

GUEST AUTHOR

ICONO-
LOGY 3.0
Image
Theory
in Our Time

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Philosophy does not free itself from the element of representation when it embarks upon the conquest of the infinite. Its intoxication is a false appearance. It always pursues the same task, Iconology.

Gilles Deleuze¹

All I want to do here is tell a story. I'm afraid that some of it will be autobiographical, or what Jacques Derrida called "autobiobibliography".² So perhaps a more precise title would be, "Image Theory in My Time", surveying 50 years of work with a variety of images, objects, and texts; spaces and places, figures and faces, all of them centered on the problem, the question, the riddle of the image. It has been a journey driven by questions: what is an image? What is the relation of images to language? How do images circulate across media? How do they affect us? How do they acquire meaning and power? Why do they seem to "come alive", and what do they want from us? How do they change with transformations in social and technical forms of life? What role do they play in historical events? And what is the history of our understanding of images, of our aspirations to create a science of images, a critical and historical iconology?

At every stage, the story of the image has been a story of some collectivity, some assemblage that gathers around an image, whether projected on a screen, carved in stone, or conjured up in language. One thinks of the prisoners of Plato's Cave, unable to look away from the shadowy figures that pass before them on the cave wall, or of a tribe huddling around a campfire listening to stories conjuring phantoms, hallucinations, and insights, and (for over a century) cinema. If this text were a slide lecture or a silent film, it would be the moment when the narrator's voice, what the Japanese call the *benshi*, describes the world of the passing images, speaks for, about, and through them, animating them for the gathered audience sitting in the dark.

¹ "The Simulacrum and Ancient Philosophy", in G. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*; translated by M. Lester and Ch. Stivale. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 260.

² For an authoritative bibliography, see Krešimir Purgar, *W. J. T. Mitchell's Image Theory: Living Pictures*, New York: Routledge, 2017.

But it is not only that the audience is an assembly of spectators. The images are also gathered in a crowd, an assemblage that looks back at the audience, holds up a mirror to it, transports it into other worlds. What kinds of images might be assembled? The range and diversity is without limit, like the spectators themselves. They could be confronted with an array of world pictures, one of Hans Blumenberg's "absolute metaphors" (the world as a globe, or as sea voyage, a hospital, *theatrum mundi*) that represent our species being; or with plate X of Aby Warburg's *Bilderatlas*, a compendium of cosmic diagrams; or most radically, by Heidegger's claim that the modern world has itself *become* a picture. They could encounter the central object of a cult, an idol, fetish, or totem that gathers a people or movement around its sacred presence.³ It could be a cultural icon that arouses passion and political violence, love and hatred, an image of the unhuman otherness that confronts us most terribly when it wears a smiling human face.

On the side of the assembled audience, it could be a professional gathering, most obviously, the tribe of art historians who, from Johann Winckelmann to Erwin Panofsky, ponder works of visual art to understand their meanings and cultural context; or a body of scientists engaged in discipline of measurement, modelling, mapping, depicting, and describing. The image is clearly foundational to science, even if it is an open question what it would mean to have a science of images.⁴ And of course images arouse desire and devotion, whether as a substitute for lost love or the cravings of consumerism. The refined delights of pure aesthetic pleasure jostle up against the even more seductive promises of kitsch. The

3 See Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*; trans. by Robert Savage, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010 and *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*; trans. by Steven Rendall, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997. Warburg's cosmic diagrams are assembled in Panel B of his *Mnemosyne Bilderatlas*. For commentary, see Spyros Papapetros in Cornell University's online version: <https://warburg.library.cornell.edu/>. Cp. Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture", in *The Question of Technology*, New York: Harper, 1977. For discussion of cult images, see my essay "Totemism, Fetishism, Idolatry", in *What Do Pictures Want?*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005, chapter 9.

4 See my *Image Science: Iconology, Visual Culture, and Media Aesthetics* (Chicago, 2015); 23-38. For a powerful discussion of the role of images in natural history, see Norman Macleod, "Images, Totems, Types and Memes: Perspectives on an Iconological Mimetis", in *The Pictorial Turn*, New York: Routledge, 2010, pp. 88-111.

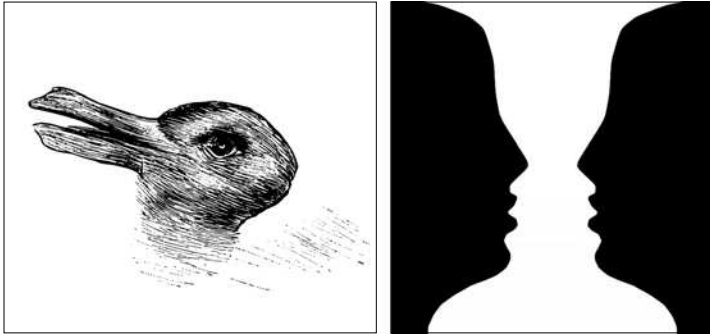


Fig. 1: (left) Joseph Jastrow, “The mind’s eye”, *Popular Science Monthly*, no. 54, 1899; (right) Edgar Rubin, Optical illusion: Face or Vase?, 1915

image is everywhere, appearing and disappearing, a fluttering of presence and absence, now you see it and now you don’t (Fig. 1). It is the butterfly of human consciousness, flying from one medium to another, appearing one moment in language, the next in painting and photography, the next in a figure carved in steel or stone or reinforced concrete. It slows down to a stillness and permanence that outlasts any human life, and speeds up to a blinding blur of motion that carries us away. It is the foundation of mental life, the material of dreams and fantasy, memory and foresight. It embraces the entire span of human presence on this planet, ranging from the Caves of Lascaux to the animated dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park*, and goes beyond human history in the fossilized remains of animals that existed long before us, and speculates on futures in which human civilization may be long gone. Artist Hito Steyerl has explored the technologies of “bubble vision” where images appear without any human beholder to experience them.⁵ Future worlds without human beings will obviously not be seen by us, but they can be imagined and depicted in all the media at our command. A few years ago, artist Freida Tesfagiorgis decided to paint my portrait surrounded by the images that have been central to my research, showing them flying around me like a swarm of butterflies (Fig. 2). Perhaps this is the “theory bubble” I have inhabited for the last 40 years. Most of them are easy to name: first, the animals:

⁵ For Steyerl’s “Bubble Vision”, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=boMbdtu2rLE>.



Fig. 2: Freida High W. Tesfagiorgis, *Iconologist at work*, a W.J.T. Mitchell's portrait surrounded by the images that have been central to his research

the Duck-Rabbit, the Golden Calf, the Dinosaur, Dolly the Sheep; then the devices and scenes of visual culture: the Camera Obscura, Descartes' Blind Man with his walking sticks, Locke's tabula rasa, Panofsky tipping his hat to an acquaintance, the Platonic Cave. And one epochal image of catastrophic iconoclasm, the destruction of the World Trade Center on 9/11/2001. One thing all these images have in common: they are not merely pictures of something, but pictures that reflect on the nature of imaging itself, or what I call "metapictures".⁶ The whole point of metapictures is to resist the common notion that images are simply the passive objects of verbal explanation and interpretation. If my first foray into image theory was entitled *Iconology*, a title that suggests the dominance of the logos over the icon, my second try reversed the field with the title of *Picture Theory*, insisting on the agency and ambition of images as entities that are capable of theorizing themselves, reflecting on

⁶ "Metapictures" appears as chapter two of *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.



Fig. 3: René Magritte, *The Treachery of Images* (*This is not a Pipe*), oil on canvas, 1929, 60 x 81 cm

their own nature, framing our understanding in master metaphors and topics of discourse itself. In the *paragone* – or contest – of words and images that has enlivened culture since the first cave paintings enchanted their beholders, images play an equally important role, as Magritte shows, and Foucault re-emphasizes in his famous meditation on Magritte's *Treachery of Images* or *This Is not a Pipe* (Fig. 3). Against the tyranny of the verbal “no”, Magritte asserts the pictorial “yes” that insists on the presence that the inscription tries to deny, in exactly the same way that a no smoking sign invariably reminds me of my unquenchable craving for a cigarette. There is, as Foucault insists, never a final victory in the struggle between the seeable and the sayable, the image and the word, representation and discourse, only a set of inconclusive skirmishes across ever-shifting borders. “Between the figure and the text”, where “a whole series of intersections – or rather attacks launched by one against the other” exist.⁷ As de Saussure demonstrated (Fig. 4), the image lies at the heart of language in the mental regions of the signified, even as the word seems to dominate from the upper level of the signifier, as if what

⁷ Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982, p. 28.

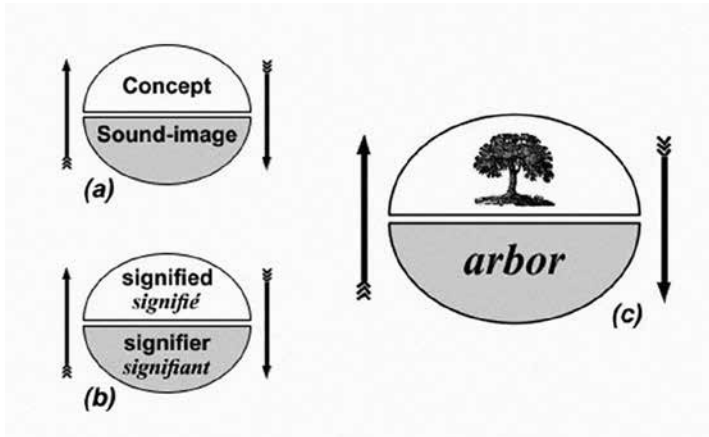


Fig. 4: Ferdinand de Saussure, Diagram of the Linguistic sign, showing the relation of the verbal signifier and the iconic signified, *Cours de linguistique générale*, 1916

comes out of the mouth of a speaker is always going to betray to some extent what resides in the mind, or in plain sight. Between the word and the image, as Foucault teaches us, there is a gray, indeterminate zone, a frontier across which arrows are launched in both directions:

We seldom pay attention to the small space running above the words and below the drawings [...] serving them as a common frontier [...] the slender, colorless, neutral strip [...] which separates the text and the figure, must be seen as a crevasse, an uncertain foggy region now dividing the pipe floating in its imagistic heaven from the mundane tramp of words.⁸

C. S. Peirce already understood this zone as the territory of the index, the shifter or pointer that stitches together the triad of semiotics, the icon/index/symbol complex that makes meaning possible across all the senses and signs we are capable of producing. Peirce's indices, his pointers, shifting borders and con-

⁸ Ibid., p. 29.

necters are de Saussure's bar, his barrier between signifier and signified, and the arrows are his arrows of desire that seek to connect sounds to signs to the thoughts of others, forming the electric circuitry of meaning.⁹

But I have not yet begun my story. This is merely a summary, a snapshot of the transcendental conditions of image-making as a human and non-human practice. It claims that images are as foundational as language in the construction of culture, and that the world of sound (noise, speech, music, the voice) provides the ground where they meet: image/sound/text, the great orders of aesthetics are, in this sense, the irreducible elements of our symbolic universe. There are no other media.

In this connection, I have been exploring for some time an aesthetic-semiotic-media triad, which permeates theories of representation from Aristotle's *opsis/melos/lexis* to Roland Barthes' Image/Music/Text, and finds its parallels in the Peirce's divisions of the sign and Lacan's "registers" of the Symbolic/Imaginary/Real.¹⁰ This is not a historical discovery; it is just something anyone could look up, or grasp immediately if one looked up from the pages of Western philosophy to see the conceptual pattern that permeates theories of mediation and meaning from ancient to modern. Like the genealogical inverted tree diagram of the image that opens *Iconology*, tracing the offspring of the image's parent concept (likeness, similitude) in dreams, memory, perception, metaphor, and writing, the pattern has always displayed itself in plain sight. The genealogy of the image-concept, like the question, "what do pictures want?" is not a matter of saying something new, but of making explicit a question we did not quite notice that we had been asking since we first started making images, gathering and gathering around them. Since, for instance, the sacred texts of all three religions of the book—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—suggested that we were ourselves images, imperfect copies

⁹ See Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs", in: *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler, New York: Dover, 1955. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*; trans. by Wade Baskin, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959.

¹⁰ See my *Image Science: Iconology, Visual Culture, and Media Aesthetics*; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015, p. 122 for a table of correspondences among the triads of media, signs, psychic "registers", "laws of association", and notational systems.

in flesh of other beings, whether the little others (our parents) or the Big Other, the *imago dei*. We are *original* copies, to be sure, but mimetic, simulating, and dissimulating beings all the same. So all of this is to be taken as metaphysical, as an ontology of the image as a transhistorical entity, as foundational to the human condition as language. But for that very reason, the image is a highly sensitive weather-vane of history, a barometer of culture and politics, with icons and metaphors emerging as symbols of the moment, most of them transitory and trivial, a special few momentous, even monumental, signifying the ephocal moment, the swerve or break in time. Some are staged, contrived, and turned into monuments (Fig. 5) or into ephemeral objects of embarrassment (Fig. 6), or into deep and lasting shame at atrocities that seem to compulsively repeat themselves (Fig. 7). Historic icons are what Claude Lévi-Strauss called “totemic operators”, that can galvanize or outrage mass societies with the aid of media.



Fig. 5: Joe Rosenthal, *Raising of Flag on Mt. Suribachi*, a photograph taken on February 23, 1945



Fig. 6: *Mission Accomplished*, George W. Bush on a photograph taken aboard the aircraft carrier *USS Abraham Lincoln*, May 1, 2003, Associated Press



Fig. 7: Nick Ut, *Napalm Girl*, Trang Bang, Vietnam, 1972

These punctual icons of history, part of the everyday consciousness of many Americans with “no caption needed”,¹¹ explain nothing in themselves. But they do provide a focus of attention, an opening for research. Why do these icons emerge at specific historical moments? What forces converge to make them powerful? The destruction of the World Trade Center produced the shock of what is arguably the greatest iconoclastic spectacle in history, administered to a global audience in real time, and repeated compulsively thereafter. As Michael Taussig notes, there is nothing like the destruction or



Fig. 8: *The Hooded Man* (Abdou Hussain Saad Faleh), 2004, a photograph taken by sergeant Ivan Frederick. Abu Ghraib prison, Iraq

11 Robert Hariman and John Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011.

defacement of an image to bring it to life.¹² Why did the faceless image become so potent in the first decade of the 21st century? The image scandal of the Abu Ghraib photographs went viral in 2004 (Fig. 8) exposing the dark underside of America's endless War on Terror, itself a metaphorical concept that had become literalized as a form of national self-torture and blinding, The Hooded Man combined "Ecce Homo" overtones of holy war, and was accompanied by the proliferation of anonymous cloned armies, so central to the popular culture of the 1990s (Fig. 9). Meanwhile, Bush was making cloning



Fig. 9: Forkscrew Graphics, *iRaq*, 2004, silkscreen on paper

12 Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative*; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

his principal wedge issue up until the day before 9/11. Baudrillard had already described the Twin Towers as architectural clones.¹³ In the era of the clone, one began to feel a kind of “historical uncanny”, the sense that certain planets are aligning, forces beyond control are unleashed, and movements have been launched that are connected to this strange new “living image”, a biopicture realized by the convergence of genetic engineering and information science. The oldest myth of human origins, God creating a living, fleshly image of himself out of clay and breath, suddenly became a technical possibility. The clone became a cultural icon in itself over the 28 year period from 1980-2008, a metapicture in the purest sense, in its emphasis on nesting and repetition of the image, the series and the *mise en abime*, not to mention its identification with reproductive technologies. The image of image-making as similitude, and identity led to the unleashing of the analog newly energized by the digital. In short, sometime around the onset of the twenty-first century we found ourselves capable of making living images of living things, fulfilling the ancient dream of playing god with a lump of clay (Fig. 10) reviving the nightmare of re-animating dead or extinct flesh: Frankenstein’s monster and Spielberg’s dinosaurs. And if scientific magic was not enough, we could count

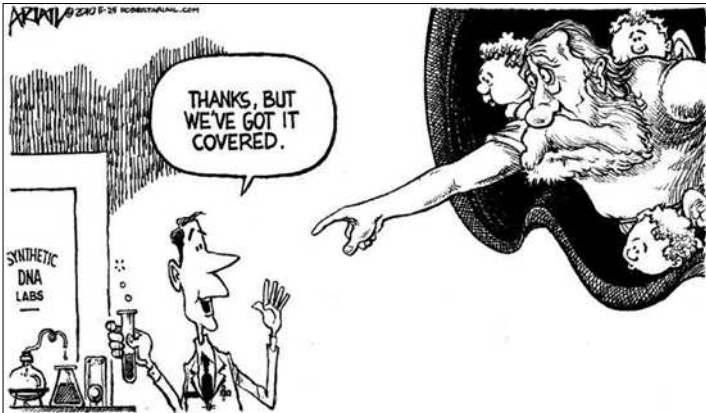


Fig. 10: Richard Locher, *Thanks, but we've got it covered*, 2010, Chicago Tribune

13 Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*; trans. by Chris Turner, New York: Verso, 2002, p. 38, 40

on the never-satisfied cravings of consumerism to make fossilized creatures come to life and obey our bidding.

The Clone was the metapicture, the master image of the period of “biocybernetic reproduction”, replacing Walter Benjamin’s model of mechanical reproduction with a convergence of genetics and high speed computing. It gave rise to dramatic forms of epistemological and moral panic. No longer could the image be regarded as a faithful copy of an original event or object. Baudrillard was the most eloquent spokesman for this panic, denouncing the clone as an obscurity that produces “monothought” and forces “singular beings” to “become identical copies of one another”.¹⁴ Like his earlier polemics against the rule of simulation and simulacra, “copies without an original”, the clone undermined truth, rendered beauty as a repetitious formula, and brought to a climax the reign of what he called “the evil demon of images”.

But inside the womb of the clone, a new metapicture was gestating, one that would reverse some of its implications, and introduce others. A dramatic signal of this was Errol Morris’s documentary film, *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008), a study of the Abu Ghraib photographs that exposed the scandal of the American torture regime in the War on Terror. Morris’s film calmed some of the panic around the digital image by unveiling its affordances to forensic procedures. In a remarkable sequence, Morris shows how the metadata embedded in the digital image does not necessarily untether the image from its origin, but links it to a determinate historical place, time, device, and operator. In contrast to the old “gold standard” of photographic reproduction epitomized by chemical, analog photography, the digital photograph turns out to be a *supercopy* that encodes the traces of time and location, signatures of authorship, along with the visible image, providing new possibilities for precision and authentication right alongside new potentials for manipulation and fraud.¹⁵

14 Jean Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001, p. 18. For further discussion, see “Clonophobia”, chapter 3 of my *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9-11 to the Present* (The University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. 30-31.

15 See my essay, “Realism and the Digital Image”, in *Image Science*, op. cit., chapter 5, and “The Work of Art in the Age of Biocybernetic Reproduction”, in *What Do Pictures Want?*, chapter 15.

But exactly what kind of precision? Morris shows us the power of a counter-forensics, that managed to undo the power of the state to mystify the Abu Ghraib images, to declare them “exceptional”. But the state has its own obsession with precision, accuracy, and timing that expresses itself most vividly in the emergent phenomenon of the *drone*, a device which weaponizes the camera itself, and turns it into flying machine that emulates not just birds, airplanes, and helicopters, but swarms of insects guided by algorithms. The drone has supplanted the clone as a cultural icon, and as a metapicture of image-making itself, from its ability to conduct fly-on-the-wall surveillance to its promise as a delivery vehicle for unbridled consumer desire – Philip K. Dick’s fantastic story begins to come true – of a world where out of control production and delivery of commodities by robots and drones is killing the human race. And once again, a counter-forensics has emerged to resist and expose the destructive capacity of drone warfare. Eyal Weizman’s Forensic Architecture program at Goldsmith’s College, University of London, deploys aerial photography, especially a low-tech mimesis of drone surveillance known as “kite photography”, which has the advantage of passing itself off as harmless children’s play while documenting the traces of Bedouin villages and their destruction by the Israeli military. The coordination of ground-level photography and aerial imaging overcomes the tactics of erasure by aligning what Weizman calls the “limits of detectability” in the photograph with the material traces left on the desert sands. Pixels and material particles match the photographic images of the desert with the images imprinted on the desert by goats and bulldozers.¹⁶

The utility of these images in exposing state violence is dramatically generalized in Weizman’s alignment of desert borders with the statistical frequency of drone strikes along what he calls “the conflict shoreline” in North Africa and the Middle East (Fig. 11). If one plots the frequency of Western drone strikes on meteorological maps, one finds an uncanny alignment, a red line of political and climatological violence. “Since empires”, Weizman notes, “historically have ruled to the edge of the desert, resistance to them has come

¹⁶ Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability*; Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 2017.

from beyond desert lines”.¹⁷ This arid shoreline becomes especially intense at the ever-shifting border of the Negev desert in Israel/Palestine, where the Bedouins are subjected to frequent removals of their bodies and all traces of their villages. One wonders if a similar forensic photo-mapping could be done in the urban geography of American cities like Chicago, where the old spaces of the congested, overcrowded ghetto housing have been replaced by vacant lots and “food deserts”, and depopulated neighborhoods settle into climates of unrelenting violence. The resistance to desertification and its climatological twin, rising sea level, is an ecopolitical and scientific struggle in which the forensic image will play a crucial role. Its task will be precisely to work against the regime of the simulacrum and to transform image-worlds into sites of truth-telling and factual documentation.



Fig. 11: Eyal Weizman and Fazal Sheikh, *The Conflict Shoreline*, a series of photographs, (Ma'ale Adumim and the Bedouin settlement of the Jahalin Tribe, July 16, 2011)

The forensic image is the concern of numerous other contemporary artists. One thinks immediately of Trevor Paglen's photo documentation of “black sites” and the hidden world of national security surveillance (Fig. 12); Harun Farocki's *Eye/Machine* explorations of

¹⁷ Ibid.



Fig. 12: Trevor Paglen, *The Salt Pit*, previously secret CIA prison, Northeast of Kabul, Afghanistan, 2006, C-print, 61 x 91 cm

military image technologies, and Lawrence Abu Hamdan's visualizations of acoustical forensics. Rather than relying on the classic cinematic technique of montage, forensic imaging tends to rely on the layering of different kinds of images – photographic, cinematic, cartographic, topographic, and topological – to produce multi-dimensional and multi-medial assemblages of specific events and processes. The result is a new kind of time-space architecture that transforms the meaning of both forensics and architecture. Shifting cloud shapes, ocean currents, wind velocity, navigational charts, chemical traces, machine imaging, sound recording, modelling, archival photographs, kite-flying, and eye-witness testimony converge in images assembled for analytic and visual attention. A new aesthetics of detective work and display enlivens the traditional evidence wall and *Bilderatlas* pioneered by art history and criminology. The other major new development in imaging technology is what has been called the “data double”, a product not primarily of state surveillance, but of self-surveillance and its coordination with the consumption of technical, medical, and financial goods and services. The visual image of one's face is only a tiny component of this iconic compilation of information. To my knowledge, no artist has attempted to render this phenomenon for aesthetic contem-

plation, but it has become such a ubiquitous part of everyday life, that it certainly is destined for this kind of attention. The fact is that we are engaged in the accumulation and dissemination of so much personal data that we are in effect creating “second selves” that reveal much more about us than any face to face encounter could provide. As with any image-making technology, the data double is susceptible to simulation, fraud, and identity theft, at the same time it has become indispensable to the most ordinary activities in contemporary societies. The figure of the clone, which threatened us with the lurid spectacle of a fleshly double, today gives way to digital phantoms that haunt our cell phones and laptops, and inhabit data bases on remote servers.

Iconology is nothing but the study of our species’ incorrigible tendency to make copies of ourselves and our worlds, images that are capable of producing both knowledge and ignorance, credible representations and credulous illusions. Religions of the book tend to converge on a deep suspicion of image-making, and thus the second commandment forbids image-making of all kinds on the grounds that we will fall down before our own creations and worship them as gods. Critical theory follows religion in this sense, pursuing an iconoclastic method that is deeply skeptical of the collective fantasies projected in what Marx called “the camera obscura of ideology”. Science and technology dream of controlling our images, using them in the service of truth, power, and human flourishing. The arts play across all these borders, exploring the affective, sensuous, and cognitive affordances of images, assembling them for contemplation and analysis. They put into practice Nietzsche’s wise advice to strike the idols with a hammer, not in order to shatter them, but to make them resonate and divulge their hollowness – and their musical potentials. Iconology assists the arts by following Nietzsche’s next move, replacing the hammer with a tuning fork, compelling our own critical and historical languages to resonate along with the images it engages.

So what is “iconology 3.0”? My answer has to be tentative, speculative, and to some extent personal. For me, the first stage – *Iconology 1.0* – was first made possible by the invention of photography and the assembling of a global cross-cultural atlas of images. Aby Warburg’s *Bilderatlas* was the most prominent symptom of this attempt to

totalize the world of images. It acquired a revived form of the ancient discipline of iconology in Erwin Panofsky's effort to envision an interpretive discipline of images that would track their meanings across the media. Art history itself, insofar as it breached the limits of fine art in search of vernacular images and everyday practices of seeing, laid the groundwork for a general science of images and the contemporary research project known as "visual culture". Cinema and cinema studies put the images into motion, revealing them as having been moving in time or space all along, while moving and mobilizing their beholders. Philosophy and critical theory similarly moved beyond the "linguistic turn" that Richard Rorty had described, to investigate a "pictorial turn" in which images would play central role in epistemological, ethical, and ontological questions, well beyond its traditional centrality to aesthetics. In my early experience as an iconologist, it was the relation between image and code that played the central role, with code playing a double role as a key to interpretation, and as an antithesis in the form of what Roland Barthes called the "message without a code" provided by photography. Semiotics, deconstruction, phenomenology and critical theory all seemed to turn simultaneously in the 1980s toward the image as a central object of investigation, and the onset of the digital image seemed to confirm the new possibilities of an archive that was moving well beyond the realm of analog, chemical based photography. For some it seemed as if the analog was in danger of disappearing, while to others it was only being enhanced and proliferated by its new technical affordances.

Iconology 2.0 is, in my view, when information science and the digital-analog dialectic converged with the life sciences, and the first "living images" began to appear as a conspicuous feature of popular culture and the scientific laboratory. Benjamin's mechanical reproduction was supplanted, not by the digital, but by the biocycbernetic synthesis that made cloning possible, the reproduction of living images of living things, what we might call "biopictures". *Iconology 3.0* is where we are now, and like everyone else who tries to inhabit their historical moment with a sense of critical clarity, I find myself caught up in a maelstrom of contradictions. This is partly because 3.0 does not leave the past behind with some kind of clean break, but gathers up all the fossils of previous times and

re-animates them in relation to our circumstances. I cannot say with any certainty what the paradigmatic metapicture, the “image of images” of our time is, and there is no rule that says there can be only one. I have offered a few candidates here, principally the sense of a renewed linkage of images and material conditions in the forensic sciences, and the emergence of the “data double” as a successor to the clone as a principal object of image anxiety. I would add to those concerns a new attention to a very old theme, the “world picture” deployed in a new register that does not regard the world as “all that is the case” (to echo Wittgenstein), nor as a pathological symptom of technical arrogance, as Heidegger imagines it. The new world picture does not image our world as a totalizable entity, but instead focusses on the planetary habitat as the limits of our livable world. Bruno Latour calls this the “Gaia” principle.¹⁸ I would connect it to the ancient metaphor of the Ship of Fools,¹⁹ reinterpreted within the conceit of “Spaceship Earth”, reminding us that our planet is a wandering island in an inhospitable void, what Blake called the “Sea of Time and Space”. On our small and fragile island, our ship of fools, the seas are rising and the deserts are expanding. If we do not find our way beyond our folly as a species, we will wind up like the dinosaurs, just another fossilized relic of a life-form that could not adapt. The metapictures of our time, then, may have to be formulated within a deeper time than human history, a paleontology of the present.

18 See Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*; New York: Polity Press, 2017.

19 See my essay, “Planetary Madness: Globalizing the Ship of Fools”; in Alexander Streitberger and Hilde van Gelder (eds.), *Disassembled’ Images: Allan Sekula and Contemporary Art*; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019.