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21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL

BEITRÄGE ZUR KUNSTGESCHICHTE UND VISUELLEN KULTUR

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ECOLOGIES OF BLUE PAPER

DÜRER AND BEYOND

Iris Brahms

Iris Brahms

ABSTRACT

This article examines blue paper as an ecological solution in drawing practice by investigating the questions of when and under which circumstances German artists in the early sixteenth century decided to use blue paper. Blue paper had several aesthetic, symbolic, and economic functions, often both referencing a geographic relationship to Italy and its tradition of drawing on blue paper, and also engaging in a world of play and imitation in workshop practices. For a better understanding of the early modern paper ecologies within which artists worked, it is necessary to regard paper production within a broader socio-cultural range, thus not only as an exchange between paper makers but also with consideration of other crafts as well as the impact of new technologies. From there we can reconsider our relationship to nature.

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The determination of an ecological consciousness, which suggests that humans act with nature and not against it, is as enigmatic as it is obvious for the early modern period. Environmentally responsible processes – that were more evident in the pre-industrial period though not mandatory – are only one indicator of a much more complex concept of ecologies in the sixteenth century.[1] Starting from a pre-industrial economy consisting of manual labor and mechanics as well as cooperation and networks, a general awareness of just such ecologically conscious processes, which were not only dependent on each other, but also reliant on the resources of nature, can be assumed. In the following, I relate these aspects to paper making in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and in particular explore the question to what extent blue drawing paper, which has been used increasingly often as opposed to colored-ground paper, can be considered an environmentally friendly material in order to open the discussion for a manifold understanding of ecologies during that time period.[2]

Blue paper can first and foremost be considered an environmentally friendly material because, in the manufacturing process during the early modern period and thereafter, the blue rags were neither washed to an utmost extent nor bleached,[3] although dyes such as *indigo* coming from Asia or the northern European *woad* could be added.[4] In addition, the fibers were not as carefully selected as they were in the case of higher quality paper, and the gelatin sizing, which made paper resistant enough for writing with a

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[1]
The arguments I develop in this article are mainly inspired by James Gibson's groundbreaking concept of ecologies, see James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, New York 1979. See also its reviews, such as: Jeffrey B. Wagman and Julia J. C. Blau (eds.), *Perception as Information Detection. Reflections on Gibson's Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, New York 2020. Unless otherwise attributed, translations are by the author. "Dürer and Beyond" was also the main title of an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2012: *Dürer and Beyond. Central European Drawings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. 1400–1700* (exh. cat. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art), ed. by Stijn Alsteens, Freyda Spira, and Maryan W. Ainsworth, New Haven, CT 2012.

[2]
Peter Bower, Blues and Browns and Drabs. The Evolution of Colored Papers, in: Harriet K. Stratis and Britt Salvesen (eds.), *The Broad Spectrum. Studies in the Materials, Techniques, and Conservation of Color on Paper*, London 2002, 42–48, here 47: "Coloured papers had evolved out of the primarily utilitarian and economic use of available raw materials for simple wrapping papers." Irene Brückle, The Historical Manufacture of Blue-Coloured Paper, in: *The Paper Conservator* 17, 1993, 20–31, 21: "Being of lesser importance than white paper, blue paper was on rare occasions manufactured by utilizing worn moulds rejected for white paper production. [...] possibly older watermarks"; Henk Voorn, *De papiermolens in de provincie Noord-Holland*, 3 vols., Haarlem 1960, here vol. 1, 94. James P. Casey notes for the recycled water systems of twentieth-century paper mills the common method of starting papermaking for white papers and switching to colored papers as the water became more discolored: James P. Casey, *Pulp and Paper. Chemistry and Chemical Technology*, 4 vols., New York ³1980, here vol. 2, 1220–1221.

[3]
Sandra Schultz, *Papierherstellung im deutschen Südwesten. Ein neues Gewerbe im späten Mittelalter*, Berlin 2018, here 45, 57.

[4]
Peter F. Tschudin, *Grundzüge der Papiergeschichte*, Stuttgart 2002, 171; Brückle, The Historical Manufacture, 20, 24.

quill pen, appears to vary.[5] Italian draftspeople pioneered the use of blue paper for the desired light-and-shadow-modeling that ideally requires a colored ground.[6] However, in order to stress both how paper is involved in a process of remaking and how paper functions as a binding agent between people and their environment – both of which are constitutive for an ecological approach – the questions remain when and under which circumstances artists north of the Alps decided to use blue paper. As such, blue paper is a precondition not only of progress through the recycling of materials but also for shaping a world built on the traditional idea of memory (*memoria*, palimpsest). Remembering is a crucial reason why an artist would draw in first place – to build up a collection of pictures to serve in an artist's workshop as templates – and it is why people generally started to draw portraits, to recall the sitter (see Pliny the Elder's *Dibutade*, Natural History 35, 151–152). At the same time, these closely interrelated factors claim to incorporate the relationship between body and mind as well as between hand and intellect, in order to become aware of the complex and indissolubly intertwined processes between creativity and skill. This is already evident in early art theory in Italy (e.g., Cennino Cennini circa 1400) and is taken up and continued by subsequent art-theoretical consideration north of the Alps (e.g., Albrecht Dürer).

However, in what follows, one has to bear in mind that "ecological configurations have no definite boundaries and no universal principles"[7] and that there are at least three ecologies – the social, the psychological, and environmental conditions – that have characterized classical naturalism since Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764).[8] Transferring this approach to the art of the sixteenth century, I address in this paper the social impact of environmental conditions and regard our environment as consisting of nature as well as of society. Nevertheless, for European culture it should not be ignored how decisive and formative the tendency is, which Pliny explores in his *Natural History* as "the

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[5]
Brückle, The Historical Manufacture, 76: "The use of wrapping paper, and even printing paper, occasionally required artists to apply a surface size consisting of a gelatin/alum solution to prevent inks and watercolors from wicking into the otherwise unsized paper." See also Berthold Cornely, Eine papiergeschichtliche Untersuchung über das Schönen und Färben des Papiers in der Masse, in: *Papiergeschichte* 6/4, 1956, 49–60, here 50: Dip dyeing and starch sizing in the same bath, and further 53; and Tschudin, Grundzüge der Papiergeschichte, 97.

[6]
Iris Brahms, Schnelligkeit als visuelle und taktile Erfahrung. Zum *chiaroscuro* in der venezianischen Zeichenpraxis, in: Magdalena Bushart and Henrike Haug (eds.), *Interdependenzen. Künste und künstlerische Techniken. 1430–1550*, Cologne/Weimar/Berlin 2015, 205–229 with further literature.

[7]
Andrew Patrizio, *The Ecological Eye. Assembling an Ecocritical Art History*, Manchester 2019, 55.

[8]
Verity Platt, Ecology, Ethics, and Aesthetics in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, in: Christopher P. Heuer and Rebecca Zorach (eds.), *Ecologies, Agents, Terrains*, Williamstown, MA 2018, 219–242, here 220.

nuances of man's relationship to a *natura* that serves as the passive object of inquiry and source of raw materials, on the one hand, and supremely intelligent agent and artist (*artifex*) in its own right, on the other".[9] That this tendency became a worldwide attitude that eventually resulted in climate change is an insight hard to bear and obviously hard to change within the economic system of globalization.

I. Recycling in a Twofold Sense

We can consider blue paper as an environmentally friendly material because it is a product of recycling in two senses: European paper of the early modern period was usually a secondary product, made primarily from rags. In addition, blue paper was even intended for wrapping goods and often became waste as packaging material. Therefore, the artists took what was essentially a huge step: they decided to use a cheap material, which was regarded as inferior, as a base for their drawings. Noticing this is crucial, because assuming that artists chose this paper because of its lower costs is obviously an oversimplification with regard to such successful artists as the Bellinis, Andrea Mantegna, Titian, and Jacopo Tintoretto.[10] Rather, the question is what impact the choice of blue paper had on the drawing's value, its meaning, and status, especially given that blue paper tends to fade quickly, even within an artist's lifetime, meaning that the discoloring process might have been common knowledge in artists' workshops.[11] It would lead nowhere to assume that artists held their drawings in low esteem. Rather, these parameters show the intriguing role that the factor of time plays for drawing. Due to the material's easy handling, drawings can be executed spontaneously, even as a note to oneself on a piece of paper, which has been devoted to another project entirely. They can be valued at a particular moment of the creative process or during a short span of their reception. Additionally, they can serve as part of a workshop's model stock and provide durability. The latter can also be true for

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[9]
Ibid., 221.

[10]
Brahms, Schnelligkeit als visuelle und taktile Erfahrung; Iris Brahms, La strada vera. Tintoretto's Drawings on Carte Azzurre and Art Theory, in: Alexa McCarthy, Laura Moretti, and Paolo Sachet (eds.), *Venice in Blue* ("Testi e fonti per la storia della grafica"), Florence 2024 (forthcoming).

[11]
Nevertheless, the blue dye indigo is a light-, water- and temperature-stable molecule, see Norbert Welsch and Claus Christian Liebmann, *Farben. Natur, Technik, Kunst*, Berlin 2003, 178. In addition, measures were taken in the scooping process to preserve the color: Brückle, The Historical Manufacture, 23–29; Tschudin, Grundzüge der Papiergeschichte, 220–221; Cornely, Eine papiergeschichtliche Untersuchung, 51; Bower, Blues and Browns and Drabs, 43–45, Fig. 1.35: "Fabrics dyed with indigo retain their color better than the dyed paper pulp." See also Julius Erfurt, *Färben des Papierstoffs*, Berlin 1912, esp. 10–14.

drawings on blue paper;[12] many studies on this paper have also been preserved, for example from Tintoretto's workshop,[13] indicating there is no evidence to consider blue paper as the preferred material for use as waste or disposable paper. Moreover, this suggests the paper may have been valued as a rather more environmentally friendly product, although this might not have been the first and foremost reason to employ it.

Apart from this, we must ask the question in what way artists reacted to the expected discoloring of the paper, to what extent they consciously included the fading in their way of drawing or whether they just accepted it as it is. We probably have to assume the latter for the sixteenth century, since indications of the deliberate inclusion of fading are only evident from the nineteenth century onwards.[14] The crucial fact we must keep in mind is that the step to choose blue paper for drawing could only be taken at a time when the technology for manufacturing paper was steadily refining the quality of paper, which had an effect on the quality of its by-product: blue paper.[15] The increasing relevance of this cost-efficient material, which in itself could serve as a colored ground, can be linked to artists' rising demands as well as increasing expectations on artists, who had to work more efficiently as a result.[16] This does not mean that inferior materials were chosen on purpose, but it seems more likely that materials were used not only because of their (assumed) quality. Their aesthetic or productive potential could be more important, as is the case with blank lime-wood sculptures or papier mâché sculptures (*carta pesta*). In addition to the twofold recycling that takes place with blue paper, an even more decisive advantage of the blue paper may have been that it rendered the time-consuming and material-intensive preparation of the paper sheets for the desired light-shadow modeling obsolete; consequently, there is no drying process, which required spreading the sheets out, and even the need for careful storage in

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[12]

Cima da Conegliano, *Salvator Mundi*, ca. 1490–1500, London, The British Museum, inv. no. 1895,0915.803; Brahms, La strada vera, 212–213, with further examples and literature.

[13]

See Brahms, La strada vera, with further literature.

[14]

With many thanks to Harriett Stratis (Chicago) for a fruitful discussion on Odilon Redon. Brückle, The Historical Manufacture, 25, and further 28: "Rapid colour changes of newly manufactured blue paper sheets as a result of the presence of acids were already noted by 19th century papermakers."

[15]

Gerhard Piccard, *Die Kronen-Wasserzeichen*, Stuttgart 1961, here 22: "[...] poor quality from the 16th century due to increasing production and steady reduction of suitable raw materials". See also Brückle, The Historical Manufacture, 21: "Hollander simplified the dyeing, in the 18th century a variety of blue papers"; and Richard Hills, A Technical Revolution in Papermaking, 1250–1350, in: John Slavin, Linda Sutherland, John O'Neill, Margaret Haupt, and Janet Cowan (eds.), *Looking at Paper. Evidence & Interpretation*, Ottawa 2001, 105–111, here 105: "We can identify improvements in pulping techniques, changes to paper moulds and the introduction of new drying techniques."

[16]

See Brahms, La strada vera.

the workshops disappeared. Altogether, these preconditions can be considered as environmentally friendly and economically responsible.

When and where blue paper was first produced is not certain. However, inherently (blue) colored papers were a common support in much of Asia,[17] a crucial component in Islamic manuscripts, and in Arabia used especially for official letters. Furthermore, it was a useful material for packaging medicines in Persia.[18] Blue paper was probably a by-product from the very beginning of hand papermaking in Europe,[19] which began in Spain and Italy between the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[20] The European import of paper technology from Arabian cultures converged with the "late medieval revolution in techniques and crafts"[21] and had initially unexpected success, advancing to mass production because of various reasons. The first mention of *carta azzurra* that we know of occurs in the Bolognese statute of 1389,[22] which established state rules for the production of different qualities of paper. North of the Alps, there was no such statute and only the watermarks provide an indication

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Tsien Tsuen-Hsuin, Paper and Printing, in: Joseph Needham (ed.), *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 5: *Chemistry and Chemical Technology, Part I*, Cambridge 1985, 52, 58–59, 74–77 et passim; Jonathan M. Bloom, *Paper before Print. The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World*, New Haven, CT/London 2001, 71.

18

Wisso Weiß, *Zeittafel zur Papiergeschichte*, Leipzig 1983, 47. Brückle, The Historical Manufacture, 20; Robert Ignatius Burns, S.J., Paper Comes to the West, 800–1400, in: Uta Lindgren (ed.), *Europäische Technik im Mittelalter, 800 bis 1400. Tradition und Innovation*, Berlin 1996, 413: the author mentions the production of fine paper in Damascus and Játiva as well as of ordinary paper that "allowed even poor folk to own books, while containers and market-wrappings were common". This indicates that the ordinary paper was not as white as it would have been if the fibers had been well washed. See also Tschudin, Grundzüge der Papiergeschichte, 76–92.

19

Cornely, Eine papiergeschichtliche Untersuchung, 50; Brückle, The Historical Manufacture, 20 mentions blue-colored paper in Asia at least since the fourteenth century; 21: "Although some white paper mills also manufactured blue paper, the bulk of blue paper production was carried out in specialized blue paper mills. Documentary evidence for the existence of specialized blue paper mills survives from the early 17th century, but such mills existed in all probability long before that time. [...] In the course of the 17th century, Dutch papermakers excelled in the manufacture and export of blue paper, and even maintained their own mills for processing dyestuffs such as logwood." See also Irene Brückle, Blue-Colored Paper in Drawings, in: *Drawing* 15/4, 1993, 73–77, 76: "Also, since the commercial use of blue papers was widespread, they probably were available in many locations." And lastly, Bower, Blues and Browns and Drabs, 46: "Some white-paper mills also made small amounts of blue and brown papers, usually for use in wrapping their own papers, but most were made in papermills that specialized only in colored papers."

20

Tschudin, Grundzüge der Papiergeschichte, 98; Tsuen-Hsuin, Paper and Printing, 296–303; Brückle, The Historical Manufacture; Caroline Fowler, *The Art of Paper. From the Holy Land to the Americas*, New Haven, CT/London 2019, 9 et passim.

21

Günter Bayerl and Karl Pichol, *Papier. Produkt aus Lumpen, Holz und Wasser*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1986, 38–44. See also Bloom, Paper before Print, 161–162.

22

Tschudin, Grundzüge der Papiergeschichte, 95 and 100.

of the regulation of dimensions and qualities.[23] However, water-marks varied greatly and were not applied systematically. They thus primarily served a local production and identity context.

For a better understanding of what follows, it is important to briefly clarify two crucial issues that are often the cause of misunderstandings.

1. Blue paper became especially fashionable in Venice before 1500, but the earliest preserved drawings on blue paper are by artists working in Bologna and Florence [Fig. 1].[24] During the sixteenth century it also became a commonly used paper for drawing in Rome.[25] North of the Alps, it was chosen by artists in most cases to reference the Italian or even Venetian style, as we will see later.

2. Albrecht Dürer follows a long tradition of *chiaroscuro*-drawing techniques on colored grounds. This is evidenced by preserved Italian drawings from around 1300,[26] while north of the Alps, such drawings exist from the 1380s onwards [Fig. 2].[27] The exchange between Italian and northern artists concerning this technique began at the latest during the fourteenth century and continued throughout the fifteenth century and beyond. By contrast, the use of blue paper (rather than the colored grounds just mentioned) by artists north of the Alps is not documented before Dürer's stay in Venice between 1505 and 1507.

II. Dürer's Assimilation as Ecological Approach

Albrecht Dürer's large studies on blue paper, which he executed during his stay in Venice between 1505 and 1507 [Fig. 3, Fig. 4 originally the same piece of paper],[28] are closely connected to a specific

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[23]
Gerhard Piccard, *Die Ochsenkopf-Wasserzeichen*, Stuttgart 1966, vol. 1, 24–25.

[24]
Brahms, Schnelligkeit als visuelle und taktile Erfahrung, 209, with more examples and further literature.

[25]
See the œuvre of the Zuccari and the Carracci. Iris Brahms, The Carracci's Reflection of Blue. *Carte Azzurre* in Annibale and Agostino's Drawings and Their Criticism of Vasari's Doctrine, publication forthcoming with further literature in: *Logbuch Wissensgeschichte*, Blog of the SFB 980 *Episteme in Bewegung. Wissenstransfer von der Alten Welt bis in die Frühe Neuzeit*, Freie Universität Berlin.

[26]
Giotto (attr.), *Saints Paulus and Julianus*, ca. 1304–1306, Paris, Louvre, inv. no. 2664, 209 × 186 mm; Taddeo Gaddi, *Presentation of Mary in the Temple*, around 1328, Paris, Louvre, inv. no. 1222, 366 × 285 mm.

[27]
See Iris Brahms, *Zwischen Licht und Schatten. Zur Tradition der Farbgrundzeichnung bis Albrecht Dürer*, Paderborn 2016, 72, 122–124 with further literature.

[28]
Brahms, Zwischen Licht und Schatten, 254–255 et passim; Fowler, The Art of Paper, 91–92; *Albrecht Dürer* (exh. cat. Vienna, Albertina), ed. by Christof Metzger, Vienna 2019, 270–271. See also the study of Eve's arm in The Cleveland Museum of Art, inv. no. 1965.470 (gift of

[Fig. 3]
Albrecht Dürer, Angel from Feast of the Rose Garlands, 1506, Brush on blue paper,
270 × 208 mm. Vienna, Albertina, inv. no. 3099 © Albertina, Vienna.

drawing method popular in Italy that uses only the brush instead of a quill pen. It has never been questioned by scholars that Dürer used Italian paper, however, the detectable watermarks are similar only to the ones found in Venice and other northern Italian towns.[29] Still, the assumption that Dürer drew the studies as *ricordi* to take them home to Nuremberg and present them in humanistic circles as proof of his success in the lagoon city is indeed the most likely scenario.[30] As such, not only do the exquisite drawings provide insight into the working process, the sumptuous modeling even manages to convey coloristic impressions that could have been enriched by Dürer's own words, which he might have chosen to explain the context of the works on paper and to describe the associated paintings. Moreover, they are proof of the artistic exchange across the Alps and substantiate an experienced awareness of the self and the foreign. In this sense, connecting means at the same time a differentiation of one's own traditions and sources, as well as one's efforts and desires. Leaving home to stay and work somewhere else means – especially in pre-industrial times – a physical movement of indescribable effort and is undoubtedly accompanied by an intensive experience of the distances that span spacious landscapes. The ground, that is, the surface of the earth we live on, acquires its irreversible importance for us from the very fact that we depend on it and enter into a physical relationship to it determined by our planet's gravity. Thus, these conditions create a local bond over time and, as soon as one moves elsewhere, engender new perspectives, in multiple dimensions: from a microcosm (to differentiate the perspective of the self and the others) to a macrocosm across a region, country, or continent.

Moving and traveling to, and working elsewhere also causes wearing and abrasion on materials such as textiles and clothing fabrics – the most important material in the current context as this is the material from which paper was made but which is also the

Alan Kennedy; Walter Strauss, *The Complete Drawings of Albrecht Dürer*, New York 1977, 1507/1) with Dürer's monogram and the date "1507".

[29] Albrecht Dürer (exh. cat. Vienna, Albertina), 456–457. I am grateful to Christof Metzger, who provided me with a documentation of the watermark of the Albertina drawing inv. no. 3103. For the Nuremberg drawings see *Meister der Zeichnung. Zeichnungen und Aquarelle aus der Graphischen Sammlung des Germanischen Nationalmuseums* (exh. cat. Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum), ed. by Gerhard Bott, Nuremberg 1992, 62–65 (Rainer Schoch). I also want to extend my gratitude to Claudia Valter and Roland Damm who agreed that the fragmented watermark on inv. no. Hz. 5481 does not belong to a Cardinal's Hat as, according to other drawings by Dürer of that period, suggested by Walter Strauss (1506/37). With regard to the Cleveland drawing, I want to thank Emily Peters and Moyna Stanton for providing transmitted light photographs of the watermark, an anchor in a circle that is close to Briquet 461, which is similar to the Albertina drawing inv. no. 3103.

[30] Brahms, Zwischen Licht und Schatten, 256; Fowler, The Art of Paper, 93; Albrecht Dürer (exh. cat. Vienna, Albertina), 262, 268 (Julia Zaunbauer and Christof Metzger). The Cleveland drawing, dated "1507", is an exception in that Dürer did not complete the associated painting until later that year in Nuremberg, now in the Prado, Madrid. However, Dürer had taken up the subject after his engraving of Adam and Eve (SMS 39) of 1504 during his stay in Venice, see Strauss 1506/50–1506/54. It is therefore likely that Dürer planned the painting so far in advance that he made such a large-scale study for it even before he left Venice in early 1507, see Fedja Anzelewky, *Albrecht Dürer. Das malerische Werk*, 2 vols., Berlin ²1991, text vol., 215.

most personal, as it is worn next to the skin to cover the body. Since all things, tools and equipment, clothing and leather works were certainly handmade (with only some mechanical support), it is likely that their owners had, in most cases, a better understanding of their production than nowadays. This might include the fact that paper is a product of recycling the very material one wears every day. At that time, the use of rags for papermaking was unlikely to be questioned as long as they were available in sufficient quantities.[31] But it would not be appropriate to consider this approach environmentally friendly in the sense and with the emphasis that this term is used today. Nevertheless, and not least due to poverty, some awareness of resources was likely in earlier times, leading to a high potential to protect from wasteful behavior.[32] Interestingly enough, in sources such as folk songs, there is conscious acknowledgment of the discrepancy in using inferior material for a high-quality substance, which was valued and used by the higher ranks of society such as scholars, juridical and ecclesiastic representatives, as well as monarchs.[33]

With this better understanding of handcraft and pre-industrial processes, as a consumer of paper one was at the same time part of developing networks that grew between paper technologies and other fields of production such as for parchment (using animal remains to produce gelatin for paper sizing)[34] and textiles.[35] Innovations in the latter field, like "the spinning wheel at Speyer around 1280 [that] 'vastly increased' the production of linen for underclothing and household items" or the fulling mill (*Walkmühle*) provided an international rag market and accelerated the path to the mass production of paper.[36] Robert Ignatius Burns, S.J., covers this development via the invention of eye glasses in Italy in the early 1280s

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[31]
On the profession of rag collector and ragseller as well as the low social position of the rag collector, see Lothar Müller, *Weiße Magie. Die Epoche des Papiers*, Munich 2012, here 76–77. That was not always the fact: people used to wear their clothes their entire life long. Documents prove that paper mills were struggling to receive the raw material: rags. See also Georg Christoph Keferstein, *Unterricht eines Papiermachers an seine Söhne, diese Kunst betreffend*, Leipzig 1766, reprint: Stolberg 1936, here 70.

[32]
Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, Cambridge 2000, 8, 11, 17–33 et passim on clothing as circulating goods and currency.

[33]
Müller, Weiße Magie, 76–82.

[34]
Erika Eisenlohr, Die Kunst, Pergament zu machen, in: Lindgren, Europäische Technik, 429–434; Peter F. Tschudin, Werkzeug und Handwerkstechnik in der mittelalterlichen Papierherstellung, in: Lindgren, Europäische Technik, 423–428, 426: "Gelatin was made from tanneries' skin waste and sheep's feet."

[35]
When making yarn, the color fastness mattered, see Margret Wensky, Frauen im Handwerk, in: Lindgren, Europäische Technik, 509–518, 515; Müller, Weiße Magie, 76–82.

[36]
Burns, Paper Comes to the West, 417; Tschudin, Werkzeug und Handwerkstechnik, 424. See also Lukas Clemens and Michael Matheus, Die Walkmühle, in: Lindgren, Europäische Technik, 233–234.

and the manual labor of the scribe to meet the demands of the establishment of a written culture; with this in mind, Burns balances the privilege of parchment against the ephemeral paper, which was by 1280 "six times cheaper than parchment in Bologna".[37] Understanding this development requires seeing the production of longer-lasting papers due to glue, gelatin, or vegetable starch sizing in Italy as a necessary precondition for its success.[38]

Although it was significantly cheaper than parchment, the production of paper was still a costly and time-consuming investment[39] and necessitated well-functioning collaboration between rag collectors, rag sorters, hand papermakers (*Schöpfgeselle*), and couchers (*Gautscher*)[40] that formed a social hierarchy up to the papermaker who was understood more as an artist than as a craftworker, which meant that papermakers did not organize in or form a separate guild;[41] rather, they were associated with the guild of the pharmacists.[42] However, they guarded secret recipes and their experiential knowledge, so that setting up a paper mill in another region required recruiting specialists from elsewhere. The entrepreneur Ulman Stromer, for example, had to enlist experts from Italy in 1389 to run his paper mill at the Pegnitz river near Nuremberg.[43] Furthermore, we have to consider the impact of new technologies such as wire drawing[44] – which allowed the production of finer papers and the application of a watermark – as well as the screw press, established for the first time in the wine industry, which allowed the extraction of about 50 percent residual moisture in the paper

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[37]
Burns, Paper Comes to the West, 417, 419.

[38]
Ibid., 419.

[39]
Tschudin, Werkzeug und Handwerkstechnik, 426: merchants were the investors.

[40]
Tschudin, Grundzüge der Papiergeschichte, 117–130; see also Müller, Weiße Magie, 45. Bayerl and Pichol, Papier, 47; Hans-Jürgen Wolf, *Geschichte des Papiers. Historische Grundlagen, Portraits, Technologie*, Ulm 2012, 625–660.

[41]
Müller, Weiße Magie, 76–82.

[42]
Andrea F. Gasparinetti, Ein altes Statut von Bologna. Über die Herstellung und den Handel von Papier, in: *Papiergeschichte* 6/3, 1956, 45–47, 46.

[43]
Franz Irsigler, Überregionale Verflechtungen der Papierer. Migration und Technologietransfer vom 14. bis zum 17. Jahrhundert, in: Knut Schulz and Elisabeth Müller-Luckner (eds.), *Handwerk in Europa vom Mittelalter bis zur frühen Neuzeit*, Munich 1999, 253–276, 258–261; Ulman Stromer, *Püchel von mein geslecht und von abentewr. Teilfaksimile der Handschrift Hs 6146 des Germanischen Nationalmuseums Nürnberg*, ed. by Lotte Kurras, Bonn 1990, 146–147, see also 70–75.

[44]
Jochem Wolters, Drahtherstellung im Mittelalter, in: Lindgren, Europäische Technik, 205–216.

that was made possible by the hydraulic operation.[45] Because rag stamping mills and paper mills in Europe were based on an increasingly powerful hydraulic system, they "used the forces of nature mechanically for human purposes"[46] and were dependent on a position close to a source of appropriate water like a steady stream.[47] Lynn White saw this against the background of "a conscious and widespread program designed to harness and direct the energies observable around us" into a "labour-saving power technology". In this mindset, the cosmos was conceived of "as a vast reservoir of energies to be tapped and used according to human intentions".[48] However, an early awareness of polluting water by soaking flax or hemp ("a long and essential stage in paper making"[49]) lead to, for example, Emperor Frederick II issuing a decree against it in 1231, forbidding it near towns lest "the quality of the air [...] be corrupted by it".[50] In view of the growing public as well as private use of paper, this became a shared social responsibility that went beyond the local dimension and gained international importance.

This broader perspective on papermaking will help us to better relate to Dürer's use of paper and his particular understanding of the drawing processes in the international context. Even though Dürer never discusses the certain use of blue paper – he in fact mentions paper very little in his theoretical writings[51] and regards the Venetian paper, which the well-known humanist Willibald Pirckheimer requested in a letter to him, as not more valuable than the paper available in Nuremberg[52] – his explanations about

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[45]
Tschudin, Grundzüge der Papiergeschichte, 94 and 100; id., Werkzeug und Handwerkstechnik, 424–426: As a location with a tradition of textile and iron production, Fabriano has played a crucial role in the invention of the paper stamping mill and scoop mold.

[46]
Lynn White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change*, Oxford 1962, 79. Bloom, Paper before Print, 9.

[47]
Stromer, Püchel, 87, fol. 99v: Judicial decision on the watercourse of the Pegnitz with assurance of one third of the inflow to the Gleismühle.

[48]
White, Medieval Technology, 134.

[49]
Burns, Paper Comes to the West, 415.

[50]
James M. Powell, *The Liber Augustalis or Constitutions of Melfi Promulgated by the Emperor Frederick II for the Kingdom of Sicily in 1231*, Syracuse/New York 1971, The third book, Title XLVIII, 132; Burns, Paper Comes to the West, 415–416.

[51]
This is, indeed, different to Cennini, who explains the use of parchment and paper and its preparation with colored grounds, see Cennino Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte*, ed. by Fabio Frezzato, Vicenza 2003, cap. X and XV–XXVI.

[52]
August 18, 1506: "Item laßt mich wissen, was Papiers Ihr meint, das ich kaufen soll, wann ich weiß kein subtilers denn als wir doheim kauft hant" (Albrecht Dürer, *Schriftlicher Nachlaß*, vol. 1: *Autobiographische Schriften*, ed. by Hans Rupprich, Berlin 1956, 53). This does not necessarily mean, in Dürer's view, that the Italian paper is of lesser quality than the paper at home, as scholars have argued (Brückle, Blue-Colored Paper, 75; Cornely, Eine

how to become a good artist are still meaningful to us. In the *Aesthetic Excursus*, printed in 1528, Dürer emphasizes the relevance of an ignorant person's judgment about art and stresses the importance of art's reception by common people such as a farmer:

> But that is why it is not reprehensible if an incomprehensible person shares his observation with you. That is not why one should not believe it. For it is possible for a peasant to tell you the error of your work, although he cannot correct it and teach you how to improve it.[53]

Dürer's exceptional approach is an important fact since ecology is often primarily understood as the surrounding of both the individual and all of us. As soon as an individual steps into the environment, which is inhabited by others, a life-shaping interrelationship develops. James Gibson has pursued ground-breaking research in this direction and investigated a new approach by asking the question how to define perception and how it functions.[54]

In terms of perception, Dürer has an eye-opening idea that relates to the artist's practice. Here, what roles the mind and the hand play and in which relationship they stand to each other is of crucial concern. Interestingly enough, Dürer does not postulate a hierarchy between them. He even seems to give the hand – at least in the early stages of art production – a life of its own by explaining that one's mind has to grow from the time one first uses it in order to be able to tell one's hand what to do: "For the mind must begin to grow with its use, so that the hand can do what the mind wants to have. From this grows with time the certainty in the art and its use."[55] It is the close intertwining of both, of mind and body, that matters to Dürer: "For these two must be together, for one can do nothing without the other."[56] This statement demonstrates the

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papiergeschichtliche Untersuchung, 60, fn. 6 even suggested that Dürer thought only blue paper was available in Italy). Rather, the quote from his letter indicates that the trade routes were vivid enough to provide the same choice of paper qualities on both sides of the Alps.

[53]
Albrecht Dürer, *Schriftlicher Nachlaß*, vol. 3: *Die Lehre von menschlicher Proportion*, ed. by Hans Rupprich, Berlin 1969, 267–306, here 297, § 74: "Darumb ist aber nit verworffenn, so einem ein vnuerstendiger ein warheyt sag, das mans darumb nicht glaubenn solt. Dan es ist mueglich, es sag dir ein bawer den yrrthum deines wercks, aber er kan dich darumb nit berichten vnd lernen, wie du den selben bessern solst." And § 77: "Man sol auch merckenn, wie wol ein gemeyner man das besser for dem schlechtern erkent. Noch dann verstet nyemant volkumlicher ein werck zu vrteyln dann ein verstendiger kuenstner, der da solchs durch sein werck offt bewissen hat." See also Christiane J. Hessler, Ne supra crepidam sutor! Schuster, bleib bei deinem Leisten. Das Diktum des Apelles seit Petrarca bis zum Ende des Quattrocento, in: *Fifteenth Century Studies* 33, 2008, 133–150.

[54]
Gibson, The Ecological Approach.

[55]
Albrecht Dürer, *Schriftlicher Nachlaß*, vol. 3: *Die Lehre von menschlicher Proportion*, ed. by Hans Rupprich, Berlin 1969, Der ästhetische Exkurs, 267–306, here 297, § 76: "Dann der verstandt muß mit dem gebrauch anfahen zu wachsen, also das die hand kuen thon, was der will im verstand haben will. Auß solchem wechst mit der zeyt die gewyßheit der kunst vnd des gebrauchs."

[56]
Ibid., § 76: "Dann dise zwey muessen bei ein ander sein, dann eins on das ander sol nichtz."

balance between intellect and practice in Dürer's understanding and underlines his distance to concepts that prioritize the mind, such as Giorgio Vasari's later *disegno*-theory will do most influentially. Instead, it becomes obvious that creativity can only develop on the basis of a synergetic relationship between the hand and the mind, so that, as a result, the skilled hand (*behendigkeyt*) transforms the creation of art into a fluid process and even accelerates this process, as long as the mind is full of images: "And this agility makes that you do not have to think long, because your head is full of art."[57] This "freyheyt der hand" (freedom of the hand)[58] made it possible for Dürer to draw most painterly depictions on blue paper in a large scale in order to counter the common assumption that he was simply a fantastic printmaker. His international experience made him aware of the different status that artists enjoyed on both sides of the Alps. With this revised perspective, he realized both the tradition from which he emerged and what needed to change in order to turn the wheel of time.

III. Burgkmair's Technical Interest in an Ecological Perspective

Change of scenery: Hans Burgkmair from Augsburg was very much interested in inventing a new method of printing: the *clairobscur*-woodcut. Burgkmair's *clairobscur*-woodcut depicting Pope Julius II (dated to 1511) [Fig. 5][59] resembles a coin. Different prints of the woodcut exist, which vary in the tone of the color plate. In addition to the woodcuts, a colored-ground drawing is preserved [Fig. 6],[60] which is considered to have been made in preparation for printing. With regard to the tradition of drawing we have to remember, however, that elaborate colored-ground drawings were hardly ever direct models for works of art to be produced, such as panel or glass paintings, but rather had the status of presentation pieces.[61] This explains why it seems less common to have the presentation

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[57] Ibid., § 79–80: "Vnnd diese behendigkeyt macht, das du dich nit lang bedencken darffst, so dir der kopff vol kunst steckt."

[58] Ibid., § 82.

[59] Iris Brahms, Mehr an Sein. Zur bildlichen Präsenz von Burgkmairs Zeichenkunst, in: Wolfgang Augustyn and Manuel Teget-Welz (eds.), *Hans Burgkmair. Neue Forschungen zu einem Künstler der deutschen Renaissance*, Munich 2018, 395–414, here 407.

[60] Ibid., 406–409; Tilman Falk, *Hans Burgkmair. Studien zu Leben und Werk des Augsburger Malers*, Munich 1968, here 56–57; id., *Hans Burgkmair. Die Zeichnungen*, Berlin 2023, 85, who omits to mention that the blue paper used in this drawing as a support was not discovered until my publication in 2018 but assumes, without further reflection, it to be undoubtedly Venetian paper and therefore even considers the drawing was created in 1507 when Burgkmair might have stayed there. For a possible sojourn of the artist in Italy see id., Hans Burgkmair, der "vernachlässigte" Altdeutsche, in: Augustyn and Teget-Welz, Hans Burgkmair, 1–28, here 9 and 11–13.

[61] Brahms, Zwischen Licht und Schatten, 131–151 et passim.

[Fig. 5]
Hans Burgkmair, Julius II, designed 1511, *Clairobscur*-woodcut, D. 245 mm. Dresden, Kup-
ferstich-Kabinett, inv. no. A 2042 © Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen
Dresden. Photo: Herbert Boswank.

drawing in the same size and format as the print, although this is probably what was intended here. This detail evokes in this particular case an extraordinarily close interrelationship between manual work and technical reproduction.

Against this background, we approach a complex context of physical work in different media and the role that the mind plays in creating a drawing or a print. In the end it is a question of various functions and, especially in the case of prints, of different steps in the process. Whereas there might be in any medium a varied intensity of creativity incorporated to either invent a depiction or to copy it, in the print process several hands are usually involved: the inventor, the engraver, and the printer (not to mention the publisher). At this point, I do not want to clarify those tasks in detail. Rather, I want to draw attention to the fact that the mind-hand relation should never be underestimated and that a primacy of one over the other becomes obsolete as soon as its interrelationship is accepted. To comprehend the skillful task of an engraver or woodcarver, one must consider the complexity of translating the drawing on paper onto a copper plate or a woodblock, which principally involves reversing the picture. Additionally, the engraver has to be aware of the characteristics and irregularities of the material (especially the latter in the case of woodblocks because of the annual rings) to control their strength and execute lines and hatchings in the requested manner. Likewise, printing the block or plate onto paper requires the knowledge, gained by experience, to cover it with ink of the right consistency, to remove the excess ink (which in itself is a creative process, since its specific manner determines the lighter and respectively darker areas and is thus dependent on certain atmospheric effects), and to adjust the paper in the press so that it does not wrinkle or misalign.[62] In this sense, it is only partly understandable when scholars emphasize the printing process as a purely mechanic process that does not require manual labor.[63] This then proves, without any doubt, the necessity of engaging the mind, as we have seen before.

While printing must be thought of, in most cases, as a collaboration, a drawing is first and foremost the work of a single person who, in all concentration, invests his reflection of the world into the creative process. By focusing on Burgkmair's drawing of Pope Julius II, a completely new argument will be presented on the basis of my empirical analysis.[64] The sheet, which is cut into a round shape, has a black background from which the dignitary stands out in profile.

[62]
Iris Brahms, Abklatsche wie sie im Buche stehen. Zur Phänomenologie der Nachnutzung, in: ead. (ed.), *Marginale Zeichentechniken. Pause, Abklatsch, Cut&Paste als ästhetische Strategie in der Vormoderne*, Berlin/Boston 2022, 103–127, here 105–107.

[63]
For a different discussion see Hana Gründler, Toni Hildebrandt, and Wolfram Pichler, Zur Händigkeit der Zeichnung, in: *Rheinsprung 11. Zeitschrift für Bildkritik* 3, 2012, 2–19, here 3.

[64]
Brahms, Mehr an Sein, 408.

His features have been drawn by pen and brush in black and white on greenish prepared paper. But this is not the white paper covered with a green primer that was particularly common on both sides of the Alps. Rather, and this is a telling discovery, blue uncoated paper was used here, which was then extensively tinted green [Fig. 7]. The question arises as to why Burgkmair chose the greenish preparation – which could have been applied by an apprentice to suggest the artist's workshop structure – and did not draw the light-shadow modeling directly on the blue paper underneath.

One can assume that the Berlin colored-ground drawing testifies to Burgkmair's intensive reflection on the new printing process. As such, the greenish preparation was necessary to anticipate the printed color plate, on which soft transitions to stronger shading were created with a watery wash in gray-brown, similar to the tone blocks in *clairobscur*-woodcuts. However, despite all the close attention paid to the production and aesthetics of the drawing and the print, a compromise remained in the respective outcome: in the drawing, the final white highlights had to be added by hand instead of just leaving the white paper blank as in the woodcut. Still, the final effect is closer to what the different processes would indicate. It is worth considering the blank paper not as a mere gap, since the white areas of the print also stand out in relief due to the high pressure on the paper during the printing process.

What we can conclude from this is another similarity in both techniques, the colored-ground drawing and the *clairobscur*-woodcut, which are purposefully formed through overlapping fields of color. In terms of printing, exactly carved plates with clear edges have to be arranged accordingly through all steps of the entire printing process leading up to the finished work of art. During the process, the individual plates become highly abstract fields of color that only in the end create a coherent image. As such, this partitioned process can be regarded as one important step in the history of manufacture and mechanics, since it breaks down a complex proceeding for better handling. At the same time, the collaborator's perception of the full process is no longer possible. Based on this microcosm of artistic production, we can draw conclusions about how we see our environment, how holistic our reactions are to it, and how individually or generally we participate in it. However, this procedure transforms as soon as we look at the finished print: the print provides a certain insight into its creation, since the overlapping color fields are still visible in the final status, even as the eyes respond to the information with a compositional way of seeing an entire depiction and discovering a high amount of plasticity. If we want to compare the picture with our view of the environment, it is inspiring to consider the artistic technique as a demonstration of what Gibson meant by the perception of hidden fields that are behind overlapping fields or objects. This technique reveals the complexity of human perception, which is not limited to the mere visible but includes more, namely the understanding of three-dimensionality and spaces that may lay behind the momen-

[Fig. 7]
Detail of [Fig. 6] in raking light © Archive of the author.

tary image ("cognitive map").[65] Whereas the edges of the color fields within the depiction could correspond in Gibson's terminology to "covering edges", the edge of an image – of the paper, panel, or canvas – signifies the very end of the format itself and as such of the depicted world from which various methods about the perception and the essence of art as well as about the discipline of art history emerges. These are matters that are equally important for the drawing, even if it has a more narrowed function in its creation. Nevertheless, from the outset it is intended to be perceived – whether as a presentation drawing or as a model for the woodcarver and printer. As such, it occupies a position within a social ecology from the very first second.

Since inherently colored papers are very rare among the preserved drawings north of the Alps in the early sixteenth century, although they were already common in Italy during the fifteenth century, Burgkmair's only use of this paper in 1511 speaks of his determined examination of the Italian drawing practice, regardless of where the very paper he used was produced. For Burgkmair, his occupation with the Italian tradition also led to the frequent reliance on red chalk.[66] This does not mean that he necessarily spent time in Italy. Nevertheless, at the time it was in no way conventional to be guided by Italian art, but rather by a modern approach that showed an awareness of foreign traditions against the background of local or regional customs, and as such a realization of what home versus remoteness means. This is certainly an insight that becomes intensified by one's own experience of traveling. However, the trade – especially vivid in Augsburg with a direct route across the Alps[67] – may have induced much for those who stayed.

However, a watermark, which would have provided proof that inherently blue paper was produced in Augsburg at that time, was not found on this drawing.[68] So, transregional trade relations, especially against the background of the second statute of Bologna of 1454, are to be considered as well. The statute included the concession that paper producers were henceforth allowed to accept external commissions and to make paper that differed from the

[65]
Gibson, Ecological Approach, chapter 5, The Ambient Optic Array, 58–84; chapter 11, The Discovery of the Occluding Edge and Its Implications for Perception, 180–192; et passim.

[66]
Falk, Hans Burgkmair. Studien zu Leben und Werk, 61–64; Falk, Burgkmair, der "vernachlässigte" Altdeutsche, 10–12. Genevieve Verdigel, in her discussion of the early use of red chalk in Venice, questions the widely held belief that Leonardo was the first artist to use red chalk for drawing, see Genevieve Verdigel, On the Origins and Functions of Red Chalk in Venetian Drawings circa 1450 to 1540, in: *Arte Veneta* 78, 2021, 102–119.

[67]
Tschudin, Grundzüge der Papiergeschichte, 100–101: "Trade routes were either from Genua over the western Alps or from the Veneto region over the eastern Alps." Andrew Morrall, *Jörg Breu the Elder. Art, Culture and Belief in Reformation Augsburg*, Aldershot 2001, here 73–76.

[68]
Weiß, Zeittafel zur Papiergeschichte, mentions paper mills in the Free Imperial City Augsburg from 1460 on, see 66 et passim.

formats and weights named in the statute as long as those papers were exported.[69] This, in turn, led to a differentiated view on local customs and regulations versus foreign perspectives, which resulted in a transregional network of various interests and as such helped acceptance of the other's approach, which in turn served to promote collaborating concepts and inventions on the market.

Franz Irsigler has shown how closely knit the networks were between papermakers, both north and south, and even beyond the Alps.[70] Bills and other sources documented in Gerhard Piccard's volumes of watermarks, for instance, prove that grayish wrapping paper was also produced in mills north of the Alps during the sixteenth century.[71] In Ulman Stromer's paper mill, founded in 1390 close to Nuremberg, for example, paper of higher quality was too expensive to make, so the mill was forced to continue exclusively with wrapping paper before closing down completely in 1456.[72] This clarifies, though, that colored papers were manufactured north of the Alps even before Dürer discovered blue paper as a substrate for drawing in Venice in 1505. In fact, there might have been a difference in quality, which is probably why artists in the north did not use it before being inspired by Italian draftspeople. Nevertheless, a development in the quality of the paper also took place in Italy, which was – we have to bear in mind – by no means driven by artists, since papers in general were not made for artists before the late eighteenth century.[73]

Even though there is a late fifteenth-century German recipe in the *Nürnberger Kunstbuch*, which explains how to immerse individual "white paper sheets in a blueberry juice solution containing alum",[74] the demand for blue paper from paper mills, by contrast

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[69]
Gasparinetti, Ein altes Statut, 47.

[70]
Irsigler, Überregionale Verflechtungen, 253–275.

[71]
Gerhard Piccard, *Die Turm-Wasserzeichen*, Stuttgart 1970, 19, city bills Schwäbisch Hall, 8774, Salem 1615, supplement 27: "2 riß graw packhpapir zu 9 batzen"; Gerhard Piccard, *Die Kronen-Wasserzeichen*, Stuttgart 1961, 25: "In the city archives of Wesel, Upper Rhenish-Vosgesian, gray maculature papers from the second third of the 16th century with the high crown as a paper mark were found." Furthermore ibid., 27. On the obscure definability of the "Upper Rhine-Vogesian" metropolitan area see also Hans Kälin, *Papier in Basel bis 1500*, Basel 1974, 126.

[72]
Irsigler, Überregionale Verflechtungen, 261, 263–264. Wrapping papers were exclusively produced from wool, see Kälin, Papier in Basel, 22.

[73]
Bower, Blues and Browns and Drabs, 45; Thea Burns, *The Invention of Pastel Painting*, London 2007, 33, with further literature.

[74]
Brückle, The Historical Manufacture, 20, and further 24: "Little wonder that dye recipes were regarded as mill secrets, and only sporadically recorded." See also Tschudin, Grundzüge der Papierherstellung, 171–172. For the oldest paper dyeing recipe from the 15th century, see Emil E. Ploss, *Ein Buch von alten Farben. Technologie der Textilfarben im Mittelalter mit einem Ausblick auf die festen Farben*, Heidelberg/Berlin 1962, 117, Recipe No Iviij: "Wiltu grüne farb machen auf papir, so nym safftgrun, temperir den auch mit essig vnd thu ein wenig alaun dar vnter, so wirt es gar gut."

to Italy, was never in such demand. In the so called "Bergpostille" (1564), Mathesius's verdict was negative: "For coarse and blue and gray wrapping paper and all evil books belong cheaply in the stores and to the coppersmith (*rotschmid*) to make paper cones (*scharnütz-lein*)."[75] It might be telling that Burgkmair chose a rather coarse paper as it may indicate its origin from north of the Alps. Wrapping paper is characterized by irregularities, since the otherwise avoided wool and silk fibers absorb the dye with varying intensity compared to linen and hemp.[76] In addition, the paper pulp is usually not stamped quite as extensively into a uniform substance as is the case for high-quality white paper, so that coarser fibers remain in the pressed, dried, and finished paper.[77] These fibers are visible on the paper surface of the Berlin drawing, even under the layer of opaque black paint [Fig. 8]. Ultimately, this provides a technical explanation for the colored preparation, since the lesser glued paper behaves in a way similar to blotting paper, which requires a primer. But there are other reasons why Burgkmair could have chosen to prepare the paper with a greenish ground: one might be to avoid the rather quick fading of the paper's color – even if the blue paper is covered and only serves as a primer (*Imprimitur*) to intensify the green of the applied colored ground. A second, and even more important, reason could have been to reproduce as closely as possible the qualities of a coin and its metal materiality, which could be better imitated with thick coated paper, making it even rather stiff, than with the merely blue paper.

Nevertheless, the question remains why Burgkmair used this rather rough and cost-efficient paper for such a prestigious project at all. Even if it was produced in southern Germany, there are still many reasons to consider it as a sign or even a "quotation" of the Italian drawing manner. Therein may lie the main interest of its use for this project: to pay tribute to the Rovere pope in a multi-faceted way, including through the aesthetics of the underlying drawing material. This may have been a valuable aspect in humanistic circles, as the influential Conrad Peutinger commissioned Burgkmair to create woodcut portraits of several personalities of high rank and

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[75] Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, 30 vols., Leipzig 1893, vol. 8, col. 2212–2213: "Denn grob vnd blaw vnd graw schlag papier vnd alle bösen bücher gehören billich in die leden vnd zum rotschmid, daraus man scharnützlein mache." See also Cornely, Eine papiergeschichtliche Untersuchung, 52. Regarding the profession of the "rotschmied" and its history see Andreas Geis and Andreas Tacke, Werkstattproduktion eines Rotschmieds in Nürnberg. Das Inventar der Katharina Amman, in: Andreas Tacke and Franz Irsigler (eds.), *Der Künstler in der Gesellschaft. Einführungen zur Künstlersozialgeschichte des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit*, Darmstadt 2011, 195–212.

[76] Brückle, Blue-Colored Paper, 77: "Some blue papers also contain wool and silk fibers, which were not used in writing or printing paper, but were acceptable in wrapping paper and even desirable in paper used for pastel painting." Tschudin, Grundzüge, 69; also cotton, Schultz, Papierherstellung, 61–62. See also Jérôme de La Lande, *Art de faire le papier* (new. ed.), Paris 1820, 15: wool and silk leftovers can be used in a high proportion of linen rags to make wrapping paper.

[77] Tschudin, Grundzüge der Papiergeschichte, 93; Brückle, Blue-Colored Paper, 76–77.

of ancient sovereigns. Additionally, he was a crucial early supporter of the artist's career.[78] It may not be a coincidence that in 1509 Peutinger was interested in learning more about Pope Julius II's facial features when he corresponded on the subject with an abbot and a Roman goldsmith.[79]

The attention paid to the material below the representation, and the preservation of its color, which becomes almost invisible in the drawing process, reveal a specific awareness of the material and, without going too far, equally of the conditions of its production. Moreover, the case clearly shows the intertwined reflection of self and other that is crucial for aspects of social ecology.

IV. Breu's Italian Approach as Historical and Ecological Consequence

Jörg Breu's Budapest drawing on blue paper for the *Story of Lucretia* [Fig. 9] takes us in another direction. It is a preparatory study for the oil painting in Munich from 1528. Needless to say, the drawing is much smaller than the painting. Furthermore, we find some differences in the position of the figures, their drapery, and in the silhouette of the city seen through the *loggia*. Breu pays great attention to the architecture and its three-dimensional depiction in a linear perspective. The construction of lines converging towards a single vanishing point even runs through the figures and was probably executed before they were added.[80] The verso [Fig. 10] further underlines Breu's concern with spatial construction.

In the catalogue raisonné of the German Drawings in the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, Szilvia Bodnár pointed out that this drawing is "one of Breu's most Italianate works".[81] And it seems likely that an artist based in Augsburg would have easily been able to consult Italian books on perspective by the likes of Alberti, Lorenzo Ghiberti, or Piero della Francesca. In 1525, three years before his death, Dürer published his treatise *Unterweisung der Messung*, which goes back to his studies of those sources. Yet, one can immediately see that Breu followed his own way, employing an approach that does not match the Italian theories, since the lines seem less compelling for the depiction of the architecture than for the postures of the figures. However, the ideal concept of perspec-

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[78] Falk, Hans Burgkmair, Studien zu Leben und Werk, 45.

[79] Ibid., 56; *Hans Burgkmair, 1473–1531. Holzschnitte, Zeichnungen, Holzstöcke* (exh. cat. Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett), ed. by Renate Kroll und Werner Schade, Berlin 1974, 17–18, No. 21.

[80] See also Andrew Morrall, The 'Deutsch' and the 'Welsch'. Jörg Breu the Elder's Sketch for the *Story of Lucretia* and the Uses of Classicism in Sixteenth-Century Germany, in: Stuart Currie (ed.), *Drawing 1400–1600. Invention and Innovation*, Aldershot 1998, 109–130, 111.

[81] Szilvia Bodnár, *German Drawings of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries in the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest* (coll. cat. Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts), Budapest 2020, 94–96.

[Fig. 9]
Jörg Breu, The Story of Lucretia in Five Scenes, ca. 1528, Pen and brush on blue paper,
214 × 312 mm. Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. 62, recto © Museum of Fine Arts,
Budapest.

tive is a mathematic construction that does not initially take into account any natural preconditions or specifics. As Gibson pointed out, the objects in perspective studies such as those by Euclid or Ptolemy are geometric bodies, not amorphous forms as seen in the extravagant draperies of Breu's picture.[82] The artificial perspective, instead, also excludes natural incidents of the sky or even any backgrounds between figures or objects. With regard to Breu's drawing, it is precisely this difference that occurs in the entire variety of compositional elements and as such provides an example of the complexity of artistic depiction.

Even in its discolored state today, the blue paper Breu has chosen gives us yet another example of the view held by artists north of the Alps that blue paper is a sign of an Italian method. Andrew Morrall and others assume a journey to Italy in the 1520s in order to explain Breu's interest in the Italian style, evidence of which may also be sought in the Italian prints in his possession.[83] What Morrall emphasizes most, however, is the way in which German artists of the time generally reflected the Italian style. This, he argues, was triggered by the Reformation, which was felt as bringing uncertainty to the status of art itself. This led to competition among German artists, who wanted to show off their ability to reference a tradition and culture like that of the Italians. Referring to Heinrich Vogtherr's *Kunstbüchlein* from 1538, Morrall argued convincingly that this competition "also displays the desire to emulate, if not surpass, the Italians in the use of a consciously home-grown classical style".[84] Breu is a case in point for such an individual approach.

Against this wider background, it is crucial to emphasize the impact such a development has had on the work of the artist. Uncertainty about the status of art is accompanied by a decline in commissions as well as the questioning of art and its function. What emerges from this is the questioning of artistic labor in general. As such, the inventive gesture of drawing, the interrelated processes between mind and hand, loses its significance and becomes a doubted skill insofar as it aims at an illusionistic and not instructive mode of representation. Nevertheless, it carries the potential to react to new demands and challenges. To transfer this potential to an international exchange in the pursuit of repositioning art means more than competition. Again, to understand the artist within the environment, shaping as well as observing it while receiving information and being provided with the resources indispensable to life,

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[82]
Gibson, Ecological Approach, chapter 5, The Ambient Optic Array, 58–84.

[83]
Melanie Kraft (*historia, narratio, exemplum. Jörg Breu d. Ä. und die Historienbilder für das Herzoghaus München*, Heidelberg 2020, 88–91) questions Breu's as well as Burgkmair's sojourn in Italy.

[84]
Morrall, The 'Deutsch' and the 'Welsch', 122; id., Jörg Breu the Elder, 136–151, 218–243. On the function of art in the context of the Reformation see also Joseph L. Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*, London 2004, esp. 27–37.

is a crucial perspective as it shifts the focus onto a socially motivated ecology. In this sense, since Breu worked for the Habsburgs as well as for the Wittelsbachs, "the artist's overall production"[85] is – following Pia Cuneo – to be contextualized in relation to his "social interaction [that] was decidedly mixed, so that his social identity, in some ways like his confessional identity [...] was flexible and complex".[86]

In this respect, Breu's specific composition of the iconography [Fig. 9] might be telling as it reveals a certain focus on political dimensions, which is mirrored in the Munich commission by Duchess Jacobäa von Baden and Duke Wilhelm IV and as such serves as *exemplum* for the good regency of the Wittelsbachs. The composition emphasizes the importance of the pictorial space by showing five subsequent scenes simultaneously. It begins with a private scene (Lucretia in bed on the left), continues with two scenes in a semi-official compartment in the middle (Lucretia's confessing, to her husband, father, and friends, the forced rape – which prompted her suicide – by Roman prince Tarquinius Sextus), and ends with the open market-place in an official setting. This is crucial insofar as Lucretia's family mobilized the people to oust the regime and to herald a new era with greater respect and justice.[87]

By referring to Italian as well as regional sources, Breu's Italianate style and his use of blue paper are a result of reflection and an ecological consequence in terms of situating himself in his environment, reaching out to greater distances in order to intertwine with promising dimensions. Thus, it is no longer decisive that the watermark is illegible and that we cannot tell definitively whether Breu drew on Italian or southern German paper. For the Italian borrowings emulsify, layer upon layer, into a new conception of art that is more concerned with an osmotic exchange and enrichment than with a delimiting competition. The fact that Breu resorted to blue paper for this drawing is an exception in his œuvre, as it is for Burgkmair. In both cases, however, the miscellaneous use of this aesthetically appealing paper for a specific atmospheric effect may also reflect economic factors. The use of blue paper may simply be due to its (inexpensive) availability, but artists knew how to use it specifically for their projects. Much more significant, however, is how in the contexts exemplified above the social effects of environmental conditions, as materialized south as well as north of the

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Pia F. Cuneo, *Art and Politics in Early Modern Germany. Jörg Breu the Elder and the Fashioning of Political Identity, ca. 1475–1536*, Leiden 1998, 61, see also ibid., 184: "Seen in relation to the European-wide stage upon which the drama of Protestantism was acted out, the unswervingly Catholic Wittelsbach dukes remained minor actors on a provincial scale."

86

Ibid., 61. See also Stefanie Herberg, Der verfluchte Maler? Jörg Breu der Ältere und der Bildersturm in Augsburg, in: Tacke and Irsigler, Der Künstler in der Gesellschaft, 288–302, with further literature.

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Kraft, historia, narratio, exemplum, 46–91.

Alps and increasingly interconnected across the Alps, coincided with environmentally friendly dimensions.

V. Conclusion. Blue Paper Made North of the Alps as Ecological Bridging

To conclude and to add a further twist, several drawings [Fig. 11 and Fig. 12][88] in the Erlangen collection of prints and drawings, for instance, prove that using blue paper became more common for artists working in Augsburg during the first half of the sixteenth century. As far as there are detectable watermarks, they are most similar to those being applied in northern regions close to the Alps such as Innsbruck or Graz. Nevertheless, these drawings have a certain relationship to Venice and again prove that blue paper was used in various ways as a sign of reference to Italy – the *Pipe Organ for the Fugger Chapel of St Anne* [Fig. 11] shows, for example, a modern Venetian type of box organ with pipe compartments in round arch arcades, whereas the *Song for Five Voices* [Fig. 12] is dedicated to the Netherlandish composer Adrian Willaert, who was active in Venice.

Above all, the three presented case studies – Dürer, Burgkmair, Breu – demonstrate one thing: the significance of hand drawings for socio-cultural and political negotiations, which were defined in a targeted and pioneering way by art and its inherently ecological structures. Part of the ecological structure is the choice of artistic material, which must be included in any iconology with all its geographical, geological, economic, political, socio-cultural preconditions. At the same time, the decision to employ a particular material also clarifies the environmental circumstances and the general interconnectedness. Only from these preconditions can types of social organization and international references be traced and art be located in this complex structure of ecologies. In doing so, it becomes evident that ecological dimensions go beyond an environmentalist consciousness, as they consist in an awareness of nature's resources and their depletion and as such primarily address the social effects of environmental conditions. These highlighted directions allow us to usefully apply as well as meaningfully differentiate the concept of the ecological for the early modern period and to rethink human relationships to nature, which has never been more urgent than today.

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mediality, gender studies, and the history of science. She is author of the book *Zwischen Licht und Schatten. Zur Tradition der Farbgrundzeichnung bis Albrecht Dürer* (2016), editor of the volume *Gezeichnete* Evidentia. *Zeichnungen auf kolorierten Papieren in Süd und Nord von 1400 bis 1700* (2021), and is currently working on a book about pastel painting in the eighteenth century.

THE FEMALE NUDE IN ANTI-ZIA FEMINIST PAINTING

Kristin Plys

Kristin Plys

ABSTRACT

After the 1977 coup that launched General Zia-ul-Haq's decade-long military dictatorship in Pakistan, visual arts flourished as part of many progressive movements. This essay on anti-Zia visual art explores the intersection of art and left politics. While left mobilization against the Zia dictatorship took several forms, one underemphasized but significant node of opposition was led by artists and poets. Especially underrepresented among these movements were the indelible contributions of female artists who were among the state's most persecuted. Though the Hudood Ordinances and other anti-women policies did not explicitly target artists, they effectively marginalized women from the arts by way of curbs on women's mobility and freedom of expression in society at large. Female artists resisted, refusing to take up calligraphy or otherwise change their artistic style. Depictions of the female nude became an important political symbol for artists pushing back against the censorship of, violence against, and persecution of women. Pakistani feminist artists' forms of cultural resistance through art creation have a long tradition in both South Asia and the Global South more broadly, but the female nude as the content of their resistance art warrants deeper investigation. In this essay, I recover the history of Pakistani women's resistance through the visual arts then leverage this to weigh in on contemporary theoretical debates on the depiction of the nude female body as feminist praxis. The goal of this contribution is to record Pakistani women's resistance during the Zia period so that feminist theory may learn from their actions.

KEYWORDS

The female nude epitomizes the commodification of the body in capitalist modernity. Its depiction of the commodification of the body by the capitalist world-economy is what makes a nude a nude. "A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude", writes John Berger, "Nudity is placed on display."[1] T.J. Clark similarly contends that, "A nude, to repeat, is a picture for men to look at, in which Woman is constructed as an object of somebody else's desire".[2] What distinguishes the nude from mere nakedness is the commodification of the body. The nude is presented to the viewer as an object for consumption akin to a bowl of exotic fruit, a thoroughbred horse, or a merchant ship; not as a depiction of a person whose body is simply unclothed. The nude is being sold to the viewer.

The social problem of the female nude in the context of capitalist modernity is further complicated when rendered by female artists. Women in the West were traditionally excluded from studying the nude body.[3] This exclusion made the nude a less common subject matter among female painters in the modern Western context. Female artists' tendency to avoid painting nudes led many critics, and other observers, to conclude that women artists are therefore lesser talents given the central importance of the nude in the history of Western art.[4] For Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, the problem of the nude rendered by women is not solely about the exclusion of women from studying the nude model, nor its relationship to women's lack of recognition as 'great artists', but a crucial part of the ideology of capitalist patriarchy. Women, in being prohibited from rendering the nude, "were therefore excluded from both the tools and the power to give meanings of their own to themselves and their culture".[5] Barring women from painting the nude was a way of preventing women from contributing to ideology-making in capitalist modernity.

If depictions of the nude female body aid us in analyzing the commodification of the body in the context of capitalist modernity, then why was the female nude central to the resistance art of Pakistani feminist painters during General Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship (1977–1988)? For Marxist art historians such as John Berger,

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[1]
John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London 1972, 54.

[2]
T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, Princeton, NJ 1984, 131.

[3]
Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses. Women, Art and Ideology*, London 1981, 35, 90, 115.

[4]
Ibid., 45.

[5]
Ibid., 115.

T.J. Clark, Arnold Hauser, Rozsika Parker, and Griselda Pollock,[6] the nude is a means of analyzing transformations to the class structures of modern Europe and locating the exploitation and oppression of women within those structures. Pakistani female artists of the 1980s, however, though inspired by Marxist-feminist theory, aimed to shatter hierarchies, rather than merely reflect the class and gender hierarchies of capitalist modernity. In pursuing this aim, they were not echoing the European nude, but instead, drawing on local and global traditions to create new possibilities for the nude as critique of not just capitalism, but neo-imperialism as well. In their hands, the nude was not primarily a commodified and sexualized body devised to entice a heterosexual male viewer, nor was it a mere depiction of an unclothed female body. Pakistani feminist artists presented the nude to the viewer in order to display what the postcolonial state wanted to conceal. Their contributions broaden the scope of the nude as social critique beyond European-focused scholarship, and in so doing, suggest a more comprehensive, global analysis of the relationship between the body and the modern state. While similarly locating the body as a bearer of capitalist modernity, Pakistani feminist artists offered a critique of the particular strategies through which the postcolonial state in 1980s Pakistan sought to restrict, and thereby further commodify, the female body.[7] The nudes Pakistani feminist artists painted were not necessarily created to be an object of the viewer's sexual desire, but exposed women's own desire to be seen. Pakistani feminist artists depicted a collective desire to make their bodies socially visible at a time when the postcolonial state threatened to render them invisible.

After Pakistan's 1977 coup that launched General Zia-ul-Haq's decade-long military dictatorship, visual arts flourished as part of many resistance movements. In the context of authoritarian regimes, traditional repertoires of contentious politics become a dangerous strategy for resistance movements given the increased stakes of engaging in collective action.[8] In such contexts, the visible work to be done is through arts and culture. This essay on anti-Zia feminist painting explores the intersection of art and left politics. While mobilization against the Zia dictatorship took several forms – for example, workers of the Pakistan People's Party, the Women's Action Forum, the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy,

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Berger, Ways of Seeing, 62; Clark, The Painting of Modern Life, 79; Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art, Vol. 3: Rococo, Classicism and Romanticism*, New York 1958, 34; Parker and Pollock, Old Mistresses, 115.

[7]

For an analysis of women artists' resistance against military dictatorship in another geographic context within the Global South see Claudia Calirman, *Dissident Practices. Brazilian Women Artists, 1960s–2020s*, Durham, NC 2023.

[8]

Kristin Plys, The Poetry of Resistance, in: *Theory, Culture & Society* 36/7–8, 2020, 295–313.

trade unions, etc. – one under-emphasized but significant node of opposition was led by artists and poets.[9]

Culture has long played a role in left politics in Pakistan.[10] Not only did the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire support cultural expression as a means to educate the public in history and politics, but critical cultural traditions oriented to social justice were also common in South Asia during the reign of the Mughals, epitomized through Sufi poetry and other cultural expressions. In the first half of the twentieth century, the Progressive Writers Association (PWA) and *halqa-e-arbab-e-zauq* (the circle of the men of good taste) were the two major movements within Pakistan's cultural landscape. PWA took an explicitly anti-colonial stance, and although they were not the first cultural movement against colonialism in South Asia, they were distinctive. Firstly, they self-identified as 'progressive', which meant revolution and social change along with an embracing of feminism, secularism, anti-imperialism, antifascism, and at the fore, national independence. The PWA was rooted in a pan-communism that sought to make common cause with anti-colonial struggles across the globe. Secondly, PWA primarily saw itself as a social and political movement and was closely aligned with the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) until both the PWA and CPP were banned in 1954. *Halqa-e-arbab-e-zauq*, referred to by its members as *halqa*, on the other hand, was an 'art for art's sake' movement, but not apolitical. Their project, immediately following independence, was to recover local pre-colonial cultural traditions in the service of building a postcolonial state and culture. Though these two movements had some ideological differences, after the PWA was banned, some progressive writers worked under the banner of *halqa*. By the 1970s, new movements emerged in Pakistan's landscape, notably, the Mazdoor Kisan Party (MKP), a Maoist party formed in May 1968. For the MKP, as it was for the Communist Party before it, arts and culture played an important role in sharing political ideas, disseminating theoretical concepts, and teaching history to mass audiences. In this historical context, *Khawateen Mahaz-e-Amal* (Women Action Forum or WAF), became a critically important political movement that similarly contributed to arts and culture in Pakistan.

Pakistan's anti-Zia cultural movement (which included *halqa*, WAF, the MKP, and those with allegiances to the banned PWA working under the guise of other groups) straddled PWA poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz's dialectic of the particular and universal in service of art. Faiz contended that art should be rooted in local artistic traditions but should also be of service to global anti-imperialist movements. The cultural movement against Zia both drew on local tra-

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Ayesha Jalal, *The Struggle for Pakistan*, Cambridge 2014, 246–247.

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For a deeper account see Kristin Plys, Political Work on a Cultural Front. The Postcolonial Avant-garde of Lahore's Pak Tea House during the Zia Military Dictatorship (1977–88), in: *Historical Materialism* 30/3, 2022, 206–235.

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ditions and had global articulations in the affinity Pakistani artists found with struggles in Vietnam, Palestine, Chile, and other places that were fighting Western imperialism and one of its common symptoms, military dictatorship. Through the 1970s, the United States, as a global force for neo-imperialism, installed and supported dictatorships across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. As artists of the time saw it, neo-imperialism in Pakistan was articulated locally through Zia, but military dictatorship was a symptom of neo-imperialism across the Global South. Pakistani artists understood this, and therefore, were not solely concerned with the restoration of democracy in Pakistan, but also saw themselves as contributing to a global anti-imperialist struggle.

Feminist themes were critically important to the cultural movement against Zia. The military dictatorship transformed Pakistan's political economy, and these changes were largely played out on the bodies of women. That women's bodies bore the brunt of military dictatorship is not unique to Pakistan, but it did have distinctive features that structured the possibilities for feminist resistance against the state. The Hudood Ordinances and other misogynist policies implemented by Zia curbed women's mobility and freedom of expression in society at large. Feminist artists resisted, refusing to take up calligraphy – one of two state sanctioned subjects for painting in addition to landscapes – or otherwise change their artistic style. Depictions of the female nude became an important political symbol for artists pushing back against the censorship and persecution of women. While cultural resistance against the state is a common strategy of feminist movements across the twentieth-century Global South, depiction of the female nude as a symbol for the visual arts movement against dictatorship is a puzzle as it remains an open question whether depictions of the female nude in visual art further exploitation by reinforcing the commodification of the female body or empower through a critique of the commodification of the body.

How feminist visual artists in 1970s and 1980s Pakistan came to depict the female nude as resistance against military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq further complicates this question. Understanding the cultural meaning of the female nude as central to feminist visual culture in the context of Zia-era Pakistan involves interrogating its many facets. This includes dispelling assumptions about the iconoclastic vein of Islamic art that have led many to believe that there is no Islamicate tradition of portraying the female nude. Yet, as I will show, feminist artists in Zia-era Pakistan drew on longstanding local pictorial traditions, refashioning the female nude and in so doing reclaiming the female body against a virulently misogynist military dictatorship.

My primary objective in this essay is to explain why the female nude became a symbol of resistance against the Zia dictatorship. I begin by providing some context about the military dictatorship's policies regarding women, along with the feminist movement that was organized against these laws. I then place the anti-Zia art move-

ment in global context by looking to articulations of feminist resistance through the arts across the Global South. Next, I weigh in on theoretical debates on the body and provide a short overview of the history of depictions of the female nude in so-called Islamic art. After which, I analyze select paintings of the female nude by Pakistani artists of the 1970s and 1980s before offering some concluding thoughts.

Examining the female nude in the Pakistani context is a controversial topic. One must critique patriarchal injustices wherever they are present, but not reinforce stereotypes of Pakistan (or the broader Islamicate ecumene) as an especially hostile place for women. The goal of writing this essay, particularly given my own location as a woman of the Global North, is not to detail a 'worse' condition of patriarchy in Pakistan but to recover the history of Pakistani women's resistance through the arts during the Zia period so that (1) women facing similar structural conditions can learn from and be inspired by their actions, and (2) this recovered history can aid in contemporary global theoretical debates on the depiction of the nude female body as Marxist-feminist praxis.

I. The Women Action Forum

After Zia-ul-Haq assumed power, he began to Islamize the penal code appointing members of the conservative political party *Jamaat-e-Islami* to participate in this initiative. Both the law and the social climate had changed with the coup. As part of the Islamization process, the Zia dictatorship implemented draconian anti-women policies epitomized by the 1979 Hudood Ordinances, which limited women's participation in society and, most infamously, criminalized extra-marital sexual activity. These laws led to countless women's imprisonment under accusations of so-called 'honor' crimes, including most grotesquely, the prosecution of rape victims for 'extra-marital sex'.[11]

Two instances of prosecution under the new ordinances include the 1981 case of Fehmida and Allah Bux versus the State in which eighteen-year-old Fehmida fell in love with her bus driver leaving her natal home to live with him, his first wife, and their children. Fehmida's parents filed a police case alleging kidnapping. When police located her, she was pregnant, so police asked for proof of marriage. She produced a *nikahnama* (marriage certificate) which had been registered days earlier. While Fehmida and Allah Bux told authorities that they had a verbal *nikah* before registering official documentation, police charged the couple with *zina*[12] based on the

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[11]
Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, London 1987, 73.

[12]
Zina is an Islamic legal term referring to any unlawful sexual intercourse. This can include a range of sexual activity, typically outside of the confines of marriage. See also Shahnaz Khan, *Zina, Transnational Feminism, and the Moral Regulation of Pakistani Women*, Vancouver 2006, 7–9.

pregnancy. Fehmida was sentenced to 100 lashes while Allah Bux was sentenced to death by stoning.[13] In 1983, eighteen-year-old Safiya Bibi, blind and from a poor peasant family, was raped by a local landlord and his son in whose home she worked as a servant. She became pregnant from the rape and gave birth to a child who subsequently died. Her father registered a case of rape, but the judge ruled there was not enough evidence against the landlord or his son, instead sentencing Safiya Bibi to public lashing, a year in prison, and a Rs. 1,000/- fine for adultery.[14] The cornerstone of Zia's Islamization program, *zina* became a mechanism for men to discipline the women in their lives. *Zina* accusations were used by family members to deprive women of their inheritances and by husbands to marry a second wife without permission of the first. Women's incarceration rates in Pakistan soared, and by 1987, half of all incarcerated women were jailed on *zina* convictions.[15]

In response to these new anti-women policies, Karachi-based feminist group, *Sirkat Gah*, called a meeting of women's organizations to launch a coordinated effort. These meetings spurred the formation of *Khawateen Mahaz-e-Amal* (Women Action Forum or WAF). WAF was needed, claimed its founders, to combat: the increased segregation of women, the removal of women from public space, anti-women measures propagated in the name of Islam, the rumored repeal of the Family Laws Ordinance that was hard won by Pakistani feminists of the 1960s, among other rationales. WAF was an intergenerational group involving women who were at the forefront of Pakistan's independence movement alongside their daughters and granddaughters. WAF members were often accused of being agents of US imperialism, of blasphemy, and of elitism for their opposition to the military dictatorship. "This caricature", writes Moon Charania was, "deployed as a central oppositional strategy in the 1980s" against the feminist movement.[16] But despite opposition, WAF's resistance took several forms, including hiring lawyers for women accused of *zina*, petitions for the repeal of anti-women laws, along with *jalsas*, theater, poetry, and song[17]

13
Ayesha Khan, *The Women's Movement in Pakistan*, London 2018, 77.

14
Mumtaz and Shaheed, Women of Pakistan, 103.

15
Khan, The Women's Movement in Pakistan, 96.

16
Moon Charania, Feminism, Sexuality and the Rhetoric of Westernization in Pakistan, in: Leela Fernandes (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Gender in South Asia*, London 2014, 318–322, here 318; see also Tahmina Rashid, *Contested Representation*, Karachi 2006, 141; Afiya Zia, The Reinvention of Feminism in Pakistan, in: *Feminist Review* 91/1, 2009, 29–46, here 32; Amina Jamal, Global Discourses, Situated Traditions, and Muslim Women's Agency in Pakistan, in: Ania Loomba and Ritty A. Lukose (eds.), *South Asian Feminisms*, Durham, NC 2012, 54–74, here 70.

17
Zohra Yusuf, In Her Own Voice, in: Sherry Rehman (ed.), *Womansplaining*, Lahore 2021, 53–60, here 57; Binah Shah, The Literary Feminists, in: Rehman, *Womansplaining*, 148–151.

on feminist themes which became successful means by which WAF spread its message, especially in Punjab.

Like the Communist Party's relationship with PWA, and the MKP's support for the arts, WAF was intertwined with cultural movements. Indeed, some of WAF's most prominent members were the daughters of PWA members. WAF is most closely associated with painting as a means of cultural resistance to the Zia dictatorship. In Pakistan, image-making has been seen as inferior to the high art of poetry, and therefore the visual arts have historically been the purview of women. Visual artists were a part of, but less central, therefore, to political movements in Pakistan in the past, until this critical moment of the Zia coup when the female-led visual arts movement became much more effective in raising global awareness and swaying global public opinion against the military dictatorship. Images, because they do not need to be translated into other languages to be fully understood, can circulate and translate to faraway contexts in ways that poetry and literature generally cannot.

WAF artists often exhibited their painting in London and New York among other global cities, which ignited conversations about the feminist movement against the Zia dictatorship and its Marxist-feminist politics. These exhibitions were so successful, in fact, that a secret report issued by the CIA in September 1984 (and partially declassified in 2006) entitled, "Pakistan: Prospects for Dramatic Political Change", mentioned the role that WAF artists could potentially play in regime change in Pakistan. The report, issued only to five officials at the State Department and Pentagon, describes WAF as "small, elitist liberal", but having "attracted international attention and embarrassed Zia".[18] In the five potential scenarios for ousting General Zia that the CIA laid out in this report, WAF artists were assessed as "on their own [...] too weak to pose a takeover threat",[19] but in a portion of the report that is not redacted, WAF artists feature as a potential means of mobilizing popular support in Punjab and abroad for various center-left and leftist groups who could potentially lead a movement to overthrow Zia. From the US perspective, however, the CIA was most concerned with how the international circulation of WAF artists and their work could sway global public opinion against Zia, particularly when it came to the issue of human rights, and thereby undermine US objectives in the region.

During the Zia dictatorship, feminist themes became prominent among Pakistani artists even beyond WAF. Though the Hudood Ordinances and other anti-women policies did not explicitly target artists, they effectively marginalized women from the arts by

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[18]
Near East and South Asia Affairs, Directorate NSC: Records, RAC Box 15, Ronald Reagan Presidential Museum and Library.

[19]
Ibid.

way of curbs on women's mobility and freedom of expression at large. Female artists resisted, refusing to take up calligraphy or to otherwise change their artistic style.[20] This often meant that women failed to secure patronage as a result, but Pakistan's female artists nonetheless won international awards for their innovative work during this period.[21] Depictions of the female nude became an important political symbol for artists of all genders pushing back against censorship and the persecution of women.[22] More Pakistani women than ever began painting during the Zia dictatorship when women's resistance art flourished.

The goals of WAF artists were articulated in the *Manifesto of Women Artists*. The manifesto begins by drawing attention to "the decline in the status and conditions of life of Pakistani women" and "the basic rights [...] to a life free from want and enriched by the joys of fruitful labour and cultural self-realisation". It then delineates seven principles "to guide us in our struggle". First, was an acknowledgment of the outstanding contributions of women artists. Second, a statement of support for gender equality in Pakistan. Third, a call to women "engaged in any creative field in Pakistan to stand together for the cause of women's emancipation". Fourth, a statement of the rights of women artists to freedom of expression. Fifth, a condemnation of any attempts to restrict the role of women in society. Sixth, a condemnation of the distortion of the role of women "into an image of obscenity". Seventh, "we call upon all women artists to take their place in the vanguard of the Pakistani women's struggle to retain their pristine image of their rightful place in society". Though ratified in 1983, the *Manifesto of Women Artists* was not made public until after Zia died in order to protect the identities of the fifteen signatories: Abbasi Abidi, Meher Afroze, Talat Ahmad, Veeda Ahmed, Shehrezade Alam, Riffat Alvi, Mamoona Bashir, Salima Hashmi, Birgees Iqbal, Zubeida Javed, Jalees Nagi, Qudsia Nisar, Nahid Raza, Lalarukh and Rabia Zuberi.[23] They asserted the rights of women to be full participants in society, which includes equal participation in politics, in the arts, and in any activity that makes the world a "happier more beautiful and more peaceful place".

[20]
Salima Hashmi, An Intelligent Rebellion, in: *India International Centre Quarterly* 24/2–3, 1997, 228–238, here 233.

[21]
Salima Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible*, Lahore 2003, 8–9.

[22]
Ibid., 11.

[23]
See ibid., 193–195.

II. Women's Movements and Resistance Art in Global Context

That women living under the Zia dictatorship took up painting as a means of resistance is not surprising. Women of the Global South have long articulated feminist resistance through the arts.[24] The Jamaican Sistren Theatre Collective, for example, wrote plays to retell and popularize the history of black feminism in Jamaica,[25] the poetry produced by the Somali Women's Movement opposed the military dictatorship of General Mohammad Sida Barre,[26] and in contemporary Syria feminist art collectives create video, multimedia, and performance art to resist life under repression.[27] The art created by women of Global South resistance movements is reflective of a particular politico-economic dynamic left in the wake of national independence.

Movements for national independence promised women's liberation but after independence was won, gains that women had made during the liberation movement were unexpectedly rolled back. As Maria Mies (1986) observed,

> Many have seen this direct participation of women in the guerrilla struggle as a direct contribution to women's liberation. Their reasoning is that women with a gun in their hand would no longer accept male oppression and exploitation. But the history of the national liberation wars, as well as other wars, has taught us another lesson.[28]

The assertion of national cultural identity after independence often meant returning to religiously inspired repressive gender relations of an imagined pre-colonial past. This assertion of cultural identity, which often meant a return to an imagined past in which women were subordinate to men, was itself "dialectically related to the growth of imperialism".[29] Both colonial rule and postcolonial states limited women's roles in society and forced women into assuming a limited symbolic role as virtue of the nation.

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[24] Françoise Vergès, *A Decolonial Feminism*, London 2021, 14.

[25] Honor Ford-Smith, An Experiment in Popular Theatre and Women's History, in: Saskia Wieringa (ed.), *Subversive Women*, London 1995, 145–164.

[26] Dahabo Farah Hassan, Amina H. Adan and Amina Mohamoud Warsame, Somalia, in: Wieringa, Subversive Women, 165–182.

[27] Banah Ghadbian, *Ululating from the Underground*, PhD diss., University of California San Diego, 2021.

[28] Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, London 1986, 195.

[29] Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, London 1986, 4.

The primary reason newly independent states limited women's role in society was to utilize women's labor in the process of ongoing primitive accumulation to build a developmental economy and state.[30] Even though the gendered division of labor across the Global South was transformed through women's participation in national liberation movements, the patriarchal consciousness remained unmoved. Women, therefore, were easily restricted by the state after independence to the realm of the family, private sphere, and informal economy. Structural or overt violence (most commonly rape, land dispossession, or murder) has been used to discipline women who are exploited and super-exploited as part of an ongoing primitive accumulation of capital.[31]

In this context, in which the patriarchal forces of religion, capital, and the state rolled back the rights of the very women who participated in the fight for freedom (along with the rights of their daughters and granddaughters), WAF artists registered their opposition through resistance art, just as women across the Global South have done. WAF artists' *form* of resistance through visual culture is foreseeable, but why were depictions of the female nude the *content* of their resistance art? This warrants further examination because of ongoing and recently revived theoretical debates about the body.

III. Theorizing the Body

Capitalism has long defined women as bodies.[32] The conditions of work in the capitalist world-economy necessitate the mechanization of the body[33] which has transformed all bodies and minds so that they may better function as labor power. The female body, in particular, has been transformed beyond its function as labor power to hold a unique and subordinate role in the sexual division of labor. "Women, in capitalist development", Silvia Federici shows, "have been expropriated from their bodies and turned into sexual objects and breeding machines."[34] In addition to the capitalist world-economy and the sexual division of labor, the modern state has similarly restricted the body which in extreme cases involves, "asserting the right of the state to destroy the body of the citizen".[35] The transformation of the female body into commodity, sexual object, and

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[30]
Mies, Patriarchy and Accumulation, 197.

[31]
Ibid., 145; see also Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, Brooklyn, NY 2004, 115.

[32]
Silvia Federici, *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin*, Oakland, CA 2020, 23.

[33]
Ibid., 83.

[34]
Ibid., 14.

[35]
Ibid., 85.

breeding machine is of ultimate benefit not just to structures of patriarchy but also to the capitalist state. Mariarosa Dalla Costa contends that the woman's body "must be imprisoned so that she can provide unpaid domestic labor that sustains the world and in this world, men above all. [...] The expropriation of women's bodies and their transformation into machines for the reproduction of labor power" benefits the state and religious authorities.[36]

Because of the centrality of the body to capitalism and its attendant structures – significantly, the state – our cultural relationship to the body remains central to the question of liberation. As Silvia Federici writes, "There is no social change, no cultural or political innovation that is not expressed through the body, no economic practice that is not applied to it."[37] Mariarosa Dalla Costa similarly concludes, "for women, in every part of the world, the construction of autonomy has meant first of all the reappropriation of their bodies".[38] While Andrea Dworkin proposed, "a first step in the process of liberation [...] is the radical redefining of the relationship between women and their bodies",[39] how this is to be accomplished remains an open question. Silvia Federici, for example, sees in androgynous models of gender identity a reaction against the sexual division of labor peculiar to the capitalist world-economy.[40] Undeniably, however, for many women the way to the freedom we've long been denied is through reconfiguring our relationship to, and decommodifying, our bodies.

Because capitalism and the state prescribe a particular role for women's bodies as machines for the reproduction of labor power, "the question of the woman's body, its place in representation and the woman artist's relation to the woman's body in representation"[41] becomes central to any analysis of the political message of art made by women. One commonality that all women face in our patriarchal world-economy is the experience of being "defined by their physical attributes",[42] and their "contribution to the modern world

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[36]
Mariarosa Dalla Costa, To Whom Does the Body of This Woman Belong?, in: Camille Barbagallo (ed.), *Women and the Subversion of Community. A Mariarosa Dalla Costa Reader*, Oakland, CA 2019, 181–196, here 191.

[37]
Federici, Beyond the Periphery of the Skin, 76.

[38]
Dalla Costa, To Whom Does the Body of This Woman Belong?, 182.

[39]
Andrea Dworkin, Woman Hating, in: Johanna Fateman and Amy Scholder (eds.), *Last Days at Hot Slit. The Radical Feminism of Andrea Dworkin*, South Pasadena, CA 2019, 45–75, here 59.

[40]
Federici, Beyond the Periphery of the Skin, 86.

[41]
Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London 2009, 89.

[42]
Ibid., 3.

[being] measured according to their sex appeal".[43] These standards of sexual attractiveness "describe in precise terms the relationship that an individual will have to her own body. They describe her mobility, spontaneity, posture, gait, the uses to which she can put her body. They define precisely the dimensions of her physical freedom."[44] As Laura Mulvey puts it, "woman = sexuality. This feminine mask is the passport to visibility in a male dominated world."[45] Women are visible in the patriarchal world-economy so long as they are "fuckable" as determined by "dominant cultural norms" and racial-ethnic, imperial, and other hierarchies.[46] To put it another way, as Andrea Dworkin writes:

> Women should be beautiful. All repositories of cultural wisdom from King Solomon to King Hefner agree: women should be beautiful. It is the reverence for female beauty which informs the romantic ethos, gives it its energy and justification. Beauty is transformed into that golden ideal, Beauty – rapturous and abstract. Women must be beautiful and Woman is Beauty.[47]

The image of a woman's body in the patriarchal world-economy is a "symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions [...] by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning".[48] The commodification of women's bodies, rooted in the capitalist division of labor, is socially expressed through gendered expectations of how women should present themselves. Whether women meet these gendered expectations, then, has consequences for how they are socially received and accepted.

   The commodification of the female body through visual culture has long been a vehicle for heterosexual male fantasies, making the female body a bearer of meaning rather than a maker of meaning. Laura Mulvey famously coined the term, 'the male gaze' to name the process by which the female body is objectified in visual culture. "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance", she writes, "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure,

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[43]
Ibid., 52–53.

[44]
Dworkin, Woman Hating, 56.

[45]
Mulvey, Visual and Other Pleasures, 57.

[46]
Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex*, New York 2021, 103.

[47]
Dworkin, Woman Hating, 56.

[48]
Mulvey, Visual and Other Pleasures, 15.

which is styled accordingly."[49] This heterosexual male gaze then transforms the female body into a commodity through woman's participation (whether complicit or inadvertent) in the patriarchal world-economy:

> The female body has become industrialized; a woman must buy the means to paint on (make-up) and sculpt (under-wear/clothes) a look of femininity, a look which guarantees *visibility* in sexist society for each individual woman [...] It is almost as though woman herself were a factory, feeding in the means of production, painting on the mask and emerging transformed with value added in the process, a commodity ready for consumption.[50]

While the male gaze reflects the commodification of women's bodies in the context of capitalist patriarchy, women remain largely excluded from the creation of culture. As Laura Mulvey puts it, "in proportion to [women's] exclusion from cultural participation, their image has been stolen and their bodies exploited".[51] Yet by placing Mulvey's well known concept of the male gaze in the context of Marxist-feminist theories of body it reveals the larger structural conditions that are reflected through the process of looking.

These theories of the body have thus far portrayed a Eurocentric perspective of the female body in visual culture. In the Islamicate context, depictions of the female nude in visual art are instead stereotypically viewed through the lens of iconoclasm. Contemporary art historians, anyhow, are critical of these old clichés about Islamic art.[52] Wherever there have been prohibitions against figural imagery, it is not a result of dictates of scripture but from its interpretation, and that too has been variable and unevenly enforced. Furthermore, cultural theorists struggle to define so-called 'Islamic art' as having any unified position.[53] Sadia Toor locates Islamic art in historical and global context, ultimately revealing that, "there is no singular 'Muslim' approach to art, either historically or today".[54] 'Islamic art' seems to exist simply because it was once employed by European art historians to identify the visual culture of a particular

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[49]
Ibid., 19.

[50]
Ibid., 56–57.

[51]
Ibid., 117.

[52]
Avinoam Shalem, What Do We Mean When We Say 'Islamic Art'?, in: *Journal of Art Historiography* 6, 2012, 1–18.

[53]
Wendy Shaw, *What Is 'Islamic' Art?*, Cambridge 2019, 2.

[54]
Sadia Toor, Art as/and Politics. Why the Attack on *Charlie Hebdo* Was Not About a "Fear of Art", in: *Social Research* 83/1, 2016, 21–31, here 27.

world region as separate from Europe, and art history continues to view the visual culture of the Islamic ecumene as a unified field despite its heterogeneity.

This fraught relationship, between the imperialist dictates of mainline art history and the "complex, transcultural, trans-geographic, interfaith, and trans-temporal"[55] culture that has been deemed 'Islamic art' by the West, has led to occlusions along with new possibilities in assessing the history of visual culture produced across the Islamic ecumene. One of the many occlusions is the neglect of studies of the female nude in the history of Islamic art.[56] Since the medieval period, depictions of the female body have been deployed by artists across the region "as symbols of divine passion and spiritual attainment. [...] the depiction of the female body is used to express religious feeling and to trigger physical desire that appears instrumental to the fulfillment of spiritual goals".[57] [Fig. 1 and Fig. 2] show images of reclining female nudes from Safavid Iran. These images from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries display nude women to stoke the lust of the male courtly viewer. Similar images of the female nude can be found in Al-Andalus frescoes, Ottoman miniatures, and in Mughal manuscripts.[58] Ironically, the nude in the English context adheres more to the stereotypes mainline art history has of Islamic art. Evangelical moral codes in Victorian England dictated that the representation of the female nude was immoral, yet British artists nonetheless found ways around these strictures drawing on "a safeguard of Englishness".[59] Whether our contemporary view of Pakistani art's perceived prudishness is remnant of an English colonial mindset rather than an inheritance from Islamicate visual culture remains an open question that art historians have yet to fully explore.

If we put the Marxist-feminist theories that animated WAF artists in conversation with a postcolonial critique of the field of Islamic art history, the strategy of rendering the female nude to

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[55]
Shaw, What Is 'Islamic' Art?, 20.

[56]
In yet another social context, black female artists question racial hierarchies and Western standards of beauty through reconfiguring and deconstructing the nude (see Lisa E. Farrington, Reinventing Herself. The Black Female Nude, in: *Woman's Art Journal* 2, 2004, 15-23).

[57]
Francesca Leoni and Mika Natif, Eros and Sexuality in Islamic Art, in: ead. (eds.), *Eros and Sexuality in Islamic Art*, London 2016, 1–17, here 6.

[58]
Cynthia Robinson, Where Have All the Boys Gone? The Lady of the 'Sala de Justicia' Ceilings and Nasrid Poetics of Sacred and Profane Love, in: Leoni and Natif, Eros and Sexuality, 65–98; Tülay Artan and Irvin Cemil Schick, Ottomanizing Pornotopia. Changing Visual Codes in Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Erotic Miniatures, in: Leoni and Natif, Eros and Sexuality, 157–208; Christiane Gruber, 'To not Toil in Lonely Obsession'. Modern Persian Erotica in the Kinsey Institute, in: Leoni and Natif, Eros and Sexuality, 209–236.

[59]
Alison Smith, The Nude in Nineteenth Century Britain, in: *Exposed. The Victorian Nude* (exh. cat. London, Tate Britain), ed. by Alison Smith, London 2001, 11–20, here 14.

[Fig. 1]
Muhammad Qasim, Lovers' Dalliance, ca. mid 17th century, Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 13 × 21.5 cm, Middle East, Iran, Isfahan, Asian and Mediterranean Art © Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, MA.

resist the military dictatorship of 1980s Pakistan is no longer a puzzle. In the long 1970s, when global politico-economic conditions led to the proliferation of military dictatorships across the Global South, the postcolonial Pakistani state restricted women's social role to wife, mother, and daughter in order to intensify the exploitation of women's labor in the process of ongoing primitive accumulation to build a developmental economy and state. WAF artists understood that women's bodies bore the brunt of the military dictatorship, and that the removal of women from public life was a strategy to further transform the female body into commodity, sexual object, and breeding machine in order to intensify the unpaid domestic labor that allows for the reproduction of labor power. Moreover, this coup, like most in the Global South of the long 1970s, occurred just after women and workers had won legal rights unprecedented in the period after independence. This reversal of the rights of workers in the Global South was born, in the Pakistani context, of a repressive state that sought to recoup capital's losses through the super-exploitation of women's unpaid domestic labor.

IV. The Nude as Resistance

The female nude in 1970s and 1980s Pakistan was resistance art. WAF artists drew on and reinterpreted the global tradition of portraying the female nude in order to take back agency of their body from Zia's anti-woman regime.[60] As Iftikhar Dadi put it,

> The Zia regime's measures were not thus simply attempting to 'roll back' existing prerogatives for women; they were also striving to exert state power to control an essentially new phenomenon, the emerging presence of women in the public arena. But the very attempt itself paradoxically amplified the emergence of the publicly visible female body as an issue that could not simply be 'rolled back'.[61]

WAF artists of this period created images of the nude female body as opposition to the regime and its repressive laws. In this section, I examine paintings of female nudes by Salima Hashmi, Nahid Raza, Sumaya Durrani, Laila Shahzada, and Sabah Husain. Then, I compare women's depictions of the female nude with Pakistani male artists of the same period.

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The symbol of the female nude in Pakistani modern art is not unique to the Zia period. Some female artists looked to the work of Amrita Sher Gil, the founding mother of Pakistani modern art. In Sher Gil's *Self Portrait as a Tahitian* (1934), for example, she paints herself in a powerful but nonetheless sexual pose. Her gaze doesn't meet the viewer but her erect nipples do. Her expressionless face stares into the distance and her broad shoulders confidently display her nude torso framed by her toned arms. This image is an assertion of a confident sexuality done on Sher Gil's terms, reminiscent of how she lived her life as an openly queer biracial communist woman in early twentieth-century Lahore.

[61]

Iftikar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, Chapel Hill, NC 2010, 211–212.

Salima Hashmi (b. 1942) described the postcolonial Pakistani condition as, "the dual colonization first by the British and then by men [who] came to be recognized [...] by women as straitjackets for both content and form".[62] After the coup, Hashmi's "painting became both a refuge and an act of defiance. The medium struggled to become a message, as one worked around the images that permeated one's being."[63] Though involved in left politics since she was young, the social and political issues that her work expressed were explored through themes of "gender and suppression".[64] One of the ways in which Hashmi expressed her Marxist-feminist politics through her painting was by depicting the female nude. "In a Muslim society like Pakistan", she wrote, "the nude, while officially frowned upon is an acceptable feature in the work of male painters – their images being predictable as objects of desire and ornament. Women painters, on the other hand, have taken up the female nude as a symbol of rebellion, social oppression and political dissent."[65] Hashmi told me that there were:

> women who had not really worked on themes to do with the body but now this became an important theme. Certainly it took center stage with my work and I started working with the unclothed body, the nude. While before that I had not been terribly interested in doing that. It's very surprising how when you look at the use of the female body in Pakistani women's art, where the unclothed body is a strong symbol of rebellion and an act of stating that 'this is mine' as opposed to how it is used in the West where the unclothed body is considered objectifying. Here it was just the opposite. It was, 'this is mine and I'll claim it, and I'll show it or I'll clothe it as I please'. So it had a totally different meaning. And, there was the possibility of your being reprimanded, or sued, or taken to jail for this. It was absolutely very tangible. [...] The female nude became a very different symbol in this context. It was a context of stating her right to be as she wanted to be. [...] in the context of the violence of Pakistani society, the public floggings that were taking place, that kind of obscenity, and juxtaposing it with the female body which was accused of being obscene [...] society was being systematically brutalized and in deference to that the female body

[62]
Hashmi, An Intelligent Rebellion, 233.

[63]
Salima Hashmi, Ramblings of a Painter, in: *Kunapipi* 19/3, 1997, 142–147, here 144.

[64]
Salima Hashmi and Quddus Mirza, *50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan*, Lahore 1997, 130.

[65]
Ibid., 235.

becomes even more vulnerable in its texture, its making, in its withering, in its growing old, and so on.[66]

The female nude as symbol of rebellion and dissent can be read through *Morning Paper* (1983). This image [Fig. 3] portrays a female form whose head is cropped from the frame of the image, reclining in the nude. On the upper left side of the image, newspaper clippings are collaged into the background painted over in purple and red, the same colors as are used to portray the pubic hair of the female figure. That the same colors that indicate the figure's pubis are those that cover the newspaper clippings detailing police violence against the women's movement is a way of asserting women's agency against the state that wanted to render them invisible. The postcolonial state uses violence as a means to discipline women into a limited social role within the confines of the family so that, "Their labour can thus be tapped in a process of ongoing primitive accumulation of capital which can then be fed into the building up of a modern economy and state. This is the main reason why women have to be 'pushed back'."[67] But in Hashmi's painting the use of color covering those representations of state violence is a way of asserting women's agency against the state. Hashmi has written:

> The female body, so dangerous, so challenging, – smothered and silenced, it took on fresh meanings of vulnerability and tenacity. The nudes in my work were either odes to the poetry and celebration of life or defiant witnesses flouting restraint. The image, although emblematic, was always lyrical, a counterfoil to the culture of violence. Press-clippings of police action against women and political workers were laid onto the paper in layers, with washes of water-colour and gouache, subduing their intensity, making the images go quietly into undertones. The paintings were small, reflecting the desire to be deciphered close-to. They were also easy to move in a hurry, in case of a raid on the Gallery, which was a familiar occurrence.[68]

This image contrasts stories of anti-feminist violence with the nude image of a woman whose nude form occupies the foreground, forcing the viewer to acknowledge her body despite the social backdrop of a political environment that attempts to erase tenacious, defiant women.

Nahid Raza (b. 1947) was born in Delhi and grew up in Karachi close to her two paternal uncles, Raza and Ali Imam, who are also

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[66]
Oral history interview conducted with the artist, July 12, 2022, Lahore, Pakistan.

[67]
Mies, Patriarchy and Accumulation, 197.

[68]
Hashmi, Ramblings of a Painter, 145.

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painters. She attended the Central School of Art in Karachi where her uncle Ali Imam was the principal.[69] In 1972, she married a young painter she met in art school, but her imagination of what life would be like for two painters in love was different from reality. Her husband was "infuriated" by her devotion to painting over her wifely duties. When Raza's career as a painter took off in the late 1970s, she soon sought divorce. The conditions of her divorce were onerous. She agreed not to remarry to retain custody of her children, and her husband refused to pay child maintenance.[70] When Zia came to power, the degraded status of women affected Raza more than other female painters as a single mother supporting herself as an artist. These circumstances led her into further involvement with left politics. Her opposition to Zia was reflected not only in her activism but also in her painting.

In the 1980s, she painted images with titles such as *Woman for Sale* and *Divorce*. While male painters, she contended, "confirmed the female body as object", Raza strove to alternately show the viewer that, "the women's body carried an abundance of meanings".[71] Her work has been described as "a celebration of woman".[72] *Woman Series* (1986) [Fig. 4] depicts a nude woman dancing to music, though dancing was forbidden in Zia-era Pakistan.[73] This work was inspired by Raza's reading of Fahmida Riaz's poetry, particularly those poems that describe a woman who feels free despite social constraints.[74] From the moment a woman is born she is limited in her role as daughter, sister, wife, mother, and social expectations of virtue and honor. The body is the physical instantiation of these limitations. For that reason, Raza's portrayal of the nude is displayed to "castigate history, society and art itself".[75] The woman dancing in the nude in this image is free to express herself through the movement of her body. She is unencumbered by social dictates and the joy that the movement of her body brings is for her alone. With the advent of capitalism, Silvia Federici writes:

[69]
Salima Hashmi, The Seventies. Tracing the Dream, in: Niilofur Farrukh, Amin Gulgee and John McCarry (eds.), *Pakistan's Radioactive Decade*, Karachi 2019, 4–14, here 11.

[70]
Hashmi, Unveiling the Visible, 88.

[71]
Ibid., 89.

[72]
Hashmi and Mirza, 50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan, 108.

[73]
Hashmi, An Intelligent Rebellion, 234.

[74]
Akbar Navqi, *Image and Identity*, Karachi 1998, 669.

[75]
Ibid., 671.

[Fig. 4]
Nahid Raza, Woman Series, 1986, drawing on paper, 12 × 10 in., Lahore, Collection of the
artist © Nahid Raza.

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the body was imagined and disciplined according to the model of simple machines, like the pump and lever. This was the regime that culminated in Taylorism, time-motion study, where every motion was calculated and all energies were channeled to the task. [...] Our struggle then must begin with the reappropriation of our body, the reevaluation and rediscovery of its capacity for resistance, and expansion and celebration of its powers, individual and collective. Dance is central to this reappropriation. In essence the act of dancing is an exploration and invention of what a body can do: its capacities, its languages, its articulations of the strivings of our being.[76]

Dance, as Silvia Federici sees it, is a way of reappropriating the commodification of the body by capital. Depicting that is an assertion of bodily agency.

Sumaya Durrani (b. 1963) is known for her offset lithographs that deliberately remove the artist's hand from the image. She became involved in the feminist movement in reaction to worsening conditions for women in 1980s Pakistan. "It starts when there are obstacles and when there is a struggle, when you are affected and people are affected around you", Durrani explained, "Now I'm far more aware of being a woman. I see how the image of a woman is exploited and it makes me angry."[77] In *Faceless Nude* (1995) [Fig. 5] Durrani uses images of the female body found in mail-order catalogs and pairs these images from advertisements with paper doilies, cutlery, and tablecloths in collage. John Holt (1996) describes Durrani's work as depicting "'tasty morsels' of what seem to be images of western women, [...] served up on tables set for male consumption".[78]

Durrani's collages rework signs and images used by male op-art artists leading the viewer to reflect on how the female body has been objectified through the male gaze. "The whole idea of being a woman and an artist, how do you communicate that?" Durrani asked, "For instance, the female body as it has been used in art; you elevate it and you subjugate it at the same time."[79] Her work instead positions the viewer as, "woman viewing man viewing woman".[80]

[76]
Federici, Beyond the Periphery of the Skin, 122–123.

[77]
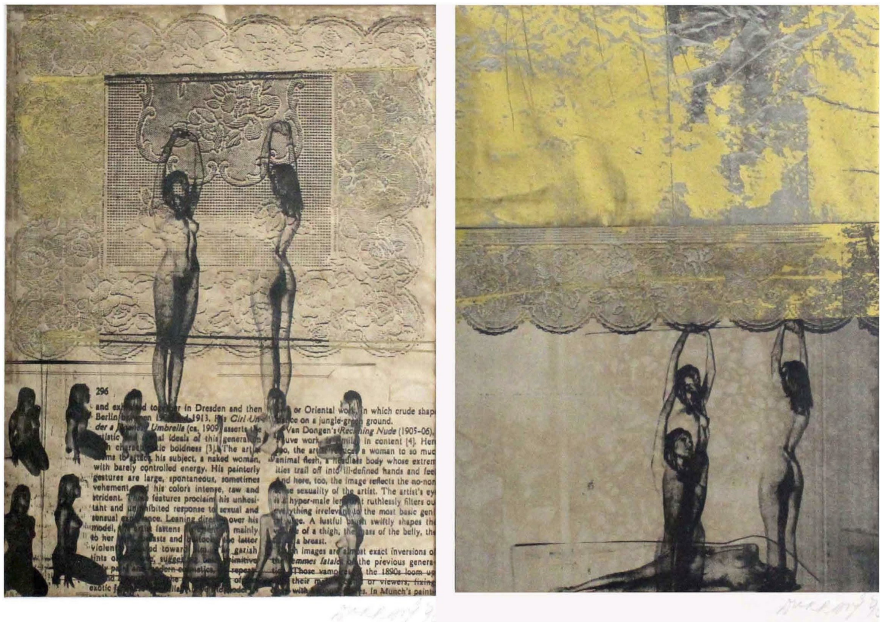Sumaya Durrani quoted in Hashmi, Unveiling the Visible, 110.

[78]
John Holt, Tampered Surface, in: *Third Text* 10/36, 1996, 87–90, here 87.

[79]
Sumaya Durrani quoted in Hashmi, Unveiling the Visible, 111.

[80]
Hashmi and Mirza, 50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan, 140.

[Fig. 5]
Sumaya Durrani, Faceless Nude, 1995, offset litho print and mixed media: gold leaf and
acrylic on paper, 14 × 10 in. each.

Durrani's play with gendered voyeurism[81] leads to a reevaluation of how one sees the female nude. "The female figures I have used", she stated,

> are the idealized figures in male fantasy. These are perfect bodies. They have not gone through childbearing, for example. The fact that they are blond and white also includes the postcolonial attitudes [...] The colour that I am using, sepia, refers to the past. But the images I am using are of the present.[82]

By distorting the viewer's sense of past and present, in other words playing with not just gendered looking but also our sense of time, Durrani emphasizes the ongoing sexual objectification of the female body through colonial standards of femininity.

Laila Shahzada (1930–1994) began painting in Karachi during the 1960s. Her paintings are a synthesis of natural and geometric forms. Her paintings of reclining nudes have a sculptural feel mainly resulting from her influences in the work of Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth. In *Untitled* (1979) [Fig. 6], a sculptural form of a female torso and thighs is depicted in bright purple against a hot pink background. Even though the figure is evocative of a sculpture, it also appears soft to the viewer and the sinewy lines reinforce the figure's tenderness. Shahzada described this and other sculptural female nudes that she painted at this time as a product of her "quest for peace"[83] in the immediate aftermath of former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's hanging on April 4, 1979.

Sabah Husain (b. 1959) was an active participant in WAF since her third year as a student at the National College of Arts. She began her studies at NCA in 1978 and soon thereafter the impact of Zia's anti-women laws and ordinances further drew her into feminist activism. She demonstrated against the Law of Evidence and many of her student paintings were statements against the misogyny of the military dictatorship. "My thesis work had a lot to do with women as its theme", she stated, "police brutality, the family laws [...] all these things combined".[84] Depictions of the female nude were featured in her thesis paintings even though she was fully aware of the resistance she would likely encounter in displaying them. In an etching from circa 1982 [Fig. 7], Husain depicts a nude female figure kneeling, touching the ground with one hand and reaching up to the sky with the other. This image not only

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[81]
See Mulvey, Visual and Other Pleasures, 213.

[82]
Sumaya Durrani quoted in Hashmi and Mirza, 50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan, 140.

[83]
Salwat Ali, *Laila Shahzada*, Karachi 2005, 37.

[84]
Sabah Husain quoted in Hashmi, Unveiling the Visible, 119.

[Fig. 6]
Laila Shahzada, Untitled, 1979, in: Salwat Ali, *Laila Shahzada. Exploring an Inner Landscape*,
Karachi 2006.

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celebrates the female body, but also expresses an optimism in the reaching upward, which gestures to an openness to possibility. As Maria Mies contends, many feminist movements have:

> the aim of preserving the human integrity and dignity of women, in the context of which these colonizing divisions were transcended, at least tendentially, and the prospect of a new solidarity emerged. This solidarity is not based on the narrow self-interest of the respective groups, but on the recognition that capitalist patriarchy destroys the human essence, not only in the oppressed, but also, and perhaps even more so, in those who apparently profit from this oppression.[85]

The gesture of this figure in the image epitomizes this optimism for asserting the dignity of women and finding new solidarities and possibilities. Husain told me that this figure, and other renderings she created of the female body,

> was very much where we were, what was happening around us, what we were exposed to [...] It was a celebration and it was about a counter-narrative to the males looking at that form. But it was a form that was more familiar to me than it was to them because it's about me so why couldn't we use it? But of course it's executed in a different manner.

For Husain, "The celebration of beauty [...] is a counter narrative to violence."[86]

Representations of the female nude were not solely the domain of female artists of this period. Colin David (1937–2008) painted images that adhered to conventional depictions of the female form, creating sexually provocative images of beautiful women that catered to the male gaze. In one of Colin David's untitled paintings, which appears to be set in a bluish-gray void, a nude woman reclines on her stomach, clutching a bright green pillow. Her legs are ever so slightly spread apart, leading the viewer to imagine what lay between them, and her one visible eye is closed but lined with thick *kajal*. The body's musculature and hands are tensed but there is a seeming unawareness of the viewer, so much so, it seems possible she could be dead. The pose of the female figure in this image is reminiscent of a common pose found in pornography produced during this period (see [Fig. 8]). In a more recent painting (see Colin David, *Untitled*, 2003, Oil on canvas, 29 3/4 × 29 3/4 in., private collection, last accessed December 14, 2023), David uses a nearly identical pose, but in this work the figure is partially clothed. Known for

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85
Mies, Patriarchy and Accumulation, 230.

86
Oral history interview conducted with the artist, June 2, 2022, Lahore, Pakistan.
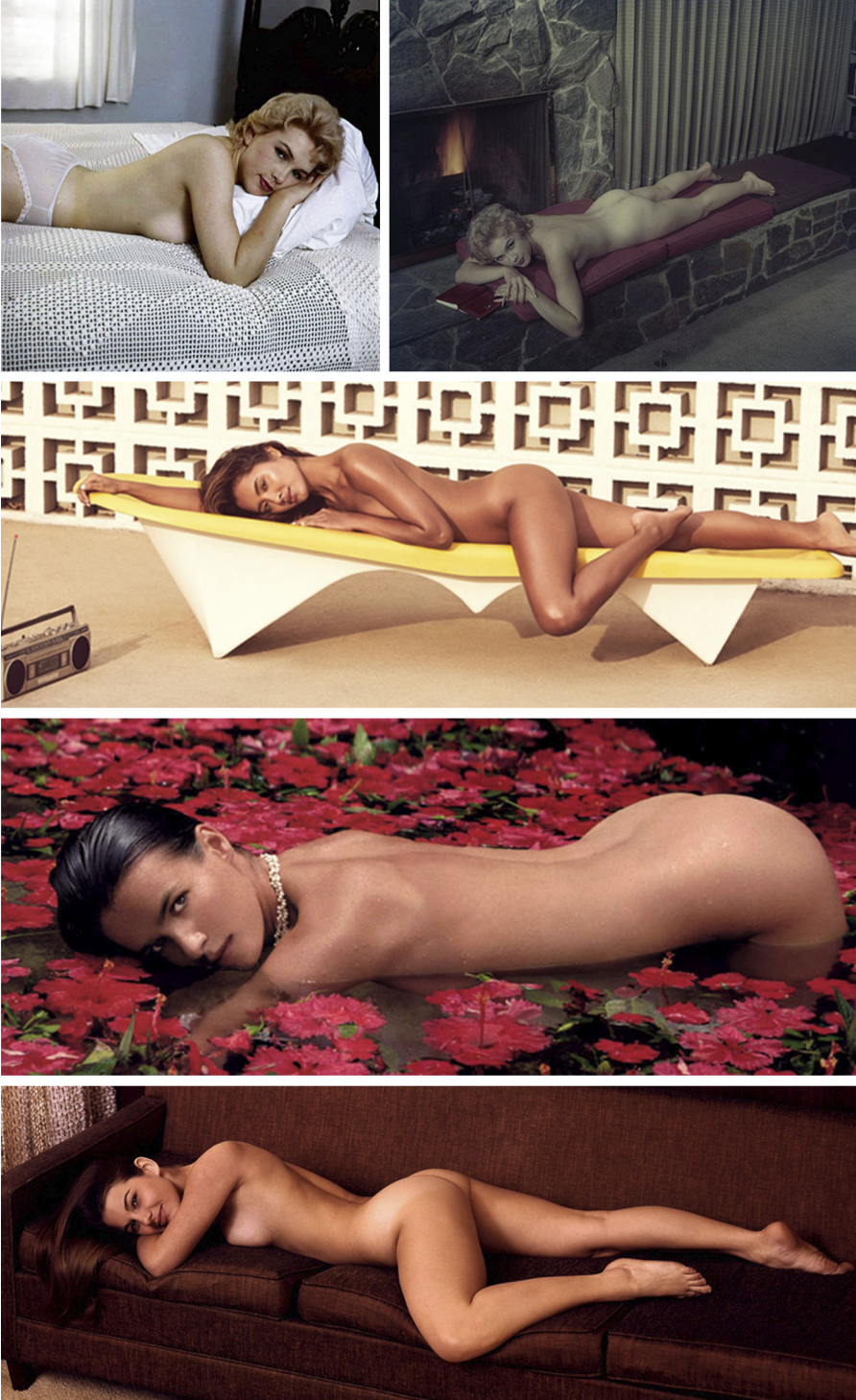
[Fig. 8]
Images of pornography common in the period.

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painting "sexy" nudes,[87] Colin David has stated, "I think the female form is one of the most beautiful forms, and that's the reason why I prefer to paint this quite often".[88] David and his paintings were targets of the Zia-era state and *Jamaat-e-Islami*, the far right Islamist party with which General Zia aligned himself. Shahid Mirza, who was a student at the National College of Arts in Lahore during the Zia coup, recounted to me a story of what happened when Colin David tried to hold an exhibit of his female nude paintings in the basement of his Lahore home:

> It was so difficult to have any art gathering from '77 to '87–'88 til Zia ul-Haq died. This was the time when Pakistan was bringing in Mujahideens from all over the world [...] You couldn't exhibit! [...] At that point [after the Zia coup] only, figurative artists couldn't display their work, so suddenly you just had hundreds of people doing calligraphy, which is just writing Quranic verses [...] Nobody else could actually exhibit. We used to have this professor, Colin David, at the National College of Arts, a wonderful artist, and he used to paint nudes. So he did an exhibition at his home, in his basement. Because he was doing figurative work and he couldn't display it, so he just invited a few people. He just had a small party for that thing. *Jamiat* guys got hold of the invitation card from somewhere and somehow they knew that there would be nude paintings there. So a bus from Punjab University came to his house, and broke everything in his house including his paintings and the refrigerator and TV. Everything! And then the police come, and after a few hours the police bring those kids there and say, 'What do you want us to do to them?' He said, 'Why would I want you to do anything to them? Just take your legal course. They have done something illegal. Why have you brought them here?' And they said, 'No, we can't really do anything to them, but if you want us to beat them up, teach them a lesson, they're young people why do you want to spoil their careers and their academic thing, because they're all students and they were emotional and they did something stupid.' So they [the police] started beating them [the students] up. He [Colin David] said, 'please don't do that. I don't want that.' So even those kind of exhibitions that you would do in your

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Akbar Navqi criticized Sumaya Durrani for having "berated" Colin David for choosing the female nude as "his favourite genre" despite depicting female nudes in her images. Navqi describes Durrani's work as having a quality of "adolescent romance" and that her images simply portrayed, "female domesticity which is her domain". See Navqi, Image and Identity, 699. If there was contempt for Colin David's nudes among female artists of the time, it was likely because while the objective of female artists was to subvert the male gaze, David's work reinforced it. Furthermore, David claimed that his images of nudes came solely from his imagination, but yet, they conspicuously conformed to poses common in pornography during this period.

Colin David quoted in Hashmi and Mirza, 50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan, 62.

home couldn't happen. It was so pathetic! He changed his style after that. He just started painting these strange land-scapes.[89]

While Colin David's nudes conformed to patriarchal modes of por-traying the female form, Ijaz ul Hassan (b. 1940) leveraged the image of the female nude as a political statement against American impe-rialism. Hassan took inspiration from "the Vietnam War, the Pales-tine Movement and in Pakistan by the working class movement".[90] In *Freedom* (1978)[91] [Fig. 9] he depicts a nude American hippie woman removing her bra and holding up a peace sign necklace in front of an unclothed and starving Vietnamese child. Hassan's nude, like the nudes WAF artists painted, is a statement against impe-rialism and its gendered articulations.[92] This contrast reveals the hypocrisy of American conceptualizations of freedom. American freedom, as Hassan depicts it, is one that sexualizes women, telling them that this objectification is, in fact, freedom, and purports to value peace as typified by hippie subculture, while US imperialist wars cause the starvation of Vietnamese children whose inability to be clothed is certainly no freedom.

V. Conclusions

The feminist artists who were at the forefront of the cultural resis-tance movement against Zia show us that "the spectacle is vulner-able. However intricately planned it is, a handful of people can disrupt it and cause chaos in a seemingly impenetrable organiza-tion. The spectacle isn't prepared for anything but passive spec-tators."[93] It is similarly significant that these struggles take place in what Maria Mies terms, "the sphere of body politics. A combi-nation of struggles and actions on the part of feminists in overde-veloped and underdeveloped countries can expose and undermine the double-faced policy of international capital towards women."[94] WAF artists, along with the feminist male artists who aligned with them, reclaimed the female body through portraying the nude in a moment when women were violently forced by the postcolonial state to become invisible. Their assertion of a right to their bod-

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[89] Oral history interview conducted with the artist, April 26, 2018, Lahore, Pakistan.

[90] Ijaz ul Hassan quoted in Hashmi and Mirza, 50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan, 74.

[91] See also Musarrat Hasan, *Ijaz ul Hassan*, Lahore 2012, 80; Hashmi, The Seventies, 7.

[92] See Jayawardena, Feminism and Nationalism, 255; Mies, Patriarchy and Accumulation, 39.

[93] Mulvey, Visual and Other Pleasures, 5.

[94] Mies, Patriarchy and Accumulation, 232.

ies transformed art into "a forum from which women question the whole social and political order".[95]

As feminist painters of Zia-era Pakistan show us, new feminist culture can reinterpret and redefine the body even as it depicts the nude female form as stereotypically feminine. There is a subversive quality in asserting one's bodily feminine sexuality in the context of a society that wants women to be invisible. In so doing they opened up a new category of the nude in depicting their own desire to be seen. This strategy of depicting the nude female form can reclaim not only women's body autonomy but also their joy and beauty as long as it is done on the artist's own terms and not to satisfy the male gaze. Feminist artists of the Zia period admired, appreciated, felt desire for, and made visible their bodies, at a time when politics threatened to render them invisible. By rendering in images what the state attempted to conceal, Pakistani feminist painters asserted their bodies' right to be female and to have a full social existence.

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Kristin Plys is an associate professor in the sociology and history departments at the University of Toronto, and for 2023–2024, the J. Clawson Mills Scholar at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She is the author of *Brewing Resistance* (2020), winner of the Global Sociology Book Award from the Federation for Social Sciences and Humanities. With Charles Lemert she is the co-author of *Capitalism and Its Uncertain Future* (2022), honorable mention for the PEWS Immanuel Wallerstein Book Award from the American Sociological Association.

[95] Hashmi, An Intelligent Rebellion, 237.

REPERFORMANCE, REENACTMENT, SIMULATION

NOTES ON THE CONSERVATION OF PERFORMANCE ART

Jules Pelta Feldman

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ABSTRACT

The conservation of performance art has become a pressing issue as museums increasingly commission, exhibit, and even collect works of performance art. While documentation might give us a schematic understanding of the original performance and its circumstances, and "reperformance" claims to reproduce the original live experience, neither of these can tell us what it was like to really be there, back then. Uniting curatorial and conservation methodologies, this paper proposes simulation as a tool for "mimetically documenting" the historical context and experience of performance works. Focusing on works by Marina Abramović and their representations in popular media, this article assesses historical reenactment, film and television, and ultimately video games as forms of simulation, arguing that these effectively transmit aspects of performance works that are otherwise difficult or impossible to conserve.

KEYWORDS

I. Restoring Performance

Art conservation has traditionally been considered to encompass two types of activities: restoration and preservation. Restorative measures – known as "interventions" – repair damage or undesirable changes. In the case of a traditional art object, this might mean replacing paint that has detached from its support, reassembling fragments of a shattered vase, or cleaning rust from metal. Preservative measures are intended to prevent such damage – usually, to minimize changes.[1] Preservation avoids intervening in the object itself, and includes measures like climate control, protection from ultraviolet rays, proper storage and handling, and the velvet ropes that keep museum visitors from getting too close. It also includes documentation, which, though long essential to conservation, has become an increasingly important part of conservators' work in recent decades.

While seemingly conventional artworks frequently present conservation quandaries, performance art's challenge to the discipline approaches the existential. In the case of performance, which has often been considered too different from paintings, sculptures, or even electronic media to be conserved, conservation strategies may be similar or even identical to curatorial ones: documents like photographs and videos are the most common way of "exhibiting" historical performance. And in the absence of an authoritative object, the division of conservation activities into restoration and preservation seems difficult to apply. A performance's traces – its various documents and relics – can be conserved, but how can one do more than document a performance? And beyond maintaining extant materials, what might a conservation intervention – an attempt to restore something already lost or damaged – look like?

One answer to this question might be found in the practice known as "reperformance", through which artists revisit works of historical performance by presenting them live. Yet reperformance has been widely criticized by scholars of performance. For while it allows for live transmission of certain aspects of a given work, such as interaction between performer and audience, reperformance neglects other qualities that scholars tend to consider vital to its meaning, even if these characteristics are not part of the work itself, such as historical context or geographical site. In short, reperform-

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ance as a conservation strategy focuses on aesthetic fidelity at the expense of historical fidelity.

In what follows, I propose to separate these two important but conflicting perspectives, imagining the possibilities of a historically sited form of preservation that is, unlike documentation, nonetheless grounded in the viewer's own experience. Using the work of Marina Abramović, reperformance's most influential and controversial practitioner, I present simulation – the real-time imitation or modeling of a process, system, or event – as a viable approach to the conservation of performance that circumvents the key criticisms leveled at reperformance. Simulation can be described as "mimetic documentation" – a reconstruction of a performance that may claim to conserve it by recouping aspects that would otherwise be, or already have been, lost. To make this argument, I will first discuss the limits and critique of reperformance, and then turn to simulation as an alternative approach, instances of which may be found in historical reenactment, cinema and television, and video games. Each suggests other mediations of performance that hold the potential to preserve, present, and convey aspects of performance art – even embodied experience – that are otherwise unavailable in traditional forms of documentation or existing conservation approaches.

II. The Limits of Reperformance

In the past few decades, reperformance has emerged as a means for both the preservation and the presentation of historical performance art. The practice has been largely pioneered by artists, most notably Abramović, who performed other artists' works for *Seven Easy Pieces* (2007) at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and made extensive use of reperformance for her 2010 retrospective at New York's Museum of Modern Art, "The Artist Is Present".[2] Reperformances of some of her pivotal works have since become a regular feature of the artist's exhibitions worldwide. While for Abramović, reperformance is explicitly tied to preservation, critics of the practice insist that a reperformance cannot be considered a document of a past performance, as a photograph might. In the logic of conservation, reperformance is not a straightforward preservation measure; nevertheless, we might with some justification see it as a form of restoration – a potentially hazardous attempt to restore something that has been lost. When restoring a painting or sculpture, conservators risk further damage. Intervention also risks privileging an earlier state of the work over its current incarnation. But when done responsibly, restoration is not only the product of extensive research but also itself a source

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[2] Other notable examples of historical reperformance include Babette Mangolte's *Four Pieces by Morris* (1993), a filmic reconstruction of 1962 performances by Robert Morris, and the restaging of Allan Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959) in 2006 at Munich's Haus der Kunst. For the latter, see: *Allan Kaprow. 18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (exh. cat. Munich, Haus der Kunst), ed. by Endré Lepecki and Barry Rosen, Göttingen 2007.

for new research: the new version of the artwork allows for new interpretations. Reperformance may arguably be used in the same way: a thoughtfully considered reconstruction can reveal aspects of the original performance that existing documentation has not preserved. However, this potential may be obscured or overridden by what reperformance cannot do.

Reperformance presents several problems to traditional and still-influential approaches to performance, which Jennie Goldstein summarizes thus: "In the performance/live art mythos of the visual arts, the audience is key to the meaning of the work. In order for an action or event to actually 'be' a performance, an audience has to be there, the performance has to be unique, and it has to take place just once."[3] Reperformance emphasizes audience in the general sense, disavowing the notion that any particular audience – the one present at that singular, unique performance – is necessary to the work. Even further, it relies on the assumption not only that a given work of performance can be repeated, but also that it can be removed from its original context (temporal, historical, spatial, cultural, corporeal) without losing its identity. In this, it moves art performance closer to other live media – theater, dance, and music – which can be reproduced without being copied.[4]

Both criticisms – audience specificity and context sensitivity – have also been leveled against Abramović's reperformance practice in different variations. For Hannah Higgins, however careful the reconstruction, a reperformance always runs the risk of giving the audience the false impression that they have personally experienced a work; indeed, the more precise and detailed the actualization, the more a viewer may be convinced that "Now I have seen it", just as it was back then.[5] And as exemplified by curator Alessandra Barbuto's worry that, "In the instance of artists whose actions are strongly characterized by their personality, it is hardly conceivable that the re-enactment of their work should result in anything other than a pale copy (or indeed a parody) of the original",[6] Abramović is often perceived as too forceful a personality to delegate

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Jennie Klein, Re Re Re. The Originality of Performance and Other (Post)Modernist Myths, in: *PAJ – Journal of Performance and Art* 2/35, 2013, 108–116, here 108.

[4]

This distinction was explicated by Nelson Goodman, who influentially distinguished between singular, "autographic" media like painting from (often) performance-based, "allographic" media. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art. An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, Indianapolis 1968, 99–126.

[5]

Hannah Higgins, *Reperformance. A Typology*, lecture delivered at Revisions: Object – Event – Performance since the 1960s, Bard Graduate Center, September 21, 2015 (February 2, 2022).

[6]

Alessandra Barbuto, Museums and Their Role in Preserving, Documenting, and Acquiring Performance Art, in: Lúcia Almeida Matos, Rita Macedo, and Gunnar Heydenreich (eds.), *Performing Documentation in the Conservation of Contemporary Art*, Lisbon 2013, 158–167, here 160.

(in Claire Bishop's term) her performances to others.[7] Another common concern is the loss of criticality and commodification of a formerly anti-institutional, immaterial art form, inevitably undermining the political efficacy and thus the meaning of the historical performance. Reflecting on the problem of performance documentation, Branislav Jakovljević asserts that reperformance also "serves to produce more documents, but of a different kind – photographs, video recordings, books – returning us to the good old economy of commodity production".[8] Amelia Jones is concerned that while

> all of these re-staging gestures have interesting critical potential, they also have the potential to flatten out or aestheticize the act (precisely by evacuating the act of its original political specificity) and thus to reduce or erase the act's potential for provoking awareness or for transformation or change.[9]

For Diana Taylor, Abramović's *Imponderabilia* (1977) exemplifies reperformance's failure to translate historically contingent aspects of an original performance, political and otherwise, into a contemporary situation. *Imponderabilia* was originally performed by Abramović and her partner Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen) in 1977 at the Galleria Communale d'Arte Moderna in Bologna [Fig. 1]. For this work, the two performers stood facing each other in the museum's entrance, obliging visitors to push between their naked bodies if they wished to enter. In 1977, their public nudity alone was enough to shock, and they were arrested as provocateurs after 90 minutes – thus establishing the work's avant-garde *bona fides*. Since the 2010 MoMA retrospective, reperformances have been less confrontational: visitors can choose to walk between two performers – who are further apart than Abramović and Ulay had been, thus leading to less physical impact between audience and work – or to avoid them altogether [Fig. 2]. But more significant than such changes to the work's staging are shifts in its context and reception. Contemporary art audiences scarcely blink at nude performers, and as the subject of major retrospectives worldwide, Abramović can no longer be seen as a subversive rebel.

Taylor is very specific, even programmatic, in her assessment of *Imponderabilia*'s meaning: "The idea activating the performance was that artists, not museums, are the guardians of art, and both

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[7]
Claire Bishop, Delegated Performance. Outsourcing Authenticity, in: *October* 140, 2012, 91–112.

[8]
Branislav Jakovljević, On Performance Forensics. The Political Economy of Reenactments, in: *Art Journal* 70/3, 2011, 50–54, here 51. Jakovljević does not mention Abramović in his article, but, given that *The Artist Is Present* had taken place the previous year, this very absence might be interpreted as criticism of her project.

[9]
Amelia Jones, 'The Artist Is Present'. Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence, in: *TDR. The Drama Review* 55/1, 2011, 16–45, here 25.

Documentation of Marina Abramović and Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen), Imponderabilia, 1977, Bologna, Galleria Communale d'Arte Moderna, courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives © Marina Abramović and Ulay.

artists and visitors have to negotiate the challenging and at times awkward relationship with them" – whereas in the reperformed version, artists "were no longer guardians of anything special".[10] Even if Abramović and Ulay were to reperform the work themselves, the historical and cultural circumstances would be too different. Amelia Jones agrees:

> The power of the works she redoes initially came from the various ways in which they surprised, confused, pressured, or otherwise destabilized gallery visitors or (in the case of pieces done in public) unsuspecting members of the general public. All such potential to provoke a productive feeling of unease in viewers is, of course, lost in re-enactments such as those of *Seven Easy Pieces*, which are accompanied (if not largely driven) by large-scale public relations campaigns proclaiming their own importance, and which themselves take place in large and fully sanctioned art institutions.[11]

That is to say, presenting the work "live" is not sufficient to bring its crucial audience relationship back to life. The specific historical circumstances of the original depended on the performance being sited – literally, yes, but especially conceptually – outside the sanctioned realm of the official art world. For Taylor and other critics, this historical caesura renders reperformance ineffective as a means of transmitting crucial attributes of the original work.

III. Distinguishing a Performance's Aesthetic Authenticity from Its Historical Fidelity

Given the limits of both traditional documentation and reperformance, is there any approach to the conservation of performance works that might retain or at least acknowledge such nuanced and contingent meanings? In order to address this question, it will be helpful to introduce a more abstract vocabulary to conceptualize the arguments for and against reperformance, revealing an emphasis on what I call historical versus aesthetic fidelity. Fidelity, in turn, may be divided into aspects of accuracy and authenticity, each of which may be available to the two umbrella terms to different degrees.

Historical accuracy aims at the historical facts: the who, what, when, and where of the past. I define historical authenticity, on the other hand, as the plausibility of a depiction in its historical context. Thus, while historiography is more concerned with accuracy, historical fiction strives for authenticity: a fictional protagonist cannot be historically accurate, since this person did not exist, but the

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[10]
Diana Taylor, Saving the 'Live'? Re-Performance and Intangible Cultural Heritage, in: *Études Anglaises* 69/2, 2016, 149–161, here 156.

[11]
Jones, The Artist Is Present, 40.

character can nonetheless be seen as authentic if they are portrayed in a manner consistent with their historical circumstances.[12] When we speak of what a particular queen wore to a particular ball on a particular day, the question is one of accuracy; when we imagine what other anonymous celebrants might have worn there, we inquire into authenticity. Though authenticity is rarely addressed in historical scholarship, it nonetheless has a place there. For example, it is important for a curator assembling a period room in a historical museum to determine whether or not the selection and arrangement of objects is authentic, i.e., whether it is a plausible approximation of what a room from that time, place, and milieu would have looked like. Yet a period room need not be accurate – a facsimile of an actual room. Both of these meanings are important to my notion of historical fidelity, which encompasses both the specific fact of historical events and the general plausibility of their details.

When moving from historical to art historical discourses, the familiarity of the two terms is reversed: while aesthetic authenticity is a well-developed discourse in art, important to practices of connoisseurship and conservation,[13] accuracy is a seldom-used concept having to do with the external identity between two objects. Generally, we speak of an "authentic" painting when the work's material integrity is preserved and its status as an "original" is secured. Of course, as Sherri Irvin has noted, the term becomes more problematic in the context of contemporary art.[14] Pip Laurenson influentially adopted the notion of the score for time-based installations, allowing for repeatability and change around a core of "work-determinative features".[15] An authentic installation in Laurenson's schema is thus one that respects these features. Yet reperformance

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There is relatively little discussion of the term "authenticity" among historians, despite its importance for popular culture. In 2009, the journal *History and Theory* devoted a special issue to the question of "Historical Representation and Historical Truth", but though "authenticity" was frequently used by the contributors, it was not defined. See: Christoph Classen and Wulf Kansteiner, Truth and Authenticity in Contemporary Historical Culture, in: *History* 48/2, 2009, 1–4. Laura Saxton approaches these terms directly in a discussion of historical fiction, but her definition of authenticity strikes me as at odds with conventional usage: "Accuracy is, to a degree, measurable because we can compare the details found in novels to details that have been uncovered by historical research", whereas "Authenticity refers to the experience of consuming an historical text and [...] is the impression that a text is accurate, even if it is not." Laura Saxton, A True Story. Defining Accuracy and Authenticity in Historical Fiction, in: *Rethinking History* 24/2, 2020, 127–144, here 128. To my mind, it seems clear that something can *feel* authentic without *being* authentic. (Accuracy, on the other hand, has no explicit relationship to feeling.) My use of these terms is therefore based not on their present use in scholarship, but rather in their deployment in popular culture: for present purposes, both accuracy and authenticity are "measurable", but the second is nonetheless still fictional.

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See: Ivan Gaskell and Salim Kemal (eds.), *Performance and Authenticity in the Arts*, Cambridge 1999; Erma Hermens and Tina Fiske (eds.), *Art Conservation and Authenticities. Material, Concept, Context*, London 2009.

[14]

Sherri Irvin, Authenticity, Misunderstanding, and Institutional Responsibility in Contemporary Art, in: *British Journal of Aesthetics* 59/3, 2019, 273–288, here 275.

[15]

Pip Laurenson, Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations, in: *Tate Papers* 6, 2006 (November 16, 2023).

as a preservation strategy has arisen as a means of addressing works that, while similarly ephemeral, resist repetition and cannot be scored. In the case of performance, it may be especially difficult to determine the parameters of an "authentic" performance, though this is often what is at issue in criticisms of reperformance. Yet aesthetic authenticity is precisely what Abramović claims to recapture in reperforming the "essence" of an historical work.

Aesthetic accuracy is a less intuitive term. It is possible to imagine, however, what this might mean in the case of a traditional art object. A copy of a painting is inauthentic – it is a facsimile of the original object – but we might nonetheless call it an accurate copy if it is very well done, faithfully reproducing the appearance of the original. An accurate duplicate, then, is one that could be mistaken for the original. In performance, such accuracy is not possible because of performance's temporal as well as its contextual embeddedness, which is impossible to recreate in its entirety (aside from in documentation, which can be forged like any other image).

Reperformance may thus theoretically achieve a degree of historical fidelity – the approximation both of accuracy in the depiction of real events and authenticity in plausible ones – but of necessity eludes aesthetic accuracy. It thus relies on aesthetic authenticity, which is the principle through which Abramović claims that reperformance functions to summon an original performance. On the other hand, Abramović freely ignores historical fidelity in her reperformances. She is concerned neither with the general situation of the original performance (historical authenticity) nor necessarily with the precise movements, actions, costumes, and verbal speech that originally constituted it (historical accuracy). While reperforming in 2005 Joseph Beuys's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965), she not only covered her face in gold leaf and honey but also chose to don a version of Beuys's outfit, apparently considering the original performer's clothing essential to the work. This was not the case, however, for her reperformances of other works, such as Gina Pane's 1973 *The Conditioning* (though it may be significant here that photographic documentation of Pane's performance is scarce). Instead, then, of pursuing historical fidelity through what would essentially be a reenactment, Abramović claims to achieve aesthetic authenticity – to provide her audience with access to an experience of what the original performance conveyed.

From such a perspective, while reperformance may allow new audiences – and new performers – to experience a live work that would otherwise exist only as historical data, and thus remain aesthetically inaccessible, it does so by obliterating the original work's identity as a historical event, one which can be excised only with violence from the precise details, both intentional and incidental, that are indispensable to its meaning. In short: reperformance may potentially offer aesthetic authenticity – a question that cannot be settled in the present text – but even if it can, it does so at the expense of historical fidelity. But it is a daunting if not impossible task to unite historical fidelity and aesthetic authenticity in the same

conservation "treatment". While the aesthetic authenticity of a performance may demand unpredictability and surprise, perhaps even shock, pursuit of historical fidelity requires a careful reconstruction of events. Let us then separate the pursuit of historical fidelity from that of aesthetic authenticity. In what follows, I will examine three possible paths to a historically faithful conservation of performance: reenactment, cinema and television, and video games, each of which may be understood as a type of simulation.

IV. Reenactment

What new knowledge and conservation possibilities might unfold if we seek to focus on the historical specificity of a performance, to allow ourselves to let go of the authentic liveness unique to performance in exchange for a historical vividness greater than what any reperformance can achieve? If we wish to understand how it was "back then" – not only what took place, but the complex context in which it happened; if we value the embodied perspective that is so often excluded from the flattening of photographs, film, and written histories; and if we are willing to separate aesthetic authenticity from historical fidelity, then we may find a potential pathway to conservation in historical reenactment.

Though scholars and critics have sometimes used the two terms interchangeably, reperformance must be distinguished from reenactment. While reenactment seeks to faithfully reconstruct and recreate a specific historical event (historical fidelity), reperformance's goal is usually the re-presentation of a specific act of performance under new circumstances, and often by a new performer (aesthetic authenticity). Reperformance is only exceptionally concerned with the historical specifics of the original work, in contrast to the meticulous costumes and antiquated vocabularies that characterize the field of historical reenactment, which is variously seen as a hobby, educational tool, or form of entertainment. Reperformance has emerged recently, from the field of art, whereas reenactment, which often considers itself to belong to historical inquiry, can trace its origins to the seventeenth century, if not earlier.[16] Reenactment becomes an artistic strategy only when artists appropriate it as such.[17]

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[16] Naval battles were known to have been staged in ancient Roman amphitheaters, but the modern notion of historical reenactment is generally dated to the seventeenth century. Reenactment grew popular in England in the nineteenth century, an outgrowth of Romanticism. See Stephen Gapps, *Performing the Past. A Cultural History of Historical Reenactments*, Sydney 2002.

[17] Artists' reenactments of historical events, while related to the present discussion, seem to me a distinct phenomenon with different roots and aspirations. See in particular: Louis van den Hengel, Archives of Affect. Performance, Reenactment, and the Becoming of Memory, in: *Materializing Memory in Art and Popular Culture*, London/New York 2017, 125–142; Sven Lütticken (ed.), *Life. Once More Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art*, Rotterdam 2005; Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains. Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, London 2011; Robert Blackson, Once More ... with Feeling. Reenactment in Contemporary Art and Culture, in: *Art Journal* 66/1, 2007, 28–40; Adam Czirak, Sophie

The term "history" refers both to the events of the past and the attempt to make sense of those events. By reconstructing real events with painstaking detail, reenactment attempts to bring the two together. Battles are popular, but any historical event recorded in sufficient detail is suitable. "Historical reenactors", as they call themselves, scour the written historical record for precise information about battle plans, language, and costume. Historical fidelity – the synthesis of accuracy and authenticity – is essential for them. Accuracy is important in the representation of real figures (such as a general), whereas authenticity is sufficient for general, anonymous types (such as an infantryman). Many reenactors insist on props and costumes made of the same materials used in the past, even if less expensive imitations in polyester and plastic look identical.

Though it may in some respects resemble dramatic performance, reenactment differs not only in its attention to historical detail over narrative, but also in its purposes. Rather than being put on for an audience, a reenactment is a collaborative exercise aimed not at merely demonstrating history but understanding it – even "experiencing" it – from the inside.[18] Though generally disdained by historians, some scholars have addressed reenactment as a cultural phenomenon, and even considered its potential for providing historical insight. The following account of reenactment, which stresses its differences from theater, was written by a scholar of education:

> The realistic reliving of an event itself, rather than simply a dramatized plotted story line, is the goal. Sequence is more important than suspense and dramatic tension. Most important, the major thrust is not to perform before an audience of nonparticipants but to develop empathetic comprehension, the feel of "being there", for audiences of participants who are totally immersed in the flow of events.[19]

Reenactment is thus – like restoration itself – simultaneously the product of extensive research and a source text for further research. Minute historical details are important in that they may generate embodied knowledge that is otherwise lost to history – for example,

Nikoleit, Friederike Oberkrome, Verena Straub, Robert Walter-Jochum, and Michael Wetzels (eds.), *Performance zwischen den Zeiten. Reenactments und Preenactments in Kunst und Wissenschaft*, Bielefeld 2019. Notable historical reenactment projects by artists include Ant Farm's *The Eternal Frame* (1975), a restating of John F. Kennedy's assassination; Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001); Dread Scott's *Slave Rebellion* (2019); and Rod Dickinson's *The Jonestown Reenactment* (2000), *The Milgram Re-enactment* (2002), and *The Waco Re-enactment* (2004).

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Reenactors do sometimes perform for an audience, a practice known as "living history". It is most commonly practiced at historical sites, such as "Colonial Williamsburg" in Virginia, which is "populated" by costumed characters of the eighteenth century. See: David Dean, Living History, in: Vanessa Agnew, Jonathan Lamb, and Juliane Tomann (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies*, London 2020, 120–124.

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Thomas N. Turner, Historical Reenactment. Can It Work as a Standard Tool of the Social Studies?, in: *The Social Studies* 76/5, 1985, 220–223, here 220.

that a heavy woolen uniform might hamper soldiers' ability to fight on a hot summer day. Thus, while reenactment must be informed by history, it also makes a claim to uncovering it. As historian Vanessa Agnew explains, "Embodying the role through disciplining the body is not just good method acting; it is considered a means of knowing history from the inside, and the emaciated or myopic infantryman has a compelling basis on which to testify what it was like to have 'gone back'."[20] Authentic uniforms are especially emphasized because the goal is an embodied understanding of history. Agnew argues that, "[w]hile many scholars would prefer to ignore or dismiss it", reenactment's "broad appeal, its implicit charge to democratise historical knowledge, and its capacity to find new and inventive modes of historical representation suggest that it also has a contribution to make to academic historiography".[21] Of course, reenactors cannot truly resurrect or experience historical events. But reenactment might well offer novel strategies for understanding aspects of historical events that otherwise escape history's – or art history's – grasp.

Let us then consider reenactment as a conservation strategy. This would entail pursuing not the aesthetic authenticity sought by reperformance, but the historical fidelity claimed by mimetic reproduction. The notion of reenactment, or at least something like it, offers access to knowledge that other forms of research cannot, and that reperformance in particular elides.

Freed from the responsibility of maintaining aesthetic authenticity, reenactment has the potential to provide the historical, cultural, and even personal context that neither reperformance nor traditional forms of documentation can provide. Abramović's early performances can be located once more in Yugoslavia – and in the 1970s. Specific architectural elements and stylistic codes can be replicated. And perhaps most importantly, these elements can be experienced "from within". Agnew explains that "As a form of affective history – i.e. historical representation that both takes affect as its object and attempts to elicit affect – reenactment is less concerned with events, processes or structures than with the individual's physical and psychological experience."[22] What kind of "experience" is available here, to "performer" or "viewer" (since each individual taking part in a reenactment would be both at once)? What aspects of a performance could be "documented" by such a mimetic reconstruction? Certain elements of Abramović's own reperformance efforts shed light on the possibilities.

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[20]
Vanessa Agnew, What Is Reenactment?, in: *Criticism* 46/3, 2004, 327–339, here 331.

[21]
Ibid., 335.

[22]
Vanessa Agnew, History's Affective Turn. Historical Reenactment and Its Work in the Present, in: *Rethinking History* 11/3, 2007, 299–312, here 301.

Jessica Santone, borrowing a term from Nikki Cesare and Jenn Joy, sees reperformances as a form of "embodied documentation" of the originals.[23] Her primary claim, while intriguing, is elusive: "Intensely focused on documentation as preservation in her performance series [*Seven Easy Pieces*], Marina Abramović produced a work that uses repetition to generate documentation."[24] How might we begin to understand reperformance itself as documentation, rather than a careful product thereof? How might a reperformance "document" aspects of a performance that have not been, perhaps never could be, captured by other documentary forms such as photographs, video, and oral accounts? Santone's argument begins to take shape in concert with Lara Shalson's observations of Abramović's reperformance, in *Seven Easy Pieces*, of Joseph Beuys's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965). Shalson notes that the dead hare, initially stiff, became soft and malleable over time as it warmed in Abramović's arms, allowing her to manipulate its limbs, making it seem more alive.[25] This is a simple yet powerful example of what can be "documented" by reenactment. Shalson's experience also supports Rebecca Schneider's contention that "When we approach performance not as that which disappears (as the archive expects), but as both the *act* of remaining and a means of reappearance (though not a metaphysics of presence) we almost immediately are forced to admit that remains do not have to be isolated to the document."[26] In short, reenactment offers the possibility not of reperforming, but of simulating historical performance. It can be considered "mimetic documentation", a living, breathing copy that, in its very fiction, allows performer/audience access to forms and types of information that are otherwise beyond our grasp.

V. Simulation

I am proposing here that what I call mimetic documentation – a form of documentation that is concerned primarily or exclusively with historical fidelity rather than aesthetic authenticity, and can plausibly claim to give information about a performance work by essentially copying that work – might serve to assist in the conservation of performance works by simulating them. The term "simulation" describes key concepts in a number of rather disparate

[23]
Jessica Santone, Marina Abramović's "Seven Easy Pieces". Critical Documentation Strategies for Preserving Art's History, in: *Leonardo* 41/2, 2008, 147–152, here 148. Santone borrows the term "embodied documentation" from: T. Nikki Cesare and Jenn Joy, Performa/(Re)Performa, in: *TDR. The Drama Review* 50/1, 2006, 170–177.

[24]
Santone, Seven Easy Pieces, 152.

[25]
Lara Shalson, Enduring Documents. Re-Documentation in Marina Abramović's Seven Easy Pieces, in: *Contemporary Theatre Review* 23/3, 2013, 432–441, here 440.

[26]
Rebecca Schneider, Performance Remains, in: *Performance Research* 6/2, 2001, 100–108, here 103.

fields. These different definitions, while they share certain fundamental points, are by no means interchangeable, and my argument relies on a specific notion of simulation. The root of the word has to do with the notion of a copy or fake, and all definitions include this idea in some way, but from there they diverge. In psychology, for example, "simulation theory" posits a person's ability to imagine what another is thinking or feeling by "simulating" that person's thoughts in their own mind. For many philosophers and theorists, simulation is difficult to disentangle from the ideas of Jean Baudrillard, for whom it is a central aspect of postmodern culture.[27] In Baudrillard's system, a simulacrum is what results when a given sign seems or pretends to refer to a profound reality, but no longer does so. Simulation is the next stage of this scheme, in which the reality underneath the sign is wholly severed, and signs refer only to other signs. For Baudrillard, this is the condition of postmodern culture – a simulation of reality that is no longer tethered to it, may even proceed it, and thus shapes rather than reflects it.

My own notion of simulation stems from the term's general use within the natural and social sciences, wherein to simulate is generally to model a process.[28] Simulation is not the repetition of a known sequence, but the modeling of a dynamic system in order to discover something new; its outcome is not fixed from the start, but emerges as a result of the simulation being run. Simulation is by necessity reductive, leaving out certain pieces of reality and simplifying others in order to focus on the most relevant elements under investigation. It is not a perfect copy but a schematic representation.[29] Therefore, simulation's primary weakness – its oversimplification of complex situations – is also the source of its utility.

Understood this way, we might think of historical reenactment as a form of simulation, as does historian of reenactment Annette Vowinckel. She maintains this even though reenactment does not generally allow for the possibility of dynamic change – i.e., something other than a fixed outcome – which Vowinckel herself insists upon as a feature of simulation.[30] In the sciences, computer simulations are often used to form predictions about real-world processes; the results of the simulation cannot be known beforehand. As a

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Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser, Ann Arbor, MI 1994.

[28]

See: Eric Winsberg, Computer Simulations in Science, in: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Archive. Winter 2019 Edition*, September 26, 2019, ed. by Edward N. Zalta (April 20, 2021); Louise Sauvé, Lise Renaud, David Kaufman, and Jean-Simon Marquis, Distinguishing between Games and Simulations. A Systematic Review, in: *Educational Technology and Society* 10/3, 2007, 247–256, here 251.

[29]

John R. Searle, Minds, Brains, and Programs, in: *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 3/3, 1980, 417–424, here 423.

[30]

Annette Vowinckel, Past Futures. From Re-enactment to the Simulation of History in Computer Games, in: *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 34/2, 2009, 322–332, here 328.

strategy for performance conservation, simulation may not necessarily provide new "hard data" about a performance, but it might yield new experiences of the work that provide crucial information about it. A simulation carefully built from the already available data might mimetically document some aspect or aspects of the original work, which allows the viewer/participant to glean or infer insights that might not be available if those same data were presented in another, drier form. Therefore, even though reenactments are frequently foregone conclusions in terms of their succession of events, they may still function to provide new information from the initial data provided – affective data, experiences rather than the quantitative information that is usually the goal of computer simulation.

This definition of simulation – the simplified modeling of a dynamic system, generally used to gain knowledge about something in the real world, which may or may not be done with the assistance of computers – may be useful as applied to the conservation of performance art. Since a performance work's "system" includes the audience as well as the various contexts in which it took place and which shape it and which need to be simulated together with the work itself, reenactment could indeed be used to simulate performance works. Still, it also presents a number of obstacles and disadvantages. Since reenactment requires that all participants function as both performer and audience, a great deal of commitment and preparation is necessary to successfully execute it; it cannot be performed casually by, say, museum visitors who are merely curious about a given work. Beyond this, it requires a suspension of disbelief that is difficult to align with the types of experiences that are native to art spaces. While mimesis is of course commonly encountered in an art museum, the type of fiction demanded of successful reenactment would likely come across as theater, if not outright kitsch.

VI. Film and Television as Mimetic Documentation

There are other conditions, however, under which this type of simulation that I call mimetic documentation appears not as anachronistic kitsch, but as clearly legible mimesis. When watching a film or television show, viewers generally find it easy to suspend their disbelief and accept the reality of the world depicted, considering it natural that people who are their contemporaries – that is, actors – might wear clothes and use language from another time and place. Historical film is a popular and prestigious genre, and its potential relevance for the discipline of history has been acknowledged since Michael Ferro's book *Cinéma et Histoire* (1977). Robert Rosenstone has also opened a path for academic approaches to film as a form of history writing.[31] A film's version of history is not necessarily more constructed or artificial than the written accounts that we call

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[31] Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, Harlow 2006.

scholarship, though its aims may be different. As film scholar Tony Barta notes,

> Film theory has always been concerned with elaborating how film art creates a sense of reality; historiography is at last beginning on the same process. Historians have probably had to reflect on their distance from reality as much as any artist (pictorial or literary) and have always assembled their representations of the past from broader perspectives and interior close-ups.[32]

Like reenactment, both film and history aim to construct a convincing reality.

Indeed, historical cinema has occasionally turned its lens to art history, thereby reconstructing – essentially, simulating – important scenes from art's past. We might think, for instance, of Jackson Pollock (played by Ed Harris, who also directed) working athletically in his studio in the 2000 film. And if we can accept a simulated Pollock on film – Harris was nominated for an Academy Award for his performance – might we be able to imagine a reconstruction of Marina Abramović's performance? Conveniently, it is not necessary to imagine; such a filmed simulation already exists.

From November 15 to December 21, 2002, Abramović performed *House with the Ocean View* at Sean Kelly Gallery in Manhattan's Chelsea district [Fig. 3 and Fig. 4]. For this durational performance, the artist lived on permanent display on three room-like, sparely furnished platforms, drinking only water. Each platform was connected to the ground with a ladder whose rungs were knives. Though Abramović did not speak, she evidently formed a powerful connection with her viewers, some of whom stayed in the gallery for hours at a time. Foreshadowing the popularity and resonance of *The Artist Is Present* eight years later, *House with the Ocean View* caused a sensation beyond the art world that earned it a pop-cultural cameo. The following year, the television show *Sex and the City* asked Abramović to recreate her performance for its 86th episode, in which the protagonist, relationship columnist Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker), becomes romantically involved with a (fictional) famous artist (played, surreally, by the dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov). Abramović declined to appear on the show, but allowed its producers to reconstruct – to simulate – her performance.[33]

Abramović treated the inquiry like a request for reperformance, allowing her work to be "redone" as long as her rights as author were respected and financially compensated – the same procedure that she herself would later follow with *Seven Easy Pieces*.

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Tony Barta, Screening the Past. History since the Cinema, in: id. (ed.), *Screening the Past. Film and the Representation of History*, Westport, CT 2004, 1–18, here 12.

33

Marina Abramović and Laurie Anderson, Marina Abramovic and Laurie Anderson. Wise Women, *Modern Painters*, March 1, 2010 (February 2, 2022).

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For the scene in which Parker's and Baryshnikov's characters first meet, *Sex and the City* filmed at the Sean Kelly Gallery in Chelsea, apparently using the same "set" and "props" that Abramović had used for her actual performance [Fig. 5]. The artist herself was simulated by actress Beth Lapides. Though Lapides bears a tolerable resemblance to Abramović, her performance is not a faithful reenactment of the latter's: the actress's hair is disheveled, her eyes dark and vacant, as if suffering. She moves aimlessly through the set, avoiding the audience's gaze. Yet in photographs of *House with the Ocean View*, Abramović appears calm and centered, her long, smooth hair pulled back in a practical ponytail. Her behavior – particularly the sustained eye contact that would later inform *The Artist Is Present* – announced her willingness to engage with her viewers.

Nonetheless, the scene does provide some meaningful relation to the original performance that is unavailable in the deliberate documentation created of it by Abramović and her gallery. Though *Sex and the City*'s version of the gallery is mostly populated by the kind of solemn viewers one also finds in the work's official documentation, Carrie is unimpressed by the performance, and shares a laugh with her friend Charlotte (a former gallerist), though she is shushed by the others. Such irreverence belies the earnestness that Abramović sought to convey – and that is promoted in official photographs – but it is very much authentic to a typical art audience, which inevitably includes a range of perspectives (even if it cannot be historically *accurate*, since Carrie and Charlotte are fictional characters). The psychologically charged documentation produced by Abramović and her gallery is meant to represent and propagate the artist's own interpretation of the work, and thus fails to register (or perhaps deliberately omits) dissenting viewpoints.

VII. Video Games as Simulation

Though certain elements of Abramović's performance might be simulated by this scene from *Sex and the City*, the scene is ineffective as a simulation of the artist's practice (nor is that its intent). Yet even if it were a more faithful rendition, it would still be limited by the formal and structural constraints of its medium. What film and television lack is immersion, the feature that allows simulation to be experienced from within, rather than from a distanced, third-person perspective. Though film and television provide a form of mimetic documentation that is more stable and accessible than that offered by historical reenactment, they lack the crucial element of embodied perspective that transforms a viewer into a participant. While filmed scenes like that of *Sex and the City* may be considered a form of simulation according to the definition discussed above, they fail to incorporate the element of immersion that has proven so essential to reenactment as a form of mimetic documentation. For sociologist Sherri Turkle, "simulations want, even demand, immer-

sion".[34] Here, affective data – experiences – are key. A weather simulation might indicate in what direction a hurricane is heading, but it will tell you nothing about the experience of standing in its path.

For the purposes of conserving performance, a suitable form of simulation would incorporate film's potential for the suspension of disbelief in terms of time, place, and character, its capacity to synthesize a specific setting or environment, but add to this the capacity for immersion, ideally even for interaction and change, as in historical reenactment. It would allow the viewer to actually experience the work, or at least certain aspects of it, from the inside – ideally, to avoid the pitfalls of reperformance, without giving her the false impression that she was experiencing an authentic instance of the performance as art. The extant notion of simulation that comes closest to the version of it necessary for my purposes here is to be found in the small yet growing field of video game studies.

While gaming scholar Veli Matti Karhulahti notes that "Gaming has been closely tied to simulation since the latter's academic emergence" as early as 1960,[35] Chris Crawford points out that the difference between video games and simulations lies in their differing goals: "A simulation is created for computational or evaluative purposes", whereas a video game "is created for educational or entertainment purposes".[36] Yet these two goals may coincide in the simulation of a work of art. Karhulahti ultimately concludes that videogames "can and should be discussed as (computerized) simulations or simulators in cases where they can be given a functional role as a model of a valid reference system" – as in the case of historical events or performances.[37] His primary distinction is between games that model real referents – for example, medieval Europe – and those that are purely imaginary, such as a fanciful kingdom filled with dragons. Note that this distinction between reality and fiction is not strictly analogous to one between real events and irreal ones. Rather, the notion of "reality" here is closer to the concept of historical authenticity discussed above. This is a particularly important and useful distinction for the possibility of modeling performance, because it allows for a certain degree of interactivity, change, and openness in the modeling of a work of historical performance. That is, the participant/viewer – a role we can now identify with (if not quite as) the player of a game – has a certain degree of leeway (in German, *Spielraum*) to influence events in a manner that, if not

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34
Sherry Turkle, *Simulation and Its Discontents*, Cambridge, MA 2009, 6.

35
Veli Matti Karhulahti, Do Videogames Simulate? Virtuality and Imitation in the Philosophy of Simulation, in: *Simulation and Gaming* 46/6, 2015, 838–856, here 842.

36
Chris Crawford, *The Art of Computer Game Design*, New York 1997, 8.

37
Karhulahti, Do Videogames Simulate?, 847.

strictly consistent with what is known of the original performance, nonetheless represents an authentic engagement with it. Indeed, this is necessary to the concept of immersion in simulation, since the "player" is playing a role: that of an original viewer.

In some ways, video games combine useful aspects of both film and reenactment; Brian Rejack observes that "the experience of playing a video game has become increasingly similar to reenactment".[38] The nascent field of "historical game studies" defines itself as

> the study of games that in some way represent the past or relate to discourses about it, the potential applications of such games to different domains of activity and knowledge, and the practices, motivations and interpretations of players of these games and other stakeholders involved in their production or consumption.[39]

Historical games are "those games that in some way represent the past, relate to discussions about it, or stimulate practices related to history".[40]

Historical games tend to follow two distinct models: the simulation of a broad historical period and the reconstruction of a particular event. Most scholarship on historical games in education, history, and sociology tends to focus on the former category; in particular, the *Civilization* series by Sid Meier has received a great deal of attention.[41] Other well-known games that fall into this category are *The Oregon Trail* (originally developed in 1971 for educational purposes) and *Age of Empires* (a series of commercial games that freely mix historical details with fiction). Such games are generally much more concerned with historical authenticity than with accuracy; the player does not reenact specific historical events, but rather moves through a simulation of a historical reality. Other historical games

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[38]
Brian Rejack, Toward a Virtual Reenactment of History. Video Games and the Recreation of the Past, *Rethinking History* 11/3, 2007, 411–425, here 413.

[39]
Adam Chapman, Anna Foka, and Jonathan Westin, What Is Historical Game Studies?, in: *Rethinking History* 21/3, 2016, 358–371, here 362.

[40]
Ibid., 367, fn. 1.

[41]
See: Matthew Wilhelm Kapell and Andrew B. R. Elliott (eds.), *Playing with the Past. Digital Games and the Simulation of History*, New York 2013; William Uricchio, Simulation, History, and Computer Games, in: Joost Raessens and Jeffrey H. Goldstein (eds.), *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*, Cambridge, MA 2005, 327–338; Jeremiah McCall, Teaching History with Digital Historical Games. An Introduction to the Field and Best Practices, in: *Simulation and Gaming* 47/4, 2016, 517–542; id., Navigating the Problem Space. The Medium of Simulation Games in the Teaching of History, in: *The History Teacher* 46/1, 2012, 9–28; Claudia Fogu, Digitalizing Historical Consciousness, in: *History and Theory* 48/2, 2009, 103–121; Karsten Weber, Erklärung Historischer Abläufe mit Computersimulationen, in: *Historische Sozialforschung* 32/4, 2007, 94–121. For a critique of the ideologies at work in *Civilization*, see Alexander R. Galloway, Playing the Code. Allegories of Control in Civilization, in: *Radical Philosophy* 128/5, 2004, 33–40.

are concerned with the simulation of a particular event, such as a battle. Yet unlike in historical reenactment, historical accuracy is almost necessarily forfeit here, as the very nature of the game requires that the outcome be determined by the player's actions and decisions. In a game, Rome might fend off the Huns, or Germany win the Second World War.

William Uricchio is right to note the value of a non-teleological approach to history[42] – those outcomes were never inevitable – but the very potential for interaction and agency that makes video games so vivid a form of simulation also threatens their value as mimetic documentation. The most productive historical games, therefore, exploit immersion and its contingency not to rewrite history, or to use it as a careless playground, but to provide a more personal, affective experience of it. *1979 Revolution. Black Friday* (2016), designed by Navid Khonsari, takes place during the Iranian revolution. The player's character is a young photojournalist, Reza Shirazi, a fictional character who takes part in real events. Though the character of Reza claims that his role as a journalist is to avoid choosing sides, the player finds it increasingly difficult to do so. As he meets people with different perspectives, and finds himself embroiled in increasingly tense and violent confrontations between the protest movement and the regime, the player is powerless to change history, but he is compelled to find his own place in it. The game thus makes fraught and personal the conflicts that often appear dry and inevitable in more conventional forms of history.

VIII. Simulating *The Artist Is Present*

As simulations, video games – or at least the technologies and visual conventions that are native to such games – have significant advantages over film, and even certain practical advantages over reenactment. They excel at providing mimetic documentation – an experience of immersion, a sort of virtual embodiment, that is at least potentially conducive to an unconventional yet meaningful engagement with history. But the question still remains whether a computer simulation in the form of a game might function as a form of conservation for live art.

Pippin Barr's parody game *The Artist Is Present* appeared on his website in 2011, not long after Abramović's exhibition and work of the same title had closed at MoMA.[43] For this work, which catapulted Abramović to a level of renown unprecedented for performance artists, the artist sat, unmoving, each day that the exhibition was open to the public, for a total of more than 750 hours. Across from her wooden chair at the center of MoMA's high-ceilinged atrium

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was placed another chair, which visitors were invited to occupy, in order to make eye contact with Abramović and experience her "presence" for as long as they wished [Fig. 6]. Despite the disarming simplicity of this premise, demand to take part in the performance quickly grew, and soon, a massive queue formed outside the museum each morning. Because an individual might choose to sit for five minutes or five hours – some did stay for the entire day – it was impossible to calculate one's chances of taking part in the work.

Barr, interested in the practical dynamics of this ostensibly spiritual experience, playfully simulated it. An assistant professor of computer science, he also designs web browser games that are generally very simple in their graphics and play. Their pared-down, pixel-drawn visuals mimic the blocky simplicity of classic 8-bit video games, or the slightly more sophisticated style of computer games that came standard with Windows operating systems in the 1990s.[44] *The Artist Is Present* borrows the graphics of the original *Police Quest*, an "adventure simulation" computer game partly designed by former police officers, which was originally released in 1987 by Sierra Games [Fig. 7].[45] In addition to their clear stylistic references, Barr's games often explore and subvert conventional game content and tropes.

When *The Artist Is Present* opens, you – the player – are standing on the sidewalk outside a schematic rendering of MoMA. Your avatar's skin, hair, clothing, and eyes (two solid squares) are randomly chosen, and may be any of a small set of colors. Text windows invite you to enter the museum's lobby – you navigate solely by pressing the arrow keys – where you must buy a ticket before you can enter the galleries [Fig. 8]. Once inside, you walk past a few pixelated masterpieces of the museum's collection until you encounter a long row of non-player characters [Fig. 9]. This is the infamous queue, where you may wait your turn to sit with Abramović – who also looks just like your avatar, save for her long black hair, pink skin, and long red dress. The line's length varies, but it may take dozens of patient attempts to sit with the pixelated Abramović.

This disappointment, however, reflects the experience of most would-be participants. Indeed, though the game is extremely simple in its visuals, conception, and play mechanics, it still bears a meaningful relationship to the reality from which it is drawn. The game is playable only when the real MoMA is open; before 10:30 a.m. EST the avatar cannot enter, and at 5:30 p.m. it must leave. This use of real time effectively reproduces real constraints that structured

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[Fig. 7]
Still from *Police Quest*, 1987 © Sierra Entertainment, Inc.
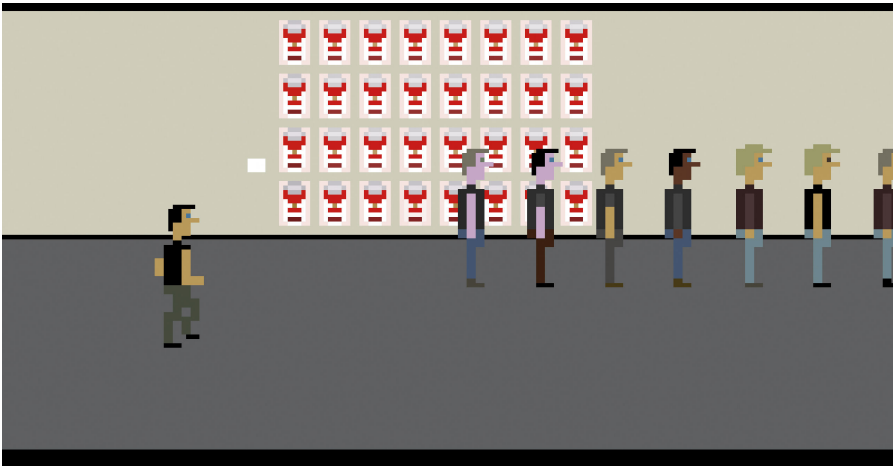
the original performance. The game foregrounds the experience of waiting in line and the uncertainty and frustration of that experience, elements that were neither part of the museum's publicity campaign nor effectively captured in official documentation sanctioned by the artist. Indeed, the best-known images of Abramović's *The Artist Is Present* are from a series of close-up portraits taken by photographer Marco Anelli of the artist along with everyone who sat with her, which have the effect of cropping out only the large crowds of would-be sitters but also the surrounding apparatus required to maintain the piece: studio lighting, stanchions, museum security officers tasked with keeping the public in line.[46] Similarly, the 2012 documentary film of the same name narrowly defined the performance in terms of the artist and individual participant, ignoring the institutional, architectural, social, and other factors that structured viewers' experiences.[47]

Reflecting on these two poles of experience, Barr considers his game to be

> a terrible remediation of [Abramović's] work which is all about human closeness [...] But for some of the people who reported back to me on the experience of playing, it did have resonance with the actual work in the intensity of the experience. [...] Sitting with her is not just about the fact that she's an intense person, but that you waited for eight hours to do it and very few people are going to have that experience.[48]

Whereas simulations in the form of theater or film may alter events in the service of plot or drama, games' structure is marked by the pursuit of one or more goals. On the face of it, this is a distortion of Abramović's performance, which instead emphasizes the simple, ambition-shunning notion of "presence"; this quasi-mystical quality was emphasized in the official photographs and film that claim to document the performance, and were criticized by a number of scholars. Carrie Lambert-Beatty called it "unabashed celebrity worship", arguing that "In a generative view of performance, the relation of performer and viewer is something to be continually manipulated and multiplied, not restricted to the model of co-presence".[49] By ignoring this notion of presence in favor of a more mundane

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[46]
Marco Anelli, Klaus Biesenbach, and Chrissie Iles, *Portraits in the Presence of Marina Abramović*, Bologna 2021.

[47]
Marina Abramović. The Artist Is Present, directed by Matthew Akers and Jeff Dupre (Show of Force, 2012), 01:46.

[48]
Jesper Juul, Interview with Pippin Barr, January 24, 2018 (February 2, 2022).

[49]
Carrie Lambert-Beatty, Against Performance Art, in: *Artforum* 48/9, 2010, 208–213, here 212. See also Caroline A. Jones, Staged Presence, in: *Artforum* 48/9, 2010, 214–219; Jones, The Artist Is Present, 16–45.

one, Barr's game may have resembled the audience's experience of the performance more than its carefully curated "documents". The game even preserves certain incidental details of the original experience, such as MoMA's 2010 ticket price and the fact that the "museum" is closed on Tuesdays – a policy changed in recent years, and thus now documented by the game. Such details may seem trivial, but they suggest the medium's potential for preserving contextual information that is subsequently completely detached from the experience of a performance, if not lost altogether.

Games have no hope of simulating every aspect of a performance, or allowing the player the unlimited options that are, theoretically, available to a live audience member. In reality – unlike in my experience of Barr's game at the time of this writing – I was eventually able to sit across from Abramović and experience *The Artist Is Present*, though not by patiently waiting in line. Though I had tried many times – taken days off work, arrived at the museum by sunrise, and waited all day until closing – I never reached the front of the line. Yet by returning repeatedly to the performance – sometimes to wait, sometimes just to watch – I came to know several people who were often there, and one of them offered to wait in line for me on the last Friday of the exhibition, when the museum would be open late, so that he could bequeath his spot to me once I left work. The specificity of my experience with *The Artist Is Present* is not available in a simulation like Barr's. Yet understood as a form of mimetic documentation, a game simulation may offer a limited number of options that stand in for a much greater range. In Barr's *The Artist Is Present* the player cannot, for example, induce himself to vomit in front of Abramović, as one visitor infamously did, but he *can* cause enough of a disturbance to induce the security guards to kick him out of the museum (this is accomplished in the game by "jostling" people in line one too many times). Beyond this, the very poverty of the format, its drastic reduction, is an answer to scholars' concern that audiences might confuse a copy of an artwork with the original.

The game format also offers intriguing potential for the viewer/player to inhabit different perspectives and thus encounter different aspects of the performance. As Barr reports, Abramović told him that she herself played the game, but never made it to the front of the line – she got bored and stopped paying attention, and when her avatar failed to move forward in line, it was forcibly removed from the digital museum.[50] Her interaction with Barr's game is likely the closest Abramović has come to accessing her audience's experience of her work. The simulation of embodiment offered by video games – however disembodied it may be – is a powerful tool for considering the question of perspective in performance art.

Barr's work even opens up the possibility of considering the performer's own perspective; in 2020, he released *The Artist Is*

Present 2, in which the player's avatar is no anonymous visitor, but Abramović herself. Barr's intention was to convey something of the artist's perspective: "You're subsuming your needs and any selfish desires you have for these little computer-generated people, who aren't real, but they need you to see them", he explained.[51] Your "goal" in the game involves waking up, taking a taxi to the museum, and taking your place in MoMA's atrium, where a crowd of authentically awestruck viewers – "It's her! I can't believe she's here!" – awaits you. Once you are seated and ready, you lift your head and lock eyes with the first visitor, remaining with them until they choose to leave [Fig. 10 and Fig. 11]. In that sense, you are entirely beholden to your viewers. As a simulation of Abramović's day, the game even has some documentary value: the apartment in which Abramović wakes up at the opening of the game is based on the one she stayed in during the exhibition's run.

In short, though Barr's *The Artist Is Present* does not claim to accurately simulate Abramović's performance, it nevertheless offers meaningful access to certain aspects of the original *The Artist Is Present* that are unavailable in more traditional forms of documentation. The game vividly demonstrates the surprising potential of video games to simulate and thereby conserve some of the most contingent and intangible aspects of live art.

In a consideration of video games as a potential preservation medium, however, it would be remiss to ignore the fact that video games themselves pose significant challenges to conservation. During the process of writing this text, the software giant Adobe discontinued support for Flash, a content-creation software and viewing application first released in 1996 that supported embedded audio and video along with vector, 3D, and raster graphics.[52] This situation is a reminder that any form of documentation is a new conservation object that must be cared for and maintained over time.

IX. Conservation Choices

Conservation entails difficult choices. When advanced technical imaging reveals another composition hidden beneath a painting's topmost layers – as in the recent case of Vermeer's *Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window* (ca. 1657) – conservators may choose to keep the painting in its current state or to reveal the image beneath, but they cannot do both. In the case of the Vermeer, the Staatliche

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[51] Jessica Conditt, Some of the Best Video Game Ideas Come from a Twitter Philosopher, in: *Engadget*, October 23, 2019 (February 2, 2022). This notion is intriguing to me because of the possibilities it suggests for delegated performance. *Seven Easy Pieces* was not only an opportunity for new audiences to experience these historical works of performance, but also an opportunity for Abramović to gain embodied knowledge through performing them.

[52] Flash's capabilities have been surpassed by newer technologies like HTML5. For more on Flash and its discontinuation, see: Richard C. Moss, The Rise and Fall of Adobe Flash, in: *Ars Tecnica*, July 7, 2020 (February 2, 2022). The version of Barr's game available on his website has been rebuilt to function without Flash, but many other games and animated videos have disappeared permanently.
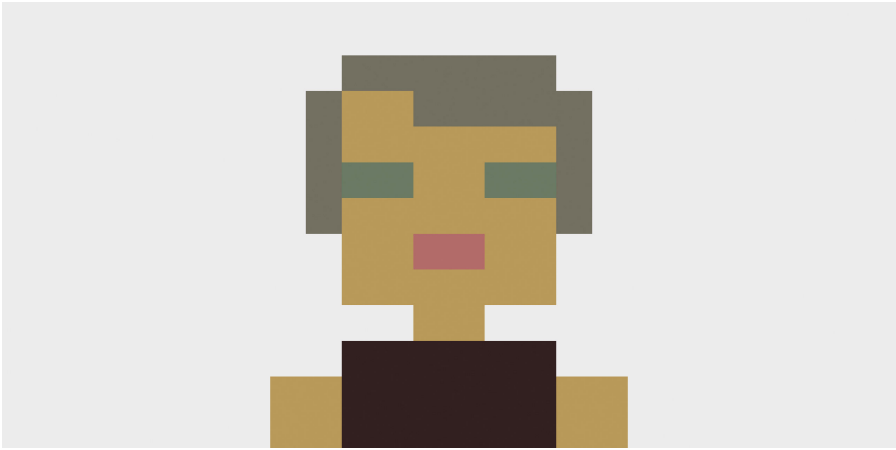
Kunstsammlung Dresden chose to restore the painting – that is, irreversibly remove its upper layers of paint – after determining that the overpainting was done after Vermeer's death.[53] The restoration exposed a prominent painting of a golden-haired Cupid on what had seemed to be a blank wall, suggesting that despite her impassive expression, the young woman is reading a love letter. This choice brings us more knowledge of Vermeer's work, but it also changes what we understand this artwork to be, permanently intervening in its history.

In conserving performance, too, it is necessary to recognize that no approach can be found that will maintain every significant aspect of an artwork. Understood as a conservation strategy, reperformance privileges aesthetic authenticity, but it severs the work from the historical, social, and other contexts that were once partly constitutive of its meaning. The present discussion is an attempt to imagine the possibility of a "conservation treatment" that might be capable of addressing precisely those elements, which I understand as constituting the work's historical fidelity, without pretending to preserve its aesthetic authenticity. My proposal of computer simulation modeled on video games like Pippin Barr's is therefore not an attempt at a complete solution to the problem of conserving performance, but is rather predicated on the understanding that no such solution exists – that, as in the Vermeer, it is impossible to gaze simultaneously upon both aspects. Yet it is here that the conundrum of performance conservation, which seems to offer challenges beyond those of traditional art objects, opens up possibilities that were not available to the Vermeer's restorers: while neither Abramović's reperformances nor Barr's games can claim to fully document the original performances, the two models are not in competition. This is not to say that neither of these approaches entails any risks; there is much potential for misunderstanding and misinterpretation. But given that conservation seeks to manage risk, not to eliminate it entirely, the type of simulation proposed here – not in spite of, but rather because of, its limitations – might offer one path towards conserving artworks usually considered lost to history at the very moment of their creation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

53
Tessa Solomon, Restoration of Vermeer Painting in Germany Reveals Hidden Image of Cupid, in: *ARTNEWS*, August 24, 2021 (December 12, 2021).

thetics at the University of Lüneburg and the 2022 Swiss Congress for Art History; my thanks to all who provided feedback. Thanks are also due to Hannes Bajohr for his support and suggestions.

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MEMETIC SUPERPOSITION

EVALUATING THE PARALLELS BETWEEN MEMES AND
RENAISSANCE EMBLEMS

Raymond Drainville

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that our understanding of Internet memes can be enhanced by a comparison with Renaissance emblems as an historical precursor. By incorporating an analysis of visual themes and production contexts, it notes striking parallels around form, conceptions of invention, in-group/out-group dynamics, uneven reception, and exploitation of maturing new media environments. In both cases, a combination of conventionalised stylistic formats and borrowed referential content free the maker to focus on invention based upon incongruous multimodal juxtaposition.

KEYWORDS

Invention; Juxtaposition; Memes; Emblems.

I. Introduction

It has been estimated that approximately 2 billion images are shared daily on the Internet.[1] Many of these are memes, visual artefacts that are assembled, widely shared, and compared online. Whilst the exact number of shared memes is unknown, the figure is undoubtedly large – administrators at Instagram for instance estimated that its platform alone serves at least 1 million memes per day.[2] Often dismissed as "media snacks", Internet memes are both pervasive and even rhetorically persuasive.[3] They have acted as everything from the amusing distractions of anthropomorphised cats to weaponised, extra-rational propaganda shaping voters' perception of political candidates and policies in recent elections.[4]

This article employs tools of visual analysis – focusing on components of formal presentation, thematic approaches, and production context – alongside observations on gesture and pose adopted from Aby Warburg's form of iconology. Warburg's interest in mixing "high art" and "low art" registers will also be central to this article. Such an approach is common to the iconological work of art historians and theorists, but not to meme theorists. Mixing these registers directs attention to important characteristics of the Internet meme as a visual artefact, which are worth exploring in their own right.

Understanding the present through analysis of the past is a by-product of iconological analysis. Whilst memes are often considered a distinctive feature of digital environments, there are surprising and meaningful parallels to an earlier phenomenon – the Renaissance emblem. They include multimodality, interreferential connections of conventional and familiar content, and a juxtaposition of these connections as a vehicle for invention to produce new meanings. These meaningful parallels operate beyond the abstracted confines of the meme, suggesting that a confluence of parallel production patterns gives rise to their similarity. It is demonstrated that fundamental components of memes, and emblems for that matter, include more than communicative function. Comparing emblems to Internet memes demonstrates the importance of key aspects of Internet memes that have been neglected in most discussions. This,

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[1]
Mary Meeker,
Internet Trends 2016, 7 June 2016 (31 October 2023).

[2]
Instagram, *Instagram Year in Review. How Memes Were the Mood of 2020*, 10 December 2020
(15 September 2021).

[3]
Limor Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture*, Cambridge, MA 2013, 11.

[4]
Chris Peters and Stuart Allan, Weaponizing Memes. The Journalistic Mediation of Visual
Politicization, in: *Digital Journalism* 10/2, 2022, 217–229 (4 November 2021).

in turn, demonstrates the importance of looking beyond standard definitions of "meme".

This paper will begin by reviewing the current understandings of memes. I will use a somewhat narrower definition, more focused on their visual qualities. This narrower definition allows us to appreciate historical parallels between visual forms and their adoption during specific periods of technological change – specifically, the maturity of the book-publishing market and the development of more personalised "Web 2.0" tools for content production and distribution.

II. Internet Memes

Richard Dawkins defined the term "meme" as a "unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation".[5] Offered in a book on genetics, the meme shares the fundamentals of genes: longevity, fecundity, and copying fidelity. The focus on the outset was thus one of communicating a replicable code of information. Whilst it is more variable than genetics, Dawkins nevertheless posited the meme along the lines of a biological model: unavoidable and fundamental to human cognitive experience, something we "just do". As such, Dawkins's memes cover an extraordinarily wide variety of cases, from whole concepts – such as the notion of god – to discrete artefacts, such as the song "Auld Lang Syne".

Dawkins's definition was adopted widely to refer to Internet memes due to its invocation by the journalist Mike Godwin in *WIRED Magazine*. Godwin called upon the concept to refer to the new "infectious idea" of imagery that resonated with, and was spread by, Internet users, at the time through email.[6] Since then, meme theorists have adopted similarly all-encompassing notions of the meme, even whilst contesting the fundaments of Dawkins's definition. Geert Lovink thinks Dawkins's definition is "outdated", yet nevertheless accepts the inevitability that memes "mimic this biological instinct".[7] Taking a posthumanist approach, Dominic Pettman still adopts a biological metaphor, stating that memetic desire is born via "infection or contagion".[8] Limor Shifman shifts the focus to Internet memes as vehicles for communication, emphasising the

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[5]
Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford [2]1989, 192.

[6]
Mike Godwin, Meme, Counter-Meme, in: *Wired*, October 1994 (27 November 2023).

[7]
Geert Lovink, Memes as Strategy. European Origins and Debates, in: id., *Sad by Design. On Platform Nihilism*, London 2019, 119, 24.

[8]
Dominic Pettman, Memetic Desire. Twenty Theses on Posthumanism, Political Affect, and Proliferation, in: Alfie Bown and Dan Bristow (eds.), *PostMemes. Seizing the Memes of Production*, Santa Barbara, CA 2019, 29.

dynamics of group participation in their creation.[9] Following suit, Ryan Milner emphasises the meme as the ground for public discourse.[10] Kate Miltner emphasises the meme as a fulcrum for social engagement in online social circles – "for their own entertainment and to make meaningful connection with others".[11] Describing the meme as a "genre of *communication*" and thus "in essence inescapable", Bradley Wiggins states it offers "some form of visual argument".[12] And Xiao Mina focuses on the power of the meme to impact the real world, particularly on its ability to amplify political movements.[13]

The idea of the meme has thus shifted from a biological and informational model to a communication-based model. This slight shift allows for a degradation of copying fidelity, important since a standard characteristic of Internet memes is not making exact copies of the same meme, but a proliferation of variations. Nevertheless, for these theorists, the meme conveys very broad varieties of content, reflecting Dawkins's profound impact. Overly broad definitions lead to overly broad presentations of memetic examples and categories.[14] The meme covers a spectrum of video, audio, and still imagery presenting re-creations such as planking, impersonations such as lip-synching, re-cut video trailers, Photoshop memes, rage comics, and rather a bit more. Ryan Milner memorably stated that "a shared joke between friends can be a meme – their meme".[15] So many disparate items are covered as memetic that they cannot share visual commonalities: it reduces the visual to "a sort of visual 'action verb'".[16] Their attempts to identify antecedents are thus impacted by focusing on communicative functions rather than formal visual characteristics, such that antecedents are kept to general

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[9]
Shifman, Memes in Digital Culture, 40–41.

[10]
Ryan Milner, *The World Made Meme. Public Conversations and Participatory Media*, Cambridge, MA 2016.

[11]
Kate Miltner, There's No Place for Lulz on LOLCats. The Role of Genre, Gender, and Group Identity in the Interpretation and Enjoyment of an Internet Meme, in: *First Monday* 19/8 (16 May 2015).

[12]
Bradley E. Wiggins, *The Discursive Power of Memes in Digital Culture*, London 2019, 6, 4.

[13]
An Xiao Mina, *Memes to Movements. How the World's Most Viral Media Is Changing Social Protest and Power*, Boston 2019.

[14]
Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear, Online Memes, Affinities, and Cultural Production, in: eid. (eds.), *A New Literacies Sampler*, New York 2007, 217–219; Shifman, Memes in Digital Culture, 100–113; Wiggins, The Discursive Power of Memes in Digital Culture, 11, 45.

[15]
Milner, The World Made Meme, 38.

[16]
Ibid., 68.

categories of popular, vernacular expression. Shifman cites "Kilroy was here" graffiti from the Second World War, and Milner contemporary caricatures of the Egyptian Pharoah and the symbolism employed in medieval heraldry.

Meme theorists are thus caught in a definitional superposition: as fundamental aspects of the human communication, Internet memes are in some sense universal. Yet, simultaneously, by focusing on the dynamics of group participation and online discourses, they are viewed as tightly bound by the specific and particular affordances of networked digital culture: made by intentional agents engaging in participatory environments of ad hoc publics using familiar, core content within pervasive networks.[17] This broad approach prioritises messaging and social dimensions over the formatting of the visual, or indeed the malleability of that formatting. Presenting memes as fundamental to human experience, they are also ahistorical, and so bypass deeper explorations of antecedents and what such explorations may uncover.

This paper will focus on still-picture Internet memes, particularly those that pair a visual image with another referent, be it visual and/or textual. This reduces the gamut of possibilities forwarded by the informational/communication model, but these examples nevertheless represent a very broad spectrum. By avoiding a model whereby "a shared joke between friends may be a meme", this focus also seems to align more closely with the model of Internet memes as commonly described by those who make and forward memes – still pictures are at the centre of an effective canon. It is only by adopting this narrower idea of the Internet meme that we can identify closer antecedent parallels and thus uncover different avenues of exploration to understand the characteristics of memes. This move allows us to note important parallels with Renaissance emblems. Exploring these sheds important light on Internet memes.

III. Memetic Types, the Psychology of Humour, and Image Theory

Some common examples of memetic presentation types are described below. They include imagery sandwiched between text in set-up/punchline joke format – i.e., the "macro" ["Not sure if" featuring *Futurama*'s Fry, Fig. 1]; a multi-panel meme contrasting different pictures [Fig. 2]; a picture with subjects turned into personifications by "object labels" [the "Distracted Boyfriend", Fig. 3]; and a "Photoshop meme" that inserts a graphic element from one source into an entirely different context ["Sitting Bernie Sanders", Fig. 4]. Formatting details alter over time. [Fig. 1] employs a layout common a decade ago in which the text, broken into two components, is placed directly on the picture with the image sandwiched

17
This paradigmatic view was most clearly posited by Shifman, Memes in Digital Culture.

718

[Fig. 1]
Author unknown, Macro Internet meme ("Futurama Fry Not Sure If"; 27 November 2023).

719

[Fig. 3]
Author unknown, Object-label Internet meme ("Distracted boyfriend"; 27 November 2023).

721

[Fig. 4]
Author unknown, Photoshop Internet meme (Sitting Bernie Sanders"; 27 November 2023).
Work shared with the author.

between them, and it uses "Impact", the archetypal "meme font".[18] The rest of the examples containing text are representative of more up-to-date styles, familiar on platforms like Instagram, in which the maker's textual imposition is minimised through white labels attached to objects in the picture or captions adjacent to it.

These examples operate by calling upon common expectations. Their presentation formats are likely very familiar, even if the specific examples are not: they employ stylistic conventions, such as pairings of text and picture, comparisons between pictures, and mixtures of pictures from different sources. These conventions set up the viewer's expectations for the meme, such as personified abstractions or visual contrasts. The specific imagery used in the meme exploits pop-cultural literacy and contemporary subject matter, thus adding another layer of viewer expectations: the meme's maker assumes the viewer's familiarity with, for example, the photograph of Bernie Sanders sitting at the 2021 US Presidential inauguration and its subsequent exploitation.

However, these assembled expectations and assumptions are violated with the imposed juxtaposition of new elements – which can be textual, visual, or both. The introduction of this unexpectedly juxtaposed element is the mechanism that changes the potential interpretation of the source image, and sets apart the particular "Sitting Bernie Sanders" example in [Fig. 4] from others. The act of the maker's imposition inclines an interpretation of an otherwise ambiguous source in a particular direction. For example, Philip Fry's "Not sure if" is based upon the *Futurama* character Fry's facial expression as attempting to distinguish between two options ("not sure if x or y"): by pairing it with the lyrics to Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody", it re-codes the meaning of the expression [Fig. 1]. In the other examples, a straightforward medical illustration contrasts an activity to relieve stress headaches with a photograph of a distorted doll's head [Fig. 2]. The "Distracted Boyfriend" is based upon the interaction of a trio of figures – a man looking back at a passing woman whilst ignoring the woman by his side, meant to be his outraged girlfriend. According to the labels attached to them, the figures play out the changing political views of Generation Z with a fixing of their perceived expressions onto political stances [Fig. 3].[19] Finally, Bernie Sanders is placed into the dream sequence from David Lynch's 1990s television show *Twin Peaks* [Fig. 4].

The moves made by the makers of these memes – conventional expectations alongside unexpected juxtapositions – reflect strategies explored in humour, psychology, and image theory. The violation of expectations through the introduction of an incongruous element is one of the central components of humour: it is

18
Kate Brideau and Charles Berret, A Brief Introduction to Impact. 'The Meme Font', in: *Journal of Visual Culture* 13/3, 2014, 307–313 (16 November 2023).

19
Kim Parker, Nikki Graf, and Ruth Igielnik, *Generation Z Looks a Lot Like Millennials on Key Social and Political Issues*, Pew Research Center, 17 January 2019 (23 January 2019).

"different enough from the norm to be remarkable", in which the viewer approaches the subject with "normal" expectations that are subsequently upset.[20] It "violates a rationally-learned pattern", and the resulting surprise creates humorous delight.[21] The violation of expectations has also long been explored in the psychology of learning as "reward prediction errors" which pull the experience out of the ordinary and make a greater impression upon the viewer.[22] Incongruity and reward prediction errors are often mixed in the meme as the mechanism of humour. The violation of expectations makes the subject more remarkable – and thus more impactful precisely because it differs from the individual's anticipations.

A prime motivation for violating a viewer's expectations is to redefine the viewer's interpretation of a representation – playing in particular upon the malleable interpretability of facial expressions and gestures, as in the "Distracted Boyfriend" [Fig. 3]. This occurs through the imposition of the maker, and has long been used in the process of making images. The art historians Aby Warburg and Edgar Wind demonstrated Renaissance artists' wilful re-use and adaptation of expression and gesture from classical works.[23] Warburg observed that artists made rational decisions to trigger irrational, affective responses by using "a traceable inventory of pre-coined expressions" that he called *Pathosformeln*.[24] This familiar, "pre-coined" imagery was then used for very different purposes. For example, Renaissance artists might use the dishevelled hair and fluttering dress of the classical Maenad in Dionysian ecstasy to render an entirely different mood and subject: the extreme grief

20
Lambert Deckers and John Devine, Humor by Violating an Existing Expectancy, in: *The Journal of Psychology* 108/1, 1981, 107–110 (14 March 2019); Thomas C. Veatch, A Theory of Humor, in: *Humor. International Journal of Humor Research* 11/2, 1998, 161–215 (5 May 2019); John C. Meyers, Humor as a Double-Edged Sword. Four Functions of Humor in Communication, in: *Communication Theory* 10/3, 2000, 310–331, here 313 (5 May 2019).

21
Meyers, Humor as a Double-Edged Sword, 310; Ted Cohen, *Jokes. Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters*, Chicago 1999.

22
Robert A. Rescorla and Allan R. Wagner, A Theory of Pavlovian Conditioning. Variations in the Effectiveness of Reinforcement and Nonreinforcement, in: Abraham H. Black and William F. Prokasy (eds.), *Classical Conditioning II. Current Research and Theory*, New York 1972; Esther De Loof, Kate Ergo, Lien Naert, Clio Janssens, Durk Talsma, Flip Van Opstal, and Tom Verguts, Signed Reward Prediction Errors Drive Declarative Learning, in: *PLoS ONE* 13/1, 2018, 1–15 (16 November 2023).

23
Aby Warburg, Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and *Spring* (1893), in: id., *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity. Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, ed. by Julia Bloomfield, Kurt W. Forster, Harry F. Maligrave, Michael S. Roth, Salvatore Settis, and Steven Lindberg, transl. by David Britt, Los Angeles 1999, 89–156; id., Dürer and Italian Antiquity (1905), in: ibid., 553–558.

24
Aby Warburg, The Absorption of the Expressive Values of the Past, in: *Art in Translation* 1/2, 2015 [1929], 273–283, 280 (8 November 2016); id., Francesco Sassettis letztwillige Verfügung [1907], in: id., The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity, 249. NB: Warburg considered the use of *Pathosformeln* as activating ancient energies, for example of ferocity, and that these energies could be channelled into different expressions in different eras. This component of Warburg's thought is not pursued in the current paper.

of Mary Magdalene during the Crucifixion, or the rendition of a servant in a hurry.[25] Used for radically disparate purposes, these "pre-coined" poses provide a form of thematic tracing used by image-makers throughout the Renaissance and indeed throughout the history of art as a compositional strategy. The re-use of familiar poses also has strong parallels with the assemblage strategies of meme makers as they take familiar imagery and poses and radically reinterpret their intent.

Meme makers take advantage of presentational conventions and familiar imagery, and then resituate the interpretation of that imagery with a new element. In each case, meme makers make use of two or more items: image and text, image and image, images and text. Such intertextual and multimodal references are long-understood features of memes, using shared cultural touchstones; alongside jarring juxtapositions, they can impose unexpected connections between disparate referents, some well known, and others perhaps understood only by a minority.[26] One might readily understand the Distracted Boyfriend example, but the captions in the four-panel meme [Fig. 5] featuring Anakin and Padme from *Star Wars II* may be more deeply obscure. This meme depends upon interpreting the sequence as Padme's dawning realisation of Anakin's true nature. The text, however, refers to the Akkadian Ea-Nasir, recipient of the world's oldest surviving business complaint for the inadequate quality of his copper ingots.[27] Many memes make use of labels or captions to fix interpretative possibilities opened by the picture's "exploitable" content – that is, content with understood references, made exploitable by isolating the work from contextual referents that fix the subject matter. By isolating the work from its original context, meme makers frequently forge connections through the interpretative malleability of gesture or expression.

The complex interplay of multimodal elements, the juxtaposition of elements spanning across modalities, the violation of expectations through incongruity, and the use of knowing, in-group referents are all initiated by the maker's wilful imposition and reinterpretation of familiar content. These are common characteristics of memes, but they are also common characteristics of a wildly popular format birthed in the Renaissance: the emblem.

25
Edgar Wind, The Maenad under the Cross, in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 1/1, 1937, 70–71 (18 November 2023); Warburg, Francesco Sassettis letztwillige Verfügung.

26
Knobel and Lankshear, Online Memes, Affinities, and Cultural Production; Limor Shifman, The Cultural Logic of Photo-Based Meme Genres, in: *Journal of Visual Culture* 13/3, 2013, 340–358 (16 November 2023); Miltner, There's No Place for Lulz on LOLCats.

27
See A. Leo Oppenheim (ed.), *Letters from Mesopotamia. Official, Business, and Private Letters on Clay Tablets from Two Millennia*, Chicago 1967, 82–83.
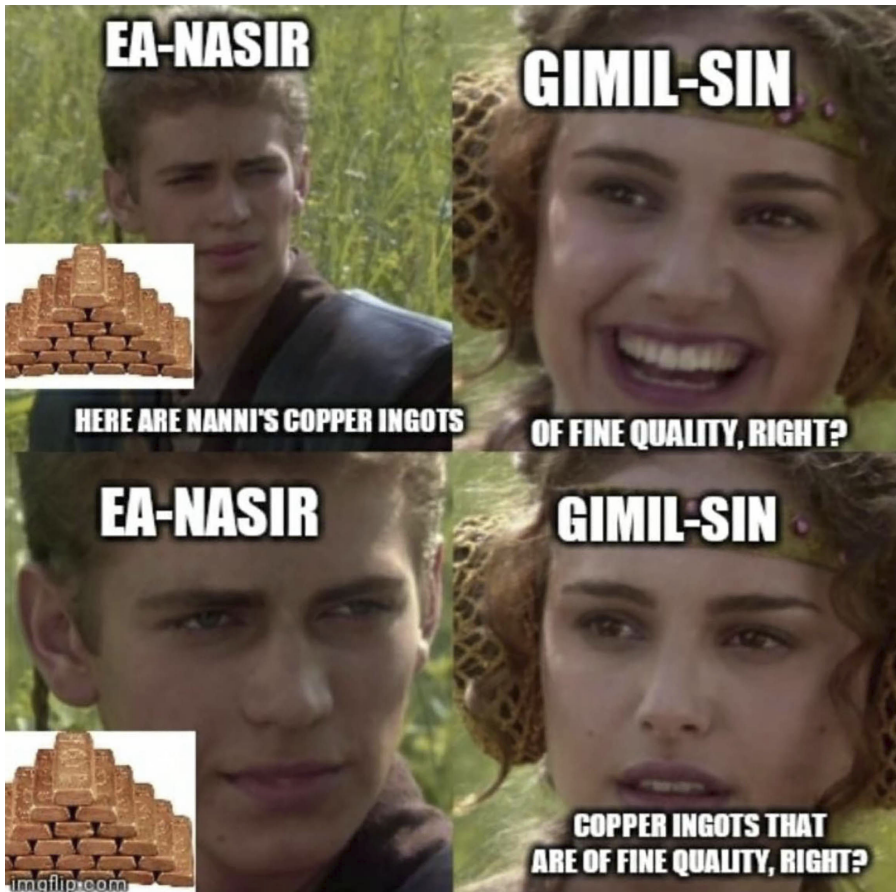
IV. The Renaissance Emblem

Emblems appeared in 1531 in a book that came to be known as the *Emblematum libellus* (*Little Book of Emblems*) by the humanist Andrea Alciato (in Latin: Andreas Alciati). For over a hundred years, the *Libellus* went through dozens of editions.[28] Alciato initiated a blossoming of interest that endured and evolved over several centuries by dozens of other authors whose subsequent volumes focused on specialised subjects, such as classical history and literature, alchemy, religious sentiments, hieroglyphs, and iconography.[29] It has been estimated that, by the end of the nineteenth century, when the format morphed into narrowly moralising children's literature, nearly 1,500 authors had penned over 15,000 volumes of emblems.[30] Despite its once vast popularity, however, the format is almost completely forgotten by the non-academic public; now, the term "emblem" merely refers to something that symbolically encapsulates its subject.

Whilst there are many variations, Alciato's emblems adopted a format of a visual "game": they combined picture and a brief text to form an interwoven whole, often with a moralising subject, presented with references that only some would understand. There are multiple antecedents, only some of which paired picture with text, but almost all of which contained moralising content. Aesop's *Fables* and Greek epigrams, for example, were originally text-only series, and were only later illustrated; medieval illustrated bestiaries are another distant relative, in which different animals' characters are described in a moralising manner; proverbs like "big fish eat little fish" were frequently illustrated; there were also textual glosses, or *tituli*, appended to imagery for moral instruction.[31] In 1500, Erasmus published the *Adages*, a textual collection of pithy statements that referenced classical antiquity. The closest antecedent may be Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools* (1494), which contained both woodcut imagery and text together to tell its stories; these, however, were more earthy and had fewer classical references. The 1499 publication of Franceso Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, alongside the 1517 publication of the *Hieroglyphica* introduced the reading public to Egyptian hieroglyphs as cryptic and fanciful pictographic encap-

[28]
John E. Moffitt, Introduction, in: id. (ed.), *A Book of Emblems. The* Emblematum Liber *in Latin and English*, Jefferson, NC 2004, 4.

[29]
John Manning, *The Emblem*, London ²2004.

[30]
Moffitt, Introduction, 10; Wendy R. Katz, *The Emblems of Margaret Gatty. A Study of Allegory in Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature*, New York 1993.

[31]
William S. Heckscher and Karl-August Wirth, Emblem, Emblembuch, in: *Reallexicon der deutschen Kunstgeschichte* V, Stuttgart 1959, 85–228 (9 May 2023).

sulations of wisdom, again pairing pictures with text.[32] Presented in Latin, Alciato's text combined Erasmus's classical focus with Brandt's moralism, mixing in some fashionable Egyptomania.

IV.1 Creative Juxtaposition as Central to the Concept of the Emblem

Erasmus's adages – such as *Festina lente* ("Make haste slowly") or a "living corpse" – employ a rhetorical strategy of juxtaposition, identified by the humanist as a "contrast of opposites" (*enantiosis*), which had "an aggregable touch of the riddle" about them.[33] *Enantiosis* depends on the incongruity between the assembled expectation – "make haste" – with its opposite – "slowly", and Erasmus constrained the expression into a purely textual domain. In contrast, picture and text paired in Alciato's *Libellus* do not oppose one another, but instead confound the viewer's expectations to invent something new. This juxtaposition of picture and text thus places multimodality at the centre of his strategy. The emblem reveals its moral by containing an interreferential mix of textual and visual imagery closely connected to one another. By employing this strategy, the emblem maker had the opportunity to present "some elegantly-chosen significance" to the subject.[34] The emphasis on *chosen* significance provided an opportunity for emblem makers to impose themselves upon their subject matter, "with whatever violence" to the source material.[35] By this imposition, the emblem could be a "bearer of unsuspected meaning, a metonym for a previously hidden reality".[36]

The emblem, then, was not necessarily true to its source material. The source material was employed for a display of personal invention, a central characteristic of the art and literature of the period, pertaining to the ability of the writer or visual artist to create a compelling work through creative use of multiple source materials.[37] For many artists of the period, invention often took shape by the use of interreferential juxtaposition, which could create a form of meta-commentary on the subject matter: for instance, Raphael's *Entombment of Christ* makes heavy use of poses taken from classical depictions of the death of the young hero Meleager, weaving

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[32] Ludwig Volkmann, *Hieroglyph, Emblem, and Renaissance Pictography*, Leiden 2018.

[33] Desiderius Erasmus, *The Adages of Erasmus*, selected by William Baker, Toronto 2001, 132.

[34] Andrea Alciato, *Le lettere di Andrea Alciato giureconsulto*, Florence 1953, Letter 24.

[35] Manning, The Emblem, 49.

[36] Ibid., 48.

[37] Sharon Bailin, Invenzione e Fantasia. The (Re)Birth of Imagination in Renaissance Art, in: *Interchange* 36, 2005, 257–273 (18 September 2020).

an intimate connection between the painting's biblical subject, its visual source material, and the given names of the family that commissioned the panel.[38] By creative imposition, the artist could create unexpected interpretations arising from a juxtaposition of source elements. The emblem maker employed the same mechanism. One emblem from the *Libellus* [Fig. 6] illustrates the point.

IV.2 Interreferentiality in Alciato's Emblems. An Example

The formatting of the emblem is standard throughout Alciato's book: a *lemma* or title introduces the emblem, an *icon* or framed picture is placed in the centre, and text of varying length (called the *subscriptio* or epigram) explains the subject whilst drawing the moral lesson.[39] "In Silence" [Fig. 6] features then-familiar iconography of the scholar in long robes and academic cap examining a book in his study. Unusually, the scholar places a finger to his lips. The epigram reads:

> In silence, he is indistinguishable from his wise friends; tongue and voice indicate his folly. By placing a finger on his lips and keeping silent, a Pharian may turn himself into a Harpocrates.[40]

The juxtaposition hinges upon interreferences between four elements: the scholar, a reference to Harpocrates, a comparison to a "Pharian", and a finger placed to the scholar's lips. The first has already been explained. "Harpocrates" is the Hellenic name for the Egyptian god Horus, the son of Isis: when depicted as a child, Horus was depicted with his finger in his mouth wiggling a loose tooth. During their centuries-long occupation of Egypt, the Greeks and Romans interpreted the gesture as related to the modern "shh", and therefore the figure was made manifest as a god of silence [Fig. 7]. As the son of Isis – and as a god of silence – Harpocrates became an important figure associated with the late-antique Isis mystery cult – and placing the finger over his lips indicated not just silence, but a keeper of wise secrets.[41]

A "Pharian", in contrast, is a lighthouse-keeper, referring to the Lighthouse of Alexandria on the island of Pharos; a "Pharian" thus illuminates the surrounding environment and makes everything plain to the eye. Alciato's epigram depends upon these connections:

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[38]
Nigel Spivey, *Enduring Creation. Art, Pain, and Fortitude*, Berkeley, CA 2001, 113–117.

[39]
For a classic formulation of the emblem's components, see Heckscher and Wirth, Emblem, Emblembuch.

[40]
Andrea Alciato, *Emblematum libellus*, Paris 1534 [1531], 7 (1 April 2021).

[41]
Emily Swan Hall, Harpocrates and Other Child Deities in Ancient Egyptian Sculpture, in: *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 14, 1977, 55–58 (31 October 2023).

EMBLEMATVM LIBELLVS.   7

In Silentium.

Cùm tacet haud quicquam differt sapiētibus amēs,
   Stulticiæ est index linguaǫ uoxǫ suæ:
Ergo premat labias, digitoǫ silentia signet,
   Et sese pharium uertat in Harpocratem.
                              A iiij

[Fig. 7]
Left: Artist unknown, Horus the Child, c. 1976–1425 BCE, faience and glaze,
4.32 × 2.65 × 1.55 cm. Baltimore, Walters Art Museum. Right: Artist unknown, Harpocrates,
c. 200 BCE, marble. Salonica, Thessaloniki Archaeological Museum. Both Creative Com-
mons license.

the finger on the scholar's lips does not indicate his wisdom – like Harpocrates – but rather his lack of it. Were he to speak, he would place his thoughts into a glaring light, and make his foolishness visible to all.[42] The emblem maker's invention is revealed only by understanding the references and by the juxtaposed connection between visual and textual imagery: indeed, the incongruous expectations laid out by the lips on the finger, what it usually means and what it means in this example hinges upon a type of interpretative malleability remarkably similar to that of the memetic examples above.

IV.3 The *Impresa*

An important variant of the emblem was the *impresa*, popularised by Paolo Giovio's *Dialogo dell'imprese* (1559).[43] The *impresa* was an evolution of the personal motto used by the nobility in the fifteenth century, an individualised variant of family or clan mottos and insignia meanings embodied in a coat of arms. As such, the *impresa* was conceived as a device conveying personal meanings; with the popularity of Giovio's book, it came to be employed by broader swathes of the public, for instance artists, publishers, and scholars.[44] As both precursor and variation of the emblem, the *impresa* is a hyper-focused, paired-down form of emblematic content that reveals an equal interest in symbolic invention. Its format consists of the visual device accompanied by a brief, enigmatic motto displayed on a ribbon. The juxtaposition of the two creates a device for both self-expression and self-presentation, and often the individual associations and referents were more personal, and therefore more obscure, than those of the standard emblem. The importance or meaning of the *impresa*, then, was veiled from public view without insider knowledge: whilst Giovio's book extends one's understanding of *imprese* by explaining them, when encountered out in the world, any such explanation would be absent. Like Alciato's emblems, then, a degree of "insider knowledge" was required to decipher the subject – but perhaps to a greater degree in the case of an *impresa*, since its content was not elaborated due to the lack of a *subscriptio*.

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[42] A pithier variant of this epigram is attributed to Abraham Lincoln (*inter alia*): "Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt" in: Leonard Roy Frank (ed.), *Wit and Humor Quotationary*, New York, 2000, 159. There is a similar variant in the Old Testament: "Even a fool, if he will hold his peace shall be counted wise: and if he close his lips, a man of understanding" (Prov. 17:28). These variations suggest that the general sentiment was well understood.

[43] Paolo Giovio, *Dialogo dell'imprese militari et amorose*, Lyon 1559 (1 April 2021).

[44] For more on the expansion of the impresa, and its consideration as an emblematic form, see Peter M. Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem. Structural Parallels between the Emblem and Literature in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Toronto 1979, 29.

ſte da queſto, come da coſa, che v'hà portato eſtremo honore, e pe-
culiar reputatione. Ond'egli ciò confeſſando eſſer vero, tornò à
dirmi; guardate voi, ſe in eſſo trouaſte alcun propoſito, ch'io ne
ſarò contento. Io perche alcuni ſcriuono, che lo ſtruzzo non coua le
ſue voua ſedendoui ſopra come gli altri vccelli, ma guardandogli
co' raggi efficaciſſimi del lume de gli occhij, figurai lo ſtruzzo ma-
ſchio e la femina, che mirauano fiſſamente l'voua loro, vſcendo lor
da gli occhij raggi ſopra le dette voua ; e'l motto era queſto; D I-
VERSA AB ALIIS VIRTVTE VALEMVS; Eſpri-
mendo la ſua vnica laude e peritia dell'inuentione di quei ma-
chinamenti ſotterranei, che con la violenza del fuoco ſono aggua-
gliati all'effetto delle furie infernali. Piacque aſſaiſſimo l'impre-
ſa al Conte Pietro, & accettolla.

DOM. Certamente Mons. queſti voſtri ſtruzzi con la lor

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The following example is representative of the form and explanation within Giovio's book [Fig. 8]. Presented in an oval surrounded by an ornate frame, the *impresa* depicts a shield with the phrase *Aut cum hoc aut in hoc* ("Either with it or on it") emblazoned on the ribbon. Giovio's text explains that the *impresa* was that of Fernando of Pescara, a cavalry captain wounded and captured at the Battle of Ravenna in 1512. This *impresa* is a projection of Fernando's martial self-image via the motto, which as Giovio explains refers to the Spartans' military moral code: that the soldier will either be victorious in battle and return with his shield, or his body shall be carried home on it.[45]

Internet memes present strong formal and conceptual parallels with the Renaissance emblem and the *impresa*. Both are multimodal, often pairing picture and text (or, in the case of Photoshop memes, merging multiple images). Both are founded upon interreferential contexts, be they familiar, obscure, or simply relatable. Both use juxtaposition of references to produce new meanings – including very personal meanings, whether in the case of the martial *impresa* [Fig. 8] or the anxiety/stress meme above [Fig. 2]. Even framing conventions can approximate one another: the familiar top text/picture/bottom text format of the old-school macro meme [Fig. 1] and emblem [Fig. 6] and the use of captions or labels to fix meaning to an otherwise ambiguous picture [Fig. 3 and Fig. 8]. Indeed, the *impresa*'s pared-down presentational structure is conceptually similar to the "Advice Animal"/"stock character" macro, a form that featured specific figures, roles, and colour schemes.[46] In total, the emblem, its *impresa* variation, and the meme use conventional formats and familiar imagery as a vehicle for invention.

A brief comparison clarifies the parallels between emblems and memes in detail [Fig. 9]. The comparison is between the "In Silence" emblem presented above [Fig. 6] and a meme created by a student after a lecture referring to the saturation of the "Alegría" style in digital illustrations [Fig. 9].[47] The two examples below employ clear formatting conventions: top text/picture/bottom text to frame the works. Both exploit imagery that is familiar to their respective periods: a single picture of the scholar in his study and a two-panel scene of the celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay mistreating another chef (as in his unkind performances on the reality TV show *Gordan Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares*). The invention hinges upon the mixing of referents and the violation of expectations in the respective

45
Giovio, Dialogo dell'imprese, 86–87. For the origin of this story and the motto, see, Plutarch, *Moralia, Ancient Customs of the Spartans*, LCL 245, ed. by Jeffrey Henderson, transl. by Frank Cole Babbitt, Cambridge, MA 1931, 464–465. Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus, *De re militari*, Antwerp 1585, Book II (ed. by Godescalcus Stewechius), 129 (11 May 2023).

46
Shifman, Memes in Digital Culture, 112–113.

47
Rachel Hawley, Don't Worry, These Gangly-Armed Cartoons Are Here to Protect You from Big Tech, in: *AIGA Eye on Design*, 21 August 2019 (3 April 2020).
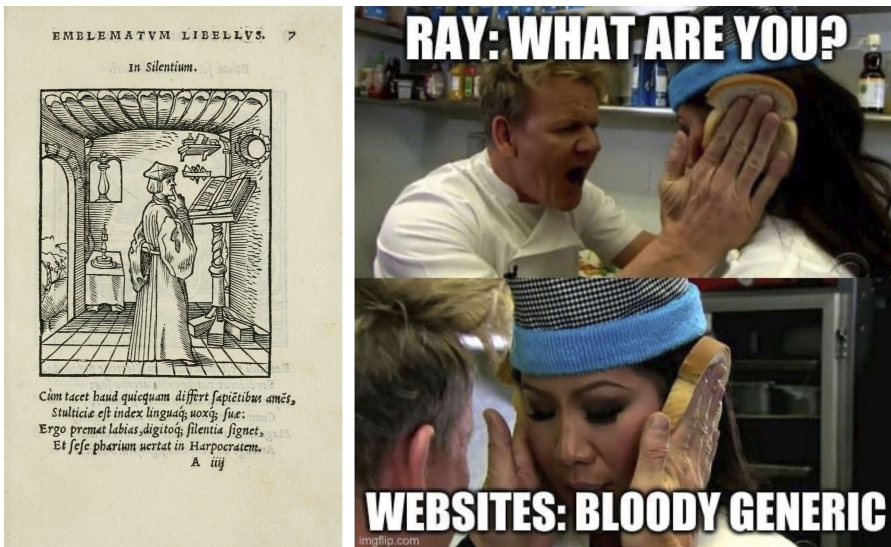
[Fig. 9]
Left: Artist unknown, "In Silence" (as in [Fig. 6]); Right: Student meme shared with the
author.

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pictures, particularly intended gestural interpretation: in the case of "In Silence", Alciato references medieval iconography, gesture, an Helleno-Egyptian deity, and geography; in the case of the meme, the student references Gordon Ramsay, gesture and expression, and a lecture on Alegría.

IV.4 Beyond Form and Concept. Other Important Similarities

The parallels between emblems and Internet memes extend beyond form and concept.[48] There are also striking structural similarities in production, targeting audiences, reception, and development in their respective rapidly maturing new media formats. These are briefly reviewed below; in aggregate, they suggest that the underlying similarities between memes and emblems extend beyond any definition of the memetic, but are bound together by a mechanism that rewards invention rising out of convention.

Production/Sharing and In-/Out-Groups

Emblems and memes both benefit from an intense examination of hyperspecific subject matter for the express purpose of exploitation for one's own interests. Even though both have proven to be popular, they were not intended for outside audiences: they are loci of invention for in-groups of viewers who understand the references and appreciate the maker's efforts, often with a very clear snub to out-groups who cannot understand the references. Emblems mined subjects such as Roman virtues or Egyptian hieroglyphics popular among an educated elite. Alciato's subject matter and their rendition in Latin create a gatekeeper effect that only allowed a rarefied group of people who could read them, "get" the references, and thus appreciate the inventive intent.

In turn, many memes focus upon niche subjects such as specific games or anime; they are often created in hothouse environments such as 4chan; and only a few meme types "break out" to the mainstream.[49] They gatekeep mainstream "normies", understood as people who cheapen the subject matter with mawkish sentimentality and who simply do not "get" the dynamics of in-group creation.[50] Indeed, these in-groups frequently reinforce their separation from

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[48] For other contemporary parallels, see Peter M. Daly, The *Nachleben* of the Emblem in Some Modern Logos, Advertisements, and Propaganda, in: id. (ed.), *Companion to Emblem Studies*, New York 2008, 489–518. Daly makes a convincing case in particular for parallels between logos and emblems.

[49] Savvas Zannettou, Tristan Caulfield, Jeremy Blackburn, Emiliano de Cristofaro, Michael Sirivianos, Gianluca Stringhini, and Guillermo Suarez-Tangil, On the Origins of Memes by Means of Fringe Web Communities, in: *arXiv* (24 November 2018).

[50] Miltner, There's No Place for Lulz on LOLCats; Whitney Phillips, *This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things. Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture*, Cambridge, MA 2016.

the rest of society by creating and sharing increasingly outrageous or baffling memes that the broader public would either not understand or find deeply offensive.[51] A comparatively gentle example reproduced here represents an emerging series of surreal memes drawing on "Gen Z" humour that emphatically avoids relatability – and thus broad shareability [Fig. 10].

In-group dynamics depend upon rules that structure behaviour and language to enhance affinities within the group and police its borders, whilst differentiating them from the out-group.[52] The appropriate application of both emblem and meme has thus been a matter of debate, and the propriety of any particular example has been hotly debated in both circles.[53] Several of the rules offered by Paolo Giovio could easily apply to memes:

1. There should be a good balance between image and text.
2. The result should be neither too obscure nor too plain; as he writes: "It should not be so obscure that it has the mystery of Sibylline interpretation, but nor should it be so clear that the plebs could understand it."
3. The imagery should not use the human form.
4. The accompanying text should be brief and its applicability should not be related directly to the image's subject matter.
5. Use pretty imagery to create a pleasing appearance.[54]

The first, second, and fourth rules could equally apply to Internet memes. The third and fifth rules do not. People frequently appear in memes. More importantly, the creation of a pleasing appearance runs counter to the Internet aesthetic, in which according to one member of the community, the shared artefact is "supposed to look

51
Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies. Online Culture Wars from 4Chan to Tumblr and the Alt-Right*, Winchester 2017; Dale Beran, *It Came from Something Awful. How a Toxic Troll Army Accidentally Memes Donald Trump into Office*, New York 2019.

52
Marilynn B. Brewer, In-Group Bias in the Minimal Intergroup Situation. A Cognitive-Motivational Analysis, in: *Psychological Bulletin* 86/2, 1979, 307–324 (15 February 2018).

53
Ioana Literat and Sarah van den Berg, Buy Memes High, Sell Memes High. Vernacular Criticisms and Collective Negotiations of Value on Reddit's Meme Economy, in: *Information, Communication & Society* 22/2, 2019, 232–249 (4 March 2019); Michele Coscia, Competition and Success in the Meme Pool. A Case Study on Quickmeme.com, in: *arXiv* (15 June 2015).

54
Giovio, Dialogo dell'imprese, 9. Daly, Literature in the Light of the Emblem, 28, *inter alia* traces the influence of Giovio's rules upon other emblem makers, notably Georg Philipp Harsdörffer. The parallels are of course not exact. The rule prohibiting the human form has no formal parallel to memes, except for the strictness of the largely defunct Advice Animal macro, a highly formalised meme with stringent rules regarding the usable character (often an animal), a specific kaleidoscopic background colour scheme, and specific subject matter (e.g., cat-business crossovers for Business Cat or embarrassing moments for the Socially-Awkward Penguin).

[Fig. 10]
Author unknown, A "surreal" Gen Z Internet meme (27 November 2023).

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like shit".[55] Memes play to usually humorous, sensibilities, that dramatically differ from emblematic sensibilities. But in short, both emblems and memes are governed by rules, and the specificity of the format raises specific expectations that the inventor must meet. The boundaries of these rules are policed by a community of informed and interested parties; the makers of either form are not free to do whatever they wish. Both share the same mechanism, however: to avoid any literalness between the image and text and rely upon invention to make something that requires shared knowledge between maker and viewer to kindle appreciation. These rules act as a practical, constraining guide for violating the viewer's expectations, whether the purpose be to amuse or to teach.

Dismissed, Yet Popular

Both the emblem and the meme have been regarded with disdain. Each has been dismissed as simplistic and childish, ephemeral trifles with little to no lasting merit. Memes, for example, are routinely dismissed as having contributed to the degradation of public discourse by the crude hot-takes offered in their fruit-fly lifespan. They stand accused of assisting in the election of Donald Trump, no less by meme makers themselves.[56] Indeed, organisations of the "alt right" in the United States specifically use memes to spread white separatist and white supremacist talking points.[57]

Emblems were subject to similar criticism. "Extraordinary" emblems were created for ephemeral festive or funereal occasions – i.e., events literally outside the scope of the ordinary – and as such their appeal was limited.[58] Others dismissed the emblem as it became a favoured pedagogical form for the moral instruction of children: the humour in them was considered indicative of vulgar sentiment and was "only fit for Women and Children", as Roger l'Estrange wrote in 1669.[59] The Dutch humanist Jacob Cats obliquely

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[55]
Nick Douglas, It's Supposed to Look Like Shit. The Internet Ugly Aesthetic, in: *Journal of Visual Culture* 13/3, 2014, 314–339 (29 May 2015).

[56]
The powering of the Trump campaign by political memes has been covered widely. See, e.g., Ryan Milner and Whitney Phillips, Dark Magic. The Memes that Made Donald Trump's Victory, in: Darren Lilleker, Daniel Jackson, Einar Thorsen, and Anastasia Veneti (eds.), *US Election Analysis 2016. Media, Voters and the Campaign. Early Reflections from Leading Academics*, Bournemouth 2016, 84–86 (30 May 2023); Nagle, Kill All Normies; and Beran, It Came from Something Awful.

[57]
For many examples of this, see Andrew Marantz, *Antisocial. How Online Extremists Broke America*, London 2019.

[58]
Henry Green, *Andrea Alciati and His Book of Emblems. A Biographical and Bibliographical Study*, London 1872, ix (20 April 2021); Manning, The Emblem, 186–192.

[59]
Manning, The Emblem, 152–153. Roger L'Estrange, *Fables, of Aesop and Other Eminent Mythologists. With Morals and Reflections*, London 1669, 32 (5 June 2022). See also Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad, In Four Books*, vol. 1, London ³1744, 98 (5 June 2022), who dismisses the

referenced this criticism and inverted it in *Kinder-spel* (*Child's Play*): the piece opens with a complex full-page emblem of children engaging in various games – playing house and soldier, playing with pinwheels and kites, performing gymnastics – and uses the Erasmian adage "*Ex nugis seria*" – "From trifles, serious things" – as a motto, suggesting that though the forms of expression may be simplistic, they nevertheless reflect the interests, concerns, and anxieties of their culture [Fig. 11].[60] Yet, despite the dismissal of both emblems and memes in certain quarters, both have enjoyed wide popularity. Thousands of emblem volumes were published over three centuries, and few today need to be reminded of the popularity of memes.[61]

New Media. Maturation and Democratisation

A notable parallel between emblems and memes is that both emerged in an early maturation period for their respective media. Emblems emerged not in the days of *incunabula*, but rather following that period: after the establishment of a robust market for printed books, with the onset of more standardised layouts and illustration formatting. No longer did books display illustrated marginalia as in illuminated manuscripts; elaborately decorated initials as in Gutenberg's Bible also decreased in number in a move towards simpler, cheaper layouts defined in part by the mechanisms of production. Illustrations were integrated within the borders defined by the wooden furniture keeping the body text in place, but visually separated from the text by a border.[62] The development of such conventions made it less expensive to print books, streamlining the layout process in favour of the press' constraints. And as a cheaper, more replicable communication medium than the illuminated manuscript, the printed book allowed for the publication and amplification of ephemera and alternative voices – as indicated not only by the development of niche interests such as emblems celebrating trifles, but by the printing of contrarian and inflammatory content, again mirroring claims levelled at memes in the current era.[63] Paradoxically, then, the economy of increasingly standardised presentation of content in printing's early maturation period con-

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emblem maker Roger Withers *inter alia* as one of the "dull of ancient days" and "wretched", ibid., 98.

[60]
Jacob Cats, *Alle de wercken van den Heere Jacob Cats; Ridder, Oudt Raadtpensionaris van Hollandt etc.*, Amsterdam 1712, 237 (2 April 2021).

[61]
For the volume of emblematic publications, see Peter M. Daly, *The Emblem in Early Modern Europe. Contributions to the Theory of the Emblem*, London [2]2016, 193.

[62]
Christopher de Hamel, *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts*, London [2]1994; Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge [2]2005; David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order 1450–1830*, Cambridge 2003.

[63]
Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, Cambridge [3]1982; Tom Standage, *Writing on the Wall. Social Media, the First 2,000 Years*, London 2013.

tributed to a proliferation of voices and interests not previously possible.

Likewise, the explosive development of Internet memes occurred not during the Web 1.0 era, but during the second wave, with user-generated content and asynchronous uploading techniques that significantly eased the ability to upload, share, and interact with content. Like the maturation period of the printing press, the easier publication tools of Web 2.0 platforms – from 4chan, Reddit, and QuickMeme to Instagram – have reduced the friction for communicating and amplifying one's interests. Coupled with multiple consumer- and prosumer-level tools for capturing and manipulating existing content, these platforms have provided fertile ground for individual invention.[64]

To borrow a biological metaphor, the early maturation periods of both printing and social media platforms are like rock pools: each has acted like a "protected area" conducive to developing conventions, forms, and accepted parameters that promote new life forms. Particularly successful examples of these life forms burst out of these isolated circumstances and populate the world more widely. Accordingly, books were published in low quantities intended for like minds, and only enjoyed more expansive print runs if they captured the public's enthusiasm – such as Alciato's *Libellus*. Likewise, memes are frequently created and shared in isolated communities such as 4chan or Reddit until a few, resonant examples leak out to the broader public.

In short, both forms exploit the affordances and circumstances provided by their respective environments. They take advantage of the possibilities offered by increasingly democratised media: more people contribute to the production of content, the content enjoys greater dispersal, and more are able to consume that content, even when that content ostensibly pertains to niche interests.

V. Differences

Of course, there are significant differences between emblems and memes; this paper can only focus on major differences. Whilst both forms feature in-group/out-group dynamics, the form of gatekeeping for the consumers of each differs considerably. The emblem was presented in an educated register: often in Latin, and usually with references to classical antiquity. In contrast, Internet memes focus on popular content and current events. Gatekeeping in meme making does not privilege education or refinement – indeed, it has been suggested that the rough quality of many memes is an impor-

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[64]
Tim O'Reilly, What Is Web 2.0? Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software, in: *O'Reilly Media*, 30 September 2005 (12 January 2016); Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media. Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, New York 2013.

tant stylistic indicator.[65] And even though the mode of distribution became more democratised for each format, in the case of emblems, the scale of that democratisation can be overemphasised.

Emblems and memes likewise differ in terms of dispersal and recognition. The creators of emblems are usually identifiable; meme makers are usually anonymous. Their respective media platforms work on different timescales. Emblems were published in multiple editions and compendia, and despite the fact that many were ephemera, measuring the impact of an emblem maker can entail a lifespan of decades or even more. In contrast, memes are often "published" individually, although they can be found in batches during moments of intense concentration as makers and sharers trade examples as they test (and exhaust) the boundaries of the subject matter, as they did of the "Sitting Bernie Sanders" meme in January 2021. They can also be found in compendium-like batches on subject-oriented sites such as Know Your Meme. In their "native" form, however, the vast majority of memes have very short lifespans and reflect accelerated news cycles and media consumption.

VI. Conclusion

By exploring unexpected parallels between Internet memes and Renaissance emblems, a vista opens up that allows us to appreciate several complex issues regarding presentational forms, devices of expectation and juxtaposition, insider and outsider reception of these artefacts, and ultimately the desire to express oneself even – or perhaps especially – within the constraints of tightly bound rules. Both forms have exploited conventionalised formats and imagery, and both have borrowed referential content that has been altered to free the maker to focus on invention. Both have also exploited the early maturity of their respective media formats and have enjoyed widespread reception, even as they have been subject to disdain. By examining the visual, thematic, and production components of these two formats, along with their contexts of production – common features of visual analysis – we can appreciate different dimensions of Internet memes in a way that may otherwise escape us.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Raymond Drainville is a specialist in the use of imagery on contemporary digital media. He has published works examining viral imagery arising from viral events and political demonstrations.

[65] Douglas, It's Supposed to Look Like Shit.

In addition, he has published works analysing the use of artificial intelligence in studying visual media, particularly common errors in content identification and methods for effectively using AI. Together with the philosopher Jennifer Saul he has co-authored studies of visual and linguistic dogwhistles, and with her was recently awarded a research grant on the study of rhetorical fig-leaves in social media. He teaches digital media and digital cultures at the University of Waterloo.

DOES THIS PERSON EXIST?

KI-GENERIERTE PORTRÄTS UND IHRE PREKÄRE EXISTENZ
IM DIGITALEN RAUM

Paul Werling

Paul Werling

ABSTRACT: DOES THIS PERSON EXIST? AI GENERATED PORTRAITS AND THEIR PRECARIOUS EXISTENCE IN THE DIGITAL

In this photo-theoretical article I interrogate portraits generated by NIVIDIA's *StyleGAN2*. Even though these portraits are completely artificial and the pictured persons have never existed, they are surprisingly realistic and could even be read as photographs. I therefore ask the question: How do these pictures relate to the photographic and can we consider them as a new aspect of the medium? I will also present an attempt to locate these images on the Internet and discuss how they are used today. The result of this experiential localization shows that the pictures are mostly used in dubious and even criminal ways.

KEYWORDS

Digital generierte Porträts sind im Begriff, ein neues Kapitel in der Kulturgeschichte des Gesichts aufzuschlagen. Was vermutlich vor einigen Jahren noch als ferne Zukunftsvision abgetan worden wäre, ist durch gewaltige Fortschritte auf dem Forschungsfeld der künstlichen Intelligenz möglich geworden: maschinell erzeugte Bilder, die dem Fotografischen in einem Maße entsprechen, dass sie die gesellschaftlichen Versprechen und Handlungsweisen um das Medium auf die Probe stellen. Möglich ist das durch die 2019 von NVIDIA entwickelte künstliche Intelligenz *StyleGAN2*. Den öffentlichen Quellcode dieser KI nutzend veröffentlichte der Softwareentwickler Philip Wang noch im selben Jahr die Website *www.thispersondoesnotexist.com*. Auf dieser Website präsentiert sich das verblüffende Potential der KI in einer endlosen Galerie. Sie ist in der Lage, ohne referentiellen Wirklichkeitsbezug Gesichter zu generieren, die in vielen Fällen täuschend echt aussehen [Abb. 1]. Medial an die Fotografie angelehnt, sollen die Bilder als solche gelesen werden. Aufgenommen wurde die Technologie mit Begeisterung und Besorgnis gleichermaßen. Die Tatsache, dass auf diese Weise entstandene Gesichter einen solchen Realitätsgrad erreichen können, sorgt für Verunsicherung. Zudem wird kritisiert, dass sowohl Bilder als auch Code frei verfügbar sind.[1]

Kritisch soll im Folgenden das Phänomen computergenerierter Porträts aus mehreren Perspektiven betrachtet werden. Zunächst gebe ich einen Einblick in die ersten bekannten Missbrauchsfälle und frage danach, wie diese Bilder detektiert werden können. In einem experimentellen Ansatz werde ich sodann mit einer Software zur Gesichtserkennung versuchen, solche Bilder zu lokalisieren, um nach ihrer spezifischen Verwendung zu fragen. Bereits jetzt sei vorweggenommen: Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass alle erfolgreich lokalisierten Bilder in Zusammenhang mit Betrugsmaschen stehen. Hieran knüpfen sich weitreichende Fragen, auf die Antworten gegeben werden sollen: Was sind die Grundprinzipien dieser Technologie? Wie lässt sich die rezeptionsästhetische Erfahrung theoretisieren? Und wie sind sie mit dem Fotografischen in Beziehung zu setzen?

I. Die ersten Fälle missbräuchlicher Nutzung

Im März 2021 wandte sich das FBI mit einer Warnung an die Öffentlichkeit. In ihrem Bericht *Malicious Actors Almost Certainly Will Leverage Synthetic Content for Cyber and Foreign Influence Operations* sammelt die Behörde bekannt gewordene Fälle krimineller oder zumindest verdächtiger Identitätsverschleierung und spricht eine deutliche Warnung aus:

> Malicious actors almost certainly will leverage synthetic content for cyber and foreign influence operations in the

next 12–18 months. Foreign actors are currently using synthetic content in their influence campaigns, and the FBI anticipates it will be increasingly used by foreign and criminal cyber actors for spearphishing and social engineering in an evolution of cyber operational tradecraft.[2]

Diese Warnung bezieht sich dabei exklusiv auf den manipulativen Einsatz von „techniques based on artificial intelligence (AI) or machine learning technologies"[3], also jenen Bildern, die im Folgenden genauer betrachtet werden sollen.

Als 2019 die Website *www.thispersondoesnotexist.com* die Bilder erstmals der Öffentlichkeit zugänglich machte, wurden neben begeisterten auch kritische Stimmen laut. Von Anfang an wurde die Befürchtung geäußert, dass die Technologie im politischen Kampf auf digitalen Plattformen missbraucht werden könnte und zudem Betrüger:innen in die Hände spielen dürfte.[4] Noch im selben Jahr löschte Facebook ein Netzwerk von Fake-Profilen und Gruppen, das insgesamt mit 55 Millionen Nutzer:innen vernetzt war.[5] Dieses Netzwerk war multinational organisiert und produzierte Content, der von harmlosen *Click-Bait*-Artikeln bis zu politischer Propaganda eine breite Spannweite abdeckte. Die amerikanischen Seiten der Organisation fielen insbesondere durch Unterstützung des damaligen Präsidenten Donald Trump auf und wurden mit der umstrittenen amerikanischen Medienfirma „The Beauty of Life"[6] verknüpft. Die Besonderheit dieses Netzwerkes war die Nutzung von technisch generierten Profilbildern bei einer Vielzahl der Fake-Profile und bedeutet damit den ersten entdeckten Missbrauchsfall dieser Technologie.[7] Unter den von Meta entdeckten *Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior*-Profilen, also jenen, die koordiniert und zentral organisiert zu täuschen versuchen, machen die mit generierten Porträts verschleierten Profile 2019 und 2020 nicht einmal 5%

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[2]
Der Bericht des FBI verweist auf einige Fallanalysen der Medienanalyse Firma Graphika. Diese dokumentieren die erwähnten Fälle detailliert. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Malicious Actors Almost Certainly Will Leverage Synthetic Content for Cyber and Foreign Influence Operations, in: *FBI*, 10.03.2021 (30.09.2023).

[3]
Ebd.

[4]
Ghahramani, Why ThisPersonDoesNotExist.

[5]
Nathaniel Gleicher, Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior from Georgia, Vietnam und the US, in: *Meta*, 20.12.2019 (30.09.2023). Siehe auch: Ben Nimmo, C. Shawn Eib, L. Tamora, Kate Johnson, Ian Smith, Eto Buziashvili, Alyssa Kann, Kanishk Karan, Esteban Ponce de León Rosas und Max Rizzuto, #OperationFFS: Fake Face Swarm. Facebook Takes Down Network Tied to Epoch Media Group That Used Mass AI-Generated Profiles, in: *Graphika*, 20.12.2019 (30.09.2023), 2.

[6]
Jordan Liles, Exclusive. Expanding Pro-Trump Outlet 'The BL' Is Closely Linked to The Epoch Times, in: *Snopes*, 11.10.2019 (30.09.2023).

[7]
Nimmo et al., #OperationFFS, 3.

der gesperrten Profile aus. 2022 jedoch, so der Jahresbericht von Meta, sind zwei Drittel der gesperrten CIB-Profile mit generierten Gesichtern getarnt. Entscheidend ist hierbei, dass die Profile durch ihre Aktivität und nicht anhand der Bilder enttarnt werden.[8] Diese können nämlich auch vier Jahre nach ihrer Geburtsstunde nicht technisch bestimmt werden, sondern müssen weiterhin von trainierten Expert:innen identifiziert werden. Der geschulte Blick bleibt bislang der zuverlässigste Identifikator.[9]

Anhand einiger Bildbeispiele zeigen die Medienanalyst:innen von Graphika in ihrer Vorfallanalyse auf, wie sich solche Bilder identifizieren lassen.[10] Denn obwohl die Porträts auf den ersten, uninformierten Blick sehr überzeugend wirken, lassen sich doch wenigstens bei einigen von ihnen auch anhand digitaler Artefakte Hinweise auf ihre Entstehung finden. Asymmetrische Brillengestelle sowie eigenartig gemorphte Schmuckelemente und Hintergründe, die mit der physischen Welt nichts gemein haben, sind dabei die besten Indikatoren [Abb. 2, Abb. 3, Abb. 4 und Abb. 5]. Dennoch äußern die Forscher:innen Bedenken über „the ease with which the operation managed to generate so many synthetic pictures in order to give its fake accounts (mostly) convincing faces."[11] Denn auch wenn mit geschultem Blick ein solches Bild in vielen Fällen identifiziert werden kann, wird einem alltäglichen Sehen die eigentliche Natur dieser Bilder wohl meist entgehen. Wie oft kontrollieren User:innen die kleinen Profilbilder auf ihren technischen Ursprung? Ohne Kenntnis von dieser noch neuen Technologie ist eine solch vorsichtige Praxis wahrscheinlich die Ausnahme und die Bilder verschwinden in der Masse authentischer Profilbilder.

Doch welchen Vorteil bieten solche Bilder für manipulative Akteur:innen, wenn sie nach gegebenem Stand der Technik entlarvt werden können? Profilbilder in den Sozialen Medien haben vor allem einen Zweck: Sie sind Bindeglied zwischen digitaler Identität und realer Person. Profilen, die ihr Klargesicht zeigen, wird intuitiv mehr Authentizität und Autorität zugeschrieben als solchen, die sich in der Anonymität verstecken. Zumeist wird die Kontrolle der Echtheit mit einem schnellen Blick auf das Bild abgehakt. Kollektiv mussten wir vor 2019 nicht lernen, ein digitales Gesicht kategorisch in Frage zu stellen. In organisierten Propaganda- und Fake-News-Kampagnen im Kampf um politische Einflussnahme eröffnet sich auf diese Weise ein neues Potential für manipulative Akteur:innen. Die generierten Bilder bieten zwei entscheidende Vorteile gegen-

[8]
Ben Nimmo und David Agranovich, Recapping Our 2022 Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior Enforcements, in: *Meta*, 15.12.2022 (30.09.2023).

[9]
Shannon Bond, AI-generated fake faces have become a hallmark of online influence operations, in: *NPR*, 15.12.2022 (30.09.2023).

[10]
Nimmo et al., #OperationFFS, 21.

[11]
Ebd.

751

[Abb. 3]

Ein von *StyleGAN2* generiertes Porträt auf der Website www.thispersondoesnotexist.com.
Die digitalen Artefakte im Hintergrund zeigen eine typische Schwäche des *GANs*. Phil
Wang, computergeneriertes Porträt, 2019, generativer Algorithmus (*StyleGAN2*), digitales
Bild (JPEG), 1024 × 1024 Pixel, mit freundlicher Genehmigung der Website This Person
Does Not Exist, Creative Commons Licence (05.12.2023).

über gestohlenen Bildern von Realpersonen: Sie sind bei rückwärts gerichteten Bildersuchen keiner Quelle zuzuordnen und da sie keiner Realperson zugehörig sind, können die Profile nicht wegen Identitätsdiebstahls gemeldet werden. Sie sind digitale Masken, die sich einer Referenz verweigern,[12] zugleich aber vorgeben, genau diesem referentiellen Bildtypus – dem Fotografischen – zu entsprechen. Im Wissen um die politische Gefährlichkeit von Massenmanipulation auf den digitalen Plattformen ist es deshalb unbedingt notwendig, technische Detektionssysteme zu entwickeln. Diese oftmals täuschend echt generierten Bilder sind mit Sicherheit nicht das Ende der Entwicklung, sie verkörpern vielmehr ihr anfängliches Potential. Es wird der Zeitpunkt kommen, an dem selbst der informierte Blick die Unterscheidung zwischen generierten Bildern und solchen, die imitiert werden sollen, nicht mehr gewährleisten kann und die Bestimmung nur noch mit technischen Mitteln durchgeführt werden kann.[13]

II. Wie lassen sich generierte Porträts finden?

In Frage steht also, wie sich generierte Porträts mit unseren heutigen Mitteln im digitalen Raum finden lassen. Fast alle bisher bekannt gewordenen Fälle wurden auf Twitter, Facebook und Instagram entdeckt. Die dort operierenden Fake-Netzwerke wurden jedoch nicht anhand der generierten Bilder enttarnt, sondern weil ihre verdächtigen Aktivitäten automatisiert im System detektiert wurden.[14] Hier wird deutlich, dass es bisher keine technologischen Lösungen gibt, um die Bilder als solche kategorisch zu identifizieren. Ein weiteres Problem bei der Recherche bereits bekannter Vorkommen ist die uneinheitliche Benennung der Bilder. Besonders der häufig genutzte Begriff *Deep Fake* ist unscharf, denn er bezeichnet eine Vielzahl von Technologien, die zumeist auf die Manipulation bestehender Medien spezialisiert sind.

Ein niederschwelliges Tool bei der Bildersuche ist die rückwärtsgewandte Bildersuche von Google. Diese Technik ist für gewöhnlich sehr treffsicher, führt aber bei den generierten Bildern nicht zu den gewünschten Ergebnissen. Statt ähnlich generierter Bilder schlägt Google stattdessen reale Personen vor, die den generierten zumindest ähnlich sind. Erfolgreich wäre diese Methode

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[12]
Hans Belting, *Faces. Eine Geschichte des Gesichts*, München 2019, 296.

[13]
Es wird bereits daran geforscht, derartige Bilder technisch zu detektieren. Ein vielversprechender Versuch scheint die Frequenzanalyse zu sein, denn die GANs hinterlassen Produktionsspuren, die im *dicrete cone transformation (DCT)*-Spektrum sichtbar werden. Dies ist jedoch eine komplexe technische Anwendung, die meine Fähigkeiten übersteigt und zudem viele Bildbeispiele erfordert. Joel Frank, Thorsten Eisenhofer, Lea Schönherr, Asja Fischer, Dorothea Kolossa und Thorsten Holz, Leveraging Frequency Analysis for Deep Fake Image Recognition, in: *arXiv*, 2020.

[14]
Gleicher, Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior. Siehe auch: Siddharth Venkataramakrishnan, After deepfakes, a new frontier of AI trickery. Fake faces, in: *Financial Times*, 12.10.2020 (30.09.2023).

jedoch nur, wenn das exakt gleiche Bild bereits im Internet aufgetaucht wäre. Da *www.thispersondoesnotexist.com* keine öffentlichen Bildarchive zur Verfügung stellt, ist die Wahrscheinlichkeit, auf diese Weise ein Bild zu finden, verschwindend gering. Eine effektive Methode, die gesuchten Bilder zu finden, entdeckte ich eher durch Zufall. In der Einleitung seines Essays *Gesichtserkennung* beleuchtet der Bildwissenschaftler Roland Meyer zwei Unternehmen, die die bis dato effektivste Software zur Gesichtserkennung entwickelt haben: Clearview AI und PimEyes.[15] Einer derart fortgeschrittenen Identifikationstechnologie wohnt immenses Potential zum Missbrauch und zur Massenüberwachung inne, zurecht stehen die Unternehmen in der Kritik. Mit ihnen zeichnet sich das Ende der ohnehin schon marode gewordenen Anonymität in physischen und digitalen Räumen ab.[16] Hinzu kommt, dass Clearview AI und PimEyes die Trainingsdaten für ihre *Deep-Learning* Prozesse illegal von den gängigen Social Media Plattformen gestohlen haben.

Insbesondere das Unternehmen PimEyes steht massiv in der Kritik. Denn während Clearviews Software nicht einfach im Internet zugänglich ist (die Firma wendet sich an größere Akteure), hat PimEyes ein Suchportal erstellt, in dem jede:r ohne Zugangsbeschränkung Gesichter suchen kann. Die Suchmaschine durchforstet in Sekundenbruchteilen das Internet und listet zuverlässig andere Websites auf, auf denen das gesuchte Gesicht auftaucht.[17] Eine Einschränkung jedoch besteht: Ohne zu bezahlen, sieht man nur Thumbnails der Ergebnisse, erhält aber keinen Zugang auf die jeweilig verlinkten Websites. Trotz erheblicher Vorbehalte gegenüber PimEyes entschied ich mich, in einem Versuch generierte Porträts in die Suchmaske hochzuladen.[18]

In Erwartung ähnlich schlechter Ergebnisse wie bei der Google-Suche galt mein hauptsächliches Interesse der Frage, ob die Anwendung generierte Bilder erkennen kann und als solche markiert. Das wenig überraschende Ergebnis war, dass die Bilder nicht als künstlich enttarnt wurden. Überraschend waren jedoch die Suchergebnisse [Abb. 6 und Abb. 7]. Ganz eindeutig sind hier verschiedene Personen zu sehen. Mit Blick auf die sonstige Präzision der Suchmaschine ist das zumindest ungewöhnlich. Weiter

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[15] Roland Meyer, *Gesichtserkennung*, Berlin 2021, 6.

[16] Daniel Laufer und Sebastian Meineck, PimEyes. Eine polnische Firma schafft gerade unsere Anonymität ab, in: *Netzpolitik.org*, 10.07.2020 (30.09.2023).

[17] Netzpolitik.org hat dessen Zuverlässigkeit und hohe Trefferquote dokumentiert. In diesem Artikel geben die Autor:innen einen detaillierten Überblick über das Unternehmen. Es sei an dieser Stelle auch darauf hingewiesen, dass das ehemals polnische Unternehmen PimEyes aufgrund der Kritik und drohender rechtlicher Konsequenzen mittlerweile seinen Geschäftssitz auf die Seychellen verlagert hat. Siehe: Laufer und Meineck, PimEyes.

[18] Alle Abbildungen sind der Website *www.thispersondoesnotexist.com* entnommen. Ausgewählt habe ich nur solche, die möglichst frei von Artefakten und anderen Indikatoren sind, die auf ihre Künstlichkeit hinweisen.
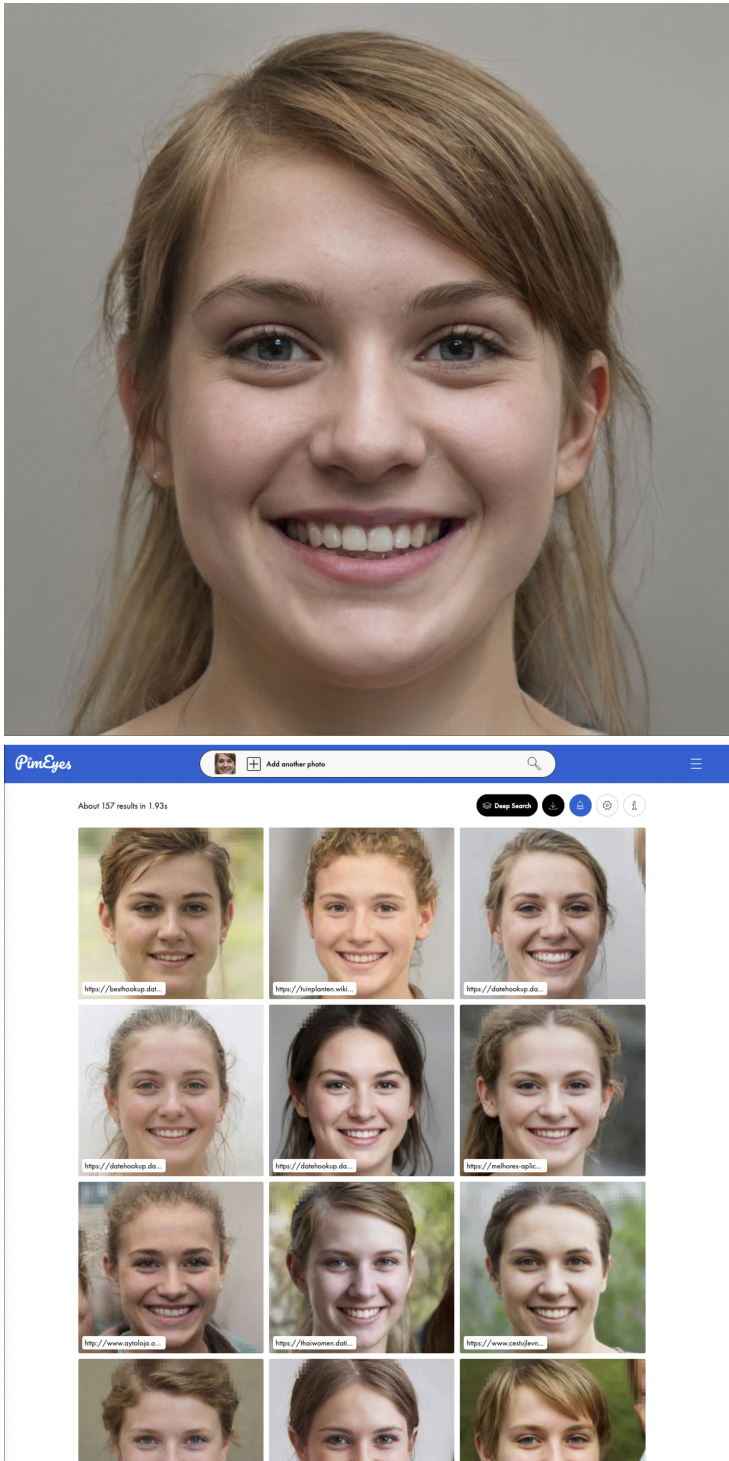
Screenshot von der Bildersuche auf der Website PimEyes. Oben ist das gesuchte Porträt,
unten ein Screenshot der Suchergebnisse. Phil Wang, computergeneriertes Porträt, 2019,
generativer Algorithmus, digitales Bild (JPEG), 1024 × 1024 Pixel, mit freundlicher Geneh-
migung der Website This Person Does Not Exist, Creative Commons Licence (15.01.2022).

verbindet die verschiedenen Gesichter eine schwer mit Worten zu fassende Ähnlichkeit. Obgleich sie eindeutig individuelle Charakteristika haben und sich in allen Belangen unterscheiden, verbindet sie dennoch etwas Durchschnittliches – man gewinnt ein Gefühl von verwandter Konstruiertheit. Hinzu kommen ein streng quadratisches Bildformat und die Position der Augen an der immer gleichen Stelle im Bild. Die naheliegende Vermutung ist, dass es sich stets um generierte Gesichter handelt und die Software deshalb keine Unterschiede feststellen kann.

Um diese These zu überprüfen, entschied ich mich, ein bezahlpflichtiges Abo bei PimEyes abzuschließen.[19] Mit diesem Zugang war es möglich, die Bilder einzeln zu öffnen und manuell zu überprüfen. Dabei zeigte sich, dass alle auf den Screenshots [Abb. 6 und Abb. 7] sichtbaren Bilder die typischen Merkmale der generierten Bilder aufweisen. Neben den Artefakten (Ohrringe, Brillen, Hintergrund-Artefakte) ist ein zuverlässiger Indikator die Position der Augen. [Abb. 8 und Abb. 9] zeigen die gefundenen Bilder transparent gestapelt. Hierbei wird deutlich, dass, obwohl die Gesichter verschieden ausgerichtet sind, die Augen (und zum großen Teil auch die Münder) auf der exakt gleichen Bildposition liegen.[20] Auch die Google-Suche nach den einzelnen Bildern brachte kein Ergebnis, das auf einen fotografischen Ursprung der Bilder hindeutet. Die Annahme, dass sich mit der PimEyes-Suchfunktion die von *StyleGAN2* generierten Bilder finden lassen, sehe ich hierin bestätigt.[21]

Daran anschließend stellt sich die Frage, mit welchem Zweck diese Bilder eingesetzt werden. Hierzu habe ich die Websites der achtzehn Gesichter auf den Screenshots [Abb. 6 und Abb. 7] aufgesucht. Zehn der Seiten waren Dating-Portale, vier Gesichter tauchten als Schreiber:innen von Produktreviews auf. Zwei der Porträts waren Profilbilder von Autor:innen, und zwei Bilder befanden sich auf Seiten, deren Zweck sich mir nicht erschloss.[22] Die Anonymisierung von Autor:innen unter Zuhilfenahme falscher und nun auch

19

Ich bin mir der Problematik dieser Entscheidung bewusst. Dadurch unterstütze ich ökonomisch ein Unternehmen, das im besten Falle fragwürdig, im schlimmsten Fall jedoch kriminell ist und eine immense Gefahr für Datensicherheit und Anonymität darstellt. Jedoch scheint dieses Unternehmen unbeabsichtigt der bisher einzige Möglichkeit entwickelt zu haben, generierte Bilder im Internet zu tracken und die damit verbundenen Praktiken zu dokumentieren. Deshalb habe ich mich entschieden, den Dienst für einen Monat zu abonnieren und anschließend wieder zu kündigen. Zudem waren alle von mir gesuchten Gesichter künstlicher Natur, somit wurden keine Persönlichkeitsrechte verletzt und das System nicht weiter an realen Gesichtern trainiert.

20

Da die Bilder verschieden gut aufgelöst waren, habe ich sie zunächst auf ihre native Auflösung 1024 × 1024 Pixel vergrößert.

21

Strenggenommen könnte es sich bei den Bildern auch um die präparierten Trainingsbilder von Flickr handeln, jedoch deuten die Artefakte daraufhin, dass mindestens der Großteil der Bilder generiert ist. Hierfür spricht auch, dass die Rückwärtssuche bei Google und Pim-Eyes nicht auf Flickr oder den Bild-Datensatz verweisen. Zudem bieten die generierten Bilder mehr Vorteile im Anbetracht des manipulativen Bildgebrauchs, den ich folgend aufzeige.

22

Die Links zu den Bildern sind im Anhang in Reihenfolge der Abbildungen aufgelistet.

[Abb. 8]
Die digital gestapelte Ansicht der ersten neun Suchergebnisse [Abb. 6]. Die übereinstim-
mende Positionierung von Augen und Mündern ist ein starkes Indiz auf den Ursprung der
Bilder.

Die gestapelte Ansicht der ersten neun Suchergebnisse [Abb. 7]. Die übereinstimmende
Positionierung von Augen und Mündern ist ein starkes Indiz auf den Ursprung der Bilder.

generierter Bilder ist eine Entwicklung, die bereits eingangs zur Sprache kam. Wie die Recherchen von Graphika gezeigt haben, gibt es globale Netzwerke, die sich auf anonymisierte Content-Produktion spezialisiert haben. Wie schon beschrieben, haben diese Inhalte eine Spannweite von harmlos bis zu Fake News und Propaganda.[23] Fake Reviews sind ebenfalls ein bekanntes Problem.[24] Es überrascht nicht, dass auch in diesem Bereich auf generierte Bilder zurückgegriffen wird, denn auch hier generiert ein Profil mit verknüpftem Gesicht mehr Vertrauen als ein anonymes.

Das interessanteste Ergebnis dieses Experiments betrifft jedoch die Dating-Portale. Seit Jahren haben große Anbieter wie Tinder mit Fake-Profilen zu kämpfen.[25] Üblicherweise werden diese Profile durch Bots bespielt, deren Ziel es ist, die User:innen auf andere Plattformen zu locken oder ihnen Daten zu entlocken. Die Identifikation solcher Profile ist nicht immer einfach, denn sie nutzen in der Regel unrechtmäßig kopierte Bilder realer Personen. Abseits der großen Plattformen, die streng gegen solche Täuschungsversuche vorgehen, gibt es kleinere Dating-Plattformen, die wiederum Betrug zu ihrer Masche gemacht haben. Im März 2021 veröffentlichte die Verbraucherzentrale einen Bericht, der Betrug im Online-Dating dokumentierte.[26] Darin wurden 187 Plattformen identifiziert, die Fake-Profile einsetzen. Diese Fake-Profile werden von Mitarbeiter:innen oder Cloud-Diensten betrieben. Ziel ist es, potentielle Kund:innen, also Menschen, die auf der Suche nach eine:r Partner:in sind, so lange wie möglich in ein Gespräch zu verwickeln, um sie so in bezahlpflichtige Abos und Nachrichten zu drängen. Die Kund:innen wissen dabei nicht, dass sie mit professionellen Chat-Schreiber:innen kommunizieren und betrogen werden.[27] Es liegt der Verdacht nahe, dass auf den bei PimEyes aufgetauchten Seiten diese oder ähnliche Betrugsmaschen vollzogen werden. Zwar tauchen die Bilder auf verschiedenen Seiten auf, aber die Namen sind auffallend ähnlich: *freehookup.dating*, *flirthookup.dating*, *besthookup.dating*, *datehookup.dating* und *thaiwoman.dating*. Offenkundig handelt es sich hier um ein Netzwerk.

[23]
Nimmo et al., #OperationFFS.

[24]
Nicole Nguyen, Fake Reviews and Inflated Ratings Are Still a Problem for Amazon, in: *The Wall Street Journal*, 13.06.2021 (30.09.2023).

[25]
Mila Krull, Gefahr durch Bots bei Dating-Apps. Wie man Fake-Accounts erkennt, in: *RedaktionsNetzwerk Deutschland*, 24.07.2020 (30.09.2023).

[26]
Verbraucherzentrale, Marktüberblick Online-Dating-Portale. Einschätzung zu einem problembehafteten Markt, in: *Verbraucherzentrale*, 2021 (30.09.2023).

[27]
STRG_F hat eine Doku gedreht, in der die Journalistin undercover einen solchen Job annimmt und ihre Bedingungen und Aufgaben dokumentiert: Nadia Kailouli und David Diwiak, Undercover als Chatschreiberin. Falsche Flirts auf Dating-Plattformen. STRG_F, *Youtube*, 02.06.2020 (13.12.2023). Siehe auch: Leonard Scharfenberg, Betrug auf Datingseiten. Das Geschäft mit gebrochenen Herzen, in: *TAZ*, 30.10.2020 (30.09.2023).

Alle diese Websites sind nachlässig programmiert und – wenigstens für ein aufmerksames Auge – voll augenscheinlicher Fake-Profile. Versucht man sich anzumelden, wird man auf andere, zum Teil pornografische Websites weitergeleitet. Spätestens hier dürfte klar sein, dass diese Websites eine Betrugsmasche verfolgen und mit generierten Porträts überzeugende Profile zu erzeugen versuchen. Die fehlerhaften Userinterfaces und die stetige Weiterleitung auf ähnliche Websites deuten jedoch darauf hin, dass es primär um Datentracking und potenziell um Vireninfektion geht. Es kann hier also ein halbwegs positives Zwischenfazit gezogen werden: Mit Gesichtserkennungssoftware lassen sich die generierten Porträts im Internet aufspüren. Weiter hat sich gezeigt, dass diese in betrügerischen Maschen eingesetzt werden, jedoch zum gegebenen Zeitpunkt nicht sehr überzeugend sind. Allerdings mahnt die Recherche der Verbraucherzentrale zur Vorsicht. Es dürfte nur eine Frage der Zeit sein, bis auch im professionelleren Dating-Betrug generierte Bilder auftauchen.

III. Zur technischen Natur generierter Bilder

Um die Natur generierter Bilder zu verstehen, ist es unumgänglich, ihren Produktionsprozess zu befragen. Im Folgenden sollen kurz wesentliche Prinzipien maschinellen Lernens umrissen werden. Grundsätzlich kann zwischen zwei Lernprozessen unterschieden werden. Zum einen gibt es das *Machine Learning*. Hier sind die Trainingsdaten strukturiert und gelabelt, wodurch das System die gesuchte Struktur erkennen kann. Aufbauend auf das Feedback des menschlichen Operators ist das System in der Lage, strukturelle Optimierungen durchzuführen. Ziel ist es dabei, ein System zu bilden, das die erlernten Strukturen auf unbekannte Datensätze übertragen kann.[28] Zum anderen wurde das *Deep Learning* als Untersystem des *Machine Learnings* entwickelt. Im Bereich der Bild- und Spracherkennung hat dieses System in den letzten Jahren enorme Entwicklungen erfahren, und auch die hier untersuchten künstlich generierten Porträts beruhen auf diesem Prinzip.

Deep Learning baut auf einem *Artificial Neural Network (ANN)* auf. Grundsätzlich sind *Artificial Neural Networks* aus „simplen Recheneinheiten, den *Neuronen* sowie gerichteten, gewichteten Verbindungen zwischen diesen"[29] aufgebaut. Diese Neuronen sind in aufeinander folgenden und hierarchisch vernetzten *Layers* angeordnet. Die *Input-* und *Output-Layers* sind dabei einsehbar, die sogenannten *Hidden-Layers* dazwischen sind die Blackbox des Prozesses. Die nicht einsehbare Eigengestaltung des Arbeitsprozesses ist

[28]
Lorena Jaume-Palasí und Fritz Pieper, KI und Algorithmen, in: *Telemedicus*, 23.01.2019 (30.09.2023).

[29]
David Kriesel, *Ein kleiner Überblick über Neuronale Netze*, 2005, 35.

das, was *Deep Learning* auszeichnet.[30] Ist es nun die Aufgabe der KI, Bilder zu klassifizieren – beispielsweise zu entscheiden, ob die Fotografie einen Hund zeigt oder nicht – muss eine riesige Menge an Trainingsdaten zusammengetragen und ins System implementiert werden.[31] Dabei wird jedem Pixel des eingespeisten Bildes ein Neuron des *Input-Layers* zugeordnet. Eigenständig werden die Pixelinformationen (RGB-Werte und Belichtung) an die folgenden Neuronen-Schichten weitergegeben mit dem Ziel, Strukturen und Muster zu erkennen, die die Form eines Hundes verlässlich klassifizieren können.[32] Durch Feedback des:der Operator:in lernt das System, welche Strukturen den Hund klassifizieren und gewichtet die neuronalen Verbindungen entsprechend der korrekten Klassifizierung. Sobald die Trainingsdaten eine ausreichende Zuverlässigkeit gewährleisten, ist das System in der Lage auch unbekannte Bilder zu klassifizieren.[33] Dieses System wird als Diskriminator bezeichnet.

Dem gegenüber steht das *Deep Generative Learning*, der Generator. In diesem Anwendungsbereich versucht die KI nicht die Daten zu klassifizieren, sondern ihre Verteilung zu analysieren: „It tries to understand the distribution of data points, providing a model of how the data is actually generated in terms of a probabilistic model."[34] Die Trainingsdaten sind dabei ungelabelt, so dass die statistischen Verteilungen der Datenpunkte aus dem Datenset extrahiert werden müssen. Dadurch ist das System in der Lage, Aussagen über die eingespeisten Daten hinaus zu treffen.[35] Bestehen die Trainingsdaten beispielsweise aus 100.000 Bildern von Hunden, lernt die KI, welche Datenpunkte beziehungsweise Pixel welche Information beinhalten müssen, um die eingespeiste Struktur (in meinem Beispiel den Hund) üblicherweise zu bilden. Darauf aufbauend ist das *ANN* bei erfolgreichem Training in der Lage, eine auf statistischer Verteilung beruhende Aussage zu extrapolieren. In diesem Fall wäre das ein von Grund auf generiertes Bild eines Hundes.

Auf sich allein gestellt ist das *Deep Generative Learning* jedoch fehleranfällig. Um Fehlerquoten entgegenzuwirken, veröffentlich-

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[30] Michael A. Nielsen, Deep Learning, in: *Determination Press*, 2015 (27.11.2023).

[31] Sven Behnke und Hannes Schulz, Deep Learning. Layer-Wise Learning of Feature Hierarchies, in: *Künstliche Intelligenz* 26, 2012, 357–363, hier 358.

[32] Ebd.

[33] Fritz Pieper und Oliver Stiemerling, Einführung in das Thema „Künstliche Intelligenz", in: *Telemedicus*, 08.01.2019 (30.09.2023).

[34] Satya Mallick, Generative and Discriminative Models, in: *LearnOpenCV*, 10.05.2021 (30.09.2023).

[35] Mallick, Generative and Discriminative Models.

ten der amerikanische Informatiker Ian J. Goodfellow und sein Team 2004 ein System, das eine gesteigerte Zuverlässigkeit versprach. Das von ihm entwickelte *Generative Adversial Network (GAN)* stellt dafür ein generatives und ein diskriminierendes System in direkte Konkurrenz und erzeugt so ein qualitatives Lernsystem, das sich selbst stetig optimiert.[36] Beide *ANN* greifen auf den gleichen Datensatz zu. Aufgabe des Generators ist es, ausgehend von einem *Noise Input* eine Aussage zu erzeugen, die dem Datensatz möglichst ähnlich ist. Aufgabe des Diskriminators ist es zu entscheiden, ob die generierte Aussage dem Datensatz entspricht oder nicht. Gelingt es dem Generator nicht den Diskriminator zu überzeugen, implementiert der Generator das Feedback in sein *Neural Network*.

Eine Analogie, die Goodfellow vorschlägt, ist die des Kunstfälschers. Seine Intention ist es, ein Bild zu schaffen, das beispielsweise dem Stil nach den Bildern Vincent van Goghs zum Verwechseln ähnlich sieht, aber keine Kopie eines originalen Werkes ist. Der Kunstmarkt auf der anderen Seite kennt das Œuvre dieses Malers und muss kontrollieren, dass nur Originale im Umlauf sind. Der Fälscher ist erfolgreich, wenn er den Markt täuscht, der Markt ist erfolgreich, wenn er den Fälscher entlarvt. Durch Überlistung und Entlarvung findet ein beidseitiger Optimierungsprozess statt.[37]

Seit der ersten Veröffentlichung hat sich die Qualität der *GANs* immens verbessert. Während die ersten Outputs noch von geringer Auflösung waren, sind heutige Anwendungen im Stande Bilder bis zu der Auflösung 1024 × 1024 Pixel zu generieren. Grund dafür sind zum einen die wachsende Masse an Trainingsdaten im Internet, zum anderen die Sprünge in der Rechenleistung von Computern. Mittlerweile gibt es eine Vielzahl verschiedener *GANs*.[38] Gegenstand der Betrachtung wird jedoch ausschließlich das von NVIDIA entwickelte und 2018 veröffentlichte *StyleGAN* sein.[39] Grundsätzlich ist dieses *GAN* in der Lage, jeden Bildtypus zu erzeugen, sofern ausreichende Bilder zum Trainieren vorliegen. Trainiert wurde das *GAN* beispielsweise an Bildern von Katzen, Pferden, Autos und Küchen. Jedoch sind diese Bilder weitaus weniger überzeugend als die von Gesichtern. Die Ursache dieser besonderen Qualität lässt sich in einer gewissen formalen Erwartbarkeit des menschlichen Gesichts vermuten. Während andere Bildsujets eine viel größere Bandbreite an Motivik miteinbeziehen, lässt sich das Gesicht auf

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[36]
Ian Goodfellow, Jean Pouget-Abadie, Mehdi Mirza, Bing Xu, David Warde-Farley, Sherjil Ozair, Aaron Courville und Yoshua Bengio, Generative Adversarial Networks, in: *Advances in Neural Information Processing System* 3/11, 2014, 1–2.

[37]
Ebd., 1.

[38]
Ein kurzer Überblick findet sich hier: Jason Brownlee, 18 Impressive Applications of Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), in: *Machine Learning Mastery*, 12.07.2019 (30.09.2023).

[39]
Timo Aila, Tero Karras und Samuli Laine, A Style-Based Generator Architecture for Generative Adversial Networks, in: *IEEE Transactions on Pattern Analysis and Machine Intelligence* 43/12, 4217–4228, 2021.

sehr einfache Grundprinzipien reduzieren. Gesteigert wird dies in der Vorformatierung der 70.000 Gesichter umfassenden Trainingsdatenbank. Die von Flickr downgeloadeten Bilder werden automatisiert in das quadratische Bildformat beschnitten und die Positionierung der Gesichter angeglichen.[40] Auch wenn die Lizenzbedingungen von Flickr den Download der Bilder erlauben, wirft der Umgang ethische Fragen auf:

> Machine learning systems are trained on images like these every day – images that were taken from the internet [...] without context or consent. They are anything but neutral. [...] A computer vision system can detect a face or a building but not [...] any of the social and historical context surrounding that moment.[41]

Solche Dekontextualisierung negiert das Individuelle und reduziert es auf einen Datensatz.

> Any individual image could easily be substituted for another and the system would work the same. According to this worldview, there is always more data to capture from the constantly growing and globally distributed treasure chest of the internet and social media platforms.[42]

Auch für die in dieser Arbeit gezeigten Porträts ist diese Art der Dehumanisierung grundlegend. Die individuellen Porträts der Personen sind nun nicht viel mehr als ein Möglichkeitsraum, der die potenzielle Bandbreite der Bildgenerierungen absteckt. Jedoch ist es dieser Möglichkeitsraum, der die Technologie von Durchschnittsbildern unterscheidet. Die Idee, aus verschiedenen Porträts eine Durchschnittserscheinung zu gewinnen, stellte 1878 erstmals der britische Naturforscher und Schriftsteller Francis Galton vor. Der physiognomischen Idee aus der menschlichen Erscheinung Rückschlüsse auf Eigenschaften ableiten zu können folgend, entwickelte er die Kompositfotografie. Indem er mehrere Porträts in einer Mehrfachbelichtung zu einem verschmolz, versuchte er einen qualitativen Umgang mit dem fotografischen Medium zu finden. „Im Ergebnis, so Galtons These, sehe man den Durchschnitt der Gesichter: eine bildgewordene Statistik."[43] Voraussetzung dafür war eine strikte Vorformatierung der Bilder, wobei hierin die

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[40]
Trainingsdatenbank Flickr-Faces-HQ Dataset (FFHQ) (27.11.2023).

[41]
Kate Crawford, *Atlas of AI*, New Haven, CT 2021, 94.

[42]
Ebd.

[43]
Roland Meyer, Operative Porträts. Eine Bildgeschichte der Identifizierbarkeit von Lavater bis Facebook, Konstanz 2019, 106.

Gemeinsamkeit mit den *GAN*-Verfahren besteht. Hingegen unterscheiden sich die beiden Verfahren im finalen Bild: Während Galton eine Synthese aus bestehenden Bildern erzeugte, generiert das *GAN* ein von Grund auf neues Bild. Keinesfalls ist dieses als Durchschnitt aller Trainingsdaten zu sehen, sondern als eine Neuformulierung der statistischen Auswertung von Trainingsdaten. Die Trainingsdaten bilden die Bandbreite der Möglichkeiten, bestimmen jedoch nicht als Ganzes die Erscheinung des Outputs. Und dies ist, zumindest auf dem fotografischen Feld, die entscheidende Neuerung: Ausgehend von Francis Galton wurde in der Geschichte der Fotografie immer wieder versucht, Mischporträts zu erzeugen, diese konnten rein technisch jedoch nie mehr als die konkrete Summe der Ausgangsbilder sein, das rein fiktive Porträt ohne faktisches Ausgangsmaterial musste bisher ein händischer Prozess bleiben. Nun aber ist das fiktive Porträt als technisches Erzeugnis nicht mehr die Summe aller Teile, sondern ein willkürliches Produkt aus dem Möglichkeitsraum aller Teile.

IV. Diskriminator:in wider Willen

Um die von *StyleGAN2* generierten Bilder zu erleben, sei empfohlen, die Website *www.thispersondoesnotexist.com* zu besuchen. In dieser Galerie prekärer Existenz fließt ein nicht endender Strom generierter Gesichter.[44] Das erste Antlitz, das mir dort begegnete, war das einer jungen Frau [Abb. 1].[45] Mein anfänglicher Eindruck war von Erschrecken geprägt. Die real anmutende Erscheinung konnte ich nur schwer mit meinem Bewusstsein von der Entstehungsweise des Bildes in Einklang bringen. In meiner so geweckten Faszination begann ich über sie zu mutmaßen: Ich las sie als junge Frau in meinem Alter, erfreute mich an ihrer Natürlichkeit und mutmaßte über ihre Lebensgeschichte – nur um all das schon im nächsten Augenblick zu dementieren. Sie ist keine Frau, nicht jung und hat auch kein freundliches Lächeln. Sie ist ein statistischer Output beruhend auf einer großen Bilddatenbank. Dennoch führt sie nun, nach zwei Jahren des Nachdenkens über sie, in meinen Gedanken eine Schattenexistenz.

Das Wissen um eine maschinelle Annäherung an die Bildlichkeit einer biologischen Komplexität und Individualität ohne die konkrete Einflussnahme menschlicher Schaffenskraft erzeugte eine Erfahrung, die im Analogen wohl als „punctum"[46] beschrieben wor-

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[44]
Ein einfacher Test belegt, dass es sich tatsächlich um eine Galerie handelt und nicht bei jedem Aktualisieren der Seite ein neues Bild generiert wird. Aktualisiert man die Website exakt zeitgleich mit zwei Browsern, so werden beide Browser das gleiche Bild präsentieren. Es findet somit keine Bedienung einer KI durch die User:innen statt.

[45]
In der folgenden Ausführung beziehe ich mich primär auf dieses Bild.

[46]
Roland Barthes, *Die helle Kammer. Bemerkungen zur Photographie*, Frankfurt a. M. 2016 [1980], 36.

den wäre, im Digitalen bisher einer solchen Begrifflichkeit jedoch entbehrt. Erwähnenswert ist es deshalb, weil auch hier die Medialität Ausgangspunkt einer starken Rezeptionserfahrung ist, allerdings in gegensätzlicher Argumentation. Denn während Roland Barthes dieses Erleben stark an die vergangenheitsweisende Zeitlichkeit des analogen fotografischen Mediums bindet,[47] tritt hier der umgekehrte Fall ein: Die Materialität der generierten Bilder verweigert sich referentieller Zeitlichkeit, obgleich sie in vertrauter Form erscheint. Ich blicke in ein „virtuelles Gesicht, das sich jeder Referenz auf einen natürlichen Träger [...] entzieht."[48] Diese notwendige Verweigerung des Realen erzeugte eine neue, zunächst unbehagliche Erfahrung, die sich nicht mit meinem bisherigen fotografischen Erfahrungshorizont vereinbaren lässt. Ein derartiges Unbehagen ist im Bereich der Robotik und grafischen Bildsimulation als *Uncanny-Valley* bekannt.[49] Der Theorie zufolge fällt die Akzeptanz simulierter Menschendarstellungen ab einem bestimmten Grad der Anthropomorphisierung rapide ab – das *Uncanny-Valley*. „An dieser Stelle kippt der Eindruck von Realismus plötzlich in sein Gegenteil um und es entsteht der Eindruck des Unheimlichen, des lebenden Toten."[50] Wie beschrieben haben viele der vorliegenden generierten Bilder das Potential, mich als Rezipienten von der Klippe in das *Uncanny-Valley* zu stoßen. Dies ist jedoch, wie auch deutlich wurde, stark vom Kontext abhängig. Die Besonderheit der Bilder ist ihr hoher Grad an Realismus im fotografischen Sinne. Dieses Kippmoment in Unbehagen kann nur funktionieren, wenn das Bild als ein generiertes identifiziert werden kann. Begegnet ein solches Porträt uns beispielsweise auf Social Media oder auf einem Führerschein, ist die Identifikation seiner computergenerierten Natur schwierig. Die Existenz der und das Wissen um diese Technologie machen es notwendig, fortan immer die Rolle des Diskriminators einzunehmen. Hat der technische Diskriminator ein Bild als der Referenz entsprechend akzeptiert, macht er uns zu Kompliz:innen in dem ewigen Ringen um Entlarvung und Überlistung. Verblüffend ist, dass dieser wissend geschärfte Blick, zumindest bis Dezember 2022, als die zuverlässigste diskriminatorische Technik angesehen wurde, auch bei dem Tech-Giganten Meta.[51]

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[47] Barthes, Die helle Kammer, 90–91.

[48] Belting, Faces, 296.

[49] Masahiro Mori, Karl F. MacDorman [Übers.] und Norri Kageki [Übers.], The Uncanny Valley, in: *IEEE Robotics & Automation Magazine* 19/2, 2012, 98–100.

[50] Markus Rautzenberg, *Bild und Spiel. Medien der Unwissenheit*, Paderborn 2020, 32.

[51] Bond, AI-generated fake faces.

V. Zur fotografischen DNA generierter Bilder

> Was unter digitalen Bedingungen als fotografisches Bild
> zirkuliert, ist [...] das Ergebnis eines Messvorgangs, bei
> dem Halbleitersensoren Lichtimpulse in elektrische Signale
> umwandeln, die sich als diskrete Zahlenwerte speichern,
> übertragen und verrechnen lassen.[52]

Durch diesen technischen Digitalisierungsprozess entsteht ein in
zweifacher Hinsicht ungreifbares Produkt: Zum einen ist das Bild
in digitaler Codeform physisch ortlos und lässt sich beliebig oft
verschieben und kopieren, ohne dabei physisch bewegt oder „sicht-
bar" zu werden. Zum anderen ist seine Sichtbarwerdung zeitkritisch
und – im Digitalen – nie beständig. Abhängig von der Bildwieder-
holfrequenz des Monitors wird es in entsprechenden Zeitabständen
ständig neu erzeugt.[53] Das digitale Bild als solches ist also für den
Menschen unsichtbar, denn ‚digital' meint in erster Linie die Art
der Speicherung.

> The ‚image' on the other hand, whether generated once as
> a print or generated 60–100 times a second to be projected
> though a monitor, is *never* digital and is *always* analogue,
> otherwise we humans could never see it because we cannot
> see voltage differences.[54]

In seinem Kern ist ein digitales Bild, sofern sichtbar gemacht, ein
streng geometrisches Mosaik aus einzelnen Pixeln. Dieses Mosaik
wird in einem langen Zahlencode gespeichert. Es ist dabei eine reine
„Designentscheidung"[55], dass die Bilder hierbei der visuellen Norm
analoger Fotografie entsprechen, der Code selbst gibt das nicht
zwingend vor und könnte auf unterschiedlichste Arten ausgelesen
werden. Die erste Zahl des Codes gibt dem auslesenden Programm
die Information über den normierten Datentyp, also wie die Zahlen
zu interpretieren sind; die folgenden Zahlen sind die Informatio-
nen jedes Pixels in der Reihenfolge des jeweiligen Bildpunktes. In
den meisten Fällen sind die Pixel-Informationen Zahlenwerte, die
sich auf den RBG-Farbraum beziehen.[56] Dies gilt prinzipiell für

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[52]
Meyer, Operative Porträts, 419–420.

[53]
Peter Berz, Bitmapped Graphics, in: Axel Volmar (Hg.), *Zeitkritische Medien*, Bamberg
2009, 127–154, hier 144.

[54]
Yanai Toister, Photography. Love's Labour's Lost, in: *Photographies* 12/1, 2019, 117–133,
hier 127.

[55]
Daniel Rubinstein, Fotografie nach der Philosophie. Repräsentationsdämmerung, Leipzig
2020, 15.

[56]
James R. Parker, *GENerative ART. Algorithms as Artistic Tool*, Alberta 2020, 120–123.

alle digitalen Bildtypen, wobei es Unterschiede in Bildformat und Pixel-Informationen geben kann. Wird das digitale Bild mit einer handelsüblichen Digitalkamera oder einem Scanner produziert, so ist die *Pixel Map* in Form der Auflösung voreingestellt. Die Pixel sind also in einem Koordinatensystem fest verortet und unbeweglich. Auch Bildbearbeitungen verändern die eigentliche Pixelstruktur nicht, sondern wandeln lediglich die Informationen der individuellen Pixel ab.[57] Dies unterscheidet digital gemessene Bilder von den digital generierten Bildern der *GANs*. Denn wie bereits aufgezeigt, ist ein stetiges *Upsampling* entscheidend für ihren Produktionsprozess. Daran anschließend wäre ein naheliegendes Argument für die Unterscheidung, dass die jeweilige Informationsproduktion grundverschieden ist. Während das eine Verfahren durch Halbleitersensoren Lichtimpulse für jedes individuelle Pixel in elektrische Signale umwandelt und so „übersetzt" und speichert, gewinnt das andere Verfahren Pixel-Informationen durch mathematische Verteilungsberechnungen ohne jede Messung. Diese Annahmen sind jedoch nur teilweise korrekt. Während der in Digitalkameras typische CCD-Sensor die Helligkeitswerte für jedes Pixel der nativen Auflösung misst, gilt dies nicht für die Farbwerte. Hierbei wird typischerweise ein Bayer-Filter verwendet. Dieser Filter misst pro Pixel nur einen der drei RGB-Farbwerte. Um dies auszugleichen, entwickeln die Hersteller Algorithmen, die die Werte zwischen Nachbarpixeln interpolieren.[58] Es lässt sich folgern, dass algorithmische Generierungsprozesse auch ein Teil digitaler Messverfahren sind und keinen grundsätzlichen Unterschied zu digital generierten Bildern bedeuten. Weiter sind beide Prozesse in ihrer Entstehung notwendig singulär. *GANs* können deshalb, zumindest gemessen am aktuellen Stand der Technik, niemals absichtlich zwei Gesichter erzeugen, die gleich aussehen. Was bedeutet dies für den referenziellen Charakter generierter Porträts?

Ihr Entstehungsprozess ohne elektronisches Messverfahren impliziert, dass referenzielle Bilder zwar die Grundlage bilden, diese Verbindung aber im durchweg technischen Prozess nicht erhalten bleibt. Denn wie bereits erläutert, ist dieser Prozess kein Kombinationsverfahren: Erzeugt wird ein von Grund auf eigenständiges Bild, das keine Elemente der Trainingsdaten kopiert. Dennoch scheint es – zumindest impliziert dies das Suchverfahren mit PimEyes – eine messbare Übereinstimmung der Bilder zu geben. Der Frage nach potentiellen *Leaks* der Trainingsdaten ging eine Gruppe von Forscher:innen nach:

> This paper presents experiments suggesting that identity information in face images can flow from the training corpus

[57]
Parker, GENerative ART, 138.

[58]
Tomohiro Hase, Chikako Nakanishi und Tadashi Sakamoto, Software Pixel Interpolation for Digital Still Cameras Suitable for a 32-Bit MCU, in: *IEEE Tranactions on Consumer Electronics* 44/4, 1998, 1342–1352, hier 1342–1344.

into synthetic samples without any adversarial actions when building or using the existing model.[59]

Um diese These zu überprüfen, implementierten sie generierte Gesichter und die Bilder der Trainingsdaten in fünf verschiedenen *Face-Matchern*.[60] Ein einheitliches Ergebnis erzielten sie nicht, denn nicht alle der *Matcher* ordneten die realen Gesichter den generierten zu. Da jedoch zwei der Abgleichungstools die echten Gesichter mit den daraus generierten in Verbindung brachten, ist ihre ursprüngliche These der *Identity Leaks* zumindest in Teilen bestätigt. Das Risikopotential veranschaulichten die Forscher:innen in einem Beispiel:

> Recently, Facebook shut down thousands of Facebook and Instagram accounts that used ‚AI-generated images' as profile photos. If Facebook had chosen to use a matcher behaving as shown [...] [in our test] to hunt down these fake profile photos [...], the real users whose face images appeared in the training data would be 6.6 times more likely to be falsely matched [...].[61]

Diese Ergebnisse zeigen zwar nicht einheitlich, aber zumindest deutlich den real messbaren Nachhall der Trainingsdaten in den generierten Bilder. „So, can we say that these synthetically generated faces truly do not exist?"[62]

Eine undurchlässige Differenzierung der verschiedenen Bildtypen ist demnach nicht haltbar, die fotografische Spur in generierten Bildern nicht verklungen. In ihrem Kern sind sie statistische Annahmen über die durch Trainingsdaten vermittelte Welt, jedoch finden sich in diesen Annahmen Spuren der Ursprungsobjekte, die verortbar sind. Die von *GANs* produzierten Gesichter sind demnach zumindest eine hybride Bildform, die ihr Versprechen gänzlicher Referenzlosigkeit nicht einlösen. Bedenklich ist dies vor allem mit Blick auf die Menschen, die ungefragt zu Trainingsdaten gemacht wurden. Die Rückverfolgbarkeit von Elementen ihrer individuellen Erscheinungen in den generierten Bildern wirft Fragen des Persönlichkeitsrechts auf.[63]

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[59] Adam Czajka, Patrick Flynn und Patrick Tinskey, This Face Does Not Exist... But It Might Be Yours! Identity Leakage in Generative Models, in: *arXiv*, 1.

[60] Dabei handelt es sich um *Deep Learning* Prozesse, die darauf trainiert sind, Gesichter abzugleichen und bei Übereinstimmung zu matchen.

[61] Czajka, Flynn und Tinskey, This Face Does Not Exist, 9.

[62] Ebd., 1.

[63] Die politischen Dimensionen dieser Praxis kommen im abschließenden Kapitel erneut zur Sprache.

Begreifen wir die generierte Bildproduktion als eine erweiterte Form des Fotografischen, und das sollten wir in Anbetracht ihrer Visualität und der bisher geschilderten Verwendung, müssen wir über die damit verbundenen Implikationen nachdenken. Denn wie die generierten Bilder gehandhabt werden, ergibt sich natürlich aus dem Medium, dem sie zu entsprechen versuchen. Die Erwartung wahrheitsliefernder Fotografie hat Pierre Bourdieu in seinem Aufsatz *Die gesellschaftliche Definition der Photographie* treffend beschrieben:

> So hat man sich [als partizipierende Gesellschaft] beispielsweise darauf geeinigt, die Photographie als ein Modell der Wahrhaftigkeit und Objektivität zu beschreiben. [...] Es lässt sich nun unschwer zeigen, daß diese gesellschaftliche Vorstellung einer falschen Selbstverständlichkeit aufsitzt. [...] Wenn man die Photographie für die realistische und objektive Aufzeichnung der sichtbaren Welt hält, dann deshalb, weil man ihr (von Anfang an) *gesellschaftliche Gebrauchsweisen* eingeschrieben hat, die als ‚realistisch' und ‚objektiv' gelten.[64]

Diese von Beginn an eingeschriebene Aufladung, man denke an William Fox Talbots Analogie des *Pencil of Nature*, findet seine Grundannahme in der vermeintlichen Kausalität technischer Bildproduktion.

> Zweifellos liegt es ebenso an der gesellschaftlichen Vorstellung vom technischen Gegenstand, der sie hervorbringt, wie an dem gesellschaftlichen Gebrauch, der von ihr gemacht wird, wenn die Photographie als die treue Spiegelung des Wirklichen gilt.[65]

Theoretisiert stand in dieser Diskussion lange das Indexikalische als Wesensbegründung der Fotografie. Rosalind Krauss' Position gilt als wissenschaftlicher Ausgangspunkt dieser Argumentation.

> Jede Fotografie ist das Ergebnis eines physikalischen Abdrucks, der durch Lichtreflexion auf eine lichtempfindliche Oberfläche übertragen wird. Die Fotografie ist also eine Form des Ikons, d. h. einer visuellen Ähnlichkeit, die eine indexikalische Beziehung zu ihrem Gegenstand hat.[66]

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[64] Pierre Bourdieu, Die gesellschaftliche Definition der Photographie, in: ders., *Eine illegitime Kunst. Die sozialen Gebrauchsweisen der Photographie*, Frankfurt a. M., 85–110, hier 85–86.

[65] Ebd., 89.

[66] Rosalind E. Krauss, *Die Originalität der Avantgarde und andere Mythen der Moderne*, Amsterdam 2000, 257.

Sie beruft sich dabei auf den Aufsatz *Die Kunst des Räsonierens* von Charles Sanders Peirce, der das Verhältnis von Gegenstand und fotografischem Abbild aufgrund dieser Kausalbeziehung als indexikalisch wertet.[67] Verschiedentlich gewichtet wurde die so argumentierte Indexikalität zum Kern des fotografischen Wahrheitsversprechen und damit zur Theoretisierung ohnehin gelebter Bildpraxis. Jedoch wurde behauptet, dass das Kriterium der Indexikalität ein Attribut analoger Fototechnik sei, das für die digitale Fotografie nicht mehr in Anspruch genommen werden könne.[68] Doch auch wenn so die indexikalische Theorie und das daran geknüpfte Authentizitätsversprechen zum Distinktionsmerkmal von analoger und digitaler Bildtechnik wird und umgekehrt das digitale Bild „nicht durch die Heilige Dreifaltigkeit von Repräsentation, Index und Punktum erfasst werden"[69] kann, sind die im Analogen verankerten Handlungsweisen ins Digitale übergegangen. W. J. T. Mitchell postuliert, dass

> die Frage der Authentizität, des Wahrheitswertes, der Autorität und der Legitimität von Photographien [...] von ihrem Charakter als ‚digitale' oder ‚analoge' Produktion ganz unabhängig ist. Die Vorstellung, dass der digitale Charakter eines Bildes in einer *notwendigen* Beziehung zur Bedeutung des Bildes steht, zu seinen Wirkungen auf die Sinne, zu seiner Einwirkung auf den Körper oder den Geist des Betrachters, gehört zu den großen Mythen unserer Zeit.[70]

Es sind also, und das knüpft direkt an Pierre Bourdieu an, die Gebrauchsweisen, die das fotografische Bild über sein reines Format hinaus zu eben diesem machen. Selbstverständlich bedeutet dies nicht, dass das digitale dem analogen Naturell gleichzusetzen wäre, sondern verdeutlicht die anhaltende Bedeutungsaufladung fotografischer Bilder, auch wenn diese ihre physische Existenz überwunden haben.

Dieser so erhaltene fotografische Wahrheitsglaube wird durch das Aufkommen der KI-Bilder ein zweites Mal erschüttert. Dabei ist die Verunsicherung gänzlich kalkuliert und schon im analog-digitalen Übergang angelegt. „Das Ganze des digitalen Bildes ist in Wirklichkeit ein Skeuomorphismus – sein Festhalten an den visu-

67
Charles Sanders Peirce, Die Kunst des Räsonierens. Kapitel II (1983), in: ders., *Semiotische Schriften. Band I*, hg. von Christian Kloesel und Helmut Pape, Frankfurt a. M. 1986, 191–201.

68
Beispielsweise hier: Wolfgang Hagen, Die Entropie der Fotografie. Skizzen zu einer Genealogie der digital-elektronischen Bildaufzeichnung, in: Herta Wolf (Hg.), *Paradigma der Fotografie*, Frankfurt a. M. 2015, 195–238, hier 233–235.

69
Rubinstein, Fotografie nach der Philosophie, 10.

70
W. J. T. Mitchell, Realismus im digitalen Bild, in: Hans Belting (Hg.), *Bilderfragen. Die Bildwissenschaften im Aufbruch*, München 2007, 237–256, hier 241.

ellen Konventionen der Fotografie ist schlichtweg eine Designent-
scheidung [...].“[71] Der Produktionsprozess generierter Bilder spitzt
diesen Umstand zu, denn das Bild hat sich weiter vom Referen-
ten entfernt, ohne dies visuell zu kennzeichnen und die visuelle
Konvention so zur Selbstreferenz gemacht. Wenn wir diesen Bild-
typus als Erweiterung des Fotografischen begreifen, ergibt sich
eine doppelte Entmachtung: Zum einen wird die Autorität des
Gesichts mitsamt seiner digitalen Kommunikationsstrategien unter-
wandert. Zum anderen wird hierbei das Wahrheitsversprechen des
Fotografischen weiter erodiert. Wie beschrieben haften den gene-
rierten Bildern zwar referentielle Artefakte an, doch diese sind
im Grunde gegenläufig zu dem, was der Fotografie als Wahrheit
zugesprochen wird: die Abbildung von Wirklichkeit. Sicherlich ist
dieser Anspruch in der Fototheorie lange schon überwunden, doch
in der alltäglichen Praxis ist die visuelle Abbildung der Wirklichkeit
noch das zentrale Argument der Fotografie. Keinesfalls meint das
einen naiven Glauben ans Bild – die Möglichkeit und Zugänglich-
keit von Manipulation sind allgemein bekannt –, sondern vielmehr
ein subtiles Versprechen von Authentizität, das dem Medium in sei-
nem digitalen Fluss weiter anhaftet und Beweiskraft zusichert. Von
dieser Verantwortung, so könnte man die Technologie als Chance
begreifen, kann die Fotografie nun endgültig entbunden werden.
Fotografie und Wahrheit sind keine sich bedingende Entitäten und
waren es nie. Sie können mit- und ohneeinander, Kausalität darf
hierbei aber niemals Voraussetzung sein, sondern muss stets das
Ergebnis individueller Aushandlung sein. Blicken wir historisch auf
das Fotografische, so ist eindeutig, dass sich die technischen und
formalen Parameter des Mediums ständig erweitern. In dieser Kon-
tinuität beanspruchen nun auch generierte Bilder ihren Platz.

VI. Das fotografische Erbe

Die strenge Formalisierung der generierten Porträts erinnert
zunächst an das, was Roland Meyer als *operative Porträts* herausge-
arbeitet hat. Sie „basieren auf Formaten, die unabhängig vom ein-
zelnen Bild und seinem Gegenstand die Produktion großer Mengen
von Bildern regulieren.“[72] Im Falle der generierten Porträts muss
jedoch noch einmal zu den Trainingsdaten differenziert werden.
Denn bevor das „Bild entsteht, sind dessen Koordinaten bereits
festgelegt: Die Abgebildeten begeben sich in einen Raum des Ver-
gleichs, in dem immer schon andere warten.“[73] Das mag rein for-
mal für die generierten Bilder gelten, doch ihre Trainingsdaten
sind zum Zwecke der Vergleichbarkeit erst nachträglich forma-

[71] Rubinstein, Fotografie nach der Philosophie, 15.

[72] Meyer, Operative Porträts, 65.

[73] Ebd.

lisiert und damit operationalisiert worden. In die entsprechende Form gebracht sind sie jedoch genau das: Vergleichsbilder für die rivalisierenden *Neural Networks*. Dass dies nicht im eigentlichen Sinne operativer Porträts ist, liegt auf der Hand. Denn während das operative Porträt eine wie auch immer geartete Identifizierbarkeit gewährleisten soll, verwässert die rein formale Reproduktion des Bildinhalts diese Kernforderung. Für das Porträt in seiner klassischen Form als individuelle Repräsentation muss ein ähnliches Fazit gezogen werden. Wurden die ursprünglichen Bilder auf Flickr noch mit dem Zweck der Vermittlung zwischen „Fremderfassung und Selbstrepräsentation"[74] produziert und gepostet, so können die darauf generierten Bilder dies natürlich nicht mehr leisten. Sie erfüllen eine generische Form, die ausreichend individuell ist, um nicht demaskiert zu werden, alle repräsentativen Attribute außerhalb des Gesichts aber ausspart. Rein formal erfüllen sie zwar die Erfassungsmerkmale von identifikationsdienlicher Fotografie, bleiben darüber hinaus aber ohne Funktionalität und kaum mehr als eine leere Hülle dieses Bildtypus. Der Status des Individuums hat sich in diesen Bildern zu dem einer „nichtexistente[n] Mischperson"[75] geändert, seine Individualität ist nicht mehr als eine folgenlose Implikation. Hans Belting beschreibt diese folgend:

> Wo ein Gesicht aus multiplen Gesichtszitaten zusammengesetzt werden kann, entsteht ein virtuelles Gesicht, das sich jeder Referenz auf einen natürlichen Träger, auf ein bestimmtes Gesicht entzieht. [...] Man könnte auch sagen: Es lassen sich Gesichter produzieren, die niemandem gehören, sondern nur noch als Bilder existieren.[76]

Diese vorrausschauende Beschreibung digitaler Porträts erfüllt sich mit den generierten mehr, als das 2013 erahnbar gewesen sein könnte. Das digitale Porträt als Maske beschreibend folgert er:

> Im Grunde ist die totale Maske keine Maske mehr, weil da nichts und niemand mehr ist, den sie repräsentiert oder maskiert. Ein digitales Gesicht ist als Bild ein Paradox, weil es die alte Aufgabe der Abbildung von sich weist und mit der Analogie zu einem realen Gesicht seinen historischen Bezug verliert.[77]

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[74]
Ebd., 391.

[75]
Richard Weihe, *Die Paradoxie der Maske. Geschichte einer Form*, München 2004, 296.

[76]
Belting, Faces, 296.

[77]
Ebd., 298.

Die Frage *wer* da maskiert wird, sofern wir davon ausgehen, dass fotografische Porträts immer eine Maskierung bedeuten,[78] hat sich von der individuellen auf die technische Ebene verschoben. Verschleiert nämlich wird ein gänzlich technischer Produktionsapparat durch die Maske fotografischer Erscheinung. Verstehen wird die Maske als „die Zurschaustellung einer Differenz und damit auch [als] ein Sinnbild für das Erkennen als Differenzieren"[79], so bedeutet dieses Erkennen eine Verschiebung auf der Bedeutungsebene.

Wird dem Bild die Maske entrissen und sein Ursprung als generiert markiert, schwenkt die Befragung des Individuellen ins Stellvertretende.

> Für Künstlerinnen und Künstler stellt sich jedoch immer wieder das Problem, wie Darstellungsaufgaben in Bezug auf das Gesicht ästhetisch zu lösen sind, ohne jene Gespenster wieder auferstehen zu lassen, die mit der Idee der Repräsentation unweigerlich verknüpft sind, wie etwa die Normativität von Aussehen und Geschlecht oder das Konzept der Identität.[80]

Als die Informatiker:innen nun mit der Erfindung Ian Goodfellows das Feld der Gesichtsproduktion betraten, schalteten sie dieses Problem zumindest theoretisch aus. Für die *GANs* existiert kein *Gender*, kein Alter und keine *Race*. Diese Konstrukte und Zustände existieren zwar in den Trainingsdaten, sind aber inhaltsleer, da sie zunächst ungelabelt bleiben. Ohne Bedeutungszuschreibung werden sie folglich als statistische Cluster erkannt und reproduziert. Die Lernarchitektur operiert so an den Erscheinungen statistischer Mehrheit, tut dies jedoch ohne binäre Erklärungsmuster. Menschliche Zuschreibungen können sich also gewissermaßen nicht erfüllen, denn die Bilder finden kein kausales Pendant in der Wirklichkeit. Strikter formuliert: Die inhaltsleere Wahrscheinlichkeitsberechnung ist für den technischen Lernprozess frei von biologischer und sozialer Eigenschaft und die einzig anwählbare Kategorie ist das „menschliche Gesicht". Das kategorisch intentionslose Bild kann durchaus als erfüllt verstanden werden, muss in der Realität allerdings an der Qualität der Trainingsdaten gemessen werden. Denn auch wenn die Technologie eine theoretische Gleichberechtigung verspricht, manifestiert sich in den generierten Bildern soziale Wirklichkeit.

Auffallend häufig blicken Gesichter, die ich als männlich kategorisiere, recht ernst, wohingegen die weiblichen von einem

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[78] Ebd., 120.

[79] Weihe, Die Paradoxie der Maske, 46.

[80] Ilka Becker, Verpasste Züge. Trockel, Prince, Ruff, in: Petra Löffler und Leander Scholz (Hg.), *Das Gesicht ist eine starke Organisation*, Köln 2004, 302–321, hier 304.

Lächeln gezeichnet sind. Die Sichtbarkeit solcher Geschlechterstereotypen lässt darauf schließen, dass sich aufgrund der ebenso geprägten Trainingsdaten von Flickr ein *Algorithmic Bias* gebildet hat.[81] Dieser verdinglicht sich weiter in den generierten Artefakten: Vor allem die weiblich gelesenen Gesichter tragen Schmuck, der in seiner artifiziellen Bildlichkeit wiederum auf den technischen Ursprung der Bilder schließen lässt. Dieser Bias hat den generierten Gesichtern eine soziale Wirklichkeit übergestülpt, welche wiederum ihre Geschichtslosigkeit in Frage stellt. Es muss hier festgestellt werden, dass der Output nur so gut sein kann, wie das Trainingsmaterial. Denn wenn dieses schon korrumpiert ist, setzt sich die Verschiebung in den *Hidden-Layers* der Lernarchitektur fest und reproduziert sich schlussendlich in den Bildern. Den größten Effekt auf die Qualität des Outputs haben Über- und Unterrepräsentationen definierbarer Gruppen.[82]

Eindrücklich belegt dies die Studie *AI-synthesized faces are indistinguishable from real faces and more trustworthy*.[83] Die wenig überraschende Erkenntnis dreier Experimente ist, dass die Bilder für die Partizipient:innen nicht zuverlässig von fotografischen Porträts unterscheidbar waren, sofern diese die gleichen formalen Parameter erfüllen.[84] Durch die Diversifizierung der Bilder in Alter, *Race* und *Gender* zeigte sich zudem, dass *weiße* Männer am unzuverlässigsten als generiert erkannt wurden, die Erklärung hierfür liegt schlicht in ihrer Überrepräsentation in den Trainingsdaten.[85] Dort wo mehr Daten zum Training vorhanden sind, präzisiert sich das *GAN* in seinem Output. Umgekehrt bedeutet hier die Unterrepräsentation eine stärkere Varianz in der Bildqualität. So reproduzieren sich Effekte von *Gender* und *Race*, insofern als dass Unter- und Überrepräsentation an diesen Parametern festzustellen sind, in den generierten Bildern.[86] Neben diesen durchaus erwartbaren Ergebnissen präsentiert die Studie ein verblüffendes Ergebnis: Die generierten Gesichter wurden als in höherem Maße *trustworthy*

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[81]
Zum *Algorithmic Bias* siehe auch: Meyer, Gesichtserkennung, 27–28.

[82]
Sophie J. Nightingale und Hany Farid, AI-synthesized faces are indistinguishable from real faces and more trustworthy, in: *PNAS* 119/8, 2022, 3.

[83]
Ebd.

[84]
Bei den Vergleichsbildern handelte es sich um den Trainingsdatensatz von *StyleGAN2*. Identisch waren deshalb: Auflösung, quadratischer Bildausschnitt, Position des Gesichts und insbesondere der Augen.

[85]
Nightingale und Farid, AI-synthesized faces, 1.

[86]
Ebd.

gelesen als die Gesichter auf den fotografischen Porträts.[87] Warum die Studienteilnehmer:innen in der Mehrzahl generierte Porträts als vertrauenswürdiger markierten, lässt sich im Detail bisher nicht erklären. Da mehr als subtile Implikationen Auslöser des überwiegend einheitlichen Verhaltens nicht sein können, ist ein Spekulieren darüber an dieser Stelle auch nur bedingt zielführend. Sinnvoller ist dagegen, auf die gemessene Ungleichheit in der Repräsentation zurückzukommen.

Der Abgleich qualitativer Übereinstimmung generierter Porträts mit dem menschlichen Gesicht ist stets Qualitätsmarker der Trainingsdaten. Umgekehrt kann der Diskriminator eine Norm definieren, die alles ablehnt, was unter bestimmten Gesichtspunkten von der Masse abweicht. Auch hier ist diese Varianz maßgeblich durch den Umfang und die Diversität der Trainingsdaten definiert. Die Gefahr ist allerdings, dass dies nur sichtbar wird, wenn die Gesamtheit der Trainingsdaten bekannt ist und abgeglichen werden kann. Ist dies nicht gewährleistet, können Marker und Identitäten schlichtweg unsichtbar werden, weil die Cluster für die Lernarchitektur zu insignifikant sind. Ähnlich subtil setzen sich diskriminierende Vorstellungen fort, die technisch in den Trainingsdaten eingeschrieben sind. Es ist mittlerweile hinlänglich belegt, dass die technische Geschichte der Fotografie nicht zuletzt eine der *weißen* Normiertheit ist:

> Die technische Prädisposition der Filmempfindlichkeit auf den Reflexionsgrad *weißer* Haut konnte in Einzelportraits von Schwarzen Menschen durch kompensatorische Maßnahmen wie Zusatzbeleuchtung bei der Aufnahme und anschließende labortechnische Feineinstellungen nach dem Prinzip von Versuch und Irrtum ausgeglichen werden.[88]

Die fotografische Darstellungsqualität Schwarzer Menschen war faktisch schlechter als die *weißer* Menschen, die normierter Ausgangspunkt der technischen Kalibrierung waren. Durch Bewusstsein um diesen Missstand und technischer Entwicklungen im Hinblick auf Film- und Sensorempfindlichkeit im Digitalen hat sich diese Normierung zwar deutlich abgeschwächt, jedoch nicht gänzlich aufgelöst. Durchaus finden sich die Effekte *weißer* Privilegierung in die schwer einsehbaren Bildproduktionsprozesse digitaler Kameras und den Algorithmen der Bildverarbeitung eingeschrie-

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[87]
Race spielte hierbei keine Rolle, weiblich gelesene Personen wurden jedoch als vertrauenswürdiger gewertet.

[88]
Jakob Schnetz, Beharrliche Apparate. Eine rassismuskritische Untersuchung weißer Normen in fotografischer Technologie und ihrer algorithmischen Nutzung, in: Rebecca Ramershoven und Simon Dickel (Hg.), *Alles Uns. Differenz, Identität, Repräsentation*, Münster 2022, 64–93, hier 69.

ben.[89] Notwendigerweise resultiert dies in ungleicher Repräsentation: „Neben der ikonografischen ist ebenso die technische Repräsentation Schwarzer Haut stets ein identitätspolitisches Moment, das sich gegenüber impliziten wie expliziten *weißen* Normen zu behaupten hat."[90] Diese in der technischen Blackbox digitaler Bildgebungstechnik verborgenen Normierungen setzen sich ungebrochen in die Lernarchitektur der *GANs* fort. Gewissermaßen erfährt die Normierung hier eine zweite Normalisierung, denn gemeinhin wird KI-Anwendungen ein hohes Maß an objektiver Datenproduktion zugesprochen. Dabei ist längst belegt, wenn auch weniger bekannt, dass Technologie alles andere als neutral ist:

> Die Schattenseite der ‚Innovation' und der verbesserten ‚Effizienz' automatisierter Technologien liegt darin, wie sie marginalisierte Gruppen – rassifizierte Menschen, Migrant:innen ohne Papiere, queere Communities und Menschen mit Behinderungen – kategorisieren und mit ihnen experimentieren. [91]

Basieren Entscheidungsprozesses auf den Empfehlungen künstlicher Intelligenz, so laufen diese Gefahr, in diskriminatorischen Praktiken zu resultieren. Denn wenn die Trainingsdaten schon Diskriminierungsmuster aufweisen, erfahren diese durch die maschinelle Auswertung nur Objektivierung und sorgen so für den Erhalt alter Macht- und Herrschaftssysteme.[92] Im Falle der generierten Porträts müssen wir anerkennen, dass das Gesicht politisch ist: Zum einen, weil schon die Trainingsdaten Ungleichheit in sich tragen, zum anderen aufgrund ihrer technologisierten Reproduktion.

Diese Erkenntnis erfährt ihre Gewichtung vor allem dann, wenn die jüngsten Fortschritte der *GAN*-Technologie miteinbezogen werden. Die frühe *StyleGAN*-Architektur, sowie die Bilder auf der Website *www.thispersondoesnotexist.com* operierten noch ohne Kategorien. Parameter wie *Gender*, Alter oder *Race* konnten nicht zur maschinellen Kategorisierung der produzierten Gesichter genutzt werden, denn zumindest auf der Nutzeroberfläche existierten diese Label nicht. Da nun die Kategorie „menschliches Gesicht" in einer Porträtsammlung trivial ist und die engste faktische Kategorie „Porträts von Flickr" nicht mehraussagend ist, sind

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[89]
Ebd., 81.

[90]
Ebd.

[91]
Sarah Chander, Datenrassismus. Eine neue Ära, in: *Netzpolitik.org*, 29.02.2020 (30.09.2023).

[92]
Folgende Bücher möchte ich hier zur Vertiefung empfehlen: Ruha Benjamin, *Race after Technology. Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*, Cambridge 2019. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Discriminating Data. Correlation, Neighborhoods, and the New Politics of Recognition*, Cambridge, MA 2021. Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression. How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*, New York 2018.

die Bilder intrinsisch als Typenbilder nicht zu gebrauchen. Dieses dennoch unentschlossene Stadium zwischen Individuum und Typ hat sich mittlerweile zugunsten des Typs verschoben. Als Typenbilder sind in der Fotografie solche zu verstehen, die stellvertretend für eine reale oder konstruierte Gruppe stehen und visuell eine Aussage über diese implizieren. Ein Musterbeispiel sind die von Francis Galton entwickelten Kompositfotografien. Universeller, doch in gleicher Fahrtrichtung ist das Werk *Antlitz der Zeit* (1929) von August Sander zu werten. Der Porträtfotograf versuchte durch Typenbilder einen visuellen Querschnitt der Gesellschaft zu erschaffen. Denn „wo er seine ‚Typen' [...] an ihrem Arbeitsplatz zeigt, präsentiert er uns [...] Figuren, die mitsamt ihrer Attribute als exemplarische Vertreter eines Berufsstandes posieren."[93] Auch kennen wir diese Bildargumentation aus dem kolonialistischen Kontext mit visuell rassistischen Implikationen sowie physiognomischen Bildbefragungen, wie sie nicht zuletzt im Dritten Reich Verwendung fanden. Es sind im Einzelbild angelegte Inszenierungen, die sich als Kollektiv vervollständigen und so universelle Aussagen provozieren. Anzunehmen, dass derlei fotografische Befragungen der Vergangenheit angehören würden, ist insbesondere im Kontext der KIs falsch, denn gerade im „Zeitalter von Big Data und Deep Learning erfahren längst überwunden geglaubte physiognomische Traditionen eine Renaissance".[94] Die hier diskutierten generierten Porträts erweckten den Anschein, derartige Kategorisierungen zu unterwandern, weil das Lernsystem zunächst ohne Labels operierte. Jedoch wird es wenig überraschen, dass das kategorische Labeln mittlerweile zur gängigen Praxis generierter Bilder gehört. Auf der Website *www.this-person-does-not-exist.com*, die eindeutig an die bisher analysierte Website *www.thispersondoesnotexist.com* angelehnt ist, können Porträts nach den Kategorien Alter, *Gender* (binär) und *Race* ausgewählt werden.[95] So erhebt sich das digitale Kollektivporträt zum Typenbild und die referenzlosen Gesichter werden zu Stellvertreter:innen der angewählten Kategorien. Dem alten fotografischen Typenfetisch folgend haben die Entwickler:innen das technologische Potential grenzenloser Gesichter beendet. Bedenken wir die zuvor erörterten strukturellen Probleme der Bildgebungstechnik, sollten wir vorsichtig sein, mit ebendiesen Kategorien zu arbeiten. Immerhin setzen sich subtil die realen Machtverhältnisse in den generierten Porträts fort. Spätestens hier ist klar, dass diese

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[93] Meyer, Operative Porträts, 258.

[94] Ders., Gesichtserkennung, 34–35.

[95] Eine vergleichbare Website ist Generated.Photos. Bei beiden Websites muss man für Bildproduktion ohne Wasserzeichen bezahlen.

Bilder keinesfalls so frei von Bezügen zur existierenden Welt sind, wie ich ihnen eingangs unterstellt habe.[96]

ANHANG

— https://freehookup.dating/online-dating/us/texas/fort-worth/divorced/single.php
— https://www.sexlugar.es/gays/linares.html
— https://flirthookup.dating/catholic-singles-fl-vero_beach.html
— https://pistolasdemasaje.top/ekupuz/
— https://melhores-aplicativos.com/305/reunioes-ringcentral
— https://www.realforexreviews.com/author/brianbgrounds
— https://freehookup.dating/online-dating/us/north-carolina/durham/jewish/single.php
— https://besthookup.dating/member338051.htm
— https://www.purobrillo.es/
— https://besthookup.dating/member114524.htm
— https://tuinplanten.wiki/2435/ongedierte-dat-op-taxusbomen-kan-voorkomen
— https://datehookup.dating/user-180620909.htm
— https://datehookup.dating/singles-la-farmerville.htm
— https://datehookup.dating/Single-Men-PA-Jeannette.htm
— https://melhores-aplicativos.com/9954/ring4
— http://www.aytoloja.org/jforum/user/profile/140311.page;jsessionid=1B30D1DFCAFACD95B8E05096C5E20267
— https://thaiwomen.dating/Nillawan
— http://bteeosw.online/page/londyn-letiste-gatwick/.

Paul Werling machte seinen Bachelor in Kunstgeschichte, Filmwissenschaft und Soziologie an der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena. 2023 schloss er den Master im Fach *Photography Studies and Research* an der Folkwang Universität der Künste in Essen ab. Thematisch beschäftigt er sich mit digitalen Aspekten des Fotografischen sowie Fotografie im Kontext von Unrechtsregimen.

REVIEWS
REZENSIONEN

BRIGITTE BUETTNER, *THE MINERAL AND THE VISUAL. PRECIOUS STONES IN MEDIEVAL SECULAR CULTURE*
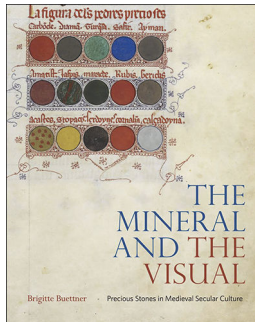
Rezensiert von
Gia Toussaint

Wertvolle Steine, ihre Bedeutung und Wahrnehmung, beschäftigen Brigitte Buettner seit langem. Nach mehreren Aufsätzen zu diesem unerschöpflichen Thema darf das vorliegende Werk als Summe ihrer weit ausgreifenden Forschungen angesehen werden. Edelsteine und Mineralien sind im Diskurs der kunstgeschichtlichen Mediävistik der letzten Jahre gut verankert, häufig im Kontext von Goldschmiedearbeiten, die, wenig überraschend, aus der Sakralkunst stammen. Brigitte Buettner wählt einen anderen Zugriff auf den Gegenstand, nämlich *medieval secular culture*, programmatisch im Untertitel genannt. *Secular*, weltlich, säkular, nicht *sacer* oder *spiritalis,* ist der Blickwinkel, unter dem Mineralien in ihrer schönsten Ausprägung betrachtet werden, als „precious stones". Damit setzt sich Buettner bewusst von einem Meilenstein der Edelsteinforschung ab, dem 1977 erschienenen Werk von Christel Meier, *Gemma spiritalis. Methode und Gebrauch der Edelsteinallegorese vom frühen Christentum bis ins 18. Jahrhundert*, das zweifelsohne auch bald fünfzig Jahre nach der Veröffentlichung seinen Platz als Standard-

werk behaupten kann.[1] Dieses materialreiche und quellengesättigte Werk verstand sich als erster Teil eines auf zwei Teile konzipierten Werks auf dessen zweiten Teil vergeblich gewartet wird. Man wird nicht fehlgehen, *The Mineral and the Visual* als *Gemma saecularis* und unausgesprochenes Pendant zu *Gemma spiritalis* zu lesen. Methodisch unterscheiden sich beide Werke: Während Meier enzyklopädisch vorgeht, wählt Buettner einen exemplarischen Zugang.

Auch wenn vormoderne Lapidarien, das wird deutlich, qualitativ nicht zwischen Mineralien, Fossilien, Korallen, Perlen, Halbedelsteinen und Edelsteinen unterscheiden und sogar fiktive Steine gleichrangig einbeziehen (S. 2–6), beschäftigt sich Buettner letztlich vor allem mit dem, was uns heute als Edelsteine geläufig ist. Der profane Kontext erfordert die Betonung des Mineralischen und die Behandlung der wertvollen Steine als physische Objekte, ohne deren kulturelle, soziale und epistemologische Rolle aus den Augen zu verlieren (S. 12).

In drei thematischen Blöcken zu je drei Kapiteln exemplifiziert Buettner ihren Ansatz: 1. *Jeweled Crowns, Mineralized Kingship*, 2. *Lapidary Knowledge in Word and Image* und 3. *Geographies of Mineral Marvels, Economies of Mineral Assets*. Was bieten diese drei auf den ersten Blick recht unverbunden nebeneinander gestellten Teile, und wie wirken sie zusammen?

Besonders der erste Teil, der sich mit juwelenbesetzten Kronen beschäftigt, irritiert zunächst, drängt sich doch sofort der Akt der Krönung in den Vordergrund, dessen sakrale Komponente evident ist. Ob man diesen Aspekt ausblenden kann? Buettner hat sich dafür entschieden und betrachtet die Krone als materielles Objekt. Damit ist sie zwar aus ihrem funktionalen Kontext gerissen, lässt aber das Objekt als Artefakt und die darauf applizierten Edelsteine als Mineralien umso deutlicher in den Vordergrund treten. Diese dem *material turn* geschuldete Betrachtungsweise überzeugt mal mehr, mal weniger. Wie schwierig es ist, das Säkulare vom Sakralen zu trennen, zeigt sich an der etwas kühnen, das Kapitel einleitenden These: „This singular jewel crystallized the very concept of royal authority. As such, it stood as proof of the consubstantiality of sovereign body and mineral materiality – that is, of an essential bond between king, crown, and precious stones" (S. 26). Mit ‚Wesensgleichheit' (consubstantiality) wird ein Begriff aufgerufen, der eine theologisch-ontologische Dimension berührt – Gottvater ist wesensgleich mit dem Sohn –, die so sicher nicht gemeint sein kann und ungewollt ins sakrale Fahrwasser führt. Der königliche Körper ist nicht wesensgleich mit mineralischer Materialität, allenfalls handelt es sich um eine metaphorische Verbindung.

Instruktiv und gut aufbereitet sind die folgenden Abschnitte zu den *Regalia*, speziell zur Krone als Herrschaftszeichen, von denen jene englischsprachige Leserschaft profitieren wird, der die umfangreiche deutschsprachige Forschung hinter der Sprachbarri-

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[1] Inzwischen ist das Buch, das im Wilhelm Fink Verlag (München) publiziert wurde, digitalisiert (25.10.2023).

ere verborgen bleibt. Eingespielt wird das Thema mit der wohl prominentesten Krone des Mittelalters, der Reichskrone (Wien, Kunsthistorisches Museum), und ihrem kostbaren Edelsteinbesatz, in dessen Zentrum der Leitstein steht. In der Mitte der Krone angebracht, bildet das Stirnjuwel, der sogenannte Waise, nicht nur einen Blickfang, er hat es zu Berühmtheit gebracht. Der wegen seiner Einzigartigkeit und Leuchtkraft „Waise" (*orphanus*) genannte Stein ging Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts verloren und wurde durch einen Saphir ersetzt, dessen Größe jedoch die Fassung nicht ausfüllt und so das Fehlende erkennen lässt. Welchen Stellenwert der Waise hat, besingt Walther von der Vogelweide (gest. 1229), wenn er ihn synekdochisch mit der Krone gleichsetzt (S. 33). Walther geht sogar so weit, den Stein und seinen Träger, Philipp von Schwaben, in gegenseitiger Strahlkraft zu verbinden: *Si liuhtent beide ein ander an, daz edel gesteine wider den jungen süezen man.* Waise und König beleuchten sich in ihrer (herrscherlichen) Kraft. Und wenig später ergänzt Albertus Magnus in seiner Beschreibung des Steins: „It is said to preserve the royal honour" (S. 34; *fertur autem quod honorem servat regalem*). Es ist bedauerlich, dass diese Quellen (wie im gesamten Buch) nicht in der Originalsprache wiedergegeben werden – besonders dann, wenn in der Fußnote angemerkt wird, dass die Übersetzung modifiziert wurde (Anm. 20, S. 211); in einer wissenschaftlichen Publikation sollten Originalzitate *de rigueur* sein.

Erhellend ist der nun folgende Einblick in die Geschichte der Krone, angefangen bei Konstantin dem Großen, auf den sowohl das Gemmenkreuz als auch das edelsteingeschmückte Diadem zurückgehen, aus dem sich die Kronenform entwickelt hat; in ihrer wohl elaboriertesten Form ist sie in den Mosaiken des Kaiserpaars Theodora und Justinian in Ravenna (San Vitale) dokumentiert. Die Allianz von Edelsteinen und Krone ist seit der Spätantike untrennbar mit dem Herrscher verbunden.

Ein gewaltiger zeitlicher Sprung führt im nächsten Abschnitt ins Spätmittelalter, um die Reichweite „of mineral visuality in the performance of kingship" (S. 47) auszuloten. Zwei Kronen stehen im Mittelpunkt der Betrachtung: die kastilische Krone von König Sancho IV. (gest. 1295) und die böhmische Krone Königs Karl IV. (gest. 1378). Beide Kronen werden in den zeitgenössischen Kontext gestellt: Bei Sancho ist es eine Erziehungsschrift (*Castigos e documentos para bien vivir*), die er für seinen Sohn und Thronfolger schreiben ließ; sie bringt die Charakteristika der in die Krone implementierten Edelsteine mit königlichen Tugenden wie Weisheit und Milde in Zusammenhang (S. 52). Mit „Bohemian mineral ecstasies" (S. 55) ist der Ton gesetzt, der direkt zu Karl IV., der Wenzelskrone und Karlstein führt, in dessen Wänden, besonders in der Heilig-Kreuz-Kapelle, Unmengen von Achaten und anderen kostbaren Steinen verbaut wurden: „Charles IV. profoundly felt mineral piety" (S. 65), so charakterisiert Buettner die Obsession dieses Herrschers.

Der mittlere Teil des Buches befasst sich mit gelehrten Wissensbüchern, nämlich Lapidarien, Steinbüchern, in denen vormodernes Steinwissen zusammengefasst wurde. Anders als Bestia-

rien fristen Lapidarien ein Schattendasein in kunsthistorischer Forschung, und es ist das Verdienst dieser Studie, Licht in diese weit verstreute Quellengattung zu bringen. Nach einem kurzen Blick auf Geschichte und Genese von Lapidarien stehen erneut Könige, sowohl fiktive als auch reale, im Mittelpunkt. Ausgangspunkt ist der einflussreiche *Liber lapidum* des Marbod von Rennes (gest. 1123). Dieses Steinbuch beschreibt ausführlich die überraschenden Eigenschaften von Edelsteinen. Der Smaragd zum Beispiel ist in der Lage, verborgene Geheimnisse aufzudecken oder bei ehrfürchtiger Behandlung den Wohlstand zu mehren (S. 77). Eine der von Marbod verwendeten Quellen ist eine lateinische Fassung des Damigeron-Evax-Lapidariums, das angeblich auf einen König Evax von Arabien zurückgeht, der auf Veranlassung des Kaisers Nero dieses Buch geschrieben habe. Der Dialog zwischen Nero und Evax findet eine Entsprechung in einem Lapidarium aus dem 13. Jahrhundert, dem volkssprachigen französischen *Livre de Sidrac*, der sich als Dialog zwischen dem Gelehrten Sidrac und einem König Boctus gibt. Während eine Illumination Sidrac zeigt, wie er dem König anhand einer Scheibe mit eingelassenen Edelsteinen deren Eigenschaften erklärt (S. 80, Abb. 31), relativiert diese Schrift zugleich die Bedeutung der Edelsteine, indem sie die Steine für eigentlich überflüssig erklärt, gebe es doch nur einen einzigen für die Menschheit unentbehrlichen Stein: den Mahlstein für die Zubereitung von Mehl (S. 81). Der *Livre de Sidrac* erwies sich als außerordentlich einflussreich und findet ein Echo in einem unter Alfons X. (dem Weisen) entstandenen *Libro del Lapidario*, der in einer kostbar überlieferten Handschrift des 13. Jahrhunderts erhalten ist. Seine zentrale Aussage ist die Klassifizierung der „geological objects as products of physical exertion and acts of intellection alike" (S. 85); außerdem werden die Steine in den Kontext der Wirkung von Sternkonstellationen des Tierkreises gestellt.

So anregend sich das alles liest, ohne Vorkenntnisse sind diese Ausführungen kaum verständlich. Vieles wird nicht erklärt, Wissen vorausgesetzt. Größere Zusammenhänge, die etwa dieses Kapitel mit den ersteren über Königtum und Edelsteine in Verbindung bringen, sucht man vergebens; eher stehen interessante Aufsätze unverbunden nebeneinander. Buettners Materialfülle ist beeindruckend, man wünschte sich, sie wäre einen Schritt weiter gegangen, um den Komplex „Königtum und Edelsteine" in seiner ganzen Vielfalt auf den Begriff zu bringen.

Die nächsten sehr anschaulichen Kapitel wenden sich den chromatischen Qualitäten der Steine sowie geschnittenen Steinen zu. Mit Vergnügen liest man die Ausführungen zu *Breviari d'amour*-Handschriften und erfährt nicht nur etwas über die verschiedenartigen Darstellungen von Edelsteinen, sondern ihren komplexen Beziehungszusammenhang: „In the Breviari, love acts as a universal ligament that connects the human to the divine, earth to heaven, women to men, and stones to stars" (S. 94). Lapidarien sind nicht selten systematische Schriften, die Steinen Eigenarten zuordnen, die sich an ihre Farbigkeit knüpfen und geradezu therapeutisch wir-

ken können, gemäß dem Grundsatz: „all treatment is applied by use either of opposites or of similarities", das heißt, gelbe Steine zum Beispiel sind wie geschaffen gegen den Überfluss gelber Galle (S. 103), rote Steine hingegen wirken gegen Krankheiten des Blutes (S. 105). Dass Edelsteine auch für magische Praktiken verwendet wurden, ist nicht mehr verwunderlich. Beeindruckende Illustrationen bietet Jacob van Maerlants *Der naturen bloeme*, die zeigt, wie mit Hilfe eines Chrysoliths ein Dämon in Schach gehalten wird (S. 119, Abb. 67). Buettners Quellenkenntnis, insbesondere was illuminierte Handschriften betrifft, ist bestechend und ein großer Gewinn für die Forschung. Gleiches gilt auch für ihre Expertise geschnittener Steine wie Gemmen, oft antiken Ursprungs. Nach mittelalterlicher Auffassung vermochten die gravierten Bilder die Kraft der Steine bis zu hundertfach zu steigern, oder, wie der Dichter Volmar es ausdrückte: „plain stones without images are no more useful than wind" (S. 126).

Im Mittelpunkt des dritten und letzten großen thematischen Blocks stehen illustrierte Reiseberichte tatsächlicher und imaginärer Reisen. Ihre umfangreiche Handschriftenüberlieferung ist eine sprudelnde Quelle, um mehr über die Herkunft der Steine und ihre weitgespannten, über Europa und das Heilige Land hinaus bis in den Fernen Osten und Afrika reichenden Handelsnetze zu erfahren. An Schilderungen mineralischer Prachtentfaltung ist ein ca. 1165–1170 verfasster Brief des mythischen, in Ostasien lokalisierten Priesterkönigs Johannes kaum zu überbieten (S. 152). Auch wenn es sich bei dem oft kopierten und einflussreichen Brief um eine mittelalterliche Fälschung handelt, ist er ein Zeugnis des „headiest mineral myth-making exercise of the entire medieval period" (S. 152). Die im Brief beschriebenen edelsteinhaltigen Flüsse und gold- und kristallstarrenden Paläste erregten die Gemüter der Zeit. Noch hundert Jahre später beeinflusste der weitverbreitete Brief des Priesters Johannes das *Devisement du monde* Marco Polos, doch ist im *Devisement* ein Reisender beschrieben, der den Bergbau erlebt und Händler, die den Wert des Edelsteins als Ware kennen. Eine weitere breit rezipierte Schrift, die abenteuerlichen Reisen des Jean de Mandeville, führt schließlich zum Ganges und dem edelsteinführenden Nil. Texte wie diese flossen im 15. Jahrhundert im *Livre des merveilles* (Buch der Wunder) zusammen, einem Werk, dessen prachtvollste Handschrift vom Boucicaut-Meister illustriert wurde und in den Besitz von Jean de Berry gelangte. Ebenso ferne wie fantastische Orte künden von paradiesischen Edelsteinvorkommen, zum Beispiel in Taprobana, dem heutigen Sri Lanka: Kostbar illuminiert, breitet der *Livre des merveilles* ein „gem-rich arcadia" (S. 172, Abb. 79) aus, wo Edelsteine und Perlen verstreut am Strand liegen und mühelos eingesammelt werden können. Beeindruckend und kenntnisreich beschreibt Buettner anhand der Bild- und Textquellen das Ernten, Schürfen, Tauschen, Befühlen und Kaufen der Edelsteine, und nicht nur das: Alle, die zu diesem Werk greifen, bekommen zudem Einblicke in vormoderne Vorstellungen von fernen Ländern und damit verknüpftes Naturwissen. Dieser letzte

Teil des Buches liest sich am homogensten und ist sicher auch der innovativste, weil verstreute Reiseberichte unter den Aspekten der „mineral marvels" und „economies of mineral assets" (S. 149) zusammengeführt werden.

Insgesamt besticht das Buch durch seine Materialfülle, insbesondere aus schwer zugänglichen Handschriften. Zwar bildet jeder der drei großen Themenblöcke eine Einheit für sich, doch bietet sich am Ende ein äußerst anregender Gesamteindruck. Auch wenn der erste Teil über „mineralized kingship" nicht ganz überzeugen kann, die anderen Teile können es umso mehr. Buettner öffnet der kommenden Forschung Perspektiven, die über einen weltlichen Deutungshorizont der reinen Materialität und Naturwissen weit hinausgehen – eine vorzügliche Ergänzung zu *Gemma spiritalis*.

ERIN BENAY, *ITALY BY WAY OF INDIA. TRANSLATING ART AND DEVOTION IN THE EARLY MODERN WORLD*

Turnhout: Brepols 2022, iv + 202 pages with 120 color ill. and 2 maps, ISBN 978-1-912554-77-5 (Hardback).
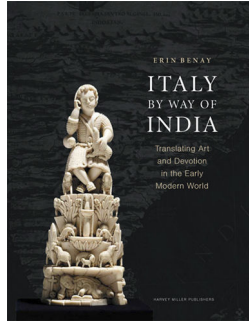
Reviewed by
Urte Krass

Erin Benay (just like the reviewer) first studied Italian art of the early modern period and then dared to broaden her horizons to India. The author now presents a book that bridges the gap between the two. The figure whose story allows her to take this step is the apostle St. Thomas. Benay has previously dealt with his representation in Italian painting, and I strongly suspect that during her study of the iconography of Doubting Thomas in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century art, she realized that the Indian history of the apostle's veneration and visualization was largely unexplored. The present book brings together for the first time the two Thomases: the one whose body is said to have been in Italy, in Ortona, since the thirteenth century, and the one who did missionary work in southern India in the first century, who is venerated there to this day by the so-called Thomas Christians, and whose place of death, as well as the location of his relics, is in Mylapore on the Coromandel Coast.

The book is an eye opener. For even though the history of the Thomas Christians is well known and researched (above all, Ines G. Županov and István Perczel have published fundamental studies), no investigation has yet been undertaken to bring their existence

into connection with the veneration of St. Thomas in Europe and specifically in Italy. The author seems to have turned the kaleidoscope – which for a very long time had produced a certain pattern – just a little further, so that all the colorful plates and set pieces could produce a completely new picture. Erin Benay deals explicitly and in depth with the visual and material culture of the Indian Thomas Christians. In doing so, one of her greatest achievements is to destabilize Goa as a center of Christian art in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is remarkable that we Western art historians, while studying the entanglements between continents and cultures in the early modern period, have long worked (in the wake of Dipesh Chakrabarty) to provincialize Europe and decentralize Rome (or, respectively, Lisbon or Madrid), but at the same time, our research has re-established other centers: thus, art historians who deal with artifacts and objects from the Portuguese Estádo da India usually put the focus on Goa as the capital of the Portuguese colonial empire – an empire that consisted of loosely connected ports and fortifications along the coasts between East Africa and East and Southeast Asia. While Goa was indeed a main hub for the movement of goods and objects of all kinds, Erin Benay emphatically reminds us that Christian faith and art are rooted in the land itself, not in Goa, but on the Malabar and Coromandel coasts, the regions where Thomas Christians were located. Christian faith and art did not first arrive in India with the Portuguese in 1498 but had existed there for many centuries, probably since the middle of the first century, when the apostle Thomas began his missionary work on the subcontinent. We have known this for a long time, but the consistency with which the author now makes this fact strong and reconstructs its slow percolation in Italy from Pliny to Rubens is impressive.

In her introduction, Benay outlines the mechanisms of translation and mistranslation of what "India" meant to Europeans at different times. Although the relics of St. Thomas were believed to be kept in Italy since the thirteenth century, Ortona has never been a famous pilgrimage site. On the contrary, it was soon known that the venerated body of the apostle was buried in India. Travelers since the thirteenth century wrote about it, Marco Polo being the earliest of them. Looking at the Indian cult of St. Thomas leads the author to question art historical paradigms that assume that Christian art was produced in India primarily for export to Europe. The fact that Goa served as the capital of the Estádo da India from 1530, was the seat of the archbishop, and was a place where many Christian churches were newly built in the sixteenth century has led to a better documentation of Christian art there and subsequently to the phenomenon that this Goan art and architecture has been much more intensively researched than other types of Christian art production in India. Erin Benay, however, is concerned specifically with the "indigenous Christian art in India" that has managed to preserve its own pluralistic identity through the incorporation of "Hindu motifs and ideology" (p. 22), even after centuries of domination by the newly arrived Roman Catholic Christians.

In the first chapter ("Saint Thomas and the Making of Christianity in Southern India"), Benay demonstrates the conflation in various objects of local and canonical traditions associated with St. Thomas. The churches of the Thomas Christians in Kerala differ from churches in Goa, integrating more Hindu architectural and decorative elements like elaborate gateways, stone lamps, flagpoles of different materials, palms, lotuses, elephants, and the crocodile-like *makaras* into their exterior and interior design. Murals as well as wood and stone sculptures such as monumental granite crosses all attest to a longstanding permeability of this art and church decoration in relation to the visual and material cultures found in and around Hindu temples. This first chapter concisely tells the complex story of the Thomas Christians, and in all brevity, the author succeeds very well in introducing the peculiarities of their art.

The transition to the second chapter ("Indian Christian Art in the Age of Colonialism") is somewhat abrupt, because now the focus shifts to artworks whose origins are mostly assumed to be in Goa.[1] These so-called "rockeries" are carved from ivory and show the Christ Child as the Good Shepherd sitting on a rock that is interspersed with caves inhabited by various biblical figures as well as tame and wild animals. It is not clear, however, if and how these objects, according to Benay, are supposed to be related to the art of the Thomas Christians. The Author does not make use of the fundamental text by Alberto Saviello who has related important Mylapore sites to the artifacts.[2] Specifically, he has convincingly associated the spring emerging at *Monte pequeno* with the spring in the ivory rockeries. Had this thesis been made fruitful, it would have provided a chance to connect these artifacts no longer only with Goa, but to try to argue for a connection to the Indian Thomas Christians and their holy places and iconographies. Saviello's two-part article would have also provided an excellent basis for placing the objects within the context of a pluralistic environment, even including two different Christian cults. Furthermore, Benay's subchapter on "Devotional Objects for Domestic Use" lacks reference to the thesis first formulated by Marsha Gail Olson that these sculptures, which could be assembled and disassembled, were most probably used publicly for didactic purposes during sermons and missionary teaching. Benay's reference to Indian antecedents for the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century ivory carvings is actually a step forward

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[1] Even though researchers are no longer so certain of this. It has been pointed out that in the 1680s, ivory rockeries were delivered from Diu to Goa. See Maria Cristina Osswald, God Bless Port Cities! The Ivory Sculpture of the Good Shepherd between East and West, in: Cátia A. P. Antunes and Amélia Polónia (eds.), *Seaports in the First Global Age. Portuguese Agents, Networks and Interactions (1500–1800)*, Porto 2017, 351–368, here 354, as well as Alberto Saviello, Transzendenz in transkultureller Perspektive. Die indo-portugiesischen Elfenbeinfiguren des "Guten Hirten", Part II, in: *Indo-Asiatische Zeitschrift* 17, 2013, 57–70, here 57.

[2] Alberto Saviello, Transzendenz in transkultureller Perspektive. Die indo-portugiesischen Elfenbeinfiguren des "Guten Hirten", Part I, in: *Indo-Asiatische Zeitschrift* 16, 2012, 59–73, here 66; id., Transzendenz in transkultureller Perspektive, Part II.

in the study of these objects: she points to comparable productions in Kashmir, Orissa, and in the Nayak dynasty in Madurai, which for two centuries from 1529 onwards reigned most of what today is Tamil Nadu. While Kashmir is not entirely convincing as a possible precursor because it is too far away in time (900 years) and space, the Orissa and the Nayak parallels make sense. The remainder of this second chapter is again concerned with works associated with the Thomas Christians, namely baptismal fonts made by sculptors who also and simultaneously produced works of art for Hindu temples and monuments, which is why these objects are "in fact more aesthetically Indian than they are European" (p. 64). Benay then convincingly relates a group of "indigenized" Christian liturgical vessels, namely monstrances and chalices with bells, to the Hindu practice of *darśan* – the auspicious sight of an image of a deity – which includes the use of a gong or a bell. It would have been interesting to know where Benay suspects is the place of origin of these goldsmithing works. Were they made in Goa, or were there also goldsmiths among the communities of Thomas Christians? And are the vessels made of Japanese silver or is it already silver from Potosì in Spanish Peru, which began its global success story in the middle of the sixteenth century? Broadening the view to the possibility of global material entanglements through raw material flows would have provided another chance to highlight the particularities of the different kinds of Christian art in India: the wooden and stone artworks of the Thomas Christians described were all made from local materials. If the ivory and goldsmithing work associated with Goa was made with foreign materials (ivory from Africa, silver from Japan or Spanish Peru), then a hypothesis could perhaps be formulated that the art of the Thomas Christians was permeable both iconographically and stylistically, but not in terms of the material used.

The third chapter ("Possessing India") turns the gaze back towards Europe and to the gradual acquisition of knowledge about India. Benay first looks at the travel accounts that were accessible to an Italian readership in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and whose authors situate the Thomas Christians correctly on both coasts of South India and report also the existence of the apostle's tomb on the Coromandel Coast. Knowledge of the existence of this Christian pilgrimage site at Mylapore soon mingled in the imaginations of Italian collectors and scholars with knowledge of the trade routes running through the same regions. Objects, goods, and other items from India (spices, animals, gems, and plants, as well as ivory sculptures from Goa, tortoiseshell boxes from Gujarat, or silk-and-cotton colchas from Bengal) came to Italy and some of these imported goods ended up in collections. Benay asks to what extent these things were able to alter Europeans' cultural imagination in ways that differed from the previously known texts. She postulates a shift from the textual to a material construction of knowledge about Indian customs, flora, fauna, and geography. The generation of knowledge through things, according to Benay, corresponded to

"more experiential modes of faith" as propagated by Ignatius of Loyola or Carlo Borromeo, among others (p. 120). Benay then looks at where such things from India were kept at the Medici court in Florence: the *Guardaroba Nova* set up in the 1560s by Cosimo I de' Medici and the *Studiolo* of Francesco I de' Medici, which was completed around 1570. In the former, things were contextualized by maps on the cabinet doors that opened to the objects; in the latter, narrative paintings visualized and, in some ways, made tangible the Indian origin of the objects presumably kept behind them – Benay picks out the case of diamond mining in India as painted by Maso da San Friano. According to the author, it was the Medici who, through accumulating things from India, did "important epistemological work" (p. 98) by placing tangible analogies in the form of things alongside the previously existing textual collections of knowledge and, moreover, by inserting the apostle's tomb into the idea of India. That the objects themselves, not just their recipients, generated meaning remains a beautiful, but very vague idea that cannot be verified. Thus, instead of trying to make thing theory fruitful for the topic, the author could have engaged more with the individual objects, described them in more detail, taken more seriously the materials and techniques used in each case.[3] To understand the *studiolo*, or at least the wall with the diamond mining painting, a consideration of the entire wall and the inclusion of the ceiling iconographies would have been helpful.[4] Furthermore, it is not clear on what criteria Benay based her selection of objects from the Medici collections (tortoiseshell box, lapis lazuli pitcher, textile *kalamkari* hanging, ivory sculptures of the Christ Child and the Virgin Mary). A paragraph on the general character of the Medici collection of Indian objects would have helped orient the reader. The Medici collections themselves remain strangely pale after reading this chapter, probably because the author's focus is to trace the inscription of knowledge of the Indian Thomas Christians in the dazzling luxury objects.

The fourth chapter ("An Indian Saint in Italy") develops again a depth and a pull. It is about the attempts of sixteenth-century Europeans/Italians to reconcile the two competing Thomas traditions. All through the sixteenth century, even after the Portuguese had long rediscovered the site of the apostle's martyrdom in Mylapore and informed the world of it, texts continued to be published in Rome confirming the presence of the relics in Ortona. Only towards the end of the sixteenth century were books published that fixed the knowledge of St. Thomas's presence in India permanently, correcting the misconception that Thomas's relics were to be found

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For the tortoiseshell boxes, Hugo Miguel Crespo, *Jewels from the India Run* (exh. cat. Museu do Oriente, Lisbon), ed. by Maria Manuela d'Oliveira Martins, Lisbon 2015, 63–72, has added new insights about the material used, the production, and the local context.

[4]

Also helpful would have been recourse to Kim Siebenhüner, *Die Spur der Juwelen. Materielle Kultur und transkontinentale Verbindungen zwischen Indien und Europa in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Cologne 2018.

in Italy and adding numerous details to the narrative of the saint's martyrdom in India. Traveling people and traveling objects ultimately ensured the demise of the Italian St. Thomas pilgrimage site. In Europe, Thomas continued to be known primarily for his incredulity. Images of the Doubting Thomas who places his finger in Christ's side wound were widespread in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries while other scenes of his *vita* were surprisingly rarely depicted. Benay discusses two Italian paintings of the mid-sixteenth century which show the apostle's death in India by the lance of a Brahmin. In both examples, the martyrdom takes place among Roman classical architecture. Only Peter Paul Rubens in 1638 imagines 'Indian' architecture for the scene and integrates an Indonesian *kris* idol into his composition.

In the book's conclusion, Benay looks ahead to the period of British and French colonial dominance in India, in which knowledge of the apostle's burial place in India was more widely disseminated, and to the present time and the strategies of both the Roman and Thomas Christian churches to cherish their faith. Indian Thomas Christians still practice their Malayali rites in the language of Kerala – that is, Malayalam – despite centuries of being controlled and curtailed by Portugal and Rome. Loss of the language through translation would have entailed the loss of identity and indigenous culture, as the Syro-Malabar Church has clearly stated. Furthermore, especially at a time when non-Hindu religions are being suppressed in India, the author argues, it is more important than ever to point to the agency of the Thomas Christians in their encounters with Portuguese rulers and merchants, Jesuits, and other extended arms of the Roman Church. Benay's attentive attitude is evident in her closing remarks, and, as can be seen from her internet presence, she is also an active representative of a political and publicly engaged art history.

This important book could have developed even greater radiance if the illustration apparatus had been considered with greater care. Benay brings new photographs into play and thus expands our visual archive of the art of St. Thomas Christians. However, most of these pictures are printed extremely small. Thankfully, the author provides in few but important cases sketches she made herself of archways and bases whose iconographies cannot be deciphered in the photos. Nevertheless, one wonders, for example, where the silver sea creatures (*makaras*) and the skirted warriors that the author describes are to be found in the monstrances in Fig. 57.[5]

Finally, I would like to add the observation that it seems important at times to think about the progression of time, meaning to keep in mind that conditions in the areas studied have evolved and sometimes changed significantly over time. Around 1600 at the latest, and thus one hundred years after the arrival of the Portuguese in India, the fronts of "European Christians" and freshly converted

[5] Errors and confusion related to several figures (e.g., Figs. 72 and 79) are also apparent.

Indians no longer existed in such clear distinction. The Brahmin caste had managed to rise within the Catholic clerical structure, and it was they who stood in the pulpits at the bottom of which carved hybrid creatures such as *nagas* animated the audience to constant acts of translations (and reverse translations).[6] The binary model Benay brings to bear, and in which "Christian patrons and missionaries" meet "Indian artists and converts" (p. 89), soon evolved and complicated. The conclusion that can perhaps be formulated at this point, therefore, is that everything is still even more complicated than assumed. We can always turn the kaleidoscope a little further, and the picture will change again.

The book accomplishes a great deal: Erin Benay introduces for the first time the visual and material culture of the St. Thomas Christians into our thinking of an entangled early modern art history. In the process, she analyzes previously rarely if ever looked-at wall paintings, altar frames, wooden church ceilings, granite monumental crosses, goldsmith liturgical objects, and painted alms boxes. And in analyzing the artworks of both the Thomas Christians and the "newly arrived" Christians based in the "center" of Goa, the author always considers the agency of the local artists and refrains from accepting, as is often the case, that indigenous iconographies and stylistic elements are merely incidental byproducts or decorative fillers of Christian artworks. With equal emphasis the author contrasts the much-invoked Jesuit practice of accommodation with the agency of *Indian* Christian art. The book stimulates new thinking about the concept of "Indo-Portuguese art" and it is highly desirable that some of the topics touched upon by Erin Benay now be dealt with in more depth and perhaps even in dialogue with art historians specialized in the different subfields of the material and visual culture of South India during the period under review.[7]

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[6] Ines G. Županov, The Pulpit Trap. Possession and Personhood in Colonial Goa, in: *Anthropology and Aesthetics* 65/66, 2014/2015, 298–315, here 306.

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[7] Gerhard Wolf, Kunstgeschichte, aber wo? Florentiner Perspektiven auf das Projekt einer Global Art History II, in: *Kritische Berichte* 40, 2012, 60–68, here 61, calls for attempts at a "dialogische Kunstgeschichte im Singular wie im Plural [...], die sowohl die Subdisziplinen inkl. der europäischen ins Gespräch bringt als auch die methodologischen Implikationen und Potentiale eines solchen Gesprächs in Form von Fallstudien und einem geteilten Umgang mit Objekten diskutiert". If I see it correctly, there has been regrettably little response to this call so far.

MARY ANN CALO, *AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTS AND THE NEW DEAL ART PROGRAMS. OPPORTUNITY, ACCESS, AND COMMUNITY*
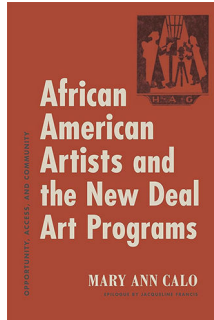
Reviewed by
Phoebe Wolfskill

New Deal art programs have been the subject of multiple anthologies – perhaps most prominently *The New Deal Art Projects. An Anthology of Memoirs* (1972) and *Art for the Millions* (1973) – which comprise perspectives on the programs collected by Francis O'Connor. These publications provided personal insights into the community spirit, frustrations, and bureaucracy of government arts funding. O'Connor's research corresponds with a range of exhibition catalogs from the New Deal period (1930s and early '40s) and later historicizations of the New Deal art. As Mary Ann Calo writes, however, despite this important history of scholarship, African American participation in the federal art projects has been studied piecemeal at best. Within these publications, a focus on individual artists and/or their stylistic and thematic approaches has tended to neglect the nuances of Black participation in the federal arts projects (FAP) and the array of opportunities and obstacles Black artists confronted. Calo's *African American Artists and the New Deal Art Programs* seeks to address this gap by exploring the broader experiences among Black artists located in key art cen-

ters in the North, South, and Midwest United States. The book enables a fuller understanding of the circumstances Black artists faced and the potential legacy of government programs for Black artists. Within this manuscript, the author explores the myriad ways in which the democratic ideals of the FAP were inevitably compromised by racial discrimination, segregation, and assumptions about Black artistic production. Digging deeply into previously untapped sources to provide a broader picture of Black participation and discourse in the 1930s and '40s, the book establishes a solid foundation for further research.

Rather than evaluating individual artworks, Calo considers the environments in which Black artists generated their art. The small black-and-white image insert mostly illustrates the spaces and people that contributed to the projects, rather than highlighting individual works. Calo discusses FAP director Holger Cahill's concerns about "criticism of New Deal art as driven by social objectives rather than aesthetic values" (p. 7). Realizing that a focus on aesthetics – and concerns over artistic "professionalism" which are cited throughout the book – have driven much of the scholarship, Calo importantly attends to the often overlooked "social objectives" that played out through the New Deal. Even as the book avoids discussion of individual artistic styles and motivations, however, Calo lists the names of the many Black contributors to New Deal projects, a vital move for mere visibility for some of these barely known artists and for future research. In her epilogue for the book, Jacqueline Francis follows up by underscoring artists' names, where they appear in documentation of the period, and the place of their individual voices in the projects, when they appear at all.

Prevailing scholarship reinforces the predominant assumption that the New Deal programs significantly bolstered African American art, which Calo posits as an exaggerated claim that relies too much on the words of Works Progress Administration (WPA) (p. 10). Calo writes,

> Historians have tended to think of the projects overall as initiatives that redressed chronic disadvantages faced by Black artists, with a generally positive effect on their subsequent professional development. The result is a kind of consensus view of their collective historical relevance that is often vague or scarce in terms of details and complacent in terms of analysis (p. 2).

The author indicates that Alain Locke, who unsurprisingly surfaces repeatedly in the study as an advocate and scholar of African American art, had been writing about Black art years before the government programs. Black artists had also shown their work and received awards through the Harmon Foundation. Calo positions the government projects within these broader conversations and exhibition opportunities.

The first chapter, "Historiography", reviews the studies of the era. Francis O'Connor's multiple publications, Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson's attention to the WPA in their tome on African American art, alongside a range of archives, newspaper reviews, writings by Black intelligentsia including Locke and James Porter, and an array of secondary literature and recent interdisciplinary work by scholars including Jonathan Harris, Stacy Morgan, Sharon Musher, and Joan Saab inform Calo's historicization of this period. She follows these studies by digging into the variety of experiences confronting Black artists depending on location, Community Art Center (CAC) directors, funding, and advocacy. From this Calo presents a range of experiences, all of which underscore the effect of institutionalized racism, alongside evidence of mostly genuine efforts to include African Americans in government-sponsored art centers.

The second chapter, "Participation", focuses on Black inclusion in the CACs and the balance and aggravations surrounding the establishment of art education programs and the clashing of amateur engagement in the projects in relation to Black artists with professional status or aspirations. Calo makes a vital contribution by engaging lesser-known projects in the Jim Crow South, highlighting the differences in these centers depending on leadership, support, and community engagement. The chapter distinguishes between urban organizations that served mostly Black communities but were not defined as segregated in relationship to those units in the South, called "Negro extension galleries" that strictly reinforced Jim Crow segregation. Southern areas were skeptical of government funding of the arts and suspicious of arts programming more generally. At times, Calo employs biased language in referencing southern communities as "culturally backward" (p. 37) and the challenge of establishing the Jacksonville Negro Federal Gallery within an "unsophisticated community" (pp. 39–40). This kind of blanket statement about southern cultures undoubtedly circulated in northern urban thought, but at times overlooks the huge structural disadvantages southern Black artists faced and/or their understandable uncertainty about the practicality of becoming an artist or art educator. This segment of the book could benefit from greater consideration of the ways in which socio-economic class and Jim Crow restrictions affected language and assumptions about southern communities, particularly through a critique of northern artists both Black and white traveling south to interact with extension centers. The paternalistic language stemming from directors and educators surrounding outreach in the South and assumptions about what "art" means to a given community demands critique and skepticism. Also worth acknowledging is the profound range of Black artistic creativity in the South – that which may fall under the moniker "folk" or "vernacular" – that was overlooked by government programs and directors perhaps too rigid in their conceptions of "art" as defined and cultivated by these programs and too out of touch with community needs.

Regardless, Calo sheds light on a range of southern centers through her careful combing of archives with particular attention to three that represent the possibilities and the shortcomings of the government programs: the Raleigh Art Center, the first FAP supported community art center in the country, the Greensboro Art Center extension gallery, and the Jacksonville Negro Federal Gallery. Calo provides Raleigh as a case with a high level of administrative skill and input from sponsoring institutions, while the Greensboro center met with administrative squabbles and a lack of funding. Harry Sutton's strong leadership of the Jacksonville gallery garnered much attention and praise as a proper art unit rather than a "Negro extension". Calo concludes that despite best efforts, the extension galleries closed without living on in institutional memory. She queries,

> [The Negro art centers] provided opportunities for Black artists, but to what extent did they transcend their educational, social, and economic functions and contribute to telling a national story about redefining America and reshaping its cultural production? (pp. 55–56).

Calo explicates how the stated goals of the centers repeatedly fell through, particularly regarding Black participation.

The third chapter, "Advocacy", ties together New Deal art projects with sponsoring organizations, such as the Artists' Union and the National Negro Congress, who sought to position artists as cultural workers essential to the project of American democracy and the fight against discrimination. Their ideas contrasted with traditional conceptions of the artist, their work, and their patron. Calo writes, "The prospect of steady employment in the projects and a union that advocated for artists' rights was anathema to elite art patrons accustomed to thinking in terms of stylistic allegiances, not economic conditions" (p. 59). Calo highlights the Harlem Artists Guild (HAG) as providing a space for education and professionalism, particularly in relation to the patronizing language of the Harmon Foundation and the often-discriminatory practices of government art programs. The HAG sought prestige, professionalism, and increasing exposure through art exhibitions and sales. Calo establishes Alain Locke's precarious place vis-à-vis the HAG; Locke, as a writer and continuous advocate for African American art, frequently fell out of step with the desires, beliefs, and ideologies of young Black artists. Locke in turn shifted perspectives about art theories based in race toward art making as an agent of communication and social change. One of the many obstacles facing Black artists was the FAP's cowardice towards bad publicity. In disallowing white models to pose in majority Black classes, for example, the FAP yielded to segregationist principles rather than supporting the basic needs of the artists.

The fourth chapter, "Visibility", considers exhibition opportunities at a variety of venues associated with the FAP and the pro-

motion of African American art by the Harmon Foundation. Calo writes,

> The formation of the FAP marked a turning point in the view of many Black artists, who went from being a neglected cohort of creative Americans with limited visibility to membership in an officially recognized category of the deserving unemployed (p. 86).

Yet the FAP, Calo tells us, generally failed to include African American artists in large exhibitions of American art, despite their language of democracy and inclusion. The exclusion of Black artists went hand in hand with segregated "Negro art shows", with accompanying racialized language.

Calo's concluding "Aftermath" considers the implications of the federal art programs in terms of Black artistic prominence and discourse. Howard University scholar James Porter expressed skepticism about the long-term possibilities of government support. Calo places Locke and Porter in conversation with art critic Clement Greenberg as a means of highlighting the corresponding dialogues of the period and the ways in which certain artists and critics become canonized in the history of art, while others were institutionally marginalized as a racial minority. While Greenberg sought a radical aesthetic separate from mass culture, Locke and Porter located progress in greater opportunities and audiences for an inclusive and more dynamic understanding of American art. Locke and Porter thus seek a different kind of disruption of the norm than Greenberg.

Black artists were ultimately more affected by the collapse of government-funded art projects than whites due to their historical exclusion from mainstream institutions. Historically Black colleges and universities, vital yet underfunded institutions, attempted to fill this gap. Calo further notes how the decidedly progressive motivations of the St. Louis project whittled away over time. The book illuminates the great complexity of the United States as a nation in undertaking the federal art project with so many different players, communities, and manifestations of racial oppression. Government funding of the 1930s and '40s was later solidified in the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), created in 1965 to provide support for the arts, yet survives precariously as an organization privy to cuts and censorship. Alongside the forming of the NEA, Calo details how in 1968 the Whitney Museum of American art's "The 1930s: Painting and Sculpture in America" continued Black invisibility by featuring not a single Black artist. Met with protest and countered by Henri Ghent's "Invisible Americans" exhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Whitney exhibition suggested that even within the Civil Rights and Black power movements, which raised Black concerns and politics to nationwide and global discussions, Black artists continued somehow to be invisible.

The book's epilogue, penned by Jacqueline Francis, considers the framing and discourse surrounding two major "Negro" art exhibitions and ends with white photographer Carl Van Vechten's photographs of interracial homosexual relationships at New York's Stage Door Canteen. Francis's contribution does not extend Calo's attention to the FAP, but rather uses the Stage Door Canteen as an example of a more genuinely interracial, progressive, and queer artistic space in comparison to the programs examined by Calo. The book concludes with words by Calo and Francis that enable the reader to contemplate where we are now in terms of visibility and support of Black artists. They stress the continued need for advocacy and visibility, acknowledging the ways in which institutionalized racism across all levels of society inevitably influences the locations and discussions surrounding Black artists within an array of cultural fields. The book offers clarity in articulating the complex and wide-ranging government and non-government programs and the place of African American people within them (as artists and within artistic discourses), and serves as a vital source within New Deal studies and African American art.

EVA KERNBAUER, *ART, HISTORY, AND ANACHRONIC INTERVENTIONS SINCE 1990*
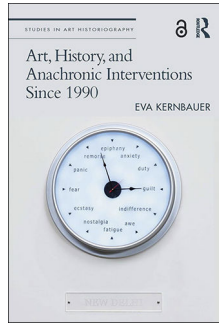
Reviewed by
Mehmet Berkay Sülek

Eva Kernbauer's book *Art, History, and Anachronic Interventions Since the 1990s* is not the first study that identified contemporary artists' growing interest in intervening in the past and creating counter-narratives in the present. As she also acknowledges, Mark Godfrey and Dieter Roelstraete touched upon this growing tendency among contemporary artists in the 2000s.[1] Thus, the promise of Kernbauer's book is not to put forward a new turn in artistic practices but rather to dissect a supposedly homogeneous turn among contemporary artists and demonstrate how different artistic approaches and distinct understandings of the past and present coexist in contemporary practices, highlighting the heterogeneous nature of them. In other words, Kernbauer's book aims to explore the multiplicity of artists' interests and the kinds of relationships these artworks establish with history. In this regard, she raises several important issues that emerge from what she calls artistic historiography, such as counterfactual history, the juridification of

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[1] See Mark Godfrey, The Artist as a Historian, in: *October* 120, 2007, 140–172; Dieter Roelstraete, Field Notes, in: id. (ed.), *The Way of the Shovel. On the Archaeological Imaginary in Art*, Chicago 2014, 14–48.

history, and anachronic and anachronistic concepts of time. She demonstrates what kinds of relationships are formed between art and history. To do so, she analyses the works of a large number of artists: Andrei Ujica and Harun Farocki (Chapter 2), Tacita Dean and Erika Tan (Chapter 3), Walid Raad, Matthew Buckingham, and Dierk Schmidt (Chapter 4), Amar Kanwar, Omar Fast, and Zarina Bhimji (Chapter 5), Wendelien van Oldenborgh and Apichatpong Weerasethakul (Chapter 6), Michael Blum and Yael Bartana (Chapter 7), Andrea Geyer and Hiwa K (Chapter 8), and Deimantas Narkevičius and Kader Attia (Chapter 9). She states that this growing interest in history arises from a historiographical crisis and the failures of nation-state discourse, building on Dieter Roelstraete's argumentation. This, as we will see, will become a focal point in Kernbauer's argumentation regarding the significance of these artistic practices, which she dubbed as "artistic historiography".

Although the book's title suggests that this is a book that fosters anachronistic ways of thinking about history, that is not the case. The promise of this study is much more significant. In this regard, Kernbauer writes: "Anachronic thought, therefore, is not ahistorical but is a prerequisite of historical thinking, as it enables us to perceive the historical potential of ideas, events, and actions" (p. 8). At this point, Kernbauer turns back to an unexpected name, Johann Gustav Droysen, who was an influential historian in the nineteenth century and, most importantly, a defiant critic of Rankean positivism. She claims that Droysen developed a transhistorical, anachronic, and subjectivist understanding of history, opening the way to the "poetological turn" which accommodates scholars such as Roland Barthes, Arthur Danto, and Hayden White. In this regard, she stresses the importance of Droysen's concept of apodeixis (representation) which emerges from Droysen's four-step methodology, the others being heuristics, criticism, and interpretation. According to Kernbauer, Droysen's understanding of apodeixis brings the question of research and representation together, in which the question of search turns into an active transformation of the past and its presentation. Thus, the reasoning behind Kernbauer's evocation of Droysen becomes clear in terms of anachrony, since for her, anachrony equates with thinking historically in the present, which comes to life through the subjectivity of the spectator. In this regard, the three main ways in which contemporary practices produce anachrony are quite telling: "formal device (nonlinear narration, including reversals and entanglements of different temporal layers); as a conceptual strategy for positioning the self within history; and as a phenomenon linked to subjective historical experience" (p. 10). However, the ways in which Kernbauer places subjectivity at the centre of artistic historiography raise a question about the absence of a particular concept: memory.

The word "memory" rarely appears in her book, and she lays out the reasoning behind her approach in the introduction. Kernbauer does not directly critique the overemphasis on memory in recent years, but she refers to Peter Osborne's critique and builds

her implicit scepticism about memory from there. She underlines the key points of Osborne's critique of memory studies, but it becomes clear that Osborne was not fully aware of the new directions of memory studies at the time he was penning his critique. One of the main criticisms of Osborne, it seems, is that memory studies foster fixed identities that stem from nation-state discourse. While this was certainly true until the early 2000s, memory studies has shifted in the last two decades. There have been serious attempts to rupture the nation-state discourse in memory studies and foster a transnational or transcultural understanding of collective memory, in which the ideas of "traveling memory" or "multidirectional memory" become prominent new directions for a scholarship to come.[2] More recently, the linear understanding of memory has also come under scrutiny in interdisciplinary memory studies.[3] If I have any reservations about Kernbauer's book, it would be its implicit rejection of the notion of memory.

Even though the book is structured around case studies and the questions that these case studies put forward, there is a grandiose idea that lies beneath this study, and this should be addressed very clearly. As soon as I came across Kernbauer's work, I could not help but wonder: why does this book belong to Routledge's *Studies in Art Historiography* series? The book seems to be largely concerned with case studies, and the book certainly comprises a close analysis of these case studies. Although this approach is necessary for the overall goals of this study, it paradoxically overshadows the main argument as well. Kernbauer's ambition to recall Droysen's apodeixis and place it in conversation with artistic practices since the 1990s almost, if not completely, disappears during her meticulous analysis of these works. The firm theoretical grounding of the first two chapters evaporates when the reader moves to the subsequent chapters. This includes her main argument as well: contemporary artistic practices are able to produce historiographical imaginations. But then the question becomes: don't art historians always seek to understand artworks historically and as a symptom of the spirit of the age? This is the twist in Kernbauer's approach; here, artworks rupture and disorient history rather than complementing it and becoming heuristic tools for the recognition of the spirit of the age. She underlines how this will of thinking historically in the present sits at the centre of these artistic practices, which are continuously reshaped by the spectators' encounter with them. In this regard, she states, following in Walter Benjamin's footsteps: "Each meaning is provisional; each present views history differently. History means taking events out of the stream of time, out of respective inter-

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[2] See Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Stanford, CA 2009; Astrid Erll, Travelling Memory, in: *Parallax* 17/4, 2011, 4–18.

[3] Marije Hristova, Francisco Ferrándiz, and Johanna Vollmeyer, Memory Worlds. Reframing Time and the Past, in: *Memory Studies* 13/5, 2020, 777–791.

pretations, categories, and disciplines into which they have been incorporated" (p. 43). There is no doubt that this position is one she shares with Georges Didi-Huberman, whose approach can be seen as an important influence on this book. In a similar vein, Didi-Huberman wrote: "The eyes of history, therefore, reveal something of the space and time that they see. This implies re-spatializing and re-temporalizing our way of looking."[4] For Kernbauer, too, the eyes of history require rethinking the space and time that we encounter through artworks. This equation is undoubtedly fulfilled with the presence of the spectator, which twists the question to the performative and the presentation rather than mere representation.

Kernbauer does not directly refer to the question of spectatorship, but questions regarding the presence of the spectator and their encounter with artworks appear multiple times, as one would expect. One of the most apparent indicators of Kernbauer's emphasis on the role of the spectator is when she highlights how Andrea Geyer opens her video installation *Criminal Case 40/61: Reverb* (2009) in which Hannah Arendt's argument on spectatorship is paraphrased as "Nothing and nobody exists in this world without a spectator" (p. 175). For Kernbauer, the artworks that she discusses only become legible and complete with the presence of the spectator.

Kernbauer's emphasis on the question of presence is quite telling with regard to her scholarly position as well. Matthew Rampley has stated that German *Bildwissenschaft* and Anglo-American visual studies are distinct from each other. The former is concerned with presence and questions such as memory and vision, whereas the latter is more engaged with the question of representation and the entanglements of artworks with socio-political issues.[5] However, this does not mean that *Bildwissenschaft* or visual studies completely disregard either of these issues entirely; rather, it is a question of emphasis. Kernbauer, too, does not dismiss socio-political issues. Her approach to "artistic historiography" is brazenly political, while her scholarly position is inherently tied to *Bildwissenschaft* as she shifts the focus from representation to presentation. In this regard, she cites Juliane Rebentisch, who claimed that contemporary art's potential lies in its ability to present to us historically.[6] Later, while discussing the Atlas Group's *Missing Lebanese Wars* (1996–2002), she writes:

[4]
Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Eye of History. When Images Take Positions*, Cambridge, MA 2018, xxvi.

[5]
Matthew Rampley, Introduction, in: id., Thierry Lenain, Hubert Locher, Andrea Pinotti, Charlotte Schoell-Glass and C. J. M. (Kitty) Zijlmans (eds.), *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe. Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*, Leiden/Boston 2012, 1–13, here 6.

[6]
Juliane Rebentisch, The Contemporaneity of Contemporary Art, in: *New German Critique* 124, 2015, 223–237, here 229.

The camera generates the actual (media) event: the winning photo that, in the collages, is presented as evidence of the best bet. This approach to the events "expost" is remarkable. From a psychoanalytic (and cultural-theoretical) point of view, it describes a perspective of "retrospectives" or "afterwardness" (Nachträglichkeit is the Freudian term) that leads to a permanent reassessment of history from the perspective of the present, and thus to a temporal deferral that arises from the distance between events and the processing of them (p. 93).

The term "afterwardness" that Kernbauer uses here is central to understanding how she interprets these artworks. She sees them not as remnants of the past as it was, but rather as reconstructions of the narratives of the past in the present. Thus, she understands artworks as active agents that carry fractured glimpses of the past into the present, rather than intact but passive pieces of the past that art historians could carefully break down to understand each component. Behind this understanding is a strong rejection of the positivistic understanding of history that Leopold von Ranke established in the nineteenth century. According to positivist historians, the past could be retrieved as it was; the past remains fixed and static for Rankean history. In contrast, Kernbauer acknowledges the living presence of the past, which is continuously reshaped by the present. While discussing the works of Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Wendelien van Oldenborgh, she emphasizes the underlying will of thinking historically of these practices in the present. This will, for Kernbauer, essentially signals the heterochronic and anachronic nature of history.[7] In this regard, she writes, "'Anachronism' is, as we have seen, the property (or potential) of artworks to unite several contradictory temporalities and thus to disorder (art-) historical categories" (p. 200). This idea takes us back to the introduction of the book, where Kernbauer quotes Hayden White's extremely influential article, *The Burden of History*, published in 1966. White states, "We require a history that will educate us to discontinuity more than ever before; for discontinuity, disruption, and chaos is our lot."[8] While the purpose of the epigraph is clear regarding Kernbauer's interest in anachrony and heterochrony, its true purpose and how it is vital to Kernbauer's objectives need a little explanation.

While White's text addresses historians and their crises and struggles, the way in which he builds his arguments makes it relevant for Kernbauer and "artistic historiography" as well. White ded-

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In this regard, Kernbauer's study is certainly aligned with studies by Jacob Lund and Cristine Ross. See Christine Ross, *The Past Is the Present; It's the Future Too. The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art*, London/New York 2012; Jacob Lund, *The Changing Constitution of the Present. Essays on the Work of Art in Times of Contemporaneity*, London 2022.

[8]
Hayden White, The Burden of History, in: *History and Theory* 5/2, 1966, 111–134, here 134.

icates a significant portion of his text to a discussion of the growing dislike of history among writers at the turn of the twentieth century, providing a wide array of examples, and underlining their dismay of history. Concurrently, historians struggled to establish themselves in an academia surrounded by the ideals of objectivity and science. White argued that historians attempted to navigate between science and art, claiming to incorporate aspects of both, but in reality, they failed to do so. For White, the solution to the burden of history was adopting a new conception of the world in which the established dynamics between past and present are transgressed. Such form of historical thinking, White argued, would abandon the idea of a single correct view and understand that there are multiple correct views which require unique styles of representation.[9]

This is precisely what Kernbauer stands for as well. What she calls "artistic historiography" brings together ways of looking at the world from both artistic practices and history, in which many different meanings are constructed and reconstructed in the present through the encounters produced by practices of artistic historiography. Most importantly, she discusses series of questions that emerge from producing alternative ways of thinking about history through artistic practices. In this endeavour, Kernbauer is not the only one putting forward the two key ideas that drive her study. First, there seems to be a growing number of historians who fundamentally question their discipline and seek solutions elsewhere. White's last work was concerned with the potential of art to evoke the narratives of the past.[10] Second, Kernbauer could be seen as one of a growing number of scholars such as Hans Belting, Horst Bredekamp and Caroline van Eck who raised the question of the agency of images and their power.[11] Seen together, Kernbauer's work puts forward an important historiographical claim: there is no end to history in the spaces that these practices create, and the anachrony that they foster is a prerequisite for such spaces, but only if the living presence of these artworks, their power to move us, are acknowledged. This requires a defiant re-thinking of how scholars interpret artworks which Kernbauer presents with her theorization of "artistic historiography".

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[9] Ibid., 111–134.

[10] Id., *The Practical Past*, Evanston, IL 2014. In recent years, Australian historians raised the question of creativity in history and the role of creative prose in history. For this, see Kiera Lindsey, Mariko Smith, Anna Clark, Craig Batty, Donna Brien and Rachel Landers, 'Creative Histories' and the Australian Context, in: *History Australia* 19/2, 2022, 325–346.

[11] Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images. Picture, Medium, Body*, Princeton, NJ 2011; Horst Bredekamp, *Image Acts. A Systematic Approach to Visual Agency*, Berlin 2018; Caroline van Eck, *Art, Agency, and Living Presence. From the Animated Object to Excessive Object*, Berlin 2015.

FELIPE ROJAS, BYRON ELLSWORTH HAMANN, AND BENJAMIN ANDERSON (EDS.), *OTROS PASADOS. ONTOLOGÍAS ALTERNATIVAS Y EL ESTUDIO DE LO QUE HA SIDO*

Reviewed by
Natalia Lozada-Mendieta

The 'past' used to be the exclusive domain of historians and archeologists, even geologists or paleontologists: those thought to have the tools that could unveil its mysteries and the 'truth' of what has been. This notion, common in Western cultures, does not, however, apply to how other cultures view and how they understand their own history. Nor does it apply to how pre-modern Western cultures studied their own histories. Our relationship to the past is always transforming and the recent book, *Otros pasados. Ontologías alternativas y el estudio de lo que ha sido* (Other Pasts. Alternative Ontologies and the Study of What Has Been) is an excellent example of how different perspectives and disciplines have dealt with diverging approaches to studying and understanding history. Reading and discussing the book also affords an opportunity to question whether the past (in all of the manifold forms of historical understanding) can be fully comprehended as well as whether an analysis of multi-

ple notions of historical understanding can be fruitfully placed into dialogue with one another.

As the title of the book underscores, the authors understand history as a plurality, belonging to different actors, who have approached it by studying either buried objects, ancient texts, or through living creatures and marks in the landscapes that co-exist with us in the present. Following this principle, eleven study cases were selected. Researchers from different backgrounds – half from Latin America – analyzed these cases with an eye to how studies of a broad range of time periods and geographical areas can shed light on different cultural approaches to the *matter* of history. From medieval China and the sixteenth-century central Andes to current Wajapi Amazonian indigenous communities, a resolutely polyphonic approach to "what has been" serves as the guiding principle of this volume. Moreover, one of the book's most innovative aspects is the conscious effort to ensure a horizontal reading of all views, without privileging one above others. Accordingly, the order of the case studies seems aleatory, jumping from America to Asia, to Europe and back to the Middle East through different time periods. An effort is made neither to follow a chronological or spatial thread nor to suggest a predetermined trajectory that might purport to resolve contesting visions of the past.

The contributions stem from a conference which took place in 2017, organized by the MUSA Archaeological Museum and the Universidad de Los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia. The volume also builds upon a previous book by two of the editors entitled *Antiquarianisms. Contact-Conflict-Comparison*, which invited its readers to consider the different interests and discourses of antiquarians and their use(s) of the past.[1] This current book, unlike its predecessor, does not deal only with antiquarians, but counts among the authors representatives from other disciplinary fields including history, art history, archeology, anthropology, and linguistics.

In the last three decades, discussions in social sciences and humanities, especially in Latin America, have increasingly dealt with the issue of how to incorporate alternative ontologies in research studies. This current book adds to this endeavor through its specific consideration of discourses and uses of history. As the editors and some of the authors recognize, there is an important theoretical framework to which their work makes a specific contribution: the 'ontological turn' in anthropology. The latter has been a growing subject of interest in Latin America, particularly since the late 1990s, when foundational ethnographic studies – particularly in the Amazonian region – embraced 'perspectivism' and its variants as a way to comprehend Amerindian ways of thinking and worlding, as proposed by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Philipe Descola, Eduardo Kohn, and Matei Candea.

[1] Benjamin Anderson and Felipe Rojan (eds.), *Antiquarianisms. Contact, Conflict, Comparison*, Oxford/Havertown, PA 2017.

Ethnographic research with contemporary indigenous communities in the Amazonian region has inspired academics to interrogate the nature/culture divide and with it, notions on agency associated with natural phenomena and even artifacts, as in Fernando Santos-Granero's key study *The Occult Life of Things. Native Amazonian Theories of Materiality and Personhood.*[2] Encouraged by these seminal studies, the authors of this compilation go beyond the Amazon and also expand the scope of objects examined to include art, linguistic terms, and landscape features in order to more fully flesh out different cultural practices of marking history for present and future generations.

The various case studies assembled here furnish convincing evidence of how, even in the West, the past was often approached through an experiential filter that required visiting and moving through certain landscapes, re-enacting past events through bodily practices. Key chapters by Byron Ellsworth Hamann and Jeffrey Moser, both associated with ancient religious beliefs and rites, discuss how ceremonies and peregrinations were performed and re-enacted in the present in order to remember and revitalize the past and faith itself. Catholic festivities in the Iberoamerican world in the sixteenth century used commemorations such as the *via crucis* to keep alive such pagan traditions, deeply entangled in the new religious order, making it difficult to differentiate past and present beliefs. Moser's chapter is of special interest for art historians since it uses a Buddhist monumental sculpture and its geological properties as a medium to evaluate ancient ontologies of history and the materiality associated with mnemonic and symbolic practices; these included the representation of divinities in durable materials located in landscapes through which pilgrimage routes were traced.

Another chapter that treats the connection between the ways in which perceptions of history manifested itself through physical landmarks is the one written by Steve Kosiba, which takes place in the Central Andes in the Inca period (ca. CE 1438–1533). In here, *huacas* or sacred landmarks, were connected through a *ceque* or network design to indicate ways to move through the territory visiting a thread of sacred points which conveyed history. The pilgrimage to these places was intended to commemorate ancestors – who were still understood as part of present everyday life – as well as to directly connect travelers with key historical events. The *huacas* were, and are, both objects and subjects of history, and the spatial component of the past was as equally important to the culture that made them as a chronological experience of events. The physical experience of space and time simultaneously aimed to incite a direct interaction with the past.

Building a connection to the past through the construction of certain monuments or marks in the landscape is just one of many ways that various cultures have sought to establish connections to

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[2] Fernando Santos-Granero (ed.), *The Occult Life of Things. Native Amazonian Theories of Materiality and Personhood*, Tucson, AZ 2009.

the ones that came before us. The chapters by Felipe Rojas, Benjamin Anderson, and Alain Schnapp each explore the concept of the ruin as a way to access the past and create political discourse which defends a particular reconstruction of events in a concrete socio-political context. Some ruins are stone structures, funerary tumuli, or ancient bronze sculptures such as the *Quimera*, studied by Vasari in the sixteenth century. Despite their various origins and time periods, in each of these cases, however, the interpretations of the remnants of ancient civilizations were used to suggest alternate stories, wherein for instance Babylonians or Etruscans were key actors in the beginning of arts, architecture, and language, even in Mesoamerica where Toltec pyramids were recognized as possible ancient Ziggurats made by ancient middle easterners. These ancient connections signal temporally deep non-Western connections between cultures, which suggest an alternate universal global history that existed parallel to the better-known Greco-Roman-centric models. This type of instrumental use of history is also tackled in Carl Langebaek's chapter, which presents a non-evolutionary historic discourse proposed by the recently independent *criollos* in early nineteenth-century Colombia. Here, the local indigenous past was carefully manipulated and curated – without scientific basis – to support the construction of an idyllic future society that contained the best features of both indigenous and Spanish cultures.

The remaining chapters present a variety of modes and media of approaching the past, ranging from linguistics and living animal remains to modern fossils. Juan Camilo Niño's chapter uses *chibcha* language, spoken by indigenous groups from the intermediate area (southern Mesoamerica and northern South America), to analyze anthropocentric historic models in which humans are understood as constituting the present stage of living beings, while past and future oscillate between vegetable and animal forms. Another compelling case study, by Irina Podgorny, uses fossils discovered in the nineteenth century of a bird from the North Atlantic – the *Alca impennis* – that went extinct due to both biological and commercial causes. The discovery of modern extinctions changed the way in which we approach the distant past and our own future, in which more species (including humans) could meet their end. Mariana Petry Cabral's chapter on the Jacamín bird, identified by the Wajapi indigenous people in Northern Amazon, analyzes an animal that is also a living archeological vestige: the bird that lives among them in the present is also the product of a primordial mythical feast, evidence of past historic events.

Last but not least, a short text by Santiago Giraldo, which acts as a sort of epilogue, poses a question to a Kogui indigenous teacher in charge of a history course for the children in his community. Virgilio, a man that moves in both the indigenous and the mainstream world, says he can teach both the Kogui and the official version of history in parallel, using a lower-case "h" to assert the plurality of versions. However, Giraldo acknowledges there are translation problems when it comes to harmonizing ancestral divine/mythical

stories with the Western official models of successive events – based on archeological finds – and the role of the past in our future.

This last aspect in particular – that is, the challenge of working with *and* between different versions of the past as proposed as a goal in the introduction of the book – remains nonetheless somewhat elusive and not fully addressed by the authors and editors. The book certainly does not aim to build a consensus. Its goal is rather to provide a platform that showcases a polyphony of views on history, as discussed here. However, the dialogue which the authors and editors aim to encourage is left to the reader, who is given the responsibility of building connections and finding commonalities as well as differences that explain our variable and transformative relationship to the past.

The book is oriented to a specialized academic audience, which means that the texts demand close and attentive reading. But it is also an enjoyable and edifying read that would certainly make itself available to a broader, non-specialized audience as well. It will hopefully also inspire readers to develop new critical perspectives on historical discourse – on a global scale that incorporates and challenges singular accounts of the past. After reading this volume, one is obliged to think about history no longer as simply a matter of *time*, but also a matter of *place*, *people*, *practices*, *artifacts*, *animals*, *plants*, *landscapes*, and *language*; as well as, of course, a political and social discourse that invests in certain stories rather than others. The key takeaway: there are plenty of versions of the past, and almost as many presents and futures as we desire.