

BEYOND MONA LISA'S SMILE: A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO THE PERSUASION OF LIKENESS IN THE DIGITAL IMAGE

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Abstract

In this article we discuss the digital image as a form of representation of likeness in the digital environment. The English word likeness entails the meaning of similarity that in the theory of rhetoric constitute persuasiveness. Likeness is an implicit and often taken for granted quality of the communicative performance of digital media. While the term *image* is a typological classification, semiotic relations of the transfer of meaning can be described with the terms *icon* and *simulacrum*. We show their presence in the digital environment tracing their tradition of their function regarding the establishing of likeness to philosophical ideas. We exemplify with the case of the digital images as derivations from the portrait Mona Lisa that the appearance as an image of all what is displayed on the screen consti-

tutes the specific likeness of digitality. The persuasiveness of digital images is in line with the theory of rhetoric in an exaggerated presence of the image as source of aesthetic perception with the sense of sight of the viewer.

Keywords: digital image, icon, simulacrum, fake, persuasion, new media, mimesis

I. Introduction: Presence and Representation of Likeness

Mitchell (2017: 349) in *Iconology, Visual Culture and Media Aesthetics* stated that despite the fact that “an image that can be produced, manipulated, stored, and retrieved by a computer”, that “it is important to keep in mind one equally important way in which images have not changed under the digital regime: they are still images for us, for embodied human beings with standard sensory and perceptual equipment.” Indeed, the perception process of the receiver, the human, provides a stable condition, but the functions that are part of the image change under the condition of the digital environment. One of the functions is the claim that the image, if not considered *art pour l'art* without any reference and an artifice on its own, is a reference to something else and as means of reference is not isolated from a context. It builds a bridge to what is outside the image and this aspect of the image constitutes its likeness. One aspect of images that makes them an object of interdisciplinary studies is the fact that they refer to immaterial and material entities across the human mind and technical artifices associated with the aesthetic sense of sight and the mental image as visuality in the area of cognition.

The discipline of semiotics is interested in the carrying of meaning and Peirce (1866) famously distinguished between icon, index, and symbol. Peirce divides the process of reasoning “into three species according as this representation is a likeness, index, or symbol. These three species are the same as Hypothesis, Induction, and Deduction. Hypothesis brings up to the mind an image of the true qualities of a thing - it therefore informs us as to comprehension but not as to Extension, that is it represents a representation which has Comprehension without Extension; in other words it represents a likeness.” The image as mental image is for Peirce a central element of reasoning. In the *Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism: Lecture V* (1903) Peirce defines abduction as “the suggestion of an explanatory theory” and “inference through an Icon, and is thus connected with Firstness.”

Induction as “trying how things will act” is defined as “inference through an Index, and is thus connected with Secondness. Deduction as “recognition of the relations of general ideas” is “inference through a Symbol, and is thus connected with Thirdness.” Peirce was able to explain formal reasoning by the forms image, icon, and symbol for proof. The hypothesis by the image is in the mind present as a mental image. The induction by the icon is made from one case to generalization with transferred meaning. The deduction by the symbol is made from a generalization to one case as transferred meaning. But what we today understand as an *image*, a *visually perceived concrete* artifact, is not part of the reasoning process. Peirce in *Logical Machines* (1887) saw no difference in how a human uses a mental image in the process of reasoning and how computational machines operate in a reasoning way, since both use it as an input to produce an output: “When we perform a reasoning in our unaided minds we do substantially the same thing, that is to say, we construct an image in our fancy under certain general conditions, and observe the result. In this point of view, too, every machine is a reasoning machine, in so much as there are certain relations between its parts, which relations involve other relations that were not expressly intended.” The image is for Peirce an element of the logical discourse of human reasoning.

Unlike Peirce who uses likeness and icon as synonyms, the word likeness is today considered to be a quality, while it is in the English used by Peirce an object. *Likeness* is in the *Cambridge Dictionary Online* (2022) defined as “the fact of being similar in appearance” for UK English and as “a similarity” for US English. Differentiation concerning the use of the terms is crucial for approaching the terminology of aesthetic phenomena and among them the image is one that is present since earliest scholars were interested in the question how meaning across the areas of mind and body and the environment of the human are established. What we today consider an abstract feature of similarity called likeness has been considered in cultural history in a wide scope of manifestations. Its limits are set in terminology of the discourse on likeness. Barthes understood that the form of the image contributes to its rhetorical persuasiveness. The image it is a limited semi-otic unit that Barthes (1964: 40) in *Rhétorique de l'Image* described stating that if the image is in a certain way the limit of meaning, it is concerning a veritable ontology of the signification that it allows to return to. (“si l'image est d'une certaine façon limite du sens, c'est à une véritable ontologie de la signification qu'elle permet de revenir”). In other words: While the image is a limited and meaningful unit, it enables us to do the genuine studying of its forms of existence. Barthes mentioned that while the *rhétorique de*

l'image is specific regarding the sense of vision, its forms are ubiquitous and independent from the means of the message calling it 'une seule forme rhétorique' (1964: 49–50) that is abstractly present in the ideas and concretely manifest in figures. This leads to the principles of persuasion of the theory of rhetoric. As icon (εἰκῶν) the persuasive image has its place in the theory of rhetoric as a figure with the appeal functions of ethos, logos, and pathos of persuasion in the classical theory of rhetoric that also work for the image as visual unit. Concerning the limitations of persuasiveness for the digital image LaGrandeur (2003: 132) in *Digital Images And Classical Persuasion* mentioned that with the overuse "the persuasiveness of digital images may be limited, paradoxically, by their own power and ubiquity." But this would in an analogy mean that words as ubiquitous means of rhetorical speech limit their persuasive power. It seems that despite the abundance of digital images the principle of their impact lies in something else: The evidence of the presence of the digital image is a unique feature that contributes to its persuasiveness as the present object overwriting its existence as a representation. Its sheer existence is the ontological clue like the formula *l'art pour l'art* makes any discourse on an artifice frames it. But as something that is communicated the digital image is not isolated.

When Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* (3.11.2) writes "I say that things are set before the eyes by words that signify that them as evident" ("λέγω δὴ πρὸ ὀμμάτων ταῦτα ποιεῖν ὅσα ἐνεργοῦντα σημαίνει"), he took examples of a speech of Isocrates and the play *Iphigenia in Aulis* written by Euripides, but the very technique can be applied as a production modus for with AI generated digital image. But are the effect of persuasion by the energy of putting things in front of the eyes of the audience and the production of digital images rooted in the principle of likeness of aesthetic experiences? The question how likeness is a means of aesthetic persuasion in visual representations of digital images can be approached both theoretically and with a concrete examination of the function of digital images. Both approaches we will take here discussing the form of the image, its meaning as means of persuasion, and the specific conditions of a representation for what is by the sense of sight perceived while being a digital manifestation with aesthetic appeal.

II. The Image as Type for the Representation of Likeness

Images are technical or artful objects that humans can produce. When we speak about the image, we consider it to be something that has a representative function of something else, but the image is necessarily neither a self-representing object nor a means of a meaning that builds a bridge

to something else. The preceding Latin word for this word in the English language, *imago*, entails the meaning of likeness stemming from the verb *imitari* (“to copy, imitate”) and the PIE root **aim-* (‘to copy’). Copying was seen as a crucial process in the creation of nature and art in the Greek culture called *μίμησις* that refers to the same PIE root. In the Platonic *Laws* an Athenian criticizes the imperfection of the human poets who without the in speech existing rhythm and harmony (ἄνευ λόγου γιγνόμενον ῥυθμόν τε καὶ ἄρμονίαν) make what is wanted and what is copied, the *μίμημα* or artistic representation, hardly understandable (*Laws*. 669e) in contrast to the Muses.

In his *Rhetoric* (1.11.23.) Aristotle explains the persuasiveness of *mimesis* when writing that since learning and admiring are sweet, all what is so is necessarily also sweet like what is imitated (τό μιμούμενον) such as drawing (γραφικὴ), sculpturing (ἀνδριαντοποιία), and poetry (ποιητικὴ), and all what is well imitated (εὖ μεμιμημένον), even if what is imitated is not sweet (μὴ ἤδὺ αὐτὸ τὸ μεμιμημένον). Not what is actually imitated, but the syllogism of the imitation and what is the object of the imitation is sweet so that learning something happens. (“ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ μανθάνειν τε ἡδὺ καὶ τὸ θαυμάζειν, καὶ τὰ τοιάδε ἀνάγκη ἡδέα εἶναι, οἷον τό τε μιμούμενον, ὥσπερ γραφικὴ καὶ ἀνδριαντοποιία καὶ ποιητικὴ, καὶ πᾶν ὃ ἂν εὖ μεμιμημένον ᾖ, κἂν ἢ μὴ ἡδὺ αὐτὸ τὸ μεμιμημένον: οὐ γὰρ ἐπὶ τούτῳ χαίρει, ἀλλὰ συλλογισμὸς ἔστιν ὅτι τοῦτο ἐκεῖνο, ὥστε μανθάνειν τι συμβαίνει.”). In his *Poetics* (144b) Aristotle adds that the sweet pleasure (ἡδονή) derives in the case that what is imitated (μίμημα) is unknown from the completion (ἀπεργασία), the sign of the surface (χροιά), or any other cause (αἰτία). The word *imago* was used for any technically produced likeness that was perceived by the sense of sight, but also for what is formed in the mind, as the rhetorician Quintilian noticed in his *Institutio Oratoriae* (10.7.15.) “*illae rerum imagines, quas vocari φαντασίας indicavimus*” as images of things (*rerum imagines*) or phantasies (*φαντασίας*). At another place (8.3.72.) Quintilian defines the *imago* as a figure of speech in images composed to express similarities of things in the phrase “*similitudines ad exprimendas rerum imagines compositae*”. Besides its function as a technical figure in speech as a comparing means introduced with the preposition *like* Quintilian (7.7.5.) uses the word also for the representation of a person in a physical artifice discussing the case of the contradicting laws when a woman has killed a tyrant that it is one the one hand allowed to place images of killers of tyrants in a gymnasium while it is on the other hand forbidden to put an image of a woman in a gymnasium (“*tyrannicidae imago in gymnasio ponatur; contra, mulieris imago in gymnasio ne ponatur*”).

Images can be produced and changed as a type of representation associated to the mind or to a particular physical material. Since they are typological classifications, images can be formal types regarding the way they are made or concerning the way they are a reference to a particular subject. For example, photographs, paintings, and drawings in any medium of humans with a focus on the head classify as the type of images called portraits. It should be not a surprise that when 2019 *CNN Style* made an inquiry at Google for paintings that topped the search results worldwide in the past five years, the *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci in the Louvre has the first place. It is impressive that this position of the painting is kept in the light of the overflowing numbers of images that surround it in the 20th century, including photography and images of new media. No doubt, in the case of the painting of *Mona Lisa* the smile has the appeal of delighting, the delectare in the theory of rhetoric to persuade its audience with its presence. In 1919 Marcel Duchamp used a cheap postcard reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's painting adding the letters *L.H.O.O.Q.*, as a gramogram that sounds like "*Elle a chaud au cul*" in the french language, a frivolous comment about a woman who lived in the 16th century. Duchamp called this kind of re-used cheap things a readymade. It was not the only adaptation of the painting made by artists and with the emergence of new media virtually everyone who was able to edit an image of the painting.



Illustration 1:
Mona Lisa. Retouched Image
7479 x 11146 Pxs Jpg Format



Illustration 2:
Mona Lisa. 1-bit Image
Jpg Format

Even though the painting of the Mona Lisa classifies as an image, a distinction between this kind of image and an image in the digital environment exists. The numeric binary organization is an underlying concept for digital images as data that can be processed in accordance with Dwivedi (2017: 117) who in *Digital Image Processing* stated, “an image may be defined as a two-dimensional function, $f(x, y)$, where x and y are spatial (plane) coordinates, and the amplitude of any pair of coordinates (x, y) is called the intensity or gray level of the image at that point.”

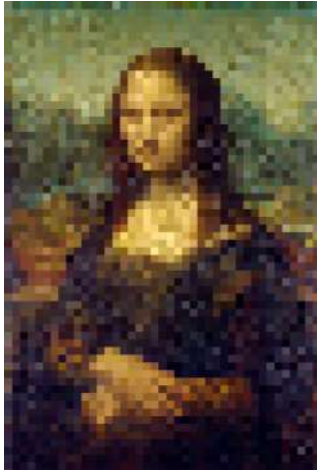


Illustration 3:
Mona Lisa. Pixelated Image
Pixel Block Size 25 Jpg Format



Illustration 4:
Mona Lisa. Pixelated Image
Pixel Block Size 100 Jpg Format

The concrete digital image is in the functional definition a unit of a specific type of digital file, e.g. jpg or png. It does not necessarily entail data with a representation. The digital image is a storage device that memorizes a digital image as a composition of finite, discrete, and numeric amount of pixels. Digital image are usually bitmapped images (jpg, png, gif) that refer to the bit as the smallest unit of information. A 1-bit image has two colors, usually white and black, represented in the numbers 0 and 1. The higher the number of multiples of bits, the better the bit depth for color shades. 8 bits (2^8) with 256 tones are used for grayscale images, while 24 bits 2^{24} with 16.7 tones are sufficient for color images that resemble the human perception of colors. Another type of digital images, vector images (svg), refers to geometrical forms that are produced in the digital environment without a reference to representation. The digital camera does not use light as a means

of the representation of an environment that is in contact with a sensitive material, the film, to produce a photo as still image or as moving image. Instead of using a light-sensitive film the digital camera conveys the light into electrical signals in numerical values in a charge-coupled device (CCD) or a CMOS image sensor. The numerical values can be processed in other digital devices. The actual image constitutes likeness as a type of unit for what can be communicated to the visual perception of the sense of sight. As a form it can exist in different media like speech and digital format. The likeness of the image stems from the principle of production: The quality of being made applies both to a poem and the digital image as a distinction between what exists and what comes into existence in the production process.

III. The Image as Icon: Meaningful Representation

While image is a formal descriptive term for a type of produced representation, the icon, a loanword derived from the Greek word *εἰκών*, is used for an image in regards to its function as a carrier of concrete meaning. Socrates (*Republic*. 588b) uses *εἰκών* for an image related to the speech of the soul when stating that in the speech an image of the soul (“εἰκόνα πλάσαντες τῆς ψυχῆς λόγῳ”) is the means of conversing by reason (*διαλέγομαι*). In his *Rhetoric* (3.4.1.) Aristotle states that the icon (*εἰκών*) is slightly different from the metaphor (*μεταφορά*) being the outspoken comparison in the example of Achilles being like a lion (ὡς δὲ λέων) in contrast to the replacement as metaphor in “λέων ἐπόρουσε”. Aristotle adds that while the icon is useful in the speech (*λόγος*), it is rare due to its poetic function (“χρήσιμον δὲ ἢ εἰκὼν καὶ ἐν λόγῳ, ὀλιγάκις δέ: ποιητικὸν γάρ.”) The *imago* as a rhetorical figure is a means of persuasion as the added meaning to something else. The meaning that is created with the icon brings, regardless of its type as a technical image, the range of meanings that mark the distinction from reality it seems to capture.

The *imago dei* as expression of the *religio* in the Christian faith show that the use of meaningful images is a question of acceptance. In its most acute form, the adoration or violent rejection of idols in movements of the criticism of idolatry or practice of iconoclasm came as experiences of cultural difference even before the concept of iconoclasm was coined. The practice of the destruction of religious statues made by Abraham's father for worshippers of cults in the house arguing that they must have destroyed each other due to they might is an expression of iconoclasm in the Jewish faith. While Islam does not allow the veneration of images and

relies on the collection of writings called *surah* (صورة) of the *Quran* as holy book, the Byzantine Emperor Leo III issued 726 edicts forbidding this practice for Christians. John of Damascus rejected this stating in his *Apolo-gia Against Those Who Decry Holy Images* (Λόγος Ἀπολογητικὸς πρὸς τοὺς Διαβάλλοντας τὰς Ἁγίας Εἰκόνας, Part I). With an implicit reference to *On the Soul* of Aristotle John writes that the phantasy of the aesthetic perception (τῆς αἰσθήσεως φαντασία) is a means to reach the critical faculty and the memory. For John the image (εἰκὼν) serve the future and for the memory in the whorshipping. In the literal wording of the text John writes that the image speaks (εἰκὼν λέγεται). John extends the concept of the image to what is written concerning what has happened and virtues (“Οὕτω καὶ νῦν τὰς εἰκόνας τῶν γεγονότων καὶ τὰς ἀρετὰς διαγράφομεν.”). John states at the end of his speech that the Bible only forbids whorshipping of daimons, while material things serving the veneration in the Christian faith are permitted. The argument of this defense relies of the point of distinguishing what actually is depicted and displayed to the whorshipper.

The distinction of what is represented is common practice for the cultural acceptance of images. Iconic image of technical means of photography, film, video, and digital multimedial environment come with the praise and criticism of acceptance or rejection of what is its apparent meaning. In her essay *On Photography* (1973) Sontag mentioned that “images which idealize (like most fashion and animal photography) are no less aggressive than work which makes a virtue of plainness (like class pictures, still lifes of the bleaker sort, and mug shots)” (1990: 7). The image as an icon, a meaning-carrying representation of reality, is subject to cultural acceptance. The authenticity of the image in the mass media is supervised by the editorial practice of journalism. Ethical and legal standards exist that take the technical type and the standards set by the industry that produces icons and the users the specific icons into account. Policies and politics also aim at the distinct discrimination between the icon with acceptable and rejectable meaning. In the contemporary technical terminology of the language that describes phenomena of digitality the icon is a concrete image that stands for a specific function of the computer that is displayed as a symbol on the interface. In a wide scope of use, the icon is any symbolic image in a digital format that represents something else, not necessarily a functional part of the digital environment. An example of the first case are the icons that allow access to a program, when clicking on them. An example of the second case are emojis or gifs that are employed to express an intended meaning by the user when transmitted in a message. As a popular icon the Mona Lisa made its way into a pop song interpreted by Nat King Cole and written

by Ray Evans and Jay Livingston for the Paramount Pictures film *Captain Carey, U.S.A.* (1949) and into the title of the movie *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) directed by Mike Newell and starring Julia Roberts.



Illustration 5:
Mona Lisa. AI Image by Nightcafe
Sampling K_LMS.
Algorithm Stable Confusion
Jpg Format

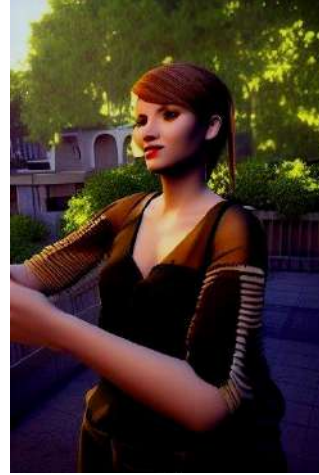


Illustration 6:
Mona Lisa. AI Image by
Sampling K_LMS.
Algorithm Stable Confusion
Modifier 3D Game
Jpg Format

Today, adaptations of this painting can circulate as digital images in social media and any other form of mass media. Icons with simplified traits of the person are in abundance available. AI images of the painting Mona Lisa have the iconicity of resemblance as likeness, while they modify the structure and style and can be interpreted by a user like emblems and used as memes. The digital environment is filled with images that have the basic function of representation based on the unit of the pixel. Pixels can form images that can be meaningful icons or simulacra. In photographs digital editing allows the change of the appearance up to the level of the smallest unit, the pixel. Digital videos are sequences of still images like older film techniques used. Editing allows alterations of each still image. In digital videos beauty filters allow to modify the appearance of a person. With the recent use of the algorithms in machine learning images can be created. In the process of scraping the internet for sampled images that have a meaningful relation to a sequence of words called the prompt and applying filters that modify the compiled image in a particular style a specific type

of digital image is produced. Realistically like photographs looking images of non-existing persons can be produced with algorithms of machine learning. The generation of random faces on the website *This Person Does Not Exist* is based on the StyleGAN algorithm from NVIDIA and software from NVIDIA CUDA. These images are a particular type of technical digital image. In the case of the iconic images of Mona Lisa their iconicity is the seeming representation of a living human being in a photograph, while they are actually not a representation of a real person. At the level of the image as an icon, the intrinsic meaning is the point of concern of likeness. Likeness is arbitrarily constituted and as representation communicated, the arbitrariness ranges from the intention of the producer to the visual perception. Iconicity is still expressed in a form, but the form represents something. The acceptance as likeness is a persuasive aim initiated by an intended meaningful purpose. In the case of iconic images for adoration this function is obvious and the use and purpose are the practice, while in other cases the specific contextual framework brings the meaning of the icon.

VI. The Image as Simulacrum: Self-Representation as Meaning

For the kind of representation that is made up without a reference to imitation Plato employs the noun *ἀπεικασία* (*Laws*. 668c). The Athenian states that what can be made (ποιήματα) relies besides imitation (μίμησις) also on a produced representation called *ἀπεικασία*. As an example the Athenian mentions that all productions (ποιήματα) of music are *mimesis* and *apeikasia*. The concrete object of this kind of representation, the *ἀπείκασμα* as made copy or simulacrum is by Plato (*Cratylus*. 402d) used when Socrates explains to Hermogenes that the name Tethys has the meaning of a disguised spring tracing the word as a composite to the words διαττώμενον and ἠθούμενον that constitute the simulacrum of the spring (πηγῆς ἀπείκασμά). The claim that Tethys as a name (ὄνομα) is a compound of two other names is not linguistically a semantic explanation, but a semiotic reference for the meaning of the self-speaking (αὐτὸ λέγειν) of a cryptic name (ὄνομα ἐπικεκρυμμένον) that Socrates reveals and Hermogenes praises as elegant (κομψόν). Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* (1447a) uses the concept of *apeikasia* (*ἀπεικασία*) as a principle complementary to mimesis in his *Poetics* using *poesis* (ποίησις) as the underlying principle of fabrication. Aristotle states that concerning poetry as imitations (μιμήσεις) in three forms of it (τῶν εἰδῶν αὐτῆς) a similarity exists to colors and schemes that imitate many things by copying (ἀπεικάζοντες) either by technique or by practical acquaintance (συνηθεία). They share that they are different in

terms of imitating in other forms, imitating something different, or imitating the other not in the same way (“ἢ γὰρ τῷ ἐν ἑτέροις μιμεῖσθαι ἢ τῷ ἕτερον ἢ τῷ ἑτέρως καὶ μὴ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον”).

The relation between the image produced with artificial intelligence and the words that are used as a prompt is technically distorted by sampled and filtered images. To consider AI image generation as production of a type of technical images does not involve what Plato called in the speech/logos an icon (*εἰκῶν*) of the soul, but the quality of the *ἀπείκασμα* as a made copy or simulacrum in the case of a portrait of a non-existing human. The negation of the persuasion is for Baudrillard a distinct feature of what machines produce. Baudrillard (1981: 10) in *Simulacres et Simulation* describes that the simulation has no territory, no referential existence, and no substance, but is the generation of a real by models without origin and reality he calls the hyper-real (*hyperréel*) (“La simulation n’est plus celle d’un territoire, d’un être référentiel, d’une substance. Elle est la génération par les modèles d’un réel sans origine ni réalité: hyperréel.”) The area of the *hyperréel*, the hyper-space (*hyperspace*) is neither an imitation nor a reduplication or parody, but a substitution of the real by the signs of the real as in inversion of persuasion in an operation of dissuasion of the real process by its operational double, the programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real (*signes du réel*) and shortcircuits all its unforeseen events. (“Il ne s’agit plus d’imitation, ni de redoublement, ni même de parodie. Il s’agit d’une substitution au réel des signes du réel, c’est-à-dire d’une opération de dissuasion de tout processus réel par son double opératoire, machine signalétique métastable, programmatique, impeccable, qui offre tous les signes du réel et en court-circuite toutes les péripéties.” (1981: 10)). The likeness of the digital image as digital simulacrum lies in its function as the carrier of the signs of the real in what is beyond the real, the hyper-real. The identification of the digital area as this hyperspace (*hyperspace*) is obviously in the early names for the internet as connection of hyperlinks evident. In the digital area new media enable us to generate, alter, and transmit likenesses at all functional levels. The image, by Baudrillard considered a simulacrum *per se* due to its belonging to the hyper-real, and the with meaning overloaded manifestations of icons and simulacra, are forms to distinguish between additional functions of meanings. All forms are finally for the viewer present on the screen of a computer or a mobile phone that is nothing else but an image that represents what is displayed in pixels. Thus, the representation of likeness is in the format of the pixel image of the screen visually present and encoded in the binary numeric values. The implicit representation of the digital image as unit of pixel and

bits creates the likeness of what can be seen and what is an array numeric data creates the persuasiveness of appeal to the sense of sight. At the same time it is a mathematical account. It is continued in the reception of the communication process: The receiver perceives the in the form of pixels encoded message on the screen.

When using AI image generators, the prompt 'Mona Lisa' usually results in a portrait with simplified and distorted facial features. A sequence of words is what is meant to be presented as an equivalent to the generated digital image. The digital image is the sign that claims to correspond with the linguistic sign (*signe linguistique*) of the *signifié* and *signifiant* in the process of signification in the terminology of De Saussure (1995: 87) recorded in his *Cours de Linguistique Générale*. Technically, this image is a digital image produced by a sampling algorithm that selects on the internet available digital images depicting Mona Lisa, the equivalent to the prompt of the words Mona Lisa. In its refined versions a specific choice of filter adds a style. Despite the changes, these digital images still allow the recognition of the original portrait. As an object of the popular culture, the images that derive from the painting tell us more about the existence of common technical devices and carrier of meaning that are ready to display the adaption than about the actual object. The person that shows it conveys the message of what is know again in a slightly different format. The technical manipulations we show for the digital images of the painting Mona Lisa are illustrative examples that are applicable to any digital image. As a technical artifact this type of image generated by a machine appears as creative due to its novelty, but is as an industrial product limited to a technical processes digital computation offers. As Benjamin (1968: 218) in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* stated, "in principle, the work of art has always been reproducible. Objects made by humans could always be copied by humans." The painting Mona Lisa was copied most likely by the student Francesco Melzi of DaVinci who worked with him since 1505 as an oil painting on a walnut panel today in the Prado of Madrid (Athena Art Foundation 2022) was replicated by other painters from the times Leonardo da Vinci flourished until today.

As for the digital image we see on the screen of digital devices, it can be like in a montage inserted into any context and is in communication processes transmittable enhancing the effect of apparent ingenuity, when loosing its actual creative original material features and environment. Ironically, the fake of the simulacrum itself becomes something genuine in such a process with the caveat of its seductive claim to be a true reference or representation of something else. The fake is the negation of likeness and

the claim of real existence. Only the type of the digital image can produce the fake in the digital space sharing the same form as medium of its presence and persuades that its likeness is the one of an original artifact that claims the illegitimate truthful meaning. Baudrillard (1981: 12) states that the simulation envelops the entire edifice of representation (*l'édifice de la représentation*) itself as a simulacrum (*comme simulacre*) and distinguishes as the successive phases of the image (*les phases successives de l'image*) that it is the reflection of a deep reality (*le reflet d'une réalité profonde*), that it masks and distorts a deep reality (*masque et dénature une réalité profonde*), it masks the absence of deep reality (*elle masque l'absence de réalité profonde*), it is unrelated to any reality whatsoever (*sans rapport à quelque réalité que ce soit*), and it is its actual pure simulacrum (*son propre simulacre pur*). Currently, the generation of images depicting human faces of not existing persons in the style of portraits with AI technology seems to correspond to the final state of the actual pure simulacrum that is no longer traceable to real persons and images of portraits. Like deepfakes of moving images in video production these images synthesize representations of humans. While deepfakes use the seemingly neat replacement of one person with another, the not existing person is the synthetic product of sampling.

The technical derivations of digital images from the painting of Mona Lisa are not fake. They do not claim to be the original painting or intend to persuade the viewer to be it. A fake copy is the reproduction of the painting, the product of a forgery with the claim to be an original work. The painting Mona Lisa was made as work on a poplar wood panel that is completely hidden for the viewer. Its texture is irrelevant for the effect of likeness the portrait brings to the viewer on the surface with its oil colors. On the contrary, the texture of the digital image is as a *conditio sine qua non* constitutive for the structure of the digital image and its digital environment. The persuasiveness of likeness in the digital is at multiple levels present ranging from the unit of the pixel as means of any visual perception of screen media to the unique digital image. As icon it needs the meaning that it communicates and as simulacrum it is a product that aims at simulation. This likeness pertains into the the non-digital world. From a socio-cultural perspective the production of derivations of existing iconic images resembles the destructive action of image-breaking of the iconoclasm now practiced in the digital media. But is is not labeled as protest, but as creation when the industry provides programs for the production of artifices with algorithmic calculation. As a simulacrum the digital image comes with the credo 'It is the likeness of the artifice' that stems from the imitation of nature and art, which has always been an aesthetic value for

art, and the persuasive appeal of art as pure technique. But the image that is completely born digital, the likeness is constituted as a type of unit, the image, that has a low degree of reference to reality, yet it is present as communicated object for the visual perception of the human. Its self-referential evidence is persuasive for the viewer who grasps it as a form. As a simulacrum the image in the communication process produces for the receiver a misconception. The representation of what is perceived by the human in any format displayed on the screen as a whole unit integrates the single digital image and marks the specific condition of likeness of this technical medium as one image.

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