

IN PRAISE OF TELEVISION.

“It will be the last thing Milosevic will give up [control of Serbian Radio and Television]. He’s the first East European ruler who understood the power of TV, He realised he can control society better with the TV than with the police.”

(Veran Matic, Editor-in-Chief at B92, independent radio station in Belgrade, quoted in *The Independent*, 24 January 1997)

TELEVISION & REPRESENTATION.

I like television and I watch it quite a lot, but grew up in a Britain where, initially, television was not ubiquitous. When I was five my father’s job in the Air Force took him to Sri Lanka and the family went with him. Before we left we had lived outside Plymouth in the southwest of the country. So far as I know the transmitter had not yet been constructed and the spread of broadcast television had not reached the southwest.

There was no television in Sri Lanka, though there was a cinema on the air base called The Astra. My brother went, he saw *The Dam Busters* and *Godzilla*, as I recall. I refused, never having been to the cinema but not thinking it was worth giving up daylight hours for. We returned to Britain after two-and-a-half years, going by the same route, though this time docking in Liverpool rather than in Southampton. On our return we spent six months at a village in Dorset where my parents had a cottage. I attended the village school. There were two classes in the school, senior and junior, perhaps thirty children together, all from the local area. Before our move to Sri Lanka the cottage we lived in had not been connected to either the electricity supply or to main drainage; a soil removal truck toured the village weekly, emptying the chemical toilets. We had a cold-water tap but our next-door neighbour drew water from a handpump in the lane between the houses. Things

had changed somewhat on our return, there was electric light, a flush toilet, and the earth floor in the back, where the chemical toilet used to be, had been concreted over to make a bathroom. These pockets of rural Dorset were always amongst the last to be connected to services and the spread of broadcast television still had not reached them. I realise now, that for my contemporaries at the village school – families only recently connected up for water, sewage and electricity and for whom the market town a couple of miles away was a major outing – for these children, my family coming from Sri Lanka might as well have come from Mars. My brother, slightly older, bore the brunt of the resulting antagonism.

From Dorset we returned to Plymouth, unusually for an Air Force family, going back to the same house. Whilst we had been away broadcasting had spread across the country and television was everywhere. Perhaps the force of this was stronger in that everything else had remained the same but the one thing that had changed, changed everything. We did not immediately have a set, I went next door and watched a neighbour's, but soon knew the schedules and became distraught at missing favourite programmes. It was an addiction but a passing one. I don't remember when a television arrived in our house and the aerial was fitted to our chimney, but it was within a year of our arrival. As a teenager I was less interested in watching and stopped when I went to art school, deliberately missing the moon landing, for example. I started watching again when my own children were in nursery school some thirteen years later, enjoying the ritual of sitting and watching children's programmes with them. Now I mostly watch television late at night. I don't have strong preferences, I don't particularly like game or chat shows or soap operas, but will watch these when I'm travelling. It doesn't seem to make much difference whether I can or cannot understand what is being said.

The point of this is to say that, in my life, there is a before. This is different from a

life where television is always present. I don't think of television as being a part of existence; it is for me an additional existence, more exotic in some ways than the jungles of Sri Lanka or the fish in the Indian Ocean, less familiar than a house with earth floors and no services. You should not think I was technologically naive, my father flew aeroplanes and drove fast cars, my mother was a doctor and had been a surgeon. I'd had X-rays and had seen radar – although as children we also listened to music on a wind-up gramophone and heard stories from an enormous radio with a glowing dial and cloth-covered speakers. No, the point about television is that at first it was nowhere and then it was everywhere. (Although, to begin with, it was not all the time. There were long periods each day when you could turn the set on and nothing would happen. I do wonder a little if the use of continuous broadcast for significant occasions – Churchill's funeral, Wimbledon, Yuri Gagarin arriving in Moscow, cricket test matches – didn't transfer significance from the event to the medium.)

One of the late-1950s programmes that I watched was a do-it-yourself programme presented by Barry Bucknell. Although the medium was developing rather fast, this was still relatively primitive, studio-based, live television. The sophistication and range of camera movements were restricted. It was monochrome. The format was frontal, played to the camera, following a standard sequence. At the start a project was suggested – making a simple piece of furniture, a telephone table, magazine rack or spice shelf for example; alternatively it was a simple DIY task – wallpapering a room or hanging a door. Materials were specified and tools demonstrated. It is not incidental that the late-1950s saw the introduction of reasonably priced, hand-held power tools into the domestic market. The exigencies of time and television broadcasting meant that, despite a carry-over from one week to the next, no task was really ever carried to completion. Each stage was started and then replaced as the work in hand was pushed aside and a more finished substitute retrieved from

under the desk. The programmes were totally stupid. No-one could possibly have wanted to make the items displayed or be willing to wait week after week to finish them. And the television was not portable, you needed an external aerial. Converting the front room into a workshop seems impractical, though a pleasant thought: thousands of dust-sheet-covered rooms, trestle tables laid out with tools and materials. And it was impossible to keep up. No stock of pre-prepared bits lay with the viewer. For a ten-year-old watching, however, it was fascinating stuff, particularly the demonstration of the action of tool on material, immediately followed by a result. Each stage opened certain possibilities, you can do this and you can also do this. Although there was an end in view, the progressive abandonment of uncompleted stages en route and the substitution of one stage for another implicitly multiplied the product. This meant that the end was not prioritised as the sole orientation. There was an end, and that was that.

What was, and is, fascinating to me about television is a marvellous closeness to and, equally, distance from, the world. Not long after becoming addicted, I was watching Yuri Gagarin coming down the steps of his plane in Moscow to be greeted by Khrushchev. If it hadn't been on television would it have been so provocative? How was it different from *Champion the Wonder Horse*? What television introduces – and Barry Bucknell's programme seems paradigmatic – is a device for looking at the world that transcends or fragments the boundaries of sequence, time and space whilst also subverting the established social and political processes. In this, and this is the point of the story, looking at television is very close to the experience of making art.

AMBIGUITY & IDEAS OF THE FUTURE.

This text started with a small group of pictures that I had begun to use at the end of talks about my work. The pictures were a parallel to the sculpture and were aids to

discussing issues such as depth, complexity, ambiguity, meaning, text, reading and reference in my work. The pictures were also a way of referring the work shown back to things seen or experienced. The number of pictures began to grow and I started to collect them together in various groups and in various ways. Some became a photographic project called *This Is Not A Story*.

The first picture shows a cloud in the sky, the second has burning fields seen from an aeroplane. The cloud in the first could also be the smoke in the second. The third image is a view of Dubrovnik after shelling, the pall of smoke from burning buildings adding a darker twist to the cloud/smoke from the first two images. The gesture of the statue in the foreground of the third image is repeated in the fourth, which is of a journalist putting up her hands to protect herself against water thrown by Paul Gascoigne's mother. The water itself forms an amorphous shape at the centre of the image, which is echoed in the fifth by the momentary shape of a flock of starlings photographed over a Yorkshire town. The flock itself is only a blur but the swarm of bees in the sixth image shows a quantity of individuals gathered together and making a shape by virtue of their number, as do the crowds in the seventh image, swirling round the square enclosure at the centre during the funeral of the Ayatollah Khomeini.

Clouds, smoke, water, flocks of birds, swarms of bees and crowds all have transient, shifting forms. The eighth image shows branches moving in the wind – the blurred branches a photographic manifestation of the invisible, of flux and movement. The next three images are somewhat metaphoric, representing aspects of the ways in which the initial images have been constructed and of their interconnectedness.

The woven branches in the ninth image manifest a complex spatial interrelationship. The warp and weft of weaving is a paradigm of construction and for storytelling, a

pattern appearing in and through time. The illustrations, from the cheap melodramas in the tenth, displayed outside a Viennese newsagent's, tell a story. However, the same illustrations are displayed in different sequences, so the story changes even though its parts remain the same. Images tell stories, suggest contexts: the burning car on the billboard in the eleventh image, a picture telling a story, refers by quotation to the smoke at the beginning of the sequence. The twelfth image is again of clouds, bringing the sequence full circle.

This sequence is constructed by association, one thing leading to another in a variety of ways. The images, of complex shapes and of momentary or indefinite events, allow this kind of associative interconnecting. Complex and allusive patterns have often been used as signifiers or portents, whether of the weather or of the gods, of the actions of armies or of individuals. Clouds, smoke, entrails, the flight of birds, the fall of sticks, the spread of tea leaves, the scatter of dust: such patterns are divined, the future is guessed. Randomness (or complexity) allows for reading, opens a horizon of possibility. There is thus an aspect of optimism in the undetermined, a willingness to read into that opening that has a public place. Both in social and in individual terms alternatives are declared possible. However one can also be a 'slave to superstition'.

Mary Douglas, in her book *Purity And Danger* (1966) suggests that the unformed or undifferentiated always lies at the beginning and that the task of knowledge or belief has to do with differentiation. The abominable nature of ambiguity is always a problem for rigid systems of value. In Douglas' view the unformed or undifferentiated, *ur-matter*, by virtue of both negativity (not being something) and potential (about to become something else) is both dangerous (that is polluting) yet highly potent. Dirt, by being precisely that which is free of form or location (matter out of place), is not only profane but, at the same time, deeply sacred. Thus the polluted may be intrinsically holy and need very careful management. This

ambiguity is embedded within all belief systems. The deviant or transgressive are both better managers of contradiction and also less dependent on authority than the fanatic and may therefore be more effective agents of transformation.

The complex, the unformed and the undifferentiated have been continuously used by artists as aids to the imagination or even as the means of making the work itself. Clouds, swirls of water, shapes in the fire, stains, vomit, pebbles, smoke and various random devices have all been both instruments and agents for artists.

“But the sound of water escaping from mill-dams, &c. willows, old rotten planks, slimy posts, and brickwork. I love such things. . . . As long as I do paint I shall never cease to paint such places.” John Constable, Letter to John Fisher, 23 October 1821 (This is also of interest because of the implicit recognition that the subject matter may be Constable himself.)

TRUTH, PROOF, READING & RESEMBLANCE.

Starting from a simple news story from *The Guardian*, 28 November 1995, that Turner’s fingerprint on a painting establishes, by a forensic rather than art-historical process, that he is the author of the particular work, I want to discuss the complex issues that are raised by the connection between maker and mark; as evidence, as substitute, as representation, as guarantee and as truth.

Mary Leakey’s discovery in the early 1970s of the hominid footprint trail in Laetoli, Northern Tanzania, is proof that there were hominids 3.6m years ago in this part of Africa. The trail was made by three individuals walking side by side across a stretch of wet volcanic ash, which a subsequent eruption covered and conserved. We feel kinship because this pattern is so familiar, walking being one of the things we humans do. There is a poignancy to these marks left behind, an identification that

comes from their having been caused by a somebody alive, an empathy that is far greater than that with the bare bones. They walked the walk and perhaps, since they were walking side by side, also talked the talk.

Similarly, Neil Armstrong's footprints on the moon prove that he was there. More than the evidence of the abandoned hardware, the scuffed and jumbled footprints are so characteristic that, like the fossil trail, we feel empathy, it could have been us, we could have been there.

A newspaper description of the discovery by Jean-Marie Chauvet in December 1994 of a hitherto undisturbed cave in southeast France was particularly evocative, talking about the footprints on the floor as if the inhabitants had just left. There was a palpable sense that just beyond the probing light of the exploring archaeologist, the last Cro-Magnon were slipping away leaving their footprints behind (visitors to the wilderness areas of America's National Parks are exhorted to "take only photographs, leave only footprints"). The story, in connecting the exploring light, the paintings on the cave wall and the footprints on the floor, nods in the direction of Plato as if the Cro-Magnon were the inhabitants of his cave, where the world is only known by its shadows.

Footprints then are compelling evidence of presence, indubitable markers. Such evidence can of course be used for an imaginative construction. The *Teufelstritt* (Devil's footprint) in Munich Cathedral is not necessarily proof that there is a devil that has a physical presence and stamps angrily or gleefully on the floor of God's house. Although it is relatively easy to reconstruct the thought process that such a mark must have been made by something.

(The ancient Mesopotamians believed birds to be sacred because their footsteps on

wet clay left marks that resemble cuneiform writing, and imagined that, if they could decipher the confusion of those signs, they would know what the gods were thinking. Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading*, 1996)

Theories about the origin of art have two main directions, one is that painting derives from copying or tracing outlines or shadows so that the image stands for, looks like or, literally, represents, the absent person. Shadow prints such as those on the walls of caves at Altamira in Spain, Pech Merle in France or Kakadu in Northern Australia are produced by putting a hand against the rock wall and spraying or blowing pigment from the mouth, thus leaving a shadow impression of the masking hand. Such negative marks stand in for their absent executors. However unleashed, the idea of resemblance, of looking-like, takes on a kind of life of its own so that, as in the case of the *Teufelstritt*, natural resemblance or the chance configuration of marks form into an image that is recognized and instigates a process of identifying representation with the supernatural, whether as evidence of God's handiwork or as proof of the physical existence of benign or malign presences.

There is an ineluctability to reading likenesses that runs the gamut from sympathetic magic and witchcraft through the supernatural to the merely curious. It remains provoking, the sliced tomato that has the name of Allah inscribed in the pattern of seeds and the bun that looks like Mother Teresa – being recent manifestations. My grandmother had a collection of Victorian magazines in the back pages of which were often reproduced readers' photographs of anthropomorphic, fruit and vegetables – carrots, potatoes, apples, all bearing some resemblance to an abstracted human image. Collected under the catch-all title of 'Curiosities', there was no attempt to explain the inexplicable, neither was there a suggestion that such phenomena are without cause. As in the 'Jesus in leaves', the relationship to photography is of interest. After a flood in southern Australia a householder was recording the damage

by photographing the wrecked interiors. Seen through a window, the pattern of leaves caught in the chain-link fence of the garden as the water receded reveals, when turned on its side, an image close to the iconic depiction of Christ in the Turin shroud.

The ability to read images in the random, to imaginatively possess the world, has been a revelation, a source of inspiration and a provocation to shaman, scholars and artists from all cultures. From the Song dynasty (around the tenth century) until the eighteenth century and later, naturally occurring rocks in bizarre, elaborate or convoluted shapes were collected by Chinese scholars. These rocks were valued as meditative or contemplative devices, containing, with the addition of imagination, landscapes or worlds. The style of the mount or base amplified, by the addition of skill, this richness.

Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574): “Piero di Cosimo would sometimes stop and stare at a wall onto which sick people had vomited, and out of it conjure up for himself battles between mounted horsemen and the strangest cities and vastest landscapes ever seen. He did the same thing with clouds.”

Sung-Ti (eleventh-century Chinese painter) advises another painter, Ch'en Yung-chih, to create a picture of a landscape in accordance with the ideas suggested by a broken down wall: “For then you can let your brush follow the play of your imagination and the result will be heavenly, not human.”

Hokusai (1760–1849) “once drew the curves of a mighty river. Then dipping the feet of a cock in orange-red, he allowed the bird to walk over his design, and so brought to the mind of all his beholders the famous river Tatsuta, with the maple leaves of autumn floating on its stream” (Edward F. Strange, 1906).

The writing-like marks on the Runamo rock in Sweden were transcribed by the Icelandic scholar Finn Magnusson in 1833 and translated, having been identified as an epic, five-poem cycle in an ancient metre. Subsequent research by Swedish geologists found the marks to be natural fissures in the rock. Magnusson's work was thus discredited, though one can also look at it as triumph of translation and remember, as Marina Warner has pointed out, that "cracks on oracle bones, produced by priests applying a hot instrument, may constitute the first written script and that reading may have begun with the need to decipher these enigmas."

Twentieth-century psychology exploits such imaginative reading as a diagnostic device. The patient is shown an ink blot and asked to describe what the image is of. It is an invitation to read the random pattern, to construct an image, to translate the marks. This description is then correlated against standard test responses, disturbance being indicated by variation from that standard. The test is rarely used now because of its inherent subjectivity.

The second direction that theories about the origin of art take has to do with sympathetic magic and assumes that likeness is a more powerful connection between things than mere appearance. The hand-print stands in for the man and, in the same way that resemblance is a two-way street, so the image can be thought to have a magic link with that which it is an image of. Image-making is then directed towards control, management or manipulation.

That this magic sense of identification is not buried with the pre-history of humanity, but remains a part of the way we deal with the world, is encapsulated in a newspaper page where photographs of heart-shaped potatoes (on Valentine's Day?) are juxtaposed with an advertisement for an erotic perfume guaranteeing sure-fire

sexual success for either the male or female user.

If likeness (resemblance) retains its potency as a connection between things then, equally, the capacity to see the one thing in another can become the foundations of a false science both pre- and post-Darwinian, when character or type is assumed to be readable in physiognomy. This is particularly so in the complex relationships between animals (their appearance and supposed characteristics) and people. The owl is wise, the camel phlegmatic, the eagle war-like. These characteristics are first imputed to the animal then transferred to human appearance and become a means of judgement. Charles Le Brun's magnificent drawings pairing humans with their animal partners are consummate and convincing. So the criminal is bestial and, descending into darkness, what is the Jew? Behind this false science are the myths of race, of eugenics and of purity.

At one point in the film version of *The War of the Worlds* the two main characters are hiding out in an abandoned house. A group of alien spaceships lands nearby and one of the creatures begins exploring the house using a remote-control sensor that is nevertheless somehow connected to the operator's central nervous system – a cyborg viewing device. Just as the hiding place of the two humans is about to be discovered, the scientist chops off the end of this sensor. The mutilated stump retreats with a screaming noise. In the ensuing panic the two of them escape. He wraps the 'eye' in a cloth and carries it with him. Later in a laboratory the 'eye' is connected to a television monitor and he says, "This is how the Martians see us." This is silly because of the implicit suggestion that the mechanical apparatus defines perception. My optic nerve connected to a video monitor would tell you something, but not very much, about my seeing.

Resemblance, replication, representation, mimicry and looking-like are, nevertheless,

a part of the way the world works. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Sigmund Freud, for example, suggests that imitative play is a means of mastering the external environment. Much of medieval science is based on similarity, on the principle of likeness implying some sort of affinity. Modernity is based on articulating difference.

William Harvey's light-hearted nineteenth-century maps identify place and stereotype: Germany as an educated spinster, Ireland as a rural peasant with her baby. From a different context Belgium becomes her own symbolic lion. These images propose a link between place, symbol and kind, introducing reflexivity, that the image, as in Arcimboldo's paintings, may be made by that which it is an image of, that a man may be made by the objects of his occupation. The Ohio Exhibit in the Agricultural Building at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, used a classical archetype, an Hellenic Greek temple, except that the columns supporting the roof were made of glass and filled with grain. The building is reflexive, a representation of itself. In their pavilion the State of Ohio also presented a picture of the prairie made from the grasses of the prairie.

Mimicry occurs frequently in nature, insects may mimic their predators to escape predation or mimic their habitat as camouflage. The plaice is able to transform the patterns on its skin to approximate the pattern on the bottom surface on which it rests. This is very sophisticated, involving a perception of the surface and externalising or retranslating that perceptual information back onto the fish's own skin as if it were looking at itself from outside. Plants mimic insects, the bee orchid mimics the female bee and uses the duped male as a pollinator, carrying pollen from one frustrated encounter to the next. The Darwinian mechanism of reinforcement is clear – orchids looking vaguely like female bees spread more pollen, with the bee itself producing the pressure that over time modifies the form of the flower. It is,

however, a remarkable plant-insect interaction. Humans mimic their gods to be able to talk with them and to be able to safely tell their stories.

THE OLDEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD.

This was the title of an artefact displayed in the Israel Museum in 1994. The accompanying display panel read as follows: ‘This figurine unearthed at the archaeological site of Berekhat Ram in the Golan Heights belongs to the Acheulean culture of the early Stone Age in Israel and pre-dates the earliest previously known sculptures by hundreds of thousands of years.’

The dating of the figurine is based on chemical analysis of two basalt layers that enclosed the archaeological site, the older one 800,000 years old, the younger 230,000 years. The figurine was made at some point between these two dates. The stone implements point to activity at the site closer to the later date, some 300,000 years ago.

The figurine is made of volcanic rock, originally brought to the site because of its intriguingly human-like shape. The breast, clearly discernible in profile, is part of the natural contour of the stone. The head, deeply incised at the neck, and the arms, lightly defined by vertical grooves, were carved with a sharp flint tool. The earliest comparable figurines from Europe, the so-called Venuses, date to the late Stone Age some 25,000 years ago. In these ‘Venuses’ the parts of the body related to fertility were emphasized, whereas no attention was paid to facial expression. The tactile quality of these figurines suggests that they were intended to be fingered, probably as amulets. The discovery of this thumb-sized sculpture raises questions as to when man first became capable of artistic creation and what kind of art he made during this long period of time?

(Excavated in summer 1981, written up by Naama Goren-Inbar in the *Journal of the*

Israel Prehistoric Society, vol. 19, 1986.)

Image is always intentional and, to a degree, is in the eye of the beholder. The claim is that the pebble has been intentionally modified to produce an image of a large-breasted, big-buttocked female form similar to that of the Upper Palaeolithic ‘Venuses.’ To my eyes it looks like a lumpy pebble. The association of the find with very ancient deposits (the archaeological horizon is between 233,000 and 800,000 years BCE) implicitly pushes the existence of a figurine (and the associated cultural ramifications) back from, at the earliest 30,000 years BCE for the Upper Palaeolithic to perhaps 300,000 years BCE. A dating this extreme is out of kilter with the date for the emergence of homo sapiens in Africa – some 100,000 years ago – or even for Neanderthals. It could be homo erectus or homo habilis but not ‘one of us’.

A recent discovery of wooden spears about 400,000 years old at a Pleistocene site in Schöningen, Germany, has some relevance. The spears themselves, weighted and shaped, imply a high degree of foresight, planning and use of appropriate technology in pre-modern hominids. (Hartmut Thieme, ‘Lower Paleolithic Hunting Spears from Germany’, *Nature*, 27 February 1997)

Of similar interest, reported from Jinmium in the remote Australian outback, artefacts and ochre found next to a series of rock engravings were dated at, respectively, 176,000 and 116,000 years old. If these datings are correct it means that hominids first occupied Australia some 76,000 years before homo sapiens is thought to have emerged from Africa, about 100,000 years ago. (R.L.K. Fullagar, D.M. Price and L.M. Head, ‘Early Human Occupation of Northern Australia’, *Antiquity*, December 1996)

”How did humanity get from caveman to space-traveller? What makes this an

essentially historical question is that human beings, though recently rather taller and heavier than ever before, are biologically much the same as at the beginning of the historical record, which is not actually very long: perhaps 12,000 years since the first city, a bit longer since the invention of farming.” (Eric Hobsbawm, ‘To See The Future, Look At The Past’, *The Guardian*, 7 June 1997)

The pebble and the hunting spears push the spread of culture far back into the hominid past and suggest that, contrary to Hobsbawm’s assertion, history alone cannot answer his question. The pebble/figurine is extremely ambiguous. It is an anomaly on the site. There are no other pieces of the same rock, so, like the more numerous functional Acheulean artefacts, it was brought to the site. What it is, is possibly unprecedented. It could be a souvenir or a keepsake. It could be a ritual object. But it might also be a sharpening stone. If one were looking for a forerunner of the cult objects that the ‘Venuses’ seem to be, then this pebble would be the sort of thing that one would want to find. This is not a negative remark. It is the ambiguity of the object, its very openness that makes it, of interest. Particularly for this pebble, determining what it is, is a process of interpretation, of using clues.

The cave at Lascaux is quite rightly pointed to as a magnificent example of the human capacity to create, to make images, to represent. But if symbolic representations were being made in the Golan heights 300,000 years earlier, then the blurb on the glossy book jacket is, at best, misleading: “The history of homo sapiens fossils in western Europe was characterized by an accumulation of experience, with various cultures spreading, overlapping and interpenetrating unevenly. From the very earliest appearance of these cultures 35,000 years ago, there is evidence of a concern for art. . . . Art appeared about 35,000 years ago and bears witness to the religious and symbolic preoccupations of homo sapiens fossils. It began with geometrical figures, sexual symbols and rudimentary outlines of animals engraved deeply with a

pick in a rock wall or on blocks discovered in rock shelters. Artists then tended towards increasingly elaborate expression. . . . Between 29,000 and 21,000 years ago appeared female statuettes made of bone and ivory, the earliest paintings and animal engravings which were still rigid but much more naturalistic. This led 18,000 years ago to a real, artistic explosion at the beginning of Magdalenian civilization and the finest example of this is the sanctuary at Lascaux.”

There are always arguments about origins, beginnings are hazy and history is written backwards. However, if material and symbolic culture does not appear with the emergence of homo sapiens but has a very much older, less specific, history, then, for example the mimicry of plants and fishes becomes something that we barely understand.

As image processing, digitalisation and data processing techniques have improved, it has been possible to look deeper and deeper into space at fainter and fainter sources. In effect, since distance in space is measured in time (so many light years away), this looking is also a looking backwards in time to earlier states of things. By focusing on background, microwave radiation from a very narrow area of sky uninterrupted by near stars or distant galaxies, it has been possible to produce an image of space from shortly after the Big Bang, That is from shortly after the beginnings of space and time themselves. The image is fuzzy, the protean nature of the source reinforced by the indistinctness of the image, by its translatability, ambiguity or amorphousness. To make the point one only has to speculate that if the same image were clearly geometric, would it be credible?

“Our representation of things, as they are given, does not conform to these things as they are in themselves, but . . . these objects, as appearances, conform to our mode of representation.” (Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781)