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TO SHOW AND TO SAY:
COMPARING THE USES OF PICTURES AND LANGUAGE

There has been a long tradition of characterizing man as the animal that talks. However, the remarkable ability of using pictures also only belongs to human beings, after all we know empirically so far. Are there conceptual reasons for that coincidence? Such a question belongs to the philosophy of language just as well as to philosophical visualistics. Comparing the two abilities to use words or pictures yields several similarities as well as distinctions. A well-known conceptual disparity between pictures and words appears in their relation to perception: the difference can be further determined in an act-theoretic manner by four modes of use of the sign vehicles during the corresponding sign acts. Furthermore, the figure/ground dichotomy means something different for language uses and picture uses. In both cases, however, there is a close relation to the function of context building, by which humans are able to communicate not only with respect to the present situation of behavior but with respect to arbitrary contexts as well. Although the structural comparison does clarify the conceptual relations, it cannot explain that the conceptual structure ought to be like that. Therefore, the paper concludes with the programme of a "concept-genetic" consideration of the two abilities (i.e., to use propositional language or to use pictures) that is able to give us such a foundation.

Keywords: pictures, language, resemblance, logic, figure/ground, experiential contexts.

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An old European tradition characterizes man as the animal that talks. We then have in mind essentially the use of predicative sentential structures like assertions. However, the remarkable ability of using pictures also only belongs to human beings, after all we have experienced so far. Are there conceptual reasons for that empirical coincidence? Such a question belongs to the philosophy of language just as well as to philosophical visualistics, an endeavor beginning recently to form as a discipline apart from art history (cf. Sachs-Hombach 2003). Before thinking about the differences and similarities between the uses of language and pictures, some clarifications about the issues of philosophical visualistics particularly in contrast to history of art may be helpful.

1. Issues of Philosophical Visualistics

Let us leave out of consideration the fact that the traditional discipline of history of art investigates pictures and other artifacts in an *artistic* framework (a rather particular framework, that is). Apart from that restriction it is important that specific properties of concrete pictorial works are analyzed – often with a merely implicit background determining the concept "being a picture" in general. An indirect clarification of that general question by means of investigating the peculiar is still possible but essentially remains a side effect. We may very well characterize art historians as those researchers dedicated to the scientific consideration of *single* works of art and the relations between them mainly (but not only) in their historical development.[1]

In contrast, we should speak of *philosophical visualistics* if the scientific interest turns to the question what it actually means to be able to cope with pictures as pictures. How should we, for example, imagine the way such a notable faculty came into existence – or more precisely: how can we conceive the development of beings with such a faculty? And what follows from the characteristics thus gained for the other image sciences (among them, of course, history of art)? Philosophical visualistics tries,

therefore, to explain what "being a picture" means in general. Examining particular cases is not irrelevant here; but they mainly serve to exemplify general properties. Above all: the immediate focus of interest is indeed not on single pictures at all, but on the faculty to use (i.e., produce and visually explore) pictures. Therefore, the research objects of philosophical visualists are the (human or eventually other) beings provided with that faculty. Even more precisely speaking, we are not interested in the particular being but what is common to all of them: the concept we can form in a meaningful and rationally controlled manner of creatures with the faculty mentioned.

Let us now come back to the empirical coincidence that both faculties – to employ language and to use pictures – have not been mastered by any other living being. In his picture theory of language, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1922) introduced a conception into language philosophy that distinguishes between what an assertion *says* (what can be asserted with it), and what it *shows* (what can be taken from its logical structure – as a "picture of the world"). Inspired by Wittgenstein, we turn in the following under the title "to show and to say" to the question: What are the conceptual relations between those two faculties mentioned? Doing so, we are mainly concerned with presentational pictures of and assertive verbal utterances for spatio-temporal material scenes.[2] In sections 2 to 5, several aspects of language uses are compared with picture uses. Section 6 shortly sketches the relation to structural pictures (logical pictures) and assertions for abstract affairs. The final section 7 starts with a summary. It furthermore indicates an extended research programme with concept-genetic considerations. This programme is assumed to justify in a systematic way the conceptual similarities and differences discovered, and hence provides a sound foundation of philosophical visualistics.

2. A Common Basis: The Situation of Sign Use

On first view, we find several important similarities between the use of language and the use of images, but also severe differences. For instance, it appears to be a central setting of using pictures that one person alone

[1] The mere extension of the interest from its original restriction to art to every visually designed creation does not change the determination given, since the "methods of material determination, historical classification, and semantic interpretation" of those particular creations (Bredekamp 2003: 56) remain in the focus of that research.

[2] The difference between real and fictitious scenes is here irrelevant.

observes a picture.[3] In contrast to that, the use of language is generally considered to take place in dialogical situations:[4] somebody tells somebody else something (or at least intends to do so by means of the speech act). Since verbal signs are not simply found in nature but have to be produced by a speaker, their use has to be an interaction between two partners – or more precisely, it has to be a communication. Among pictures, on the other side, there are cases that may be considered – at least on first view – as the result of natural processes without the influence of humans: think at shadows or reflecting surfaces. Indeed, instances of such "natural pictures," as they are often named, are already mentioned in ancient explanations for the ability to use pictures (cf. Plinius 1977: 23; Scholz 2000: 623).

Perhaps then, the lonely confrontation with a picture is more equivalent to reading than to spoken language. After all, reading involves a single reader, too, who is rather withdrawn and does usually not want to be disturbed by others. However on a closer look, even reading is a communicative activity, though it is not immediately clear who actually plays the role of the sender. Correspondingly, authorities in literature have pointed out that literary texts (which may serve us as a typical example) can be read in two manners with different conceptions of the sender. For once, there is the historical producer of the text who can be considered as the sender: "What is it the author (in his/her particular situation) wants to tell us – or more precisely: the readers he/she had in mind?" Or the reader may consider himself/herself as the sender, and may try to find out what can – in the current situation – be communicated with that text: "What is it, a contemporary (or I in the role of a contemporary) can tell me with

this text today, in the present situation?" Both conceptions thus actually employ dialogical settings derived more or less immediately from speaking face to face; only that one of the dialog partners is "internalized" and only present in the imagination as an interlocutor.[5] Many other seemingly soliloquial forms of language use can be understood in a similar way as being communicative throughout.

Now, is it not true that the internalization of a communicative partner reminds us of the lonely use of a picture? Is it not the case that I when watching my mirror image show something to myself (in the perspective of somebody else standing at that other position)? And is it not quite evident that I direct my own attention on this or that aspect when studying unaccompanied a picture in a gallery – when I present that picture to myself, so to speak? This may be an aspect of the picture's content or a stylistic feature, a physical property of the picture vehicle (like signs of aging) or even an imagined situation of use (the presentation and reception of that picture in a regular dialogical situation with two participants). It is indeed quite plausible to reduce the lonely use of pictures to communicative acts. Therefore, picture "dialogs" are the standard situation of use, not picture "monologues."[6] In this respect, we find a strong similarity between the use of pictures and the use of language.

In the following, we therefore assume that picture use *and* language use imply that there are always two roles: a sender (eventually internalized and possibly merely imagined), and a receiver (conceived with similar options) who interact with each other in communication (at least in one's imagination). In exactly this – still rather unspecific – sense we speak in the following of a *sign act* (cf. Figure 1).

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[3] This type of use became more or less paradigmatic for history of art but was lately softened successively; (cf. Bogen 2005). Even in a cinema, where many visitors watch the moving pictures together, the presence of those others is not immediately connected with the consumption of the images: after all, the film and its effects do not necessarily change when experienced all alone.

[4] This holds true at least since the breakdown of the argumentation patterns of the philosophy of enlightenment at the beginning of the 20th century and the consecutive linguistic turn: What we understand as the meaning of verbal signs cannot be conceived as something already given independently from language, something that is only associated later with verbal means and thus made communicable. It originally results from and exists in verbal interaction (cf. Dummett 1992).

[5] For the author as well we correspondingly assume an internalized dialogical situation of use with imagined readers. Conversely, the historical author being usually not personally introduced to a reader also appears in the internalized dialogical situation as an imagined historical person only. It was, by the way, G. H. Mead who already considered the internalization of interaction partners as an essential precondition for the faculty of conscious communication (cf. Mead 1934).

[6] "Natural images" are then really and only pictures if they are integrated in a corresponding dialogical situation (open or hidden). They otherwise remain just an optically reflecting surface, nothing more.

Figure 1: The Situation of Sign Use: "Person A Imagining a Sign Act"
(Also: Ascribing the Symbolic Mode, see below)
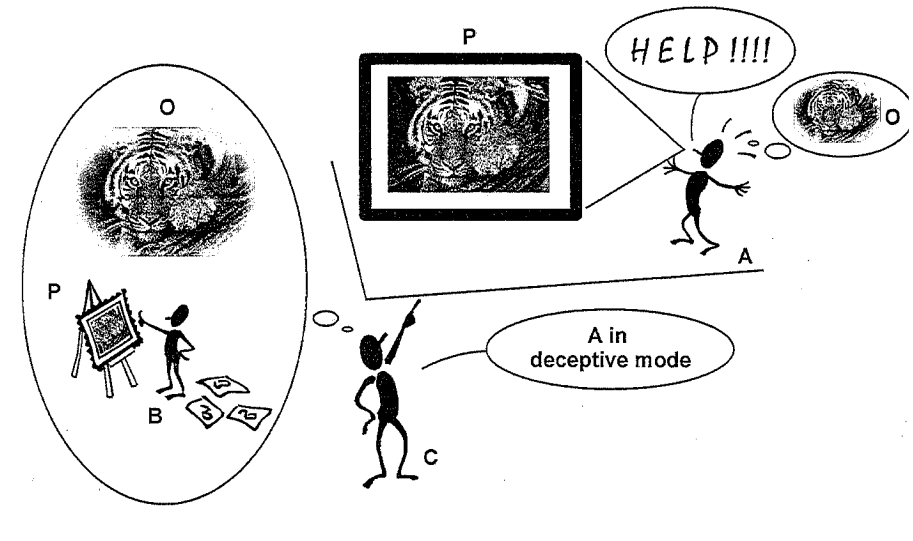

Figure 2: Ascribing the Deceptive Mode
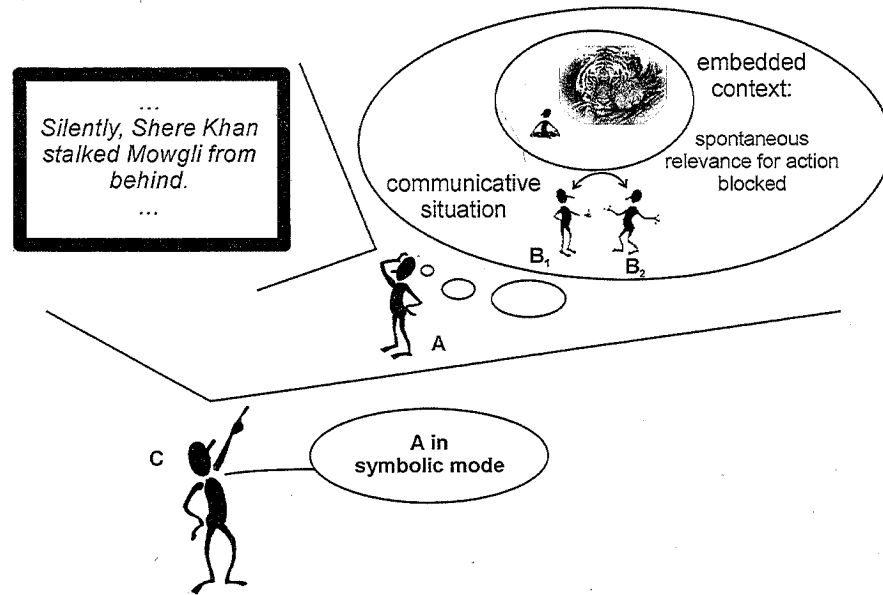
3. The Immersive Mode

A significant difference between employing pictures and using language comes into view when considering the role of (visual) perceptional competences within sign acts. At least the use of some pictures – pictures that are commonly rated as rather characteristic cases – involves certain perceptional competences that are originally employed in perceiving completely different kinds of objects or scenes: we usually call those objects or scenes the ones being "depicted" in the image. To say that a picture *resembles* the things it depicts is another way of circumscribing this feature, which does not have a language counterpart: by and large words are not particularly related to the competences necessary for perceiving the things denoted.

The matching conception of pictures as a special kind of *perceptoid* signs (precisely visual perceptoid signs) can be defined by means of four
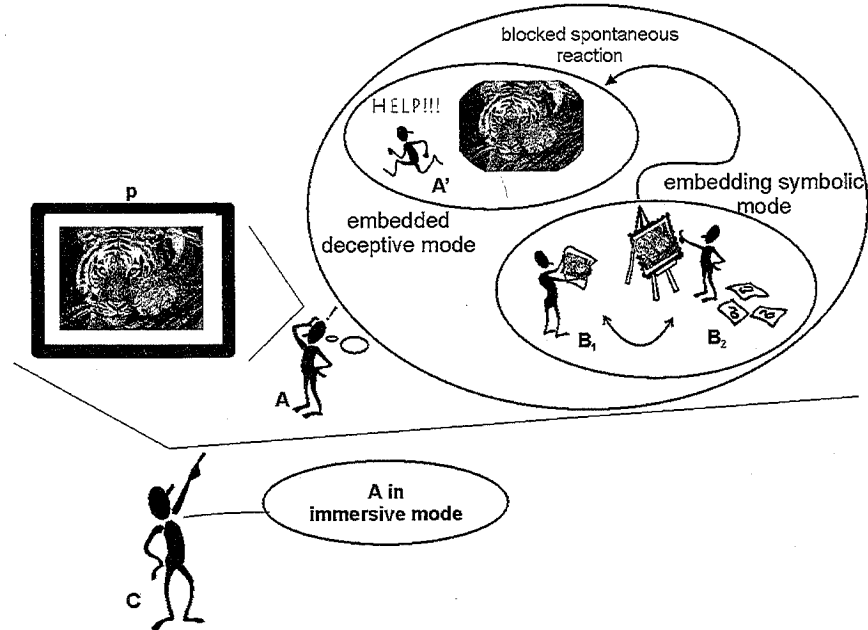
concepts for distinct modes of reflection that may occur when dealing with an object that can be used as a picture (i.e., a potential picture vehicle).[7] First, we can be deceived and take the (potential) picture vehicle as the thing depicted: Who has not experienced such a *mis-take* when facing a *trompe l'œil*. We call this the *deceptive mode,* which, by the way, can indeed occur to animals as well (cf. Figure 2).

Second, the potential picture vehicle can be employed as a sign – not necessarily a perceptoid sign, though. That means, one is aware of the communicative situation, recognizes that there is an object presented by a sender in order to represent – quite literally: to bring into presence – for a receiver something else that is usually not present. This we call the *symbolic mode.* It is characteristic for the symbolic mode that spontaneous reactions to the thing represented – a tiger for instance – are more or less suppressed, as that thing is normally not really present but only symbolically at hand (cf. again Figure 1).

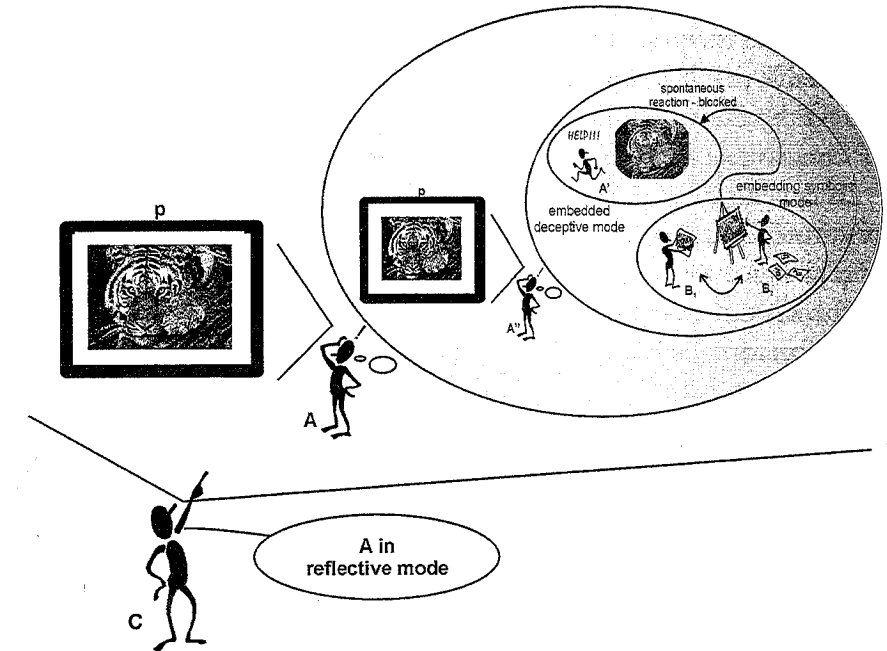[7] Actually, those modes can be applied to all kinds of perceptoid signs.

Figure 3: Ascribing the Immersive Mode

Figure 4: Ascribing the Reflective Mode

The "fog" is supposed to indicate a focus on syntactic aspects.

Third, we can consider a systematic combination of the two modes mentioned so far: experiencing the deception *and* knowing simultaneously about it by taking it as the basis of a sign use. Let us call this combined reaction the *immersive mode*. This mode is indeed the core of perceptoid signs: as signs, they require the symbolic mode. But additionally, their sign vehicle is supposed to resemble the thing represented. That is, there must be a more or less strong spontaneous reaction of deception – indicating the deceptive mode. That spontaneous reaction however is not necessarily observable externally due to being embedded in the symbolic mode; but it affects what one assume as being represented by the sign act (cf. Figure 3).

Finally, a picture vehicle can be used in the *reflective mode* as well. In that case it is as a rule not the usual meaning of the sign – i.e., the things depicted – that is meant. Instead, the sender brings by means of exempli-

fication certain (any) aspects of the corresponding sign uses *per se* into the focus of attention (cf. Figure 4). Quoted pictures as well as many pictures of art should be used exactly in the reflective mode.[8]

When comparing the four modes relevant for perceptoid signs with the uses of verbal signs, the symbolic mode and the reflective mode can be directly transferred. The symbolic mode is evident since it epitomizes

[8] Of course, we have to admit that not every picture has something depicted associated without further ado. Here, we only want to mention that pictures lacking something depicted enforce the use in the reflective mode: The missing of a depicted content expected causes – as a kind of miscommunication – some strategies of error analysis that direct the attention to the pictorial communication as such. In these cases, we may indeed speak in contrast to presentational pictures and structural (or logical) pictures of "reflective pictures", which are not considered any further in this paper. Besides, the content depicted needs not be something visible. The negative case is exactly the characteristic for structural images (cf. also sect. 6).

the normal use of language. Examples for the reflective mode also come to mind rather easily: any quotation belongs here, just like the uses of example phrases in linguistic papers. We fail however to find the deceptive mode as a regular option for facing verbal sign vehicles.[9] It is hardly imaginable that healthy speakers mistake a verbal expression for the thing denoted by the expression. In consequence, the immersive mode, too, is not conceivable for verbal signs as it depends on the deceptive mode.

In conclusion, the option to employ the immersive mode originally constitutes a particular kind of signs distinct from verbal signs: the perceptoid signs. Restricted to visual perception, that mode leads us to an act-theoretic characterization of picture use, as opposed to language that generally lacks the immersive mode.

4. Characteristic Decompositions

Being composed of parts in several respects is a characteristic feature of verbal acts. Every layperson knows a bit about the syntactic composition although that is not even the most important one.

4.1. Illocutionary Function, Predication, and Nomination

Much more important are the functional-pragmatic decomposition in illocutionary function and propositional content on the one side, and the decomposition of the propositional content in predication and nomination on the other side. Decomposing verbal sign acts in illocutionary function and propositional content accounts for the fact that using language always means more than merely uttering sounds or drawing letters. We *warn* or *promise, ask* or *demand, assert* or *doubt,* to name just a few examples of illocutionary functions.

That aspect, which focuses on the interaction performed with the speech act, is to be distinguished from the intentional aspect mediated by the propositional content: *what* it is that we warn of, promise, ask or demand.[10] The propositional content is again composed of partial acts of

two kinds: a speaker tries to communicate with one or several nominations which (individual) object or objects he wants to refer to in the context of the complete sign act; with the predication he tries to communicate which ability of discrimination or classification he wants to apply to that (set of) object(s). It is not possible to perform a complete act of communication with any of those partial acts alone: predication and nomination are generally conceived of as being "unsaturated" (cf. Tugendhat 1976; the terminology goes back to Frege 1892).

Does picture use provide decompositions with similar partial acts? We certainly can perform illocutionary functions with pictures as well; for instance, caution against a snappish dog, or assert that a certain door is the one of the women's lavatory. However, it is commonly doubted that all illocutionary functions available with language can be performed by means of presenting an accordingly chosen picture. Purely pictorial acts of doubting, for example, or a purely pictorial promise are hard to conceive, indeed. Conversely, there may also be pictorial illocutionary functions that cannot be reach by means of language.

Propositional content poses a problem for images that is even bigger than commonly assumed: On first view, pictures appear to be able to carry both functions that constitute propositions. The standard function of a passport photo, for instance, could be regarded as being predicative: "This human being *looks like that (!).*" The photo articulates (so to speak) a rather complicated ability of visual discrimination, which is bound linguistically by means of "that" together with a pointing act ("!") as part of the predication, while the nomination is plain and implicitly given in the situation (namely the one presenting his passport). On the other hand, we do easily accept a sign act with someone presenting the picture of a huge red suspension bridge with two characteristically designed piers, and briefly telling us "has been build in 1936;" here, as in the case of the purely verbal nomination, the receiving communication partner must conceive the object meant as something mutually known before, as she would otherwise not know how the classification according to the year of construction should be applied.

In both cases, the pictorial sign act seemingly takes over one of the partial acts involved in a multimedial assertion, the verbal part of which remains unsaturated in the sense of Frege, i.e., is not comprehensible

[9] There are few exceptions, in particular onomatopoetic expressions.

[10] There are also verbal sign acts without propositional content, e.g., to greet somebody.

without the presentation of the picture. There occur, of course, also many other cases of assertions with incomplete verbal form (ellipsis), containing, e.g., no nomination: "Quite cheeky!" Only, the seemingly missing parts have been communicated implicitly in such cases: they are implied by focus of attention on objects mentioned earlier or by salient objects in the situation of the utterance.

The examples with pictures described above are entirely different since the parts missing verbally are explicitly supplemented by pictorial acts to gain a complete assertion. Therefore we may ask whether pictorial sign acts are in general unsaturated. But then, communicative acts with pictures that are not part of a much more complex complete sign act would not be comprehensible. On the other hand, we have to note that the act of picture presentation is not uniquely associated as such or in any obvious way to any partial act of a proposition. It is more plausible to assume that the necessity to become saturated of the verbal partial acts co-occurring with the picture presentation firstly induces the application of the picture.

4.2. Figure, Ground, and Medium

There are many arguments for rejecting a decomposition of picture presentation acts analogous to the decomposition of propositional acts relevant for language. Nevertheless, the distinction of figure and ground offers a dimension of pragmatic decomposition that is at the same time specific and basic for pictures. In fact, the decomposition in figure and ground is not bound to perceptoid signs but belongs originally to perception in general. Perceptual features are organized according to one's current mental state while perceiving. Those features are, thus, interpreted either as part of a figure, hence rated as relevant and given more attention subsequently, or as part of the ground into which the figure perceived is embedded by necessity. That decomposition is variable not only in the one sense: that our perceptual attention is not focused on all the surrounding objects but moves from one to the other so that something being figure at one moment may become the background of another figure in the next instant. The differentiation in figure and ground is also variable in the sense that an entire re-interpretation of the current situation of behavior remains

Figure 5: Ambiguous Picture "Rubin's Goblet"
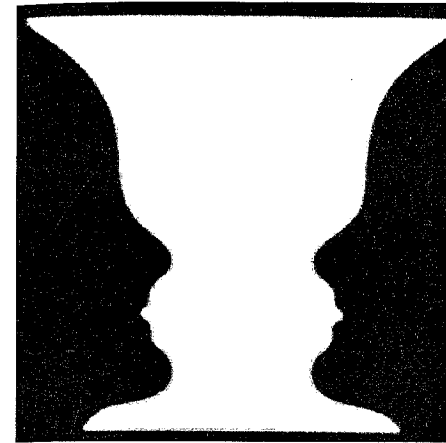
possible. Such a re-interpretation also occurs, for instance, when we recognize something as a mirror image that we have first perceived unconsciously as another person (i.e., in deceptive mode).

Figures in a picture attract our attention accordingly: by means of being perceived, and stepping in front of grounds that simultaneously position and embed their figures. While predication and nomination cannot be transferred from their verbal source to pictures in a satisfying manner, it is much easier to apply the decomposition in figure and ground from its perception- and picture-based origin to the propositional content of language. A predication resembles the concept of figure by bringing into the – now mutual – focus of attention a certain habit of distinction that is considered as relevant in the discourse situation. Furthermore, that habit has to be anchored in the objects assumedly mutually known already and given by means of the nominations, which thus act as a corresponding ground.[11]

But the association of figure and ground to certain parts of a picture is always merely one of many possibilities inherent to the picture. Certain pictures (cf. Figure 5) indeed play with the ambiguity: They are constructed in a way so that quite drastic changes of mutually incompatible figure/ground differentiations occur spontaneously.

In general, any one object of a set of objects depicted in a picture can step as figure in front of the rest framing it. The same holds for any part of a complex object. In the example above (the photo of the Golden Gate Bridge), the bridge is certainly the most prominent choice for figure, but

[11] Closely related to predication and nomination, the expressions "thema" and "rhema" used in the Prague school of linguistics indeed focus particularly on the difference of the two parts in what is mutually known (ground) or what is new (figure) for the receiver.

the picture can also be employed to direct the attention to the straits spanned by the bridge, or to a sailing boat depicted as it is about to leave the bay; to the city being partially shown or to a single one of her buildings visible in the frame; to the one pillar that stands right in the straits, or to the large gray spot indicating the place where the characteristic protective coating of the bridge is being renewed. In any case, a different figure/ground differentiation is working with the ground as the necessary anchor for the aspects of the figure considered as currently relevant.

The apparent similarity between predication/nomination, and figure/ground is imperfect: while propositional content is originally determined by one concrete predication and one (or several) similarly fixed nominations, the differentiation of a picture in figure and ground is not at all predetermined. Similar to the surrounding world, which becomes – by means of perception – a stage that is partitioned in something relevant at the moment being entrenched in the rest, pictures offer essentially the *potential* for many figure/ground differentiations.[12]

We shall have to further investigate this feature of offering figure/ground discriminations together with its relation to the manifest division of the propositional contents of verbal signs in predication and nomination(s). In order to have at hands a simple and not completely unmotivated terminology, we suggest calling the not yet realized potential of an entity for figure/ground differentiation a *medium* – following a tradition of Gestalt psychology.[13] Figure and ground thus differentiate always within a medium originally offering the option for such a partition. They refer to the medium, which simultaneously remains available for alternative figure/ground associations. We also suggest considering

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[12] Pictures – in contrast to situations for perception – additionally provide means of pictorial rhetoric, for instance by varying the presentation style of some aspects so that their interpretation as figure becomes dominant (cf. Sachs-Hombach & Schirra 2002).

[13] See Heider 1927 and the juxtaposition of "figural and medial I" in Bischof 1998. It may appear unfortunate to introduce with "medium" an expression so highly ambiguous already. Nevertheless, the choice is well motivated by the relation between media in the sense used here and behavioral situations in general: straight away, the environment of a creature is not partitioned, too. It firstly becomes structured according to the motivations of the creature when the creature – perceiving and behaving – faces it, or rather when it immerses in that environment – as a medium.

pictures as media in this sense. The propositional contents of verbal utterances are based on a kind of figure/ground differentiation already performed – though the question of the corresponding medium must remain open here.

So far, the essential difference between "to say" by language and "to show" by pictures may, thus, lay in the distinction between (assertive) language communicating a manifest figure/ground division and (presentational) pictures making available a whole medium.

5. Context Building: Empirical and Logical Re-Presentation

In contrast to simpler kinds of sign acts, verbal utterances with propositional content are essentially used when we try to communicate situations that are not immediately linked with the situation of utterance (cf., e.g., Tugendhat 1976). We then refer with the nominations to a particular type of spatio-temporal-material objects that are often called "sortal objects" in philosophy:[14] individual objects, which cannot be divide into parts of the same type again.
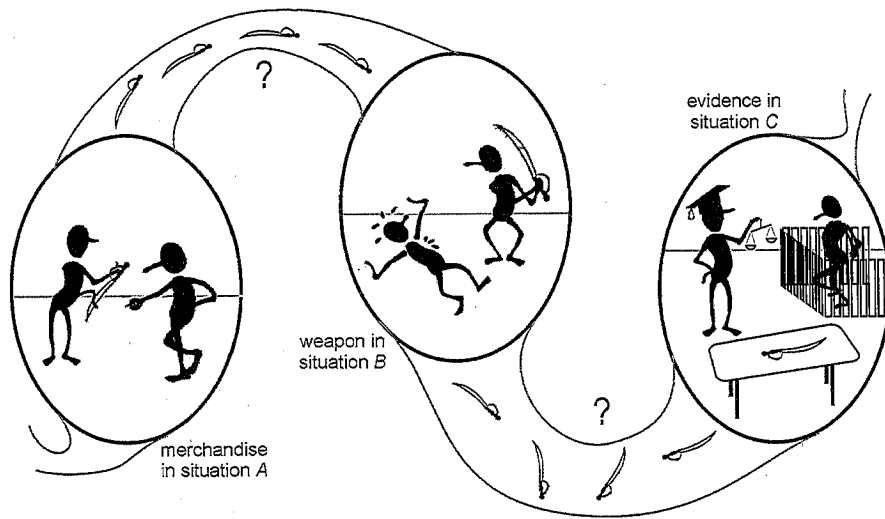
5.1. Propositions, Sortal Objects, and Contexts

We usually assume that our world consists (among other things) mostly of individual objects – tables and chairs, trees, cats, cars, and houses, etc. Those are things we meet at different times and in some cases also in different places as the *same individuals* even if they have changed in the meantime. As in the example of the caterpillar becoming a butterfly, those changes can be rather severe. It is only for the reason of the sortal individuation that we are able to prove whether we deal with the same individual object at two different instants or with two different objects of the same kind. Take, for instance, a court of justice trying to identify the dagger among the evidence in the courtroom, the pointed object that killed the victim on the other side of the city a year ago, and the knife the accused

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[14] More precisely, we ought to speak about sortal concepts. "Sortal objects" is in fact only a shortened form for "objects falling under sortal concepts" covering things like nuts or bottles in contrast to, e.g., sand or water, which may be split to parts of the same sorts – i.e., sand or water respectively.

Figure 6: Identity and Lifeline of a Sortal Object

Figure 7: Context Building as Part of an Assertion and as the Result of Its Use: Logical Re-Presentation of Non-Present Situations
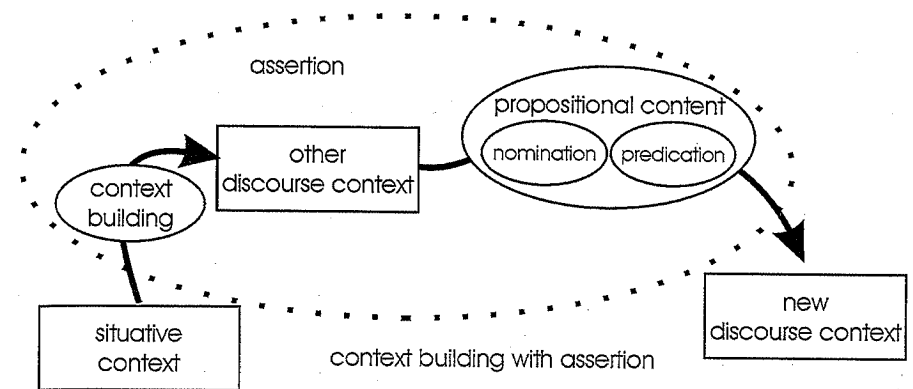

has bought 13 months ago in a neighboring city (cf. Figure 6). The sortal concept determines even the possible transformations that do not change the identity of the instances of the according kind (e.g., staining of the knife, dirt, bending of the knife's point – *versus* changing the blade).

Note that sortal objects can never appear in isolation: speaking of them only makes sense as something acting as the figure in front of a background, as something that exists in more than one context of behavior. The expression "context" is used here – at least for the time being – for indicating any finite and structured set of intentional sortal objects, i.e., a couple of individual things standing in relations with each other as far as somebody knows about them (or perceives them).

Since propositions do not refer regularly to the current situation of behavior, we have to consider – apart from predication and nomination – an additional partial act used to specify to the interlocutor the context actually meant. Let us call this function *context building* (with Gilles Fauconnier [1985] expression "space builder" in mind). Verbal references to places and statements of times can serve for context building. But we can verbally build hypothetical or fictitious contexts, too, for example by means of a

reference to a text of literary fiction: "In Uwe Johnson's novel 'Jahrestage,' Gesine has a daughter named Marie." The persons the speaker means by the nominations "Gesine" and "Marie" can only be identified relative to the given literary fictitious context. In general, the verbal act of context building opens up another situational context apart from the current situation of utterance so that the interlocutors become able to refer – from the distance – to the objects spanning that context (cf. Figure 7).[15]

The current situative context certainly plays a distinguished role since the referential anchoring of nominations and predication can be performed in an immediate manner only for assertions on this particular context. Only in this case, the sensory-motor components of the concepts used – i.e., the corresponding habits of distinguishing – can be employed without additional efforts. The situational context is therefore particularly suited as a default assumption: it is plausible and "economic" to assume

[15] Furthermore, relations between the two contexts (or more contexts introduced by means of context building) can be articulated verbally. Such is in particular the function of identity sentences.

the situative context in which the interlocutors exchange the utterance if no other context building is evident.

A second type of default context building is given by a preceding assertion: accordingly, an assertion has not only an act of context building as its part, but is again employed for context building. In the "natural order" of a narrative, the context building successively extends to the whole sequence of assertions, a result also forming the basis for context building by referring symbolically to texts, as in the example above (novel "Jahrestage").

Acts of verbal context building that indicate locations like the sentential adverbials "in Prague" tell us in a way a method to transform the current situational context into the context meant to be used for referentially anchoring the propositional content of the utterance. One has to consider two components in order to referentially anchor an assertion: one has to understand (a) how to "position" the sensory-motor routines for identifying the objects meant (by making the context indicated by means of context building the actual situation of behavior); and one has to know (b) how to apply the sensory-motor test routines associated with the predication in the then actual situation (how to practice the corresponding habits of distinguishing).

So far, the conception of context fits with the description given above: a finite, structured set of intentional sortal objects. However on closer look, we may determine contexts as well as generalized compounds of activities, as *behavioral situations* for sensory-motor test routines. With Wittgenstein, we ought to conceive such behavioral situations as systems of facts rather than sets of objects: what is the case *there and then*. What we have named a "behavioral situation" forms an offer for interpretation, i.e., it opens up a potential for many reactions or explanations by means of assertions (cf., e.g., Wittgenstein 1922: § 1; Fellmann 2000: 27 ff.). Contexts, as behavioral situations, are principally open for many different figure/ground differentiations, and thus, for changes of perspective. Therefore, the characterization as a set of objects is a simplified view: it is in a sense the *figurative* aspect of a context, which has to be complemented by its *medial* aspect as a behavioral situation open for (re-)interpretation.

Hence, contexts form on the one hand – according as the current behavioral situation is a context, too, and as any other context can (at least

Figure 8: Context Building with Pictures
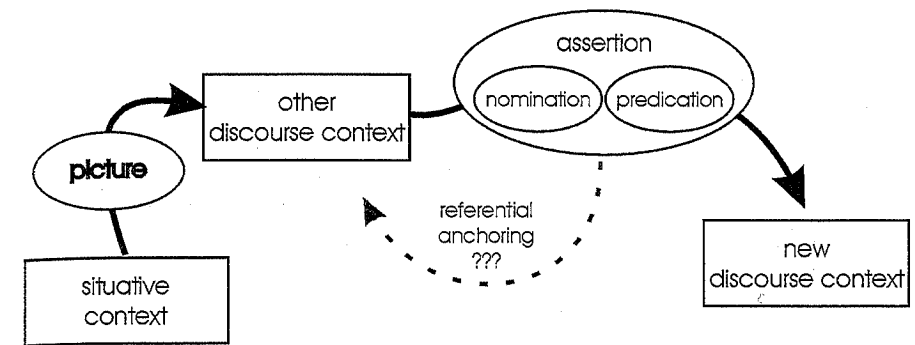
in principle) be made the current behavioral situation – the medium that can be partitioned by perception in sortal objects as figures in front of a ground, so that they appear as a set of intentional objects. On the other hand, they also form – in as far as they can be generated by means of propositions and represented in propositions – the medium for the other differentiation in predication and nomination: as a system of facts. Those facts can be communicated in various manners as propositional contents, and are, in consequence, distinguished into *(i)* the figure of a habit of distinguishing considered as not yet mutually known, and *(ii)* the ground of objects that are assumed as mutually known already (i.e., objects that are by then integrated in the system of mutually known facts).

5.2. Picture Use as Context Building

Obviously, the non-reflective use of a presentational picture also places at our disposal an additional situational context, which may be – and usually is – employed as the basis for nominations and predications. After all, the utilization of the image gives the interlocutors exactly the context that is needed for the assertions about the picture content (i.e., what is depicted; cf. Figure 8). Similar to the example mentioned above where referring to a novel opens a certain (fictitious) context for the communication partners, somebody presenting a picture tries to direct the mutual focus of

attention to a real or fictitious situation of perception, which in most cases is not identical with the situation of the presentation act.[16]

The idea that indeed any application of an image depends on the use of context building appears, then, as a promising hypothesis: Since it is always the ostensible sensual re-presentation of a situation usually not really present that permits other, more specific uses. When presenting a passport photo, for example, the context evoked pictorially makes it possible to use another appearance of the sortal object to be identified as a reference for proving the identity of, precisely speaking, the person having that sortal object as her body.

Conceiving picture use as being essentially context building does not mean, by the way, that a finite set of assertions would be equivalent to an image. No specific set of assertions at all can completely determine the significant content of a picture – neither actually of any other situation of behavior, be it given immediately or mediated by an act of context building. Understood in its medial aspect the context specified restricts possible nominations and predications, but it does not determine them entirely. On the contrary, it is the medial function of contexts for propositional sign uses, as was already mentioned above, to remain open for alternative interpretations by means of other nominations and predications.

Context building with purely verbal tools offers usually no way for *empirically* verifying the corresponding assertion by means of perception. The referential anchoring works only for the assertions about the current situation of utterance. In the other cases, the context specified by context building has first to be visited – if that is possible at all. In contrast to that, context building by means of pictures includes the deceptive mode embedded in the immersive mode: it therefore enables us to anchor the nominations and their interaction with the predication at least to some degree (e.g., modality of sense) immediately in perception – as in an actual situation of behavior.

It would be necessary to leave the current behavioral situation and move to the context specified in order to empirically prove that the concept really applies to the single objects in the way an assertion claims. In

Figure 9: Context Building with Pictures: Empirical Re-Presentation
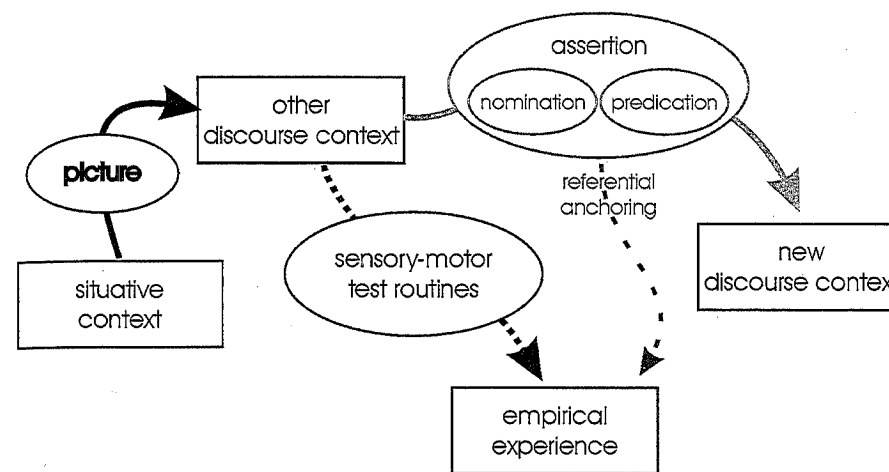
that sense, verbally introduced contexts stand distinctly separated, so to say. One cannot anchor referentially in several of them at once. If I do not want – or am not able – to make the context built to my current situation of behavior (e.g., in case of fiction), all that remains is gaining more assertions by drawing logically conclusions from the concepts employed, and check those conclusions for consistency with what I know already about that context. However, that never leads me to the real situation that is needed to actually prove empirically the assertion.

In contrast to that, an additional behavioral situation is evoked – as perceived in deceptive mode – when building the context by presenting a picture; a situation that thus allows the users for spontaneous reactions: the sensory-motor test routines of the habits of distinguishing mentioned in an assertion can (at least partially) be applied right away. Unlike the verbally introduced contexts, that context is not utterly separated from the actual situation of the sign use. The two contexts rather appear as partially "fused," the "distant" context, in a way, brought *into the present* – "re-presented" in its literal meaning (cf. Figure 9).

The essential difference between "to say" and "to show" is thus, for short, that verbal context building can *re-present* facts merely *logically,*

while pictorial context building can *re-present* facts *empirically* as well. The manifest figure/ground division in predication and nomination(s) is indeed a prerequisite for the analytic (logical) treatment of assertions, just as referential anchoring at the core of empirical investigation depends on a medium (given, for instance, by a picture).

6. A Short Note on Structural Pictures and Abstract Language

In the preceding arguments, our focus of attention was essentially on pictorial presentations of spatial-material scenes (presentational pictures, for short) on the one hand, and on the verbal access to spatio-temporal facts about sortal objects on the other hand. Although pictorial and verbal representations of concrete spatio-temporal affairs are core phenomena for their respective domains, they do not cover the whole phenomenal range. A comprehensive elaboration has to include the use of structural pictures and of language for abstract affairs. For the later it is not obvious how to apply empirical checks of validity. For the former, it remains unclear how they can be *perceptoid* signs as well, and hence how empirical re-presentation may work for them. Structural (or logical) pictures are pictures with something depicted that can actually not be seen (like graphical representation of poll movements) or at least has some non-visual aspects (e.g., temperature map of a house).

There are good arguments supporting a close connection between the conceptual transition from presentational pictures to structural pictures, and the one from spatio-temporal language to abstract language. Metaphorical relations between fields of concepts – as they are considered in "cognitive linguistics" (see Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Johnson 1987; Lakoff 1987) – may well play an important role there. More precisely, we have to consider in both cases partial structural transfers from the field of sortal concepts to the field of concepts of the abstract domain under consideration. Following the arguments of cognitive linguistics, that transfer at last makes it possible to speak about those abstract things and their relations and properties at all: namely to speak about them – and what's more: to depict them – as if they be sortal objects in a context with corresponding visually perceptible parameters and relations (cf. Schirra 2005: 4.4.4). The function of empirical context building is, then, crucial for structural

pictures as well. Due to spatial restrictions, these considerations cannot be refined here.

7. Prospect: A Concept-Genetic Research Programme

Let us recapitulate: We have presupposed a dialogical communicative situation for the use of language as well as for the use of pictures. We furthermore have determined a characteristic feature in the particular way competences in (visual) perception are brought into the argumentations concerning picture uses. The salience of this feature for an adequate conception of the faculty of picture use, which we covered for short by calling pictures "perceptoid signs," is determined in an act-theoretic manner by a specific mode of reception. In particular, that *immersive* mode has no (significant) counterpart for language. On the other hand, we have established decompositions in complementary, unsaturated partial acts as a characteristic feature for language uses. Such decompositions can be obtained for picture presentations only in rather special and derived cases. However, we have got the idea that the figure/ground relation from perception theory might have an influence on potential uses of a picture for nomination or predication. Employing pictures indeed refers to the yet undifferentiated basis of the figure/ground opposition, namely the medium that can be partitioned in many ways and is also closely linked with the sortal concepts of objects. Consequently, picture use is at its core, so our thesis, context building that allows us – in contrast to verbal context building – to re-present empirically non-present situations of behavior. That thesis obviously needs more conceptual clarification.

Such a clarification is one of the reasons to investigate in philosophical visualistics the logical-conceptual preconditions we have to assume if we speak about creatures with the ability to use pictures or to use language. Moreover, philosophical visualistics should look for rational arguments justifying those preconditions. That may indeed lead us finally to a more distinct research programme for philosophical visualistics, a sketch of which we want to add here.

To that purpose let us first recall some methodological results from the philosophical theory of rational argumentation. That theory distinguishes between conceptual clarifications and justifications of conceptual

clarifications (cf. Ros 1989/1990). In the nutshell, by means of a conceptual clarification a debatable concept in a dissent is determined as a logical combination of other concepts for the same phenomenal domain. Recall that concepts are essentially inter-individually controlled faculties of distinguishing phenomena. Those concepts used in a conceptual clarification are, however, often explained with the concept originally determined. Systems of concepts that mutually determine each other are called a field of concepts. One way out of such cyclic determinations is to decide on a small set of basic concepts for the field of concepts in question so that any other concept of that system can be logically reduced to the basic concepts. The basic concepts remain, then, the end of the chain of explanation that cannot, unfortunately, be determined any further. The dissent about a concept is, thus, only solvable if all parties involved in the debate accept the basic concepts as unproblematic.

If this is not the case reasons have to be given that *(i)* justify or reject one or the other aspect of the system of basic concepts spanning the field in question, and that *(ii)* can be accepted by all participants. In contrast to conceptual explanations, which always remain *internal* to one field of concepts, those reasons have to be *external* to the field under investigation: It is obvious that a justification of basic concepts cannot be deduced logically within the very field of concepts they originally span – like the axioms of a theory. At this point, *concept-genetic* considerations enter the game, i.e., the proposal to consider the field of concepts in question (or the corresponding system of basic concepts) as introduced by means of a systematic combination of other fields of concepts conceived as being originally independent from each other. Those founding fields have to be accepted by all the participants and have usually got an internal structure simpler than the one to be justified. While instances of objects falling under a concept in one of the simple fields have properties determined in the other field in a contingent manner only at the best, the combined field of concepts covers instances that show attributes from all the constituting fields in a systematically linked manner. Furthermore, the schema of the combination of fields together with the internal rules of the constituting fields determines the rules governing the combined field of concepts: the schema thus gives us in fact a justification of axioms.

The justification of conceptual clarifications by means of concept-genetic considerations rests on two arguments: One can show (1) that some concepts relevant for us cannot be determined in any way in the elementary fields, and (2) that it is possible to define those concepts in the combined field of concepts. This opens an additional option for solving dissents about concepts and their properties – if only all parties involved accept the simpler fields of concepts as well as the schema of combination, and if they also have an interest at all in establishing the concepts debated as common habits of distinguishing phenomena.

* * *

We are now interested in the relations between the fields of concepts for creatures with the abilities to use pictures or language. In the preceding sections, we have essentially collected some conceptual clarifications. With them we have tried to determine the internal structures of those two fields. However, we are not yet sure whether these relations belong to different fields of concepts by any means – the faculty of using language and the ability of employing pictures could instead depend on each other (belonging to the same field), or they may stand in a constituting relation in one way or the other. That question can only be decided by means of concept-genetic considerations, which also lead us to a justification of the internal determinations of the corresponding fields.

The thoughts about the uses of pictures and language gathered above provide some starting points for such a concept-genetic consideration. Sign use can, as we have seen, serve as a common base for the two faculties. Therefore, we should study the fields of concepts for creatures able to use signs on various levels of complexity. On the other hand, the link between the deceptive and immersive modes together with the relation between medium and figure/ground can be used as a specific difference: we therefore have also to consider on successive levels of complexity the fields around the concept of something able to perceive in a more or less ambitious sense. The origin for the concept-genetic examination ought to be the fields of concepts for those beings we cannot yet ascribe in the most elementary sense perception, and sign use respectively. Corresponding leveled theories can actually be found in ethologic studies and in the philosophy of language (cf. also, e.g., Ros 2005).

Figure 10: Hypothetical Schema of the Two Sequences of Fields of Concepts
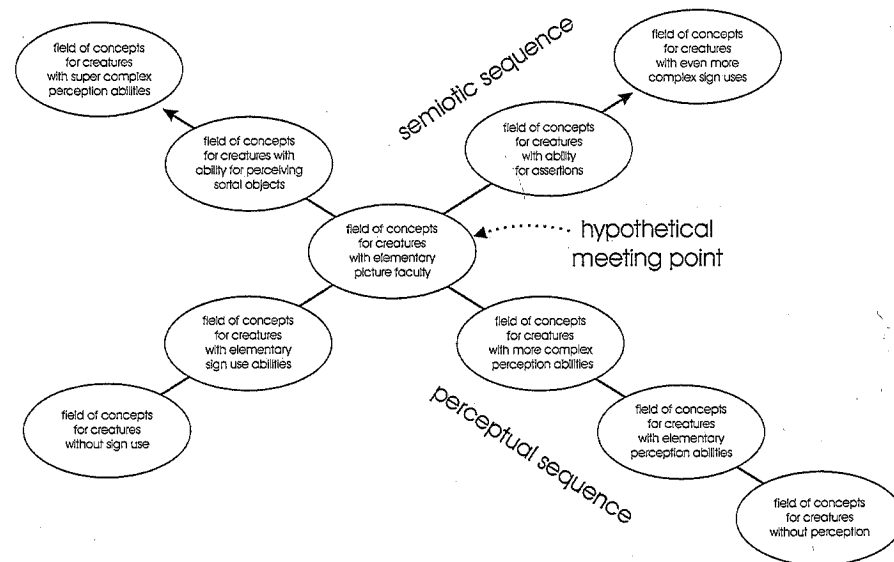
The straight arrows indicate concept-genetic constitution relations. At the – merely supposed – meeting point, perceptual abilities and signing skills can be combined into the immersive mode. In the case illustrated, the faculty of using picture is constitutive for the ability to use assertive language.

The goal of the considerations is to reconstruct from the two sequences – the semiotic one and the perceptual one – the (minimal) level that contains the most peculiar combination of symbolic mode and deceptive mode so characteristic for pictures. The minimal field with a concept for creatures able to use pictures must, then, hold exactly the essential determinations for that faculty (cf. Figure 10). Starting from that field, more complex fields characterizing higher levels of picture uses can be investigated. Furthermore, we can elucidate the relation to the (minimal) level on which assertions become an option – being a part of the semiotic sequence anyway. It, thus, becomes clear whether the concept for the ability to use assertions is a necessary but not sufficient precondition for the concept for the faculty of using pictures – or the other way round; or whether the two concepts depend on each other so that we cannot

rationally speak about beings that have one of the faculties alone (see also Schirra & Sachs-Hombach 2006).

It should be obvious that the detailed elaboration of this plan lastly aiming at a fundamental clarification of the questions characterizing philosophical visualistics exceeds the frame of this article by far. At least, we hope to have drafted a reasonable concept-genetic research programme for philosophical visualistics.

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Figures

Figure 4 taken from: FISHER, GERALD H. (1967). Measuring ambiguity. *American J. Psychology* 80: 541–557.

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RAINER GULDIN*

ICONOCLASM AND BEYOND: VILÉM FLUSSER'S CONCEPT OF TECHNO-IMAGINATION

Western thinking about pictures is characterized by a strong tendency towards iconoclasm. Within this theoretical framework any attempt at thinking in pictures ultimately leads to idolatry and irrational behavior. As a reaction to this, some theoreticians writing in the wake of the iconic turn tend to extol what they call pure visibility. Vilém Flusser's writings, on the other hand, deal with the constantly evolving relationship of image and text. He does not simply reject the accusations of the hazards inherent in picture making put forward by the iconoclasts but tries to steer a middle-course in an attempt at reconciliation. His concept of techno-imagination is an answer to the invention of the new media of photography, film, video, TV and computer, in an attempt to draw philosophical and ethical conclusions from their use. To be properly understood techno-images need techno-imagination which is both a reading of pictures and an act of creative pictorial invention bringing out unexpected situations from among a given field of possibilities. Calculated, digital images, in fact, allow a radically new view of the gesture of picture making transcending a purely representational interpretation. Techno-imagination implies a move away from the search of "objectivity" in favor of an inter-subjective way of dealing with pictures. Picture making has to do with the creation of a new sense of doubt regarding the world by multiplying points-of-view and making them available to others.

Keywords: iconoclasm, techno-imagination, inter-subjectivity, photography, digital pictures.

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