related to something which can be better explained—and, thus, controlled and manipulated—if it is conceived of as a mechanism. Yet, this mechanism finds its fullest expression not in a vital process, but in a device. The human being is therefore viewed as something that moulds itself to (or attempts to fit) a shape which is not really its own. As a consequence, technological tools end up embodying an ideal to which to aspire. In other words, it is not so much ourselves that we see in the mirror of technology as something we might—or maybe should—be.

This, in its completeness, is the dynamic of the mirror's reflection. This is the way in which the interchange of images between the human being and the machine occurs. According to this exchange, the machine is initially designed to adapt itself to the human being, but soon enough it becomes something to which men have to conform. This inversion of perspective was theorised, by Descartes, in the seventeenth century, when the human being was viewed, in contrast to "imperfect" animals, as a "perfect automaton". This passage presupposes a specific paradigm shift: from a paradigm which endorses the concept of the organism—a system whose parts are linked together by a common aim, thus leaving open the possibility of choice—to a paradigm which is based on the organisation of components and operates according to a standardised procedure.[13] In this case, the two images—the image of the human being and the image of the machine—end up merging into one and become an indistinct blur. In the end, the mirror's reflection leads to identification.

In conclusion, if the way in which the human being reflects itself in machines is to be interpreted as an attempt to conform to the rules which they—once they have become independent—lay down for themselves and

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[13] This thesis was advanced by Hans Jonas in his *Organismus und Freiheit. Ansätze zu einer philosophiscen Biologie*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1973.

for the world, then the experience we are having is not merely that of the "sorcerer's apprentice" (to use a metaphor employed in the twentieth century by Günther Anders in relation to new technologies).[14] What is at stake here is not only our diversity, interlinked with the legitimate fear of losing control over the consequences of the actions which we ourselves have triggered. It is much more than that. As a point of fact, it has been a while since we lost control. Technology is much more advanced than we can even conceive. So, where does this leave us? What can we do now? All we can do is to lay claim to our humanity from an ethical point of view. All we can do is to take upon ourselves the responsibility of both that which is really in our power and that which is no longer so, but which, in some aspects, we can still try to resist.

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[14] See. G. Anders, *Die Antiquierheit des Menschen*, 2 voll. Beck, München 2009.

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CHAPTER SIX

TECHNOSPHERE –
A NEW DIGITAL AESTHETICS?:
THE BODY AS EVENT, INTERACTIVITY
AND VISUALIZATION OF IDEAS

ŽARKO PAIĆ

Introduction

One thing that this discussion will attempt is to show the path towards the technosphere as a new discourse in the aesthetics of the age of digital currents. In this way, various concepts of science, technology, and art are linked with a view to revising the notions of art, aesthetics, and the spectator. Certainly, the artistic usage of new technologies and the specific current forms in which science and art are interlocked lead to diverse formulations of questions—of practical and formal, as well as conceptual and philosophical natures—to which only future developments will deliver answers. The technosphere as a new "aesthetics of the digital" addresses several of these principle questions.

Beyond the metaphysical place of modal categories, all forms of life become completely virtual: possibility, reality and necessity. The primacy of virtuality characterizes the ontology of the digital age. However, this condition arises from an epochal constellation of relationships among things in the order of thought. But the structure of the living object is setting a "hidden agenda" within the ultimate purpose of historical development. Instead of "a plan of transcendence", into the contemporary philosophy of science Gilles Deleuze introduced the "plan of immanence", with its leading terms of nonlinearity, difference and desiring machines (Deleuze, 1994). These new concepts are determined by the technosphere. From it is derived the power of the digital illusion of reality itself as a construction process of virtual reality. Within the technosphere, other virtual

worlds have also been created beyond the classical metaphysics of reality and illusion. The fundamental problem is no longer the cognitive–theoretical meaning of being in the constellation of the techno–scientific world. Actually, it is only important to know how to understand the emergence of events and from which perspective to consider all the changes concerning the prospects of "life" as the alliance of technosphere and biosphere in the forthcoming production of artificial life and artificial intelligence.

This aesthetics was born in the very heart of modern technology, just as art itself originally emerged from a folding complexity of *poiesis* and *techne* (Paić, 2014). It is obvious, however, that technique belongs to the peculiarities of human activity within nature. Culture should appear fundamentally changed compared to the previous understanding of the world itself. "Experience" of the world as a matter of entity and its powers of imagination corresponds to art's "illusion". On the other hand, the disappearance of truth in favor of aesthetic works of art finally leads to the technosphere. Art beyond "art" is addicted to the media–art event that represents the "essence" within the technical development of the world. Martin Heidegger, with the philosophical concept of *Gestell* as the essence of technology, gave a brilliant description of the metaphysical articulation of power. Directly derived from the essence of modern technology, it could be understood as something uncanny, beyond human interfaces. Hence Heidegger articulated five basic conceptual elements. All of them were included in historical movements, from modernism to the information age. With a reframing of the close connection of aesthetics, technology and power, a whole new constellation of relationships between human and inhuman worlds emerged. These elements are essential in providing a new assemblage:

(1) *dynamics* refers to the realization of power;
(2) *totality* affect the rules of power on anything outside that environment and these effects lost their innocence and cannot be considered as "real";
(3) *imperiality* is derived from the nature of domination and is able to cancel out any possibility of exceptions and cases in their own environment;
(4) *rationality* implies that the human mind as computer recognizes the character of opinions in the withdrawn part of the power of execution;
(5) a *planetary* orientation indicates in what circumstances power is no longer just "total" and focused on one country and one nation–state, but its limits are determined within the inhabited globe, like the atmosphere and the stratosphere, which means that the planet as a whole and

its related images can be won in a "breakthrough" and thus neutralize any possible planetary opponents (Heidegger, 1997:16–25).

Let us see how we can describe the essentials of our world today. The contemporary global capitalist economy is based on the digital immateriality of work and related social connections. From this perspective there is certainly only one step to the abolition of binary oppositions: work and freedom, working time and leisure. Controlling the freedom of humans as biopower does not come from outside, where we can detect a strong transcendent power owned by human characteristics and governing the enforcement of discipline and punishment for non–performance of "plan" and "construction". It seems that posthuman immanence controls the emergence of the whole system from within. Boris Groys, art theorist, ironically recalls a famous slogan from the early Soviet system of production when totally organized life was under surveillance by Party and State and had an extremely deep impact on the pressure deriving from physical labor: "Comrades, sleep faster!" (Groys, 2009).

The difference between what Heidegger called the technique of the outcome of the new period of visibility and transitions in the upcoming world and the technosphere, however, appears to be the difference between two forms of aesthetic "experience" and "illusion". These two forms provide two important ways in which the understanding of the digital world, humans, language and art is revealed. These are also two forms of visual communication: analog and digital. The former is based on a mimetic–representational image paradigm and the latter on a cybernetic code of information. When the sign replaces reality, and refers only to other visual signs, interaction in the communication process indicates that the technosphere takes place within the matrix of social relations of late capitalism. That is the reason why we should start talking about an epistemic cultural turn: *semiosphere occurs as mediasphere*. In his provocative essay *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, Paul Virilio wrote about accelerated changes in our techno–aesthetic environment. There are no more changes, but only the speed and acceleration of transformation processes.[1]

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[1] "This stage of photographic art is today really *depassé* since photography, overcome by indifference, seems from now on incapable of finding something new to photograph. Already collective thought imposed by diverse media aimed at annihilating the originality of sensations, at dispensing with the presence in the world of people by furnishing them with a stock of information destined to program their memories. We now know that with the progress of electronics, we may envisage active prostheses of intelligence" (Virilio, 1994: 47–48).

The meanings of the digital age are contextually determined and decoded within situations. To put this proposition in aesthetic terms is to pose a question about the possible relationship between art and technology. To understand the antinomies and paradoxes of the digital age and the notion of structure within reality from virtual events (uploading), it is necessary to show what was marked by the "ontological difference" between the analog and digital worlds (body, language, pictures). Why, in digital communication, does the main condition of the possibility of the process take place around the globe as the realization of a techno–scientific "experience" and the aesthetic "semblance" of the world? And finally, does it mean that we should discard the metaphysical distinction between binary oppositions that were decisive for the analog way of thinking? Furthermore, does it mean that we have to roam between the different spheres of spiritual life, beyond the connection with the nation–state and its borders, like interplanetary nomads?

The triad of the current digital art world are:

(1) the immateriality of works,
(2) the interaction of participants in networked events, and
(3) the simulation of reality as "illusioning" of virtual events in real time.

All three features are determined by the digital "ontology" of contemporary art. It has the character of "analytical and constructive thinking" because art has quite another position in the age of technoscience. Contemporary debates on cognitive science and epistemology of information are closely tied to the distinction between analytical and constructive concepts of thinking. Informational ontology became influential after the cybernetic revolution in all areas of postindustrial societies. Let me note one remark on this matter. One of the leading philosophers of technology was Gilbert Simondon. His turn towards the contemporary meaning of technology came from the American cybernetic tradition. In that resource we can find many technical concepts, e.g. "information" and "communication". But Simondon introduced not only the technical concepts into the ontology of information. On the contrary, he decided to think radically beyond the humanist tradition. The question about technology examines what went wrong with the emphasis on technology assumed as a metaphysical language for advanced postindustrial societies. Finally, he concluded that we have to approach our conceptual patterns as a new way of thinking (Simondon, 2012b). Techno–aesthetics, therefore, is a part of the corresponding examination of digital communication based on objectified "experience" in vast virtual archives (files and databases). On this path of

thinking, "experience" enters directly into a collective experience of memory, or into the matrix of reproductive events in the network, as an important reproductive activity of artificial intelligence. Heidegger claimed that our communication in *the digital age* must be a *dynamic, total, imperial, rational* and *planetary* exchange of information in the process of the world becoming a power of the technosphere. The true subject of communication in the digital age is oriented in the reverse direction. It might be said that the posthuman information code generates the emerging new order in a complex relationship with mediating social needs, cultural lifestyles and corporeal desires, and not with the technosphere, like the entropy of social relations in general.

1. Overlapping differences: analog – digital

What could be taken to be the meaning of *technosphere*? Understanding the concept is an attempt to clarify the frame produced indirectly through the analysis of the relationship of new technologies and science, with the ontological nature of cyberspace taken into consideration. Marshall McLuhan, in fact, in his own mediology, introduced the concept of the noosphere. He implied with it a new complex of communication that transforms the world into a global village (McLuhan, 1996). The noosphere is a concept used by Teilhard de Chardin for the place of *the human in the universe*. In short, the technical exposure of life in modern civilization cannot be captured with the old metaphor of knowledge as the Alexandrian library, but by positing a Gutenberg galaxy in the open space of information as an immaterial world of human communication. Physical space, the relationship between local and global, disappeared in networked cyberspace, and this is a new framework for planetary communication.

Interface computer communication supersedes natural or physical proximity. Above all, cyberspace should be recognized as the product of the process of the realization of the virtual potentiality of technology transfer and storage of information (Capurro, 1998). What is maybe particularly important in the paradigm shift from text to picture, or letter to visual communication, seems to be a radical change in the fundamental metaphysical category of traditional ontology. Divine virtues and qualities, omnipresence, and eternity and immateriality were virtualized in space which did not actually exist. Given the character and status of traditional modal categories, this concept of space can be viewed as unreal and illusory. The noosphere, however, cannot be equal with early modern ways of constructing the reality of pure reason. As already mentioned by McLuhan, any employment of this concept has proved that the world of modern

civilization has actually transformed Earth's scope into something beyond a celestial foundation. The change of physical space for the benefit of the technological creation of an artificial area governed by mediality has moved towards global networking.

The principle of technology lies in enframing (the subjectivity of the subject). Thus, the essence of technology is deliverable information for the transformation of essence into energy. It is clear, therefore, that the relationship between art and technology, subject and setting–up state, has been exposed the far–reaching changes. It is no longer a matter of determinism and the first principle. The effectiveness of feedback is decisive. As a universal science of the technology era, cybernetics can be described as a metatheory of the logic of virtual events. Accordingly, the construction of events has a crucial role within the logic of this complex. The purposefulness of the process in the structure of technology changes the meaning of beings and being and the meaning of the essence of the human. Heidegger's standpoint could be taken as techniques with which we could finally leave the metaphysical understanding of history and consequently traditional ontology (Heidegger, 1954: 13–54). Information that enables communication is nothing more than a new word, from cybernetics, for the old concepts of metaphysics. We are finally entering space–time with the radical abolition of relational structures based on causality and purpose. If relations were historically determined by specific vertical central structures (God, ideas, substance, subject), as Jacques Derrida once said,[2] then it is evident why cybernetics must abandon any possibility of divine providence and historical self–determination. The concept of the process of controlling information exchange replaced a belief in *Last Judgment*. Indeed, the assembly is formed with the setup that everyone can switch from one state to another. If information were to be transferred to the constellation of transformation, the event would be the posthuman condition of artificial life (*A–Life*). Today, only techno–art, as a productive complexity

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[2] "If this is so, the entire history of the concept of structure, before the rupture of which we are speaking, must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations oft the center. Successively, and in a regulated fashion, the center receives different forms or names. The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix—if you will pardon me for demonstrating so little and for being so elliptical in order to come more quickly to my principal theme—is the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence – *eidos*, *archē*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *alethēia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth." (Derrida, 1978: 353).

of information and communications technology, is performed within a virtual axiomatic in the sense of power, appliances and rule over nature and the world in general. Therefore, technology is operated just as language is acted out in the process of communication. Language performs the condition of the possibility of interaction. It could be referred to as the agent–purpose of a new technical interactivity. Accordingly, it transcends natural inherited languages connected to the assembly of information and communication technologies. Language opens up the horizons of the world. Since the world has been transformed into a technical environment, language becomes a piece of apparatus (Heidegger, 2007; Gaffney, 2010).

If we keep in mind this great transformation in the core of ontology, then the differences between techniques and technologies which have been deeply incorporated into everyday life require consideration of the question of the technical nature of thinking as *computation, planning and construction*. It should immediately be said that Heidegger did not strictly complete a new "ontological difference". Our task should be determined by the introduction of this concept into the debate only because we have strengthened the difference between the analog and digital eras. Technique is referenced in the analog age of industry and machines in which assemblies of humans operate as subjects. But when we are preoccupied with an entire set of new information and communication technologies (computers), we are acting in a digital environment. Instead of changing nature (technique), we are witnessing a dramatic change of life (technology). One should not be surprised that today the fundamental questions of philosophy and theology are no longer the questions of being, God, the world and humans, but rather of the origin and end of "life" itself. Technique belongs to computer based thinking in natural sciences, e.g. mathematics and physics.

Digital design, on the other hand, refers to the technology of the transfer of information. It is a feature of the computer method of generating reality. Technique was always tied to the analog system of nature, but technology intends to open the digital network order beyond the differences between nature and culture. Maybe a cybernetic concept of encoding information connects them with the new assembly. Without it, there is no possibility of future communication between related systems. At the same time, in Luhmann's media theory, for instance, people do not communicate mutually, but operational systems and their social actors communicate for them (Luhmann, 1995). Technique is rooted in the presence of time dimensions as sequences of "now–here". However, technology, quite in contrast to this, assumes a construction of time as a number far in the future. In this way, the digital model appears, with the primacy of the spatial

dimensions of virtual reality over the openness of time in its three dimensions (past, present and future). Actuality squeezes out past and upcoming things. We should add that, in the digital age, systems rule over people. It follows that everything becomes fast, dynamic and organized in total mobilization. Sociologists sometimes speak about the phenomenon of *accelerating in disappearance*, so one could argue that the origin goes back to the essence of technique. Only in this way can we understand how the implosion of information might be an acceptable explanation of what is going on, when in reality, all leads to loss of memory. Digital oblivion, in some respects, obviously represents a dark shadow of the transformation of the remaining scraps of living memory.

What actually connects technique and technology? The answer lies in planning for future current affairs on the basis of a scientifically designed world. Therefore, within the technological and scientific assembly of opinions, at the beginning of the modern era, being was determined as *measurement*, *calculation* and *planning*. Quantifying nature and experimenting with it could be seen as a procedure of scientific appropriation of the artificial environment. In traditional ontological categories, this is not merely external and inanimate. Therefore, there should be a link between the mind and the world, the image and the image of reality. Artificial intelligence within cybernetics emerged as a result of technoscience.[3] What, then, is the ultimate meaning of this transformation for metaphysics in general? One could say in advance that it refers to the transformation of the concepts of power and freedom. Western thinking has always been considered an essentially technical way of thinking of humankind. When it comes down to a common denominator, it is about that which Heidegger called computation [Rechnen], and not reflexive thinking (*Besinnung*) or mythopoetic narrative (Heidegger, 1997). Generally speaking, demand for control systems and the environment has decisive consequences indeed for the concept of contemporary art. Heidegger clearly saw that the advancement of technology quashed the linear scheme. Maybe it is more important that we realize the methods and experiments produced from the essence of a

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[3] Concerning the main trends in contemporary arts that theorist Peter Osborne called "postconceptual art and *viractualism*", there are close ties between investigations in art and new technologies in many different forms. In virtual managed space new corporeal things could be interconnected with visual aesthetic sensations. From this perspective, the core of postconceptual art might be concerned by the virtual production of computer technology. Therefore, we find that strong connectedness between "virtual" and "actual" is real. It should not surprise us if, in the time to come, we detect new forms of transformation in the intensities which are governed by techno–culture in its powerful visuality. See: Osborne, 2013: 3–51.

new scientific approach to the world. Being becomes information, and relationships between entities might occur as assemblies during the communication process. What might the condition of possibility of the assembly be, if a network event is nothing but transition from technique to technology? Technosciences can no longer be positive sciences of nature. Their main features were included in the design of artificial nature. With the transformation of machine from its mechanical "nature", a living machine becomes a kind of apparatus, controlled by a cybernetic code. And since it is a part in which interaction has been replaced by the relationship between subject and object, it is obvious that cybernetics, as a general science of systems management, enables the world to become one of artificial life and living machines.

Life can no longer be seen as linearity, suspense and causality in necessity of order. Hence, it follows that the emergence of the case of the optimal control of replacing the one–off and the unique gave unprecedented opportunities for further reconsideration. And furthermore, singularity, in the complex environment of the animate and inanimate, consequently becomes a key concept of posthumanism (Paić, 2011). What was Heidegger's most valuable contribution to the debate on the achievements and the limits of understanding life in cybernetics, understood as a completed metaphysics? First, the classical concepts of physics as a basic science of nature, such as energy, mass and velocity, were replaced by notions such as biogenetic information within the power of the genetic structure of the organism. Thus, genetic code information is associated with a new ontology and a new epistemology, with being and consciousness. The emergence of the new is no longer the result of a creative encounter, created by eternal nature and immutable being. Instead, we should note that the merging and splitting of the core or stem cells with another living organism produces an emergent and complex living condition. Biology, as the paradigmatic science of posthumanism, testified to the extent of the event in this matter. This means that humans and all other beings necessarily appear as "cases" of the recombination of animate and inanimate, mind and machine. With the design of synthetic life, all the methods that were previously widely accepted for processing industrial, ready–made objects disappeared.

If natural language is no longer relevant for daily communication, then we should agree that only the binary code of a computer program determines future interactions in the technosphere. This is also evident in the rise of the pragmatic meaning of language in the digital age. It all boils down to the handling and decoding of information in the user community. The program becomes the *know–how* and system information outlook ne-

cessary for telematic communication. Therefore, the predetermined notion of temporary user community gained a ruling character of order. And eternity irreversibly disappeared in actuality protocols at all levels of networking (Frankel, 2004). Indeed, we have seen that technique became the essence of modern science. Postmodern critiques of knowledge shifted the main focus of investigation in a number of different directions. Classic humanist categories, e.g. substance, mind, causality and the teleological purpose of the creation of the world, were replaced with new pragmatic dispositives. Instead of these, very different approaches today govern the exploration of the mystery of Being as event. Tehnoscience and techno–aesthetics currently attempt to show something very constructive in essence, but it is merely attractive because of technological intervention deep within "nature". The implementation of new technologies in the social and cultural mediascape is proceeding with huge impact on the understanding of the complexity of the posthuman condition.[4]

2. Technoscience and art

Recently, technosciences and the discovery of visualization have successfully combined that which was determined as natural/technical science and that which has so far opposed it (cultural/human science). The concept of *technoscience* was first used by French sociologist of science Bruno Latour and American anthropologist Donna Haraway in late 1970s (Haraway, 1990; Latour, 1999). By this they implied a paradigm shift in the understanding of the relationship between technology and science and its effect on the outcome of the modern era. Accordingly, the definition of technoscience in the operative sense of the word can hardly be more precisely determined. The reason is very simple. It lies not only in the claim

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[4] "Techno–aesthetics can present itself following a pyramidal structure. The components already have their own norms. And so does the compound, the true individual–because where is the limit between the component, which is already part compound, like a thermoswitch, and the set of sets? It's not simply a question of denomination but of point of view and usage. The battery of a car is a component, but it is itself a compound (plates, electrolytes, insulators, terminals, plugs for the release of hydrogen by electrolization). A set can also be a crowd or a mass rather than a society. We've already talked about the field of emission antennas in Villebon; here, each antenna is independent from the others. It's only the buildings that contain the emitters that create a link between these antennas because a building can contain several emitters whose output goes to separate antennas. Antennas are compatible rather than associated. Whether we are dealing with compatibility or true association (as for directive antennas), the technicized landscape also takes on the meaning of a work of art" (Simondon, 2012a: 7).

that scientific practice depends on a technological paradigm shift from the mechanical to the digital era. Rather, we must abandon all previous dichotomies between old and brand new paths in constructing a place for difference in the very core of the metaphysical framework. As the development of computer technology changed, so too did the position or relationship of the observer to the visual basic implementations change, leading to a great transformation in the meanings of traditional differences between theory, practice and production itself. So experimentation, visualization, and simulation were immersed in a change of concepts, especially regarding the final purpose of this process.[5] Since quantum physics, chaos theory and string theory, as well as the results of biogenetics in uncovering the relationship between the origin of life and its development in the surrounding world, changed the concept of *de nature* in the natural sciences, it became clear that it would be impossible to separate technology from science and research. Objects of research are not neutral. Furthermore, the concept of nature can no longer be reduced to something outside of laboratories and ways of constructing objects. The technoscientific production of the world at the same time attempts to conceptualize the production/reproduction of life as artificial and to change rationality in the complex world of artificial intelligence. With the help of modern technologies, such as nanotechnology, robotics, genetic engineering and biogenetics, new constellations emerge. Artificial intelligence appears as a product of research into the complexity of artificial life. It cannot be denied that this could have unexpected consequences for further creative thinking. One of these consequences is evident in changing design notions. Creative design life stems from the virtual power of artificial intelligence, from the alliance of neuroscience, cognitive science and biogenetics (Reichle, 2003: 193–204).

We can explore the technosphere essentially as the productive fold between technoscience and aesthetics. There are brand new sets of structural events and realities that possess the character of "experience" and "images". The recently developing fields of all kinds of aesthetics seek correlations between technological practical skills (engineering) and the artistic creation of new objects. The production of new artworks still involves the creation and design of objects. In fact, strictly speaking, there are no longer any frontlines between art and design. As explained by the notion of technoscience, our conceptual framework was composed from principles

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[5] "*In technoscientific research, the business of theoretical representation cannot be dissociated, even in principle, from the material conditions of knowledge production* and thus from the interventions that are required to make and stabilize the phenomena. In other words, technoscience knows only one way of gaining new knowledge and that is by first making a new world*" (Nordmann, 2004: 2).

and patterns contained in the deep ecology of mind. Especially after the re-evaluation of the impacts inherited from the epistemology of information, the pragmatic construction of reality in cyberspace today attempts to open up virtualities for advanced transformations in the structure of the pictoriality of image. Instead of the still existing prevalence of the concept of image and body from the phenomenological point of view, the development of interdisciplinary approaches in contemporary aesthetics moved beyond the modern paradigm. The pictoriality of technical images formed by computer programs cannot be reduced to any of the familiar schemes from the history of art. The fundamental crux of all these aesthetic approaches is perceived as the bottom–up processes given by technoscientific investigations such as artificial intelligence (AI). Evaluation and aesthetic judgments through technoscience could trace the lines and curves far away from our modern perceptions of art as the imaginary production of new objects. Image science is the triumph of technoscientific conceptual tools, just like "visualization" and "transfiguration" try to conceptualize the place or gap in between art, science and technology (Weibel, 1991: 205–248).

The sphere (Greek *sfaira* – ball, globe) was originally the Greek understanding of the world, indicating that perfection of form and the materiality of fulfilment is circular and rounded. That is to say, this expression means a set of points in space equally distant from the centre of circle. In three–dimensional space, geometric shapes such as spherical balls represent a visual projection of the celestial bodies and the planet. Speaking of spheres, we should notice the symbolic language used in reference to material and immaterial bodies.

We know that the digital image, then, occurs as artificial life in real time and virtual space. So it could be possible to make radical constructivist settings from the aesthetic paradigm shift:

(1) the entity becomes a project of alternative worlds;

(2) there is no difference between "truth" and "illusion";

(3) technoscience and its power of visualization of the world creates the space of virtual reality for art as an aesthetic sphere of new information technologies and communication interactions;

(4) beauty is no longer an "illusion of" truth because there is no difference between the sensitivity of the phenomenon and transcendental things–about–itself that allow the beauty of truth to shine in the activity of the subject;

(5) aesthetics in the age of primacy of technology over science designs or creates immaterial objects.

Technosphere? Is this concept just another name for aesthetic design in the digital age, where everything seems to be becoming a virtual event in a network environment?

If we go one step further in examining this problem, it is useful to show how contemporary art in dialogue with complex technoscience could answer this question. In the early 1990s, with the use of the World Wide Web as the universal medium of the digital age, new opportunities for mutual interaction in the visual arts were created. Many theorists of new media in particular stand out, as interactivity provided a key for digital communications and related contemporary art in a virtual space. In 1995, British artist Jane Prophet created an interactive video installation on the network entitled *TechnoSphere*. The main idea was evident in the fact that digital interactive communication on the www network produced unintended consequences. It led to the spontaneous "creation" of new images in the process of creating the illusion of a digital image as a complex environment by software researching artificial life. In this way, the interaction between human and machine that occurs within cyberspace was very different than in any mechanical projection. The digitalization of life introduced a profound change in the concepts of body and machine. In a virtual space, interactions between two entities that are apparently separated in the order of events of reality produce something in between. In this way, entirely new events and conditions emerged. This state of being – between machine and human – attempts to mark the relationship between the technical and the human. Embodied digital communication presupposes the elimination of the traditional understanding of the media as intermediary in the process of the transfer and exchange of information.[6] Traditional media could no longer predict future situations like the kind of digital device we can see in Spielberg's movie *Minority Report*. It seems to be justified to call new media "*metamedia*", as in Gene Youngblood's new media theory (Youngblood, in Rötzer, 1991: 305–322).

The installation by Jane Prophet refers to the crucial issues of modern communication: how exactly do bodies interact in networked systems? Keep it simple. Analog media such as radio and television are based on

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[6] "The complex process of transformation undergone by art and aesthetics, as well as the closely intermeshed interdisciplinary relationships, can be understood only by investigating those phenomena and theories which have so far driven forward the syntopy of art, science, and technology, and in the future will continue to do so. It is not sufficient to describe the current state of art by concentrating on its epicenter; instead one must expand the horizon of consideration to adjacent fields and trace the historical developments in which corresponding changes and contemporary phenomena can be discerned" (Gianetti, 2005: 2).

analytical thinking, which practically excluded the entire human sensibil-ity. On the other hand, new media attempt to establish an interactive, arti-ficial logic for participation in the creation of the event. The communica-tion of the disembodied subjects/actors supersedes the physical boundaries of time and space. And this condition creates a new "body" in its virtual or immaterial image. In Greek philosophy, from Plato onwards it was called the picture, a reflection of reality [eikon], but today it seems that the ap-pearance of things [eidos] and the illusion of appearances [eidolon] are two sides of the same coin. Particularly in the digital environment of com-puter–generated reality, it seems that a single state of being, with its prop-erties in objects and things, becomes at once the illusion of what we use to call appearing, because virtual appearance looks exactly like an illusion of appearance [Schein]. Therefore, we can no longer talk about beauty as the transcendental appearance of beings in the sense that its appearance is pleasant as an aesthetic phenomenon, or that the essence of beauty exists beyond appearance. Aesthetics from a digital perspective is generated from the world beyond this opposition. What does this mean?

The history of the notion of aesthetics points to the rise and fall of the idea of beauty as an object of art.[7] Beauty is now "embodied" in the same phenomenon as the idea of beauty. Therefore, appearance must always be apparent. The appearance of a semblance of reality leads to the disappear-ance of the difference between appearance and illusion, between "truth" and "illusion". The technosphere should provide the aesthetic in the age of digital communication whose interactive powers design our world. Digital bodies as immaterial in virtual space cannot be denoted like "virtual" bo-dies, because real bodies in the real–time of "reality" no longer provide a model for digital bodies. The result could be paradoxical. The social en-tropy of capitalism as the only global system of information is a stabilizing force and produces the interactions of its subjects/actors, to the potential exhaustion of cognitive capacity. This system, therefore, perfectly operates in a crisis and produces stability in a network that should be constantly regenerated by moving the center to the edge of the current condition.

The installation *TechnoSphere* focused on the key issue of the digital era. We have seen that Heidegger showed that, in the outcome of the Early

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[7] "The form of aesthetics of the digital landscape were influenced by project mem-ber's discussions about the concept of the 'sublime' in European art and nature since the end of seventeenth century. Concepts the sublime, like artificial infinity, dimensions, and series were linked by Prophet to common metaphors of cyber-space, for example, the infinity of digital space, the idea of cyberspace [as a territo-ry beyond all social and legal norms, and the notion of succession] and homoge-neity of fractal geometry and mathematics" (Reichle, 2009: 180).

Modern period, three fundamental words regarding thought were high-lighted: "life", "experience", and "illusion". *TechnoSphere* questioned the old metaphysical difference between nature and the human world. A virtual 3D environment in which we can see interacting participants in a digital event as users changed the accepted characteristics of artificial life forms. Users received emails about events which occurred in real time. There are simulations and real activities in virtual space that make reference to the event. At the same time, this refers to the twofold assertion of the event in virtuality. In the battle for survival in an artificial environment, the body as a form of creature appears Other to the "life" substance. However, the problem of the illusion of reality emerged from the perspective of our bodily interacted perception. The *TechnoSphere* not only "exists" as new form of "life", but in fixed space–time there are singular configurations of events. Without interaction between the users and recipients of virtual reality, there is no "digital evolution" of singular life with uniqueness in the artificial world (Reichle, 2009). From the perspective of the philosophical discipline that commonly refers to the concepts of beauty and the sublime, aesthetics simply vanish. On the other hand, information–theoretical examination in digital aesthetics has recently become more articulated. New aesthetics is deeply immersed in the techno–environment as never before, and represents a real challenge for research into the conceptual turn in the discipline itself.

We can find a main reason for the origin of the concept in the idea of mutual interconnectedness between computer science and the philosophy of information. As Luciano Floridi said in his examination of the philosophy of information, a new and vitally important scope emerges with the intimate connection between art, new technology and technoscience. Philosophy of information is defined as an autonomous field concerned with a critical examination of the conceptual nature and basic principles of information (Floridi, 2002: 123–145). Development of new theoretical approaches is imminent in all aspects of life, including the technological landscape that shaped our perception patterns and socio–cultural matrix in advance. The total flexibility and hybrid character of networks embedded in the mutual closure of perspectives has had a great impact on philosophy of science today. Technology is true invention. From this point of view, we can move directly beyond the frontiers of mapping territories on the ground when there are different forms of technological progress as different forms of aesthetic strategy throughout the entire history of the modern epoch. Information is very often approached from many perspectives, but usually as a reality or ecological information, information about reality or semantic information, and finally, as generic information about reality that

provides crucial turning points of knowledge in the posthuman condition (Floridi, 1999). As we mentioned earlier, the process of transition from semiosphere as mediasphere to the area of a completely new concept was articulated by technoscience, and artwork today could have large consequences for our mental scapes, particularly when we talk about perception and neurocognitive issues.[8]

The process of aestheticization is going to capture almost the entire reality of contemporary art. Within the environment of postindustrial societies, art and technology operate as complex living systems. It is no longer about nice things and the objects of industrial civilization. Rather, we can envision it as being an open access to new aesthetic objects which are ready–to–use (*ready–mades*). In our network societies, aesthetics cannot be autonomous in its effort to carve out almost all the leading movements in modernism. It is a part of either technoscience or the philosophy of art. However, the internal driving force of the process of aestheticization in the entire world of life that can be seen in the postindustrial environment goes beyond encompassing borderlines. What happens when aesthetic processes arise out of the logic of the technosphere becomes clear as soon as we realize it might be shown that the "experience" and "illusion" of beauty in the digital world occur only from the production of artificial life. Therefore it should be irrelevant that the idea of Jane Prophet's installation is linked with the construction of an artificial "ecosphere". In the field of *A–life,* only different forms can flourish and thrive. The contemporary British artist's installation in a virtual space crossed the border where all artifacts were considered aesthetic objects.

Let us turn now to the fundamental concepts of digital art, which could also be understood as the fundamental concepts of digital communication: (1) design; (2) interactivity; (3) emergence; (4) autopoietical systems; (5) cybernetical models and algorithms of action; (6) mediality performance; (7) the immateriality of works; (8) virtual reality space; (9) simulation events, and (10) artificial life and artificial intelligence (Reichle, 2003: 193–204). The technosphere not only denotes a visual metaphor for interactive communication on the network, but is also an attempt to build a complex environment. It keeps the communication interface. It also controls nature as an artificial landscape (*mediascape*) which is necessarily

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[8] Floridi emphasized that "the necessary process of converting the entire domain of organized knowledge into a new, digital macrocosm began slowly in the 1950s and, since then, has followed three fundamental directions: (1) *Extension*: from numeric data to multimedia information and virtual reality... (2) *Visualization and manipulation*: from punched cards to 3D graphic interfaces... (3) *Convergence and integration*: from the mainframe to the Internet". See: Floridi, 1999: 14–15.

determined by artificial life. However, if this explanation is sufficient for enframing digital or technological aesthetics in our cultural reshaping currents, then communication in the digital age derives from the constellation of relationships between human and the inhuman on different grounds that have never before existed in the history of mankind.

3. Interaction as event

Design in the digital age becomes communication design and an interactive, immaterial culture. This means that the concept of the environment extends from the world to the entire biosphere and mediosphere. Communication can no longer be reduced to unambiguous terms of social action in the world and in the world of life. With the idea of generating life itself in biocybernetical systems, its aesthetic code refers to life totally designed, from its inception to its disappearance. The contemporary aesthetics of the digital era might be described as the creative design of the world of "experience" and the "illusion" of events. This kind of creative design constructs uncanny networking: the "ecstasy of communication" (Baudrillard, 1994: 145–154). However, let us repeat the question: what makes a "bit" of the technosphere? If this concept means connecting the technology and art of life itself in an artificially constructed environment (design), does something happen beyond technology and art, beyond a completely "artificial" world, or should we be able to support the radical change of our philosophical and artistic ways of thinking concerning the existence and meaning of the posthuman condition? In the view of developments in the technosciences, it should be noted that we have performed a completely new conception of "nature" in the last fifty years. Paradoxically, technosciences were embedded in huge networks of life technologies, just like transhumanism and posthumanism in reference to body modifications and enhancement. Donna Haraway, for instance, broke with binary oppositions of nature and culture (Haraway, 1990).

The differentiation between nature and culture was always considered a matrix of transfigurations of beings which are separated by an ontological "iron curtain". The solution in the era of technosciences could be a very simple operation in *thinking–as–image making virtualities* – hybrid network theory (Latour, 1999). From this point of view, interaction becomes the essence of digital communications. It also becomes a key factor of the entire transformative process, which is taking place in network realities that encompass both sciences and arts, society and bodies. There are no strong conflicts between human actors and non–human environments. Obviously, the reason lies in the reversal of the radical negation of binary

oppositions. In the hybrid network of interactors and transbodies, all conflicts of this kind definitely become obsolete.

In the concept of interactivity, as is evident in the term itself, which consists of the words between (*inter*) and action, that which belongs to a thinking machine and that which is inherent to the human body perfectly coincide. The machine is programmed with options that the body chose on the basis of its relationship to the environment. Therefore, media interactivity is nothing more than an emergent practice. It cannot be completely independent from natural factors as points of resistance and can immerse itself in the realm of pure subjectivity. The emerging new phenomenon was at the same time separated from the old phenomenon and went in precisely the reverse direction, creating its own aesthetic way of communication by changing the digital code. If we want to summarize what distinguishes contemporary media art from modern artworks, the answer can only be: *the event of interactivity*. The triple circle of author, work, and spectator is becoming interactive within the complete artistic event, because what happens in the digital age assumes the emergent label of "technosphere" as a unity of artificial life and artificial intelligence. Event as interactivity triggers a change in the status of work, author, and audience. So, interactivity might be understood as a technological concept of communication between "desire machines" as the thinking and sensuousness of machinery in particular. It is always imbedded in the contextual reality of entities/actors. Therefore, interactive art is determined by the metamorphoses of media. It is art–in–transformation (information and conditions) of a living body in real space and real time.[9] From this perspective, we

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[9] According to the leading concepts of cybernetics, e.g. control, communication, and information, integrated systems emerged through sets of non–linear acting throughout the entire delimited bulks of networks. The body gained aesthetically performed virtuality and became a kind of interface, located in between the computer as apparatus and brain as center of total control over an environment in transformation. Stelarc, in his art performances, for instance, tries to show hidden paths towards liberation from external disturbance and unpredictable changes, which take place in front of events on scene. Stelarc's body, according to interpretation derived from the phenomenology of Merleau–Ponty, represents an external instrument to incorporate technological devices for transfiguration purposes in overcoming the frontiers of all metaphysical differences between physical body and spiritual–techno–body. There is no room for the traces of physical body as machine. Finally, the notion of art in this performance–oriented technosphere should be considered only as the creative interactivities of many fractals, which uncover all gaps in memories. What genetic appliance of memory might come after technological implementation is yet another mystery in the examination of the paths of "brain–ology" today. See: Broadhurst, 2007: 91–94 and Paić, 2011: 106–117.

could comprehend the ontological place of the body in virtual space. An interactive media art installation, e.g. *TechnoSphere*, necessarily assumes a performative character, because techno–pictures open up many possibilities for the emergence of different kinds of event in artificial environments.[10]

What are the consequences of the transformation of information and the transformation of immaterial events or digital images? We have seen how media art attempts to create a whole work of art in the cognitive space–time of virtual reality. We have not considered the computer as a "window through the world". In that manner Leibniz described monads. They cannot enter the intermediary world. On the contrary, the function and meaning of computers in generating techno–pictures consist of the fact that they visualize the world. This world appears like a dream in the triad of traditional aesthetic categories: "experience", "illusion", and "empathy". The latter term refers to a unique opportunity to participate in the event, which either imitates real life drama or shows and represents the medium of cyber physicality in the unpresentable and unrepresentable. At the same time, they were reserved for the notion of greatness in aesthetics from Burke to Nietzsche.

The basis for the exhibition entitled *Les Immatériaux,* held 1985 in Paris and dedicated to the relationship between new information and communication technologies and contemporary art, was Lyotard's notion of the unrepresentable (Lyotard, 1994). This exhibition reconsidered the issue of the construction of the "uncanny" as technological or artificially created greatness. Herein lies the reason why media arts in the digital age move beyond the arts, and simultaneously all digital media become meta–media. If we are humans in the digital age, we should be able to make the substance of "human nature" a project of transformation. It is self–evident that the language of communication leads to radical scientific interpreta-

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[10] In digital practices, due to the advancement of new information–communication technologies, there are various intensities of performance and media constructed paths to interaction between twofold environments. One of the acceptable approaches to a theoretical consideration of body interactions through the hybridization of media protocols might be computer modelling and brain scanning, derived by neurocognitive science. Almost all recent discoveries in the field of brain research have been oriented towards a new ontology of information. In the cognitive neuroscience related to visual communication that is emerging nowadays, many theoretical frameworks have attempted to overcome the gap between the old dichotomy of action and meaning in technical interactions made by computer as meta–media. Visual cognition, therefore, has become a key component of the technosphere in a differentiated perception, from imagery to perceived objects. See: Broadhurst, 2007: 6–7.

tions of media art and cannot be more than the application of techno–
aesthetics. However, the artificial creation of life will simply be denoted as
the other kind of "existence" in our understanding the thing itself.

Conclusion

In contemporary philosophy following in the footsteps of Husserl, Heideg-
ger and Wittgenstein, until now, the fundamental question of understand-
ing the relationship between humans and machines from the perspective of
intersubjectivity of consciousness, events and language games might be
determined as the question of the conditions for human communications in
the world. Heidegger's use of the term event [Ereignis] occurs as the face
of being and time, going through language as a truth–telling world. Hence,
it is not the world of objective or subjective truth, but rather the truth of
the world without the metaphysical distinction installed on the logical–
historical level. What happens in the present world will obviously have a
strong impact on the understanding of language in the world and its rela-
tion with the network of communication. In the digital age, the world is
constructed by the methods of the technosphere. It is clear that language
directed towards technical skills would be pragmatic and focused on the
function, structure and application of "fact". But the technosphere, as a
possible encounter of human and machines, was programmed with a new
technical language. With a little help from that apparatus, new concepts of
computer visualization could perform interactive communication in tele-
matically managed societies. Those who argued that a global order based
on the assumptions of technical knowledge and skills implicitly indicates
the disappearance of physical proximity actually went in completely new
directions. What may remain open for further consideration is the question
of language.

Vilém Flusser, in an analysis of techno–pictures, noted that language
always operates as a symbolic form of communication. The discursive
conditions for transference of language into an apparatus were established
by the computation of information. These assumptions constitute major
propositions about the nature of connectivity in mutual convergence be-
tween language and machine–worlds. Without the introduction of media
images of the world, or technosphere, language remained "empty" and lost
its meaning. In fact, language lost its own world. The "natural" worlds of
the abodes of gods, humans, and other creatures no longer exist. We are
living in a time of disappearance of languages. In one of the most disturb-
ing descriptions of communication, contemporary media philosopher Vi-
lém Flusser wrote:

> The Human communication is an artificial concept, with the intention of forgetting the nonsense of life on death row convicts. The man is "by nature" solitary being, because he knows that he must die and that in the moment of death with him forever disappears his whole community. Everyone must die alone (...) Human communication covers a veil on codified world, the veil of art and science, philosophy and religion (...) In short, a person communicates with others as "political animal", not because he is social animal, but because the man is solitary animal who cannot live in solitude (Flusser, 2005: 10).

Everything has been stored in an application when the language of information reflects the entropy of social relations in the form of messages without meaning. Hence, uselessness dos not mean the meaninglessness of things, but rather the unworkableness of opinions in closed systems. The problem of the digital world should be considered in this way when, aesthetically and technically, it functions flawlessly. But virtual experience of that flawlessness disappears exactly at the moment when everything seems to be quite useless, worthless, unusable. The digital age, therefore, perhaps reflects the uncanny event of the disintegration of the world of life and its continuation in the artificial life we denote as the technosphere, where the death experience becomes interactive communication due to fear of emptiness and the abandonment of the human's own language – probably the last remaining refuge of a meaningful world. Can we find a way out of this one–way street?

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CHAPTER SEVEN

EYES IN THE WINDOW:
INTERMEDIAL RECONFIGURATION OF TV
IN THE CONTEXT OF DIGITAL PUBLIC SPHERES

STEFAN MÜNKER

Introduction: on the notion of television

The notion of "television" is equivocal: It is a technical medium, which has, over the course of its very successful career, become a vessel for a multitude of formally and content–wise very different audiovisual media – so–called TV formats. On one hand, we denote television as the cultural technique of the reception of individual programs, which have to be mastered in order to be watched at a profit. On the other hand, television denotes the system of broadcasting corporations, which have, through the establishment of the medium of television as a medium of record, developed television into a politically as well as economically crucial institution of our society. (A reconciliation of the equivocality of television would perhaps work best in an understanding of the medium as a Foucaultian dispositif.[1])

It has long been assumed that, if not the notion, then at least the mediality of television could be clearly defined – in its determination as a "mass media, which mediates centrally conceptualized and produced audiovisual programs to a dispersing mass audience unidirectionally and synchronously" (as the German Wikipedia states).[2] Meanwhile, the complex we call

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[1] Knut Hickethier discussed the notion of a dispositif of television in 1993, without any reference to Michel Foucault, of course, in his text "Dispositiv Fernsehen, Programm und Programmstrukturen in der Bundesrepublik", in Geschichte des Fernsehens in der Bundesrepublik. Vol. 1: Institution, Technik und Programm. Ed. Knut Hickethier. Munich: Fink, 171–243.

[2] http://de.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fernsehen&oldid=102943696 (9. Mai 2012, 22:36 UTC; trans. Paol Hergert).

"television" is medially so differentiated, and contains such divergent elements, that the notion of a specific mediality of the medium is rendered obsolete.

In a recent article, Judith Keilbach and Markus Stauff argue similarly: it is evident, that "contemporarily, a coherent definition of the medium seems impossible: contemporary television is plainly too complex, too heterogeneous and subjected too much to permanent changes".[3] One corollary of this would be: television does not exist.[4] Amanda Lotz similarly claims to pluralize the term: in her book on the recent changes that have arisen mostly due to the technological and cultural process of digitalization, she states that "we need to think of the medium not as 'television' but as televisions".[5] And indeed, Keilbach and Stauff reveal that "television has, over the course of its history, been subjected to perpetual changes", which is why they suggest that we should "not limit notions of change and transformation to the contemporary state of television, but (…) recognize change and transformation as fundamental characteristics of television".[6]

Their suggestion is justified: a medium such as television has always been a medium in transition. One only has to think of the catch phrase of "personalized television use", which has justifiably been used in conjunction with digital technology (I will return to this). The personalization of television certainly started with the invention of the remote control, which heralded the start of the era of mass medial television in the 1950s, which in turn continued with the introduction of VCR and later the pluralization of channels, all long before the implementation of DVR, multimedia online libraries and social TV platforms of the world wide web.

This is why I first want to look back and juxtapose two distinct metaphorical figures which have been used to describe television in its history, before introducing a few developments which have arisen due to the process of digitalization and its culture.

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[3] Keilbach, Judith, and Markus Stauff. "Fernsehen als fortwährendes Experiment. Über die permanente Erneuerung eines alten Mediums". *Blickregime und Dispositive audiovisueller Medien*. By Nadja Elia–Borer et al. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011. 155–181 (155), trans. Paol Hergert.

[4] Münker, Stefan. "Es gibt das Fernsehen nicht. Meditation über ein verschwindendes Medium". Ed. Gundolf Freyermuth. *figurationen* 2 (2007): 97–103, trans. Paol Hergert.

[5] Lotz, Amanda D. *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*. New York: New York UP, 2007. 78.

[6] Keilbach and Stauff cont. 156.

Windows and eyes

In 1946, Thomas Hutchinson published his book *Here is Television. Your Window to the World,*[7] on the emergence of television in the USA. There were roughly 44,000 television sets in private ownership in 1946 (of which 30,000 alone were located in the New York metropolitan area). NBC had started broadcasting regularly in 1944, and the DuMont Television Network joined in in 1946. Television was indeed a novel technology, unknown by most, and one could hardly suspect that the medium would one day become the most successful electronic mass media of the twentieth century and conquer the living rooms of all nations alike. The description of the television as a "window to the world" would indeed turn out to be defining, even in the non–English speaking world. In the Federal Republic of Germany, regular television broadcasting began over sixty years ago on Christmas Day, and Werner Pleister, founding intendant of the Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk (NWDR), accordingly announced the official start of broadcasting as follows:

> Television will build bridges from man to man, from nation to nation…We promise you to do our best to fill this mysterious window in your homes, this window to the world which is your television set, with content that will interest you.[8]

The metaphor of the window is initially much more prosaic than other verbal images such as magic mirrors or boob tubes. On the one hand, the window metaphor suggests that the viewer can take a look into the world; on the other hand, it implies that the viewer can admittedly take a look, but gets to safely stay in the confines of their own home. In all the banality which the description of the medium of television as a window to the world entails, it also contains some compelling content. As trivial as the superficial resemblance of windows and television screens may be, the implications of the image of the window, which is situated in between transmitter and receiver, between film and viewer, are anything but trivial in its showcasing the central characteristic of mediation. The space of media is, similar to that of windows, always an in–between.[9] Media, further-

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[7] Hutchinson, Thomas H. *Here Is Television, Your Window to the World*. New York: Hastings House, 1946.
[8] Pleister, Werner. "Das geheimnissvolle Fenster in die Welt geöffnet". *Fernseh–Informationen* 1 (1953): 7, trans. Paol Hergert.
[9] Roesler, Alexander. "Medienphilosophie und Zeichentheorie". *Medienphilosophie. Beiträge zur Klärung eines Begriffs*. By Stefan Münker and Alexander Roes-

more, just like windows, mark differences[10] – between inside and outside, here and there, yesterday and today, and so on.

Media, however, not only mark differences; they generate them as well. And furthermore: media are not neutral towards the contents they transport. The constitutively important role of technological mediality, however, is not only consistently overlooked (inadvertently or conscientiously); it has also always been concealed by descriptions of the media (and its function) which purport converse semblances. In relation to this, the window metaphor is downright exemplary: saying "window" evokes associations of translucence and transparence, of the diaphanous. However unconsciously based on Leon Battista Alberti's programmatic description of the painting as an open window, "finestra aperta",[11] which is supposed to show the world it represents as it really is, the (self–)description of TV as a window to the world underlines, for example, the journalistic claim of objective reporting. Complete transparency, and likewise absolute objectivity, is, however, admittedly an illusion.[12] The transmission of information is simply not obtainable without dysfunction.

If, however, one tries to understand the window metaphor in a slightly different manner, it unveils a new semantic level: windows are indeed transparent, but they also limit the field of view to a specific segment; they are translucent, but they also refract the light; in looking through the glass and upon the outside, one's own reflection is also always present. Windows are therefore not neutrally mediating an unregimented view of the world. The associative space is thus expanded and the window metaphor gains density – if against the initial meaning of the metaphor and contrary to the well–meant intention for which the metaphor was made in the first place.

This new window into the world is mysterious, because the medial setting of TV in all its facets (from the camera angle to decisions by the directors, producers and editors to the quality of the broadcast and the equipment of the receiving units) is shaping the content in ways that are

ler. Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 2003. 34–52, trans. Paol Hergert.

[10] Georg Christoph Tholen states that "media open up a spectrum of differences" (G. Ch. Tholen. "Medium/Medien" in: Alexander Roesler, Bernd Stiegler. Eds. *Grundbegriffe der Medientheorie*. Paderborn 2005, S. 150–172 (153), trans. Paol Hergert.

[11] Alberti, Leon Battista. *De Pictura*. Darmstadt: 2000. 25.

[12] In his study *Das durchschnittliche Bild. Konturen einer medialen Phänomenologie* (trans. *The Average Image. Contours of a Medial Phenomenology*), Emmanuel Alloa offers an outstanding philosophical–historical and media theoretical discussion of the image–intrinsic interplay of transparency and opacity (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2011).

undecipherable by the viewer. We can plainly only see what the TV lets us see.[13]

This sentence can be radicalized by reformulating it non–literally: we can only see what the TV itself sees. The window metaphor is herewith exhausted and we have to change to a different register. The history of television itself has an alternative on hand: namely the metaphor of the eye, which was used earlier and had nearly disappeared by the 1950s. Previously, however, it appeared on various occasions. The perspective of the eye describing the phenomenon of television is inherent to the medium. On January 6th, 1884, the Imperial Patent Office of Berlin patented Paul Nipkow's invention of the "electrical telescope" – which can "make an object at place A visible at an arbitrary location B". A telescope is admittedly not a window, although one looks through both of them. While the window can make a barrier transparent, only the telescope is a technological tool for enhancing the perception of the viewer. One can passively sit in front of windows and one can entirely ignore whatever happens on the other side of them. The user of the telescope, however, is acting as a conscious viewer.

This more active perspective on the medial occurrence of television that Nipkow provided has subsequently been received disparately. John Logie Baird, for instance, reacted particularly emphatically:[14] Baird researched, and in the 1920s developed mechanical television sets on the basis of the Nipkow disk. In 1926, he achieved the first wireless television broadcast. In 1927, he founded the Baird Television Development Company, and one year later his televisions were already broadcasting the first color broadcasts. In the same year he accomplished the first trans–Atlantic broadcast from London to New York.

The receiving unit Baird had built was pleasantly named "Televisor" – the machine as that which looks into the distance. The logo of his company implements this perspective on the medial occurrence metaphorically as well as figuratively:

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[13] The world that is mediated by TV is a reality construed by the medium. Niklas Luhmann has described this process better than others, and simultaneously rejected the question of whether this medially construed reality is a distortion or deception, because "this would presuppose an ontological, existing, objectively accessible, clear–of–construction reality: it would presuppose the old cosmos of essence". Luhmann, Niklas. *Die Realität der Massenmedien*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1996. 20, trans. Paol Hergert.

[14] For further information on Baird, see: Hills, Adrian. "Eye of the World: John Logie Baird and Television. Part 1". *Kinema, A Journal for Film and Audiovisual Media*. Vol. 5 (1996) as well as Baird, Malcolm. "Eye of the World: John Logie Baird and Television. Part 2". *Kinema*. Vol. 6 (1996).
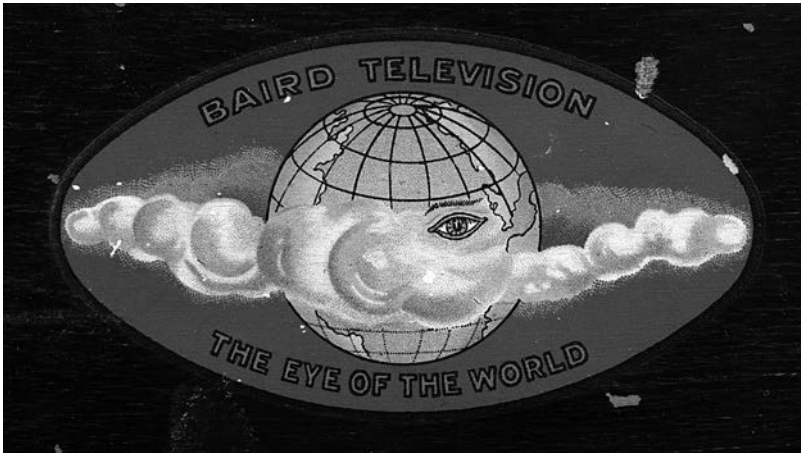
Fig. 7–1: Logie Baird Television Company, 1927.

The TV is becoming the eye of the world. With the introduction of the medium of television, the world is opening its eyes – or, more precisely (as in the advertising campaign of German TV channel ZDF), it opens one eye, which has the capability to look through the veil of the globe–encompassing layer of clouds. The eye's view is directed directly at the viewer, and not back at it in self–reflection – almost as if the responsible advertising graphic designers had anticipated that television sets would not only broadcast programs, but also record the behavior of the viewer: "monitors that monitor us", as Mark Andrejevic beautifully states.[15]

Baird, incidentally, could not keep up in the 1930s, as his mechanical system was technologically inferior to the electronic devices that had been made possible due to inventions by Zworkin, Farnsworth, Marconi and von Ardenne. The metaphorical depiction of TV as the eye of the world, however, existed on a little longer – in 1935, attendees of the public television rooms in Berlin, for example, were greeted as follows: "Nothing is concealed before the eye of television! Television is the eye of the world!"[16] The same year also saw the first documentary film on the newly emerged medium of television: Carl Hartmann's *Das Auge der Welt* (trans. *The Eye of the World*).

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[15] Andrejevic, Mark. "The Twenty–First Century Telescreen". In: Graeme Turner / JinnaTay: *Television Studies after TV. Understanding Television in the Post–Broadcast Era*. London: Routledge, 2009. 31–40 (33).

[16] Kubitz, Peter Paul. *Der Traum vom Sehen. Zeitalter der Televisionen*. Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1997. 18, trans. Paol Hergert.

A window is something *through* which one can see; an eye is that *with* which one can see. The metaphorical descriptions of TV, as a window on the one hand, and as an eye on the other, thus unite and connote two different, if not entirely opposing, perspectives on the mediality of the medium. If it is understood as a window, television primarily appears as a passively received medium of propagation; if it is understood as an eye, television becomes an active viewer. The metaphor of the window oscillates between the ideal of impossible transparency (along its implicit deconstruction) on the one hand, and the logic of difference, which defines the medial occurrence because it institutes it itself, on the other hand. Alternatively, with the metaphor of the eye, the aspiration of an immediate witness of truth surfaces almost solemnly: the medium which can see is without medial features.

To view what is being broadcast means participation in the viewing. We see what the medium of television sees, as if we were there. In the 18th century, William Blake formulated this condition of immediate sensual insight as "as the eye, such the object".[17] In the dispositif of the mass media of television, such immediacy can only be achieved at the cost of the leveling of the medial setting, which negates this achievement altogether. Besides, we know which metaphor has ultimately asserted itself: almost no one describes television as a self–viewing medium anymore, and yet the medium is still referred to as a window to the world. This is demonstrated by this recent example: "media are windows to an always growing world, they enable observation, facilitate knowledge and provide guidance", as Ottfried Jarren stated in 2007. And he continues: "media are therefore contributing to the societal co–orientation, and thus to the societal orientation".[18] (The expansion of the window metaphor to go beyond the audio-visual context is a little unfortunate.)

Similar descriptions are found again and again on various sites. And justifiably so, as the window metaphor describes the role of television as a mass medium and as part of a classical, modern public appropriately: mass media such as television mediate between the spheres of a civil society on the one hand, and the societal institutions of politics, law and economy on the other – mostly, though, due to the medium's establishment of a level of information that is shared by the whole of society (this ensures the integrability of communication without making any participation by the reci-

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[17] Blake, William. "Annotation to Reynold". *Complete Writings*. Ed. Geoffrey Keynes. Oxford: 1976, 456.

[18] Ottfried Jarren and Peter Christian Hall. "Gesellschafts– und Medienwandel als Herausforderung für den Öffentlichen–Rundfunk". *Öffentlichkeiten Im Wandel: Fernsehen Im Digitalen Wettbewerb*. Mainz 2007, 21–35, trans. Paol Hergert.

pients necessary). In this model, an active role taken by the viewer is not only undesirable, it is by definition impossible.

Media and digital public spheres

This understanding is precisely what is being put to the test contemporarily – and digital public spheres, especially in the realm of social media, are here seen to be at fault: contrary to the publicity of the mass media, digital public spheres emerge only through the collaborative participation of its users on the inside of civil society; its media (text and video blogs, social networks, etc.) mediate less between different spheres but alternatively mingle them.[19] In his book *The Wealth of Networks*, Yochai Benkler described the realization of digital public spheres as follows: "the networked public sphere is not made of tools, but of social production practices that these tools enable".[20] Benkler's citation is significant, because it emphasizes two things: the media–technological base of digital public spheres is no sufficient explanation for its emergence, and the key to an understanding, especially of newly emerged, and contemporarily emerging, ways of cultural production, is to be sought out, particularly in social practices. For television, this means that not the technology, but the new cultural practices are actually the enthralling challenge.

To find out what we are dealing with here, a shift of attention towards these practices is indispensable. For the field of audiovisual production, YouTube is exemplary as a website which gathers content exclusively via the participation of its users, and which only exists as a medial platform because users share content with others. The amount of available content is immense, the number of views tremendous.[21] The heterogeneity of the material is great – just like that of the users: in a typical (for digital public spheres) way, YouTube circumvents the segregation of amateurs and professionals. Fans up– and download their own films and professional material alike; they edit material by their friends or products of the film and television industry and upload them again. The material is there; what mat-

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[19] I have extensively analyzed the emergence and function of digital public spheres in my book *Emergenz Digitaler Öffentlichkeiten: Die Sozialen Medien des Web 2.0*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009.

[20] Benkler, Yochai. "The Wealth of Networks: Hoe Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom". New Haven/London: Yale UP, 2006, 219.

[21] A contemporary statistic released by YouTube on occasion of the website's seventh birthday on May 20th, 2012, states that 72 hours of video material are uploaded every minute; 800 million users watch three billion hours of content every month (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLQDPH0ulCg&feature=youtu.be).

ters is what the user does with it: techniques such as remixes and mashups result in the emergence of innovative new formats, which merge materials of great artistic and cultural diversity. Even though the name YouTube suggests otherwise, the platform, as part of the participatory internet culture, does not have much in common with the mass media of television (at least if one looks past the fact that a lot of the audiovisual input has its origin in professional TV): YouTube is not broadcast. YouTube has channels, but no programming. For some, YouTube might be part of the general flow Raymond Williams described as the specific aesthetic feature of television in 1974, but it does not, contrary to its name, have anything to do with broadcasting.

A prominent example will shed some light on the pivotal differences between the mediality of social network platforms such as YouTube and the mass medium of television, namely the 2008 music video *Yes We Can* by the Black Eyed Peas' Will.I.Am. The music video was initially produced for publication on Dipdive, but was simultaneously uploaded to YouTube, as Dipdive was still in its experimental stage.[22] As a mashup, the video blends excerpts from a New Hampshire campaign speech by then presidential candidate Barack Obama with sung excerpts of that same speech by renowned actors and singers. The video is shot entirely in black and white and juxtaposes imagery of Obama and the various actors and singers in ever–changing manners, while the song is staged as the speech's audiovisual echo. Obama's campaign had nothing to do with the production of the video, but nonetheless shared it on its own various websites after it was released. The video went viral quickly, and the YouTube link alone has over 25 million views to date (as of July 7th, 2014); on Dipdive it had around five million views before the site went down. Will.I.Am won a Webby Award thanks to the song, and the song itself won an Emmy (the Emmy version has over two million views on YouTube as well).[23]

In an exemplary manner, *Yes We Can* demonstrates the tendency to undermine the classic differentiations and rigid borders between the various spheres and their actors, in a manner that is typical for audiovisual practices in digital public spheres. In reference to an essay by sociologist Jeffrey Alexander, Vinzenz Hediger has discussed the same example, and states that "YouTube becomes a site for a symbolic fusion of actor and audience".[24] This fusion is thereby also an echo of the literal linkage be-

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[22] The video is still retrievable on YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v= jjXyqcx–mYY), but not on Dipdive, as the site shut down.

[23] The Emmy version can be found here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v =SsV2O4fCgjk

[24] Hediger, Vinzenz. "YouTube and the Aesthetics of Political Accountabil-

tween active and the passive behavior patterns in relation to audiovisual productions, which are by now, on specific internet platforms, not just technically possible, but have become cultural practices. These cultural practices have furthermore resulted in new forms of audiovisual mediality themselves. YouTube users can only watch what others have produced; they can rate, share and integrate the material (on their own websites or those of others); and they can upload films themselves, while also being able to use other users' films, edit them and upload them again. YouTube is by no means a window.

TV and digital culture: four models

In the fight for the attention of viewers, YouTube has become a serious competitor to the mass medium of television. YouTube is, however, only one example, and the challenges the dispositif of television has to face from the digital interconnection of all media has long gone past the necessary contention with new competitors, because, among other things, this contention has resulted in the irreversible alteration of televisual mediality. As a reaction to the digital revolution and the consequent changes in user expectations, the medium of television has developed a range of medial strategies; television–specific media studies has accompanied these developments attentively, and described, analyzed and criticized them. In the following, I will present four of these medial strategies and briefly discuss them via the use of examples, each of which I will annotate with a specific thesis. These strategies are nowhere near covering all of the contemporarily developing strategies, and I by no means try to completely describe the status quo, but want to offer an analysis of a variety of specific examples – an analysis which will focus on showing to what extent the specific strategies challenge and alternate the mediality of television, and how they consequently integrate into the historical context of TV's (self–)descriptions. (The question of whether or not these strategies are particularly interesting, challenging, or even appropriate in their medial surroundings will be of marginal importance to my analysis.) In order to focus the argumentation, I have obtained the examples from the public broadcasting corporations of Germany.

The four strategies I will discuss are 1) the online presence of the various broadcasting corporations and the program–related internet offers on their respective websites, 2) the online presence of the channels in the

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ity". *The YouTube Reader*. By Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau. Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009, 252–66 (256).

form of online media libraries, 3) the adaptations of internet–specific me-
dialities in television programming, and 4) the integration of genuinely
web–produced content into programming.

　1) Television channels and their shows are, in the year 2012, almost all
represented and actively participating in the internet – channels with their
own portals, and the various shows with their respective offers. This holds
true (to the sorrow of the competition from the areas of the print media
and commercial television) for the public broadcasting corporations ARD
and ZDF (as well as their various subchannels), which have been enlarg-
ing their respective online presences ever since the mid–1990s. The basic
modules of program–related content are overarching, from broadcaster to
broadcaster and from program to program. A program like ARD's news
show *Tagesschau* is exemplary, as it provides users of its website (www.
tagesschau.de) with a special short version of the show, and offers further
video and audio data, as well as text–based news.[25] A range of links refer
the user to further content, which is not just *Tagesschau*–related either, but
can link to different ARD shows as well.

　All of this has nothing in common with traditional television and its
specific televisual mediality; on the contrary, we are now looking at a hy-
permedial presence, which is typical for the online presence of television
shows. This hypermediality extends television's audiovisual stipulation
with text and images, audio data, and sophisticatedly programmed interac-
tive modules. Consequently, my first thesis reads as follows: the presence
of TV channels on the internet through show– and program–related offers,
whether it is on single websites or on entire portals, is forming medial par-
allel universes. Through their interconnecting text, image, video and audio
material, these parallel universes possess deeply hypermedial qualities,
which unequivocally medially enrich the realm of television as a whole
system.

　This enrichment is one of the reasons why, as Amanda Lotz said, the
notion of television in singular form has been rendered obsolete. On the
other hand, the medium of television in the narrower sense (what is under-

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[25] Tagesschau is incidentally the only television show that has managed a spot in
the top 100.de domains. At position 75, the show is far ahead of its host channel
ARD, which is in position 181. (Interestingly, this is the reverse case for ZDF,
where the channel is in the third position of German television channels at rank 91
(after RTL at 31 and n–tv.de at 70); www.heute.de, the online presence of the
ZDF's flagship news show lags far behind in position 599.) See: *Alexa: The Web
Information Company*, Top Sites in Germany; URL: http://www.alexa.com/ top-
sites/countries;0/ DE.

stood as classical broadcasting TV),[26] remains largely untouched by these developments.

2) Alongside program–related offers, almost all television channels offer the opportunity to view specific parts of their programs online. These specifically programmed online multimedia libraries are proprietary video portals through which the user can access the respective shows and view them via streaming: the possibility of sharing or downloading is given only rarely,[27] but the viewings are, at least on the public channels, free of charge.[28] These multimedia libraries are constantly advertised with the question "Missed a show?" alongside a reference to the possibility of viewing parts of the program independent of the original airdate. This online presence in the form of online multimedia libraries is, as a translation of the television–specific medialities and their aesthetics on the internet, furthermore to be understood as an attempt to use its own medium's strengths and incorporate them into the new medium. Consequently, my second thesis states that online multimedia libraries lead to an intermedial prolonging of the mediality of television. This, however, does not impact largely on the genuine televisual mediality of television – almost no show is produced differently simply because it will be put online after the original airdate.

The existence of online multimedia libraries does, however, as one element in the context of the aforementioned continuing personalization and individualization of television usage, have repercussions: through elevating the viewers to sovereign designers of their time–related mode of reception, the act of making content available for viewing online is questioning the respective channel's program–related sovereignty, just as the availability of DVRs has done in a manner that is removed from the necessity of an internet connection.[29] Even if the television channels' online activities

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[26] An online study by ARD and ZDF has revealed television to be in first place with 229 minutes per day, while radio has 192 minutes per day, and the internet 80 minutes per day. Internet usage, however, is growing rapidly, and when looking at 14–29 year olds, the internet is in first place with 147 minutes, with TV at 146 minutes. Source: www.ard–zdf–onlinestudie.de/index.php?id=289.

[27] This is mostly because of German (especially music–related) law.

[28] The Rundfunkstaatsvertrag (trans. Interstate Broadcasting Agreement) closely regulates how ARD and ZDF can provide their shows, which usually results in the programming only being available for a very limited amount of time. The commercial channels provide some of their shows for free, while some others will cost the user a specific fee.

[29] As of now, this new way of consumption has not asserted itself, as Engel and Best state: "In total, classic television is dominating over all other forms of consumption with 96%." Source: Best, Stefanie and Bernhard Engel. "Stream, Audio

cannot solely be reduced to the making available of program–related information on the one hand, and videos of the respective shows on the other; both strategies represent the two most widespread attempts of television to be an active participant in the medial sphere of the internet and to be recognized as television. Consequently, the fact that the mediality of television remains largely untouched by these online endeavors is not surprising in the least. In the realm not of the channels but of individual programs and shows, this is slightly different.

3) As a medium of constant change, television has always reacted to social, technological and cultural changes. The style of a show, the aesthetic design as well as the dramaturgy of the camera movements and so on are certainly always reflections of the status quo that is lived by the agents of television – and which they insinuate is the viewers' reality of life. It is therefore no coincidence that experimental adaptations of internet–specific medialities and its aesthetics are growing in, and by means of, television programs – especially in the sphere of the public channels, perhaps driven by the hope of attracting younger audiences that are out of reach of traditional programming. The editorial team, for example, of the political talk show *Maybrit Illner* (ZDF) is prompting viewers to upload videos with questions about the show via YouTube – and some of those videos are then actually shown on the show to be discussed. The viewer thereby becomes part of the show, in an attempt to elevate the passive recipient to the level of a "prosumer" (or at least to make him feel like one). The path to achieving this, however, will be a long one: the interested user is initially presented with legal parameters. If the user follows the respective link, he will find himself at the YouTube channel of the show, where, next to clips from the show and internet–specific videos by the editorial team, he will find viewer–/user–created content. If I now want to upload a video, I have to click "send", after which an uploading form appears which only works if I have agreed to the terms and conditions. To read these terms and conditions, I have to follow a link that takes me back to the ZDF online presence. It is obvious that the path to user participation is not exactly made easy by the show's editorial team. Obviously, the editorial team closely monitors not only which videos will ultimately make it onto the show, but which ones are allowed to stay on the YouTube channel itself. From the viewpoint of the broadcasting medium, this all makes sense, but the YouTube–specific way of sharing content largely differs from these practices.

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und Page – die Rezeptionsformen in der Konvergenten Medienwelt". Trans. Paol Hergert. *Media Perspektiven* 2 (2012): 62–75 (73).

Experimental adaptations of internet–specific medialities and internet aesthetics in television programming and the respective internet offers are examples of "retrograde remediation",[30] to use the words of Jay D. Bolter and Richard Grusin; that is to say, they aim, contrary to the attempt to incorporate the strengths of their own medium in the new, to elevate the "old" medium of television by incorporating characteristics of the "new" medium of the internet into it. Even if there now are sophisticated and indeed interesting exceptions,[31] the norm is that the adaptation of the mediality of the internet only scratches the surface of the programming, which is my third thesis. Analogously to the historical staging of interaction with the viewership via call–ins, which only suggests interactivity and ultimately forbids it, the incorporation of various elements of internet aesthetics and internet culture into the program is merely a simulation. Their (mass–)medial logic, which functions as the structural foundation of the dramaturgies of shows, has been immunized with regard to the indeed anarchist potentials of the cultural practices of the internet.

4) The last strategy I want to present is not actually a strategy per se – at least insofar as its emergence is extensively born out of necessity and therefore not a calculated element of television's attempt to meet the demands of a digitally revolutionized media world: the integration of genuine audiovisual internet productions into television is, at least with regard to the version I focus on, a phenomenon that is not (yet) widespread – even though it is featured increasingly, especially in the realm of news programming. In the absence of current video footage by the channels' own correspondents, the editorial teams of news shows worldwide increasingly make use of material that is supplied by internet users, often shot via cellphones and uploaded to YouTube, Twitter or Facebook and thereby made public. The advantages of this practice are obvious: in many cases, the world would not know what was happening otherwise. Especially in totalitarian societies, the internet (and especially social networks) has opened up channels of information that have on the one hand made communication between the members of oppositional groups possible, and that have

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[30] Bolter, Jay David and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 1999, 184.

[31] One example of a show that exists in the (difficult to regulate) mode of communication of the internet, and in a playful manner, is Richard Gutjahr's contemporary social TV experiment *Rundshow* on the Bayrischer Rundfunk. It was on the air for four weeks in May of 2012 and marketed as political entertainment. The show was entirely dependent on the active participation of its internet users, who could interact with the agents of the show via Twitter, Facebook and Google+. Further information: http://blog.br.de/rundshow.

enabled citizens to send information out of various countries and thereby garner international attention on the other hand. The integration of You-Tube videos into television news is problematic, firstly because the chan-nels are thereby facing the near–impossible task of verifying the material's authenticity and checking whether or not it is actually showing what it alleges to be showing. Secondly, the way in which the various channels handle their respective sources is worthy of discussion: the indication "YouTube material", or "material from the internet", which is readily shown in reports, is vague as a source citation (and plainly wrong as legal disclaimer): after all, the internet is no archive, just as YouTube is no channel; furthermore, the platform does not possess any copyrights with regard to the published videos – the user possesses those copyrights (and his name could by all means be stated).

Consequently, and in the context of my analysis, my fourth thesis is that an integration of genuinely internet–produced content into television programming indeed leads to the reconfiguration of the mediality of tele-vision *within the medium of television itself*; this mediality confronts the mass medium with a fundamentally alien acquisition practice of informa-tion. In cases of the incorporation of, say, YouTube video into news shows, a mingling of the digital and mass–medial public spheres takes place. This mingling undermines the difference between active constitu-tion and passive reception, and thereby runs contrary to the traditional logic of the medium of television. In this instance, television does not just broadcast audiovisual material produced by amateurs who are potential viewers and that is dramaturgically staged by the agents of television; the mass medium experiences and allows the incursion of a medial culture whose modes of production and distribution follow altogether different regulations straight into its own heart.

Eyes in the window

The medial differentiation of television has many facets, and it is continu-ing, not least due to the digital revolution, on all sides of the classical no-tions of broadcasting. In an attempt to deal with the challenges of digital culture, the television dispositif has come up with a range of strategies, of which the four presented only make up one section (if an exemplary one). Every one of these strategies extends the medial semblance of the total system of television. It must, however, be noted that the digitalization of the productive means (from camera to sound to editing and archiving) has had a stronger impact on the mediality of television than the various online presences of channels and shows, which, in their parallel universe, have

had hardly any lasting effect on the mediality of television. This might be due to the fact that the barrier between online and on–air (which is just a cultural phantasm anyhow) has admittedly been overcome by television on a technological level, but has to be constantly reimagined in the process of self–description (if only to outline an alternative model). This alternative model is, obviously, not fictitious. The digital online culture stands, due to its social practices and the medial and aesthetic formations it has created, in irresolvable opposition to every form of mass–medial structure, because the participation of its users, which is so essential to the internet, is widely barred from any mass medium. This opposition is irresolvable, because the exclusion of viewer/user/reader interaction is congenial to the mass medium: "In any case it is crucial that there can be no interaction between attendees, between broadcaster and receiver".[32] For that reason alone, experiments that seek to integrate medial elements of the internet into the production of television are both exciting and uncertain.

The neutralization of the medial brisance of Facebook, Twitter or YouTube via the structure of editorial dramaturgy is essential for the survival of the mass medium (the particular intentions do not matter here). Television remains the mass medium of television only as long as it strictly differentiates between itself and its viewership. Metaphorically speaking, the window can only exist as a window as long as there is a difference between the outside and the inside. If the wall is gone, the window loses its raison d'être. In cases where the mass medium of television opens itself up for the medial production of digital online culture—in experiments, which are no mere enactments, in shows which effectively allow participation and interaction and do not just simulate it, and even where the channels of information of the network are derived from material provided by the cellphones, computers and cameras of involved civilians—these places allow the window to become permeable, and the window truly turns into eyes.

<div align="right">(Translated into English by Paol Hergert, Berlin)</div>

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CHAPTER EIGHT

PICTORIAL THINKING:
ON THE "LOGIC" OF ICONIC STRUCTURES

DIETER MERSCH

Ambiguity of the image

It is not always easy to decide whether something is an image or not. Some objects are images without revealing themselves as such, while others are not images at all, and only appear like them. Design objects, for instance, have a genuine image–like quality, as their iconicity conceals their materiality, while the actual value of the object is assessed according to its form, its exterior appearance. On the other hand—especially in the context of science and technology—we are confronted with iconic textures like maps, blueprints and diagrams which cannot simply be subsumed under the category of the pictorial, as they are much closer to writings which have to be "read" than to images which have to be viewed. This does not imply that one cannot talk about "the image" in general, just because only particular images exist that have to be studied in their singularity, which leads beyond the scope of any unified term—although it appears to be problematic to speak of "the image" in an all–encompassing way, in order to gather and collect the characteristics of "all" images. In contrast, the pictorial is to be understood in the sense of a medial, the structure of which is to be examined here. On the one hand, this structure participates in a structure of mediality itself; on the other hand, it preserves the characteristic order of this structure. It can be deciphered as an order of "showing" [Zeigen].[1] Showing, however, cannot be deduced solely via the struc-

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[1] Cf. Dieter Mersch, *Kunst und Medium. Zwei Vorlesungen*, Gestalt und Diskurs (Schriftenreihe der Muthesius–Hochschule), Vol. 3, Kiel, 2003; Dieter Mersch "Wort, Bild, Ton, Zahl. Modalitäten medialen Darstellens", in: *Die Medien der Künste: Beiträge zu einer Theorie des Darstellens*, München: Fink, 2003, pp. 9–49.

ture of representation, or the symbolic content of a depiction, or via the techniques of visualization—the methods of making visible and being made visible by the use of tools, instruments or devices. Instead, a thorough examination of the close interplay between the gaze and the image must be included in the analysis of the pictorial. It is possible to differentiate between at least three levels of the iconic in this context: (a) the actual depiction or representation, which, on occasion, may also turn up blank; (b) the methods of visuality with their specific aesthetic and technical strategies, and (c) ultimately, those conditions which cause the eye to be fettered by a visible object and allow vision to become aware of the visible in the first place.

This last relationship, however, proves to be extremely tricky and conflicted. Its complexity begins with the fact that an image requires a gaze, while gazes do not inevitably generate images. As Merleau–Ponty points out, the image is primarily connected to the invisible,[2] requiring a particular gaze to initially see something *as* an image—a gaze that one can identify as "double vision". This "double vision" becomes the subject of the interplay between visibility and invisibility in multiple ways. If one wants to decipher the mediality of the pictorial and its structure, then one needs to proceed from this double gaze and its multiple interlacing between "withdrawal" and "excess".

Pictoriality and visibility

Initially, to see an image means to perceive something "as" an image as well as to perceive the object shown by the image. This phrasing alone alludes to an instance of duplicity: the "image as image" as well as the "image as a thing" that makes "something" visible or brings it into view, regardless of whether it is an object, a figure, a color or a simple division of a tableau. Thus, a gaping difference exists between pictoriality and the creation of visibility, which nonetheless remains invisible "in its quality" *as* a difference, because that which becomes visible only does so by virtue of the images themselves creating this visibility. This difference "marks" the pictorial, as it is constitutive—*as* a difference—of the visibility of the image itself, in as far as it represents the condition of the possibility of iconic visuality and its "thinking". That is: an instance of invisibility constitutes visibility, with a rift running between the visible and the invisible;

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[2] Maurice Merleau–Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible. Followed by Working Notes*, Northwestern University Press: Evanston 1968; Bernhard Waldenfels, "Spiegel, Spur und Blick", in *Homo Pictor*, ed. by Gottfried Boehm, Munich and Leipzig: Saur, 2001, pp. 14–31.

not right through the image, but rather across it—in another, hidden dimension, so to speak. It does not split or divide the image, but separates it into image and "likeness" (*Ab–Bildung*), or medium and representation—and in this context, the terms "likeness" and "representation" are to be used in their general meanings, from depiction to indication, from symbolization to that which "offers" a view to the gaze, as Jacques Lacan puts it.[3]

Of course, this differentiation leads to a number of consequences. First of all, to see an image means to perceive it *as* an image—and not as something else. This finding also allows for an inversion: a thing that can be perceived as an image may alternatively *not* be seen as such. Accordingly, seeing an image permits a change of attention, the literal "re–flection" of the image as a thing, its construction, its usage, its hanging or its materiality. We are not able to perform this change intentionally, we cannot employ it freely to shift back and forth between perspectives as "metastable" images demonstrate; the gaze rather *jumps*, according to Ludwig Wittgenstein, between its "aspects". In fact, complicated medial interventions are necessary at times to carry out this inversion, and art has developed numerous practices to blur and irritate the gaze or to create "metapictures", which reflect the process in terms of pictorial strategies. While we cannot control the gaze and thus the image, it is not unusual for the image to control *us*—that is to captivate us and to force its direction upon us, making "other" means of detachment and distancing necessary to disentangle ourselves from its illusion and its powers of deception.

The other aspect of this difference results in images being less expressive. They are not so much disposed to impart something to the observer; instead, they rather—as has been suggested above—*show*. Images are certainly quite able to symbolize something and to "tell stories", but where they represent or intimate something, they represent or intimate *in the mode of showing*. This showing, or indication, differs from observation and also from comprehension, because it opens up a view, but the visibility generated thus—even if it is the visibility of a thing—is different from merely seeing a thing. René Magritte coined the *apercu* that pictures are viewed differently than objects in space.[4] This suggestion hints at the spe-

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[3] Waldenfels also stresses that this is not only a figure of reflection: "The enigma of visibility lies in the fact that the becoming as well as the making visible employ the means of the visible" (Waldenfels, 2003, p. 5). This, on the other hand, gives rise to the question of how the constitution of visibility can be become visible in turn.

[4] René Magritte, *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. by André Blavier, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Vienna 1985, p. 44 (Org.: *Écrits complets de René Magritte*, Paris, Flammarion, 1979).

cial medial status of the image, namely the difference between the visible, which is constituted by it, and the visual that we encounter. It implies that the visible of the image is different from the visible of the non–image that we face in our visual experience—even if the image itself belongs to things which exist in space and can be experienced as such. This also means that the gaze towards the image differs from the gaze of normal perception, even if they both relate to each other. Apparently, some quality must be added so that something can be seen *in* the image, just as, inversely, something normally pertaining to the object is not enough to turn it into an image; in point of fact, the pictorial quality is experienced first and foremost due to a specific "kind of perception", which turns something into an "image of something", just as the image has a quality which turns the thing that one can experience visually into a "representation". The work of imaging struggles with this: to open up a perception not by offering a "sujet" but by presenting perceivable stimuli which address the gaze.

The aforementioned difference is not always easy to spot, particularly since many things which ostensibly do not perform as images can turn into images if one observes them through the lens of the iconic gaze. This gaze, on the other hand, only exists where images have already been experienced: the view of a landscape, a look through a window, mirrors, photographs, monochrome canvasses, masks, patterns on wallpaper, geometric figures or simple colored rags nailed to a wall. It is, in the first place, their "framing" which turns these sights into images—although not necessarily, as they can be perceived differently or even not at all. Consequently, the *perception of a frame* appears to be the quality that has to be added to the gaze, to perception itself, in order to turn it into an iconic experience.

At the same time, framing does not automatically refer to that thing which surrounds an image and separates its interior from the exterior, but rather to the *dispositive,* meaning the system of material and non–material conditions which mark a "border" in numerous possible ways, be it via a real or imagined frame, a certain format of camera (*cadrage*) or a material medium, like a plate, which invariably transforms what is displayed on it into a surface, just to name one of many possible examples. Even images that technically move their edges out of the field of vision, like projections in IMAX–cinemas or *Fulldomes*, are characterized by this border, at least by the edge of the screen, the dome, the spatial arrangement and the rows of seats which fix the gaze, and so on: they facilitate the viewing of something *as* the viewing of an image, while they limit the viewing to this function at the same time; their restriction bears comparison with the framing that forces the visual to turn into the iconic and trains or disciplines that which can be tentatively called "iconic vision". All categories of technical

illusionism, which can be addressed as the "immersiveness" of the image, find the source of their dynamic—but also of their futility—in this structure. However, its aim amounts to a paradox: the effacement of that which constitutes the viewing of an image, and thus the erasure of pictoriality as a medium. The logic of technological progress exists due to this *telos*: "a medium that negates its own mediality."

The iconic and discursive "as"

It is, however, the framing *dispositif* that initially turns the image–like into an image and produces the duplicity of "viewing something as an image" and "observing something in the image". Pictorial thinking starts with this duplicity. Every border is marked with a difference, and constitutes itself along this difference. Here, it can be designated as "iconic". Therefore, we encounter a variation related to Gottfried Boehm's topic of the "iconic difference",[5] which originally turned pictorial studies into a philosophical discipline. This also denotes precisely the difference that constitutes the quality of the image as a medium. Consequently, its framing or difference has two results, which coincide directly with the duplicity of the gaze introduced above: (a) first of all, it sets something apart from its surroundings *as* an image and thus emphasizes it; (b) secondly, it makes something visible "as a representation of something", i.e. it shows something "as" something. Therefore, along with the pictoriality of the image, it characterizes the representation of something "as" a specific representation and consequently generates that which can be denoted as an "iconic as" as distinguished from the "apophantic" or "hermeneutic as". The multi–functional conjunction "as" represents the philosophical riddle *per se*. It is responsible for any determination. It signifies, even if it generates this significance not in the medium of the sign. Here, it constitutes meaning in the medium of the image. Accordingly, "framing/difference" both indicates that which makes an image possible and generates the pictoriality of the image, which allows it "to show"*,* "represent", "display something" or make it visible "as something". Because this occurs in the visual medium, which is subject to other laws than discursive media like scripts and numbers, it still has to be differentiated from the "hermeneutic" and thus from the "semiological" and the "discursive as"—but initially, such a separation points out nothing more than the necessity of making a distinction between the registers of the "sayable" and denotable on the one hand and of the

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[5] Cf. Gottfried Boehm, "Die Wiederkehr der Bilder", in Gottfried Boehm (ed.), *Was ist ein Bild?*, Munich: Fink, 1995, pp. 11–38. Since then the term has had a career in different guises.

iconic on the other, while its characteristics *as* a distinction still have to be gauged. In turn, this is the distinction that characterizes the medial peculiarity of the image in contrast to text, script and mathematical structures, as well as bestows upon the image its distinct "logic", which does not conform to the "logic" of the symbolic or the discrete and cannot be reduced to them.[6] It reveals that the particular mediality of the image cannot be reduced to a grammatical, semiotic or rhetoric mode; in fact, we are dealing with a systematic incompatibility, which simultaneously raises the question of its describability, which as a discursive description has to remain inadequate with regards to iconic processes.[7]

As an additional consequence, any attempts to reduce "visual strategies of staging" to rhetoric and thus to figures which can be traced back to speech, or to simply conceive the image as a metaphor or a method of allegorization, appear obsolete.[8] To put it differently: semiotics, hermeneutics and "iconology" prove to be inadequate approaches for a theory of pictoriality, because they disregard precisely the key aspect that would have to be denoted as the mediality of the image in the proper sense. Moreover, the image resists a thorough discursive analysis, as is shown by the failing of *ekphrasis*, which, by interminable utilization of terminology only shifts and enlarges the gap between discourse and pictoriality, instead of closing it. If, alternatively, a discursive analysis were at all possible, if the image could be completely transformed into language, then it would be nothing but a readable text and its observation a continual reading.

In contrast, the approach presented here insists on a fundamental untranslatability, an incommensurability of images and other medial modalities. It relies on the difference between saying and showing. Pictorial thinking bears cognition in the realm of showing. The approach suggests taking the gaze as a starting point for deciphering the peculiarity of the pictorial and thus for placing the pictorial in the spectrum of perceptions that originally do not have a seamless relationship with terminology. Consequently, this approach insists on the intuition that the relationship between image and gaze defines the specific format of the medium, which

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[6] I have taken a closer look at the hypothesis of the incommensurability between the basic medial formats of writing, images, numbers and sound in my article "Wort, Bild, Ton, Zahl. Modalitäten medialen Darstellens" in Mersch, 2003, pp. 20–35.

[7] Cf. regarding this question cf. Gottfried Boehm and Helmut Pfotenhauer (eds.), *Beschreibungskunst – Kunstbeschreibung*, Munich: Fink, 1995.

[8] Concerning this tightly employed perspective from literary studies cf. e.g. Bettine Menke, "Bild – Textualität. Benjamins schriftliche Bilder," in Michael Wetzel and Herta Wolf (eds.), *Der Entzug der Bilder*, Munich: Fink, 1994, pp. 47–65.

requires other means than those borrowed from sign theory or literary studies and linguistics. A close examination of this intuition leads to the discovery of a series of divisions that structure the relationship between image and gaze; the use of the plural form here is meant to underline the fact that this structure consists of a system of differences, of *aporias* and *chiasmi* which evoke varied series of "perforations". And the task of a philosophy of the pictorial that bases itself on the gaze has to be committed to reconstructing the mediality of the image and the specific scopophilia it evokes from this inherent system of differences. At the same time, this approach also highlights the manifold traces of invisibilities that organize the complex interplay of "excess" and "withdrawal" [Zug und Entzug] in an image.

Reflexivity and deframing

The first principle of the gaze's division is constituted by the framing mentioned above. Not only does framing locate a difference via pictorial means, by intersecting or separating, but it is also based upon a material arrangement, which focuses the gaze to the same extent that it indicates and signalizes—be it via the rim of an ocular, the lens of a projector, a screen, or spatial boundaries and the like. This has always been utilized or reflected upon by the arts—whether in the form of mirrors that invert or unveil elements not covered by the spatial arrangement, as in the case of Diego Velázquez's *Las Meniñas* (Fig. 8–1),[9] or the pastose and expressive quality of coloring that exposes as well as suspends the corporeality of the object in works by Cézanne or Van Gogh. But, at the same time, modernism has pointed out the impossibility of this endeavor. Take, for example, Maurice Denis's simple remark that, before it becomes a naked woman or an anecdote, an image is essentially a "level surface" which is covered by paints in a certain arrangement,[10] to which Man Ray adds that as a "form of expression", the art of painting—as a simulation of matter or of an arbitrary inspiring subject—is characterized "by the colour and structure of the material", that is by pigments and other substances, reduced to two dimen-

[9] Diego Velázquez's painting *Las Meniñas* has brought forth an abundance of interpretations by, among others, Michel Foucault, John Searle, Hermann Asemissen. Concerning the non–opening imagination of Velázquez cf. esp. my deliberations in "Ästhetischer Augenblick und Gedächtnis in der Kunst. Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Zeit und Bild", as in FN 1., pp. 151–176.
[10] Maurice Denis according to Werner Haftmann, *Malerei des 20. Jahrhunderts*, München: Prestel, 1965, p. 50.

Fig. 8–1: Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas*, 1656. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

sions.[11] If the surface, the materiality of the image—or its *dispositif*—happens to be the prerequisite of presentability—a fact which, when applied to the gaze, becomes the precondition for viewing to literally turn at the borders of pictoriality—then framing, in turn, evolves into the principle of a reflexivity that draws attention to something which is at the same time veiled by the image: the scene of its visualization. The viewing of the im-

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[11] According to Andrea Jahn, Katharina Lepper and Hannelore Kersting (eds.), *Man Ray* (exhibition catalogue), Stuttgart et al. 1998, p. 35.

age shifts between these two poles. This is the reason why we referred earlier to a "double" gaze: its viewing, as far as it perceives anything in the image, requires the refraction and inversion of the gaze at the image, in order to make it possible to discern between picture and "depiction" or medium and representation at any time. The viewing of an image is necessarily reflexive, and this also means that one is able to turn towards the pictoriality of the image itself—and to know at all times that one is viewing an image.

Theoretical possibilities are not real possibilities; in fact, other prerequisites are necessary to turn one into the other. For this does not only concern the reflection of the representation's form, but also the exposure of mediality itself; i.e. the appearance of the medium "as" a medium, which allows an analysis of its structure, just as making it visible includes a paradox. Therefore, the principle of reflexivity is likewise a prerequisite of viewing an image and of the discovery of mediality itself. Only because of this principle, a media theory of the image exists. Art has always capitalized on this—exemplarily in Magritte's reflections on the image in *Les mots et les images* (1929) or the indistinguishability of transparency and opacity in Marcel Duchamp's *Grand Verre* (1923, Fig. 8–2)*,* a large window–image which at the same time enables and obstructs the view through it; the sites of fracture that are present in this work anticipate those interferences that later constituted the actual genre of video art. By deceiving the eyes and other paradoxical strategies it seeks to refract—manifestly as well as latently—the illusionism of pictoriality, as a way to make visible the elements that generate visibility in the first place.

However, this can be inverted as well, because the conditions of reflection are simultaneously the conditions of its very negation. The desire for technological perfection in the production of images, as mentioned before, aims in this direction: in this sphere, iconic reflexivity becomes a tool of illusion. Thus, framing and deframing refer to each other, just like difference and its annulment via "immersion", which share a similar connection. Both shift like foreground and background in an optical illusion and terminate the varied history between art and technology. Their correlatives constitute strategies of visualization concerning the mathematical construction of the image as well as the device–based manipulation of the field of vision and the systems of optics, which equally direct and blind the gaze. But because reflexivity as a constituent of image–viewing cannot be completely effaced, they also grow to monstrous proportions and turn into a synopsis and totalization of the gaze, as demonstrated most notably by the techniques of illusion prevalent in the 19th century: their enhance-
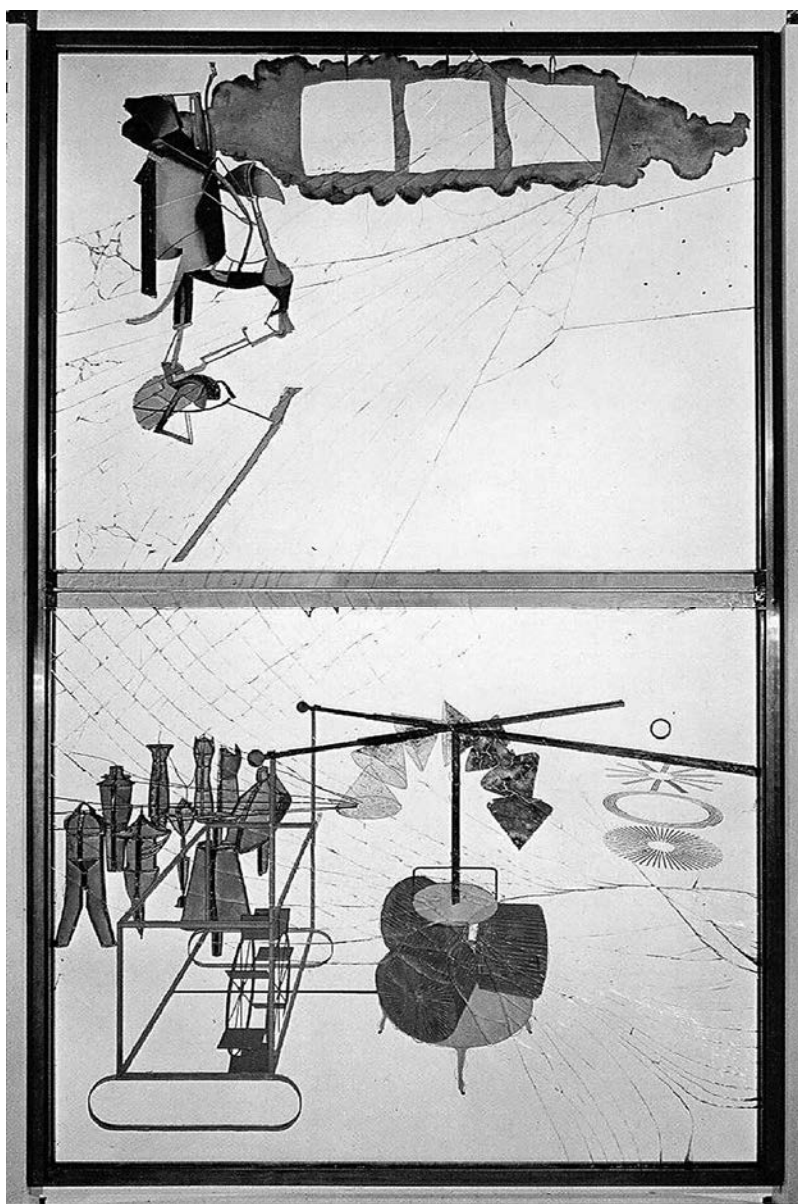
Fig. 8–2: Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass – Grand Verre)*, 1915–1923.

ment and excess exposes an "iconic claim to power", which Nietzsche and Heidegger demarcated as a general characteristic of the technological in the shape of a "will to power".

It is subject to another shift with relation to the digitalization of the pictorial, its constructability without an index, which photography invariably still leaves intact. Since this development, effects have written themselves into the visible, without being visible, because no residual traces remain. Image and gaze submit to the regime of those elements that keep themselves unrecognizable *as* a regime. Accordingly, these "imagings" use devices and algorithms to install orders of signs that cause the pictorial itself to withdraw, only to generate it anew as an "iconic grapheme" by means of numerical and statistical methods.[12] But technology does not continue with the classical *illusio*, insofar as this would always relate to a *mimesis* based upon ontology, but with *simulatio* that proves to be committed completely to the *"art" of the mathematical* which proceeds *syntactically* and is therefore independent of any discrete content. That which is "on offer to be viewed" does not conform to *immersion* or *illusion* anymore; instead it turns into fictionality. Here, the term "fictional" points to literary forms, but refers to the mathematical term *existence*, which only denotes a *possibility* subject to the restriction of formal coherence, not a reality.

This becomes particularly virulent in the case of digitally generated "images in science", which do not proceed from mimetic reference, but are based on the computer–aided processing of probabilistic amounts of data, which are used—often with the aid of "smoothing" and the truncation of extreme values—to make something visible that otherwise would not submit to any kind of visibility. This is not the interplay of generating visibility and invisibility that dominated visualization for centuries, but rather the representation of something non–visual which only follows a "graphemic" and not a visual "trace".[13]

As a result, we are dealing with abstract patterns that, as with scanning tunneling microscopy, are generated by scans of distances and their statistical extrapolation, and only function as genuine scriptures. Of course, the explosiveness of an "iconic ideology" lurks within these depictions, which systematically play with the most prominent characteristic of the image: the power to make something visible and to feign verisimilitude in the

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[12] Cf. Dieter Mersch "Das Bild als Argument," in *Ikonologien des Performativen*, ed. by Christoph Wulf and Jörg Zirfas, Munich: Fink, 2005, pp. 322–344.
[13] Cf. also Dieter Mersch, "Visual Arguments: The Role of Images in Sciences and Mathematics", in: *Science Images and Popular Images of the Science*, ed. by B. Hüppauf, P. Weingart, New York: Routledge 2008, p. 181–198.

process. The image employed as an argument in scientific discourse is in danger of succumbing to this ideology.

Irrepresentability

As the development of the technical generation of images progresses in this manner, from *illusio* to graphemic *simulatio*, it simultaneously follows a "logic" in which the division of the gaze is annulled; a division that appears to be constitutive of the image as a medium. Thus a tendency appears that suggests the erasure of the image as such and its morphing into three–dimensional structures or walkable spaces. But this tendency also exploits the order of framing or difference to the same extent as it is teleologically guided by the images' principle of reflection. Here, the paradox of the endeavor reveals a central feature of the structure of the medial itself. While images are cut by their framing and their visible elements are raised by *dispositifs* and implemented by technical devices, these remain without outline *in* the image itself. They do not stand out. The prerequisites of pictoriality thus assert themselves as something that is irrepresentable within the pictorial. Every image is divided by this difference between representation and irrepresentability, which can never be effaced or obliterated by any kind of technical *perfectio*. In other words: the image withdraws its own mediality. It keeps its mediality in the sphere of the invisible.

This invisibility corresponds to the "dialectics of mediality", which consist of the medium's peculiar quality to conceal itself in its appearance. A "negative" media theory has its starting point here.[14] We look by the means of devices, optical appliances or techniques of visualization, but we do not look at them. We recognize or observe something due to the manner of its shape, its coloring, or due to a specific direction of the image or choice of detail—but, as modalities of production or enactment, these elements remain merely accompaniments: *they show themselves*. Even when we encounter only algorithms which calculate images as graphs, we look right through them. While the medium *as* a medium allows the possibility of refraction and thus reflection at any time, it forfeits its function concurrent to the degree of its surfacing *as a medium*: the self–observation turns into a disruption, a dysfunctionality, as has been the topic of, for example, Nam June Paik's early television art, which addressed the blindness of the apparatus.

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[14] Cf. also Dieter Mersch, "Medialität und Undarstellbarkeit. Einleitung in eine "negative" Medientheorie", in *Medialität und Performanz*, ed. by Sybille Krämer, Munich: Fink, 2004, pp. 75–96.

The distinction which thus emerges is *primordial* even to the "iconic difference"; it enters into it as an "interplay" of appearing and vanishing. It would be possible to speak of a "difference concerning the difference", although this is not the distinction between picture and "de–piction" respectively, medium and representation, but rather the distinction between medium and mediality, image and pictoriality. It enters into a relationship of *negativity* towards the represented and visible. This explains the reference to invisibility: it points to the contours of a *negative aesthetics of the image and the medium*. This suggests that only the image and its representation appear—not the mediality: it remains behind visibility, as something that is always hidden. It constitutes this visibility, but, as a conditional, it does not generate a position in the image, in the field of vision, because it initially opens up and directs the image *as* an image.

This finding is characteristic for every medium qua "middle" or "mediation", insofar as a *genuine dualism* is inherent in this "inbetweenness": it exposes itself in the process of representation while not making itself recognizable. While images are able to express or represent *something—* and in this they appear "similar to language",[15] to the same extent that they refuse language itself—they cannot represent *by what means* they represent: *this shows itself*. The showing conforms to irrepresentability: it is neither able to show *at what* it is pointing, nor *by what means* it is showing. Instead, it points in a certain direction, uses allusions, displays or parades itself. Here, the figure of "showing/concealing" can be borrowed from Wittgenstein's early work. Language, as is formulated in the *Tractatus*, can speak only because of its "logical form", which, however, cannot be expressed in words. Thus, it is not able to additionally express its own structural or performative format: this "shows itself".[16] Images direct the attention in a similar manner: they make something recognizable, *they show*, but in a way which *does not show the modalities of their showing in the process*—they elude the visualization of their function where it concerns the creation of visibility.

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[15] Theodor W. Adorno insisted on the "similarity to language" of music in a similar context, but of course in such a way that this similarity would only manifest itself where music departed from language's function as statement. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, "Music and Language. A Fragment", in Theodor W. Adorno, Quasi una Fantasia. Essays on Modern Music, London New York 1998, pp 1–7. (Org. "Fragment über Musik und Sprache," in *Musikalische Schriften III,* Gesammelte Werke, Vol. 16, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003, pp. 251–256).

[16] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico–philosophicus*. Transl. Odgen and Richards, London: Routledge 1981, Prop. 3.262, 4.022, 4.12–4.1212, 4.126, 5.62, 6.12, 6.36 and 6.522.

In an image, showing corresponds to the aesthetic dimension. It reveals the duplicity of semblance and appearance and leads—beyond the legible, the *dispositif*, the framing and the "iconic as"—to the manner of its specific phenomenality. An image, as it represents something, must appear in the same instant, which means that it must show *itself* in the process of showing and exhibit the means of its representation, its structure as a medium and its materiality, while these suspend and limit the representation at the same moment. The whole complex logic of the "showable" and the "unshowable (non–showable)" is linked to this, in a manner which corresponds to the relationship between the effable and ineffable present in the discursive. Concerning language, Wittgenstein came to the conclusion that "one […] [cannot] describe the nature of language employing language":[17] language has to speak for itself. He adds: "We are confronted by a kind of theory of relativity pertaining to language".[18] The philosophy of language fails, because it has to express itself in language about language. Thus, a withdrawal remains, a "negative mediality of language",[19] which was analogously expressed by Heidegger's tautological aphorism that language is only language: "Language is language. Language speaks".[20] This also holds true for the image. "What the image tells me is itself", notes Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*: "That is, its telling me something consists its own structure, *its* own lines and colours".[21]

The logic of showing

Thus, whatever an image shows or incorporates, whatever it says or represents, it does so in the mode of showing. Showing has a different format than telling (itself). Converted and brought close to Nelson Goodman's difference between "denotation" and "exemplification"[22] as well as the difference between "representation" and "presentation" in the approaches

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[17] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Bemerkungen*, Vienna Edition, Vol. 3, Vienna and New York: Springer, 2000, p. 30, No. 3.

[18] Wittgenstein, 2000a, p. 33–34.

[19] Cf. Dieter Mersch "Negative Medialität. Derridas Différance und Heideggers Weg zur Sprache" in *Journal of Phänomenologie, Jacques Derrida*, Vol. 23, 2005, pp. 14–22.

[20] Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, transl. Albert Hofstadter, New York: Harper 1971, pp. xxv and 187–189.

[21] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, transl. G.E.M Anscombe, Oxford, 1953, p.143 § 523. German Original: "Das heißt, dass es mir etwas sagt, besteht in seiner eigenen Struktur, seinen Formen und Farben". *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971, S. 175, § 523.

[22] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, Indianapolis 1976, p. 52–58.

by Susanne Langer, Husserl and Gottfried Boehm, it proves to be fundamental for the analysis of the aesthetic of the pictorial and its structure. At
the same time, it indicates another difference, which intersects the image
invisibly and irrepresentably, because it precedes every instance of constituting the iconic. Additionally, the specific "logic" of iconic mediality
becomes legible here. Images *present*—despite all the systems of significance and reconsideration, of symbolization and interpretation which open
and domesticate the gaze—and this presentation, this "making present"
also generates their peculiar proximity to evidence. This is the reason for
the abundant presence of pictorial strategies; from illustration to allegedly
documentary photography and the pictorial character of the news to the
use of images in the intrinsically image–less natural sciences: *they all
serve to produce an evidence which cannot be generated discursively*. The
gaze is not only offered something to observe in the image; in fact, it experiences something non–negatable, as in the literal sense of "evidence"—
the true seeing, including that leap into the eyes which cannot be disregarded. Conversely, it is therefore not knowledge or understanding which
is characteristic of the pictorial, but the *force creating such evidence*,
which also excludes its negation. This exclusion of negation forms the
actual focus of the short media theory of the image as set down by Freud
in "Dream–Work", the pivotal chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*.[23]
The bizarre forms of dream logic proceed from this. "[I]n any event, a
painted, or plastic image, or a film […] cannot present what is not the
case", thus the corresponding assessment—once more from Wittgenstein's
Philosophical Inquiries—and the *Big Typescript* adds: "I am able to draw
an image of two men fencing with each other; but not of two men not
fencing with each other (meaning an image that represents only this)".[24]
This means—as the *first characteristic of iconic "logic"*—that the status
of negation in the pictorial proves to be precarious, as there is no adequate
visual correlative to it: "One cannot draw the contradictorily negative, but
only the contrary (in the sense of representing it positively)".[25]

     Above all, showing is not able to withdraw itself; it is unable to negate.
This is also due to the fact that the image lacks a grammatical site for the
subject. While self–reference exists, it is only possible in a very indirect
manner and, again, only while employing the means of visuality, for in

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[23] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, transl. A.A. Brill, New York
2010, Chapter VI.
[24] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Big Typescript*, ed. by Michael Nedo, Vienna Edition,
Vol. 11, Vienna and New York: Springer, 2000, p. 83. No. 4; Wittgenstein, *Bemerkungen* as in FN 17, p. 56, No. 5.
[25] Wittgenstein, *Bemerkungen*, as in FN 17, p. 56, No. 6.

stance an image within an image which refers to the first. This fact implies—as the *second characteristic of the logic of the image*—an additional format of paradox. While in the discursive mode this is based on a connection between a self–reference and a negation, which generates the antinomy in the sentence, the image only allows *pareidolia*, or metastable interplays between figure and background, as Wittgenstein illustrated with his example of the famous "duck rabbit" derived from *Gestalt* theory.[26] Here, both facets of the paradox appear simultaneously, though not in a relationship of affirmation and negation in order to oppose each other; in contrast, they rather demand a continual shifting of attention, which makes their inverse orders exclude each other.[27] While it is possible to paint contrasts and opposites in this way, these are of a different kind than negative "ipsoflexivities" like "This is not a sentence" or "This sentence is false". No image is able to demonstrate that it is not an image; at most it can remove itself like in De Kooning's erased drawing by Robert Rauschenberg or resort to cancellations like in Jörg Immendorf's *Hört auf zu malen* (1965), where the traces of deletion or of the annulled painting are retained and are thus exposed. Even René Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (1928–1929, Fig. 8–3) requires the counteracting sentence, but at the price of an instability developing between image and language, which leaves the observer systematically in the dark about which element has to be given priority.[28] Of course, there are manifold ways of "manipulation", "retouching" or "dissemblance", and also "fogging" and "blurring", that can make something appear indistinct and vague; these techniques stick to the history of images like shadows, but they always retain an affirmative momentum. Even when they deliberately intend to deny, denounce or conceal something, they still demonstrate the thing that was denied and denounced in the first place and thus display it as well.

As an additional effect—*the third characteristic of an iconic logic*— the pictorial lacks any capability of restraint, of distancing consideration: in the process of showing it has to position itself. Accordingly, an equivalent to the subjunctive in language is missing; therefore the use of images in sciences which debate in the discursive mode appears problematic. The language of the subjunctive is constitutive for the entire rhetoric of the natural sciences, as well as of the empirical social sciences; it embodies not only the discrete ethos of science, but also the latent reservations to-

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[26] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* as in FN 21, part II, XI.

[27] Cf. also William J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 35 ff.

[28] On René Magritte see my remarks in *Was sich zeigt. Materialität, Präsenz, Ereignis*, Munich: Fink, 2002, p. 295 ff.

Fig. 8–3: René Magritte, *The Treachery of Images* (*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*), 1928–29. Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

wards one's own results, the principle of revisability and the parenthetic authority of truth. But because the image is always interlinked with evidence, which becomes manifest or not, skepticism is alien to the pictorial. Certainly, there is occlusion, preliminarity and fragmentariness, but they remain in a mode of presence throughout. The power of pictoriality is based on the magic of such a presence. It imposes itself without reservation and forces the gaze into what Freud called "scopophilia": an inescapable addiction of the eyes.

The gaze "opened up"

The lack of negation, metastability, the interplay of pareidolia and an impossible subjunctive are the ciphers of a different "logic of the image", not indications of its failures, assigned to position it beneath language, textuality and rational discursiveness. Instead, they delineate the limits of one kind of representability, which provide it with a genuinely affirmative character. As Wittgenstein put it: "What the image tells me is itself"; but it also affirms itself. This is the true meaning of evidence: an "addiction of the eyes" and "*to* the eyes"—the usurpation as well as empowerment of vision. It attracts but also disciplines the gaze. At the same time, it is based

on the evocation of a presence that, to the same degree, amounts to the evocation of evidence. Therefore, showing the limits of representability and the production of evidence coincide directly, and consequently define the aesthetic autonomy of the image. Insofar as evidence originates from perception, it contains a "perception–that" (*quod*) before it turns into a "perception–of–something" (*quid*), as was pointed out by Kant.[29] It does not concern the witnessing of a thing as such, but rather the "gift" of becoming visible itself.[30] No kind of seeing may doubt the existence of the "that" without doubting itself in its role as visual perception, just as images are unable to not show something: a specific kind of *ek–stasis* is inherent to them. *Ekstasis* refers to "standing outside one's self" or emerging. The terms "existence" and "appearance" mean the same: something appears, i.e. something comes into being. The roots of evidence, especially of evidence as related to pictoriality, can be found in this connection. It is also interlinked with the ability of the image to cause a perception and to captivate the eye.

But this evidence, conceived of in such a way, turns out to be "fractured evidence". It shifts between the non–negatability of the iconic showing, which reveals a presence that, on the other hand, is also not present. But it is exactly this gap which forces one to look at the image, to view it. Jacques Lacan has connected this kind of compulsion to desire: a desire for visibility as well as a desire *for* the gaze and a desire *of* the gaze. This matches the endowment of the gaze of the image itself, because, as Lacan made it clear, to create an image means to *bestow a gaze*—and that is, in the same breath, *to give oneself, to surrender oneself*.[31] In the image itself, such a gaze does not possess a donor, and therefore cannot be answered; it can only be received, i.e. accepted. In a manner of speaking, all painters, creators, directors and video artists surrender their gazes, and it is this surrender that characterizes the hazard of their efforts, just as the image links it to a desire that aims at being looked at to the same extent that it desires to observe seeing itself. It indicates that point that equally "ap–proaches"

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[29] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. Paul Guyer, Allan Wood, Cambridge University Press, 1999, A 225, B 272 f.

[30] While the term "gift" has been made a topic by Derrida—tracing it back to Marcel Mauss—here something completely different is focused upon: the perception of a given as something that is "given beforehand" and not already constructed by perception. For the usage of the term cf. Dieter Mersch *Ereignis und Aura*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002, p. 47 ff.

[31] To show an image thus means to "provide" a gaze. Cf. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book VII, transl. Dennis Porter, New York: Routledge, Chap. X. p. 128–139.

and "ad–dresses" the gaze, just as, on the other hand, looking at an image means paying attention to the gaze's direction while seeing. This is not a definable position or characteristic *in* the image, it is not something that can be deciphered; instead, *the evidence of pictoriality does not possess a decipherable center.*

The difference between *studium* and *punctum*—which goes back to Lacan and was put into focus by Roland Barthes in his philosophy of photography—is connected to this: the *studium*, as an encoded and thus learnable sphere of experiencing an image, allows the reading of the image, while the *punctum* stays uncoded; it denotes the actual irresistible quality, that which, according to Barthes's explicit description, is not identifiable in the image and approaches and attacks the observer instead.[32] Conforming to the invisibility present in the medium, it both seduces the gaze and *forbids it to look away*. The captivating quality of the image, this specific intensity, but also power, delineates the characteristic that eludes understanding to the same extent that it "looks" at the observer and forces him to see. Images and faces share this quality: it is not us who gaze at them, but we are gazed "at" in return and "positioned" by them as well. Being looked at precedes the gaze; this is why Deleuze and Guattari speak of a "face–like quality" concerning the image, which always contains—however subtle—the "trace" of the other. *Images are equal to such countenances which do not let go and demand an answer, a "return of the gaze".* Therefore it is possible—aside from the refraction of the gaze at the frame and even beyond the demonstrated duplicity of telling and showing—to detect another *principle of the gaze's division*: the *exchange of gazes between image and observer*, which presupposes that *gazing at an image always equals answering a gaze*.

The effects of this exchange point far beyond the *dispositif* of visibility, because they do not concern the character of the image as a sign, but rather its "aura".[33] This also means that, in media theory, no image can be reduced to its techniques of visualization; instead, it requires the constitution of a theory of the image that proceeds from the gaze, and the examination of the specific exchange of gazes and its effects, because only this displays that momentum concerning the image that, in Walter Benjamin's choice of words, *constitutes the gaze's impact*.

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[32] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*, transl. Richard Howard, New York 1981 pp. 25, 26, 43–46.
[33] Cf. Mersch, *Ereignis und Aura*, as in FN 30, p. 75 ff.

Chiasm of gazes

This means also that a *relation to alterity* is inherent in every image, insofar as it is marked by the *responsive structure of the exchange of gazes*. Thus, the actual subject matter of an aesthetics of pictoriality arises. Psychoanalysis, in particular, tried to fathom the abyssal depth of the pictorial time and again with a string of different approaches. This is particularly true for that otherness that no gaze can ever perceive, because it constitutes pictoriality in the first place. Images do not only present *something* to look at; instead, because of the process of showing, *an Other gazes out*. Thus, two different perspectives cross on the pictorial *tableau*—making it possible to find a *third principle of the gaze's division* there, one which configures this crossing, a *chiasm* which first and foremost determinates the mediality of pictoriality in all its intricacy.

According to John Berger's *Ways of Seeing,* all images involve a specific way of seeing;[34] however, different kinds of gaze are necessary to decipher it, because one must not forget that each different gaze perceives different things, as can be exemplarily demonstrated with a look at Jan Vermeer's *The Art of Painting* (1660–70, Fig. 8–4). Because the painter is turning his back towards the observer, the painting performs a feat that—according to Lacan—is impossible for a self–portrait: it observes itself "in the act of observing". Here, two perspectives make themselves accessible to the observer: that of Vermeer, who is looking at his model and his canvas and that shows the picture in the moment where he has just started to paint, and, on the other hand, one's own, which is observing the painter, while the artist himself is removed from the gaze. No one is able to observe himself from behind; the gaze onto the back remains rather disquieting, and thus the extraordinariness of Vermeer's *Art of Painting* is based on the feat of marking the indelibleness of difference with the back view and the double gaze.[35] Hence, the *chiasm of gazes* points exactly to this intrusion of an alterity into seeing: the observer's gaze is foiled by a confrontation with an image, just as the gaze of the other, who is offering himself via his medium, is hit and violated by the observer's vision. In the literal sense, chiasm means a cross–wise intersection. Things that cross each other normally intersect at one point; but if one thinks about the directions of the lines forming the cross spatially (in three dimensions) in the form of "skewed lines", then there is no point at which the lines intersect.

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[34] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London 1972, p. 9, 10.
[35] On Jan Vermeer cf. my remarks in "Ästhetischer Augenblick und Gedächtnis in der Kunst. Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Zeit und Bild", as in FN 1., pp. 151–176.

Fig. 8–5: Johannes Vermeer, *The Art of Painting*, 1665–68. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

This is pointed out by the way the expression "chiasm" is normally used. It is a disparity that does not work out anywhere. The "chiastic" would be that which cannot be aligned, however hard one struggles for identity. Accordingly, a lapse is inherent to it, a *fundamental incommensurability*.

In this sense, every viewing of an image is a chiastic event, and no construction of the image will ever be able to get hold of it. In other words: the beholding of the image proceeds *from there*, from something

that is at the same time *indeterminate and open*, from a *gap*, which, as such, remains *irrepresentable*, and thus *inaccessible* as well. Pictorial thinking crystallizes in this: the formation of a gap, a hollow, which is able to captivate and persuade the gaze and keep the beholder's eye in suspense. It points, again, to an instance of invisibility, insofar as the gap bestows a gift that cannot be gazed at. It withdraws itself, while constituting an excess at the same time. The fascination of the image has its source in this excess. For this reason the image always proves to be more than what can be said or construed; it is for the same reason that the image approaches me, imposes itself on me, entreats my gaze and lures it, as Lacan expressed it, into its "trap"[36]—and, once again, it is art and its pictorial thinking that finds its particular domain, its game of mirrors, in this trap and its literal "re–flection".

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[36] Cf. Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* as in FN 31.

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CHAPTER NINE

PICTORIAL ACT THEORY:[1]
IMAGES AS COMMUNICATIVE MEDIA

KLAUS SACHS–HOMBACH

1. Image, depiction and art

In my conception of a "general image science" (cf. Sachs–Hombach 2003) I suggested starting out from the particular area of the images that are, possibly, the least problematic, and successively integrate further areas after thorough investigations. With this in mind, it seemed obvious to me to draw on the area of external, that is material, pictures. In addition, it is the field of depictions that has been marked as the core area, since, on the one hand, their existence is not questionable, and on the other hand, we can already draw on extensive engagement with this type of picture (for instance in art history). Apart from pictures within art, this class of pictorial representations encompasses, above all, any kind of picture deemed to be for practical use. This pragmatically motivated suggestion—to start out from a particular image phenomenon—can be further motivated by the distinction between broad and narrow versions of a concept. The domain of depictions is the core area of a narrow image conception. There are, of course, many phenomena labelled as "pictures" that are not images in this narrow sense. Their designation does not, however, derive from mere metaphorical transfer. The nowadays less commonly employed German word *Bildwerk* (literally "image work"), for instance, also designates sculptures or works of architecture. Despite the obvious differences between a sculpture and an image in the narrow sense, the two phenomena are related. Accordingly, arguments could be put forth for understanding them not only metaphorically as images, and thus for regarding them the same as

genuine objects of image science. The same may hold true for "cloud images" and even mental images.

More precisely, an object is, according to my understanding, an image in the narrow sense if it is (1) planar, artificial, and relatively durable, if it (2) serves as the illustration of real or fictional circumstances within a communicative act, and if it (3) is perceived in a way similar to the perception of the matters depicted. This definition describes what we usually regard as the core area of external images and what I address as "signs close to perception", e.g. paintings in a museum, holiday photos, illustrations in magazines, press photos, or diagrammatic representations in textbooks. In my assessment, it essentially coincides with common language use. An increasingly broader conception of images emerges if more and more of the conditions under (1) and (2) are abandoned. Thus, for instance, an object is an image in the broader sense if it does not fulfil one, several, or all of the conditions listed under (1) despite falling under condition (2). Accordingly, sculptures or cloud images can be regarded as images in the broader sense. The essential condition they must share with the phenomena of the core area is the special way we perceive them. This kind of perception, which can be denoted as "pictorial perception", is determined as follows: an object is perceived pictorially (i.e., is a sign close to perception) if its interpretation uses the intrinsic structure of the object as a starting point for the same perceptually driven process of categorization that is necessary in the case of the perception of the matters depicted (cf. Sachs–Hombach 2003, 88ff). The two definitions of "images in the narrow sense" and "images in the broader sense" are interrelated. By no means do they contradict each other; on the contrary, they commonly structure the complex field of image phenomena, thus suggesting a model of concentric circles locating depictions at the center and the various modifications thereof in the periphery.

Why choose the area of materially realized pictures in general and depictions in particular? The suggestion of such a focus presupposes that, as of yet, no satisfactory theory exists that covers the entire phenomenological area or even just a segment considerably larger than the core area suggested. Given this presupposition, there is only one reason to argue against a preliminary limitation of the topic: the danger that important, possibly irreversible preliminary decisions for the further course of theory development will be unwittingly made. It shall be assumed here that theories regarding different phenomena as paradigmatic also presuppose different basic assumptions. The choice of a starting point, accordingly, is closely related to the respective theoretical orientation. It could be pointed out, for instance, that the classic theories of similarity primarily refer to objective,

perspectival images in their analyses, whereas conventionalist image theories find support in the multitude of forms in abstract and non–objective art, while approaches oriented towards phenomenology tend to assign a paradigmatic function to mental images.

Competing validity claims, which frequently originate from overly–generalized theories, are characteristic of current image–scientific efforts. In general, they are the hallmark of disciplines whose scientific status is as yet unclear. They emerge from different, possibly incomparable paradigms. Accordingly, it is certainly accurate that the decision of which images are considered typical also influences the basic assumptions and the structure of the respective theory. This procedure, however, is unproblematic as long as the respective basic assumptions are not resistant to revision. Therefore, it is to be understood as a mere pilot stage of the various theories, necessary for originally designing their conceptional possibilities and testing methodological instruments.

In my assessment, four advantages speak in favor of labeling objective images as a core area: that 1) their existence is unproblematic, contrary to other pictorial phenomena; that 2) we can draw on an already extensive engagement with these images in particular; that 3) these images can be considered as very early evidence of human existence, and finally, that 4) early evidence of image reflection also, and in a particular fashion, addressed the objective aspect of images (cf. Sachs–Hombach & Schirra 2013). Additionally, it can be pointed out that other areas (such as the area of aesthetically valuable images) are less apt as core areas, as especially the artistic image encloses aspects that are not genuinely pictorial. Being artistic certainly heightens the complexity and efficiency of images, but does not necessarily contribute to the understanding of image competence conceived as fundamental. Due to their complexity, artistic images rather complicate the analysis. It seems generally more promising to me from an epistemological point of view to commence with simple phenomena and then to introduce additional parameters for more complex phenomena.

2. Image and communication: general preliminary remarks on nomination, predication, proposition and illocution

My image theory can be conceived of as a predicative image theory. For a starting point it chooses the phenomenon that images are often provided with image titles, captions or explanatory notes, i.e. they are actually used as part of text–image contexts (cf. Stöckl 2004). In the case of structural images (like maps or diagrams), such an embedding is indispensable for

the realization of the respective communicative intentions. This suggests that images do not—at least not automatically—fulfil communicative functions in an independent fashion, but require an additional element in many cases. In order to better understand the nature of the complement assumed and the connection between image and language, the relevant basic concepts of communication theory may now be recapitulated as a first step. The initial focus of attention is hereby on language use. Subsequently, the question arises of which of those basic concepts may also be helpful for an understanding of the application of images. Perhaps they have to undergo some kind of change first. The differences between language use and image use in particular can then motivate the introduction of my predicative image theory.

Let us start out from the elementary case of the singular declarative sentence, say: "The late medieval city of Magdeburg has a conspicuous dome from the early Gothic period". The structure of such a declarative sentence can be divided into two components. On the one hand, we use this sentence to point at a concrete object, in this case late medieval Magdeburg; on the other, we assign this object a property, namely the property of having a conspicuous dome. These two components roughly correspond with the entities designated in linguistics as subject and predicate. Strictly speaking, however, this is not so much a question of syntactic categories but rather of the pragmatic functions performed by these components. Here, language philosophy uses the terms nomination and predication with reference to the two partial activities of the overall sign activities, those of nominator and predicator, with reference to parts of the linguistic signs by means of which these activities are enacted. In the case of the singular declarative sentence, the nominator designates an individual, usually spatio–temporal object. In the case of general declarative sentences, the only difference is that classes of objects are now thematic.

According to general understanding, a nominator can appear in three different varieties: as a proper name, as a designation or as a deictic expression. "Magdeburg", in our example, is a proper name and thus a singular terminus. Therefore, the related declarative sentence is a singular sentence. The specification "late medieval" merely provides a temporal limitation which we can ignore for the moment. Were we to apply a designation, we could alternatively speak of "the city at the Elbe which contains the imperial stronghold of Otto the Great". The complexity of designations can be freely chosen. Sometimes they contain a proper name onto which the nomination is fixed, as it were; in the example, the case with "Otto the Great". This is not necessary, however, as illustrated by the example "the most famous living philosopher". Concerning deictic nominators, there are

once more various possibilities of specification, for instance by anaphoric structures or demonstrative pronouns, the latter in particular combined with pointing gestures. Deictic designations, such as "this conspicuous dome", are a combination of the latter two varieties of nomination.

In contrast to the nominator, the predicator necessarily contains an expression denoting the assigned property (or relation). A simple example would be "is mortal"; somewhat more complicated is "has a conspicuous dome from the early Gothic period". Predicators, too, can be of any level of complexity by subsuming several properties. It is important to see that an expression can assume one function or the other according to the utterance in which it occurs. In particular, expressions that denote properties and that might be labeled as "predicates" can also be used within a nominator. Take, for instance, the following two examples: "Aristotle is Plato's student" and "Plato's student is a famous philosopher". In the first sentence, the expression "Plato's student" serves within the predicator "is Plato's student" as a characterization relative to the object denoted by means of a proper name, whereas in the second sentence, the very same expression indicates the object to which a property is assigned.

This structure of singular as well as general declarative sentences, consisting of one or several nominators and one predicator, constitutes the proposition. The proposition contains the declarative content or the sentential meaning of the utterance and is usually expressed in a *that*–phrase: "that Aristotle is a student of Plato's." Since Frege's analyses, the proposition is regarded as the smallest unit of the highly developed human verbal language. Thus it follows that, as a rule, we would be unable to convey meaning if we uttered only nominators or only predicators. Taken by themselves, predicators are unsaturated functional expressions that are in need of nominatory addition within a communicative situation. Were someone to utter the phrase "is arrogant", we would justifiably ask whom he was talking about.

Within the framework of speech act theory, a further differentiation has now been made which, to me, seems fruitful from an image–theoretical viewpoint as well—namely the differentiation between propositional structure and illocutionary role. Whereas the proposition contains the content of a sentence, its illocutionary role arises, in a sense, from the attitude the speaker takes towards the content. We can claim, accordingly, that Aristotle is a student of Plato's, but we can also just *assume* this or *hope* for it. We can furthermore *inform* about this fact, *question* it or *declare under oath* its validity. These different possibilities are denoted as the respective illocutionary roles of an utterance. They do not derive from the proposition itself, but from the communicative activities respective of the

communicative intentions into which the proposition is embedded.

In conclusion, therefore, it follows for verbal communication that the utterances of the central form, as a rule, always display at least three aspects, namely a nominatory, a predicatory and an illocutionary aspect. The first two at least are necessary in order to convey something concerning circumstances within the world, that is, for declarative sentences. Hereby, one object is picked out and assigned a property by means of the predicator, or several objects between which a relationship is meant to be established. Together, nominators and predicator form a proposition that may find use in various illocutionary functions (cf. with regard to language–philosophical basics in general Tugendhat 1982).

3. Image use as a communicative action

Let us suppose that images, too, serve the purpose of conveying something to a partner, e.g. in order to inform him about the outward appearance of a particular object, to mobilize protest against a political deficiency, or just for the sake of entertainment. In all those cases (as well as in many others), we then assume a communicative core function analogous to language use. The question then arises whether and in what respect this assumption entitles us to also assume an analogous message structure which renders possible communication processes by means of images.

There have already been some attempts to transfer linguistic terminology—especially the speech act theoretical approach sketched above—to the area of images. As early as 1978, for instance, Kjørup talks of "pictorial speech acts" (Kjørup 1978). Terminologically, it is of course quite problematic to denote the concrete applications of images as "speech acts". Apart from the problem of adequate denotation, however, it seems correct to me to regard the use of images as a communicative action, as an act of painting or showing, intended to convey something to somebody by means of producing an object. This characterization of image communication as an act of showing something to someone suggests at the same time similarities with and differences from verbal communication. The similarities refer to the conditions of the communicative frame, and thus to a very general model of communication; the differences refer to the way in which something is "conveyed", in this case particularly to the specific aspect of showing in images, which is naturally connected to special mechanisms of understanding.

If the process of image presentation is described in analogy to speech acts, it is possible to ask first of all and in a very general way whether it makes sense to differentiate, as a further similarity, between the illocutio-

nary role and propositional content in the case of images as well. When someone presents an image in order to make a claim to another person about the particular visual character of an object not present in the presentation situation, the act of claiming must be considered the illocutionary role of the communicative act, whereas that which *is* claimed (for instance, that an object has a certain outward appearance) corresponds to the propositional content.

The assumption that images have propositional content, however, serves to point out some problems in our analogy. Contrasting with the case of language, there seems to be no clearly defined proposition in the case of images. Furthermore, no grammatically supported assignment of single expressions to corresponding functions is obvious. When it comes to images, the construction of complexes from single elements so characteristic of language is a lot less clearly defined. Thus, in analogy to which linguistic units are images to be understood? In analogy to which functions do we have to understand what sections of images? Here, just a brief glimpse shows that any unambiguous assignment remains problematic because images, depending on their respective application and context, can be defined in analogy to texts as well as to sentences or words.

Let us go through the analogy of image and sentence in a somewhat greater degree of detail by means of an example, and let us thereby limit our deliberations once more to representative images, i.e. interpret the presentation of an image, e.g., the presentation of a copperplate print of the medieval city of Magdeburg, as analogous to the utterance of a singular sentence. We may understand that presentation as the claim *that this particular city did have, at a particular time and viewed from a particular perspective, the indicated visually characterized silhouette*. Leaving aside for now the illocutionary function, we are dealing here with a proposition (in analogy to a sentence) inasmuch as a particular object is assigned a particular property. Whether medieval Magdeburg did indeed possess this property (i.e., a particular outward appearance) and the image can respectively be regarded as true, is, for the time being, insignificant. It is in fact a confirmation of our analogy between (presentation of) image and (utterance of) sentence that the truth value of the image can be doubted, for it is a principal and essential characteristic of propositions that they can be true or false. Let us therefore determine that there certainly are many cases in which images can be understood to be analogous to single singular sentences.

Even in these cases, however, it remains unclear how images realize the supposed proposition. Taking seriously the analogy to sentences, we would have to assume that images can be divided into autonomous sub–

units. At this point, the basic differences from language begin to show, as images lack the division into nominators and predicators necessary for propositions in language. This is due to the fact that images can only be divided in a very limited way into autonomous sub–units which possibly allow for further division. A grammar of images, were there such a thing, is certainly no compositional grammar like, for instance, transformational–generative grammar. Moreover, there is no constant rule as to which functional role is assigned or should be assigned to a determined single image element, whereas sentences normally indicate which part should be taken as nominator or predicator. Finally, with every functional division of an image, the question of internal syntactic structure arises, inasmuch as image sections carrying meaning can be regarded as complete images in themselves.

The problem of separating the functional elements might possibly be evaded by presuming that the nominatory and predicatory functions are somehow blended. The identification of a particular object within an image would then also always bring into play the property that is to be assigned. In this case, we would not only use the image to refer to a city but at the same time display the city's appearance visually, or, more precisely, we would refer to a particular city *by* putting on display certain visual properties. This idea exactly suggests a predicative image theory, for the predicative function, the visual characterization of looking–so–and–so, prepares the basis for the nomination. Before I go on to explain this in more detail, we can state that the analogy of pictorial and verbal communication is appropriate insofar as overlapping aspects with regard to the functionality of both symbol systems can be pointed out; however, the analogy no longer works once the manner comes into view by which these functions are realized. Hence, it is especially important for my communication theoretical approach to image theory to provide an answer to the question of the internal microfunctional structure of images. Here, a suggestion derives from the presentation of predicative image theory, as follows.

4. Predication as an elementary function of images

The central thesis of predicative image theory is that images can be described in analogy to predicators, and accordingly can, in their elementary application, fulfil a predicative function. It is supposed here that an elementary application of images exists, which—in analogy to elementary mathematical operations—being rather simple can, firstly, not be reduced to other applications, and, secondly, can be proven to be constitutive for

all other applications. The content or the predicatory content of an image is, by virtue of this thesis, a so–and–so–appearance (generated through the denotation of particular visual properties of the image vehicle). Accordingly, the production resp. the presentation of images in their elementary application is an act of visual characterization or illustration.

Predicative image use of a more complex nature is already given when someone points out a photo of a wanted person accompanied by the words: "The person we are looking for looks like *this*". In this case, the expression "*this*" refers to the image and thereby assumes a characterizing function within the communicative act. This function does not derive from the image itself but from the contextual embedding. The photo of the wanted person would assume a nominatory function if it was connected to the following statement: "This is the person, name unknown, who is wanted for this or that offence". In this second communicative context, the image replaces the "*this*" and serves as the denotation of a particular person. The nominatory function that is thereby performed by means of the image, however, ensues nonetheless via a visual characterization. The characterized properties are skilfully chosen in such a way that they are suitable for the denotation of an individual object in the respective context. The suitability of the characterization for the identification of a concrete object by no means changes the fact that the characterization itself appears in the sense of a denotation and may be understood as analogous to a predicate, thus, a general term.

The example of the mug shot is a somewhat more complex case, but still a special one. In order for the predicative image theory to be plausible, it has to be made clear in what way it is supposed to be applicable to all cases of image use. Initially, the central idea here is that no image use can be found that dispenses with this predicative aspect. An additional theory would state that any image use that is not primarily predicative necessarily depends on additional conditions external to the image in question, usually through verbal additions or appropriate agreements or conventions.

To understand the predicative function as an elementary image function therefore does not mean that image communication only consists of illustration, but that more complex image applications can also be derived from the predicative basic function. Here, four basic levels of complexity can be distinguished. On the elementary level—and thus, in analogy to a predicate—an image merely illustrates properties. On this level, only the features of a concept that are deemed essential are brought into play: for instance, the concept of the parallelogram can be illustrated by means of four lines drawn accordingly. Thus, the elementary predicative image function is basically reflexive of the concept: by means of illustration, the

image points us to specific aspects of the thematic concept. However, this happens in a very indirect manner, as merely the visual characterizations, and not the thematic concepts, are given. The latter have to be completed cognitively. An elementary function, the predicative image function is therefore an unsaturated form of utterance. Through it, we arrive at pictorial predicates only, but we are usually not consciously aware of this fact, as it involuntarily uses our cognitive system for classification and thus adds to it the relevant concept.

A more complexly layered case arises when visual properties are presented in such a way that the act of presentation serves as a visual pattern of certain classes of objects. This predicative application of images is made use of, for instance, in botanic classification books, in which the typical visual properties of a particular species of plant are illustrated in order to allow for better detection and identification of concrete members of this species. Here, the nominatory partial aspect of the utterance is explicitly supplied, say, through a denotation such as "Indian lotus". Thus, the predicative function of the image is pragmatically integrated into an act of utterance and nominatorily fixed as a predicative supplement.

On another, yet more complex level, an image can also be employed to indicate that the illustration depicts a particular individual object that is meant to be made reference to or to be assigned particular properties. This can, like in a botanic classification book, ensue via an explicit nominator in the image caption, or by means of choosing the visual properties displayed in the illustration in such a skilful way that the observer is involuntarily made to think of an individual object. This second instance, which is highly prone to error, of course (just think of two twins), not only illustrates particularly well the reason why I consider the nomination that comes into play here a more complex process compared to the prior cases; it also demonstrates why visual predication should generally be regarded as more elementary than visual nomination: nomination already presupposes, that is, entails, predication, since the reference to concrete objects ensues here in the sense of visual denotations and thus through the skilful combination of those particular visual properties which are suitable, in a specific context, for the characterization of individual objects.

A final level of complexity is given when we exercise the various illocutionary functions by means of pictorial presentations. The presentation of an image, for example, can be linked to an assertion or an appeal, i.e., it can generally convey an attitude towards an object. It must also be assumed that in the case of images, the illocutionary role is not already fixed by the image itself, even if suitable illocutionary markers might suggest such an application.

In summary of the central idea of predicative image theory, it can be said that, especially within the field of images, there is no equivalent to verbal proper names, and the nominatory function can therefore only be realized via the predicative function in the sense of visual denotation. Accordingly, all complex image applications depend on the predicative function and can be reconstructed in connection to the relevant image–external conditions.

5. Semantic implications

My deliberations concerning predicative image theory imply that the term *image meaning* may refer to some very different aspects: namely image content, image reference, symbolic meaning, and communicative image content. In connection with these differentiations, which I will only sketch out briefly, predicative image theory allows, in my assessment, for a description even of complex image forms and image uses.

Image content is that which someone sees *within* a picture, but not in the sense of a particular single object (which could be verbally identified by means of a nomination such as "the Eiffel Tower"), but in the sense of a (possibly very complex) habitual distinction (which could be articulated by means of a predication, such as "a great dark tower with four feet made from a dark material tapering upwards and…"). Image content depends on specific mechanisms of perception, especially those exact capabilities of differentiation that are activated in the process of perceiving the image surface.

Image content arises from the visual properties of the image carrier. As fictional images show, however, it neither concurs with the image referent nor does it presuppose it. The reference of an image is principally uncertain because different objects can, given certain perspectives, evoke the same perceptive impression. At most, the image content conveys a necessary condition for the determination of the reference; by no means a sufficient one. Thus, image reference is always a contextually fixed function.

A third important phenomenon of meaning is symbolic meaning, assigned to an image or a pictorial element by mediation of the content. It is that to which an image "alludes" or which it symbolizes. This kind of meaning, sometimes also referred to as "connotation", is a frequent object of iconographic analysis. An understanding of the symbolic meaning (e.g. *transiency*) presupposes the determination of the image content (e.g. "being a bug"). Moreover, it demands considerable knowledge of the respective social and cultural context of production. Thus, the symbolic meaning by no means becomes apparent in an image all by itself.

From the three phenomena of meaning named above—content, reference and symbolic meaning—the communicative content of an image must be distinguished. The communicative content of an image consists of the "message" the image is meant to convey, i.e. that which the use of the image aims at. In speech act theory, the analogous linguistic phenomenon is referred to as utterance meaning. Though image content does provide a necessary premise to make the communicative content of an image accessible, it is, as a rule, not sufficient in this case either. This fact derives from the predicative understanding of the image inasmuch as the image content provides a visual characterization whereas the determination of the communicative content requires a complete propositional structure. In order to arrive at this structure, the contextual specification of the image reference is necessary. Moreover, the illocutionary image function referring to the propositional structure of the image must first be determined.

The relationship between the different aspects of meaning, tension–filled as it might occasionally be, is, in my assessment, responsible for the ambivalence of images. One may even speak of a semantic anomaly of images. Compared to a verbal utterance, the meaning of an image is at the same time more clearly determined and more indeterminate. It is more clearly determined inasmuch as we can evoke by means of images the impression of a scene (the perceptively conveyed content) with great immediacy. It is, however, more indeterminate at the same time in that in image use (1) the factual nature of a real scene is not guaranteed (only perceptual realism is given) and (2) the communicative content often remains vague. The ambivalence thus ensues from the different processing mechanisms for image content (determined syntactically/perceptually) and image message (determined pragmatically/contextually).

6. On the scientific status of image use and language

In conclusion, I would like to address the relationship between image and language (on this topic cf. also Schirra & Sachs–Hombach 2007). What, in scientific analysis, is special about that relationship? In search of an answer, it is helpful to differentiate between the perspectives of object, description, and theory. In the case of image science, single concrete images make up the object area. These objects of consideration must first of all be captured, that is, perceived. Precisely speaking, the image always constitutes itself in a respective situation of reception only. For scientific analysis, it is furthermore necessary to make the perceived available in an intersubjectively conveyable manner. On the elementary level, this is achieved by means of a description that captures the relevant (especially visual)

properties of the image. Of course, it is principally impossible in this area to capture all the properties, because every object possesses an infinite number of properties. This is a general problem concerning all sciences, which must necessarily limit themselves to a finite number of relevant properties: the descriptive quality of a theory decisively depends on the degree to which it can capture or has captured the phenomenal properties causally relevant in the respective research context.

The numerous questions concerning the evaluation of scientific description have been intensely discussed in the history of scientific theory under the heading of "protocol statements", leading to the widely acknowledged result that every description can be regarded as charged or led by theory. Thus, the inductionist understanding of science, which was assumed to have a secure fundament in observations and descriptions, lost its base: since every description presupposes concepts that are themselves connected again to theoretical contexts, description and theory depend on each other. Even the most neutral phenomenal description, therefore, is never without condition. Accordingly, descriptions are reliable only to a limited degree; they are not suitable for concluding the confirmation of our theories. As a result of this, among other things, all empirical–scientifically formulated laws were assigned the status of hypotheses. This loss of certainty, however, has rather promoted the "progress" of science than hindered it, since it has forced an intense occupation with scientific processes and claims to validity. This will be unlimitedly valid for a future interdisciplinary image science as well.

As a rule, science consists of the attempt not only to describe the observed circumstances, but to find regularities between them and to formulate these as precisely as possible. Just like every other science, image science conveys theory and description via the conceptual instruments that delimit and structure, on the one hand, the respective object area; on the other hand however, those instruments are embedded in theoretical contexts, as the explication of a basic concept is always understandable only relative to its theoretical embedding: the explication of a concept is essentially the explanation of the position and the function that this concept possesses within a theory.

The conceptual–theoretical area receives, as a rule, the most attention, including from cross–disciplinary perspectives. It is connected to intense discussions, which—not uncommonly—are ideologically charged. Which theory is adequate for a particular object area can surely not, according to the above deliberations, be decided only on the basis of mere descriptions, as descriptions always already contain theoretical assumptions and a respective justification thus becomes circular. An appropriate theory should

of course not contradict these descriptions and, moreover, should contribute to a better understanding of them. As a rule, however, competing theories are able to achieve this if they respectively lean on their own (theory–guided) description basis. As long as it remains impossible to purposefully bring about a decision by means of experiments, the fruitfulness of a theory, that is, its integrability, has to be adduced as a criterion above all else. Thus, competing theories cannot easily be proven wrong. Not uncommonly, competing theories also capture single aspects of a phenomenon quite correctly, so that the essential task occasionally consists of appropriately delimiting the application areas of the theories so as to be able to relate them to each other sensibly.

What meaning do these relatively general science–theoretical notes hold now for the question of the relationship between image and language? As far as this question poses itself in the light of image–scientific research, it implies first of all that the verbalization of images by no means excludes their being captured appropriately, but on the contrary, provides the prerequisite for this. Any accusation that we are largely unable to capture the supposed essentials in describing a picture are irrelevant inasmuch as we generally do not possess any other capability of scientifically accessing these essentials either. Verbally capturing the images is thus not simply an indispensable presupposition for understanding them. Moreover, I wish to claim that there is no principal untranslatability of images into language anyway, but merely a continuing verbal inability to "catch up" with them, deriving from the presentiveness related to the figuration of the images, which must perpetually be newly interpreted in context.

The relation of image and language is problematic, however, if we have indeed incorrectly or insufficiently observed the described important properties. But the only thing that helps here is, as with all sciences, the improvement of our observation process with regards to our verbal means of articulation with respect to what we are considering. The decisive question, therefore, should not be whether images can be transferred appropriately to language, but rather what the criteria are exactly for an appropriate verbal description of phenomena. Since these criteria, however, are dependent again on the conceptual–theoretical condition, the evaluation of whether a description is adequate always ensues relative to the image theory applied. Thus, a circle of arguments of course emerges, but this will only appear fatal to those still inclined to expect absolute certainties. In other words: even our scientific engagement with images is characterized by preliminaries, which is why it appears prudent to strive not so much for the exclusion of competing theories for the possibilities of sensibly connecting them.

This characterization does in fact match the actual discussion in many cases. If, for instance, we speak of an idiosyncratic "logic of images", we bring into play a particular, more or less clearly explicated image theory. The reference to a "logic", which can only be understood meaningfully as a reference to an internal organization structure, addresses, in particular, the relationships between perception and the relationship of figure and Gestalt. Thus, it serves to claim the particular properties of the object area, whose capture and description are only possible from a specific theoretical perspective. It may not be possible to exclude the fact that the scientific benefit of a theory only consists of a projection of its own prerequisites. Whether this is the case, however, must be examined for each concrete example through a comparison of different theories and their respective results. In whatever way the idiosyncrasies of images and their relation to language may be captured, a comparison between the competing theories, and thus intersubjectively shared criteria concerning the evaluation of this comparison, are indispensable.

An appropriate description of the image phenomenon must be distinguished from a complete description. It must further be distinguished whether a description is impossible in principle or only factually because of currently insufficient verbal means. As far as we are dealing with image *science*, in my thesis, only that which can first be verbally captured is of relevance, and a complete verbal description is neither possible nor required. Moreover, it is a misunderstanding to conclude from this possibility of verbal translation that the image thus becomes replaceable or superfluous. Apart from an inability to "catch up", as mentioned above, such a conclusion also fails to recognize that the application of images is a very complex process, which is, for instance, also about specific atmospheric qualities linked to perception that are especially important for aesthetic phenomena. Although the latter can be characterized verbally as well, the respective descriptions naturally no longer possess the emotionally enhanced immediacy of perceptive impressions. Those who see a difficulty in this seem to have, in my view, a problematic understanding of the task and the purpose of science. Scientific descriptions and the laws and regularities formulated with their help are not competing with the immediate experience of the phenomenon. Rather, they provide an explanation of this experience, and thus enrich it, as a rule, even though in a rather more mediated form.

Accordingly, it would be a misunderstanding, in my assessment, to regard as the art historian's work the preservation or defence of a meaning that cannot be captured verbally. On the contrary, his special competence seems to me the ability to make images "talk". Indeed, this statement is to

be understood metaphorically only inasmuch as the images do, of course, not talk themselves: their potential meaning is verbally made available by the art historian or image historian. Such verbal translation is, in my understanding, not a kind of conclusive interpretation of the work but rather an explication of the respective processes and their contextual fixations. This applies to art very generally. In the case of visual arts, the focus is specifically on the visual processes, the analysis of which ideally brings perception competences to awareness in a reflexive manner. I assume that the impression of being unable to verbally articulate an important work of visual art in an appropriate manner is caused by the fact that the applied visual strategies do occasionally create new perceptual competences of differentiation. As a rule, the highly differentiated description categories of the art–historical connoisseur allow him to verbally capture the visual strategies and thus to convey an understanding of differentiation competences (not yet) developed in or known to the less trained recipient. In any case, this explicit verbal mediation is required in order to train our historically changing visual perception competences and to make them generally possible and available for passing on.

Let us therefore conclude: a verbalization of the image is certainly indispensable for scientific analysis and probably also necessary for aesthetically demanding images in order to secure their appropriate reception. Without sufficient image descriptions, there can be no image science. Descriptions, however, are always (in a more or less explicated way) inherently theory–guided. Whenever there is an argument concerning the appropriateness of a description, an evaluation and a comparison of the underlying theories are under consideration as well.

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CHAPTER TEN

POINT, LINE, SURFACE AS PLANE: FROM NOTATIONAL ICONICITY TO DIAGRAMMATOLOGY

SYBILLE KRÄMER

1

We are living, as it usually seems to us, in a three–dimensional world. But within that world we are surrounded by *surfaces*, which we encounter in the form of images, book pages, display boards, maps, notepads, movie screens, and computer screens. Even the intrinsic logic of these technical devices is aimed at "flattening". Two–dimensional planes are so omnipresent and we handle them so naturally that we are hardly aware of how remarkable this kind of spatial arrangement is. Surfaces are envelopes of masses and have something underneath them: "surface" is therefore always paired with "depth".[1] Nevertheless, a "surface as plane" is something extensive *without* a depth dimension. We treat the surfaces of rather flat but still massive objects as if they had no depth. Surfaces *serve* as planes in precisely the situations where their function is to bring images or inscriptions to appearance.

This artificial two–dimensionality is a first–rate cultural achievement. The aesthetic and cognitive consequences of this invention are obvious and—interestingly—still rarely thought about.[2] We capture and outline the opulence of the real world as well as the phantasms of fictional worlds in the form of plane drawings, illustrations, schemes, and descriptions. We

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[1] Regarding the relation between "surface" and "depth" see Ehrlich 2009, Krämer 2009.

[2] Impulses in that direction: Châtelet 2000, 38 et seqq; Ingold 2007, 39 et seqq; Summers 2003, 43 et seqq.

are interested in the epistemic dimension of that use. The question driving us is: what does it mean for our way of thinking that we use a special form of two–dimensional spatiality for cognition issues, for that which, in the widest sense, has something to do with the acquisition, explanation, and presentation of knowledge? We would like to re–approach this question from a different perspective.

2

Gaining awareness of the artistic and scientific functions of characters is one of the most exciting discoveries made by humanities' research in the last third of the last century.[3] In linguistics, the difference between phonic and graphic realization, i.e. between spoken and written language, was examined along the line of communicative proximity and distance.[4] "Cultural history" has generalized the difference between "orality and literacy", making them traits of epochal knowledge cultures.[5] Jacques Derrida finally showed that iterativity and the possibility of de–contextualization embodied in written characters were characteristics of any set of signs, so the script advanced to the position of a constituent if not a transcendental of our linguisticality.[6] With Derrida, the "linguistic turn" took a grammatological direction. As different as these three origins of script awareness may be, there is one aspect in which all of them pull together: the definition of what script is emerges from its relation to language.[7] The ennobling of the script to a legitimate object of humanities and culture science studies in the course of overcoming the assumption about the second–rate status of the script accompanied the phonographic understanding of the script.

As this is always the case with scientific innovations, the changed view of a phenomenon also generates new blindness. This primarily refers to three aspects, which are insufficiently illuminated in the phonographic understanding of script, if not entirely disregarded.[8] (i) A number of phenomena are scriptural, although they do not emerge from scripturizing a phonetic language or striving towards it. This does not include only the existence of non–phonetic scripts, which always establish a connection to

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[3] An overview: Krämer 2005a.

[4] Koch/Krämer 1997; Koch/Oesterreicher 1994.

[5] Havelock 1963; Goody 1986; Ong 1982.

[6] Derrida 1974, 1976, 1988.

[7] Thus it does not surprise us that the classic manual of research into scripturality defines scripts as "written oral language": the script is "the body of graphic symbols that record the spoken language". Günter/Ludwig 1994, VIII.

[8] See: Grube/Kogge 2005; Krämer 2005.

a spoken word—although the Greek alphabet served not only the notation of language, but also music and numbers. Moreover, there is an encompassing domain of scripts that are unutterable or that can be turned into vocal sounds only retrospectively and fragmentarily, e.g. logic, mathematic, and natural sciences formulas, choreography and music scripts or programming languages. (ii) It becomes obvious in mathematic script that it does not serve only communication, but in the first place cognition—written calculus is paradigmatic in that respect. Scripts are used as instruments that, in interactions with the eye, hand, and mind, can attempt and bring creative acts to realization, be they of artistic or scholarly nature. Scripts are always operative; they are "instruments of thought". (iii) The medial characteristic of speech is the succession of sounds in time. In the understanding of the phonographic script concept, this temporal linearity was simply transferred to the spatial sequence of characters. Thus the oversight was made that scripts condensed to texts used the two–dimensionality of the surface and did not fit into the "linearity dogma" of script theory.[9] Crossword puzzles—if only a marginal script example—show this potential of writing's notational iconicity in an exemplary manner.

The concept of *notational iconicity* [Schriftbildlichkeit] attempts to work against these three "blind aspects" of phonographic script concepts.[10] As its name says, in this perspective, script is no longer a visible and fixed form of *language*, but it is a hybrid structure that connects language and image, discursive and iconic aspects. The impression could emerge that the way may thus have been opened for the script concept to make a trendy "change of ends", away from its orientation toward the "linguistic turn" and towards the orientation of the "iconic turn". However, this impression is not far–reaching. From the hybrid characteristics of scripts emerges a potential in this form pertaining *neither* to language *nor* images. This potential crystallizes at the intersection point of three script properties: its visibility, manageability, and two–dimensionality. Where these properties connect, spatiality can turn into a presentation matrix and positional relations in the form of two–dimensional arrangements can evolve into a representational medium and an operational technique. It is thus not the mere visuality, and also not a mere stability, that constitutes the potential of notational iconicity, but their rootedness in *spatiality as a modality of representation.*

But how can we explain the fact that two–dimensional relations like up/down, left/right, central /peripheral have attained articulation power? Here we again find a fundamental meaning pertaining to the surface as a

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[9] See: Groß 1990; Harris 1986, 2000.
[10] Krämer 2003.

matrix of two–dimensional arrangement. Still, we'd like to approach this problem from a third perspective.

3

When we make the synthesis of visibility, manageability, and two–dimensionality the focus of the idea of "notational iconicity", we outline a triad that is not valid *only* for scripts, but *also* for scripts. The aspects with which scripts enter a horizon of inscriptions turn thematic; they are not limited to notations like disjunct and finely differentiated symbol systems in the sense of Nelson Goodman.[11] This horizon shows the contours of a multitude of very different inscriptions that include tables, lists, diagrams, graphs, and maps. It is obvious that they are all visible, manageable, and two–dimensional; this family resemblance cannot be overlooked. However, are not images of art and technical images of science (x–ray, sonar, radar) also members of this "family"? If we mean to provide an answer to this, we must bear in mind that conceptual distinctions can always seem different depending on how we "tailor" our notions in accordance with targeted insights. Within the framework of our interest in understanding how spatial relations can take over epistemic tasks, we are going to systematize artifacts like scripts, graphs, diagrams, maps etc. under the common denominator of "*inscriptions*" i.e. "*the diagrammatic*" and delineate these "operative images" from images of art on the one side and the technical images of science on the other, knowing that there are also perspectives in which all these categories of the visual come together again. So what makes inscriptions different from ordinary images? For this purpose, we have introduced the notion of *operative Bildlichkeit* at a different point[12] and specified it through a number of interwoven properties like two–dimensionality, pointedness, graphism, syntacticness, referentiality, and operationality. Should we ask ourselves if this variety of characteristics might again be condensed the "zero grade" of that which scripts, diagrams, and maps share, there is actually an answer to that: it is the circumstance in which forms of operative iconicity emerge from the *interaction of the point, line, and surface.*

   This said, we have (finally) reached our topic. Our assumption is that the outlined question, asking how it can be explained that spatial relations can be used as a matrix for the presentation and operation of epistemic interrelations, can be answered by reverting to the practice of dealing with

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[11] Goodman 1968; also: Fischer 1997.
[12] Krämer 2009, p. 98.

inscribed surfaces, which we shall call "graphism". Starting from that which happens in the interrelation of point, line, and surface through the interaction of the eye, hand, and mind, we would like to elaborate what "graphism" means and how it—from the epistemic point of view—becomes effective based on the phenomenon of the line. We shall focus on this in the following section.

4

Reflection on the graphematic in a variety of its cultural uses and cognitive junctions has been introduced into surprisingly many disciplines. Here is an exemplary overview:

(i) In *cultural history,* Tim Ingold[13] developed a comparative anthropology of the line by tracking transformations in the joint effect of traces, threads, and surfaces in different regions and epochs. Activities like walking, weaving, telling stories, singing, drawing or writing, for Ingold, show the omnipresence of the production and trailing of lines. In this the threads constituting surfaces, as well as traces carved into solid surfaces, are for him the two basic modalities of an anthropological archeology of the line. The interplay of thread and trace shows, for example, also in the script as the interconnection between texture and text.

(ii) In *paleontology,* André Leroi–Gourhan[14] has examined the function of graphism: the early line structure of ornaments, hunting signs and book–keeping display a graphic ability paralleled by Leroi–Gourhan to speech in its world–constituting function and traced to the same origin. Speech and graphism are not only on par in their cognitive potential; moreover, the drawing and reading of symbols, unlike the generating of acoustic signals, had not been practiced anywhere before the emergence of homo sapiens and there is no previous model for it.[15] Leroi–Gourhan disengaged the graphic from the art image. He showed that the graphic marking is related to abstraction and by no means to mimetic construction.

(iii) In *literary theory,* Georg Witte[16] developed a phenomenology of line systems and graphism in the interplay between the performance of the

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[13] Ingold 2007.
[14] Leroi–Gourhan 1980.
[15] Ibid., p. 238.
[16] Witte 2007; regarding the phenomenological convergence with the line also: Lüdeking 2006.

writing and drawing hand and the contrastive figuration of lines. Witte examines the line in its double function: it is both a man–made depiction and representation medium, and a self–generating creative force.[17] Between the line as an evidence–generating form of knowledge and an aesthetic absolute stretches a wide field, explored in practice and probed in theory by art avant–gardes.

(iv) In *cognitive semantics,* George Lakoff,[18] Mark Johnson[19] and others have shown that spatial schemes of body movements can be transferred to cognitive domains through metaphorization. Thus an implicit cognitive topology is created,[20] which discloses the meaning of spatial orientation in non–spatial, abstract thinking and in dealing with quantities. In this, the line, and with it the "path" as a distance between a starting point and a target point, emerges as one of the central topographic ordering principles.

(v) In *art history,* Wolgang Kemp reconstructed the notional history of "disegno" in the 16th century. "Disegno" is double–faced, meaning graphé both as the everyday "origin and beginning of all human activities" and the non–everyday ingenuity of a godly design inherent to nature. Therefore "disegno" plays "an active mediating role between nature and a work of art".[21] Art theorist Karlheinz Lüdeking[22] has disengaged the line from the exclusively aesthetic approach to it. He analyzes it as a grapheme that can show but not say and, expanding Alexander Rodchenko's concept, develops the ontic, practical, and epistemic meaning of the line. It is not only a means of performing differentiations, but it generates the possibility of discriminability, thus attaining the power of constructing the world anew beyond the expression of everything factual. Art historian Horst Bredekamp has analyzed the line on the basis of Galileo's moon drawings, Leibniz's knot drawings, Darwin's evolution diagrams, which are similar to corals, Mach's diagram of the eye, amd Crick's spiral.[23] "Drawings and diagrammatic lines develop their own suggestive power, not observable in any other form of expression at the border between thoughts and material-

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[17] Witte 2007, 37.

[18] Lakoff 1988, 1990.

[19] Johnson 1987.

[20] Ibid., 29.

[21] Kemp 1974, p. 227; there are, however, in contemporary art theory attempts at a "non–fixating" understanding of the line: Busch 2007; Derrida 1997; Elkins 1995; Rosand 2002.

[22] Lüdeking 2006.

[23] Bredekamp 2002, 2004, 2005, 2007.

ization (…) they embody (…) as the first trace of the body on paper the
thinking process in its utmost immediacy".[24] For Bredekamp, the line is so
fundamental for recent art and science because it manages to bridge visual
perception and contemplation, thus participating – as already demonstrated
in the notion of "disegno" – in both the sensory and the spiritual spheres.

(vi) In *philosophy*, Kant has made us aware of the ineluctable temporality
and processuality of the line as a stroke: to imagine a line means to draw it
in our mind. With a linear stroke, time becomes "external" and "figural"
and thus accessible to perception.[25] Therefore he recommends the line grid
of schematism as a procedure that is supposed to open up a visual percep-
tion basis for general notions, independent of experience. The line and
with it the scheme constitute for Kant something intermediate and third,
positioned between thinking and visual perception and therefore predes-
tined to bridge the gap between thinking and perception, between empiri-
cism and ideality.[26] Jacques Derrida[27] concludes from the hybrid position
of the line between the sensory and the cognitive that the stroke marks the
boundary between thinking and visual perception, which it brings together
by dividing them at the same time.[28] The line is for him neither intelligible
nor sensory. Derrida is above all concerned with constitutive blindness,
inscribed into the graphic in its every reference to something external. At
the moment of concentration on the execution of the line, the artist does
not see what he draws. It is his imagination that guides his pencil while he
draws the line; in the process, something previously invisible, unper-
ceived, necessarily emerges.

5

What is the "secret" of the productive potential of the stroke that supports
the cognitive process? In what is the line's power of cognition rooted? Our
assumption is: these roots can be located in the *heteronomous–auto-
nomous double character of the stroke*, because the line is both a trace of a
gesture and an independent draft of a world. It conveys something prelim-
inary to it; therefore it is a determined effect, able to convey something. At
the same time it embodies the potential of free, almost unlimited composi-
tion. At the intersection point of these two aspects, on the one hand a trace,

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[24] Bredekamp 2002, p. 24.
[25] CPR, B, p. 156, Notes.
[26] See: Krämer 2009, p. 108 et seqq.
[27] Derrida 1997, 49 et seqq.
[28] Ibid., p. 57.

on the other a draft, we see the potential of the line for *transfiguration*. It is this capability of transfiguration that makes the line so momentous in an epistemic respect. From this perspective, a geometric circle can at the same time be an inextensive mathematical entity *and* an extensive empirical object. Therefore a graph can at the same time be a record of individual experimental data and a rendering of a general law. Lines—this is our central assumption—are therefore able to *mediate* between visual perception and insight, between empirical evidence and theory, between the individual and the general. In this we have an open statement that can be transformed into a question: how can the relationship between the heteronomous–autonomous double character of a stroke, its transfiguration potential, and its mediating function between contemplation and visual insight be described more precisely?

6

How is "diagrammatic spatiality" constituted in a coordinated interplay of stroke and surface? Three aspects are decisive: (i) the *one–dimensionality* of the line, in life–world terms, unusual form of a spatiality; (ii) the *directionality* of the surface generated by the lines drawn into it; and (iii) the *processuality and operationality* of inscriptions.

(i) *One–dimensionality*: lines have just one dimension. Is this not a basically "unimaginable" property? Similarly, there is the point, which—viewed mathematically—is an inscribed "object" without extension and dimension. Here we can already see a peculiar ambivalence: as an empirical stroke, the line is actually two–dimensional if not (when dug into a surface or applied to it) three–dimensional. The sensory differences that a line stroke shows have a wide aesthetic impact. Nevertheless, a significant part of the lines that appear in *schemes*—no matter if used for scripts, drawing graphs or as boundary lines on maps—is conceived in such a way that the individual two–dimensionality and depth of the stroke are supposed to be ignored. The point of a diagrammatic reference to the line is: *in an empirical stroke we see a non–empirical, one–dimensional line*— and we also use lines in this sense. Already this transformation from sensory into non–sensory is remarkable.

The inscribing of a line requires a surface. Without its bareness there would be no room for a stroke. However, the relationship between stroke and surface is subtler than the inscribing of a line onto a surface suggests: it is not that a surface comes first and then something is inscribed onto it. Two–dimensional surfaces actually do not exist as much as one–dimen-

sional lines and zero–dimensional points. Only when images or inscriptions on surfaces are shown do these surfaces transform into *planes without depth*. Related to the line: it is the *inscribing* of the stroke that triggers the metamorphosis during which the corporeal aspect is reduced to a two–dimensional flat medium for inscriptions. It is not nature that provides us with planes, but it is our practice that, through inscribing, turns natural and artificial surfaces into planes. Is the discovery of two–dimensional planes maybe as momentous for the mobility and productivity of the spirit as the discovery of the wheel for the mobility and productivity of the body? Let us define this: the interaction of the point, line, and surface generates the two–dimensional specific space of the graphic.

(ii) *Directionality*: Our body does not just place us in space, but also creates a spatial matrix in which the differences between front and back, up and down, right and left become important in life–world terms. Because of this, surfaces must be positioned in a certain manner: they must be viewed frontally, so that a view of them is possible, as well as an overview. However, it is not just that the plane is positioned in the field of vision of the viewer; it must also be spatially structured *as such*. It is this structuring that we are interested in at this point. Although only scripts require strict reading directions, every surface used for visualization turns into a plane that cannot be positioned randomly; up and down, right and left are not interchangeable. The fact that in script games, but also in the art of the image, examples that deny the validity of the non–inter–changeability precondition repeatedly emerge only corroborates the self–evidence that inscription surfaces—to which we would like to limit this consideration—have an internal directional mechanism. Let us just think of up and down on book pages, with their headers and footnotes, of the directions of axes in a system of coordinates or of the matrix of compass points without which topographic maps would be useless. Planes are not just a certain amount of possible places for inscriptions; these places are also—weakly or strongly—*orientated*. That which a chess board rudimentarily places before our eyes with its fields is, in an attenuated form, valid for all inscribed surfaces: they embody an elementary and semantically usable raster of a directed arrangement of places.[29]

What concerns us here is the role played by the line in the constitution of this matrix: in the same way our body influences the elementary direction of its surrounding space, the stroke inscribed onto a surface generates its inner structuring into a topological ordering raster like up and down,

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[29] For the relationship between spatial arrangement and symbolic usage in notations see: Cencik/Mahr 2005.

right and left or—if the lines are closed—inside and outside. In addition to this, relatives like far away and close can be marked. However, at this point one simplification must be abolished.

(iii) *Processuality and operationality*: It is only "half true" that a line turns a surface into a plane, in this way generating a specific form of spatiality, because it is actually the gesture—if we stick to the simple act of manual inscription and recording—that performs the stroke. The hand and its writing instrument move over the surface, leaving a configuration of lines. Michel de Certeau reminded us that space emerges from the mobility of subjects whose actions generate space in the form of space for *movement*.[30] We can analogously say that the motivity of the hand is that which moves from one surface point to the other, leaving the inscription as a trace of the motion space constituted by this trace. Immanuel Kant had already pointed to the fact that the line should be understood not only as a spatial mark, but also as the temporal act of generating a line: "I cannnot imagine a line, as short as it may be, without drawing it in my mind, i.e. gradually generating all its parts starting from a certain point, only thus achieving its visual perception".[31] If we for the moment ignore Kant's mentalism expressed here, we can find something decisive for us in his suggestion: if the drawing of a line constitutes its "nature", then the subsumption of the line under purely spatial categories will go amiss. A stroke is an action in time, the surface is successively traversed from one point to the other. The line decodes itself as a conveyance tool: it *conveys* motion into structure, time into space, and successivity into simultaneity.

We have stressed before that the recognitional power of the line is rooted in its transfigurative potential. Here we come across an explanation important for this potential: the efficiency of the line is contained in an elementary translation accomplishment, which befits it as a trace of a gesture. Our terming of this translation as "transfiguration" is based in the fact that here, *one* modality, like mobility, temporality or successivity, is translated i.e. transformed into a *juxtaposed other* modality, like structuredness, spatiality or simultaneity.

If we take the executive character of the line into consideration, it becomes conceivable that the simple and not too exciting dependence of the line on the hand motion is replaced by a more complex dependence when the role of the hand is taken over by instrumental, that is machine, impulse generators, which can also record particular data on a surface, achieved,

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[30] Certeau 1988, p. 218 et seqq.
[31] Kant 1971 (CPR, B 203).

for example, by experiment.[32] In this way we have a point of departure at which the *rendering* potential of the line and thus its "heteronomy", its determinability, is disclosed through something external to it. It becomes understandable that a two–dimensional surface is so suitable for bringing something not constituted as flat to visual perception in the specific graphic space.

However, now we are going to proceed from this rendering aspect to the aspect of operationality. The assertion that the stroke is a trace of a gesture that traverses the surface as actual movement finds its analogy in the assumption that, in this way, space has come about in which, experimentally and operatively, thoughts can be performed in the form of directed line movements.

7

The roles played by lines and points will be demonstrated on a very simple example, called the nomogram of the multiplication table.[33] Let us take a look at the graph (Fig. 10–1). This graph opens up the possibility of schematically conducting all multiplications within the multiplication calculus up to 100. For that purpose, between the numbers that are to be multiplied, a thread is stretched or a ruler laid. Where it crosses the middle line, the desired number is found. Here it is illustrated on the basis of the equation 3 x 4 = 12.

What makes this worthy of attention for the understanding of the cognitive functions of the graphic? The following aspects are crucial:

(1) *There is a difference between auxiliary lines and operative lines*: the nomogram is based on the status difference of the lines used: auxiliary lines can be told apart from operational lines. Only through the application of three auxiliary lines, marked with numbers in frequent spacing, is the paper turned into a "plane number space" (from 1 to 100) – in the literal meaning of the word. The operation line (embodied by the thread or ruler) becomes "active" within this figure space. It is an instrument for problem solution, as from two known numbers, an unknown third can be computed through the simple operation of establishing a linear connection between known numbers. The cognitive operation of connecting numbers turns into the task of mechanically and linearly connecting two points of the external columns, so the desired number can be read at the intersection point with a

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[32] See: Chadarevian 1993.
[33] Regarding this nomogram see: Hankins 1999, p. 53.
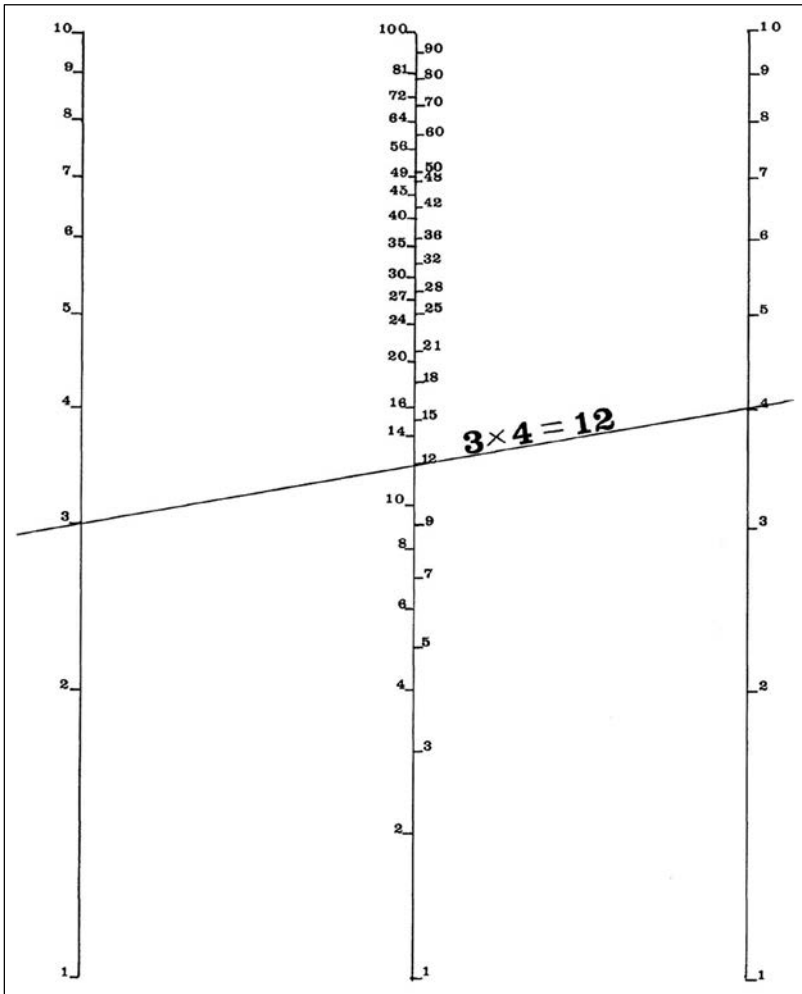
Fig. 10–1: *Nomogram of the multiplication table.*

middle column. The difference in the operational values of the lines can also be formulated as follows: the auxiliary lines mark the general possibility of the multiplication operation, embodying a universal arithmetic rule in their arrangement, if not a law that connects the numbers. The operational line, as the execution of a concrete operation, embodies the application of this rule to individual numbers. Both the *universal* arithmetic law and its *particular*

application to individual numbers are visualized.

(2) *Making spatial through array*: numbers do not dwell at a certain place; they are—however individual—theoretic entities. However, thanks to sequentialization, here the auxiliary lines acquire an unambiguous position. Through rising numbers in columns, this space also acquires a direction, so that a quantitative value corresponds to its spatial positioning: the lower the position in the column, the lower the number. Down/up and deep/high are topologic relations used to express the value of a number. This correspondence of spatial attributes and quantities is not limited to nomograms, and as a cognitive peculiarity of (not only) our quantifying manner of thinking it has been sufficiently researched in cognitive semantics. In addition to this, it is well–known to us from everyday speech: high numbers are *large* numbers, low numbers are small. The nomogram demonstrates this literally.

(3) *Operationality through making visible*: not only numbers are invisible; mental operations—at least as long as we naively picture this as a "process within our heads"—are invisible as well. However, the emergence of a flat *space* containing numbers, easily overviewed and handled, in which arithmetic operations can be executed with points and lines as a consequence of spatialization and arraying, causes invisible parts of knowledge like numbers and mental operations to be transferred into the register of visibi-lity and operability. However, one misunderstanding must be avoided if this vocabulary is used: "transferred" should not be understood to mean that numbers exist in the first place and that the intellectual activity of calculation first takes place in the mind to then be expressed on a surface. It is the other way round: we can assume that the existence of numbers is bound to the evolution of their sensory rendering media and that arithmetic operations—in the higher range—are not at all feasible otherwise but through the inclusion of "external" reflection means: we do not think only *on* the paper, we think *with* the paper, i.e. *in* the medium of point, line, and plane. Our thoughts have always been more than that which happens in the brain.[34] Our spirit unfolds in the joint action of the eye, hand, and brain.

(4) *The thread and the stick are the cultural and technical precursors of the line*: the functioning mode of the multiplication table is based on the requirement that the graphic entry of the auxiliary lines remains stable, as

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[34] This is the position of philosophers and cognitive theorists, who advocate the "extended mind" concept: Clark 2008; Clark/Chalmers 1998.

they visualize a non–altering law of numbers (i.e. an arithmetic rule). On the other hand, the "inscription" of the operational line marks a particular calculation. Therefore, mobile elements like a thread or a ruler are ideal instruments for connecting numbers, because both can easily be moved on a surface and then removed. If they could not, the multiplication table would soon become useless due to a large number of the operation lines cutting across it. This seems to be a trivial observation. However, in that interplay of stable lines and mobile line–generating instruments, a genuine relatedness of the graphic line to the stick or thread is revealed. The variety of forms of straight and bent lines and thus the "syntax of the line pattern" emerges exactly when we ask ourselves which elementary operations are possible on a surface with the aid of a stick (straight line) and a thread (curvy line). We presume that stick and thread are the material embodiments and cultural and technical foundations of the cognitive approach to lines. This seems to be historically verifiable if, for example, we think of the meaning of the "gnomon" in antiquity, which, as the hand of a sun clock or angle measuring tool, simultaneously advanced to a "spiritual technique" and a "cognitive tool"[35] since the psephoi–arithmetic of the Pythagoreans. We should also bear in mind that a thread is not just the source of curved lines—e.g. in graphs and knots—like in mathematical knot theory, but it can also—as a *woven* structure—achieve sufficient density to become a surface for inscriptions.[36] And last but not least, the straight line and the circle were the favored shapes in Greek mathematics, with lasting applications in astronomy and mechanics.[37]

(5) *Interpretability*: when, in the case of the multiplication table, we speak of numbers, this is imprecise. Those figures arranged along the line are not numbers (they are not visible to anyone), but figures as number *characters*. The spatialization of the cipher happens on the basis of its semiotic representative. Thus the usage of the multiplication table is based on the possibility of its interpretation. In the effectively geometric action of drawing a line, we see an operation with numbers and thus we perform it, read it, and interpret it as an arithmetic operation. Still, the connection between "operation" and "interpretation" is looser than this might make it seem. The paper has no "consciousness" and, nor does any machine that could perform this operation instead of a human. To "see" an operation with numbers in the operative graphism of the line arrangement is (actually) the mathematical goal of the multiplying table, but it is not a precondition for

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[35] Bogen 2005; Krämer 1991, p. 12 et seqq.
[36] Ingold 2007.
[37] Boyer 1945.

the mechanism, enabling its functioning: it can do—if accordingly pre-
pared—without consciousness and "knowing that". The cognitive usage of
the nomogram uses and corroborates the division between knowing how
and knowing that, between sensuality and sense, between the mechanics of
an operation and its interpretation.

(6) *Translatability through transcription*: we know that the graphic multi-
plication discussed here can be achieved through a number of other proce-
dures: with strings of beads on an abacus, with the columns of a calculus
board, as a ready–made multiplication table, as a written calculation with
decimal numbers, with slide rulers, and finally with mechanic and elec-
tronic computing machines. Not only are symbolic and technical artifacts
convertible into one another, but different graphic realizations are also
mutually translatable and equivalent in their function merit, at least in re-
gard to the result. The elementary determination, essentially due to the
line, to be the transfer of a gesture, is generalized into the transferability of
diagrammatic artifacts to differently conceived graphic and technic arti-
facts. Translatability is also a constituent of the diagrammatic.

(7) *Schematizing*: while a painted artwork radiates the aura of an irreplace-
able singularity, the usable forms of operative iconicity are thoroughly
non–spectacular and prosaic. They are also governed by schematism,
which provides a breeding ground for the translatability of inscriptions.
"Schematizing" here means only the following: reading and understanding
schemes is based on the disregard of the aesthetic opulence of inscription.
Seeing just a one–dimensional line in the empiric occurrence of a stroke is
at the same time amplification and reduction. In its simple plasticity, the
nomogram of the multiplication table is just supposed to open the door for
the question of what it means "to think in a plane".[38] We would like to
briefly show an early usage of graphs, which is almost[39] a pioneering act
and a milestone on the road of intellectual use of diagrammatic inscrip-
tions. What we have here are Johann Heinrich Lambert's scholarly visual-
izations, thanks to which *graphs* in science attained operative meaning.

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[38] Thomas L. Hankins has shown in a brilliant article that American scientist L.P.
Henderson used nomograms in psychology in 1928; with a nomogram, whose
functioning principle is similar to that of the multiplication tables, because it can
be used for analysis performed with the help of a thread and a ruler, Henderson
managed to determine the physical and chemical composition of mammal blood.
[39] Nicole Oresme (1320–1382) used diagrams scientifically, see Châtelet 2000, p.
38 et seqq.

8

Johann Heinrich Lambert (1728–1777), maybe the last polymath at the intersection of philosophy, mathematics, empirical natural science, and cartography, was one of the pioneers in the field of scholarly usage of graphs. For him, they were not only good for the visualization of observational data and/or theoretic connections, but also a means for reaching new insights in the tension area of empiricism and theory.[40] This can be exemplified on two graphs: one uses the depiction potential of a *straight*, the other of a *curved* line.
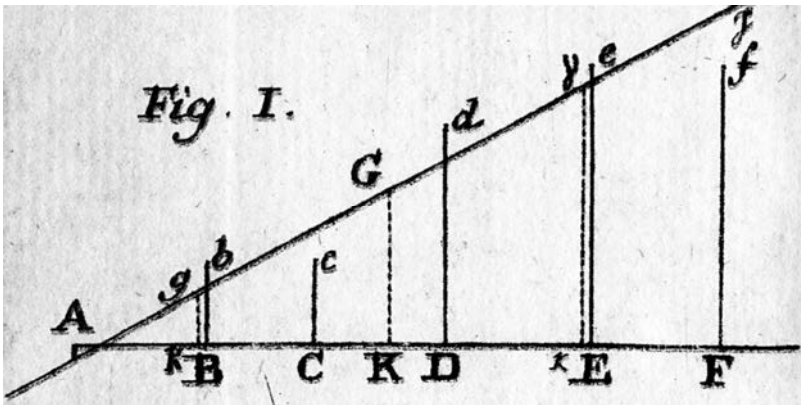
Fig. 10–2: *Straight line.*

8.1 The initial problem is how we can correct the impreciseness of empirical observation, i.e. the almost unavoidable measuring errors in experimental work. Usually, measuring is repeated several times for this reason and an average value is obtained so that the trials with the highest aberration from the average value can be eliminated.[41] Lambert developed a method of evading and finally correcting measuring errors—as a purely graphic operation. The measuring results are inscribed as points in a system of lines; the line that connects the points represents the general law implicit to the obtained data, which, thanks to the position of the points and in the form of the line that connects them, become graphically visible. However, this is just the basis. Lambert operatively used visualization while connecting singular data and a universal law and therefore as an instru-

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[40] For example: Shynin 1966 and 1971, Vogelgsang 2004, Bullynck 2008.
[41] Lambert 1765 (*Reliability theory of observations and tests*), p. 426 et seqq.

ment of correction of empiric aberrations in favor of the sharpness of geometric representation, in the way that it "liberated itself" from the factually obtained position of the individual measurements.

It is conspicuous in the illustration that the lines drawn from points B, C, D, E and F on the horizontal axis towards the climbing straight line end either *before* or *behind* this straight line (these are the points marked by lowercase letters). Obviously the measured values change as the lines rise; however, the measure of their change is not constant in that process. Lambert's idea was to inscribe a single, *straight* ascending line instead of a successive connection of points through a zigzag line. A rising line emerges, which does not exactly cross the obtained measure points, but goes "so to say through the middle".[42] Lambert—and this is an assumption his method of correcting errors is based on, in this case—in a Pythagorean manner takes the presumption that the measured values are somehow linearly connected as a point of departure. While Lambert makes a line, as the visual shape of a nomological relation, interacting on paper with particular observed data as measured values, he obtains the average of the measured values in the form of an ascending straight line that contains error correction and whose position is the "closest" to natural law. If the average value is arithmetically derived from erroneous measurements, this value is exactly on the inscribed line: here this refers to the points G, g, and y.

8.2 Here we come to the second example, which shows a curved line. It is supposed to demonstrate the aberration of the magnetic needle from the geographic North Pole depending on time and related to Paris as a place. Lambert used the geographic record of observed data to obtain the variation in the aberration and to determine the period of this variation. Before him, Muschenbroek had assumed that this aberration was linear and that it ascended towards the West during a period of 1,542 years. Lambert managed to correct that view: using a graph, he could show that the aberration undulated in a 400–year rhythm. He stressed that, in this, his "figure provides much better services than a table".[43] However, unlike the first example of a linearly ascending straight line (whose basis is an arithmetic equation), here Lambert draws a line with "free hand".[44] Because the position of measuring points "does not follow any rules",[45] the trace of the hand must compensate for our lack of knowledge regarding the underlying rule through a drawing act. A harmonically undulating line is written into a

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[42] Ibid., p. 430.
[43] Ibid., p. 476.
[44] Ibid., p. 475, cit. 43.
[45] Ibid., 475.

cross of coordinates. The axes are segmented according to the years of measuring, reaching from 1550 to 1760, Lambert's present and slightly into the future. The horizontal and the vertical intersect at point C, where the aberration is equal to 0.

   With a freely drawn line, to which Vogelgsang has drawn our attention, Lambert managed to solve the induction problem, the intricate question of how a generally valid law could be derived from particular data. Vogelgsang says: "The induction problem becomes tangible in the interplay of points and the line and takes place as a haptic problem".[46] The curve enables us to transfer conclusions from a low number of observed values to ones that have not been observed. This is enabled by a "drawing hand movement",[47] which closes the gaps in the unobserved areas. He has analyzed in detail the fact that this freely undulating line resembles William Hogarth's snake–like line of beauty in a surprising manner.[48]
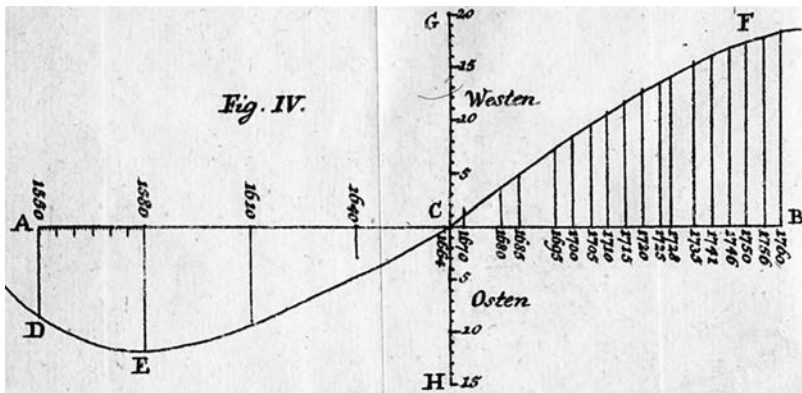
Fig. 10–3: *Curved line.*

8.3 Lambert is considered a pioneer of the scholarly usage of graphs of the late 18th century, towards which William Playfair's[49] statistic charts and James Watt's[50] indicator diagrams also count. Unlike the latter methods, Lambert's graphic method is embedded into numerous theoretic discus-

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[46] Vogelgsang 2004, p. 43.
[47] Vogelgsang 2004.
[48] Ibid., p. 52 et seqq.
[49] About William Playfair's economic graphs: Beniger/Robyn 1978; Tilling 1975, p. 199 et seqq.
[50] About James Watt's self–charting graphs: Tilling 1975, p. 198 et seqq.; Dickinson/Jenkins 1827, p. 228–233.

sions, as well as manifold practical scientific applications that reach into the domain of art (linear perspective) and cartography (projection).[51] Lambert is a treasure chest for diagrammatic reconstructions, which would push the boundaries of this paper. However, let us just outline this embedding of nature science's diagrammatic procedures: (i) *Figural insight*:[52] in terms of insight and theory of signs, Lambert develops the idea of a symbolic insight—Leibniz's heritage—which follows the ideal that the objects of cognition are always given in the form of sensory, visible and manageable symbols.[53] Our thinking requires exteriority. In the heart of external symbolism is the figure and with it the "figural insight", whose specific characteristic is that it proceeds not only optically, but also haptically. Therefore the notion of the figure is very wide: it encompasses non–alphabetic scripts as well as notations of astronomy, chemistry, algebra, music and choreography. (ii) *Logic*:[54] Lambert developed—like Leibniz before him, whose logical diagrams became known only after his death—a graphic logic where syllogistic sentence types, in the sense of Aristotelian conclusion modes, are represented by two lines arranged in a specific way. Logical relations are rendered in the form of topological relations.[55] (iii) *Art theory/Cartography*: In many articles devoted to perspective[56] and projection, Lambert examined the graph as a central instrument for conveying real–world relations on a two–dimensional level, applying it to cartographic designs and developing it further.[57] His methods for the projection of maps are used even today. (iv) *The graphic method*: For the empirical natural sciences, in many observation and experimental fields Lambert applied graphs, whose task was not only to graphically represent experimental data and/or laws, but to become instruments of analysis[58] with the aim of reaching new insights on inscription surfaces. They cannot be read from the observation data as such, for example from a table list; so this system visualizes the "invisible" side of scientific observation.

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[51] That is why Laura Tilling (1975, p. 204) is wrong when she sees no connection between Lambert's philosophy and epistemology and his scientific–mathematical use of graphs. Bullynck 2008 stresses this connection.

[52] "The symbolic insight is also called figural, prevailingly if the symbols that represent it are visible or figures, like characters, numbers, notes etc." Lambert 1965, Vol. 2 § 22, p. 15

[53] See: Lambert 1965, 1771.

[54] Lambert 1764, Vol. 1, § 179, p. 111 et seqq.

[55] See: Engelbretson 1998; Hubig 1979; Wolters 1983.

[56] Lambert 1943.

[57] Lambert 1772.

[58] See: Tilling 1975; Bullynck 2008.

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Let us remember this: we were supposed to examine ways in which the visual–haptic inscription procedure—condensed in a line stroke—might serve cognitive issues. Maybe now it becomes clearer what is meant by that and how these aspects are interconnected. By inscribing geometrical points into a system of axes, the graph appears to be a *trace of individual* data. It actually does depict something, i.e. it records something external onto paper, but it needs a projection method to accomplish this; the graph always embodies only a "trans–natural image". The connection between the points makes only a *general* procedural form visible and visualizes a theoretical context.

This connection produces—in the form of a straight or curved line—a continuum, which no longer has the character of a trace, but embodies a *design*, a design in which—let us think of the similarity between the undulating line of the magnetic aberrance elaborated by Vogelgsang and Hogarth's line of beauty—mathematical and aesthetic aspects work together. The line also always records the points that are not identified empirically, but "set up" through the line stroke of the hand. The line as a continuum in this way closes the gap between the sparse observation data, the hiatus between the observable and unobservable, the particular and the general. Trace and design are entangled in the graph, which simultaneously belongs to the realm of the empirical and the theoretical, connecting both at the same level.

In this metamorphosis the transfiguration potential emerges: the measuring point as a single point is empirical; in the continuum of the line it is regarded as theoretical. On the surface of the paper we can perform an operation that shifts the measuring point, and by placing it on a line it can be transformed into a theoretical, error–optimized "average date". The heteronomous–autonomous double character of the line as a trace and design at the same time enables mediation between contemplation and perception, between theory and observation. The two–dimensional surface opens itself to the "mind's eye" in the interaction of point, line, and surface; the surface turns into a cognitive tool and a laboratory of thought. We think on the paper and with the paper.

(Translated into English by Andy Jelčić)

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Chapter Eleven

Impaired Images and the Boundaries of Discernibility

Asbjørn Grønstad

Let us start with the state of the art, and what I propose to call digital culture's penchant for pellucidity. In January 2013, exalted reports from the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas widely hailed the latest improvements in high–resolution technology unveiled at the event. *The LA Times*, for instance, praised the 4K TV set for reproducing "stunningly good pictures on very large screens" with "an amazing level of detail and brightness".[1] The dream of optimal transparency seems to drive the business, as well as the expectations of the consumer–viewer. This teleology of ever–greater clarity notwithstanding, our current image ecology is rife with objects and practices that gravitate instead toward various forms of what some (the CES no doubt) would see as visual imperfection. Found across a diversity of contemporary visual media and genres—photography, documentary, fiction films, television news, the social web—this aesthetic is easily recognizable through its reliance on a set of recurring properties: fuzzy graphics, motion blurs, out–of–focus or grainy images, discolorations, wobbly cameras, elliptical editing, intrusion of "noise" either from the environment or the recording apparatus itself, technical glitches, and material decay (nitrate film).

At the same as the future of celluloid–based filmmaking is becoming ever more precarious, a new generation of experimentalists (for instance Ben Rivers, Rosa Barba, Tacita Dean, and Luke Fowler) has been exploring the specificity of the cinematic apparatus, often underscoring its discrete material components. Moreover, the volatile conditions of the analog image have been subjected to close scrutiny by artists such as Bill Morri-

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[1] Jon Healey, "CES 2013: Sharp Shows off super–sharp 8K TV, waits for content", *The LA Times*, January 10, 2013, http://www.latimes.com/business/technology/la–fi–tn–ces–sharp–8k–tv–20130110,0,5741879.story

son, Pat O' Neill and Ernie Gehr. That questions concerning the nature of the medium should resurface in artistic works now that we have apparently entered the age of the post–cinematic is hardly surprising;[2] as John Guillory has pointed out, "[t]he full significance of the medium as such is always difficult to see in advance of remediation, as with the remediation of writing by print or painting by photography".[3] As historically contingent materialities are on the wane, we may, as film theorists or film philosophers, gain a better vantage point from which to pose certain problems of mediality; the ones that I am interested in here involve the notions of opacity and other theories of post–representation.[4]

In this article, I examine the strange and optically regenerative practices by which materially impaired images exploit their own opacity to attain

a new modality of existing as visual artifacts. Bill Morrison's *Decasia* (2002), a film made up of found archival footage in different stages of erosion, fixates on the moment when the image is about to turn unreadable (Fig. 11–1). A hymn to decomposing celluloid, *Decasia* materializes the effects of fading vision while at the same time, perhaps inadvertently, aestheticizing the forces of decay. We glimpse, among many other things and objects, parachutes descending from a broken sky, a pugilist boxing into empty space, and ethereal camel figures ambling across a surreal desert. Morrison's repurposing of film in various phases of dissolution represents, I will argue, a particular kind of precarious aesthetics capable of producing new affective registers while also conveying in rather explicit terms what Paolo Cherchi Usai sees as our "deluded" desire for permanence.[5]

In what follows, I want to explore the notion of opacity in relation to our different forms of visuality and to the image, and at the heart of this project lies a theoretical question that may not yet, however, be articulable as a question at all. Rather, it takes the form of an intuition, or a hunch, that maybe all images are somehow immersed in opacity, and that we have yet to acknowledge the full extent of this impenetrability, this dormant murkiness. I would like to suggest that there might be three forms, or stages, of opacity. Very tentatively I will refer to them as material, conceptual and transcendental. Only the first type will concern me here (a study of the latter two will be pursued elsewhere). Looking at images that are damaged, barely readable or otherwise opaque in the most literal sense seems to be a felicitous enough starting point for this mostly theoretical study of the rhetoric of opacity. At the same time, I am also interested in the broken materiality of decomposing images in its own right, as a particular aesthetic address that, as stated above, may enable a different form of affective experience.

Decasia is a found footage film, in execution and sensibility not so dissimilar from Peter Delpeut's collage work *Lyrical Nitrate* (1991). Director Bill Morrison, a former student of the experimental animator Robert Breer, culled the material from the University of South Carolina's Moving Image Research Collections—as well as the Library of Congress, The Museum of Modern Art, George Eastman House and the Cinematheque Suisse. His moldy assemblage borrowed from travelogues, melodramas, newsreels; the final work became a 67–minute black and white montage piece. While some parts of the eroding film stock were processed and altered by computers (for every original frame, two or three frames were step printed, effectively slowing down the images), there was no artificial

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[5] Paolo Cherchi Usai, P. C., *The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory and the Digital Dark Age*, London: BFI, 2001, 129.
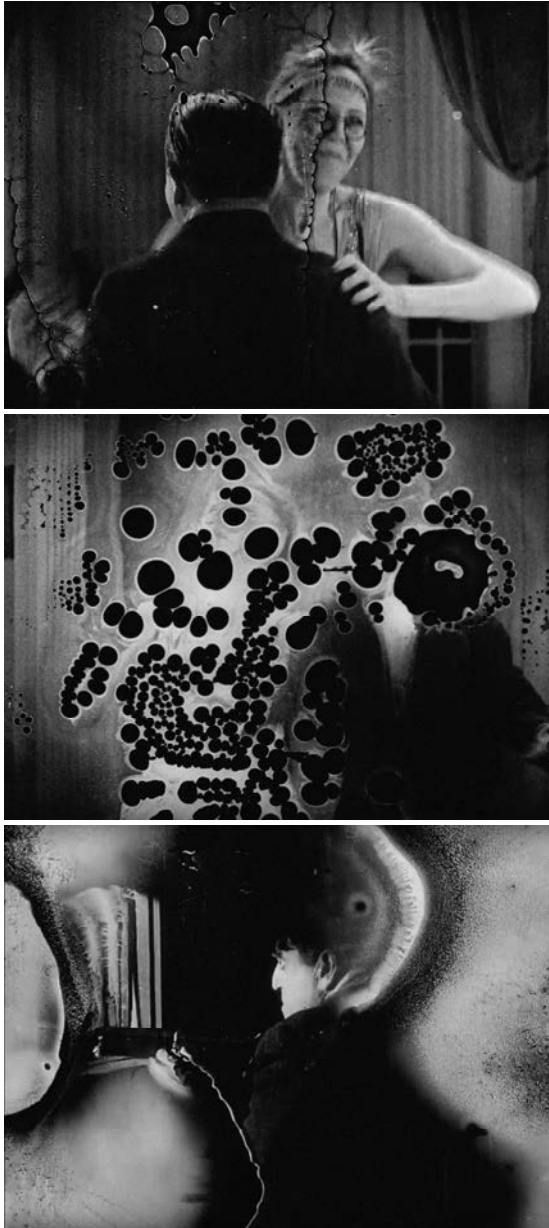
Fig. 11–1: Bill Morrison, *Decasia*, 2002. Film stills.

attempt to speed up the process of decay itself. Of the several hundred reference prints Morrison scrutinized, ranging in time from 1914 to 1954, only two films have, as far as I know, hitherto been properly identified: *The Last Egyptian* (J. Farrell MacDonalds 1914, written, produced and based on a novel by L. Frank Baum) and *Truthful Tulliver* (William Hart 1916). Not much has been said about this cinema of decay, at least that I have come across, and it represents a type of visual degradation that is of its own order, in the sense that it is in some way about temporality's own iconoclasm. This makes films like *Decasia*, *Lyrical Nitrate* and *The Decay of Fiction* different from other instances of damaged images in modern visual culture, such as the veritable attacks carried out on the picture plane in gestural abstraction, where the artists turned the destruction of the image into a purposeful mode of aesthetic expression.[6] They are also of an order different from those images that are the subjects of one of the few pieces that have in fact been written about optic imperfection from an aesthetic point of view. In the article "In Defense of the Poor Image", Hito Steyerl identifies the eponymous object as a binary numeric entity, usually a ripped AVI or JPG, a frequently copied file whose decline is caused by infinite acts of transmission, by digital wear and tear. The poor image is

> a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution.[7]

Yet, it might be that these forms of visual mutilation, vastly unalike though they are, can provide us with an entry point through which to consider the precarious imaging of artists like Morrison, Delpeut, O'Neill, and Ernie Gehr (the latter of whom I will return to in more detail below). That point is the fetish of transparency. Resolution and sharpness, as Steyerl points out, are the most valued image properties; there is a sense in which a high–resolution image looks more "mimetic" than its low–resolution counterpart. Intriguingly, Steyerl—referencing Juan García Espinosa's Third Cinema Manifesto "For an Imperfect Cinema"—links the ambitions toward ever greater resolution (and thus transparency) to what she describes as "the neoliberal radicalization of the concept of culture as commodity" and to "the commercialization of cinema, its dispersion into mul-

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[6] See Paul Schimmel, *Destroy the Picture: Painting the Void 1949–1962,* Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art/Skira Rizzoli, 2012.
[7] Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image", *e–flux*, 11 (2009), http://www.e–flux.com/journal/in–defense–of–the–poor–image/

tiplexes, and the marginalization of independent filmmaking".[8]

What is particularly noteworthy about the connection Steyerl makes is the unmistakable politicization of a feature, or condition, conventionally thought to be technological or formal in nature. Clarity, or transparency, is bound up with commodified culture; for Espinosa, for instance, so–called "technically and artistically masterful" cinema even tends to be reactionary.[9] Critics like Steyerl and Espinosa posit a fascinating bifurcation in which markedly dissimilar political, cultural and even ethical values are being ascribed to what are essentially different aesthetic properties. What is routinely perceived as a matter of technological enhancement might in fact be better understood as a divergence on the level of form that in turn may index a different ethical content. In the electronics business, for example, the technological and the formal frequently seem conflated, as the media admiration for the 4K TV unveiled at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas would seem to confirm.

The points that I want to make with this small detour around Steyerl's discussion of the poor image are: first, that this technological hierarchy of good versus bad image quality (in short, transparency and opacity) can be fundamentally misleading when talking about the cultural and epistemological value of images and that we would do better to refigure the terms of the debate according to the specificity of different aesthetic constellations; second, I want to suggest that poor images—degenerating, abstruse and almost illegible images—make visible the more conceptual and transcendental conditions of opacity that might be ontologically constitutive of the image in the first place. The rich and dense patina of "visual noise" that consumes the poor image is thus construable as a kind of decrepit allegory—one critic, in fact, has proposed that the decayed footage of Morrison's film functions as "medium and metaphor" and that his works "elegize the avantgarde tradition even as they make the case for its continued relevance".[10] A film like *Decasia* also gestures toward what Kazimir Malevich termed "cinema as such". In his essays from the mid–1920s, Malevich showed that he had high hopes for the new art form: "One would expect the cinema to overturn the whole of imitative culture, and, of course, it will be overthrown when abstractionists with their new flash of consciousness get into the cinema".[11] This remark, evidently, encapsulates the time–honored conflict between mimetic and abstract art, between what

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Juan García Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema", trans. Julianne Burton, Jump Cut, 20 (1979): 24–26.

[10] Elizabeth Schambelan, "Bill Morrison", *Artforum* 42.9 (2004): 210.

[11] Kazimir Malevich, "The Artist and Cinema", *Essays on Art*, 235.

Malevich referred to as "imitative" cinema and "cinema as such". The teleological destiny of film as a medium seems to be the latter; as Schambelan notes in her review of *Decasia*, "[a]ll film, if left to its own devices, will eventually become cinema as such".[12]

With its cornucopia of decontextualized segments from so many films—as well as with its obvious linguistic nod to Walt Disney's *Fantasia* (1940)—*Decasia* is, however, not necessarily wholly non–narrative and abstract. It certainly does not conform to anything even remotely resembling the stylistic and narrative transparency of most conventional filmmaking, but in its very opacity it still murmurs its fragile tales, populated by ephemeral protagonists and spectral apparitions, the film perhaps a phantom double of Jean–Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinema* (1998). This sense of a work which transmutes its own opacity into a meditation on film is also affirmed by the director's own comments about the process of making it:

> I was seeking out instances of decay set against a narrative backdrop, for example, of valiant struggle, or thwarted love, or birth, or submersion, or rescue, or one of the other themes I was trying to interweave. And never complete decay: I was always seeking out instances where the image was still putting up a struggle, fighting off the inexorability of its demise but not yet having succumbed. And things could get very frustrating. Sometimes I'd come upon instances of spectacular decay but the underlying image was of no particular interest. Worse was when there was a great evocative image but no decay.[13]

The sad, scary and enigmatic beauty of *Decasia* may thus hint at a narrative, but one materialized *in* rather than *through* its form. There is nothing at all eccentric or unusual about this narrative, which concerns the subject of obsolescence, the archive, and the precarious state of cultural memory. According to Morrison, he wanted the spectator "to feel an aching sense that time was passing and that it was too beautiful to hold on to".[14] The moment and circumstance of the film's release also suggest an oblique relation to what Hal Foster, drawing on Thomas Hirschhorn, has described as precarious art. The gestation of *Decasia* harks back to "The Europäischer Musikmonat's" commissioning of Michael Gordon (of Bang on a Can), described as Morrison's "acoustic twin", to compose a sym-

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[12] Schambelan.

[13] Lawrence Weschler, "Sublime Decay", *New York Times*, December 22, 2002.

[14] Dave Heaton, "Portrait of Decay: Bill Morrison on *Decasia*", *Erasing Clouds*, 13 (2003), http://www.erasingclouds.com/02april.html, accessed on June 12, 2013.

phony to be performed by the Basel sinfonietta in November 2001.[15] The Ridge Theatre company in New York (with whom Morrison worked) was then asked to provide a visual accompaniment; the theme of decay was Morrison's own proposal. The two artists worked separately for the most part, Gordon on his decaying symphony, Morrison in the archives. In November 2001, the work premiered as an intermedial performance in Basel, the film cut to Gordon's atonal and rather minimalist score, performed by a 55–piece orchestra while slides of visual decay were being projected. It was the live recording of this performance that became the soundtrack for the film. During the show, however, a frame got stuck in the projector, setting the image ablaze to smolder in real time. Evincing a temporal contiguity with the events of 9/11, the premiere of *Decasia*, with its eruptive glitches, further imbues the film with a sense of material and existential vulnerability.

According to Foster, much of the art made under the sign of the precarious—Jon Kessler's *The Palace at 4 a.m.* (2005), Paul Chan's series *The 7 Lights* (2005–2007), Mark Wallinger's *State Britain* (2007), and Isa Genzken's *Skulptur Projekte Münster* (2007), to name a few—sidesteps modernist practices of negation, suggesting instead the almost inverse effort to embrace the formlessness of the times. This "mimesis of the precarious", as he puts it,[16] does not characterize Morrison's project, one salient difference being that *Decasia* infuses the effects of the precarious into its very materiality, in the process creating a work that is anything but formless. If we are to understand the nature of this aesthetic, we might, in the final instance, be well advised to look beyond both Steyerl's notion of the poor image and Foster's accentuation of the formlessness of precarious art. One of the most immediate impressions one forms when watching *Decasia* is that the warped figurations of the film's images invoke a sense of the ghostly, an effect Morrison's work shares with some of experimental filmmaker Ernie Gehr's recent videos. For Aby Warburg of the unfinished *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924–1928), compiled around the same time as Malevich's essays on "cinema as such", images contain pagan energies which linger on through their posthumous lives as phantasms waiting to be summoned. This explains Warburg's idea of art history as a story of ghosts and of the art historian as a necromancer. These reflections later get developed by Giorgio Agamben, who writes there that

> the images that constitute our memory tend incessantly to rigidify into specters in the course of their (collective and individual) historical trans-

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[15] Weschler, op. cit.
[16] Hal Foster, "Precarious", *Artforum*, 48. 4 (2009); 207–209.

mission: the task is hence to bring them back to life. Images are alive, but because they are made of time and memory their life is always already *Nachleben*, after–life; it is always already threatened and in the process of taking on a spectral form.[17]

For Agamben, cinema is neither a technology, nor an aesthetics or material medium, but rather a method or praxis charged with releasing the image from its "spectral destiny".[18] Cinema is that process which brings life to images, which unleashes their unlived histories. A film like *Decasia*—which so eloquently foregrounds its own opacity—embodies that Warburgian potentiality better than most.

Whatever otherworldly qualities one would like to attribute to images that have been damaged and impaired, however, a preliminary issue that needs to be addressed when it comes to modes of visual opacity is the aforementioned notion of precariousness. In the beginning of this article, I referred to Morrison's *Decasia* as a work enveloped by a precarious aesthetic. What I mean by this is that the film, through its splendid procession of decaying images, dramatizes the interplay between material and perceptual forms of vulnerability, between object and vision. What is opaque and difficult to discern may generate a sense of the precarious. But in recent intellectual discussions, the concept of a *precarious aesthetic* is perhaps most immediately evocative of Judith Butler's reflections on the problem of how to "negotiate a sudden and unprecedented vulnerability", as she puts it in *Precarious Life*.[19] The backdrop against which her intervention is set is the catastrophe of 9/11 and the invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Since then there have been more precipitous and unprecedented vulnerabilities to negotiate, most crucially the twin threats of the financial and environmental crises. One could probably be forgiven for thinking that the perceived difficulties within the field of aesthetics cannot but be obliterated by these more urgent and ubiquitous predicaments. I do not want to suggest otherwise in this text, but I want to remain for a little while with Butler's emphasis on vulnerability as perhaps a key condition of life in the 21st century.

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[17] Giorgio Agamben, "Nymphs", *Releasing the Image: From Literature to New Media*, eds. Jacques Khalip & Robert Mitchell, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011, 66.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, London: Verso, 2004, 42. The term has also more recently been invoked by both Nicolas Bourriaud and Hal Foster. See Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant: No. 17*, New York: Sternberg Press, 2009; and Hal Foster, "Precarious", *Artforum*, 48.4 (2009): 207–209.

One point of departure for my following remarks and for my attempt to engage conceptually with the art of Ernie Gehr is the not too uncommon observation that the conditions of aesthetic experience have found themselves in a rather perilous state, one which they have been in for quite a while now. This is yet another context for the concept of the precarious. Paying too much attention to the aesthetic dimension has long been regarded as somewhat suspect, politically. First, the aesthetic fell victim to the scientifical of the humanities; thereafter, to the remarkable intellectual and institutional force of cultural studies in its manifold guises, postcolonialism and various sociological readings of art and culture. While the former sought to map and thoroughly explain every single feature of the aesthetic object, in the process rooting out the inherent enigma of the aesthetic that Adorno, among others, asserted as an indispensable element of aesthetic ontology, the latter more or less systematically privileged politicized and often formulaic analyses of the art object, readings that often tended to either overlook or brutalize the formal properties of the work.

The pairing of the terms "precarious" and "aesthetic" is thus not as capricious as it may seem at first. We could say that there are two basic senses of the precarious aesthetic: the material and the conceptual (or the explicit and the implicit). The material sense designates various forms of what one could understand as impaired or imperfect images. The second sense is more abstract and would imply something that is quite close to a state of semiotic or hermeneutic opacity. The two senses also appear intuitively related and they straddle the distinctions between different forms of opacity that I make in the introduction. Furthermore, phenomena identifiable as instantiations of a precarious aesthetic may possess a particular force, or power, and this force might even be locatable precisely in their very precariousness. Etymologically, "precarious", from the Latin precārius, was a legal term first registered in the 1640s and close in meaning to "prayer". It denoted a favor asked of someone more powerful than the one doing the asking. A little later the meaning of the word shifted toward the sense of "risky", "uncertain", "perilous", "unstable" and subject to chance. Within the art world, an example of a precarious aesthetic might be Hollis Frampton's *Nostalgia* (1971), in which a series of photos showing mundane places and objects like bathroom stalls and moldering pasta are placed on a slow–burning hot plate gradually to incinerate before our eyes the moment after we hear a description of each one. A film that underscores the difference between language and image, it also simultaneously lays bare the seemingly inherent link between particular varieties of precarious aesthetic and the iconoclastic impulse. A more recent case is Israeli visual artist Keren Cytter's image of a burning turntable.

The notion of a precarious aesthetic and its possible effects form the background, then, of this study of the boundaries of discernibility. From mainstream cinema's historical predilection for unobtrusive staging to porn's axiomatic appropriation of maximum visibility, the medium of film has—for obvious reasons, I think—favored what could be seen as a poetics of transparency. But on the fringes of this paradigm, there is another style of audiovisual representation that has increasingly come to the fore in contemporary visual culture. Memorably considered in fictional form in Antonioni's art house classic *Blow–Up* (1966), this representational problem is one that poses severe challenges to the hermeneutic efficacy of the filmic image. A variation of precarious aesthetics, what I propose to refer to as the epistemology of opacity cuts across a wide range of films, from experimental films such as *Decasia*, *The Decay of Fiction*, and *To Lavoisier, Who Died in the Reign of Terror* (Michael Snow 1991, Fig. 11–2), to commercial movies such those of the Dogme movement, certain segments in Paul Haggis's *In the Valley of Elah* (2007), to amateur footage posted on YouTube and finally contemporary documentaries like *Rouge Parole* (Elyes Baccar 2011). What need to be explored further are both the aesthetic underpinnings and the philosophical ramifications of this forceful orientation toward visual opacity.

Fig. 11–2: Michael Snow, *To Lavoisier, Who Died in the Reign of Terror*, 1991. Film still.

The reasons I want to bring in Ernie Gehr, finally—in addition to the materialization in some of his work of an aesthetic of the opaque and the precarious—is first that, as David Schwartz notes, "every element of the cinematic apparatus is called into question and becomes a source of artistic energy".[20] Second and maybe more importantly, my interest relates to something he wrote in the program notes for a 1971 show:

> Most films teach film to be an image, a representing. But film is a real thing and as a real thing it is not imitation. It does not reflect on life, it embodies the life of the mind. It is not a vehicle for ideas or portrayals of emotion outside of its own existence as emoted idea. Film is a variable intensity of light, an internal balance of time, a movement within a given space.[21]

That film is not really representational, counter–intuitive as the claim may at first seem, is an observation that I have explored at length elsewhere.[22] In my book *Transfigurations* (2008), I propose the term *amimetic* to describe an ontological condition at odds with the principle of transparency that routinely informs much film criticism and theory. Gehr's work in film and video supports and accentuates this claim that film is not a representation but a real thing, and his stylistic mobilization of visually imperfect and indistinct imagery could be considered a first acknowledgment of the inherent opacity of all images. Decades before it became commonplace to talk about film as a form of thought, moreover,[23] Gehr demonstrates the capacity of his chosen medium to perform the work of philosophy. In his analysis of the pulsating *Serene Velocity* (1970, Fig. 11–3), Gehr's most widely known film to date, Noël Carroll picks up on precisely this aspect, asserting that the film represents "a celluloid counterpart to a philosophical thought experiment designed to advance the con-

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[20] David Schwartz, "Ernie Gehr at the Turn of the Century", in *Serene Intensity: The Films of Ernie Gehr*, New York: American Museum of the Moving Image, 2009, 3.

[21] Ernie Gehr, "Program Notes", in *Serene Intensity: The Films of Ernie Gehr*, New York: American Museum of the Moving Image, 2009, 17.

[22] See Asbjørn Grønstad, *Transfigurations: Violence, Death and Masculinity in American Cinema*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008.

[23] See for instance Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time–Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989, 168; and Éric Alliez, "Midday, Midnight: The Emergence of Cine–Thinking", trans. Patricia Dailey, *The Brain is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema*, ed. Gregory Flaxman, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000, 293.

ceptual point that an essential feature of film is movement".[24] Gehr's method, or technique, entails to a significant extent a reworking of the film image through a set of optical and chemical processes: arithmetical editing, zooms, superimpositions, abstractive lenses, re–photography, reversed or slowed down motion, rack focusing, and swish panning.

As Tom Gunning sees it, these techniques are more than just stylistic trademarks. Rather, they function as "basic structuring devices, whose effects on the image and the viewer are interrogated by the film".[25] The result comes close to Gehr's own encapsulation of the essence of filmicity, quoted above. We have no choice but to focus on these devices, Gunning writes, because "we can not [sic] simply see through them to something else... For most filmmakers and film viewers film has become something one simply looks through in order to get at either a dramatic story or documentary evidence".[26] Gunning's description of Gehr's practice is in fact the poetics of opacity in a nutshell, a poetics configured by processes of "deautomatization". His are images that need figuring out. In *Reverberation* (1969), the image we look at is just barely discernible. In *History* (1970), Gehr places a piece of black fabric in front of a lens–less movie camera. A light is used to illuminate the textile, and what we see is nothing but swirls of dye from color film and grains of black and white. In *Field* (1970), the image shows something that is elusive at best, and in the aforementioned *Serene Velocity*, "seeing is stretched to the breaking point between contradictory poles of stillness and motion, flatness and depth, abstraction and representation", to borrow Gunning's words again.[27] Gehr's work seems consistently preoccupied with an analysis of the phenomenon of visual opacity, and it is perhaps symptomatic of this enduring inclination that one of his early films is called *Transparency* (1970).

But how, one wonders, does this marked fascination with the materiality of film and the limits of human perception, with apparatical self–referentiality and an almost sensual form of structuralist rigor, compute with the evidentiary potential of the image, what André Bazin once called "the irrational power of the photograph"?[28] When we are confronted with an aesthetic practice that allows us to actually see the image as image and

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[24] Noël Carroll, "Philosophizing Through the Moving Image: The Case of *Serene Velocity*", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 64.1 (2006): 173–185; 182.
[25] Tom Gunning, "Placing the Films of Ernie Gehr", in *Serene Intensity: The Films of Ernie Gehr*, New York: American Museum of the Moving Image, 2009, 11.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Gunning, 9.
[28] André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image", *What is Cinema 1*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, 14.

Fig. 11–3: Ernie Gehr, *Serene Velocity*, 1970. Film stills.

not as a transparent window into some kind of diegetic environment, by what parameters do we appraise the reality and the value of that at which we are looking? What is the currency of the image, epistemologically speaking? What kind of document, if any, is an image that exists, precariously, one might say, on the fringes of the discernible? One answer could be that such images are a reminder that the relative uncommunicativeness which surrounds them is as a matter of fact not too foreign to other, less obviously opaque images either. Consider, for instance, Raymond Bel-

lour's argument that filmic images are what he calls "unattainable",[29] impossible to paraphrase, quote or ultimately decode (and the insertion of video clips in electronic articles or the pausing of an image played back on a DVD or Bluray, among other things, do not really change anything, since this is merely a matter of transferring the image between different technological platforms). When we look at any perfectly lucid, graphically un–impaired image, do we necessarily always know what we see? Another answer might be that, because these "uncertain images", to use Dudley Andrew's phrase,[30] engender rather than represent a world, their status as signifying objects has been altered. They are not fictions, one step removed from the spectator's reality, but exist, in fact, within the same experiential horizon. Yet another answer is that Gehr's distorted, disorienting, and occasionally hypnotic aesthetics of constraint invokes a sense of the spectral. How could it not, with its intangible figures, ethereal mood, deformed urban spaces and characteristic omission of human presence in the shot?

Gehr's life and work have also often been shrouded in a veil of enigmas. Consider, for instance, his "oblique autobiography", his well–known reservations with regard to sharing personal information, and the resolutely anti–psychological and abstract style of his films and videos. An artist more interested in capturing the delicate changes of objects and spaces than in showing characters and action, Gehr's body of work has typically been described as "oblique" and "mysterious". These attributes also pertain, I think, to some of his most recent video works—for instance *Abracadabra* (2009), *Auto–Collidor XV* and *Auto–Collidor XVI* (2011), and *Work in Progress* (2012), which seem on some level to be conceptualizations of the relationship between the ghostly and the opaque. Gehr, who taught a course on phantasmagoria at Harvard University, has, ever since early films like *Morning* (1968), *Transparency* (1969) and *Serene Velocity* (1970), betrayed a rare sensitivity to the texture of surfaces, the modulations of light, the play of color and the importance of scale. More often than not, his art seems poised on the edge of the visible world. Yet, the impenetrability of Gehr's images also tends to generate a sense of the apparitional, in that his formal obfuscations of mundane spaces (say, a busy urban street) bring out an almost otherworldly presence. For example, in *Abracadabra*—a digital reconfiguration of four early silent films reminiscent of the stereoscope loop—Gehr assembles semi–transparent images of boys playing outside a department store, which he effortlessly transmutes into cinematic ghosts. In *Work in Progress*, he exploits the elusiveness of

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[29] Raymond Bellour, "The Unattainable Text", *Screen*, 16.3 (1975): 19–27.
[30] Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is*, Oxford: Wiley–Blackwell, 2010, 13.

the video surface in reconstituting an informationally dense urban street as a spectral tableau. Of *Essex Street Market* (2004), the critic J. Hoberman has even used the term "ghosts" to refer to the presence of elderly shoppers at the eponymous market.[31] Thus, even on the very margin of legibility, or maybe because of it, Gehr's images appear capable of conjuring phantasmagoric spaces. But, as we have seen, he is not the only artist to forge a connection between spectrality and the opaque; a similar association is inarguably at work in *Decasia* and *The Decay of Fiction*. While likewise invested in matters of temporality, Gehr's cinema is more about duration and continuity than the instant and the fragment. The artist himself has referred to his method in terms of a "meditative ecstasy",[32] a strangely incongruous juxtaposition that nevertheless captures the formal uniqueness of his work. According to some of the rather scant criticism that has grown up around his filmography, this meditative propensity, in part inspired by Karlheinz Stockhausen's intensities of tonal dissonance, enabled Gehr to create "a completely new visual look for the New American Cinema".[33] In Wheeler Dixon's view, many contemporary examples of a precarious aesthetic, from MTV to various DIY and YouTube practices, are indebted to the 1960s avant–garde cinema of which Gehr was a crucial part. Ultimately, the filmmaker's gravitation toward forms of ghostly opacity might be conceived as a search for what Emerson called "the manifold meaning of every sensuous fact".[34] Whether translucent or muddy, as shiny as the 4K TV or as indeterminate as decaying celluloid, images are incisions into the flow of life that have a certain thickness to them, an all too often unacknowledged density.[35] My rather skeletal and slightly impressionistic remarks about Ernie Gehr's cinema thus merely represent one possible point of departure for a nascent theorization of the immanent opacity of the film image.

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[31] J. Hoberman, "Metro Pictures: J. Hoberman on Ernie Gehr", *Artforum*, 43.6 (2005): 41.

[32] Filmmakers' Cooperative, *Filmmakers' Cooperative Catalogue*, no. 6, New York: New American Cinema Group, 1975, 198.

[33] Wheeler Winston Dixon, *The Exploding Eye: A Re–Visionary History of 1960s American Experimental Cinema*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997, 66.

[34] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet", *Essays*, 1844. In P. Adams Sitney, *Eyes Upside Down: Visionary Filmmakers and the Heritage of Emerson*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 200.

[35] Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, *Life After New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2012, 75.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

PROTEAN IMAGES OF FASHION:
REVALUATION OF PAST STYLES
IN NEW SETTINGS

ALICIA IRENA MIHALIĆ

Emerging within western society during its transition from the late Middle Ages to the early Renaissance, fashion has been defined by its ever–changing character, which eventually enabled this phenomenon to distinguish itself as one of the most prominent mechanisms of contemporary society. Driven by its dedication towards novelty, the fashion system continued to flourish along the lines of historical progress, with new styles cyclically arising from the upper classes and subsequently trickling down towards the lower. In the beginning of the twentieth century, these processes were described by Georg Simmel as the consequences of psychological tendencies towards imitation and social equalization on the one hand, and the need for differentiation and variation on the other (Simmel, 1999: 226). Along with this definition of fashion as an expression of class division, Simmel established a link between the essence of fashion and its question of "simultaneously being and non–being". Once certain fashion styles were adopted by those of high social standing as a form of novelty and consequently appropriated by the less well off, while being at their fashionable peak, these new ideas established a dividing line between the past and the future, thus channelling for a moment, according to Simmel, more than any other phenomenon, a very strong sense of the present (Simmel, 1999: 232).

Whereas fashion, over its centuries–long course, has undoubtedly been marked by constant reinvention, it is this notion and connection to a certain time frame, understood as the present, that should be addressed before making attempts to analyse the relays between fashion's contemporary and historical manifestations. Even though Simmel's understanding of fashion was profoundly rooted in his study on the impact of modernity upon early

twentieth–century social life and consumption, the link between fashion and the present continued to remain a point of interest, often revised by postmodernist authors such as Gilles Lipovetsky. In the introductory chapter of his book *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy*, which represents an analysis of fashion's transformation and the conceptualization of its rising power within the notion of "open society" of the twentieth century, Lipovetsky not only made an attempt to describe fashion as a "frenzied modern passion for novelty", but additionally noted its importance as a "celebration of the social present" (Lipovetsky, 2002: 4). On a similar note, fashionable clothing was approached by Christopher Breward as a commodity that had the ability to contribute towards "the shaping of a sense of the present for its various consumers" (Breward, 2003: 16) and Barbara Vinken, furthermore, discussed fashion as the "art of the perfect moment, of the sudden, surprising and yet obscurely expected harmonious apparition – the New at the threshold of an immediate future" (Vinken, 2005: 42).

By following fashion and its guidelines we become acquainted with garments and accessories of specific shapes, cuts and fabrics that were appreciated by consumers as desirable commodities during a particular period of time. But due to fashion's susceptibility towards perpetual innovation, this effect of new modes can only establish itself as temporary. On account of the fact that the emergence of fashion accompanied the appearance of capitalism, Roland Barthes aligned fashion with other, similar phenomena of *neomania*. Fashion's reality, as Barthes once commented in his semiotic analysis of the fashion system, represented nothing more than the arbitrariness which established it (Barthes, 1985: 300).

According to Barthes, as was the case with many other phenomena of the day, fashion had the power to covert reality into myth. While blurring and discrediting its own past, the rhetoric of fashion established control over the fashion process, as a consequence of which the present became perceived as a "new absolute". Despite this profound relationship between "in" and "now", the role of history within the fashion system has always been accompanied by its ability to resurrect past forms. Fashion's seemingly forward–looking and progressive character allowed this phenomenon to play with styles of bygone eras rather than casting them off as outdated forms excluded from the speculative optimism of today. In order to find examples of such historical turns, it is sufficient to recall the "passion for things Antique" and high–waisted muslin dresses popular after the French Revolution, or even the later neo–Gothic and neo–Renaissance styles adopted by the rich middle classes during the first half of the nineteenth century (Boucher, 1967: 337–355; Dorfles, 1997: 71).

Challenges to the linear nature of historical progress continued to flourish in the modern, postmodern and contemporary fashion eras with their ever–quickening rhythm of metamorphosis and an increasingly democratized system of fashion. This allowed certain styles to become reinstalled after rather short periods of time, which raised questions regarding the applicability of the acclaimed Laver's Law that was postulated in 1937 as a chart with which the costume historian James Laver made an attempt to describe the dynamics of taste and establish a relationship between trends and continuous cycles of nostalgia. Based on his observation of fashion history, Laver suggested that the same costume could be perceived as indecent ten years before its time, shameless five years before its time, daring one year before its time, smart while being fashionable, dowdy one year after its time, hideous ten years after its time, ridiculous twenty years after its time, amusing thirty years after its time, quaint fifty years after its time, charming seventy years after its time, romantic one hundred years after its time and beautiful one hundred and fifty years after its time (Lurie, 1983: 7).

Although Laver's chart seems applicable to modernity's appreciation of past aesthetics, recent vogues for 1990s fashions raise questions regarding its relevance when it comes to contemporary trend mechanisms. Based on styles that were considered popular only two decades ago, current designer reinterpretations of 1990s fashions or even original vintage items dating from the decade in question seem to be perceived by contemporary fashion diffusion agents and consumers as anything but "ridiculous". Whereas Laver's forecasts regarding the impossibility of reviving the fashions of the mid–twenties prior to the expiry of a thirty year period were able to come true during the course of the twentieth century, the same cannot be claimed for present–day consumer expectations. It becomes obvious, therefore, that the above mentioned intervals of time can no longer be applied to existing circumstances. In addition, such points of view lead us to the conclusion that the concept of temporal gaps, which were previously considered a key element in the functioning of trend mechanisms, has accordingly been challenged in its own right (Mackinney–Valentin, 2010: 12).

Following the impact of technological advancements, consumerism, mass communication and other phenomena accountable for inflicting changes within the structure of postmodern societies, fashion gained such an importance that it became, as Lipovetsky pointed out, a dominant feature. Along with its logic of ephemerality, fashion managed to restructure society from top to bottom, leaving the sphere of peripheral, aesthetic and irrational behind (Lipovetsky, 2002: 6). The question of fashionability

required a redefinition, as former standards were no longer considered mandatory in a world in which styles were simultaneously coming in and going out of fashion. Fred Davis defined fashion cycles as periods of time initiated by the introduction of a particular style and terminated by the advent of the following (Davis, 1994: 102). This cyclical pattern was indeed deeply rooted within the logic of fashion and maintained a steady pace throughout the majority of its history, but started gaining speed as a consequence of the overall development that followed the dawn of the nineteenth century. According to Davis, this acceleration was accompanied by the appearance of independent couturiers accountable for dressing a newly established market of upper–middle–class customers. New fashions ceased to be the unique privileges of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie, as had been the case during previous centuries, and following further democratization, not only of society itself, but of the fashion system as well, fresh designs started appearing in a significantly faster rhythm.

This rapid flux of innovations culminated during the second half of the twentieth century. By that time, haute couture had already established its status as a central point of the fashion system, and fashion became institutionalized, orchestrated and frantically focused on the obligatory introduction of new trends (Lipovetsky, 2002: 58). And as the speed of fashion cycles accelerated, opposing fashionable concepts were no longer divided by decades,[1] but by biennial changes, mostly oriented towards new generations of post–war youth. Ted Polhemus indicated that, whereas 1960s and 1970s fashions, although significantly boosted by the advent of street cultures, managed to preserve their influence upon the dress styles of the majority of the western population, the 1980s succeeded in opening the door to a plurality of clothing trends that opposed the previously dictated universality of fashion (Polhemus, 1994: 25). At this point, fashion entered a new stage of its historical development, a phase that was notably marked by its "open" configuration (Lipovetsky, 2002: 119). By defying the need for aesthetic conformity, this new stage appeared detached from obligatory standards of dress and liberated consumers from the pressure to follow the latest fads in order not only to present themselves as individuals who kept up–to–date with fashion, but also to maintain the appearance of being socially acceptable (Laver, 2012: 291).

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[1] In the eyes of Barthes, a historically stable rhythm of fashion changes was superseded by seasonal variations that eventually became apparent over much shorter periods of time. A consequence of this alteration, which could be called a "micro–diachrony", manifested itself as an intensification of fashion's variability through the appearance of its annual character and was, according to the author, encouraged by accelerators of an economic nature (Barthes, 1985: 297).

Contrary to its preceding formations, the 1980s fashion system became significantly determined by the "anything goes" paradigm. Its newly encountered fragmentation and flexibility was characterized by certain shifts that affected one of fashion's seemingly constitutional characteristics – its fascination with The New (Polhemus, 1996: 9). As fashion approached its contemporary stage, the span of fashion cycles, with their beginnings, middles and ends, became significantly shorter and shorter, thus enabling the repetition of past themes more than ever before. It seemed that, even though certain stylistic similarities with earlier periods can be traced throughout fashion's history, once visual materials from bygone eras became widely available due to the advent of technology and various means of mass media, the fashion system was at once imprinted by an unmistakable presence of historical quotation. As fashion developed into the ultimate form of bricolage that left us without any specifically discernable trends related to any particular season, Evans noticed that a great number of leading designers had started resembling magpies, or even nineteenth–century ragpickers, who plundered historical imagery in order to resurrect past forms with the aim of reviving them within their upcoming collections (Evans, 2007: 12–13). Moreover, apart from drawing inspiration from past eras in the sense of Martin Margiela's 2006 reinvention of a 1970s shirt pattern, some designers gained great success by re–releasing their cult classics of previous decades. Diane von Furstenberg's wrap dress is an example mentioned quite often within literature dealing with this topic. As a symbol of a decade marked by women's liberation, the wrap dress was an iconic design that experienced a prosperous breakthrough on the fashion scene in 1973, only to triumph once again more than twenty years later in 1997, during a decade that was marked by an increased interest in vintage clothing.

In the analysis entitled *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness*, Evans employed Walter Benjamin's thoughts as interpretative tools in order to make attempts to explain retrospective tendencies within contemporary fashion. In addition, similar interpretations of Benjamin's theses related to fashion had already been postulated by Ulrich Lehmann in his work *Tigersprung: Fashioning History*. Lehmann used Benjamin's metaphors with the purpose of supporting arguments that distinguished fashion as a cultural phenomenon which had the ability to alter our perception of history (Lehman, 1999: 297). Ideas conceptualized by Benjamin in the late 1930s seemed particularly useful to both authors, mostly due to philosopher's focus on modernity and his interpretation of history based upon metaphors of dialectical images and labyrinthine turns. By comparing the relationship between past and present images with cine-

matic montage techniques, Benjamin argued that a juxtaposition of past and present could create a third image with a new meaning. This new dialectical image had the ability to transform both images and make itself comprehensible in the present as a truth that is "fleeting and temporal, existing only at the moment of perception, characterized by 'shock' or vivid recognition" (Evans, 2007: 33). According to Lehmann, this approach allowed us to think of historical time not solely as linear, but as something with many different turns through which the past can be reactivated by injecting the present into it (Lehmann, 1999: 298). Benjamin described history as an "object of a construction whose site is not constituted by a homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [Jetztzeit]" (Benjamin, 1969: 261). He established a link between social revolutions and fashion by perceiving the invocations of former eras and the revolutionary quotes of earlier times as similar to the way in which fashion seemed to be evoking the costumes of the past. According to Benjamin, fashion is understood as a sartorial commodity that has "a flair for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago" (Benjamin, 1969: 261). Acting as a dialectical image of a tiger's leap into the past, fashion hence fulfils its ability to move back and forth from modern to forgotten without establishing an exclusive relationship with the social or aesthetic values of a particular era. This enables styles stemming from periods of time separated throughout linear history to become reconnected once again while fashion realizes its potential to act not only transitorily, but also as trans–historically (Lehmann, 1999: 305).

    Although the analysis presented by Evans focused primarily on historicism in the work of 1990s fashion designers, it might seem restrictive to correlate recent borrowings from past times exclusively to the sphere of contemporary fashion design. As suggested by Yuniya Kawamura, fashion should be discussed not as a phenomenon created only by a particular group of individuals, but as a "collective activity". Kawamura's sociological approach, entitled *fashion–ology,*[2] aimed to expand the understanding

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[2] Kawamura mentions that her approach to fashion was partially based on the studies of Roland Barthes. As Kawamura remarks: "Barthes' semiotic analysis makes us aware of the clothing system and helps us develop the concept of an institutionalized system with the concept of and the practice of fashion" (Kawamura, 2005: 39). In addition, she speaks about her references to Davis' understanding of the fashion system, even though it should be noted that his formulation of the term varies from that of Barthes in the sense that Davis does not employ the model of the fashion system as a way to comprehend various semiotic signs that arise from the combination and usage of different garments, but rather refers to roles of the multiple institutions that take part in different interwoven processes ranging from production to consumption, such as design, display, manufacture, distribution,

of fashion by encompassing an institutionalized system that was not creat-
ed as a result of the work of designers alone, but rather developed through
various activities of multiple institutions, organizations and individuals
participating in the production of fashionable items of dress and the diffu-
sion of fashion (Kawamura, 2005: 43). This postulation implied that fash-
ion did not arise from one central origin, but was built from various
sources that were equally involved in the development of trends. In order
to fully encompass the various aspects of revivalism, it would, therefore,
seem only logical to base further evaluations of current reinterpretations of
historical styles on a broader understanding of fashion, defined as a system
of separate but nevertheless interacting institutions, an approach that could
not only allow the analysis of this subject to aim beyond the realm of lead-
ing fashion designers, but also make it possible to appropriate the different
materializations of the retro trend.

The term "retro" (Latin: back, backwards) entered widespread use in
the early 1970s[3] and it was during this decade that the word managed to
establish its current connotations of revivalism and resurrections of the
past. Stemming from the 1960s space–age lexicon and retrograde rockets,
the term was initially adopted in order to "suggest a powerful counter to
forward propulsion" (Guffey, 2006: 12). During the course of time, the
expression developed other associations and was further linked to the late
1960s revival of interest in Art Nouveau styles, which were at the time
echoing primarily throughout the field of graphic design. However, retro
should not be mistaken as a term applicable to a wide range of historical
quotations. According to Guffey, unlike the historicism of the nineteenth
century, the retro phenomenon aims to focus on the recent past as opposed
to finding inspiration in remote historical eras. It might be even more ap-
propriate to argue that retro aspires to come to terms with the ideas of mo-
dernity, its boundaries and mortality, while at the same time trying to cov-
er as many spheres of popular consumption as possible (Guffey, 2006: 14).

In her study dedicated to trends and trend mechanisms, Maria Mackin-
ney–Valentin employs the term "retro trend" to discuss contemporary fa-
shion revivals. Her arguments introduce a perspective that offers a fuller
insight into the term "trend" and a deeper understanding of various forms
of reinterpretation of earlier fashions in present–day fusions of old and
new. When discussing the cultural and economic presence of revivalism,
Mackinney–Valentin makes an attempt to distinguish three different but

sales and others (Davis, 1994: 200).
[3] Jenß establishes a link between the term "retro" and the "nostalgia–wave" of the
1970s, which was accompanied by the popularization of second–hand clothing
(Jenß, 2005: 179).

potentially overlapping categories (Mackinney–Valentin, 2010: 108).[4] In accordance with her classifications of material, immaterial and literal revival,[5] the aforementioned reinterpretation of historical turns, as explored by Evans, represents but a fragment of the overall reconnection with bygone times and can be understood only as a single aspect of the retro trend.

Relying on Benjamin's metaphors, Evans described contemporary fashion images as bearers of meanings that are able to "stretch simultaneously back to the past and forward into the future" (Evans, 2007: 12). In this way, they encompass a capacity to bring forth new meanings and occupy new spots within the existing chain of signifiers. Some similar thoughts on the retro trend were expressed by Christina Goulding in her article *Corsets, Silks Stockings and Evening Suits – Retro Shops and Retro Junkies*. Goulding pointed out that it would be wrong to take retro as nothing more than a simple form of imitation. On the contrary, retro seemed to appear as a blend of positive qualities from the past and modern ideas, which resulted in a considerably fresh mixture that managed to obscure the differences between historically authentic designs and present–day forms and act as a distinctive feature of the contemporary fashion system (Goulding, 2003: 55). While analyzing the retro phenomenon through recent forms of revivalism, which can be traced within a vast field of media, design, popular culture and advertising, Guffey argues that this resumption of interest in the not–so–distant past "suggests the beginning of a unique post–war tendency, a popular thirst for the recovery of earlier, and yet still modern, periods at an ever–accelerating rate" (Guffey, 2006: 8). She describes retro as a cardinal shift in the popular understanding of the historical, a newly established relationship between past, present and future in which the word retro "implicitly invokes what is yet to come, as well as what had passed" (Guffey, 2006: 28).

This alteration of the communal perception of history was addressed by Jean Baudrillard in his analysis of historical references in postmodern

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[4] On a similar note, Jenß also postulates that retro "cannot clearly be restricted to reproduction or original" (Jenß, 2005: 179).

[5] Mackinney–Valentin describes the categories present within the Retro Trend as follows:

1. Material revival – the "category concerned with the physical, material revival of an item that has been excluded from the fashion system at some point, and which has often been previously worn".

2. Immaterial revival – the "category concerned with how the fashion system incorporates the Immaterial expression of the Retro Trend".

3. Literal revival – the "category concerned with the literal revival of the past trend in the sense of a direct copy of past fashion items" (Mackinney–Valentin, 2010: 108).

1970s cinema. Baudrillard argued that history had already retreated, leaving behind a vagueness empty of references, a void that could be filled solely with phantasms of the past, such as retro fashions themselves. These substitutions did not occur because of any hopes for the potential rebirth of past eras, but with the aim "to resurrect a period when at least there was history". According to the philosopher, the past had become demythologized and just about anything could serve to escape the condition that he referred to as a "void" and a "hemorrhage of values". The postmodern perception of retro hence approached various phenomena ambiguously simply because of the fact that the present–day era was marked by the absence of a dominant idea that would allow all previous history to become resurrected "in bulk" (Baudrillard, 2000: 44).

In a stage in which fashion came to light, freed from the influence of major haute couture houses (Lipovetsky, 2002: 119), other re–performances of the past start appearing as trans–historical elements within the broad sphere of the fashion system. Items that were once considered fashionable, but that had found themselves substituted with fresh styles, represent only a fragment of a vast body of second–hand clothing (Tranberg Hansen, 2006: 232; Calefato, 2004: 127). The trade in used garments developed a long history during which disposed–of clothes were widely considered to be affordable alternatives in times of poverty and scarcity. These social and economic purposes eventually linked recycled garments to connotations of lower social status, and traces of former owners meant pre–worn clothes were perceived as unhygienic or even associated with disease and death (Jenß, 2005: 184; Palmer and Clark, 2005: 3). While trying to examine the nature of the second lives of used garments, Alexandra Palmer and Hazel Clark pointed out that many cultural taboos surrounding used clothing started to blur out with the turn of the new millennium (Palmer and Clark, 2005: 4). At that point, the transformation of the fashion system that accompanied the advent of postmodernity had already welcomed more widespread claims for distinction and the emergence of fashion as a form of bricolage made it possible for the system to encompass long abandoned trends.

Since the 1960s, along with the advent of countercultural street styles, original items of dress stemming from previous eras started regaining popularity as reflections of anti–consumerist tendencies, the search for individuality and forms of romantic reinterpretation of the past. These tendencies, mostly present among 1960s American and British youth, encouraged the resurrection of both ethnic and antique romanticized materials such as furs, lace, velvet and crepe (Goulding, 2003: 57). While evoking a radical "granny" look, these garments managed to succeed in expres-

sing scorn and rejection of contemporary trends (Lurie, 1983: 82), hence throwing down challenges to the existing hierarchical structure of fashion. Changes in the second–hand market continued to take place as bohemian morality remained present during the upcoming decades. This enabled re-used clothes to enter new cycles, extend their life expectancies as commodities and prolong their biographies (Kopytoff, 1986: 67) through unexpected transformations of their cultural and economic values (Gregson and Crewe, 2003: 146). The term "vintage" became distinguished from the general notion of second–hand clothing by serving as a means of Mackinney–Valentin's manifestation of material revival, thus allowing used clothing to become reinterpreted in a new context, which was now accompanied by a fluctuation of signifiers and associated meanings.

Yet as much as young people develop fondness for former styles in order to express their uniqueness and distinguish themselves from those whom they perceive as victims of mass imposed fashion, interests in forgotten trends have often been related to nostalgic tendencies (Goulding, 2003: 56; Davis, 1994: 130), which on their own might transform themselves into, as Anja Aronowsky Cronberg observed in the article *Postmodernism and Fashion in the Late Twentieth Century – Imagined Nostalgia and False Memories*, "an epidemic of the modern age" (Aronowsky Cronberg, 2010: 167). In her book entitled *The Future of Nostalgia,* Svetlana Boym referred to nostalgia not only as a malady of the individual, but as a symptom of our age, "a historical emotion" (Boym, 2001: xv). Boym approached this collective nostalgia as a form of defiance that appeared against the current perception of time, understood as the time of history and progress. In an age marked by "accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals", feelings of nostalgia arose as a consequence of a longing for continuity in a fragmented world. The irreversibility of time, therefore, was opposed by the transformation of history into a collective mythologized age that could be revisited in geographical terms.

As postulated by Davis, nostalgic revival is more likely to take hold of eras which are classified within the collective memory as pleasant. Such recollections might explain why 1920s and 1960s styles have experienced as many reincarnations as they did after their initial appearance (Davis, 1994: 130). In her ethnographic research dedicated to the contemporary German 1960s scene, Heike Jenß examined the passion that encouraged retro scene members to resurrect objects and motifs retrospectively associated with their lifestyles and the desired look of the past.[6] In order to

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[6] These 1960s German enthusiasts should not be misunderstood as a unique phenomenon oriented towards the historically accurate resurrection of former decades/streetstyles. Ever since the mid–1980s, there has been a wide range of retro–

achieve authentic retro appearances these individuals collected original items of dress which they perceived as valuable witnesses of bygone stylistic eras. Although Jenß argued that this particular choice of dress opened up "an imaginary time travel, technically realized through the interconnection of dress and space" (Jenß, 2004: 390), she also pointed out that it would be rather superficial to interpret such interests in 1960s clothing as symptoms of nostalgia that would result from the inability of retro consumers to cope with present conditions (Jenß, 2005: 194). Moreover, Jenß emphasized that vintage clothing allowed 1960s scene members to create new identities and establish themselves as collectors and connoisseurs who accumulated specialist knowledge about their favourite historical period, a knowledge that was further utilized in order to establish their retro–performances and distinguish them from the inauthenticity of other vintage wearers, representing in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu an important component of their (sub)cultural capital (Jenß, 2005: 182).

According to Palmer and Clark, fashionable reinterpretations of second–hand clothing are approaching the status of commodified mainstream phenomena and vintage garments are being transformed into highly desirable fashionable styles that are gaining popularity among contemporary consumers. Along with retro aficionados, as described by Jenß, who constantly strive for perfect historical accuracy within their lifestyle of choice, retro garments are becoming increasingly sought after by high street fashion consumers. Palmer and Clark pointed out that, at the beginning of the twenty–first century, the rise in the popularity of vintage clothing started shifting from the sphere of subcultural practices towards the sphere of mainstream fashion wearers (Palmer and Clark, 2005: 174). Lacking any kind of relationship with the historical past or specific interest in particular bygone eras, mainstream consumers delve into vintage styles in order to become perceived as fashionable and stylish without raising questions regarding potential nostalgic references and desires to revisit a romanticized past. Vintage fashions are worn in different environments, ranging from college campuses to red carpet events, and are often mixed together with currently fashionable forms of dress and adornment. Dres-sing in these fusions of old and new clothing in various settings opens the way, according to Calefato, to multiple discourses (Calefato, 2004: 127).

Such forms of eclecticism should not come as a surprise. Fredric Jameson had already established a relationship between the above mentioned postmodern deterioration of historicity and an understanding of contempo-

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groups dedicated to the reinvention of the spirit of specific post–war youth cultures such as: Neo–Mods, Neo–Teds, Neo–Hippies, Neo–Psychedelics, Neo–Punks and even Neo–New Romantics (Polhemus, 1996: 130).

rary culture as irredeemably historicist; in other words, as one that is mar-
ked by an "omnipresent and indiscriminate appetite for dead styles and
fashions; indeed for all the styles and fashions of a dead past" (Jameson,
1997: 285). He presented these thoughts by giving examples of architec-
tural historicism while trying to refer to various works marked by the
presence of random cannibalization of earlier styles that merely resulted in
an equally random "play of stylistic allusions" and "overstimulating en-
sembles". According to Jameson, nostalgia was not an appropriate term to
describe these forms of historical fascination. Whether it came to architec-
ture or the genre of "nostalgia film", the efforts made by the postmodern
present to catch up with its past remained solely reflected through "stylis-
tic connotations, conveying 'pastness' by the glossy qualities of the image,
and '1930s–ness' or '1950s–ness' by the attributes of fashion" (Jameson,
1997: 18).

   Even though certain aspects of revival have the ability to disclose con-
notations of self–performance and express the preservation of certain eras
through material dress forms, the individuality of the mainstream retro
wearer remains questionable in an age when vintage clothing has become
widely perceived as fashionable and desirable. Similar questions can be
raised when referring to the ragpicking designers discussed by Evans or
even those who decide to rerelease their former collections in order to par-
ticipate in the current retro trend. According to Polhemus, we are all "ret-
ros" today (Polhemus, 1994: 78): the subcultural retro groups that indulge
in time travel in their attempts to annihilate the present as well as the girl
next door who simply follows another trendy stereotype when rummaging
through thrift stores in order to emulate the latest style of an idolized ce-
lebrity. While the behavioral patterns which encourage these "consumer
bricoleurs" to indulge in mixes of old and new fashions could be perceived
as links between looking backwards and looking forwards (Aronowsky
Cronberg, 2010: 186), it should be recalled that contemporary fashion
mechanisms function along significantly different lines than their preced-
ing modern and postmodern editions.

   As a system marked by chaotically auto–referential signs, contempo-
rary fashion has managed to transform itself during the past two decades
into what Paić terms the "visual semiotics of the body". The last remaining
site of postmodern culture, the idea of spectacle as postulated by Guy
Debord has not only fully developed fashion's ability to dominate over our
lives and society, but also to "deprive fashion of its privilege of novelty
and constant change" (Paić, 2007: 233). The modern as well as postmo-
dern rules that used to govern the existence of this social phenomenon
now appear tooo have been submerged in an understanding of the time of

fashion as "consumed in a space where it no longer makes sense to separate past and present, synchrony and diachrony" (Calefato, 2004: 123). Calefato writes that, while recreating former styles, we remain inevitably marked by the overriding signs that define us as individuals of our own time and not of the past. Although these thoughts are in line with comments expressed by Jenß, who concludes that many members of the 1960s retro scene end up emulating styles available through associations based upon visual archives of media images such as photographs, record covers, feature and documentary films, as a consequence of which the look achieved might even inadvertently distort rather than replicate the look that was at the time adopted by the majority of consumers (Jenß, 2004: 395), when it comes to semiotic profiling, it is almost inevitable that questions are raised concerning the ability of contemporary signs to function along the lines of previously established semiotic correlations.

In case the present condition can be held accountable for transforming the classical relationship between signifiers and signified and in turn leading to the above mentioned metamorphosis of fashion's social and aesthetic codes, as postulated by Paić, revivals of past styles might no longer have the ability to convey connotations of "pastness" throughout contemporary visual culture. In short, Woody Hochswender's thoughts on the incidence of 1960s revival[7] lose their significance in a world where the mini skirt is not only stripped of its 1960s connotation, but also of its message of youthfulness and freedom. Such challenges to Barthes, Eco or Lurie's variations of the "language of clothes" encourage us to consider alternative approaches along the existing interpretations of the fashion system. While alluring new interdisciplinary paradigms are stimulated by the undoubted necessity of fresh thoughts when it comes to acknowledging the importance of images and the effect they produce upon current fashions, previously postulated ideas still remain useful for making wider attempts towards the understanding of past historical turns.

It was therefore the aim of this paper to offer a brief overview of various academic evaluations of historical recurrences of former styles ranging from the era of modernity to present–day visual expressions, but also to encompass those styles that have been absorbed by corresponding fashion systems as both fashion and anti–fashion statements. Even though our

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[7] In the article *A Little Nervous Music,* published by *The New York Times* in January 1991, Hochswender expressed the following thoughts trying to predict fashion trends for the upcoming decade: "The cycles in fashion get shorter and shorter. How many times have the 60s been revived since the 60s? They're never out long enough to be completely out. Soon all the decades will overlap dangerously. Soon everything will simultaneously be out" (Davis, 1994: 107).

frantic raid of the past continues, the rules of the game have undoubtedly been challenged and different codes seem to be governing ever–present retro–futurist tendencies. The potential developments in theoretical approaches that could underpin historical longings in the twenty–first century, as well as accommodate Davis's guidelines when it comes to introducing a balance between certain aspects of the existing fashion system model and the understanding of various contemporary swirls in the sphere of the sartorial, remain to be further established in the context of complementary societal changes.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

PICTURING GENDER:
FROM IDENTITY CODE TO RESISTANCE CODE
IN FASHION CULTURE

KATARINA NINA SIMONČIČ

In 2010 the photographer Nick Knight shot a black–and–white cover for *Vogue Hommes Japan* magazine, in which he portrayed the pop icon Lady Gaga as a Sicilian male. This challenge to her sexual identity was the very trick she had used to gain dominance in the media in 2009. However, it was not a new form of media provocation, having been used by musical performers worldwide. The public still remembers the photographs of Madonna in the *Rolling Stone* magazine from 1991, taken by Steven Meisel. In a gesture reminiscent of the 1920s, she is wearing a male suit characteristic of the *garçonne* look for girls, much like the look of the fashion icon Marlene Dietrich. If we focus on the composition of the photograph, we can observe an array of almost naked men wearing not much more than pairs of hold–ups surrounding Madonna as a central figure, whose dominance in the picture is increased by her stand–up position. On the other hand, it is a rather uncommon phenomenon to witness men play with female sexual identity on magazine covers anywhere in the world.

This article will focus on re–examining sexual identity through two garments: trousers and the skirt, which have been woven into the dress code of western culture and fashion for centuries. It will take a retrospective look at their roles as gender code and resistance code in western culture. The context of historical analysis will enable us to identify the application of these same codes in the contemporary age. Three main guidelines will be presented:

  a) a timeline for the introduction and the abandonment of trousers and skirts divided by gender;
  b) examples of cross–dressing throughout history;

c) the impact of social changes like the French Revolution, the struggle for women's rights, the influence of the church, art movements, music and other media.

In our historical overview, we will use the method of Michel Pastoureau (1947),[1] who based his analyses on historical sources of visual arts, which he substantiated through archive records. However, if we consider the contemporary scene and the way it elaborates the imposed male–female division of garments into trousers and skirts, we should equally use other media of representation alongside historical records, as pointed out by W.J.T. Mitchell (2002).[2]

The question of identification through dress code is not new. Sherry C. M. Lidquist (2012) noticed that gender is a relatively new category of historical analysis, advocated by Joan Scott in an influential article in the *American Historical Review* in 1986 and subsequently appearing in disciplinary encyclopaedias and lists of key terms in the early 1990s.[3] Numerous researchers from various disciplines have examined clothing as a form of sexual identification. Approaches and discussions on the subject can be found in several authors. In his work titled *Gender and Sexual Culture in Renaissance Italy*,[4] Michael Rocke (2002) addresses the social rules of sexual identification through clothing. He considers these rules vital for understanding the disciplined organization of the Renaissance world. In her analysis of classical antiquity, Mary Harlow (2004)[5] emphasizes the need to respect the division of fabrics (silk vs. wool and linen) depending on the sex of the person wearing the garment. Susan J. Vincent (2009),[6] from an analysis of garments as a means of expressing sexual identity,

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[1] Pastoureau, Michel: *The Devil's Cloth, A History of Stripes and Striped Fabric*, Columbia University Press: New York, 1991.

[2] Mitchell, W.J.T., "Showing seeing, A critique of visual culture", *The Visual Culture Reader,* edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff, Routledge, 2002, pp. 86–102.

[3] Lindquist, Sherry C.M.: Gender, *Studies in Iconography*; ed. Nina Rowe, Volume 33, Medieval Institute Publications Western Michigan University, 2012, 113; Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A useful Category of Historical Analysis"; *American Historical Review,* no. 91, 1986, pp. 1053–1075.

[4] Rocke, Michael: "Gender and Sexual Culture in Renaissance Italy"; *The Italian Renaissance,* ed. Paula Findlen, Blackwell Publishing: Oxford, 2002, pp. 192–213.

[5] Harlow, Mary: "Clothes make the man: power dressing and elite masculinity in the later Roman world"; *Gender in the Early Medieval World, East and West, 300–900*, ed. Leslie Brubaker, Julia M. H Smith, Cambridge University press, 2004, pp. 44–70.

[6] Vincent J. Susan: *The Anatomy of Fashion, Dressing the Body from the Renaissance to Today*, Berg: Oxford, 2009.

concluded that social laws and the unwritten standards of morality reached the peak of their significance in the 19th century.

The exhibitions *Men in Skirts* at the Victoria and Albert Museum (2001), London and the expanded version *Bravehearts: Men in Skirts* organized by Andrew Boltonin at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (2013) were aimed at presenting the distinction between skirts and trousers as means of sexual identification. The title was inspired by Mel Gibson's film *Braveheart*, depicting the battles of the Scots for freedom from English rule. Designers and fashion houses represented in the exhibition included Giorgio Armani, Leigh Bowery, Roberto Cavalli, Christian Dior Haute Couture, Comme des Garçon, Dolce & Gabbana, Dries van Noten, John Galliano, Jean Paul Gaultier, Rudi Gernreich, Tom Ford for Gucci, Kenzo, Michiko, Alexander McQueen, Anna Sui, Walter van Beirendonck, Vivienne Westwood, Yohji Yamamoto and others.

In the mid–14th century, fashion gained its basic features, which were to dominate until the 20th century. It became a means of class, spatial, chronological and sexual distinction. Women retained tunics, which would later evolve into skirts, whereas men start revealing their thighs and legs in garments known as *hose* or *calze*, which would gradually be transformed into trousers in the 19th century. Strict division of these garments into male and female was brought about by laws, social rules and guidelines. Sexual identification with the opposite sex through clothes was avoided and severely punished. Even though they were rare, there were still a few exceptions of overlap and cross–dressing.

Types of garments became an object of interest as early as in Ancient Rome, where Honorius forbade Romans to wear trousers from 397 to 416 AD, as they were considered a distinctive feature of barbarian tribes. Frequent wars and battles between the peoples of the North (Barbarians) and Rome led to the assimilation of trousers, first among soldiers,[7] and later among other citizens of Rome. However, this did not happen until later in the 5th century.[8] Until then, people were fined and threatened with prosecution in Rome for wearing *leggings* (*bracae*) and boots (*tzangae*).[9] A clear gender distinction already existed in the times of the Roman Empire,

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[7] The form of leggings was forbidden for Roman citizens, but become popular for Roman soldiers in the 3rd and 4th centuries.
[8] Killerby, Catherine Kovesi: *Sumptuary Law in Italy: 1200–1500*, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 2010. (Oxford historical monographs), p. 16.
[9] Harlow, Mary: "Clothes make the man: power dressing and elite masculinity in the later Roman worl"; *Gender in the Early Medival World, East and West, 300–900*. Ed. Leslie Brubaker, Julia M. H Smith, Cambridge University press, 2004, p. 63.
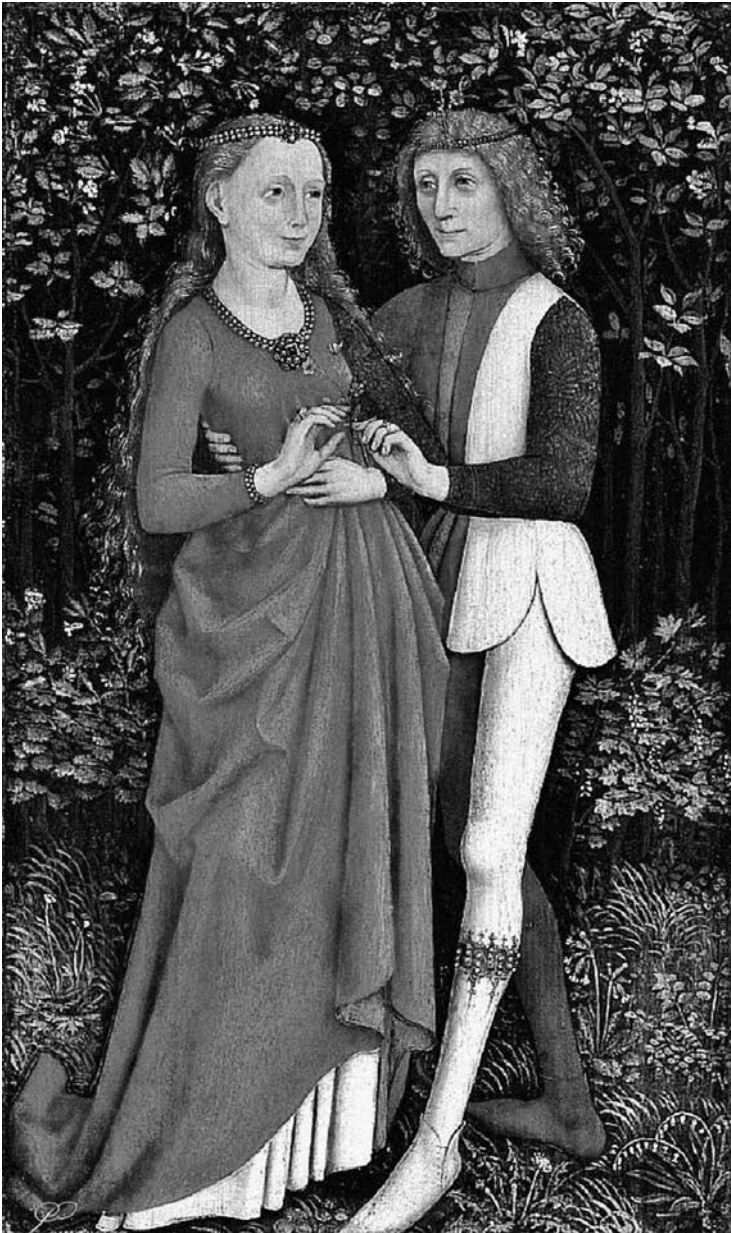
Fig. 13–1: South German School, *A Bridal Couple in the Garden*, 1470.

but it was determined by the type of fabric. According to the Augustan History and Cassius Dio, the silken tunic *dalmatika* was considered a reflection of femininity, whereas a real man was seen wearing a woollen toga.[10] In the beginning of the Middle Ages, forms of clothing for women and men were similar. Both women and men dressed in two fold tunics. Up until the 14th century there was no clear division in clothing style between men and women.

However, clothing culture was influenced by *Sumptuary Laws* (against luxury), through which the church tried to discipline society and influence spiritual formation. The 14th century was revolutionary for western fashion. It was the first time when there was a clear clothing distinction between genders. Women kept long tunics (dresses), while men revealed their legs with short doublets and tight leggings similar to trousers, as is seen in the example of *The Lover* from 1470 (fig. 13–1). Based on passages from the Bible, the *Sumptuary Laws* contributed to the further emphasis of gender differences in clothing and the formation of a dress code in which trousers were reserved for men, whereas tunics, and later skirts and other flared forms, were considered appropriate for women. The clothing principles of classical antiquity (rough wool for the male population and silk and linen for women) would become the framework for the dress code in the Medieval Era and were corroborated by passages from the Old Testament:

> *Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material.*
> —Leviticus 19:19

> *A woman shall not wear man's clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.*
> —Deuteronomy 22:5

Cross–dressing was forbidden. It was forbidden for men to dress up like women and the other way around. This ban was also regulated by law. In 14th–century Italy, a man caught in woman's clothes was fined and jailed. In the light of clearer gender identification in the period between the 14th and 16th centuries, in some cities in Italy,[11] even veils were forbidden.

The reasons for this ban found in the laws of that time were that there was no way to know who was behind the veil: an honorable or dishonora-

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[10] Harlow, 2004: 55.
[11] Killerby, 2010: 140.

ble women or even a man (1337).[12] Women did not wear underwear; information remarked upon by Roberta Orsi Landini[13] that Maria Medici wore breeches (or trousers) as a form of underwear is extremely significant. She also pointed out that Maria Medici transferred this fashion to French ladies of the court in the beginning of the 17th century. One example of breeches from that period is shown on the left side, while on the right side it is shown how ladies wore breeches beneath airy dresses while in private. While that was desirable at the French court in Venice, a century earlier it had a completely different connotation for women who wore them. In order to emphasize their occupation, Venetian courtesans wore men's overcoats, hats and breeches (or trousers) beneath their dresses, as shown in a sketch by Pietro Bertelli from the end of the 16th century (fig. 13–2).

An engraving by Cesare Vecellio from 1590 clearly shows that the form of trousers could be seen beneath the airy lower part of a dress and that it resembled the clothing style of women from the East, like the image of a Standing Woman in Turkish costume from the 17th century. Fashion among Venetian courtesans shows the influence of orientalism, which came through the trade routes from the East. However, Tessa Storey offers a different insight in her 2004 article *Clothing Courtesans: Fabrics, Signals and Experiences*. She states that, in the western fashion, prostitutes wore male clothing in order to make it clear that anal sex, which was labelled sodomy, was also included in their offered sexual services.[14] In February 1496, Friar Girolamo Savonarola, campaigning to reform the morals of Florentine society, fulminated against sexual debauchery, which, in his view, had "ruined the world, (...) corrupted men in lust, led women into indecency and boys into sodomy and filth, and made them become like prostitutes". His condemnation of erotic licence stemmed not merely from its immorality, but also from his conviction that the indulgence of sexual pleasures produced a dangerous confusion of gender boundaries: "Young lads have been made into women (...) there is no distinction between the sexes or anything else anymore (...)".[15]

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[12] Killerby, 2010: 64.

[13] Orsi Landini, Roberta: "The Influence of the Medici Style on European Fashion"; *Fashion And Clothing in Late Medieval Europe*, Abegg–Stigtung: Riggisberg, 2010, pp. 193–209.

[14] Storey, Tessa: "Clothing Courtesans: Fabrics, Signals and Experiences"; *Clothing Culture, 1350–1650*, ed. Catherine Richardson, Ashgate Publishing: Burlington, 2004, pp. 95–107. (98)

[15] Rocke, Michael: "Gender and Sexual Culture in Renaissance Italy"; *The Italian Renaissance,* ed. Paula Findlen, Blackwell Publishing: Oxford, 2002, pp. 192–213.
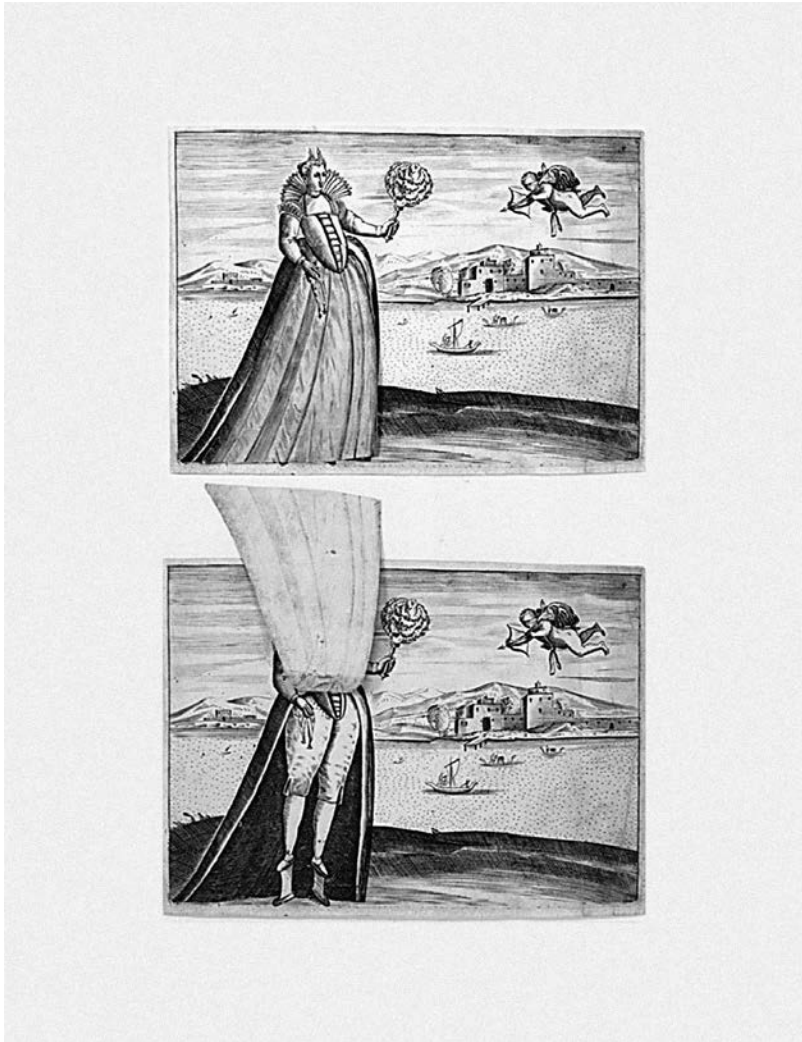
Fig. 13–2: Pietro Bertelli, *Courtesan and Blind Cupid*, ca. 1588; engraving and etching. Sheet: 14 x 19.1 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

(192); Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Amos e Zaccaria,* P. Ghiglieri, (ed.) 3 vol. (Rome, 1971–2), Vol. 1, pp. 194, 200 (23 February 1496).

There were exceptions for cross–dressing, like children's manners of dressing. To protect male children from "unknown forces", death and diseases in their most vulnerable period – from their birth until they were five years old – they were masked as girls. That is the reason why most of the heirs to the throne and members of noble society were shown at their earliest ages in portraits dressed up like girls (fig. 13–3). They are recognized by typical male attributes like wooden swords, wooden horses etc. It is common knowledge that boys and girls were dressed alike in long gowns in their infancy, but it is perhaps less well appreciated what a significant milestone it was when boys finally graduated to breeches. It marked the transition from the female–dominated world of the nursery to being more in men's company and under their tutelage.[16] This clear distinction was slightly blurred during the rise of *rhingraves* in the 17th century, when male trousers became so wide that they resembled a short skirt. But in spite of these bold changes in male fashion, trousers were still forbidden to women.

The female riding habit became increasingly popular as a fashionable style of clothing for women during the 17th century. The jacket of the riding habit took its features from fashionable male styles in both form and decoration, but it was always worn with a skirt that followed the lines of female fashion. This masculine influence on women's dress (which extended to wearing hats and adopting traditionally male hairstyles), and the perceived resulting gender confusion, was not new to the Restoration period. Women had been wearing masculine–inspired clothing, including doublet–like bodices and men's beaver hats, since the 1580s, a practice that was subject to fierce criticism. The publication of the pamphlet *Hic Mulier* (The Man–Women) in 1620 is notable for both its anxiety over and desire concerning the sexually provocative sight of women dressed in masculine style clothing. Women wearing men's clothes ("masculine" women)[17] were becoming increasingly common, causing concern to social conservatives.

The pamphlet argued that transvestism was opposed to nature, the Bible and society. However, cross–dressing in female fashion continued, e.g. in the court of Charles II of England in the second half of 17th century. In a Samuel Cooper miniature of Frances Stuart, the subject's torso is covered by a garment cut along the lines of a male doublet in its final shape, before

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[16] Vincent, 2009: 117.
[17] Mirkin, Ronnie, "The portrait of Elizabeth Cary in the Ashmolean Museum: 'cross dressing' in the English Renaissance"; *The Renaissance Theatre Text, Performance, Design,* ed. Christopher Cairns, Volume I, Ashgate, 1999, pp. 77–107.

 Fig. 13–3: Flemish School, *Portrait of a Young Boy with a Bird and a Dog*, ca. 1625.

being replaced by a longer line of the coat. It is likely that she is wearing the top half of a riding habit.[18]

At the end of the 18th century, the French Revolution overthrew the old social order. Foundations of revolution, liberty, equality and fraternity were now mirrored in the equality of genders. The first fledgling appearances of women in trousers began in Europe around 1800, to the great dismay of the male ruling class. Contrary to the misogynistic society that pervaded Europe at that time, it was felt for the first time that women should be allowed the freedom of menswear. The *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* was published in 1791, modeled on the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* of 1789:

> *...No one, of any gender, will ever be able to force another man or woman to dress in an undesired manner since this would lead to harassment charges...*

> *...Woman is born free and remains equal to man in rights. Social distinctions may only be based on common utility...*

As a symbol of resistance and victory, revolutionaries discarded the clothing items of the aristocracy, like the silk *breeches* (trousers) called *culottes*. Instead they introduced long trousers—*pantaloons*—called (symbolically) *sans–culottes* or *no breeches*. The women followed them by wearing trousers (*sans–culottes*), but only for a short while. In 1799 the police chief of Paris made a decree: any woman wishing to wear pants must seek special permission from the police. If a lady wanted to "dress like a man", she had to get approval – this approval often required a medical justification for exposing her legs.[19] This law technically existed until January 2013, when a French minister made it officially illegal to arrest a woman for wearing trousers in the French capital. The law required women to ask police for special permission to "dress as men" in Paris, otherwise they were at risk of being taken into custody. In 1892 and 1909 the rule was amended to allow women to wear trousers "if the woman is holding a bicycle handlebar or the reins of a horse". However, in a public request directed at Ms. Vallaud–Belkacem in January 2013, Alain Houpert, a senator and member of the conservative UMP party, said the "symbolic importance" of the law "could injure modern sensibilities" and he asked

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[18] Reynolds, Anna: *In Fine Style, The Art of Tudor and Stuart Fashion*, Royal Collection Trust, 2013, p. 261.

[19] http://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/02/it–just–became–legal–for parisian–women–to–wear–pants/272836/.

the minister to repeal it. Ms. Vallaud–Belkacem agreed, and in a published statement wrote: "This ordinance is incompatible with the principles of equality between women and men, which are listed in the Constitution, and in France's European commitments".[20] During the 19th century, the fight for women rights identified itself with the struggle for the right to wear trousers. In that period, the theme of a large number of engravings was the struggle for the right to wear trousers between men and women (fig. 13–4). In 1851, Amelia Jenks Bloomer, a suffragette pioneer and author of the feminist journal *The Lily*, began crusading against the tyrannies of the corset with the "anti–crinolines" movement in the United States. She designed and wore a pair of long, full bouffant pants (later called *Bloomers*) that were fitted at the waist and ankles. Girls that dressed like her were called *Bloomer girls* in the press. They were often sarcastically shown in the press in comic strips and were often portrayed as scandalous.

BLOOMER COSTUMES OR WOMAN'S EMANCIPATION.

Fig. 13–4: Cartoon *Bloomer Costumes or Woman's Emancipation*, early 1850s.

However, with the support of doctors and artists, at the end of the 19th century the Bloomers movement contributed to the appearance of the *Rational Costume,* which set women free from skirts and corsets. Even though these

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[20] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/9845545/Women–in–Paris–finally–allowed–to–wear–trousers.html.

changes occurred as a result of a political struggle, they were also reflected in artistic pursuits and works of art. Gustav Klimt and the *Wiener Werkstätte* played a significant role in creating the perception of clothing as a means of expressing new aspirations. Klimt advocated a revival of medieval principles, according to which both men and women wore long tunics, whereas the *Wiener Werkstätte* focused on garments as a new medium of artistic creativity (fig. 13–5).

As women became more active in sports, this also contributed to their wearing of trousers. At the end of the 19th century, bicycling introduced trousers to the fashion world. Fashion magazines of this period suggested *divided skirts* (*culotte skirts;* French *jupe–culotte*) for women's sportswear, whereas men's fashion did not step outside the traditional well–paved pattern – a three–piece suit. However, in women's fashion, trousers as a form of clothing style were accepted only when the great Parisian designer Paul Poiret introduced them in 1911. Paul Poiret had been influenced by orientalism through the visits of the Ballets Russes in 1909 and he assimilated elements of certain costumes in his fashion collection: pantaloons or harem trousers, caftans and turbans. He presented a series of sketches entitled "Four Ways to Dress Women in Pants" and introduced the "harem skirt" – a long tunic with very full gathered pants of the same material underneath.

In the 1930s, the rise of the film as a "new" medium started affecting the world of fashion significantly. Actresses who wore men's suits in movies contributed to the expansion of trousers in women's fashion: in 1930, for example, Marlene Dietrich wore trousers and in 1935, Katharine Hepburn did. Seen on movie sets in the 1930s and 1940s, trousers were promoted in fashion magazines as a form of leisure clothing. A strong impact on women's clothing and the acceptance of trousers as a female garment came with the outbreak of the Second World War. During WWII, trousers were worn by women working in factories, as it was more convenient. In 1942, in former Yugoslavia, the establishment of the *Women's Antifascist Front* would promote a new type of active woman who would perform multiple roles: those of partisan, mother, activist and shock–worker. The mass employment of women after the war was proof of women's newly–acquired rights. It was precisely trousers and overalls that suited these newly emancipated women, who were self–sustained through their work in factories, laboratories, work actions and the like, as perfect garments in which they could exercise their shock–worker status. This visual coding of a female worker as seemingly equal to a man was used for ideological purposes as a form of promotion of a new social and political order. Post–war, trousers became acceptable for leisurewear. The strongest turning point

Fig. 13–5: A photograpic portrait of Emilie Flöge and Gustav Klimt, 1905–1910.

that led to the acceptance of trousers as a female garment was the 1960s
and the influence of the sexual revolution. Television, the new mass com-
munication device of the age, along with other media outlets such as radio
and magazines, could broadcast information in a matter of seconds to mil-

lions of people. These media outlets helped spread new ideas. It was not until the 1960s that trousers were introduced as a "fashion item", which then led to the pantsuit and designer jeans. A significant role in cross–dressing in the 1960s was played by the Hippie movement. In their struggle for freedom and equality, cross–dressing was usual. Members of that movement chose clothing forms from other cultures, such as the *sari* and *sarong,* and from the working classes, such as jeans, worn both by men and women.

The result was new terminology—"unisex clothes"—to describe a new style of clothing designed to be worn by both genders. Although trousers for women had been growing in popularity for some decades, the sudden and overwhelming trend for young people to wear jeans regardless of gender probably contributed more to the evolution of a unisex style than the women's movement or the sexual revolution. But the idea of a simple and cheap garment for both sexes was promoted as early as 1920 by the Italian futurist Thayaht Ernesto Michahelles (1893–1959) in the magazine *La Nazione*. The magazine introduced this garment under the name *TuTa,* with precise cuts and measurements. Even though it was widely accessible, the garment was only partially accepted as a form of indoor outfit in Florentine high society.[21] Unisex terminology was particularly popular in the *Space Age* era,[22] when the denial of sexes became a starting point for fashion design. This was especially well presented in Pierre Cardin's collections from the 1960s. Cardin dressed both men and women alike in rounded helmets, flat plastic eye shields, sturdy ribbed unitards, and jumpsuits with industrial zippers.[23]

In 1966, Yves Saint Laurent sent France into shock when he sent his models down the runway in "Le Smoking" Suit. This pant suit eventually allowed it to be acceptable for women to step out of their skirts and dresses and dress with more of a masculine flare. The trouser suit "Le Smoking", in this specific moment of the social changes of the 1960s, gave women "power" in the same manner as short skirts without a corset by Coco Chanel gave them "freedom". The basic boundary markers—trousers for men and dresses/skirts for women—had disappeared. Now women also wear trousers.

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[21] Stern, Radu: *Against Fashion: Clothing as Art, 1850–1930*, MIT Press, 2004.

[22] In 1961, the Russian Yury Gagarin become the first man to orbit the earth. Most intriguing about space age fashion was the idea of unisex – lack of gravity seemed to level the playing field. In futuristic movies and television shows, as well as on the runways, both sexes wore version of unitards, jumpsuits, tunics and leggings.

[23] Rennolds Milbank, Caroline: *Space* Age, *Icons of Fashion, The 20th century,* ed. Gerda Buxbaum, Prestel, London, 2005, pp. 88–89.

What about men? Has it become "normal" for them to wear skirts
/dresses? Throughout the centuries, there have been experiemnts with fe-
male clothing attributes in men's fashion. For example, the wide trousers
called *rhingraves*, from the end of the 17th century, that look like skirts
from today's point of view. A second example is the femininity among
men in the French court that was very popular at the end of 16th century,
with men being called *mignon garçone*. In the Victorian era, if a man was
dressed like a woman he would be convicted of a crime. For example, on
April 28th 1870, Ernest Boulton, aged twenty–two (otherwise known as
Lady Stella Clinton) and Frederick William Park, a twenty–three–year–old
law student (otherwise known as Miss Fanny Winifred Park) were arrested
for wearing women's clothes. The trial(s) fascinated the media of the day,
and the scandal–loving public avidly consumed the pulp tabloid coverage.
But cross–dressing was presented as unnatural behavior. At the beginning
of the 20th century, Gustav Klimt, a leading Secession artist, advocated
equality in dressing. He insisted that people should return to the principles
of medieval times, when men and women both wore tunics.

But it was actually David Bowie who imparted magnitude to that way
of thinking. "It's not a woman's dress. It's a man's dress". So said David
Bowie – commenting on the cover of his 1970/71 album *The Man Who
Sold the World,* which depicts him lying on a couch wearing a sumptuous
Michael Fish designed gown. In 1985, Jean Paul Gaultier[24] caused a shock
in the fashion world by introducing the man–skirt. While male clothing
outside western culture already includes skirts and skirt–like garments,
often single sheets of fabric folded and wrapped around the waist, such as
the *dhoti* or *lungi* in India, and the *sarong* in South and Southeast Asia, the
wearing of a skirt is still usually seen as typical for females and not males
in North America and much of Europe today. This was a revival of orien-
talism, which has been a source of inspiration since the 18th century.

During the 1980s, male celebrities and fashion designers like Giorgio
Armani, Marc Jacobs, Yohji Yamamoto, Kenzo, John Galliano and Rei
Kawakubo tried to promote the idea of men wearing skirts, but they failed
to popularize it back then. Marc Jacobs is the one designer who loves his
skirts and has no reservations about wearing them. But the assimilation of
a new trend of "men in skirts" came thanks to the promotion of a famous
media figure. In the mid–1990s, the footballer David Beckham was photo-
graphed in a Jean–Paul Gaultier version of a sarong. Designer Marc Ja-
cobs followed that promotion, while Thom Browne (1965), the American
fashion designer from New York City, designed a male suit in 2009 that
can be seen on the streets of Chelsea.

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[24] S/S 1985 collection entitled *Et Dieu créa l'Homme.*

Today, it is not uncommon to see a skirt or dress as a part of male collection at fashion shows: for example, those of Rick Owens, Givenchy, Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton, Number (N)ine, Comme des Garçons, Yohji Yamamoto, Yves Saint Laurent and Alexander McQueen. The models shown wear clothes ranged from flowing long skirts to short, tight skirts. Since the mid–1990s, a number of companies have been established to sell skirts specifically designed for men. Walter Van Beirendonck explored the non–gender specificity of the skirted garment in greater depth in his Spring/Summer 2000 *Gender?* collection, which included crocheted dresses worn over floral cotton trousers. In an interview with Suzy Menkes, van Beirendonck said of the collection: "Whether clothes are for men and women is all in the head – and none of these are hundred percent".[25] That freedom of expression can also be witnessed in the art project *Switcheroo,* by photographer Hana Pesut from Canada. In 2010 she started taking photos of couples, friends, and families in their own outfits and then again after they swapped clothes. She has taken around two hundred photographs from all over the world and was surprised by the number of reactions to and the different opinions about the photographs.[26] She thinks that the western culture of today in general has become more permissive and tolerant of gender neutrality. But the struggle for freedom and equality, with the help of clothing items, is not over. While the women's movement from the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century used trousers in the political struggle as a visual code of resistance, at the beginning of the 21st century, the skirt has paradoxically taken over this role.

Dominique Moreau is a trailblazing freedom fighter, a man battling for equality and recognition in a world of prejudice and gender–based stereotypes. Moreau is the president of *Hommes en Jupe* (Men in Skirts), an association of about thirty men in Poitiers, western France, who wear skirts in their regular everyday lives. For them, getting dressed in the morning is less about style and more about political substance: "We're fighting against prejudice and clichés (...) women fought for trousers; we're doing the same with the skirt," says Moreau.[27] On the other side, a women's movement with the symbolic name *Neither whores, nor submissive* (*Ni putes, ni soumises*) has arisen in the banlieues of Paris as a result of revolt. It was an area of frequent rapes and the women were blamed for the attacks because they were wearing "provocative" skirts. A large number of them had

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[25] http://www.waltervanbeirendonck.com/HTML/PUBLICATIONS/BOOKS/brave hearts.html.
[26] The result of that project is book "Switcheroo" by Hana Pesut, published in 2013.
[27] http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2008/aug/04/fashion.gender.

to take on tomboy looks, behavior and clothes in order to protect themselves from repeated attacks and rapes. Because of this, every 25th of November the women's movement calls for resistance to intimidation and freedom of choice in clothing. The principle *in a skirt, yet not submissive* (*en jupe et pas soumises*) was introduced to encourage women to wear skirts and not be afraid to walk around in their neighbourhoods.

In today's fashion propaganda, there are often experiments with gender and cross–dressing. Women do tend to be made to look like men, as shown by the example of Lady Gaga on two covers for Vogue magazine in Japan in 2010. Men can also be made to look like women, as shown by the example of Andrej Pejić on the *Out* Magazine cover in 2011, referring to an Irving Penn photo from the cover of Vogue in 1956. When it comes to the questioning and presentation of sexual identity, the focus of media interest no longer lies in garments such as skirts and trousers, but in the naked body. In her book *The Anatomy of Fashion* (2009), Susan J. Vincent simply concluded that "my first contention – and it is a big one – is that dress no longer really matters to us. The locus of awareness and the site of intervention and activity are to be found in the body itself".[28]

Based on the above–mentioned elements throughout history and up until today, we can conclude that: first, in western culture, both skirts and trousers are symbols of gender and sexual affiliation. Second, the distinction in fashion according to gender started in the 14th century and finished in the 1960s. And third, the transformation of these elements – trousers for men (power) and skirts for women (femininity) – during the course of history are clearly indicators of the social, cultural and political transformations that have influenced the relationship between the two genders and demonstrate the processes that are trying to overcome the boundaries of gender identification, birth stereotypes and the aspiration for freedom of expression.

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[28] Vincent, 2009: 159.

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This book uncovers an underlying dispute over the role images play in contemporary society and, consequently, over their values and purposes. Two decades after the concepts of the pictorial and the iconic turn changed our vernacular involvement with regard to images, it has become clear that it was not only a newly discovered social, political or sexual construction of the visual field that brought turbulence into disciplinary knowledge, but that images have their own "pictorial logic" with powers exceeding those that are purely iconic or visually discernible. Instead of underscoring previously defined concepts of the picture, the contributors to this book view visual studies and *Bildwissenschaft* "merely" as a place for the theory of images, making a case for the hotly-debated topic of their powers and weaknesses on the one hand, and of their respective theories on the other. Therefore, as the title indicates, this book theorizes images, but it does not present a theory *of* images, because visual studies cannot lead to a unified theory of images unless a unified ontology of images can be agreed upon first. Although that would be a different task altogether, all the contributions in this book (in different ways and at different paces), by theorizing images in their aesthetic, historical, media and technological guises, pave the way for the future of visual culture and for the image science that will make this future more comprehensible.

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