## Oculus imaginarius

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The flow of our mental images is so permanent and habitual that we rarely attempt to observe its appearance . When we evoke a mental image we consider what is represented and not how it is represented. Yet: What colors? What forms? Which frame? The appearance of the unpredictably colored crystallizations which form a mental image, such as the neurons present it to our mind, cannot be rendered as such. The main reason is that the neurotransmitters display these images without material support : no canvas, paper or screen. The project of restoring them appears doomed to failure, hopeless…

This project, however, proposes to expose a particular category of representation — within the very broad framework covered by the notion of a mental image: what our mind forms after the utterance of words — hence, more or less abstract, symbolic or psychological objects or concepts.

The association of two subjects, such as stability and perturbation, forms a mental structure, an abstract structure corresponding to a feeling: a perturbed stability... This is not limited to a phenomenon placed in balance, a dancer losing equilibrium, or any physical or psychological modification of an established entity, but to all of this at the same time, a kind of formula.

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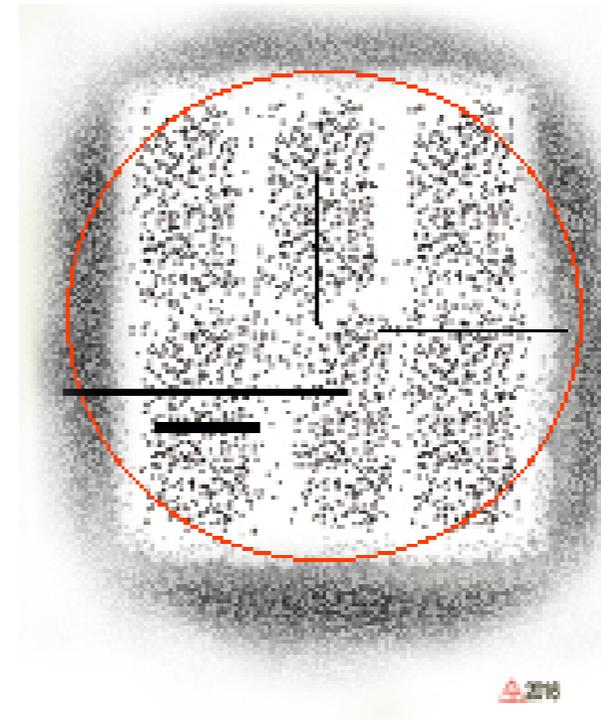
The notion of the mental image covers all cerebral representations of a physical object, a concept, an idea, or a situation other than direct perception. In other words, it is any image that we form in our mind without its object being before our eyes. These mental images populate our memory and serve our imagination. The first existence of a mental image has its origin in optical perception - it is therefore related to the present - but the rest of its existence will take place in memory and will relate to non-optical processes. To the visibility, sharpness and all the details that the present offered, fragmentations, alterations and reconstructions by memory will succeed.

If I think of my cat, for example, I content myself with having more or less «seen» my cat, without taking any interest in his «rendering». If I were presented a photograph, or a pen drawing, or a painting on canvas, or a video showing my cat, the modality of each representation would appear clearly - but that does not matter in the case of a mental image. These images are inscribed in a non materiality - except if you attribute one to the neural system. Above all : the fugacity of the image and its immateriality do not allow it to separate the subject from its form : signified and signifier are totally intertwined.

The experiments proposed here of transpositions on paper, canvas or screen, brie-

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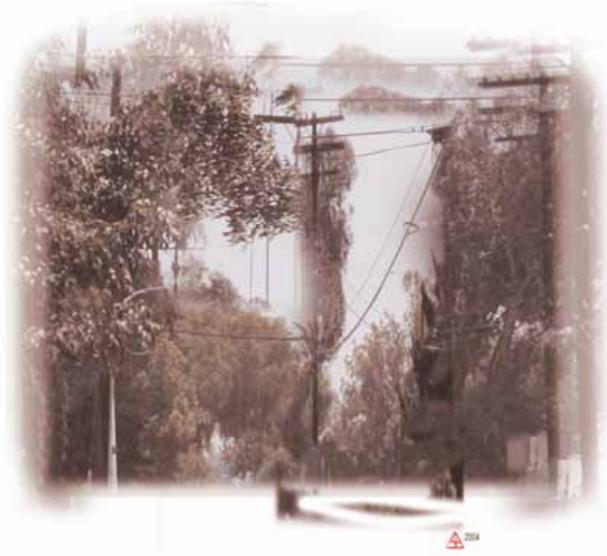
fly *in vitro*, of an image that has been formed in memory, are not to be situated in the psychological or philosophical reflection posing the question of reality versus its representation, or in that of dreams and surrealism. They are to be considered in the field of pure representation : what outlines, colors, traces, for an image formed in our mind ? Every one, probably, has its own graphic dimensions, its singular automorphy, but the reasonable hypothesis of a *mundus archetypus* suggests possible collective expressions.

The subject of each image, of course, remains essential: no mental image without subject is as abstract as it can be. And the subjects which form these mental images are naturally as numerous as the subjects which we can distinguish in the world. But if, like Buffon for animal species or Hubble for galaxies, the subject of a mental representation can be categorized by hierarchies, typologies, substances, by degree of abstraction, by qualities, ideas, or dimensions the types of these mental representations, on the other hand, challenge the analysis. At most, we can venture to distinguish two genres or two great systems.

Figurative : faces, situations, landscapes, events... whose appearances are to be compared to photographic and cinema representations.

Abstract : mathematics, diagrams, schematizations, plans, configurations, hierarchies, mechanisms, organisms, whose ap-

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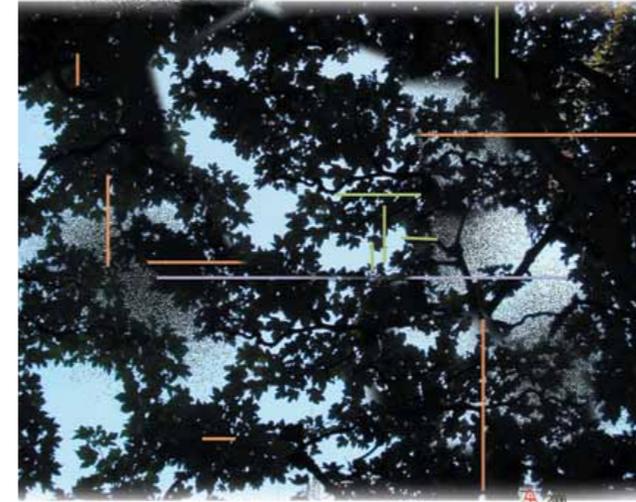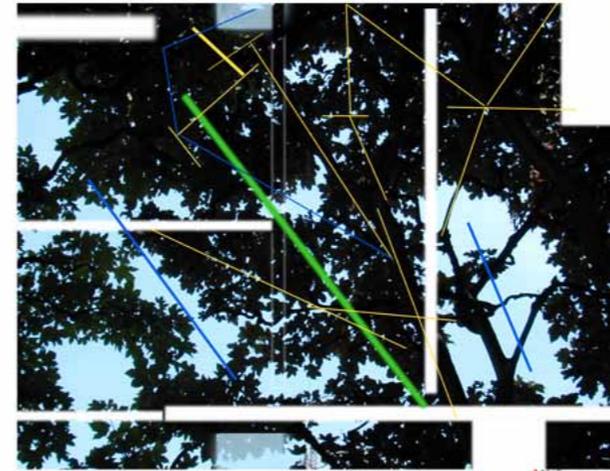
pearances are compared to geometry.

The visual domain alone is not concerned, all the senses are involved.

In comparison to media like painting, photography, etc ... which belong to optical vision, not many studies, it seems, apply to the specific observation of what should be called a «neural» media. The unseizable character and the incomposable intricacy of the signified and the signifier probably explain this. There is something of the *unanschaulichkeit* invoked by quantum physics.

Depending on the frequency with which the event recurs, such as seeing an object or person several times, the neurons concerned reinforce the «background» information; But in our mind the event acquires a different sense than when it was before us. Details disappear, fuzzy, amorphous or non-existent spaces are established, proportions and hierarchies are organized differently in symbolic figures, in light and
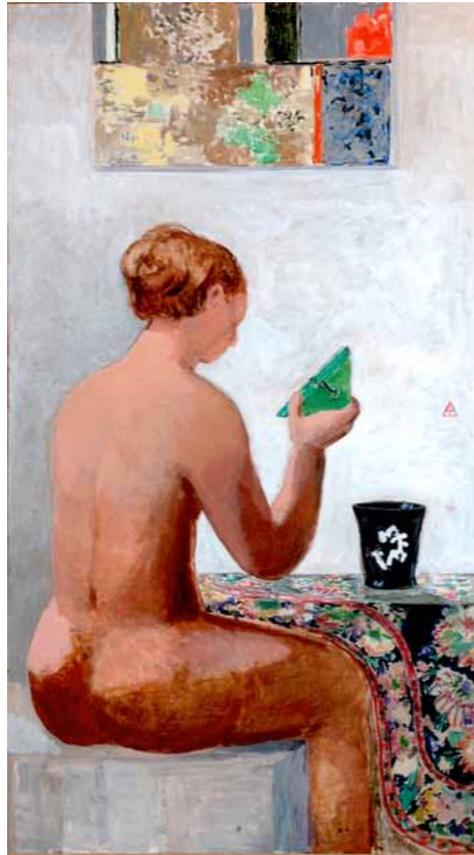
geometric relations ...

For psychology and philosophy, the notion of mental image covers an abstract psychic construction related to schema or structure. For Aristotle: «Soul never thinks without a mental image»; Mozart describes the completed work «in his head» that he can embrace at a glance, like a statue - specifying that «It's a treat!».

Since the origins of representation, the effort of the artist is given according to a binomial : original image / memorized image, (ie retinal view / mind's view), with two options:

1/ To get as close as possible to the present image - O -. Painter and model… the painter's gaze verifies as much as necessary, and in the present moment. His reproduction of the visible original is given by back and forth verifications and adjustments between what he did on his canvas and the present visible subject.

2 / To get as close as possible to the image it has become in memory, in the mind's eye - M -. The painter is still at work but the model is no longer there: the Gods do not willingly pose, the bison do not stay still nor does the landscape by the window of a high-speed train. The painter then resorts to his imagination, which resorts to his memory. His reproduction of the visible original is given by back and forth verifications and adjustments between what he did on his canvas

and his memory.

In any case, the mental image formula is not separated from the subject it represents because the subject is very intimately connected to it. Hence, when Mozart speaks of «statue» this leads eventually us to imagine a statue made up of sounds.

Since the term «statue», historically marked, evokes some antique figure on a pedestal, a more abstract and contemporary idea of a sound-sculpture could be advanced… Anyway, when Mozart says «how one embrace a statue at a glance,» he does not say what it looked like at one glance. What did this construction look like in his mind? And what does it look like in ours? I regret that Mozart did not specify his vision, but could he have? He transposed the «statue» which was certainly untranslatable to any other, into a readable score. Certainly … who knows? I begin to dream of it. Music, precisely, is a matter that involves specific mental representations. The articulation of a musical phrase can be translated by the articulation of geometric elements - as, inversely, with Varese for example, a geometrical structure can inspire a musical phrase. This is not transcription but something similar, a similar flavor, let's say a resemblance.

Sustained observation of mental images is extreme. The images kept in memory change like a sea anemone pulled out of

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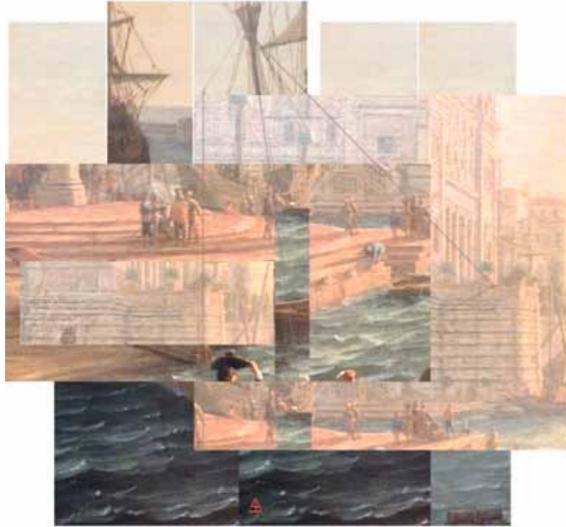
water and they flee like stars with dawn. If, in the case of dreams, their representations seem clear and precise, it is that the question of precision arises differently - or probably does not arise - in the course of the dream. The rest of the time the projection that the mind makes of the images that it has memorized does not take place on a screen like that of a computer. The projection support - the visual cortex - is not a liquid crystal display ... What we find, if we try to imagine a support, resembles a dark cloud vaguely scintillating and unstable, amidst gray and scattered shadows. The images that the mind forms, project themselves into this milieu and reflect the tones of an absence of screen, much like a cinematographic projection which, rather than being oriented towards a white surface would be towards a gray or twilight sky ... Like a solarized photo, a Seurat, dancing dust in the sunlight?

An immense part of mental images is not linked to the elaboration of a musical composition, a spatial memorization or scientific research. The reason for their appearance is most often associated with the evocation of a person and this in an emotional context.

One imagines «her or his face» an image more or less photographic. Among the subjects that occupy the mind the sentimental domain certainly represents

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an important part, as Marbeuf sings ...

The love of my thoughts, as with a brush,
When I close my eyelid, paints you in my mind ».[1]

This category evokes a mental representation that cinema intends to restore, too often casually, by combinations of cross fadings and superpositions. In fact, once memorized, images from the past have become in our minds something completely different in essence and meaning. And this is something that cinema does not reach, because it uses pseudo-objective photographic images that will never represent anything other than a pseudo present.

In a reverie, mingled memories of a smile and those of a garden in the rain, associated with what one has before one's eyes at the present moment, — the clamor of a market perhaps, — provokes assonances, reminiscences, sensations. They project briefly a different reality, in a moment «dazzling, unique, and already obscured. « Julio Cortázar observes that the state we define as distraction is perhaps a different form of attention. Cortázar jokingly situates it «in the form of a sort of yawning to the crows, of a misguidance, which projects in a perspective of reality where it is difficult to gain a foothold and even more difficult to remain.»
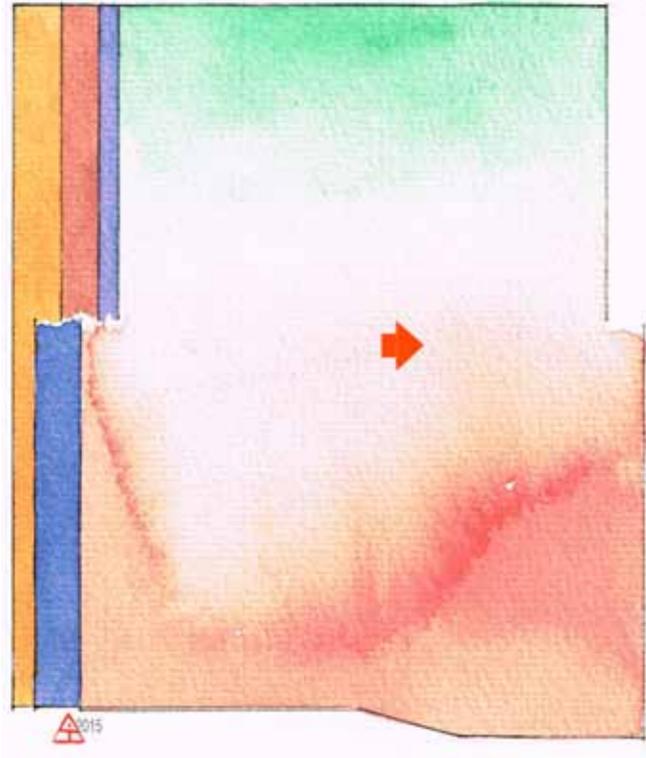
To restore, on a traditional support, a mental image such as it presents itself to the sight of our mind being unaccessible, we'll use a process inspired by mathematics. What does mathematics do? To effectively describe a phenomenon, they duplicate the «real» world in another world that enables us to understand it. They attract and transpose the question to their «homes», so to speak; They deal with this issue and then come back to experience it in «our» world. The subject of each mental image considered as a mathesis singularis *is complex enough not to blur its reading with style or peremptory individual aesthetic. Paul Klee, almost a century ago, already warned : «It is certain that our turbulent time has still confused what was already confusing».[2] To my purpose, I use visual elements deliberately drawn from the very wide range offered today by the history of painting, especially abstract painting experimentations of the so-called modern period.*

Jean-Max Albert, Paris, 2017.

Notes

1   Pierre de Marbœuf,
    Recueil des poèmes,
    Hachette, 2012, Paris

2   Paul Klee,
    Über moderne kunst,
    Conférence, Iéna, 1924

Illustrations