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**Dos deslocamentos da forma ao traço aurático:
Notas sobre o pensamento de Didi-Huberman
acerca das imagens**

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RESUMO

Dos deslocamentos da forma ao traço aurático: Notas sobre o pensamento de Didi-Huberman acerca das imagens

O texto sublinha o modo como, para Georges Didi-Huberman, tópicos como matéria, sintoma e memória se tornam primordiais para o pensamento das imagens.

Palavras-chave

imagem; Didi-Huberman; Derrida; Benjamin; memória; aura

ABSTRACT

From Displacements of Form to Auratic Trace: Notes on Didi-Huberman's Thinking on Images

This text underlines the way in which, for Georges Didi-Huberman, topics including matter, symptom and memory become primordial to the thinking of images. But as Didi-Huberman proceeds, the course that leads him to highlight such topics first addresses other topics that, in philosophy and iconography, sought to deny such readings, namely: image as form and its correlative meanings, that is, image as symbol and image as visibility. Didi-Huberman, however, argues that the notion of form may no longer be merely opposed to that of matter, nor be considered as solely idealistic. If, on the one hand, Didi-Huberman presents the insufficiency of the deconstruction of the notion of form presented by Jacques Derrida, on the other hand, the displacements of the notion of form proposed specially in *Ce que nous voyons ce qui nous regarde* point to an approximation to deconstruction, mostly to the themes of trace, *index* and "the belows" (*les dessous*) of images. In addition, passages of this and other works of Didi-Huberman may insinuate a connection between the notions of trace and aura, which refer to convergences concerning the deconstruction of the visible and the dialectical image. This text seeks to reconstruct such directions from writings of Didi-Huberman and, in this way, restores other writings that border on them: specially from Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin.

Keywords

image; Didi-Huberman; Derrida; Benjamin; memory; aura

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Introduction

First scene: There is a cube. Not just one: a few. Painted in black. They were many and similar. They repeated themselves: in form and in gesture. From their muteness they invoked the passer's gaze. And from their shape: tomb shape, lapidary and polished. Tony Smith would have preferred that his works be seen in the evening, the day passing into night. They would represent nothing beyond this half-light. "What you see is what you see" – *and what you see in the twilight* – so he would add to Frank Stella's minimalist motto. But it could happen that a peculiar corner of one of these cubes leads us to see beyond it, or it could happen that a shadow projected on them interfered in some way with the purity of form. Or maybe we would see something like a vacuum there. A representation of a vacuum? No: a memory-vacuum or "a volume that carries and shows the void".¹ And how could it be a void – so asks Didi-Huberman – as "a form that looks at us (*qui nous regarde*)"?²

Second scene: That intense white seemed misplaced in the image, as if eroding the background of the fresco *Annunciation* [1440-41]. Fra Angelico had intensified that colour too much, as if dissociating it from the rest of the composition: a "patch of white" (*pan de blanc*) and nothing else. In this way, this white could either be read or be overlooked, since it, unlike the angel, the virgin and the figure in the background, means nothing, symbolizes nothing. But Didi-Huberman urges us to look at it again and again, until that white looks at us or removes us from the usual place of image's readers or interpreters. The figurative power is lacking in that white patch, it lacks the remissive function of being-sign: in this "lack to be" that white becomes colour-*index*, it indicates itself, rendering it impossible to become idealized.³

Third scene: In a corner of the room, he played with that reel, he made it his closest and most distant friend, he supposed sometimes that he may have lost it, and then rejoiced at its presence. Presence of an absence. This would be, for Didi-Huberman, the sense that Freud attributed to the reel between

the distancing itself [*fort*] from the child and the approaching it in the presence [*da*], even if this refers to another: the reel changes from the condition of a “visual object” to the “visual image”, in so far as it appears and disappears “rhythmically”.⁴ As Didi-Huberman points out, it may occur that the symbol replaces the reel and “reveals” it, but “that reel will stand in a corner [...]”.⁵ It will subsist as *bruised rest* of the child’s wish.”⁵

In these three scenes – of a cube, of a white patch, of the reel – images become visible just as that which, in the visible, is shown in retracting, from a background of darkness or from something that, in the core of the visible, is a fracture or the memory of a fracture without point of origin. Images understood as events work beyond the symbolic, as that which resists signification, as that whose materiality, whose incarnation, resists like a symptom.

This text underlines the way in which, for Didi-Huberman, topics including matter, symptom and memory become primordial to the thinking of images. But as Didi-Huberman proceeds, the course that leads him to highlight such topics first addresses other topics that, in philosophy and iconography, sought to deny such readings, namely: image as form and its correlative meanings, that is, image as symbol and image as visibility.

Didi-Huberman, however, argues that the notion of form may no longer be merely opposed to that of matter, nor be considered as solely idealistic. If, on the one hand, Didi-Huberman presents the insufficiency of the deconstruction of the notion of form presented by Jacques Derrida, on the other hand, the displacements of the notion of form proposed specially in *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* point to an approximation to deconstruction, mostly to the themes of trace, *index* and “the belows” (*les dessous*) of images. In addition, passages of this and other works of Didi-Huberman may insinuate a connection between the notions of trace and aura, which refer to convergences concerning the deconstruction of the visible and the dialectical image. This text seeks to reconstruct such directions from writings of Didi-Huberman and, in this way,

restores other writings that border on them: specially from Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin.

I. Displacements of form

Departing from the primacy that the terms 'form' and 'presence' assumed in the philosophical tradition and returning to the deconstruction of such a primacy, brought about by Jacques Derrida, Didi-Huberman retains a dislocated sense of the notions of form and presence especially by writing about the work of the sculptor Tony Smith. Referring to Smith's black cubes, he points out that these are "excessively rigorous and abstract forms" which would be dissociated from symbolic, figurative and representative aspects: they would be, at the same time, objects lacking "nostalgia", "images of memory" and "forms endowed with presence".⁶ In order to examine the meaning of "at the same time" here – that is to say, the possibility of being simultaneously "abstract forms", "image of memory" and "forms endowed with presence" – it is necessary to first recollect Didi-Huberman's considerations of the notion of form and its partial deconstruction.

Didi-Huberman argues that Derrida's deconstruction of the notion of form in phenomenology was limited to linguistic aspects and could not cover the subject of form in images or sculptures. I quote Didi-Huberman, in the chapter "Forme et intensité"⁷ ("Form and intensity") on this topic:

"The sense of being has been limited by the imposition of form", concluded Derrida. But can we be satisfied here with such radicalness? Not exactly. For the context in which Derrida develops this view is identified with a vocabulary drawn from the history of philosophy alone. And, moreover, that concerns in his analysis only the problem of a "phenomenology of language". Our problem here is not exactly that of the sense of being, nor of the status of language in general; it touches on, more modestly, the status of a simple black cube, of a sculpture in general. Of a form, to put it mildly. What happens when the word "form" refers *also* to the appearance

of a sensible, visible object, of its own matter, and certainly its singular content and background?⁸

Thus, for Didi-Huberman, Derrida would have thought about form in a limited way, that is to say, by restricting this term to the analysis of language and the acts of conscience, as this would be emphasized in Derrida's text taken up by Didi-Huberman "La forme et le vouloir-dire: Note sur la phénoménologie du langage"⁹ ("The form and the *vouloir-dire*: A note on the phenomenology of language"). In fact, in this text, Derrida states that metaphysical thought would have been characterized itself as thought of the form and of the formality of the form. This thought of the form would have found its greatest radicality in Husserl's phenomenology, in so far as this would present the link between the ideality of linguistic meaning and the living present as fundamental form of the phenomenon. According to Derrida:

The form is the presence itself. The formality is what of the thing in general is presented, what lets itself be seen, what gives itself to thinking. That the metaphysical thought – and consequently the phenomenology – is thought of being as form, that in this the thought thinks itself as thought of form, and of the formality of form, so there is nothing else as necessary; and about that one would perceive a final sign in the fact that Husserl determines the *living present* (*lebendige Gegenwart*) as the ultimate, universal, absolute "form" of transcendental experience in general.¹⁰

For Derrida, the "philosophy of presence" in phenomenology would thus prolong and accentuate the classical primacy that the form has found in the metaphysical tradition. Husserl would have shown that ideality need not be real presence or just contained in consciousness, but must be able to be repeated and actualized as such in every act of consciousness. In this way, phenomenology would have bound the notions of presence and present, determining the living present [*die lebendige Gegenwart*] as the ultimate form of the phenomenon, which is given and actualized in the temporal flow of consciousness in a continuous and uninterrupted way.¹¹ From

this, the phenomenology as “philosophy of presence” would hardly recognize the contingency of the sense, the interferences of materiality, the fragmentation of each perception, of each image, of each word at the moment in which they appear. As Didi-Huberman’s sees it, this implies that phenomenology could not approach the image as symptom or as fracture.

In order to overcome the philosophical reduction of the form and also to overcome what would be a partial Derridian deconstruction of this concept, Didi-Huberman proposes to rehabilitate the term “form”. The chapter “Form and Intensity” suggests that this term is no longer opposed to matter, as in the classical sense; it neither subordinates nor reduces the sensible. On the contrary, the notion of form would shelter the sensitive object, its matter, its memory, its forgetfulness. Didi-Huberman indicates that the inclusion of such levels – i.e., sensitivity, materiality, memory, forgetfulness – in the notion of form is not a whim, but can be seen achieved in the course of some movements in the visual arts, especially by Russian formalism.¹²

The first of the transformations of the notion of form would be the recognition of form in its own materiality, in its texture and concreteness. A second re-elaboration of this notion pointed out by Didi-Huberman emphasizes the organicity of form, in the sense that a form would no longer have only this or that aspect, but would imply relations in which certain things enter into bonds, in conflict, juxtaposition, or confluence. Thirdly, form would assert itself as assemblage, giving rise to multiple transformations, as well as deformations. Form and figure, in this case, were understood as “formation” in the Freudian sense, and so, starting from the dream’s displacements, as “deformation”.¹³ Linked to this movement, form has to be affirmed in its contextuality, in the sense that it does not impose itself on a context as neutral, to the extent that it always configures and disfigures according to other elements of a conjuncture. In this case, the current situation brings with it the memory of previous conjunctures, but what becomes currently transposed neither presents itself as such, nor acts as a

fragment of a previous context. Didi-Huberman points out that finally with Freud the notion of form has shifted from a link to the beautiful and the visible, to a bordering place in which – I quote – “seeing is losing, and where the object of loss without recourse looks at us. It is the place of the disquieting strangeness (*das Unheimliche*)”.¹⁴

Just by these displacements of the notion of form, it could be asked, however, if the deconstruction of this same notion by Derrida was limited to language, as Didi-Huberman highlights. By examining Derrida’s works such as the assembled texts in *Penser à ne pas voir: Écrits sur les arts du visible*¹⁵ (*Thinking Out of Sight: Writings on the Arts of the Visible*), as well as *Mémoire d’aveugle: l’autoportrait et autres ruines*¹⁶ (*Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*), we can say that Derrida’s considerations move from concepts such as form and visibility, to those underlying aspects of the image, and, in general, of aspects placed in the background by a phenomenology, which would have privileged the themes of visibility and ideality for the analysis of image consciousness [*Bildbewusstsein*]. Mainly Edmund Husserl, in his manuscripts dedicated to the analysis of image consciousness¹⁷, has evidenced this idealistic side, by dividing the structural components of image into three instances – namely, the physical image, the object-image or *Fiktum*, and the subject-image –, by privileging, in the contemplation of image, how the object-image or *Fiktum* allows the manifestation of the subject-image, while the physical image or the support of the image becomes secondary to the manifestation of the meaning. Especially in the sense of deconstructing this so-called idealistic approach, Derrida¹⁸ introduces the quasi-concept¹⁹ of *dessous* (*below*) of images, that is linked to the quasi-concept of trace and *retrait*. Here, in the sequence, it is only a way of indicating, in a focus on the thinking of image, again with regards to Didi-Huberman’s own allusions, how such quasi-concepts are operative in Didi-Huberman’s own thinking on images.

II. Matter, memory, symptom

Didi-Huberman points out that the tautology of “What you see is what you see”, which could act as a motto of minimalism, would reject “the aura of the object, by displaying a mode of indifference to what lies just below, hidden, present, underlying”.²⁰ I will return to the re-elaboration of the notion of aura later. Here, I wish to accentuate the meaning of “just below” by Derrida and, in an analogous way, Didi-Huberman’s considerations about the “colour-subject”.

In opposition to an idealizing variation of the image, Derrida inscribes the quasi-concept of *dessous* (below), written preferentially in the plural: *les dessous* (the *belows*).²¹ *Dessous* refers to the sub-levels of the image, not directly visible on the surface – that is, the support, the substance, the subject, the *subjectile*. In this way, Derrida points specifically to the material supports, such as paper, copper plate, wood, linen, etc., as well as to other not visible (sub) levels of the image that act as the *subjectile* without which there is no work, and which could not be subordinated to the intention of a supposed subject (the producer and the theme) of the image.

In an analogous sense, Didi-Huberman refers to a procedure of Gothic painting which not only represents the blood but hurts the gold surface and by so doing allows the underlying red to emerge, as the “relationship of violence to the subjectile (i.e. to the support)”, which aims not only to reproduce the wound, but to accomplish the “*production* of a wound in the image” or “a lesion made in the image”.²² In this sense, argues Didi-Huberman, the appearing red could be called a “*colour-subject*” [*couleur-sujet*], which “supports (*supporte*) all event of image”.²³ Didi-Huberman’s implicit reference here to the Husserlian tripartition between subject-image, object-image and physical image makes it clear that the appearing colour is neither a pure physical element that allows the detachment between the object-image and the support, nor an element not existent, as a *Fiktum* that would only appear while pointing to the subject-image: but it is a colour that becomes a subject and a support,

condenses, intensifies, becomes “a *dislocated* vestige of the flesh”.²⁴

Similarly, Didi-Huberman describes the white colour in the fresco *Annunciation* by Fra Angelico, mentioned at the beginning of this text: there is an intensity of white that is “matter” and is “visual” before being there to make something else visible or before delineating a shape.²⁵ In an implicit reference to Husserl and to Derrida (reader of Husserl) – in the rehabilitation that the deconstruction proposes about the sign in the modality of *index* in its material and factual aspects nuanced by Husserl regarding to the privilege that he assigns to the expressive sign²⁶ – Didi-Huberman alludes to this white as “pure phenomenon-index that puts us in the presence of the chalky colour, well before telling us what that colour “fills” or qualifies”.²⁷ In the *colour-index* an unmasked but virtual memory claims another possibility of thought, different from the expressed and filled meaning, otherwise than the transparency of the image²⁸ and also than an iconology of the visible:

With the visible, we are of course in the realm of what manifests itself. The visual, by contrast, would designate that irregular net of event-symptoms that reaches the visible as so many gleams or radiances, “traces of articulation” (*marquages d'énonciation*) as so many indices... Indices of what? Of something – a work, a memory in process – that has nowhere been fully described, attested, or set down in an archive, because its signifying “material” is first of all the image.²⁹

In the sense of this displacement from the visible image to the indexical memory, Didi-Huberman also presents a criticism of the notion of symbolic form proposed by Ernst Cassirer and developed in the iconography of Erwin Panofsky.³⁰ Cassirer has stressed the form as an ideal unit, while Panofsky would have asserted a primacy of the visible, neglecting the “sacrificial economy” in works of art that, for example, present the incarnation of the verb in the Middle Ages. In a peculiar perspective on circumcision – and similar to what Derrida points out concerning the relation between circumcision and

writing – Didi-Huberman refers to the incarnation as “an opening of the flesh” in the core of the bodies or a “rip” [*déchirure*] in the “tissue” of the image.³¹ In this way, the symbolic function becomes pervaded by an “interruption” and is a “constitutive disfunction”.³² The sense of symptom required for the thinking of images is understood here as the pathways of event and its virtual materiality, that is, what cannot be appropriate itself but what comes to the visual is interrupted from within as a gap at the core of the experience and of the flesh. Therefore, the symptom within images deconstructs, respectively, the ordering of iconographic symbols and the supposed imitative feature of the visible. It goes from the “knowing of the symbolism” to the “non-knowing of the symptom”.³³ Didi-Huberman even points out that the “prototypical” images of Christianity would be “pure symptoms” or “*exposed traces of the divine*”.³⁴

In this sense of trace – as Didi-Huberman emphasizes in another text again in reference to Derrida – the erasure of presence understood as differential or *différent*, in so far as it displaces and delays the presentation, in a tissue of spacing-temporizations.³⁵ This implies, in Derrida’s words, that an image never coincides with that which, from it, becomes visible, since it is permeated by delays, suspensions and displacements that refract from the gaze.³⁶ When Derrida writes that repetition is never the same, that there is no pure reiteration or pure origin, and that iterability must be thought prior to the presence, he alludes mainly to the Freudian notions of trace [*Spur*], inscription [*Niederschrift*] and tracking [*Banhung, frayage*].³⁷ Already the perception is inscription of traces and retraces, before being and being thought of as presence. It follows that Derrida further developed the quasi-concepts of *différance* and that of *re-trait*: which can be given as image in so far as it retracts to the presence. This meaning was reworked in *Memoirs of the Blind*, when Derrida, referring especially to drawing, explains the retraction of the trait [*retrait du trait*] that could not contain its own trace. I quote Derrida:

[...] the drawing always makes sign towards this inaccessibility, towards the threshold

where only the outline of the trait appears, which it spaces by delimiting and which therefore does not belong to it. *Nothing belongs to the trait*, so to the drawing and to the thought of the drawing, not even its own "trace".³⁸

Instead of the forms of the drawing and the visible, Derrida thus speaks of trace, trait and *retrait*: doubly, the act of retracing anything in its iterability – the repetition that is never the same – and also the retract of the *trait*, in the sense of the trait's not-belonging to its trace.

The question posed by Didi-Huberman is then precisely whether, "insofar as the trace is placed in the foreground, it would still be possible, under these conditions, to speak about *form*".³⁹ As it turned out, his texts examined here point to a positive response. But while Didi-Huberman intends to include matter in the notion of form – so it becomes appropriate to think of "the informal matter when it emerges in the form"⁴⁰ – the same notion of form also includes processes such as deformation, reconfiguration, deconfiguration. Derrida, otherwise, intensifies the deconstruction of form from such processes, or, more properly, from such displacements which make it impossible to preserve a presence as a form beyond the differentiations or even inside of differentiations. However, such nominal or relational distinctions between the authors do not preclude some convergences, especially in the way that both underline the gap between image and visibility, the fractures and erasures as constitutive of images and, with regards to the topic of trace, the remaining question about the indexical memory and the insufficiency of a perceptual approach on images.

Against the tautological minimalist statement that "what you see is what you see" and that what you see "*does not play with some presumed presence elsewhere*"⁴¹, Didi-Huberman rescues the remissive character of the image without, however, reducing this to a sign. If the sign, in one key way, can be defined as that which is in the place of something else (*pro alio posito*), the image, because it refers to other objects, meanings and images

and also is not only a statement of this condition of remission, refracts itself both from its own visibility and from the relationship with another presence that would be manifest from it. If Husserl defined the three components of image, explaining that it is up to the *Fiktum* to make the subject-image or meaning present, however, these distinctions do not embrace that which, in the image, neither expresses nor remits. A reinforcement of the visual simplicity of the object, as in the case of Smith's black cubes, would escape such tripartition insofar as what appears would be something like the *Fiktum*, but without some idealizing function, since it binds itself to its own materiality, even if it leads us to see beyond it – spatially and temporally, in its disjunction of the present, in its anachronism.

As Didi-Huberman points out following Michael Fried, the denunciation of the illusionism of art by minimalism is accompanied by an affirmation of "presence".⁴² But, in this case, there is the affirmation of a presence in the form of a volume: and of a volume that reveals emptiness, adds Didi-Huberman: the void itself as presence. To the "optical" evidence and the evidence of "presence", enumerated by Fried, Didi-Huberman adds the "evidence" of the form of a void: "What is a volume that carries and shows the void? How does one show a void? And how does one make a form from this act – a form that looks at us?"⁴³ Although a response is not presented beforehand, a possible access to the void – which appears in its withdrawing – is achieved not by what permeates it, but as a half-opened door through which one does not pass, through which one cannot pass, as in the Kafkian sense, also considered by Didi-Huberman.⁴⁴ But in proximity-distance, it would not be possible simply to deviate from something that, made image, touches us, awakens us, differs us – and, for Didi-Huberman, looks at us.

We can only say tautologically *I see what I see* if we refuse the image the power to impose its virtuality as an opening, a loss – even if momentary – practiced in the space of our sensitive certainty about it. And exactly from there the image becomes capable of looking at us.⁴⁵

III. Auratic trace

Here we return to Tony Smith's cubes, in the sense of re-trait and retraction as well as from those displacements of the notion of form. As such, the black cubes can be considered images of memory, however, not because they rediscover or reproduce a past, nor and much less by critically reporting a past to be overcome, or in a nostalgic way of a past to be updated. Instead, the cubes of Smith are objects of memory in disjunction to their own presence, by amplifying, intensifying a given object as a non-narrative or non-figurative memory. I quote Didi-Huberman:

[...] this image of memory was brought into play in such a way so as to produce an aniconic volume, a sculpture painted in black, as if the black gave the colour of a memory that never tells its story, diffuses no nostalgia and is content quietly *to present its mystery* as volume and as visuality. [...] Thus, Tony Smith's black cube acts as a place where the past knows to become anachronistic, even though the present gives itself as *reminiscent*.⁴⁶

In this case, the memory is not what retains and knows what it accumulates, but an instance that loses and incessantly differs what was never present, but at the same time that whose survival cannot be neglected. As Didi-Huberman points out in *Devant le temps (Before time)*⁴⁷, the Copernican revolution of history would have consisted in moving from the past as an "objective fact" to the past as a "fact of memory" – both in the psychic and in the material sense. The required dialectic in relation to the past is done insofar as the past reaches us both in discontinuities and in material traces – vestiges, symptoms, etc. – in a relation of anachronism to the present. An archaeology of these remnants and breaks of the past can be called a "material archaeology"⁴⁸ or a "phenomenology of textures"⁴⁹, attentive less to that which becomes visible and to that which signifies, than to those latencies, details and textures.

In this way, once again following the indications of Didi-Huberman, is possible to discern how this anachronism of the trace may be approximated to the anachronism of the aura.

In “Ausgraben und Erinnern” (*Excavation and Memory*) Walter Benjamin presents the figure of the one who aims to approach the past like an archaeologist who digs: “Whoever wants to approach to his own buried past must act like a man who digs”.⁵⁰ Thus in the *Passagen-Werk*, Benjamin emphasizes the fact that in the trace [*Spur*] we take possession of the thing, while in the aura, on the contrary, it takes us over:

Trace and aura. Trace is the appearance of proximity, no matter how distant it is that which left it. Aura is the appearance of something distant, however close it is that which evokes it. In the trace we apprehended the thing; in the aura it takes possession of us.⁵¹

In thinking about these two passages in relation, one may ask whether and to what extent the emerging image, in its relation to the past, would have the character of *Spur*, a trace of the past, that comes close to us and would allow us to appropriate a past, even if this is distant; or if the moments of the image, referring to a supposed past, would rather remain in an insurmountable distance, in the sense of the auratic distance and the impossibility of appropriation. In a possible answer to this question, which in fact chooses neither of the alternatives, Didi-Huberman approaches both Derrida’s considerations on the phantomatic returning trace⁵² and the notion of aura in Benjamin:

The fact, for one thing of being *passed*, does not only mean that it is far from us in time. It remains distant, of course, but its own detachment can arise in the nearest of us – that is, according to Benjamin, the *auratic* phenomenon par excellence –, such an unredeemed phantom, such a *returning*.⁵³

In the proximity-distance between, on the one hand, what appears at the core of image as a returning past, and on the other hand and at the same time, what appears as something

immersed in the present, that what appears can be thought of as auratic trace: both as a distance that can emerge as if it were the closest and paradoxically in a proximity in that the nearest one seems to be the most distant, anachronistic or even archaic. In this way, the auratic trace is able to refer to Smith's cubes.

Benjamin, in *Passagen-Werk*, as well as Eugene Atget, in his photographs of Paris, and Aby Warburg, in *Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, would make the effort not to hierarchize the (re)found rests and remains of the past, themselves auratic: so that what appears in a contiguous way and without apparent connection, is also exposed, as in Benjamin's statement that "nothing should be considered lost to history".⁵⁴ But the differences that appear in what is rescued would depend on the way in which each vestige of time or rest of bygone reaches us: differences of intensity in which images shock us or invoke us or awaken us, as Benjamin indicates⁵⁵ This condition of being invoked by images, however, does not have repercussions on decoding or endowing them with meaning nor does this condition lead to a mutism that would only attend to their exposition. What would be first inscribed are new textures and constellations by which the now and the bygone, from their differences and latent bonds, collide. As Benjamin puts it: "For a piece of the past to be encountered from the actuality, there must be no continuity between them".⁵⁶ Simultaneously, the "waste of the past", to employ Benjamin's expression, or "material effectiveness of past time"⁵⁷, as Didi-Huberman transposes it, that which bonds in the emerging image a supposed past and a present in which it arises, could not be based on the associative principle of similarity.

It is thus to the notion of matter that Didi-Huberman leads us to. First, from Freud's effort to displace the notion of association by similarity in the dream processes: Freud would insist on the "material and non-formal" contact in which two hitherto separated elements emerge into a configuration or, rather, become permeated by each other, producing something else.⁵⁸ In this case, the mimetic similarity is braked by the

displacement, while the formation process is pervaded by deformation. Therefore, we must consider not only what binds A and B, C and D etc., this bond that gives them form and makes them reappear, but there is on the scene what remains, which does not appear in such a link, namely, the threshold, the interval of the *différance*: “The image is not the imitation of things but the interval made visible, the line of fracture between things”.⁵⁹

In this sense, the “negative force” of the image would be a “less topical question, perhaps”, says Didi-Huberman, “than dynamic or economic. A question of intensity rather than extension, level or location”.⁶⁰ The historical-materialist attitude itself would at first assimilate this condition not by choosing or “apprehending” [*sie greift nicht*] its objects, but by “detaching” [*sprengt heraus*] them⁶¹, or rather by enabling them to detach themselves from the course on which they had been placed. From this original disjunction the possibility of association of a remnant to other contexts – existing or not – and thus its withdrawal to itself, as “really invented figure of memory”⁶² implies that the auratic trace cannot be restored to a totality to which it never belonged in the first place.

It is in this hiatus, in this dissymmetric temporality, that there is also a space for something like an intensive white patch, a black cube, a reel: Being able to withdraw from the attempt of appropriation at the moment we address them, they may present themselves to us, revealing themselves, as the “erratic flashes” of the fireflies, at the same time “untouchable and resistant as such – under our amazed gaze”.⁶³ If this occurs, such – fragmented, dialectical – images appear to us with an auratic facet, such as the appearance of something distant [*fort*], however close [*da*] this apparition may in fact be to us. We cannot appropriate them, but at the moment when we would not be able to deviate from them, even if we wanted to, they would appropriate us. In the words of Didi-Huberman, in this condition we are no longer those who see them, but it is the image that, from its background of latency, between its proximity [*da*] and *insurmountable* distance [*fort*], looks at us.

They are there, but what composes them visually, in front of us, comes from afar. In them the loss comes and goes. They force us to think the image – its compactness itself – as the process, difficult to see, of *what falls* [...]. And which from there looks at us.⁶⁴

But the remaining question – which, nevertheless, could not be answered here – is to what extent this transfer of the gaze to the other, in this case to the “image that looks at us”, would still constitute a primacy of an “oculometry”, as a focus on the records of the ocular movements from each and each other. Of course, it will no longer be possible to speak of an ocularcentrism, already deconstructed in Derrida’s writings and also already displaced thanks to the other’s gaze. However, there is still the question of how this reciprocity of the visual, inscribed in the state of being looked at, often seems not to be operative on the condition given that, even when we do not look at images or are not being looked at by them, we are somehow pervaded by something – from the image, from it as matter, symptom and memory – which has always escaped apprehension. The modalities of this evasion and of the ‘being pervaded by’, which underlie the question put above, could so far only be indicated in this text. It should be noted that the development of this matter implies passing from an “oculometry” to an “oculography”: when the problematic of gaze, its circumscription and extension, should come after and already affected by the implications of that of trace and aura. So, a thinking on oculography would depart from the remaining intervals, such as the remains of what the eye gazed upon and what bordered it.

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¹ “Qu’est ce qu’un volume porteur, montreur de vide?” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 15).

² DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 15.

³ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1990, p. 27s.

⁴ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 57.

⁵ “[...] mais elle subsistera bien dans un coin, cette bobine [...]. Elle subsistera comme *reste meurtri* du désir de l’enfant” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 57; my translation).

⁶ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 83, 153.

⁷ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992.

⁸ “ ‘ Le sens de l’être a été limité par l’imposition de la forme’, concluait Derrida. Mais pouvons-nous nous satisfaire ici d’une telle radicalité ? Pas exactement. Car le contexte où Derrida la développe s’identifie à un vocabulaire puisé dans la seule histoire de la philosophie. Et, de plus, concerne dans son analyse le seul problème d’une ‘phénoménologie du langage’. Notre problème ici n’est pas exactement celui du sens de l’être, ni celui du statut du langage en général, il touche, bien plus modestement, au statut d’un simple cube noir, d’une sculpture en général. D’une forme, pour tout dire. Que se passe-t-il lorsque le mot ‘forme’ désigne aussi l’apparence d’un objet sensible, visible, sa matière même, et sans doute son contenu, son fond singuliers ?” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 160; my translation).

⁹ DERRIDA, 1992.

¹⁰ “La forme est la présence même. La formalité est ce qui de la chose en général se présente, se laisse voir, se donne à penser. Que la pensée métaphysique – et par conséquent la phénoménologie – soit pensée de l’être comme forme, qu’en elle la pensée se pense comme pensée de la forme, et de formalité de la forme, il n’y a donc là rien que de nécessaire et l’on en percevrait un dernier signe dans le fait que Husserl détermine le *présent vivant (lebendige Gegenwart)* comme la ‘forme’ ultime, universelle, absolue de l’expérience transcendantale en général” (DERRIDA, 1972, p. 188; my translation).

¹¹ Cf. DERRIDA, 1967.

¹² DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 165 ss.

¹³ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 164 ss. Cf. DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1995.

¹⁴ “[...] le lieu où voir, c’est perdre, et où l’objet de la perdre sans recours nous regarde. C’est le lieu de l’inquiétante étrangeté (*das Unheimliche*)” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 179; my translation).

¹⁵ DERRIDA, 2013.

¹⁶ DERRIDA, 1990.

¹⁷ HUSSERL, HUA XXIII, 1980.

¹⁸ DERRIDA, 2013b. Cf. SERRA, 2014.

¹⁹ The quasi-concepts differ from a conceptual system in that their boundaries do not delimit sharply from other quasi-concepts, they are not hierarchically placed in relation to others and are shifted from other texts to the deconstructive text, in many cases implying a change in their graphic notations.

²⁰ "Il aura donc tout fait pour récuser l'*aura* de l'objet, en affichant un mode d'indifférence quant à ce qui est juste là-dessous, caché, présent, gisant" (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 19; my translation).

²¹ DERRIDA, 2013b. Cf. SERRA, 2014.

²² "[...] acte dans lequel le rapport de violence au subjectile (c'est-à-dire au support) allait bien au-delà de la reproduction d'une plaie. Car c'était bien de la *production* d'une plaie dans l'image, d'une blessure faite à l'image, qu'il s'agissait alors" (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1990, p. 243; my translation).

²³ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1990, p. 245.

²⁴ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1990, p. 246s.

²⁵ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1990, p. 26.

²⁶ HUSSERL, 1984; DERRIDA, 1967.

²⁷ "[...] pur 'phénomène-indice' qui nous met en présence de la couleur crayeuse, bien avant de nous dire ce que cette couleur 'remplit' or qualifie" (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1990, p. 27; my translation).

²⁸ Cf. BOEHM, 2010.

²⁹ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2005, p. 31. "Avec le visible, bien sûr, nous sommes dans le règne de ce qui se manifeste. Le visuel quant à lui désignerait plutôt ce filet irrégulier d'événements-symptômes qui atteignent le visible comme autant de traces ou d'éclats, ou de 'marquages d'énonciation', comme autant d'indices... Indices de quoi ? De quelque chose – un travail, une mémoire en processus – qui nulle part n'a été tout à fait décrit, attesté ou couché en archives, parce que sa 'matière' signifiante fut d'abord l'image" (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1990, p. 41).

³⁰ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1990, p. 222 ss.

³¹ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1990, p. 222, cf. DERRIDA, 1991.

³² DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1990, p. 175.

³³ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1990, p. 215.

³⁴ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1990, p. 226.

³⁵ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 156 s.

³⁶ DERRIDA, 1972b; 1990.

³⁷ DERRIDA, 2006; FREUD, 1987. Cf. SERRA, 2011.

³⁸ "[...] le dessin toujours fait signe vers cette inaccessibilité, vers le seuil où n'apparaît que l'entour du trait, ce qu'il espace en délimitant et qui donc ne lui appartient pas. *Rien n'appartient au trait*, donc au dessin et à la pensée du

dessin, pas même sa propre « trace ».” (DERRIDA, 1990, p. 58; my translation).

³⁹ “Mais, si le mot de “trace” vient désormais au premier plan, faudra-t-il encore, dans ces conditions, parler de *forme* ?” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 157; my translation).

⁴⁰ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1990, p. 175.

⁴¹ “[...] le parallélépipède de Donald Judd *ne représente rien* [...]. Plus précisément, on devra convenir qu’il ne représente rien dans la mesure où il *ne rejoue aucune présence* supposée ailleurs” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 37; my translation).

⁴² DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 47.

⁴³ “Qu’est-ce qu’un volume porteur, montreur de vide ? Comment montrer un vide ? Et comment faire de cet acte une forme – une forme qui nous regarde ?” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 15; my translation).

⁴⁴ Cf. DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 188.

⁴⁵ “Nous ne pouvons dire tautologiquement *Je vois ce que je vois* que si nous dénions à l’image le pouvoir d’imposer sa virtualité comme une ouverture, une perte – fût elle momentanée – pratiquée dans l’espace de notre certitude visible à son égard. Et c’est bien de là que l’image se rend capable de nous regarder” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 76; my translation).

⁴⁶ “[...] cette image de mémoire fut mise en jeu de façon à produire un volume aniconique, une sculpture peinte en noir, comme si le noir donnait la couleur d’une mémoire qui ne raconte jamais son histoire, ne diffuse aucune nostalgie et se contente sobrement de *présenter son mystère* comme volume et comme visualité. [...] Ainsi, le cube noir de Tony Smith fonctionne-t-il comme un lieu où le passé sait devenir anachronique, alors même que le présent s’y donne *réminiscent*” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 83; my translation).

⁴⁷ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2000, p. 103.

⁴⁸ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2000, p. 103.

⁴⁹ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2000, p. 107.

⁵⁰ “Wer sich der eigenen verschütteten Vergangenheit zu nähern trachtet, muss sich verhalten wie ein Mann, der gräbt” (BENJAMIN, 1972, p. 400; my translation).

⁵¹ “Spur und Aura. Die Spur ist die Erscheinung einer Nähe, so fern das sein mag, was sie hinterließ. Die Aura ist die Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah das sein mag, was sie hervorruft. In der Spur werden wir der Sache habhaft; in der Aura bemächtigt sie sich unser” (BENJAMIN, 1983, p. 560; my translation).

⁵² Cf. DERRIDA, 1978.

⁵³ “Le fait, pour une chose, d’être *passée*, ne signifie pas seulement qu’elle est loin de nous dans le temps. Elle demeure lointaine, certes, mais son éloignement même peut surgir au plus près de nous – c’est, selon Benjamin,

le phénomène *auratique* par excellence –, tel un fantôme non racheté, tel un *revenant*” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2000, p. 109; my translation).

⁵⁴ BENJAMIN, 1980; cf. DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2000, p. 106.

⁵⁵ BENJAMIN, 1980.

⁵⁶ “Damit ein Stück Vergangenheit von der Aktualität betroffen werde, darf keine Kontinuität zwischen ihnen bestehen” (BENJAMIN 1983, p. 587; my translation).

⁵⁷ DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2000, p. 108 s.

⁵⁸ Cf. DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1990, p. 182 s.

⁵⁹ “L’image n’est pas l’imitation de choses, mais l’intervalle rendu visible, la ligne de fracture entre les choses” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2000, p. 114; my translation).

⁶⁰ “[...] il faudrait tenter, devant l’image, de penser la force du négatif en elle. Question moins topique, peut-être, que dynamique ou économique. Question d’intensité plus que d’extension, de niveau ou de localisation” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1990, p. 174; my translation).

⁶¹ “Die materialistische Geschichte wählt ihre Gegenstände nicht leichter Hand. Sie greift nicht, sondern sprengt sie aus dem Verlauf heraus” (BENJAMIN, 1983, p. 594).

⁶² DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 82.

⁶³ “[...] insaisissables et *résistants* comme tels – sous notre regard émerveillé” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2009, p. 19; my translation).

⁶⁴ “Ils sont là, mais ce dont ils font état visuellement, devant nous, revient de loin. En eux la perte va et vient. Ils nous obligent à penser l’image – sa compacité même – comme le processus, difficile à voir, de *ce qui tombe* [...]. Et qui de là nous regarde.” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 1992, p. 84; my translation).