... art, too, thinks; it is thought. Not the thought about it, or the thought expressed in it, but visual thought.¹

Mieke Bal, 1999

MEDIALITY AND INTERMEDIALITY

For his series Atomists (1996), Mexican-born artist Gabriel Orozco over-painted and then digitally enlarged photographs clipped from the sports section of English newspapers (plates 9.1 and 9.2). In a number of these he includes the original photo credits and captions, describing the actions of footballers or other sports stars caught in the frame:

Asprilla, the Newcastle United substitute, attempts an overhead kick despite the close attention of Calderwood at St James’ Park yesterday.

Ferdinand powers his header past a helpless Ehiogu and Bosnich to clinch a vital victory for Newcastle at St James’ Park yesterday.

Blindside run: Les Ferdinand fails to connect with his head but Darren Anderton ghosts in to open for England.

Orozco captures these moments in the game as a molecular abstract pattern, overpainting a grid of circular and elliptical forms, keyed to the dominant colours of the underlying photograph. This atomistic translation of the image of dynamism, speed and the body in motion conjures an array of art-historical associations (from the geometrics of Russian constructivism to Robert Delaunay’s The Cardiff Team begun in 1912, as well as the tradition of ‘motion study’ in photography). Yet these are clearly not scientific inquiries into bio-mechanics, nor do they orient specifically towards painterly or art-historical concerns. Rather than simply rendering the images of athletes in paint, Orozco elaborates the found photographic image, overlaying one form of media with another to trace lines of tension and energetic flows within the image. In doing so he creates cells that serve to frame various details: gestures, points of contact, facial expressions.

The image of the athlete in effect becomes gestural in this convergence of media. Bodies engaged in the purposive action of a game are broken into their

component parts by the segments and spheres that reframe particular aspects of the action as gestures or expressive movements. To highlight the gestural character of action in this way is to view it not as goal-directed but as activity that is inhabited or ‘supported’, in the sense proposed by Georgio Agamben.\(^2\) For Agamben, an activity that is commonly regarded as a means to an end – he cites porn acting but competitive sport is another example – may be reconfigured in a way that does not deny its function as a means but focuses on ‘being-in-a-means’. Gesture is the key figure for this, particularly when it reveals the slippage between an action performed or spoken and the ‘inner’ sense of this activity, thereby embodying a dialectic between the communicative (externally directed) and the solitary (inwardly felt).\(^3\) In this sense, the incidental gesture that manifests self-consciousness may be seen as a direct expression of its own being-in-a-medium, and thus as a means of deriving a portrait from an action image.

In a more general sense, gesture reveals what Agamben terms ‘the media character of corporeal movements’.\(^4\) In doing so, it constitutes corporeal actions – or bodies – as interfaces, engaged in a relational dynamic, whether with an ‘interiority’, with media proper (film, video, image) or with the larger action that encompasses it (the game, the sex in a porn film). This interface is manifested when gesture is isolated within the image of an action, originally configured as a means; in other words, through an intervention within media.

In this regard, the convergence of media that characterizes the Atomists must be understood not simply as a translation of an image into paint, but as an intervention (through painting and digital reproduction) into a wider knowledge nexus. If the Atomists evoke bodies and actions as ‘medial’ in a conceptual sense, the works embody, in the broadest sense, a tendency in contemporary practice to operate between media (and between all kinds of semiotic codes). The old descriptors of ‘mixed media’ and ‘appropriation’ are inadequate in the characterization of such practice, which is more readily captured by the concept of ‘intermedia’ – a term which implies more than the internal differentiation or mixing of media that occurs within art itself. Realized as the intersection of different practices, technologies, languages and sign systems, intermediality posits a broad transdisciplinary sphere of operation, open to – but not restricted to – interventions in aesthetic form.

Intermediality, then, is not just an issue of medium; nor can it be confined to semiotic or iconographic operations. One of Orozco’s Atomists, with the title Ascension, plays on an iconographic correspondence, relating a photograph of a rugby union line-out (a formation in which players are held aloft by team members) to the image of the Christ’s Ascension into heaven. The joke arising from transposition is a familiar trope of contemporary art. British artist Simon Patterson (best known for his revision of the London Underground map, which he populates with the names of famous people) also conflates football and religion in a wall-drawing of 1990 snappily titled, The Last Supper Arranged According to the Sweeper Formation (Jesus Christ in Goal). Such work clearly plays on the significance attached to the organizational schema. The Atomists, however, are concerned less with significations or the associations of particular sign systems, than with the staging of intermedial relationships, and thus with the creation of an ‘intermedial aesthetic’ per se.
The possibility of an intermedial aesthetic remains a blind-spot for art history, which misses the concept when it reduces the image of the athletes in action to the ‘subject matter’ of the painter, or when it confines formal analysis to the identification of an artistic lineage. Paradoxically, however, the Atomists provide more than ample scope for an art-historical criticism of this nature. Benjamin Buchloh locates the Atomists in relation to a rich history of art focused on kinetic movement and the representation of athletic skill, citing orphism, futurism, constructivism and the early modern fascination with athletic performance. Buchloh’s account is exemplary and informative art history, well attuned to Orozco’s manifest interest in the historical avant garde, but it confines the issue of intermedia to the parameters of fine arts (specifically, to the interrelationship of sculpture–painting–photography), leaving aside the question of how the Atomists configure art media within a contemporary cultural formation. Yet amidst the layering of art histories, the Atomists register a relationship between quite diverse practices and technologies, orchestrating a biomechanics in painting around sport and print media. The geometric grids painted onto the sporting scenes seem to float somewhere between the underlying photograph and the surface of the image, itself generated through a process of digital remediation, so that painting is, as it were, suspended within the image itself.

A further medium in play in this dynamic is text: the words subtitling the photograph, about which Buchloh is silent. The journalistic captions no doubt resonate more deeply with the sports fan. A Newcastle United supporter (unlike a regular art historian) would derive particular enjoyment from the framing of ‘a helpless Ehigou and Bosnich’ or ‘the close attention of Calderwood’ in a manner informed by — though not reducible to — their earlier viewing of the game, or reading of the sports pages. But the issue here is not whether the art historian’s reading should prevail over the popular cultural reading; notwithstanding one’s orientation towards either art or football, the inclusion of a caption locates the aesthetic operation not just with one supervening discourse but somewhere within the triangulation of painting, sporting image and text. Asprilla presents movements, gestures and affects combining in the event of the overhead kick. The caption keys us to the portrait of ‘close attention’, much as the word ‘concentration’ resonates with the image of a snooker player in an Atomist captioned ‘Griffiths, who now needs spectators, gives a testing shot complete concentration.’ These images are not ‘about’ attention or concentration, any more than they are about sport; rather, these words, clipped and quoted in such a way as to bracket their discursive or idiomatic status, are linguistic elements in play, bouncing off the segmented visual components (Griffiths’s one bespectacled eye; Calderwood’s relaxed hand in its circular frame; Bosnich’s ‘helpless’ startled face watching the ball head into the goal).

The wit of the Atomists derives in part from the extent to which the serviceable text of the sub-editor is drawn into an interactive poetics with the image above. The segmentation of pictorial elements in the frozen tableau has the effect of amplifying certain descriptors in the text, so that captions, economically penned to capture the action in its entirety, give rise to abstractions; conceptualizations of elusive actions or expressions such as ‘failing to connect’ and ‘ghosting in’.
Words, then, are operative elements in the generation of a conception of movement, dynamism and interaction, though it is the medial rather than signifying function of signs that is highlighted. The Atomists do not decontextualize signs; rather, elements or details of the image are transformed as they are framed within – and in relationship to – media. In other words, the Atomists do not complete an intersemiotic translation – a movement from one sign system to another, such that signs are now open to a reading within another organized structure (the protagonists of the Last Supper, turned footballers, in the ‘sweeper’ formation). Instead, movements, gestures and words are, in the terminology of Agamben, ‘suspended in and by their own mediality’.6

The exploration of mediality in this sense implies more than – the opposite of – a focus on medium or mediation, since it reveals the condition of being-in-a-medium, or of inhabiting actions that are generally viewed as a means, like the (literally) goal-directed activity of a football match. For Agamben (as for Orozco), gesture constitutes the exhibition of a mediality. It is neither the means of addressing an end, nor an end in itself (a purely aesthetic form) but ‘the process of making a means visible’? Hence, Asprilla’s attempt at the overhead kick is not shown as the means of gaining possession of the ball, and is set against, rather than transformed into, an abstract pattern. Through the convergence of the gridded molecular patterns, action photograph and caption, the action of and around the kick is presented as a matrix of gesture, expression and affect. The effect of such a capture is to refigure the sign to reveal, in the first order, its medial dynamics, and the media character of corporeal movements, rather than its signifying or instrumental function. It is to ask, in Agamben’s formulation, not what is being produced or acted but ‘in what way is an action endured and supported?’8 It is in this particular sense that I invoke the term [inter]mediality to describe not just the literal intersection of media but the inquiry focused on – and conducted through – medial relationships or mediality itself.

**CULTURAL STUDIES WITHOUT WORDS**

The Atomists effect a ‘visual cultural’ study without words. Operating at the intersection of different discourses, practices and aesthetics, these images constitute an intermedial space through which new ways of seeing and new terms for analysis can emerge. In this regard, the Atomists are emblematic of a mode of contemporary art practice that, by its very interdisciplinary constitution, sits within a visual cultural paradigm. That is to say, the work’s theoretical counterpart may be understood as an art theory that formulates itself within the expanded field of cultural studies.

In spite of the emergence of visual culture studies as a multifarious practice, operating beyond the boundaries of art history, leading voices allied with both visual culture (Mieke Bal) and the broader field of cultural theory (Brian Massumi) continue to argue that cultural studies has missed expression (Massumi) in critical ways, too readily confining itself to a bounded domain of popular culture that effectively excludes art and analysis of its particular modes of operation (Bal).9 In this sense it does not take up the challenge of describing an intermedial aesthetic as this is embodied in contemporary art practice. In this essay I situate these theorists and others in relation to both current trends in practice and a
mode of art analysis undertaken in a broader interdisciplinary field, going back to Aby Warburg.

I am not interested here in the turf war between art history and visual culture, for, as Bal has shown, the discussion of disciplinary demarcation is a futile diversion; methodology is the substantive issue. Thus, I seek to account for the elements of a visual cultural method that is equal to the task of extending an aesthetics of intermediality. These elements may be distinguished in terms of three interlocking concepts: ‘whole-field analysis’, ‘co-production’ and ‘differential’, through which a fourth, ‘visual thought’ – conceived by Bal as a constitutive feature of art – may be extended.

**WHOLE-FIELD ANALYSIS**

The concept of a ‘whole-field’ operation emerges in Brian Massumi’s critique of cultural studies as a defining feature of a practice that cuts across disciplinary boundaries and divisions between ‘high’ and popular culture.\(^{10}\) In contrast to the discipline that defines its parameters in terms of a specific group of either objects or subjects, an interdisciplinary cultural studies engages what Massumi calls ‘whole-field modulation’. The ‘whole field’ in this sense is not a substantive concept that lays claim to a particular terrain, but a description of the potentially unlimited arena of a practice that relinquishes the need to pre-determine its object domain.

Nevertheless, Massumi argues, this cultural studies does not exist, except as a potentiality. The reason for this is that cultural studies, in its current institutional formation, has missed two key concepts: process and expression. It clings to the notion that ‘expression is of a particularity’; in other words, it treats expression as an attribute or property of a predefined group of persons (a culture, a sub-culture, a gender, a minority).\(^ {11}\) In doing so, it fails to actualize in its own more radical terms, veering back towards sociology or social policy studies. Rather than practising intervention within an expanded field, it turns to regulation and reform. On this basis, visual cultural studies may be readily aligned to the study of popular culture, and art (and its formal analysis) ceded to art history. Art may be embraced by visual culture studies by virtue of its content, context of production or the cultural identity of its producers. But aesthetics – the dynamics of form – is not prima facie the business of visual culture studies, if and when it exhibits the limitations ascribed by Massumi to cultural studies.

The concepts of process and expression to which Massumi alludes are methodologically allied to whole-field modulation in as much as they describe the dynamics of cultural forms, insisting on a focus on movement and transition (the behaviour of aesthetic entities) rather than on their classification (the definition and qualification of an object as art or popular culture). What, then, might a visual cultural analysis in these terms look like? And how can art figure in an analysis that traces process lines running through a range of disciplines and practices? If analysis is not circumscribed by classifications of discipline, genre or iconography, how is the ‘line through’ characterized?

Aby Warburg stands out as a pioneer of whole-field analysis, exemplifying the methodological embodiment of the concepts of both visual thought and co-production. Warburg’s key work in this regard is *Mnemosyne*, the atlas, compiled
between 1924 and 1929. The atlas was, for Warburg, a means of doing art history without words – performing image analysis through montage and recombination. Mnemosyne is constituted from the large panels, stretched with black cloth, on which Warburg arranged images from disparate sources: photographs of classical statuary, news clippings, magazine advertisements, maps and amateur snaps, which were then rephotographed. Like Orozco, Warburg finds formal resonances linking certain sporting images to painterly and sculptural compositions (on one panel two images of golfers in mid-swing are juxtaposed with an image of Judith holding the head of Holofernes, as well as several advertising images and classical seals). But Mnemosyne is not an art work, nor even a finished object. Having been subject to continual modification by Warburg, it is best understood as the embodiment of a method: a means of studying the internal dynamics of imagery, and the ways in which formulas emerged in different contexts and periods in history.

Central to Warburg’s method was the idea that pictorial forces were at work across a wide-open field. Thus he insisted that the analysis of art – of aesthetic form in a given medium – could not be undertaken without exceeding the borders of art history; that it must entail a kind of geography of a vast field of visual imagery. The atlas was in this regard ‘an instrument of orientation’, tracking the emergence of figures at different points in a history of representation and tracing their migration into different cultural domains, areas of knowledge, genres and media.

For Warburg, Mnemosyne was a psychological study, rather than one that is art-historical in the pure sense; it might now be routinely classified under the rubric of visual culture studies, but for the fact that its inquiry is closely focused on aesthetic principles. Those who persist in defining visual culture as art history’s other, as the study of culture excluded by the ‘high art’ cannon, might find Mnemosyne disappointingly orthodox in its disproportionate focus on classicism. Yet, its radical nature lies precisely in the fact that it constitutes its domain as the whole field of culture. Thus, it cannot be defined through delineation of a group of material objects. It enshrines a practice that is no longer the study of art per se, but the study of dynamic principles within imagery.

The precise terms of analysis emerge in the execution as sets of relations cohere around the dynamics of gesture, and affect. These terms arise from the recombination and reframing of pictorial elements, not by virtue of their iconographic significance, but through the dynamics of interaction. Warburg, as Georges Didi-Huberman notes, did not strive to ‘create a structure out of iconographic detail’:

Instead he would discern suddenly a formal line of tension, a sort of symmetry in movement line, sinuous or broken with the alternately slackening or coiling body. Dancing or explosive, yet ever present in the very crux of the gestural chaos distributed by each part of its ungraspable geometry.

His method entailed the identification of ‘formal pivots’ (in Didi-Huberman’s term) – the hinges around which the internal dynamics of an image are organized. Orozco’s Atomists work in similar fashion; geometry, introduced as a distinctive and separate semiotic code, is not a ‘graspable’ totalizing schema, but
a visual method for identifying pivots. If the Atomists transform the sports image into a study of gesture and expression, then expression and gesture are not merely semantic or iconographic categories, nor individual properties, but revealed as formal components in a pictorial dynamic. This dynamic has both a critical and cultural dimension in so far as gesture is understood as exposing action as it is inhabited in a given site. For the same reason, Agamben notes that Mnemosyne was ‘historical’ precisely through its capacity for transforming the image:

Because of the fact that this research was conducted through the medium of images, it was believed that the image was also its object. Warburg instead transformed the image into a decisively historical and dynamic element.¹⁶

Hence, Mnemosyne is in part a study of the elements of portraiture as they emerge at a particular historical or cultural juncture. One panel of the atlas features a fifteenth-century Florentine altarpiece by Domenico Ghirlandaio, from which the figures of the patron Francesco Sassetti and his circle are clipped and included as separate details (plate 9.3). This extraction has the effect of highlighting the entry of the contemporary portrait into the religious scene, and the means by which figures are characterized and rendered expressive. ‘Attentiveness’ becomes a focus in its own right as a feature of the supplicant figures. Like some of Orozco’s Atomists that highlight the expression – or what certain psychologists classify as the affect¹⁷ – of interest (concentration, attention), this reframing of elements from a larger pictorial structure functions to suspend gesture (and its dimensions of expression and movement) within the context of the medium. This is the mode of analysis that Agamben identifies as operating through the reduction of works to the sphere of gesture, a sphere which lies ‘beyond interpretation’; in other words, a level of analysis that cuts across signification or iconographic meaning, while at the same time tracing the emergence of cultural forms, the dynamics of which are constituted within the image.¹⁸

That a contemporary artist like Orozco would turn his attention to the sports photograph is not surprising in an era where the technical imagining of the athlete in motion has become so advanced as to constitute a mode of portraiture in itself. Interactive television now allows us to select a point of view on a football match, or a player on which to focus, and replays in super slow-mo reveal the muscle contractions generating specific movements. In 2006 video artists Philippe Parreno and Douglas Gordon premiered Zidane: a Portrait of the Twenty-First Century at Cannes, described as ‘a portrait on film, in action and in real time, of one of the greatest players in the history of soccer, Zinédine Zidane’ (plate 9.4). Filmed with seventeen synchronized cameras, each focusing (almost exclusively) on Zidane throughout the entire course of a Spanish premier league match, the film is presented as ‘a unique endeavor midway between the work of a portrait artist and a high action movie for a broad viewing public’.¹⁹ The elements of a portrait (gesture, expression, affect) are, in other words, found within the very space of sport (the stadium in the real-time of a game), bracketed as a study in concentration and movement.

For the full ninety minutes of the game the cameras follow the trajectory of the body in motion, breaking into details: the soles of Zidane’s feet crunching
the grass, his relaxed arm and straight back as he runs, his attentive eyes, his smile. Zidane watches the game incessantly as the viewer watches him. As critics have noted, by means of this intense focus on a single player, the film offers a study of a ‘man at work’, an ouvrier. Work, however, is described through interaction and response, registered in movement, gesture, affect and expression. The absence of the whole narrative and whole-game perspective transforms Zidane into the image of the hyper-responsive figure. Every action – from intense concentration and scrutiny to explosive intervention – is keyed to the game, and to largely off-screen action.

The exclusive focus on the single player functions as a constraint, which in turn dictates a pace and rhythm determined by Zidane himself as he moves through phases of relaxed concentration, coiled energy and explosive bursts of activity, and occasionally of emotion. If (as Agamben suggests) gesture registers a tension or dialectic between the solitary and the communicative, such that it expresses precisely the experience of ‘being in’ an interaction – rather than simply the articulated communication – then Zidane is poised exactly at this interface. Rather than constructing an external (or completely internal) perspective onto the spectacle of the game, or presenting movement and expression as a means to an end, it simply follows the single strand weaving through a game, registering various points of connection and contact along the way.

A similar logic, and effect, is pursued even more starkly by South African-born video artist Candice Breitz, in whose Soliloquy Trilogy protagonists of three well-known Hollywood movies are cut away from the scenes that make the narrative legible (plate 9.5). Dropping in a monochrome black screen (the digital filmic version of the atlas panel screens), Breitz recompiles clips of these characters speaking, though now without evidence of others present in conversations, with the effect that every word, sound and gesture acquires a prominence and intensity. With no context to absorb or make sense of a (corporeal or verbal) gesture, the soliloquy intensifies into a spiralling word flow. As Marcella Baccaria has noted, language loses not just its external context but its ‘transcendental angst and inner necessity’, taking on an almost psychotic quality as it degenerates into solipsistic babble. No longer psychological, spoken language becomes (as Beccaria puts it) ‘solidified matter’ (much as the captions of
the Atomists acquire a material dimension). Speech runs on relentlessly, unable to flow through the normal communication channels that articulate it into conversation and feedback. It registers as pure intensity: affect characterized by urgency and lack of attachment, disarticulated from motives or drives. In this sense its performance is literally captured in its own mediality.

Overtly, Zidane is a study of the dynamics of movement and gesture, though in this instance – as in Mnemosyne – gesture is conceived less as subject matter than as method. As has been widely reported, on the morning of the shoot/match Gordon and Parreno took their film crew (whose combined experience ranged from Martin Scorsese films to National Football League events) to the Prado to look at the portraits of Goya and Velázquez. If these were to serve as models for the creation of the portrait of the twenty-first century, it is not in the manner of direct reference but in the mode of visual thought that Bal characterizes in the book, which, more than any other, identifies this form of transhistorical relationship, Quoting Caravaggio. Put another way, they served as a way of identifying – seeing, understanding, modulating – the gestural components of a portrait, conceived in terms of its emergence in the modern arena, forged from a conflation of representational codes, and designed and executed by the subject in collusion with the film-makers.

THE CO-PRODUCTION OF ANALYSIS
At the heart of this intermedial constitution of a portrait, as in Warburg’s study of the Renaissance portrait, is a conception of co-production, operating at a number of levels: between artist and subject (both with a particular relationship to the

---

medium); between artist and art theorist; between the art work and the inter-disciplinary knowledge nexus in which it is created. This notion describes, but is not reducible to, intersubjective relations, but it emerges from the very logic of cultural studies, conceived as true interdisciplinarity. Hence, Bal concludes her methodological argument in these terms:

Neither the boundary between ‘high’ and ‘popular’ culture can be maintained, nor that between visual production and its study. If the object co-performs the analysis [...] then creating and policing boundaries of any sort seems the most futile of all futilities that academic work can engage in.23

In the absence of a consensus about what constitutes the object domain of visual culture, we are, Bal infers, in the realm of the interdisciplinary. The error, then, is ‘to persist in [the separatist project of] defining’. The challenge is to negotiate the apparently contradictory demands of a field that cannot be defined in terms of a unified object domain but at the same time derives its ideas, methods and concepts from its objects. If the aesthetic can no longer be located through the classification of an object domain, it must be traced through the distinctive operations of images inhabiting the interdisciplinary field. Its object is, to borrow Philippe-Alain Michaud’s description of Warburg’s proposition, the ‘image in motion’.24

Co-performance, in Bal’s sense, can be conceived as the co-production of an object of study. As Bal reminds us, Roland Barthes distinguished interdisciplinary practice from multidisciplinarity on the basis that it is no longer a question of lots of people from different disciplinary perspectives looking at the same objects, but rather the creation of a new object.25 The object that emerges from the interdisciplinary nexus is, of course, not simply a material object but a conceptual one: an object of knowledge that comes into being through the enmeshed practice of philosophy, art, literature, cultural studies, anthropology and so on. This is the hybrid object described by Bruno Latour as calling for a new methodology in the philosophy of knowledge.26

Interdisciplinarity is, for Latour, axiomatic since knowledge can no longer be considered the product of a pure science. Typically, he argues, a newspaper article on the ozone layer will feature the voices and concepts of industrialists, chemists, politicians, ecologists, perhaps not fully commensurable but somehow caught up in the same story, linked by a single thread. Newspapers are full of ‘hybrid articles that sketch out imbroglios of science, politics, economy, law, religion, technology, fiction’,27 churning up all of culture and all of nature so that even the most fundamental distinctions in the philosophy of knowledge (like nature – culture) are compromised. If ideas come from amalgams, philosophers must attend to the crossings and meetings between disciplines or languages, and to the way that a knowledge matrix works. This, Latour argues, is best understood in terms of a network: ‘more supple than the notion of a system, more historical than the notion of structure, more empirical than the notion of complexity, the idea of network is the Ariadne’s thread of these interwoven stories.’28 Since discussions of scientific phenomena can no longer be assimilated in specific disciplines, the analytic methods of a single discipline are inadequate in isolation; the
philosopher must follow the imbroglios wherever they lead, shuttling back and forth within a network of ideas.

The ‘object’ of knowledge in this sense is not the pre-given object of the discipline of philosophy of science, since it is necessarily the emergent or ‘becoming’ object of interdisciplinary production: the amalgam, hybrid, or Bal’s ‘travelling concept’, made up of the threads of distinct practices and modes of understanding, which can only be expressed in terms of their connectivity or symbiosis. These interweaving threads may be distinguished as differently behaving components of an amalgam but not as separable disciplinary perspectives on an object. Thus, visual thought (a particular behaviour) is located within cultural studies only when symbiosis is articulated in its full aesthetic dimension.

**Differential**

One process line cannot judge another. Process lines can interfere with each other. They can modulate each other. They can capture each other’s effects and convert them into more of their own. But they cannot judge each other because they are immersed in the empirical field, not ‘reflections’ of it.

The intersection of art and other discourse may be conceived as a production born of the slippages that occur when different practices encounter one another and start to ‘speak’ from the same field of operation. The field, constituted through intermedial relationships, is contingent and unnamed; it is the space of the differential. The term differential has a currency in media studies where it describes (in Andrew Murphie’s definition) ‘cultures and technologies that are based upon the in-between, that is, difference in itself’. Difference in this sense is a constitutive force functioning to create intermedial environments in a context where media are no longer bound forms (film, television) or genres (television drama, news or sports coverage), but constantly differentiate themselves.

Agamben tellingly refers to Warburg’s project as the ‘discipline that exists but has no name’. This ‘nameless science’ was variously described by Warburg in terms that convey the sweep of cultural studies: a ‘history of the psyche’, a ‘history or culture’; and in more precise methodological or processual terms as an ‘iconology of the intervals’, evoking not so much an object of study as the relational space between that comes into being in the collage of the atlas, and the means by which the object of knowledge is created.

*Mnemosyne* is itself an active production instantiating an intermedial or transdisciplinary arena. As Michaud emphasizes, it

does not limit itself to describing the migrations of images through the history of representations; it reproduces them. In this sense, it is based on a cinematic mode of thought [the reproductions of paintings and sculpture that comprise *Mnemosyne* are treated as film stills, argues Agamben], one that aims not at articulating means but at producing effects.

This, then, is both a thinking cinematically or thinking visually, and a co-production in which Warburg uses (‘abductively’, as Bal might say) imagery to create a new effect.
Warburg is by practice a co-producer, an art historian deriving a conception of history from found images and reproductions. As Kurt Forster first noted, Warburg’s sense of the production of art was profoundly collaborative, in so far as he regarded the emergence of secular portraiture not as an artistic phenomenon but as the result of the relationship between artist and patron, and hence as linked to broader cultural shifts. Indeed, Latour’s imagery of the network spun from threads (which are traced rather than disentangled by the cultural analyst) finds resonance in Forster’s metaphors when he describes Warburg’s own written analysis of Domenico Ghirlandaio’s portraits:

Warburg inlays the threads of an essentially pre-photographic, verbal replication of the paintings with the strong yarn of his own concerns. He works them into an interpretation that entangles conflicts […] But he unites the weave and the inlay by transforming the ostensibly self-sufficient, purely aesthetic character of the work of art – as caught in the web of his own enchanting description – into ‘something quite different’. And this ‘something quite different’, which transcends the purely visual substance of the work, is not of the artist’s devising, or of the beholder’s, but derives solely from the effort of understanding that Warburg demands of his cultural studies. What is quite different is the recognition that works of art are ‘documents’ that bear a special charge.

Cultural analysis thus engages the ‘thought’ inherent in aesthetic production. The ‘effort of understanding’ is itself an aesthetic (rather than interpretive) operation in the first instance, grounded in the double action of the reduction to gesture and the constitution of the interval as a space for the re-emergence and activation of pictorial forces. It is through the interval, conceived as differential, that Warburg generates an understanding of the gesture/image within an historical dynamic. For him, the differential is a space of return, the site at which a latent cultural memory resurfaces in a gestural dynamics. The gesture is itself ‘intended as a crystal of historical memory’, so that its irruptions, plotted in the differential spaces of the atlas, act as coordinates for the tracing of process lines along a continuum or ‘vectors of exchange between heterogeneous spaces and times’. Warburg’s ‘cultural studies’ is, then, the expression of the process line – of an historical and cultural dynamic – as visual thought.

This line, characterized by symbiosis, does not, of course, plot the re-emergence of an unchanged form. The concept of gesture as always embodying a differential leads towards the notion of media as an interface, folding out into new relationships.

THE EFFORT OF THINKING VISUALLY

Thus, gesture (or ‘gestural criticism’) is a means of investigating media itself. Media art opens up such a critical engagement when it promotes looking through, rather than looking at gesture. The T-Visionarium project is archetypical in this regard, furnishing an apparatus for a co-produced criticism (plate 9.6). T-Visionarium is a differential structure without predetermined content, an interactive immersive environment that allows viewers to navigate spatially a vast televsual database. Produced by a team of artists, critics and programmers, under the auspices of iCinema, this apparatus functions as an instrument of orientation: an atlas of the digital televsual domain.


_T-Visionarium_ engenders both art and criticism, though resists classification in either category. As a result, viewers and critics may have problems conceptualizing their role in the _T-Visionarium_ environment. It is certainly ‘user-friendly’ – spectacular and quite easy to navigate – but the constitution of the virtual atlas is the viewer’s prerogative; aesthetic selections must be continually re-made. It is, in essence, a project without an object that forces users to address it as mediality, and to think and do co-production.

The second phase of _T-Visionarium_, premiered in 2006, comprises sixty-four separate video recordings, viewed on ‘windows’ (rectangular surfaces) positioned in three-dimensional space. The viewer wanders freely in the darkness of the room, experiencing the spectacle in three dimensions of two hundred floating windows, each playing footage recorded from network television. Equipped with a remote control, the viewer may click on any single image to trigger a sort of all sixty-four windows according to type. Each of the (22,636) segments making up the footage has been tagged according to the degree that it exhibits various kinds of emotion, expressive behaviour, physical behaviour, or spatial and structural characteristics, and also whether it contains male or female characters. The values assigned to each shot are used as the basis for the distribution, along with automatically detected similarities of colour and movement. Thus, if a viewer selects a close-up of a woman speaking on the phone in the bluish light of a television morgue, a flood of images with similar colour values and formal or dynamic properties fly across to the area around the chosen image. The most dissimilar images move to the spaces furthest away – so that all the images facing
the viewer will likely be of women, and those on the opposite wall of men. Whereas some of the images in the cluster will be of people holding phones, in others the gesture may correspond in a looser way to that of the figure with the telephone (holding a cup to the mouth, for example), or may exhibit only colour or movement similarities. Footage is broken into segments, averaging four seconds long, which loop continually until a further selection is made. The viewer may double-click on a chosen screen to elect to play the footage on that screen in full (for around thirty minutes). When such a selection is made the remaining windows freeze into silent stills, catching the resonant gestures and movements in midstream.

The experience of these images is both visual and auditory and part of the interest emerges from the mismatch or crossover of soundtracks. While words are often emphatic elements, their syntax and dialogic context are rarely, if ever, preserved in these brief clips. Dialogues are transformed into fragmentary monologues, sounds and gestures, stripped of their communicative function. The viewer cannot ‘interpret’ these gestures, other than in reference to the correlative movements that surround them. T-Visionarium is, thus, radically synchronic. Fragments of conversation are re-absorbed immediately into the synchronic arrangement, configured in a variety of new relationships based in shared movements and affects, rather than in the logic of dialogue. This process of recombination tends to mitigate any sense that these are truncated or incomplete actions in need of extension or a response. Seen in this format, corporeal and verbal gestures no longer appear as the tools of interpersonal communication or as properties of the individual, because the overriding impression is one of gestural echo, or of the migration of affect and gesture across the medium.

Again, this effect is crystallized by Breitz. In the companion works Mother and Father six Hollywood stars perform motherhood, and a further six fatherhood in a separate ensemble (plate 9.7). Extracted from their respective movies and re-assembled twitching and fidgeting against a black backdrop, the actors’ incidental gestures of distress, betrayal, self-pity and loss of esteem are transformed

from ‘meaningful’ expressions into displaced symptoms. Julia Roberts’s eye roll, stripped of context, and repeated with a digital twitch, looks hysterical, and when orchestrated with gestural sequences, performed in similar isolation on the other five screens, appears contagious. Breit’s characters do not converse or interact but perform gestures directed outward, towards the viewer; for want of a reverse-shot, the logic of conversation operates at the level of gestural echo, across a horizontal plane.

In turning this methodology over to the spectator, T-Visionarium reveals, simultaneously, how homogenous, yet radically impure and hybrid television is. T-Visionarium combines the full range of free-to-air television screened over an eleven-day period in the peak-hour evening slots (which includes news and current affairs and the odd feature film), within which there is a marked prevalence of drama, principally US crime drama: Law and Order, CSI, Cold Case, Without a Trace. As a mediascape it is marked by the economy of gesture and movement that characterizes such drama. Headshots and dialogue prevail. There are very few panoramic shots (except in occasional frames from feature films or news footage) or full-body gestures.

There are few silences. Characters seem to talk most of the time, or, failing this, to generate some form of noise (breathing, panting, sighing). An occasional musical score will waft across from one window to another, impressing itself onto the conversation, much as the diegetic sound of Zidane (featuring sounds of the game and the stadium) fuses with the soundtrack provided by the band Mogwai. This impure, transient, intermedial space thus seems always to exist already in media – not just in a specific but a general sense. Every mix is already envisaged by the medium.

T-Visionarium is not about television in the same way that Mnemosyne is not about art objects – though it uncovers a televisual vocabulary of gesture. Agamben argues that in the early modern period gesture migrated from everyday life into the domain of cinema. Hence, much like Warburg’s atlas, early cinema has its centre in gesture and not in the image. Television, ostensibly, has its centre not in the grandiloquent full-body gestures of early silent movies, but in the restrictive close-up (which registers facial affect and micro gestures), and in the performance of dialogue. Its gestural dimension is reclaimed from dialogue once the medium is reconfigured – through a new technological aesthetics – and made to display its own media character in a changing set of relationships.

Similarly, if the portrait has now migrated to the cinematic domain of sport, where technology reconstitutes it (via Goya, Velázquez and the action movie) through the expansive full-body spectacle, what enables this is the possibility of registering the body within media in its gestural dimension. Hence, Zidane is not a narrative portrait but a genuinely cinematic – or more accurately, intermedial – one.

TRANSLATIVE VERBS: INCOMPLETE CONVERSATIONS
The striking feature of Candice Breit’s aesthetic, as well as of T-Visionarium and Zidane, is the degree to which the truncating of a conversation or an action focused on another does not register as a loss. Gestural activity without an object is rapidly redistributed across new sets of relations.

Orozco’s frozen action gestures and expressions are suspended in a way that brackets them from their objects (which are still visible in the larger frame but no
longer figured as the end point of activity). They are like transitive verbs that remain incomplete for want of a direct object (a footballer 'attends...'). Zidane, in Gordon and Parreno’s film, is often performing in relation to an absent or off-screen focus. Yet in these instances, the whole body in its multiple relationships is the site of expression; technologies converge to frame each aspect of movement and engagement, so that it becomes gestural rather than communicative or directed towards an end.

In a sense, the portrait – the close-up, registering the detail of expression – is written onto the body of the performing athlete in the intermedial space. Yet, it is not configured as a face or an identity. In *Zidane* it is constituted as a continuum, a dynamic trajectory in space and time, subject to interconnection and modes of contact that engage different aspects of the body, at points along the way. The body is fragmented into multiple frames, multiple gestures (as in the Atomists); gesture is itself intermedial.

Breitwieser’s movie stars and the athletes of the Atomists and *Zidane* should not be reduced to studies of the iconic celebrity forms of the times, and they are certainly not critiques of ‘media constructions’. They create a zone between the celebrity ‘bio-pic’ and a tradition of semiotic media analysis in which technologies can claim the portrait in the form of the image in motion: the full-body performance of concentration, attention, engagement, interaction. Here the corporeal body’s media character is neither denied nor presented as its determining feature; it is, however, inhabited. The contemporary portrait, in this sense, can only emerge in the dimension of ‘being-in-a-medium’. The portrait is the effect of showing how a body endures an activity, broken into gestural components, which exhibit the interface between body and action. This is not, of course, to argue that the subjectivity of the one who sustains the gesture is at stake; rather that media should be understood through its interfaces, and the slippages that characterize intersections. Gesture, as ‘the process of making a means visible’ – and as the indication of a body–media dialectic or interface – is the manifestation of slippage.

As Bal has long argued, to fetishize popular cultural content (rather than to treat it as part of an expressive continuum) under the rubric of visual culture studies is to reduce the field to its most banal constitution. It is to ‘miss process’ and to miss the forms of expression that characterize the whole field of contemporary culture and intermedia – and that ultimately reveal how media relations operate. I have indicated here that it is a mistake to reduce method to content. Gesture is an operative concept: a mode of criticism or thinking visually that is fundamentally relational and intermedial. Rather than carving up the object domain, we might simply allow that the media character of a given object is revealed, as it moves, in slippages and interactions. For this reason we need to follow it wherever it leads.

Notes


4 Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', 49–59, 58.


6 Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', 58.

7 Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', 58.

8 Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', 57.


10 Massumi, Parables, 22, 23.

11 Massumi, Parables, 253.


14 Michaud, Ably Warburg, 277.


16 Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', 54.


18 Agamben, 'Kommerell', 80.


21 See Agamben, 'Kommerell'.


24 Michaud, Ably Warburg.


27 Latour, We Have Never Been Modern, 2.

28 Latour, We Have Never Been Modern, 3.


30 Massumi, Parables, 246.


34 Michaud, Ably Warburg, 278; Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', 54.

35 Bal, Quoting Caravaggio.


37 Forster, Ably Warburg/The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity, 56; see also Michaud, Ably Warburg, 102.

38 Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', 54.


40 TVisionarium is a project of iCinema (the Centre for Interactive Cinema), led by Dennis Del Favero, Neil Brown, Jeffrey Shaw, Peter Weibel (lead software engineer: Matt McGinitely). The first phase was premiered in Lille in 2003, the second in Sydney in 2006.