ON THE EDGE OF MOBILITY

OR: THE UNCONSCIOUSNESS OF KINETICS

Thesis about aesthetics in space and time

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Abstract

The article tries to reflect the relation between space and time in different fields: the development of media and art, the concepts of modern and traditional cultures and traffic and the public sphere in the city. It shows that even the modern concept of time and speed is related to a point of standstill ans space. Also in modern physics all speed is a relative one and followed by a shadow or a unconsciousness in the form of a space-category. This is shown in the Japanese idea of iguse, a thought-picture that contains in a standstill alredy all possible movements as a monad.

Keywords | Media | Art | Monad | Public Space | City

ON THE EDGE OF MOBILITY

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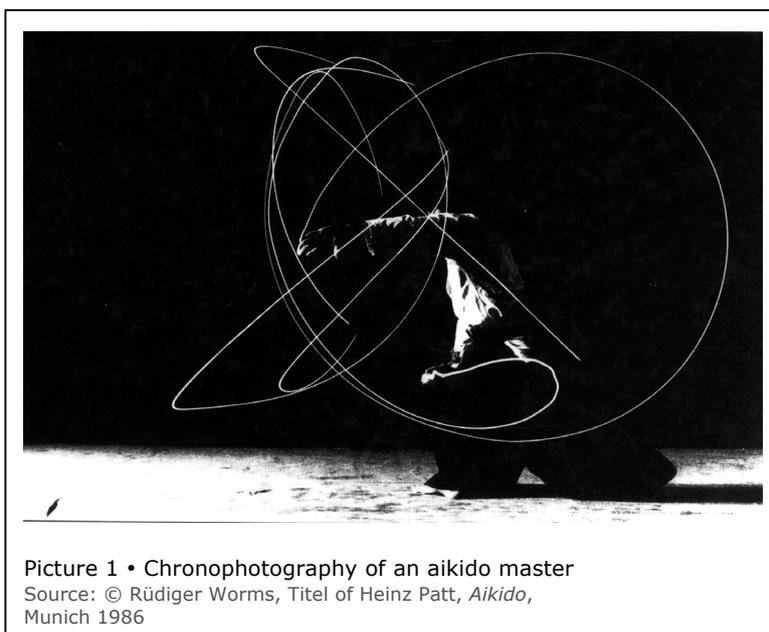# Thesis about aesthetics in space and time

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I.   Iguse

The Japanese concept of *iguse* is basing on a still position of a body, which contains all other possible movements, as in a nutshell.

Iguse does not mean a single film still, which stops the film at a certain point and cuts out a part of the floating stream. It is closer to the idea of *a whole virtual film in one picture*, from the beginning to the end – comparable to the monadic idea, popular in Baroque times: Each part of a mosaic contains the plan of the whole picture in itself – not evidently in *apperception*, but dreaming in *perception* – as Leibniz would have called it.[1]

In analogy to this concept, one might say, that all movements refer to a still point as *framing* the possibility of mobility itself. Instead of using the term frame, one may also talk about an *unconsciousness of moving* as a pattern of reference, where all movements are starting or ending. Needles to say, it might be that such a configuration is not static, but must be imagined as moving itself.

Picture 1 • Chronophotography of an aikido master
Source: © Rüdiger Worms, Titel of Heinz Patt, *Aikido*, Munich 1986

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II.   Modernity and mobility

Physics

Modernity can be described as a kind of *mobilisation* – in the double sense of making to move and preparing a war. In the ancient paradigm of the Greek, Romans and the early Christianity, the ground – the earth itself – is not moving, but standing still. Copernicus presented a new picture of the cosmos and Newton's description of a space based on the assumption, that gravity turns the static world as its normal status out to the moving as the new status of normality. Einstein could show, that even the former fixed position of the spectator is in movement and, in relationship to his position, the dimensions of the cosmos are changing within certain parameters themselves.
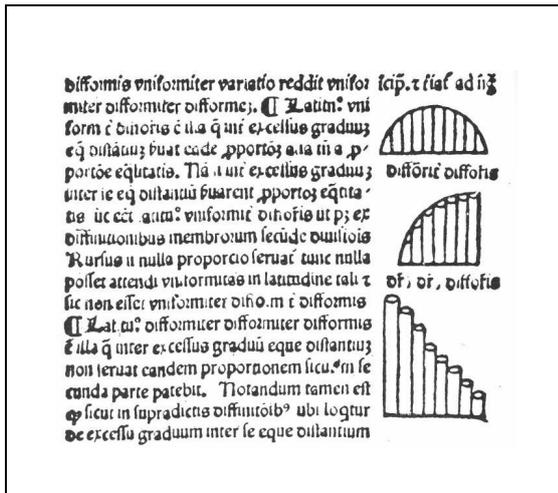

Picture 2 • God creates the stars
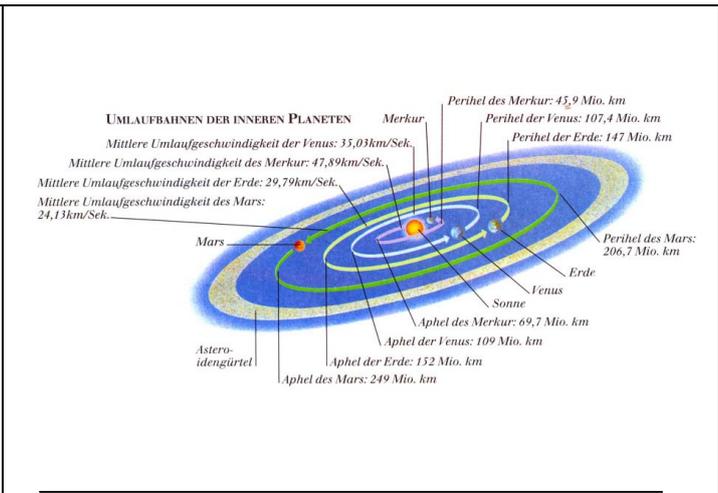Source: Postcard of Freiburg/Br. Cathedral, 1962, Karl Alber Verlag
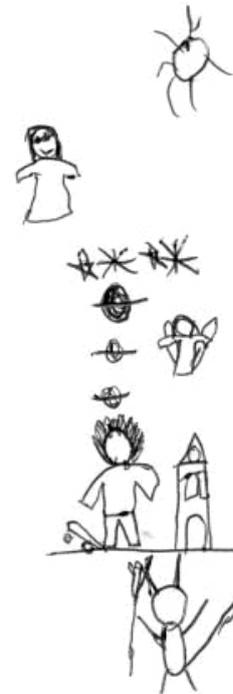
Picture 3 • Ancient topography of the world, children's drawing
Source: © Fabienne Arimont, Weimar

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Picture 4 • Nicolas Oresme, *First graphic of Movement,* Padua, 1550
Source: Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command*, Oxford 1948, p. 36

Picture 5 • Copernical system with the sun in the center
Source: Dorling Kindersley, *Ultimate Visual Dictionary*, London 1994, p. 30

From the painting to the cyberspace

Close to the development of the physical image of the world, it might be easy – referring to Lászlò Moholy-Nagy and Walter Benjamin – to describe the expansion of the materialistic base of aesthetics from immobility to movement in a sequence as:

painting (and sculpting), *photography*, *film*, *video* and three-dimensional objects in *cyberspace*, in which we are able to zoom in and out.

The canvas painting shows objects, which cannot move themselves;

- the film uses still photography and puts single images in a chronological order as Edweard Muybridge does the first time in his *chrono-photography* or Marey and Anschütz, which managed to put the line of images in one picture.

- video fixes floating pictures on a magnetic strip,

- while new digital equipments is based on data-storing no longer in an analogue way, which opens up possibilities not available though analogue processes.
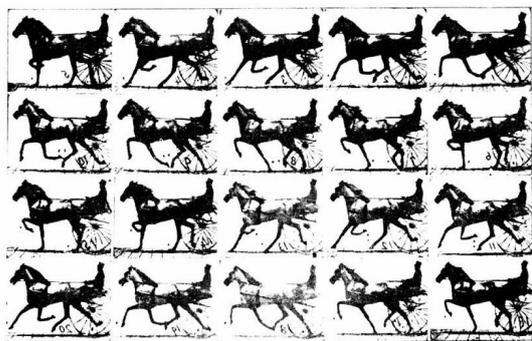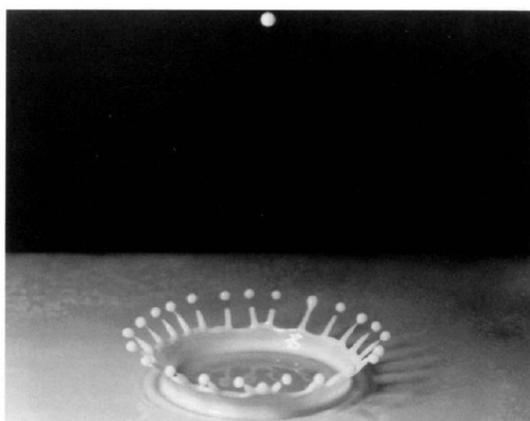
Picture 6 • Edweard Muybridge, *Chronophotography of a trotting horse*, 1887
Source: J. Peach, *Bilder von Bewegung – bewegte Bilder*, in: Monika Wagner, *Moderne Kunst*, Reinbek 1991, vol. 1, p. 238
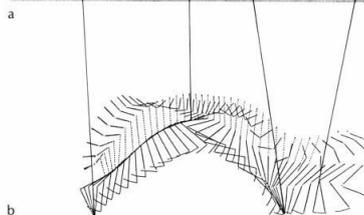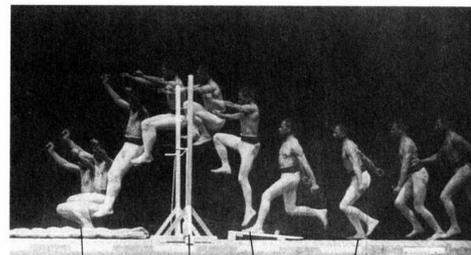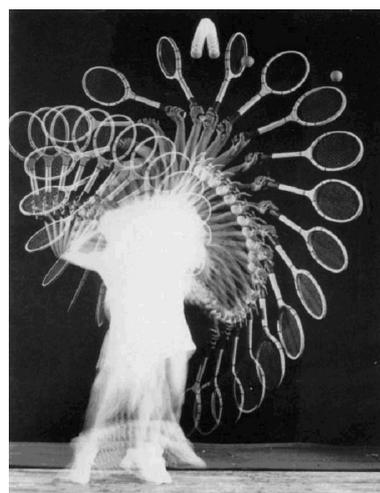

Picture 7 • Étienne-Jules Marey, *Chronophotography of a high jumper*, 1886; analysis of the phases of a high jump.
Source: German Film Museum, Frankfurt/M; cf. Paech, p. 239
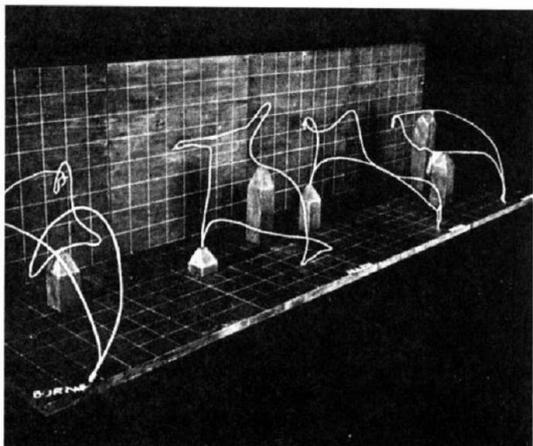

Picture 8 • Harold E. Edgerton, *A drop of milk*, 1936
Source: R. Mißelbeck, *Photographie des 20. Jahrhunderts. Museum Ludwig Köln*, Köln 1996, p. 146
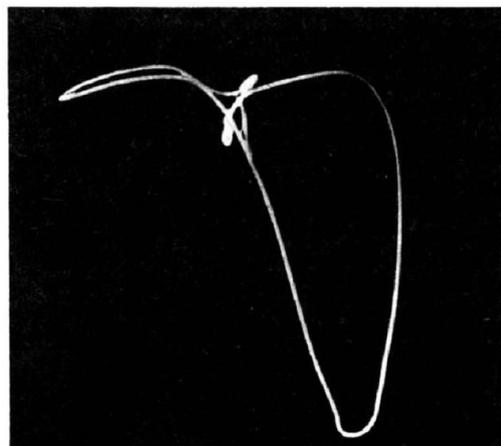

Picture 9 • Harold E. Edgerton, *Tennisplayer*, 1938
Source: Cf. Mißelbeck, p. 147

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Picture 10 • Frank B. Gilbreth, *wires of movements*, 1912
Source: Cf. Giedion, p. 129

Picture 11• Gilbreth, *Perfect movement, wired modell*, 1912
Source: Cf .Giedion, p. 131

But also the most advanced modern techniques of imaging – as to be seen in *Matrix I* (USA 1999) directed by the Wachowsky brothers – leads back to the principles of *chrono-photography*, by posing hundreds of cameras around the object and connecting them trough a computer.
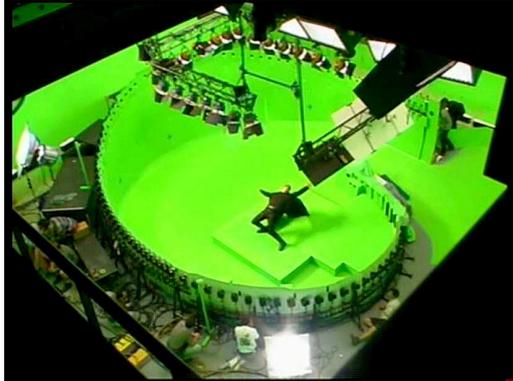

Picture 12 • Scene from *Matrix,* USA 1999
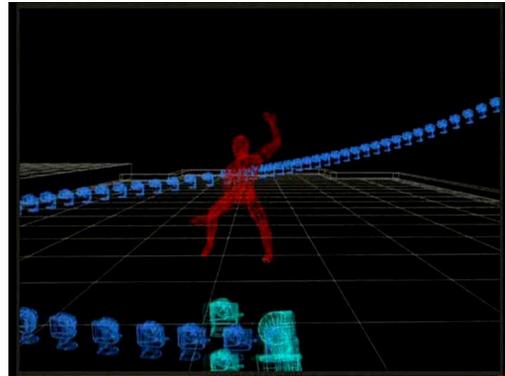Source: DVD Warner Brothers, 1999

Picture 13 • Scene from *Matrix,* USA 1999
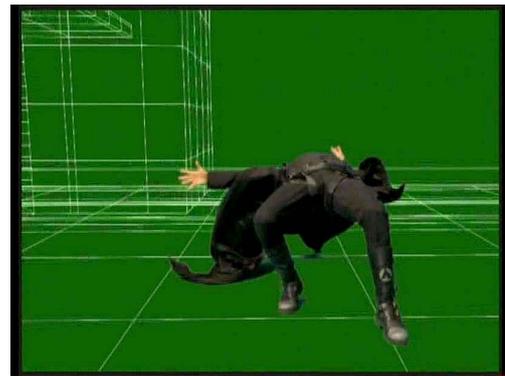Source: DVD Warner Brothers, 1999

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Picture 14 • Scene from *Matrix,* USA 1999
Source: DVD Warner Brothers, 1999

Picture 15 • Scene from *Matrix,* USA 1999
Source: DVD Warner Brothers, 1999

Picture 16 • Scene from *Matrix,* USA 1999
Source: DVD Warner Brothers, 1999

Picture 17 • Scene from *Matrix,* USA 1999
Source: DVD Warner Brothers, 1999

With this equipment one is able to go back and forth in order to create a new kind of three-dimensional film still. The high-speed cameras are so fast, that the shown composed image is again a still picture, but now to be seen from all angels. It is closer to the *iguse*-concept as to the cut of the traditional film-still.

Modern painting

As the Swiss architect Sigfried Gideon shows, the photographers Muybridge, Marey, Edgerton, Gilbreth and others influenced many modern artists, which took the principle of movement and transferred it back to the immobile painting.[2] Kandinsky, Duchamp, De-launey, Boccioni, Klee or Miro used principles of movement in static painting.

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Picture 18 • Marcel Duchamp, *Act, walking down the stairs*, 1912
Source: Ruhrberg et. al., *Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Köln 2000p. 129
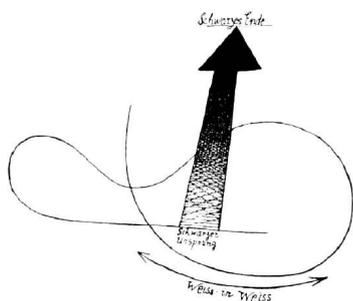

Picture 19 • Delaunay, *Tour Eiffel*. 1910/1911
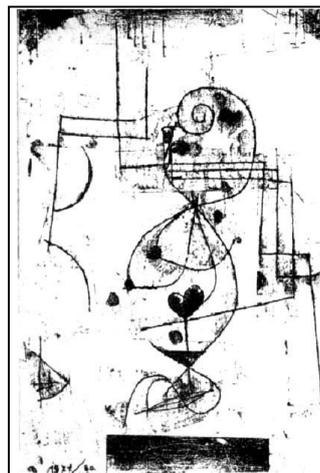Source: Basel, Museum of Art; cf. Monika Wagner, vol 1, p. 13
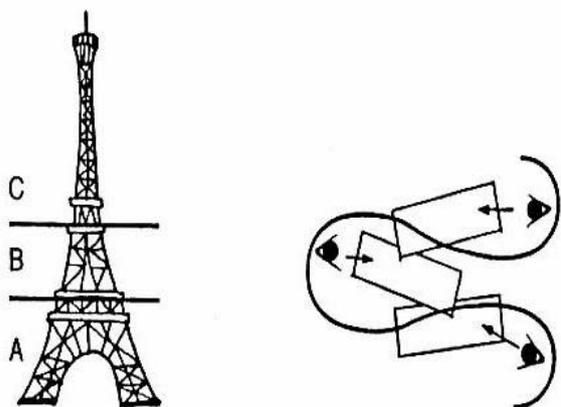
Picture 20 • Eisenstein, *Reconstruction of the diverse perspectives of Delaunay's Tour Eiffel*
Source: Cf. Paech, p. 245

Picture 21 • Umberto Boccioni, *Unique continuing forms in space*, 1913
Source: London, Tate Gallery; cf. Ruhrberg et. al., p. 435

Picture 22 • Paul Klee, *Design of the black ar-row*, 1925
Source: Cf. Giedion, p. 131

Picture 23 • Paul Klee, *The Queen of Hearts*, 1921
Source: Galerie Buchholz, New York; cf. Giedion, p. 136
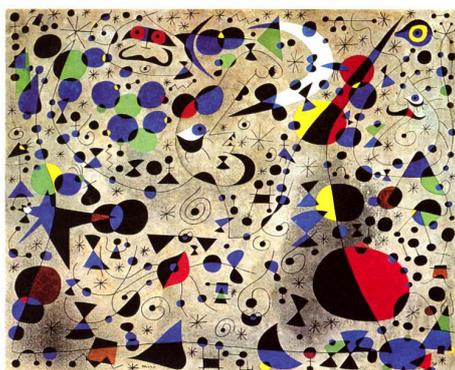
Picture 24 • Miro, *The poetess*, 1940
Source: New York, privat; cf. Ruhrberg et. al. p. 150
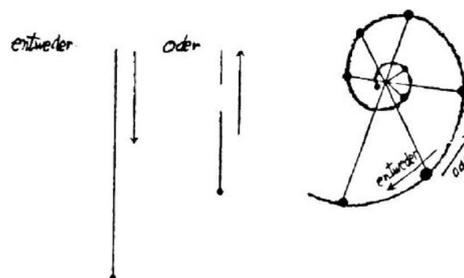
Picture 25 • Paul Klee, *Course at the Bauhaus in Weimar*, 1925
Source: Cf. Giedion p. 137

Especially Klee tries to show in his Bauhaus-course from 1925, how a point starts out to be a line, and a line to be a square; Moholy Nagy experimented on that base with early thee dimensional pictures.[3]

Picture 26 • Paul Klee*, Course at the Bauhaus in Wei-mar*, 1925
Source: Cf. Giedion p. 137

Modern abstract painting is refers to an imaginary space, which is not the same as real physical space. It has more to do with *psychic-space*, *body-space* and *dream-space* outside the real physical sphere of space and time. These movements are inside and outside movements at the same time.
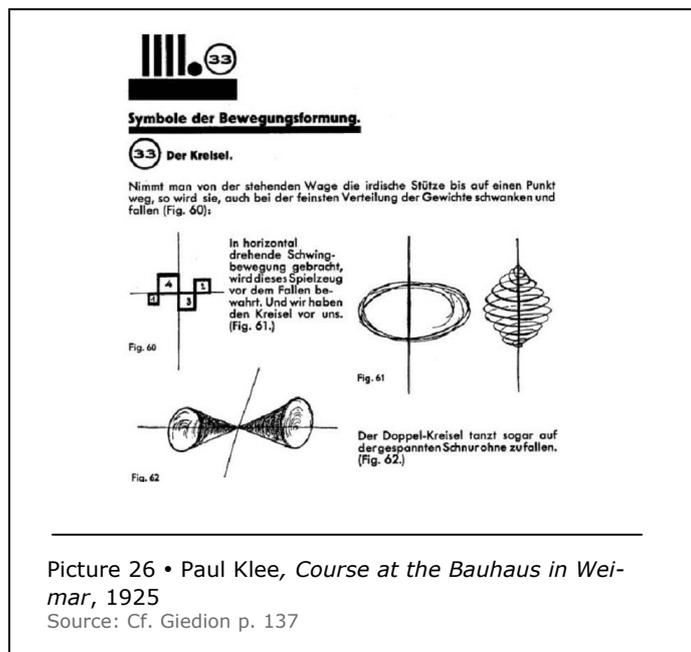
Also contemporary digital films – as one may explain with Gilles Deleuze – are going away from picturing the outside (moving) world and tending to show an imaginary (time based) world with new physical concepts and possibilities such as moving though walls and material, as if they would be real.[4] The Australian director Gregory Godhard dives in his films "Wormholes" (1996) and "Mind's eye (1998) into space and time.
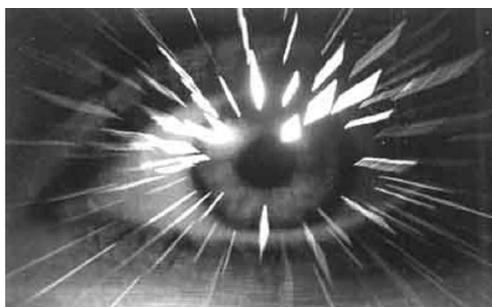
Picture 27 • Still picture of Gregory Godhard's film *Minds's eye*, AUS 1998, 16mm, color, 5 Min.
Source: www.exground.com/ archiv/ex12/120_6.html

Picture 28 • Still picture of Gregory Godhard's film
Source: http://www.acmi.net.au

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In this perspective, contemporary aesthetic theory – as *media-an archaeology* – is once again interested in the proto-forms of film, because newest film technique refers to the early films.[5]

In this perspective the concept of mobility is also changing from linear movements to circles and loops, which brings us back to the relationship between time and space or the frame of movement. But *unconsciousness of the moving* as we called it in the beginning, also means, that the modern digital films are no longer films in the sense of documenting the outer world – as the first films still did. They are closer to the spaces of inner worlds, than to the reality of material objects. But in film images the outer world is still represented in analogy to the principle of reality, which is still to be interpreted through the psychoanalyse of an individual's dreams.

III.   Space and time in early symbolic forms

The German philosopher Ernst Cassirer argues in an early essay, that the idea of aesthetics changes in a modern society based on an time concept such as the one Kant developed in transference of Newton's ideas. Ancient societies are based on a mythological concept which belongs to an idea of contiguity.[6] In this archaic place nothing gets lost: All the dead are present and so are all things. Cassirer uses the renaissance astrology and it's series of objects – minerals, plants, animals, temperaments, illnesses, wind directions, human characters, planets and astrological signs – as an example for a quality of time based on a schedule of moving in space.

Picture 29 • Leiter der Zahl Sieben
Source: Agrippa von Nettesheim, *De Occulta Philosophia. Drei Bücher über Magie* (1510), Nördlingen 1987, p.224-225

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Other popular examples for such a cosmos are Malinowski's description of the Kula-Ring-exchange in Polynesia: The *mwali* arm rings and the *soulava* necklaces are moving in periods of twenty years from the left to the right and from the right to the left in the archipelago.[7] Also Sigmund Freud shows, that in animistic societies the magic of similarity and mimicry – as it is for example shown in the voodoo ceremonies – are based on a contiguity of the both parts of influenced objects in a certain space.[8]
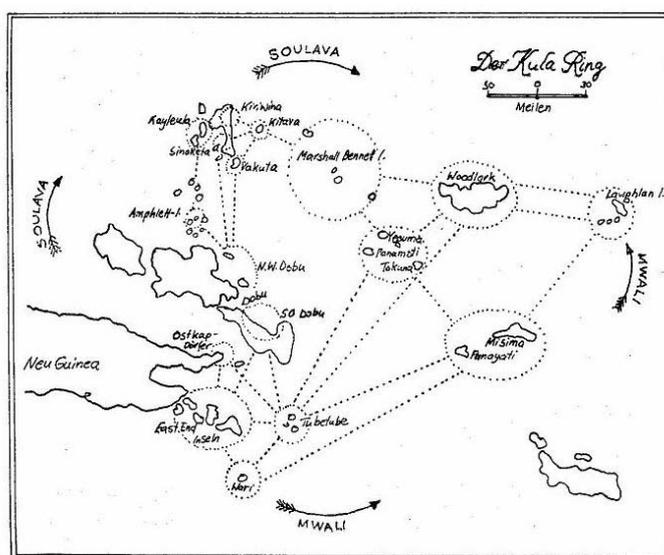
Picture 30 • The *Kula*-exchange
Source: Cf. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the western pacific.*
An account of Native Enterprise and Adventures in the Archipelagoes
of Melanesian New Guinea (German) Frankfurt/M. 1979, p. 114.

Cassirer explains, that the central relation of cause and effect in these systems – which includes, by the way, also the metaphysical implications of Christianity, Islam and Judaism with their resurrection of all dead at the Last Judgement – is based on a concept of mythological space.[9] Cassirer contends, that these systems are proto-philosophical systems. They a for him a step to a further step towards a development of science.

But these descriptions may not be a testimony of a lower level of knowledge, rather a clarification of the constant relationship between space and time. In his critic of Kant's experience and metaphysics, Walter Benjamin tries to explain, that such a spatial concept – of children, barbarians and lunatics – is close to the spatial concepts of modern literature and art (and we may add: and the digital image).[10]

This concept of space is also very close to Martin Heidegger's form of technique as a *Gestell*, which does not mean a frame as a gentry, but an unseen condition of its appearance, which is not part of the technical sphere itself.[11]

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IV.   Mobility and slowness

For a democratic speed

That would mean, that in the modern time-concepts the space is present as a frame, a barrier or as a unconsciousness moment. That leads us back to the afore mentioned sense of mobility as strategies and preparations for war.

In that case, modernity and enlightenment are confronted with the dialectical opponents of their intention, which brings back the slowness at the same time, that the official plan tries to speed up the society. Not only in a sense of art and philosophy – as Paul Virilio showed in his works about the relation between war and cinema and racing stagnancy in the negative horizon –, but also in the meaning of sociology for the public space.[12]

Let me just mention the research of my colleague Ivan Illich, who has shown, that the higher speed of a traffic system – for example as the automobile concept – affects the slower motion of other participants in public traffic space – as bikers or pedestrians, who have to pass around the highways, bridges and tunnels: *Isolation through traffic*. His concept of a *democratic speed* from the 1970s needs a new discussion in before mentioned context of new mobilisation.[13]
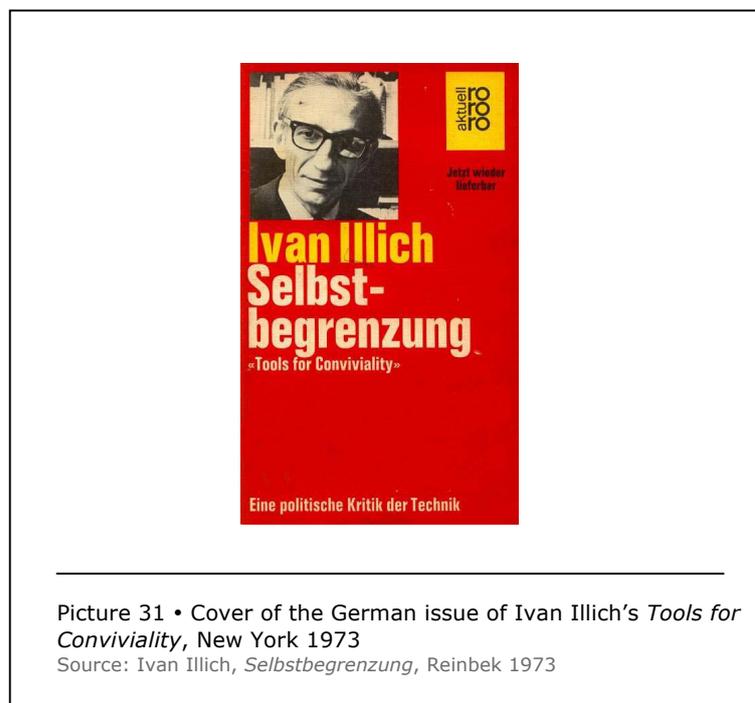
Picture 31 • Cover of the German issue of Ivan Illich's *Tools for Conviviality*, New York 1973
Source: Ivan Illich, *Selbstbegrenzung*, Reinbek 1973

Public policy is decided in the public space. The public space is not just an aesthetic room, but also involves the "economic" traffic of distributions and private moving. Physical

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movements are representative for all members of the society. Violence here is an *negative index of democracy in the society*. Therefore accident rates are not only tragic as a *blind faith*, but also an expression of the level of democratic development and civilisation.

On the edge of mobility

But the old sense of faith also is present in an other meaning. In modern concepts of mobility, the space is a kind of resource, which might be eaten in the way as in the old Greece triple concept of the Heptamychos *chronos*, the allegory of time, eats *chton*, the allegory of material in the frame of *zeus*, the allegory of space and ether.[14] It may show, that space is more than just a resource. One might say, that the public space is like an kinetic unconsciousness of mobility. It represents the backside of the willingly formed strategies.

Picture 32 • Saturn, the allegory of time, eating the torso of Apollo Belvedere, Amsterdam 1702
Source: Title of François Perrier, *Eigentlyke afbeeldinge van 100 der aldervermaedste statuen of antiquebeelden*, Amsterdam 1720

That brings back the interest to a new slowness. Also in aesthetics – as in mobile communication – one needs not just sudden appearance, but also distance and a space for reflections. The need of speed is always related to running away. But this pattern is something, which can not be done away with. As Franz Kafka expressed it:"The more horses you stretch tide, the faster it goes – not the lifting of the block out of the base, what is impossible – but the rupture of the strip and therewith the empty lucky journey" .[15]

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Picture 33 • Drawing by Franz Kafka
Source: Title of Franz Kafka, *Sämtliche Erzählungen*, Frankfurt/M. 1984

Picture 34 • Broken directional arrow in Ireland
Source: © by the autor

Notes

[1] „Each part of nature can be seen as a garden, full of plants and as a pond, full of fishes. But each branch of the plant, each part of the animal, each drop of its fluid is again such a garden or such a pond." (G.W. Leibniz, *Neue Abhandlungen über den menschlichen Verstand*", Stuttgart 1993, § 67, p.29.

[2] Cf. Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command*, Oxford 1948.

[3] Cf. Paul Klee, *Pädagogisches Skizzenbuch*, Bauhausbücher Nr. 2, herausgegeben von Walter Gropius und Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, München 1925.

[4] Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *L'image-mouvement*, Paris 1983*; L'image-temps*, Paris 1983.

[5] Cf Siegfried Zielinski, *Archäologie der Medien*, Reinbek 2002 and Erkki Ilmari.

[6] Cf. Ernst Cassirer, *Die Begriffsform im mythischen Denken* (1922), in: Ders., *Wesen und Wirkung des Symbolbegriffs*, Darmstadt 1956, P1-70. The text is a elementary study of his theory of symbolic forms.

[7] Cf. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauten des westlichen Pazifik*, Frankfurt/M. 1979, p. 114.

[8] Cf. Sigmund Freud, *Totem und Tabu*, *Studienausgabe*, hrsg. v. A. Mitscherlich et al., Frankfurt/M. 1970 Band IX, pp. 370-371. Cf. from the autor, *Astrologie und Aufklärung. Über modernen Aberglauben*, Stuttgart 1995, pp. 177-186. Further examples in Cassirer, *Denkform*, a.a.O., pp. 68-69.

[9] „Wenn das wissenschaftliche Denken bestrebt ist, den Primat des Zeitbegriffs vor dem Raumbegriff festzustellen und immer bestimmter auszuprägen, so bleibt im Mythos der Vorrang des räumlichen Anschauens vor dem zeitlichen durchaus gewahrt." (Cassirer, *Begriffsform*, a.a.O., pp. 48-49.

[10] Cf. Walter Benjamin, *Über das Programm der kommenden Philosophie*, Gesammelte Schriften, Frankfurt/M. 1983, Vol. II, 1, pp. 157-171; pp. 158-159.

[11] „Alles nur Technische gelangt nie in das Wesen der Technik. Es vermag nicht einmal seinen Vorhof zu erkennen." (Martin Heidegger, *Die Frage nach der Technik*, in: ders., *Die Technik und die Kehre*, (1962), Stuttgart 1996, p. 46).

[12] Cf. Paul Virilio, *Guerre et cinéma I, Logistique de la perception*, Paris 1984 ; *L'horizon négative*, Paris 1984 ; *L'inertie polaire*, Paris 1990.

[13] Cf. Ivan Illich, *Energy and Equity*, London 1974.

[14] Cf. Pherekydes von Syros, *Heptamychos*, in: Diels, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie I.*; *Berichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin*, 1897 und Diogenes Lartios, *Leben und Meinungen berühmter Philosophen*, Hamburg 1990, p. 8-12, sowie Fritz Mauthner, *Wörterbuch der Philosophie. Neue Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* (1910/11), Berlin 1923, p. 498.

[15] Franz Kafka, *Betrachtungen über Sünde, Leid, Hoffnung und den wahren Weg*, in: *Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande und andere Prosa aus dem Nachlass*, *Gesammelte Werke*, Frankfurt/M. 1983, Aphorismus No. 45, p. 33.