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# *Imago and the Concept of Imagotron*

### **Abstract**

*This paper explores the relationship between the image and the time in which we live. In the first part, we critically engage with the image as a concept. The second part introduces the concept of imagotron, a conceptual symbiosis that defines the relationship between the image and electronics. This is illustrated by two manifestations of the imagotron: the hypercube and the hologram. The final part recapitulates the significance of the image in relation to technological developments and virtual reality.*

### **Keywords**

image, imagotron, technology, hypercube, hologram, technical image, electronic image, virtual reality

## **1. Image as a Concept**

“... the tongue goes in the mouth closes it must be a straight line now it's over it's done I've had the image.”<sup>1</sup>

– Samuel Beckett

Recent developments in the conceptualisations of the image show that concepts about the image are changing and asserting themselves over older, static ones.<sup>2</sup> One of these developments is the technical image (more specifically, electronic image), which, roughly speaking, refers to the image of television, cinema and the computer (including their extensions, e.g. smartphones, tablets, etc.). The aim of this paper is to examine and highlight the importance of the image in the contemporary era, which manifests as an age of the image.

In retrospect, the image encompasses all of human history; it is indispensable to the evolution of our civilisation. Some moments in the history of humanity's journey via image give us an insight into the time we live in today. The first of these moments are characterised by cave paintings. Here I want to emphasise the “image consciousness” (*Bildbewusstsein*)<sup>3</sup> of existence because

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Samuel Beckett, *How It Is*, John Calder Publisher, London 1996.

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See: Thomas Nail, *Theory of Image*, Oxford University Press, London – New York 2019. In his rather idiosyncratic interpretation of the image, Thomas Nail views the old theories of Plato and Immanuel Kant as static or immobile. Plato's objectivist views are static the image can be broken down in numbers, which per se are static. But Kant's subjectivist views

are also static, because the image is a body to be understood as an object, and thus in itself it has no mobility.

3

Edmund Husserl, “Imaging Consciousness in Its Immanent Function and in Its Symbolic Function – on the Aesthetic Contemplation of an Image – Inquiry into the Relationship of the Founding Apprehension in Phantasy Consciousness and in Image Consciousness to Perceptual Apprehension”, in: Edmund

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consciousness as existences goes *vis-à-vis* the image. We know ourselves and others through this relationship with the image. The second moment is the icons, i.e., the iconoclasm that marks any belief in or revolt against the image. The third moment, in relation to Walter Benjamin, is the image of modernity, which can be seen as a means of technical reproduction. Currently, the image has entered into the fields of fractality and hyperreality.

At this point, I would like to highlight a new academic discipline called *Bildwissenschaft*<sup>4</sup> or image sciences, not because other developments in the theorisation of the image aren't unique, but mainly because the turn I'm describing here has brought about a paradigmatic shift in the conceptualisation of the image, effectively synthesising history of art, visual arts, and art theory to make visual culture and image technologies more tangible. This new paradigm aims to deconstruct the hegemony of art history as the main discourse for providing the analytical and conceptual tools for understanding the image, while participating in a reconfiguration of our ideas about the image. Image sciences emerged in the German-speaking world and very quickly became part of the discourse on the image and art in general. This endeavour is worth noting because its main impact lies in these reconfigurations or what Barbara Herrnstein Smith described as "conceptual styles",<sup>5</sup> to sketch the ubiquitous presence and the importance of the image in our *Lebenswelt* (life-world). Moreover, in a postmodern context, a crucial shift occurred from deconstructionist textualism in the analysis of image-making as a complex form of manifestation.

The image has always stood in the shadow of civilisation, and only in recent years has it been recognised how much it has shaped us – to the extent that even we ourselves become images. It becomes clear why Thomas Nail stated that:

"A spectre is haunting the twenty-first century, and it is the spectre of the image."<sup>6</sup>

Because of its highly dispersed character, an axiomatic definition of the image does not exist. For the Ancient Greeks, the word used for image was *eidolon* [εἶδωλον],<sup>7</sup> which roughly meant the "presentification"<sup>8</sup> of things. This use of the word is equivalent to the German word *Bild*. Many researchers of image theory view the roots of the word *image* in connection with the Latin word *imago*, which literally means "material imitation". Other uses of the word carry meanings such as "simulacrum", "figure", "duplication" and "echo". But in order to grasp the meaning of the image, we have to delve deeper into the multitudes of meanings the word carries. Here we will give two views about its use: the first will show its use within philosophical discourse, while the other will focus on the philological aspects of it.

In the first case, the image is conceptualised as follows: a) in aesthetics it means imitation (mimesis), b) in literature studies it is a rhetorical device, c) in ontology it is understood as appearance/apparition, d) in logics as resemblance and similitude.<sup>9</sup> In the second case, based on how the philosopher William John Thomas Mitchell categorised the image in his work "What Is an Image?": a) graphic (pictures, statues, designs), b) optical (mirrors, projections), c) perceptual (sense data, "species" and appearances), d) mental (dreams, memories, ideas, and phantasm), and e) verbal (metaphor, description).<sup>10</sup>

We can clearly see that the image is one of the human concepts that extends to all spheres of our lives, and through all intellectual disciplines or discourses. We cannot reduce the image only to the epistemological discourse, because

the image is *amphibolous*, which implies that it operates within the logic of doubling; the image, on the one hand, is the subject image of something, and on the other hand, it is itself the subject that produces the image. From this we can conclude that the image in itself is neither a painting, nor a depiction, nor a visualisation, that is, neither a representation by sight, nor an illusion, nor a simulacrum. The image permeates all our social and individual structures through its power of movement with all the qualities mentioned above. This makes us dependent on the play of exchange between it and us. We have to come to terms with the overarching multiplicity of the image in all facets of life. We are stunned by its flux and, as Jean Baudrillard claims, we are the victims of a “diabolical seduction of the image”.<sup>11</sup> The following passage from Thomas Nail beautifully elucidates this complexity of the image:

Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, Memory (1898–1925)*, Rudolf Bernet (ed.), *Edmund Husserl Collected Works*, vol. XI, trans. John B. Brough, Springer, Dordrecht 2005, p. 37–47.

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For more see: Horst Bredekamp, *Image Acts. A Systematic Approach to Visual Agency*, trans. Elizabeth Clegg, De Gruyter, Berlin – Boston 2021; Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images. Pictures, Medium, Body*, trans. Thomas Dunlap, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2014.

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Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Scandalous Knowledge. Science, Truth and the Human*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2005, p. 65.

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Th. Nail, *Theory of Image*, p. 2.

7

Gerard Simon defines the image not only in relation to *imago* but also with the ancient Greek concept *eidolon*: “The Greek names for image always privilege one of its defining or functional characteristics: eikōn [εἰκὼν], ‘similitude’, phantasma [φάντασμα], ‘appearance in light’ (see PHANTASIA, IMAGINATION, from phōs [φῶς], ‘light’, and LIGHT), tupos [τύπος], ‘imprint, impression’, and so on. The entry EIDŌLON, the most general term derived from the verb meaning ‘to see’, and that denotes the image as something visible by which we can see another thing, discusses at greater length the main difficulties of interpretation and translation that have arisen in ontology and optics, via the Arabic (ma’nā [منعرجا]; [...] other philosophical contexts, the word can denote eidolon [εἰδῶλον], ‘image’ and ‘simulacrum’. The Latin entry SPECIES discusses the Latin translations of eidos, in its pairing with eidolon.” – See: Gerard Simon, “Eidolon”, in: Barbara Cassin *et al.* (eds.), *Dictionary of Untranslatables. A*

*Philosophical Lexicon*, trans. Steven Randall *et al.*, Princeton University Press, Princeton – Oxford 2014, pp. 245–249.

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Jean-Pierre-Vernant, “From the ‘Presentification’ of the Invisible to the Imitation of Appearance”, in: Jean Pierre-Vernant, Forma I. Zeitlin (ed.), *Mortal and Immortals. Collected Essays*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1991, pp. 151–163, here pp. 153–155.

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“Image”, in: B. Cassin *et al.* (eds.), *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, p. 478.

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William John Thomas Mitchell, “What Is an Image?”, *New Literary History* 15 (1984) 3, pp. 503–537, here p. 505, doi: <https://doi.org/10.2307/468718>. In the same essay Mitchell also explains the relationship that this family of image or image genealogy has with the relevant discourse or institution: “... mental imagery belongs to psychology and epistemology; optical imagery to physics; graphic, sculptural, and architectural imagery to the art historian; verbal imagery to the literary critic; perceptual images occupy a kind of border region where physiologists, neurologists, psychologists, art historians, and students of optics find themselves collaborating with philosophers and literary critics [...] I locate a parent concept, the concept of the image ‘as such,’ the phenomenon whose appropriate institutional discourse is philosophy and theology.” – *Ibid.*, p. 505.

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Jean Baudrillard, “The Evil Demon of Images”, trans. Paul Patton – Paul Foss, in: Jean Baudrillard, *The Evil Demon of Images*, Power Institute of Fine Arts, Sydney 1984, pp. 13–31, here p. 13.

“The image is, therefore, the mobile process by which matter twists, folds, and reflects itself into various structures of sensation and affection. By this definition, the image is not reducible to a strictly visual kind image alone but, also, is optical, sonic, haptic, olfactory, and gustatory. All sensation is thus bound together in a continuous flow of images.”<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, the image is difficult to define. This paper’s neuralgic point is the technical image, specifically the electronic image.

The fate of the technical image is determined by a schismatic link to imagology.<sup>13</sup> Before discussing this further, we first need to consider what a technical image is. Vilém Flusser described it as “the consciousness of a pure information society”.<sup>14</sup> The technical image marks the period of the “telematic society”<sup>15</sup> or information society, which with its velocity of particles becomes a manifestation of our life through imagology. Imagology becomes manifest at the point where history ends, meaning that its reign is post-historical and post-ideological. This is stratified by the technical image produced by television or is computer-generated in various forms. The task of the imagological period is to show the visual form of the image’s *schizoid character*, while drawing us nearer to its transmitting and transfiguring power. This cannot be described in any other way than as movement from the reign of wholes towards the organised chaos of particles. Imagology plays a role in highlighting how the image, with all its antinomies, resides in coexistences with the opposites.

Today, more than ever, we are exposed to what can be called an “imago culture” or image culture, in which our entire cultural, ontological and/or epistemological belonging depends on our relationship to the image. By constantly participating in a virtual vortex of zeros and ones, we become images with which we not only convey messages and knowledge, but also shape our existence through their visibility. The devices that surround us, from the television to the computer, are characterised by their function to produce, design, and store images, exposing us to the power of the image wherever we are. From the point of view of speed theories (dromology),<sup>16</sup> only the ephemeral power of the image can match the speed with which the world is evolving. Through the image we anticipate the future dynamics of melancholia. Thus, ‘imago culture’ is a culture as “hauntology”<sup>17</sup> – one woven by a fibre-optic network.

If we were to conduct an anamnesis of modernity, one of whose apices is the “synthetic mind”, and also its *cul-de-sac*, an attempt to view the principle of *a priori* knowledge as a synthetic principle or reduce it to Kantian synthetic can be seen as “symptomatic of modernity”. The developments of recent centuries have led to a crisis of metaphysics and challenged “academic” philosophy to give an answer to these developments. Related to this crisis we have the last interview with Heidegger, who in a neutral tone, on the one hand, makes an implicit apologia to *logos*, while on the other hand, claims that “cybernetics” is the end of philosophy and metaphysics. This state is fittingly described by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas in his book *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, where he writes:

“Hegel spoke of ‘shapes of spirit’” and that “posties” are not only deft opportunists with their noses to the wind; as seismographers tracking the spirit of the age, they must take seriously.”<sup>18</sup>

The consequence of the crisis and this delegitimation is that we are increasingly talking about post-metaphysics, post-enlightenment, post-culture, and even post-humanism.<sup>19</sup>

Despite all the neutrality, scepticism, negation, and apologetics we are immersing into new paradigms of conceptualising the world. Hence, this

immersion could be described as a conceptual journey from the anthropoid to the *cybernanthrope*,<sup>20</sup> from beings to cyber-beings/digital-beings,<sup>21</sup> and from citizens to netizens.<sup>22</sup> Some inquiries about the aforementioned concepts were constructed from a critical perspective, while some others were from an affirmative perspective. Furthermore, we also have many radical approaches to bring humans and computers closer together.<sup>23</sup> Technology has begun to absorb our linear vision of history's temporality and is creating a (quantum) universe and a "synthetic self-sufficient parallel"<sup>24</sup> reality under the name of cyberspace.<sup>25</sup> Via an "auto-creative" power our whole life is becoming manifested through bits and bytes; all institutions are represented through this space, ranging from our private lives up to our "second life"<sup>26</sup> in our social media profiles, altogether characterised by the rise of the new hyper-modern

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Th. Nail, *Theory of Image*, p. 11.

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The term "imagology" will be used in accordance with how it is employed by Milan Kundera. See: Milan Kundera, *Immortality*, trans. Peter Kussi, Faber & Faber, London 1992.

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Vilém Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Image*, trans. Nancy Ann Roth, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis – London 2011, p. 4.

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Ibid., p. 4.

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Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, trans. Mark Polizzotti, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles 2006.

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The term was first used by the philosopher Jacques Derrida in his book *Specters of Marx* which combines *haunt* with *ontology*. See: Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Routledge, New York – London 1994. However, here we are using the term based on Mark Fisher's interpretation as the ghost of a lost future or as he describes it: "What haunts the digital *cul-de-sacs* of the twenty-first century is not so much the past as all the lost futures that the twentieth century taught us to anticipate." – Mark Fisher, "What is Hauntology?", *Film Quarterly* 66 (2012) 1, pp. 16–24, here p. 16, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1525/fq.2012.66.1.16>.

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Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking. Philosophical Essays*, trans. William Mark Hohengarten, MIT Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts) – London 1992, p. 4.

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See: Nancy Katherine Hayles, *How We Become Post-Human. Virtual Bodies in*

*Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, The University Chicago Press, Chicago – London 1999.

20

This concept was explained by the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre in his book *Vers le cybernanthrope*. See: Henri Lefebvre, *Vers le cybernanthrope*, Denoël – Gonthier, Paris 1971. For more see: Andy Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre. A Critical Introduction*, Routledge, London – New York 2006, who provides an amazing explanation of the concept.

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See: Peter Sloterdijk, "Anthropo-Technology", *New Perspectives Quarterly* 17 (2000) 3, pp. 17–20, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/0893-7850.00275>; Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital*, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1995.

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Astrit Salihu, *Diskursi filozofik i postmodernës*, Dukagjini, Pejë 1997, p. 14.

23

See: Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York 2005.

24

A. Salihu, *Diskursi filozofik i postmodernës*, p. 15.

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Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", in: Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature*, Routledge, New York – London 1991, 149–183.

26

Hurbert L. Dreyfus, *On the Internet*, Routledge, New York – London 2009, p. 6.

Narcissus and his rebuilt *topos* (where he feeds his *ego-topia* through platforms like Instagram). All these reconfigurations happen within what we now know as the “techno-sphere”<sup>27</sup> or a vague variant of the conception, such as “Cyberia”.<sup>28</sup> Surfing in a world without dimensions like cyberspace as well as digitalisation have created a delirium-like allure, a kind of transcendence that decomposes previous transcendences, and at the same time, makes sense of the emptiness of immanence or of what the French philosopher Bernard Stigler conceptualised as “a-transcendentality”.<sup>29</sup> While we are trying to understand this period as a whole, defined by the Heideggerian metaphor “arrow of progress”, the question that must be asked is where is the image to be found within these newly created environs?

In implicit ways, this question presupposes that we are living in the age of the image – not the image as a form of imitation, but as simulation, which, at the same time is creation, electronic or virtual. According to Gilles Deleuze, the virtual image is “pure recollection”,<sup>30</sup> and has, therefore, nothing to do with the real or the imaginary. Thus, this kind of image is now, as never before, an “object of perpetual recognition”.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, we begin to experience the object from its two-dimensionality and/or three-dimensionality to its four-dimensionality – an example of which is the hypercube (discussed in the next subsection). Historical contingency does not allow us to be indifferent to the other developments of our predecessors in the realm of theory. Therefore, to give a conceptual sketch, the abovementioned attempts by Neil and Flusser should be reemphasised as a fitting prelude to understanding the electronic or technical image. Neil views electronic image as divided into two categories: (1) hybrid image, and (2) generative image. The first is a kind of radical rehabilitation of pre-existing images by mixing them through digitalisation, while the second is a new kind of electronic creation.<sup>32</sup> Flusser views the electronic image as an apotheosis of the image form that is produced via keyboarding and numerology. A conceptual symbiosis is possible in the form of concept of *imagotron*.

## 2. The Electronic Image: The Imagotron

“I had a dream about reality. It was such a relief to wake up.”<sup>33</sup>

– Stanisław Jerzy Lec

Since we experience daily the rapid, yet fleeting, developments in our technoscientific habitus, we are unable to grasp and outline all the manifestations of the *imagotron* in this work. Therefore, it seems best to approach this through some glimpses and basic overviews of the *imagotron*. The *imagotron* can be localised throughout the image technologies found whether in the exact sciences, which are conditioned by their traditional character and do no longer suit the recent scientific developments, or new art forms, especially in radical forms that synthesise art and technoscience, which have brought about a need for finding new *modus operandi* within aesthetics. This conceptual symbiosis will be especially fruitful in elucidating the new forms of technoscientific manifestations that are relevant in grasping the image. Image technologies<sup>34</sup> have a direct influence on the discourses of various scientific, social, and ultimately existential phenomena, not to mention what Heidegger describes as “average everydayness”. The *imagotron* becomes relevant in understanding the visual culture that dwells within the art world and the “techno-culture”

(Ihde) that is becoming increasingly present in our worlding (Heidegger). Examples of the *imagotron* increase ceaselessly, from medical devices to imagining our findings in quantum physics. This undertaking must necessarily remain incomplete as the *imagotron*'s current vectors direct us toward games of exchange. Here we are only dealing with some semiotic extracts that have been inserted in all pores of society following this image boom. Characteristics of the *imagotron* can be found both in digital and analogue images, in electronic images as linguistic as well as conceptual formations – all are encompassed by it. Any attempt to outline everything would be a Sisyphean task as the image's temporal vector is immeasurable. The *imagotron*'s manifestation weave an endless web. The intention is to stimulate more intense engagement with the concept and find extended application beyond this work, which constitutes merely a fragment.

The *imagotron* is a symbiosis between the word *imago* (*image*) with the suffix *-tron* (derived from electronics) thereby indicating a kind of instrumentality. Many thinkers/scholars agree that the electronic image is produced via keyboarding, which allows programming in a meta-language. Such numerological tools enable the reproduction, storage and finally the visualisation of the electronic image. Thus, the conceptual self-formation of the *imagotron* encapsulates both the *imago* (visualisation, simulation, figuration and simulacrum) and the suffix *-tron* that heralds the arrival of the digital world, by assimilating numerology, keyboards, and electronic devices. The *imagotron* is produced through self-organising particles that reproduce it. Therefore, it functions within the framework of “digital logic”,<sup>35</sup> – meaning access memory (RAM) – in which the bytes are layered, meaning that it does not work through a mechanical “analogue logic” or, in its radical variations, through the intermingling between the analogous and the digital. Our views on the

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Nick Land, “Machinic Desire”, in: Nick Land, Robin Mackay, Ray Brassier (eds.), *Fanged Noumena. Collected Writings 1987–2007*, Urbanomic – Sequence Press, Falmouth – New York, 2014, pp. 319–345. An explicit depiction of the technosphere is offered by the Croatian philosopher Žarko Paić, who conceives it as a kind of productive space between technology and aesthetics or as a kind of habitat where digital art is manifested. See: Žarko Paić, “Technosphere – A New Digital?: The Body as Event, Interactivity and Visualization of Ideas”, in: Žarko Paić, Krešimir Purgar (eds.), *Theorising Images*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne 2016, pp. 121–143.

28

Land, referring to Deleuze and Guattari, views Cyberia as a kind of state where the earth becomes artificial enough that it loses the force of deterritorialisation movement, and from this a necessity is created for us in another earth. For more see: Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley – Mark Seem – Helen R. Lane, Penguin Books, Minneapolis 2009.

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Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3: Cinematic Time and Question of Malaise*, trans. Stephen Barker, Stanford University Press, Stanford – California 2011.

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Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson – Robert Galeta, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1989, p. 80.

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*Ibid.*, p. 265.

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Th. Nail, *Theory of Image*, p. 322.

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Stanisław Jerzy Lec, *Unkempt Thoughts*, trans. Jacek Galazka, St. Martin's Press, New York 1962, p. 154.

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For more see: Don Ihde, *Expanding Hermeneutics. Visualism in Science*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston (IL) 1998.

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For more see: N. Negroponte, *Being Digital*.

cause of this acceleration, although we must be cautious, critical, or sceptical of it, must not be based on the assumption that the characteristic of the *imagotron* and the digital world is *omnicidal*.<sup>36</sup>

By the means of fibres and numerological fluxes we can computerise moving images entirely on a surface. We can control the image with thus-far unseen autocracy and inexplicable freedom. We can see that the *imagotron* has an accelerating power of experiencing the image in its totality, so we can see its entire pores with the freedom to control and project, but also with a fear of manipulation. A component of the *imagotron* is its power to produce biomorphic images and experience their copies hypertelically while, at the same time, retaining in itself the functioning “phareno-technic”<sup>37</sup> principles. The production of the (hyper-) real occurs in a terrestrialised networking surface, through an alphanumeric coding order or by a “particle swarm”.<sup>38</sup> This is also the existential code of the *imagotron*, which is visualised, projected, and constructed from a “magnitude starting at zero”<sup>39</sup> or “eros that is centered on a zero”<sup>40</sup> – thus its logic already operates within the informative generativity. The *imagotron* as a by-product of techno-aesthetics meets all the criteria revealed by Gilbert Simondon, while at the same time being functional, efficient, and beautiful. By fusing in it the intercategory characteristics that it is “aesthetic because it’s technical, and technical because it’s aesthetic”,<sup>41</sup> Simondon describes precisely what the *imagotron* is. On the one hand, the *imagotron* is a symbiosis between science, technology, rationality, and “programs” (*techné*). On the other hand, it is a symbiosis of art, beauty, gestures, and the lucid irrationality of the artist (*poiesis*).

In our time, we cannot deny the omnipresence of *imagotron*. Perhaps the fundamental difference between *imagotron* (a technical image as a form of it) and the traditional image lies in what Flusser explains as follows: “that the traditional images are observations of objects, while the technical image, we can freely say that it is a concept of computing”.<sup>42</sup> From a discourse observation, we can say that this immanent hopelessness created by the *imagotron*’s acceleration, is leading us to a different axis from where we have to rethink our previously held positions. *Imagotron* undeniably holds a persuasive power. We as observers find ourselves enchanted by it and libidinally submit to it. Our existence becomes a meeting ground of anticipating (whether wilfully or not) the ecstasy intrinsically bound with the image. *Imagotron* is the apex of the image as a phenomenon; it is built and actualised by seducing us to the extent of surrender. Perhaps Jean-Luc Nancy’s description of this libidinal surrender best encapsulates it:

“The seduction of images, their eroticism, is nothing other than their availability for being taken.”<sup>43</sup>

If we also invert Baudrillard’s famous theoretical formula about the image in regard to the *imagotron*, we find ourselves “diabolically” lured into its spiral. Everyday life on an empirical level proves this; from examples such as Instagram and Video-Conferences, we experience its monstrosity in the sense that it frightens and seduces us at the same time. The image has begun to slowly take the throne, which it has inherited from the caves. Thus, we find ourselves powerless as its temptation leaves us standing naked before its whiteness, or as Nancy’s ontological perspective formulates the image’s persuasive power, “wise as an image”.<sup>44</sup>



This power has a twofold character. Regardless if one is engaged or disengaged with it, they find themselves in the same disposition – isolation. If we participate, we become isolated in the network of virtual games, where the image manifests as it gets transmitted and deposited from zeroes and ones. Likewise, if we do not participate, we become isolated in this asceticism of exclusion, brought about by the exclusivity of information. Such ascetics, who still feel the psyche of nature, are rare, some compromise to the use of corded telephones, whereas some semi-ascetics limit their participation solely to e-mails. The inability to not participate is becoming a new multifaceted existential code. Existence becomes equivalent to the postulate, “are we present online in the network of loneliness and great happiness”. This paradoxical co-existence is made possible by the *imagotron* under the dictum of *experimentum mundi*,<sup>45</sup> that has introduced the global village into the entropic game of images reproduced *ad infinitum*.

The *imagotron*'s consequences extend to the ethical and political sphere. The psycho-political<sup>46</sup> reading of the situation created by the *imagotron* can be outlined with a simple formula: the frightened right complains of losing the ethos of freedom, under this disturbing anaesthesia becoming protectors of the museal value they have preserved, while the left with doom and gloom play the chorus of “alienation”. Perhaps, as Flusser notes, by becoming unburdened by psycho-politics, we might find ourselves in a dialogical field that

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An interesting interpretation of omnicide is put forward by the American philosopher Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh, as a synthesis between Oriental and Western thought and belongs to the province of experimental philosophy. It explains human's fatality and explores the dimension of the lunatic experience of omnicide. See: Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh, *Omnicide. Mania, Fatality, and the Future-in-Delirium*, Sequence Press, New York 2019.

37

According to the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, who in his essay on techno-aesthetics views the meaning of “phanero-technique” as something aesthetic in itself, which also applies to the *imagotron* which functions through visualization in phanero-technical form. See: Gilbert Simondon, “On Techno-Aesthetics”, trans. Arne De Boever, *Parrhesia* 14 (2012), pp. 1–8.

38

V. Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Image*, p. 10.

39

Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis – London 2005, p. 153.

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Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1993, p. 212.

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G. Simondon, “On Techno-Aesthetics”, p. 1.

42

V. Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Image*, p. 10.

43

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort, Fordham University Press, New York 2005, p. 23.

44

*Ibid.*, p. 10.

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The term *experimentum mundi* was coined by philosopher Ernst Bloch. The term is also used by Peter Sloterdijk to indicate the experimental axis of the human being in the world. See: Ernst Bloch, *Experimentum Mundi. Frage, Kategorien des Herausbringens, Praxis*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1975; Peter Sloterdijk, *Not Saved. Essays after Heidegger*, trans. Ian Alexander Moore – Christopher Turner, Polity Press, Cambridge 2017, p. 192.

46

Here we employ the term as Sloterdijk intended it. See: Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time. A Psychopolitical Investigation*, trans. Mario Wenning, Columbia University Press, New York 2010.

seeks a compromise between the image and human being, a dialogical compromise which this situation of distrust has made possible. Flusser accurately describes it as a

“... loop between image and person and creating a new dialogical consensus.”<sup>47</sup>

This new dialogical consensus can best be seen in the imagotron’s two manifestations, which are the hyper-cube and the hologram.

### ***2.1. The Hypercube***

A normative and by-the-book description of the hypercube is that it is a higher-dimension cube, which in itself is a barren description as it does not represent the whole of this newly created manifestation in the realm of the image. If Baudrillard under his post-structuralist/postmodernist discursive registers sees the Möbius strip,<sup>48</sup> in which only the shadows of the fourth dimension can be observed for the hypercube, we can freely conclude that we are in four-dimensionality.

Hypercube is an example that crystallises imagotron as a concept but also in its manifestation. This merges programming and mathematical skills with artistic creativity. Salvador Dalí’s work *Crucifixion (Corpus Hypercubicus)* inspired the perfect extension in the form of the imagotron, the “Hyper-Cube” by mathematician Thomas Banchoff.<sup>49</sup> This imagotron projects the numbing magic of the image: 1) construction, 2) design, and 3) control. Here we experience a kind of anxiety from the overwhelming power of visualisation through highly dispersed particles that form such a perfect unitary model. This perfect form can be projected only by a computer, which combines two-dimensionality with three-dimensionality to construct and produce four-dimensional information. All this work, which at first sight seems to be only technical, has within itself a kind of aesthetical excitement in the form of parallax. As Robbins claims:

“A two dimensional object (such as a square) can rotate around a point (one of its vertices); a three-dimensional object (a cube) can rotate around a line (one of its edges), and a four-dimensional object (a hypercube) can rotate around a plane (one of its faces). Planar rotation by real-time computers is by far the most powerful way of understanding and visually comprehending four-dimensional figures.”<sup>50</sup>

The hypercube’s arbitrary surface dimensions give us a complex pattern model that in geometric and mathematical language would be called “azimuthally symmetric” or, put simply, it would be the perfect physical rotation. This symmetrical magic not only gives us the aesthetic experience of the projected particle but also liberates our imagination, and through these mathematical forms, we also understand more “mathematics in itself” (Tony Robbins). The parallax experience is made possible by the parallactic projection of the hypercube, therefore, this rotation creates a kind of “hyper-space” because it cannot be manifested except on a computer surface. This hyper-space becomes the manifestation of the hypercube in its four dimensions. To understand the projection of the hypercube and its hallucinatory power, Tony Robbin exemplifies this through the use of Platonic cave, which is symmetrically three-dimensional. Subsequently, we must grasp the Einstein cave that has time output that is subjected to the physical laws but its shadows are three-dimensional and phantasmagorical, while in four-dimensional reality through the hypercube

“... symmetrical origins of these multiple and contradictory shadows are what is real and that this reality is present to us via its projections.”<sup>51</sup>

Contextualising the last presupposition, implying the hypercube as the image is a delirious and fantastic experience of hyper-reality. This perfect geometrical construct/design fulfils Dalí’s trinity about the fusion of art, science, and religion. Simondon, from the perspective of ontogenesis and techno-genesis, views aesthetics as a bridge between science and religion instead.<sup>52</sup>

## 2.2. *The Hologram*

A three-dimensional imagotron that has the power to take us to the fourth dimension<sup>53</sup> is the hologram. A vernacular definition for the hologram would be a three-dimensional object that is projected with light lasers. Douwe Draaisma describes the hologram as

“... a window into an astral reality, constructed of light instead of matter. The effect is magical and enchanting.”<sup>54</sup>

The word hologram was coined by the British physicist and engineer Dennis Gabor, from the Greek words *holo*, which means *whole*, and *gram*, meaning *letter* or *message*.<sup>55</sup> The hologram projects the image as a whole by reconstructing information. Therefore, we could metaphorically refer to the hologram as a bodiless memory from which this information is distributed to create a whole image. Thus, the function of the hologram is “phanero-technical” – meaning a kind of image that is described in scientific discourse as integrative optics, with the power of (re)producing duplicates of our universe. We experience a “mimetic violence”<sup>56</sup> from its design, even though it is considered an apex of technological science. By projecting synthesised images,

47

V. Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Image*, p. 67.

48

Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1994, p. 100.

49

Thomas Banchoff, Charles Strauss, “The Hypercube: Projections and Slicings” (1978). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90olwwLdEYg> (accessed on 1 November 2022).

50

Tony Robbin, “Painting and Physics. Modeling Artistic and Scientific Experience in Four Spatial Dimensions”, *Leonardo* 17 (1984) 4, pp. 227–233, p. 227, doi: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1575096>.

51

Ibid., p. 230.

52

According to Simondon’s explanation, the geographical world marks the technique/technology, while the religious one integrates human beings into it. Geography integrates

religion and distributes it. The aesthetic universe marks the unity and the meaning of coming-in-being. – Gilbert Simondon, *On the Existence of the Technical Object*, trans. Cecile Malaspina, John Rogove, Univocal Publishing, Minneapolis 2017, p. 192.

53

Baudrillard describes the hologram as “three-dimensional simulacrum”, which “render us sensitive to the fourth dimension as a hidden truth”. The fourth-dimension means “a secret dimension of everything”. – J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 107.

54

Douwe Draaisma, *Metaphors of Memory. A History of Ideas About the Mind*, trans. Paul Vincent, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, p. 165.

55

Ibid., p. 166.

56

J. Baudrillard, “The Evil Demon of Images”, p. 15.

the hologram has opened an *eisodos* or the path leading to the loss of signs and referents. Through it we experience the hyper-real temptation between the imaginary and the real.

The hologram works through resemblance, what Baudrillard calls the “imaginary aura of the double”.<sup>57</sup> The hologram also gives meaning to the hyper-modern Narcissus,<sup>58</sup> who since the loss of the mirror as representation has returned to us immersed in the virtual image. Although it no longer can see itself, it can still experience the phantasmagorical body. Baudrillard notes:

“After the fantasy of seeing oneself (the mirror, the photograph) comes that of being able to circle around oneself [...] spectral body – and any holographed object is initially the luminous ectoplasm of your own body.”<sup>59</sup>

For Baudrillard, this means the end of aesthetics and the advent of mediality. Thus, the hyper-modern Narcissus exalts the duplicating power to the experience of Nirvana. Because similarity does not mean authenticity but rather concretises the value of the simulation, hyper-similarity becomes thus equivalent to the killing of the original.<sup>60</sup>

The hologram constructs a *heterocosm*, by reconfiguring light. The hologram can be simplified to mean the other as the same, in the sense of shared similarities. This similarity is detached from us, but at the same time, it is us projected by photons. Therefore, the hologram is not an imitation, but a similitude that is concretised by visualization. Despite its amazing design we need to be concerned about the forms it can be manifested and about the implications it has for the psychological structure of society.

### 3. Towards Conclusion – A Hyperreal *Coda*

“The essence of Technik is by no means anything technological.”<sup>61</sup>

– Martin Heidegger

Our devices, which Heidegger calls *Gestell*,<sup>62</sup> have begun to organise/frame our lives mathematically, and the image has played an essential part in this. We are witnessing before us, whether we want to or not, the transformation of the image as it detaches itself further from us – leaving us in a nebula of doubt about its originality. These doubts are carried over in the new forms of the image. Two representative forms of the image’s manifestation are: 1) the living image,<sup>63</sup> and 2) the fractal image.

The first is a bio-cybernetic form of the image known as “living images” within the aesthetical discourse. They are the merging of biology with computing under the halo of aesthetics. The second forms are images as infinitely fractal. Baudrillard’s warning about a metastasising of perfect models was prophetic. We have reached a stage in which the image is evolving with such speed that every day new forms of its expression are designed.

The importance of understanding how we become images is expressed excellently by Jean-Luc Nancy, who in his reflections on Georg Achen’s paintings proclaims that:

“I become the dissonance of a harmony, the leap of a dance step. ‘I’,; but it is no longer a question of ‘I’. Cogito becomes imago.”<sup>64</sup>

In his conclusion, we can see a shift from subject-centrism to imago-centrism. Although imago-centrism might sound like an oxymoron, it is this what

makes the idea of a decentralised centre rather intriguing, elusive yet also seductive. After all, subject-centrism also brings about phantasmagoria from our attempt to view nature as a mirror. The temporal context provides us with endless strategies of decentralisation. The image's vortex – a point without locus – has absorbed and gravitates our desires, temptation, and thoughts as it expands into emptiness. This expanding vortex of the image has swallowed the *eschaton* and invites us to coexist with its infinites/endlessness.

The image is provoking us, constantly inviting us to rethink our positions towards it. Pushing us to rethink reveals the image's fantastic power as the new designer.

### Labinot Kelmendi

### Imago i koncept Imagotрона

#### Sažetak

Ovaj rad istražuje odnos slike i vremena u kojem živimo. U prvom dijelu kritički se bavimo slikom kao pojmom. Drugi dio predstavlja koncept imagotрона, konceptualnu simbiozu koja određuje odnos slike i elektronike. Odnos se ilustrira pomoću dvije manifestacije imagotрона: hiperkočke i holograma. Završni dio rekapitulira značaj slike u odnosu na tehnički razvoj i virtualnu stvarnost.

#### Ključne riječi

slika, imagotron, tehnika, hiperkočka, hologram, tehnička slika, elektronička slika, virtualna stvarnost

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J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 72.

58

This concept is attributed to the French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky, who explains this concept within the scheme of modernism and postmodernism. This concept for Lipovetsky marks the time of the fabricated mutant, hyper-consumerism, new individualism and narcissism. – Gilles Lipovetsky, *Hypermodern Times*, trans. Andrew Brown, Polity, Cambridge 2005.

59

J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 72.

60

Ibid., p. 74.

61

Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", in: Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other*

*Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, Harper & Row, New York 1977, pp. 3–35, here p. 4.

62

"Heidegger's Gestell is the ability to see technology in its totality, so, it is [...] technology where we manage things within a framework where they can be calculated and manipulated." – Michael Inwood, "Technology, Machination, and Enframing", in: Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden (MA) 1999, pp. 209–221, here p. 210.

63

William John Thomas Mitchell, "The Work of Art in the Age of Biocybernetic Reproduction", *Modernism/Modernity* 10 (2003) 3, pp. 481–500, here p. 481, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.2003.0067>.

64

J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 23.

**Labinot Kelmendi**

**Imago und das Konzept des Imagotrons**

**Zusammenfassung**

*Dieser Beitrag erforscht die Beziehung zwischen dem Bild und der Zeit, in der wir leben. Im ersten Teil befassen wir uns kritisch mit dem Bild als Begriff. Der zweite Teil bietet eine Einführung in das Konzept des Imagotrons, eine konzeptuelle Symbiose, die den Konnex zwischen dem Bild und der Elektronik definiert. Dies wird durch zwei Manifestationen des Imagotrons veranschaulicht: den Hyperwürfel und das Hologramm. Der abschließende Teil rekapituliert den Stellenwert des Bildes in Bezug auf technologische Fortentwicklungen und virtuelle Realität.*

**Schlüsselwörter**

Bild, Imagotron, Technologie, Hyperwürfel, Hologramm, technisches Bild, elektronisches Bild, virtuelle Realität

**Labinot Kelmendi**

**L'Imago et le concept d'Imagotron**

**Résumé**

*Le présent travail analyse la relation de l'image et du temps dans lequel nous vivons. Dans la première partie, nous abordons de manière critique l'image comme concept. La deuxième partie présente le concept d'imagotron, symbiose conceptuelle qui définit la relation entre l'image et l'électronique. Cette relation est illustrée à l'aide de deux manifestations de l'imagotron : l'hypercube et l'hologramme. La dernière partie offre un récapitulatif de l'importance de l'image en rapport au développement technique et à la réalité virtuelle.*

**Mots-clés**

image, imagotron, technique, hypercube, hologramme, image technique, image électronique, réalité virtuelle