

CRITICAL NOTICE

Visualism and Illustrations: Visual Philosophy beyond Language

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Thoughtful Images: Illustrating Philosophy through Art

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Contemporary philosophy can be characterized along the lines of a profound and vigorous debate between the prevalent ideas of 20th century philosophy's linguistic–conceptualist age, on the one hand, and the re-emergent field of what we might call 'visualist' philosophy on the other hand, which is experiencing a revival within the framework of the current visual turn in philosophy. *Thoughtful Images: Illustrating Philosophy through Art* by Thomas E. Wartenberg stands at the intersection of these two camps. The philosophical visual turn foregrounds the importance of the visual sphere, and it is this sphere with which Wartenberg engages. Investigating the genre of philosophical images throughout history, Wartenberg's significant book joins the controversy between the characterization of humans as linguistic–conceptual or rather as visual beings. Do we reach intellectual superiority only through linguistic–conceptual schemes, or, rather, is it the richness of visuality and its level of detail – which can never be fully captured by language – that allows us a true glimpse of our reality and our very selves? I shall later claim that Wartenberg falls on the linguistic–conceptualist side of the polemic. But, a concrete example that may actually support the visualist perspective is found in the book's final chapter, which is devoted to what Wartenberg terms 'graphic philosophy'. Here, Wartenberg analyses Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* – a memoir produced through illustrations that address the philosophical question of scepticism via Bechdel's 'epistemological crisis'. Bechdel is overcome with doubt over the truth status and objectivity of her own personal diary entries. Wartenberg argues that 'this is parallel to Descartes's worry in the Meditations that he might be mistaken about everything he takes to be true', and is knowingly resolved by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *On Certainty* (Wartenberg 2023: 282). He emphasizes the centrality of images in the memoir to portray a conceptually life-changing event for Bechdel, namely an encounter with a

woman in a restaurant whose appearance assists her in figuring out her own identity. Wartenberg notes that text itself is insufficient to express Bechdel's ideas here, arguing that 'the visual information ... is essential to our understanding of this incident in the book. Bechdel here uses a picture to convey information quickly in a readily understood manner, something that could not be done as efficiently with words alone' (281).

Throughout his book, Wartenberg methodically discusses images that engage with a variety of subjects, from less personal subjects to big concepts and philosophical theories, embodied in figurative or abstract pieces, from mosaic and oil painting or conceptual art to books' illustrations or frontispieces, from antiquity up to the 21st century. Still, Wartenberg counts on the artform of graphic philosophy (actually, philosophical comics) that assumes text and imagery to be co-dependent and equal to allow philosophy to be disseminated to a wider audience. 'We will have to wait to see how new works in this artform bring philosophy into popular culture', he says, 'but it seems likely that many more pedagogical works of philosophy will be produced in comic form' (Wartenberg 2023: 289). The special relationship between texts and visual images renders comics a milestone in both philosophical illustrations and philosophy more generally. Wartenberg rightfully emphasizes that although philosophical images have been common since antiquity, comics are not only able to convey philosophical arguments, but also to *make* them in a whole new way. Being a 'very abstract discipline', philosophy has largely been confined to the realm of academic research. But because visual signs are more accessible than text in many ways, illustrations of philosophy render the audience of those illustrations viewers of philosophy as well; as such, they are 'an important means for increasing the impact of philosophical theorizing on a broader public' (Wartenberg 2023: 298).

Wartenberg thus explains the popularity of the visual in terms of accessibility. However, I contend that the current visual turn of philosophy might offer an additional possible explanation for this popularity, which I call here a visualist one. In an age of interfaces, ever-present screens and rapidly growing do-it-yourself media channels, it becomes increasingly clear that the appeal of visuality, imagery included, is not necessarily a result of an effortless consumption or the visual being easier to digest. Images can be opaque and difficult to decipher – they can be multi-layered, intricate or even disturbing. Visuality is influential and attractive because we are visual beings – or at least no less visual than conceptual or linguistic. The theories that support the visual turn therefore see the visual as the appropriate arena in which to characterize our being and culture (Benedek and Nyíri 2019). Thus, when philosophy makes use of illustrations, it does not necessarily move away from its origins toward popular culture, but rather returns to a foundational, indispensable and rich source of thought. Rudolf Arnheim, a prominent philosopher of the visual sphere and visual perception, argues in his seminal book *Visual Thinking* that 'there was much

evidence that truly productive thinking in whatever area of cognition takes place in the realm of imagery' (Arnheim 1969: v). I accordingly think that if philosophical texts, namely ideas given verbally, are 'difficult to understand', it is not because language is superior and closer to reasoning than imagery, but rather because it is sometimes foreign to understanding and internalizing ideas. This is why, for instance, philosophy has always used metaphors and figurative techniques, which are based on visual imagery and experiences. This philosophical use of visuality is noted by Arnheim in his *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, in which he contends that 'the influential philosophy of Neoplatonism, based entirely on the metaphor of light, found its visual expression in the use of illumination by daylight and candles in the churches of the Middle Ages' (Arnheim 2009: 324). The metaphor of light (as experienced visually) was also adopted by modernist philosophy, characterizing illiteracy as dark in opposition to the enlightened intellectual spirit, rationalism and cultural maturity (Gal 2022b: 3–11).

Naturally, then, the focus of the discussion of philosophical illustration has been on the ability of the visual to embody an abstract thought and to further relay it to an audience, and thereby to serve as philosophical pieces by themselves. 'Contrary to what we see in the [Plato's] Allegory of the Cave, philosophical texts do not generally include stories', 'Instead, they make claims, present arguments, and develop theories', writes Wartenberg, before going on to ask, 'The question I now turn to is how, if at all, these aspects of philosophy can be rendered visually' (Wartenberg 2023: 34). Wartenberg correctly reminds us that 'there is a significant tradition of visual works of art – etchings, drawings, prints, paintings, sculptures, installations, etc. – that illustrate philosophy' (8). He takes it upon himself to initiate the field that seeks a theoretical framework for philosophical illustrations and accordingly, for the relations between philosophical images and texts. To demonstrate the importance of his subject, Wartenberg outlines the history of philosophical illustrations (of 'visual images of philosophy') across two millennia of Western culture, from 1st-century BCE illuminations of Plato's Academy to 21st century graphic philosophy, such as Apostolos Doxiadis and Christos H. Papadimitriou's graphic novel *Logicomix: An Epic Search for Truth* (2009). The history of graphic philosophy exposes the impressive diversity and development of philosophical illustrations. Plato's Academy illuminations were originally drawn to grace manuscripts copied by monks in antiquity. But, *Logicomix* contains in itself its philosophical overview, having Bertrand Russell as a protagonist who narrates the progress of modern logic during his quest to seek out the logical foundations of mathematical certainty. Committed to Russell's occupation with self-reference, and much like prints made by M. C. Escher, for instance, this piece is self-referential and 'does a very nice job of presenting this interpretation of Russell's paradox using visual images' (Wartenberg 2023: 264).

Between these two moments in Western philosophical history, Wartenberg's instructive survey encompasses, for instance, medieval illustrations of Plato's *Timaeus* that visualize Plato's description of the world, and which also include text, and the illustrated French translations of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, which were commissioned by Charles V of France in the 1370s to introduce their ideas (among them the concept of 'virtue') to his advisers. In the latter case, the illustrative technique is 'a personification of abstract philosophical terms'; it shows three kinds of friendships that were defined by Aristotle through three pairs of men conversing. Following the linguistic age scheme, here Wartenberg characterizes the visual as simpler, more rudimentary and more accessible than the textual (a claim that I shall address shortly). 'This visual representation of Aristotle's theoretical typology is designed to help readers of the translation understand and remember the three types of friendship Aristotelian theory distinguishes', he notes (59). The survey advances to a discussion of the *Artificiosa totius logices descriptio* ('Artful description of logic in its entirety') print by Léonard Gaultier (1614) that Wartenberg argues is an analogical illustration, in which Aristotelian logic is depicted as a garden, as well as the frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* by Abraham Bosse from 1651 – an engraving that visualizes 'the Leviathan's body as created out of the bodies of the citizens of the state' and that is thus 'a representation of claims Hobbes makes about the Leviathan or ideal commonwealth he describes in the book' (80). Special attention is also paid to the frontispieces of *Emile, or On Education* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a 1762 treatise that promotes a modern model of education and virtue to replace the classic one and that exploits the engravings to serve as a model for the educator. Rousseau was closely involved in the creation of the engravings and selected specific passages as their sources, giving them titles that direct the viewer-readers to focus on figures from mythology, Thetis, Charon, Hermes, Orpheus and Circé, who appear as teachers. Rousseau uses these characters 'to make the image more suitable for his philosophical purposes', which proposes that education is intended to make the disciple 'a person who has as much autonomy as possible'. Accordingly, these illustrations are relatively autonomous, inviting a focus on the medium itself, by trusting its visual power and providing 'an image that is more artistically satisfying' (92). Beyond addressing the text, the images, which are labelled here by Wartenberg as 'counter textual', portray abstract philosophical models of education, even ones that Rousseau opposes. The historical path delineated by Wartenberg devotes Chapters 7 and 8 to post-modern artists who illustrate Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy, including Mel Bochner, Jasper Johns and Maria Bussmann, the last of whom produced clear and direct illustrations of aphorisms from the *Tractatus*, which function similarly to encyclopedia illustrations. From the perspective of what I call here a 'visualist philosophy', one cannot overestimate the importance of Wartenberg's crucial project, which beautifully highlights the role of the visual in the philosophical oeuvre and brings both visual philosophy and philosophical visuality

into the wider discourse on aesthetics. However, *Thoughtful Images* is too careful with regard to acknowledging the power of the visual. It instead sticks too closely to the schema and hierarchies of the linguistic era, which began with the linguistic turn of the fin-de-siècle and which was followed by the mid-20th-century conceptualist philosophical turn. These movements characterize humans as linguistic–conceptual beings first and foremost and accordingly attribute priority to language and concepts rather than to images and the visual. The power of images and visual composition notwithstanding, linguistic–conceptualist philosophy posits that they are forever subjugated to conceptual schemes. Thus, for Wartenberg, ‘an illustration is always related to some other thing, its source. The source is metaphysically primary; the illustration, the target, is subordinate’ (20).

Hence, we encounter a somewhat conflicting discursive structure at this juncture. On the one hand, Wartenberg’s book suggests that illustrations are usually subsumed within media that subordinates visuality to literality and cognition. This is what made art critic Clive Bell classify as non-art not only illustrations but also illustrative works of art, which he designates ‘descriptive’, on account of their lack of significant form:

Portraits of psychological and historical value, topographical works, pictures that tell stories and suggest situations, illustrations of all sorts, belong to this class. That we all recognise the distinction is clear, for who has not said that such and such a drawing was excellent as illustration, but as a work of art worthless? (Bell 1958: 22)

It is true that early formalism excluded illustrations and illustrative art from the realm of real, free art – art that does not emerge from external sources but rather from internal forms. On the other hand, I believe that it is legitimate to argue that illustrations exist because the literal cannot capture and produce what the visual can, thereby proving that visuality always possesses some self-standing power even when related to pre-existing text, ideas or states of affairs. Thus, giving the visual medium of philosophical illustration its day in the sun and its long-overdue theoretical attention is most welcome and accords with the motivation of the visual turn.

Moreover, if I am right, Wartenberg’s step is a counterpart to the ideas expressed by William Morris, the leader of the Arts and Crafts movements in his 1877 ‘The Lesser Arts’, which calls for a dissolution of the distinction between decorative art and fine art. According to Morris:

When they are so parted, it is ill for the Arts altogether: the lesser ones become trivial, mechanical, unintelligent ... while the greater ... unhelped by the lesser, unhelped by each other, are sure to lose their dignity of popular arts. (Morris 2012: 2–3)

Analogously, Wartenberg calls for the status of illustration to be elevated to equal that with which ‘art’ has been endowed since antiquity. *Thoughtful*

Images implies that the division between art and illustration is often less sharp than is portrayed in the literature, which overlooks, for instance, the fact that a painting, even a canonical oil painting, could also be a philosophical illustration: ‘Perhaps part of the problem is the failure to recognize that the distinction between painting and illustration is not a mutually exclusive one. The same work can be both. ... Perhaps, recognizing the fluidity of this distinction among artforms will help restore illustration to its rightful place among the fine arts’ (Wartenberg 2023: 50). Wartenberg rightly presents the uncomfortable truth that philosophy of art has largely neglected illustration, and that illustrators have been considered ‘second- or third-class artists, with the category of first-class visual artist being limited to painters and sculptors’ (40). Wartenberg draws on Titian’s *The Rape of Europa* (c.1560–1562) as an example here. The painting explicitly draws on Ovid’s version of the tale, but art historians do not classify it as an illustration because it is considered a masterpiece in its own right, one whose artistic features are striking (and not because it contains a few independent details). For Wartenberg, on the contrary, even autonomous paintings could be subsumed under the category of philosophical illustrations. For instance, Rembrandt van Rijn’s oil painting *Aristotle Contemplating a Bust of Homer* (1653) is classified as ‘a concept-based painting’ that has no textual origin but that should rather be considered a philosophical illustration, largely on account of Homer being depicted as a source of inspiration for Aristotle. The painting thereby denotes the status of truth seeker and philosophical art that Aristotle attributes to poetry. It also implies that philosophy was highly valued by Rembrandt, given that ‘his painting of Aristotle presents the philosopher as a deep thinker who had a reverence for his poetic predecessor. As in Raphael’s painting, the scene is a pure invention of the painter, for there is no textual record of such an event. As a result, we can classify it as a concept-based illustration’ (104).

Concept-based illustration, which depicts an abstract philosophical idea, is one of three categories designated by Wartenberg, along with text-based and theory-based illustrations. All are categorized on the basis of their sources – a concept, a text or a theory – as well as the distinctive links they draw between ideas and visuality. A text-based illustration presents ‘a picture whose central features are specified by a text’; an example here would be a diagram of Plato’s Cave because its features and figures correspond to Plato’s description of the Cave. A theory-based illustration is defined as such if ‘there is a plausible interpretation of the work as an illustration of the theory in question’ (Wartenberg 2023: 99), for example Friedrich Nietzsche’s use in *The Birth of Tragedy* of Raphael’s Renaissance painting *Transfiguration* (1516–1520) as an illustration of his theory about the Apolline–Dionysiac dichotomy being dominant in Western culture. Wartenberg also marks two evaluative, sometimes competing, parameters: (1) fidelity or faithfulness to the meaning of the source text and (2) felicity, which highlights the originality and vividness of the translation as if it were autonomous or independent.

Figurative illustrations of textual formulations of philosophical ideas may indeed be evaluated by the standard of fidelity. Although visual compositions of various kinds have life and force of their own, still their dependence on specific texts renders the direction of the source target clear. The fidelity condition is met, for instance, by the frontispiece made by Abraham Bosse for Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, which 'is able to illustrate Hobbes's theory of the sovereign because Bosse intended it to do just that and was guided in his attempt by Hobbes to ensure its fidelity to the theory he developed in *Leviathan*' (99). Fidelity is not necessarily based on intentionality, as Wartenberg claims, provided that philosophers choose a readymade illustration, as in the case of Friedrich Nietzsche and *Transformation*, or Michel Foucault and Diego Velasquez's 1656 painting *Las Meninas*. Fidelity can be intricate and somewhat indirect, and, as such, it can be exercised by concept- or theory-based illustrations. Rembrandt's *Aristotle Contemplating a Bust of Homer* illustrates 'an idea that the artist had about the philosopher(s) depicted in the image that is derived from their understanding of the philosopher's works' and fulfils the fidelity condition if it fits the philosopher's thesis (101). However, this interconnection between illustration and ideas is difficult to assess in the rubric of illustrations of abstract ideas, namely the concept- or theory-based kind. According to Wartenberg, 'They may even make an important contribution to our understanding of the notion itself. This is possible because a visual image follows a different logic from that of a written text' (40). As I see it, the absence of specificity of textual passages may endow concept- and/or theory-based illustrations with more autonomy than text-based ones. But the visibility of the latter also sheds some light on the spirit and ideas of the texts – ideas that cannot be pre-conceptualized and that emerge from the composition and visual elements. It is now generally accepted that cognition also resides in visual structures. That being said, concept- or theory-based illustrations contribute to the controversy over the power (or lack thereof) of the visual to present intellectual cognizance and to be fully philosophical in and of themselves rather than mere decorative tools placed at philosophy's service.

Wartenberg uses as a paradigmatic example of the conceptual kind of illustration Norman Rockwell's canonical series *Four Freedoms*; these paintings are not text-bound but they depict the essence of each of the general ideas of the humanist liberalism that Franklin Delano Roosevelt propounded in his 1941 State of the Union Address. Reading Wartenberg's analysis of the paintings brings to mind Clement Greenberg's dismissal of Rockwell's illustrations as low art or kitsch, and 'products of American capitalism', in his paper 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' (Greenberg 1984: 14). For Greenberg, Rockwell's work was too transparent and easy to consume; accordingly, it requires no contemplation or perceptual and cognitive adjustment on the part of the viewer. Interestingly, Wartenberg's account of Rockwell's pieces argues to the contrary, attributing intricacy and opacity to the paintings because they

address general ideas and thus belong to the realm of art. Wartenberg clarifies that:

Rockwell had to envision scenes that could plausibly be interpreted as illustrating each of the four freedoms. In so doing, he followed the general strategy ... he was tacitly applying the norm of felicity to his art, saying that the crucial thing was to get to the feeling behind the work rather than being faithful to every detail. (49)

We should note that whereas Greenberg belittles Rockwell's works by claiming that their visuality is subjugated and transparent to external ideas or concepts, Wartenberg praises Rockwell's works by claiming that, being concept-based, their visuality is not committed to faithfulness to the external source but is rather vivid and expressive. Wartenberg's account is eye-opening and useful for acknowledging the power of the visual – which is indispensable in our visual age. In a way, he trusts visuality more than Greenberg, because while Greenberg supports the elimination of content, Wartenberg, so it seems, believes that visuality can overcome it and strike us, content notwithstanding. Nonetheless, it also seems that despite the significant attention that he dedicates to the visual with regard to philosophy, Wartenberg still works under the spell of language, or the privileged status afforded to it during the linguistic era of philosophy. Wartenberg himself points to the linguistic era in a later part of the book, in a lovely description of the 20th-century shift of language from a transparent tool of communication to a phenomenon that is worthy of study by itself. Prior to the linguistic turn, Wartenberg reminds us that 'philosophers had generally treated language as transparent, as a diaphanous medium through which we could communicate our ideas to others. Beginning with the work of Gottlob Frege, however, language itself became, at least for a while, the primary focus of philosophical inquiry' (209). This shift was notoriously exploited by conceptualist philosophy-oriented artists in the 1960s and 1970s who transported sentences from Ludwig Wittgenstein's texts to visual media, such as lit neon, thereby rendering their work illustrative.

This devotion to language, which still hovers above *Thoughtful Images*, is demonstrated by the analysis of the phenomenon of 'ready to use' painting, namely pre-existing paintings, which are utilized by philosophers. Consider, for instance, the account of Nietzsche's use of Raphael's *Transformation*, to make his Apolline–Dionysiac theory more accessible owing to its presence in the painting. It implies a hierarchy that locates the theory above the painting, which is consequently classified 'as an illustration of a philosophical thesis'. Wartenberg notes that the category of theory-based illustration is used 'to explain such an innovative use of a work of visual art to illustrate a theory that is developed linguistically' (125). However, I would like to claim that *the painting itself is the source*, namely, the very area in which the cultural tendencies take place, and Nietzsche's theory is its illustration. Put

differently, Wartenberg argues that the painting functions as an illustration of Nietzsche's claim 'about the forces that determine European history and culture'. I, however, think that it is the other way around, and that the theory illustrates the painting. After all, Nietzsche's claim emerges from the painting and functions as an analytic description of it and its cultural motivation and forces. The same misdirection also applies to Wartenberg's classification of the painting, after Nietzsche, as 'a product of that history and culture, part of his evidence for the validity of those claims'. This overlooks the fact that the painting is the very substance of culture that is later described (illustrated) by theories such as Nietzsche's (114). This amounts to an oversimplification of the concept of 'illustration'.

Similarly, the hierarchy between Michel Foucault's theory of the modernist practice of representation and Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* runs in the opposite direction than the one denoted by Wartenberg. Wartenberg claims that Foucault uses *Las Meninas* as illustrative of philosophical claims about the shift from Classical *episteme* to the modern elusive methods of perforated representation. However, Foucault's language is the illustration of the piece, and the piece is the matter, the stone, so to speak, of culture. We see, then, that, on the one hand, *Thoughtful Images* acknowledges the philosophical power of the visual, thus expanding the scope of philosophical topics of research; on the other hand, however, the direction of dependence is portrayed in the book under the schema that continues to classify the linguistic as superior to the visual. However, the linguistic age of philosophy often overlooked areas in which the visual is primary and language secondary. Philosophy sometimes *follows* visual pieces of culture, using them as sources, thus serving as the illustration rather than as the model. *Las Meninas* itself is made of the intricate, self-referential, elusive method of representation that, according to Foucault, replaced the pre-modern mimetic system. And Foucault's theory is but the description of this, which, just like illustration, highlights selected elements of the painting. In other words, Foucault's philosophy is the illustration of the artwork, it emerges from it and it depends on it. The confusion between exemplification – which is inductively used to develop a theory – and illustration – which comes after the fact to clarify or show elements of its source – is the corollary of the rigid hierarchy that the linguistic era of philosophy mistakenly enforced on us. But, this time, philosophy extracts critical elements from the painting to be illustrated in a theory. As Nelson Goodman's theory of exemplification well explains, an example is a centre of properties, a few of which are shown in accordance with the relevant context. In this case, *Las Meninas* is inserted into a context relevant to Foucault's theory of the intricacy of modern representation, the relevant properties to serving as an example of it.

The tendency to attribute a privileged status to content and literality over visibility is revealed by the adoption of the postmodernist linguistic-oriented description of modernist painting, which reached its peak in the classification

of abstract expressionist paintings as matter-of-fact illustrations of modernist philosophy, and ‘concept-based paintings’ (159). Modernist painters sought to show rather than to refer, creating flat paintings to avoid aboutness (Gal 2015: 17–45, 2022a: 337–38). But Wartenberg presents modernist paintings as being about that very flatness, arguing that ‘Abstract Expressionists made their philosophical point by creating concept-based illustrations. The concept that these painters illustrated was, not surprisingly, flatness’ (152). Thus, despite modernist art’s renunciation of extra-medium content and commitments, Wartenberg endorses the approach of Adrian Piper and other postmodernists to modernism and formalism, over that of Greenberg. A key element of the controversy is the attribution of intentionality, or lack of it, to the paintings. Wartenberg emphasizes Piper’s focus on the formalist appropriation of non-Western art methods, which necessarily involved a self-conscious style. Piper, as I see it, overlooks the fact that new waves of style, and even more so new habitual ways of using materials, often emerge from passion, artistic curiosity and nonconceptual enthusiasm, rather than from self-conscious and deliberate theoretical choice. Better yet, even if we accept Piper’s proposition that modernist artists were well aware of the nature of their work, its impact and its role in the development of art, the fact that an artist possesses a mental content that motivates the artistic process *does not entail intentionality or aboutness made by the artwork*. In other words, the motivating mental content of the artist does not necessarily render the artwork as referring to it, or a symbol of it. This leads us to question whether Piper’s and Wartenberg’s conclusion that modernist paintings are illustrations of philosophical stances is indeed supported by the attribution of self-awareness to the artists.

The same concern regarding the redundancy of attributions of aboutness is raised even with regard to the oeuvre of Piper herself, as in the case of her 1988 installation *Cornered*, whose philosophical import is beautifully presented by Wartenberg thus: ‘Viewers of *Cornered* are made to reflect on their own racial identities in ways they likely had not done prior to encountering the installation. ... For this reason, I characterize the work as philosophical’ (158). This analysis is no doubt plausible. However, the syllogism that advances from the fact that a piece *invokes a philosophical insight to classifying it as an illustration of this insight* may be too hasty. Import and effect are not necessarily referential or illustrative. Similarly, abstract expressionist artwork that relinquishes mimesis and its dedication to reality may invoke the idea of freedom from mundane reality in favour of aspiring to new ontologies. However, it is forced and unsatisfactory to claim that the abstract expressionist work is an illustration of this idea. An artwork may cause a life-changing experience, or even invite one to go through such an experience, without being an illustration of either the viewer’s experience or the artist’s intention. In the debate between the linguistic-oriented and the visualist aesthetics, the visualist will see the characterization of

modernist paintings as *referring* to the theoretical zeitgeist (rather than just being motivated by it), namely the confusion between reference and motivation, as deriving from the addiction to representation or aboutness and to the inconsequential classification of everything as a symbol.

Within this perspective, the aforementioned gap between Wartenberg and Greenberg, and formalism in general, is revealed yet again. Greenberg, a prominent champion (and a major curator) of Abstract Expressionism, specifically claimed in his canonical essay 'Modernist Painting' that both abstract and non-abstract modernist paintings were aimed solely at the eye, arguing that they 'can be travelled through, literally or figuratively, only with the eye' – thereby fusing form and content (Greenberg 1983: 8). As such, he characterized this oeuvre as anti-illustrationist, foregoing referentiality and aboutness. Contrarily, Wartenberg joins the somewhat artificial interpretation of modernist abstract painting as aiming at aboutness and revolving around content – the philosophical essence of painting. True, Wartenberg includes a significant quotation from 'Modernist Painting', where Greenberg states that:

Modernist art does not offer theoretical demonstrations. It could be said, rather, that it converts all theoretical possibilities into empirical ones, and in so doing tests, inadvertently, all theories about art for their relevance to the actual practice and experience of art. (1983: 14)

Then again, Wartenberg classifies modernist painting as 'concept-based illustration'. He thus joins the imperative of linguistic–conceptualist philosophy, which cannot admit the autonomy of the visual medium, and the power of composition, categorizing it as always subjugated and inferior to language. Thus, whereas Greenberg stresses the predominance of visuality and the practice of showing, Wartenberg stresses the aboutness and the practice of referentiality. 'Claude Monet's late Water Lilies paintings', Wartenberg argues, 'are less about what water lilies actual look like in a pond than they are about the swirling colors and effects of light Monet perceived in his pond in Giverny' (142). He thus endorses Rosenberg's account of Greenberg's view of modernist painting as failing to grasp their content. In the 1960s, Rosenberg's account was considered rebellious but it may seem conservative now, enclosed within the cage of language and the prevalent views of the linguistic era, and confusing modernist commitments to the medium of painting with aboutness, referentiality and illustrativism.

So, what kinds of artworks do fit the attribution of illustrative character and referentiality to philosophical ideas? Jasper Johns and Mel Bochner, both conceptualist artists, supply paradigmatic examples of works that denote Wittgensteinian ideas and which could be rightly subsumed under philosophical illustrations. Wartenberg offers generous and inventive analyses of these works, and as well as concluding *Thoughtful Images*, they seem fit to conclude this essay, bringing us back as they do to the centre of the

linguistic/conceptualist vs. visualist controversy, by revealing the heavy price that philosophy paid during its linguistic age. The first of these works is Jasper Johns' *Spring* (from *Seasons*, 1987), which manifests intricate relations with Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. It explicitly embodies aspect-seeing as essential in arguments about the perception of art by superimposing ambiguous images, such as the famous 'Rubin's Vase' double-aspect image by Edgar Rubin, the 'My Wife and Mother in Law' illusion by William Ely Hill, and the very 'duck-rabbit' illusion by Joseph Jastrow that appears in *Philosophical Investigations* (rendering it a unique illustration of a philosophical text that borrows a visual image from the text itself). Above and beyond the referential work that characterizes illustrations, Johns' work executes the perceptual phenomenon it symbolizes by forcing the aspect-seeing experience of it on the viewer. An even more radical example is the conceptualist series *On Certainty: Counting Alternatives: The Wittgenstein Illustrations* by Bochner, which explicitly originates from Wittgenstein's arguments against radical scepticism. This definite source of intentionality is materialized by the medium whose visual appearance is aimed at the deciphering mind rather than the eye. Wartenberg offers a generous and enlightening analysis of the (overly) opaque pieces that use 'Wittgenstein's own words to create quotation-based illustrations', and that thereby denote specific anti-sceptical arguments about knowledge and language (190). The specific area of distorted or rule-less arrangements of numbers within a matrix is composed into a concept-based illustration that is analogous to the structure of a specific moment of doubt in which the individual does not trust the validity of their own perception (one that should not be generalized to radical doubt), and 'through the process of interpreting the drawings, the reader-viewer becomes aware of the rationale for Wittgenstein's ideas precisely because Bochner has provided a visual system in which those ideas and the rationales for them have explicit analogues' (229). Being visually analogous to a legitimate take on *On Certainty*, claims Wartenberg, Bochner's matrix even fulfils the condition of fidelity.

Bochner's case is interesting. He himself would not classify his *Wittgenstein's Illustrations* as 'real' illustrations, wishing, as quoted by Wartenberg, to 'construct in abstract visual terms a mental state parallel to that evoked by Wittgenstein's meditations' (Letter to Alice Young, September 1, 1986). However, Wartenberg's expansion of the category of illustrations to include concept-based pieces enables their labelling as such. Wartenberg's categorization is easy to support. Ultimately, Bochner's works do function as riddles of sorts, in a manner that characterizes a great many works of Conceptual Art. Once you solve the riddle and capture its aboutness, it is not necessary to re-visit the visual medium. The outcome of Bochner's efforts to move away from the warm richness of visuality towards tough conceptuality is rigid and cold and emphasizes yet again that the visual is actually indispensable. Conceptual Art, which indeed tended to flirt with illustration, because its

passion was philosophy rather than visuality, failed as art in many respects. Vehemently endorsing the zeitgeist of the linguistic age, it went all the way to being subjugated to linguistic philosophy by relinquishing visual and compositional motivations. A medium that guides us to push its visuality aside in favour of its pre-existing concept does not invite us to immerse ourselves in it time and time again. Therefore, from the perspective of the visual turn of philosophy, *Thoughtful Images*, which explores the sphere in which philosophy spreads its wings, to be given also through images, is most welcome.

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