

THE STONE ART THEORY INSTITUTES : VOLUME TWO

# — WHAT IS AN IMAGE?

Edited by James Elkins and Maja Naef

*WHAT IS AN IMAGE?*

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THE STONE ART THEORY INSTITUTES

Edited by James Elkins

VOL. 1

*ART AND GLOBALIZATION*

VOL. 2

*WHAT IS AN IMAGE?*

The Stone Art Theory Institutes is a series of books on five of the principal unresolved problems in contemporary art theory. The series attempts to be as international, inclusive, and conversational as possible, in order to give a comprehensive sense of the state of thinking on each issue. All together, the series involves over three hundred scholars from over sixty countries.

This series is dedicated to Howard and Donna Stone, long-time friends of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

*THE STONE ART THEORY INSTITUTES VOLUME 2*

# WHAT IS AN IMAGE?

EDITED BY JAMES ELKINS AND MAJA NAEF

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS, UNIVERSITY PARK, PENNSYLVANIA

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

What is an image? / edited by James Elkins and Maja Naef. p. cm. — (Stone Art Theory Institutes)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Summary: "Brings together historians, philosophers, critics, postcolonial theorists, and curators to ask how images, pictures, and paintings are conceptualized. Issues discussed include concepts such as 'image' and 'picture' in and outside the West; semiotics; whether images are products of discourse; religious meanings; and the ethics of viewing"—Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-0-271-05064-5 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Image (Philosophy).
2. Aesthetics.
3. Art—Philosophy.

I. Elkins, James, 1955— .  
II. Naef, Maja, 1973— .

BH301.l52W43 2011  
701—dc23

2011020777

Copyright © 2011 The Pennsylvania State University  
All rights reserved  
Printed in the United States of America  
Published by The Pennsylvania State University Press,  
University Park, PA 16802-1003

The Pennsylvania State University Press is a member of the Association of American University Presses.

It is the policy of The Pennsylvania State University Press to use acid-free paper. Publications on uncoated stock satisfy the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Material, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

This book is printed on Natures Natural, which contains 50% post-consumer waste.

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## SERIES PREFACE

In the usual course of things, art theory happens invisibly, without attracting attention. Concepts like *picture*, *visual art*, and *realism* circulate in newspapers, galleries, and museums as if they were as obvious and natural as words like *dog*, *cat*, and *goldfish*. Art theory is the air the art world breathes, and it is breathed carelessly, without thought. It is the formless stuff out of which so many justifications are conjured. Art theory also happens in universities and art schools, where it is studied and nurtured like a rare orchid. And art theory happens in innumerable academic conferences, which are sometimes studded with insights but are more often provisional and inconclusive. In those academic settings, words like *picture*, *visual art*, and *realism* are treated like impossibly complicated machines whose workings can hardly be understood. Sometimes, then, what counts as art theory is simple and normal, and other times it seems to be the most difficult subject in visual art.

A similarity links these different ways of using theory. In the art world as in academia, it often feels right just to allude to a concept like *picture*, and let its flavor seep into the surrounding conversation. That is strange because *picture* is so important to so many people, and it leads to wayward conversations. The books in this series are intended to push hard on that strangeness, by spending as much time as necessary on individual concepts and the texts that exemplify them. Some books are more or less dedicated to particular words: volume 1 focuses on *globalization*, *translation*, *governmentality*, and *hybridity*; volume 2 explores *image*, *picture*, and *icon*. Volume 3 is concerned with the idea that art is *research*, which produces *knowledge*. Volume 4 is about the *aesthetic*, the *anti-aesthetic*, and the *political*; and volume 5 concentrates on *visual studies*, *visual culture*, and *visuality*. This series is like an interminable conversation around a dictionary—or like the world’s most prolix glossary of art. That isn’t to say that the purposes of these conversations is to fix meanings: on the contrary, the idea is to work hard enough so that what seemed obdurate and slippery, as Wittgenstein said, begins to fracture and crack.

Each book in this series started as a weeklong event, held in Chicago. No papers were given (except as evening lectures, which are not recorded in these books). For a week, five faculty and a group of twenty-five scholars met in closed seminars. In preparation for the week they had read over eight hundred pages of assigned texts. The week opened with a three-hour panel discussion among the faculty, continued with four and a half days of seminars (six hours each day), and

ended with a five-hour panel discussion. All thirty-five hours of it was taped and edited, and the pertinent portions are presented here.

This series is a refinement of a previous book series called *The Art Seminar*, which appeared from 2005 to 2008.<sup>1</sup> Like *The Art Seminar*, the Stone Summer Theory Institutes are an attempt to record a new kind of art theory, one that is more inclusive and less coherent than some art theory produced in North America and western Europe since the advent of poststructuralism. The guiding idea is that theorizing on visual art has become increasingly formalized and narrow, even as art practices have become wildly diverse. Both of the book series are meant to capture a reasonable cross-section of thinking on a given topic, and both include people at the far ends of the spectrum of their subjects—so far from one another that in some cases they were reluctant even to sit together in the events, or participate in the books. Some conversations are genuinely dialectic, others are abrupt encounters, and still others are unaccountable misunderstandings. All those species of communication are recorded as faithfully as possible, because they are evidence of the state of understanding of each field.<sup>2</sup>

The Introduction to each volume is meant as a straightforward and clear review of the critical situation leading up to the seminars. *The Art Seminar* books then had a set of essays to help set the stage for the transcribed discussions. There are no essays in this series, because it is not possible to usefully condense the hundreds of pages of texts that informed these discussions. (References can be found in the transcripts.) The omission of essays makes this series more “difficult” than *The Art Seminar*, but the literature of art theory has grown beyond the point where it can be helpfully anthologized. The books in this series are not introductions to the various people who participated, and they do not usually function as summaries of the subjects they treat. They are attempts to move forward given the current state of discourse in each field, and they presuppose the readings that were assigned in the seminars.

After each year’s week-long event, the editors selected excerpts from the thirty-five hours of audio tapes and produced a rough-edited transcript. It was given to each of the participants, who were invited to edit their contributions and add references. After several rounds of editing, the transcript was sent out to forty or fifty people who did not attend the event. They were asked to write assessments, which appear here in the order they were received. The assessors were asked to consider the conversation from a distance, noting its strengths and its blind spots, in any style and at any length. As the assessments came in, they were distributed to people who hadn’t yet completed theirs, so that later assessments

1. The topics of the seven volumes of *The Art Seminar*: *Art History Versus Aesthetics* (2006), *Photography Theory* (2007), *Is Art History Global?* (2007), *The State of Art Criticism*, coedited with Michael Newman (2008), *Renaissance Theory*, coedited with Robert Williams (2008), *Landscape Theory*, coedited with Rachael DeLue (2008), and *Re-enchantment*, coedited with David Morgan (2008). All are published by Routledge (Taylor and Francis), New York.

2. Different fields have different kinds of incoherence. The particular disunities of art criticism are discussed in an e-mail exchange at the end of *The State of Art Criticism*. The incoherence of theorizing on the Renaissance is the subject of another exchange at the end of *Renaissance Theory*. My own thoughts about the very strange second volume, *Photography Theory*, are in “Is Anyone Listening?” *PhotoFile* 80 (Winter 2007): 80.

often comment on earlier ones, building an intermittent conversation through the book. And finally, the books end with Afterwords, which are meant to paint a picture of the current condition of thinking on the subject, pointing out the results and noting the misunderstandings and dead ends.

The objective of all this is not to produce a new consensus, but a new level of difficulty. I say in several of the transcripts that I would be happy if the seminar conversations and assessments make it harder to write about art. For some readers, art theory may seem too abstruse and technical, but at heart it has a different problem: it is too easy. Both the intricate art theory practiced in academies, and the nearly invisible theory that suffuses galleries and art fairs, are reasonably easy to do reasonably well. And as Wittgenstein knew, the hardest problems are the ones that are right in front of us: *picture, visual art, realism*. The purpose of the books in this series is to do some damage to our sense that we understand words like those.

#### A SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This is the kind of project that is not normally possible in academic life, because it requires an unusual outlay of time and effort: a month of preparatory reading, a concerted week without the distractions of papers being read or lectures that are off-topic.

The originating events at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago are called the Stone Summer Theory Institute, after Howard and Donna Stone, whose gift made this series possible. They are dedicated collectors of postminimal art, with an eye for the most ambitious and characteristic pieces by a wide range of artists, from John McCracken to Gerhard Richter, Steve McQueen, Janine Antoni, Luc Turmans, Michael Krebber, and Marlene Dumas. What is remarkable about their support is that it is directed to *content* and not infrastructure or display. In the art world, there is no end to the patronage of display: corporate sponsors can be found for most every art project, and galleries traditionally depend on individuals and corporations for much of their programming. In that ocean of public patronage there is virtually nothing directed at the question of what art *means*. The market plummets onward, sometimes—as in the case of contemporary Chinese painting—with very little serious critical consideration or interpretation. The Stones' gift is extremely unusual. Their own collecting interests are in line with the subjects of this series: the theories addressed in these books are only important if it is granted that the history of art theory exerts a pressure on the dissipated present, just as postminimalism is crucial mainly, and possibly only, for those who experience the modernist past as a challenge and not merely an attractive backdrop.

So this series is dedicated to Howard and Donna Stone: if more patrons supported art history, theory, and criticism, the art world might well make more sense.

## THE TOPICS IN THIS SERIES

Volume 1, *Art and Globalization*, is about writing in the “biennale culture” that now determines much of the art market. Literature on the worldwide dissemination of art assumes nationalism and ethnic identity, but rarely analyzes it. At the same time there is extensive theorizing about globalization in politics, postcolonial theory, sociology, and anthropology. The volume is an experiment, to see what happens when the two discourses are brought together.

Volume 2, *What Is an Image?* asks how well we understand what we mean by *picture* and *image*. The art world depends on there being something special about the visual, but that something is seldom spelled out. The most interesting theorists of those fundamental words are not philosophers but art historians, and this book interrogates the major theories, including those with theological commitments, those based in phenomenology, and those concerned principally with social meanings.

Volume 3, *What Do Artists Know?*, is about the education of artists. The MFA degree is notoriously poorly conceptualized, and now it is giving way to the PhD in art practice. Meanwhile, conversations on freshman courses in studio art continue to be bogged down by conflicting agendas. This book is about the theories that underwrite art education at all levels, the pertinent history of art education, and the most promising current conceptualizations.

Volume 4, *Beyond the Anti-Aesthetic*, is about the fact that now, almost thirty years after Hal Foster defined the anti-aesthetic, there is still no viable alternative to the dichotomy between aesthetics and anti- or non-aesthetic art. The impasse is made more difficult by the proliferation of identity politics, and it is made less negotiable by the hegemony of anti-aesthetics in academic discourse on art. This is the first concerted, systematic effort to understand the impasse.

Volume 5, *Farewell to Visual Studies*, is a forum on the state of the once-new discipline (inaugurated in the early 1990s) that promised to be the site for the study of visuality in all fields, inside and outside of art. Despite the increasing number of departments worldwide, visual studies remains a minority interest with an increasingly predictable set of interpretive agendas and subjects. Hence our farewell.

## INTRODUCTION

*James Elkins*

*A version of this introduction was given on the opening day of the event, July 13, 2008.*

There is, luckily, no way to summarize contemporary theories of the image. The very disorganization of the subject is reason enough to worry about the state of writing that depends on the word *image* and its deceptive cognates such as *picture* and *Bild*. In this Introduction, I want to say a few things about the *kind* of disorganization that pertains to concepts of the image, and the reasons why that sort of incoherence makes it impossible even to make a reasonable list of the meanings that are assigned to words such as *image*. This Introduction is therefore a sort of anti-Kantian prolegomenon, in the sense that what I have in mind is the conditions of the impossibility of a certain field. But first it may be useful to say a little about why it might be interesting to ask the question, What is an image? to begin with.

There are at least three answers to this question about a question, depending on whether subject is art instruction, art history, or visual studies.

First, regarding the studio art environment: in art instruction, it is often assumed that the visual exists in a separate cognitive realm from language, logic, or mathematics. This assumption often takes the form of the common, and now scientifically outdated, claim that the right brain and left brain are configured in such a way that they can explain what artists do. More generally, in studio art settings it is often said that some things can only be communicated through the visual and not through other senses or media. Art pedagogy is also broadly committed to the notion that the visual is politically privileged, in the sense that politically oriented practices are optimally situated as visual arts practices. The justification for this claim is that art schools and academies are marginal in relation to institutions of power, including universities, so that visual art practices end up being the vehicles for effectively oppositional political work; but there is also an underlying implicit claim that the visual is itself inherently outside discourses of power and therefore suited to speak against power.<sup>1</sup> This particular tangle of often undeveloped claims—the left brain / right brain claim, the idea that the visual is somehow outside of language, the hope that the visual is optimally or inherently suited as a medium for political work—underwrites a substantial amount of the work that is done in art departments, art schools, and art academies, and so it is especially important from their point of view that the concept of the image be understood as well as possible.

1. This theme is developed in vol. 3 of this series, *What Do Artists Know?* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2012).

Second, regarding art criticism, art theory, and art history: most historians and critics work with received ideas about what images are. Words such as *image*, *picture*, and *Bild* work in art-historical discourse as placeholders: we do not put much pressure on them, or expect them to carry much of the argument.<sup>2</sup> Relatively few art historians or critics have developed accounts of images. (Among the dozen or so exceptions are Panofsky, Hans Belting, Gottfried Boehm, Tom Mitchell, and Aud Sissel Hoel.) This is not a fault of art history, criticism, or art theory, but a characteristic of their discourses, which enables many other things to happen within the ill-defined field (the cloud, as Karin Leonhard, one of the contributors to this book, might want to say) of the image. The pragmatic, everyday use of words such as *image* does have some nameable consequences, however, such as art history's relative lack of interest in detailed visual incident.<sup>3</sup>

Third, regarding visual studies: like art history, theory, and criticism, the developing field of visual studies uses the word *image* as a given term, but with different consequences because of the enormous rhetorical weight that visual studies puts on the idea of the visual.<sup>4</sup> We are said to live in an especially visual culture: we may see more images in our lifetimes than any other culture has, and we may be able to assimilate more images per minute than any other culture. Visuality is said to be characteristic of late capitalist first-world culture, and it has even been claimed that we have come to think and experience primarily through the visual. The authors associated with different forms of these claims—Martin Jay, Jean Baudrillard, Nicholas Mirzoeff, Lisa Cartwright—either speak for or are claimed by visual studies. For that reason the relative lack of work on the nature of images themselves plays an especially important part in the constitution and conceptual possibilities of visual studies.<sup>5</sup>

In all three of these areas—art production, art history, visual culture—the image is normally taken as a given term. That is how I would frame an answer to the question about the question. (Why ask, What is an image?) My own interest in this is principally conceptual and not normative: that is, I do not want to reconsider or reformulate the fields that use the concept of the image in these ways. The uses of *image* and related terms do not call for change as much as explanation. Since art pedagogy, art history, and visual studies are all thriving, a more intriguing question might be what kinds of discourse are enabled by *not* pressing the question of what an image is. It's a commonplace in studio art instruction that theories tend to be used strategically, to let the student artist get on with whatever she wants to do, so that it might not be helpful or pertinent to interrogate the student's theories. Whatever they are, however strange and idiosyncratic they might seem to the student's instructors, their purpose is to enable

2. In Frege's terminology, words like "image" are high in sense (*Sinn*, meaning the manner in which the word has meaning) and low in reference (*Bedeutung*, meaning the object to which the word refers).

3. This is explored in Section 8 of the Seminars.

4. I am conflating visual culture, image studies, and *Bildwissenschaft*; see vol. 5 of this

series, *Farewell to Visual Studies*, for a detailed discussion of the differences. (University Park: Penn State Press, forthcoming).

5. An interesting meditation on this subject is Whitney Davis, *A General Theory of Visual Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

other practices. In the same way, the words *image*, *picture*, and *Bild* in art history, theory, and criticism, and in visual studies, may work by not being analyzed, and so the work done in this book might be counterproductive or misguided.

Contemporary discourse would not be alone in its lack of interest in its leading terms. There is a long history of texts that take *image* for granted in order to do other things. Here, as an emblem of that issue, is Hume's opening argument in the *Treatise of Human Nature*: "Impressions," he writes, are "all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul. By ideas I mean the faint images of these [impressions] in thinking and reasoning." Notice how much weight images have to bear: they are the link between impressions, a crucial concept throughout Hume's work, and ideas. As scholars have noted, Hume is thinking of a printing press, and so an image would be the visible result of the printing. But the image's faintness is not the result of a faint print impression, at least not according to this passage. Somehow the image itself carries the property of faintness, which then characterizes all ideas.<sup>6</sup>

It would not be difficult to multiple examples of often fruitful theories that have begun by declining to interrogate the image. I leave this thought for readers of this book to ponder; it comes up in Section 1 of the Seminars, but it was not developed during the week of conversations recorded here.

Because most of this book is occupied with concerted theorization, I thought it might be good to begin informally, with a selection of theories about images. I present these in absolutely no order. Afterward, I will propose six reasons why it would be difficult to do this more seriously: that is, to begin a study of images in the way that might be considered both reasonable and necessary in many other fields, merely listing the principal existing theories.

1. *Images as very thin skins of things.* This is Lucretius's theory: images are "membranes" or "cauls" (*alantois*, and in German *Glückshaube*) that float through the air toward our eyes. We see the world by virtue of our eyes' capacity to take in these diaphanous skins of objects. An image, in this theory, actually *is* a skin: it is not thin like a skin, but is an actual skin.<sup>7</sup> As a metaphor this is very suggestive, very embodied, but as a theory it would restrict seeing to literal embodiment.<sup>8</sup>

2. *Images as reminders of love.* This was well put, as an allegory, by André Félibien. Here is how Jacqueline Lichtenstein recounts Félibien's idea: "As the substitute for an absence, the pictorial image has all the characteristics of a sign, but it is a lover's sign born of the painful experience of lack, the only form of representation capable of satisfying a desire that seeks a presence."<sup>9</sup> It would not be difficult to find other examples: Leon Battista Alberti compared painting and friendship; and, in contemporary scholarship, David Summers has made use of

6. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), 1.1.1, "Of the Origin of Our Ideas." For the printing metaphor see William MacGregor, "The Authority of Prints: An Early Modern Perspective," *Art History* 22, no. 3 (1999): 389-420.

8. I tried using it as a metaphor in *Pictures of the Body: Pain and Metamorphosis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1, but I am not aware of any attempts to use Lucretius in image theory.

7. *De rerum natura* 4.2.1.60.

Gabriele Paleotti's expression "the defect of distance" to elaborate a theory of art in terms of the pathos of human presence and absence.<sup>10</sup>

3. *Images as reminders*. This is, for instance, Susan Sontag's position: images don't tell us anything, they remind us what is important.<sup>11</sup> The same intuition that images point to meaning, without specifying that meaning, can be found in a culturally very distant location—Christian doctrine. John of Damascus's theory, for example, takes images as mnemonics of divinity: "We see images in created things," he writes, "which remind us faintly of divine tokens."<sup>12</sup>

4. *Images as kisses*. This lovely idea emerges in a very convoluted etymology proposed by Wolfgang Wackernagel: one can associate Greek *philos*, that is to say "friend," and the Indo-European root \*bhilo (origin of the German *Bild*). In that case, Wackernagel says, *Bild* could be associated with meanings Émile Benveniste proposed for *philos*: "mark of possession," "friend," and, by verbal derivation, "kiss."<sup>13</sup>

5. *Images as models*, entailing a capacity for "cognitive revelation (*deixis, demonstratio*)": this is one of Gottfried Boehm's senses of the image, and it is discussed in the Seminars in this book.<sup>14</sup> There are in addition a number of other research projects on the idea of the image as model, which are not connected to theories of *deixis*.<sup>15</sup>

6. *Images as the touch of flowers*. This is one of Jean-Luc Nancy's formulas: "every image is à fleur, or is a flower," he writes, "it approaches across a distance, but what it brings into proximity is a distance. The fleur is the finest, most subtle part . . . which one merely brushes against [effleure]."<sup>16</sup> Even though the Seminar participants read a number of Nancy's texts, he did not figure strongly in the discussion or the assessments, and it is not entirely clear why.

7. *Images as sign systems*. The many structural semiotic theories are hardly mentioned in this book, despite a fairly extensive literature that includes Fernande Saint-Martin and the Belgian Groupe μ. The Swedish scholar Göran Sonesson, author of a number of books on systematic visual semiotics, is excluded from these Seminars.<sup>17</sup> Partly that is because both North American and some German scholarship (especially including Gottfried Boehm's) reject systematic semiotics, and partly because performative, open, and contextual readings have become central in art history.

9. Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color: Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 123.

10. See the references in my review of David Summers, *Real Spaces*, in *Art Bulletin* 86, no. 2 (2004): 373–80, reprinted in *Is Art History Global?*, Art Seminar 3 (New York: Routledge, 2006), 41–72.

11. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003).

12. *Apologia Against Those Who Decry Holy Images* 3.16, available at [fordham.edu/halsall/basis/johndamascus-images.html](http://fordham.edu/halsall/basis/johndamascus-images.html).

13. This is discussed in my *On Pictures and the Words That Fail Them* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 208–9.

14. Boehm, "Iconic Knowledge: The Image as Model," unpublished manuscript, 3. The concept of modeling was also a subject of active discussion in the Iconic Criticism (Eikones) initiative in Basel, Switzerland, between 2008 and 2010.

15. For example, *Visuelle Modelle*, edited by Ingeborg Reichle, Steffen Siegel, and Achim Spelter (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2008).

16. Nancy, "The Image—The Distinct," in *The Ground of the Image*, translated by Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 4.

17. See especially Sonesson, "On Pictoriality: The Impact of the Perceptual Model in the Development of Pictorial Semiotics," in *Advances in Visual Semiotics: The Semiotic Web, 1992–1993*, edited by Thomas Sebeok (New York: Mouton de Gruyter), 67.

8. *Images as defective sign systems.* This argument is usually assigned to Nelson Goodman, and especially his argument against naturalism. In the effort to capture “the crucial difference between pictorial and verbal properties,” he argues, representation is “disengaged from perverted ideas of it as an idiosyncratic physical process like mirroring, and is recognized as a symbolic relationship.”<sup>18</sup> The notion of a defective or incomplete system is crucial to this sense of what an image is: “In painting and sculpture, exemplification is syntactically and semantically dense. Neither the pictorial characteristics nor the exemplified properties are differentiated; and exemplified predicates come from a discursive and unlimited natural language.”<sup>19</sup> Goodman has an unresolved position in some contemporary discussions of the image, and of the texts on this opening list, he is the one most likely to be almost adopted: “almost” because the authors who most believe him, including Tom Mitchell in these Seminars, are also the ones least likely to use his theories in any detailed way.<sup>20</sup>

9. *Images as a genus, composed of individual species.* Goodman’s theories divide images into different kinds, and so do many others. The question of dividing and classifying is taken up in Section 9 of the Seminars. In general, theories that try to divide images do not get much further than the distinction between naturalistic images and their proposed counterparts, which are normally named diagrams, notations, or graphs.<sup>21</sup> Thomas Sebeok’s *Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics*, for example, begins with Peirce’s triad icon, index, and symbol. Sebeok then comments, “the neglect of diagrams is particularly incomprehensible in view of the fact that they loomed large in Peirce’s own semiotic research.”<sup>22</sup> I think the Seminars reflect the general tenor of the literature in that they are less interested in the actual divisions than in the idea of dividing. Aside from a small recent literature on diagrams, most discussion on whether images are divisible into types has centered on the word/image dichotomy—and some form of that distinction is assumed even in philosophic texts interested in the image, such as Nancy’s essay “Distinct Oscillation” (i.e., between word and image).<sup>23</sup>

10, 11, 12 . . . This list is disordered and, of course, potentially infinite. Next up could be psychoanalytic theories, or theories developed in hermeneutics, psychology, phenomenology, cognitive science, neurobiology, or rhetoric and media theory. There is no end, but more significantly, there is no order and no way to know what “order” would be.

18. Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1974), 42–43.

19. *Languages of Art*, 234.

20. My own contribution to this problem is in “Pictures as Ruined Notations,” in *The Domain of Images* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 68–81.

21. John Bender and Michael Marrinan, *Culture of Diagram* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); and see also Sebastian Bucher, “Das Diagramm in den Bildwissenschaften,” in *Verwandte Bilder: Die Fragen der Bildwissenschaft*, edited by Ingeborg Reichle, Steffen

Siegel, and Achim Spelten (Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2007). Bender and Marrinan cite a number of schemata that divide images into more kinds, including Ignace Gelb and my own *Domain of Images*, which proposes seven kinds of images, but for them “diagram” is the historically appropriate Other to naturalistic images.

22. Sebeok, *Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics*, second edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), section on “Features of Iconicity.”

23. Nancy, “Distinct Oscillation,” in *Ground of the Image*, 63–79.

I think it is fair to say that a list like this is hopeless from the very beginning. The question is why that should be so. I will propose six reasons as a kind of heuristic introduction to the concerns that are explored in this book.

1. There are theories of images, but most of them are other people's theories.

By this I mean that they can be interesting and coherent, but less than ideally suited for the purposes of writing about visual art. Few seem useful for illuminating the ways people use the word *image* when they talk about art. One way to think about this is to make a distinction between theories of images and theories that are about what happens to the concept "image," or to particular images, in different settings. For some writers, including some participants who came to Chicago to talk about theories of images, what counts more than theories of images is theories that take image as a given term, and ask about how images work, what relations they create or presuppose, what agency they might have, or how they appear in discourse. That is a live issue throughout this book, and especially in Section 3 of the Seminars, titled "Accounts of Images, and Accounts That Begin from Images."

(Once the focus shifts to the distinction between theories about images and theories that use images, then another possibility also appears: the difference between these two kinds of accounts and the idea that pictures also *produce* theories. That has been discussed by several authors, including Hubert Damisch and Jean-Louis Schefer, and it is contemplated in Tom Mitchell's *Picture Theory*. His interest in that book is in theorizing pictures, but also in "pictures themselves as forms of theorizing."<sup>24</sup> Susan Buck-Morss has also attempted to find ways to let pictures guide and theorize her inquiries. But this theme is not developed in Buck-Morss's books or in Mitchell's *Picture Theory* or *What Do Pictures Want?*, where images continue to work as mnemonics and as examples of many things voiced in the text, but not as objections to the text, or revisions of arguments presented in the text. It could be argued that the idea of images that theorize has been identified but not developed in art history, theory, and criticism, or in visual studies.<sup>25</sup> The subject is not explored in this book: I mention it here because it seems to me that it is logically implied by talk about theories of images and theories starting from images. It is an open door in both art history and visual studies.)

2. A number of fields work with images, and they do not often share bibliographies.

A wide range of disciplines and areas are involved in images: at the least there are philosophy, art history, visual studies, cognitive psychology, experimental psychology, neurobiology, neurology, machine vision, robotics, computer-

<sup>24</sup>. Mitchell, "Vital Signs / Cloning Terror," in *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 6.

<sup>25</sup>. The production of images is a current interest of Sunil Manghani's; see the end of his Assessment in this book. The possibility

that images can do more than just illustrate the theoretical, social, and political concerns of visual studies is the central concern of the *Visual Studies Reader* project, a book that is being written by graduate students (New York: Routledge, forthcoming; and see [visualreader.pbworks.com](http://visualreader.pbworks.com)).

aided vision, evolution, animal vision studies, and art practice. Depending on how these disciplines are classified, they might reduce to just four faculties (art, humanities, sciences, social sciences) or expand into dozens of individual subjects. A survey I made at the University College Cork in Ireland of the departments that were invested in images yielded an astonishing list: virtual-reality reconstructions in legal cases, linguistic inquiries into historical uses of color terms, emblems of free choice used in economics, problems of documenting performance art, visualizations of viruses, programs that graphically monitor intranets, image-based exercises in occupational therapy, multispectral imaging in aerial surveying, radio astronomy images of stars, visual solutions to mathematical problems, automated recognition of cetaceans, studies of the deformation of grains in sandstone, comparative analyses of kidney pathologies, images of the sea floor using side-scanning sonar, and visual tropes in Arabic and Russian. The contributors to that project used a bewildering range of technologies, including digital video editing, computerized surveying, optical microscopy (fluorescence, confocal, interference contrast, and a half dozen others), electron microscopy (transmission electron microscopy, atomic force microscopy, a half dozen others), spectroscopy, sound spectrograms, and image manipulation (using programs such as NIH Image, ImageJ, Exbem, and PhotoShop). The thirty contributors to the resulting book included just two art historians, and even they did not share a common bibliography.<sup>26</sup> There are ways to address the problem of nonintersecting bibliographies; it is possible, for example, to find groups of allied technologies. But at least in the Irish project, it was not possible to begin from any common theoretical sources.

The challenge for humanities-based research on the image, as in this book, is to take other fields as seriously as possible. There is increasing mention of non-art fields in visual studies and art history, but relatively few projects begin from science, or stay with it, or study its languages as carefully as they deploy the languages of the humanities.<sup>27</sup> A sign of the limited engagement of humanist scholarship with other fields is the complete absence of work that takes its interpretive methodologies from outside the humanities. What would happen, for example, if photography criticism were to stop using terms like *realism*, the *punctum*, or the *index*, and use instead terms from the criticism of electron microscopy (*contrast transfer function*, *optimal foci*, *Scherzer focus*)? The fact that this sounds outlandish is a sign of the distance that still has to be crossed before image studies in different fields can begin to share bibliographies.

26. This is documented in *Visual Practices Across the University* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2007). See also *Bild und Erkenntnis: Formen und Funktionen des Bildes in Wissenschaft und Technik*, edited by Andrea Beyer and Markus Lohoff (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2005).

27. Two notable exceptions are the initiative “Das Technische Bild,” led (until 2010) by Horst Bredekamp in the Helmholtz-Universität in Berlin, and Lena Johannesson’s work in Göteborg.

In this book non-art interests are represented by Alexis Smets, Klaus Sachs-Hombach, and Christoph Lüthy, among others. See further, Sachs-Hombach and Klaus Rehkämper, “Thesen zu einer Theorie bildhafter Darstellung,” in *Bild-Bildwahrnehmung- Bildverarbeitung: Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zur Bildwissenschaft*, edited by Sachs-Hombach and Rehkämper (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitäts-Verlag, 2000), 119–24.

3. Some accounts are primarily concerned with the politics of images or images as politics, while other accounts do not feel the necessity of approaching political concepts at all. This is made more difficult by positions according to which images and politics are inextricable, so that every image is a political act. At the beginning I mentioned that from the point of view of production, visual art is sometimes seen as a potentially privileged vehicle for social action. (In *What do Pictures Want?* Tom Mitchell asks, rhetorically, “Are images the terrain on which political struggle should be waged . . . ? There is a strong temptation to answer . . . with a resounding yes.”<sup>28</sup>) The converse, which produces an especially strong claim, is that the political is optimally realized through the visual.

Recently discussions about politics and visual arts have tended to defer to Jacques Rancière’s account of images, or “imageness,” as fundamentally a matter of relations. “Imageness,” he says, is “a regime of relations between elements and between functions,” an “interplay of operations.”<sup>29</sup> It is distinct from likeness and resemblance. Images “produce a discrepancy, a dissemblance,” and they are therefore political, because in Rancière’s philosophy the effect understood as politics in the proper sense produces dissemblances.<sup>30</sup> Rancière’s ideas are discussed intermittently throughout this book, but his operative terms such as *image* and *politics*, which have special technical meaning in his work, tend to be reassigned to the meanings that are in wider use, making it difficult to assess the pertinence of his ideas.<sup>31</sup>

In this book a number of contributors begin with some form of the assumption that politics and the image need to be conceptualized together. Marie-José Mondzain’s meditations on the image have often turned on the coordinate theorization of economics and imagery.<sup>32</sup> In the short book translated as “Can Images Kill?” she writes, “My aim here is . . . to understand what an image is and to understand its relation to violence.”<sup>33</sup> At the extreme, accounts that focus on politics can make the place of art unclear, as if the choice of art, images, or visuality as subjects is arbitrary. This has played out in different ways in recent art history. For this book, a pertinent moment occurs in an exchange of letters between Gottfried Boehm and Tom Mitchell, which the participants read in an unpublished English version. In that version, Boehm remarks that his sense of

28. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 32–33.

29. “The Distribution of the Sensible,” in *Politics of Aesthetics* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 4, 6.

30. “Distribution of the Sensible,” 7. The argument becomes more concrete and contentious when it comes to specific art practices. Developments like abstraction, Rancière argues, are misunderstood by modernists and postmodernists: they weren’t medium-specific, but “implicated in an overall vision of a new human being lodged in new structures.” The flatness of abstraction is “the flatness of pages, posters, and tapestries,” of “interfaces.” Abstract paintings are about the development of new communities, new spaces, new “bodily functions and movements” (16, 19).

31. The participants in vol. 4 of this series,

*Beyond the Aesthetic and the Anti-Aesthetic* (based on conversations held in summer 2010) also read Rancière extensively, but in that context his sense of terms like “politics” appeared as an obstacle to taking his theories into art discourse. *Beyond the Aesthetic and the Anti-Aesthetic*, edited by James Elkins and Harper Montgomery (University Park: Penn State Press, forthcoming).

32. Mondzain’s principal work on this is *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*, translated by Rico Franses (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

33. Mondzain, *L’image peut-elle tuer?*, translated as “Can Images Kill?,” *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 1 (2009): 22.

the “pictorial turn” (a phrase both he and Mitchell coined, independently, in the early 1990s) is that it involves “a criticism of the image rather than one of ideology.”<sup>34</sup> Mitchell replies that his aim “was to show . . . that the very notion of ideology was grounded in a specific image-repertoire.”<sup>35</sup> It is a moment of deep divergence in a correspondence that several contributors to this book describe, rightly, as mainly about points of agreement.

4. A fourth reason why it is not easy to list theories of images is that some accounts are about the agency of images—their “voice,” their “life.” They ask for a different kind of response than accounts that are not centrally concerned with agency. At the extreme, when such accounts draw near to anthropology, religious belief, or animism, they may also involve a suspension of disbelief, as in Mitchell’s question, What do images want? or Mondzain’s, Can images kill? This is not the place to adjudicate those claims, but it is pertinent that they need to be heard with a different ear than claims about, say, a picture’s semiotics. It is not clear, at least to me, exactly how to change the register of the conversation when talk goes from a picture’s structure, or even its politics, to its agency, its voice, its life. Moving back and forth between those perspectives, as the talk in this book often does, produces a kind of dissonance that is heard, but not analyzed, by a number of the participants.

5. The same sort of observation can be made about the idea that images are a fundamentally religious category. The claim that images are conceptually inseparable from religious or ritual belief is easy to substantiate by considering the historical record: secular modernity is a tiny, Western fraction of the sum total of image making. Even within the Western tradition, the theorization of the image has until recently been an exclusively theological preoccupation. In *Of the Trinity*, St. Augustine writes, “While in all creatures there is some likeness to God, in the rational creature alone we find a likeness of ‘image’ . . . whereas in other creatures we find a likeness by way of ‘trace.’”<sup>36</sup> The image is inside the economy of the revelation, and until recently that is where images belonged.

But the force of that argument is not so clear, because it assumes that we can step outside our putatively secular modernity to consider images in that broader context. I am not at all sure if academics interested in images can do that: what, after all, is that larger context that comprehends representations of images as religious and as nonreligious? We represent religious uses of images to ourselves as historical practices, but we do not step *into* those practices.<sup>37</sup> In terms of contemporary theorizing about the image, a version of this difference plays out at

34. Letter to Tom Mitchell, unpublished in English, §3. For the two letters in German see Boehm, “Iconic Turn: Ein Brief” and Mitchell, “Pictorial Turn: Eine Antwort,” in *Bilderfragen: Die Bildwissenschaften in Aufbruch*, edited by Hans Belting (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2007), 27–48. Boehm’s sentence in the original is “‘Mein’ turn ist also eher bild- als ideologiekritisch” (31).

35. Mitchell, unpublished letter, §5.

36. *Of the Trinity* 2.6. The passage continues, “imprints which are left by the movements

of animals are called ‘traces’; likewise ashes are a trace of fire.”

37. This is argued in my *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (New York: Routledge, 2004); and in relation to Bruno Latour, Peter Weibel, and Joseph Koerner’s exhibition *Iconoclash!*, in a review in *Art Journal* 62, no. 3 (2003): 104–7.

38. An example of work along these lines is Daniel Siedell, *God in the Gallery: A Christian Embrace of Modern Art* (Grand Rapids: Baker

the level of interpretive strategies. For some scholars, talk about images is always also talk about religion.<sup>38</sup> Marie-José Mondzain is a strong example of this sort of discourse, and Tom Mitchell is an equally strong example of the opposite. The tricky thing in preparing the Seminars was to bring out that difference, which immediately disappears when talk of religious meanings is taken historically, or when talk of historical meanings is interpreted as implicitly theological. There were no participants in the 2008 event who would have said, with the art historian T. J. Clark, “I will have nothing to do with the self-satisfied Leftist clap-trap about ‘art as substitute religion,’”<sup>39</sup> and none who would have wanted to counter that with a Marxist review such as the one Karl Werckmeister wrote in response to Clark’s book.<sup>40</sup> The participants moved seamlessly from talk about the image that required a full, historically specific series of theological terms from Byzantium to the present, to talk that had no need of any such terms. The seam, the dissonance, was often invisible, and for me that was the puzzling thing.

Marie-José Mondzain’s intricate and powerful monologues about images and theology would seem to preclude any discourse that presented itself as secular. “The story of the incarnation is the legend of the image itself,” she writes in “Can Images Kill?”; “only the image can incarnate.”<sup>41</sup> Or again, “artistic practice broke with the Church in order to remain faithful to the incarnation of the invisible.” The “failure of the gaze,” she says, means sight will never encounter “what it desires to see: God. That is why men continue to desire and to make images” even though “God is thus nothing other than the name of our desire to see our similarity . . . that constantly escapes from sight.”<sup>42</sup> The difficulty is not in finding ways for these insights to work for a historical understanding, any more than it was difficult during the event for Mondzain to encounter any number of nonreligious issues, from diagrams to semiotics. The problem is deeper, or different: it is to know how the negotiation between those forms of meaning takes place.

6. The same problem of theorizing the move from one form of understanding to another also emerges again in the discussions about the claim that images have an inherent logic or rationality, and the companion claim that they possess a kind of irrationality. Some accounts, especially of modern and contemporary art, involve searches for the irrational, the nonlinguistic, the nonverbal, the unrecognized, or the unrepresentable. In other accounts, those properties are understood as constructions of modernism, historically determined desires in relation to images, or misunderstandings of the nature of pictorial meaning. Texts on the postmodern sublime, on practices of the monochrome, and on artists’ interest in void, negation, or emptiness can be understood as artifacts of modernism’s

Academic, 2008). In a very different register, the participants also read several texts by Nancy that develop theological issues in relation to art. He argues, for example, “the image is always sacred” if by that word is meant “the distinct,” “the separate, what is set aside, removed, cut off . . . It is there, perhaps, that art has always begun, not in religion . . . but set apart” (“The Image—The Distinct,” in *Ground of the Image*, 1–3).

39. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); this is an epigraph in *On the Strange Place of Religion*.

40. Werckmeister, “A Critique of T. J. Clark’s *Farewell to an Idea*,” *Critical Inquiry* 28 no. 4 (2002): 855–67.

41. “Can Images Kill?,” 23, 28.

42. “Can Images Kill?,” 30, 31, 32, respectively.

understanding of the image.<sup>43</sup> One reason why Jean-Luc Nancy figures less in this book than he did in our readings is his own immersion in issues of the non-linguistic and nonverbal, which seemed at times to be less explicitly aware of its historical position than it might have been.<sup>44</sup>

Discussions of the rational and the nonrational may be different from discussions of agency and structure, or religious and secular meaning, because there are discourses that can bridge what can appear as a large gap. There are theories of the alternative logic and sense that inhere in images (Gottfried Boehm's theories, for example), and there are also theories of the nonrational or nonlinguistic nature of images (the Rosalind Krauss of *The Optical Unconscious*, or the Jean-François Lyotard of *Discours, figure*). Not every position is as pure, as extreme, as Georges Didi-Huberman's when he writes, "We must try, before the image, to think the negative force within it. . . . There is a work of the negative in the image, a 'dark' efficacy that, so to speak, eats away at the visible (the order of represented appearances) and murders the legible (the order of signifying configurations)."<sup>45</sup> Boehm's work is a bridge in this respect. On the one hand, he considers the study of the visual as a convenient distillation and official, disciplinary name for "das Ikonische zu denken": to understand how images create meaning apart from language, and therefore also apart from semiotics.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, he thinks pictorial meaning is "nonpredicative," and does not involve truth and falsity. It entails questions of clarity or obscurity—a "logic of intensity or of forces."<sup>47</sup> It may not always be easy to see how "image and concept meet each other in the image itself,"<sup>48</sup> or how "iconic knowledge" is produced by a "nonverbal, iconic *logos*," distinct from and possibly underlying other knowledge,<sup>49</sup> but such formulations make many discussions possible.

The difficulty, as in the third, fourth, and fifth topics in my list, is knowing where we are, as speakers, as scholars, or even as observers, when we move between these registers. If I write in one text about the nonlinguistic elements of the image, and then I write in another text about the historical discourses that have led me to want to claim that images have nonlinguistic properties, then what has happened to me in between those two acts of writing? The answer cannot simply be that the conceptual has been captured by the historical, because the movement will very likely reverse itself.

I hope this is not too abstract for an introduction. The principal reason I wanted to stage a lengthy conversation between Tom Mitchell, Marie-José Mon-

43. "Iconoclasm and the Sublime: Two Implicit Religious Discourses in Art History," in *Idol Anxiety*, edited by Josh Ellenbogen and Aaron Tugendhaft (Stanford: Stanford University Press, forthcoming).

44. The "ground of the image," he writes in "The Image—The Distinct," "appears as what it is by disappearing. . . . It is the force of the image, its sky and its shadow." Nancy, "The Image—The Distinct," in *Ground of the Image*, 7.

45. *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, translated by John Goodman (University Park: Penn State

Press, 2005), 143.

46. *Wie Bilder Sinn Erzeugen: Die Macht des Zeigens* (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2007), 9. I am translating *Bildwissenschaft* as "the study of the visual," just to avoid the difficulties of explicating the nuances of *Bildwissenschaft* that are in play in Boehm's book.

47. Boehm, "Indeterminacy: On the Logic of Images," unpublished manuscript, 6–7.

48. Boehm, "Iconic Knowledge: The Image as Model," unpublished manuscript, 3.

49. Letter to Mitchell, unpublished in English, § 2.

dzain, and Gottfried Boehm is because they are each such eloquent representatives of differing conceptualizations. This is not the kind of encounter that leads to arguments: it is the far more interesting and difficult sort of encounter in which the participants are enthusiastic about a dialogic and even a collaborative conversation. Still, there remains the dissonance between fundamentally political understandings of the image and those that are not; between theological conceptualizations of the image and those that do not require theology; and between ideas of the image that take the visual to be nonrational, irrational, or nonlinguistic, and those that do not.

These dissonances themselves, aside from whatever we may decide about the particular claims that give rise to them, are a fascinating subject. Of the people who contributed to this book, Paul Willemarck and Wolfram Pichler do the most work on this. But then again, these dissonances are my own interest: this book is bursting with many other viewpoints and concerns. I hope this book is a contribution to the current state of thinking, in all its indecisions and messiness and compelling energy, and—in its wonderful Afterword—its promise of foundational rethinking.

THE SEMINARS

The 2008 Stone Summer Theory Institute



**THE PARTICIPANTS:**

The 2008 Stone Summer Theory Institute had five Faculty, sixteen Fellows, and nine graduate students from the School of the Art Institute. They are shown on the panorama on the following pages.

**THE FACULTY:**

Gottfried Boehm (Eikones—NCCR Iconic Criticism, University of Basel), James Elkins (School of the Art Institute), Jacqueline Lichtenstein (Paris-Sorbonne [Paris IV]), W. J. T. Mitchell (University of Chicago), Marie-José Mondzain (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales).

**THE FELLOWS:**

Elisabeth Birk (Aachen University), Catherine Burdick (PhD candidate, University of Illinois at Chicago), Daniel Gleason (Illinois Math and Science Academy), Regan Golden-McNerney (University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee), Ian Heywood (Leeds Metropolitan University), Aud Sissel Hoel (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim), Ladislav Kesner (Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic), Markus Klammer (PhD candidate, Eikones—NCCR Iconic Criticism, University of Basel), Adrian Kohn (PhD candidate, University of Texas at Austin), Rachel Mundy (PhD candidate, New York University), Maja Naef (Basel, Switzerland), Steffen Siegel (Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities), Si Han (PhD, Göteborg University, Sweden), Alexis Smets (PhD candidate, University of Nijmegen), Joel Snyder (University of Chicago), Merel van Tilburg (PhD candidate, University of Geneva).



THE SCHOOL OF THE ART  
INSTITUTE GRADUATE CLASS:

Ellen Hartwell Alderman, Dorota

Biczel, Andrew Blackley, Karl

Hakken, Kristi McGuire, Rachel

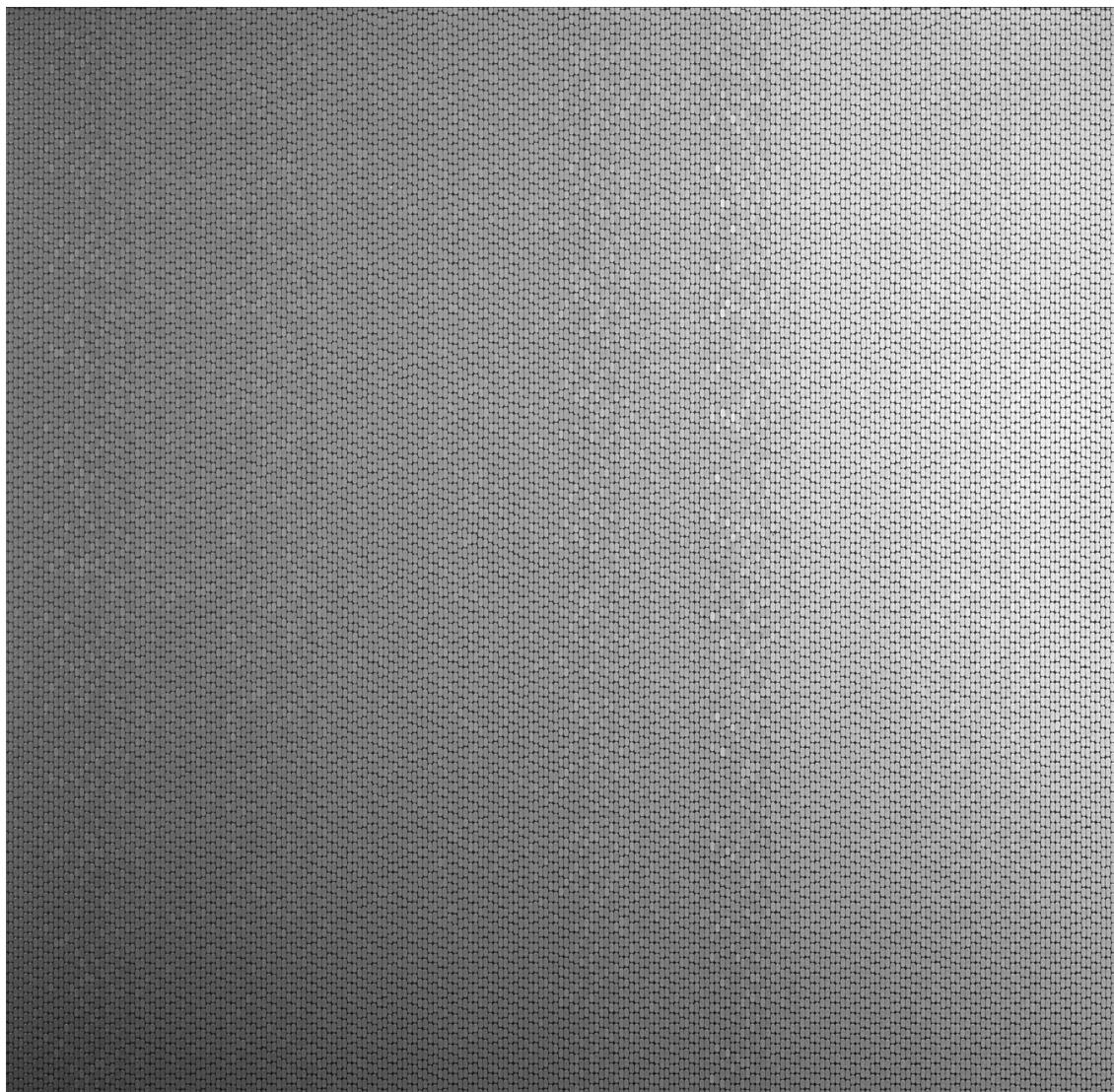
Moore, Marcus Owens, Candace

Wirt, Eduardo Vivanco Antolin.

Auditors: Marie Krane Bergman,

Barbara Stafford, Margaret Olin.

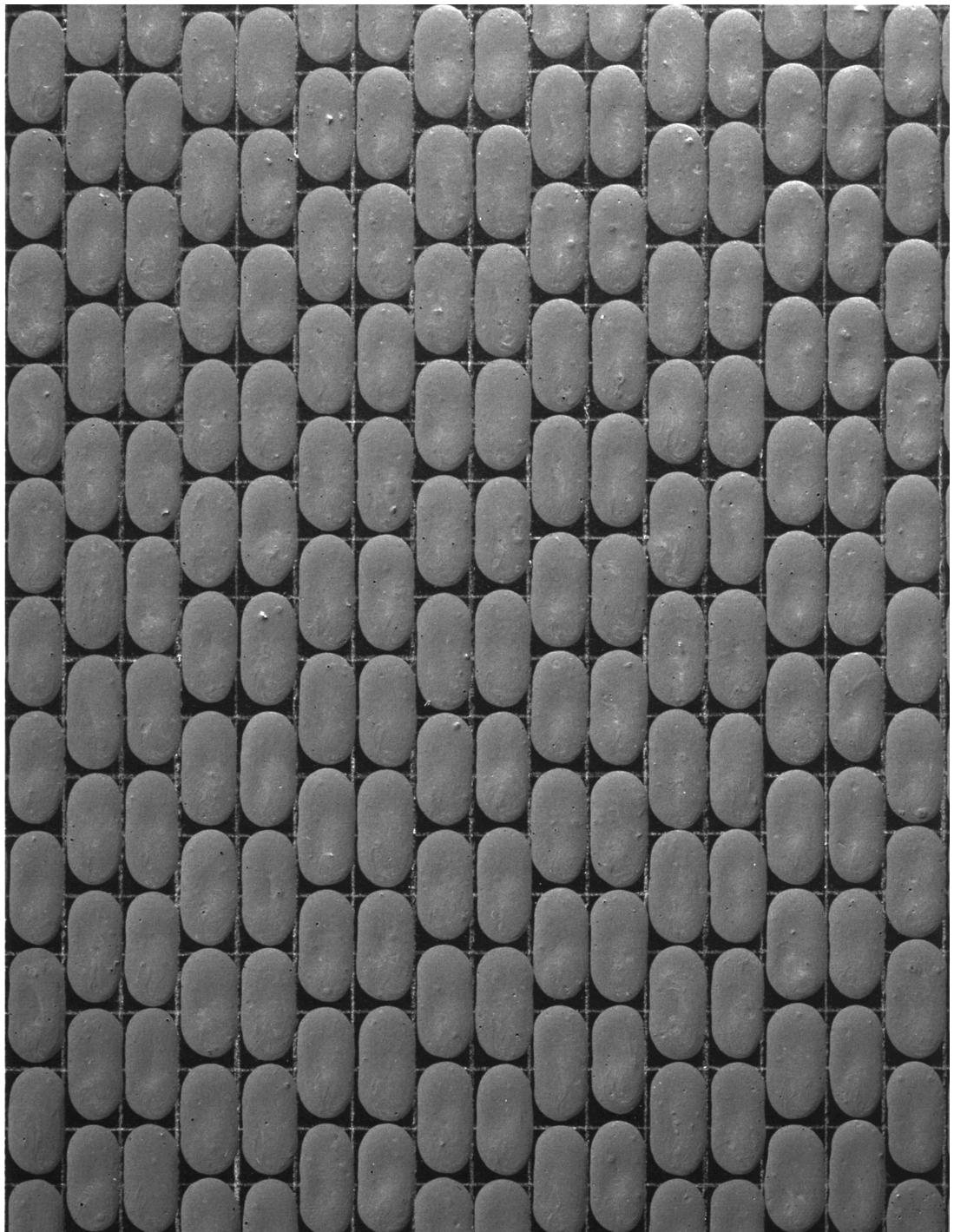
The panorama was taken by James Elkins and Aud Sissel Hoel, who took turns taking photographs on three different days. Kristi McGuire appears twice, which is appropriate, because she was the assistant for the event and was often in several places at once. On the three occasions the photographs were taken Joel Snyder was absent.



We had a painting, a diptych, in the room with us during the seminar. The two canvases are called *And* and *Towards Neither*; they are acrylic and pencil on linen on board. The artist, Marie Krane, paints in small, regular oval shapes on a penciled grid. The colors are carefully determined according to naturalistic criteria (for example, they may match the decay of a flower over

time), and they change incrementally according to a geometric grid. The paintings are usually executed by artists who work in Krane's studios. The participants referred to these intermittently throughout the week. See [www.mariekranenbergman.com](http://www.mariekranenbergman.com) for more information.

Marie Krane Bergman  
Part of One Year (May)  
2003  
acrylic and pencil on canvas  
70" x 70"  
177.8 x 177.8 cm  
The Donna and Howard Stone  
Collection  
Reproduced with the permission  
of the artist.



Detail

The following conversations were recorded during the week of July 13–19, 2008,  
at the School of the Art Institute, Chicago.

## 1. HOW MANY THEORIES OF IMAGES ARE THERE?

*An initial problem in considering images is identifying the principal theories that have supported accounts of images. The week of discussions was predicated on the impossibility of enumerating theories, anthology-fashion. But the question remains, because prominent theories, or groups of theories, continue to articulate the discourse on images.*

*It is not difficult to compile texts that are crucial for image theory. Anthologies such as l'Image or the English-language reader Images provide examples.<sup>1</sup> In the course of the week we mentioned or discussed almost three hundred authors. Although there are a number of crucial texts that did not come up (there is no mention in the thirty-five hours of audio tapes of Burke, Guy Debord, Meister Eckhart, Marshall McLuhan, or Plotinus), the conversations were long enough so that most writers were introduced repeatedly. And yet, despite the relative freedom from time constraints, talk about theories tended to sound abbreviated.*

JAMES ELKINS: Before we begin, I would like to expand a little on the introduction I gave on Sunday,<sup>2</sup> regarding the reasons why we can't just list theories, and then set about comparing them.

First, theories are interrelated. They are imbricated, they depend on one another, and in addition there are an indeterminate number of theories. It is sometimes clear, and sometimes not, what might count as a theory. Some descriptions of images are what I call *theory-metaphors*: that is, they're short, evocative, and depend on tropes as much as argument. Images as reminders of love, as mnemonics of divinity, as things that touch us very lightly like flowers, even as kisses. Of course the list is infinite. An artist's book by Paul Zelevansky, called *24 Ideas About Pictures*, has brief chapters with titles such as "Pictures Give Direction," "Pictures Eliminate Doubt" (followed immediately by "Pictures Mask Doubt"), "Pictures Are Asleep Until They Are Awake," "Pictures Are Scapegoats," and "A Picture Is in Fact a File."<sup>3</sup>

Because we will be talking about Goodman's theory of images, it is amusing to note that the set of theory-metaphors, book-length theories, and all sorts of

In these seminars, the notes have been added by the speakers, except in the italicized introduction to each seminar, where the notes are editor's, or where otherwise indicated.

1. *l'Image*, edited by Laurent Lavaud (Paris: Flammarion, 1999); *Images: A Reader*, edited by Jon Simons, Sunil Manghani, and Arthur Piper (London: Sage, 2006); *Was ist ein Bild?*, edited by Gottfried Boehm (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1994).

2. See the Introduction to this book.

3. Zelevansky, *24 Ideas About Pictures* (Los Angeles: Great Blankness Press, 2008). I thank David Raskin for bringing this to my attention. Another book that asks "What is an image?" is Stephen Pattison, *Seeing Things: Deepening Relations with Visual Artefacts* (London: SCM Press, 2007); chap. 3, "What Is an Image?," proposes over a dozen answers to the question.

other pronouncements about images themselves form what Nelson Goodman called a syntactically *nondisjoint* set that is not *syntactically finitely differentiated*: in other words, it's a mess.<sup>4</sup>

TOM MITCHELL: I would put it a different way. It is all too possible to list theories. The problem is merely listing: we have Didi-Huberman, Goodman, Wittgenstein, Husserl. . . . That's listing, not classifying. It doesn't produce a meta-level taxonomy, which differentiates the fundamental differences of each position.

JAMES ELKINS: Exactly.

TOM MITCHELL: The challenge, the one I have tried, and it's something Gottfried is interested in, and which Jacqueline has illustrated with questions of the identity of painting in relation to the image—the problem is to find a way to do more than merely listing.

Image science demands a taxonomy. I have been listing the words that we have been using in expressions of the form *image and . . .* So far today we have *image and fear, hate, love, desire, terror*. And then there are the general words that cover those, like *emotion* and *affect*. Let's say that is one big bag of issues. Another would be *truth, reality, beauty, reliability, authority, goodness, evil* . . . the topics of the branches of philosophy known as aesthetics, epistemology, ethics, and political theory. And finally there would be the internal questions: images and other images, images and words, images and pictures, and icons, and analogy, and logic, the sign, the symbol. That is the internal analysis, the internal differentiation, that images make visible. One science that tried to advance that was semiotics, and that has its limits.

So this is just intuitive; it might be the wrong taxonomy. All I'm saying is that (a) we can make lots of lists, and (b) if that's all we want to do, let's go home.

JAMES ELKINS: Yes, that is completely compatible with the way I see it. Let me pursue this a moment more, because it will lead toward what I thought might be productive for us today. A second reason why it is impossible to list theories is that so very few of them have been developed by people in the art world. Very few art historians have worked out what they mean by *picture* or *image*. I named Gottfried, Tom, Hans Belting, Erwin Panofsky, and a couple of others, but the overwhelming majority of art historians prefer to work using received ideas of images. The same is even more true in visual studies. Even more interesting, to me, is the fact that it is easy for art students to graduate with MFAs and even PhDs, and never develop an account of what images mean for them. It is clear to me that there is an advantage, in the art world, in *not looking* too closely at what images and pictures are. There is clearly a lot to be said for not coming up with an account of what images are. Therefore any accounts we develop this

4. It is syntactically disjoint in the sense that individual claims (such as the resemblance between images and kisses) can be assigned to more than one theory; and it is syntactically dense or not *finitely differentiated* because it is not always possible to tell if a given claim

should be considered as part of a theory or not. See the development of these definitions in Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), 133, 135; and the discussion in my *Domain of Images* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 69.

week will run against the grain of the art world, which prefers to continue as it does without thinking about its central subject. I hope we can think, later on, about what this means.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: I am a little embarrassed by what we mean by the word *theory*. You are naming Goodman, Didi-Huberman, and so on, but I do not think the word *theory* has the same meaning in each. There is no theory of images in Jean-Luc Nancy, for instance. He has a philosophical approach to images, but it is not a theory. There is a very strong theory of images in Goodman—that's for sure. There is a theory of images in Jean-Paul Sartre. So it is not enough to have a philosophical approach, or a theoretical approach, to a problem like the image.

There are also weak and strong theories. Goodman's is a strong theory, but I am not sure how far it is useful. Does it help me think about the difference between image and painting? I don't agree with some parts of it, for example the distinction between allography and autography *because* of the history of art. Even though I understand it is a methodological choice not to take into account the diversity and variety of art, still some of his distinctions do not work. And perhaps you might be shocked, but for me, Didi-Huberman is a very weak theory. That doesn't mean it's not a theory!

So there are hierarchies to be made.

JAMES ELKINS: Yes. I hope we can return to these difficulties as we talk. Any number of approaches can be fruitful provided we concentrate on questions that underlie the problematic nature of an anthology or encyclopedia of theories.

AUD SISSEL HOEL: Given that we are making a provisional inventory of principal theories that support accounts of images, I would like to note some salient candidates that are missing from our conversation. You might have omitted them, Jim, because they are too obvious. Still, I think they are worth mentioning. I am thinking of approaches that conceive of pictures as records of perception, such as Gombrich's, and the versions of this theory in approaches inspired by cognitive science. I am also thinking of approaches that conceive of pictures along the lines of a language model, such as semiology.

I'm calling attention to these approaches, because when contemporary image scholars go about their business using received ideas of images they tend to resort to one of these theories or strained combinations of the two. They are our default theories, and they are sorely in need of revision.<sup>5</sup>

5. For a discussion of the limitations of semiological and cognitive approaches to images, see chapters 3 and 4 in my dissertation, "Fremstilling og teknikk: Om bildet som formativt medium" (Image and Technics: On the Formative Power of Pictures), (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2005). These approaches

are usually presented as opposites, but I show them to have a fair share of unspoken premises in common. The biggest drawback of these approaches is that both of them, in different ways and for different reasons, end up depriving the image of formative powers.



## 2. WHAT IS OUTSIDE IMAGES

*One of the first questions that came up during the week was the negative of our starting question. Steffen Siegel was the first to ask, What is not an image? The question turned out to be very difficult, in the sense that the answers people proposed did not fit well with one another. Little was resolved in this conversation, but it was very revealing of the “negative space,” as artists say, that seems to surround the unknown object of our attention.*

STEFFEN SIEGEL: I would like to ask about the object of our studies. When I read your books, Jim, I see a large number of examples—tables, diagrams, models, cartography—that could also be images. So I would like to propose we talk about the borders of our subject: What is *not* an image? And can that be a distinct concept? Are we limited by thinking of the image in terms of the visible?

JAMES ELKINS: Let me propose that we take this question in two directions. On one side is the possibility of *dividing* images, as I have sometimes tried to do, so that we would try to begin again with such words as “table” or “diagram” instead of “image” or “picture.” Let’s defer that question for the time being, because I think it forms a distinct problematic.<sup>1</sup> On the other side is the question of what lies outside of images, or of the image. That is a distinct question because it begins with the whole concept, the undissected concept, and asks what it might omit or occlude.

MARIE-JOSÉ MONDZAIN: You just said that painting is not necessarily an object. I would say that image is not necessarily an object. First, it seems to me that the presence of thought in images, in painting, is *inside* the images. As Gottfried has said, we learn things through images. But there is a distinction to be drawn between image and gaze. The visibility of an object cannot be reduced to what is at stake in the gaze in the relation with invisibility. It is either the meaning, which is constructed, or what I call the nonobject. It is a question of the *desire* to see, the *desire* to show. That is inside, in the subject.

Gottfried said, in relation to the preeminence of the image, In the beginning was the image. I would have said, In the beginning was desire. It is the condition of movement for all humans. It puts thought in motion. And if desire is the beginning of thought itself, there is something in the image that shares something with the condition of thought itself.

When I speak of “nonobjects,” it isn’t an optimal formulation. I am embarrassed by the neologism, but I would say the object of the gaze is not far from what Jacques Lacan tried to designate with the *objet petit a*, the object of desire.

1. See Section 9.

I do not follow Lacan, because the object of desire is always the object of *lack*. I am not sure that it is necessary to put the question of lack at the core of our interrogation, but only the question of the separation, the gap. What I mean is that the operation of the image is to separate. When you say painting is an object, then this object you call painting *is* an image *when* it separates. It becomes an operator of separation. It builds, constructs the gaze between subjects: from the one who sees to the one who shows. The circulation of the gaze is inseparable from the question of the image. Image is a sort of empty center of circulation. That is the meaning I give to the inadequate expression *non-object*.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: In your analysis of the image as the empty center of the gaze, what would you say about artists who work on things that cannot be seen, such as Jochen Gerz's *Invisible Monument*?

MARIE-JOSÉ MONDZAIN: It is a good example of a *dispositif*—in English both an apparatus and a device. Gerz uses space and time to create a work in which there is nothing to see, but much to share.

TOM MITCHELL: I have a suggestion about how to think this question, What is not an image?—and it goes back to the fundamentals of linguistics. I am thinking particularly of the Greimasian square of opposition. Let's say the beginning term is *the living*. So you ask, for example, What is not living? You plug in the concept of the living into the Greimasian square, and you ask, What is the contrary, what is the negation, and what is a third term, that occupies a different locale? In relation to the concept of the living, one opposite is *the dead*, and the other opposite is *the inanimate*—it never was alive, versus once was alive and is no longer (hence a temporal opposition). And what is in the third position, to fill out the quadrilateral of opposition? The usual candidate I give is *the undead*—a compromise.

Can we do that with the image? Is there something that was an image, and is no longer? Or is not an image yet, but is about to be? Or is there something, analogous to the inanimate, that can never be an image? The *non-image*? What is that? Is it like the table, in relation to the picture? I don't know: I'm just posing this as a way to think, to diagram the question.

JAMES ELKINS: I like this idea, and it strikes me that if you diagram *the image* in this fashion, you would probably not want to posit *writing* as any of the other terms, even though the literature is dominated by versions of word and image, word/image (as you have put it), and so forth. Or perhaps *writing* would be the thing that images once were not, but are no longer not—

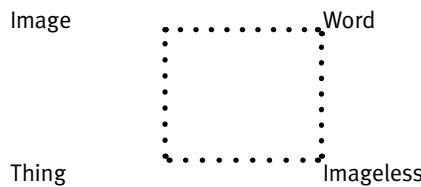
TOM MITCHELL: —or might become.

So here's another candidate, completely ad hoc: The image is not a word. That's obviously wrong. I can deconstruct that right away; I'm sure all of us can. Some words are images, there is a poetic craft called *imagism*. But it is one version of the common construction, so *word* could be a corner of the square.

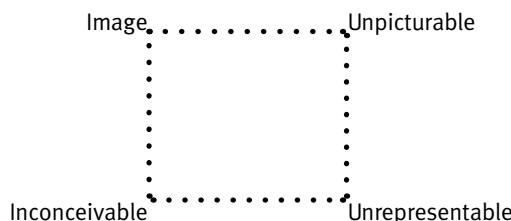
There is also the realm of objects, and in particular things—the distinction being that an object is a thing that has an image. You know how to depict it,

or recognize it, because it has come to you a second time. But if someone says, “Hand me that thing. That green thing over there,” then it’s a thing because you don’t know what it is: it isn’t an object yet. So is a *thing* one of the terms in the square?

Another candidate would be something like the *imageless*, whether that means the unpicturable, the overlooked, that which cannot be shown, or can be seen but isn’t, such as the blind spot. (This also begs a series of questions about the sensory routes through which images come to us. Are they all visual? I don’t think so. But if we constrain this to the visual image, then we have to take up these questions.)



JAMES ELKINS: If the blind spot, or the unseen, is going to be part of the square, then the square has to take its place in the history of interpretations. I say that because the idea that there is something unpicturable, unrepresentable, or uninterpretable, has its own history in image interpretations. You’ve said as much in “Vital Signs: Cloning Terror”—I think you associated it with hermeneutics and semiotics<sup>2</sup>—and I am guilty of having explored the unrepresentable, the unpicturable, and the inconceivable as if they were necessary opposites, outside of the histories that gave them sense or urgency.<sup>3</sup> I recognize that, now, as a late Romantic schema.



So for me, at this point, the Greimasian square itself would be more a mirror of current—early twenty-first century, post-Romantic—notions.

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: I think we did not start by looking for a definition of images, but rather by thinking about the question itself. The two are quite different. To ask

2. Mitchell: “The question of meaning has been thoroughly explored—one might say exhaustively—by hermeneutics and semiotics, with the result that every image theorist seems to find some residue or ‘surplus value’ that goes beyond communication, signification, and persuasion.” “Vital Signs / Cloning Terror,” in *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of*

*Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 9.

3. The concepts of the unrepresentable, etc. are explored in an ahistorical sense in *Pictures of the Body* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) and other books. I wrote a critical review of all that in “Einige Gedanken über die Unbestimmtheit der Darstellung (On the

for a definition, even of opposites and complements, before we have opened the question sufficiently will only lead to false answers. Whether you ask, What is an image? or What is not an image? doesn't matter. I think we should cut the discussion at this point.

A first step forward might be to use the plural. Not, What is not an image? but What are not images? That is because they are singular items, and they are historical. They include materiality, and so forth. So the first step might be to consider that we are able to reflect on the plurality of *the image*.

MARIE-JOSÉ MONDZAIN: The question, What is not an image? depends on how you cut the proposition. So:

What is | not an image?  
 What is not | an image?

According to where the cut is made, the question is completely different. I should like to give an example, from the field I know: for Christians, the question, What is not an image? has an answer: the Jew. He hates images, and there is no image for him, no image *of* him. So if image is life, then whatever is not an image is dead, or becoming-dead, or susceptible to murder. No image, no life.

The distribution of life and death depends on what you are calling an image, because it depends on where you make the cut. When the fathers of the church were speaking against images, and defending images against the iconoclasts, one of their arguments was that when we use a word, we always also use its negation. We can express opposition, negation, criticism, and so forth. But when we show an image, there is no negation, no answer, no opposite. No image is opposite to another image. The image of Christ does not have an opposite in the image of no-Christ. So the image does not know any opposition within itself, and it has no replica.

TOM MITCHELL: So it sounds as if an image could be the negation of a negation.

MARIE-JOSÉ MONDZAIN: Yes.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Concerning the idea that there is no negative image. This is an interesting issue that philosophers have raised as a *logical* problem. I am thinking for example of the logicians of Port-Royal. If you say, The earth is round, and yet the Earth is not round, even so in your imagination you have the same image of the earth and its roundness; but you cannot have an image of not-roundness.<sup>4</sup> Up until Freud, the idea of the impossibility of the negative image

Unrepresentable in Pictures)," in *Das unendliche Kunstwerk: Von der Bestimmtheit des Unbestimmtens in der ästhetischen Erfahrung*, edited by Gerhard Gamm and Eva Schürmann (Berlin: Philo, 2006), 119–40.

4. Arnauld et Nicole, "Des idées selon leur nature et leur origine," chap. 1 in *La logique ou l'art de penser* (Paris: Flammarion), 66: "celui qui juge que la terre est ronde, et celui qui

juge qu'elle n'est pas ronde ayant tous deux les mêmes choses peintes dans le cerveau, savoir la terre, et la rondeur; mais l'un y ajoutant l'affirmation qui est une action de son esprit, laquelle il conçoit sans aucune image corporelle; et l'autre une action contraire, qui est la négation, laquelle peut encore moins avoir d'image".

5. See Section 2.

was very important. It concerns the image of death: you can have an image of a cadaver, but you cannot have an image of a nonexisting person.

JAMES ELKINS: To continue with Steffen's question: I would want to consider things we might not be able to talk about so easily if we continue to use *image* and its proliferating contrasting terms. We could ask what this discourse limits, what it makes possible and what it makes difficult.

I notice here, for example, we have little to say about individual images of any sort, whether they are considered as things in history or not. I doubt we would be able to make our way easily from this conversation to detailed conversations about, for example, the methods of searching chest X-rays for signs of tuberculosis, or the nearly microscopic marks that border the stripes in a Mondrian painting, to take examples from my introductory talk. Specialized languages don't just add to what we are considering here: I suspect they are deeply disjunct from it. But this leads back to the disjunctive dimension of Steffen's question.<sup>5</sup>

Another way to think about this issue is to ponder *image* and *picture* in other languages. I do not want to repeat material that is extensively available elsewhere, but I wonder if any of us would like to contribute ideas that are pertinent to our immediate problem, What is not an image?

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Gottfried, I wrote for the *Dictionary of Untranslatable Terms*.<sup>6</sup> Do you think German *Bild* has the same meaning as *image*? *Image* does not have the same meaning as *eikon* or *eidolon*. In the Greek there is no link between the problematic of the image and the one of imitation. *Eikon* and *mimesis* belong to two completely different fields. It's not the case in Latin, where this link did exist—*imago*, *imitando*—and I think that this meaning of *image* is completely foreign to German language and thought.

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: You are totally right. The differences of the terms belong to the cultural fields of languages. In German, *Bild* means the material and spiritual aspect of the image, considered together; and the power of production, of forming.<sup>7</sup>

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: So it is a *dynamic* concept.

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: *Einbildungskraft* means the power of producing the image. *Bildung* means the social process by which you can come to share your own culture. Those distinctions are always bound together in the German word *Bild*, and I think that differs from other languages.

JAMES ELKINS: So in this sense, what is outside *image*—considered as *Bild*—is the static, and whatever is outside of culture, or is not susceptible to being formed as a person or a culture is formed.

6. *Vocabulaire Européen des Philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, edited by Barbara Cassin (Paris: Seuil, 2004), forthcoming in English translation as *European Vocabulary of Philosophies: Dictionary of Untranslatable Terms* (tentative title).

*Bild* is Marion Müller, "What Is Visual Communication: Past and Future of an Emerging Field of Communication Research," *Studies in Communication Sciences* 7, no. 2 (2007): 7–34. [–J.E.]

7. A good introduction to the meanings of

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: For me this distinction is crucially important. Because of the influence of German philosophy—Kant, Hegel, Heidegger—our theorization of the Image is pervaded by this sense of *Bild*. In France we imported a German conception of *Bild* into our discourse. The idea of process and production is completely absent from the Latin word, which is used in French and Italian.

SI HAN: For me, the question, What is not an image? depends on how we define the term *image*. There are two words in Chinese for what is named by *Bild* or *image* in Western languages. One is *tu* 圖, which means graphical images, and *xiang* 象, which refers to all kinds of imagery and has been used for *phenomenon*, *appearance*, *likeness*, *imitation*, *resemblance*, *figure*, *symbol*, *metaphor*, *imaginary*, and *imagination*. This reminds us of Tom's distinction between *picture* and *image*. If I think in terms of the Chinese *tu*, the only images we saw this week are Marie Krane's diptych and several films, including some from the Stones' collection.

Things that are not images are usually juxtaposed with the words that we use for *image*. In Chinese *tu* is juxtaposed with *texts*; *xiang* is juxtaposed with *meaning* and *speech*. For Chinese philosopher Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249 A.C.E.), *texts* (*shu* 书) cannot fully express *speech* (*yan* 言), and *speech* cannot fully express *meaning* (*yi* 意)—and that is why we need *image* (*xiang* 象). Once we get the image, we can forget the speech, and once we get the idea, we can forget the image. So if we define *image* as *xiang*, then meaning and language are not images in the Chinese hierarchy of *text-speech-image-meaning*. But what is included in *xiang* is really extensive.

TOM MITCHELL: Let me propose something that may only be available in English: the distinction between *picture* and *image*. I take them in a vernacular, common-sense way, to designate the material object that contains the picture, and the image itself. There is a sense in which the image is immaterial: it is the name of an apparition, a phenomenon, or maybe a relationship that occurs to a consciousness. It is an image for somebody, of something. But the picture is the material realization: an actual photograph, a painting, or—to stretch the language—a statue. We say in English, “You can hand a picture,” but we don’t hand an image. You can cut a picture in half, but what does it mean to cut an image in half?

MARIE-JOSÉ MONDZAIN: In Greek, the differences are very strong, because *eikon* is a verb, not an object. If you have *ikon* as image, you have *eikonisma*, *homoiôma*, *mimêma*, all natural words—but *eikon* is on the same side as *mimesis*, not *mimêma*. In Greek, *eidolon* is on the side of the natural world, and natural worlds.

The lexical distinction in Greek is very clear: *eikon* is a verb, and implies action and process. It does not always imply there is something to see. But when it does imply that, the questions remain: What is *eikon* in what we are seeing? Where is the process? Where is the temporal effectuation of the gaze? Inside the thing we are looking at.

8. For these terms, see Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*, translated by Rico

Frances (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 70, 85, 89.

When we speak of *mimésis*, it is important to make the distinction with *miméma*. Same with *homoiôsis/homoiôma* and *poiesis/poiema*.<sup>8</sup> All this can happen within the same object.

JOEL SNYDER: I admit to being lost. We keep going back to origins, to the Greeks. So I want to go back to the Scholastics. In Aquinas and the people who follow him in the interpretation of Aristotle, *image* comes up in terms of the product of the imagination. Imagination is used to hold together a world that is holding together a world that is flying past us, that is not static. I can put sensations together to form an image. That is pretty much how I understand John Peckham, or Aquinas. But under that view of things, we are suffering from the tyranny of the visual. Whenever you identify something you can sense, you have formed an image. That means there would be images of taste, acoustic images, musical images, olfactory images. When we talk about images here, we mean *visual* images: but by attending to the Scholastic sense of images, we might learn a lot more about some sense of image that would hold all our meanings together.

JAMES ELKINS: And it would make it much more difficult to say what is not an image: or to put it differently, the Scholastic interpretation could explain why the question, What is not an image? is so difficult to pin down.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Even in Plato, the image can be a way to reach the truth, the relation between *mythos* and *logos*. But the image can also be an obstacle to attaining the truth. Why? Because an image is never a universal. It is always the image of a single, sensible object. In Plato the image is not only ontologically opposed to the Idea; it is also an obstacle that prevents us, not only from reaching the Idea, but even from looking for the Idea. There are two aspects to the Platonic definition of the image. First it is an obstacle, but it is also something that *seduces* us, takes us off the right path. This is the crucial point about Plato's criticism: the image is dangerous because it is an obstacle, and also because it prevents us from *desiring* the truth, because it satisfies us, it gives us pleasure.



### 3. ACCOUNTS OF IMAGES, AND ACCOUNTS THAT BEGIN FROM IMAGES

*There is no concise way to name the subject here. Some theories of images set out to explain them directly; Goodman and Peirce are examples, and so are Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Other accounts take image as an undefined term, or one that has a commonly agreed-upon meaning, and consider what happens to images and pictures in the world. The difference between those two kinds of accounts is a fundamental reason why it is not possible to make a listing, or even a classification, of theories (as in Section 1).*

*This portion of the conversation was aimed at understanding that difference, and finding a way to talk about it that could bridge the gap between different conceptualizations of what an account of images might be.*

JAMES ELKINS: I would like to focus for a while on one of the most important reasons why a list of theories is easy and therefore unpromising (as Tom says) or impossible (as I had said). It is the difference between accounts that intend to address images directly, which would include almost all the ones we have talked about so far, and accounts that take some notion of the image or the visual as a starting point, a given in the mathematical sense. The most common form of the second kind of account is one that is interested in politics and society.

There are a number of examples, but I want to begin with a distinction Marie-José made the other day, which precipitated this issue for a lot of us. She assigned the difference between the two kinds of accounts to a difference between the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions. The Platonic tradition, she said, is the one that has the question, *What is an image?* while the Aristotelian tradition has the question, *What do images do?* Aristotle was interested in politics, in *doxa*, and so forth, and so—in Marie-José’s description—his claim wasn’t only that we can’t think without images, but that we cannot *live together, make sense together, without images*.

All week I have been mulling over how to introduce this subject, because a prevalent discourse has it that all interpretations already are about politics, community, and society. We all know how to argue that every aesthetics is a politics. So it can be problematic to open this question, and I am grateful that Marie-José introduced this genealogy.

A second way to think about this issue is bibliographically. In that sense I think it is indisputable that some ways of writing about images are very much concerned with how images themselves are structured, what they are, and what they mean. We have some Fellows here this week whose work is focused on these subjects—I am thinking of Alexis Smets, Steffen Siegel, Aud Sissel Hoel, and

Catherine Burdick, for example—and we have others for whom the question is really more, What do images do? How do they work in the world? Two of our three evening lectures were very strongly on politics—I am thinking of Marie-José's and Tom's.

So if the issue begins to seem muddled, and it seems to be necessary to say that we are all necessarily Aristotelian in this sense, or that no inquiry can proceed without also interrogating the image itself, then I think it is helpful to recall the very real bibliographic differences that separate our practices into these two large groupings.

TOM MITCHELL: I don't think that Marie-José would continue to stand very long behind the idea that Plato asks only, What is an image? and Aristotle asks only, What do images do? Aristotle also asks, What is an image? and vice versa.

To me the difference is that Plato comes to images with a deep suspicion. He is very concerned about what they do, and about limiting their power, and he is concerned about appropriating them, as he does in the allegory of the cave, in order to produce a metapicture that allows us to get outside the image, and then go back into it critically. So for me, he is the great inaugurator of the great critical tradition.

Whereas Aristotle comes on images as a taxonomist, a biologist. He asks, What are images? How do they ramify? What are their varieties? I think he already saw what Wittgenstein understood as the distinction between showing and seeing, in the theory of mimesis. Sometimes, in the theater, we tell a story, and other times we act it out, we show it. So I wouldn't split Plato and Aristotle that way.

JAMES ELKINS: The distinction then becomes an origin myth—

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: I think Plato, among philosophers, is the one who was most acutely aware of the power of images. The machine he built against the image shows how much he was aware of their incredible power.

So I agree with you, Tom. Aristotle thought that images do good things. They have a positive action.

TOM MITCHELL: He learned from them.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Whereas Plato was suspicious.

JAMES ELKINS: I don't mind giving up the distinction as a claim about Plato and Aristotle, and taking it as an origin myth—I think that is more how Marie-José intended it in that conversation. I was hoping to use it as a springboard, because contemporary discourse makes it difficult to address the question at all. Those for whom community, society, and politics are not the central issues are in a certain way voiceless because what they have to say is subsumed into, or is seen as part of, what is considered as essentially or inevitably political discourse.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: The theory of images in Aristotle is developed in the *Poetics*, the *Ethics*, and the *Rhetoric*. There are a few sentences in the *Metaphysics*, the analytic works—

TOM MITCHELL: There is also material on images in the psychology, on the theory of the soul—

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Yes. This is very interesting as a contrast to Plato, where images are developed along with a general theory of knowledge, against a metaphysical background. Immediately, in Aristotle, image has to do with community, with relations to others.

It is significant that the theory of the image, in Aristotle, is developed inside a theory of theater, and not of painting. That is completely different from Plato. The insistence upon *theater*, and the paradigmatic role of theater, is crucial. Aristotle comes back, against Plato, to the origin of the concept of *mimesis*. The original meaning of the word is theatrical, and that's important because theater is a public art: it has to do with the relation between audience and actors.

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: Two small points. The question, What is an image?, considered as a Platonic question, is linked with the other question, How do images work? You can't answer the first question except by relation to the other.

The other point, regarding Plato: if you enlarge the subject from the image to the myth, things look quite different. It becomes more complicated because he recounts myths in order to explain theories. That is very strange.

But to come back to your intention, Jim, when you introduced this alternative between Plato and Aristotle. For me it is decisive whether we relate to images in an iconophobic, iconoclastic manner, or in a manner that recognizes the power that resides in images.<sup>1</sup> There is the beginning of a discussion in sociology regarding images, for example. It is not our question, but it is interesting to observe that discussion: does it relate to the power of images, or to a determination that attempts to bring images back to language, to *mortify* images?<sup>2</sup>

TOM MITCHELL: I am very glad Jacqueline has brought in the paradigmatic example of each philosopher, painting (for Plato) and theater (for Aristotle). This connects to our presumption, which I have been wanting to question since the beginning, that the image is always visible.

Images occur in all the media, in all the senses. For Aristotle, *mimesis* occurs in music and in dance, and in the imitation of the language of the hero or the buffoon. The image goes across the media. It starts from his ontological presumption that man is the imitative animal, that it is natural to us to imitate, to make artifice, to produce representation.

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: Resemblances.

TOM MITCHELL: And in many senses, not just through the eye. There is a kind of hypertrophy of the eye in Plato.

1. Boehm, "Ikonokasmus: Auslöschung—Aufhebung—Negation," in *Wie Bilder Sinn erzeugen: Die Macht des Zeigens* (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2007), 54–71.

2. Jeffrey Alexander at Yale and other sociologists in Germany discuss the iconic turn in the field of sociology. See, for example, Jeffrey

Alexander's paper "The Performativity of Icons: Architecture, the 'Critic' and the Variability of Iconic Power," presented November 18, 2008, at the Yale University Twentieth Century Colloquium, and also at the Konstanz University Iconic Turn Conference II, December 14, 2008.

JAMES ELKINS: I notice that we are finding a different reading of Plato and Aristotle, one that seems more plausible and is therefore less of an origin myth—but one that can still support and perhaps explain the distinction with which I began, between theories of images and theories of how images work. I also like the idea that iconophobia and iconoclasm can be ways of understanding this distinction.

I want to bring this up again to the present. I have two examples in mind: first there is Jacques Rancière, who prefers the term *imageness*, which he defines as “a regime of relations between elements and between functions” or an “interplay of operations.” He has a simple model of images in the ordinary sense: they were mainly concerned with likeness, resemblance, or their modernist opposites. What interests Rancière is not the images themselves, or even the traditional modernist discourse around them, but the relations among them and the ways they can “produce a discrepancy, a dissemblance.”<sup>3</sup> In that sense, it is not a theory of images, or even a theory preeminently concerned with visual objects. (I think this distinction between *imageness* and *images* is entangled with the reasons he has become so popular in the art world.<sup>4</sup>)

Second, it is no secret that one of my interests in this question is to understand the disjunction between studies of science, technology, and other non-art practices, which are often about the nature of the image in a particular case, and any number of studies in visual culture, which take an idea of images for granted and ask about their dissemination in the world. There’s Francis Burke and Catherine Gorman’s study of porcelain teeth, for example, in *Visual Practices Across the University*.<sup>5</sup> It’s all about the color science of porcelain teeth—

TOM MITCHELL: Porcelain teeth?

JAMES ELKINS: It’s an unusual subject for a study of images.

TOM MITCHELL: On the contrary: you should see Ronald Paulson’s study of white teeth in *Critical Inquiry*.<sup>6</sup>

JAMES ELKINS: That sounds like a perfect example of what I mean. A social and historical analysis of the meanings of white teeth, as opposed to a technical analysis of what comprises a white tooth. You send me that essay, I’ll send you this one.

Can I take this as an unsolved problem? From my point of view we have barely even opened the question.

3. Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, translated by Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2007).

4. Rancière’s influence on the art world is different from his reception in academia. See Ben Davis, “Rancière, for Dummies,” a review of Rancière’s *Politics of Aesthetics* (New York: Continuum, 2006), [www.artnet.com/magazineus/books/davis8-17-06.asp](http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/books/davis8-17-06.asp) (accessed July 2008).

5. Francis Burke and Catherine Gorman, “Matching Shades of Crowns,” chap. 11 in *Visual Practices Across the University* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2007).

6. Paulson, “The Perfect Teeth: Dental Aesthetics and Morals,” *Critical Inquiry* 34, no. S2 (2008): S130–45.

#### 4. ONTOLOGY

*One of the deepest differences between theories of images is one that can be identified with ontology. There are those, like Gottfried Boehm, who are committed to understanding the nature of images—what makes them different from other things, such as language. For other writers, ontology can have a real power in the ways images are used and understood, but it is something that is believed by others. This is one of the most delicate questions in image theory, because it can be exquisitely difficult to know where writers stand on the issue. Still, there is an enormous distance between people for whom images have an essential nature, and people for whom any such “nature” is a desire, the product of a certain history of ways of conceptualizing images, or a fiction that is useful for some further project.*

*In the summer of 2006, Tom Mitchell and Gottfried Boehm exchanged letters comparing their interests, which touch on this issue.<sup>1</sup> In one letter Boehm reiterates the question that has guided him for a number of years: How do images create meaning? This question is articulated through a series of other concepts, including the iconic logos. The recurrent idea is to ask how meaning “can articulate itself without borrowing from linguistic models . . . or from rhetorical devices”—in other words, before, under, or outside language. Nothing in Mitchell’s work corresponds to this ontological interest, but because the powers of images are visible to all, they agree broadly on many points. This exchange was perhaps useful in that regard.*

JAMES ELKINS: So far, we have only just touched on the question of the ontology of images. To open this subject, let me provisionally call an “ontological reading” one that attempts to find in images something other than language or logic—something that inheres in images. There is a contrast between ontological readings and those by writers who prefer to talk about how images are treated, what reactions they provoke in the world, how they are treated, and many other *effects* whose interest is not—in these accounts—thought to be explicable in terms of the *nature* of images.

Of course Gottfried Boehm has been working on the nature of images for years, and so I thought I would just name a few of the operative concepts he has used.

Perhaps the most fundamental is the notion of the “nonverbal, iconic *logos*,” which you describe in one passage as the origin of an “iconic knowledge” distinct from, and possibly underlying, other knowledge, for example linguistic

1. The Seminar participants read an unpublished English version of the exchange. See Boehm, “Iconic Turn: Ein Brief,” and Mitchell, “Pictorial Turn: Eine Antwort,” in *Bilderfragen*:

*Die Bildwissenschaften in Aufbruch*, edited by Hans Belting (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2007), 27–48.

knowledge.<sup>2</sup> In your new book you open by considering the phrase *das Ikonische zu denken*: to think the iconic, to understand how images create meaning apart from language, and therefore also apart from semiotics.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere you say that pictorial meaning is “nonpredicative,” and does not involve truth and falsity. It entails instead questions of clarity or obscurity, a “logic of intensity or of forces.”<sup>4</sup>

There are many other concepts: you also speak of a thing called an “iconic intelligence,”<sup>5</sup> and you have developed the idea that images possess or evoke “a different mode of thinking”<sup>6</sup>—but this is enough to open the question.

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: I think a good starting point might be to choose the term that is usually used, and that is *iconology*. It is a good term for our question of ontology, because it determines a relation between icons and what can be said about them. Icons are able to mirror reality, and so it is important to develop a critical understanding of that capacity. There are two sides to this question, external and internal. It is important to develop an understanding of the image as copy, as *Abbild*: as it is defined in relation to external realities. On the other side of the question, it is important to develop ideas about the *internal* sense of the icon. Here Tom and I have different determinations.

In relation to the term *iconology*, the accent shifts from *logos* to *icon*, with the consequence that the *logos is the icon*, or to put it differently, the *icon as logos* is thematized. How is this possible? It is a question of differentiating between structures of language and structures that generate sense within images. We have discussed some mechanisms for this; some of our conversations were very intense on these subjects, and we can come back to them here.<sup>7</sup> In my language for speaking about images, these mechanisms have to do with *iconic difference*: a quality that can, in my view, participate in all images, all pictures. It has to do with historically and anthropologically transformed differences between a

2. Boehm, “Iconic Knowledge: The Image as Model,” unpublished in English. In that text, “iconic knowledge” appears first as a question: “Does something like *iconic knowledge* exist?,” and that leads, several sentences later, to another question: “How do *image* and *concept* meet each other in *the image itself*? The concept of *model*, and of the “interlacing” of concepts and images, is the means of developing the concept of iconic knowledge in this essay. *Wie Bilder Sinn erzeugen: Die Macht des Zeigens* (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2007), 120: “Wie lässt sich mit Bildern überhaupt Wissen erzeugen? Gibt es dergleichen wie ikonisches Wissen?”; see also letter to Tom Mitchell, unpublished in English, ¶2.

3. *Wie Bilder Sinn Erzeugen: Die Macht des Zeigens* (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2007), 9. The expression is associated initially with *Bildwissenschaft* (“Das Ikonische zu denken führt auf schwankenden Boden, auch dann, wenn eine gewachsene öffentliche Aufmerksamkeit, ein sich ausbreitendes Forschungsinteresse und das Aufkommen des Titels Bildwissenschaft Stabilität und sichere Wege verheissen”), although

the concerns of the book are more capacious, especially in terms of ontological concerns.

4. Boehm, “Indeterminacy: On the Logic of Images,” unpublished manuscript, 6–7. “Unbestimmtheit: Zur Logik des Bildes,” in *Bild und Einbildungskraft*, edited by Bernd Hüppauf and Christoph Wulf (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2006), 248. An English version of this volume is forthcoming. The context of the argument was an analysis of paintings by Cézanne and Monet, especially the concept of “sensation”: “In unserem Sinne eröffnet die Sensation einen Zugang zu jener Potentialität des Bildes durch die der Mangel an Bestimmtheit in einem Überschuss an Sinn umschlägt. Seine Logik hat mit der Differenz von Energien zu tun, mit der Organisation visueller Kräfte” (247–48).

5. Letter to Tom Mitchell, § II, ¶ 3.

6. Letter to Tom Mitchell, ¶ 1.

7. In particular, the Seminar had earlier discussed Boehm’s paper “It Reveals Itself: Gesture, Deixis, Image,” unpublished English translation of “Was sich zeigt: Geste, Deixis, Bild” (unpublished MS, ca. 2009).

continuum—ground, surface—and what is shown *inside* this continuum. This difference is constituted by elements—for example, signs, objects, figures or configurations—and has to do with contrasts. They appear in an infinite “number of manners,” formed up in the course of history. To make an image, that means nothing else than realizing this contrast, giving it a distinct appearance. Marie Krane, for example, follows a way of repetition. She connects very small elements to a visually unstable grid. Seen simultaneously, the dots generate an oscillating totality, which leads the beholder to the threshold of perception. Other pictures by other artists follow quite different strategies, but basically they all work with contrast and visual unity. The iconic difference, in the sense in which I mean it, is the consequence of the interplay, intersection, or coming together of these two ontological classes, which are *totally different*. They are like fire and water, but they are one.

The quality of the horizon, and the quality which is shown *before* the horizon, are totally different, and it is a miracle that they come together in the image. The main point for me is to understand how they come together. This is what iconology should be, and also what the conditions of the ontology of the image are.

By the way: the term *ontology* is not used in the traditional metaphysical sense. It has nothing to do with an essence, or very general distinction: it means *this image*, *this painting*, *this drawing*; it means the status of the phenomenon. I want to discuss the prevailing iconic event or process, the image or picture as singularity. General and theoretical aspects are devolved from the phenomenon itself.

AUD SISSEL HOEL: Gottfried, could I ask you to elaborate on this point? In what way does your approach differ from ontology in the traditional metaphysical sense?

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: Thank you, Sissel, for this important and complicated question. To put it briefly: my position is based on a critique of traditional metaphysics and ontology which was established during the twentieth century by philosophers like Husserl, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Whitehead, Derrida, and others. The main point is that general (that means ontological) terms do not fall from the heaven of ideas, but they depend on processes in time, history, or perception. If you want to establish a theory or, as we say, an ontology of the image, this Greek “on” must be derived from our experiences in time. Husserl called these acts of experience *intentionality*, Heidegger *Dasein* or *historicity*; analytical philosophers argued with the play of language (*Sprachspiel*) and based their theoretical argumentation on a critic of language. After this critique, ontology is no longer pure; it is less general and does not hover any longer over sensual reality. A theory of the image must therefore be linked with those processes of experience, with the domain of effects and affects, with the eyes of the beholder, his implicit or outspoken interpretations. The image as theoretical object is a concrete act in the sense of the Latin verb *concrescere*, which means “to grow together.” The general and the individual is one single quality.

JAMES ELKINS: Can I ask about the intersections between the discourse that begins from these places, and discourse that makes use of the concept of *logic*? In your essay on indeterminacy, you say pictorial meaning is “nonpredicative” and does not involve truth and falsity. It entails questions of clarity or obscurity—a “logic of intensity or of forces.”<sup>8</sup>

Two questions occur to me here. First, there is a literature on what Susan Haack calls “deviant logics,” logical systems that do not operate according to Aristotelian norms.<sup>9</sup> So I am curious whether you have developed connections between the interests you have in “nonpredicative” logics, or logics of forces, and the various systems that have been proposed as alternatives to Aristotelian logic.

And the second question, then, is how you would talk about the connections between logic, as you use the concept, and the terms you have been adumbrating, such as *iconic difference*, the *logos* of the *icon*, *iconic intelligence*, the notion of *thinking the iconic*, and others.

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: You are totally right that the common determination of logic cannot be used in this field, and that it is nevertheless necessary to formulate the meaning of logic appropriate to images. Logic, in this context, means the determination of the rules that come into play when one observes the mechanisms of pictures and images. These rules have to do with visual phenomena. For example, there is the just mentioned phenomenon of *contrast*: in my view, it is a “logical” condition of the image, it forms the basis of the power of the iconic difference, which generates sense. It is very remarkable that Alfred North Whitehead introduced visual contrast—unavoidably visual—into his theoretical philosophy and gave it an important role as one of his eight fundamental categories.<sup>10</sup>

So we can discuss logic as a visual phenomenon, outside language. It is very important that we not use the model of language: I want to be emphatic about this, because it is terribly important to avoid the trap which lies in the structure of the sentence *S* is *P*. This structure reflects also how we see the object: it is something, a thing or object with certain qualities.

JAMES ELKINS: Would it be possible to pursue this without using the concept of logic? If you have rules, structures such a contrast, and so forth, that are making themselves evident—

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: It is possible, yes. But there is a charm to the word *logic*, because it relates to *logos*, linking *logos*, *logic*, and *icon*. And it demonstrates that *logos* is more than verbal: the world is richer than what can be said or described, beyond saying there is showing, the revelation through the image (not to speak about music or other cultural nonverbal languages.) It was you, Jim, who argued in

8. Boehm, “Indeterminacy.” German version, “Unbestimmtheit: Zur Logik der Bilder,” in Hüppauf and Wulf, *Bild und Einbildungskraft*, 248.

9. Haack, *Deviant Logic, Fuzzy Logic: Beyond the Formalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); also Haack, *Philosophy of Logics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

10. Frederic Fitch, “Combinatory Logic and Whitehead’s Theory of Prehensions,” *Philosophy of Science* 24, no. 4 (1957): 331–35; Alfred North Whitehead, chap. 2 in *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Free Press, 1977), 2.

this direction, with your lucid and audacious book *Pictures and the Words That Fail Them*. But it would be enough to call the things I am speaking of *rules*—*Regeln*, in Wittgenstein's sense.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Gottfried, I agree that ontology can be misleading. But I don't think we need to fear any misunderstanding. For fifty years now, ontology has had a completely different meaning. Now when we talk about ontology, no one refers to any metaphysical meaning.

I just wanted to add, because perhaps American readers might not know, that the first to use the expression “ontology of art” was a French philosopher, Etienne Gilson, in a book called *Art and Reality*.<sup>11</sup> Gilson is a realist, a Thomist. He is interested in what he calls the “mode of being” of the work of art; he distinguishes the aesthetic mode of being and the artistic mode of being.

My question concerns the word *iconology*. I wonder if it might not be misleading because of its history. It is difficult to separate the use of a word from its history. In this case, *iconology* comes from Cesare Ripa; in his sense, the *logos* of *iconologia* is one of language.<sup>12</sup>

So don't you think that this word *iconology* maintains a meaning you want to fight against? Doesn't it maintain the privilege of language? Shouldn't we invent another word?

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: You are totally right. That is why I started with the word. Ripa gives the impression of a natural *topos*, that language is the place where our question of the image can be located. The definition of the term is overlaid with language. Perhaps it is not possible to change the sense of the term, but it seemed to me that for the purposes of an inquiry into the nature of images, it would be interesting to see what could be done beginning from this position, from this history.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Each time you use the word *logos*, or *logique*, we have to mentally redefine the word. So perhaps this will work in twenty years' time—

AUD SISSEL HOEL: Yes, and for this reason I would like to bring some alternative terms to the table. Earlier Jim asked if it would be possible to pursue this argument without using the term *logic*. I certainly see Gottfried's reasons for keeping the term. Still, I would like to propose some alternatives: how about “the formative power of images” or “the differential power of images”?

JAMES ELKINS: In addition to this historical and historiographic question—which should also include uses of the word *iconology* in Aby Warburg and others—there is also a practical question. We haven't mentioned the fact that Tom Mitchell uses the same word, *iconology*, in a very different sense. He does not intend it to conjure the *logos* of the *icon*. I have been collecting uses of the word *iconology* among young scholars, and I find some take it in Gottfried's sense, and some in Tom's. In both cases, it is taken as a license for a kind of freedom from existing

11. Gilson, *Painting and Reality* (London: Kegan Paul, 1958), translation of *Peinture et réalité* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1958).

12. On Ripa's *Iconologia*, see especially Gerlind Werner, *Ripa's Iconologia: Quellen, Methode, Ziele* (Utrecht: Haentjens, Dekker and Gumbert, 1978).

art-historical practices—a freedom that is not necessarily connected to its critical context in either Gottfried's or Tom's writing.<sup>13</sup>

**GOTTFRIED BOEHM:** But perhaps we could also widen this discussion of iconology and ontology to include the problem of history. To what extent—and I address this to you, Tom—do we need history to do our work? This is an open question in the rivalries between art history, visual studies, and what we are doing. How much history is needed to understand our question, What is an image?

**TOM MITCHELL:** We always need more history than we have. Is history enough? No. Is Lascaux a historical site? Yes. Is it also a nonhistorical site? Yes, and we need both. I think one half of the question of iconology is answered by the imperative *Always historicize*. Always place the image in its context—and context includes discourse, language, words. But also: *Always decontextualize*, because the image always resists text, leaps out of it. So the second imperative, I would suggest, is *Always anachronize*. Always defy the notion that history explains everything. If Lascaux were purely a matter of history, we couldn't even see the images. The fact that they transcend history, that they leap across historical boundaries, is what lets them speak to us (I wouldn't say they are intelligible to us, but that they speak). They show themselves to us, and we understand something.

**GOTTFRIED BOEHM:** And what about *anthropology*, the term Hans Belting has used?<sup>14</sup>

**TOM MITCHELL:** I don't have a precise sense of anthropology as he uses it. Anthropology has gone through a cultural turn; recall the *October* "Visual Culture Questionnaire."<sup>15</sup> They accused visual culture of being a visual anthropology, and then they concluded that it was ahistorical. To me that betrays an ignorance of what was actually going on in anthropology. To me, anthropology asks the ontological question, What is the human? That is what its *logos* is, the *anthropos*. To me there is a deep ahistorical core to anthropology. It is about space, the environment, location of the social, the articulation of the social as a synchronic matter. Classic anthropology was trying to get at the ontology of the human, to ask the question, What are the anthropological universals?

13. For example, a very interesting project at Leuven called the Iconology Research Group, [www.iconologyresearchgroup.org](http://www.iconologyresearchgroup.org). One of its organizers, Barbara Baert, mentioned Tom Mitchell's work as an impetus for their use of the term "iconology." But the website traces another genealogy: "Iconology is a two-faced beast. To students, it is often presented as a functional subordinate to art history. In the practice of research, it transgresses the borders of its discipline and can devour whole universes of images. Indeed, iconology, as envisioned by Aby Warburg, is supposed to study images produced inside and outside the realm of art. And in order to trace the meanings, histories and transformations of images, iconology is in essence interdisciplinary. Warburg therefore explored anthropology, Erwin Panofsky looked into film, and Ernst Gombrich put psychology

and social sciences to his service. After these famous ventures from within, the pictorial turn however was announced by other disciplines, and implied a critique of art histories' conservative approach to images. Visual studies was formed and opened the realm of images to literary theory, gender studies, performance and film studies and many others. Yet, in the endeavor to study visuality in all its facets the field remains somewhat indistinct." (Accessed July 2008; personal communication, May 2008.)

14. Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2001). A translation is forthcoming from Columbia University Press.

15. "Visual Culture Questionnaire," *October* 77 (Summer 1996): 25; and see Rosalind Krauss, "Welcome to the Cultural Revolution," *October* 77 (Summer 1996): 83–96.

Our discussions the last few days have uncovered one of those universals: human beings are image-using animals. This is not a discovery of this conference! We have known for a long time that man is the speaking animal, the tool-making animal, and that because of those things man exists in history. It is our nature to change our nature, to transform ourselves.

I think of the historical and the anthropological as different, but not as a choice we are compelled to make. I also think that the difference between us, Gottfried, lies in your effort to purify the icon from the contamination of linguistics, perhaps semiotics, discourse analysis . . . I understand that. I fact I share that impulse. But I don't think you can purify the image.

How do we talk about the *logos* of the *icon*? Even the question brings back the repressed. We don't want language, but the image keeps speaking. We don't want words, but the image can't exist without them.

JAMES ELKINS: Looking at my own work, in comparison to both of yours, I wonder if there isn't a third way. I feel the pull of what we are calling ontology—by which I mean the idea that images have something fundamentally nonlinguistic, something outside language and logic, something that needs to be experienced as “pure” in Tom's sense of that word—but I don't believe in it. At the same time, I respond to it differently than you do, Tom. I suppose I'd say that the history leading up to the position Gottfried articulates so well—the history that leads from Plotinus through ideas of the hieroglyph, through Romanticism, up to and into semiotics—is still our history, and that we do not have the distance that would be required to see that history, and its crucial claim of ontological “purity” as one of many hopes and desires people have about images.<sup>16</sup> Ontology, in this sense, has a tidal pull, different from the pull of other understandings of the image. I see it as an overconfidence of some modernist and poststructural art history—not including you, Tom—that this ontological question can be simply deferred or demoted to the level of an intellectual inheritance.

I thought it would be helpful if we talked about what might be posited as the “ontology” of images in senses other than the one Gottfried has sketched. There are accounts that find alternative logic and sense in images, partly inside and partly outside language, more or less immured in the materiality of pictures: there is an enormous variety of such accounts, from Leibniz to Wittgenstein, from Hubert Damisch to Michael Polanyi.

Let me propose that those can be distinguished from accounts that want to find something more definitively outside the rational or the logical: something

16. Where those other hopes and desires are also disciplines that can be elected or emphasized whenever they might be able to help. Tom Mitchell enumerates these in his letter to Boehm: “I suspect that, for you, the relevant science is hermeneutics, the study of the way images make meaning in human history. But there would be other sciences: semiotics and the formal conditions of meaning; psychology, phenomenology and cognitive science, and the

study of conditions of perception and recognition of images; rhetoric and media theory, focusing on the circulation and power of images, as well as the technical innovations in media that transform the very conditions under which images appear to us. And then there are what in English we call the hard or exact sciences—mathematics, physics, and biology.” Mitchell, letter to Boehm, ¶ 3.

that is nonrational or extralinguistic. A local example, but I think a very clear one, is Rosalind Krauss in *The Optical Unconscious*, where she was trying to exempt her favorite modernists from hope of rational recuperation by citing Jean-François Lyotard's notoriously untranslated *Discours, figure* and the Freud of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.<sup>17</sup> This is by way of getting at a difference between accounts that stress the inevitable return of the linguistic, or logic, and accounts that place the stress on what is taken to be irrecuperable.

TOM MITCHELL: Do you think that illogic and irrationality are unique properties of the image? Or are they equally to be found in language?

JAMES ELKINS: They are equally to be found in language, but they *feel* different in images, and that's why this has more to do with a hope or a desire. I guess from my point of view there would be a difficulty in standing as far back from it as you sometimes do, because I feel entangled in it.

TOM MITCHELL: Standing back from what?

JAMES ELKINS: The idea that there might be something nonlogical or nonrational in images. Simply because I see it in so much discourse that I don't feel free of it.

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: I don't agree with the idea that there is an irrational content or background in images that cannot be explained or must be accepted. From a methodological perspective, it's a false conception, because it posits that there is irrationality, which is then followed by a rationality. This opposition is not the state of the art in an intellectual discussion. Sorry.

So when we are speaking about images, we have to always relate the invisible and the visible, the absent and the present, namelessness and what can be named and determined, as Marie-José showed us. Image theory is about that relation.

Naturally the unrepresentable exists, and we have to accept it. It is very important. But it is not an intellectual maxim: it is the horizon of our intellectual world, which we have to accept. It is not a distinction that we should bring to our discussion. So I do not agree with Rosalind Krauss.

JAMES ELKINS: I think she didn't agree with herself! Because in the next books she abandoned that attempt. But it is significant that the dead end exists. It is closely analogous to the dead end Roland Barthes encountered in "The Photographic Image," where he ended in a hopeless place where he was compelled to say nothing, because he had stripped away all the photograph's code.<sup>18</sup> In topographic terms, the horizon, as you say, is sometimes treacherously close.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: I think the most important thing for us is not to be trapped in all those binary distinctions that come from language. The theory of image can help us to think in a new word. The distinctions between rational and ir-

17. Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993); Jean-François Lyotard, *Discours, figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971); Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, translated and edited by

James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961).  
18. See the discussion in *The Domain of Images* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 55–56.

rational work in the domain that is constituted by language. If we try to find a specific logic of the image—and that is what we are all trying to do, in different ways—it *must* be a logic that does not obey the distinctions between rational and irrational, philosophy and history, logic and illogic, and so on.

JAMES ELKINS: I would like to risk an overly quick shift here, and talk about another way of thinking about what structures pictures. Nelson Goodman is pervasive in what I write, and I think Tom would say the same in different words. He makes available a kind of discourse about what images are—what structures them *as* images—if we would want to ask that exact question outside of the contexts in which we normally work. Speaking for myself, Goodman is the air I breathe when I think of questions of what images are, at least in this sense. Every once in a while, I work directly on Goodman in this sense—as in the *Domain of Images*, where the chapters on such things as subgraphemics and semasiology are really indebted to Goodman. But normally, I am after something else, and Goodman is just in the air, or he is the air.

I am suggesting that there is a parallel between your concepts, Gottfried—I mean ideas of contrast, rules, iconic difference, and others—and some of Goodman’s leading concepts. The two sets of vocabularies make for different conversations about images. I may have put this too obscurely; but if your sense of images comes back to such things as *semantic finite differentiation*, *densemess*, or *syntax*, then you are likely to speak of images in different ways than if your sense goes back to contrast, rules, and other concepts.

Two proposals, then: first, that Goodman may be occupy an analogous place to understandings of such things as iconic difference; but the two understandings are *differently connected* to the talk about images that they then enable.

TOM MITCHELL: This goes back, Jim, to your “footnote one” principle.

JAMES ELKINS: The idea that there are some authors, and also some theories, that get cited in the first footnote of scholars’ essays, but that aren’t engaged throughout the texts.<sup>19</sup>

TOM MITCHELL: I can speak about my own sense of Goodman. Yes, it’s true, in some sense I have internalized his vocabulary and his ideas. I rely on them for a certain kind of analysis of certain logics of the image. In particular there is the concept of the analog and the digital, and also of the dense and the differentiated, and the replete and the articulate. There is a whole set of opposition that are extremely useful for me, and also connect with distinctions from other theories. The current discourse around digital and analog media, for example, would benefit greatly from reminders of the rigor with which Goodman analyzed the topic. The digital is not an invention of the computer. We have had digital codes

19. This is something I had mentioned earlier in the week in reference to Georges Didi-Huberman, who, I had suggested, is now routinely cited in the first couple of footnotes of essays by Renaissance scholars, even though he

is not normally engaged in any serious fashion. This is discussed in *Renaissance Theory*, edited by James Elkins and Robert Williams (New York: Routledge, 2008).

and forms of representation since we have had signs and symbols of any kind, and that includes images. Australian Aboriginal sand painting involves grains of colored sand. You have a stack of ochre, a stack of black, of gold. You know how many grains. You don't count them, but your hand counts them as you paint. That is pixelation, digitization.

Goodman helps us to see that, *because* he is ahistorical.<sup>20</sup> I think it is crucial to his rigor that he does not try to address the historical issues: in fact he explicitly renounces them. He says, I am looking for a general theory of the languages of art, the symbol systems and notational schemes. That doesn't just make him pervasive like the air. For me, he is also an object of analysis. I have written two lengthy essays about him, one in *Picture Theory*—<sup>21</sup>

JAMES ELKINS: I have written on him also: it is possible to step back—<sup>22</sup>

TOM MITCHELL: Right. My essays were attempts to analyze where his language comes from, how it relates to Peirce, what its limits are. In particular, his theory of realism always struck me as necessarily encountering the question of history, so that it just couldn't say much about realism—that was a limit of the theory. So I don't agree he is just pervasive, like air.

JAMES ELKINS: Okay. These metaphors of horizon and air are always in trouble. But here is another way of thinking about this. Goodman provides fundamental, useful concepts, I'll say, for both of us. Then, when Goodman isn't the object of analysis, another *kind* of writing can be done about images, leaving structural analysis and going on to different points—in your case, social and political interests. Gottfried, I think that the move from *your* formative concepts is more *organically* related to what follows—your writing about modernist painting, for example.

Something remains to be said, to be thought, about the move from Goodman outward or onward to other concerns, and I am proposing a parallel here with your work, Gottfried, in order to suggest how problematic it is for me (and, I'd like to suggest, for Tom) to move from Goodman, or Peirce, "out" to the topics that preoccupy us.

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: I admire both *Languages of Art* and *Ways of Worldmaking*.<sup>23</sup> But my problem with *Languages of Art* is the generalizing attitude. He tries to explain everything about art, its symbols, and so forth. I feel that his attitude destroys the possibility of getting to the core point. So I refrain, a little, from the possibilities that are present in his theory.

I was educated in a very different philosophy: Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, and later Wittgenstein. For me, the possibility of building up all of philosophy from intuition, as Husserl did, was a very attractive philosophical idea. I

20. On this question see the debate between Tom Mitchell and Catherine Z. Elgin in *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 25, no. 1 (1991).  
[—E.B.]

21. Mitchell, "Realism, Irrealism, and Ideology: After Nelson Goodman," in *Picture Theory*:

*Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 345–70.

22. Elkins, chap. 5 in *Domain of Images*.

didn't use his system of intentionality, but some crucial ideas, which I found very adaptable to image questions. There is, for example, the difference between ground and figure; the concept of *Abschattung*, the continuum in which things are shown, are present; and the way singular things are presented in this continuum. This is a style of philosophy that interests me, and it is always a little at odds with the philosophy of Wittgenstein.

I am fascinated with the distinction between *showing* and *saying*. It is crucial! The idea that there are two cultural techniques, speaking and showing, is really important, and we haven't understood, until recently, what can be done with it.

So this is my fascination, and therefore I refrained a little from engaging what has fascinated you—Goodman and Peirce.

JAMES ELKINS: I want to pursue this some more. I am very concerned with the coherence of bodies of work. I worry about this with my own work—it is past repair, it has incoherences of many sorts. But I see in your work, Gottfried, a strong coherence. I see the Wittgensteinian element, and I can appreciate how it is folded into what I was calling your ontological claims.

But with my work, and to a certain extent with yours, Tom, there are discontinuities. The kind of thing I mean in regard to your work, Tom, occurs in passages where you say things like “There are deep and fundamental differences between the verbal and visual arts.”<sup>24</sup> That's an example of a moment when the reader is invited to agree that we know what some differences between images and words are.

TOM MITCHELL: Well, that is very similar to the idea of beginning with the vernacular. If I ask anyone in this room what is the difference between words and images, none of them will be dumbstruck. They will all have answers.

JAMES ELKINS: I see. I have been taking passages like that in a different way. I've been reading them as needing Goodman *somewhere*, maybe way in the background, to say what the distinction is. I think of passages like that as moments analogous to moments in Gottfried's work that are explicitly about how images are, what they are: it's *as if* they were ontology.

TOM MITCHELL: No, it's just that Goodman has provided one of the most powerful, systematic, and wide-reaching answers to the question. But it's a question everybody has an answer to. The answers can then be made intelligible, more coordinated, more systematic, by reference to Goodman. That is what I think is the great virtue of his generality.

Gottfried, I don't agree that he tries to explain everything. One of his great virtues is his renunciation of a certain claim to theoretical totality. He explicitly renounces history: he says, I am not even going to deal with the history of this

23. Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978).

24. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 55. The passage is part of the answer to the question, posed in

italics because it represents responses he had gotten to earlier versions of the lecture “What Do Pictures Want?,” “Does the question, what do pictures want? apply to verbal images and pictures as well as to visual ones?”

problem. You will find very few references to the history of philosophy, to Plato or Descartes. But the proof is in the pudding. Is it good thinking? Does it clarify issues? Yes, up to a point. And the thing I love about Goodman is that he knew what that point was. He stated it: he said, This is a restrictive field, the domain of my system.

JAMES ELKINS: Well. I have wanted to stay with this subject of ontology because it seems to me it is one of a very small number of crucial issues in understanding images. If our conversation were longer, we could have talked about how these foundational moments work in Jean-Luc Nancy, or in Georges Didi-Huberman . . . but I always return to these two questions: What sense of images animates the discussion? And how does that sense of images connect with what the writer then goes on to talk about?

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: One last remark. It is important that there are other positions that we're not touching on here. If there were other people here, we would have to come back to the question, What instance could we use to further our explanations or research? How could we judge what is right and what is wrong? Is there such an instance? I mean *instance* as a category of justification or legitimation.

JAMES ELKINS: Yes, and to me the greatest challenge there is the tremendous division between theories that are committed to an ontology and those that speak differently. Here is the passage from Georges Didi-Huberman that I was thinking of a moment ago: "We must try, before the image, to think the negative force within it. . . . There is a work of the negative in the image, a 'dark' efficacy that, so to speak, eats away at the visible (the order of represented appearances) and murders the legible (the order of signifying configurations)."<sup>25</sup>

TOM MITCHELL: Ooh! [Making a conjuring motion with his hands—laughter from the audience.]

JAMES ELKINS: Thanks, I'll transcribe that. But here's the point: this is what some people would call a mystical discourse, and others might call a psychoanalytic discourse—

TOM MITCHELL: I would call it Gothic.

JAMES ELKINS: One of the ways to pursue our question would be to ask how such a moment informs the rest of his discourse. A passage like that is, in a very different way, a commitment to the nature of images, and it differs fundamentally from accounts like yours, Tom, not only because you aren't Gothic. These are comparisons that need to be made.

25. Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, translated by John Goodman (University Park: Penn State Press, 2005), 143. The passage continues, "This work or constraint can be envisaged as a regression, since it brings us, with ever-startling force, toward a this-side-of

("vers un en-deçà"), toward something that the symbolic elaboration of artworks has covered over or remodeled. There is here a kind of anadyomene movement . . . whereby something that has plunged into the water momentarily re-emerges, is born before quickly plunging in again."

AUD SISSEL HOEL: It bothers me that, in our conversation, the acknowledgment of images having a formative power of their own keeps being associated with a commitment to some kind of ontological purity or essentialism. I don't think this needs to be the case.

It is true that the iconic or pictorial turn invites us to focus on the specific ways that images make meaning, and I think we should. The rise of the field of visual culture studies, for instance, could be regarded as a reaction to the long overdue hegemony of language-centric approaches such as semiology and post-structuralism. Not surprisingly, then, phenomenology now seems to be going through a renaissance.

However, I think it is important that we do not go about the task of redefining the image as if poststructuralism never happened. At this point in time, the image could not, should not, be thrust back into the silent murmurs of sensation. So, I suppose all of this boils down to the following question: How are we to conceive of the visual *after* poststructuralism?<sup>26</sup>

TOM MITCHELL: I wouldn't want to rehearse a full answer here. Let me just say that this is precisely the question raised by my essay "The Pictorial Turn," which explicitly renounces the idea that it is merely a *re*-turn to earlier notions of infability, naturalness, and self-evidence sometimes associated with ideas about imagery, but rather a "postsemiotic" and post-poststructural moment, when we are encountering the question of images and pictures in a genuinely new way, as theoretical problems in their own right. I think this is the core of the agreement between Gottfried and myself: our sense that there is something genuinely new in the world about our contemporary understanding of the image, and of course, something radically new in the practical existence and use (could we call this "everyday ontology"?) of images.

JAMES ELKINS: Sissel, let me suggest there are two ways of hearing your question. The first would be a historical question: How have we inherited these ideas, including purity? How has it come to seem that an idea such as purity, or indeterminacy, appears as an optimal starting point, or is essential to images, or is even the whole of their difference? Where was it first elaborated? This is the kind of question that has been studied, for example, by Mark Cheetham, who has written on the history of ideas of purity in twentieth-century abstraction. But another way of hearing your questions would be to acknowledge our entanglement in this issue. We are entangled *in* the issue, not just *with* it. We can't necessarily step back, outside it, in order to consider it alongside other possible concepts—such as the ones you name under the name of postmodernism.

26. This question could also be formulated as follows: What have we learned from post-structuralism? In this context I restrict myself to suggesting four lessons worthy of being kept in mind while we struggle to reconceive the image outside the model of language: that images are

not innocent, that images are shot through and through with cultural meanings, that there is no pure origin, and that there are no privileged forms of expression (that is, forms of expression that are capable of giving expression to "being" in its very becoming).

AUD SISSEL HOEL: One more thing: the other day Markus asked if we need a “supertheory” to support our accounts of images.<sup>27</sup> As we have seen from our conversations, the concept of the image is deeply entangled with other concepts, such as thinking, perception, imagination, language, and so on. For this reason it is hard to rethink the image in isolation, that is, without approaching the task from a more comprehensive conceptual viewpoint.

For the same reason I think it is necessary, or at least useful, to develop some overarching notion of symbolic meaning that is not rooted in a semiotic framework. What I am saying is that when we set out to redefine the image, it would be useful to do so with a broader framework in mind and with an eye to other kinds of symbolisms as well. In this way we can prevent reintroducing old, unproductive dichotomies—

JAMES ELKINS: Right, the consequence of redefining the concept of the image is the redefinition of *all the concepts* that are linked to it, and it would produce a new *configuration* (in French), a new field. That is exactly what Tom and Gottfried are doing.

TOM MITCHELL: I totally agree. I think any redefinition of the image will involve a redefinition of all its companion systems of signification. Language would become something different. This is why Gottfried argues that the pictorial turn grows out of the linguistic turn. It finds the image at the heart of language in a new way.

The idea of purity is one of the symptoms of a pictorial turn. That is why the ontological question is inevitable, and also why I do not accept Jim's earlier characterization of my work as uninterested in ontology, but rather in the politics and social uses of the image. I started this kind work in the eighties with an essay entitled “What Is an Image?,” which strikes me as an ontological question if there ever was one. But to me ontology is not simply the study of “being,” but most fundamentally of “being in the world” and “being with.” So the question is, What does it mean to be *with* or *in* an image?

AUD SISSEL HOEL: I totally agree that the redefinition of the image involves a redefinition of the whole gamut of related concepts, including the concept of *logos*. That was exactly my point.

Indeed, my intention was to push things even further in this direction. I want to question the very dichotomy of intuition and concept that underlies the distinction of showing and saying. I want to call attention to the fact that there is a kind of showing, a *deixis*, at work in language, just as much as there is a kind of saying, or articulation, at work in pictures.

27. [Markus Klammer adds: The other day I had been making a statement about the difference between a theory of the image and a theory of (different types of) images. I had tried to suggest that the use of the word “image” in the sentences “What is an image?” and “What are images?” was rather homonymous than univocal or even analogical. By ironically evoking a “supertheory” of images I wanted to point at

the radical difference that separates questions about the essence of things (questions in the singular) from those questions that start from given practices and already established modalities of use (questions in the plural). As a possible reference for dealing with this difference I mentioned Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. —M.K.]

This is why I am reluctant to accept indeterminacy as a unique property or distinguishing feature of the image. To my mind, there is a productive indeterminacy, a free play of potentiality, at the heart of all kinds of symbolisms, including language.

JAMES ELKINS: But Sissel, the way that you are talking implies that you stand *equally* outside *each* of these elements, so you can rearrange each of them. Whereas what I was hearing in Jacqueline's and Gottfried's responses is that we may not be quite as far from purity, or indeterminacy, as we are from some other concepts.

What I am saying goes across the comments Tom, Gottfried, and Jacqueline have made: I am not arguing about the terms themselves, but about our ability to rearrange them. That ability varies according to the term. That's the sense in which I would say I am between Tom's perspective—in which the purity of images can be observed, as it were, from the outside, watching the ways it works on people's understanding—and Gottfried's—in which indeterminacy is a condition, a fact of images, waiting to be more fully understood. I do not believe that images are constituted according to indeterminacy, but I also do not think that it is one of a potentially equal range of concepts that we control. It controls most of our thinking: with other concepts, for example *repleteness*, or *finite syntactic differentiation*, we control *it*. This is an abstract point about what is amenable to redefinition.

AUD SISSEL HOEL: I don't quite follow you here. I don't believe in God-like perspectives from which we can rearrange our concepts just like that. Rather, I believe in choosing the most convincing framework and then reworking it from within. Eventually, it might result in a new framework.

JAMES ELKINS: I didn't say there is a "God-like perspective": I'm suggesting that your project will run into difficulty because we aren't equally in control of the elements we propose to choose, or arrange, or rework. Some of those concepts own us.

TOM MITCHELL: In respect to "supertheories," we do have such things. Goodman's theory is a "supertheory" that knows its limits. Peirce is a "supertheory" that doesn't know its limits. (It is a "super-duper theory.")

[*Laughter.*]

JAMES ELKINS: That's a new technical term?

TOM MITCHELL: Yes. And then we have weak theories, and I am proposing a "medium theory."

MARKUS KLAMMER: What is the difference between research into images, and research into the aesthetic? The example of the porcelain teeth is about making distinctions. Regarding Gottfried's sense of *logos*: if I make a play on words, I can associate *logos* with *legein*, meaning "to collect." To collect, you have to make distinctions: the art of the *logos* is about finding differences. For a long time, this

locating of differences has been confined to the field of art. But Jim, the example of the porcelain teeth is also about making distinctions, but it has become somehow disconnected from aesthetics.

JAMES ELKINS: Markus: if I heard you correctly, that is a very incisive question. I take it you're implying two things: first, that Gottfried and I might be working on something related to aesthetics, and second, that this work—this research—might be covert. (Perhaps it's a continuation of *fin-de-siècle* aesthetics, or else it's collecting as Benjamin describes it.)

I wonder about the word *somehow*—that a study of porcelain teeth, for example, has somehow become disconnected from aesthetics. At least in the example of porcelain teeth, the dentist (it's funny how much weight we're putting on the contribution of this unsuspecting dentist from Ireland!) might think of his work not as distinctions but as an expression of his professional skills, a result of research. It is true that I am very interested in distinctions, of the sort that *could* be associated with aesthetics, and to tell the truth I have been criticized as a late nineteenth-century style aesthetician.<sup>28</sup> But I wonder also if these new kinds of looking, borrowed from fields as distant as the science of porcelain teeth, aren't just different discourses that appear to us, from our vantage in the humanities, as transposed or covert aesthetics, when actually their distinctions *are actually* their vocabulary. But perhaps aesthetics does reimagine itself—or even disguise itself—as ontology.

SI HAN: Gottfried, in *The Tao and the Logos*, Zhang Longxi discusses the similarities between the two concepts.<sup>29</sup> He follows Gadamer, who reminds us that the original meaning of *logos* is chiefly *language*, though often translated as *reason* or *thinking*. *Tao* and *logos* are seen as comparable and meaning both thinking (*Denken*) and speaking (*Sprechen*). But for Laozi, the constant *tao* can neither be “spoken of” or “shown.” My question is not about the comparison—but can you, Gottfried, explain a bit more clearly in which way you use the term *logos*?

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: The main difficulty seems to be that *logos* is at the same time “the word” and more than the word. This difference often disappears often when *logos* is identified with the human capability to speak. But language is more. In my view it is possible to define *logos* as language if you are prepared to enlarge and broaden the meaning of both terms. Then they include other symbolic systems. Even the Greeks called number (and music) *logos* (not only speech), and we know that we have a whole spectrum of sense-producing-capacities at our

28. If aesthetics is understood as a work of distinctions, then my picture book *How to Use Your Eyes* (New York: Routledge, 2000) is the closest to Klammer's argument. Its chapters can be seen as aesthetics rediscovering itself in new, non-art contexts. Perhaps when the objects, and the images of them, no longer provoke aesthetic pleasure, that link is less strong—as in *Visual Practices Across the University*. My work has several times been accused of being a throwback to the *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism of a

Walter Pater; see, for example, the very unpleasant review by Robert Williams, “Sticky Goo,” *Oxford Art Journal* 25, no. 1 (2002): 97–102, but then also the revised account in the essay by Williams in *Art: Key Contemporary Thinkers*, edited by Diarmuid Costello and Jonathan Vickery (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

29. Zhang Longxi, *The Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992).

disposal. They are all based on the movement of our body, on gesture, on voice, on showing and cultural techniques such as singing, dancing, miming, or the use of different types of signs. They allow us to enrich our experiences. In this context the image plays an outstanding role. But to emphasize its importance does not mean to argue against language. It means that there are other ways to communicate with reality than bare sentences, propositions, or words. The concept of the *iconic logos* leads to the reconstruction of *logos* as a new totality of sense and symbolic meanings. When we understand how images function and how they are connected to the beholder and the different spheres of culture, then we understand even better what *logos* or language really is.

A last remark to your reference to Gadamer, Si Han. Indeed: the last chapter of his book *Truth and Method* discusses our questions. Not that of the image itself (in which Gadamer was nevertheless deeply interested), but other symbolic qualities, for example, the experience of beauty. What he intended is indicated by the title of that chapter: “Language as Experience of the World” (“Sprache als Welterfahrung”). For Gadamer, too, language is more than that what we say when we speak.<sup>30</sup>

30. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1960), III, 3c; and my commentary, “Zuwachs an Sein: Hermeneutische Philosophie und bildende Kunst,” in *Wie Bilder Sinn Erzeugen*, 243–67.



## 5. NON-WESTERN ACCOUNTS

*The week of discussions was very strongly, almost exclusively, Western, in the specific sense that our operative terms were nearly all English, French, German, Greek, and Latin. One morning we had a longer conversation about the possibility of pondering the question, What is an image? from outside that lexicon. It remained an open question whether translation itself was an adequate conceptualization of the problems attending discussion of non-Western accounts of images: is all that is required attention to the possibility or impossibility of translation?*

JAMES ELKINS: A couple of times this week I have resisted our passing interest in non-Western terms. That is not at all because of a lack of interest or Eurocentrism: it is because I think the stakes can be substantially higher than a temporary interest in analogical comparisons or cognate terms in non-Western languages and concepts. On the other hand, I know it is completely unpragmatic to think that non-Western concepts could come to play a more central part in discussions of the image. There aren't any recent PhDs who are going to say, I'm going to stop citing Lacan and Benjamin and base all my work on the *Atthasālini* or the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*.<sup>1</sup>

But conceptually, this is a fascinating and pressing issue. Ladislav, you were present at the panel discussion for *Is Art History Global?*, which contains extensive debates about this question as regards art history—not specifically as it pertains to our question, What is an image?<sup>2</sup> Last year's Stone Summer Theory Institute, on art and globalization, also explored these issues.<sup>3</sup> So perhaps your impression of this is different; but my sense is that I was in a small minority in that book. The preponderance of opinion was that if you're doing a specialized study, then you will need an appropriate vocabulary, but that it would be of interest within the larger framework of art history. Non-Western terms would not play a part in the machinery of the discipline as a whole.

Still, this would have been a different event if we could have found ten fellows (out of the fifteen) who work outside the Western traditions. Scholars like

1. The Seminar participants had all read a revised version of the chapter "Different Horizons for the Concept of the Image," which explores the concepts of the image in Persian, Sanskrit, and Chinese texts. The essay was originally published in *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunsthissenschaft* 43, no. 1 (1998): 29–46 and in *On Pictures and the Words That Fail Them* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

2. *Is Art History Global?*, with an afterword by Shelly Errington and contributions by Fried-

rich Teja Bach, Cao Yiqiang, Shigemi Inaga, Craig Clunas, Suman Gupta, David Carrier, Matthew Rampley, Keith Moxey, Andrea Giunta, Sandra Klopper, Barbara Stafford, Charlotte Bydler, Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Mariusz Bryl, Keith Moxey, Suzana Milevska, Shelly Errington, David Summers, and others (New York: Routledge, 2006).

3. Volume 1 in this series (University Park: Penn State Press, 2010).

Si Han, who has done some interesting work bridging Chinese and Western concepts, are very rare.<sup>4</sup> I think that realistically speaking, it would be hard to find more than five or ten scholars anywhere in the world whose concepts of the image are thought and worked through other traditions.

The question for us, therefore, is, What *kind* of attention should a generalized account of images and pictures pay to non-Western sources?

**SI HAN:** In my years of studying in Sweden, I have found it is very hard to use Western theory to investigate Chinese materials. Exclusion or oversimplification of non-Western thoughts are often embedded in the secondary sources and the results that are drawn from them. You often need to look at what is overlooked. It can be very hard to connect concepts across texts in different traditions.

Visual studies has opened more possibilities, partly because it studies images other than fine art. If we want to make visual studies something global, non-Western theories have to play a role in the core theory of visual studies. And the genealogy of image theories and practices should include as many cultures as possible. It is important to try to think *through* another language; answers can't always be found in the study of concepts, or in the framework provided by Western scholarship.

**JAMES ELKINS:** Yes, I agree with that last thought. In *Is Art History Global?*<sup>5</sup> there is a general confidence that careful scholarship—usually area studies, or postcolonial studies—can locate unfamiliar regional practices of art history, places that are developing different ways of writing about art and its history. The hope is that those practices can be read as part of the conversation of art history, and yet as importantly different from its Western European and North American incarnations. The differences people hope to see range from previously unfamiliar terms, like *citta*, *kya*, *xiang*, or *qalam* (examples from the Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Persian texts in the readings), all the way to different readings of interpretive methods (different senses of psychoanalysis, for example), and ultimately to different primary theoretical texts (Buddhaghosa instead of Benjamin, Qadi Ahmad instead of Jacques Lacan).<sup>5</sup>

I have to say I am skeptical. All I can say is that from my own experience, I have yet to discover a single place in the world where there is a kind of writing that is recognizable *as* a history of art, and yet is different in nameable, significant ways—not just in its subject matter. What I keep finding is people very interested in adopting whatever they consider to be the most interesting or advanced art theory from the West. When there *are* discourses that are different in more than subject matter and a scattering of concepts, they can appear not to be useful *for* or *as* art history: they can appear as parts of wholly different projects.

4. I didn't mention Catherine Burdick, who specializes in Mayan word-image relations, because there is no indigenous historiographic or critical tradition there, so she has no concepts to set alongside the ones provided by North American, European, and Central American work on epigraphy, linguistics, and art history.

5. In addition to the sources named above, see the arguments in *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 110–20, and *Stories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 89–116.

I think that way about Zhang Yanyuan, for example, the ninth-century Chinese historian whose book on the history of painters has become a kind of touchstone for these discussions in China.<sup>6</sup> I'm not a specialist, so I have to defer when Craig Clunas and others tell me that Zhang is fundamentally similar to Vasari. My own sense of it is that his entire history is framed in Confucian terms, because he begins with ideas about how images promote a healthy community and culture. His words for *painting* and *image* are therefore deeply different from the terms that control Western texts.

SI HAN: I have reread Zhang Yanyuan and his translators recently, and especially the opening sentence, in which he stated both the social and the instrumental functions of images.

JAMES ELKINS: In the sentence, how does that work?

SI HAN: The sentence reads like this: *Fu hua zhe: cheng jiao hua, zhu ren lun; qiong shen bian, ce you wei* (夫画者：成教化，助人伦；穷神变，测幽微). In my translation: “Painting is a thing to perfect the civilization, to aid human relations, to reveal infinite changes, and to fathom the subtle.”<sup>7</sup> There is a word in the third phrase, *shen* 神, which is translated by Acker in 1951 as “divine”; but I have done some research, and in Chinese, when the character *shen* 神 is used together with *bian* 变 (“changes”), it is usually interpreted as “endless” or “infinite changes.”<sup>8</sup>

JAMES ELKINS: Aha, so maybe that is Clunas's resistance to my notion that Zhang's project is very different from Vasari's.

SI HAN: Perhaps. A reader of Zhang Yanyuan in Acker's English would obtain an overall impression of someone who is interested in myth. The myth Zhang does mention is about the origin of images, but that's another thing.

JAMES ELKINS: Just to stay with Chinese examples for a moment: there are texts prepared for the emperor Huizong, which catalogue his collection of Chinese bronzes.

6. See the revised version of “Different Horizons for the Concept of the Image,” and also “Afterword” to *Discovering Chinese Painting: Dialogues with Art Historians*, , second edition edited by Jason Kuo (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 2006), 249–56; and my letters to Jim Cahill, in *Stones from Other Mountains: Chinese Painting Studies in Postwar America*, edited by Jason Kuo (Washington, D.C.: New Academia, 2009).

7. Acker translated as follows: “Now painting is a thing which perfects the civilizing teachings (of the Sages) and helps (to maintain) the social relationships. It penetrates completely the divine permutations (of Nature) and fathoms recondite and subtle things.” W. R. B. Acker, *Some T'ang and pre-T'ang texts on Chinese Painting*, 3 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954), 1:61.

8. I have observed that in the Ming dynasty, when Wang Qi compiled the famous pictorial encyclopedia *San cai tu hui* (三才图会), he cited Zhang Yanyuan's statement but changed *shen*

神 into *wan* 万, which means “ten thousand” or “many.” For more discussions on this, see my *A Chinese Word on Images* (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 2008), 150–53. The combination *shen bian* first appears in the commentary of *I Ching*, and the type of images that Zhang Yanyuan had in mind that “reveal infinite changes” is perhaps the hexagrams, which he mentions later in the same passage on the trisection of images. Acker interprets *shen* as “divine” and relates *shen bian* to hurricanes and floods. His translation and footnotes to Zhang's opening passage give Zhang's text a more superstitious color than it deserves, making it hard to infer that the second half of Zhang's statement, *qiong shen bian, ce you wei* (穷神变，测幽微), is actually a characterization of the informative or instrumental function of images, a function that Wang Qi emphasized in compiling his illustrated encyclopedia.

Those texts worked as a full account of the objects—nothing more was needed, or expected. But what they actually tell you is the weight, dimensions, and inscriptions in the vessels. They have no connection to what Westerners would conceptualize as art history, as art that has a history.<sup>9</sup> They would be considered as material for an art history, in the way that archival information can provide the background and framework for a catalogue essay.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: The first question here is the use of Western concepts to analyze non-Western forms of art; and the other question is the use of non-Western concepts to help us understand our own concepts. Those are two different questions.

The first one has to do with translation. When you say that Western concepts are not very helpful in understanding Chinese art, I would say the same happens within Western culture. For example, the Italian distinction between *color* and *colorito*, which played such an important role in the theory of painting, can be and has been translated in French as *couleur* and *coloris*, but it cannot be translated into English.<sup>10</sup> So if you talk about Italian color theory in English, using the word *color*, you completely miss the point. You have to work with the Italian concept.

Another example is *disegno*. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, the French word was written with an “e”: *dessein*, which is the exact translation of *disegno*, with its two meanings of *project* and *drawing*. In the middle of the eighteenth century, French writers omitted the “e,” creating two different words, *dessein* (project) and *dessin* (drawing). These days very few scholars respect this orthographic distinction. They write about the French seventeenth-century theory of *dessin*, misleading the reader; it’s a complete misunderstanding.<sup>11</sup>

So I think it is always necessary to be as careful as possible with translations of concepts, even within Western art.

One more example: I am the editor of a collection of books on aesthetics that are published by Vrin, and last year I published a book by a nineteenth-century author named Eugène Véron.<sup>12</sup> He is completely unknown; I discovered him in a little book stall. He was a successful author, published in English and Japanese, and then after twenty years he was forgotten. But it was Véron’s book that introduced the word *aesthetics* into Japanese. But the word in Japanese means “science of beauty,” and that is the nineteenth-century French meaning of the word, but not the contemporary one.

SI HAN: I agree with you that careful translations of concepts are necessary, Jacqueline. But where there is something lost in translation, there is also something found.

9. This is discussed in my “Remarks on the Western Art Historical Study of Chinese Bronzes, 1935–1980,” *Oriental Art* 33 (Autumn 1987): 250–60, revised in *Our Beautiful, Dry, and Distant Texts: Art History as Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 178–94.

10. See Section 8 of the Seminars.

11. This is why we respected the seventeenth-century orthography in our edition of

the academic conferences of the seventeenth century: *Conférences de l’académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, édition complète, scientifique, et critique*, edited by Jacqueline Lichtenstein and Christian Michel (Paris: École nationale supérieure des Beaux arts, 2006).

12. Vrin, *l’Esthétique*, published as *Essais d’art et de philosophie*, with a preface by Jacqueline Lichtenstein (Paris: J. Vrin, 2007).

I would say that it is very helpful to use Western terms in the understanding of Chinese art, *but* without expecting to totally replace the Chinese account. It is also possible to use Chinese concepts to help us understand “our” own concepts. The Chinese *tu* (图), signifying all possible graphical images, is a term that lacks equivalents in English or German. The fifth-century trisection of *tu* recorded by Zhang Yanyuan is very similar to Elkins’s trisection in *Domain of Images*. Another term is *xiang* (象), which refers to all kinds of imagery. The difference between *tu* and *xiang* reminds us of the distinction Mitchell makes between picture and image in *Picture Theory*. Such comparisons are useful: concepts that are diffuse in one language can be made clearer in another.

JAMES ELKINS: In relation to *dessin*, the question would be whether the internal differences among Romance languages, or Indo-European languages, are equivalent to these other kinds of influences.

In relation to the Japanese example, I would like to mention the tremendous work of the Japanese scholar Shigemi Inaga, an expert on the Japanese reception of the Western reception of Japan. His contributions to *Is Art History Global?* are astonishing, because in part he is interested in stopping anyone, sometimes including himself, from finding any equivalents in translation.

LADISLAV KESNER: Jim, I think Shigemi Inaga’s route leads nowhere. In Chinese art history, at least, you have a long tradition of people using concepts like *fang*, a key concept in Chinese landscape painting theory, or *píng dàn*, a critical term in relation to the painter Ni Zan, in a very responsible manner. I would follow Michael Baxandall’s advice: use the native category and put some explanation around it. On the other hand, I would not agree completely with

SI HAN: I think that Western analytic concepts such as *agency*, *style*, or *meaning* cannot be replaced by anything in the native Chinese tradition, and possibly not in any other. When you get into a deep discussion of art and images, you inevitably end up using the Western categories, and I feel comfortable doing that. I agree with you that art history is an essentially Western discipline, and if you want to have meaningful discourse, you have to use these categories. If I employ expressions such as *visual interest* or *pictorial event*, I know I am doing some injustice to Japanese or Chinese or Benin art, but there is no way around that.

It is necessary to rely on the Western categories, and to use the individual terms judiciously.

JAMES ELKINS: I wouldn’t disagree with that. In the real world, if you intend to finish something and publish it, then there has to be some limit on explanation. The Chinese 平淡 *píng dàn* has a large literature—it is a difficult concept to explain. But what matters more is that the narratives that want to *use* the term are themselves Western. That is my argument in my book on Chinese painting.<sup>13</sup>

13. *Chinese Landscape Painting as Western Art History*, with an introduction by Jennifer

Purtle (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), with further references to *píng dàn*.

TOM MITCHELL: I would invoke an argument Gottfried has made, regarding the icon and the *logos*. We're dealing with two anthropological universals. One is that human beings use language, and in any ideal world, any utopia of humanity, that will continue to be the case, unless we evolve into something totally unrecognizable.

[*Laughter.*]

The other universal is that we are image-using creatures, and the two are connected. That is why there is, as Gottfried says, a *logos* of the icon, and an icon of the *logos*. So it seems to me that the place to situate this whole debate is to recall that art history is coming late to it. Comparative literature has been fighting this out for decades, and there are historical issues that need to be taken into account. I agree with Jacqueline that the differences between English, French, and Italian are considerable, and that translation is unavoidable.

It is going to be the norm in any ideal or possible world. So the notion that somehow every culture and language will have developed a kind of equivalent to Western art history, Western comparative literature, or Western philosophy is setting up an ahistorical chimera. You couldn't expect that any more than you could look at the history of the species and say, Ideally everyone invented the steam engine. Well, no, some people did and some people didn't, and there are perhaps environmental reasons for that.

So let's postulate at the outset the inevitability and centrality of translation. We should also be extremely suspicious of the non-Western, as a category. Here I'd like to invoke my colleague Dipesh Chakrabarty, who is very interested in comparative Asian languages and cultures. He says something that will sound completely politically incorrect, but I want to quote it: "From the standpoint of cultural theory, political theory, and philosophy, India had the good fortune to be colonized by the British Empire."

We're talking about a history of oppression, colonization, and empire, but we can't make up for that by saying that everybody has a right to their art history. It's as if you could take these catalogues of objects and say, as if by fiat, that they possess deep inside themselves a full philosophy of the image. I would say, on the other hand, that we think about the way that concepts, or at least words, out of non-Western languages, have played central roles in human philosophical thought. (I don't believe in "Western thought." I think it's a complete chimera.)

SI HAN: Thank you, Tom! for pointing out this myth of a *purely* Western thought. Think of the Enlightenment: China is everywhere, in Leibniz, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Diderot . . . no matter if they were sinophiles or sinophobes. The knowledge of the other is greater now, but at the same time it is marginalized.

TOM MITCHELL: I think of two terms in particular: *totem*, which comes from right around here, the Midwest, and *taboo*, which comes from Polynesia. Freud writes a book called *Totem and Taboo*, with a sense of what the ethnographers have found; but he makes a completely new thing out of it. I am sure any number of words have worked that way. They have been seen as either completely untranslatable or as constantly requiring a gloss. But that's just the way human thought works. You

can't just say, Everyone will have their own art history, or else, Art history will be universal and we will all understand each other perfectly.

JAMES ELKINS: In *Is Art History Global?*, I thought the best way to think about this was in terms of people's hopes. Some people felt the world is becoming flat, and they were made happier by the thought that places they hadn't gone had these amazing discourses. The book I mentioned has the title *Chinese Landscape Painting as Western Art History*, and it's broadly commensurate with Chakrabarty's take on things, but I am not at all as optimistic as he is.<sup>14</sup>

MARIE-JOSÉ MONDZAIN: One of my best friends is Chinese, and she is writing an essay called "On Positive Misunderstanding." She lives in France, and she's writing about the meeting of the two cultures. What is constructed, what is built, from the fact that we do not understand one another?

When I went to China, I was interested in encountering a culture in which there is no incarnation in the Christian sense.<sup>15</sup> I was able to do this thanks to Anne Cheng's book on Chinese thought.<sup>16</sup> She claims that even the word *concept* has no translation, so we cannot compare the concept of image in the West and in Chinese, because the concept *concept* has no translation. The status of the word is problematic. She reminds us that when a king begins his reign in China, he reforms the dictionary: each reign begins with the refoundation of the dictionary. So in China, the dictionary is inseparable from the practice of political power.

SI HAN: Ah! When I tried to explain *xiang* to my colleagues at a seminar in Sweden, it was suggested that *xiang* should be translated into "concept." I refused to do so, and it seems that I made a correct decision.

I am very interested in the concept of *incarnation* that you did not find when you were in China. The Jesuits who went to China in the sixteenth century must have found it difficult to explain this idea to the Chinese people. The Chinese may think of incarnation in terms of a ghost who, in a hurry before the sun rises, tries to find a body to use as host—but that is *reincarnation*. But why can't we compare the concept of image in the West and in Chinese just because Chinese does not have a concept of *concept*? Matteo Ricci discussed the concept-of-time image with the Chinese around 1600. Of course it is not possible to find incarnation in the Christian sense in China, because Christianity is not Chinese. But I think the idea of incarnation can be helpful in analyzing Chinese thoughts on images. For example, the character for human beings is *ren* (人); if we add a horizontal stroke indicating the four directions, it becomes *da* (大), meaning *big*; if we add one more stroke on the top, it becomes the biggest thing in the universe—*tian* (天), meaning the sky or heaven. That is to say that, in Chinese, heaven has the form of a human being. Isn't that a sort of incarnation? Or re-

14. This argument is made in my *Chinese Landscape Painting*, sec. 37.

15. [See Marie-José Mondzain, *Transparence, opacité? / Touming bu touming* (Paris: Diagonales, 1999). —J.E.]

16. Cheng, *Histoire de la pensée chinoise* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1997). [See the review by Michael Nylan in *Philosophy, East and West* (October 2000). —J.E.]

versed incarnation? Is this a *positive misunderstanding*? The relationship between an image and its maker, as well as the maker of the maker, is for me what the Chinese term *xiang* is about.

This reminds me also of Gottfried's theory of body, gesture, and the root of imagery. The lack of a concept of *concept* in the Chinese language indicates that Chinese terms related to images that are *nonconcepts* are perhaps a good place to start with in the process of finding the *logos* as images.

JAMES ELKINS: Let me return to the question about conceptualizing the image—with *concept* provisionally under erasure! We have been talking about individual terms in a couple of languages, and we have also been assaying very general, abstract questions of translation. Let me pose a midlevel question: What would be the ideal form of the book we produce from this conference? Would over fifty percent of the contributors be exploring concepts from outside of European languages? Would a preponderance of the theorizing be non-Western in that sense? Or, instead of that, what if we went on as we have started to today, pondering examples of non-Western terms? Either way would be different from what we probably *will* produce, which is a book full of terms whose etymologies go back to Latin or Greek.

EDUARDO VIVANCO ANTOLIN: Sometimes we are slaves to our own languages and traditions, and we cannot get over that. Our conversation about the difficulties of translation is probably not helpful; what arises is a kind of mysticism about things that cannot be explained—the *je ne sais quoi* and other such terms.

If you take a plane to Japan, the words are different, but they still feel the pull of gravity. We're not discussing gravity anymore, but there was a time when it was discussed. I think we should master language in such a way that we can get to the broader discussion. For me, the cognitive sciences are promising, because they find words, and ways to measure things, and they do not waste opportunities to get to know more about ourselves, and our culture, and art.

JAMES ELKINS: Focusing on translation is itself a gesture that disallows other kinds of contact. As Tom said, literary studies have looked at this for a long time, and even in Chinese studies there is a mass of literature on translation beyond Anne Cheng—a journal called *Philosophy, East and West*, and scholars such as David Hall.<sup>17</sup> So I agree with you, Eduardo (also about science, but that is another

17. *Philosophy, East and West: A Quarterly Journal of Oriental and Comparative Thought* (1951–); David Hall and Roger Ames, *Anticipating China: Thinking Through the Narratives of Chinese and Western Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); and in general, see the helpful anthology *The Translation Studies Reader*, second edition, edited by Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge, 2004). Other attempts before Cheng's to rethink specifically Chinese conceptualizations include Bo Mou, "The Structure of the Chinese Language and Ontological Insights: A Collective-Noun Hypothesis," *Philosophy, East and West* 49, no. 1

(1999): 45–62, which responds to Chad Hansen, *Language and Logic in Ancient China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983); François Jullien, *In Praise of Blandness: Proceeding from Chinese Thought and Aesthetics*, translated by Paola Varsano (New York: Zone Press, 2004); and Jullien, *Detour and Access: Strategies of Meaning in China and Greece*, translated by Sophie Hawkes (New York: Zone Books, 2004); and in particular the universalizing claims of Ulrich Libbrecht, *Inleiding Comparatieve Filosofie: Opzet en ontwikkeling van een comparatief model* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1995), translated as *Within the Four Seas . . . Introduction to*

conversation), and also with you, Ladislav, and Tom. But again I want to change the direction of our conversation a little: I propose that *all* talk about translation is safe. Psychologically there is much more to risk in thinking about images differently.

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: We have discussed the translation of concepts. But among artists, there is interrelation on the level of images. They quote them, they translate them, they transform them—and I would be curious about what we can learn from that level. The artist, or rather, all types of image producers (even scientists), are the real inventors: it's Brunelleschi and Piero della Francesca, it's Leonardo da Vinci and Caravaggio, Rembrandt and Rubens, it's Chardin, Delacroix, Cézanne, Duchamp, and all the others who introduced new concepts of image and new ways of experience. They changed the reality of images, at least to the same extent as philosophers or intellectuals did.

I agree, the idea of productive misunderstanding is wonderful: that is what is going on, if it is going on in a good way. That is also what we are doing here, today!

MARIE-JOSÉ MONDZAIN: Yes. I want to come back to the *logos*, and logocentrism. A strange idea of Western culture lies behind the word, and yet it is very difficult to translate. *Logos*, in Greek, is not discourse, and it is not reason. It is just a relation between two terms, nothing more. In French, *logos* is *rappoport*, relation. So when we are speaking of logocentrism, in relation to Eurocentrism and so forth, we forget that the center of our discourse is already a misunderstanding about the reign of reason. *Logos* is a concept that moves; it is difficult to translate, but it is worth taking the time to make our way through to it, as if it were a constellation of words.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: That is exactly the experience we had with our dictionary of untranslatable terms.<sup>18</sup>

I believe completely in translation. Umberto Eco used to say that Europe is translation. But I also believe in positive misunderstanding. Both are correct. Everything is translatable, but we have to always be aware that each translation inscribes a word in a new constellation, as you say. When we translate a word from one field, one language, to another, we are changing its meaning. What I am calling for is *general translation* of everything, with increasing knowledge about the difficulties of translation. The two must go together.

JAMES ELKINS: Let me introduce something that is not a question of translation. I think there is a tendency in the humanities to speak about translation as if it were sufficient to address questions of different conceptualizations. But speaking about translation is relatively easy because there is no way to stray off the path—as Jacqueline's synthesis shows.

*Comparative Philosophy* (Paris: Peeters, 2007), together with the review essay by Bruno Nagel, "Feature Review: A New Approach to Comparative Philosophy Through Ulrich Libbrecht's

Comparative Model," *Philosophy, East and West* 47, no. 1 (1997): 75–78

18. This is discussed in Section 9.

Here is something that points to what translation enables us *not* to think about, the genuine and sometimes repellent strangeness of other conceptualizations. It is an origin myth for painting, which we can try to put beside Dibutade, the Maid of Corinth, and other Western origin myths.

This is from the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, right near the beginning. Much of what follows is a painter's manual, with descriptions of all sorts of things of interest to painters: the six types of men, the width of women's hips, the magic effects of idols, the four kinds of painting. But before that, the author wants to tell us how painting started. There is a prince, and a man engaged by the prince. The prince's companion sees a number of beautiful women approaching, and he wants to distract the prince. So he takes the juice of a mango tree and paints a picture of a beautiful woman. The picture then attracts the prince more than the actual women. The editor of this edition did a *stemma*, and she found a different manuscript tradition in which the prince's companion paints the picture *on his thigh*.<sup>19</sup>

There is a completely different origin myth for painting. So it is not always just a concept, or even—as Marie-José points out—the concept of *concept*. We would have to ask how we could understand painting starting from a place like this.

ALEXIS SMETS: Each time we talk about a new concept, we are also trying to solve a problem. Zhang Yanyuan, for example, was trying to include painting with the arts, and so his framing passages are intended to make that happen. It's the same with these origin myths. I think Wittgenstein and Goodman are also examples of this: they were out to solve particular problems, not to think through translation in an abstract sense.

JAMES ELKINS: The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* origin myth serves a particular purpose—among other things, it introduces the author's thoughts on figural painting. I am trying to solve a more abstract problem, I suppose: the problem that it seems so easy to contain non-Western theorizing on the image within these very flexible conversations on translation. I think we are refusing the whole narrative of books like the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, except when they can be sampled, mined for individual concepts.

19. *The Citrasūtra of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, edited and translated by Parul Dave Mukherji (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2001), *Adhyāya* [chapter] 35: 1–7; and for the account of painting on the thigh, *Citrasūtra of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, 10: “Then, with the intention of disturbing their penance, ten celestial nymphs entered Badari. Upon seeing them frolicking about and picking up flowers, Nara was overcome with

desire. [But] the other sage Nārāyaṇa who had control over anger and desire, sensed their intention. Then he obtained [some] mango juice which induces passion, and painted a beautiful nymph on [his] thighs. At that very moment, a long-eyed woman of incomparable beauty came into being [from that very painting]. On seeing her, the celestial nymphs were put to shame and they departed.”

## 6. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

*Another fundamental difference between accounts of images is that some theories focus on the public life of images, their actions in society, their role in politics, community, and culture, while others center on the single viewer and his or her engagement with the image. In this conversation we review some episodes from the history of the idea of private seeing (religious observance, Romanticism, aesthetic experience), and we consider why there is no such thing as purely private seeing. The preponderance of current scholarship on images stresses their public nature, and yet there is also writing that is uninterested in public seeing. We try, fitfully, to understand that gap.*

JAMES ELKINS: There is of course a long history of the reception of artworks as a series of private encounters. But instead of trying to find a philosophic ground for this question—which might take us, for example, into the history of religion and ritual, or into the history of Romanticism—I want to start from a practical issue and work backwards. For a high percentage of scholars in and around art history and the history of science, encounters with images are fundamentally private, and in saying that I don't at all mean to exclude the public element of viewing. I do not think there is such a thing as a purely private encounter, and I'm not valorizing the relatively private encounter, or denying that there is community in every encounter. But scholarship for a number of the participants in this event means attending, as a single observer, reader, or historian, to an object that is more or less by itself: the condition is common, and yet the articulation of it is problematic in contemporary scholarship. Current work on images in art history and visual studies is very interested in artworks and images in society, in the dissemination of images in the public sphere, in the ways artworks construct and strengthen senses of community, culture, and nation. Much of what we have been talking about this week, from Marie-José's questions of community and what the "we" sees, to Tom's lecture on images of terrorism and cloning, has to do with images in public contexts.

TOM MITCHELL: For us, a person in front of a single image may seem paradigmatic, and we may think of it as normal, but in Marie-José's account, it is eccentric and weird. For the Byzantine icon, it would have been abnormal.

JAMES ELKINS: Very true. I think, Tom, that one of the divergences between the things you and I do is contained in this question. I find myself more drawn to images that have as their exemplary occasions viewings by individuals, and less drawn to images whose meaning accrues in public venues.

ADRIAN KOHN: Can I jump in here for a moment? This is a distinction I've been waiting for. If we view our analysis as epistemological—not what images are, nor what they do, but rather what we learn from them—the difference between public and private knowledge is crucial.

Yes, your knowledge is partially handed down and in that sense partially public. However, it never really feels like that in front of an unfamiliar painting, like just now when I was over there staring at Marie's pieces from different distances to see what would happen. Examining works of art, such as those two paintings, turns out to be more private and incommunicable than we're comfortable admitting.

JAMES ELKINS: Jacqueline gave us another way into this issue when she recalled that for Baudelaire, a crucial part of the aesthetic experience is private.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: The problem is that aesthetic experience is a specific encounter with images. There are different kinds of encounters, and different kinds of images call for different encounters. For example, I wouldn't say that the recent cover of the *New Yorker* depicting Barack and Michelle Obama as terrorists calls for an aesthetic experience.<sup>1</sup> I think the aesthetic experience is definitely private. The question for me is, What do we share when we say we share an aesthetic experience? And how do we share such an experience in front of the image? I am convinced that the aesthetic experience we have in a theater is different from the experience we have in front of a painting, because we are not alone in the theater. You might say that you're not alone in the museum, either: but no one interferes *at the moment* of the experience. In the theater, experience can be shared *afterward*. I am sitting in the theater; I have gone with friends. I don't like the play. I am listening to the sounds, the barely perceptible behavior, of my friends to see if we share the same experience. My experience is my own, and when the play is over, the lights come back on, and I turn to my friends and find out, Did my friends like it? Did they dislike it? These are important moments, because you can decide to stop seeing someone if you do not share such experiences. So to have the same taste does not entail sharing the same experience.

JAMES ELKINS: And that is so even though for you, Kant is wrong on the content of aesthetic experience, which you see as conceptual. That would seem to make the aesthetic experience *more* communicable, *more* public.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Baudelaire, Goncourt, Huysmans—they all insist on this specific quality of the aesthetic experience: it is solitary, it depends on the individual. (This begins in the eighteenth century, but it is characteristic of the nineteenth.) It can be shared only with a few people. That does not mean it cannot be communicated—that is another question.

1. *New Yorker*, July 21, 2008; see for example [www.newyorker.com/online/covers/slideshow\\_bittcovers](http://www.newyorker.com/online/covers/slideshow_bittcovers).

TOM MITCHELL: I think the idea of the *very few* is important here. I always tell my students in my visual culture class that when they go to a museum or gallery, they should go with someone else. And part of my seduction is to say, Go with a date.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: That can be a terrible experience. Because you can discover something about the other, yourself, or your feelings that you didn't know or didn't want to know.

TOM MITCHELL: I know: that's the reason for it. You find out so much more about a person by going to a gallery with them than you do by going to a movie. During the movie, you can't talk. You can do other things in a movie, which maybe get to the point more directly!

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: I agree with you. It's a real challenge.

TOM MITCHELL: The privacy of a movie theater is a different kind of privacy.

JAMES ELKINS: This is very telling, because I have told students the opposite: go with someone, but don't talk to them while you're in the museum.

When I was thinking of this topic of public and private, I wasn't thinking of aesthetic responses. I meant *any* private encounter—with a medical image, an image in a law court, a scientific image—and I was concerned with the kinds of responses that people choose to write about, that they publish, that they find valuable as texts.

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: I would like to try to determine two different levels of our discussion. In the first, works of art are privately processed. That means there is a privacy of the body in front of the work: but as Tom said, at the same time there is a *circulation* of the image *inside* the body. It is interesting to see that private collectors are not content with their privacy. They open their houses; that has to do with the market, the economy, and so on.) It is interesting to learn that the *real* privacy, in the sense of your own *capturing* of the work, is very limited. The image has the potential, the potency, to escape from that capture.

The second level has to do with the *unknown third* in every act of recognition or understanding. As a philosopher, let's say, or a scientist, you are alone with your subject and your ideas—but you are not quite alone, because there is always an *unknown third* present, to whom this recognition is *addressed*. I don't understand something for myself if I don't understand it for the *third*. This is a very general statement, but it helps us to go further with our topic.

And I would like to recall that the Greeks said that theory is the act of seeing. The concentrated act of *theoria* is seeing, and in that respect it is private. It is connected with the lonely thinker . . . but at the same time, the Greeks institutionalized the muses. They are invoked at the beginning of poems, for instance in Pindar, where the *Odes* begin with appeals to the muses. That means that the instance of the gods, the instance of the world, *is present* when the poet articulates his ideas and his language. Against this background I would also like to recall that in the practice of viewing, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries, there is a genre of conversations, *entretiens*, in front of paintings, and the custom of the Salons. The Salons were public. Hence the implication of the public in the image, and in the process of determining that images are.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Concerning your first point, about the kind of private-ness that is a matter of possession: I wasn't thinking of that, but of *solitude* (in French) and solitary encounters. About your second point: it's true that the Greeks invoked gods, but today the gods are dead, so who are we invoking? And then concerning the conversations in the Salon, it is true there is an interaction between the solitary encounter and the exchange, the conversation, that comes to *fill* my experience afterward. I just wanted to say that even if the experience I end up having is filled with meanings that come from social relations, conversations, and so forth, I am alone during the experience itself. I am the only one who has it; as Wittgenstein said, my toothache is my own, and no one else's. It is great that we can then share, in conversation, but it comes back to the moment of solitude, which I think is very important.

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: May I ask: isn't the *unknown third*, as I called it, present in this moment of solitude?

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Probably.

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: Is it a closed circle, or not? That is my question.

ALEXIS SMETS: These notions of solitude and unknown third seem very interesting, and perhaps fundamental in the seventeenth century and later. But the thing is, I would not oppose solitude to publicity. I think they go together. The seventeenth century invented the *visual witness*. Think of Galileo, Boyle, or Newton: they all showed their experiments to witnesses who, although alone and possibly not scientifically educated, had to confirm the experiment in order that the laws that were claimed could be confirmed. The universality of what they saw in their solitary observations was, in one way or another, a very strong claim. Each witness was alone with what he saw, but each one would hopefully confirm the same thing. When he didn't, then it was the relation between his gaze and his reason that had to be educated. In that case solitude moved toward a common public space, but there was also a strong *mise-en-scène* that made solitude the same for every witness. Even my toothache is not my own: I'm alone in my suffering, but I have to be able to describe it to my physician, who himself must be able to connect it to my body.<sup>2</sup>

2. And there is also the case of the microscopists. The solitude of the witness is really directed to public space: think of the famous Dutch microscopist Antony van Leeuwenhoek. He was almost the only one able to see what he saw through his lenses. He drew what he saw, and what he had seen was thus the source of a new knowledge trusted by the most eminent scientists of the time. Of course there is no question of an aesthetic experience here, but of a rationalization of sight and, in the case of a patient describing his toothache to the

physician, a rationalization of pain. For the problematization of the relation between the witness's gaze and his reason, it is interesting to look at Galileo's *Dialogo dei due massimi sistemi del mondo* (1632). Concerning Boyle and the invention of the witness, see Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). On Leeuwenhoek, see Philippe Boubionnes, *Van Leeuwenhoek: L'exercice du regard* (Paris: Belin, 1994).

TOM MITCHELL: Perhaps I could open this discussion by invoking Wittgenstein, but not on the subject of pain, where he at least asks the question, Can I feel your pain? I don't know if he gives such a decisive answer to that—

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: But the question troubles him.

TOM MITCHELL: It is. Of course our almost intuitive answer is No, I can't feel your pain. I can understand that you're in pain, but that's not the same as feeling it.

But when Wittgenstein goes on to argue about language, he says fairly strongly that there is no such thing as a private language. That would not be a language. If there is a locus of the icon, then the question is, Is there a private image? Is there a sense in which every image, like every utterance in a language, is simply constituted as *necessarily* public, necessarily calling to the third, the Other, to validate the fact that it is an image to begin with?

ELISABETH BIRK: In Wittgenstein the question of mental images and sensations is part of his reflections on the “philosophy of psychology,” which includes a cluster of problems such as the status of intentions and sense data.<sup>3</sup> I have to say that Wittgenstein scholars are divided on the fate of these concepts given the critique of the solipsist subject in the *Philosophical Investigations*.<sup>4</sup>

ADRIAN KOHN: Is there a sense in which every image is *necessarily* public? Definitely not. For instance, Robert Irwin made his acrylic disc paintings to teach himself to see more.<sup>5</sup> He would spend hours painting them and hours staring at them.

3. Stanley Cavell has argued that “sensations are private” (“Empfindungen sind privat,” § 248 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, [Oxford: Blackwell, 2001]) is a formula for a skepticism about other minds, for our (potentially tragic) human condition—like Othello, we live with the possibility of betrayal. Stanley Cavell, chap. 3 in *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979). For Cavell, this skepticism is more powerful than Wittgenstein’s reflections on private language and grammatical propositions. But mostly the *Philosophical Investigations* are read as a critique of any kind of solipsism: the private language argument establishes that signs can’t be private because the criteria for their use are necessarily public: I cannot even talk to myself, I simply cannot *refer* without a shared language. “Sensations are private” states a rule of our language games rather than a fact (it is what Wittgenstein calls a “grammatical proposition,” not an “empirical proposition”). Sensations and mental images, as well as intentions, sense data, and all other objects of a “philosophy of psychology,” lose their status as mysterious mental objects and are subjected to a grammatical (modern linguistics would say “pragmatic”) analysis. (For short introductions to these questions see Hans-Johann Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1996].)

4. In this way, the first part of Wittgenstein’s *Investigations* shows us how the question of

the privacy of the image is directly connected with the problems of skepticism and solipsism and with the question of the status of rules. And the private language argument clears the ground for a fresh approach to the analysis of “psychological” concepts. But the text also leaves us with a host of new questions, such as: Does the private language argument apply to pictures and other nonlinguistic symbols? Should the status of mental images be the same as that of sensations? Does the term “mental image” refer to perceptions and/or imaginations? See, for example, Élisabeth Rigal, “De certaines ‘Questions Phénoménologiques’ dont traita Ludwig Wittgenstein,” *La Part de L’Oeil* 4 (1988): 63–75, and Hans Julius Schneider, “Mentale Zustände als metaphorische Schöpfungen,” in *Wittgensteins Spätphilosophie: Analysen und Probleme*, edited by Wulf Kellerwessel and Thomas Peuker (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1998), 209–26. For a general reflection on the status of mental images, see chap. 5, sec. 2 in Nelson Goodman and Catherine Z. Elgin, *Reconceptions in Philosophy and Other Arts and Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1988).

5. “We block out that information which is not critical to our activities[,] and after a while, you know, you do that repeatedly, day after day after day, and the world begins to take on a kind of fairly uniform look to it,” Irwin warned in a series of interviews between 1975 and 1976. With practice, however, he managed

Apparently David Macaulay draws for the same reason—to force himself to pay more attention to cathedrals, pyramids, mosques, city streets, and the way things work.<sup>6</sup> That's not a public experience. It's learning in private.

TOM MITCHELL: I would also like to add a historical consideration, the famous discussion of the public sphere inaugurated by Habermas. The inauguration of the public sphere, and the whole idea of *private life*, as an outgrowth of the public. The private sphere, as I recall Habermas saying it, is in a dialectical relation to the public: you can't have a public sphere unless you have a bourgeois society. You need people with private property, private spaces . . . in the eighteenth century, privacy was not so common. Parents slept in the same room as their children, and that was true all the way up the public ladder. One of my students wrote about the endless and futile attempts of Louis XIV to carve out a private space for himself, where he would not be the king.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: There was no privacy, even in the toilet—

TOM MITCHELL: And Versailles was an endless attempt to keep retreating, to create spaces where he would not be under observation. But they would even examine his feces every morning: no privacy there.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: If I follow your argument, the experience of privacy is the result of a transformation in public space. The idea of aesthetic experience is linked to this idea of privacy: the literary description of what we call an aesthetic experience, in art criticism, is contemporaneous with the birth of aesthetics as a new discipline in the philosophical field. Both appear in the middle of the eighteenth century, the first one in France, the second one in Germany.

TOM MITCHELL: I think this is also linked to phenomenology—the idea of the onset of the image, the perception, the raw moment of intake. In some sense that must be radically private. But not in the sense of social privacy. It would perhaps be an anthropological universal: in that sense we are all alone.

to recalibrate his own visual acuity, unveiling new phenomena that in turn redoubled his curiosity and scrutiny. “I became . . . able to discern a little bit more than I did originally,” Irwin recalled, “therefore I had more interest, or more to look at.” With his late oil-on-canvas line paintings under way in the studio between 1962 and 1964, he “started spending this time just sitting there looking”: “I’d look for a half an hour, sleep for a half an hour. . . . I just literally went to the studio at eight o’clock in the morning, and I came out of there at twelve midnight, and I did it seven days a week.” See Frederick S. Wight, *Robert Irwin*, interview transcript, 1975–76, Los Angeles Art Community Group Portrait (Los Angeles: Oral History Program, University of California, Los Angeles, 1977), 43–44, 163 (phrases reordered); and Lawrence Weschler, partially processed interview transcript, 1977,

in *Robert Irwin Project Interviews* (Los Angeles: Oral History Program, University of California, Los Angeles), 44. See also Adrian Kohn, “See Like Irwin,” *Chinati Foundation Newsletter* 12 (2007): 20–31.

6. Macaulay created an introductory pamphlet for his 2007–8 exhibition at the National Building Museum. “To draw you have to stop moving—at least for a little while—and concentrate on what is in front of you,” he explained. “Eventually, you start looking at everything that is around you. And the longer you look, the more you see. . . . This is not just about drawing, it’s also about looking harder at things.” See David Macaulay, *Drawing Big*, exhibition pamphlet for *David Macaulay: The Art of Drawing Architecture*, June 23, 2007–May 4, 2008 (Washington, DC: National Building Museum, [2007]), unpaginated.

JAMES ELKINS: Well, I am grateful for all these historical contexts, and for the idea of the *third*—they help articulate my overly quick notion of privacy. I agree, Tom, that phenomenology is linked to aesthetics in this way, and it may answer my interest in private experiences that are not aesthetic.

But I would like to make this conversation more complex and more concrete at the same time. Let me gesture in the direction of these two objects that have been showing and not telling: I mean Marie Krane's paintings. [*They were on an adjacent table, as if they were also speakers at the event.*] I have known Marie for years, and so I have an impending sense that I might be asked to write something about her work. At the moment my interest would be questions of perfection and imperfection, and what counts for her as failure. Slight deviations from the grid, too many minute bubbles, the wrong color—things inevitably go wrong in these paintings, but it is far from clear what counts as failure. One of the participants in this event, Adrian Kohn, is interested in optical phenomena in post-1960s painting, and there would also be a lot to say about the difficulty of simply perceiving the colors and color changes in Marie's paintings. So there are analytic and phenomenological discourses that might support the paintings.

However, there would also be a much more viable way of writing about these, which could more easily find a home in a journal in art history or cultural studies—and that would be an inquiry into the complicated arrangements of Marie's workshop. A lot could be said about the ways she employs people to make the paintings, and about the different kinds of authorship that produces. For a young art historian interested in publishing on Marie's work, that would be a far more promising subject.

ADRIAN KOHN: The most startling thing about Marie's paintings, something I wasn't expecting at all, is the instability of the grid. There seem to be differing densities of visual stimulation, hotspots and lacunae, and now and then a new formation seems to wash over the old one. I don't think the systematic changes in the hue of the individual marks affect this illusion, but I'm not sure—I have to look some more.

But to return to the second account that you are proposing, an analysis of what it means that Marie now only mixes the colors and that others make the marks: from the very first word that account yields sociological, economic, and political concepts and, for this reason and perhaps by necessity, ends up overlooking what the marks and works actually look like. It's easy to get caught up in verbalizing what a piece means to a public at the expense of what it is in itself and how it looks—questions far less suited to language.

JAMES ELKINS: Well, I wouldn't agree that this has to do with what is not suited to language, or somehow beyond it.

The choice I am proposing is a matter of the widespread interest the humanities has in social meanings. And this is what I mean by making our conversation more complicated, because I do not think our thoughts about the third, and about the history of private viewing, as true and useful as they are, explain this

question of academic taste and publishing. For many contemporary scholars, the interest of images is private: but that discourse has relatively little place in contemporary image theory, or in our conversations.

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: I would open our discussion to the phenomenon of *showing*. I would like us to ask if there is something like privacy in showing. I do not think so. To show means to address something to a public—and so again this is a strong argument against private viewing.

TOM MITCHELL: Showing and also telling. That is why I think the public is the ground—not in any technical sense, but just in the notion of the Other, of people together. Wittgenstein was not only against private language; he also debunked the idea of the private image. His real argument about mental images is that they are discussed as if they are private property. You think you have an image in your mind, and that it is your thought. Richard Rorty's reading of Wittgenstein was to say, Just stop thinking that way. Forget about mental images, because it's the wrong model. My reading of Wittgenstein is that it's an argument about making the mental image public, externalizing it. He says if you want to know what your mental images look like, look at a picture, or a movie, or something else. It is not so much that images are the private content of consciousness, but that consciousness itself (and even the unconscious, as Lacan says) is always structured like a language, and so is the medium of consciousness (what Stephen Pinker calls "mentalese"). As you think, you're not only thinking *of* something, but you're thinking *in* something: streams of words, associations, images, sounds, perhaps other sensations. All of those are potentially things that could be put outside: you could express them, you could describe them. That would be a sign that your consciousness is connected to other people's consciousness. So inside we are social animals.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: But all your examples are of sentences.

TOM MITCHELL: Yes, but they could be examples of images. If I ask you to think of your mother—her face, not her name—couldn't you go on to draw it? The image of your mother isn't private, even though it's your image. There is something public about it, even though it is private in its foundation.

So Jim, you were right to characterize one of the differences of our positions in this way. I start from the public. Then sometimes the private is carved out within it. But it always returns to the public.

JAMES ELKINS: Well, let's see. I'll try one more intervention along these lines. Maybe these questions of private language aren't the right way to get at it. Maybe it's an institutional question. For some people an adequate description of an interesting visual object could be contained in a description that does not actually reach out to the political. And that would be true even if the writer agrees (as I do) with Wittgenstein's argument, with showing as a public act, and even with our fundamentally social nature. From such a point of view, the political can seem like an interest that can be added on *after* an initial encounter.

This is not a reversible perspective, because from the position of a writer for whom the social is not only an initial but a final interest, it can seem as if an account that declines to elaborate the social or political is *necessarily* inadequate or partial. There doesn't seem to be a way of seeing an account that doesn't center on the social as having plenitude, as being a full account.

**TOM MITCHELL:** I wouldn't jump to the political right away. I see a continuum, or a series of degrees, from things like the privacy of solitude to the privacy of two, which is already in a certain way public. My colleague Lauren Berlant has coined a phrase, "the intimate public sphere." There are all kinds: gendered public spaces; spaces of professional interest; of intimacy, where people already understand one another. Maybe the isolated subject is the version of what we were looking for in relation to purity.<sup>7</sup>

**JAMES ELKINS:** Well, I'm not arguing for private language or purity. I don't disagree that even showing is public. I am trying to understand why so much of the theorizing and writing on images begins with, and stays with, the public life of images.

Tom, there is a passage in the essay "What do Pictures Want?" where you ask, "Are images the terrain on which political struggle should be waged . . . ? There is a strong temptation to answer . . . with a resounding yes."<sup>8</sup> You then go on to say some things I share, about the political ineffectualness of visual studies, but I think I would find myself, in the end, on the other side of this interest.<sup>9</sup> But it is also possible that images can be principally outside or before social interests—so that Michael Fried's gestures in the direction of absorption (you have an excellent footnote on that, about absorption as desirelessness), or Nancy's thoughts about presentation and absence, are the larger part of what pictures are.<sup>10</sup>

This is also an issue in the production of art. Here in the School of the Art Institute I see a lot of hope pinned on the social advantage of the visual—its power in social intervention, in the redefinition of the social subject—and that worries me more than the hope that's pinned on avoiding public meaning in favor of the expression of what are understood as largely private, partly incom- muncurable, subjective states.

**TOM MITCHELL:** That is a big problem, and it is unfortunate when artists somehow think that a political position will generate interesting artistic results.

**JAMES ELKINS:** It's more that artistic *results* are thought to generate interesting politics.

**TOM MITCHELL:** I do think there is a distinction between the aesthetic and the political, in fact many distinctions, depending on what sense you are giving to the respective categories of aesthetics and politics. Walter Benjamin's endlessly fascinating

7. See Section 4.

8. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 32.

9. The next passage includes the observation that the "critical exposure and demolition

of the nefarious power of images is both easy and ineffectual." Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 33.

10. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 50n41.

remarks about fascism's "aestheticizing of politics" and communism's "politicizing of art" would be one place to start. Another would be Jacques Rancière's quite different notion of "the distribution of the sensible" (on the analogy of the distribution of wealth).

When is the subject truly alone with itself? Marie-José rightly says that the subject is not only never alone with itself, but never even at one with itself.

[*Tom's cell phone rings.*]

See what I mean?

[*Laughter.*]

MARKUS KLAMMER: I wonder if the faculty here are all anthropologists.<sup>11</sup> I am thinking of Gottfried Boehm's theory of gesture, which is linked to the body; Marie-José Mondzain's interest in embodiment; Jacqueline Lichtenstein talking about the "flesh" of the painting as opposed to its "nerves"; and Tom Mitchell, in *What Do Pictures Want?* treating pictures as members of a society or a community.

JAMES ELKINS: You left me out.

MARKUS KLAMMER: Yes, for the moment. I am thinking of a Lacanian approach to the visible, of attention to a gap or a difference. I note that Marie-José Mondzain uses the gaze very differently than Lacan, because for her the gaze belongs not to one person but to a community, so it can circulate. For Lacan, it's clear that the gaze is wholly separate from the body, and from human practices. So if you build a theory of the gaze on the Lacanian conception, it could be a radically different from Marie-José's sense of the gaze in community.

JAMES ELKINS: I wonder if I could say something as long as I'm not one of the accused. Anthropology is a vexed term, because it means such different things on the two sides of the Atlantic. For me, your question is really not about anthropology as much as phenomenology. The license to conceive art as a private experience, mediated through the body, comes into art discourse from Merleau-Ponty. And for that reason I wouldn't identify the question as post-poststructural; in Anglo-American scholarship, *both* an interest in the embodied, material nature of art *and* an interest in community and social meaning are poststructural. So I would divide your question: the private, disembodied gaze you assign to Lacan receives its imprimatur from an understanding of phenomenology. The public, communal gaze you identified with anthropology is definitely the tenor of the times, despite our deep loyalty to phenomenological models.

TOM MITCHELL: We need to have a longer conversation about Lacan. I do not agree that his notion of the gaze is "private" or "disembodied"; in fact, the gaze always begins with the gaze of the Other, either the Big Other (God, the Father) or the

11. By "anthropology" I mean the inclination to explain certain image-related phenomena out of the structure of the human body, out of its acts as a socialized body, or out of its interactions with other bodies. This assessment would apply to Hans Belting's idea of "Bild-Anthropolo-

gie" as well, and I think it is not totally amiss to conceive of Jim Elkins's "domain of the images" as a domain of different social practices of making and interpreting images, although I am not sure if his emphasis is really on the body and not on the faculty of understanding.

“petit a” of the Mother. Lacan’s eye-gaze dialectic is the foundation of his notion of the socialized subject in the scopic drive and Imaginary register.

But on the issue of disciplines: The only disciplinary identity that I have tried to espouse for myself, aside from being an English professor and an art historian—I belong to those departments, so I have my union cards—is an iconologist. By that I mean a student of images across the media. I don’t specialize in any one medium; one of the founding ideas of iconology is the liberation from the rule of any one medium, in order to move from painting to engraving to sculpture to theater to photography to cinema, and to keep track of how images circulate across the media—while also understanding that there are boundaries between the media. That is a historical task. I think of it as a hunter-gatherer model of the scholar: we are on the trail of images. They are leading us somewhere, or they are fleeing from us and we are trying to trap them. That is a historical, philological, anthropological enterprise. But it is also phenomenological. It has to first dawn on you that you have an image in front of you, before you can go on and analyze the image.

So it’s not only that iconology allows us to move across media, but also that it lets us get lost among the disciplines. Any discipline can be brought in. I am not going to say, for example, that I renounce psychoanalysis because I am a phenomenologist.

What is exciting to me about Gottfried’s, Jacqueline’s, Marie-José’s, and Jim’s work is that this problem of the image is being raised as a problem that might appear as a new discipline, a regenerated iconology. Iconology can appropriate a great many disciplines and still be itself.

MARKUS KLAMMER: So I have a question about methodology: What does opening up the traditional methods of art history, their blending with the instruments of microbiology and quantum physics or the vocabulary of traditional Chinese thought about painting, as Jim is suggesting, regarding both the classical domain of high art as well as the broader realm of the images, actually imply? What do we gain and what do we lose applying those techniques? Can we conceive of them as mainstream techniques forming the core of a discipline to be called “image science,” or will they always remain in a supplemental role compared to traditional, well-established, disciplinary ways of dealing with images? How can such a discourse become institutionally hegemonic?

A possible analogy comes to my mind: talking about the phono-logo-phallo-centrism of Western thought, Jacques Derrida points to a principal misunderstanding about deconstructionism: it is not new theories and techniques with which we deconstruct and dismantle the old ones, but with the old techniques themselves turning them against themselves and working them against the grain. For they are “our” occidentalists’ theories, and we have no others. This sentence was formulated in 1967. Have “we” changed since then? And if yes, how?

JAMES ELKINS: So right. And also so sad, really! Because, in another way of considering it, the reason that “we” accept “our” “old techniques” as the ones with the power to unsettle existing practices is because “we” wish to remain who we are, despite all our rhetoric that insists otherwise.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: I agree with the importance of phenomenology. The phenomenological approach is one of the few philosophical discourses that insists on the body, on materiality, on the fact that the world we refer to—and it’s for me it’s important that this includes the world of art—is given and not only constituted.

JAMES ELKINS: I was assigning your observations to phenomenology, Markus, also because it seems to me that phenomenology is the largest unasked question in art history. A preponderance of art historians work within phenomenology in a specifiable way: it often occurs in art-historical texts that critics and historians before Merleau-Ponty are assigned their particular historical contexts, but that Merleau-Ponty arrives into the discourse of art history as a nonhistorical source of truth.<sup>12</sup>

AUD SISSEL HOEL: Yes: the visual is the largest unasked question of visual culture studies. What is needed is not only a rethinking of the image but also a radical reinterpretation of phenomenology itself.<sup>13</sup>

12. Among many examples there is the use of Merleau-Ponty in Richard Shiff, *Doubt, Theories of Modernism and Postmodernism in the Visual Arts 3* (Cork: University College Cork Press; New York: Routledge, 2008).

13. The work of reinterpreting phenomenology has already begun. Hugh Silverman, for instance, has developed a position between or beyond structuralism and phenomenology; see his *Inscriptions: After Phenomenology and Structuralism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997). Don Ihde has developed a position

called “postphenomenology”; see his *Postphenomenology: Essays in the Postmodern Context* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993) and *Expanding Hermeneutics: Visualism in Science* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998). What approaches such as these have in common is that, to a greater extent than classical phenomenology, they understand material inscriptions, symbols, and technologies to be at the heart of human meaning formation. This is also the point of departure of my own efforts to develop a “differential phenomenology.”

## 7. RELIGION, RITUAL, AND THE SACRED

*The week ended without any extended discussion of what is arguably one of the most striking divergences within writing on images: the divergence between accounts that use the language of religion, ritual, and the sacred to understand how images work, and those that use secular discourses of all sorts. We include this in the book because it is too important to omit, and because the lack of conversation on the topic is symptomatic of the constellation of people who attended the event.*

JAMES ELKINS: Here is a theme that we have not raised this week, because even our very lengthy conversations are limited. It is the difficulty of connecting two discourses about the image: one that insists, with the full weight of the history of art and anthropology behind it, that images have been ritual or religious objects in all culture; and another that places images within a secular discourse. Examples of the former are endless: they include the whole tradition since Christianity, including the very intricate themes Marie-José has explored, replete with terms like *homoousia*, *homoiosion*, *homoiôma*, *skhésis*, *skhéma*, *prototypon*, and many others, and continuing up to the present in themes of incarnation, iconophobia, and iconophilia. Examples of the latter are historically bounded, but they include widely divergent accounts—from philosophers like Peirce and Goodman to modernist and postmodernist art historians to historians of science and technology. Among the fifteen Fellows at this event, there are texts where you would have to work hard to find elements of what Marie-José would rightly insist are questions of representation that have ultimately to do with incarnation and other religious themes.<sup>1</sup>

I have been doing a lot of work on this subject, involving two books and several conferences, and I think it is difficult in part for the same reason that the question of politics, or the public and the private, is difficult:<sup>2</sup> because it is so easy to decline to accept the existence of fully secular discourse.<sup>3</sup>

Let me propose as an opening example Tim Clark's intransigent line in *Farewell to an Idea*: "I will have nothing to do with the self-satisfied Leftist clap-trap

1. This is argued in many ways in Mondzain's texts. The general outlines I meant to evoke here can be glimpsed in a sentence such as "It is obvious that the visual empire to which we are today violently subjected to [sic] appears in the struggle between incarnational thought and strategies of incorporation"—a statement whose vocabulary and terms of address would be declined by the modernist discourses that are engaged in *Re-Enchantment*, edited by James Elkins and David Morgan, *The Art Seminar 7* (New York: Routledge, 2008). See Mondzain,

"Can Images Kill?," *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 1 (2009): 33.

2. See Sections 3 and 6 of the Seminars.

3. *Re-Enchantment*; and Elkins, *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (New York: Routledge, 2004). The former involves over thirty scholars in various disciplines in and around religion and art. Since the publication of these two books I have been involved with a number of Christian communities and institutions; but there is little sign of the discussion in secular educational institutions.

of ‘art as substitute religion.’”<sup>4</sup> Let me just take that to epitomize one form of the deliberate rejection of religious discourse.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Sorry, I don’t understand: for you Tim’s sentence is an example of nontheological discourse?

JAMES ELKINS: His book proposes itself as nontheological. Tim knows these histories very well.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Because for me it has nothing to do with the difference between theological and nontheological. It is a reaction to an idea that was developed in the nineteenth century, the idea of religion as art. For me, the passage is more a critique, or opposition, to a familiar way of thinking that includes a certain interpretation of Nietzsche, Baudelaire, Huysmans, and what is called *la religion de l’art*.

JAMES ELKINS: I take that point in relation to Tim Clark, but that is one of the reasons this is such a difficult question. Tim’s discourse *is* secular, at the very least in that his points of reference are Hegel, de Man, Benjamin, and many others—writers whose pens were soaked in religion, to adapt Benjamin’s phrase, but who did not write using religious concepts. Compare Tim Clark’s texts, for example, to Marie-José’s wonderfully concise observation that “the story of the incarnation is the legend of the image itself” or the assertion that “only the image can incarnate.”<sup>5</sup> Or to Jean-Luc Nancy’s meditations in “The Image—the Distinct” that “the image is always sacred” if by that word is meant “the distinct,” “the separate, what is set aside, removed, cut off. . . . It is there, perhaps, that art has always begun, not in religion . . . but set apart.”<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps those contrasts capture what I mean a little better.

TOM MITCHELL: But somehow the idea of art as a substitute for religion . . . I would first want to divide the concept of religion from the sacred—

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: And from theology—

TOM MITCHELL: Yes. I’m not sure how that would go, but I would be really surprised if there was anyone in this room who thought that art was a substitute for religion. But almost everyone would say art is an issue in religion, and not just art, but the role of the image.

JAMES ELKINS: Right, but would everyone say that their interest in images is usefully informed by a discourse on religion?

TOM MITCHELL: Yes, that’s quite a different thing. A *religion* may ban images or proliferate them, but the sacred, as Durkheim always insisted, is quite a different thing from religion. There are plenty of societies that have operated very well

4. This is one of two epigraphs in *On The Strange Place of Religion*.

5. Mondzain, “Can Images Kill?,” 23, 28.

6. Nancy, “The Image—The Distinct,” in *The*

*Ground of the Image*, translated by Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 1–3.

without religion, but none, no matter how secular, that can function without the sacred. Secular democracies, for instance, instantly confer a sacred halo on the winner of that mysterious, secretive ritual known as elections. No matter how secular and Jeffersonian we might want to be about the office of the president, the Oval Office remains a sacred space. Jean-Luc Nancy is right to insist that the image is always at least potentially sacred, but this is completely independent of religion.



## 8. PAINTING AND IMAGES

*One of the most persistent issues in image theory is the place of painting. To some people, painting is an historically specific practice, associated with the last five centuries in the West; it has become increasingly marginal, and is not appropriate as an exemplar for images as a whole. But to others, a painting is the central example of an image, and the discourse on painting has intimately informed the theorization of images from the Middle Ages onward. Throughout our week of conversations, painting kept coming up as the model for images in general, but it also tended to take the conversation away from the question of the image and toward questions that seemed to be only about painting.*

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: In the distinction between image and painting, I would like to stress the painting's physicality. Today, in the age of the Internet and the digital image, it is important to recall that the painting has physical and material properties.

MARIE-JOSÉ MONDZAIN: Daniel Arasse always started from the detail, and using details to drive the gaze of the viewer. The idea was to move to another level of temporarily in the experience of the image.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: I agree, and I remember that he fought against most art historians! I am not saying he was marginal, but he was often at odds with art historians.

JAMES ELKINS: Friedrich Teja Bach is another art historian who is fascinated by details. There is a Festschrift for him, which contains, I think, the state of the art in thinking about how details can appear in, or as, art history. Part of the problem is that the issue is historiographic. It is necessary to consider the various times and places when details appeared to be capable of sustaining meaning—even most of the meaning, or the key to the meaning—of paintings. The discussions in that book involve psychoanalysis, Morellian analysis, formal analysis, archaeological reporting, and many other sources.<sup>1</sup>

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Do you think art historians are interested in the physicality, the materiality, of objects?

JAMES ELKINS: No.

1. These are listed in my essay “Über die Unmöglichkeit des close reading,” in *Was aus dem Bild fällt: Figuren des Details in Kunst und Literatur, Friedrich Teja Bach zum 60. Geburtstag*, edited by Edith Fücher, Stefan Neuner, Wolfram Pichler, and Ralph Ubl (Munich: Wilhelm

Fink, 2007), 107–40. [On the epistemic functions of details see also “Der liebe Gott steckt im Detail”: *Mikrostrukturen des Wissens*, edited by Wolfgang Schäffner, Sigrid Weigel, and Thomas Macho (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2003)—E.B.]

TOM MITCHELL: Yes.

[*Laughter.*]

TOM MITCHELL: At least, if their own testimony can be trusted, which is of course another question. Every art historian I know professes to base everything in the concrete, material specificity of singular objects.

STEFFEN SIEGEL: Where does the detail begin and end? Is it a matter of pure materiality? Of surface? And what do you do with digital imagery? Is the materiality, the detail, in the pixel?

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: First, I would distinguish *color* and *coloris* in French, which is the pictorial color. It can be an artistic choice, to use color without any elaboration, but what concerns me is material color, with the brush.

I am not sure I want to comment on pixels, on detail in that sense, on Chuck Close or Roy Lichtenstein. I would prefer a more modest project, focusing on the materiality of painting in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

JAMES ELKINS: I think I should say something here, because I am guilty, in the book *What Painting Is*, of trying to look very closely, with the aid of a macro lens, at just one square inch of a painting at a time, and squeezing every possible meaning from what appears there.<sup>2</sup>

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: And is this how you justify your answer, that art historians are not interested in the physicality, the materiality, of the objects they study?

JAMES ELKINS: I said that on the spur of the moment, because as you said in relation to Arasse, those acts of seeing are marginal and problematic. The challenge of the book *What Painting Is* was simply to keep writing, when it seemed that the meaning was draining out of the picture. Once you get closer than a face, closer than any clearly depicted object, it becomes tremendously difficult to write something other than an impressionistic, poetic evocation that is detached from history. The discipline just does not represent details or materiality in any consistent way. I'm pretty stubborn on this point.

MARGARET OLIN: I am just wondering what you mean by close looking.

JAMES ELKINS: That is a complicated question,<sup>3</sup> but right now I just mean it in a literal sense: stepping up, looking at small portions of the picture.

MARGARET OLIN: I do that all the time. I use a magnifying glass—

JAMES ELKINS: Yes, you do, Peg. But the plurality of art historians don't.

2. *What Painting Is* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

3. Close looking is analyzed by a group of scholars, including art historians (such as Whitney Davis and T. J. Clark), anthropologists, and archaeologists, in the debate following my “On

the Impossibility of Close Reading: The Case of Alexander Marshack,” *Current Anthropology* 37, no. 2 (1996): 185–226. The essay “Über die Unmöglichkeit des close reading” summarizes some of those perspectives.

TOM MITCHELL: What kind of looking is close looking? Is it looking *for* something? Or looking *at*?

JAMES ELKINS: I think art historians are always looking *for*, because the meaning they need to produce has to connect to historical accounts. What kind of writing is produced by looking *at*?

ADRIAN KOHN: Mine. An account that starts with how things look strange and have strange effects on the eyes when you keep looking. Or, broadening that, the strange effects on the senses when you resist immediate translation into language and will yourself to keep sensing.

TOM MITCHELL: Well, Jim, phenomenological accounts, for example.

STEFFEN SIEGEL: The Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna had several exhibitions with the pictures and their X-rays. That was not only looking close, it was looking through!<sup>4</sup>

JAMES ELKINS: I don't mean to defend close looking, or indict art history. But from my point of view, this idea that art history is involved with close looking, with what Jacqueline calls materiality, is itself a *topos* of the discipline. It's part of our description of ourselves. But say you go into the art history section of a library and pick a book at random. It is not unlikely that some number of those illustrations might not have been needed, that the book's argument could have proceeded just as well without them. So I am stubborn because I think that the self-description of art history serves a certain purpose, that it isn't an accurate description: I'm not stubborn in an ideological sense—I'm not trying to reform or defend anything.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: If I ask this question, whether art historians are interested in images or in paintings—which I think are different categories—it is also because it is very difficult to talk about painting. It is easier to talk, and write, about images.

*[Everyone objects at once—laughter and shouting.]*

Let me finish. If you consider all the texts on painting, very few of them are concerned with what I call painting: the texture, the color, the line. From the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onward, the texts describe the image, the symbols, the narrative. I'm not saying that is easy: I'm saying that the question of description is not raised in the same way when we're talking about painting, and when we're talking about image.

4. See *Bellini, Giorgione, Tizian und die Renaissance der venezianischen Malerei*, edited by David Alan Brown and Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, exh. cat. (Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum,

2006), and *Der späte Tizian und die Sinnlichkeit der Malerei*, edited by Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, exh. cat. (Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum, 2007).

How do you describe those spots, patches, dots, finger marks? The long tradition of *ut pictura poesis* makes it easier to talk about images. This was already a problem in the seventeenth century in regard to still life painting. What can you say about a still life painting? The Abbé Du Bos said there is nothing to say about still lifes unless you talk about the art of paint. If you want to talk about them, you have to talk about painting. That's why it's so difficult. What can you say about an apple? Later the same problem was raised in relation to landscape painting. If you want to talk about landscape paintings, you have to talk about *painting*.

There is a wonderful sentence in Pascal: “Quelle vanité que la peinture qui attire l'admiration par la ressemblance des choses dont on n'admirer point les originaux”—“What vanity painting is, that makes you admire a copy of a thing even when you don't admire the thing itself.”

So that's all I want to say. I work on *Kunstliteratur*, and in this corpus there are very few texts on painting. On the other hand, the texts on image are innumerable. It's different with the writers, the *écrivains-d'art*; Baudelaire, Fromentin, Huysmans, and Zola talk about painting. As artists themselves, as writers, they are concerned with the heterogeneity of the visible.

MARKUS KLAMMER: I am very interested in the notion of materiality and physicality of the painting, which seems to have very much to do with singularity, with something like the Benjaminian aura according to what you said, Jacqueline. I wonder how this singularity is produced. Is it a material effect in its own right, brought forth by the sheer presence of layers of paint on a canvas,<sup>5</sup> or is it rather a discursive phenomenon due to changing techniques of production and reception? So I have two questions: the first is for Jacqueline, and the second for Jim.

Jacqueline, could you try to explain more precisely the distinction between a painterly mark, which in itself might mean nothing, and a pixel on a computer screen, which in itself also might mean nothing?

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: I agree that is a question, but I can't answer. I belong to a generation that is not familiar with this question.

[*Laughter.*]

KARL HAKKEN: Markus, you're precisely wrong. In order for a pixel to even show up on a screen, as a piece of information, it has to be exactly the same on every machine.

JAMES ELKINS: Yes, and from a cognitive science point of view there is the color constancy problem, which demonstrates that individual pixels do carry meaning, which they get from surrounding pixels.<sup>6</sup>

5. Here I am thinking of Michael Fried's notion of “presentness” as developed in “Art and Objecthood,” *Artforum* 5 (1967): 12–23.

6. For example, P. Brou. T. Sciascia, L. Linden, and J. Lettvin, “The Colors of Things,” *Scientific American*, September 1986, 84–91; K. Campbell, “The Implications of Land's Theory of Color Vision,” in *Logic, Methodology, and*

*Philosophy of Science VI: Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Logic, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science, Hannover, 1979*, edited by L. Jonathan Cohen et al. (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1982), 541–53; and H. Helson, “Some Factors and Implications of Color Constancy,” *Journal of the Optical Society of America* 33, no. 10 (1943): 555–67.

AUD SISSEL HOEL: I am wondering if the distinction you are invoking, Jacqueline, is unique to the case of painting. I am thinking of the double nature of the painterly stroke (or line, dot, or whatever) when it works as a mark or differential trait in the symbolic sense: not only is it in itself something material and visible but it also *makes visible*—a field, a scene, a world.<sup>7</sup> To me, this distinction comes close to what Gottfried is getting at when he talks about iconic contrast, a quality that he, as we have seen, ascribes to all kinds of pictures.

Perhaps it would make sense to conceive of pictures as material constellations of traits that are endlessly productive of *views*—in virtue of bringing about a certain distribution or redistribution of the sensible in the sense of Rancière.<sup>8</sup>

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: I think Rancière is not interested in painting. Only in the image. But of course this distinction I am making is an abstract one. Image is *in* painting, and is an *effect* of painting. We cannot understand the concepts separately. But Markus, you had a second question.

MARKUS KLAMMER: I asked about pixels and painterly strokes because it is clear there is a great difference on the material level and also on the level of production of these two materialities. But nevertheless both the physicality of the painting and the physicality of the pixel have to do with *making sense*, they have to be read. If you are looking very close, the painter's marks cannot be perceived as denotational, as signs. It is the same with the computer pixel. So Jim, this made me think of something you said in your chapter on Goodman, that all pictures are “ruined notations.”<sup>9</sup> So you would not deal with the whole problem as a matter of the material and the immaterial, but as a matter of making more or less sense.

JAMES ELKINS: Or a matter of who you want to talk to. The problem with *What Painting Is* isn't that there is no meaning to very tiny portions of paintings, or that history has to be left behind when you look so closely at oil paintings. The problem is that it becomes excruciatingly difficult to keep talking, or writing, when you are looking very closely; but it is never impossible. The ideas come much more slowly, and they are hard to attach to other people's meanings (to the whole history of writing on, say, Monet or Sassetta or Rembrandt), and they begin to sound eccentric, forced, or willful. I think of that book as an extreme case, a limit case, of what Jacqueline was saying about the lack of books on painting.

TOM MITCHELL: Sometimes at the level of the mark, it turns out there is another signifier. There's a scandalous painting by Marcus Harvey of the serial killer Myra Hindley, which was shown at the *Sensation* show in 1997. It was made from a newspa-

7. In “Eye and Mind,” for instance, Merleau-Ponty talks about the constitutive power of the line. He also points to the peculiar double nature of pictures by reminding us that it is hard to say *where* the painting is that you are looking at. “For I do not look at it as I do at a thing; I do not fix it in its place. . . . It is more accurate to say that I see according to it, or

with it, than that I *see it*.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” in *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 64.

8. Jacques Rancière, “The Distribution of the Sensible,” in *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2004).

9. Chap. 5 in *Domain of Images*.

per photograph, but when you got up close, you realized the units—the pixelations—were not dots, but identical babies' handprints. People were outraged.

JAMES ELKINS: Tom, I think that example is too easy. It isn't difficult to talk about the babies' handprints. But it would be increasingly difficult to say something about the qualities of each individual handprint, its gesture, its force, and then—even closer—about the lines in the palms, the lines of the fingerprints. That would be the analogue of what I was talking about. What's interesting to me in that level of close looking, of attention to materiality, is first that it is not a part of contemporary critical or historical discourse, as Jacqueline says; and second that there is no point at which you can say, Aha, now I'm in the domain of marking, and I have become definitively detached from historical and critical discourse. You *can* keep talking.

MARKUS KLAMMER: And when you are writing, when do you stop?

JAMES ELKINS: You don't. Or you do, when you go cross-eyed.

I would like to know more about the history of this problem. How long has it been possible to pose this as a problem—to identify materiality in this sense, to associate it with close reading? Jacqueline mentioned Huysmans's criticism of a Goya painting, in which Huysmans sees "commas" and "chevrons."<sup>10</sup> Is the late nineteenth century the first time when it was possible to place oneself in an abnormally close position?

MARGARET OLIN: But what is abnormal? There are paintings made on the head of a pin—

JAMES ELKINS: Okay. That word is wrong. I mean when was it first possible to write about details, especially "meaningless" ones? You can read all of Vasari, for example, and there's no close looking in the sense we're developing it.<sup>11</sup>

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: I think it started with Diderot, but what is new in the nineteenth century is the reversal of *ut pictura poesis*. Painting became a model for writing. All the *écrivains critique d'art*—Baudelaire, Huysmans, the Goncourts—were fascinated with painting, and it's interesting to know that most of them wanted, at first, to be painters. Huysmans insists upon the fact that he belonged to a family of painters; he said that he decided to become a writer watching at the paintings at the Louvre. He said to himself, I have to do that with the pen. On the other hand, Cézanne said to Gasquet that all his life he tried to paint the white tablecloth described in Balzac's *Peau de Chagrin* until he realized he could never, and should never try to, transpose a literary description onto canvas: "Tenez . . . tenez . . . Il parle d'une table servie, il fait sa nature morte, Balzac. . . . Il lit: 'Blanche comme une couche de neige fraîchement tombée et sur laquelle s'élevaient symétriquement les couverts couronnés de petits pains

10. Huysmans, *Certains* (Paris, 1889).

11. The famous passage on meaningless marks on a wall is often cited in this regard, but it served a particular rhetorical purpose, and it was a theoretical example that did not involve

any actual close looking. This is developed in my *Why Are Our Pictures Puzzles? On the Modern Origins of Pictorial Complexity* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

blonds.' Toute ma jeunesse, j'ai voulu peindre ça, cette nappe de neige fraîche. . . Je sais maintenant qu'il ne faut vouloir peindre que 's'levaient symétriquement les couverts' ert 'de petits pains blonds.' Si je peins 'couronnés,' je suis foutu."<sup>12</sup> Here he puts his finger on the irrevocable difference between painting and literature. The painter cannot paint the metaphor or the comparison.

MARIE-JOSÉ MONDZAIN: Yes, but if we come back now to the gap, the distinction, between painting and image: in the case of Cézanne, his whole life was dedicated to giving birth to images that were not dependent on narrative, on ordinary subjects, or on the impressionist brushstroke. His concern was the gaze, his own gaze, on the *skin* of the work, giving birth to the image. There is a distinction in French in the expression *peinture un tableau*, which is not exactly "painting a picture"—

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: But if I may, painting has to give birth to sensation. And sensation is not the same as image. In his book on Bacon, Deleuze quotes Cézanne about what he calls the "logic of sensation": to produce sensation, to give birth to a new kind of sensation, is an effect of painting. I do not think you can say that it is the same as producing an image.

We have all been making confessions this week, and perhaps my own is appropriate here. There is an expression I have not been using, and that is *aesthetic experience*. What I am looking for in painting is a certain kind of sensation or emotion. My interest in physicality in painting has to do with that. I can find an image on the computer or in a painting, let's say, from Lichtenstein (the painter!) very interesting, very thought-provoking. But when I see a little Cézanne or a little Fautrier, I am filled with emotion, I just want to cry. The experience of painting is, for me, completely different from the experience of image of pixels on a screen. What produces in me this emotion is the pure materiality, the physicality of painting. It is what gives me the desire to touch. I really want to touch the painting, but I cannot. That is what produces in me the aesthetic emotion. This is what is fantastic in Cézanne, that he produces sensation.

I mentioned the fact that some nineteenth-century writers learned how to write by looking at painting. In that connection, I just want to mention something that is a reference for my own way of thinking. After Kandinsky listened to Schoenberg's music for the first time, he went home and wrote Schoenberg a letter. He said to him, Listening to your music, I understood for the first time what I was looking for in painting.<sup>13</sup> I think that is fantastic. It has nothing to do with *ut pictura poesis*. It just means Kandinsky was looking for something *in* painting that could be analogous to what Schoenberg was looking for in music.

SI HAN: I am interested in this tactile quality. Some images can never be touched, like the sky. But with paintings, you have a tactile desire, but it cannot be fulfilled, as most paintings are not meant to be touched, but to be looked at. (Exceptions include tactile pictures—but that is not painting.)

12. Paul Cézanne, *Conversations avec Joachim Gasquet* (Paris: Macula, 1978), 158.

13. Letter to Schoenberg, January 18, 1911, published in *Contrechamps* (April 1984).

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Paintings are there to be seen, but there is a tactile dimension as well. I don't like all paintings: the kind I like is the one that gives my sight a tactile dimension, gives birth to a desire for touching.

MARIE-JOSÉ MONDZAIN: Are you coming back to Berenson here?

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: No, but I believe in this tactile dimension.

TOM MITCHELL: Jacqueline, isn't this an illustration of a point you made the other day, about the desire to touch? If you could touch—

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: But you can't.

TOM MITCHELL: So what you desire is your desire.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Absolutely! That is why I said that the *if* is very important: if I could touch the painting, I would caress it . . .

LADISLAV KESNER: I don't think this is just about touching. It's a matter of embodied seeing. It happens with painting, but not with all images. If I see a painting of trees in the wind, I feel the wind . . . but it does not happen with digital images on a screen.

KARL HAKKEN: [*Inaudible.*]

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Sorry, I didn't hear that.

KARL HAKKEN: People masturbate to porn all the time.

[*Laughter.*]

LADISLAV KESNER: Well, that's true, so maybe we should distinguish the kinds of emotional behavior, the kinds of embodied understanding, in each case.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: But masturbating does not imply that porn in digital images has a physical dimension. Jean-Jacques Rousseau talks about "those books you read with only one hand." They were just paper and words.

KARL HAKKEN: So in the absence of the physical object, images do not have the same kind of physical presence.

JAMES ELKINS: I am concerned about the history of the idea of tactility. It concerns me that Merleau-Ponty's essay on Cézanne is so ubiquitous—it is in our required readings for this conference, and it is a common starting point for methodology seminars and for conferences on tactility and art. I think Merleau-Ponty has given us too much of our sense of Cézanne in this respect, and we take Cézanne himself too much as a model. I'm especially curious about this in relation to your work, Jacqueline, because more than many other historians and theorists, your points of reference are seventeenth- and eighteenth-century painting. I wonder if *other* models of tactility, or *other* touchstones aside from Cézanne, might make the conversation more flexible. (I was interested when you mentioned Fautrier a moment ago: that's a pairing, Cézanne/Fautrier, that would not often be made on this side of the Atlantic.)

Or are we here, as I think we often are, in some sense inside the horizon given us by phenomenology?

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: You will not be surprised If I say that my horizon is rather eighteenth-century empiricist philosophy. Diderot, Rousseau, and Condillac were all interested with the metamorphosis of the senses and sensation: perception into touch, touch into vision, etc. All senses are nothing but touch, said Diderot.

MARGARET OLIN: In nineteenth-century theory, all sorts of spatial feelings were associated with the sense of touch. You experienced a sense of touch not only when you were touching something, but also in seeing. Touching is somehow bound up with how far you have to walk, or stretch out your hand, to touch something.<sup>14</sup>

That same notion persists in architectural theory in the twentieth century. Benjamin carries on the same discussion in his discussion of abstraction and the tactile. That's why architects are still interested in the subject. So in that sense, we could carry architecture into our discussions.

MEREL VAN TILBURG: I have a question about memory and the experience of art, for example in museums. It seems to me you are refusing the idea of the *musée imaginaire*—

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Yes. I am absolutely against the idea of the *musée imaginaire*. I think Malraux did a very bad thing introducing that concept. But in regard to memory: the experience of a museum embodies a lot of bodily sensation, memory. It is wrong to restrict the aesthetic experience we have in front of a painting to a visual experience. It embodies so many different feelings, memories, expectations. For instance, if you have to meet someone in the museum, you're not looking at the painting in the same way. You can also be distracted or bored. It's a part of your aesthetic experience.

Often in theaters I fall asleep. I sleep for a few minutes, and when I wake up, for a moment I wonder, Where am I? The memory of the play I saw is enmeshed with my experience of sleeping. Sometimes I misremember part of a movie, and I *invent* what I missed, or misremembered. That becomes part of my experience—

MEREL VAN TILBURG: Actually, I was trying to trick you into saying whether you remember the painting or the image.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: I see. It's a good question. I am not remembering the image, but the *experience* I had.

TOM MITCHELL: Maybe the memory is the image.

14. On touch as a theoretical concept, see my *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegel's Theory of Art* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1992) and "Validation by Touch in Kandinsky's Early Abstract Art," *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1989):

144–72; and my forthcoming "The Visual and the Tactile in Science, Art, Modernism," in *Art History and German Philosophy: A Systematic Legacy*, edited by Daniel Adler, Mitchell Frank, and Richard Woodfield.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Yes.

TOM MITCHELL: But the image of the painting.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: But this is why we have to go back to the painting, to see how this kind of confrontation works.

JAMES ELKINS: I wonder where we have arrived in this conversation. At times the question of painting seems to be a part—perhaps a small part—of our thinking on the image. But at other times, the materiality we assign to painting, and the experiences of painting, seem to stand for what can happen with all images, from architecture to pornography . . .

AUD SISSEL HOEL: I agree with your comment earlier, Jim, that we tend to take Cézanne too much as a model. I would be wary of making painting, and even aesthetic experience, into the paradigm case of images in general.<sup>15</sup>

REGAN GOLDEN-MCNERNEY: I wonder whether this distinction between image, in general, and painting as a material object can be extended to contemporary painting, for example in the distinction between the white ground, which is the abstract image, the potential of the image, and the painting that is then put over it.

JAMES ELKINS: In relation to Marie Krane's paintings, for example, there is so much to be said about the conception of the painting itself that it might not make sense to distinguish the image—which we all remember, without even turning around to see the paintings—from the paintings themselves. And her grounds are not just abstract preparations, but highly developed formulas—they are anything but conceptual preparations.

ADRIAN KOHN: I'm wondering whether the ground in Marie's paintings counts as an image. Is it unfair to ask the theories we've been discussing to perform right here and now? The ground of these works sometimes projects and looks like a lattice, but other times it recedes much farther behind the paint marks than it is. It's sort of coppery but also can look metallic grey, like pewter. The point is, there's visual information there, but does this count as an image? I'm worrying about the consequences of my suspicion that if we try to apply this distinction between painting and image to an actual artwork—to a piece of matter—the distinction will stop working in the ways we want it to. The theory might be revealed as too much of an abstraction to describe and predict with any accuracy how a painting actually appears. Although I will say that even if this is the case, it's always very interesting to see where, how, and why a theory breaks down.

REGAN GOLDEN-MCNERNEY: That is what I am wondering: is the ground of a painting as physical as what the artist then places on top of it?

15. In "Cézanne's Doubt" and "Eye and Mind," for instance, Merleau-Ponty privileges the paintings of Cézanne and some other modernist painters at the expense of other kinds of pictures such as perspective painting and photography. The result is a questionable aesthetic

hierarchy of expressive forms. For an account that offers a critical discussion of Merleau-Ponty's aesthetics while remaining sympathetic to his doctrine of embodiment, see my *Techniques of the Body: Merleau-Ponty and the Problem of Inscription* (forthcoming).

GOTTFRIED BOEHM: The distinction between painting and image is really interesting, because they can only work together. Separating them is an abstract procedure. As I understand these questions about the ground, they are arguments for pure abstraction.

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: Yes, it's a pure abstraction to separate those two things. I agree it is interesting to see the limits of the theory that image and picture can be understood separately. It's just that from my point of view, theory works best when it starts *from* the object, from the painting. If the works oblige me to form a new theory, that's fine. But for the moment, my theory about the distinction between image and painting is made on the basis of the classical history of painting. If it doesn't work with contemporary art, that's fine.

JAMES ELKINS: And yet . . . once again we are using a relation specific to painting—figure and ground—to conceptualize the relation between image and picture. That is—I just want to note this—a strange thing to be doing.

ADRIAN KOHN: I see that as the most beautiful outcomes from our talks: the realization that at least some of us *want* these theories to fail—

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN: —in order to prove that art exists.

[*Laughter.*]



## 9. IMAGE, NOTATION, GRAPH . . .

*Here the subject is when it makes sense to divide our given terms—image, picture, visual object, Bild—into smaller units. Elkins’s book The Domain of Images, following Ignace Gelb, distinguishes such things as subgraphemics, hypographemics, holomorphs, allographs, enuntiographs, semasiographs, pseudowriting, and picture-writing.<sup>1</sup> One of the Fellows at the event, Alexis Smets, studies such things as the vestigium, umbra, nota, character, signum, sigillum, indicium, figura, analogia, proportio, diagram, hieroglyph, ideoogram, map, pictogram, and schema.<sup>2</sup> Another of the Fellows, Si Han, has studied a twelfth-century Chinese text that distinguishes pictures (圖 tu), writing (書 shu), and tables (譜 pu).<sup>3</sup> Steffen Siegel has researched the Renaissance concept of tabula.<sup>4</sup> For Catherine Burdick, the operative terms in her field of Mayan writing are such things as main glyph sign and affixes, logograph and phonetic element, infix and conflation.<sup>5</sup> Elisabeth Birk is a specialist in graphs and notations. In each of these cases, and in many others, it can seem appropriate to take a term such as notation, tabula, glyph, graph, chart, or map as a starting point, rather than the covering concept of image. The question is really how far the general concepts, like image and picture, can take us.*

ALEXIS SMETS: I think we may need to think historically of the problem of images because the diversification of the image into subgenres such as diagram, schema, and so on was historically produced. It’s through history that the notion of image takes on its complexity. We can make use of a distinction between Plato and Aristotle. Plato is supposed to be an iconoclastic thinker, a thinker who dismissed sensible

1. Elkins, *The Domain of Images* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

2. He works on the different significations of image names, in an attempt to capture the differential features of scientific images according to the traditions to which they belong. See the extensive study by Alexis Smets and Christoph Lüthy, “Words, Lines, Diagrams, Images: Towards a History of Scientific Imagery,” *Early Science and Medicine* 14 (2009): 398–439; in the primary literature, an interesting reference for the distinction of some of the terms given here is Giordano Bruno, *De Imaginum, Signorum, & Idearum compositione* (Frankfurt: Wechelus & Fischerus, 1591).

3. Si Han’s text concerns Zheng Qiao’s treatise *Tu pu lüe* 圖譜略. See *A Chinese Word on Image: Zheng Qiao (1104–1162) and His Thought on Images* (Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitet, 2008).

4. Steffen Siegel, *Tabula: Figuren der Ordnung um 1600* (Berlin: Akademie, 2009).

See also his articles “Wissen, das auf Bäumen wächst: Das Baumdiagramm als epistemologisches Dingsymbol im 16. Jahrhundert,” *Frühneuzeit-Info* 15 (2004): 42–55; “Bild und Text: Ikonotexte als Zeichen hybrider Visualität,” in *Lesen ist wie Sehen: Intermediale Zitate zwischen Bild und Text*, edited by Silke Horstkotte and Karin Leonhard (Cologne: Böhlau, 2006): 51–73; “Bildnisordnungen: Visuelle Pragmatik in Paul Frehers Gelehrtenlexikon *Theatrum virorum eruditio[n]e clarorum* (Nürnberg 1688),” *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 90 (2008): 79–108.

5. Coe and Van Stone, *Reading the Maya Glyphs*, second edition (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2005); Montgomery, *How to Read Maya Hieroglyphs* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 2004); *Writing Without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes*, edited by Elizabeth Hill Boone and Walter D. Mignolo (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Herring, *Art and Writing in the Maya Cities, A.D. 600–800: A Poetics of Line* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

visuality, whereas Aristotle is usually regarded as an iconophilic thinker.<sup>6</sup> But in the *Timaeus* we find that the first elements have regular geometrical shapes,<sup>7</sup> and in the *Meno* we encounter actual squares and triangles, out of which Meno's servant's mathematical knowledge is said to be produced.<sup>8</sup> This is a specific usage of images because when you draw a square or a triangle, at the same time you are working with an image and you are working with an actual square or triangle. Nonetheless, as instituted in the myth of the cave—itself an image—the sensible eye shouldn't be trusted. Many centuries later, in the Renaissance, when Plato was rediscovered and translated by Marsilio Ficino, the Aristotelian tradition was almost imageless,<sup>9</sup> and the Platonic tradition was quite iconophilic. It's even more complicated since the Neoplatonic tradition blended with the current of thought related to Hermes Trismegistus, who was also translated by Ficino.

So initially Plato and Aristotle thought differently of the image, and it's clear that neither of them fully dismisses or welcomes images in his system. Second, different types of images emerge from these two leading traditions. In Plato you can find geometric figures used in a heuristic manner and applied to geometry, as in the *Meno*, but you can also find similar geometric figures applied to the physical world, as in the *Timaeus*. Same shapes, but different usages: should these images bear the same names?

Now consider the Renaissance. In the Neoplatonic tradition, you'll find the so-called allegories and geometrical figures, and they are sometimes mixed together in the same image. The interesting thing is that they are produced by thinkers who belonged to the Neoplatonic tradition, a tradition that should have preferred not to use images. In the Aristotelian tradition, you'll find tables: images that are minimalist in the sense that they are very close to text. In short, it seems to me that the historian would tend to say that image-types are the product of distinct philosophical traditions. This is the historical version of typology.

My question here is also our question: What is an image?—and what would justify speaking of types of images? I believe that it is possible to answer the question by attending to the type of being that is created by the image, through what I would like to call *onto-poiesis*. Each time I'm looking at an image, a particular knowledge, a specific feeling, may emerge from this relation. And this is because my gaze wants to grant being to the image, because my gaze wants to acknowledge the particular being of the image. On some occasions, my relation to the image fails to reach a level where there's a being that I will have to take into account. That is my attempt at classification; perhaps you will say it is a dream, or even a bad dream—

JAMES ELKINS: Or a PhD dissertation!

6. See for instance Aristotle, *Poetics*, 4; and Aristotle, *Parva Naturalia*. In these two texts that belonged to the readings for the summer school, Aristotle advocates the importance of the image in the context of tragedy and of the art of memory.

7. Plato, *Timaeus* 53cff.

8. Plato, *Meno* 82bff. See also Luc Brisson, “La ‘Khora’ dans le Timée de Platon: ce en quoi se trouvent et ce en quoi sont constituées les choses sensibles,” in *Qu'est-ce que la matière?*, edited by Françoise Monnoyeur (Paris: Le livre de poche, 2000): 23–44; Norma E. Emerton, *The Scientific Reinterpretation of Form* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 49–51 and 65.

ALEXIS SMETS: —but images compel me to take them into account in different ways, and to respect the intention that lies behind them in different ways. In the history of science, which I research, I think this is very important. It seems to me this creation of being in the image is a crucial element in our understanding.

CATHERINE BURDICK: This idea of presence is also immensely important for art history, and particularly for the study of visual representation in those traditions that fall outside the boundaries of Western discourse. I would argue that our understanding of *image* as applied to cultures such as the pre-Columbian Americas hinges not only upon our attempts to understand how works such as the colossal sculpture of Coatlicue or the Bonampak murals asserted their present to an indigenous viewer, but also upon engaged considerations of the ways that *other* forms of representation such as diagrams, calendrical charts, geoglyphs, and even hieroglyphic texts engaged their intended audience through such presence.

JAMES ELKINS: Thank you for that, Alexis—it is a promising link between the question of classification and our question of ontology. Catherine, let me just extend your remark and recapitulate the founding problem here: it is whether or not we can proceed in the various directions of our researches using general terms such as *image*, or whether we need to begin from some other place, including perhaps your distinctions between modes of being.

ALEXIS SMETS: That's it. I would say that we can use the term *image*, but that it's necessary to cope with history: an image isn't the same thing for Plato and for Aristotle, and it's not the same thing for their followers. Additionally, history can teach us how these terms that we use, such as *diagram*, *schema*, *graph*, and others, have long and sometimes controversial histories. For instance, it seems that originally *diagram* was used for a visual device that facilitated a demonstration, whereas a *schema* was merely the limits of a solid.<sup>10</sup> Compare that with François Dagognet's account of these two words, and you will find significant variations.<sup>11</sup>

I would propose that we take images as beings out of which emerge particular types of obligation. A being always belongs to a particular environment, and that's part of the obligation: to acknowledge an underlying environment. What I mean is that when I look at Marie Krane's works, I don't have the same type of obligations as when I look at some the so-called allegories in alchemical texts. The obligation present in alchemical engravings is still under discussion; however, I can say that I should certainly make use of my memory. They may represent a version of the ancient art of memory. They also ask me to play with analogies: there's a whole play of analogies in such images. In alchemical medicine, if I know how the macrocosm works, I will also know how the microcosm, that is, the human, works. If you aren't able to make these analogies when you look at alchemical

9. Christoph Lüthy, "Where Logical Necessity Becomes Visual Persuasion: Descartes's Clear and Distinct Illustrations," in *Transmitting Knowledge: Words, Images, and Instruments in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Sachiko Kusukawa and Ian Maclean (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 98.

10. Barbara Obrist, *La cosmologie médiévale. Textes et images: Les fondements antiques* (Florence: Sismel, edizioni del Galluzzo, 2004), 21–22.

11. François Dagognet, *Écriture et iconographie* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1973), 91.

images, you may miss the point. I'm not sure whether in Marie Krane's painting one could say that we have the obligation to make analogies, to activate memory, or to make associations. But it's pretty clear that when you work with geometrical figures, you must manipulate and transform the image: trace an axis of symmetry; trace a median line; work out some axioms; and inscribe your figure in a circle! It's a very different job. That's what I mean by beings and obligations.

JAMES ELKINS: Another aspect of this problem of differing *onto-poiesis*, as you call it, is the very different senses of images among scientists. We could not find any faculty who are vision scientists, mainly because none of them could sustain a protracted engagement with ideas in history or philosophy. We are hoping to expand the conversation in that direction when we assemble the book.

Let's try to get at this issue from both sides: from the side of the large-scale concepts like *image* and *picture*, to see how far they can penetrate into discourse that uses narrower concepts; and also from the side of the specialized concepts, to see how far they depend on the more general ones. For the first I am thinking of Jean-Luc Nancy's essay "A Distinct Oscillation," which meditates on the interrelations of text and image,<sup>12</sup> or Tom Mitchell's "Beyond Comparison: Picture, Text, and Method," which proposes the fused form *image/text*.<sup>13</sup> They are both very reflective essays on the entanglements and ideologies of "word" and "image," but I wonder about limitations imposed by the vocabulary. I would be glad to agree, for example, that "the pure image" is "both impossible and utopian, which isn't to dismiss it, but to identify it as an ideology, a complex of desire and fear, power and interest" (as Tom says), but at the same time I might wonder how that could help me articulate what happens in seventeenth-century heraldry or twentieth-century atomic force microscopy.<sup>14</sup>

ALEXIS SMETS: For myself, I am interested when the act of reading a scientific image forces me to think differently. And although I may use it, I'm at the same time a bit defiant about the opposition between image and text and the related notion of purity. It's interesting, but it's probably an external criterion, probably not the criterion of those who created the images: they must have had something else in mind, something else was at stake for them. I then try to read parts of images, in order to see what makes the particular image different from the text that supports it, and from other images in its context. I am interested in what makes an image an object of experimentation, and what type of experimentation I can make. For example, a diagram in Kekulé allows me to calculate something about the molecule—

JAMES ELKINS: How useful to do you find accounts that help in those kinds of specific readings, as opposed to what I called large-scale accounts like Nancy's?

ALEXIS SMETS: I see a lot of interesting things in the general texts on images, but I have to forget all of it when I look at scientific images. I must. Otherwise I miss the

12. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, translated by Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 63–79.

13. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 83–110.  
14. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 96.

image. To grasp the history of the image, to understand its context, I need to see how it succeeds in being not a part of its history, but a thing.

JAMES ELKINS: I notice you are describing your problem using the general word *image*. But you could also describe it using words like *graph*, *notation*, or *diagram*.

I'd like to call this the *problem of footnote 1*. Just to use Nancy as an example: his essay "A Distinct Oscillation" could go in the first footnote of an essay on, say, Kekulé. But he wouldn't be connected to footnote 2, or to the rest of the argument. It's a question of utility, and also of the relation between discourses.

AUD SISSEL HOEL: Regarding the way images can be described by more specialized terms:

I want to point to the work of the Danish scholar Frederik Stjernfelt. He has proposed an interpretation of Peirce in which the diagram is seen as the key to Peircean epistemology. According to Stjernfelt, diagrams amount to a special kind of icon: they are icons we can think with. Icons such as these are rule-bound entities that yield new information about the object if we experiment with them. He goes on to describe pictures as a subcategory of diagrams.<sup>15</sup>

JAMES ELKINS: That turns the question around. Instead of subdividing images into smaller concepts, you are taking a part, diagrams, as the whole.

AUD SISSEL HOEL: Yes, and afterwards you have to subdivide the elements in a new way. This interpretation of Peirce is more interesting than the common one, because it doesn't begin with the distinction icon–index–symbol. Rather, it takes its point of departure in a noncircular definition of the icon.

Stjernfelt seems to think of picture analysis as a procedure akin to scientific analysis: it proceeds by qualified guesses (abductions), testing of hypotheses through manipulations of the diagram, and inductive probability support.

JAMES ELKINS: What are the limitations of that account? It reminds me of Thomas Sebeok's interest in diagrams.<sup>16</sup>

AUD SISSEL HOEL: Well, it seems to be an approach that privileges spatial features and symbolic meanings invoked by spatial clues. The account is built around two examples, a perspective painting and one of Malevich's Suprematist compositions. I am not sure to what extent it would work as well with, say, a photographic portrait or one of Marie Krane's paintings.

JAMES ELKINS: I like the idea of taking an apparently narrower concept, like *diagram*, and putting it in place of a larger concept like *image*. But I wonder if it would end up being an artificial exercise.<sup>17</sup>

15. Frederik Stjernfelt, chaps. 4 and 13 in *Diagrammatology: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Phenomenology, Ontology, and Semiotics* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007).

16. Sebeok, the section "Features of Iconicity" in *Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics*, second edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001): "The neglect of diagrams is particularly incomprehensible in view of the fact

that they loomed large in Peirce's own semiotic research, and that they have been reviewed by at least three careful scholars, at some length (Zeman 1964, Roberts 1973, Thibaud 1975)."

17. For example, Denise Schmandt-Besserat's account of the common ancient Middle Eastern origin of mathematics (or at least counting), writing, and pictures provides an intriguing starting point for image theory, but it could be

EISABETH BIRK: Stjernfelt's project is very ambitious. He is less interested in classification than in showing that iconicity is pervasive wherever we use signs. Diagrams are the paradigmatic case for his idea of iconicity.<sup>18</sup>

RACHEL MUNDY: One of the things I don't understand about this subject is what the relation is between creating a taxonomy or classification system, and the social contexts that are involved. If you're looking at one of the objects I study, like a sonogram of a bird song, or if you're looking at a Peircean diagram, they raise issues of word and image; but that also brings up relations between academic fields. I wonder how classification systems enable those problems.

JAMES ELKINS: Well, just speaking for myself, *The Domain of Images* is a classic case of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. I am still convinced by the examples in the second half of the book, if not by the exact classification I proposed there involving semasiographs and so forth. I still find it convincing because it is an attempt to describe how people have read pictures of different sorts. I am not saying properties like *enuntiographs* (signs that are the equivalent of sentences), register lines, allographic elements, and so on are inherent in pictures, but *it's as if they were*, because that is how the images have been interpreted. In order to read images that way, you have to throw out the baby of social context and history. I'd like to think Goodman bracketed history for a similar sort of reason.

Jim Herbert, who read the manuscript in an early version, was very sympathetic, but in the end he is on the side of the baby, as most people are! But it is not possible to do both in a single text. The book was my way of acknowledging, of describing to myself, the ways we have of reading images, and those ways remain somewhat submerged whenever social contexts—the baby—take precedence over attention to the ways images are read—the bathwater.

EISABETH BIRK: Jim, would you say that these two types of approaches are necessarily alternatives? Can "historical" approaches really ignore formal distinctions and can "formal" approaches really bracket social and historical context? Does Goodman really bracket history?<sup>19</sup>

JAMES ELKINS: Not in the sense you mean. The *Domain of Images* is meant to be about social practices of interpretation. But in practice, the reception of the *Domain of Images* has been limited to those who do not miss the absence of certain kinds of socioeconomic contexts.

said to be as artificial as, say, Wackernagel's etymology of images as kisses (see Section 1). For Besserat, see my essay "The Common Origins of Pictures, Writing, and Notation," in *On Pictures and the Words That Fail Them* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 163–87.

18. Stjernfelt is a proponent of semiotic realism, and he hopes that a broad conception of iconicity will provide an ontological foundation for semiotics. See, for example, his claim that "any higher sign, index and symbol alike, must contain, or, by association or inference terminate in, an icon." *Diagrammatology*, 29.

19. Classification requires abstraction. Knowing that a symbol system is analog or digital does not, in itself, enlighten me about its functions in a given social or historical context. But then, given information about a social or historical context, it may be crucial to decide whether, say, my diagram is digital or analog, because this property may be what enables a certain discourse, a certain discovery, a certain practice.

And classification permits abstraction. For the purposes of classification we may treat references as relations instead of practices. And it is quite

REGAN GOLDEN-MCNERNEY: One of the problems with using a concept like *diagram* is that if all images are diagrams, there is no space for entropy, for things that undermine the unity of the image. I suspect that all diagrams are examples of good gestalt so as not to distract from the information being presented, but I would be interested in hearing opposing views.

AUD SISSEL HOEL: I am not an expert on this theory; I have just discovered it. But I think it's more that the viewer is part of the interpretation. If your example is an abstract painting with only squares on the surface, like Marie Krane's, you can still think *as if: if I do this*, then something else happens. There is no fixed meaning, and yet nothing is arbitrary either. The point is that an icon would not be a tautology, but would generate new meaning, and that is what a diagram does.

EISABETH BIRK: The chief interest of Stjernfelt's book for a study of diagrams (in the narrow sense) is his idea that diagrams can be manipulated, experimented with, and that this is what makes them so important epistemologically.<sup>20</sup>

AUD SISSEL HOEL: I am not an expert on this account. But I don't think it posits unitary meanings. It is more that the picture is regarded as an open field of experimentation in which the viewer takes an active part. There are no fixed meanings, and yet nothing is arbitrary either. The point is that an icon would not be a tautology, but would generate new meaning, and that is what a diagram does. But again, this is not really my—

JAMES ELKINS: This is different from what Marie-José introduced as *exousia*, the power of choice, possibility, liberty, and abuse.<sup>21</sup> This freedom is much more quantitatively constrained.

This is also related to what I call *the problem of the pencil*. When you read a science textbook, you need to have a pencil in hand, not only to take marginal notes—which can also be done in the humanities—but because there are problem sets at the end of each chapter. Science cannot be learned without writing and drawing. Starting, or restarting, image theory from the position of the diagram would entail a similar commitment. The diagram has to be tested, redrawn, expanded—

REGAN GOLDEN-MCNERNEY: I agree that this type of redrawing of diagrams and charts occurs in the sciences, but the viewer is still kept at a distance from the object, in fact they must maintain critical distance to solve the problem, so even if there

true that we are often so familiar with the use of a symbol system that we forget that the characteristics a classification is based on are those of a certain practice, and *not* inherent qualities of the symbol. But not all cases can be decided by habit or analogy. Even for a familiar type of representation like a graph it may not be clear whether it should be read as digital or analog; here, formal classification depends on context.

20. Stjernfelt sees “diagram experimentation” as the “basic rational semiotic behavior” at work in “pictures, metaphorical, analogical,

and poetical reasoning, linguistic and narratological syntax, basic sensory-motor schemata, as well as mathematics proper” (Stjernfelt, *Diagrammatology*, 115).

21. Mondzain pointed especially to Luke 20:2–8, where Jesus links his authority (*exousia*) to his image.

is some interaction between the viewer and the image, it does not change their relationship which remains detached.

MARIE-JOSÉ MONDZAIN: I would like to come back to your initial question, Alexis. What is the relation between all the theory, the readings we have done, the concepts we have been using, and the desire for classification, taxonomy, control, science, and knowledge? Where is the real, material meeting with the image? You were speaking about the necessity of reminding ourselves about what we are doing with *images*, and what this has to do with our desire to show, or so see. To an extent, the desire of theory is a repressive desire. Our desire for control is set against the excess of all images. This was your question, right?

ALEXIS SMETS: Yes—<sup>22</sup>

MARIE-JOSÉ MONDZAIN: So this is a very important question. There is a desire of knowledge or knowing, and also a desire of seeing. Sometimes the desire of seeing is the desire of *not* knowing; not exactly of forgetting, but of something which is linked to our desire to believe. Images are signs of our belief; even a diagram shows me what I believe. The relation between knowledge and belief is at the center of the operation of images. Sometimes our belief can be true, and other times it's a matter of credulity, or magic. There are many levels of belief. But the question is not always one of theory.

JAMES ELKINS: These are linked questions, because I notice, listening to you, the word *image* and the word *diagram*. How far into the realm Alexis's interests—into diagram, *vestigium*, *umbra*, *nota*, *character*, *signum*—can a discussion of image, belief, and knowledge go?

MARIE-JOSÉ MONDZAIN: It is the economy of *partition* and *disparition* in the things we produce.

TOM MITCHELL: Can I interject something here? What got me into the image problem was not literature or the arts. It was mathematics. It was in particular the relation between algebra and geometry. Plato's allegory of the slave boy, and the Pythagorean theorem, were critical, but also a very simple equation:  $y = 1/x$ . It's a simple statement. Peirce would call it an icon. Then you diagram  $y = 1/x$ , and you find you have to inscribe the space first. That is something that needs to be said about the diagram: it does not happen on a blank screen. It starts with the preparation of the space, the ground. It can start with the establishment of coordinates, or with an understood structure. If it's a Cartesian diagram, it has to have  $x$  and  $y$

22. I wish to maintain my “yes,” but at the same time I would like to make it more nuanced. I am defiant about general theories of the image because I often have the impression that they aim less at the particular images they happen to study than at problems that are external to these images. In other words, when I read a general theorization of the image, it seems to me that its author wishes to tackle a

problem that is less the problem aimed at by the image than, for instance, a problem of epistemology. So the problem is no longer “What does this image do in this precise context?” or “To what problem does this image answer?” but instead it becomes “How do we know what this image means?” And this is a very different question, in which the image may play a secondary role, in spite of our alleged interest.

axes: otherwise the diagram will mean nothing. Once the ground is prepared, it produces a field which is itself an icon: it is a way of dividing up space, classifying regions of space. Some portions are above the x axis, and some below.

Then it turns out that  $y = 1/x$  allows you to intuit the infinite, because it means the closer y comes to zero, the further you go out along the x axis: that's the asymptote.

So it strikes me that the diagram is an image. It's a special kind of image, and I think that Peirce and Goodman together give us a very powerful language for describing exactly what kind of image it is. It's an image that is laid on top of another image, namely the space itself, the ground. (Ground is prepared in a different way in painting, although there are paintings that begin with perspective geometry.) The diagram is also a hybrid image, if we're thinking about the relation between symbols and icons. It is filled with indices.

So it seems to me the scientific image, whether it is a diagram, a graph, a computer readout, is made very intelligible by this method.

JAMES ELKINS: Yes, and there are far more complicated examples that also can work with Peirce and Goodman.<sup>23</sup> What you say would be a good case that divisions of *image* into subcategories could work after the establishment of concepts of the image. If I were to construct the opposite argument, it would be something like this: Let's say you're interested in fractal geometry, the Mandelbrot set, and related things. If that's your interest, then you would need to look into different ways of setting out what is called the complex plane. You would work on the iterated equation, like  $x_{n+1} = x_n^2 + c$ , that is to be applied to each coordinate group, and you might be interested in how to assign colors to each set of iterations. Your conversations would have to do with ways of disposing individual parts of that graphical space. And the further you get into that, the less it will help to think of diagrams as kinds of images that use preexisting space, that mix icons and indices, and so forth. The theory of the diagram would become footnote 1.

TOM MITCHELL: No, that's where I disagree. It would not only be footnote 1. It would also become footnote 10, and maybe footnote 30. Because this is precisely the question of whether you can discover anything, whether you can get new knowledge. This is crucial to Peirce's theory of the diagram, and of the icon in general. An icon is something that you can go back and look at again, and see something you didn't see the first time. With  $y = 1/x$ , for example, you can ask, How do I make a diagram that does like this? [Gesturing up] What expression do we need?

JAMES ELKINS: Our question is about shades of grey, but in general I would be on the other side. In general, the more detailed and specific the discourse gets—the further from the humanities, the more engrossed in the specific languages of images—the less need it has for these general conditions. True, the diagram sug-

23. See the analysis of a sonar chart and several mathematical expressions in *The Domain of Images*, 35–36, 136–38, and the discussion of Goodman's place in Section 1. For more on

the history of the visualization of mathematical expressions, see *Visual Practices Across the University* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2007), 194–98.

gests new knowledge: but it isn't knowledge you get by returning to Peirce. There is no footnote 10 or 30 to concepts like *image* in mathematics textbooks. The language changes: with the Mandelbrot set, the next things people thought of were self-similarity and periodicity, and those properties did not require a return to the general concepts of diagram or image. They led onward, into mathematics.<sup>24</sup>

JOEL SNYDER: There are some moments in the history of science in which a figure of speech and a diagram come together. I am thinking of the figure of the double helix, which I do not think was even diagrammed in the original Watson and Crick paper in *Nature* in 1953. It was simply proven. Then that notion received a diagrammatic form: it then had the economy of the model, in that it contained all the information about crystallography and molecular form. So there is a moment in which it seems to me that sometimes what matters is just *stating* a figure that fires the imagination, and I don't see how there is a general method of describing that.

JAMES ELKINS: Sorry, I don't understand: how would that problematic be different from the case with images in general?

JOEL SNYDER: Well, this was not an image. It could be *made* into an image. There was a moment in which the double helix could either be a diagram or an image, or something else, and that moment needn't be reduced to the notion of imagery.

JAMES ELKINS: So that would be another way of dividing, or not dividing, the domain of the image.

I have been trying to use scientist's, engineer's, and other nonhumanist's discourse to describe images. This is the second of the two possibilities I mentioned. (The first would be keeping our allegiance to the general concepts such as *image* and *picture*, and the second would be to give those up in favor of subdivisions, special cases, technical discourses, local languages.) It is possible to go a very long way in this direction. In electron microscopy, for example, there are very interesting things that can be said about focus and blur, and they are very different from ideas of focus and blur in ordinary photography. The electron microscopist's terms, like *Scherzer focus* and the *contrast transfer function*, can be learned, and they can provide just as rich, suggestive, and powerful a vocabulary for interpreting photographs as the ordinary uses of *blur* or *focus*. You could actually switch allegiances for a while, and think of photographs through these terms.

But again it's shades of grey, because if you're interested in ideas like showing and saying, or questions like What is an image? then you could probably not afford to leave the fold of general humanities discourse.

MEREL VAN TILBURG: Regarding the transfer of an image from one field to another, I think of Deleuze's use of the diagram in the field of painting.<sup>25</sup> Rather than a

24. This argument, about the differences between humanities discourse and mathematical discourses, is pursued in my *Visual Practices Across the University and Six Stories from the End of Representation: Images in Painting*,

*Photography, Microscopy, Astronomy, Particle Physics, and Quantum Mechanics, 1985–2000* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

25. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (London: Continuum, 2005).

transfer of knowledge, it would be a matter of knowledge based on belief, as you said, Marie-José.

JAMES ELKINS: The diagram or graph has played an interesting role in our conversation so far, because we have looked at it from several points of view—Joel's, Tom's, Sissel's, Alexis's—but no one has mentioned any other candidate to contrast with *image*. We haven't talked about maps, for example, or *notation*, or tables (as in your Chinese texts, Si Han). I wonder if this means that diagram presents itself as the principal companion of writing and image.

EISABETH BIRK: If diagrams appear as a third term, that may have to do with their role in the process of typification (or at least in its representations).<sup>26</sup>

AUD SISSEL HOEL: Well, based on the account that I presented earlier (which was Stjernfelt's account and not mine, by the way), maps, notations, and tables would all be examples of diagrams.

SI HAN: Is it possible to distinguish between taxonomy and classification? For me, the taxonomy of images divides things into different species according to criteria that often involve form. It involves a process of looking at images as *types*, exemplifying them ostensively, characterizing each type holistically, and then giving it a label. I have found at least six trisections of graphical images that I would regard as a sort of taxonomy. For you, Jim, writing is one form, picture is another, and notation is the third.<sup>27</sup> We all know what writings and pictures are, but what is included in notations? We mentioned diagrams. In the Chinese systems there are Zheng Qiao's use of tables, *pu*, and Zhang Yanyuan's inclusion of hexagrams from the *I Ching*. Michael Twyman uses the term *schematic graphics*; the art historian Arnold Hauser would add *decorative* patterns; and the phenomenologist Robert Sokolowski would add *a pile of stones*.<sup>28</sup> So the third element is very problematic. Writing and picture are less so. I think it is possible to divide the third term further.

Zheng Qiao's *shu*, *hua*, *pu* are taxonomical terms, but his sixteen categories of images are a classification. Zhang Yanyuan's and Jim's trisections are taxonomy; Tom Mitchell's family tree of images in *Iconology* is a classification. This is why the issue of taxonomy and classification is important to me. Classification has to do with the *function* of images, rather than their form. In science, medicine, and mathematics, they use different species of images. So classification is more flexible than taxonomy, for the kinds of subjects that interest us.

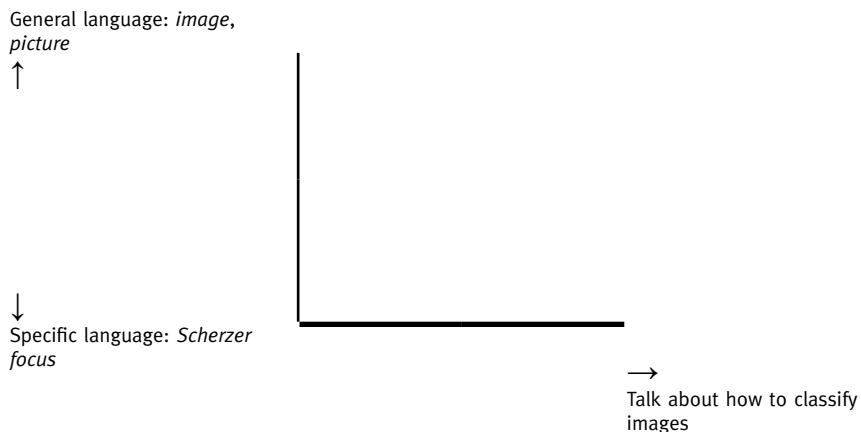
26. Christian Stetter, "Bild, Diagramm, Schrift," in *Schrift: Kulturtechnik zwischen Auge, Hand und Maschine*, edited by Gernot Grube, Werner Kogge, and Sybille Krämer (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2005), 115–35.

27. [In *The Domain of Images*, I argued this using the concept of notation, which I think is more capacious than diagram. —J.E.]

28. In *A Chinese Word on Images*, I discussed this and compared some of the trisections. For Twyman's trisection of graphics (verbal, pictorial, schematic), see Michael Twyman, "Using Pictorial Language: A Discussion

of the Dimensions of the Problem," in *Designing Usable Texts*, edited by T. M. Duffy and R. Waller (Orlando: Academic Press, 1985), 245–312. For Sokolowski's three sorts of intentions in images (signitive, pictorial, symbolic), see Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5, 77–87. For Hauser's three basic forms of pictorial representation developed at the end of the Paleolithic age, see Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, third edition, vol. 1, *From Prehistoric Times to the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1999), 15.

JAMES ELKINS: So at the risk of being too abstract, let me propose that the shades-of-grey metaphor I have been using needs to become a two-dimensional diagram. In addition to the axis that leads from very general terms such as *image* to very specific image languages such as the one involving *Scherzer focus*, we should add another dimension: the one that pursues images by thinking through classification and taxonomy. No matter how we define classification or taxonomy, thinking about them is different from thinking about images either as Nancy does (in the general language of the humanities) or as an electron microscopist does (in the specific language of a science or technology). Now we have three ways of looking at the problem, and no resolution in sight.



## ASSESSMENTS



## PREFACE

*James Elkins*

These Assessments expand on many points that were elided during the week, and address a number of areas that are not represented in the transcribed Seminars. Here I offer, as a reader's guide, brief hints about their contents. I feel a little odd writing this Preface, which was requested by one of this book's referees, because the Assessments are amazingly rich and various, and their contents just cannot be telegraphed. Nor is this Preface any kind of critical assessment: that is provided by the excellent Afterword by Wolfram Pichler.

Section 1 of the Seminar, "How Many Theories of Images Are There?," inspired a poetic meditation by Emmanuel Alloa, who sees both images and theories about them coming to us in "multiples, in flows, fluxes, and cascades." His answer is that images are related, fluidly, to one another, and his attempt to specify, which leads him from Wittgenstein through Sartre to Porphyrius, and then forward again to Husserl, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty. Paul Willemarck's assessment focuses on the discussion about the place of rationality and irrationality in our senses of images; he proposes that there might be an emerging sense of a role for a theory of images after poststructuralism. Klaus Sachs-Hombach was invited to participate in this book when we realized that science had been almost entirely omitted, despite our best efforts; he says the difficulty in listing theories comes from the fact that we have not yet developed a systematic image science. He suggests several axioms and concepts for getting started.

Section 2 of the Seminar, "What Is Outside Images?," is mentioned by several people. Adrian Rifkin's evocative assessment elaborates Marie-José Mondzain's play on What is not | an image? and What is | not an image? by adding, What an image is not and What is an image not, and then, in true Adrian style, Where is the image, Where is not the image, Where is the image not. (And to these Keith Moxey also adds, When is an image? and "For whom is an image?) Crispin Sartwell contributes a sketch of the history of our proclivity "to make image the category into which we ought to analyze other categories." Sunil Manghani's essay centers on the difficulties the Seminar participants got themselves in when they worried about distinctions between picture, image, *Bild*, and *Vortstellung*, and Manghani ends by suggesting it may be time to consider *making* images as a way into these difficulties.

Section 3 of the Seminar, "Accounts of Images, and Accounts That Begin from Images," elicited a thoughtful response by Alex Potts, for whom the Seminars lacked the "drive" and "political urgency" that such discussions have had in the past, but paradoxically also lacked extended engagement with contemporary

art, except in “very formalist” terms. He wishes for more talk of the “historical baggage” the present brings with it, and reminds the participants that they do not live in a “postideological age.” Rainer Totzke’s Assessment is an abstract meditation on how certain strains in contemporary philosophy have taken the image as their central concept, hoping, he says, to be able to reimagine parts of philosophy *through* the image.

Section 4 of the Seminar, “Ontology,” provoked several responses. Keith Moxey’s Assessment includes the observation that culture determines what counts as ontological presence; Aud Sissel Hoel considers the reasons for resisting an ontological account of images, and summarizes her own extensive work on conceptualization of images by pointing to the “relational ontology” inherent in phenomenology; Ellen Chow considers the ontology of *eidolon* and *ikon*; Ruth Sonderegger shows how, from a Wittgensteinian perspective, some of the uses of ontology in the discussions are incoherent; Sebastian Egenhofer allows the necessity of an ontological reading when it comes to naturalistic images, but asks that it be reassigned to questions of temporality and ideology; Irmgard Emmelhainz is interested in thinking about images in relation to sensation but also together with “memory, thought, perception, imagination, language”; and John Michael Krois calls for a rethinking of the concept of embodiment, pointing out, for example, that for Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology was to be thought in the first and second person, and not imagined to be a “general doctrine.” And finally, Karin Leonhard contributes a beautiful essay on images as clouds, and clouds as images, which has many points of connection with themes of epistemology and ontology.

Section 5 of the Seminar, “Non-Western Accounts,” is questioned at the most fundamental level by Frederick Asher, who notes that the Sanskrit *lalit-kalā*, which is taken as an ancient word for art, is actually a modern concept, made up in response to the West. Given that, the entirety of art theory, the framing conditions for this text, is in question. He calls for a discourse, which has hardly begun, on the general conditions of shared intelligibility. At the same time, we would both hold that in many cases, the conversation people may hope for, the one that will lead from fundamental terms into familiar art histories and theories, may not be possible. Frank Vigneron’s assessment takes up Si Han’s terms, *tu* 圖 and *xiang* 象, and suggests that they need to be brought forward into current pedagogy. Parul Dave Mukherji wonders why it’s necessary to even speak of “giving up” some Western terms or methodologies; she prefers to mix them together. For her the Sanskrit term *anukṛti* denotes the performativity in representation, but she saw how to use the word after reading Derrida on mimesis, and she broadens this into a trenchant meditation on the ghosts of postcolonial theory in Mitchell, Terry Smith, and others. Kavita Singh makes several similar points, but she is both angry and irritated by what she sees as the “brutally casual invocation and dismissal of the ‘non-West.’” She suggests that one way forward is to stop discussing well-known Indian sources (several of which

circulate through the pages of this book) and turn to ephemeral, apparently minor, little-known texts. And Francesco Peri's contribution is a lighthearted but sober set of questions about whether it makes sense to be speaking of universal theories, Westernness, or non-Westernness at all. (He also compares this book to Macrobius's *Saturnalia* and Athenaeus's *Deipnosophistae*, which is an unusual way of pointing to its lateness and its scholasticism.)

Section 6 of the Seminar, "Public and Private," mainly inspired reactions that favor the public. An exception is Michael Ann Holly. She might not see her brief and poetic contribution fitting here, but when she asks that visual studies not dedicate itself exclusively to politics and identity, but also remember the "powerful and poetic moments of encounter and engagement that make still art still matter," she is invoking themes that, for me at least, have everything to do with the vexed distinction between public and private seeing. Thomas Baumeister offers an extended defense of aesthetic experience, and ends by stressing that such experience is "publicly given," and therefore culturally shared; but at the same time he stresses that "the public in a museum usually does not form a *community*"—that is, not every public is more than a collection of individuals having incommunicable experiences. Ciarán Benson's assessment considers images as *affordances*, a term he borrows from J. J. Gibson in order to speak about images as social acts, things that provoke, parody, defy, deride . . . Benson provides a long, open-ended list of social functions that can help reorient discussions of the nature of images. Michael Zimmermann considers the public-private debate from a position that is skeptical of our capacity to step outside of images in order to theorize them (he compares image theorizing, in a great metaphor, to repairing a boat while it is in the water). Zimmerman's conclusion, however, is that Lichtenstein's (and my own) interest in apparently private viewing is an artifact of fundamentally public possibilities of meaning.

Section 7 of the Seminar, "Religion, Ritual, and the Sacred," had very little resonance with the assessors. Keith Moxey gives belief a secular turn in his response, bringing it near to enculturation.

Section 8 of the Seminar, "Painting and Images," elicited an interesting meditation by Harry Cooper, on the reasons why he rejects the word *image* in favor of *painting*: it isn't because *image* forgets materiality, but because *painting* is open to the senses and experience in ways that *image* isn't. Like Cooper, Klaus Speidel is interested in looking closely at paintings; his contribution brings Daniel Arasse more into the conversation. Speidel notes that Arasse understood how looking very closely at a painting is also a way to gain power over it by "breaking" the images into details. Antonia Pocock considers the Seminars' reluctance to engage the actual paintings we had in the room with us, and what that might say about the concepts of the image that were in play.

Section 9 of the Seminar, "Image, Notation, Graph . . ." got the second-least number of responses, after section 7. Vivian Sobchack takes a particular example, computer-generated images of humans, and shows that they share the

“material resemblance” of images and the “conceptual resemblance” of diagrams; she concludes that we will soon get used to this “strangeness” and see it as normative—at which point our current perplexities about diagrams may disappear. The historian of science Christoph Lüthy raises a series of questions about *why* there have been so many kinds of images, and what functions they have served. Frederik Stjernfelt’s contribution includes a helpful analysis of Charles Sanders Peirce’s sense of “diagram.”

There are also assessments that begin from places outside the discussions in this book. Ladislav Kesner wishes the week’s seminars had touched more on epistemic images such as scientific, medical, and other utilitarian forms. He notes the fact that the languages of presentation and interpretation of such images are often outside the languages of this Seminar. Paul Messaris wonders why the participants were interested in the question, and why he found himself interested enough to read through the text; his answer is that in media studies, questions like *What is an image?* end up being about the reception, translation, and dissemination of images. Xaq Pitkow offers a vision scientist’s point of view, and provides a discussion of *perceptual inference* and other contributions to vision that come from places other than the retina. And there is the very suggestive meditation, offered by Thomas Macho and Jasmin Mersmann, on three births and three deaths of images: a new ontology read through Robert Bresson.

And then there is José-Luis Brea’s diaphanous meditation on images in thought and language. José-Luis Brea died in September 2010, and he knew he was dying when he wrote this piece. He was a wonderful scholar, gentle and subtle, as his writing shows.

## INDIAN IMAGE / IMAGE IN INDIA

*Frederick M. Asher*

As we interrogate the notion of an image, asking about diverse conceptualizations of the term and its referent, I want to insert some cautions. Not only is it evident that terms are often not adequately translatable from one language to another, as Jacqueline Lichtenstein has noted, but it should be equally clear that the meaning of terms shifts through time, as much within cultures, even non-Western ones, as within Western ones. Finally, and most importantly, we need to be cautious about broad generalizations that the very term *non-Western* promotes.

Before thinking about whether it would be possible to practice art history using indigenous Indian methods and theory, we need to ask whether premodern India had an art history at all, and that question is predicated on the assumption that India had a thing that was understood as art.

So let's start with the concept of art in India. Before the colonial encounter, did Indians identify a thing as art? The Hindi word *lalit-kalā* is generally taken to mean "art" and because of its Sanskritized basis is assumed to be a term of considerable antiquity. For example, the Lalit Kala Akademi is India's National Academy of Art, and *Lalit Kalā* is one of India's premier art history journals, with articles exclusively in English. But *lalit-kalā* as a term for "art" is a modern construct, one necessitated by the introduction of the European notion(s) of art. In Sanskrit, the adjective *lalita*, from the verb *lal* (to play or sport) means played, and also amorous or voluptuous; the noun *kalā* means a part of something and so can refer to one of the sixty-four arts, which include such things as good manners, cooking, and knowledge of code words, as well as painting and making clay figures, though curiously not stone sculpture. My Sanskrit-English dictionary, the thickest there is, doesn't record *lalita-kalā*, suggesting that the independent category of fine arts did not especially concern anyone in the days when Sanskrit was a prevalent written and spoken language.

If there wasn't a category of fine art, could there have been an art theory or art history? Two types of texts have been taken as representative of the art theory of ancient India. One type is those texts that appear to prescribe such things as ideal proportions of painted or sculptured images as well as other aspects of their appearance, for example, their colors. The *Vishnudharmottapurana* is probably the most frequently cited such text, but it is by no means the only one. More or less contemporary with it is the *Brihat Samhita*, and perhaps a bit later are the *Matsyapurana* and the *Agnipurana*, among many others. I cite these names not to fill the page with a great deal of italicized Sanskrit and thus to suggest erudi-

tion but rather because each of these texts shares much in common. That is, they are encyclopedic works intended to capture all knowledge, ranging from history to astrology to anatomy and statecraft. They also generally have chapters on the appearance of images, which are cast in prescriptive terms. That is, the proportions of the image should be the following, and the details of the objects held in the hands should be such-and-such. Thus these texts, or at least these portions of the texts, are taken as guides for artists, leading to the colonialist trope that Indian artists slavishly followed textual prescriptions. But control of knowledge represents power, and these texts, probably composed by Brahmins, that is, priests, were intended to vest control of knowledge in those who preserved by memory the sacred texts rather than those who performed such functions as making images. After all, could authority over the images of gods be ceded to those who work with their hands?

But the *Vishnudharmottarapurana* is no different from the other *puranas*, that is, the encyclopedic texts of ancient knowledge (*purana* means old), or the *Brihat Samhita*, an astrological text. It is sometimes taken as a portion of a larger *purana*, the *Vishnupurana*,<sup>1</sup> and its function is to record all knowledge, starting with creation and moving quite quickly to geography, to history, mythology, and a dose of medicine. Only one portion, some nine chapters of the third book of this text—nine chapters, that is, out of hundreds of chapters in the *Vishnudharmottarapurana*—relates to images.<sup>2</sup> Though that is probably the longest of any *purana*'s discussion of images, the work is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a history of art, a manual for artists, or book that reveals the aesthetics of a particular age. It is, much more, a book of taxonomy and carries with it the authority of relegating, as taxonomy does, each thing to its proper place, an exercise in the placement of bounds and thus control. And, like the rest of the text, it is addressed to kings and brahmins, not to artists.<sup>3</sup>

These nine chapters are identified as the *Chitrasutra*, the sutra or text on painting.<sup>4</sup> They describe in some detail how images, principally images of deities, ought to appear. And as such, it may be taken as much as admonitions for the reception of visual images as it is for their production. In that limited sense it is a theoretical text about images.

For a text of such brevity, it has generated considerable discussion and some degree of controversy. Apart from translations and their introductions, Jim El-

1. Priyabala Shah, *Vishnudharmottara-Purana: English Translation of First Khanda* (Delhi: Parimal, 1999), xvii–xviii.

2. That's a total of 306 couplets; one of the nine chapters is only 15 couplets long, another 17 and one 18. By contrast, the section of the *Vishnudharmottarapurana* devoted to literature consists of fifteen chapters, as does the section on dance.

3. Repeatedly, the text uses a phrase that may be translated as, "Oh Best of Kings . . ." as a prelude to a description. Earlier books of this text introduce concepts with the phrase "Oh Brahmin. . . ."

4. The *Citrasūtra of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, edited and translated by Parul Dave Mukherji (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2001). Like *lalit-kal*, the term *chitra* as a word for painting is a complicated one. "Variegated" and "brilliant" are the principal meanings for the term. It is clear from the opening couplet of the *Vishnudharmottarapurana*'s book 3, chapter 35 that *chitra* is here intended as painting or perhaps as art, that is, a figure fashioned by human hand. But even here, it does not carry a sense of the aesthetic (perhaps another fraught term), but rather a sense of mimesis.

kins was probably the first to discuss this text in a context a great deal broader than the text itself.<sup>5</sup> He did so in the context of works that might present stories of art, diverse stories, not the linear account confined to the West that E. H. Gombrich had offered a half century ago. Since the time of Gombrich's book, other writers of histories of art have tacked on chapters concerning the art of the Other's places, but generally as side trips from an otherwise linear narrative and still written from a Western perspective. Considering an inside story, that is, a discussion of art as presented by texts composed long ago in these Other's places, represents a major and very important departure, the beginning of a respectful one.<sup>6</sup> Yet curiously, a colleague whom I very much respect, Parul Mukherji, has recently taken exception to the story of the *Vishnudharmottara Purana* presented in *Stories of Art*.<sup>7</sup> There are errors in Elkins's text, no doubt. But I am struck much more by the common project Elkins and Mukherji share than the differences their missions reflect. As we reflect on the diverse understandings of an image, we need to engage in this project collectively and critically but also from the diverse perspectives that our individual expertise permit.

Much more than these nine chapters, the *Natyasastra*, a text of about the second century attributed to a sage named Bharata, is often assumed to present a theory of art. In fact, however, it has virtually nothing at all to do with the visual arts. Rather, it is a text devoted to *natya*, that is, dance, and by extension to performance. Certainly there is a close relationship between the visual and performing arts, likely a symbiotic one. For example, the strong red backgrounds of Mewar painting in the seventeenth century may very well derive from the backdrops of outdoor theatrical performance; and the organization of early Indian narrative relief, that is, relief sculpture of the second and first centuries BCE, by location rather than narrative sequence may derive from multiday performance of theater. For example, the *Ramlila* (the performance of the story of the god-king Rama) in Varanasi once moved from place to place so that all the episodes of the story that took place, say, in Rama's home city, Ayodhya, whether at the beginning or end of the story, would be performed in one part of Varanasi, while those scenes that took place in, say, Lanka, would be performed in the part of Varanasi that still is called Lanka, as if geography were fluid so Lanka could be brought to Varanasi. Early Indian narrative relief is similarly organized, for example, with all the scenes that take place in the city of the Buddha's birth, whether prior to his birth or later in his life, clustered together, while those that take place in the locus of his enlightenment are clustered elsewhere.

But the *Natyasastra* barely mentions the visual arts. It does, however, offer what might be considered a sort of reception theory, a set of emotions (or fla-

5. Elkins, *Stories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 2002). [This adapts an earlier discussion, in *On Pictures and the Words That Fail Them* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) —J.E.]

6. As an outsider (Chicagoan, Jew, American university teacher, and writer) who interprets and presents the art of India, often to Indians, I'm sensitive to the struggle involved in crossing

cultural boundaries, and to the audacity of telling someone about their own art, art that has become mine only by adoption.

7. Parul D. Mukherji, "Putting the World in a Book: How Global Can Art History Be Today?," in *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence*, edited by Jaynie Anderson (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2009), 91–96.

vers, as the word *rasa* might be translated) that the audience should experience. And while they are portrayed in this text as pertaining to dance performance, they have been assumed by scholars of the visual to pertain as well to the visual arts, as if an artist thought consciously about a single *rasa* that he wished to inspire with a particular work of art. So much has the set of *rasas* been taken as an aesthetic theory for images that an entire exhibition was recently organized around *rasas*, and each work in the show was described as conveying this or that *rasa*.<sup>8</sup> In fact, of course, *rasa* theory, as it is generally described, is yet another taxonomy. It categorizes emotional response. True, that is a theory, but was it composed, we must ask, with the purpose of providing insight into performance or, stretching things farther, to the visual arts?

And while on the subject of performance, let me ask: Could one perform art history, that is, practice this discipline, using indigenous Indian methods, to paraphrase a question that Jim Elkins has elsewhere asked?<sup>9</sup> My answer—which I assert with real reluctance—is no, because these texts were not intended to provide aesthetic insight or to give a sense of the actual practice of premodern Indian artists. This may very well mean that there was in premodern India no practice that can be described as art history. But that's not surprising if there was no category of art and thus neither the collecting of it nor the writing about it.<sup>10</sup>

That does not mean, however, that those of us who study Indian art—a term I use with recognition that we have imposed the notion of art on the visual things of precolonial India—need not be familiar with the textual tradition. But it does mean that we should not search for an indigenous practice of art history, a realization that came into focus in the first phase of a project that the National Committee for the History of Art calls the Emerging Art History Project. With support of the Getty Foundation, the National Committee invited a small group of art historians from countries with limited established institutions to support the practice of art history and relatively few art historians. From one country, Ecuador, the only PhD art historian in the country participated in the discussions. Others came from India, China, Nigeria, Brazil, and Turkey, and as the project continues, the list of countries represented will grow considerably. I had expected, even hoped, that each of the participants would talk about the practice of art history with at least some recognition of indigenous traditions. In fact, by the end of the discussion, it was evident that the quest was very much like that of the anthropologist seeking some culture unsullied by contact with the rest of the world. The language, methods, and theoretical lenses were little different from those we employ in countries with established art history practices. What they lacked, rather, was the infrastructure that supports our work: JSTOR, the

8. B. N. Goswamy, *The Essence of Indian Art* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, 1986).

9. Elkins, review of David Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism*, *Art Bulletin* 86 no. 2 (2004): 373–81.

10. Joseph Alsop observes the link between collecting and writing about art. *The Rare Art Traditions: The History of Collecting and Its Linked Phenomena Wherever These Have Appeared* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982).

BHA, the Getty Research Institute, and generous individual benefactors such as Howard and Donna Stone.

As one who spends considerable time in India, I'm grateful to note that surgery is not practiced by some ancient techniques but rather by skilled professionals who both follow and establish international standards. And physics at Mumbai's Tata Institute of Fundamental Research is practiced by some of the world's leading scientists, who incorporate global theories and practices in their research while also breaking new theoretical ground. Similarly, art history, whether in India or Nigeria, Afghanistan or Ecuador, is part of a global process whose theoretical and methodological approaches are nuanced to the issues that our specific material presents.

So what is an image in the Indian context? Perhaps the word that best describes the notion is *mūrti*, that is, an embodiment, manifestation, incarnation, or personification. In modern parlance, a sculpture of a deity is called a *mūrti*. So in premodern terms, the manifestation of a deity on a temple wall or on palm leaf or even in the imagination of a devotee would be a *mūrti*. The image, in other words, is as often mental as it is material.

As I write, I realize that I am here reflecting the sense of two extraordinary young scholars who ask in another volume Jim Elkins has edited, "How then can 'world art history' ask the non-West to feign amnesia and return to a past 'untarnished' by the West? For whose benefit?"<sup>11</sup> Is it not a colonialist enterprise to insist, even to imagine, that those outside the West operate in a fashion that's different from us?

11. Atreyee Gupta and Sugata Ray, "Responding from the Margins," in *Is Art History Global?*, edited by James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007), 350–51.

## CONVERSATIONS THEN AND NOW

*Michael Ann Holly*

What is an image? Can we catch it, apprehend it, arrest it in a painting? Where does it reside? Before or behind the painting in time, inside a painting in material, after a painting in the mind of its spectator? Wrestling with this “conversation from a distance” (in both time and space) in the quiet of my office late one summer afternoon at the Clark Art Institute, I waylaid Michael Conforti (director of the Clark as well as the American Association of Museum Directors) and asked him what he thought the difference is between an image and a painting. “Canvas,” he replied. Then that one-word answer resonated—although at the other end of the theoretical spectrum—with another conversation I had some time ago with Hubert Damisch: “Never,” he once gently reprimanded, “use the word *image* when you actually mean *painting*.” So many of the participants’ comments gathered here continue to pierce my once-secure synonyms. To add anything more to what you have talked about for so many exhaustive hours is an impossible challenge, at least for me.

So instead I’ll just recount two brief, apposite tales—one factual and recently reminiscent, the other metaphorical and from over a century and a half ago—which have nothing to do with one another other than that they are both provoked by your conversations, and they both occurred in the city of Rochester, where I once lived. In the early nineties, at the University of Rochester, a number of us “invented” the first graduate program in Visual and Cultural Studies—the same sort of thing that Jim Elkins bids a premature “farewell” to in the title of the fifth volume of this book series. At the time, heady with the insights of poststructural theory and postmodernist art, we thought that renaming the study of art history and reframing it to address the visual world at large would encourage the spilling out of the contents (both conscious and unconscious) of this century-old cornucopia, promising insights anew. We certainly never intended to restrict either the name or the emphasis of visual studies to social and political contexts as several of the Chicago participants do with their dismissals (but certainly not Mitchell). At some point in your conversations you distinguish a concentration on the public life of images (visual studies) from the private (a new phenomenological aesthetics). Rochester’s capacious commitment to all kinds of critical theories (including phenomenology and psychoanalysis) is what gave this new program energy and zest, if not the coherence of approaches that could gather under the rubric of the history of art. Perhaps I am just being nostalgic, but I want actively to resist regarding visual studies as that which only investigates “images, their actions in society, their role in politics, com-

munity and culture” and not the powerful and poetic moments of encounter and engagement that make still art still matter. Acknowledging “presence” (the ontology of the image) should still be—as I think both Boehm and Elkins would agree with Mitchell—as much a part of visual studies as the reconstruction of “absence” (past worlds).

Yet what I really want to do is summon another kind of Rochester spirit story (provoked by Si Han’s Chinese fable of the “ghost who, in a hurry before the sun rises, tries to find a body to use as a host”) that kept occurring to me when reading your deliberations. In the mid-nineteenth century, upstate New York—and especially the Rochester neighborhood where I eventually lived (Corn Hill)—became the site of spiritualism, the belief that communion with the dead could happen under staged circumstances. Mysterious “rappings” occurred across town, and hushed gatherings arose around the séance table, facilitated by mediums who practiced their craft of divination with apparent conviction. The serious audience for these “parlor games” often included abolitionists, active in the Underground Railroad, and Suffragettes, active in the women’s rights movement. Many were indeed convinced that “conversations” with the spirit world would empower changes in their own world.

And what does this have to do with your own conversations about images and paintings around the seminar table in Chicago? I began to picture the material thing—the painting—as the Ouija board spread before you, with all hands lightly touching the planchette. The spirit that hovered just behind that visible scene is, of course, the image—the spectral presence that is forever out of reach, untouchable. We all know it’s there because of the magic that courses through works of art. An image is the ghost in the machine of the picture. As Mitchell asks, why do we hold the presumption that the image is always visible? And as Lichtenstein notes, “an image is in a painting and is an effect of painting.” There is always more to a painting than just paint, of course, and that’s why we keep talking and “divining,” or at least try to keep our solitary conversations with the work of art forever alive.

## WRITTEN FROM MEMORY

*Adrian Rifkin*

Marie José Mondzain is right to insist on the possible scensions of the phrase

What is not | an image?  
What is | not an image?

Generally it's not bad to listen to a possible emphasis or at least to be alert to a polyvalent sound of a phrase that is flat and clumsy on the page. This is one way of finding out if one ever meant to say what one had written in the first place, a space of disagreeing with oneself, even. The two cuts above are surprisingly complete in their rhetorical defiance of further elaboration.

Perversely, then, I would like to start by adding to them the following reformulation, which is slightly more on the side of the enigmatic. The first line is in itself sufficient to open a question regarding the principle of this seminar, while the shift of “is” in the second serves to leave the “not” hanging and somehow reflexive. When in a bit of a muddle, it's still not a bad idea to go for little negatives, reversals of active and passive, subjunctives and so forth. (Why does Mitchell dismiss Didi-Huberman the more readily to assert the value of anachronism, which is Didi-Huberman's main theme, or why does Lichtenstein think that English has no equivalent to *colorito*, whereas I use one frequently? Stop making big gestures and inflating little ones. [“There aren't any recent PhDs who are going to say, I'm going to stop citing Lacan and Benjamin and base all my work on the *Atthasālinī* or the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*.”] Stop making sense, because that is the work of art, not of theory.)

Anyway, here is my modification:

What an image is not  
What is an image not

In the first case you could say that an image is not “a pig in a poke,” and some clever or not so clever old language philosopher would tell you that this is anyway the case because the conjunction—the image/pig impasse—itself is some kind of a category mistake—although it might not be, if you go for the semiotic index. (Also, how about “an image is not something by which we do not feel ourselves sometimes to be possessed”?)

In the second case an additional phrase would invite some kind of a questioning; what is the image “if not an *énoncé*?” for example. This does seem to seem to be at issue in the micro-negative theology of Maimonides' definitions or speculations, for instance, in chapter 49 of *The Guide for the Perplexed*:

The motion of flying, frequently mentioned in the Bible, necessitates, according to our imagination, the existence of wings: wings are therefore given to the angels as symbols expressive of their existence, not of their true essence. You must also bear in mind that whenever a thing moves very quickly, it is said to fly, as that term implies great velocity of motion. . . . “As the eagle flieth” (Deut. xxviii 49). The eagle flies and moves with greater velocity than any other bird, and therefore it is introduced in this simile. Furthermore, the wings are the organs [lit. causes] of flight; hence the number of the wings of angels in the prophetic vision corresponds to the number of the causes which set a thing in motion, but this does not belong to the theme of this chapter.<sup>1</sup>

Here the image is brought into being—it is hard to say this without launching into a chain of pleonasms (given wings = winged shape)—as a figure for the incommensurable orders of envisaging the divine at all on the one hand and scriptural obligation to do so anyway on the other. “Angels are given wings” is essential to communicating the existence of the divine order, the formless infinitude of the deity, and the less infinite but equally immaterial forms the angels, archangels, and so forth. The image comes into view as a without-which-not of a particular discourse, but more so, of all discourse insofar as this imaging is also the foundational procedure of any elaboration of the immaterial that constitutes theology’s materials. In the last analysis, one could say that the image coincides with the first lines of the Pentateuch, and its gesture of bringing the void into figure as an inaugural gesture of our thought; which is one reason why it is so difficult to decide to break camp and set out for a Hindu or a Buddhist version of the matters under discussion. That said, it’s not a bad idea to try to use these languages as if they were names: that might be more useful than arguing about whether we have correctly understood or translated them.

I suppose that what I like about this passage from *The Guide* is something that might sound quite sentimental and even naïve. But that can’t be helped, even though I do accept that for me to assume naïveté would be sentimental in the worst possible way. What I like about it is its mode of being alive, a febrile anxiety of its tone that is the anxiety of being heard, not that of being in itself. Funnily enough, it’s more like a kind of language philosophy, and maybe one could slip it somewhere into Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Grammar*. At the same time Maimonides’ argument is almost like a form of construction, pixel by pixel, of units of speculative and suppositional utterances; it has a quality that makes certain procedures of the image in our time, virtual ones, seem really quite old enough to be current rather than simply new.

Gottfried Boehm says something with which I agree in the light of this: “it means *this* image, *this* painting, *this* drawing, it means the status of the phenomenon. I want to discuss the prevailing iconic event or process, the image

1. Chap. 49 in *Guide to the Perplexed*, 66, [www.sacred-texts.com/jud/gfp/gfp059.htm](http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/gfp/gfp059.htm) (accessed October 2010).

or picture as singularity. General and theoretical aspects are devolved from the phenomenon itself." It is indeed the devolvement that counts.

One painting that helps me to find a place in this seminar, which counts in this way, and with a little further help from *The Guide*, is Ribera's *Jacob's Dream* of 1639; perhaps, quite simply, because the iconic event coincides with the *Guide's* problematic, as well as with some of its other glosses on the reception of divine messages in a state of sleep.

Writing of Daniel, for example, Maimonides quotes the Book of Daniel: "And I saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me, for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. . . . Thus was I in deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground" (Daniel 10:8, 9). Maimonides comments, "But it was in a prophetic vision that the angel spoke to him and 'set him upon his knees.' Under such circumstances the senses cease to act, and the [Active Intellect] influences the rational faculties, and through them the imaginative faculties, which become perfect and active."<sup>2</sup>

It needs to be recognized to what extent the life of the image unfolds before closed eyes, while we are drowsy, asleep, or in a trance; at the same time it needs to be remembered how many ways there are of describing or accounting for the presence of an image to us, and how these do not necessarily date, or can even be backdated. The Seminar skates round this in favor of the comparative strength of differing arguments. Sleep cannot be recognized insofar as there is no sign of the Seminar evolving in a linguistic frame after psychoanalytic ideas have become a currency, nor of any other not fully rational relations like those of distraction, inattention, or lapsus.

In Ribera's painting Jacob is reclined, his head resting on one hand above a crooked elbow, the other hand flat on the ground, ungainly, hardly comfortable, but deep in his slumber. His face and flat hand are illuminated by a golden light from the clouds above him, a burst of sunlight in a dark cloud of which the brushstrokes form the dream itself as visible but indistinct. Disturbances in the golden-yellow paint and whitened highlights indicate angels and the ladder, robes fluttering and wings, but those are nothing more than a material of light and a material of the dreaming state; the golden cloud itself is an emergence from the grey-brown ground and middle ground of a somber sky, glazes, scumbles, and so forth, and a tree leafy with the dying colors of late autumn, composite stages of figure and affect find differentially emphatic form, more or less.

Where is the image

Where is not the image

Where is the image not

In terms of that, all of that, I am not at all certain, nor do I wish to be.

2. Chap. 41 in *Guide to the Perplexed*, 235.

## DOXA AND EPISTEME OF THE IMAGE

*Frank Vigneron*

After reading the dialogue in this Seminar, I was left kind of dumbfounded by the level of knowledge of these scholars, quite jealous also, and, I am sorry to confess, at times a little annoyed. I was reminded of Aristotle's dichotomy between history and poetry, the first being clear and therefore more sterile than the vagueness of poetry. But were these conversations clear or vague? I could not decide. Being an art history teacher in a small fine arts department, I have constantly to work in the domain of uncertainty referred to in the Seminar as the situation of the art historians writing about images without ever clarifying the concept of image itself. Vagueness is my lot when writing or speaking about the many images I show to my students during my lectures, but vagueness cannot stop me, or any other of my colleagues, from carrying on teaching and hoping that we are making sense. The situation, however, is not as desperate as it sounds: as Tom Mitchell said, "If I ask anyone. . . . what is the difference between words and images, none of them will be dumbstruck. They will all have answers."

Although it is fascinating to reflect on the philosophical theories of the image, the ones that are so difficult to classify, according to the speakers, it seems that the untheorized images at the core of art-historical thinking can be identified as the *doxa* of the image, and, insofar as art history is also one of the tools of art education, it is apparently as *doxa* that the image is being used in art history and art practices in the domain of education. Whether this is to be deplored or not is a question I prefer to leave aside here, but in the context of art education (even at university level, or at a postgraduate level in the context of an MFA or PhD), it might not even be particularly important, because artists coming out of the art education system still manage to make wonderfully original uses of what remains mostly untheorized.

I have often compared some artists with the alchemists of ancient times who hoped to turn lead into gold: even bad ideas, bad theories, and badly understood philosophies can become, in the hand of artists, interesting, and even thought-provoking, works of art. One could mention, for example, the many instances of the word "deconstruction" in titles of artworks, the word obviously used to refer to Derrida, but often without knowledge of what it means in practice. However irritating it may be to professional academic theorists, it would be unfair to criticize artists for using theory wrongly, because most of them were not trained as philosophers: they may well have been fed on the wrong diet of badly assimilated concepts, and what they believe images to be comes from those

half-understood sources. It is possible to survive, at least for a while, on junk food. As an art educator and maker of images myself, I have to be content with an understanding of what an image is in what Pierre Bourdieu called the *doxa* (meaning, to put it simply, nonspecialist knowledge).

The domain of *doxa* is notoriously difficult to analyze as it is far more unstable than the episteme of seriously conducted philosophy and cannot be understood without the tools of the sociologist, but it is in the domain of *doxa* that the conceptual analysis of the image may produce some of the most interesting results for practicing artists, because in the domain of *doxa* there is a praxis, a working understanding of what an image is. The *doxa* of the image is also particularly interesting because it evolves in a domain that knows no frontiers, unlike the philosophical domain of the image, which has to rely on a mostly “Western” understanding of what theoretical thinking can or cannot do. (As many participants underlined, in Section 5, this “Westernness” is not to be regretted, but it is a concern that needs to be addressed in as “open” a way as possible.) In the domain of *doxa*, the image also has to be thought in relation with the many languages within which images have been conceptualized and, as a result, the cultures within which they are and were made (among many others, that issue is treated by Si Han, when he mentions the difference between *tu* 圖 and *xiang* 象 in Chinese).

As Mitchell emphasizes, “the pictorial turn grows out of the linguistic turn. It finds the image at the heart of language in a new way.” It is necessary to keep in mind, when talking about or making images, that what an image is also depends on the language of the person making the image. This obviously does not give us a definition of what an image is, but it can establish that this definition might be different for different speakers. The difference between *tu* 圖 and *xiang* 象 is actually much more profound today, after the changes brought by the adoption of new concepts in modern Chinese at the beginning of the twentieth century, than it was, for instance, in the painting theory of the eighteenth century. There is also the question of how to distinguish between large language groups within which a definition of the image might be at least similar—this is the whole question of incommensurability, which has been central to the way cultural differences have been conceptualized. All the same, we should probably not expect that the understanding of the concept of image in different languages might be entirely dissimilar, but it is in the smallest of differences that the most revealing clues to different worldviews can be grasped.

These tiny differences are sometimes magnified in a situation of cultural mixtures. A French teacher using English as a medium of instruction, speaking to Hong Kong Chinese students, has very little chance to refer to exactly the sort of images his audience has in mind—especially when these students are also trained to make images with techniques created centuries ago in completely different cultural circumstances. The idea of “productive misunderstanding” is

mentioned a number of times in this Seminar, and it is exactly what is going on in the exchanges made at the level of *doxa* between teachers and students in the sort of environment I just mentioned.<sup>1</sup> At this level of *doxa*, however, these slight misunderstandings are not profound enough to create real problems of communication, even though they might reveal, and this time at the level of the episteme of philosophical discourse, very interesting and productive differences that might also be seen as fuel for the production of other concepts, and other images.

1. The simplest definition of such an act, although in the study of early twentieth-century Chinese literature, can be found in Chen Xiao-mei's *Occidentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 85: "In this dialogue, the foreign reader imagines a question, looks for an answer in the text from another culture, and comes up with a misreading as a solution to his question. Acts of misreading and misunderstanding are mechanisms with which literary production and

literary reception can be dialectically and dialogically mediated between different cultural and literary traditions. . . . Twentieth-century Chinese literary and cultural histories cannot always be seen as reactive to and preconditioned by a so-called predominant Western colonization, but as formative sites where Chinese writers can and have been actively constructing their own stories, from their native perspectives, and with a voice of their own."

## LOST IN TRANSLATION

*Keith Moxey*

Once again the Stone Art Theory Institutes tackle a question of central importance to visual reflection today. If the following remarks focus on what might have been missed, it is with an appreciation of what was accomplished and with the full realization that it is, perhaps, necessary to do one thing at a time.

To the question, What is an image? one might add, When is an image? or, For whom is an image? Important, timely, and relevant as the topic may be, an unexamined assumption informed the discussion. It appears, curiously enough, to have been assumed that it might be possible to come to some conclusions, if not agreement, about the question. It seems quite clear, however, that an image has both a time and place. Not all images are endowed with ontological presence, for cultural practice dictates which ones are granted this status and which are not. We cannot tell, however, which is which, unless we have participated in the cultural rituals that establish their particular significance. When we learn to tell the difference between a fine picture and an indifferent one, or even between, say, a picture and an image, then we are in a position to have appropriate responses and to make the expected value judgments. The same is true of images. A few have presence and charisma, others some, and most none. Some arrest our attention, others don't. Unmediated access to discerning which are possessed and which are not is impossible. How could we make these distinctions without being acquainted with them, without a cultural context in which to understand them?

As understandable as the reaction to the linguistic turn may be, the current interest in the inherent power of the image may be in danger of “purifying” the status of its object to such an extent that the blurred nature of our relation to them is forgotten. The image, after all, cannot work without the presence of an encultured being, just as humans cannot work without the presence of encultured artifacts. Among the many insights afforded by the discussants is one afforded by Marie-Jose Mondzain: “Images are signs of our belief; even a diagram shows me what I believe. The relation between knowledge and belief is at the center of the operation of images. Sometimes our belief can be true, and other times it's a matter of credulity, or magic. There are many levels of belief. But the question is not always one of theory.”<sup>1</sup>

What systems of belief, what processes of enculturation made themselves evident along with the theories entertained at this distinguished gathering? An important issue for the group was whether, or to what extent, images can be said to be free of words. Gottfried Boehm emphasizes the autonomous status of im-

1. See Section 9 of the Seminars.

ages, paradoxically claiming that they afford us separate but equal access to logic and meaning. The inherent structure of the image, the constitutional difference between figure and ground, allows for the binary oppositions on which, since structuralism, meaning is said to be made. Where this meaning lies, however, is hard to discern. While Boehm focuses on the architecture of the image, meaning can only be produced in the interaction of the image and the viewer. Where does the active principle lie? Who or what initiates the “to-and-fro” between object and subject on which meaning depends? Can we ascribe agency to the image without falling into a form of animism? Even if this is the “secondary agency” attributed to objects by Alfred Gell, the burden would fall on the viewer rather than the object.

Tom Mitchell, according to whom image and language are so inextricably meshed that you cannot have one without the other, opposes this view of autonomy. As one of the architects of the “visual turn,” however, he would also like to assign the image a remarkable degree of independence. While the image is said to lie within time (history), it is also claimed to have the ability to “break” time (escape history). Can one claim the image has autonomous power and presence beyond its cultural and historical location? Is not the time and place of both production and reception important to whether it is ascribed something like an ontology? Isn’t a phenomenological response as encultured as any other form of understanding images? If it is, then it is not the image that escapes time, but rather our encultured desire to collapse the perceived distance that separates us from it. Mitchell’s answer to these questions is Yes, “we are stuck with our magical, premodern attitudes towards objects, especially pictures, and our task is not to overcome these attitudes but to understand them, to work through their symptomatology.”<sup>2</sup>

Given the importance of identity politics in the recent history of the humanities in the United States, it is notable that the issue of the nature of the receiving subject, the character of the viewer, should not have figured more prominently in these discussions. We may be so intellectually exhausted of the subject that we neglect all that we learned from that historiographic moment. We have forgotten just how easy it is to universalize the “we” we invoke as “we” try to make sense of our predicament. Is it necessary to obliterate the subject in order to concentrate on the object? Doesn’t this return us to the very subject-object distinction the return to the image seeks to dismiss? Mitchell touches on the issue when he states, “So let’s postulate at the outset the inevitability and centrality of translation.”<sup>3</sup> His confidence in translation as the means by which intellectual traditions, such as art history, can be shared across cultures depends on what he terms “anthropological universals”: “We’re dealing with two anthropological universals. One is that human beings use language, and in any ideal world, any utopia of humanity, that will continue to be the case, unless we evolve into

2. *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 30.

3. See Section 5 of the Seminars.

something totally unrecognizable. The other universal is that we are image-using creatures, and the two are connected. That is why there is, as Gottfried says, a *logos* of the icon, and an icon of the *logos*.<sup>4</sup> Mitchell is fully aware of the limitations of translation as an enterprise, yet he nevertheless regards translation as the only means by which our ideas about images may be shared. If translation is our only hope, the recognition of its failures and limitations should bring to mind the continuing necessity of attending to the cultural incommensurabilities that run interference on the project. All theories aspire to generality, and theories of the image are no exception. Mondzain's words, however, are worth repeating: "There are many levels of belief. But the question is not always one of theory." Can we assert the importance of social, cultural, national, and gender difference for the nature of the subject into our evaluations of the phenomenological nature of the object?

4. See Section 5 of the Seminars.

## I'LL NEVER SAY "NEVER AGAIN" AGAIN

*Harry Cooper*

"Never use the word *image* when you actually mean *painting*." Thus Michael Ann Holly, in her Assessment, recalls a "gentle reprimand" from Hubert Damisch. (Why are the gentle ones always the hardest to forget?) The reprimand is familiar: its occasion may also be the word *picture*, which has the same Latin origin as *painting* but whose meaning has been pulled toward the thing painted or depicted, always a picture *of*. A painting, the reprimander reminds us, is a complex artifact made of particular materials, and not simply the snapshot or postcard, whether mental or actual, we take away from it. In substituting "image" for painting, as Holly apparently did, one is possibly revealing a nonchalance about the physicality of the work, a lack of interest in how its medium constrained whatever image was produced—a failure to tarry on the plane of the signifier, rushing instead from painting to painting *of*.

So why it is fine for iconographers, even at their most concrete and physical, to speak of images? In asking, for example, why the angel in the Annunciation sometimes comes from the right, the question of just how paint is applied to support is irrelevant. This is also why those with an interest in abstract art find talk of images so unhappy: the very idea that an image might detach itself from the material vehicle contradicts the project of abstraction, or at least one of its main strands. What you see is what you see, as Frank Stella famously said in 1964. There is nothing but the thing before us.

And yet. And yet the painting is still primarily something to *see*, not to touch (or taste or hear or smell). And what we see are images. Stella did not say, What you see is what you get: he altered the proverb, by way of a Wittgensteinian tautology (one of his enthusiasms at the time), to insist on the eye. No escape from the circuit of images. In working on Mondrian, I followed the trail of materiality as far as it would go, using the stereomicroscope to look down the sides of cracks much as a geologist might look at layers of rock exposed by a rift to try to uncover the history of a particular region. And yet, at the end of the trail, one is still left debating just what the microscope shows, just what piece of paint is over or under which (interpretive problems that are even more acute with images coaxed from the nonvisible parts of the spectrum). Squint, change focus, adjust the little light to cast a different shadow on the tiny bit of topography, and the issue is still not settled. There we are (with James Elkins in *What Painting Is*) scuttling over the seafloor of painting, self-blinded to any larger compositional structures—and still arguing about images. And if I found more than just forensic evidence of process at that infra-level of Mondrian's paintings, if I tried to see aspects of psycho-painterly binding and release, it was only possible as a projection from a more distant view of the painting. *What I saw was what I saw.*

I am tempted to offer a corollary to Damisch's reprimand: *Never use the word paint when you actually mean imaging*. But seriously, my problem with using the word *image* when one means *painting* (which, just for the record, is always what I mean, no matter what I say) is not so much the neglect of materiality, for, as I have suggested, in the realm of the visual, matter and image are impossible to tease apart. And after all, using a material word to designate a painting does not in any way guarantee an attention to the material plane: the connoisseurs who speak of "an oil" or "a canvas" are no more interested in the materiality of painting than the iconographers. No, my problem is that *image* is singular, simple, and closed in a way that *painting* is not. There is something nice in the fact that the English noun *painting* (unlike the French *peinture*, for example) repurposes the present participle and thus borders on the temporal and quantitative openness of the gerund. *Painting this painting was fun*. The word manages to suggest what Jacqueline Lichtenstein calls, in praising certain nineteenth-century French poets for their attention to the stuff of painting, the "heterogeneity of the visible." We would be better off if the word *image* were inherently unbounded, like *air* or *water*, so that it would be impossible to refer to an image, but only to *image*, thus reopening a plurality of structure, internal possibilities of articulation and collapse. Best of all is the French *tableau*, which seems to encompass both of the tensions we are considering: it combines on the one hand materiality with visuality—the indubitable *table*, yet not just in itself but as prepared to receive an image—and on the other hand multiplicity with unity, referring as it often does to a group of figures or (why not?) a group of marks, and yet insisting, in the Diderotian tradition, on the (ideal) unity of that group.

Talk of the materiality of painting always seems to end in a discourse of emotion and desire. Lichtenstein speaks of wanting to cry in front of the *facture* of a Cézanne or a Fautrier, explaining, "I really want to touch the painting, but I cannot." She ends by quoting Diderot to the effect that all senses are nothing but touch, which is the last refuge of the materialist. Perhaps the emotion of painting *qua* painting has to do with the fantasized opening of vision not just to touch but to all the senses. Yve-Alain Bois has admitted his illicit desire to lick the surface of a desired painting (exactly the desire that the prelicked surface of salon painting preempts), a fantasy that is equal parts taste and touch. In a recent essay on Jasper Johns, I indulged my desire to hear paintings speak or make music. And how many of us have approached a painting at an opening and inhaled? Smell is the last frontier, one explored to great effect in the Korean pavilion of the current Venice Biennale, which combines the beauty of light filtering through Venetian blinds with olfactory repulsion. Or rather, smell is the first frontier, the primordial sense.

Perhaps we long to escape the tyranny of the visual not just because it has digitally colonized so much of our experience today but because it has always seemed both masterful and evasive in its plenitude. Who can blame us? But let's beware of this escapism, this primitivism of the "other" senses, which promises some refreshingly direct access to a world out there, a *table*, a *chair*. If painting can do anything, it can open vision, not to matter or paint or canvas, but to itself.

## OVER THE SHOULDER OF SI HAN . . .

*Parul Dave Mukherji*

MARKUS KLAMMER: For they are “our” occidentalists’ theories, and we have no others. This sentence was formulated in 1967. Have “we” changed since then? And if yes, how?

JAMES ELKINS: So right. And also so sad, really! Because, in another way of considering it, the reason that “we” accept “our” “old techniques” as the ones with the power to unsettle existing practices is because “we” wish to remain who we are, despite all our rhetoric that insists otherwise.<sup>1</sup>

Elkins’s lament captures for me most poignantly the paradox of contemporary art theory that is in the throes of seeking alternative spaces of thinking. It is in that search that “non-Western accounts” are foregrounded. I will restrict my interventions to this section.

While reading the transcript of the Seminar, I felt like an eavesdropper on the conversation. Hence my keenest interest in the interventions made by the closest Other, the Chinese scholar Si Han. I was struck by the Chinese context that he kept foregrounding, almost echoing my musings about how I would have brought a similar trajectory about the Sanskrit terms for images. Why is it that my own culture defines the scope of my intervention, whereas I am equally interested in Gombrich, Goodman, Didi-Huberman, and others, whom I have read with avid interest?

The gap between the desire “to remain who we are” and the rhetoric that seeks alterity comes to the surface in Elkins’s invocation of the non-Western accounts and their relevance to the discipline of art history: “There aren’t any recent PhDs who are going to say, I’m going to stop citing Lacan and Benjamin and base all my work on the *Atthasālinī* or the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*.<sup>2</sup>”

Why should interest in non-Western concepts and terms of art exclude reference to either Lacan or Benjamin? In my current work on comparative aesthetics, I find no contradiction in approaching a classical Sanskrit text on art and dramaturgy via contemporary theory. It was Derrida’s notion of *mimesis*, which he derives from Stéphane Mallarmé, that opens up an obscure Sanskrit term, *anukṛti*, and brings out representation as performativity and not as mere imitation.<sup>2</sup> The either/or approach to Western or Indian terms brings in essentialist notions of cultural purity. We in the non-West would welcome visibility in the Euro-American discourses on art and art history, and the imperative of having to

1. See Section 6 of the Seminars.

2. Mukherji, “Towards Performative Mimesis,”

*Theatre India: National School of Drama Journal* 13 (2006): 178–92.

choose between the non-Western and Western frames of reference is predicated too much upon cultural insularity. This in a way perpetuates the ethos of multiculturalism, which assumes every culture to have a core of homogeneity that the authentic practitioner should never let go.

I was also struck by the manner in which postcolonialism as a discourse was constructed, which was entirely resonant with the way it was invoked at the CAA roundtable last February conducted by Iftikhar Dadi on art and transnationalism. The alacrity with which Terry Smith attempted to declare postcolonialism a passé discourse and open up the unchartered space of “post-postcolonialism” was remarkable. Has the discipline of art history really taken cognizance of postcolonialism for it to be consigned to history?

In the move to new art history in India, visual culture as a method has proven to be very productive and has opened a new domain of objects of study and investigation. Tom Mitchell’s work has played a key role in the disciplinary restructuring of visual studies in my institution, and so to come across his reading of postcolonialism via Dipesh Chakrabarty was puzzling: “From the standpoint of cultural theory, political theory, and philosophy, India had the good fortune to be colonized by the British Empire.”<sup>3</sup>

What deeply troubles me is this compulsion to project postcolonialism as perpetuation of colonialism that completely evacuates the political dimension from the discourse. I am in complete agreement with Mitchell when he states that not all cultures produce art history. Art history may not even be desirable in all cultures; art history makes sense in those cultures which have a history in collecting, museums, and funerary practices and also an awareness that the present marks an unbridgeable break from the past. But it is one thing to imply that art history has a culturally specific provenance in the west and its emergence is historically specific, and quite another to condone colonialism because it provided the most suitable conditions for the way disciplines travel across borders. Mitchell’s reading of postcolonialism seems to me to be symptomatic of this general discomfiture with the questions of politics of representation opened up by postcolonialism.

One could imagine a time when globalization lets distant cultures confront each other; art history can hardly dispense with postcolonialism and its notion of cultural translatability. Take, for instance, Elkins’s “productive mistranslation” while confronting a “strange” story of origin from the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*. What is it about his given framework that compels him to read the *Citrasūtra*, an ancient Sanskrit treatise on *citra* (which implies an image as it incorporated both painting and sculpture), in a specific way? The two protagonists in the origin myth are Nara, an initiate, and Nārāyaṇa, an enlightened ascetic. Nārāyaṇa, the stronger of the two, leads in the act of deep meditation, which would earn them such merits that Indra, god of the gods in heaven, is threatened and conspires to distract the two sages by sending beautiful nymphs from his court to the hermitage. Nārāyaṇa, seeing through the conspiracy, creates on the ground,

3. See Section 5 of the Seminars.

out of mango juice, an outline of an exquisite female form that comes to life. She is named *Urvaśī*, meaning the one born out of earth, and her transformation from a flat drawing to a three-dimensional living form embodies the concept of *citra*, which incorporates painting and sculpture. Apart from the gender politics involved, where the birth of painting is a result of male rivalry between sages and the gods, the myth highlights the tremendous cultural value attached to verisimilitude, which was considered to be the most celebrated function of an artist.

In Elkins's account, I find it fascinating to note the degree to which the myth is secularized, such that the conflict between the divine and human agency is redescribed as an earthly episode involving a man and a prince. This really takes us into cultural translation, about which Elkins has raised a very salient point: negotiating cultural difference via translations often lapses into mining for individual concepts.

Cultural "mistranslations" are inevitably going to abound, because it is through the familiar grid that one "understands" the unfamiliar. For me, to diagnose a "mistranslation" in Elkins's account or for him to do the same in my reading, we need to invoke the transcultural, which allows one to understand each other's "mistranslations." And that seems to me to be a productive starting point and theoretical terrain for comparativism.

I would like to round off my response by recalling my experience at a recent conference at the Getty Research Institute, attended by art historians and cultural critics from Nigeria, Turkey, China, Brazil, and India and some leading American art historians. The problem that was posed to us was that for too long art history has been dominated by western tools and methods, and they have been used to the point of exhaustion. World geopolitics has altered drastically. Weary of critiques of Eurocentrism, American art historians and art critics have challenged and appealed to us to explore alternative spaces of thinking. They urged us to fashion new tools from our "native" traditions and intellectual resources to help them come out of the dead end of their discourses!

The appeal was both earnest and arrogant. I could only respond by questioning the question itself. Can ethnicity be attributed to thinking? I fully laud Mitchell's firm position on this when he emphatically dissociates ethnicity from thinking. Can we sustain this belief in drawing a line between their and our intellectual traditions? Did modernism emerge out of the West's monologue with itself? Can we postcolonials bypass the history of colonialism and reclaim some lost native discourse that holds an exotic key to our present predicament? Does this imperative position the non-Western scholar outside of modern knowledge systems and research methods and entail cultural and intellectual insularity?

For me, the most productive terrain where such questions can be raised is that of comparativism—call it comparative aesthetics or relational aesthetics—which turns away from any purist search for authentic origins but engages with the contagion of cultural thinking, where our tools are already hybrid at the point of their inception and what matters more than the ethnicity of those tools

is their performativity—what you do with them. The culturally different object is not some passive artifact that animates the theories from elsewhere, but strikes back, compelling the refashioning of concepts, tools, and practices.

## ABOUT “AESTHETIC EXPERIENCES” AND DIFFERENT USES OF “PRIVATE” AND “PUBLIC”

*Thomas Baumeister*

Reading the records of the meandering and inspiring discussions of the Chicago conference on images, I felt at a loss how to comment. Where to begin, where to stop? And how to enter a discussion, where the standpoints of the participants shift and get modified in the light of the arguments of their opponents? Finally I decided to make some remarks about the notion of aesthetic experience, and the notions of “public” and “private,” hoping that they fit in with the rest.

Aesthetic experiences, in my view, are essentially concerned with appearances: how things appear, how they feel, sound or look (*aisthesis*), and how meanings are embodied in objects presented to our senses. People can look at things for different purposes. For instance, they can look around in Venice only in order to find their way through its labyrinth. But they also can be attracted by the appearance of the city, that is, attracted aesthetically: by the look of their palaces raising out of the water, by the Venetian light, the Venetian colors, and the Venetian mist. Looking in an aesthetic way means looking at things because they display qualities, which *as such* (intrinsically) are thought worth being looked at, worth being experienced for their own sake, without necessarily pursuing other purposes.<sup>1</sup>

The term “aesthetic experience” was used for the first time—as far as I know—by Hermann Lotze.<sup>2</sup> With this expression Lotze emphasized the importance of the concrete, the sensual, the personal experience of the beauties of art and nature in contrast to the formal knowledge of the so-called rules of art or beauty, and in contrast to the abstractions of philosophical theories. It may seem trivial to say that the living experience of the aesthetic object is of importance, but it is still worth stressing. Of course, genuine aesthetic experience is no longer endangered by classicist aesthetics or its associated artistic or poetic rules. But there is still a tendency to use works of art only as *examples* of trends and currents in the art world or as *illustrations* of philosophical theorems which may be more or less in vogue. On the other hand, the excessive number of reproductions, visual or auditory, poses a threat, making it difficult to get a fresh and personal look at well-known works. The harsh drawings of nudes by Schiele, and the once revolutionary *nymphéas* by Monet, have nowadays become fashionable decorative objects.

But there is another—in some ways an opposite—tendency, which not only obscures the notion of the aesthetic experience, but may distort its practice as

1. See Baumeister, “Ästhetische Erlebnisse?,” *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 39, no. 2 (1994): 145–61. See also my *De filosofie en de kunsten* (Best: Damon, 1999), 457–66.

2. Hermann Lotze, *Geschichte der Ästhetik in Deutschland* (Munich: J. G. Cotta, 1868), 250ff.

well. This is the danger of emotive subjectivism. I fully and sympathetically share Jacqueline Lichtenstein's passion for Cézanne and the texture of his paintings. But I think that she puts her enthusiasm into words which may be misleading. She looks for "a certain kind of sensation and emotion" in paintings. "I am not remembering the image, but the *experience* I had," she remarks enthusiastically. The remark sounds rather odd, because the painting of Mont Sainte-Victoire is essentially also an image of this mountain, a fact which in the end Lichtenstein fortunately also acknowledges. (Not all paintings, of course, are images; that is, images of something. And certainly not all images are paintings.<sup>3</sup>) Lichtenstein stresses the emotional aspect of Cézanne's notion of "sensation," which may obscure the fact that Cézanne first of all was pointing to the *sensation of colors*, that is, to his project to render spatial relationships in terms of color relations, which still gives his paintings their extraordinary freshness.

It is common today to ask people first and foremost questions about their feelings. "What did you *feel*, when x happened?" What do you feel listening to Mozart's *Requiem*, looking at Delacroix's *Crusaders*? Searching inside yourself, scrutinizing your "feeling" as such, usually will not result in something informative and specific. In order to describe what you feel, you have to turn to the object, to its specific physiognomy, to the specific language of a work of art, and also to its imagery. The emotion can only be characterized in terms of the object and of the situation.

There are at least two main groups of feelings—emotions and affective states—to be distinguished. On the one hand there are feelings that are just feelings, without an object and without being a feeling *about* something, as for example objectless moods, awakening relaxed or stressed, toothaches, or the feeling of physical well-being after dinner. On the other hand, there are feelings that are—to use a pompous-sounding term—*intentionally directed* to features of the object. This relationship is an internal one: the feeling of "aesthetic" pleasure, for instance, is not something just caused or "produced" by the object (as for example a drug may cause a feeling of well-being), but is a *pleasure in* something: a pleasure taken in the elegance, the robustness of a building, of a movement, of a style of drawing—a pleasure that can only be described by referring to the object and its features.

This distinction seems important to me. Blurring the distinction can lead to trouble. Kant, for example, tried to define beauty exclusively in terms of a feeling of (disinterested) pleasure and did not sufficiently realize that the feeling itself has to be characterized in terms of its object; that is, as a *pleasure in* the playful and free disposition of forms, a delight you take in the features of things, of movements, of performances, even actions (as, for instance, driving a car, riding a horse, dancing or walking), all of which can be seen and observed. All those things or qualities that define the feeling are given in public space and are not private in the sense of being accessible only from the first-person perspective.

3. We don't usually call abstract paintings, although they may have image-like elements in

them, such as the suggestion of space, of "in front or behind," etc.

Of course, performances like dancing, playing cricket, drawing are not only observed from the outside but are experienced by the performer from the inside, privately if you like. But a observer may also note if a movement is performed with ease or even with pleasure or not.

Gottfried Boehm and Jacqueline Lichtenstein point to the rise of art criticism in the eighteenth century. Works of art became matters of public critical discussion, giving way to the development of a differentiated descriptive vocabulary. Diderot and Baudelaire are important in this respect, but philosophical histories of art should also be mentioned here: the theories of Schiller, the Schlegel brothers, Schelling, Hegel, and Nietzsche, who tried to develop a rich descriptive vocabulary in order to catch the differences between the various artistic idioms and ways of seeing the world that appeared in the course of human history. But again, all those terms refer in principle to publicly observable qualities.

Of course, in order to perceive those aspects and qualities, people need the appropriate skills and also a considerable amount of imagination, especially if one wants to understand the reactions of people from other cultural contexts. I remember a rather cultivated Korean student who was to my surprise not pleased by the battle scene fresco by Piero della Francesca in Arezzo. The kind of silent tumult, the frozen-looking action of horses and warriors, the emperor on horseback *en profile* raising a white cross—all this and especially the white cross made a disquieting and scary impression on him. First I was astonished, but then I grasped his viewpoint and to some extent could look at the painting with his eyes. The aspect under which he saw the painting may not be universally shared, but is nonetheless something public and intersubjectively accessible and explainable.

Very often works of art, the *appearance* of things, persons, animals, the way they look, refuse verbal explanation and description. The silent logic of forms and colors that Gottfried Boehm emphasizes, and the expressive physiognomy of works of art, may escape verbalization. But this does not mean (and I think Boehm will agree) that they are something private or only privately accessible, as some people may think. Qualities that a work of art or an image displays can be incommunicable in the sense that there is not yet a publicly available verbal expression or an appropriate gesture.<sup>4</sup>

To clarify what communicable or incommunicable may mean in this respect, the following may serve as an illustration. The first impression of a work of art is often confused, disorganized, and incommunicable. One does not know yet what one has to look at and what to say. Those “experiences” should not be called private; they are simply incomplete and inarticulate, as Adrian Kohn points out in the Seminars. At the next stage, having become more acquainted with the work, one will learn to see more clearly what matters in it. A Mondrian painting, for instance, may look in the beginning like a rather simple and stable

4. “A property expressed . . . need not coincide in extension with any easy and familiar

description”: Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), 93.

constellation of vertical and horizontal lines on a white ground, some of the rectangular fields filled with one of the elementary three colors: red, yellow, blue. But then one will discover that the whole structure has open margins, that the black strokes do not have the same thickness and that there are different shades of white in play. Finally, one may discover that the whole structure is out of balance because the color fields are of very different sizes; a small yellow one, for instance, has to maintain itself against a large red one. The whole structure now begins to live, acquire spatial depth, and appear as a kind of permanent process of regaining balance out of a state of imbalance.

Sometimes we may succeed, at least to some extent, in putting our impression into words, as I tried here with this example. We may even say that, in the case of finding a fitting expression or metaphor, the experience is not only *translated* into words. Moreover, we may say that the articulation of what you see or hear brings the experience itself to completion. Now you see more clearly what the work is like. Very often, of course, we are at a loss for adequate words. Fortunately, there are other ways to communicate our experiences. We can explain them by means of gestures and movements, not only in the case of music, but also with respect to buildings, sculptures, drawings, and all kind of images. Finally, comparisons are very helpful in explaining our perception of the way things look. Compare, for instance, a Mondrian composition with a work of Van Doesburg's and you will see immediately the difference and will realize why Mondrian's work matters more than the rather static Van Doesburg painting.

The term *incommunicable* may also refer to the expressive traits of a work itself, of a human face or even a landscape. It can point to a kind of laconic, a some-way wordless, communication-refusing quality. And it can also mean an enigmatic, a rebus-like feature of a work. Nonfigurative works, buildings, etc. may appear to us as *signs*, which seem to suggest meaning without revealing it. But essentially those qualities are also something publicly given, in the sense of accessible to everyone possessing the skills needed.

A final remark concerning some further meanings of "public" and "private." First, there is the *epistemic* meaning, which has already been mentioned: colors, for instance, are public givens, accessible to everyone who has sound eyes and is not color-blind. Works of art are in principle public objects in this sense. But they may nonetheless be only of *private use*. Small altars in private rooms, pictures of somebody beloved who has died, may not be meant to be seen by everybody, but only by a few or even only by one person who, in solitude, communicates with God or with the person who has passed away. However, the same altar in a museum has a *public use* and is in principle accessible to everybody.

But the public in a museum usually does not form a *community*, wherein the individual would be an element included in the whole. People in a museum are addressed as individuals. They should find their own personal contact with a work, which of course does not mean that they do not share their experiences and their background with others.

James Elkins talks about the future of public art and public images, and he may have in mind images that are addressed not just to *a public* but to *a community*, an already existing community or a community to be shaped. Religious ceremonies, religious pictures, and religious musical performances presuppose such a community and to some extent can also create in the nonbeliever a feeling of being part of it. Political propaganda is in this sense also a way of making images public, and it may be directed to an existing, imaginary, or future community that may have more or less totalitarian traits. But there are also weaker processes, which only try to create a sense of *common responsibility* without totalitarian implications.

Commercials and advertising are also forms of public-image making. Here people are not addressed as individuals as is the case in the museum (although this may be the suggestion of commercials), but only as members of a group, that is, as consumers. Although the commercial tries to trigger a common reaction—“Yes, now I will buy this car!”—the group that is being addressed cannot be considered as a community in the sense mentioned above. Instead of a *community*, we should speak of a *collection* of competitive individuals.

## DIGITAL IMAGES AND DIAGRAMS, OR DISSEMBLING ICONICITY

*Vivian Sobchack*

REGAN GOLDEN-MCNERNEY: If *all images are diagrams*, there is no space for entropy, for things that undermine the unity of the image.

TOM MITCHELL: It strikes me that *the diagram is an image*. . . . It's an image that is laid on top of another image, namely the space itself, the ground. (Section 9 of the Seminars)

Semiology and existential phenomenology are coimplicated in any discussion of the image. Semiology is not solely about language (although in the Seminars it is often referred to as if it were). It studies the logic of *all* forms of meaningful signs—including images. And existential phenomenology is not solely about “the onset of the image . . . the raw moment of intake”; it only begins there and then discovers that already meaningful moment as much more cooked than “raw.” Indeed, if we think broadly of *logic* as the *structure of our meaningful relations to the objects of our experience* (here, both the apprehension and function of images), then a semio-logic and a phenomeno-logic do not exist in hierarchical relation or in two separate domains of experience. Indeed, neither can escape their irreducible existential entailment—materially, formally, historically, and culturally—each with the other, and with embodied and enworlded persons who, as Merleau-Ponty put it, always live the world “on a bias.” In existence, we do not apprehend “the image” but a variety of particular “images,” and we do so according to varying (and perspectival) perceptual and cognitive habits—these constituted from our practice of diverse mediating techniques and technologies, and constituting varying effects, functions, and significance within the particular configuration of our given life-worlds. Thus, the two general questions of what and how images “are” and what and how images “do” the things they do cannot be separated—but they also cannot be answered generally. In sum, given all the possible phenomenological and semiological variations and qualifications of images (in the plural) or of a single image (over time and culture), as Jim Elkins writes in “Image, Notation, Diagram,” “The question is really how far the general concepts, like image and picture, can take us.”

### WHAT IS WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

So let's explore, if too briefly, a particular instance of a particular kind of *image-ness* (to use Rancière's term)—one that simultaneously materializes the icon as

both image and diagram, and is of interest in illuminating not only the doubled nature of the iconic sign but also our shifting phenomenological and historical engagements with it. In this instance, which involves the relative novelty of computer graphic imageness, we can see quite clearly (to quote Rancière) “a regime of relations between elements and functions” that, in this historical moment, produces for the viewer a phenomenologically perceived “discrepancy” or “dissemblance.”<sup>1</sup> Something in the relation of its internal elements both overlay and undermine the image’s unity—making it appear strange and somehow not right.

The image to which I refer is of computer-simulated and animated human beings. For more than a decade, the holy grail of digital (or CGI) animation has been the rendering, through simulation of cinematic photorealism, persuasive (photorealistic) images of human beings. Nonetheless, and despite extraordinary technical advances (such as “motion capture”), we read litanies of disappointment at the results in film after film—these grounded in the “human” characters’ simultaneous lack and excess of photoreal life. The problem, I would argue, is both phenomenological and semiological. That is, the imageness here is experienced as somehow “incompatible” within itself—in Rancière’s terms, as a *disimulation* that emerges between, and from, the two elements (or subclasses) of the iconic sign that together (and equivalently) constitute the computer graphic rendering: one, the image as simple likeness or resemblance to a human being, and the other, the diagram that limns the structural relation of the human being’s parts.

The dissimulation and disunity that mark our perception of computer graphically rendered human beings emerges, however, not just as a phenomenological and semiological effect but also as an effect of history and culture. That is, the dual nature of the iconic sign—as both image and diagram—has been perceptually elided since the advent of photography and cinema. In part because of their material properties and in part because of cultural habits, these culturally pervasive image-making media have caused “resemblance” and “likeness” to dominate our apprehension of the iconic sign. Even as one might argue that the analog processes of photography and cinema are grounded in a diagrammatic arrangement of particles that chemically reflect the structure of objects on light-sensitive film (most often made explicit in experimental and structural works), the cultural fact is that resemblance and likeness have historically overwhelmed and occluded apprehension of diagrammatic iconicity (except, of course, in such, emphatic manifestations as maps, schematic plans, and the like).

The advent of CGI has troubled this dominant and one-sided vision. In its attempts to achieve the simple physical resemblances of photorealism, computer graphic rendering, by its very digital nature, must not only ground the imaging of its referent (here, a human being) through the computational diagramming of that referent’s parts, but it must also inevitably bring this relation to the surface. Thus, although it may aim for simple physical resemblance, when CGI

1. Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, translated by Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2007), 4, 7.

attempts photorealism, its iconic resemblance to its referent is explicitly—and ambivalently—not only *composed* but also *doubled*: the rendered image is perceived as both the likeness of a human being and the diagram of a human being (the latter revealing the structure of the former). Given the iconic sign's internal duality, its reflexivity, these algorithmic humans always seem overly specific. To quote Louis Menand, "They are simulations of humanness, figures engineered to pass as 'real.'" This, however, is "realism from an instruction manual: literal, thorough, determined to leave nothing out. But it has a vaguely irreal effect."<sup>2</sup> In terms of its significance to those of us habituated to the photoreal, CGI's doubled "imageness" enlarges the photoreal; its iconicity seems "too much."

But CGI's iconicity also seems diminished and "not enough." Its "doubling" has the effect of seeming to give us "too little" at the same time it gives us "too much." That is, its reflexivity—its reflection in and on structure—puts a perceptual and conceptual "drag" on simple resemblance and reduces the illusion of "life" and the "real." As one reviewer notes, "You miss the unchoreographed wayward tilt of a head or an improvised double take."<sup>3</sup> Double-take, indeed! Against the historically normative and single-valued iconicity of the photoreal, live-action CGI human simulations seem embodied in a highly reflexive mode even as their "motion capture" movement would suggest otherwise.

Gottfried Boehm asks, "How do image and concept meet each other in the image itself?"<sup>4</sup> The response in this context would be that whereas the image strives for material resemblance, the diagram strives for conceptual resemblance, and they meet in the historical novelty—and hyperrealism—of CGI imageness. As Akira Lippit writes, "The intersection of a *material condition* with a *conceptual value* . . . makes hyperrealism possible only as an after-thought, an *après-coup* that flashes backward a representational structure . . . only possible as something that has (just) ended."<sup>5</sup> Our normative sense of the photoreal and live action as "just right" becomes, in its CGI simulation, stalled in its diagrammatic grounding and reflexivity—the iconic sign as uneasily compositing both physical likeness and conceptual diagram, and thus presenting us both a refusal and affirmation of "the distance that separates *things* from *ideas*."<sup>6</sup>

In sum, as Lippit says of the economy of the hyperreal, "*Synthesis and analysis* at once and one after the other."<sup>7</sup> Too much here becomes too little. Enlargement and diminution. Something is "wrong"—if fascinating—with this picture. But not for long, and not solely because of future technological advances in

2. Menand, "Something About Kathy," *New Yorker*, March 28, 2005, 79.

3. Elvis Mitchell, *New York Times*, July 11, 2001. "Motion capture" has been developed precisely to inform CGI simulations with the organic we sense in natural human movement—and the CGI humans still seem wooden to most. This is a function of the disjunctive relation between the *plasmaticness* of movement and the algorithmic rigidity of simulation phenomenologically felt by the contemporary spectator.

4. "Iconic Knowledge: The Image as Model," unpublished in English, cited by James Elkins in Section 4 of the Seminars.

5. Akira Mizuta Lippit, "Extimacy: Chronography and Hyperrealist Films (1963–71)," unpublished translation of his "Extimité: Chronographie et Cinéma Hyperréaliste (1963–71)," in *Hyperréalism, USA: 1968–1975*, edited by Jean-Claude Lebensztejn (Paris: Les Musées de Strausborg, 2003), 79–97.

6. Lippit, "Extimacy,"

7. Lippit, "Extimacy."

CGI. Given the increasing dominance of computer graphic “*imageness*” and our seeing according to it, this phenomenological and semiological effect is likely to lose its historical “*strangeness*” and become, instead, the norm.

#### PUNCHLINE

ALEXIS SMETS: “*Images compel me to take them into account in different ways.*”<sup>8</sup>

8. See Section 9 of the Seminars.

## WHAT IS AN IMAGE

*Alex Potts*

The discussions in this volume are intriguing to me in an oddly paradoxical way. They clearly testify to a renewed intellectual engagement with understandings of the image. At the same time they also show how present-day speculation on the subject has lost much of the political urgency it had in the days when people were preoccupied by the delusive power of the image and the role played this played in reaffirming hegemonic cultural values, whether in the operations of consumerism or in the propaganda machines of totalitarian politics. In the present volume there is a refreshing range of issues addressed, and a laudable openness to contrary approaches to analyzing the nature and function of the image. But there is also a certain drift, an absence of energetic drive to get to the bottom of things. This is in part a consequence of the origins of the text in an open discussion forum, but it is also symptomatic of the situation in which much intellectual analysis of the formal constitution of the image and of the art work takes place at the present historical juncture.

There is not to deny that distinctive preoccupations with the image are clearly evident, defined by way of a series of conceptual polarities. Among these I would single out the distinction between inquiries into the nature of the image, an ontology of the image as it were, and questions about how images function and what role they play. Also very much in evidence is a concern with the structural differences between the image on the one hand and the text or word on the other. This gives rise to interesting discussion of the perennial question as to whether there is a distinctive way in which images can convey meaning that is not reducible to linguistic articulation. Finally, and related to such concerns, is an apparent dichotomy between the relative immateriality of the image, its absence of anchoring in a particular medium or material support, and the materiality ascribed to painting in modern aesthetic theory and critical writing. The image is often envisaged as being able to realize itself in different material forms without substantively changing its identity, whereas with a painting, the material substance and formation of the work is seen to be integral to its meaning and affective power. In theory, a painted image is not transferable from one material realization to another, though in common parlance we often talk about images in paintings as if this were the case, and a number of twentieth-century artists, such as Robert Rauschenberg, have enjoyed playing with such possibilities. A hard-line distinction between the dematerialized image and the materialized painting is a characteristically modernist one. Interestingly, in the present context it is a scholar of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century art theory, Jacqueline Lichtenstein, who holds to it most firmly.

The variegated reflections offered on such questions are often very suggestive, partly by virtue of a clarity of mind brought to the discussion by the background of many of the participants, such as Jacqueline Lichtenstein, W. J. T. Mitchell, and Gottfried Boehm, in philosophy or critical theory. At the same time, the philosophical bias means there is little consideration of the distinctive image regimes operating in more of the ambitious and experimental art being produced today. The commentary on contemporary work is marginal and mostly very formalist. There is little attempt to address the broader cultural politics evident in the deployment of often highly charged images by present-day artists.

What is really lacking, in my view, however, is sustained consideration of the historical conjuncture shaping the discussions of the image taking place in the Seminar. I am thinking in particular of the often quite conscious marginalizing of preoccupations that played a key role in discussions of the image in relation to the visual arts through much of the mid- and later twentieth century. These preoccupations no longer have the same urgency they once had, but they continue to shape conceptions of the image being articulated today. In both modernist and postmodernist discussions of the image, there was an insistence on distinguishing between the image as something readily apprehended and consumed that lured and deceived the viewer, and as a radically different kind of entity that renounced the easy blandishments of the image in the interests either of engaging the viewer in a process of critical reflection or of offering up something that was unrepresentable in conventional imagistic terms—a kind of non-image that got one beyond the image. In the modernist imaginary, the second alternative played a key role, the utopian idea that a new kind of art might be fashioned that divested itself of the ideological baggage corrupting the image in modern bourgeois or capitalist culture, presenting in its pure but indecipherable immediacy a sense of something that lay beyond or outside the common currency of images circulating in the modern world. But there was also a less utopian, more hard-headed modernism, in which the emphasis was on critical self-awareness—with the task of the artwork being seen as negating the superficial vividness and immediacy of the image and offering up something more complex and authentic, and in the first instance unalluring and unrecognizable, but for all that more compelling in the longer term.

The late twentieth-century postmodern turn, as thinkers such Jacques Rancière have convincingly argued, often took the form of melancholy reflection on the impossibility of such transcendence of the image. No longer, it began to be felt, could a separation be maintained between the lure and the emptiness of the image in late capitalist culture and the actual possibilities open to art in the society of the spectacle. In its more extreme forms, postmodern speculation envisaged the artist and his or her audience as immersed in a world in which the image had lost its power to refer to anything other than itself—and could no longer make apparent any concrete reality that lay beyond the play of signs and images in which it trafficked, let alone any sense of an alternative reality. Within

this mindset, both artist and audience were destined to reflect on their gratuitous fascination with the play of images in the postmodern world and to mourn the incapacity of images in the present day to represent any substantive reality or imaginative possibility. For some, this led to a condition of radical cynicism in which images were being perpetually quoted and ironized, while for others, an irresistible impulse to reassert the power of the image made itself felt in a pursuit of pure aura or sublimity.

This is a very schematic picture, and has much more of a bearing on critical speculation about art and the image in the later twentieth century than it does on the mind-set of the artists producing interesting work at the time. This said, such engagement with the image, while no longer intellectually fashionable, does to a degree continue to underpin the compulsion felt by critics and theorists today to address issues relating to the image, and it also shapes the kinds of issue being discussed. My sense is that a fuller consideration of this historical baggage might have given a greater sense of direction to the discussion. We are not living in a postideological age, and are kidding ourselves if we think we can dispense with the ideologically charged concerns of the immediate past. In fact, it may be necessary in the future to move beyond the open liberal and putatively rational discourse on the nature of the image, of which the present volume is an instructive and intelligent instance, and focus on issues relating to deployments of the image that really do matter in larger political and cultural terms. This would probably entail a critical reengagement with earlier politically charged discussions of the image from what Eric Hobsbawm called the age of extremes. Such discussions were concerned with the deceptions and the power of image making and with the conflicted role images played in the modern world in obscuring and rendering more vivid a sense of the reality in which they were embedded.

## WHERE DOES VISUAL THEORY LIVE?

*Kavita Singh*

Three kinds of annoyance bristle against each other as I read the transcript of this Seminar. I am annoyed, firstly, by having to read the transcript of a conversation. Its record of digressions and interruptions transmits to the reader the shortcomings of a meandering discussion, where ideas are invoked but never fully developed, without being able to offer the compensation of participating in the fluidity of the conversation's unfolding. Instead, I chafe as I watch passively this theater of dominant and submissive voices. I am annoyed also—more than annoyed—by the brutally casual invocation and dismissal of the “non-West,” a category that is about as useful in thinking about civilizations as it would be to divide all living beings into, say, “flies” and “non-flies.” I will refuse to rise to this bait, I think. It is not worthy. And then, my third annoyance: of not knowing what to do with this invitation to write a response to this text. Should I play the native informant or not; should I rise up in predictable postcolonial anger or not; whatever path I choose, I know my wheels will turn upon deep ruts. Whatever I do will be exactly what was expected of me.

Let me query, then, the Seminar's interest in image theory, which turns upon an examination of words about images. Although the issue of logocentrism is raised several times during the discussion, words remain the sign and symptom of thought about images: consequently, only those cultures are deemed to have a history of art, or a theory of images, who have produced texts about them. What of the images themselves? That profuse torrent of images produced over the millennia in India, for instance: images eagerly commissioned by patrons or sought by buyers, prodigiously made by artists who engaged in refining their skills and sought to exceed the work of their predecessors; a society's consistent investment in the production of images over a long duration—does that not offer up evidence about an engagement with, a thinking about images? Do we not need to attend to *that*, and to read through and from *that*, rather than to look for a tract by an Indian Aristotle or a Chinese Vasari as evidence of a civilization's having thought about art? For this is only a chimerical search for texts from elsewhere that would mirror or resemble the art-historical or image-theoretical texts that are familiar to the majority of the Seminar's participants, and this begs too many questions to even begin to raise in this short space.

And if it is texts we are after, might I suggest widening our scope, seizing sources wherever we may find them? The desire to find an authoritative text that will represent the civilization's thinking about art exerts a strong pull; as a result, the *shilpa shashtra* texts, and particularly the *Chitrasutra*, have become emblem-

atic of premodern Indian thinking about art. No single text should be given this position, however: even in the fourth or fifth century, when this text was presumably composed, art making in India was so diverse that this text could not have represented all attitudes towards the making and efficacy of images. The issue is complicated by the class and caste within which the text was produced: as Rick Asher suggests in his intervention, the text was probably written down not by an artist but by a priest. When an art historian recently tried to correlate the system of proportions recommended in this text, with images produced in more or less the same period and region,<sup>1</sup> unsurprisingly, he found that no image actually followed the text's prescription. His empirical research carefully demonstrates what should be obvious on a moment's reflection: if artists were replicating the proportional systems mandated in a text, of course, their sculptures would never change; and the stocky, fleshy Kushana figures, for instance, would never turn into the ethereal elegance of the Gupta age. So, while I agree with both Rick Asher and Parul Dave Mukherji, who call for a more nuanced and historically grounded reading of this text, I also ask us to not read it so much: not to canonize it as the central text on art issuing from early India, and then be forced to defend it or use it as the measure of a reflexive tradition.

If texts are needed, then I ask what we should do with the knowledge we gain from other, more fugitive, kinds of texts. Far from being self-conscious meditations on images, the texts I am thinking of are not even meant to be read by us: their accidental survival glimmers on the rare page. I am thinking of instructional inscriptions and scribal notes in the margins of manuscripts and on preparatory drawings: more than most other sources, it is these that allow us to look over the artist's shoulder as he works.

Consider the intriguing evidence about the artistic process that comes from John Seyller's study of scribal notes in Mughal manuscripts.<sup>2</sup> In a number of manuscripts, Seyller sees microscopically small notes that record the names of artists and number of days they spent painting each image. The artists' names are surprising, because vastly and even irreconcilably different paintings are noted as having been made by the same hand. A pattern emerges: in one manuscript, all the paintings were made in a range of three to five days; in another, the paintings took between forty-five and sixty-three days. It then becomes clear that the painting workshop would decide to produce a deluxe or an ordinary manuscript, and would prescribe the appropriate amount of time to be devoted to it. The same artist, working on a prestigious or workaday project, could produce entirely different kinds of painting suited to the work at hand. What does evidence like this suggest to us about self-conscious Mughal attitudes towards style and value, on the one hand, and what does it say, on the other hand, to today's art historian, obsessed as he is with the project of the recovery of artistic personality?

1. John Mosteller, *The Measure of Form: A New Approach for the Study of Indian Sculpture* (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1991).

2. John Seyller, "Scribal Notes on Mughal Manuscript Illustrations," *Artibus Asiae* 48 (1987): 247–77.

A more eloquent example is one leaf from a stack of preparatory drawings for a late eighteenth-century Kangra series of the love story of Nala and Damayanti. B. N. Goswamy's study discusses this page: the prince Nala walks through a garden, where he sees a pomegranate tree in fruit.<sup>3</sup> The skin is stretched tight over the globular fruit, which is so ripe that it is fit to burst, and the sight of the pomegranates fills Nala's mind with the memory of Damayanti's breasts. The artist has missed this point entirely: he makes an exquisite sketch of Nala in the garden, but there is no pomegranate tree. An inscription, from the librarian, scribe, or supervisor, then says, "There should be a pomegranate tree in the garden, filled with fruit." And on the same page, in darker ink, the artist has added a beautiful pomegranate tree, laden with fruit, standing in the very center of the garden in front of the figure of Nala. And there next to the tree is the supervisor's second inscription: "Do not make it stand out." In the finished painting, made after these drawings, the pomegranate tree stands among a row of other trees, along the garden wall: the viewer who knows the text, and who knows such a tree should be there, must seek and then find it. To my mind, the inscriptions on this page describe a process in which the manuscript's supervisor carefully shapes not just the narrative accuracy of the illustrations, but their visual subtlety as well. Evidence of connoisseurship—of poetry and painting—engaged in and shaping the work as it emerges from the artist's pen.

3. Goswamy, *Pahari Paintings of the Nala Damayanti Theme in the Collection of Dr. Karan Singh* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1995).

## RESPONSE TO "WHAT IS AN IMAGE?"

*Paul Messaris*

I am neither an art historian nor a philosopher. I read the transcript with great enjoyment, but also with increasing befuddlement. I found myself puzzling over a series of relatively small points, and one big one.

Some examples of the small points: why was the Gombrich-style approach to the psychology of picture perception brought up briefly early in the discussion and then dropped entirely? Why was the idea that pictures can be defined in opposition to words dismissed abruptly on the basis of one counterexample? If Peirce's work is self-evidently a "super-duper" theory, why is Goodman's self-evidently not?<sup>1</sup>

And now the big point: despite the eloquent introduction, in which the rationale for the Seminars was spelled out, I was never able to figure out from the discussion itself why the participants wanted to know what an image is. What difference would a definition, or lack of a definition, have made to anyone's other concerns?

Having failed to discern the seminar participants' motives for trying to define images, I was inspired to try to clarify my own motives for being interested in such a definition. In the area in which I teach and do research, media studies, the definition of pictorial communication seems to matter a lot, because it seems to play an important role in helping us answer some of our big questions. Here are four of them.

Over the past decade, new developments in computer animation have brought us increasingly closer to two important milestones: first, photorealistic simulation of movement without the use of motion capture; second, photorealistic computer-generated movies of actual people (for example, Marilyn Monroe). In the eyes of media scholars, it appears that these two technological developments are likely to have a significant impact on the evidentiary status of images. But the evidentiary status of words doesn't seem to be affected as profoundly by technological change. Why?

In 1984, the Apple Computer Company produced a now famous TV commercial that used pictures to imply that Apple's big competitor, IBM, was a totalitarian entity. If Apple had said such a thing in words instead of pictures, IBM would most likely have had grounds for bringing legal action against Apple on a charge of defamation. In the face of the TV commercial's images, however, such legal action would have been much harder to get off the ground. Why should there be such a difference? Is it simply a matter of metaphorical versus literal

1. "Super-duper" is Tom Mitchell's characterization; see Section 4 of the Seminars.

speech, or does this case have to do with a deeper difference between images and words?

Last year, filmmaker Alexander Kluge issued a nine-hour movie called *Nachrichten aus der ideologischen Antike / Eisensteins Kapital*. As the subtitle says, this mammoth movie was inspired by Sergei Eisenstein's celebrated (although possibly apocryphal) plan to produce a cinematic version of *Das Kapital*. But there's a crucial difference between the kind of movie that Eisenstein was supposedly planning and the kind of movie that Kluge actually produced. The whole point of Eisenstein's *Kapital* was going to be the use of cinematic montage—image juxtaposition—to convey the ideas of the original through purely, or largely, visual means. Kluge's movie, on the other hand, consists mainly of dialogue. If a visual *Kapital* was such a hot idea, why did Eisenstein fail to produce it, why has no other filmmaker managed to realize Eisenstein's vision, and why did Kluge's version omit the one feature that was most responsible for the fame of Eisenstein's original plan?

In recent years, a linguist named Dan Everett has been producing dramatic accounts of the language and culture of the Piraha, an isolated community of fewer than four hundred people living in the Amazon jungle. According to Everett's reports, not only the language of the Piraha but also their performance on certain tests of cognition are so radically different from those of any other society as to call into question a number of widely held scholarly assumptions about linguistic and cultural universals. However, there is one area in which the Piraha appear to function very much like other people elsewhere. When Everett showed them the movie *King Kong* on a DVD player powered by a portable generator, they reacted with tremendous enthusiasm and clear signs of having comprehended the basic storyline. How come?

In media studies, these are the kinds of questions we are trying to answer when we ask, What is an image? I realize that much that was said by the Seminar participants had a bearing on such questions, but, more often than not, that bearing seemed to me to be quite oblique.

## INTENSIVE, NOT EXTENSIVE

*Emmanuel Alloa*

An image never comes alone, so it seems. Despite all the theorist's efforts to contain the unity of her object, images always escape any attempt at framing and come as multiples, in flows, fluxes, and cascades. We are surrounded by images—few would doubt it. We might well be acquainted or feel at ease with some, we might well recognize their meaning, understand their function, and identify some of their desires (as Tom Mitchell has insisted). However, the question remains: what connects all these phenomena, all so different, with each other? The listing of image types (and their correlate: the listing of image theories) does confirm that image streaming is immense, but such a listing may just contribute to a general, often noted disorientation. Early on in the Seminars, however, the need was interestingly formulated to have some ordering principle, some “taxonomy,” as Tom Mitchell called it.

The question then is, what kind of family ties relate these iconic objects to each other, and in what way are they relatives of each other, so that we might ultimately become familiar with what interrelates them? Even before Wittgenstein developed his idea of “family resemblance” (*Familienähnlichkeit*), Jean-Paul Sartre had already discussed the reticulation of images in terms of family ties. Just as with a family and its members, Sartre said, “we do not know where the class of images begins or ends.”<sup>1</sup> Since every member of a big family can be related to an infinite number of others, it simply makes no sense to close down its borders. The taxonomical classification, the furor of hierarchy, trees, and genealogies—this whole vertical arborescence—gives way to a flat world, as flat as the surface of an image, on which we can read relations of a new kind, new lateral links, bonds, and coalescences. Only some of those connections can be visible at once: seeing more of them requires shifting one's own standpoint.

In this sense, the Sartrean suggestion is to explore the “family of images” just as we would explore a family's history of which we know that every genealogical “family tree” will only be valid according to a chosen perspective, while an infinite number of other genealogies are still possible, if considered from a slightly different perspective. Deciding if your first, your second, or your third cousins are part of your family (and vice versa if you are part of theirs) is thus not so much a question of essence or species as of a narrower or a broader perspective of what you consider a family to be. In any case, most would probably agree that any relation of kinship is a matter of “degree,” and while everyone would

1. Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of Imagination*, translated by Jonathan Webber (London: Routledge, 2004), 17.

consent that closely related subjects are definitely part of the family group, there would probably more debate about those who are linked to it in a lesser degree.

What is then left to be understood how to define a *degree*. According to the classical ontology of species, first consolidated in Porphyrius's *Isagogē*, the degree is dependent on the number of links that each of two relatives traces to his or her most recent common ancestor. The relationship with the first cousin is of a stronger degree since there is only one higher level (the brothers and sisters of the progenitors); the relationship with the second cousins is of a lesser degree, because it leads through two levels of common ancestry. To summarize: the intensity of the degree is dependent on genealogical lines and to the belonging to species or, in short, *degree is a matter of pedigree*.

If Sartre is right and the phenomenological breakthrough consists in saying that degrees and essences are not dependent upon any hidden ontological derivations, but on their intrinsic "phenomenal" qualities, and if qualities are no longer intrinsic to an objective order, but to a fundamental correlation to whom they appear, then this will also have consequences for defining what interconnects the "family of images." The fact that in some contexts some phenomena will indisputably be regarded as images while in others they will be considered to be at the margins of the "domain of images" does not rely on any kind of weaker bond to the higher class encompassing all images, but rather on the perspective chosen, which always specifically reorganizes degrees and intensities.<sup>2</sup>

When the phenomenological tradition from Husserl through Sartre to Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that iconicity is not a quality of an object, but of a way of looking at the world, it 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. If such a phenomenological approach is true (and here I would like to use the word "phenomenology" in an unorthodox, broad way, including a philosophical position such as Wittgenstein's later theory of "family resemblance"), then it is not only the family ties of Porphyrius that receive a new meaning: so does the classical distinction that has ruled Western ontology, the distinction between a difference in degree and a difference in essence. That distinction effectively collapses.

The possibility of talking about images not just in terms in terms of *artistic images*, of *mnemotechnical, poetical or political images*, but in terms of the "imageity" (or iconicity) of those images is not granted. The project of an autonomization of the image, which went hand in hand with the modernistic project in painting, unshackling the image from its referential needs and its representational functionalization, often led to the postulate of a sovereign "realm of images," a domain where only the rules of iconicity would govern, such as in the dream-world analyzed by Freud.<sup>3</sup> Many authors have tried consolidating this

2. It is pertinent that in some contexts "mental images" are considered to be the paradigm of all images, whereas in others they are considered to be merely images in a metaphorical sense.

3. Freud, chap. 6 in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, translated by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1965).

specific domain of images and their correlated iconic knowledge, from Bachelard’s “domain of images” and Bataille’s “realm of images” up to Jim Elkins’s more recent cartography.<sup>4</sup>

Yet one can ask if there may not be, in this project of itemizing the specificity of what constitutes an image, a latent danger of having the expelled return in a sublime form. If the *specificity* of the iconic derives from its belonging to a *specific realm*, what arguments can be opposed to reintroducing the ontological order of *species*, of classes, genera, and types and thus an order of *extension*? It seems as if, in the endeavor of specifying what has received no common name but was always subordinated to other purposes, a strange reentry of the ontology of propriety and of belonging—in brief, the ontology of territorial extension—has taken place.

To take seriously the intuition that the class of images has no beginning nor end, and that it would be impossible to number all its elements, must mean—so I believe—to mourn the phantasm that we could find a continent where all images are gathered and could be “entomologically” studied by the *Bildwissenschaftler*. Images have no domain nor realm of their own, they are fundamentally pervasive and always essentially out of their place. This does not mean they don’t have any singularity. It just means that their functioning (or their “logic,” if we want to use this ambivalent word) cannot be explained in *extensional* terms, but must rather be described in terms of *intensity*. A thinking of the image which would follow, as Gottfried Boehm called it, “a logic of intensity or of forces” would thus imply that, from the beginning onward, iconicity is not a question of essence, but of degree.<sup>5</sup>

Thinking in terms of degrees, levels, and intensities challenges dichotomical ways of thinking, making them quite difficult. Applied to the issue of the image, thinking in terms of intensities would mean that the image is not a matter of “objective” belonging to a specific realm of objects: iconicity does not name an encircled class of numerable elements and the question of whether an image is, or is part of, another thing is simply not the question. Nor could iconicity be a matter a matter of pure subjective projection, a matter of free consciousness, as Sartre believes, so that everything becomes an image just because I intentionally consider the object *as an image*: the material ground of the picture, the figural infrastructure and the intrinsic visual economy of the surface resists a free projection of the imaginary and has a co-constitutive function in the emergence of the image.

As Bergson has shown with penetrating clarity, images precede the distinction of subject and object; they are already present in a latent, virtual status in the world, although they require their actualization and, thus, individuation. If the individuation of an image is the product of a condensation of such an iconic potential, we have to believe that further modifications and metamorphosis are

4. Elkins, *The Domain of Images* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

Bernd Hüppauf and Christoph Wulf (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2006), 248.

5. Boehm, “Unbestimmtheit: Zur Logik des Bildes,” in *Bild und Einbildungskraft*, edited by

possible where images deflate and turn into new ones, survive in other ones, and so forth. The old question, What is an image? is now replaced by When is an image?, and it can only be answered circumstantially, as the constitution of an image is in itself the result of a complex chiasmatic relation between the material matrix of an image and the spectator, producing permanent reversions. When Merleau-Ponty says that when I look at a *tableau*, I would be hard pressed to tell where I am and where the painting is, he is in my opinion already on the way towards a thinking in terms of intensities.<sup>6</sup> As in every dimension of intensity, *mathos* and *pathos* cannot ultimately be divided: image knowledge implies psychic affection, pictorial sense involves somatic sensation. Now, as Bergson demonstrated, sensation has no localization: it's not a matter of where my tooth precisely aches, it's a matter of how intensely it aches.<sup>7</sup> The fundamental “atopia” of the image relation dismantles a logic of localization and opens up the perspective of an iconic force field. Such a logics of intensities points towards a crossing of the gazes for which it would be difficult to say if the image is looking back at me or I am looking back at its startling gaze it directs at me.

Such a crossing of gazes is certainly not true of every image and not even true at any time. That's precisely what a thinking of intensities would like to gesture at. The work of condensation, contraction, and *Verdichtung* can take many forms and degrees—some might even want to answer the old question of what makes an image to be artistic through the degree of its intensification. For sure, the investigation of images is far from having come to its ends, though already now, I believe, we can affirm that the singling out of the image—be it historical or theoretical—misses its clandestine reticulations, its permanent intermingling with its surroundings in space and time. In brief: what may be called *imageity* is there before an image is consciously considered as an image, and *imageity* exceeds the singled-out, framed image, moving towards what Warburg called the “survival” of images. Images come in flocks, droves, and packs—theory would be well advised to take that into account.

6. Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader. Philosophy and Painting*, edited by Galen A. Johnson, translated by Michael B. Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 126.

7. Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, translated by F. L. Pogson (New York: Dover, 2001), 1–74.

## DIFFERENTIAL IMAGES

*Aud Sissel Hoel*

The current mobilization on behalf of the visual is theoretically perplexing. Even if the much referred to “pictorial turn” can be framed as a reaction to the predominance of semiological and poststructuralist approaches, the lessons learned from these approaches prevent us from simply returning to earlier ideas of visual purity. From where we stand now, *after* poststructuralism, resorting to notions like naturalness and self-evidence no longer seems a viable option. Indeed, what the renewed interest in images and visuality makes clear is that the existing explanatory frameworks are insufficient and that the established vocabularies are inadequate. The result is a conceptual bewilderment that may prove productive, since it leaves open the possibility for thinking something genuinely new about images.

James Elkins may be right when he maintains that the majority of visual culture scholars shy away from ontological questions, being content to work with received ideas of images. This is not all that surprising, considering the fact that questions concerning the “nature” of images more often than not are associated with the aspirations and pretensions of modernist aesthetics of the Greenbergian variety. The general sentiment is summed up by Joel Snyder’s observation “we are all anti-essentialist.”<sup>1</sup> Ironically, though, refraining from asking ontological questions may help sustain the metaphysical framework antiessentialists renounce. The reason for this is that the default theories that come into play when images are taken for granted are more likely than not to have sprung from the very framework that is rejected.

All this notwithstanding, the discourse on images and visuality has changed. At present, images are less talked about in terms of things and representations and more in terms of events and relations. These changes, I think, are symptomatic of more comprehensive conceptual transformations that are taking place on a deeper level. For many years now, substance metaphysics and its related sets of views (ontological dualism, objectivism, representationalism) have been under serious attack. It remains to be determined what possibilities these metaphysical ref framings open up in terms of understanding images. Gottfried Boehm takes on this task by advancing a notion of “iconic logos,” thereby challenging established notions of rationality. Tom Mitchell, for his part, recasts the field with his concepts of “everyday ontology” and “medium theory.” In the following, I will suggest yet another trajectory for rethinking the image, picking up on Marie-José Mondzain’s comment that “the operation of the image is to separate.”

1. Snyder’s comment was presented at a roundtable conversation on photography that took place in 2005. The transcript of this round-

table was published in *Photography Theory*, edited by James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007), 131.

Images make a difference. I think no art historian, no scholar of visual culture studies would disagree with that. Still, this rather commonplace observation remains a hard point to establish theoretically. What is more, even if essentialism is renounced explicitly in every direction, conceptions and dichotomies born of the old ontology live on and continue to influence the current discussion. Conceptualizing the image *outside* the essentialist vocabulary seems to be difficult. Why is that? I can think of two reasons. First, the concept of the image is intimately entangled with the concepts of language, thinking, perception, imagination, knowledge, and truth. Thinking something *new* about the image, therefore, requires a metaphysical reframing that affects the whole constellation of related concepts. A second reason is that the everyday notion of the image, the minimal notion that we tend to resort to across theories, is molded by the dualist scheme at the heart of substance metaphysics. Let me substantiate this claim: a few years back I set myself the task of comparing theories of the image.<sup>2</sup> The selection included rationalist, empiricist, perceptualist, cognitivist, semiological, and poststructuralist approaches (admittedly, they were all Western accounts). I made this comparison not only with a view to the explicit propositions of each approach, but also with a view to their more or less unstated assumptions. The most striking result of this undertaking was the *lack* of variation in the ways that the image was conceptualized—this even though the approaches differed widely and the worldviews they exposed were completely incommensurable. Upon closer scrutiny the majority seemed to converge on the conceptual figure—the fundamental theory of the image, so to speak—that the image is an *image-of*. This conceptual scheme frames the image as an entity that stands in or substitutes for another entity that serves as its model as well as its purpose. So, what is the problem? There are many. To keep it short: when the image is defined as an *image-of*, it is deprived of its constitutive force and formative powers.

What is at stake here may become clearer if we take the bigger picture into account. The basic contention of substance metaphysics is that objects are self-identical and thus radically independent entities.<sup>3</sup> Knowledge, therefore, is framed as a question of immediate access to pre-given essences. Seen against this standard of truth, the image appears as a paradoxical and contested entity. Defined as an *image-of*, the image as such is conceived as derivative, and its object is accorded ontological priority. The setup that has framed the problem of the image ever since is thus complete. Hence, the valuation of the image hinges on whether or not one believes it capable of providing access to its model (is the image transparent or opaque?). I will not even start to enumerate the contradictions and aporias to which this setup gives rise. Instead, I'll fast-forward to the main point: in this setup, if the image is to remain truthful it has to efface itself and coincide with its model. The image as such has no purpose, no meaning whatsoever apart from its object; it does not contribute in any positive sense of

2. The investigations referred to make up the first part of my doctoral dissertation, "Fremstilling og teknikk: Om bildet som formativt medium" (Image and Technics: On the Formative Power of Pictures) (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2005).

3. An entity is understood to be individuated by a set of invariant properties that describe the entity as it is, in and by itself, without reference to process or history.

the word to the delineation of the object as object. Any creative or formative activity on the side of the image, any *difference* introduced as a result of *mediacy*, is considered a source of error. Accordingly, if difference and mediacy are in fact acknowledged, the standard of truth introduced by substance metaphysics leaves us no choice: the image is a fiction; it is blind.

Strangely, the archaic idea that mediacy and human intervention somehow rule out truth is still with us. Even one of the most ardent critics of the “metaphysics of presence,” Jacques Derrida, continued to frame mediacy in terms of a substitutional logic.<sup>4</sup> And, as Mitchell has observed, these days it is commonplace to conceive images “as the sort of sign that presents a deceptive appearance of naturalness and transparency concealing an opaque, distorting, arbitrary mechanism of representation.”<sup>5</sup> On these grounds, I agree with Boehm when he underlines the importance of putting iconoclasm behind us so that we can start recognizing the power that resides in images.

The current turn to the visual is characterized by a certain “return of the repressed.” Much attention is devoted to materiality and to the body, and, as could be expected, phenomenology seems to be going through a renaissance. Yet there is another reason why phenomenology has been taken up at this point. Phenomenology offers a *relational ontology* that resonates well with the current focus on events. In contrast to substance metaphysics, phenomenology accords ontological (or at least experiential) priority to relations over entities. For all that, in order for it to become a workable framework for us today, phenomenology itself has to be rethought. We have to rid it, for instance, of its tendency to purify relations. What we need, in other words, is a phenomenology that to a greater extent than classical phenomenology recognizes difference.

The important thing to realize is that genuine relations are in fact differential. Maurice Merleau-Ponty is right, I think, when he maintains that the simplest sense-given in perception is not a sense impression but a figure on a background.<sup>6</sup> A differential interpretation of this basic sense-bestowing scheme allows for a new and more productive understanding of “identity” by framing it as a question of *articulation* and *focus* rather than as a question of conforming to pre-given objects. The approach is differential in that the taking-shape of the figure is understood to happen only by virtue of the formative intervention of a “foreign” intermediary that provides the criteria for the figure’s continued delineation (its “interminable in-figuration,” to borrow a term from Jean-Luc Nancy.<sup>7</sup>) The distance introduced by the formative intervention transforms the object, but only to reveal it in a more intense “sameness.” Seen against this framework, images appear not as things to be seen but as differential matrices that *make visible*. The image then retains its status as a purveyor of knowledge, not in spite of its difference but only because of it.

4. See Aud Sissel Hoel, “Thinking ‘Difference’ Differently: Cassirer Versus Derrida on Symbolic Mediation,” *Synthese*, DOI 10.1007/s11229-009-9629-2.

5. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 8.

6. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1962), 4.

7. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 97.

## ONTOLOGY OF THE IMAGE

*Ellen Chow*

These Seminars provide a very rich anthology on the question, What is an image? This question, which is asked without a preliminary definition of the image, can perhaps give an opening which permits us to think what an image is really about. However, the problem is that without a definition or a concept, the reader can only get lost in these interminable discourses, without being able to decipher what really underwrites the notion of the image.

The question, What is an image? illustrates in fact a question of ontology. Traditional ontology studies the theory of being as being. Ontology deals with the basis of the order of things; in Plato's conception, it concerns the science of being as opposed to becoming; in Aristotle's conception, it concerns substance as the center of classes of things. Ontology designates the being as determined absolute. In contemporary reflection, attention is focused on the problems of language and on a reinterpretation of Aristotle's idea that being can be understood in several senses. Ontology has been opened up by abandoning the traditional conception of substance. And by denouncing the deficiency of traditional metaphysics, ontology is asking about being itself.

The question of ontology of the image, the characteristic that, as Gottfried Boehm points out, "has nothing to do with an essence,"<sup>1</sup> merits our attention. Boehm regards the image as absence of essence, which means the image is inconsistent.<sup>2</sup> To a certain extent, his conception is related to Husserl's. Husserl gives the image the status of a phenomenon in accordance with time, experience, history, and perception, by introducing the idea of intentionality—the optical individual experience of effects and affects. Image, according to Husserl, is on one hand consistent as intentionality, so that it makes sense to speak of the image's being; and on the other hand it is only a phenomenon, the characteristic of inconsistency. Boehm, however, gives the image only the characteristic of *inconsistence*. Our question is then, How can we think about ontology of the image given its double characteristic of consistence and inconsistency? The paradox of the image as both consistent and inconsistent may help us to understand the question, What is an image?, which I take as a question about the ontology of the image. (This is, I think, unrelated to questions Rancière raises, which are discussed in the Seminars.<sup>3</sup>)

1. See Section 4 of the Seminars.

2. The term "consistent" (French *consistant*),

philosophically speaking, designates the character of solidity. It does not depend on arbitrary or on accidental circumstances but rather it possesses permanent qualities and objectivity. "Inconsistent," applied to the image, signifies that the image does not have permanent qualit-

ties, that it lacks substance, that it is marked by an absence of being.

3. Many of participants of the Seminars mention Jacques Rancière. In fact, Rancière's *Le destin des images* (Paris: La fabrique éditions, 2003) has other preoccupations than asking such ontological questions as, What is an image? What does interest Rancière is "ce que

The notion of the image in Greek, *eidolon*, retains the complexity of vocabulary of the image. *Eidolon* signifies image-simulacrum, designating the image as it is materialized in reality. Plato elaborates this image of reality in his work *Timaeus*, where he argues that men are guided through the image's manifestation. *Eidolon* is also derived from *eikon* (resemblance), which means that we can see the image as something similar to reality—something that is redoubled like a ghost. The term designates a virtual image or the representation of something, like the reflection of an object on a surface such as water or a mirror, which captures the luminous impressions of real objects and gives us the perception of a resemblance. For Plato this pure visual is the bearer of illusion, opposed to the real being. *Eidolon* can also be referred to *emphasis*, which is in turn derived from *phantasma*, the encounter of the visual as an obstacle; and *eidolon* is related to *enaptron*, referring to the medium in which we see, as an appearance in water or in a mirror. The *eidolon* can be conjured with the *tupos*, which signifies fingerprints, analogous to the image in the mirror. In ancient Greek, only the soul can perceive the impressions of visions and of our dreams. Linguistically, then, *eidolono* of *eidolon* designates the formation of an image, and the capacity of *facere* (making) the image is referred to a faculty of soul—that of the imagination and memory. The soul alone can put objects before our eyes and transpose them into signs and images. In this sense, the etymology of *eidolon* is inseparable from the imagination and from memory.

The concept of *phantaisia*, in turn, can be understood by reference to *phainô*, signifying “appearing to the light”; and *phainomai*, signifying “coming to the light.” Both are closely related to *phantazomai*, meaning “becoming visible, appearing or rendering visible to the eye and to the spirit.” All this shows the importance of the visible and sensitive image in relation to the intelligible. Image is understood in this perspective as inseparable from the intelligible. The exploration of the etymology of the term *eidolon* shows how *image*, in relation to other concepts, is a key term that can open the way to the ontology of the image.

*Eidolon* designates the double characteristic of the image and shows how the consistence and inconsistence of the images can be related. An *eidolon* is first and foremost an image of reality, a copy or resemblance opposed to the original being; it requires the faculty of imagination to relate the image to being, thus opening the image to possibility of an ontology. In this way, the ontology of the image goes directly to the question of the being of the image.

An image, whether it is natural or produced intentionally, has an uncertain mode of existence. This specific mode of the image leads one to raise questions about its existence, its referent, and whether it consists of being or only nonbeing or deficit of being. In this sense, one will ask if the image suggests or simulates a presence, so that it might turn out to be only the image of nothing,

sont les images de l'art et aux transformations contemporaines de leur statut” (9). He tries to think about the images of art and the transformation of their status in contemporary reflections. He has no intention at all of proposing

a theory of art; he only wants his book to be a philosophical reflection concerning the images of art. If some contemporary artists have tried to use his philosophical reflections as a guide to their practices of art, that is their problem.

an illusory appearance, a representation devoid of meaning. In fact, even when the image remains invisible, it always participates of something. This allows the image other perspectives related to being and gives it a new existence, in which it works by appearing as a supplement of being. Image, in this sense, give rise to ontological questions concerning the deficit of being and the supplement of being. It is a concept inseparable from other concepts such as imagination, perception, or intellection, and it oscillates between a plenary being, full of meaning, and a nonbeing, marked by its nothingness. It is this division which separates traditional and contemporary conceptions of the image.

Traditional discourses demonstrate how the image is consistent, meaning the image is inseparable from the movement of being, of the circulation of being inside and outside the image. Image is then thought of as resemblance. We can see how Plato confers to the sphere of images a certain conception of ontology, which he then opposes to nonbeing. Plotinus pushes further this idea of participation of being in the image. Image can be thought then as the participation of being in the mode of multiple and reflection. Every image cause one to find the source of being. The image of Plotinus, whether it is imagined as resemblance or dissemblance, does not have any referent to reality. It is not an image of imitation of reality, but rather an imitation *from the inside*. The image is always the image of something, and this something corresponds to what Plotinus calls the One, which may be read as God, or—in my reading—being. Image is therefore understood as a system of dissemblance and resemblance.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, both Plato and Plotinus develop a certain consistency in the image<sup>5</sup> which enables the circulation of being both inside and outside the image. This sense of the image is recaptured by other discourses like romanticism and surrealism. Most later discourses on the image retain this sense of the image's ontology. Only contemporary discourses, perhaps, try to denounce this fundamental ontology of the image.

Contemporary conceptions of the image sometimes oppose an understanding of the image in terms of the presence of being, and at the same time they can doubt its mediation of being. They propose a *de-ontologization* of the image, which sees the image only as the expression of nonbeing or of nothing. Such nihilist discourses consider the image as an absence of being; for them, the reality of the image consists in its intrinsic unreality, in liberation from all transcendental models.<sup>6</sup> This idea of the image insists on the inconsistency of the image and its ontological referent. It dismisses the characteristic of consistency and doubts the image's relation to being; in doing so, it reduces the image to a simple appearance. These contemporary discourses demystify the ontology of the image as a category of representation by linking the nature of the image to the unreal. The

4. This conception of the image of Plotinus can be found in *The Enneads*, in particular 1 and 5.

5. We can refer this to what Jacques Rancière said about the representation in Plato's sense, which he calls “consistance ontologique.” Rancière, *Le Destin des images*,

132; see also the English version, *The Future of the Image*, translated by Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2007).

6. For example Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'Imaginaire* or Jean-François Lyotard's *L'Inhumain*; both proclaim the same idea of the image.

internal inconsistency of this image, either because it is deficient or because it is pure semblance, encourages the production of representations that have nothing to do with the presentation of a reality.<sup>7</sup> The image does not aim at substance any more, but turns to a representation without reality—of pure fiction. The discourse on the sublime of and the “irreprésentable” is an excellent example of this nihilist conception of the image.<sup>8</sup>

The analysis of the sublime shows how images can be said to renounce all references to being, or to any generator of form in the Platonic sense. The sentiment of the sublime does not allow the recognition of the invisible in the visible, the being in the presence, but rather works by positing a subject who replaces *logos* with *pathos*, language with feeling. This sense of the sublime does not have to do with representation resulting from an intuition, but presentation, in the sensible, of what exceeds representation. The image does not offer any way to be thought, recognized, or spoken; it can only be felt, as an affective impact on the subject. This sublime shows to what extent the image is no longer an imitation of an ideal reality but a simple appearance, an indirect presentation. We see discourses against Plato’s idea of the image-copy, such as that of Gilles Deleuze, which abolish all relation between the image and the original. The simulacra of Plato can be thought as liberated from any guardianship of ontology, as neither original nor copy. The simulation is now identified as the *phantasm*. The image does not relate to being, but to the pure phenomenon of Plato’s phantasm; images give way without end to a continuing flow, one image to another image, in such a way that there is no longer a junction between being and the image. The image is a simple repetition, absent of substance and of consistence.

Is it enough, then, to determine the image only according to an ontological characteristic or only according to a deontological characteristic, to think the ontology of the image in a unilateral approach? Should we think the ontology of the image as a disjunction between being and nonbeing, or should we think the ontology of the image in a mixed approach, as a conjunction of being and nonbeing, consistency and inconsistency, presence and absence? An artwork, for example, can be thought as appearing in a certain mode of presence, an interiority localized in an exteriority. Image in this sense can be a claim to expose an essentiality, a claim that does not permit empirical particularity to play its full role. Modern or contemporary discourses, such as those of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jacques Garelli, insist on this point of view.<sup>9</sup> The *quasi-présence* and the *nimbre de l’être* of the image in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and the perception of being in Jacques Garelli’s poetic images, proclaim the same idea of the image, in which the image disconcerts and at the same time

7. Practices like Pollock’s action painting or Newman’s monochromes are good examples of antimimetic representations. Either Pollock’s “drippings,” which create infinite accumulations of unstructured lines, or Newman’s pure presentations of color in its simple materiality bring representation out of the imitation of reality and also out of ontology.

8. Particularly in Lyotard, *L’Inhumain: Cause-réie sur le temps* (Paris: Galilée, 1988).

9. Merleau-Ponty, *L’œil et l’esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995); Garelli, *La gravitation poétique* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1966).

permits thinking. The image is not thought of as mimetic or fictive, but rather as “imaginable.”

And so the question of ontology of the image is still open. I would like to refer again to the question Boehm asks: “How much history is needed to understand our question, What is an image?” I think the aesthetics of Hegel may help us to answer this question, because it places ontology at the center of reflexion and this ontology is surprisingly linked to history. For Hegel, the appearance of the image is truth and illusion at the same time, and it is related to history, to community. The consistence and the inconsistency, ontology and history, anthropology and ethnicity, may each be merged in this double characteristic of the image.

## WHAT IS AN IMAGE?

Xaq Pitkow

One voice that was missing in the conversation was a scholar who could speak from a cognitive perspective. James Elkins said he hoped to rectify that. So I'll offer one relevant way that I think about the ontology of images as a vision scientist, responding to some ideas offered by the participants.

I like to think about an image as a representation of something in the physical world. In vision science, that representation lives in the brain. To be concrete, we can describe the visual sense this way: light comes from the world, enters our eye, is absorbed by our retina, and is transduced into the electrical signals that implement thought. Those electrical signals constitute an image. Of course the direct, sensory cascade is just one process that influences the mental image of the physical world. Image interpretation seems to happen in hierarchical stages in the brain, where the later stages become very mixed with other less visual modes of thought (especially short-term and long-term memory, emotion, language). These processes all affect our mental images of structures in the physical world.

Normally we think of an image as a static thing, but I'd like to emphasize the fundamental role time plays in this conception. The process of forming a sensory representation takes about a couple tenths of a second, but the sensory machinery itself has also been sculpted over time: by past experience, past memories, and even past lives through genetically programmed neural wiring selected by evolution. This long reach of the past is absolutely crucial in an image, because the raw, uninterpreted sensory signals are fundamentally ambiguous, and it is only the past that allows us to see.

Let me give a few concrete examples. First, everyone has a blind spot, a place on our retina where the neural wires break through our light-sensitive neurons en route to the brain. Though we can't see light there, we don't perceive a dark spot. Why not? Second, we have our most acute vision in the very center of our gaze, and our peripheral vision has much lower resolution. But we perceive the world as finely detailed everywhere. How? Third, we see a person in the distance; but how do we know it isn't a half-sized person twice as near?

In each of these instances, our brain seems constantly to make unconscious guesses about the world, and not random guesses but educated ones. About a century ago, Hermann von Helmholtz named this idea *perceptual inference*. Since then, many studies (by Purves, Hoffman, and others) have shown how these guesses come from our past experience. The exact mechanisms are still mysterious, but scientists have been making progress unraveling them.

An upshot of perceptual inference is that all images are, in a deep sense, constructed by our brains. This is not a statement about culture or discourse, but

rather about biology. Our brains fill in the gaps, interpret the ambiguities, and generally perceive the world, all based upon our past experience.

I might be tempted to claim then that all images are private, since no one else shares my experiences. That would be a fallacy. There are regularities of our natural world that are effectively universal, so that you and I actually share many experiences, not in detail but in structure: the world is made of mostly opaque objects, those objects don't generally appear and disappear suddenly, distant things appear smaller than near ones, direct light most often illuminates from above, etc. James Elkins said that "we aren't equally in control of the elements we propose to choose. . . . Some of those concepts own us." For me, this is another way of talking about the universal, learned aspects of vision that create our mental images of the world. The combination of shared experiences and shared biological hardwiring leads to shared interpretations. As a consequence, some particularities of a visual experience (I saw the scene in the day, you at night; I was standing on the left, and you were on the right) seem to be partly abstracted away by our brains, leaving a mental image unexpectedly similar between observers.

On the other hand, some of our experiences are more particular, shared only among a minority as small as one. These experiences can be recent (someone draws our attention to a detail), or long past (training to read certain diagrams or text). They can be emotional (adrenaline), cultural (traditional signifiers), anatomical (blur), or of many other types. These differences can inflect our mental images in profound ways, through the computations effected by our brain. It is often these types of considerations that lead people to consider some of the thornier philosophical problems about subjectivity or significance (is my red the same as yours? what does this light pattern mean?). Unfortunately, these individual differences are more difficult to address from a scientific perspective, not least because it's much so much easier to collect data about shared aspects of brain function.

Philosophical conversations often focus on the difficulties of defining an image that are posed by these individual differences, and they neglect, or sometimes outright deny, the universally shared elements of mental images. So I want to end this comment on a less abstract note that illustrates how powerful the universal is, despite the diversity of personal experiences that sculpt them. A fascinating fMRI study by Uri Hasson et al. (2008) showed people movies while tracking their eyes and scanning their brains. The results revealed not only that we very frequently look at the same place at the same time, but, amazingly, huge portions of our brains are synchronized. Alfred Hitchcock turned out to be the ultimate master director, synchronizing two-thirds of our cortex! Thus a good director is directing not just the sequence of frames on a screen, but also our inner, private images. Despite our many individual differences, these images are thus highly shared, and in this sense, public and intersubjective. Of course, it is these shared aspects of our mental states that make this conversation possible.

## TOO WELL

*Crispin Sartwell*

I think what we don't see is that we understand images *too well*. Images are breathtakingly transparent; we interpret them for the most part effortlessly. It's possible to raise many puzzles about images, and some images of course are obscure or distant. But that's not to say that most images aren't so easy as to be too easy. In the 1980s, Flint Schier, in his book *Deeper into Pictures*, made ease of interpretation the distinguishing mark of the image as opposed to the word: to know what the word means, you've got to be trained to operate a specific convention. (This was in part a polemic against Nelson Goodman.) To know what a picture means, you only have to look. The ease with which human beings interpret pictures, or "natural generativity," to use Schier's tendentious phrase, has proven seductive, and the role that the image and the concept of pictorial representation played in modern philosophy—in Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant, Schopenhauer—is foundational. Essentially, the entire mental economy consisted of or was to be analyzed into images: Descartes's ideas; the impressions of the empiricists; sense-data; the manifold of perception.

So one interesting way to write the history of Western thought would be in terms of the history of the image. For Plato, the relation of image to the everyday world is the best analogy to the relation of the everyday world to the Forms: the world becomes an image of the realm of the Forms. That is neo-Platonism, but it is also Idealism, in Shaftesbury, Schelling, Hegel: the world as an image of the Absolute. In properly "modern" philosophy—Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Berkeley, Hume—all we are directly acquainted with are images; we infer a world from the order or procession of images. This pervasion or saturation of consciousness and reality by the image was rather a disaster for philosophy. It raised the already age-old crisis of depiction: the question about pictorial realism or truth: whether the picture matches up to the reality or corresponds to it. It led to the crisis of skepticism supposedly resolved by Kant. And Kant's approach was to turn from the alleged fact that we experience the world, if any, in images, to an attention to the structure of images: from, as it were, the sheer fact that there are pictures to a theory of perspective rendering as a theory of perception.

I don't think this approach worked out. One thing to remark is that you don't get anywhere, for example, explaining vision via mental images or sense-data: images must be seen in order to be interpreted, just like trees. You end up with an infinite regress of homuncular eyes. More disturbingly, you end up with a veiled world, a world merely inferred from what appears on the screen of perception, which if nothing else is not a very good description of what it's like to be

a human being. And even as the image continued to be read phenomenologically with ease, it was defamiliarized in philosophy, or became a mystery. This is even why there could be such a discipline as semiotics, where Peirce or Goodman is trying to articulate a theory of the iconic sign or the picture. There are still attempts, in a way, to make image the category into which we ought to analyze other categories, the basic data; as late as the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* you get a “picture theory of language.” And the sense-data theory of the positivists, enshrined forever in Ayer’s *Language, Truth, and Logic*, is still laboring under the idea that when you’ve reduced words to images—observations, phenomena, sensibilia—you’ve made a positive epistemological step, indeed you have gone as far as is possible to come to know.

However, the twentieth century slowly overturned the hegemony of the image in favor of the word, as in Peirce, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Quine, Rorty, and so on. By the time we arrive at the “postmodern era” (which is now over), Daniel Dennett denies that there is any such thing as a mental image. Abstraction in Western painting might be correlated: the idea that the image is banal or kitschy, or is always itself rhetorical. Philosophies such as Goodman’s and Derrida’s explicitly assert the strategic sovereignty of language in the language/image dichotomy. The very best moment of this literature, it seems to me, is Austin’s *Sense and Sensibilia*, which is framed as an attack on Ayer and just eviscerates the whole idea of sense-data as a bizarre mistake that gets you absolutely nowhere: so that eventually sense-data epistemologists are inferring from the pinkish patches in their visual fields that they seem to see a pig, as if that helped explain human knowledge of anything. This was a response reaching backward through Ayer to Hume and Locke.

At a certain moment, which coincided with “modernism” in philosophy, the image was the ground of the word. At a later moment, the word became the ground of the image; language became the arch-metaphor or structure of experience. I would just say that we are in a backlash against that. Many early rumblings were pleas for the integrity of the image, and I think it is fair to say that art historians were not going to be satisfied with “the language of art.” So you have books like David Freedberg’s *The Power of Images*, or Schier’s book, or John Hyman’s excellent *The Objective Eye*, groping for a defense of the image against linguistic or Protestant iconoclasm, a manifesto for the integrity or autonomy of image as its own kind of sign.<sup>1</sup> Both Mitchell and Boehm are concerned, as are a lot of people who really look at images, to defend the integrity of the image as a distinct semantic system or phenomenological level, even though perhaps they are still basically working with a linguistic model.

What the modernist use of the image and the postmodernist use of language have in common, of course, is that in some way they take themselves to be re-

1. David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); John Hyman, *The Objective Eye: Color, Form, and Reality in the Theory of Art* (Chicago: Uni-

versity of Chicago Press, 2006); and Flint Schier, *Deeper into Pictures: An Essay on Pictorial Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

stricted to semantic entities, which are supposed to be objects of immediate acquaintance in a way that, say, rocks and pigs are not. The transactions, we might say, are all taking place within semantic systems: between the word-system and the image-system of consciousness, as well as within each system. And when the semantic systems lose any external context, they merge into pure syntax or nonsense.

So to take up the question of what happens after poststructuralism, raised by Aud Sissel Hoel, I would also point to the work of Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière (who comes up several times in the discussion), where we're sort of emerging again into an actual world in which we're trying to live: not ignoring the role of semantic entities like words or pictures but seeing that even they (contra Hans-Georg Gadamer, for example) have origins, that language isn't the primordial muck out of which we arose. Sissel Hoel says, "At this point in time, the image could not, should not, be thrust back into the silent murmurs of sensation." That is, we face a dilemma in that linguistic/analytic philosophy and poststructuralism have made it clear that the image must be the object, not the ground, of analysis, so we cannot merely return to the image in our boredom with language.

By the same token, however, Anglo-American linguistic philosophy and continental poststructuralism have left us as skeptical about language as about the image. When Foucault shows us language as oppressive or carceral, when he describes domination in terms of inscription of the body, he is also certainly not proposing the image as a sheer mode of liberation. Rather, there is the temptation to drop back into the body, the silent murmur of sensation, almost a mysticism of brute physicality. But at any rate I think the work relentlessly emphasizing language just became tiresome after awhile; the vein is worked out for the time being.

The point now (as Austin saw, for example) is to deflect any quick epistemological reduction, while also trying to demystify each of various areas of inquiry in terms of the others. We want understand the circulation of signs as part of "the distribution of the sensible" (Rancière) which incorporates political economy, aesthetics, the histories of built and natural environments in interaction, and so on. Or within art history it make sense to talk about "material culture," which implies that even semantic activity is also carried out by material interventions, by the arrangement, in cooperation with them, of material objects.

We labored for centuries under the delusion that all we are immediately acquainted with are our own symbol systems—iconic or linguistic—and only through them to things outside them: semiotics as metaphysics: Cartesian ideas to Rorty's "world well lost." But this runs aground not only in skepticism, and not only because our symbol systems end up being just as mysterious as everything else, but because it's false: we're acquainted with all sorts of things, and you can't understand images and words without a context that includes many sorts of things, social or asocial, human or in excess of the human.

## "DON'T STAND SO CLOSE TO ME"

*Klaus Speidel*

I felt a bit like an actor who, arriving late to a play, listens from behind the curtain to stage business while he waits for a moment to join the scene. I decided to enter the play with Daniel Arasse. The detail seems to concentrate and connect different elements that were important in the Seminar discussions about images.

When Jacqueline Lichtenstein refers to Arasse, she underlines the marginality of his approach to art history, and James Elkins recounts his own experiences of being extremely close to the picture surface and the feeling of isolation that it caused. This is no mere coincidence. Elkins describes how "the meaning rushes out" when we get so close to pictures. I want to use this chance to join an informal conversation, to deploy some of the Seminars' thoughts, and to explore ideas of what happens in our moments and acts of isolation with and within pictures.

One way to explain the disappearance of meaning in the microscopic is based on the fact that—to take up Michael Ann Holly's expression—the spirit doesn't hover behind too small portions of paint. In other words, the twofoldness of the pictorial experience disappears: only the paint remains—with, sometimes, a trace of a gesture. Arasse never went quite so far into the microscopic, and therefore all his chosen details have an iconic and a pictorial aspect. Sometimes a painter might seem to insist on the one rather than the other, but ultimately making details is less about the painter's brush or the beholder's looking glass than about choosing to see something as discrete small element.

There is also linguistic reason that can account for the difficulty of talking about pictorial details, and thus sharing our experience with others: what can be called our "object language" (in a literal rather than logical sense) is so much richer than our "material language"; it is much easier to talk about objects than about materials.

Why has art history been reluctant to concentrate on details? I think that there are several more or less subject-specific reasons for this resistance. The most obvious one is that a detail is small, materially speaking. It occupies only a small portion of a picture surface, and this relative smallness tends to be seen as an indicator of insignificance, making it unpromising for examination.

While pure paint may not be full of meaning, its aspect can induce pleasure and desire. Lichtenstein's desire to touch a painting is connected to this experience of a painting's materiality. At several moments in the discussion, I got the strange feeling that the real pleasure for many analysts lies where the analyses end. It arises when pictures stop giving way to images. It is apparent that Arasse

had a passion for the materiality of painting. And the famous passage of Proust's *Recherche*, where Bergotte dies after having beheld a small, yellow patch of a wall in Vermeer's painting *A View of Delft*, makes me think that Arasse shared that passion with Proust. The difficulty of saying anything about the content of the experience might be one of the reasons why the experience of the material aspect of a painting seems so intimate that it can be "confessed," as Lichtenstein says. As in the Police song "Don't Stand So Close to Me," getting closer means leaving the domain of public interaction. Stepping closer to a picture opens a potential for infringement of the rules of public viewing, which do not include the permission to touch. Touching would mean following our purely personal urge while we leave our public personae standing at an appropriate distance. Interestingly, the public persona is a teacher in both the Police's and Lichtenstein's cases. The detail thus appears as the mirror on a pinpoint, concentrating the conflicts between public and private gaze as well as the potential tension between picture and image.

All this makes it hard to find a place for the pictorial detail (the stain) as opposed to the iconic (the apple) in academic accounts of pictures. For "picture professionals," concentrating on the matter opens up a space free from the pressure of analysis and where a purely personal experience can take place.

Will you follow me if I tell you that there might be something else in play, and that it is power relations? With most pictures, moving closer at will, giving up the image for the painting, the public for the private, and the painting for the paint, doesn't comply with the obligations they carry (Alexis Smets). Even though "obliging" might be a bit strong, it is clear that a picture and maybe all works of art suggest that we view them in a specific way. To guarantee an appropriate viewing of a *trompe l'oeil* painting, it has to be placed in a specific location, not too well lit, and the viewer should discover it from afar before moving closer. When looking at an old Suprematist painting, you should probably ignore the cracks in the paint, maybe even actively imagine that they are not there, privileging the image over the picture. With other traditions, it's the opposite. If you decide to act in opposition with them, ignoring what experience the work and the painter want you to have, you take control over your viewing experience. Arasse emphasizes that a detail that you see has not necessarily been made. Focusing on it is somehow to break it off, destroying the image or at least initiating into a process of recreation. This may be enjoyable to the viewer, but it is exactly what makes details such unsafe anchors for scholarship.

## ABSENCE AND ABSTRACTION

*Antonia Pocock*

“Do you think art historians are interested in the physicality, the materiality, of objects?” This question, posed by Jacqueline Lichtenstein, provoked a polarized response. Mitchell offers the opinion that “every art historian I know professes to base everything in the concrete, material specificity of singular objects.” Elkins finds this pervasive self-description curiously at odds with the majority of art-historical writing that is actually produced: “say you go into the art history section of a library,” he says, “and pick a book at random. It is not unlikely that some number of those illustrations might not have been needed, that the book’s argument could have proceeded just as well without them.”

Interestingly, Elkins’s suspicion about the distance of art history from art objects is very much present in the Seminars transcribed here. Indeed, these discussions also proceed quite well with limited reference to specific examples of their main subject, the image. Participants cite a wide variety of art-historical and philosophical texts as they unravel the very problematic question *What is an image?*, but they rarely introduce actual, material works of art to support, test, or refine their reflections.

Perhaps this avoidance stems from a certain understanding of the image, shared by Mitchell, Mondzain, and Lichtenstein, as distinct from the object, the picture, or the medium, and therefore beyond the visibility of these material things. Or perhaps it can be attributed to Lichtenstein’s assertion that it is more difficult to write or talk about painting than about images, or to Elkins’s argument that “looking closely” at a work of art, and engaging directly with its materiality, is said to produce an “impressionistic, poetic evocation that is detached from history.” Or could it be the structure of the question itself that encourages such an omission? Boehm suggests that the question *What is an image?* necessarily excludes the history and materiality linked to the plurality of *images*. And so it could be that our guiding question, posed in the singular, encourages abstractions, generalizations, and ontologies. What all of this amounts to is that the topic at hand is particularly resistant to the object-based approach many art historians claim to employ.

I don’t mean to suggest that an engagement with specific images and their materiality would help our cause. In fact, such an approach could potentially turn a conversation such as this away from the image and towards *this* painting or *that* photograph. It is hard to imagine combining the singular and the plural in a unified perspective. Even still, the absence of the artwork from this discussion remains bothersome. It is counterintuitive that an account of images can or must be formed in spite of them, especially if we agree with Boehm that

“artists changed the reality of images, at least to the same extent as philosophers or intellectuals did.” It is to be expected, though, that this comment remained suspended in the discussion and was never taken up by other participants, who continued theorizing apart and around from concrete examples.

I wonder what exchanges may have been provoked, not simply by using particular images to illustrate or put pressure on key points, but also by engaging these specific images as theories in themselves, which is what I think Boehm was trying to suggest. What other insights may have arrived, if participants not only explored what Plato or Wittgenstein meant by “image,” but also what Da Vinci or Duchamp meant? Without this additional component, art history and theory appear more engaged with art history and theory than with art.

I am certain, however, that particular images invisibly guided the discussions that transpired in Chicago. Each assertion seems to take for granted a certain kind of image, even if it is not outwardly admitted. Only on one occasion was this bias revealed: during the portion of the discussion dedicated to *Painting and Images*, when Lichtenstein posits materiality as a distinguishing point between a painting and an image. Here she is challenged to find this distinction at work in Marie Krane’s paintings, at which point she qualifies her theory: “from my point of view, theory works best when it starts *from* the object, from the painting. If the works oblige me to form a new theory, that’s fine. But for the moment, my theory about the distinction between image and painting is made on the basis of the classical history of painting. If it doesn’t work with contemporary art, that’s fine.”<sup>1</sup> We are again faced with an art-historical wish that all theories begin from the object, and so the question remains: why is this object basis so often hidden?

I think it is important to disclose the image behind the theory, if only to be fully aware of those images it does not explain. Indeed, it is the remark cited above that points to a whole order of images that are blatantly neglected in the Seminars. Most understandings of the image referenced here—as a copy or representation of an object that is opposed to the object itself, as an apparition or phenomenon distinct from its material realization, as a figure that is perceived on a ground, etc.—take for granted that the image is representational, that an image must be *of something*. But what about images of nothing? Is this a logical impossibility, or simply a different moment of the image? For example, when Mitchell asks, is there something that is no longer an image, or that is about to be an image, or that can never be an image? we could frame abstraction to satisfy each of these states. And so, my final question is, where do abstraction and representation stand in relation to the image?

As we know, abstraction in art makes conceptions of the image that start from mimesis, or from some kind of figure-ground opposition, highly problematic. An abstract painting, for example, does not allow for the perceptual shift between the “image” and the “painting” that Lichtenstein posits. Abstract painting dissolves a distinction between what is represented and what it is represented with, or between looking through and looking at. All this seems obvious. How-

1. See the end of Section 8 of the Seminars.

ever, I think it is worth mentioning because the predominant theories of the image cited here—which we are meant to take as the current state of theorizing on the image—still seem to ignore the now quite extensive lineage of abstract art.

Turning to abstraction—to Mondrian, Pollock, or Richter—we will find other approaches to our questions, *What is an image?* and *What is not an image?*, particularly because abstraction has often been understood as an extreme case. With abstraction, we are never quite sure if we have left the realm of images entirely, or, conversely, if we are encountering an image in its pure form, uncolonized by language. Or, for that matter, what kind of account of images proceeds the ready-made? How does the artwork-image-object relation shift in the twentieth century with reference to this invention? Can an object become an image? It all boils down to Boehm's point that artists continue to introduce new understandings of what counts as an image, and I believe these contributions must not be ignored.

## ELKINS ENTANGLED?

*Paul Willemarck*

Dialogues, especially with many participants, entail a strange movement hinting at different horizons, often opening sideways, closing off or anticipating evidences and dead ends. An intriguing sideways movement pops up in the dialogue on ontology. James Elkins states that he doesn't feel free from "something nonlogical . . . in images," upon which he is immediately bullied by Gottfried Boehm. Elkins, however, launches this thought as a hint aimed at Boehm's proposition on iconic logic. He also points beyond Boehm's notion of the image. This reveals a resistance. Boehm doesn't want the science of images taking the irrational as a principle or maxim. But Elkins doesn't doubt this. What he doubts is that we are free from irrationality, meaning that perhaps we are not free from an interest in "something nonlogical or nonrational in images." Elkins tries to point at something that escapes explanation. Something that owns the person who studies images, just as it owns the viewer. Boehm's resistance to acknowledging this point is bizarre. Let's look more closely at his argument.

Boehm suggests that Elkins supposes "the idea that there is an irrational content or background in images that cannot be explained or must be accepted," and he concludes that this is "a false conception, because it posits that there is irrationality, which is then followed by a rationality." Of course, Boehm is right in thinking that, in order to build a science, one must be able to establish relations starting from what is known and proceeding to what is less known. But Elkins doesn't consider using a mystagogical way of thinking about images. He even refrains from incoherences. But that doesn't mean he wants to ignore them. Quite the contrary. What he is saying is that there is something that he can't clarify about what we know of images. That it is all over the place and crucially in discourses that do not propose to start with ontological answers about what an image is. Certainly, it is not because everyone is talking about something incomprehensible that we can or should draw on it. Discursive practices regarding the images' meaning may always be mistaken for a comprehensive meaning of them. In investigations of how images create meaning without having recourse to language, this difficulty raises a methodological question concerning the subject of irrationality. The task of getting at a comprehensive meaning of what showing is (Boehm) inevitably points to something that may be mistaken for irrationality. And although irrationality may haunt images as much as it haunts people, it is not a good research method to start identifying it with the meaning of images as such. But again Elkins does not imply this.

Elkins tries to hint at a third way in between two positions roughly identifiable with the work of Boehm on the one hand and that of Mitchell on the other.

From the perspective of this medium way, Elkins feels the pull of our ignorance about what an image is. This ignorance feels like bondage, and that is why he is open to discourses that “want to find something more definitively outside the rational or the logical.” It seems that in Elkins’s mind this move away from the rational and the coherent indicates a space where we can almost stand back from our entanglement in the history of ideas of what an image is. The strange thing about what he says is that he doesn’t doubt the possibility of standing back further,<sup>1</sup> but not from his perspective. Also, he doesn’t want to value the entanglement he is feeling as conceptual, hence rational.<sup>2</sup> What is he doing, then?

He basically feels the need of hinting at a tidal pull that would be an entanglement to us, a bondage. I provisionally identified this entanglement as an ignorance because it seems that what it asks for is comprehension, that is to say a concept. And if it doesn’t feel like a bond but rather an entanglement, it is probably because the concept is lacking, hence the feeling of irrationality. But, if it would be out of a conceptual need, why would Elkins engage in borrowing from discourses that want to find something definitely outside the rational or logical? It is because he wants to point at something that resists comprehension. And, although it has a hold on us, it can and should set us free of some of our inherited ideas, especially those that characterize the rationality of images. It has to do with the logic of the image as such, but also with the limits of its logic. What could there be found in the image that informs our relation to it, but doesn’t enable us to rationalize it? Elkins mentions a long list of literature on the subject, from “Leibniz to Wittgenstein, from Hubert Damisch to Michael Polanyi,” from Krauss, Lyotard, and Freud to Nancy or Didi-Huberman. What seems to be holding his attention, however, is the cleavage between the rational and the irrational, between the logical and the illogical, a cleavage which may be epitomized as incoherence. It seems that, according to Elkins, the question of the ontology of the image draws our attention to something in our relation to images which cannot be rationalized, meaning something that cannot be conceived of as relational, but which informs a great deal of what our relation to images is about.

At this point we must wonder if Elkins’s third way is a view on the concept of vision after poststructuralism. The point then would be not to have this figure of the nonrelational sense of the image become a natural starting point for elaborating another logic of perception, an aesthetic, and subsequently a semiotics. In fact, from the beginning, the pictorial or iconic turn and the visual studies it inspired was meant to be a field of research that felt the need to proceed beyond poststructuralist inquiry. Tom Mitchell’s imperative to *picture* theory may serve as a guideline here, as well as Gottfried Boehm’s expression “to think the iconic.” What has changed in respect to more traditional answers? It seems that what has changed is the idea that theory can be all-encompassing. What does it mean for a theory that it doesn’t pretend to give all the answers? It means that theory

1. This position is clearly identified as Tom Mitchell’s.

2. Which may be the case with “some modernist and poststructural art history.”

doesn't conceive of itself otherwise than as a set of singular answers, and that this singularity implies a limited scope that may be understood very differently. For Mitchell, it means a hard relativism in regard to current practices and uses of images.<sup>3</sup> For Boehm, ontology is "less general" and is linked "with the domain of effects and affects, with the eyes of the beholder, his implicit or outspoken interpretations." But if it is not an all-encompassing answer that theory is looking for anymore, what does this imply except that it is addressing issues that until they are addressed are left unrelated, that is, unanswered. So it seems that this dialogue over the ontology of the image needs to find its address. What does it mean to Elkins? What is the sense of his third way? I think it is about the change it can effect at a certain point in time, as when he states, "I always return to these two questions: What sense of images animates the discussion? And how does that sense of images connect with what the writer then goes on to talk about?"

3. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 63.

## PRIVATE, SOCIAL, OR POLITICAL?

*Ruth Sonderegger*

Ever since my first encounter with Wittgenstein's *Blue Book*, I have been fascinated by what he writes in the opening passage: "The questions 'What is length?,' 'What is meaning?,' 'What is the number one?' etc., produce in us a mental cramp. We feel that we can't point to anything in reply to them and yet ought to point to something. (We are up against one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment: a substantive makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it.)"<sup>1</sup> As is well known, Wittgenstein's reflections on the bewitched "what" proceed by showing via examples, rather than arguing, how much further we get when we transform what-questions into how-questions. Once we ask for how and in which contexts we use the bewildered "substantives" and how we interact with the things to which such seemingly weird concepts refer, not only does the query become less opaque; we are even able to find answers, or so the Wittgensteinian story goes.

In light of this, I was intrigued by the changes the seminal question of the Seminar undergoes in the course of the discussions; discussions, by the way, of which nonparticipants like me cannot but be utterly jealous. In a veritable Wittgensteinian way, What is an image? is first transformed into What do images do? How do they work in the world? In the opening remarks of the section entitled "Ontology," there is, in addition, talk about how images are used, understood and believed. At a later stage, an epistemological variant of the how-question is asked: What can we learn from images?

However, despite the fact that Gottfried Boehm points out right at the beginning that the two questions as to *what* images are and *how* they work cannot be separated, the topic—or myth, if I may—of two substantially different approaches to images—one ontological, the other more social, institutional if not political—keeps coming back and seems to virtually haunt the discussion from the beginning to its end. And this is where my puzzlement begins.

Approximately all the voices of the wonderful and thoroughgoing conversation that took place in the summer of 2008 seem to subscribe to theories of images that are historically informed, impure, anti- or postmetaphysical. Nonetheless, the "nature" of the image and even the possibility of a "supertheory" as opposed to *theories of images* in the plural remain a contentious point. Does this mean that the acknowledgment of Wittgenstein, whose name pops up on virtually every other page, is halfhearted? In what follows, I would like to continue the debate by focusing on some methodological implications of a Wittgensteinian approach to images.

1. Wittgenstein, *The Blue and the Brown Books* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 1.

If we agree with Wittgenstein, and I do as much as James Elkins does explicitly and most of the participants seem to do implicitly, we can no longer disentangle the ontological question from the social dimensions of images.<sup>2</sup> To be exact: only how-questions will answer the what-question or, rather, make what-questions disappear. For to answer the question about the nature of images we have to specify, according to Wittgenstein, to which objects exactly we are referring: paintings, diagrams, digital images? to name just a few variants of images mentioned in the seminar. In addition, we have to discuss the ways, or practices, as Wittgenstein would say, in which we refer to such objects: practices like, for instance, thinking, looking, touching, dreaming, researching. And, last but not least, we have to specify the “we.” Are “we” museum visitors or philosophers, film addicts or art historians, downloaders of illegal film stuff or those who play with the pics on their mobile phones? Both we who ask the question, What is the image? and our world are part of the what-question, so we cannot but take all these dimensions into account.<sup>3</sup>

It is, of course, possible to ask what *certain* visual practices, as opposed to historically or culturally *specific* linguistic or sonic practices, share and where the differences begin. If this is the main point of an ontological approach, a Wittgensteinian could indeed make sense of ontology, although overlaps between different practices would not only not be excluded but would be very likely to be found. In this vein, Elkins seems to propose a modest and impure (Wittgensteinian) account of ontology when he says, “let me provisionally call an ‘ontological reading’ one that attempts to find in images something other than language or logic—something that inheres in images.” But when he continues, “There is a contrast between ontological readings and those by writers who prefer to talk about how images are treated, what reactions they provoke in the world,” a totally different concept of ontology seems to be at play.<sup>4</sup> And this is the point where Wittgensteinians, and Heideggerians too, are lost.

For in their eyes we cannot separate the nature of whatever object from the practices it is part of and, likewise, from the specific subjects of these practices. It is an interesting and worthwhile question to ask what we (participants in a discussion about images, for instance) do with images (in academic settings) as opposed to what we do with words (in academia). But what would an image beyond all social uses be? Wittgenstein’s arguments against private languages (and private images, as Tom Mitchell points out rightly) do not only make the social character of all kind of signs explicit. Part and parcel of this sociality is their practical fundament. And this is why being cannot be separated from doing. Ontology in the first of the above-mentioned senses is welcome and part of any investigation into the specificity of a certain field of practices. Ontology in the second sense, however, simply does not make sense in the eyes of those who follow Wittgenstein.

2. Elkins’s comment is in Section 6 of the Seminars.

3. Pretty much the same argument can be found in the opening section of Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*, where he points out that those who ask a question as well as their “world”

have to become the starting point of answering whatever kind of questions. But Heidegger seems to have played only a minor role in the Seminar, so I will focus on Wittgenstein.

4. See Section 4 of the Seminars.

As for politics, things are much more complicated, indeed. I am the first to admit that when it comes to politics Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's theories of the social are not helpful at all. And this is why I think that Elkins is right in being hesitant to assimilate the social to the political. It would be extremely naïve to believe that all kinds of images can or actually do affect political parties and other political institutions. However, there are theorists of the political who conceive of it in both a broader and a more fundamental way so that the political is no longer identified with institutions (of the state). One of them is Jacques Rancière, who is mentioned briefly a couple of times during the Seminar. Let me therefore conclude with some remarks on Rancière.

Those who find his theory of the political convincing (and to my mind Rancière's political theory is a plausible continuation of a Wittgensteinian account of the social) will hesitate to close the borders between the social and the political too quickly. For, according to Rancière, politics happens when the status of political subjects is at stake, that is, in moments of disagreement and negotiation about who counts and is perceived as a subject. Such negotiations are, in the eyes of Rancière, about whose noises are perceived and treated as meaningful words as opposed to mere noises that go unanswered. "Politics exists because the *logos* is never simply speech, because it is always indissolubly the *account* that is made of this speech: the account by which a sonorous emission is understood as speech, capable of enunciating what is just, whereas some other emission is merely perceived as a noise signaling pleasure or pain, consent or revolt."<sup>5</sup>

In this vein, one could also pose the question, Whose images are perceived as images instead of blotches of color, scribble, daub, or junk? To my mind, this visual variant of a Rancièrean approach to the political is always already at play when we start asking what images, as parts of specific practices, are. Not for nothing, the challenging question, What is not an image? or, as I would like to add, What is not perceived as an image? is addressed early on in the seminar and consequently treated as a necessary corollary of What is an image? I am not implying that Rancière has elaborated much on visual aspects of his political theory. In fact, quite the contrary is the case. But I wish he had. For in most contemporary societies it is not only the acknowledgment of noisy emissions as linguistic entities that makes an animal into a subject; visual emissions seem to play an equally important role in processes of becoming a subject and, at the same time, a political being. In addition, comparative reflections on the linguistic, visual, and sonic dimensions of (not) being acknowledged as a human and likewise as a political being could bring out into the open the extent to which Rancière relies on Plato's and Aristotle's possibly dated definitions of the human being as the one that is capable of speech.

Before my thoughts become too speculative, I would like to conclude by thanking all participants in the 2008 Stone Summer Theory Institute, for it is an invaluable source of excellent food for thought and vision, too.

5. Rancière, *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1999), 22–23 (my emphasis).

## "ON TWO DEATHS AND THREE BIRTHS"

*Thomas Macho and Jasmin Mersmann*

Michael Ann Holly's association of the School of the Art Institute Seminar with a site of spiritualism where *the image* is evoked like a ghost is instructive in two respects: in a critical vein, because "the image" risks remaining an anemic entity as long as it is treated as an ahistorical, abstract entity; and in a constructive vein, because the comparison points to the intrinsic link of images with life and death, that is, to the spectral character of images, which come to life only in hosts—in pictures and living bodies. That the image historically incarnates in different bodies does not mean, however, that the image stays the same in its concretizations: the compounds of image and host are ever-distinct phenomena, cognizable from their effects.

The distinction of *image* and *picture* is useful, but is still in the grip of Platonic-Christian soul-body dualism: like ideas or souls, images are considered as immaterial entities using material bodies, which are born, emerge, and decay, while the images are timeless and eternal. Only Dorian Gray succeeds in changing roles with an image: his portrait grows older and uglier, whereas he seems to overcome death in eternal youth and beauty. Thus, it would be at least problematic to consider "the body" as a possible oppositional term to "the image" in the Greimasian square.

Even if we decide to leave the question of the right corner of the square open (James Elkins has proposed *writing* as one candidate, Tom Mitchell *the word* or *the imageless, the unpicturable or the overlooked*), the example Mitchell uses to explain the diagram seems to be a case in point: there are structural analogies between, on the one hand, the living, the dead, the inanimate, and the undead and, on the other hand, the image and its opposites and complements. Marie-José Mondzain has already tried to establish a link between the two schemes, justly stating that "the distribution of life and death depends on what you are calling an image."

A note by the French cinematographer Robert Bresson from the 1950s might help reflecting the nexus more closely: "My movie," he writes, "is born first in my head, dies on paper; is resuscitated by the living persons and real objects I use, which are killed on film but, placed in a certain order and projected on to a screen, come to life again like flowers in water."<sup>1</sup>

Even though Bresson is talking about film, what he says could also be pertinent for a theory of images, which are not strictly contrasted to writing. Bresson's well-known critique of film-as-theater was an attempt to overcome Lessing's distinction between the spatiality of images or sculptures and the temporality of

1. Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, translated by Jonathan Griffin (Copenhagen: Green Integer, 1997), 23. The title of this

chapter is taken from the same source. Further references will be in the text.

music and poetry. Bresson's intention was to *write* with images: "Cinematography," he noted, "is a writing with images in movement and with sounds" (16). Later: "Cinematography: new way of writing, therefore of feeling" (38). And he quotes Montaigne: "Les mouvements de l'âme naissaient avec même progrès que ceux du corps" (The movements of the soul were born with the same progression as those of the body; 45).

Cinematography as writing or as a "language of images" transcends the concept of the image as a single entity, because it gains its life only from the relation to others: "The images must exclude the idea of image" (71). This is a radical position, which could lead us to the question whether this does not apply to images in general: do not all images stand in a historical line with other images, taking their life also from the relation to their precedents and successors? One point is clear: images are multiple, already without being explicitly put together in a film or on a Mnemosyne plate. Every image has preimages.

*First birth:* The film is born from the pictorial memory and imagination of the cinematographer; it lives in his fantasy until it loses its life through the fixation in writing a script. This description points at the difficult question of mental or corporeal *visibility* as a necessary condition for what we call an image: Bresson requires the director to "see" the film with closed eyes: "Your film must resemble what you see on shutting your eyes. (You must be capable, at any instant, of seeing *and hearing* it entire)" (60). Thus, this image has a virtual status, which might be compared to Vasari's term of *disegno*. Images do not only refer to what is spatially absent, but also to what is no longer or not yet there. In their own temporality they operate *before* and *after* other images.

*First death:* The first death of the film in the script parallels the often-lamented death of the oral word when transformed into a book, which comes alive again when being read or even pronounced. The script, however, when read by other people, might also give birth to other images. Thinkers like Aby Warburg and Georges Didi-Huberman have been interested in the latency of the text between the book covers, the spectral presence of the images between times and countries, their *survivance* or *pre- and afterlife*.

*Second birth:* A first resurrection takes place when the film is shot: in contrast to a traditional movie, where the actors embody the fictional characters conceived by the filmmaker, Bresson does not want his "models" to play, but to perform gestures—automatically, in a mechanical manner. They are not asked to simulate inner feelings, but to produce surface effects—"Model," he notes, "All face" (40). "What they lose in apparent prominence during the shooting, they gain in depth and truth on the screen. It is the flattest and dullest parts that have in the end the most life" (75). Bresson condemns traditional cinema for restricting itself to filmed theater, using the camera to "reproduce," whereas the cinematographer uses the camera to "create" (15): "Theater copies life," film produces it (20). Traditional cinema produces only semblances of life, and the characters remind him of Madame Tussaud's; he mentions the "waxwork aspect of their faces photographed in color" (64).

*Second death:* The models are “killed on the film,” but, like cut flowers, the “stills” have some life and can be reanimated through montage and projection. It is the relation between images and sounds which gives persons and objects their “cinematographic life” (55). The filmic characters are at no time “present” at the set, but stem from the montage of individual images: “Cutting. Passage of dead images to living images. Everything blossoms afresh” (89). The touching effect of a film is not due to moving images, but is an effect of montage, which creates a relation between invisible and visible images. Film is “what happens in the joins” (28). Being “unlinked” means dead: “without bonds, and so dead” (95). Bresson compares filmic images to the words in a dictionary, which “have no power and value except through their position and relation” (21).

*Third birth:* The equivalent to the flower water is the light that brings the filmic images to life: life here is connected to visibility, but in the first case, that is, the death of the imaginary image on paper, it is rather the fixation and bringing into a publicly visible sphere that equals a death. The last resurrection can be repeated ad infinitum: the latent film can be brought alive in every projection, and every time the images will find viewers to take as hosts, the images might possess them, they might die or just sleep in their imagination, be seen in reality, recycled in other films, transformed in other media and arts. Rather than transforming the image into a “fetish of discourse,” we should look at its interaction with others and their effectiveness through the contact with viewers, the new hosts: “One recognizes the true by its efficacy, by its power” (27).

It is important to stress that every rebirth brings to life something new: the film Bresson is talking about does not stay the same all the time, but already during the shooting there will always be “a new pungency over and above what I had imagined. Invention (re-invention) on the spot” (13–14). The director should put himself in a “state of intense ignorance and curiosity, and yet see things in advance” (26). Rather than transforming the image into a “fetish of discourse,” we should look at its interaction with others and their effectiveness through the contact with viewers: “One recognizes the true by its efficacy, by its power” (27).

By its temporality, film is finite, the reel has a determined length, and, not only in Bresson, the film often ends with the death of the protagonist. “Films,” Lorenz Engell states, “are conceived from their ending and make the end comprehensible. As images of finiteness they ‘have’ an ending instead of simply finishing.”<sup>2</sup> Films exemplify what Leonardo describes as music’s and poetry’s logic of life and death: for him, the sense of hearing is less dignified than vision: “perchè tanto, quanto ne nasce, tanto ne muore, et è si veloce nel morire, come nel nascere”—sound dies as quickly as it is born.<sup>3</sup> Filmic images, however, obtain their life in time: cinematographic life is contagious, it stems from the contact of people, of images with other images—and with viewers.

2. Lorenz Engell, *Bilder der Endlichkeit* (Weimar: VDG, 2005), 15 (our translation).

3. Leonardo da Vinci, *Codex Vaticanus—Urbinas*, fol. 11r/v.

## IMAGES IN ACTS

*Ciarán Benson*

There is a prevalent inclination to approach the idea of the image analytically. This is highly productive but does not satisfy the complementary need to think of images and image making synthetically. This is especially evident in psychologies of the image. The semiotics of the image is much stressed, and rightly so. Its pragmatics needs emphasis also.

Rather than duplicate the many interesting themes of the Stone Summer Theory Institute seminar on the image, I would like to add some thoughts on the ways in which images find themselves nested in social acts and, as a consequence of the kinds of acts in which they are nested, can find their meanings altered, transformed, or developed. In doing this I want to connect a number of interesting lines of thought from psychology that might advance our understanding of the ways in which images find themselves integrated into social acts.

First, images can be thought of as *affordances* in the general sense developed by the psychologist of perception James J. Gibson.<sup>1</sup> An affordance was for Gibson “an action possibility” latent in the environment. Steps “afford” climbing, banisters sliding, and so on. The original meaning of *afford* comes from the Old English word *geforthian*, meaning to “further” and, later, “to perform” or “to accomplish.”

Applying this idea of affordance, can we then think of images as invitations to *go further*, to embark on journeys of imagination which may, or may not, involve completing acts initiated by the image maker, such as, for example, joining the army (“Your country needs you”), reflecting on what it feels like to grow old (Rembrandt’s self-portraits), or joining a revolutionary attempt at a new art (Malevich’s *Boy with a Knapsack*)?

If we can think of images as kinds of metaphorical affordance, then one way of considering the meaning of images would be to think of the roles they perform in social acts. There has been much preoccupation with the idea of an *act* on both sides of the Atlantic over the last century or so. Nonetheless it remains surprisingly marginal, not to say neglected, in contemporary psychology, and especially in contemporary psychologies of art.

Here is one framework from the philosopher and psychologist Rom Harré—who is influenced by the English philosopher John Austin—that allows us to think of the ways in which initially meaningless marks or movements become meaningful as they are gathered up into actions and acts.<sup>2</sup>

1. Gibson, “The Theory of Affordances,” in *Perceiving, Acting, and Knowing: Toward an Ecological Psychology*, edited by Robert Shaw and John Bransford (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004), 67–82.

2. Rom Harré, *Social Being*, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 74.

Actions are the meanings of movements and utterances;  
 Acts are the meanings of actions;  
 Commitments and expectations are the meanings of acts.

Your head could nod involuntarily, for example, as you experienced great fatigue and an overwhelming desire to sleep. To an observer, that nodding movement simply means that you are very tired. That very same nodding movement of the head finds another meaning when it becomes an act of greeting. Whether it is an appropriate thing to do as an act of greeting would in turn depend on the commitments and expectations of the cultural context in which you find yourself and your position within it. Tugging one's forelock might have been an expected confirmation of subservience between a nineteenth-century tenant and his landlord, but it would be an act of ironic contempt between a revolutionary Red Guard and a feudal landlord. The distinctiveness of movements, actions, and acts, as Harré says, "derives from the embedding of the same neutral core existent in three distinct and irreducible relational systems." Others, like Canadian psychologist Merlin Donald, speak of "webs of cultural practice."<sup>3</sup>

We can apply this way of thinking to images. To take just one illustrative example: the black squares in Vermeer's *Allegory of Faith* (1671–74) are effortlessly taken by the viewer to represent floor tiles. Malevich's *Black Square* (1915), in its project to create an entirely new art, has to be understood, by contrast, as finding its meaning as part of a revolutionary creative act.<sup>4</sup> How different again, and how poignant, is Malevich's act of signing his 1932 *Self-Portrait*, or his 1933 *Portrait of the Artist's Wife*, with his still quietly insistent, but now much tamed and more fearful, black square.

Changing commitments and expectations alter the scope of permitted and forbidden acts. These acts in turn change the heuristics of the kinds of actions that artists sense will be favored or forbidden. Images must always be understood as framed by the acts which bring them, and their apprehension, into being.

This idea is embedded in contemporary art history even if it is neglected in contemporary psychologies of art. Let me conclude with a recent example that I found particularly compelling. In 2005–6 the Musée National D'Art Moderne in Paris mounted a show called *Big Bang: Destruction et Crédation dans L'Art du XXE Siècle*. It was curated by Catherine Grenier. What struck me about this stimulating show was how it was structured and presented by using the kind of framework which I am suggesting should be part of any general theory of the image.

In effect, the images constituting this extensive review of twentieth-century art were organized under a number of verb forms which, I am suggesting, can be understood as acts. One could imagine differentiating cultural-historical periods by the patterns of the acts which characterize them.

3. Harré, *Social Being*, 61; Donald, "The Slow Process: A Hypothetical Cognitive Adaptation for Distributed Cognitive Networks," *Journal of Physiology (Paris)* 101 (2007): 214–22.

4. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

Here is the list of such acts which *Big Bang* used to describe the eddies and flows of twentieth-century art, and which I have abstracted from the accompanying documentation for that show:

To destroy	To explore other types of hybrid, archaic language
To redefine	To affirm the right to sexual pleasure
To abandon	To liberate women
To distort	To explore sex in terms of shapes, etc.
To recombine	To bear witness
To devalue	To entail commitment
To reform	To mobilize
To deconstruct	To remember
To experiment with	To parody
To investigate qualities	To provoke
To speculate	To defy
To cross-fertilize	To deride
To find again	To subvert
To produce/simulate regressive acts	To re-enchant
To refer to buried areas of thought	

This is an example of what I intend the idea of *images in acts* to mean. Could one draw up equivalents for each period of art and in so doing characterize each period in terms of its pattern of predominating acts? This is not of course to argue that kinds of imagistic reference might not also be considered in act terms. It is to argue that a more complete theory of the image should take account of the ways in which images are nested in acts, which are in turn nested in commitments and expectations.

## NOT *WHAT*, BUT *WHY* AND *HOW*

*Christoph Lüthy*

What is an image? This is the question that attracted the participants to the 2008 Stone Summer Theory Institute, stimulating or harrowing them into making the various utterances that are collected in this oddly nearly imageless volume. What is an image? was also the question raised by Plato's perfidious sophist. But in the *Sophist*, it figures as the paradigm of an impossible question. There, the sophist's interlocutor first attempts to provide a Wittgensteinian answer by listing a number of applications of this word: "we mean the images in water and in mirrors, and those in paintings, too, and sculptures, and all the other things of the same sort." But the sophist laughs him out of court for failing to provide a definition that strings together these rather disparate phenomena. The interlocutor subsequently attempts an ontological definition ("another such thing fashioned in the likeness of the true one"), but again, he shipwrecks quickly. In fact, Plato invokes the word *image* (*eidolos*) as an exemplary case for situations in which our "poverty of terms" results in the kind of philosophical embarrassment on which the slick and sly sophist thrives and makes his living.<sup>1</sup>

Whoever attempts to provide a definition for the word *image* must inevitably end up in the same impasse, the more so because the English term may possess an even larger field of applications than Plato's *eidolos*. After all, it can meaningfully be asserted that we are "images of God" (following Genesis 1:26) or that we think with the help of images (see the so-called imagery debate in the philosophy of mind). Moreover, any drawing, painting, photograph, model, or optical projection appears to qualify as an image. Joel Snyder is on record in this book as referring to this ubiquitous use of *image* as "the tyranny of the visual." Indeed, one may wonder which aspects of our very essence and our various activities may possibly defy the net of this seemingly all-embracing term. Steffen Siegel's question, What is *not* an image?, discussed in Section 2, quite clearly brought about a collective awareness of the inextricability from this net—an awareness that becomes involuntarily comical precisely when Tom Mitchell begins to "diagram the question," as he calls it. *Die Sprachnot als Mutter der Zeichnung*.

The participants at the Stone Summer Theory Institute could thus not possibly have achieved what the sophist's trapped interlocutor couldn't. But does this foreseeable failure matter? No, or so it might be argued, because the question was merely asked for heuristic reasons. Looking at the records of the discussions in this book, one may in fact get the impression that the coveted reward for the participants' labors was not so much the unattainable answer to this question, but the various intellectual spin-offs. Still, the question formulated by Paul

1. Plato, *Sophist* 239D–240A, translated by Harold North Fowler, in *Theaetetus; Sophist*,

Loeb Classical Library 123 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921).

Messaris in his Assessment is pertinent: “What difference would a definition, or lack of a definition, have made to anyone’s other concerns?” For, if the answer to Messaris’s question should turn out to be “none at all,” one wonders whether it might not have been more fruitful to ask a different question.

The same is true for the question of the first Section: How many theories of images are there? I myself would be tempted to swap this question for another one: How many types of images are there? The motivation for this proposed swap lies in the assumption that a theory that explains to us historical scenes frescoed on the walls of nineteenth-century town halls, optical afterimages, and four-dimensional models of global warming will have to be so absurdly vague as to be meaningless and be relegated to the proverbial footnote 1, mentioned by several Institute fellows.

My alternative question, How many types of images are there?, is in fact addressed on a number of occasions. “Image science demands a taxonomy,” Tom Mitchell demands in the opening pages of this volume. In Section 2, James Elkins and Steffen Siegel mention *table*, *diagram*, and *models*, and in Section 9, Alexis Smets offers a number of early modern categories, including *vestigium*, *umbra*, *nota*, *character*, *signum*, *sigillum*, *indicium*, *figura*, *analogia*, *proportio*, *diagram*, *hieroglyph*, *ideogram*, *map*, *pictogram*, and *schema*. Smets, using an interesting legal term, suggests that each of these “image types” requires a “particular type of obligations”—required reactions on the part of the competent beholder or user.

Now, each type of image may possibly be connected to certain obligations—think of allegories, *memento mori*—type still lifes, exhortational or devotional religious painting and icons, etc. But obligations seem to be particularly crucial in the case images with which one can work: structural models, astronomical drawings with movable volvelles, mnemonic drawings, etc. In fact, for the historian of philosophy and science (like myself), “epistemic images,” that is, images that have been crafted expressly to accompany or even replace verbally transmitted explanations, are particularly puzzling phenomena in dire need of analysis.

But once again, the question to be asked about epistemic images is not *what* they are—the sophist’s grin would accompany anyone attempting such a definition. The interesting questions have to do with *why* there are types of images that are deemed useful by their inventors or users and *how* it is that they work. And since there are so many types of epistemic images (as the incomplete taxonomic list above suggests), we must never treat them as a category but have to address them singly, or in small groups, and always in their specific historical context. What one wants to understand is what it is that specific graphic, figurative, mapping, diagrammatic, emblematic, or symbolic types of images or models can do and words alone cannot.

Nice examples of such questions might be, Where resides the particular force of Euclid’s type of “visual proof” (*demonstratio*), in which the conclusive statement *quod erat demonstrandum* may only been written down once the geo-

metrical drawing accompanying the verbal proof has been successfully executed? What was the perceived advantage, to the medieval mind, of teaching logical relations in squares of oppositions, wheels, or Porphyrian trees? What concept of scientific truth was embraced by the type of Renaissance thinker of whom Giordano Bruno said that “if he does not draw and rhyme, he cannot be a good philosopher”? Why did Robert Fludd believe that his analogy of micro-macrocosmic images amounted to a scientific demonstration, while in a polemical reaction Johannes Kepler rejected them as “mere enigmas and dark symbols,” proposing his own mathematical diagrams as much more truthful representations of the divine structure of the world? Why did Descartes speak ill of the senses, but feed his readers’ eyes with images of imaginary structures? What happened in Darwin’s mind when in 1838 he famously wrote, “I think,” but then drew his branching diagram of a tree (or of a coral, as some protest), which in turn he then annotated, in the way in which one usually annotates someone else’s text? How should we think about operationally effective images of microscopic reality like the chemists’ molecular ball-and-stick models, which are at once entirely conventional and yet appear to have empirically predictive power? What happened to physics in 1924 when Werner Heisenberg rejected *Anschaulichkeit* and all the traditional configurations of atoms in three-dimensional models and drawings? In what way did subsequent physicists manage to think and understand nature differently because they no longer used Bohr’s planetary model of the atom but were instead acquainted with so-called Feynman diagrams? And why are contemporary scanning tunneling microscopes made to produce images of solid, globular atoms, although they function precisely thanks to the kind of quantum mechanical effect that led Heisenberg to reject *Anschaulichkeit* in the first place? And, so as to end this list with a soft landing in everyday life, in which respect could we handle our vacuum cleaner better if we had a diagram of its entrails?

Importantly, all of the above questions can be answered, at least in part.<sup>2</sup> While all of them are related to Gottfried Boehm’s overarching question, How

2. On Euclid and Porphyry, still extremely useful as a well-explained set of case studies is John E. Murdoch, *Antiquity and Middle Ages* (New York: Scribner, 1984). On Giordano Bruno’s own xylographs, see Giordano Bruno, *Corpus iconographicum: Le incisioni nelle opere a stampa*, edited by Mino Gabriele (Milan: Adelphi, 2001). On Fludd Versus Kepler, see Robert S. Westman, “Nature, Art, and Psyche: Jung, Pauli, and the Kepler-Fludd Polemic,” in *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, edited by Brian Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 177–229. On Descartes’s use of images, see Christoph Lüthy, “Where Logical Necessity Turns into Visual Persuasion: Descartes’ Clear and Distinct Illustrations,” in *Transmitting Knowledge: Words, Images and Instruments in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Ian Maclean and Sachiko Kusukawa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 97–133. On Darwin, see, e.g., others Julia Voss, *Darwins Bilder: Ansichten*

der Evolutionstheorie 1837–1874 (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2007). On atomist imagery, see, e.g., Christoph Lüthy, “The Invention of Atomist Iconography,” in *The Power of Images in Early Modern Science*, edited by Wolfgang Lefèvre, Jürgen Renn, and Urs Schoepflin (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2003), 117–38. On Heisenberg’s abolition of *Anschaulichkeit*, see Arthur I. Miller, *Imagery in Scientific Thought: Creating Twentieth-Century Physics* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1984). On Feynman diagrams, see David Kaiser, *Drawing Theories Apart: The Dispersion of Feynman Diagrams in Postwar Physics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). On microscopic images of atoms, see, e.g., Arne Schirrmacher, “Einsicht in die Materie: Konjunkturen und Formen von Atombildern,” in *Konstruieren, Kommunizieren, Präsentieren: Bilder von Wissenschaft und Technik*, edited by Alexander Gall (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007), 109–45.

do images create meaning?, the answer will in each case be quite specific. The respective answers will, however, never be purely historical, but consist of a thorough mix of historical circumstances and ahistorical—semiotic, neurological, perceptual—elements, quite in keeping with Tom Mitchell's twin maxims, "Always historicize" and "Always anachronize. Always defy the notion that history explains everything."

The more case studies one assembles, the more it appears that epistemic images essentially depend for their intelligibility and persuasiveness on viewers sharing with their producers a certain set of premises. For example, emblematic representations disappear from chemistry around 1650 as structural representations are introduced. These in turn give way to tables of affinities in the early eighteenth century but return at the end of that century, and this time manage to coexist with tables. In this history, the prevalent type of visualization routinely reflects the dominant scientific theory. Astonishingly enough, however, there also exist certain types of images that survive even the most dramatic epistemic or scientific paradigm shifts, seemingly adjusting their apparent message to the new scientific model or *mentalité*. Only by historicizing will one understand the former phenomenon; only by anachronizing will one be able to approach the latter.<sup>3</sup>

3. For an attempt to come to grips with the methodological requirements and pitfalls of an historical approach to epistemic images, see Christoph Lüthy and Alexis Smets, "Words, Lines, Diagrams, Images: Towards a History of

Scientific Imagery," in *Evidence and Interpretation in Studies on Early Science and Medicine: Essays in Honor of John E. Murdoch*, edited by Edith Dudley Sylla and William R. Newman (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 398–439.

## NOTES ON THE ONTOLOGY OF THE IMAGE

*Sebastian Egenhofer*

A range of resonances is at play when there is talk of the ontology of the image. Reading the Seminars, I got the impression that some of these resonances tacitly structure the divergent threads of the argumentation. I'll try to make some of them explicit, trying to better understand what is at stake. This won't lead to far-reaching conclusions. I'll rather repeat some theoretical platitudes, elucidating all too well-established connections of the concepts involved here. And yet since I want to criticize, or, deconstruct, some of these connections, that might not be useless.

1. The discussion seems to presuppose a close association of the commitment or noncommitment to an ontological research with the question of the possibility or impossibility of something like an “essence” of “the” image. Evidently, the questions, What is an image? and more strictly, What is the image? resound with the question *ti to on* at the root of Greek ontology. But how is this question and the questionable legitimacy of a necessarily most general answer related to the problem of the image? *Ti to on*, the ontological question about the “essence,” the determining structures, that constitute a being as being of a certain kind, can be asked with regard to anything there is. It doesn't seem evident how this question should be related to the specificity of images as “signs” of a certain kind, and, particularly, to their supposed *naturalness* in contradistinction to arbitrary and conventional sign systems like language. Can't we examine the “nature” or “essence” of *obviously* conventional modes of signifying as well? Can there be no ontology of language? Against the backdrop of a continental understanding of ontology and especially of the broad Heideggerian conception of what ontology is and what its field and methods of research are, I feel somewhat uneasy with the cross-fading of the problem of a “natural” versus a “conventional” mode of signifying with the possibility and impossibility of an ontological questioning.

2. I will try to explore some of the argumentative patterns that support this cross-fading. The ontological question seems to be reduced, in a first step, to the question, *What* is an image? The sister question—*How* is the image?—is set aside, notwithstanding that exactly the problematic mode of being, the possibility of the very “existence” of something like images, is at the core of the Platonic image theory in the *Sophist*.<sup>1</sup> Here the strange and, from a Parmenidean (as well as from a modern positivist) point of view, scandalous entanglement of being and nonbeing in the structure of the image is analyzed. I will come back to this entanglement further down. I think that the potential of the image to function as the catalyst of a critique of natural consciousness is bound to this “scandal-

1. Plato, *Sophist*, 233c–241b.

ous” structure of its mode of being. For the moment I’ll follow the other line of the ontological research, the question, What is . . . ? This question concerning the “essence” of the thematic object can be reformulated as a question about the “nature” of something, in this case the image. The traditional synonymity of “essence” and “nature” doesn’t imply, of course, that images represent a natural mode of signifying as opposed to the arbitrary code of language. There is no semantic or logical bridge between a supposed “essence” or “nature” of the image and the affirmed or questioned “naturalness” of its relation to a referent. Everybody, of course, is aware of this; it’s the dynamic of language that nonetheless produces this resonance—an iconic resonance, ironically, based in the *similarity* of words—and supports the mute implication that only some natural as opposed to historical and social fact could “have” an essence.

3. This implication is more firmly grounded in the common opposition of ontology and history. If the referent of ontological research (the subject of ontological sentences) is understood to consist in some unchangeable structures of being of the respective thematic object or objects, then the opposition of its method, its field of research, and its results to those of history (as a scientific discipline) is self-evident and necessary. In its most theoretical moments, historical thinking analyzes the conditions of the appearance and disappearance of certain types of things and events. It examines the concrete *existence*—of images, in our case—at certain places and at certain times, but it doesn’t seek after a structure that is common to all of them. From a historical viewpoint such a structure is a Platonic phantasm, a hyperbolization of a legitimate empirically (inductively) grounded generality. From an all-too-classical ontological perspective, on the contrary, any historically existing examples are understood as *masks* under whose disguise such a general structure or core adapts itself to varying historical circumstances that remain contingent to the “essential nature” of the image. Put this way, the relation of history and ontology is one of mutual exclusion. The amalgamation of the supposed referent of ontological research with something like nature—as a region of being (*Seinsregion*, Heidegger’s language)—follows automatically. Only in the domain of nature might we find those existing beings—whether they are images or examples of some other “species”—that are independent from history and from social conditions of production, and are therefore sufficiently stable or unchangeable to be the appropriate objects of ontological research. Language as a system of arbitrary (that is conventional, socially constituted) signs falls necessarily on the side of historical and cultural relativity. An ontological examination of language would from this perspective unavoidably distort its, if one might say so, “essential historicity.” Images, however, can be thought to be appropriate objects of an ontological questioning, just insofar as their relationship to their referent is based on natural resemblance, that is, on a stylistically more or less tortured *spatial congruence* with the things they represent. Obviously, then, the opposition of ontology and history resonates with that of nature versus culture, of image versus sign, and of icon versus sym-

bol. It rhymes further with the opposition of anthropology and biology versus sociology. On a transcendental level it relates to the dichotomy of space (as the matrix of similarity, of spatial congruence as the base of the natural signifier that is the icon) and time (as the necessary parameter of the historical grounding of arbitrary codes). It seems clear that this system of oppositions is, if not grounded in, then at least historically motivated by, that basic metaphysical dichotomy of being and time that dominates the language games of European philosophy from Plato to Nietzsche. I don't want to digress into the territory of the Heideggerian meditation about the inclusive and conjunctive meaning of the "and" in this last coupling of words. Heidegger changed the modern understanding of ontology by showing (or trying to show) that the sense of being as presence (*Anwesenheit*), which is the common ground of European metaphysics, is only conceivable in the horizon of an *understanding of time*, an understanding that is a constitutive moment of human subjectivity. Ontological research, then, means to outline a schema of the *temporal structures* that determine the accessibility of a region of being (*Seinsregion*)—be it nature or history, images or language, life or matter—for human understanding. It is in these temporal structures that what were thought of as unchangeable "essences" in classic ontology have to be found. It is obvious that from such an understanding of ontology the network of oppositions loses its firm ground and gains some new perspectives.

4. But this does not change the fact that the suspicious "naturalness" of the image is at the core of the discussion. I will not try, of course, to summarize the complicated discussions about the porous limits between a natural and a conventional mode of signifying in the domain of the image. Turning around James Elkins's statement, I want to say that for my part I cannot manage *not* to "believe" in a kind of natural (motivated) foundation of the image's relation to its world, a foundation in an analogy—be it most deferred and abstracted—to what it "shows."<sup>2</sup> The point I want to make, though, is that this naturalness has to be assigned a different *ethical* and *cognitive* value than it has in common usage, it seems, in the discussion between "naturalists" and "conventionalists." 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 in space, the human retina, and a painted surface—this is in no way a guarantee of something like the *truth* of the image. The association of nature with truth is an old and deeply entrenched *trope*, not a philosophical argument. Under the persuasive pressure of this trope one thinks of the seeming naturalness and transparency of the image as a veil behind which some sinister code is at work to falsify or distort the innocent natural facts.<sup>3</sup> The seeming evidence of the image, its easy accessibility, is only a trap for the naïve (illiterate) mind. Caught in this trap, the innocent eye is subject to manipulation by a silent discourse that uses or abuses the image to infuse it with a thoroughly codified, and therefore possibly deceptive, message. In this setting the critique

2. See Section 4 of the Seminars.

3. On this "commonplace of modern studies of the image," see Mitchell, *Iconology: Image*,

*Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 8.

of the image is conceived as the revelation that its naturalness is in fact only a semblance. The association of naturalness and truth as such remains intact. This seems surprising if we take into account that a harsh critique of the idea of an adamitic innocence and access to truth makes up a main line of European thought from Plato through Spinoza and Hegel to Lacan. The first inscription on the empty plate of the mind might very well be a naturally produced or effected image, but this image may all the more be deceptive with regard to the structure of the thing it shows. The most natural and uncodified image is, in this tradition, thought to be a delusory trap as well. It is an external duplication of that trap and horizon of illusion that is called natural consciousness: the consciousness of the mind that is enmeshed in the prison (and movie theater) of the perceiving body in which the perspectival appearances of the outside world are taken for the “things themselves” exactly by the “naïve” and “innocent” mind. In this tradition it is the code, the abstraction of language and conceptual thinking, that is charged with the task, if not of destroying the wrong evidence of the perception (that is, the images that are produced by the perceiving body), then at least of neutralizing their deceptive power by understanding the structures of their genesis. The code, that is, *history*, is assigned the task of liberating the human subject from the trap of its natural immersion in the merely perceptive world (*Wahrnehmungswelt*). It is here where the tradition of European rationalist (logocentric) philosophy, the Marxist critique of ideology, and the psychoanalytic deframing of “natural” consciousness converge in a single project of emancipation.

5. With reference to the *genesis* of the image in all its seeming naturalness, the other side of the ontological question crops up. And it is this sister question of the image’s mode of being that converts its deceptive evidence in a more than only self-critical force. Asking for the image’s mode of being leads to a destabilization of that “natural” (metaphysical, traditional) ontology that inscribes itself in the horizon of “presence,” of “positivity” or “givenness,” as the ultimate sense of being. Certainly we can describe the image as the existing thing (the *picture*, the material support) that is present at hand here and now. This thing conserves in its material body the appearance or phenomenon (the *image*) it shows. (I rely on Mitchell’s use of the two terms *picture* and *image*.) The appearance or phenomenon, of course, is not the referent—the mundane thing (whether it exists or has existed, like an apple or a historical person, or whether it was a phantasmatic projection from the start) to which the image relates. The phenomenon is the *noema*, to use the Husserlian term, the apple as it appears in the picture, with only one side, uneatable, undestroyable, and present or given only to the always already seduced eye of a beholder. The *noema* of the picture does not exist. And the split between it, the image in the narrow sense, and the picture, the material support, does not exist either. Only the picture exists in time and space. As a material thing it is a product or, say, an integral effect, of some more or less mechanical process (as with a photograph) or of the handicraft of an “artist” (as

with a drawing or painting). The picture as a thing is a conglomeration of heterogeneous materials, informed by its production process and, more generally, by its temporal genesis. As this kind of material thing, it relates to its world by an endlessly open network of indexical relations, to quote the third term of the Peircean triad. This indexical and, as I want to call it, *lateral* or *collateral* relation of the picture to its world never ceases to unfold. The picture ages like any other material thing there is. It is the place of inscription of new traces, and it produces (effects) traces in the surrounding world by itself, traces that vanish immediately like the ephemeral impressions of its viewers, and traces that persist in the archive of history—like other materialized pictures that bear its influence, or texts that refer to it. The 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. And it is the gaze that reverses the direction of time: from the *latest* moment of the picture's existence, that is, its own present, it reaches back to its phenomenal appearance in the depths of time. There is not only a spatial, but an ever-widening temporal cleavage between the image and its material support. The ontology of the image (in the wide sense) has to deal with this "scandalous" structure of its object: to be nonsynchronous with itself. This nonsynchronicity *is* the picture's or image's mode of being, a mode of being that is rather a *happening*. To describe this happening as a signifying process might very well be possible. But be it in a semiotic or an ontological analysis, the happening of the image can never be inscribed in the homogeneous horizon of present relations of present terms (signifier, signified, whether in their spatially or conventionally determined relationships). The image's happening is marked by the incommensurability of its immediate present and sensual evidence, which opens up to and includes the ideal presence of its *noema* and the deep and opaque time of its existence as a material thing. An ontology of the image that explores this inherent incommensurability opens up to at least two fields of research that are, classically, opposed to ontological questioning. It shows, first, that the image's accessibility to varying interpretations is bound to its very mode of being, to the structural *heterochrony*, that is at the heart of its signifying relation to a world. Its capacity to produce meaning is seen as being bound to its inherent *historicality*. Secondly, by articulating the relation of the image's ideal, or, "shown," space (flat as it may be) to the genetic matrix of the existing material support, it stages the image as a paradigm of a critique of natural consciousness, itself congruous, or homologous, with the dimension of immediate and phenomenal appearance. The image has a double-sided relation to the world, as a material product that is the playground of an array of material and ideological forces that informed and further inform it, and as a window that opens perspectively on an intentionally represented (or "denoted," as Goodman would have it) field of reference. Taking this into account, the ontology of the image verges on the field of the critique of ideology, which, in an analogous topical frame, relates the dimension of the intentional, socially shared self-representation of a world to its forgotten, or repressed, historical (economic, material) conditions of existence.

## WRESTING IMAGES SILENTLY OUT OF THE MURMURS OF SENSATION

*Irmgard Emmelhainz*

The 2008 Stone Summer Theory Institute took up a task that art history and theory, visual studies, and contemporary artists fail to do today: to pose their main subject—images—as a fundamental problem, and to elucidate the possibility of a metatheory of images. As a starting point, a distinction was kept between theories or expressions that designate what images *are* and theories about how images *work*. Given the unlimited number of theories available, another question that was raised was whether it is possible to go beyond historical and sociocultural specificities. Paradoxically, such interrogation takes place at the so-called moment of the “pictorial turn,” and at a stage in which a critical engagement with images has proven to be both easy and ineffective. Given the current excess of images and the obsession with visualization, however, it is pressing (and here I agree with Marie-José Mondzain) to interrogate this excess and the kinds of encounters it prompts with images. W. J. T. Mitchell articulated the “pictorial turn,” drawing upon the lessons of poststructuralism. Images came to be understood as more than transparent windows onto the world: they became elusive signs veiling processes of ideological mystification placing a demand on the viewer.<sup>1</sup> Rosalind Krauss furthered Mitchell’s assertion, arguing that the “pictorial” might rather be a “visual turn” in which what is identified as an image is perhaps a sign whose material structure has collapsed. Along the lines of Jean Baudrillard’s notion of *sign-value*, Krauss described the visual turn as characterized by the circulation of a sign detached from its material support, a sign that is imaginary, hallucinatory, and seductive.<sup>2</sup> This approach to the visual could tentatively be characterized as Platonic and considered as currently coexisting with Jacques Rancière’s Aristotelian one: the regime of the sensible, a kind of public sphere predicated upon a fundamental interplay of operations without which we cannot make sense or live together.

The task of making sense of the empirical and cognitive aspects of our visual literacy and how it has affected the production of mental images, and of separating the *image* from the *visual*,<sup>3</sup> were articulated in the discussions as a matter of the separation between *sign* and *image*. In regard to the limitations of semiotics and of semiology, the central questions that were posed were, How can images be considered as objects of study and of knowledge beyond understanding them like a language? How it is possible to start looking at the specificity of the ways in which images make meaning? Can images be pure objects of knowledge?

Considerations of the image as an encounter, as a desire to see, as *concrecence*—after Gottfried Boehm, who posited it as the transient and simultaneous

1. Mitchell, “What Is an Image?” *New Literary History* 15, no. 3 (1984): 503–37.

2. Rosalind Krauss, “Welcome to the Cultural

Revolution,” *October* 77 (Summer 1996): 92.

3. The “visual” understood as the identification of signs as images.

coming into being of a gaze with what is shown—were interrogated. On the one hand, such elucidations are based on dichotomies like visibility/invisibility or presence/absence, which raise the problem of the unrepresentable as the horizon of thought. The problem is that this way of thinking about images presupposes that there is something in the image that escapes our control—Jim Elkins thus proposes to think about this “irrational” aspect of the image as *repleteness* or as *finite syntactic differentiation*. On the other hand, these accounts are premised on indeterminacy and potentiality, which, along with *deixis* and interpellation, are qualities that images share with language. Thus, gravitating toward the specificities in which images make meaning implies a separation of idea from sensation, concept from intuition (which is underlined by the very opposition between saying and showing), and a wresting of the image out of sensation and the sensible in order to turn it into a matter of cognition or knowledge. Or, as Marie-José Mondzain put it, as a matter of exploring what the image (*aesthesia*) shares with the condition of thought (cognition): the brain of sensation or an “ontology of aesthetics,” as Jim Elkins suggested. Could we completely eschew a conception of the image as an encounter in which desire and belief are inherent? How can we go beyond the distinction between *the desire to see* and *the desire to know*, and what would be the terms to address such kind of knowledge?

One of the conclusions drawn during the discussions was that our current notions of the image are tied to concepts such as memory, thought, perception, imagination, and language, and that it appears impossible to discuss the image in isolation from these terms. How would the image be redefined along with its companion systems of signification, and on what premises? Moreover, can this redefinition be thought of outside of humanistic discourses such as phenomenology or Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s work? Is it a matter of finding ways to translate sensations as something other than signs? Because signs differ when they are expressed, sensible data have unstable meanings and thus sensual receptions cannot be shared. Thus, an immersion in the concept of sensation, and a consideration of sensibility as immanent to experience, are matters of speculation. Bearing this in mind, how can we understand images and their so-called ontology, and how would we redefine *logos*?

A provisional answer for thinking images as a science is to taxonomize images at the meta-level, or the and operational level, based on internal differentiations—that is, to understand images as tables of information (diagrams) to be categorized or classified. Another possibility would be to highlight images’ associative character and arrange them according to series based on analogies, removing the metaphysical base for cognition by linking familiar experience with the new experience. Scientific language could think images as objects of knowledge as pure optical spaces. For example, light on bodies could be coded through physics or mathematics as functional variations of speed and modulations. Perhaps it is a matter of elucidating what kind of relationships can be established to chaos by way of sensation.<sup>4</sup>

4. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 118–19.

## A UNIVERSAL IMAGE SCIENCE? ONLY IN OUR DREAMS

*Ladislav Kesner*

As I was preparing to leave for Chicago to take part—as one of the Fellows—in the Stone Summer Theory Institute, I downloaded onto a flash disk a carefully selected file of mostly nonartistic images that I have been working on, expecting that non-art images would feature prominently in coming discussions. It turned out that I was wrong. My flash disk remained dormant, and our talks seldom strayed from the territory of artistic, religious, and media images. At the same time, they focused exclusively on images that appear in front of our eyes, while leaving out mental and entoptic images—those “behind the eyes.”

I therefore take this opportunity to comment on what was not said (and perhaps could not have been said) during the very productive sessions of “image week.” The course of the meeting was naturally predetermined by its key participants, a faculty made up of two philosophers and three art historians with a strong interest in visual studies and general image science; none of them were scientists. As the transcript makes abundantly clear, a lot of ground was covered during this week. So the question I am about to pose is purely rhetorical and is not asked so much with regard to the meeting but in a more general spirit: how can a conference or workshop titled, *What Is an Image?* almost totally avoid epistemic (scientific, medical, and other utilitarian) images, given the fact that the majority of the most important and consequential issues about images happen in this realm? I would venture that such a situation is symptomatic of the problematic status of image science—the misplaced dream of truly universal *Bildwissenschaft*.

It is true that historians of science and a few art historians, such as Horst Bredekamp, James Elkins, and Barbara Stafford, have been mining scientific imagery for years and trying to establish connections between the “two cultures” of the humanities and the sciences. However, such scholarship often has rather problematic connections to mainstream art history and visual studies. Humanists largely write on historical dimension of scientific images, and when touching on contemporary scientific imagery at all they tend to explore its culture status and implications, rather than key interpretive issues that surround them. Even the self-assured discipline of visual studies, which never tires of emphasizing its unlimited scope, is in fact extremely tame, if not impotent, vis-à-vis the vast majority of epistemic images. There is so far little sign that art historians or scholars of visual culture see scientific imaging as a fundamental methodological and theoretical challenge, as James Elkins urged them to do, or that art historians are any closer to assuming a leading role in a truly multidisciplinary image

science, as Barbara Stafford envisaged more than a decade ago.<sup>1</sup> They are even not much heard in cases when utilitarian images have manifestly cultural and social implications—such as the case of new biomedical imaging, which will be discussed shortly. But most importantly, humanist writing on scientific images has virtually no resonance in the native discourse concerning these images, in communities of their authorized interpreters.

Therefore, a quick and probably correct answer to my initial question would be, what is there to puzzle about? The Chicago meeting provided exactly accurate mapping of the relationship of humanities to scientific imagery. On the one hand, the question, What is an image? (and a host of related ones) carries urgency and interest only for philosophers/art historians/historians of sciences, not for those who create and interpret epistemic images. Faced with such a question, scientists would be perfectly content with a simple definition, for instance that an image is a mapping of an object or some of its properties (chemical, physical, radioisotope) into image space.<sup>2</sup> Problems of ontology and taxonomy do not loom high on the agenda of science imagists. They would find no reason for attending an event with such a title.

But let us, for discussion's sake, press on with two more questions: can the current discourse on scientific images provide any relevant concepts, models, or research strategies to humanists concerned with artistic, religious, or popular imagery? And vice versa: could art historians' interpretive skills or conceptual framework supply anything that might be found useful in scientific image discourses? Are there some common issues and concerns? These questions, of course, point right to the prospect of a truly interdisciplinary dialogue about images. There seems to be little reason for an affirmative answer.

On the face of it, there would seem to be some analogous concepts and issues, such as image understanding, beholder's share, close reading, and interpretive vision, appear central to the concerns and agenda of both humanists and those who work with the epistemic images. Perhaps even one of the Seminars' topics, "What is outside images?," is a question that might be productively asked in both realms. (In fact, it would be a nice experiment to try to assemble a conference around this topic that would involve an equal number of scientists and humanists.) One can entertain such fantasies. Yet it only takes limited exposure to the native discourse of scientific images—for instance, reading a few methodological papers in journals such as *Medical Image Understanding*, *Human Brain Mapping*, and *Neuroimage* (to name just a few examples from our field that I have been trying to follow recently in researching my exhibition project on images of mind)—to fully appreciate the near-total incompatibility of discourses. To realize the scientist's sense of images and the problems that arise around them, his conceptual framework, and so on is totally alien to the humanistically educated visualist. Moreover, "science" or the "scientist" that I am evoking here is in itself

1. Elkins, *The Domain of Images* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 31–51; Stafford, *Good Looking: Essays on Virtues of Images* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

2. Robert Beck, "Overview of Imaging Science," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science (USA)* 90 (November 1993): 9746–50.

an inaccurate abstraction, as there is no coherent and united field and discourse of epistemic imagery. Key issues and specific discourses in images differ across scientific disciplines and imaging modalities—a radiologist interpreting a PET scan shares only a minimal agenda and expertise with his colleague who uses diffusion tensor imaging to investigate the development of cerebral fiber pathways, or a biologist who studies cell nuclei with fluorescent microscopy, or countless other experts working with specific kinds of images.

While scientists have little incentive to take interest in the general reflection on the nature of images, humanists lack specific competencies that would enable them to discuss various kinds of epistemic images in the language of their native discourse and integrate them into their theories.<sup>3</sup> I look at an image accompanied by a caption, a rather typical example of labeling scientific or medical images: “Averaged diffusion tensors using a 5x5x3 Gaussian kernel weighted with their linear measure  $c$ , resulting in a macrostructural measure of fiber tract organization.”<sup>4</sup> It seems to offer itself for a rumination on how meaning is embedded in an image and some other issues covered by the Stone Summer Theory Institute. However, no amount of Goodman or anything else that art history, semiotics, and philosophy have to offer can replace the technical knowledge of image-processing algorithms, the principle of diffusion tensor imaging, and the basics of neuroanatomy and neurophysiology that discussion of such an entity requires.

This is as much inescapable as it is regrettable, as many kinds of epistemic images are obviously enmeshed in a dense forest of issues and questions, which stretch from their essential characteristics and representational mechanisms to the problems of viewing and interpreting and even to larger social and political issues. Let me briefly consider a specific example, a case of functional magnetic resonance (fMRI) imaging. Despite the massive proliferation of fMRI-based studies (more than one thousand new peer-reviewed papers appear every year) and their far-reaching, much discussed implications in several fields, there is a much uncertainty and controversy on what exactly fMRI images represent, with ongoing discussions taking place on the representational mechanism of these images (or rather, “functional image volumes” or “brain activation maps,” as they are called in the trade). With this comes an increasing awareness within the scientific community of the dangers of incorrect interpretation and inference from such image data.<sup>5</sup> Somehow such discussions appear to provide a much

3. For a remarkable exception see Elkins, *Six Stories from the End of Representation: Images in Painting, Photography, Astronomy, Microscopy, Particle Physics, and Quantum Mechanics, 1980–2000* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008). Here Elkins attempts to discuss specific image modalities using their native discourse and conceptual vocabulary. The same is true of some contributions in the journal *Bildwelten des Wissens: Kunsthistorisches Jahrbuch für Bildkritik*.

4. C.-F. Westin, S. E. Maier, H. Mamata, A. Nabavi, F. A. Jolesz, and R. Kikinis, “Process-

ing and Visualization for Diffusion Tensor MRI,” *Medical Image Analysis* 6 (2002): 102.

5. See, for example, Nikos K. Logothetis, “What We Can Do and What We Cannot Do with fMRI,” *Nature*, no. 453, June 12, 2008, 869–78; Hans P. Op de Beeck, Johannes Haushofer, and Nancy G. Kanwisher, “Interpreting fMRI Data: Maps, Modules and Dimensions,” *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 9, no. 2 (2008): 123–35; Sven Haller and Andreas J. Bartsch, “Pitfalls in fMRI,” *European Radiology* 19, no. 11 (2009): 2689–706.

more stimulating source of insights into the nature of images than many fashionable theories that are currently considered *de rigueur* in art history and visual studies.

The problems of interpretation concerning the relationship between the visualized signal and neurobiological mechanisms are then mirrored on a higher level, where broad inferences from fMRI images are made with important social consequences. The unresolved problems of epistemic significance and the effects of these images stretches to the level of the social and ethical implications of fMRI, the use of neuroimaging in forensic psychiatry, law, economic and political marketing, and so on, and to reflections on how our understanding of these images challenges concepts of the human self, notions of psychic normality and disease, and other issues with potentially far-reaching social implications. Such discussions now increasingly involve philosophers, experts in ethics, lawyers, and social scientists. Again there might be much to be gained from attending to this discourse, and again, art history or visual studies experts have little to contribute here. It is only when considered at the level of anthropological object or object of visual culture that such images involve historians of science and other humanists.<sup>6</sup>

I shall dramatize my conclusion by insisting that this event, around the question, What is an image?, has unintentionally confirmed the impossibility of rigorously pursuing transdisciplinary inquiry into the nature of images. The question can be asked only in a very limited manner; in fact, it cannot be properly approached, and sooner or later it faces an insurmountable problem, namely, that it makes no sense to raise such questions with only artistic, religious, and media images in mind, while overlooking the vast and ever-increasing universe of epistemic images. (The same, incidentally, holds true for images in front of/behind the eyes.) Yet there is little hope of integrating scientific and utilitarian images into such an inquiry, as, on the one hand, the humanists and social scientists who do such asking lack the essential competence to discuss them in a nontrivial way, while their interpreters lack incentives to join humanistic inquiry into the nature of images (for which they are not well equipped either). The question of what is an image is thus in a substantial sense opaque to scrutiny. With each new captivating, complicated, and dense image that appears in science, medicine, and other fields, the prospect of truly multidisciplinary image discourse and science becomes a more distant utopia.

6. For a good example of such a study, see Anne Beaulieu, "Images Are Not the (Only) Truth: Brain Mapping, Visual Knowledge, and

Iconoclasm," *Science, Technology and Human Values* 27 (2002): 53–86.

## ANTHROPOLOGY IS TOO ANTHROPOMORPHIC, BEING EMBODIED IS NOT

*John Michael Krois*

As these seminars progressed, the course of the discussions finally led one of the participants, Markus Klammer, to ask, “I wonder if the faculty here are all anthropologists?” He elaborated a host of reasons for this question, and although the point got muted a bit when it was shifted towards the claim that phenomenology might be a better term, the question remained in the air. This question links up with comments scattered throughout the seminars on the topic of embodiment. This link deserves to be made more explicit because it can show how philosophy might be able, after all, to make a contribution to the topic of these seminars. *What Is an Image?* begins with a criticism of philosophers: “The art world depends on there being something special about the visual, but that something is seldom spelled out. The most interesting theorists of those fundamental words ['image' and 'picture'] are not philosophers but art historians.”<sup>1</sup> This points to a sore spot in the history of philosophy: the reluctance to deal with pictures, which were shunted off into marginal disciplines—aesthetics and the philosophy of art—keeping them segregated from the main theoretical discussions. In the twentieth century, theoretical philosophy was centered upon language, and not surprisingly, the thinker with the biggest impact on the discussion of images and pictures in the English-speaking world (Nelson Goodman) converted the topic into a problem of symbolisms.

These seminars reflect a desire to develop the philosophy of images and pictures that philosophers have failed to provide. Ontology is a specific topic in one of the seminars, but it is implicit everywhere: the worry about the essential “nature” of images. There are two ways to understand ontology: the traditional way, which takes ontology to deal with the unchanging way things are; or understanding reality as a process. In more technical language: substance metaphysics versus process philosophy. For process philosophy the attempt to find out about “what there is” is a hopeless undertaking, for it brackets time out of reality. Taking a process approach to “ontology” does not mean that there are no universals, only that they are regarded as habits and not timeless essences. Charles Peirce, who was a scientist by profession, and one of the thinkers who developed modern process philosophy, regarded even so-called natural laws as habits.

The questions, *What is an image?* and *What is a picture?* seem to ask for a substantive: *What sort of an object is an image (or picture)?* Questions of this

[John Michael Krois passed away in October 2010, several months after writing this. His contribution has turned out to be especially prescient because of the recent resurgence of

interest in embodiment, discussed in vol. 4 of this series, *Beyond the Anti-Aesthetic* (forthcoming). —J.E.]

1. James Elkins, Series Preface.

kind are difficult to deal with because they ask for something that can't be had: an ontological answer. In order to avoid old-fashioned ontology, most modern philosophical theories of speak of "depiction" rather than of pictures and so deal with the viewer's actions or experience, emphasizing—to borrow a phrase from Gombrich—"the beholder's share."<sup>2</sup> So they become stuck in subjectivisms. Instead of dealing with pictures as objects, they talk about depiction, explaining it via processes such as "seeing-in," "experiencing resemblance," "symbolic interpretation," or the perceptual capacity to "recognize" or "see" something.<sup>3</sup> It isn't surprising that in this situation art historians seek instead to start with pictures as objects. This is evident in Gottfried Boehm's question, How do pictures create meaning? Boehm calls attention to the phenomenon of *deixis* in pictures, the fact that pictures show something that would not otherwise be visible, which is more fundamental than "depicting" or representing something.<sup>4</sup> Pictures make visible, as Klee put it, but they have other effects too (these are not just things people do with pictures), effects that stem from the fact that they are pictures. Most striking: pictures can appear to be animate. Pictures have effects that go beyond the intentions of the artists. Such "picture acts," as Horst Bredekamp calls them,<sup>5</sup> cannot be explained by reference to the viewer alone any more than they can be traced to artists' intentions. Such picture-centered approaches to pictures have involved the comparison of pictures with the human body and its gestures rather than with language, as is typical of semiotic theories. Independently of one another, Hans Belting, Georges Didi-Huberman, and James Elkins have all criticized the emphasis in semiotics on the "legibility" of pictures and the neglect of their visceral impact, which they and other art historians (such as David Freedberg) have striven to bring back into the theoretical discussion.

Calling this turn "anthropology" or even phenomenology stops too short. Phenomenology, after all, is a method, not a doctrine, although some recent phenomenologists have gone beyond even Merleau-Ponty (who kept to the first- and second-person perspectives rather than dealing equally with the third person as well) in making phenomenology into a theory of embodiment.<sup>6</sup> Embodiment is not actually an anthropological conception. The second generation of cognitive science recast the notion of artificial intelligence in terms of the concept of embodiment. Instead of intelligence being understood in terms of

2. This was the title of part 3 of E. H. Gombrich's *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, sixth edition (London: Phaidon, 2002), which begins by discussing the faces people see in clouds.

3. These views are associated with Richard Wollheim, Christopher Peacocke, and Nelson Goodman (although there are many more semiotic theories). The recognition thesis has been developed in different ways by Flint Schier, Dominic Lopes, John Kulvicki, and Lambert Wiesing. Concern with the beholder's share has led some, notably John Hyman, to offset this overemphasis of subjective experience by recall-

ing the importance of optics and the realistic dimension of depiction.

4. Boehm, "Bildbeschreibung: Über die Grenzen von Bild und Sprache," in *Beschreibungskunst—Kunstbeschreibung: Die Ekphrasis von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, edited by Gottfried Boehm and Helmut Pfotenhauer (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1995), 39.

5. Bredekamp, *Theorie des Bildakts: Über das Menschenrecht des Bildes*, Frankfurter Adorno-Vorlesungen (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2010).

6. Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

computation, now the interaction between the sensors and motors of robots and their surroundings stands as the model of “embodied” cognition.<sup>7</sup> Embodiment goes deeper than psychoanalysis, since it deals even with the premental, such as neurology, and not just the unconscious “mind.” The question whether violent images must deeply affect people or can cause them to engage in acts of violence treats the question as a matter of psychology and overlooks the fact that pictures change the brain, especially growing brains. The German neurologist Manfred Spitzer has made enemies in the German media for his criticisms of television,<sup>8</sup> since he goes so far as to argue that screens, with their fast-changing images, affect the brain adversely, especially in the young, no matter what they display. The neural configurations resulting from violent images are a further problem. If picture theory were consistently regarded in terms of embodiment, then the assumption that images and pictures are matters of “what we can see” would need to be abandoned. At several points in the seminars, touch is referred to in connection with vision. The psychologist John M. Kennedy has shown that even the congenitally blind can draw and understand pictures,<sup>9</sup> provided they have the proper materials to create tactile images. Blind artists are capable of creating pictures using perspective and metaphorical devices of their own invention, which the sighted can understand. One such artist, Eşref Armağan, born unsighted, is capable even of drawing in three-point perspective.<sup>10</sup> The blind navigate the world and so know its spatial organization. The importance of manipulating things in space is also central to Frederik Stjernfelt’s conception of “diagrammatology,” mentioned several times in the seminars, which deals with art as well as diagrams. Tom Mitchell’s mention of mathematics recalls George Lakoff and Rafael Núñez’s book *Where Mathematics Comes From*, which offers a philosophy of mathematics based on embodied cognition.<sup>11</sup> Their point is not that mathematics can be reduced to manual operations, but that embodied operations are where the science of mathematics comes from. The shift from the medium of the body to written marks in mathematics parallels the shift from gestures to lines in drawing.

Goodman was able to explain expression in pictures at the price of reducing it to the linguistic notion of labeling, thus ignoring the body. A picture possesses the property of being grey, which metaphorically exemplifies the label “sad,” but this is a matter of convention on Goodman’s account. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By* bases metaphor on embodiment rather than convention, on the “image schemas” inherent in the dynamic organization of activities: up-down, front-back, right-left, in-out, and the numerous images that

7. Rolf Pfeifer and Josh Bongard, *How the Body Shapes the Way We Think: A New View of Intelligence* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

8. Manfred Spitzer, *Vorsicht Bildschirm! Elektronische Medien, Gehirnentwicklung, Gesundheit und Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 2005).

9. John M. Kennedy, *Drawing and the Blind: Pictures to Touch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

10. An impressive demonstration with Armağan and Kennedy can be seen in a video from the Discovery Channel, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3Ag06HoH98](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3Ag06HoH98) (last viewed September 1, 2009).

11. George Lakoff and Rafael E. Núñez, *Where Mathematics Comes From: How the Embodied Mind Brings Mathematics into Being* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

these involve (container, path, and force forms).<sup>12</sup> The spatial organization of human activity leads to metaphors that fit with how people live. (For example: up is good and down is bad because for humans to be upright means to be in health and not lying in bed sick.) For such an approach even colors possess certain basic metaphorical meanings derived from the embodied nature of experience. Grey skies and the weather are part of the spectrum of sources for an embodied theory of meaning. Embodiment is always in process, and yet it can offer a way to rethink the organization of images and, especially, actual pictures. This can put the project of iconology in an expanded sense on a new, more fundamental level than what people intentionally do with pictures, namely what pictures do with people.

A final historical note: the proposal to base art history (and philosophy) on the theory of embodiment first came from Edgar Wind in the 1920s, who was at home in both fields.<sup>13</sup>

12. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

13. Wind, *Experiment and Metaphysics: Towards a Resolution of the Cosmological Antinomies*, translated by Cyril Edwards, with

an introduction by Matthew Rampley (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, 2002); and Wind's BBC Reith lectures, *Art and Anarchy*, third edition, with an introduction by John Bayley (London: Duckworth, 1985).

## CLOUD SPOTTING, OR: WHEN IS AN IMAGE AN IMAGE AND NOT A MESS/MASS?

*Karin Leonhard*

Do you spend time gazing skywards staring at the clouds? Do you know your nimbus from your cumulus?

What is an image? Surely the question is a tricky one, especially when put in the singular. It suggests that there exists “an image,” that it can be found somewhere behind or outside a list of “divided images,” and that there may be a uniting continuum encompassing various and divergent types of images. An image, it seems, is not necessarily a picture or a painting, but it can act as both. It is not necessarily the same as a diagram, a table, or a model, but on the other hand each of these modes of representation participates in the deictic capacity of the image, that is, the capacity of *showing by visualizing*. Hence, the image is a generic quality. It only seems possible to speak of individual images when they are surrounded by a backing (an iconic field), giving them an outline and coherence as a figure. It is there that the ontological question arises. During the Seminar, the iconic structure was understood either as a formal differentiation that creates a pictorial meaning apart from language or as the result of semiotic processes and practices, which immediately implies cultural and social meanings. The *pictorial turn* once derived from both of these needs: criticism of the image (Boehm) and criticism of ideology (Mitchell).

Within the history of art, and even within visual studies or *Bildwissenschaft*, the notion of “image” is so ill-defined and the extension of the term so loose that the question is usually never addressed. So when the Seminar attempted to reach out for a classification system to provide some structure for one of the most *nebulous* words used in art theory (Mitchell: “image science demands a taxonomy”), it should have been for the sake of clarification. To my relief, nothing like that happened. Instead, the attempt to classify the image served to divide and diffuse its unity, resulting in a whirling amalgam of subcategories and historical notions. The Seminar participants agreed that images cannot be restricted to visuality alone but that they occur in all the media and senses, and that it is impossible to isolate the concept of the image from other concepts, such as thinking, perception, imagination, or language. It was also agreed that enumerating, enlisting, and comparing an infinitely differentiated and interrelated set of theories is impossible. In short, as it has been summarized: image theory is a mess. Though in cloud studies it would be spelled out differently: it’s a mass.

Cloud studies can teach us a lesson. If we follow the visualization programs of the evolution of clouds in calm skies, clouds are incredibly complicated and difficult phenomena to model or render, even in non-real time. When are clouds

clouds and not only aggregations of hydrogen molecules? One answer lies in their differentiation from the background against which they emerge as visible figures. A cloud is a visible mass of *droplets* or frozen *crystals* suspended in the *atmosphere* above the surface of the earth or another *planetary body*. On Earth, the condensing substance is typically *water vapor*, which forms small droplets or ice crystals, typically 0.01 mm in diameter. When surrounded by billions of other droplets or *crystals*, they become visible as clouds.

But it is not as simple as this. For example, take the color problem. Deep, dense clouds exhibit a high reflectance throughout the *visible* range of wavelengths. They appear white, at least from the top. Cloud droplets tend to *scatter* light efficiently, so that the intensity of the *solar radiation* decreases with depth into the gases, hence the grey or sometimes dark appearance at the *cloud base*. Thin clouds may appear to have acquired the color of their environment or background and clouds when illuminated by nonwhite light, such as during sunrise or sunset, may appear colored. In cloud-simulation programs the interrelation and interference of properties of droplets of water vapor are rendered comprehensible by being transformed into a digital image. Supercomputers are run day and night to model or render the visual complexity of clouds—a complexity dependent on the context in which the cloud is found. Each pixel or colored droplet carries meaning which it derives from its environment, that is, its surrounding pixels.

Next is the problem of classification. We know that clouds come in a variety of shapes and sizes depending on how and where they are formed. Although there are just three primary types of cloud, these types can combine to produce other types, each with their own characteristics. In all, there are about ten possible sorts of cloud, and these are usually identified according to their shape and how high they are found in the sky. Clouds also have different symbols. The introduction of categories into the nebulous phenomenon has to work against the indistinguishability between cloud and noncloud on a substantial level on the one hand, and the difficult morphology of cloud formations on the other. The classified formations are then tagged with icon-symbols.<sup>1</sup>

Like images, clouds are products of our own doing; they do not exist as objects but are the results of perceptual acts.<sup>2</sup> Seeing, however, cannot be reduced to propositional and intentional activities. In the Seminar there was principal disagreement between supporters of “seeing as” and “seeing-how.” It is important to realize that to see something does not automatically mean seeing “something-as”

1. I quote from several Internet sources on clouds and cloud modeling to mirror common knowledge about cloud formations; for a discussion of /cloud/ as media theory, see *Wolken*, edited by Lorenz Engell, Bernhard Siegert, and Joseph Vogl, *Archiv für Mediengeschichte* 7 (Weimar: Bauhaus-Universität, 2005). For cloud modeling, see my *Wolken modellieren*, 95–105, or e-pub.uni-weimar.de/volltexte/2006/812/pdf/o8leonhard.pdf. See also Hubert Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); and

Gavin Pretor-Pinney, *The Cloudspotter's Guide* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2006).

2. For a distinction between image and picture I follow this definition of Mitchell's (which I have rearranged slightly): “The picture is an image in a medium, or an image that is mixed into some picture of an object. You can hang the picture on the wall but you can not hang an image on the wall. An image is what comes off the picture.” Interview, December 13, 2004, as part of the Iconic Turn Lectures, Munich.

or “something-in-something.”<sup>3</sup> Visual experience is by no means a predicative act (neither is touch, smell, etc.). We therefore have to consider the perceptual as much as the cognitive side of seeing when once again addressing the question of *what is an image*.

Both semiology and phenomenology stress the dynamic nature of vision. In theories of *practices of seeing* as well as *seeing as practice*, visual perception becomes an active and constitutive dimension. Be it either in the involvement in linguistic conventions and forms of life or in the corporeality of the world, the reception and production of images form interdependent aspects of seeing. Nevertheless, there are significant shifts of emphasis in the arguments. For some, an image is chiefly understood as figure-ground-constellation, where thought and sense unfold in the encounter between visible and invisible, while for others an image provides at best an encounter with modes of representing the communications of the social, political world. The first aims at an awareness of the primacy of experience and the particularity of visual perception in cognitive processes, the second on the interrelation of media and the heterology of representation in a sign-based society. But equally the idea of visual practice flashes up, be it with, against, or in addition to Wittgenstein’s role of training and practice in language. Vision is described as a human practice embedded in life forms, so image theory therefore clearly demands a shift from semantics to pragmatics of perception. Here the theories meet. By focusing on visual practices, we can reconcile these notions while still challenging their respective statements on proper and improper seeing, on the essential nature of images and their historical conceptualization, or on the visual and discursive functions that are assumed in the representational order.

To distinguish a cloud from its atmospheric surrounding is a highly complex act, and still it is different from seeing a face or a figure in cloud formations. It is also something else to recognize a face or figure in a painting, for example, where it may have been put deliberately.<sup>4</sup> To distinguish a familiar face in a crowd requires different perceptual and cognitive steps than to look at Warhol’s icon of Marilyn Monroe. By discussing these differences, we are already in image pragmatics. Image pragmatics works on the assumption that we have to deal with the interaction not only of a plurality of images, but also of images and words, or images and words as parts of media systems.

So what is left of the image other than a desire to retain it? During the discussion, the question came up again and again. There, the idea of a pure image was addressed as ideology, radically opposed to a critical historicism on the one hand and semiology on the other. At the same time, even when being denied, the image acts as a huge stimulator, creating a desire to see the unseen. Western thought has been infiltrated by the metaphysical, or even theological, implication that the infinite cannot be an object of the senses, but that the senses can

3. See further remarks in Eva Schürmann, *Sehen als Praxis: Ethisch-ästhetische Studien zum Verhältnis von Sicht und Einsicht* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008).

4. See Martin Seel, *Ästhetik des Erscheinens* (Munich: Hanser, 2000), 286.

serve to activate the formative power of the mind. We are still entangled in this kind of relation between the visible and the invisible. Hubert Damisch once associated the gathering of clouds in the skies of Baroque cupolas with the wish to conceal (and simultaneously broach the issue of) the opening onto an indefinite perspective.<sup>5</sup> Reflecting upon the idea that when we think *in* and *with* images, what we end up with is a mess/mass, one may reach the following conclusion: the question of the image functions as a sort of circulation pump, or steam engine, of powerful visual and discursive thinking. And though I am weary of talking about the “image” from the perspective *dal sotto in su*, gazing skywards I cannot help recognizing the historical force of this perspective.

Poststructuralism, however, has taught us to look skeptically at notions of purity and has provoked the need for a redefinition of the image and the production of a new field of image sciences. There is something disturbing about the idea that we will always have our heads in the clouds no matter how far we push forward to get a clear sight of the image, not just because it questions our scope of vision, but because of the impossibility of getting outside the picture without entering another. Because we are always *with* and *in* images we need a history of seeing and a history of the image, which again has to be inscribed into a history of media systems. Because seeing only happens *in* and *through* media, we have to consider its influence, not only because it constitutes the world technically, but because it shapes the life forms through which the structure of human experience can be altered. Art plays a decisive role here. The structure of human experience can be altered through modes of representation, and art reflects this very aspect. Art is a critique of vision as well as of visual culture, of the image as well as of ideology.

Sigmar Polke’s *misprint, or flopp*, can serve as a theoretical guide to the state of the image.<sup>6</sup> Being a misprint or a *macchia* that has derived from a medial disturbance, and at the same time a cloud emerging from the unarticulated iconic field, it messes with the purity of the image. With its being a significant aberration, its making a difference, the misprint or cloud is a parallel of images and the systems of media in which they are produced. The parallel provokes some brief thoughts: Visuality has to first pass through the grid of representation to become an image, or a picture. The history of art is the critique of the image. Aesthetics can become normative by articulating such criticism.<sup>7</sup> So *Bildkritik* it may be.

5. Damisch, *Theory of /Cloud/*, 178.

6. Polke, *Flopp*, 1996, silkscreen in black on Schoellershammer board, 50 x 70 cm. An image is available at [www.galerie-slutzky.de/tl\\_files/](http://www.galerie-slutzky.de/tl_files/)

[galerie\\_slutzky/katalogbilder/Po/Po-119-Flopp.jpg](http://www.galerie_slutzky/katalogbilder/Po/Po-119-Flopp.jpg).

7. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 359.

A BANQUET BEYOND HISTORY  
Some Ramblings About the Seminars, Postmodernism,  
and the Right to Be Picky

*Francesco Peri*

Unlike a few other people who wrote Assessments, I was particularly pleased with the dialogic form of the manuscript and its aporetic, hazy, unpolished edge. More often than not, the quick pace and the ever-changing point of view turned out to be more stimulating than just another well-rounded theory of the whole. Especially when the exchanges never fall short of an extremely high intellectual *niveau*.

I'm not suggesting that books should always be like this, of course, but every now and again it's refreshing to remove the lid and watch ideas being hauled back and forth in real time, to see what happens when they collide. When I and some colleagues published a similar experiment a few years ago, we subtitled it "A Jam Session." The comparison, perhaps, is not entirely unreasonable: a jazzman knows, by and large, what kind of material he is going to perform and where he stands in terms of style and technique, but he doesn't know when, how, and in which context he'll play his cards and in what ways the experience will eventually redefine his musicianship. Moreover, in a jam session, unlike brainstorming, the value is not in the outcome, but in the performance itself: the beauty of the "situation," the thrill of the challenge, the novelty of an evolving whole that's more than the sum of its parts. The right question, therefore, is not what a seminar boils down to, what conclusions did it reach, and what new theories it contributed to the acts of philosophical thought, but how it affected the participants and the public, what *effects* it produced, how it challenged and reshaped our perception of things.

Does that still work in a modern book format? All in all, I would say it does: even if the *ex post facto* reader is not allowed to chip in (and heaven knows he sometimes would like to), he's still encouraged to reposition himself, to see things from new angles, to parry and fight back, to come up with solutions, objections, patches, and compromises, all inside his head. "What if's" and "maybe's" are the dumbbells of mental exercise, and that's where books of this kind may prove particularly useful. The French have a very good expression for this: *remuer des idées*.

The problem, if it is a problem, lies in the specific outcomes, in what is actually going on. Jam sessions can be good or poor, they can succeed or miscarry. That's what makes them so dangerous and exciting. One impression I couldn't get rid of, for example, is that this seminar transcript, insofar as it inevitably calls for a comparison with ancient dialogic models, is not so much reminiscent of the fantastic conversations of Plato's *Symposium*, but somehow tends to mimic

the encyclopedic extravaganza of Macrobius's *Saturnalia* or Athenaeus's *Deipnosophistae*, with their omnivorous eclecticism, their plentiful name-dropping, their bookish erudition, and the feeling of "lateness" that is constantly hanging over them. This may have something to do with the problems we sometimes associate with a certain notion of the postmodern condition. Let me try to elaborate a little.

I am probably not alone in thinking that the most instructive and fascinating passages of the transcript are those where "non-Western" notions come into play. As an amateur linguist and lover of Eastern cultures, I found them particularly enriching. At the same time, some have criticized the very notion of the non-Western as generic and intrinsically biased (for instance Kavita Singh). There are probably good reasons to raise this objection, but this is where a much more fundamental problem arises. My question is, could it be otherwise? Would it be desirable? Are we to make believe that we're speaking from nowhere, from a place outside time and space, beyond cultural strategies and individual interests? Couldn't it be that the very idea of philosophical reflection as a neutral meta-level where notions from all ages and every corner of the planet, stripped of their empirical and historical determinacy, are free to enter all sorts of combinations is one of the fictions of late modernity (in the sense in which we speak of "late antiquity")? Isn't there something terminal about, a sinister Hegelian touch to, this representation, irenic as it is? Even worse, isn't the self-erasing gesture that posits our own academic discourse as the blank, transcendental space where cultures may come and settle their differences the ultimate shot at "Western" intellectual supremacy?

In other terms, what are we to make of ideas that are not our own, or have not been up until now, if we want to handle them properly? Let them react with our traditional notions and see how they force us to redefine our paradigms, to rethink our identity in the face of alternatives? Or treat them as tiles of a colossal jigsaw puzzle, as fragments of a supertheory of the image transcending all specific situations? The latter is what I'd call a Humboldtian perspective: every culture is heir to some bits and pieces of what, all put together, makes up the human mind. The more we know about them, the more we know about ourselves as men.

In a time of globalized knowledge and unprecedented inclusiveness, it is tempting to embrace the latter point of view: the more we call upon "foreign" notions, the closer we get to a hypothetic whole, the more we know about the thing itself. This may sound like a caricature, but let us consider a fictional scenario, to see how far we can go along this way: let us suppose that one day the sudden discovery of a three-hundred-thousand-year-old alien library will introduce us to the subtleties of a genuine Venusian theory of the image. What would be a good reaction to such an unpredictable event? Should we gratefully adopt some of its concepts to expand our terrestrial vocabulary with notions such as *qwbrz* or *vztrf*? Should we simply ignore its contribution as alien, as having no

place in the panhuman mosaic of the mind we were trying to reconstruct, and no relevance to our experience? Should we evaluate its tenets on the basis of an even greater inclusivity, as Kant used to refer to a moral community of “rational beings” that weren’t necessarily humans? Would our notions of fairness, solidarity, and political correctness still apply to an alien civilization that went extinct ages before the rise of *Homo sapiens*? For example, would a belligerent department of “Venusian studies” make any sense?

My impression is that none of the above questions can be answered in general, once for all, because there is no such thing as a disincarnate history, or a neutral taxonomy of ideas. The perception of some participants, who objected from the start to the form of a simple encyclopedic catalogue, was fundamentally correct. Historical description is never pure, it is always the function of a specific point of view: fragments of past theories and unfamiliar alternatives (where the axis is not necessarily West/non-West) are retrospectively gathered in new and specific constellations according to a present contention or polemic intention. Isn’t it true, in the end, that we primarily draw on the discourses of our predecessors to make a point about an image that attracted our interest, to come to terms with an iconic shock, to affirm an individual experience at the expense of others? The force field of our primary aesthetic perceptions recreates the past anew at every additional theoretical move by rearranging its segments in rhetorically relevant figures. History, as I once put it, is always an *oratio pro domo*. We make things with ideas, not just contemplate them.

This is why the dream of an indefinitely inclusive meta-theory as a pacific and egalitarian pow-wow of concepts from every time and land is something of an illusion: it doesn’t do justice to the structure of ideas themselves, which is intrinsically *polemic*. Think of the ambiguity of the word “argument.” Just as subatomic particles do, ideas constantly attract and repel each other, they react to each other, they don’t suffer to be laid down side to side in orderly geometric rows. That is also why Tom Mitchell’s alternative between “historicizing” and “anachronizing” is not really an alternative but a dialectic. Our incessant redefinition of the past along strategic force lines makes liberal use of both operations, which are by no means mutually exclusive: we historicize *and* anachronize in turn at our convenience, according to the way we want things to look. The relative interest and pertinence of Chinese, Indian, or ancient Greek notions varies accordingly, oscillating between “crucial” and “irrelevant” at any given time.

The vague “postmodern” uneasiness I voiced above is somehow related to all this, or better to a disturbing jamming of this mechanism, to a general release of polemic tension. Eclecticism and strategic consciousness are inversely proportional, to an extent. What I called “lateness,” or Alexandrinism, is among other things the absence of a powerful primary experience commanding a global reinterpretation of reality, the risk of a spiritual plateau. Late antique *deipnosophistae* were encyclopedic philosophers sitting at a banquet, casually examining alternatives and throwing quotations at each other, in a time when all the causes

had already been defended, all the battles had been fought, everything had already been said. Like these loquacious and irresolute sages, the politically correct posthistoric subject is playing around with an infinite array of alternatives, none of which seems to have an intrinsic advantage or to fit an individual truth, the stubborn but precious uniqueness of one's specific perception. What if absolute inclusiveness were a neutralization of difference, more than its apotheosis? What if the peaceful, noncommittal cohabitation of all historical, theoretical, and geographical alternatives were a sort of white noise, a saturation we should fear? They say that beggars can't be choosers, but sometimes choices are even more difficult when one is exceedingly *rich*, so rich he loses all perspective.

The adoption of "non-Western" notions is nothing particularly new or laudable in itself. When Schopenhauer tried to work Buddhism into the fabric of Kantianism, however, he was doing so to drive home a particular point about his individual perception of reality, not to suggest that in general, or just in case, things could also be seen that way, or any other way. He was not a *deipnosophistes*, a *dilettante* of world philosophy (in the hybrid but still Eurocentric sense of the catchphrase "world music"). Of all things, his Eastern-Western game was not *amorphous*. He wasn't trying to complete his collection of theoretical butterflies with exotic specimens; he wasn't doing justice to the otherness of others for the mere sake of it: he was synthesizing heteroclite materials in an original way to back up his own powerful vision, he was making a point. He was *philosophizing*, exerting his right to choose, discard, and reject, to assert his unique priorities.

I wonder if it isn't unfair to raise these issues in the wake of a seminar. After all, such events are ecumenical and tactful by definition: objections are okay, but all-out polemics would come across as extremely inappropriate. As it tends to happen in Japan, straight "no's" are replaced by "sure, but maybe's," or by the respectful invocation of an even greater authority. Am I mistaking diplomatic politeness for a nightfall of theory in which all cats are equally grey? Am I failing to read between the lines of an ostensibly friendly teatime chit-chat? It may well be, but I have tried to stick to my first, unprocessed, spontaneous sensations: I was explicitly asked to submit such a reaction, artless and right off the bat, so I tried to be faithful to the jazz spirit I mentioned above: I rushed onstage to play through my chorus, at the risk of getting the harmonies wrong. Circumstances helped me: I found myself jotting down these notes in a hurry, in the nick of time, so I didn't have much of a choice anyway. I invoke the protection of the Geneva convention of jam session-seminars, and the benevolence of my fellow improvisators.

# IMAGES IN REASONING, EXPERIMENT, GENERALIZATION, AND ABSTRACTION

*Frederik Stjernfelt*

Reading the Seminars, I am immediately struck by two things. One is the astonishing amount of good ideas and observations. The other is the recurrence of certain almost systematic blind spots. This assessment focuses upon the latter, which I number 1 to 5.

1. A strange hesitation to speak about ontology in the metaphysical sense of the word seems widespread. Yet it is never argued what should, in fact, be the dangers in so-called essentialism. The lead question of the whole series, *What is a picture?*, is indeed an essence question. And asking for the essence of something—for instance, pictures or images—is neither more or less than asking what makes those things what they are. Nobody promises that the answer is simple. Criticisms that try to get rid of metaphysical ontology invariably and unknowingly erect a substitute ontology: if you claim there is no such thing as ontology because it is historical, cultural, mental, you immediately construct a substitute ontology of history, culture, or the mind. But that is just another ontological claim, with the special character that you think the ontology of a specific area (history, culture, mind) is more fundamental than that of other areas which may then be reduced. Instead of such reductionism, I would favor Husserl's notions of a common formal ontology for all objects and a pluralist material ontology for different fields of objects.

2. Another strange obsession is that of allegedly Western conceptions of images as against non-Western conceptions. This chimera, as Tom Mitchell calls it, makes believe that the West forms one homogeneous and coherent culture with very specific ideas of what images and pictures are. As the variety of viewpoints already in the Seminars testify, this is not the case. The West is not a coherent culture, it contains lots of different currents, it borrows from other cultures and constantly evolves.

3. This culturalism reifying cultural traits also occurs when discussing the important social function of pictures, which returns as their strengthening senses of “community, culture, and nation.”<sup>1</sup> This may indeed be the case. But why are such conservative notions of collective groups the only ones mentioned? Why not the possibility of images strengthening “civilization, arts, sciences, democracy”?

4. Again and again, the discussion seems to presuppose certain dualisms, with the result that you are obliged to choose one or the other opposed position. That goes for the historical versus transhistorical determinations of images. That goes for general theories of images versus more specific theories. That goes for

1. See Section 6 of the Seminars.

theories as such versus particular images. That goes for humanist approaches versus scientific approaches. That goes for private versus social uses of images. To me, the stiffening of such conceptual tensions into exclusive dualisms is a source of error. We are not forced to choose one side of these dualisms over the other. Rather, they are indeed not exclusive dualisms, but constitute continua referring to *aspects* of the object. And the same object may have different aspects at one and the same time. It may have general and less general properties. If you do not have a transhistorical conception of the image, for example, you are unable to follow the important historical changes of images because you are not able to identify "images" in epochs or cultures different from your own. If you do not have a more or less explicit general theory of images, you will not be able to relate more specific image theories to each other, or the single, particular image experience to other such experiences. And correlatively, if you do not have such experiences, you will not be able to make your general theory. There are private uses and there are social uses of the very same pictures, and they do not exclude each other. In all cases, you need both sides of the dualisms (or both ends of the continua) in order to give a proper description of your object.

5. A particularly evil dualism seems to be that between images and pictures on the one hand, and language and logic on the other. The delimitation of the concept of the image against that of language has, of course, become necessary in image studies because of the "linguistic imperialism" of early picture semiotics. But in the Seminars, language is identified, over and over again, with logic. This has some very unfortunate implications. One is the more or less explicit suggestion that images are irrational, ineffable, or beyond logic; another is the failure to realize the many important connections between images and reasoning, both everyday, aesthetic, and scientific.

I think these five blind spots are related. Here, however, I shall especially comment upon the shortcomings resulting directly from the last point. It is a very widespread phenomenon that pictures and images are accompanied with indices that indicate which object they refer to. This occurs every day in the media, in science, in the arts, and it is the rule rather than the exception. The image and the index taken together constitute a proposition. Peirce would call it a *dicensign*, to give a term that is more general than the linguistic proposition. Take, for instance, a portrait painting. Here the painted figure on the canvas constitutes the predicative part of the dicensign. The indexical part pointing out the subject of the dicensign may be a small sign on the frame reading "Louis XIV"; it may also be a part of the painted figure itself, indicating the identity of the king with different linguistic, symbolic, indexical, or other means. Like all propositions, this composite sign has an indexical component, making explicit the subject referred to, and a predicative, iconical component, claiming something about the properties of the subject referred to. An enormous amount of picture use, private or social, artistic or scientific, political or commercial, connects pictures with such indications of their objects. It is indeed one of the main functions

of images. It is true that, especially in artistic, aesthetic uses, this propositional function is often weakened, even if it is rarely totally absent. Such propositions involving image predicates may, like all predicates, form part of arguments. The portrait of Louis XIV may function as the propositional premiss to a historical argument pertaining to our knowledge of the king, or to an art history argument about the painting styles and representation practices around the French absolutist court—in exactly the same way that linguistically represented propositions (“The sky is blue”) may function as premisses for argument conclusions (“Don’t bring your umbrella”). The propositional function is a logical function, and it has no privileged relation to language—this is a misunderstanding stemming from the fact that artificial formal languages have been used for formalizing logic. But images may also formalize logic, as Euler, Venn, and especially Peirce have shown us. Peirce’s “existential graphs” thus form a diagrammatical notation system for logic.

This points to the use of images, not only as furnishing the predicate part of such logical arguments, but as the vehicle of the very argument structure itself. That was what Peirce pointed at with his notion of diagrams. Elsewhere I have tried to give an account of his general notion of diagrams and diagrammatical reasoning,<sup>2</sup> and I believe it holds some very important implications for the notion of images in general. It is correct, as Elkins remarks in the *What Is an Image?* sessions, that Peirce conceives of the whole field through a new central concept, that of diagrams. I believe this revolution, or attempted revolution, is potentially very fertile. But that does not imply that all images are diagrams *tout court*. In order to understand the thrust of Peirce’s diagrammatology (this term is originally Tom Mitchell’s), it is very important to realize that the whole of Peirce’s architectonic of signs with taxonomies and subtaxonomies should *not* be seen as a direct correlate to biological taxonomies. Icons, indices, and symbols do not, for instance, form mutually exclusive classes of signs just as lions, tigers, and panthers are mutually exclusive classes of animals. Icons, indices, and symbols are *aspects* of signs, and one and the same sign may be iconic, indexical, and symbolical at one and the same time. Any photograph, for instance, is both iconic (it has certain similarities with its object) and indexical (it is connected to its object via a physical process through the lens and the light sensitivity of the camera). And many such photographs may, on top of that, acquire additional symbolical meanings: the famous photo of Che in many teenage rooms meaning revolution, youth rebellion, etc. Such a sign is iconic, indexical, and symbolical.

The same thing goes for the conceptual triad to which Peirce’s concept of diagram belongs. It is *image*, *diagram*, *metaphor* as subtypes of the icon. Peirce’s image concept refers to icons that function by means of simple qualities, shapes, colors, pitch, harmony, smell, etc. Diagrams are icons that perform a skeletal analysis of their object into interrelated parts and facilitate your reasoning about the relations of those parts. This entails that all diagrams are also images—they must be composed of shapes, colors, etc. So the difference between images and

2. *Diagrammatology: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Phenomenology, Ontology, and Semiotics* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007).

diagrams in Peirce is one of use: the very same sign vehicle may be used in some contexts as an image, in other as a diagram. (A metaphor, the third concept of the triad, will be an icon functioning via an intermediary between it and its object—it will typically contain a diagram.) The very same triangle may, in one context, be used as an image, in another context also as a diagram, if we begin to pay attention to the relation between its parts. Or the very same landscape painting may be an image when contemplated vaguely as a whole, but become a diagram when we begin to calculate the distance between foreground and middle ground, imagine a walk along the path leading deep into the countryside, etc. Images acquire diagram qualities as soon as we begin reasoning by using the relation between their parts. Thus, Peirce's diagram concept connects objects otherwise conceived of as very distant: artworks, scientific diagrams, construction plans. This is possible because this concept gives the full development of what I call Peirce's nontrivial icon definition. We know that icons are signs that function by means of a similarity to their object. But how is this similarity ascertained? The mere psychological feeling of such a similarity is not sufficient. Peirce makes clear his icon definition by saying that an icon is a sign that by the observation of it allows for the making explicit of new information about the object that was not explicit in the construction of the sign. That is what similarity consists in: the possibility to manipulate the sign so that new information appears. In some cases this new information may be very easy to retrieve—for example, because of the built-in intelligence in our visual system. In other cases, however, it may be harder, or even very difficult, to get at. This is why maps, graphs, algebra, notations, and so on will also qualify as Peircean diagrams—to the extent that new information may be retrieved by the experimental manipulation of them. Peirce's diagram notion is generalized from the geometrical *figurae* in Euclid's *Elements*. The important issue here, of course, is that given the axioms, definitions, and proof rules—and a compass and ruler—you are able to prove general geometrical theorems by manipulating one particular triangle. Still, the result holds for triangles in general. It is this important connection between the particularity of the image and the different levels of generality we may intend through it that forms the center of Peircean diagrams. Diagrams make possible the direct observation of general truths, as Peirce would have it. This is connected to the fact that, when contemplating a diagram, the user must abstract from the accidental qualities of the image and focus upon what is central to the diagram. Working with the Euclidean triangle, the user immediately abstracts from its color, size, the breadth of the lines, etc. In complicated cases, of course, different observers may make different abstractions. In all cases, though, the fertility of the abstractions made can be measured on the new information that the abstraction and the experiment with the diagram gives rise to. Such generalities, it is true, may be on very different levels, such as the general look of Louis XIV or the angular sum of any triangle. In this sense, Peircean diagrams also add a further important classical source for image conceptions in addition to Plato and Aristotle, discussed in the What Is an Image? sessions—Euclid.

As to the discussions of the private/social functions of pictures, it is central that diagrams facilitate both. The private contemplation of an artwork and the proof performed by the solitary scientist may use diagram experiment, as may the collective discussion of the structures of an artwork or a proof. The diagram's making explicit the relations between its part forms an important bridge between the private and public uses of it: by making it possible for several people to work at the same time on the same diagram, it breaks with skepticist notions that the ideas about the content of a picture are mere subjective projections and must remain private. Here, Boehm's observation of the potential third observer always present in image contemplation finds its counterpart. Because of their reliance upon rules, diagram experiments could be repeated by other observers, but in many cases they require individual creativity to realize a specific combination. Exactly because the diagram points to the active use of the picture, artistic or scientific collaboration on the same project immediately becomes possible—including the strange cases where the sum of collective diagram work exceeds the contributions of each participant.

It is important to see why this diagram notion is not in a dualist, destructive opposition to the material, individual qualities of the image: because every diagram is first an image. And you are free, of course, to focus upon those individual qualities of the particular image that are extremely important—for example, in artworks. But as soon as you pass from contemplating those qualities to reasoning about the relations between them, you are already using the image as a diagram. Thus, I would claim that when Elkins “keeps talking” in his still closer readings of small select samples of a painting,<sup>3</sup> he uses diagrammatical reasoning in comparing and relating the still smaller parts and aspects of those patches. Diagrams thus give us a new insight into the famous “depth” of images: it is because their many interrelated parts may give rise to new information by our ongoing reasoning processes that images have their richness. By contrast, single linguistic utterances have rather few diagrammatical experimentation possibilities. You may learn from “Peter beats Paul” that “Paul is beaten by Peter,” but that is about the only diagram experiment possible here (the amount increases vastly, of course, in the case of whole texts).

Both Elkins and Mitchell have been leaders in enlarging the scope of images and pictures to encompass scientific maps, graphs, tables, notations, and so on. I think Peircean diagrams furnish us with a theoretical means of understanding why this extrapolation is indeed important and fertile. Many image people will probably dislike Peirce's broad diagram concept. They will fear it threatens their age-old traditional privileges of focusing upon special, dignified image classes only. It is unnecessary to say that I find the strengths of it much more appealing: the way it allows us to investigate the connections between logic and images, sciences and the humanities, not to speak of algebras and graphics—aspects of the world that infertile dualisms have prevented us from relating.

3. See Section 8 of the Seminars.

# WHAT IS AN IMAGE? WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

*Rainer Totzke*

In the following I would like to explore how the question of what an image is is connected to the question of what philosophy is, or what philosophy should be. In doing so, I hope to also give an explanatory comment on some remarks that were made during the discussion—for example, why Gottfried Boehm accuses Nelson Goodman of adopting a “generalizing attitude” in his book *Languages of Art* and says, “I feel that this attitude destroys the possibility of getting to the core point.”<sup>1</sup> Boehm targets the same issue later, saying, “I think we did not start by looking for a definition of images, but rather by thinking about the question itself. . . . To ask for a definition, even of opposites and complements, before we have opened the question sufficiently will only lead to false answers.”<sup>2</sup> I will offer an account of how it is to be understood when Aud Sissel Hoel says, “What is needed is not only a rethinking of the image but also a radical reinterpretation of phenomenology itself.”<sup>3</sup>

## I. PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES

I believe that there are two types of approaches to images. On the one hand, there are theory-oriented approaches, which try to answer the question what an image is or try to identify the ontological status of the image in comparison to other phenomena such as “objects,” “ideas,” “writing.” On the other hand, there are approaches that are more interested in political or societal questions. Those approaches are based on an unexplicated commonsense notion of the image and analyze where and in which social, political, or cultural context images appear, for what reasons they exist, and what effects they have.

Both types of approaches make use of philosophical methods. Especially the theory-oriented approaches, interested in the ontological status of the image, are strongly philosophically motivated. With the choice of their methods they position themselves—often explicitly—in different philosophical systems, resulting in competitive relations between different types of approaches. In my opinion, this situation also became apparent during the discussion in Chicago, where—I believe—three “image-philosophical” orientations were discussed: first, phenomenological approaches, drawing on Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, or Merleau-Ponty; second, language-analytical, symbol-theoretical, or semiotic approaches, drawing on Goodman or Peirce; and third, approaches seeking to bring Wittgenstein’s philosophy to fruition in image theory. In the following paragraphs

1. See Section 4 of the Seminars.

2. See Section 2 of the Seminars.

3. See Section 6 of the Seminars.

I will provide a short overview of those approaches and address advantages and disadvantages of the respective image-philosophical positions.

Image theoreticians in the phenomenological tradition believe that, above all, the analysis of the cognitive abilities and of the corporeality of the observer, and of the materiality of the image, is of utmost importance for the development of an appropriate understanding of the image. Gottfried Boehm, for example, refers to phenomenological concepts such as *Abschattung*, the difference between figure and ground, the distinction between presence and absence, the visible and the invisible. Also, semiotic and language-analytical approaches are frequently criticized from a phenomenological perspective. The core points of those criticisms can be summarized as follows: semiotic approaches conceptualize images with too much from a language point of view, thereby missing the peculiar characteristic of images. Cognitive abilities and the related corporeal *In-der-Welt-sein* of the observer are thus neglected. Also, the materiality of the image is not sufficiently thematized.

Goodman in particular is accused of abstracting too much from the concrete cultural history of images and symbols. In doing so, he is said to wrongly universalize specific, historically contingent ways of viewing images and other media. He also uses those universalized ways of viewing to support some of his most important theoretical concepts, for example the distinction between autographic and allographic art, which is entirely ahistorical—thus leading to one-sided and indefensible implications (for example, the odd conclusion that the logically primary function of sheet music is the identification of a work of music). However, music ethnology tells us that musical notations serve a variety of purposes.

Also, particular distinctions that are important for fine arts, such as those between sketch and original, cannot be sufficiently captured by Goodman's terminology. It is most likely this problem that Gottfried Boehm wanted to point out with his criticism of Goodman's generalizations. In contrast, Tom Mitchell emphasizes the strength of Goodman's approach: its claim to theoretical totality. From semiotic, symbol-theoretical, and language-analytical positions in image theory, phenomenology has been criticized because of the lack of systematicity in its argument, its fixation on artistic-aesthetic images, and above all its use of imprecise notions, which ultimately renders phenomenology unusable as a genuine operative analytical tool.

In the third type of philosophically informed theoretical approach to the image, Wittgenstein's work is often used, usually in two distinct ways: on the one hand, his distinction between saying and showing is currently viewed by many—including phenomenologists like Gottfried Boehm—as very instructive, since Wittgenstein's concept of “showing” opens up an approach to the image, rendering it, next to speech, a genuine and independent form of human re-presentation and experience. On the other hand, Wittgenstein's fundamentally pragmatic perspective, as well as his notion of the “language-game,” are being drawn upon in the attempt to apply them adequately to the analysis of the image phenomenon.<sup>4</sup>

4. Oliver Scholz has, following Wittgenstein's notion of “language games,” developed a conceptualization of “image games.” See Scholz,

*Bild, Darstellung, Zeichen* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2004).

## 2. FIGHTING PHILOSOPHICAL BATTLES WITH IMAGES

All in all, it seems to me that philosophical battles are being fought over the image as a theoretical object. Those battles ask not only What is an image? but also What is philosophy? or Which type of philosophy is the appropriate philosophy for the present? In the following I provide some sketches for theses, initially focusing on phenomenology.

Phenomenologists have recently developed a great interest in the discussion of the image. In my opinion, this is due to the fact that phenomenologists believe they have found an object in the image, which can be used in a specific way to legitimate their own philosophical position. Especially in the analysis of the phenomenon image, phenomenology sees itself as having an advantage over other philosophical positions, but in particular in comparison to analytical philosophy of language, which supposedly or actually is limited to formal-logical analyses of concepts, and which either resists the analysis of the multitude of medial forms of re-presentation and experience of the human life or performs such an analysis only from a logocentric perspective.

Especially in the examination of the phenomenal image, certain theoretical core concepts of phenomenology seem to prove their viability. As is generally known, the talk about a “prepredicative experience,” as it can be found in Heidegger and other phenomenologists, has not been subjected to a rigorous criticism by analytical philosophy. Yet precisely this concept of “prepredicative experience” can be applied to the phenomenon of the “image” in interesting new ways, and thus legitimized. For example, in a painting a prepredicative experience is sedimented, which obviously cannot be articulated verbally in its entirety.

With respect to the use of images in epistemic contexts, but not only there, Heidegger’s conception of nonpredicative forms of cognition and knowledge can be made comprehensible in new ways. The distinction between *explicit* and *tacit knowledge* introduced by Michael Polanyi, but in substance going back to Gilbert Ryle and Heidegger, can be confirmed with respect to iconic forms of knowledge representation.<sup>5</sup> It can also be further differentiated, since—besides logical-conceptual constituted forms of knowledge—other forms such as narrative, diagrammatically, or pictorially explicable or explicated knowledge also exist.

It seems to me that Boehm’s insistence on a very broad notion of logic is grounded in his recognition of the pictorial as a distinct form of knowledge representation—next to language—and in his interest in the examination of the inherent logic of iconic knowledge. In particular, artistic images have not only an epistemic but also a reflexive potential, so that it needs to be acknowledged that the place “where our question of the image can be located” is not only language, but sometimes the image itself.<sup>6</sup>

5. See the discussion in vol. 3 of this series, *What Do Artists Know?* (forthcoming) [—J.E.]

6. See Section 4 of the Seminars.

## 3. PHILOSOPHY OF THE IMAGE: MEDIA PHILOSOPHY

In the discussion it was often pointed out that there is a need for a redefinition of the concept of *image* as well as of all other concepts connected to it. This includes the concept of language. I want to emphasize here that this holds for many of the other core concepts of philosophy, such as knowledge, writing, reality, and truth. The philosophical reflection on the image should become a driving force in the new interpretation or reorganization of the entire field of philosophy. It seems to me that Aud Sissel Hoel's call for a "radical reinterpretation of phenomenology itself," which I quoted above, is based on the same persuasion. Such a philosophically transformative mindset can already be found in Derrida's *Grammatology*, except that Derrida sees the driving force behind philosophical transformation not in the image but in writing.

By relating the discourses on the pictorial turn or the iconic turn respectively to Derrida's "scriptual turn," I want to point out that a philosophy of the image has to position itself in the context of more comprehensive media-philosophical considerations such as the "media turn." The idea of renewing philosophical concepts and entire philosophical approaches with respect to media such as image, writing, language, and reconstructing philosophical lines of thought on the basis of media-theoretical considerations can be understood as the goal of media philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

7. This kind of media philosophy has evolved especially in German-speaking countries in recent years. Important representatives of this debate are Sybille Krämer, Dieter Mersch, and Matthias Vogel, and, focusing on the image, Klaus Sachs-Hombach and Lambert Wiesing, as well as Kristóf Nyíri. The last named attempted a media-philosophical rereading of Wittgenstein's work and states, "Writing as a source of

philosophical confusion was Wittgenstein's real enemy. He wanted to avoid the traps of written language by working out a philosophy of the spoken language. And he tried to overcome the limits of verbal language by considering a philosophy of images." Kristóf Nyíri, *Vernetztes Wissen: Philosophie im Zeitalter des Internets* (Vienna: Passagen, 2004), 129 (my translation).

## THINKING THE IMAGE FROM THE INSIDE OF THE PICTURE

*Michael Zimmermann*

When I read the exchange of letters between Gottfried Boehm and W. J. T. Mitchell published by Hans Belting in 2007, I was struck by the many points of contact and even agreement between two positions that started from two totally different positions.<sup>1</sup> In our program of interdisciplinary master studies now called “Aisthesis” (art history, archaeology, philosophy, and literary studies, coordinated among universities, museums, and research institutes in Augsburg, Eichstätt, Munich, and Regensburg), we have made students aware of the discrepancies between two traditions of thinking that were behind the “iconic” and the “pictorial” turn declared in 1994. Boehm insisted on the difference between what appears in an image and what we see, unmediated, through images; he labeled this the “iconic difference.” In 1994, you could still imagine remains of old aesthetics in Boehm’s texts: one of the arguments was that there is coherence in images, whether they are beautiful or ugly, boring, interesting, or scandalous. This coherence might be what remains of Kant’s “purposefulness” (*Zweckmäßigkeit*) of the beautiful image. However, more recently, Boehm has emphasized the idea of *deixis*, linking it to whatever one can do, or wants to do, in producing and using an image or by showing something in or through an image.<sup>2</sup> In Mitchell, instead, images tend to be what one does with them—and what they do to those who see them. They are placed in practice and ideology; they tend to reflect what they are, and how they make us see the world through them. The gap they build between fiction and reality, or the links they forge between those two terms, are reflected in themselves.

In Boehm’s “iconic turn,” the mental image, mediated through pictures, stood in the center, whereas in Mitchell’s “pictorial turn,” mental images are pushed into the background: we cannot share them except through other things, whether they are descriptions, ideology, or pictures. If we in Aisthesis perceived a common denominator in both “turns,” it was the discovery that we always already are in the image, the *Bild*, just as we are always already in language—but not *because* we are always already in language. Images, pictures (*Bilder*) are not a subcategory of signs. And they have their own impact; they are not merely something that goes along with words or notions, corresponding to them and adding a more or less clear idea to concepts. Words and images were transformed from the Kantian *Begriff* and *Anschauung* into two parallel universes.<sup>3</sup>

1. Gottfried Boehm, “Iconic Turn: Ein Brief”; W. J. T. Mitchell, “Pictorial Turn: Eine Antwort,” in *Bilderfragen: Die Bildwissenschaften im Aufbruch*, edited by Hans Belting (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2007), 27–36 and 37–46 respectively.

2. Boehm, *Wie Bilder Sinn erzeugen: Die Macht des Zeigens* (Berlin: Berlin University Press 2007), 19–53.

3. I refer mostly to the classical texts: Gottfried Boehm, “Die Wiederkehr der Bilder,”

In 2007 Boehm and Mitchell, while underlining the differences, found many common interests in the nonverbal epistemic uses of the image, from psychology to mathematics. But between the lines, what struck me was the spirit of friendship in inaugurating a dialogue that was continued in 2008, thanks to James Elkins, who had already contributed so much towards enriching, but also complicating, our understanding of images far beyond their use in the still prevailing domains of the narrative or the artistic imagination.<sup>4</sup> The spirit uniting faculty and fellows in the Stone Summer Theory Institute seemed to be that the theory of pictures and images is something that is highly precarious, but that we still have to work on. *Bildtheorie* (picture theory) is somehow like the famous boat that has constantly to be repaired, but without our being able to get it out of the water. When you change a piece, someone has to pour out the water that comes in through the place you're working on. You never have the boat wholly intact, but somehow you have to keep it going. The theory of and about images is not a text. Or before it is a text, it is in the images themselves. Art must not end in order to become philosophy, as Hegel thought. Art itself can be philosophy.

As a student, I lived with an old woman who took care of an even older man. He had been very active, and still liked to stroll through the city, even though he didn't always find his way back right away. When you found him, he smiled and explained the situation with a saying that is idiomatic in German: "Ich bin nicht so ganz im Bilde" (I am not entirely in the image), meaning that he did not entirely know where he was. The sentence struck me again when I read the lucid discussions mostly about ontology and public and private. The elderly man had said "nicht so ganz" (not entirely), and he thus was "in the image," but not totally. By strolling around the houses he had known for so many times, and leaving over and over again, even though he knew the risk that he would not find the way back before becoming tired, he was still "in the image," but not entirely so. Hence we cannot walk and not be *im Bilde* somehow (even if not entirely), in one sense or another; we think about the images from within. The old man had known the houses and streets, the blocks and the subway stations. He had studied the city map and the public transportation maps, the architecture of his friend's houses, and so on. But it all became a bit fuzzy for him. The world "in the image" is thus at the same time like an ocean, like a cosmos for us, and like something limited and very concrete, a montage, sometimes a collage of a great many pictures (but not an endless quantity of them) that structure our knowledge of the city. There is no vantage point from which to see our world from the outside. We are always already in the picture, *im Bilde*. *Picture theory is done from within.*

in *Wie Bilder Sinn erzeugen*; and Boehm, *Was ist ein Bild?* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1994), 11–38. See also W. J. T. Mitchell, "The Pictorial Turn," *Artforum* (March 1992): 89–94.

4. Elkins, *On Pictures and the Words That Fail Them* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); *The Domain of Images* (Ithaca:

Cornell University Press, 1999); and *Six Stories from the End of Representation: Images in Painting, Photography, Astronomy, Microscopy, Particle Physics, and Quantum Mechanics, 1980–2000* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

However, we know that the old man's world is not ours, that sometimes he needs ours to find his way back. And we know that we teach ours to children (as in the German *Bildung*, meaning both education and picturing), showing them the city map and so many other pictures, and that other people, other cultures, other times have their montage or collage of pictures and images, and their intermedial world of pictures, texts, and metaphors. We thus have to think our being-in-the-image (that sounds Heideggerian, but I am thinking of the old man) as something at the same time universal for us and also very concrete—sometimes regrettably limited—for others. *It is thus from within that picture theory has to be done.*

In the discussions about the ontology of the image, the paradox of the universal and the concrete, the nonhistorical and the historical, in images and pictures is well explored. Anthropology, at least in a universalizing sense, is dismissed: it is not the human in a generalized form that explains this double status of being concrete (namely “human”) and universal (for us “humans”) at the same time. As Mitchell says, “It is our nature to change our nature.” Humanity is not beyond its own history, but within it. It is not beyond the pictures from Lascaux to Matthew Barney, but in their history. Even anthropology has to enter into the historical conceptions of what is or was considered to be irreducibly human at any given time, within any given discourse or visual *dispositif*.<sup>5</sup> It is part of the paradox: so many ideas, conceptions, pictures of what is human in general, but no one of them suitable to be accepted as universal. Anthropology becomes its own history, destroying through its own approach what it is interested in: the transhistorical, the universally “human.”

So the question comes back to asking how can we do theory from within, without “super-duper theories” (to take up Mitchell's pun) such as Peirce's that do not know their limits, or even without ahistorical “supertheories” that do know their limits but are ahistorical? How can we at the same time be in the image (*im Bilde*) and out of it?

For the boat that has constantly to be repaired within the water, it would be futile to give answers to that question. But maybe there are links between phenomenology, analytic philosophy, and their “posts-” that are worth exploring. In the discussions about public and private images, I encountered an astonishing agreement. Jacqueline Lichtenstein rightly insisted that during the eighteenth century, roughly at the time of the invention of modern art criticism (as opposed to normative aesthetic theory), the private character of the encounter with images became an institutional practice. On the other hand, from the *Entretiens* about the salons to the emergence of public museums and exhibitions, privacy

5. I refer to the use Foucault made of the notion of the *dispositif*, but also to its transformation in cinema theory and to attempts at defining the *dispositif* as an operative notion by Deleuze and recently by Agamben. Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 1, *La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), especially 101–73; Michael Maset, *Diskurs, Macht und Geschichte: Foucaults Analysetechniken und*

*die historische Forschung* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2002; Jean-Louis Baudry, “Das Dispositiv: Metapsychologische Betrachtungen des Realitätsindrucks,” in *Kursbuch Medienkultur: Die maßgeblichen Theorien von Brecht bis Baudrillard*, edited by Claus Pias, Joseph Vogl, Lorenz Engell, Oliver Fahle, and Britta Neitzel (Stuttgart: DVA, 2004), 39; Giorgio Agamben, *Was ist ein Dispositiv?* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2008).

was projected into the public sphere, Habermas's *Öffentlichkeit*. Boehm introduced the figure of the invisible third to whom I address even what I imagine around private images. The faculty seem to have agreed that images are not primarily private, that the mental image, for example, is not primarily a result of private imagination that then is coded into a medium (translated into it in order to become a picture) in order to enter only then the public sphere. Instead, images seem to be always already public. Mitchell introduced Wittgenstein's argument against "private language" as read by Saul Kripke (some philosophers label this reconstructive reading "Kripkenstein"): there cannot be a private language because it would have no criteria.<sup>6</sup> I could name my apple of today a pear tomorrow, and no one would say that this is not consistent. So: are there private images? The double answer tended to be No, because our imagination is always addressed to the "unknown third," and No, because our mental images are already "picturesque"—they are permeated by the rules and codes of pictures we see and that are in common use: city maps, photographs, movies . . . There is a public element in projection, as there is a public element in reception. There are cultural codes, media *dispositifs*, historical discourses in our dreams. Both aspects insist on the essentially (ontologically) communicative and thus public character of images. This is a statement about ontology, but it is also nonessentialist: it does not say what pictures are in themselves, but where we find them, where we should and where we should not situate them in order to know more about how they work.

But still Jacqueline Lichtenstein is right in insisting on the intense presence the image has just for me, for an imagination that in considering an image is, so to speak, intensely present for the one who "has" it, and through that feels compelled into talking about it to the one beside himself, preferably so in front of an image. In his *La voix et le phénomène*, Derrida tried a certain reading of Husserl in order to understand, reconstruct, and deconstruct the extraordinary presence of his voice to the one who speaks.<sup>7</sup> What we speak about is, so to speak, co-present with our speech; it has the temporality of an ongoing presence. That temporality is of course opposed to writing, to what is marked and put into the series of iterative readings and rereadings. The image seems to have more of voice and speech, the picture more of writing and rereading and revisioning. However, just as Derrida accords primacy to writing, which grants some sort of fixity in relation to any possible speech, so we have to accord some sort of primary status to the picture, through which images enter the communicative sphere, that sphere we all share.

Before coming back to picture theory, we might have to enter into a reflection linking "Kripkenstein" to Derrida. Rereading Wittgenstein with Kripke, we should ask whether the private language argument is not in a hidden sense a writing argument. What makes language public, if not its capacity to be reused,

6. Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 55–113.

7. Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967).

to be used tomorrow not the same way as today but in a way that somehow presupposes the way it had functioned before? And is it the group of speech users that guarantees that today's usages can be linked to yesterday's? Cannot all the users of a language forget about what they meant yesterday? So we might grant to writing, to *écriture* in the broadest sense, an important status in this argument. The meaning of yesterday's word does not necessarily have to have been written, but it has to be part of a code that has already been somehow fixed, that is thus used as something potentially written, or pinned down onto some medium.<sup>8</sup>

Derrida's definition of *écriture* does not systematically divide writing and drawing. There has to be some surface that serves as a medium. It can be a *tabula rasa* that is used as a playing field, as a field to calculate or as a field for graphic demonstration (icon in the broadest sense), or for a more or less coded writing. It is largely James Elkins who has explored the boundaries between these practices—boundaries that are at first floating and only gradually more defined, and that vary in different cultures. It seems to me important to reread not only Derrida's *Grammatology* again in that context, but also his early comment about the sixth treatise of Husserl's crisis book about geometry.<sup>9</sup> Husserl had commented about the origin of geometry within a vital practice, measuring land, for example after flooding for irrigation. Rules that were first linked to that practice were abstracted, step by step, and coded into an ever more autonomous field of knowledge, known as geometry. Through that process of abstraction, geometrical knowledge could be transposed to virtually any field. Husserl's argument would be that by forgetting its epistemological place within the *Lebenswelt*, geometry loses its ground in practice and starts to govern through abstract mechanisms, a motion that is the root of any future form of estrangement. Derrida, however, is interested mostly in the common ground of geometry, arithmetic, and writing in the *gramma*, and how that ground is projected onto what we may conceive as a *tabula rasa*: first the irrigated land flattened out through the floods, then the surface the geometer used to establish his laws.

A deviation from private language to private writing can shed some light on our reflections on private images and pictures. There is presence in a picture, especially if it enters a process of beholding or of "realization" by Gottfried Boehm's "unknown third," or if it enters into some sort of community, or even if it is situated in a public sphere so that it unites people otherwise unknown to each other. But that presence is linked to a preexisting picture, to a whole process of production and description commonly described as a *dispositif* (as that term is developed in Foucault, Deleuze, and Agamben). In order to acquire its intense presence as an image for me, it has to be part of a common sphere; and

8. See also Mitchell's recent discussion of Luhmann in *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

9. Edmund Husserl, *L'origine de la géometrie*, translated with an introduction by Jacques

Derrida, second edition (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974). I used the German translation of Derrida's lengthy introduction: *Husserls Weg in die Geschichte am Leitfaden der Geometrie* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1987).

in order to enter that common sphere, it has to be produced by some individuals who are part of an institutionalized sphere of the production and reception of images. And, as in writing, any new reading is a rereading, an iteration (Derrida) and a renaissance (Warburg) that also changes its sense, sometimes more, sometimes less, sometimes even subverting it through ironic appropriations, through second readings within new metaphorological frameworks and so forth. As for the relationship of text and image, metaphorology plays a role, as Anselm Haverkamp has argued. But we should not confuse the metaphor with talking in images.<sup>10</sup> It is not the metaphor that links language to images, but language itself that is always already imaginative, before being metaphorological. The metaphor links texts images to cultures of *seeing as*. We are always already in texts, and we are always already (more or less) *im Bilde*.

So far, we have been more in images, private and public, than in the image. Are these reflections picture theory, or merely historical? Why not say whatever an image was or is in a certain context is historical, and any attempt at generalizing is futile and thus boring? Or why not say any such attempt is either more or less tautological (that looking at an image is somehow like looking at something else) or speculative? There is that image of our world, that mixed up cocktail of images, gathered partly strategically and partly casually, which makes up my being *im Bilde*. For many of us, it is chaos, for some of us a mess, and for Proust it was saved within a novel as his personal “cathedral.” There also is the oeuvre of an artist, that totality of works that make up his or her accomplishments. It is maybe more that mess that makes up the “private” subject than the presence of the mental image . . . However that might be, in any image we indirectly encounter the *dispositif*, the practice producing it as a medium, and, with it, the potential of the worlds it might possibly contain. That encounter with the potential of the *dispositif* is, so to speak, silent; Mitchell rightly emphasizes that we do not see a medium, but something within it, as he convincingly said in *What Do Pictures Want?* “We not only think about media, we think in them, which is why they give us the headache endemic to recursive thinking. There is no privileged metalanguage of media in semiotics, linguistics, or discourse analysis. Our relation to media is one of mutual and reciprocal constitution: we create them, and they create us.”<sup>11</sup> However, in his insistence on meta-pictures, he opens space for a theory of the medium within the medium itself.

Any medium has two languages: it stops the stream of consciousness, of perception that always moves, and it fixes images—according to one rule or another—in such a way that we can speak about them, in such a way that they enter into communication. This is true even for cinema: according to Deleuze, the *time-image* is diachronic, but structured in time, a structure that is perceivable only, like that of a melody, by putting the sequence into some sort of simultaneity, a synchronic presence. At the same time, in any medium, in any *dispositif*,

10. Anselm Haverkamp, *Metapher: Die Ästhetik in der Rhetorik* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2007), 99–102.

11. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 215.

there is a movement towards self-reflection. In gradually exploring its possibilities, the medium is also about its own status, about the rules, the paradigms and axioms that makes it possible. Very often, a tendency towards filling itself with all sorts of images, details, and emotionally interesting features is counteracted by a tendency towards emptying itself out, reducing it to something that seems to be its status of pure potentiality, before it conveys or contains anything. Wilhelm Worringer called these tendencies *empathy* and *abstraction*. The tendency towards abstraction has been transformed into a program since the historical avant-gardes, in art that became philosophical, self-reflective, and critical of other industrially produced media surrounding itself.

From Manet to Mondrian and Agnes Martin, the drive towards emptying out the medium and at the same time filling it, worked in relation to the idea that the medium somehow preceded itself and was originally void in a primordial sense. That tendency towards the *tabula rasa* finally tended towards treating the empty surface as itself a medium, as a thing already pre-coded with all the rules characteristic of a fully defined *dispositif*. The process of abstraction towards something very simple, towards a form somehow containing all the other forms, can also happen in sculpture, for example in Brancusi. The strange end of that process is that it projects the very simple or empty medium as primordial, as preceding itself in a radical way. Before the medium contains anything, before it contributes building up worlds, it is already there, in a state of emptiness, but filled with all its potentialities. This was another sense of the primitivist ideology: the projection that you can find in earlier cultures in some cultural evolution. But even without primitivism, this seems to be an inevitable move within a medium, and beyond it: from within, the searches for its own transcendental status, for a historical *a priori* in Foucault's sense: the rules that make it possible.<sup>12</sup> And the result of that process of abstraction thus always seems to be projected into some sort of *arche*, some inaugural scenario. Some metapictures and some ambiguous pictures reflect that process in themselves. Within pictures, we arrive at the picture.

These are points I consider worth exploring, not in order to resolve the paradox of a way of thinking of picture theory that is at the same time historical and outside history. Boehm's and Mitchell's shared interest in the relation between the historical use of pictures on the one hand and what was named (maybe mis-named) an ontology of the image on the other hand is what keeps *Bildtheorie* going. But can the paradox be resolved, or is it constitutive of what we are doing, of what we feel we have to do? Perception is always on the move; we cannot stop seeing. However, we always arrest it in pictures. We are always already participating in the Heraclitian movement of seeing, as Georg Simmel called it.<sup>13</sup> And

12. I use the term *transcendental* first in the Kantian sense of any condition that makes episteme possible. But the move towards atranscendental *arche* from within episteme itself has to be rethought in discussing Derrida's reading of Husserl, and in situating it in the context of multiple medialities.

13. See the forthcoming PhD study of Georg Simmel's comments on Rodin, and other attempts at constructing models of modernity through readings of Rodin, by Dominik Brabant.

we are always already participating in the simultaneity of the image, of a world made up of images. That is one side of the paradox. Would the other not be something like this: we are always already in history, and in discourses and media *dispositifs* that have their own historical, social, and ideological conditions? These media tend towards thinking their own conditions, whether as specific images or as images in general. There is a transcendental move in images towards what they are, towards their specific constitution as this or that medium, and towards their being images in general (whether or not we call that ontology or essence). The problem is that all ontology is subject to rereading, revision . . .

## IMAGES

### An Imaginary Problem

*Sunil Manghani*

Part of the problem always lay in waiting in the title of the Seminar—a certain *objet petit a*, or “an” to be precise, embedded from the start. Asking what an image is appears restrictive, since invariably an image offers plurality. Sartre’s account of his image of Pierre is a case in point, to say nothing of René Magritte’s *Les Deux mystères*. Boehm appears to raise this point in Section 2, when we says, “A first step forward might be to use the plural. Not: What is an image? but What are not images?” However, the point is lost to remarks about how one grammatically cuts the question What is not an image? This raises a plurality of images, but as distinct, singular image-types or instances, rather than the image as a shifting phenomenon. I want to imagine what might have happened had Boehm’s call to “reflect on the plurality of the image” been more adequately traced.

Mitchell suggests, also in Section 2, that “picture” and “image,” taken in their vernacular senses, help demarcate a material picture from an immaterial image. As he puts it, “You can cut a picture in half, but what does it mean to cut an image in half?” It is a convenient, pragmatic distinction. Yet potentially it glosses over a crucial distinction between image and idea, which arguably forms the basis of any proposed “pictorial turn” (as in Mitchell’s own books *Iconology* and *Picture Theory*). He also suggests that the nuance “may only be available in English,” which seems spurious since it is from Wittgenstein’s original German that he draws the distinction (and of course the Seminar itself includes some discussion around the complexity of the German *Bild*).

The problem stems from a (mis)translation of Wittgenstein’s statement “eine Vorstellung ist kein Bild, aber ein Bild kann ihr entsprechen,” which Mitchell cites in translation (in the essay “Surplus Value of Images,” in *What Do Pictures Want?*) as “an image is not a picture, but a picture can correspond to it.” Inevitably, Wittgenstein’s pithy line has prompted debate among philosophers. Alan White provides a useful overview.<sup>1</sup> The standard translations do indeed use “image” for *Vorstellung*, yet this has been argued to be misleading, with a more appropriate term suggested as “imagine” or “imagining.” The problem, of course, is that these words are not nearly as flexible in English.

In White’s view, *image* is entirely against the “whole tenor of Wittgenstein’s views,” not least because the word *Bild* relates as much to the word *image* as it does to *picture*. While Wittgenstein is asserting a difference between a mental and a material image, he does so straightforwardly elsewhere, “by declaring that an ‘innere Bild’ is no more like an ‘äusere Bild’ than a number is like a numeral.” Therefore, there seems a very particular reason to have deployed the term *Vorstellung*.

1. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford:

Blackwell, 1988), sec. 11:2, 151–55.

*lung*, which is only ever used with respect to *imagination*. Thus, White claims that while Wittgenstein “would have insisted that it is not necessary that whenever I imagine something (*sich etwas Vorstellen*), I must have an image (*Bild*), he would have held that whenever I imagine something (*sich etwas Vorstellen*), I must have a *Vorstellung*.” What remains unresolved is just what that means! However, it doesn’t necessarily seem to need to be an image. A more fitting word might be “idea,” which for those heavily invested in image debates might sound like a terrible *Vorstellung*!

We could take this as a “positive misunderstanding” (as discussed in Section 5). Or we could revert to other terms, such as the Chinese *tu* and *xiang*, which Si Han suggests chime with Mitchell’s distinction. But difficult questions remain. For example, are Mitchell’s own self-declared “metapictures” really pictures at all? Let us consider this with Mitchell’s analogy to species and specimens in “The Surplus Value of Images”: “The task of an iconologist with respect to images and pictures,” he writes, “is rather like that of a natural historian with respect to species and specimens” (86). The idea being that we can make comparisons and judgments about specimens, whereas a species is neither good nor bad, evoking more fundamental questions about why they exist, what they do and mean and how they change. But why posit this as a “metapicture of images”? I’d argue the analogy of images and pictures with species and specimens is an interesting idea (if needing a stretch of the imagination) but it doesn’t necessarily contribute to the operation of a metapicture.

Mitchell notes of the “totalizing theoretical ambitions of ‘image studies’” evident in the invocation and parade of critical theorists. However, his account of “surplus value” appears to add to such ambitions. And it reveals, if unwittingly (with respect to its *Vorstellung*), that all such hopes of an encompassing “image studies” are just that: a hope, a pipe dream. If anything, I find his playful text *The Last Dinosaur Book* more convincing as a metapicture, simply because in bringing together “a range of images whose registers of value are utterly disparate” he engages with the “living” value of the immaterial image, simultaneously with handling their material evidence.<sup>2</sup> The metapicture, as described in *Picture Theory*, makes visible to us the difficulty in separating out theory from practice, so “to give theory a body and visible shape that it often wants to deny, to reveal theory as representation.” In *What Do Pictures Want?* it is described with the neat phrase “objects that reflect on their own constitution, or (to recall Robert Morris’s wonderful object of minimalist Dadaism), boxes with the sound of their own making.” And yet I detect a slight shift in the later book, a potential dilution. Here, in explaining the methodological strategy to “picture theory,” the embodied discourse becomes “one that is constructed around critical metaphors, analogies, models, figures, cases, and scenes.” While this is still fitting with a *Vorstellung*, I can’t help sense a more literary mode. (We might think of Gregory Ulmer’s article “The Object of Post-Criticism,” which, with reference to modes of collage and montage, allegory,

2. *The Last Dinosaur Book: The Life and Times of a Cultural Icon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

the parasite and grammatology, accounts for the blurring of the distinction between literature and literary criticism.<sup>3)</sup>

At stake is a more creative and imaginative mode of engagement. Early on in the Seminar, Elkins notes the advantage in the art world of “not looking too closely at what images and pictures are.” While he hopes this might be considered “later on,” his suggestion that accounts developed during the week “will run against the grain of the art world” seems to have been more realistic. There is a potential breakthrough when, in section 5 of the Seminars, Boehm shifts the discussion of literary translation across to the kinds of “translation” artists make of images: “They quote them, they translate them, they transform them,” he says; it’s the artists “who introduced new concepts of image and new ways of experience. They changed the reality of images, at least to the same extent as philosophers and intellectuals did.” But again, these remarks quickly fade. Mondzain comes in immediately with the emphatic recovery: “Yes. I want to come back to the *logos*, and logocentrism”! (Echoing Elkins’s suggestion that we seem to refuse the “narrative” of books outside the Western canon, “except when they can be sampled, mined for individual concepts,” and there is a compulsion to put creative, practical engagements with the image to one side—no doubt because these appear always idiosyncratic).

I don’t think it makes sense to untangle the picture (as material) from the image (as immaterial). Besides, I can “picture you” (in my head) in an imaginary outfit, yet I wouldn’t know where to begin to “image you”! We need to hold onto the plurality of the image, and in so doing continue to ask what the image is that an idea isn’t. Somehow we get snagged by a desire, an *objet petit “an,”* to theorize the image as a singularity, rather than reimagining and enacting theory around its multiplicity. Mondzain nicely disarms Lacan’s neologism so as not to be a lack, “but only the question of the separation, the gap,” which in turn leads her to describe the image as “a sort of empty center of circulation.” What we can’t seem to get our head around are the consequences of Mondzain’s later remark: “when we show an image, there is no negation, no answer, no opposite.” So, if we ask what is an image, it appears to gives us little to go on, since “no image is opposite to another image.” And if we try to ask what images are, we find we’re in for a very long ride, since again “the image does not know any opposition within itself, and it has no replica.” It is perhaps significant that the relation between image and picture is most closely attended to—and arguably most revealing—when the discussion turns to painting and the image in Section 8. Maybe it’s time to go back to the drawing board, quite literally.

3. Gregory L. Ulmer, “The Object of Post-Criticism,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on*

*Postmodern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983): 83–110.

## THEORIES OF IMAGES

### Five Tentative Theses

*Klaus Sachs-Hombach*

Certainly one can find a large variety of theories of images both throughout history and in recent discussions. In addition, nobody would doubt that it is quite impossible to differentiate and classify them all according to clear-cut meta-level categories, as Mitchell states. But why is this regarded as a fundamental problem? Jim Elkins has given four reasons why the theoretical level within the research on images appears somewhat messy: theories of images are up to now not interrelated, they are seen as merely of heuristic value, they do not enter empirical work properly, and they are finally not all theories in the same sense. These four reasons explain the appearance of messiness, but they do not state a principal problem for image science. In my understanding, they only emphasize the immature status of image science.

Let's have a look at some analogous cases: communication science deals with an equally large corpus of phenomena while having an overwhelming variety of theories of communication as well. Here we would not, I guess, consider this an insurmountable problem for research on communicative processes. Communication science is well established. The same is true for psychology. Within psychology one can find a lot of different theories that regard as central either behavior or mind or the soul under different interpretations. One would certainly not succeed in classifying the different psychological theories and distinguishing each of them clearly. But this also does not create major problems for the scientific status of psychology. Finally, within art history we have different theories of art, but we do not question the status of art history or art science. Why, then, is the absence of a taxonomy seen as a problem in the case of the theories of images? I assume that the reason is associated with the fact that image science is not yet established as a proper academic science. And this leads me to my first thesis.

Thesis 1: The reason that the absence of a taxonomy within the theories of images is regarded as an important problem stems from the dominant political interests within this field of research. In the terminology of Thomas Kuhn, image science at the moment is still a preparadigmatic science, and as such is heavily influenced by strategic considerations.

There are several reasons why image science is a very special area of research. One is certainly the close relation between the area of images and the area of art: a rather small but important set of images are pieces of art. This creates a somewhat special situation for image science, as most researchers occupied with art tend to assume that it is not possible to define it. Also, according to our

everyday understanding of art, one cannot give a rule for producing art. Something produced according to a rule might be design or craft, but it would not be considered a piece of art. Insofar as it seems right to insist that art in general cannot be defined properly, these images also cannot be defined properly. And since these images are an important subset of images in general, every definition must at least leave something important out of consideration.

This kind of reasoning seems to be correct, but I would like to question it. Let's start with a look at anthropology. Although nobody denies that humans create art, and most researchers would probably agree that art cannot be defined, nobody would claim that anthropologists are therefore not able to develop a definition of humans that at least allows anthropology to do scientific work. It is even more revealing to compare image science with linguistics. Here we have texts that are considered as pieces of art, such as, say, James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The situation therefore seems similar for research on images and research on language. If we regard *Ulysses* as a piece of art, and if art cannot be defined, then language as a whole might not be definable. Nevertheless, linguistics is a fully developed science. Given that nobody would question the scientific status of linguistics, why do we evaluate the relation between the general aspects of the medium of language and the concrete subset of texts that are considered art differently than we do in the case of images? Thesis 2 tries to provide an answer for this question.

Thesis 2: Image science is still dominated by art history, and thus by research that is primarily interested in the analysis and interpretation of concrete images or particular sets of images (and in particular in interpreting them as art).

This does not imply any skepticism about art history. Within the area of language nobody would say that an adequate analysis and interpretation of *Ulysses* can be achieved by means of linguistics. On the other hand, probably nobody would say that one can understand the structure underlying different natural languages by relying on artists' writings. Doing linguistics and doing literary theory are just two different enterprises. Both might be helpful for each other, but they have a different focus on their topic even if they analyze one and the same text. The same can be said for art history. Dealing with an object as a piece of art and dealing with it as an image should not be seen as one and the same enterprise. Properties that are important for the artistic status of an object might be rather contingent for an object as an image. This can be stated more generally:

Thesis 3: A conceptual determination of a central term, and thus of a certain set of phenomena, does not have to specify all the properties the relevant phenomena possess. It must not exclude features we consider important, but this will not happen just by our leaving open the determination of various special features.

Probably this thesis will be controversial. An example might help to avoid misunderstandings. If you are trying to give a conceptual determination, a definition, or, in a weaker sense, an explication of the concept *mammal*, you do not

have to go into the details of what humans are capable of, although humans are a very interesting subset of mammals. A conceptual determination of what a mammal is might therefore be fine without mentioning the capacity for speech. Such a definition would be inadequate, of course, if it stated that speech is something impossible to achieve for mammals. Thus, in giving a general explication of a term, one is justified in abstracting from various properties. Conceptual determinations have first of all to draw a line between sets of objects. Everything is fine if a conceptual determination allows us to distinguish clearly between two sets without excluding particular objects we would like to include or including particular objects we would like to exclude. Such a determination will at least be sufficient for setting up a science and getting research going that might gradually provide a better understanding of how the defining criteria are related and which ones are more fundamental—that is, not only necessary for determining the extension of a concept but also essential for understanding the nature of the defined phenomena. Therefore, a general conceptual determination, and in turn a general science of the area defined, is in principle not endangered by abstracting from interesting topics and special features possessed by some of the concrete objects within the defined area. With regard to image science, one can now venture the following thesis:

Thesis 4: Within image science we should distinguish a systematic general branch and a historical branch. The latter is primarily concerned with the functions and contexts of concrete images or sets of images.

It is sometimes assumed that the image does not exist, but only images, and that this might then serve as an argument against a general science of images. I would certainly agree that we find in the world only very different images and image uses, just as we find only very different humans and not the human. But it does not follow from this kind of nominalism that one cannot define a set of phenomena and that one then does not have, in doing so, a concept of this set—for example, the concept *image* or the concept *human*. In fact, I would claim that everybody who has once experienced images has also a more or less vague concept of the image, just as everybody has a concept of the human. The problem is not that one cannot say what the image is: it is simply, in Plato's words, the idea of image, or, in a more modern terminology, the concept of image. The problem is that that we have several proposals that seem to be in conflict with each other. But this is not really a devastating problem, as all sciences have managed to overcome such conflicts. One strategy is to limit the scope of the theories the conflicting concepts have shaped. Another strategy is to unify different proposals. Further strategies might be learned by a closer look at the history of science. However, as Kuhn has pointed out, it is not likely that changes on the theoretical level will happen gradually; rather, they will occur as a kind of gestalt switch that a future generation of image researchers will take for granted.

According to these four theses, the systematic reason for not being able to enumerate and classify theories of images is the fact that we have not sufficiently

tried to create a general science of images. Doing so would allow us to distinguish two levels of research: a more general level concerning the basic functions and structural properties of images, and a more concrete level concerning the specific uses of images and their meanings within a specific context, society, and social interaction. The latter provides us with an immense variety of examples of what can be done with images and which features are important given a concrete setting of use. The former should enable us to develop an overall perspective that is capable of relating the different small-scale theories together. I am convinced that research on images in this general sense will in the near future provide us with a rather small set of functions and structural properties of images that can then serve as foundation for a general science of images. Certainly it will have to be revised and will change its appearance several times, but this is just the way sciences develop over time.

In concluding my very sketchy remarks, I would like to formulate a further thesis concerning the shape of such a general science of images.

Thesis 5: There are various features of images and uses of images that are not controversial. A general science of images can easily be developed if a reasonable amount of research is done on relating these features systematically.

Finally, I would like to mention two features:

1. *Antiesentialism*: There is no intrinsic property that turns an object into an image. It is a specific use of objects, in particular a specific way to perceive objects, that creates images. (Stars and their relations, for example have, become images by being perceiving in a particular way). There might be conflict on how that perceptual capacity has developed and how it functions in particular, but I find it very hard to imagine how one can deny the perceptual basis of images in principle.

2. *Representationalism*: One of the most prominent features of externally manifest images is their capacity to provoke the imagining of absent objects by visual sensory stimulation. One might claim that using physical objects in this way as external representations is not the only feature of images, and one might find other uses more fundamental, such as in nonrepresentational art, but here as well I find it very hard to imagine how one can deny the representational function of images in principle.

## AN IMAGE IS AN IMAGE IS AN IMAGE (THREE STAGES)

*José Luis Brea*

An image is an image, and hardly anything. The gossamer echo of the passage of an energy that has given itself light—birth—before becoming matter; that has become thought without crystallizing—even for a moment—as sign; that has become *social intensity* having hardly rubbed that which is real of the *constructed world*, and without having been taken as biased object of memory or archive by the powers that manage and administer that constructed world.

One never knows where they, the images, would dwell more comfortably. Perhaps in the bounces of light between things, between beings of the world; perhaps floating in the *mists* of nothingness, reverberating against the remaining hardnesses of blindness. Perhaps best in the projections—like flashes of desire—produced for *humankind* by the yearning of being, of being there, in thought's nourishing obscurity. It could also be, who knows, in the heraldry and the emblems once raised among people, with or against one another—interfaces for the recognition of the common (homologues and/but different), belonging to the same but unequal shared aspiring destiny; or maybe exploded chips of a community's force, in *Diaspora's flight* like proper stars in the eternal and motionless time of the universe.

An image is always that which is not *anymore*, which might have never become, and the mild memory that *this not having already become . . .* leaves, like a shooting star. Image as a volatilized memory of a [non]light that hasn't, and could never, become *inertia*, crystallized memory, *dead energy . . .*

### FIRST STAGE: IMAGES OF THINGS

That odd Borgesian paradise of an echo of everything in everything, like a dark *aleph*, like a Leibnizian monad with thousand windows—yet all blind. Each thing or corner, each intensive point, the result of pure acquaintance with the surrounding or confronting points, with all the others at which it looks and which it “perceives,” noticing them. It may be that what really exists in the world is mostly this summarily pondered light, these bounced lights, a prop of infinite mirrors. It all reverses to light, all being noticed through it, each object to one another. Even when a single point lacks “consciousness of consciousness,” at any point there are receptors noticing it. Light bears witness to this being of all the objects, as if “all” (tree, lamp, street, sky) could see “all” (perhaps a car, building, table, glasses). Yet I don't know whether this “seeing,” this pure and mere bounce of light of *each object off each object* (a thick warp and weft where an infinite cross-linkage gets

woven into) constitutes *image*—the algorithm we can calculate and estimate (an *ordinal* number with a certain defined amount of *form*, discreet blows of light) or rather an imponderable cataclysm, be it pre- or post-*Gracianian*.<sup>1</sup>

It sure has something of it—of pure chaos—of a summation that imagined as totality can only be intuited as blackness, invisible sum. And once there it fails to organize: everything has and has not one size and its opposite; it all happens and does not happen simultaneously and everywhere; pure virtuality—without an interposed antenna (tiny hole) filtering into the (*mechanical or organic*) eye, such a chaos of beams would be an image of nothing: the whole world would be a projection, in turmoil and chaos, of all the images which all objects (which all things) throw in one another's faces . . .

Oh chaotic universe! Oh magnificent turbulence, exploded, as a maelstrom with no center (or with hundreds of them scattered around the edges of its own funnel); a periphery constantly moving away and yet always falling down; black hole into which that same beam of lights falls due to excessive radiation; luminosity infinitely cross-linked; more echo and more presence than any sight, any glance, could bear! No! Let us not try to imagine how things would see things, what kind of pure images they would be for themselves!

No! They need us—perhaps we need to think that they need us—or accept us in order to momentarily become *images*; they need our clumsiness, our greater slowness, our clumsy and limited being “situated,” in crystallized eye, diminished, in a place. Only like in *animal eyes* (in locations, cornered to the back or to the other side of those *micro-holes* which produce focus, *ocellus*, which make the *screen*) can we *imagine* that murky *vegetalia*, that magmatic being of everything as an aquatic garden of the world images, of everything, *of things* . . .

#### SECOND: ON MENTAL IMAGES

For our concern here, however, *seeing* is always and under any circumstance of the same nature as the active vibration caused by a bounced *impression* (like the drum skin) in the retina which, ghost in the machine, we call *image*.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps such an impression like the one that (child's play) causes the careless rubbing of eyes—lights flowing from the inside out penetrating through the *tunnel-like path* of the blackness which divides the invisible depth from the out of necessity invisible-to-itself (dark, unknown) body, towards that exterior in which the *inhabitant* is notwithstanding not there. Here all appearance of images is *production*: a game indeed (child's play) of *interiorities* wanting to break through; perhaps the exteriorizing flow promoted by a large *generator synthesizer*.

Here images are due just to themselves, they only know themselves; given to secret games, clandestine, where nothing is given to us for scrutinization.

1. Baltasar Gracián (1601–1658), Spanish Baroque writer, first admired and later criticized by Borges; his style is known as “conceptism,” characterized by ellipsis and the concentration of a maximum of significance in a minimum of

form, an approach referred to in Spanish as *agudeza* (wit).

2. The word in Spanish for “ghost is *fantasma*, the same as the Greek term for “image,” *phantasma*. [—Trans.]

We know that all that there occurs has to do *with desire*, and hardly with ideas or representation. No, there is nothing *real* in images when we talk about their dark inner life, *mental*, the foggy field of the pure active unconscious. Nor does anything in them have to do with meaning or concept—their movement is like that of an abstract *machine-graphy*:<sup>3</sup> intensive, calculating the innumerable and almost random blows with which, maybe prodigiously, it constantly reestablishes itself, unbalances itself. To sum up: a permanent compromise of the organic which is capable of knowing (without knowing) itself; that in each unbalanced state—in which it afflicts every system's time unit following the previous one—seeks to recover its balance, telling itself “*this I am*.”

Thus, it is there clearly about the *affect* and sprain caused by *being*, about how can one only *become the one that one is* by abandoning every single time *the one that one has never been*. Here it is all passion and desire's outbid economy, potential of limitless joy; a constant overflow unaware of stations, stops, or any other stilling but the immeasurable of the balance won to dream or ecstasy; moment of a barely presaged *little death* which is quickly and once more followed by an implacable weave of lust and deviations, of loves and complete losses; the action of this architrave trying all the connections, putting into play all the mixes, trimming, combining all over, always pasting and fusing, promiscuous, in all directions, not allowing itself rest. It is with all of this—with this feverish vigor of the being that does not remain still but constantly pounces onto the likely abysses which outline it as *other than what one is*—that the image has *something to do*, something to fight over, something *within range*, not with thought or reality, or with the idea or representation, but with desire, with the *ghost*, with the irruption of what is not (yet *would like* to be) in what it is.<sup>4</sup>

What a tremendous mistake thus having thought the *image* as the world *mirror*! No, they do not live there, but inside the agencies *managing invention*, inside *poiesis*, a pure anthropology of what *there is not*, what there wasn't—there are only images for men, and that's so due to their not conforming with being, with a being which they'd been had they done it. No, images serve no thing but desire's subtle work and striven production; *factures* of matter's murkiest dream, that of *not being nothingness*; decantations of a pure fantasy; always *productive*. There governs, evaded, the order of *mathema*, but only inasmuch as he slips implicit and uncontained to that one-point-larger complexity of *phantasma*'s blurred logic since, indeed, everything can be in his domain—all is liable to be *loved*.<sup>5</sup> In their rebound: never mere reflection but capture and production; interleave; interference; *work of an enhanced reality*, produced; an economy of *drive* operating just as those *new cameras* that simultaneously *receive* and generate *projection*. These respond to the constant desire of invading the world, of filling it with what was lacking, of transporting it to the order of what is loved—what is dreamed. The images, more will than representation; as heralds and wit-

3. *Maquinografía*, in the original, is a made-up word referring to Derrida's concept of the machine, as exposed in an essay from 1998, “Typewriter Ribbon.” [—Trans.]

4. Something to do: in Spanish *algo que ver*, literally “something to see.” [—Trans.]

5. *Mathema*: Jacques Lacan, *Encore, Le Séminaire 20* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

nesses of our being boringly uncomfortable in the world, tedium, tedium within nothingness—always demanding more. Always *wanting*, always wanting more . . . they, pure force—*no one knows the powers of an image*—only for us humans, *all too* humans . . .

Hence there can be no other study of visuality than *anthropology*, and no other anthropology than phantasmagoric, no other phantasmagoria than *analytic drive of desire's machines* . . . every *iconology* would always be (or nothing at all) an analytic (a geometry of planes and forces) of *love*, of the impossible difficulty and the invincible yearning . . . of becoming *subject*.

#### THIRD STAGE: ON IMAGES AS INTERFACES OF THE COLLECTIVE

And yet here (where the *we* is) all is agreed upon, all is socialized, all is *domesticated*. It is there: where the confrontation with the sheer power of desire has inflicted images with a painful commission—baring the *in-facture-ability* of a self, of its wanting to be where *an other* hardly was; where a whole *kinematic of capitulation* condemns to a diminished destiny—less life, less strength of thought, less power of joy, less intensity of existence, an impoverishment of the forms of experience that consecrates with its inability the mediocre form of *real* life, of the life we live. *Logic of the spectacle* or filth from that agreement in the factory of the *formations of the imaginary* could be the names of this usurious conspiracy by which images end up serving that which expropriates us from what we should never consent to lose. No! Here even the image is made accomplice of that *sick confinement* which negotiates and displaces the total of the *psycho-bio-social* energies serving the all-embracing form of *logos*, of representation, of *capital*—all those of the endless power of desire of its regulation by the condensed and fraudulent logic of commodity!

And it is precisely this what is *urgently* at stake here: the development of a *counteremployment of images* that returns them to their own power, right to where they arose as perturbing war songs *against representation*; hymn to a dark and shaken poetic that just now could draw its giving into the unfolding form and regime taken in its extreme materiality; weapons of an implacable policy which mobilizes and frees its power to *resist* any whatsoever pretensions of stability of the economies of meaning, something which unties and verifies once again and each time its extreme and *mad power*. Decanted in front of those dominant economies, images are not—nor should they consent to be—at all: *memory*; stillness or sign; condensation of *meaning* of the sheer powers that weave intensities; but lubricious mobility through the ambushed ladders of the free, untamed difference. Never tools for refinement, for homologation, for accreditation—but of breakage. Forces which—just as tectonic movements in the igneous depth where its stammering muteness hardly *says* something, *thinks* something, or *knows* something—attract and project chained razing fractal disorders over the dead and anodyne surface of the agreed, asleep, domesticated Imaginaries.

No, it's not little what is here at stake! On the one hand: the politics of a pending *Grammatology*—the biggest bet on an *ontology of the event*; to which all thought is (or *returns to be*) erratic slip, sheer flow, and all image is thus a mere *time-image*, an active *antimemory*, an implacable countersign, a sheer differing, and even more, a sheer *differing from itself*—plowed in event's own path. And on the other, and at the same time: a *politics of collectivities*, of *subject formation*, right where they refract and resist any whatsoever lugubrious *promises of identity*—hallucinated projections of retina's volatile persistence of the seen, of the imagined—to nonetheless prepare and activate themselves only as tracing tensions of an *awry ecology* of the *becoming-subjects*; *multiplicities*; there where *community's power* tells nothing but the agonistic framework of alterities, the thick ambush of the guerrilla and mutuality of the *free differences*.

And of course this does indeed mean to take sides—with the domain of images. Doing it precisely against that *tameness* which hijacks their *intrusive* potential (unreachable and rebel) from them and thus takes them captive one more time to the service of the instituted *Imaginary formation*. Against that, perhaps the pertinacious insistence that they oppose to legibility and to any sort of calculated regulation. Rather run the risk of blankness: of not being anything and not saying anything, except (and this isn't a small thing!) in their firm negation of the idea of being just a little, of becoming murky accomplices of the most unacceptably diminished being, of decayed life, of the poverty of experience that forges and crystallizes life's worlds as a triumphant foolishness's conspiracy against any aspiration to be something more—even if it is just a little more.

An image is an image is an image—perhaps that *something more*—and hardly anything.

[TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY EDUARDO VIVANCO ANTOLIN]



## AFTERWORD

### Configurations of the Image

*Wolfram Pichler*

Da die Welt, durch Würfelaugen gesehen, gewürfelt erscheint, als alles, “was der Fall ist,” werde ich die Ergebnisse permutieren und alle möglichen Verbände, ohne weitere Auswahl, notieren. Der Wald wird nach und nach eine augenlose Wand identischer Elemente, und mein weiteres Vorgehen darin ist vom Ohr geführt, das mir die Gefilde erschließt, dessen, wie durch Ösen, was nicht der Fall ist.

[Because, when seen through the black eyes of dice, the world appears a die already cast, or everything “that is the case,” I will permute the results and make note of all possible groupings without any additional acts of choice. Gradually, the forest becomes an eyeless wall of identical elements; my further progress within it is led by listening, which brings me to open fields, as through the ear’s own loopholes, of what is not the case.]

—OSWALD EGGER

A book in which allusions are made to so many theories of the image makes a person want, in closing, to examine at least one of them more closely.<sup>1</sup> I have chosen the theory sketched out by Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Why? First, because it is relatively compact and clearly articulated, and in some respects rather extraordinary. Even just the attempt to elucidate the most striking features of this theory through comparison with other theories of the image can be instructive: one’s attention is thus drawn to problems of more than merely local interest, which are likely to continue to provide material for considerations of the image in a systematic as well as historical respect. Second, an analysis of Wittgenstein’s theory offers the welcome opportunity to return to some exciting points discussed in the Seminars, for example, the question of the relationship between image and negation. Third, we will be reminded of how appealing it can be to talk about images with a certain logical rigor: that which in images opposes or evades logic thus becomes all the more obtrusive, even if it is not explicitly named. Fourth, it is to the credit of Wittgenstein’s theory that it will inevitably provoke contradictions and in this way will keep thought moving.

1. My thanks go to Jim Elkins and Maja Naef for the invitation to write this afterword, to Elizabeth Tucker for her brilliant translation, and, last but not least, to Teja Bach, Steffen Bogen, Franz Josef Czernin, Whitney Davis, Frank Fehrenbach, Matthias Flatscher, Elisabeth Fritz, Richard Heinrich, Catharina Kahane, Markus Klammer, Esther Ramharter, Gudrun Swoboda,

and Ralph Ubl for their help, suggestions, and critique. The shortcomings of the text are my own responsibility. Figures 1 and 2 are adapted, by Jim Elkins, from Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus, Tagebücher, Philosophische Untersuchungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), 64 and 119, respectively.

## I

Wittgenstein—the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, which is the subject of this discussion—viewed images as configurations of elements.<sup>2</sup> He posited that each element of an image functions as the proxy (*Stellvertreter*) of an object. As a configuration of elements, the image represents a particular configuration of particular objects—namely, those objects for which the image's elements serve as proxies. In early Wittgenstein, configurations of elements or objects are called “states of affairs.” For him, images are actually existing states of affairs, which represent or model other states of affairs. Since Wittgenstein also refers to actually existing states of affairs as “facts,” then, in the terminology of the *Tractatus*, images can be counted as facts.<sup>3</sup> As opposed to images themselves, the states of affairs they represent do not have to be facts. According to the theory, it must be possible for there to be images that represent states of affairs that *do not* actually exist. Wittgenstein calls these images “false,” the others “true.” An image cannot guarantee its own truth, but can attest that the state of affairs it represents *could possibly* be a fact. No image is necessarily true, but there is also no image that is necessarily false. Whatever can be depicted can always be treated as a potential fact. Wittgenstein postulates that the configurability of the proxies that comprise an image must from the outset agree with the configurability of the objects for which they stand in. The elements of an image must be compatible with one another and must be configurable in exactly as many ways as the objects for which they serve as proxies. In the *Tractatus*, this structural agreement between the elements of an image and the objects for which they stand in (or the basis for this agreement) is termed the “pictorial form” (see 2.17).<sup>4</sup>

For the early Wittgenstein, the category of images also includes propositions. As is well known, the image theory presented in the *Tractatus* is part of a more extensive theory of the proposition; one could even say it is only there for

2. My exposition of Wittgenstein's picture theory has primarily been informed by the following studies: Erik Stenius, *Wittgenstein's "Tractatus": A Critical Exposition of the Main Lines of Thought* (1960; repr., Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996); Wilfrid Sellars, “Naming and Saying,” *Philosophy of Science* 29 (1962): 7–26; Jay F. Rosenberg, “Wittgenstein's Theory of Language as Picture,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 5 (1968): 18–30; Rosenberg, “Wittgenstein's Self-Criticisms or 'Whatever Happened to the Picture Theory?'” *Noûs* 4 (1970): 209–23; Rosenberg, *Linguistic Representation* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1974); Merill B. Hintikka and Jaakko Hintikka, *Investigating Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Richard Heinrich, *Wittgensteins Grenze* (Vienna: Deuticke, 1993); Thomas Ricketts, “Pictures, Logic, and the Limits of Sense in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, edited by Hans Sluga and David G. Stern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 59–99; James Elkins, *The Domain of Images* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 57–67; Gerd Grasshoff,

“Hertz's Philosophy of Nature in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*,” in *Heinrich Hertz: Classical Physicist, Modern Philosopher*, edited by Davis Beard, R. I. G. Hughes, and Alfred Nordmann, *Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 198 (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998), 243–68; Stefan Majetschak, *Ludwig Wittgensteins Denkweg* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Alber, 2000); Dieter Mersch, *Was sich zeigt: Materialität, Präsenz, Ereignis* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2002); Martina Heßler and Dieter Mersch, “Bildlogik oder Was heißt visuelles Denken?,” in *Logik des Bildlichen: Zur Kritik der ikonischen Vernunft*, edited by Martina Heßler and Dieter Mersch (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009), 8–62. I shall provide further references in the following.

3. How Wittgenstein's terms “state of affairs” (*Sachverhalt*) and “fact” (*Tatsache*) should be interpreted is subject to debate. Here I am following Stenius's interpretation.

4. Unless otherwise noted, all citations from the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* are taken from the translation by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1974).

the proposition's sake. Wittgenstein was convinced that propositions are images and thus (like all images) consist of elements that stand in for other objects. He called these elements of a proposition "names." In its simplest, most elementary form, the proposition as Wittgenstein understands it is a configuration or concatenation of names: it is not a "blend of words" (3.141), but an articulated figure that represents a specific state of affairs. "One name stands for one thing, another for another thing, and they are combined with one another. In this way the whole group—like a *tableau vivant*—presents a state of affairs" (4.0311). If this state of affairs exists in reality, thus if the objects represented by the names are related to one another in reality as is shown in the proposition, then the proposition is true; otherwise it is false.

In the *Tractatus*, the proposition in its simplest, most elementary form—as a configuration of names—is called an "elementary proposition." The sense of any possible proposition is drawn from the sense of elementary propositions. Any proposition, as complex as it may be, will differentiate itself from other propositions in the way that its sense depends upon the sense of certain elementary propositions. For Wittgenstein, determining the sense of a complex proposition means demonstrating its relationships to elementary propositions. This can be done through indicating logical operations by means of which the proposition in question can be derived from elementary propositions. Wittgenstein posits that only two logical operations, negation and conjunction, are required to analyze the relationships of all possible propositions to the elementary propositions. If all elementary propositions are given, then (according to Wittgenstein) the systematic application of negations and conjunctions is sufficient to generate all possible propositions—including those that do not represent states of affairs, because they either contradict or else tautologically confirm themselves. In any case, Wittgenstein was convinced that the world can be completely described by means of elementary propositions, configurations of names.

But what does it mean to conceive of the proposition as a configuration of names? It means, for example, that in a proposition there are only symbolic proxies for nameable *things*, that is, for what Wittgenstein terms "objects." Relationships between the named things are represented in an entirely different manner—that is, in the particular way the names are configured in the proposition.<sup>5</sup> In a much-discussed passage in Wittgenstein's treatise, this is formulated as follows: "Instead of 'The complex sign *aRb* says that *a* stands to *b* in the relation *R*,' we ought to put '*That a* stands to *b* in a certain relation says that *aRb*'" (3.1432). In this example, the letters "a" and "b" function as names, and the syntagma "aRb" functions as a proposition. The proposition represents a particular state of affairs: it is being asserted that a particular relation *R* exists between the objects designated by the names "a" and "b." Among other objectives, Wittgenstein wants to call attention to how the proposition, just like the state of

5. Here I am following the interpretation developed by Sellars, "Naming and Saying," Rosenberg, "Wittgenstein's Theory," and Rosenberg, "Wittgenstein's Self-Criticisms."

For another view on this matter, see Stenius, *Wittgenstein's "Tractatus,"* 120–26, or chap. 2 in Hintikka and Hintikka, *Investigating Wittgenstein*.

affairs it represents, consists of only two elements. Accordingly, the letter “R” is not a free-standing symbol, but only a graphical aid, a marker intended to give a particular character to the relationship between a and b in the inscribed proposition, to form this relationship in a certain way. To illustrate, the proposition “aRb” is a different fact from the proposition “aSb.” Here, the names “a” and “b” are related to one another differently in the first case than in the second, since in the first case they are separated (or joined) by an “R,” and in the second, by an “S.” The two propositions deal with the same objects, but represent different states of affairs. But how can one know what these states of affairs are? Wittgenstein offers no clear answer.<sup>6</sup> He simply stresses that there must be a “law of projection” (4.0141) that allows propositions to be related univocally to states of affairs, and he adds that one can understand propositions without their sense being explained (4.021). When one has recognized the names and knows what they stand for, it is sufficient to observe how they are configured in the proposition in order to grasp the proposition’s sense. As vague as this disclosure remains, one can nonetheless grasp his intention to avoid a reification of relations: expressions of relation such as “R” in the proposition “aRb” are not to be analyzed as designations or names of relations, but as means for producing on paper particular relations between names (and thus between the elements of an image), which are distinct from other possible relations between these names. One could also replace these expressions of relation with different spatial arrangements of “a” and “b.” The basic idea is that which on the level of content is a relation should not on the level of expression be represented by a name—in a similar way to how, in standard musical notation, chords are not represented by chord symbols, but by the way particular notes are placed in relation to each other in the score. One quality of images and diagrams that fascinated the author of the *Tractatus* was their capacity to represent relations between things through relations between marks—instead of through signs in the manner of linguistic substantives, which can tempt one to confuse relations and things.<sup>7</sup>

## II

In the following, an attempt will be made to elaborate more clearly basic features of the image theory presented in the *Tractatus*, and to discuss these in the larger frame of image theory. Unlike Francesco Peri, I do not think the attempt to

6. One possible reason for this is that he saw the examination of the pictorial relationship (*abbildende Beziehung*) as the task of psychology and not of philosophy. See Erich Ammereller, “Die abbildende Beziehung: Zum Problem der Intentionalität im *Tractatus*,” in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, edited by Wilhelm Vossenkuhl (Berlin: Akademie, 2001), 111–39.

7. The *Tractatus* makes no mention of how qualities (monadic predicates) are represented. It could be that at the time Wittgenstein held the view that qualities are secondary as compared with relationships: a particular object’s

having this or that quality is the product of the specific relationships it holds to other objects. If this was in fact Wittgenstein’s view, there would be a clear parallel between the concept of the object in the *Tractatus* and the role “material points” play in Heinrich Hertz’s mechanics. See Grasshoff, “Hertz’s Philosophy,” 260. Other interpreters have considered what it could mean for a logical notion to be pictorial also with respect to the notation of monadic predicates. See Sellars, “Naming and Saying,” Rosenberg, “Wittgenstein’s Theory,” and Rosenberg, “Wittgenstein’s Self-Criticisms.”

make a systematic comparison of theories necessarily leads to a sterile metatheoretical realm of reflection (see Peri's Assessment). Rather, I am convinced that such comparisons (as are carried out in the Seminars at James Elkins's instigation) can be heuristically valuable. Sometimes, major conceptual efforts are indeed required in order to make different theories comparable—or what's more, classifiable—in the first place. The platform upon which certain juxtapositions can be carried out first has to be constructed. In this way it can happen that new questions emerge or that common theoretical concepts or problems show previously unnoticed facets, the contemplation of which brings pleasure and perhaps leads to new insights.

In considering Wittgenstein's theory, five topic areas will be subject to scrutiny, some of which are closely connected to certain discussion points of the Seminars: (1) "we make pictures of facts for ourselves," (2) elements of the image, (3) the image as an image *of* something, (3a) aspect and representation, (4) proposition, image, diagram, (4a) negation of the image—images of negation, (5) saying and showing. These seven headings designate problems of various complexity and difficulty; for this reason, my commentaries are of varying length and variable charm. Overall, I will keep my remarks as brief as possible.

1. "We make pictures of facts for ourselves" (2.1).<sup>8</sup> This proposition, like an initial postulate, introduces the image-theoretical deliberations of the *Tractatus*. It does not imply that all images represent facts and thus are true. Rather, the intention is to suggest that in every image, and thus also every sense-making proposition no matter whether true or false, a relation to truth is always inherent. Since there is no *a priori* guarantee that the state of affairs represented by an image or proposition actually exists, this primary relation to truth can only be hypothetical. Hence, at a later point in the treatise can be read "A proposition *shows* how things stand if it is true" (4.022). This is the case for every image: it shows how things stand if it is true. Every image can in principle be true or false. But truth is not exalted over images, since differentiating between true and false only becomes possible through images.<sup>9</sup>

Among readers who are not automatically willing to go along with the abstractions of formal logic, this conception of the image will immediately provoke an array of questions and objections. I will name only a few obvious examples: The pictures we make for ourselves are, as one could argue, not only and not even primarily "pictures of facts." They include dreams, fantasies, and fictions. They also include pictures of God or gods, pictures of ourselves and others. Besides, when we make pictures, we make them not only *for ourselves*; we also make them for others, present them to others, perhaps in order to distract or

8. "We picture facts to ourselves" in Pears and McGuinness's translation. Wittgenstein wrote, "Wir machen uns Bilder der Tatsachen." Compare the wording of the notorious prohibition of images in Exodus 20:4: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." But one can also dis-

cern the echo of Hertz: "We form for ourselves images or symbols of external objects." Heinrich Hertz, *The Principles of Mechanics Presented in a New Form* (1894; New York: Dover, 1965), 1.

9. See Fabian Goppelsröder, *Zwischen Sagen und Zeigen: Wittgensteins Weg von der literarischen zur dichtenden Philosophie* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007), 21–22.

deceive these others, or to hide ourselves behind them. And of course we are not the only ones who make pictures. Others also make pictures, including pictures of us, for us. Perhaps we only *believe* that it is *we* who make pictures, while in reality it is the other way around and we are the *products* of pictures, and possibly of pictures others have made (of us). But what sort of things are “we” and these “others”? What are they, apart from being figments of my imagination? And what am I, myself? Could it not be that this “I” has come from a picture, which was not primarily “my” picture, was not even ever a picture of me?<sup>10</sup>

From some of these questions—“I” have presented them in caricatured form, but they are likely familiar to “us” (see the remarks on Lacan in Section 6 of the Seminars)—Wittgenstein’s text seems to be sealed off from the outset. The subject of his proposition signalizes universality. The “we” of the *Tractatus* seems to be an inclusive term, which means “everyone” and which does not single anyone out. Although the text was composed during the First World War, “we” is systematically abstracted from social and political divisions. But what idea should one have of this subject? Who are “we”? Perhaps “we people” is intended. And perhaps “we people” are specifically defined as those who—unlike animals—have the capacity to interpret configurations of elements, according to highly specific rules, as images of states of affairs. Wittgenstein’s proposition could then be read as a basic anthropological definition. However, the proposition doesn’t seem to be an empirical proposition; it cannot be true or false in the customary sense, for it deals with that which grounds the difference between true and false. Ultimately, the “we” of Wittgenstein’s proposition could refer to the “the subject that thinks or entertains ideas” (5.631) of philosophy—the subject that, Wittgenstein is convinced, “does not exist” (ibid.). That is, it is there in a certain way, but it is not a part of the world. “The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world” (5.632). In this respect it is similar to God, who also does not reveal himself “in the world” (6.432). The subject can therefore also not become the object of a science (according to the model of natural science). Wittgenstein’s proposition “We make pictures of facts for ourselves” would thus not be a verifiable anthropological statement, but rather would belong among those propositions the reader of the treatise must recognize as nonsensical and must “transcend” in order to be able to see the world “aright” (see 6.54). (The nonsense ensues from how the word “we” does not serve as proxy for anything and thus cannot be a name.) Inasmuch as the subject who makes pictures for itself is the subject who entertains ideas, this picture making also does not take place in the world, but at its limit. The subject itself cannot be represented by any of the pictures. It cannot be depicted any more than God can, since neither the subject nor God is an object or state of affairs. And as for deception, lies, feints, pretense, and the like, they either fall outside the reach of the theory, or else are resolved in pictures that are very simply “false.”

Perhaps some of the most important reasons have thus been suggested for why, to many readers of the book *What Is an Image?*, the image theory presented

10. See Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the ‘I’ as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” in *Écrits: A Selection*,

translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 1–7.

in the *Tractatus* may seem unattractive or even irrelevant. Their dissatisfaction has to do with the meaning Wittgenstein gave (or didn't give) to the expressions "we," "true," and "false"—expressions with which his image theory is inextricably intertwined. Since Aristotle, philosophers and psychologists have repeatedly come back to the observation that "image has to do with community, with relations to others" (Lichtenstein in Sections 3 of the Seminars), or that images could even "promote a healthy community and culture" (see Si Han's remark on Zhang Yanyuan in Section 5 of the Seminars). In the early Wittgenstein, this aspect is not present.

However, it will be shown that his theory is more multilayered and complex than it may at first appear; and that from it, one can learn about the character of other theories that, to many of "us," seem much less remote.

2. The idea that images are built of elements is obviously a central component of the theory developed in the *Tractatus*. In general, it represents an important, if disputed factor in the consideration of images (see Elkins's introduction to Section 9 of the Seminars). Following a reference of the later Wittgenstein,<sup>11</sup> one could in this context think of Plato: for instance, there is the curious interweaving of language philosophy and image theory to be found in the *Cratylus*.<sup>12</sup> Plato has Socrates speak of a systematic classification of things on the one hand, and of sounds on the other hand; and he has him contemplate the possibility of a motivated correlation of the things and sounds thus analyzed. In order to illustrate these thoughts, the philosopher cites the example of painting: as paintings are produced through the selection and combination of colors, speech is generated from the selection and combination of sounds. And as the painter selects and mixes his colors in correspondence with the things that he would like to represent, the structure of speech can also correspond with the structure of the things spoken about—whereby it is also stated, conversely, that paintings, like speech, are composed of elements, specifically, colors.<sup>13</sup> As if it were Plato's intention to tame the mottled, variegated art of painting, he declares it to be the model of a particular form of mimesis, oriented according to the paradigms of writing and the portrait. "The twofold paradigm of writing and the portrait—the portrait as writing and writing as a portrait—restores the homogeneity among the various elements of a picture in favor of mimesis. By defining color as a sign, the sign as an image, the image as an inscription, the inscription as a portrait, Plato achieves the incredible feat of defining color as drawing."<sup>14</sup> As forced as this rationalizing appropriation of painting seems, it was not without emulators.<sup>15</sup> A similar concept of mimesis would also be crucial to the Renaissance's first treatise on painting,

11. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, revised fourth edition, edited by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), § 46.

12. Wittgenstein himself quotes from the *Theaetetus*.

13. *Cratylus* 424–25.

14. Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color: Rhetoric and Painting in the French Clas-*

*sical Age*, translated by Emily McVarish (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 51.

15. On the importance of Plato's philosophy of language in and for the construction of perspectival images in fifteenth-century Florence, see Friedrich Teja Bach, "Filippo Brunelleschi and the Fat Woodcarvers: The Anthropological Experiment of Perspective and the Paradigm of the Picture as Inlay," *Res* 51 (2007): 157–74.

Leon Battista Alberti's *De pictura*.<sup>16</sup> Alberti thought of paintings as configurations or "compositions" of elements. For him, the most important of these elements were circumscribed planes, from which complex works are built in a process with multiple stages. He drew upon models from rhetoric, geometry, and optics (Quintilian, Cicero, Euclid) and formulated exact rules for the construction of such compositions. As is well known, he specified a "procedure of projection" (as Wittgenstein would have called it) that not only enables the production of illusionistic paintings, but moreover may also clarify how the elements of a painting are related to the particular state of affairs (again in Wittgenstein's terms) being represented.<sup>17</sup>

Though it is unusual to consider the image theory of the *Tractatus* against this background, it is not arbitrary. The early Wittgenstein can by all means be considered a resident of the language-philosophical and poetological continent known as "Cratylia,"<sup>18</sup> even if the correlation of elements of a proposition (image) on one hand and elementary objects on the other does not function according to the scheme sketched out by Plato—a scheme based on resemblance.<sup>19</sup> The type of agreement Wittgenstein postulates between the elements of an image and the objects for which they stand in only becomes visible when one considers the single element with regard to its combinability with other elements. The elements do not resemble the objects they designate, but their configurability into images or propositions corresponds exactly to the configurability of the respective objects into states of affairs.

A comparison of Wittgenstein's image theory with Alberti's concept of painting can also be illuminating. Unlike Alberti, who explains and theoretically grounds a particular type of perspective construction, Wittgenstein leaves undefined what type of projective relationship it is that exists between the elements of an image and the elements of the represented state of affairs. He claims that propositions and states of affairs are related to each other through a "law of projection" (4.0141), without specifying that law or explaining how it is to be found. Another difference is also striking: for Alberti's primary pictorial elements—circumscribed planes—it is the case that with every change of their form, no matter how minute, the represented state of affairs will also change. It could be expressed this way: every change makes a pictorial element into a different pictorial element, which then in turn represents something different (for instance, a larger or smaller eyebrow, one that is arched in this or that particular way). As Goodman would say, paintings in Alberti's sense participate in a syntac-

16. See Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, translated by Cecil Grayson, with an introduction by Martin Kemp (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979). For an excellent recent study of Alberti's theory of painting, see Hans H. Aurenhammer, "Studien zur Theorie der *historia* in Leon Battista Albertis *De pictura*: Themen, Begriff, Funktionen" (*Habilitationsschrift*, Vienna University, 2004).

17. Similarly constructed image theories are being developed today in the field of perception

psychology. See John Willats, *Art and Representation: New Principles in the Analysis of Pictures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

18. See Gérard Genette, *Mimologics: Mimologiques: Voyage en Cratylie*, translated by Thaís E. Morgan, with a foreword by Gerald Prince (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994). Genette himself doesn't refer to Wittgenstein in that book.

19. Again, see *Cratylus* 424–25.

tically dense system of representation.<sup>20</sup> Wittgenstein, on the other hand, accepts logical symbols as pictorial elements, and among these symbols it is possible to differentiate between type and token.<sup>21</sup> For example, in the propositions “fa” and “ga,” there appear two inscriptions, or tokens, of the type “a.” For tokens, it is the case that not every change of their form will have an impact on the represented state of affairs. So at least some of Wittgenstein’s images, as opposed to paintings in Alberti’s sense, are, in Nelson Goodman’s terminology, syntactically discrete. Thus, Wittgenstein’s theory stands in contradiction to Goodman’s influential view that images can be classified as syntactically dense symbol systems. Adherents of this view will refuse (or at least it will be difficult for them) to accept diagrams in the manner of logical notations or musical scores—classic examples of what Wittgenstein termed an “image”—as images.<sup>22</sup>

The idea that images consist of elements, in perhaps its strongest variant, implies that images can be broken down into parts in an exclusive way and that these parts are something primarily given. Both Plato and the author of the *Tractatus* make this assertion. Later, Wittgenstein himself subjected it to a fundamental critique:

But what are the simple constituent parts of which reality is composed?—What are the simple constituent parts of a chair?—The pieces of wood from which it is assembled? Or the molecules, or the atoms?—“Simple” means: not composite. And here the point is: in what sense “composite”? It makes no sense at all to speak absolutely of the “simple parts of a chair.” . . . But isn’t a chessboard, for instance, obviously, and absolutely, composite?—You’re probably thinking of its being composed of 32 white and 32 black squares. But couldn’t we also say, for instance, that it was composed of the colours black and white and the schema of squares? And if there are quite different ways of looking at it, do you still want to say that the chessboard is absolutely “composite”?<sup>23</sup>

If one accepts such objections, the concept of pictorial elements will not automatically be obsolete, but it can no longer be used to designate indivisible first entities. Elements cease to be metaphysical building blocks. Instead, as one possibility, they can be understood as functional units that are fundamentally different from spatial parts and that vary according to the respective analytic viewpoint.<sup>24</sup>

20. See Nelson Goodman, chap. 4 in *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, second edition (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976).

21. On this point and the ensuing difficulties, see Peter Geach, “Saying and Showing in Frege and Wittgenstein,” *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 28 (1976), 54–70, especially 67. The difference between type and token was notoriously introduced by Peirce. See Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers*, edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, vol. 4, *The Simplest*

*Mathematics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 423–24 (CP 4.537).

22. See the critical discussion of this point of view in Elkins, *Domain of Images*, 81.

23. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 47.

24. For a more specific analysis of the notion of “iconic parts,” see Flint Schier, *Deeper into Pictures: An Essay on Pictorial Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 78–88.

But, even following such ontological relativizings, it could be that one is not entirely satisfied with the notion that images are composed of elements. For example, one could remove one's attention from the elements and direct it toward that which separates them (and thus allows them to be related to each other in the first place): between-spaces, gaps, cuts, and the like. Thomas Macho and Jasmin Mersmann argue along these lines when they say with Robert Bresson that film is "what happens in the joins" (see their *Assessment*). Applied to image theory, this could mean that images live more in their between-spaces than in their positively given elements, and that every image theory must ultimately be an "iconology of the between-space" (Warburg).<sup>25</sup> But doesn't something like this also apply to entirely different cultural products, such as texts, pieces of music, and architecture? Wherever there is articulation there seems also to be a play of between-spaces. Why, then, should one think particularly of images and posit an *iconology* of the between-space? Perhaps because we wrongly tend to associate the pictorial with continuity, and therefore repeatedly have to be reminded of the discontinuities that play such a crucial role even in the realm of the image? Or because the between-spaces in images—especially when we are talking about paintings—are particularly unstable and difficult to grasp? Before these and similar questions can be answered, it should first be established what "between-spaces" can be taken to mean. "Without the weaving awareness of disjointness and fusion, there would be less pleasure in seeing; but without the initial and ongoing notion of disjoint and simple lenient sets, there would be no hope of perceiving the painting at all."<sup>26</sup> The appeal of this statement, made by James Elkins, lies not only in how disjointness and fusion are interwoven (one should note that the threads of a fabric are neither disjoint nor fused with one another); its particular density is produced from the way different ideas of disjointness are made to overlap. First, and overtly, Elkins takes up Goodman's distinction between dense and discrete symbol systems and suggests that painting is located neither in the realm of the discrete nor entirely in the realm of the dense, but in an uncertain between-zone in between the two. Second, he also alludes to the fact that the marks from which a painting is constructed often merge into each other or are interwoven in such a way that it cannot be said where one mark ends and the next begins. At issue in the first point is whether the marks can be conceived as tokens of certain types, and in the second, whether they can be distinguished from one another as marks at all. The first question can be related to the difference between image and non-image, and the second to a particular difference between painting and drawing, since in the European tradition, painting tends to cover the ground with a continuous layer of flecks of paint, while drawing is characterized in that individual marks are separated by between-spaces in which the ground lies open to view.<sup>27</sup> That the marks of drawn

25. On Warburg's "iconology of the in-between space," see Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante: Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: Minuit, 2002), 496–505.

26. Elkins, *Domain of Images*, 74.

27. See, for instance, Norman Bryson, "A Walk for a Walk's Sake," in *The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Act: Selected from the Tate Collection*, edited by Catherine de Zegher (London: Tate, 2003), 149–58.

images in this latter sense are disjoint does not, however, affect their pictorial nature according to Goodman's criterion. For drawn images, it rather seems the case that "the separate marks are not taken as separate marks but rather as continuously correlated in a single pattern perceived all at once."<sup>28</sup> There can be no syntactic discreteness where it proves impossible to distinguish individual marks from one another, but wherever marks can be isolated, there is not necessarily a syntactically discrete symbol system. So there are at least two kinds of between-spaces here, one having to do with the syntax, the other with the phenomenology of the image. Will we always be satisfied with this distinction? What if one were not dealing with a single painting or image, but an entire system of paintings or images: a multiple image, whose individual components were at once separated from and connected to each other by cuts or frames? How could the image-theoretical status of these cuts or frames be conceived? (See part III of this essay.)

3. The early Wittgenstein postulates that images represent something different from themselves. This postulate is logically independent from the idea that images are built from elements. However, the first concept, as much as the second, is a controversial point in the image theory debates of the recent past and present (see the Assessments by Aud Sissel Hoel and Antonia Pocock). As is well known, influential thinkers have been convinced that images *do not* necessarily represent something different from themselves. This conviction is not only fundamental for theories of abstract art, it also plays a distinct role in the self-critique of philosophical thinking starting with Nietzsche. According to Heidegger's conception, an image, before it can be a depiction or an archetype of something, is always already a look (*Anblick*):

First of all, image can mean: the look of a determinate being to the extent that it is manifest as something at hand. It offers the look. As derivation of this meaning, image can also mean: the look which takes a likeness of something at hand (likeness), i.e., a look which is the after-image of something no longer at hand or a look which is the premonition of a being [yet] to be produced for the first time. Then, however, "image" can also have the full range of meaning of look in general, in which case whether a being or a non-being will be intuitable in this look is not stated.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, the look proves to be the original phenomenon of the image. The theory of the image is grounded in a theory of the look or the sight. In his Parmenides lecture, Heidegger suggests how this can be understood: "Looking, even human looking, is originally experienced, not the grasping of something but the self-showing in view of which there first becomes possible a looking that grasps

28. Whitney Davis, "Replication and Depiction in Paleolithic Art," *Representations* 19 (Summer 1987): 117.

29. Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 5th ed., translated by Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 65.

something. . . . The look,  $\varthetaέα$ , is not looking as an activity and act of the ‘subject’ but is sight as the emerging of the ‘object’ and its coming to our encounter.”<sup>30</sup> Heidegger detects a glimmer of this original look that precedes the subject in the ideas of Plato: “The ‘countenances’ things take on, their ‘outward look,’ is in Greek  $\varepsilonιδος$  or  $\iotaδέα$ . Being— $\iotaδέα$ —is what in all beings shows itself and what looks out through them, the precise reason man can grasp beings as beings at all.”<sup>31</sup> In a similar way, Heidegger also traces what he considers the “Greek” understanding of theory to the look of being. Ultimately, image and theory prove to be the same.

Wittgenstein’s postulate that images represent something different from themselves, and in this sense are images *of* something, seems—in comparison to Heidegger’s concept of the image—relatively conventional. This postulate only becomes interesting through the special way Wittgenstein subjects it to a detailed interpretation. As previously stated, he posits that images can represent states of affairs that do not exist. Hence, he cannot conceive of images as imitations of pre-given facts, but instead as models of possible states of affairs. In fact, he calls the image not an imitation but a “model of reality” (2.12).<sup>32</sup> What’s more, it should be noted that the images under discussion in the *Tractatus* do not by any means need to resemble the states of affairs they represent. For the early Wittgenstein, resemblance in the sense of recognizability is not a necessary condition for something to be an image. For him, it is sufficient that by means of an image’s elements, all states of affairs can be represented into which the objects they stand for are capable of entering, and that there is a law of translation according to which particular constellations of objects can be derived from the particular constellations of image elements that stand for them: “There is a general rule by means of which the musician can obtain the symphony from the score, and which makes it possible to derive the symphony from the groove on the gramophone record, and, using the first rule, to derive the score again. That is what constitutes the inner similarity between these things which seem to be constructed in such entirely different ways. And that rule is the law of projection which projects the symphony into the language of musical notation. It is the rule for translating this language into the language of gramophone records” (4.0141).<sup>33</sup>

A further, and crucial, characteristic of Wittgenstein’s theory consists in the fact that the image as a “model of reality” results from a minimum of two functions: it comes out of the interplay of proxying and configuration. Every element of the image *serves as proxy* or *stands for* an object that is different from itself

30. Heidegger, *Parmenides*, translated by André Schwur and Richard Rojewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 103.

31. Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 104.

32. On models, see, for instance, *Visuelle Modelle*, edited by Ingeborg Reichle, Steffen Siegel, and Achim Spelten (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2008).

33. However, Wittgenstein fails to provide a satisfactory analysis of the cited systems of

notation, which also include the written proposition. Hardly anyone will be easily convinced that propositions (no matter whether written in hieroglyphs or alphabetic script), musical scores, and lines on gramophone records exhibit a structural commonality that allows the conclusion to be drawn that they are all pictures “in the ordinary sense” (4.011).

(according to the old formula *aliquid stat pro aliquo*). Through the way in which the elements are configured in the image, a state of affairs is represented or modeled. Here, a familiar logical scheme can be glimpsed: just as proxying recalls the logical subject's function of singling out an object, so configuration recalls the function of the logical predicate to specify what is to be stated about this object. In this book, with reference to Peirce, Frederik Stjernfelt's *Assessment* discusses a comparable analysis of representation through images:

It is a very widespread phenomenon that pictures and images are accompanied with indices that indicate which object they refer to. . . . The image and the index taken together constitute a proposition. Peirce would call it a "dicensign," to give a term that is more general than the linguistic proposition. Take, for instance, a portrait painting. Here the painted figure on the canvas constitutes the predicative part of the dicensign. The indexical part pointing out the subject of the dicensign may be a small sign on the frame reading "Louis XIV"; it may also be part of the painted figure itself, indicating the identity of the king with different linguistic, symbolic, indexical, or other means. Like all propositions, this composite sign has an indexical component, making explicit the subject referred to, and a predicative, iconical component, claiming something about the properties of the subject referred to.

Despite the obvious analogy, there are certain difficulties with translating Wittgenstein's concepts "configuration" and "proxying" into Peirce's concepts "icon" and "index." Configurations are indeed possibly diagrams in Peirce's sense, and thus can be assigned to the category "icon." But proxies are not indices. On the other hand, upon closer observation it is striking that Wittgenstein did not uniformly describe the relationship between image elements (names) and objects as one of proxying; occasionally, he described it as a relationship of contiguity—that is, as one of indexing: "The pictorial relationship consists of the correlation of the picture's elements with things" (2.1514); "These correlations are, as it were, the feelers of the picture's elements, with which the picture touches reality" (2.1515). Strictly speaking, the elements of the picture (names) thus take on two functions: they not only *stand in for* objects, they also *point to* them. As proxies, they bring something into view by combining with other elements in a particular way; as indices, they point out that what they bring into view as proxies can be translated according to a certain rule into a (hypothetical) configuration of objects for which the proxies stand in.

In addition, from the way in which Wittgenstein conceives of the relationship between the elements of the image and the objects for which they serve as proxies, or which they index, it follows that there can be no image element or name that stands in for *nothing*. Every image element, every name stands in for exactly one object. The objects represented by proxy will not be immediately

present in the image, but they *must* be present or at hand somewhere, since, for Wittgenstein, their existence is among the conditions of possibility for images and propositions. This always presupposed existence of represented objects is thought of by Wittgenstein (in the usual manner of logic) as a timeless being. The possibility that the objects represented in the image (or proposition) *don't exist anymore*—or that they *don't exist yet*—is not discussed in the *Tractatus*. Essential dimensions of that which one normally terms an “image” are thus not taken into account. Anyone who would like to think about the connection of the image with death and birth will only learn something from the *Tractatus ex negativo*. The same is true for the relationship between the pictorial and fiction. Pictures that represent states of affairs that have never been given or are never given in reality (although the respective objects necessarily exist) are considered by Wittgenstein simply to be “false.” Motivated by logical considerations, his theory has no sense for differences such as that between falsity, illusion, and fictionality.

What if *one* component of Wittgenstein’s concept of the image, either proxying or configuration, falls away? We would have either proxies that do not join together into a fact and thus cannot model a possible state of affairs, or a configuration of elements that is indeed a fact but likewise cannot model a state of affairs because the individual elements do not stand in for or index anything. These two components taken for themselves—from the standpoint of Wittgenstein’s theory they are mere fragments—have nevertheless been able to serve as the kernel for quite different theories of the image. For example, one can attempt to think of the image first of all and predominantly on the basis of the problem of proxying and/or reference, as Hans-Georg Gadamer did. He attempted to situate the image or picture on a theoretical axis defined by signs, which refer, and symbols, which stand in as proxies: “The essence of the picture is situated, as it were, halfway between two extremes: the extremes of representation are *pure indication* (*Verweisung*, also “reference”), which is the essence of the sign, and *pure substitution* (*Vertreten*), which is the essence of the symbol. There is something of both in the picture. Its representing includes indicating what is represented in it.”<sup>34</sup> (Again, it is striking that Wittgenstein’s image elements or names are, in a certain way, both at once: both signs that refer and symbols that stand in.) Another example would be Hans Belting. For Belting, images are proxies in a primary sense—they stand in for human individuals who are no longer here, because they have died. Thus, his view opposes that of Jacqueline Lichtenstein, who asserts, “you can have an image of a cadaver, but you cannot have an image of a nonexisting person” (see Section 2 of the Seminars). For Belting, the “image of a dead person is thus not an anomaly, but is actually the original meaning of what an image is in the first place.”<sup>35</sup> The

34. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, second revised edition, translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2006), 145.

35. Hans Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2001), 144. For an interesting

discussion of Belting’s ideas, see Thomas Mächo, “Körper der Zukunft: Vom Vor- und Nachleben der Bilder,” in *Bilderfragen: Die Bildwissenschaften im Aufbruch*, edited by Hans Belting (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2007), 181–94. On the logic of substitution from an art-historical point

image makes “an absence visible.”<sup>36</sup> The gap torn by death is at once filled and held open. For Belting, mimesis is a secondary phenomenon of the image. The image does not by any means have to resemble the absent one in order to be able to stand in for him or her. By this point, we have certainly come very far from Wittgenstein’s logical concept of representation by proxy. I only want to underscore what is perhaps the most important structural difference: the images and propositions of the *Tractatus* are not in a position to notate radical absence. Every image element shows *eo ipso* the existence of the object for which it stands in. No image can cancel the existence of that which its elements represent. One can also proceed the other way and attempt to think of the image first of all and predominantly on the basis of the problem of configuration. Certainly there are configurations of elements that one normally calls “images” without intending to specify that the elements in question refer to objects outside the image. A prominent example is discussed in the following paragraph.

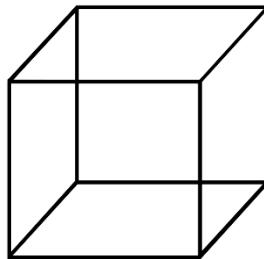
3a. One of the features of Wittgenstein’s image theory that will be met with little understanding beyond the realm of logic is his attempt to consign facts in general—and with them also images in particular—to univocality. In order for it to be decided whether the state of affairs represented by an image actually exists—thus, in Wittgenstein’s sense, in order for the truth or falsity of an image to be decided (and it *must* be possible to make this decision, if all images are either true or false)—the image must model the respective state of affairs in a univocal way. In order for that to be possible, among other factors, two preconditions must be met. First, for each element of the image, it must be clear what object it stands in for, and second, no doubt may arise as to how the elements of the image are related to one another. One can sense the unease that overcame Wittgenstein when faced with phenomena such as the reversible figure known as the “Necker cube.” “To perceive a complex means to perceive that its constituents are related to one another in such and such a way. // This no doubt also explains why there are two possible ways of seeing the figure as a cube; and all similar phenomena. For we really see two different facts” (5.5423).

Evidently, Wittgenstein is attempting to do away with the instability of perception illustrated in this example by no longer accepting as perception everything that is unstable or indeterminate. This seems more like a logical sleight of hand than a solution to the problem. Equally curious in this context is his use of the term “fact.” The situation that one can see “this figure” as a cube in two different ways—or that the cube regards us in two ways, turns toward us two different faces—may be a (psychological) fact. Perhaps one could even manage to call the drawing itself—the lines on the paper and their arrangement—a fact. But the cubes that we see in the drawing? Are they not rather imaginary forms—things that aren’t really there?

of view, see Christopher Wood, *Forgery Replica Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), 36–59, and Alexander Nagel and Christopher

Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

36. Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie*, 153.



This last objection touches on some much-discussed questions of the phenomenology of the image. Insofar as we resist labeling the different aspects of the Necker cube “facts,” we are probably also inclined to say that the seeing of these aspects is no ordinary seeing, but a more complicated act. In other words, we draw upon a highly specific and at the same time very familiar experience of and with images—an experience that consists in our seeing, or imagining we see, markings located *materialiter* upon a two-dimensional surface as components or features of three-dimensional forms. In critical engagement with Ernst Gombrich and with reference to Wittgenstein’s later remarks, Richard Wollheim discussed this experience at length and designated it as “seeing in.” Gombrich was convinced that the viewer of an (illusionistic) painting can always only see one of two aspects, either the flecks of paint that comprise it or the view that the painter simulates. To perceive both at the same time is, in his opinion, as impossible as the simultaneous perception of the two aspects of a reversible figure (such as the Necker cube): we “cannot experience alternative readings at the same time.”<sup>37</sup> Wollheim, on the other hand, maintained that under certain conditions, in a complex, twofold act of perception, it is highly possible to see both at once: both the three-dimensional form as well as the marks applied to a two-dimensional surface, by means of which (or in which) marks the form is seen.<sup>38</sup> To be sure, Wollheim is expressly concerned not with images *tout court*, but with painting as an art, and it would be a grave error to treat image, painting, and art as equivalent. Nevertheless, recalling this debate serves the purpose of marking a point from which certain phenomenologies (and also prehistories) of the image depart and diverge.<sup>39</sup> In addition, we are made aware, at least indirectly, that when

37. See Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), 5.

38. See Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 205–26; Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 46–58; and the discussion in Whitney Davis, chap. 10 in *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

39. See Emmanuel Alloa, “Seeing-As, Seeing-In, Seeing-With: Looking Through Images,” in *Image and Imaging in Philosophy, Science, and the Arts*, Papers of the 33rd International Wittgenstein Symposium, August 8–14, 2010, Kirchberg am Wechsel, edited by Elisabeth Nemeth, Richard Heinrich, and Wolfram Pichler (Kirchberg: ALWS), 14–16; Davis, *Queer Beauty*; Davis, “The Origins of Image Making,” *Current Anthropology* 27, no. 3 (1986): 193–215.

pictorial representation is at issue, very different things can be intended. After all, it is by no means extraordinary—in light of Gombrich’s and Wollheim’s arguments, it is perhaps even quite reasonable—to consider the Necker cube as an image, and to regard the two aspects of the cube as that which this image *represents*. What is represented in this sense approximately corresponds to what, in this book, Sebastian Egenhofer, using Husserl’s term, calls the *noema* (see Egenhofer’s Assessment). Wittgenstein, however, avoids referring to the Necker cube as an “image.” He only refers to it, very indefinitely, as a “figure.” For him, the aspects of the cube were—as we have seen—not objects of iconic representation but perceived facts. According to the theory of the *Tractatus*, each of these facts can itself become an image (or a means of iconic representation). But this presupposes that the elements of each perceived configuration are treated as proxies of particular objects that exist independently from them. Thus, to speak once more with Egenhofer, the presentation of the *noema* must here be connected with an extrapictorial referent—that is, *cum grano salis*, the objects for which the pictorial elements serve as proxies. Only then is it possible for the perceived fact to be interpreted as a representation that shows how things could possibly stand with these objects (and, if the image is true, how things do stand).

Something else becomes clear. If, in the *Tractatus*, images are conceived as facts, then this means, conversely, that that which is not a fact cannot be an image. But lines on a page (to stay with the example of the Necker cube) do not necessarily join together into a fact. Only when it is seen that, as parts of a figure, they are related to one another in a certain way does a configuration appear. Only as a configuration do lines form a fact, and only as a fact can they become an image or model of something. It not only follows that Wittgenstein’s concept of the fact includes entities that others would assign to the realm of the imaginary and would not accept as facts; it also results that images in Wittgenstein’s sense will always be clearly articulated figures. Other theoreticians—Gottfried Boehm, for example—support the opposing view, that images essentially live from the tension between the articulated and the unarticulated, the determinate and the indeterminate.<sup>40</sup> From this standpoint, one could accuse the author of the *Tractatus* of attending only to the *figure* or *configuration* and forgetting the *ground* against which it appears—and thus violently severing the form as it meets the eye from its dormant or repressed alternatives. There is something right about this. But is it right that Wittgenstein *forgot* the ground? Perhaps it would be more correct to say that he wanted to have the ground become a figure—as if he wanted to repeat the “inaugural gesture of our thought,” namely, the Pentateuch’s “bringing the void into figure” (Adrian Rifkin’s Assessment). The *Tractatus* can be interpreted as an attempt to transform the difference between figure and ground into the seemingly closely associated relationship between positive and negative form. The ground, and with it everything indeterminate or unarticulated, is to be exchanged for the precise imprint—the nega-

40. See Gottfried Boehm, “Unbestimmtheit: Zur Logik des Bildes,” in Boehm, *Wie Bilder*

*Sinn erzeugen: Die Macht des Zeigens* (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2007), 199–212.

tive image—of a strongly articulated form (see paragraph 4a below). Philosophy “should establish the boundary of the thinkable, and thus of the unthinkable. / It should bound the unthinkable from within, through the thinkable.”<sup>41</sup> Thus the outer limits of the space (or *cubiculum*) where thinking occurs can be seen as the inner face of the unthinkable.

4. With respect to the much-discussed relationship of word and image, in the theory of the early Wittgenstein there is a surprising convergence of the two entities. In the process, the concept of the image is forced to make some concessions.<sup>42</sup> As we have seen, Wittgenstein posits that images (like all facts) can be broken down into elements in an exclusive way; that for these elements, the distinction between *type* and *token* can be relevant; that one and only one object is assigned to each element; that what the image represents is a state of affairs that could possibly apply to the objects for which the image’s elements stand in and, if the image is true, does also actually apply to them; that the represented state of affairs can be derived by means of a general rule from the configuration of the image’s elements, and so on.

But it is not only the concept of the image that is “tractated,” as James Elkins once put it.<sup>43</sup> The word, too, appears in an unaccustomed light. Wittgenstein does not distinguish between language and writing. More precisely, he thinks of language not in terms of the spoken word, but in terms of graphical inscription. The *Tractatus*—as Hubert Damisch has clearly seen—is not least a treatise on graphic markings, traces, and notations.<sup>44</sup> Thus, it is not just the image that is made to converge with the proposition, but also, conversely, the proposition that is made to converge with the image. If the analysis of pictorial representation as the interaction of proxying and configuration is reminiscent of the old logical scheme of predication (see paragraph 3), then one must also say that Wittgenstein’s concept of configuration proves to be a radical reinterpretation of what is called the “predicate” in the traditional scheme. In Wittgenstein’s interpretation of the proposition, the predicate is given simultaneously with—and inseparably from—the subject: the predicate is not conceived as an independent sign, but as the way in which the names (which correspond to the logical subject) are configured in the proposition. In this respect, too, Wittgenstein’s theory makes language and the image converge.

The so-called image theory of language developed in the *Tractatus* is, one might critically argue, neither a theory of the image nor a theory of language. However, formulated positively, this could also mean that this theory describes an interesting third entity located in between the image and language or, more

41. TLP 4.114 (translation modified). Wittgenstein had written that philosophy “soll die Denkbare abgrenzen und damit das Undenkbare. / Sie soll das Undenkbare von innen durch das Denkbare begrenzen.” In Pears and McGuinness’s translation, philosophy “must set limits to what can be thought; and in doing so, to what cannot be thought. / It must set limits to what cannot be thought by working outwards through what can be thought.”

42. See Elkins, *Domain of Images*, 66: “Any attempt to escape from the word-image opposition by fusing *word* and *image* will involve doing some violence to the vernacular meanings of picture, and that violence might be expressed most powerfully in the *Tractatus*.”

43. Elkins, *Domain of Images*, 57.

44. Hubert Damisch, *Traité du trait—Tractatus tractus* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1995).

specifically, the image and writing. That which is thus implied—the diagram—has recently become the object of a lively transdisciplinary research interest.<sup>45</sup> Since this “diagrammatology,” as Mitchell and others have called it, draws heavily from Charles Sanders Peirce, it seems appropriate to briefly take note of what Wittgenstein and Peirce have and don’t have in common as far as logic is concerned. The above-mentioned affinity between the theory of the image and the proposition in the *Tractatus* on one hand and Peirce’s concept of the dicisign on the other (see, again, paragraph 3) ought not cause us to overlook the important differences in the respective conceptions of logic and the image. Especially in comparison with Peirce, it is striking that the early Wittgenstein’s images and propositions (which may to some extent be neither images nor propositions) display at their core a certain immutability. Wittgenstein’s central interest is the *form* of the image, and he imagines this form as that which all images capable of representing the same state of affairs have in common (with each other and with the represented state of affairs)—that is, he considers this form as *invariant*. The idea was foreign to him that through the transformation of images or propositions, one could generate empirical insights into the states of affairs they represent. When the names of things are given, all possibilities for their configuration are also given. By contrast, Peirce was fascinated by the possibility that, through experimenting with diagrams, one can arrive at new insights into the nature of the things and relationships represented, even into the nature of thinking itself.<sup>46</sup> As Frederik Stjernfelt emphasizes, building on Peirce, experimentation with diagrams potentially leads to results that must not necessarily already have been invested in the diagram’s construction.<sup>47</sup> That the early Wittgenstein has nothing to say about this heuristic value of diagrammatic representation or its role in the constitution of possible objects of experience may, in the context of current image-theoretical discussions, be perceived as a deficiency. Borrowing a felicitous phrase from Aud Sissel Hoel, one could say that the author of the *Tractatus* is depriving the image of its formative powers (Section 1 of the Seminars; see also her Assessment). On the other hand, every reader of the *Tractatus* knows how original the early Wittgenstein already was in the invention of, and experimentation with, notations and diagrams. Thus, one must draw a distinction between what Wittgenstein says about images and what he is able to

45. Goodman, *Languages* remains an important reference here. Recent contributions to diagram theory include Elkins, *Domain of Images*; Steffen Bogen and Felix Thürlemann, “Jenseits der Opposition von Text und Bild: Überlegungen zu einer Theorie des Diagramms und des Diagrammatischen,” in *Die Bildwelt der Diagramme Joachims von Fiore: zur Medialität religiös-politischer Programme im Mittelalter*, edited by Alexander Patschovsky (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje-Canz, 2003), 1–22; *Diagramme und bildtextile Ordnungen*, edited by Birgit Schneider, *Bildwelten des Wissens* 3, no. 1 (Berlin: Akademie, 2005); Fredrik Stjernfelt, *Diagrammatology: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Phenomenology, Ontology, and Semiotics*

(Dordrecht: Springer, 2007); Sybille Krämer, “Operative Bildlichkeit: Von der ‘Grammatologie’ zu einer ‘Diagrammatologie’? Reflexionen über erkennendes ‘Sehen,’” in Heßler and Mersch, *Logik des Bildlichen*, 94–122.

46. On this difference between Peirce’s and Wittgenstein’s approaches, see Jaakko Hintikka, “C. S. Peirce’s ‘First Real Discovery’ and Its Contemporary Relevance,” in *The Relevance of Charles Peirce*, edited by Eugene Freeman (La Salle, IL: Hegeler Institute, 1983), 107–18. An interesting attempt to bring Wittgenstein’s theory closer to Peirce’s can be found in Rosenberg, *Linguistic Representation*.

47. Stjernfelt, *Diagrammatology*, 90, 99, 105.

do with them. Perhaps future diagrammatical examinations will be able to show that Wittgenstein's doing is at times more instructive than his saying.<sup>48</sup>

4a. Proposition and image are made to converge in the *Tractatus* to the greatest possible extent, but they are not made equivalent. Wittgenstein emphasizes at least *one* structural difference. Against the background of the Seminars, it merits particular attention that this difference pertains to the relationship between image and negation. Determining the relationship between image and negation—as Marie-José Mondzain and Jacqueline Lichtenstein pointed out in the discussion—is an old problem in image theory, and has been debated in the fields of theology as well as logic and cognitive theory (see Section 2 of the Seminars). Lichtenstein cites a passage from *Port-Royal Logic*. Arnauld and Nicole assert that thinking is different from imagination. It is “impossible,” they assert, “to imagine a thought or to paint its image on the brain. Neither do affirmation nor negation allow of images. But he who holds that the earth is round and he who holds that it is not round have the same things depicted in their brains—the earth and roundness—but the one adds affirmation, which is an action of his mind accompanied with no material image, and the other adds negation, a contrary action, of which it is still less possible to have an image.”<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, the authors do not reveal why it is “*still less possible*” (my emphasis) to have an image of negation than it is to have one of affirmation. However, it is clear that for them, images cannot be judgments and judgments cannot be images.

The Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* initially gives images more credit. In opposition to an influential tradition reaching back to Aristotle, according to which ultimately only *propositions* can be true or false, Wittgenstein speaks of “true” and “false” *images*.<sup>50</sup> As we have seen, according to him, an image is true if the objects represented by the image's elements relate to one another in reality as is shown in the image, and false if they relate differently. On the other hand, this same Wittgenstein asserts that with images—unlike with propositions—there is no negation.<sup>51</sup> That is, first of all, he denies that an image can be negated: “So can one negate an image? No. And therein lies the difference between image and proposition. . . . I can only negate that the image is true, but I cannot negate the image.”<sup>52</sup> But Wittgenstein also saw propositions as images, and he naturally did not doubt that propositions can be negated. Could it then be concluded that images *actually can* be negated, inasmuch as they are propositions? Wittgenstein arrives at the opposite conclusion: there is something about propositions that

48. See Dieter Mersch, “Wittgensteins Bilddenken,” *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 54 (2006): 925–42.

49. Antoine Arnauld, *The Art of Thinking: Port-Royal Logic*, translated by James Dickoff and Patricia James (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), 33.

50. Proponents of this view can expect considerable resistance. “But we must not forget that, strictly speaking, calling a picture true or false is false.” Nelson Goodman, “Statements and Pictures,” *Erkenntnis* 22 (1985): 269.

51. On the relation of image (or picture)

and negation in Wittgenstein, see Uli Richtmeyer, “Logik und Aisthesis—Wittgenstein über Negationen, Variablen und Hypothesen im Bild,” in Heßler and Mersch, *Logik des Bildlichen*, 139–62. Richtmeyer's phenomenological remarks are very interesting in themselves, but I am skeptical about his readings of Wittgenstein. I have developed my interpretation independently and come to very different conclusions.

52. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks*, 33, entry from November 26, 1914, 33 (translation modified).

transcends their pictorial nature. In fact, he was convinced that the negation sign as is used in the logical notation of propositions (“ $\neg p$ ”) is not an element of the proposition, inasmuch as the proposition is an image. The reason is clear: there is no object for which a negation sign can stand in; it is not the proxy of anything (see 4.0621). Nor does it serve to give a configuration of names a certain form (for example, as does the grapheme “R” in the proposition “ $aRb$ ”). So what does the negation sign do or mean? Its meaning, if there is any, is an operation that can be performed on any proposition: in particular, the operation that transforms a given proposition into another one that negates it. But this transformation, according to Wittgenstein, leaves untouched the proposition’s pictorial core. It neither adds anything to the proposition’s descriptive capacity for representation nor takes anything away from it, but simply changes its direction (see, again, 4.0621). Through the combined application of negation and conjunction, however, from a given proposition another can be obtained that is *not* an image anymore. For example, the proposition “ $p \cdot \neg p$ ” is a contradiction and thus not an image: it does not represent a possible state of affairs. For Wittgenstein, it is only in *this* sense that images can be negated: namely, through being made to disappear. The disappearance of the image can be explained pictorially like this: the propositions “ $p$ ” and “ $\neg p$ ” are related to one another like a positive form to its negative impression or reverse image. What is a body in the case of  $p$  is a hole in the case of  $\neg p$ , and vice versa. The simultaneous assertion of  $p$  and  $\neg p$  plugs up all holes. Because the whole space has been filled up, the figure that the proposition describes in space is lost. The image disappears.

I did not invent this scheme. Wittgenstein himself developed it, in order to clarify (for himself) what the operation of negation is all about: “Think of the representation of *negative* facts, as through models: such as two railway trains may not stand on the same track. The proposition, the image, the model are—in the negative sense—like a solid body restricting the freedom of movement of others, in the positive sense, like the space bounded by solid substance in which there is room for a body.”<sup>53</sup>

Wittgenstein saw the proposition and its negation (or the proposition that it negates) as two sides of the same coin. He spoke pointedly of a “commonality of the boundary of  $p$  and  $\neg p$ .<sup>54</sup> Elsewhere, he states, “The negating proposition determines a logical place with the help of the logical place of the negated proposition. For it describes it as lying outside the latter’s logical place” (4.0641). One suspects that for Wittgenstein, the image was nothing other than the shared boundary of the negated and the negating proposition. During the reversal of the proposition’s polarity, which negation turns out to be, this boundary remains unchanged, and thus cannot itself be negated.<sup>55</sup> Undoubtedly, Wittgenstein would also have said of a photograph and its negative that they are fundamen-

53. Wittgenstein, *Notebooks*, 30, entry from November 14, 1914 (translation modified). Compare 4.463.

54. Wittgenstein, *Notebooks*, 57, entry from June 8, 1915 (translation modified).

55. However, as we have seen, through the combined application of negation and conjunction (or the combined application of negation and alternation, which produces a tautology), it can be made to disappear.



tally the same image. Considering this scheme, one can additionally ask why he schematizes the proposition “in the negative sense” as something positive (that is, as a solid body), and the proposition in the positive sense as something negative (that is, as a cavity). Only a little thought is needed in order to see that the solid body Wittgenstein is talking about comes into effect *not* as something positive, but as a negative force: a solid body restricts the freedom of movement of other bodies; it acts as a type of blockade. With respect to the proposition, this means that in the negatively polarized proposition, the configuration of particular objects that it represents is *closed out*. Naturally, the positive case behaves in exactly the opposite way: there, only *one* possible configuration of particular objects is kept open, and all others are (implicitly) closed out. The positive proposition can be considered to form a mold, which is made to be perfectly filled up by a very specific state of affairs. If the proposition is true, and thus the state of affairs it represents actually exists, the world and the proposition fit together perfectly. From the “commonality of the boundary of  $p$  and  $\neg p$ ” there will have then been produced a commonality of the boundary between world and proposition.<sup>56</sup>

Let us return to the starting point of these thoughts. According to Wittgenstein’s thesis, images cannot be negated. One could counter that it is indeed possible to turn images upside down.<sup>57</sup> But what is accomplished by such a turning upside down? For example, a rejection of the image as such can be expressed. In this case, the inversion is an iconoclastic act. Wittgenstein did not take such acts into consideration for systematic reasons. To describe iconoclastic acts as negation is to depart from the realm of logic. In logic, as is well known, the double application of negation leads back to the positive starting point. One can just as well turn right side up an image that has iconoclastically been turned upside down. But the result—even when the image has not been damaged and is nowhere visibly crossed out—is no longer the original, positive image; it is a restored or restituted image. However, the rejection or negation does not have to be directed (or only directed) at the image as such. It can also be directed at

56. On boundaries in early Wittgenstein, see Heinrich, *Wittgensteins Grenze*.

57. See Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), pt. 1, Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works 4, translated from the

German under the general editorship of James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alex Strachey and Alan Tyson (London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953), 326–27.

what the image represents. Wittgenstein only thought of *this* case. He wanted to point out that a negation directed at what the image represents must already presuppose the image's capacity for representation (as with certain signs stating what is prohibited, in which the prohibited thing is crossed out, but must remain recognizable as something that has been crossed out, so that people know what it is that is prohibited). But when one abstracts from the conditions of logic, this argument may not be very persuasive. Ultimately, the impossibility of differentiating between the two cases—negation directed against the image as such or against what it represents—may be part of the nature of iconoclasm.

Let us return to the starting point a second time. Wittgenstein excludes the possibility that images can be negated. Should it also then be said that images cannot negate, that there is no pictorial form of negation? Probably this is also intended. For Wittgenstein, negation remains external to the image—as the negation sign in “ $\sim p$ ” remains external to the letter “ $p$ ” and does not even touch it. For the author of the *Tractatus*, images belong in the realm of *forms*, and negation belongs in the different realm of *operations*. Forms can serve to represent something; operations serve to pass from one form to the next or, in the case of negation, to reverse the polarity of one and the same form. Here, the peculiar statics of Wittgenstein's concept of the image can be seen once again. For him, images are invariants and thus by their nature immutable. Consequently, they can also not be acts, which intervene in the world by changing. The two aspects of the Necker cube are not images, but could become images; by contrast, the emergence or alternation of aspects in Wittgenstein's understanding is not an image *and also cannot become one*.<sup>58</sup>

Images, if one follows Wittgenstein, can thus neither negate nor be negated. Negation remains external to the image.<sup>59</sup> But is there not a certain discrepancy between what Wittgenstein *says* and what he *does*? He says, or leads one to understand, that negation remains external to the image—while he simultaneously makes use of a pictorial scheme in order to consider the relationship between a proposition and its negation. But there is no contradiction here. One could formulate it this way: precisely *because* negation remains external to images, images are particularly well suited to illustrate how opposed or conflicting entities relate to one another. This thought is not Wittgenstein's, but it is one that I suspect would be met with agreement among many image theorists today. It seems clear that contrary, maybe even contradictory oppositions can be represented in a certain way through images. Or should the square of opposition (or, more specifically, semiotic square) Tom Mitchell used in order to find out what is *not* an image *not* be counted as pictorial representation (see Section 2 of the Seminars)? Squares of opposition illustrate relationships that exist between different

58. Tom Mitchell is, in this respect, one of Wittgenstein's antipodes. He interprets the change of aspects as the image's performative force, its power to interpellate the viewer. See W. J. T. Mitchell, “Metapictures,” in Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual*

*Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 35–82.

59. For a radically different view on this matter, see Koerner's thoughts on the dialectics of iconoclasm: Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004).

conditions of implication and opposition.<sup>60</sup> A contrary opposition is represented through a spatial opposition of terms (a relationship from left to right), while contradiction is represented through a different, in a way stronger spatial opposition (a relationship from the upper left to the lower right, or from the upper right to the lower left), and implication is represented through a term's position below, or depending from, the term above. These relationships are abstract and concrete at the same time. They are the material from which complex paintings, even entire systems of images—I am thinking in particular of what Wolfgang Kemp has called the “Medieval image systems”—are made.<sup>61</sup> As is well known, images live not only from analogies, but also from oppositions. And precisely because the diagram Mitchell used is a darling of structuralism, it is striking how much phenomenology is contained within it. The scheme's unique power of illustration cannot be reduced to abstract geometric relationships. It depends not only on how the individual elements relate to each other, but also on how the entire configuration relates to the perceptive field of its viewer. Here, the truth of Mitchell's comment that a diagram “does not happen on a blank screen” and that it is always “a way of dividing up space, classifying regions of space” (Section 9 of the Seminars) is demonstrated. A mere rotation by 45 degrees destroys the logical square's ability to convey its meaning; one could say the square has been unmasked.

With these remarks, the topic “negations of the image—images of negation” is far from exhausted. In my opinion, Alex Potts was right to bring into discussion the idea, central to the history of modern art, of “a kind of non-image that got one beyond the image . . . something that lay beyond or outside the common currency of images circulating in the modern world” (see Potts's Assessment). On a theoretical level, this idea leads to the question of whether and to what extent there can be something like iconoclastic images. This question is also raised in light of the problematic role of images in the cult of Christianity. Joseph Leo Koerner, in an important study on image culture in the era of Luther, spoke of an “iconoclasm launched from inside the image's resources” and even drew the more general conclusion that “images . . . persist and function by being perpetually destroyed.”<sup>62</sup> These formulations are the product of intensive historical studies, but even on the basis of relatively banal observations, one can be persuaded that there are forms of negation that do not befall images from without, but that are enclosed or posited by them. When we speak of images, we often mean things that can only be experienced as images when a type of neutralizing or bracketing—perhaps one could say a negation—takes place. One

60. On the logic and topology of the semiotic square, see Jean Petitot-Cocorda, *Morphogenèse du Sens: Pour un schématisme de la structure* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985). Thürlemann and Bogen, “Jenseits der Opposition,” 21, discuss the diagrammatic features of the square of opposition from an art-historical point of view.

61. See Thürlemann and Bogen, “Jenseits der

Opposition”; Wolfgang Kemp, *The Narratives of Gothic Stained Glass* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Kemp, *Christliche Kunst: Ihre Anfänge, ihre Strukturen* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1994); Kemp, *Die Räume der Maler* (Munich: Beck, 1996), 62.

62. Koerner, *Reformation*, 181 and 12, respectively.

might consider illusionistic paintings: to be deceived by them is to see something that is not an image. Only disillusionment allows the viewer to experience that which he or she sees *as* an image. In order to be able to see illusionistic paintings, for example, as images, I must be aware that that which can be seen is not really there. To this extent, viewing them seems to require a “no” or “not.”<sup>63</sup> This “no” or “not” can correspond to a picture frame. The frame marks the “not” of the picture by setting it off from that which is “not picture.” It becomes an agent of Freud’s reality principle.

5. In order to conclude this comparative examination of Wittgenstein’s image theory, one more point must be added: it is necessary to outline, at least in a rudimentary fashion, what the often-cited distinction between saying and showing is about, which plays such a large role in the *Tractatus* and is regularly taken up in the context of image-theoretical discussions (see Sections 3 and 4 of the Seminars). First, it should be noted that Wittgenstein uses these concepts and their opposition in different ways. At one point in the treatise, the following can be read: “A proposition *shows* how things stand if it is true. And it *says that* they do so stand” (4.022). Here, the dichotomy between showing and saying is evidently related to a difference between image and proposition that has to do with the problem of negation. The proposition shows something inasmuch as it is an image. Specifically, as an image it represents a particular state of affairs. It does not give any guarantee that things in fact do stand in the way that the proposition (as an image) shows. But one can always take as given that things could stand that way. As an image, however, the proposition is not yet committed to the assertion that things do stand in the way it shows. The image can also be used to illustrate how things *do not* stand. According to Wittgenstein, the commitment to one of these possibilities—affirmation or negation of the described state of affairs—lies beyond the reach of that which is an image in the proposition. *That* things stand in a certain way (or do not stand in this way) can only be *said*. The proposition cannot show anything without saying something, but not everything that it can say can also be shown. From this perspective, saying goes beyond showing.

However, in the *Tractatus* there is also an entirely different definition of the dichotomy of saying and showing.<sup>64</sup> This second definition is based on a conviction that is widespread in modern logic. “Wittgenstein had, in both his early and his late philosophy, a clear and sweeping vision of how language and the world are connected with each other. Like Frege, he did not think that this vision could be expressed in language.” Why? “The reason for this alleged impossibility is that one can use language to talk about something only if one

63. See Reinhard Brandt, *Die Wirklichkeit des Bildes* (Munich: Hanser, 1999), 105–6. Compare the totally different—and, of course, much more intriguing—account of trompe-l’oeil Jacques Lacan gives in the ninth session of his Seminar XI, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978).

64. An interesting discussion of the different aspects of Wittgenstein’s dichotomy is to be found in Felix Gmür, *Ästhetik bei Wittgenstein: Über Sagen und Zeigen* (Freiburg: Alber, 2000), 13–40. Gmür distinguishes three kinds of showing in the *Tractatus*: descriptive, transcendental, and transcendent. My discussion covers only the first two.

can rely on a given definite interpretation, a given network of meaning relations obtaining between language and the world. Hence one cannot meaningfully and significantly say in language what these meaning relations are, for in any attempt to do so one must already presuppose them.”<sup>65</sup> Similar figures of thought are familiar from various epistemological and semiotic contexts, especially when it comes to defining the relationship between representation and performance: the act of thinking cannot simultaneously be carried out and made into the object of thinking; the act of description cannot in the same moment be described, etc. Giorgio Agamben: “The only thing of which one cannot make an image is, if you will, the being-image of the image. The sign can signify anything, *except the fact that it is in the process of signifying.*”<sup>66</sup> Wittgenstein argues analogously that an image or proposition can represent everything except for that which grounds its capacity to represent something in the first place. This grounding entity he calls the “pictorial form” or “logical form.” It is that which the image or proposition must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent a state of affairs at all. The commonality of logical form guarantees that the configurability of elements in a system of representation agrees from the outset with the configurability of the objects for which these elements stand in, thus, that every image *eo ipso* will represent a possible state of affairs. If one sets aside contradictions and tautologies, the same is also true for propositions: every sense-making proposition represents a possible state of affairs. However, propositions that *speak about* names or states of affairs, or about the identity of objects (among which can be counted many of the propositions in the *Tractatus*), are propositions in appearance only; they attempt—in vain—to refer to that which enables the possibility of propositions in the first place. Wittgenstein formulated this fundamental argument many times in the *Tractatus*, with reference to images as well as to propositions: “There must be something identical in a picture and what it depicts, to enable the one to be a picture of the other at all” (2.161). “What a picture must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it—correctly or incorrectly—in the way it does, is its pictorial form” (2.17). “A picture can depict any reality whose form it has” (2.171); “A picture cannot, however, depict its pictorial form” (2.172). Analogous statements are made about the proposition: “Propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it” (4.12). As previously stated, similar thoughts can be already be found in Frege. However, Wittgenstein’s attitude towards the unrepresentable (which he defines as the undepictable and the unsayable) is different from Frege’s: Wittgenstein was convinced that the unrepresentable makes itself *shown*, that it “shows itself” or “expresses itself.” “Thus one proposition *fa* shows that the object *a* occurs in its sense, two propositions *fa* and *ga* show that the same object is mentioned in both of them”

65. Merill B. Hintikka and Jaakko Hintikka, *Investigating Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 1–2.

66. Giorgio Agamben, “Difference and

Repetition: On Guy Debord’s Films,” in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, edited by Tom McDonough (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 319.

(4.1211). The proposition *fa* states, about a particular object *a*, that things stand in a certain way with it. It does not say that the name (“*a*”) contained within it serves as proxy for this particular object, since that must always be presupposed in order to say anything at all about this object. That the object *a* appears in the proposition *fa* is not a property of this proposition—at least, is not a property that could be described by a sense-making proposition. Wittgenstein calls such nonproperties “internal properties” and describes them in physiognomic terms: “An internal property of a fact can also be called a feature of that fact (in the sense in which we speak of facial features)” (4.1221). In Wittgenstein’s images (and propositions), the mimetic aspect one might find lacking on the level of depiction returns on the level of showing as a physiognomic presence, which the logician is able to perceive even if the propositions themselves have a hooded, disguised form. The images (and propositions) are something made by us, but what they show in themselves, their cloaked or uncloaked features, is not at the disposal of our depicting and saying. That which images make possible regards us as something undepictable and unsayable from within the images we have made. The proposition “We make pictures of facts for ourselves” thus requires a supplement, which is also a restriction: “What expresses *itself* in language, *we* cannot express by means of language” (4.121).

The distinction between saying (or depicting) and showing (or displaying) is among the aspects of the image theory in the *Tractatus* that is discussed most frequently and intensively today.<sup>67</sup> Those who bring the image into connection with showing at times overlook the fact that Wittgenstein’s distinction, in its possibly more interesting variants, applies to propositions as well as to images. It is therefore not superfluous to stress that “there is a kind of showing, a *deixis*, at work in language, just as much as there is a kind of saying, or articulation, at work in pictures” (Aud Sissel Hoel in Section 4 of the Seminars). On the other hand, it can be appealing to assert both at once: both that the difference between saying and showing does not align with the difference between proposition and image, as well as that the image’s center of gravity can be found in the realm of that which cannot be said or depicted but nonetheless shows itself. Louis Marin has made some interesting remarks along these lines, which simultaneously suggest, in an entirely different manner than Heidegger, a profound connection between image and theory. In Marin’s conception, theory consists in “transferring *into language* this silent gesture of showing that every statement contains according to its nature.”<sup>68</sup> But if it is also the case that images have “showing as the primitive mode of signification,”<sup>69</sup> and thus are more closely connected to the dimension of showing or displaying than are other modes of representation, then it follows, thirdly, that they are not an arbitrary object of thought, but one that tests theory in a unique and particularly intensive way.

67. For a discussion of Wittgenstein’s distinction in the context of picture theory, including comparisons with similar distinctions drawn by Heidegger (*Sage* vs. *Zeige*) and Goodman (denotation vs. exemplification), see Mersch,

*Was sich zeigt*, chaps. 2 and 3.

68. Louis Marin, *Opacité de la peinture: Essais sur la représentation au Quattrocento* (Paris: Usher, 1989), 18 (my translation).

69. Marin, *Opacité de la peinture*.

Marin is by no means the only one who has associated saying with the content and showing with the execution of—pictorial and linguistic—acts of articulation.<sup>70</sup> If the distinction between saying and showing has experienced a substantial enrichment in recent decades, this has been to a large extent the result of a persistent interest in performativity and the pragmatic contexts of images and other things (see the Assessments by Ciarán Benson and Karin Leonhard). Examining the performance aspect of pictorial utterances can involve asking, for example, how images open or close in relation to possible viewers, how access to the contents of representation is regulated, and how communication between image and viewer interferes with that which can be seen inside the image (i.e., what the image “says”).<sup>71</sup> If some images (one might think of Renaissance paintings) can be described as openings through which something can be seen (imaginatively) as through an open window, and if that which can be seen in the opening itself includes openings, for example in the form of windows and doors, then it can be illuminating to analyze how the opening *of* the image relates to the openings *in* the image. In this way, the axes of saying (or representation) and showing (or presentation) are no longer strictly kept apart; one begins to take interest in the points at which they intersect.<sup>72</sup>

### III

In coming to a close, I would like to make an opening. How entertaining or illuminating it can be to profile Wittgenstein’s theses through comparison with other, at times quite different theories of the image will have been shown or not shown. It goes without saying that among these comparisons there are several that appear peculiar or even bizarre. The propositions of the *Tractatus* have repeatedly been measured according to criteria that are foreign to them, and have been laid upon one of those dissecting tables where normally only sewing machines and umbrellas meet. There is no doubt about it: in order to understand Wittgenstein’s theory in detail and be able to evaluate its originality, it is necessary to consider it within the historical context in which it was produced, that is, according to its relationship to Hertz, Frege, Russell, and so forth. It was not the goal of this essay, however, to achieve such a historical understanding; rather, an attempt was made to observe greatly differing statements about images—statements from different time periods and fields of knowledge—as if they were stars without their own atmospheres, stars in the night sky of theory. And the *Tractatus* was intended to serve as the northern constellation Septentrion, that is, to assist with orientation.<sup>73</sup> “Always historicize, always anachronize,” one of

70. In the field of philosophy, an example, well known to Marin, is François Récanati, *La transparence et l’énonciation: Pour introduire à la pragmatique* (Paris: Seuil, 1979).

71. See Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Wolfgang Kemp, *Der Anteil des*

*Betrachters: Rezeptionsästhetische Studien zur Malerei des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Mäander, 1983).

72. See Marin, *Opacité de la peinture*, and Kemp, *Räume der Maler*.

73. Here, the allusion is to Mallarmé, “A Throw of the Dice Never Will Abolish Chance,” of which the final line declares, “All Thought

Tom Mitchell's slogans, is cited multiple times in this book (see the Assessments by Christoph Lüthy and Frederik Stjernfelt). I believe I have acted accordingly. If the commentators of the Seminars had done nothing but anachronize, then in this position I would have been obliged to historicize. But since most of them were advocates of historicizing, in order to preserve the balance I was obliged to pay homage to anachronism. It has been my pleasure to do so. The narcissism of a philosophy that closes its eyes to the contingency of history is to be avoided; but so too is the convenience of a historical discourse that invokes the contingency of history in order to spare itself the exertions (and also the joy) of conceptual work.

However, since one prefers not to stop where the dice have already been thrown, but would rather press onwards and throw the dice for oneself, it is worth considering whether the *Tractatus* could not also be used as a ladder for reaching new vantage points. Some will be skeptical. Those who want to think about the psychology or phenomenology of the production or perception of images, or those who are interested in images' role in the context of religious practices, in forms of political representation, in artistic and other "games of make-believe,"<sup>74</sup> or in the modeling of objects of cognition, will not automatically feel drawn to the early Wittgenstein. For them, the question of whether it is possible to use Wittgenstein to go beyond Wittgenstein will not be raised at all. Nevertheless, I suspect that both his thoughts on the relationship of image and negation and the distinction between saying and showing, which he introduced, offer points of departure for future image-theoretical examinations.<sup>75</sup> Also, it seems to me the attempt to theorize the image as configuration could be carried further productively. One need only bring into play the possibility of recursion to open up entire realms of inquiry. If images are configurations, what about configurations of images? Do they, too, have the features of an image? Studies of medieval image systems, such as those dealing with the stained-glass windows of Gothic cathedrals, give cause to answer in the affirmative. Wolfgang Kemp, Steffen Bogen, Felix Thürlemann, David Ganz, and others have impressively elaborated the diagrammatic features of such image systems.<sup>76</sup> While the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* was fascinated by the idea that multiple pictures of the same kind can be added together into one great picture, a picture of the world or a world-picture, art-historical studies have shown how productive the interac-

emits a Throw of the Dice." In this poem the site of the Master's shipwreck is marked by "the Septentrion or North, / A CONSTELLATION / Cold from neglect or disuse." *To Purify the Words of the Tribe: The Major Verse Poems of Stéphane Mallarmé*, translated by. Daisy Aldan (Huntington Woods, MI: Sky Blue Press, 1999), 165. [—Trans.]

74. See Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make Believe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

75. See, for instance, Mersch, *Was sich zeigt*, and Mersch, "Wittgensteins Bilddenken."

76. Kemp, *Gothic Stained Glass*; Kemp,

*Christliche Kunst*; Bernd Mohnhaupt, *Beziehungsgeflechte: Typologische Kunst des Mittelalters* (Bern: Lang, 2000); Steffen Bogen, *Träumen und Erzählen: Selbstdarstellung der Bildkunst vor 1300* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2001); Felix Thürlemann, "Vom Einzelbild zum hyperimage: Eine neue Herausforderung für die kunstgeschichtliche Hermeneutik," in *Les herméneutiques au seuil du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle—évolution et débat actuel*, edited by Ada Neschke-Hentschke (Louvain: Peeters, 2004), 223–247; David Ganz, *Medien der Offenbarung: Visionsdarstellungen im Mittelalter* (Berlin: Reimer, 2008).

tion of many, in part also heterogeneous, pictures can be, which specifically *do not* fuse into a seamless whole (see the Assessment by Thomas Macho and Jasmin Mersmann).

Let us take two or three final steps, or rather, leaps.<sup>77</sup> Images can be distributed to different locations and configured into image systems, but sometimes they also come together in the same location and are superimposed or penetrate each other. Francis Galton's composite photographs—which, after Freud, Wittgenstein would also interpret in an original way—are a prominent example.<sup>78</sup> Such superimposed images, if one could call them that, play an important role in the art of Modernism, for example in the context of Dada and Surrealism.<sup>79</sup> In a certain way, they form a dialectic counterpart to the idea of the *tabula rasa* and are thus often brought into connection with the concept of the palimpsest or Freud's thoughts on the mystic writing pad.<sup>80</sup>

A third possibility for making images into images that are more than one comprises embedding them within each other in the manner of the “picture-within-a-picture.” The most radical form of this may be the self-embedding that leads to the so-called *mise en abyme*.<sup>81</sup> (Wittgenstein, incidentally, considered this type of abysmal self-embedding to be an illusion: in his view, the enclosing image necessarily has a different logical form from the enclosed image; see TLP 3.333). From an image-theoretical perspective, however, even the simplest case of embedding is of interest. I can only briefly suggest the associated problems here: In order for there to be a picture-within-a-picture, it must obviously be possible for a picture to depict a picture. But in order to be able to depict (and not merely reproduce) a picture, the picture must be capable of showing the depicted picture as a picture. In other words, it must be capable of differentiating between two types of things: those that are, and those that are not, pictures. Thus, every picture that depicts a picture has succeeded at reproducing in its interior the difference, constitutive of its own nature as a picture, between picture and nonpicture. The picture-within-a-picture proves to be a form of reentry.<sup>82</sup> But how can

77. For a more detailed discussion of what follows, see Wolfram Pichler, “Topologie des Bildes: Im Plural und im Singular,” in *Das Bild im Plural*, edited by David Ganz and Felix Thürlemann (Berlin: Reimer, 2010).

78. On Galton and Freud, see Andreas Mayer, “Von Galtons Mischphotographien zu Freuds Traumfiguren: Psychometrische und psychoanalytische Inszenierungen von Typen und Fällen,” in *Ecce Cortex: Beiträge zur Geschichte des modernen Gehirns*, edited by Michael Hagner (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1999), 110–43. On Wittgenstein's interest in Galton, see, for example, Michael Nedo, “Familienähnlichkeit: Philosophie und Praxis: Eine Collage,” in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Ingenieur–Philosoph–Künstler*, edited by Günter Abel, Matthias Kroß, and Michael Nedo (Berlin: Parerga, 2007), 163–78.

79. See, for example, Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 53–58, and the critical comments in Ralph Ubl, *Prähistorische Zukunft: Max Ernst*

*und die Ungleichzeitigkeit des Bildes* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2004), 125–28 (forthcoming in English from the University of Chicago Press).

80. See Whitney Davis, “Replication and Depiction”; Davis, *Replications: Archaeology, Art History, Psychoanalysis* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1996), chaps. 2 and 3; Davis, *Forms of Likeness and the General Theory of Visual Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming); Davis, chap. 5 in *Visuality and Virtuality: Art Theory in World Art History from Ancient Egypt to New Media* (forthcoming). See also Klaus Krüger, “Das Bild als Palimpsest,” in *Bilderfragen: Die Bildwissenschaften im Aufbruch*, edited by Hans Belting (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2007), 133–63.

81. See Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, “L'affiche L'affiche,” in Lebensztejn, *Zigzag* (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), 277–90; Koerner, *Reformation of the Image*, 429–40.

82. Stoichita's fascinating thoughts on the self-reflexive forms of European painting in the

the relevant difference between picture and nonpicture be conceived? It seems to be associated with the above-mentioned circumstance that certain images presuppose a type of bracketing or negation in order to be able to be seen as images (see my thoughts above on the negation of the image). From this perspective, what lies between image and not-image is a type of bracketing or neutralization, for example in the form of a frame.

What are all these instances of configuration, superimposition, and embedding of images about? It can perhaps be posited as the most general condition of their appearance that the image enters our view not in the singular, though maybe also not in the plural, but rather “in flows, fluxes, and cascades” (as Emmanuel Alloa says in his *Assessment*), or emerges “like air and water” without division into units (see Harry Cooper’s *Assessment*): that it is always at once more and less than one. Configuration, superimposition/penetration, and embedding of images denote historically specific ways of capturing and organizing flocks of images. In view of the history of European art and images, it can be said, in a highly simplified manner, that the possibility of distributing images to different places, their configuration into image systems, was already highly developed in the Middle Ages, while the embedding of images within images was not systematically tested until the late Middle Ages at the earliest. The career of configuration is associated with the arts of commemoration and narration, and that of embedding with the birth of the autonomous painting and with the experience of iconoclasm. Finally, the mode of superimposition/penetration can be observed in modernity in many different variations, and it would certainly be worth examining how the related individual phenomena correspond to the emergence of new media for the production and reproduction of images, as well as with new ideas about memory, the brain, and mental images.<sup>83</sup> However, it should not be overlooked that the superimposition or interweaving of images is frequently encountered in rock art, for example in that of the Paleolithic period. Could it be that in these prehistoric sites, the necessary historicity of the making and interpretation of images became, and becomes, evident? Even in the oldest palimpsests known to us, does the insight become manifest that in the ground of every image, other images (and non-images) lie, which the image augments and overwrites?<sup>84</sup> It is necessary to historicize—but also to continue to anachronize. Thus, let us a risk another, final leap. If one attempts to consider the three modes

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could be summarized as follows: the system of painting achieves closure by playing a game with its own boundaries—which always also means, with the difference between image and non-image. See Victor Stoichita, *L’instauration du tableau* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1993). As an antidote to this type of system-theoretical interpretation of the processes described by Stoichita, see Wolfgang Kemp, “Teleologie der Malerei: Selbstporträt und Zukunftsreflexion bei Poussin und Velázquez,” in *Kemp-Reader: Ausgewählte Schriften von Wolfgang Kemp*, edited by Kilian Heck and Cornelia Jöchner (Munich: Deutscher

Kunstverlag, 2006), 77–98, as well as the same author’s “Praktische Bildbeschreibung: Über Bilder in Bildern, besonders von Van Eyck und Mantegna,” in Heck and Jöchner, *Kemp-Reader*, 175–91. On the role played by embedding in and for the contradictory temporalities of Renaissance art see Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*.

83. I am preparing a larger study on this subject from an art-historical point of view.

84. See Davis, chaps. 2 and 3 in *Replications*; chap. 5 in *Visuality and Virtuality*. The author kindly informed me that, in chapter 6 of *Forms of Likeness*, he takes the literal phenom-

of multiple images—distribution, embedding, and superimposition—from a theoretical perspective, an investigation of great scope comes into view. It could be named “the topology of the image,” since it is involved with exploring how images are distributed to sites and how they themselves constitute sites that in turn can incorporate, address, and (thus) constitute further images.<sup>85</sup> The notion of such a topology is all the more appealing since it is presented from the outset as a paradoxical undertaking. Ultimately, today one is easily convinced that images are threshold entities and consequently are neither *here* nor *elsewhere*, but are characterized by a fundamental “atopia” and thus are “essentially out of their place” (Alloa in his *Assessment*). In the midst of the half-seen, half-dreamt-of topology of the image, a place is therefore to be imagined that has just been left, or at which something is about to arrive that isn’t there yet.

Here it is, finally: the opening that allows me to stop without coming to a close.

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emon of material superimposition as a useful general or conceptual model for pictoriality as such.

85. See Pichler, “Topologie des Bildes,” as well as my essay “Topologische Konfigurationen

des Denkens und der Kunst,” in *Topologie: Falten, Knoten, Netze, Stülpungen in Kunst und Theorie*, edited by Wolfram Pichler and Ralph Ubl (Vienna: Turia & Kant, 2009), 13–66.

[TRANSLATED BY ELIZABETH TUCKER]

## NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS

ELLEN HARTWELL ALDERMAN works at the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts in Chicago. She is also a PhD student at the University of Illinois–Chicago in the Art History Department, with a focus in Architecture, Urbanism, and Design.

EMMANUEL ALLOA works at Eikones—NCCR Iconic Criticism at the University of Basel. His publications include *La résistance du sensible: Merleau-Ponty critique de la transparence* (2008; Spanish translation 2009) and *Das durchscheinende Bild: Konturen einer medialen Phänomenologie* (2011). He has also edited a number of books, including *Nicht(s) sagen: Strategien der Sprachabwendung im 20. Jahrhundert* (2008; coedited with Alice Lagaay), *Penser l'image* (2010), *Bildtheorien aus Frankreich: Eine Anthologie* (2011), and *Du sensible à l'œuvre: Merleau-Ponty et les arts* (2011).

FREDERICK M. ASHER is interested in South Asian visual culture in the context of the Indian Ocean. His recent scholarship examines contested religious space, patterns of trade as they relate to works of art in India, and the site of Bodh-gaya, including its manifestations globally. He has studied present-day artists working in traditional modes both because they are interesting in themselves and because they offer models for premodern modes of artistic production. He holds offices in the American Institute of Indian Studies and the National Committee for the History of Art, and is a member of the editorial board of *Archives of Asian Art*.

CIARÁN BENSON is Emeritus Professor of Psychology at University College Dublin. His books include *The Cultural Psychology of Self: Place, Morality and Art in Human Worlds* (2001) and *The Absorbed Self: Pragmatism, Psychology and Aesthetic Experience* (1993). He was appointed Chairman of the Arts Council of Ireland (1993–98) by the Irish Government. He was also Founding Chairman of the Irish Film Institute (1980–84) and of the City Arts Centre, Dublin (1985–91). He is a member of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA).

ELISABETH BIRK is a postdoctoral student at the DFG Research Training Group 1458 Notational Iconicity at the Free University of Berlin. Her publications include *Mustergebrauch bei Goodman und Wittgenstein* (2009) and “Nelson Goodmans Begriff der Exemplifikation und seine Anwendung in den Bildwissenschaften,” in *Medienbewegungen*, edited by Ludwig Jäger, Gisela Fehrman, and Meike Adam (in press). She coedited (with Jan Georg Schneider) *Philosophie der Schrift* (2009).

ANDREW BLACKLEY received his MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is an artist curator and writer living and working in Chicago. His artwork is held in collections including Lendroit Galerie (Rennes, France); Printed Matter (New York); B-A-S (Istanbul); the Centre for Fine Print Research (Bristol, UK); Salon für Kunstbuch (Vienna); and the Joan Flasch Artists' Book Collection (Chicago).

GOTTFRIED BOEHM is the author of “Zu einer Hermeneutik des Bildes,” in *Die Hermeneutik und die Wissenschaften*, ed. Hans-Georg Gadamer and Gottfried Boehm (1978), *Wie Bilder Sinn erzeugen* (2007), and numerous other works on images and image theory; he is the originator of the expression the “iconic turn.” Boehm was the director of Eikones, a large-scale research institute based in Basel and dedicated to the investigation of the meaning and power of images of all kinds.

CATHERINE BURDICK completed her doctorate at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2010. Her dissertation was entitled “Text and Image in Classic Maya Sculpture: A.D. 600–900.” Her publications include “The Maize God as a Framing Device,” Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, 2003, [www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org); and *Peter V. Bianchi: The Art of Science*, exhibition catalogue (2004).

ELLEN CHOW is a Docteur en Philosophie specializing in the Philosophy of Art. She teaches at the Faculty of Social Science at Chinese University of Hong Kong.

HARRY COOPER has been curator of modern and contemporary art at the National Gallery of Art since 2008. He was formerly curator of modern art at the Fogg Art Museum, where he organized exhibitions of the work of Piet Mondrian, Medardo Rosso, and Frank Stella. Recent publications include “To Organize Painting,” in *Arshile Gorky* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2009); “Speak, Painting: Word and Device in Early Johns,” *October* 127 (Winter 2008); and *Mondrian: The Transatlantic Paintings* (2001; with Ron Spronk).

SEBASTIAN EGENHOFER is Laurenz Professor for Contemporary Art, University of Basel, Switzerland. Recent publications include *Abstraktion—Kapitalismus—Subjektivität: Die Wahrfahrtsfunktion des Werks in der Moderne* (2008); *Produktionsästhetik* (2010); “Figures of Defiguration: Four Theses on Abstraction,” in *Painting*, edited by Terry Myers (2011); “Image and Machine: Introduction to Thomas Hirschorn’s Spinoza Monument,” in *Spinoza Now*, edited by Dimitris Vardoulakis (2011); and “Aesthetic Materiality in Conceptualism,” in *Aesthetics and Contemporary Art*, edited by Armen Avanessian and Luke Skrebowski (2011).

IRMGARD EMMELHAINZ is an independent researcher, writer, and translator interested in the relationship between the aesthetic and geopolitics, Jean-Luc Godard, cinema, contemporary art, and the Palestine question. She has published in *Third Text*, *October* (2009), and *Chasqui Journal of Latin American Studies*; writes for the blog of the Comité Invisible Jaltenco; and has collaborated with the visual artist Miguel Ventura. She currently teaches a course on filmic analysis in Casa Comal in Guatemala City.

REGAN GOLDEN-MCNERNEY is an artist, writer, and critic based in Chicago. She is a frequent contributor to *Art Lies Journal* and *New City Magazine*. Her publications include “Before and After a Landscape,” *The Core Residency Book*, edited by Mary Leclere (2010); “The Persuasive Periphery,” in *Frappery*, edited and translated by Hai-chi Jin (2009); and “A Home of Hair: Wenda Gu’s Temple of Heaven,” in *Reinventing Tradition in a*

*New World*, edited by Wang Ying (2004). Her artwork has been exhibited at Harvard University's Fisher Museum in Petersham, Massachusetts; Gallery 400 in Chicago; the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis; and the Cue Gallery in New York. She recently received a Long-Term Ecological Research Grant in the Arts from the National Science Foundation.

KARL HAKKEN works for the Department of Sculpture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Departments of Critical Studies and Sociology at Harrington College of Design. His publications include "How the City of Broad Shoulders Got its Growth Spurt: Appropriating the Economic Gaze," in *Monu 12: Real Urbanism* (2010); and *Actually I Like Crap*, an Archeworks publication (2006).

AUD SISSEL HOEL is an Associate Professor of Visual Communication in the Department of Art and Media Studies at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). She is currently conducting two closely related projects, *Technics of Thinking: Image, Word, Number and Photographic Difference*, in which she is developing an approach called "differential phenomenology." She authored an exhibition catalogue and co-curated an exhibition on Norwegian nineteenth-century mugshots at the National Museum of Justice (2007–8). Her dissertation (NTNU, 2005) endeavors to reframe the image conceptually in order to establish a framework that is able to account for the formative power of pictures. She has published widely on phenomenology, photography, and the theory of vision. Her English-language articles include the forthcoming "Techniques of the Body: Merleau-Ponty and the Problem of Inscription." She has also coedited two books and written a number of articles on Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms, including *Form and Technics: Reading Ernst Cassirer from the Present* (forthcoming) and "Cassirer's Dynamic Conception of Form," in *Forms of Knowledge and Sensibility: Ernst Cassirer and the Human Sciences*, edited by Gunnar Foss and Eivind Kasa (2002).

MICHAEL ANN HOLLY is the Starr Director of the Research and Academic Program at the Clark Art Institute and teaches critical theory in the graduate program of Williams College. She was co-founder of the Visual and Cultural Studies program and chair of the Art and Art History Department at the University of Rochester and is the author or coeditor of several books on the subjects of the historiography and theory of art history. *The Melancholy Art* (Princeton), on the history of art as a melancholy discipline, will be published this year.

LADISLAV KESNER is Associate Professor at Department of Art History, Masaryk University Brno. His research interests include early Chinese art, art historiography, and problems of art and cognition. His most recent publications include *Miloš Šejn: Being Landscape* (2010) and "Neuroaesthetics: Real Promise or Real Delusion?," in *The Aesthetic Dimension of Visual Culture*, edited by Ondřej Dadejdík and Jakub Stejskal (2010).

MARKUS KLAMMER is a member of the graduate school "Image and Knowledge" at Eikones, NCCR Iconic Criticism at the University of Basel. He is currently writing a PhD thesis on "Phantasy and Externalization: Representations of Psychoanalysis." His publications include "Fig 1': Grund und Signatur der Psychoanalyse," in *Prekäre Bilder*, edited by Thorsten Bothe and Robert Suter (2008); "Die Zeit des Palindroms: Zu Guy Debords letztem Film In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni," in *Zur topologischen Imagination in Kunst und Theorie*, edited by Wolfram Pichler and Ralph Ubl (2008); "So Simple and

So Loaded': Markus Klammer über Robert Gober im Schaulager Basel," *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 67 (2007): 318–21; "Gartenkunst oder die Entscheidung von Kunst und Politik" (with Stefan Neuner), *Kritische Berichte* 34, no. 3 (2006): 61–69.

ADRIAN KOHN is Assistant Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art History at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design. Recent publications include "Work and Words," in *Phenomenal: California Light and Space*, edited by Robin Clark (2011); "A Look at John Chamberlain's Lacquer Paintings, in *It's All in the Fit: The Work of John Chamberlain* (2009); "Judd on Phenomena," in *Rutgers Art Review* (2007); "See Like Irwin," *Chinati Foundation Newsletter* 12 (2007): 20–31; and a book review of Donald Judd's collected writings in *Art Journal* 64, no. 4 (2005): 131–33.

KARIN LEONHARD is in the Department of Art History at the University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt. Her publications include "Vermeer's Pregnant Women: On Human Generation and Pictorial Representation," *Art History* 25, no. 3 (2002), 293–318, 418; "Was ist Raum im 17. Jahrhundert? Die Raumfrage des Barock: Von Descartes zu Newton und Leibniz," in *Visuelle Argumentationen: Die Mysterien der Repräsentation und die Berechenbarkeit der Welt*, edited by Horst Bredekamp and Pablo Schneider (2006); and "Inside/Out: Inversionen des Sehens," in *Maßlose Bilder: Visuelle Ästhetik der Transgression*, edited by Ingeborg Reichle and Steffen Siegel (2009).

JACQUELINE LICHTENSTEIN is Professor of Philosophy of Art and Co-chair of the Department of Philosophy at Paris-Sorbonne. She has been Associate Professor at Berkeley and chief editor of the series *Essais d'art et de littérature* (Éditions Vrin). Her field is aesthetics and theory of art. Her publications include *La couleur éloquente* (1989; English translation, *The Eloquent Color*, 1993), *La tache aveugle* (2003; English translation, *The Blind Spot*, 2007); and, with Christian Michel, a complete and scientific edition in ten volumes of the *Conférences de l'académie royale de peinture et de sculpture* (2007–).

CHRISTOPH LÜTHY is Director of the Center for the History of Philosophy and Science at Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands. One of his research interests is the status and evolution of scientific images. With Alexis Smets, he wrote "Words, Lines, Diagrams, Images: Towards a History of Scientific Imagery," *Early Science and Medicine* 15 (2009): 398–439; another recent publication is "Centre, Circle, Circumference: Giordano Bruno's Astronomical Woodcuts," *Journal of the History of Astronomy* 41 (2010): 311–27.

THOMAS MACHO is Director of the Institute for Cultural Theory and History at Humboldt University of Berlin and Associate Director of the Center for Literary and Cultural Research in Berlin. In 1999 he cofounded the Hermann von Helmholtz Center for Cultural Technology at Humboldt University, and in 2001 he received the Award of the Aby Warburg Foundation in Hamburg. He has been a Member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts since 2010. Recent publications include *Weihnachten: Kindsmord und Zeitenwende* (forthcoming); *Das Leben ist ungerecht* (2010); *Menschen—Tiere—Maschinen: Zur Kritik der Anthropologie* (2009); *Was ist schön?* (2010; coedited with Gisela Staupe and Sigrid Walther); and *Kulturtechniken der Synchronisation* (2009; coedited with Christian Kassung).

SUNIL MANGHANI is Reader in Critical and Cultural Theory at York St John University. He is author of *Image Critique* (2008) and co-editor (with Arthur Piper and Jon Simons) of *Images: A Reader* (2006), an anthology of writings on the image from Plato to the present. He is currently preparing a textbook entitled *Image Studies*, as well as a four-volume set, *Images: Critical and Primary Sources*.

KRISTI MCGUIRE is a writer, editor, and independent curator based in Chicago, Illinois. She received her MFA and MA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2010), and an AM from the University of Chicago (2006). Her work has been featured or is forthcoming in *Chicago Review*, *htmlgiant*, and *Triple Canopy*; she is an active contributor to the *Visual Studies Reader* project (edited by James Elkins). As a writer and editor, she has worked on numerous artists' books and transcripts, catalogue essays, gallery ephemera, and scholarly monographs. She is cocurator of the interdisciplinary artists' project *Dear Navigator*, which has featured the work of David Antin, Caroline Bergvall, Paul Chan, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Vanessa Place, and Tan Lin, among others. She teaches in the Department of Visual and Critical Studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and works for the University of Chicago Press.

JASMIN MERSMANN is in the Department for Cultural History and Theory at Humboldt-University in Berlin. She coedited (with Eva Johach and Evke Rulfes) the "Mimesis" issue of the journal *Ilinx: Berliner Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft* 2 (2010). Her publications include "Minimalistischer Überschwang: Die Verselbständigung der Form im Werk von Jan Dibbets," in *Maßlose Bilder*, edited by Ingeborg Reichle and Steffen Siegel (2009); "Figuration und Transformation: Monumentale Anamorphosen im 17. Jahrhundert," in *Der entstellte Blick*, edited by Kyung-Ho Cha and Markus Rautenberg (2008); and "Iconic Turns: Die Wende zum Bild in Bildern von Wenden," *Moderne Kulturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch* 2 (2006): 19–35.

PAUL MESSARIS is Lev Kuleshov Professor of Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania. His publications include *Visual "Literacy": Image, Mind, and Reality* (1994); *Visual Persuasion: The Role of Images in Advertising* (1998); and *Digital Media: Transformations in Human Communication* (2007). He has directed several fiction films and is a designer of smartphone apps.

W. J. T. MITCHELL is Professor of English and Art History at the University of Chicago. He is editor of the interdisciplinary journal *Critical Inquiry*, a quarterly devoted to critical theory in the arts and human sciences. His publications include *Cloning Terror* (2011); *What Do Pictures Want?* (2005); *The Last Dinosaur Book: The Life and Times of a Cultural Icon* (1998); *Picture Theory* (1994); *Art and the Public Sphere* (1993); *Landscape and Power* (1992); *Iconology* (1987); and *The Language of Images* (1980).

MARIE-JOSÉ MONDZAIN teaches at the École des Hautes Études, Paris. She is the author of the groundbreaking book *Image, icône, économie* (1996; English translation, *Image, Icon, Economy*, 2004), which explores the origins of the current power of the image and its roots in the Byzantine concepts of the icon, the image, and invisible, and the visible. Her other books include *Homo spectator* (2007), on the origins of image making; *L'image peut-elle tuer?* (2002); and *Le Commerce des regards* (2003).

RACHEL MOORE is an artist and organizer currently located in Stowe, Vermont. Her recent socially engaged public projects include *The Space Between* (2010), *Push the Envelope* (2010), *E Pluribus Unum* (Chicago, 2009), *Conserve-A-Story* (2008), and *Spoke* (founded Chicago, 2008). She is represented by Traver Gallery in Seattle, Washington.

KEITH MOXEY is Barbara Novak Professor of Art History at Barnard College and Columbia University. Recent publications include "Do We Still Need a Renaissance?" in *Crossing Cultures*, edited by Jaynie Anderson (2009); "Mimesis and Iconoclasm," *Art History* 32 (2009): 52–77; and "Visual Studies and the Iconic Turn," *Journal of Visual Culture* 7 (2008): 131–46.

PARUL DAVE MUKHERJI is Professor and Dean at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. She holds a PhD in Indology from Oxford University. She is the co-convener of the Forum on Contemporary Theory and co-editor of the *Journal of Contemporary Thought*. She has lectured in India, the United States, Europe, Australia, China, and Japan. Her current research focuses on comparative aesthetics, global art history, and contemporary art in India and Asia.

RACHEL MUNDY is a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Music at Columbia University. Her publications include "Birdsong and the Image of Evolution," *Society and Animals* 17, no. 3 (2009): 206–23, and "Musical Evolution and the Making of Hierarchy," *World of Music* 48, no. 3 (2006): 13–27.

MAJA NAEF is an art historian based in Basel, Switzerland. She contributed the afterword to the forthcoming volume 4 of the current series. Recently she published *Joseph Beuys: Zeichnung und Stimme* (2011). Her publications include various essays for art magazines and exhibition catalogues as well as "Zeichnen als Leseverfahren: Überlegungen zu Raymond Pettibon," in *Randgänge der Zeichnung*, edited by W. Busch, O. Jehle, and C. Meister (2007); "Dieter Roth, Schreibszenen" (with Jörg Wiesel), in *Über Dieter Roth: Beiträge und Aufsätze*, edited by B. Soentgen and Theodora Vischer (2004); "Schneiden und Verschleifen: Eva Hesses 'Mechanical Drawings,'" in *Figur und Figuration: Studien zu Wahrnehmung und Wissen*, edited by Gottfried Boehm, Gabriele Brandstetter, and Achatz von Müller (2007).

MARGARET OLIN is Senior Research Scholar at Yale University, with appointments in the Divinity School, the Departments of History of Art and Religious Studies, and the Program in Judaic Studies. Among her books are *The Nation Without Art: Examining Modern Discourses in Jewish Art* (2001); *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade* (2003; coedited with Robert S. Nelson); and *Touching Photographs* (forthcoming).

MARCUS OWENS is a New York and Berlin-based artist who works with design, text, photo, and video to document and intervene in the built environment. He is a DAAD Fellow in Architecture in association with the Universität der Künste–Berlin and a candidate for a Master's in Design Studies at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design. He received professional architectural training (M.Arch) at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

FRANCESCO PERI is an independent scholar based in Paris. His publications include *Da Weimar a Francoforte: Adorno e la cultura musicale degli anni venti* (2005), “Linguaggio che mostra, linguaggio che nasconde: La critica d’arte di Michael Baxandall,” in Michael Baxandall, *Parole per le immagini* (2008), “Storia dell’estetica e storia della critica: Meditazioni sul pensiero musicale,” in *Filosofia e musica*, edited by Carlo Tatasciore (2008), “Per la storia delle scienze inesatte: Riflessioni a margine,” in *La ragione impura*, edited by Rino Genovese and Italo Testa (2006). His doctoral dissertation, *L’esercizio della descrizione: Il visibile e il dicibile nel mondo occidentale* (2008) is currently being translated into French.

WOLFRAM PICHLER is in the Department of Art History at the University of Vienna. His publications include “Topologie des Bildes: Im Plural und im Singular,” in *Das Bild im Plural: Mehrteilige Bildformen zwischen Mittelalter und Gegenwart*, edited by David Ganz and Felix Thürlemann (2010); “Detaillierungen des Bildes,” in *Was aus dem Bild fällt: Figuren des Details in Kunst und Literatur*, edited by Edith Futscher, Stefan Neuner, Wolfram Pichler, and Ralph Ubl (2007); “Metamorphosen des Flussgottes und der Nymphe: Aby Warburgs Denk-Haltungen und die Psychoanalyse” (with Gudrun Swoboda and Werner Rappl), in *Die Couch: Vom Denken im Liegen*, edited by Lydia Marinelli (2006).

ANTONIA POCOCK is a Panofsky Fellow at New York University’s Institute of Fine Arts, where she is working toward her PhD in Art History. She received her BA in Art History and Visual Arts from the University of Chicago in 2007. Her thesis, “The Paradox of Representation: Gerhard Richter’s Abstract Figuration,” was awarded the Robert and Joan Feitler Prize. Her current research continues to interrogate the relationship between abstraction and figuration in postwar European and American painting.

ALEX POTTS is Max Loehr Collegiate Professor in the Department of History of Art at the University of Michigan. His publications include *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (1994 2000) and *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (2000). He is coeditor (with Jon Wood and David Hulks) of *The Modern Sculpture Reader* (2007) and was project scholar and wrote the introduction for the new English translation of Winckelmann’s *History of the Art of Antiquity* (2005).

ADRIAN RIFKIN is in the Department of Art at Goldsmiths University, London. His publications include “Bayreuth, World City? Or the Provincial Village as Global Denkmal,” in *The Cultural Identities of European Cities*, edited by Katia Pizzi and Godela Weiss-Sussex (2010); “Can the Subaltern Wave?” in *Let’s Take Back Our Space*, edited by Mike Sperlinger (2009); and “Look, No Strings,” in *Digital and Other Virtualities: Renegotiating the Image*, edited by Anthony Bryant and Griselda Pollock (2010).

KLAUS SACHS-HOMBACH teaches and works at the Department of Pedagogy and Philosophy at the Technical University of Chemnitz. His publications include *Das Bild als kommunikatives Medium: Elemente einer allgemeinen Bildwissenschaft* (2003), *Bildtheorien: Anthropologische und kulturelle Grundlagen des visualistic Turn* (2009) (editor), and “To Show and to Say: Comparing the Uses of Pictures and Language,” *Studies in Communication Science* 7, no. 2 (2007): 35–62 (with J. R. J. Schirra).

CRISPIN SARTWELL is Associate Professor of Art History, Political Science, and Philosophy at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He is the author of a number of books, including *Six Names of Beauty* (2004) and *Political Aesthetics* (2010).

STEFFEN SIEGEL works at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities in the working group “Bildkulturen.” His publications include *Tabula: Figuren der Ordnung um 1600* (2009). He coedited (with Marcel Leppe) *Jenseits des Poststrukturalismus? Eine Sondierung* (2005) and (with Ingeborg Reichle), *Verwandte Bilder: Die Fragen der Bildwissenschaft* (2007; second edition 2008), *Visuelle Modelle* (2008), and *Maßlose Bilder: Visuelle Ästhetik der Transgression* (2009). His articles include research on the concept of “iconotext,” the theory and the history of the diagram and cartography (especially in the early modern period), as well as photographic practices in contemporary art.

SI HAN teaches at the Department of Art History at the China Central Academy of Fine Arts and works as a fellow researcher at the School of Innovation, Design, and Engineering at Mälardalen University, Västerås and Eskilstuna, Sweden. His publications include *A Chinese Word on Image: Zheng Qiao (1104–1162) and His Thought on Images* (2008); “Shi Dake—Gaijian Zijincheng de Ruidian jianzhushi,” *Jianzhushi lunwen ji* (Treatises on the History of Architecture) 16 (2002): 166–73; and “En svensk pionjär i Kina,” *Arkitektur* (November 2001): 64–66.

KAVITA SINGH is Associate Professor at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, where she teaches courses on the history of museums and of Indian painting. Her recent publications include “The Temple’s Eternal Return: Swaminarayan Akshardham Complex in Delhi,” *Artibus Asiae* 70, no. 1 (2011); “A History of Now: Modern and Contemporary Art Museums in India,” *Art India* (July 2010); “Repatriation Without Patria: Repatriating for Tibet,” *Journal of Material Culture* 15, no. 2 (2010): 131–55; “The Universal Museum: View from Below,” in *Witnesses to History: A Compendium of Documents and Writings on the Return of Cultural Objects*, edited by Lyndel V. Prott (2009); and “Material Fantasy: The Museum in Colonial India,” in *India: Art and Visual Culture, 1857–2007*, edited by Gayatri Sinha (2009). Her current research focuses on the history and politics of museums in postcolonial India.

ALEXIS SMETS is a PhD Candidate at the Center for the History of Philosophy and Science at the University of Nijmegen. His publications include “Words, Lines, Diagrams, Images: Towards a History of Scientific Imagery” (with Christoph Lüthy), *Early Science and Medicine* 14 (2009): 398–439, and “The Controversy Between Leibniz and Stahl on the Theory of Chemistry,” in *Neighbours and Territories: The Evolving Identity of Chemistry*, edited by José Ramón Bertomeu-Sánchez, Duncan Thorburn Burns, and Brigitte Van Tiggele (2008).

VIVIAN SOBCHACK is Professor Emerita in the Department of Film, Television, and Digital Media at the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television. Her essays have appeared in journals such as *Film Quarterly*, *Film Comment*, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, *Camera Obscura*, *Screen*, *Journal of Visual Culture*, *History and Theory*, and *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. Her books include *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology*

of *Film Experience* (1992) and *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (2004). She has also edited two anthologies: *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event* (1996) and *Meta-Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick Change* (2000).

RUTH SONDEREGGER works at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Her publications include *Für eine Ästhetik des Spiels: Hermeneutik, Dekonstruktion und der Eigensinn der Kunst* (2000); *Falsche Gegensätze: Zeitgenössische Positionen zur philosophischen Ästhetik* (2002; coedited with Andrea Kern); *Golden Years: Queere Subkultur zwischen 1959 und 1974* (2006; coedited with Diedrich Diederichsen et al.); and *Conceptions of Critique in Modern and Contemporary Philosophy* (forthcoming; coedited with Karin de Boer).

KLAUS-PETER SPEIDEL teaches the philosophy of art at Sciences Po Poitiers. He is a regular contributor to Art 21 in France. His publications include “Portrait Expressioniste et Caricature: Le rôle réaliste de la distorsion,” in *Ridiculosa*, edited by Alain Deligne and Jean-Claude Gardes (2007); “Gegenstände und Schaffensprozesse: Unfertige Gedanken von Leonardo da Vinci zu anderen Künstlern und Wissenschaftlern,” in *Syntopia* (2007); and “L’écriture du détail: allers-retours entre peinture et littérature,” in *Complications de Textes: Les Microlectures*, edited by Marc Escola, LHT no. 3 (2008).

FREDERIK STJERNFELT is a professor at the Center for Semiotics, Aarhus University, Denmark. His publications include *Diagrammatology: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Phenomenology, Ontology, and Semiotics* (2007), ten books in Danish, as well as papers in international periodicals (*Semiotica*, *Synthese*, *Zeitschrift für Semiotik*, *Lexia*, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, *Recherces Semiotiques*) and in volumes on semiotics, pictures, diagrams, epistemology, and political philosophy. He is coeditor (with Peer F. Bundgård) of *Semiotics: Critical Concepts in Language Studies* (2011); and he is editor of the periodical *Kritik* (Copenhagen).

MEREL VAN TILBURG is a PhD candidate and research and teaching assistant at the Department of Art History at the University of Geneva. She regularly writes exhibition reviews for the art magazine *De Witte Raaf*. Her publications include “De hand van de schilder,” in *Catalogus Koninklijke Prijs voor Vrije Schilderkunst* (2008); “Ferdinand Hodler und die Erfindung des Parallelismus,” *WINK* 1, no. 3 (2008): 2–4; *Sven Kröner: Hidden Path* (2008); “Face à l’Impressionnisme, Jean-Jacques Henner, le dernier des romantiques,” *De Witte Raaf*, no. 129 (2007): 11; and *Beelden van Amsterdam: Amsterdammers vertellen* (2006).

RAINER TOTZKE is a philosopher in the DFG Research Training group “Notational Iconicity” in the Department of Philosophy at the Free University of Berlin. His publications include “Bilder und Wissen,” in *Sprache—Kultur—Darstellungsformen*, edited by Bettina Kremberg and Rainer Totzke (2010); “Logik, Metaphysik und Gänsefüßchen,” in *Schrift: Kulturtchnik zwischen Auge, Hand und Maschine*, edited by Gernot Grube, Werner Kogge, and Sybille Krämer (2005); and *Buchstaben-Folgen: Schriftlichkeit, Wissenschaft und Heideggers Kritik an der Wissenschaftsidealologie* (2004).

FRANK VIGNERON works in the Fine Arts Department at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

His publications include *I Like Hong Kong: Art and Deteritorialization* (2010); *Académiciens et Lettrés: Analyse comparative de la théorie picturale du 18e siècle en Chine et en Europe* (2010); *Pour et Contre l'Académie: Les traités de pratique picturale en Europe aux 17e et 18e siècles* (2010); *Zhijian: Zhongxi yishu shangxi bijiao* (2007); and *Shen Zongqian: Jiezhou Xuehua bian, un traité de peinture chinoise du dix-huitième siècle* (1999).

PAUL WILLEMARCK is an independent scholar in France. His publications include “Histoire et déconstruction” (PhD diss., Université des sciences humaines, Strasbourg, 2002); “Nood aan filosofie,” *Kritiek*, no. 32 (1999): 64–90; “Rudolfs Mores: Utopia,” in *In verhouding*, edited by Willy Coolsaet (1993); “De getuigenis,” in *Hugo Debaere* (1987); and “La fiction du lumen materiale,” in *Pour la photographie*, vol. 2, edited by Ciro Bruni (1987).

EDUARDO VIVANCO ANTOLIN is a PhD student at the Yale School of Architecture. He was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study art at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and holds a Master of Arts in Modern and Contemporary Art History, Theory, and Criticism, being the sole recipient of the annual departmental Fellowship. Vivanco got his B.Arch in Spain, where he later worked for Juan Navarro Baldeweg, opened his own firm, and was Assistant Professor at the ETSA of Madrid, as well as a lecturer in various schools of architecture, including the Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany. His work, as architect and artist, and his writings have been exhibited and published in Europe and the United States.

CANDACE WIRT graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2010, receiving a Master of Arts in Art History, Theory, and Criticism and a Master of Arts in Arts Administration and Policy. While at the School, she worked as a graduate assistant at the Sullivan Galleries and Betty Rymer Gallery and as a teaching assistant in the Department of Art History, Theory, and Criticism.

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James Elkins is Professor in the Department of Art History, Theory, and Criticism at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Maja Naef is an art historian and art critic based in Basel, Switzerland.

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THE STONE ART THEORY INSTITUTES

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS

UNIVERSITY PARK, PENNSYLVANIA

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