ROLAND SCOTTI

A GAZE OF OUR OWN—AN ESSAY

Translated by Michael Thomas Taylor

THEORY

We live in a visually overstimulated world, and yet most of us—from laypeople to media critics—are visually illiterate. The iconic turn proclaimed in the 1990s called for a systematic scholarly, and interdisciplinary, analysis of images made by humans[1]—ranging from Stone Age cave paintings to works of fine art since Afro-European antiquity, or from the invention of photography to the digitally generated visual worlds of today. And yet the relationship to visual information, the visual relationships constructed by individuals, including scholars and photographers,[2] and by global societies at large can at times appear naïve and other times overly reverential; it can seem deeply dismissive, uncritically affirmative, or skeptically fractured.

This can likely be traced to many factors. Since the institutionalization of art history and the emergence of professional literary art criticism in the nineteenth century,[3] a subtly conveyed sense of exclusivity, an ostensible connoisseurship, has been bound up with the field of fine arts, possibly producing the paradoxical situation in which any sophisticated visual design is perceived as the concern of a markedly small elite, a group of initiates. Artistic languages, unlike other cultural techniques necessary for social competence such as reading, writing, arithmetic, and even music, are accordingly not counted among the foundational skills expected to be comprehensively taught at every level of education. Even in the field of contemporary art, which can be deliberately dilettantish in form—meaning it essentially aims for a low threshold of cultural competence in order to be accessible—aspects of the work that are avowedly visual, or immediately tangible to the senses, are often obstructed or even hindered by a discursive superstructure.[4]

If the theoretical discourse current in any given moment—rather than the craft, the making, the experience, and the transformative representation of visible things in themselves—forms the foundation of artistic productions and

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their interpretations, then, succinctly put, the creation and interpretation, the conveyance of the visual finds itself shifted into the realm of the literary, that is to say, into a scholarly language bound to the codes of a specific discipline.[5] In this case, the basics of visual literacy, its transformative skills, become unteachable, since they largely cease to function as criteria for critically appreciating and interpreting the artistic production of images, including those made by amateurs.[6]

What is even more perplexing is the fact that technical image production, from photography and film to digitally generated images, likewise remains unaddressed in education. Where are the schools that teach the ABCs of photographic knowledge and the inherent possibilities or limitations of media, or that offer an overview of media history? They are few and far between—and when media literacy is taught as a skill, then only in upper grades or in specialized academic programs such as visual communication, visual studies, museology, or art history.[7]

This is extremely surprising, given that the history of photography began with two grand, albeit still ultimately unfulfilled, promises. First, the photographic apparatus promised to enable anyone to accurately reproduce visual reality, without the need for prolonged artistic training; and second, the images it created through light claimed to be objective, that is to say, truthful and unburdened by subjective or individualistic distortions or alterations. Both promised to make image production—in the future in which we now live—independent and universalistic: to free it from artisanal creativity, expertise, imagination, and dilettantish subjectivity, and from the arbitrary whims of interpretation; to make it equally legible and understandable anywhere in the world and by everyone. The introduction in 1888 of the first affordable box camera, the Kodak No. 1, appeared to have accomplished this utopia, the democratization of image production. If we are to believe the marketing campaigns of the time, from that moment on, anyone would now be able to reproduce the visible world, or even (human) vision itself, without any special technical training; no longer would it be necessary to cede the visual mode of appropriating the world to specialists, artists, or scientists. The act of snapping a photograph appeared to unexpectedly realize the idea of the authentic, genuine, original image—ignoring, of course, the fact that developing photographs was entirely the province of a new industry. It appeared to make possible the ultimate secularization of the "vera icon."[8]

As we know today—or at least we think we know—this was a misconception, even a chimera. And no matter how knowledgeable or informed we have become, the promise remains compelling—of an unbiased, unadulterated,

honest view of the world; of a view that would at once afford deeper insight. And that this could be possible for everyone. This notion is perhaps the only way to explain the success of smartphones and their integrated cameras. We feed social media, the internet, our clouds, the cosmos with images, firmly believing and claiming that they represent something which existed precisely as it appeared before the camera's eye. Yet we barely understand the region-specific settings of our apps, let alone reflect on what we are doing when we pluck a moment from its temporal, social, natural context and place it into another one, often imaginary—into a virtual world, as we call it today. Perhaps this is because we lack a fundamental understanding of how images come to be? Because we have such little knowledge of the materials, skills, or mechanisms enabling their realization—and even less so of their social and ideological effects? Or perhaps it is because we exploit the cover of a machine-generated *re*-production, governed accordingly by an instrumental logic, to superimpose an ideal, "correct," world atop a reality that is obviously incomplete?

Such ignorance has consequences; notably, it is shaping the ongoing debates around DALL-E and other image generators based on artificial intelligence. And the argumentative incapacity it engenders—not only on the part of amateurs, but among cultural journalists and image editors, too—is remarkable in the face of an ostensibly "enhanced intelligence" that claims to replicate images, illustrations, and art in any conceivable fashion, comparable to the abilities of human imagination.[9] Yet this technological approach to image creation has largely failed to surpass a certain, base level of formal mediocrity; there seems to be no measure for its substance, which may be linked to a deficiency in visual education and critical judgment among both the developers and the "consumers" of this technology: we now struggle to see clearly; we uncritically or overcritically reconstruct its visual narratives.

We seem to be heading fully unprepared, to put it pessimistically, toward a scenario that Oliver Wendell Holmes, a physician, writer, photographer, and phototheorist, ironically predicted back in 1859:

> *"Form is henceforth divorced from matter.* In fact, matter as a visible object is of no great use any longer, except as a mold on which form is shaped. Give us a few negatives of a thing worth seeing, taken from different points of view, and that is all we want of it. Pull it down or burn it up, if you please. We must, perhaps, sacrifice some luxury in the loss of color; [...] There is but one Coliseum [*sic*] or Pantheon; but how many millions of potential negatives have they shed,—representatives of billions of pictures,— [*sic*] since they were erected! Matter in large masses must always be fixed and dear;

> form is cheap and transportable. We have got the fruit of creation now, and need not trouble ourselves with the core. Every conceivable object of Nature and Art will soon scale off its surface for us. Men will hunt all curious, beautiful, grand objects, as they hunt the cattle in South America, for the *skins*, and leave the carcasses as of little worth."[10]

Since 1859, the number of images that have been created—photographically, artistically, digitally—has surely gone beyond mere billions toward a googol (10^{100}).[11] These are images of minerals, plants, animals, artifacts, fantasies … and of course, of human beings. In the words of Holmes: they are strippings taken from visible surfaces, preserved and archived for eternity, or rather: for perpetual consumption, while the origins—the products of culture and the vitality of the world—have long since vanished. This certainly means that we nowadays encounter surrogates rather than realities, which may occupy little physical space but indelibly shape our imaginations. The acknowledgment of this fact, combined with the thesis articulated by Walter Benjamin in the 1930s, that mechanical reproduction annihilates the "aura" not only of artworks but of all originals,[12] might lead to profound exhaustion or to a furious iconoclasm—but this is not what is happening. What remains is a sheer inscrutable fascination: the sudden immediacy and potency of every depiction, every imagined form, every artwork, and every photograph.[13]

It thus seems all the more urgent to foster multiperspectival literacy in the realms of visual production, utilization, interpretation, and so forth. To be precise, what is needed is competence in seeing—in the physiological process that we primarily use to perceive the world, to form an "image of reality." The fact that we must develop any visual impression first in the darkroom of our mind, in order to create an image of reality, presupposes fundamentally abstract learning and cognitive processes. Otherwise, we could hardly grasp, let alone name, what we see: we would be lost in the very visibility of the world, lacking any point of orientation—an astonishing, even shocking state, given that as animals we are habituated, indeed dependent, on reacting instinctively and immediately to sensory stimuli, and especially to changes in our field of vision, as every person who moves in traffic knows well.

So how can we respond to the perplexing and overwhelming deluge of images that exists beside, within, and above the things of the world, without succumbing to iconolatry? Certainly not with ignorance or by refusing to look with care.[14]

PRACTICE

We might learn to see, to gain well-founded insight. We could practice, from our first years at school or even as small children at home, nuanced modes of vision; to scrutinize the natural conditions of our visual apparatus;[15] to discuss, early on, the relationship between images and reality, be it subjective or objective. We could learn to reveal the historicity of the visual worlds which we encounter, as well as the contingency of our own gaze; we could read texts on visual theory since the time when literature, or writing itself, made claims to capture the world. And yet we would still find ourselves exposed, even unprepared, vis-à-vis the sudden immediacy of images from the past, and especially those being constantly created, published, and manipulated in our present day. Layers of truth and reality, of a present that is both visible and seen, multiply and overlap here, at once mysterious and banal.

Or we could "simply" create images ourselves while immediately explaining what, how, why, and to what ends we do so. We would then be agents in the process not only of creating one or many images, but also of reflecting on the many decisions that determine how our own gaze functions—from choosing a perspective to snapping a shot and choosing a form of publication. This would also mean reflecting on how we ourselves structure and direct the gazes, feelings, and thoughts of others, of voyeurs, viewers, and "users." We could also write about photographs made by others, in ways that are both subjective *and* critically informed.[16] Or we could venture, in a conceptual way, to take stock of all these ideas, these improvised suggestions—and ultimately, then, to take responsibility, to give an account of ourselves: of our view, of the scope of what we see, of what has been imprinted on our retinas, of what we would like to communicate among our more intimate circles or share with the broader public.

I suspect that the photographers Sabina R. Korfmann-Bodenmann and Kenneth C. Korfmann, partners in life and art, have been doing exactly this since 2019 in a long-term project that might conclude only in death—this is a project to achieve clarity and power over their "own gaze" and thus their own viewpoint or horizon of perception. Eschewing restrictions on form or content, they set out with cameras on expeditions to explore visibility, journeys toward the surfaces of their surroundings, near and far, and thus also into the depths of their individual perception. And yet they do so with the knowledge that their personal realm of imagination, learned and practiced over time, the subjective biases which are so deeply rooted in their own ways of experiencing the world, will be reflected in the images they bring back from their voyages of study and adventure. It is these images that they archive, cooperatively consider, and

invite others to discuss, under the heading *Through Different Lenses*: "We concluded that our photography was an effort to understand the consequences of individuality."[17]

The couple defined several parameters for arriving at "images" that make it possible to compare individual worldviews as they are captured in photographs: the location and timeframe of the shots should be identical; it is always the complete, uncropped, and unmanipulated photograph that is printed. The artists give no specification as to which camera should be used, or whether the photographs are to be black and white or in color. They neither seek out nor favor innovative photographic perspectives, nor prescribe any taboos—be it in terms of visual frameworks or templates published by other photographers, or to avoid repeating motifs from the history of art and photography (whether intentionally or coincidentally). The portfolios present not individual images but series of photographs, in each case with a note that is more or less concise, though always personal. The same structure is employed for each portfolio: Kenneth's shots appear first, followed by Sabina's. Kenneth and Sabina work together in selecting the shots to be included, while each of them individually determines the dramaturgy of the sequences in their own part. And while the titles of the portfolios are assigned in advance, the headings—such as *Joie de vivre*, *Suburbia*, *Borderlines*, or *Solitude*—are in a certain sense more like evocative rubrics than leitmotifs that would define and delimit what they contain. This also means that individual photographs created in the course of a certain inquiry, as part of a photo campaign guided by one particular idea, can very well migrate into another portfolio with a different frame of reference.

These guidelines, in essence an extremely variable framework in which "anything" could happen, set the stage for work that is done individually, for capturing photographs, or rather retinal reflections, on journeys into the world. Visibility itself, what is seen, is seldom what is shown. Exceptions prove the rule: In *Decadentia*, Sabina uses a picture-in-picture montage to interpose two visual realities, the sacred and the profane. Both Kenneth and Sabina are aware that they are applying psychosocial patterns of behavior or responding to ways in which they have been socioculturally imprinted, not least because of their life experience, which has been stored and internalized as visual experience; their approach may be distanced in documentary-fashion or aesthetically formalized, or follow any number of other models.[18] Or to translate this into another picture: Kenneth uses a visual language anchored in rational thinking, aimed at achieving a situational overview; Sabina visualizes what she encounters in ways that are associative and poetic, to generate a thick view of a given moment. What remains crucial is that we not see nostalgic or escapist explora-

tions of the self, but images that testify of transgressions: with every image, every portfolio, Sabina and Kenneth probe their inner view of the world.

Since both photographers prefer to capture what people have made (architecture, urban landscapes, interiors, etc.) rather than people themselves, the "decisive moment" plays no role here—aside from conditions of light or weather. Their photographs do not emerge from patient waiting or instantaneous reactions, but through a consciously taken pause during a stroll, a moment of stillness amid the movement of a searching eye, where a potential composition becomes visible.[19] Sabina and Kenneth are not reporters with an intent to document current events; they approach their work as essayists, carefully deliberating over each word, each piece of grammatical and lexical significance, sometimes reinterpreting what they encounter—so that their own way of seeing, their assessment of what is visible, can be articulated, even if just in outline. They engage in this endeavor to discuss—among themselves and with us, the viewers and interpreters of their portfolios—the criteria for appropriating the world.

This conversation between the two, far from being mere small talk, revolves around discoveries—about the medium of photography, about proximity and distance, about historical and cultural convictions or entanglements, and about themselves, particularly their own, individual gaze. Sabina and Kenneth here adapt a form of the Socratic method to their needs, where roles of teacher and student, educator and educated, are fluidly exchanged—and at times, the camera, the imaging device, turns into a discreet interlocutor, the true philosopher, because it captures and preserves details that typically elude human observation.[20] The development of one's own gaze is thus continuously tested, sometimes questioned, sometimes affirmed—and crucially, it is expanded and redefined through continuous discourse, as seeing is inherently a process of learning.

We see in the portfolios—in their realized combinations of image and word, in their meticulously arranged presentations—not pedagogical applications or didactic admonitions from a campaign for visual literacy; instead, we find open and "honest" reflections or preliminary findings from the photographers' inquiry into those human, visually driven processes of individualization whose social, cultural, and political implications are suggested in the passage, quoted above, from the preface to their own project. Beyond this, I see a sense of sadness and concern—a melancholy.[21]

AN EXPERIMENTAL APPROACH TO INACCESSIBILITY

This investigation, in which two people apprehend and perceive the world through different lenses, centers on visual and philosophical inaccessibility—on precisely what the mechanical apparatus denies: namely, the impossibility of creating an image of reality that is valid and independent of our will to know, be it drawn, painted, or photographed. Even though reality objectively exists without us, we cannot view it objectively—especially not when we duplicate it, or rather give it concrete form, with tools that seem to be extensions, that is to say, externalizations, of our sensory organs and powers of signification.[22]

This is why Kenneth and Sabina refrain from serving us a coherent story of the places and moments they seek out, something ready to be enjoyed as a coffee-table book. They do not transform us into consumers of artifacts but motivate us to move through their complexly structured labyrinth of perception, which encompasses more than sixteen "branches," to activate our own visual and cognitive apparatus and participate in their dialogue: they thematize the mechanical apparatus as a visual aid. In viewing and reading the portfolios, which for me are notebooks of memory, our vision becomes part of their experiment. We are the missing link: our inner eye—the term I would apply here to the intellectual and emotional space of imagination developed in each brain, in each nervous system—picks up Ariadne's thread, complements the visual narratives of the two photographers, without ever being able or even wanting to bring them to a close.

And we learn that the retina admits of neither right nor wrong, neither old nor new, of nothing absolute—that it registers variations, nuances, depending on the perspective, standpoint, or frame. Beautiful images do not necessarily show beauty; true images hardly convey truth; good images need not be inventive—too complex is the fabric of experience, knowledge, memory, and explanation that alternately settles upon any immediacy, seemingly veiling every prospect and insight behind a framework constructed of technology and words.[23]

This is proven by Sabina and Kenneth Korfmann's photographic explorations. The photographs in their "notebooks" instead make visible intensities, apparent condensations of sensory perceptions, captured in formally balanced and precise visual traces that we follow—though never with the intention of reconstructing a predetermined story, foreign to us, but with the will to construct a different aesthetic narrative: that of communicating vessels.[24] It is then that we see both realities and images as vessels for communication—which can be pictorial, verbal, or exclusively impulsive, dreamlike, and dance-like, and which transcends our mostly unreflected conditioning. Images and words

capture nothing but themselves—if anything, they articulate transitions. In their substantial inaccessibility, which we must first accept and then transcend, they open several paths to a comprehensive perception of what we as humans might know, experience, and communicate through our senses and our minds, if we so wish. By constantly provoking a discussion of images, Sabina and Kenneth Korfmann invite us to apply reality, photography, and seeing itself in a new way, entirely in the spirit of director Wim Wenders: "There are so many different ways to see the world, yet most people pass over the opportunities that seeing presents, preferring instead to have somehow constructed a manner of seeing that is all their own."[25] The Korfmanns' portfolios dismantle this construction—and we enjoy, we attempt, an open, unobstructed gaze.

NOTES

1 On this point, see Gottfried Boehm, ed., *Was ist ein Bild?* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1994); Hans Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2001); Christa Maar and Hubert Burda, eds., *Iconic Worlds*: *Neue Bilderwelten und Wissensräume* (Cologne: DuMont, 2006).

2 These specific professions stand here pars pro toto; to make my point I could ultimately provide any list of professions in which "images" are produced, disseminated, evaluated, criticized, or instrumentalized.

3 See Roland Scotti, *Texte zur Zukunft einer Kunst*: *Kunstkritik in Frankreich zwischen 1886 und 1905: Zwischen Sichtbarkeit und literarischer Spekulation* (Mannheim: IT Verlag, 1994); Udo Kultermann, *Die Geschichte der Kunstgeschichte: Der Weg einer Wissenschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1981); Regine Prange, *Die Geburt der Kunstgeschichte: Philosophische Ästhetik und empirische Wissenschaft* (Cologne: Deubner Verlag, 2004).

4 On dilettantism, see Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Über den sogenannten Dilettantismus oder die praktische Liebhaberey in den Künsten" (1799, first published in 1833); published in a modern edition in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller, "Über den Dilettantismus (1799)," in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche,* ed. Friedmar Apel, Frankfurter Ausgabe, vol. 18 (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1991), 739– 785, on 780–781: "Paralipomena: Über den sogenannten Dilettantismus oder die praktische Liebhaberei in den Künsten"; on the relationship between art and science, see Konrad Paul Liessmann, "Kunst ist keine Wissenschaft: Eine Grenzziehung," in idem, *Bildung als Provokation* (Vienna: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 2017), 127–139. On the question of the necessary cultural techniques, and especially on the criticism of a functional basic education and the utilitarian goals of PISA, see Rainer Bölling, *Zur Fragwürdigkeit des PISA-Rankings* (November 21, 2017), guest article on the forum page of the Gesellschaft für Bildung und Wissen e.V., Forum für Schule, Ausbildung und Studium, https://bildung-wissen.eu/fachbeitraege/zur-fragwuerdigkeit-des-pisa-rankings.html. Accessed December 15, 2023. For an enlightening, in part also instructional aesthetic practice that addresses the creation and impact of images, I refer to the Israeli artist Guy Ben-Ner, especially the video work *Escape Artists* realized in 2016, https://www.pinksummer.com/en/guy-ben-ner-escape-artists. Accessed December 15,

2023; exhibition *Guy Ben-Ner*: *We've Lost,* Kunstmuseum Luzern (November 11, 2023–February 4, 2024).

5 For discussions of modern art's much-criticized "need for commentary," including today's practice of "contextualizing" all artifacts, see Hans Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte: Die bildende Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts als Symptom und Symbol der Zeit*, 11th ed. (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1998 [1948]); Tristan Weddigen, "Context as Content: Zur Kontextualisierung moderner Kunst," *Kritische Berichte*: *Zeitschrift für Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaften* 33, no. 3 (2005): 5–15.

6 On the notion of metadiscourse in art (and art studies), see Georg Oberdorfer, dictionary entries on "Metadiskurs," "Sprachthematisierung," "label" and "labeling," in *Textlinguistik, Stilistik und Diskurslinguistik,* ed. Christina Gansel and Constanze Spieß, Wörterbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft (WSK) Online (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020): https://doi.org/10.1515/wsk. Accessed February 9, 2024; Gottfried Boehm, "Kunstwissenschaft (Bildkritik)," in *Sprache – Kultur – Kommunikation*: *Ein internationales Handbuch zur Linguistik als Kulturwissenschaft*, ed. Ludwig Jäger et al., Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft 43 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 244–259; Marius Babias, ed., *Ute Meta Bauer: Kuratorische Praxis; Interviews und Gespräche*, n.b.k. Berlin 3 (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2012); Thomas Gartmann and Michaela Schäuble, eds., *Studies in the Arts*: *Neue Perspektiven auf Forschung über, in und durch Kunst und Design* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2021). On current research methods, see the Zeppelin Universität Friedrichshafen, "Arts Production and Cultural Policy in Transformation: International Research Cluster on the Transformation of Cultural Production in the Context of Social Change," https://www.zu.de/lehrstuehle/wuerth/transformation-kulturproduktion.php. Accessed December 18, 2023. On the further development of metalevels, see Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationelle* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 1998).

7 Of course, there is no shortage of manuals on how to take photographs; yet manuals on how to understand the visual languages of photography are as scant or scattered in focus as those devoted to reading artistic images. Treatments of visual aesthetics banished any timeless or universally valid canon from theory early on, by the 1960s at the latest; today's practices of knowledge transfer in educational institutions similarly avoid normative assertions, stemming from the insight that the validity of traditional norms can rightly be questioned. Criteria for quality, in terms of both form and content, are thus hardly discussed any more in public or on a broad scale. See Gabriele Rippl and Simone Winko, eds., *Handbuch Kanon und Wertung*: *Theorien, Instanzen, Geschichte* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2013), and especially the essay by Hubert Locher, "Kunstwissenschaft," 364–371; Anna Brzyski, *Partisan Canons* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). Conversely, the literature on efforts to engage the public with art and images is growing; see Roland Scotti, *Neue Wege der Kunstvermittlung im ländlichen Raum*: *Ein Projekt, gefördert von der Gebert Rüf Stiftung 2014–2018; Schlussbericht* (Appenzell: Heinrich Gebert Kulturstiftung, 2018). Even on Instagram, content managers are common who present curated photographs meant to cultivate influence; photo agencies such as Magnum in Paris offer courses on photographic practice, both online and in workshops. See Magnum Learn, https://www.magnumphotos.com/learn. Accessed December 18, 2023. Comprehensive curricula for schools, universities, etc. are being developed by private institutions that follow strategies of visual thinking: Philip Yenawine, *Visual Thinking Strategies: Using Art to Deepen Learning Across School Disciplines* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2013); www.vtshome.org. For the German-speaking world, see www.visbild.com. Accessed February 5, 2024.

8 On the "vera icon" in photography, see Christoph K. Schwarz, "Vera Ikon: Das authentische Bild," lecture held on October 3, 2011, Fineartforum, Paderborn, https://silo.tips/download/vera-ikon-das-authentische-bild-1. Accessed December 18, 2023. Advertisements for high-resolution cameras in smartphones promise that we will be able to capture, and even optimize, our experience of the "perfect moment" with "perfect technology." On the confusion in photographic practice of art and life, reality and aesthetics, see Konrad Paul Liessmann, "Erkenne dein Selfie! Das Selbstporträt im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit," in Liessmann, *Bildung als Provokation* (see note 4), 106–112.

9 On the notion of enhanced intelligence, see Gabriela Bonin, *"Künstliche Intelligenz gibt es eigentlich nicht,"* interview with Ladan Pooyan-Weihs, https://hub.hslu.ch/informatik/kunstliche-intelligenz-gibt-es-nicht-wichtig-ist-digitale-ethik. Accessed December 15, 2023. See also Georg Seeßlen, "KI in der Fimindustrie: Die menschenleere Traumfabrik," *Die Zeit*, vol. 54, December 30, 2023, 52.

10 Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and Stereoscopic Photographs," *Atlantic Monthly*, no. 11 (June 1859), 747–748; punctuation and spelling as in the original. A more concrete form of the "destruction of the world" associated with photography was the subject of the exhibition *Mining Photography: Der ökologische Fussabdruck der Bildproduktion*, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg (July 15, 2022–October 31, 2022), Gewerbemuseum Winterthur (September 22, 2023–January 21, 2024). This passage from Holmes's essay was cited as a "leitmotif" in the exhibition.

11 The Googol was introduced as a unit of measurement in 1938 by the mathematician Edward Kasner; since the publication of the bestselling book by Edward Kasner and James R. Newman, *Mathematics and the Imagination* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940), the terms Googol and Googolplex have been inaccurately used as synonyms for "infinite" in the English-speaking world. The name of the search engine Google was inspired by this mathematical term.

12 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility: Third Version" (1939), in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, vol. 4, 1938–1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and others, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), 251–283. Today's critical discourse on media and art often characterizes some of Benjamin's assumptions as outdated; his diagnosis that technical means of reproduction are changing the world as perceived by human beings is, however, still accepted as valid.

13 On the concept of suddenness, or *Plötzlichkeit*, see Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Plötzlichkeit: Zum Augenblick des ästhetischen Scheins* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981); Emmanuel Alloa, ed., *Erscheinung und Ereignis: Zur Zeitlichkeit des Bildes* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2013). On the concept of potency, or *Wirkmächtigkeit*, see Margarida Alpuim and Katja Ehrenberg, *Warum Bilder so wirkmächtig sind*, https://www.bonn-institute.org/news/psychologie-im-journalismus-5. Accessed December 18, 2023; Annegret Wigger, Thomas Schmid, and Gianluca Cavelti, *Zur Wirkmächtigkeit von Gesellschaftsbildern: Ethnographische Befunde aus der Welt der Erziehungshilfen* (Weinheim: Beltz Juventa, 2022). Simone de Beauvoir provides a literary examination of the impact made by images that correspond to, or even create, behavioral patterns; see *Les belles images* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 256: "Élever un enfant, ce n'est pas en faire une belle image …"

14 See Hans Belting, *Das echte Bild: Bildfragen als Glaubensfragen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2005).

15 There are remedies against "gawking": Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954); Wolfgang Kemp, ed., *Der Betrachter ist im Bild: Kunstwissenschaft und Rezeptionsästhetik* (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1992); Hans Dieter Huber, Bettina Lockemann and Michael Scheibel, ed., *Bild – Medien – Wissen: Visuelle Kompetenz im Medienzeitalter* (Munich: kopaed, 2002); Hubert Sowa and Bettina Uhlig, "Bildhandlungen und ihr Sinn: Methodenfragen einer kunstpädagogischen Bildhermeneutik," in *Bildinterpretation und Bildverstehen: Methodische Ansätze aus sozialwissenschaftlicher, kunst- und medienpädagogischer Perspektive*, ed. Winfried Marotzki und Horst Niesyto (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2007).

16 Obviously, there is a need to be able to read images; this is indicated by the increased publication of literary, essayistic, and popular scientific texts that exemplify how to deal with images, and especially photographs, in meaningful ways. See Leslie Jameson, *Make It Scream, Make It Burn: Essays* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2019); Katja Petrowskaja, *Das Foto schaute mich an*: *Kolumnen* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2022); Mario Casella, *Senza scarpe: Romanzo biografico* (Mendrisio: Gabriele Capelli Editore, 2022), published in German as *Der Wanderfotograf: Biografischer Roman*, trans. Franziska Kristen (Zurich: Atlantis Verlag, 2023); Freddy Langer, *Harte Blicke, stille Städte und ein Fotograf, der zur Rakete wird* (Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 2023).

17 Kenneth and Sabina Korfmann-Bodenmann 2022; in this publication, p. 29.

18 This was explicitly formulated in conversation with the author in Zurich on October 19, 2023. On the notions of psychosocial and sociocultural, see Lotte Köhler, Jürgen Reulecke and Jürgen Straub, eds., *Kulturelle Evolution und Bewussteinsswandel*: *Hans Kilians historische Psychologie und integrative Anthropologie* (Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2011); Ali El Hashash, *Interkulturelle Kommunikation*: *Missverständnisse, Klärungen und Umgangsformen* (Dietikon: IKM Institute, 2013), 52–55.

19 Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), originally *Images à la sauvette: Photos de l'anteur* (Paris: Verve, 1952). This "manifesto" of engaged photo reportage was later qualified by Cartier-Bresson himself in 1976: "Die Erfindung nach der Natur (1976)," in Wolfgang Kemp and Hubertus von Amelunxen, eds., *Theorie der Fotografie 1839–1995,* Bd. III (München: Schirmer Mosel, 2006), 82–83. I am not using "composition" here in the art-historical sense but rather in reference to graphic design.

20 On the Socratic method (also known as Socratic dialogue), see Rainer Loska, *Lehren ohne Belehrung: Leonard Nelsons neosokratische Methode der Gesprächsführung* (Bad Heilbrunn: Julius Klinkhardt, 1995); Dieter Krohn et al., eds., *Diskurstheorie und Sokratisches Gespräch* (Frankfurt am Main: dipa-Verlag, 1996).

21 Wolf Lepenies, *Melancholie und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998 [1969]). Sabina and Kenneth Korfmann do not discover any "new" visual grammar, which would in any case be an ahistorical endeavor that was pursued to exhaustion in the first half of the twentieth century.

22 On "concretization," see Roman Ingarden, "Konkretisation und Rekonstruktion," in *Rezeptionsästhetik: Theorie und Praxis*, ed. Rainer Warning (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1975), 42–70; Karel Kosík, *Die Dialektik des Konkreten*: *A Study on the Problem of Man and the World*, trans. Marianne Hoffmann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967): "and it is always tacitly assumed that this most obvious thing […], that which least requires questioning and researching, is reality. […]. What is realism and nonrealism in art depends on what reality is and how reality is understood" (115).

23 In Martin Heidegger's sense of "frame" or "enframing" ("Gestell"), i.e., technology as a means in which human beings lose themselves. See John Loscerbo, *Being and Technology: A Study in the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981).

24 André Breton, *Communicating Vessels,* trans. Mary Ann Caws and Geoffrey T. Harris (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), originally published as *Les Vases communicants* (Paris: Gallimard, 1932).

25 Maik Brüggemeyer, "Wim Wenders im Rolling-Stone-Interview: Master of Vision," *Rolling Stone Germany* 351, no. 1 (January 2024), 64–68, on 68.