The Atlas as Method: The Museum in the Age of Image Distribution[*]

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| abstract

With the scope to develop survival strategies out of Covid-19 pandemia, many museum had to re-define their space of representation and turned to digital communication. A common trend was to digitalise collections and archives in order to make these available to visitors. The blurred boundaries between consumption and production in art and social media, and the overwhelming of spaces of visibility questioned the museum as space of representation towards one of distribution. A prognosis came from the exhibition *Supermarket of Images* (Jeu de Paume, Paris, 2020) as it raised the issue of the economy of images, of saturation and of spaces of visibility. The text emphasises the consequences on the role of museum in the time of increased digitalisation. For many commentators the reference for understanding the changing role of the museum was Malraux's *musée imaginaire* which became an icon of a loose understanding of domestic museums. However staging art at the "level of the image" doesn't go without consequences and calls for incorporating in museum studies new methodologies. Ultimately the text upholds Warburg's "atlas" as an imperative to understand the stratification of images and their trade routes and, as a better tool for investigating the museum's function in the age of image distribution.

Introduction, or Pandemic Unveiling

Entering the digital realm implies a change of paradigm (Wong, 2021)

It has been a challenge for museums to remain "open" during 2020 and 2021. "Open" has been one of the primary slogans of cultural institutions during this period. It indicated an act of resilience in the hope that the pandemic will soon at least decrease in strength. The claim of being "open" indicated also an exit strategy from the lockdowns and imposed closures. Many institutions have tried to mark their visibility and presence by using this slogan, which has meant being accessible and which implied the use of digital tools. With a daily loss of € 1,000 to € 100,000 for the larger institutions during closures (NEMO, 2020, p. 7), museums have had to develop survival strategies. For many, this has necessitated a redefinition of their space of representation. The initial

questions and worries, alongside the obvious need for economic survival, were: «How do we keep in contact with our visitors?» «How do we make our collections available?' How do we stimulate cultural exchange?».

The immediate answer seemed to be to digitise collections and hold online exhibitions (Colombo, 2020a; Doyle, 2020). In fact, the very first prediction articulated in the press was to see an increase of online exhibitions. Moreover, these were the expected outcomes of studies and surveys on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on museums. However, as the initial report in May 2020 and those which followed have shown, this was far from being a substantial result. According to ICOM (International Council of Museums), restrictive measures did lead some museums to develop their digital activities. Indeed, early in the summer of 2020, online art journals and platforms began advertising selections of the best online shows to visit, mimicking the summer tradition of advising the public on what to see. However, contrary to expectations, such activities increased by only about 15 % during the lockdown (ICOM, 2020a, p. 10) and were usually disappointing experiences. Moreover, those museums that became more involved in digitising their collections were in fact already doing so. This might be, quite simply, due to the fact that it was difficult to implement digitisation, which would have necessitated hiring new staff, drawing up contracts and so on at a time when most non-necessary economic activities were frozen. What did increase in use during the harshest periods of the pandemic was social media, with the aim of appealing to audiences through participatory actions. These uses increased, in some cases as early as the first lockdown of the pandemic, for an average of 50 % of the institutions that answered the surveys conducted by UNESCO, ICOM and NEMO.

Thus, online exhibitions per se did not seem to be an answer for the future. This could be because, generally speaking, the digital is neither an "addition" nor an either/or proposal when compared to analogue. An example of the difficulty of the shift from analogue to digital is that of the *Raffaello 1483-1520* (2020). An exhibition dedicated to the great master of the Italian Renaissance held in Rome at the Scuderie del Quirinale. A few days after its opening to the public, the curators of the exhibition were forced to close it, offering online content as a follow-up.[1] This solution found a great deal of attention from the digital public, only initially. A similar occurrence was experimented even by the most popular institutions for online initiatives, as the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza (NEMO, 2020a, p. 17). This point was particularly evident in the follow-up reports centred on the economic and labour consequences of the pandemic. UNESCO's latest report (2021) shifted its attention to more pressing issues, focussing on how cooperation between institutions and national or international networks could support museums' infrastructure, with NEMO providing a toolkit for applying for European funding for culture (2021).

The debate around the need to digitise museums has, in fact, been going on for 10 to 15 years (Garmil, 1996; Colombo, 2020b). However, the digital turn in museum studies, invoked by Jeffrey Schnapp in the previous decade, was not really about online exhibitions. The whole action of embracing the digital world involves a transformation at the heart of the museum's identity and modus operandi (Schnapp, 2015). This point clearly surfaced on 23 January 2019, when William Griswold, director of the Cleveland museum, proudly

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1. The exhibition dedicated to Raphael commemorating the 500th anniversary of his death was heavily challenged by the Pandemic. The curators tried to keep the point of the exhibition alive by a program called #RaffelloOltrelamostra in which curators from their studio at home talked about the exhibition. Conscious of the impossibility of moving the exhibition online they only offered talks without providing any image.

announced that all of the museum's collections had been licensed with Creative Commons Zero (Griswold, 2019). The direct consequence of this was that everybody could download and use any of the images in the collection (figure 1).

Figure 1. View of The Cleveland Museum of Art's touch interactive ArtLens Wall featuring "Open Access Highlights" from The Cleveland Museum of Art's Open Access program. Image by Cleveland Museum of Art, CC BY 4.0.

This simple example shows how the digital implies a radical shift from thinking of the museum as a place of storage and pilgrimage to thinking of it as a platform or hub in which experiences, whether in person or not, are provided in differing, convergent and divergent forms and formats. In other words, the museum is a fabric of connections, not just of collections (Schnapp, 2015)[2].

In light of the above, the aim of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it is to investigate the implications of this transformative path that has been put under the spotlight by the pandemic. Secondly, it is to suggest a framework to investigate it in the future, drawing on the basics of Warburg's methodology in the Atlas of Mnemosyne, which is posited as a better tool than André Malraux' often cited concept of the "imaginary museum".

The Rhetoric of Participation

The point raised by Jeffrey Schnapp about a museum's potential to become a fabric of connections has been embraced during the pandemic through the use of quasi-oppositional tactics. On the one hand, museums indicated that they had to connect to local or artistic communities by offering their spaces for making and production. In Italy, examples of this kind are the Mambo Museum in Bologna's project *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, through which its spaces were made available for artistic production (Balbi, 2021, p. 34). Similarly, Macro museum in Rome offered a space called *Reharsal* to artists in which to present works in the making[3]. These activities indicate a shift in the position of museums

2. After this paper was written a new definition of "museum" was given by ICOM. A fact that confirms the main points of this paper and aligns with some of the major changes in the role of museums, see https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-approves-a-new-museum-definition/ (accessed October 2022).

3. *Reharsal* is intended as a space available to artists to test their works in progress or not yet fully finished. The project is part of a three year program inspired by the "Bureau for Preventive Imagination", established in 1973 by Carlo Maurizio Benveduti, Tullio Catalano and Franco Falasca. https://www.museomacro.it/institution/museum-for-preventive-imagination/ (accessed October 2022).

from simply collecting and exhibiting valued and recognised finished artworks towards valuing the artist's creative process.

The other tactic, which is the focus of this article, is for the museum to connect with the visitor by offering engagement of some sort, with a strong tendency to share, or make digitally available, the museum's collection. This typically involves high definition images, manipulation and, in some cases, also gaming.

The common reference when describing these initiatives was and, in many cases, still is Malraux's *musée imaginaire*, often translated as the «museum without walls» (Allan, 2020; Gale, 2020)[4]. The French art historian has become the icon of a loose understanding of domestic museums, photographic encyclopaedias and digital museums. In a famous series of photographs taken by Maurice Jarnoux in 1953, we see Malraux standing in his living room. Viewed from above, he ponders and rearranges scores of photographs of artworks from various cultures and epochs, which are set out on his floor. The *musée imaginaire* is a collection of photographs of artistic treasures. It does not "replace" the art museum. Malraux was aware of the insidious effect of reproduction: works all look the same size, the closeness imparts a likeness and homogenises radically different objects.

What Jarnoux's famous photographs show us, is art in the process of being decontextualised. This is a key element of Malraux's thinking and also the linchpin of his defence of the idea of the museum. By taking an artwork out of its original context through a photographic reproduction, and manipulating it through the use of scale, lighting and angles, he could liberate it. His art history books, in which he arranged photographs of artworks from all around the world, he allowed readers to discover the universal styles and forms of art, and ultimately the essence of creativity (Bickerton, 2017).

It is this point that becomes crucial when museums distribute images. By taking the artwork out of its context, the museum aims to offer to the visitor the opportunity to become an "active user" and to unleash his or her own creativity. The trajectory of this involvement of the spectator has been investigated brilliantly by Dario Gamboni in *Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art* (2002). In this volume, the art historian shows that, over the centuries painters, tried various techniques to increase the involvement of the spectator. In order to attain this goal, deliberate ambiguity and indeterminacy were, according to Gamboni, the strategies painters utilised to attempt to transfer agency from the artist to the spectators (Gamboni, 2002). In short, the spectator is called to "complete" the painting. The central premise of this is the idea that seeing is a creative process. It is exactly this point that many museum's online initiatives aim at: to make the viewer a co-creator.

Progressive art pedagogy was already gesturing towards art participation at the beginning of the XX century and was reinforced by the contribution of philosophers such as John Dewey, who formulated his pedagogy around the idea of "learning by doing" (Dewey [1934] 2005). It is in light of this pedagogy, mixed with the necessity to attract the attention of the visitor, that projects such as that of the Rijswijkmuseum in Amsterdam were shaped. As Malraux did in his sitting room in Paris in 1953, the Rijswijkmuseum's visitor can make up his or her own collection of images from crops, details and full images of artworks from all over the collection (#Rijksmuseumfromhome) (figure 2). The possibility to zoom in to closely inspect the details and gain an intimacy with the painting is also made available to the visitor. In the online viewing of *Rembrandt's Nachtwacht* (*The*

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4. The references are only exemplary, many were the articles referring to Malraux above all: Pandemia e Musei, 2020; Hoffman, 2020; Joselit, 2021.
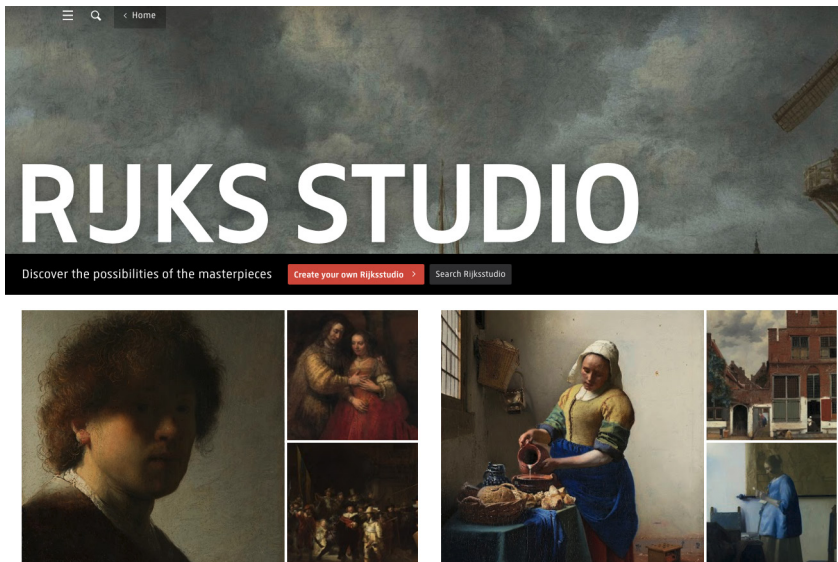
Figure 2. Snapshot from Rijksmuseum website, https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio (last accessed October 2022).

Night Watch, 1642), for example, figures from the crowd that would be difficult to single out when standing in front of this large canvas, which measures more than three by four metres, are isolated and zoomed in on.

Could digitisation be the answer to Rosalyn Krauss's call for a closer encounter with artwork? (Krauss, 1990). To be fair to Krauss, the plea was made in relation to an architecturally-determined museum space. It was a direct critique of the triumph of "star-architecture" for museums, in which the external wrapper overshadowed the artwork. However, the point of making a closer encounter with artwork available to everybody (something similar to democratisation, even if the word is not used) is the rhetoric which underpins its promise. The dark side of this rhetoric is that it also implies the power to control through the media (Mbembe, [2017] 2019). Moreover, Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd raise various valid points demonstrating how, through user-generated content, art is commodified by capitalism, while the boundaries between consumption and production in art and social media becomes blurred (Dimitrakaki & Lloyd, 2015).

What is happening within the conjuncture of the pandemic reminds us of what Claire Bishop wrote in *Radical Museology*, when, due to austerity measures, museums are forced to turn back to their collections because funds for loan-based temporary exhibitions have been slashed, «the permanent collection becomes the museum's greatest weapon» (Bishop, 2013, p. 24). Bishop compares it to a "time capsule" of what was once considered culturally significant which, for the museum, can become a meaningful proposition for the future, indicating the strength and contemporary relevance of the museum in times of crisis. As a proof of this, during the pandemic most biennials, usually considered the privileged site of the contemporary art world, were cancelled or postponed, being unable to offer an alternative exhibition programme.

For museums turning to the collections and putting them online, however, was not without consequences. Bishop herself is cautious and warns that when art is «staged on the level of the image», there is a creation of an «alter-reality» (Bishop, 2013, p. 12).

The blurred boundaries between consumption and production in art and social media, and the overwhelming of spaces of visibility, call into question the museum as a space of representation, reconfiguring it towards one of distribution. Following Benjamin's discourse, Szendy highlights that the museum loosens its protection function to

take part in the infinitely reproducing process provided by distributive networks (Szendy, 2019, pp. 79-83). However, distributive networks have their rules and being online implies a change of paradigm.

The Condition of Visibility

Peter Szendy calls the secret writing of images' appearance "resolution" (Szendy, 2020, p. 29) with reference to its coding and formatting. All digital images are rewritten, as they are coded and uncoded in order to navigate the network. A blue sky will take up less space on the network if its colour characteristics are expressed in a statistical formula rather than by specifying the exact shape of each pixel. This process of coding and decoding, which connotes what we call "compression", is almost invisible, but it allows the image to travel rapidly within the network.

The more this process is refined, the more images will be in high resolution. This inevitably results in a distinction between "rich and poor", the description of which I borrow from Hyto Steyerl

poor image is a copy in motion. Its quality is bad, its resolution substandard. As it accelerates, it deteriorates. It is a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution (Steyerl, 2009, p. 1).

The consequence of such process makes resolution the condition of the visibility of the digital image; something that we experience with frustration when we can find only a low resolution image of a photograph that we like. We cannot see it well. Its visibility is compromised. In the case of the museum online, this translates into a pretty blunt consequence: digital strategies of communication are the tip of the iceberg, hiding below a more complex issue of communication modes of interacting with the public (i.e. The museum with better funding will have high resolution images). Resolution is simply an indicator of the quantity of details condensed into an image. However, its characteristics condition not only its consumption; it is also a communicative process of its own shadow. As Antonio Somaini states in his analysis of Thomas Hirshhorn's *Pixel-Collage* (2015-2016), in which the artist tackles the widespread practice of pixelating images in order to protect viewers' sensibilities, «controlling resolution is a way of controlling visibility, with all the aesthetic, epistemological, ethical and political implications that this entails» (Somaini, 2020, p. 145).

The conditions of our gaze cannot be fully addressed without a clear understanding of the way in which the degrees of resolution establish differing thresholds of visibility and differing economies of attention. Entering an image into a network produces asymmetries in visibility, conditioning it by speed differentials. The conditions of resolution thus create a condition of vision that is connected to the mastering of the platforms, which is what museums are called to do.

Just before the pandemic broke out in Paris, the Jeu de Paume hosted the exhibition *Le Supermarché des Images* (The Supermarket of Images) which made a point about the distribution of images, using the museum as public platform to raise attention to the shadow economy of art (figure 3). This exhibition ended up being a prophecy for
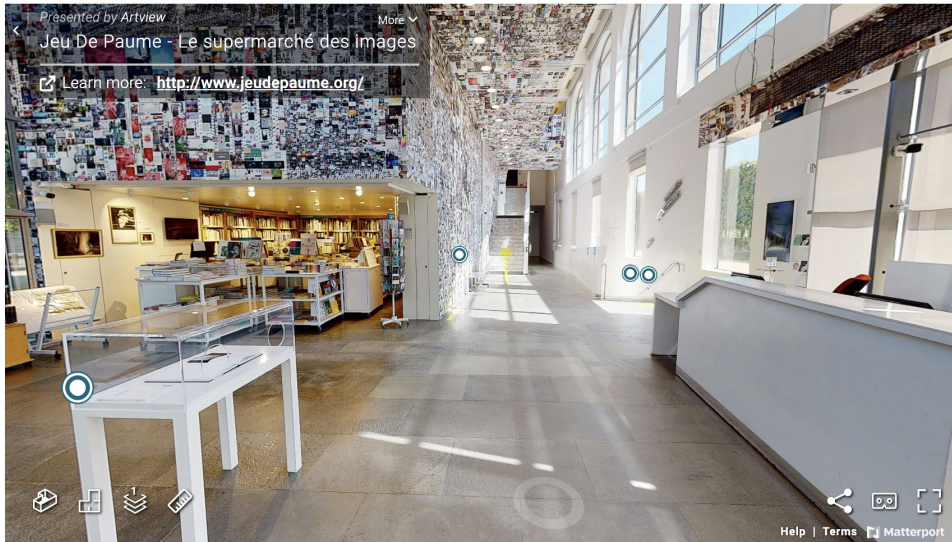
Figure 3. Screenshot of *Supermarket of Images'* online viewing page, https://jeudepaume.org/evenement/le-supermarche-des-images-2/ (last accessed October 2022).

the museum system of image production in itself, putting under the spotlight a process which, as mentioned above, did not start with the pandemic, but which became viral during it. The incipit of the catalogue essay by Peter Szendy, whose writings inspired the exhibition, cry out: «There are so many images. So, so many. An immeasurable quantity, a literally immeasurable flood of them» (Szendy, 2020, p. 18).

Learning that about 350,000 images are downloaded in a single day evokes a feeling of being drowned in representation. This is even more true in light of the pandemic. We all rely on downloading image files of all sorts for daily purposes, such as working, shopping, distance learning, fun, entertainment and so on. What would that number look like today? Relating this question to the museum strategies of engagement: how does one gain visibility in such a saturated situation? It therefore becomes central to not only understand how digital images gain their appearance, how their visibility is connected to their coding, formatting, weight (being rich or poor images) and so on, but also to recognise the significance of the management of surfacing the images into visibility, in other words, their distribution. But which methodology?

The Museum as an Atlas

Digital images follow paths of the *Electronic Super Highways* (1995). This term was initially coined by Korean artist Nam June Paik and it expressed in the Nineties his vision for the future. In his huge installation made of waves of audio and visual media, he envisioned that, in the future, communication would be boundaryless due to advanced technology[5]. The electronic superhighways, though, act as trade routes, along which images are exchanged, connected and charged by various elements. Moreover, fibre broadband connection avenues are made of speed differentials which connect and democratise in theory only. As the video The *Land of Wandering Souls* (2000) by Rithy Panh shows, the workers digging trenches to lay optical fibre cable linking Southeast China with Europe,

5. *Electronic Super Highways* is visible on the Smithsonian American Art Museum website as it was a gift of the artist, 2002. https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/electronic-superhighway-continental-us-alaska-hawaii-71478 (accessed October 2022).

do not even have electricity, so they are completely cut off from these networks. More-over, image trade routes follow those previously used to conquer and colonise and the «cable geography is layered into a geopolitical matrix of pre-existing colonial and national routes» (Starosielski, 2015, p. 30). One example among many are the two fibre-optic cables connecting New Zealand to the outside world, which are located in the same zones as those of telegraph cables from the early XX century.

It is necessary for any analysis of the shift of the museum towards being an image sharing and visitor content generator to take into account these "speed differentialities", because there are aspects that are beyond one's control when an image enters the network. I suggest we need to devote our attention to a more cautious understanding of pathways and vehicles of visibility. Instead of examining the current situation of content sharing by museums in light of the musée imaginaire, I propose taking into consideration the consequences of having the museum collection at one's fingertips, and to look at the routes of image trade, through which images travel, change and are re-shaped. In this regard, Aby Warburg's fundamental notion of an Atlas is particularly useful. Or more precisely, what could be a fruitful methodological hint: Warburg's imperative of examining the mechanisms of transmission underlying the dynamics of the process of image formation (Warburg & Rampley, [1926-29] 2009, p. 281).

Despite the fact that we face a reverse situation. In his Mnemosyne panels Warburg was connecting distant images in time, showing the recurrence, the shadow survival of icons in image formation over time (Mnemosyne atlas, 2012). Today, this process is apparently at the surface. Warburg's atlas itself entered the image process formation of contemporaneity, with Gerard Ritcher being one example among many (Buchloh, 1999). However images distant in time juxtaposed on our screens resemble Warburg's atlases only iconographically, generating, paradoxically, the opposite of Warburg's desired effect: disorienting, or giving an idea of a constellation, not of similarities but of vastity. So, why invoke Warburg's guide rather than Malraux's popular imaginary museum?

The success of the musée imaginaire has lost nothing of its appeal (Grasskamp, 2016, p. 33). It has even gained more popularity with the pandemic, despite the Malraux myth shrinking a little after each new study, as many embellished or invented episodes of his life are sized down. Nevertheless, the exact meaning of the imaginary museum has slipped away. As Grasskamp argues in his analysis in chapter two of his book on the French home de lettres, Malraux himself used it in different ways. The perpetuating myth of the expression lies instead in Jarnoux's images. The shooting was intended for a report in the magazine Paris Match. This article, which was enriched by many invented episodes of his life, was largely responsible for creating the myth about Malraux, who in those years, between 1954 and 1959, was taking a break from politics to dedicate himself to writing books about art. This nine-page reportage on his activity also featured the famous image of him standing in front of the selected photographs for his upcoming book, *Le Musée Imaginaire de La Sculpture Mondiale, Des Bas-Reliefs aux Grottes Sacrées* (1954).

What I would like to draw attention to are the images next to this one, which show an important detail that has not received the same consideration. Three photo crops of three paintings by Johannes Vermeer are under a magnifying glass (figure 4). In each image, the lens shows an enlargement and detail, as if one was clicking on the zoom button to enlarge it.

The scope of this was to demonstrate how Malraux, "the great art historian of times", was able to recognise the same figure model for the painter. However, as this series of Vermeer images in Paris Macht shows, he did not shed tears about the loss of aura and em-
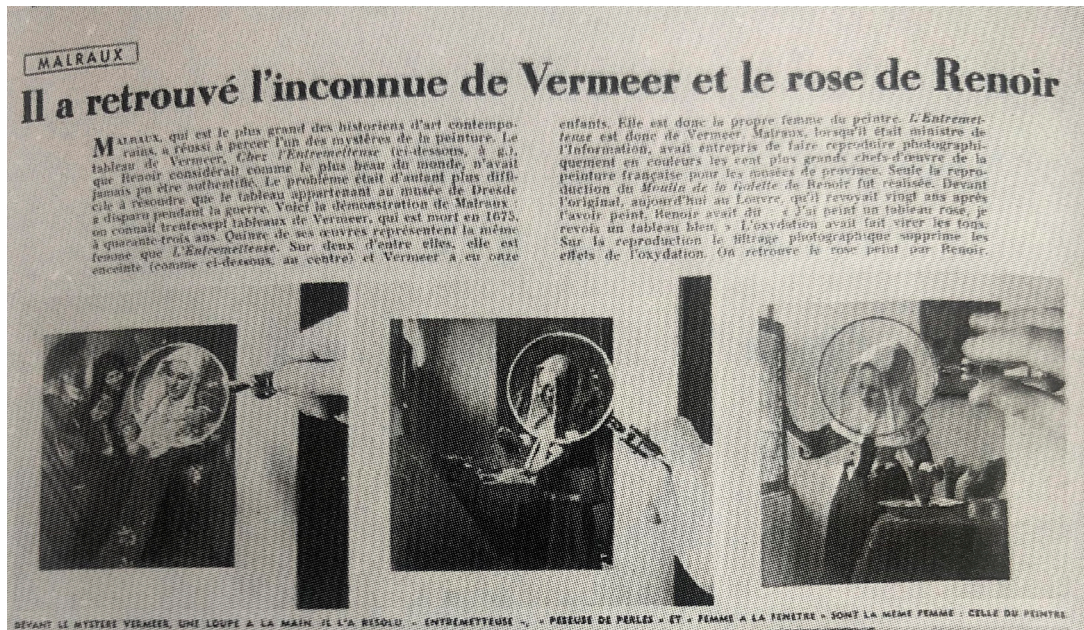
Figure 4. Photo crops of three paintings by Johannes Vermeer in *Paris Match*, 19 June 1954, p. 40.

braced the potentialities of the use of photography in art history. Borrowing from Alfred Salmony, assistant curator at the Cologne museum, he effectively used the methodology of making epochal stylistic comparisons with images[6]. The heritage of the musée imaginaire lays in the possibility of cropping provided by reproduction techniques. Details are discovered through photography. The effect of this is well described on the dust jacket of Glodscheider's art album Zeitlose Kunst: «Images of works of art that have an immediate impact on the viewer, even if he has hitherto had no interest in art history [...] these works [...] look as if they were made today» (Goldscheider, quoted in Grasskamp, 2016, p. 95).

Probably, the first and most evident proof of Malraux's reception took place in the hall of the Fridericianum Museum during the first documenta in Kassel in 1955 (figure 5).

Through an ahistorical juxtaposition of details of archaic and non-classical works, Arnold Bode thought to make a declaration of art being universal, showing how the modern forms that the visitor was going to encounter after this prologue were part of a long history.[7] The influence of Malraux can be traced through artists and thinkers until today, but what lasted alongside the cropping and juxtaposition, thanks to the Paris Macht report, was the idea of assembling and collecting images distant in space, time and economic possibilities at home. The intimacy of his gesture is recalled in the recent revival of the expression. Thus, Malraux should, in fact, be investigated more on the level of affect and desire.

For the future of the museum and art history, the investigators of the present shift, which implies moving collections online, have to necessarily take Warburg into consideration. Warburg's research into "die Wanderstraben der Kulture" (the trails of culture) was innervated by the desire to orient the viewer in the realm of thought. What Warburg called the "migration of images" proceeds along "migration pathways" that must be mapped as routes that allow for iconic exchange. It thus becomes fruitful to examine Museums as nodes of these migration routes.

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6. Grasskamp analyses André Vigneau's *Encyclopédie photographique de l'art* (1935-1949) as another important reference for Malraux. (Grasskamp, 2016, pp. 51-87).

7. Documenta archive reconstructed the plans of Bode for the first documenta making it available on their website, https://www.documenta-bauhaus.de/en/narrative/376/arnold-bodes-first-plan-for-documenta-art-across-national-and-genre-borders (accessed October 2022).

Figure 5. Exhibition view of the entrance area of Museum Fridericianum. documenta 1 (1955) Copyright: © documenta archiv (Dauerleihgabe der Stadt Kassel) / Foto: Günther Becker.

Museums, which tend to be perceived as repositories, are instead, and increasingly so, unaware actors in a display of image migration. One of the main activities through which transformation has silently occurred is, for example, museum merchandising. Cropping the digital image, and sticking it on pencils and mugs, has allowed, for example, the angels from the Madonna Sistina (1513-1514) by Raffaello to freely populate the imaginations of people around the world, even if the image was already popular thanks to fascinated writers as Dostoevsky (Gazzola, 2015). Museums should, thus, be investigated as the hubs of these migrations. Today, museum merchandising and, after the pandemic, engaging in public programmes, act as the astrological and cosmological images that were the vehicle trappings of Warburg's "high roads". The Mnemosyne Atlas, visible through the Warburg Institute virtual exhibition,[8] was an unfinished process and «the ever-shifting arrangement was not conducive to producing a definite version and had to remain fragmentary» (McEwan, 2006, p. 252). His methodology included utilizing "Wanderkarte" (the map of images), a psychogeographical tool to chart human inventiveness and memory. With the help of dots and lines, Warburg «tried to supply the guiding principles and orientation in the maze of our intellectual heritage» (259). He found it important to show people that, from a vantage point that was even higher than a tower, they could see, spread out below them, the network of roads and understand the connections. At the end of her analysis of Panel ACB of Mnemosyne (Seminario Mnemosyne, 2015) Dorothea McEwan concludes,

The routes of culture are presented in a web of net, in which one nodal point was Hamburg and Warburg's library. It would have delighted him if it would have been seen and used as hypertext and a worldwide web of information and symbols (McEwan, 2006, p. 259).

8. To view Warburg Institute's virtual exhibition visit https://warburg.sas.ac.uk/aby-warburg-bilderatlas-mnemosyne-virtual-exhibition (accessed October 2022).

Would he? The quotation regarding the museum imaginative is in itself indebted to Warburg. Even if, as Grasskamp points out, Malraux could not have known about Warburg, any possible similarities between the two was downsized by Wind, who noted that the Malraux museum was a «museum on paper» (Wind, 1960, p. 4 quoted in Grasskamp, 2016, p. 149). Warburg was aware of the possibility of a sense of heterogeneity. His project, remote from any positivist or neo-Kantian ambitions, operated through historical anachronisms and discontinuities. Using "montage-collision" (Michaud, 2004), he created textless collections of images which he himself warned did not create a salad but sense (Seminario Mnemosyne, 2001). The challenge for the museum lies in this warning. In the era of image distribution, we need to look through a heuristic rather than a journalistic filter. The translation of archives, collections into individual life stories' submits the image to a digital statute, the digitally produced image is a distributed image in the sense that it is open to a tendentially global social distribution via the internet. There is an inherent tendency in the distributive networks of the digital image to move the image on (Osborne, 2018).

It is here that I invoke the Atlas of being methodological, allowing for the search for orientating tools. Within this framework, museum strategies are scrutinised as temporary storages of trade routes, as places of custody, not closure or abandonment, but understanding that, already in themselves, the works are placed in a process of migration of meaning and that their recomposition on a screen can take place only by fragments. The interactive use of images offered by museum, as in the case of instagram project #gettymuseumchallenge, acted similarly to those in *Mnemosyne*

> as "engrams" capable of re-creating an experience of the past […]. As conceived by Warburg, his album of images represents the place in which original expressive energy can be rekindled in archaic figures deposited in modern culture and in which this resurgence can take shape (Michaud, 2004, p. 255).

Warburg's imperative to understand the stratification of images, tracing maps and building multiple atlases, has been brilliantly reshaped into one of possible usage by Szendy's notion of "iconomy" which points to the heart of the an important and overlooked museum' function. By "iconomy" he means the general economy of images in which an attempt is made to capture the laws of their circulation and exchange (Szendy, [2017] 2019). Through this lens, for example, we can understand museums as infrastructures of the visible that often form part of an unsuspected continuity with the communication networks which preceded them. Introducing, on the basis of their funding and mission, "speed differentials" into the visible facilitates the contrast between speed and extremely slow images propagation. The ability of the Rijswijkmuseum to offer images, in high resolution, easy to navigate with many opportunities is very distant from the Brera Museum in Italy, which does not have fewer masterpieces, but has a different funding policy. Thus, an investigation of the geopolitical pathways and their vehicles of visibility appears to be the central task of the future of museum studies.

The age of image distribution, which has only been accentuated by the pandemic, brings to the museum new methodological issues, that need to be oriented towards the spaces between images, the variations and repetitions, concentrations, inscriptions into what the atlas pointed to, the interval that involve tensions, analogies, contrasts that made up mnemosyne, memory and the museum-atlas itself.

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