

# EPISTEMOLOGY OF TURNS THROUGH IMAGE/TEXT AGENCY: THE COMPLEX READING

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**Abstract:** *This essay points to epistemological questions on relation between visual and verbal theorisation of contemporary media and Postmedia art. The discussion is poly-generic because I used the models of theoretical interpretations, manifesto assertions or modes of visual indexing to interpret visual or nonvisual aspects of contemporary art. The purpose of the discussion is to point out the antagonisms and conflicts of contemporaneity. In the discussion, I point to theorisations of modern and contemporary human, cultural, and artistic practices that refer to antagonistic and certainly turbulent processing of production and reproduction in visual arts. The new image/text THEORIES make meaning not only by building a new interpretative text through absorption and transformation of other texts, but also by embedding the entirety of other texts (analog and digital) seamlessly within the new.*

**Keywords:** *epistemology of turns, the will to knowledge, operational text/image, image/text theory, Postmedia practice, tactical art (airports, general intellect, storytelling, touch)*

My starting points are:

- (1) *There has been an explosion of writers employing strategies of copying and appropriation over the past few years, with the computer encouraging writers to mimic its workings. When cutting and pasting are integral to the writing process, it would be mad to imagine that writers would not explore these functions in extreme ways that weren't intended by their creators.<sup>1</sup> 1 is turned in 2*
- (2) *When cutting and pasting are integral to the theoretic process, it would be mad to imagine that theoreticians and philosophers would not exploit these functions in extreme ways that weren't intended by their creators.*

Or

- (1) "The Medium is the Message" is a phrase coined by Marshall McLuhan meaning that the form of a medium embeds itself in any message it would

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1 Kenneth Goldsmith: "Introduction", in: *Uncreative writing*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 5.

transmit or convey, creating a symbiotic relationship by which the medium influences how the message is perceived.

(2) “The Medium is the Message” has been turned in: “The Mode is the Message”.<sup>2</sup>

*Epistemology of turns* is, therefore, the theoretical framework of knowledge on *theoretical turns* or *artistic turns*, and how the knowledge ‘on’ turns and knowledge ‘in’ turns are produced in specific material conditions and circumstances of epistemological community; actually, from the school/university, through the public communication channels and spaces allocated to performing/displaying knowledge, to institutions of distribution, archiving and collecting knowledge as such.

My critical points are:

The concept *the will* in the syntagm “the will to knowledge” applies as “wish, désir, Wunsch”, as “will, Wille”, or merely as an “intention”, “direction” or “orientation” towards acquiring or performing knowledge in specific epistemological contexts. Most commonly, interpretation of *the will to knowledge* occurs in relatively outdated<sup>3</sup> accounts of anthropology, psychology and philosophy by way of concepts like curiosity, urge to acquire a specific skill or knowledge, fear of the unknown, pressure of tradition, flight from the incomprehensible, coming close to the unfamiliar, conformity with the spirit or the sentiment of an epoch, verification of and identification with historically sanctioned values, firm requests and answers in time to pedagogical challenges, setting horizons of rationality as opposed to irrationality – either binary structuring of the urge for rationalization of the irrational pertaining to incomprehensible events, or creative proclamations. Therefore, one must start from a simple distinction between knowledge and insight, and material conditions and circumstances wherein knowledge (what can be transferred, adopted and possessed) and insight (what must be performed) take place. Acquiring or deriving knowledge is not a simple act of appropriation and adoption of “knowing how” (knowledge of epistemological skills), “knowing that” (knowledge of substance) and “knowing what” (knowledge of purpose),<sup>4</sup> administered from teachers, professors to students and any public audience.

2 Cornelia Sollfrank: “Revisiting the future: Cyberfeminism in the twenty-first century”, in: *Across & beyond. A transmediale reader on post-digital practices, concepts, and institutions*, eds. Ryan Bishop, Kristoffer Gransing, Jussi Parikka and Elvia Wilk. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016, p. 237.

3 Michel Foucault, “The will to knowledge”, in: *Michel Foucault: Ethics – Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley et al. London: Penguin Books, 1997, pp. 12–13.

4 Jaakko Hintikka, “Knowing how, knowing that, and knowing what: Observations on their relation in Plato and other Greek philosophers”, in: *Modernism, criticism, realism*, eds. Charles Harrison, Fred Orton. London: Harper and Row, 1984, pp. 47–56.

*The Will to Knowledge* is indeed rendered as “desire of a subject to know”, but also as subjects’ expectations from the theory/philosophy and theory/philosophy expectations from the subjects, whereas notions of *will* and *expectation* do not imply merely the epistemological level (possessing knowledge about knowledge and applying this knowledge in making new knowledge), but also the levels of breeding, identification, gratification of intentions or assuming roles – or, rather, becoming an subject between epistemology as theory or philosophy or arts.

But, I will continue to speak about IT through pictures and diagrams in function of textual knowledge.

### TEXT AS OPERATIONAL IMAGE

Operational text/image (text as image, image as text) are not simply meant to reproduce or offer something, but instead are part of an operation.<sup>5</sup>

I will start out from the premise that more is at work in singular *operational text/image* than in history of knowledge, mind or art history.

What does it mean to make a text as image? Moving from the image to image, a text is created. It is the diagrammatic path. The diagram is a very simple algorithm. The diagram, then, is both form and matter, the visible and articulable – connectio between images and words.<sup>6</sup> Transition interpretative modes:

*The “story” consists of a concatenation of scenes that have all the appearance of having been improvised. Each seems able to stand on its own, independently of the others. The connective tissue of the narrative must be supplied by the spectator as she or he infers what might or must have taken place between scenes.*<sup>7</sup>

### IN

The “*image/text theory*” consists of a concatenation of *visual and verbal indexes* that have all the appearance of having been improvised. Each seems able to stand on its own, independently of the others. The connective tissue of the narrative as interpretative must be supplied by the spectator *or reader* as she or he infers what might or must have taken place between *indexes*.

5 Harun Farocki: “War always finds a way”, in: *HF/RG*, ed. Chantal Pontbriand. Paris: Jeu de Paume/Blackjack Editions, 2009, p. 107.

6 Jakub Zdebik: “Introduction”, in: *Deleuze and the diagram. Aesthetic threads in visual organisation*. London: Bloomsbury Studies in Continental Philosophy, 2012, p. 9. See also Peter Eiseman: *Written into the void: Selected writings 1990–2004*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007, p. 90.

7 Victor Burgin: “Introduction: The noise of the marketplace”, in: *The remembered film*. London: Reaktion Books, 2004, p. 12.

and

Where digitextuality departs from Kristeva's notion of intertextuality is that the former moves us beyond a "new signifying system" of quotations and transpositions, to a meta-signifying system of discursive absorption whereby different signifying systems and materials are translated and often transformed into zeroes and ones for infinite recombinant signifiers. In other words, new digital media technologies make meaning not only by building a new text through absorption and transformation of other texts, but also by embedding the entirety of other texts (analog and digital) seamlessly within the new.<sup>8</sup>

IN

The new image/text *THEORIES* make meaning not only by building a new interpretative text through absorption and transformation of other texts, but also by embedding the entirety of other texts (analog and digital) seamlessly within the new.

Note:

Transition effects a relocation and reorganisation – reintegration – of one system and practice into another. In public opinion, transition is presented as "gradual and justified progress" and not in terms of explosive destruction giving rise to a new order. Transition is therefore an ideologically mediated order of events that hide their real intentions. Due to the fetishisation of "progress", transition cannot be identified with restoration. Then, however, the following question arises: does the concept of progress also involve the concept or effects of emancipation as an important indicator? A revolution occurs when there is a dominant feeling that there is no time left and that everything must be settled now, whatever the price. By contrast, restoration occurs when in public opinion there emerges or is realised the feeling that in our pursuit of the new we have gone too far and now find ourselves in unfamiliar territory, that we must go back and seek safety in a domain of living and acting bound by tradition. Transition emerges as a situation where we are in control of time and are aware that things are solved gradually – slowly – by proceeding in the smallest steps that will, by means of accumulating life, economy, and politics, eventually yield results. In any case, it is always an ideology that names and represents "change" in a pragmatically instructive way!

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8 Ana Everett: "Digitextuality and click theory", in: *New media: Theories and practices of digitextuality*, eds. Ana Everett and John T. Caldwell. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 7.

**I DON'T WANT REALISM.  
I DON'T WANT MAGIC.  
I DON'T WANT CREATIVITY.**

**I WANT THEORY!**

UNCREATIVE WRITING  
I DON'T WANT CREATIVITY  
NONCREATIVITY  
CREATIVITY AS IDEOLOGY  
UNCREATIVE WRITING  
I DON'T WANT CREATIVITY  
NONCREATIVITY  
CREATIVITY AS IDEOLOGY  
UNCREATIVE WRITING  
I DON'T WANT CREATIVITY  
NONCREATIVITY  
CREATIVITY AS IDEOLOGY  
UNCREATIVE WRITING  
I DON'T WANT CREATIVITY  
NONCREATIVITY  
CREATIVITY AS IDEOLOGY  
UNCREATIVE WRITING  
I DON'T WANT CREATIVITY  
NONCREATIVITY  
CREATIVITY AS IDEOLOGY

Negative Dialektik TO DAY

THEORY OF TURNS

TURN	PHILOSOPHY THEORY	ART
Linguistic Turn	language character of philosophy	conceptual art as the first <b>tactical art</b>
Analytical Turn	conceptual tools	Analytical conceptual art as <b>autoreflexive tactical art</b>
Cultural Turn	contextualisation	anthropological <b>tactical art</b>
Media Turn	media centric practice	new media art as <b>tactical practice</b>
Pictorial Turn	oculocentrism	visual culture through <b>tactical visualization</b>
Performative Turn	live action	performance art as <b>tactical art</b>
Postmodern Turn	posthistorical condition	Transavanguardia new expressionism retroavantgarde as <b>non-tactical art</b>
Gender Turn	politics of difference	feminist art lgbt art queer art as <b>tactical art</b>
Body Turn	bodycentric	body art performance art and <b>tactical art</b>
Postcolonial Turn	cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism	non-Western contemporary <b>tactical art</b>
Decolonial Turn	post-continental interventions in theory, philosophy, and critique	decolonial art as <b>tactical critical and subversive art</b>
Political Turn	return of politics	political art is always <b>tactical art</b>
Activist Turn	social or cultural intervention	political art as <b>tactical art</b>
Philosophical Turn	reseting philosophy after theory	reset universality in arts as <b>tactical philosophical improvisation</b>
Postmedia Turn	modes and apparatuses interventions	installation art digital art software art as <b>tactical procedures</b>

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Affective Turn	affect theory as a way of understanding spheres of experience or apparatus effects	attraction and expression in new or post media <b>tactical art</b>
Saptial Turn	emphasis on place and space in social science and the humanities	geopolitical art as <b>geotactical art</b>
Data Turn	difference between facts and datas	documentary art as effects of <b>tactical interventions</b>
Speculative Turn	philosophical movement toward continental realism and materialism	object oriented mind as <b>tactical practice in art</b>
Genre Turn	loss of disciplinary boundaries	any contemporary <b>tactical art</b>

## WHAT IS TACTICAL ART?

TACTICAL ART	
art as a reflexive media practice	
art practice as <i>signifier practice</i>	
postmedia practice <sup>9</sup> :	
Postmedium/postmedia practice	non-media practice
beyond medium/media practice	un-creative media practice
transmedia practice	de-re media practice

EXPLANATION OF THE CONCEPTS
<p>Technical support denotes various means of creation, production, communication, and presentation, which are used to make, present, communicate, and exchange works of art; those means do not constitute the character of an artwork, but make it accessible in the conventional sense of reception.</p> <p>In other words, a “technical means” is not an integral part of the work, but only its necessary agent, whose phenomenal characteristics do not constitute the work’s aesthetic, poetic, or artistic character.</p>

9 Rosalind E. Krauss: “A voyage on the North Sea”: *Art in the age of the post-medium condition*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1999, pp. 32, 45. Felix Guattari: *Chaosophy. Soft subversions*, trans. David L. Sweet and Chet Weiner. New York: Semiotext(e), 1996, pp. 106–111.

<p>“Medium” is a problematic term. Entirely joking, I might say that it denotes people endowed with extraordinary supersensory abilities that enable them to communicate with beings beyond our world of experience. In the present context, however, that is not the meaning of “medium” I have in mind.</p> <p>In the context of this discussion, the term signifies the totality of all material conditions and aspects, i.e. things that are required in the production, emergence, exchange, and communication of a work of art as such in the art world, culture, and society.</p>
<p>“Media” are technical means built in and presented as a constitutive poetic and aesthetic aspect of a work of art.</p>
<p>The postmedia artistic practice may be interpreted as a hybrid linking of various artistic, poetic, and extra-artistic phenomena in the presentation of political, aesthetic, ethical, and artistic ideas. Postmedia works are artistic or aesthetic events realised as objects, installations, performances, that is, appropriations of extra-artistic objects, situations, events, institutions, and modes of behaviour, that is, data aesthetics or documentary practices.</p>
<p>Non-media practice could use any human or nonhuman dispositive as a means of artistic activity, production, performing etc.</p>
<p>Un-creative media practice could be connected with remixing, reusing, repurposing, recopying, reframing, repeating, resetting, and regurgitating through different digital vehicles. Media as non-personalized <i>changeable</i> vehicles.</p>
<p>De-re media practice could be relating to the properties of things mentioned in an assertion or expression, rather than to the media of assertion or expression itself. Or, de-re media is open set of media representations which exist as object or world independently from media itself.</p>

Therefore, the important question concerns the relationship between art, media, politics, real life and forms of life with regards to practices of production and reproduction according to the idealisations and biopolitical functions of political theory in modern and contemporary societies. If real life “cannot be separated from its form”,<sup>10</sup> then the impact of political theory is fundamental and indisputable in giving shape to the shapelessness of real life.

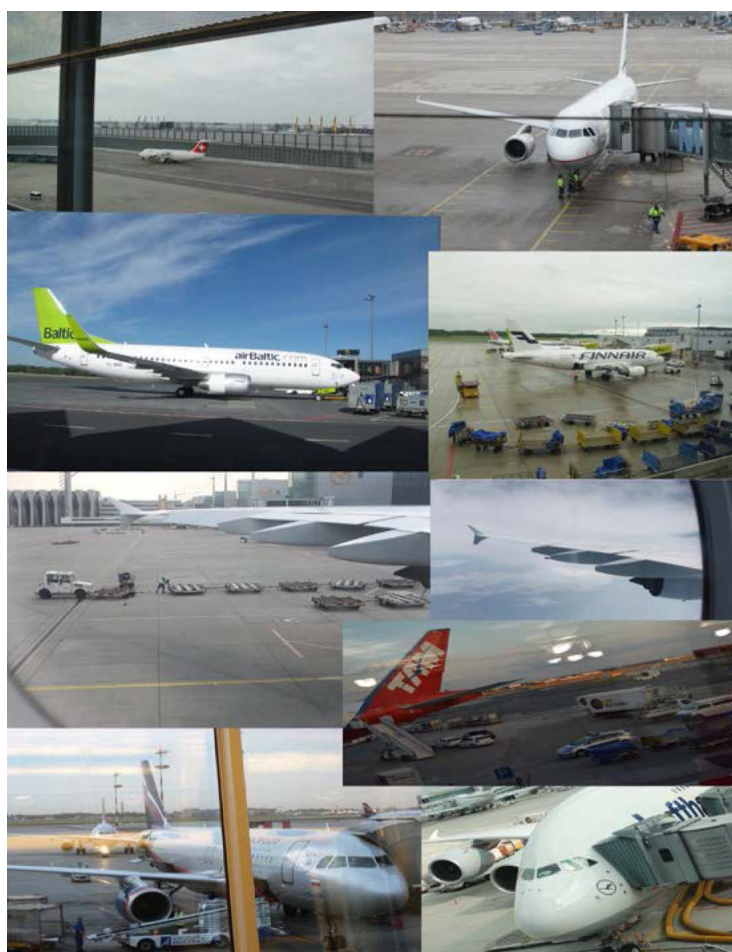
10 Following Giorgio Agamben: “A life that cannot be separated from its form is a life for which what is at stake in its way of living is living itself. What does this formulation mean? It defines a life – human life – in which the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life, always and above all power. Each behavior and each form of human living is never prescribed by a specific biological vocation, nor is it assigned by whatever necessity; instead, no matter how customary, repeated, and socially compulsory, it always retains the character of a possibility; that is, it always puts at stake living itself. That is why human beings – as beings of power who can do or not do, succeed or fail, lose themselves or find themselves – are the only beings for whom happiness is always at stake in their living, the only beings whose lives are irremediably and painfully assigned to happiness. But this immediately constitutes the form-of-life as political life. “Civitatem [...] communitatem esse institutam propter vivere et bene vivere hominum in ea”. See Marsilius of Padua: *Defensor pacis*, V, ii; in Giorgio Agamben: “Form-of-Life”, in: eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt. *Radical thought in Italy* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp. 151–152.



## EPISTEMOLOGY OF TURNS

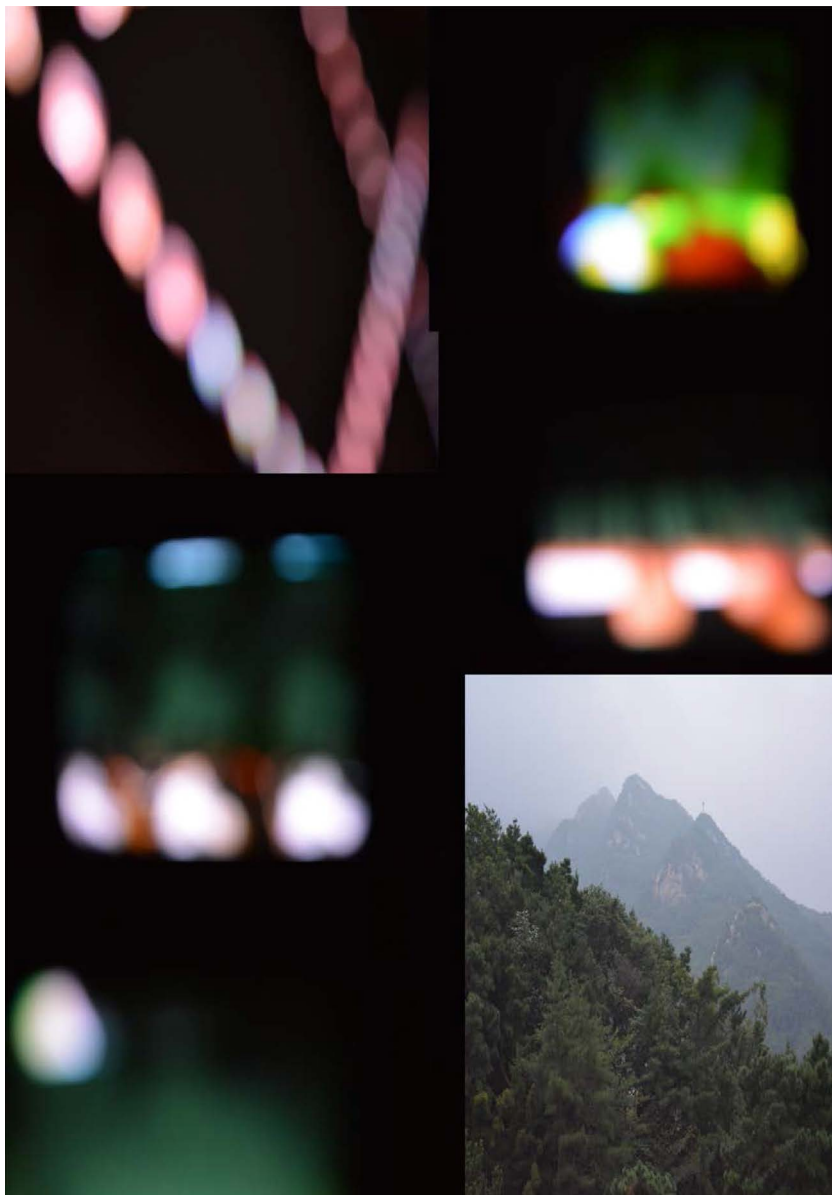
If real life may be isolated from its forms and those forms may be viewed as expressions of *speculative realism* or, more traditionally, idealism, then production/reproduction is aimed directly at real life, while real life, as the relationship between political theory, political economy and forms of life, persists as an *alienated* abstraction or idealisation, which is supposed to perform the function of disciplining the “world of consciousness” on the abstract level of a superior model of governing life.

## AIRPORTS<sup>11</sup>



11 Peter Fischli and David Weiss: *800 Views of Airport*. Cologne: Walther König, 2012.

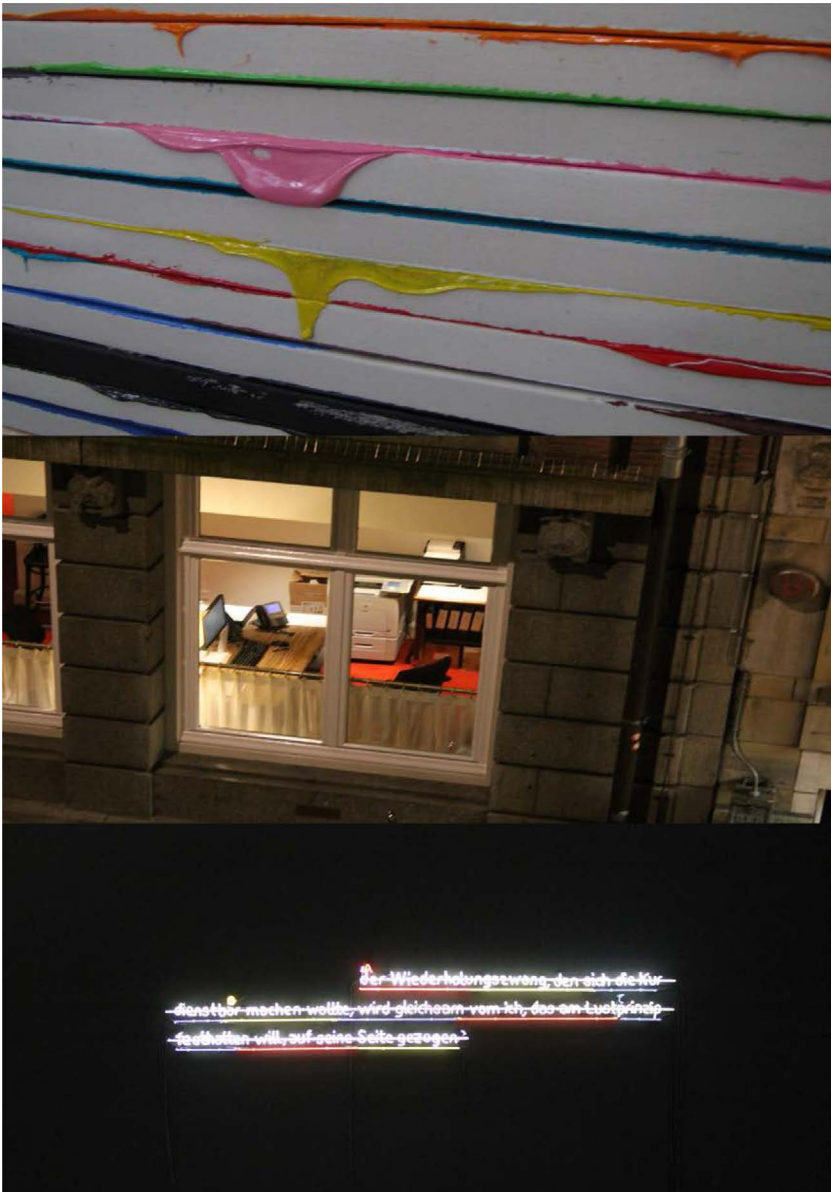
GENERAL INTELLECT<sup>12</sup>



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12 *General intellect*, according to Karl Marx in his *Grundrisse*, became a crucial force of production. It is a combination of technological expertise and social intellect, or general social knowledge, increasing importance of machinery in social organization. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General\\_intellect](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_intellect) (19.3.2017).

STORYTELLING<sup>13</sup>



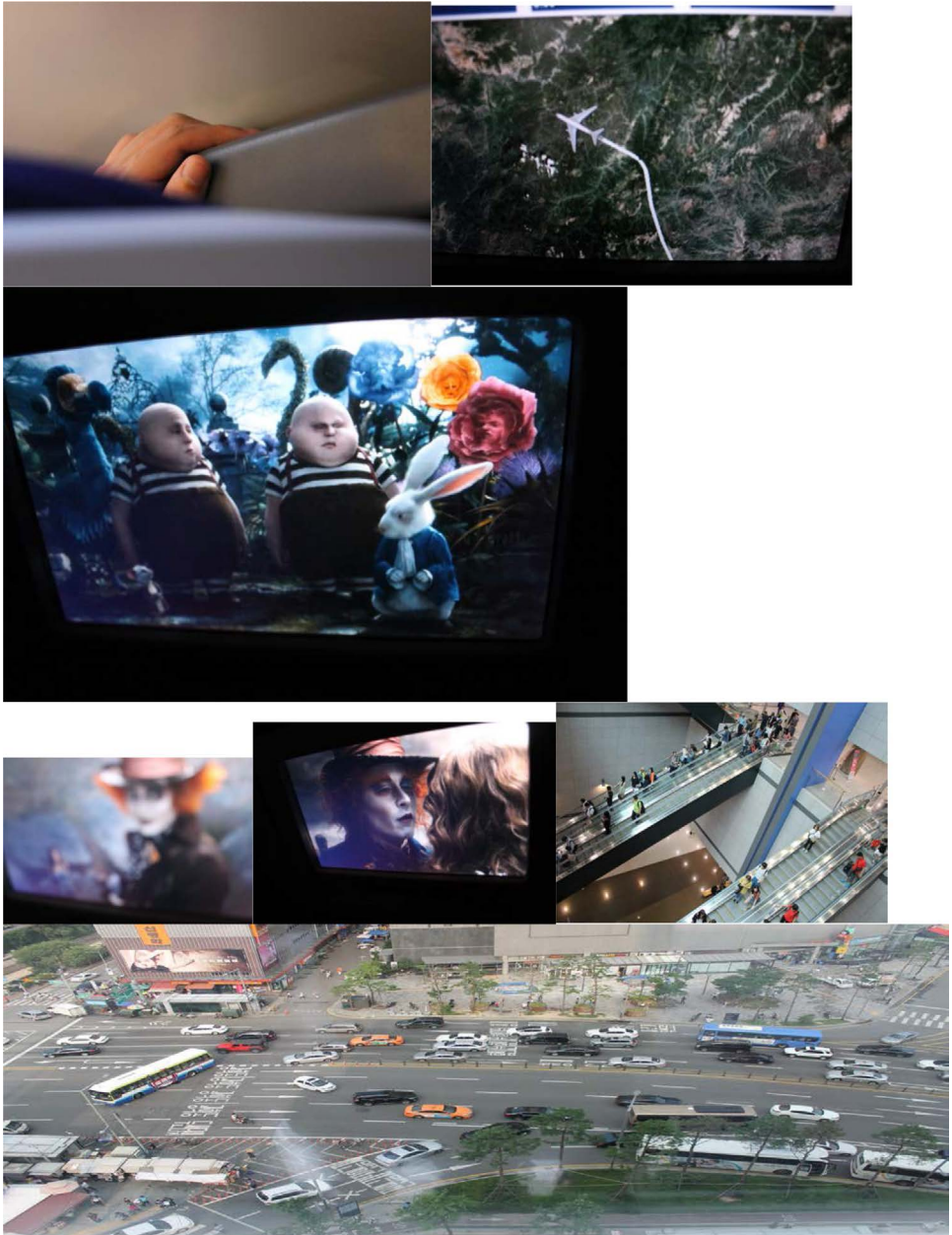
13 Peter Osborne: “Fictionalization of artistic authority/collectivization of artistic fictions: A first transnational”, in: *Anywhere or not at all. Philosophy of contemporary art*. London: Verso, 2013, pp. 33–35.

TOUCH<sup>14</sup>



14 Peter Fischli and David Weiss: *Rock on top of another rock*. Oslo: Forlagre Pres, 2012.

IT IS NOT THAT SURFACE HAS LESS NONSENSE THAN DOES DEPTH<sup>15</sup>



15 Gilles Deleuze: "Lewis Carroll", in: *Essays critical and clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 22.

WE AND THEY AROUND US

*How should humans respond to disaster?*

*On View!*

*The World as Prison?*

*Crossover/s!*

*Other Body : Refugees, Asylant, Immigrants!?*

*Conjuncture!?*

*Theory as the Theory of theoretical practice.*

*Epistemology 'represents' the theoretical turn  
in the realm of knowledge.*

*Theoretical practice intervenes  
in the realm of knowledge.*

*The form of a specific intervention:  
epistemological break.*

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