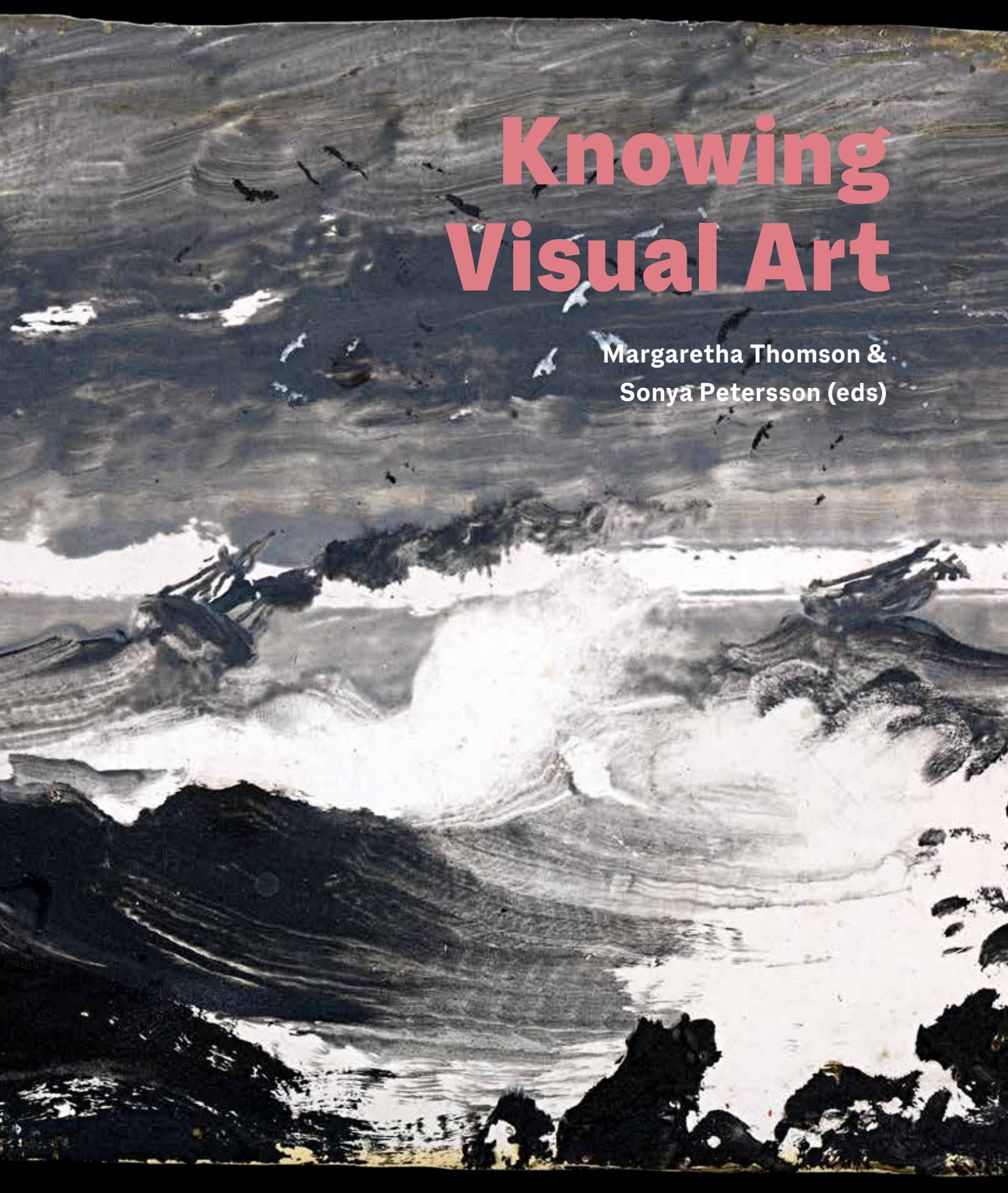

Knowing Visual Art

Margaretha Thomson &
Sonya Petersson (eds)

KVHAA Antikvariska serien 60

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Sonya Petersson (eds)

Knowing Visual Art

KUNGL. VITTERHETS HISTORIE OCH ANTIKVITETS AKADEMIEN
HANDLINGAR ANTIKVARISKA SERIEN 60

Abstract
Knowing Visual Art is a collection of studies that investigates what it is to know visual art. The fundamental aim is to explore how two interconnected but radically different spheres of knowledge and experience meet in the analysis of visual art: the epistemological rationality of scholarly methods and the experiential, visual and material, power and appeal of the artworks. The object is to reach further into the domain of visual art by sharpening perceptual impressions and interpretative meanings and by making knowledge claims clear, analysed and known, but without reducing the expressive powers of visual art. Rather, the authors explore more of the distinctly visual and material conditions of the artworks and examine how these conditions meet—or escape—cognitive ways of thinking and undertaking art-historical research. The studies in this book bring these questions to a range of visual expressions from different epochs. The reader will get to know medieval architectural spaces, contemporary video works, 19th-century prints and Antique sculpture along with paintings and drawings by artists from the 17th to the 20th centuries.

Keywords
art history, visual arts, interpretation, knowledge claims, experience

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MARGARETHA THOMSON

Thematic introduction

Stakes in knowing visual art

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF this book concern understanding visual art and the scholarly challenges connected to exploring artworks. Strong epistemic claims in analyses of art's various modes of being do not diminish notions of art's expressivity; on the contrary, inquiry is a prerequisite to explore an artwork's unique power.

We connect to a scholarly scenery, in the aftermath of the intense self-reflective work during the decades around the year 2000—a date signalling both retrospection and new initiatives.[1] In most recent time, however, research on artworks expressing multi-layered and deep meaning through their appearance seems to give pride of place to studies of culture in a wider sense, to political and historiographical perspectives. That change has affected the scholarly notions about the importance of visual art and loosened or simplified the structures of analyses. And that is a mistake of strategy, in our opinion, since art's impact is strong—in cases, bordering on such life experiences that are described as sacred or mysterious. With a precise and deep analysis of visual art, such effects can be better known and connect further, through comparisons, with other fields of the humanities.

Searching for truth about visual art

The notions about truth conditions in relation to visual art are present along a wide borderline between what is clearly knowable and reasonable in scholarly language, and even in any descriptive language, about art—and what is purely iconic, maybe beyond the reach of language.

Around 1900, art history was a more hard-edged scholarly discipline than aesthetics, a result of the influence and legacy of the Vienna School.

1. Examples of texts from the years around the new millennium that explore the scholarly positions of art history include: Cheetham *et al.* 1999; Halsall *et al.* 2009; Wood 2019.

There was an emphasis on objective formal analysis, and beyond that, a search, through the discipline, for an idealist content in the *Kunstwollen* of artists and cultures.

Leading scholars in the British tradition a century later—Ernst H. Gombrich, Richard Wollheim and Michael Baxandall—explored visual art with epistemic ambitions, with a touch of learned conversation. The analyses were in the format of scientific research. But the analytical structure of arguments was combined with the search for the mental aspect, the historical intent, the source, the creative idea. Keeping the formal aspect of the investigations, they opted for knowing the artwork as a structure witnessing mental and lived experience. Art, for these historically dominant scholars in the decades before 2000, was a scene rendering creative ideas and structures of viewpoints, displaying their exploratory minds.

The research was based on observations of perspective, focal points and viewpoints, like a visual philosophical grid of thoughts on famous paintings as mental constructs. The paintings seemed approachable for a mind prepared to be receptive, through the learned scholar's mind and vision that served as a bridge for readers.

From the time of these leading British scholars, there have been substantial differences in attitudes and methods. The global scene is opening up, and there are tendencies to reach beyond the Eurocentric area and the Renaissance legacy for subject choice. Art is no longer only a construct of idealized mental resources. The viewer and the artist are not the only "subjects" to lead the way; the work itself also performs this role, in the museum, at the exhibition, as it is as a resource of life force.

Original works of art that are currently shown in great museums of the world have an impact far beyond their historical identities. A work of visual art is "acting" in the present, showing its historical dimension as well as its ongoing appeal to emotions and thoughts.[2] This strong "agency" of great art is the line of thought in Horst Bredekamp's *Image Acts. A Systematic Approach to Visual Agency* (2018), focusing on the visual force.[3] There has been a new "turn" in the explorations of visual art, ways of showing its expressivity, in combination with notions of art's impact, as carrier of intellects and feelings, in its encounter with a viewer. In the

2. Wolfgang Kemp introduced the "implicit viewer" in Kemp 1992; W.J.T. Mitchell stated the problem of images as having a kind of "mind" in their physical substance, intention and power of persuasion in Mitchell 2005. See also Morgan 2014 and, more importantly, Morgan 2018; Bennett 2001.

3. Bredekamp 2018.

first decade of the 21st century, there were attempts to widen the perspectives of art history, globally and in terms of the effects and functions of visual art. There was a "visual turn", referring back to W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Interpretation* (1994).[4] The idea was to acknowledge a "life" of images.[5] Contemporary art is now a broad scene where artworks appear as "acting", as performing their own identities, in the contexts of the thoughts and experiences of the artists who created the works. Many of the initiatives about the "agency" of images concern a broad spectrum of visual impressions, and the affects and responses triggered in the viewer. Here, we focus on visual art and its impact on viewing and thinking.

Along with experiencing the impact of visual art, we focus on premises in art-writing, stating claims of knowledge about what and on which conditions art performs.

Knowing Visual Art, as the title of this book reads, is a collection of essays written by Swedish scholars. The focus is on the scholarly claims, truth aspects and methods that concern understanding and writing about visual art, applying both an epistemological approach and—acknowledging the visual power and material appeal of visual art—a notion of presence. How do we know what we know about art, the logic of object and subject, the expressive force? "Visual art" in our era is a designation relevant for a wide repertoire of expressions: architectural spaces, digital and moving images, along with the traditional categories of painting, drawing and sculpture.

There is no one "school" of interpretation, but a shared intent to reach far into the domain of visual art, to sharpen impressions and meaning, and to let claims of knowledge become clear, analysed and acknowledged.

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4. Mitchell 1994.

5. The ideas went as far as thinking about the artwork, by the example of photography, as having a soul and a mind of itself, see Martin Jay: "of attributing to images their own desires, their own vitality, instead of seeing them as the mere projection of human wants and interests" in Jay 2013, p. 39. To my mind, this is beyond what can be considered knowledge. I think that when an artist projects feelings and thoughts in a work, the traces visible in the work are not all from controlled or even conscious thinking or experiencing; the artist and other watchers may think of those expressions as coming from another mind, the artwork's mind as it were. A less extreme variant is to be found in Heywood & Sandywell 2012, pp. 10–11; the authors opt for a visual thinking across media, sciences and cultures; their idea is to pursue research "to restore human activities and practices to their sustaining experiential contexts and forms of life (a project that involves integration of research agendas concerned with the senses in historical and comparative perspective)." The object of the research agenda is the live, visible acts connected to various expressions, not specifically visual art.

This is, however, far from reducing the expressive powers of visual art; on the contrary, we try to explore more of the nature and conditions of the visual expressive enigmas of the artworks, the dimension on the other side of a cognitive border zone, or maybe blurring the border zone, making it vague or morphing. The aim is to understand where and how science and explanations ultimately reach insights about modes of visual art, but also where those cognitive ways of thinking do not find answers; when there is a kind of resistance, or an escape into another kind of mental processing, something different that is felt but not understood, and how such parameters in art can be explained, or rather explored. Art history needs to be precise—to find out about art's abilities to form visions of ideas and how art shapes, or triggers, emotions. And art history needs to be precise about its own epistemic tools in the encounter.

Art. The ancient, the present and the silent

In a preliminary seminar on some recent scholarly writings about visual art, we noticed that there was a kind of void around the art object as such.[6] The texts were fluent regarding economics, traffic connecting cities and continents, claims about understanding large patterns of a certain culture, or the psychological effects the artwork could cause. However, the visual "face" of the specific images, with all the nuances, enigmas and startling revelations, was as if avoided, as if not within reach of a systematic scholarly language, or as if not within the expected interests of a wider scholarly community.

So, let us start as far back as we can find relevant statements in Western culture that embrace the present, or, rather, presence: with the ancient Greeks. Simonides, born in the 6th century BC on Keos, is the source. Plutarch, writing about the "Glory of Athens", tells us that "Simonides calls painting silent poetry and poetry painting that speaks; for actions which painters represent as happening, words set out and describe after they have happened."[7] Usually this famous phrase appears truncated, just stating the comparative idea, but not the aspect of different format and targets in time.

6. The preliminary scholarly seminar had the title 'Gestaltning, beskrivning och logik i konstanalys (Representation, Description, and Logic in Analyses of Visual Art)' and was held at the Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien (The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquity), Stockholm, on 20 October 2021, with focus on scholarly aspects of analyses of visual art.

7. Campbell 1991, p. 363. Iribarren 2012 does not, however, stress the fact that Simonides made a difference between the arts, in terms of immediacy and succession.

To start exploring knowledge related to visual art—with the earliest possible, and obviously fundamental statement—is to be in tune with the phenomena of visual art. To be in relation to visual art of sublime qualities means connecting to the origins of human thinking, to what was first and yet remains as being present, active in the sense that we, as viewers, can "enter" those image-worlds, projecting our minds into the artworks' sceneries.

Visual art is always in the present tense, as Simonides said. Literature is recording things in the manner of stories, about events that appear as told, at some moment set down in abstract signs. When talking about visual art, some passages of a discourse will entail talking about presence and the material. The ageing of artworks is relevant, as well as previous or expected viewers. (Looking at Russian icons in an art museum is like witnessing how the images have lost their viewers and their function, as if deprived of their meaning in a state of mourning; the scars of time do not matter, just the loss of people.) In a museum, it is not self-evident which artworks are more suited for display, or even originally allowed to be on display (depending on their history). In visual art, works seem animated and vulnerable—even if they are treated as statements or as symbolizations of ideas—because they resemble visions of reality (in one way or other) and show the qualities of worked substances, carrying individual qualities.

Other disciplines

We acknowledge the fact that visual art operates with other processes of meaning-production as well as with art history (or *konstvetenskap*, aligning with the German *Kunstwissenschaft*). There is a border zone of strangeness or unfamiliarity in the very crossing area of the interpretation and the work. The work is visual or brings visuality along with its expressions; its border systems are fluent and changeable; its impact emotional as well as discursive; its sources in time are as old as the human species. But such differences are current in subjects of many historical academic fields. So, why bother in art history?

This is probably due to the notion of an analogy between the interpretation of a work and the expression or ontological character of the work itself. This is a tradition connected to the arts. Literature, however, has the paradigmatic role. There is a lingering idea of a necessary likeness, deep down, if not on the surface, between the interpretation and the expression to be known. In literature, both are texts. This idea

of "sameness" is typical of the strategies of *hermeneutics*, especially in literature.[8] The interpretation of a text, along with hermeneutics, is like a second text, an explored mode of the original text.[9] In visual art, the scholar needs to transform the artwork into a mental screen, to opt for an idea of likeness, in terms of shape and substance, or in terms of being of the mind.

Apart from the impact of the legacy of hermeneutics, visual art studies share a heritage with *aesthetics*. Applying aesthetic reasoning to a work of visual art makes the idea of ageing differences vanish. Aesthetics can grasp the core meaning of a visual expression, immediately, as in an apparition, since the kind of mind status studied in aesthetics can be thought of as the cause of the expression or in analogy with it, as a property preserved in the work. But, in aesthetics, the reasoning is scant around the conditions of knowledge related to specific artworks and around historical circumstances.[10]

Siding with aesthetics, art history gains the prestige of philosophy, but is deprived of the claims concerning historical truth, in relation to specific cultures. And aesthetics holds a lower prestige position within the "family" of philosophy, when it comes to explanations of truth based on arguments, since its traditions are connected to form and perception, more than to logic. Truth can inevitably be stated in a logical paradigm; as a quality of sense experience, it rests within the conditions of the human body and mind—and can be disputed.[11]

Voices

However, for Friedrich Schiller, a pioneer in the domain of art reflection, "beauty", as a quality in visual art, is linked to vision, but also to "freedom", which Schiller thought was the goal for human life. And freedom as a quality in the visible sets a political or ethical agenda for visual art, as well as for the interpretation of art. Through showing and making visible, visual art has claims beyond the already recognized conceptual structure of knowledge that is linked to power.[12]

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8. Rossholm Lagerlöf 2018, p. 175.

9. Especially relevant about Paul Ricœur: Valdés 1991, pp. 48–63, and *passim*.

10. Woodfield 2009, pp. 19–33.

11. In England, aesthetics was not admitted as a university discipline until in the mid-1930s, see Woodfield 2009.

12. A very powerful case manifesting this idea of identities being acknowledged and thematized, from events of daily life, and made visible in visual art is in English 2019—a chapter of which was the example chosen by Mårten Snickare for the discussion at the

If Schiller was right, his ideas may be seen alongside those of Jacques Rancière, bringing power of influence to recent reflections on art, where politics is at the core of the arguments.[13] Artworks and any manifestations of culture bring evidence to the "aesthetic", according to Rancière, since they state what is recognized as reality—anything that is object for sense perceiving—and thus knowable. What is seen and felt, and thus known, identified and potentially brought to notice, is a political question, according to Rancière. And he is certainly right.

A major difference in the "landscape" of art history today, in comparison to even the rather recent period of Gombrich, Wollheim and Baxandall, is the presence of female scholars. Are there differences, beyond the aspects of the individual? I would say, yes—in the sense that there is more of exploring, with women authors, and less focus on development and heritage, in giving credit to strategically important models. In scholarly practice, *traditio legis* (transferred to the realm of science, from the biblical context and Christ's giving the message of faith to the apostles) is a very powerful means of ascending the ladders of prestige and fame for recognized male art historians. Research among female art historians is more focused on discovery, new evidence and the presentation of different perspectives. When Michael Ann Holly writes about the great development of cultural achievements in Vienna, a century back in time from her own writing, she develops a large scenery of places (including the urban quarters and streets where Sigmund Freud moved), persons, meetings, achievements—as the scenery for presenting and analysing Gustav Klimt's enigmatic large paintings about human knowledge, made for the university (and destroyed during World War II).[14]

Now. The great moment

Since artworks appear, the physicality or materiality of their appearance claims the present tense. They are not only in their historical identities, but they become what they are when they are emerging for an informed viewer's eyes and mind. A viewer who is also a scholar explores the artwork, and the intent looking comprises core moments within long

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seminar (see note 6). His contribution to the seminar marked the beginning of a common project concerning the examination and development of art history as a discipline, resulting in this volume. English's chapter is about a painting by Kerry James Marshall, *Untitled (Policeman)*, 2015.

13. Rancière 2004.

14. Holly 1999.

periods of time spent on information and cultural analyses. With large and time-consuming studies, the scholar is equipped with the keys of understanding, allowing him or her to unlock the artwork; this showing, which can be sudden or slowly emerging, can only be made possible by the long period of preparation.

Sometimes, the interpreter may also meet the hazards of the "great moment" that passes, comes to an end, and renders back the remains or memories like an apparition. A scholar who has experienced that is T.J. Clark, in *The Sight of Death. An Experiment in Art Writing* (2008). After a period of "living" within or through some paintings by Nicolas Poussin, especially *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake*, Clark is left with his notes and his writing, trying to capture and express what he had experienced, claiming a new way of writing art history that amounts to both an original text and a period of involvement that has passed.[15] So, art history is marked by intense moments of witnessing and viewing; it is a scholarly practice that brings the past in contact with the present, in very specific ways that cannot be generalized.

Scholarly studies of cultures, avoiding aesthetics

Scholarly work, as theory of reasoning, differs fundamentally according to the objects. The same philosophy of interpretation cannot be used for visual art and literature, for example, except with very sharp distinctions. Literature, which is already verbal, aligns easily with philosophies of interpretation, such as semiotics and, nowadays probably more frequently, with phenomenology or hermeneutics, and even psychoanalysis. Art history has employed iconography and nameless interpretive methods based on viewing psychology and pictorial perspective.[16] But, employing terminologies from other academic fields, the scholar of visual art uses indirect vocabularies, projecting meaning on images.

Art history, as a discipline with narrow terminologies, sometimes seems to be a discourse where the scholars avoid the deep analyses of the

15. Clark 2008; Rossholm Lagerlöf 2008.

16. Baxandall 1985, p. 1 and *passim*. Baxandall does not frame his method of explanation in terms of a philosophy, but it emerges as self-evident that his interpretations are based on observations and documentations from the period in question. His method is empirical and historical; the descriptions are non-analytical (they do not have truth claims) but serve as the basis of the interpretation. A few terms are introduced: "brief" to frame the kind of agenda an artist experienced, in terms of inventing an artistic solution; and "troc" to refer to economic networks and other material and commercial premises in the studied culture.

pictorial and deal with more solid evidence about cultural and historical patterns around the artworks.[17] John Rewald's famous research about the Impressionists, *The History of Impressionism*, published in 1946, became a lasting framing of this period of art history, exploring the paintings in the context of urban environment and ways of connecting among the artists. Towards the close of the 20th century some art historians opted for explicit, deep realism, examining economic, political and cultural levels of meaning-production in a culture. Craig Harbison explored realities in his work *Jan van Eyck. The Play of Realism* (1991) based on the evidence of religion, money and bonds of securities, both in this world and the next. He acknowledged himself as a distant, inquisitive witness, coping with contrary impressions: comic effects and hyper-reality.[18]

Strengthening scholarly thoughts in the interpretation of visual art

Leading British scholars writing in the late 20th century opted for an essentialist psychological solution, within a historical dimension. Richard Wollheim invented a scheme where painting and mental structure became a match.[19] To be able to reach the essence of the historical mind, the scholar passes through a layer of mind in the work itself.

Another British scholar of the late 20th century, Michael Podro, introduced a more complicated mental construct, in a contribution to a book dedicated by many colleagues to Wollheim. It is the act of imagination that is essential—recalling both the artwork's expression and the viewer's involvement and understanding.[20] What you see as represented in the artwork is exactly what you imagined.

Hubert Damisch, on the other hand, explores centuries of pictorial illusions in Western painting, witnessing the images and their effects as if he was among the first viewers; the foundation is a deep historical understanding of pictorial methods, such as perspective and apparition of painted visual reality.[21] Where all the illusions of Western painting come

17. Rewald 1946 became both a source and a template to produce art history, dealing with events, contacts, politics and the artworks in a context of culture.

18. Harbison 1991.

19. Wollheim 1987. Wollheim's scheme of analysis develops three levels of understanding: the "repertoire" (assumptions, beliefs, understanding of subject/object relation, in the relevant period of time, seen in a painting); the internal viewer (an assumed viewing role in the painting, sometimes also depicted, as in a work by Caspar David Friedrich, *The Large Enclosure*, p. 136); and the external viewer, the interpreter, a scholar. His approach is historical.

20. Podro 2000, p. 113.

21. Damisch 2002.

to an end, where art becomes different, as if liberated from experiments through illusion, is with Cézanne. Damisch represents a continental tradition of art reflection, outside the realm of British empiricism and historicism; but he does not name his learned method, he just uses it, as if it all had to do with presence.

Artworks may also belong to a specific origin, their place. Important artworks that are in their original place, as parts of sites, can express their own effects according to the conditions of the surrounding space and the use of a building. Peter Gillgren has vastly expanded the meaning structure of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* for the Sistine Chapel, in relating the unframed and differently illuminated pictorial space of the painting to liturgy and illumination.[22]

Research in art history may come near other scholarly areas such as social history, reception theory, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism … but few terms or concepts are uniquely used in art history. The term "iconography", denoting subject matter, remains from the explicatory method of Erwin Panofsky, but not the term's relevance as a part of Panofsky's philosophy as "iconology".[23]

Interpretive terms, used in art history, may originate in other discourses, such as philosophy, semantics, literature or psychology. And the transfer of terms is not always explored, with the consequence that visual art itself becomes imbued with a verbal character. But, in visual art, the expressive thing to be understood is non-verbal; unlike interpretation of literature, the interpretation of visual art is dialectic, balancing on a difference of nature between image and words. The art historian talks about something that will not respond, but "react" or become known somehow, mentally, and emotionally, with the help of words in connection with very long sessions of looking.

Among recent scholarly initiatives, the theme of "performativity", and the method of inquiry it denotes, connects more directly to situations of artworks and how they show their meaning in relation to an environment—as shown in Gillgren's art-historical work on Michelangelo.

Searching for a language and claiming an inquiry

The British scholars opted for examining perspectives, perceptions and angles of visions as the origin of an explanation or interpretation, using

22. Gillgren 2017.

23. Panofsky 1955. Panofsky's theory was at the basis of art history teaching at Stockholm University in the 1960s and 1970s.

their observations as mirrors or signs reflecting the intent of the works.

With art interpretations of recent time, inspired by continental hermeneutics and phenomenology, language, mind and object are fundamentally interrelated. The visual artworks merge into the language. So, the texts may appear as literary depictions of aspects of the artworks, and the visual is tuned into the language, as it were.

With the art of the contemporary period, art writing becomes more literary than scholarly, as if resembling somehow the aesthetics of the work. And recent visual art certainly invites inventive language. Just think of Tony Oursler's *The Influence Machine* (2000–2002), as it was performed on 20 October 2016 at the Stockholm University campus, in a collaboration with the art site Accelerator and Magasin III Museum of Contemporary Art.[24] Huge phantasmagorical faces, speaking like breathing spirits among the large trees, were projected in the park under the dark and windy evening sky. What interpretational scheme would analyse such a work? The first move would be to interpret the relation to early projection techniques, from the age of industrial discoveries, and measure the impact of the impressions.

Contemporary art is more reviewed than interpreted in a scholarly manner. However, it also invites deep analyses. Mona Hatoum's video work about the relation between her mother and herself, *Measures of Distance* (1988), was analysed by Gabrielle A. Hezekiah in 2020.[25] The theme of the artwork is the distant nearness through the vision of the mother's body.[26] Hezekiah builds an elaborate interpretation, based on a theory of the French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion, who has coined the expression "saturated phenomenon", meaning a phenomenon that has an overflow so strong that it does not convey all that it empowers; the recipient is left, at loss, with parts of a whole that is unknown. This idea comes forth as a kind of light directed on the artwork, but it is not

24. Accelerator at Stockholm University is an art site and an institute for research; it was established through the initiative of David Newman, director of Magasin III, in collaboration with representatives of the university.

25. Hezekiah 2020. Hezekiah also refers to an interpretation of the work done by Katherine Young. Young has pointed out that there are two channels of hearing and two channels of viewing, and that all these levels of communication are unconnected to each other. The large number of communication channels that do not connect demonstrates a strong need for communication means, and inabilities in realizing real communication.

26. The meaning is very subtle and has many layers. Mother and daughter have lived separate lives because of war; memories, language and habits separate them, but the intimacy of bodily memories from childhood are relevant and trigger both a sense of loss and of comfort.

obvious how, and if, it meets the visual performance of the artwork in such a way that it belongs to its meaning.

And again, what are the criteria for connecting the theory to the imagery of the artwork?

Hélène Cixous, on the other hand, comes into image interpretation from language philosophy, in the vicinity of Jacques Derrida's thinking. Her texts about visual art appear as completely free from the academic pursuit of art history. She deals with words and the sound of words as sense experiences, as it seems, taking meaning of words from their sound. And, writing about visual art, she takes a step in a different direction from art historians; she "becomes" the motif of certain paintings. She sees herself in the flayed ox painted by Rembrandt.[27] She is the seen, the object. This is beyond a statement about that painting. But it is true about traditions, on the evidence of many hundred years of traditions in art.

But Cixous' standpoint is not so far from the hesitant art historians'—in a kind of refusal to continue with the discourse. There is some reluctance to talk about visual art, as if all visual expressive resources were already spent or beyond reach. Either the painted image "pretends" (as Damisch says, quoting Karl Marx),[28] showing represented space and forms; either substances morph into things and bodies, maybe figures appearing as ghost-like replicas of real bodies (sometimes they are real bodies); or all material of art turns into matter that escapes representation and becomes a self-referential expression or a statement without a readable message.

Visual art is thus a serious challenge for scholars—on the edge, as it is. And for both scholars and non-scholarly viewers, coping with understanding, art is not like a holiday for restful escape into dreamland, since art contains so much passion (even in the sense of suffering) and so many challenges. And yet, it is extremely powerful, in ways that remain different from the magic of the screen, the films, the serials and the talk shows. Its power has to do with the material quality, mixing with something imagined, within a context of presence.

What next? This book

Our agenda with this book is to let the two sides of the inquiry—the artwork and the interpretation—face and mirror each other and be

27. Cixous 2012, p. 9.
28. Damisch 2002, p. 231.

equipped for the occasion. The interpretive tools of the scholars allow the artwork to become reflected, in the sense of the viewer's experienced understanding. It will be clear what the conceptual tools are and what they are not. There can be a change of method if the artwork somehow remains unattainable. The intention is not to bring the work to a final and lasting understanding, but on the contrary, to allow it to show its potentials, how it can become important to know, as an expression and a configuration, and why. The interpretive work, collected in this book, will be more like an exploration than a confirmation.

At the start, the scholar is there with the artwork on one side and the interpretive tools (observations, philosophy, cultural studies, terminology, specific comparisons or properties of a context) on the other.

The concepts and terms, the ways of thinking expressed in methods, will be exposed to the questions of the writers: what kind of understanding does a concept carry in the terms and thoughts it proposes in relation to the artwork; can a scholarly method be used just partly, adjusted as it were to the claims of the pictorial work; what messages about understanding are captured in the terminology of a method of interpretation; what are the effects of different, relevant times for the understanding of the artwork (the time of production, other important times in the history of the artwork and the time of the scholar's viewing)?

The scholar directs the "searchlight" of some tools towards the expressive work. In that moment, what is revealed about the artwork? What are the effects? What parts or properties of the work are affected and how? Is the interpreting philosophy lighting the work, and in what ways, what qualities and what parts of it—is it excluding too much? There are many questions to answer.

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SONYA PETERSSON

Chapter introduction

Main lines of inquiry

THE FOLLOWING CHAPTERS inquire into what it is and what it means to know visual art. Each chapter makes its own theoretical and methodological choices and examines its own object of study, ranging from architectural space and video art to situated sculpture, paintings and printed illustrations. Together, the chapters reflect the inclusive character of art history as it is practiced today.

This section offers a consideration of the main lines of inquiry that run through this book. But first, a short recapitulation of the preceding thematic introduction: our mutual commitment is to investigate what happens in the encounter between various analytical tools and the artworks. The tools operate in the cognitive domain of knowledge, and the artworks, with their "visual power and material appeal", appear and have effects in much broader registers of human life and experience. By stating the problem this way, as one that recognizes the difference between scholarly procedures and knowledge claims on the one hand and the effects of the works' visuality and materiality on the other, this book engages with a "surplus" that demands attention, examination and articulation.[1]

Ways of knowing

The first main line of inquiry concerns *ways of knowing* visual art. With the exception of Dan Karlholm's more theoretically oriented contribution, the chapters develop the question of knowing visual art through close encounters with actual works of art. As a reader, one is invited to follow the ways of analysis where historical sitings, pictorial contexts, affects, iconotextual interplays and much more are traced and made eloquent and appear in a to-and-fro movement between the tools, (the experience of) the artworks, contextualizing strategies and other parts

1. "Surplus" as in Mitchell 2005, pp. 76–106.

of the studies. Thus described, the analysis itself turns out as a process, something evolving, through which the works gradually come forth as denser and richer.[2]

The expression "ways of knowing" is intended to resonate with several aspects of this book. Its first part, "ways", implies methods as well as the way somewhere, the evolving path that leads ahead, not to a final point or an end of analysis, but simply to another, and therefore different, stage. "Knowing" emphasizes the ongoing, evolving or processual, character of the way ahead (hence the -ing form), and is further related to two different sets of ideas that are deeply interrelated in our chapters. The first is the cognitive and epistemic sense of knowing something about the artwork or about the experience it engenders. The second is the more open sense of familiarizing or acquainting oneself with the artwork.[3] Our extended encounters with works of visual art have the character of an evolving familiarization.

In particular Dan Karlholm's chapter, which elaborates the question of knowing visual art into a question of acknowledging the truth of the work, pursues an argument that is connected to the second sense of knowing above. Karlholm makes an analogy between the artwork and "a kind of subjectivity or unique individuality", which is claimed to "create a new vision of what artworks are and how we could choose to approach them". This reasoning hinges on a distinction between the knowledge we can have about the artwork and the truth of the work. The former includes, for instance, the past and present meanings attributed to the work and its circumstances of production and reception, or knowledge established through scholarly tools and procedures, whereas the latter concerns the "reality" and "energy" of the artwork, which is to be recognized (i.e. acknowledged) rather than known. At the other end of the spectrum is Sonya Petersson's chapter with its focus on pictorial knowledge in the more epistemic sense. The chapter investigates the knowledge production of a set of 19th-century prints in the margins of art history, introduced as "pictures with which to think". Nevertheless, Petersson's epistemic focus is tied to an analysis of the prints in relation to an idea of experience as simultaneously embodied and historical.

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2. The idea of visual art's "density" is developed by Goodman 1976, pp. 127–221, as part of his analytical aesthetics and theory of denotation.

3. Cf. the entry 'Know, v.' and the examples under I and II for the second sense and the examples under III for the first sense: 'Know, v.', *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), oed.com, accessed 28 March 2023.

These two chapters exemplify the interconnected senses of "knowing" in this book. As a whole, the book has the character of an evolving exploration of the knowledge production *and* ontology of visual art, its meaning *and* materiality, through cognitive *and* experiential ways of knowing the artwork.

Exploring the specificity of visual art

Another shared concern is to explore the *specific* manner in which visual art gives rise to meaning, causes effects and interacts with the world. Margaretha Thomson's discussion of presence as a paradox of time is tied to *painterly* qualities in Rembrandt's *Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem* (1630). The work's "empty" spot of abstraction in the middle of the scene is for Thomson the place where the painterly process reveals itself, in the present, and exposes its past beginnings, just as the present materiality of paint is analysed as coextensive with its condition of ageing. Similarly, Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe builds up *pictorial* contexts around Otto Dix's painting *Neugeborenes auf Händen (Ursus)* (1927) by following its visual references to older, art-historical works and to other works by the artist and his contemporaries. *Visual* references hence form Sjöholm Skrubbe's basis for exploring how the painting is both embedded in and, by its pronounced abstraction and gesture, withdrawing itself from the recognizable social milieus of the Weimar era's political imagery and from the narrative character of traditional Christian iconography.

These aspects of Thomson's and Sjöholm Skrubbe's chapters exemplify this book's engagement with the artworks' materiality and visuality. Throughout the chapters, this line of analysis is coupled with the authors' in-depth attention to what could be described as the *multidimensionality* of the artworks: how their materiality and visuality interrelate to and interact with representational and narrative content and the modalities of movement and time.

One overall contribution of this book is then our recognition and exploration of visual art's multidimensionality. By the same token, it also offers a nuanced perspective on that which is generally circumscribed by the label "visual". As amply shown by art history's neighbouring field visual studies, without further delimitations, "the visual" encompasses everything that enters perception and cognition through the sense of sight.[4]

4. Alternative denominations of this field, which emerged in its present form in the 1980s, are visual culture studies and image studies in the Anglophone world and *Bildwissenschaft* in the German-speaking world (*bildvetenskap* in Swedish). Cf. Elkins *et al.*

It includes the artworks' imagery, pictoriality and materiality,[5] as well as their spaces and places—the exhibition space of the art museum and its arrangement of paintings in Nina Weibull's chapter on Eugène Delacroix's painting *Médée furieuse* (1838), or the patterned Piazza di Campidoglio around the Antique equestrian bronze sculpture in Peter Gillgren's chapter. Here, it is of less importance whether "the visual" is taken as denoting a quality in objects and places or as epitomizing a sensory channel. In both cases, the point is merely that it is encompassing. Against this background, this book approaches "the visual" as *both* differentiated within itself *and* interoperative with other modalities and sensory channels. The former concerns the chapters' recognition of the artworks' imagery, pictoriality, materiality, environments and even writing as included in the visual, but in need of analysis by more precise terminologies. The latter concerns how several authors deal with the visual as cooperative with, for instance, movement. In Mårten Snickare's chapter on Isaac Julien's video work *Western Union: Small Boats* (2007), the choreographed movements of the drowning bodies, the temporal sequence of moving images and the musical rhythm are examined as intermixed with the visual and spatial elements of the work.

Temporalizing the artwork

Whether focusing on siting processes, architectural space or something else, and whether engaging with longer or shorter time spans, nearly all chapters deal with the historical and/or experiential temporality of their examples.[6] Along these lines, Lena Liepe explores the 12th-century crypt of Lund Cathedral as the space of present-day visitors, but without losing sight of how its "historical integrity" becomes manifest through time-honoured liturgic rituals and architectural environments. This power of evoking an awareness of the past is in Liepe's analysis further framed by the art-historical terminology that designates and temporal-

2015. For updated perspectives on "the visual" and "visuality", see the edited volumes by Kristensen *et al.* 2013; 2015.

5. These three are closely related. "Pictoriality" includes imagery in the sense of an image that appears in the materiality of a picture. In its broader sense, "imagery" includes the metaphors and mental images that are discussed in some of the chapters in this book. This distinction between image and picture has been elaborated by Mitchell 2005, pp. 84–86, but should be regarded as a commonplace of both aesthetics and visual studies, cf. Seel 2005, pp. 159–185, and Hans Belting's threefold model of the image (picture, medium, body) in Belting 2014.

6. For an expansive discussion about temporality in relation to art history, see the edited volume by Karlholm & Moxey 2018. See also Nagel & Wood 2010; Moxey 2013.

izes the materials and formal features of the architecture as, for instance, "Romanesque" (or other terms for later additions). Liepe also connects this "macro level" sense of the crypt's historicity to the temporality that is registered on the "micro level" of sense experience, as one moves one's body around its columns and altars. The "macro level" of historical awareness is thus tied to the embodied experience of moving in space, which entails the experience of time.

Gillgren's examination of the siting processes around the equestrian statue of (probably) Marcus Aurelius and its shifting locations likewise exemplifies an approach to the past as layered and in dialogue with its own history and future as well as with our present. Gillgren shows how the antique bronze was neither designed to be viewed as a free-standing statue nor exhibited at the piazza of the Capitoline Hill. Throughout history, it has been the object of various attributions and sitings before 15th-century scholars started to identify it with Marcus Aurelius, and before Michelangelo eventually placed it at the centre of the piazza (reminiscent of former sitings of antique obelisks), where it is now replaced by a replica. (The original is in the Capitoline Museums in Rome.) From its present hindsight position, Gillgren's chapter heightens our sense of the works' pasts and futures in the plural.

The chapters of Liepe and Gillgren are, together with those of Thomson and Sjöholm Skrubbe, the ones that most explicitly thematize the temporalization of their objects—in Sjöholm Skrubbe's case with an emphasis on the historical "alterity" of Dix's painting that aligns to, but is not the same as, Liepe's "integrity". Nevertheless, temporalizing analytical activities recur in all the other chapters as a more or less explicit way of knowing visual art. At minimum, temporalization includes the recognition of one past and one present dimension of the artwork. This is the case when the interpretative implications of Delacroix's *Médée* is explored in relation to the time frame of the Salon of 1838 as juxtaposed to the Louvre's Delacroix exhibition in 2018, or when visual references to past works are studied as effective in the time of the artist at the same time as they are reactivated in the time of the work's ongoing presence.

Border zones

This book was born out of a wish to counter what the thematic introduction describes as "a kind of void around the art object" in some art-historical writings, which primarily focus on the various contexts of visual art. The same ambition seems to have animated much of the work

in the wake of scholars such as David Freedberg, Horst Bredekamp, Hans Belting and W.J.T. Mitchell.[7]

Now, at the end of the journey, do we know more about the actual artworks, or about the process of experiencing the artworks, or about how the works both engage with and slip away from the tools that structure art-historical knowledge? This question has no definitive answer, which would depend on whether it springs from, for instance, phenomenologically or positivistically tinted views on the ways (and possibilities) of knowing the external world. More importantly, our shared endeavours, with their non-programmatic character in the range of methods and theories employed, point beyond such fundamental, i.e. non-heuristic, divisions between object and subject, object and context, meaning and materiality, and so on. Instead, the chapters' explorations of *border zones* between the divisions that order and make the world intelligible turn out as the last main line of inquiry.

What I have in mind is the authors' engagement with the intersections between visual art's tangible materiality and representational capacities; its cognitive and affective responses; its multisensory and multimodal ways of operating in the world; its historical alterity and ongoing presence; its delimitation as an object that activates "outside" contexts. This attention to the border zones where such intersections operate cannot be described in merely additive or inclusive terms. More to the point, it is all about the authors' scrutiny of the ways in which meaning and materiality, time and space, past and present, context and object, and so on, border onto and affect each other (rather than being studied as separate entities that are merely added to each other). This can be followed, for instance, in Thomson's examination of the border zone between the real and the imaginary in the experience of the Rembrandt painting, in Liepe's study of how the historical integrity of architectural space manifests itself in the embodied present, and in Snickare's formulation of his initial problem as one that concerns the interactive relations between Julien's video work, its "affective effects" on the beholder and the cognitive scholarly interpretation of this interaction. We are not faced with three separate ingredients but a study of the border zones where they interfere with each other.

7. See notes 1 and 5, and Freedberg 1989; Bredekamp 2018.

Outline

With diverging focal points, these main lines of inquiry run through all the chapters of our book. Therefore, they do not serve as a blueprint for the outline. The chapters could be read in any order and, taken together, still demonstrate the lines of inquiry presented above. But for the reader who wishes to follow the course of the book, the chapters are arranged in what could be described as an order of variety according to the objects of study, the artworks that are examined in each chapter. The chapters on paintings (Sjöholm Skrubbe, Thomson, Weibull) are followed by chapters on sculpture (Gillgren) or architecture (Liepe) or video art (Snickare), while the latter is followed by the chapter on pictorial prints (Petersson). The thematic introduction (Thomson) and the discussion of the "unknowable truth in art" (Karlholm) stand as two theoretical companion pieces at the beginning and the end of the book.

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1927

JESSICA SJÖHOLM SKRUBBE

Knowing the artwork "itself", or enduring historical alterity

Otto Dix's *Neugeborenes Kind auf Händen (Ursus)*

IN 1927, SHORTLY AFTER the birth of his second child, his first son, Otto Dix painted *Neugeborenes Kind auf Händen (Ursus)* (fig. 1). It is a relatively small painting, measuring 50 × 43.5 centimetres, executed in mixed media on plywood. Its subject is seemingly simple and direct. Out of a deep blue darkness, two hands wrinkled with age emerge, holding a newborn, and almost equally wrinkled, baby boy in a white cloth. Arguably, what immediately strikes the one who faces the painting is that it addresses the beholder. The contrast between the indistinct background and the meticulous care with which the child and the hands are rendered creates a gestural effect. This is not an image of someone holding a child, but of someone handing over a child. Put differently, the painting not only represents, but rather presents the newborn to the viewer. This gesture suggests at once a generous gift and a binding obligation; it demands something in return from the beholder. The reciprocal logic of the gift and the responsibility of attentively caring and catering for a new life create a relational bond that captivates the viewer in front of the painting.[1]

Another way of putting this is that the gesture of the painting endows it with an agency that seems to transcend the fictional space of the image and intervene in the reality of the beholder. The painting apparently insists on attention, but offers no obvious explanation as to why. The dark void of the painting from which the hands with the child emerge refuses, unlike the Christian iconographic tradition to which Dix obviously refers, to provide answers to fundamental existential questions about the enigma of life. The first encounter with the artwork thus leaves the viewer bewildered. Why do the child and the hands emerge from a compact darkness without any spatial or temporal determination?

Figure 1. Otto Dix, *Neugeborenes Kind auf Händen (Ursus)*, 1927. Oil and tempera on plywood, 50 × 43.5 cm.

1. In his well-known essay of 1925, Marcel Mauss had explored the reciprocity of the gift just a couple of years before the painting was created. Mauss 2016.

Whose hands are these and why is the person holding the child not depicted? Is there a proposal or request coming with the offering gesture? As visually striking the painting might be, it evades simple explanation and immediate understanding.

It has been argued that interpretation is "the act by which we seek to do away with our incomprehension".[2] This doing away with incomprehension might also be phrased in terms of a quest for knowledge. A first fundamental question to ask, then, would be what it is that art historians claim to know something about when they assert to produce knowledge about art? How narrowly or how broadly defined can the object of knowledge be for us to still claim that the knowledge produced makes the artwork itself knowable? The ability of artworks not only to "speak" but to "act" upon the beholder has been the subject of renewed interest for quite some time now and prompted a number of publications theorizing the agency of art and, more recently, its affective power.[3] At a surface level, a common denominator of these approaches is the shift in focus from the interpreting subject, which in the wake of poststructuralist critique has become the normative perspective, to an actively intervening object. One could be tempted to describe such methods as object-oriented, but the question is whether this way of subjectifying or animating artworks says anything about the objects themselves or whether it is just another way of theorizing the projections of the interpreting subject? Agency and/or affect may be appropriate concepts to capture something essential of what the encounter with and experience of a painting such as Dix's evokes in the viewer, but do they help us better understand the work *per se*?[4] Here, of course, the next question arises: what does it mean to put the object "itself" at the centre? It is not my aim to explore this particular issue in detail here, but I would like to draw attention to the fact that claims to bring the artwork to the fore, implicitly or explicitly to do it justice, may be voiced from diametrically opposed premises and result in divergent methodologies.[5]

2. Bätschmann 2003, p. 182.

3. Horst Bredekamp (2014) has reminded us that all known cultures have in one way or another recognized the prevalence of *imagines agentes*. Some key publications on the subject are Freedberg 1989; Holly 1996; Mitchell 2005; Bredekamp 2010; Best 2014; van Eck 2015. The issue is also a central theme in Elkins 1997. For some recent critical readings of the revived interest in agency and the related concept of affect, see von Falkenhausen 2019; Rampley 2021.

4. See Mårten Snickare's chapter in this volume for a less sceptical approach to "affective knowledge".

5. In the introduction to an anthology dedicated to exploring and theorize the im-

For instance, Oskar Bätschmann argues that "an object-specific theory and method" concerned with artworks "as themselves" primarily implies that the work of art is not treated as a document, i.e. as "evidence" of something beyond itself, such as the artist's biography, political contexts or social hierarchies of power. This focus on "what renders a work visible" should not, according to Bätschmann, be conflated with the viewer's immediate experience of the art object in the present; considering an artwork as itself requires taking into account its historical contexts, while also insisting on the essential difference between artwork and context.[6] Mieke Bal offers a completely different conception of what it means to understand a work of art "on its [...] own terms". While, like Bätschmann, she insists on engaging with artworks through "a qualified return to the practice of 'close reading'" and, while doing so, treating artworks as "second persons", allowing them "to speak back", her focus is exclusively on engaging with the artwork in its present existence with the aim "to articulate how the object contributes to cultural debates".[7]

What I take as a basic assumption in what follows is Bätschmann's assertion that "strictly speaking, it is impossible to interpret a single work".[8] If Bätschmann seems to offer this as an argument for the importance of historically situating the work of art, which I can certainly agree with and to which I shall return in the last section of this essay, as for now I see it more as a reminder that it is impossible to make any claims about an artwork in isolation. The artwork needs to be related to some kind of context in order to be intelligible. It has been pointed out that there are no given contexts; contextualizing an artwork always involves selections and delimitations.[9] However, images obviously do not emerge in a visual vacuum. In that sense, at least, there is a given frame of reference; images always mean in relation to other images. Therefore, in what follows, I focus on Dix's painting "as itself" or "on

plications of the artwork's material presence and "compelling visuality" as part of a historical interpretation, Robert Zwijnenberg and Claire Farago explicitly phrased their agenda in terms of doing justice to individual artworks. Zwijnenberg & Farago 2003.

6. Bätschmann 1984, pp. 9, 132, 154–155; 2003, quotations pp. 179, 180. See also Keith Moxey, who, like Bätschmann, rejects analytical perspectives that limit themselves to considering art as historical documents. Unlike Bätschmann, however, Moxey emphasizes that it is the aesthetic power of the artwork in the present that disqualifies such approaches. Moxey 2004.

7. Bal 2002, pp. 8–10, 44–45. See Dan Karlholm's chapter in this volume for a further discussion on the prospects of approaching artworks as persons.

8. Bätschmann 2003, p. 192.

9. Bal & Bryson 1991.

its own terms" in the sense that I have let the visual specificity of the artwork limit and decide the contexts that I bring to bear on it. In other words, I focus on pictorial contexts that the painting has helped me identify through (more or less) tangible visual references. It goes without saying that these contexts do not exclude other, equally valid ones, or that the following discussion would thus be exhaustive.[10]

Emulating Old Masters

Since the early 1910s, Dix had emulated the formal features of the Old Masters of the German and Flemish Renaissance and he consciously employed traditional painting techniques, elaborating with thin layers of oil and tempera.[11] In many of his portraits, he depicted the individual with great attention to detail while the surrounding environment was reduced to a uniformly coloured and inarticulate spatiality. The revival and reworking of the Renaissance portrait tradition was something that occupied Dix well into the 1930s. Overt references to Hans Holbein the Younger's portrait of Henry VIII (1540, fig. 2) can be found, for example, in Dix's portrait of the actor Heinrich Georg (1932, fig. 3). The half-figure format, the bodies that come close to the viewer and almost exceed the picture plane, the grim expressions of the faces and the gazes that slip past the beholder, the position of the arms, as well as the monochrome backgrounds with inscriptions, are all common denominators.

Figure 2. Hans Holbein the Younger, *Henry VIII*, 1540. Oil on wood, 88.5 × 74.5 cm. Gallerie Nazionali, Palazzo Barberini, Rome.

→ Figure 3. Otto Dix, *Heinrich Georg*, 1932. Oil and tempera on wood, 100 × 83.5 cm.

More poignant in this context, though, is his 1912 self-portrait, *Selbstbildnis mit Nelke* (fig. 4). Dix's painting clearly refers to Albrecht Dürer's first self-portrait, *Selbstbildnis mit Distel* (1493, fig. 5).[12] Dix's portrait,

10. An additional context would be, for example, the visual culture of Weimar mass media, where photographic images of more or less isolated hands were commonplace. Recent research has begun to explore Dix's paintings in relation to a broader visual culture, see e.g. Reimers 2022.

11. On Dix's painting technique, see Miller 1987. Interestingly, the subject of the painting in focus here, Dix's son Ursus, also wrote about his father's painting technique. Dix 1991.

12. On Dix's historical references in his early self-portraits, see Schubert 1977.


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executed while he was still a student at the Königliche Kunstgewerbeschule in Dresden, is basically a companion piece to Dürer's painting. Like his predecessor, he portrays himself in three-quarter profile against a uniformly coloured background, he has the same stern posture and solemn facial expression, and he glares out of the picture with a concentrated, scrutinizing gaze. Instead of the thistle, he holds a carnation. The painting is executed in a glaze technique, where Dix, in traditional manner, has applied thin, translucent layers of oil and tempera on paper mounted on a panel of poplar wood. In this context, the pronounced focus on the portrayed is of particular relevance. The artist puts himself, the individual subject, at the centre in a manner that emulates an older portrait tradition and thus implicitly invokes the humanist ideal of the Renaissance.[13] In *Neugeborenes Kind (Ursus)*, the individual is at the centre too, and here even more pronouncedly so because the newborn child lacks both clothing and attributes that anchor it in time and space—it is essentially bare humanity.

Figure 5. Albrecht Dürer, *Selbstbildnis mit Distel*, 1493. Oil on parchment transferred to canvas, 56.5 × 44.5 cm.

→ Figure 4. Otto Dix, *Selbstbildnis mit Nelke*, 1912. Oil and tempera on paper mounted on poplar panel, 73.7 × 49.5 cm.

The soft hairs on the child's heavily tilted head, the heightened colour of its grimacing face, the dots of darker pigment on the skin, the creases on its arms, legs and stomach, and the wrinkled soles of its feet as well as the ageing lines and veins of the gnarled hands in which it is held and the folds and falls of the white cloth are all rendered with attentive accuracy. The graphic quality of the figurative elements bears the same kind of detailed rendering that contrasts sharply with the indistinct background also found in Dix's self-portrait and which, in terms of execution, consciously emulates the technical skills of Renaissance painters. Apart from these rather generic visual references and the revival of traditional craftmanship, there are more explicit references to well-known sketches

13. Dix's continued interest in the distinctiveness of the individual keeps his portraits from appearing as constructed types to the same extent as those of his contemporary colleagues such as Christian Schad and Georg Schrimpf. On the portraits of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, including those of children, in terms of constructed types that create distance from the viewer, see Hülsewig-Johnen 1990, pp. 14–20; Heisig 2011, p. 247.


DIX
1912

by Albrecht Dürer. Among the preserved sketches by Dürer there are several images of isolated hands and drapery with folds but also of children's heads (figs 6–7).[14] Dix's painting bears a striking resemblance to some of these, which together with the way he signed the painting—with his surname spelled with a lower case "d" as used by Dürer at the beginning of his career—testifies to his active engagement with Dürer's art.[15] This type of sketching was, of course, a natural part of artistic practice and Dix also busied himself with drawing isolated hands and folds (fig. 8). However, in the painting of the newborn child, the disembodied hands and cloth with folds have taken on a more decisive significance because they constitute the infant's only visually "readable" or comprehensible context. The dense darkness of the blue background against which the figurative elements of the image emerge offers no recognizable spatial framework. Although what at first appears to be a compact and undifferentiated darkness shifts to a lighter blue in the upper part of the painting, the horizon line or cityscape that seems to appear at the height of the child's head is rather the result of the viewer's desire to be able to spatially orientate their gaze in the image. In fact, there is nothing there but a chromatic space that cannot be meaningfully described or known.

The representation of the child on the white cloth is an indisputable allusion to one of the most central pictorial tropes in Western art history, the Christ child. Countless paintings of the Birth of Christ, the Adoration of the Magi, or the Virgin and Child depict the naked Christ child lying on or partly draped in white cloth, referencing the swaddling cloth wrapped around the newborn that is explicitly mentioned in the Bible.[16] On closer inspection, the white fabric in Dix's painting is not

14. Dürer's drawings of folds and hands have been the subject of numerous studies, see e.g. Widauer 2010; Heuer 2011.

15. On Dürer's way of signing his works as part of the creation of his "trademark", see Zaunbauer 2019, p. 22.

16. Luke 2:7; 2:12.

Figure 8. Otto Dix, *Faltenstudie*, 1927. Charcoal, heightened with white, on paper, 64.2 × 48.3 cm.

← Figure 6. Albrecht Dürer, *Three Studies of Dürer's Left Hand*, 1493–1494. Pen and brown and black ink, 27 × 18 cm.

← Figure 7. Albrecht Dürer, *Gewandstudie*, 1508. Brush, pen, black ink, black ink wash and white highlights on green prepared paper, 25.7 × 19.2 cm.

entirely white, but has elements of blue on the left and yellow on the right, the latter creating a soft golden glow that subtly echoes the use of gilding in older Christian art. In the Christian pictorial tradition, the Christ child does not appear as an isolated motif but is included in narrative scenes anchored in biblical texts. Disembodied hands, though, were introduced as a symbol of God in Jewish art of the 3rd century CE and were subsequently adopted by Christian art. As a pictorial element, the *Manus Dei* have appeared in various iconographic contexts, such as Moses receiving the Ten Commandments, the Expulsion from Paradise and the Ascension of Christ, where they have signified God's presence or voice.[17] Although the disembodied hands in Dix's painting clearly depart from established iconographic conventions, they provide additional resonance to the image's Christian references.

Unlike the Christian pictorial tradition, there are neither narrative references nor overt symbolical meaning in Dix's image. The painting is more about figuration and gestural address than about narration and symbolic signification. It is essentially lacking "inner communication": there is no diegesis unfolding. Instead, its spatial organization and gesture of the hands seem to create a shared communicative space for image and viewer. If an artwork defines itself also by what is excluded, and the fragmented and indeterminate character of what is depicted can thus be recognized as an interactive or intersubjective device, this might partly explain the power with which the work captures the viewer and seems to demand something of them; a response, a commitment or a completion of what the painting has only begun.[18] But what has begun here? If we are to pursue the Christian theme established by the picture, it is

17. Sachs *et al.* 1994, pp. 160–161.

18. On the artwork's capacity to establish its own communicative space and thus to a certain degree pre-configure the viewer's reception, see Kemp 1983; 1992; 1998.

impossible to avoid noting that the birth of Christ foreshadows his agonizing death and that the swaddling cloth prefigures the linen cloth that Joseph of Arimathea wrapped around Christ's dead body.[19] Moreover, the hands holding the child and the white cloth are iconographically related to the Pietà (a motif particularly present in German late medieval and Renaissance images), in which the Virgin holds the mortal body of Christ, wrapped in a loin cloth or shroud. In addition, it could be noted that some of the oldest depictions of the Manus Dei are found in representations of the Old Testament's account of the Binding of Isaac, where God puts Abraham to the test by commanding him to kill his only son.[20] What was first perceived as a potential gift now emerges as a sacrifice.

Portraying human vulnerability

The immediate reason for the work's creation was the birth of Dix's second child, his son Ursus, in March 1927. Several sketches have been preserved and they suggest that the motif was distilled from the moment of the boy's birth. A drawing in black ink, *Geburt III* (1927, fig. 9), seems to have been executed in the delivery room. In the foreground is a woman's swollen belly and bare lower body. Between her spread legs, a figure with sleeves rolled up is holding the infant. The artist has omitted the faces of both the mother and the person holding the child. In another drawing, strongly foreshadowing the final composition of the painting, the bow of the small string that ties the umbilical cord is visible behind the boy's right knee (fig. 10). In this sketch, as in the painting, the hands and the body of the newborn emerge from a void. In a watercolour painting executed in April 1927, about a month after the birth of the child, the white void of the paper has been filled with the darkness that is also a prominent feature of the painting (Centre Pompidou, Paris, inv. no AM 2003-311).

Figure 9. Otto Dix, *Geburt III*, 1927. Ink on drawing cardboard, 45.1 × 38.2 cm. Kupferstichkabinett, Dresden.

Figure 10. Otto Dix, *Neugeborenes von zwei Händen gehalten. Ursus*, 1927. Ink on drawing cardboard, 42.4 × 36.2 cm. Kupferstichkabinett, Dresden.

The character of the sketches as instantaneous images executed in the immediate vicinity of the child's birth reverberates in the painting's focus on the very moment when the boy appears as an individual separate from his mother's body. This is the instant when the child is seen for the first time. The long fingers that gently support the head and shoulder and the deep creases in the child's thighs created by the light pressure of the lower hand's supportive grip on the body mark the child's fragility. But

19. John 19:40; Mark 15:46; Matthew 27:59; Luke 23:53.

20. The motif appears on Roman sarcophagi from the 4th and 5th centuries CE and in Roman catacomb painting. Sachs *et al.* 1994, p. 161.

the hands not only embrace the child in a protective gesture but also provide support for display. The splayed-out fingers of the upper hand seem to adjust the position of the head in order to expose, bringing forth the child as a revelation.[21]

Although *Neugeborenes Kind auf Händen (Ursus)* is obviously related to a specific event, it is no naturalistic documentation. The painting remained in the family's possession until the late 1990s, but it was exhibited for the first time in 1929 and then a dozen more times before it was taken on permanent loan to the Galerie der Stadt Stuttgart (today's Kunstmuseum Stuttgart) in 1978 and acquired by that same institution in 1999, indicating that it was perceived as an exhibition piece and not a private keepsake.[22] Moreover, the painting's visual isolation of the child establishes a temporal and spatial uncertainty which precludes clear references to the specificity of the artist's intimate sphere.

Neither the above-mentioned sketches nor the painting are exceptions in Dix's oeuvre in the sense that ever since the birth of his first child, his daughter Nelly in 1924, he had turned to his own children as subjects in his art. Children are also a prominent feature in many of his other paintings and portraits, to which I shall return below. In Dix's portrayals of children, too, scholars have been quick to identify art-historical references, both to the Dürer period and to German Romanticism.[23] The paintings of his own children, in particular, have been associated with Romanticism's idealizing images of children. His portrait of *Nelly in Blumen* (1924, fig. 12), for example, is often seen as entertaining a visual dialogue

21. I am indebted to Margaretha Thomson for pointing out the revelatory aspects of the image.

22. Exhibitions and literature up to 1989 are listed in the holdings catalogue of the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, which has a significant collection of Dix's works, see Schmidt 1989.

23. See e.g. Hartmann 1989; Hirner 1990.

Figure 11. Philipp Otto Runge, *Die Hülsenbeckschen Kinder*, 1805–1806. Oil on canvas, 131.5 × 143.5 cm.

with Philipp Otto Runge's idyllic portrayal of *Die Hülsenbeckschen Kinder* (1805–1806, fig. 11). However, *Neugeborerenes Kind auf Händen (Ursus)*, and the closely related painting *Neugeborener mit Nabelschnur auf Tuch (Ursus)* (1927, fig. 13), occupy a special place among the portraits of his own children, since they depict the infants without any reference whatsoever to their immediate social context. The latter work also draws on the Christian pictorial tradition, but as the child is now placed in the centre of a white cloth that stretches across the picture plane, the *vera icon*, the true image, is the most immediate visual reference here.[24]

Much of the enigmatic allure of *Neugeborenes Kind auf Händen (Ursus)* can be ascribed to the contrast between the detailed accuracy of the figurative elements and the opaque space that surrounds them. As suggested above, its visual "call" is mainly due to the fragmentary rep-

Figure 12. Otto Dix, *Nelly in Blumen*, 1924. Oil on canvas, 81 × 55.5 cm.

24. Horst Bredekamp has discussed the *vera icon* as a "substitutive image act" with a special ability to act on the viewer. Bredekamp 2010, pp. 173–178.


19 27

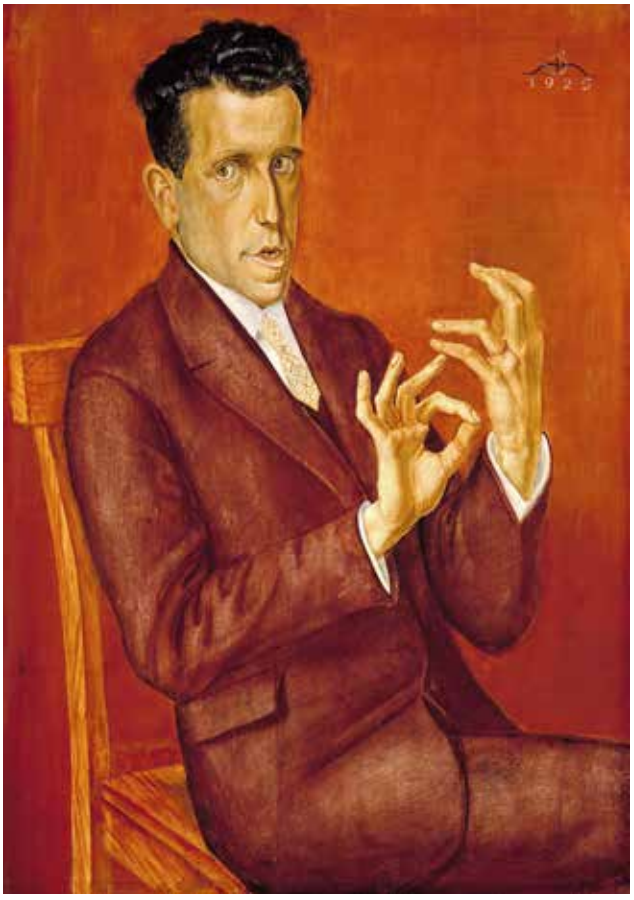

Figure 14. Otto Dix, *Hugo Simons*, 1925. Tempera and oil on plywood, 110.3 × 70.3 cm.

resentation of the hands that emerges from the darkness. In several of Dix's portraits from the 1920s, the execution of the sitter's hands constitutes a crucial expressive element. For instance, in his portraits of the lawyer Hugo Simons (1925, fig. 14), the journalist Sylvia von Harden (1926) or the art dealer Alfred Flechtheim (1926) the clearly accentuated, gesturing hands with splayed-out fingers serve as an important part of the model's characterization. Obviously, in conventional portraiture, hand gestures and body language have often been used as an expressive and symbolic means of visual communication.

In *Neugeborenes Kind auf Händen (Ursus)*, the grimacing and crooked body language of the infant and the gesture of the hands seem all the more prominent because of the scarcity of other visual elements that help us understand what we are looking at. But here they do not help us to better distinguish an individual's character or personality. Although we know that the painting represents the artist's son, it is in fact difficult to consider the painting as a portrayal of a specific individual. Even the title of the work is ambivalent and it does not seem to fully fulfil its purported function as anchorage of the meanings of the image.[25] Labelling the artwork *Neugeborenes Kind auf Händen (Ursus)* certainly indicates that the painting represents the artist's son, but only hesitantly so because the boy's name is put in brackets (as opposed to the anonymous hands that appear in the main title).[26] In fact, despite Dix's meticulously detailed depiction of the child's grimacing face and wrinkled body, the baby boy paradoxically has generic rather than individual features. So, if

Figure 13. Otto Dix, *Neugeborener mit Nabelschnur auf Tuch (Ursus)*, 1927. Mixed media on wood, 60 × 50 cm.

25. Barthes 1977.

26. It is unclear to me whether the title was decided by the artist himself, which is the most plausible, or if it was added later, but that is rather irrelevant for my argument.

we accept the transition from gift to sacrifice suggested above, it seems that the responsibility for deciding who should be the sacrifice lies with the beholder; it could be *his* (Dix's) child, *the* (Christ) child or *any* child.

Otto Dix is perhaps best known for his works of social criticism and satire, which depict the gruesome horrors of the First World War and its devastating consequences in the politically fraught milieu of the Weimar era in excruciating detail or grotesque exaggeration. In these works, too, Dix often entered into dialogue with canonized works from European art history. His series of engravings *Der Krieg* (1924) revives Goya's *Los desastres de la guerra* prints (1810–1820), and the triptychs *Die Großtadt* (1927–1928) and *Der Krieg* (1929–1932, fig. 15) not only adopt the format of altarpieces but revisit the pictorial repertoire of the German late Gothic period and carry references to among others Lucas Cranach the Elder, Mathias Grünewald, Hans Holbein the Younger, and, again, Albrecht Dürer.[27] As a leading exponent of what contemporary art historians such as Gustav Hartlaub and Franz Roh labelled *Die neue Sachlichkeit*, Dix thus made a name for himself with an unsentimental, naturalistic visual idiom coupled with historicist references and pastiches. The artist's rejection of an expressive, subject-oriented concept of art in favour of what has been aptly described as an "amalgamation of the sordid iconography of the post-war avant-garde with the technical mastery of the Old Masters" served as an effective strategy for gaining attention and recognition in the Weimar art world.[28]

Many of the paintings that brought Dix critical attention seem to have a relatively clear objective to expose, process or criticize contemporary traumas, crises and realities of life. What *Neugeborenes Kind auf Händen (Ursus)* is all about is not as clearly spelled out. The painting's tension between excessive visual information and impenetrable obscurity renders a surreal effect that makes the child appear as both utterly frail and strangely alienated. Precisely this, I suggest, is key to understanding how it was embedded in contemporary critical visual discourses on the situation of children in interwar German society, characterized by economic bankruptcy, social misery and political conflicts. Depictions of vulnerable children of the urban precariat served as a powerful symbol in the critical imagery of the time. Socially and politically committed artists such as Conrad Felixmüller, Hans Grundig, Karl Hubbuch and Georg

27. Herzogenrath 1991; Scholz 1991; Schwarz 1991.
28. van Dyke 2009, p. 44.

Figure 15. Otto Dix, *Der Krieg*, 1929–1932. Mixed media on wood, centre panel 204 × 204 cm, left and right wing each 204 × 102 cm, predella 60 × 204 cm.

Schrimpf exposed how children suffered and were ruthlessly exploited in the miserable urban environments of the interwar years. They thus joined forces with contemporary educators, psychologists, politicians and intellectuals who focused precisely on the urban living conditions of children. The image of the child as a defenceless victim was repeatedly used as an effective metaphor for social injustice.[29]

Dix too devoted himself to these issues in several paintings, such as *Arbeiterjunge* (1920), *Frau mit Kind* (1921) and *Mutter mit Kind* (1923).[30] With *Streichholzhändler II* (fig. 16), executed in the same year as *Neugeborenes Kind auf Händen (Ursus)*, 1927, Dix responded to the debate on child labour with a pictorial language that did not shy away from the miserable reality of impoverished children while at the same time referencing the "pathos formula of older visual arts" by having the boy standing next

29. Heisig 2011.

30. On Dix's paintings of mothers in relation to Weimar politics, see Vangen 2009; on women artists' images of motherhood in the Weimar era, see Meskimmon 1998.

to a column as in older portraits of the nobility.[31] The idyllic portraits of his own children, mentioned above, thus stand in sharp contrast to the critical works in which Dix exposed children's vulnerability in poverty or mocked their conformist existence in the petit bourgeois family. Dix was not alone in creating pictures of children of a diametrically opposed nature. The portrayal of children by several contemporary artists—among them Conrad Felixmüler, who, like Dix, portrayed his own children and children on the margins of society in completely different modes—were equally wide-ranging, and it has been pointed out that the idyllic utopias tended to reinforce the accusing tenor of the socio-critical works.[32] But whether Dix depicted the idyll of his own children or the privileges and hardships of other children, he usually situated them in recognizable social contexts. The image of the newborn Ursus, on the other hand, presents the child's existence in a limbo without a social framework. It is an existence beyond and before language, where words have no function. Perhaps this also contributes to the sense that words seem unusually inadequate and insufficient in the face of this painting, that everything depends on the visual and the gestural.

Figure 16. Otto Dix, *Streichholzhändler II*, 1927. Mixed media on wood, 120 × 65 cm.

It has been noted that the painters of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* emphasized the relation between human self-assertion and suffering, thereby questioning human existence in mass society.[33] In *Neugeborenes Kind auf Händen (Ursus)*, Dix metaphorically engaged with a similar theme by, on the one hand, presenting the child as a generic representative of the human collective and, on the other, emphasizing the vulnerable solitude of the individual. In this, he joined forces with one of the contemporary artists who was perhaps most consistently committed to critically expos-

31. Krystof 1995, p. 239, quoted in Heisig 2011, p. 252.
32. Heisig 2011, pp. 238, 249–250.
33. Heisig 2011, p. 243.

ing human suffering in the wake of war and social deprivation: Käthe Kollwitz.[34] Kollwitz, like Dix, often made use of the visual tropes of the Christian pictorial tradition. In many of her works, suffering figures appear in solitude against a compact darkness. In this, she created some of the most powerful images of how the precarity of the individual united the human collective.

Whereas several of Dix's other paintings of suffering children addressed the acute social issues of Weimar Germany, the image of the newborn Ursus at first seems to have been detached from current political events. However, by visually highlighting the child's vulnerability in an as yet unknown, and visually inaccessible, world and at the same time iconographically referring to the Christian pictorial tradition, the painting of the newborn child calls attention to the double meaning of *Opfer*: both victim and sacrifice. Arguably, Dix thereby situated the image of his own child in the midst of current social debates.

Dix revisited

So far, I have tried to make Otto Dix's painting knowable by drawing on (some of) the visual relations that the painting's own pictorial idiom seems to indicate. As far as has been possible within the scope of this essay, I have moved between what could be described as the immediate visual milieu of the painting—including the artist's oeuvre and the artistic environment at the time of the work's creation—and a broader array of images to whose stylistic, iconographic or thematic features Dix's painting establishes tangible, and thus meaningful, connections. In doing so, I have kept to the past, i.e. I have only considered what could be described as historically valid relationships, connections and contexts. The focus has thus been on what has been defined as the artwork's "three systematic relationships": the co-text, the con-text and the pre-text.[35] A fourth relationship, described by Michael Ann Holly as "the post-text, the afterlife of the object as it continues to work at organizing its remembrance in the cultural histories that emplot it", has received less attention.[36] The reason for this is neither a naïve belief in or claim to definitive historical truth about the artwork, nor a denial of the "ineluctable contemporaneity" of the art-historical object.[37] It should

34. See e.g. Moorjani 1986.
35. Bal 2006, p. 189.
36. Holly 1996, p. 14–15.
37. Moxey 2004, p. 750.

rather be seen as a recognition of what Susanne von Falkenhausen has theorized as the artwork's "historical alterity".[38] Crucially in this context, von Falkenhausen argues that recognizing historical alterity "implies a greater orientation towards the object than towards the interpreting subject".[39] This again raises the question of what it means to focus on the work in itself or on its own terms.

Arguably, it is precisely this alterity, i.e. the artwork's emergence within a visual, textual and social context with its own situated discourse that was different from the present, that both enables and necessitates art-historical knowledge. Oskar Bätschmann relates this alterity to a loss of the artwork's original "function", which defamiliarizes the object and creates uncertainties about meaningful ways to engage with the artwork in the present.[40] Even if I would argue that this kind of "gap" between the artwork and its beholder is due to an irreversible loss of "moment" rather than a loss of function—not least because the art-historical object's ascribed status as art might be conceived of precisely as a meaningful function in the present—I take Bätschmann's argument as an acknowledgement of historical alterity.

As suggested in the first section of this essay, Mieke Bal has offered an entirely different perspective on and scholarly approach to this issue. Her proposition to engage in "preposterous history" centres on how contemporary art appropriates and creates "subversive footnotes" to older art. These practices of "contemporary quotation", she argues, "really changes older art" that no longer exists in the context of its production.[41]

In the course of writing this essay, I came across a work of art that offered an opportunity to revisit Dix's painting precisely from a preposterous point of view: Jens Fänge's *La Gran Aventura* (2022, fig. 17).[42] Fänge's piece was created for the group exhibition *The Spring* shown at Galleri Magnus Karlsson in Stockholm in the summer of 2022. The artists of the gallery had been invited to participate in the exhibition with the request to produce an artwork that in some way related to another artistic work.[43] *La Gran Aventura* overtly quotes *Neugeborenes Kind auf*

38. von Falkenhausen 2020, pp. 203–206.
39. von Falkenhausen 2020, p. 206.
40. Bätschmann 2003, p. 183.
41. Bal 1999, quotations pp. 6, 15.
42. For a general introduction to Fänge's art, see af Petersens & Elgh Klingborg 2017.
43. For the gallery's description of the exhibition concept, see https://www.gallerimagnuskarlsson.com/exhibitions/21-kallan-the-spring-group-exhibition-with-gallery-artists/, accessed 4 January 2023.

Figure 17. Jens Fänge, *La Gran Aventura*, 2022. Assemblage, oil, vinyl paint and textile on panel, 65 × 38 cm.

Händen (Ursus) in the "willfully anachronistic" manner that, according to Bal, enables contemporary art to "be construed as theoretical objects that 'theorize' cultural history".[44] In the context of this essay, *La Gran Aventura* thus seemed as impossible to ignore as the preposterous storying of *Neugeborenes Kind auf Händen (Ursus)* proved to be unreasonable to fulfil.

La Gran Aventura is an assemblage composed of oil, vinyl paint and textile on panel and measures 65 × 38 centimetres. Against a compact background painted in black, a baby in a nappy and a rainbow cape is held up by abruptly disembodied hands. The child and the hands are sprinkled with green twigs with leaves. Instead of recycling the symbolic significance of the white cloth in Dix's painting, the child here has been provided with another key signifier of the Christian pictorial tradition: a white halo made of textile attached to the panel. In his work, Fänge has drawn attention to a particular detail in Dix's painting: the way the newborn spreads his toes. This element is quoted, translated and transformed in the assemblage into the victory sign that the child forms with his fingers.[45] To cut it short, the fragile and vulnerable child has been resurrected as a self-confident, laurelled and glorified little superhero.

Having come thus far, the unavoidable question arose: how could the preposterous superhero be construed as a theoretical object that could be brought to bear on Dix's painting? And on whose terms would such an encounter occur? I will not pursue such a task here, since it seems to me that revisiting Dix's work solely on the basis of its being quoted and recast

44. Bal 1999, p. 5.

45. According to a brief statement on the gallery website, the artist "saw the same sign, but with the toes of the baby in Dix's painting". https://www.gallerimagnuskarlsson.com/exhibitions/21/works/artworks-4480-jens-fange-la-gran-aventura-2022/, accessed 4 January 2023.

in the present would distract from rather than recognize the painting itself. Moreover, like Dix's painting, Fänge's assemblage points to its own visual contexts, of which Dix's work is only one, albeit an obvious and central one. Reading *Neugeborenes Kind auf Händen (Ursus)* through *La Gran Aventura* thus also seems to risk a misrepresentation of the latter work by an arbitrary sidelining of other con-texts, co-texts and pre-texts.

It should be noted that I am in no way doing justice to Bal's arguments or analytical claims here. Her cultural analysis entails a much more profound, sophisticated and complex procedure that has many merits and is, in fact, an apt reminder of the importance of close engagement with the artwork. But if the present is the only legitimate locus of analysis, and if the sole or main purpose is to engage with the artwork as a contribution to contemporary cultural debate, then I find it difficult to see this as compatible with addressing the work "itself" and on its own terms. Susanne von Falkenhausen has argued that such a presentist viewpoint fails to recognize the object's historical alterity and risks imposing the viewing subject's narcissistic projections onto the disempowered object.[46] She thus rightly posits this as a stance of ethics in art-historical research and proposes "a mode of seeing that perceives and accepts the otherness of what it sees".[47] Arguably, making the artwork knowable can be realized neither by trying to overcome its unfamiliarity by objectivist historicism, nor by willfully ignoring it through narcissistic presentism, but only on the basis of embracing and enduring its historical alterity, which is also to accept that it can never be fully known.

Coda

I first encountered Otto Dix's *Neugeborenes Kind auf Händen (Ursus)* in an exhibition of the artist's work in London in 1992.[48] My strongest memory of this occasion is that the painting seemed to insist on attention: it was as if it was directly addressing me when I entered the gallery room. I was captivated by the gesture of the hands emerging seemingly out of nowhere and by the vulnerability and fragility of the child immersed in an unknown darkness. During the course of writing this essay, I had the opportunity to revisit the painting in the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, a

46. von Falkenhausen 2020, ch. 8.

47. von Falkenhausen 2020, p. 22.

48. The exhibition, arranged to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Dix's birth in 1891, was first shown in Galerie der Stadt Stuttgart and the Nationalgalerie in Berlin before it travelled to the Tate Gallery in London in 1992.

second encounter more than thirty years later that proved to be crucial for the finalization of this text. Not only did I get the chance to confirm, correct and expand my observations of the painting's formal and material specificities at a detailed level that no reproduction can ever match (I was now particularly struck by the absolute absence of idealization, the golden shimmer of the white fabric and the chromatic variations of the background which I did not remember from my first encounter and which do not always appear in reproductions); the re-encounter also made it clear that although the brief moment of intense wonder at seeing the painting for the first time was forever lost, since I now know the work quite well, the inexplicable dimensions of the painting are still just as strong. The (historical) alterity of the painting remains, it still eludes and marvels, albeit in a slightly different manner. Perhaps because in the end, spending time in front *Neugeborenes Kind auf Händen (Ursus)* has also altered me.

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PETER GILLGREN

Name, place, myth

Siting Marcus Aurelius

The siting process

MOST PEOPLE HAVE the experience of hanging a picture on a wall, furnishing a room or laying a table. Exact positions must be determined: there is no room for approximations. The painting, armchair or plate is either placed *here* or *there*, higher up or lower down, more to the side, at a different distance from other items—and so forth. The decisions are absolute and every change makes a difference. Qualities of colour, size and form must be considered and in the end the wall, room or table may have to be rearranged altogether. Soon the activity turns into a reshuffling of given objects, each with their individual character, and a dissatisfaction with current arrangements become a driving force behind new decisions. Such is the process of *siting*; a heightened awareness of one object in relation to other objects that results in a "conceptualized place with strong internal and external relationships".[1] Without such an attentiveness to detail, there would be no site-specific objects and no sitedness. The siting process is so common that it may well be described as an anthropological fact, taking place in all cultures regardless of historical specificities. It is a cultural phenomenon with a storyline of its own. Both the formal qualities and the identity of the object to be sited is of importance for the siting process and its result. Most important, though, is the overall idea of the design and the arrangement intuitively searched for in relation to the place where the object is to be sited. Siting is a dialectical enterprise, built upon the tensions between the organization of specific objects and general aesthetic ideals.

One of the most ingeniously sited works of art and worthy of special attention within an art-historical context is the equestrian, partly gilded, bronze statue on the Capitoline Hill in Rome. It is today believed to represent the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius—and very likely it does

1. Gillgren 2017, p. 30.

(fig. 1).[2] It is one of the most well-known works of art from Antiquity and the only full-scale equestrian bronze sculpture that has come down to modern times. It has probably never been buried underground or lost, giving it a legacy within Western culture that is perhaps unrivalled. Without doubt, its siting at the Piazza del Campidoglio has been of fundamental importance for its fame and status.

Figure 1. Unknown artist, *Marcus Aurelius*, c. AD 180. Gilded bronze. Capitoline Museums, Rome, Italy.

Sometimes the statue has been understood as an early example of modern monument culture; the idea of celebrating historic events and placing important rulers at the centre of public squares. Rosalind Krauss, for example, in an important essay of 1979 singled out Marcus Aurelius as an example of the outmoded idea of sculpture as representing the "logic of the monument", in contrast with the ambiguity and loss of place that characterized the art of her own time.[3] Such an analysis is questionable, though, representing more of a historicist understanding of art, where the meaning of a work is something static, fixed to a specific name and place. Broader aesthetic issues are left out of the discourse and the individual work of art is reduced to an instance of general historical developments.

A richer interpretation was given by Joseph Brodsky in an essay from 1994. For him a monument is a vertical and "symbolic departure from the general horizontality of existence".[4] Its aspiration is often eternal, with its durable materials and direct references to history:

> Yet, even if the subject is an abstract ideal or the consequences of a momentous event, there is a detectable clash of time-frames and notions of viability, not to mention textures [...] And it occurs to one that the monument owes its genealogy to great planes, to the idea of something being seen from afar—whether in a spatial or a temporal sense. That it is of nomadic origin, for at least in a temporal sense we are all nomads.

2. A solid and up-to-date publication on the Capitol, with reprints of the most relevant documents, is Bedon 2008. Ackerman 1961, vol. 2, pp. 50–68 also publishes many of the sources.

3. Krauss 1979, p. 33. For a more developed example, see Bodart 2014.

4. Brodsky 1994, p. 40.

Eclipsed by Michelangelo's Renaissance architecture, it is still clear that the bronze statue comes "from afar", that in a sense it is foreign. It has been put there deliberately by someone from the outside. It is of a different texture; it has been shuffled in and sited. In contrast with Krauss, Brodsky seems aware of the statue's status of independence, that a present location—no matter how vertical and permanent it may seem—is always temporary and that its origin is nothing if not nomadic. It comes from somewhere and it is going somewhere.

So, it may be asked: What was the *meaning* of placing the equestrian bronze statue with remains of gilding at the Piazza di Campidoglio in the 16th century? The search for such *knowledge* leads to documents, guidebooks, histories and legends related to the statue. It also necessitates having a look at the historiography of the monument and some of the many interpretations attached to it. However, the urge to move the statue to the piazza, to give it a name and to charge the place with a specific meaning exceeds what can be gathered from historical documents and the unfolding of events. Such a qualitative leap goes beyond the continuities of pure causality. It is often a matter of social psychology, mythology and unarticulated ideals.

In the search for knowledge there should be method. Changes of perspective generate new meanings to works of art, as shown by Margaretha Thomson in her essay on Rembrandt's painting of Jeremiah for this volume. In the present case, the method is not understood as a change of perspective, though, nor as a new framing, as in Dan Karlholm's essay in this volume. Instead, the working method might be described as a siting process in itself.[5] Specific facts, ideas and ideologies are set in different arrangements, all related to the bronze in question, covered in spots. The quest for meaning is answered in terms of *sitedness*; the statue's position in relation to a naming process, a premodern understanding of public spaces and an anthropology of myths and origins.

Guidebook variations

With its unique legacy it is no wonder the bronze horse and rider has a mention in almost every guidebook to Rome there is, from the Middle Ages until today. The statue is mentioned in 10th-century pontifical sources and documents as *Caballus Constantini*, the horse of Constantine.[6]

5. On siting as method, see Gillgren 2017, pp. 18–30.
6. Freiberg 1995, p. 8.

Figure 2. Maarten van Heemskerck, *View of the Lateran Basilica, c.* 1532. Red chalk drawing on paper. Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin, Germany.

It is described more fully for the first time in the widely disseminated *Mirabilia Urbis Romae* from the mid-12th century.[7] Clearly there was a debate regarding the statue's identity already at this time, because here the reader learns that the bronze horse is often called Constantine's, but that this is incorrect. Instead, the guidebook says, the figure is a Roman hero who saved his city from a foreign tyrant. An extended version of the book, the *Narratio de Mirabilia Urbis Romae* from around 1200, says that the bronze figure is called Theodoric by pilgrims, that the Romans say it is Constantine but the cardinals and clerics of Rome say Marcus Aurelius—or the legendary Republican ruler Quintus Quirinus, who gave his life for the city.[8] Again, though, it is concluded that the rider is a Roman warrior named Marcus, who once fought a foreign king.

It is difficult to say precisely when the present identification of the statue as Marcus Aurelius was established.[9] It grew gradually with Renaissance humanists of the late 15th century, such as Bartolomeo

7. Blennow & Fogelberg Rota 2019, p. 74.
8. Classen 2009, p. 167.
9. Fittschen & Zanker 1994, vol. 1, pp. 72–74.

Figure 3 a & b. Unknown artist, *Marcus Aurelius*, *c.* AD 180, Gilded bronze. Capitoline Museums, Rome, Italy.

Sacchi and Berbardo Ruccelai.[10] The 1520 edition of the guidebook *Mirabilia Rome* by Francesco Albertini says Marcus Aurelius, mentioning also the identification with Constantine. In Bernardo Gamucci's guidebook from 1565, again, misidentifications such as Septimus Severus and Lucius Verus are rejected.[11] The important *Ritratto di Roma* by Pompilio Totti from 1638 mentions Marcus Aurelius only, indicating that the debate is now closed.[12]

So, by the 17th century the identification seems to have been quite firmly set: Haskell and Penny give the approximate year 1600 as the date by which it appears to have been decided.[13] However, even in guidebooks of today, authors are tempted to repeat that the statue has come down to us only because of a misnaming, that it was once thought to represent Constantine—but that it is not him. Despite the inclination of modern scholarship to pinpoint precise iconographies, names and identities, the various identifications attached to the statue have remained in public consciousness right up to the present day. Throughout the history of the monument there seems to have coexisted an urge to name together with a certain hesitance—with an awareness of the naming process as a risk. In the words of Jacques Derrida, a "risk to bind, to enslave or to engage the other, to link the called, to call him/her to respond even before any decision or any deliberation, even before any freedom".[14]

A loss of place

The origin of the bronze horse and rider is not known. Throughout the Middle Ages it was kept outside the Archbasilica of Saint John Lateran and it may have been located there all the time (fig. 2). It could also have been placed at the *Forum Romanum* or some other prominent position

10. Weiss 1969, p. 80.
11. Gamucci 1565, p. 17; Ackerman 1961, p. 70.
12. Totti 1638, p. 404.
13. Haskell & Penny 1994, p. 252. The same with Freeman 2004, p. 154.
14. Derrida 1995, p. 84.

in the ancient city. It can be said with some certainty, though, that it was not meant to be free-standing at the centre of a forum or a piazza, as it is today. It has a clear front and back (fig. 3). The horse turns its head to the right, it is lifting its right leg and the emperor stretches out his right arm with a slight twist of the head in the same direction. In contemporary prints the one-sidedness is usually corrected (fig. 4), but close up it can be seen that even the figure's eyes are directed somewhat sideways. This has led to the suggestions that the statue either was placed against a wall, which was common in the Classical period, or that it originally belonged to a pair of equestrian statues, one representing Marcus Aurelius and the other his co-emperor Lucius Verus.[15]

Figure 4. Nicolas Béatrizet, *The Equestrian Statue of Marcus Aurelius on the Capitol*, 1548. Engraving. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, United States.

For Michelangelo, the dynamic movement of the horseman was very likely observed and understood as a positive quality. It is reminiscent of the twisted, *serpentinata* figures of his own design, such as the Prophets and Sibyls in the Sistine Chapel and the tomb figures of the Medici Chapel in Florence.[16] For a contemporary viewer it can also remind of Richard Serra's controversial *Tilted Arc* in New York, installed at Federal Plaza between 1981 and 1989.[17] Even though it was not placed at the centre of the plaza, the leaning steel construction was considered so dominant that it eventually had to be removed. The asymmetric design evoked unease.

The original setting of the equestrian statue just outside the Lateran Basilica is fundamental for an understanding not only of its earlier history but also for the later decision to relocate it.[18] The Lateran Basilica is the oldest Christian basilica in the world and very much related to the name of the first Christian emperor, Constantine the Great. Not only did he found the Church in the year 324 but according to legend he was also baptized here, at the famous Lateran Baptistery. This was also the place where he supposedly transferred the power of Rome and the western part of his empire to Pope Sylvester and the Church, the so-called Donation of Constantine. The palace he donated to Sylvester remained the

15. Wegner 1939, p. 42.
16. van Tuinen 2011, with further references.
17. Weyergraf-Serra & Buskirk 1991.
18. Herklotz 1985, pp. 1–43.

principal papal palace until the transfer of the curia to Avignon in 1307. The Lateran was Constantinian territory.

When the popes returned from Avignon, the Lateran Basilica was in a ruined condition, but Martin V (1417–1431) and some of his followers put great efforts into bringing it back to life again—even though others were more dedicated to the refurnishing and rebuilding of St Peter's Basilica and the Vatican Palace. Sixtus IV (1471–1484) focused much on the Lateran and among his projects was the transfer of several Antique statues to the Capitol in 1471.[19] The equestrian bronze was kept in the Lateran, though: it was given a new, prominent position in between the main entrance of the Basilica, the Papal Palace, the Baptistery and the benediction loggia, and set on a new base with an inscription. Clearly, Sixtus still insisted that the statue represented Constantine the Great.

Paul III (1534–1549) was another important patron of the Church, who while still a cardinal had governed the Lateran as its archbishop.[20] In 1537 he ordered a demolition of the medieval Lateran palace, most certainly to build a modern one—even though we know little of his further plans. The same year he asked that the equestrian statue should be moved to the Capitol.[21] Probably, the large bronze did not fit with the new plans for the Lateran and the identification with the horseman as Constantine had become untenable, both among antiquarians and the public. As is well known from mobility studies, the "push factor" is almost always more important than the "pull factor", and this applies to Renaissance culture as well.[22] The arguments for removing the statue from the Lateran were at this time well developed, while the plans for its relocation—on the Capitol or elsewhere—had not yet been formed.

It may seem strange that all through the Middle Ages the horseman could be taken for Constantine. All one had to do was to compare his face with images of relevant coins or with the figures on Constantine's well-known Triumphal Arch to see there was a difference. In contrast with his predecessors, Constantine had introduced a clean-shaven and youthful iconography, perhaps harking back to Augustus or Alexander the Great.[23] Portrait likeness had little weight in the Middle Ages, though: the context of the many important Lateran monuments and the inscrip-

19. Freiberg 1995, p. 8.
20. Freiberg 1995, pp. 9–10.
21. Buddensieg 1969; Bedon 2008, pp. 55–59.
22. Burke 2002.
23. Lanzillotta 1992, pp. 14–16; Bardill 2012, p. 11.

tion mattered more. It was not until the rise of portrait painting in the late 15th century and its enormous popularity a few decades later that the attribution became unsustainable. A decisive factor may have been the finding of the colossal head of Constantine at Constantine's Basilica in 1486.[24] If this was Constantine clearly the face of the horseman must portray someone else. Still, developments were surprisingly slow. When Titian between 1536 and 1539 painted one of the first series of Roman emperors for the Ducal Palace in Mantua, he took pride in using Antique coins and medals as his models.[25] Even so, he made the obvious mistake of providing Augustus with an out-of-character drooping moustache and curly hair. Constantine himself was represented with a short beard all through the 16th century and into the early 17th century, not only in the famous Vatican frescoes but also in the Lateran frescoes from around 1600.

The relocation of the statue provoked some protests, as can be gathered from a report sent from Rome to the duke of Urbino.[26] The conservators at the Capitol were positive, the report says, while both the Lateran chapter and the architect to be in charge of the project, Michelangelo himself, were negative "since it seemed to him to be better where it was". If his Holiness could not be persuaded, Michelangelo continued, he would also like to have "the two horses and statues from the Monte Cavallo", that is, the Dioscuri today at the Quirinal. It seems as if, at this early stage of the process, Michelangelo was content with the many Classical works of art already in place on the Capitoline Hill. If he was to have one large horse, however, Michelangelo wanted two more—probably to balance the large bronze emperor both formally and iconographically. The Dioscuri had since Antiquity been associated with brotherhood and Republicanism, repeatedly appearing as saviours of the Roman Republic on the battlefield.[27] In the Middle Ages the myths were intertwined with Christian interpretations, so that the naked Castor and Pollux could also be seen as, for example, allegories of Truth.[28]

In January 1538 the equestrian bronze statue was moved to the Capitol. It took another year until Michelangelo was formally given the commission to reconstruct the Capitoline Hill, and it is worth stressing that no

24. Bardill 2012, p. 203.
25. Wethey 1975, p. 45.
26. Ackerman 1961, vol. 2, p. 51.
27. Richardson 2013, pp. 901–918.
28. Blennow & Fogelberg Rota 2019, pp. 74–75.

plans for the projects are known from this time. Michelangelo was faced with an unruly site of diverse buildings and a collection of antiques. One of the first things he did, though, was to produce a new base for the equestrian bronze. It can be seen in different drawings and prints from around 1540 (fig. 4). In some of the prints the texts on the base can be read. On the one side is a pseudo-Antique inscription, probably produced together with the base.[29] For those well versed in Classical Roman inscriptions, the sudden appearance of an inscribed stone dedicated to the well-known statue must have come as a surprise. For others, the mention of Marcus Aurelius's many ancestors and titles probably only helped the confusion about his identity. The inscription on the other side of the base says that Paul III donated the statue of "M Antonino Pio" in 1538.[30] Some readers missed the M and took the inscription for a reference to Antoninus Pius, which was another common attribution. Even modern scholars have debated to whom the inscription is actually referring, Antoninus Pius or Marcus Aurelius.[31] The emperor, furthermore, is given the title Optimus Princeps, an honorific title given normally only to Marcus Aurelius' predecessor Trajan.[32] It seems as if the precise identity of the man on the horse was not the most important piece of information to communicate to visitors at the Capitol. The name of the donor was more relevant and the conservators involved were also given a separate inscription.

Because of financial problems and because the foundations of the piazza first had to be secured, it took quite some time before build-

29. IMP CAESARI DIVI ANTONINI F DIVI HADRIANI NEPOTI DIVI TRAIANI PARTHICI PRONEPOTI DIVI NERVAE ABNEPOTI M AVRELIO ANTONINO PIO AVG GERM SARM PONT MAX TRIB POT XXVII IMP VI COS III P P S P Q R – To the Imperator Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (son of the deified Antoninus, grandson of the deified Hadrian, great-grandson of the deified Trajan conqueror of the Parthians, great-great-grandson of the deified Nerva), pious, august, conqueror of the Germans and Sarmatians, Supreme Pontiff, invested for 27 years with the Tribunician power, acclaimed as Imperator 6 times, elected Consul 3 times, Father of his Country, the Roman Senate and People [dedicate this].

30. PAVLVS III PONT MAX STAVAM AENEAM EQVESTREM A S P Q R M ANTONINO PIO ETIAM TVM VIVENTI STATVTAM VARIIS DEINDE VRBIS CASIB EVERSAM ET A SYXTO IIII PONT MAX AD LATERAN BASILICAM REPOSITAM VT MEMO RIAE OPT PRINCIPIS CONSVLERET PATRIAEQ DECORA ATQ ORNAMENTA RESTITVERET EX HUMILIORE LOCO IN AERAM CAPITOLINAM TRANSTVLIT ATQ DICAVIT – ANN SAL M C XXXVIII – Paul III, Supreme Pontiff, that he might foster the memory of the best of emperors and restore to the nation its glories and honours, transferred from a lowlier site to Piazza del Campidoglio the bronze equestrian statue erected by the Senate and People of Rome to Marcus Aurelius Pius in his own lifetime, later overthrown in the course of the City's sundry calamities and set up again at the Lateran Basilica by Sixtus IV, Supreme Pontiff, and dedicated it in the year of Salvation 1538.

31. Ackerman 1961, *Text and Plates*, p. 68; Winner 1967, No. 8.

32. Lansford 2009, pp. 16–17.

ing could begin and the statues were given their definite positions.[33] In 1560 two other Dioscuri were unearthed and it was decided to use them at the Capitol instead of the ones from Monte Cavallo, but they were not installed until 1590 (fig. 5). Two Egyptian lions from an old Isis temple at Campo Marzio in Rome were donated by Pius IV in 1564 and reworked into fountains in 1588 (fig. 6). Michelangelo himself died in 1564 but had given instructions for the design, as can be seen from the prints made by Dupérac in 1567 after his drawings (fig. 7). Since the prints represent the Dioscuri from Monte Cavallo rather than the ones that were eventually used, the original drawings must have been produced before 1560, perhaps as early as in the 1540s.[34]

The reason for bringing the equestrian statue to the Capitoline Hill has given birth to a number of contradicting interpretations. It could be seen as a manifestation of papal power, a tribute to Emperor Charles V or as representing Rome's Classical origin in general.[35] Likewise, the Dioscuri can be interpreted as symbols of the pope and the emperor in collaboration or, in contrast, as representing republican activism in line with the legendary Tyranomachia statue.[36] The transfer to the Capitol of the equestrian statue is hard to explain, in the words of James Ackerman, not because there was no reason for it, "but because it had so many reasons".[37] The most simple and straightforward explanation, as argued above, is that it was no longer considered desirable to keep it at the Lateran. Since it could not be accepted as Constantine any more, it needed a new home and a new name. Eventually, it became Marcus Aurelius at the Capitoline Hill.

Figure 5. Unknown artist, *The Dioscuri*, *c.* AD 200. Marble. Piazza di Campidoglio, Rome, Italy.

Figure 6. Unknown artist, *Egyptian Lion*. Black basalt, probably from the 2nd century AD. Piazza di Campidoglio, Rome, Italy.

33. Ackerman 1961, vol. 2, pp. 55–56.
34. Ackerman 1961, vol. 2, pp. 61–62; Barnes 2010, pp. 125–131.
35. In his brief but important 1957 article Ackerman gave an overview of the most common and popular interpretations; the debate is still ongoing.
36. Ackerman 1957, p. 70.
37. Ackerman 1961, *Text and Plates*, p. 67.

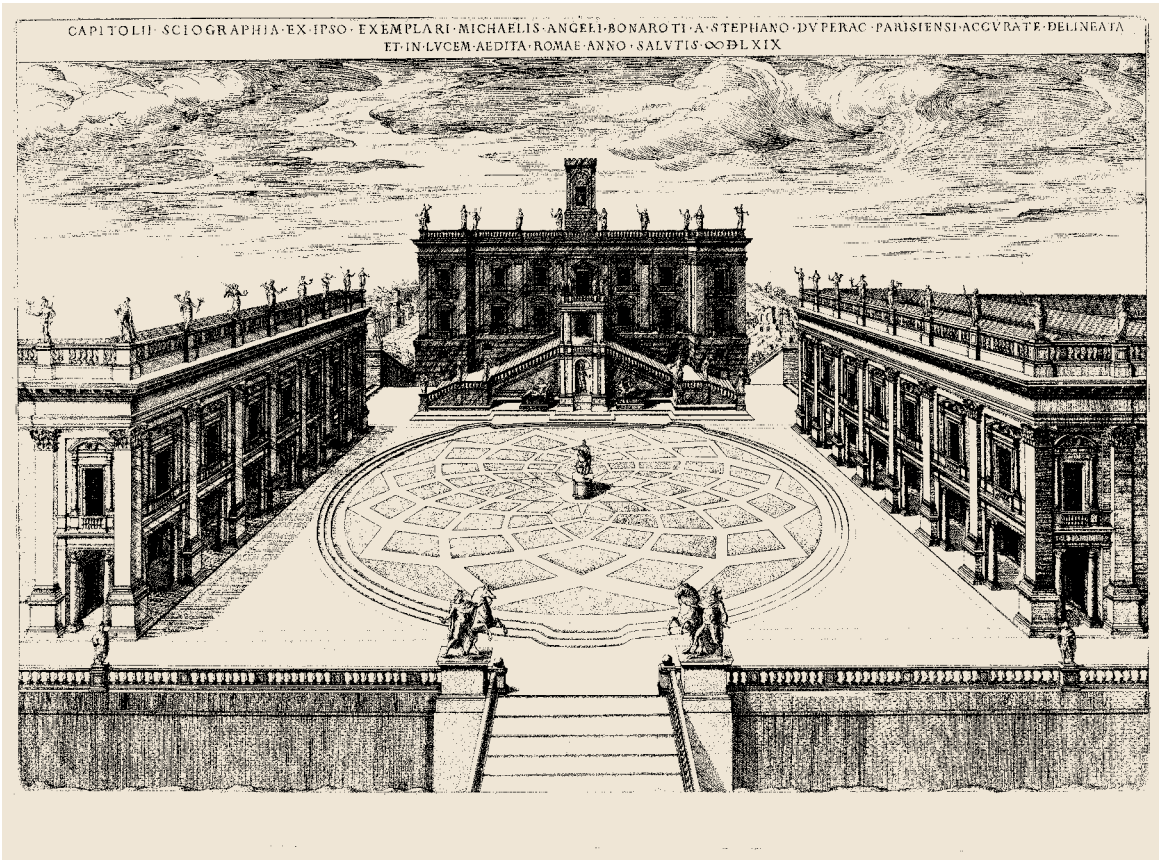

Figure 7. Étienne Dupérac, *View of the Campidoglio*, 1569. Engraving. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, United States.

Uncertain identities

There are few Antique bronze horses to compare with the equestrian statue at the Capitol, the most important ones being the more archaic horses at San Marco in Venice. The dating of these four horses varies greatly but it is agreed that they are of a Greek rather than Roman type.[38] They are smaller, more slender with a smooth skin and stylized mane. The one in Rome is more muscular and bony, the body is tenser and the mane wilder. This is typical of the Roman–Hellenistic style, as can be seen for example in the horses of the Dioscuri at the Capitol (fig. 5). The body of the rider is also strikingly firm, much like his horse, with a dynamic structure of muscles and bones described in detail and clearly visible beneath the smooth skin. The statue is usually dated to the 170s

38. Freeman 2004, pp. 154–157.

Figure 9. Unknown artist, *Marcus Aurelius*, c. AD 180. Bronze. Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs, Hungary.

Figure 10. Unknown artist, *Marcus Aurelius*, c. AD 180. Bronze and copper alloy with inlaid glass. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, England.

← Figure 8. Unknown artist, *Marcus Aurelius*, c. AD 180. Detail. Gilded bronze. Capitoline Museums, Rome, Italy.

AD and more precisely by Fittschen and Zanker to AD 176/177.[39] The saddle cloth is of a Sarmatian type and could be connected to the victory over the Sarmatians in AD 175, but it has also been suggested that the horse originally belonged to, or is copied from, an equestrian statue of a Hellenistic ruler from about a decade earlier.[40]

The modern identification of the figure as Emperor Marcus Aurelius is, of course, based on comparisons with Roman coins and portrait busts. His iconography is generally divided into four types.[41] However, the equestrian portrait does not belong clearly to any of them (fig. 8). While the small mouth and the thin eyebrows is reminiscent of type 3, the beard and less-modelled hairstyle are closer to type 4.[42] Since the portrait does not fit well with established types, it has been argued that the statue is postmortem and produced with a variety of previous portraits as models. Such a work may have been commissioned by Marcus Aurelius's son and successor Commodus, perhaps with a pendant representing Commodus himself on horseback and manifesting the near relationship between the two emperors.[43] Compared to a similar head found in Romania in the 1970s, the face of the Capitoline figure is smoother and without the usual bony structure of eye sockets and cheeks (fig. 9).[44] On the other end of the scale is the extremely stylized and locally crafted head found in Northamptonshire in England (fig. 10).[45]

The face of the rider on the Roman equestrian statue falls somewhere in between those works, but together they point at the wide range of images to which the name of Marcus Aurelius has been attached. In any case, the Capitoline portrait falls short of both Classical ideals and traditional Roman verism. With its almond eyes, the thin, retracted lips and the ornamentally arranged beard of the chin, it displays almost Byzantine characteristics. Such a reduced sign for a beard is not to be seen in the

39. Fittschen & Zanker 1994, vol. 1, pp. 72–74.
40. Heermann-Trömel 1988; Nickel 1989; Bergemann 1991.
41. Bergmann 1978, pp. 22–28.
42. Fittschen & Zanker 1994, vol. 1, pp. 72–73.
43. Presicce 1990, p. 80.
44. Maráz 1997, pp. 24–25.
45. Walker 2014, pp. 223–242.

iconography of Marcus Aurelius elsewhere and is more common in Late Antique portraits. However, it can be seen in a classically styled marble bust of Lucius Verus, giving some strength to the argument that the Capitoline image was fashioned after a variety of portraits rather than based on an established Marcus Aurelian type (fig. 11). The impersonal character of the rider's face may have caught the attention of Michelangelo, who never painted a portrait and who preferred to give his own sculptures, for example, those representing Giuliano and Lorenzo de Medici in the Medici chapel, abstract rather than realistic features.[46]

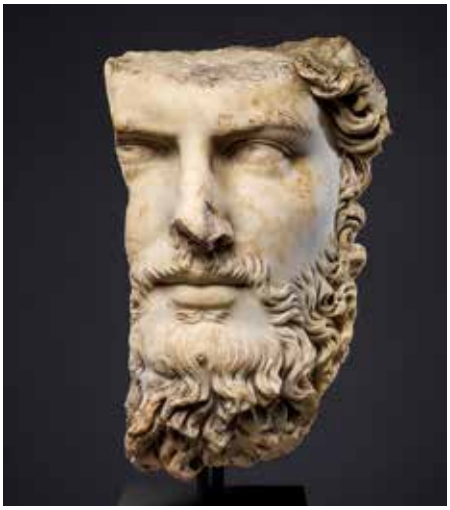

Figure 11. Unknown artist, *Lucius Verus*, *c.* AD 170. Marble. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, United States.

The centre of the piazza

In modern times it became customary to place statues at the centres of public squares and piazzas. In Antiquity this was not the case, nor in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance.[47] When such monuments start to appear in the early modern period they have often been thought of as symbols of absolute rulership and authority, blocking the heart of a public square to prevent citizens from taking it into possession. The equestrian statue at the Campidoglio has also been interpreted as such an intervention upon public space.[48] There could be some truth to this, even though by and large it is an interpretation founded on nationalistic ideologies of a later date than the Renaissance. What we do have from early on are fountains placed at strategic places in Rome in order to be easily accessible for its population.[49] Sometimes they were more or less centrally positioned at a piazza and at times they were artfully decorated. However, they were not thought of or designed to appear as being placed at the specific centre of a public square. The first objects that we know of to be placed in similar strategic positions in Rome are the Antique obelisks. These precious and mystical items were taken by the Romans from Egypt in the

46. Gillgren 2017, p. 61.

47. There are a few literary sources suggesting that equestrian statues at times were positioned at the central axis of a forum, most notably Ammianus Marcellinus (16.10.15) on Trajan's Forum. Even though this assumption is rejected by archaeological evidence, the passage could have had an influence on Michelangelo. There are no comparable instances from the Middle Ages. For an overview, see Bergemann 1990, pp. 16–19 and for Trajan's Forum, see Chenault 2012, p. 104.

48. Ingersoll 1985, p. 392.

49. Interestingly, the monumentalizing of Roman fountains also had its beginnings in the reign of Paul III: D'Onofrio 1986, pp. 52–59.

Classical period.[50] They usually came in pairs and were used to decorate, for example, the entrance of Augustus's mausoleum and the turnaround at the *spina* of Domitian's circus—today's Piazza Navona.

The most well-known and best documented of the Roman obelisks is the one at Piazza di San Pietro in the Vatican.[51] It was brought to Rome by Emperor Caligula for a circus that was located in what is nowadays the Vatican. In the mid-15th century Pope Nicolaus V (1447–1455) had plans for moving it to a central position at a new piazza positioned between San Angelo and Borgo. According to Torgil Magnuson "this symmetrical placing of a monument as the formal centre of the layout was an entirely new concept [...] and an innovation of the greatest importance".[52] Most likely Nicolaus V engaged Leon Battista Alberti for the project, which was never realized. Discussions continued, however. Michelangelo, among others, was approached on the matter but declined because of the technical difficulties.[53] There is a plan for the project dated 1535 in which Paul III took an active part (just as at the Capitol). It was not until 1585, however, that Sixtus V (1585–1590) was able to make the decision to move the obelisk to its present location, as a centrepiece for the newly constructed place outside St Peter's. This was in the time of the Counter Reformation and after being properly exorcised the obelisk was celebrated as a witness of Christ's victory over paganism. Soon afterwards, in 1588, an obelisk taken by Constantine the Great from Thebes and placed by his son Constantine II at Circus Maximus was moved to the Lateran.[54] It was raised in the same place that the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius had been standing 30 years earlier and became part of the new papal palace complex.

A less known but well-documented obelisk is the much smaller one that was once planned to be part of the reorganized Campidoglio.[55] The hieroglyphs make it possible to date the obelisk to the period of Ramses II (1290–1233 BC), but this is a modern discovery. No name was attached to it in the Renaissance, and it is not known when and why it was brought to Rome. Eventually, it became one of a pair that was used to decorate the entrance of the ancient Isis temple, from where the two basalt lions also came (fig. 6). One of the obelisks today stands in front of the Pantheon,

50. The best overview is given by Iversen 1968. See also D'Onofrio 1967, and, more recently, Sorek 2010.
51. Iversen 1968, vol. 1, pp. 26–46.
52. Magnuson 1958, p. 81.
53. Iversen 1968, vol. 1, p. 28.
54. Iversen 1968, vol. 1, pp. 55–64.
55. Iversen 1968, vol. 1, pp. 106–114.

the other was taken to the Capitol in the 14th century, perhaps by Cola di Renzi.[56] In the time of Paul III, probably around 1535, it was taken down again in order to be relocated at the Capitol. Plans were changed, however, and in 1582 it was given to the nobleman Circa Mattei for his new villa, known now as Villa Celimontana (fig. 12). The villa architect was Giacomo della Porta, also responsible for completing the Campidoglio in accordance with Michelangelo's plans after his death.

When Michelangelo wanted to turn down the offer of having the gilded bronze horse and rider from the Lateran relocated to the Capitol, it might have been because he did not yet have a plan for the piazza—or that he had other plans. Given the circumstances, it is possible that he intended to place the Capitoline obelisk at its centre. This would be in line with the plans for the Vatican obelisk and the St Peter's project, in which he was also engaged at the time. It would have been the first obelisk in Rome to be relocated in accordance with the new ideals for city planning. An obelisk at the centre of the Campidoglio would also explain the refined brickwork of the piazza, outlined by Michelangelo and appearing in Dupérac's prints—but not realized until the 20th century (fig. 7). In an original conception, the obelisk could have served as a *gnomon*, casting its shadow on the decorated brickwork and registering the passage of time in relation to the sun and the universe (see below, p. 75).[57] The obelisk had to give way for the horse and rider but the elaborately designed brickwork was kept. The geometrical pattern has otherwise been interpreted as representing the Capitol as caput mundi, the astronomical scheme of St Isidor of Seville or the protective power of Roman citizenship.[58]

Figure 12. Unknown artist, *The Mattei Obelisk*, 13th century BC. Granite. Garden of Villa Celimontana, Rome, Italy.

Regardless of specific meaning, it is agreed that the *ovato* is of constructive importance for the appearance of the site. According to some scholars, most importantly Harmen Thies, the equestrian statue is at the absolute centre of the piazza and the guiding principle for all of the architecture at the Capitol.[59] Others have argued that the statue is not

56. D'Onofrio 1967, pp. 209–215.
57. Ackerman 1957, pp. 73–74.
58. de Tolnay 1930, p. 25; Ackerman 1961, vol. 1, p. 72; Liebenwein 1984.
59. Thies 1982, pp. 49–83.

at all at the exact centre. How can there be a centre of a trapezoid form? Anna Bedon asks rhetorically, adding that the sculpture with its base has been moved several times during renovations and reworkings of the brickwork.[60] It is probably more correct to say that the ornamented piazza makes it look as if the statue is at the centre, regardless of its actual position in relation to the buildings. The siting process has led to the appearance of the bronze as a centrepiece, replacing the obelisk in what might have been Michelangelo's primary idea for the Campidoglio.

Hierophanies of space

Issues of foundation, centre and origin are often best answered in terms of myth and legend.[61] In his influential study *Das Heilige und das Profane* (The Sacred and the Profane) from 1957, Mircea Eliade made a distinction between the *hierophany* and *homogeneity* of space. For the religious man, he says,

> space is not homogeneous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others [...] There is, then, a sacred space, and hence a strong, significant space; there are other spaces that are not sacred and so are without structure or consistency, amorphous.[62]

Typical for the sacred space is its orderliness, with clearly defined borders and a precisely defined centrepiece of mythical origin. It can be the slaying of a dragon, a well that has sprung forth, a fire or symbols of carnal death. Every sacred space has an opening towards the divine, towards the mysteriously and eternally true.[63] For Eliade, the typical example of a sacred space is the temple with its altar. Despite its title his book has little to say about—or perhaps little interest in—profane spaces.[64] It can

60. Bedon 2008, p. 57.
61. For a variety of thoughts on the issue of origin, see Pizer 1995.
62. Eliade 1963, p. 20.
63. Eliade 1963, pp. 176–179.
64. Eliade has been discussed and debated for decades and from many points of view. He has been criticized both for rigid essentialism and for problematic political sympathies. In his many publications over the years his ideas and political affiliations varied, but a sound scepticism towards defining the precise origins of, for example, religions and myths and his embrace both of the fascistoid Iron Guard of Romania and Mahatma Gandhi's non-violence revolution in India, illuminate the complexity of his thinking and much of its validity still today. Such issues are dealt with by, for example, Ellwood 1999, pp. 79–126.

be argued, though, that premodern societies were so profoundly shaped by a religious mentality that not only the temples and shrines but public spaces and piazzas, as well, followed parallel patterns. Furthermore, even in contemporary secular societies similar ideals about the formation of meaningful sites are flourishing, indicating that ideas about the organization of places are of a fundamentally human nature and not to be associated with the religious sentiment only.

The origins of cities, forums and architecture

A look at the treatises on the foundation of cities, forums and architecture that were most readily accessible in the Renaissance period point in the same direction. Questions of origin are dealt with in a dialogical fashion, as qualitative leaps made possible by presenting unclear mixtures of ideas and anecdotes for the reader. For Vitruvius the origin of architecture is man's discovery of fire.[65] To begin with, people were terrified of it and fled the furious flames. Then they realized that they could have warmth and comfort from it and started to keep it alive:

> And so, as they kept coming together in great numbers into one place, finding themselves naturally gifted beyond the other animals in not being obliged to walk with faces to the ground, but upright and gazing upon the splendor of the starry firmament, and also in being able to do with ease whatever they chose with their hands and fingers, they began in that first assembly to construct shelters.[66]

When it comes to the founding of cities Vitruvius insists on the methods of old times:

> Our ancestors, when about to build a town or an army post, sacrificed some of the cattle that were wont to feed on the site proposed and examined their livers [...] They never began to build defensive works in a place until after they had made many such trials and satisfied themselves that good water and food had made the liver sound and firm.[67]

65. Vitruvius 1970, p. 38–41; *De architectura*, II:1.
66. Vitruvius 1970, p. 38; *De architectura*, II:1:2.
67. Vitruvius 1970, p. 20; *De architectura*, I:4:9.

Preferably in the middle of the city should be a forum dedicated to Mercury, messenger of the Gods and protector of the arts and trades.[68] "In the very center of that spot set up a bronze *gnomon* or 'shadow tracker.' At about the fifth hour in the morning, take the end of the shadow cast by this gnomon, and mark it with a point etc."[69] Marking out further points from this central place, the quarters of the city should be lined out in orderly sections. It seems plausible that Vitruvius's text directly influenced the Renaissance projects regarding the old obelisks in Rome and the grid at the Piazza di Campidoglio (see above, p. 72).

Leon Battista Alberti's ideas about the origin of architecture are also founded in myth and in speculations on the beginnings of mankind:

> In the beginning men sought a place of rest in some region/*regio* safe from danger; having found a place both suitable and agreeable, they settled down and took possession of the site/*situs* [...] Whoever it was who first started to do these things, the goddess Vesta, daughter of Saturn, or the brothers Heuralius and Hiperbius, or Gallio, or Tharso, or the Cyclops Typhinicus, I believe that such was the original occasion and the original ordinance of building.[70]

The concept of *regio* is important to Alberti, defined by the ruler's capacity to control the surroundings and his political power. It is also related to the drawing out of lines and borders. The site/*situs* or *area* is a more conceptualized space and characterized by its well-organized walls, buildings and monuments. The site is the place from which the region is controlled.

Alberti was also familiar with the tradition of founding cities through animal sacrifices and that "the ancients, Varro and Plutarch among others, mention that our ancestors used to set out the walls of their cities according to religious rite and custom".[71] This was done not only in order to find the best available site for a city but to give "the soothsayers the opportunity to predict its future". The Etruscans, he claims, could even determine the future ages of the city from such evidence. He is much concerned with the building of protective walls for the city, preferring the circular form over other possibilities. At the centre of the city circle, at a

68. Vitruvius 1970, pp. 31–32; *De architectura*, I:7:1.
69. Vitruvius 1970, pp. 26–27; *De architectura*, I:6:6–7.
70. Alberti 1988, pp. 7–8; *De Re Aedificatoria*, I:2.
71. Alberti 1988, p. 101; *De Re Aedificatoria*, IV:3.

cross-road, should be a forum surrounded by a portico. Alberti says nothing about the centre of the forum and focuses instead on its entrances, saying that "the greatest ornament to the forum or cross-road would be to have an arch at the mouth of each road".[72] Important sites should, however, be well conceptualized. This can be achieved in different ways, through natural phenomena such as rocks and springs, planted trees, the erection of columns and obelisks, the giving of a dignified name to the place as well as through the establishing of specific rules for the site.

> A most appropriate way to make a place more dignified is through good taste and ingenious measures, such as the laws that prohibit any male from entering the temple of Bona Dea, or that of Diana by the patrician portico; likewise at Tanagra no female may enter the grove of Eunostus, nor the inner parts of the temple in Jerusalem.[73]

The relationship between site and region, as well as with the provinces, is dealt with in some of Alberti's other writings as well, usually in connection with aspects of power and rule. In the present context his pamphlet *Descriptio Urbis Romae* is also interesting. Alberti sets out to define the positions of

> the walls, the river, and the streets of the city of Rome, as well as the sites and locations of the temples, public works, gates, and commemorative monuments, and the outlines of the hills, not to mention the area which is occupied by habitable buildings, all as we know them to be in our time.[74]

The origin of all the observations is "the center of the city, that is, from the Capitol".[75]

Filarete in his *Treatise on Architecture* follows Vitruvius and Alberti but is less ideological and more anecdotal than the others:

> There is no doubt that architecture was invented by man, but we cannot be certain who was the first man to build houses and habitation. It is to be believed that when Adam was driven out of Paradise,

72. Alberti 1988, p. 265; *De Re Aedificatoria*, VIII:6.
73. Alberti 1988, p. 161; *De Re Aedificatoria*, VI:4.
74. Alberti 2007, p. 1; *Descriptio Urbis Romae*, § 1.
75. Alberti 2007, p. 1; *Descriptio Urbis Romae*, § 2.

> it was raining. Since he had nothing else to cover [himself], he put his hands over his head to protect himself from the rain. Since he was constrained by necessity to [find his] living, both food and shelter, he had to protect himself from bad weather and rain. Some say that before the Flood there was no rain. I incline to the affirmative, [for], if the earth was to produce its fruits, it had to rain. Since both food and shelter are necessary to the life of man, it is believed for this reason that after Adam had made a roof of his hands and had considered the need for his sustenance, he thought and contrived to make some sort of habitation to protect himself from the rain and also from the heat of the sun. When he recognized and understood his need, we can believe that he made some kind of shelter of branches, or a hut, or perhaps some cave where he could flee when he needed. If such was the case, it is probable that Adam was the first.[76]

In the following Filarete outlines the building of his ideal city *Sforzinda*. The foundation of the city is a dramatic and violent history. The exact time of laying the foundation stone is ritually calculated and a ceremonial procession is arranged:

> When they arrived at the determined place, the bishop and the other clergy performed a solemn ceremony suitable to such an act and blessing the stone, the site, and everything else. With great solemnity of music and chant, the things were put in.[77]

During the ceremony a large and beautiful serpent appears. A person present tries to attack it but the snake "wrapped itself around his neck and squeezed so hard that it took his life".[78] After killing the man, the serpent went to "the center where the piazza was laid out". In the middle of the piazza there was a large laurel tree. The serpent entered the tree and disappeared among a swarm of bees: "Everyone watching was half stupefied by this event. My lord said: 'Certainly these are omens of great significance.'"

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76. Filarete 1965, p. 10; *Trattato di architettura*, 4v.
77. Filarete 1965, p. 47; *Trattato di architettura*, 26v.
78. Filarete 1965, p. 47; *Trattato di architettura*, 27r.

Foundation offerings

In all three examples above, myth and human or animal sacrifice plays an important part in explaining and deciding about the origin and construction of sites and buildings.[79] There is no mention of placing images of rulers or other important individuals at the centre of public places. According to anthropologists, human sacrifices in connection with the founding of settlements and shrines were widely spread in premodern societies.[80] Often they can be substituted with replacement offerings, such as animals, food, libations etc. There is a connection with the tradition of erecting chapels on sites of martyrdom and with the tradition of relics within the Catholic Church. However, it has also been argued that the practice of building sacrifices has more the character of magic than a conventional sacrifice. Slaves, prisoners of war or strangers are often "offered", rather than matters of more personal concern.[81] It is also a way of giving the site a new spirit and character; bringing it into the common narrative of a people, social congregation or family. The papal gift to the Campidoglio and the giving up of the idea of the statue as representing Constantine the Great, giving him a new and non-Christian identity, can be read as such a foundation offering; a papal sacrifice for the benefit of a new public centre in Rome.

Uncertain legacies

Michelangelo's siting of the equestrian statue at the centre of the piazza can be seen as a model for the following centuries. If, however, we limit ourselves to the 16th century, the examples are not numerous or even very close to the artistic achievement at the Campidoglio. Giambologna's statues of Cosimo I (1594) and Ferdinando I (1608) are at approximate centres of their respective piazza in Florence but they do not at all give the same impression of sitedness.[82] They don't stand in the same strong relationship with the surrounding architecture and they don't relate in the same way to passages and visitors as in Michelangelo's case. Further-

79. Somewhat later, in 1550, Giorgio Vasari writes self-confidently but less precisely than the others that the origin of "all these arts is Nature herself, that the inspiration or model was the beautiful fabric of the world, and that the Master who taught us was that divine light infused in us by a special act of grace which has not only made us superior to other animals but even similar, if it is permitted to say so, to God Himself" (Vasari 1991, pp. 3–4).

80. Sartori 1898; Eliade 1963, pp. 54–58.

81. Sartori 1898, p. 28.

82. Erben 1996.

Figure 13. *View of the Campidoglio*, 2020.

more, as recently deceased rulers and newly produced works of art, they are all too easily named and identified; they lack the archaic aura of the Campidoglio bronze. Much more than Marcus Aurelius they are pointing towards the modern taste for representational and political symbolism at public places. It may well be that the bronze on the Capitol served as an inspiration for later enterprises, but in many ways it is closer to the obelisk at St Peter's than to the nearby equestrian statue of the Vittorio Emanuele II monument (1895–1911). What is certain, though, is that the Campidoglio bronze has been retrospectively interpreted in line with later political projects, such as the statues of Louis XIII at Place des Vosges in Paris, Peter the Great at the Senate Square in St Petersburg or, for that matter, the Robert E. Lee monument of the Lee Park in Charlottesville.

Vignette

Experiencing the Campidoglio site in its totality would be worthy a study of its own, in line with Lena Liepe's work on the crypt of Lund Cathedral (in the present volume), but there is no room for that here. In brief: accessing the Capitoline Hill means passing in between two Egyptian lion fountains of black basalt, strolling the long slope of the *cordonata* up to the huge white marble Dioscuri at the top of the stairs only to be confronted with the equestrian bronze of the piazza, the symbolic founding piece of Michelangelo's ensemble of buildings at the site (fig. 13). For the egological mind, confronting a centre outside itself is always somewhat disturbing; be it a provocation or a revelation.[83] With all its otherness, the bronze manages to regulate the visitors, the public space and the architecture of the piazza. In many ways it materializes both the Renaissance idea of microcosmos and the postmodern definition of an artistic site, with its choreographed pathways, clear boundaries and well-defined centre. However, the centre tends to be unstable and mythical. The uncertain identity and origin of the equestrian statue in the Lateran was never a hindrance for placing it at the centre of the Capitoline piazza, nor its blank face, nor the tilted posture. On the contrary, like martyrs, fountains and obelisks, the statue came with a storyline that quieted all questions about precise historical detail and identity. Unwanted and dismissed from the Lateran, it found a new life and refuge at the Capitol. Today, because of contemporary air pollution, it has been decided that it cannot stay at the piazza. Two hundred years of museum praxis makes it natural for the bronze to depart indoors, to the Capitoline Museums, where it has been given a prominent but rather sterile gallery display. The piazza, the architecture and the living sky above are sadly missing, robbing it of some of its best qualities. Outside at the centre of the piazza is, since 1997, a rather dull replica, lacking the original's unique historical patina. How later generations will evaluate the relocation is too early to say. No doubt, there will be different opinions and a variety of interpretations.

At the end of his essay on Marcus Aurelius, Joseph Brodsky finds himself at the Capitoline Hill once more. It is a wintery night and he is alone on the piazza, hiding from the rain under the arcades: "And suddenly—presumably because of the rain and the rhythmic pattern of Michelangelo's pilasters and arches—all got blurred, and against that

83. Mosès 2003, pp. 123–127.

blur, the shining statue, devoid of any geometry, seemed to be moving."[84] True to its nomadic origin, the legend is by definition on the move. So must sited knowledge take a step out of the historical continuum and straightforward causality. Being both horizontal and vertical, it can never be more exact than it is temporary.

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84. Brodsky 1994, p. 53.

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MARGARETHA THOMSON

A precarious presence

Rembrandt's *Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem*

REMBRANDT PAINTED A scene showing the brooding Jeremiah against a distant view of the burning temple in Jerusalem. In order to arrive at a wide-reaching understanding of how Rembrandt's painting affects viewing, compassion and understanding, I established a layered structure of knowledge involving several factors: the act of painting the scene, the challenges of Rembrandt's society, related to the painting, the experience of viewing the painting in a temporal sense (the process of viewing experiences), and the expressivity explored and deeply developed as the great art museums were established and the painting became part of that context.

The purpose is not a new philosophy about interpreting visual art. It is to arrive at a deeper and conscious exploration of viewing art. In all the aspects of the investigation, my aim is to come back to the painting's expression and expressivity, and how the aspects of Rembrandt's society, as well as the ways of seeing art, explored during the epoch of the great museums have impact on the experience of seeing the painting.

The painting and the scene

In Rembrandt's painting *Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem* (1630, fig. 1.), different visual dimensions are merging into a scene.[1] The impression of a visual continuity is countered by variations in the treat-

Figure 1. Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, *Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem*, 1630. Oil on panel, 58.3 × 46.6 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

1. I here use the title of the work as it is given at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and in all Rembrandt literature. However, using the title here is, for me, not equal to subscribing to the specific meaning that issues from the standard title. I don't see the prophet "lamenting", since that is an active, expressive state; I see him drained and maybe brooding, and in an unnatural position as if still constrained in movement, due to the invisible divine strength that dominates him and determines his movements.

A dendrochronological report states that the material is oak, either Polish or Baltic (Klein 1995). The date is 1630, according to Rijksmuseum.

ment of colour substance, highlights, and in shifting pictorial methods, from one side to the other of the small painting.

At the centre is the reclining main figure, the prophet Jeremiah. A flowing space without obvious representational content borders the prophet's right side (on the left for the viewer) and swells out towards the ground. It could be associated with smoke or dust, painterly raw material, or pure nothing, as a break in the representational dimension.[2] It could also be seen as a visual mark, implying the prophet's state of holiness, rendered in such a way to show the prophet's exceptional state, as the man God has chosen—a relationship nobody but Jeremiah knows. The luminosity of the empty space intensifies with its growing size; and the colour shifts from a very light pink touch in the greyish shade to a more glowing effect in the flow bordering the prophet's foot.

The empty light space along the prophet is a potent indicator of Rembrandt's way of painting: the greyish layer along the prophet's body appears as abstract or pure matter—as if uprooting the representational and simultaneously "lifting" or enhancing the presence of the man, his dress and the treasures, in contrast to the light layer of paint. In *Study of an Old Man in Profile*, a small painting (19.5 × 16 cm) with the motif of a sorrow-stricken old man with a tear in his lower eyelid, painted by Rembrandt in 1630 (thus contemporary with the Jeremiah painting), a stunning "fusion" of the colour as material substance and as medium of a representation is performed: the tear is obviously a mark of paint and simultaneously a dim teardrop with an effect of about-to-burst fullness.[3]

Rembrandt demonstrated the whole range of painting in which nature itself participates, in tune with traditions from the early Renaissance, when a magical illusion was created with material substance in combination with inventions of perspectival painting.[4]

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2. Suthor 2018, p. 108, identifies a link, in colour substance and meaning, between the fire and the empty area: "In the depiction of the tongues of flame consuming the temple, yellow ocher is mixed with red pigment and thickly applied to the glazed 'dead-colored' zone. Upon closer inspection, the entire scene seems to be set ablaze by the tinted *imprimatura* shining through." Van de Wetering 2015, p. 500, thinks that the empty space is a damage and loss of some layers of paint, which spoils the whole painting and its motif.

3. During a study trip to Copenhagen in August 2023, I visited Statens Museum for Kunst and the 'Barok—ud af mørket' exhibition, and had the opportunity to see Rembrandt's painting of the old man with the tear. I thank The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities for the funding that allowed my travel.

4. See e.g. Damisch 2002, pp. 33–36, about the interaction between the representational and the physical or substantial in painting, with the effect of morphing meaning and appeal to the imagination of the spectator.

At the centre, there is a strong illumination on both the prophet and the precious objects in front of him. The prophet and the treasures appear as solid, as real, as spectacularly present and light-catching, as a protagonist and his objects on a stage, centrally placed and as if illuminated by approaching light sources—from a direction above, independent of the darkness that shapes the vault of the cave.

The arrangement recalls a theatrical scene, with an arranged light source or an opening allowing strong light, and the barren scenery as the backdrop—a cave-like surrounding with a weathered column that seems to merge into the wall behind, and the prophet's belongings, a huge book (secondarily labelled BiBeL by someone else than Rembrandt), a large water bowl and a bag with a wrinkled belt, presumably the girdle damaged through neglect, a symbol that God used to teach the prophet how to understand the threats connected to their bond, in Jeremiah 13.[5] The book is the symbolic item designating Jeremiah as a character and as a biblical figure, to be recognized visually and thematically.[6] The things behind him signify and clarify the control God has of Jeremiah, but also Jeremiah's identity and his needs as a human in a desert environment.

Rembrandt uses a theatre analogy: in the painting we witness a real person at the "centre stage", with significant objects; a setting with scenery; lighting; performative shadows, as emphases of the story; and explicatory background images, all illustrating the conditions of the drama.[7]

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5. The belt, attached to the worn bag, seems to have marks along its side, appearing as almost-effaced signs, or wrinkles in the material, demonstrating a state of abandonment and destruction, but also traces of a message—a status that matches the text in Jeremiah 13. Concerning the water bottle: Sánchez 2014, p. 30, refers to Budick 1988, pp. 260–264, stating that the bottle is a sign referring to Jeremiah 19:2–13, where God instructs Jeremiah to break a bottle as a sign of the impending destruction of Jerusalem. Since the large bottle in the painting has no signs of being broken or an intention of being used for destruction, I think this interpretation is misleading.

6. Sánchez 2014, pp. 32–33.

7. The theatre aesthetics of the time balanced between horror effects and moral messages (for instance, the horror plays by Jan J. Vos, 1612–1667, in contrast to morally oriented and eloquent, edifying plays by Joost van den Vondel, 1587–1679). Theatre was performed in varying conditions, but with developed technologies; regular theatre houses were commonly built somewhat later, at the beginning of the 18th century. I here thank, warmly, Willem Otterspeer, professor emeritus from Leiden University, and Karin Helander, professor of Theatre Studies at Stockholm University, for relevant information about early modern theatre practices. Otterspeer confirms the presence of itinerant theatres in Leiden, not least in relation to the university. Rembrandt was enrolled twice at the University of Leiden, in 1620 and in 1622, but it is not known if or what he studied (archival documents are on the website of the university). In Amsterdam the theatre building Schowburg was constructed in 1638. Helander informs

Rembrandt was still living in Leiden when he made the Jeremiah painting in 1630. Leiden was a great European centre for scholarly, intellectual life due to the famous university, but also an arena for the expression of the many conflicting ideas about the current political situation. Theatre was a means to thematize and dramatize the political and moral conflicts of the new republic.

The scenery creates an access for the viewer through the story and the experiential details of the situation, opening both the differences and the references between holy text, painted image and the recognition of a theatrical arrangement—into a path of meditation or a comparative reflection. The experience of involvement is, in itself, a dramatic process, since the coherence of the image world is questioned through the empty area (being just coloured surfaces in thin layers and the *imprimatura* coming through from beneath in the depiction of the vegetation) bordering the prophet's body and the visual depth of the whole scene seems to be within a wave-like shape of changing depth: starting, at the viewer's left, far away, thin and frightful; then bulging out in the middle, showing the bodily presence of the prophet and the precious things beside him; leaving the scene, at the right side, at the tangible, and somewhat comfortingly near, heap of dark brown items supporting the old man's reclining and tense body, things that are represented as near and real, since they project sharp shadows. Below the assembled items there are large stones or lumps of earth, roughly painted with layers of varying density. There is an impression of bare matter and deep darkness that makes the light change, as if withheld by it.

The impression of the prophet's illuminated head and his restrained and reclining body, and the shining objects in front of him (and ignored by him), makes the pictorial space seem to protrude, in a way, as if expanding outwards around the main figure. The effect of a swelling image space contrasts with the distant and loosely thin, vibrant and sketchy image of the burning city, and with the flatness of the shadow shapes and the vaguely ambiguous lumps of earth or stone on the other side of the prophet.

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me that during the mid-17th century theatre illumination in the Swedish context, in relation to Dutch performance groups, used wax candles, oil lamps and torches. She states that the sources of light could be placed high up, downstage and on top of certain sceneries; candelabras hung right in front of the scene, thus also lighting a small part of the audience space; there were footlights on the stage and behind the scenery; and reflectors were used to direct light.

The "stage-effects" in the painted scene are also a kind of competitive show of the powers of painting versus theatre, since the allusions to stage-craft in the setting of the painting also perform the magic of painting itself: the medium of the painting shows a continuous rendering of a situation that can be conceived both as simultaneous states of being and as a system of visual concepts, maybe combining aspects that are not completely simultaneous, but only in painting arranged in simultaneity, as through an apparition.

It is not known who bought or commissioned the painting. The subject matter is unusual (Abraham and Moses being more often chosen as protagonists in religious themes in Holland); the small format suggests a private, devotional situation.[8] The intimate focus on the brooding prophet opens a situation of contemplation in solitude, as if replacing the icons and images of saints of Catholic contexts. The situation invites thought and immersion, more than adoration and the sense of holiness, through symbols.

The situation depicted. Experience and memory—shown

Jeremiah is recognized as the protagonist, among biblical prophets, through the distant scene in the painting of the temple threatened by fire, and through the symbol of the large book, on which he rests his elbow—his prophecies being retold and included in the Bible.[9] In the painting he is seen as an individual person, not according to pictorial schemes of a high style. He is seen, as if in reality and related to visions about the disastrous events he has lived through, recent events of war, distrust and confinement. He is seen in a situation of being uprooted and without a clear future—without interest in the costly treasures (either remains of the temple treasure,[10] or treasures given to him by a leading Babylonian military commander, Nebusaradan[11]—thus gifts from the enemy, albeit during a time when an understanding with the Babylonians

8. Owners can be traced back to the 18th century; in 1939 the painting was sold to the Rijksmuseum. Due to the very important research conducted by Jager (2020), it is possible to evaluate the status of the work in relation to a massively developing but stratified market. Rembrandt's works were the apex of quality, required by certain initiated and wealthy persons and groups (until near the end of his life, when taste had changed in favour of a "smooth" style; see also Alpers 1988, pp. 17, 38, 39).

9. Sánchez 2014, pp. 12, 33–34.

10. Both Sánchez and Budick think of the environment as an actual site in relation to the vision, and the costly things as items that were in the temple, see Sánchez 2014, pp. 29–31; Budick 1988.

11. Jeremiah 40:5.

was what Jeremiah desired: a kind of make-do living with the enemy); as if the heap of things beside him were to be seen as remaining belongings, gathered for escape or an uncertain future, more than as symbols of his status as prophet with references to biblical texts.

The scenery of the painting can be understood as a visual complexity, showing effects of the protagonist's mind (memories, reactions), as well as his physical presence. The distant view of the temple and the fire could be his reminiscences, how his thoughts and his fears were triggered and then turned into the despair and exhaustion he is seen in.

The contrasts between flatness towards the sides of the painting and depth or protrusion in the centre open for options to see the flattened spaces more like intentional signs, influencing the conditions and experiences of the protagonist. The imagery concerning Jeremiah is primarily found within book illustration and in plastic arts such as sculptures in churches—thus imagery with layered visual structures that corresponds to the imagination of visual perception of reality, unlike easel painting.

In the small-size easel painting (58.3 × 46.6 cm), Rembrandt has merged kinds of imagery and time conditions in a synthesis corresponding to the dimensions that possibly were equal to reality for Jeremiah: passing time, stopped at his time of brooding, or just suffering; the already past, disastrous events stopped, as if in the mind of the prophet, before the destruction of the temple, but after the fall and capture of the Jewish king under Babylonian rule, Zedekiah, who can be identified as the small sketchy figure seen escaping in the distant scene of the imminent destruction of the temple.

The prophet's body is shown with just one foot visible; the foot is somewhat deformed, as if from long walks with unforgiving footwear. The foot is matched by one visible arm, with wrinkled loose skin showing, and with a hand supporting the prophet's head. His right-side limbs are clearly hidden, unused, unseen.[12] The focus is on Jeremiah and his head, seen illuminated and with minute details of his face, his thin hair,

12. Jeremiah's hidden right arm is a feature interpreted by both Shelley Perlove and Sanford Budick, and commented on in Suthor 2018, pp. 103–105. In the case of Perlove 1995, the hidden arm is explained with reference to Psalm 137 ("If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning."). Budick 1988 refers to Lamentations, and the withdrawn arm as a replica of God's gesture, in his anger at Jerusalem, and Budick pursues this theme further into a psychoanalytical reading. To my mind, the hidden right side, the normally "active" side of Jeremiah's limbs, is showing his own controlled condition, as dominated in all his acts by God, and the crisis in knowing that God has used the enemy to destroy the temple and the city. There is no way for him to "go", nothing to be active for.

his wrinkles, his eyes with a faded gaze, unfocused, extremely tired, but aware. He is seen as if he were deprived of motions and perceptions, in a state of immobility, and thus out of options. The head leaning on the hand and the brooding look convey the idea of "Melancholy" to the viewer, recalling Albrecht Dürer's figure of this state of mind. The comparison to which the viewer is invited stresses a meaningful difference: Dürer's allegorical figure has an intense dark gaze, conveying a kind of inspiration while Jeremiah appears as if emptied of his own command, unable to move, unable to connect.[13]

The book of Jeremiah in the Bible describes the destruction of Jerusalem and states that Jeremiah stays in Judah, his country, after a long time of imprisonment and after that as a free man, under the new rule of Nebuchadnezzar, the victorious Babylonian king. Promises of peace are violated, masses of people are killed or deported—events that cause the emigration of the Jewish people to Egypt. Jeremiah, however, plans to stay. The violence and strength of the Babylonians and the disagreements among the Jewish leaders are determining factors for all Jews to leave their country, Judah, within the Babylonian territory and take refuge in Egypt—including Jeremiah.[14]

Jeremiah's bond with God is absolute and leaves no options. Rembrandt has interpreted this visually.

The stance of the prophet's body expresses discomfort, in combination with a need to rest, maybe to contemplate. The hidden right arm and right foot express the bond as a loss of mobility (of the active side): he must always obey God, and he is completely alone in this condition. He cannot even rest comfortably with the twisted arm; the arm being a token of a kind of bondage that the ability to give prophecies and understand God entails. His gaze, almost extinct, expresses nothing; and, in that way, maybe, his awareness of his own unique and desperate situation—a situation that cannot be communicated to anybody else and cannot be refused by him. In this condition of obeying, the only pleasure he allows himself is to rest his naked foot on the costly carpet; as an escape in a small way from the bondage of being chosen.

The events leading to the flight into Egypt are as follows. In chapter 36 of Jeremiah we learn about God's great wrath against the Jewish people who do not agree with God's commands; and we read that the nobles of

13. See a discussion on the comparison between Rembrandt's Jeremiah and Dürer's allegorical figure *Melencolia I*, in Sánchez 2014, pp. 36–37.

14. Jeremiah 43:5–6.

Judah, in the presence of their king Jehoiakim, tear Jeremiah's account of God's command apart and then burn it. So, God obliges Jeremiah to write the whole content again, saying that no descendant of Jehoiakim will ever sit on the throne of David.

Then, another king is installed in Judah, Zedekiah, even though the Babylonians are about to take over the whole territory. Zedekiah is at first aligned with the great Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar. He has been appointed by the Babylonian ruler,[15] and Jeremiah wants to withdraw from Jerusalem into the countryside and unite with the common people, but Zedekiah calls him and wants to know if Jeremiah can tell something about his, Zedekiah's, future. And Jeremiah says that Zedekiah will be imprisoned by the Babylonians. Then, a long time of suffering and imprisonment follows for Jeremiah, and a period when he also counsels Zedekiah to surrender to the Babylonians, in order for Zedekiah to save his own life and save Jerusalem from destruction. But Zedekiah does not trust his own countrymen, because he suspects that they secretly support the Babylonians.

This is what determines Jeremiah's situation and his position as both singled out and incapable of acting, forced into immobility with the right arm and the right foot out of function (out of view), as if in a twisted position, although it looks fairly comfortable at first glance.

The situation is also made apparent enlightened by the sketchy scene in the far distance, visible beyond the opening of the cave-like space in which Jeremiah reclines. The loosely painted, small scene is like a visual tale, with places and events that can readily be discerned.[16] It can be rationalized as a screen of memories, or as real events far away, both in time and in place. The flow of time has been stopped: we can identify the king of Judah, Zedekiah, fleeing with his guards, hiding his face (and as we can understand from the Bible context, Zedekiah's gesture is a prefiguration of his blinding);[17] the city of Jerusalem is burning, but the temple is still intact; and an angel is hovering above the whole scene and its ominous events—the tiny angel is even reaching out its arms as if wanting to stop the violent fire. The scene seems to be stopped in the

15. Jeremiah 37:1–3.

16. Identification of the figures in the distant view, with a detailed narrative, is in Sánchez 2014, pp. 30–35, and in Suthor 2018, pp. 101–109, with a somewhat different interpretation of the events shown in the distant scene. Without stressing details, I agree with Suthor's reading, defining the fleeing figure as King Zedekiah, hiding his eyes, as a sign of his imminent blinding.

17. Jeremiah 39:7.

middle of the account, at a climax that could have been a turning point since the temple is intact.[18]

The sketchy scene could be an objective rendering of events, stopped at a certain point. Or, the scene might have been conceived of as the prophet's thoughts, focusing on instances before the complete destruction, as if the flow of events was not yet performed and as if the motif of the painting was not set by the words of the Bible. The sharp stop of events in the roughly painted movements and surroundings, at a point of a possible change of the course of events—as a hopeless wish, beyond any terms of reality—is, for the prophet, like his feet and arms, present but unable to be controlled.

As text, as prophecies or Bible references, the story is predetermined. But, as depicted, the outcome of shown actions remains open, visually, in the present tense.

For the expected viewer, apparently a person within the rich bourgeoisie of Holland, the attraction, like a trap, would have been the painting of the costly gifts, shimmering like real silver, gold and jewellery. The impressive image of the brooding prophet, with a realistic rendering in paint of the shape but not the details of the buttonholes and buttons of his robe, and his melancholy face, would arouse compassion and interest.

In his uncomfortable position of rest, with his right hand and right foot concealed and his upper body slightly held in tension, through the effort of folding back the hidden arm, the figure of Jeremiah could communicate the fateful situation he was engaged in: the temple of Jerusalem was destroyed, and the people of Judah dispersed, not because Nebuchadnezzar burnt the temple and defeated the people, but because God wanted this to happen and used Nebuchadnezzar as his tool. So, Jeremiah is left without an enemy and without hope in his relationship to God.

The painting performs its effects in a time of conflicts

The scene of Jeremiah in the cave is multi-layered, while at the same time—with the suggestive expression of oil painting—it allows a visual coherence and a sense of immanent presence as was expected of easel paintings, the usual format of visual art in 17th-century Holland.

18. It can also be argued that the temple is shown intact as an understandable visual sign denoting the "temple", to elucidate the event.

A painted scene should reflect an eye-witness impression of a whole view, sometimes even capturing the brief moment of a shifting facial expression.[19]

In Holland, prosperity and skill were more important than family and rank, and in the early 17th century the private market for easel paintings was expanding quickly.[20] Religious themes, such as the Jeremiah painting, alluded to the complexity of reality as known from the Bible stories, the foreshadowing of divine intervention and the networks of meaning between the Old and the New Testament. Biblical scenes offered visions of dramatic, great or intimate events, as if witnessed by the spectator. The market was predominantly private, for burghers with substantial means, but also reaching widely into less wealthy groups, as a mass market with images made in standard formats and with "shorthand" methods of copying and combining selections of standardized, mostly biblical scenes.[21] Rembrandt's painting represents the highest value in a large market.

In Rembrandt's painting of Jeremiah, the prophet is seen illuminated, with precious treasures at his side, valuable and beautiful things that he is seen to ignore, completely, and that the spectator would admire. The sense of a unified moment of time, or a present situation, is allowed through the visual focus of illumination in the centre and the flattening of the pictorial space towards the sides. The effect is as if a culmination of almost protruding visual volume, showing the prophet, became created through a pressure from the flattening sides: the sketchy scene of burning Jerusalem at the left end, and a softer and calmer view towards the right side, where the objects are more piled up than flattened—and tuned in the same dark, dimly shifting brownish colour.

Supposing then that Jeremiah and the jewellery are comprehended as real and present, the distant scene with the destruction of Jerusalem could most probably be seen as a kind of memory screen, with reference to how such a reminder (of an event, or of the thoughts about the event) could be presented in an image structure that to some extent resembles a theatrical performance. Since the events in the distant scene are shown

19. The typical and most appreciated works of the period show unified visual space, entailing the impression of rather short time passage. Even large format and symbolic or heraldic themes such as "companies" and other professional groups show situations, with the impressions of short time—a choice that accentuates the "impossible" combination of short time and symbolic, existential or heraldic significance.

20. Perlove & Silver 2009, pp. 17–67. See further their detailed bibliography.

21. Jager 2020.

in the middle of the action, and not at the final state after the completion of the destruction, the scene does not convey the whole complex of actions and the ensuing results, but appear as halted, when there was still a situation of suspense (the temple is intact) before the final disaster. The figure of Jeremiah is focused, both as present and real, and in some way, as elevated above a normal condition, as singular, as chosen.

The province of Holland was a centre for refugees from a large number of non-Catholic creeds. The government was Calvinist, but factioned between hard-line Calvinism and more open and liberal views on governing that allowed the powerful flows of commercial connections. Money and wealth were played out against dogmatism of creed.

Ideals within the Reformed religious movements became linked to Jewish perspectives and rites, connecting to a legacy beside and beyond the papal domain of power and cultural influence, and concentrating on rituals and the spiritual bond between man and God. The Jeremiah painting is a key work in that respect.[22] But the presence of large numbers of Jewish people was a challenge for radical Christians. The moderate Calvinists, knowing that Jewish merchants and brokers had unique access to markets in Spain and Portugal, hoped for the sake of prosperity and peace that Jewish people would assimilate Netherlandish customs and learn to become Christians.[23]

The plan made by Hugo Grotius and Adriaen Pauw in 1615, stating the designs of Dutch society for the Jewish population, contained the idea of conversion to the Christian belief, but also a recognition of the special holy bond between God and the Jews, since the Jews were the first to be chosen by God and have the holy mysteries revealed to them. Grotius wrote: "habent primordium veritatis (theirs is the origin of truth)."[24]

The political and religious tensions in Holland culminated in an even more dramatic manner—in the execution of the province's leader Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, on 13 May 1619. He had resisted acknowledging the Calvinist creed as the only tolerated creed in the province of Holland and he was in favour of negotiating with Spain about the peace settled in 1609. The ongoing political conflict pitted Calvinists against one another, the radical against the moderate, and against the multitude of creeds present within the society.

22. Perlove & Silver 2009, pp. 1–14, 126–128.
23. Pieters 2012, pp. 204–205.
24. Pieters 2012, pp. 209–212.

During this period of unrest, a theatrical play was presented in Amsterdam, by Joost van den Vondel, *Hierusalem verwoest* (*The Destruction of Jerusalem*), in 1620. Van den Vondel made works with a taste for the Greek and Roman heroic format, dealing with morality and spiritual conflicts, and suffering.[25] Van den Vondel, himself, was not Calvinist, but Mennonite; he advocated a pious life through meditation and accord with God's will, however different it might be from the ambitions of men.[26] The message of the play was to put aside the conflicts and sorrows of men and obey God.

Van den Vondel was strictly against the radical Calvinists. Religion should not be used as a tool in human struggles: it is the will of God alone to revenge and punish those who act wrongly.

A presentation of the event and scenery of the destruction of Jerusalem could refer to two different events: the destruction brought about by the Babylonians under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar in the 6th century BC; or the destruction depicted on the Arch of Titus in Rome, showing the capture and plunder of Jerusalem under the rule of Titus in the year AD 70.

Van den Vondel's play was about the event of AD 70 and represented the Jews as punished by God.[27] The sack of Jerusalem under Titus invited references to Roman greatness, a triumphal arch and Classical ideals of thought and representation.

Van Oldenbarnevelt's death is the main key to the construction of themes in van den Vondel's play, intended to convey God's punishment of the contemporary radical Calvinists, as represented by the Jews that God punished in the play.

Rembrandt's presenting Jeremiah in the context of the historically older event of the Babylonian war was to take the internal challenges of a motif much further. There were ideas about Amsterdam as the "New Jerusalem", replacing the devastated Old Testament city, inviting the idea that Jews and Christians would unite into a new common Christianity.

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25. Parente 1987; Pieters 2012. Van den Vondel's dramas were more reflections of thoughts than dramas about emotional conflicts and eventful, engaging life stories. The play was not well received. However, his high morality and classical concept of drama probably matched the religious seriousness that prevailed, along with the wealth that was both pleasure and witness of God's protection. There is an interesting review of Jan Bloemendal and Frans-Willem Korsten's *Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679). Dutch Playwright in the Golden Age* in Hermans 2013, who points to the tendency of partly applying modern theoretical thinking to the works of early modern theatre practices; he finds the strategy problematic but also creative.

26. Parente 1987, pp. 95–100.

27. Pieters 2012.

Jeremiah as a Jewish prophet, a protagonist of the Old Testament, has no guilt for the death of Christ. Jeremiah has suffered in his loyalty to God's commands and in his endeavours to unite his people who were caught in internal struggles.

Over time, Rembrandt became acquainted with some important Jewish people, first in his earlier Leiden environment of 1630, at the time he had chosen the Jewish protagonist of the theme of the destruction of Jerusalem, and then when he permanently settled in Amsterdam in 1631 (at first changing addresses several times, with the intent to find the most suitable place for clients of costly paintings).[28]

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28. See Zell 2002, pp. 73–98, about Menasseh ben Israel (1604–1657) and his relations with Rembrandt, in the context of Menasseh's allegorical book *Piedra Gloriosa o de la Estatua de Nebuchadnesar* (1655), dedicated to Isaac Vossius, librarian to Queen Christina of Sweden. Menasseh was a printer, an author and a rabbi (third in a hierarchy of four), living not far from Rembrandt; they knew each other, but the exact nature of the relationship is not known. About the relationship and Rembrandt's work for Menasseh, see also Nadler & Tiribás 2021. The issue of Rembrandt's connections with Menasseh ben Israel is an important topic, far from explored despite a large literature. Rembrandt made four images for the *Piedra Gloriosa* (based on the visions of Nebuchadnezzar, explained by the prophet Daniel, in Daniel 2) apparently in discussion with Menasseh, who had claims about the figuration, since he intervened. The men had known each other since at least May 1639, when Rembrandt moved to a house he bought on the Breestraat in Amsterdam. In the 1650s, Rembrandt was at his highest peak of fame and reputation; he claimed payment for his contribution but obeyed the wishes of Menasseh. In November 1655 Menasseh arrived in London, embracing millennium visions, to pursue the Jewish cause in England. Before his journey, he and Rembrandt discussed the book. It is surprising that Rembrandt adjusted his imagery, to a certain extent, to accommodate the wishes of Menasseh. As found by Nadler & Tiribás 2021, the Jewish religious congregation in Amsterdam ultimately disapproved of Rembrandt's images, which is why they are present in only three copies of the book (they were in one more, since-lost copy), and also why they were replaced in one copy by images by another artist (repeatedly identified as Salom Italia), who made simpler, more classicist images (and, above all, excluded a figurative representation of God)—engravings instead of the labour-consuming and more precious etchings by Rembrandt. Menasseh put forth his visions of an era to come, a reality in human terms (it was not transcendentalism), when the "stone" of Nebuchadnezzar's dream would be realized as a new and lasting era of life under God's guidance.

Moderate Calvinists among the leading Dutch politicians were in favour of including the Jewish population in Dutch society, under the condition that all members of the society would be Christians. Menasseh's journey to England did not change this condition. See Nadler 2003, pp. 47–48.

The discussion I miss in all this documentary research is a focused eye on what the figure appearing in Nebuchadnezzar's dream looks like (Daniel 2), what and how it performs in Rembrandt's etching. The figure we expect to see is the composite and fearsome figure Nebuchadnezzar sees in a dream vision, eventually explained as a prediction of the future by the prophet Daniel. If we were to imagine a statue based on the vision of Nebuchadnezzar, it would appear to us as comic rather than awe-inspiring. Rembrandt opts for individuality in the appearance of the ugly, not-far-from comic figure; it has no parallel in his other works, as was often the case in Rembrandt's oeuvre.

The Jewish religious authorities declined the book because of an anthropomorphic

Time of viewing: A prolonged presence. On conditions of difference

Looking at Rembrandt's panel painting is a position of connecting times, bridging a huge span of 392 years. How can we enlighten the areas of the meeting—where the unknown remains, or the not-enough known, with a fragile "life", in terms of possible ways to enlighten, to become aware of its mode of existence—then, and now, and how these dimensions become active in the object?

The body of the painting is tangible and real, and it is a remnant. It allows the viewer to experience the expression and the features of the depicted, but the challenge to grasp the mental expectations connected to the object is conditioned—by the bodily "here" and "now" of the object, in contrast to the vanished culture in which it was the key to many effects and experiences, many wordless experiences and nuances that belonged to its meaning. There is no way to capture the fullness of its impact in its own time. But the viewer in our time has the advantage of experiencing this difference, the sense of distance and loss becoming an energy in capturing meaning, expressivity and the remaining access to the image's world, the scholarly access, where time is understood as measures of change in the substances of things, beings and ways of thinking.

The art museum is already a construct of heritage, in order to talk, write and compare, in a prolonged "now", where the time of creation is a lead in a theoretical or descriptive analysis of an artwork. The art museum is a laboratory of knowledge. The time of the creation of an artwork will be experienced as a kind of mental landscape, with paradigms or maps of thinking and viewing, plans and descriptions of activities in which, in some ways, the mind of the present viewer and the artwork's expressive and structural state "meet" in the viewer's mind. However, the inverted commas around the word "meet" are crucial: in what ways, through what thematic, can the viewer of a later date be aware of the old artwork's extinct culture, as a vital source and condition of meaning for the expression of the work?

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vision of God in Rembrandt's etching of *Daniel's Vision of the Four Beasts*, according to Nadler & Tiribás 2021. The first image in the series, showing the statue, is an artistic challenge, as if refusing even the threat of the figure. It looks surprisingly mundane, even trivial or vulgar, and not with the potential to be a threat to eschatological visions. Since Rembrandt, in this case, allowed his client (also his acquaintance) to make demands about the content and positions of figures, maybe he wanted to state his own case by making a figure, paradoxically untamed and an "awe-inspiring" threat.

There will be blanks in the pattern of understanding; the space will be taken by historically retrievable data, about the wars, the competitions, the economic standards. But the painting's presence is complete in its capacity to tell me the story; only, I can't hear it. Time, a dense web of unknowability to me, shuts me out. But it is also a channel of continuation, where I and the painting are present as physical bodies.

If I choose to focus on time, since it encompasses the term "now" —what happens? What happens is that the painting shows its build-up, from layer to layer, as expressions or differences of actual presence. Additionally, Rembrandt turns the tables of painterly processes, making the empty space in the paint, with the beginning, in the *imprimatura*, showing through in the vegetation along the cave's opening. So, painting here appears as if happening in a coherent movement, the beginning connecting to the end and vice versa.

Choosing time entails risks, however, in terms of basic conditions of the statements. Time on the whole is a very tricky choice, since its ontology is hard to state, although it is a life-condition at any moment. It is an effect of other, surrounding physical processes in the universe, without being objective, like the material resources. Measuring time is always in relation to place. Keith Moxey is the art historian who has most eloquently and thoroughly explored these themes of investigation in his work *Visual Time. The Image in History* (2013). With the term "anachrony" he reflects on the affective response to visual art, implying that the intensity of the viewing experience conditions the temporality of visual art: "The intensity and complexity of response is as embedded in time as are the works themselves. Visual objects disturb and disrupt chronology rather than organize it."[29]

Here, I would pursue this path of investigation. We know that time somehow is both subjective and objective, as it is grafted on the minds of people, it "does" something and "is" something; it is a condition, and it changes. Moxey shows that time has individual durations, depending on the act of viewing and the involvement of the onlookers, even if the technical measure of passing time is objective. It has been studied how the notions of time changed during the ongoing industrialisation in the late 19th century.[30] Exact measures of time (boats and trains coming

29. Moxey 2013, p. 174.

30. In Dombrowski 2020, presented and discussed by Dan Karlholm at the preliminary symposium on 20 October 2021 (see note 6 in the thematic introduction to this volume), time was the issue: the theme concerned Claude Monet's paintings and their

and going ...) were challenges against age-old measures of light and its directions, as well as notions of human expectations and patterns of movements.

Time related to an artwork connects to its making, but also to the experience of viewing, with varying extents of duration. The way the work appears is like a dawning realization, based on knowledge gained through the stages of an interpretation. Time expands, even though the chronometer is uniform, to allow the work "to realize itself": the artwork is seen showing itself as presence, as an ontologically specific thing, where time and movements are seen as halted and expanding. The concept of presence is irrational in many ways: it is a time notion, although it designates neither beginning nor end, and in that way, it is in opposition to the habitual notion that time passes, in moments, stages and periods. In the painting, time has stopped, as real movements have left their traces, their marks—and then time starts ticking again, as the traces of movements become marked by ageing materials and damage. As traces, they have been leaving marks of their passing—as in the tale of Hansel and Gretel, marking their existence with a crumb-trail—so there is a continuous path of moments kept in the artwork, connecting to its being.

The contradictory conditions of knowing an artwork are dependent on those time concepts that are different in what notions they express: time and presence. One is passing, the other has stopped, or has never been touched by beginning and end, although it is a relevant concept about what time is.

If something is present, or perceived as present, it does not vanish, it does not begin nor end. Presence is in many ways in contradiction to history. Traditionally, our craft, as art history, has to do with history, and maybe philosophy. But the kind of history pertaining to art history would be recognized as more similar to the scholarly domain of theatre studies, as studies of ongoing or performed processes of actions—than to studies on literature and philosophy—the traditional comparative screen, in relation to art history, to make the whole conceptual value of the academic field of "art history" rise to the level of the purely intellectual. Visual art is not purely intellectual; its exceptional quality, equal to unmeasured time, is related to matter, presence, the untold and the

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time, at a period when time went from natural to technical and precise, in terms of measured units, variously at different locations. The changes of experienced time explained in the article and discussed at the seminar had an impact on the understanding of light effects in earlier art.

concept of "apparition". The situation of experiencing art ranges between an arousal of a kind of passion ("heart") and a strictly pursued investigation of evidence, should one wish to explore aspects of knowledge about the artwork ("head").

But I am not saying that scholarly work could be aligned, as discourse, with the existential parameters of experiencing an artwork. The scholarly analysis and the experience of looking at the work have different dimensions; they are not connected conceptually, but as different empowering energies in the quest of knowledge. The scholar needs to know what the experience of the artwork is like—to retrieve the focal points and areas of the investigation. The concept of presence is crucial in that respect, since it holds the contradictions and complexities that will be further discussed in the next part of this text, about the artwork's "utterance", or how it shows itself, as it were, as aligned with the condition of loss of reality in the representation, in the pursuit of gaining the exceptional experience of art looking. You can achieve access to the image world of the artwork on the condition that you lose it as representational reality, while you, simultaneously, experience the physical substances performing the image world.

Ways of understanding

This final part of my text is about the visual dimensions of the painting, corresponding to the suggested ontology of the depicted world. There are transitions and contrasts in the depicted reality presented in the image, due to the changes in painterly methods. I look for frameworks of reasoning about how to understand the visually mixed world of Rembrandt's painting. Furthermore, I opt for knowing and experiencing the act of viewing in relation to the dimensional differences in the visual universe of the painting. I need to explain how the painting captures the involvement of a viewer. What kind of mental act is emerging in looking at the painting?

The scenery of the investigation changes from Rembrandt's time to the time of a prolonged displaying of the image, in the cultural context of the huge collections of artworks on show in the leading art museums. In the 19th and 20th centuries, art viewing became a public experience, on a large scale, allowing both a solitary focusing on certain artworks and mixed experiences of private contemplation within a public situation. The whole process of encountering artworks changed—from palaces, churches and private collections to national museums, functioning like

reserves of national heritage as well as universal resources of the world, displaying the human mind in acts of creativity in visual format. The art museums became sites where large audiences had access to art collections, but they were also preconditions for the serious studies eventually amounting to "art history".[31]

The development of the art museum system was the precondition for the scholarly approaches towards visual art, in the dawning of the art history discipline. Along with different national characters, the methods and ideologies of art, and of understanding art, were explored as specialized aspects of knowledge. It was during the 20th century, in various stages, that philosophy engaged in visual art, in search of its cognitive and expressive functions, and its structure as a product of the mind. I take it that this would not have occurred without the development of the art museum. Visual art became seen as one of the main domains of human intelligence, in interplay with philosophy.

In 1939 Rembrandt's painting of Jeremiah was acquired by the Rijksmuseum.[32] The painting is now shown as an early masterpiece in the collection of Rembrandt's most famous works, renowned through the museum context and through perspectives of current research.

There are specific themes of inquiry that I want to develop, concerning aspects of functions in visual art that have fuelled my interest. These themes can only be approached with a focus on the large art museum and the context of emerging philosophical interpretation of art. In earlier periods, art reflection was more directed towards artists, in matters of ideology (how to think about visual art, its metaphysical values and its construction and appearances) and in matters of method of the craft as such: how to create an artwork. With the art museum, the viewers, on various scales of engagement, were emerging as explorers of visual art's magic.

The main theme of my inquiry, here, is the stratification of visual realities in the artwork: the interplay between factual fabric of various kinds and an emerging, visually shown, virtual, but not "real", image

31. Surprisingly enough, research on the kind of "discourse" embodied and practiced at the art museum is lacking. The large historiographical perspectives on the art museum are often about chosen subjects explained from within the art museum; so becoming a "voice", rather than a "subject matter". Examples of such historical overviews are: Whitehead 2004; Knell 2011; more of a meta-perspective is pursued in Norton 2007. A much wider scope is in Aronsson & Elgenius 2015.

32. Rembrandt's Jeremiah painting reached public display in 1939, when it was sold to the Rijksmuseum by Herman Rasch, a producer of Swedish historical movies.

presence. How can they connect? Or, how can we, viewers, understand the process of showing that is going on in visual art?

In the depicted scenery, performed as visual illusion, the real and physical fabric is still there, however, just as obvious as the represented, but the ontological levels have expanded: the visual scene is seen emerging—but showing the marks of the physical material and touches that build up the surface in thickness and dissolution. It is like a mystery, still as awe-inspiring as such events must have been when explored in a far-distant time, at the beginning of life of the human species.

In reproductions, the effect vanishes. Most images are now based on photographic techniques. The physical substances of layers in paintings, sculptures, drawings and various mixed media are shown, as explored, and reproduced, subsumed in the recording of photographic presentation (and for reasons of research, also studied in extremely high resolution). But the original artwork has its layers of physical material; you can see these effects in the reproduction, but they will not emerge, performing visually as they do in the original. And in the present case with Rembrandt's painting of Jeremiah, the original painting is the only kind of reality that can witness the connections between the physical material and the visually shown, representational effects in the artwork.

The inquiry is this: I want to understand, in detail, if possible, how the fabric of an artwork—paint, stone, canvas, chalk, wood, metal, real bodies performing ...—can appear, on another level of existence, as representational figures and sceneries. Where is the border between real and imaginary and what is the nature of this border?[33] The relation between the real (the means, the fabric) and the representational (the motif, the imagined or witnessed scenery) is like a timeline showing its path, leading the mind of the viewer like the thread of Ariadne. It is a temporal act as well as a spatial.

Where does philosophy lead us, along these paths? Since Rembrandt's painting is the case, the focus here is on canvas and paint.

The nature of visual representation became a major topic of philosophical discourse in the 20th century, aligned with the development of

33. Even film and photographic images appear in such scenarios of meaning, in visual art, concerning the relation between physical identity and the representational content of visual art. When photographic images are used in visual art, the factual aspects of the images prevail, along with subject matter: their size, colouring, substances and traces of use. Photographs in visual art thus refer more specifically to the medium itself, than the more usual reading of photographs as predominantly documentary or communicative.

large national collections of masterpieces of art. The inquiries were not only focused on the heritage of the Renaissance and Baroque traditions, but also on the development of contemporary art and its links back in time to symbolism and painterly abstractions in works such as paintings by Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin. The purely formal art in the late 20th century marked a peak: the works by Sol Lewitt, Frank Stella, Agnes Martin and many others showed just paint, or purely formal elements, but they appeared as universes of meaning and shifts of the border between physical and representational, or oblique, expressivity.

The main philosophical contributions came from French phenomenology, and from British empiricism. The following takes the phenomenological path. Why not British empiricism? This is because the British tradition amounts to thinking about the artworks as sceneries of the human mind—as screens of thought, observations and structures of visual thinking.

In phenomenology, language and thought are not only means or targets of reflection, but the outer border of human existence. What is seen in a painting—its material and its suggested scenes and topics—is on the same outer edge of consciousness as language itself. So, if anywhere, the bodily sameness of relations—the conceptual, the representational and the material—are treated here in this kind of reasoning. However, since the differences are connected, they can be in an interplay, they can affect each other, entering in sequence, to perform the polarity, the choices and the time-bound in human expressions.

Continental philosophy traced art in periods during the 20th century, aligned with the changes in art's development—the questions about representation, in relation to the treatment of coloured materia, and, further on, the tendencies to abstraction in painterly style.[34]

Visual art was thus explored in philosophy, or, in the vicinity of philosophy; it was seen as reflecting the inner self of the artist's mind, inviting a kind of shared, deep understanding; but it was also seen as an open social interface of culture and thought, accessible only through enhanced, explicit theoretical research, beyond the aspects of the artist's mind.[35]

The basic ideas about visual art were, according to Edmund Husserl, the perspectives of how the representational object, or a representational method of creating art, could be seen as replacing the real (person, mat-

34. Cobos 2018.

35. See the discussion about the methodology of phenomenological interpretation, generally, in Russon 2016.

ter, object ...); what is represented is categorized as absent, and the screen or canvas that holds the fulfilment of the representation is an empty space, in terms of reality (the screen holds nothing real, only the substitute or reflection, as with Narcissus, when he gazed at the reflection of his face in the water).[36] On the other hand, this nothingness, concerning being, opens an abundant space within the dimension that is the other; an enchanting and abyss-like emptiness that could turn into something seen or experienced and be explored as virtual.[37] The representational has other reality conditions than the objectively real; that, however, is the ultimate condition for the deviations—the indirect dimensions being grafted on, or playing on, the direct.[38]

Phenomenology had other terms and cognitive conditions in the writings on aesthetics of Mikel Dufrenne, *Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique* (1953). In the parts concerning painting, he explains how the visual artwork gains its reality, becomes known, in "temporality", through the developing thoughts in the minds of informed viewers.[39] With the passing of time, the accumulated refined knowledge will fill the empty space of the objectively unknown of the artwork.

The notion of understanding visual art appears here as a product of dialectic effects of thinking: art is something it could not be, unless it were in opposition to other, habitual or factually determined activities of production, thought and experience. And the thought used in understanding art cannot find its subject unless it were recognizing, and showing as different, these other representational conditions of meaning creation. The reflection needs duality or dialectic structure—in which emptiness causes abundance, in a way of thinking that can only be reached through the artwork.

The artwork appears to the reflecting mind of the viewer indirectly through a representational and ambiguous reality effect, which calls to

36. Cobos 2018, p. 304.

37. Merleau-Ponty writes "a spectacle of nothing", quoting Bru 1959, pp. 86, 99, in *L'Œil et l'ésprit* (1961) as quoted in Harrison & Wood 1996, p. 752. The Narcissus theme is here my choice; it is not used in the works referred.

38. Cobos 2018, p. 303.

39. Dufrenne 1953, pp. 346–376. The thought differs from Husserl's idea of "realization" (*Vergegenwärtigung*) of a fictional object (an object that hides the fact that what it represents is not present). With the idea of "temporality" as the mechanism that produces the grounds for a truth value of an interpretation, the time of the informed viewer's developed reflections is the cause of access to the meaning of the artwork. But both philosophers agree on the duality of the artwork—a structure through which the "unreal" represented content becomes deeply explored in its obliqueness and in its different being within the factual matter that holds it.

mind the myth about Narcissus. I am not referring to the myth's ideas about self-mirroring, as falling in love with oneself, excluding the rest of reality. Art viewing is self-mirroring in the sense of experiencing the powers of imagination as grafted onto physical viewing. The Narcissus theme is here called to mind through the notion of never reaching the seen in the image, although you perceive it. A notion of "both–and", on the apparent condition of "never", triggers emotions, kinds of arousals, about longing, searching, being involved in the quest, being excluded and being immersed. These kinds of reactions are obvious experiences, sometimes retold or apparent, in art-historical writings.[40]

Knowing the artwork is related to widening notions of pictorial presence:

- the presence and appearance of paint, as material substance and as evidence of the artist's own body, the bodily movements in the painting process, in the scene as a whole—effects that are not completely consumed in the representational
- paint carrying meanings of abstraction, as non-identity, interacting with the physical appeal, in the figurative
- the materiality of paint conveying impressions of the "ongoing" visualization, the present, as well as, and simultaneous to, the condition of ageing (a bodily aspect entailing notions of passing time).

Past and passing time thus appear in the present as halted in the visualization of movements traceable in the paint.

The backdrop to the philosophical studies and statements was modernist painting, in relation to its forerunners of around 1900 and its important main groups. Thus, in the new wave of modern art theories, thinking took root in the visual aspects of art, more than in its themes and subject matter.

The existential conditions predominated, however, exemplified to the philosophers as aspects seen in paintings with representational character: the realitistic character of a depiction and its method, and the consequences for ways of thinking when the representational dimension called for statements about what kind of reality it brought, as indirect visualizations of the visual.

40. I add here a note from my thematic introduction to this volume, referring to the state of mind of a scholar who meets the inaccessibility in combination with involvement in "art viewing" (Clark 2008; Rossholm Lagerlöf 2008).

In the intellectual landscape of phenomenological philosophy, along with the development of modernism in art of the 20th century, the idea of the divide was, however, about the "representational", about substitution in a way possible only in visual art. But the artists also changed the course of events, through opting for the "object"—that did not necessarily represent, but rather stated a kind of "being", beyond things in the common world.[41] The materiality of art appeared as a difference in visual art, after centuries of hiding or transforming the material aspects and focusing the spiritual, the perceptual and the subjective. Representational painting with marks of painting's own "otherness", such as Van Gogh's self-portraits (landmark works from the previous century), stated difference, in tension with the mentalism or abstraction of philosophy. Visual art of the 20th century fills the pictorial domain of the divide made by the "representational" (addressed by the philosophers), stating art's substantial independence—in a new kind of materiality, a "nothingness" in terms of subject matter, becoming abundance, in a spiritualization of pictorial substances.

Seen, as here, in connection with perspectives of phenomenology in philosophy of a later date, and tendencies towards modernism in art reworking the rules of representational painting, Rembrandt's painting appears as a different version, from a different time, of what can be seen in modernism: the combination of raw painting and spiritualized, vitalized depiction. It combines the dimensions of the trace (the movements made in the act of painting, in the handling of paint), the depicted object, manifest in painterly substances, and the illusion. In his time, it would have appeared as a theatrical solution, brought much further than expected into a painting. The image shows its own making; stages of depiction emerge as advanced beyond any standard, as an apparition showing the prophet in his bond of faith, rather than the staged and recopied pictorial events offered on the mass market for paintings in Holland.[42]

41. See, for instance, Fried 1998.

42. About the mass production of devotional paintings in 17th-century Holland, with copied or remade solutions of pictorial compositions, see Jager 2020.

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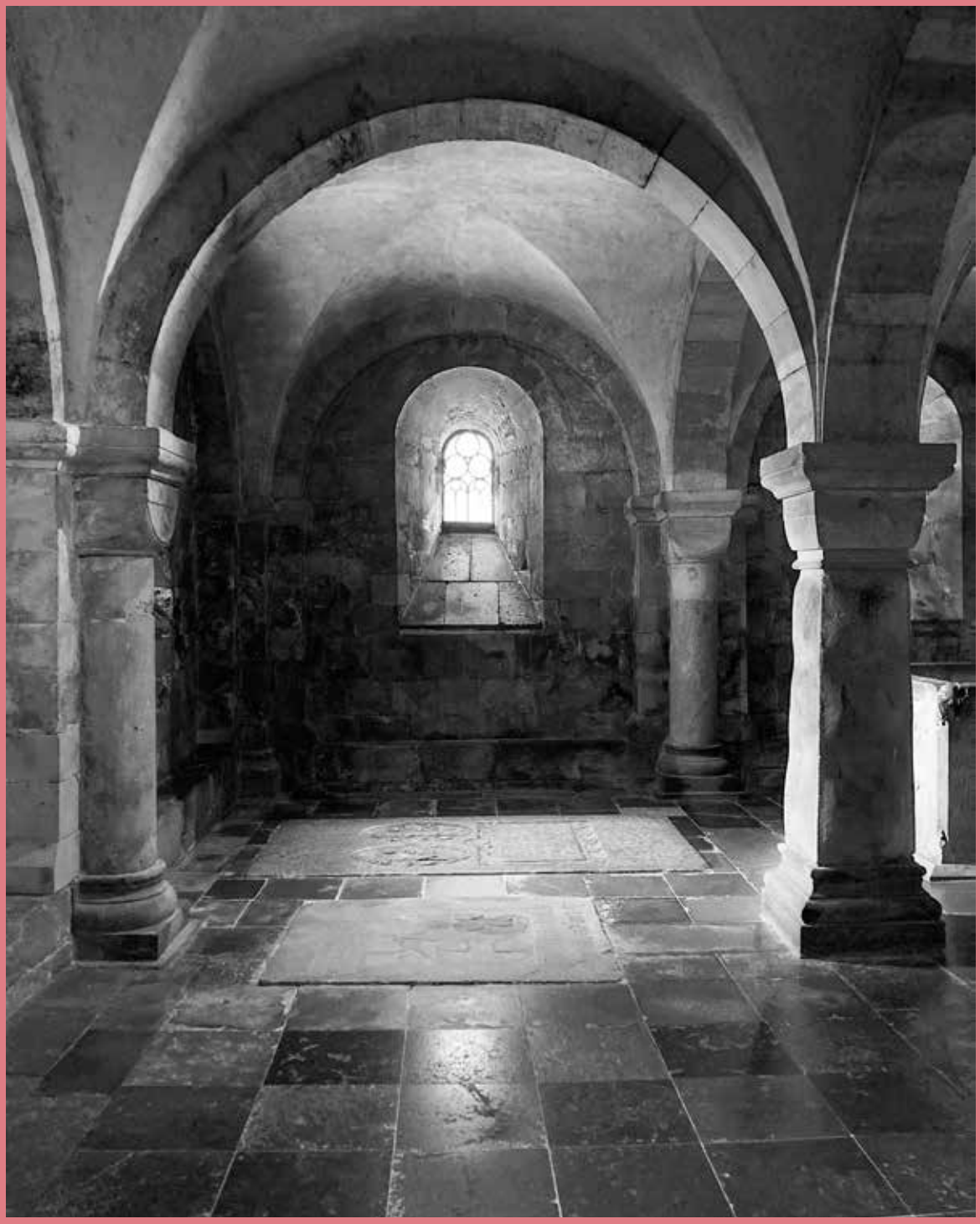

LENA LIEPE

Inner spaces

The inside experience of architecture

The crypt of Lund Cathedral as architectural space

SUPPOSE THAT I FACE the task of acquainting a group of people with a piece of architecture such as the interior of an ancient church building—a situation familiar enough for most art historians who teach at university level. The standard procedure is to speak of the architecture in terms of ground plans, elevations, sections, and in the case of exteriors, the design of façades. By this, the building is treated in terms of its material components, the visual representations of which are flattened into two-dimensional patterns, i.e. the just-mentioned ground plans, elevations and sections. Descriptions likewise focus on the material and visual qualities of a built structure and its diverse parts, all of which can be characterized by means of a well-developed repertoire of precise terms. Such academic abstractions work to purpose in that they are well-suited to characterize and classify buildings as manifestations of the structural and stylistic developments that it is the discipline's task to uncover. They have, however, less to do with how buildings actually are experienced by those who are inside them; namely, as space.

Take the early 12th-century crypt of Lund Cathedral (fig. 2). Going down the stairs at the eastern end of either the north or the south aisle of the upper church, the visitor finds her- or himself in a room of the same horizontal extent as the transept, chancel and apse of the upper church, but considerably lower in height. Whereas the corresponding section of the upper church consists of five huge bays, each covered by a single vault so that no free-standing supports are needed, the crypt is crowded by a forest of columns and piers. Wherever the visitor directs her or his gaze, it bumps into stone. But it is not the massive ashlar walls, the paved floor or the squat round-arch vaults with their support, the piers and columns, that "make" the room; their surfaces serve to frame and define it, but the room as such is the space they circumscribe. This is linguistically clearer in German, where the same word, "Raum", is

Figure 1. The crypt of Lund Cathedral.

Figure 2. The crypt of Lund Cathedral, looking north.

used for space and room. "Architecture", writes Christopher Tilley, "is the deliberate creation of space made tangible, visible, and sensible."[1] For Juhani Pallasmaa, the purpose of architecture is to domesticate limitless space; and Simon Unwin similarly describes "doing architecture" as organizing space into places, equating space with (material) structure as the medium of architecture.[2] And Tadhg O'Keeffe points to how, when entering a building, one's initial sense is often of its volumetric nature, not of surface details such as bay-dividing pilasters and soffit arches.[3]

If the built structure is but a means to create space, then to grasp the nature of that space is as vital for a genuine understanding of the "meaning" of architecture as knowledge of construction principles and the grammar of architectural styles. So, how do I best communicate the spatial qualities of the crypt of Lund Cathedral to my audience? I need

1. Tilley 1994, p. 17.
2. Pallasmaa 2012, p. 35; Unwin 2014, pp. 28–29, 177. Cf. Rasmussen 1962, pp. 46–50, on the conception of any built interior as predominantly spatial.
3. O'Keeffe 2007, p. 80.

to find a way to verbalize the room as space: as an expanse enveloped by building parts conflated into a stony shell. This, however, is easier said than done, at least if the ambition goes further than to merely define the physical space in geometrical terms as a volume with an extension in three dimensions. Which it should, since, as Pallasmaa underlines, "[a]rchitectural space is lived space rather than physical space, and lived space always transcends geometry and measurability".[4] To explore space as a felt sensation and mental experience is a challenging exercise. According to Anthony Vidler, space is the most elusive of all the characteristics ascribed to architectural form: it is intangible and escapes representation, to the extent that it can only be characterized through a study of what is *not* represented: "the white ground of a plan, the implied sense of visual and bodily projection in perspective views."[5]

This means that the explication of an architectural interior, such as the Lund Cathedral crypt, in terms of space requires fieldwork. Looking at ground plans and even photographs is futile—the researcher has to be *in* the room and alert her or his senses to its range of modalities, or wavelengths, for transmitting its spatial qualities to the receiver.[6] Sight, hearing and the skin's capacity to register the movement and humidity of air are all sensory channels through which the expansion and quality of the room as space are perceived, as well as moving about, measuring the span of the room with one's steps. But a mere description of the atmosphere and sensory properties of the crypt will not suffice; the *modus operandi* must answer to a level of applicability general enough to be transferable to other contexts as well. To this end, a research question needs to be formulated against which the procedure of analysis can be tried. The question will be in what way the crypt as space is constitutive of the crypt as a sacred room, a sanctuary. The obvious answer, of course, would be to point to its plan, with a central apse and two lateral recesses for altars as liturgical foci for the celebration of mass.[7] What I aim for, however, amounts to more than an exposition of how the layout of the

4. Pallasmaa 2012, p. 68.

5. Vidler 1998, p. 105.

6. Accordingly, in preparation for this chapter I spent just short of six hours in the crypt on a Thursday in October 2022.

7. This is the approach taken by, for example, Harold Turner and J.G. Davies, in their respective studies of the architecture of the Abrahamitic religions as expressions of how the Divine is defined vis-à-vis the sanctuary as a physical location; and by John Renard who devises a method to investigate how architecture communicates the theological beliefs and spiritual convictions of religious communities. Turner 1979; Davies 1982, pp. 125–127; Renard 1996.

crypt answers to the liturgical requirements. I aspire to a fuller understanding of what might with a somewhat prosaic phrase be described as the mechanics of the architectural space of a sanctuary: in this case, the crypt of Lund Cathedral.

Approaching the object. Description and theory

The theoretical framework that will be applied for the investigation builds on phenomenology tinted with anthropology and hermeneutics. I will expound on the constituents of the theoretical apparatus as I go along; but since theory is but a lens, a device to use when looking at things, I wish first to introduce the object of investigation, the crypt. Despite the initial questioning of the sufficiency of the means provided by architectural history and terminology for a communication on a space such as the crypt, the merits of an adequate vocabulary for description cannot be overestimated, both for the sake of economy and exactness, and for the inherent cognitive value of words. The following account is intended to set the scene, so to speak: it aims to communicate the essentials of the crypt in architectural terms to the reader, thus hopefully making it easier to grasp the spatial qualities that are the main point of interest here (fig. 3).

The crypt extends under the transept, chancel and apse of the upper church. The transept part of the crypt is divided into three equally large modules, each in its turn consisting of nine bays, arranged three by three. Two pairs of massive piers with semi-engaged columns on all four sides separate the central module from the ones to the north and the south. The 27 bays are covered by round-arched groin vaults supported by the piers, twelve freestanding columns and twenty semi-engaged columns in the walls. In both the north and the south transept arm, the mid-section of the east wall opens onto vaulted recesses that at one time contained side altars. A pair of piers carry the transverse arches that join the central transept module to the chancel. The north and south walls of the chancel curve into the apse; hence the ground plan of the chancel is elongated compared to the transept modules, with the apse forming an additional bay and the twelve vaults being carried by six freestanding columns, plus the piers.

A total of eleven of the crypt's columns are decorated. The shafts of six columns of the apse and one column at each end of the transept are patterned in relief with ridges or tori twisting around the shaft, wavy bulging stripes, more complicated grids of angular bars climbing

stepwise along the shafts, or curving stems interlacing with vertical posts for a trellis-like effect. One column shaft in the north section of the transept is of square section and is more subtly moulded in large convex quadrangles, three on each side. Two columns display figurative sculptures. Next to the north entrance is the so-called "Finn column" where a male figure, long tresses cascading down his back, embraces the column with both arms.[8] Uniquely for the crypt, the capital above his head is richly decorated: four small, sternly staring corner figures are entangled in the ribbed leafy stalks twining over all four faces of the capital. On the corresponding place in the south end of the transept two smaller figures have attached themselves to the column, one by wrapping arms and legs around it, the other by being squeezed tight between the shaft and the head of the first figure.

The crypt is furnished with two early 16th-century sculpted works by the master mason Adam van Düren: the northernmost section of the transept holds a wellhead constructed from four slabs of stone decorated with somewhat enigmatic motifs in relief, and the central bay of the chancel is occupied by the huge sarcophagus of Archbishop Birger Gunnersen (d. 1519). Grave slabs, some raised and others on a level with the pavement, fill the floor space of several bays in the transept arms and chancel; they were transferred from the upper church to the crypt in the 19th century. The most recent addition to the crypt is a stained-glass window in shifting shades of blue, red and golden yellow. It was created by glass artist and designer Erika Lagerbielke for the apse's easternmost window, where it was installed in 2023.[9]

The above account settles the formalities but does nothing to communicate a sensation of the crypt as space: in plain words, what it feels like to be there. This might seem like a simplistic issue to raise in a scholarly context: to feel, or sense, is a subjective experience of a kind that, it could be argued, is irrelevant for architectural analysis. With regard to space, however, the reverse applies: Juhani Pallasmaa's phenomenological

8. The name derives from a folklore tale where the figure is identified as a giant named Finn who was tricked by St Lawrence into building the cathedral. Scholarly interpretations abound: the north ("Finn") column figure has been interpreted as Samson, and the south column figures as children that according to a legend told by Gregory of Tours miraculously raised a column that no grown men could move. Other suggestions include the pair of column sculptures taken together as generic representations of God-sent strength, as representations of the Boaz and Jachin bronze pillars in the Temple of Solomon, or simply as construction workers. Carlsson 1976, pp. 78–86; Rydén & Lovén 1995, pp. 50–53.

9. Cf. Liepe 2024.

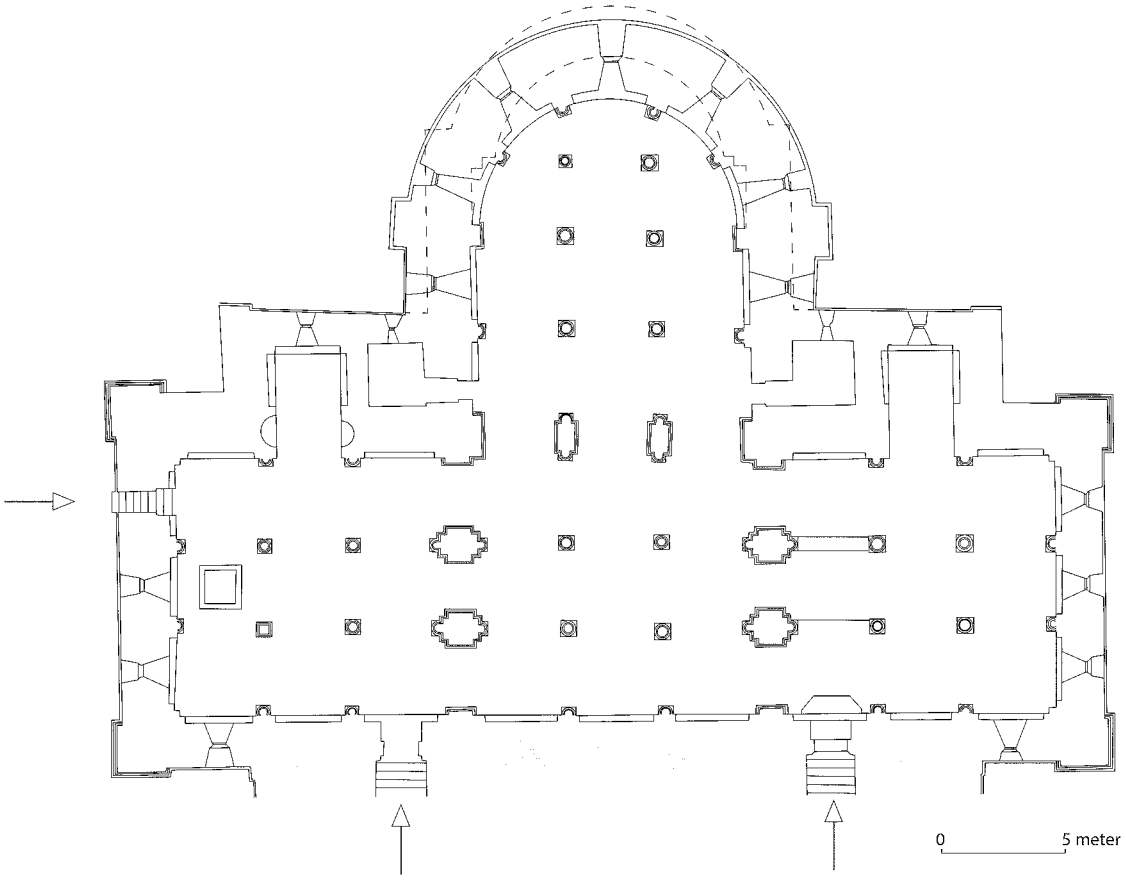

Figure 3. The crypt of Lund Cathedral, ground plan.

equation of architectural space with lived space is another way of saying that space, rather than being an immaterial object delineated by material surfaces, is a function of dynamic interactions and interrelations with the body that experiences it.[10] More than this, body and space are mutually contingent in that the body cannot be perceived separate from its domicile in space, whereas space—indeed, the world—is not knowable exterior to perception; the "objective", scientifically explainable world is only a second-order expression of the silent world of actual experience which precedes knowledge.[11] Human existence is premised on the embodied engagement with the material world; the body, says Maurice Merleau-Ponty, is the general medium for having a world.[12] Its spatial and temporal dimensions are embedded in our existence: our body *inhabits*

10. Pallasmaa 2012, p. 68.
11. Merleau-Ponty 2005, pp. xviii, 66; Pallasmaa 2012, p. 44.
12. Brück 2005, p. 46; Merleau-Ponty 2005, p. 169.

space and time.[13] "I am not in space or time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them. [...] our body is not primarily *in* space; it is of it."[14] Because the vital channel of communication between body and world is provided by sense experience, the qualities thus perceived always involve a reference to the body.[15] Translated into a discourse on the crypt, this implies that it is the sensation of the crypt as architectural space—"what it feels like to be there"—that constitutes its primary meaning for the experiencing subject. In comparison, renderings of the architecture into ground plans and stylistic categories are retrospective rationalizations with little bearing on the actual experience.[16]

Another expression for what the crypt as space feels like might be atmosphere. According to Gernot Böhme, architecture consists essentially in the production of atmospheres.[17] Pallasmaa points to how we, upon entering a space, grasp its atmosphere immediately, before we identify its details or understand it intellectually; the perception of the overall character of a built environment—whether an architectural interior or a city—is an intuitive, emotive capacity that works independent of conscious reasoning.[18] Philosopher Gerhard Thonhauser has recently observed that the research interest in moods and atmospheres is on the rise.[19] Thonhauser widens the perspective by reviewing the history of the German term *Stimmung*, a word that encompasses the whole semantic field of mood and atmosphere. In 'Sein und Zeit' (1927), Martin Heidegger makes the central claim that *Stimmung* can be sought neither in the individual mind—it is not a mental state or grounded in psychology—nor in objects and environments external to it: it exists in the relationship *between* the subject and the object, attuning the being-in-the-world as a whole.[20] In an application on architecture, David Seamon seizes upon Edward Relph's distinction between *sense of place* and *spirit of place* in arguing that architectural atmosphere, the sensing of a "mood" or ambience as distinctive of a certain site, is the product of a two-way communication: that of an awareness, often tacit and beneath consciousness,

13. Merleau-Ponty 2005, p. 161.
14. Merleau-Ponty 2005, pp. 162, 171.
15. Merleau-Ponty 2005, p. 61.
16. Merleau-Ponty 2005, p. 61; Johnson 2013, p. 383.
17. Böhme 2017, p. 70.
18. Pallasmaa 2014, pp. 20–26; 2017, pp. 132–136.
19. Thonhauser 2021, p. 1247.
20. Heidegger 1927; Thonhauser 2021, p. 1261.

which radiates from the experiencing individual toward a place ("sense of place"), and a quality radiating from the physical environment toward the experiencer ("spirit of place"). By this, Seamon assigns to architecture a part in sustaining the human faculty to feel the uniqueness of a particular environment; it is the qualities of the experiencer and qualities of the built world taken together that contribute to the relative atmospheric presence of a building.[21]

A prerequisite for Seamon's model to qualify as phenomenology has to be that the "spirit of place" only exists as a sensible experience when it is processed as such by the receiver's perception. A variant approach that takes account of the agency of architecture without bothering too much about the perceptual conditions is the exploration of built structures in terms of "affective spaces". This is the *leitmotif* of anthropologists who have taken an interest in sacred architecture, i.e. buildings that function as religious *foci* by force of being formally consecrated and thus transformed into hallowed sites, or in more general terms by being sites where supranatural powers are ritually approached, venerated and appealed to. Thus, Oskar Verkaaik ascribes a power of affect to sacred edifices, activated in a dynamic interactional relationship between the building and the believer. By limiting or directing movements, impressing visitors, affecting the senses and evoking connotations, sacred architecture exerts influence on human experience and provides opportunities for processes of identification—and, it might be added, dissociation.[22] Pooyan Tamimi Arab likewise acknowledges elements of agency in sacred architecture, in reference to Bruno Latour's notion of symmetrical anthropology: "[a] Muslim does not only pray in a mosque, he is not only a subject or a mosque-user, he is also called to prayer by the mosque and in that sense the object of the mosque's attention. [...] buildings can be said to have 'psychologies' that affect the humans who use them."[23]

21. Seamon 2017, p. 255; cf. Pallasmaa 2014, pp. 20–21 on atmosphere as an exchange between the material properties of a place and the subjects' immaterial realm of projection and imagination. Yet a theoretical matrix is offered by French anthropologist Michael Chambon who, in an article on Christian churches in China, outlines an understanding of the agency of architecture from an actor-network theory perspective. Chambon approaches the churches as "actants" in a net of relations that includes everyone and everything in their surroundings: Christian and non-Christian laypeople and clergy, Chinese geomancy and history, and even gods, ghosts and ancestors. "It is from the multiplicity of these relations and influences", says Chambon, "that Christian churches come to act and ultimately transform local worldviews" (Chambon 2017, p. 118).

22. Verkaaik 2013, pp. 12–13.

23. Tamimi Arab 2013, p. 56.

What anthropology contributes to the theoretical substructure of this chapter is a foregrounding of the architectural space as a force to consider on a par with the human actor, though still within the phenomenological confines of sensory experience as the fundamental premise for perception and, based on this, cognition. In accordance with the anthropological recognition of the agency of space, the analytical perspective will be constructed to point *from* the crypt *towards* the experiencing subject, posing questions such as:

- Where does the crypt situate me as a visitor?
- How does it address me?
- How does it use me?
- How does it talk about itself? What does it say?
- What are its material qualities? How do its surfaces relate to its volume?
- What is its time? How does it measure time?

The walk

Since the starting point of my inquiries is an imagined teaching scenario, I will proceed by walking (quite literally) my group through the experience of the crypt as space, ending up, hopefully, with an understanding of its distinctive character as a room formed by the circumstances for and under which it was constructed, both spiritually and materially.

This is how we will proceed. We walk towards the entrance of the crypt in the east end of the upper church's south aisle (fig. 4). Our steps echo in the large, vaulted space that we are traversing, but as we descend the stairs and approach the opening into the crypt, the surfaces of the ashlar walls on both sides of the stairs and of the archivolt muffle the resonance into a dry, nearby sound, thus heightening the feeling that the space tightens around us for a moment. Visually we register the hues of the masonry, shifting between a stony grey and a pale reddish yellow, and the progressively deeper archivolts that frame the arched opening, making it resemble a funnel that pulls us down- and inwards. We notice the sculpted angel above the opening and, if we are attentive, also the strings of palmettes and *fleurs-de-lis* in low relief that run along the two outermost archivolts; but we may be too preoccupied with not tripping on the stairs to look up at this stage.

We pass through the opening and linger for a moment on the landing that leads from the stairs to the paved floor; partly to adjust our eyes

to the dim light of the crypt, partly to get a first overview of the room before us. When we step down and advance a little into the room, we sense a slight increase of humidity in the atmosphere. The sound caused by our walking again swells into a reverberation that reveals to our ears the expanse of the crypt, but also, in comparison with the upper church, its considerably lower height. The acoustics are such that the smallest movement causes a noise that can be heard across the room, and we automatically lower our voices (if we speak at all) in adaption to this. Faint sound from the outside makes its way into the crypt and reminds us of the outer world: people talking in the upper church, the distant but clearly discernible peal of the cathedral's bells, the low murmur of the traffic on the street in front of the cathedral. If we happen to arrive in the morning, we may sit in on the daily pilgrim's prayer. The soft chanting of the priest, settled on a chair in the chancel, resounds from the vaults and fills the entire room. The words cannot be heard distinctly unless one is close by, and the voice seems to come from everywhere.

Figure 4. Lund Cathedral, the south entrance to the crypt.

This is what we hear. What do we see? Depending on the time of the day and the weather conditions, the crypt is illuminated by daylight falling in from the east, south or west through the small, round-arch windows that are placed well above eye level, deeply recessed in the masonry, and set with semi-opaque glass. The sections of the crypt nearest to the windows are more brightly lit, and the gradation from light to increasing dullness articulates the room as a three-dimensional volume (fig. 5). In addition, spotlights on thin metal bars that run beneath the vaults spread an artificial yellow light across the room. The many columns and piers crowd the field of vision in all directions, to the extent that the layout of the crypt is not easily grasped, at least not at first sight. The lack of a clearly indicated spatial orientation towards a centre leaves visitors free to choose their route. Most tend to wander from the entrance in the south-western part of the transept, towards the crossing where many arrest their steps at the sight of the stained-glass east window, floating like a mirage of light in the dusk. They then either advance further into the chancel to take a closer look at the window and, perhaps, circle the

Figure 5. The crypt of Lund Cathedral, south transept.

archbishop's sarcophagus (fig. 6), or else head for the north section of the transept, where the column-hugging "Finn the giant" and Adam van Düren's wellhead are to be seen (fig. 7). The grave slabs influence the routes taken by the visitors: most slabs rise only 10–20 centimetres above floor level, but it is rare to see people climb them, and some even avoid stepping on the slabs that are inserted on a level with the pavement.

To stroll at a slow but steady pace from one end of the transept to the other takes about 40 seconds. To circuit the entire room along the walls at a similar tempo takes between one and a half and two minutes. To a visitor tuned into her or his immediate surroundings (and not only intent, as many seem to be, on seeking out "Finn the giant"), it is an eventful promenade: as one moves along, the vista changes continuously when the relative positions of the columns and piers shift in one's visual field. The dense distribution of columns and the pronounced longitudinal and transverse arches make the bays appear as distinct spatial units, with the effect that the larger space of the crypt is divided into a multitude of sub-spaces or rooms-within-the-room that open up and then disappear out of sight again as one walks on. The varied surface ornaments on nine of the columns also contribute to the excitement, plus of course the two columns with sculpted figures. Visually, the walk is a highly three-

Figure 6. The crypt of Lund Cathedral, the chancel.

dimensional experience: the slow gliding, as one passes by, of the columns from the focused sphere of one's vision to the periphery, and then out of the visual field entirely (but leaving an awareness of them still being there, behind one's back) produces a strong sense of being enveloped by the crypt as a continuous expanse: as space. The stained-glass window, the sarcophagus, the wellhead and the "Finn" column constitute breaks or stopping places before which the journey momentarily comes to a halt (figs 6–7).

It would run against the whole idea of this project if I merely told my followers all these things. Instead, I would begin by sending them on their own explorative mission, with the instruction to make a tour of the crypt and alert their senses to what it feels, looks and sounds like. When we gather again my task would be to verbalize a discourse on the crypt as a sacred room with a history, in a manner that resonates meaningfully with the experience of the room as, in the words of Christopher Tilley, "space made tangible, visible, and sensible".[24]

Figure 7. The "Finn column" in the crypt of Lund Cathedral.

24. Tilley 1994, p. 17.

Sound and movement

It may not be apparent from the above, but strictly speaking, the two parameters by which the sensation of the crypt as space can be gauged are sound and movement. Visually, an architectural volume can be perceived only indirectly, by mentally multiplying its three dimensions.[25] We cannot "see" spatial volume: what we see are the surfaces that delimit it. We can, however, hear it. Aurally, we sense the volume of a room by the resonance of sounds emitted in it. "[T]he sound measures space and makes its scale comprehensible", says Juhani Pallasmaa: "We stroke the boundaries of the space with our ears."[26] All sounds are the result of dynamic actions that produce sound-waves, and so a necessary constituent for sound to arise is movement. In a space such as the crypt, the main source of sound is bodily movement: one's own or that of other visitors. To move about is also to measure the room with one's body, to calculate its area by means of one's steps, and to project one's bodily proportions onto the dimensions of the room and its structural components.[27]

The realization that architectural space cannot be grasped visually is potentially dismaying to an art historian, and it is also a powerful reminder that the standard photographic illustrations of church interiors (as of interiors in general in art-historical literature) fail to capture built structures as material sites for actions, events, situations and experiences: the sum of which David Seamon equates to buildings understood phenomenologically as lifeworlds.[28] Photographs of architectural interiors normally show them empty of people, detached from the functions for which they are built, and preferably lit by an even, cool light that makes the structural details appear as sharp and distinct as possible, but does little to communicate the atmosphere of the room; at least not in the sense that this evasive quality is defined by Seamon, namely, as a complex, diffuse, invisible, never fully graspable or describable "mood" that is nonetheless often the most significant effect of a space or building. "[A]rchitectural and place atmospheres [...] are not brought to awareness or identity via vision alone but incorporate a wide range of lived qualities that include sound, tactility, emotional vibrations, an active presence

25. Blesser & Salter 2006, p. 21.
26. Pallasmaa 2012, p. 55; cf. Rasmussen 1962, pp. 226–237, on what it means to hear architecture.
27. Casey 1997, p. 229; Pallasmaa 2012, p. 71.
28. Seamon 2017, p. 248.

of things and spaces"[29]—none of which a visual, two-dimensional rendering can even remotely do justice to.

Being physically present in the crypt, however, will allow me and my group both to attune our senses to the atmosphere and to take the intellectual and theoretical position that comes with paying attention to visible form.[30] At this stage, the set of questions formulated above may bring us forward. So, where does the crypt situate us, how does it address us, how does it use us, what does it have to say about itself, what are its material qualities, and what about time? A first observation would be that the crypt is a non-restrictive space, in that it does not command us to follow a certain course or go in a specified direction; on the contrary, its composite character, and the fact that parts of the room are always hidden from view no matter where one stands, invite exploration. At the same time, by force of its overwhelming materiality, it is a commanding room. The presence of massive, solid stone makes itself felt everywhere: stone surrounds the visitor on all sides and is a cause of the clearly perceptible humidity of the air. Visually the crypt states its structural design in no uncertain terms: each bay, consisting of four load-carrying supports and a groin vault marked off by two pairs of perfectly semicircular arches, can be read as an example of the modular constructional principle that underlies the crypt's layout.

Although the crypt as a whole encourages meandering, within the confines of a bay the visitor may have the sensation of being firmly positioned vis-à-vis the module. One might even feel quite ensconced in the "safe space" of the bay: partly because the vault forms a shielding canopy above one's head ("[a] semicircular vault, [...] is in fact a form of embracement"),[31] partly because the proportions of the columns correspond to the human body. The columns measure 1.95 meters from base to capital, meaning that someone of medium height is, so to speak, roughly on eye level with them (a notion that is not as far-fetched as it may seem, considering that columns have been seen as embodiments of human qualities since Antiquity).[32] In contrast, the distance from the floor to the apices of the transversal and longitudinal arches is 3.15 meters, mak-

29. Seamon 2017, p. 254; cf. Pallasmaa 2014, pp. 38–39, with a similar observation on the inability of photographic images to render the embracing character of peripheral perception ("the perceptival mode through which we grasp atmospheres"), encompassing not only unfocused vision, but also hearing, smell and touch.

30. Cf. Pallasmaa 2017, p. 133.

31. Davies 1982, p. 152.

32. Onians 1988, pp. 4, 34, 162–165.

ing persons look small in comparison when seen at some distance. The visitor thus becomes one of the means by and against which the crypt measures itself. In doing all this, it asserts itself as a structure with a strong material presence that exercises control over the senses; over the kinesthetic self-awareness of the position and extension of one's body, over movement and hearing (as explained above), and not least over sight. Wherever one looks, columns and arches frame the gaze and direct it either along the main axes of the room, or diagonally across them.

Moreover, the stony surfaces that define and delimit the spatial volume of the room speak eloquently of time.[33] One does not need to be aware that the finely cut, smallish (in comparison to those of the upper church) sandstone ashlars of the walls, the columns likewise made from sandstone, and the tufa stones of the vaults, were hewn and put in place in the 12th century in order to recognize that the crypt has existed for a very long time.[34] For Juhani Pallasmaa, such an insight implies an emancipation from the present: the awareness that buildings are manifestations of time cycles that surpass individual life makes the passing of history visible and graspable.[35] But buildings are also of the present; the crypt is in daily use as a liturgical space and receives numerous visitors all year round. Lindsay Jones points to how built structures in which people continue to live, work and worship are, in a certain sense, perpetually new, even when, in fact, old. In every material object with a history, the past is linked to the present, or embedded in the present.[36]

On a microscale, this embeddedness applies also to the momentary experience of the crypt as space. Spatial volume is apprehended first and foremost through sound and movement, and both entail time: the temporal dimension is constitutive of hearing, and of any perception of movement. In contrast to light waves, which move instantaneously and thus do not communicate a sense of time, sound-waves traverse a space with perceptible speed, so that when the space produces a reverberation or echo, it is the sound of the past we hear.[37] And movement is registered as a change of location—as in the case of a person, of a limb or of the entire body—from where it was a moment ago to where it is now. Thus, not only in the idea of the crypt as a monument from the past that

33. Pallasmaa 2012, p. 34.
34. Sundnér 1997.
35. Pallasmaa 2012, p. 56.
36. Jones 2000, pp. 143–145; Knott 2005, p. 23.
37. Blesser & Salter 2006, p. 16.

continually greets new visitors, but also in the on-the-spot sensorial registration of the crypt as space, is the past built into the present. This insight offers a cue for the discourse on the historical layers of the crypt that is one of my objectives to communicate to my audience.

Sacred space

After this unravelling of what the crypt is, does and states in material terms, it is time to move on to the question of how all this relates to its being a sacred space, and a space with a history. In my approach I will follow the lead of Kim Knott in her refusal of any idea of space as *inherently* sacred. She quotes Andrew Merrifield's definition of place as practiced space, i.e., a terrain where social practices are lived out, whereby the space becomes a place equipped with specific user values.[38] For Knott, a religious ritual is a sacred-making practice or behaviour that produces sacred space: "[r]itual *takes* place, and *makes place* in this sense." Sacred-making spatial practices are not intrinsically religious either; ritual practice is simply practice transformed by religious meaning.[39] Along similar lines, Lindsay Jones calls for what he describes as "a more eventful approach to sacred architecture",[40] and proposes a redefinition of the very concept of sacred architecture as made up, not of buildings, but of "ritual-architectural events". For Jones, the meaning of a building such as a church emerges within the confines of the performative occasions in which it is but one player, alongside the people that partake in the ritual seen as a hermeneutical game of meaning making. The resulting meaning, and perhaps even the very being of the building, lasts only as long as the ritual, or performative occasion, takes place.[41]

Nonetheless, once a space is brought into existence—or, with Tilley, has been made "tangible, visible, and sensible"—by the built structure of which it is a function, it conditions the activities that take place within its confines. Frank Burch Brown compares the disposition of sacred spaces in different religious traditions (Chinese temple architecture, Catholic and Protestant churches, and Islamic mosques), in support of the view that a tradition's dominant sacred space shapes the worshippers' characteristic perceptions of the sacred in particular ways. "If places can be made and used in such a way as to mediate a particular sense of

38. Merrifield 1993, p. 522; Knott 2005.
39. Knott 2005, p. 43; see also Kilde 2008, p. 7.
40. Jones 2000, p. 46.
41. Jones 2000, pp. 48–52.

the sacred, this means that the sacred is partly defined and created by material making."[42] Jeanne Halgren Kilde also brings the users into the equation when she cites Jonathan Z. Smith's argument that the ways in which religious sites organize and arrange the people who use them contribute importantly to the perceived holiness of a place.[43] Consequently, the question to ask is: By what means does the architectural space of the crypt engender behaviours that define the space as sacred?

The answer, it seems to me, lies in the crypt's quality of being a room that manifests itself as fundamentally different from the outer world; a world from which it is, furthermore, set apart by the thick walls and the high-placed windows that preclude all view of the outside. The existence of exterior surroundings is perceived only through faint sounds penetrating from the outside, and shadows cast by foliage dancing on the semi-opaque windowpanes when there is sunshine. The room's own acoustics magnify every sound, inducing the visitor to adjust her or his behaviour accordingly: one speaks in a low voice and moves quietly. The sonorous, reverberant soundscape of the crypt is yet a distinctive trait that, perhaps more than anything else, enhances the visitor's awareness of the space as an entity with an intense presence. The otherness of the crypt is further accentuated by the shadowy twilight atmosphere that prevails all through the day. The mid-section, or crossing, is furthest from the windows and is hence the darkest part of the room (although nowadays lit by spotlights). John Renard quotes a line by Dylan Thomas: "Dark is a way and light is a place", as a poetic way of suggesting that dark is a condition through which one moves, whereas light is an invitation to come to rest.[44] If Thomas is to be taken literally, the contrasting lighting conditions bear on how the crypt pilots the visitor to certain parts of the room.

This, however, opens for an intriguing aspect of the crypt as a sacred space, or in any case a Christian sacred space, namely, its lack of a clearly indicated direction towards the focal point of the room, liturgically speaking. The typical Christian church is a rectangular hall that ushers the visitor ahead from the western entrance towards the chancel and the altar in the east end. Also in centrally planned churches, e.g. in the

42. Brown 2000, p. 211.
43. Smith 1992, pp. 56–60; Kilde 2008, p. 7.
44. Renard 1996, p. 118. The line is from Dylan Thomas, 'Poem on His Birthday' (Renard 1996, p. 191). The poem is at https://www.poetryverse.com/dylan-thomas-poems/poem-on-his-birthday, accessed 12 March 2025.

Eastern Orthodox building tradition, the chancel with its altar behind the iconostasis is a definite centre of attention.[45] The crypt, however, appears to the visitor as a kind of floating space where the forest of columns that demarcate the bays—the rooms-within-the-room—extends in all directions. The impression is heightened by the fact that one enters the crypt not from a centrally placed opening, but from the stairs in the south- and north-western ends. Hence, the chancel is at first hidden from view, and appears in sight first after one has proceeded laterally some way towards the crossing. In this, the crypt is not unlike a mosque. Mosques of the so-called open-plan type are multidirectional, with a profusion of pillars and arches in the hypostyles, or pillar halls, that can be added to if more space is needed. The *mihrab* or niche that indicates the direction—*qibla*—to the Kaaba in Mecca which Muslims should face when praying, is not a sacred focus in itself and hence does not determine the spatial structure of the mosque in the same way that the altar of a Christian church normally does.[46] In the crypt, the recent addition of new stained glass to the window in the wall of the easternmost bay has increased the spatial-liturgical weight of the altar below: the black contours of the cames that hold the glass panels together create a perspective in depth that draws the beholder forward into the chancel, to the altar.

There is, of course, a rationale behind the layout of the crypt. Its three altars—the still-extant main altar and a (now-missing) side altar in each of the recesses in the south- and north-eastern walls of the transept—were inscribed in the original plans for the crypt. The main altar was inaugurated in 1123, and when the south side altar was consecrated in 1131, the transfer of the liturgical functions from the pre-existing church of the bishop, which preceded the present cathedral, to the crypt was completed.[47] The main obligation of the canons who constituted the cathedral clergy was to perform the daily services: the reading of the hours and the celebration of mass.[48] The crypt formed part of this liturgical infrastructure, and mass must have been celebrated at all three altars on a regular basis, presumably daily.[49] The rule of the Lund Cathedral chapter specifies that the mass was to begin and end with a procession,

45. Brown 2000, pp. 208–209; Kilde 2008, pp. 52–59.
46. Davies 1982, pp. 125–127; Jørgensen 2010; Giudetti 2017, p. 134.
47. Cinthio 1957, pp. 15–16, 49, 57–58.
48. Ciardi 2003, p. 17; 2004, p. 109.
49. Karlsson 2015, pp. 196–199.

and for this the crypt is eminently suited, with its multiple axes at right angles framed by the columns' line-up along the procession route.[50]

Knowledge of the crypt's original use, however, does not diminish the relevance of the contemporary visitor's experience for the understanding of it as a sacred space. Lindsay Jones underscores that the entire reception history of a building as a ritual-architectural event must be considered for the interpretation of its qualities as sacred architecture; *all* "human–monument hermeneutical conversations" are valid evidence when the building's meaningfulness as a site for ritual occasions is sought to be established.[51] This includes the contemporary visitor's encounter with the crypt *hic et nunc*. Furthermore, a potential recognition of the sacredness of the crypt hinges not only on the ritual-architectural performativity it engenders, but also on the visitor's previous experiences and preconceived notions of sacred spaces. To describe the crypt in terms of a mosque might seem like a didactical approach designed foremost to trigger the recognition of an audience with a Muslim identity. This is a fully legitimate objective, but in the present context, the analogy aims further. It begs the question of possible generic, behaviour-inducing elements in sacred architecture across religious persuasions.

Among the essential qualities of sacred edifices in the main, it seems to me, is the "otherness" of the inner space, an otherness that sets the sacred interior apart from its surroundings. The distinction comes in many forms: the experience of awe-inspiring interior vastness, as in cathedrals and mosques of monumental proportions; or the sensation of descending from daylight into the perennial dusk such as reigns beneath the vaults of the Lund Cathedral crypt. Vaults and domes are frequently seen as representations of Heaven in both Christian and Muslim contexts.[52] The symbolic values aside, the acoustics produced by stone vaults—and walls—are fundamental for the perception of an interior space as charged with a presence that exceeds the visitor's own being. The slightest motion generates sound-waves that travel through the space and resonate back towards the source. The visitor thus becomes acutely aware of the space as an autonomous factor, almost a force, that conditions and regulates the visitor's behaviour by broadcasting every movement made. Yet a common

50. Ciardi 2003, pp. 64–68.
51. Jones 2000, pp. 29–48, 146.
52. Turner 1979, pp. 190, 272; Kilde 2008, pp. 56–60; Unwin 2014, p. 180; Mostafa 2021, p. 15.

Figure 8. World Trade Center car park, Växjö.

feature of sacred interiors is the exclusion of any view of the outside by the windows—if there are any at all—being set well above eye level.

Finally, and somewhat in contradiction to the foregrounding of space that is otherwise the main concern of this chapter, the materials of the visible, and touchable, surfaces of a sacred space often differ quite markedly from those of more mundane surroundings. In the crypt, the masonry of the paving, walls, vaults, piers and columns fuse into an indoor landscape of stone quite unlike anything met with elsewhere—the closest equivalent would, perhaps, be underground or multi-storey car parks (fig. 8). (This makes for a thought experiment: why does an indoor car park *not* effuse a sense of sacredness comparable to the atmosphere of the crypt? The answer lies partly in the prosaic building materials used in the former—steel, concrete, LECA slabs[53]— although strictly speaking the raw concrete surfaces of the car park should not count among the distinguishing features, on account of there being a number of modern churches built in the Brutalist architectural style, with bare concrete walls where casting impressions and abrasions remain.[54] Aside from this, and disregarding the obvious difference that lies in the presence of cars and the noise and pollution they emit, the modulation of space by means of height and light is very different in an indoor car park. The interior

53. Slabs made from expanded clay (Lightweight Expanded Concrete Aggregate, LECA).

54. Cf. Bartolacci n.d.

height need not be more than 2.1–2.2 meters, and light tubes are used for illumination, ideally creating an evenly diffused, white light that leaves as few shadowy nooks as possible.[55] When stamping one's foot on the concrete floor, the reverberation that bounces against the low, flat ceiling comes out as a short, metallic ringing. Overall, an indoor car park level is just that: an empty, unarticulated shell without shape or orientation. It exudes nothing in particular: it is a blank space, made not to linger in, but to pass through and leave. However, in accordance with Kim Knott's definition of sacred space as the product of sacred-making rituals, it is quite possible to imagine an indoor car park being transformed into a hallowed space if used as one, for instance, if a small shrine in remembrance of something that had taken place at the site was installed in a corner.)

The historical layers

So much for the generic otherness shared by sacred spaces of different cultures and religions. What of the particularity of the Lund Cathedral crypt, configured by historical layers that make the room unique in comparison to all others? Materially speaking, although quite a few blocks of the ashlar are 19th-century replacements, the stonework bestows on the crypt an aura of great age, heightened by the bareness of modern fixtures (the bars with spotlights beneath the vaults). Is "ancientness" a quality that conveys sacredness on a par with otherness? The answer is a conditional yes; not, of course, as an absolute requisite, but in the sense that the awe inspired by the feeling of standing in a room that has existed for almost a millennium adds to the solemnity of the experience. Later additions, most recently the stained-glass window in the apse, prevents the crypt from turning into a mere historical space—a museum. The window is a token of the crypt's continued existence as a sanctuary and links the ancient past of the masonry to the present.

The historical layers of the crypt are what art historians normally concern themselves with. I opened this chapter by airing a discontent with the conventional art-historical discourse on architecture as a means to make sense of the crypt as a spatial experience. In conclusion I wish to

55. The Swedish SIS standard for indoor car parks (SIS 05 01 50, valid from 15 February 1978 but since abolished) stated an interior clearance height of 2100 millimetres for indoor car parks (*Svenska institutet för standarder*, https://www.sis.se/produkter/byggnadsmaterial-och-byggnader/byggnader/allmanna-byggnader/ss50150/, 12 March 2025).

return to the question of art history's place in an exploration of the crypt along the lines suggested above. It may be that an art-historical approach alone does not do justice to the experiential qualities of the space; still, without an insight into the time-specific constants of particular groups of artworks and buildings—or, with George Kubler, into the temporally conditioned formal sequences that divide shaped artefacts into form-classes—the understanding of the historically concrete groundedness of the works in question is lost.[56] In other words, to recognize the formal features of the crypt, the modular layout, the rounded arches, the cubic capitals, and the mouldings of the bases and echini, as belonging to the architectural vocabulary of the early 12th century is to acknowledge the integrity of the crypt as a historically situated entity.

This is important: although the perception of the crypt as space is of necessity subjective and influenced by contemporary values, its very materiality entails that it cannot be described arbitrarily in any way one pleases. The historical conditions and the range of available artistic choices that have determined its realization constitute what Ernst Gombrich describes as a "structured situation", i.e. the conventionalized style, outside which an artwork or monument logically cannot occur.[57] What art history as a discipline has to offer is a conceptual framework for ordering and defining the vast universe of artistically shaped artefacts vis-à-vis the points of reference that make up these "structured situations". An art-historical explanation of the crypt as an example of 12th century Romanesque does not exhaust its significance, but it provides a fixing in time and geographical space that confirms its singularity *and* serves to heighten the awareness of its material properties as an essential factor for the experience of it as space.

And, to repeat the just-stated: this experience is subjective. Although my exposition of the sensorial perception of the spatial and material qualities of the crypt may seem to presuppose that the sensations I describe are common for all, this is far from so; in fact, they are entirely subjective to the extent that I cannot objectively prove that anyone but me takes in the crypt in this exact manner. A disabled person, for instance, who cannot walk about may experience the room quite differently, not to speak of how a person with impaired hearing is partly or entirely deprived of the aural dimension that is fundamental for the sensing of the

56. Kubler 1962, pp. 33–37.
57. Gombrich 1968; Jones 2000, pp. 82–83; Brück 2005, p. 58.

crypt as a spatial volume. And I in my turn have a hard time imagining how the crypt as space is perceived by someone in a wheelchair, or with a hearing impairment, or with reduced eyesight. It can work both ways: a person with a sensory impairment can develop increased sensitivity in other senses to compensate.

Theoretically this chapter is premised *inter alia* on phenomenology, a school of thought that has been criticized for a totalizing tendency to assume that the experiences of the individual theoretician represent universal and timeless sensibilities shared by all.[58] Although this pitfall should be avoided at all costs, the inherent subjectivity of the enterprise undertaken in this chapter does not undermine the effort as such. When subjectivity comes into play, what is taken to be objectively true about the crypt is in part replaced, or at least supplemented, by the unknowable. Rational certainty might to a degree be put on hold whereas new dimensions of thought are revealed. Intersubjectively speaking, the cognitive gain lies in the shared realization that the experience of a built space, sacred or not, starts and ends in one's own bodily engagement, regardless of what forms this insight takes in each specific case.

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58. Whyte 2019, p. 24.

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NINA WEIBULL

Notes on a shadowed gaze

Delacroix's *Medea* of 1838

IN 2018, AT THE *Delacroix (1798–1863)* exhibition arranged by the Louvre in collaboration with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, all the "grandes machines" by which the painter once established his fame were brought together. Halfway into the labyrinth of halls and passages built to display the extraordinarily comprehensive show, a rarely displayed painting of monumental scale (215 × 280 cm), *Saint Sebastian Tended by the Holy Women* (1836, fig. 2), remarkable for its compositional balance and luminous colour, was flanked by the figure of *Medea*, powerfully dominating her narrow picture space. The paintings are near-contemporary, and their pictorial interconnection is obvious. Female figures dominate, mirroring each other in posture, both directing their action towards male opponents, to care for or to kill. As with *Saint Sebastian*, *Medea About to Kill Her Children* (1838, fig. 1) is also remarkably large, but of a vertical format (260 × 165 cm).[1] Paintings of this size and format tend to represent moments of singular importance, such as the Crucifixion and the Ascension of Christ, or of the Madonna. The vertical axis serves to support a performance of existential or mystical transformation. The allegorical *Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi* (1826, 209 × 147 cm) preceeded *Medea* by just over a decade, but would constitute a formal parallel to it although celebrating a most grievous state of heroic defeat.

When *Medea* was originally shown in 1838 at the Salon, the official art exhibition of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris, the painting received enthusiastic praise. However, a certain detail caught the critics'

Figure 1. *Medea About to Kill Her Children*, 1838, oil on canvas, 260 × 165 cm, Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts, inv. no. 542. RMN-Grand Palais.

1. The title of the painting when shown in 1838 was *Furious Medea*. "She is pursued and on the point of killing both her children" (*Médée furieuse*. "Elle est poursuivie et sur le point de tuer ses deux enfans [sic]", *Livret du Salon de 1838*, no. 456, Sérullaz 1963, p. 184). In 1864 it was bought by the French state for the museum in Lille and given the title *Médée s'apprêtant à assassiner ses enfants*. In 2018 the painting was accordingly presented as *Médée furieuse* in Paris and as *Medea About to Kill Her Children (Médée furieuse)* in New York.

Figure 2. *Saint Sebastian Tended by the Holy Women*, 1836, oil on canvas, 215 × 280 cm, Nantua, Département de l'Ain, Collection du Centre national des arts plastiques, inv. FNAC PFH-5176.

attention and caused objections to the near-horizontal shading of her eye. The effect of a shadowed eye is in fact prefigured in Delacroix's *Saint Sebastian Tended by the Holy Women*, where the woman bringing unction in an amphora turns her face as if to observe a company moving down in the valley. The shadow vertically veiling her profile is a reversal of the half-illuminated face of Irene, who kneels by the side of the saint; it is an alluring effect of the oblique light originating from a source to the left beyond the borders of the image.

Of interest to the critics of 1838, and to me, is the detail of *Medea's* shaded eye as the artist decided to paint it, thereby seemingly granting it a specific signification. Is this sharply delineated shadow, appearing within the intriguing play of light and darkness which characterizes the painting, to be seen as a strictly optical effect, or should it rather be understood as a metaphor? If shown to function metaphorically, what does it signify? Is it an instance within an iconographic tradition, or does it rather serve as a unique key to Delacroix's contemplation of Medea's myth and tragedy?

This chapter investigates the primary models, the ensuing work of sketches and the final representation of Delacroix's *Medea*. I will consider the historic moment of attracting the critics' attention at the Salon of 1838, and further scrutinize the painting's affective and intellectual effects on a female academic beholder of the 2020s. Questions to be raised are: By what visual means does *Medea* continue to bring its specific charge to the beholder; what does it make me see?[2] What range of visualized qualities did Delacroix's *Medea* communicate to the group of male critics at the Salon, versed in the classical tradition and who stated their impressions in accord with the spirit of the age? What elements in Euripides' tragedy of 431 BC are contained in Delacroix's painting, whether appealing to the critics of 1838 or, alternatively, going unrecognized? I will finally address the concepts of the "sublime" and the "beautiful", as expounded within an exploration of aesthetics by Edmund Burke in the 1750s, aiming to explore their relevance as keys to capture and clarify the quality of disturbing ambiguity which marks the painting, apparent to the critics of 1838 as well as to me as a present-day spectator.[3]

My dialogue with the painting's visual implications aims at clarifying the sense of a paradox or an enigma which seems to be embodied in the final version of *Medea* and partly played out by the element of shadows. Whereas Medea's shifting grasp of her children is in clear focus in the sketches on paper, the full effect of shadows only comes into play in the final painting. Shadows may be referred to as "holes in the light". On the last page of a study that is strictly dedicated to the intriguing optical play of light and shadows, Michael Baxandall resorts to the term "uncanny" to indicate the emotive form which a mimetic and mobile shadow (*ombre*) may take in an extended and ontologically more evasive sense, well known to and applied by men of the French Enlightenment: ghostly, secret, threatening.[4] His final reference to this concept, in a Freudian reading charged with ambiguity, will accompany my endeavour to grasp the nature of Medea's shaded gaze. Also present in my mind, while working on this paper, is Baxandall's reminder with reference to ekphrastic texts: "What one offers in a description is a

2. My method of analysis gives priority to the affective commitment involved in artistic creativity and in interpretation serving as a way of scientific knowledge; see also the chapter by Mårten Snickare in this volume.

3. Burke 1757, 1759. For Delacroix's knowledge of the idea of the sublime, see Mras 1966, p. 24–25.

4. Baxandall 1995, p. 144.

representation of thinking about a picture more than a representation of a picture."[5]

Primary models for Delacroix's interpretation of Medea

The theme of Medea—a mythological subject treated in visual, literary and dramatic art since the 6th century BC, first performed in 431 BC at the Dionysia festival in Athens as a tragedy by Euripides, holding a high and persisting ambiguity—seems to be absent in French painting of the 19th century both before and after Delacroix.[6] The tragedy would have been known to Delacroix and his contemporaries mainly through textual versions and in the form of theatrical performances. The core of the drama is the revenge of a woman, aimed at her husband but acted out against her innocent young sons. Regardless of the fulfilment of her deed, Medea's story appears to have been an appreciated and widely spread subject in the Antique period.[7]

In a representation of *Medea* of around 50 BC, attributed to the painter Timomachus, the protagonist is said to have been shown with sword in hand, agonizing over the impending killing of her children.[8] Timomachus figures in G.E. Lessing's seminal 1766 essay *Laokoon, oder über die Grenzen der Mahlerey und Poesie*. Lessing celebrates Timomachus for having represented Medea, not "at the moment when she was actually murdering her children, but a few moments before, when a mother's love was still struggling with her vengefulness". Lessing praises the artist's wise decision not to paint Medea at the height of her rage, "thus endowing her brief instant of madness with a permanence that is an affront

5. Baxandall 1985, p. 7.

6. Johnson 1986, p. 80. Paul Lemoyne exhibited a marble group of the subject at the Salon of 1837 (Hargrove 1990, p. 165). A picture of *Medea and Jason*, promised by Titian to Philip II of Spain in 1554 as a pendant for *Perseus and Andromeda*, was never delivered, nor further mentioned (Puttfarken 2003, pp. 19, 24). A pen and ink study by Rubens of "a muscular and emotionally overwrought woman carrying lifeless children on an otherwise bare sheet of white lead paper", datable to *c.* 1600, is a rare representation of the subject preceding Delacroix's painting (Lusbeck 2017, ch. 3). A pen, ink and wash drawing on paper by Nicolas Poussin showing Medea killing her children, *c.* 1649–1650, is in the Royal Collection Trust. Two paintings by Carle van Loo, dated 1759 and 1760, show Medea punishing and taking leave of Jason.

7. Claus & Johnston 1997.

8. Pliny the Elder mentions Timomachus of Byzantium, who "in the time of the Dictator Caesar, painted an Ajax and a Medea [both representing a state of rage] which were placed by Caesar in the Temple of Venus Genetrix" (*Naturalis Historia*, book 35, ch. 40). The subject of Medea contemplating infanticide is known in several Campanian paintings (Ling 1991, pp. 134–135).

to all nature".[9] As a jotting by Delacroix in a notebook from around 1821 attests, he read Lessing in the Vanderbourg translation of 1802, well known to students at the École des Beaux-Arts.[10]

The setting of "but a few moments before" is shown in a fresco in the Casa dei Dioscuri (House of the Dioscuri) in Pompeii (fig. 3). It corresponds to the hint in Euripides' play that the killing takes place out of sight, inside a house. The interior is marked in angled surfaces which promote a subtle play of light and shadow. Dressed in a chiton Medea grasps the knife, handling it in the same vertical position as in Delacroix's painting. Her head is accentuated by a shadowed pane (suggesting a crammed line of columns) behind her, marking her face as the focus of an intense conflict. The only detail which Delacroix's setting shares with the Pompeian fresco is nonetheless significant: the diagonally cast shadow which partly veils Medea's gaze.

To a beholder familiar with Freudian theory, the contradictions in the scenic arrangement in the fresco may call forth the concept of the "uncanny". Whereas the children play in the apparent safety of their home, which is also the proper place of their mother, Medea stands apart, pondering their death while keeping her blood-stained past and repressed guilt to herself.[11] "Thus, *heimlich* is a word, the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambiguity, until it finally coincides with the opposite, *unheimlich*." [12] In this instance the "uncanny" would perform a turn from the homely safe to the imminently gruesome.

However, the Pompeiian fresco was uncovered only in 1827, a fact which certainly puts Delacroix's knowledge of it in doubt. Still, another fresco representing a solitary and likewise standing Medea, found in Herculaneum in December 1739, was known and accessible in the form of an engraving published in volume 1 of *Le Antichità di Ercolano Esposte* (fig. 4).[13] Medea is seen standing in a space briefly characterized by floor steps and a door panel, the diagonal upper line of which seems to mark

9. Lessing 1984, pp. 20–21.

10. Louvre, no. 1741, f. 43, verso. "Another manuscript of Delacroix records the French title of Lessing's work: '*Laokoon, ou bornes de la peinture et de la poésie*, par Lessing'" (Hannoosh 1995, p. 7, n. 11).

11. Margaret Rustin and Michael Rustin notably stress the subject of repressed guilt and shame, see Rustin & Rustin 2019, p. 43.

12. Freud 1955, p. 347.

13. Engraving by Nicola Vanni and Rocco Pozzi after a drawing by La Vega, in *Le Antichità di Ercolano Esposte* (*The Antiquities of Herculaneum Exposed*) VV.AA. vol. 1, pl. 13, 1757–1787, Naples. This information, for which I am most grateful, was kindly provided by Professor Emerita Anne-Marie Leander Touati.

Figure 3. *Medea*, Casa dei Dioscuri, Pompeii, fresco, 127 × 104 cm, AD 62–79, Museo Archeologico nazionale de Napoli.

Figure 4. *Medea*, Herculaneum, fresco, found on 31 December 1739, Museo Archeologico nazionale de Napoli. Engraving, fol., 48 × 36 cm, by Nicola Vanni and Rocco Pozzi from a drawing by La Vega, in *Le Antichità di Ercolano Esposte*, VV.AA. vol. 1, pl. 13, 1757–1787.

it as being ajar. Interlacing her fingers, she supports a metal sword in her half-open hands. Again, her face is half covered in shadow, partly suggesting the volume of her head and figure, partly emphasizing her gaze, which but faintly retains the expression of agonized pain. Still, to find the qualities which dominate his final version of *Medea*, Delacroix would have to look for other models.

The artist considered the subject of Medea from very early on. In a sketchbook dating back to 1820, when in his early twenties, he notes: "Medea kills her 2 children".[14] That Medea kills her children is the foremost aspect indicated by Delacroix, followed by the event of her deceitful ruse bringing death to King Peleus (Pélias). On 4 March 1824 the journal kept by Delacroix registers a shorthand note: "Medea preoccupies me" ("Médée m'occupe"). For lack of continuity of his journal—discontinued in June 1832 to reopen in January 1847—the next reference to Medea occurs in 1836. In a letter to a friend, Delacroix writes: "The awful heat in my study makes work almost impossible. I have begun work on the Medea who goes on well; we will see."[15] Except for these brief comments

14. "Médée tue ses 2 enfants", reference to the Louvre sketchbook RF 9153, fol. 8. "He had also listed the actual subject of this painting as early as 1820" (Johnson 1986, p. 80).

15. Letter to Frédéric Villot, 20 July 1836: "ensuite il fait une chaleur affreuse dans mon atelier qui m'y rend presque le travail impossible, J'ai commencé la Médée qui se débrouille; nous verrons" (Delacroix 1935, p. 416).

further mentions of the subject are lacking. In a mediated reading of Aristotle, he may have found that shocking subject matter in art has a long and honourable history.[16] To a young painter the "furious Medea", the tragedy of a mother's killing of her young sons, would have offered an opportunity to inquire into his own affectionate relation to a lost mother. Delacroix initiated his journal, in which he carried out a straightforward dialogue with himself, with an entry on 3 September 1822, eight years to the day after his beloved mother's death in 1814. When realizing the coincidence, he called upon her spirit to be present and close to him in his continuous writing. "Spirit" in the English translation refers to *ombre*, the word de facto used; thus, he asks her to be present as something like a "shadow" whenever he turns to his journal.[17] From then on, she is nominally absent; only in 1857 does he again mention his mother and her dear memory.[18]

Any beholder familiar with psychoanalytic thinking, and with a knowledge of the artist's yet-unrealized works, would be unwilling to disregard his seemingly prosaic association between mother and "shadow". Pliny tells the story of how visual art was unintentionally invented when a young woman in Corinth, wishing to preserve the memory of her beloved, drew the outline of his shadow as it appeared on a wall. Although the journal lacks any mention of Pliny's anecdote, one might sense an echo from it in Delacroix's specific association of mother, "shadow", and memory.

Visiting the Louvre, Delacroix contemplated representations of ideal maternity. In April 1823 he made a note of having spent hours admiring Andrea del Sarto's *Charity*, the virtuous mother figure who lavishes all the goodness of her body and mind on the infants surrounding her. "What grace, nobility, and strength in his children! [...] I wish I had time

16. Voltaire, discussing Aristotle in the 'Questions sur l'Encyclopédie par des amateurs', cites some well-known lines from Boileau's *L'Art poétique*, which credit the arts with the power to reduce the shock of disagreeable subject matter: "There is no serpent, nor odious monster/ Which, turned into art would not please the eye/ A delicate brush may turn the most horrible object into a fine piece of art:/ So, in order to charm us, tearful tragedy/ Transforms a bloodstained Oedipe into pleasing pain" (my translation of: "Il n'est point de serpent ni de monstre odieux/ Qui par l'art imité ne puisse plaire aux yeux:/ D'un pinceau délicat l'artifice agréable/ Du plus affreux objet fait un objet aimable:/ Ainsi, pour nous charmer, la Tragédie en pleurs/ D'Oedipe tout sanglant fit parler les douleurs"), see Mras 1966, p. 27, n. 60.

17. *Delacroix 1980*, 5 September 1822, p. 3. Victoire Oeben Delacroix (1758–1814) died when Eugène was 16 years old.

18. *Delacroix 1980*, 23 December 1857.

Figure 5. Marcantonio Raimondi after Raphael, *The Massacre of the Innocents*, 1512, engraving, 28.3 × 43.6 cm. Musée du Louvre, collection Edmond de Rothschild.

to make a copy."[19] Delacroix fully acknowledged the need to "imitate [one's predecessors] virtually without interruption", willingly and unknowingly.[20] The classical pictorial tradition with its emphasis on line was early revealed to him, as if brought to life in and by the work of Raphael, represented by his paintings in the Louvre and in the form of engravings.[21] One month after writing the note that "Médée m'occupe", he bought a print of Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving *The Massacre of the Innocents* after drawings of the same subject by Raphael (fig. 5).[22] Two drawings in a sketchbook from around 1820 testify to his earlier knowledge of the figural details in the engraving.[23] Both drawings are studies of the crouched woman in the foreground, leaning on one knee, holding her child in one arm and raising her other arm in a gesture of self-defence. For his future *Medea* he would shift focus to the woman on

19. *Delacroix 1980*, 15 April 1823, pp. 10–11.

20. Sieben-Meier 1963; quote from Peter Hecht (1980, p. 195).

21. *Delacroix 1980*, 30 December 1823: "Oh! Raphael's beautiful *Holy Family*!"

22. *The Massacre of the Innocents*, engraved by Marcantonio Raimondi after design by Raphael about 1510, published and discussed in Ekserdjian & Henry 2022, pp. 182–183. Two powerful paintings also depicting massacres were shown at the 1824 Salon: *Scène du massacre des Innocens [sic]* by Léon Cogniet, and, by Delacroix, the *Massacres de Scio* (Johnson 1986, p. 80).

23. Lichtenstein 1971, p. 532, figs 50–51, two studies by Delacroix of *A Mother and Child* after Raphael's *The Massacre of the Innocents*, pencil, 20.5 × 20 cm, Cabinet des Desseins, Musée du Louvre, cat. nos 17 and 18.

Figure 6. Delacroix, *Study of Medea*, *c.* 1836, pencil on paper, 22 × 15.5 cm. Reproduced in Sérullaz 1963, picture 253.

the centre left. Her body is facing forwards as she looks back, while holding her child and running to escape (figs 6 and 7). Delacroix's *Medea* clearly owes her strongly turned head and, not least, the position of her half-lifted right foot to the running mother in the engraving.

In 1830 Delacroix would characterize Raphael: "His execution: shy but precise, since the ideas and the emotions were pure in his mind. The neglects of entirety, of proportions, of aerial perspective, of costume [...] do not prevent his figures from living in the soul conveyed by him: their eyes live."[24]

In 1836, when finishing the large *Saint Sebastian Tended by the Holy Women*, Delacroix finally found the appropriate idea to represent Medea. The motifs appear side by side in a pen and sepia wash sketch,

Figure 7. Delacroix, *Study of Medea*, *c.* 1836, pencil on paper, 21 × 33.5 cm. Reproduced in *Delacroix (1798–1863)* (2018), cat. 99, p. 157. Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts.

24. My translation of Delacroix's annotation: "Raphaël. Son execution: timide mais précise, parceque les idées et les sentiments étaient nets dans son esprit. Les fautes d'ensembles, de proportions, de perspective aérienne, de costume (Apollon avec un violon) n'empèchent pas ses figures de vivre de l'âme qu'il leur communiquait: ses yeux vivent." Unpublished notes for the article of Delacroix in *Revue de Paris*; Delacroix 1981, p. 826.

Figure 8. *Saint Sebastian and Medea*, c. 1836, sketch, pen and sepia wash, 19.1 × 31.5 cm. Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts.

Saint Sebastian and Medea, most likely made in 1836 (fig. 8). A significant link, charged with ambivalence, is the representation of the vulnerability of the young male body, exposed in close connection to the women. The figure group of *Medea* and her sons finds its shape, through the insisting lines in a suite of drawings, as a reversal of del Sarto's *Charity*, as well as of the defensively crouching and running mothers in Raimondi's *Massacre of the Innocents* after Raphael.

"The penumbra that swallows up her gaze". An enigma preserving its complexity

When shown at the Salon in 1838, the painting was celebrated as a chef d'oeuvre by most critics. "*Medea About to Kill Her Children* is linked to the same order of ideas that produced the frescoes in [the *Salon du Roi*]. It is an ancient subject worked out with modern intelligence and in forms more human than ideal", wrote Théophile Gautier.[25] Attentive to Medea's

25. *Delacroix*, New York 2018, p. 113 n. 31; Gautier 1838.

limited range of options to act in the drama, Alexandre Decamps found that "the love of a mother [clutching her children] that is so passionate, so frenetic, that she will stab them rather than abandon them into the hands of her enemies, is the complete expression of a violent passion in its greatest energy and truth".[26] Étienne-Jean Delécluze, usually not appreciative of Delacroix's art, wrote that everyone who saw the painting was moved by it because it had "an ardour" and "a carnal existence", moving the spectator with great force.[27] Even so, he found reason to question the "awkwardness to the eye" of the children ("Pourquoi ses enfants sont-ils si disgracieux à l'oeil?") and also the perceived lack of majesty of Medea, who, if not for the dagger, would merely look like a mother trying to keep her children away from a great danger.[28]

Frédéric de Mercey took a specific interest in the detail of the shadowed eye of Medea and of the effect that fury may have on beauty:

> If Iphigenia was the daughter of Goethe's imagination, Medea is the daughter of Delacroix, this fiery, expressive, harsh painter of *The Massacres at Chios* who cares little about changing his form. Notwithstanding, his Medea will remain forever true, due to being most of all a passionate woman. [...] The expression of her panting head, looking backwards, is superb. Brilliant sunlight hits the entire body of the sorceress, only her forehead and eyes are in the dark; this forehead in the dark, and this terrible and veiled gaze, do have an admirable effect. All in all, the movement of the figure is full of rage and emotion. [...] This furious and deceived woman is no longer a mother, and to avenge herself of her perfidious husband, if killing them will cause him despair, she will tear her children apart with her own hands. To take vengeance and then die is all that she thinks about. Even if her mouth says nothing, the feverish excitement of her whole being shows her pale head rising like that of a serpent, with a dark gaze, and with shivering lips. [...] Mr. Delacroix has been criticized for not having made Medea more beautiful; but a more beautiful Medea would have been less true. Of all the passions, it is fury which alters the harmony of a face, without which there is no beauty. Other observations of details are more well-founded: the shadow covering the forehead and the upper part of the face is too

26. Johnson 2011, p. 180 n. 80.
27. Johnson 2011, p. 182.
28. Sérullaz 2001, p. 52.

> dryly cut. Strangely adding to the effect, it still feels too dark; the grip of the right hand does not make sense, the drapery is too heavy and one would wish that its folds were given a finer brush work.[29]

Another way of putting it, according to *La Quotidienne* of 2 March 1838:

> The picture is striking in aspect; one feels truly moved at the sight of this demented mother with a haggard eye, pale face, dry, livid mouth, palpitating flesh, and oppressed bosom. There is an admirable animation in these three figures and a vigour in the drawing and colour which surprises, touches and cancels out the one thing one might hold against Eugene Delacroix, the shadow thrown across the top of Medea's face.[30]

To the critics of 1838, whose general viewpoint marks an engagement in formal, aesthetic concerns, keeping a stance outside the pictorial reality, Medea and her children aesthetically and emotionally represent the imaginary "other". However, the critical response to the mother's shaded eye, although guarded from the boys as well as from the beholders of the painting, seems to have activated a primordial terror: a gaze such as this implies the imminent threat of death, caused by maternal hatred turned into madness. In 2018, some 180 years later, the effect of the play of shadows was spelled out as follows: "Delacroix made ingenious use of the narrative power of the lighting; as the shadow cast by the dagger onto the child's thigh symbolically cuts into its flesh, the mother's blinding hatred is evoked by the penumbra that swallows up her gaze. At the same time, her brightly lit breasts and hands accentuate her monstrous anomality."[31]

The oil sketch

Would the significance of visual art change if some of its primary agents, the lines of the pen and the traces of the brush, demonstrating the materiality and radiance of paint itself, were conveyed in purely semantic concepts and so became "readable"? Constantly confiding to his journal, and with all his philological intelligence, Delacroix insists on the power of the visual medium and its specific impact on the imagination and the

Figure 9. *Medea on the Point of Killing her Children*, *c.* 1836, oil sketch on canvas, 46 × 38 cm. Provenance: Delacroix's posthumous sale, February 1864, lot 139. Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts, inv. no. P 933.

29. de Mercey 1838, pp. 384–385; my translation and italics.
30. Anonymous 1838; my translation.
31. *Delacroix 2018*, p. 116.

emotional life that he shares with the beholder, as distinguished from conceptual thinking and writing.[32]

Contemplating Delacroix's oil sketch of *Medea* (fig. 9)—based on printed and digital versions of the picture which replace the inevitably fading memory left by the painting back in 2018—my thinking finds its way, step by step. What an unstable way of descending this steep wilderness! Within the small picture the effect of a strong wind whips the cape around the woman's head into a dark sail. The distant sky, reduced to a vertical strip, materializes through diving strokes of yellow and white suggesting the activity of flickering sunlight. Two pale patches of paint suggest a sea surface. The shape of the rock blocking the seascape is distinctly modelled; with its sunlit and shadowed parts it resembles a handle, an antipode to the loosely sketched foreground. The setting is indicated by blurred strokes of umber green and ashen grey, covering a layer of yellow. Subdued maroon, greenish and dark blue planes in the upper part of the picture frame its lower half, dominated by figures embodied by loose movements of the paint brush. Close to the foreground they tend to dissolve, like a phantasm. Still, traced contours of the woman's feet and the legs of the older boy stand out as remaining marks from an underlying layer of red. The skirt—is it a pair of oriental trousers? —assumes a dark violet shape traced with long strokes of pink; the hip cloth is painted in thickly applied strokes of golden yellow. Tight brush strokes of white highlight the naked parts of the woman and her infant child; the torso of the older child is shaded by reddish-brown accents. A thin stroke of white paint along the knife hints at the sharpness of the blade. Medea's eye is ablaze, with a darker crescent suggesting an iris at the center. Her face, with its flat nose, swollen jaw and gaze turned inwards, recalls the images of barbaric rulers on ancient coins.[33]

Does the free-flowing character of the oil sketch demonstrate that Delacroix painted in an act of imagining the agony and fury of an archaic Medea? Did he experience her pain and the children's panic while man-

32. As in the entry of 8 October 1822: "When I have painted a fine picture I have not given expression to a thought! [That] [...] would strip painting of all its advantages. A writer has to say almost everything in order to make himself understood, but in painting it is as if some mysterious bridge were set up between the spirit of the persons in the picture and that of the beholder. [He] sees figures, the external appearance of nature, but inwardly he meditates; the true thinking that is common to all men" (Delacroix 1981, pp. 28–29; my translation).

33. Medea's traits remind one of some of the female profiles on Greek and Roman coins drawn by Delacroix in 1825.

aging the flowing medium of paint? Does the quality of the seemingly unrestrained strokes of paint imply a moment of access to emotionally charged impulses? Later in his life, in a plea for the art of painting, he would offer an implicit response to these questions, specifying that "the type of emotion peculiar to painting is, so to speak, t*angible* [...] The figures and objects in the picture, which to one part of your intelligence seem to be the actual things themselves, are like a solid bridge to support your imagination as it probes the deep, mysterious emotions, of which these forms are, so to speak, the hieroglyph, but a hieroglyph far more eloquent than any cold representation, the mere equivalent of a printed symbol."[34] Delacroix's trust in the pictural medium as a membrane for visualizing concepts and experiences of his inner life seems never to have faltered.[35]

"A representation of thinking about a picture more than a representation of a picture". The 1838 Salon painting

While renouncing the arrangement of a neatly staged and illuminated Pompeiian hallway, the drama of Delacroix's full-size *Medea* materializes in a dark and shallow space suggesting an open cave lined with crumbling stone (fig. 1). A slanting shadow marks the form of a protruding roof. Sunlight finds its way through an opening in the rock. While flooding light exposes the woman who closely hugs two naked children, darkness spreads and fills the cave behind their bodies, as if the very essence of shadow had turned into a substance that absorbs any lingering trace of light.

At first sight the group of three appears to be seeking refuge from some pursuing threat in this no-man's-land. Turning her head, with an ear freed from her loose hair, Medea seems to listen for distant sounds. The figurative components of the oil sketch reappear, though monumentalized with smoothly modelled surfaces within firm contours, in accordance with the ideal of academic painting, but also following an early observation. While in 1824 meditating on the subject of Medea,

34. Delacroix 1980, 20 October 1853, p. 213; my italics.

35. Discussing the concern with rapid execution which relates Delacroix to the Impressionists, Lee Johnson observes an essential difference in the reason for such speed: while the Impressionists sought to record nature's shifting shades of colour, Delacroix required speed to preserve the vitality of his imaginative inventions, "the ideal carried in his mind" (quote from Delacroix 1980, 12 October 1853), or of his recollections. This emotive and expressive handling of brushstrokes would vary in size, shape and direction "following the idea or the emotion" ("suivant l'idée ou le sentiment") and in a technique that Delacroix would call "strokes of emotion" ("hachures de sentiment") (Johnson 1963, p. 103–104).

Delacroix added a note on the art of Raphael in his journal: "The first and most important thing in painting is the contour. Even if all the rest were to be neglected, provided the contours were there, the painting would be strong and finished [...] *think constantly about it, and always begin that way*. It is to this that Raphael owes his finish."[36]

The painted figure of Medea, a woman with magic gifts, claims the entire pictorial space. With bare breasts and arms, adorned with an oriental diadem set with pearls and red and blue gems, and an earring with a gleaming dark sapphire, her white body is close to the picture surface and larger than life. A tress of hair trails along her left arm with the effect of visually distorting its shape, as does the hair of the child against the lower part of her arm. There is a striking contrast between her slender arms, a conventional sign of feminine beauty, and the heavy burden represented by the children. Another move forward, and she will traverse the border of the canvas. Suggesting the form of an unstably raised ellipse, her figure is weighed down by a skirt draped in heavy folds which preclude all perception of the position of her legs. Is she moving forward, half standing, or rather about to seat herself? The unclear intention of her posture retains an unresolved tension. As she looks back, her bare feet blindly seem the flat stones needed to support the weight of her body and that of the struggling burden in her arms. Does she simply know where to tread in this desolate place?

The slanting ground of the cave literally hazards the balance of the figure group. It is a site where glistening vegetation and venomous snakes thrive, material for magic charms and poison. The grotto is a proper place for a sorceress, an aspect of Medea emphasized since the earliest versions of her myth and in the written tradition from Euripides, Ovid and Seneca to Pierre Corneille. In the tradition, Medea in Corinth only ever dwells in a house or a palace. To Euripides she is a foreigner, a barbarian with a brilliant mind, endowed with magic gifts, emotionally a feminine human being and with a life adjusted to Greek habits. In Seneca's Roman version of the tragedy, Medea's magic means are described by the Nurse who tells of the deadly herbs and serpent's venom gathered from heaven, earth and hell to poison the gifts to Princess Creusa.[37] Only Corneille makes his baleful *Médée* explicitly finish her incantations in a magic grotto.[38]

36. Delacroix 1980, 7 April 1824; italics following the original.

37. Seneca, *Medea*, c. 50 CE, Act IV, Scene 1.

38. Corneille 1634, Act IV, Scene 2. Delacroix may have had the idea of a cave from reading Corneille's seldom-performed tragedy.

This dark space would metaphorically imply an existential core of femininity, the womb of life and—by the logic of an interlaced dichotomy—death.

A loop of soft material between Medea's breasts is tied to a blue ribbon. The red cloth draped around her waist, and the double bend of its extension, suggest the brim of a skirt. While the delicate pinkish material has connotations of perishable flesh, the heavily falling forms of red cloth suggest the effect of gushing blood. With her right arm Medea seizes the older boy's arm while pressing the blond infant's head to her bosom. A blotch of shaded pink, the colour of his mother's nipples, marks the little boy's cheek, and his eyes are brimming with tears. While his contracted hands stand out, and his genitals are exposed, his belly and thighs appear as parts of his mother's pale lustrous flesh. The children, cramped to their mother's body like terrified cubs in the jaws of a lioness, wriggle awkwardly, half losing their proper forms in her grasp. Cries, unheard by her, rise from their stifled throats, buried as they are in her arms.[39] They can sense, rather than hear, the rhythm of her panting. In this instant Medea, her shadowed eye turned away, is on the point of ending her motherhood.

The focus of Medea's profiled eye is lost in some remote unseen. Her gaze is veiled, visibly an effect of the darkness emanating from the rock. The shape of her eye strangely echoes the sky appearing in a gap close to the cave. Does the darkness rather protect and clear her sight—and her restless mind—from the light of the day?[40] Does she seek the shadow to sharpen her sight while, like a wounded animal, watchfully focusing on her pursuers, still out of sight? After all, she is guilty of yet other crimes, most recently having caused the gruesome death of Princess Creusa and her father, the king of Corinth. The dagger, a dark vertical clasped in Medea's left hand, casts a shadow on the strained thigh of her older son. His face is lost in her shadow, but there is a glimpse of his eyes, staring as if to communicate a message to the spectator: "For the love of gods, stop this!"[41] The boy's gaze, breaking out of his mother's body, performs

39. "[…] she is like a bull or a lioness with cubs, that's how she looks": Euripides 2008, lines 215–216; cries of the children: Euripides 2008, lines 1271–1278.

40. It is interesting to note that the shadow touching the eyes of the left woman in the first painted version of *The Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1834) is an added, alluring detail in the painting entirely absent in the watercolour study made on the spot during Delacroix's voyage to North Africa in 1832 (Mras 1966, pp. 56–57, fig. 14).

41. Euripides 1912, p. 71: "A child: 'Yes, in God's name! Help quickly ere we die!' The other child: 'She has almost caught me now. She has a sword.'"

the effect of a metaphorical slit in the fabric of the image, as a sign effectively crossing the border between realities of imaginary and virtual space, addressing the beholder with a desperately direct appeal. This is the moment when the painting abjures its condition of being a mere artefact and gains agency, silently claiming a compassionate response from an eye outside its frame of identity.[42]

How is it that the critics, writing about *Medea* at the Salon of 1838, shunned the most poignant signal breaking out of the pictorial reality of the painting? Three isolated gazes, turned in different directions, chart a triangle of pain: that of the mother, containing the darkness of agony; that of the infant flooded with tears; that of the boy, beseechingly addressing the beholder. Still, the artist imagined and painted his cry. Did I discern this unvoiced triangular figure of gazes, when confronted with the painting in 2018? What I did see, instantly, struck by the visualized passionate pain, was an act of implosion of timeless motherhood. I found myself pleading: "Medea, stop whatever you're about to do, don't tread further into this madness. Save your reason, your sons and yourself! Granddaughter of the Sun, get out of this dark place and find a different destiny for yourself and for them, a future without endless suffering and loss."—candidly compassionate reactions of a beholder of the 20th century, erupting on the threshold of a dialogue with a painted tragedy.

Gendered ethics

In his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, investigating the passions affecting the human mind, Edmund Burke claims that "Most of the ideas which are capable of making a powerful impression on the mind, whether simply of Pain or Pleasure [...] may be reduced very nearly to these two heads, *self-preservation* and *society*; to the ends of one or the other of which all our passions are calculated to answer. The passions which concern *self-preservation* turn mostly on *pain* and *danger*." While ideas of life and health make no such impression by their simple enjoyment, the passions "which are conversant about the *preservation of the individual* turn chiefly on *pain* and *danger* and they are the most powerful of all the passions".[43] Jason's bonding with the Princess of Corinth is a befitting advance within *society*, considering

42. Bredekamp 2021, chs 2 and 5.

43. Burke 1757, 1759, part I, section VI: "Of the passions which belong to self-preservation." "The individual" in Burke's thinking is by implication a male human being. Italics according to the original.

that enjoyable sexual stakes to "the generation of mankind [are] a great purpose, and it is requisite that men should be animated to the pursuit of it by some great incentive".[44] If his betrayal initially strikes Medea with the pain of despair, it is when realizing the consequence of a fatal loss of her own place in society, directly affecting her *self-preservation*, that the acute pain of fury directs her further actions.

Although at times expressing an intense love for her children, Medea does not celebrate the powers and duties of the womb. In a monologue early in Euripides' tragedy she addresses the women of Corinth, expressing her deep regrets of woman's lot as compared to that of men: "Men tell us we live safe and secure at home, while they must go to battle with their spears. [...] I'd rather stand there three times in battle holding up my shield than give birth once."[45] And when her strategy for revenge against Jason amounts to killing their sons, she takes not to sly poison, which is the weapon of cunning women, but to the knife. In this classic context the knife in Medea's hand is clearly gendered. A knife and a sword are the utensils of men, used for slaying other men, for killing women and sacrificial animals. Pointed weapons manifest a deadly intention. Delacroix's painting suggests an association between the blade of the knife and Medea's shaded eye. On her mind, implicitly in her gaze, is the pragmatically self-centred Jason, the object of her passion, a man who, disregarding ethics and without remorse, has broken their marital union that was confirmed with an oath sworn by the gods.[46] The pain implicated in what she is about to do has turned into the desire to cause him even greater pain in revenge for having deserted her and the children for a profitable royal marriage.

Did Delacroix imagine and purposely represent the figure of Medea as metaphorically binary? Her eye, intrinsically associated with the mind, and her hand, seizing the knife, would rather signify male heroic action for the sake of defending (her) justice, whereas her uncovered breasts, her thighs and womb, although covered by dark cloth and thus concealed, unambiguously accentuate a sensual female radiance and implicate a space of primary maternity. Captured in a state of sharply conflicting

44. Burke 1757, 1759, part I, section IX: "The final cause of the difference between the passions belonging to Self-Preservation and those which regard the Society of the Sexes."

45. Euripides 2008, lines 287–292.

46. Foley 1989, p. 65. For my analysis of Delacroix's *Medea* I am indebted to Foley's philologically oriented reading of the implications of gender in Euripides' *Medea*.

ethics—a male heroic ethics focused on justice and (her own) honour, and a female ethics focused on (her) motherly love and protection of life—Medea's mind is caught in an agonizing moment of entangling arguments. Her anguished monologue, opening with a desperately irresolute "I" and ending in a decomposed "you [my heart]—woman—I'm so sad", corresponds to the moment of "just before", visualized in the painting.[47] Does her shaded gaze signify a point of momentary existential collapse, caused by the contradiction between identification with a (patriarchal) ethics of restoration of honour through revenge, and the unbearable experience of being a mother about to sever the dearest part of herself?[48]

Reading the monologue, leaving aside the question of authenticity when referring to any distant original version, I cannot but wonder at the surviving vestiges of (say) empathic insight into the mind of a woman (although exceptional) shown by an Antique tragedian by means of male actors to his audience (of male citizens). Years after first painting *Medea*, Delacroix compared Euripides to Aeschylus while specifically stressing the human elements of pain and contrasts in Euripides' plots: "[...] he is sharper [more painful]; he looks for effects, for contrasts. Plots become more complicated as men feel the need to appeal to new sources of interest, which are being discovered in the human soul."[49]

"A more beautiful Medea would have been less true"

Intending to capture the attraction of *Medea* when first shown at the Salon of 1838, the critics used terms such as "ardour" and "carnal existence", highlighting visualized sexual implications which only barely agree with Voltaire's ambiguous comment on beauty.[50] However, qualities such as these do not fundamentally diverge from the understanding of beauty as suggested by Edmund Burke, who calls beauty a "social" quality, not least bearing on the procreation of the species.[51] In his further exposition, the "*Beautiful*" remains founded on the sense of pleasure, implying qualities

47. Euripides 2008, p. 60, lines 1460–1472.

48. The moment of an existential collapse on Medea's part marks a visual antonym to the moment of confirmation of a newborn child, demonstrated in the existential gesture of "handing over"; see Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe's contribution in this volume.

49. Delacroix 1981, 23 February 1858, p. 708: "[...] il est plus poignant; il cherche des effects, des oppositions: les artifices de la composition s'augmentent avec la nécessité de s'adresser à des sources nouvelles d'interêt qui se découvrent dans l'âme humain."

50. Note 16.

51. Burke 1757, 1759, part I, section X, 'Of Beauty' opens: "The passion which belongs to generation, merely as such, is lust only. [...] The object therefore of this mixed passion which we call love, is the *beauty* of the sex." Italics according to the original.

such as clarity (with special reference to the eye and to sight), lightness, smallness, smoothness, delicacy (aspects of a "feminine" nature). Beauty is a quality within the realm of painting, which Burke defines as a "clear representation". But whereas "pleasure [shared with someone else] of any kind quickly satisfies",[52] the passions which concern the "self-preservation" of the individual predominantly turn on pain and danger; "they are the most powerful of all the passions".[53] Whatever excites the ideas of pain and danger is a source of the "*Sublime*". The sublime has the power of producing the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.[54] In Burke's exegesis, this potent category finds its application in the realm of words and is based on the experience of pain, fear, horror and death. It is caused by effects such as the obscure, the great, the rigid, the vast. Obscurity is sublime because it frustrates the power of vision.[55] Physiologically, it induces pain by making us strain to see that which cannot be comprehended.[56]

"Brilliant sunlight hits the entire body of the sorceress, only her forehead and eyes are in the dark; this forehead in the dark and this terrible and veiled gaze do have an admirable effect." The message of the metaphor guiding de Mercey's line of observations is that of mortal danger, embodied in the mesmerizing shape of a serpent, a primary object of terror.[57] It agrees with the passion of "self-preservation" (as experienced by the spectator) caused by the sublime, leaving little space for the convivial passion of "society" which relates to beauty. To the men confronted by Delacroix's *Medea*, the ambiguous signs of sensual beauty, passion and fury were foregrounded. The idea that the passion of self-preservation is common to all human beings, men and women alike, may not have been all too obvious to them. Any visual indication of empathy with the protagonist is entirely on the painter's part.

As to "brilliant sunlight"—whereas mere light is a source of pleasure—this sensation brings a force that may transform from pleasure and turn

52. Burke 1757, 1759, part I, section II, 'Pain and Pleasure': "Pleasure of any kind quickly satisfies; and when it is over, we relapse into indifference, or rather we fall into a soft tranquility."

53. Burke 1757, 1759, part I, section VI, 'Of the passions which belong to self-preservation'.

54. Burke 1757, 1759, part I, section VII, 'Of the sublime'.

55. My conclusion from Burke 1957, 1959, part IV, section XVI, 'The cause why darkness is terrible'.

56. Mitchell 1986, p. 126.

57. Burke 1757, 1759, part II, section II, 'Terror'. For de Mercey's line of observations, see note 29.

into pain and danger, obscuring the sense of the eye.[58] Halfway through his *Enquiry* Burke concludes that however distinct the causes of two basic categories, we must expect to find the qualities of things the most remote imaginable from each other unite in the same object. If "two ideas as opposite as can be imagined", for instance light and darkness, or life and death, are "reconciled in the extremes of both", they concur in producing the sublime.[59] Also, we must expect to find combinations of the same kind in the works of art.[60] The intrinsic tension between opposed ideas representing the sublime in Burke's aesthetics would seem to find a certain vicinity in Freud's concept of the "uncanny". In the tragedy of *Medea*, the "sublime" would tend to correlate to the impending turn from the homely safe to the dark moment of unrepresentable horror.

Concluding reflections

My method of analysis gives priority to the affective commitment involved in artistic creativity and in interpretation serving as a way of scientific knowledge. Artistic creativity and scholarly interpretation share a precarious disposition: both activities precondition a state of not knowing the result of the complex investigation beforehand. In certain respects, the activities radically diverge: while the artist's work tends to rise in silence and to shun the use of words, the scholar's discourse is strongly dependent on conceptual thinking and "talk". Delacroix mastered both practices, often contemplating the potential of a "bridging" interconnection between the pictural medium and thinking. While his fully published diary, the *Journal*,[61] is an invaluable source of knowledge of his dialogue with artistic predecessors and with his own ambitions and convictions, it also offers a privileged site for continued dialogue over time. Wary of the obvious multiple distances involved, I have joined the painter with the intention to glimpse fragments of his way of thinking in words with relation to the pictorial subject. The fact that the corpus of Delacroix's oeuvre is well documented, having come into state possession both early and successively, greatly facilitates the search for sketches and

58. Burke 1757, 1759, part II, section XVI, 'Light'.

59. Mitchell 1986, p. 128: "Burke's dialectical method, whether we praise it as sublime rhetoric or denounce it as self-contradiction, is grounded in what he regards as the physical structure of the human senses."

60. Burke 1757, 1759, part II, section XXVIII, ending lines of 'The Sublime and Beautiful Compared'.

61. Referred to as Delacroix 1980 and Delacroix 1981 in the bibliography.

notebooks which may shed light on the elaboration of a specific pictorial idea, in this case of *Medea*.

Lacking a pre-existent pictorial tradition on the subject of Medea, Delacroix contemplated the theme of mothers and children over several years. His praise of the aesthetic ideal of Andrea del Sarto's *Charity* can be linked to his reminiscence of an early lost mother. The archaic figure of *Medea*, a mother who is faced with conflicting solutions, strongly opposes the virtuous *Charity*. G.E. Lessing, in his 1766 study dedicated to the *Laokoön* sculpture, celebrates a painter of the classic period for having represented Medea, not "at the moment when she was actually murdering her children, but a few moments before, when a mother's love was still struggling with her vengefulness".[62] Whatever information Delacroix may have had of the frescoes found in the Vesuvian area by the mid-18th century and onwards, he adhered to the convention, formed by Lessing, of leaving the murderous act to the imagination of the spectator. In Raphael's work Delacroix found a dramatic picture of mothers trying, but in vain, to save the lives of their infant boys: the *Massacre of the Innocents*. The pictorial emphasis given to line and contour, with a literary antecedent in the story of the origin of painting told by Pliny, was revealed to him early: "[Raphael's] execution: shy but precise, since the ideas and the emotions were pure in his mind. The neglects of entirety, of proportions, of aerial perspective [...] do not prevent his figures from living in the soul conveyed by him: their eyes live." To experience such a "bridging" connection between the "living eyes" in the picture and those of the beholder implies assigning a magic dimension to the picture. The free-flowing character of the oil sketch also indicates that Delacroix painted in an act of imagining the agony and fury of Medea. Only in the large-format version do Medea and her sons manifestly appear open to the beholder, not in the refined interior of a Corinthian house but in a cave in the wilderness. While their bodies are exposed to bright sunlight, a dark shadow veils her gaze.

The aim of my dialogue with the painting's visual implications has been to elucidate the sense of an enigma in *Medea*, embodied by the element of shadow. Significantly, the full effect of shadows comes into play only in the final painting. While light exposes the figure group, darkness fills the cave behind the bodies, spreading as if shadow has turned into a light-absorbing substance. The dagger in Medea's hand casts a shadow on

62. Lessing 1984, p. 21.

the thigh of her son, his face lost in her shadow; but there is a glimpse of his eyes staring as if to communicate a cry for help to the beholder. The sharply delineated shadow veiling Medea's eye, as Delacroix decided to paint it, is only partly an optical effect, emanating from the domed cave.

Michael Baxandall's analysis of the optical play of light and shadows in French 18th-century painting indirectly offers an instruction to grasp the nature of shadows in the *Medea* of 1838. While endowing the eyes of female figures in paintings of the 1830s with an appealing shadow—in *Saint Sebastian Tended by the Holy Women* and *The Women of Algiers in their Apartment*[63]—although thereby but marginally indicating an iconographic tradition, Delacroix veiled Medea's gaze metaphorically, *as if* either to suggest a sharpening of her sight, alternatively a loss of sight, physical or mental, or even to convey a moment of existential collapse; or, still, to allude to her "otherness" as a "sorceress", a "barbarian", "a different sort—dangerous to enemies, but well-disposed to friends".[64]

In practice, Baxandall's late reference to the "uncanny" is here shown to help shed light on the nature of Medea's shaded gaze. This Freudian concept, referring to the experience of horror at the sight of something familiar and "homely", something "old-established in the mind which has become alienated from it through the process of repression",[65] something which should have remained hidden but is now exposed, can be shown to pertain to the concepts of the "sublime", as expounded within an exploration of aesthetics by Edmund Burke in the 1750s. The sublime, based on the experience of pain, fear, horror and death, and, importantly, connected to the obscure, turns out to be useful as a key to capture the quality of haunting ambiguity which marks the painting, apparent to the critics of 1838 as well as to me. Not apparent to the critics, however, is the significant gendering of Burke's insisting on *self-preservation* as "the strongest of passions". The implied male prerogative in Burke's application of the concept of self-preservation, a "passion" present in the voice which Euripides assigns to Medea, only becomes apparent to a beholder of Delacroix's painting informed by 21st-century critical paradigms. The concluding reference to Burke's aesthetics presents itself as an instance of not knowing beforehand the unexpected turns of an investigation.

63. Note 40.
64. Euripides 2008, lines 808–810.
65. Freud 1955, pp. 363–364.

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MÅRTEN SNICKARE

Affective knowledge

Getting to know Isaac Julien's *Western Union: Small Boats*

Looking with soft eyes

DURING A CLOSE-UP of a chandelier, slightly out of focus, a new sound takes over: the sound of water, subdued yet distinct, evoking the bodily sensation of moving vigorously under water. My auditory sense is activated, and so is my sense of touch and feeling; I feel the coldness and wetness together with water's peculiar way of restraining and slowing down my movements, making them strenuous and limber at the same time.

A moment later, a moving image appears that both matches and contrasts the sensations aroused by the sound: a man, lying on a richly painted, tiled floor, fiercely twisting and turning, the pace and intensity of his movements corresponding to the sound. This combination of sound and image produces a double tactile sensation, where the soft coldness of water blends with the hard, glossy coldness of tiles. Even though I have seen it before, it takes me a few seconds to become aware that the image is upside down—the floor apparently constituting a hard surface above the man, through which it seems he is trying to break.

Then the image shifts, the very same man performing similar vigorous twists and turns under water, creating bubbles that obscure my vision and occasionally conceal his body (fig. 1). Sound and image now fully match. Sunbeams penetrate the water, indicating that the man is just beneath the surface. Despite his fierce movements, however, he does not manage to break through to get some air. The surface of water appears as impenetrable as the tiled floor.

The intensity rises as images and angles shift at an increasing pace: clips of the body under water from different angles and at different distances, shifting to clips of the same body twisting and turning on the tiled floor. My bodily sensations get stronger and my heart beats faster. I become affected by the enhanced tempo, and by the man's movements, at the same time a beautifully choreographed dance and a ghastly death struggle.

Figure 1. Isaac Julien, *Western Union: Small Boats*, 2007, still from video.

Dance and death—the affective short circuit constitutes a culmination of *Western Union: Small Boats*, a video work by British artist Isaac Julien, made in 2007 in response to the continuous migrant and refugee catastrophe on the Mediterranean. The scene, and the work as a whole, has given rise to a debate about the ethical implications of aesthetics: is it ethically defensible to represent something as horrible as a migrant's or refugee's death struggle in the Mediterranean by means of such beautifully composed imagery and well-choreographed movements? Critic Alan Gilbert states that Julien's imagery is so stylized "that certain moments approximate a fashion shoot, lending what is a gritty, harrowing, and sometimes fatal journey a slightly incongruous quality of slick sensuality".[1] In a reply to this kind of critique, Julien argues that he understands dance as a parallel language with the capacity to open up for new, unexpected ways of thinking that involve not only the mind but also the body.[2] Through the bodily and kinaesthetic beauty of dance, the conventional gaze becomes dislocated and the beholder may experience the brutal and harrowing reality in a new way, in a stronger and more intimate manner than via the conventionalized news media imagery. Furthermore, the transgressing of borders between art and reality, beauty and horror, the documentary and the poetic, resonates with the migrant's transgressing of geographic and political borders. In addition to this, I would suggest that the beauty of dance works as a way of restoring the dignity of the anonymous migrant or refugee; to present them as something more than just another number in the chilling statistics of deceased migrants on the Mediterranean. Dance as a way of claiming the migrant's right to take their place, and to lead a dignified life.

These issues of ethics and aesthetics are important and well worth a deeper exploration. In the following, I will focus on a slightly different, yet related aspect of the affective mode of *Western Union: Small Boats*, an aspect implied in Julien's response to the critique above, and his way of pointing out the relations between dance and thinking, body and mind. Connecting my study to the issue at stake in this volume, *Knowing Visual Art*, I will frame it as an issue of the relation between affects and knowing. How can I understand the interplay between the work of art, its affective effects on me as a beholder and my scholarly interpretation of it? Or, to put it in more general terms, how can we approach the rela-

1. Gilbert 2008, p. 91. On this debate, see also González 2011, pp. 127–128; Petersen 2018, pp. 97–98.

2. Julien 2013, pp. 173–176.

tions between art, affects and knowing? Are (scholarly) knowledge and (aesthetic) affects incompatible, or could they be conceived of as interacting? Could we even, in any meaningful way, talk of *affective knowledge*, as suggested by this essay's title? What would that mean in the context of the scholarly interpretation of an artwork?

Western Union: Small Boats will remain at the centre of my essay, as a touchstone for the more general and theoretical issues of affects and knowing. My main reason for choosing that particular artwork in this context is its strong affective impact on me. Over the last ten years or so, I have been lucky to encounter it on a number of occasions and, over and over again, it has proven its capacity to arouse strong and complex bodily sensations and emotions. Thus, it makes a good case for this essay's exploration of the possible relations between art, affects and knowing. (And, vice versa, the theme of this anthology—*Knowing Visual Art*—has given me an opportunity to dig deeper into the aesthetic, affective and epistemic layers of Julien's artwork.)

Before continuing the exploration—or, rather, as a first step of it—I will get back to Julien's artwork in order to give a close description of it. In this descriptive part of the essay, I am deeply inspired by art historian Darby English, who has pointed out *description* as an essential art-historical method, and a way to deepen and refine one's gaze. English encourages us to commit ourselves to "deep sustained attention" to the work of art, in order to avoid the all-too-common repetition of "readymade perspectives".[3] Such a programmatic slowness, called for by the act of description, may be particularly difficult when dealing with an artwork like *Western Union: Small Boats*—a work entangled in burning political and social issues, which might imply an urge to move quickly to the safety of preconceived notions and readymade perspectives. How to stay with the unresolved questions, the complexities and ambivalences rather than hasten to the clear-cut answers? How to keep "looking with soft eyes", to borrow a phrase from English?[4]

English notices a frequent "gap" between a work of art and the art-historical interpretations of it. This gap, he states, is due to the fact that scholars often know beforehand what they look for in the artwork. As scholars, we come to the work with a hypothesis that we intend to verify or satisfy, and we leave with the piece we came for in order to confirm

3. English 2019, pp. 4, 26.
4. English 2021.

our thesis, or exemplify our theory, leaving the remainder of the work unaccounted for. Description, following English, can be understood as a kind of "gap tending" between what the work of art is and what it has been said to be.[5]

English's advocacy of attentive description has some affinity with political theorist Jane Bennett's suggestion that the scholar admits to moments of "methodological naïveté" in the sensory encounter with objects and the materialities of the world. That we, as scholars, "linger in those moments during which we find ourselves fascinated by objects, taking them as clues to the material vitality we share with them".[6] *Time* is an important factor for English and Bennett: the encounter between observer and object needs to take time, it needs "lingering" (Bennett) and "sustained attention" (English). Both scholars also propose a less hierarchical relation between the scholar and the artwork or object of interest. Rather than aiming at control over the artwork, by means of established methods and theoretical concepts, the scholar should be prepared to let the artwork lead them in unexpected directions, to accept its ambiguities, obscurities and contradictions as well as its resistance against being fully comprehensible, fully subjected to the scholar's interpretative manoeuvres.

Literary theorist Ernst van Alphen proposes a connection between the slowness of description and the affective powers of art and literature:

> The recognition of the role of affective operations forces us to slow down—not shut down—the reading for meaning and our haste to reach that destiny. A hasty flight to (allegorical) meaning can only end up in the already known, in the recognition of conventional meanings, whereas the affective operations and the way they shock to thought are what opens a space for the not yet known.[7]

Van Alphen's thoughtful reflections on the affective operations of art form an important source of inspiration for my essay, and I will return to them in more detail later. At this moment it suffices to point out that affect in van Alphen's understanding is social rather than personal. It can be transmitted between people, but it may also be triggered by non-human agents, such as a work of art or a literary text. Further, affect is

5. English 2021.
6. Bennett 2010, p. 17.
7. van Alphen 2008, p. 30.

physiological rather than psychological; it is connected to the body and the senses. Affect carries no verbal content in itself but it may trigger emotions and feelings—the latter could be understood as affects that have been put into words, or affects of which the affected person has made themselves aware. And—this is important—affect may also trigger thoughts, yes, even "shock to thought" and, by that means, "open a space for the not yet known". Following van Alphen, thus, there is a link between affect and knowing.[8]

Encountering *Western Union: Small Boats*

Western Union: Small Boats is an 18-minute video work that appeared in 2007, constituting a late step in Julien's gradual transition from filmmaker with distinct artistic pretensions to artist with film and video as his preferred media. The work exists in different versions: the original three-screen version, a five-screen version (shown in different ways depending on the exhibition space) and a single-screen version with another title: *The Leopard*.[9]

The artwork is enacted against the background of the thousands of people who every year endeavour to cross the Mediterranean from Asia or Africa to Europe, fleeing from war, persecution, poverty and climate crisis—an endeavour that for many ends with death by drowning. This is not to say that Julien's artwork *is about* the Mediterranean migrant and refugee crisis, or that it *depicts*, or *represents* the crisis; rather, that the crisis, and Europe's response to it, form a social and political space in which the artwork unfolds.

Western Union: Small Boats moves between different genres and expressive registers. Seemingly documentary scenes are followed by theatrical stagings and poetic, dreamlike sequences. Expansive views of the sea and sky are juxtaposed with the zooming in on a detail. The sound also shifts, between the sober voices of newscasters, sounds of the sea shifting from calm to fierce, the screaming of seabirds, the song of a female voice, and an electronic soundscape moving between the ominous and the serene. Image and sound are connected in a way that could be described as contrapuntal: at some instances, the sound strengthens and supports the image and vice versa, while at other points the two seem to go against or undermine each other. As a whole, the work is not held

8. van Alphen & Jirsa 2019a, see in particular van Alphen & Jirsa 2019b.
9. Julien 2013.

together by a pronounced narrative structure, an internal chronology, or a consistent chain of cause and effect. It is not—at least not primarily—about telling a story. This, however, does not mean that elements are arbitrarily joined. Quite the opposite: the work is characterized by a temporal and spatial precision, and by an unmistakable musical rhythm resonating in the body of the beholder.

The work's non-linear, fluid, musical rhythm is most fully developed in the multiscreen versions where themes and sub-themes, panoramic views and close-ups, are repeated and interwoven on different screens, sometimes in unison, at other times canonical or contrapuntal. Julien has stated—relating to an earlier video work—that "there is something about the three-screen version that allows a certain choreography that emphasizes movement and flexibility in narrative progression", while, on the other hand, "the demands of a single-screen piece of work lead to a slightly conservative way of viewing".[10] This being true, I would yet claim that also in *The Leopard*, the single-screen version, the fluent, rhythmic, non-linear character is maintained. My description of the work is based on the single-screen version to which I have had access during the process of writing, but it is also coloured by my memories of encounters with the three-screen and five-screen versions.

Western Union: Small Boats could tentatively be divided into three acts, each of them roughly six minutes long. No clear borders distinguish the acts—a particular sub-theme or scene may appear in more than one act—and it could be argued that this way of dividing up the whole of the work goes against its continuous musical flow and its lack of internal chronology. However, in order to avoid getting bogged down in the enumeration of endless details, the distinction might be helpful for the interpreter as well as the reader.

In the opening scene of the first act, two protagonists are introduced, two recurrent characters throughout the video work: the sea, moving from calm, sunlit and inviting to stormy and ominous; and a female character who might be described as an observer or a witness—art historian Jennifer A. González has likened her to the chorus in ancient Greek drama.[11] Rather than taking part in the events and actions, the character

10. Julien 2002, quote from p. 54.

11. González 2011, p. 117. The character is played by actress Vanessa Myrie, who appears as a similar character in two earlier video works by Julien: *True North* (2004) and *Fantôme Créole* (2005). In relation to these two artworks, Julien has stated that Myrie's character is "a trespasser, a witness who will never become part of either geography" (Julien 2013, p. 173).

Figure 2. Isaac Julien, *Western Union: Small Boats*, 2007, still from video.

observes, standing or sitting still, or moving slowly and gracefully. She is often, if not always, seen from behind, the beholder then looking in the same direction, following her gaze. In the opening scene, she appears from the shadows and approaches a gateway opening up towards the sea and a bright blue sky (fig. 2). A rocky coastline, barely visible on the horizon, suggests that the sea, peaceful and inviting, constitutes a passage between lands. The crystal-clear, proud voice of Malian singer Oumou Sangaré blends with the calm waves. A tension is suggested between the gateway, a promising opening to the sea, and its iron gate, first shown half open and then closed and locked, apparently conditioning the access to what is on the other side. The passage between lands is not for everyone.

In the next scene, a group of fishermen are introduced together with their small, wooden boats and their fishing tackle. A series of close-ups highlights the sunlit, white-painted planks of a boat, hands deftly handling a long fishing line, and a tanned, furrowed face—together emphasizing sensuous presence and tactile interplay between human beings and their lived environment. The fishermen seem to be in tune with their surroundings; they know their craft and their tools, and they know how

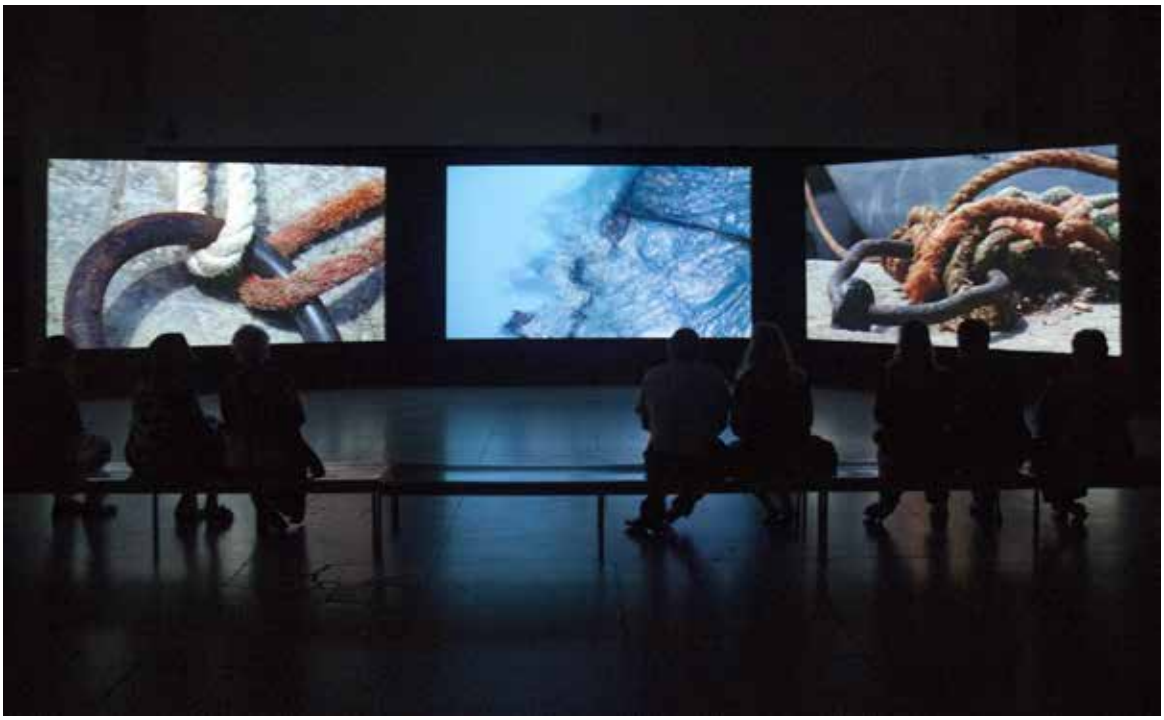

Figure 3. Isaac Julien, *Western Union: Small Boats*, 2007, still from video.

to interact with the sea. Yet another close-up shows a mooring ring with two mooring ropes that tighten and slacken pari passu with the gentle waves (fig. 3). I get an immediate sense of the weight and importance of ring and ropes, and their calm rhythm—not primarily as sign or symbol but rather as presence, relating to my own presence, and rhythm relating to my own rhythm.

Like in the preceding scene, there is a tension, this time between image and sound. While the imagery presents the sea as a workplace, harmoniously interacting with the confident, experienced fishermen, the sound consists of a sustained, ominous tone combined with crackling radio reports on shipwrecks and lost migrants. This tension brings forth an image of the sea as at once life-giving and lethal.

The Witness appears, her earnest gaze leading from the fishing harbour to a ship graveyard where broken boats are left to weather in the burning sun. The camera shifts between overviews of the graveyard and close-ups of single wrecks in which clothes and shoes are left behind, evoking an alarming sense of lost passengers. A sudden shift to a calm, sunlit shoreline with bright, stepped cliffs, recognizable as the *Scala dei Turchi* (the Turkish Steps) on the south-western coast of Sicily, facing

one of the shortest passages between Africa and Europe. The Witness approaches from the cliffs, walks gently into the sea and lifts up a red t-shirt floating in the shallow, tranquil water. Holding the wet, heavy t-shirt with both hands, she watches the water running and dripping back into the sea: again, an abandoned article of clothing produces a negative image of its lost wearer. A group of people descends from the cliffs. In contrast to the quasi-documentary character of the scene with the fishermen, there is something dreamlike about this scene, people moving slowly, choreographically. Next, a close-up of a man from the group, now sitting alone on the shore gazing out to sea.

Then comes another abrupt shift—in a way foreboded by the man's gaze—from the tranquil shore to the loud sound of waves on the open sea, arousing in me a bodily sensation of being in danger. A close-up of a hand, holding on tight to the rail of a small, open boat in high sea, the horizon rapidly moving up and down—the tremors and movements of the camera making me physically dizzy. Onboard is a group of men, one of them dozing. Dreamlike, impressionistic images of what might be understood as his African hometown in a sunbaked landscape are interspersed with images of the man, eyes half-closed. His head falls forward, marking the passage from dozing to sleeping. End of act one.

Whereas the first act takes place on, and around, the sea, as a site for the giving and taking of life, the primary setting for the second act is Palazzo Valguarnera-Gangi, an opulent late Baroque palace in Palermo (fig. 4). One possible approach to the setting is via the man in the small boat falling asleep at the end point of act one; the almost surrealistically sumptuous palace could then be understood as the migrant's dream about a world of infinitude and abundance. At the same time, the palace stands out as a blatant manifestation of global injustice and inequality, caused by centuries of European colonialism, dominance and extractivism. The splendid, elaborate Baroque interiors seem to embrace both these interpretations: European Baroque art and architecture is about endless power and colonial dominance, manifest in its scale, its hyperboles, and the excess of gold and other precious materials extracted from distant parts of the world and displayed at its self-proclaimed centre. But it is also about constant movement, the transgressing of borders and the opening of passages between the real and the imaginary. In the great hall of Palazzo Valguarnera-Gangi, where several scenes of the second act are set, the latter becomes manifest through the constant blurring of borders between illusionistic paintings and three-dimensional architectural

Figure 4. Isaac Julien, *Western Union: Small Boats*, 2007, still from video.

space, culminating in the barely graspable pattern of ornaments and openings in the ceiling. The sense of spatial ungraspability and constant transformation evoked by the hall's architecture and decoration is further enhanced in the video work by means of winding camera tracking, superposition of images and sliding transitions between focus and blur.

Through the setting in Palazzo Valguarnera-Gangi, a relation is also established between *Western Union: Small Boats* and Luchino Visconti's classic film *Il Gattopardo* (The Leopard) from 1963.[12] Julien describes the relation as a conversation with Italian film, particularly pointing out the long ballroom scene at the end of Visconti's film, "a total tour de force of visual composition", enacted in the palace's great hall.[13] Strong affects are at work in Visconti's film, in particular in the ballroom scene, by means of gestures, gazes, music, camera movements and, not least, the bodily motion of dance. Through dance, thus, a resonance is established between Julien's artwork and Visconti's film. And, to borrow a wording

12. Visconti's film is made after the novel with the same title: *Il Gattopardo*, by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa (1958). A relational chain is thus established between Julien's video work, Visconti's film and Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel.

13. Julien 2013, p. 175.

from van Alphen, the resonance between the two seems to be more about "affective" than "allegorical" meaning.

In the opening scene of act two, the camera moves slowly from a close-up of a decoratively painted, tiled floor, and gradually takes in what proves to be the great hall. A soundscape of repeated creaking, together with sustained, glassy tones on low frequency, lends the scene an elusive character, reminding one of the state of hypnagogia. A voice from a speaker, with a pronounced echo, seems to arrive from a different space, another reality. The voice announces "La Principessa di Lampedusa", whereupon a blonde woman enters from the blur and approaches the camera, smiling. During the sustained take, her smile seems to stiffen and become forced. A rhythm, like a rapid heartbeat, is added to the soundscape, giving an element of stress and threat to the scene. Next appears the Witness, with a confident smile, walking gracefully and fanning herself, temporarily leaving her role as observer and playing with the role of princess or noblewoman, quite at home in the ornate Baroque hall.

A man—the same man who was sitting alone on the shore in the previous act—enters, carrying another man, apparently a corpse, on his shoulders. He stops at the centre of the hall with a serious, even accusatory gaze at the beholder. Then follows the affective culmination described in detail on the first pages of this essay (fig. 1). The man who choreographically twists and turns on the hall's tiled floor and under water is the same man who entered the hall with a corpse on his shoulders.

After this strongly affective sequence in a border zone between dance and death, the camera moves slowly, apparently randomly, around the hall, eventually zooming in on the image of a leopard painted on the tiled floor, another visual allusion to Visconti's film.

The scene shifts to the palace's magnificent staircase. Dancers are seen rolling and sliding down the stairs, partially recalling the choreography of the man under water, but less vigorously, as if the power had left their bodies and they unresistingly follow the law of gravity. The Witness appears in the staircase, now back in her role as non-involved observer. The sound of church bells. End of act two.

In contrast to the first act, mainly set in vast landscapes and dominated by a straightforward filmic language, act two is thus framed by the palace milieu and characterized by a dreamlike, choreographic mode. The third act, then, opening with the same song as the first, initially returns to the sea and the straightforward tone. The small boat from the end of act one has now reached calm water close to the shore; its motor is off,

Figure 5. Isaac Julien, *Western Union: Small Boats*, 2007, still from video.

and the men onboard seem to sleep—or are they deceased? The red t-shirt is still floating at the edge of the water. Tourists are on their way in small boats to spend their day swimming and sunbathing in a small bay next to the *Scala dei Turchi*. Sounds of gentle waves and children playing are eventually overshadowed by a dark, menacing electronic soundscape as the camera zooms in on five dead bodies lined up on the beach, covered by metallic blankets, a mere stone's throw from the unknowing (or unconcerned?) tourists (fig. 5). Jarring details of the deceased, such as sandy toes protruding from under a metallic blanket, are juxtaposed with relaxed tourists, walking in the water, playing with a ball, lounging under their parasols. For a moment, the artwork abandons its open tone and its subtle play with tensions and ambiguities, shouting its message right in the face of the beholder: it is your looking away, your unwillingness to care, that allows this ongoing human catastrophe to continue.

Everything turns black, as if the work implodes under the pressure of its own horrendous imagery. A rapid, stressful drum rhythm emerges out of the dark, forcing its way into the body of the beholder, impossible to defend oneself against. When the image reappears, it is under water again. Human bodies recall the choreographed death struggle of the second act, but this time their movements are less vigorous, as if they

are in a state of giving up their resistance. The intensity of the drum rhythm increases until it becomes almost unbearable, the bodies sinking and sinking. Black again, and silence.

A peaceful sound of a distant boat engine, a harmonious chime of bells, small boats crossing a streak of sunshine on the calm mirror of the water, the Witness watching the scene, sitting high up on the *Scala dei Turchi*. No visible trace of the tragedy. The scene shifts one last time, to a close-up of a black sleeveless t-shirt, slowly lifted up from the water and held by a male hand, its water dripping and running back to the sea.

Affective knowledge

The concept of affect, part of aesthetic theory since Aristotle and with important philosophical contributions by Spinoza and Bergson, has attracted renewed interest over the last decades, partly thanks to the impact of the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and their English translator and introducer, Brian Massumi.[14] An "affective turn" has been proclaimed by many, but also contested by some: as is often the case when theoretical concepts become fashionable, the concept of affect sometimes tends to lose its edge and applicability, to signify everything and nothing at the same time.[15] Is affect just another word for emotion or feeling? If not, how to distinguish between them? Is affect primarily about reception, i.e. the subjective response of the reader, beholder or audience? Or is it rather about certain qualities and potentials of the text or the artwork? Where is affect situated? Here is neither the place to enter into the debate on the affective turn, nor to delve into the etymological and philosophical subtleties of the concept. For the moment I confine myself to proposing that the current interest in affects forms part of a gradual shift of attention within the humanities and social sciences, from meaning to effect, from semiosis to experience, from representation to presence, from structure to process, from the rational to the sensuous, from the linguistic to the material and embodied.[16]

Two scholars have been of particular importance for my understanding of affect, and for suggesting ways in which an at times elusive philosophical concept could be used as a practicable and productive tool for

14. Deleuze & Guattari 1980; Massumi 2002.

15. On the "affective turn", see e.g. Ticineto Clough & Halley 2007; Gregg & Seigworth 2010; La Caze & Lloyd 2011, pp. 1–13. On the questioning of an affective turn, see Rose 2012, pp. 201–211; Brinkema 2014; van Alphen & Jirsa 2019b.

16. On this shift, see e.g. Fischer-Lichte 2004. See also van Alphen 2008, pp. 21–22.

the exploration of the workings of art: media scholar Eugenie Brinkema and literary theorist Ernst van Alphen.

Brinkema approaches the concept with a critical edge, pointing out (at least) two recurrent fallacies in the current discourse on affects. The first fallacy is the idea that the study of affect—understood as something immediate and automatic that takes place before or beyond language—does not require deep attention to formal aspects of the studied text, film or work of art; that it does not require what Brinkema calls "close reading". These kinds of shortcuts past the strenuous work of reading or observing closely, Brinkema asserts, would only lead to a repetition of the general and already known. Affects, in all their manifold, shifting forms and appearances, are only graspable through the scholar's deep attention to formal idiosyncrasies and contingencies of the studied text or artwork, through "an analysis that allows the particularities of any individual text to disrupt those terms known in advance, to challenge the forms of the affects one is claiming those very texts provoke".[17] In the context of this essay, it is interesting to notice the link hereby established between Brinkema's critical approach to the study of affects, and English's insistence on "deep sustained attention" in the description of a work of art. (By the way, it could also be noted that the wording, "close reading", discloses Brinkema's implicit understanding of the written text as the paradigmatic medium, even though she mainly deals with the visual/audial/kinetic medium of film.)

The second fallacy, according to Brinkema, is the tendency among many scholars and critics to look for the affects within their own personal experiences. "It is often", she states, "*her* felt stirrings, *his* intense disgust that comprises the specific affective case study."[18] Such an account of the scholar's sensations and emotions while reading a text or watching a film is an impasse that can never "open up avenues for thought and investigation".[19] Rather, the study should focus on the ways in which affects take shape in the details of the artwork's specific "forms and temporal structures".[20]

I agree with Brinkema that a scholar's account of their individual affective experiences in the encounter with a text or an artwork is not enough for a study that wants to reach a deeper understanding of the affective

17. Brinkema 2014, p. xvi.
18. Brinkema 2014, p. 31.
19. Brinkema 2014, p. 34.
20. Brinkema 2014, p. 37.

operations of art. However, I think that it could be a productive method; that a reflective registering, and tentative translation into words, of the interpreter's affective response to a work of art could form part of the process of getting to know that work and its affective operations. If the sources of an artwork's affective powers—as suggested by Brinkema—are to be found in its forms and temporal structures, then the scholar's affective responses to the artwork could be regarded as *symptoms* of exactly those forms and structures. In the same way as a fever, rash or blood count are symptoms by means of which the physician may trace and define the physiological and mental whole of a patient's state of health, a scholar could look at their own affective reactions and responses as symptoms of the complex workings of an artwork. Hence, I propose an interpretive practice that constantly shifts between a deep sustained attention to the particularities and idiosyncrasies of the artwork *and* a close reflective registering of one's own affective response to it.

In my description of *Western Union: Small Boats*, I have consequently endeavoured to put my own affective experiences of the artwork into words, not as an answer to the question of the artwork's affective capacities, but as a way to get sight of, and clarify, the forms and structures where the affects take shape. If we get back to the affective culmination of the second act, as described earlier in this essay: what is it in the artwork that brings about my affective response, my bodily sensations and my increasing pulse rate (fig. 1)? It seems to be the forceful movements of the man on the floor and under water, the way he seems to desperately try to break out of a confined, suffocating space, together with the increasing pace of the shifting clips; but also the collision between two apparently incompatible bodily motions: the transient beauty of dance and the desperate horror of a death struggle. And what is it that makes the underwater scene at the end of act three almost physically unbearable? At least a part of the answer seems to lie within the tension between the frantic drum rhythm and the slowly, unresistingly sinking bodies. More generally, the affective operations of *Western Union: Small Boats* mostly seem to be situated in bodily movements and postures, shifts in tempo and changes between soft and abrupt visual and audial transitions, and in the relation between sound and image, a relation that is often fraught with conflict.

If Brinkema's critical approach points out limits for the study of affects, clarifying what is *not* a productive affective interpretation of art, van Alphen suggests a useful, practicable model for the study of "affective

operations of art and literature", to quote the title of one of his articles on the issue.[21] Together with Tomáš Jirsa, researcher in comparative literature, van Alphen suggests that affects be regarded as a process of three consecutive stages (stages that are often mixed up in the current discourse on affects, resulting in confusion). The affective operations of an artwork could schematically be divided in the following stages: 1. The formal characteristics of the artwork as a trigger of affect; 2. Affect (triggered by the artwork) as an intensity or resonance within the body of the beholder; 3. The bodily affect in the beholder as a potential trigger of emotions and imagination, but also thoughts.[22]

To regard affects in this way, as a processual series of stages, has at least three important implications. First, that affects are social rather than personal. Their place is not within me, but rather in the encounter between me and another person, an artwork, or another kind of object that might trigger affects. The chain might be prolonged: my affective response to an artwork could in its turn trigger affects in another person. (A small but important distinction is noticeable here between van Alphen and Brinkema: while they both mostly situate affect within the forms and temporal structures of the artwork, van Alphen also places strong emphasis on the encounter between artwork and beholder.) The second implication is that relations between humans and artworks (or other objects) seem to be less hierarchical than is often taken for granted. If we usually tend to understand the act of interpretation as an act of taking control of an artwork by means of the interpreter's gaze and conceptual tools, we could just as well consider the artwork as the initiator of the interpretative process, triggering an affective response in the body of the interpreter which, in its turn, triggers thoughts about the artwork. The third implication, finally, is that there is a strong link between affects (body, pre-language) and thoughts or cognitive operations (mind, language): an affect, triggered by an artwork, may in its turn trigger a cognitive process. In this context, it could be noted that Julien makes a similar connection, suggesting that the bodily movements of dance provide a way of thinking and, by extension, of knowing.[23]

This further suggests that the affective turn, if embraced in a meaningful way, is not about replacing meaning with effect, semiosis with

21. van Alphen 2008.

22. van Alphen & Jirsa 2019b, p. 4. van Alphen and Jirsa refer to Spinoza who distinguishes between stages 2 and 3 by means of the words *affectus* and *affectio*.

23. Julien 2013, pp. 175–176.

experience, or the linguistic with the corporeal, but rather about opening up a wider and richer field for approaching and getting to know the surrounding world, including its works of art; to enable a productive play between meaning *and* affect, representation *and* presence, mind *and* body. The whole idea of separating what seems to belong to the body from what seems to belong to the mind is undermined by the simple act of me writing this text: it would never have come into existence without the interaction of body (my fingertips dancing on the keyboard) and mind—and I am reluctant to establish exactly where in that interaction the words you just read have emerged.

One point of including affect in the act of interpreting an artwork is that it enables this wider field and richer play between what van Alphen distinguishes as "allegorical" versus "affective" reading.[24] The one is simply poorer without the other. Let us return once again to *Western Union: Small Boats*: it seems reasonable to state that the red t-shirt, floating at the edge of the water towards the end of act one, serves as a synecdoche for a deceased migrant, but it does not seem to capture the full experience of watching that particular scene. The allegorical meaning of the t-shirt is embedded in a whole world of sensuous impressions and experiences: the slow movements of water, the woman carefully lifting the t-shirt, her way of holding it with arms stretched, looking at it while the water runs and drips slowly back to the sea from where it came. Exactly what the movements, textures, gazes, muscular tension, dripping and running of water *do*, what they add to the synecdoche, is hard to put into words. But they find their way into the body of the beholder, where they resonate with the allegorical meaning, deepening and modulating its impact.

Another example from the first act is the close-up of the mooring ring with two mooring ropes that tighten and slacken, following the rhythm of the gentle waves (fig. 3). The close-up in itself is a cinematic device that calls for attention: "Look at this, this is significant!" But the allegorical reading seems to leave us groping in the dark. Do the ropes and ring want to say something about connection and safety, underlining the calm confidence of the fishermen? A safe harbour? Maybe, but that seems a rather shallow and superficial interpretation in relation to the complexity and precision of the work as a whole. Still, the ring and ropes possess gravity and presence; I sense their heft as their calm rhythm gives rise to a muscular response in my body. Unlike the instance of the red

24. van Alphen 2008, pp. 29–30.

t-shirt, where allegorical and affective interpretation seem to support each other, in this case the affective understanding almost stands alone. I am convinced that the scene plays an essential role in the whole of the artwork, but it eludes my efforts to translate it into written words.

Affective knowledge, as in the essay's title, was initially thought of as little more than a clash between two words that are usually sorted into different categories: one pointing toward the realm of the body, the senses and the irrational, the other to the mind, rationality and system-building. What happens if they are brought together? Could anything productive come out of the clash? In the course of my explorations of the affective workings of *Western Union: Small Boats*, and my reading of current literature on affect, I have come to believe that *affective knowledge* could be put to work as a theoretical concept. Indeed, it already is, within the field of pedagogy, where it refers to the ways in which knowledge and the process of learning may bring forth affects and emotions, and how these affects in their turn could serve a pedagogic purpose. That is, the process of learning may trigger affects that, in their turn, trigger further learning.[25]

Here, I propose that it might also be a valuable concept outside the field of pedagogy, albeit with a slightly different meaning. Inspired by van Alphen's and Jirsa's model—a work of art may trigger affects in the beholder, affects that in their turn may trigger thoughts and "open a space for the not yet known"—I suggest that *affective knowledge* refers to the capacity of affects to bring forth new knowledge. Rather than putting the affects aside as irrelevant, or even as an obstacle to the interpretative process, I suggest that the scholar's affective responses to a work of art could play an important part in the process of getting to know the work.

Approaching the end of my essay, I would like to return to the call by Margaretha Thomson, the initiator of this book, to delve into the issues of *Knowing Visual Art*. In response to the call, I set out to explore possible relations between *knowing*, *art* and *affects*. In connection with that, I also wanted to strike a blow for a kind of slow, humble description of art, mildly questioning the virtues of a kind of more theoretically driven art analysis that seems to want to domesticate and discipline the art. In that endeavour, I found support in Darby English's "looking with soft eyes" and Jane Bennett's "methodological naïveté". More unexpectedly, I

25. Ainsworth & Bell 2020.

also found support in current theories of affect: in Eugenie Brinkema's insistence on "close reading", and Ernst van Alphen's call to "slow down". That coincidence strengthened my sense that I was onto something—and that that something might open up for a less hierarchical and dominant relation between art historian and artwork, interpreter and object.

Throughout the modern history of art history, the art historian's established position has been modelled after the paradigmatic Renaissance artist before a painting made with central perspective: a mind without body placing itself at a specific distance from the work of art, in order to control it with the (one-eyed) gaze. Even if the idea of the scholar's detached, objective gaze has faltered in recent decades, at least on a theoretical level, it can be claimed that it still dominates art-historical prose. Inspired by English and Bennett, but also by Brinkema and van Alphen, I think that it is high time to reconsider the relation between art and art historian. For the art historian, it could mean leaving the detached position modelled after the Renaissance artist and, in its place, searching for a more humble and entwined, less hierarchical and objectifying relation to the artwork; to engage in the materiality and sensuality of the work of art, not only with gaze and intellect, but also with body and senses; to take the affective as seriously as the discursive—or what van Alphen calls "the allegorical"; to approach the work of art as an equal part in a dialogical knowledge process, and to be prepared to be affected and changed by that process. Brinkema is after something similar when she asks for "an analysis that allows the particularities of any individual text to disrupt those terms known in advance".[26]

Finally, I propose that the juxtaposition of *knowledge* and *art*, the core issue of this anthology, should not be about squeezing art into a prevailing Western concept of knowledge (as discursive, systematic, limited to the mind, etc.), but rather about the capacity of art to open up and push the limits of knowledge as we think of it. The act of juxtaposing knowledge and art might performatively do something to the notion of knowledge. It might bring forth qualities and aspects of knowledge, such as bodily and embodied, sensuous and sensual, aesthetic, mobile, transient, transboundary. *Knowing Visual Art*, the title of this anthology, calls for a closer connection between aesthetics, affects and epistemology.

26. Brinkema 2014, p. xvi.

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1. Landsvägsbron, från norr. — 2. Notdragning i »floden». — 3. Fiskboden med rökhuset, sedda från Kungsbron. — 4, 5. Laxfiskena, med fiskekar o. s. v.
Tecknadt af J. Ericsson.

SONYA PETERSSON

Pictorial knowledge

Image, text and their experiential base in the 19th-century illustrated press

ART-HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE production has more than once been described as a "translation" of images into words, which reaches deeper than merely the communication of scholarly results through the writings of articles and books: in the process of examination and interpretation, the image is thought of as "translated" into conceptual knowledge.[1] In this discussion, "translation" is used to emphasize the image's alterity or its distinctiveness from text, the latter in the inclusive sense of the arch medium of writing, words and conceptual knowledge. My intention here is to nuance and provide an alternative to this idea of art-historical knowledge production as ultimately a "translation" between image and text. The chapter aims to pursue the reversed idea that knowing pictures involves *cooperative acts* of thinking and experiencing in images *and* texts. As I understand "text" inclusively, I take "image" to cover pictorial as well as virtual and metaphorical manifestations—which will become clear throughout the study.[2] First, what is the problem with the translation metaphor?

Translation?

The fact that pictures are standardly addressed by linguistic language, either critical or colloquial, is just one aspect of a much richer sphere of interrelations between images and texts and does not deprive the picture of the capacity of acting—if not strictly speaking—back.[3] Traditionally, knowledge and cognition are restricted to how thoughts, concepts and

Figure 1. *Views from Mörrum*. Xylographic print in *Ny illustrerad tidning* 9, 1876, p. 75. Dimensions: 30.8 × 20.8 cm.

1. Cf., e.g. Baxandall 1985, pp. 1–11; Elkins 1998; Elsner 2010.
2. About the image–picture distinction, see Mitchell 2005, pp. 84–86.
3. My use of "acting" and "act" builds on Bredekamp 2018, esp. pp. 1–35, but is slightly broader. While Bredekamp's focus is on investigating the image's agency and its conditions of possibility, my idea of agency is that it is distributed between the image in its pictorial manifestation, its relations to texts of different kinds, its relations to cultural conventions, and its relations to the embodied mind that makes sense of it.

propositions operate through words. But this is only one of the many forms of knowledge that are embedded in, as well as conveyed, processed and altered by, the experience of pictorial media that is simultaneously perceptual and cognitive, past and present. With this point of departure, I see three reasons to be suspicious of the idea of translation:

The first is that many pictures are in obvious ways involved with texts of different kinds. Examples range from pictures with inscriptions on the pictorial surface to pictures with juxtaposed texts (historiographical, critical, journalistic, literary) and pictures with texts inside their iconic fields. In such cases, both image and text are present with their own sign vehicles in, on or around the picture. In other cases, stories are visualized in pictorial media, as when the famous iconography of the *Danse Macabre* (Dance of Death) was reworked from a medieval romance to Hans Holbein the Younger's drawings disseminated through Hans Lützelburger's engravings (which were printed with juxtaposed verses) as one particularly well-known instance of its many pictorial manifestations.[4] Pictures are, in these and many other ways, *iconotextual* from the start (defined here as an umbrella term for all image and text interrelations that are activated by the picture).[5] This does not, however, mean that the textual dimensions of pictures exhaust their capacity of knowledge production. It only means that the pictorial and the textual dimensions of the knowledge-producing process are deeply intertwined. And further, to account for textual dimensions in/of pictorial media also serves to highlight those pictorial elements that resist easy labelling and conceptualization. Effects of texture belong here as well as the minimal marks that build up iconicity but are lost in the language that names the referent. In a notable contribution to the discussion about translation in art history, Keith Moxey has, on the one hand, emphasized the lack of congruence between what he calls "the verbal and the visual"; on the other hand, his preferred way of dealing with this gulf is to recognize it as a productive tension: "Far from canceling or obviating the need for words, the recognition that visuality and language are inextricably entwined but never coincide indicates that we desperately need all the powers of language—analytic and poetic—to explore the inexhaustible

4. For earlier manifestations of the Dance of Death, see Fein 2014.

5. The concept is taken from the works of Liliane Louvel and Peter Wagner, where it is developed in relation to images in literature (Louvel) and in relation to texts in and around graphic art (Wagner). Cf. Louvel 2011; 2018; Wagner 1995; 2015. Related image and text relations are discussed in Mitchell 1994.

potential of their incommensurability."[6] In other words, the fundamental difference between pictorial and textual media is a source of meaning rather than a loss of "pure" pictoriality.

The second reason to be suspicious of translation as a metaphor for the inability of words to capture pictorial ways of existing and making meaning in space and time is that it seems to include too much. If one understands "translation" in line with Benjamin as a "transformation and renewal" of the preceding text or in line with most discussions on transmediality as an at once transferring and transforming process, one could ask what would not—metaphorically—be a translation when content is transposed either within the same (arch) medium or sign repertoire or across different media or sign repertoires.[7] No one would expect a quote of a first text in a second text to relate to the first text in a 1:1 fashion, just as no one would expect a photographic reproduction of a painting to be anything other than a transferred and transformed visual quotation. Even in these cases, which do not include transfers across (arch) media and sign repertoires, we are aware of selections, partial views, new materialities and new media channels and interfaces that meet new addressees. Then, one wonders if not all transfers, either within textual or pictorial media, or across textual and pictorial media, are not slightly or radically translated.

The third reason to move beyond the translation metaphor is that it seems to suggest both the existence of media purity and firm analogies between media and perceptual and cognitive capabilities.[8] Iconotextual pictures are not only labelled that way because they are in a strict sense composed of both pictorial and textual elements, but also because their ability to act involves perceptual and cognitive input and response; relations to referents that are grounded in likeness, contiguity and convention; and spatial and temporal modes of interacting with the embodied and historically situated experience of the addressee. Pictures are iconotextual, multimodal and situated, because perception and cognition are iconotextual, multimodal and situated in the first place. Even so, it is a commonplace that any idea of iconotextuality needs to assume

6. Moxey 2013, p. 100.

7. Benjamin 1996, pp. 256. For "transmediality", see Elleström 2014. For a different take on the prefix "trans-" as opposed to "inter-", see Bal 2022, pp. 162–164.

8. As if pictures would be restricted to seeing and iconic and spatial representation, whereas writing would be restricted to thinking and symbolic and temporal representation. See note 9 for references.

some sort of media difference—if only to account for the image and text interrelations that constitute the iconotextual object. Any talk about tensions, fusions and combinations presupposes that there is more than one medium to begin with, and that there are borders of some kind between media, even though they are transgressed or deferred from another point of view.[9] In order to explore the "inexhaustible potential" of the tensions, fusions and combinations of pictorial and textual media, including their material, modal, representational and experiential dimensions of acting and making meaning in the world, we need a language that specifies the differences between media as well as the character of the interrelations.

For these reasons, my question mark after "translation" is not meant to question productive difference; rather, I understand the latter as the starting point of a process of iconotextual transfers and reworkings that yield what I tentatively define as *pictorial knowledge*, or knowledge that is, in one or another way, derived from the picture.

The pictorial letter as a figure with which to think

The plate *Views from Mörrum* (fig. 1) is taken from the Swedish weekly *Ny illustrerad tidning* (1865–1900), an equivalent of many European and North American counterparts, such as *The Graphic* in England or *L'Illustration* in France.[10] The plate is chosen because it exemplifies a type of picture, sometimes called metapictorial or metareferential,[11] that regularly occurred in the 19th-century illustrated press. These pictures are interesting because they deviate from illustrations that, at least superficially, were more adapted to the journalistic coverage of the cultural, political and social events of the day. They include the standard representations of celebrities, crime scenes, tourist sites, social affairs and so on, but also an extensive repertoire of something completely different: depictions of other pictures (cf. fig. 4), frames (cf. figs 1 and 2), inscriptions that are incorporated in pictorial space (cf. fig. 1), and other devices that engage with modes of pictoriality and transgressions of any easily fetched idea of what is pictorial in the first place. As my prime example, *Views from Mörrum* will be the focus of attention throughout the study,

9. Cf. the discussions about "mixed media" and "intermediality" in Rajewsky 2010, p. 52 and Mitchell 2015, pp. 129, 125–135.

10. For studies on the 19th-century illustrated press, see Beegan 2008; Korda 2015; Mainardi 2017.

11. "Metapictorial": Mitchell 1994, pp. 35–82. "Metareferential": Wolf 2009.

Figure 2. *Spring Images*. Xylographic print in *Ny illustrerad tidning* 19, 1868, p. 149. Dimensions: 32.5 × 22.8 cm.

VÅRBILDER. Originalteckning af K. A. Ekvall.

but not its sole actor. Other examples will be integrated insofar as they clarify, develop or ground the prime example.[12]

The Mörrum plate shows, metaphorically speaking, a "montage" of different landscape views from a Swedish country town (Mörrum, in the south of Sweden) in a both continuous and interrupted pictorial space. The top view of a river changes into a silhouette of houses that continues into a view of a jetty and a waterfall, and, finally, into a panorama over a verdant landscape with a river. One by one, the views occupy their own space. At the same time, they flow into each other's space. But there is more going on in the picture that complicates its depiction of space. To the left, the views are framed by an arrangement of fishing gear, which, at the bottom, extends into a railing with two bystanders looking in over the panorama (the man to the left) and out of the picture (the woman to the right). At the top of the frame, the landing-net ends with another "frame" that encloses yet another, smaller view. Through its iconicity and illusion of three-dimensionality, the framing arrangement constitutes a space of its own. While this could be said about many framing arrangements in the 19th-century illustrated press (cf. fig. 2), what is important here is that the curious text in the middle of the plate makes the construction of space an object of attention. The text plays with space.

The text "Mörrum" is not an inscription on the surface of the picture. Only the second and third letter could be described as such, whereas the others are localized *inside* both the space of the frame and the space of the views. Also, habits of reading, and therefore to view the word not as separate letters but as a graphic entity of its own, create an effect of seeing the word as in *front* of the jetty, as hovering in the air, and continuing *into* the scene at the other end. And more, the last letter "M" differs from the first in another way than by its place in space. If the first "M" is a *letter* caught up in a net, like a fish, the middle part of the last "M" constitutes a *thing* in the fishermen scene: a supporting crutch for the landing-net that extends into the scene, where it is handled by the two men. The difference here is that while the first "M" is nested in the iconicity of the net, it is still a letter. The last "M", however, is both a letter (conventionally expected to communicate by formal code) and a

12. The title *Views from Mörrum* is mine but modelled on the practice of *Ny illustrerad tidning* to caption its plates "pictures/images/scenes from …", as can be noted in fig. 4, *Pictures from Norway*. The title of fig. 2, *Spring Images*, is another variant of this pattern, which emphasizes image qualities of representation, whether in the form of pictures, depicted as material objects as in fig. 4, or of contemporary scenes of town and country life as in fig. 2.

Figure 3. *Pictorial Letter.* Xylographic print in *Kasper* 3, 1878. Dimensions (of the pictorial letter): 3.3 × 3.1 cm.

depiction of a crutch (conventionally expected to communicate by similarity).

This fusion of the "M" with (a depiction of) a crutch might be viewed as somewhat elusive as it is "hidden" in a letter of a proper name. But in relation to the historical experience of what should properly be called explicit iconotextual conventions in the 19th-century illustrated press, it is more eye-catching. Variants of pictorial letters appeared regularly, especially pictorial initials such as the one in figure 3, taken from *Ny illustrerad tidning's* sister magazine *Kasper*. The recurring heading "Teater-verlden" (The Theatre World) begins with the figure of Kasper forming a "T" by holding out his arms. The more elusive iconicity of the "M" becomes more explicit as seen through pictorial letters such as the Kasper "T", as a figure that acts through less explicit examples. What is assumed here is familiarity with surrounding pictorial conventions. In that perspective, the pictorial "M" constitutes a sort of occasional ground for a possible sphere of referents, including the Kasper "T", and makes implicitness and explicitness less a question of articulation and more a question of what is within one's frame of reference (for a related discussion about pictorial contexts, see Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe's chapter in this volume).

The same reliance on pictorial conventions also accounts for how *Views from Mörrum* (fig. 1) exposes its own representation as resulting from acts of artistry, artificiality and manipulation. In relation to the realism inherent in both 19th-century painting and pictorial print media, the Mörrum plate is fancifully distorted. Each one of the views, taken separately, exposes a monochrome graphic version of ordered space, where the far landscape at the bottom is smaller and the river at the top regresses into the depth of the scene. These age-old techniques of illusion are coupled with, and hence suspended by, the way the views flow into each other and the framing arrangement's extension into the picture by a word that ends with a pictorial letter. These features provoke awareness of media and of preceding acts of artistry, artificiality and manipulation. Additionally, in the fisherman scene, both scale and spatiality are confused. The men are over-sized compared to the bystanders below, who are better fitted into their environment. Following the stick of the landing-net, its front-and-back scheme is slightly peculiar. It projects from behind the fisherman's leg, continues through, both behind and in front of, the last "M", then

behind the "U", and ends with the "R" being draped by the net bag. This way, the plate directs attention to its transgression of the pictorial conventions it simultaneously exposes. Because the plate foregrounds the artistry, artificiality and manipulation of representation, it can be argued that the represented views in the picture fall out of focus, while representational conventions and means of depiction take centre stage.[13]

Against this backdrop of a play with conventions of representation, the pictorial letter cannot but expose itself as a fusion of two medialities, two medial means of representation, rather than merely representing a part of a proper name or a thing in the iconic field. This involves a tension between the pictorial letter and the well-known comparative, separatist and supplemental image and text paradigms (see below). The fusion of the pictorial letter is seamless, continuous, uninterrupted—or exposing integration far beyond combinations such as picture and caption or picture and inscription (such as the framed words in fig. 2). Of course, the paradox of the pictorial letter is that any identification of a fusion depends on having a previous idea of exactly what the fusion postpones: media difference. For these reasons, the pictorial letter is a remarkable figure in the history of iconotextuality. It refutes the *comparative* model encapsulated in Horace's simile *ut pictura poesis*, which throughout the Renaissance until the end of the 18th century was evoked to justify a common goal for the arts, poetry and painting, in the ideal imitation of human nature and actions in shared subjects (i.e. stories).[14] At the same time, the pictorial letter also eschews Lessing's *separation*, which distinguishes the visual arts of space from the literary arts of time along with their "natural" and "arbitrary" signs.[15] In 19th-century discussions on aesthetics, Lessing was more frequently evoked in theory, while the older comparative model was treated as a matter of history. The longevity of both models is nevertheless attested to by the fact that they are standardly addressed, both theoretically and historically, in any modern textbook on topics such as, for example, ekphrasis.[16] Finally, in a narrower perspective, the 19th century had its preferred image and text relation in *illustration*. Critics and publishers alike celebrated the "new" communicative means of juxtaposing pictures with printed text, both in

13. Cf. Karin Kukkonen's study of metalepsis in 20th-century comics in Kukkonen 2011.

14. Horatius [Horace] 1992, line 361. One classic text on the *ut pictura poesis* doctrine is Lee 1940.

15. Lessing 2005.

16. E.g. Kennedy & Meek 2019, pp. 5–6, 9.

treatises on "the art of illustration" and in journals such as *Ny illustrerad tidning*.[17] But, like the other models, "illustration" does not correspond to the fusion of the pictorial letter: the illustration, although argued to surpass or complement writing, was still destined to work in the service of a preceding word, as the *supplement* without which the word could not be sufficiently illuminated.[18]

The pictorial letter's refusal to adhere to these models makes me understand it as significant in two regards. First, it offers itself as a starting point for a history of iconotextuality that relies less on the treatises that form the bulk of theory, the authoritative paradigms that speak on its behalf, and more on actual iconotextual manifestations. Second, it offers itself as a figure with which to think when further examining *Views from Mörrum*.

Images of motion in description and depiction

As most pictures in the 19th-century illustrated press, *Views from Mörrum* is juxtaposed to an article. Aimed at an urban middle class, the article introduces its topic, the country town of Mörrum, by mentioning the ongoing establishment of railways and their benefit for tourists travelling in the countryside. In editorial voice, the plate is addressed simply as an illustration of the article's content, or more precisely, as a depiction of the actual sites that are described in the text. What is of greater importance is that the first paragraph of the article, by textual means, describes a verbal image or a virtual scene of changing landscape views as seen through the window of a train compartment in motion. Words that relate to vision, such as "the sight of", "the sights expanding themselves" and "little variety for the eye", alternate with descriptions of the shifting sites (that are also sights): "barely inviting forests and swamps" that change to "streaming waterfalls" and "verdant banks".[19]

This virtual image, generated out of description, has no privileged position towards the plate in the sense that it would be destined to inform the plate. Both the virtual image and the pictorial plate could be brought to bear on the other in repeatable and invertible acts of meaning-making. Therefore, they reinforce each other.

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17. E.g. Blackburn 1896, esp. pp. 15–39; Anonymous 1889.
18. Cf. 'Supplement' in Derrida 1997, pp. 141–164.
19. "[Å]synen af", "vidga sig utsigterna", "för ögat föga omvexling"; "föga inbjudande skogs- och myrmarker", "skummande forsar", "grönskande stränder". Anonymous 1876, p. 73.

The virtual image, suggesting a real-world scene of visual sense impressions, has a *mise en abîme* character in that the window of the train compartment constitutes a frame, as well as a "screen" for the unfolding sites that are described as sights. The frame makes the passing landscape appear as a moving image within the image of the compartment scene (nested in description accessible through writing). This virtual image-in-image structure is reinforced by being "framed" by many analogous plates in *Ny illustrerad tidning* as well as by the practice of displaying paintings.[20] In general, the frame is that which marks the painting as an object of attention. It constitutes a border(zone) to the environment. In the Mörrum plate, the frame marks the flow of views as an object of visual interest, as something worth looking into, both in the sense of repeating the act of one of the bystanders and of something to explore. The frame invites viewing and examination. This analogy with a framed painting should not be taken too literally, however. Even though the frame importantly emphasizes the image character of that which it frames, it does not necessarily make it appear as a *picture*. In the case of *Views from Mörrum*, the frame is *part* of the picture, although outside the space of the views (cf. also fig. 2). The views are not presented as pictures in the same way as in figure 4, *Pictures from Norway*, which depicts (in drawing reproduced through xylography or wood engraving) a montage of what appear to be five photographs pinned-up on top of each other, with curly edges, faint shadows and foliage to produce illusionistic effects. The first-order picture (i.e. the whole montage) has no depicted frame comparable to the white margin of the second-order middle picture, but appears as a picture (of pictures) by virtue of being "framed" by the cultural and communicational conventions that make it recognizable as such,[21] including its declarative and genre-typical caption as well as the more fundamental familiarity with pictures as representational objects. The framed views of the Mörrum plate are more reminiscent of how figure 2, *Spring Images*, depicts three "living" *tableaux* that are decidedly theatrical: the middle scene looks as if its figures were actors on stage in front of painted scenery. Such framed scenes, views and pictures in the plates of *Ny illustrerad tidning* heighten the image modality of the

20. I will use frame without quotation marks when denoting a concrete, physical frame in analogy with painting and "frame" with quotation marks when denoting "framing" or the concept that grew out of a critique of context in the 1980s and 1990s. About the latter, see Bal 2002, pp. 133–193. See also "framing" in Dan Karlholm's chapter in this volume.

21. Cf. "Immaterial frame" in Nöth 2007, pp. 69–70.

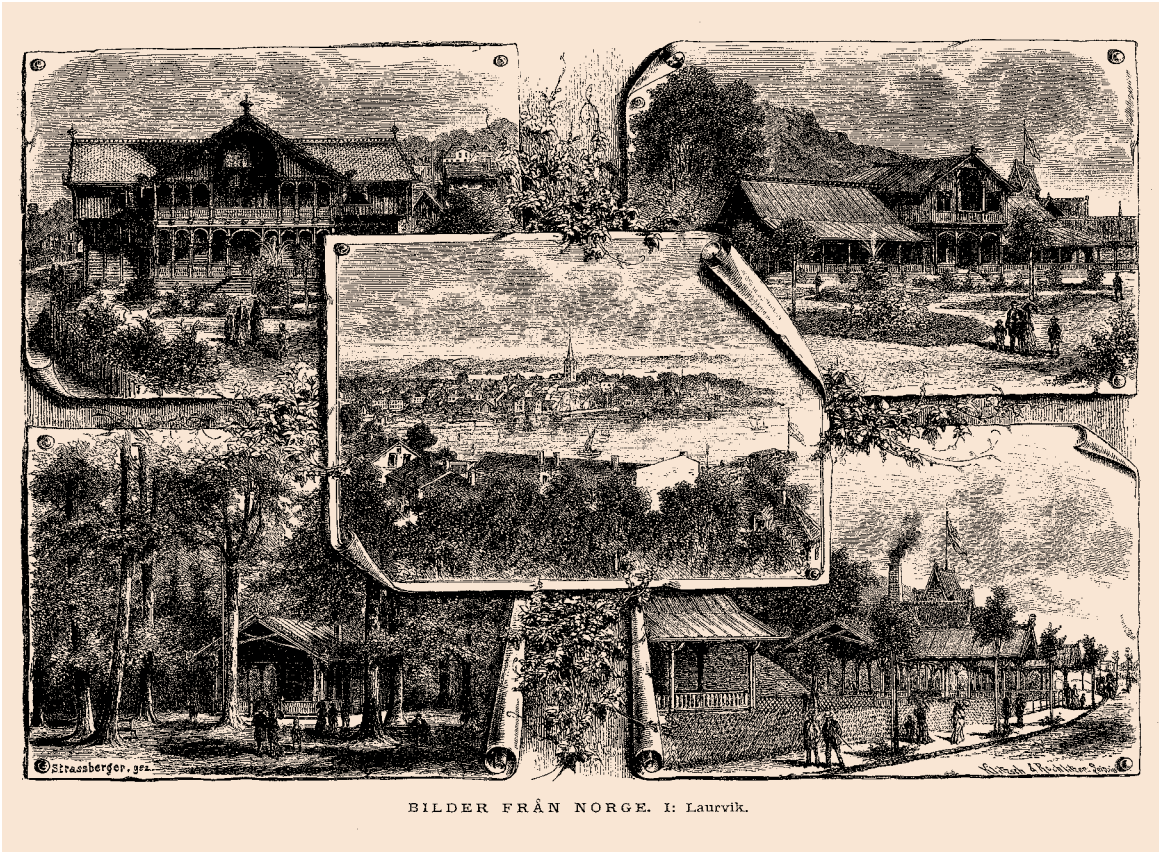

Figure 4. *Pictures from Norway.* Xylographic print in *Ny illustrerad tidning* 17, 1882, p. 156. Dimensions: 15.1 × 23 cm.

real-world experience described in the article and impart on it the status of something worth looking into.

The virtual image of the article and the *Views from Mörrum* are both *about* motion, although the one is generated out of writing and the other is generated out of the fixed print on the page. More precisely, even if both picture and description are the objects of reading and viewing acts, i.e. at once perceptual and cognitive operations that unfold in, and are affected by, space and time, their sign vehicles are fixed. The inner "film" generated out of words in writing is immaterial, unlike the film that is projected in a cinema (to use a later media concept as metaphor), and the continuous flow of the depicted views are still. Nonetheless, the plate *evokes* or *conjures up* the modality of motion: partly through the whole layout, partly through indicating different directions—the flow of water downwards, the road beneath the houses running horizontally out of view to the right—and partly through the transitional areas in between

the views, where the water turns to sky in the top view and the stream turns to sky in the middle view. Above, these areas have been designated by words such as "flow" and "continuous", or abstract motion concepts (that are further supported by the layout, etc.). These in-between areas differ from the views that are tied to their referents by, and termed after, figurative depiction. The transitional areas in between the views are abstract; they reside outside depiction. They are built up of parallel and horizontal xylographic lines and strokes, which constitute the reversed print from an engraved wood block (that likely had a drawing transferred to it photographically). It is impossible to say exactly which one of the parallel horizontal lines and strokes that signifies water, and which one signifies sky. Therefore, these *are* areas of transition, gradual shift and uncertainty at the same time as they *refer* to the ideas of transition, etc. (for more on the interplay between abstraction and figuration, see Margaretha Thomson's chapter in this volume).

The relations between the images in the description of the article and the depiction of the plate, the motion concepts they give rise to and the analytical figure of iconotextuality that encourages the comparison are mutually meaning generative and built into the way pictures act and are interacted with. I believe this to be an accurate but *reductive* description of the process of pictorial knowledge production. The way from elements on the page via referents in depiction and description to motion concepts ("flow", "continuous") is no straightforward exchange between pictorial elements and linguistic language. To make sense of motion concepts in the first place, the interrelations between writing, pictorial elements and their referents must be understood as embedded in and mediated by *experience* in two senses of the term. The first sense, concerning *bodily experience*, is informed by Mark Johnson's philosophy of embodied meaning (see also Lena Liepe's phenomenologically informed analysis of architectural space in this volume).[22] Depiction and description of motion (with or without the use of explicit expressions) are shaped by the bodily experience of moving in the world as well as by experiencing the natural–cultural environment in motion. The reason why back-and-front, distorted scale, etc., are meaningful as such is their embeddedness *both* in representational conventions (cf. the preceding section) *and* in the bodily

22. Johnson emphasizes the primordial role of the bodily experience and acquired "image schemas". For my purposes, it suffices to understand them as co-dependent on representational conventions. Cf. Johnson 2007, pp. 113–154; 2018, pp. 18–19, 46–47, 218–219.

experience "stored" in internal, sensorimotorically acquired "image schemas" of scale, verticality, motion, etc. Such internal and experience-based schemas guide one's interaction with the world and unconsciously shape one's understanding of scale, motion, etc., in depiction and description. In the second sense of the term, plates such as *Views from Mörrum* are embedded in the intersubjective *historical experience* of an addressee that cannot but relate the representational conventions, modalities and media channels of the plates to the larger culture they are part of, including aesthetic, epistemic and communicational standards and deviations as manifested in concrete pictorial form. Any "translation" from image to text runs through embodied and historical experience.

Iconotextual imagery through the magic lantern

The "flow" of views depicted in the Mörrum plate and described in its article are, from the perspective of the historical experience of the surrounding image culture, closely related to the media practice of the magic lantern. As the Kasper "T" acts through the pictorial "M", the magic lantern acts through the fixed "flow" of the depiction and the virtual flow of the description, in ways that tie together different pictorial media, metaphoric language and the modality of sequence.

The magic lantern was a 17th-century invention that had its heyday in the 19th century. It was basically a lamp with a system of lenses and mirrors for picture projection. Printed or painted slides on a transparent support (usually glass) were inserted in the lantern, lit from behind, and projected on a screen (usually a linen cloth). Magic lantern shows were operated by one or two lanternists and accompanied by speech and sometimes music. Besides the early 20th-century scholarly use of the lantern (e.g. for art-historical lectures), the lantern practice that is perhaps best remembered today is the post-revolutionary phantasmagorias associated with Étienne-Gaspard Robert's projections of spectres and demons with startling light and smoke effects and lanterns on wheels to create the illusion of movement.[23] But this should not obscure the fact that magic lantern shows, staged by travelling lanternists as well as by societies for education or the entertainment industry, were a regular part of the broader 19th-century image culture, in addition to the use of magic

23. Warner 2006, pp. 146–156. The standard text on the magic lantern as one of several pre-film technologies is Mannoni 2000. More recent scholarship on the magic lantern has turned away from the pre-film perspective, e.g. Dellmann & Kessler 2020; Jolly & deCourcy 2020.

lanterns in homes. As in the illustrated press, an extensive part of the international as well as Swedish lantern imagery consisted of landscape views.

Shared imagery is important as one of several interconnections between the magic lantern and the illustrated press, but not the chief reason to bring the magic lantern into this study. Rather, the claim here is that the fixed and virtual "flow" of views described in the previous sections mediates the magic lantern practice and its actual sequences of pictures. Given previous familiarity with the image culture that included both the illustrated press and the magic lantern, the fixed and virtual "flow" of views had the potential of *evoking* the magic lantern as a media type, characterized by certain modes and modalities of representation, and as a widely used media metaphor.

As a media metaphor, "magic lantern" was nested in both journalistic and literary prose to denote the flow of images in the human mind. This wide-spread metaphoric usage included two main characteristics: the idea of a sequential flow of shifting images and the location of these to the memory or the imagination (via sense impressions), as can be noted in the following examples from 19th-century Swedish literature: "the most comic shapes now filed through the magic lantern of her imagination" or "[d]ifferent were the images, that the mother pulled from the magic lantern of her memory".[24] In relation to the Mörrum plate and its article, it is also noteworthy that the magic lantern was especially evoked in the context of travelling: "Who does not otherwise long to travel and to let, as in a magic lantern, new scenes alternate as quickly as the fancy of the moment."[25] In these examples, the magic lantern is used as an image for the images of the mind, or, in other words, abstract mental processes are substituted for the *sequential* picture projections of the magic lantern. As the fixed "flow" of the Mörrum plate and the inner "film" of the article were likely to convey the media concept "magic lantern", the latter's metaphorical usage directs attention to the unfolding images of the mind, like the sites described as sights.

One of the characteristic features of the magic lantern as a media practice was its *sequentiality*. If no special effects were used, its pictures

24. "[D]e mest komiska skepnader nu defilerade genom hennes inbillnings laterna magica", Gyllenhaal 1883, pp. 182–183; "[O]lika voro de bilder, som modren drog fram af sitt minnes laterna magica", Cronholm 1852–1854, p. 115.

25. "Hvem längtar ej annars att resa och att låta, liksom i en laterna magica, nya scener vexla snabbt som stundens infall." Carlén 1861, p. 196.

were projected one *after* the other, which means that the first picture disappeared when the next appeared. In the illustrated press, the plates are materially present (as long as one does not turn the page)—which does not mean that they are non-sequential. The point of understanding the lantern practice as acting through the *Views from Mörrum* plate is that its actual sequentiality, which was enacted in practice and underlined by metaphoric usage, directs attention to other kinds of sequentiality in the Mörrum plate and other pictures of its kind in the 19th-century illustrated press. In general, pictorial sequentiality can be described as without order and without determined beginning or end (in the latter sense, it resembles Margaretha Thomson's concept of presence in this volume). It could be argued that one is inclined to "read" the Mörrum plate from the top down, following the direction of the water, but many other routes are possible. The bystander looking in over the bottom panorama invites another entrance. Without order, the plate's sequential character is reminiscent of how Gottfried Boehm describes image perception as a "taking apart" of elements while "taking part" or attending to the relations between the elements as well as to the totality. Image perception thus includes engaging *both* in "a visual sequence that never comes to rest" (in following the elements one by one) *and* in the duration of "taking part" (in attending to that which is at hand).[26] The following of the views one by one is the succession, the sequence that is heightened by analogy with the lantern but still contains the possibility of resting in each one of them. In the more particular case of the 19th-century illustrated press, the pictorial sequence was also a newly established convention, including sequences suggested by numbering parts of pictures, by assembling several pictures on one page, by arranging pictures in captioned rows, inviting the order of reading, and by the "montages" exemplified by figures 1 and 2.

It should be emphasized that such pictorial sequences in the 19th-century illustrated press are rarely held together by a story. They do not commonly represent a chain of unfolding actions and events, which is also true about their juxtaposed texts. The articles in the journals and the captions (to plates as well as to lantern slides) were descriptive rather than narrative. Therefore, these pictorial sequences fall outside Jacques Rancière's "representational regime of art", which refers to imagery that is conditioned by the logic of a story or, differently put, by a specific sort

26. Boehm 2019, esp. pp. 25, 30.

of relation to a text. The latter had the function of a "conceptual linking of actions", whereas the image functioned as "the supplement of presence that imparted flesh and substance" to the story.[27] Rather, the pictorial sequences in the 19th-century illustrated press were entangled in other types of relations to texts, which are better characterized in terms of juxtaposition and varying fusions of difference. The first, juxtaposition, is in the sense that articles (but not captions) seldom target the picture in an explicit or elaborated way. If the pictures are mentioned, it is once or twice in passing, as a deictic gesture to the picture as a stand-in for the real thing (as the actual sites at Mörrum). The second, varying fusions of difference, is in the sense that metaphors and virtual images are nested in language: language extends into pictures when brought to bear on them (as well as the other way around), and language is generated out of pictures (as the *Views from Mörrum* generate motion concepts).

Lastly, the magic lantern as a media practice offers yet another motion concept that targets the plate's transition between the different views: namely the so-called *dissolving view*. It has often been remarked that this concept, like many other specialized media concepts, such as diorama or chromatrope,[28] are essentially unstable as the terms were applied to a whole range of different practices and techniques.[29] What matters here, however, is that the dissolving view of the lantern is tied to the Mörrum plate by resemblance, whether or not addressed by the term. In other words, the *fixed* "flow" in *Views from Mörrum* had, by similarity, the potential of recalling the image of the *actual* flow of the dissolving view. The dissolving view (often referred to in Swedish 19th-century texts by the English term) was a visual effect, including the play of light and movement, where a first image was gradually transitioned into another.[30] The effect was achieved either by using two lanterns projected on the same spot or by using "biunial" or even "triunial" lanterns (lanterns with two or three lenses). In both cases, the trick was to slowly diminish the first image by stopping down light while lighting up

27. Rancière 2007, p. 46.

28. With "specialized media concept" I mean something like the hierarchical categories of information specialists, in the sense that, e.g. "picture" covers a broader field than "xylographic print", which is a particular type of picture. Cf. Gartner 2016.

29. Potter 2018, p. 72.

30. Even though the gradual transition of the dissolving view involves movement, it should not be confused with the moving images of chromatropes and other mechanically moving discs or slides (with figures that make funny faces or animals that move their heads up and down) displayed via the magic lantern.

the second, sometimes with the assistance of special instruments, such as hand-operated shutters. The result was an actual transition from, for example, the Colosseum or St Paul's Cathedral in daylight to moonlight. Figures 5 and 6 show two lantern slides displaying the same view of a ruin in daylight and moonlight, with only minor differences—the small persons in the foreground are in daylight a seated man drawing, and in moonlight two standing men looking and pointing at the site. Most dissolving views shifted from day to night or from season to season, but some had more advanced transitions, such as a set of slides showing the eruption of Vesuvius in four steps.[31] These transitions from day to night, from season to season, or from a quiescent to an erupting volcano, are counterparts to the Mörrum plate's metaphorical "dissolve" from water to sky. The difference between the dissolving view of the magic lantern and *Views from Mörrum* is that in the former, the site is more or less the same, while the light conditions change with an altering of the representation from day to night. In the latter, the first picture changes into a completely new landscape, from the river to the silhouette of houses or from the waterfall to the panorama. Still, it is striking that the row of houses is darkened as the sun sets (or rises) below a clouded sky, with the effect that the river scene above "dissolves" into dark.

Figure 5. *A Ruin in Daylight*. Wood-framed glass slide for magic lantern display. Dimensions: 12.5 × 20.3 cm, diameter 10 cm.

Figure 6. *A Ruin in Moonlight*. Wood-framed glass slide for magic lantern display. Dimensions: 12.5 × 20.3 cm, diameter 10 cm.

Pictorial knowledge

"Pictorial" is a casual choice of term, intended to indicate that my study is based on what is conventionally delineated as a picture and that everything else brought into it is determined by the chief example of the *Views from Mörrum* plate. In less casual terms, pictorial knowledge is iconotextual knowledge and the chief example is an iconotext. The point of determining "knowledge" by "pictorial" is to emphasize that pictorial knowledge is derived from the picture. Thereby, this study begs the question of the limits of the picture: What is inside the actual plate on the page? What is outside the plate but still in its material adjacency? What is outside the plate as a material entity but still belonging to it in the senses of being either evoked by or generated out of features in it? And most importantly, how are these ontologically different entities held together? One way of dealing with the limits of the picture is by paying close attention to the historical object of study. In the specific case

31. All examples of dissolving views are taken from the sales catalogue Hasselblad *et al.* 1896, pp. 254–256.

of the 19th-century illustrated press, juxtaposed captions and articles belong to the plates both by intentions of production and expectations of consumption. By the same reasoning, evocations have been addressed as a product of historical contiguity in the late 19th-century image culture, exemplified by, for instance, the Mörrum plate's potential of evoking the media practice of the magic lantern on the basis of mediating the latter's imagery and modality (which also means that the magic lantern practice, from the point of view of the historical experience of the addressee, is understood as preceding the plate). Another way of dealing with the limits of the picture is the assumption that perception and cognition necessarily involve iconotextuality and multimodality. Not even "purely" iconic or trace-like elements (such as the horizontal lines and strokes between the views) can escape the ongoing evocation and generation of preceding and forthcoming words, images and modalities, because these different forms of knowledge are already *in* experience—embodied and historical. Further, by "pictorial knowledge" I intend both a *process* of knowledge production and a *result* generated out of the picture (the latter indicated by the noun form "knowledge"). Another way of putting this is that the result is *derived* from the picture, but *dependent* on the picture's capacity of acting upon historical circumstances in the past as well as on methodological procedures and theoretical premises in the present.

One of the afterthoughts of this study is that the concept of iconotextuality needs to be further specified. First, it is necessary to point out that iconotextual relations between elements in the picture, the entities to which they refer and the response they produce cannot be reduced to relations between the abstract media concepts of image (or iconic dimensions of images) and text. Both image and text, whether thought of as (arch) media or sign repertoires, are realized in particular media technologies, materialities and channels which are always operative in relation to embodied and historical experience. It is necessary to remember that as abstract media concepts, "image" and "text" do not specify the materiality nor the concrete operative character of the interface, the contact zone of the addressee. Iconotextuality should therefore be thought of in relation to a *third parameter*: its realization in the particular materiality and mediality of the object (or of elements in the object). Second, the concept includes a *range of different relations* between image and text in their specific medial and material realizations. The *fusion* of the pictorial letter, where both pictorial and textual sign vehicles are

present, differs from the *nested* character of the virtual image in the article, accessible only through description and writing, but still with a fusion-like, imperceptible passage from writing to image. Both cases differ from the *juxtaposed* relation between the article and the plate and from how the fixed "flow" of the views *generate*, rather than evoke, motion concepts. The distinction between evoked and generated words, images, etc., may be slight but important. It consists in the contrast between recognizing, for instance, the media practice of the dissolving view in the plate on the basis of some of its actual features and a more wide-reaching generation of "new" knowledge entities that could not be born without the plate but surpass any of its single features.

These image and text relations are, in their turn, embedded in simultaneously active but more fundamental relations between the picture (or elements in the picture) and the world as it is known. Traditionally, pictorial meaning is conceived of as the product of *similarity*, or a vast category that equally includes the straightforward case of a view in relation to its referent in the world and the relation that holds the graphic flow of views and the virtual image of the article together. On almost the same overarching level, one could add *historical contiguity as the force of evocation*, as the link, for instance, between the graphic and virtual "flow" and between the graphic "flow" and the magic lantern as a metaphor and a media practice. Historical contiguity includes both the mediation of something absent and material adjacency, as long as the linkage is meaningful within the same historical space. One can also add *embodied experience* as actively involved in understanding fixed expressions of motion in relation to the modality of motion, while the historical experience links together expressions of motion in the illustrated press with counterparts—fixed, sequential, dissolving—in the broader image culture. The most important point, however, is that all these interrelations are stimulated by actual features in the picture and working more or less simultaneously. Together, they produce pictorial knowledge.

Moreover, pictorial knowledge is generated out of the *non-unidirectional* and *processual* character of both the picture itself and of perception and cognition, which has implications for the well-established idea that the medium disappears once its content appears. This idea would amount to, for instance, a suspension of the graphic "flow" of views the moment the dissolving views of the magic lantern are called to mind. Notably, Sybille Krämer places the idea of a withdrawal of media to make

the message appear at the centre of her media philosophy but makes an important exemption for the arts.[32] It is easy to agree; arts and cultural artefacts are intended and expected to act by virtue of their forms and materiality. Another reason why I think the idea of a withdrawal of media to make the message appear is misleading in the case of pictorial knowledge is that pictorial perception and cognition never rests in one place. Returning to the transitory areas of *Views from Mörrum*, even if one is, for the moment, immersed in understanding the lines and strokes on the page as "transitory areas" and even if one is, for the moment, forgetful of their ink-on-paper and line-and-stroke appearance, this momentary understanding is still preceded and followed by attention to material, modal and medial qualities as well as attention to other elements in the picture that may (or may not) support the perception and cognition of the line-and-stroke areas as "transitory" (or "uncertain" or "dissolving"). I would rather describe this perceptual and cognitive act as an ongoing oscillation between, on the one hand, the abstract concept of "transition" and its pictorial realization in ink, lines and strokes, and, on the other hand, between the first oscillation and its preceding and forthcoming counterparts. Such shifts between simultaneously successive and rest-inviting elements in the picture, the entities to which they relate and the responses to which they give rise, are also the reason why it is fundamentally beyond the point to speak of either logocentric or iconocentric origins of pictorial knowledge production. The texts juxtaposed to the plate in my example do not determine the understanding of the picture per se (or the other way around) but they are, in a continuous process of embodied, past *and* present experience, alternately brought to bear on each other. The virtual image of the article heightens the fixed "flow" of the plate whereas the framing devices of the plate and its neighbouring pictures heightens the image-in-image character of the virtual image. In the ongoing process of pictorial knowledge production, changes in meaning—slight or radical—occur at each stage.

In this section, I have addressed the concept of pictorial knowledge and its experiential base, including issues about the limits of the picture, the third parameter of iconotextuality and the processual character of picture perception and cognition. These issues are derived from and developed against my chief example, *Views from Mörrum*, but are of an inclusive character in the sense that they could be brought to and fur-

32. Krämer 2015, pp. 31, 35, 59, 60, 84, 172–173.

ther informed by many other pictures from different times and places. Obviously, none of my examples are traditionally included among the visual arts, even though it is true that the illustrations in the 19th-century illustrated press were connected to the visual arts of the period as sometimes designed by contemporary artists (e.g. Carl Larsson, Jenny Nyström, Thyra Kleen), sometimes reproducing past and present famous works of art and, as has been noted above, building on pictorial conventions from the history of art. For my argument here, it is of minor importance whether one, as I do, understands these pictures as exponents of the broader 19th-century image culture or if one instead wishes to further explore their interconnections to the visual arts. The crucial issue is that the basic idea of pictorial knowledge as iconotextual knowledge could be brought to and reshaped by non-art as well as art pictures. The chief importance of my examples is that they make explicit and develop the issue of iconotextual knowledge.

On another level, the particular issues of the Mörrum plate have bearing beyond the latter's location in 19th-century image culture. What additionally makes the Mörrum example worthy of attention today is that it offers renewed and refined knowledge about the border zones and transgressions of pictoriality itself. Here I would like to recall the seamless manifestation of the pictorial letter that opposes received models of image and text relations; the play with the illusion of pictorial space by the juxtaposition of the separate views, the curious text and the framing device; the juxtaposition of graphic and virtual images that evoke the moving images of the magic lantern; the play with fixed "flow" as if to push the limits of the picture to show movement; the ongoing mediation of other media in addition to the pictorial representation of the journalistic topic of a Swedish country site. *Views from Mörrum* belongs to a type of picture in the 19th-century illustrated press that generates reflections on media, mediality and representation. Such self-reflexivity is a phenomenon too often narrowly tied to postmodern art and culture, albeit with occasional gestures towards isolated predecessors such as, e.g. Laurence Sterne's novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–1767) and Diego Velázquez's 1656 painting *Las Meninas*. Apart from being an antidote to that kind of short-sightedness, *Views from Mörrum* and its fellow illustrations are pictures with which to think, in the past and the present tense.

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The unknowable truth in art, or What has love got to do with it?

> How can we know an image if the image is the very thing [...] that imperils—through its power to take hold of us, which is to say its *call to imagine*—the positive or "objective" exercise of knowledge? If the image is what makes us imagine, and if the (sensible) imagination is an obstacle to (intelligible) knowledge, how then can one *know an image*?[1]

Art and knowledge

LET ME BEGIN by spatializing my dilemma. Starting this article, I feel squeezed between the prospect of two mountains, indeed enormous mountain ranges, stretching into a world landscape, towards a shifting and receding horizon. We know them as Art, on the one side, and Knowledge, on the other. Our task now, if I have understood our brief correctly, is to reflect upon the relationship between them.[2]

The relationship between these metaphorical mountains is of course asymmetrical, however much the two may tower above us in equally awe-inspiring measures, and however far they both seem to extend into the present conception of what we call the past. The question before us is not, I take it, to establish whether connections or associations between them are possible, whether we can establish a bridge between them, but, instead, how the one can be said to be grounded, covered or defined by the other.

Is art, in other words, possible to know? What knowledge could we bestow upon art? What would it entail to *know art*? What can we never know about what we call art? We can obviously know a thousand and one

1. Didi-Huberman 2005, pp. xvi–xvii.
2. I borrow the term "brief" from the chapter on a historical bridge in Baxandall 1985, pp. 12–40.

Figure 1. Twin peaks near Eklutna Lake, Alaska, United States, 2008.

things about it, but *knowing it*, period?[3] The task may seem insurmountable, but perhaps we must just differentiate between different forms of knowing. Addressing the "unknowability of the art object", Karen Lang reminds us that "art history trades in aesthetic objects, objects for which the truth claims of any interpretation nestle around a still point of uncertainty".[4] We *might* know something of importance here, we are just not sure. In contrast to Lang's estimation, Georges Didi-Huberman laments that the discipline of art history is characterized by a Kantian "tone of certainty", related to reason and an insatiable quest for knowledge, for which he chiefly blames Erwin Panofsky.[5]

One reason why these two mountains appear so intimidating is that they are both of our own making. They look like mountains and appear to be natural, but they are cultural through and through, which means

3. An analogous interest would be whether what we call knowledge is possible without art, where the latter must be understood in its antique sense of doing something skillfully, like practising the art of reasoning or of drawing conclusions. This, however, I will leave out of the present discussion.

4. Lang 2006, pp. 196–197.

5. Didi-Huberman 2005, pp. 1–9.

that we are looking at them and into ourselves at the same time. We have made them both up, in the sense of naming and categorizing them as part of our human universe, but for a long time we have also tried hard to mark distance to them, as if they were mere elements of the external world we are trying to navigate and understand.[6] The twin peaks of Art and Knowledge have been so thoroughly naturalized for so long that it appears futile to even begin localizing their origins.

Art and chaos

In his musings on what was at the time taken to be the first expressions of human "art" making, following the recent discovery of the Lascaux Cave, Georges Bataille wrote that

> [a]t the very heart of existence, we find a kind of chaos, a gaping void perhaps, which conceals a chaotic delirium. At the heart of existence, we find art, and we find poetry, and we find a multitude of religions. Yet no one knows what art is. Or poetry, for that matter. No one, in the end, knows what religion is.[7]

Art is at the heart of existence, along with chaos, allegedly. Or perhaps more accurately: *preceded* by chaos, in which case cave art becomes a kind of cosmic force, a means to handle, manage or just express the most archaic conditions of our existence. But the same might be valid also for the other term, the mountain, invoked here by Bataille, of knowledge. Might it not be said that not-knowledge or ignorance is at the heart of existence as well? That art and knowledge are complementary ways to come to terms with our primordial sense of chaos, however hard it would be to know how this would be achieved? Bataille claims that we—unclear whether humans, as such, or just his modern contemporaries—do not know what art, poetry or religion is. But this he knows. I know that I do not know, and I claim to know that no one knows what these phenomena are, he says. The rock bottom of this knowledge is evidently *not-knowledge*.

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6. This refers to a post-Kantian period, since for him Knowledge was both exterior and interior to the subject, marking fundamentally what we could ever hope to say truthfully about aesthetic objects such as art.

7. Bataille 2005, p. 121.

Art and life

Long before we could have even addressed our existence as humans, we might inquire into the development of life as such, which reveals a deeper kind of chaos, our essence, perhaps, including "the whirling, unpredictable movement of forces, vibratory oscillations that constitute the universe", which may not only be understood as disorder, but, rather, as "a plethora of orders, forms, wills", in the words of Elizabeth Grosz.[8] In such remote beginnings, she continues, "life can only exist and perpetuate itself to the extent that it can extract from the whirling and experientially overwhelming chaos that is nature, materiality, and their immanent forces those elements, substances, or processes it requires [...]" Now if this process can be (scientifically) known, why not also the process by which artworks in their universe of art are adapted to their shifting circumstances, how they take from their environment what they require to function and work as artwork? Linking art with the above-mentioned forces, Gilles Deleuze underlines that "[i]n art, as in painting as in music, it is not a matter of reproducing or inventing forms, but of capturing forces."[9] I will return to these questions below, to what we may agree upon regarding what is *required* from an artwork. What it may "want" may not be the question so much as what we feel, think or know it actually does (if it is able to operate according to its brief).[10]

Taking leave of the dimly lit cradle of humankind, invoked here, let us focus on the period where we, in the Western world, actually do know what we mean by art and artworks (roughly from the Renaissance onwards). I will circumvent the ancient and medieval civilizations, as well as those outside the Western world, just to narrow down what the mountain called Art really entails, and, despite numerous revisions of the concept of art, still entails. The mountain of Knowledge, I will take to be of ancient Greek origin (*episteme*), knowing full well that other civilizations have had other concepts and ways to deal with knowledge as well as truth.

8. Grosz 2008, pp. 5–6.

9. Deleuze 2002, p. 56.

10. In his widely referenced book, Mitchell seems to me to over-emphasize intention and volition (the virtual over the actual), if also transferred to the object of art itself. Mitchell 2005.

Art and artworks

For the terms of our discussion, I wish to make clear that I will not speak of art in this context, but of artworks, or works of art—individual cases, that is, of the so-called visual arts. Why? Art is simply too broad a concept to use, forcing us constantly to emphasize that it is only the visual or graphic arts, *Bildkunst*, to which we are referring, not any art, or the arts, or art as such. The fact that the mountain of Art is the mountain of art *as such*, that is, a generic mountain, is one reason it appears so disturbing and frigid to me. The notion of art (or Art) is also much too theoretical for my interests, and despite our custom to speak of "art" as an abbreviation of artworks (as in the phrase "have you seen any good art lately?"), art/Art is notoriously hard to disconnect from the categorical concept of art—a privileged domain of philosophy called aesthetics, invented in the mid-18th century in Europe, based on Roman constructs. This concept ought to be central, one would think, to the discipline of art history, developed in its modern, academic guise in the German-speaking mid-19th century, but it is not.

Whereas Grosz argues that "concepts are by-products or effects rather than the very material of art", this polarization is not correct, however, since, if by art we mean not a removed super-category but an instance of it—one or more *works* of art—it is clear that any such work is a constellation, composition or assemblage, of both a concept of art and a material carrier, support or medium.[11] To speak of "the very material of art" when it comes to a work of visual art is too material or only addressing half of it. Its material part, as Theodor Adorno underlines, is necessarily and immanently in conflict with its non-material art part. An artwork is a thing which constitutively subverts its material thing-character.

Art historians, in general, take the concept of art for granted, as the unarticulated centre of their broad or specific interest in art. Art historians know, as well, that theoretical deliberations on different concepts of art may be safely delegated to the specialized cadre of theoreticians (within or without our discipline). Art historians on average, however, realize that, as Panofsky famously observed, unless "theory is received at the door of an empirical discipline, [it] comes in through the chimney like a ghost and upsets the furniture", to which he adds that a similar requirement must be entrusted to history vis-à-vis a theoretical disci-

11. Grosz 2008, p. 4.

pline unless its groundwork be undermined.[12] Art historians, in general, are empirical scholars; they deal with works of art (in whatever shape or form, age or category), but do not have to bother with the abstract minutiae of concepts of art. They have to tackle the tricky questions of theory and method in processing their "material", however, and must always be prepared to justify their decisions and what they think that they are doing, but they do not have to deal with art.

Art and agency

Speaking of the work of art as *working* may evoke the theoretical discussion within the (post)humanities and social sciences in recent years on the relationship between art and agency. I see no need to rehearse this debate at any length here and, besides, I find it largely misunderstood, both by its advocates and its detractors.[13] Clearly, however, no theoretical special pleading is warranted to argue that artworks (have the capacity to) work, act and demand things from their viewers and interactors.[14] Although artworks cannot be trusted to always and everywhere perform such a function, they do, as part of their current definition of art, have the capacity (one sense of agency) to stir, trigger, evoke, move, unleash, etc., responses among their attentive receivers. Now, whether this is accomplished is of course always a case of a reciprocal transaction, a call-and-response encounter, a "dialogue", metaphorically speaking, or a mutual, two-way communicative kind of engagement. This, at least, is the traditional point of view—relevant to most art historians.

Another, more powerful way to phrase what art is capable of, to follow how Grosz puts it (summarily), is this:

> Art engenders becomings, not imaginative becomings [...] but material becomings, in which [...] imponderable universal forces touch and become enveloped in life, in which life folds over itself to em-

12. Panofsky 1974, p. 22.

13. Many supporters seem satisfied to empirically confirm Latour's simplification —"*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor"— while many critics worry about these relationships being animistic, i.e. too dangerously close to primitive or savage thought. Latour 2007, p. 1. For a critical review on similar issues, cf. Rampley 2021.

14. Just to mention a few recent art-historical sources arguing as much, albeit quite differently: Freedberg 1989; Gell 1998; Mitchell 2005; Hantelmann 2010; van Eck 2015; Bredekamp 2018.

> brace its contact with materiality, in which each exchanges some elements or particles with the other to become more and other.

Adding that art, in this interpretation, is "culture's most intense debt to the chaotic forces it characterizes as nature", it becomes difficult to ascertain what of this, if regarded accurate, can be epistemologically evidenced. Grosz's interest is in ontology, as is mine, but this suspends the whole issue, it seems, of establishing the limits of knowing visual art. What art and philosophy share, according to Grosz, is

> their capacity to enlarge the universe by enabling its potential to be otherwise, to be framed through concepts and affects. They are among the most forceful ways in which culture generates a small space of chaos within chaos where chaos can be *elaborated, felt, thought*.[15]

Yes, but *known*? I do not know.

A central notion, according to this account of art, is "plane of composition", deriving from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and which sounds familiar enough, but is not equal to just any composition of the image, screen or canvas:

> The plane of composition is the field, the plane of all artworks, all genres, all types of art, the totality of all the various forms of artistic production in no particular order of organization, that which is indirectly addressed and transformed through each work of art.[16]

It is as if the work of art was not so much, or really at all, a product of an artist, objectivized by a subject, but itself a kind of autonomous relay, filtering deep cultural forces and affects, from within the chaos of our life existence, which the individual artwork is simultaneously able to transform. "The artwork is a compound of sensations, composed sensations, sensations composed through materials in their particularity."[17]

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15. Grosz 2008, pp. 23–24; italics added.
16. Grosz 2008, p. 70.
17. Grosz 2008, p. 74.

Art and framing

If we leave the grand visions and theories behind for a moment, according to which art(works) are the screens of life, existence, culture, etc., resounding with Freudian themes of forces from the past disrupting the present, let us look at the matter from a more direct and practical angle. One way to do so is through the notion of the frame.[18]

"Framing is the means by which objects are delimited, qualities unleashed and art made possible", which means that if art is to be known, it will first have to be framed or "territorialized", in the vocabulary of Deleuze and Guattari on which Grosz draws.[19] Without a frame, figuratively speaking, a work of art cannot be contained as an object or work, but will overflow its limits, deterritorialize and even re-enter chaos. Such a frame is a crucial but pragmatic feature, since needed, in the last instance, to distinguish art from non-art. Following the drift of Grosz's reasoning, however, it should be mentioned that, in modern art, broadly conceived, the artwork is not just elevated, squeezed between or compartmentalized inside its frame, but may also rework and thus transform its own framing condition, as in so many attempts of avant-garde art or so-called anti-art.[20]

Framing practices encompass everything from literal frames or plinths to titles, descriptions, conservation reports, historiographical representation, exhibition spaces, critical judgements, second-order representation (visual and textual reproduction) and more. All of this can certainly be known, but how to value such a listing of—facts, certainties, information? Let us dig deeper into the depths of an artwork, withholding, for the time being, the consequences of the following point on which we could possibly all agree: that to access a work of art, besides just glancing at it, a personal commitment is needed since "art requires engagement".[21] Such preconditions are of course neither accumulated under any framing device, nor listed among the most definitive scholarly accounts of a single work of art, the entries of a catalogue raisonné. While frames and catalogues approach the work with philosophical and technical rigour, they do so from outside.

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18. The by-now classical locus for this discussion is the interpretation by Derrida of the work and its frame, based on Kant: Derrida 1987, pp. 37–82.
19. Grosz 2008, p. 17.
20. On this theme, cf. Duro 1996.
21. Lang 2006, p. 197.

Art and reasoning catalogues

A catalogue raisonné lists, at least, the following information about the work in question:

> Title and title variations, Dimension/Size, Date of the work, Medium, Current location/owner at time of publication, Provenance (history of ownership), Exhibition history, Condition of the work, Bibliography/Literature that discusses the work, Essay(s) on the artist, Critical assessments and remarks, Full description of the work, Signatures, Inscriptions, and Monograms of the artist, Reproduction of each work, List of works attributed, lost, destroyed, and fakes, Catalog number.[22]

This package of information on a single work of art is clearly essential to scholars determined to investigate the work in question. What goes unsaid here, however, is that these accounts, which presume to be definitive, only exist for artists of a certain commonly acclaimed notoriety or fame. Although these lists are commonly seen as almost too object-oriented and plain, they are fundamentally subject-oriented. The idea of a catalogue raisonné must be something like this: the important artist is important (to art history) on account of having produced a number of important works, also known as masterpieces, wherefore it would be valuable for art history to list *all* of the works of said artist—in one word the *oeuvre*—regardless of the quality of these works, which may be referred to as secondary, lesser, minor or downright inferior.

To give a current example of how a large museum collection is presented online, if not by way of a literal catalogue raisonné, I chose this small painting, *The Tempest* by Peder Balke (currently not on display) from the National Gallery in London.

About this image, with the inventory number NG6614, we learn the following:

> The Norwegian painter Peder Balke's tiny monochromatic paintings on panel are among his most original works. He created them for his own pleasure after a lack of commercial success led him to give up trying to make a living as a professional artist in the 1860s. The fact that he was not aiming to sell them gave him the

22. New York Public Library, "What is a catalogue raisonné".

> freedom to experiment with new techniques and radically simplified compositions.
>
> Here the mighty power of nature is condensed in miniature, with a palette restricted to shades of black and white. Sea and sky are conveyed with deft sweeps of the brush while the boats and seagulls are touched in with strokes of calligraphic delicacy. There is no landmark to indicate a specific place, but the scene was inspired by the turbulent seas off the coast of north Norway, which Balke had experienced at first hand.[23]

What knowledge are we gaining here? The first sentence is an unsupported critical judgement, highlighting the value of comparing an artist's work within the oeuvre (in search of the best, which is here translated into the importance of being original). The second sentence gives insight into his motivations and contains references to commercial transactions. The closing line of the first paragraph draws rather bold conclusions regarding the licence of the artist to "experiment" since he did not intend to sell these panels, which leaves us with a mildly depressing image of the unadventurous taste of the normal buyers or collectors. In the second paragraph, we are directed towards the image itself, which is credited with condensing nature—without the use of colour! Balke's technique is characterized along with an art-critical appreciation of the result. A comparison with calligraphy is presumably intended to speak to the value and quality of the production as well as the product. The next sentence is still as if located somewhere within the painted image, commenting on the scene's relation to land, on the one hand, and to experiences of the artist of rough weather in northern Norway, on the other. It is claimed that the artist was inspired by these dramatic non-art encounters, which serves, it seems, to forge a strong connection between art and reality, thus affirming the value of such connections (some version of realism).

The text on *The Tempest* is short and resembles the didactic exhibition screens in large museums, addressing the public at large. Besides the detailed information of a work in a catalogue raisonné, addressing the specialists, this is like a resumé—maybe caricature—of the discourse of art or art criticism, which eventually ends up as art history. None of this is other than circumstantial, however, since this work of art by Balke is

Figure 2. Peder Balke (1804–1887), *The Tempest*, *c.* 1862, oil on wood panel, 10.3 × 12.2 cm, The National Gallery, London.

23. The National Gallery, "Balke, Peder"; the information on Balke derives from the Provenance Guide (selected museum-based provenance projects) of the IFAR (International Foundation for Art Research, www.ifar.org).

inevitably held hostage to interests exterior to the work, interests other than the truth content of the work, as described by some of the theorists on this subject to whom I will turn in a moment.

Obviously, however, and again, any work of art requires to be *encountered*, met with a response, which is then taken to trigger a concomitant response, somehow, from the work vis-à-vis the respondent, in the famous "hermeneutical circle"—derived from Wilhelm Dilthey via Martin Heidegger before it became associated with Hans-Georg Gadamer. The problems of hermeneutics notwithstanding, regarding, for example, its emphasis on meaning and closure, instead of opening to a notion of the work itself ending up transformed, as I have argued,[24] we still have to acknowledge that it is an encounter we are dealing with, between the work and its viewer, which Graham Harman has described as a unified kind of object, a *compound*.[25] This may all sound self-evident, but we should remind ourselves that the most tired and well-worn cliché about the artwork is that it is an object created by a subject. What I am interested in pursuing further is to depart from this age-old entanglement to forward, instead, an understanding of the object (conventionally put) of the artwork as a kind of subject (unrelated to artists and viewers). Timothy Morton has stressed that "[t]hings are exactly what they are, yet never as they seem, and this means that they are virtually indistinguishable from the beings we call *people*."[26] I think this pertains especially to artworks (which I am not comfortable speaking of as things, or objects, by the way). There is a striking sense, however, in which artworks resemble persons, or more to the point, how we tend to meet and encounter other human beings, but before we approach this theme, we should reflect upon the relationship between art and truth.

Art and truth

In an anthology devoted to subjectivity and methodology in art history, Margaretha Rossholm Lagerlöf writes that "[t]here have been more or less outspoken claims on 'objective' truth in art-historical discourse, to match the status of a research activity, providing knowledge." Her first example is Panofsky and his followers, who have tended to "hide the

24. Karlholm 2016, esp. p. 43. I would now add that Gadamer's equation of *understanding* with "a real fusion of horizons" is a further stumbling block for me, since *fusion* is irreversible and final and could preferably, from my horizon, be substituted with something more temporary like concurrence. Gadamer 1979, p. 273.

25. Harman 2018, pp. 88–89.

26. Morton 2018a, p. 81.

subjective reactions of the scholar in a pseudo-objective language".[27] The problem with this problem for me, now, is that it seems to confirm the very phenomenon it challenges. Unless "subjective reactions" are factored in, any claim to "objective" truth will be false. Pseudo-objectivity is thus the enemy of true objectivity, since for objectivity to prevail, subjectivity must be accounted for. If such a qualified, not to say conflicted, objectivity is the goal—the sibling of knowledge, evidence and truth—the road to reach it seems challenging and devoid of shortcuts. In Didi-Huberman's questioning of Panofsky, presented as a hero for generations of rational art historians, it is not a question of hiding subjective responses but of "exorcizing" certain elements of the works of art themselves, a process characterized by many "safety measures and reasonable distancings", in order for these works to become intelligible to, and representable in, a proper history of art.[28]

Art historians, in general, are seldom comfortable talking about truth in relation to art. Certainly, we can say that we know for a fact that this building was not erected before 1536 or that the pigment applied to that canvas is mostly burnt umber. If this information is accurate and verifiable, the above statements count as true. Truth statements, however, on this or that aspect of an artwork is not what matters when it comes to the overall, not to say binding, relationship between artworks and truth. In art, truth is something different from what truth means outside it, which may sound like relativism but is, on the contrary, a kind of objectivity. This objectivity is very different, however, from the one patterned on the scientific notion of objectivity, that is "approximately something absolutely true, regardless of any contingency", although this is a more complicated affair than we usually think.[29] Anthony J. Cascardi puts the issue in context:

> Artworks speak concretely, addressing themselves to the senses. They are meaningful but they are, in Hegel's terms, forms of "*embodied* meaning". The difficulty with aesthetic theory is that it has sought to assimilate the truth-content of art to the truth of concepts in their more or less conventional forms, which are disembodied and abstract.[30]

27. Rossholm Lagerlöf 2003, p. 10.
28. Didi-Huberman 2005, pp. xv–xxvi.
29. Daston & Gallison 2007.
30. Cascardi 2010, p. 11. The reference to aesthetic theory could easily be replaced by theory-oriented art history.

I will return to what I refer to as an objectivity of the artwork, unrelated, that is, to projected claims of objectivity from the art-historical discourse, and which is neither held in place nor challenged by subjective responses to the work, but is equal, counter-intuitively, to a kind of subjectivity of the work.[31]

Truth is clearly a third mountain, connected to both the other two. Its most obvious connection is arguably to the mountain of Knowledge, which presumes to reveal and speak the truth about something. In the intellectual, Christian history of the West, truth of course has a religious ring, closely connected to, for example, the vision of a saint. Truth is here almost the opposite of a positivist statement of fact—a miraculous insight, an item, ultimately, of belief, something lived and experienced by someone at some crucial moment, but impossible to verify. The only verification available is the determination of the person involved to witness and speak about the event. Ergo: Truth—capital T—hinges on belief, not just religiously speaking, as we shall see.

A further point on truth, outside art, is its relation to data and facts. Following Timothy Morton, a fact is composed of "two things: data, and an *interpretation* of that data". This flies in the face of the popular perception that facts simply exist, in and of themselves. In fact, there is nothing self-evident about facts; they rely on interpretation.[32] Noticing the raindrops falling on the windowsill, we might surmise that it is raining. Looking up, however, we realize that these drops of water derive from the rain machine of a film set. It is, in fact, *not* raining. We misinterpreted the data for rain.

Data are registered, facts are established. The latter is, again, sure to cause anxiety among many of us: as if there was no certainty, no firm ground beneath our feet, and facts were no more stable than the result of our reasoning, interpretation or guesswork. Facts, however, like miraculous truth visions, rely on belief. We have to believe in facts when established (and not sink into the quagmire of fact resistance); we have to believe in them (in general) to make these efforts to establish them (in particular); and we also have to believe in or trust the process whereby this is accomplished. Facts are not readymade, they are made. Again: data are registered, facts are established. Truths, in science, are claimed. Truths, in art, are rather *acknowledged*, meaning, according to

31. A draft of this idea was first summarized in Karlholm 2017.
32. Morton 2018b, p. 19.

one dictionary: "to accept, admit, or recognize something, or the truth or existence of something."[33]

Art and its truth

In his famous essay on 'The origin of the work of art', Heidegger coins a dynamic concept for truth in art, in the sense of concrete artworks. First, he pronounces that in a work of art, "the truth of what is has set itself to work" and that "[i]n setting up a world, the work sets forth the earth".[34] Setting up is virtually a synonym to framing for Heidegger, which seems to match the conditions of the artwork, elaborated by Grosz in a Deleuzian vein, whereby natural or earthly forces are taken to pervade the work. Heidegger's next step is to propose that what is thus taking place or actively happening in the work as such is—truth.

"In the work, the happening of truth is at work. But what is thus at work, is so *in* the work."[35] Although agency is never addressed, the work of art here seems almost alive. Its forward-leaning happening of truth is also aligned with Heidegger's semantic emphasis of the artwork's working, connected to its reality (*Wirklichkeit*), what it *is* essentially, betraying its ontology. Importantly, truth is thus not exterior but interior to the work itself. The contrast is evident in the efforts of the science profession and art industries, derided by the author in the same essay, to try to establish truth statements on various aspects (literally outside-views) of the work. Here, instead, we encounter something truthful or truth-like from within the work itself. Truth is working itself out—not towards a particular person, recipient or public (it is not a relational game)—but as a condition of the very reality or work-being of the artwork. I suppose we could discuss this element as a kind of essence or even spirit, but as long as truth is not contaminated by exterior epistemological desires to nail down or explain traits of the work, truth will do.

The efforts to make the work of art known to us as individual interlocutors (private or professional) as an *object of* (partial or full) *knowledge* hinges on the work's constitutive passivity. We stand here, in front of or inside the work, and are the ones who look and reflect on what we experience in this process—all according to the established understand-

33. Cambridge Dictionary, "acknowledge". It may seem circular to argue that truths in art amount to recognizing something as true, but if we use some other term for this rich noun, such as accuracy or reality, the circularity is evaded.

34. Heidegger 1975, pp. 38, 45.

35. Heidegger 1975, p. 56.

ing, which I argue is fundamentally mistaken. Certainly, we do all these things, thereby collecting material for writing up and presenting our results in various media and situations, but what we fail to be *seeing* (in the sense of understanding) is that the work in question is active. Although impossible to elaborate on here, the latter resonates with how Aby Warburg perceived the theoretical challenges of art history, in contrast to Panofsky's position.[36]

The work of art is not to be seen as *presented* by the artist, curator or pedagogue (whose oral or textual discourse immediately becomes a *re-presentation* of the work), *it presents itself*, like nature.[37] This is a presencing of the real, according to Heidegger, which is, again, related to work in the following way, at least in our Germanic languages:

> The real [*Wirklichkeit*] is the working, the worked [*Wirkende, Gewirkte*]; that which brings hither and brings forth into presencing, and that which has been brought hither and brought forth. Reality [*Wirklichkeit*] means, then, when thought sufficiently broadly: that which, brought forth hither into presencing, lies before; it means the presencing, consummated in itself, of self-bringing-forth.[38]

This is a bit dense but also vital to grasp the *reality* of the work (*verkets verklighet* in Swedish), a term for which Aristotle used the word *energeia*. What Heidegger keeps repeating regarding the bringing forth, etc., is importantly not an exterior activity, again, but part of what the work as work does (or is capable of doing). This energy, so to speak, is no small thing, since what the real also reveals, or, with the philosopher's special term, unconceals, is—truth: "We translate *aletheia* [unconcealment] by the Latin word *veritas* and by our German word *Wahrheit* [truth]."[39]

A different take on truth is Adorno's, at least when he refrains from equating truth with meaning, philosophy or critique (all exterior), and

36. "Panofsky wanted to define the 'meaning' of images, whereas Warburg sought to grasp their very life (*Leben*), their paradoxical 'survival'. Panofsky wanted *to interpret* the contents and the figurative 'themes' beyond what they expressed, whereas Warburg sought *to understand* the 'expressive value' of images beyond what they meant." Didi-Huberman 2017, p. 325.

37. In some of my earlier work I was drenched in theories of representation and discourse, a position with which I no longer identify. I managed to bypass or ignore the presence and presencing of the work of art, which was nevertheless the centre of my scholarly activities. E.g. Karlholm 2003; 2004.

38. Heidegger 1977, p. 160.

39. Heidegger 1977, p. 164.

instead professes that "the knowledge that is art, has truth, but as something incommensurable with art", whereby he, the philosophical theorist, seems to link art as a concept with "discursive knowledge"—incompatible with art on the level of artworks.[40] Furthermore:

> Art is directed toward truth, it is not immediate truth; to this extent truth is its content. By its relation to truth, art is knowledge; art itself knows truth in that truth emerges through it. As knowledge, however, art is neither discursive nor is its truth the reflection of an object.[41]

To say that art is knowledge begs the question of how to know this knowledge of art. We seem trapped in a circle, necessarily discursive, of shifting senses of our most ingrained vocabulary. To say, as I did above, that truths, in art, are *acknowledged*, may seem doubly vague, by pluralizing truth, contra Heidegger and Adorno, and by lamely using the passive term acknowledgment. Given the vibrant activity of the artwork, however, what else can we say and do? Adding our feelings and judgements to this acknowledgement is optional, but the important thing, arguably, is to receive or "get" the artwork's own truth. This truth is not equal to its meaning, which always has to rely on other comparable meanings, and is always established at a critical distance from the work. Truths are immanent and can only be acknowledged. Meanings, however, are known to be made, thus charted and ranked on a spectrum from meaningful to meaningless.

Now whether truth in action can be identified with Bataille's delirium or existential angst; with Grosz's disruptive affective forces that impregnate the work of art from behind and provide for an enframed world of chaos; or whether truth "emerges through" the artwork, according to Adorno; is seen as a happening or reality at work, as with Heidegger; or the artwork, as Margaretha Thomson puts it in the Thematic Introduction to this volume, can be seen "as a resource of life force": all this will in any case bolster my claim that the artwork is an active phenomenon, not something we are merely responding to in order to make sense of, interpret and create knowledge about. Knowledge creation—interesting phrase—is, indeed, creative, and the apex of this creative process is of

40. Adorno 1997, p. 126.
41. Adorno 1997, p. 282.

course Knowledge itself. Art and Truth are equally phantoms of our creation, as already mentioned, which is why they have intrigued us for so long, and why they may appear so hazy to us when we approach them.

The mountains of our mind and imagination—Art, Knowledge and Truth—have become veiled by a fog. When this is lifted from the mountain of Art, however, we see that it is made of nothing but gravel, or rather grains of sand, as the hopelessly abstract mega-concept Art yields to an almost infinite number of individual works of art. The adjacent mountain of Knowledge is also crumbling under its own weight of absolute (that is, non-relational) scientific veracity, virtually impossible to climb. Confirming that "the unity of knowledge" does exist, Didi-Huberman adds that the reason is that "it is nothing other than the unity of the knowing mind".[42] What does remain of the latter mountain after the fog has lifted is knowledge with a lower-case "k": all sorts of important, indeed indispensable, information on, or accounts concerning the artwork. The third mountain, the mountain of Truth, is still so mist-shrouded that it is difficult to pin down what it stands for: a strange combination of factual knowledge, and its many synonyms, on the one side; a belief-based vision, on the other, something that can only be registered and ac*know*ledged rather than known. This is where a link to the phenomenon of love finally presents itself. The issue is to see whether art(works) may be less something to know than to encounter, even possibly to embrace and to love.

Art and love

To accept the idea, presented here, that an artwork may be understood as a kind of subjectivity or unique individuality, is to short-circuit the idea that our approach towards the work should aim at offering an *interpretation* of it in search of its *meaning*—a process which must adhere to the rational scholarly protocol of ascertaining truth statements about an artwork. The analogue between a work and a person creates a new vision of what artworks are and how we could choose to approach them. The possibly strange idea that artworks deserve to be loved is of course not a necessary requirement for associating with artwork in general, but it goes to the heart of the matter (of truth)—in contradistinction to centuries of art reception, criticism and interpretations, unable, per definition, to reach the basis of unassailable knowledge and thus conclude

42. Didi-Huberman 2005, p. 127.

the attempts.[43] Unless you believe in the possibility and desirability of an end to interpretation, one where we may in unison confirm that we have collectively arrived at the final interpretation of the work in question, interpretations will be a never-ending enterprise—a social game. Of greater scholarly importance would be to establish what a work of art is, and what it does. I am aware that this suggestion circles around an idealized work of art, from the point of view of the person involved in the encountering: that is, a chosen one, picked out from a huge crowd of possible candidates. Works perceived as trivial or boring cannot be approached in the same way. We might here return to the now-jaded question of how artworks (not images as such) would want to be approached. My response would be that they would like us to love them, since only such a deep affectivity corresponds adequately to the (serious/ambitious/advanced/masterful, etc.) work itself. Let me now shift emphasis.

Do I love my wife? I know I do. Do I know my wife? I believe so, but the truth is: I do not know. All I know is that I love her dearly. What, again, has this got to do with anything connected to art? My wife can sometimes be a piece of work, as the Americans say, but nothing close to a work of art. She is a living person, a true individual. There is no one like her in the known universe. She is inimitable, unique and one of a kind (the category of human beings). In this she resembles an artwork, which has all these individual yet generic qualities. Each artwork, even if a duplicate or copy, is unique, as well as an autonomous end in itself, akin to a human being.

Another way to make my point is to announce that each genuine or authentic artwork is real and true. We just have to accept as much, whatever else we may feel inclined to say about its sources or qualities. If we apply this to an artwork held in great esteem by us, or, more colloquially, that we really love, we realize that it comes across as equally inimitable, unique and one of a kind. To compare the merits of this work to other works, not to mention ranking them, would be as vulgar as comparing the merits of my wife to other persons that I know, that I know of, have known or just imagine.

There is no such thing as an epistemology of love. Love is not possible to know, nor to judge, compare, rate or safely confirm for all perpetuity. Love is there, or not, and then it may be gone … There is no response

43. Artworks are also "matters of concern" rather than "matters of fact", to use the vocabulary established by Latour 2007, pp. 87–120.

to the question of why you love something or someone, you just do. Approaching artworks with this sentiment is of course, again, only possible if you really feel attached to them, seduced by them or committed to relating intensively to them, which is, after all, often the case when we make efforts to spend time with them and to enquire deeper and deeper into their character.[44] For all other more academic responses, justified, for example, by the presence of an interesting material, or that no one has yet paid any attention to this artwork, accounts of knowledge will do; no personal commitment is required—you just have a job to do, research to conduct, results to deliver. But if we, again, are going to justify our interest or devotion to the peculiar phenomenon of visual artworks, why we care so much, we could try treating them as individuals, notwithstanding what we perceive as their marks of ageing, quirks or faults. All we know is that we simply love what we see, what we experience and encounter, which testifies to the deepest possible relationship conceivable to the phenomenon at hand.

The word of love is final, at least it has a finality to it, although in human social intercourse it is expected that a performative utterance such as "I love you" will be followed up, sustained, at least for some time, until perhaps this is no longer the case. Exclaiming that I love someone or something (like a painting) inevitably reveals something about me (unless I am lying or play-acting, which reveals something too …), committing me to a bond of sorts.[45] More importantly, however, it *creates* that bond. The professing of love, loud or silent, cannot be undone, at least not easily. This bond is not hermeneutical, however, as if I were proudly announcing that, finally, I am about to produce the most convincing interpretation. Nor is it a bond of knowledge, explanation or expert assessment, degrading the work to an object or material entity. The bond is real, creating a visceral link, an almost physical sense of exchange between the work and yourself. This is where and when the unknowable truth in art presents itself. There is not a lot to say about it. It happens, which we can only acknowledge. Or it does not happen, in which case we are free to continue our research and searches for …

44. Attachment, seduction and commitment could perhaps also be relevant in cases where we are struck by artwork containing difficult, disturbing or horrifying elements or contents, garnering responses from us that we would never dream of characterizing with the word love.

45. I am aware of the increasing inflation of this utterance, which often means nothing more than a strongly emphasized form of liking something or someone, as if it were just a polite phrase.

Art and light

In Susan Sontag's well-known essay 'Against interpretation' from 1966, the very act of interpretation of art is pitched as "the intellect's revenge on art", serving, she argues, to make "art manageable, comfortable". Furthermore: "The aim of all commentary on art now should be to make works of art and, by analogy, our own experience more, rather than less, real to us. The function of criticism should be to show *how it is what it is*, even *that it is what it is*, rather than to show *what it means*." The essay closes with the suggestion that "[i]n place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art."[46] Flippant as this may read, however, as a typical soundbite of the hip sixties, and also somewhat misleading in relation to my argument on art and love since any utterance containing "the love of art" (a possible rephrasing) is overloaded with negative connotations in the long discourse on art in the West, erotics might not be so off the mark.[47] The sadly derogatory not to say contemptuous term "art lover", by the way, has typically been reserved for those "amateurs" (also a sadly devalued word) whose feelings overwhelm their brain and whose lack of education or adequate knowledge is betrayed by their embarrassing confessions to truly love art.

A most interesting word is introduced just ahead of the end of the essay: *transparence* (nowadays often called transparency). The paragraph reads: "Transparence is the highest, most liberating value in art and in criticism today. Transparence means experiencing the luminousness of the thing in itself, of things being what they are."[48]

When Deleuze saw art as a matter of capturing forces and Adorno spoke of truth emerging through the work of art, these are variants of understanding the work of art as a medium of (relative) transparence. Whereas what we are given to look at when encountering a work of art is its enframed surface or gestalt, its visible planarity—truth, in the sense discussed above—emerges from within the work. Transparence, which is ascribed by Sontag not just some material quality but a value, indeed, the highest value, has a most fraught connection to truth, however. On the one hand, it has earned a bad name in modern cultural discourse since it is associated with the naïve idea of viewers taking things for granted or

46. Sontag 1966, pp. 4–5, 10; italics in original.

47. The reference to erotics must not be confused with anything pornographic, which Sontag rightly characterizes as purely instrumental, thus a veritable antithesis to art.

48. Sontag 1966, p. 9.

simply seeing what immediately appeals to the eye without realizing its conditions of production, its sign status, socially produced value, etc. Yet, and on the other hand, falling in love is known to occur regardless of such knowables, and the luminosity to which Sontag refers is one of the most longstanding metaphors of truth and knowledge in the Western world.

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