Stage Designs of Power.
Genealogy of the Apparatuses of Illusion and their Conquest by the Bourgeoisie.

Research report on the exhibition “The Assault of Illusion”,
organized by Santa Mònica Arts Center and Círculo de Bellas Artes

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This document you are now reading aims to serve as a compendium of the research carried out around the exhibition "The Assault of Illusion." Its intention is to act as a democratizing tool for the knowledge surrounding the curatorial framework of an exhibition: all those conversations, lines of inquiry, and authorships that, often due to a lack of transcription, remain beyond the reach of the general public. Thus, in this document you will first find the premises that have shaped the conceptual framework, presented as a text that disseminates the conclusions of the study. You will also find a compilation of quotes, testimonies, and excerpts from interviews that have served the curators and artists as supporting materials and projections of their imagination. Finally, this text seeks to become a guide for all those interested in understanding the foundations of the aesthetic dominance of the bourgeoisie and in countering its monopoly over illusion and desire.

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Foreword

We can imagine our present as an abandoned cabinet of curiosities. These rooms—also called "cabinets of wonders"—appeared in the imagination of modernity as spaces for the physical containment of the desires of the newly born bourgeoisie. Cabinets were the first spaces of collection, where the ruling classes gathered all objects they found curious and strange. Thus, first the nobility and later the bourgeoisie sent their servants across the world in search and capture of rarities. Everything had a place in these chambers, which became prisons for imagination captive to the world.

When we talk about cabinets, we must imagine them as small rooms tailored to the desire of the powerful: every carved and designed piece of furniture housed their possessions; portraits on the walls of legendary ancestors who placed them in power; relics of saints and weapons of mythical heroes who preceded them on the throne; stuffed animals and minerals deposited as tiny corners of the world expropriated from nature. And at the center of this chamber, observing all its contents with curiosity and pride, was the owner.

The cabinet can also be understood as an altar to private property. Throughout the Middle Ages, the idea of property was shaped by the feudal rights that nobles invented around themselves. If someone wanted to claim a piece of land, or any resource, or even a body, they needed to create a legend that justified their right of possession. In the expansion of kingdoms that characterized the European Middle Ages, the nobility established these narratives by force. And once the land—and all who inhabited it—was possessed, a need arose: how to perpetuate that story. Mythical history acts like an alchemical chain. If it dissolves, the land and the bodies return to their natural state of dispossession.

We can imagine cabinets of curiosities as a physical space of reaffirmation. Before it, the owner could contemplate a synthesis of the landscape now dominated: a seashell brought memories of conquests over the northern seas; the tanned hides of unknown animals testified to the daring explorations of an ancestor in southern lands; beautifully bound books certified ownership of all their castles; in a corner, fossilized stones shaped like skulls were proof of the persistence of their lineage.

The cabinet was, therefore, a testimony to the power's dominion over matter. The feudal noble generated these ecosystems of power around them, and the bourgeoisie—the class that usurps power in modernity—continued this narrative. Cabinets thus become a grand scenography of power, where every ruling class seeks to generate an illusion of possession. However, cabinets were not public in their origin. They were intimate, private spaces designed solely for the self-contemplation of their owner and close associates.

Thus, the cabinet functioned as a great apparatus of self-illusionism. By contemplating what they and their predecessors had accumulated, they reaffirmed their power and the need to continue defending, tooth and nail, their position of domination over others. Because what the cabinet answers is a question that class studies have often neglected: what is the desire of the bourgeoisie? Why does one class oppress while another is oppressed? Materialist scientific tradition has already answered these questions from the perspective of economics and sociology, but the question of desire surpasses the analytical tools at our disposal. One could almost say that the question of desire requires theology to be answered. For this reason, it is necessary to understand cabinets as the overlooked altars that in modernity indicate the course of bourgeois conquest. At their feet, before accumulated bones, oil-painted landscapes, and meticulously classified natural objects, the bourgeoisie invokes, like shamans possessed by Capital, their right to conquest.

The cabinet also receives the name "cabinet of wonders" precisely because it was the space where the one in power could "marvel," legitimizing their conquest through the story of their gaze. The cabinet's great innovation, from a historiographical perspective, is that it allows all conquered elements to be gathered under a single gaze. In a cupboard or a small room, all the landscapes, lands, animals, humans, identities, and beliefs captured are brought together. No person who holds power can truly imagine every corner of what belongs to them. Those in power need to glimpse a fiction that allows them to conceive—and thus reaffirm—the entirety of what they are entitled to by right of conquest over humanity and nature. The cabinet materializes this desire: it is the hermeneutic structure that gives meaning to their power.

But with the advance of their dominion and the defeat of the proletariat, the bourgeoisie needs to reinforce its desire. It is then that the cabinet abandons

its private character. Throughout the Middle Ages, the nobility maintained a conservative idea of expansion. Most kings and feudal nobles were content to dominate and control a small piece of land. For this reason, their cabinets were "humble," small rooms constructed for their own enjoyment. But with the emergence of modernity, fueled by the colonization of "new lands," cabinets became insufficient, too small to contain all the accumulated desire of the new powers. It is here that the cabinet expands, unfolding into the grand apparatuses of illusion that are museums, theaters, galleries, and exhibitions—the great centers where the bourgeoisie consolidates its narrative.

Scenographies of power are all those symbolic spaces that serve to channel a collective emotion toward dominance and control. In this text, I speak of scenography to differentiate it from architecture. Temples, palaces, or public political spaces are architectures of power, erected with the intention of enduring in space and time. In contrast, the spaces that shape the narrative of power have a much more scenographic essence: they need to be mutable, reconfiguring according to the constant mutability of desire. Therefore, we can discuss here how the cabinet is a scenography that, like the museum or theater later, is configured as a space of constant change in service of the narrative.

I think of the sense Latour gives to scenography, as a "cascade of images"[1]: In modernity, the constant accumulation of images requires the invention of increasingly detailed classification mechanisms. The accumulation of "objects," both physical and symbolic, surpasses the capacity for understanding and overwhelms the storage of natural history museums. Society governed by the bourgeoisie generated a collapse by accumulation: the shelves supporting the cabinet give way under the weight of the amassed objects. As it expands toward infinity, the cabinet becomes unmanageable; the owner's own gaze can no longer encompass everything and faces the danger of disillusionment. The objects themselves cease to make sense and are recognized as "the effect of a complicated scenography, paper beings produced by 'phenomenotechnics.'" The world of modernity invents an entire series of technical, symbolic, mechanical, and social devices that act as scenographic forms of subjugation of the gaze. But Bruno Latour establishes a distinction between those who believe they see everything with the "naked eye," those subjects of power who consider that under their gaze they behold the universe in all its complexity. However, it is not with that naked eye that we observe the world, but with the "dressed eye," that form of contemplation filtered by the mechanism that

interposes itself between the gaze and the object. The bourgeoisie invents the devices that manage to mobilize the objects of the world, freeze them in an immutable form, and seclude them under their gaze[2].

There is an image imagined by Joseph de Maistre that seems particularly suggestive for understanding the evolution of cabinets of curiosities and their relevance today. De Maistre was an "anti-Enlightenment" thinker who strongly opposed the French Revolution. As a defender of the Ancien Régime, he sought through his writings a way to confront the new power emerging from the bourgeoisie. For this, he took the cabinet—which the bourgeoisie had adopted as a symbol of their conquest of power—as a reference: "We can form a perfectly fair idea of the universe by viewing it under the aspect of a vast natural history cabinet shaken by an earthquake. The door is open and broken, there are no longer any windows, some cabinets lie scattered on the floor while others still hang from pegs, ready to fall. Some shells have rolled into the mineral room, and a hummingbird's nest rests on the head of a crocodile. Yet, what fool could doubt the original intention, or believe that the building was constructed in this state? ... Order is as visible as disorder; and the eye, as it wanders through this vast temple of nature, effortlessly restores all that a malicious agent broke into pieces, twisted, stained, or moved. And more still: if one looks closely, a repairing hand can already be recognized. Some beams are propped up, paths have been opened amid the rubble, and, in the general confusion, a multitude of analogs have regained their place and touch one another"[3].

The image invoked by Joseph de Maistre is powerful because it positions the scenographic role that characterizes the cabinet and the objects it contains. In this text, I will revisit all the elements I have previously worked with and attempt to reconstruct the categories under which they are grouped. I will use the notion of "apparatus" that the author Jean-Louis Déotte employs to define all those forms of knowledge and arts configured through technical devices[4]. For those subjects who situate themselves within "modernity," phenomena are only conceivable if they can be objectified, that is, reduced to a form of rational and quantifiable contemplation. The cabinet is a paradigm of this, where the complexity of nature and human sociability is simplified into a built-in cupboard. Apparatuses are, therefore, all those categories that organize the scenographic forms in which the desire to order the world manifests: rhetoric, cinematography, perspective, the stage box, or the Enlightenment

museum, among other examples. All are apparatuses that, derived from the cabinet of curiosities, embody this spirit of classification. But even more importantly, as I want to make clear here, they are apparatuses invented, funded, or propped up by the bourgeoisie.

Thus, the notion of "apparatus" proves the most suitable in this work to classify every scenographic form that power uses to maintain its position. "Apparatus" derives from the Latin apparatus, which in turn comes from apparare: to prepare for. As Jean-Louis Déotte points out, the meaning of the notion of apparatus refers, first, to ceremony, splendor, and décor; and secondly, to device, prosthesis, instrument, and artifact, among other meanings[5]. The apparatus is thus conceived as any element that generates action around it, but which is neither the machine itself nor the one that operates it; it is not the physical element, nor the symbolic space. The apparatus is an intermediate point between fiction and truth, between the real object and the imagined one. It is not the items collected on the shelves of the cabinet, nor the furniture that supports them. It is the combination of both, which gains meaning through the gaze that possesses it and transforms its significance.

The idea of the apparatus proves ideal for analyzing the scenographies under consideration, because it also escapes the notion of the image—which has proven too simplistic—and allows me to focus on what truly concerns us: a forensic analysis of illusion. As Andrea Soto Calderón points out, the function of the apparatus in Jean-Louis Déotte's thought plays with its double semantic meaning: it is both a technical object and an ornamental object, that which generates a connection between technique and appearance[6]. This brings me back to the idea of understanding scenography as the sublimation of the apparatus, the space where illusion and technique meet to give rise to a reality that transforms. And every illusion that surrounds us—whether political, social, physical, or sensory—possesses a scenographic soul. An analysis of the structural facts of scenography allows us to understand the illusion it generates as a whole. As the same author points out, we are facing a decline of bourgeois art, which at the same time allows us to reimagine new forms of perception and experience. I share her position when she asserts that the function of art is no longer the elevation of beautiful forms, but the active reorganization of spaces outside the capitalism engendered by the bourgeoisie[7]. The conditions of production must be placed at the center of its

analysis; it is necessary to speak of its matter, to dissect the apparatuses that compose the scenographies of power, and to recognize their "spectral materiality."

Let us return for a moment to the image of the abandoned cabinet of curiosities invoked by Joseph de Maistre: that is the image of our time, a space where the strict and hierarchical ordering of the bourgeois class has violently collapsed. But, unlike De Maistre, there is no will to reconstruct the cabinet to the taste of the former masters; it may be more suggestive to understand where all the objects that compose it come from. In the cabinet we now observe, not only objects are displayed: "apparatuses" are exhibited—elements that shape an era, now displayed and momentarily neutralized, like the beast behind the glass in a zoo. In the following pages, the objective will be to analyze these apparatuses, develop five useful categories from their contemplation to dissect the scenography, define their materials, and thus attempt to avoid the unwanted harms of illusion.

Matter in direction

Speaking of directed matter refers to all those apparatuses that, in their connection to power, instrumentalize matter to shape a directed gaze. When we think of scenographies of power like those described above, they all share the main characteristic of structuring the gaze in a very specific direction. To make this concrete, I will explain it using two specific apparatuses that centrally configure modernity: perspective and the frame.

PERSPECTIVE

Let us imagine a landscape, a body, a building, or any object before us. Now let us imagine it traversed by lines that define its proportions, directions, and vanishing points. With the advent of perspective, the entire world comes into order. Every form, landscape, figure, and body that unfolds before the gaze becomes classified from a single viewpoint. It is a tool that allows imaginary lines to be traced through space, which simultaneously generate hierarchies. The gaze is no longer free, but falls under the tyranny of geometry: one line parallel to another, extending into the infinity of space. The perspectograph captures at a glance the wandering stroke of the draftsman.

The perspectograph was born as a mechanical device that allows, thanks to factors like the vanishing point and the observer's position, to draw in perspective. Albrecht Dürer designed one of the most well-known perspectographs, a simple model composed of a screen, an ocular, and a wooden frame that framed both the action and the gaze of the draftsman, called a "door." Maximilian I was Dürer's principal patron. His reign was characterized by the strengthening of imperial authority and the centralization of the administration of his domains, which is why he is considered a pioneer of the conception of the modern state.

Until then, medieval painting did not follow the laws of perspective but obeyed a symbolic hierarchy. For example, Romanesque art did not aim to represent proportions faithfully; instead, representation followed a spiritual canon: figures or elements increased or decreased in size according to their

role in the mystical hierarchy. This comes from Egyptian art and persisted until the emergence of Renaissance perspective.

Linear perspective arose as a strong deviation imposed on the prevailing representational will until that moment. By representing objects and bodies "faithfully," it creates architectural fictions upon which narratives can be staged. Space, previously symbolic, becomes tangible and, therefore, dominable. Perspective establishes an order of "rational" dominance over nature and the bodies inhabiting it.

Its invention, first attributed to the architect Filippo Brunelleschi and codified by the writer Leon Battista Alberti, was based on the belief that the representation of nature should obey geometric laws. Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici was the principal patron of both artists, remembered as the founder of the powerful Renaissance Medici dynasty. He did not come from nobility, and therefore did not follow traditional symbolic laws; as a banker, he needed to promote a new way of representing his domains.

The perspectograph works as follows: the person drawing places the eye at a fixed point of view, often assisted by a wooden frame that orients and classifies everything unfolding before their gaze. With this, the human being becomes the center of the universe, inaugurating humanism as the doctrine of the colonial state.

During the Renaissance, metaphysical symbolism escapes the artist's goals, and the arts are put at the service of representing the empirical world, that is, a notion of bourgeois realism. A standard representation of reality is imposed: objects and bodies can no longer have the shape they desire. Everything is classified, first in artistic representation and then in reality.

An anecdote illustrates the importance of the perspectograph and perspective: in 1424, a young Filippo Brunelleschi was commissioned to construct the building for the officials of the Monte, the main bourgeois governing bodies of Florence. There he applied, for the first time, the laws of perspective to represent, on behalf of the rulers, a new reality where space served the gaze of the proprietors.

With the perspectograph, a deviation of visual attention occurs: everything is planned around a vanishing point, which becomes the idea of progress, and through an artificial perspective that reorganizes nature. It organizes visual thought in a homogeneous and normative world.

The development of perspective—centered on the palace built by Brunelleschi for the new social class, the bourgeoisie—becomes the fundamental support for the forms of expression of modern civilization. Art rises to the status of science.

Brunelleschi created a device called a "perspective box": small wooden boxes containing perspective drawings of hills, towns, and surrounding roads. His knowledge of optics allowed for a three-dimensional illusion so that laypeople believed, when looking through the viewers, that they were seeing reality rather than drawings. A century later, this small artifact became popular as a fair attraction, with boxes containing landscapes in perspective, beautifully lit by candles and moved by invisible threads—perfect worlds contained in a small box held in the spectator's hand. These small spectacles were called "nousmons." With the perspectograph, vision becomes a tool of knowledge and plays a fundamental role in constructing modern scientific understanding. Another inspired by this model was the painter Antonio di Pietro, who created a series of compositions in perspective projecting the perfect city, articulated in wide avenues and strict geometry, breaking with the anarchic chaos of the medieval city. He called his model of the ideal city "La Sforzinda," in honor of the patron who commissioned the vision, the magnate Francesco Sforza.

In spreading the "wonders" of the perspectograph and perspective, the chronicler Giovanni Villani played a vital role, dedicating himself to disseminating the virtues of this technique for representing a new reality in the coming "nous mons." Villani was also an important merchant and shipowner, owning the most significant private naval fleet in the Mediterranean.

Renaissance artistic greatness revolved around concepts of bourgeois "realism," so that the real change brought about by the Renaissance is that metaphysical symbolism loses force and the artist's objective becomes consciously and definitively limited to the representation of the empirical world.

Thus, images gradually oriented themselves toward the technical obligation to represent reality's dimensions accurately, or rather, to bear the weight of practical reality. Things and people ceased to have dimensions organized by religious hierarchy, and their measures and proportions began to correspond to a mathematical hierarchy. It is important to note that paintings were commissioned works, that is, they were—at least to some extent—exchangeable for goods and products, contrary to the naive conception of "free representation of ideas, concepts, or feelings, without link to reality." They were always technical enterprises, but the imposition of a standard representation of visual reality was not possible until the first half of the 15th century, with Brunelleschi's studies.

Perspective is, therefore, the apparatus that Jean-Louis Déotte uses to illustrate more clearly the link between politics and matter[8]. Specifically, it shows the connection with the political thought of Niccolò Machiavelli, who is the theorist that configures the new reality arising from modernity. Jean-Louis Déotte goes so far as to assert that the existence of Machiavelli would not have been possible without Brunelleschi's projections. It is the dome of Florence, and not the printing press as is often claimed, that generates modern times. The only consistency that sustains city-states like Florence in the 15th century is that of paintings in perspective.

Perspective shapes the political condition, generating around it a transfer of power from the represented to the representatives. A similar process occurs in the "Italian-style" theater, where this separation is transferred to the tension between auditorium and stage. Representation makes presence possible: the representatives model the "common" while simultaneously replacing it.

In the Renaissance, perspective establishes the idea of the "eye as universal judge," modifies the appearance of images, changes visual conventions, and introduces protocols that continue to influence how we look and how we relate to images. As Andrea Soto Calderón notes, the political operation that perspective undergoes allows for ordering and controlling everything we see, "participating in an order of the invisible"[9]. As Nicholas Mirzoeff points out, "the strict application of perspective would have meant that the king appeared smaller than one of his subjects, a politically impossible result." The monarchies of late modernity needed to control this "floating power of images," establishing a single, dominant point of view.

Finally, from the 15th century onward, perspective instituted a symbolic form. The Italian, Dutch, and Flemish elites first, and later the French, English, and German elites, were compelled to see perspectivally. This is how, according to Jean-Louis Déotte[10], due to the education in perspective drawing, the "Italian-style" theater, urban perspectives, and French gardens—which form part of the educational curriculum of all noble and bourgeois elites—it is under this framework that we must understand how perspectival culture makes globalization possible. Therefore, perspective becomes the foundation that leads to globalization.

FRAME

The frame is the apparatus that separates the artwork from the real world. Historically, its use to frame art has been linked to religious images. As in medieval altarpieces, the frame establishes a boundary from which the gaze passes toward illusion.

The origin of frames can be found in the tradition of Byzantine icons, which served as a mirror for the earliest paintings of European Romanesque art. The first primitive altarpieces needed to be assembled with individually painted panels, which together generated a large theological image. The tabernacle frame, as it was originally known, functioned as a support for this structure, as the grain of the panels reinforced the union between them. This modular structure allowed that, at a given moment, the central religious images—such as a Virgin or Christ—could be removed from the set for private devotion. Therefore, the origin of the frame lies in the subtraction of the devotional image from the people, creating a private icon that moves from being contemplated in the popular spaces of churches to the private chamber of the wealthy.

From the 15th century in Florence, an inexhaustible market dedicated exclusively to the production of these private icons for the upper classes emerged, marking the origin of the pictorial painting as we know it today. Gentile da Fabriano is considered one of the first painters to create a private icon, a frame independent of any larger religious ensemble and self-supporting. He is regarded as the initiator of the frame designed to contain an

artwork, rather than as part of a greater whole. It was created for the Strozzi banking family, main opponents of the Medici hegemony. From these first private devotional images, portraits quickly emerged—individual frames that served to fix the image of their owners as an "idolatrous" icon of power.

During the Renaissance, new artistic patrons led to the emergence of the so-called "court frames." As the wealthy gained power, frames acquired more presence and became gilded, serving the same purpose they had in previous religious works: to separate them from the common people.

Ontologically, the frame functions as a boundary between the real world and fiction, or between the "vulgar" world and the "extraordinary." The painter Nicolas Poussin told his patron Chantelou that it was essential to adorn his work with a frame, to prevent the dispersion of sunlight and the "influence of neighboring objects that might confuse the eye."

Jacopo Sansovino was a Renaissance sculptor, considered the first to gild the frames of his works using gold leaf. This represented a revolution in the frame as an aesthetic apparatus, so significant that he became the first artist in the 20th century to have an exhibition dedicated exclusively to the frames he created, at the National Gallery. Gilding represents the ultimate elevation of the private icon over the public religious image. Sansovino devoted much of his career to working as a scenographer for court rituals, notably creating ephemeral arches for Pope Leo X's entry into Florence in 1515. His scenographic practice influenced the conception of the frame as a display device.

With Gothic art, Christian art adopted framing edges from Egyptian and Greek art. This zone around the painted surface originally served only an instrumental function: to allow the work to be held. With the expansion of Christianity, smaller icons began to be produced, leaving the frame visible. Decoration was added, with gilding and precious stones, to suggest the glories of heaven. The halo, the luminous oval frame surrounding the heads of divine figures, can be considered a proto-frame, an element that serves to highlight and distinguish the central image from the surrounding everyday world.

A clear correlation exists in the history of frames: they increased in number as nobles, kings, and popes gained power and wealth throughout modernity. The

rise of the bourgeoisie represents the ultimate expansion of the frame, as it became the most practical form of art possession for an emerging social class, due to its size and portability. The framed image is the perfect commodity.

Frames were not considered artworks in themselves, but rather status symbols and a display of the power of the family that owned the artworks. Thus, with the arrival of the Baroque, Renaissance frames were replaced by more uniform gallery frames, in accordance with the fashions of the time. Frames were changed each generation, preserving the paintings solely to demonstrate that the power of their owners remained strong and that their fortune had not diminished.

Trade with the so-called "New World" and the Protestant Reformation introduced a transformation in frames. They began to be made from woods like ebony, expropriated from colonized territories, as a symbol of conquest. Dutch frames, in particular, adopted an austerity characteristic of Protestantism, which, beneath its simple appearance, concealed the extraction of exotic materials as a new status symbol.

In 1746, August III of Poland commissioned the largest known construction of frames, for his collection recently acquired by the Gemäldegalerie. This gallery became the most renowned in Europe at the time. The frames, engraved with the king's initials and coats of arms, served to demonstrate royal ownership of the works. As Emmanuel Alloa asserts, the painting may be destroyed, but the image of the sovereign endures in its frame[11].

During the colonial period, sculptors such as Kugler and Deibel created frames using materials expropriated from the "New World," thereby reflecting the conquests of the Bavarian court. The frame always carries the name of the power it embodies in each era. Examples of this include the "Louis XVI frame" from the Baroque period or the "Empire frame" from the Napoleonic era.

The Rococo period incorporated the fashion of naming new frame designs after each French king: Louis XIII, Louis XV, Louis XVI... It is no coincidence that frames were given the names of kings precisely at the moment when the first public art galleries were being created. Assigning the king's name to a "vulgar" element such as a frame served as a marker of identity for the proletariat. Now, artworks—expropriated by the private class from the temples

—were, for the first time, once again exposed to public view in the new temples of modernity, the museums, but framed by the one who grants, as a gift, the right to contemplate them.

With the avant-garde movements of the past century and a half, many artists began to hang works without frames. This was seen as a rejection of art as a commodity, because the frame is placed only at the end of the process, when the artwork leaves the studio and ceases to be "living matter" to become a consumer object. With this small act of rebellion, many contemporary artists attempted to break the framing tradition of the past 500 years. The market, however, quickly adopted this new trend: the unframed work did not represent the end of the frame, but rather its ultimate expansion.

The "imaginary framing," as Alloa defines it, is the separation that the framed image generates from its surroundings and that disrupts the linear hierarchy of time. The frame thus functions to "set apart" the image, to delimit it, and to make it stand out[12]. The frame generates an "image environment," a space that should be understood more as bordering than as a boundary; it suppresses the bevel of perception and directs the gaze against its will[13]. The framed image creates a hierarchy of what surrounds us. A "subtraction of visibility"[14], that monopolizes the desire of the eyes.

SYNTHESIS

Directed matter refers to this phenomenon: how the scenographic image establishes, through apparatuses such as the frame or perspective, a direction that reinforces the narrative of the ruling class in power. In this way, matter is encapsulated—first in physical spaces that also become mental ones—and reorganized according to an idea of order, invoking a worldview of progress and hierarchy. "Directed matter" is thus the category that allows us to group all those characteristics in which the scenographies of power separate, isolate, and elevate an image from the surrounding reality.

Matter in contemplation

Talking about matter in contemplation refers to all those forms of the scenographic image that are designed to be viewed from a specific perspective or frame. Thus, the previously discussed apparatuses configure the two main exhibition devices of modernity, which I will now analyze in their connection to power: the stage box and the museum.

STAGE BOX

The stage box is the apparatus that shapes the model of what we today understand as theater. It is a complex system of stage machinery, where curtains, backdrops, pulleys, and other scenographic mechanisms are put at the service of representing an illusion.

The origin of the stage box can be dated to 1506, in the hands of Baltasar Catiglioni, who designed this device for the Court of Urbino. Also a naval engineer, he created the model of the stage box by replicating the pulley and sail systems of the ships that colonized the "new worlds." In the following century, Michelangelo Buonarroti developed new machinery for the theatrical spectacle of the weddings of Cosimo II de' Medici and Maria Maddalena of Austria. Thus, the stage box is an apparatus that, using the same naval technology that enabled conquests, establishes a new order of illusion.

The first modern theaters, as we understand them today, are the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, the Teatro di Sabbioneta, and the Teatro Farnese in Parma, all driven by bourgeois and noble capital. These served as models for other theaters, but above all they created the stage box, that apparatus conceived to generate illusion through the creation of a space where the laws of vision and perspective could be controlled at will.

Bernardo Buontalenti was one of the inventors who contributed to its renaissance by rediscovering classical texts on mechanics, such as those by Heron of Alexandria. This Hellenic engineer and inventor argued that by hiding from spectators the mechanisms responsible for marvelous effects, the

builder of automatons placed themselves in a position superior to that of the observer. The relationship between consciousness and surprise, inherited from classical Greek thought, had a significant influence on Baroque stage creators. The stage thus became a place where matter was transformed through the vision of theatrical machines, generating an illusion in the observer that defined a hierarchy of contemplation.

All the characteristics of this period converge in the figure of Pietro Paolo Floriani, architect and scenographer. His knowledge of stage machinery also led him toward what would later become his main occupation: military engineering. He cultivated these two facets in parallel, designing theatrical machinery that he then applied to the construction of war devices. This dual skill allowed him to serve the main European courts, from the Habsburgs to the papal army of Ferrara.

Spectacles of power became increasingly spectacular, designed to impress important guests. These were organized only every few years, to celebrate dynastic weddings, and performed only once or twice. Hundreds of artisans worked for months toward this purpose. In 1585, the Grand Duke Francesco I of Florence invested 25,000 scudi in a single production, the highest documented economic amount, surpassing any other civil or military engineering work of its time.

It was during this period that the proscenium emerged, the front part of the theater separated by a gilded frame. Theater historian George Kernodle argued that this gigantic frame was likely created by scaling up the framing of pictorial works. Another historian, Lawrenson, suggested it was designed to replicate triumphal arches. In both cases, the framed proscenium served the same function as in painting: separating the stage from reality, reaffirming ownership, directing the gaze, and elevating the status of its organizer.

Jean-Louis Déotte, through Hannah Arendt, asserts that politics emerges from the space constituted around people. The agoras of classical antiquity, the Renaissance representation spaces of Italian cities, or the revolutionary conventions and squares of France are examples of physical and symbolic spaces that constitute “epochs of spacing.” The French author affirms that Arendt’s model of political stage originates in the Renaissance with the invention of perspective and theatrical space, with the proscenium as its

center[15]. This space is significant because, for the first time in the tradition of political spaces, those who act are separated from passive spectators. Thus, a new world is configured in which the space for political discussion is organized around an elite that holds the possibility of "ascending the stage" and shaping collective visions of "new worlds," while others participate only in their contemplation, with their gaze strategically directed.

The proscenium also served to hide the theatrical machinery from the viewer's eyes at its edges and, at the same time, to hierarchize their gaze, contributing to further reinforce the perspective of contemplation. These same lines persist in the transition from theater to cinema, where the stage becomes a large proscenium, and in the definitive leap to virtual apparatuses, where screens replicate this same intention.

In the late Renaissance and early Baroque, a fusion emerges between theater, magic, and alchemy. Stage creators then receive the role of new "magicians" of the visible world, who order the chaos of the world in service of a discourse of order. The Spanish court of the time officially assigned Giacomo Torelli, an Italian scenographer, the title of "Le grand sorcier," translated as "the great wizard" or "the enchanter." The stage of premodern theater thus had a cognitive dimension, as the place where the high society of the time experienced its own self-perception.

Historical stage technology can be traced back to multiple ancient cultures, but it is from modernity, and especially from the European Baroque, that an inseparable union between technique and theater is generated. Baroque theatrical machines serve illusion, synchronizing as a single body with the orchestra, the presence of the actors, and the audience itself.

Joseph Furttenbach offers an interesting reflection on seventeenth-century Florentine stage machinery. In his *Codex iconographicus*, he explains that, in the organization of court spectacles of the time, there was great secrecy surrounding the scenographic devices that enabled stage tricks. The associated technical and technological innovations were jealously protected, to the point that princely patrons of the spectacles ordered armed guards to patrol the scenographers' workshops day and night, to prevent the secrets of the performances from leaking. This was done to preserve the element of surprise, since secrecy granted the sovereign the power to elicit astonishment, illusion,

and wonder in their audience. Control of the scenographic "magic" was essential to guarantee control over both the court and the people. If a rival noble could "copy" the scenographic mechanisms and replicate a similar illusion, the king's sovereignty on the throne would be seriously threatened.

In the Spanish courts, a unique theatrical genre known as Jesuit theater developed. This religious order adopted the innovative Italian theatrical mechanisms and adapted them inside temples, transforming them into first-rate performance spaces. The Misterio de Elche is one of the few surviving examples of the fusion between temple and theater, where the adoption of the stage-box apparatus is essential to continue captivating the faithful with its doctrine and not "lose" them to new bourgeois charms.

When Pope Gregory XV canonized the founding saints of the Jesuit order in 1622, their spectacles acquired a new dimension. This strengthened the relations between the House of Habsburg and the Society of Jesus in Madrid. Philip IV, to celebrate it, ordered the construction of a temple specifically designed to host Ignatian performances. From that moment, churches became public squares, and the Jesuits even removed sacred space from the altars to accommodate more audience and theatrical machinery. The spectacular scenographies often covered the entire presbytery, fusing sacred icons and stage machinery into a single body. This gesture provoked strong criticism, and it is not minor: the replacement of sacred temple space with the space of the stage apparatus reveals how the theatrical machine became relevant in that period. The stage box becomes the new mediator between the divine and the earthly, and both the emerging bourgeoisie and the religion-supported nobility needed to cling to it to perpetuate their worldviews and maintain power.

Cornelis Drebbel, the Dutch inventor of the submarine, is cited by Jill H. Casid as an example of the transformative power of projecting dominant images into the historical subconscious. Drebbel offered spectacles at the court of James I of England, where he tested his inventions through demonstrations halfway between science and performance. Francis Bacon observed these demonstrations, and the author argues that they were the main material source for shaping his vision of a society governed by an elite of philosopher-scientists[16].

In this line, Jorge Luis Marzo points out the existence of an “elite of authorized witnesses”: in modernity, a judgment of visual discernment is configured by a community of experts, which determines what has the right to “exist” and what does not, both in the political, social, and scientific realms. The author cites a letter written by Cornelis Drebbel that illustrates the role of his demonstrations: "I am the only one who appears in a room, with no one else present with me. And first of all, I change my clothes in front of everyone in the room. Now I am completely dressed in black velvet, and in a moment, no, as soon as one can imagine, I am completely dressed in green velvet, in red velvet, changing my outfit to all the colors of the world. And not only this, but I change my clothes in all kinds of garments, according to my desire, for example, in satin of all colors, then in silver cloth, then in golden cloth, presenting myself as a king, adorned with diamonds and all kinds of precious stones, and an instant later transforming into a beggar, with all my clothes patched and torn, although I wear only one set of clothes that I never remove. Moreover, I transform into a royal tree without anyone else noticing, the leaves trembling as if moved by the wind; and not only into a tree, but into all kinds of things, anything that occurs to me. Then I transform into some creature, following my desire, now into a lion, then a bear, then a horse, then a cow, a sheep, a calf, a pig, etc. And then it seems as if the earth opens and spirits rise from it, first in the form of a cloud and then transforming into the shape that seems fitting to me, namely, the form of Albertus Magnus or in the form of some prince or king, according to my choice. No, I make the giants, as they existed in other times, appear to rise from the earth, twenty, thirty feet high, moving and agitating so wonderfully and perfectly as if the parts of their bodies seemed to come to life. And I do all this through a new invention, which I have discovered through optics, with which I can perform incredibly ingenious things, too many to mention them all here, of which I will tell you more at another time”[17].

Marzo explains how, in the Baroque period, a mass instruction of the public took place in identifying all the figures that make up the scene and in the narrative that shapes the storytelling. As the art historian Wölfflin points out, “now ever larger multitudes enter the scene (...) the eye relinquishes following each individual figure and limits itself to the overall effect.” In this period, language and thought are visually synthesized, with the Counter-Reformation playing a key role, extending visual production to large audiences through

processions and parades that illuminate current mass mobilizations. “Images become a general language.”[18].

The appearance of phantasmagorias, shadow plays that allowed the projection of imaginary beings long before the invention of cinema, was a revolution for the stage box. The theatrical apparatus became the ideal space to gather crowds eager to be frightened by artificial ghosts. It is interesting to note how their peak occurred around the French Revolution, where the bourgeois audience, terrified by the revolutionary outbreak, needed to exorcise the demons of the “Terror.”

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, dioramas appeared, invented by Louis Daguerre, a scenographer. The dioramas were large theatrical representations intended to reproduce nature at its scale. Translucent backdrops and lighting effects created an illusion that transported the audience as if they were in front of a real landscape. Soon, natural history museums would adopt dioramas as a way of representing the natural habitats of exotic territories, populating these small stage boxes with stuffed animals and papier-mâché landscapes. Dioramas were thus the translation of stage box technologies into colonial language.

Daguerre, years later, would become the inventor of the daguerreotype, the first commercially widespread photographic process. Thus, there is a connection between the scenographic and the cinematographic, in applying stage box technologies to the first technique of “real” capture, photography. Daguerre’s obsession with capturing reality was the reason that led him to move from the theatrical diorama to the cinematographic apparatus.

MUSEUM

The museum is the apparatus that best embodies the use of illusion as a tool of domination. Its origin can be found in cabinets of curiosities, small collections of objects that the emerging bourgeois class accumulated in rooms designed to display them, with the goal of astonishing their contemporaries with their “rare properties.”

This is the case of the collection assembled by Rudolf II, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, which, upon its disintegration, was dispersed throughout Europe and became the seed of the great museums of the continent. This collection, made with the support of his court physician, Anselmus Boetius de Boodt, sought to recreate the universe in miniature, where this microscopic world served to reinforce his imperial authority. Everything was organized within the multiple rooms of the cabinet: more than 30 cabinets gathered all known minerals; art rooms exhibited works by the leading painters of the time; all documented animals had been captured, killed, and stuffed for display; magical artifacts, astronomical instruments, celestial globes, and maps of all conquered lands. Emperor Rudolf II thus announced his dominion over the real world.

The first cabinets of wonders were exactly that: spaces where objects were re-signified not in service of nature, but of illusion: a narwhal tusk became a unicorn horn, the taxidermy of an exotic animal became firm proof of the existence of mythological creatures, or skulls expropriated from the dead constituted the root of the racial barbarism to come. In other words, cabinets of wonders were portals where the reality of the object was re-signified, adulterated, and placed at the service of enchantment. For this reason, after self-enchanting, the wealthy owners of these cabinets expanded them to everyone, to the proletarians, and thus the modern museums were born.

As Déotte asserts, with the museum a space of "suspension" is created, where all theological, political, and social discourses gain access to an "institution of active forgetting." The museum becomes the great apparatus that the bourgeoisie uses to neutralize works of art and reduce them to their literalness [19]. It establishes the social tendency to be carried away by wonder.

From the Enlightenment onwards, these cabinets expanded, and it is here that we can date the birth of the museums that persist to the present day. With the avant-gardes in the twentieth century, driven by the Rockefeller family, the white cube appeared, an evolution of the museum that, within the framework of globalization, neutralizes dissident discourses.

Another way to understand the global discursive framework of this entire grouping of works is as a modern cabinet of wonders, those cabinets of curiosities that the emerging industrial bourgeoisie collected with the aim of

re-enchanting themselves in a world collapsing under old spiritual values. In a landscape where God was fleeing and revolts were rising, wealthy industrialists needed to create a space where they could establish a new order —a cataloging of the world.

In Baroque Europe, what is known in German as the wunderkammer, or "room of wonders," developed. With these private collections, the possessing individual determined their place in the universe. The recreation of the world represented by these cabinets allowed them to offer a narrative of control over existence within an apparently chaotic cosmos. If this is the essence of cabinets of curiosities, we understand that their perpetuation in the Enlightenment museum and in the contemporary white cube responds to the same principle. In the Enlightenment museum, it is the State that orders the chaos to confer itself authority, while in the white cube, contemporary oligarchies legitimize their position as dominators of reality.

Before the cabinets of curiosities, most European collecting was restricted to religious art, especially relics of saints and martyrs. This was when the Catholic Church accumulated its great treasures, which can still be seen today in the Vatican Museums, and also when European monarchies amassed their picture galleries, such as the courts of Burgundy. With the expansion of transoceanic travel networks and the beginning of the colonial era, an emerging mercantile class sought to replicate this collecting as a way of establishing its hegemony over former rulers. It is here that what we now call the "museum" is most clearly channeled into colonial agendas. One of the clearest examples of this is the English court physician Hans Sloane. Son of the head of the Scottish colony established by James I in Ireland, upon his death he donated his vast collection of artifacts expropriated during his research travels, which became the foundation for the British Museum, the Natural History Museum, and the British Library.

A museum is, after all, always a machine for generating narratives of power. Recent curatorial research seeks to question whether an institutional space, heir to the violence of cabinets of wonders, can become a space of counter-power. Where objects—in all their ontological dimension—take possession of their own narrative. One must visualize that cabinets of wonders—always created by those who held possession—still exist today. But now they are more like virtual rooms, where words lose value, where poor-quality images

constantly mutate, and where all intangible objects parading before us are re-signified, like digital narwhal tusks.
An example of how the modern museum configures reality is that its collections did not only accumulate exotic objects and stuffed animals, but also included human bodies. Thomas Dent Mutter was an American pioneer in plastic surgery who devoted much of his life to collecting thousands of human skulls, mainly from colonized lands and socially "displaced" individuals. This collection would give rise in the nineteenth century to research that justified racial differences between human groups, which in turn became the seed of twentieth-century genocides. The exhibition and cataloging of human remains in cabinets and later in museums lie at the genesis of racial ideology, according to which human beings, like minerals, lands, or animals, could be used as objects of consumption and rejection.

The white cube is that room where the walls are nullified in their whitewashed whiteness, windows are replaced by neutralizing light sources, and the floor is polished to reflect the visitor. Therefore, it is a space of isolation, of containment, conducive to detaching the artwork from the outside world and not exposing it to corruption, like a refrigeration chamber. There is a parallel between the emergence of the white cube and the creation of the scientific laboratory, as an aseptic space where external conditions, such as weather, are momentarily nullified so as not to interfere with the aesthetic experience, supposedly neutral, where "art exists in a kind of eternity of exhibition." "Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than a phonetic association," affirms Adorno. They become family tombs of artworks, which "testify to the neutralization of culture."

The museum thus operates as a machine that transports the passive viewer through space-time to wherever the institution's owner desires. For this reason, from the twentieth century onwards there is a return to the ideology of private museums, where neoliberal billionaires display their art collections. Like updated cabinets of curiosities, they finance neo-aristocratic institutions that seek to influence the public sphere, in the same way they buy media outlets or sponsor massive sporting events. The Guggenheim museums, a family that made its fortune in the second half of the nineteenth century exploiting mining in colonized countries, are a clear example of this phenomenon.

Nineteenth-century European museums represented an idea of accumulation characteristic of the continent's colonial expansionism. The American elite sought to distance itself from the European museum model to display its newly conquered hegemony. This is the birth of the MoMA in New York, a museum primarily promoted by the Rockefeller family, which sought to break with the exhibition tradition of the Old Continent. Quickly, the museum's team adopted the white cube aesthetic ideology, where Alfred H. Barr Jr., its first director, implemented a dynamic exhibition format, creating a curatorial discourse among the works. This dynamism sought to reflect the same dynamism that characterized American imperialism, expropriating resources such as oil, the Rockefeller family's main asset, in contrast to the "stagnation" of European colonial methods.

The white cube recovered the lost idea of the museum as a temple of art during modernity. In the Renaissance, churches became theaters to keep pace in the art of seduction with the grand spectacles of the court. In the twentieth century, the museum reclaimed this with the white cube, where the work, displayed in a kind of elevated, neutral, and aseptic space, evokes a divine and transcendent idea in the viewer. The art exhibited there overwhelmed the spectator in those large neo-colonial museum colossi, making the viewer feel privileged in its presence. The historical narrative of the avant-gardes, which unfolds gradually from the nineteenth century onwards, serves to enthrone the bourgeoisie, where the works on display are incomprehensible to the general public without mastery of a cultural capital possessed only by the bourgeoisie.

SYNTHESIS

The matter contemplated is that which embodies within itself the primary function of existing in order to be seen. Unlike architectural matter, which also has the function of being inhabited, scenographic matter is designed to be visualized. From the apparatuses of the stage box and the museum, we can understand how the aesthetics of power reorganize scenographic matter to construct narrative through its exhibition. "Matter in contemplation" is thus the category that allows us to understand that the scenographies of power aim, beyond being inhabitable surfaces, to exert a visual channeling of desire.

Matter in movement

To speak of matter in motion means to refer to all that scenographic substance that mutates and constantly evolves in order to achieve its effect of seduction. Thus, in this section I will discuss two apparatuses that shape the contemporary era and that transfer the scenographic act to the moving image: the cinematograph and editing.

CINEMATOGRAPH

The various technologies that converge in the cinematograph fulfill the same function: to convert the still image into a moving image. The oldest surviving photograph, "View from the Window at Le Gras" by Nicéphore Niépce, taken in 1826, maintains the rectangular format inherited from the representative tradition of easel painting. There is, therefore, a formal link connecting the apparatuses of the frame, perspective, and the stage box, perpetuating the individual format of private iconography initiated in modernity.

The photographic and cinematographic tradition is a direct continuation of the pictorial culture of the Renaissance, when realistic figuration was assumed to be the only possible system of representation. It postulated that, through the representation of objects, the imitation of reality had to be achieved in such a way that human eyes would be deceived. The most perfect work of art was considered to be that which succeeded in making the viewer interpret reality as fiction.

As Guy Gauthier points out, it must be taken into account that the rectangular format appears very late in the history of images, and predominantly only in Western culture. Other cultures and civilizations have not used this format, which encapsulates images, whether physical or virtual, under strict laws of perspective. The rectangular frame does not correspond to the natural field of human vision. That we still consider it "natural" to contemplate images in this format today responds to an ideological imposition, yet another illusion.

The appearance in the nineteenth century of analog image-capturing devices allowed, for the first time, the reproduction of reality without the intervention of the human hand. Until then, the creation of images implied artisanal labor, as in painting or engraving. Now, however, everything was left to a chemical process, characterized by its unlimited reproducibility.

In 1895, Woodville Latham, a former Confederate officer in the U.S. Civil War and a chemistry professor, showed in a New York shop the first public screening of a feature-length film. It was the first time a complete sequence—in this case, a boxing match—was shown instead of individual segments. Latham stated that, unlike the cinematographic devices created up to that point, his would be "tailor-made presentations, where you will not need to look through a small hole to see them. You will sit comfortably and watch fighters striking each other, circuses, suicides, hangings, electrocutions, shipwrecks, scenes from the stock exchange, from the street, horse races, football matches, almost anything. You will see people and things as they are."

The cinematographic apparatus also quickly became a universal guarantor of truth. In 1898, the French president Félix Faure became embroiled in a controversy. The German chancellor Otto von Bismarck accused him of having violated etiquette by not removing his hat before the royal guard during a visit to Saint Petersburg. But the incident was recorded by Matuszewski, a pioneering Polish photojournalist, who demonstrated that Faure had indeed removed his hat as protocol required. The cinematograph thus became a guarantor of truth, and Bismarck's authority was internationally weakened. This episode is considered fundamental in the discrediting of the German leader and in the beginning of the disagreements that would lead to the wars of the twentieth century. Matuszewski stated that "if human witnesses contradict one another about an event, the cinematograph could resolve the disagreement by silencing the one who denies it," thus turning the apparatus into a kind of "oracle object" capable of settling human conflicts, while overlooking the hand that manipulates it as a witness of truth. For him, "cinematographic truth" became the ultimate truth, reinforcing the role this apparatus would play in the new media and the appeal to a hypothetical "neutrality" of the journalistic image.

As also demonstrated by the most well-known screenings of the Lumière brothers, held that same year at the Grand Café in Paris, the cinematographic

apparatus became an ideal tool for conveying a sense of reality, fantasy turned into the mentality of the masses. Thus, one of their most famous films, "Workers Leaving the Factory," prefigures the service the cinematograph would provide throughout the twentieth century as a tool of replication and, therefore, of perpetuation, of reality.

The invention of the cinematographic apparatus in Europe and the United States was rapidly exported to colonized territories. An example of this was its arrival in India, then a British colony, where the Lumière brothers traveled only one year after their famous exhibitions in Paris to present their magical projections. In this country, the impact of the cinematograph was enormous, giving rise to the creation of a gigantic industry, Bollywood, which rivaled Hollywood in popular reach. This led the British colonial authorities to pass the first film censorship law in 1918, limiting the distribution of films to native and popular classes. The power that this image-distribution apparatus could generate as a tool of cohesion—and therefore of transformation of an oppressed society—was thus recognized.

In the 1890s, its earliest applications were placed at the service of the symbolic perpetuation of the figures of power that sustained the bourgeoisie. Queen Victoria was the first public personality to be filmed, in order to increase her popularity and trust among her subjects. She was also the first leader to be photographed following the tradition of the royal painted portrait, allowing her image to be disseminated massively. This initiated a long tradition of using the media as a tool of mass propagation.

Dickson, a young assistant to Thomas Edison, invented the kinetograph in 1888, which in the hands of capitalist entrepreneurship became a mechanism that allowed the individual viewing of primitive moving images. At the same time, Edison put this technology at the service of the magnate William Randolph Hearst, who used it as a propaganda medium in the 1896 United States elections. This magnate decided to cover the sides of his building in New York and other places in the city with large wooden structures with screens, which acted as projection surfaces for images. Entertainment recordings were projected alongside maps of the United States, where election results were displayed. The cinematograph served, in parallel to the creation of fictional narratives, to reaffirm already existing narratives of power. This founding act by Hearst prefigured the use of colossal screens, like those that

would later populate Times Square, as a scenographic medium to influence public opinion. Scenography and cinematography became, from the outset, an inseparable binomial for the propagation of virtual images.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Nickelodeons were created, the first spaces dedicated exclusively to the exhibition of films. These small cinemas used shopfronts where brief naïve entertainment films were projected on a loop. Their name comes from nickel, the five-cent coin, and odeion, a term in ancient Greece referring to roofless theaters. Nickelodeons were the first cinema network, designed to be accessible to the working class. The ticket price was much lower than that of a theater performance, which made these primitive film screenings the main space of popular entertainment. Their low cost, rapid distribution in working-class neighborhoods, and offering of "vulgar" entertainment were the precedent of cinema as a tool of mass entertainment.

In 1908, the Motion Picture Patents Company was created, a conglomerate of the most powerful film companies in the United States. Its intention was to take control of a nascent image-production industry, privatize public patents, and distance cinematic creation techniques from the popular classes. By establishing a monopoly over moving image control, they managed in just two years to multiply audiences exponentially, quickly surpassing theater as a medium of mass communication.

The image-capturing apparatus was also applied to serial photography by Eadweard Muybridge. His experiments were sponsored by a railroad and telegraph magnate, and he used this technique to closely examine the movement of workers' bodies in order to evaluate their performance in the factory. The fragmentation of image flow into frames was integral to increasing the profitability and surplus value of rationalized industrial capitalism. Other pioneering photographers such as Frank Bunker Gilbreth filmed workers performing various tasks, such as packing cardboard boxes or assembling machine gears, to analyze forms and patterns of movement and increase productivity.

Ford Motor Company implemented cinematographic technology to improve the profitability of its mass assembly lines. These motion studies contributed to the division of labor into separate and individualized tasks, increasingly

routine and mechanized. This process of rationalizing the worker's body and industrial production culminated, in 1913, in the establishment of the first moving assembly line, increasing direct control over the pace of workers' production and maximizing the extraction of surplus value. This is the birth of Fordism, the system of industrial production that displaces artisanal labor, isolating workers from global knowledge of production and separating intellectual from manual labor. The cinematographic apparatus, therefore, plays a fundamental role in the origin of the modern system of corporate capital production as we know it today.

Film theorist Hugo Münsterberg pointed out how, after cinema leapt from fairground entertainment to mass spectacle, it was quickly incorporated into the war industry. The design of the first automatic weapons was inspired by the design of the camera, as was the parallel development of sound reproduction technologies. An example of this is General Electric, a company associated with the birth of cinema, which worked with the United States Navy to improve sound reproduction for its fleet, technology that they later applied to the stage box of cinema. In parallel, the New Deal or the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom developed the first mobile cinema technologies, with the aim of bringing propaganda films to the most isolated working-class populations that were electorally significant to them. This would be at the origin of the simplification and independence of the cinematographic apparatus, leading to television and years later to mobile device screens.

EDITING

The camera and, especially, montage are the apparatuses that, according to Déotte, allow the ruling class to observe the "dangerous class": "Paradoxically, if the 'dominated' can emancipate themselves from alienation, which in Benjamin is necessarily defined as phantasmagoria, this success will leave the 'dominated' in a state of unease. How, indeed, can one continue observing—and therefore controlling—those who are no longer seduced, and who for that reason become a 'dangerous class'?" The solution to this political problem would be technical: hence the recourse to the film camera, which over time would evolve into surveillance cameras: "Those who profit from the labor of

the proletariat no longer expose themselves to the gaze of the proletarians. Gazes that threaten to become increasingly fierce; under these conditions, it is of utmost importance to have the possibility of calmly studying the members of the lower classes without in turn becoming the object of study by them"[20].

An example of the emergence of montage as a tool for modifying perception is the magic lantern. This device was very popular in the nineteenth century and consisted of a box that projected a beam of light through a glass slide painted with landscapes, scenes, or grotesque figures. The magic lantern is thus considered one of the most recognized models of pre-cinema, but above all, it offers a first approach to the apparatus of montage. In the arrangement and succession of glass slides, an instructive narrative is orchestrated where, as the author Jill H. Casid points out, the power of the projection scene is configured. The "projective machine" takes agency and confronts the fantasy of the "sovereign subject"[21].

Another precedent of montage can already be found in the camera obscura, an optical device popular in the seventeenth century that made it possible to project images thanks to the refraction of light as it passed through a small aperture functioning as a converging lens. Contemporary cameras take their name from these devices, which were called "camera obscura" because they were literally small rooms painted black to enhance the effect. Giovanni Battista Della Porta was its inventor, an astronomer and the son of a merchant family from Naples, owners of land and one of the largest naval fleets.

In his work *Magiae Naturalis*, Della Porta defined the camera obscura as an "orchestrated spectacle of images," a machine of "satisfaction of desire": "As in a chamber one may see a hunt, battles with enemies, and other illusions (...) That in a dark chamber with white sheets, one may see with such clarity and brightness, as if they were before our eyes, hunts, banquets, armies of enemies, plays, and whatever one wishes. Let there be before that chamber, where you desire to represent these things, a spacious plain where the sun may shine freely: upon it you shall place trees in order, also woods, mountains, rivers, and animals, which are real, or are made by art, of wood or some other material. One may include small children, as we are accustomed to do when comedies are performed, and one may counterfeit deer, rhinoceroses, elephants, lions, and any other creature one desires"[22]. With Della Porta's invention begins the era in which images, thanks to the apparatus of montage

and its scenographic device, are ordered according to the rhythm of what its "orchestrator" decides to "falsify."

This manipulative use was already denounced in its time by the Jesuit mathematician François de Aquilón who, upon observing the effects of the camera obscura on what he described as the "ignorant populace," stated: "In this way, certain charlatans tend to deceive the ignorant crowd; they claim to know about black magic, although they scarcely understand what that means. They boast of summoning ghosts of the devil from hell itself and show them to the spectators. They lead the inquisitive and curious, who wish to know everything about secret and obscure matters, into a dark chamber where there is no light, except for the little that filters through a small panel with a glass lens [...] they say that soon the devil will come. Meanwhile, an assistant puts on a devil's mask so that he resembles the images of demons one usually sees, with a monstrous and terrifying face and horns on his head (...) After that, one takes an immense sheet of paper and places it before the rays of light that have managed to enter the chamber. On it one can see the image of the devil walking up and down; this they watch with unease. This is the reason why the poor and the inexperienced do not realize that they are seeing the shadow of the charlatan and waste their money unnecessarily"[23] The power of the projected image lies in taking advantage of the vulnerable spectator, summoning "theatricalized demons" that alter the image and reality. Thus, the camera obscura seems to prefigure the alienating and manipulative power that, in the centuries to come—and especially in the twentieth—moving images would acquire as a tool for the submission of the proletariat.

A final scientist of the period, Robert Hooke, sought to demonstrate the affective power that projected images could have over those who contemplated them in order to immerse them in belief: "This optical experiment [...] produces effects of great delight, but for those who do not know the device, very marvelous; so that spectators not very versed in optics, who should see the various appearances and disappearances, the motions, changes, and actions, which in this way may be represented, could easily believe them to be supernatural and miraculous, and just as easily be affected by all those passions of love, fear, reverence, honor, and astonishment, which are natural consequences of such belief. And if the pagan priests of old had known it, their oracles and temples would have been much more famous for the miracles of their imaginary deities. For with an art like this, what could they not have

represented in their temples? Apparitions of angels or demons, inscriptions and oracles on the walls; prospects of countries, cities, houses, fleets, armies; the actions and movements of men, beasts, birds, etc., their disappearance into a cloud, and that they appear no more after the cloud has vanished. And indeed, almost anything that can be seen may by means of this artifice be represented very vividly and clearly, in such a way that, except to persons very curious and sagacious, the means by which these appearances are produced would not be discovered"[24].

Finally, as Jill H. Casid points out, the magic lantern, the camera obscura, and other technical devices that configure the apparatus of montage served in the production of the imperial subject of reason. The use and mastery of these techniques allowed colonial Europe to materialize its vision of a "new world," especially through the use of these projection technologies in exhibitions orchestrated by power, such as the great expositions where the powers gathered to perpetuate the narrative that, to this day, reaches us about their apparent "technological supremacy"[25].

The origin of cinematographic montage can be situated in the early experiments of Charles Pathé, who at the beginning of the twentieth century dedicated himself to creating films that exclusively narrated real crimes. These narratives continued in cinema the already well-known genre of "real crime" or "true crime" from crime journalism, requiring sequential construction to narrate the murder, the capture, and the execution of the criminal, producing in the spectator a sensation of "conquest" and "justice" that perpetuates these sensationalist narratives to this day. The expansion of this genre also served to reinforce the bourgeois vision of a narrative of fear, according to which the subaltern classes must fear their equals and require the protection of power in order to live in community.

A film that situates the origin of montage within "true crime" is the one produced by the Edison Manufacturing Company in 1901. Edison acquired the exclusive rights to film events in which President McKinley participated. By chance, he was able to capture, in panoramic form, the faces of the crowd at the moment when he was assassinated by the anarchist Leon Czolgosz. To conclude the film in the purest narrative style of "real crime," Edison requested authorization to record the execution by electric chair to which Czolgosz was sentenced. When this was denied, he decided to stage it,

establishing the first precedent of a "reconstruction" presented as real, reinforcing the idea of these montages as truthful events even though they were completely falsified. This idea continues in current programs where crimes are reenacted, presenting the "culprit" as the embodiment of evil, just as in the magic lanterns and camera obscuras of the past, where the "devil" was embodied to frighten the population. Through this operation of montage, a scenography of evil is created that impacts the subconscious of the working-class audience to which it is addressed, completely overlooking the class struggles within which these acts are inscribed.

Montage thus appears as the apparatus that allows moving images to be endowed with narrative meaning. A form of proto-montage can be found in the recording of a procession in 1897 for Queen Victoria's Jubilee, where the distributors of the images that captured the moment determined that they should be shown in a specific chronological order. Thus, the "truth" of what happens in an event comes to be integrated not by what a fixed camera captures as a single sequence, but by the ordering subsequently established by an external operator.

With montage, therefore, a continuous narrative is created in which images acquire a fixed order within their own universe, and thus establish a hierarchy of contemplation and institute a single account of the perception of the event. A clear example can be found in the work of the American filmmaker D. W. Griffith, especially in *The Birth of a Nation*, where through the revolutionary use of montage he manipulates the visual narrative to associate Black and migrant populations with chaos, thereby legitimizing social control and reinforcing white bourgeois ideology. Griffith's work, the most expensive produced up to that time, was financed by the United States' banking economic elite, mostly direct heirs of the defeated side. This film became the first mass phenomenon, seen by more than 3 million people, the most consumed cultural product up to that moment in human history.

An example of how the apparatuses of montage and cinematography were in the hands of elites occurred after the October Revolution in the main Moscow studios. With the Bolsheviks' seizure of power, most producers and studio heads went into exile. The first resolutions were then approved recognizing the power of cinema as a real weapon for the enlightenment of the great popular masses. Film studios were nationalized, and proletarian technicians

and creators, until then directed by producers aligned with the bourgeoisie, began to produce their own films. This fact implied not only a practical revolution in the mode of production, but also a formal and aesthetic one, which is why films produced during this period, such as *Battleship Potemkin*, or *October*, are today considered masterpieces of world cinematography.

SYNTHESIS

Matter in motion is that which is characterized by the constant mutability of its form. Unlike architectural matter, scenographic matter evolves according to the narrative one wishes to implant. It does not require demolition, but only transformation, which is already embedded in its material conception. Therefore, "matter in motion" is the category that allows us to group together all those scenographies of power that manifest themselves—as illustrated by the apparatuses of cinema and montage—through their capacity to transform perception and space, regenerating themselves.

Matter in arrangement

Speaking of matter in arrangement refers to all that scenographic substance that needs to be structured according to a narrative logic in space. Thus, we can refer to a technical system that organizes and classifies information as a whole. To analyze this form of ordering matter, I will examine two apparatuses that are characteristic of this function: the automaton and computation.

AUTOMATON

The automaton, as a device at the service of illusion, has existed since very ancient times. Automatic artifacts are often documented in the centers of power of various cultures: in Greek temples, enormous statues were moved by steam-powered machines, and in Persian courts, royal thrones were adorned with mechanical beasts that intimidated the subjects.

Ctesibius was a constructor of automatons in Alexandria, which at the height of its prominence in Egypt, home to many craftsmen, specialized in building singing statues. In the same city and period, around the 2nd century BCE, Philo of Byzantium also designed large war machines and automated theaters, offering performances without human performers. Centuries later, Hero developed the first pneumatic devices applied to automatons and theatrical effects, generating miniature three-dimensional spectacles that amazed those who witnessed them. Alexandria thus holds the title of the ancient city where the most automatons and scenographic devices were developed.

Hero, in particular, adapted this technology to religious engineering, creating automated altars where sacred statues moved in response to the singing of the faithful, producing the illusion of talking gods. Among the devices he designed was the first automatic door, designed to open by itself when the temple priest lit a strategically placed fire. Two thousand years later, automatic door technology would be implemented in commercial centers. In this way, automation fulfills the function of a divine invitation: access to the temple occurs in the same way that Capital wants us to access consumption, through a “magical” seduction.

Hero's automatons, compiled by him in his eponymous book, were primarily intended to facilitate the priests' ritual actions. Thus, the inventor designed a scenographic device in the form of a vending machine, where the faithful, upon inserting a coin, automatically received purifying water for rituals. In these devices, we see for the first time the practical substitution of the priest's role by the machine. This erosion of sacerdotal authority, which was the principal foundation of the imperial power of the time, is considered by historians such as Sprague de Camp to be one of the causes of the disintegration of ancient Rome[26]. Another historian, Robert Brumbaugh, stated that religious scenographic technology led to the loss of power of priestly figures, decentralizing religious belief. The priest becomes decadent, and the machine catalyzes popular illusion.

We must remember that today the temples of antiquity have reached us completely devoid of the scenographic artifacts that once brought them to life. The architectural shell was only the casing to house the full arsenal of automatons arranged to generate illusion. The great scholar of classicism, E.R. Dodds, described the last centuries of the Roman Empire as "an age of anxiety," arguing that the regimented and mechanical imperial efficiency could no longer contain the growing chaos in the souls of its subjects[27].

The knowledge of the art of creating automatons was lost with the collapse of the ancient world, but it survived in part thanks to the Byzantine Empire and Arab culture. Liudprand, bishop of Cremona, describes a large scenographic machine that preceded the throne room in the imperial palace of Constantinople in 949. He recounts how the emperor's throne was guarded by two enormous metallic lions that, when approached by subjects, roared threateningly, moving their heads and blinking their eyes, while the throne itself rose with the emperor atop as if propelled by a "magical" force. In this way, Western envoys were shown the superiority of the East compared to their own decadence. The survival of automatons only in this part of the ancient world demonstrates their significant connection to maintaining power.

The reintroduction of automatons to Europe came from the Arab world, specifically through the scholar Al-Jazari, via his treatises on "ingenious mechanisms." His early creations were devices in the shape of birds and other animals that adorned the gardens of princes and nobles. The numerous figures, moved primarily by hydraulic systems, represented the mechanical

spectacle of a recreated nature. These artificial animals were the precursors to the automation of human bodies, which, with modernity, would become central—not merely entertaining and astonishing the elite, but becoming the driving force of the scientific revolution.

With Descartes' mechanistic thought begins what we can today call "robots" or "artificial intelligences." The French thinker developed his vision while observing the mechanical devices in the royal gardens of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, where the royalty and bourgeoisie of the 17th century gathered to delight in watching creatures animated by hydraulic forces. From this point, these "animated beings" acquire centrality in our time as embodiments of absolute control over the forces of nature and creation.

Descartes' obsession with automatons led him to attempt to "duplicate" his daughter, who had died at five years old, through a mechanical doll that replicated all her movements. Descartes became so attached to this figure that he directed it as if it were his real daughter, reborn through the "magic" of mechanism. Legend has it that the philosopher traveled with it on a ship, and one day the captain discovered the small automaton. Horrified to see that the "girl" moved on her own, he threw it overboard. Upon learning this, Descartes killed the captain and threw him into the water as well, as he had done with his "daughter." The philosopher considered all living beings to be merely complex automatons, devoid of any mental state, driven by survival. Yet, as the story recounts, they were not exempt from feeling and suffering the consequences of their actions.

The adoption of this mechanistic cosmos by the ruling classes occurred during the transition from the Middle Ages to the Modern era. There, automatons were incorporated into the clocks of temples and public buildings: mechanical figures representing the seven deadly sins, sinners, saints, or Death itself. These moving figures marked the rhythm of workers' lives and presaged Descartes' revolutionary thinking, in which "the difference between a living being and a corpse was no more than the difference between an unwound clock and a worn-out automaton"[28].

The theorist Erik Davis states that in modernity, the West established a "pact with the machines"[29], We can situate these machines in history as reflections of ourselves in their movements and designs. An example of this is the

Luddism that erupted during the Industrial Revolution, when the bourgeoisie believed it was possible to replace the proletariat with machines. The scientific understanding that the ruling class had of machines—conceived already as their divine servants alongside the workers—was not well received by the proletariat, who rebelled against them by destroying them. Curiously, it is worth noting that the revolt against machines that characterizes the 18th century preceded, in a way, the revolutions against the bourgeoisie in the 19th century.

This vertiginous intrusion of automata into all spheres of modern society reached its peak in the Age of Enlightenment, where even the automaton itself could be supplanted. At the court of Vienna, the "Turk" was presented, an automaton designed to play chess, created by Wolfgang von Kempelen. This proto-robot greatly fascinated all the Enlightenment intellectuals of the time for its high problem-solving capacity, which almost perfectly imitated the human mind in the reasoning and decision-making necessary to win a game. But the automaton revealed itself as a deception when it was discovered that Kempelen had designed it to conceal a person inside, who was the one actually making the decisions. This fact demonstrates the innocent fascination that automata generated in wealthy audiences: a machine that appeared intelligent but was, in reality, animated by the enslaved hand contained within. Just as today occurs with computers, their successors—as demonstrated by the late 20th-century impact of Deep Blue humiliating chess champion Garry Kasparov, or more recently, artificial intelligences that project the illusion of consciousness onto us—hide behind them all the knowledge extracted as an intellectual byproduct.

It is no coincidence that the machine imitated the ethnic features of a Turk; automata were seen as representations of alterity, and the fact that they were depicted with physical characteristics of distant cultures placed them at the center of the rise of racial discourses that began to characterize European mentality. Throughout history, the powerful have always felt this fascination with automata and commissioned their creation from artists. Da Vinci created for Louis XII of France a mechanical lion that opened its chest to display his coat of arms, and the artisan Juanelo Turriano created a monk who walked the streets begging alms for his master, Emperor Charles V. Much earlier, the medieval Arab creator Ibn al-Razzÿz al-Jazarÿ created a humanoid machine representing a slave whose task was to pour water over the king's hands

during ritual washings. The automaton was the lucid dream in the mind of the powerful class, intended to replace slave labor. The automaton does not complain, does not protest, and therefore has no capacity to rebel. This fact led, in the later bourgeois imagination, to a nearly naïve fascination with the automaton and the desire to replace the proletariat with the machine.

Emmanuel Alloa asserts that the anthropomorphism we associate with images of automata generates a "magical force of attraction" capable of drawing gazes with an intrinsic force of traction[30]. In their presence, what Alloa calls a "commandment of visibility" is staged, diverting the human gaze from its everyday paths, summed up in Valéry's well-known phrase: "The things I look at, look at me as much as I look at them".

COMPUTATION

Digital computation is the capacity to convert any information into a binary system of reproduction. Its origins as a device can be traced back to the eighteenth century with figures like Leibniz and Johnson, who conceived it as a method of calculation.

When we speak of computation, we must also refer to digitalization, tracing back to the beginnings of the term in the hands of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. In the seventeenth century, he developed the first binary system, a universal language that reduces information to just two numerical units. From a young age, Leibniz worked as a jurist and diplomat, being one of the few historical thinkers with such extensive knowledge of state mechanisms. In a letter to the son of Baron Boineburg, he stated that "I am of the opinion that one must obey, as a general rule, since the evil of revolution is far greater, by comparison, than the evils that give rise to it." The concepts of "programming" and "binary language" stem from Leibniz's will to, as a pioneer of cybernetics, originate a theory that sought to "order" nature in the same way the modern state is ordered.

Originally, producing an image required direct contact with natural material. In a cave painting, for example, red pigment was made by crushing copper-rich rocks, while gray and black tones often came from grinding bones and

charcoal from fires. There was a direct relationship between the act of producing the image and its final manifestation, at least for those in charge of its creation. This remains true for all the images we have discussed so far—from perspective to the stage box, to cinematography. With computer-generated imagery, matter is relegated to the shadows, deep inside chips and computers, producing the illusion of its disappearance.

With the computation apparatus, Déotte's maxim regarding all devices is continued: all of them, invented in modernity, are made for "play" and contain a ludic component. "They are accessories of human pleasures, whose birth lies neither in the workshop nor in the laboratory, but in the fairground booth"[31]. With computation, the playful aspect of the virtual world merges with military and propagandistic technology. From perspective to the stage box, through rhetoric and montage, all devices act as producers of new regimes of fiction—self-generating worlds and temporalities that transform the socio-historical flow.

The computation apparatus goes beyond the cinematograph, insofar as it produces electronic images that are already purely spectral. Until now, all produced images were embodied, in one way or another, in their materiality: from theater backdrops that painted landscapes to celluloid negatives that gave physical form to the filmic image. With the advent of digital technology, spectral scenographies are created that dissolve the union between image and matter. With computation, Josep M. Català asserts, images can finally leave the world of matter to which they had been bound for millennia[32]. They are "mental images" that recover their own "scenography."

There is a line connecting automata with computation, from the machine that enchants to the machine that organizes. In 1801, Joseph Marie Jacquard, a textile entrepreneur, made a fundamental contribution to robotics. He designed an automatic operating system for looms that allowed the programming of their movements. It consisted of a punched card that established patterns and assigned tasks. More than a century later, IBM revived this system, implemented in automated looms, to replicate it in the first computers. The organizing machine is a direct heir of those early machines born from the Industrial Revolution, which for the first time designated workers as obsolete material.

The image theorist Vilém Flusser asserts that, from modernity onward and especially after the Enlightenment, apparatuses undergo a process of progressive refinement[33]. This implies that apparatuses began to function ever more quickly, and humanity found itself incapable of keeping up with their evolutionary pace. As is characteristic of computation, their calculating capacity rapidly surpasses human ability to comprehend it, so that the apparatuses start to operate beyond human reason. In other words, humanity loses control over the apparatuses. The quintessential Enlightenment myth, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein monster, is the popular manifestation of this loss of control.

Flusser provides examples[34] Tangibles examples of apparatuses operating beyond human control include administrative, political, and economic systems... Don't we feel around us how bureaucracy exceeds all human bounds? This is an instance of how any social apparatus can surpass human understanding and advance autonomously. Yet, as the author notes, they still require human intervention. Human decisions may appear eliminated, but apparatuses depend on humans to continue "pressing keys." The computation that governs everyone's life is a clear example of Flusser's ultimate statement: we are becoming clerks who merely reprogram apparatuses.

It is in the 20th century, however, that we can observe the practical evolution of this system, particularly through the role of General Electric, the world's most important technology company. To improve its competitiveness, it created a system for digitizing the insurance policies of millions of users, violating their confidentiality. This laid the groundwork for the development of massive digital record-keeping systems, which led to the contemporary virtual bureaucracy that today tracks nearly every social action.

From this point, digital technology spread to all fields of information management. Especially by the late 20th century, this gave rise to the modern techno-feudal empires of Google, Apple, and Microsoft, which, among others, shape the representation of reality today.

The ordered image inhabiting the virtual world allows us to surpass the notion of "neutrality" often attributed to the technologies surrounding these apparatuses. At the same time, it also seeks, as Erik Davis notes, to transcend mere categorization as a "tool": "Technology is a deceiver; it has been since the

first cultural hero taught the human tribe how to spin wool only to blindfold them with it. The deceiver shows how intelligence operates in an unpredictable and chaotic world; it invites us to pass through the open doors of innovation and traps us in the prison of unintended consequences"[35]. In computerized images, this capacity for deception becomes even more present. Until now, all images could lie, but to do so they needed to undergo a chemical and alchemical transformation of their material. With digital images, their material remains intact, and it is only an invisible change in code that modifies their projection.

The arrival of the digital image from the 1980s onward meant abandoning the need for rudimentary devices such as camera obscuras and chemical processes to produce images. A definitive separation occurred between the image and the postproduction process, which, with the widespread use of personal computers first, and later smartphones, simplified the process of obtaining an image. Light no longer transforms into chemically reactive surfaces, but into electric charges following the computational system originated by Leibniz.

However, the dematerialization of the digital image occurs only on the surface of the receiver's mirror. Internally, computation is a geological parliament that gathers a collection of minerals and rare earths extracted from all corners of the world. The production of virtuality perpetuates the same colonial logics of extractive capitalism, but shifting attention to other materials that had previously been less relevant.

A current example is the use of AI: behind a spontaneous generation of infinite images lies an unprecedented exploitation of natural resources in history. By dissolving the boundary between symbolic and physical matter, the computational apparatus projects the illusion that creation becomes purely virtual, through an almost "divine" intervention.

Today, the struggle for control over this "unknown" matter sits at the center of geopolitical tensions. The main powers have as a top priority the conquest of territories rich in rare earths. Behind major current conflicts lies the need to maintain a monopoly over this matter, which paradoxically allows sustaining the illusion of an immaterial digital world.

In 2024, Apple released an advertisement for the new iPad Pro M4. In it, the scenography showed a large industrial hall, at the center of which stood a platform filled with numerous objects: musical instruments, craft utensils, board games, wooden toys, cameras, and other analog devices. Suddenly, a gigantic hydraulic press descended dramatically from the ceiling, slowly crushing the objects, which burst apart violently. As it rose again, the platform displayed a single object at its center: the iPad. This anecdote illustrates the vision that technological powers have regarding the future of digital devices: the complete disappearance of all material "nuisances" and, therefore, potentially manipulable elements beyond their predesigned object.

SYNTHESIS

Ordered matter refers to the narrative structure that every scenographic form requires to generate fascination and meaning. A fundamental characteristic of this is that, in the narrative construction of power, the replication of recognizable forms for the observer is essential to confer coherence to the illusion. In the analysis of apparatuses such as the automaton or computation, we find a concrete manifestation of this fact. "Matter in ordering" is, therefore, the category that allows the construction of an internal logic that sustains the fiction it generates in its execution.

Matter in disintegration

This final categorization of matter aims to analyze it in its most singular particularity: the capacity to disintegrate and constantly recombine, to mutate and transform as a scenographic form before the eyes of the observer. To illustrate this phenomenon, two characteristic apparatuses will be analyzed: the anatomical representation of the body and literary rhetoric.

ANATOMY

During modernity, the anatomical representation of the body became a key apparatus not only for the development of medicine but also for the exercise of power over the human body.

Examples of this include Rembrandt's painting The Anatomy Lesson, the illustrations by Gautier d'Agoty, and the plates by Henry Gray, all commissioned directly by medical societies formed by the bourgeoisie of the time. Although these works were significant advancements, it is important to note that many of the bodies used came from marginalized individuals or those condemned to death.

Thus, anatomical knowledge is articulated around a hierarchy: the body studied often belongs to those who have no voice or power, while the knowledge itself is exercised by academic or medical institutions. The anatomical representation, therefore, reflects not only a scientific interest but also a relationship of dominance over the body as an object of knowledge and control.

Throughout European history, scientists of all kinds dedicated themselves to "illustrating" what was considered "abnormal." As Jorge Luis Marzo notes, it is at this point that anything deemed "outside the norm" was indexed, classified, and incorporated into the cabinets of curiosities of modernity: malformed fetuses, deformed men, two-headed calves, elongated skulls, or colossal femurs came to constitute a particular teratology, a catalog of "monstrosities."

The human body was parceled, dissected, and classified by power, and this act of disintegrating the subjective image of the human body gave rise to

xenophobic identity at the core of European society. Gender inequalities were reflected in the objectification of women's bodies, treated as industrial products for reproduction and sexuality. Colonial violence manifested in racial phrenology, which sought "scientific" evidence of the inferiority of non-white people. Social hierarchy was reflected in taxonomies that identified the subordinate classes as "less intelligent" compared to the dominant bourgeoisie.

In the 19th century, scientists such as Galton and Quetelet designated what they called *l'homme moyen*, the "average man," an abstraction derived from analyzing numerous phenotypic characteristics to define human anatomical "normality." Binarism, quantitative production, and the value chain were applied to the human body in the same way that the capitalist system applied them to inanimate matter. Quetelet even stated that "the greater the number of people observed, the more their peculiarities, whether physical or moral, are erased, allowing the general facts upon which society exists and is maintained to predominate." Thus, anatomical classification became a tool of biopower, a means to control the human body and its agency.

Following this premise, Galton used the photographic apparatus to capture snapshots of convicts' faces in search of a pattern of abnormality. Under this paradigm, the "decent man" has no image, does not stand out from the collective: "truth is presumed dull while deceit is spectacular." As Marzo points out, this marks the birth of equating the social sciences with the physical sciences: the common human being is reduced to "average results," turning human experience into just another data point.

Within the framework of 19th-century positivism, criminologist Cesare Lombroso formulated the theory of the "born criminal," according to which certain anatomical traits—cranial, facial, or bodily—revealed a biological predisposition to crime. This naturalization of social deviation helped to pathologize poverty and associate the proletarian body with degeneration. Anatomical discourse thus became an instrument of scientific legitimization for penal repression and the social control exercised by the bourgeois liberal state.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Frederick Winslow Taylor, a mechanical engineer specializing in performance improvement, systematized the scientific organization of work through meticulous analysis of bodily movements. The

worker's body was broken down into functional units optimized according to criteria of productive efficiency. This anatomical instrumentalization reduced the worker to a quantifiable mechanical force, consolidating a form of bourgeois domination based on discipline, surveillance, and maximum extraction of labor.

Throughout the 19th century, a connection was established between the control of the proletarian body and the architecture and urban planning of large population centers. Baron Georges Eugène Haussmann promoted urban reforms during the Second French Empire, partially justified by hygienist arguments focused on air circulation, light, and bodily health. However, the anatomical reorganization of the city also entailed the displacement of working-class neighborhoods and the destruction of districts deemed centers of disease and revolt. The medical discourse on the collective body thus served to legitimize spatial restructuring favorable to bourgeois interests and political control.

LITERARY RETHORICS

Rhetoric, from antiquity, has been a fundamental tool for exercising and maintaining power. Mastering the art of discourse allows one to influence public opinion, construct convincing narratives, and legitimize authorities.

In the contemporary era, literary realism emerges as a rhetorical apparatus that seeks to represent everyday reality with precision and detail, often as a critical response to the social changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the bourgeoisie.

A clear example is Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, which depicts the existential frustration of a woman trapped within the social and moral limits of her time. The work was accused of offending public morality, demonstrating how power reacts to representations that challenge the established order. In this way, realism not only reflects reality but interrogates it, revealing who controls it and with what discourse.

As Roland Barthes points out[38], Western culture has used description as an end within the literary institution, what we call rhetoric. It has an aesthetic function, where the plausible is what sets the generic rules of discourse—the rules that articulate how the world is described and narrated. Thus, through rhetoric, a "physical" territory is established that generates its own rules, a universe in itself, a "state of exception" permanently installed in the utopia of boundless illusion. The purpose of every effect—in reference to the literary landscape—is to exercise manipulation of the point of view: now I occupy your field of vision, now I am the entire world.

Déotte argues[39] that political discourse, as a genre in itself, should not be considered just another rhetorical discourse; it subverts the social order founded on Aristotelian canons. From modernity onward, the arts are mobilized through apparatuses, establishing what Rancière calls a regime of representativity of the arts. It is in rhetoric, as a human-born apparatus, that one can most clearly see what the materials of art and politics become: they tend toward fragmentation.

The modern parliament is not only a deliberative space but also an apparatus that stages legitimate speech and defines who can speak politically. In its nineteenth-century censitary configuration, figures such as François Guizot helped establish a device where political representation was structurally linked to property. Parliamentary rhetoric thus produced the bourgeoisie as the universal subject of the nation.

Following Déotte's logic, the museum is not neutral: it organizes historical time and taste. Institutions such as the Musée du Louvre consolidate a narrative of civilizing continuity that coincides with bourgeois hegemony. The selection, classification, and exhibition of works configure a visual pedagogy that naturalizes the modern social order.

With the expansion of industrial press, magnates like William Randolph Hearst transformed the newspaper into an apparatus for producing public opinion. It is not only ideological content, but the establishment of a daily rhythm of reading that structures public space. The bourgeoisie appears there as the bearer of common sense and political realism. Randolph Hearst was also one of the main promoters of yellow journalism, dedicated to inflaming public opinion through the indiscriminate use of alarmist and catastrophic headlines.

SYNTHESIS

With the disintegration of matter, we can refer to the fact that, as shown in the analysis of the rhetorical and anatomical apparatuses, the scenographic event is characterized by its fragmentation. The study of these specific apparatuses in this final category serves to show how the human body is no exception to being considered "despicable" matter, as evidenced by the role of power in its attempt at substitution. Therefore, when speaking of "matter in disintegration," I establish the last category that classifies the scenographies of power, in which they must structurally reformulate themselves to, paradoxically, maintain their manipulative strength.


52.
Lo que puede un Sastre!

Epilogue. The Naked Trunk

This engraving is a good image for reflecting on the role of illusion today. In the center, we see a small log covered with a cloth. The way it wraps around it seems to evoke the figure of a monk, a preacher, or even an ancient shaman. Its "arms" are raised toward the sky, and the "face," tilted, appears to fix a merciful gaze upon the people. They cluster at its feet: first a woman whose devoted gaze is lost among the folds of the bark; behind her, a stream of faces that form a catalog of emotions, from fear to mercy, from calm to indifference. A representation of the people kneeling before the log as if it were a pagan idol, which behind it conjures spirits, witches, and demons to frighten its worshippers. Yet this retinue of malevolent forces seems diffuse, intangible; it does not have the same presence as the bodies of the people or the hooded log. We cannot know whether the demons are actually present in the scene or are a product of illusion. However, this does not matter, because they are equally real.

The image belongs to the series *Los caprichos*, which the Enlightenment painter projected at the end of the eighteenth century as a way to reflect his vision of the era he lived in. He titled the print *¡Lo que puede un sastre!* ("What a Tailor Can Do!") and accompanied it with a handwritten text, commonly attributed to the painter himself: "General superstition makes a whole people bow down and worship any log, dressed as a saint." A later manuscript by another contemporary author added the following interpretation: "How many times a ridiculous creature suddenly transforms into a phantom that is nothing yet appears to be much! So great is the skill of a tailor and the foolishness of those who judge things by how they seem."

The icon thus fits within the general theme associated with Los caprichos: a critique of superstition, which dominated every sphere of the era—religious, social, and political. A time of transition, where Enlightenment ideas collided with tradition, and where illusions founded on faith shifted toward illusions produced by reason. In the text accompanying the publication of the prints, Goya explained that his intention was to create an Enlightenment genealogy of the concerns, deceptions, manipulations, and phantasmagorias that portrayed his time, while simultaneously exercising in the viewer the "fantasy

of the artificer." The painter, as he makes clear, neither wanted nor could copy the nature of those deceptions; rather, he sought to "expose to the eyes norms and attitudes that have existed only in the human mind until now, darkened and confused by lack of enlightenment or inflamed by the frenzy of passions." Goya decided to sell his prints in 1799 in a perfume shop in Madrid, located—coincidentally or not—on the "Calle de Desengaño" ("Street of Disillusion").

The most famous statement from *Los caprichos* is known: that fantasy, when abandoned to reason, produces the most impossible monsters; but when united with it, it is the origin of all wonders. Beyond the countless readings that have been made of his work, I want to emphasize here its central role as a reflection on constructed illusion and its function as a warning. ¡Lo que puede un sastre! invokes, even in its very title, the scenographic capacity of matter to seduce the observer, to construct desire around it using only the most ephemeral materials. A simple bare tree trunk, covered with any cloth, can summon around it the powerful force of the symbol, the raised totem that conjures belief.

Here it is pertinent to return, as we have done throughout these pages, to the thought of Jean-Louis Déotte on apparatuses. The author speaks of how "subversive intoxication" characterizes the function of apparatuses, piercing the common time that constitutes us. In his words, it is "that which suspends the temporality of specters, of the collective phantasmagoria"[40], that which transcends the time and space constituted around us are the apparatuses, which break the logic of contemplation to institute a new one. This is what Goya shows us in the print before us: a masked being who is capable, simply by its presence, of generating a sense of belonging around it, an entire people prostrated before the illusion it exudes. Déotte, reflecting on images like this, cites a thought from Rang: "The king can do justice only when covered with the starry habit of his god. The priest who delivers an oracle thus becomes both person and character; person: he per-sona; speaking through the mask of the god (...) When it comes to honoring a god in a given place, the site must be covered with the habit of the one being honored: an idol is divine clothing placed upon a stake. (...) All authority is a mask..."[41].

All authority is a mask. This very statement seems to be what the Aragonese painter presents to us: a scarecrow that, like a ritual totem—and always guarded by a retinue of malevolent creatures—subjugates a multitude of

devotees around it, who worship it as if it were a Marian apparition. This image, however, does not exist solely in Goya's imagination, but, like much of the rest of Los Caprichos, responds to a trope in the literature of the time. In a letter to the Count of Lerena, the Valencian poet León de Arroyal illustrated a similar idea: "Respect and fear, contracted through long habit, sometimes make us worship a tree trunk; but if a determined hand gives it the first stroke of the axe, we are not content with despising it, but cast it into the fire."[42]. Connected to this, the enlightened society of the time, influenced by the French Revolution, sought to escape the connotations that religious superstition exerted over contemporary politics. A politician as prominent in Spain at the time as Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos wrote numerous critiques against certain sacred images and the veneration of relics, which he considered served to dominate the lower classes[43].

Goya thus exemplifies, through his prints, a world in crisis[44], where the old values are confronted, and the illusions sustained by religious tyranny begin to dissolve. Where the estate-based stratification dominated by the nobility gives way to a rising class that, under the banner of reason and liberty, establishes a new order—supposedly free from manipulative illusions. The painter, in fact, created these prints as a form of support for King Carlos IV and Queen María Luisa, at a time when the crown faced the old secular power of the more conservative clergy and aristocracy[45]. Thus, there exists an ideological program behind Los Caprichos that serves to reinforce the power of the monarch and a cultivated elite aligned with Enlightenment values, in opposition to more conservative sectors composed of the clergy and the blind support of the populace.

Around the prints, therefore, is generated what Vilém Flusser calls a "scenic vision of the world," which serves to postulate a future manipulation of it[46]. The world must be "computerized" according to the new ideology—in this case, one that "attacks" the popular beliefs of the people for being considered "superstitious," and supports a new elite, the bourgeoisie, which takes the place of the previous one. As the author points out, the challenge for any new producer of images is to "fix" a vision of the world so that it can serve as a map for future generations. He notes that technical images—and prints are the first of these subjected to technical reproducibility—are attempts to establish common points in the collective consciousness. Goya chooses to make his drawings as prints with the clear intention of reaching as wide an audience as

possible. With printmaking, a new apparatus is invented that allows the invisible to become visible, such as the character of an era[47].

But, as Flusser warned, technical images generate a new form of idolatry around themselves. By being produced mechanically and repetitively, they erase the trace of their own production[48]. There is not a great distance between Goya's prints and today's digital images; both are mass-produced and designed to circulate without restriction. From caricature to meme, they demand of us a consciousness that resists the "magical fascination" they emit. The inventors of technical images put an end to the "sacred"[49], with the dominant icon up to that moment. But around it arises an atmosphere of doubt, where the new superstition settles to dominate. Faced with the image of illusion, as if standing before the hooded trunk, the scenographic matter poses to us the same questions that already arose in Descartes: "But then, what am I? A thing that thinks. What is a thing that thinks? That is, a thing that doubts, that conceives, that affirms, that denies, that wills, that does not will, that also imagines, and that feels [...] Am I not, perhaps, the very same one who doubts almost everything, who nevertheless understands and conceives certain things, who assures and affirms that only those are true, who denies all the others, who wills and desires to know others, who does not want to be deceived, who imagines many things, even sometimes against my will, and who also feels many things through the organs of the body?"[50]

From the concerns left to us by Descartes, we can return to Goya's image. I have spoken of the manuscripts Goya wrote to accompany the complete series of *Los Caprichos* and of its central image, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*. One detail to note is that, in the commentary on this engraving, Goya added: "When men do not hear the cry of reason, everything becomes visions." This same concern is echoed in Descartes' reflection, that creature incapable of knowing whether what stands before it is a celestial being or a disguised trunk, struggling to discern the face beneath the hood: "Imagining things against our will." In modernity, visions burst forth with unprecedented force thanks to the proliferation of apparatuses. Surrounded by visions, the world becomes indecipherable. The excess of enchantment produces a general disenchantment.

I believe that the current state of the world, the world of Descartes and Goya —which remains our world—stems from disenchantment. When we ask

ourselves about the role of illusion today, perhaps one answer is that it exists in a state of transition: neither has it disappeared nor is it omnipresent. This constructs for us a world of chiaroscuro, interesting but dangerous. I think of Gramsci's well-known quote: "The old world is dying and the new cannot yet be born, and in these interregnums, monsters are born." But when he speaks of the old world dying and the new not yet born, I think the configuration of the idea of "world" is not tangible—returning to Barthes—but a fluctuating illusion. The problem does not lie in the fiction itself—nor, therefore, in the effect—but in the moment when we lose sight of "the aesthetics of representation." Everything relates to illusion: ideologies, religions, relationships... And it is precisely in these chiaroscuro moments—which is the world we now inhabit—where the most skillful manipulators of effects emerge. The monsters Gramsci spoke of are the conjurers. The issue is not the light that conceals or reveals the effect, but whether that light wields the totalitarian violence of anti-aircraft spotlights or the subtlety of a guerrilla of fireflies.

Goya, in his campaign commissioned by the enlightened bourgeoisie, criticizes the Church's tendency to fill its temples with images that incited superstition and fostered educational decay. Yet, blinded by his crusade, he perhaps misidentified the scarecrow. In his time, illusion had already abandoned the old sacred icons and, like a contagious ghost, possessed the new goods—the economic icons that became sacred under the new mandate of power. To understand this, Théophile Gautier's description of Goya's images is illuminating: "One feels transported to an unknown world: incredible yet real. Tree trunks seem like ghosts; men, hyenas, owls, cats, asses, or hippopotamuses. Fingernails may become claws; split hooves are shod with shoes adorned with pompoms; this seemingly young gentleman is, in reality, an old man, even dead, and his leggings, full of ribbons, cover the bare bone of a femur and two fleshless tibias. Never did more sinister and mysterious apparitions emerge from Doctor Faustus' oven..."

Goya dedicates himself to creating projections of appearances with his images. Observing all his engravings, this boundary play between fiction and reality is always present. Witches become as real as maidens, and nature transforms into the material of nightmares. But if we return to our image, *Capricho* 52, it is the only one in which the artist presents naked reality. The trunk is not an appearance, not a ghost, not a god; it is as it shows itself to us, an artificial

icon. In the rest of the series, animals take human form, and humans take demonic form, but here, the supernatural is stripped bare, revealing the scenographic alchemy that is the matter of dreams. Goya's attention focuses on detailing the faces of the people. He humanizes them, representing an alliance of depicted faces, an image far removed from Romanticism. The people accumulate all passions, as they are formed by individualities. The witches and demons in the engraving appear only in the background and, unlike in other depictions, seem almost blurred.

With this image, the painter not only warns us of the dangers of religious superstition. In its starkness, he also alerts us to the potential of any constructed illusion to subjugate the masses. In doing so, Goya, in a sense, stones the ideals of the Enlightenment before their birth, which would have formed the framework of bourgeois dominance. He shows that religious and economic narratives are merely different forms of enchantment. I think of Erik Davis's definition of the anthropological figure of the magician, a hybrid of shaman and politician. Davis asserts that, using language, costume, gestures, song, and scenography as a whole, magicians apply techné, symbolic technology, to social imagination. That is, social engineering structures the collective psyche by modifying its images and narratives, and thereby its desires[51]. The author then asks: "What are the differences between the world that magicians create and the one that scientists construct?" As we have already seen in this text, both worlds systematically intersect in the apparatuses that produce illusion and their scenographic techniques.

This is the dressed trunk that embodies the image: a substance that constantly mutates, shifting from a reincarnated god to a commodity that seduces. The trunk no longer needs to "literally" embody a desired virtual presence. It is the costume itself, the wrapping produced by the scenographic apparatus, that generates attraction. The material systematically transforms, yet it does not lose its capacity to deceive, even as the transformation occurs before the eyes of the people. Illusion, in Goya's time—which is also ours—is precisely this: someone emerges from outside the frame of the engraving, a new "tailor"—let us call them a magician—who violently strips the trunk of its old garments and dresses it in new finery. The witches and spirits accompanying it change with the new attire, but the illusion persists.

FETISHISM

At this point, I want to briefly discuss the role played by a concept from the Marxist sphere in understanding the role of illusion in our time: commodity fetishism. This concept is often associated with the realm of economics and the process of distribution of goods, but I believe it must also be understood from its aesthetic dimension. As we have seen throughout this text, the world of modernity undergoes a process of aestheticization: first, images embodied sacred icons, the apparatuses did not respond to a rational but symbolic logic, producing a religious aesthetic; then, the elite took control of the images, individualized and privatized them, generating around them an aristocratic aesthetic; a third phase, in which art and the images it produces project a certain idea of autonomy; and finally, the fourth and definitive phase of globalized aesthetics in which we now find ourselves, where the triumph of artistic capitalism nullifies or absorbs all other aesthetics. As Josep M. Català summarizes, "after art for the gods, art for princes, and art for art's sake, what now triumphs is art for the market"[52].

Erik Davis reinforces this position, stating that, although the boundaries separating the market from the space of artistic imagination have always been porous, the process of industrialization has led to the incorporation of aesthetics into all commercial dimensions[53]. As we can see in the analysis of the apparatuses of illusion, scenographic matter has systematically evolved to be incorporated into every corner of existence. If medieval icons were initially symbolic, separating the divine from the earthly, perspective then sought to embody reality, and the frame atomized only to expand later, becoming projected image, cinematography, stage box, until reaching the virtual image which, between automatons and computers, absorbs the human body itself. The landscape of collective imaginative desire has been colonized, what Davis calls a "corporate colonization of the unconscious." "A Baroque arcana of logos, brand names, and corporate seals now seasons landscapes, goods, and our disguised bodies"[54]. Unlike the sacred images of the past, from the Egyptian tradition to Romanesque art, the icons of our time no longer embody the animist powers of nature or the social magic of kings, but the power of corporate identity and commodity fetishism. The dressed trunk no longer seeks to deceive us into believing in new gods; it only wants to convince us to buy its fabric.

Goya's trunk is, therefore, a mannequin, the original name for the "model," the figure that parades and embodies the ultimate icon of fetishism as defined by Marx. As Anselm Jappe points out[55], Fetishism becomes a mystification of every consumer object, contributing to the "self-justification" of capitalist society. Marx defines his era as an "enchanted world," where, in the relationships established by the bourgeoisie, human beings become merely "guardians" of commodities. At its deepest level, what defines our society is not only the domination of one class over another, but that society as a whole is "dominated by real, anonymous abstractions".[56]. Yes, as Jappe points out, there is clearly a ruling class, but we must not make the mistake of forgetting that it too is subject to its own enchantment. As Marx defines them, the bourgeois are nothing more than "second-tier officers of capital," servants of the monetary icon who, when it collapses—when the Wall Street bubble bursts—are capable of mass suicide by leaping from skyscrapers. There is no difference between this ritual impulse toward self-destruction and that of ancient shamans who, from prehistory to today, have populated the world. Those who generate illusion have no guarantee of escaping the same trap, and this is the central issue behind the great, almost impregnable, strength of capital.

Returning, as always, to Goya's print, we must not believe that there is humanity outside the crowd, which, subjugated, reveres a "mere log." Whoever masks it, once the garments of illusion have been fashioned, merges back into the crowd. This is the same consideration Déotte gives to apparatuses: we can trace, as we have done here, the names and surnames of the figures of power who bring them into the world. But once deployed, the desires they project deceive everyone equally. As Marx points out in the second chapter of Capital, "all the mysticism of the commodity world, all the spells and apparitions of souls that envelop like a fog the products of labor developed on the basis of commodity production, vanish immediately as soon as we turn to other forms of production"[57]. These "apparitions" surrounding the product are precisely what, half a century before Marx, Goya depicted in his print. From a class perspective, one must not make the mistake of granting power an absolute condition of domination. It is far more interesting to suggest, as both the philosopher and the painter did, that it is illusion itself that is sustained through collective adoration. The magicians of today, like those of times past, are not immune to their own charms.

But the people drawn by Goya are not servile; in their faces, for the first time in European tradition, a complex psychology is made visible. Goya, as a true Enlightenment thinker, knew well who truly produced the Revolution before it was usurped by the bourgeoisie. And he reflects this in the intricate psychology of their faces, especially that of the woman in the foreground. Her gaze is not passive; it acts, it mobilizes. She does not look absorbed or possessed, but curious. The other faces that unfold behind her reflect the richness of the community. The painter does not depict a single emotion—devotion, fear, joy, or indifference; all are summoned before the scarecrow: the shopping mall window, the television spectacle, the infinite loop of the screen. The dressed log stands in the background. In front of it, the protagonist figure, the embodiment of the absorbed proletariat. Yet in the complexity of her face, we can perceive a critical gaze.

To keep this necessity for critique in mind, I turn to the meaning Andrea Soto Calderón gives to the concept of the "scene"[58]. She understands this concept beyond the theatrical realm, as a territory that allows us to conceive the image in a broad sense, where the "scenographic matrix," as she defines what encompasses both the visual and the textual, constructs and accommodates discourse. She conceives the concept of the scene as a "surface" that serves to open a common space and time, where the matter that composes it—perhaps because it is scenographic matter—has the power to deform itself, reorganizing the sensations and emotions within it. One must avoid linking the scene exclusively to the theatrical institution and instead understand it as the space in which to generate "dissident images," a way "to experiment with forms of pursuing the small truths without appearance"[59].

In a certain sense, this is what Goya's engraving evokes, where the painter is not satisfied with aesthetic virtuosity, but understands the brush as a means of translating his conception of the world, the philosophy hidden behind the image. It is no coincidence that, seven years before putting Los Caprichos on sale on the "Calle del Desengaño," the painter delivered a speech upon his admission to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando, where he shared his worldview: "...but nothing would be more precise, if there were a remedy, for the current decadence of the Arts than to know that they should not be led by power, but by the wisdom of the other sciences, and if governed by their merit, as has always happened when great talents have flourished: then the despotic enthusiasts cease, and prudent lovers are born"[60]. His

images can be spaces where illusion is constantly reconstructed, like all those projections generated by the apparatuses around them.

At this point, and to conclude this journey through the scenographies of power and the traps of deception, I think it is important to delve into the political role of illusion. Let us return to an essentially political question: what is the role of illusion, of effect, of deception, in our times? Perhaps, by reflecting on this initial question, with this forest of quotations as a backdrop, we can help ourselves discern which paths are firmer to traverse.

"We walk with the feet of others, see with alien eyes, recognize with an external memory, live through the works of others"[61]. This phrase from Pliny the Elder is a good starting point to understand the role of the arts of deception in the past. The Roman writer reflects on the act of building from technique, the study of nature, and the observation of the political animal. From his thought, synthesized in this phrase, one can extract the idea that we construct upon the illusion of a nonexistent past. To live through the works of others means learning from the gods drawn on walls, from the magic tricks in laboratories, and transmitting, thread by thread, the stories of our ancestors. Thus, we can infer that illusion is sustained by the weight of the past, and we can therefore ask: what happens in a time like ours, where the past becomes blurred once again? It is then that what Eric Sadin calls technological mythology perhaps gains greater prominence[62]. He states that, in our time, technological mythology has surpassed that kind of "modern virility" that characterized spaces like the Gothic cathedral and has shifted toward an "emotional veneration." As in the engraving, a hooded tree trunk is enough to sustain wonder, just as in today's virtual apparatuses, the systematic reproduction of "impoverished" images generates a saturated, constant illusion, trapped in the feedback loop of social media.

I believe this reflection by the French author—and which he later explicitly connects to Pliny the Elder—allows us to establish coordinates for understanding the role of illusion today. The analogy with the Gothic cathedral is key: as we know, it was conceived as a gigantic machine of wonders, a precise artifact where—especially through light—a power-laden imaginary was constructed. Without the cathedral, the ideological colonization of minds would not have been possible.

Interestingly, linking with earlier reflections, just at the moment when cathedrals begin to retreat as ruins of history, museums emerge. The analogy of the museum as a temple is well known, but it is important to recall it if we consider the function they share at their core: as large, illusion-generating artifacts. In fact, most cathedrals lost their primary function as theaters, yet some, behind seemingly solid marble walls and floors, always hid theatrical machinery, pulleys, and trapdoors that "haunted" the faithful. The Misteri d'Elx is a surviving example of this phenomenon.

Sadin's reflection is particularly valuable for understanding the role of today's technologies of deception, especially when he speaks of how they seem to "emancipate themselves" from us, just as Déotte said about apparatuses.

Perhaps here we find a key—and a link toward the conclusion—about how illusion today no longer needs to be believed, because it has managed to emancipate itself from our minds. Or perhaps it no longer has much left, in this process that, as Campbell reminds us, began in the 19th century: "Thus it happened that during the 19th century, which marked an era with its almost incredible spiritual and technological transformations, the old horizons were separated and the center of gravity of all knowledge shifted (...) Communities that once felt comfortable in the consciousness of their own divinely guaranteed deities suddenly found themselves as devils in the eyes of their neighbors. Evidently, now a mythology of a broader and deeper type is required than any that may have existed in the past anywhere: a much more fluid, more sophisticated arcanum arcanorum (...) But that, precisely, is the great mysterious parade that only waits to be noticed as it appears before us, so to speak, in departments, lobbies, and museums of the various sciences, even though it is already alive in the works of our greatest artists"[63].

Exactly, here the idea of mystery becomes central: the effect of illusion does not sustain itself on its own, but through the halo of uncertainty that surrounds it. Without mystery, illusion fades and gives way to disillusionment. What Campbell describes—the succession of technological enchantments, the revolutions followed by periods of subordination to our own creations—reminds us that illusion is not merely a simple aesthetic artifice, but a tool that structures temporalities, power relations, and collective expectations.

In this sense, the "mysterious parade" that Campbell speaks of connects directly with what we have seen in Goya: the dressed trunk, the mist of spirits and demons, the complex psychology of the faces of the people—everything is sustained by uncertainty, by fascination with what is not seen entirely clearly. In the same way, our contemporary illusions—mediated by digital images, social networks, and technological devices—require mystery: without it, the image becomes a mere object of consumption, banal and quickly discarded.

Your observation about the "ruins of the nineteenth century" is very pertinent: we live in a time in which the effects of past illusions are fading, yet they continue to shape our present. The function of illusion is no longer only ideological or aesthetic, but also structural: it allows us to imagine possible futures, explore alternatives, and reconfigure the perception of the collective. Campbell proposes that we must participate in the "festival of passing forms": that is, to accept the temporality and fragility of illusory effects in order to then transform them, to build a conscious reenchantment, where the machine of effects—the apparatus—no longer manipulates blindly, but becomes a tool for exploration and creativity.

Ultimately, illusion operates in an intermediate space: between enchantment and disenchantment, between fascination and critique. And it is the notion of mystery that sustains it, turning each illusion—whether Goya's trunk or contemporary digital images—into a driving force for understanding and acting upon the world[64]. The foundational text by Graeber and Wengrow brings to the table something we already know, but which we have often overlooked for being obvious or worn out: the primary role of technology as an illusory game. It is necessary to delve much deeper, theoretically, into the reflection on technique. And to place it at the center, as a will of re-appropriation: first, technique was at the service of deception, but now it is deception that takes possession of technique.

Here we can enter into a reflection on virtuality, and for this reason it evokes Baudrillard's thought, which I consider crucial to bring to the table when we want to understand the role of illusion in the age of virtuality: "How can we overcome our shadows when we no longer have any? (...) The human species could be dedicating itself to a kind of automatic writing of the world, to an automated and operationalized virtual reality, where human beings as such have no reason to continue existing (...) We move in a world where everything

that exists only as idea, dream, fantasy, utopia, will be eradicated. Nothing will survive as idea or concept. There will not even be time to imagine. Events, real events, will not even have time to occur. Everything will be preceded by its virtual realization. (...) We could then, through this detour, penetrate the mirror of technology—against Heidegger—for whom technology still remains the absolute achievement of metaphysics. Technology as delirium, technology as ultimate illusion"[65].

The question about overcoming shadows appeals to me, for its clarity. We no longer believe in shadows. Illusion no longer needs to camouflage itself as "real." The shadow takes on body and seems to have substance—this would be a good definition of illusion today. Helping to confront the mystery of technology head-on seems important: to pass through the black mirror that surrounds us, an immersion in virtuality, as a field to be conquered. From a political perspective, we can agree that one of the most urgent and practical issues we can address is providing tools to collectively eradicate the possession of technology in the hands of a few. In the end, I believe today's artists are more like relics of a past where they could still wield control over illusion; today, it emancipates itself, and technique passes into the hands of generative tools serving capital and confusion. It is no longer about generating illusion, but dizziness. The aim is not the effect itself, but the constant sensation of "disorientation," of a world spinning, where fixing one's gaze on a point becomes nearly impossible. "Turning illusion into reality and fiction into truth shows the degree to which imagination has become an instrument of progress (...) By reducing and even canceling the romantic space of imagination, society has forced imagination to test itself on new terrain, where images translate into capacities and historical projects (...) Imagination has not remained immune to the process of reification. We are possessed by our images; we suffer our own images"[66].

The collapse of imagination is a common territory in contemporary philosophy. It is a fact that everyone points out, but perhaps it is more fruitful to examine the causes of this degradation. It is not true, I believe, that we are incapacitated to imagine—imagination understood here as the individual invocation of illusion; rather, based on this brief journey through the politics of illusion, I think we must contribute to generating a class consciousness of illusory images. Everyone knows—children know it with their fantasies from birth—that we can always imagine; we do it constantly. What perhaps requires

deeper reflection is that these images that possess us—why do we let them in?—are also instruments of power. The theatrical machines of magicians are a clear example, and to reveal them—just like computer code or bureaucratic paperwork—are merely other forms through which bourgeois illusion exerts control. There are many kinds of demons.

"The revolutionary project, as it has been dreamed in the dark satanic factories of consumer society, can only be the creation of a new eruption of life in its entirety and the subordination of productive forces to this end. Life must become a game of desire with itself. But the rediscovery and fulfillment of human desires is impossible without a critique of the fantastic form in which these desires have found the illusory realization that allowed their real repression to be prolonged. Today, this means that 'art'—fantasy erected into systematic culture—has become public enemy number one. (...) Our wildest fantasies are the richest elements of our reality"[67].

A review like this could not close without citing the Situationists, with this anonymous text, since they are the main precedent that generated a rupture with the inherited illusion of the nineteenth century. I linger on the final sentence, "our wildest fantasies are the richest elements of our reality," above all because it is clear and direct, no longer constructing artificially elevated discourses but grounding them in a shared common sense. This is one of the conclusions that this genealogy of thought around illusion and its "assailants" can offer: to reinforce the idea that illusion—in all its forms—is a political tool, and that, like all tools, it can be reclaimed or neutralized by an organized majority. I hope this text contributes to the process that is already underway: the need to surround ourselves with people capable of both believing in and denying their gods at the same time.

[1] "This scenography is recognized in Boyle's vacuum pump, in the neutrinos of the sun, as well as in Pasteur's microbes. Set designers and directors know well that every detail counts; it is the same for this "theater of proof": a new morsel for a culture of microbes, and it is a new object that takes on color under the microscope; a new program to give scanner images artificial colors, and it is the entire illumination of the brain that is altered; a new amplifier for the physiograph, and subtler signals stand out in majestic peaks above the background noise... The details? Yes, of course, for those who believe that the world is seen with the naked eye or becomes the object of a contemplation called theory. But researchers, like set designers, lighting technicians, and painters, know how many people are in the image. It is not with the naked eye that we see the world, but with the clothed eye". Latour, Bruno. *Las "visualizaciones" del pensamiento. Una introducción a la antropología de las ciencias y las técnicas* a *Pensar la imagen II. Antropologías de lo visual*. Ediciones / Metales pesados, 2022. 210-212

[2] Ibid. 222

[3] Benjamin, Walter. Libro de los pasajes. Edición de Rolf Tiedemann. Akal, Madrid. 2017. 383

[4] Déotte, Jean-Louis. *¿Qué es un aparato estético? Benjamin, Lyotard, Rancière*. Ediciones / metales pesados, 2013. 19

[5] The apparatus must respect the law of the reception of the event, for it is thanks to it that appearances are enhanced and the solemnity of an event is made manifest: it is, for example, the apparatus of a ritual of hospitality, the pomp of a public ceremony, the solemnity of a celebration, the set of critical notes that come to accompany a major text. Déotte, Jean-Louis. *La época de los aparatos*. Adriana Hidalgo editora, 2014. 101

[6] Soto Calderón, Andrea. *La performatividad de las imágenes*. Ediciones / Metales pesados, 2020. 123

[7] The task is to intervene actively in the sensible surface of ideology, to raise new phantasmagorias that articulate collective bodies, that trace other flows of desire, breaking up the masses where lives do not meet. It is not a matter of resorting to the figure of deception in which people would be alienated, but of spectral materiality, that is, the enchantment produced by the monopoly of the media. It is not about what deceives us, but about what seduces us. Ibid. 61-63.

[8] Déotte, Jean-Louis. *¿Qué es un aparato estético? Benjamin, Lyotard, Rancière*. Ediciones / metales pesados, 2013. 122-123

[9] Perspective as the fixation of a single vantage point is an operation of subjection of bodies, of subduing multiplicity and manipulating its forces. A calculated coercion that renders the gaze available to see what is shown to it while at the same time establishing a specific idea of the horizon. Soto Calderón, Andrea. *La performatividad de las imágenes*. Ediciones / Metales pesados, 2020. 115-117

[10] Déotte, Jean-Louis. *La época de los aparatos*. Adriana Hidalgo editora, 2014. 131

[11] Alloa, Emmanuel. *La imagen diáfana. Fenomenología de los medios visuales*. Ediciones / metales pesados. 2021. 288

[12] Ibid. 295

[13] Ibid. 297

[14] Ibid. 452-453

[15] Déotte, Jean-Louis. *La época de los aparatos*. Adriana Hidalgo editora, 2014. 195-196

[16] Casid, Jill H. *Escenas de proyección. Reenvíos del sujeto iluminista*. Ediciones / Metales pesados, 2023. 254-255

[17] Marzo, Jorge Luis. Las videntes. Imágenes en la era de la predicción. Arcadia, 215-217
[18] Ibid.
[19] Déotte, Jean-Louis. *La época de los aparatos.* Adriana Hidalgo editora, 2014. 286
[20] Déotte, Jean-Louis. *¿Qué es un aparato estético? Benjamin, Lyotard, Rancière.* Ediciones / metales pesados, 2013. 43
[21] Casid, Jill H. *Escenas de proyección. Reenvíos del sujeto iluminista.* Ediciones / Metales pesados, 2023. 53-55
[22] Ibid. 64-65
[23] Ibid. 68-69
[24] Ibid. 74
[25] Ibid. 118-119
[26] Davis, Erik. *Tecgnosis. Mito, magia y misticismo en la era de la información.* Caja Negra editora, 2023. 46-48
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid. 178
[29] Ibid. 177
[30] Alloa, Emmanuel. *La imagen diáfana. Fenomenología de los medios visuales.* Ediciones / metales pesados. 2021. 422
[31] Déotte, Jean-Louis. *La época de los aparatos.* Adriana Hidalgo editora, 2014. 182
[32] Català, Josep M. *Complejidad y barroco. Arrebatos del sujeto.* Shangrila, 2023. 379
[33] Flusser, Vilém. *El universo de las imágenes técnicas. Elegía de la superficialidad.* Caja Negra editora, 2015. 103
[34] Ibid. 104
[35] Davis, Erik. *Tecgnosis. Mito, magia y misticismo en la era de la información.* Caja Negra editora, 2023. 31
[36] Marzo, Jorge Luis. *Las videntes. Imágenes en la era de la predicción.* Arcadia, 2021. 117
[37] Ibid. 118
[38] Barthes, Roland. "El efecto de realidad". https://www.fadu.edu.uy/slv-i/files/2012/05/Barthes_Roland-El_efecto_de_realidad.pdf
[39] Déotte, Jean-Louis. *¿Qué es un aparato estético? Benjamin, Lyotard, Rancière.* Ediciones / metales pesados, 2013. 100-101
[40] Déotte, Jean-Louis. *La época de los aparatos.* Adriana Hidalgo editora, 2014. 71
[41] Ibid. 70
[42] Munain Iturrospe, Gorka López de. Los caprichos de Goya. Estampas y textos contra el sueño de la razón. Revista Sans Soleil, Euskal Erriko Unibertsitatea, 2010. P. 94
[43] Ibid.
[44] Clemente Barrena, Javier Blas, Juan Carrete y José Miguel Medrano, Calcografía Nacional: catálogo general, Madrid: Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Calcografía Nacional, 2004, vol. II, p. 425-484.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Flusser, Vilém. *El universo de las imágenes técnicas. Elegía de la superficialidad.* Caja Negra editora, 2015. 35
[47] Ibid. 40

[48] Ibid. 47-48

[49] Ibid. 91

[50] Descartes, René. *Meditaciones, "Meditación segunda"* citat a Gómez Pin, Víctor. *El ser que cuenta. La disputa sobre la singularida humana*. Acantilado, 2025.

[51] Davis, Erik. *Tecgnosis. Mito, magia y misticismo en la era de la información*. Caja Negra editora, 2023. 245-246

[52] Català, Josep M. *Complejidad y barroco. Arrebatos del sujeto*. Shangrila, 2023. 99-100

[53] Davis, Erik. *Tecgnosis. Mito, magia y misticismo en la era de la información*. Caja Negra editora, 2023. 251

[54] Ibid.

[55] Marx, Karl. *El fetichismo de la mercancía (y su secreto)*. Pepitos de calabaza ed., 2016. 10-11

[56] Ibid. 13-14

[57] Ibid. 43

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