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Connected Images: New Paradigms for Aesthetic Experience

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Performativity, connection, aggregate, conflict, Stimmung and artificial intelligence are among the topics chosen by the authors of the monographic issue of scientific journal *Paradigmi, Rivista di Critica Filosofica* dedicated to *Connected images: New Paradigms for Aesthetic Experience,* edited by Micaela Latini and Elena Tavani. Numerous contemporary and transdisciplinary forms of interpretation represent aesthetic experience in this Issue. It approaches the art world with Nature and the images naturally created by animals and natural environments (Tavani), the body in motion and its intentionality represented by images (Alloa, Benjamin), the body and time in tattoo images (Vercellone), the biological world and molecular discoveries (Bredekamp), furniture objects and the image of aesthetic experience they suggest (Goehr), political and social conflicts and what they represent (Latini), and pictures of music (Pangrazi). The last essays follow this mainly focused on the digital context, artificial intelligence and the technological impact on the art world and of chiasmus in images (Diodato), political rhetoric (Fimiani), surreal image interventions in the world of artificial intelligence (Somaini) and identity and the constitution of algorithms (Eugeni).

That Issue emphasizes an innovative approach to the world of aesthetic experience that opens new forms of especially multidisciplinary dialogue between the world of artistic representation and the use of images that do not necessarily pertain to the work itself but are improvised, implied, and practised. The assumptions of this work are explicit, namely, to take the image as a set of events that determine new conditions for aesthetic experience: «The present issue of *Paradigmi* revolves around the notion of image. Not primarily, however, of image as a relation "between" heterogeneous or homogeneous elements (form and content, figure and object, etc.) but as an "assembled event" that

determines a new condition in current aesthetic experience, i.e. the experience of "connected images"» (p. 409). One could divide the collection of essays into two sections, a first focusing on the "material" and "tangible" themes, starting with bodies and Nature, of images and imaginaries, and a second one devoted to "immaterial" themes more concentrated beginning with the world of music, up to the new boundaries of artificial intelligence. New types of image "connections" reveal the contemporary Era's mutual relationship between reality and virtuality: «But the most crucial question remains: Do connected images offer new paradigms for offline and online experience?» (p. 410).

Opening the "material" section are Emmanuel Alloa and Horst Bredekamp, who have two essays on the performative evolution of images, correspondingly titled *Performing an Appearance. On the Performativity of Images* and *In the Depts of Artificiality, The principle of image - Active, Disjunction*. Alloa, taking up Wittgenstein's Tractatus, stresses the importance of the representation of objects through images. He highlights the return (or confirmation) of the performative power of images, beginning with Mitchell, Gell, Bakewell, Elkins, Bolt, Pentcheva, Stoelleger, Seja, Hantelmann, Schwarte, Cappelletto, Descola, Bredekamp, and Soto Calderón. What is the contemporary power of images? In what ways do images make things? Horst Bredekamp, the German art historian, insists on the very power of images: «The image is, in short, no longer the instrument, but the actor - indeed, the 'prime mover,' the protagonist»[1].

  Alloa presents several fascinating examples in an iteration that describes the "active" faculty of images. The first is James Montgomery Flagg's famous Uncle Sam poster, "I Want you" for U.S. Army of 1917, which, in addition to being a propaganda image, Alloa writes, is a performative image; that is, it induces the audience to participate in it. Another example is that of offensive images, which are often categorized as performative, as in the case of artistic cartoon images with a political or even pornographic background. In conclusion, Alloa argues that the performative quality of images means epitomizing that what appears intrinsically depends on the act of its imaginal display. In this regard, the last image he illustrates is that of a black hole, visualizing the invisible, an image taken by the *Event Horizon Telescope* in 2017, 55 million light-years earlier. This means that every image has evocative power and extreme imaginative power for Alloa.

This is followed, almost in response, by Bredekamp's essay, which focuses on the microscope images that appeared in issue 459 of the scientific journal "Nature" in 2009. The activity of imagery is an ambiguous one. The quotations beginning with Federico Cesi and Robert Hooke give this essay a historiographical impression of the development of images that represent an invisible to be discovered in a micro-world of physics or biology or the history of science, up to the most sophisticated

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[1] H. Bredekamp, *Image Acts: A Systematic Approach to Visual Agency*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2018, p.33

contemporary technologies, which allow us to visualize what we cannot even imagine. Indeed, the imaginative act corresponds to the principle of disjunction in Nature, as in the case of the jellyfish *Aequorea Victoria*, which produces a fluorescent protein that became a tool for molecular biological experiments a few years ago and is the basis for the invention of technicolour. «The jellyfish is an extreme example of the force active in the world of images itself, which shapes nature according to its image» (p.436).

Another kind of reflection is that of Elena Tavani, in the essay *The Aggregate as an Image of Connection and Individuation. The Case of Pierre Huyghe's Untilled (2011 - 2012) and Abyssal Plain (2015 - 2016)* questions the notion of "aggregate" understood as a perceptual concept of aesthetics. The specific case of French artist Pierre Huyghe, who works with organic and inorganic objects from the environment, creates "unique" environments. An interesting example is "Untilled", a sculpture made from an actual colony of live bees. The aggregation of organisms and their assembly are part of an aesthetic dynamic that belongs to the "inner" image. Tavani takes up Emilio Garroni's work *Immagine, Linguaggio, Figura* (2005), in which Garroni introduces the concept of the perceptual image as an aggregate.

The movement and forms of images presuppose observation in Nature and the body's movement, as in the essay *Connecting Informed Bodies, from Aby Warburg to Peter Dew and the Body of Nation* by Andrew Benjamin. In a work of art, the body is a moving entity, a kind of movement that is never abstract. In fact, according to Benjamin, the body in art presupposes a form of expression. Aby Warburg's writings about the relationship between movement and the presence of the body are symbolic in the case of Dürer: *Dürer und die italienische Antike* (1906), as well as the introduction of the concept of "pathosformula." Regarding the concept of movement represented by the presence of the body in the work of art and vice versa, Benjamin creates a dialogue with the Australian artist Peter Drew in his posters, with the faces of immigrants and the words "Aussie" in the background. The image in this case, Benjamin writes, has a twofold quality: 1) Documenting a historical moment in Australia, 2) The juxtaposition of the non-Anglo-Celtic or white face with the words "Aussie" to echo the concept of co-presence.

Lydia Goehr describes another co-presentation and image referencing case in *The Chair in Question. Armchair Philosophy and Furniture Art*. According to Goehr, there is a correspondence between the organization of furniture and the organization of the mind, especially in the case of the Tate Gallery exhibition "Hogarth in Europe" (2021 - 2022) and regarding the mahogany chair on which William Hogarth sits. The focus is on the relationship between this chair and the slave trade during colonialism

and the establishment of nations in the nineteenth century. For Goehr, this chair represents a trait d'union between history, philosophy and art regarding concepts such as perspective, form and posture.

In contemporary and post-modern times, the condition of images and the resulting imaginaries take an increasing part in social and political contexts. From a social and anthropological point of view, the body, with its movement, releases traces of intentionality, and likewise, the parts of it tell a precise imaginary of one's being, as in the case of the skin in regard to the art of tattooing. Federico Vercellone, in the essay *Philosophy in the Time of Tattooing*, highlights the extensional power of tattoos regarding one's narrative: «The skin is thus potentially the medium for an indefinite if not infinite, extension of the imaginary» (p.493).

Another aspect of contemporaneity is the development of imaginaries from significant wars and strongly ethical and conflict concepts, both in the case of World War II and the atomic bomb. Micaela Latini, in the essay *The Conflict of Images and the Images of Conflicts. Günther Anders and Harun Farocki* indicate a focus on the concept of "bargaining" between what is within images and what is outside. Latini takes up the 1980s dialogue between artist Harun Farocki and Günther Anders about the conflict of images in the contexts of conflict images. That is, how there is a relationship between media and technologies used in war. The event that touches both is undoubtedly that of Auschwitz and a series of images taken by American area forces on April 4, 1944. These are images of a survey done by the Allies in southern Poland with the intent of identifying targets for bombing. Looking closely, one notices in the photos sheds used to produce fuel and buma by the Nazis. In this regard, Farocki points out how the "production" of the Nazis and not their "destruction" of human lives is highlighted in the photos. About this considerable paradox, Farocki, with Anders, argues the importance of inventing a new "war machine" to prevent the instruments of the state from positioning us before the irreparable.

Opening the "immaterial" section is Tiziana Pangrazi's essay *Sensible Image and Musical Process in K. Stockhausen's Stimmung (1968).* The concept of intuitive music developed by composer Karlheinz Stockhausen in 1960 reveals atmospheric images. "Stimmung", for six voices and six microphones, is a work by Karlheinz Stockhausen, written in 1968 and commissioned by the city of Cologne for the Collegium Vocale Köln. It has an average duration of seventy-four minutes and bears the number 24 in the composer's catalogue. Emblematic is the use of the word *Stimmung*, which Pangrazi relates to the concept of atmospheric presence introduced by Gernot Böhme in contemporary aesthetics.

The correspondence of images understood as "chiasm" appears evident in the contemporary Era, especially with the introduction of new digital technologies. In the essay *The Dream of a Machine. An Example of the Chiasmatic Image*, Roberto Diodato takes up Anna Ridler's work "Fall of the

House of Usher I" (2017). Diodato not surprisingly dwells on this work; the British artist intends to associate the analogue material and the digital artificial by connecting the celluloid-made film of Watson and Webber's silent film, "The House of Usher" (1929) and transferred, digitally reprinted, scanned, and reconstructed by GAN (Generative Adversarial Network). According to Diodato, Ridler's work is dwelling because it is associated with constructing an aesthetic sensibility of the world that connects artifactual images with a real imagination.

Filippo Fimiani addresses in his essay *Faceless Gazes in the context of a visual culture. Rhetoric and Politics of the Google Street View*, the imagery created through the daily use of the Google Street View application. Through the work of an Italian artist Domenico Antonio Mancini, Fimiani takes as an example the desire to represent pictorially the coordinates followed by users of the application. This is because, in Mancini's work, we observe a conceptual challenge in wanting to depict landscapes that no longer speak to us but are "followed" in a uniquely horizontal way. The loss of identity of landscapes is confronted with the daily use of technological skills that threaten to wrest from our aesthetic sensibility the experience of the uncanny of places.

Almost ephemeral visions outside reality surround the use of generative artificial intelligence, such as that of the DeepDream generator. In his essay *Dreams, Visions Hallucinations. AI-Generated Images and the Long History of Surrealism*, Antonio Somaini, focuses on the terms "dreams," "visions" and "hallucinations" used very often to describe the virtual reality of artificial intelligence. About the 1924 Surrealist Manifesto, Somaini focuses on Max Ernst's collages related to psychic automation. In the 1936 exhibition Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism, curated by Alfred H. Bart at MoMA in New York, the relationship between the term "Surrealism" was staged not only with the movement conceived by André Breton but also with the historicization of the art of the fantastic dating back to the 15th century. Somaini, through a reconstruction of historical surrealism, highlights the character of the generation of artificial intelligence capable of introducing characters from the past, present and future, as in a flow, a puzzle, a timeless space.

In an almost mirror-image fashion, Ruggero Eugeni's essay, *ARtFaces. Augmented Filters, Art and the Constitution of Identity in Algorithmic Media* defines a series of comparisons of augmented reality images with (by now) our virtual worlds. ARFs (Augmented Reality Filters), now used in almost all social networks, belong to actual gamification practices and the construction of our identities in the contemporary era. Through ARFs, we get in touch with the Metaverse, with the virtual world mixed with the real one. Seemingly a content-free activity, ARTFace is becoming more profound and increasingly moving through social, political, and economic meanings. Will there be an increasingly

pluralistic and uncontrolled construction of our virtual identities? We wonder at this point if we will lose sight of our faces and increasingly use our favourite masks.

The challenge of this Issue is to ask the question about an increasingly uncertain future, not only projected toward the fluid relationship between real and virtual, analog and digital, image and imagination, but especially toward the new frontiers of our being. One's imagination, as well as one's identity and image, are increasingly involved in the representation of ourselves. Through the world of artificial intelligence this shift is more evident than ever. In this regard, the conscious use of natural and rarefied imagery is of paramount importance, there is an urgent need to accept a transdisciplinary dialogue in order to welcome new forms of communication and to know how to make the best use of them without suffering the consequences.