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Picture-Networks

Abstract

Bilder mögen in Netzwerken leben. Bilder mögen neben anderen Bildern existieren. Der Beitrag analysiert und problematisiert wie ein Bildnetzwerk entsteht. Als theoretischer Hintergrund fungiert eine Verbindung aus Netzwerk-Theorie (Barabási Albert-László) und Bildwissenschaft. Damit sollen zugleich die von Gilles Deleuze geprägten Begriffe wie Rhizom, Re-, Deterritorialisierung neu interpretiert werden.

The pictures are living frequently in networks. Pictures like to stand near other pictures. In the following study, I analyse how the picture-network is realised, which are the connections between the network science (Barabási Albert-László) and the visual studies, how can be reinterpreted the Gilles Deleuze term, such as: re-, de-, territorialisation and Rhizom in this context and how the picture-hubs are formed.

1. Pictures as living creatures

Pictures[1] like to connect to other pictures.

In the above statement, I speak of pictures, as if they were beings endowed with autonomous will and freedom. And it's not by accident. In his book entitled *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*, W.J.T. Mitchell considers pictures to be living creatures, in a particular metaphorical context.

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[1] I refer here to material pictures.

The genuineness of the simile and the metaphor is demonstrable: images have in many respects analogous properties to living beings, but, most of all, we are the ones who treat them like that. Anthropomorphization does not give us the right to regard pictures as real, animated creatures, but speaking of them and analysing them as if they were most certainly can be of great help in understanding our relationship to images. Exhibition spaces, publications, museums and collections provide a platform for the encounter, coexistence and connection of images. A picture can have many imagistic links, depending on its physical placement. These relationships may be accidental or consciously constructed, and are usually valid for a certain time interval. Pictures may also develop very strong linkages, when one image becomes part of another, forming constant interconnections that are usually of content origin or are created as part of the picture-in-picture phenomenon. Oftentimes an image does not come into contact with other images in its original state, but is present as a reproduction or only as a reference, since a particular picture may refer back to other ones. Pictures like to socialize.

Talking about the life of pictures, W.J.T. Mitchell considers the latter to be animated beings. The metaphorical approach Mitchell follows refers primarily to the specific use of images. The metaphor reveals the nature of man as a being which composes and uses images. As image-users[2], in the process of visual experience and interpretation we relate the pictures we see to a whole range of other pictures. I do not deal below with the connections emerging in the course of interpretation, reception, I rather focus on identifying those picture-correlations that are already present in the creative process, namely, in the picture-body. Images are born, they come into existence. They disappear, perish or are destroyed. Throughout their lives, they have a penchant for appearing in picture-communities, picture-groups, picture-networks. Most images are related to another or various other images. They are similar to animated beings in many respects. Mitchell provides a number of arguments in favor of acknowledging them as living organisms:

> do pictures resemble life-forms? Are they born? Can they die? Can they be killed? Some of Curtis's (biologist) criteria don't fit pictures in any obvious way and require modification. »Growth and development« might characterize the process by which an image is realized in a concrete picture or work of art, but once completed, the work is normally homeostatic (unless we think its aging and reception history constitutes a kind of "development" like that of a life-form (MITCHELL 2005: 70).

2. The reproduced image. Horizontal picture-networks

Each iconic repetition constitutes a networking act. Pictures are wandering and living in permanent migration. Pictures and media like to connect (cf. MITCHELL 2005: 128). The repeated picture behaves as a node in visual artwork. Relating

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[2] Our processes of composing and comprehending images are defined in a large extent by when, what type and what amount of images we encounter with.

the picture repetition / recurring picture phenomenon to Barabási Albert-László's network theory, I highlight the existence of weak and strong nodes. I assume that each and every repeated image is a node which changes the course line of accepting, understanding and construing the work.

From the perspective of picture-networks, the most important criterion Mitchell points to in terms of Curtis's definition of living organisms is reproduction. In our daily use of images we are experiencing the acceleration of picture-reproduction, in conjunction with the increase and multiplication of the changes in its medium. There are so many technical devices at our disposal which enable us to copy and replicate pictures and reduce the duration of reproduction to a minimum, that the multitude of reuse opportunities offers composers / users of images an ever-increasing surface. Consequently it's only natural that we are creating more and more complex picture-networks. Each iconographic repetition constitutes a networking act. Pictures are wandering and living in permanent migration, a painting from the XVth century may appear today on Instagram or as part of a GIF — in the form of a photograph or a motion picture —, but it is equally possible that a photograph taken of a photograph of a painting becomes part of a collage, and thus specific picture-exponents are created. Images may even be incorporated, integrated, transplanted into one another, they do not only switch to other media, but can also occur as parts or elements of new pictures, and today one encounters images that undergo not only binary-, but also multi-exponentiation. Walter Benjamin's 1935 study saw in the reproduction of artworks their potential degradation. Interestingly, in the interwar period, the current printing techniques and photographic processes looked terrifying, Benjamin himself is talking about a dizzying acceleration: »Mechanical reproduction of a work of art, however, represents something new. Historically, it advanced intermittently and in leaps at long intervals, but with accelerated intensity« (BENJAMIN 1968: 28).

It is not only pictures, but also media that step out of their reclusive life, often migrating and popping up in new media: see the photographs taken of paintings or films, the real or hand-painted photographs etc. collaged on paintings. Pictorial media are constantly changing during their migration, but they conserve referentially the medium and, of course, the visual product, the picture. Mitchell also stresses the fact that pictures dislike solitary existence primarily because humankind itself — image-using by its very nature — likes to collect pictures, establishing museums, galleries, grouping images in private collections, photo albums and displaying masses of pictures on Facebook pages, websites or publications. That is to say, both pictures and media like to connect. »All media are mixed media« (MITCHELL 2008: 247).

3. Image-repetition = Building picture-networks

A recurring picture (a reproduced image appearing in a new image) comes into being when two different pictures meet, more precisely when an image is integrated into another one, creating a visual correspondence. The two begin a common life form, in many cases a transplant takes place, one picture incorporating the other. This might as well be considered a hierarchical relationship, since the receiving image dominates the recurring one. The latter is often a well-known picture.

Encounters of images can be of various types:

3.1 Encounters of original pictures

Original artworks usually meet one another in museums and exhibitions, where they form a specific network, that will be rearranged after the exhibition. In the case of original pictures, there are no permanent network-maps, but a continuous image-migration and a constant reorganization. The life of pictures is measurable in this permanent motion: some of the artworks are more agile, others rather stable, some never move away from their place of birth, remaining in their creator's living space, whilst others travel through continents several times a year, carrying their materiality with them.

3.2 Encounters of replicas, reproductions

In the cyberspace, any picture can be duplicated with the aid of a photograph or a film, and the resulting reproductions may already occur in a new medium, attached to a new kind of materiality, to other carriers. Reproductions as recurring pictures may connect with one another in many ways, they may be incorporated, transplanted into new images, or become part of new pictorial groups. An essential part of the life-story of an artwork or a picture is constituted by its geographically outlineable displacements, by the map of its journeys on which it is taken by its users. This movement-imprint reveals a great deal about its value and reception context. Virtual interfaces represent predominantly the meeting point of replicas. In contemporary aesthetic and art-theory discourses, originality does not constitute anymore a fundamental term, because through the adoption of the repeated image the emphasis shifts to the ›how‹ of reusability and recontextualization. Though novelty and originality are redefined through reproduction, they do not disappear, because a reproduction may be genuinely used in a new environment, as an element or part of a new picture, just as it is possible to reproduce in a totally innovative manner etc. The aura believed by Benjamin to have been lost actually revives, in some sense it also gets reproduced, or to put it another way: while the old aura doesn't perish, a new one is born, since a photograph of a painting has its own aura, without having stolen the already existing one of the opus. »One might subsume the eliminated element in the term ›aura‹ and go on to say: that which withers in

the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art« (BEN-JAMIN 1968: 6).

4. Reproduction-based pictorial connections

Replicas, reproductions establish specific imagistic connections. If we take a photo of a visual artwork, we create a permanent connection, as the photo refers back to the photographed opus. The question of originality discussed by Benjamin does not arise, because the replica is also original, only its object is another work. However, the two cannot be compared, at least not medially. The reproduction is most of the times the result of a technical process, multiplication establishing a network, a pictorial function between the reproduced and the reproduction(s). In this case, one has to do with repeated pictures, as the image structure does not usually change during the reproduction process, it is just placed in a new medial context. Often a reproduction serves simply knowledge dissemination, but it can be made with creative intent, too. Reproductions create a horizontal picture-network. Aby Warburg's collection of reproductions entitled *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* represents one of the first consciously compiled horizontal iconographic meshworks. The collection itself can be considered a stand-alone work of art, while it weaves a web of pictorial connections.

5. Recurring pictures = Vertical picture-networks

Recurring pictures are repeated images that appear in new visual environments, as parts, elements of new pictorial works. This iterative process involves their exponentiation. Image migration and implantation results in the simultaneous, non-linear, integrated presence of one or more pictures within one picture. It is not only in the domain of artworks, but also in our everyday image-use, image-composing activities and current pictorial culture that there is an ever growing tendency to reuse images, to incorporate already existing, well-known pictures in new iconographic contexts, recycling, recontextualizing, remedializing and reinterpreting them.

6. Referential picture-networks

Images may appear in a new environment not only as reproductions, but also as references. This creates a very strong picture-network or iconographic

relation system. Pictures or artworks that are repeated in another visual context, namely, that are present referentially or as replicas, form hubs (Albert-László Barabási). The most evident network connection is reproduction. A looser interlinkeage is the referential picture-repetition. For instance, László Újvárossy's artwork entitled *Politolatria* has been elaborated after the print of Matthew Barney's *Entered Apprentice Cremaster Cycle 3* (2002), which constitutes a referential background. Újvárossy's creation enables us to meet another opus of art history without the author using its reproduction. Thus, a pictorial parallel occurs, in which one artwork is present as a starting point for the future opus. Bartha József's creation entitled *This is not a.... 1 (Ceci n'est pas... 1)* (2014) evokes René Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (1929), referentiality being realized on a textual level, by means of the sentence structure, and not through the exhibit. Referentiality in the case of Bartha *'s* opus presupposes the viewer's art historical competence, as it doesn't indicate anywhere Magritte's name or the title of the painting.

Recurring pictures are networking images. Due to the phenomenon of transmediality, one picture occurs within another picture, while the mediality of the original one is also present, but only as a reference. If a film image appears as still picture, the movie as medial context is not present, but by means of predominantly textual references one is able to gain knowledge of the medial environment of the original work. Meanwhile, however, we only encounter the photograph as still picture taken out not only of its medial, but also of its temporal and montage context. Even medial attributes are present solely as references, which we are mostly aware of, or which our attention is usually drawn to. During the change in the medium, imagistic attributes get rearranged, too. Recurring pictures most of the times lose their initial materiality, unless it comes to materially homogeneous repetition, when one takes a photograph of a photograph, or creates a film about a film. Most recurring pictures are recognizable as repeated images. Recognizability presupposes usually a certain degree of familiarity with visual culture and art history.

Recognizability and identifiability are multi-factorial. For instance, a medially homogeneous picture-repetition is constituted by a painting depicting another painting. The painting-in-painting is, as well, painted, solely its frame being unreal, since it is also painted. This is what sets the receiving picture apart from the received picture, the former having a real, material frame. However, if one takes a photograph of it, then the photograph becomes the receiving picture, whereas the painting depicting the other painting turns into the recurring picture. Jan Vermeer van Delft's A *Lady Standing at a Virginal* (1673–1675) delineates three paintings in one painting which are medially homogeneous recurring pictures. These are not well-known opuses of art history, they simply represent elements of the living spaces of the current age, but their significance in terms of content is not at all negligible. Repeated images occur in most of Veermer's paintings, the picture-in-picture depiction having become his unique signature. There are a lot of paintings depicting many others, such

as Samuel F. B. Morse's *Gallery of the Louvre* (1831-1833), which reproduces dozens of paintings from the Louvre.

Recurring pictures constitute a leitmotif of Samuel F. B. Morse's opuses, as he had a penchant for rendering galleries and ateliers crammed with paintings, drawings, sculptures and works of art. Morse's contemporary follower, Lluís Barba rearranges already cluttered classical artworks by placing new pictures alongside the existing ones or by replacing the latter. Naturally, the creator indicates here, as well, only the reference to the standard work, without providing any guidance for the other pictures appearing in the opus. In their volume entitled *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*[3]*,* Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari introduce the concept of the rhizome, which represents a relationship system built upon the pattern of an underground meshwork, namely, on the biological foundations of an invisible connection among roots and tubers. Rhizome is none other than a network.[4]

7. Picture-hubs. Refrain-pictures

7.1 Scale-free picture-networks

Picture-networks, picture-families, picture-conglomerates, picture-groups represent specific arrangements created by humans as image-using beings. Meanwhile, peculiar linkeage-patterns emerge. During image use, some of the pictures occupy a privileged position in the iconographic network, in the sense that they interrelate many times and with many pictures. Visual arts are increasingly embracing the opportunities offered by imagistic repetition. Art history has various similar cases, too. The painting-in-painting represents the earliest example of the picture-in-picture phenomenon. With modern art, exponentiated images become increasingly common, change in the medium or re-medialization becomes more and more natural in the creative process and is progressively accepted by the receiving audience. The encounter, mixing and juxtaposition of different media and pictures, their incorporation into one another, image-implantation, pictorial oculation constitute axioms of contemporary visual art. Examining the iteration rate of still images, Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (1503-1519) proves to be clearly, without taking into account any

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[3] »A rhizome as subterranian stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles. Bulbs and tubers are rhizomes. Plants with radicles may be rhizomorphic in other respects altogether: the question is whether plant life in its specificity is not entirely rhizomatic. Even some animals are, in their pack form. Rats are rhizomes. Burrows are, too, in all of their functions of shelter, supply, movement, evasion, and breakout. The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers« (DELEUZE/GUATTARI 1987: 27).

[4] »Der Poststrukturalismus denkt sowohl in differenten Vielheiten wie in Zusammenhängen. Das dabei entstehende Bild von Einheit und Vielheit ordnet die Vielheit der Einheit nicht identitätslogisch unter bzw. sie verfällt nicht in bloß nominalistische Opposition, die nichts am Baumschema […] ändert. Vielmehr verweben sich Einheit und Vielheit ineinander und weder existiert das eine vor oder über dem anderen noch hebt das eine das andere auf. Keines gibt es ohne das andere« (KUHN 2005: 63).

statistical data, the most common recurring picture that is present in the most diverse medial contexts and interpretations. Similarly, Diego Velasquez's *Las Meninas* (1656)[5] and Edward Munch's *The Scream* (1893) have achieved high popularity among repeated images.

Repetition in visual arts can by no means be analysed in the context of originality, the phenomenon being rather approachable from the direction of reinterpretation, transsignification. This applies also to the case of the ready-made, when the author recontextualizes, namely, removes an ordinary object from its everyday environment. In this regard, every iteration is unique, even though it repeats the same thing. Deleuze sees uniqueness as an opportunity resulting from repetition.[6] Until romanticism, repetition was present in art as a requirement, while today it pops up as an opportunity, often as a provocation. Repetition in visual arts functions as a bridge, connecting ages, artistic move-ments, creators and images. It has appeared in various forms at different phases of art history. Mimesis, imitation represented the simplest form of iter-ation, where the aim of the picture was the accurate, precise recreation, ren-dering of reality. Another manifestation of repetition was technique itself as a learnable pattern or method used during the creative process. Thematic repe-tition has then taken the phenomenon to a whole new level. But works of art can also behave like ›ready-mades‹, like finished products that would be used in most cases as replicas, reproductions during a subsequent creative process.

Gábor Bódy assumed in the late 1980s, that there would come a time in the history of film[7] when short-length film units would be used — similarly to words — to edit movie-sentences, forming parts of a film-lexicon, from which anyone who wishes to make a movie can choose freely. The prophecy has come true, even if not quite the way Bódy has envisioned: neither the film-lexicon, nor the film-sentences have been created yet, but gifs — that pick out very short sections from existing movies — have grown ever more popular, and portions from certain films tend to return in the frame of other films, too. Bódy also pointed out that film theory should not be implemented by verbal means, but by cinematic ones, in a self-reflexive manner. Gábor Bódy's hy-pothesis is built upon the idea that available image material is likely to accu-mulate to such an extent and pictures will probably become so easily accessi-ble, that they will be used like words. Of course, there are hardly any visual grammar rules, since it seems nearly impossible to set any kind of convention. It is rather the degree of awareness and availability that determines when and

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[5] There is even an online collection with referential artworks that refer back to Velasquez's *Las Meninas* (Cf. URL: http://spacioars.blogspot.com/2010/07/otras-meninas.html [accessed December 7, 2020]).

[6] »Repetition is a necessary and justified conduct only in relation to that which cannot be replaced. Repetition as a conduct and as a point of view concerns non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities. Reflecting, echoes, doubles and souls do not belong to the domain of resemblance or equivalence; and it is no more possible to exchange one's soul than it is to substitute real twins for one another« (DELEUZE 1994: 1).

[7] »Soon, all individual film shoots may become redundant, and our thoughts expressible by simply relying — like on a dictionary — on the ›ready made‹ images taken from television« (BÓDY 1996: 112; translation by Erika Fám).

which pictures are utilized, replicated, and thus exponentiated in new medial environments.

7.2 Deterritorialization. Reterritorialization. Picture-networks

Similarly to the phenomenon of the ready-made, appropriation art is based on collage technique, and found footage film is built on the principle of recycling, reuse. We encounter specific forms of imagistic repetition in the cases mentioned above. Collage technique, which interlinks various images, is one of the most concrete examples of elaborating picture-networks, imagistic connections in the creative process. It is necessary to separate picture-networks that emerge within an image from those that constitute an aggregation of separate images conjoined by the space of common occurrence; beyond that, there may, of course, be content-related, thematic or formal criteria due to which they become parts of the set. Aby Warburg's panels, Gerhard Richter's *Atlas* represent specific examples of elaborating picture-networks, which constitute a frontier between creative and curatorial work. These collections of pictures reflect the Deleuzean deterritorialization and reterritorialization process. Reterritorialization applies mostly to replicas, however, a copy constitutes on its own a de- and reterritorialization, a spatio-temporal displacement. Picture-networks interconnect different media during the change in the medium or remedialization. There are oftentimes still and motion pictures, paintings, photographs, medially homogeneous linkeages, movie-in-movie phenomena (when an already existing film snippet appears in a new movie) in the film, as well. In his *Steps,* Zbigniew Rybczinki remakes the stairway sequence from Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), using the black-and-white film snippet as a basis and introducing American tourists who interact in various ways with the cinematic events. They participate in the cinematic environment by experiencing visuals as reality. They appear virtually, enjoy full immunity, events take place independently of them, while they transform into pictures through their observer status, their pseudo-presence. This creates a feedback-based picture-network.

Wittgenstein[8] described the system of language with an apt metaphor. Language as a city is an appropriate visual representation of the evolution of linguistic processes, reflecting how existing buildings and streets are preserved, sometimes rebuilt, the city by all means is growing and is in constant dynamic development. The new buildings appear mainly on the outskirts of

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[8] »Unsere Sprache kann man ansehen als eine alte Stadt: Ein Gewinkel von Gässchen und Plätzen, alten und neuen Häusern, und Häusern mit Zubauten aus verschiedenen Zeiten; und dies umgeben von einer Menge neuer Vororte mit geraden und regelmäßigen Straßen und mit einförmigen Häusern« (WITTGENSTEIN 2010: §18, 12). Engl. translation: »Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses« (WITTGENSTEIN 1958: §18, 8).

the city, in the Wittgensteinian interpretation. The same city-metaphor is applicable to the ever-growing picture-networks, as well.

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