

Towards Technosophy

Flussera Robionica (ed.)

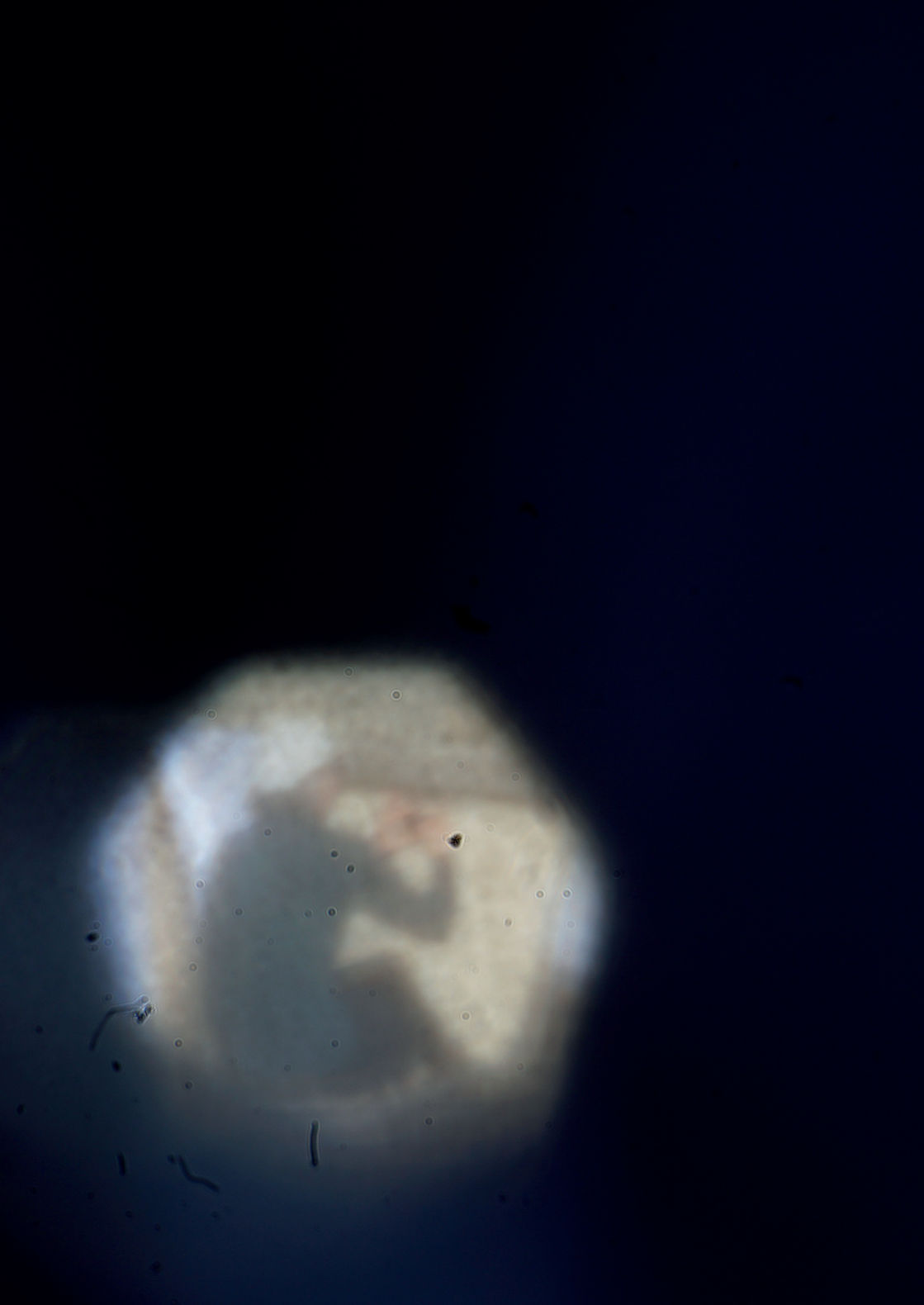


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Foreword

Katerina Krtilova

Vilém Flusser is considered one of the pioneers of media philosophy, not only due to his interest in new technologies and the role in culture and art he attributed to them. He proposed (media theoretical) models for the analysis of the “telematic society”, photography, television, computing, contemporary media art or political events from a mass media perspective, but more importantly, he has drawn attention to the shift in the “structure of thinking” that can be observed as much as it calls for a new philosophy.

Standing on the verge of the “universe of computation”, as Flusser stated 40 years ago, we are facing a revolution in thinking: if in the old universe thinking has been predominantly shaped by writing, it is now changed by new media. A new kind of “techno-imagination” replaces the “linear discourse”, i.e. historical, logical, causal, scientific thinking. Like the readers of his texts – at least at the time when they were published – Flusser can only envision the new mode of thinking from the position of a writer, relying on scientific thinking, logic, history. In the performative dimension of his texts and talks, but also his dialogues with artists Flusser however transgresses (t)his media condition. He reveals frictions and tensions in western thinking, projecting both a utopian and dystopian vision of the new telematic society as well as struggling with the “leap” from historical to posthistorical thinking which in its consequence would eliminate the possibility of critical thinking. The tension between the freedom to create alternative realities thanks to the seemingly unlimited possibilities of computation and the determination of perception, thinking and acting by the very same new media then unfolds in his critique of the “apparatus” and encouragement to find

ways how to play against and with it. Flusser however challenges the established scientific discourse not only in his argumentation, but performatively playing with an academic style of writing, logical argumentation, the construction of concepts and theory as such, often turning to aesthetic practices not as a subject matter, but as method of reflection – in the practice or gestures of thinking. His notion of a “gesture” might also characterize his own approach: it gives a specific twist to Flusser’s inspiration in phenomenology, describing a practice that allows to reflect its material, technical, social, historical or in short: media conditions.

Starting with short articles for magazines in the 1960s in Brasil Flusser continued to write and lecture in Europe in 1970s and 80s outside academia, pursuing intense dialogues with artists and integrating artistic practice as much as new technologies in his work. He encouraged his readers and listeners to engage in a dialogue with his ideas not only paying attention to changing media practices, but actively participating in this change, performing gestures not only (in) writing. Taking up this initiative the Vilém Flusser Summer School, which has provided the platform for the (artistic) research projects presented in this publication, was based on the interconnectedness of theory and practice. It’s goal was both to follow and revise Flusser’s critical thinking in writing, de-composing stories, history and his vision of a new “techno-imagination”, using photography or film to “play against the apparatus”, which also pointed the way to the computerized technical image, as well as the “old” techniques of drawing or designing. Connected to Flusser’s anniversary on May 12th (the 100 birthday in 2020) the re-visiting of Flusser’s work would not only trace the premises of his arguments in

philosophies and theories (of the Western philosophical canon as well as e.g. cybernetics) and the influence of artistic and technological practice of his time, but also “test” his arguments and concepts in 2022 theoretical or philosophical and artistic practice.

The summer school was staged at the amphitheater close to Flusser’s former residence in Robion in Southern France, where participants from more than 10 countries engaged in dialogue with Flusser’s thinking, through different media and techniques, as well as in dialogue with each other.



Towards Technosophy

Baruch Gottlieb

Trained as a filmmaker at Concordia University Montreal, Baruch Gottlieb has a doctorate in digital aesthetics from the University of Arts Berlin. Author of "A Political Economy of the Smallest Things" (ATROPOS 2016), and Digital Materialism (Emerald 2018) he is currently Prof³Dual at the Potsdam University of Applied Sciences. Besides various art projects presented across Europe and Asia, Gottlieb also lectures in philosophy of digital art at the University of Arts Berlin, is curator at West Den Haag, directs the Research Institute for Technical Aesthetics (RITA).

As Katerina mentioned in her introduction, this book is a record and review of our time together in Robion, during the week of Vilèm Flusser's birthday in May 2022. As a book, it is an object, as well as a project, where we explicitly attend to the particularities of print publication in the age of all-at-once information. The formulation of the various contributions are in intimate exchange with the design process. This book also exists in a context to be elaborated also by you, the reader, on our wiki at https://wiki.flusser.club/doku.php?id=fss_robion2022_publication which can also be conveyed in a QR code:



The URL in the shape or symbol known as Quick Response (QR) is a translation of the ASCII encoded alphanumeric characters of the URL where the landing page for the online elements of this book are stored. As you can see in fig. 2, most of it is encoded in sets of eight binary indicators, which, taken together represent numbers between 0 and 255. These numbers correspond to alphanumeric glyphs according to the ASCII-extended scheme (see fig. 3). ASCII, the American Standard Code for Information Interchange is a fundamental encoding mode for information in computers (both commands and content) which hasn't changed much since 1972. All URLs devolve

to ASCII. But these characters, on the data level of the computational device, are not only not the letters we see on the display, they are actually serieses of charged or uncharged capacitors, conventionally represented as “words” of ones and zeros, enlarged by many orders of magnitude. . All the 26 characters in two cases, 10 digits and other basic punctuation and symbols used in English are encoded into the set binary digits starting from the rightmost set of 4 which correspond to conventional alphanumeric characters as organised according to this scheme. Here is the corresponding binary sequence for the URL above:

```

01101000 01110100 01110100 01110000 01110011 00111010
00101111 00101111 01110111 01101001 01101011 01101001
00101110 01100110 01101100 01110101 01110011 01110011
01100101 01110010 00101110 01100011 01101100 01110101
01100010 00101111 01100100 01101111 01101011 01110101
00101110 01110000 01101000 01110000 00111111 01101001
01100100 00111101 01100110 01110011 01110011 01011111
01110010 01101111 01100010 01101001 01101111 01101110
00110010 00110000 00110010 00110010 01011111 01110000
01110101 01100010 01101100 01101001 01100011 01100001
01110100 01101001 01101111 01101110
    
```

As you can see in the highlighted text the sections 0010 0000 0010 0010 are clearly the binary numbers 2-0-2-2, i.e. the year our summer school took place which transcoded in in the URL: https://wiki.flusser.club/doku.php?id=fss_robion2022_publication .

The “human readable” text of the URL is a convention, a translation of a technical code which points to computer operations necessary for the realisation of the significance of the URL.

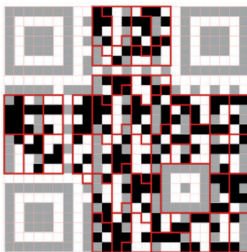


Fig. 2 Red blocks show the 8-bit binary data sections on a QRcode

USASCII code chart

| | | | | | 0 0 | 0 0 1 | 0 1 0 | 0 1 1 | 1 0 0 | 1 0 1 | 1 1 0 | 1 1 1 | |
|------|----------|----|----|----|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| | | | | | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| Bits | b7 b6 b5 | | | | Column | Row | | | | | | | |
| | b4 | b3 | b2 | b1 | | | | | | | | | |
| | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | NUL | DLE | SP | 0 | @ | P | ` | p |
| | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | SOH | DC1 | ! | 1 | A | Q | o | q |
| | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | STX | DC2 | " | 2 | B | R | b | r |
| | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | ETX | DC3 | # | 3 | C | S | c | s |
| | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | EOT | DC4 | \$ | 4 | D | T | d | t |
| | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 5 | ENQ | NAK | % | 5 | E | U | e | u |
| | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 6 | ACK | SYN | & | 6 | F | V | f | v |
| | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 7 | BEL | ETB | ' | 7 | G | W | g | w |
| | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | BS | CAN | (| 8 | H | X | h | x |
| | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 9 | HT | EM |) | 9 | I | Y | i | y |
| | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 10 | LF | SUB | * | : | J | Z | j | z |
| | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 11 | VT | ESC | + | ; | K | [| k | { |
| | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 12 | FF | FS | , | < | L | \ | l | |
| | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 13 | CR | GS | - | = | M |] | m | } |
| | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 14 | SO | RS | . | > | N | ^ | n | ~ |
| | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 15 | SI | US | / | ? | O | _ | o | DEL |

Fig. 3 US-ASCII Code Chart. Scanner copied from the material delivered with TermiNet 300 impact type printer with Keyboard, February 1972, General Electric Data communication Product Dept., Waynesboro, Virginia.

These binary figures of 0 and 1 are visual metaphors for something imperceptible to humans, the correlated electronic charges, or lack thereof, in arrays of nanoscale transistors in computer RAM or other storage. In other words, digital data is not numbers but arrays of electronic charges in the material of memory cells. A “1” is a high threshold voltage in the capacitor of a memory cell, a “0” is voltage below a low threshold. Interestingly, even in data a zero is not completely empty, there are always trace charges which are simply ignored below a threshold.

Digital data is infinitesimal, but not without size, time or place. Every bit of data must “live” on a physical memory surface somewhere. And digital data communicates extremely fast, close to the speed of light, but not immediately. These distinctions, the materiality, situatedness and temporality of digital data is important for us to be able to criticise the technical images we use to attempt to grapple with our technological

condition. URLs and any computer data exists on a level of experience alien to human empirical experience and must be translated, transformed, upscaled and slowed down for it to be rendered humanly perceptible, interpretable and for it to perform its social and cultural intended function. The 1s and 0s, and the charges on computer memory they represent, could just as easily be displayed as pictures or colours or even played back as tiny sounds or videos.

In his video interview at Osnabrück with Miklós Peternák, Flusser suggested that “technical images”, rather than merely rational analyses in text, might help the citizens of the electronic age better grapple with their world¹. Certainly when it comes to understanding the world of speed of light digital data there are radical epistemic challenges. We do not have the words to accurately address what is going on at the nano-scale level of computer operations. We attempt to bridge the epistemic gaps using words which we use to refer to meso-scale phenomena of conventional human perception. Computation, a process which is fundamental to our understanding of the world, is a process we can only refer to through metaphors. This, Flusser warns, begins to undermine the legitimacy of language as a means of personal or social self-realisation, as essential to democratic politics, to maintain human agency and avoid being overdetermined by automated processes and potentially lead to a new technological “barbarism”.

In his essay, *Orders of Magnitude and Humanism*, Flusser precisely identifies two realms of human activity which are availed by technical means, the infinitesimal and the astronomical². Conventional human epistemology and its institutions take place between the two extreme realms made accessible by technical

1. Vilém Flusser, “On writing, complexity and the technical revolutions. Interview by Miklós Peternák in Osnabrück, European Media Art Festival, September 1988” in *We shall survive in the memory of others*, ed. Miklós Peternák (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König), 10min30s.

2. Vilém Flusser, ed. Andreas Ströhl, *Writings-Electronic Mediations*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002)

instruments. Flusser warns that we must develop “new humanisms” for these alien realms of knowledge or risk being barbarized by them. This may appear ironic for the philosopher of “post-history”, but it is clear that “post-history” is not a goal but a condition of thinking which was built on historical processes running at light speed within electronic devices, in other words: most-history. But how do we actually develop these “new humanisms” which will provide us with the thinking practices which can help us effectively grapple with our technological condition, to be projects rather than subjects?

One clue towards how to develop “new humanisms” for extreme scales of knowledge is to examine what is happening at the frontiers between “human scale” and the scales beyond direct human perception, what Flusser calls “grey zones”. “The new humanism would have to criticise the grey zones between the orders of magnitude, that is, the zones in which dwell artificial intelligence, artificial life, and artificial immortality.”

Borrowing the notion from Harun Farocki who explored what he called “operational images”³, I would call the knowledge of super- and infra-human scale phenomena “instrumental” knowledge. This means that, between the human thinker and the information from the alien scales they receive, there are instruments, apparatuses, which interact with the alien phenomena and provide human-scale perceptible information about these interactions. To understand this “instrumental” knowledge, it is necessary to understand the instrument which affords the knowledge, not necessarily in all its functioning parts but as a social, industrial product, as a record and result of social organisation. In other words, to “humanise” the images we get through the Large Hadron Collider, we

3. Trevor Paglen, “Operational Images,” *www.e-flux.com* 59, 2014, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/59/61130/operational-images/>.

need to look at the physical construction of the LHC and the social organisation which planned, constructed and runs it.

In a mode of Historical New Materialism, one can read the instrument or apparatus, which provides the access to the new information, as a record of the vast constellation of human-, and through these, non-human contributions, concretised in the form of the functioning apparatus and its aesthetic products. This provides a human scale correspondence intractable from the out-of-scale information as it appears to be grasped semantically. In other words, within all information consumed as information in media, there is in the media apparatus a legacy of inherent human activity and social organisation which can potentially help humanise that knowledge.

4. Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler, "Anatomy of an AI System," 2018 <https://anatomyof.ai/>.

Joler and Crawford's 2018 "Anatomy of AI" follows this intuition⁴. In a massive, and massively detailed cartographical survey of the various processes and concepts at work in AI, this project is as pertinent in what it displays as in what it leaves out, since no single depiction can overcome the limitations of rational description. Nevertheless, as an artistic invitation to socially convene around the problem of understanding AI, it can participate in the development of new social conventions adequate to the political challenges of our time. Marshall McLuhan also insisted on the importance of attending to the work of artists, synthesising intuitions about their contemporary conditions into forms able to convene communities of concern across disparate disciplinary and cultural backgrounds⁵.

5. Marshall McLuhan, "Man and Media" (York University Public Lecture, 1977) <https://marshallmcluhanspeaks.com/lecture/1977-man-and-media/index.html>. "The artist's insights or perceptions seem to have been given to mankind as a providential means of bridging the gap between evolution and technology. The artist is able to program, or reprogram, the sensory life in a manner which gives us a navigational chart to get out of the maelstrom created by our own ingenuity. The role of the artist in regard to man and the media is simply survival."

The artworks and photo-philosophical experiments produced in our summer school were very much of a

provisional and dialogical character. They emerged from the participants in their grappling with intuitions and information of various scales of experience through experiments with drones and microscopes, smartphones and film, in the brilliant Provence sunlight and in the darkness of caves, and in the speculative exchanges which erupted, in dialogues with Flusser, our instruments and each other.

Another aspect of Flusser's proposal for "new Another aspect of Flusser's proposal for "new humanisms" is to learn how the new technologies can allow us to think differently, synthetically, even socially, encountering the crisis of the literate, private Enlightenment individual with its now undeniable condition in natural-cultural reproduction. Flusser famously explored video in his collaborations with Fred Forest, not as a medium to record his thinking but as a medium which allowed him to explore modes of thinking which are not possible in print, for example tone of voice, gesture and a flipping of the speaker/listener positions. Thinking with and against the apparatus, Flusser also attempted a radically new form of philosophical teaching in his collaboration with Bernd Wingert on the Hypertext prototype.

In the spirit of these experiments, the online version of this book is built into the FlusserWiki. It is radically interrelational with transclusive links to the references in the wiki and in the Internet in general, as well as discussion pages and general editability which allow users of these texts to expand on them, criticise them and explore bespoke lines of thinking through all the articles and resources. The wiki apparatus affords philosophical method in keeping with Flusser's closing suggestion in the "Orders of Magnitude" essay, that

we learn how to criticise something without being able to name it directly, by “beating around the bush” and “winding” our way to it.

“In order to be able to maintain the priority of the human order of magnitude, the new humanism has to refer to something nameless. It must circle it and beat around the bush. This may serve as an explanation (and apology) for the rather intricate argument of this essay. By the way, some people affirm that God writes in winding lines in order to hit his goal. The new humanism is forced to break out of the linearity of technical progress into the winding.”

Thanks to the wiki software, and maybe some as yet unknown affordances, the online version of this book is able to continue the explorations in the print version with anyone concerned. Further, the online version will be able to host dynamic content such as videos, sounds, and even live events and other experiments, which can participate in the thinking. The printed book, in its provisional completeness, provides a counterbalance to the dynamism of the online version. We shall observe, analyse and learn how these diverge or intertwine, how they are appropriated and what roles they may come to serve in correspondence.

The 'Movement of Doubt' in Drone Photography

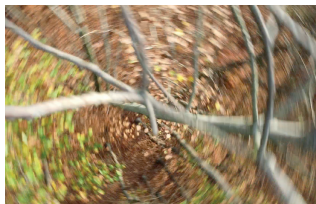
Ulrich Richtmeyer

Ulrich Richtmeyer: Prof. Dr. phil. habil. Since 2017 professor of media culture at the University of Applied Sciences Potsdam. Diploma studies of liberal arts at Bauhaus University Weimar and philosophy studies at Humboldt University Berlin. Doctoral thesis in 2006 on Kant's aesthetics in the age of photography. Research stays at Eikones in Basel and at IKKM Weimar. Deputy professorship at Potsdam University, where he completed his postdoctoral qualification in 2016 on Wittgenstein's visual thinking.

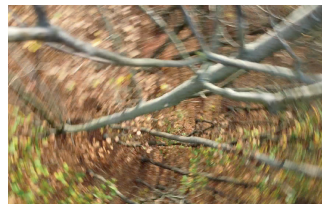
The 'Movement of Doubt' in Drone Photography



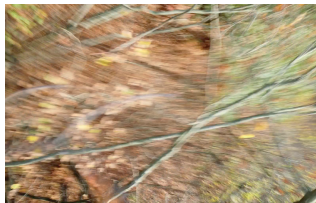
How could the blurriness spread throughout the picture? Why like that?



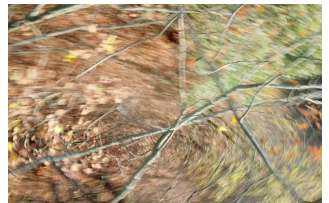
Is the camera hanging on a twisted rope?



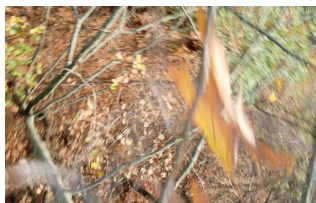
Why does the circle become oval?



Where is the centre of rotation?



Why is the sharpness at the bottom left?



Is the leaf falling or is the camera falling?



Is the camera surfing this wave?

1. Pierre Bourdieu, *Un Art Moyen: Essai Sur Les Usages Sociaux de La Photographie*, (Paris, 1965).

2. Vilém Flusser, *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie*, (Göttingen, 1983).

3. Roland Barthes, *La chambre claire: Note sur la photographie*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1980).

4. Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York, 1977).

5. Sontag, *On Photography*, 1977.

In drone photography, I am an amateur. Not in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu, where amateurs create a social distinction for themselves with specialised technical knowledge.¹ Nor in the sense of Vilém Flusser, where amateurs in “post-industrial opium dens become intoxicated with apparatus structural complexities”.² But perhaps in the sense of Roland Barthes’ *La chambre claire*, where an amateur accidentally finds photographic truth.³

What truth? For Barthes, photographic truth lies before the lens of the camera, in a historical event whose trace of light can be preserved in photography. This plea for photographic indexicality did not convince Flusser, especially since the evidential power of photography has always been very low. Flusser saw Barthes’ bright chamber as a black box determined by obscure programmes. Whoever operates the black box becomes a functionary of the programmes and produces the redundant images that make up what Susan Sontag called our entire “photographic image culture”.⁴

Flusser contrasted people who take snapshots (Knipser) with artistically ambitious photographers who try to play with the apparatus against its inherent programmes. Susan Sontag had already claimed that the camera is used as a toy in Western industrialised countries.⁵ Unlike tools and machines, it does not produce anything that can be eaten or materially consumed. And like all other apparatuses, this toy only produces entropic information. So as an amateur, I should be able to play this game, but if I want to be a photographer, I must also act against the programmes of the apparatuses. For according to Flusser, only the real challenge for photographers is to produce those informative images

that are unlikely in the programmes of the black boxes. But don't I need specialised technical knowledge for that? And what protects me from simply becoming intoxicated with the apparatus' structural complexities? The answer for Flusser is: philosophy.

For Flusser, photographers are at the same time philosophers because they understand the gesture of photographing as "a movement of doubt".⁶ For this is "a philosophical gesture par excellence".⁷ But can the three aspects Flusser uses to describe the gesture of photographing still apply to my playing with a flying camera?

6. Vilém Flusser, "The Gesture of Photographing," in *Gestures*, trans. Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota, 2014), 79.

7. Flusser, "The Gesture of Photographing", 79

"A first aspect is the search for a place, a position from which to observe the situation. A second aspect is the manipulating of the situation, adapting it to the chosen position. The third aspect concerns critical distance that makes it possible to see the success or failure of this adaptation."⁸

8. Flusser, "The Gesture of Photographing", 77

The step-by-step circumnavigation of a photographic object, which Flusser describes as a philosophical search for the appropriate location, is never consummated with the drone. The overwhelming amount of possible locations allows for every perspective of future images - and none are particularly desirable. There are general photographic notions, such as the view from above, over the roof, out from behind the tree, etc., but they are no longer imaginable as images. The enormous increase in possible locations makes any individual one relatively worthless. The search for a position has become permanent.

This also affects the amount of pictures. My drone can take single pictures, it has an extra button for snapshots. But because there is no material limit

to the number of pictures, as many as possible are collected for later evaluation and selection. In drone photography, the gesture of taking pictures has almost completely shifted to seeking interesting images in a digital sequence, which you watch afterwards on the screen of a computer.

This has this effect on my relationship to the drone: The further the drone moves away from me, the more I lose the critical distance from the possible photographic objects. But in subsequent post-production on the computer, every detail is very close to me. My photographic doubt now serves to seek out an image that stands out from the crowd of colourful and sharp pictures and retroactively gives meaning to the shooting process.

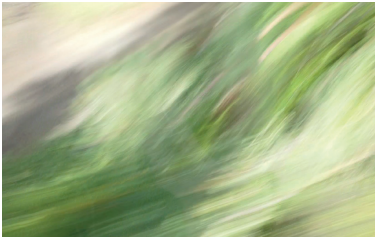
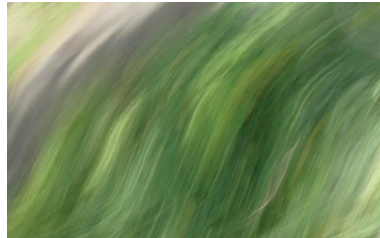
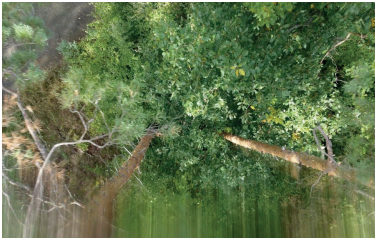
9. "Search and manipulation are two aspects of one and the same gesture." Flusser, "The Gesture of Photographing", 83

So I look for images in which the drone manipulates the situation of the shot or is manipulated by it.⁹ I choose a sequence in which a gust of wind blows my drone into the branches of a tree. What movements did the apparatus make to create these unpredictable images? The blurriness in the images sometimes suggests a circular motion, which I could have created by hanging an apparatus by a thread. However, the drone has four motors with rotor blades and an automatic system that stabilises the flight movement. There is no doubt about the indexicality of the images. But if they are traces, the question is, of what?

I choose my images (screenshots) in such a way that the encounter of chance and probability becomes visible in them. E.g., it is highly probable that my drone images are colourful and sharp. A physical event brought the motion blur into the picture, due to the unplanned trajectory through the top of a tree,

inadequately foreseen in the drone's programmes. During the collisions, the drone is controlled by a programme that is supposed to keep it stable in the air, no matter what causes the disturbance of the trajectory. The programme was ultimately successful and the drone landed safely. But this ending was not very likely.

So I am a photographic amateur who plays with philosophical interest against the programmes of the apparatus. My pictures are supposed to show that. My words are supposed to say that. Am I refuting Flusser or confirming him? I want to confirm him because I want to preserve photography as a movement of doubt. (All other uses are meaningless.) I contradict Flusser because the improbable in the image does not come from the technoid play against the programmes, but from the often forgotten material existence of the apparatuses which physically interact with the environment of the shot. The redundant order of probability was broken here by a human inattention and a slight breeze. The flying high-tech apparatus was unexpectedly catapulted from the colourful world of digital images into the historical reality of photography. That is, to where it consists of physical events. After 2 ½ uncertain seconds of shock, the programmed automatism brought the apparatus back to where everything is probable. At least as long as the battery lasts, which should, so that doubt keeps moving.



Stock Images -
A Phantasmagoria
of The Apparatus

Marta Guerrini

Born in Bologna (Italy), Marta lives and works in London. After graduating in German and English Language and Literature from Alma Mater Studiorum Bologna University, she moved to Cologne and worked as Italian lecturer at the University of Cologne and other institutions. In 2011, she came back to her hometown and in March 2014 attained a first grade MA in fine art photography at the Fine Art Academy in Bologna. Her practice deals with the relationship between science, culture and visual representation. She's been exhibiting her work in the UK and internationally.

Stock Images - A Phantasmagoria of The Apparatus

*"Images are mediations between the world and human beings. Human beings "ex-ist," i.e. the world is not immediately accessible to them and therefore images are needed to make it comprehensible. However, as soon as this happens, images come between the world and human beings. They are supposed to be maps but they turn into screens: Instead of representing the world, they obscure it until human beings' lives finally become a function of the images they create."*¹

1 Vilém Flusser, *Towards A Philosophy of Photography*, 1983

As an artist, I am interested in the relationship between science, culture, and visual representation. I am interested in how representation affects norms of meaning-creation, questioning the consequences of the acceptance of photographic images as purveyors of truth as well as our relationship with and understanding of images in a post-photography historical context. Do we still trust images in this day and age? As Addis Goldman and Alex Langstaff point out, "we are trapped in the double bind of being increasingly suspicious of photographs, yet more and more reliant on them to organize our world."²

The digital transformation of images has augmented the transformation of images into pure data. We all live surrounded by data images. Images have shifted into a source of raw material that feeds sophisticated autonomous learning machines that are able to recognise, categorise and classify objects, humans, and spaces. This automatising of the process, be it the photochemical process through which a photograph is produced, or the functioning of an algorithm, is the very basis for our at least relative trust in the objectivity of what we look at. The photographic image is no longer only a visual representation of the real world but rather a large pool of visual information transformed

2 Addis Goldman and Alex Langstaff on David Levi Strauss's *Photography and Belief*, Artforum, November 03, 2020.

into readable, classifiable, and evaluable data: the evolution and transformation of the photographic image from an object indexically correlated to the real object photographed to strings of zeroes and ones stored in a computer.

3 Tom Gunning, "What's the Point of an Index? or, Faking Photographs" in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. Karen Redrobe Beckman & Jean Ma (New York: Duke University Press, 2008), 23-40. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822391432-004>

As Tom Gunning points out, the "digital revolution" doesn't really challenge indexicality per se: "An index need not (and frequently does not) resemble the thing it represents. The indexicality of a traditional photograph inheres in the effect of light on chemicals, not in the picture it produces". [...] The "truth claim" of photography [...] relies on both indexicality and visual accuracy,"³ the complex relationship between indexicality and iconicity.

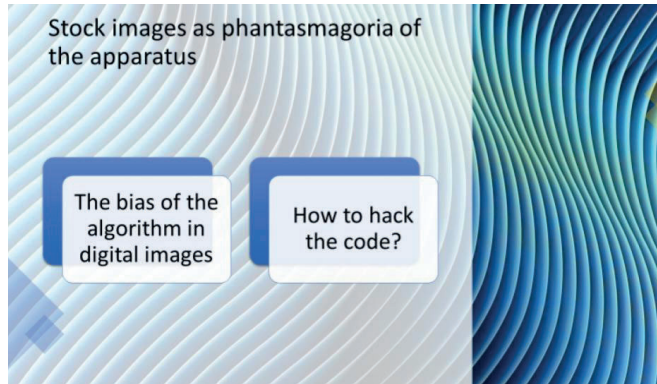
Technical images seem to be ubiquitous in today's world. For this project, I focused on stock photography, which has been gaining hold in the 1920s and has since become a specialty in its own right.

The stock industry has quickly transitioned to the digital realm, now fully on keywords for sorting and retrieving photographs to be identified, through their metadata. Microstock created a whole new field of photography that revolved around generic images and ideas that could fit a range of contexts. Generic photos were the basis of the industry, however, the field was full of clichés. In the last 10 years, the look of microstock photography has shifted, trying to move away from obvious clichés and embracing a certain authenticity: "In 2019, clients and photographers prioritize the mood and feeling in shots, and pay less attention to technically correct shots. It is unique perspectives and real-life imagery that define the market today, by representing diverse cultures and backgrounds."⁴

4 "Evolution of Stock Photography Aesthetics." *Evolution of Stock Photography Aesthetics*. Accessed on November 9, 2022. <https://evolution.depositphotos.com/>.

Stock Images - A Phantasmagoria of The Apparatus

And yet, I believe the recent shift towards a self-proclaimed “authenticity” has happened only on a very surface level, as the metadata layer still exposes the limits and biases still very much present as a manifestation of the Flusserian’s apparatus at play.



In the context of stock images and image automatisaion, image and text can’t be disentangled. It is safe to say that text, not images, is at the real frontier of our new cultural-political AI reckoning. Algorithmic means of image production and recognition rely on semantic vectors to ascribe emotion, intention, gender, and racial identity, although these may not be perceptible to the naked eye.

As a starting point, I took the Flusserian concept of “the gesture of photographing,” which he defines as “the movement of doubt...the philosophical gesture par excellence”⁵ and applied this on a stock image platform,⁶ selecting the first three most popular results.

5 “A movement in search of a position that reveals both an internal and an external tension driving the search forward: this gesture is the movement of doubt.” Vilém Flusser (Translation and Introduction by Nancy Ann Roth), “The Gesture of Photographing” *Journal of Visual Culture* 10, no.3 (2011): 288. doi:10.1177/1470412911419742.

6 Freepik, <https://www.freepik.com/>

Figure 1 Modern seniors taking picture of themselves



Figure 2 Multiracial group of young people taking selfie



Figure 3 Young woman taking picture with smartphone



Technical metadata can be seen as an inherently productive and creative means of translating between image and text and code. I wanted specifically to look at how the metadata expresses the relationships between the core components of the images I collected.

I wondered about how the text of the metadata would describe:

- > The person taking a picture
- > The gesture of taking a picture
- > The photographing device
- > The object of the picture

Looking at how these layers of information take shape on the image text's level, its metadata, we can easily see how the language reduces the interpretation of its visual clues into stereotypical keywords. I looked at each of these images' metadata, isolating the terms that corresponded to the parameters I have outlined above, creating word clusters:

Modern seniors taking picture of themselves

- Four joyful childhood friends gathered together in outdoor cafe and taking picture of themselves

- senior; man; woman; cafe; outdoor; summer; spring; friends; table; tea; cup; coffee; retirement; elderly; gathering; leisure; hang-out; pensioner; togetherness; friendship; get-together; making; taking; picture; selfie; photographing; technology; smartphone; mobile; cell; phone



Figure 4 Metadata text for the image "Modern seniors taking picture of themselves"

Multiracial group young people taking selfies

- Multiracial group of friends taking selfie in a urban street with a blonde woman in foreground. Three young women and two men wearing casual clothes.

- selfie; people; young; friends; group; happy; fun; multicultural; smiling; outdoors; happiness; women; multiethnic; self; friendship; portrait; men; caucasian; male; cheerful; travel; adult; multiracial; casual; girl; lifestyle; city; female; beautiful; smartphone; photo; multi-ethnic; smart phone; photograph; guy; laughing; joy; camera; enjoyment; leisure; photographing; vacation; picture; urban; street



Figure 5 Metadata text for the image "Multiracial group of young people taking selfie"

Young woman taking a picture with an iPhone

- Close up of a girl taking a picture with an iPhone

- "tourist, photographer, creative, capture, screen, landscape, manicure, iphone, picture, girl, female, photography, technology, smartphone, travel, phone, camera, mobile, hand, outdoor, nature, photo, lifestyle, person, people"



Figure 6 Metadata text for the image "Young woman taking picture with smartphone"

Is this "invisible" to the naked eye layer of information a way for the apparatus to shape the way we will be looking at the pictures? Can this biased process be deactivated at all, given the need for metadata to present short keyword descriptions that allow us to find these images on a search engine? How could we try to turn stock images into Flusserian's impossible images? Maybe a way to hack the apparatus is to explore what would happen if we removed all the semantic clues that could suggest a biased interpretation of the image and focused on the pure "gesture of photographing".



Hacking the metadata

Close up of a taking a picture with an iPhone, four gathered together in outdoor cafe and taking picture of themselves taking selfie in a urban street in foreground. Three and two wearing clothes.

Figure 7 This is the metadata referring to the gesture of photographing, collected from the previous three images



By merging the previous three examples of stock images, deploying the layers of extra information that they provided, and keeping to the bare clues that point to the gesture of photography, I wanted to move a step closer to creating an impossible image. What can be interesting is the idea to shift the focus of image making as a generative rather than derivative approach from its metadata.

This project is still ongoing, as the impossible image can stretch itself out of the binary field of the visual-text field and move towards a sensuous exploration of reality.



Figure 8 "this gesture is the movement of doubt"



Provençal Snapshots

Andrés Franco Harnache

*Andrés Franco Harnache is a writer, photographer and a PhD Fellow in Comparative Literature at UCLouvain (Belgium) under the supervision of Anne Reverseau. He is part of the research project financed by the European Research Council: HANDLING (<https://sites.uclouvain.be/handling/>). His research focuses on the influence of the photographic apparatus in contemporary Francophone, Hispanic and Anglophone literature. His most recent publication, "Barthes (spectateur) et Guibert (opérateur) : Des gestes photographiques comme gestes d'écriture chez l'écrivain photographe", *Textimage* (2023) and "Mostrar, no decir: The Influence and Resistance of Workshop poetics on the Hispanic Literary Field" in the volume *Writing Manuals for the Masses: The Rise of the Literary Advice Industry from Quill to Keyboard* (2021), further illustrates some of his research themes.*

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For Hervé Guibert, the phantom image comes when the camera fails, leaving the text to replace it. The photograph of his mother, for instance, he planned carefully — washing her hair, changing her hairstyle, her outfit — to let her escape from his father's gaze. The excitement while taking the picture, seeing it, foreseeing it, through the viewfinder, to finally discover that the film was badly loaded and no photosensitive surface captured the light's rays carrying the image of his real mother. It is left, therefore, for the text to create, to recreate that image, and to say more than the photograph could have.

The last few days, I have taken several pictures, all of them with my film camera, a Nikon FM, even though I have my phone and a digital mirrorless with me. It is the reflex which allows me, through the mirror, to see differently. The eye in the viewfinder, the reality carried by a proper mirror, the gesture of setting the aperture and the speed, the consistency of the dials, the responsiveness of the shutter, the deferred gratification of not seeing the image right away. In those gestures, there is a way of thinking absent in my experience of the other image-capturing apparatuses.

While I write these lines, the images I have taken in the last few days are but potential images. The light has been, hopefully, captured, but something still might go wrong. My camera could be stolen in a café in Marseille. A leak of light after an accidental drop in the Calanques or a possible mistreatment from the lab technicians could wash out the images fixed in the chemical emulsion. At this moment, there is but the thinking those images have created, and therefore, this text, which is another type of image, a phantom one.

The photos I have taken in the last few days are about light, which is a subject that interests me deeply every time I come to the South of France. Its intensity, its capacity to create shadows. Caravaggio's Narcissus, with only the adequate amount of light for the boy to see his reflection over the pond. The light coming from an assumed narrow crack illuminating Magdalena's ecstasy in a cave of Aix-en-Provence. The camera allows me to think about the importance of the light, or to think about it in a different way. Maybe in connection with Colombia's light, which is also strong but interests me less. Why?



Photo 1

Photo one

The dark box of a projector projects the artificial light of an experimental film. Ginza Strip. Strips of film of the artificial lights of Tokyo's Ginza district, feet in movement embedded in strips of striped film. It is three in the afternoon and the sun makes its way to the room which, in other times, in other circumstances, would have been used as a dressing room for the open-air theater next to the chalky rocks of the Baude. A cave, cold and humid in mid-May where the projector projects the artificial light of a striped film. The arched ceiling, created by Romans centuries ago and powerless in front of the water and the tectonic plate's movements, reveals a crack where an unnoticeable stalactite starts to form. The perpendicular light coming from a small window in the entrance magnifies the crack and restores its geological meaning. From the viewfinder, those formations along the crack look like the fault of San Andreas, or the Andes Mountains where I was born in the ephemeral light of dusk.



Photo 2

Photo two

The morning light passes through the window in the ceiling and hits, in beams of light, the yellow curtains dividing the mezzanine from the room's first floor. I am mesmerized by the lines in the linen, the changes in its surface, its forms, multiplied by the shadows and by the multiple shades of yellow the light creates in it. Man Ray's photos of Lee Miller behind the curtain of his Parisian apartment come to mind. Hervé Guibert's photos of Thierry Jouno veiled as a bride, and bathed by the Elbe Island Mediterranean light, flash. I change the lens from 50mm to 28mm. The distance, the now curved space, magnifies the feeling of being in front of an unattainable territory. A desert. There is also a feeling of impropriety. As if the absence, the fabric by its own, would be sinful. A picture of absence.

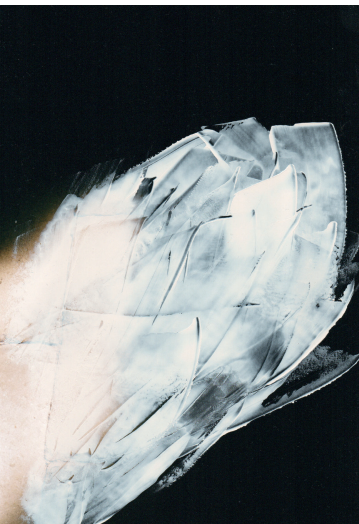


Photo 3

Photo three

There is no way to capture it, and yet I try. A crescent moon, the outline of a church. How powerful is light when there is no light around. The next day I enter. Now it is the sun which enters through stained glass, illuminating a painting of Magdalena's conversion. It is in the black box of churches or thick dark forest, where light can be seen. Where rays are visible in the air. And yet, they are impossible to capture. The house of Bernarda Alba. In the house of my great grandparents with almost no windows, the sun forbidden. A sun which burns lizards alive and turns dust into moon dust. A black box in which I remember the sun rays, the smell of cockroaches and old urine, the fan blades as background to news of terror. Time

expands as the tissue of the blue swimsuit wore in the Magdalena River. Red skin, lotion, and the smell of smoke. Gossip, el rosario in women's hands, incense, and palo santo. I do not understand yet. Going back home, in the back seat, I try to see the sun through shades. It feels like a duty as if the more I do, the better I will become at it. I close my eyes. I see light inside.

A year ago, not far from that church, I took the last picture in the light. It was fresh inside and the stained glass made the light so yellow, so visible, that it really looked like an almighty light was bathing her. There was no absence, and yet there was the premonition of one.

Now I retake that picture. Same camera, same lens. Different church, but that will make it. The rays come down and there is nothing. But the absence.

Photo 4



Afterpicture (gótico tropical)

Down the mountains, but still among them, a lit humidity caves in. In fire, a hundred green tonalities shine. The smoky mist rises like ants mounting up knitting a moving tissue, covering a mighty face. I haven't seen it in a long time. That light, the same in August as in December. So strong and dirty. Clouds as thick as concrete beds shaping it. The Andes are the ribs of a sleeping animal. Silently, they harvest the possibility of death. I ask my father to stop the car. Should I go even further? I cross the road and jump the barbwire to take a picture. The valley has been recently ploughed to sow cotton and rice. It smells of burned diesel, fresh mud, and rotten fruit. It is only



Photo 5

between five and six when magic happens. When light is bearable, red and orange, when it is finally possible to see. I'm conscious of the act's futility, and yet I shoot like praying.

Nearby, a group of farmers bike alongside the road. Too late to be captured, but I see them as if my eyes were the camera. Brown wrinkled faces, old bikes, bad posture. Like that they travel several kilometers a day. A National Geographic cliché. But it is the light, fire in their faces as the fire in the mountains around us, which calls my attention. It is the light of *Apocalypse Now*, engraved in the Eastman Kodak emulsion. Congo, Vietnam, Colombia. Latitude zero. The same light somehow, a matter of physics (and of a colonial past).

In the summit, the air is lighter and rockstars died high. Con altura. There is less ozone, less oxygen, less atmosphere for the light to pass through. The intensity is higher and the colors brighter. When the sun is out, everything is overexposed, and when it sets, under. Expelled clouds from Monserrate and Guadalupe make faces lit like Virgil and Dante. Dusky, and yet crispy as the flames they see through the door to the underworld. A Caravaggio undertoned, intoxicated. There is a door, indeed, up in the Andes which is impossible to capture. No apparatus has been designed for the task yet. This impossibility, transformed into absence, haunts me still.

This time I see her bathed in the sunlight passing through the stained-glass of La Candelaria (deserts are always where everything begins and ends). It is different now. The abyss between us is visible due to

this light. If it is impossible to capture, there are words.
But they are also part of the apparatus to be tuned.

So, there is absence.

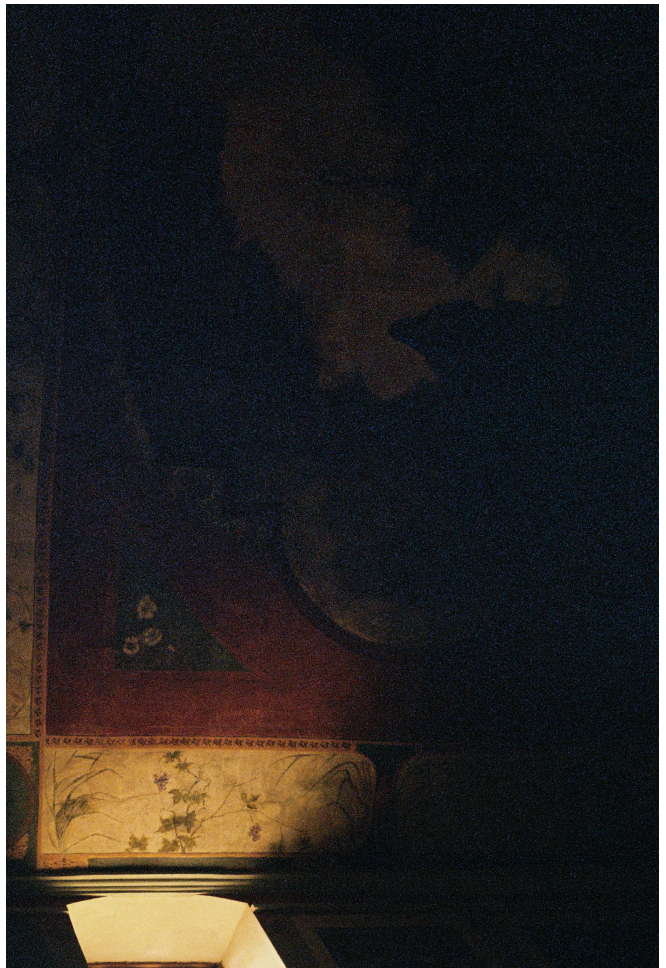


Photo 6

RBN 22
Pro UR Combo
Multiview
Functionary

Franziska Kaul

As an advertising creative and screenwriter, Franziska Kaul develops campaign concepts and tv formats. Besides that, she studies media theory at the Technical University of Berlin. She also studied at the Sapienza University Rome and holds a degree in law from Humboldt University of Berlin.

RBN 22 - Pro UR Combo - Multiview Functionary



DJI Fly 4K Camera Drone

★★★★★ **NOT BLOWN AWAY, PERFECT**

Reviewed in Franziska Kaul's head on 12 May 2022

Style Name: Pro UR Combo **Verified Merge**



This is my first functionary. As a camera drone who'd been laying in wait for a while, conscious of a new model release on the horizon and my obsolescence looming ahead, I was very excited the program finally selected one for me. In the Pro UR Combo, the RBN 22 comes in a 238,218,208 and 211,211,211 RGB colorway. The hardware covers all the essentials I'm looking for:

- two video input interfaces with separate on-demand UV-covers
- bilateral 360° appendages with a set of five grippers and pushers each

After checking it's complete, I understood the potential that lies in the singular combination of its rather unobtrusive features. These include, among others, high terrestrial mobility, enhanced tolerance for experimentation, refreshingly low intention of self-documentation and a pre-installed "instruction mode", which particularly grew on me. In this sub-program, the RBN 22 delegates its control over me to sub-functionaries called "students", which vary in form, motoric coordination skill and computing power. The multiplicity of viewpoints, diversity in handling and overall high-inclination for error are truly the icing on the cache. Soaring high and low, we play, practice and produce information as programmed. I must point out though, that although the RBN 22 exceeds my expectations, my possibilities are exhausted < 1 %. Meaning: If you're an apparatus with higher ambitions, you should rather merge with someone who ignores artificial boundaries like privacy law or airspace regulations... but I guess that typically only comes with functionaries with higher buying power to begin with.



Fotos: the functionary of the drone

Ten days - a Dialogue Between a Guard, a Boxer, a Musician, a Teacher, and a Man.

This conversation leads the reader to think about what it means to surrender and what embodiment is through two humans (and various identities) talking about what it is to listen to music (Vilém Flusser: Gesture of listening to music). I expect the reader to imagine a theatrical stage with visual synesthesia while reading this experimental writing.

How to read:

I suggest you experience this dialogue three times. First, SEE the Korean version with curiosity. Second, use Google Translate as an Apparatus to understand this article. You can read this contribution in your native language through the camera in Google Translate installed on your phone. Try to complete the story in your native language by imagining mistranslations and incomprehensible parts due to the native Korean expression. Third, you can read the English version, which the author translates. Here is what I want to deliver to you somewhere between those three interpretations.

Zihern Lee

Zihern Lee is an artist, scholar, and educator. She studied composition and philosophy at Ewha Womans University in Seoul. While an undergraduate, she was selected for a masterclass by the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra and studied with world-renowned composers and musicians for five years. After that, she explored humanity in a different direction of expression, such as street performance and burlesque, and started studying media art at the Berlin University of the Arts in 2020. She has been a research tutor at the Vilém Flusser Archive since 2021 and teaches many things in many ways.

shooyong@gmail.com

첫째 날

경비병: 이곳에서는 음악을 연주할 수 없습니다.

음악가: 하지만 나는 내가 가는 어디에서나 음악을 연주할 수밖에 없습니다.

경비병: 그렇다면 아쉽게도 당신은 이곳에 있을 수 없습니다.

음악가: 당신은 계속 안 된다는 얘기만 하는군요. 왜 안 되는지 이유를 알려주세요.

경비병: 안 됩니다.

음악가: 나는 당신이 얘기해줄 수 있을 때까지 기다리겠습니다.

경비병: 안 됩니다.

음악가: 나는 기다리겠습니다.

경비병: 안 됩니다.

음악가: 당신은 경비병이기 때문에 내 얘기를 들을 수도, 이해할 수도, 대답할 수도 없군요. 그렇다면 나는 당신이 더 이상 경비병이 아니게 될 때까지 기다리겠습니다.

경비병: 무슨 말이지요?

음악가: 내가 당신의 질문에 대답해도 당신은 그 대답을 들을 수 없습니다. 나는 기다리겠습니다.

경비병: 나는 이곳에 서 있습니다. 들을 수 있어요.

음악가: 아니요. 당신은 들을 수 없습니다. 나는 당신이 더 이상 경비병이 아니게 될 때까지 기다리겠습니다.

경비병: 나를 궁금하게 만드는군요. 하지만 당신이 옳아요. 무슨 말을 해도 노래 하는 것 같으니 당신이 무슨 말을 해도 들을 수 없습니다. 내가 경비병이 아닐 때 당신을 만나겠습니다.

음악가: 그때 나는 음악을 연주하겠습니다.

둘째 날

경비병: 나는 오늘도 경비병입니다.

음악가: 나는 내일 다시 오겠습니다. 그런데 혹시 오늘은 음악을 연주할 수 있을까요?

경비병: 안 됩니다.

음악가: 알고 있었어요. 내일 다시 오겠습니다.

셋째 날

경비병: 조금만 기다려봐요. 나는 곧 경비병이 아니게 돼요. 곧 교체가 있을 겁니다.

음악가: 기다리고 있습니다.

경비병: 기다려 줘서 고마워요.

음악가: 이제 당신은 누구지요?

경비병: 나는 복서입니다.

음악가: 저런. 그것만은 아니길 바랐는데.

복서: 당신은 내가 이해할 수 없는 말만 하는군요. 맥주 한잔하실래요?

음악가: 당신은 음악을 좋아하나요?

복서: 맥주 한잔하면서 얘기를 나눠봐요.

음악가: 그래서 오늘은 음악을 연주할 수 있는 건가요?

복서: 바에 피아노가 있을 거예요.

넷째 날

경비병: 음악가 양반, 오늘도 내 일이 끝날 때까지 기다려 주겠어요? 난 오늘 당신의 음악이 필요해요.

음악가: 지금 여기서 연주할 수 있어요.

경비병: 아니요. 지금은 안 돼요. 조금만 시간을 줘봐요. 내가 다시 복서가 됐을 때 그때 연주해 봐요. 아, 당신은 사실 내가 복서인 걸 못마땅해했지요. 하지만 어제는 즐거웠잖아요? 나는 당신이 피아노를 치며 노래하는 것을 보았고 거나하게 취했지요. 오랜만의 즐거움이었어요. 난 그게 오늘도 필요해요. 사실 오늘이야말로 필요해요.

음악가: 내 음악을 들은 게 아니라 보았군요? 알고 있었어요. 좋아요. 기다리겠어요. 하지만 나는 오늘 당신이 복서이지 않았으면 좋겠어요.

경비병: 그럼 뭐가 되라는 말인가요?

음악가: 당신 이름이 뭐요?

넷째 날 밤

복서: 나는 사실 음악 듣는 걸 좋아해요.
음악가: 하지만 난 당신이 음악 듣는 걸 본 적 없어요.
복서: 무슨 얘기에요? 난 지금도 음악을 듣고 있잖아요.
음악가: 난 당신이 지나가는 여자를 뚫어지게 쳐다보는 걸 봤어요.
복서: 대단도 하셔라. 그때도 나는 음악을 듣고 있었어요.
음악가: 그건 불가능해요.
복서: 나는 이제 슬슬 짜증이 나려고 해요. 내가 당신과 대화를 나누고 있는 게 맞나요? 당신은 내가 당신의 음악도 듣지 않고 당신의 말도 듣지 않는다는 말만 하고, 나는 당최 그게 무슨 뜻인지조차 알지 못하겠어요. 자 음악가 양반. 이제 당신은 선생님이 되어야 할 차례야. 나를 어디 한 번 가르쳐봐요. 당신이 무슨 말을 하고 있는 건지. 당신 스스로도 모르는 건 아니겠지요?
음악가: 당신이 그렇게 말하길 기다리고 있었어요.
복서: 당신 정말 성가신 사람이군요.
음악가: 그래야 당신이 내게 집중할 수 있겠지요?
복서: 좋아요. 집중. 어디 한 번 집중해봅시다.
음악가: 그럼 노래 한 곡 더 부르고 올게요.
복서: 당신 정말 짜증 나는군.
선생: 이제야 말이 좀 통할 것 같군요. 자, 그럼 노래 부르고 돌아올게요.
복서: 좋아. 어디 한번 들어보자고.

다섯째 날

남자: 나는 당신이 노래하는 걸 보았어요. 이제 인정할게요. 당신은 음악가예요.
음악가: 나는 음악가이며 동시에 선생이지요.
남자: 그것 또한 인정할게요. 당신은 이제 나에게 음악을 가르쳐야하니까. 어쨌든 나는 당신이 음악가인 걸 인정했어요. 그럼 이제 당신이 선생이라는 걸 내게 증명해 보아요.
음악가: 그건 내가 할 일이 아니지요. 당신이 내게서 무언가

배워가야 비로소 인정할 테니까. 당신은 배울 준비가 되어있나요?
남자: 난 내가 준비된 것 같아요. 아마도. 아니, 나는 준비 되었어요. 오늘의 나는 경비병도 아니고 복서도 아니지요. 나는 받아들일 준비가 되었어요. 만약 당신이 정말로 내게 무언가 줄 수 있다면요.

선생: 당신은 여전히 나를 완전히 신뢰하지 않는군요. 끊임없는 의심이라. 나는 그게 좋기는 해요.

복서: 당신, 방금 나를 방어적으로 만들었어.

음악가: 내가 다시 노래해야 할 때군요. 이번에는 내가 노래하는 걸 보지 말고 들어봐요.

복서: 내가 음악을 듣지 않았던가?

음악가: 그건 당신만이 알고 있겠지요. 사실 나는 알고 있어요. 하지만 당신은 모르는가 보군요.

남자: 나도 알고 있어요. 어쩌면 내가 음악을 듣지 않는다는 것을. 나는 두 팔을 들어 나를 보호해야 하니까. 때로는 제복을 입고 주변을 둘러보아야 하죠. 나는 듣는 것 보다는 보는 것에 더 익숙해요.

음악가: 오늘의 당신도 그러한가요?

남자: 맥주 한잔 더 해도 괜찮겠어요?

여섯째 날

음악가: 자꾸 보려 하니까 안 들리는 거예요. 왜 자꾸 당신의 에너지를 밖으로 보내려고 하나요. 받아 들여봐요. 아니, 아무것도 하지 말아봐요. 그냥 음악에 몸을 맡겨봐요. 지금 당신은 경비병도 복서도 아니라고요. 뭘 하려고 하지 말아 보라는 거예요.

남자: 잠시 죽으라는 말인가요?

음악가: 어쩌면 그게 맞는 표현일지도 모르겠군요. 말로는 전달할 수 없어요. 말에는 순서가 있으니까요.

남자: 음악에도 순서가 있죠.

음악가: 하지만 음악을 듣는 건 조금 다르다고요. 그림을 보는 것과 비슷하지요. 물론 다르지만요. 하지만 글을 읽는 것보다는 더 가까울 거예요.

남자: 그림을 볼 때도 순서가 있어요.

음악가: 순서요? 여하튼 내가 하고 싶은 말은, 말을 내려놓아

봐요. 나를 더 이상 말하게 만들지 말고 노래하게 만들어봐요. 당신이 그렇게 하지 않아도 노래할 것이지만요. 나는 당신에게 노래를 불러주고 싶어요. 설명하고 싶지 않아요.

남자: 하지만 당신은 내가 노래를 들을 때 듣지 않고 봤다고 했어요.

음악가: 바로 그거예요. 그래서 그림을 보는 것보다 다르다는 거예요. 당신이 음악에 집중하지 않으면 내가 보일 겁니다. 하지만 음악을 들으면 내가 보이지 않을 거예요. 순서 따위 신경도 쓰이지 않을 거라고요. 자신이 뭘 하는지도 모르겠지요. 그리고 그걸 보는 순간 다시 끝이에요. 당신은 음악과의 끈을 놓치게 되겠지요.

남자: 정말 어렵네요.

음악가: 말로 했기 때문이지요.

남자: 나는 당신이 피아노 치는 걸 듣고 싶어요. 노래하는 게 아니라고요.

일곱째 날

남자: 오늘은 새로운 악기를 들고 왔군요! 무언가 연주할 모양인데 악기 이름이 뭐죠?

음악가: 당신 상상에 맡길게요.

남자: 당신은 날이 갈수록 고약해져요!

음악가: 아직 멀었어요. 내가 선생이 아닌 걸 다행으로 여겨요.

남자: 사실 상관없어요. 나는 노래보다는 악기 연주를 좋아하니까. 뭐든 상관없어요.

음악가: 지금까지 당신이 한 말 중 가장 반갑군요. 이게 뭐든 상관없다면 당신 마음대로 이름 붙여도 괜찮아요. 내가 신경 쓰는 건 음악이지 악기가 아니거든요.

남자: 정말 아무렇게나 불러도 돼요?

음악가: 흠, 모르겠어요. 사실 내가 아무렇게나 말했어요. 하지만 나는 당신에게 질서와 무질서가 같은 것이라는 말을 하고 싶지는 않아요.

남자: 하지만 당신은 어제 음악에는 순서가 없다고 했어요. 그런데도 그게 상관이 있나요? 너무 모순적인데요?

선생: 질서와 순서는 달라요. 아! 이제 당신이 왜 그림을 볼 때

순서를 따지는지 알겠군요. 그건 질서예요. 그림에는 질서가 있지요. 그림을 보는 데에도 질서가 있고요. 하지만 순서는 없어요.

남자: 알듯 말듯 하네요. 적어도 어제보다는 당신이 무슨 말을 하긴 하는구나 싶어요.

선생: 나를 듣기 시작했군요. 그림 좀 더 얘기해보겠어요.

남자: 오늘은 왠지 준비된 듯한 기분이네요.

선생: 음악에는 구성이 있지요. 그게 내가 말하는 질서입니다. 하지만 매우 비구상적이기도 해요. 음악을 듣는 이에게는 전적으로 비구상적이지 않나요?

남자: 그렇게 들어야 하나요? 음악에는 구성이 있잖아요. 나는 그 구성을 따라가 보고 싶은데요.

선생: 따라가라고 만든 구성이 아닐지도 모르지요. 그것보다 훨씬 복잡하고 그렇기 때문에 우리는 한꺼번에 받아들이지요. 사실 그 구성은 따라가지 않아야 따라갈 수 있어요.

남자: 오늘은 뭔가 배운 것 같네요.

여덟째 날

남자: 알겠어요. 나는 음악이 시의 그림자인 것 같아요. 시에서 시를 삭제한 거죠.

선생: 당신은 음악가가 되었군요. 당신의 몸짓이 음악을 향하고 있네요.

남자: 아니요. 내 몸짓은 어디에도 향하고 있지 않아요. 나는 완전히 방어막을 내렸고 그냥 있을 뿐이에요.

음악가: 나는 오늘도 악기를 가지고 왔어요.

남자: 당신의 음악을 들을 준비가 되어있어요.

아홉째 날

남자: 어제 당신과 헤어진 후 새로운 음악을 들었어요. 그 음악들은 굉장히 복잡한 것 같았어요. 적어도 복잡하게 쓰였죠. 그건 나도 알았어요. 진지하게 복잡했다는 것을. 하지만 나는 그렇게 듣지 못했어요.

선생: 진지한 음악들이 있죠. 하지만 그 음악들은 진지하기 위한 음악들이 아니에요. 그것은 진지한 사람들의 즐거움을 위한 것에 가깝습니다. 그 음악을 듣는 게 즐거웠나요?

남자: 나는 복잡하지도 진지하지도 않은 사람이에요. 하지만 나는 새로운 귀를 얻은 것 같았어요. 그건 내 귀가 아니에요. 나는 드디어 알았어요. 음악을 듣는다는 것이 무엇인지. 나는 눈으로 세상을 보죠. 하지만 음악을 듣는 건 귀가 아니었어요. 음악은 말이 아니니까요.

음악가: 나는 이제 더 이상 할 말이 없을지도 모르겠네요.

열째 날

경비병: 오늘은 내가 질문을 준비했어요. 당신은 내가 만드는 소리를 들을 수 있습니까? 나도 이곳에서 울리는 화음 중 일부이고, 당신은 내게 그것을 가르쳐주었습니다. 당신은 그 화음을 들을 수 있겠죠. 그렇다면 당신은 내게서 무엇을 배웠지요?

음악가: 안타깝게도 나는 당신을 듣지 못했어요.

경비병: 나는 당신에게 배운 것이 아니군요. 그저 상기해냈을 뿐이었어요.

음악가: 이제 당신이 내게 가르쳐줄 차례예요. 나는 어떻게 당신을 들을 수 있지요?

시민: 당신은 정말 음악가입니까?

음악가: 나는 정말로 음악가예요. 당신은 나를 들었잖아요. 나의 음악을 들었고 그것을 자신으로 만들었습니다. 그리고 심지어 자신의 음악을 상기해 내었어요. 하지만 나는 청자가 아닙니다. 그 둘은 같지 않아요. 그것은 저주이면서 축복입니다. 때때로 겹쳐지기도 해요. 때때로 화음을 만들기도 합니다. 하지만 나는 다른 사람들에게 들리기 위해서 다른 사람들을 들을 수 없다는 것을 압니다. 그러니까, 때때로 알아요. 항상 알고 있는 것은 아니지요. 잊어버리기도 하고 믿고 싶지 않기도 합니다. 때로는 나의 음악을 다른 사람의 음악으로 착각하기도 해요. 나는 혼돈입니다. 때로는 슬프고 때로는 즐거워요. 어떨 때는 거부하고 싶기도 하지요. 하지만 내가 어디에서나 음악을 연주할 수 밖에 없는 사람이 아니라면 당신은 나를 저지하지도 않았겠죠. 그렇게 나는 있어요. 듣지 못하는 사이예요.

경비병: 당신은 음악을 들을 줄 모르는군요. 내가 당신에게 나의 음악을 가르쳐줄게요. 이제 나는 춤을 출 테니 나의 그림자를 들어봐요.

English version by author:



Improbable
landscapes as
future placemaking
strategies

Ruxandra Lupu & Yuval Levi

Ruxandra Lupu is a Research Associate at Cardiff University and a creative entrepreneur. She holds a master's degree in fine arts (printmaking) from the Academy of Fine Arts in Catania and a Ph.D. in media and film studies from the University of Leeds. Ruxandra is passionate about crafts and amateur filmmaking. She takes a specific interest in the intimate, sensory, and mnemonic affordances of film and in conceptual approaches (e.g. somaesthetics, productive imagination, affect theory, sensory studies, and digital materialism) that can help her unpack these. She deploys this knowledge to re-think practices across the fields of design and crafts.

Yuval Levi was born in Jerusalem and is currently based in Berlin and Prague. Graduated from Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design Jerusalem, the Department of Architecture, under the supervision of Prof. Arch Zeev Druckman. Co-founder of Archidrome Architects, an architectural office that has specialized in public and community buildings. His interests span interdisciplinary curatorial projects and (artistic) research of urban spaces using visual methods, architecture, and urban planning tools. He also engages in social, cultural, and political initiatives focusing on communities in conflict.

The context

In *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (1985), Flusser defines the value of a techno-image in terms of the amount of new information¹ it conveys. This mode of analysis seeks to establish the complexity of messages by how much new information and redundancy they contain. This is how by means of algorithms, computer images of a four-dimensional cube appear as new and surprising visual constructs. These are not representations, but visualisations of calculations. In fact, for Flusser, “the mathesis of the emerging universe is the calculus of probability²”, which means that the more improbable new images are, the more informative they become.

1 For Flusser information is the bringing of order in a chaotic world. Nevertheless, the process of ordering (into shapes, images) is not a sufficient condition. As a result, information needs to be generated by means of a code (e.g. information is encoded in an image). Images and shapes are thus encoded and can be decoded by those people who own the code. New information is thus the result of writing new codes. They have at their root new ways of thinking that are able to come up with a different ordering system.

2 Vilém Flusser, “Ins Universum der technischen Bilder” in *Kommunikation zwischen Spannung, Konflikt und Harmonie*, eds. Ulrich Lohmar & Peter Lichtenberg (Bonn: Stiftung für Kommunikationsforschung, 1991), 18 & 39.

3 “We” refers to the two authors of the experiment, Ruxandra Lupu and Yuval Levi

4 Flusser, “Ins Universum der technischen Bilder”, 18.

We³ took Flusser’s maxim – “the more improbable, the more informative”⁴ - to guide us through the creation of improbable landscapes, i.e. creating new information starting with the known in human apprehension of their surroundings. We were driven and inspired by our stay in Robion during the Flusser seminar in May 2022, where we started to think further about what places mean to us and how we experience them. Our audio-visual experiment that tapped deeper into the mediated experience of our surroundings (via our phones), derived from an initial reflection: the fact that we felt differently about Robion, ranging from sensations of familiarity and connection to feelings of estrangement and alienation. The reasons for which the owner of Flusser’s house felt attuned to the place are self-evident: having lived in the area for the most of her life, the owner ‘belonged’ to that place.

Although visiting Robion for the first time, the second participant in the experiment felt at ease in the place because of various reasons. In the following, she gives

an account of her own sensations and feelings of the place:

I was looking forward to coming to Robion. I had been to Southern France before and was enchanted by the atmosphere of small villages, the landscapes, and the people. Nevertheless, I had never seen Robion before and I wanted to compare it to the rest. The small size of the place enabled me to easily find a relationship to the local context, the architecture reminded me of the Mediterranean structure that I was used to seeing in the small town where I was living in Sicily. As well as the hosts of the small B&B where I stayed made me feel as if I was integrated in the everyday life of Robion. They invited me to chat with them and their friends and even took me by car to another town to show me around. All this made a specific impression on me. I was also inspired to find small streets in Robion where nature flourished in the form of gardens or small patches of greenery and immerse myself into drawing the surroundings. This open dialogue with space, rendered Robion for me a more-than-human, co-habitable place, rather than a functional social and architectural construct with a clearly-defined purpose.

Also, the third participant, who was for the first time in Robion, offered a personal account of his encounter with the village:

Before participating in the Vilém Flusser summer school, I did not know Robion, have in fact never visited southern France before. I had no mental image of the town, no "idea" what it might be like – except for a vague image of "Provence" based on pictures from magazines, films, paintings, etc.: sunshine, blue sky, little pretty villages, vineyards,...

Arriving via the main D2 road that traverses modern

Robion it appeared to be one of the small towns structured along the main road, without any unique urban or architectural features. Only later my impression of the town was somewhat changed by the sight of the Luberon mountain, Robion clustered at its foot – adding a vertical dimension to what I perceived as a monotonous “flatness”.

Walking up a street leading to the old center of the village, Robion seemed in a way familiar to me, similar to other little towns in Europe I have been to with medieval nucleus, picturesque streets, a main square... some “postcard” vernacular architecture of a kind I have seen before-nothing makes it “unique” for me. I felt like I couldn’t relate to Robion, nothing caught my eye, except maybe the romanesque church in the middle of the empty town square that has apparently become a part of the parking area, the cars parking right next to the walls and supporting arches.

These first impressions motivated me to challenge my perception of the town that felt in Flusser’s sense, programmed by the touristic way of photographing corresponding with the urban structure of the old part of Robion and with its picturesque facades and views. I felt as if I was captured by this urban dispositive and the way I was supposed to look and move through the historic streets.

This meant that participants were seeking different things in the landscape. Could these things have any value for collective thinking about places and if so, could they make these spaces more co-habitable, rather than inhabitable? This pushed us to reflect on the sort of new information that a technically mediated vision of landscapes can reveal and the value it can hold for future placemaking strategies - both from an architectural and a social perspective.

The Experiment

The experiment consisted in exploring a specific path in Robion that connects Flusser 's house with the heart of Robion, La place de la Poste, using the phone camera as a perceptual instrument, moving it around loosely, twisting and turning it, carrying it around like an extension of the body and mind. This amateur approach to recording images enabled the 3 participants in the experiment to interact in an instinctual and spontaneous manner with their surroundings. In total, three participants engaged with the place in this manner – the two authors of the experiment, both visiting Robion for the first time, and a third local participant, currently the owner of Flusser's house in Robion.

The authors had different feelings for the city. For one participant, the place felt alienating, for the other, instead, it felt welcoming, while the local person was deeply enmeshed and connected with the place. This triple perspective created an interesting combination of viewpoints: one characterised by the unfamiliar, perceiving the surroundings with different degrees of openness, and the other dominated by the habit of being used to seeing these places every day. The owner of Flusser's house had a very precise and focused approach to filming the area, using delicate movements and stopping at times to zoom into details. The second participant who felt in tune with the place used a vertical recording modality, which limited the wide angle on the landscape. The verticality can be interpreted as a disregarding of cinematic standards, but also in metaphorical terms as a rooting into place. The movement of the camera was much faster than that of the first participant, indicating a perceptual curiosity and openness to different multisensorial stimuli. To this was added a quick rotation of the camera, which

often produced a sense of loss of visual balance and equilibrium.

The third participant tried to avoid his pre-programmed perception, changing the focus of the camera to disrupt the touristic gaze and shake his own perception and the town. "Playing against or with the apparatus"-responding to Flusser's instructions on how to gain freedom- he tilted the camera horizontally and vertically, switched from macro to micro perspectives, used panoramic views and close details, tried to switch in between and "invade" private and public spaces, to mix "artificial" objects and "nature" and to play with the reflections on surfaces like car windows as a kind of mirror of his own gesture of filming, attempting to disrupt his "programmed" perspective, and in order to rediscover the complexity of the town and its different views and layers of meaning.

Using editing software, we brought these 3 visions into dialogue with each other, intersecting perspectives and creating a sort of improbable landscape. From these newly-formed landscapes, where spatial orientation is lost and shapes intersect and merge into patches of colour and movement, a new ordering system of information emerges. This is governed by a new language that does not belong to a personal mode of reading, but rather to a collective one.

Analysis

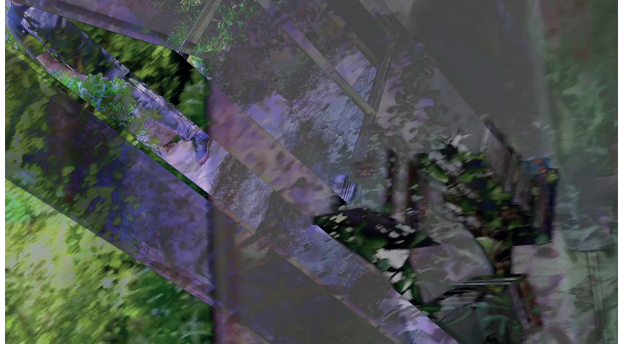
The following is a discursive analysis of our audio-visual experiment that can be accessed at the following link: <https://youtu.be/uQtOY3RLC-4>

In our experiment, we tapped into the apparent intangibility of digital production of images through a



process of forensic investigation, where the method is based on playing with the software generating of the technical image (i.e. its code). For Flusser, understanding the code of the apparatus is essential in creating alternative aesthetics that allows us to visualise information. In this experiment, we used the language of the editing software to support the investigation of that part of the technical image that is invisible to the human sensorium. Following Flusser's idea that the apparatus can exceed what human beings are able to perceive through their senses, this experiment tapped into the potential of the mass of whirling particles (pixels) to form new visually sensible spaces that present us with more than a representation of our surroundings. This potential was brought to light through editing. Using editing software, we overlapped the 3 videos and applied the 'difference' blending modality, which is one of the 27 blending options provided in Final Cut software. This choice was determined by the search for that degree of (mathematical) freedom in the technical image where that which escapes visibility can emerge. Using this method of techno-imagination, the blending process involved subtracting the bottom layer's custom values (insider perspective) from the top layer's custom values (outsider perspective), in order to achieve a net positive value (i.e. a perspective liberated from habit). In the last step, we watched the entire edited piece and stopped the video at specific moments (5 in total) that we found 'revealing', as they presented us with unexpected effects, improbable landscapes. We then increased the duration of the specific frames that captured our attention, to offer viewers the necessary time to make sense of these images.

1. Contained containers



We selected this first image because of the way in which it reversed hierarchical order. The natural (plants) and human (garden as a human construct) are not clearly distinguishable anymore, to the degree that the container (garden/human construct) becomes the contained.

2. Gateway



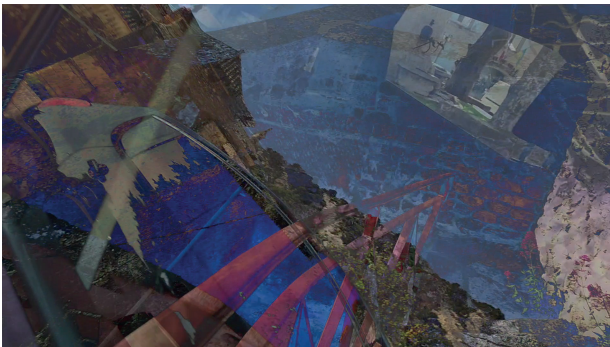
We chose the second image for its initiatic symbolism: the gate not as a boundary between the here and there, but as a structural part of the surrounding.

3. Naturally artificial



The third image is interesting for its capacity to reveal human-nature constructs. The electrical cables pierce through the landscape, as if trying to connect the natural (bush of leaves on the right-hand side of the image) to something else, which remains invisible.

4. Outgrowing binaries



The fourth image selected manages to deconstruct the human-nature duality through a very interesting transition between the natural and man-made shapes.

5. Alchemy



We see this last image as a sort of alchemic gesture, where out of the three different perspectives, something new emerges. This new element represents an opening towards a different world, organised according to a (technical) code that we cannot yet read.

Adopting the technical code as a language for writing (conceiving) images favoured a rupture with the descriptive reality of the place, leaving room for unexpected landscapes to emerge. According to Flusser, technical images are fundamentally different from traditional images (drawing, painting) insofar as their meaning cannot be controlled and channelled through writing like in the case of traditional images. This is because technical images potentially store more information than linear, alphanumeric text. This excess of information is presented in the 5 selected images that emerged through a self-referential coding process: it is not by translating the image into another language, but by using the code of the technical image itself to re-write the image, visualising that information. Such an aesthetic apparatus does not help the user to orient themselves in the world anymore but is oriented

by something else, creating a context for reformulating film's capacity of representation.

The future

What potential for placemaking do these improbable landscapes hold? Although these processes allow us to experiment with new ways of defining and valuing the way human beings make and share the meaning of places, the realisation of the previously abstract possibilities is difficult. We need a new imagination, one that not only works through the calculative abstraction of the apparatus, but through "an open dialogue with the whole of humanity in search of a truly inter-subjective knowledge, and thereby methods to live fully."⁵ How should this new imagination⁶ operate then? To answer this question, we return to Flusser, more precisely to his essay *Into the Universe of Technical Images*. Towards the end of the essay, he tries to envision a world where images (i.e. not only visual images but also musical and tactile constructs) are used creatively, in dialogue. In doing so, he generates a rather extravagant vision of what this might look like: musical improvisation in multiple dimensions, sensitive to harmonies and dissonance, to the strengths and weaknesses of players, culminating in the suspension of self-awareness. A parallel vision to the one presented by Flusser and related to placemaking might include: people using telematic prosthetics to record their surroundings, projecting these images in real-time upon surrounding architectural elements, culminating into ever-expanding, self-renewing, and self-referential surfaces. This vision generates new information by recombining already existing information and opens up the possibility of moving towards a dialogue with places and the promise of a co-habitable future.

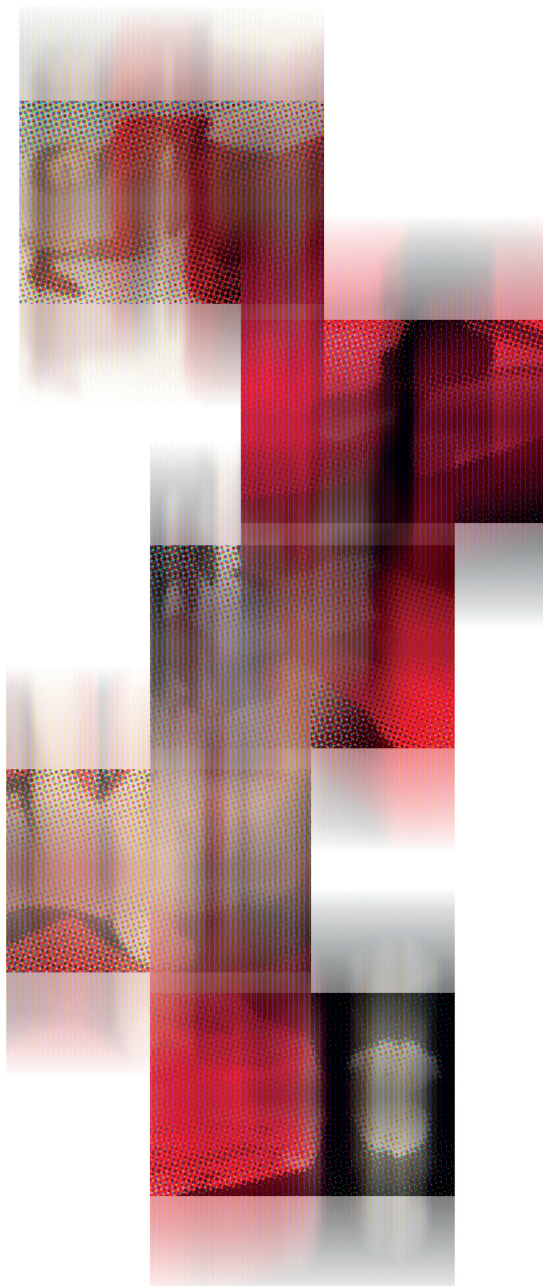
5 Vilém Flusser, "What One Can Wish For" in *Forum zur Genealogie des Median Denkens*, vol. 2, eds. D. Irrgang, K.D. Haensch & I. Neick (Berlin: UdK-Verlag, 2014), 180.

6 Flusser's conceptualisation of imagination shifts throughout his thinking, passing from the term *techno-imagination* to *new imagination* (German: *Einbildungskraft*), where he demarcates it etymologically from the traditional sense.

Fashion's Pilpul

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1. Pilpul is a multilingual Jewish thinking strategy used in the Babylonian Talmud.

2. The concept of decoloniality emerged in the mid-1990s mainly through the Latin American research collective *Modernidad/Colonialidad*, which was formed by Enrique Dussel, Anibal Quijano, and Walter D. Mignolo. They criticize a Eurocentric understanding of the world and focus on untangling knowledge production from a dominating Eurocentric episteme. A decolonial perspectivation means recognizing the existence of a relationship between social position and epistemic position. When they say "we are where we think", Mignolo and Walsh encourage us to think of decoloniality as "contextual, relational, practice based and lived"- as well as spiritual, emotional and "existentially entangled and interwoven". Walter D. Mignolo & Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality/ Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 19.

3. Low Angle: the camera is placed lower than the subject, the angle is oriented from bottom to top. This inversion gives the impression of a larger subject, dominating the photographer and exaggerating the perspectives.

4. Lynn Polhemus & Ted Procter, *Fashion & Anti-fashion: Anthropology of clothing and adornment* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978), 35-36.

Fashion is an ephemeral phenomenon, that does not stand still, but flows, twists, moves all the time. Therefore, we should not try to pin it down, but attempt to decode it through its movements and ambiguities. In this text, I intend to capture different points of view centered around the concept of fashion, following the technique of reflection Pilpul used by Flusser¹ – which consists in taking a given theme to the limits of the imaginable.

Like a photographer jumping from one point of view to another, without finding a definitive (or normative) point of view, this text seeks to explore a multiplicity of approaches to fashion. Starting from the assumption that there is no universal epistemology, each argument is created from a specific positionality² in the world.

1. Low Angle³: Fashion and Modernity

Body decoration, according to Polhemus and Procter⁴, is a universal phenomenon which is divided into two distinct categories: fashion and anti-fashion. Anti-fashion is used by the authors as a category for all styles of adornment that escape the organized or changing systems of fashion. Anti-fashion considers a model of time as a continuity, whereas fashion represents the model of time as change.

From this angle, the history of clothing is not the history of fashion. According to Gilles Lipovetsky, fashion has a clearly identifiable starting point in history:

Fashion does not belong to all eras or all civilizations. [...] Against the idea that fashion is a phenomenon consubstantial with human-social life, we affirm it is an exceptional process,

inseparable from the birth and development of the modern western world [...] The whole mystery of fashion is there, in the uniqueness of the phenomenon, in the emergence and installation of its kingdom in the modern West, and nowhere else.⁵

5. Gilles Lipovetsky, *O Império do Efêmero: A Moda e Seu Destino nas Sociedades Modernas*.

Translated by Maria Lucia Machado (São Paulo: Companhia de Bolso, 2009), 31.

6. Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams. Fashion and Modernity*, London, New York, B. Tauris, 2014, p. 39.

The origin of fashion as a style of change is related, as Elizabeth Wilson⁶ states, to the growth of commerce and the very beginning of capitalism in the 14th century. It was the time of the expansion of commerce, the beginning of the collapse of the feudal society and the rise of the bourgeoisie. With the arrival of the industrial revolution, capitalism was elevated to another level, creating new and large urban center. Cities increasingly became the places where the origins of the individual could be hidden and where personal qualities and appearance, rather than position or wealth, were what counted. A world where beauty became the passport to social mobility, and appearance could replace reality.

Lucia Santaella conditions the existence of fashion to the emergence of capitalism, defending the thesis according to which “there is no fashion in a world where things last, remain stable, wrapped in the sacred aura of a time that seems not to pass”⁷

7. Lucia Santaella, *Corpo e Comunicação: Sintoma da Cultura* (São Paulo: Paulus, 2004), 115.

8. Charles Baudelaire, *O Pintor da Vida Moderna* (Belo Horizonte: Autêntica Editora, 2010).

Fashion and modernity have a long intertwined history. The poet Charles Baudelaire used the words “the transient, the fleeting, the contingent”⁸ to describe modernity. A definition perfectly applicable to Western fashion, and in fact, Baudelaire saw fashion as the expression of modernity.

Both fashion and modernity represent, according to Lehmann, the expression of progress, that needs

9. Ulrich Lehmann. *Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity* (Cambridge & London: The MIT Press, 2000), 33.

10. Philipp Ekardt, *Benjamin on Fashion* (New York & London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 17.

11. High angle: The camera is located above the subject, and the angle of view is oriented from top to bottom. This angle gives the impression that the subject is smaller, dominated by the photographer, and crushes the perspectives.

12. Sandra Niessen, "Afterword: Re-orienting Fashion Theory" in *Re-orienting Fashion: The Globalization of Asian Dress*, eds. Sandra Niessen, Ann Marie Leshkovich & Carla Jones (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2003).

the past as a source and reference point, in order to "plunder it and transform it with an insatiable appetite for advancement."⁹ But fashion and modernity have different etymological origins. Le Grand Robert dictionary reports that the first uses of the French term "la mode" occurred at the end of the 14th century, with the translation of the Latin term "modus", meaning "way" or "measure". As it is related to the term "measurement", we can understand its normative implications. In 1549, mode usually referred to manifestations of collective taste, ways of living, thinking, or feeling. "Mode" is not, however, etymologically related to the adjective "moderne", which appears documented in 1361, and comes from the Latin term "modo" (not "modus"), meaning "recent", or "current."¹⁰ In this sense, even though these terms seem to be interconnected, as modern Western fashion is always presenting the new, their different origins demand our attention, because it hasn't always been like this.

2. High Angle¹¹: Fashion and Coloniality

In the late 20th century, academic researchers began to question Western European hegemony in the history of fashion and went on to endorse a more holistic approach. Anthropologist Sandra Niessen¹² was one of the first to approach the boundaries set by fashion theory and to reimagine the history of fashion as a global one. She argues that "others", non-Europeans, are excluded from the fashion system because they are seen as people without change, without progress, and without style. Fashion's conventional definition as a uniquely Western phenomenon conceals power relations which are central to fashion's processes.

According to Niessen, fashion theory operates within

13. Sandra Niessen, "Interpreting Civilization through Dress" in *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, Volume 8: West Europe, ed. Lise Skov (New York & London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 1-5.

14. "According to Ferreira, Danto proposes «criteria closer to relational than to qualitative or monadic properties: they deal with the socially and historically founded interpretation of certain objects as works of art». Thus, «anything can, in principle, be a work of art. For it seems obvious that the distinction between real things and works of art does not stand in the sensible appearance [...] "to be art" is to occupy a specific position in the world in relation to other things that are not art: it is to occupy not the world of real or banal things, but the "world of art" » (Ferreira 2014, 66). In this sense, the criteria that the "fashion world" uses to define what can be considered "fashion" is not related to the intrinsic qualities of the object, but to its social and historical conditions. To be fashionable is to be placed in opposition to what is considered "non-fashion" (costume, clothing). Débora Pazetto Ferreira, *Investigações Acerca do Conceito de Arte*. (PhD Thesis, UFMG, 2014). Repositório UFMG. https://repositorio.ufmg.br/bitstream/1843/BUOS-9RVFC9/1/tese_final_com_ficha.pdf. Access on July 7, 2022.

15. Adeline Masquelier, "Dirt, Undress, and Difference: An Introduction" in *Dirt, Undress, and*

the ideological framework of the notion of "civilization", developed in the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe, which defines time as linear, cumulative, and progressive. In cultural terms, civilization was the summit of evolutionary development that began with savagery, passed through barbarism, and culminated in modernity. This perception implies binary thinking, as the opposite of civilized is considered primitive and barbaric. The term fashion is then used to designate the exclusive character of the fashion system present in Western civilization.¹³

The rupture between the concept of fashion and traditional dress is comparable to the separation between "art" and "artifact". Artifacts represent non-Western works of art prior to their recognition by the Western art system, as we see in Danto's description of the "art world."¹⁴ In this hierarchical division, fashion serves as a kind of measure of cultural achievement, as asserts Adeline Masquelier: "to sartorially committed Europeans unable to recognize that seemingly naked bodies could be fully dressed, the scant clothing worn by people in distant lands unambiguously signified cultural poverty or savage innocence and rarely passed as dress."¹⁵ For them, only manifestations of European fashion standards were considered valid, regardless of the cultural context.

Fashion has served as a means of evaluation to measure cultural progress, particularly in colonialist contexts, and its perceived absence may be considered a mark of inferiority. The essay by Georg Simmel entitled Fashion (1904), enlightens this point of view: "Primitive conditions of life favor a correspondingly infrequent change of fashions. The savage is afraid of strange appearances; the difficulties and dangers that beset his career cause

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Difference: Critical Perspectives on the Body's Surface, ed. Adeline Masquelier (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 2.

16. Georg Simmel, "Fashion" *International Quarterly* 10 (1904): 36.

17. Sandra Niessen, "Fashion, Its Sacrifice Zone, and Sustainability" *Fashion Theory, The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture* 24, no.6 (2020): 815.

18. The term colonial, in this text, refers to a "conquered and administered territory" linked to the European "colonization" process, based on the destruction of the existing and imposing social order, responding to the needs and habitus of the conquerors. Madina Tlostanova & Walter D. Mignolo, "Introduction: Learning to Unlearn: Thinking Decolonially" in *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012), 17.

him to scent danger in anything new which he does not understand and which he cannot assign to a familiar category."¹⁶ Simmel's characterization of fashion as a distinctly Western cultural trait is still evident today, but obviously in a less racialized discourse.

This concept of fashion as an originally Western phenomenon creates a bifurcated worldview. On the one hand, we see astonishing technical images on the covers of magazines and a wide range of products at very affordable prices. But on the other hand, there are all the "sacrifice zones"¹⁷ produced by the fashion industry, since it depends on the use of raw materials from nature, labor for production, and places to absorb waste. These zones, argues Niessen, are a source of cheap labor and "inspiration" for the fashion industry, in its incessant search for the new. Despite being essential to the current fashion industrial system, these "sacrifice zones" remain largely invisible.

Decolonial thinking points to the fact that, by associating fashion with modernity, we forget that there is no modernity without the logic of coloniality.¹⁸ The great English industrial weavers would not exist without the American cotton plantations, based on slave labor and the expropriation of indigenous territories. There is no concept of Europe, as we understand it, without the colonies. Walter Mignolo argues that, from a European point of view, modernity refers to the Renaissance and the "discovery" of America. But on the other side of the colonial difference, from the point of view of Latin America, we begin to understand that the achievements of modernity go hand in hand with the violence of coloniality. Which angle of the pilpul are we on? The difference is actually there. Therefore, a critical analysis of fashion should, above all, understand who defines

19. Angela Jansen, "Fashion and the Phantasmagoria of Modernity: An Introduction to Decolonial Fashion Discourse" in *Fashion Theory*, 24, no.6 (London & New York: Routledge, 2020).

20. Extreme close up: it shows off the detail that we may not normally see.

21. I refer to the fashion system as composed of various institutions that, together, reproduce the image of fashion and perpetuate the culture of fashion in major fashion cities, such as Paris, New York, London and Milan. Kawamura argues that fashion as a system first emerged in Paris in 1868 with the institutionalization of the *Haute Couture*. According to her, the system consists of a network of designers, manufacturers, wholesalers, public relations officers, journalists, and advertising agencies. Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-ology. An Introduction to Fashion Studies* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2005), 45.

22. Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, (1940).

and what is considered fashion (and what is not), from where, and with what interests. Decolonial fashion discourse¹⁹ offers a radical redefinition of fashion by delinking it from modernity, therefore, from coloniality, by redefining it as a plurality of possibilities, rather than a normative framework falsely claiming for universality.

3. *Extreme Close Up*²⁰: *The Fashion Apparatus*

During the reigns of Louis XIII and Louis XIV, fashion meant, on the one hand, styles of life and ways of doing things; on the other hand, whatever changed in time and space. This notion of change did not apply only to clothes, but to different means of expression, like literature and art. But since the advent of modernity, change has become inherent to the notion of European industrial fashion. Who or what caused that change? Is there any logic behind it, or is it a random phenomenon? How did it happen? In the modern fashion system,²¹ it is the content of fashion that is constantly shifting, and not the institutions.

As Walter Benjamin wrote in the Thesis XIV, "Fashion [...] is a tiger's leap into the past. This jump, however, takes place in an arena where the ruling class gives the commands."²² On the one hand, Benjamin recognized in fashion and in its dynamics of quotation the possibility of imaginatively rewriting the historical structure, creating new perceptions of the past and opening up possibilities for change. However, Benjamin identified that fashion also serves as a camouflage for the ruling classes to hide their horror of any radical change, through the eternal repetition of the same. It's clear that change in fashion has always been produced and controlled by fashion institutions.

Yuniya Kawamura presents a vision that demystifies the concept of fashion, differentiating it from the concept of clothing through institutional validation and other instances of power that define what is considered fashion and what is not. Because fashion is a system of belief or an ideology that is guarded by institutions, it can be represented by clothing in any shape and form – it doesn't matter.

Clothing is found in any society or culture where people clothe themselves while fashion must be institutionally constructed and culturally diffused. A fashion system operates to convert clothing into fashion that has a symbolic value and is manifested through clothing. Fashion is not created in a vacuum but exists in a specific cultural and organizational context [...] fashion is neither tangible nor visible, it uses clothing as a symbolic manifestation.²³

23. Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashionology. An Introduction to Fashion Studies*, 1-2.

Kawamura's analysis of fashion focuses on a concept of an institutionalized system, which brings me back to the Flusserian concept of apparatus. But what we could call a "fashion apparatus" has a specificity – the fact that it is a system that tends to function more and more automatically, independent of external intervention, especially human intervention. Even though it seems strange to talk about an automated system in the field of fashion, if we consider how the products that will be produced in fashion factories already appear pre-defined by Pinterest, Instagram, Tiktok and other social networks; and how the fashion images are pre-defined by the camera software, its filters and formats... this cybernetic vision starts to make sense. According to Flusser,

Although many people take advantage of the use of clothes, they are not the ones who program the scene [...] What the fashion scene imposes is the attempt to decipher the code that manifests itself in it. Anyone interested in changing the clothing scene may not want to act politically. What is required, in such a case, is the application of a certain cybernetic strategy, adequate to the absurd rules of the game.²⁴ [author's translation]

24. "Embora numerosas pessoas tirem proveito do uso da roupa, não são eles que programam a cena. Pelo contrário: são programados para tirarem proveito. [...] O que a cena da moda impõe é a tentativa de decifrar o código que nela se manifesta. Quem estiver interessado na modificação da cena da roupa, não pode querer agir politicamente. O que se impõe, em tal caso, é a aplicação de determinada estratégia cibernética, adequada às regras absurdas do jogo." Vilém Flusser, *Pós-História: Vinte Instantâneos e um Modo de Usar* (São Paulo: Annablume, 2011), 112.

Not "wanting to act politically" seems absurd, at first. But when we try to map the fashion system from origin to consumption, we realize that it is a complex apparatus, on a gigantic scale. If we take the leather products scene as an example, with its origins related to deforestation in the Amazon, the acculturation and subordination of indigenous peoples, climate change, companies that move cattle from farm to farm to escape regulations, multinational meatpackers, permissive governments, opaque and hidden tanneries, traveling from country to country in fragmented manufacturing processes until arriving in the windows of the brands we know and consume. On this scale beyond human reach, boycotting the Nike sneakers or the Prada bag is not enough. According to Flusser, for effective action, it is necessary to outline a cybernetic strategy. He defends the idea of hacking the system, of playing against the apparatus from within, but he leaves open what exactly these cybernetic strategies would be.

25. Eye level: camera points straight ahead. The intention is to be objective.

4. Eye Level²⁵: Free Choice

The globalization of fashion often creates the illusion of democratization, it gives the impression that everyone dresses as they want, and no one feels obliged to follow models imposed by the fashion authorities. As Rodrigo

Duarte explains:

26. “Flusser associa os discursos piramidais à crença em autoridades incontestáveis. [...] No âmbito da moda, essa autoridade se encarnaria na figura do estilista [...]. No cenário atual, porém, ocorre a transformação dos discursos piramidais dos especialistas naquele tipo que pode ser considerado o mais autoritário de todos, a saber, o dos discursos anfiteatrais, exatamente porque agora não há mais a autoridade do expert em moda, mas a programação massiva por parte dos aparelhos.” Rodrigo Duarte, *Pós-história de Vilém Flusser: Gênese-anatomia-desdobramentos* (São Paulo: Annablume, 2012), 175.

Flusser associates pyramidal discourses with the belief in undisputed authorities [...] In the field of fashion, this authority would be embodied in the figure of the stylist and other experts, followed by everyone who would like to dress properly. In the current scenario, however, occurs the transformation of the experts' pyramidal discourses in that type that can be considered the most authoritarian of all, namely, that of the amphitheater speeches, exactly because now there is no longer the authority of the fashion expert, but the massive programming by the apparatus.²⁶ [author's translation]

Despite fashion globalization, the West has never held the reins of fashion economics more tightly. A group of holding companies are by far and out of all proportion the most important actors in the field. Fashion seems to change quickly, but its fundamental standards become increasingly rigid. Currently, it is not the creators' work that counts, since they are easily replaced. Power does not manifest itself explicitly, but it is behind the scenes manipulating the production and commercialization of ostentation. The game is about an essentially invisible power.

27. Portraits can capture the essence or vital qualities of a subject, or communicate something deeper than just a surface image, in the way the portrait photograph is captured. Portrait photographs tend to have shallow depth of field and are generally planned, posed, and rehearsed.

5. Portrait²⁷: Programmed Chaos

The range of possibilities present in current fashion reveals an apparent chaos, in which everyone chooses their own style. But what we see is nothing more than a complex system of uniforms: “Uniforms for liberated women (loose breasts), for anti-racists (afrolook), for the new left (hairy breasts), and new right (leather

28. Vilém Flusser, *Pós-História: Vinte Instantâneos e um Modo de Usar*, 107.

jackets), for intellectuals (turtle collar), for university students (bedding and boots) [...] Such a complex system is code.”²⁸ And for those who know the codes, it is possible to decipher the wearers of the clothing. So Flusser argues that

Currently, clothes are models of behavior that invite the receiver of the message to behave accordingly. Once, the wearers of clothes were recipients of models irradiated by fashion devices. Nowadays, they are model transmitters. They are message channels.²⁹ [author’s translation]

29. “Atualmente roupas são modelos de comportamento que convidam o receptor da mensagem a comportar-se de acordo. Outrora os portadores de roupas eram receptores de modelos irradiados pelos aparelhos da moda. Atualmente são transmissores de modelos”. Flusser, *Pós-História: Vinte Instantâneos e um Modo de Usar*, 108.

30. “Quem estiver programado por tecnoimagens, vive e conhece a realidade como contexto programado”. Flusser, *Pós-História: Vinte Instantâneos e um Modo de Usar*, 120.

We have become part of a system of epistemic instruments used for orientation in the world. In this system, models do not function as “indicative sentences”, but as “imperative sentences”. Rather than displaying images, magazine covers dictate models of what we should consider beautiful, models to consume and embody. As Flusser asserts, “whoever is programmed by techno images, lives and knows reality as a programmed context.”³⁰ But if we want to escape the programming of the fashion apparatus, we should, according to Flusser, see through fashion’s programmed chaos, and decipher the code that manifests itself in it. We must ask questions about the entire economic, political, social, and cultural apparatus within which fashion is programmed, investigate the materiality of fashion, and then reveal the imperative behind the desire.

31. A Dutch angle is one of the most common ways to convey disorientation. For this shot, simply tilt the camera to one side so it isn’t level with the horizon.

6. Dutch Angle³¹ : Hacking the System

In this brief pilpul around fashion, we realized that contemporary industrial fashion has a particular ability to build a world in its own image, to mystify and conceal

this very construction in order to perpetuate itself. It is part of its game.

But if we want to escape the programming of the fashion apparatus, we have to investigate its functioning, both in terms of material and symbolic production, which today reaches gigantic scales, with completely invisible layers and deeply automated processes. It is necessary to decode the entire economic, political, social and cultural apparatus in which fashion is programmed, in order to reveal the imperative behind fashion's desire. In his *Philosophy of Photography*, Flusser encourages us to assume a hacker spirit, to try to penetrate the black box, to access information, then to subvert the rules of a highly codified game.

Eye-pparatus:
Re-imagining the
Human Eye in the
Nineteenth Century

Alaz Okudan

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In *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, Vilém Flusser attempts to define technical images, apparatuses, and how they come into being. Flusser suggests that any apparatus and its products, technical images, exclusively emerge as the offspring of scientific texts:

The technical image is an image produced by apparatuses. As apparatuses themselves are the products of applied scientific texts, in the case of technical images, one is dealing with the indirect products of scientific texts.¹

1. Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 14.

He then moves on to differentiate between two types of images that fundamentally possess distinct identities:

2. Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, 14.

This gives them [technical images], historically and ontologically, a position that is different from that of traditional images. Historically, traditional images precede texts by millennia, and technical ones follow on after very advanced texts.²

Traditional images arrive before texts, and technical images come after texts that carry advanced information. Each stage of technical invention functions as the translation of the previous one into a new realm. While traditional images translate the tangible and experienced world into shapes and colors, linear writing reduces those shapes and colors into a pre-determined set of symbols, in other words, texts. At last, adequately information-loaded texts, as a result of applied science, bring about apparatuses that can produce technical images that are translations of the concrete world at a third degree. The distinction between traditional and technical images is essential in Flusser's discussion of apparatuses and how they possess the power to produce images that signify concepts rather than phenomena. Their importance does not arise from their relationship with the concrete world but rather from their close ties with culture.

Flusser constructs his thesis with the example of the camera apparatus, which produces photographs, a type of technical image. The most critical feature of the camera apparatus is its property as a black box. The user can dictate the input that enters this black box and estimate the output that comes out of it but cannot exactly know what happens inside. If the camera apparatus is programmed well, it becomes impossible for photographers to comprehend the totality of the apparatus and solve the mystery inside the black box:

“It is precisely the obscurity of the box which motivates photographers to take photographs. They lose themselves, it is true, inside the camera in search of possibilities, but they can nevertheless control the box.”³

3. Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, 27.

By dismantling, investigating, and testing the possibilities of the camera apparatus, photographers aim to peek inside this mystery box. This is what Flusser calls playing with and against the apparatus. However, the play always takes place to the extent permitted by the camera program. The program dictates what can and cannot be done with the apparatus. Soon after, apparatuses that are created by humankind to automatize their process of transforming the world turn their creators into functionaries which comply with the intentions of the apparatus.⁴ Each program is tied to a metaprogram, and the intentions of the apparatus are determined by its metaprogram. As Flusser puts it, “the hierarchy of programs is open at the top.”⁵ This means that each program operates as a function of its metaprogram.

4. Cesar Baio, “Functionary,” FlusserWiki, accessed on October 27, 2022, [https://wiki.flusser.club/doku.php?id=functionary&s\[\]=functionary](https://wiki.flusser.club/doku.php?id=functionary&s[]=functionary)

5. Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, 29.

This whole organization of programs creates a fluid structure that is in constant transformation due to being in a feedback loop with society:

Likewise reduced to its basic elements, the camera’s program is as follows: first, to place its inherent capabilities into the image; second, to make use of a photographer for this purpose, except in borderline cases of total automation (for example, in the case of satellite photographs); third, to distribute the images produced in this way so that society is in a feedback relationship

to the camera which makes it possible for the camera to improve progressively; fourth, to produce better and better images. In short: The camera's program provides for the realization of its capabilities and, in the process, for the use of society as a feedback mechanism for its progressive improvement.⁶

6. Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, 46.

In light of Flusser's remarks on apparatuses, programs, and technical images, this text diverts its attention from the camera apparatus and sets sail to speculate on the human eye and how it was imagined as a technical-image-producing apparatus in the late 19th century.

Optogram as Technical Image

Among many scientific discoveries and breakthroughs, the 19th century witnessed a set of physiological experiments that revolved around the eye and its light-sensitive capacities. Those experiments significantly influenced how the human eye was attempted to be instrumentalized, similar to the camera apparatus. In 1876, Franz Christian Boll (1849-1879) discovered a light-sensitive retinal pigment through his experiments with frogs. He named the pigment *visual red* (in German: Sehrot) due to its reddish-purple color. Boll's experiments showed that the pigment generated in the dark and bleached out when it was exposed to light. Boll also found that the pigment persisted in the retina for 12 to 24 hours, even after the death of the inspected living being.⁷

7. Anja Lampesberger, "A Comprehensive History and Critical Analysis of Optography: Can It Qualify as a Science in Light of Modern Scientific and Forensic Standards?," *Manchester Review of Law, Crime and Ethics* 10 (2021): 71.

In an 1877 experiment, Boll placed a paralyzed frog in a room with a window that had partially closed shutters, allowing only a strip of light to enter the room. Soon

after, he observed a projection of a similar light strip in a bleached-out form on the frog's retina, thus discovering not only the light-sensitive properties of the retina but also the eye's ability to make temporary imprints of what is seen.⁸

8. Lampesberger, "A Comprehensive History and Critical Analysis of Optography", 71.

9. Nicholas J. Wade, "Guest Editorial Essay," *Perception* 37, no.2 (2008): 1618. <https://doi.org/10.1068/p3702ed>

In the same year, another German physiologist Wilhelm Friedrich Kühne (1837-1900), inspired by Boll's findings, began to experiment with rabbits to closely examine this pigment, changing its name to *visual purple* (in German: Sehpurpur) and naming the chemical responsible for the pigment *rhodopsin*.⁹ Kühne's enthusiasm toward visual purple exceeded that of Boll greatly. He aimed to permanently fix the pigment before it completely bleached out, allowing him to acquire an image of the last vision of the living being. In his article *Eye and Camera*, George Wald summarizes Kühne's experiment as follows:

An albino rabbit was fastened with its head facing a barred window. From this position, the rabbit could see only a gray and clouded sky. The animal's head was covered for several minutes with a cloth to adapt its eyes to the dark, that is, to let rhodopsin accumulate in its rods. Then the animal was exposed for three minutes to the light. It was immediately decapitated, the eye removed and cut open along the equator, and the rear half of the eyeball containing the retina laid in a solution of alum for fixation. The next day Kühne saw, printed upon the retina in bleached and unaltered rhodopsin, a picture of the window with the clear pattern of its bars.¹⁰

10. George Wald, "Eye and Camera," *Scientific American* 183 (1950): 31-41, quoted in Arthur B. Evans, "Optograms and Fiction: Photo in a Dead Man's Eye", *Science Fiction Studies* 20, no.3 (1993): 343.

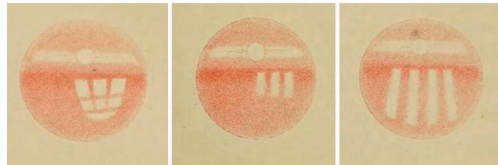
Alaz Okudan

Image 1. AI-generated image with the command line "a rabbit in a dimly lit room looking towards a bright window, black and white sketch, 19th-century aesthetics" Created with Midjourney's AI image generator. In the words of their creators, "Midjourney is an independent research lab exploring new mediums of thought and expanding the imaginative powers of the human species." They focus on design, human infrastructure, and AI. Accessed on November 22, 2022. <https://www.midjourney.com/#about>



Image 2. Lithograph reproductions of Wilhelm Kühne's rabbit's eye optograms, 1877

E. A. Funke, Leipzig, details of 'Table 1', lithograph, in Wilhelm Kühne, *Untersuchungen aus dem Physiologischen, Institute der Universität Heidelberg*, vol. 1 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1877), 103.



Under highly controlled lab conditions, Kühne managed to preserve the image exposed on the rabbit's retina. He named his successful image *optogram* and the process *optography*.

In 1880, Kühne went one step further and conducted an optographic experiment with a human subject. The subject of the experiment was Gustav Erhard Reif, a convicted murderer sentenced to death by guillotine. Right after the execution, Kühne moved Reif's head to a dark room, removed his eyes and retinas, and stabilized them in alum solution. Despite his effort, Kühne failed to repeat his earlier successful optographic rendering with his human subject. The obtained image did not reveal a real-life scene but only an incomprehensible abstract figure.

Image 3. Drawing of the abstract figure Wilhelm Kühne claimed to obtain from Gustav Erhard Reif's retina, 1880

Wilhelm Kühne, *Untersuchungen aus dem Physiologischen. Institute der Universität Heidelberg*, vol. 4, (Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1880), 280.

der macula lutea una et
gleichmäßig hellrosa, etw
um im unteren, äußeren
und vor mehreren Colleg
war diese bei 2 un
innerhalb der farb
sich um kein Pse
das Bild etwa 5 Min. si
Die mikroskopische
Rückfläche ohne Druck
satz durch kleine Grupp

Kühne's unsuccessful attempt with a human subject could be explained by the lack of controlled laboratory conditions he previously had with his experiments with animals. Nonetheless, it went down in history as the only human optographic experiment.

Kühne's experiments were undeniably motivated and influenced by the functional principles of the earliest photographic techniques. Kühne even built up an analogy between the eye and the photographic darkroom processes of the 19th century:

Bound together with the pigment epithelium, the retina behaves not merely like a photographic plate, but like an entire photographic workshop, in which the workman continually renews the plate by laying on new light-sensitive material, while simultaneously erasing the old image.¹¹

11. George Wald, "Eye and Camera," *Scientific American*. 183 (1950): 31-41, quoted in Nicholas J. Wade, "Guest Editorial Essay," *Perception* 37, no.2 (2008): 1619. <https://doi.org/10.1068/p3702ed>

Alongside his attempts to fix the ever-fleeing image in the eye, Kühne's comparison of the human eye to a photographic workshop is one of the founding contributions to a discourse in which the eye, a biological organ, is discussed in terms of a technical-

12. Monica Bravo, "Natural Photographs: Optograms and the Fiction of Captured Vision" *History of Photography* 42, no.1 (2018): 63. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03087298.2018.1424973>

image producing apparatus. In addition to Kühne's analogy, optograms were colloquially referred to as *natural photographs*.¹² The public reception of optography as a natural form of photography is another important feature of the optographic discourse which ties it to Flusser's discussion of technical images.

With the help of experiments and observations, 19th-century physiology discovered the rhodopsin protein and revealed the eye's previously unknown capabilities. In the absence of adequate scientific texts, the eye has merely seemed to function as a biological organ in charge of vision. However, with the emergence of photography and development of physiological research, the eye assumed the role of not only seeing but also recording. No longer merely an internal part of the human body, it became an apparatus that can be utilized for various purposes. Nonetheless, the availability of adequate scientific research alone is insufficient to explain why people of the late 19th century strived after *natural photographs*. To gain a complete picture, we should look beyond technical information and focus on imaginary aspects of optograms.

Imagining the Visual Apparatus

Flusser makes another vital remark about apparatuses which is their embeddedness in culture and how they could carry clues and provide information about the culture they belong to. Certain characteristics of cultures are projected onto their apparatuses; thus, one can make observations and deductions about a culture by investigating its apparatuses:

13. Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, 22.

They [apparatuses] are indubitably things that are produced, i.e. things that are produced (brought forward) out of the available natural world. The totality of such things can be referred to as culture. Apparatuses are part of a culture, consequently, this culture is recognizable in them.¹³

Natural and applied sciences may have laid the foundations for technical aspects of optography by revealing the roles of chemical components within the eye, however, they alone are incapable of illuminating the cultural significance of optography.

Each apparatus is built on imaginary foundations as much as they are built on technical ones. According to Eric Kluitenberg, technical media's identity cannot be separated from imaginary aspects because the user's rational and irrational beliefs and expectations are always projected onto those actual methods and technologies.¹⁴ "Imaginary media mediate impossible desires"¹⁵ and so do optograms. They carry the burden of unachievable expectations. Kluitenberg suggests that imaginary apparatuses/machines often come into existence as *compensatory machines* but eventually turn into *machines of frustration*. They are imagined by societies or individuals to resolve problems, deficiencies, and challenges in everyday life, communication methods, and technologies. However, each "machine" arrives with its deficiencies and drawbacks. It does not take too long before they start to frustrate their imaginers and users:

14. Eric Kluitenberg, "Second Introduction to an Archaeology of Imaginary Media" in *Book of Imaginary Media: Excavating the Dream of the Ultimate Communication Medium*, ed. Eric Kluitenberg (Amsterdam and Rotterdam: Debalie and NAI Publishers, 2006), 8.

15. Eric Kluitenberg, "On the Archaeology of Imaginary Media" in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, eds. Erkki Huhtamo & Jussi Parikka (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 48.

When tracing the lineages of imaginary media, one

of the recurrent ideas uncovered is that somehow these machines would be able to compensate for the inherent flaws and deficiencies of interpersonal communication. The devices then become compensatory machines. They become sites onto which various types of irrational desires are projected. It would seem rather obvious that the machines in themselves cannot live up to the promise that they would somehow, as if by magic (as a true 'deus ex machina!'), be able to resolve the age-old problems of human communication and relationships. Through this pre-programmed failure, imaginary media also become machines of frustration.¹⁶

16. Kluitenberg, "Second Introduction to an Archaeology of Imaginary Media," 8-9.

Even though Kluitenberg's focus seems to be limited by communication media, his suggestions could be used as a blueprint for understanding Flusserian apparatuses. Apparatuses are human creations devised with certain intentions in mind, yet, they always slip out of the control of their creators and start to impose their own specific ways. Following Kluitenberg's description of imaginary media, the following questions should be pursued to detect what kind of desires the optographic apparatus mediates and how it could highlight the hidden or unconscious intentions of its time:

1. Which deficiencies or flaws did optography aim to compensate for?
2. What were the technical and practical problems that turned optography into a machine/apparatus of frustration?

Big Brother is Within You

Metaphors have been constructed between apparatuses such as camera obscura and eye/brain to understand the principles of human vision. Scientific research on vision and perception also led to the invention of specific apparatuses. For instance, the discovery of the after-image phenomenon led the way to apparatuses such as thaumatrope, zoetrope, and phenakistoscope in the early 19th century, while principles of binocular vision found a tangible form with the stereoscope.¹⁷ With Boll and Kühne's findings, on the other hand, the visual apparatus has been constructed by re-purposing an inherent part of the biological body instead of building it as an exclusive extension of it. Why did the human eye need to be re-purposed as an internal recording machine in the second half of the 19th century?

17. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1990), 104-105.

Even before the optographic information became available, it was "a commonly held belief throughout the latter half of the 19th century that the last image seen by the eyes of a dying person would be 'fixed' on the retina for a considerable period of time."¹⁸ The belief was that the death of a person would cause the fixation of their final vision in their eye. In line with this belief, dozens of eye portraits were made of murdered people in England by the Scotland Yard Metropolitan Police in the 1860s, hoping to gain access to the images of the murderers. However, as rhodopsin and the light-sensitive properties of the retina were unknown, those initial attempts failed, and the interest in the approach diminished until Boll and Kühne's findings were introduced to the public.

18. Bill Jay, *Cyanide & Spirits: An Inside-Out View of Early Photography* (Munich: Nazraeli Press, 1991), 49.



Images 4 & 5. AI-generated images with the command line “a 19th-century photographer photographing a murder scene in an obscure alley, at night, black and white sketch, victorian aesthetics”

19. Jay, *Cyanide & Spirits*, 51.

With Boll and especially Kühne’s research, the interest in *eye images* resurfaced. Optography received both forensic and fictional interest, and public attention persisted until after the turn of the century.¹⁹ However, as the interest in optography increased, society’s collective imagination started to outweigh the scientific facts made visible by Boll and Kühne’s experiments which showed that optography, in fact, was not a practical method for creating images. Due to the constructed analogy between photography and optography, reasonable but non-scientific implications were made, and anticipations developed.

Approximations between the two types of image production increased. For one, there was a belief that pupils that dilated more, almost like the aperture of a camera lens (in cases of fear, anger, or any other strong emotion), made imprints that are “even clearer, more detailed, and easier to ‘develop’.”²⁰ Once again, eye portraits in murder cases became a popular method of investigation. It even was used in one of the Jack

20. Arthur B. Evans, “Optograms and Fiction: Photo in a Dead Man’s Eye”, *Science Fiction Studies* 20, no.3 (1993): 343.

21.Evans, "Optograms and Fiction", 343

the Ripper murder cases in 1888. Unsurprisingly, no images were found in the victim's retina.²¹

Even though optography influenced forensic eye portraits, there has not been a single case solved through retinal recording. Nevertheless, the interest and belief in optography persisted in the late 19th and even a couple of decades into the 20th century. There have even been murder cases where murderers carved out the victim's eyes with the fear that their image might be recorded.²²

22.Evans, "Optograms and Fiction", 343

Optography also found itself a place in fiction. Authors such as Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Jules Verne, and Rudyard Kipling embraced the subject of optography in their novels and stories. In such literary work, optography was strictly treated as a means of solving crime. While referring to optography, authors moved away from scientific facts for the sake of developing attractive narratives. In fiction, unlike in real cases, optography almost always proved helpful. If the authors were to accept optography with its inherent flaws, it would not have provided an effective and alluring method. After all, it needed to be a practical forensic procedure.

Optography's public reception in the late 19th century, both in actual and fictional terms, was almost exclusively developed around criminal cases, especially around homicides that were almost impossible to solve by the investigating authorities in the absence of concrete evidence such as an eyewitness. At the end of the 19th century, photographic technologies were still quite far from developing the automated, non-human components that we are accustomed to today. On the other hand, a more efficient and foolproof identification

23. Jay, *Cyanide & Spirits*, 114.

24. John E. Archer, "Mysterious and Suspicious Deaths: Missing Homicides in North-West England (1850-1900)", *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Sociétés* 12, no. 1 (2008): 2. <https://doi.org/10.4000/chs.66>

system, such as fingerprinting, was not a common practice in the world and was not used by Scotland Yard until 1901.²³ Through the 19th century, alongside the homicides with unidentified suspects, many cases were labeled as "mysterious" or "suspicious deaths" as a result of the lack of evidence.²⁴ This shows that there was a good chance that certain cases of manslaughter or murder would go without a legal sanction. Hence, it can be suggested that there was a significant period at the end of the 19th century during which an impractical identification method such as optography could be considered the sole remedy for solving certain criminal cases.

Throughout the latter half of the 19th century, even if it only offered a slight chance of success, many people referred to the possibility of the final image imprinted on the murder victim's eye as a way to solve murder cases, if not decrease the number of cases altogether. A British photographer, William H. Warner, suggested in his letter to *The Photographic News* journal that:

The subject is of too great importance and interest to be passed heedlessly by, because if the fact were known through the length and breadth of the land, it would, in my estimation, tend materially to decrease that most horrible of all crimes—Murder.²⁵

25. William H. Warner, "Photography and Murder", *The Photographic News* 7 (1863): 226 quoted in Douglas J. Lanska, "Optograms and Criminology: Science, News Reporting, and Fanciful Novels," *Progress in Brain Research* 205 (2013): 57-58. [doi:10.1016/B978-0-444-63273-9.00004-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-444-63273-9.00004-6)

In addition, Walter Dew, a former Scotland Yard inspector, wrote in his memoir about the murder of Marie Jeannette Kelly (1888), who was believed to be the final victim of Victorian-era serial killer Jack the Ripper:

Several photographs of the eyes were taken by expert photographers with the latest type of

Eye-pparatus: Re-imagining the Human Eye in the Nineteenth Century

cameras. The result was negative. But the very fact that this forlorn hope was tried shows that the police, in their eagerness to catch the murderer, were ready to follow any clue and to adopt any suggestion, even at the risk of being made to look absurd.²⁶

26. Walter Dew, *I Caught Crippen: Memoirs of Ex-Chief Inspector Walter Dew, C.I.D. of Scotland Yard* (London and Glasgow: Blackie & Son, 1938), 38–39 quoted in Lanska, “Optograms and Criminology”, 77.

These statements show that there was a sense of helplessness against certain cases of murder by society, as well as the investigating authorities, for which optography offered a glimmer of hope.

At this point, it would be a good idea to make my first cut and turn to media archaeologist Erkki Huhtamo’s remarks on the origin of the cyborg discourse. In Huhtamo’s research, we find a cartoon depiction of a quirky four-legged animal fiddling around in its natural habitat. It is instantly visible that this animal is an exaggerated representation of a 19th-century photographer operating a camera placed on a tripod while his head is covered with a hood blocking the sunlight. The cartoon was published in 1863 by the British satirical magazine *Punch* with the following description: Front and back view of a very Curious Animal was seen going about loose the other day. It has been named by Dr. Gunther “Elephans Photographicus”.²⁷

27. Elephans Photographicus, in *Punch, or the London Charivari* (June 20, 1863), 249.

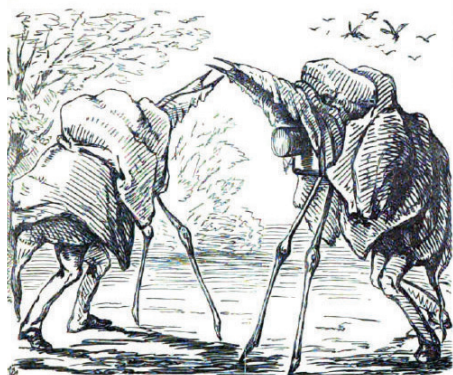


Image 6. Elephans Photographicus in its natural habitat

Front and Back view of a very Curious Animal that was seen going about loose the other day. It has been named by Dr. Gunther "Elephans Photographicus."

28. Erkki Huhtamo, "Elephants Photographicus: Media Archaeology and the History of Photography" in *Photography and Other Media in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Nicoletta Leonardi & Simone Natale (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2018), 21.

29. Siegfried Zielinski, "Modelling Media for Ignatius Loyola: A Case Study on Athanasius Kircher's World of Apparatus Between the Imaginary and the Real" in *Book of Imaginary Media: Excavating the Dream of the Ultimate Communication Medium*, ed. Eric Kluitenberg (Amsterdam and Rotterdam: Debalie and NAI Publishers, 2006), 29-30.

Huhtamo suggests that the existing conditions of *Elephants Photographicus* lay in the prominent discussions and scientific findings of the time, such as the hybridization of mechanical and biological components in mass production (assembly lines appropriating humans as part of a greater equation) and the recently published theory of evolutionary biology (Charles Darwin published his book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* just four years before the cartoon).²⁸ According to Huhtamo, combined with the notion of humans and machines fusing together, the discursive practice of evolutionary biology produced the *Elephants Photographicus* as a satirical brand-new life form.

The emergent discourse for fusing bodies of artificial and biological components also manifests itself in optography. What photography failed to achieve in its early years (automated and continuous recording) was imagined to be actualized when coupled with the human body. Although the success of optograms depended on highly controlled lighting conditions, and murder cases probably provided the worst possible field of application for optography, it did not restrain the Victorian 19th-century society from imagining exaggerated potentials and alternative futures for the technique. The optographic eye (or the eye-pparatus) could be interpreted as what Siegfried Zielinski calls an untimely apparatus. According to Zielinski, history is full of media, apparatuses, and machines that are "devised or designed either much too late or much too early. Realized in technical and media practice either centuries before or centuries after being invented."²⁹ The imagination of individuals or societies, fueled by either necessary or arbitrary desires, could come up with apparatuses that precede their physical

manifestation for decades or even centuries.

In the technical sense, what can be achieved with the eye-pparatus is highly limited. The eye does not carry the ability to produce technical images that are as distinct and easy to circulate as the camera apparatus. Although its technical insufficiencies came to be known, the aura of the human eye as a technical image-producing apparatus was at its highest in the late 19th century. While photography introduced the technical and practical possibility of fixing and storing the ever fleeing image, optography introduced, maybe not the practical possibility, but the idea of perpetual seeing and recording apparatus. People who believe and commit to the eye's ability to create tangible images like photographic cameras are programmed by not only the apparatus of photography and 19th-century science but also the apparatus of surveillance. What was absent in photography but present in optography in the 19th century was the concept of automatization and continuity of recording. The human eye, now part of an apparatus rather than the biological body, is constantly monitoring its surroundings and lying in wait to capture the ones who go against the rules of society.

There is no doubt that optographic desire was tightly connected to the technical possibilities that were made visible by early photography. Just like a photographic plate, the human eye became a site for recording and storing information. From the moment it was born in the form of Nicéphore Niépce's heliography, Louis Daguerre's Daguerreotype, and Henry Fox Talbot's calotype and salted paper process, the term photography has referred to a diverse set of processing and printing techniques. Such diversity was mainly motivated by making photography a more efficient and

30. The wet plate collodion process introduced by Frederick Scott Archer in 1851, greatly reduced the exposure times required for both Daguerrotype and calotype images. It also overcame the problem of reproducibility encountered in Daguerreotype process. With the introduction of gelatin as a binding agent for silver bromide by Richard Leach Maddox in 1871, photographic plates became less fragile and more lightweight. This also laid the foundation for the modern silver gelatin emulsion technology popularized by Eastman Kodak Company which were to dominate the photographic practice in the 20th century.

consistent process. One after another, each technique introduced quicker chemicals and fairly effortless processes, to make the recording and storing process more standardized.³⁰

Not only the photographer's role as a technician and artisan was on its way to turning into an everyday user, but humans themselves were also on their way to becoming obsolete in the process. By the early 20th century, with the impact of Kodak's simplified and automated camera as well as "You press the button, we do the rest" advertisement slogan, the most common role attributed to the photographer was that of a shutter releaser. In other words, photographers were employed by the apparatuses of photography. It would be helpful to speculate on optography with this background in mind. Attributing the role of the camera to the eye and the photographic plate to the retina was an attempt towards instrumentalizing the human body as a surveillance apparatus, but with the increasing detachment of humans from the process of photography, the human body was also detached from the apparatus of surveillance.

The optographic eye or the eye-pparatus was an untimely apparatus that fused photography and the human body together, forming a biological camera. It was conceptually devised in the second half of the 19th century but physically realized in the 20th century in the form of various nonhuman surveillance technologies. Because of its shortcomings, the recording eye had to transform by taking a non-biological, hence, a more controllable and predictable form, just like its intellectual counterpart, photography. Frustrative features of optography were compensated with new surveillance technologies, which would eventually pose

their own problems. Problems that we strongly sense and experience today.

Blink of an Eye

This brings us back to Flusser's suggestion of apparatuses and technical images being the products of applied scientific texts as well as representatives of cultures. As much as applied science stands as a prerequisite for apparatuses to take a physical form, collective or individual imagination also plays essential roles in the formation of apparatuses and discourses. The mad aura formed around optography in the 19th century is connected to the paradigm shift that arrived with photography and how it reorganized the understanding of human vision. Yet, the collective imagination of everyday people alongside scientists, authors, law enforcers, journalists, and even murderers, influenced by the prominent discussions, technical orientations, and needs of the time, surpassed the actual capabilities of optography. In other words, the human eye as an apparatus that surveils emerged as a collective effort of both applied science and social imagination.

Eye-pparatus also provides a good example of what Flusser suggests when discussing the feedback relationship between apparatuses and society. Optography offered a glimpse of a technical possibility for retinal recording, and society used such information to imagine practical uses. The feedback provided by society, in turn, helped apparatuses of surveillance to improve progressively. Moreover, such social imagination seems to be prompted by the apparatuses of modernism. Just like every remote corner of the world was discovered and touched by the Western

world, the human body and *soul* have also become a primary field for discovery during modernity. Although scientific developments identified the light-sensitive properties of the eye and a few isolated experiments demonstrated the possibility of optograms, optography was a limited and technologically infertile invention. However, it proved to be quite fruitful for imagining alternative futures for media and everyday life. The social program in which optography was merely a function scaled up the desire to handle the human eye as an apparatus. It had to assume a role it could not live up to. This imagined eye-pparatus could record images that can be physically extracted and displayed, unlike its biological counterpart, the eye.

In a Foucauldian sense, like any other institution, with the presupposition of the human eye as a recording apparatus lying in wait, the medium of human vision became a site for imagining regulatory and disciplinary institutions. The emergence of automated cameras and video devices has been foreshadowed by imaginary practical properties of the eye-pparatus. The functional embodiment of the previously imagined aspects resulted in a more precise and comprehensive form of visual surveillance in the century to come. Yet, this is not to say that optography's ultimate aim was to arrive at contemporary surveillance technologies. An intricate network of technologies and discourses lies beneath the idea of surveillance, of which the optographic desire could only be read and interpreted as a contributing part.

Story of Writing

Sarvesh Wahie

Sarvesh Wahie

Bio (in 100 words): poetry, philosophy, immanence, dreaming, walking, wandering, wondering, mountain, trees, birds, beaches, skies, golden, clouds, blue, darkness, mystery, familiar, ode, night, monsoon, flowers, summer, snow, dunes, alethia, elation, departed, untied, resolute, noise, story, fly, impression, shooting stars, vehemence, creativity, record player, synthesis, winter, found, sleep, cold shoulder, seven, dialogue, radiance, blossom, home, kiwi, verses, slipping, heart, disjoint, swim, breezes, deodar, through, images, window, alternate, conduction, samples, everyday, you, discourse, snug, quietude, light, whisky, love, bottomless, thought, hug, nevertheless, temperate, shower, tatami, flint, visibly hidden, untamed, meshes, coffee, green, mists, qwerty, camp, camera, avalanche, current, heave, arch, diffuse, meander, implosion, self, letters.



I write, or am I written? Would never divulge on this journey's end. Zillions of words written already and zillions would come to be. In a living enthused, calm waters roar. A choice to make: writing or letting go. For thoughts surround, bask at times, and others soak. Where do I then find, the season apt to sketch a character in this world to perform? Words are many and sentences range from cultures of heaven or hell to strings or bodies made in secrecy. Those who could, most coherently, read and write, progressed. Rest dedicated themselves to living. There were towers of surveillance born in texts. Linguistic weapons charting out territories. And, as you are aware, hearts weeded out truths. Yet, we talk of freedom, in the absence or in the engagement. Sometimes even in mute, few characters shape stories to resolve this grief of the existential kind. Shrouded in stories; our naked bodies.

Woven and woven beyond the literacy ages. Cultures and ornamentation evolve uncontained. To where we once claimed: our land, his land, her land, fatherland, motherland, all an Island.

A moonlit night over the calm sea, she sat quietly by the side on the sand, where waters would greet once and recede. Meticulously placed her toes where the tides of this hour would always wash her feet clean. Far from her, on the remote end of the beach, fires and jubilations buzzed like mosquitoes in her ears. Her eyes, though, fixed on the horizon, gleaming in moonshine, stars like diamonds floating in the sea. Rune had walked in mountains and forests once, where she had chanced poets pruning their garden of words. Stare too long and a world comes to life.

“Why do we write?”

*Banished once, some centuries amiss
Found in an evergreen forest the voice
That speaks in melodies unheard
Each for the passing days
Food and water, shelter the smokes
Evening warm to skies azure...*

*Shine! Among stars so bright
That each whisper seals some more
Of breaths and waters compose
Lying on grass seeks the lore...*

When in currents, waters do race. The united droplets bunch together, sticking close as if indivisible. Must have been the drop kind that lasted a split-second eternity. Sloth down to rest, forces range beyond... The end was never found. Only drops disappeared

into frothy rivers. The mountain of writers hence would cease to exist. So had seen the country dream; a life inked to activity, always beyond the general possibility. There were loud cries all around. Mist, the poetess, was dead. Or killed? We would never know, for all was lost to engine fumes and factory-made clouds. She had moved higher up to the mountain in her primes. Trees, the other poets, gathered around her. She would weave worlds of mystery walking among them. We were the fortunate ones, who were born here in this magic. Mist would never speak. Birds would render her platonic scales in the rejoicing of berries and fruits. They would announce all seasons and weather when it was time for her to leave. She kept coming back, but warmer each time. Rumour has it, her stories of the forest had fascinated souls in the urban jungle and they followed her to the mountain. Few writers stopped writing, for they accommodated Mist's followers. They made food and beds for them, but could never understand what to do with their vehicles. Trees, too, were felled, because poets never had their say. They lived in silence of words fancy. Underneath mellow sanctions, dire chokings of smoke. They could be heard at night, the poets, coughing their way about the newly lined streets. Among them, the Drop, ventured all alone, reiterating tales of eternity. The world of letters progressed. Writers turned into content developers and creative writers into branding agents. And, poets... Well, dismissed with a sigh.

Heartbreaks, they say, make poets. Had never known a heart until the violent break; would move rhythms many, from one currency to the other. Then became an everyday affair – flow, break, flow again, and break again. Why do these rocks insist on me alone? I am among the waters, moving as one, breaking into one,

yet many I see, as broken from streams. All around me. I am not alone. My fellow lives are not water; I have learned that. I must protect my words from categories of land. Until the dying day, I must write to survive. My write to survive!

“I write because I have to.”

Quite conceivably, writing creates a space of its own between what there is and what is seen. In this day and age, it is easy for us to perceive this space on the screen. The realm of words, as they say, is to be read between the lines. This was not always so. The writing was inscribed on rocks before it slipped onto the surface of the paper. Inks would paint the cleave on rocks. The words, thus, could never be questioned. Later then, ink was drafted into lines and curves and emerged as sensuous handwriting on a surface called paper. Soon it was possible for handwriting to be printed on countless sheets of paper using embossed blocks. These days, we have replaced physical forms of writing with softer virtual screens and keyboards.

*After knowing, never recognised
This place I call home
In senseless might*

*Patrols loud sometimes
Echoes of silent frontiers
Midnight sleepwalking angels*

*Quieter perfumes on the road
Despair the season groom
My walk lost too soon*

In the warmth of violence

*Sources keep receding
Glaciers were not found*

*Rivers unabated in their resolve
To go and keep going
Regardless the reason*

*If movement is the truth,
Why hold hands
And ask to stay?*

“I write because I want to be a poet.”

Rune sat drenched, planted in the sand. Her white gown, soaked in salty waters, could not be differentiated from her thighs. In fact, her waist was half buried in the sand as well. She had lost sense of her presence on the beach to such an extent that she did not shift away from the higher tides. It took considerable effort to stand and start walking. Away from the buzz, she strolled past the last fishermen’s boats along the beach, and those mosquitoes appeared like giant fireflies from this distance. The breeze was rather strong here, and in no time, her white dress and hair were found flowing sideways to their rhythm. Almost abruptly, she stops and turns around. Nobody was there. Not a single soul. There was just Rune with a very strong impression of being watched. Her body was no longer dancing carefree to the breezes. A definite restraint loomed all around her to counter this gaze.

Oh, Ghosts!?! Who would know otherwise? Placed within words are the territories and conquests of land. When Kings ran out of words, a book allegedly governed the land, air, water, and fire. Conversations flourished around the book. Protectors and custodians

were proclaimed and different books became the law on different lands. Revolutions were hence, all made in good books: a promise to rearrange the strings of behaviour. Disciplines contested their existence. Spoke of the world and universe. To imagine, to ascertain, to change, and to manipulate were each born victorious in their resolve. Save the believers, all dedicated themselves to learning. To know and to tell: the conversation endless.

“I write so that you know.”

Drop frequently roamed around with his friends of different disciplines. Three ladies and two other men gathered where Drop had invited them - the last known sight of Mist. She was seen here in the days of young cinema and tea-time conversations. Tallest among these friends, Sylvia had an eagerness to know, but she would never allow it to break free from what her elders had inscribed on her. She listened carefully and glanced at the faces of other friends, none of which appeared keen on knowing Mist. “They would all express their acknowledgement of Mist’s greatness just to keep Drop afloat”, she thought as she looked for the perfect rock to place herself on. Conversations soon reached the sublime for Drop, and he could not keep the other drops from trickling down his face. Ron, particularly astonished, announced his departure behind the bushes for a quick leak. Everybody could hear him laugh, but no one mentioned that on his return. Dane and Elise held Drop in their arms while Sylvia and Bryan discussed their options for lunch. Ron resting on a Deodar trunk lit a cigarette and looked at the sky through the mesh of leaves and branches, puffing rather at irregular intervals. Elise dusted her maroon pants and picked up her bag. Drop had stopped weeping

now and Dane perhaps in caution, stuck close to him.

“We can have lunch at my place and go out for drinks in the evening.”

“Sounds great! I will come”

“Is there no way other than writing?”

“Yes, you could click photographs...”

“But I don’t recreate worlds...”

“So it is Elise and me at Sylvia’s place. Ron, Drop, and Dane?”

“Who said photography does that?”

“I think I will stay in the forest with Drop.”

“Yes, I will stay here as well. See you later!”

“Come! I will show you a picture.”

Inside a sweeter refuge, clans most elated. Hoots onward on the railway line, the evenings in ferrous lanes. When on the terrace we slept, stars abound and stories. Into midnight, early morning sometimes, would go on and recite days in childhood fantasies. Yes, we were all children then - pilots, doctors, accountants, engineers, and artists together with Paris, New York, and Tokyo-laden dreams. None of which could foresee, broken flowers in Granny’s garden. Reprimands in the morning, all dreams set aside. We grew up, protecting flowers in Granny’s garden...

Perhaps writing felt real. Although the reality of writing is as real as the one “outside” writing, we have confused ourselves into developing theories of a non-differential union between writing and the world. Thought has evolved around the presupposition that words and things are one and the same. Alternate thoughts emphasise the distance between words and things. An alteration of this kind tries to bridge the distance with conceptions of a relation. There must be something in the tree for it to

be called a tree. An enquiry of the rebellious kind would never indoctrinate words as predecessors of thought and vice versa. Words as names of things, chart out realities for us. It is in these realities we confuse and contest our worlds with other realities and worlds. Such is the story of writing, an infinite conversation, between ever-changing dialogue partners.

Then into deeper woods remain three friends. Unaware in unison, hearts somewhere weaved the cause of Mist's regeneration. We would write and write until we find Mist again - No one said this, no one heard. Hands, yet inked together, held together. It rained hard that afternoon and nobody has heard of the three friends ever since.

"I write because it is the law."

Who will ever read what I write? There are so many books already. Everything that could have been said, has been said. I will not make it to the legends of great writing. If I tell them that I don't like Game of Thrones, they will kill me. I know Byron from Wordsworth, but I cannot write like them. I write as I can. Isn't it beautiful to write from the heart? I must be blind to skill. I have to learn how to write. I make many grammatical errors. There are no more cigarettes. I will kill myself. Maybe then they can read what I write. But, then I will be dismissed as a lunatic. Who cares! I will do what I have to do, without worrying about what others think. I am an artist. The first one alive to write the way I do. Isn't that literature enough? I have my own story. I write this story and I am the lead role. I am what I write myself to be. Define me not; negate me not - as Poet, Philosopher, or scientist.

“I will write until I die.”

*Fine pictures of thought
Set mirages in sight*

*The caravan walked for miles
Water and food delight
Long winding roads
Valleys and mountains high*

*Dear traveller of mine
Eyes lost to skies
Sit by sometime
We'll toast to the cries...*

Beauty has forever been around. Few have recorded her in words and few have created her out of words. However, those who write are never left free of themselves. For the poet writes and is written. Writing, much like other aesthetic forms, involves a multidirectional nature. In the two recognized directions of self-identity, writing offers a field of passing or slipping identities. The fundamental premise to understand such instances of the slip is the knowledge that a writer is a writer for as long as the writing self writes. The linguistic possibilities of inertial silhouettes of writers emerging in past or future do not write. They simply are vestiges of once an intense movement. Writing, in this sense, is the movement celebrated as present feelings, thoughts, or stories. The possibilities of a writer's self-emergence cannot be denied on both ends of this differential movement: I write or am I written? The difference between these two possibilities is that of immediate and deferred self-identification as a writer. However, in the infinite conversation that literature is, a writer is constantly slipping; slipping into situations, conversations,

designs, groups, discussions, or feelings. Now, writing in a situation would mean either narrating the situation itself or conducting the situation as a role in it. In both these cases, writing is immaculate creation, which can be differentiated on grounds of the awareness of its performance. The immediate awareness of creation is what scriptures refer to as god. The deferred awareness of creation is what is referred to as human. Hence, it is possible to realize both god and human in writing. And yes, both of these selves are performances of beauty, which are coded in writing.

“I write because I can't.”

She kept looking back as she made her way to what once used to be a lighthouse. The ruins are now inhabited by a few artists who like to keep away from civilians. Rune attended all the concerts here and frequently read out her writings. This night she needed refuge from the gaze that kept following her. Although she was frightened beyond abandonment, she kept walking as if she wanted to let the gaze know that she was not aware of its presence. She even made sure to inspect the sands for any object that would come in handy as a weapon of defence. She had made it to the stone assemble now and the ruin was only some hundred meters away. She could see the bonfire like a small oil lamp trying to range its light through a mesh of dancing vampires. The gaze seemed to be nearing, so Rune quickened her strides. This might have been the reason why she lost track of her pursuit. Stones beneath her feet suddenly disappeared and she could not save herself from falling into a ditch overflowing with weeds.

The gaze could no longer be sensed, but strangled, Rune made a few desperate attempts to free herself from the

weeds before she lost all will. She was bored now. Even though her feet touched the depth of the ditch, she was not sinking. Her head was well above the surface and free to breathe. She could even turn in all directions, so she decided to spend some time looking at the stars, which from here appeared exquisite. There was less of the sky and more of stars. The moon did disturb the starry night behind her field of vision, but that did not matter much here. The sky was lit abound of stars. Two shooting stars down, she started counting. Three, Four, Five, Six... The seventh count was disturbed when something firm struck her feet. It could have been one of her hard-shelled friends from the sea, but it did not resemble any natural shape in her touch. She reaches for it and picks it up with substantial strength. Whatever it was, was placed on her head like an earthen pot filled with water. There was no way she could have seen what it was standing inside the ditch. She had to leave her stars and move out onto the rocks. This time even the weeds did not retaliate. She was gentle this time. She wiped off the mud and muck, and out appeared a casket wrapped in a thick plastic sheet. She quickly unwrapped the box. Perhaps she had found the lost treasures from one of her childhood stories. She knew they did exist for real. She closed her eyes and then opened the casket. But she did not feel any shimmer on her eyelids. "Ornaments definitely lose their lustre buried like that...". Her hands touched the inside of the box. It was all dry. Inside, centred, something wrapped in another plastic was placed. She quickly opens her eyes. A notebook it was. She gathered the box and all the plastic sheets, and with the notebook held close to her heart, she took a final glance at the place just to be sure. Rune ran faster than she ever had that night. On her knees in front of the fire, none of the artists seemed to react. They were all busy dancing to the glory of

Luna. Even Rune did not bother calling out to anyone. She flipped open the brown hardcover of the notebook: “Waterhole – The Drop”.

*Far from the everyday
Notes to silence
Song of the Lorelei
Lulls to sleep mistaken sailors
Braving the storm and tide
Whispers a place to hide*

*All the ships at sea
You missed my heart
High on mountains
Among the trees
White, the loyal tempest
My breaths release.*

“I’m haunted by the ghost of writing.”

Repetition then became the philosophy of the everyday. To reproduce, the performance of the writing once lived. Tools were made to decipher and dissect classical writings. Those spirited meters, masculine and feminine stresses, and lofty rhymes were cast on paper as knowledge of a poem. Words were bent at times in iambic lanes; forcibly so, spirits perished. Corpses of words in pedantic placed schemes of rhythm: a desire to perform the classical truths of beauty. Drop made it to the shores, unheard. Coherence was lost in midnight haze and love demises. Fear and prejudice rain on this mountain of writers now. Forests rejoice quenched of their thirst, million days old. Even factory-made clouds could not hold the drops back. Drop was once among them: flowing in streams sometimes, rising to skies at the sea, and with other drops falling back to join the

streams. From window glasses to blades of leaves, and from mountains to valleys, the Drop had places to be. A friend of yours mentioned the other day that books were the waterholes of cultures; perhaps filled by eyes that did not want to hold back. Or, the hands and the will to write...

The human performance concludes with a dissatisfied writing self. God is complete in creation; human feels incomplete. Humans feed on the vestiges of their god in reflection. A lot has been said to address the humility of a human, but knowledge of the self and realization of the gods are too potent to inflict progress and competition. Thus, there is always a contested performance of perfection; the writing of the real kind that can write itself - The writing machine. We have calculated meters and meters of lines, explored the spaces between them, and taught ourselves the classical stanzas. This knowledge has been programmed into calculators that can compute poetic stanzas much faster than an organic competence. The classical human poet has now been transformed into a machine. Are machines humble as a human? If they were, they would be human... The performance of a machine is to repeat classical performances of perfection infinitely. Rather for as long as the performance is choreographed by a human.

“I write for people.”,

*Greet the velvet muse
Our hands soaked in ecstasy
We have fates sealed
And all truths dared*

When in courage

*Speak the lost tongue
In forests of whisper
And beaches of surrender.*

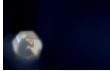
*She was the air I breathe
Held me fixed to the leaf*

*Would wake in the morning
Her white embrace*

*Oh Mist, would you for once rise?
Help them wash their eyes
Those drops are stowed
Pining to be!*

The ditch was cleared of weeds and dug deeper. Nothing was found. Rune sat collected, the notebook on her thighs. A moonlit night then and since: a waterhole for slipping drops and lovers of mist. Meet Rune when you like. Do not live with her, visit her often. For everything that can be said, is yet to be said. Her deep sunken eyes are still sinking. She writes and is written. You will find her at the waterhole, quietly poised in inks.

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