Where Images Make Their Wonder: An Introduction

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Those who had entered one of the Venetian venues of the François Pinault Foundation in early 2020, before the world closed for pandemic, would have been able to visit an exhibition that was not only superb but also philosophically interesting. On display in the rooms of Palazzo Grassi were some eighty works by one of the most important living painters in the world: the Belgian Luc Tuymans.

La Pelle (The Skin), this is the title of the exhibition, was interesting from a philosophical point of view because it allowed the most attentive spectators to sense some of the issues that are at the center of today's international debate about the status of images.

First of all, the paintings hanging on the walls of the museum featured representations of different kinds. Some of them depicted real existing objects; others were abstract, in part or entirely, or reproduced childhood doodles; still others were not simple representations, but representations of representations taken from the most disparate sources: analogue or digital photographs, films, TV programs, book illustrations, scientific illustrations or photographs produced with particular technologies, copies of drawings, 3D models, etc.

Each of the figures painted on the canvas had a particular relationship with its referent. Among very different degrees of verisimilitude, not everything was what it seemed: what at first glance appeared to be the representation of an imposing mountain, at a second glance turned out to be that of a small pile of sand. And yet, despite

this figurative pluralism, all the works gathered in the museum could rightly be included in the same class: the class of images. But why? What shared characteristics or properties gave the painted figures the same ontological status?

Secondly, the exhibition was remarkable because there were no captions on the walls to accompany the artworks. At first sight, therefore, one found oneself observing Tuymans' paintings without any interpretative mediation; only later was it possible to delve into the meaning of each painting by reading a short guide that was provided at the entrance to the show. Thus, during the visit, two opposite experiences alternated. Sometimes it happened that the work itself communicated a certain feeling, which remained unchanged or intensified after reading the description included in the guide. At other times it could happen that apparently innocuous figures such as a face or a landscape depicted people or events of tragic historical significance: the portrait of a Nazi commander, a copy of a drawing made by a prisoner in a concentration camp. And so the paintings became colored with a different, disturbing emotion depending on whether or not one had read the description provided by the museum.

What do we see when we see an image? Is it possible, in an image, to see immaterial phenomena such as movement, emotion, or even the expression of an ethical-political value? When is this the result of perception and when is it the result of interpretation?

Third, by reading the supplied guidebook, one could discover that not all of Tuymans' paintings depicted real objects. Some canvases portrayed scenes or things that were the product of imagination, others represented experiences that the painter had lived in the past and then brought back to memory. In one way or another, many of the works exhibited in the Venetian museum had passed – perhaps – through the artist's mind before becoming real. Conversely, the same process seemed to happen in the mind of the viewer when, once back home, he reflected on the exhibition remembering what he had seen during his trip to Venice.

So can it be said that the artist and the viewers had mental images of the works on display? Do these mental images really exist? What do they consist of? And if they do exist, can we say that they are of the same kind as the other images we have mentioned so far?

Through this third issue of the *Journal for the Philosophy of Language, Mind and the Arts* we want to ask ourselves a series of questions similar to those raised by Tuymans' exhibition at Palazzo Grassi. We ask ourselves what images are and what properties characterize them; if and how they exist also in our mind; what relationship they have with phenomena such as perception, memory, language and interpretation. In fact, it is repeated more and more often that in the twenty-first century the world is overloaded with images, that our culture is now made up of images, but it is not at all clear what this

means. What, then, do we refer to when we speak of images?

The authors participating in this issue have been asked to answer these and other questions starting from and in dialogue with the two philosophical perspectives that, in our opinion, have most enriched the study of our object of research since the second half of the twentieth century: analytical philosophy and visual culture studies.

In the context of analytic philosophy, images have been considered – so to speak – one by one. Usually, in fact, theorists who have placed themselves along this axis of thought have examined images as single entities placed in relation, on the one hand, to a real or unreal referent and, on the other hand, to the perceptive or interpretative abilities of a given observer.

The debate on pictorial representation, though longstanding (think of Plato's *Cratylus*, Leon Battista Alberti's *De Pictura*, or Descartes' famous essay on optics), has only recently re-entered philosophical discussion, and only after the appearance of *Art and Illusion* (1960) by Ernst Gombrich (Lopes 1996, 8; also Newall 2011, 1). The nature of each intervention is animated by the following fundamental question: "what does it mean for X to depict Y?", or "what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for X to be said a pictorial representation of Y?" (Di Monte 2018). Depiction theorists have proposed various solutions, which can be ordered on the basis of a few major strands.[1]

The conventionalist theory (sometimes also referred to as the semiotic, or structuralist, model), defended by Nelson Goodman, assumes that pictures adhere to a certain representational code. According to this view, a picture X represents an object Y not because of a similarity between the object and the picture, but because of a convention stipulated within a community of individuals (Goodman 1968).

According to the so-called resemblance theories of depiction, on the other hand, the shapes and colours of an object Y resemble the shapes and colours of a picture X (which depicts Y). Goodman, who has been the severest critic of the resemblance theory of depiction, claims that the biconditional "X depicts Y if and only if X resembles Y" is essentially false.

Despite Goodman's position, influential scholars have subsequently reworked a new version of the resemblance theory. This is the case with John Hyman (but also Catharine Abell 2009), whose theory takes up the Fregean demarcation between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* (Hyman, Bantinaki 2021). The relation between representing and represented is thus not explained in terms of *Bedeutung*, but in terms of *Sinn*; this means that, for example, a portrait of Y represents Y only in a certain respect, so that two different portraits of Y certainly refer to the same individual, but describe two different aspects of her, i.e. they differ in

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[1] For a recent and complete overview, see Hyman, Bantinaki 2021.

meaning. To give a concrete example, the Venetian painter Titian made at least two portraits of his friend Pietro Aretino, one in 1537 (now in New York), the other in 1545 (now in Florence). In the second one, Aretino appears in a frontal position, with his face in half-light and a frowning expression (like the choleric and daring "scourge of princes" that he actually was, a label he earned by force of blackmail against the powerful of his time). In the first portrait, however, he is portrayed in a three-quarter profile, with his face illuminated. He looks like a humanist of elevated rank, with an enlightened gaze – note the necklace in evidence and the gloves – and a calm, quiet attitude (Mozzetti 1996). The two portraits seem to depict two completely different men, what changes is therefore the meaning, but their reference is the same, namely Pietro Aretino. Hyman's theory is also based on the concept of occlusion shape, which is the smallest mark one would need to make on a sheet of glass, placed between the observer and an object Y, in order to completely hide Y. For example, the occlusion shape of a television set, with respect to a given point of view Z, is a rectangle, while that of a coin, again with respect to Z, is an ellipse. Thus, the similarity between the object Y and a representation of it concerns the sharing of the same occlusion shape, obviously with respect to a given point of view Z (Hyman 2006).

Another strand is that of the so-called psychological theories of depiction, which try to illustrate the phenomenon on the one hand by describing the experience that pictures evoke in the observer, on the other hand by focusing on their aptitude to trigger recognitional abilities in the viewer. According to Richard Wollheim, if a picture X represents an object Y, this means that the observer goes through a particular visual experience of X which establishes that X represents Y. This experience is called by Wollheim the "appropriate experience" of the picture (Wollheim 1998a, 217). According to Wollheim, moreover, the experience of seeing a picture is articulated through two distinct, but inseparable and simultaneous aspects: the configurational fold (the awareness of the pictorial surface as a support) and the recognitional fold (the fact of recognizing a content in the picture). This perceptual experience is defined by Wollheim seeing-in (Wollheim 1980): the observer *sees* the pictorial subject *in* the material surface of the painting (Wollheim 1998b). For Robert Hopkins (1998), the seeing-in concerns the fact of experiencing a similarity between the outline shape of the actual object and the outline shape of the depicted object. Depiction can thus be understood as the kind of representation that generates an experience whereby the viewer is led to notice that the outline shapes of the figures on the canvas resemble the outline shapes of the depicted objects. Kendall Walton, on the other hand, proposes an empirical theory of pictorial representation that is based on an exercise of imagination. According to Walton, representations – or rather, works of fiction – are props within what he calls the game of make-be-

lieve. Imagination, as Walton understands it, is propositional; he does not refer to a quasi-perceptual process, but to a propositional attitude (x imagines that p). This means that a representation prescribes an observer to imagine a proposition p. Such a proposition is then fictional, within the world created by the representation W, if a viewer's full appreciation of W requires him to imagine that p. Moreover, a proposition is true, within the fictional world created by the representation W, if W's appreciation requires that the proposition be imagined true within the fictional world created by W (Walton 1990). According to Flint Schier (1986, 43-4), instead, who defends a recognitional theory of depiction, a representational system can be defined as iconic only if, once some of its elements have been interpreted, one can proceed to interpret every other element of the system, provided that one is able to recognize the objects represented. Basically, a competent viewer, who correctly interprets a picture as a picture of Y, does not need a rule (e.g. a rule connecting the picture to the object it represents) to recognize the objects in the picture. Schier calls this property "natural generativity", and states that it is a peculiar characteristic of iconic representational systems (contrary to what happens in natural languages, where the interpreter must know the reference of the terms in order to interpret them correctly).

An intermediate position between a recognitional theory and an experience-based theory is held by Michael Newall (2011, §3), according to whom a surface X depicts Y if and only if: (i) X is capable of causing a non-veridical view of Y; and (ii) this non-veridical view accords with an adequate standard of correctness (where adequacy is established beforehand by the picture maker's intention to create a picture X that causes a non-veridical view of Y).

Finally, Alberto Voltolini (2015) has developed a personal theory, called syncretistic theory of depiction. A syncretistic theory thus merges what Voltolini identifies as the two main paradigms of pictorial representation, namely the semiotic (or structuralist) one, which refers to Goodman, and the perceptual one, which brings together both theories of similarity and those experience-based (Voltolini 2015, 16-17). As Voltolini himself declares, the core of this theory can be summed up through the following biconditional: an object P represents a subject O if and only if:

(i) the spectator experiences a state of seeing-in involving P (where the configurational fold of this seeing-in captures the properties that P approximately shares with O, while its recognitional fold is the consciously illusory perception of P as something belonging to a genre to which O himself belongs);

(ii) P entertains a proper causal/intentional relation with O (Voltolini 2015, 167).

While in the context of analytic philosophy, images have been thought of as single entities having significant relationships with both a referent and an observer, visual culture studies have also taken into consideration images in their multiplicity and reciprocal relationship.[2]

One of the pioneers of this approach to the study of images, which we could call iconological, is certainly the German historian Aby Warburg. Starting from his groundbreaking studies on the astrological motifs in the frescoes of Palazzo Schifanoja in Ferrara, Warburg (1922) believed he could demonstrate that certain images survive stylistic and historical changes, persisting through the centuries according to identifiable evolutional regularities. It is precisely this ability to survive (*Nachleben*) that makes images vehicles of meaning.

As Ernst Gombrich points out in his biography of the German thinker (1970), Aby Warburg was strongly influenced by the neurology of Richard Semon. In his treatise *Die Mneme* (1905), Semon argued that every event capable of affecting matter leaves on it a sort of unconscious mnemonic trace, which the biologist called an engram. Warburg applied Semon's theory of memory to the study of images, which were thus conceived as symbols of experiences lived by a certain society in the course of its history. *Pathosformel* was the term that the thinker coined to identify that activity of social memory capable of fixing emotional expressions in figurative repertories stable in time.

Even without committing themselves to hypothesizing the existence of a collective unconscious, philosophers and historians inspired by Warburg have continued to thematize the relationship of images to social history. The historian Carlo Ginzburg, for example, related shamanic rites of Eurasian origin to some testimonies collected during the witchcraft trials instituted in Italy between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (1966, 1989). It was his merit to extend the Warburgian method well beyond the sphere of art and figuration, applying it to images evoked by written documentary sources and literary works. George Didi-Huberman, on the other hand, whose essay follows this introduction, elaborated the concept of *Nachleben*, arguing that every image is constructed and lives in the dimension of anachronism (2000). In fact, every figurative composition refers back to other images produced both synchronically and diachronically to it, in an entirely inhomogeneous temporal and cultural stratification. According to Didi-Huberman, the awareness of the multi-temporal nature of images imposes a rethinking of the role that historians are

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2 We certainly do not want to affirm here a clear methodological distinction between analytic philosophy and visual studies. Let's think, for example, how much the relationship between image and referent is crucial in the concept of *Ikonische Differenz* as coined by Gottfried Boehm (2007). Rather, we want to emphasize an opposition in order to encourage comparison and dialogue between perspectives that are not always in contact with each other.

called upon to play: their task is not to reconstruct the linear chronology of a past event, but rather to make explicit the multiple temporalities that constitute each era. In this sense, images are the synthesis of a collective history that unravels between censorship and returns, repetitions, cancellations and misalignments.

The relevance that Warburg's perspective still enjoys today is evidenced by the exhibition *Aby Warburg: Bilderatlas Mnemosyne. The Original*, staged at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin at the end of 2020. Curated by Roberto Ohrt and Axel Heil, the exhibition consisted of a faithful reconstruction of the 63 plates that make up the atlas *Mnemosyne* (1929), a collection of figures only, through which Warburg observed the permanence of images from classical antiquity in Renaissance and contemporary culture.

Both the exhibition and the catalogue published in conjunction with it (Ohrt, Heil 2020) do not fail to emphasize in an innovative way how the method traced by Warburg can dialogue today with digital technologies. Machine learning programs make it possible to compare infinitely more images with each other than a single scholar's attention can manage. Articles such as the recent ones by Amanda Du Preez (2020) and Stefka Hristova (2016) compare Warburg's methods and insights with today's cultural analytics and media visualization techniques, highlighting continuities between them that hint at possible future developments. Therefore, if it is true that the era in which we live is characterized by a massive production of images as well as of tools capable of analyzing them, it is also true that it is increasingly urgent to ask ourselves what epistemological changes this quantitative difference entails.

In the spirit of pluralism that characterizes the journal, this issue seeks to address the problem of images from several points of view and according to different methodologies. Ideally, the articles that will follow after this introduction can be divided into four main sections.

The first four essays address issues related to ontology. In their pages the question will be asked not only about the nature of images, but also about what it means for an image to represent an object or an action realistically – the emphasis here is of course on the adverb 'realistically.'

The section opens with an essay by George Didi-Huberman titled "S'inspirer des spirales" ("Inspired by Spirals") in which the French theorist reflects on the boundaries of pictoriality. Observing some drawings made by Walter Benjamin in the margins of his manuscripts and rereading the course held by Paul Klee at the Bauhaus in Weimar in 1921-22, Didi-Huberman identifies in the spiral the beginning and the end of every possible image. On the one hand, in fact, the spiral is associated with infantile drawing, which marks the sheet of paper like a big bang: from it, children give rise not only to their first figures, but also to their first words in the form of little cries that accom-

pany their gestures. On the other hand, whirling characterizes the scribbles that Benjamin himself sketched during a series of experiments with drugs conducted under the guidance of Dr. Fritz Fränkel. The spiral then becomes the sign of the sinking of the logos into the depths of the unconscious. Both cases are evoked by Didi-Huberman to allude to the indeterminacy that characterizes the margins of language as well as those of figuration: is a whirlpool an image or not?

Jesse Prinz, in his "Realism Relativized: A Cultural-Historical Approach to What Images Capture", offers a fascinating journey into both western and non-western artistic tradition to expand the survey around the concept of pictorial realism. What does it mean that an Italian Renaissance painting or a Japanese *ukiyo-e* print are realistic? Are we talking about the same kind of realism? And does it make sense to compare the two types of realism or even to draw a rule that lumps them together under the same definition? After examining (and rejecting) two distinct groups of philosophical theories – those that emphasize perceptual processing and those that define realism in terms of informativeness – Prinz proposes his own alternative account of pictorial realism. The MCA analysis (an acronym standing for manners, capture and aspects) describes what aspects of reality an artwork or a style capture, and in what manner they capture these aspects. Given these premises, the MCA solution is necessarily relative to a specific historical, cultural and social context, so the philosophical analysis must proceed in concert with art history investigation.

In her "On the Narrative Potential of Depiction", Katerina Bantinaki argues against skeptical positions that depreciate the narrative potential of monophase pictures. She identifies two main strands of skepticism. The first one derives from Lessing's *Laocoön*: static pictures are related to space and not to time, so they cannot represent actions. According to this account, any sense of temporality emerging from the picture is not really perceived but depends on our imagination or interpretation. The second one claims that monophase pictures have to be excluded from the realm of narratives because they cannot express causal relations between temporally ordered events of which a story is composed. While the first strand of skepticism has been brilliantly faced in many ways – for example, emotions facially expressed by the characters in a painting lead unambiguously to the recognition of a specific action – the second strand is more thorny. In order to tackle this last position, Bantinaki argues that (i) the concept of 'causal relation' itself needs to be better defined, and that (ii) in this case empathy plays a fundamental role. For what concerns the second point, looking at a picture, gestures, gaze directions and facial expressions can activate the viewer's life experience in order to recover the causal relations between depicted characters and events. From this perspective, causal relations are not an imag-

inative construct of the spectator, rather they are a product of the picture's design itself.

"The Treachery of Images" by Riccardo Manzotti concludes the series of essays dealing with ontological matters. The philosopher claims a radical eliminativist thesis that develops on a double front. In the first part of the article the distinction between physical supports and images is refuted. According to Manzotti indeed, images are ontologically superfluous entities: only flat physical objects having the power to cause certain visual effects under certain conditions really exist. In the second part of the paper the logical consistency of the notion of mental image is questioned, as well as its empirical soundness. The author argues that, in neuroscience, referring to images risks to causally overdetermine phenomena that can be explained simply in terms of neuronal activity. The purpose of Manzotti's double refutation is the achievement of an ontology in which there is no need of mediation, and therefore of distinction, between subject and object by means of images.

The second part contains discussions related to the topics of perception, appreciation and creation of pictures. Gabriele Ferretti opens this section with his "Motoric Understanding and Aesthetic Appreciation". He presents a manifesto of what he calls "Motoric Aesthetic Appreciation" of pictures, based on the analysis of experimental results from neuroaesthetics. As is well known, according to Richard Wollheim, the nature of pictorial experience is twofold, and so is aesthetic appreciation of a picture. In picture perception, the observer is visually aware of the surface she looks at, while also recognizing something that emerges from that surface. Ferretti claims that also motor representations play a central role in order for a viewer to reach pictorial aesthetic appreciation. Nevertheless, this is not to be understood in the sense that the viewer represents the action related to the pictorial content. Rather, according to Ferretti, the viewer represents the gestures by means of which the artist creates the painting, i.e. thanks to which the marks responsible for a pictorial significance are generated on a material surface. This leads the spectator to perceptually realize *that* the pictorial space is realized by the painter and *how* it emerges from the surface that hosts the depicted object.

Starting from Mark Johnston's analysis of Lockean primary and secondary qualities, Nathaniel Goldberg and Chris Gavaler put forward an original account of picture and style perception with their "Perceiving Images and Styles". According to Goldberg and Gavaler, a pencil line on a sheet of paper is response-independent like Lockean primary qualities, whereas the corresponding picture emerging from that line (for example, the skidding of a bike tire) is response-dependent like Lockean secondary qualities. While the physical properties of the mark on the paper do not depend on a spectator, the tire skid represented by that mark on the paper is relative to a perceiv-

er. Also, Goldberg and Gavaler distinguish between a physical style, say, the shape of the mark on the paper, and a representational style, say, the shape of the depicted tire skid. But how does the representational style of a picture is connected to the corresponding depicted object? Here, their solution draws on Paul Grice's distinction between conventional and conversational implicature.

In their "Neuroimagining: How to Question Scientific Images and their Artistic Value", Emanuele Carlenzi, Davide Coraci and Alessandro Pigoni claim that, although the topic of images has been most frequently associated with art history and aesthetics, it has also profoundly influenced the vast field of science. Taking into account fMRI-based images, one of the aims of Carlenzi, Coraci and Pigoni is to present the figure of the neuroscientist not only as a simple documenter of reality, but also as an image maker. Like many other pictures, fMRI images try to convey some information (in this case, about the neuronal activation). Yet, the more informative fMRI products are about the brain activity the further they move away from an exact reproduction of reality. In this sense, Carlenzi, Coraci and Pigoni argue, resemblance and informativeness are two independent concepts. In fact, in order to communicate a specific content as fully as possible, neuroscientists operate on pictures modifying them, making visible what is not immediately visible, in a complex process that also involves their creativity and imagination.

The third section goes through the problems related to the very concept of representing by images. In his "Wittgenstein's Bridge: A Linguistic Account of Visual Representation", Michael Biggs compares Wittgenstein's early philosophy with Wittgenstein's later philosophy in order to fill the apparently incommensurable gap between the analytic and the visual culture approaches to image interpretation. All over his whole life, Wittgenstein used images to clarify the nature of the relationship between language and the world. According to Biggs, in his early period this relationship was illustrated through the analytic picture theory of meaning, while in his later period he embraced a more culturally centered explanation. Whereas in the early period the representational relationship between language and world is first comparable to similarity and then to analogy, in the later period it is better described by a metaphorical functioning. The former approach is more analytical, while the latter is closer to the visual culture tradition. For Biggs, then, the structural linguistics is the common ground that could place the two approaches near, investigating the relationship between analogy and metaphor.

In her "The Visual Power of Photography and Its Status as a Representation" Katarzyna Weichert criticizes Roger Scruton's theory that photographic images cannot be considered representations in their own right. Taking his cue from Currie's observation that photographs, like films, depend on the existence of the objects they cap-

ture, Scruton argues that these sorts of artworks cannot, by origin, represent anything other than the real things which cause them; it is only by use that this limit can be overcome. Weichert opposes this argument using the concept of aesthetic nondifferentiation as coined by Gottfried Boehm. In fact, the Polish theorist claims that Scruton's mistake is to separate the subject of a film or photograph from its mode of presentation. On the contrary, every photo or movie has compositional and editing features that express the intention of the artist and determine the way in which what is depicted is to be interpreted. For this reason, even mechanically produced representations can be said to be representations to all intents and purposes, by both origin and use.

Finally, in "The Productive Inadequacy of Image for Contemporary Painting" Moyra Derby analyzes the production of three artists working with abstraction in the twenty-first century. The author's aim is to resist a tout court assimilation of painting to the notion of image in its triple meaning of visual artifact, organized system of data, unitary perceptive experience. The works of Beth Harland, Jacqueline Humphries and R.H. Quaytman are shown as critical processors that are activated in a dimension that extends between the tactility of the colour on the canvas, their unfaithful transposition and dissemination on digital media, the relationship with other works and images more or less contiguous and homogeneous to them. The outcome of the essay is demonstrating how, in the three instances examined, the viewer's senses, attention and memory are mobilized well beyond the ocularity and frontality with which painting is generally associated.

The last section of the issue is devoted to two cases in which images are used not so much and not only to represent something, but also to convey ethical-political values. Hanna Fasnacht examines climate change protest photographs in their functions as historical documents, exemplary illustrations, and tools for social change. In her "The Narrative Aesthetics of Protest Images", the theorist analyses both crowd images – focusing on the role played by signs and banners in the interpretation of the message depicted – and images of collective actions inspired by works of art and movies. In both cases, the author emphasizes the narrative characteristics of photographs, defined by Bence Nanay (2009) as the ability to represent goal-directed actions. Building on Nanay, Fasnacht concludes that the most media-effective protest images are based on dramatization efforts whose aesthetics recall the temporality of an apocalyptic future.

The issue ends with an essay by Oliwia Olesiejuk dedicated to the work of Andrea Carlson, a multimedia artist born in the Grand Portage Ojibwe Indian Reservation renown for being involved in the Indigenous Futurism movement. In her "Decolonizing Visuality" Olesiejuk focuses on a small body of works through which Carson investigated a portion of land along the Mississippi river once occu-

pied by Dakota tribes. In particular, the comparison between two video animations by the artist and the maps that led to the construction of the Upper St. Anthony Lock and Dam in 1960 allows the author to show how cartography, too, is a technique informed by colonial power relations. The artist, Olesiejuk notes, reintroduces into the field of representation places significant to indigenous culture that had previously been removed. In doing so, Carlson not only makes a gesture of decolonization through images, but also suggests that the concept of Anthropocene is in itself tainted by the perspective of a colonizing subject.

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