

100 SCREENGRABS

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Confronting several archive videos of national leaders meeting at international summits, I noticed the rigidity of the formal protocol and the similarity of recurring gestures and poses. This common pattern led me to contextualise the greeting as a replicative performance. Therefore, I decided very intuitively to represent the concept of repetition using a printer, and I made 100 iterations out of progressive photocopies.

The process I adopted is very similar to the one used by Alvin Lucier in the project *I'm Sitting In A Room* (1969), but whereas he made his iterations in the acoustics field, re-playing and recording his voice, I started from a picture and I photocopied it, using then the new copy to repeat the process. The result is analogous in both cases: going forward with iterations the outcome becomes more blurred and eventually unintelligible. Regarding the picture, at each step the image decreases in quality and a noised and grained patina becomes more consistent. To use Lucier's words referred to acoustics, we can interpret the auto-deterioration of the image as the result of its natural "resonances", which reinforce themselves and "reverberate" through the printer.

What is interesting in this series of iterations is the process itself and its implications rather than the singular outcomes. The breakdown of the image reveals, after a few steps, an organic structure similar to a cellular tissue. This comparison suggests the possibility to define a unitary element, which is the basis of the printed image on the sheet, likewise pixels define it on a digital screen. The iterations do no more than make the structure visible so as to prevail on the subject of the image. There is therefore a turning point when the interpretation and comprehension of the image switched from the evaluation of the subject and the context to the decoding of the structure and the borders. This transition happens unintentionally in our brain and it is dictated by previous experience and perception rules. If this consideration may sound rather trivial for the uninitiated, it has instead a strong relevance for the discipline of graphic communication design, since it underlies the theories about Gestalt psychology: it demonstrates how we look at images and what we see.

The image I used for the iterations depicts two national leaders shaking their hands. The first spontaneous thoughts revolve around the content: we recognise the two characters and we assume they are meeting during an official visit. Our eyes elaborate this information and suggest to the brain that we are looking at the actual event rather than an image made up of ink jets on a blank sheet. The human trait of attributing feelings to images is rooted in a primitive tradition of animism and idolatry, but, according to Mitchell (2005), it is still very entrenched (although unconsciously) in the modern mankind. For instance "Art historians may "know" that the pictures they study are only material objects that have been marked with colours and shapes, but they frequently talk and act as if pictures had feeling, will, consciousness, agency, and desire" as it is reported by Mitchell. (Mitchell, 2005, p. 31).

In our case the process of deconstruction progressively erases the features of the subject and brings us face to face with the essence of the image: the structure formed by cells, which combined together recreate the reproduction of the event. The passage to the abstraction is what Mitchell considers the liberation of the image from human attributes: "Abstract paintings are pictures that want not to be pictures, pictures that want to be liberated from image-making." (Mitchell, 2005, p. 44).

Reflecting on the dichotomy between reality and representation we can see the animation of 100 frames as a dynamic transposition of Magritte's theory illustrated in the painting *La Trahison Des Images* (1929). In the animation, the perception of the misconception is marked even more clearly by the progression, in particular by a threshold of sorts which we cross when the image goes too abstract and we become aware of the structure. Trying to draw a linguistic analogy, which may simplify, we can distinguish a significatum and a signifier, or a content and a container, where the greeting is the former and the structure is the latter.

Alvin Lucier (1969) *I'm Sitting In A Room* [Sound Art performance]. Guggenheim Museum, New York: Electronic Music Studio at Brandeis.

W.J.T. Mitchell (2005) 'What Do Pictures want?' in *What Do Pictures Want: The Lives and Loves of Images*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

René Magritte (1929) *La Trahison Des Images* [Oil on canvas]. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles.



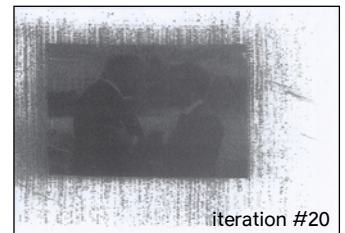
original image #0



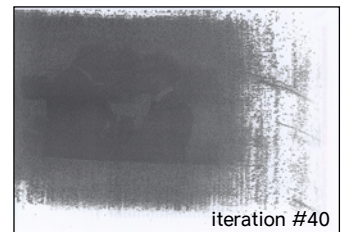
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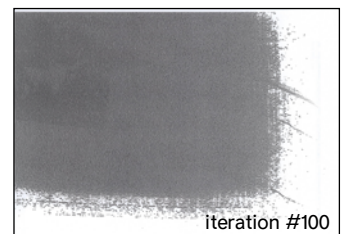
iteration #10



iteration #20



iteration #40



iteration #100

NEW BRIEF: thinking on the double nature of the image as significatum and signifier, how can we use the tools of graphic communication design to deconstruct the image into parts in order to separate the attributes ascribed by human interpretation and eventually remove them. How would the image look after this deprivation? In the case of images of public figures, where the meta-communication plays a predominant role, what does this loss entail? Would the image be able to communicate without the superstructure? Would the image still exist?