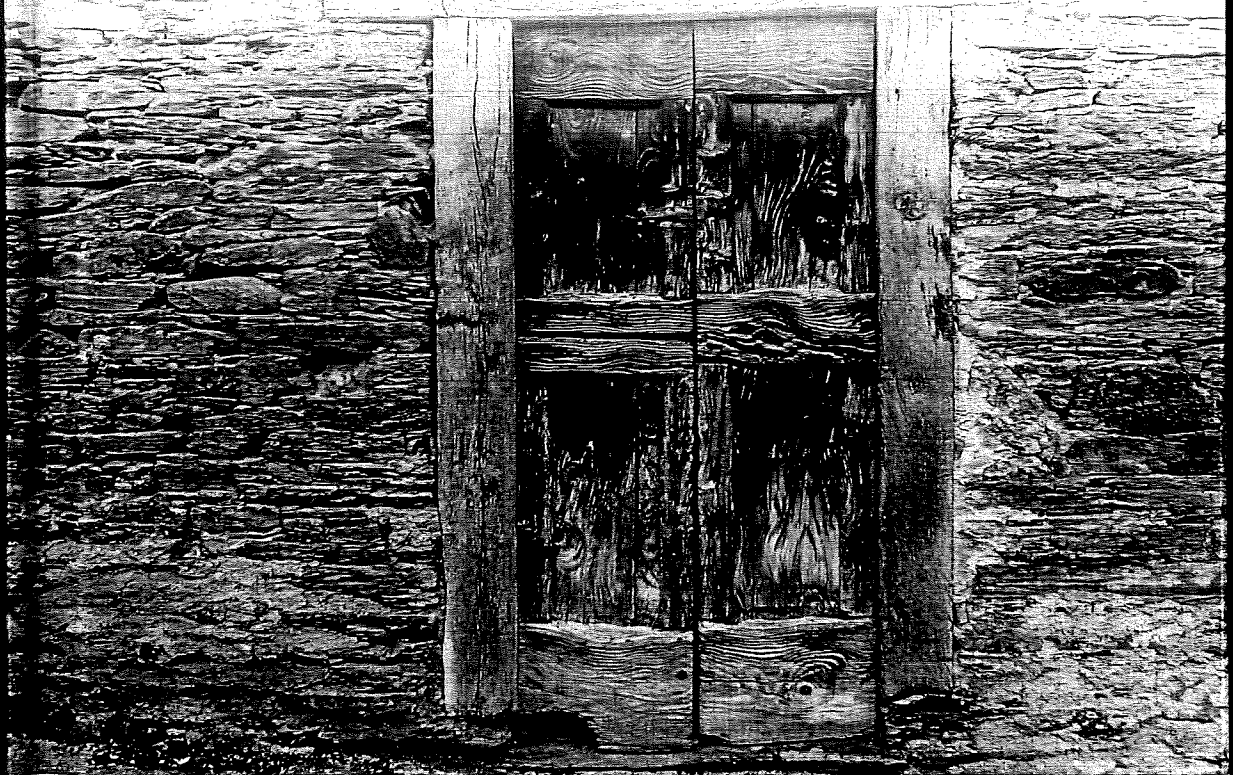


The
Didi-Huberman
Dictionary



Magdalena Zolkos

'This extraordinary glossary leverages the power of interdisciplinary research in art and human sciences and invites the reader to consider the beauty of these disciplines by embracing multiple genres in and about the work of philosopher, thinker, poet Georges Didi-Huberman.'

Barbara Baert, KU Leuven

The Didi-Huberman Dictionary is a specialised introduction to the thought of contemporary French philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman, best known for his path-breaking philosophy of image and his impact on the fields of art historiography, aesthetic philosophy and cultural theory of psychoanalysis.

With 85 entries written by 30 leading international scholars, the dictionary is a useful tool for students coming to Didi-Huberman's work for the first time. It identifies and explains his key figures, inspirations and philosophical metaphors, as well as introducing Didi-Huberman's polemics with other contemporary philosophers, including Aby Warburg, Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin. Entries on concepts and motifs from Didi-Huberman's major texts that are not, as of yet, translated into English – *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* (1992) and *Ninfa moderna* (2002) – are also included.

Magdalena Zolkos is Associate Professor in the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland.

Cover image: Getty Images

Cover design: www.hayesdesign.co.uk

EDINBURGH
University Press

edinburghuniversitypress.com

ISBN 978-1-3995-0098-2



9 781399 500982

give it topography? And above all, how should we establish *constants* – or construct coherent groups – without proposing a deterministic and teleological view of history, without limiting possibilities, without enclosing singularities in categories that tend to smooth things out? By establishing a theory of interpretation of images, of the logic of images, of the non-verbal discourse of images, the iconologist classifies, orders and establishes groups with which we can situate ourselves and, inevitably, he *orients* the gaze. In the late 1920s, art historian Aby Warburg constructed an atlas (the *Mnemosyne Atlas*) because he was driven by this problem of orientation. He sought to trace lines, to map the life of images and to determine migratory trajectories; he identified the highways (or the thoroughfares – *Wanderstrassen*) of culture. But Warburg had a very particular sense of order, and an unwavering attention to irregularities. Other art historians have hardened the method, and the work of de-partitioning works that are documented in this way, read or held in classifications seems endless. For Didi-Huberman, this work includes the deconstruction of art history's 'magic formulae', and the invention of an alternative poetics of the image.

Devant le temps initiates a 'critical archaeology' of the dominant temporal models of art history. Some historians have had difficulty dealing with non-standard temporalities and have defended an ideal (in other words, impoverished) conception of history. How did history as a discipline favour conditions of blindness over the impurity that was nonetheless characteristic of the temporal phenomena linked with images? Didi-Huberman is troubled by the systematic refusal of anachronisms, with the anachronistic moment appearing to be the pet peeve or the symptom of time for art historians. From his viewpoint, the anachronism has nothing to do with the timeless (*'hors du temps'*), or with what is the universal (*'de tous temps'*). Instead, it concerns a crossover or an entanglement whose complexity resists any simple models: 'The anachronism, according to a first approximation, is the temporal way to express the exuberance, the complexity, and the over-determination of images' (Didi-Huberman, 2000a: 16). Art history, and especially the history of images, therefore cannot avoid being anything but anachronistic. It is anachronistic because of the specificity of its object. For this very singular object transforms the discipline from inside, and demands its metamorphosis: 'to make art history – does this mean to make history, in the sense in which it is normally made? Or is it not, rather, to modify profoundly the epistemic layout of history itself?' (2000a: 27). In order to understand profoundly the astonishing plasticity of time, in order to grasp the unconscious phenomena, the survivals of repressed elements, the non-evident links, Didi-Huberman focuses on the process of memory, a cognitive function that assembles and cuts and that – fearlessly – 'manipulates' time, or 'handles' time (or

ART HISTORY

Maud Hagestein

In the city of Lyon, Didi-Huberman received a university education in art history, at the same time as he took classes in philosophy, and developed in the space between them a very keen attention to problems of epistemology. To be an epistemologist, especially in a discipline whose claim to be a science must constantly be defended, has nothing to do with being a policeman, which would involve establishing norms and reporting any transgressions of those norms. To write the epistemology of art history consists, rather, in identifying, during the construction of a knowledge – and in order to thwart them – any likely effects of authority over the real. As such, it is more of a counter-policing job. By critiquing the historical inclination to smooth too much, to synthesise and to fit things into boxes, Didi-Huberman – ever sensitive to bastardised images, to events that are exceptions, to artistic experience that is failing/in default (*à l'expérience artistique en défaut*) and always somewhat heretical – has shown to his readers that art history is above all a discourse that claims to be scholarly, a formidable model of intelligibility, a system of distribution of legitimacy, and a system of beliefs, with its own totem notions, taboo concepts and catch-all terms. For this reason, his fierce and engaged critique of art history is never plainly aggressive (despite some savage outbursts), for it leads to practical, heuristic propositions, signalling towards a home-made, inventive, poetic art history, one whose strong ethical dimension in fact became more emphasised with time. If the debate with art history is practically constant in his works, its two most easily identifiable phases unfold in *Devant l'image* (1990a; *CI*) and *Devant le temps* (2000a).

Devant l'image challenges the iconological tradition and its humanistic tones. Beneath the surface, the book is organised around a very serious problem in art history: the problem of *orientation*. If art is to be the object of a history, where should we place ourselves in relation to it, within it? How should we situate ourselves in the visible and in the vast history (stretching back at least 30,000 years) of painting? Where should we look? On what should we focus our gaze? How should we build a history from that? How should we create its points of reference? How should we avoid the temptation of an excessively synthetic gaze, or shoulder the incompleteness of the undertaking? Those who have tried to embrace such a broad reality find themselves obliged to make choices, to select and to classify. But how then should we justify these choices? How should this material – this infinite material – be stirred, or how should we propose paths to the amateur of art? How should we put down milestones? How should we

even 'kneads' it like plastic matter): 'It is memory that filters the past of its exactitude. It is memory that humanises and configures time, that intertwines its fibres, ensures its transmissions, devoting it to an essential impurity. It is memory that the historian convokes and questions, not "the past" really' (2000a: 37).

In Didi-Huberman's work, the inventing of new modalities of writing that equal the complexity of images has gained, with time, a political (or even *ethical*) dimension. The writing of art history obeys its own necessities, which are not secondary, and which are not merely 'stylistic'. To displace the gaze, to grasp the disregarded materialities, to observe those at the bottom, the extras rather than the main actors, demands a renewal of art history, an art history taken down from its pedestal, an art history that might be sensitive to symptoms and to things considered waste. This required the invention of a new and original way of writing on the relation with images. Through his chiselled formulae, his patience in conceptual variations, his indomitable style, and never put off by the play of affects, with the rhythm of his phrases, his frequent parentheses and his dense footnotes, Didi-Huberman has invented a writing of his own, guiding many readers:

To write art history means, firstly, and I must repeat it, *to write*. Is it just *to describe* what we think we have the skill to see, and what we think we have enough talent to have understood? Certainly not. The historian must not settle for describing – in the basic sense of the term – any more than the painter should settle for depicting. Describing and depicting are skills: they are acquired through practice. But writing and painting are re-enacted each time; they are unlearned and begin with each stroke. Writing, like looking, is not some kind of know-how or expertise, even if it requires a lot of work. It is a doing or a making that challenges the knowledge in question at every instant, and it is a knowledge that in every instant challenges the doing or the making. (2018a: 112)

Translated by Shane Lillis

ART WRITING

Andrzej Lesniak

Didi-Huberman's questioning of the foundations of art history as a humanistic discipline (through critical theorising of anachronism, image, symptom, visibility, etc.), has also influenced his writing and ideas about the poetics of art writing. His aim is not, however, to break with art history and to disregard the task of accumulation of knowledge,

but to introduce into the epistemic practices the possibility of uncertainty and/or ignorance. Thus, the experience of visibility (i.e. of what is *not* fully subordinated to the order of knowledge and visibility) ought to be transcribed in other ways than in the frame of the dominant discourses of art history. According to Didi-Huberman, the discipline of art history ought to reflect upon its own practices of the construction of knowledge. Since writing is one of the elements of the epistemic process, it should be analysed as a condition of possibility of knowing.

Didi-Huberman's practice of art writing is rooted in the developments of the French philosophy of images in the second half of the twentieth century, especially in the works of Hubert Damisch and Louis Marin, who developed a poststructuralist version of pictorial semiology. Although Didi-Huberman does not refer frequently to these two thinkers, he is clearly indebted to their poetics of writing, as well as to the notion of 'theoretical object' (Marin, 1989), which denotes a singular, material object conceived as a condition of possibility of theoretical reflection. Textual fragmentation in some of his later writings is indicative of the influences of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno; the works of the two thinkers are – together with the psychoanalytical theory of association – at the root of Didi-Huberman's approach to interpreting as juxtaposing. More generally, Didi-Huberman's position is inscribed in the context of postmodern developments on the theory and methodology of historical research, especially Frank Ankersmit's and Hayden White's propositions about the literary nature of historiography.

Didi-Huberman assigns radical consequences to these assumptions; from his point of view the work of historians is necessarily literary: '[t]he historian is, in every sense of the word, only the *factor*, which is to say the modeler, the artisan, the author, the inventor of whatever past he offers us' (CI, 2). Thus, the status of the knowledge they are able to provide ought to be redefined, as it can only be constituted in the act of construction, reconstruction or creation. The creative role of the one who tells the story of the past is not to be underestimated.

The implications of this position are conspicuous in Didi-Huberman's strategies of writing. He not only frequently appeals to the notion of anachronism, which allows him to recognise the temporal heterogeneity of past objects experienced in the present, but he also juxtaposes objects belonging to different temporalities (see temporality) to generate unpredictable interpretative effects. His readings are always focused on particular visual objects that are considered to be both starting points for interpretative processes and conditions of possibility for theoretical reflection. Hence, writing is necessarily a response to the theoretical challenge posed by the object itself.

Didi-Huberman's texts make recourse to particular images that are chosen so as to emphasise their reflexive potential. Put differently, the poetics of his writings underlines and exploits the theoretical fertility of art and, more generally, of the realm of images. The chapters in *Images in Spite of All* take as a starting point the analysis of the material qualities of four photographs (see *photography; Sonderkommando photographs*) in order to articulate a statement critiquing the popular assertion that aligns the Holocaust with pure negativity and irrepresentability (*ISA*). In *Confronting Images* the detailed interpretations of Johannes Vermeer's *The Lacemaker* (c. 1665) and Pieter Bruegel's *The Fall of Icarus* (c. 1560) introduce and exemplify Didi-Huberman's key conceptual and philosophical distinction between the visible and the visual.

In his recent works Didi-Huberman has transformed his writing even more. Some of his texts are not only written in the first person, from a subjective perspective, but also contain autobiographical motifs. They do not so much offer arguments and precise conceptualisations as create atmospheres. In *Bark*, photographs of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp taken by Didi-Huberman are accompanied by a fragmentary narrative on the possibility of remembering and acknowledging the past. In turn, *Aperçus* (2018) is a series of fragments that do not constitute a coherent discursive whole. In Chari Larsson's words, 'this eclectic collection of intimate thoughts and memories, combined with research notes and observations, self-consciously draws attention to the traditions and conventions that continue to determine art-historical writing' (Larsson, 2020: 167).

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ATLAS

Maud Hugelstein

Atlas is both the name of the Titan who rose up against the gods and that of the concrete solution to a central problem in the theory of the image. In the exhibition in Madrid organised by Didi-Huberman in 2010, *Atlas, comment remonter le monde? (Atlas, How to Carry the World on One's Back?)*,

the one condemned by Zeus to 'carry the world on his shoulders' was invited by the art historian to give form to the task undertaken by those who love images. What is to be done with images? How should they be carried, and how can we let ourselves be carried away by them? How do we take on the colossal visual material in our culture, deal with it, allow it to continue to circulate? How do we make images speak, give meaning to them, articulate them with words? Should we merely collect them, accumulate them, keep in mind their raw and insistent memory, or sort them, select them, find a new order for them? Obsessed with these questions, Didi-Huberman undertook an examination – a colossal examination in itself, including more than 12,000 images – of the innovative operations with which visual culture chooses to display itself. And atlas has become the generic name for a series of strategies regarding the presentation of visual documents. At the Reina Sofia museum in Madrid, viewers of the exhibition in 2011 were in this way able to discover multifaceted atlases, which sought to map the real from objects as distinct from one another – and as troubling – as tidal waves (Susan Hiller), water towers (Bernd and Hilla Becher), disasters (Goya), pieces of lava (Roni Horn) or smoke trails (Etienne-Jules Marey). Many organised collections of images that play with the catastrophe. This exhibition challenged the viewer to grasp the subversive logic at the origin of these sometimes incongruous montages for these atlases caused both resemblances and contrasts to swarm. In his works, Didi-Huberman patiently describes the heuristics of montage at work in those who handle and manipulate images. Whether it is Warburg, whose presence is decisive of course, or Brecht, Blossfeldt, Marey, Giacometti or Penone, Didi-Huberman makes room for those who address, in their work, the issue of the presentation of images and their placing in a series.

Re-examined in this way, the atlas becomes a 'counter-iconological' apparatus, in the sense of opposition as well as proximity, for it allows us to rethink the strictly *interpretative* function of reading in its complicity with the order of reasons (see *iconology*). The atlas introduces mistrust into our sometimes abstract relations to knowledge. By discarding the idea of a reasoned decoding, by blocking the impression of too great a legibility, Didi-Huberman's work gives the atlas its full heuristic meaning: images are to be grasped, assembled and placed in montage, arranged, moved around and given a new frame, etc. As the fruit of such inventive handling and manipulation, the creative atlas becomes political, aiming to transform the narrations to which images are linked, and to produce new knowledge. The atlas makes it possible to unravel the ideological effects inherent in the iconosphere and to free itself from them. It has nothing, therefore, to do with the finalising and smoothing operation that

redistributes scattered elements according to a unique pre-established logic. In Farrow's work, for example, the viewer feels 'quite obstructed by a montage that, on the contrary, stopped the story, exposed and showed it, diffracted it, dialectised it into crystals that responded to one other or contradicted one another on the spot without any solution, without synthesis, and without pacification' (Didi-Huberman, 2010c: 93). The atlas takes us far away from the classic iconological operation that fluidises, induces and allows narration.

Before mantling our shoulders with the weight of the world, we begin by cutting into the world, by dismantling it, in order to invent movements and an alternative circulation of meaning. This allows to perceive other connections, to create passages and to cross borders. It is the operation of *démontage* – dismantling or disassembling: 'everything is broken so that the space between things can appear – their shared base, the unperceived relationship that connects them in spite of all, whether it be a relationship of distance, of inversion, of cruelty, or of non-sense' (EH, 70). Having cut the images (in the broad sense of detailing, isolating, framing, etc.), having broken their ideological chains, the creators of atlases are free to reassemble the material according to a different logic. Here dislocation is inseparable from recomposition; the material is modified. With one of the atlas's plates, we can offer multiple interpretations, as is the case with *Mnemosyne*:

Looking at the plates of the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, it is impossible to get a clear sense of how Warburg intended us to look at them, or of the exact meaning he attributed to the relationships among the neighboring images. The more one looks, the denser and more intricate the relationships begin to appear. At the same time, the images appear to take off in several directions, to stream out everywhere like fireworks. Even the saturated 'packets of images' seem like sprays of light about to explode. It thus appears that the *Mnemosyne Atlas* is less the illustration of a pre-existing interpretation of the transmission of images than a visual matrix meant to increase the possible levels of interpretation. (SF, 312)

As the formal reconfiguration of a world returned firstly to its own disorder, montage leads its creator (and its viewer, ideally) to take a position. Warburg, Brecht and Benjamin sought to present a very complex view of history in their works. Obtained by means of disassembling/reassembling in a montage (*démontage/remontage*) their atlases are as temporal as they are geographic:

Montage is valuable only when it doesn't hasten to conclude or to close: it is valuable when it opens up our apprehension of history and makes it more complex,

not when it falsely schematizes [...] The image is neither *nothing*, nor *one*, nor *all*, precisely because it offers multiple singularities always susceptible to differences. (ISA, 121)

Thus the constitution of an atlas becomes, for the viewers themselves, a call – or even an obligation – to situate themselves somewhere, to take a position. The atlas becomes the theatre for an engagement (something Brecht would not have denied). It tends to bring about a movement. Not only the movement of the eyes that circulate between the elements assembled, but the movement of the mind too that creates connections and that reads itself of unequivocal readings of historical reality.

Translated by Shane Lillis

AURA

Adina Balint

Didi-Huberman has conceptualised the notion of the 'aura' after Walter Benjamin's elusive and well-known rendering of the term, which first appeared in his *Little History of Photography* (2005 [1931]), and was further explored in his 'Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility' (2002 [1936]). The Latin dictionary defines 'aura' as 'air, heaven, breeze, breath, wind', and as 'gleam, odor or stench and vapor' (Olivetti Latin-English Online Dictionary). The first meanings, particularly 'wind' and 'breath', resonate with the philosophical way in which Benjamin reflects on the aura of nature (2002 [1936]: 105). In his essay on Baudelaire, Benjamin notes that the aura is connected to 'the breath of prehistory' (2003 [1940]: 336), meaning that it enables the beholder to recollect what has been forgotten. If the beholder is an actor in this experience, then the aura functions in a manner akin to *le souffleur*, 'the prompter'. Benjamin connects both experience (*Erfahrung*) and involuntary recollection with auratic perception as the organ of fulfilling experience: such perception builds experience from a past that can be neither exhausted in subsequent experience nor relinquished by a voluntary act of will. The reference to 'odor' helps associate Benjamin's linkage of the aura to Proust's *mémoire involontaire*, which refers to the springing-up of memory triggered by sensory experiences. Didi-Huberman explores this definition in 'The Supposition of the Aura' (SA, 3–18). In modern English, aura appears as 'energy', 'a luminous radiation' (echoing 'light'), and most commonly, 'a special quality or feeling that seems to come from a person, place or thing' (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Benjamin writes

Deleuze, G. (2006). *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. H. Tomlinson. Bloomsbury.

DESIRE

Chari Larsson

In Didi-Huberman's early work, the art historian's desire for the art object is punctuated by absence and loss. In *Confronting Images*, he observes that the historian's 'desire will always be suspended between the tenacious melancholy of the past as an *object of loss* and the fragile victory of the past as an *object of recovery*' (CI, 38). Later, Didi-Huberman sidesteps traditional formulations of desire measured in terms of absence and lack as his proximity to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari comes to the fore. As such, desire is positioned as productive and affirmative and is closely associated with *potentiality* and *Pathosformel* (see *pathos formula*). This corresponds with Deleuze and Guattari's famous observation that 'the traditional logic of desire is all wrong from the very outset: from the very first step that the Platonic logic of desire forces us to take, making us choose between *production* and *acquisition*' (1977 [1972]: 25).

To formulate desire being rendered as a mode of production, Didi-Huberman retrieves an important case study by French psychoanalyst Pierre Fédida that reveals a distinct attitude towards absence and loss. It is crucial to recognise that Deleuze sat on the committee for Fédida's *doctorat d'État* (state doctorate) (Deleuze, 2007 [2001]) and Fédida is a vital link in retheorising desire as affirmative and generative. In his 1978 book *L'Absence* Fédida described two young sisters whose mother had just died. Fédida observed that the sisters played a game using a sheet imitating their dead mother lying underneath a shroud:

A few days after her mother's death, Laure – aged four – played at being dead. With her sister, aged two years older, she argued over a bedsheet that she asked to be covered with, while she explained the ritual that was to be scrupulously accomplished in order for her to disappear. The sister carried this out until the moment when, seeing Laure no longer moving, she began to scream. Laure reappeared, and, in order to calm her sister, now asked her to be dead: she demanded that the sheet she had used to cover her remain still! She did not finish arranging it, for her sister's crying suddenly turned into laughter, rippling the sheet with joyful jumps. And the sheet, which was a shroud, became a dress, a house, a flag hoisted up a tree, before finally being ripped up in a mad dance, as an old velveteen rabbit was put to death by Laure bursting its belly! (1978: 198)

Absence and mourning in Fédida's hands become unstable and productive. A shroud becomes a dress, house, or flag. Fédida goes on to observe, '[d]ecidedly, mourning sets the world in motion' (1978: 198). Underscoring the link between mourning and productivity, Didi-Huberman noted in relation to Fédida's case study, '[f]rom the start, mourning had to be conceived of together with play, that is to say, in its paradoxical capacity to set in motion' (2005c: 128).

Fédida's case study of the two young sisters playing with a sheet forms one of the theoretical cornerstones for the 2016 exhibition *Soulevements* held at the Jeu de Paume. In the exhibition, desire is configured as a motor for change. Didi-Huberman traces the iconography of the sisters' sheet across diverse trans-historical examples, from Sergei Eisenstein's film *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) to Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (1830) and Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818–19). Emphasising the connection between desire and production, Didi-Huberman writes, '[b]etween the shroud and the sheet, the sheet and the flag, the flag and the tearing, it is as though the storm of the rebellions found its clearest emblem in the rising up of all surfaces' (U, 292). Desire is understood as productive, the engine driving the potentiality of change.

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DETAIL

Maud Hagelstein

As shown by its great 'fortune' in the interpretation of works, the detail plays a 'key' role in the corpus of traditional iconography:

The detail – with its three operations: proximity, partition, addition – would be the fragment as invested with an ideal of knowledge and of totality. This ideal of knowledge is *exhaustive description*. Contrary to the fragment whose relationship to the whole only puts it into question, posits is as an absence or enigma or lost memory, the detail in this sense *imposes the whole*, its legitimate presence, its value as response and point of reference, even as hegemony. (CI, 230)

In his works, Didi-Huberman almost systematically discards the vocabulary of the detail in favour of the vocabulary of the *symptom* – that untreatable upon which we stumble – and of the *‘pan’* – that sovereign accident of matter which catches our eyes and troubles representation (the French word *pan* is used to denote a ‘patch’, ‘section’ or ‘fragment’ of fabric; a section, panel or part of a wall, a slab of masonry, or a patch or slab of paint; see incarnation). While he undoes the cult of the detail that seeks to resolve the whole, Didi-Huberman gives a special place in his text to singularities. The singular event in art history requires a *mathesis singularis* (the theory of art is in his mind a ‘science of singularities’). Each effective and intense encounter with a work of art calls for a careful adjustment of already forged concepts, or even for a new theory, that is for the invention of tailor-made concepts:

Every parcel of the world merits its own book. As does every instant of every parcel. There would have to be an infinite number of novels for that infinite number of characters which are the most delicate things, the most short-lived moments or beings. I tend to look upon my work as that craft involving the impossible tearing of every apparition from oblivion. (2018a: 15)

For Didi-Huberman, the concept only has meaning if each image is recognised in its singularity. But the *mathesis singularis* with which he experiments does not prevent him from tinkering, from one book to the next, with the same concepts – even if their definitions always transform upon contact with objects – neither to reduce nor to raise the indeterminateness of what is perceived but rather to complicate and to grasp, as closely as possible, the behaviours of our power of imagination.

The conception of the detail adopted by Didi-Huberman (symptom rather than proof, acute anxiety rather than explanation) owes much to art historian Aby Warburg, to whom people often attribute the phrase: ‘God is in the detail’ (*Der liebe Gott steckt im Detail*). Warburg gave extreme (and almost sick) attention to details – ‘details’ meaning as much the singular elements that divide up at the heart of a work as, more broadly, the so-called ‘secondary’ aspects of culture. The reading of images for Warburg was the object of a great meticulousness. Beginning with his doctoral thesis in 1893, devoted to two major works by Botticelli (*The Birth of Venus* and *Primavera*), Warburg showed an acute interest in the representation of secondary elements (hair, draperies, etc.), which had often been overlooked, as well as the movement that goes through them. From this ‘local’ analysis of Botticelli’s work, he developed one of the essential points of his vision of history and culture (in which forms were understood through their relations to *pathos*) – with the detail

constituting an obligatory passage towards the elaboration of a general theory while at the same time constantly threatening it. For Warburg revealed in an exemplary way the fact that art is recalcitrant towards large collections (*grands ensembles*). He sought to understand movements of culture (the famous ‘migratory movements’) which he wished to grasp and map – in order to reveal the logic with which Western artistic culture developed. Didi-Huberman sensed that secondary elements were only secondary in appearance and that their status as apparent flaws was to be taken seriously. For this reason, he presented *Mnemosyne* not as a system of analogies, but as a system of divergences whose details (or symptoms, fragments) are so many pitfalls that challenge thinking. For the German Jewish art historian, the detail was not simply a matter of ‘meticulous awareness’, as it seems to have become later for the majority of iconologists:

The detail is always understood by Warburg on the basis of its *symptomatic* nature, which implies, at the least, four very precise points. First of all, the *identification* of the painted figures is not at all the goal of Warburgian interpretation [...] Secondly, for Warburg the detail is always to be understood on the basis of its intrusive effects or of the exception it represents; in short, as a *historical singularity* [...] Thirdly, this singularity, this breach in the present, is understood in turn, as the index of a *structure of survival* [...] Fourthly, this use of detail assumes that the scholar, in understanding its function, is guided by the *papers of the unconscious*. Just as in Freud’s work, the detail in Warburg’s work is revealed in the ‘rejection of observation’: it is a detail *produced by displacement*, and not a *detail produced by enlargement*. (SI, 322–3)

Translated by Shane Lillis

DIALECTIC

Patrick French

Didi-Huberman’s deployment of a dialectical method is persistent across his oeuvre and is given a specific formulation; it involves the putting into relation of ostensibly incommensurate registers, media, temporalities and forms and an invariably provocative transgression of established boundaries and categories. There is a dialectical impetus in Didi-Huberman’s work towards a form of relationality that is productive not in the sense of synthesis or resolution, but of tension and collision. Didi-Huberman’s dialectic is thus richly heterodoxical and may be seen in continuity with a broad tendency in post-war French thought towards the contestation of

division' which, from their perspective, means that *formless* matter is not absorbable into the image or in language, and remains as a material residue (see materiality). This critique can serve to illuminate an essential aspect of Didi-Huberman's dialectic: it affirms the possibility of a productive collision between modes of expression, between image and form, for example, or between language and image, while resisting the postulation of synthesis or unity and maintaining the difference and violence of this collision. Didi-Huberman's response to Krauss and Bois in the postface to the re-edition of *La Ressemblance informe* in 2019 proposes a useful rejoinder to this criticism, reiterating the claim inherent in the initial postulation of the 'dialectical image' and underlining the mood of 'perpetual anxiety' which it induces.

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DISSEMBLANCE

Maud Hagelstein

Didi-Huberman's epistemological work involves a critical and systematic battle with the totem concepts of art history. Many of his texts offer a determined deconstruction of the humanist concept of *mimesis*. For this reason, the critique – sometimes fierce – is not only subversive, but also proposes in a positive way new conceptual tools that are more suitable for responding to observed artistic realities. While he places the seminal notion of *mimesis* at a distance, Didi-Huberman certainly does not shy away from thinking about some forms of resemblance, especially in his research on Christian iconology and his work on the heretical avant-garde of the journal *Documents*.

In his book *Fra Angelico* (1990b), published in a diptych in the same year as *Devant l'image* (1990a; *CD*), Didi-Huberman reinstated one aspect of the mimetic process – already theorised by Aristotle, but subsequently forgotten by Vasari – which the painter Fra Angelico had used. According to

an alternative conception of the mimetic process, imitation is in the *act* of creation rather than in the *thing* created. Or, to borrow Didi-Huberman's frequently used expression: for Fra Angelico, it was a matter of 'imitating the process' rather than of the 'aspects' or 'appearances' (cf. *FAD*, 96; Didi-Huberman, 1986b: 627). Thus, according to the theory of *dissimilar similitudes* that arose from the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius, a splatter of paint blotches as shown in the *Madonna of the Shadows* places its spectator more directly in the presence of God than, for example, the representation of an old bearded man seated on a throne. For by splattering his paint on the wall, following a technique frequently employed in the Quattrocento, Fra Angelico reproduced the gesture of anointing. He imitates the divine action. On the face of it, nothing resembles God less than a spot of paint (Pseudo-Dionysius used the image of a worm). If we must speak here of a certain kind of resemblance, it nonetheless has nothing to do with the resemblance of a copy to its model. In this case (God/a splatter of paint blotches), the resemblance is cracked by dissemblance, yet nourished by it, hence the paradoxical expression 'dissimilar similitudes'.

Didi-Huberman's work on Georges Bataille and the avant-garde journal *Documents* represents, in his own words, another 'particular moment in a much broader study of the notion of resemblance' (1995a: 6). The art journal *Documents*, abundantly illustrated, comprised fifteen issues spread out over two years (1929/1930). Among the young surrealist dissidents who wrote in it we find Carl Einstein, Michel Leiris and Georges Bataille. The composition of this journal sought – by linking fine arts with ethnography – a 'certain art of rapprochements, of montages, of friction, of attractions of images' (1995a: 18); in other words, 'an art of resemblances', bringing documents into contact with one another. But by pushing resemblance to its limits, Bataille contributed to making a 'work of tearing' and of making this notion 'tear into us' (1995a: 9). The artistic and visual experiments of *Documents* worked initially from the idea of 'contact', violently breaking 'the taboo of touch upon which the whole Christian myth of resemblance indeed appeared to have been built' (1995a: 29). This taboo relied on the idea that, in order for a copy to resemble the model, they had to be distinct, and even *hierarchically* distinct. In the work of *Documents*, the model and the copy touch one another, overturning the very possibility of a hierarchical relation. Didi-Huberman detected a critique of humanism in the visual experiments by Bataille. Central for the humanist conception of *mimesis*, the originality of the model is pushed back by heuristic operations of levelling, by a 'base materialism' in which images approach each other straightforwardly, a 'materialism that touches the *lowest point*', where thought is brought down to the level of concrete things (1995a: 240).

This conceptualisation of the processes of resemblance favours contact – or montage – between things over terms. But bringing documents into contact with one another (whether photographic documents or not) has no smoothing effect at all, and is haunted by dissemblance. The images of *Documents* mix *contact* and *conflict*. While similar, they remain heterogeneous. They resemble one another – they are, at the very least, taken together: they assemble – but according to different orders. The echoes between images bring the human face to face with the animal, the object with the organ, the normal with the monstrous. Visual differences, since they are in contact and since they touch, whether ‘assembled in a montage’ or ‘stuck’ together, do not reduce each other to differences but present themselves as dissemblances. Later, Didi-Huberman proposes that ‘only that which has firstly been separated, cut, can “stick” with force’, and that, symmetrically, ‘only that which has firstly been in contact can “cut” with intensity’ (1995a: 302). The shock of confrontations comes from what the formless, the animal, the primitive, trash, the dead have already made an integral part of the human figure. In this sense, dissemblance is devastating – and only an escape from the humanist model allows the theory of art to perceive its effects.

Translated by Shane Lillis

DISTANCE

Busra Copuroglu

Didi-Huberman’s conception of distance is one of his most intriguing, complex and poetic ways of bridging relations between aesthetics, politics and methods of seeing. He thinks of distance through the idea of contact and draws from a constellation of writers, theories and concepts including Jacques Rancière’s *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, hysteria, gaze, exile, photography, aura, atlas and montage.

Rancière considers distance to be ‘the normal condition of any communication’ (2009: 10). By questioning the position of the theatre spectator since antiquity, Rancière removes the spectator from the position of a passive agent and argues that viewing ‘is an action that transforms the distribution of positions [where] the spectator observes, selects, compares, interprets [and] links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen in other kinds of places’ (2009: 13). Rancière’s considerations of distance become one of the important reference points for Didi-Huberman’s conception of distance, as well as his insights derived from Brecht’s notion

of images that ‘take a position’, which Didi-Huberman sees as a disorderly montage created by the critical eye that comes to contact with history through distance and forms an atlas of knowledge (*EH*). Thus, bridging aesthetics and politics, the idea of distance informs Didi-Huberman’s project of ‘sketch[ing] a historical anthropology of the gaze and imagination [by examining] a certain variety and multiplicities of gazes’ (*EH*, xxv).

In *Éphores* (2020a), true to his imaginal thinking, Didi-Huberman begins his poetic reflection on distance with reference to contact and recounts a memory of seeing his crying face in the mirror as he writes about the moment of watching the gathering of tears in his eyes. In his reflection in the mirror, he discovers a ‘new perception’, which illuminates his conception of distance: ‘this face I see in the mirror’, he says, is ‘impersonal and interesting’ (2022: 9, 10). It is something new, born out of distance that exteriorises (tears) emotions (interior) by modifying the surface of his face, making it an ugly sight. Didi-Huberman sees this as the moment that distances him from himself, because the ugly face he sees does not feel like his own any more. These tears situate the imaginal in proximity of distance and contact, which ‘are implicated in each other’ (2022: 10–11). Thus, the seemingly antithetical but interconnected processes of distance and contact inform Didi-Huberman’s perception of distance as a form of contact that ‘immobilizes seeing and the object of seeing’ (*EH*, xvii). After all, ‘contact’, Didi-Huberman explains, is ‘the experience of moving toward contact or the experience of distance’ (*IH*, 90).

As Didi-Huberman considers distance in various shapes or forms, Walter Benjamin’s definition of aura as ‘a strange weave of space and time[,] the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be’ (Benjamin, 2002: 105), becomes one of the recurring motifs that inform Didi-Huberman’s approach to distance and complements his approach to exile in *The Eye of History* series. In this series Didi-Huberman considers distance as ‘taking a position’, and argues that by distancing one does not move away to ‘lose sight of things [...] [rather] distancing means that we sharpen our gaze’ (*EH*, 56). As Sigrid Weigel notes (2018 [2015]: 43), Didi-Huberman’s writing here is informed by ‘a gaze schooled in art and poetry’, whereby it ‘becomes fruitful to produce the layered and condensed meanings, the configurations and conflicts that revitalize the petrified images and set them in motion again’. Thus, by bridging the aesthetic, political and ethical considerations, Didi-Huberman articulates position-taking as a form of constructing knowledge that creates an atlas of ‘new connections between orders of reality’ (*EH*, 58–60).

Furthermore, in *Phasmes* (1998a), Didi-Huberman’s encounter with phasms during a visit to the Jardin des Plantes becomes an intriguing

Duende is also an alternative model to classical aesthetics and classical metaphysics, which are embodied, respectively, by the figures of the angel and the muse discussed by Lorca. Unlike them, *duende* does not come from outside; it corresponds neither to the ideal of aesthetic beauty nor to the supreme power of God. It is the 'genius of the poor' (Didi-Huberman, 2017b: 26; DD, 33) born of the experience of the body in pain, which seeks a form of expression for itself. If they found anything, it is an 'aesthetics of intense form' (2021c: 21), that is, an aesthetics that contains its own rupture in confrontation with the power of the affect and is thus able to blow up all top-down aesthetic models and hierarchies. This is why the experience of Andalusian culture was so important in Bataille's work. As Didi-Huberman shows, *duende* is responsible for Bataille's revolutionary approach to art, his specific perspective that breaks with the tradition of Western thought and questions the 'art of stases' in the name of the 'art of ecstasies' that does not refer to any ideal and has only 'erratic vital upsurges' at its disposal (2017g: 17–18; DD, 29).

As Bataille's fascination with Goya's paintings shows, Spanish culture was for him – and is for Didi-Huberman – an opening to the 'art of the impossible' (Didi-Huberman, 2021c: 21), that is, art whose inspiration is not the closeness of the ideal or of divine power, but the inevitability and intimacy of death. This art cannot ossify into monuments because it is 'the art of the moment, whose monuments consist only of passing flashes, sometimes of catastrophes' (2021c: 22). *Duende* is recognised in a group when a form of dancing or singing elicits an *olé* cry from the audience, stating its presence. It is a popular art in which a marginal and nomadic people celebrate their proximity to disaster and death.

As Lorca wrote, *duende* signifies 'a radical change to all the old kinds of form' and 'draws close to places where forms fuse in a yearning beyond visible expression'. Working along these lines, Didi-Huberman insists that this claim means that 'energy takes shape [*prend forme*]' (2017b: 32; DD, 35), but that, at the same time, it never closes it down, never fully defines it, depositing in it the power of transformation and re-emergence. In this way, *duende* also embodies 'this potency of interior uprising of which an artist – or any person guided by the desire to give shape to their freedom – might be capable' (2017g: 37; DD, 36).

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DYNAMOGRAM

Maud Hagelstein

In *Le danseur des solitudes*, Didi-Huberman describes the rhythmic intelligence with which dancer of the *baile jondo* Israel Galvan creates forms in movement, or forms *with* movement, in an often very delicate mode, one of virtuosic or dynamic immobility (2006a: 98). The quality of his gestures – very much inspired by the world of bullfighting – is clearly artistic; moreover, 'to dance is not to bullfight', as Didi-Huberman says, rereading Ortega y Gasset: 'Where the dancer makes the beauty more visible than the wound, the torero makes the wound more visible than the beauty. We could assume that Israel Galvan seeks, in *Arena*, something equally distant from both the wound and from beauty' (2006a: 38). What is this plastic language that produces figures that are so dense and always delicately, tenuously balanced? The dancer invents gestures that seek to match the intensity of the tragic desire that is expressed in the arena, gestures that give form to the forces that life deploys when it comes into contact with the possibility of death. It is at the same distance from the wound (pathos) and from beauty (form). Dancing, then, resembles a Nietzschean struggle that re-enacts the tension between the Dionysian and the Apollonian. This model owes much to the views developed by Warburg, and to the conceptual tools with which the art historian sought to comprehend how a gestural language takes form.

'Dynamogram' is a concept borrowed from Warburg, and it plays a unique role in the *anthropological* and *aesthetic* story of the emergence of forms. What is it? A dynamogram measures muscular effort (movement) and is defined literally as the sensitive trace (form) left by a movement (force). Art is full, therefore, of these imprint-forms that have recorded forces graphically, and that have attempted to grasp or master them, whether these forms are superlative, leaning towards excess, as are very often the gestures linked to the expression of *pathos*, or whether they are *restrained* as in Galvan's works. In Didi-Huberman's reading, the dynamogram is the 'graph of the symptom-image': it is what draws, what inscribes, and what gives form to the forces of life and to its contradictory tensions (2002b: 169). One of the distinguishing features of antique dynamograms is that they form at moments of great 'energetic tension'

chapters go through the cube's thirteen sides, one after the other, using the French word *face*, which means surface, wall, side, front and aspect. These two sides of the 'face' are unfolded in multiple variations and conflicting facets in Giacometti's sculpture. Neither a regular geometrical cube, nor a doubled six-sided cube, the *Cube* has 12+1 sides (*faces*). Giacometti's negation of the *Cube* as an abstract sculpture and a head thus provides its reading at once as a head and not a head. If it is a head, it is expected to show a face (*visage*). This is what happens when years later Giacometti incised into one of the sculpture's sides (*faces*) a *visage*, or more precisely a kind of double portrait of his father and son. On another side Giacometti placed his signature, and on a third a view or portrait of the cube itself. All these manipulations of an abstract polyhedron are concentrated in an almost one-metre-high object that is too small to indicate a human counterpart, but large enough to stand as a massive, many-sided, many-faced body-object that in Giacometti's words 'has volume' (Lord, 1980: 9).

The play on *face* and *visage* is no mere pun; like the number of facets that Didi-Huberman follows up in his thirteen chapters – the last one has the same title as the first – it originates in the *Cube* itself. Face derives from the Latin *facies*, meaning, among other things, the exterior, look, shape, figure, face, type, condition and configuration (see Olivetti Latin-English Online Dictionary). This heterogeneous derivation points to the tension on to which Didi-Huberman shifts the reception of both the *Cube* and Giacometti's oeuvre by means of the sculpture as a figure of crisis.

In this sense the *Cube* has at least two faces. On the one hand, in the (self-)portrait, it presents the signature of the artist, who seeks to create an enigmatic and delicate monument to his loss (of his father, of meaning, of the ability to love); on the other hand the face is also problematised as an alteration: a simultaneously positioned, irregular structure of facets, which the materiality of the sculpture opens up, dissects and perhaps even explodes over the course of Didi-Huberman's study.

This is how, with Giacometti's sculpture, Didi-Huberman crystallises the critical question addressed by the face as a paradigm of identification, authorship and symbolic power (AI). Or he asks with Deleuze and Guattari 'How do you dismantle the face?' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 186). In a continuous rotation, the turning around of Giacometti's sculpture, the ascribed identity of the author becomes complex, an object of doubt. In this way, the motif of the *turn*, which is inscribed into the face of the *Cube* because of its genuine polarity, likewise anticipates Didi-Huberman's later writings on the temporality of images, above all his study on Warburg (ST). In the sense of the 'iconology of the interval' examined by Warburg, this turn or twist can be discovered as a 'place of thought', as an interval

– typically in situations of mourning, of desire, of delirium, of belief, or of struggle. In them, life constantly beats and oscillates between two strong poles, between excess and restraint, between maximum force and introspection. Insofar as it is passed on (for the forms of art interchange, copy each other, circulate), insofar as it crosses epochs and can therefore disconnect from the precise historical ground on which it was formed, the dynamogram is an operator for the phenomenon of survival: in other words, it has the capacity to begin the future plastic and inventive revival of the forms of the past.

Translated by Shane Lillis

F

FACE

Elena Vogman

The face appears as a crucial motif at many points throughout Didi-Huberman's vast exploration of expression and pathos – first in the representation of hysteria in Charcot's photographic boards (*IH*), later in the context of the German science of expression (*Ausdruckskunde*) and Aby Warburg's pathos formula (*SD*), and most recently in the representation of peoples in the history of photography and film, with a particular focus on film extras (*les figurants*) (*PEPE, TRS*). However, a proper philosophical and conceptual elaboration of the 'face' (*le visage*) as a paradigm takes place in Didi-Huberman's monograph on Giacometti's *Cube* sculpture (*CF*). The *Cube* serves here not merely as an object for art historical investigation but as a unique instrument for the conceptual articulation of the face: between the phenomenology of a surface (*la surface*) or side (*une face*) of an object and an iconic vis-à-vis, a visage and its representation or portraiture.

In *The Cube and the Face* Didi-Huberman discovers the *Cube* as a many-sided enigmatic object, a riddle having more sides than its reception has noticed so far. He reveals the *Cube*'s overlooked underside – that is, its basis – as its thirteenth side, the one that stubbornly conceals itself from view and seems to be buried in both the cube and its reception. Didi-Huberman's title, *Le Cube et le visage*, plays with the difference implied in the French notion of the 'face'. While the French title uses *visage*, which refers uniquely to the human face, the book's '12+1'

that doesn't simply bring about a transformation of the face but relocates and intensifies it. This moving and twisting face has something unsettling about it, as it simultaneously integrates two contradictory features – both (for example) the front and the profile. Oscillating between 'mourning and desire', cavity and envelope, between the paradigm of proper name and eerie revenant, it is primarily a 'place to experience a threshold' (CF, 31). The face is pervaded by disquiet as if by a tic, a twitch, which Deleuze and Guattari describe as an immanent conflict: 'It is precisely the continually refought battle between a faciality trait that tries to escape the sovereign organization of the face and the face itself, which clamps back down on the trait, takes hold of it again, blocks its line of flight, and reimposes its organization upon it' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 188). This shimmering ambivalence can be read as the embodiment of the paradox that Didi-Huberman situates in the *Cube* between 'a cavity that is too large and an envelope that is too small' (CF, 134).

This all-embracing in-between therefore takes the face close to that desirable but ambivalent place described by Jorge Luis Borges in *The Aleph* and quoted by Didi-Huberman at decisive junctures:

I saw the Aleph from every point and angle, and in the Aleph I saw the earth and in the earth the Aleph and in the Aleph the earth; I saw my own face and my own bowels, I saw your face; and I felt dizzy and wept, for my eyes had seen that secret and conjectured object whose name is common to all men but which no man has looked upon. (AA, 60–1; see Borges, 1945)

In this vertiginous in-between, the face is above all a critical locus that, because of its polarities, would suggest the aleph less as a possibility – that is, a place in which you could linger – and more as the place of sheer impossibility. This figure of thought can be traced to Didi-Huberman's exploration of an 'atlas of the impossible' (AA, 54). Yet this place is not entered from a merely philosophical, fictional or theoretical direction, but on the level of form: an aesthetic and genuinely anthropological level where the face becomes the real result of a logic of neither–nor become the 'crystal or the "synthesis" of a tearing', which doesn't resolve the conflicts but crystallises them (CF, 154). To invoke Plato's image, it belongs to a certain extent to a 'third kind of being' (CF, 154).

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FAROCKI, HARUN

Maud Hagelstein

As the rebellious heir to critical iconology, so close to Aby Warburg yet so harsh with regard to Erwin Panofsky, Didi-Huberman returns to the question of the legibility of images in the volumes of his series entitled *L'Œil de l'histoire* (*The Eye of History*). A rereading of the fragments of Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* allows him to dissociate himself from the rigid arguments that surround the relations between the visible/the legible in the perpetual debates regarding the 'iconic turn'; and it allows him to situate the investigation 'beyond the endless nit-picking over the primacy of the legible over the visible or vice versa, in which historians or iconologists – even structuralists – have too often become bogged down, as well as all those who seek to establish an order of ontological hierarchy between the "symbolic" and the "imaginary"' (2010b: 15). To avoid falling into these sterile debates, image theorists must endeavour to construct new models of legibility. In 1990, in *Devant l'image* (*Confronting Images*), while refusing to give texts a natural, absolute authority over images, Didi-Huberman had already begun to defend the idea that the efficiency of images implied 'transposed legibilities' and 'a work of opening – and thus of breaking and entering, of symptom formation – effected in the order of the legible, and beyond it' (CI, 20). In his series of explicitly political books *L'Œil de l'histoire* (2008b; 2010b; 2011b; 2012a; 2015b; 2016a; *EH*), Didi-Huberman shows how those reopened and transposed legibilities are vectors of critical perspectives: images whose historical legibility has been 'affronted' (poorly read images) can then be received anew and can *speak differently*.

The works of filmmaker Harun Farocki (1944–2014) fit perfectly within this experimental research into alternative ways of reading images – and Didi-Huberman pushes the problem to its greatest intensity. He begins his work with an observation: images do not always speak in the moment that they are captured. They can, however, find a new legibility later on, once the 'critical point' or the 'eddy in the stream of becoming' (to borrow an expression from Benjamin, 2019: 24), from which emerges the

possibility of a different gaze, has been found. This critical point must be constructed. Didi-Huberman calls this 'the eye of history', just as we speak of the eye of a cyclone, that is, the point around which we can, at a given moment, make everything else rotate. Even when images speak or, through innovative audiovisual means, find the point from which they address us, they do not speak to bring to a close:

By relentlessly attacking the violence of the world, the films of Farocki – in spite of their fundamental tact, their somewhat Bressonian way of organizing dialogue between images and of never letting go of their subject, just as Bresson held his frames very tightly – confront a certain pretension on the part of any viewer who expects to be given conclusions. This violence is merely the perseverance of a thinking that has understood that an image never has the last word (no more than does a word). (2010b: 93)

From Didi-Huberman's viewpoint, filmmaker Harun Farocki was among the greatest contemporary performers of critical montage. He showed this in exemplary fashion in his film *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (*Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges*, 1988), in which he analysed an aerial view of the Auschwitz death camp, a view taken unexpectedly by an American pilot on 4 April 1944, while he flew at an altitude of 7000 meters over the IG-Farben factories:

The pictures taken in April 1944 in Silesia arrived for evaluation in Medenham, England. The analysts discovered a power station, a carbide factory, a factory under construction for Buna and another for petrol hydrogenation. They were not under orders to look for the Auschwitz camp, and thus they did not find it. (extract from the voice-over from *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges*, H. Farocki, 1988, translated by Karen Margolis and Bert Papenfuss-Gorek)

Yet the technical apparatus had indeed recorded and inscribed in these aerial images the reality of the camp and clues to its organisation (selection ramps, footsteps in the snow indicating the line of the new arrivals, gas chambers, etc.). Everything was there except for the *conditions* that might allow us to recognise in these images what was – already – to be seen. And these conditions of new legibility had to be constructed: '[f]or what is recovered in the archive is always *re-assembled* into a montage by Farocki: for it is his way to expose the lines of conflict rather than any assembled groups [*les ensembles*], his way of dealing with the mass of archives in order to construct a new legibility there' (2010c: 109). By multiplying the viewpoints, by bringing images (images that are initially mute) into contact with other photographic documents produced from inside by the

Nazi camp administrators, or produced clandestinely by a member of the *Sonderkommando* (see photography; *Sonderkommando* photographs), or with images from times that are closer to us, such as the photographs of Algerian women unveiled taken by Marc Garanger in 1960, Farocki helps to give a new thickness to the aerial views that he analyses. Using innovative arrangements, he shows that the meaning of the images is not definitively set and that exegesis must at all costs avoid freezing them. The meaning of an image must, on the contrary, remain open; we can then place it in a duration and maintain the possibility of a future reading.

Translated by Shane Lillis

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FÉDIDA, PIERRE

Nigel Saint

The psychoanalyst and author Pierre Fédida (1934–2002) is an important figure for Didi-Huberman both intellectually and personally. Fédida taught and researched at the universities of Lyon, the Sorbonne and Paris VII-Denis Diderot, establishing a new programme and laboratory in 'Fundamental Psychopathology' and setting up the Centre d'études du vivant (Stone-Richards, 2003–04; Mijolla-Mellor, 2002). Both men contributed to each other's seminars (*CI*, 9) and cite each other's work (Fédida, 1992: 142–3). Didi-Huberman frequently draws on Fédida's work on dreams, absence, melancholy and the temporality of images, and devoted a long essay to his friend after his death entitled *Gestes d'air et de pierre: corps, parole, souffle, image* (2005a).

'Psychoanalysis is not to be applied to art, instead it should allow itself to become more complicated as a result of its readiness to engage with the many questions asked of it by art' (Didi-Huberman, 2005a: 62). Fédida's questions for Didi-Huberman begin with the former's work on dream-images, where in a gloss on Freud's discussion of perception and memory in dreams, Fédida states that the dream-image is initially both speechless and sightless: 'The image [...] does not reflect anything because it is the screen-mirror of a vision that is unable to speak and therefore unable to look. It's as if the image becomes, for a moment, a face with unsighted eyes' (Fédida, 1995: 187). Fédida also considered what kind of sight might

results in a 'disappointment with what is legible' and diminishes curiosity (CI, 13).

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FREUD, SIGMUND

Maud Hagedstein

In the late 1970s, for his doctoral thesis on Charcot and the photographic iconography of the Salpêtrière, which he then defended in 1981 at the EHESP (Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales) under the direction of Louis Marin, Didi-Huberman began to immerse himself in the thinking of Sigmund Freud, and began to construct from his readings the project of an 'aesthetics of the symptom' (see *IH*). A particular scene caught his attention in Freud's descriptions: that of a body during an attack of hysteria. The scene – witnessed by Freud, a 'true feat of plasticity' (*IH*, 162), where the woman suffers while offering the spectacle of a paradox (she embodies both the aggressor and the aggressed) – made it possible for the first time to establish the hypothesis that the symptom of hysteria could be the expression of a compromise between two fantasies, the one feminine and the other masculine:

In one case which I observed, for instance, the patient pressed her dress up against her body with one hand (as the woman), while she tried to tear it off with the other (as the man). This simultaneity of contradictory actions serves to a large extent to obscure the situation, which is otherwise so plastically portrayed in the attack, and it is thus well suited to conceal the unconscious phantasy that is at work. (Freud, 1959 [1924]: 166; see also Didi-Huberman, 1995c: 200–1; 1995a, 361; *IH*, 163; *CI*, 260)

As Didi-Huberman is clearly sensitive to contrasting gestural formulae, or ready to be seized by them, he was struck by this image, and recognised Freud's genius in having been able to give meaning to the apparent incoherence of the hysterical crisis, whose attitudes had until then been interpreted as illogical. What unsettled him then would never leave him: Freud directed our gaze towards an alternative logic of the image, a *para-logic*, allowing us to think that contradictory things can be simultaneous and embodied in the same body. Captivated by this often neglected inaugural scene, he noted the violence of interpretation, which forces images into the expected boxes. For the conflict observed by Freud on the body of the hysterical patient, and the complexity of its painful choreographies, had to a certain extent been 'flattened out' and unified by the photographic practice of the Salpêtrière and its assigned stage directors. Obsessed by the idea of masking the visual paradoxes that animated them, Dr Charcot – a skilled operator in the 'twisting of meaning' – wanted too much to make these lost women resemble the model of the hysteric, according to an idealist conception of resemblance, similar to that which Didi-Huberman would later refuse to grant to art historians (*IH*, 63).

The hysterical body described by Freud had enduringly challenged knowledge. Upon discovering these images, the young art historian had decided to face this challenge. The hysterics of the Salpêtrière hospital visualised a lacuna, a fault in the reading, a blind spot in interpretation. While the text is not explicitly devoted to the question of art, Didi-Huberman considers *The Interpretation of Dreams* – particularly the chapter 'The Dream-Work' – a necessary theoretical passage to study the processes of image formation. Here, Freud defends the idea that a dream never has a one-sided meaning. Its manifest content – the elements of the dream to which we have direct access upon waking – is overdetermined in comparison to its latent content – the unconscious thoughts that give rise to the dream. In other words, the elements of the dream are determined several times by the thoughts of the dream. The possibility of an over-determination of images, opened up by Freud, allows us to understand how contradictory elements react when brought into contact with one another, the kind of contact that the psychoanalyst would call 'contrasting associa-

tions' (where 'condensation' means that a thing is grouped together with its contrary, though without any explanation as to why; Freud, 1953: 279–80). A study of the rich logical relations that the dream has at its disposal to show the latent content reveals that the expression of resemblance can take unexpected forms (Freud, 1953: 284). 'Resemblance' is a sometimes brutal or apparently incoherent operation that can take place between elements with divergent meanings. Didi-Huberman's subsequent works fall within this observation (CI, 145). For him, Freud's thinking indicates the crumbling of one patch or section (*pan*) of mimesis, in its humanist acceptance, which mobilised art historians so strongly. For here, the act of resembling exhibits a contact, a 'collision', an 'infection', rather than a 'formal and ideal unity of two objects' (CI, 150). It is Freud therefore who sets Didi-Huberman on the way to a figurability capable of linking resemblance (contact) with dissemblance (gap, contrast), and of accepting that images can be overdetermined.

Didi-Huberman has focused his gaze, since 1990, on the field of study involving the interpretation of images, of which, for many reasons, he is the direct heir: and that field is iconology. The year 1990 is an important date, especially for the re-evaluation of this inheritance, since Didi-Huberman published two works that are like two separate focal points regarding the same opposition to iconology: *Devant l'image* (translated as *Confronting Images*) and *Fra Angelico*. These two works are formulated around an event (which was presented many times in his works): the encounter with a fresco by Fra Angelico, *Madonna of the Shadows*, painted around 1440–50 for the San Marco convent in Florence. This aesthetic event – the discovery of something inconspicuous and unnoticed yet striking: the four aniconic panels in the bottom half – would function as a trigger, like a 'symptom' in the etymological sense, something we fall upon, and that reaches us from its place of blindness. This fresco from the Quattrocento then becomes the paradigmatic example – or more precisely the symptom – for what iconology prevented us from seeing, since the usual cognitive and evaluative arrangements always condition our perception of visual elements. The aesthetics of symptoms implemented from this point by Didi-Huberman intentionally focuses the gaze on objects that have either been neglected by art and visual historians, or that subvert the classic interpretative machine of art history (and very often these objects are the same). He concentrated, therefore, on what causes us to sway or to shake, what troubles the classic iconological reflexes, and which for this reason calls for an alternative method of reading. For in order to avoid getting bogged down in analyses that are merely reactive, we have to see clearly the new evaluation that Didi-Huberman proposes of this kind of image, perfecting new descriptive and poetic means. Where art theory

was insufficient for thinking about the overdetermination of the image, and as Freud did in his own domain by forging specific tools (condensation, displacement, etc.), Didi-Huberman concentrated on developing a specific conceptual arsenal – so specific indeed that it flirted with the idea of a *mathesis singularis* – (re-)inventing concepts that matched the power of his objects. We might think of the concepts of '*pan*' (patch, section), 'visual', 'dissemblance', 'symptom-image'.

Translated by Shane Lillis

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GAZE

Busra Copuroglu

Didi-Huberman's concept of the gaze is one of the most fundamental and complex terms he employs in the body of his work, and it becomes a vehicle for the construction of an atlas of knowledge through montage. For Didi-Huberman, the movement and the stillness of the eye mobilises images and becomes instrumental in creating meaning.

Didi-Huberman considers the gaze not merely as the act of looking that we take for granted in our relation to images, but as a regimen of seeing. He conceptualises the gaze as it relates to art history (seeing and knowing the image before our eyes), and the responsibility and the ethics of looking at history (e.g., *Sonderkommando* photographs, Auschwitz-Birkenau). As Sigrid Weigel observes, Didi-Huberman's 'works on and with images are allied with poets and with poetical language', and pervade his writing. His work and thoughts on images, Weigel adds, are 'the operations with

of this updated, democratised iconology (Didi-Huberman, 2019c: 114). Through the montage of images it is possible to release the singular power in these gestures of lamentation – ‘to sustain the weight of the time, or of the times, that such a gesture brings into being’ (Didi-Huberman, 2007c: 201) – and to amplify the political charge of both an artist’s works and the resurgent images with which they coexist. The historian is looking for the genealogy of influences, traumas and customs that consciously or unconsciously results in a particular configuration of images (Didi-Huberman, 2019c: 106). As Didi-Huberman has remarked, the erudite, idealist and positivist focus on details and search for their ultimate source gives way to an act of contemplation registering the rhythm of the event and its visceral impact on the viewer (2019c: 119). This is an iconography of time, gesture and affect.

Finally, alongside the open-endedness of Didi-Huberman’s inquiries, the recognition of the negative dimension to the forming of figures and the connections established between trans-historical cultural activities, the alternative iconography reads for the gaps and returns in the archive. This may be the result of the montage of images in the *Atlas*, as mentioned above, or the creative search for lost or destroyed images and objects. Didi-Huberman’s thinking about the recovery of images is developed in his work on contemporary visual artists, notably concerning the monochrome, which offers a paradoxical terrain for the iconographer. In works discussed by Didi-Huberman, monochromes are deployed to do justice to the situation of the historiographically overlooked, the socially marginalised and the politically discarded. They suit a general social attitude of indifference (Mathieu Pernot’s use of grey; Didi-Huberman, 2014h), a combination of personal and political crisis (Convent’s white or blanks; Didi-Huberman, 2013k) and a totalitarian death machine (the black of László Nemes’s film *Son of Saul* (2015); Didi-Huberman, 2015a). Being able to see through the monochrome of deathly indifference enables us to see the beauty and energy in others and escape a uniform, conformist understanding of the past, an oversimplified view of memory and oppressive regimes. Traditional iconography can suffocate the viewer, preventing them from seeing figures emerge from the past, whether as extras given unexpected attention, participants in uprisings, social pariahs, returning forms of affect upheld in rituals of mourning or ethical gestures of resistance in spite of unbearable opposition. The new iconography gestures towards a future iconology outside of the confines of artistic representation and brought into the domains of cultural critique and political reconfigurations.

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ICONOLOGY

Maud Hagestein

From the 1990s onwards, visual theory reinvented itself by spreading out into broader disciplinary territories and by developing a very original conceptual arsenal. From the viewpoint of its philosophical grounding, image theory has always had to take position in relation to critical iconology – a field of interpretation of images launched in 1912 by art historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929), enriched by the philosophy of symbolic forms of Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945), and systematised by Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968) in his *Studies in Iconology* (1972 [1939]) in particular. Towards the end of the 1980s, this theoretical heritage was challenged by researchers seeking to distance themselves from it, or at least to give a more up-to-date meaning to the concept of iconology.

Criticisms aimed generally by contemporary theorists at the iconological method – and Didi-Huberman can be linked with this critical movement, even if he developed specificities of his own that are discussed below – are most often articulated around the problem of the language paradigm. The question is whether it is possible to study the logic of the visual (‘icono-logy’) outside any reference to language and to its syntax. And it is thought that the domination of the language paradigm for the interpretation of images can be overturned, and that their supposed docility can be undone in order to rediscover their potential. Rather than concentrate solely on the study of the symbolic content, several theorists seek to envisage what constitutes the intrinsic specificity of the image and to show how its *materiality* directly affects the production of meaning (the tools of phenomenology are very often employed in this way). Against the excessive semiotisation of forms of visual expression, it was necessary, for

these theorists, to confirm the intransitive function of images (images are not only the service providers attached to the translation and the circulation of words), that is, to give back to the image a thickness and even an opacity of its own.

In many ways, Erwin Panofsky and his very efficient iconology served both as a model and a foil in the debates concerning the change of paradigm that would bring us back to the image. We can sense what would be problematic in this method today: Panofsky is accused of mostly dismissing material preoccupations from his analysis of pictorial works in order to focus more intently (or even entirely) on the elements of content (allegories, symbols) and to analyse at best the links between the work of art and meanings or ideas. This critique is the foundation for the science of the image today: it seems nonsensical now to study symbolic contents (the *what*) without giving enough attention to the *way* in which these contents are fastened to the sensible (the *how*). Didi-Huberman has never hidden his opposition to Panofsky's classic iconology, while, at the same time, being the main protagonist in the rediscovery of Warburg in the francophone world. For Didi-Huberman gives a *political* and an *ethical* turn to his epistemological engagement: Warburg was a pioneer; Panofsky was to be a founder – and this is not exactly the same vocation.

Confronting Images (*Devant l'image*, 1990a) is a decisive work, undoubtedly the most forceful and critical that Didi-Huberman has ever written. And in spite of surface appearances, it is undoubtedly the most political. Here the epistemologist is not merely the one who observes the functioning of the sciences from on high (and from a distance); he also describes relations of power and subservience, and describes the struggles – the turf wars sometimes – that aim to impose interpretative models, with homogenising effects that diminish the heterogeneity of the situations analysed (which are ideologising), with objects whose visibility is refused, etc.

If we examine the main critical axes of *Confronting Images*, we see that Panofsky is challenged throughout, as much as Cassirer, who provided philosophical foundations to his work. Didi-Huberman reproaches Cassirer for reducing all acts of knowing observed in the field of culture to scientific knowledge and to the knowing mind (where Didi-Huberman seeks, with Freud, whose thinking gave impetus to his early writings, to comply with elements of *non-knowledge* in the image, with strangeness, indetermination, the aniconic, etc.) (see knowledge). And he reproaches Cassirer for bringing back 'the multiplicity of mediations, methods and objects of knowledge' to the need for unity that scientific knowledge bears within it, and finally with ending – by spreading the Kantian critique to spheres that had hitherto been preserved – philosophical idealism (*CI*, 127) (see Kant, Immanuel). In the same vein, he reproaches Panofsky

for applying to art a 'transcendental-scientific' method based on concepts that are not obtained by abstraction from artistic phenomena themselves but that are 'foundational' concepts (that emerge from the fertile humanist soil) to which singularities would be required to conform. Didi-Huberman criticises the fact that Panofsky called for a doctrinal use of Kantism which merely reinforced the order of the Same at the expense of the difference and the heterogeneity that run through artistic productions; that he adopted a Kantian tone in order to redirect 'the totem-notions of the humanist history of art', and preferred the denial of everything that escapes the frame of representation, everything that is not identified as a signifying symbol but that would belong to the order of the troubling potential of the visual. When we take this as our starting point, it is not easy to reconcile these different parties.

Beyond the critique, however, it is an entire method that seeks to reinvent itself. Where the defenders of the method instituted by art historian Erwin Panofsky thought they could decode, translate and perhaps even exhaust the meaning of a work of art, Didi-Huberman recalls the particular rhythm that conditions our relations to images, playing dialectically between proximity and distance, clarity and obscurity, knowledge and non-knowledge:

When we face images we face strange things that open and close alternatively to our senses – whether we understand this word to mean a fact of sensation or a fact of meaning, the result of a sensible act or that of an intelligible faculty. Here, it was thought that it had to do with a familiar image, when in fact, suddenly, it closes up in front of us and becomes the ultimate inaccessible. There – another version of that same uncanny – we have experienced the image as an insurmountable obstacle, a bottomless opacity, when suddenly it opens in front of us and gives us the impression that it is violently sucking us into its depths. (Didi-Huberman, 2007a: 25)

The image is conceived as an organism that opens and closes again (sometimes in a single movement) and whose *meanings* – rather than the *single* signification – are grasped with patience only: nothing says that the image always speaks, and when it is not mute, nothing guarantees that it speaks with a single voice. For Didi-Huberman, it would appear that the critical purpose of the constructed image is to shatter meaning, particularly when it is ideological, to make it falter in order to make room for alternatives, and to disassemble it to show what other possibilities it condemns, etc.

In his analyses, Didi-Huberman has often given back to images the meanings that had been denied them, but he also reopened images whose interpretation was thought to be sealed or completed – the most

spectacular example being that of the frescoes by Fra Angelico. For many years Didi-Huberman has worked hard to return a new legibility to the elements in our visual culture (artistic elements in particular), despite firmly established *readings*. The renewed iconology – whose possibility can be seen to emerge in the epistemological debates initiated by him and others – in reality surpasses the framework of art history alone. The dialogue undertaken by the work of Farocki in *Remontages du temps subi* shows the critical and political dimension in the problem of legibility – which constitutes a central and typical problem for iconological investigations:

Writing and montage make it possible [...] to offer images a legibility, which implies a dual, dialectical approach (on condition that it is understood, with Benjamin, that to dialecticise is neither to synthesise, nor to resolve, nor to 'regulate'): to never stop opening wide our childlike eyes in front of the image (to accept the test, the non-knowledge, the danger of the image, the deficiency of language) and to never stop constructing, as adults, the 'knowability' of the image (which implies knowledge, viewpoint, the act of writing, and ethical thinking). *To read* is to *link* these two things – *lesen*, in German, means to read and to link, to gather and to decipher – just as, in the lives of our faces, our eyes never stop opening and closing. (Didi-Huberman, 2010b: 65)

Translated by Shane Lillis

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IMAGES

Nigel Saint

Plurality strikes the reader when encountering the images in the many books of Didi-Huberman. He himself encourages us to look at the images first when opening any work of art history and always to consider an image in relation to other images. His books range from the ancient to the contemporary, with his selection of images from different media embracing not only the visual arts, but also conflicts and uprisings from the last two centuries, the history of psychoanalysis, cinema, the natural sciences, the history of medicine and the body, and philosophy. Throughout, the guiding spirit is Warburg, to whose *Mnemosyne Atlas* Didi-Huberman has regularly paid homage in his work and in his exhibitions. A sample

of images or 'pans' (see detail) discussed in his work might include the following: the *Farnese Atlas* (2011b: 83–101), Fra Angelico's frescoes at the San Marco convent (1990a; 1990b), Enguerrand Quarton's *Coronation of the Virgin* (1998b), Niccolò dell'Arca's *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (2002b: 176–9; 2007c: 238–9), the Susimi and Zumbo sculptures in wax (1999a: 106–18), the four *Sonderkommando* photographs (2003a) and Turrell's *Blood Lust* (2001a: 26–37).

In addition to the multiplicity of images, readers are struck by the sustained attention that Didi-Huberman pays to the making of them. Craft, the choice of materials (his essay on ex-votos includes objects in metal, wood, marble, terracotta, stone and wax [2006b]), the experiments with new forms and the potentialities of different media are all included in his numerous studies. How a work is made and the skill demonstrated therein are the first questions for artists, according to Henry Staten (referring to Paul Valéry) in a discussion of aesthetics from Socrates to Duchamp (Staten, 2011). Staten underlines how art is a knowledge-based activity that involves the making of a form (poem or sculpture) before we come to the evaluation of how the work succeeds mimetically or in terms of any higher cultural value. In the same way, Didi-Huberman, in Aristotelian and anti-Platonist mode, argues for specificity and precision when describing, situating and elaborating upon works of art in his analyses. The transformative power of an artwork is far from being overlooked, as may be seen in Didi-Huberman's interest in Rilke (2013c: 180–93) or Blanchot (2013c: 249–79), but the effects are only possible because of the manner in which the image has been made. Attention to production also grounds the writing project in each of his studies: the relationship between images and words remains open, alert, unending and noticeably uncertain.

Images in Didi-Huberman's work are regularly discussed collectively in sets and groups, partly to escape an excessive fascination with the whole or part of single images and also to avoid a dangerous focus on the uniqueness of any particular image. In his view, images need to be connected and compared, for our own sake and in order to register their cultural significance. Nevertheless, as made objects and as the first sites of our encounters with new forms of the imagination, images are also singular and specific (Larsson, 2020: 48–68). The eyes of the beholders are undoubtedly moving rapidly while looking, but they are also pausing and contemplating, taking time with individual images. In fact, due to this rapid movement and prolonged gaze, the viewing subject experiences the loss of certainty and order that Didi-Huberman equates with Freud's investigation into identity (1990a). In addition to an experience of depleted self-knowledge, the loss is felt like an absence (Didi-Huberman, 2001a: 10–13), 'nothing but the absence where every desire to see leads us'

to compare the manifestation of memory to seismic waves registered by the seismograph, envisaged, in the context of the philological tradition of Bloch, Burkhardt, Nietzsche and Warburg, as a device for recording the subterranean fractures and discontinuities in history (2002b: 117–18; *SI*, 67–72).

By associating mnemonic construction with a temporal complexity that is at once geological, archaeological and seismographic, Didi-Huberman articulates memory as a bearer of energetic and transformative forces composing an unconscious of time. These forces, which refer to what endures and survives throughout the intricacies of time, and therefore what escapes the *rationale* of historical positivism, are also morphological, since they are inscribed in the forms and gestures that animate the life and the afterlife of images. The phenomenology of memory links to the epistemology of history from the moment that the act of remembering is described in terms of the survival and the spectrality of the image (see phantom). This explains Didi-Huberman's interest in the migrations and metamorphoses of images across the plates of *Mnemosyne Atlas*, with particular emphasis on the nymph, whose emotive formulas of pathos coincide with the staging of traumatic memories by the hysterical body (2002b: 288–301; *IH*, 152–5, 160).

Images are put at the centre of historical examination because they carry the marks of multiple times, necessarily including history of catastrophes and destruction. Didi-Huberman's analysis of contemporary documentary cinema related to political violence and the memory of the Holocaust acquires a particular importance in this context. The films of such directors and artists as Jean-Luc Godard, Harun Farocki and Shalev-Gez reactivate a psychic or mnemonic history by means of the montage of multiple historical fragments, overlapping facts and fiction, testimonies and self-reflexivity. By counteracting the saturation of memory and its mediatic ritualisation, these cinematic seismographies of history expose the rhythms of a memory at work, a memory considered in its latencies, interruptions, deferrals and flaws in communication (*ISA*, 156; *BSO*). As inscriptions of memory, the images of the historical archive resist amnesia and force humanity 'to rub its eyes' (*TRS*, 70) before the catastrophes that must be rescued from oblivion (*ISA*, 178–9). For Didi-Huberman, this operation will only be effective insofar as memory is 'de-saturated' and treated as an intrinsically cognitive and imaginative process (2010b: 12; *ISA*, 167) (see *imagination*).

MIGRATION

Maud Hagedstein

While both discrete and forceful, the Warburgian concept of migration works from within Didi-Huberman's meditations on the image – probably more and more over the last few years, or with a replayed dimension. His interest in artistic or historical images of the nameless, the 'extras', the 'people exposed' to the shocks of modern democracies has led him to observe the communities of those who rage to survive (see *peoples*). By spending time on Warburgian themes, Didi-Huberman became sensitive to the effort and the tearing away from oneself involved in migration, which is why he works, today, to look straight at the catastrophe of migration policies in Europe (2017a).

Without succumbing to the reductive facility of biographical explanation, it is worth noting that art historian Aby Warburg himself suffered the threatening reality of migratory displacements, not firsthand (even if he was not unfamiliar with psychological wandering), but in his anticipated and visionary paranoid fantasies, and then 'materially' after his own death, since his whole world of research, his tools, his library and his archives, were all displaced to London in the early 1930s to be preserved from the Nazi regime. Echoing this posthumous migratory reality, we could reread with Didi-Huberman the essay by Adorno entitled 'Bibliographical Musings' in which Adorno shares a slightly anthropomorphised gaze on books damaged by travels in exile during the 1930s and 1940s, deported several times, finally devastated, mutilated, appearing as the wounded survivors of a painful history (1992: 20–31). On this ground, Didi-Huberman has, throughout his work, put into narrative one of Warburg's key ideas: important things can become uprooted. In his article from 1912 on the astrological frescoes of Ferrare, Warburg attempted to elucidate the origins of enigmatic divine figures, of very particular 'pagan migrants', whose beating Greek heart he thought he could detect under the sevenfold coat that had gradually covered them during their peregrinations. He sought to track these motifs, these forms and these gestures that inhabit Western art, to identify the migratory paths or the 'pathways of culture' (*Wanderstrassen*) through which they circulate. In the impressive work in 2002 devoted to the ideas of the art historian, *The Surviving Image*, Didi-Huberman measured the operative character of this concept of migration.

Thus, the migrations of figures of art show that the time of the image is impure, complex, and mixed (see *temporality*). Regarding the obstinate circulations of certain motifs passing from earth to earth (*passant de terre*

en terre) (sometimes hostile), Warburg thought to create their precise cartography, noting the survivals, re-establishing completely any links that were otherwise unresponsive, showing the profound plasticity of images. To do this, it was necessary to invent a knowledge that was in movement itself, the knowledge of a tracker and of a cartographer (not to mention a fortune teller), a knowledge ready to be reinvented through contact with the power of difference or deviation of images. For the logical effect of phenomena of migration (we might say of 'displacement', in the Freudian sense) can be read in the overdetermination of images, in their sense that is always too rich and in excess (that of a character who might have the absurd idea of covering himself with seven coats):

First, we do not stand confronted with or *before an image* the way we do before a thing whose exact boundaries we can trace. The ensemble of definite coordinates – author, date, technique, iconography, etc. – is obviously insufficient for that. An image, every image, is the result of movements that are provisionally sedimented or crystallized in it. These movements traverse it through and through, each one having its own trajectory – historical, anthropological, and psychological – starting from a distance and continuing beyond it. They oblige us to think of the image as an energy-bearing or dynamic *moment*, even though it may have a specific structure. (SI, 19)

For a person does not migrate as they might embark on any other journey; migration is always costly. To circulate, the visual forms must be resilient; they must also activate a resilient force of metamorphosis.

Translated by Shane Lillis

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MONTAGE

Henrik Gustafsson

'How can we see time?' (EH, xv). This question is raised in the opening sentence of Didi-Huberman's book-length study of Bertolt Brecht's 1955 photobook *Kriegsfiel* (*War Primer* in English translation, 2017), which was pieced together with scissors and glue from press clippings

and self-penned epigrams. Three years later, in the concluding sentence of his second volume devoted to the unfinished *Mnemosyne Atlas*, created by the cultural historian Aby Warburg in the late 1920s, Didi-Huberman declares that the tenacious construction of montage constitutes 'the difficult – and dialectical – work of anyone who attempts to see time' (AA, 255).

Four interconnected theses informing Didi-Huberman's poetics of montage can be gleaned from these formulations. First, the montages assembled by Brecht and Warburg constitute a belated response to the devastation of industrialised warfare. The demand to make montages, to break apart (*dé-montage*) and piece together (*re-montage*), is thus integral to a modern experience of shock and chaos. Second is Didi-Huberman's insistence on montage as dialectical work, or as 'the art of *making the image dialectical*' (ISA, 138; see dialectic). However, contrary to the Hegelian tradition, Didi-Huberman understands dialectic antonymously to synthesis and suture. Emphasising rather effacing gaps and tensions, the juxtaposition of diverse imaginal elements accords equal significance to the latent connection as to the disorienting rupture. Third, there is the emphasis on the difficulty that the labour of montage entails, precisely due to its resistance to closure, containment and completion. The interminability of the process is highlighted by Didi-Huberman's ubiquitous use of the prefix re-: to make a montage is to 'redit', to 'reframe', to 'reread', to 'rearrange' and 'to retie the memory threads' (AA, 219). Fourth and foremost, montage is conceived as the construction of a particular kind of optics calibrated 'to see time'. It enacts a form of visual 'archaeology or "cultural geology" that would aim to make the historical immanence of images sensible' (AA, 153).

The problem of 'how to see time' is also the eminently archaeological question posed by Michel Foucault in his critique of historical hermeneutics. In common with Foucault's archaeologies of the human sciences and the discursive production of knowledge, montage offers 'a way of *visually unfolding the discontinuities of time*' (SI, 311). As such, it is premised on the notion that the contemporary is hidden from us, and that its layers need to be unfolded in order to bring together what chronology has separated. Here Didi-Huberman takes his cue both from Warburg's cartographic model of a memory atlas and its concomitant terminology of image migration (*Bilderrwanderung*) and disciplinary border guards (*Grenzwächter*), and from what Foucault referred to as his 'spatial obsessions' (1980 [1976]: 69), perambulating the boundaries of discursive formations through the inquisitive lens of regional phenomena and territorial struggles. Polemically positioned as a reaction against 'the *territorialization* of the study of images' (SI, 18), montage constitutes a form of spatial

Pasolini's film poetics of 'figurative fulgurations' a direct counterpart of Benjamin's 'dialectical image' (2012a: 180).

The other major figure in this constellation is Aby Warburg, with whom Pasolini shares an interest in the long duration of archaic gestures and the cultural logic of the 'survival' of forms of expression. Tracing the remnants of prehistory within the present is one of Pasolini's most important passions, and his theory of cinema can be straightforwardly called a visual process of 'sopravvivenza' (2014a: 93). Pasolini may not have read Warburg, but he was certainly influenced by authors close to Warburg's research, such as Roberto Longhi, Erich Auerbach and Ernesto de Martino. The latter, a scholar of the migration of forms of lamentation from antiquity to contemporary popular practices in southern Italy, is also important inspiration for Didi-Huberman's own research (see 2019c).

Another key insight emerging from Didi-Huberman's writings on Pasolini is that he shows the fundamental influence of Pasolini on the work of Giorgio Agamben, despite only sparse references to the former in Agamben's writings. However, the concept of a permanent state of emergency, the new identity of the citizen as a *homo sacer*, or the theory of modernity as the collapse of experience would have been impossible without the unmasking of the fundamental anarchy of power and the visions of anthropological catastrophe developed by Pasolini. Didi-Huberman also shows that Agamben's indebtedness to Pasolini relates closely to the inspirations of Warburg and Benjamin in his work. Thus the constellation seems even tighter.

Pasolini is a paradigmatic figure for Didi-Huberman for a third reason: as the point of fundamental opening of the field of reflection. Didi-Huberman is not Pasolini's uncritical admirer, and it is in polemics with the theses of Pasolini's article on the disappearance of the fireflies that one of the most important books in his recent oeuvre, *Survivance des lucioles*, emerges (2010a; *SF*). Characteristically, the opposition to Pasolini's (and consequently Agamben's) apocalyptic tone underscores their inconsistency with his own inherently dialectical thinking and his rejection of capitulation in the face of despair. To the thesis of the extinction of the fireflies – tiny lights of hope opposed to the great searchlights of power (see *light*) – Didi-Huberman opposes the hypothesis of their survival, the duration of the possibility of resistance *malgré tout*. It is in his nuanced and not unsympathetic engagement with the despair of Pasolini's late writings that Didi-Huberman defines his position, which a few years later would result in the opening of a major new research field devoted to the images and forms of revolt.

Finally, Pasolini has also enabled Didi-Huberman to concretise his interest – aesthetic, political and theoretical – in the cinema of poetry. This

path, too, is still being developed, as demonstrated by Didi-Huberman's recent essays on the films of Maria Kourkouta, Chris Marker and Mikhail Kalatozov (2017a; 2019a: 11–15, 189–205).

PATHOS

Maud Hagelstein

In the autumn of 2016 Didi-Huberman presented his exhibition *Soulevements (Uprisings)* at the Jeu de Paume in Paris, which was shown afterwards in Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Mexico and Montréal. *What makes us rise up?* The exhibition was a five-step response to this question, which would form the chapters of a history of revolt told through a political anthropology of images. Like Aby Warburg, who had in the late 1920s created a gigantic atlas of images which brought together thousands of 'formulae of pathos', Didi-Huberman created his own atlas (a collection of images) for the figures of uprising. So how do we rise up? 1. With (unchained) elements – 2. With (intense) gestures – 3. With (exclaimed) words – 4. With (blazing) conflicts – 5. With (indestructible) desires.

What link does Didi-Huberman trace between the *political* value of historical revolutionary facts, and the *poetic* charge of the phenomena of uprising? In an interview for the journal *Vacarme*, in response to the question (announced as 'brutal') about his 'real relation' to politics, Didi-Huberman said he felt incapable of having an *authorised* opinion on political matters (WI). A certain reservation prevented him from speaking publicly about all kinds of topical issues that we might have expected him to speak about:

We only become engaged effectively in areas where we truly work, that is to say where it is possible, through the work itself, to intervene effectively in a given field. I feel quite unfit – and I am not trying to make excuses, but only recognizing my own limits – to sign petitions on dossiers that I have only a second-hand knowledge about, or to engage in concrete and complex political questions. (WI)

In a radio interview on *France Culture* on 10 November 2016, Didi-Huberman showed, even more radically, his reluctance to enter into predictions, analyses, strategies and political solutions. He has no opinion on the present 'dark times', or at least no opinion *to give* or to present publicly (at the risk of imposing one) – because that is not his work, nor his expertise. Yet his research on images has often led him into political terrain, following in fact two central paths in *Uprisings*: the question of *desire* or

of *emotion*, and the question of *gestures*. These paths are not self-evident, particularly the path of emotion. Numerous intellectuals have observed that the present times are marked by lack and by anaesthesia: political action, where it should be replenished, finds little hope, little energy, little anger and little emotion.

Hence the importance of the problem of emotion, for which the heuristic work of images can provide a new place, one that will allow us to 'completely overturn our stereotypes concerning the "weakness" of affects (or of passions) compared with the "strength" of facts (or of actions)' (Didi-Huberman, 2012a: 21). Traditionally, in Western philosophy, *pathos* has been thought of as 'the impasse of the logos', as a sort of illness of reason (2012a: 26). In the 'little conference' entitled *Quelle émotion! Quelle émotion?* (2013f), Didi-Huberman starts from common sense to show the extent to which emotionally stirred individuals (those who are crying or shouting), exposed to others by their own nudity, in their own powerlessness or impotence, are often considered with disdain: such individuals are called 'pathetic'.

The very term 'pathos', in Aristotle's categories of logic, flows directly from what we refer to as the passive grammatical forms of the verb, and it refers to the impossibility of acting or the 'impasse of the act'. Yet can we be sure that emotion is an impasse of the act? For Didi-Huberman – who is close to the positive revalorisation of *pathos* in Nietzsche and later in Warburg – emotional individuals, by taking the risk of showing their impotence and 'losing face', stand out also by an act of honesty and bravery: such individuals refuse to lie, refuse to pretend, and thereby resist a state of the world that is imposed upon them (2013f: 23). In other words, this has to do with a first transformation of passivity, inherent in the trial of emotion itself. Immediately, something resists.

The subject of emotion transforms therefore his or her initial 'passivity' – that 'existential impasse' linked to the fact that this subject 'is unable to face' a certain order of the world that is imposed upon them – into an insurrectional gesture of his or her own body, an 'activity' that begins with the destruction, whether it be psychological or visual destruction, of this objective world that must then be 'shattered'. (2009a: 32)

The expression of pathos acts then like a resistance: a resistance that is not (yet) organised and that seems to be passive (we suffer the world, and the tears come), but which is at the same time 'insurrectional' since it opposes – physically – a 'certain order of the world'. Something of this world is not accepted. When Didi-Huberman states that this resistance 'is not organised', he means that it is not collective. That will be the challenge

of the second stage in coming out of passivity: how do we turn powerlessness into power? How do we 'arm the eyes'? How do we convert tears into weapons? How do we draw from tears new means for action?

Didi-Huberman endeavours to show the *social* dimension of emotion. Warburg, for his part, left this problem as a legacy, having articulated his thinking on art around a reflection on the 'formulae of pathos'. Warburg showed that emotion is evidently incarnated in a subject, in a body, but that it 'overflows' in order to open a larger dimension. It is detachment, tearing, decentring in relation to the sensible and to the immediate given; and the excess that characterises it is the condition of possibility of circulation and the shareability of forms. Emotion is always articulated around overflowing and effusion. It undermines the good management of our relation to the world. From the opening of *Peuples en larmes, peuples en armes*, it is a question of excess, of the pathos that resists the framework of representation, and of emotion as 'movement outside of oneself' or as 'oblique revolt' (Didi-Huberman, 2012a: 33). To be outside of oneself, when gripped with anger for example, means that the subject is overrun (overflowing), and the question of the collective opens within this effusion. 'Emotion does not say I', according to Gilles Deleuze in 'La peinture enflame l'écriture' (2003 [1981]: 172). While it does not say 'I', we can conceive a political approach to it. Something strange, something foreign is deployed in emotion, something too heavy for one person, and sometimes something like an ordinary pain, one so intense that it is incomprehensible for an individual. Something indeterminate in emotion links me with these depths ('the other of the inside') and with other individuals ('the other of the outside').

On the one hand, we must note the universality – the geographic, temporal universality – and the *community* of emotions: all children have cried, all children will cry [. . .] On the other hand, we must acknowledge the *singularity* of emotions: all children cry, but each creates the 'fundamental tonality' of their affect through the play, which is different every time, of innervations, motor discharge, singular sensations and reminiscences linked to the moment, to movement, and to the desiring constitution of the subject. This is how emotion, that *movement outside of oneself*, appears as a *movement outside of the self*, outside of the 'I'. (2012a: 46)

Emotions – like beliefs or like the phenomena of 'taste' – are not those little 'personal' things that an individual has to 'possess', to keep within oneself: *emotions are everyone's business*, they are the concern of all of us. It is the aesthetic, ethical and even political extension of the idea according to which emotions work on us like 'movements outside of oneself' or, even, 'outside of the self'.

Translated by Shane Lillis

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PHANTOM

Maud Hagelstein

In 1929 art historian Aby Warburg wrote, in the unpublished notes for his *Grundbegriffe*, a phrase that described the project of his *Mnemosyne Atlas*, which Didi-Huberman cites on numerous occasions, that the history of images is 'ghost stories for grown-ups' (*Gespensstergeschichte für ganz Erwachsene*) (quoted in *SI*, 50). This phrase, for Didi-Huberman, eventually created an unwavering link between images and ghosts, a link that photography had so often made possible for him to explore. Yet to speak of images as ghostly realities or as 'phantom-like' (*SI*, 50) is neither the naive illustration of a more complex reality, nor a language game, nor an easy metaphor. Instead, it concerns the very nature of the image: several definitions of the image exist, but the majority describe a certain relation – a new kind of relation on the ontological scene – of presence and absence. The image escapes by staying there, and its absence (that part of the real which withdraws into it) calls for reconstruction (we investigate what it challenges us to grasp). Only phantoms can rival this type of existence.

Having studied phenomenology under Henri Maldiney (particularly specialised in experiences of *haunting* related to art), and as a keen reader of Merleau-Ponty, Didi-Huberman focused on giving back the complex phenomenology of the image, or what he called the 'double system' of the image, its dialectical system (1992b: 103). The image is not mere presence. In other words, it is not merely 'the absolute denial of absence', as some – those who believe only what they see – tend to think (1992b: 96). However, nor is it ever absence alone, for it has its own consistency and an insurmountable materiality. There is something within it that does not pass, that resists metabolisation, and that insists. It is situated in the interval between what is there and what disappears. Its auratic nature makes it a fragile but obstinate 'survivor'. To insist on its ghostly existence is to claim that the image has an 'essentially lacunary nature', and is never whole, and is never full (*ISA*, 59).

There is an elective link between (phantom-)images and death; they flirt with death, and in this way, they put pressure on the living, like the empty tombs in American minimalist sculpture analysed in *Ce que nous voyons, ce*

qui nous regarde (1992b). This link, this way of articulating 'the question of the matter of the image with that of the time of the dead' (2005a: 66), is one whose story Didi-Huberman has told in almost all of his research, from the final development of *Confronting Images*, which calls for 'opening itself (such is the risk) to the sombre insistence of an always-returning negativity' and to 'let death insist in the image' (*CI*, 227), right up to his very Warburgian focus on votive images: 'their essential *anthropomorphism* – which, as will by now be understood, has nothing to do with a more or less "figurative" stylistic choice – makes these forms things that are "everywhere escaping and everywhere similar to themselves," types of phantoms, in short' (EV, 14).

Translated by Shane Lillis

PHASMIDS

Emmanuel Alloa

Belatedly, Didi-Huberman's oeuvre is starting to be translated into English and it comes as no surprise that his supposedly 'main works' have been published first, such as his readings of the iconography of the Salpêtrière (*IH*) (see Charcot, Jean-Martin; hysteria), of Fra Angelico (*FAD*), his groundbreaking readings of Warburg (*SI*) or of the photographs of the Auschwitz *Sonderkommando* (*ISA*) (see *Sonderkommando* photographs). As important as these works indisputably are, they might not necessarily offer the best entry points into an often-asked question: what does Georges Didi-Huberman's method consist of? Arguably, the most concise answer might be found in the book series *Essais sur l'apparition*, whose first volume came out in 1998, under the title *Phasmes* (1998a), with the second in 2013, under the title *Phalènes* (2013c). Rather than monographs, these are collections of short texts about objects that, at face value, seem to be totally disconnected from each other: an Etruscan ex-voto, a Neapolitan nativity set, an inkblot on a manuscript page by Victor Hugo, a drapery by Loie Fuller, a diagram by Beckett, an anatomical Florentine wax figure, a Jewish prayer shawl. The only thing connecting this disparate series is that the author never actively searches for them; he fortuitously encounters them in the course of a bigger research project, aimed at producing some contribution to knowledge. What is the status of these things that suddenly come in the way, that appear out of the blue? What to do with these encounters that never match with the long-term goal, with that object of desire the researcher was actively searching for?

Lanzmann. Lanzmann's epic film, *Shoah* (1985), had made a point of using no archival material. For Didi-Huberman, the *Sonderkommando* photographs, when the critical work of imagination is brought to bear on them, refute claims pertaining to the unimaginable.

It is known that the four photographs in question were snapped at Birkenau's Crematorium V: two from within a gas chamber (*ISA*, 12–13), two outside (*ISA*, 13–14). If the first two images, from a position of only partial potential visibility, were captured in haste, the second two must have been made on the run: 'image[s] on the gallop', as Didi-Huberman calls them in *Aperçus* (2018: 20–1). The fourth in the series (*ISA*, 14) captures only the black silhouettes of a few trees. Together, they suggest to the mind a moving picture of those few moments of resistance against Goebbels' prohibition of any evidence of their atrocities.

On display at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim, Poland, these images are credited to an anonymous photographer. From survivor testimony, Didi-Huberman conveys what we know about this Greek prisoner known as 'Alex' and the circumstances under which he made and managed to get the photos out of the extermination camp (*ISA*, 9–17). If 'Alex' was in the gas chamber during those moments, it was because he was a member of the *Sonderkommando*. Two of the tasks to which this 'special unit' was assigned were pulling gassed bodies out of the death chamber and incinerating them. Two of the photographs bear witness simultaneously to both tasks: the views are trained on bodies that we can see being hauled and dropped by other *Sonderkommando* labourers into a fiery pit, and the oblique opening of the gas chamber thickly frames this hellish vision, suggesting where those people being burned had just been gassed moments before.

In the analysis Didi-Huberman meticulously offers in *Images in Spite of All*, the *Sonderkommando* images are inextricable from a matrix of issues hovering around witnessing. 'Witness to all the last moments' (*ISA*, 4), members of the 'special unit' were the most potent and irrefutable witnesses to the atrocity. Knowing this perfectly well and bent, as they were, on making the *Endlösung* an event without witness, the Nazis took care to regularly eliminate the Jews who made up the *Sonderkommando*. Were none to have survived (in fact, about twenty did), the four photographic documents would become silent, 'inanimate' witnesses in their place – rich in testimony for those who would read them, eloquent for those who would listen to them.

The subterfuge carried out by 'Alex' and his accomplices and the survival of the four photographs converge at the nexus of witnessing and the preservation of eyewitness testimony when no witnesses are meant to survive. Or, as Didi-Huberman puts it, 'in the fold between [...] two

complementary constraints: the ineluctable obliteration of the witness himself and the fear that the testimony itself too would be obliterated' (*ISA*, 6). Before the four furtively snapped shots, Didi-Huberman puts his skills of observation to work, entering as far as any witness of today can into what David Rousset named 'the concentrationary universe' (1982).

A cursory glance at a few titles reveals how Didi-Huberman's work with the four *Sonderkommando* photos resonates in his considerable oeuvre. Already in 2002, in studying Aby Warburg, he was referring to the survival of images (*SN*). Lending the title 'Eye of History' to a series of six monographs to date pays tribute to the brave *Sonderkommando*. Just as 'Alex' exposed himself (*PEPE*) to immediate death by positioning himself (*EH*) and his camera as best he could in order to take a risky position vis-à-vis the Nazi prohibition of all images of the Shoah, Didi-Huberman, in turn, and on the basis of these four photographs, took position with respect to Claude Lanzmann's cultish foreclosure of presentability.

To the extent that this set of photographs provides guideposts for a narrative, they tend to allow a convergence between film and photography. The suture holding moving images together and articulating them is montage. As powerfully as the survivors' words bearing testimony in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, under Didi-Huberman's critical eye the *Sonderkommando* photographs constitute a 'cited past' (cf. 2015b) that lives on in the witnesses we should be today.

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SURVIVAL

Maud Hagelstein

The concept of 'survival' runs through Didi-Huberman's entire theoretical work, from epistemological considerations to the more political developments of his theory of the image (see images). However, the survivals that he finds in the history of images are not identical repetitions, nor are they archetypes, and it would be a serious error of analysis of his work (and that of historian Aby Warburg from whom he borrowed the concept) to believe this. Survivals are not manifestations of a maintenance or a stability of meaning. It is not the order of the Same that is expressed in them; it is not a reassuring permanence, but rather a symptom of 'temporal

disorientation'. In *The Surviving Image*, Didi-Huberman reminds us that survival (*Nachleben*) is first of all a concept of Anglo-Saxon anthropology, borrowed from British ethnologist Edward B. Tylor:

The 'permanence of culture' is not expressed as an essence, a global characteristic, or an archetype, but, on the contrary, as a *symptom*, an exceptional characteristic, something displaced. The *tenacity* of the survivals, their very 'power', as Tylor says, comes to light in the *tenuousness* of minuscule, superfluous, derisory, or abnormal things. It is in the recurrent symptom, in games, in the pathology of language, and in the unconsciousness of forms that survival as such is to be found. (SI, 30)

By focusing on the behaviours of forms, Warburg strategically shifted the focus on to the problem of their plasticity, underlining the echoes and resonances on the one hand, but identifying a whole system of differences and variations on the other. The concept of survival allows us to think about continuity and fractures at the same time. The *survival* of a form, and especially the survival of an antique form in the Renaissance, refers to its critical recovery by an artist who stumbles upon it as on a root sticking out of the ground, and inevitably transforms it: survival does not define a model, or a motif borrowed from ancient art which might be replicated identically, according to the standard schema of mimesis (imitation). This concept seeks to think, on the contrary, about the extreme or 'radical' plasticity of forms of art, in the sense of the powerful metaphor used by Didi-Huberman in *Aperçus*: 'we do not go "to the root" because *the root* does not exist: there are only *roots*, a necessarily indefinite, pullulating and incalculable, vivid and sometimes monstrous quantity of roots' (2018a: 177). Art is indeed woven with borrowings from distant eras (underground eras), but it is also punctuated by deviations. To study art history as a movement, as a trajectory, to show how art developed along the lines of an infinite number of migrations, means, from the perspective of Warburg and followed by Didi-Huberman, to draw, to map out a whole system of gaps and twists, a somewhat mad 'tree of derivation', to borrow an expression from Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

The *Mnemosyne Atlas* has this function. It allowed Warburg to draw anew the 'radical' vitality of artistic forms, their perseverance, their vitality, the way in which they refuse (themselves) and adapt at the same time. This history is, of course, a history of phantoms, of beings on the crest that separates existence and absence, since the surviving form survives above all its own death (SI, 37).

What 'survives'? That which is strongest and best adapted? Not necessarily. Sometimes things survive which might easily have succumbed,

from not being captured by the gaze. Not only did Warburg not discount contradictions – the moments in which, for example, a secularised culture reconnects with pagan beliefs – but he enjoyed looking for the flaws, the exceptions, the moments when the dominant explanatory system is shown to be defective. Culture is always already complicated by all kinds of exteriorities, by the unknown that insists from far away. Culture does not resist its inevitable contamination, the times and the influences that it crosses, and from these incessant crossings there emerge 'enigmatic organisms'. The images studied by Warburg can rarely be assigned and assimilated to a precise (social and historical) identity culture, for which they would be the authorised representatives. Transformation alone is permanent. Didi-Huberman is the heir to this idea, and the knowledge concerning the image that he has built over these forty years seeks to be on the same level.

Survival in Didi-Huberman's work has gained a critical and political aspect of its own. This is seen in the title of a work that not only solicits this difficult concept, but defends the idea of a space of resistance specific to art and popular culture – *Survival of the Fireflies*. Didi-Huberman knows that political reason is made up of images, in the same way that the 'imagination is political', in other words that 'in our way of imagining lies a fundamental condition of our way of doing politics' (SF, 30).

With an unflinching attentiveness, close to that of Walter Benjamin or Hannah Arendt, Didi-Huberman distanced the concept of survival from a messianism that would have been inconsistent. Even if it survives in dark times, survival does not indicate a salvation with which we could be content, or that might recreate a light without shade on forgotten cultural motifs.

Only religious tradition promises a salvation beyond all apocalypse and beyond all destruction of human things. Survivals, though, concern only the immanence of historical time: they have no redemptive value. And as to their revelatory value, it is always spotty, in flickers: symptomatic, to be honest. Survivals promise no resurrection (what meaning could one expect from raising a ghost?) They are nothing but glimmers, flashes, passing in the shadows, never the advent of a great 'light of lights'. Because they teach us that destruction – even ongoing destruction – is never absolute, survivals spare us from believing that a 'last' revelation or a 'final' salvation is necessary for our freedom. (SF, 42)

Works of art are full of survivals, that is to say they are full of desire, of the desire to live. They are perforated with elements that insist, that stand their ground, that leave traces (we find the layers and the passage of migrations). With regard to Ninfa (see nymph), the young servant carrying a

basket of fruit on her head in the fresco by Domenico Ghirlandaio at Santa Maria Novella, Warburg wondered where he had already seen it, and wondered about its 'anamnestic content':

This very young woman occurred in the image unexpectedly, breaking with her strangeness the economy of representation which surrounded her – the Christian imagery of the birth of Saint John the Baptist – and this from something like a very early Antiquity, as though the two temporalities of *suddenly* and *since a very long time* were superimposed in the same event or figurative symptom. (2018a: 160)

Survival is defined as an overwhelming phenomenon which renders distraught and tormented. Didi-Huberman, both seduced and shaken by the 'dangerous fluidity' of the figure of Ninfa, has sought to put himself to the test of these torments (see 2002a; 2015c; 2017c; 2019c). If survivals must be excavated as such, looked at head on, it is above all because in art, as elsewhere, there is always something left over, 'so we should be wary of grand discourses that begin by declaring the disappearance of all kinds of things' (2018a: 176).

Translated by Shane Lillis

SYMPTOM

Magdalena Krasnińska

The symptom is a very important concept in Didi-Huberman's critical reflection on the perception of art. It appears in numerous works, from *Invention of Hysteria to Confronting Images to The Surviving Image*. The essay 'Of Images and Ills' recapitulates the implementation of the concept of the symptom in Didi-Huberman's critical method of art history and imaginal analysis (it was written as a postface to the 2012 edition of *Invention de l'hystérie*). In the essay Didi-Huberman reminisces that his research interests developed in the direction of the painful experience of an image (see pathos), by which he means a disturbed experience that cannot be reduced to a result, a synthesis, an incontestable interpretation or the recognition of a specific symbol within the work (II, 440–1).

In Didi-Huberman's approach, the notion of the symptom is situated as a counterpart to symbolic function and constitutes a crucial component of his critical study of the history of art as knowledge (see art criticism; art history). Adapted from Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, the notion of the symptom in Didi-Huberman's writings is not used in

a clinical sense, but, rather, it is a category that belongs to the critique of knowledge insofar as it signifies 'the unpredictable and immediate passage of a body into the aberrant, critical state' (CI, 260). Importantly, contrary to the category of signs, with symptoms, gestures lose their clear representational function. In Freudian thought, symptom includes the work of a hidden structure; it is *antithetical*, but not devoid of sense. As a semiological entity, the symptom is therefore located between an event and a structure; its meaning is not stable, but, at most, a puzzle or a pointer. That which the symptom expresses does not allow any sort of transcription, because the symptom is a rupture: it 'speaks to us of the insistence and return of the singular in the regular [...] of the rupture of equilibrium and of a new equilibrium, an unprecedented equilibrium that soon will break itself again' (CI, 162). For this reason, the symptom as a hermeneutic category requires a continuing renewal of interpretation. Confronted with the symptom, the theory of art faces a different task, which is not distinguishing the symptom from the symbol, but capturing the moment 'in which knowledge of the symbol is traumatized and interrupts itself in the face of the not-knowledge of the symptom' (CI, 180). This 'opens and propels' the rich symbollicity of visual contents 'into an exponential spurt of all the conditions of meaning operative in an image' (CI, 180).

Dynamic in nature, the symptom is not reducible to knowledge; it corresponds to the psychoanalytic notion of work, which eventually is also expressed 'in the crude and material terms of the signifier' (CI, 177–8). At the same time, however, one is dealing here with a dispersion of associations of sense and visualisation of 'equivocal knots and the conjugation of symbolic treasure with markers of not-meaning' (CI, 177–8). The symptom reveals the paradoxicality and ambiguity of a painted work, in which both the relation of negation and the relation of identity are impossible to sustain: 'the image effectively knows how to represent both the thing and its contrary; it is impervious to contradiction and must always come back to this' (CI, 262). This can be followed in Didi-Huberman's analysis of the details of Renaissance paintings, including Johannes Vermeer's *The Lacemaker* (c. 1665) and *Girl with a Red Hat* (c. 1665–67), which are capable of 'binding together as they do, paradoxically – but closely – the work of mimesis and that of not-mimesis' (CI, 262).

The 'aesthetic of the symptom' (CI, 264), for which Didi-Huberman formulates general guidelines, is supposed to give an answer to the problem of what, in the work of art, is signifying and what is unthinkable. As such, symptom aesthetics presumes a convergence of semiotics and phenomenology. He writes that '[t]he concept of symptom is two-faced, being situated precisely on the boundary between two theoretical fields: a phenomenological field and a semiological field. The whole problem of a

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W

WARBURG, ABY

Maud Hagelstein

In the wake of the epistemological revolution that he launched with his very first theoretical works (in *Confronting Images* especially), Didi-Huberman has adopted a more overtly political gaze regarding images (or rather, a more *visibly* political gaze). In this process, the theory of culture defended by German Jewish historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929) has certainly played an indispensable role, and for this reason constitutes a key passage in Didi-Huberman's work, creating a link between the first

historiographic or *epistemo-critical* considerations, the implementation of a *heuristic* of visual documents (revealed in the exhibition projects, among others) and the *political* approach to images developed in the series entitled *L'Œil de l'histoire* (2009–16) or *Ce qui nous souève* (2019–21). Didi-Huberman has contributed with great commitment to the rediscovery of Aby Warburg, with *The Surviving Image* being certainly, in the French-speaking world, the most stimulating introduction to Warburg's work.

The conceptual apparatus refined by Warburg at the beginning of the twentieth century elucidates the complexity of the investigation of images, as Didi-Huberman has chosen, in turn, to implement it. By developing, following Warburg, a very elaborate *ethos* of observation and of frequentation of images, Didi-Huberman allows us to keep in mind the idea that the image does not exactly behave as an entity that bears information and offers useful service to the diffusion of meaning. Facing images, the spectator is not specifically invited to 'recognise'; the relation to visual works is not only a matter of *recognition*, which would involve referring them to the real from which they emerge or of which they are a projection. Of course, recognition, attribution, deciphering, identification are all parts of the iconological inquiry (see iconology). However, the play of recognition is interesting only insofar as it comes up against obstacles, mixes with moments of non-recognition, and this is why Warburg – the first to use the term 'iconology' in a modern sense – spoke of 'enigmatic organisms' with regard to artworks. Yet, while he sometimes restored, in their most minute details, the symbolic values and ideological context of the works analysed, Warburg did not seek to give any definitive signification to the works. Rather than limiting iconology to the sole identification of figures, he explicitly took on the task of recreating paths of transformation to show the great plasticity of the motifs of art.

In many ways Didi-Huberman has (re-)opened the contemporary field of the theory of the image to all the concerns that stirred the mind of Warburg. As he bathed in the world of images – as an investigator, as a historian, as a lover even – what did Warburg do? What did he look for? He sought to make the plasticity of the visual appear. Not to exhibit the established meanings attached to images and to the visual formulae from which they are created, but to render visible the modifications that they know – each time they are taken up and reworked by an artist in the practice of a style. Warburg built his propositions for art history starting from the concept of *Pathosformel*, 'pathos formula'. These formulae that haunt Renaissance painting were, for Warburg, intensified gestural (overplayed) formulae bearing a great emotional charge: an arm raised to the sky, knees bent (in deference, devotion or warlike aggression), mouths open, expressions of desire, cries, moans, gestures of lamentation, enthusiasm,

or pain. Warburg notes that these formulae are omnipresent, and that most of them are borrowed from antiquity, from the Greek sarcophagi for example. They are formulae that move (in every sense). For once they have been taken up again in the paintings of the Renaissance, they find another grounding, an alternative actualisation, and their meaning can even be inverted (Warburg spoke of 'energetic inversion'); in other words they are ambivalent plastic formulae which are charged according to the contexts in which they are reinvested.

Hoping to show these displacements, these circulations (to indicate how images are charged), Warburg invented an atlas, an apparatus that marked all theoreticians of the image who came after it, and beyond them the artists, the avant-gardists, the historians; an atlas that is presented as a gigantic visual juxtaposition of motifs of art history. With the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, the art historian sought to capture the infinite variation of motifs and deviations – 'disfigurations' – engaged in this phenomenon called the 'survival' (*Nachleben*) of forms. Through his use of documents, Warburg restored the 'life' of images to a certain extent by activating their latent effects. With regard to Warburg's propositions, the interpretation (the work of inquiry) basically seems to have no end, nor to have any final goal other than to describe a movement.

Didi-Huberman brought his predecessor's project to maximum intensity. We might begin by understanding that the 'legibility' of works remained the objective for Warburg. But by rethinking the strictly *interpretative* function of the relation to works, by challenging the complicity of the art historian with the order of reason, Didi-Huberman shed light on the truly avant-garde character of Warburg's project, insisting on the implementation of a singular heuristics. Images are not to be read in the sense of a reasoned deciphering, but are to be read *alternatively*, through an alternative practice of manipulation of documents: images are to be grasped, to be arranged, integrated into new, opening, poetic (in the etymological sense) montages. During the First World War, deeply affected by the horror in which he saw Europe foundering, Warburg had seemingly 'abandoned' his research in art history in order to devote himself to the study of conflicts. Haunted by the rise of devastating forces, he reacted by compiling a mass of iconographic documents related to the war (maps, newspaper cuttings, etc.). He explored in his own way a more practical and urgent relation with images, struggling to understand their logic and their effects. If Didi-Huberman teaches us to reread Warburg's propositions, if he follows his impulses (even as an exhibition curator), it is certainly with the idea of starting to build a new epistemological framework, one in which montage would become both a concrete apparatus for understanding the potential of images and a new interpretative

tool. If iconology had a different life after this, it is because it involved empirical work with images, even for the historian or the theoretician: this involves handling them, cutting, arranging, changing frames, moving, etc. The essence of the critical operation of *montage* consists in preventing the impression of too much legibility. The work of montage allows us to separate things that are taken for granted, or to introduce mistrust, and to cast doubt on appearances. The possibility of thinking, rethinking and giving *legibility* to historical documents must constantly be maintained; the possibility of rearranging them into a new order, of introducing them into complex montages – so as not to abandon reason to those who make a totalitarian use of it.

Translated by Shane Lillis

WITNESSING

Robert Harvey

Didi-Huberman is altogether straightforward about how the conjunction of images mobilises the imagination: 'montage creates a third image out of the assemblage of two' (*ISA*, 138). Coming as she does between a victim and a perpetrator, the third party that a witness is does exactly the same thing: she bears testimony regarding a crime. This special position and this special function meet in the Latin pun concerning witnessing: the *testis* is a *testis*. Like the work of the imagination, the work of witnessing has the power to raise to 3 the sum of 1 + 1.

Witnessing is thus conceptually more complex than the single term would seem to indicate. An event occurs in front of someone who sees (hears, smells, etc.) what occurs in such a way that it makes an impression on that person's mind. This individual thereby becomes a witness. At some later moment, this individual may be called upon to relay what she saw (heard, smelled, etc.) in some context such as a court of law or a documentary film. This we call *bearing witness*. (Primo Levi and others have noted that a sense of the burden of such transmission is the guilt felt by the witness-bearing witness that she survived the event relatively unscathed.) Not only are witnessing and bearing witness the two discrete yet interrelated operations just outlined, occurring in two discrete yet interrelated temporalities, the agents of these acts that witnesses are may be animate or inanimate: a piece of evidence, an 'exhibit', that is, in a criminal trial may be as eloquent as a speaking witness. The event is actualised when (and if) the witness reproduces what she saw for the interpretative ear or eye of the recipient of the testimony (the court, the spectator, the reader,