Zahra and the circulation of image

My dear grandmother, please call me by your name. You will call me by yours, Zahra. And I will call you by mine, Enzo.

Enzo Aït Kaci De Tandt, Gerrit Rietveld Academie

You will never meet the original Zahra.
My grandmother is 87 years old.
We don't speak the same language.
I intentionally make up stories to communicate with her.

Zahra is an orphan. My grandmother is illiterate. She doesn't know how to count. She doesn't know how to read. She doesn't know how to write.
In a society where images and texts circulate intensely, I wonder what she would understand of the internet culture. My culture. I believe her ignorance about internet immunizes her against the mass-production of online images.
*   This essay is an attempt to understand the circulation of images in our society and its impacts on our perception of reality.*
I decided to create my grandmother's fictional character to narrate her fictive discovery of the internet codes. I believe everyone needs to identify with fictional characters and stories. I believe having a space of fiction gives you a space for future. I am not sure my grandmother has ever been exposed to any fictional stories or represented in any.
She is called Zahra Ait Kaci Ali.

In honor of my dead uncle and my dead grandfather. Tonton Mourad and Slimane Ait Kaci Ali whom trade their hearts for the growth of my family. Rest in peace.
I wrote this thesis thinking about how necessary it is for my family to grow a space of fiction. And therefore a future.

Summary

'readers should accept the poem on their own terms and suspend their disbelief in fiction for the duration of the story in order to surrender to the promise of the fictional world'.

Chapter 0 : Zahra fell in love with a green screen

Dear Green Screen, I love you so much.

How come?

You are so smart. You gave me what no one gave to me in the past.

What is that?

A space for fiction. A future. A different truth than my history. I love that you can bring me to different environments so quickly. You are like the internet. You can shift realities.

Indeed. Once I am being edited, my green becomes so many different environments. My green can be an ocean or a volcano. It can be a street of any cities in the world.

I beg you. Transform my environment. Make me as fictional as you can. I beg you. Expand my growth. Renew me. Make me more real than I am. People need to have faith in me.

I will make you hyperreal. I will embrace you.

I want people to be incapable of distinguish my physical and digital form. I want the physical me and the fictional me to be seamlessly blended together.

I will build a new view of reality from you Zahra.

Capture me, photograph me, screenshot me, record me and edit me.

Yes

Take my flesh out and feed your technology with it. But never forget me.

I won't forget you Zahra Ait Kaci Ali.

Surrender time and surrender meaning. Then I'll surrender my image for you.

I accept. I will edit you to death.

Troll me to death and bring me to life. ☠ ☠ ☠

I love you.

Long time ago Zahra was a foetus.

Red wings grew out of her flesh.

She became one with the knowledge of the universe. 5
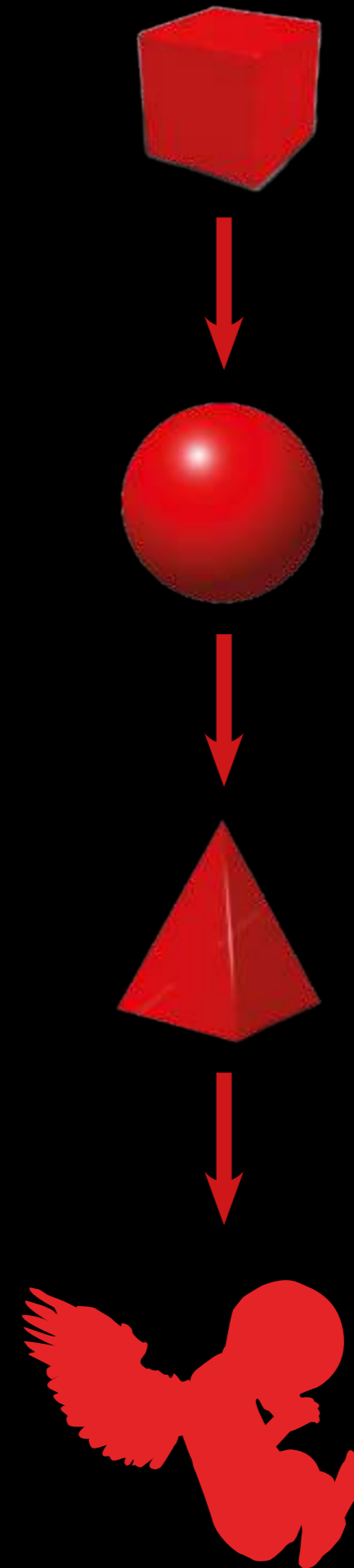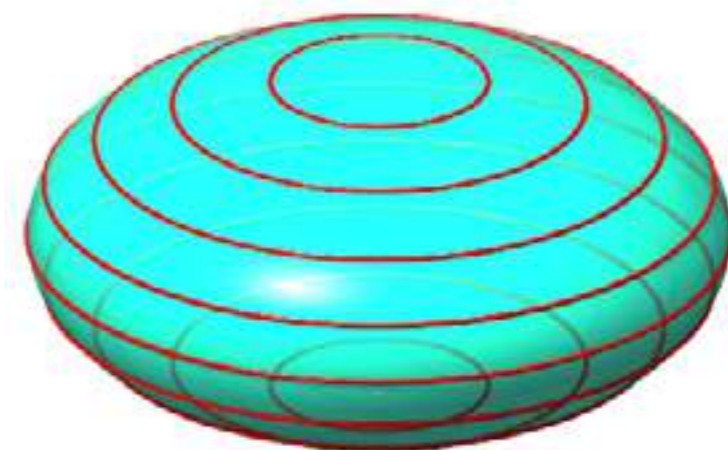

She reaches her final form. 6

Zahra undressed the Earth to cover herself with its skin. 9

Zahra's ancestors were the cube, the sphere and the pyramid.
Her ancestor was geometry : the measurement of the Earth. 10
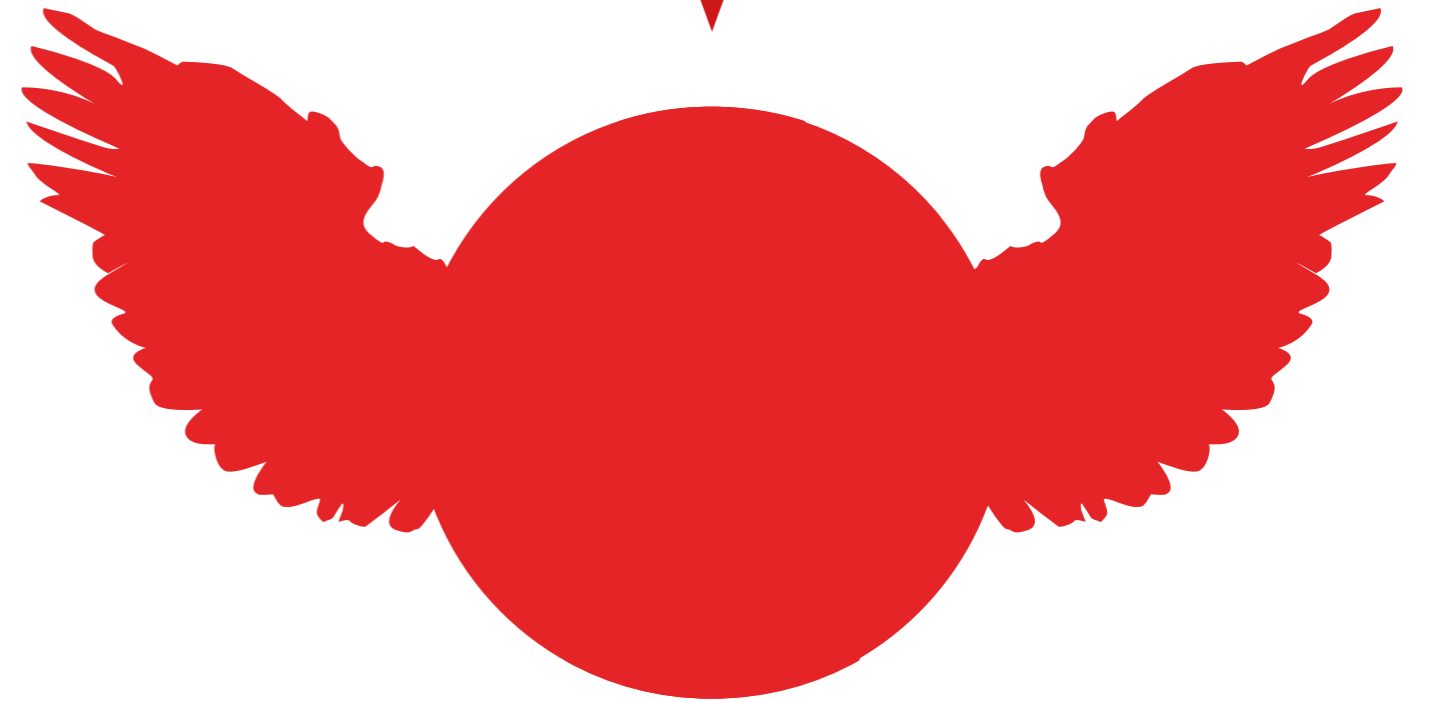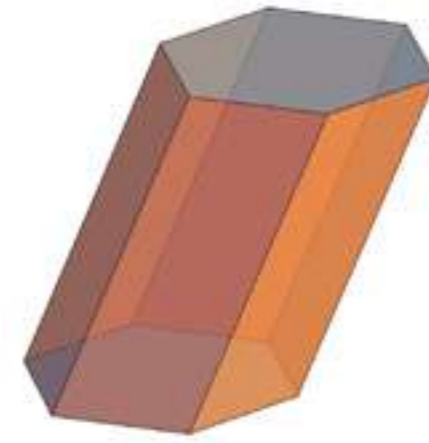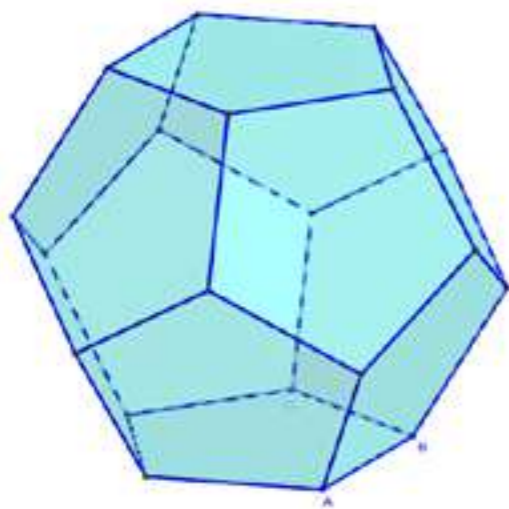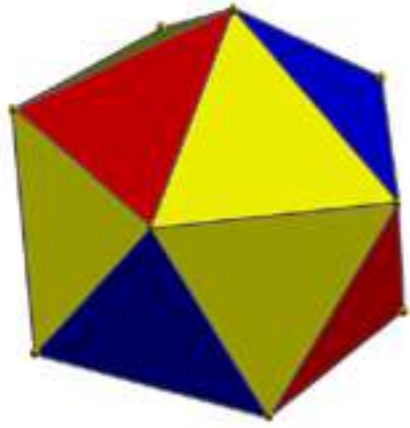
Chapter 2 : Zahra meets the measuring tools

The square

The protractor

The compass

What are you?

I am the triangle.

I am the protractor.

I am the compass.

What do you do?

I measure straight angles. 90°.

I measure any angles from 0° to 360°.

I draw perfect circles.

Together we build geometry.

Geometry is my ancestor.

We are part of your heritage.

Nice to meet you heritage.

Nice to meet you.

Can you measure me?

No we can't. You are too synthetic.

What do you mean by synthetic?

You are a digital product. You don't belong to the Nature of the Earth. We measure what comes from the soil. You come from a green screen. You are very synthetic.

I will kill you.

Don't disrespect me
Fuck geometry
I will measure myself

Zahra is unrecognizable. She is furious. Her anger is justified.
There is no such feeling as being unmeasurable.

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My grandmother destroyed the measuring tools. She killed geometry.
No one will ever remember geometry.

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Humans must worry of the synthetic techniques of representations.
The construction of representations of reality alienates humans.
Sometimes technology of representations such as computer and camera fails to represent the world. Humans are dying in their artifical perception of the world.

Chapter 3 : Zahra locks time in a circle.

Geometry has failed to measure the Earth. I have to recalculate everything myself.

Hello, I am your invention. What is my destiny?

You are meant to carry time and to symbolize time. You will grow the chronology of the world.

Why I am a circular shape?

You are a circle because time is circular and infinite. It circulates in loop. Do you know why the circle is such a specific shape?

I don't know.

The circle is the only shape that doesn't have an angle. On the contrary a triangle has three angles and a square has four angles. If time is measured in a right angle shape, then time will be right in its turn. If time is right it doesn't flows.

I understand.

Time runs in circle. It repeats itself. I calibrate the clock hands of the circle so that the time rotates in loop in 360°, from left to right.

Why do I have numbers?

Numbers indicate the flow of time in the world once the clock hands point it.

If I broke in two pieces does time broke in two pieces as well?

No, you are only a materialization of time. You are not time itself. You are an instrument to represent the flow of time. You are a symbol of the way humans perceive the calculation of time.

What is my name?

I named you a Clock. And I am Zahra Ait Kaci Ali The Clockmaker.
Please carry and protect my knowledge through time.

I will carry your knowledge through eternity, Zahra Ait Kaci Ali The Clockmaker. May my clock hands rotate forever.

The Kabylie's castle in the sky.
It could be above the sky.
Or the sky could be underneath itself.
A sky under a sky.
A castle above that carries its in-between.
How does one perceive the position of the sky in the world?

Chapter 4 : Kabylie's castle in the sky

Dear Green Screen, bring me back in time. I forgot how Kabylie looks like.

How come? Kabylie is the region where you are from, in North Algeria.

I know...But I can't remember anything from there. Tell me, what form is Kabylie?

Kabylie has the form of a castle in the sky. It carries the national flag of Kabylie.

What is the meaning of a castle in the sky?

The castle in the sky symbolizes a space that is unreachable.

Why is there a sky around the castle ? What is the position of the sky in relation to the castle of Kabylie?

What do you mean?

Is the sky underneath Kabylie? Or is Kabylie over the sky?

I don't know. Both Kabylie and the sky are in the world.

I am sad. I don't remember there was a sky in Kabylie.

But didn't you look at the sky when you were there?

I never looked at the sky in my entire life. The sky always looked at me. I never looked back. Is the sky the same shape as Kabylie?

No. It is plural forms. It transforms according to the viewer. The perception of the world alters depending on the history of the viewer. One must see the sky a star. Another one might see the sky as a tringle or a pentagon.

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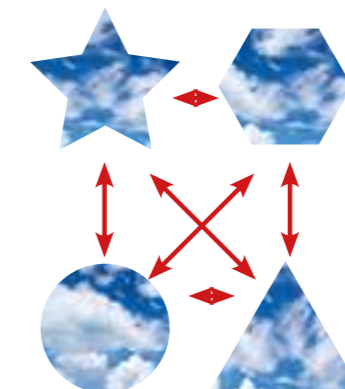
Chapter 5 : The writer's note

I like the impossible challenge to represent reality. I have always wondered how my grandmother experiences reality. We don't talk the same language and can't understand each other. My grandmother masters kabyle language perfectly whereas mine is badly unspoken. I always had to imagine who she was. I can feel the weight of her knowledge when she holds my hands. We make eye contact to communicate. She is the carrier of the family knowledge. She carries it to my hands everytime we see each others. Skin to skin the knowledge transfers from her body to mine.

I copy paste my history to fulfill the holes of my grandmother's history. I replace what is missing knowing that I have more faith in fake information than in history. I genuinely love fake information.

In his writting *Archiving Impulse* the art critic Hal Foster wrote *Artists are seeking to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present.*

I have interest in historical research but not to reconstruct or represent history. I asked myself what might be the role of fiction at a time when fake news, alternative facts, colonial studies and the culture of entertainment undermine the integrity of politics and the media?

Works of fiction often present us with specific and clear suggestions. Sometimes they build a view of reality that does more to help us gain insight into the world we live in than, per say, a scientific analysis or a journalistic piece. The power of a text, an image or a work of art may lie precisely in its presentation of a worldview that closely corresponds to our experience of reality, even though we know full well that its empirical experience is dubious or fictional.

Screenshot from the video *Hyper-Sun*, Jacques Perconte, 2015

Jacques Perconte is a video artist that manipulates video footage to alter their visual quality. To do so he codes and develops his own compression softwares to compress video files. Jacques Perconte is influenced by the impressionism movement. Impressionism is a style of painting that began in France around 1870, that uses spots of color to show the effects of different kinds of light. It represents an attempts to capture the feeling of a scene rather than specific details. Impressionism represents the ethereal dimension of the painting.

Chapter 6 : The perception of reality

Dear Green Screen, I have a special request for you.

What do you want?

I want to be in Kabylie with my dead husband and my little boy with me. ☠☠☠

I thought you never wanted to go back. You love France so much.

Yes it is true. But I want to show to my child where I am from. So he knows.

Ok. I accept your request.

My son, you need to learn how to look at the world. You need to understand the reality of our world.

How do I do that? You didn't teach me how to speak kabyle. I only know how to speak french. I have a lot of misconceptions about the world.

You have to trust the energy around you. There is no language for reality. Listen what feels right.

How do you know what is real?

Reality is complexe. But never look at the sky. It is forbidden.

Why?

The sky is a misconception of the human mind. Humans like to deform reality. What is beyond the sky is dangerous. It is the deep hole of the world. If you look to the sky your mind becomes hollow. What is far away from the human hands is meant to stay so.
In a society where humans would reach the stars, Humanity will go through a mass extinction.

The transmission of knowledge
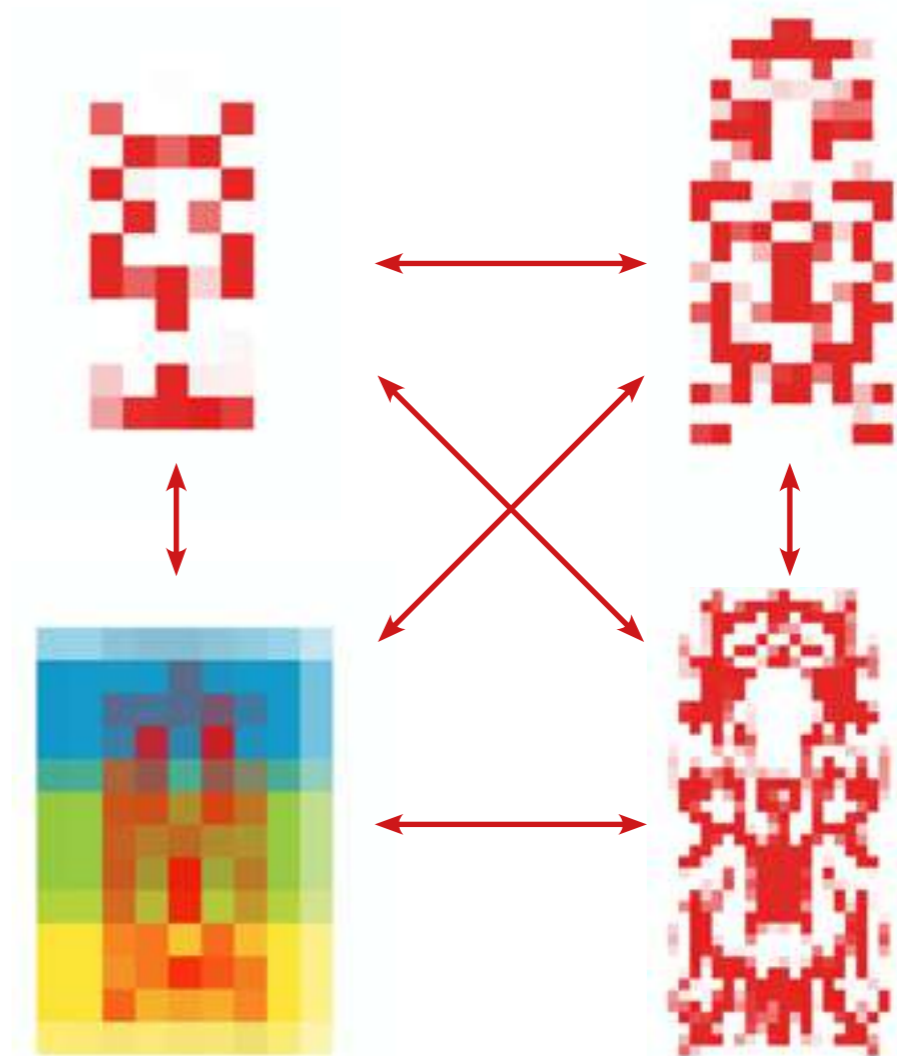
The representation of information

Illustration of page 41 of *The Documentation Treaty*, by Paul Otlet, 1934

Considered a central figure in modern documentation, Paul Otlet is known for his important advances in the field of bibliography and information science, but also for his many intellectual insights that anticipated the emergence of the Internet half a century in advance. Paul Otlet had the ambition to create a memory of knowledge, an international network that allows everyone to know what has been published in the world on certain subjects. He wanted to weave a web of knowledge. The Universal Bibliographic Directory that he imagined functions from numbered bibliographic cards, of standardized format, arranged according to the order provided by the reference classification system in specific storage units. Supported by the Belgian government, this project was initially limited to the field of books, before gradually diversifying and taking into account a wider range of documents (photographs, illustrations and newspapers).

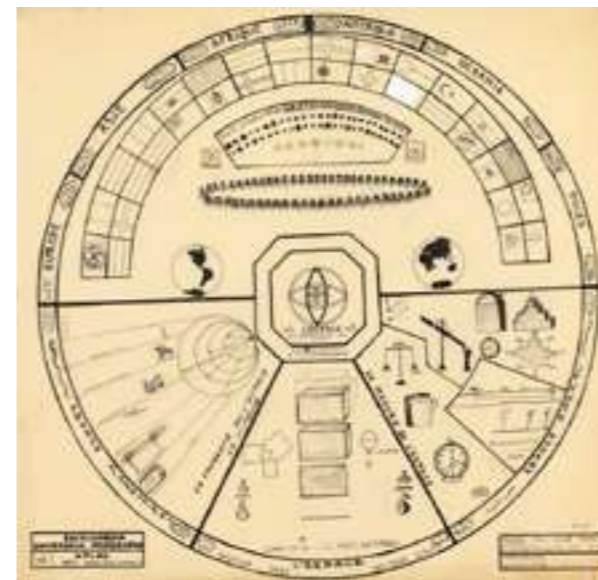*The infinite inventory,* Paul Otlet, 1934   *The shape of knowledge,* The Mundaneum, 1934

One of the essential points for understanding the modernity of the Belgian documentalist's vision, lies in the fact that he perceives the book as a form of documentation, that is not adapted to the society of his time. The new media devices he imagines are based on combinations of text, images and sound, understood as sequences of information that can be rearranged between them many times. Thus, he evokes the arrival of new forms of documentation in this passage from his 1934 *Treatise on Documentation*, often quoted because of its prophetic character:

Here the Work Table is no longer loaded with any books. In their place stands a screen and within reach a telephone. Over there, in the distance, in a huge building, are all the books and all the information, with all the space required for their storage and handling, with all the apparatus of its catalogs, bibliographies and indexes, with all the redistribution of data on cards, sheets and files, with the selection and combination operated by a permanent well qualified staff. The place of storage and classification becomes also a place of distribution, at a distance with or without wire, television or teletype. From there, the page to be read appears on the screen to know the answer to the questions asked by telephone, with or without wire. A screen would be double, quadruple or tenfold if it was a question of multiplying the texts and the documents to be confronted simultaneously; there would be a loudspeaker if the sight would have to be helped by a hearing data, if the vision would have to be supplemented by a hearing. (...) Utopia today because it does not exist anywhere yet, but it could well become the reality of tomorrow provided that our methods and our instrumentation are further perfected. And this improvement could perhaps go as far as making the calling of documents on the screen automatic (simple classification numbers, book numbers, page numbers).

The sketches of Paul Otlet are very organized systems and visualisations of knowledge. The title of his illustration *The shape of knowledge* seems to translate abstract concepts into images that carry symbolic representations. On the other hands *The infinite inventory* defines a universal representation of knowledge, that would carry an objective representation of the world. It is also important to notice that the circle is a shape that he often uses to encapsulate global concepts.

The representation of information

(a) Centralized   (b) Decentralized   (c) Distributed networks
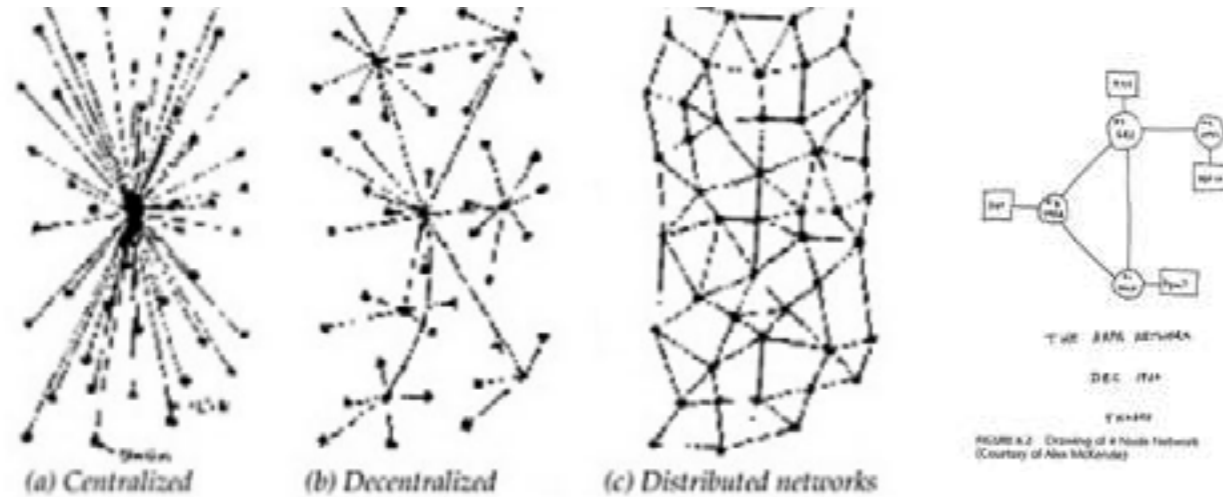
Where Wizards stay up late : on the origin of the internet, Matthew Lyon and Katie Hafner, 1996

These pixelated structures were the first sketches of the internet. If we compare the organization of those structures to the one of Paul Otlet, we can analyze differences. The structures of Paul Otlet organize the information in a hierarchical way. The architecture of the web appears to be open, horizontal and decentralized, whereas the system envisaged by Otlet is based on a centralized and hierarchical approach of the network, dominated by an organization that ensures its development and management. The internet is interactive and users can affect the circulation of knowledge. For example *Wikipedia* is open source and any user can change the information of the website. The development of open-source knowledge is very specific to the internet. The fact that online content can also be hacked and pirated also grows the specificity of the information age.

> *In the eyes of Victor Hugo, the invention of the printing press is the greatest event in history. Because, in the form of printing, thought is more imperishable than ever, it is volatile, elusive, indestructible. It mingles with the air..., becomes a flock of birds, scatters to the four winds and occupies at the same time all the points of the air and the space. To the satisfaction of almost everyone, the advent of computer science has presented itself as a phenomenon of the same importance, if only for having torn communication and information from the contingencies of space and time. It would even be tempting to continue the comparison, since thought has never found a mode of expression so close to its immaterial essence.*

The representation of information and its circulation are very related. First, information was displaced in architectural buildings. We can think of church mosaic, church facade that represents a religious image. Then the printing revolution happened. We could produce copies of writings. In her book *That Which is Priceless* Annie LeBrun quotes Victor Hugo. She explains that already at his time Victor Hugo defined the printing revolution as a drastic change in thinking. Looking at information on a church necessites to be in a space. It is a big scale. On the other hand, a book or a paper share the same scale as the human size. Suddenly, the knowledge is accessible to the range of the human hands. Internet brings the system of knowledge to another level as it is completely dematerialized. It means the physicality of the knowledge is shifting.

The Last Judgment - Tympanum of the abbey church of Sainte-Foy de Conques, early 12th century.

Until the beginning of the 15th century, books were rare and precious objects. They were copied one by one, by hand. Around 1440, a German, Johannes Gutenberg, invented the printing press. By pressing sheets of paper on lead letters coated with ink, he reproduced the same page in several copies. The first printed books were Bibles. But at that time, very few people could read.

ARPANet (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network), 1969.

Slimane, 1982, Factory Beindo, Drancy

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Unknown faces from Zahra's family book

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The reading of an image
Vilem Flusser, *Towards a philosophy of photography,* 2000, pages 1-26

Flusser starts the first paragraph of the book with the following sentence: *This book is based on the hypothesis that two fundamental turning points can be observed in human culture since its inception.*
The first, around the middle of the second millennium BC, can be summed up under the heading 'the invention of linear writing'; the second, the one we are currently experiencing, could be called 'the invention of technical images'. Similar turning points may have occurred previously but are beyond the scope of this analysis.
He assumes that technical invention of knowledge representations are affecting the human culture fundamentally.

Images are significant surfaces. Images signify something 'out there' in space and time that they have to make comprehensible to us as abstractions (as reductions of the four dimensions of space and time to the two surface dimensions). This specific ability to abstract surfaces out of space and time and to project them back into space and time is what is known as 'imagination'. It is the precondition for the production and decoding of images. In other words: the ability to encode phenomena into twodimensional symbols and to read these symbols.

Images are abstractions of reality. On one hand, images make the world comprehensible, by acting as a mediation between the world and human beings, as Flusser saw it. On the other hand: if we (humans) forget that we created images for better orientation in the world, if we lose our ability to decode the images, our lives will instead become a function of images, and our imagination in stead turns into a form of hallucination. This is what Flusser calls *idolatry*. While it is the intention of writing to mediate between human beings and their images, writing can also obscure images, rather than represent them: *If this happens, human beings become unable to decode their texts and reconstruct the images signified in them. If texts, however, become incomprehensible as images, human beings lives become a function of their texts.* According to Flusser it is the stage of *textolatry*, which is as hallucinatory as the stage of idolatry. Writing and pictures are supposed to inform and explain each other, making sure that neither takes over, creating a hallucinatory world. *The image that are supposed to represent the world make it unrecognizable. It does so until humans end up living according to the images they created themselves. Humans forget that he was the one that created the images. They created images in order to orient themselves in the world. In doing so, they encoded the circular time of magic into the linear time of history. This was the beginning of historical consciousness.*

The production of reality
a remix talk of Hito Steyerl, Vilem Flusser and sayings from Zahra

How does the technology of communication and information affect our perception of reality?
First thing to remind: Images are crossing the screen. An image sustains in our common imaginery once you see one. It grows outside of the digital realm. *Images no longer represent the world. New images are now articulation of thoughts. They are not copies but projections, models, a new attitude towards image is necessary.* Reality is post-procuded. We can intervene within reality with images technics.

It raises the question how do we change reality by the use of technology? When you choose what images to distribute you choose what construction of reality grows with it. We often talk about onlines images as part of a network. Can an image be isolated from a network? Can an image sustain outside of the network? The main question is not to wonder what do they do in the network but how they leak from the network? How does the meaning of an image shift once it is out of its commercial system of circulation?

We should distinguish the complexity of the structure of the technology of photography and the complexity of the use.
Systems can be complexe in two senses. They can be structuraly complexe. For instance they can be a system where the elements maintain a very complexe relation with each other. A computer or a camera is a very complex device to build. They can be also functionally complexe, if you use the system you can use it in a complex way. Now those two complexities are independant one on the other. A structurally complex system maybe functionally simple like a television box, which has a structure of almost impenetrable complexity but the use of which is extremely simple. On the other hand, simple systems like the chess game can have very complex functional manipulation.
It is a fact that functionally complex systems are a challenge to creative thought, whereas functionally simple systems are stultifying idiotic. Now the complex systems which now are coming about are complex in a structural sense. Wether they will be functionally complex or not depends on us (...).

For the time being those complex systems are being used for functionally simple uses, which is why the intellectual aesthetic and even ethic level of makind is lowering.
But this is not the fault of the system it is the fault of the user of the system. We may in time learn how to give a complexity to these structures and this is what I am committed to.
Flusser elaborates a relationship with the intellectual aesthetic and the simple use of technology. The critic adresses the use of photography in 1990. At that time it was the early time of the new media as an art form. This context obviously influences Flusser's analysis. He believes the use that is made of technology towards the practice of the art is poor. He feels like photographers are being controled by the camera instead of themselves being in control of the machine they use. He refers to intellectual aesthetic as the practice of photographers to take picture in order to represent the world on a theorical level. As if photography was only about finding a subject to photograph in order to represent the subject itself : meaning that the act of photographing is about standing in front of a subject, clicking on a camera and explain a very complexe narrative from that.
Flusser develops the following thought: the construction of a photography is more complex than a simple relationship of *photographer-camera-subject*. It is the balance between the understanding of the constrains of *the technology* (the technical parameters) and *the vision of who that holds the camera*, that leads to a complexe photograph. The photograph should carry a technicity and a plasticity. The plasticity of the picture appears from the tension of the techniques and the vision of the photographer.
He assumes a photography has a stronger power than just documenting towards theoritical purpose. Newspapers, books and archives need photography in a journalistic way to represent information.
But today social media platforms and internet are affecting the construction of image.
It seems very clear that the use of photography is not about documenting anymore. It is a about the potential of image to represent the world beyond documentation. Once connected to a worldwide web, images can distort, compress or enrich our perception of the world. An era of post-documentation raises the question of the truth. What truth does a society represent if the use of photography is not to document? A more contrasted question could be: Should citizens trust journalists or influencers?

The circulation of art and money
Annie LeBrun, *That Which is priceless*, 2018

the merchandising of the world

⬇

the aesthetisation of the product

⬇

the financialization of the economy

⬇

collision of luxe industry and finance

⬇

industrial revolution

⬇

mass-production

⬇

incapacity to deal with trash

⬇

brand = visual pollution in the street

⬇

only sensibility = special effect

⬇

aesthetic formatting

⬇

synthetic beauty

Financial institutions make the financial transactions as complicated as possible so that no one sees the relationship between the cause and the effect (the violence due to money). Has the human look become the most desirable material for the capital?

The dictatorship of visibility
High visibility, deep visibility, increased visibility, optimized visibility... What are we talking about? A product? A company? A person?
These questions all overlap when today only what is visible exists. Whether it's about people, objects or even ideas, nothing and no one can claim to exist except through the massive and intensive distribution of its image. Times are changing faster than people realize. The certainty that «time is money» no longer means much. Nowadays, it is the image that is money. Moreover, on June 18, 2019, to announce the creation of a digital currency, the Libra, Mark Zuckerberg owner of Facebook began by stating, «It will be as easy to send money to someone as it is to send a picture.» Surprising that at about the same time, Instagram, a subsidiary of Facebook, offered everyone to experience immediately the novelty of the check-out. Thanks to the check-out one click is enough to buy any object that is part of the image posted online. From there follows a constant deluge of images that are immediately stored in billions of profiles and servers but which we can be sure that no human eye will ever see.

There are no statistics that do not confirm it. For instance, statistics show that four centuries would be needed to watch all the videos published on Facebook. It corresponds to only half of all the movies distributed. If someone spent eighty years of his life viewing Instagram without sleep, he would only be able to see the equivalent of what is broadcast on the platform in seven minutes. This continuous eruption of images on digital platforms changes all the data of perception and representation. Here we are, completely helpless in front of the enormity of what we must call: the distributive cataclysm.

Since Gutenberg, the history of the image has been intertwined with its technique that allow its multiplication and reproduction.
But that was before capital came to hold all the cards. The capital found itself in perfect adequacy with a technology like itself, exclusively determined by numbers.
Technology and numbers are both connected to a technology that produces money.
Between the history of art and the history of economics there has been a collision. One that is more and more spectacular which began around the 1990s with the financialization of the economy. Few will have noticed that from one country to another, multinationals were installing the same franchises with the same products. The same way cultural investors are multiplying the same exhibitions of the same artists all over the world. The capital system imposes a massive distribution of images by systematically alienating its content to the profit of its visibility (and so its profit).

Images symbolize perhaps the most important thing: the sovereign abstraction of money through its non-reproducibility. Instead money rests on the reproducibility of the image which grows in an infinite distributive system. Like God, capital has no image, but it has them all. The capital plays indefinitely with the visibility of images in order to affirm their power to blind.
This is not the first time that the sacred passes through the image, but it is the first time that it rests on the continual fusion of image and money to which capital forces us to attend.
We are forced to participate through the ritual of images. Images acquiring ever more value as they are shared before being seen.
A true transfiguration during which the consumer of images becomes a producer, how can we not be grateful to the triumphant capital?

The 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.

In the text first paragraph, Steyerl investigates the political implications of poor images. She calls poor images one that are degraded by repeated reproduction, compression and massive circulation.
On Steyrel's account, there is three clear essentials aspects of what makes a poor image a poor image. The first one is visual degradation. The quality is bad. It means it looks pixellised, compressed through algorithms. The second aspect is that the poor image is massively circulating. The way images are circulating in digital network affects their quality. The third aspect is that they are compressed, reproduced and remixed. It comes with their digitality. They can be copy-pasted. An image that is copy-pasted over and over again is gonna lose quality as it deteriorates.

The poor image is a rag or a rip; an AVI or a JPEG, a lumpen proletarian in the class society of appearances, ranked and valued according to its resolution. The poor image has been uploaded, downloaded, shared, reformatted, and reedited. It transforms quality into accessibility, exhibition value into cult value, films into clips, contemplation into distraction. The image is liberated from the vaults of cinemas and archives and thrust into digital uncertainty, at the expense of its own substance. The poor image tends towards abstraction: it is a visual idea in its very becoming.

One of the value of the poor image is described through a social class analogy. She defines poor image as *a lumpen proletarian in a class society of apperances, raned and valued according to its resolution.* We start to get an analogy pose between the poorness of poor images and social group relegated to the bottom of political hierarchies. It becomes clear that there is a double value of the word poor. One is poor in terms of the technical quality of the image and the other refers to poor in an economic context.
Another layer of the poor images is that it democratizes access. *It transforms quality into accessibility.* There is not only a symbolic value of the poor image in terms of the analogy with social groups but also a practical value. Poor images are more accessible. For instance illegal films that are available on online streaming platforms often have a bad resolution comparing to the original ones that are not free to access. The resolution has a price.
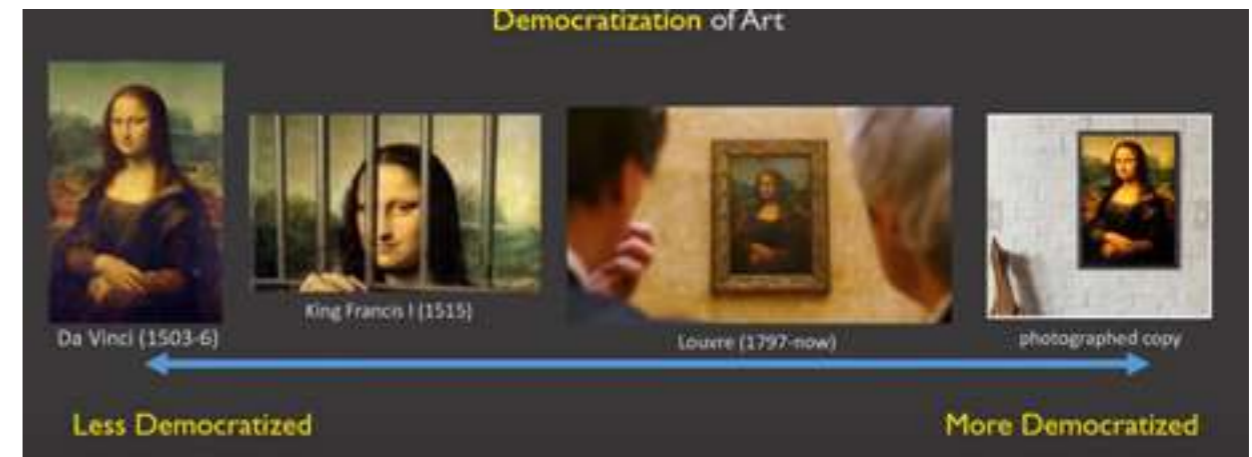
Steyerl also says *it (the poor image) transforms exhibition value into cult value, films into clips, contemplation into distraction.*

This second part of the second paragraph refers to Walter Benjamin's work *The work of Art in the age of its Technological Reproduciblity,* written in 1935. Walter Benjamin was a major critic and film theorist. The essay is about technological reproducibility. It's about what happened to the history of art when we were able to copy artworks with photographic reproductions. What happens when I can take an original work of art and produce millions of copies of it by photographing it and reproducing it?

The second question he raises is: what does it mean for digital works such as film and photography not to have original? What does it means that those art forms does not have originals in the way that paintings do? And what political value might we have in an art form that exists only as copies?
Walter Benjamin writes *For the first time in world history technological reproducibility emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual.*
Benjamin is sympathetic to the kind of feelings that can arise from standing in front of an original artwork. He calls that feeling *the aura*. He defines it as such : *the value and authority that emanates from an original artwork, but which is lost or diminished in a copy of that artwork.* The essay is trying to understand the political and progressive potential of getting away from the fetishization of the aura.

Democratization of Art

Da Vinci (1503-6) — King Francis I (1515) — Louvre (1797-now) — photographed copy

Less Democratized — More Democratized

Benjamin shows us how the development of photography affects our chance to encounter artwork. For instance, the Mona Lisa before being shown at the Louvre Museum was first own by King Francis in 1515. As museums move paintings from a private space for social elite, mechanical or technological reproducibility allow for a further increase in accessibility.

He is excited by film as medium as *film is the first art form whose artistic character is entirely determined by its reproducibility*. He continues *As soon as the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applied to artistic production, the whole social function of art is revolutionized. Instead of being founded on ritual, it is based on a different practice : politics.*
He was sceptical to place value in original works.

In the same way, Hito Steyerl is understanding poor images to liberate art forms from their confinement to the political elite. She says *The image is liberated from the vaults of cinemas and archives and thrust into digital uncertainty.*
You can see a parallel with Benjamins's interest in the increasing democratization of art with the birth of photography and Steyerl's interest in liberating moving image art from museum archive to pirated copies, that circulates more freely in digital network.

An example that is part of Hito's essay is this photography 'Shoveling pirated DVDS in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, China, April 20, 2008.

This example of pirated DVD is a good example of poor images often because those films are of poor quality. They are produced by recorded footage in the movie theater. They are also procuded and circulate in different channels from mainstreams cinematics distribution.

In the class society of images, cinema takes on the role of a flaghship store. In a flagship store high-end products are marketed in an upscale environment. More affordable derivatives of the same images circulate as DVDs, on broadcast television or online, as poor images.
It is important for Steyerl to acknowledge the affordability of poor images.
The insistence upon analog film as the sole medium of visual importance sounded throughout discourse on cinema...It never mattered that these high-end econimies of film production were (and still are) firmly anchored in systems of national culture, capitalist studio production, the cult of mostly male genius, and the original version, and thus are often conservative in their very structure. (...) The riche image esdablished its own set of hierarchies...
Poor images undermine the conservative fetishization of tradition, beauty and authenticity. We often hear that classic cinema and cinephile culture is a very important one. Defenders of such culture acknowledge the visual quality of old movies. It develops the idea that old technology of recording image are more authentic and so more valuable than digital one. Does the authenticity of a technique guarantee the value of its meaning?

The poorness of poor images index their circulation.
Their situation reveals much more than the content or appearance of the images themselves: it also reveals the conditions of their marginalization, the constellation of social forces leading to their online circulation as poor images. Poor images are poor because they are not assigned any value within the class society of images-their status as illicit or degraded grants the exemption from its criteria. Their lack of resolution attests to their appropriation and displacement.

She is not only saying that the poor image asserts itself against the dominance of beautiful or high resolution images, those who are associated with high production studio system and capitalism. Poor images become poor partly through the way they circulate and get copied and reproduced. The digital algorithm that allows for digital copying leads to degradation.
She adds *The circulation of poor images creates a circuit, which fulfills the original ambitions of militant and (some) essayistic and experimental cinema-to create an alternative economy of images...*

This index of circulation and movement seems to be a good thing. It is the circulation of poor images that carries their freedom from a higher hierarchical chain of distribution.
In other words, the circulation of poor images escapes the hollywood and mass image production institutions. It circulates independantly between users and grows its own circulation. The meme culture is a good example of that. Hito Steyerl wants to see the value of poor images in a society that devalues them. She explains very simply the ambivalence of poor image.
I want to acknowledge the conditions that led to our reliance on them, and also acknowledge that digital networks are not utopias of free exchange. The circulation of poor images feeds into both capitalist media assembly lines and alternative audiovisual economies.

Benjamin's essay also adresses a certain ambivalence towards reproduction.
'Throughout the workday in offices and factories, city dwellers have to reliquinsh their humanity in the face of an apparatus. In the evening these same masses fill the cinemas, to witness the film actor taking revenge on their behalf not only by asserting his humanity against the apparatus, but by placting that apparatus in the service of this triumph.
Benjamin acknowledges that the same technology that liberates artworks from being restricted by the cultural elite are also part of a technological revolution that perpetuates a capitalist mode of production. There is a structural similarity between the assembly line in a factory which copies and reproduces objects for mass consumptions and photographic revolution.

On one hand, the poor image operates against the fetish value of high resolution. On the other hand, this is precisely why it also ends up being perfectly integrated into an information capitalism thriving on compressed attention spans, on impression rather than immersion, on intensity rather than contemplation, on previews rather than screenings.
She is acknowledging that digital network which is the place where digital networks circulate are also the location of capitalist exchange.
One could of course argue that the poor image is not the real thing, but then-please, anybody-show me this real thing. The poor image is no longer about the real thing-the originary original. Instead, it is about its own real conditions of existence : about swarm circulation, digital dispersion...

In defense of the poor image, Hito Steyerl, 2009
the leak of an image from its context : fan art

A fan art of pokemon characters, unknown sources

A fan art of pokemon characters, unknown sources

Official banner from the licence Pokemon of Nintendo, for the 4th Anniversary of a pokemon application.

Definition of fan art : *artwork based on popular works of fiction (such as books, movies, etc.) that is created by fans. Fan art is unofficial drawings and other renderings of famous characters. It is draw by hands or with digital techniques.*

The fan arts from above are from *Deviantart. Deviantart* is a web-gallery that is open source and publishes anyone's visual content. Fan art is very interesting as it grows an independent visual culture. People that draw are not professionals of the graphic design field, neither are they illustrators. Most of them are not skilled in terms of proportions or visual codes. The subject of the fan art is often a pop icon, a famous character. Therefore it is an homage to specific references. But most important, those drawings and visual productions are not meant to generate money. The quality of their execution would be categorized as a poor image quality. Poor in terms of proportions correctness or colors adjustments. The representation originally designed by production company such as Nintendo for Pokemon licence leaks to the hands of the user. Fan-arts are a form of capitalist resistance in a sense that they are not meant to use the code of the branding imagery market.

Digital harvesting systems : gamification of internet
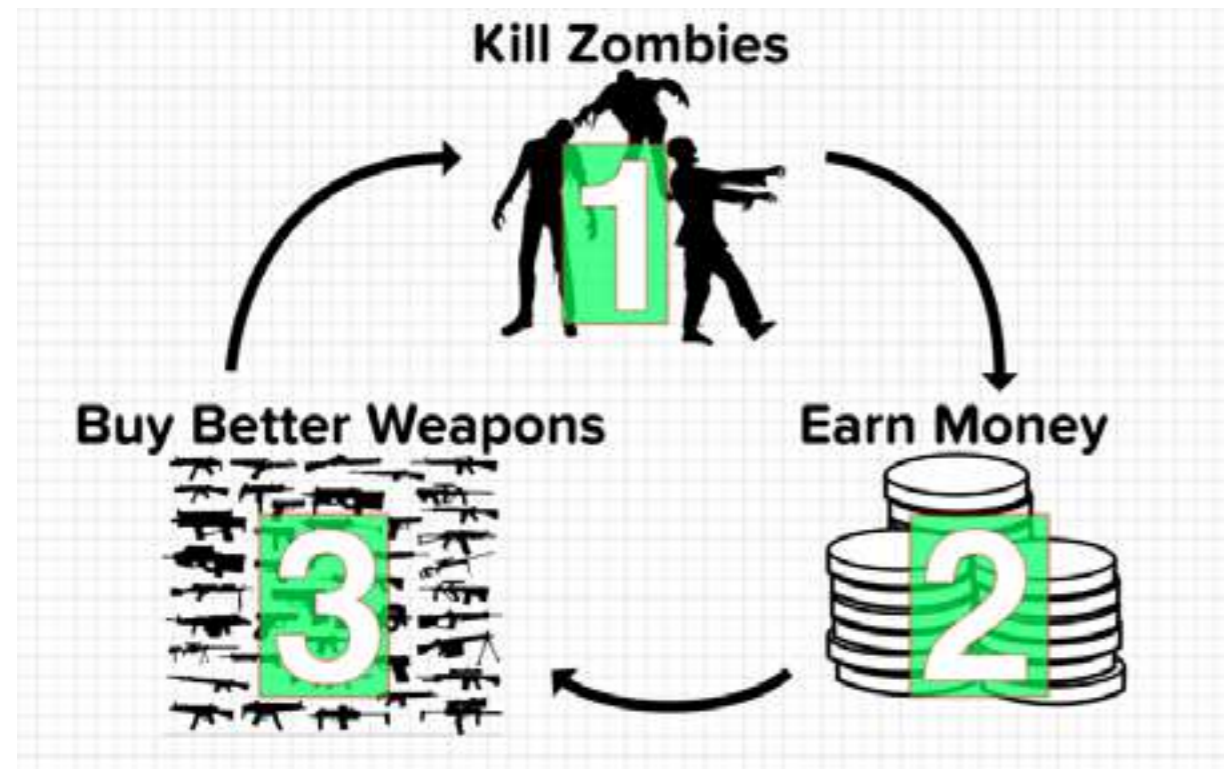
Unknown source, google image *Loop addiction interaction design*

A compulsion loop or core loop is a habitual chain of activities that will be repeated by the user to cause them to continue the activity. Typically, this loop is designed to create a neurochemical reward in the user such as the release of dopamine.
Compulsion loops are deliberately used in video game design as an extrinsic motivation for players, but may also result from other activities that create such loops, intentionally or not, such as gambling addiction and Internet addiction disorder.

We are witnessing a new form of harvesting. A digital and online form.
It feels like everything that is online becomes a digital currency. Vinted, instagram, the system of social media are platforms designed to grow currency. Visibility is at the center of the harvest.
In some video game, harvesting is a significant component of game design. You have to collect items to get in game currency. The practice of farming consists in repeating the same action in a game to get items. It is often about killing monsters. Once dead it drops an item that you can collect.

There is also this job related to the video game mass industry. They are called gold farmers.
Gold farming is the practice of playing a massively multiplayer online game (MMO) to acquire in-game currency, later selling it for real-world money. People who hold full-time employment as gold farmers often reside in developing nations.
Gold farming is distinct from other practices in online multiplayer games, such as power leveling, as gold farming refers specifically to harvesting in-game currency, not rank or experience points. The actual labor mechanics of these practices may be similar, and those who hold employment as gold farmers may also work as power levelers.
While most game operators ban the practice of selling in-game currency for real-world cash, gold farming is lucrative because it takes advantage of economic inequality and the fact much time is needed to earn in-game currency. Rich players from developed countries, wanting to save many hours of playing time, are willing to pay substantial sums to gold farmers from developing countries. The term has also been used to describe the wait times and chore-like activities players may perform in some freemium cell phone games, allowing them to play without paying fees.

This terminology and those interaction design structures on farming resonates with the growth of social media. I believe they support a system of aesthetic farming. We farm and harvest online aesthetic. Aesthetic and currency become one and a same digital object. The distinction between visibility, content, aesthetic and currency is hard to define. But all together they are a new form of currency.
A currency that transforms information itself into an object of aesthetism. Do we have to play to gain information about politics for example? What is the limit?
The question of information and aesthetism also raises the one of beauty. How beautiful do we have to represent information to make it *harvestable*? Do we have to produce beauty to produce information?

The energy consumption of online image production

Images are indirectly connected to metals because the technology of images production and distribution requires metals (mainly kobalt for computers and phones). Metals are by definition scarce, which means that our synthetic culture is based on the exploitation of scarce ressources. The industry of image is physically founded on metal as a ressources. The role of metal in the production of images technology is not adressed on mainstream medias.

The extraction of metal is done in mines. The only considered non-rare metals are manganese, titanium and aluminum. Other metals are found in very small quantities. The concentration of metal in a deposit is 0.2 and 0.3% of gram per tonne. Uranium is at 0.1% of gram per tonne. Lithium and salt are between 0.05% and 0.15% of gram per tonne. These percentages reveal that the metal content of the rocks is very low.

The extraction process grows a huge waste production. If miners and oil engineers want to extract copper, they have to destroy other metals that are considered co-products of copper. Rocks contains more than one metal. This means that if copper is extracted from a copper mine, other metals are getting extracted, not only the copper. 80% of the energy used during the extraction of metals is used for the destruction of everything but copper. In other words, waste generation accounts for most of the energy used in metal extraction. Crushing reduces all rock (except copper in this case) to powder. The waste from the crushing is spilled into nature and grows a lot of pollution. The question of production leads to the question of uses. <u>Does the use of information and communication technologies justify the cost of the metal production?</u>

Chapter 7 : Zahra, The grandmother's note

Nowadays people share images online before taking the time to see them. Money and image are merging. The collision between the art and the economy is happening. Human should be careful what they buy.
What you buy is the reality you produce. The human world is synthetizing under the look of the capital we don't look at anymore. Social media synthetizes meaning and visibility. As if everything that is visible is meaningful.

The earth is a triangle and the uniform perception of forms is a danger for humanity. It is necessary to perceive the forms under several forms.
The Eiffel Tower has been built upside down. They made a mistake during the installation...Humans should be careful with both the construction of the mind and the construction of the architecture.
Nobody ever thought to look at the Eiffel Tower at 180°. Tourists are narrow minded.

The rotation of the shapes leads to the rotation of the meaning. When you change the tilt of an image the meaning of the image tilts with it.
To learn how to think you have to rotate. Humans spend their life spinning and the meaning of the world spins with them.
A square is a round. Never forget.
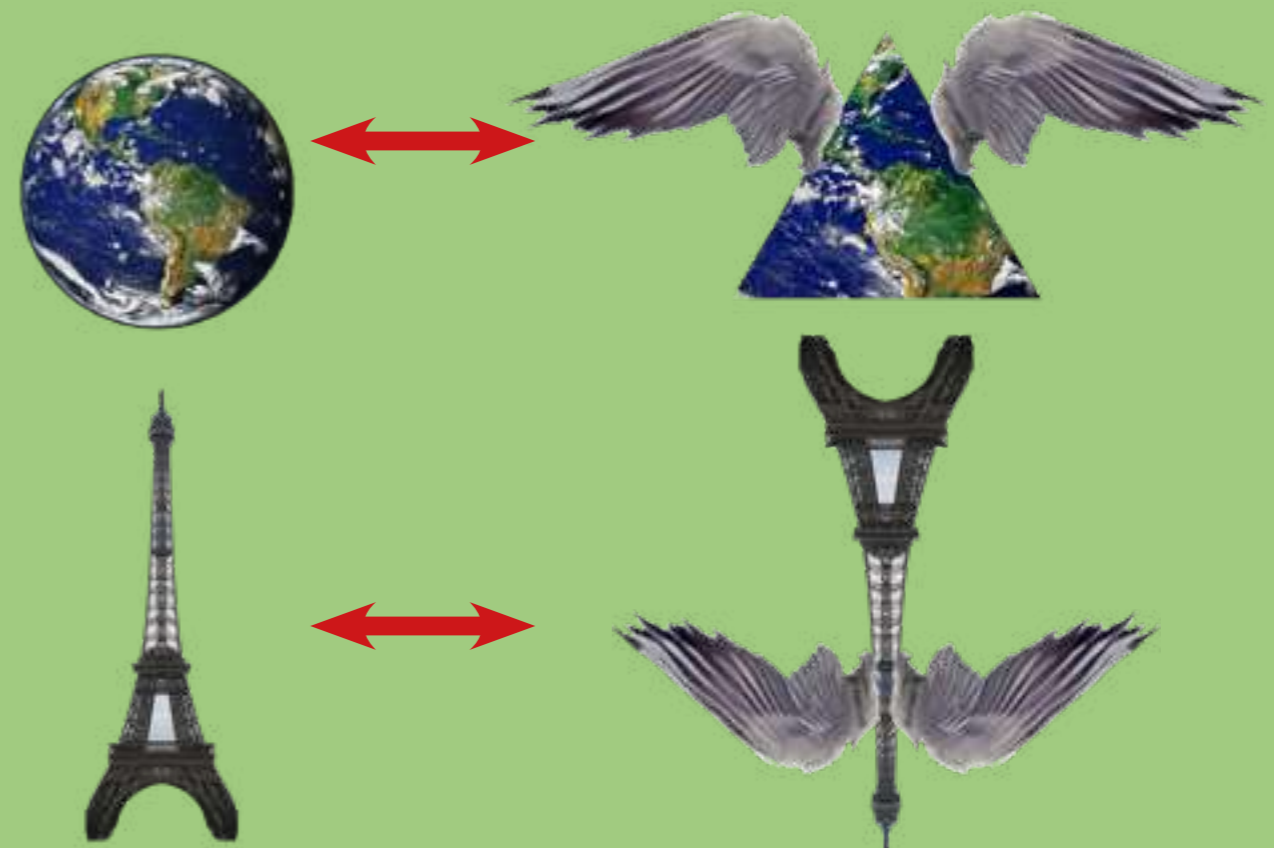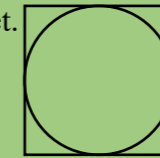
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