

Behind the Circulations of Images

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Images in Circulation

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Behind the Circulations of Images

In 2015, users of social networks shared more than 3 billion images per day.¹ Circulation seems to be a fundamental dimension of digital images, as if circulation were their most essential property, perhaps even their purpose. Nevertheless, images have always existed in motion, albeit at different speeds. We need think only of mental images, which circulate at the same rate as the individuals who carry them within their minds. However, to be more rigorous, any discussion of images in circulation must first return to the definition of the image itself. According to Hans Belting, an image by definition has no body, and therefore needs to be “embodied” in a medium, that is to say, a historically created means used by humans to create and recreate their images.² Mediums can be both inanimate - such as the stone of a statue, the painted wooden panel of a portrait, the screen of a cell phone - and living - essentially the human body and its faculties of imagination and memory.³ Hans Belting further suggests that images must be analyzed as existing within a triangular configuration, through the common relations of three distinct parameters: images, mediums and bodies. Indeed, issues of image and medium always return us to the body, which for Belting is the “place of images”, even if only by virtue of the imagination.⁴

The history of images is thus nothing but a history of their mediums and a history of physical bodies. And hence, it is a history of circulation. This volume of the *Artl@s Bulletin* takes up this question of the circulation of images across all their various mediums, from painted, engraved, and sculpted images, to photographic and cinematographic images, to the electronic images that emerge with the advent of television, and finally to contemporary digital images, *i.e.* images that are transcribed in a binary mode and visualized in the form of an orthogonal grid composed of “picture elements” or pixels.

The papers in this volume seek to go “behind the circulations of images” by combining the fields of cultural, political and geopolitical studies, and by bringing together different methodologies from monographic and formal analysis to digital approaches (quantitative, cartographic, visual). These diversified case studies make it possible to answer three major questions: 1) How do images circulate? 2) Why do images circulate? 3) What does circulation do to an image and, more generally, to people?

How Do Images Circulate?

According to the definition set out above, images circulate through people and from one medium to another. Creativity and resemantization are at the heart of the first mode of circulation, and intermediality is at the heart of the second.

¹ Simon Faulkner, Farida Vis et Francesco D’Orazio, “Analyzing Social Media Images” in Jean Burgess, Alice Marwick and Thomas Poell (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media* (London: SAGE Publications, 2018), 161.

² Hans Belting, *Pour une anthropologie des images* (Paris : Gallimard, 2004 [2001]), 26.

³ *Ibid.*, 7-9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 49 and 77.

Desire, Mental Images and Creativity

According to Sigmund Freud, the image is what distinguishes desire from need, desire being in essence defined as the production of images.⁵ When the satisfaction of a desire is delayed, or made impossible, the real object is replaced by “mnemonic images” that provide the subject with a degree of imaginary satisfaction. Mental images, or mnemonic images, therefore circulate with people, that is to say within their minds. From this Freudian point of view, the moment of creation resembles a sublimation. Yet the relationship between artistic creation and the world of images is much more complex. The myth of the purely original creation that arises directly from the talent of a genius-artist is the rooted in a romantic myth. Artists create their own images not through talent alone but also through knowledge and through circulating images.⁶ This is exactly what contemporary artist Lei Xie explains in his contribution this issue⁷. He describes how he selects a few images from the massive flux that surrounds us, images which act as a “stimulus”. These can be “ordinary” images that circulate widely, or private photographs taken by the artist himself and which are thus outside of circulation. Thomas Hirschhorn is another artist who makes extensive use of “already there images” found on the internet, images whose provenance is by definition uncertain and unverifiable.⁸ These two testimonies recall the “salad of images” of which Aby Warburg spoke at the beginning of the 20th century.⁹ To the extent that they are stimulated by images of all kinds that leave more or less conscious traces, work created by artists is never entirely, wholly original.

The result of an artist’s creative efforts thus always maintains a link, however tenuous, with images in

circulation. To use Michel de Certeau’s metaphor,¹⁰ artists can actively draw from this flood of images, like poachers, to create a work of art – which will become a new image in turn. The practices of scrapbook and 20th-century collage are exemplary of this. Poaching can nevertheless take less explicit forms: borrowing an expression from Ségolène Le Men,¹¹ Evangelia Stead highlights an “extensive iconography” that accompanied the interpretation, transposition and illustration of Goethe’s Faust by artists across Europe.¹² Images and motifs passed from one edition to the next, allowing for diffuse, hybrid reinterpretations.

These reinterpretations and circulations of patterns and images take more or less visible forms. Aby Warburg sought to identify what he referred to as “pathos formulas” (*Pathosformeln*) in all his art historical work. As Kuniko Abe shows,¹³ Akita Ranga painting offers a revealing case study of the links between the circulations of images and artistic creation. The painters of Akita Ranga fused the traditional aesthetics of the Japanese Kano school, the auspicious motifs typical of the new Chinese realist style and, above all, the Western realism they encountered in the copper engravings of Western books imported to Japan between the 1720s and the 1760s. The artworks they created serve as the highly visible outcome of a process of resemantization. For example, Akita Ranga’s “Far-Near” type compositions retained the precision of Valuerda’s drawings, but abandoned their scientific ambition of the originals, which were devoted to anatomical study. Similarly, ancient gems bearing Capricorn motifs lost their astrological and protective meaning when they were reused exclusively for their precious appearance in the Middle Ages, as *spolia*, and mounted on holy crosses, altars or reliquaries.¹⁴ As these examples show, the circulation

⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* (Vienna: Franz Deuticke, 1900).

⁶ John Claireborne Isbell, *The Birth of European Romanticism. Truth and Propaganda in Stael’s “De l’Allemagne,” 1810–1813* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1–2, quoted by Evangelia Stead, “Extensive and Intensive Iconography. Goethe’s Faust Outlined” *Artl@s Bulletin* Vol. 10, 1 (Spring 2021), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol10/iss1/>.

⁷ Lei Xie, “Circulations of images, from their recognition to their erasure,” *Artl@s Bulletin* Vol. 10, 1 (Spring 2021), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol10/iss1/>.

⁸ Pascale Borrel, “Un mode d’existence équivoque. Ce que *Touching Reality* de Thomas Hirschhorn dit de la circulation des images,” *Artl@s Bulletin* Vol. 10, 1 (Spring 2021), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol10/iss1/>.

⁹ Aby Warburg, quoted in Horst Bredekamp, *Théorie de l’acte d’image* (Paris : La Découverte, 2015 [2010]), 281-285

¹⁰ Michel de Certeau, *L’invention du quotidien I. Arts de faire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1990, p. 239–255.

¹¹ Ségolène Le Men, “Millet et sa diffusion gravée, dans l’ère de la reproductibilité technique,” in Geneviève Lacambre (ed.), *Jean-François Millet (Au-delà de l’Angélus)* (Paris: Éditions de Monza, 2002), 370–87, quoted in Stead, “Extensive and Intensive Iconography.”

¹² Stead, “Extensive and Intensive Iconography.”

¹³ Kuniko Abe, “Travelling Images in the Global Context: A Case Study of the Short-Lived 18th century Akita Ranga Painting School in Japan,” *Artl@s Bulletin* Vol. 10, 1 (Spring 2021), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol10/iss1/>.

¹⁴ Alessandra Magni, Umberto Verdura and Gabriella Tassinari, “*Sub signo Capricorni*. The image of Capricorn in Glyptics: Literary Sources, Gemstones, Impressions, Drawings,” *Artl@s Bulletin* Vol. 10, 1 (Spring 2021), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol10/iss1/>.

of images takes time, whether it is the time necessary for the constitution of mental images, the time of individual artistic creation, or, as in this last case, the hundreds of years it takes for one belief system to replace another. In terms of the circulation of images, this span of time, whether near-instantaneous or epochal, can allow us to determine the speed of circulation of a given medium.

The Liquidity of Mediums

An image circulates all the better when its medium is “conducive” to circulation. In economics, monetary liquidity measures the availability of a means of payment and the time it takes to mobilize it. If we transpose this idea of liquidity to the image, we can say that a medium’s liquidity is determined by the speed with which it can “welcome” an image. In other words, the more liquid the medium, the more likely the image is to circulate within in, and the faster it will circulate. For instance, it takes more time to sculpt a bust of an individual than it does to photograph them. Some mediums are therefore better suited to circulation, such as the photosensitive chemical plates that give rise to photographic images in the 19th century. In the 1870s and 1880s photomechanical reproduction processes indeed led to an influx of images into auction catalogues, as creating such images and inserting them into publications became faster and cheaper than producing etchings.¹⁵ Similarly, in the post-war period, rather than circulating original artworks through exhibitions across the world, UNESCO deployed color photographic reproductions as “ambassadors”.¹⁶ Photographs had the advantage of being lighter, more mobile, and above all less difficult, less fragile and less expensive to exhibit than paintings.

The most important vectors for the circulation of images have thus tended to be the most liquid mediums. For example, in the 19th century, *fliegende Blätter* (loose leaves) and books illustrated with

engravings - and the translations that accompanied them - allowed for the circulation of a significant Faustian iconography.¹⁷ Later, in the 1950s, the illustrated press was a privileged vector for the diffusion of photographic images as well as a “mobilization weapon”.¹⁸ Later, in the 1970s, Rubens’ iconography circulated widely through photography and postcards, but also through film and television. With digital images, circulation has become near instantaneous, making their origins and trajectories more difficult to verify.¹⁹ With digital images, the issue is no longer so much their speed as their resolution, i.e. the amount of detail contained in an image: an image’s resolution largely determines its visibility.²⁰

What happens, however, when an image circulates from one medium to another? Numerous studies take “intermediality” as their object of research. In this issue, Evaghelia Stead analyzes how Delacroix was able to extract the dramatic potential of an engraving by Moritz Retzsch to create his own free-hand copies.²¹ The question of speed is also at the heart of intermediality: in the late 19th century, Rubens’ paintings were not reproduced directly by photomechanical reproduction processes: photographs taken at the time pictured the widely available engravings created from Rubens’ paintings, rather than the original works.²² Conversely, when he transposes the digital images that stimulate his painting, Lei Xie explains that “the painting is far from the chosen image”. Indeed, the slowness of painting, compared to the speed of digital images, gives rise to a “quasi “ghostly” appearance of the subject through the painting [. . .], like the light that manages to pass through the painting, giving a filmic sensation or an electric effect. I regard these effects as an analogy of the digital image that emerges from a screen”²³.

¹⁷ Evaghelia Stead, “Extensive and Intensive Iconography.”

¹⁸ Beatriz Martinez Sosa, “To Let See. The Shocking Picture as Social Mobilization Weapon,” *Artl@s Bulletin* Vol. 10, 1 (Spring 2021), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol10/iss1/>.

¹⁹ Borrel, “Un mode d’existence équivoque.”

²⁰ Antonio Somaini, “Les champs de pixels comme champs de bataille. Esthétique, économie et politique de la résolution des images,” in Peter Szendy, Emmanuel Alloa et Marta Ponsa (eds.), *Le supermarché des images* (Paris : Gallimard / Jeu de Paume, 2020), 146.

²¹ Stead, “Extensive and Intensive Iconography.”

²² Griet Bonne, “The Copy & the Real Thing: Changing Perceptions between the Rubens Centennials in 1877 and 1977,” *Artl@s Bulletin* Vol. 10, 1 (Spring 2021), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol10/iss1/>.

²³ Xie, “Circulations of images.”

¹⁵ Léa Saint-Raymond, “Laura démultipliée : la photographie comme vecteur de diffusion et de valorisation de la sculpture (1890-1930),” *Sculptures* n°6 (2019), 34-40.

¹⁶ Chiara Vitali, “How to build a *World Art*: The Strategic Universalism of Colour Reproductions and the UNESCO Prize (1953-1968),” *Artl@s Bulletin* Vol. 10, 1 (Spring 2021), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol10/iss1/>.

Artists are, of course, not the only ones who circulate images: beyond artistic creation, which modifies images by moving them from medium to medium, images make their way into the realm of the visible in numerous ways. It is thus necessary to understand why images circulate, and through which channels, via which routes.

Why Do Images Circulate?

Walter Benjamin forged the concept of the “inner-vation”²⁴ of the visible, which Peter Szendy later incorporated into his notion of “optoroutes”. With this term, Szendy designates the roadway of the visible, or the clearing of the paths of the gaze within visibility.²⁵ In other words, images follow roads in the space of the visible - streets, avenues, boulevards, highways, as well as dead ends. Analyzing the circulation of images means mapping the geography of these “migratory routes” and understanding who creates the roads and controls the flows.

A Conductive Environment

To use the metaphor of innervation, images must, in order to circulate, encounter a conductive, rather than a resistant, environment. The article by Alessandra Magni, Umberto Verdura and Gabrielle Tassinari offers a characteristic example of this phenomenon, by way of the image of Capricorn in glyptic.²⁶ They demonstrate that this motif was very popular in the first century B.C., largely thanks to the spread of the science of astrology and the practice of horoscopes in Rome, and often appeared in intaglio engravings. Capricorn was believed to be a positive and apotropaic creature that provided help in everyday life. The authors show that this same motif disappeared at the end of the 3rd century A.D. from the gemstones of the emerging Christian religion. Indeed, Capricorn was

increasingly perceived as the devil’s companion and came to symbolize sin.

The resistance of an environment is therefore not fixed in time and space but is rather subject to an ongoing series of negotiations, and acts more like a force field. This is the case in the domain of science, where multiple disciplines confront one another, each of which has its own visual habits. In her contribution to this issue, Nina Samuel discusses the impact of a particular technical discovery, that of localization microscopy.²⁷ This technique, invented in 2006, was developed by physicists who used it to visualize the structures of biological cells. An epistemic struggle subsequently pitted physicists specialized in applied optics and information processing against biologists. However, the epistemic struggle, part of the research and discovery process, was also an aesthetic struggle that centered on the right form of visualization for localization microscopy. Two scientific cultures and two different “cultures of vision” clashed in this episode: the resulting images bear traces of this process and the compromise that was reached.

An image circulates all the better when it is capable of adapting to different environments and to different resistances. Here, the concept of the “boundary object”,²⁸ set out by sociologists Susan Star and James Griesemer, could usefully be applied to images: “boundary images” are those that circulate in heterogeneous “collectives of thought”. Nina Samuel thus develops in her article the example of the Japanese engineer and mathematician Yoshi-suke Ueda, who produced an image that was integrated into the circulation of science.²⁹ The notion of boundary images could also be applied to images that move from one field to another, thus circulating with great ease: this is the case of anatomical plates, engraved in European scientific books and which, as Kuniko Abe shows, became a source of artistic inspiration for Akita Ranga painters.³⁰ The

²⁴ Peter Szendy, *Le Supermarché du visible. Essai d'iconomie* (Paris: Minuit, 2017), 72. Dorothea McEwan, “Aby Warburg’s (1866-1929) Dots and Lines. Mapping the Diffusion of Astrological Motifs in Art History,” *German Studies Review*, vol. XXIX, n°2 (May 2006): 243–268.

²⁵ Peter Szendy, “Voiries du visible, iconomies de l’ombre,” *Le supermarché des images*, 21.

²⁶ Magni, Verdura and Tassinari, “*Sub signo Capricorni*.”

²⁷ Nina Samuel, “Notes on the Circulation of Epistemic Images,” *Artl@s Bulletin* Vol. 10, 1 (Spring 2021), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol10/iss1/>.

²⁸ Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer, “Institutional Ecology, ‘Translations’ and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley’s Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39,” *Social Studies of Science* 19 (1989): 387.

²⁹ Samuel, “Notes on the Circulation of Epistemic Images.”

³⁰ Abe, “Travelling Images in the Global.”

introduction of these images to Japan was facilitated by a major phenomenon that cannot be overlooked in our study of the circulation of images, namely trade.

Trade Routes

Optoroutes are partly linked to economic paths. For example, if Dutch anatomy books came to Japan, it was thanks to trade, mediated by the Dutch East India Company (VOC). The globalization of images goes hand-in-hand with economic globalization, which circulates images either by selling them - for example, the trade in illustrated books, works of art, etc. - or by using images as advertising tools. Econometric analysis has proven, for example, that an artwork reproduced in an auction catalog obtains a higher hammer price than when goes to auction without an illustration.³¹ The image thus increases the economic value of an object, eliciting desire in the Freudian manner.

Denis Viva describes this phenomenon in all its complexity with his study of Italy in the 1970s: in the absence of museum institutions - contemporary art museums did not open in Italy until the 1980s - magazines were largely responsible for the internationalization of Italian art, bolstering the reputations of artists and their visibility.³² Photographic reproductions in illustrated magazines thus played a very important promotional role, so much so that art critics and artists acknowledged that "one reproduction in an art magazine is worth two one-man shows". However, the advertising space that galleries bought in these magazines had to take on subtle forms, as Denis Viva explains: the act of advertising, a practice which stemmed from the cultural industry, was frowned upon by contemporary art audiences, who considered attempts at persuasion to be vulgar. Gallery owners promoted their artists in roundabout and "disinterested"³³ ways, either by investing in indirect

promotion or, as in the case of Leo Castelli, by including his name in the credit lines and captions of photographic images.³⁴ Images rarely circulate alone, and are most often accompanied by text, with the negotiation of text and image a matter of more or less apparent intentions.

The Geopolitics of Images

The example of 1970s Italy reveals the importance of particular figures - such as galleries and magazine owners - who control image routes and circulate images and their accompanying texts. These "go-betweens" often occupy a central position in social space and play the role of tastemakers. For instance, two key actors contributed to the formation of a group of Akita Ranga painters at the end of the 18th century: Satake Shozan, Lord of the Akita domain, a painter, and author of three important essays on art, and Hiraga Gennai, an influential geologist, physicist and engineer, also an eminent expert on Western painting techniques in Japan.³⁵ With intermediaries playing such an important role in images' circulation, politics are never far away. The minting of coins is emblematic of this link between the circulation of images and power: Umberto Verdura thus shows that Capricorn was at the heart of Augustus' propaganda and that he used it in a wide variety of media - precious stones, coins, public monuments, literary works - to reach as broad and diverse an audience as possible at different levels of understanding. The symbols of this message - peace, rebirth and power - became an integral part of Augustus' program to create a new Golden Age for Rome and his Empire.³⁶

Institutional bodies also deliberately circulate particular images. For example, in 1977, the city of Antwerp participated in the promotion of Rubens' works for the 400th anniversary of the artist's birth and organized a travelling exhibition of photographs that featured works from the municipal

³¹ Léa Saint-Raymond, *À la conquête du marché de l'art : le Pari(s) des enchères* (Paris : Classiques Garnier, forthcoming 2021).

³² Denis Viva, "Circularity and Visibility in Italian Art Periodicals (1968-1978)", *Artl@s Bulletin* Vol. 10, 1 (Spring 2021), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol10/iss1/>.

³³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Raisons pratiques : sur la théorie de l'action* (Paris : Seuil, 1994), 164.

³⁴ Viva, "Circularity and Visibility in Italian Art Periodicals."

³⁵ Abe, "Travelling Images in the Global Context."

³⁶ Magni, Verdura and Tassinari, "Sub signo Capricorni."

collections.³⁷ UNESCO, an international cultural institution with a global reach, organized travelling exhibitions of color photographic reproductions in the 1950s and 1960s. Chiara Vitali's article identifies and discusses the most influential personalities behind UNESCO exhibitions.³⁸ A handful of members of the ICOM committee of museum professionals played a decisive role in selecting the artworks whose reproductions would circulate around the world. Among them, two figures stood out: René Huyghe, head curator of the paintings and drawings department of the Louvre Museum, and Jean Cassou, the director of the recently opened MNAM in Paris. Unsurprisingly, UNESCO's exhibitions, despite their global vocation, were criticized for their "Eurocentric universalism", which was not so far removed from a "strategic universalism". Jean Cassou and René Huyghe were also the instigators of major exhibitions of "French" art, which circulated throughout Europe and the Americas, and whose main narrative - much like the UNESCO exhibitions - was that modern art had spread throughout the world from its center in Paris.³⁹

If images are used to support political and cultural ambitions, they are also at the heart of conflicts. W.J.T. Mitchell analyzed the specificities of the "image wars" waged through the diffusion of images, chosen according to the audience and the victims. Violent images multiply like viral entities, and to this "pictorial epidemic", the opposing camp responds by creating antibodies "in the form of counter-images".⁴⁰ The artist Thomas Hirschhorn attends to this war of images by collecting violent images on the Internet. Similarly, *Pixelated Revolution* by Rabih Mroué refers to the Syrian conflict of 2011 and the images that the opponents of Bashar-al-Assad's regime broadcast on social networks that recorded their own deaths.⁴¹ Beyond the circu-

lation and counter-circulation of images, conflicts also play a role in the quality of images: the value of digital images, evaluated according to their resolution, can be affected by the geopolitical context - for example, a bad connection or violent interruptions of the network - or, as Thomas Hirschhorn has shown, by the intentional decrease of the resolution of images, i.e. the authoritarian gesture of pixelization.⁴² The war of images is an extreme situation, which aims to affect populations. With this in mind, this issue of the *Artl@s Bulletin* also questions the effects of circulation on images and people.

What Does Circulation Do to Images and to People?

The papers in this issue also investigate the consequences of circulation for images themselves as well as their social consequences, in other words circulation's effects on the "aura" of original works on the one hand and the impact of the "performativity" of images upon people on the other.

The consequences on the aura and value

The notion of the aura of the work of art appeared was established in Walter Benjamin's canonical 1935 essay.⁴³ Although set out in ambiguous terms,⁴⁴ this notion broadly refers to the effect of real presence exerted by a singular and authentic artwork on the spectator who focuses upon it and contemplates it. When Benjamin analyzes the present, the aura becomes a kind of Paradise Lost, a negative reference in relation to which he describes the new effects of the mechanical reproduction of works of art and the new seduction of the masses that has replaced the old beauty of art. In other

³⁷ Bonne, "The Copy & the Real Thing."

³⁸ Vitali, "How to build a World Art."

³⁹ Léa Saint-Raymond et Maxime Georges Métraux, "Paths of (French) Glory. The Circulations of the Matsukata Confiscated Collection (1946-1959)," *Artl@s Bulletin* vol. 8, 3 (Fall 2019), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol8/iss3/2/>

⁴⁰ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Cloning terror ou la guerre des images du 11 septembre au présent* (Paris: Les Prairies ordinaires, 2011), 23 and 47, quoted in Borrel, "Un mode d'existence équivoque."

⁴¹ Wagner Peres Morales Jr, *Visualités et contre-visualités. Les images d'amateur de guerre et conflits et ses utilisations dans l'art contemporain. Une politique des images*

sur un « bruit de fond » godardien, Ph. D, 2018, 256, quoted in Borrel, "Un mode d'existence équivoque."

⁴² Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image", *e-flux journal* #10, November 2009, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>. Somaini, "Les champs de pixels comme champs de bataille," 146.

⁴³ Walter Benjamin, "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit," (1935), trans. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 217-51.

⁴⁴ Antoine Hennion and Bruno Latour, "L'art, l'aura et la technique selon Benjamin ou comment devenir célèbre en faisant tant d'erreurs à la fois...", *Les Cahiers de Médilogie* 1, n°1 (1996): 235-241.

words, the circulation of the images dissolves the aura of the original artwork.

However, Benjamin's thesis can be nuanced, and perhaps even invalidated altogether. The proliferation of engravings, even those that reduced originals to simple outlines that were heavily altered by copying, contributed significantly to the success of Faust and to its consecration as a major work: the aura of the author - here, Goethe - was not only bolstered by the image, but by the circulation of illustrated books, which participated in the work's canonization.⁴⁵ The same phenomenon affects not just literary works but artworks, too. As shown by Griet Bonne, building on the analysis of Dean MacCannell⁴⁶ and Boris Groys,⁴⁷ copies of Rubens' original works, dispersed to a large audience and circulated centrifugally, generated at the same time a centripetal force, i.e. a desire to be as close as possible to the original image of these reproductions.⁴⁸ Instead of desacralizing the original, the multiplication of images via copies constitutes its aura by emphasizing its uniqueness.

Denis Viva proposes a close analysis of the relationship between the circulation of images and the aura of works of art, drawing on Byung-Chul Han's research.⁴⁹ By circulating through exhibitions, artworks become visible, with this visibility restoring their aura. Indeed, the economic value of works increases in line not only with their visibility but also with public attention, one of the most valuable commodities in an information society.⁵⁰ The artistic ranking of the *Kunstkompass* confirms that the economic and symbolic value of works increases with their circulation through exhibitions, transforming visibility into a form of circularity: the mention of the exhibitions and the pedigree of the works increases their auction price, all other things being equal.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Stead, "Extensive and Intensive Iconography."

⁴⁶ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 45.

⁴⁷ Boris Groys, "The Topology of Contemporary Art," in Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nancy Condee (eds.), *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 73.

⁴⁸ Bonne, "The Copy & the Real Thing."

⁴⁹ Byung-Chul Han, *The Transparency Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 9.

⁵⁰ Viva, "Circularity and Visibility in Italian Art Periodicals (1968-1978)."

⁵¹ Léa Saint-Raymond, "Revisiting Harrison and Cynthia White' Academic vs. Dealer-Critic System," *Arts* 8 (3), 96, 2019, <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0752/8/3/96>

Giving Style to Reality

As they circulate, images impact not only original works, but act upon the world itself. This is, at least, Jacques Lacan's analysis: at the mirror stage, the child who is not yet motor-coordinated recognizes and appropriates their own body through their imagination and thanks to a very particular image - that of their reflection in a mirror. Only the passage to the symbolic order allows the child to stabilize their relationship to reality. But even after the mirror stage, Lacan explains, "images give their style to reality".⁵² For Vilém Flusser, the world is not a pure contingency offered to our gaze: it is not only represented by our own mental images, but also by images that come to stand between the world and us.⁵³ From a cognitive point of view, images make sensory stimuli emerge, plunging us into the heart of our inner life and our affective life by eliciting recollections or emotions.⁵⁴ For instance, Thomas Hirschhorn's work *Touching Reality*, by presenting unbearable images of destroyed human bodies, "assails and petrifies its viewer"⁵⁵, brutally confronts them with the violent reality of recent history.

But images do not only act as stimuli: they also forge what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as the habitus of the spectators. Indeed, images play a key role in educating the gaze.⁵⁶ André Malraux understood this when he came up with the idea of a "*musée imaginaire*"⁵⁷ in the hope that the public would recognize the beauty of the heritage of humanity. We can also detect a similar investment of pedagogical ambitions in images in UNESCO's efforts to circulate color photographic reproductions in exhibitions around the world and, as Lionello Venturi stated in the introduction to a 1952 catalog, to "get into the factory, the public buildings, the private homes, in the city

⁵² Jacques Lacan, "Les écrits techniques de Freud," *Le Séminaire, I* (Paris, Seuil, 1975), 93-94 and 160-161.

⁵³ Vilém Flusser, *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie*, *European Photography*, 1983, quoted in Hans Belting, *Pour une anthropologie des images* (Paris : Gallimard, 2004 [2001]), 271.

⁵⁴ Maxime Coulombe, *Le plaisir des images* (Paris: Puf, 2019), 95.

⁵⁵ Borrel, "Un mode d'existence équivoque."

⁵⁶ This tradition dates at least from the writings of John Damascene (Jean Damascène, *Discours contre ceux qui rejettent les images*, 730)

⁵⁷ André Malraux, *L'homme et la culture artistique*, (Paris : J. J. Pauvert, 1947). 6-7, quoted in Chiara Vitali, "How to build a World Art."

and in the countryside”.⁵⁸ The images, however, go beyond simple encyclopedic exposition: they also dictate how the images ought to be seen. Postcards, for example, present an idealized version of monuments, defining what the visitor “should” see at a given site or showing how to approach a work of art.⁵⁹ This education of the gaze is even more explicit with moving images. Short art documentaries were an important tool in post-war cultural policy for educating the gaze of the “masses”, as Griet Bonne shows. Her article quotes René Huyghe’s comments on this new medium: the curator explained that “people do not generally know how to look at pictures. The film enables us to hold the spectator’s eye and guide it step by step through the descriptive and visual detail of a work of art.”⁶⁰

Performativity and Effectiveness

The power of images is a field of research that has structured “visual studies” ever since David Freedberg’s pioneering research. A specialist in iconoclasm, Freedberg applied John L. Austin and John Searle’s thesis of “speech acts”⁶¹ to the visual field, attributing to particular images a “performative power” capable of realizing what is shown in representation.⁶² Hans Belting’s work on images in the Middle Ages⁶³ and Horst Bredekamp’s on the “act of image”⁶⁴ similarly explore the effectiveness, or rather the “performativity”, of certain images.

In this issue, Beatriz Martinez Sosa’s paper deals with a particularly powerful image, that of the funeral of Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old African American boy who was brutally murdered and disfigured. His unrecognizable face was exposed by his mother, who asked the funeral director to open the

casket to make the horror public, “for all the world to see.”⁶⁵ Several newspapers and magazines addressing African-Americans published pictures of the funeral, including close-ups of Till’s face: *Jet’s* September 15 1955 issue even sold out and was reprinted, a first for the magazine’s. Through the circulation of these images, Emmett Till entered into the collective memory of the African-American community as a martyr for the cause of civil rights.

We must closely analyze the circulation of such images if we are to understand their effectiveness and their status as icons. In her 2017 PhD thesis, Camille Rouquet focused on four famous photographs of the Vietnamese conflict: by meticulously retracing the genealogy of their republications in the press and in the archives of the pacifist movement, she showed that the myth associated with these images was rather an *a posteriori* reconstitution that emerged throughout the 1980s and 1990s.⁶⁶

Studying images through the prism of their circulation thus allows to better understand - or even relativize - their power and their elevation to the status of icons. However necessary, though, this methodological ambition is a very complex task. Indeed, tracing the circulation of images, especially in the digital age, is painstaking work which, because of the liquidity of many mediums, can often present an imposing task. This is why images constitute the real challenge of global studies, according to Sanjay Subrahmanyam.⁶⁷ The constitution of large digitized corpora of texts and images on the one hand, and their interrogation with the help of computer vision tools on the other, will facilitate this work in the long run, allowing researchers to see as far and as wide as possible.

⁵⁸ Lionello Venturi, “Foreword,” in *Catalogue de reproductions en couleurs des peintures*, (Paris : UNESCO, 1952), 7, quoted in Vitali, “How to build a *World Art*.”

⁵⁹ Rolf Potts, *Souvenir* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 56-57, quoted in Bonne, “The Copy & the Real Thing.”

⁶⁰ “Summaries of Lectures and Speeches,” in *Report on the First International Conference on Art Films, Paris, 26 June – 2 July 1948* (Paris: Unesco, 1948), 8, quoted in Bonne, “The Copy & the Real Thing.”

⁶¹ John L. Austin, *Quand dire, c’est faire* (1962) (Paris: Seuil, 1970); John R. Searle, *Les Actes de langage. Essai de philosophie du langage* (1969) (Paris: Herrmann, 1972).

⁶² David Freedberg, *The Power of Images. Studies in History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁶³ Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult : eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1990).

⁶⁴ Bredekamp, *Théorie de l’acte d’image*.

⁶⁵ Martinez Sosa, “To Let See.”

⁶⁶ Camille Rouquet, *Les Icônes du Vietnam et leur pouvoir*, thèse de doctorat (dir. François Brunet), Université Paris Diderot, 2017.

⁶⁷ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Par-delà l’incommensurabilité: pour une histoire connectée des empires aux temps modernes,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 54-4 bis (2007): 34-53.