



# Remediations of the Image: Audiovisualizations and (Dis)Appropriations of the History of Art and the Visual Culture

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The release in 1972 of the television series *Ways of Seeing*, and the subsequent book of the same name, marked a radical intervention in the canonical narratives of art history. Produced by the BBC and led by writer and art critic John Berger alongside filmmaker Michael Dibb, *Ways of Seeing* quickly became a project as admired as it was criticized for its audacious challenge to art and culture conventions through television mediation (Fuller, 1981; Gould and Leblond, 2023). It was an experiment proposing alternative ways to write art history through media, paving the way for discussions that would develop later with the rise of visual studies and the interest in the plurality and dissemination of images, opposing the fetishistic mystification of the

original artwork and its authorship. Over fifty years later, *Ways of Seeing* continues to arouse interest because of its irreverent strategies: remediation and montage of images, collaborative writings, modes of (dis)appropriation, and other nonlinear ways of narrating art history departing from critically situated experiences instead of purportedly expert and hegemonic knowledge (Conlin, 2020).

Although these characteristics positioned *Ways of Seeing* as a crucial reference in the Anglophone realm of visual studies and the new art history (Mitchell, 1986; Pollock,

1988), its influence in the Spanish-speaking context appears to have been less extensive. To contribute to the debate around the relevance and continued importance of *Ways of Seeing* beyond its original context, this issue of *Umática* integrates a set of reflections on different cases of remediations of images, particularly from Latin America and Spain. These are investigations stemming from exercises and experiments that elude the conceptual and institutional architectonics of authorship, ownership, genius work, and the male gaze, among other characteristics inherent to the canon of Western art history.

By 1972, the boom in the television industry had already transformed daily life, producing a new audiovisual ecosystem (Zielinski, 1990). It was

in this context that television programs about art and its history gained popularity, most of which viewed television as a new medium to expand the reach of their traditional narratives. Among them, *Ways of Seeing* stood out for its critical use of the medium, demonstrating that a television program about art should primarily address art-as-seen-on-television (Sperling, 2019). This approach by *Ways of Seeing* was part of an intense debate about the social implications of television (Enzensberger, 1981; Hall, 1973; Negt and Kluge, 1993; Williams, 1974), as well as the experimentation with this medium in artistic practices (Spampinato, 2022). It also addressed the implications of such mediations for art history, which was then in crisis, confronted with problems that demanded new ways of defining its "objects of study," developing perspectives, and disseminating its knowledge (Rees and Borzello, 1986). The relevance and timeliness of *Ways of Seeing* thus lie in how it addressed all these issues in the form of a practical experiment through audiovisual mediation. Its paradox, however, revolves around it remaining an uncomfortable and unfeasible case for adoption by both the television industry and contemporary academic institutions despite its fame (Dyer, 1986; Wood, 2019).

The particular perspective of *Ways of Seeing* on the mediations of art history was not entirely new. Since the rise of photography, in the late 19th century, it has become evident that art history is always socio-technically mediated (Pehlivan and Şener, 2014). From Heinrich Wölfflin's lectures relying on photographic projections (Karlholm, 2010) and Aby Warburg's

famous *Atlas Mnemosyne* (Kalkstein, 2019), to the popularization of television programs about art and culture (Wyver, 2007; Walker, 1993), art history has consistently had to turn to different (audio)visual remediations to produce and disseminate its knowledge.

This special issue aims to foster a debate on remediation practices, not only as syntactic displacements from one medium to another but as translation and overflow operations occurring among the diverse materialities and discursivities involved in any social process of image production (Kember and Zylinska, 2012). Here, we aim to highlight the role of images in constituting the social field, conceiving them as assemblages that, at several scales, articulate different media with human and non-human agents interacting with them. Understood this way, remediation becomes a *mediation of mediation* (Bolter and Grusin, 2000, p. 55).

To approach remediation from this particular perspective, we have anchored the debate around two fundamental notions: on the one hand, the *audiovisualization* of art history and, on the other, the *(dis)appropriation* of visual culture. As complementary processes, these notions operate transversally throughout this issue of *Umática*, showcasing their various scopes in the case studies and problems addressed in each included investigation.

First, by audiovisualization of art history, we refer to the various processes stemming from this discipline's dependence on certain technical mediations for its development (López Cuenca, 2018; Preziosi, 1989; Ramírez, 1976). This issue

features reflections that interrogate the peculiarities of the television medium, conceiving it as a complex system of social and infrastructural relationships that surpass the technological boundaries of the device itself. Audiovisualization is thus understood as a socio-technical assemblage: from satellites, antennas, cables, and other apparatus (Parks and Schwoch, 2012), to the financing, legislation, and management of the radioelectric space (Streeter, 1996), the reorganization of public space (McCarthy, 2001; Silverstone, 1994), and domestic life (Spigel, 1992). This also includes the materiality of (re)transmitted images (Levin, 2022), the artistic and pedagogical processes generated (Thomson, 1979), and the networks of collaboration, activism, and self-organization that audiovisualization enables (Boyle, 1997).

Second, (dis)appropriation here refers to the various operations inviting us to critically reinscribe the vast array of images and meanings once released from institutional control. Written with the prefix (*dis*) in parentheses, the notion evokes a dual play of possibilities. Firstly, it refers to appropriation in its traditional (and therefore problematic) sense, as the act of taking material to inscribe it in a context different from its origin and mediating it differently. Secondly, it refers to disappropriation as the gesture of relinquishing “ownership of the self” (Rivera Garza, 2013, p. 270), which challenges the privative logic of property and enables forms of “common ownership” (López Cuenca and Bermúdez Dini, 2024), favoring distributed and collaborative modes of creation over authorial authority. Disappropriation

calls for “constructing communal-popular horizons that ensure the collective reappropriation of available material wealth” (Rivera Garza, 2021, p. 108). In this issue, (dis)appropriation operates within the framework of audiovisualization as an impulse that does not respond to what is *appropriate* as correct or well-seen but always supposes the *inappropriate* or *improper*, challenging the logics that constrain art and its images.

Considering this dual perspective on image remediation, following in the wake of *Ways of Seeing*, this issue gathers works surpassing disciplinary boundaries, embracing approaches such as the political philosophy of the image, feminist stances, reflections on audiovisual ecologies, archive reconceptualizations, critical pedagogy initiatives, and other hybrid theoretical-methodological perspectives. These works explore the experiments opened by the processes of audiovisualization of art history and (dis)appropriation of visual culture. This is neither a tribute nor an exhaustive review of *Ways of Seeing*, but rather an exploration of its possible remediations, contradictions and readjustments, more than fifty years after its appearance and in latitudes that surpass its frame of origin.

The issue begins with the **Research Area** section, comprising four contributions. The first, “Television’s assault on art history. *Ways of seeing* in the dispute over the copyright of art images”, by Alberto López Cuenca, examines why *Ways of Seeing* remains both renowned and criticized, arguing that its relevance lies not so much in its reverence toward atypical subjects within the canon of art history, but in its assault on that canon.

It exemplifies how television mediation could liberate images from the authority of experts and intellectual property protections upheld by elites, redirecting them toward the most diverse experiences of everyday life. The second contribution, titled "Transmission and Distance: Unveiling Artistic Collaboration and Circulation of Images Through Fax", by Beatriz Escribano Belmar, analyzes collaborative strategies arising from the rise of fax-mediated art, highlighting the impoverished quality of the resulting images as a unique graphic language that prioritizes mass circulation within global collaborative networks. The analysis focuses on selected works from the collection of the International Museum of Electrography – Center for Innovation in Art and New Technologies (MIDECIANT) in Cuenca, Spain. Thirdly, shifting toward Latin America, the article "Expresión y apreciación artísticas: an Educational Book for Artistic Mediation by Juan Acha", by Minerva Salguero Gómez examines the school textbook designed by the Peruvian theorist, which aimed to provide critical aesthetic appreciation tools to a non-specialized audience. The analysis takes into account the context of neoliberal reforms in Mexico during the early 1990s, when the book was published. Closing the section, the fourth article, "Exhausting the Gaze. Interfaces of Images in the Video Essays 'My Mulholland' (J. McGoff, 2020) and 'Watching The Pain of Others' (C. Galibert-Lañé, 2018).", by Edwin Culp, explores transformations in how we view images and its implications for contemporary visual culture. The article begins with the analysis of two recent video essays that revisit existing films, questioning the interfaces of

images as material boundaries or points of contact between two media, from which the possibilities of an imagination that exhausts the gaze and its hegemonic configurations may emerge.

The **Visual Essays** section features two contributions, one from Spain and the other from Mexico. In a gesture of (dis)appropriation of the second and third chapters of *Ways of Seeing*, the essay "S-colpire, un-hitting: Uncarving the female figure", by artist Elo Vega revisits the construction of the gaze on the female body from classical statuary to advertising images. Using a visual assemblage, the essay seeks to reclaim the sculptural gesture but with the aim of "un-striking" the female figure as a critique of the violence that the Eurocentric beauty canon exerts on women's bodies. On the other hand, the essay "Nobody move! Without Television There is no Nation", by the collective TRES (ilana boltvinik + rodrigo viñas) reflects on the political, technological, and infrastructural conditions that enabled the launch of Mexico's first satellite, Morelos I. The essay narrates Mexico's entry into the global telecommunications dynamic and how the Televisa corporation played a fundamental role in the neoliberalization process of that country, both through its complicity with contemporary governments and by shaping a visual culture broadcast massively in Mexico and beyond.

In the **Creation Zone** section, Olga Sevillano Pintado contributes with the project "Digital Conceptualization, Archiving and Art History: *Rethinking Guernica*", which recounts the development of this macro-site hosted on the website of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina

Sofía. Conceived to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the presentation of *Guernica*, by Pablo Picasso, at the Spanish Pavilion of the 1937 Paris International Exposition, with emphasis in the importance of rethinking archives for the collective production of knowledge in digital environments.

The final section, **Conversations**, comprises four contributions. First, the essay "Tell me more... Image and cultural (re)mediation", by Diana Cuéllar Ledesma analyzes the intersections between art and memes, particularly through the exhibition *#EIMemeEstáEnLaTrienal!* as part of the 4th Poli/Gráfica Biennial of San Juan, Latin America, and the Caribbean (2015). The author explores the political scope of memes, not by attempting to insert them into an artistic logic, but by considering their "activist and collective spirit of the image," from which it is possible to think about their potential to mediate the tensions of the present. Next, two interviews highlight the work of two Latin American researchers. In the first one, Giada Lusardi talks with art critic, curator, and educator Lupe Álvarez about her experience teaching art history in Ecuador, questioning the narratives about artistic practices that have shaped the hegemonic imaginary of cultural and educational institutions in that country. In the second one, Tania Valdovinos Reyes interviews Chilean philosopher Alejandra Castillo, exploring the remediation of images beyond masculine technogazes. In their dialogue, these two philosophers weave relationships between image, body, and politics in contemporary culture from a feminist perspective. Finally, Mauricio Patrón Rivera proposes a review and glossary of

Peter Szendy's *Para una ecología de las imágenes* (2023), providing a lexical framework to consider the relationship between images and the context in which they circulate, alongside other human and non-human entities. The review reflects on the implications of this audiovisual whirlwind for extractivist practices and the devastation of the ecosocial environment.

Lastly, concluding all these contributions, the cover of this issue is a collage designed by TRES collective, working as another remediation of the editorial work behind this publication. *Starlette incrustado en órbita* (2024) is a provocation to think about images not only through their plastic materiality but also through the assemblages and infrastructures that make them possible. With this cover, the images establish connections ranging from the immediacy of the infinite screens that surround us daily to the remoteness of space, where satellites once enabled the rise of television.

Through the various investigations compiled in this issue, we aim to critically interrogate art and its canonical narratives, emphasizing the importance of considering the remediation processes of images in shaping collaboratively disseminated meanings. Nevertheless, we offer a final caveat, echoing Berger's warning in *Ways of Seeing*: the reflections presented here do not exhaust the discussion and provide only a partial glimpse into the complexity of audiovisual phenomena and the (dis)appropriation of art history and visual culture. Thus, this special issue invites a skeptical reading that questions its scope and fosters its continuations through other means and mediations.

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