

**A Monstrous Rhinoceros (as from life):  
Toward (and Beyond) the Epistemological  
Nature of the Enacted Pictorial Image**

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# A Monstrous Rhinoceros (as from life): Toward (and Beyond) the Epistemological Nature of the Enacted Pictorial Image

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## Abstract

This paper reveals how both contemporary and prior views of the nature of the pictorial arts since early modernism have been underpinned by the classical concept of *mimesis*, and as a result has brought with it a pre-occupation with both representation and the privileging of the visual. Through tracing the concept of mimesis from its Platonic and Aristotelian roots, the paper will reveal how the concept permeated the visual arts during early modernism, particularly through the work of art historian Aby Warburg. The concept remained dominant within art history until the late twentieth century, and still has its lingering grip on the visual within non-representational models. In discussing ‘the more than visual’ nature of the pictorial image, the paper draws insight from ‘enactivist’ literature; particularly Francisco Varela’s concept of ‘perceptual guidance by action’ provides a framework within which to theorise perception as structured by movement and action, and as such the whole multi-sensory-motor experience. Providing a theoretical platform within which to re-think the pictorial image as a multi-sensory-motor process in which no one sense modality is privileged. As such, in offering a speculative theory, the paper maintains, the ‘enacted pictorial image’ should be theorised as a ‘trace’, not of a visual world of experience, but of an entire enacted reality.

## Introduction

Since early modernism, the conventional view of art and of art history was one that removed art from the stream of lived experience, to treat it as an expression of the imagination of the artist, and as such as a symbolic representation of a concrete external reality (Ingold, 2010; Malafouris, 2007; Wind, 1983). The questioning of the epistemological role of the pictorial image is enjoying a current resurgence within fields dealing with the visual arts, specifically in light of contemporary non-representational models of perception and cognition. From attempts to understanding the practice of drawing as ‘bringing forth’ of a reality (Cain, 2010), to rethinking paleontological images through its ‘processes’ of becoming (Malafouris, 2007; Ambrose, 2006). Within the field of anthropology, the symbolic (representational) nature of ‘art’ has been strongly contested, instead, taking a pragmatist approach, proposing that we should consider the activities of drawing, painting and carving not as a means of representing a world, but of revealing or bringing forth a world through a kind of ‘perceptual visual thinking’ (Malafouris, 2007, p. 299) linked to the sensi-motor engagement of the artist and the world. Such approaches maintain that in doing so, the studying of the pictorial image (specifically that of the Palaeolithic era) offers radical new epistemic access to the world of visual experience.

This paper positions itself within this debate, and aims to show that whilst efforts within anthropology move away from the underpinning of representation, a further condition remains, that of the privileging of the visual. To begin to tackle this issue, the paper will reveal how both contemporary and prior views of the pictorial arts since early modernism have been underpinned by the concept of mimesis, considered to be the oldest theory of the representational arts, which, as I will show, brought with it a pre-occupation with both representation and the privileging of the visual. Through tracing the concept of mimesis from its Platonic and Aristotelian roots, the paper will reveal how the concept permeated the visual arts during early modernism, pioneered by the work of art historian Aby Warburg, and remained until the late twentieth century, and still has its lingering grip on the visual within non-representational models. In discussing the more than visual nature of the pictorial image, the paper draws insight from ‘enactivist’ literature; the concept of ‘perceptual guidance by action’ (Varela *et al.*, 2001) provides a framework within which to theorise perception as structured by movement and action, and as such the whole multi-sensory-motor experience of the artist. Providing a theoretical platform within which to re-think this ‘perceptual visual thinking’ as a multi-sensi-motor process in which no one sense modality is privileged. As such, in offering a speculative theory, the paper maintains, the ‘enacted pictorial image’ should be theorised as a ‘trace’, not of a visual world of experience, but of an entire enacted reality of the artist.

## 1. Imagination: The ‘Visual Mental Image’

As Matthew Potolsky reminds us, the concept of mimesis is considered to be the oldest theory of the Western representational arts, which has survived well into the twentieth century (Potolsky, 2006; Sorbom, 2002). Established during the Classical period in Greece as a means to characterise the epistemological nature of painting, sculpture, poetry, music, dance and theatre as an art (Sorbom, 2002), in complete contrast to other forms of human inquiry,<sup>1</sup> such as history and science, which were seen as a form of universal truth and reason (Potolsky, 2006). In this section I will show how the concept of mimesis rests upon two basic epistemological assumptions that (1) the mind and world are as separate domains, and (2) the visual nature of human experience.

The nature of mimesis during the Classical period is divided between the thought of Plato and Aristotle, and rests upon the core distinction of an artwork as a ‘copy’, ‘imitation’, or ‘similarity’ of an pre-defined external ‘real’ world, through which is drawn a distinction between the *real* (the concrete object) and the *mimemata* (a painting, sculpture, prose or music), the result of the process of mimesis. Both Plato and Aristotle remain faithful to such a dichotomy, however they have differing views on the epistemological nature of the imitation itself (Sorbom, 2002; Potolsky, 2006). The Platonic model of the image is based upon the concept of an exact copy, or ‘mirror image’, of the ‘real’ world (Potolsky, 2006). As such, the Platonic model argues that images and artworks are no more than reflections of the world as it is in reality; passive reflections that require no skill on the part of the artist (pp. 23–24). Such a position on the imaginative image, Potolsky notes, leads Plato to see mimesis as a threat to concrete knowledge and reason, as any imitation that is said to be knowledge of an object, can only ever be illusory (p. 24), and

potentially deceptive. In contrast, Aristotle argues that *mimemata*, far from being mere ‘mirror images’ of reality, have an epistemological value in themselves (pp. 33-38). Rather than merely copying, Aristotelian mimesis is linked directly to perception, and seen as *simulating*, through the imagination, as a self-contained ‘heterocosm’ that *simulates* the ‘real’ world through our ways of knowing it. As such, Aristotle’s mimesis is not conceptualised as an exact copy of reality, but as a “craft with its own internal laws and aims” (p. 33). Fundamentally, in maintaining mimesis as an act of simulation, Aristotle, in contrast to Plato, holds that mimesis is in fact a natural aspect of human life, and even a unique source of learning. Aristotle is thus able to maintain that at some level each area of knowledge<sup>2</sup> is itself an imitation, maintaining that human beings learn through the process of imitation itself. Such a move to understanding knowledge as imitation, posits mimesis as an active aesthetic process. To Aristotle, the poet (or artist) does not *imitate* reality, but *simulates* and brings reality into existence through the process of mimesis.

Aristotle’s insistence upon the epistemological value of mimesis, and its inquiry, had a direct impact upon the knowledge systems of Greek Culture. Examples of his model of *simulation* mimesis, which requires the active human imagination, can be traced to permeate throughout the Greek allegorical mnemonic and knowledge system, the ‘art of memory’, as studied through the work of the anthropologist Frances Yates. It is here that the reliance upon both representation and the visual, that underpins mimesis, can be clearly seen as influencing the culture, through the system of creating imaginative ‘visual mental images’ from verbal concepts, to aid memory.

The art of memory<sup>3</sup> was a memory practice, conceived as a theoretical mnemonic tool for the creation and subsequent recollection of ‘visual mental images’ from memory within oral cultures (Curruthers, 2009). The practice relied upon the principle of the translation of a verbal concept or object, through the imagination of the user based upon mimetic knowledge, into ‘visual mental images’ arranged within an fictional, imagined space (Sapir, 2006; Yates, 1966), a principle that Frances Yates traces to be influenced by the Aristotelian concepts of knowledge as imitation through mimesis. It is here that the underpinning conditions of representation and the bias of the ‘visual’ endemic to mimesis, are brought out through this article through the three conditions of ‘the art of memory’ system: (1) the translatability of verbal concepts into ‘visual mental images’ (Sapir, 2006, p. 85); (2) the necessity of an ‘imaginary fictional place’ in order for something to happen, and (3) the disfigurement and unusualness of the ‘visual mental images’ of objects to be placed within imaginative fictional places (Yates, 1966, p.19).

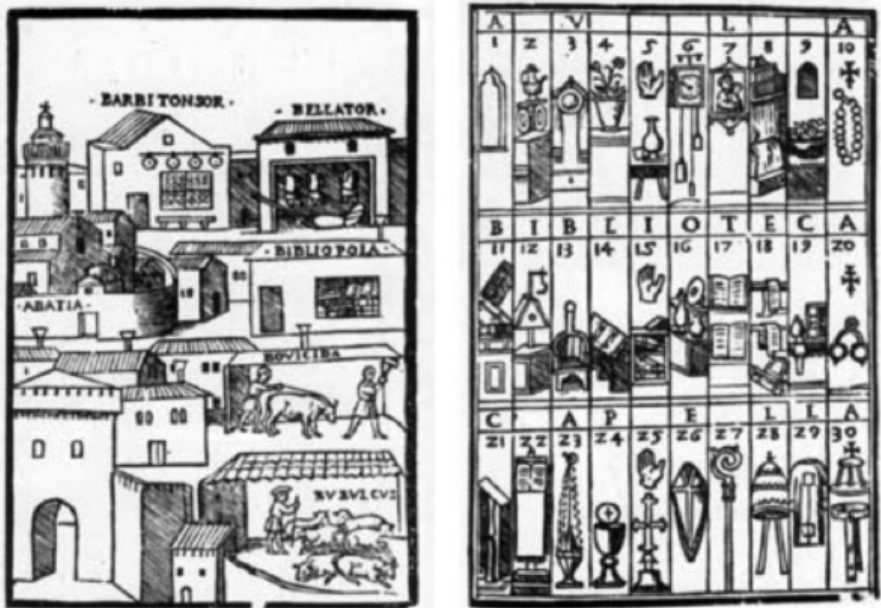
Yates describes how Greek memory systems built around the time of Aristotle shared a focus upon the importance of the role of the imagination in perception, drawn out through his treatise in *De-Anima*:

The perceptions brought in by the five senses are first treated or worked over by the faculty of imagination, and it is the images so formed which become the material of the intellectual faculty (Yates, 1966, p. 46).

Here, she maintains not only the importance of the imagination as the intermediary between perception and thought, but also within the creation of ‘visual mental images’ that became the

very material of the intellect itself. Imagination to Aristotle is pictorial in nature, and as such ‘the soul never thinks without a mental picture’ (p. 47). This ‘pictorial’ nature of imagination, and intellect, is the fundamental founding support for the use of ‘images’ within the Greek art of memory system that followed. Yates reveals, by quoting Cicero, how the memory systems, based around the time of Aristotle, required a mediation of the non-visual senses through a visual image,<sup>4</sup> due to the superiority of the visual:

[T]he most complete pictures are formed in our minds of the things that have been conveyed to them and imprinted on them by the senses, but that the keenest of all our senses is the sense of sight, and that consequently perceptions received by the ears or by reflexion can be most easily retained if they are also conveyed to our minds by the mediation of the eyes (Cicero, in Yates, 1966, p. 19).



**Fig. 1.** Depictions of an Abbey Memory System (1533). Left: Abbey Memory System. Right: Images used within the Abbey Memory System. (Yates, 1966, Fig. 6a, 6b)

Yates reveals that to Aristotle, memory “belongs to the same part of the soul as the imagination; it is a collection of mental pictures from sense impressions but with a time element added” (p. 47). The ‘art of memory’ systems of this period thus required the construction of a ‘visual mental image’ from an oral description, in which visual objects are placed within an imagined place (Fig. 1). To Yates (p. 23) the ‘art of memory’ systems function upon this privileging of the visual within imagination, underscored by two basic principles laid out by Cicero; the rules for places and the rules for images. The rules for places require the creation of ‘fictitious places’, in contrast to the ‘real’ places<sup>5</sup>, the rules for images (which are placed within a ‘fictitious place’)

rely upon the core concept of making the mnemonic images as striking and unusual as possible through their ugliness or deformation, in order to fully awaken the memory during recollection<sup>6</sup> (p. 23). Yates shows how, for Cicero, to remember (for a long periods of time) requires making the images unfamiliar, novel, and to visually disfigure<sup>7</sup> them in some way within the imagination:

[I]f we set up images of a kind that can adhere longest in memory. And we shall do so if we establish similitude's as striking as possible; if we set up images that are many or vague but active; if we assign to them exceptional beauty or singular ugliness [...] or if we somehow disfigure them (Yates, 1966, p. 26).

The 'art of memory' system, underpinned by the Aristotelians concept of mimesis, rests upon three key points: (1) the perfect, transparent translatability of verbal concepts into 'visual mental images' (Sapir, 2006, p. 85). (This does not necessarily mean that there is a resemblance between what has to be memorised and its mental image); (2) an absolute necessity of a 'fictional place'; in order for something to happen, the place becomes inseparable from the images themselves (Yates, 1966), and (3) the disfigurement and unusualness of the 'visual mental images' created in order to awaken the memory of them (Yates, 1966). Surveying the Classical concept of mimesis and its direct influence upon the 'visual memory systems' reveals both a dichotomy between mind and world, and a bias toward the visual, pictorial nature of imagination.

Aristotelian mimesis, as *simulation*, draws a dichotomy between *perception* (of sense data of the real world), and the *imagination* (of the intellect that simulates or represents the sense data of the real world). Mimesis here is a product of the imagination, and so is the 'mental visual images' it produces. The reliance upon both *representation* and the *visual* within the theory of mimesis would underpin later thought regarding the epistemological nature of the 'pictorial image' during a revival of mimesis within art history and anthropology during the modernism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in which the pictorial image was theorised as a projection of an expressive, imaginative, psychological disposition of the artist.

## 2. Perception: Modernism and the Emotional Mimetic Image

The resurgence of mimesis throughout the late nineteenth century is placed alongside the rise of the general interest in empathy within the aesthetics of late nineteenth century modernism (Rampley, 2001, p. 124). During this period mimesis takes on a much wider scope being placed directly within the category of human perception, within which Robert Vischer's essay 'The Optical Sense of Form' was a central text.<sup>8</sup> Vischer emphasises the role that emotions and feelings play on our perception of the visible world, maintaining that our "aesthetic response to form is at least partially conditioned by the inner psychological life of the percipient" (p. 124). As such he argues: "It is quite possible in the sphere of imagination for purely formal phenomena to coalesce with other essential features of our humanity. This is the work or achievement of our representational or imaginative faculty" (Harrison, 1998, pp. 690). Such an increase in the interest of empathy and mimesis within aesthetics takes on a wider scope through the emerging field of anthropology (Ramley, 2001, p. 124), particularly applied to the nature of the pictorial

image. Predominantly within the work of the art historian Aby Warburg, who in aiming to join the psychological with the anthropological,<sup>9</sup> recognised the perceptual possibility of mimesis (Rampley, 2001) applying it to the study of the pictorial arts, not merely as a product of the emotional faculty of the imagination, as Vischer claimed, but within the activity of the physical expression of the entire body (Wind, 1983).

In asking the question of how “human and pictorial expressions originate; what are the feelings or points of view, conscious or unconscious, under which they are stored in the archives of the memory?” (Gombrich, 1970, p. 222), Warburg applied the concept of mimesis, in order to foreground perception in the studying of the pictorial image as a concrete object itself, as conditioned by the physical mimetic experience of the body and thus the techniques used.<sup>10</sup> Warburg took on the concept of mimesis to discuss the nature and origins of the ‘visual pictorial image’, as being underpinned by the emotions and psychology of the artist who formed them, his ‘pathos formula’ expressed his main theory regarding the relationship between what he termed the ‘primitive’<sup>11</sup> human psyche and the “manipulation of the external chaotic world that surrounds” (Efal, 2007, p. 221). To Warburg, any stimulus from the outside world always involves, within perception, a projection of a psychologically known ‘visual mental image’:

For any stimulus, be it visual or auditory, a biomorphic cause of a definite and intelligible nature is projected which enables the mind to take defensive measures [...] when a door creaks in the wind [...] such stimuli arouse anxieties among savages or children who may project into such sounds the image of a snarling dog (Gombrich, 1970, p. 217).

For any stimulus, such as a sound, a psychological ‘visual mental image’ is projected for the cause of the stimulus. It is such a ‘phobic reflex of cause projection’, Warburg maintained, that is always present at the edge of consciousness (Gombrich, 1970, p. 218). It is upon this principle, of the projection of a psychological ‘visual mental image’, that Warburg’s theories of the origins of the pictorial image, as the projection of the psychological ego, are based. Warburg, like Vischer, focused upon the psychological and emotional projection of the psyche onto and through inanimate objects. However, he differs in that his theories of the ‘pictorial image’ rest upon the recognition that man was, as Gombrich claims, first and foremost, a tool using animal, who through using tools, was able to widen and extend his ego:

I regard man as a tool-using animal whose activity consists in connecting and separating. In this activity he is apt to lose the organic sensation of the ego. The hand permits him to manipulate things which, as inanimate objects, lack a nervous system but which nevertheless provide a material extension of the ego. [...] there exists indeed a situation in which man can become assimilated to something that is not he himself precisely by manipulating or wearing objects which his bloodstream does not reach (Gombrich, 1970, p. 221).

It is here that Warburg extends mimesis, beyond that of a faculty of the imagination to the physical act of manipulating or wearing an object, and is thus able to maintain that man made objects and pictorial images are mimetic in origin. To Warburg, mimesis moves beyond an imaginative reflection of the active mind and becomes situated within the expressive gestures of the experiencing body itself (Wind, 1983, p. 30-32). As such, to Warburg, human muscles



themselves serve the purpose of mimetic expression (p. 31), which is always associated with the minimum of reflection. In pursuing this move, Warburg was able to suggest that the nature of the formation of the pictorial image must be studied “*in statu nascendi* in the shape of the expressive gestures made by the body” (Wind, 1983, p. 30). To Warburg, the ‘style’ of artefacts and images are formed in the very expressive gestures of the body that formed them. Using this extended theory of mimesis, Warburg was able to trace a clear cycle of the development of the image of the Greek Hero Perseus, from the Greek origin to the *perversion* of that form in a distorting Oriental and mediaeval tradition (Fig. 2), through to its restitution in the Renaissance (Gombrich, 1970, p. 194). Warburg suggested that at each stage of *re-form* within these oral cultures, the form of Perseus was ‘sterilized’<sup>12</sup>, stripped of expressive meaning, through verbal descriptions and translations (becoming a ‘stimulus’ much like the sound of creaking door) and ‘polarized’ or given new expressive meaning (the projection of a new mental image – like the snarling dog) through new cultural imaginations, which ultimately structured and formed the new visual aesthetic.

Warburg aimed to isolate and study these psychological factors that conditioned the formulation of style (Wind, 1983) of the pictorial image throughout different cultures and times. As such he believed that “any attempt to detach the image from its relation to religion and poetry, to cult and drama, is like cutting off its lifeblood” (p. 25). It is through the studying of the concrete object itself, as conditioned by the nature of the techniques and psychology used to make it, that Warburg aimed to understand the epistemological nature of the pictorial image, as a projection of imaginative, visual and psychological dispositions.



Fig. 2. Images from a 15th-century Arabic Magic Manuscript, depicting ‘Persues’ (far right). (Gombrich, 1986, pl. 39)

### 3. The Psychologically Charged Image

Such a ‘psychology of the pictorial arts’ remained central to discussions of fields related to the visual arts well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and became the focus of discussions of the psychological nature of the pictorial image.<sup>13</sup> Particularly traced through the work of the art historian Ernst Gombrich, these theories inherited the concerns and biases endemic within the traces of mimesis. Gombrich’s concept of ‘schema and correction’ can be seen as a direct extension of Warburg’s ‘pathos formula’. The theory of ‘schema and correction’ rests upon a model of perception that Gombrich calls the ‘searchlight theory’<sup>14</sup>, which emphasises the active role of the living organism, with their experiences (schema) in probing and testing (correction) the environment:

It might be said, therefore, that the very process of perception is based on [...] the rhythm of schema and correction. It is a rhythm which presupposes constant activity on our part in making guesses and modifying them in the light of experience (Gombrich, 1964, p. 272).

Gombrich maintains that our perceptions are representational, and are bound within the constant activity of the organism, beginning as vague and general, and as we require greater clarity through experience, they will become progressively more articulated. He maintains, like Warburg, that the ‘familiarity’ of our psychological experience (what he called a ‘schema’) is always a frame of reference for the ‘unfamiliar’ experiences of the external world. He applies his concept of ‘schema and correction’ to the pictorial image through discussing the activity of the artist, within which he argues that “the artist begins, not with his visual impressions of an external world, but with his idea or concept” (Gombrich, 1964, p. 62). To Gombrich, we must always have a starting point or a standard of comparison “in order to begin that process of making and matching and remaking which finally becomes embodied in the finished image” (p. 321). The artist’s process of depiction works much like a simile in which the process of *copying*, of the ‘motif’ (the concrete thing being depicted) is compared to the artist’s ‘schematic form’ (prior experience). He outlines the process of ‘schema and correction’ through the discussion of copying an ambiguous shape such as an ink blot:

The draughtsman tries first to classify the blot and fit it into some sort of familiar scheme – he will say, for instance, that it is triangular or that it looks like a fish. Having selected such a scheme to fit the form approximately, he will proceed to adjust it, noticing for instance that the triangle is rounded at the top, or that the fish ends in a pigtail (Gombrich, 1964, p. 64).

To Gombrich, the ‘schema’ represents the power of expectation, rather than that of pure conceptual knowledge, which moulds and shapes how we understand what we see in life. He demonstrated this through the test of ‘serial reproduction’<sup>15</sup> (Bartlett, 1995 p. 180), in which a series of drawings are produced each depicting a series of transformations from the original Egyptian owl to a cat through the serial copying and reproduction from memory (Fig. 3). It is around reproduction five that the ‘unfamiliar’ shape, which has no pre-existing category within the schema of experience of the subjects, is ‘distorted’ to gradually assume the shape of a pussycat (Gombrich, 1964, p. 64). To Gombrich, where the pre-existing category (such as the ambiguous

nature of the owl/cat hybrid) is lacking, a ‘distortion’ founded upon the ideas or concepts of the artist schema, takes over (p. 64).

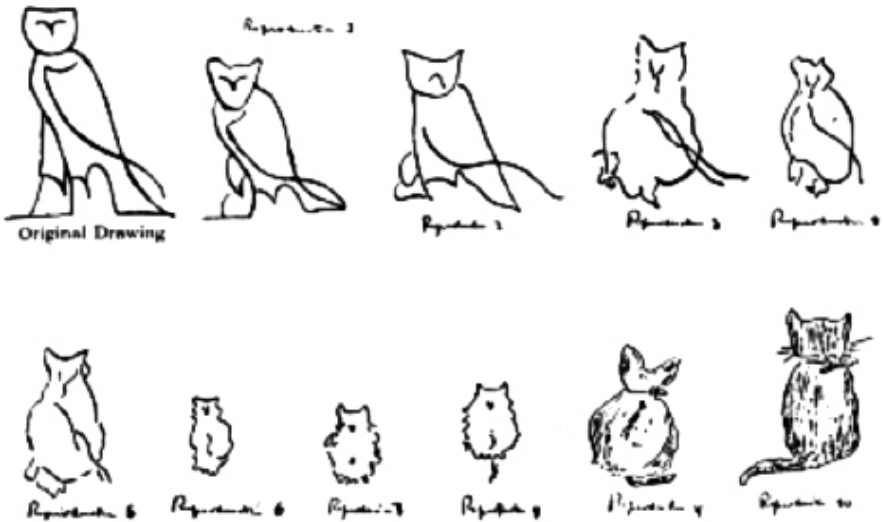


Fig. 3. Transformation of a Hieroglyph through serial copying. From Bartlett 1995 (Gombrich, 1964, p.64).

Thus to Gombrich, the ‘familiarity’ of our own prior experiences “will always remain the likely starting point for the rendering of the unfamiliar” (p. 72). Upon this premise Gombrich maintains that an existing representation (based upon the artist’s schema) will always have an influence over the artist, even when he strives to record the “truth” (p. 72), which he maintains results in “adaptations” of the “motif” which can be seen as “distorted” representations of reality. The workings of such an approach become explicit within his reading of Albrecht Dürer’s woodcut of a rhinoceros (Fig. 4) from 1577.

Albrecht Dürer had never seen a rhinoceros first hand. When creating his woodcut of a rhinoceros, he had to rely upon descriptions and second hand evidence<sup>16</sup>; a sketch of the animal that had been sent to Rome as a present for Pope Leo X and a Portuguese newsletter that was sent to Nuremberg playing out the stories of the bitter rivalry between the elephant and rhinoceros from Pliny the Elder<sup>17</sup> put to test by the King of Portugal (Batrum, 2002, p. 283). It is together with these brief sketches and a description from a newsletter that Gombrich suggests were used to begin to build up Dürer’s depiction (Gombrich, 1964, pp. 70-71), within which he filled in the ‘gaps’ from his own imagination coloured by his own experiences rendering exotic beasts and dragons, evident within the details of the image. From the Portuguese descriptions of the triumphant fight of the rhinoceros, the creature is given skin like plated armour and hard scales covering the legs, it also has a second horn on its back (possibly inherited from the stories of Pliny) with a powerful stance (Fig. 4). It is this fusion of prior experience/expectation and ‘information’ of the descriptions of a rhinoceros that, for Gombrich, builds up the artist

(distorted) depictions of the world.



Fig. 4. Albrecht Dürer, Woodcut – Rhinoceros, 1515.

As the literature has shown, through the underpinnings of empathy, mimesis and psychology to reading of the pictorial image during Western Modernity, we can read the concerns with both representation and the visual that situate the pictorial image: (1) as a product of human perception and imagination, as a ‘copy’ of an external world; (2) as treated as a ‘visual’ artefact, and (3) as no more than an expression of the psychology, emotion and experience of the artist. Such an understanding treats perception and the external world as separate epistemological domains, as such these images are treated as visual representations of something; an owl, a rhinoceros, grounded upon the notion of representation. The Study of Dürer’s Rhinoceros demonstrates well the visual bias inherent within such an approach, through the reading of the psychologically charged and distorted ‘visual features’ such as scales, body armour and dual horns as visual representations (or distortions) of actual ‘visual’ features, other non-visual aspects are not considered. In viewing these images through such a representational model, the epistemological status of the image is reduced to a ‘perversion’, ‘deformation’ or even ‘mis-constual’ of a single concrete reality, representing the psychological disposition of the artist.

In aiming to overcome this epistemological dualism inherent within the symbolic readings of the psychological models of the pictorial image, anthropologist Tim Ingold (2010, pp. 110-131), maintains that in denying the views of Western Modernity and the reliance upon representation that treat artworks and depictions as an expression of the imagination of the artist, what we understand as representational art, should “be understood as ways not of representing the world of immediate experience on a higher, more ‘symbolic’ plane, but of probing more deeply into it and of discovering the significance that lies therein.” Drawing, carving, painting and depicting, to Ingold, are not a matter of representing a world, they are a process of “thinking” a world, of “bringing forth” or, as will be outlined in the following section, enacting a world. As the paper will show, such a move compounds the problems of representation, but still leaves behind the lingering privileging of the visual.

#### 4. Thinking: The [Visual] Enacted Image

In shifting from theorising the pictorial image from representing to thinking, Ingold (2010, p. 130-131) maintains that there is no distinction between ecology and art, that there is no distinction between the “organic provisioning” of the environment and the free play of imagination, they are entwined. Ingold suggests that to move away from an understanding of “depictions”<sup>18</sup> as representational, we must better understand the *relationships* between human beings, animals and the land (p. 112). In doing this, the purpose of a ‘depiction’ emerges as not to *represent*, but to *reveal*, as an *activity* to reach a deeper levels of knowledge and understanding. As such, Ingold maintains that “depictions” are not to be understood as an artistic object for the purpose of further reflection, but as an emerging understanding, between body and world, what could be termed as a process of “embodied thinking” (pp. 126-127). He contends that the activities of carving and painting should not be seen as modalities of the production of art, instead, ‘art’ should be seen as one “peculiar, and historically very specific objectification of the activities of painting and carving” (p. 131), that is, of the activity of “perceptual thinking”. In extending Ingold’s insight, Lamfros Malafouris (2010) suggests that the pictorial image should be approached as an activity in itself, whose purpose is not to alter a ‘fixed’ external world, but to bring forth a world, making available information as a part of a specific human perceptual experience. As such (speaking of the Palaeolithic image), Malafouris focuses upon the ‘activity’ of imaging as being ‘brought forth’ from a new process of acting and thinking within the world, as a result of a way of perceptual ‘learning’ through ‘probing’ it. Here, images are:

[B]efore and beyond representation, they first ‘bring forth’ a new process of acting within this world and at the same time as thinking about it. This thinking however, should not be understood—at least not in the first instance— as that of ‘higher level’ abstract symbolic type. This thinking should be understood in the more basic ‘lower’ sense, namely as a new form of active sensi-motor engagement (Malafouris, 2010, p. 295).

In moving beyond the symbolic ‘higher’ level to a ‘lower’ level of a sensi-motor account, two implications for his theory of ‘imagery’ emerge: (1) that it enables us to understand seeing and perceiving as a form of ‘skillful interactive engagement, as a form of acting in the world’ (p. 295)

and (2) it enables us to conceive the role of the (Paleolithic) image as a ‘continuous prosthetic part of this probing mechanism and thus a cultural extension of the visual brain’ (p. 295). As such, he maintains that the process and act of drawing or painting is an act of bringing forth a world through perceptual learning and compounded to visual thinking. Based upon this, Malafouris is able to claim that the early Paleolithic cave imagery in fact provide a scaffolding device that enables human perception to gradually become aware of itself, or to think, perceptually, through the very production of images. He demonstrates such a process through tracing the use of basic visual gestalts within early cave art, such as similarity and proximity (Fig. 4), which he sees as evidence of ‘bringing forth’ the possibility of new forms of visual thinking by the image-maker, through the activity of painting itself. This conception of the ‘activity of imaging’ requires not a conception as to *what* the image means, but rather *how* it means, investigated through its most salient perceptual features. To Malafouris, such evidence suggests that through the process or activity of ‘imaging’, the underlying mechanism of human perception itself (of that period) become transformed into an object *for* perception and contemplation (p. 299); a process of ‘active visual thinking’. To Malafouris, the ‘invisible’ gestalt visual patterns he traces throughout the visual works offer us a new mode of epistemic access to the visual world of experience, not as representing a world, but as a mode of active, ‘visual’ thinking of a world.

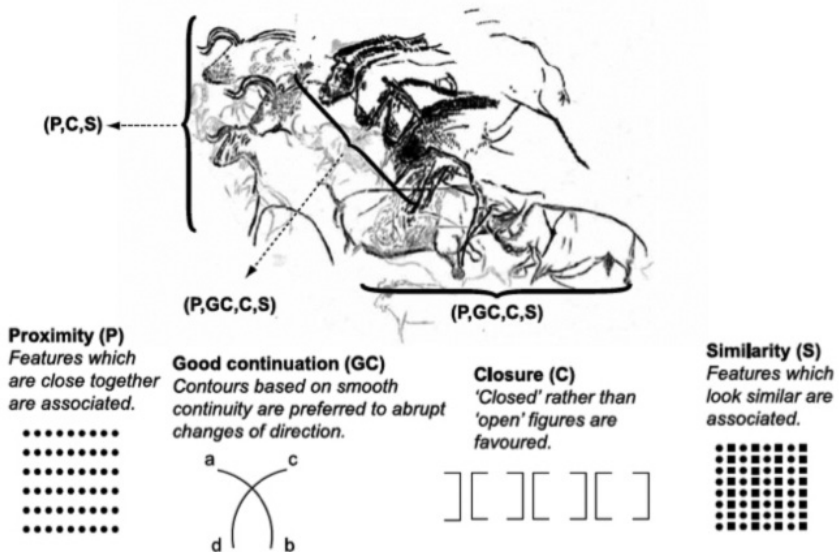


Fig. 5. Major perceptual Gestalts, Chauvet Cave, France. (Malafouris, 2010, p. 299)

The embodied anthropological perspective of Ingold and Malafouris counters the modernist pre-occupation tied to mimesis in structuring understandings of the pictorial image; that of representation. However, the second pre-occupation, the privileging of the visual, is still overestimated, we still ‘think’ visually, Malafouris goes as far as to maintain that the pictorial

image is for exclusive reflection by visual perception, and that visual images give us epistemic access only to visual experiences of the world. The idea of ‘active visual thinking’ a world is also a central focus of enacted models of perception and cognition (Varela *et al.*, 2001; Noe, 2003), however, these models suggest that ‘visual’ perception is guided and structured by the movement of the multi-sensory body, as such the ‘activity of imaging’ can move beyond mere ‘active visual thinking’, to encompass an entire multi-sensory enacted dimension of experience.

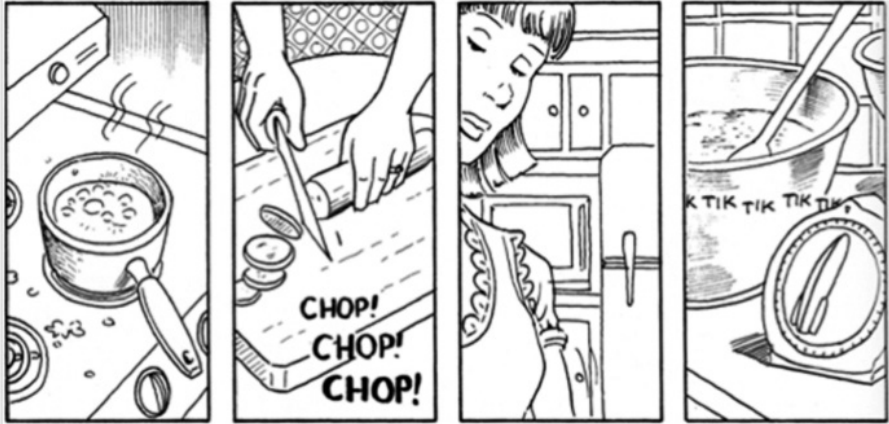


Fig. 6. Kitchen scene as constructed through the narrative of a comic (from McCloud, 1993, p.89).

‘Perceptual Guidance by action’ (Varela *et al.*, 1993, p. 175) maintains that as all stimulations are only possible through movement, as such, what we term ‘visual’ perception is guided by the action of the whole multi-sensory body in the world. Thus, objects are not seen by the visual extraction of features of a pre existing world, but rather by ‘features’ of the world which are enacted by the perceptual guidance of action<sup>19</sup> (1993, p. 175), in which what we perceive (in this case visually) is structured and guided by the actions and movement of the body. As perception is guided and structured by the movement of the body coupled with the world, ‘visual’ perception is redundant to and structured by the rest of the enacted dimension<sup>20</sup>, which provide a situation in which to theorise the pictorial image within a framework in which no one sense modality is privileged. Evidence to support such thought can be found through a number of sources; Bahrick and Lickliter (2000, pp. 190-201) show how auditory information redundantly supports the visual channel, and as such aids in comprehension and learning. Their ‘Intersensory Redundancy Hypothesis’ claims that visual learning is more efficient when redundantly supported by audio experience<sup>21</sup>. Such multi-sensory structuring of visual experience can also be demonstrated through the ‘visual’ media of comics. Scott McCloud (1993, p. 89) notes how in perceiving a seemingly ‘visual’ only media, in which no sound, taste or smell is materially present, we have no problem in establishing, and experiencing, the multi-sensory context of the scene. In discussing a kitchen scene (Fig. 5), he observes that we can almost smell the food cooking, hear the boiling pot and egg timer and taste the food, perceptually through the assumed visual only panels.

With the insights drawn from ‘perceptual guidance by action’ we can theorise an epistemology of the pictorial image that does not restrict itself to that of visual experience alone. As we have seen, enacted non-representational approaches to the epistemological status of pictorial images maintain that, rather than resting an epistemological inquiry upon either perception or a concrete reality, that the epistemological status should be placed within the bringing forth, or thinking, of a world through the activities of the codependent system of body and world. As bodily action does not simply express previously formed mental concepts, bodily actions are a part of the activity in which concepts themselves are formed, the process of depiction can be thought of in terms of a coming to know, and a subsequent bringing forth of a world, a thinking of a world. Thinking is not seen as a ‘visual’ process, but as a multi-sensi-motor process in which no one sense modality is privileged. As such, the enacted pictorial image becomes a ‘trace’, not of a visual world of experience, but of an entire enacted reality.

### **Conclusions: A Monstrous Rhinoceros (as from Life)**

This paper has shown how in bringing together literature from anthropology, philosophy, cognitive science and art history, we can provide a framework in which the nature of, and discussions of, the pictorial image can move beyond the two concerns drawn from modernism; representation and visual bias, and begin to theorise a status that does not reduce itself to a product of perception, and does not restrict itself to that of visual experience. Such an approach, at present, will be theoretical and speculative, however with further work the intricacies of such an approach will become apparent. This paper can suggest, however, that within such an approach, we can ‘read’ not merely visual gestalts and patterns, but the entire enacted experience of the artist that formed it, the entire multi sensory experiences, the culture it is embedded within, the use of technologies and the philosophies created and lived by. Such readings could make available for reflection an epistemic access to an entire embodied experience. The Enacted Pictorial Image as such, is not merely a copy nor a perversion, or an expression of a reality; it *is* a multi-faceted reality itself.

Upon further reflection, a revisiting of Warburg’s approach seems timely in light of the linking of ecology to imagination through the work of Malafouris and Ingold, revealing the ‘lifeblood’ of a human artefact lying within its relations to practices, technologies, beliefs, ideas and imaginations. The analysis of the very multi-sensory, experiential aspects of all of these cultural bindings could reveal the deeper roots of the reality that the images and objects brought forth. Upon this thought the paper will conclude with a further question: could we read, for example, within Dürer’s Rhinoceros the effects of the emergence within the 16<sup>th</sup> century of experiments with technologies of travel and flight, such as parachutes and submarines, on the experiential, perceptual and cognitive awareness of the artist through the pronounced physical weight of the rhinoceros itself?



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Potolski (2006, p. 18) outlines how mimesis first appeared within Plato's dialogues as luxurious and unnecessary, existing only among the Hunters, Workers, Actors and makers of women's adornments. It is defined as secondary and unhealthy to an Ideal state, separating it from the real, rational and essential and equated with the emotional and irrational.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle is careful in his distinctions of different kinds of knowledge (Baktir, 2003). He claims that there are different kinds of truth that are attached to art and philosophy. Art deals with the aesthetic and universal truth, and philosophy with the concrete and absolute truth. Both however, are treated as mimetic.

<sup>3</sup> The Greek culture heavily relied upon mnemonic systems known as the 'art of memory', which existed from the time of the Sophists, through the Middle Ages until the sixteenth century. The 'art of memory' is a theoretical memory system based upon the use of imaginative narrative structures for the improvement of memory, used particularly by orators and poets at the time of Simonides. Frances Yates (1966) traces the sources for the art of memory systems from its Latin roots, within Cicero's *De Oratore*, through the Middle Ages up to the Renaissance.

<sup>4</sup> Yates (1966, p. 19) reveals how through the 'discovery' of the sense of sight as the strongest of all the senses, attributed to Simonides, the art of memory systems rely upon a construction of a 'visual mental image'.

<sup>5</sup> Further conditions for the rules for places can also be seen to rely upon the underpinning of a visual bias. Such as a desolate, deserted, solitary place, of a moderate size, not too brightly lit and not too dark (Yates, 1966, p. 23).

<sup>6</sup> Yates outlines how the rules for images aim to work with the imagination to aid memory by opposing the banal though creating visually striking imaginary: "When we see in everyday life things that are petty, ordinary, and banal, we generally fail to remember them, because the mind is not being stirred by anything novel or marvellous. But if we see or hear something exceptionally base, dishonourable, unusual, great, unbelievable, or ridiculous, that we are likely to remember for a long time" (Yates, 1966, p. 25).

<sup>7</sup> It is through such striking and unusual images that memory is helped by "arousing emotional affects", though figures "wearing crowns or purple cloaks, bloodstained or smeared with paint, of human figures dramatically engaged in some activity", creating an unusual and extraordinary imaginary world (Yates, 1966, p. 23).

<sup>8</sup> Vischer's theories are situated within the prolonged debate between Formalist and Idealist philosophies during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, within which he distinguishes two different understandings of content, drawn from the Formalist and Idealist positions respectively: (1) the objectively given content, which is directly presented to us by the object of contemplation in its own right and (2) the subjective content, our own psychological life which as percipients we bring into contact with any and every phenomenon capable of being grasped aesthetically. In attempting to find a middle ground within the debate, Vischer employed the concept of empathy that he maintained could exist both "in the case of aesthetic perception and artistic presentation" (Vischer, in Harrison, p. 690).

<sup>9</sup> The joining of the psychological (through *empathy*) to the anthropological was first outlined within the work of Wilhelm Worringer (1908) in his *Abstraction and Empathy*.

<sup>10</sup> Warburg's positioning of the epistemological within perception is driven by the denial of the formalist 'autonomy of the arts', and its belief in separating the formal artistic object from the context of its formation (Wind, 1983, pp. 23-24).

<sup>11</sup> Warburg's theory of the pictorial image stems from his research and theories of 'primitive' (pre-literate) symbolism, primarily evident through his research regarding the Hopi Serpent Ritual.

<sup>12</sup> Warburg use of the term 'Aesthetic Sterilization' to describe the stripping down of an 'image' (mental or pictorial) of any belief and prior aesthetic so as to allow another aesthetic based upon new beliefs to be created in the imagination. Gombrich (1986, p. 198) notes how this can be best summarised through the description of the process of the *ars memoria* in creating new imaginative images from verbal descriptions: "No religion, so long as it is believed, can have that kind of beauty which we find in the Gods of Titian, of Botticelli, or of our own romantic poets. To this day you cannot make poetry of that sort out of the Christian Heaven and Hell. The Gods must be, as it were, disinfected of belief; the last taint of the sacrifice, and of urgent practical interest, the selfish prayer, must be washed away from them, before that other divinity can come to light in the imagination." (C.S Lewis, in Gombrich, 1970, p. 198).

<sup>13</sup> Particularly through the work of perceptual psychologists Rudolf Arnheim (1974) and Herman Von Helmholtz (1910).

<sup>14</sup> His model of perception is an attempt to reorient all the traditional views of the human mind, which were based upon what he termed the 'bucket theory of the mind'. The concept of the mind in which sense-data are deposited and processed.

<sup>15</sup> An image (an Egyptian hieroglyph) is given to a subject, who must reproduce the image accurately from memory. This reproduction is then given to a second subject who also reproduces it from memory.

<sup>16</sup> The description of the rhinoceros Dürer inscribed on the top of his woodcut outlines his understanding of the beast: "On 1 May 1515 was brought from India to the great and powerful King Emanuel of Portugal at Lisbon a live animal called a Rhinoceros. His form is here represented. It has the colour of speckled Tortoise and it is covered with thick scales. It is like an elephant in size, but lower on its legs and almost invulnerable. It has a strong sharp horn on its nose, which it sharpens on stones. The stupid animal is the elephant's deadly enemy. The elephant is very frightened of it, as when they meet it runs [...]. Because the animal is so well armed, there is nothing that the elephant can do to it" (Translation of text inscribed with Dürer's Rhinoceros woodcut; Bartrum, 2002, p. 287).

<sup>17</sup> Chapter 29 of Pliny's *The Natural History* states: At the same games the rhinoceros was also exhibited, an animal which has a single horn projecting from the nose; it has been frequently seen since then. This too is another natural-born enemy of the elephant. It prepares itself for the combat by sharpening its horn against the rocks; and in fighting directs it chiefly against the belly of its adversary, which it knows to be the softest part. The two animals are of equal length, but the legs of the rhinoceros are much the shorter:

its skin is the colour of box-wood. Cuvier says that this was the single-horned rhinoceros of India. The commentators have been at a loss to reconcile this description with the Epigram of Martial, Spect. Ep. xxii., where he speaks of the rhinoceros exhibited by Domitian, as having two horns. It has been proved that this latter was of the two-horned species, by the medals of that emperor, now in existence. Martial, Spect. Ep. ix., seems also to have been acquainted with the single-horned species. That with two horns is mentioned by Pausanias as the Æthiopian bull. We learn from modern naturalists, that the two-horned species is a native of the southern parts of Africa, while that with one horn is from Asia (Bostock, 1957).

<sup>18</sup> Ingold restricts his analysis to the paintings, drawings, carvings and sculptures of a certain peoples that are known as ‘hunter-gatherers’ within anthropological literature. Such a people have a very intimate relationship with the land and with animals, which stands somewhat in contrast to a Westerner.

<sup>19</sup> Varela demonstrates perceptual guidance by action through his discussion of the ‘visual guidance by action’ through Held and Hein’s kitten study, in which “Held and Hein raised kittens in the dark and exposed them to light only under controlled conditions. A first group of animals were allowed to move around normally, but each of them was harnessed to a simple carriage and basket that contained a number of the second group of animals. The two groups therefore shared the same visual experience, but the second group was entirely passive. When the animals were released after a few weeks of this treatment, the first group of kittens behaved normally, but those who had been carried around behaved as if they were blind: they bumped into objects and fell over edges”. (Varela, 1993, p. 175).

<sup>20</sup> As outlined elsewhere (Woodward, 2010), the non-visual nature of an ‘enacted dimension’ of experience, as involving every aspect of possible human experience, in which there exists no division of the sense experience.

<sup>21</sup> Bahrick and Lickliter (2000) showed that five-month-old infants could differentiate between two five-element rhythms (of hammers hitting a surface) when the rhythms were presented bi-modally, (audio and video) but showed no evidence of differentiating the rhythms when they were presented uni-modally (video only). These studies all agree that auditory information redundantly supports the visual channel, and as such aids in comprehension and learning.

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