

Preface to the English Edition

Seeing one's book translated into another language a decade after it was first published is both flattering and terribly discomfoting. It is flattering inasmuch as it tends to prove that the book, initially written in German, can have a life of its own, slowly but steadily making a place for itself in contemporary debates. The fact that this English edition coincides with translations into other languages seems to indicate that the ideas it advances have a certain momentum. Yet the prospect of having one's book transposed into another language is also terribly discomfoting inasmuch as, in retrospect, its author sees all its flaws and shortcomings. Many ideas, especially in the later, more experimental sections, are merely sketched and will have to be spelled out in more detail. The temptation is considerable to rewrite it in light of all the developments the field of visual studies and media philosophy has seen since the book first came out. This temptation, though, is stopped dead in its tracks by the realization that it would not mean writing the book differently but writing a different book altogether. *Pace* my perfectionist instincts: I have kept interventions in the text to a bare minimum, just enough to dare present the book to a foreign audience.

The next temptation, then, if the content cannot be changed altogether, is at least to provide a guide to reading the book, explaining the text with some sort of paratext, an explanatory vestibule, as it were, to frame the entry into the real thing. But again, that would be tragically to overestimate the role of the author: once published, a book is no longer in the hands of the one who wrote it, and it should be left to readers to make their way through it as they see fit. Suffice it to say that I always envisioned the book as a phenomenologically inspired archaeology of the Western engagement with images. Yet in any archaeological endeavor, diggers never know what they will find.

In that respect, the table of contents is less a table than a topographical map that points the way to all sorts of paths and shortcuts across a vast excavation site.

I will thus leave it at that and instead highlight the crucial role several people played in seeing this volume to publication.

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to Lydia Goehr and Gregg Horowitz, who decided to include this book in their prestigious series: I could not think of a more desirable setting. Second, I'm indebted to Andrew Benjamin, with whom I have discussed matters of image philosophy for many years now. He has been one of the most penetrating readers of the book, probably because he looks at it from a distance from where its author is. Third, my thanks go to Wendy Lochner at Columbia University Press for her precious support throughout the entire process: such editors have become rare in publishing today. But if there is anyone who deserves credit for this book coming into being, it clearly is Nils F. Schott. Not only has he checked every source and chased down technical translations where they existed in remote libraries or suggested his own where they didn't. More important, he has achieved something that seems half a miracle, namely, turning a text written in baroque academic German into a readable English text. At least I like to think so. Should anything remain that seems stiff or obscure, the blame lies not with the translator but with the author alone.

The volume epigraph is from Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, ed. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, 4th ed. (Chichester: Wiley, 2009), 2.251:224^c; and James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin, 2000), 45.