Klaus Sachs-Hombach / Jörg R. J. Schirra (Eds.)

Origins of Pictures

Anthropological Discourses

in Image Science

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Dedicated in cordial friendship
and deep respect to
Arno Ros
on the occasion of his
70th birthday in December 2012

CONTENTS

PHILIPP STOELLGER

The Image – As Strong as Death?
On Death as the Origin of the Image

1.   Hermeneutical introduction: discomfort caused
        by the *logic of origin*

The approach to ask for an origin as this volume attempts to do constitutes a controversial challenge. In terms of a sociology of knowledge it leads to the *logics of origin*, the quest for principles and their consequences which derives from myth. The origin is the beginning of all. Here, everything is already included although not yet real. With omnipotence, the origin comprises all upcoming developments. Myths are narrations that universally describe and demonstrate the way, the reason and the purpose of all existence. Hesiod's Theogony is a myth where everything originates from night. In such myths, the *logic of origin* explains all that is to come, and it provides the secret key to the world's mysteries because everything is already inherent. But can they provide a satisfying model of explanation or is what they offer too simplistic despite the conceded ›logics‹ and wisdom of myths?

Metaphysical philosophy comprehends this mythological requirement for principles, it offers the same structure in other modalities. It claims that our knowledge of the principle of all would allow us to refer back to the nature and essence of all and not just its apparent existence. Everything incorporates its origin in this general way of explanation. However, if we use naive or critical metaphysics, there is an explanation for everything if we just know its basic essence or concept. This is an attempt of enormous

simplificaton: The knowledge of essence saves us extensive and sophisticated endeavours to understand the diversity and plurality of reality. Instead of struggling to grasp the diversity of all being, the realisation of origin facilitates the understanding of all at once.

Christian theology as well as its traditional ancient ancestor used to operate with similar strategies. If God is the universal origin, creator and principle of all being, then we can interpret many occurrences in a rather sensible way – in favour of oversimplifications and banalities. The *sancta simplicitas* of such logics is attractive but fails to preserve the complexity of concrete, individual and complicated issues.

Considering the principles of myths, metaphysics and theology, why should we ask for the origin of the image if everything derives from this one origin of all? The present volume provocatively asks for multiple origins. This seems to be a scheming *contradictio in adjecto*, almost an oxymoron: if there is the one origin, there cannot be any more. If we postulate multiple origins, we deny the singular beginning. The question of origin is thereby disseminated and so to speak methodically pluralised. This applies primarily to the historical version of the question: When and where did the image emerge? We could answer this question by means of phylogenesis and ontogenesis, universal history or individual history. We could also examine this question from the perspective of interculturality or a certain culture in particular, of general history of religion or respectively the history of Christianity. Both paleanthropology and historic anthropology could ask for the origin of the image and could start and end at the thrilling differentiations of cave paintings. Developmental psychologists could develop experiments to identify the beginnings of awareness, cognition and usage of images in children and primates. Do all these experimental approaches to examine the image still serve the pretension of realising its origin? This might at least be the case in historical research and empirical research might serve this aim: Even if they do not define the origin, they might find the beginning to identify and explain critical aspects. The logics of origin are even present in empirical neuroscience. If a neuroscientist locates which and when brain activities happen, he might find out about the experience and meaning of image. But this too only stays a faint compensation, a need for the *arche*, as even neuroscientists no longer try to identify the essence of man but its human nature.

»I would prefer not to ...« – especially since the second plural of this volume's title and question, particularly the search for origins of images, is not without consequences, in contrast it creates confusion and complication as what does it mean? Which image are we talking about? Is it the Hebrew *zäläm* or *d'mut*, the Greek *eikon, eidos, eidolon*, the German *Abbild, Vorbild, Nachbild, Urbild* or the English *icon, image* or *picture*? Finally the second plural *images* declares the question of origin as an absurdity.

2.　　Which origins – which image?

The following remarks seek to illustrate *the image* in itself in its very elementary meaning and as undifferentiated as possible. They aim to differentiate between the *object* and the *image* and this issue of difference appears to be debatable. Horst Bredekamp follows Alberti's theory which states that every case of formed or shaped nature constitutes images (BREDEKAMP et al. 2003).[1] From there, it would also be possible to understand the mere manipulation of nature as the beginning of the image. Creating a stele from stones that are easily obtainable, or by putting one on top of another only could count as a manipulation as such. It is to be seen as a human intervention that leaves a visual mark. A different perspective than that of nature and culture is equally possible. Everything that is taken out of its original context, of its common way of utilisation could be suspected of being an image, like Blanchot's *désoeuvrement* (1989)[2] or Agamben's *inoperativeness* suggest (1998: 62, 1993: 93, 2000: 140; cf. DURANTAYE 2009: 18ff.). That is certainly an important measure to suspect the unusability of a *je ne sais quoi* of being art, but it is too specific to actually distinguish anything from being something that is an image.

Now, the meaning of *image* will preliminarily be defined as broadly as possible: An image is usually a human-made visual artefact that is created to be the focus of attention. But this differentiation, too, causes theoretical challenges. What about the *objet ambigu?* Is a shell with visual quality beyond question an image, even if it is not an artefact made by an artifex? There are natural things like a piece of driftwood that are qualified by visual at-

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1　On page 9 he refers to Alberti (2000: 142).
2　Blanchot 1989: cf. the translator's note on this concept on p. 13.

traction to the extent that they are object of exposition, like the cult statue of Dionysos. In that sense there are non-artificial images that only can be accepted as such. On the other hand, our oversensitive modern view of the visual world perceives images in every object. Accordingly, there is the frantic and inflamed eye, for which any thing or constellation can become an image.

Having considered the nature of origin in mythical, metaphysical, theological and historical respects, we now illuminate the aspect of origin under systematic and hermeneutical viewpoints. Three perspectives, firstly the semiotical, secondly the phenomenological and thirdly the anthropological, are consulted to distinguish between the object and the visual figure as such. Each perspective analyses the imaginative and reflexive point that determines the distinction between imagery and other visual phenomena.

2.1　*The semiotic distinction*

The semiotic perspective considers the question of this volume by asking for the ›origin‹ of signs, especially those of iconic or visual nature. Summarised: Has the visual reference its origin in the presence or in the absence of an object? Is an X named in its full presence and direct perception (as a friend is recognised by his name) or is the X not named until it is disappeared from the present perception (»Was that Jack right now?«)? Obviously, both references are possible. But if the intrinsic function of signs is to ›represent‹ X when X is not present anymore, then the use of signs has its origin not in the presence of X but in its absence. This would be the exact function of signs – to represent and substitute X through a sign even when X is not present.

To specify this semiotically, it is to be noted that the triadic semiosis resolves from a dynamic object that is removed from perception, in opposite to the present object that is perceived ›immediately‹.

When a car starts and the driver hears a strident creak, he will comment the obvious with saying something like »Once again the fan beltl«. He perceived the noise and named something that is inaccessible to his perception, namely the fan belt. In this case, it is an abductive reasoning because it could also have been a marten.

Ergo: The sign has its origin in the absence of the named. Therefore, a sign is always an addition of the missing object. This is a ›negative‹ theory of

signs unlike other theories that define the origin of figure under full percep-
tion, pure present or even revelation of an event or a god (cf. MERSCH 2006).
This negativistic thesis should not be determined in a way that signs would
be understood as a deficient compensation for an unavailable reality. To
understand language as techniques, or signs as instruments to operate with
objects in absence is not necessarily linked to a (Gehlen invoking) theory
of compensation (GEHLEN 1988).

2.2 *Phenomenological perspective*

2.2.1 *From object to image-object*

Hans Jonas' theory of *homo pictor* (JONAS 1982) is the image-theoretical version
of such concise terms like Cassirer's *animal symbolicum* (CASSIRER 2009: 26,
68) or Blumenberg's *animal metaphoricum*. The anthropological thesis ac-
cording to which man becomes originally man by recognising images as
images must be clarified in regard to its *original* sense. Even if it might be
self-explanatory that even hunter-gatherers perceived a cave painting as
an image and (for example) didn't attack it, what is happening regarding
perception and cognition is not self-explanatory at all.

What does it mean to perceive something as an image – to recognise a setup
stone or hands on a wall as a visual mark? How should we determine what is
happening when we randomly perceive and classify an object as an image?

The central point of Jonas' theory is that man is no longer exclusively
seen as the *zoon logon echon* but as the *zoon eikonon* (or *eidon*) *echon* as well.
Competence of language and image are stated as being equally constitu-
tive and equally substantive. If that is supposed to be his punchline, it
would be strange to understand image competence in the light of linguistic
competence. This devolvement would seem all too natural, but it would
be contradictory to the *iconic difference.*

If we understand the liminal, initial and basic identification of an im-
age as an image in the model of predication (SACHS-HOMBACH 2001) or in
analogy to predication (SIMON 2012), then the *logon echon* would determine
the example and generate insight. This indicates a problem. How can per-
ception and cognition of images as images be understood differently than

language-guided cognition? Husserl and Cassirer[3] suggested a prepredica-
tive synthesis (HUSSERL 1975: 27f., 83f., 2003: 98f., 1973: 77ff.; cf. SMITH 2003;
CASSIRER 1957: 202, 2009, 2005). We could also constitute Wittgensteins
examples of »seeing as« (WITTGENSTEIN 1958: 194f.) as cases of perceptual
judgement. In either case, the basic image competence is understood in the
medium of linguistic determination and analogue to language. But that is
precarious since at the threshold between seeing and interpreting images
on the one hand and *immediately* understanding them (SIMON 1989: 76ff.)
on the other hand we face a vacuum where either words are missing or al-
ready sound too familiar.

In terms of semiotics and interpretation philosophy (GOODMAN 1978;
ABEL 1993; LENK 1993), we could phrase as carefully as possible: A distinction
in interpretative perception is already made as we distinguish a setup stone
from the untouched, one mark on the cave wall from all the others, one sig-
nificant feature from another, as later the wall from the frame, the frame
from the picture, one picture from the other and so forth. Usually one object
is specifiable from all the others by a visual mark that is spontaneously and
automatically recognised as a difference and guides perception accordingly.

However, it can be observed that especially this kind of *immediate* dif-
ferentiation has been repeatedly counteracted in postmodern art, at the
latest by Duchamp. Duchamp visualised that the future artist would no
longer create works of art but simply point at something and say: »Thus
is art« (DE DUVE 1998).[4] If this is the case, then the foresaid differentiation
becomes invisible and the mere function of a deictic act. It is debatable,
whether we should determine this liminal discrimination as a perceptual
judgement. Thus, it would already be conceived as a predication and its
outcome as a proposition, analogue to linguistic judgements, which schema
would be encoded in the perceptual judgement. According to Hogrebe,

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3 Ernst Cassirer analyses the unity of sense and sensibility in perception as the result of a pre-
predicative synthesis in his central concept of »symbolic pregnancy«, in: *The Philosophy of Sym-
bolic Forms, Vol. 3: The Phenomenology of Knowledge*. transl. by Ralph Manheim. New Haven [Yale
University Press] 1957, part 2, chapter V (»Symbolic Pregnancy«), especially p. 202; for Cassir-
er's notion of perception see also Ernst Cassirer: *The Concept of Group and the Theory of Perception*
(1944). In: *ECW 24. Aufsätze und kleine Schriften*. ed. by Birgit Recki et al. Hamburg [Meiner] 2009,
p. 209-250; for a comparism of Cassirer and Husserl in this respect see Oswald Schwemmer:
Kulturphilosophie. Eine medientheoretische Grundlegung. München [Fink] 2005, p. 144-149.

4 For this phrasing referring to Duchamp see Thierry de Duve: *Kant after Duchamp*. Cambridge
[MIT] 1998, p. 3-87.

PHILIPP STOELLGER

The Image – As Strong as Death? On Death as the Origin of the Image

it is to be distinguished between the rarely discrete or even *indiscrete* as a *mantic* phenomena and a semantic one. In other words: It is a significance and difference that is conceived neither linguistically nor propositionally or conceptually if we want to avoid retrospective overrationalisation (HOGREBE 1992: 126). That perception is *interpreted* is also a retrospective metaphor for something that acts rather deictical than lexical. A striking object that shows up is perceived as something that demands our attention, as something worth noticing that stands out from the rest. Our attention already distinguishes and judges what we perceive as a response to visual clues.

The discrimination via attentional perception has a synthetic character and the result is the prepredicative synthesis named *image-object*. Because of the unintentional nature of this synthesis, it is recommended to speak of a passive synthesis according to Husserl, analogue to his concepts of connotation or association and affection (HUSSERL 1966). The advantage of these concepts is that it is not assumed that a subject conducts the act of synthesis consciously and intentionally. It rather happens to be without conscious control and subject manipulation and thus without purpose. This might be the critical indication of homo pictor's unintentional perception of image as image.

There are aesthetic strategies that rely on and employ this discrimination and are subject to aesthetic interventions and practises, where perception is irritated for example in the presentation of relics. To what is a body part transformed when it is presented as a part of a holy person? Something quite similar occurs to artificially deformed skulls of enemies and ancestors for example in New Ireland and Jericho for political, social and religious reasons.

When a human being dies, it seems to turn into an inartificial, an-aesthetic and anti-creational dimension of existence: Does the dead body of a man become the image of the living man or even the iconic display of it through the presentation at the funeral?

The image awareness is initially implicit but later explicit and distinguishable from that. As an attentional awareness and its interrelated discrimination, it is secondary and it intentionally refers to the perceptual process. We could describe this process as ›subliminal‹ according to Leibniz' ›petits perceptions‹, as we hear the sound of the sea without consciously listening to it and we perceive an object as an image without consciously recognising it (LEIBNIZ 1996: 54f., 1992).

2.2.2 From the image-object to its sujet

The distinction between an image-object and the image-sujet is already beyond this elementary synthesis in which an image-object is constituted, as the synthesis of those aspects of both object and image are already included in that what is forming the image-object (HUSSERL 1980: 23ff.).

> »Simple perception does not deliver an image in a conventional sense but spots an object that can function as an image later on. But how can an object function as such an image? How should it be comprehensible that we don't settle for the image-object that is perceived by us but we (through this image-object) refer to another object?« (HUSSERL 1980: 23ff.)[5]

Image perception as a differentiation leads to a perception of an object as an image. But what is perceived then refers to a different dimension: when the strokes and spaces on the cave wall are perceived as bisons or Pollocks paint splatters are perceived as aesthetic composition. We can find a number of aesthetic strategies at this stage of transition that expound the problems of such phenomena, as non-figurativeness close to emptiness or pretended contingency. An example would be Richter's surprisingly non-figurative window for the Cologne Cathedral. But his work seems to show its point much more than the equivalents of Lüpertz which were (surprisingly) predictable. Husserl:

> »We recognise the portrait as an image but we do not mean the image-object that first appears in different shades of grey or as an already colourful painting. It is recognised as an image of a certain person. But to simply ›mean‹ something would not be of any help. There must be an intentional act of visualising, a conscious perception of the object – the objectification that constitutes the new object« (HUSSERL 1980: 23ff.).[6]

> »What really exists, besides the physical object called ›painting‹ or the

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5 »Mit einer schlichten Auffassung hätten wir also im eigentlichen Sinn noch gar kein Bild, sondern höchstens den Gegenstand, der nachher als Bild fungiert. Wie kommt er dazu, so fungieren? Wie soll es verständlich werden, dass, während uns das Bildobjekt erscheint, wir uns damit nicht genügen lassen, sondern mittels seiner ein anderes Objekt meinen?«, ibid; whenever there is no English translation available, German quotations are translated by the author.

6 »Das Porträt gilt uns als Bild, d.h. den zunächst ›in‹ Graunuancen erscheinenden Bildgegenstand, oder den schon in Farben erscheinenden eines Gemäldes, meinen wir nicht. Er gilt uns eben als Bild der und der Person. Aber ein bloßes Meinen kann da nicht helfen. Es muss doch ein Vorstellen im Sinn eines Auffassens zugrunde liegen, eines Objektivierens, das den neuen Gegenstand intentional konstituiert«, ibid.

PHILIPP STOELLGER

The Image – As Strong as Death? On Death as the Origin of the Image

canvas with its arrangement of colours, is a certain composition of emotions inside the beholder when he is contemplating the painting and his opinions about it as soon as he is consciously attending it« (HUSSERL 1980: 22).[7]

The result is a visual re-presentation and a duality of perception because of

>»a perception in which the image-object appears with the intrinsic feature of representing an object, focusing on the image-object and furthermore to the represented object that is constituted by that. And another form of perception facilitated by a potential transformation in which the image-object is not actually given but a modified comprehension of the same contents, and this would result in a new simple perception: the visual re-presentation (>das bildliche Vergegenwärtigen<). But it seems to me that the difference is only determined by the act of meaning something on various levels and that there is always the duality of perception« (HUSSERL 1980: 28).[8]

To acknowledge this >duality of perception< would be a strong argument, as it claims that we would inevitably perceive everything as an image-object. The question for the origin of the image would be metaphysically and mythically eternalised – >once and for all<. That could not possibly be true.

2.3 Anthropological perspective: Homo necans as homo pictor – and the dead man as his own image

The anthropological theories of animal symbolicum, animal metaphoricum and homo pictor identify man as the origin of the images both productive and receptive. Man produces images and therefore instinctively perceives

them as images and human-made. (Fig.: Hands: I was here). Belting agrees: »Obviously the human is the place of origin of images. Why >obviously<? Because he is a natural home for images, a living organ of images so to speak« (BELTING 2001: 65, 57).

Beltings anthropology of images explicitly examines the question of origins, as for example the question of »the role of death for the reason to represent and utilise images« or when he asks for the »analogy between image and death that is as ancient as the development of images itself«. »Images refer to a form of absence whose embodiment is death itself« (BELTING 2001: 143). »The conflict between absence and presence that images still reveal today has its roots in the experienced death of others. We can visualise images just like we can visualise dead persons even if they are not present« (BELTING 2001: 143). »Lost places still exist in our bodily memory in forms of images« (BELTING 2001: 57).

Some people value the experience of art as an experience of transcendence to the extend that aesthetic and religious experiences become existentially similar. Belting however emphasises a >pre-aesthetic< or even >an-aesthetic< state that is originally placed in the past. According to him the experience of images is analogue to the experience of death. What does this tell us?

»The image of a dead man is therefore no anomaly but the actual original meaning of the essence of image« (BELTING 2001: 144). Simply put: the image produces a present illusion of an absent object, but it will always stay the presence of absence. The experience of the presence of something that is absent is similar to perceiving a dead man or an image. An object or person that is absent is made present through the medium of its image – visualising a dead man or an object through an image is analogue. We could generalise this with Barthes's photo theory: A photograph of for example the dead mother is always a mask like a death mask in the perception of the dead person. A »photography is a kind of primitive theatre, a kind of Tableau Vivant, a figuration of the and made-up face beneath which we see the dead« (BARTHES 1981: 32).

At this stage we are at the origin of images that transform someone absent to be present by images. These images are after- and anti-death images as symbols of life despite the state of death and antagonizing it. Images of those who once lived become images of the dead person and therefore turn into the pictorial presence of the absent.

Early forms of these images are effigies like death masks and artificially deformed skulls for example from New Ireland or Jericho. They are ver-

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7   »Was da wirklich existiert, abgesehen vom physischen Ding >Gemälde<, von dem Stück Leinwand mit seiner bestimmten Verteilung von Farbenpigmenten, ist eine gewisse Komplexion von Empfindungen, die der Beschauer, das Gemälde betrachtend, in sich erlebt, und die Auffassung und Meinung, die er darauf baut, so dass sich für ihn das Bewusstsein vom Bild einstellt«, ibid., p. 22.

8   »... eine Auffassung, in der uns das Bildobjekt erscheint mit dem anhängenden Charakter, dass es Repräsentant für etwas sei, wobei ein Meinen und Achten auf das Bildobjekt geht und dazu auf ein darauf gebautes repräsentiertes Objekt. Und eine andere Auffassungsart, die durch allzeit mögliche und wesentlich mögliche Verwandlung statthat, wobei das Bildobjekt gar nicht gegenständlich ist, vielmehr ein modifiziertes Auffassen derselben Inhalte, das eine neue einfache Auffassung ergeben würde: das bildliche Vergegenwärtigen. Doch will es mir scheinen, dass hier im wesentlichen nur das verschieden fungierende Meinen den Unterschied setzt und dass eine Doppelheit der Auffassung immer vorliege«, ibid., 28.

sions of pictorial representations of the past antagonising perishability that are as pristine as persistent in cultural history. These are images that function cataphatically since presence dominates nevertheless – and a bigger or smaller visible material constancy of the image and the dead that it is representing. This material constancy is furthermore an ontological trait of those visual artefacts, which marks them as actual presence and not mere representation, even if this presence is as precarious as the materiality of the dead body.

Here we touch an even more original level, and now it becomes uncanny. Belting was not the first to ask for the essence of a corpse. Maurice Blanchot already considered this question and provided the answer that the corpse is its own image as Belting paraphrases Blanchot here without further citation (BELTING 2001: 154).

However, we can reconsider and hence deepen and specify this statement (cf. BLANCHOT 1989; DIDI-HUBERMAN 2004): In Blanchot's poetology and language philosophy death is the embodiment of the imaginary, it is a solid impossibility that is never captured by its symbolisation but is still insistent and somehow disturbing (DERRIDA 2000; LEVINAS 2000).[9]

From Blanchot's constellation of death and language Didi-Huberman draws some conclusions for the interrelation of image and death. He identifies »a precise correlation between the materialisation of the image and the dissolution of life.« The creation unfolds »basically within the ›space‹ of death« (DIDI-HUBERMAN 2004: 33; cf. also Barthes's theory of photography), as Didi-Huberman states with Blanchot. He argues that the dynamics of similarity create an interrelation, not a unity.

> »It disunites existence and enforces separation in that very moment when it also offers connection. [...] Similarity, then, is to be understood as something that separates the face from its living person, that creates distance and disturbance. In Blanchot's opinion it is this which constitutes the characterisation of the image itself:
> ›(B)ut the cadaver's strangeness is perhaps also that of the image‹, as he reads. ›Something is there before us which is not really the living person, nor is it any reality at all. It is neither the same as the person who was alive,

nor is it another person, nor is it anything else... The cadaverous presence establishes a relation between here and nowhere... the unbearable image and figure of the unique becoming nothing in particular, no matter what‹« (DIDI-HUBERMAN 2004: 256f.).

With the discovery of the disturbing imagery and of both similarity and dissimilarity, namely in the body, the dead man and his unsettling closeness and distance to past life, we come closest to the origin of the image in death.

Relating to the subheading ›The Cadaverous Resemblance‹ Blanchot reads:

> »When this moment has come, the corpse appears in the strangeness of its solitude as that which has disdainfully withdrawn from us. The feeling of a relation between humans is destroyed, and our mourning, the care we take of the dead and all the prerogatives of our former passions, since they can no longer know their direction, fall back upon us, return toward us. It is striking that at this very moment, when the cadaverous presence is the presence of the unknown before us, the mourned deceased begins to *resemble himself*« (BLANCHOT 1989: 257).

It is strange to speak of similarity in this respect. We would expect visual and substantial identity and not mere similarity. Accordingly death masks try to preserve the decaying facial identity with their marks. It seems that similarity finds its point in the inherent indirect dissimilarity – just like the metaphor's ›is and is not‹ in its consistent dissimilarity provides the actual tension for example in saying the pope is a fox. Dissimilarity is the analogue expression of difference and simultaneous physical identity. The difference of life and death regarding to the continuity of the physical substance of the body constitutes the sign and herein the image that shows the one that lived in the past and the decay of his existence.

»The cadaver is his own image« (BLANCHOT 1989: 258)[10] – that is the core statement, whereas »its own« sounds somehow absurd. Blanchot introduces his theory as he is assuming: »The image does not, at first glance, resemble the corpse, but the cadaver's strangeness is perhaps also that of the image« (BLANCHOT 1989: 256) – in terms of ›mortal apparel‹, a metaphor for the body, the dead person and possibly even the image.

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9 The analogies to Derrida's *Adieu to Emanuel Levinas* (transl. by Pascale Anne-Brault, Stanford: University Press 2000) and Levinas' *God, Death, and Time* (transl. by Bettina Bergo, Stanford: University Press 2000) could be analysed in detail.

10 Ibid., p. 258; more precisely said, it is the image of the passed self.

PHILIPP STOELLGER

The Image – As Strong as Death? On Death as the Origin of the Image

3.   For example: »Life before death«

As part of the fourth »Trienale der Fotografie« in Hamburg 2008, the photographer Walter Schels and the journalist Beate Lakotta presented their exhibition *Noch mal leben vor dem Tod* – »Life before death«. The large sized black and white photographies portray the story of twenty-five people who were terminally ill just before and shortly after their death. The exhibition attempted to capture their experiences, fears and hopes and gave them space to express their thoughts.

> »Very few things are as touching as encountering death. But the process of dying is carefully concealed and hidden in modern society. Dying and death become experiences that are taboo and deliberately excluded from everyday life and family. Photographer Walter Schels and journalist Beate Lakotta asked terminally ill patients for permission to accompany their last days. The result of these personal encounters is a collection of very sensitive portraits that capture the moments around the deaths of these people. Most of them spent a long time in hospices, a place to accompany dying people full of hopes and fears. Whoever comes to live here his or her last days or weeks has the chance to spend this time as conscious and painless as possible. What remains is only a short period of time to come to terms with relative and find peace as well as contemplate death and the question of what might come after. Twenty five stories told by people that are terminally ill and disclose what it is like to say farewell to life and to be close to death – accompanied by impressing portraits taken a short time before and immediately after death« (LOKATTA/SCHELS 2008: blurb).

Here we talk about the absolutely imaginary, not as such visible »moment or minute of death«, that is repeatedly addressed by Blanchot (BLANCHOT 1989). This moment is characterised by the uncanny mystery (*fascinosum et tremendum*) that happens: someone alive transforms into someone dead, which is as banal as it is incomprehensible through the fact that it could never be subject of experience. There are traditional scientific schemes for this passive indicated incident: the soul dissolves; medically considered the brain activity ceased and Aristotle would emphasise the end of breathing. Attempts to define death encircle indexically this differentiation, but they merely indicate indexically and iconically or metaphorically and metonymically aspects.

The statement Blanchot insinuates is quite simple: the living body becomes the corpse, and thereby the body becomes the image of the once

that lived within. Thus the moment of death becomes the origin of the image. Regarding to this, the image in form of the dead man is not made by man – so to say it is not made at all. Or put differently, when an enemy or animal is killed, the killing becomes the actual creation of the image. Homo necans is homo pictor.

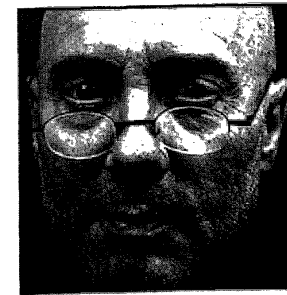Fig. 1   Fig. 2

Noch mal Leben. Eine Ausstellung über das Sterben, Kunsthaus Hamburg, 2008. (Foto: Philipp Stoellger)

Fig. 3: *Noch mal Leben. Eine Ausstellung über das Sterben*, Kunsthaus Hamburg, 2008. (Foto: Philipp Stoellger)

PHILIPP STOELLGER

The Image – As Strong as Death? On Death as the Origin of the Image

Fig. 4: *Noch mal Leben. Eine Ausstellung über das Sterben*, Kunsthaus Hamburg, 2008
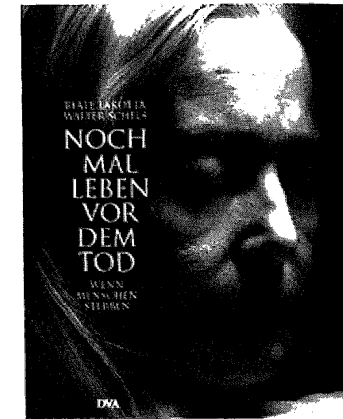(Cover page, in: Beate Lakotta/Walter Schels: *Noch mal Leben vor dem Tod. Wenn Menschen sterben*. München [dtv] 2004)
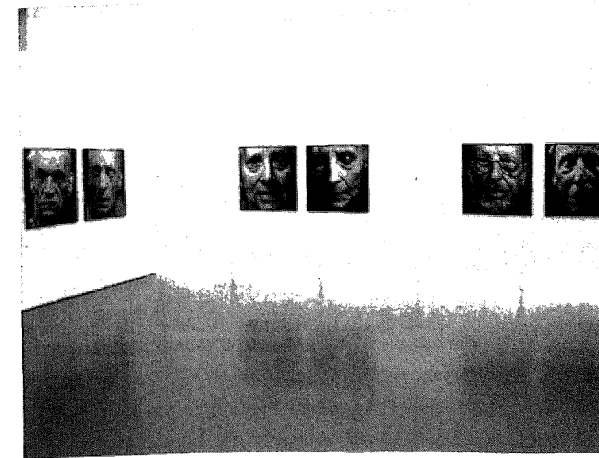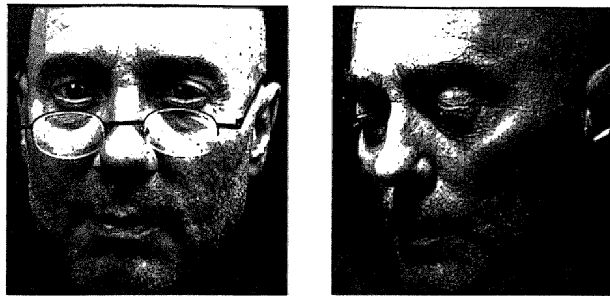

Fig. 5: *Noch mal Leben. Eine Ausstellung über das Sterben*, Kunsthaus Hamburg, 2008 (Foto: Philipp Stoellger)
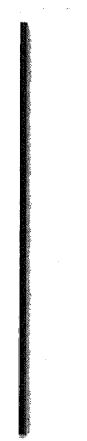
Fig. 6: *Noch mal Leben. Eine Ausstellung über das Sterben*, Kunsthaus Hamburg, 2008.
Fozo: Philipp Stoellger

When the killer is seen as the creator of images, then the hunter produces a visual artefact by killing that thereby becomes an exhibited object, for example, a trophy. The sublimated later version of this is the sacrifice (STEIGER 2010). But by all means we have to clearly distinguish the corpse or the cadaver as an image from

1. anti death images: Those are virtually put against death in forms of still living, continuing living and living again.
2. artificial preparations of dead bodies: This was implemented with the Jericho skulls in New Ireland, the bodies of Mao and Lenin and is still done with the bodies of popes and saints.
3. supplementations of the foresaid in media: Such are staging of victims and sacrifices as it is displayed in the news, in films and video games. Death becomes a visual event even and especially in warfare.

Death as the origin of the image – this seems to be the original impression with inevitable consequences, and this is the reason for Blanchot to claim, »that a tool, when damaged, becomes its image« (BLANCHOT 1989: 258). »In this case the tool, no longer disappearing into its use, appears. This appearance of the object is that of resemblance and reflection: the objects double, if you will [...]. Only that which is abandoned to the image appears, and everything that appears is, in this sense, imaginary«

(BLANCHOT 1989: 258f.). Here, the damage is equivalent to death and therefore the reason for *désoeuvrement*, the reason that the tool is unusable, disabled and powerless. If this is seen as an aesthetic strategy, then it is appropriate to turn an object into something unusable, like, for example, a pissoir. It is the *Epoché* in which the object loses its independence but is dissociated from its actual meaning (*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*). The object is no longer purposeful but becomes an object of perception.

4.   What kind of image-act?

How can we describe the act in which the image originates »in the moment of death« and thereby the image creation becomes the *petit mort* in this model?

This question is relevant because I assume that speaking of the image-act cannot possibly grasp the genealogy of the image from death. The passive origin of the image is an immediate event of creation wherefrom all image-acts are belated. Images act against death, and that is their intended purpose. It is common, comprehensible and plausible to oppose the constitution of presence (GUMBRECHT 2004) with a constitution of absence (of the living, the person, the thing) as its counterpart. This can be called ›compensatory‹ or ›supplementary‹ presence. Through this, the image becomes the actor by staging and performing presence as it happens with masks in a drama or even more primarily in commemorations and in funeral practices. Accordingly there is the image-based cult of gods in which iconic artefacts embody the absent gods. The image as a simulation of presence is established and has its origin in representation and embodiment.

But the original dysfunctional object or the corpse or cadaver of the animal, the enemy or relatives is not an artefact that is to be compensated and that becomes its preparation, originally it is rather an disconcerting provocation. It is an initial interruption of life or its practical context whereby the interrupting part develops a new quality of appearance.

Instead of talking about the creation of presence, we could also define death as the creator of absence as a ›terminus a quo‹ for all creation of presence. An additional conflict is the fact that death, the dead person or dysfunctional object is not actually absent. The presence of the dead or the dead presence is the presence of the past, the presence of absence. Thus, this can be seen as the reason why the removal of presence appears as un-

settling and thereby generates a supplementary production presence. To comprehend death or the dead person as an image, (and therefore comprehending a passively evolving object differentiation as the origin of the image) is not an act but rather antagonistically »the opposite of action«. Blanchot's *désoeuvrement*[11] and Agamben's »inoperativeness« (AGAMBEN 1998: 62; AGAMBEN 1993: 93; AGAMBEN 2000: 140; DE LA DURANTAYE 2009: 18f.) are terms to basically name an initial passivity, which is originally the passivity of death. It is »a passivity, that makes us suffer the image even when we ourselves appeal to it« (BLANCHOT 1989: 255). »But when we are face to face with the things themselves – if we fix upon a face, the corner of a wall – does it not sometimes happen that we abandon ourselves to what we see? Bereft of power before this presence suddenly strangely mute and passive, are we not at its mercy?« (ibd.).

The »origin« of the image is in this case (unusual in image theory) externalised with a metaphysical overtone. On the one hand, there is the eye of a stranger that we relinquish our perception to, but on the other hand there is also something in the appearance of the object, for example, a certain phenomenon that is not actively comprehended by us but a result of a passive synthesis, as Husserl would say. The image is no longer a secondary duplicate of an object but a certain way the objects appears, so to say »the thing as distance, present in its absence« (ebd.: 256).

Horst Bredekamp calls it the »substitutive image-act« as distinguished from the schematic and intrinsic one (BREDEKAMP 2010: 171ff.). The intrinsic image-act

> »occurs via the vitalisation of the image through a configuration of bodies, automats, and biological images, and this vitalisation is either instantly effective or instrumentalised. The second possible effect is characterised by the substitutive image-act. It emerges through the reciprocity of body and image in religion, science, media, law, politics, war, and iconoclasm. The intrinsic image-act can be considered as the third possible impact. It is generated by the power of the shaped form as a form« (BREDEKAMP 2010: 52f.).

And finally: »When substituted bodies are seen as images and images as bodies. This is the most precarious aspect of the image-act« (BREDEKAMP 2010: 173).

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11   And therefore Nancy's too.

PHILIPP STOELLGER

The Image – As Strong as Death? On Death as the Origin of the Image

This image-act theory becomes relevant if bodies constitute images. But Bredekamps examples mean the vera icon, the *Naturselbstdruck* that are printings that do not require manipulated printing material, such as fingerprints or the printing of leaves, the photography as contact print, coins, the image punishment when criminals are executed in effigy and iconoclasms when the punishment for example for idolatry is completed on the images. Substitution functions as a model as an image stands for a body and the image-body becomes a substitute of the living body. This theory is characterised by representation as a form of quid pro quo and therefore seems strangely technically, as if we would replace x by y. That raises the question how y would be replaced by z.

It seems that Bredekamp only describes the second, derived original phenomenon, namely the image replacing a body. But what happens when the body itself becomes an image?

The disturbing theory of Blanchot's »cadaverous resemblance« when the decedent becomes an image, just like the »cadaver is its own image« (BLANCHOT 1989: 257f.), is not thoroughly considered by Bredekamp. Thereby it seems to me that Bredekamps description does not necessarily lack the sense for this original difference and duplication, but that it lacks the adequate concept. How is the living body defined, when the corpse becomes image of the living? This extreme annotation illustrates drastically what was evident before: that a human exists not only as himself but also as an image of himself as both common and extravagant presentation of the body illustrate.

What is apparent here, is the duplication of the body in its iconic quality, which has implications for the symbolic imaginary. Nobody is only a self, everyone is simultaneously his own image too, and this happens via self-perception as well as the perception of others. This becomes particularly evident if we consider the different »roles« he identifies with and the role reversal between them. This is simply illustrated by the loving father, who sits at the fireplace in his cave preparing for hunting and later becomes the fearsome hunter, or when a father appears as a fire-fighter, banker or policeman. Occupational role identifications are iconic designs in which the living person appears. Insofar anybody we encounter does not show us his authentic face as Levinas states (LEVINAS 1979: 190, 194, 212; cf. WALDENFELS 2004) but a composed image of his role identity.

And this perspective can be applied on all aspects of our daily life: In the morning we inattentively grab the toothbrush as we know intuition-

ally where it is, we use it and do not waste a second thought about it. But if for once we intentionally look at it, observe and appreciate it as a creation, we might become aware of the different dimensions of the object. We might see something ready-made with a certain visual quality for example, something that is new in our perception and that disrupts our common way of recognising it, a new feature that changes our judgement into a new evaluation.

That is what aesthetic strategies do, they work with different perspective and play with it. But if we ask for the origin of the image then the origin has its »Sitz im Leben« where the thing is no longer purely seen an object of utility. This change of perspective as a change of perception leads to another seeing as – another way of contemplating. I suspect that this change of perspective generates a new form of origin of the image. And it is anything but evident where this could lead. Exaggerated it could lead to an aesthetically exerted eye when gradually or suddenly everything is viewed outside its original and practical context and shows iconic quality.

The omnipresence of design is certainly provoking this. Nowadays almost everything is designed in a fashion that wants to hypnotise us like the snake Kah of *The Jungle Book*: Look at me, just me – trust me and only me. Design creates things in a way that they are not only supposed to show an object but create symbolic and imaginary meaning. Even a toothpaste tube can stand like a small Oscar, as a proudly erected promise of cleanliness, freshness and gloss. So every morning this small cult stature embodies the freshness that the new day shall bring and which we do not own or create ourselves but which we gain if we bow before the tube and draw on it so we might become clean and pure. All the glossy effects of the tube are aesthetical charges that enhance even this object of banality to an icon. But these deliberately applied design strategies are the downside of the inconspicuous but critical shifts in perception that could be described as »catching the eye«. Speaking in terms of phenomenology, we could say that here we have a sudden loss of the »natural approach«, but not in a sense of »the intuition of essences« or »reduction« but rather with an accidently aesthetic view. The same might happen to us as it happened to Lacan when he saw the sardine can : »It was a small can, a sardine can. It floated there in the sun, a witness to canning industry, which we, in fact, were supposed to supply. It glittered in the sun. And Petit-Jean said to me – ›You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!‹« (LACAN 1998: 95). The older Jaques (Lacan) had a different view of the topic. »If what Petit-Jean said to

PHILIPP STOELLGER

The Image – As Strong as Death? On Death as the Origin of the Image

me, namely, that the can did not see me, had any meaning, it was because in a sense, it was looking at me, all the same. It was looking at me at the level of the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated – and I am not speaking metaphorically« (LACAN 1998: 95).

What we see can look back at us like Lacan's sardine can, but it will not actually see us, so that we might want to refine Georges Didi-Huberman's inclusion of Lacan (DIDI-HUBERMAN 1999). Didi-Huberman stated: »To see means to sense something that is inevitably withdrawing, in other words: what we see is what we lose. That is the whole problem« (DIDI-HUBERMAN 1999: 17). It is remarkable that he identifies this removal with a theological distinction. He speaks of *imago*, the fullness of presence and resemblance, and of *vestigium* – the »piece of a lost similarity – man's similarity to God, which was destroyed by sin« (DIDI-HUBERMAN 1999: 17). Seeing deals with pieces, with vestigia. Things are always characterised by imperfection, lacking fullness and presence. That is the intuitional perspective of negativistic views that are related to negative theology.

The fact I already mentioned that »the eye is caught« is accompanied by the loss of a natural approach, not by a methodical epoché but rather a non-intentional, even accidental epoché. This loss of the natural, spontaneous thing-relation is a loss of »unquestionability« that leads to the removal of the natural implicitness. This should not unvaluedly be celebrated as the entrance to the world in relationship of aesthetics nor as the silver bullet that leads to aesthetic fullness, as this can be very precarious. The things lose their quality of being available and ready-to-hand and they become unwieldy, strange and irritating, they fall out of usualness.

This generates a difference in our act of seeing as well as in what we see, e. g., in the object or the body. This is already emphasised by the phenomenological distinction of the living body and the mere mortal apparel. Therefore we can agree to Husserl's aforementioned theory »that there is always a duality of perception« (HUSSERL 1980: 28). It is questionable if that is really always the case. But every phenomenon, every thing and every body has the potential of its duplication into functioning and malfunctioning, the désoeuvrement. This potential is actualised in the appearance of disturbance, when the objects breaks apart or the living body becomes the corpse. It can also be actualized in an aesthetically calculated way, whereas the thing is deliberately manipulated like a pipe taken out of its context. In extreme cases this might lead to aesthetic overstimulation and irritation of the eye, as when we permanently squint and see everything around us double, as alive and dead, as aesthetically charged and functionally damaged.

5.   Image and death – and the religious valence of a dangerous proximity

When image and death are connected so intrinsically the question of religion cannot be far (as expected). This can be observed by examining the cultural complexity associated with death and the way we handle dead persons, especially burials and funeral practices. When the corpse is its own original image, then the burial is an original image-act and a way of dealing with this image, with the corpse. And does it not appear quite astonishing that these images are buried instead of being eaten or displayed in the living room or the cave?

Death as an image initiated various ways of using an image, which primarily aim for the elimination of this disturbing image – the face-to-face encounter of the dead body – and to substitute them by sublime supplements in forms of preservation and remembrance. Every burial is more or less a reverent form of iconoclasm as an original image criticism in which the disturbing powerful image itself is left to decay.

Accordingly all forms of preparation by which the corpse is saved from decay are as artistic as they are violent, because they fight the power of decay by all technical means. Whether pharaohs or popes are prepared, Lenin or Mao, these are all attempts to conserve an iconic artefact, to stop the original image from decaying. It is the attempt to make the finite become infinite, at the risk of demonising it.

In Judaic tradition all this would be judged with disgust. »Oh vanish, ye' symbol of men's inability to capture the infinite in an image« (SCHÖNBERG 1958: 95off.). By speaking these words, Moses smashes the golden calf in Arnold Schönberg's opera *Moses und Aaron* and it applies to images of God and equally to the image that corpse constitutes.

The accusal of creating images of God can also be perceived as criticism on the production of images, in which the dead persons are captured in the presence by the preparation of their bodies. According to ancient Judaic practices, the corpse had to be buried as soon as possible, which is also understandable in regions of warm climate. But most of all this was meant to be a law against death cults.

The Babylonian Talmud refers to the procedure of hanging, explicitly why and how someone is to be hanged and handled and what shall happen to him afterwards (EPPSTEIN 1987: 46b.). One of the regulations is that the body should not remain hanged longer than the night and the day after as it would become an image, and this creation of an image would contradict the ban of images[12]. The following scene illustrates this context:

> »It has been taught: R. Meir said: A parable was stated. To what is this mat-
> ter comparable? To twin brothers (who lived) in one city; one was appoin-
> ted king, and the other took to highway robbery. At the king's command
> they hanged him. But all who saw him exclaimed, ›The king is hanged!‹
> whereupon the king issued a command and he was taken down« (EPPSTEIN
> 1987: 46b). Goldschmidt notes: »Because of their similarity, just like man is
> made in the image of God« (BEER 1933: 645).

This example indicates that it is not only about an offence of the narcissistic affinity of the king through his embarrassing image of his twin brother. But the removal of the hanged also has the theological meaning of burying an image, if not even eliminating it. An early burial prevents the creation of images and effectively counteracts it.

There is a critical difference between consuming the corpse of relatives or treat them in any other way or finally bury them. It is neither empirically nor historically documented whether this difference distinguishes humanoid species from one another or if it even identifies a human in distinction from the prehistoric man. But the necessity of handling the dead and developing a funeral culture constitutes the difference that is critical to a man becoming human. It is remarkable that the cultural practice of funeral is significantly older then the cave paintings that are known today. The oldest paintings are dated back to approximately 32.000 BC[13]. As far as it is known, the oldest burials are confirmed in the caves of Qafzeh and Es Skhul in Israel and are dated 90.000 till 120.000 BC. Whether Neanderthals buried their relatives 70.000 BC or not is at least subject of discussion (GARGETT 1989). Whoever does not perceive the dead body of his own species as food does perceive it as something else, as anything else whatsoever, as a *je ne sais quoi* that demands to be treated differently than eating or ig-

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12 With thanks to Gerhard Langer.
13 Lascaux between 17.000 and 15.000 BC; the paintings in the Chauvet-cave (Département Ar-
   dèche) are from the younger Aurignacien around 32.000 BC.

noring it. The question that only can be answered hypothetically is then if this perception of the dead body and the corresponding cultural practices lead into the prehistory of homo pictor. If homo pictor inherently perceives images as images, then we should assume that he perceives dead men of his species respectively as belonging to him and consequently buries them. Herein lies the supposition that the funeral practices are congruent with the becoming of man because of his approval of images.

The disputable hypothesis, therefore, is whether the cultural handling with dead as a »liminal« image of the living and thus the funeral practice and the culture of images account for a co-emergent cultural context of practices that is somehow religiously and aesthetically valid. That accounts for the handling of animals as well as humans since it reveals the image-producing connection of image and death in general. According to the theory of religion, this is ascribed to the fact that images and dead are signs of the realm of beyond, that both are of a certain materiality and presence and that both can be symbolically and visually charged figures of elementary transcendence. The corpse and the image embody the presence of someone absent and deprived and are therefore preexisting in a paradox way. Consequently it could become plausible that funeral culture and image culture are early forms of communicating the transcendence-difference in form of immanent cultural techniques.

This extensive and far-reaching hypothesis has cultural-anthropological preconditions: Man becomes man by »drawing« certain distinctions from which culture emerges. Man becomes man as a hunter and gatherer of distinctions and differences, and he – nolens volens – gets transcendence in turn. Cultural techniques and media as language, technology and images become intrinsic mediations of the difference of immanence and transcendence.

The hypothesis of the origin of culture through the production of differences comprehends that it is not the usage of tools but of icons that seems to be elementary for the genealogy of man. But in cultural practices, too, we differentiate in indexical, iconic and symbolic ways so that they represent a crucial step in the development of man.

It is controversial which distinctions are decisive: the difference between consciousness and self-consciousness or between »good and evil«, so to speak a reflexive and moral distinction? That would be a conventional approach. But that would mean to ignore other distinctions, like the foresaid difference between thing and image-thing and between image-thing

PHILIPP STOELLGER

The Image – As Strong as Death? On Death as the Origin of the Image

and image-sujet, that seems to be equally important. A lying stone next to a deliberately placed one that marks something, a mammoth and its iconic representation or a decedent and his remains as symbols of continuous presence are differences that are both religiously and iconically valid. Even differences like life and death, own and strange, inside and outside or edible and inedible are differences in the environment surrounding of the »raw and the cooked« (Lévi-Strauss). They are differences that mark the threshold of culture.

Those differences structured and regulated the world people were living in. One effect of these differences is that the difference of this world and the realm beyond identifies as an effect of the *gravity* of these distinctions and differences. Criticisms of myths and metaphysics will later call it the *otherworld*, but initially it is just the distinction between thing and image-thing that is integrated in daily life similar to the distinction between life and death.

The deceased is somewhere else, in a *heterotope* – just like the reality of the image is something *somewhere else*, a small version of transcendence. That is why early forms of imagery like the cave paintings are generally suspected to be loaded with transcendence. The scenes on the cave wall are not simple reproductions of the outside world but memorial and pictorial scenes of an outside, of a beyond realm inside the cave.

Differentiations like here and there, presence and representation and finally the composition of representations in order to produce a form of presence that becomes visible in prepared skulls, pictorially concise signs and specially formed tools, postulate an elementary consciousness of differences and the ability to deal with them. These differences are small versions of transcendences: from this here to that there, from the available to the removed to the transcendence of the decedent, of those who have been, who will come and who are absent. This is also a way to understand the handprints on a wall's »I was here« that proclaim an enduring presence of the past. Thereby we anticipate a »diachronic« continuity of past and present humans even for those who will come. Could that already be understood as a form of historical awareness? If the hands of the dead are visible on a wall and will potentially be visible forever, then a retrospective transcendence to the now present decedents is visible too. When furthermore present humans add their handprints to the old, then a community of the living and the dead is formed through the image. This means that

transcendence is mediated and passed on within the immanence of the imagery work.

It can be assumed that the same applies to animal depictions: They are illustrations of the strange and alien, like the hunting success of the past, and similarly they are anticipations of those to come. With these representations, man mediates the diachronic difference and the mediations are put in scene. Insofar, images can be understood as windows to time and space. They are not mere representations but also platforms of presence. This, too, can be identified as a form of iconic presence of the dead and the strange and alien, and this form of presence indicates an iconic conciseness and energy that seems impossible to imagine without a *fascinosum et tremendum*. It must have been an iconic presence of symbolic and imaginary quality whose concentration and fullness surely did not demand any semantic distinctions, in which art, history, religion and so forth would trail off. But it is unquestionable that meaning, and its iconic condensation, are an integral part of it. Of course we don't know what all that is supposed to mean. Herein lies the intensity of meaning, at the centre towards everything is orientated and organised – all is condensated here as the epitome of meaning. What is hunted and eaten? What is of essential importance?

The entity of iconic staging and inter-iconicity provides a reduction of complexity and contingency on such a high level in forms of impression and expression that still today we hardly can elude from its iconic energy. How powerful these images must have been operated in former times! The power of the image was an image of power, that only can be imagined under the forcing influence of sanctity and extensiveness. Then so-called living meals would not be just edibles and huntable objects, but they rather would be superior powers embodied as animals. These are the realms of the strange, alien and sacred – the fascinating and the tremendous. Of course these are anachronistic interpretations, but we have nothing else to offer yet.

6.   Genealogy of the image from death
        in Christianity

When and where did cult images emerge in Christianity? Were they also images that emerged from death? From a historical perspective, we could quite reliably conclude the genealogy of cult images from grave images. Belting wrote:

PHILIPP STOELLGER

The Image – As Strong as Death? On Death as the Origin of the Image

»We should ask first about the early use of icons and their functions before raising the question whether they developed an aesthetic of their own. The realm of the funerary portrait proves to be the source of the cult of the saint's icon. Here, the memorial image at private tombs became transformed into the cult image of a public saint. The icon is the result of this change from pagan to Christian, from private to public use of the image« (BELTING 1994: 78).

The images of dead in ancient times were made to remember, honour and possibly even worship the dead. Accordingly, Christianity did not restrict the display of memorial images of the deceased at the gravesite. They were potentially open to develop from private images of the decedents to cult images (BELTING 1994: 82). What follows is speculation:

»Perhaps he was a popular cleric whose burial place was honored not only by his family but, as happens with priest‹s graves today, by women of the parish. When this happened, then the first step toward an official cult had been taken. Private honoring of the dead developed into public veneration of saints« (BELTING 1994: 82).

Did the veneration of the decedents through images lead from the continuity of grave-relics and image up to the continuity and identity of image and deceased? If that is the case, then the venerated image becomes detachable from the gravesite and can be multiplied and positioned onto other graves in transference (BELTING 1994: 82, 85), as it happens with votive pictures and consecration pictures showing the donators. The conclusion is: »The change from funeral portrait to saint's icon, from a memorial image for private use to a cult image for public ritual, took place in the real of tombs, much as the cult of saints itself grew out of the funeral practices of the previous age« (BELTING 1994: 82). And: »The saint's icon was a product of the cult practiced at the saint's tomb« (BELTING 1994: 98). Therefore »most of the early icons were recognized as portraits. But the true portrait originated as a portrait of the dead and retained in this function within the cult of the saints as well [...] Here, where the grave itself was primary, the portrait was always secondary« (BELTING 1994: 58).

Considered from a theological background, the question is whether the original impression of imagery in Christianity is determined by incarnation or by passion, ecce homo and the cross. This is the distinction between a cataphatic image theory and an apophatic image theory: Whether we find the origin in presence and revelation or in lowliness, humbleness, withdrawal and *sub contrario*.

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PHILIPP STOELLGER

The Image – As Strong as Death? On Death as the Origin of the Image

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