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ART IN THE AGE OF VISUAL CULTURE
AND THE IMAGE

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7.

Anders Michelsen

Nothing has Meaning outside Discourse? On the Creative Dimension of Visuality

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The subjects of interest to visual studies seems, at first sight, to be scattered over the whole range of image production and reception [...] photographs, advertisements, animation, computer graphics, Disneyland, crafts, eco-design, fashions, graffiti, garden design, theme parks, rock/pop performances, subcultural styles, tattoos, films, televisions and virtual reality – to which I would add sex and sexuality, Las Vegas, Hollywood and Bollywood, depictions of death and violence, international airports, corporate headquarters, shopping malls, Balinese tourist art, Bake-lite, Barbie, Burning Man [...] Astroturff, ivory *mab-jongg* sets, underwater Monopoly [...] Ghanaian coffins in the shape of chickens and outboard motors [...] tourist attraction ashtrays [...] Sally Mann and Catherine Opie. The list seems hopelessly miscellaneous or happily inclusive depending on your point of view.¹

James Elkins

We would miss, on the one hand and above all, the fundamental fact that there is nothing visible that is fully given and completely made in which the seer could insert herself, any more, indeed, that there is a 'representational picture', but rather emergence, continued creation, incompleteness [...] that is never filled out but rather transforms itself into another incompleteness.²

Cornelius Castoriadis

1. THE PREDICAMENT OF THE IMAGE WORLD: TRIPARTITION

The debate on visual culture over the past two decades has largely been predicated on the assumption of novelty. Thus Nicholas Mirzoeff tells us that

¹ J. Elkins, *Visual Studies. A Skeptical Introduction*, New York 2003, pp. 34-37.

² C. Castoriadis, *Merleau-Ponty and the Ontological Tradition*, in D.A. Curtis (ed.), *World in Fragments. Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination*, Stanford 1997, p. 284.

«human experience is now more visual and visualized than ever before from the satellite picture to medical images of the interior of the human body»³. Sturken & Cartwright contend similarly that «the world we inhabit is filled with visual images. They are central to how we represent, make meaning, and communicate in the world around us. In many ways, our culture is an increasingly a visual one. Over the course of the last two centuries, Western culture has come to be dominated by visual rather than oral or textual media»⁴. Gillian Rose ponders in yet another introduction that «recently many writers [...] have argued that the visual is central to the cultural construction of social life in contemporary Western societies. It is often suggested that much meaning is conveyed by visual images»⁵.

It would probably raise indefinitely many and complex questions to find out whether present visual culture really transcends previous forms. Would for instance murals of The Last Judgment have less impact on a Danish peasant in the Middle Ages than let's say fifty images of Pamela Anderson on the average high school student of today? It is safe, however, to claim that to critics of latter day visual culture, the novelty of this cultural form looms large. So much more peculiar that the dynamics of this articulate novelty, assumed to expand by the hour, is often stifled as determinate. *First*, the articulation of visual culture is subsumed under a structuralist or poststructuralist notion of representation originating in terms of linguistics, semiotics, and communication. *Second* the dynamics of visual articulation is conceived by a prefiguring system of relations and differences – relationality, e.g. by negotiating and negotiated positions of encoding and decoding, establishing systems of visual meaning. *Third*, a practice of visual culture – of 'looking' is understood by discursive action upon such systems in some capacity of imagery, visual mediation, and technique. Visual culture is thus a structuring/structured relation, manifest in a range of visual forms, which is determinable e.g. by the notion of discourse. While this notion today resounds in many versions and definitions it is fair to say that the debate on visual culture approach discourse in the basic Foucauldian sense of a complex strategic situation. Visual culture understood thus makes no sense outside discourse, it must be understood as

³ N. Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, New York 1999, p. 1.

⁴ M. Sturken and L. Cartwright, *Practices of Looking. An Introduction to Visual Culture*, Oxford 2001, p. 1.

⁵ G. Rose, *Visual Methodologies. An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, London 2001, p. 6.

clusters of meaning predicated on discursive formation, as Stuart Hall argues in the popular textbook *Representation* (1997) ⁶.

Put differently: criticism of visual culture follows largely the postwar attempt at turning structuralism and poststructuralism into cultural theory, from Lévi-Strauss and Lacan, over Barthes and Eco, to Foucault and Deleuze & Guattari. Following the general antihumanism of this attempt it focuses on the visual as an ocular-eccentric visuality (Martin Jay) invested in a showdown with the seeing subject and its ocularcentrism. Thus in Hal Foster's inaugural manifesto of visual culture criticism presented by the DIA Art Foundation in 1988, the notion of difference between the seeing subject, 'the datum of vision' and cultural forms of *visuality* is developed into a transversally structuring system of differences *generating* «how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing or the unseen therein» ⁷. Visuality is ultimately a «disc[o]ursive determination» as Foster terms it, an immanent conjecture of social and cultural determination conceived by e.g. interpellate ⁸

⁶ S. Hall (ed.), *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London 1997. Hall summarizes his concerns: «Discourses are ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society» (p. 6). This 'classic' definition of discourse may – from its standpoint – be adjusted vis-à-vis novelty and creativity by emphasizing the dynamics of power, e.g. in terms of hegemony/resistance. Hall himself adjusts it by attaching a notion of constructionism to the notion of discourse (pp. 5 ff, 24 ff). However, what is at stake in this paper is also a different ontological approach. To focus on visual culture in terms of 'emergence, continued creation, incompleteness' (Castoriadis, *op. cit.*) is to change the ontological framework from issues of structure/structuring to issues of becoming, to become, see below. See also P. Murphy, *The Pattern of Creation*, in *Budhi: A Journal of Culture and Ideas* (Manila, Ateneo University Office of Research) (forthcoming); *Autotranscendence and Creative Organization: On self-creation and Self-organization*, in P. Murphy and A. Michelsen (eds.), *Autopoiesis: Autology, Autotranscendence and Autonomy*, «Thesis Eleven Critical Theory and Historical Sociology» 88 (2007) (forthcoming).

⁷ «Why vision and visuality, why these terms? Although vision suggests sight as a physical operation, and visuality sight as a social fact, the two are not opposed as nature to culture: vision is social and historical too, and visuality involves the body and the psyche. Yet neither are they identical: here, the difference between the terms signals a difference within the visual – between the mechanism of sight and its historical techniques, between the datum of vision and its discursive determinations – a difference, many differences, among how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing or the unseen therein» (H. Foster, *Preface*, in H. Foster (ed.) «Vision and Visuality. Discussions in Contemporary Culture Number» 2 (1988), p. IX).

⁸ Cf. L. Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)*,

changes of relational states, as further conjectured in the famous power/knowledge relation.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to follow the ways that structuralism and poststructuralism make their points from the 1940s to the 1990s including the many crossovers and linkages in a further contextual landscape, from linguistics and cybernetics over speech act theory to ethnology, cultural studies, and discourse analysis – to mention some of the offsprings and implications⁹, it remains however fair to argue that the cultural criticism of visual culture grasps its object as determinate by diverging paradoxically from the dynamics of visuality per se, that is the novel impetus of imagery, visual mediation, and technique.

One interesting approach to this paradox is found in the relation between visual culture and current visual art. Often visual culture criticism takes the predicament of visual art vis-à-vis visual culture for granted. Visual culture has «surpassed art's power to communicate» as Lisa Phillips writes in the catalogue to a major statement of appropriation art, the exhibition *Image World* in 1989¹⁰. While post-Duchampian art – from the revolutionary Agit-

in D. Tallack (ed.), *Critical Theory. A Reader*, New York 1995. The framework of Althusser is of course the classic settings of Western Marxism within structuralist interpretation. However, the wider cultural and social implications are quite clear, e.g. in relation to the concerns following upon the 'cultural turn' of the 1980s. For a specific use in relation to the current debate on visual culture, see W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago 1994.

⁹ In terms of image theory etc. a wide variety of notions are active, e.g. convention, mythology, text, code, communication, abstract machine, scopic regime, screen of signs, etc.. All this is beyond the scope of this paper, but one should, however, not overlook the continuity and the commonality of themes, from the 40s to the 90s. See T.G. Pavel, *The Fend of Language. A History of Structuralist Thought*, Cambridge, 1989; K. Bartels, *Kybernetik als Metapher. Der Beitrag des französischen Strukturalismus zu einer Philosophie der Information und der Massemedien*, in H. Brackert und F. Wefelmayer, *Kultur Bestimmungen im 20. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt a.M. 1990; V. Descombes, *The Barometer of Modern Reason. On the Philosophies of Current Events*, Oxford 1993. See also A. Michelsen, *Faces, tears and ascii-codes. On the paradox of the human in visual culture – why there can be no visual culture without humans*, in M. Bogh, H.D. Christensen and A.R. Petersen (eds.), *Anbro/Socio: Towards an Anthropological Turn in Practices, Theories and Histories of Art*, Copenhagen 2006.

¹⁰ L. Phillips, *Art and Media Culture*, in M. Heiferman, L. Phillips and J.G. Hanhardt, *Image World. Art and Media Culture*, New York 1989, p. 57. An important aspect of the paradox debated here lies in the pervasive understanding of post-Duchampian art as representation in some capacity of semiotics, linguistics and discourse theory in debates throughout the past three decades. Along with this has gone a continuous depreciation of art vis-à-vis other forms of visuality assumed to be more probable social and cultural, e.g. mass media.

prop trains of the Russian Revolution to Fluxus and appropriation, has been following – with a hopeless reduction, an agenda with deep similarities to concerns such as Foster’s above, it is also true that this art, the major art form of the 20th century has been expanding radically on the visual, that is, in a basic sense, on what one may well ‘see’ as art, thus establish as visuality in some capacity. Post-Duchampian art has explored the options of the visual in such breath, scope and scale that it is still not really understood. Momentous constellations such as the postwar formation of Broodthaers-Lewitt-Warhol-Kosuth-Beyus-Koons-Levine-Sherman (to mention just one probable entry out of an indefinite number) are not only focused on critique and assessment of inherited ocularcentrism and related preferences for style, oeuvre and biography. More importantly it is focused on disclosing new issues of imagery, visual mediation, and technique. From Beyus’s ‘eurasiatic’ explorations to Warhol’s parody, novel forms of the visual are a major way of exposing artistic concepts. The shock of the new inherent in modern art is thus also an impetus of «emergence, continued creation, incompleteness»¹¹ (Castoriadis). From Duchamp’s urinal over the predicaments of the 1950s formalism – an overexposed issue in the larger picture (to the advantage of Clement Greenberg as well as his critics), to current relational aesthetics, one may review modern art history as a continued articulation by the creative addition to the world by visuality.

In a debate on culture and creativity Johann P. Arnason suggests that creativity can be conceived by a theme of tripartite culturalization, raising the fundamental problem of how a world is created for humans under a novel perspective shifting *from the essence of reason/imagination to the dimensions of ‘rationalization’/‘imaginary’*: not the given ability of reason vis-à-vis imagina-

It goes without saying that however important this conceptualization has been for rendering a new contextual and institutional view of art possible, including interesting new artistic strategies, from Barbara Krüger to Superflex, it has, however, also come at price, e.g. in the contrafactual assumption of the crisis of art in an era of unprecedented boom, as well as in the unqualified embrace of mass medial forms. Cf. Brian Wallis (ed.), *Art After Modernism. Rethinking Representation*, New York 1984. It goes also without saying that part of the intricacy of this debate relates to versions of critical theory contributing by the reiteration of a negationist and reflexive critique. Cf. Hal Foster, *The return of the real: the avant-garde at the end of the century*, Cambridge, 1996. Today it appears apparent that new positions beyond the differences, schismas, and agenda established over the past three decades – and earlier, are necessary, not least because of the increased unfolding of the very cultural dynamics these debates has relied on in the first place, e.g. the spread of mass culture.

¹¹ C. Castoriadis, *op. cit.*

tion, but the ‘cultural articulation of the world’ as new forms of creative rationalization is the mainstay of this turn¹². According to Arnason the contemporary landscape of thinking pursues a tripartite problematic¹³ to this end: (a) ‘radicalization’; developing inherited notions of reason to forms of rationalization; (b) ‘fragmentation’; leading to «the abandonment of the search for a common denominator»¹⁴ and (c) ‘relativization’; focusing not on the universal, but on on «the explication – and explicability – of cultural patterns»¹⁵.

This seems relevant to the current debate on visuality: insofar visual culture articulates new fields of imagery, visual mediation, and techniques, it may be theorized by Arnason’s tripartition. It articulates, (a) *radicalization* by developing inherited forms of reasoned imagery to new forms of visual rationality, e.g. as clusters of meaning – visuality, predicated on discourse; (b) *fragmentation* by relaying inherited ocularcentric canons, e.g. in art to a pervasive yet disparate visual culture of e.g. mass media visuality; (c) *relativization* by developing art publics into a performative and dynamic visual audiencing. Thus a cultural articulation of ‘rationalization’/‘imaginary’ in realms of visual culture points to a transversal yet highly diverse propensity of visualities.

If we take a brief look at two of the major ‘manifestoes’ of art in the 90s, Nicholas Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics* (2002/1998) and Peter Weibel’s *Kontext Kunst* (1993)¹⁶, we may indicate a number of aspects of such a tripartite articulation. Weibel argues emphatically for a discursive notion of contextualized art because «artistic discourse must be relativized by reintegration in social, philosophical, political, economic, ecological, natural scientific discourses»¹⁷. Thus art may be seen as specific forms of *rationalization*, establishing comprehensive yet specific *fragments* of a new public, *relative* to other articulations. In Weibel’s view this is underlined by a critical review of the paradigm of social self-organization in Niklas Luhmann’s theory of autopoietic social construction¹⁸. In Bourriaud’s account tripartition is further developed to an engagement with direct creative articulation. A work of art is a creative

¹² J.P. Arnason, *Reason, Imagination, Interpretation*, in J. Rundell (ed.), *Rethinking Imagination. Culture and Creativity*, London 1994, pp. 155-156.

¹³ *Ivi*, p. 164.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ *Ivi*, p. 165.

¹⁶ P. Weibel (Hg.), *Kontext Kunst. The Art of the 90s*, Köln 1994.

¹⁷ *Ivi*, p. 19.

¹⁸ *Ivi*, p. 19 ff.

performativity of culture co-extensive with visual audiencing. What is established is a dimension of concrete rationalities adding directly to the cultural world of forms. Fragmented and relational statements in artist performances becomes a direct 'social interstice'¹⁹ Bourriaud argues, allowing for networks of meanings (form) to emerge as a «rich loam for social experiments»²⁰. The micro-utopias of Bourriaud's manifesto may thus be read as a further conjecture on Weibel's idea of a principal contextual art²¹. However, Bourriaud's conception is also able to overstep the lurking determinist predicament of Weibel's discourse because he sidelines the notion of discourse – representation, to the advantage of direct addition to the world. Context is connoted as a cultural articulation which is not based on aligned and determinate representational form, but as direct addition to a dimension of the social – art as a generalized modeling of the world, emphasized by Bourriaud when he argues for a new connectionist form²² by «elements forming [...] joined together in a form: 'a setting of elements on one another»²³. This marks a break as well as a continuity in the notion of visuality. Visuality may well be generative by immanent systems of e.g. discursive determination, but it transcends the ocularcentric mainly because of addition. It is creative and forwards new unseen, thus incomprehensible, forms, not of, *but to* the world.

2. REPRESENTATION AND PRESENTATION: META-INSTABILITY

The process developing from Weibel's discursive art definition of context to Bourriaud's relational art conception is more than an issue of differing intellectual positions. The often lamented eclecticism of Bourriaud matters less, as do the radical chic of so-called micropolitical art²⁴. What appears to be in

¹⁹ N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon 2002, p. 16.

²⁰ *Ivi*, p. 9.

²¹ One should not overlook Weibel's comprehensive intervention into issues of complexity and culture, see e.g. Peter Weibel, *Virtuelle Realität: Der Endo-Zugang zur Elektronik*, in F. Rötzer und P. Weibel (eds.), *Cyberspace. Zum medialen Gesamtkunstwerk*, München, 1993; O. Rössler, *Endophysik* (ed. Peter Weibel), Berlin 1992.

²² In fact one should not overlook either the influence on Bourriaud's manifesto from issues of complexity. Read him e.g. with D. Parrochia, *Philosophie des réseaux*, Paris 1993.

²³ *Ivi*, p. 19.

²⁴ The intense predicaments of a critical project today, vis-à-vis globalization, fundamentalism, and new forms of identity, are mirrored in the redicule/compartementalization

question in relational aesthetics is rather the acknowledgement of a formation of creativity which has been lurking within modernity: a further acknowledgement of the moderns that we construct the world on constraints which are somehow residing with a human issue of a meta-instable yet manifest 'autotranscendence'²⁵ and 'self-creation'²⁶. We may, in different words, model the world under a number of complex constraints of form, or systems of form, i.e. morphology, let's say, from the Green House Effect to On Kawara's mail art. In terms of the visual this acknowledgement can be discerned in a major change from the dichotomy of representation/presentation *in terms of* exterior and interior, that is, depiction of the world, e.g. by the inherited canon of ocularcentrism, aesthetics, *sensus communis* etc., to a *tripartite term of* dimensioning by implicit and explicit meaning, that is, *by the addition of visual organizations* to the world, in all sorts of manifestation of new imagery, visual mediation, and technique. It is possible to discern an implicit

of critical reflection by elitist and expert forms of culture e.g. in contemporary art, which may serve to indicate some of the forces at play. Thus in the director's text of *Documenta 11*, Okwui Enwezor's radical chic lead him almost to embrace Islamic fundamentalism as a form of resistance against 'Empire'. He writes: «The main political rupture of today is properly caught in the resistance struggles being initiated by a host of forces (whether Islamic or secular) in order to prevent their societies from total integration in these two phases of the Western system [the world system of capitalism and democracy A.M.]». The relation between current Islamic forces and what they allegedly resists against is, to say the least, somewhat less clear than Enwezor indicates. One may think e.g. of the relations between Wahabism, the Saudi Arabian state, The West, and al Qaeda, which might indicate that Islamic religious struggle may be complicit somehow with Western agendas in an as yet unclear manner, and can not merely be counted on in a struggle 'against'. Culture is no guarantee in these matters, on the contrary. Cf. O. Enwezor, *The Black Box*, in *Documenta 11 Platform 5: Exhibition. Catalogue*, Ostfildern-Ruit 2002, p. 46. See also, A. Michelsen & K. Ramadan (eds.), *Dossier Terror-ISM* in «*Atlantica Revista de Arte y Pensamiento, Atlantica Revista de Arte y Pensamiento*» 35 (2003). For different perspectives, also relevant to visual culture see the debates on global civil society, cf. M. Kaldor, H. Anheier and M. Glasius (eds.), *Global Civil Society 2003*, Oxford 2003; T. Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jibads and modernity*, London 2002; A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis 1997.

²⁵ P. Dumouchel and Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Colloque de Cerisy: L'auto-organisation. De la physique au*, Paris 1983; J.-P. Dupuy, *Introduction aux Sciences Sociales. Logique des phénomènes collectives*, Paris 1992.

²⁶ C. Castoriadis, *Domaines de l'homme. Les carrefours du labyrinthe II*, Paris 1986; C. Castoriadis, *World in Fragments. Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination*, Stanford 1997. See also A. Michelsen, *Autotranscendence and creative organization: on creation and self-organization*, *loc. cit.*

creativity of the visual rendered explicit in systems of form, whether en-
framed in terms of an immediate modeling of visual form (in the sense of
apparantial entity constructed by someone), e.g. in the *Gestalt* of an installa-
tion by Jeff Koons, or in the programmings of mass media organizations, e.g.
reality-tv such as *Extreme Makeover* or the ‘spin’ of embedded journalism in
the recent American campaign in Iraq²⁷.

To make visible, to visualize – to see, may be conjectured beyond ocu-
larcentrism as a generative creativity, that is, as an articulation of organiza-
tions to the world by additive novelty, dimensioning and appearing to a visual
field (but of course not only to this field). Thus, one may argue, it is possible
to rephrase the relation between what an image may depict by a reference in
some capacity, and what an image may picture in larger sense by including as
well phantasy, phantasms etc. In other words one may undertake a revision of
the relations between representation and presentation which constitute – one
way or the other, the Western ontology of the image, from Plato to discourse
theory. In particular one may argue that the issue of current visuality points
to a change in an ongoing Western scepticism with regard to the image, from
Plato to Jean Baudrillard, by a different rehearsal of possible relations be-
tween representation and presentation, residing with the dimensioning of vi-
sual organizations.

Let us take a closer look at some of the options for such a rehearsal.
According to Jean-Jacques Wunenburger the «ontology of the image»²⁸ in the
West depreciates the image by a range of deeply paradoxical arguments which
develops from the Middle Ages onwards towards postmodern conceptions of
the simulacrum. In its basic mode Western scepticism reviews the «compre-
hension of the image» as meta-instable because of the unclear relation be-
tween representation of something external in the sense of depiction, and
something internal in the sense of an interiority of a mental presentation.
Wunenburger argues for a *longue durée* circumscribing two exigencies in this
respect:

²⁷ The phenomenon of spin (SPIN), re-surfaced in the American debates on the
Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) in the 1980es, where it came to designate ‘Significant
Progress In the News’, ‘spin’ often, though not always, implies disingenuous, deceptive
and/or highly ‘manipulative tactics’. Not least the visual aspects of spin has had impor-
tance as the recent American president elections has proven, whether the focus was
Michael Moores *Fahrenheit 9/11* or Karl Rove’s streamlined Republican campaign. Cf.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spin_%28public_relations%29 (04/11/05 12:14).

²⁸ J.-J. Wunenburger, *Philosophie des images*, Paris 1997, p. 147 ff.

(a) The appearance of the image as a mode of presentable sensation [*présentation sensible*] cannot be confined to an immediate experience of the real:

A painting, a dream, a metaphor, a symbol, is accompanied by a mode of particular presence, proper to a mental interiority, or localized in an exteriority [...] the image is [...] endowed [*dotée*] by the pretention to expose something essential which can not be delimited [*rabattre*] by a contingent empirical particularity.²⁹

To Wunenburger it is not at all clear how the image is actually taking up a place in the world, or in the ‘mental [*psychique*] flux’³⁰. This may however, point to an deepened understanding of an issue of paradox, with a number of consequences. We cannot establish a determinate relation between exteriority and interiority and this remains a feature of Western scepticism, whether the solutions tend toward a discursive or a naturalizing attempt of definition³¹. The image is clearly established by act of seeing but such acts are not really to be relied upon, it appears.

(b) One important consequence of the paradox of exterior and interior is clearly at display if we regard the historical unfolding of the troubled bereasoning [*arraisonnement*] of the image in terms of representation and presentation. Since representation cannot be cleared by determination, it raises emphatically the issue of principal meta-instability. It is not possible to dedicate any direct relation between image in the sense of representation and presentation. Representation is ‘impure’ as Ernesto Laclau has argued³², be-

²⁹ *Ivi*, p. 190.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ For a recent raise of stakes in this schisma, see J. Petitot, F.J. Varela, B. Pachoud and J.-M. Roy, *Naturalizing Phenomenology. Issues in Contemporary Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*, Stanford 1999.

³² «It is of the essence of the process of representation that the representative has to contribute to the identity of what is represented». E. Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*, London 1996, p. 87. Based on Derrida’s notion of supplement, Laclau develops his notion of impurity in a critical exchange with what he terms the phenomenological idea of conflation of meaning and intuition. Since meaning is not ‘reducible’ to appearance, but in itself contributing by an apparitional hegemony of power, a fuller horizon must be installed: what Laclau terms «the general form of fullness» which is «independent of any particular content» (p. 93). On this background it becomes possible to conceive of power as a lack to be filled by floating signifiers contesting and ‘negotiating’ hegemony, including the stance of hegemony *per se*. That is, the notion of discourse may be de facto creative in some capacity. However, what I am arguing here relates further to a qualification of discourse by emphasizing

cause it ads something which from within of representation transcends the system. The image, Wunenburger argues comes to exist as an indefinite rotation which does not coincide with a 'last' manifestation, «an ultimate Revelation which can express or mount the one or the many [*qui dirait ou monterait l'Un ou le Tout*]»³³. The process of imaging is thus highly dynamic.

Whereas the Western ontology, at least according to the criticism of visual culture, appoints the paradox mainly to an ocularcentric relation between exterior and interior, to be solved by a discursive determination, Wunenburger points to important further prospects of creativity. The paradox of exterior and interior may develop into a tripartite version of explicit and implicit pertaining to the issue of modeling ocular-eccentricity. In the immanence taken for granted in visual culture criticism, explicit and implicit co-exist on meta-unstable – impure, terms: that is, between a moment of explicit organization in systems of morphology, that is, manifest organizations of visuality, and a different moment of implicit creativity, an inherent mode of additive conception dimensioning the organizations in question, throughout a human world.

To Wunenburger, Western ontology may well circumscribe a meta-instability as «a properly unedited discourse» which has to do with the options of exteriority and interiority. But meta-instability also defines a wholly different realm of creative manifestation. As he puts it, the «massive and irrevocable devaluation of the image»³⁴ in the Platonean and Christian heritage is also a performative moment of creativity, of what he terms an 'ontophany' [*ontophanie*] of Being³⁵. That is, an appearance of reasons for the world in a wider sense. Meta-instability is autotranscendent in «the manifestation of the suprasensible, traversed [*travers*] by the spatio-temporal incarnation of the divinely absolute»³⁶. Image-scepticism is on the one hand the reading of a 're-

the creative disclosedness of structure in a human predication; what Castoriadis terms the 'magma' of social imaginary significations structuring the social as an ongoing relation between what in Laclau's argument is termed the contingent and the connective. In the final sense, what is at stake is a principal difference between a notion of discourse predicated on language and what Castoriadis terms the magma, see below. Laclau's versatile version of discourse theory remains within the immanence of discursive determination, residing in the final sense with an ambiguous notion of «the general form of fullness».

³³ J.-J. Wunenburger, *op. cit.*

³⁴ *Ivi*, p. 148.

³⁵ *Ivi*, p. 148 ff.

³⁶ *Ivi*, p. 149.

ductionist lecture' yet it becomes paradoxically impregnated with a status of affirmation, an apotheosis – reflecting a divine reason for the world. In other words, the image is depreciated, untrusted – specular, mirror, surface, simulacrum, and so forth, yet it is also the opening of a dimension which we may well designate as creative.

Most important in the present context, within modernity, this issue takes on increasingly charged and radicalized character, pointing from exteriority/interiority of essence to and explicit/implicit of dimension, in the sense of Arnason. The initial paradox of depreciation/ontophany is rephrased as a tentative (and secular) 'nihilism' of unrepresentable presentability thematized as an incessant movement of «presence to absence»³⁷. The modern aesthetic renounces the Christian reference to divine revelation, but furnishes a continuing, yet differently motivated distrust by the theme of the sublime, charged with exposing a world much vaster than the sensible³⁸. Whereas the beautiful contemplates harmonious, finite forms, bound to the appreciation – to the commonality of a 'sensus', that is, an experiential beauty (attempting to solve meta-instability by measures of commonality), the sublime circumscribes a problem of the properly invisible in the visible, a comprehension which goes beyond mere representation of a suprasensible intuition, and becomes a «presentation in the sensible of what may exceed, by way of its incommensurability, by its disproportion, our faculties [*pouvoir*] of representation»³⁹:

Following this, the sublime relates to an image in which the imagination produces a maximum representation of that which is, which turns out to be directly unrepresentable to the human. As I. Kant underlines, the sublime «oblige us to think subjectively nature itself in its totality as presentation [*Darstellung*] of something suprasensible, without being able to realize this presentation objectively» [...] That is why the image is not anymore [*n'est plus*] an imitation of an ideal and perfect reality [*d'une réalité idéale et idéale*] but a simple appearance created by the human in order to make an indirect, symbolic presentation of what proves the presence around [*autour*] it, and beyond [*au-dessus*] him, but of which he cannot assure [*assurer*] a direct presentification.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Ivi*, pp. 181 ff, 182 ff.

³⁸ *Ivi*, p. 183.

³⁹ *Ivi*, p. 184.

⁴⁰ *Ivi*, pp. 185, 185 ff.

This «new way of thinking»⁴¹, related to Kant's Enlightenment but radicalised by the romantics, poses the problem of an «asymptotic representation of a dazzling point [*d'un point aveugle*] [...] (the focus imaginarius in Kant's terms)»⁴² which in its postmodern versions is summoned by a appraisal, *on the one hand*, of the simulacrum, interiorizing the original and the copy – the model and the reproduction, as «pure phenomenality»⁴³. In the words of Deleuze, «the simulation is the phantasm itself, that is, the effects of the functioning of the simulacrum as a sort of [*en tant que*] machinery, a Dionysiac machine»⁴⁴. *On the other hand*, the image may thus capture nothing, it is perpetually vacillating, flowing, in a 'continual flux'⁴⁵:

The image is repetition without end in itself [*d'elle-même*] because in itself it lacks substance, consistence. Deprived of Being it appears as incessant movement, a tropism, a tendency towards; the image thus loses all ontophanic value, it elides [*s'évide*], it deposits only of form-inform, always disappearing [*disparais-sante*], nourishing in the final sense a new iconoclasm. In this sense [*dès lors*] the creation is itself the movement by which one erases [*s'arrache*] the images completely in order to install a vacuum [*vide*], an abyss [*abîme*], the origin of all expression, writing or representation.⁴⁶

This pure phenomenality is on the one hand a possible culmination of inherent image depreciation in the West leading to a non-depreciative appraisal of form, from Clement Greenberg's modernism to the mechanisms of mind e.g. in the symbolic approach to Artificial Intelligence (and further in the various complex attempts at a naturalized phenomenology, from algorithms of vision to pattern recognition). In this sense pure phenomenality empties form in order to open a different agenda. However, and even more important, the issue of pure phenomenality is opening an ultimate form of depreciation/creation underlined by an appreciation of a Dionysiac flux of simulacra, and the instantiation of vacuum, abyss, as «origin of all expression, writing or representation»⁴⁷. That is, a different appreciation of visuality proceeding

⁴¹ *Ibidem.*

⁴² *Ibidem.*

⁴³ *Ivi*, pp.185-186.

⁴⁴ *Ivi*, p. 186.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁷ *Ibidem.*

from a new lurking issue of creativity in the collective mode of e.g. Deleuze and Guattari's 'abstract machine', that «does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality»⁴⁸.

One should thus not overlook the problem of creativity lurking in the continual flux underwriting current conceptions of the image, from the Deleuzian simulacrum over Baudrillardian simulation to Foucauldian power/knowledge.

The fact that the being of the image is meta-instable, is withdrawing in primordial abyss, opens a quite different and paradoxical acknowledgement of creativity. What vacillates in this meta-instability is a transformation from essential relations between exterior and interior to dimensions of explicit and implicit. Put differently: the formation of creativity as conveyer of images by images: that is, the problem of the image being not the effect *of* the world somehow, in some capacity, but the emergence of effect *upon* the world. The explicit organization of the visual, in post-Duchampian art or postwar broadcast media, is rendered on intrinsic dimensions residing within, or perhaps, from within of autotranscendence. This is why the discursive notion of visuality is forced to define the visual as a system of differences within an immanence in some capacity, but it is also why this notion cannot stand alone.

One may thus debate the role of 'nihilism' in modern conceptions of the image, not only as an ontology of a system upon simulacrum/abyss, but as an ontology of creation upon simulacrum/abyss. Insofar the image in the Western tradition precedes towards a 'point zero' of no qualities it is because the creative is increasingly apparant as a pressing predicament of presentation: a form of heteronomy, which cannot be conjectured from the standpoint of representation. What is lurking in the abyss of the modern image may be a peculiar nihilism, but it is also a rite de passage to creativity. The propensity of for instance the modern Bild Verbot, the 'shock of the new' – the avantgarde's ongoing struggles with visual form and material, also in the debates on visuality, can be apprehended not only as tropism of de-depiction,

⁴⁸ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis 1987, p. 142. See also A. Michelsen, *The imaginary of the artificial: automata, models, machinics. Remarks on promiscuous modeling as precondition for poststructuralist ontology*, in T.W Keenan and W.H. Kyong Chun (eds.), *New Media, Ole Media. Interrogating the Digital Revolution*, New York 2005.

but as a will to creativity, surrounding and surmounting the image from many points of entry.

Image in the sense of depiction becomes thus less a casualty, and more a lever of creativity, what Wunenburger terms the 'in between' of the 'imaginal' [*imaginal*] – an imago-formation beyond aisthesis; a creativity which has to be defined not by the inherited realism of intuition-imagination-conceptualization, that is ocularcentrism in some capacity, but by the inverse relation of creation-imaginary-valorization, forwarding ocular-eccentricity by relations implicit to certain explicit organizations of the visual.

3. ONTOLOGICAL MODELING: VISUALITY AND CREATIVITY

Wunenburger's genealogy of the problem of presentation in Western image-scepticism may be summoned by at least four stages of meta-instability of representation and presentation (1) apotheosis allowing for ontophany, that is, Being as divine becoming for humans, (2) sublimation in the modern era opening a vaster realm of secular appraisal of creativity as incomprehensible, (3) transformations of sublime presentation in issues of abstraction in the 20th century, e.g. by post-Duchampian art and conceptual approaches from the 1950s onwards, (4) a further disclosure of the contours of a new dimension of the creative by the appearance of a tripartitional modeling of explicit organization and implicit dimension.

As Martin Jay argues, the emergence of modeling in the postwar period is closely related to the change from essential reason/imagination to a dimensioning of rationalization/imaginary. The import of ocular-eccentricity is not blindness or 'un-seeing' but rather seeing by the creativity of modeling in a new sense: 'models of visuality'. As post-Duchampian art shows, visuality does not abolish seeing as such, but inserts systems of intermediation in the visual, e.g. by notions such as discursive determination. Modeling is thus anything but a simple term. As Jay writes:

Indeed, it is precisely the proliferation of models of visuality that the antiocularcentric discourse, for all its fury against the ones it distrusts, tacitly encourages. Ocular-*eccentricity* rather than blindness, it might be argued, is the antidote to privileging any one visual order or scopic regime [...] Michel Serres claims that contemporary modes of communication, based on codes and computers, have put an end to the reign of 'panoptic theory'. «The informational world takes the place of the observed world», he writes, things known because

they are seen cede their place to an exchange of codes. Everything changes, everything flows from harmony's victory over surveillance.⁴⁹

The notion of modeling is in Jay's usage primarily to be understood in terms of a history of ideas. However I think, it also relates crucially to a question of model in the sense of a creative dimensioning in Arnason's terms. Jay's use of the notion model is clearly playing on the computational heritage where a model is first of all signifying how things may organize themselves in a human dimension, that is, as complexity in a form discernible to humans (e.g. by images). The term model is endowed with an emergent dimension which can be grasped by humans, but only within the given order of the model, e.g. as a diagram of traffic flows or a weather system relating to number of algorithmic and mechanical functions of computation, further to the issue of complexity in various strata of the real (e.g. 'real' weather) accessible – one way or the other, to humans⁵⁰.

However, the idea of model may be expanded if viewed as a question of creative appearance. Put differently, the visibility of the postwar era may be reviewed as emergence, incompleteness and continued creation of visibility, first by the appearance in immediate terms of new explicit morphologies, from art to broadcast, second, by an implicit dimension. Explicit organization is referring to a broad field of concrete organizations of the visual reflecting effects of the 'models of visibility' Jay debates, importantly not only in the exotic issues of scientific visualization and the like, but as a circumscriptive critical mass of social and cultural issues, such as reality-tv or embedded journalism. Implicit dimension refers to what may be termed effectuation, to the creativity residing with what Arnason terms dimension. This makes it possible to replace the inherited oculo-centric predicament of exterior/interior (that is, the conception of creativity by the dichotomy of essentialism and skepticism), with a conception based on relations between explicit organization and implicit dimension (the dimensioning of organizations) without arguing for discursive *determination*, e.g. in Foster's sense.

Arnason situates the most far-ranging version of tripartition in Cornelius Castoriadis's philosophy of the 'imaginary institution of society'. Here tripart-

⁴⁹ M. Jay, *Downcast Eyes. The denigration of vision in twentieth century French thought*, Berkeley 1993, pp. 591, 593.

⁵⁰ See J.-P. Dupuy, *The Mechanization of the Mind. On the Origins of Cognitive Science*, Princeton 2000, p. 27 ff.

tion is mirrored in a concern for how the imaginary pertains to (a) a ‘dysfunctionalization’ going beyond organic needs and drives in a further sense of creative – dimensioning, rationality⁵¹, (b) a ‘deconditioning’ loosening its bond to ‘external referents’ thus fragmenting essentialist and ocularcentric form in created organizations and (c) most importantly, a ‘destructuring’⁵² by an inherent issue of implicit creativity, to Castoriadis the issue of the ‘magma’:

It concerns its internal determinations, and it is perhaps here that the shift from the imagination to the imaginary is most important. Neither the representative affective/intentional flux of the psyche nor the open-ended and self-altering network of linguistic and cultural significations in society can be reduced to determinate structures; more precisely, we have to do here with a mode of being which resists description in the terms of traditional ontology, and for which Castoriadis suggests the concept of magma [...] The destructuring and destructured aspect of the imaginary is what ultimately undermines closure and makes total identity impossible, makes a culture capable of questioning itself, of confronting other cultures as well as the world in its capacity of – to quote Castoriadis – an interminable enigma and an inexhaustible source of otherness.⁵³

Now, how can this notion of implicit dimension, that is, of form antepredicate to explicit morphology of organizations in fact be grasped beyond speculative claims? That is, how can creativity per se be addressed? Castoriadis suggest a number of procedures having to do with the understanding of social and historical morphology, the issue of sublimation, and not least, as indicated, the problem of ‘constraints’ as inherent part of human autotranscendence. However, closer to the protolinguistics of discursive determination he presents the idea of a polysemy of language by a «bundle of referrals»⁵⁴. The issue of ‘significations in language’, he argues, is also «the co-belonging of a term and of that to which it *refers*, by degrees, whether directly or indirectly»⁵⁵ that is, to a system or a further dimension of the co-signification

⁵¹ J.P. Arnason, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

⁵² *Ivi*, pp. 166-167.

⁵³ *Ivi*, p. 167. For Castoriadis’s own definitions and debates on the notion of magma (beyond the scope of this paper), see C. Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cambridge 1987, and D. Curtis (ed.), *World in Fragments. Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination*, Stanford 1997. See also A. Michelsen, *Autotranscendence and creative organization: on creation and self-organization*, *loc. cit.*

⁵⁴ C. Castoriadis: *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, *loc. cit.*, p. 345 ff.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

present in language as well as by other possible imports of signification in a human realm. Signification in language gains form by an open «bundle of referrals starting from and surrounding a term»⁵⁶. This inherent polysemy is of course relying on the magma, or conversely pointing to multifarious issues of structured meaning cum sign. A living language, Castoriadis argues is characterized by the dedication of an indeterminate option or a ‘continuous possibility’⁵⁷ – a constitutive option, of the emergence of significations, of «signifieds *other* than those already recorded for a given ‘synchronic’ state»⁵⁸. The ‘bundles’ of referrals are always emphatically open because the attachment of concrete signification, of meaning, is predicated on the magma:

A signification is indefinitely determinable (and the ‘indefinitely’ is obviously essential) without thereby being determined. It can always be marked out, provisionally assigned as an identitary element to an identitary relation with another identitary element [...] and as such be ‘a something’ as the starting point for an open series of successive determinations. These determinations, however, in principle never exhaust it.⁵⁹

The ‘being of signification’, Castoriadis goes on, has been inadequately described by «the distinctions between proper and figurative meaning, central signification and semantic aura, denotation and connotation»⁶⁰. In fact there is no denotation opposed to connotations, there are only connotations or as Castoriadis argues, «*every expression is essentially tropic*»⁶¹. All language is essentially the ‘abuse of language’⁶². Any formal rule of language, any structural setting of language, is only applicable insofar as it allows for creation of significations in the sense of letting the creative organization of the magma prevail. Being in language means to accept that there is no final and in this sense determinate response to the issue of identity, that is, to ‘accepting to be in signification’⁶³ – in our context to accept certain organizations as options of dimensioning: «A language is such only inasmuch as it offers speakers the

⁵⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁹ *Ivi*, p. 346.

⁶⁰ *Ivi*, p. 347.

⁶¹ *Ivi*, p. 348.

⁶² *Ibidem.*

⁶³ *Ivi*, p. 350.

possibility of *taking their bearings* in and through what they say *in order to move within it* [...] to use the code of designations in order to make other significations appear»⁶⁴:

There is thus a logical and real inseparability of these two aspects of signification, *peras* and *apeiron*, definiteness-determinacy-distinctness-limitation and indefiniteness-indeterminacy-indistinctness-unlimitedness. It is essential that language always provide the possibility of treating the meanings it conveys as an ensemble formed by terms which are determined, rigorously circumscribable, each identical to itself and distinct from all the others, separable and separate. And it is equally essential that it always provide the possibility of new terms emerging, that the relations between existing terms be redefined, and so that the existing terms, inseparable from their relations, also be redefined [...] Beyond any set which could be extracted from it or constructed out of it, significations are not a set; their mode of being is other, it is that of a magma.⁶⁵

It is important to understand that the Castoriadean polisemy – his definition of signification, is pertaining to issues of language, in that sense, to the ways structuralism and poststructuralism make their points over six decades. Nevertheless, his idea of a principal connotation is not only transversal aking to the sense of a discursive determination, but pervasive in the sense of creative articulation of human meaning (e.g. in contrast to Barthes's definition of connotation). There, in fact a question of a principal porosity and mutual supplement of different aspects of human meaning – of co-extensive relations between, as Castoriadis terms it elsewhere, the functional, the symbolic and the imaginary⁶⁶. Thus opens a different, or essentially supplementary issue – an «essential supplement»⁶⁷ within the visual, as within other possible

⁶⁴ *Ivi*, p. 353.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁶ «Beyond the conscious activity of institutionalization, institutions have drawn their source from the *social imaginary*. This imaginary must be interwoven with the symbolic, otherwise society could not have 'come together'; and have linked up with the economic-functional component, otherwise it could not have survived. It can be placed, and it must be placed, in their service as well: there is, of course, a *function* of the institutional imaginary, although here, too, we observe that the effect of the imaginary *outstrips* its function; it is not the 'ultimate factor' (we are not looking for one anyway) – but without it any determination of both the symbolic and the functional, the specificity and the unity of the former, the orientation and the finality of the latter, remain incomplete and finally incomprehensible», *ivi*, p. 131.

⁶⁷ *Ivi*, p. 127.

modes of human meaning. It is, in other words, possible to conceive of various tripartitions of various dimensions, e.g. the visual, the oral, the aural, the tactile, even the olfactoral etc. even if it must be emphasized that these dimensions are still a crude approximation residing with a delimited, yet relevant, issue of human psyche-soma – the sense-making body. Thus in a collective – to Castoriadis social-historical mode, it should be envisaged to see these approximations as merely heuristic.

4. REVISION OF VISUALITY: MERLEAU-PONTY AND THE ONTOLOGICAL TRADITION

This may be developed by a quite radical revision of the notion of visuality, if one reads Castoriadis with the posthumous Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the latter's elaborations of the reversibility thesis and the 'chiasm' by the conjecture of the new element of the 'flesh' of the visible and the invisible⁶⁸. Proceeding from the psyche-soma of the perceptual faith of a human body invested in the world – the formula of his early work stipulating that «our own body is in the world as the heart in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system»⁶⁹ – Merleau-Ponty takes radical steps in the second posthumous phase of his thought, into a terrain which becomes equally co-formative of such different approaches as poststructuralism and cognitive science⁷⁰. While this may create problems with regard to reception of his work, it also opens, more importantly, crucial alternatives for the issues of visuality. In fact one may see the later Merleau-Ponty's thought as a blueprint for a conception of visuality which not only allows for an expansion of the notion of discursive determination into a proper visual field, but also to discern what possible specificities might pertain to such a field. Most important the idea of a chiasmic relationality (the reversibility thesis) between the visible and the invisible may open for a different understanding of how a dimensioning

⁶⁸ See also J.P. Arnason, *op. cit.*; P. Murphy, *op. cit.* F. Ciaramelli, *The Self-presupposition of the Origin: Homage to Cornelius Castoriadis*, in «Thesis Eleven Critical Theory and Historical Sociology» 49 (1997).

⁶⁹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, London 1986, p. 203.

⁷⁰ For the former see e.g. G. Deleuze, *Foucault*, Minneapolis 1988, for the latter see A. Noë and E. Thompson (eds.), *Vision and mind: selected readings in the philosophy of perception*, Cambridge, 2002.

of Being as signification⁷¹ is rendered possible by specific organizations of the visible.

With a further importance, the mutual ‘projections’ – what Renaud Barbaras terms ‘the conjunctive tissue’⁷² of the visible and the invisible are not recursive but rather explicit/implicit in the sense I try to indicate here: that is, they are the dimensioning – the ‘dimensionality’⁷³ of organizations relying on an intrinsic relation between explicit systems of form and implicit issues of dimension: the opening of an explicit visible relative to what Merleau-Ponty himself describes as a conjunctive ‘dimension that can never again be closed’ – the ‘idea’ – i.e. the meaning of world (for humans) – the ‘invisible of this world’:

With the first vision, the first contact, the first pleasure, there is initiation, that is, not the positing of a content, but the opening of a dimension that can never again be closed, the establishment of a level in terms of which every other experience will henceforth be situated. The idea is this level, this dimension. It is therefore not a *de facto* invisible, like an object hidden behind another, and not an absolute invisible, which would have nothing to do with the visible. Rather it is the invisible of this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being.⁷⁴

Thus, in different words, there is no visible without an invisible, there is no explicit organization without an inwardly sustained dimensioning of the ‘invisible of this world’ in some capacity. And moreover, this must apply to any mode of explicitness, that is any manifest morphology of the world, which consequently – in general terms, and in each and every specific case, has a recourse to the invisible of a dimensioning. That is (beyond the early Merleau-Pontean phenomenology of a ‘worldly’ psyche-soma, or, for that matter, the Husserlian eidetics of diagrammatic morphology), there is no visuality without the meaning of the invisible, e.g. in a cultural realm of visual culture.

Nevertheless, with all said, Merleau-Ponty does not treat the issue – beyond vague indication, of what leads to the peculiar chiasm of the visible and the invisible he probes. Along the lines of the phenomenological heritage he

⁷¹ R. Barbaras, *Phénoménalité et signification dans le visible et l'invisible*, in «Les Cahiers de Philosophie» 7 (1989), pp. 40 ff, 42.

⁷² *Ivi*, p. 38.

⁷³ *Ivi*, p. 42.

⁷⁴ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Evanston 1968, p. 151.

ultimately refers to something given, in the extreme a wild form of being, but a being still given, still appearing somehow, in the posthumous Merleau-Ponty to be sure beyond most phenomenology (and thus a conception of vision in the ocularcentric form) but still, given.

Castoriadis focus on this deficit in different parts of his thought. While acknowledging the possible creative dimension of the notion of the chiasm, arising from the moment of mutuality between the visible and the invisible, he also criticizes the latter's moderation with regard to the imaginary⁷⁵. Thus in the text 'Merleau-Ponty and the Ontological Tradition' he argues that a notion of perception remains problematically present in Merleau-Ponty to the extent where it forecloses the issue of the imaginary. Thus the possible imports of creative constitution related to a notion of chiasm *de facto* recedes. The imaginary is not thought in the capacity of creative constitution, and consequently, Castoriadis argues, «the difference between real and imaginary becomes again as absolute as it could be, their qualities opposed, the consubstantiality of the first with the true and of the second with illusion massively affirmed»⁷⁶.

Thus Merleau-Ponty's posthumous thought comes to affirm the phenomenological notion of the given as an unmitigated real, thus affirming the traditional division between real and imaginary to the effect that «the real is coherent and probable because it is real, and not real because it is coherent; the imaginary is incoherent or improbable because it is imaginary, and not imaginary because it is incoherent»⁷⁷.

Nevertheless, even in terms of the mind, Castoriadis goes on – i.e. the traditional focus of phenomenology (although with important qualifications in Merleau-Ponty), it is inconceivable that the imaginary should not have real implications. It is not only inconceivable that the mind should be unable to be captured by its representations, it is conceivable, in much more radical terms that representation is the produce somehow of a creative instantiation. It is thus possible to conceive of a notion of mind – meaning, wherein the issue of representation becomes co-extensive, or even derived, from a creative flux emerging in the mind:

⁷⁵ See F. Ciaramelli, *op. cit.*

⁷⁶ C. Castoriadis, *World in Fragments. Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination*, *loc. cit.*, p. 279.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem.*

The mind does not 'have' representations. The mind [*esprit*], if one wants to use this term, *is* this: representational flux (and something else as well, of course). The 'mind' is, first and foremost, this perpetual 'presentation' of 'something' that is not there *for* something else [*re-presentation*, *Vertretung*] or *for* 'someone.' Perception, dreams, reverie, memory, phantasm, reading, hearing music with eyes closed, thought are first and foremost that, and they rigorously enter under the same heading. Whether I open or I close my eyes, whether I listen or I stop up my ears, always, except in dreamless sleep, *there is* that itself – and, to begin with, nothing but that – which is in and through this presentation; there is (since the metaphor of vision, and not by chance, dominates) absolute '*spectacle*,' which is not spectacle of another trans-spectacle, nor is it spectacle for a spectator, the spectator herself being, in as much as she is at all, on stage'.⁷⁸

The net result is thus that the invisible and the invisible remains within the perimeter of a much expanded perception – e.g. in relation to the ocularcentric subject, however expanded. It cannot overcome a question of derivation from the real somehow, which stands in contrast to the fact that forms of the given must recur to imaginary articulations in some capacity, to reflections instantiating – positing, the perception and its juxtaposition to something real. The issues of perception, and thus of the real, are of a secondary nature, an invention, in simple terms, which refers to a much more complicated issue of emergent flux, Castoriadis argues:

The 'something' (as object, *Gegen-stand*, whatever its particular tenor incidentally might be, but as holding itself [*se tenant*] apart from the representational flux) and the 'someone' (as subject, whatever the 'interpretation' thereof: man, soul, consciousness, 'mind', or *Dasein*) are separations resulting from reflections. They are inevitable and legitimate – but of a second order. They are 'real' and 'logical', even 'solid' so far as they can be – but of a second order. That in the *there is* of the representational flux the (allegedly full-bloomed) perceptual thing rapidly (though not inevitably) blossoms forth is of importance and even decisive – but of a second order'.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ *Ivi*, pp. 281-282. I would like to emphasize that what Castoriadis argues is, I think, neither incompatible with current cognitive science, e.g. of the connectionist type, or with aspects of neurobiology, or with the idea of discursive construction. In fact what Castoriadis argues is philosophical complement to a number of pressing issues in contemporary debates on mind, cognition, neurobiology, and culture. For a historical perspective, see O. Breidbach, *Die Materialisierung des Ichs. Zur Geschichte der Hirnforschung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt a.M., 1997. See also K.P. Dencker (ed.), *Labile Ordnungen. Netze Denken, Kunst Verkehren, Verbindlichkeiten. Interface 3*, Hamburg 1997.

⁷⁹ *Ivi*, pp. 282-283.

To base a 'cosmology' – the term of Merleau-Ponty⁸⁰, on the visible and the invisible is thus also to open a debate on a creative – dimensioning, magma of the imaginary, that is, of a 'primar' order. There is no real discrepancy, Castoriadis maintains, between reality and fiction, rather there is something 'before' the distinction between 'real' and 'fictitious' namely the imaginary of the magma, mirroring a radical imagination of the psyche-soma: «It is because radical imagination exists that 'reality' exist *for us* – exists *tout court* – and exists *as* it exists»⁸¹.

There is, however, still an ambiguous side to Merleau-Ponty's argument. In fact Merleau-Ponty circles around the issue of creative dimensioning in ways which at points comes close to acknowledge the need for a query of how the chiasm comes into being. This is quite clear when he asks for example by what instance the natural world attains the status of a chiasm to be reflected upon, and more importantly, by what instance – he uses the term 'miracle', – the issue becomes reflectable at all, that is: «By what miracle a created generality, a culture, a knowledge come to add to and recapture and rectify the natural generality of my body and of the world»⁸².

This question may be answered in a further sense – not only in the absolute terms of Castoriadis's conjecture of a strong ontological imagination, but in the subtle terms of how it is possible to align the two work. It is thus possible to displace the ontological agenda of the visible and the invisible – Merleau-Ponty's strategy of approaching Being by the visible, into a realm of tripartition in the sense of what Castoriadis terms a cultural history of creation of perception. One should understand the notion of culture correctly here, in fact Castoriadis is talking about collective, historical emergence⁸³ of the entire implication of the chiasm as a new creatively constituted visuality, which may simultaneously retain and qualify the inherited idea of perception:

If our perception is cultural-historical, as it incontestably is, not only could it not be a question of maintaining for it any ontological privilege whatsoever or the status of 'archetype' relative to other forms of access to what is, of 'giving itself' something or making it be, what you will; it becomes important and ur-

⁸⁰ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et L'Invisible*, Paris 1986, p. 318.

⁸¹ C. Castoriadis, in D. Curtis (ed.), *The Castoriadis Reader*, Oxford 1997, pp. 319 ff, 321.

⁸² M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, *loc. cit.*, p. 152.

⁸³ The issue of definitions of history and culture looms large in Castoriadis work and is beyond the scope of this article, see e.g. C. Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, *loc. cit.*, p. 165 ff.

gent to explore the consequences of this fact, to ask oneself what ‘components’ of perception are social-historical in origin and in what manner they are so, whether one can thus distinguish any ‘components’ therein and impute them in a distinct way to this or that origin, and, finally, whether one can even preserve the traditional sense of ‘perception’.⁸⁴

Of course then, the visible and the invisible – loosened, or better, qualified from a perceptual issue to an imaginary state circumscribing the perception as it were – thus conjectured without any real neglect of the independent aspects of perception, cognition and culture etc. – must reside with what Castoriadis terms magma. However, and we should not proceed too hastily here, the visible and the invisible is still a qualified instituted field of ‘referrals’ of visuality, organizing a dimension of the real whose ultimate ‘reason’ lies in the magma but whose intricate complexity may well be accounted for by the notion of chiasm. Put differently: we may have gotten closer to the implicitness of explicit morphology in the visual terrain, and we may have seen an inaugurative dimensioning, but we still need to retain Merleau-Ponty’s comprehensive idea of specific visuality. Put differently: In the synergy between Castoriadis and Merleau-Ponty one may discern a framework for understanding visuality as a creative dimensioning of the world, explicit in specific organizations, from art to reality-tv.

5. IN CLOSING

I have been trying to argue above that the debate on visual culture is in deficit with regard to discerning the creative dimension of its own appearance. This has not only obvious analytical implications, but also further implications for understanding why or age ultimately may be rendered more visual. I have been trying to indicate that a closer look at the notion of visuality may not only clarify why the novel creativity pass by unacknowledged but also shed light on a further cultural dynamic, relating to the creativity of visual organizations making up concrete visual culture. Finally I have attempted to describe a synergetic framework for a notion of creative visual culture beyond – or better aligned or «essentially supplementing»⁸⁵ discursive determination,

⁸⁴ C. Castoriadis, *World in Fragments*, *loc. cit.*, p. 293.

⁸⁵ Cf. C. Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, *loc. cit.*, p. 127.

which should ad to the understanding of why and how visuality is appearing to the world. With regard to the possible predicament of art in the age of visuality, this should finally be a reassurance as to the further prospects of artistic endeavor even if art in the future may change even more in possible modes of tripartition.