

Images as Remnants of the Time

Images of art and images of the culture industry

Since images are increasingly used in the art world and the culture industry simultaneously the necessity to distinguish between them poses the urgent question. I use the term ‘image’ instead of art or photography in order to understand the potential of images which may be discovered by ‘being stripped bare’ and brought to its position as the blueprint. I am also very well aware that art is developing according to the logic of the culture industry. But if we still talk about the difference in the use of images in the art world and in the culture industry, then it makes sense to problematise this difference. If we use phrases like ‘art’ and ‘the industry’, and in the same way we speak of any other form of art then it makes sense on the discursive level, whereas it makes no sense on the commercial level, for instance. In other words, we can still distinguish images even if it is thought that art is totally industrialized and institutionalized. The distinction is possible because the images themselves are reminders of the time and to distinguish between images is possible as far as the question of the time remains.

I distinguish two kinds of images. The image as art is the determined historical activity, the rest of the images seen elsewhere in the culture industry are a chaotic circulation of different forms associated with things. Both are the ‘recorded memory’. The proliferation of the image creates the connection between the art and the culture industry. I claim that the image is a condensed fragment of the time-space.¹ In other words the trace that memory left is transformed into the image

and stretched in the frame of the image. In this sense a certain ‘time-space’ becomes a temporal entity which can only be grasped by images and in images. They are records of memory and traces of time. As such the image is an *evidence* of what happened in time.

Because of the growth of the use of images elsewhere in the industry and the appropriation of artistic ideas by other forms very often art is considered as a part of the industry, yet it still continues to insert its special influence. I would like to ask the question in relation to images again by reformulating that there is nothing outside of images and if it is so, how to distinguish between images used in art and images that are circulated in the culture industry. I would like to stress two dimensions of this multidimensional question: firstly, the artistic dimension pointing to the artistic freedom of being able to take on more complex issues in relation to the proliferation of images, i.e. the engagement with the work when it is necessary to appropriate from other spheres, such as science or philosophy if required, secondly: the political dimension, a constant censorship created by artistic trends linked to a very limited definition of the role an artist plays in the industry. In both of these dimensions the limitation is above all the denial of the access to other spheres of activity which may provide the richer and fuller engagement with the subject. Other spheres of activity remain as they are denied to access.

Since modern capitalism’s engagement with the free regulated market, what is called as ‘catastrophic’ by philosophers such as Karl Polanyi who has predicted origins of this catastrophe “in the Utopian endeavours of economic liberalism to set-up a self-regulating system”.² In order to expand its territory in such way populism oriented capitalism also needs to create new subjects, therefore the interest of capitalism has shifted from the economy to the cultural sphere,

especially to the role of the artist. We can think of the American economist J. K. Galbraith's answer to Mitterrand: 'It is the artist who is at the cutting edge of development, not the engineer'.³

Modern capitalism is interested in economics as far as it helps to create an exchange between different government bodies and to help to seize control over the obedient population; the main focus of modern capitalism is not economy per se. The main investment is made on the emotions of subjects, which is promoting their emotional condition instead of fostering the aesthetic potential of subjects. That is why in any work made by the mainstream artists reality poses itself as an absent referent. The work automatically becomes the reconstruction of the relationship with the absent subject and reality as an absent referent constructed by existing stereotypes. As such art is a form of neo-conventionalism, and art as the sphere of the activity welcomes anyone who is ready to speak or to deliver the message of the power. For instance, in the current debate about migrations in the art world there is an emergence of 'artists' that consider themselves victims of this activity and these artists are welcomed elsewhere. More critically oriented artists are almost completely excluded from the art world since these artists' work is not helpful for the mainstream politics of the discovery of 'scapegoats'. Art is functioning by adopting social and political questions in order to develop its own sphere of influence. As such art is a form of neo-conventionalism, and art as the sphere of the activity welcomes anyone who is ready to speak or to deliver the message of the power. For instance, in the current debate about migrations in the art world there is an emergence of 'artists' that consider themselves victims of this activity and these artists are welcomed elsewhere. More critically oriented artists are almost completely excluded from the art world since these artists' work is not helpful for the mainstream politics of the discovery of 'scapegoats'. Art is

functioning by adopting social and political questions in order to develop its own sphere of the influence. As such art has become what it is today. However, the question of the projection of ideas and their expansion makes possible the evolution of images within the larger paradigmatic formations. In order to understand the nature of the dialectical evolution of images within the larger paradigmatic formations I have created the schema to explain this evolution. One stipulation is that despite the dialectics it is also able to provide conditions that are articulated by contingencies. According to this schema the visual culture has transformed through the three phases of modernism. These three stages are appropriation, distribution and proliferation. An appropriation in its turn accompanies the first stage of the development of images in the early modernism, the distribution of images circulates ideas that are appropriated within the high modernism and finally a new form of economy, the proliferation simply proliferates and opens up the space for the mass production and consumption of images. I will expand on this schema about the three phases of the modern visual culture briefly in the following paragraphs. To repeat again I increasingly use the term ‘the image’ as a technique rather than art or photography in order to show that if images are used in different contexts differently it is due to the fact that images are schematic. Images also have their contested nature, which always provides the legitimacy of retaining the symbolic power of art that is recorded in memory and history.

Three phases of production: appropriation, distribution, proliferation

In this schema I claim that modernism is developed by *extending* already existing convenient ideas while sometimes giving them a new look. The emergence of modernism in art also coincided with the final triumph of colonialism when colonialism established the form of *appropriation* as a normal state of affairs.⁴ It

should be noted that art has become to symbolize the consciousness of time and as a main agent of the ideology at this point.

The second stage of the development following the appropriation is called *distribution*, i.e. distributing appropriated forms in a way to create a new economy which can work in the modernised way only. Modernity was distributed by artistic means and *the concept of art itself* became a driving force of the century of the age of modernism. The distribution took place by the development of images classified under the headings of different movements and groups, such as surrealism, Dadaism, conceptualism etc. Each century has a force, otherwise called hegemony, which helps to transform its people, ideas and projects. The visual culture became such a force within the distribution period, mostly in the 20th century, which helped to transform the century from the traditional to a modern. It has played the role, which was played by mechanics and engineering since the 17th century by intensifying industrial revolutions. New media, advertising, film and contemporary art transformed societies by bringing aesthetic revolutions into existence. For each society this transformation created specific forms depending on the local ideology. For instance, for the art of the USA it is populism and pop art, for the Western Europe it is the modernisation of societies etc. Innovation, artistic mannerism and love for the excluded and marginalised are the important elements of this transformation, which is exercised elsewhere, including in politics, science, fashion and so on. It has partly helped to create new mythologies, as Roland Barthes masterfully formulated sometimes ago.⁵ So this transformative nature of art opened up perspectives not only for artists, but also for any profession, for example for the nuclear physics or the fashion star. The artistic nature of Einstein played an important role in popularizing the science of physics. The other new form of communication that came into existence in the 20th century as art's alter

ego and finally gave the legitimate role to inventions of mechanics and technology is the media. In the 'post-metaphysics age', which is also remarkable by the confrontation of the economy and culture, the role of the artist became the most privileged.

This was extended by the explosion of images through the rapid development of technologies, what is called the proliferation. This is the stage of the development which is interesting for me in the given context. In the early stage, the appropriation created original figures, and if the distribution made prominent the endless surprises and the 'star system', then the age of the proliferation limited the role of an artist to a banal imitation of the past. I believe that this function has a double functioning and on the one hand it limits the possibility of art to imitate what happened and what is known historically as art and on the other hand it fosters the role of an artist as the inventor within the space of history and memory as far as their influence goes. This role is re-inventing what is invented already and extending the role of the image in this manner. Harun Farocki and Chris Marker are two good examples of this kind of artist, whose work is a constant elaboration of the missing dimensions of culture based on their search for a lost memory that is recorded in images.

The emergence of the proliferation has its logic in the emergence of the proliferated locations, ideas and means. The scenario of globalization is the proliferation of discrete locations, breaking down the total geographic definitions on the one hand and the personality articulating these discrete, fragmented means and places on the other. The characteristic feature is never coming to the point of being described, yet understood only according to their production. The reason is that the prolific personality is someone holding together two polarities at the same time and articulating them. These polarities are technology and knowledge. Just to

underline the logic of the aesthetic revolutions following the industrial one: technique comes before the thought. It is also not surprising that the past century was characterized by the explosion of visual means. Very often the work was made when a new means of expression, such as the 'video imitated not nature but time' (Nam June Paik) and this kind of imitating 'connected' discrete locations made out for the spectacle of 'time' or temporality, like in Eisenstein's 'montage of attractions'.

Since the distribution has achieved its culmination via consumerism, new forms of communication have challenged it and contribution versus production-consumption as the new form of extension has brought total chaos into the world: *the proliferation*. The nuclear proliferation, the political proliferation, the image proliferation accompanied with the media proliferation and forgery and simulacrum defined the move towards the total 'pauperization of culture' which is actively criticised elsewhere by Bernard Stiegler. An extension of ideas that help to proliferate should be understood as a set of rules converging on knowledge and techniques and the principle of negotiation between the senses and meaning. The 'appropriation' provided the ground for the re-invention of forms, the 'distribution' fostered the critique and the proliferation opened the way for the participation for the convenience of 'subjects that speak by themselves' and products became more important than producers.

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forgery and simulacrum defined the move towards the total 'pauperization of culture' which is actively criticised elsewhere by Bernard Stiegler.⁶

In the "Communist Manifesto" Marx describes an axe produced by bourgeois, which will destroy it.⁷ In his view it was a proletariat, the main work force of the age of the manual labour. With the reorganization of the labour in a global age, in the age of digital machines such an axe is not only the producer, but also what is produced: images. According to Thomas Sebeok, in this "scheme" the culture itself 'become generic, specific topics become obsolete. The world awash of messages, every living thing is a unique signal. Evolution is an intricate switchboard, path for passing signals back and forth'.⁸ In this situation an artist's position becomes more clearly defined as someone who articulates not only different forms and means as a result of proliferation but also ideas that are disseminated from ancient times to our days. An artist isn't any more identified with the medium or the story but as far as he/she takes on to operate by bringing together things that have fallen apart through the stratification of cultural knowledge. We are constantly reminded of the idea of the proliferation of genres, which creates the chain of genres transmuting from one to another.

The population reached the last frontier of subjectivity defined as liberated of any principle and politics strengthening control by most conventional means. Because the 'instrumentalised knowledge' has no other reference point than conventions it finds the balance and an affirmation at this point. By its nature knowledge is altering any perspective which it confronts and simultaneously changing its own perspective. Because of this 'the knowledge industry' makes a shift by transforming the exchange based on production into the production regulated by exchange. Knowledge translates the space of production into its symbolic form. At this point knowledge doesn't think or judge, it restricts itself to giving an exchange

a new form. The subject and object collide and the collision becomes the hegemonic force articulating differences into the syntax of everyday reality.

The language was once rooted in the capacity to reproduce non-sensuous similarities between the self and being. The correspondence made by the meaning was directed to the subject's knowledge as the mimetic experience of the natural world. When digital technologies themselves became the mimicry of this mimetic experience how can one elaborate the difference and non-identity?

In a primary experience when words were similar to things they named, the difference meant something different. In the current world our machines, part of our everyday 'wardrobe'; the Internet, the podcast systems, smartphones that replaced for us 'the real'. This real has a particular intentional content which can easily be reduced to the meaning that human subjects invested in it. 'Let machines work for us, communicate instead of us, speak and write for us!' The mimetic experience that was a primary reality for intersubjectivity once more returned back, but this time carefully calculated in order to restrict any form of difference or non-identity. Adorno was right in this case, when he predicted the 'wholly administered society' and 'knowledge' as its managerial basis.⁹

Linguists recognize the double function of language. The double function of language consists of its playing the role of index on the one hand and describing consciousness on the other. Language always comes first, it is a priory, given at the first instance and it is the first technique whereas consciousness is something fabricated, constructed and turned into paradox. In the 'digital language' however, the language is formalised, already filtered by the logic of the algorithmic calculation. It may have a real distinction from the natural language which is given

in its ‘innate’ form and plays a significant role in the formation of the consciousness because of its generative nature.

In the natural language the fabrication or the construction is the process of consciousness. In the proliferation this consciousness is already fabricated and then programmed as a code, as an index, yet still not immediately given. Modernisms’ separation of the thought from the work helped to create aesthetic institutions providing the possibility to serve the aesthetic potentials of subjects. As soon as images became institutionalised it also became the main instrument for the proliferation of messages of power.

“Mendeleev’s periodic table” for images

Like in Mendeleev’s periodic table chemical elements periodically disappear and appear again, images also cycled in different contexts as such become proliferated accompanied by the distortion of their meaning.¹⁰ The question: how the process of the proliferation of images is manifest in the distortion of meaning and how the process of dispersal or dissemination occurs. Meaning is simultaneously distorted and disseminated by proliferation, and the missing dimension of this experience must be brought back, or restored.

It should be said at this point that to bring back something missing is not exactly the same as restoring what it distorted or lost: the restoration is another image and it is an image of lost meaning.¹¹ But what has gone missing? What has gone missing is the dimension of experiencing. Experience can be associated with thought, or memorising, or making art, but above all is the sole means of perceiving the real. Here the lost dimension is the loss of the previous function of experience. Images definitely lost their previous function because they were distanced from their reality, and we have lost the distance that allowed us to

discern between images and reality. But what still exists is memory *of* the previous function, which like Walter Benjamin's storyteller mediates the distance between the past and present conditions of images. This gives images their "saturated" form and makes possible their cross-circulation, "the crossing of the visible".¹²

Thinking is closely associated with thinking about images, the visual, poetic or the sonic, in terms of their future. There is a constant questioning of "what images can do?" by different critics. There is no simple acceptance of images; their effects are always questioned as what they actually achieve with images. In this sense images are always about the future, about becoming. One could say that the future itself is an image and until it comes to pass an image only exists as the projection of human thought. To think of "the future of images" is to think of the image of an image. Images in this sense exist as projections of the future as well as remnants of the past. The future of the image is always viewed by means of the most recent use of images or through the remnants of the past, because it is the closest we can come to the next development; as such it is the best image through which to understand or imagine the next image. It displaces the image from the category of art towards that of the copy.

Images constantly change their function depending on the regime under which they are produced.¹³ Because artistic images have lost their affinity with reality, they give us their status as a copy and their particular visual materiality. In other words they are useful since they still function formally, but they have ceased to exist contextually. As copies they are capable both of enhancing and of cancelling the anxiety bound up with their unreality. They can be used for another context. It is also true that at this point they themselves are empty of meaning or feeling, but they function as a set of displacements and substitutions in the minds of viewers,

waiting for the moment of their use in another context. Therefore we must think of them in terms of the operations they perform.

The loss of connection with previous context liberates images from their previous meaning. As a result the connection between context and meaning seems to become blurred. But because images are freed from their previous meaning, they are *separated* from their context.

The image of time, the image as technique and the mimetic function

In his argument with Newton in relation to the world of objects which exists in time and space Leibniz asked: would objects disappear if to take away the substance: time and space? He also answered that time and space will continue to exist in objects and in this way ‘time and space’ may disappear yet leaving objects behind. I would like to add to this: what continues to exist is not simply objects but the image of traces of memory left behind by ‘time –space’! Memory is identical to duration. Identity in this sense is temporal and depends on the behaviour of time. Time produces objects (images) which are also called space. Space in this sense is a continuation of time in objects (images).¹⁴ Images are remnants of the time, “the time that remains” to put it in a meaningful phrase by Giorgio Agamben.¹⁵

If to look at the image from this angle the role it plays in the constitution of an artwork becomes clearer. ‘Images as technique’ provides the possibility to constitute the subject of art differently. The image as the technique precedes the thought and enables the thought to come into existence. The image as technique helps to discover this missing dimension of the visual by creating the difference in the world of commerce, tourism, advertising and marketing where images are used for the sale promotion. These activities as they are used for the instant consumption are constantly erasing memory, whereas the activity of thinking is

recording memory and framing of the visible. Thinking is often shaped in this manner. For instance, when we encounter the images of the people's movement, what is called the 'migration crisis', we encounter parameters of thinking which influences the attitude of people in different corners of the planet. I have repeatedly attempted to show the prominence of the image in the age of the proliferation. This is also the difference between the use of images in art and the culture industry.

The world appears to us not as we see it, for which seeing is the illusion. The world appears to us through the technique of seeing that provides the possibility to look. In the primary societies the freeing of hands helped to form bipedality as a technique. In its turn the standing upright freed the face and eyes to see the world around. With the increasing adoption of technologies the technique is transferred from the eyes to its copy to machines, therefore seeing is left to machines. Machines do the work for us and any seeing is an imitation and the return to a primary impulse. In doing this the mimetic functioning of the subject plays its role, since this function is the primary basis of any human activity. Like the technique of 'bipedality' imitating the first gesture of freeing hands in the highly developed technological societies the imitation (from the word *'imitari'*: making images) remains a primary tool enabling to retain memory that is disseminated in the complex proliferated world of images. Making an image is the reconstruction of the lost memory. The imitation is a tool of imaging and therefore making art to constitute the activity of the image as a technique.

Imitation is defying two dominating tendencies of profound thinking: the relative and the absolute. The relative is usually about having the viewpoint to look at the world; the absolute is being immersed in the world. Instead of looking from the viewpoint the imitator inserts the viewpoint into the event. The absolutist point of

view insists on absolute involvement in the events, rather than standing outside in relation to these events. But in the event of the imitation the subject inserts the viewpoint to the inside from the outside and the image retains its power. It brings together the external and the internal to synchronise the power of grammatisation of the visible. In this sense the image created by imitation is not relational and neither is it an absolutist: it is transpositional and moves towards the alterity while adopting what took place already. It is because to imitate means being inside the image, where the image itself is the remnant of the time. To imitate is transposing its other while being resided in the time of the image. In the world of the cultural clash between the relational and the absolute and often populism articulated in their both, the possible is the third, the other, the transpositional: imitation. Wrongly understood as a simple copying of the past, it is usually forgotten that the event of imitation has a lot to offer since it takes on the images with their history of contestation and may be a good answer to the industrial populism. The imitation brings the thought into the technique! The notion that the future can be realised not by the existential experience or creativity alone, which is the residual of human subjectivity, but the matter of the technical recording of these residues is an important departure point for the ‘grammatisation of the visible’.

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Notes:

¹ David Harvey argued that the use of the time based technologies has obliterated space over time. He also argued that there is 'time-space' compression which has created what we call globalization (David Harvey: *The Postmodern Condition*, 1989). Although I agree with the definition of globalization as the 'time-space compression', I disagree about the notion that the use of the time based technologies obliterated space over time. In my view the use of time based technologies has opened a new dimension of globalization, which does not obliterate anything, instead provides the possibility for the proliferation. There is nuclear proliferation, image proliferation, the proliferation of ideas, means, gadgets etc.

² Karl Polanyi quoted in John Gray, *From the Great Transformation to the Global Free market*, in *The Globalization Reader* (ed. by Frank J. Lechner and John Boli), Blackwell, and 2004 p.22.

³ Michelle Mattelart, *Can Industrial Culture Be a Culture of Difference?*, in *Marxism and the interpretation of Culture*, (ed.) Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, Macmillan, 1988, pp.429-446

⁴ Since the discovery of the lost antique knowledge during crusades by Roger Bacon the appropriation by translating became a method and later being adopted by politics and in order to expand its territory. In this way the politics become dependent upon the appropriation (Abu -Lighod: *Before the European Hegemony*, 1991).

⁵ Roland Barthes: *Mythologies*, London, Vintage, 2009

⁶ Bernard Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2010

⁷ Karl Marx: *The Communist Manifesto*, London, Verso 2012

⁸ Thomas Seboek: *Global Semiotics*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001

⁹ Theodore Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, Bloomsbury, 1981

¹⁰ Famously Deleuze appropriated the use of images in the cinema for their classification of signs like Charles Peirce and to systematize them as in Mendeleev's periodic table. The notion that historically humanities and arts appropriated methodologies from natural sciences, not only to create a new methodology but also to create the scientific basic of arguments. However it should be noted here that Mendeleev's table wasn't made as the final method, but as a mechanism which will include already existing elements and the elements yet to be invented. It is open and it is contingent. This nature of the periodic table is an important fact about how to avoid determinism when the contingency is a necessity of the existence of elements. It is also true for images.

¹¹ The complex semantics of 'discover' (find/reveal, literally ' ') is crucial. The formulation 'something missing' is closer to the critique of 'utopia' in Bloch/Adorno debate 'etwas fehlt' – 'something's missing' – i.e. the missing 'something' can't simply be 'shown' as 'thing', but its erasure can be negated, keeping its potentiality alive in some sort of fragile way See: Adorno and Bloch: Adorno, Theodor, Bloch, Ernst, 'Something's missing', in Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*, MIT Press, 1989, pp.3-18). I do think that the image in general -- is most often used as a means of creating illusory objective presence of the missing within a given, simplistic time, and therefore a way of affirming erasure. And on a 'third hand', so to speak, there is the experience/memory excluded by names, i.e. a name can lead straight to a chain of stereotypical/canonical association, reinforcing the falsification wrought by the stereotypes/canonical reading. cf. Marx-Marxism-Stalinism, African-authentic-primitive, Asian-inscrutable, etc. Hence the Bloch/Adorno tension over the 'something missing'. This question is very closely studied by the 20th century thinkers from Russian formalism to French structuralism and hermeneutics. It also arises in questions such as the genealogy and the deconstruction. A very strong position is that of Giles Deleuze, who describes philosophy as a search for missing dimensions of time and subjectivity Giles Deleuze: *Cinema*, 1992, 1995.

¹² Challenging postmodern iconoclasm, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion also offers the radical view of the possibility of a new art that does not destroy images, but instead re-discovers the underlying meanings of the phenomenology of art. In place of the "nihilism" of postmodern iconoclasm, Marion suggests that images, especially painting, should play the role of an index pointing to the conditions of the appearance. He argues that there are phenomena of overflowing fulfilment, which can be named as the "saturated phenomenon". Following Jean-Luc Marion it can be said that there are images which have been appropriated to the degree that they are saturated and the intentions involved are overrun. Both the dissipation of meaning and the intentionless images resulting from saturation point to the images' further capacity rather than their end. See: Jean Luc Marion; *Crossings of the Visible*, 2004.

¹³ Jacques Ranciere argues that images are developed historically under three regimes: the ethical, the representational and the aesthetic. Today images are produced within the aesthetic regime See: Jacques Ranciere, *The Future of the Image*, 2009

¹⁴ Recently physics has provided the visual evidence of Einstein's theory of gravitational waves. Kip Thorne, Ron Drever and Rai Weiss himself are regarded as the fathers of LIGO (Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory), having proposed the concept back in the 1980s. They have observed the warping of space-time generated by the collision of two black holes more than a billion light-years

from Earth. The emergence of the theory of relativity was based on Einstein's proof of the Browns motion that made time as a basic substance of the universe and the understanding of contingency as a necessity.

¹⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains. A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, Stanford University Press, 2005