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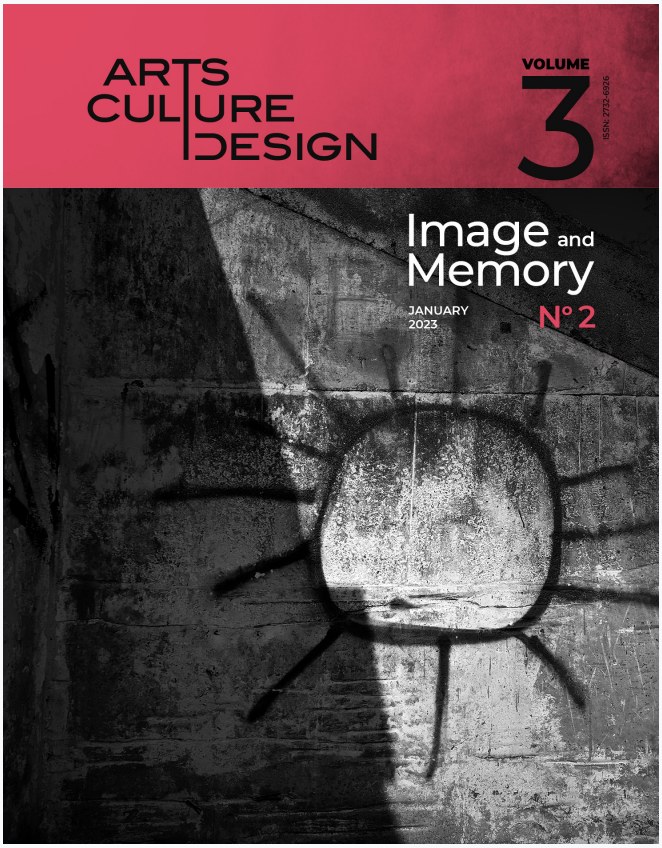
EKT
NATIONAL DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

Design/Arts/Culture

Vol 3, No 2 (2023)

Image and Memory



(HI)STORIES

Margalit Berriet

doi: 10.12681/dac.31320

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To cite this article:

Berriet, M. (2023). (HI)STORIES . *Design/Arts/Culture*, *3*(2), pp. 19–27. https://doi.org/10.12681/dac.31320

https://epublishing.ekt.gr | **e-Publisher:** EKT | **Downloaded at:** 20/05/2026 13:24:14

Design | Arts | Culture Vol. 3 | ISSN: 2732-6926

ARTICLE

(HI)STORIES

RECOLLECTIONS: ALLEGORIES OF TIME

Margalit Berriet

Margalit Berriet

Mémoire de l'Avenir (MdA) – Humanities - Arts and Society (HAS)
CIPSH – UNESCO-MOST
www.memoire-a-venir.org / www.humanitiesartsandsociety.org
45/47, Rue Ramponeau, 20eme Paris

margalit.berriet@gmail.com

Research artist, curator, and founding Director of MdA-HAS with a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) from New York University Tisch School of the Arts. Since 1984 she exhibited internationally in group and solo shows and has set multiple transdisciplinary arts events: symposiums, workshops, and exhibitions, promoting a better knowledge of cultural diversities and pluralism and fostering intercultural dialogue. She is the author (with Patricia Creveaux) of the book *From Drawing to Symbol: A Grammar for Humanity*, Alternative 2010, and other various papers. She collaborated with UNESCO and various cultural institutions (the Musée du Quai Branly, Centre George Pompidou, Musée de Louvre, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaisme, L'Institut du Monde Arabe, Musée de l'Homme), and with personalities like Emmanuel Anati, Luiz Oosterbeek, Claude Gilbert, Jean-Pierre Mohen, George Rosevègue, as with private and public intuitions like La Préfecture of Paris, Academy of Paris, the City hall of Paris, of Jerusalem, the National Agency Against Racism (LICRA), La Foundation for la Memoire de la Shoah etc.
Inspired by personalities involved in reflection and transdisciplinary work, engaged on crucial topics towards inclusive and sustainable development. A cross/transcultural comparative studies lead (20 years ago), to the founding of Memoire de l'Avenir (MDA); in 2016, together with UNESCO—MOST (Dr. John Crowley) and The International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences–CIPSH (Prof. Luiz Oosterbeek) I have initiated the Humanities, Arts & Society, the HAS Project's assignment: the arts contribute to new schemes anchored in research and creativity; the arts, allied with sciences, are part of the process of enhancing creativity as a tool of manufacturing and producing, imagining new futures, seeking to connect ethics with aesthetics within emerging local and global solutions; the arts, throughout (hi)stories have been venues of sharing knowledge, leading to a deepening of our understanding of selves and of the world.

(HI)STORIES

RECOLLECTIONS: ALLEGORIES OF TIME

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to journey through the world of abstract signs, symbols, and images, in an attempt to comprehend the process of constitution of memories, of (hi)stories, of dialects, and of (super)natural realities, as generated by human perceptions of things.

Sensitivity and intuition in the process of recording impressions of spaces and places, of nature and of objects, are integral parts of the process of generating and storing memories, shaping associations, and fashioning the storylines that compose our (hi)stories.

These are also the sources for comprehending the process by which the mind produces images and other means of communication inventing signs and symbols, composing messages, languages, technologies, and arts. The need to leave a trace is instinctive. Human beings are defined by their capacities to observe, propose ideas, defend hypotheses, and prove objectives. Artistic images and creations, from pre-history to today, convey thoughts, facts, and memories, making the incredible diversity of the human spirit visible.

All human actions are based upon cultural, social, and ethical constructions of knowledge, interpretations, awareness, and of engagements. Arts and cultures, then, are mirrors of the journey of civilization, reflecting on the entirety of its expeditions and productions.

Imagery and metaphor connect people, continents, philosophies, beliefs, (hi)stories. Languages and arts transcend locations and personal differences, illustrating and enhancing the understanding of realities, ethics, and aesthetics. Nowhere on earth do people exist without language, art, or culture.

Keywords
(hi)stories
metaphors
symbols
images
arts
perception
ethics
aesthetics

(HI)STORIES – ALLEGORIES OF TIME

The neuroscientist Luc Foubert (2021) has noted, regarding the process between observation and the conceptualization of cognitive messages, that most of the studies in neuroscience stand on the background acceptance that the development of our neo-cortex, which is responsible for perception, consciousness and cultural assimilation, is based on the repeated presentation of 'shapes' that our mind has been imprinted with, and trained during early life through the ontogenetic processes of learning and plasticity, leading to a multi-sensory mapping of a world we re-create.

The humanities tell cultural stories about the past, oriented by the traditions, habits and beliefs of our ancestors, creating heroes and gods that correspond to those beliefs, building the patrimonies of the humanities and recording the (hi)stories of societies. These truths are culturally authentic by the very fact of their continued replication over time. (Hi)story then becomes the accumulated meanings attributed to events, memories and ways of thinking about one's past. The creation of these narratives is an innate human activity, and the narratives reflect the intuitive ways in which we observe, comprehend and attribute order to our existence.

Recollected (hi)stories serve to create cultural or national identities, producing adapted (hi) story lines by which people identify with personal or collective memories. Historians have also realized that interpretations of the past and the documentations attached to these comprehensions change over time, building (hi)stories upon ever-growing data.

IT IS FUNDAMENTAL TO EXPLORE HOW THE VARIOUS FIELDS OF THE HUMANITIES MODEL AND CONDUCT THE CONSTRUCTION OF THEIR ACCUMULATED DATA.

(Hi)story, then, developed as a form of storytelling, related to interpretations that remain always alive, moving and rooted in a long, evolving and transformative process. Stories, references and images are often seized by individuals or cultures, to which they then attribute various meanings. In any group, a unity of identity is needed to overcome the natural diversities and pluralism of the peoples, their beliefs, dialects, comprehensions and philosophies. Groups are always forming cultural and national identities. As Stefan Berger puts it, "Nation-builders everywhere agreed that a nation must have a history with a long and proud story" (Tamm, 2016).

Collective and national (hi)stories are therefore primary agents of historical analysis impacting social behaviours and opinions. Although the writing of history is based on the critical examination of sources, there is always a process of selection with respect to the details, so the synthesis of those details should always be tested by a critical, academic, or societal examination (Vann, 2022). Histories spring from stories told or events documented, as well as non-traditional sources like personal documents or objects, which offer new levels of recollection, and in which the emotions and thoughts of people have been accounted for.

Ethnologists, archaeologists, palaeontologists and historians cannot refute suggested narratives when documented material has been collected. However, the information collected is selective, and much of it is created through interviews, photographs and objects. With these elements, professionals try to put order into making (hi)stories just and (relatively) accurate. Yet humans also transmit recollections via verbal communication, and oral history is still important in many parts of the world. It is only recently that (hi)story has been recorded with the help of writing and technology.

Images transmit and propose a sense to life. They mirror the journey of civilizations. In his research, Emmanuel Anati has shown that the most ancient artistic expressions, throughout the entire world, illustrate a similar typology, choice of themes and types of associations. Even their styles are fundamentally inscribed in the same sequences and limited in variation. It, therefore, seems to be justified to speak about a unique visual language, springing from the same source, from the same associations of ideas and from universal symbolisms that compose the human essence, and which are engraved on rocks and walls in the places around the world where populations lived in early civilizations, before the birth of written language (Anati, 1999).

These pictorial languages, illustrating and enhancing the understanding of human realities, limits, and references, transcend location and difference. They are not merely echoing existing perceptions, nor re-productions of existing realities, but rather they contribute to new schemes, anchored in the limitations of human beings. They may also lead to a deeper understanding of ourselves, and perhaps of the world and its inter-relations.

The capacity of human beings to communicate may be our greatest gift. The ability to create images – abstract or figurative, not limited by language – witness, justify, and enlighten our incomplete perceptions. In The Role of Art, Abstract Thinking and Social Relations in the Human Evolution (2016), on Art and social development, in the Homo genus evolution, Mihaela and Gabriel C. Corneanu argue that Images found may go back as far as 700,000 years (or more), and the immaterial become transmittable (Corneanu & Corneanu, 2016, p. 197).

This is the birth of myth and of culture. These expressions reflect the ways human beings have of observing the phenomena of life, while expressing their inner selves and their questions about their existence in a vast variety of interpretive forms. Among them there are factual tells and expressions of spiritual ideas and myths – all of them research tools for the observation of human and natural events.

Nowhere on earth do people exist without language, culture, memories and art. All cultures have accumulated records, and these are the (hi)stories of humanity. They also carry an ambition to remember to comprehend the expedition of humanity and understand the world. The need to communicate is innate and offers a critical glimpse into the origins and development of human expression. Humans are defined by their capacities to observe, propose ideas, defend hypotheses and prove objectives. Artistic images and creations, from pre-history to today, convey thoughts, facts and memories, making the incredible diversity of the human spirit visible.

The arts, therefore, offer outstanding support to the unfolding of (hi)stories. Images and objects are fundamental components of world knowledge, from singular to collective experience, reflecting the innate processes that exist between creativity and human cognitive faculties which have produced human civilization.

When arts are used as tools and means for dialogue, they echo the interdependence between chronologies and the imageries that have produced them, making them accessible and visible. These are sensitive approaches to information, making knowledge transdisciplinary and reachable for all. Observing trans-cultural knowledge will prevent misunderstandings, conflicts and the creation of stereotypes.

WHY ARE WE INTERESTED IN THE JOURNEY OF PICTOGRAMS, ICHNOGRAMS AND SYMBOLS?

Civilizations transmit their values through rituals, traditional objects and art. In his 2021 publication, “Les formes du visible: une anthropologie de la figuration,” Philippe Descola, continuing the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Alfred Métraux and Michel Leiris, demonstrates that our separation from nature is accomplished by the forms of presentation we have created.

Descola renewed the approach of the relations between man and his environment by distinguishing four ontologies: totemism, analogism, animism and naturalism. By doing so, he questions the great diversity of figurations that compose our ‘knowledge’ – some considered works of art, others evidence, information, or transmission of knowledge.

His investigation “aims to show how the objects and relations that iconic images depict, the pictorial forms in which they are presented and the types of agencies they exercise are interdependent and express in broad strokes the properties of one or other” of these four ontologies of the world (Descola, 2012, p. 26).

The artist, then, can copy, illustrate, translate, imitate or interpret the world. He or she can propose ideas, offer attitudes, provide descriptions or bear witness to events. As languages developed, spread and became more complex, they became simplified into abstract symbols. According to *Roberts’ Dictionary of Industrial Relations*, a symbol is that which represents something else by virtue of an analogical correspondence.

Yet, "History decays into images, not into stories" insists Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) in the *Arcades Project*, in chapter N, On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress (Benjamin, 1999, p. 476).

Arts may spring from the obsession of 'simulacra' mixed with the attributions and comprehensions of the mind. Hypothetically, only humans possess an interiority which must be attached to the rest of the (bio)organism by its own substantial virtue of being. The result is a dissociation of humans and of their cultures from nature, though they belong to it by their physical constitution.

In his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Ludwig Wittgenstein tries to bring the reader to understand the procedure of the circulation of knowledge, by offering logic and order to senses and thoughts:

"1 The world is all that is the case.

6.373 The world is independent of my will.

6.4 All propositions are of equal value.

6.41 The sense of the world must be outside the world.

6.51 Doubt can exist only when there is a question; a question can exist only when there is an answer". (Wittgenstein, 2001, p. 27)

"Universality", then, is not a form of standardization, but on the contrary, takes shape within the circulations that belong to the world, eventually becoming collective. For no less an author than Noam Chomsky, language is associated with an inner presence of a neuronal module, which is based on a universal grammar. Given this function, all human languages are part of human cognitive aptitudes (Picq and Roche, 2006, p. 32).

The forces of nature are the resources generating the tools of communication, evoking associations and memories. Mountains, deserts, dark and light, faunae, flora, colours, all transcend the human condition and evoke dreams as the ultimate sources of imagination, creation and, eventually, memories. While gods and goddesses mirrored miracles and wonders, they also incarnated our limitations. Accumulated, prototypical forms and symbols serve as cultural references in the cultivation of complex historical patrimonies, the representation of dynamic inner worlds, establishing narratives via the combination and re-combination of accumulated impressions.

Jean Louis Dessalles emphasizes two main functions of human communication, illustrating a universality of communication apparent in all human societies. The first he titles "events functioning," which consists of accumulating information in images and signals, generating facts that seem interesting. The second is "argumenta functioning," reflecting an ability to discuss, judge and construct. One cannot exist without the other (Dessalles, 2017).

Cultural figures have stamped our historical popular figurations, from cave art to contemporary art. Goya calls attention to the "dark side of humankind," offering what may perhaps be a private vision, but one that challenges our conceptions of the human condition (Brown, 2014).

Charlie Chaplin offers an unforgettable image familiar to all of us – the misfit, the one rejected by society, unlucky in love, but ultimately a survivor. The Chaplin character offers a poetic, bitter image of modern times and of humanity as a whole (Barson and Erickson, 2022).

Claude Lanzmann's nine-hour-long film documentary *Shoah* (1985) retraces the genocide of European Jews during the Second World War. A documentary is a collection of testimonies, an archive in itself. Yet Lanzmann spoke of it as a "fiction of the real" in which it was necessary to transform these people into actors (even though) it is their own story that they are telling.

By this gesture, the 'characters' become cinematographic images. The film is not about reconstitution, nor about archiving, but about how the past affects the present. According to Jean-Michel Frodon (2007), *Shoah* is not only a documentary, "this film changed our perception, the face of the world, and it is through the power of art, through the power of film." (Radio France, 2022) From Chaplin's *The Dictator* to Spielberg's *Schindler's List* to Resnais' *Nuit et Brouillard* to *Shoah*, these directors put technique into the service of (hi)story, employing a creative visual approach to ethics, storytelling, memory, philosophy and (hi)story.

The Japanese photographer Kikuji Kawada (1933) is an example of a disturbing exploration of the trauma of World War II. His work includes images of stains burnt into the walls of Hiroshima's A-Bomb Dome, now the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, in addition to images related to the iconography of the American occupation (Kaneko, 2021).

In 1929, Lee Miller (1907-1977), a young American photographer, was assigned to the U.S. Army as a war correspondent for Condé Nast Publications. Her photographs portrayed army nurses across Europe, including those on the front lines and as prisoners of war (Bouhassane and Watson, 2022).

With photography, she conveyed the voices of dying children in a Vienna hospital, documented peasant life in post-war Hungary, exposed the corpses of Nazi officers and their families, and finally, documented the execution of Hungarian Prime Minister László Bárdossy in *BELIEVE IT! Lee Miller's Second World War Photographs as Modern Memorials* (Hilditch, 2018, pp. 209–222), Lee Miller and many other photographers provided eyewitness accounts of the casualties of life and of war, using the camera to record scenes of desperation and destruction.

Pablo Picasso's painting *Guernica* (1937) has imprinted each and every one of us with a universal cry of grief due to war crimes. The painting is a response to the April 1937 bombing of Guernica, a Basque country town in northern Spain, carried out by Nazi Germany's Condor Legion and the Fascist Italian Aviazione at the behest of the Spanish Nationalists. The painting, a moving and powerful anti-war artwork, was used to raise funds for Spanish war relief. It soon became widely acclaimed, and it helped bring worldwide attention to the Spanish Civil War (Cole, 2021).

Through the arts, artists can demonstrate the similarities between people, their joys and their pains. Artists bridge the gap between thinking and feeling. According to Aristotle, for example, the ethics of obligation versus the ethics of personality is precisely what art can provide – a means of perceiving, with imaginative understanding, that to which one does not formulate or apply global principles but rather emphasizes the particularity and the singularity of individual ethics. Ethical theories aim to improve our lives and are concerned with the nature of human well-being. Ethical virtues are found within the complexity that exists between one's cognitive, rational learning and the emotional singularities of each, becoming socially acquainted.

Wisdom cannot be acquired only by learning, but rather through experiences and the capacities of each to understand, imagine, and venture. Because a symbol is in fact a sign that traverses time and place, it is an 'image' of an object cut in two, of which the two hosts each keep one half that they pass on to their children. Throughout generations, when the two parts are brought together, they serve as the bearers of recognition between minds and the world, and when they prove previously contracted relationships of similitude and hospitality, they are a means of recognition for people, an 'object' by which a generation recognizes its humanity (Bailly, 2020, p. 2180).

According to Gaudi, plants develop very precise and effective architectural stratagems. He was not only inspired to duplicate nature, but also to learn its properties, imitating them to reproduce an architectural order. He said: "I do not invent anything; I copy the large, always open book of nature." (De Jaegher, 2014). Gaudi's work is a fantastic demonstration of a singular appropriation of nature and its order, producing his own unique visual language. From the prehistoric imprints of nature of the Carboniferous period (Black, 2012) to the buildings of Gaudi, we can read nature as a book of interactive tells, of technological secrets, proposing order and serving as the palate for the birth of symbols, of structures, of forms, and of new functionalities.

The cognitive experimental psychologist Stanislas Dehaene, in *How Learning to Read Changes the Cortical Networks for Vision and Language* (2010) and in his conversation paper *What Are Numbers, Really? A Cerebral Basis for Number Sense* (1997), showed that the shapes of letters do not stem solely from arbitrary cultural choices but have been oriented by our capacity to recognize the natural forms that surround us.

The creation of visual signs offered to humanity a tangible form of control, establishing relationships between the world and themselves. Via anthropomorphic, even surrealistic signs, human beings attributed sense to their intentions and behaviours. Thus, unfolded the storytelling of civilizations.

DISCUSSION

Pre-historical humans buried their dead, carved tools, produced jewellery and figurines, and decorated the caves and rocks with a rich array of images: animals, humans and geometric signs. Paintbrushes, pencils and cameras offer further points of view, in a continuous flow of storytelling, witnessing, and creating (hi)stories. We are more engaged by storytelling than by lists of facts – it is easier to remember stories. Our brains make little distinction between experiences evoked by reading and ones that actually happen. Images add an instantly grasped component to storytelling that texts or numbers do not.

The human intuitive and sensitive intellect does not work like a processor and the physical world is not actually a mathematical structure, but rather symbols and graphics become deductive codes to build with algebraic structures, aesthetics effects and or collective ideas of social living and ethical comprehensions. These are the ways that a singular, subjective eye is evolved to provide meaning and knowledge and is evolved to explain the physical world.

It is thus not surprising that Dan Zarrella, HubSpot's social-media scientist, has found that tweets with images are 94% more likely to be retweeted than tweets without images, or that the Instagram platform has become a powerful political and marketing tool (Zarrella, 2013).

HOW, THEN, DO IMAGES INFLUENCE OUR VIEW OF THE WORLD?

They most likely correspond with how each, distinctly, 'sees' the world. Images also shape international events and guide our considerations of them. Engravings, photographs and films influence our approach to events like war and disasters, as well as cultural happenings. These days, visual dynamics are transmitted instantly, via various media, and they impact morals, ethics, and social and cultural belonging. The power of images is their capacity to impact the brain and therefore affect all political, social, and cultural choices (Bleiker, 2018).

In *The Vision Machine* (Virilio, 1988), Paul Virilio investigates the perception, production and dissemination of images throughout history, presenting a survey of art history, as well as of technology, war and urban planning. The logistics of imagery have become even more powerful, with the intervention of photography and cinematography proving that history unfolds into the process of 'seeing', generating a collective 'social existence'.

Endless anonymous postcards, family albums, Instagram posts and drone images, among many other forms of imagery, define the paths of the humanities.

Although one may say that images are data-accumulating traces, one may also argue that creativity, the major asset of humanity, is responsible for the process of building (hi)stories. Humanity is the creator of its own knowledge. Logic does not reflect the world as it is, independently of us reason mirrors the structure of our creative mind.

Images work at numerous overlapping levels, across national boundaries and between physical and psychological (idiosyncratic) worlds. No matter how diverse and complex visual images and artefacts are, they all have one thing in common – they work differently than words.

They are often ambiguous and infused with emotions. That is their very nature.

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