

undisciplined thinking\_

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**Erik Porath** \_ Transfiguration, Mediation, Analysis:  
On the Transformative Power of Art

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Recht nützlich ist die Malerei,  
wenn etwas Heiligkeit dabei.  
*Wilhelm Busch*

Mögen wir die griechischen Götterbilder noch so vortrefflich finden und Gottvater, Christus, Maria noch so  
würdig und vollendet dargestellt sehen –es hilft nichts, unser Knie beugen wir doch nicht mehr.  
*G.W.F. Hegel*

In der Kunst allein kommt es noch vor, daß ein von Wünschen  
verzehrter Mensch etwas der Befriedigung Ähnliches macht  
und daß dieses Spielen – dank der künstlerischen Illusion –  
Affektwirkungen hervorruft, als wäre es etwas Reales.  
Mit Recht spricht man vom Zauber der Kunst und  
vergleicht den Künstler mit einem Zauberer.  
*Sigmund Freud*

Die Aura einer Erscheinung erfahren, heißt, sie mit dem Vermögen belehnen, den Blick aufzuschlagen.  
*Walter Benjamin*

## Interventions

June 2012. A lecture on the “Dispensability of Abstract Art” is taking place at Kunstraum Ossastrasse, Berlin. The walls are adorned with abstract works of art. Standing amongst them is the Belgian curator Ludovik Vermeersch, who delivers an inflammatory speech against abstraction. It is historically obsolete, he claims, it fails to have an impact, and neither reaches nor unsettles the audience of today. Some interesting twists occur in the subsequent discussion, which turns out to be quite controversial. None of the protagonists seem entirely satisfied, but nonetheless, they have all been challenged.

June 2013. Another exhibition in the same space. A monitor shows artist Anna Ernst at a loss, standing in front of her own abstract paintings and choosing to say nothing at all. The curator Vermeersch now appears in the role of a coach, and can be seen enquiring, suggesting interpretations, and proposing new captions for her works. In Anna’s case as well as those of the other artists featured in the videos, Vermeersch suggests narratives that initially appear as plausible explanations, but later come across as fictional or downright deceptive due to their contradictory nature. The artists either pensively consider or quickly reject his suggestions. The narratives or theoretical frameworks being offered also cast doubt in the viewers’ minds as to whether everything or anything presented to them can be deemed trustworthy. Is this man serious? Are these really the artists standing in front of their images, sometimes stuttering, sometimes eloquent? Are the captions more than theoretical displacements, imaginative fabrications or confusing falsehoods?

Ludovik Vermeersch has made a huge effort to create a forum that exceeds conventional exhibition modes, enabling a more nuanced examination of abstract painting as well as of the participating artists (or the artificial characters that feature as the authors of the artworks). Beyond the idea of the gallery exhibition, he designed a discourse on art that he developed through numerous lecture performances. He has coined the term “transfigurative recontextualization” as the crux of the theoretical framework for his interventions. This notion merges a theological tradition (transfiguration) with a discursive practice (recontextualisation). In its combination of a miraculous event and a technical arrangement – mixing the consecration

from above with the profane context of life – the concept of transfigurative recontextualisation mirrors the difficulties of grasping what contemporary art and art experience are about.

Seduction by appearances or examination of existential questions? Profane enlightenment or revelation of deeper dimensions? Vermeersch narrows down the general question of what contemporary art is supposed to be, to the specific case of abstract art. He claims on the one hand, that the abstract artist must fight for recognition; on the other, abstract painting has always been an ambiguous matter. From the beginning, its seriousness has been confronted with irony. This analysis offers a broader historical-theoretical perspective from which to question the conditions of the contemporary art experience. If Vermeersch proclaims the dispensability of abstract art, as mentioned at the start, this must be located in the sphere of this ambiguity. Can the transfigurative recontextualisation he demands escape the modernist fate of being understood as ironic?

To unsettle the audience's expectations, Vermeersch employs different strategies. His interventions are not always easy to see through: is he mocking art when he argues, verbosely and with great seriousness, the redundancy of abstract art? Is it a Socratic irony when the artists are obliged to explain their own images only to be proven wrong afterwards by their mentor? Are these really the creators of the works who we see talking in front of the images – at times stammering, at others glibly declaring an explanation – or are they part of a fake art communication set-up? To which extent is the audience being taken for a ride when terms like transfiguration, revelation, and veneration are brought up?

Through these interventions, the abstract pictures gain attention, interest, and significance, even though they seemingly lack a communicable meaning – as one of the protagonists by the name of Anna Ernst emphasises. However, the seriousness of Vermeersch's moderation and coaching, the speeches and discussions, the exhibitions, the video-documentation, and not least the book you are reading at this moment, are constantly jeopardised: affront and irony can shift the course of events at any time.

### **Transfigurative Recontextualisation as a Solution?**

To draw attention to abstract painting, Vermeersch uses a neologism that feeds on an old stock of traditions. Transfigurative recontextualisation is the phrase that attempts to smash the Gordian knot of the drama of recognition in which abstraction finds itself today. What is meant by that? In the centre of his reflections Ludovik Vermeersch places the experience of the transfiguration, as it is conveyed by the biblical tradition: Jesus' apparition as the Son of God, that takes place without much change to his outer appearance. Merely the manifestation of a certain brightness around his person served the disciples as evidence of a divine presence. This marks the difference with metamorphosis, the literal reshaping of a Gestalt in another, as we know it from Greek-Latin poetry. If Ovid's transformations predominantly triggered astonishment or fear, in the Christian tradition, experiences of transfiguration formed a foundational basis for an attitude of worship, which was confirmed by ritual re-enactments over the centuries. The numinous aspect of a transfiguration lies less in the visible qualities of an actual transformation, possibly effected by a God, than in the impact of the epiphany on its witnesses. The extraordinary manifestations of a divine presence cause commitment and are thus a basic part of the specific power that the Christian religion has unfolded in the Occident.

According to Vermeersch, the experience of abstract painting can be connected to this influential tradition, as it could restore to the audience a position of adoration of images, which would in

turn place the marginalised abstract art back in the centre of attention. Vermeersch emphasises a downright metaphysically charged urge to veneration,<sup>5</sup> that in the form of idolatry finds its primal scene in the adoration of the golden calf in the Old Testament. The existence of such an urge could help contemporary art to justify its relevance, and artists would be served by it, as they often lack the appropriate arguments to answer to the demand for legitimation that comes with their artistic activities.<sup>6</sup>

If what is at stake is a change in the iconic status of the object (Bildlichkeit/iconicity), compensating for the loss of attention by means of transfiguration, then we should ask whether the position of venerating images is really a productive point of departure to rehabilitate abstract painting. Ours is not the world of the ancients; we exist in a pluralistic society with a predominantly secular culture. One could say, for instance, that images today enjoy such unprecedented popularity and ubiquity, that they do not particularly need lessons in how to have an impact. This is true of the cultural archive of canonical images as much as the common medial techniques for image production and distribution, which bring about an omnipresence of (mainly representational) images.<sup>7</sup> When we talk about abstract images, however, the starting point appears different.

The appetite for abstract pictures has substantially diminished, and the historical development in the arts has increased the difficulties of young artists to continue to engage with the genre of abstract painting without being dismissed as mere epigones and traditionalists. If abstract images no longer exert the same attraction they had on art lovers in the early twentieth century, then we are dealing also with a loss of significance of the experimental approach to non-objective imagery in the course of implementation of these new, avant-gardist artistic and aesthetic standards. It may be so that the use of diagrams, tables, schematic charts and computer-generated images has become standard in the representation of scientific knowledge and its communication to the public, increasing the abstracting and translating capacities of a wider audience. Nevertheless, the purposeful nature of these pictures, the referentiality that is required of them, remains assured, as it affords them their scientific validity.

### **Transfiguration and the Constitution of Images**

In contrast to these more scientific uses, Vermeersch's question of how to reach the transfiguration of abstract painting aims at a kind of iconicity that escapes a clear definition of purpose. This introduces the larger problem of how images constitute their iconicity: if transfiguration means the appearance of something as more than itself,<sup>8</sup> then this addresses not just the religious experience of Jesus who may appear as the Messiah to the apostles without changing his corporeal Gestalt. Rather, the term transfiguration applies to the whole phenomenon of iconicity, that makes a visible Gestalt appear not just as such, but as more than itself, as a reference to something other, something absent, that is thereby manifested, realised, and represented. Whether an image fulfils this function, does not depend on its material reality per se – the isolated piece of canvas, paper, or wall, covered with lines or fields of colour. Instead, anything that arouses our attention visually, can give reason to interpret something as something.<sup>9</sup>

Thus iconicity<sup>10</sup> presents only one of the problems of representation, of meaning, of mediality, that all build on a procedure that makes something appear as something (else) and requires a phenomenology of second order. What constitutes a phenomenon in a phenomenology of first order – its more or less basic appearance – should, in a phenomenology of second order, be treated as explicitly relational. This relational quality is based on the symbolic character, the

iconicity, the linguistic nature, the expressiveness of the appearance, that stands not just for itself but also for something else, which is made present as something absent. This is particularly exciting, and invites interventions, when we are not talking about the retrospective representation of that which already exists (representationality – *Abbildlichkeit*), but about delineating that which does not yet exist, that is *poiesis* (in its strongest sense of creation, design, improvisation, anticipation, vision, evocation, provocation), that ultimately can lead to altered attitudes, actions, and patterns of behaviour. Thus, iconicity stands in a productive field of tension between poetical, mediological, and aesthetic aspects, that make dimensions of production, distribution, and aesthetic reception coalesce in a complex constellation, that Horst Bredekamp has called the “Image Act” (*Bildakt*).<sup>11</sup>

If already an ordinary image can be understood as *more-than-visible*, as a transfiguration of visibility, then the concern with and the need for a transfiguration of the image result from the experience of a loss of conciseness in what constitutes the image as image. This experience of loss is based on life-related and intra-worldly factors; for this, Walter Benjamin has coined the term “loss of aura” (*Auraverlust*), which he applied to a specific historical constellation of development in media.<sup>12</sup> In order to revive the transfiguration of the image, Vermeersch prescribes a transition through unknowing, that can be accomplished through the experience of abstraction. It is only when the intellectual categories, concepts and forms of judgement have reached their limits and are no longer useful to cope with what is offered visually, that we can get into a state of bewilderment (Clement Greenberg), which allows us to register the visible as such, without connections or comparisons with the already-known or with our routines of understanding. This getting to know without cognition or recognition, this quite shocking confrontation with the unintelligible, with a sensuous presence, that does not let itself be explained, provides the royal road to another vision, or at least an altered experience of iconicity, that cannot be processed so quickly.

### **Recontextualisation of the Transfiguration**

Since the threshold for such an experience of the unfamiliar is quite high and not every viewer can be expected to accept the challenge that it creates, Vermeersch advises the artist to anticipate and embed this confrontation by contextualising it: “theory and other stories” (W. J. T. Mitchell) must increase the appeal of what is offered visually. However, a tension persists (as Vermeersch acknowledges) between the discursive contextualisation<sup>13</sup> and the state of unknowingly seeing<sup>13</sup> that is triggered by bewilderment: any narrative commentary or theoretical embedment divert from what is considered an immediate experience of the artwork.

A solution to this tension is found – according to Vermeersch – in considering artworks not as isolated, autonomous entities, but as fundamentally relational, contextual, and thus contingent on mediation. Making up narratives and theories have always been part of the artwork, they are not principally something that is added afterwards. We can call this a relational or molecular (in contrast to an atomistic) conception of artworks. Seen from this perspective, the traditional caption of abstract painting – that it would refer to itself or at least to no outside object and would gain its aesthetic value mainly through inner coherence – appears as just a further discursive embedment. However, the expectation that follows from this, that non-objectivity would push the viewer into bewilderment, seems exaggerated in view of our familiarisation with abstraction that has been going on for more than a hundred years now. Bewilderment is a strong word. Let us assume with Vermeersch, however, that a lack of clarity and recognisability could and would indeed make viewers puzzled and leave them in the dark. If according to the Christian Neo-Platonist Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (whom Vermeersch relies on), unknowing is the

true way to knowledge of God, then, similarly, viewers, when in a state of bewilderment would be able to come closer to the essence of abstract images.

Next to the objection of increased familiarisation with the non-objective, two further arguments against Vermeersch's approach can be put forward: first, in times of rapid cultural change, there are manifold occasions to get confused and become aware of your ignorance – it is no privilege of abstract painting. Second, why would a cognisance of the essence, the true, emanate exactly from confusion and unknowingness? Whereas the first point may not generally discredit Vermeersch's point of view, you would need greater efforts of argumentation to defend the transition through unknowing as helpful for a deeper cognisance of painting. Wouldn't such a point of view instrumentalise or even reduce the role of abstract art to its truth-revealing faculty?<sup>14</sup>

### **A New Theology of the Image?**

Against the charge of such reduction, Vermeersch employs a double strategy that is part of the elementary endeavour of abstraction: “preserving dysfunctionality while refuting arbitrariness.”<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, the clarity and recognisability, the referentiality of images, should be suspended in order to bring about a confusion of the viewers' sensuous perception, of their pre-knowledge and categorisations. On the other, the impression of arbitrariness and randomness should be avoided in order to get the viewer interested in abstract images in the first place. Vermeersch calls this double strategy the “delicate balancing act the artist has to perform” and connects it with a religious discourse, saying “it entails the need for a transfiguration, which delivers the proof that the artwork is indeed imbued with some kind of pneuma, a soul or a higher spirit.”<sup>16</sup>

This rather irritating conjunction introduces a series of questions, for instance as to the necessity of religious terminology here: what do soul, higher spirit and pneuma have to do with our experience of art today? And are there any other more adequate, more profane notions that could be used to deal with art and abstraction? You could argue that the historical or religious mortgage on these concepts is too high for them to be so self-evidently welcomed here, in a theoretical investigation of today's abstract painting. It would be better, instead, to question the epistemological requirements that make an image (or something visible) manifest itself as an image. The conditions should be enquired that dispose a subject to expose itself to a specific effect of iconicity, or to be gripped by the impact of an image. The medial conditions could be questioned that lead to images embodying an iconic impact (image production), that in turn reaches other subjects (image distribution) and enables different receptions (image consumption), which reach from an active use to a more passive experience of it. Next to art history, epistemology, psychoanalysis and media studies are needed to explore – without reliance on supernatural agencies – how anything, whatever it may be, can become a manifestation-of-more-than-itself (*Mehr-als-Erscheinung-seiner-selbst*).<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, there is a whole range of approaches from the beginning of the last century that connect these questions with those of spirit and soul, and that may cast a historical light on the present condition of art in question here. I will deal with these in the next section.

### **Culture as Immanent Transcendence**

Around 1900, theorists of the now so-called “first school of cultural studies” started to develop a science of the life of the spirit (Hegel's *Geist*) as interrelatedness (Wilhelm Dilthey<sup>18</sup>), as culture

(Georg Simmel, Sigmund Freud,<sup>19</sup> Ernst Cassirer<sup>20</sup>) or as image (Aby Warburg<sup>21</sup>). Georg Simmel writes:

It is the paradox of culture that subjective life which we feel in its continuous stream and which drives itself towards inner perfection cannot by itself reach the perfection of culture. It can become truly cultivated only through forms which have become completely alien and crystallized into self-sufficient independence. The most decisive way of making this point is to say that culture comes into being by a meeting of the two elements, neither of which contain culture by itself: the subjective soul and the objective spiritual product.<sup>22</sup>

If we overlook the dualistic starting point here – the fact that what is called soul here is not conceived to form a constitutive unity with the notion of culture – we can gather from this passage that subjectivity does not articulate itself without alienation. The bewilderment that Vermeersch invokes finds its pendant in this alienation. While Vermeersch adapts abstract painting as a medium of transfiguration, what is at stake for Simmel is the productivity of culture in general, whose ability to transcend becomes visible every time a person points beyond herself in her artistic products and the respective artwork develops an individual life (*Eigenleben*) within the cultural framework. In an up-to-date reformulation of the Simmelian approach, one would have to deal with unfolding the problem of bringing into relation individual and culture, subjectivity and objectivity, creative activity and objective product, without ending up in aporetic despair and catastrophe, a tragedy of culture, nor arriving at the conciliatory mediation of an Hegelian absolute spirit, and neither seeking refuge in the religious promise of a redemptive beyond.

In this perspective, the transfiguration appears not as an element of a religiously charged theology of the image, but as an accomplishment of culture.<sup>23</sup> That way, images and iconicity are first of all to be looked at as “cultural intermediate forms of objectivity,” that in spite of being subjective and collective products, simultaneously follow an internal dynamic that points beyond subjectivity: “What drives forth the products of the spirit is the cultural and not the natural scientific logic of the objects.”<sup>24</sup> Following this insight, Simmel designs the idea of an immanent transcendence:

Just as life’s transcendence, within the plane of life itself, of its current, delimited form constitutes more-life (although it is nevertheless the immediate, inescapable essence of life itself), so also its transcendence into the level of objective content, of logically autonomous and no longer vital meaning, constitutes more-than-life, which is inseparable from it and is the essence of spiritual life itself. In general this signifies nothing other than that life is not merely life (although it is certainly also nothing else), but is rather absolute life, because it embraces the relative contrast between life in the narrower sense and content independent of life. As the definition of spiritual life one can even declare that it produces something with a meaning and law unto itself.<sup>25</sup>

Both directions mentioned here correspond to the differentiation between transformation and transfiguration. Life in the biological sense stands for those processes of life that signify a constant transformation (exchange, replacement, rearrangement, growth, conception) of matter that is organised in a living system and contributes to its self-preservation. Spiritual life on the contrary (*Leben als Geist*), means the transfiguration, or the translation of biologically facilitated processes into objectifiable cultural products, that represent a sphere and dynamic with its own laws, and bring ephemeral life into lasting, material form. In the emergent objective forms these processes of life take on an intersubjective mode of existence, that through repetition (ritual, custom, tradition) and change (variation, contradiction, parody) can become a steering and animating element and at the same time the motive for a redirection and critique of the current process of life. It is this tension between traditions that face the present day, and the living appropriation that transforms the input into something else, something unforeseeable. To some, it may border on the miraculous, but the taking place of such transfer, passing on, reference and appropriation, that is called history, is not exactly an indication for a strict beyond of life (an

absolute transcendence). Rather, it is “inherent in the basic fact that transcendence is immanent in life.”<sup>26</sup>

The plurality of forces immanent to life, its diversity of voices and its variety of shapes – equally counter-directed as referring to each other – join to a unity that may be a result of these processes, but is certainly not their endpoint, since “the innermost essence of life is its capacity to go out beyond itself, to set its limits by reaching out beyond them; that is, beyond itself.”<sup>27</sup> Pointedly, Simmel can thus claim: “Life finds its essence, its process, in being more-life and more-than-life, its positive is as such already its comparative.”<sup>28</sup>

### The additional value of the Image

Texts and images belong to the most important medialities through which culture articulates and organises itself. Images that exert a meaning that transcends their physical, visible presence must not on these grounds automatically be seen as switching into a mode of transfiguration, or of an extramundane connection to the beyond. Images can have a meaning without participating in a “higher order” (Vermeersch), yet without in the same breath being reduced to their limited physical presence. The profane approach to the image persists in its distrust of religious conceptions of it: an image may be more than itself, but it is not on these grounds automatically a representative of a higher, transcendent, trans-mundane sphere. The image is *in* this world and *of* this world.

To see images means to consider certain sensuous, physical presentations *as images*, but also to acknowledge the multiple relations in which they function. They relate to the viewers who experience them in specific ways, to other images, that determine the context in which viewers see them and to other things, that are not considered images. This does not in any way solve the questions and problems connected to the status of something being an image (Bildsein). Rather, the issues are reformulated in a non-theological dimension, particularly for abstract art and explicitly after the loss of the aura (Walter Benjamin<sup>29</sup>): what are the specific conditions that allow us to recognise something as an image? What constitutes the peculiar magic that a visible presentation can emanate? How does a loss of aura come about? What is the technical equivalent of the aura?<sup>30</sup>

Contrary to common views that art is or should be committed to the creation of beauty, that it would be the sensuous appearance of the Idea (das sinnliche Scheinen der Idee – Hegel), or the “visual organisation of the visible world” (sichtbare Gestaltung der sichtbaren Welt – Konrad Fiedler<sup>31</sup>) – contrary also to the shapeless idea that anything could be seen as art, it should be argued here, in an updated connection to Georg Simmel, that art tends towards a permanent transgression of itself. A recontextualisation of the transfiguration, away from religious paradigms, could follow from there: what is art, is decided in and through the context, not from a sole point of reference (work, artists, artistic activity, viewers, curators, institutions such as museums, auction houses, galleries, art fairs). The transfiguration thus becomes analysable as an effect that emanates from specific contexts, in which that which is considered artwork and its viewers are present together.<sup>32</sup> The transgression of itself leads art to a constant adjustment of the boundaries that determine it. Between the ties to tradition and the pressure to innovate, a tension builds up that can be resolved by a transgression in the form of a sheer refusal: a refusal to obligingly adhere to any tradition or an insubordination to the demand for something new. Such transgression could offer a productive possibility when for instance an abstract-art-in-refusal-mode develops a way of handling itself that takes it beyond itself: by analogy to Simmel’s triad

“life – more-life – more-than-life” the visual arts today could be characterised by an all at once context-oriented, transgressive and transformative “image – more-image – more-than-image.”

Hence an altered form of abstraction in art is attained<sup>33</sup> which can challenge a contemporary audience in paradoxical ways: in the face of ever increasing expectations you see yourself confronted with a loss of meaning and significance; in spite of an ever greater complexity of what you are looking at, you find less and less form or style; for all your increasing knowledge of tradition, you are demanded to be satisfied with less and less work and institution; in spite of a patient willingness to engage, you put up with less and less perception and resemblance; indeed – in spite of all your love for art, you are led to get along with less communication and affordance. However, the *sine qua non* of art – for the viewer as well as the artist – is that it implements a potential to irritate, a moment of surprise, an expansion of experience, sometimes even a growth of knowledge, because there is one thing that artworks should not be allowed to do by any means: to be boring, as that would make anyone lose their interest – the artists, the audience, the buyers, the collectors, the market, and the discipline of art history.

<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Busch, ‘Unserer Frauen Bildnis’ from ‚Der heilige Antonius von Padua,‘ in *Kurzes Referat über die kurzen Würste des Herrn Lang*, (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1979) 95-103, here: 103.

<sup>2</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik, I*, in *Werke in zwanzig Bänden, Bd. 13*, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 142.

<sup>3</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem und Tabu* (1912/13), in *Studienausgabe, Bd. 9*, ed. Alexander Mitscherlich, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1969ff.), 287-444, here: 378.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire’ (1939) in *Gesammelte Schriften, Band I,2* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp: 1974/1991) 605-653, here 646.

<sup>5</sup> This recalls Arthur Schopenhauer’s claim of a “metaphysical need.” The problematic nature of such assumptions cannot be dealt with here.

<sup>6</sup> Arnold Gehlen spoke of a “Kommentarbedürftigkeit” of modern art, a need for commentary. Arnold Gehlen, *Zeit-Bilder* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag 1960), 162 ff.

<sup>7</sup> On images of cult in the dialectics of secularisation, see Sigrid Weigel, *Grammatologie der Bilder* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2015), 285-325.

<sup>8</sup> Like the doctrine of the incarnation, the transfiguration typifies the complex figure of a being that is more than itself. This being-itself and at the same time being-more-than-itself forms an extreme challenge to the binary logic of western thought, especially the law of identity and the law of excluded middle.

<sup>9</sup> This is true as well, of course, for presentations that correspond to other spheres of the senses and are realised in other materialities, for instance as audible sound forms as they come to us in articulated compositions as a form of music or in spoken language, as poetry.

<sup>10</sup> Gottfried Boehm speaks of an iconic difference (ikonische Differenz) as constituting iconicity. “Kunstwerke bewahren ihre Anziehungskraft, verschließen sich in dem Maße, wie sie erschlossen werden. Zwischen Sukzession und Simultaneität herrscht jene ikonische Differenz, die sich nur mittels produktiver Einbildungskraft ausmessen läßt. Wir sehen immer neue Wege, auf denen sich das Bild zur Simultaneität ‘integriert’ und aus ihr, auf dem Rückweg, in die Sukzession ‘differenziert.’” Gottfried Boehm, ‘Bildsinn und Sinnesorgane’ in *Neue Hefte für Philosophie, Heft 18/19* (1980), 118-132, here 130. This inevitable dualistic structure gives reason to another characteristic of iconicity: being “present and not-present at the same time” (Boehm 1980, 131). As far as the gaze is focusing on the detail it turns away from overview (Gesamteindruck) – and the other way around.

<sup>11</sup> Horst Bredekamp: *Theorie des Bildakts*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2010)

<sup>12</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (1936), in *Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. I,2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974/1991), 431-469.

<sup>13</sup> Vermeersch takes an “agnostic state of mind” as a model “to explore the experience of abstractness” (see his essay in this volume).

<sup>14</sup> Rüdiger Bubner, ‘Über einige Bedingungen gegenwärtiger Ästhetik’ (1973), in *Ästhetische Erfahrung*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 7-51.

<sup>15</sup> See his essay in this volume.

<sup>16</sup> See his essay in this volume.

<sup>17</sup> Isn’t already the being-image of what is, of entities (das Seiende) a more-than-being – in fact an utterly intra-worldly sort of more-than-being? This perspective implies a fully mundane character of being which contains an immanent transcendence in manifold dimensions: every being entity refers to one another in spatial, temporal, energetic, social, iconic-pictorial and semiotic-linguistic direction. There is no such thing without relation, without context. Focusing on a single entity (*to de ti*) is an abstraction which could be a justified step in an epistemic or scientific strategy – but it won’t change a bit of its specific interconnectedness in the world as such. See Alfred North Whitehead: *Prozess und Realität* (1929), (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987), 60.

<sup>18</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften* (1911), (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981).

<sup>19</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930), in *Studienausgabe, Bd. 9*, ed. Alexander Mitscherlich, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1969ff.), 191-270.

<sup>20</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* (1923ff.), (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> Aby Warburg, *Werke in einem Band*, ed. Martin Tremel, Sigrid Weigel and Perdita Ladwig, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Georg Simmel, ‘The Concept and Tragedy of Culture’ in *The Conflict in Modern Culture and Other Essays* (Columbia: Teacher College Press, 1968), 30.

<sup>23</sup> This is said without ignoring the ample religious and theological tradition of thought on iconicity. See Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, (München: C.H. Beck, 1990/93).

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<sup>24</sup> Georg Simmel, 'The Concept and Tragedy of Culture,' 42.

<sup>25</sup> Georg Simmel, *The view of life: four metaphysical essays*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), originally published in German as *Lebensanschauung: Vier metaphysische Kapitel* (1918), 16.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 17. The extent to which the philosophising sociologist Georg Simmel intended his remarks on transcendence in a secularistic and non-theological way, is clear from his commitment to culture and the philosophy of culture: "[T]he metaphysical question finds an historical answer. In cultural forms, the spirit reaches an objectivity which makes it at once independent of all accidents of subjective reproductions, and yet usable for the central purpose of subjective perfection. While the metaphysical answers to this question in general tend to cut it off by somehow demonstrating that the subject-object contrast is unimportant, culture insists on the full opposition of the parties, on the super-subjective logic of spiritually formed objects through which the subject raises itself beyond itself to itself." op. cit. Georg Simmel, 'The Concept and Tragedy of Culture,' 45.

<sup>29</sup> Walter Benjamin (1936), see footnote 11.

<sup>30</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Kleine Geschichte der Photographie,' in *Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. II,1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974/1991), 368-385, here: 376.

<sup>31</sup> Erik Porath, 'Situation und Bewegung. Die Kunst des Ausdrucks bei Fiedler und Freud' in *Kinästhetik und Kommunikation. Ränder und Interferenzen des Ausdrucks*, ed. Tobias Robert Klein (Berlin: Kadmos, 2013), 241-262.

<sup>32</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche has defended the idea that each artwork would be a transfiguration of reality. Arthur C. Danto has taken up this reflection, under different historical conditions, in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace. A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981).

<sup>33</sup> Vermeersch terms this "contextual abstraction" as indicative of contemporary art, as opposed to "formal abstraction" which, according to him, would be more indicative of classical modernity. (see his essay in this volume)