

artificial memory, which was itself also born of the catastrophic disappearance of the scenery. The story goes that the lyrical poet Simonides of Chios, in the middle of reciting a poem at a banquet, was suddenly called away to another part of the house. As soon as he left the room, the roof caved in on the other guests and, as it was a particularly heavy roof, they were all crushed to a pulp.

But with his sharpened memory, Simonides could recall the exact place occupied by each of the unfortunate guests and the bodies could thus be identified. It then really dawned on Simonides what an advantage this method of picking places and filling them in with images could be in practising the art of poetry.⁶

In May 1646 Descartes wrote to Elizabeth, 'There is such a strong connection between body and soul that thoughts that accompanied certain movements of our body at the beginning of our lives, go on accompanying them later.' Elsewhere he tells how he once as a child loved a little girl with a slight squint, and how *the impression his brain received through sight whenever he looked at her wandering eyes* remained so vividly present that he continued to be drawn to people with the same defect for the rest of his life.

The moment they appeared on the scene, the first optical devices (Al-Hasan ibn al-Haitam aka Alhazen's camera obscura in the tenth century, Roger Bacon's instruments in the thirteenth, the increasing number of visual prostheses, lenses, astronomic telescopes and so on from the Renaissance on) profoundly altered the contexts in which mental images were topographically stored and retrieved, the *imperative to re-present oneself*, the imaging of the imagination which was such a great help in mathematics according to Descartes and which he considered a veritable part of the body, *veram partem corporis*.⁷ Just when we were apparently procuring the means to see further and better the unseen of the universe, we were about to lose what little power had of imagining it. The telescope, that epitome of the visual prosthesis, projected an image of a world beyond our reach and thus another way of moving about in the world, the *logistics of perception* inaugurating an unknown conveyance of sight that produced a telescoping of near and far, a *phenomenon of acceleration* obliterating our experience of distances and dimensions.⁸

More than a return to Antiquity, the Renaissance appears today as the advent of a period when all intervals were cleared, a sort of morphological 'breaking and entering' that immediately impacted on the reality-effect: once astronomic and chronometric apparatuses went commercial, geographical perception became dependent on anamorphic processes. Painters such as Holbein, who were contemporaries of Copernicus, practised a kind of iconography in which technology's first stab at leading the senses astray occupied centre

stage thanks to singularly mechanistic optical devices. Apart from the displacement of the observer's point of view, complete perception of the painted work could only happen with the aid of instruments such as glass cylinders and tubes, the play of conical or spherical mirrors, magnifying glasses and other kinds of lenses. The reality-effect had become a dissociated system, a puzzle the observer was unable to solve without some traffic in light or the appropriate prostheses. Jurgis Baltrusaitis reports that the Jesuits of Beijing used anamorphic equipment as instruments of religious propaganda to impress the Chinese and to demonstrate to them 'mechanically' that man should experience the world as an illusion of the world.⁹

In a celebrated passage of *I Saggiatore* (1623), Galileo exposes the essential features of his method: 'Philosophy is written in the immense Book of Nature which is constantly before our very eyes and which cannot be (humanly) understood unless one has previously learned the language and alphabet in which it is written. It is written in mathematical characters... '

We imagine it (mathematically) because it remains continually before our very eyes from the moment we first see the light of day. If, in this parabola, the duration of the visible seems simply to persist, geomorphology has disappeared or is at least reduced to an abstract language plotted on one of the first great industrial media (with all the artillery so vital to the disclosure of optical phenomena).

The celebrated Gutenberg Bible had by then been in print for nearly two centuries and the book trade in Europe, with a printing works in every town and a great number of them in the capitals, had already disseminated its products in the millions. Significantly, the 'art of writing artificially' as it was then called, was also, from its inception, placed at the service of religious propaganda, the Catholic Church at first, then the Reformation. But it was also an instrument of diplomatic and military propaganda, a fact that would later earn it the name *thought artillery*, well before Marcel L'Herbier labelled his camera a *rotary image press*.

A connoisseur of optical mirages, Galileo now no longer preferred to form images in the world directly in order to imagine it; he took up instead the much more limited oculomotor labour of reading.¹⁰

From Antiquity, a progressive simplification of written characters can be discerned, followed by a simplification of typographical composition which corresponded to an acceleration in the transmission of messages and led logically to the radical abbreviation of the contents information. The tendency to make reading time as intensive as speaking time stemmed from the tactical necessities of military conquest and more particularly of the battlefield, that occasional field of