



artificial presence

the image between sign and mirror

review of:

Lambert Wiesing: Artificielle Präsenz
Studien zur Philosophie des Bildes
Suhrkamp 2005

See also my reviews of [Nelson Goodman](#), [Arthur Danto](#), [W.J.T. Mitchell](#), [Gottfried Boehm](#)

PDF-version

INTRODUCTION

In 2005, Lambert Wiesing published a series of studies, in which he distances himself from the semiotic approach of the image, from a phenomenological point of view. The key concept is the 'artificielle Präsenz' (artificial presence) of the image(object) that is not subject to the laws of physics. In this review, we do not intend to deal with the particular subject of the essays. We rather want to investigate whether Wiesing's model is a convincing alternative for an adequate understanding of the image.

WIESING'S IMAGE

A not to be underestimated plus of Wiesing's philosophy is that his concept of the image (p. 14) is about genuine images, and not about images in a metaphorical sense (worldviews, metaphors like with [Nelson Goodman](#) or [W.J.T. Mitchell](#)), pseudo-images like the diagrams and maps of [Gottfried Boehm](#), let alone 'art works' that are unjustifiably called images (e.g. 'monochromes', p. 15) .

The reverse side is that his concept of the image is too narrow.

To begin with, it seems to comprise only the visual and two-dimensional image. Three-dimensional images, let alone moving three-dimensional images do not seem to exist. That comes home to roost when, in his survey of the development of the image (p.122), he has the moving image appear as late as the advent of the film, whereas three-dimensional moving images (mimetic dance and theatre) are among the oldest images, not otherwise then shadow

plays. Neither does Wiesing mention auditory images (audio recording, [mimetic music](#), lyric poetry), let alone images for the 'lower senses' (touch and smell). Also bisensorial images do not belong to his universe; audiovisual images like theatre, or tactilovisual images like pet animals. None of these comply to criteria like 'reine Sichtbarkeit' (pure visibility), and 'unkörperlich' (disembodied) (p. 32).

Next, Wiesing only conceives of images that emerge from a 'physical image'. Mental representations (memory, fantasy, dream, hallucination) are mentioned, but only as 'mentales Bild' or as 'geistiges Bild' that 'has no material existence' (p. 15) and hence are a mere 'Phantasieobjekt' (e.g. on p. 119), which is transformed into an image only when it is 'exteriorised' in the new media (p. 120). No wonder that Wiesing has nothing to say about narrative literature. It does not occur to him that 'exteriorising' can be achieved not only through the introduction of a 'physical image', but also through the use of [image conjuring signs](#): all the readers of Gulliver's Travels produce grossly identical images of that story.

Remarkable is, finally, that Wiesing denies the status of image to its very paradigm - the mirror. We come back to this topic at the end of this text.

Since - apart from the mentioned shortcomings - Wiesing is dealing with genuine images nevertheless, he is able to unfold an appropriate terminology to approach the image. He adopts the Husserlian trias - Bildträger (the picture as a physical object), Bildobjekt (what is to be seen on the painting), Bildsujet (what stood as a model in the real world), and also that of Jonas (Darstellendes, Darstellung en Dargestelltes) (p. 33). The downside is that this terminology does not allow for a distinction between the painted canvas or the lighted screen, and the coloured light that is reflected by these supports - what we call the mimetic medium which has to be distinguished from the medium support. Mimetic medium and medium support are two constituents of the 'physical image'.

THE SEMIOTIC PARADIGM

As an alternative to the semiotic trias Zeichenträger, Token, Signifikant/ Inhalt, Sinn, Designat, Intension/ Referenz, Bedeutung, Extension (p.29), Wiesing propose the 'phenomenological' trias Bildträger, Bildobjekt, Bildsujet. The reference to the semiotic trias does not mean that Wiesing adopts the semiotic logic. He rather demonstrates that it is not relevant for the understanding of the image. In 'Wenn Bilder Zeichen sind', he rightly contends that whatever object can be used as a sign. The question is, hence, 'ob ein Bild immer eine Representation und damit eine Bezugsname sein muss' (p. 35). And, of course, Wiesing's answer is 'no'. For, just like the other things that can be used as a sign, also the image can be understood 'substantially' instead of 'functionally': not as what it can be used for, but as what it is in itself. Wherewith Wiesing has dismissed the semiotic approach as 'non-substantial', and hence as accidental, not as essential.

That does not mean that the devotees of the semiotic approach will accept their being labeled as the merely functional counterparts of genuinely 'substantial' theories. That the semiotic approach has been so widely accepted, can only be understood in that it is grounded in a sound intuition: that signs - gradients like shadow, perspective, but also expressions, and what have you - play a constitutive role in the emergence of the image(object) from the physical image. As a matter of fact, what is to be seen on the flat surface of the image (the mimetic medium) consists primarily of what we have called 'object constituting signs' (see: [Mimesis and semiosis](#)). But this is merely an intuition. For, the semiotic relation in question is a relation between physical image (more precisely: the mimetic medium) and the image object: and that is a dyadic relation, in which the 'image subject' - the third element of the semiotic trias - does not play any role whatsoever.

That does not prevent Wiesing from rightly remarking that Husserl remains indebted to the

semiotic paradigm when he introduces the term 'image subject' as that which the image object 'refers to' (p. 70-71). Why then retain the term 'image subject', even when, as opposed to what Jonas contends, it does not belong to the 'ontologische Struktur des Bildes' (p. 27)? A theory of the image only has to mention the possibility of using the image as a sign, but it has not to contain terms like 'denotation': these belong only in a semiotic theory. A theory of the image also has to mention that real objects can be used as a model for the image object. But, once the painting is finished, the model no longer matters: henceforth, the image is "Präsenz" sui generis.

It should not escape our attention that his contention that the semiotic relation between image object and image subject is not constitutive of the image enables Wiesing to get rid of the problem of resemblance by relegating it to the semiotic domain. Resemblance is thereby reduced to the resemblance between image object and image subject. In order to stress that similarity has nothing to do with the image as such, Wiesing remarks that also real objects can resemble each other (p. 57). And to further minimise the import of resemblance, he reminds that image objects as well as real objects can be signs for something that does not resemble them: think of the use of a drawing as a diagnostic sign for child abuse (p.56). Wiesing thereby obfuscates the fact that in matters of the image 'resemblance' has nothing to do with the relation to some 'referent' or some model, but with the relation between physical image and image object: how is it that a two-dimensional plane is read as - resembles - a three-dimensional object, even when they have only the two-dimensional projection of light points in common? And how is it that, when seeing a purely visual appearance, we have the certain impression of seeing a tangible body with a living soul?

Thus, the semiotic paradigm of the image is welcomed as plausible, but at the same time dismissed as not essential and not typical for the image, since applicable to objects in general. Also the mimetic paradigm is sidelined in that it is assimilated to a specific semiotic relation (motivation through resemblance) that applies equally to real objects that resemble each other. The semiotic alternative is dismissed in so far as it describes the relation between image object and image subject, but remains unrevoked in so far as it describes the relation between physical image and image object. And also the mimetic paradigm is disposed of as one of the ways of motivating a sign. Let us examine, then, in how far the phenomenological approach can offer a better model for understanding the relation between the physical image and image object.

THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL PARADIGM

The central concept in Wiesing's phenomenological approach is the 'artificial presence' of the image object, the ontological counterpart of the 'reale Präsenz' of the real world. Wiesing describes 'reale Präsenz' as follows: 'Ein Gegenstand in der Welt mit realer Präsenz ist Notwendigerweise ein Gegenstand, welcher sich nach den Gesetzen der Physik verhält, was wiederum bedeutet, dass er physisch auf den menschlichen Körper einwirken kann' (p. 31). The image, on the other hand is an object that - as with Jonas - is 'herausgehoben aus dem Kausalverkehr der Dinge' (p.28). And, to emphasize how much the concept of 'artificial presence' is meant as a counterpart to a mimetic understanding of the image, Wiesing adds: 'Bilder werden nicht durch Ähnlichkeit zu Bildern, sondern durch das Zeigen von Dingen die nicht den Gesetzen der Physik unterliegen' (59)

Wiesing owes us the answer to the question how such 'artificial presence' is achieved. He refers to Husserl's distinction between 'Geltung' (the creation of something that is not 'physical') versus 'Genesis' (p. 155) , and describes how that phenomenon is typical of media (p.157): a sign that has a meaning, or a physical image that reveals an image object. Gombrich speaks of an 'ungelöstes psychologisches Rätsel' (p 52). Wiesing resigns himself to the assessment that the 'Beziehung zwischen einem physikalischen und einem intentionalen Objekt' (52) cannot be explained: a description must suffice (p. 52).

It is not difficult to show that the alternative to a semiotic or mimetic approach is not only inexplicable, but also unsatisfactory.

To begin with, according to this criterium, a mirror should be regarded as an image indeed: already Narcissus knew that, although he could see his mirror image, he could not touch it.

Next, and already nearer to the mark, Wiesing produces a mere sophism when he contends that the image of a house does not age, whereas a real house does: 'Diese Darstellung eines Hauses wird insofern nicht älter, als das gezeigte Haus nicht älter wird, auch wenn der Bildträger sehr wohl wie jeder andere physikalische Gegenstand im Raum und Zeit älter wird' (p. 28). Of course, Michelangelo's David does not age, but neither does the marble in which it is carved. And if it weathers, also David's beauty fades away. And that testifies to the opposite of what Wiesing intended: that also the image is bound by the laws of physics.

Something similar holds for the argument that the image does not change when viewed from different angles (p.28). That demonstrates only that there is a difference between physical image and image object: the image object does not change when our position with respect to the physical image varies. And, since the image object exists only by the grace of the physical image, a two-dimensional image can only produce a frontal view. That does not entail that it does not obey the laws of physics, quite the contrary: we cannot see the profile views of a two-dimensional frontal image object for the very mundane reason that they are not there. When the image is three-dimensional, we can see the profile views because they are there. Thus, it turns out that also the three-dimensional image obeys to the laws of physics - in case: optics - indeed: the image changes according to our viewing angle. Wiesing himself writes that, as opposed to the image on a film screen, that is the same for all viewers, the perspective on a theatre varies according to the position of the viewer.(p.161). But he seems not to realise that this is a falsification of his thesis.

That example reveals the central shortcoming of Wiesing's contention that the image does not obey the laws of physics. Let us have a closer look. A visual image only provides the visual appearance of an image object. But that does not imply that it consists of mere light - that it is 'reine Sichtbarkeit', 'entkörper't: we have the certain impression to see a real body in flesh and blood that is inhabited by a soul. The visual appearance is read as a sign for a sensorially more encompassing image object. That means that the image object as a visual appearance is real, whereas it is 'artificial' only in so far as its tactile and interoceptive dimension is merely suggested. If we put aside mental images, like Wiesing himself, the image object has a double ontological status: it is half real, half 'artificial': an ontological hybrid, not disembodied ('entkörper'te)', but partly embodied, partly disembodied. It is mistaken, hence, to contend that images do not belong to the physical world. The peculiar nature of two-dimensional images may contribute to the confusion in that the visual appearance is projected on a flat plane. Only the distribution of light in height and breadth is real, whereas depth is merely suggested - 'artificial'. And with the projection in the depth, the image object itself seems to have left behind the two-dimensional support altogether and to have withdrawn into an imaginary space behind a 'transparent' two-dimensional window, where it unfolds into an immaterial being consisting of 'reine Sichtbarkeit' (Konrad Fiedler), "ein stoffloses Gebilde", 'entkörperlichte Sichtbarkeit' (p.32). Wiesing seems to convincingly prove his contention by pointing to the fact that an image cannot be lighted. 'Obwohl Licht auf ein Bild fällt, wird nicht der im Bild gezeigte Gegenstand beleuchtet' (p.28). But that holds only true of two-dimensional images, where we can only light the physical image, where the distribution of light and shadows as it applies to the image object is already determined - even when that is only true for light as such: for when a painting is lighted with red, the image object changes indeed. That an image object can be lighted - and hence obeys to the laws of physics - appears in all clarity with three-dimensional images. Here, we need not specify the shadows to generate the impression of volume. Normally, we do not notice the shadows, as when contemplating real bodies. That does not prevent the artist from manipulating the light in order to obtain special effects - think of the way in which Rodin had his

sculptures lighted by candlelight when having them photographed by Edward Steichen. That Rodin could really change his image objects by lighting is due to the fact that in a three-dimensional sculpture, the image object is a real lighted surface in a real three-dimensional world, and hence has a real surface over a real volume, although it is not tangible: when we touch it, we feel that we are dealing with marble, not with flesh. Such image is partly 'real' and partly 'artificial presence'. The share of reality increases when we are dealing with tactilo-visual images like those of John de Andrea. Generally speaking we can contend, thus, that all the real parts of the image object necessarily have to obey the laws of physics.

The thesis that Aktuelle Präsenz is not susceptible to the laws of physics is also untenable in the version that it cannot 'physisch auf den menschlichen Körper einwirken' (p. 31). On face value, it seems evident that paintings or photographs cannot have any physical impact on the viewer - even when a film image could blind us. But the evidence dwindles when we turn to three-dimensional images. To be sure, a purely visual three-dimensional image has only the lighted surface in common with the image object - but, even when we could not bump against it, since it consists of pure light, we would tend to walk around it, because it suggests a surface over a volume. When the three-dimensional image has a tangible support like marble, the impenetrability is not only a visible, but also a tangible fact: we cannot find ourselves where the image is, and, even when it would not feel like flesh, it would hurt us when we bumped against it. With an image of John de Andrea we would even feel yielding and warm flesh. And with moving three-dimensional images (from actors to robots), the impact is even more encompassing: Santaclaus can really pinch the cheek of a kid, who really should beware for the jaws of a dino-robot. With hindsight, it is apparent that also images for the eye and the ear can exert 'physical' influence upon the viewer, although it is a more disembodied ('entkörper't') action at a distance: just think of the impact of a nude image, which does not differ much of that of a real nude. But, how encompassing and fundamental the physical impact on the image may well be, is nowhere more evident than in the very act of the creation of the image: the image object as such is created merely through manipulating some 'physical image' (more precise: the image medium). For a more subtle description of the possible relations with the image, we refer to ['The I and the image'](#)).

The more image objects are incarnated in a physical image (a mimetic medium) - the more parameters of a sensory domain and the more sensory domain they cover - the more they become susceptible to the laws of physic, the more the viewers can interact with it, and the more they can interact with the viewers. Not to be subject to the laws of physics is, hence, not constitutive of the image, as Wiesing (and Jonas/Husserl) would have it. If the image has to be described in these terms nevertheless, then we have to contend that the image has a double ontological status - that it is partly subject and partly released from the laws of physics. Which does not mean that images are approached like other objects: that they are only partly 'artificial' suffices for them to be approached as 'mere images' in their entirety.

Apart from the fact that image objects are not exempt from the laws physics, there is still another objection against Wiesing's thesis: until further notice, I am not prepared to believe in a creatio ex nihilo or in some 'Geltung' (p. 155). All the more so, since the 'Geltung' of sense from some sign support, or of an image object from a physical image, is perfectly understandable on purely 'physical' grounds: brains that are capable of treating sensory configurations as signs. That applies especially to images: only a semiotic theory of the relation between mimetic medium and the image object can explain how something that is not given in the physical image can be attributed to the image object nevertheless - and therewith to understand the 'emergence' of something 'non-physical' from something physical.

Where with is demonstrated that Wiesing's thesis 'Eine bildliche Darstellung ist nicht eine Form von symbolisiertem Sinn, sondern eine Form artifizieller Präsenz' (p.31) is untenable.

THE MIMETIC PARADIGM

The deeper reason for the inability to understand the real nature of the image object, and of the fervour to introduce inadequate concepts like 'artificial presence', is the rejection of the mimetic paradigm. It is not even mentioned in the chapter 'Main trends in the contemporary philosophy of the image': although it is all too present in all these theories in the guise of the universally rejected 'bête noire'. Mimesis is rejected not only by the semiotic approach, but also by phenomenologists - albeit on different grounds. Thus, Wiesing, quotes Husserl: 'die Ähnlichkeit zwischen zwei Gegenständen, und sei sie auch noch so gross, macht den einen noch nicht zum Bild des Andern' (p. 35) and resolutely declares: 'Keine Ähnlichkeit ist hinreichend für Bildlichkeit' (p. 59), and even: 'Dass Ähnlichkeit hinreichend für Bildlichkeit wäre, wurde wahrscheinlich niemals von jemanden behauptet' (tp. 35)

Wiesing does not deny that images can resemble real objects - that is precisely one of the conditions for objects to function as signs. He merely denies that such resemblance would turn them into images. 'Bilder werden nicht durch 'Ähnlichkeit zu Bildern, sondern nur durch das Zeigen von Dingen die nicht den Gesetzen der Physik unterliegen' (p, 59). In the above, we described how an image is partly real, partly 'artificial'. The real part of the image object resembles the corresponding part of the physical image by definition - which seems sufficient ground to concede that the image is constituted by resemblance. Here is not the place to fully develop this approach. We can suffice with stressing that the resemblance in question is not the resemblance of the image object with the image subject, but the resemblance of the physical image (more precisely: the part of the physical image that we call the mimetic medium) with (the visual appearance of) the image object. Magritte's pipe is an image, not because it resembles some real pipe, but in that a particular distribution of colours on a two-dimensional plane - which is not a pipe indeed - nevertheless seems to be a real pipe - resembles a real pipe: *Ceci n'est pas une pipe, mais c'est - plutôt: ça ressemble à - une pipe quand-même*. The image object is called an image in that the third dimension is only there for the eye: just like Narcissus cannot touch or kiss his image, we cannot touch or smoke the pipe. And that holds also when the third dimension is really there, as with a marble sculpture: there the hand feels that the resemblance is merely visual, not tactile. The image object is, hence, merely a 'semblance', and that implies that there must be a difference too (that has to be defined more precisely as 'mimetic difference').

In view of the ineradicability of the confusion of the resemblance between physical image and image object on the one hand, and the resemblance between image object and image subject on the other hand, it pays to examine how it can arise in the first place. Three factors go hand in hand. To begin with, the object conjured up by Magritte can only be called a pipe in that it resembles other objects. The resemblance in question is, however, not a mimetic, but a conceptual resemblance: the object possesses the characteristics of the concept 'pipe' and is, hence, an instance of it. On the same grounds of conceptual resemblance, I can equally contend 'that is a pipe' - which means that it is an instance of a pipe, not that it is an image of it. Also of the painted pipe it is said that 'it is a pipe'. But we should rather phrase it as 'this is an image of a pipe' - to stress that we are not dealing with a real pipe. And it is here that language plays a trick on us: although the sentence 'this is the image of a pipe' only means that the pipe is merely an image of the pipe and not a real pipe, we tend to understand it as if the pipe on the painting is the image of some real pipe. For - and that is the second source of confusion - many an image is what we call **uncompleted mimesis**: mimesis that is only meant to make images of objects that exist in the real world - exemplary in the mirror image or in photography. In that case, the image object is supposed to resemble the real object - and that intention can be realised or not. Let us suppose that the intention is realised, then there is a perfect resemblance between the 'model' and 'the original' emerging from the physical image: the model as well as the image object have not only the visual resemblance in common, but also the semblance of a body of flesh and blood, and even of a soul. The model and the image object turn out to be duplicates of each other, not images, just like twins or mass products. But one of the duplicates exists only as an image. It is obvious then, that what makes an image an image is not the relation to a model, but the relation of the image object to the physical image. That is all

too evident in what we call 'completed mimesis' - when the artists conjures up some imaginary being, of which there simply is not a model in the real world. Also centaurs and unicorns appear to be of flesh and blood and to possess a soul, but there are no duplicates of them in the real world. The propinquity to read the statement 'this is (the image of) a pipe' as 'this is the image/imitation of some real pipe' is only enhanced in that, in uncompleted mimesis, a real pipe stood model for the pipe in the image. And that propensity is further enhanced in that - and that is a third source of confusion - images are also used to refer to real objects, as when images of UFO's are produced to convince gullible viewers of their existence.

No wonder that the confusion is so ineradicable, not alone in phenomenology and semiotics, but above all in the mimetic approach itself - that is precisely the reason why the theory could so easily be refuted. With Wiesing, the confusion catches the eye. When he is talking of resemblance, he clearly does not refer to the relation between physical image and image object: 'Offensichtlich hat nicht der materielle Bildträger mit dem Dargestellten Gegenstand Ähnlichkeit' (p.131). He is talking of the relation between image object and image subject: 'Das Bildobjekt ist ein Objekt, welches - wie jedes andere Objekt auch - partiell und graduert die gleichen sichtbare Eigenschaften und Gestalten wie andere Objekte haben kann' (footnote 40, p. 57). That is why he denies that whatever form of similarity could be constitutive of the image.

In misconceiving the nature of mimetic resemblance, Wiesing embroils himself in theoretical conundrums. He cannot deny that the image has something to do with resemblance - were it alone to be able to call the image object a pipe, for that is impossible when it would be a cigar. Indebted as he is to the confusion that 'being an image' is somehow a relation - which to him can only be a relation between an image object and some image subject - he cannot but conceive of such a relation as of resemblance. But, since he at the same times contends that resemblance cannot constitute an image, he cannot but conclude that resemblance is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition - whereby the sufficient condition turns out to be 'intentionality'. The resemblance has to be intended, as with Plato's mimesis (p. 131). Since there are two kinds of Präsenz, there are also two kinds of imitation: 'Nachahmung durch Darstellung' (a photo of a Rolex) and 'Nachahmung durch Imitation' - a fake-Rolex (p. 131). Imitation, hence, turns out to be non-constitutive of the image: 'Der Begriff der Nachahmung umfasst sowohl bildliche Darstellungen wie auch Imitationen, welche keine Bilder sind' (p. 60, footnote 42). On top of that, the shift from resemblance to imitation creates a new problem. For there is a possibility that the creation of an 'artifiziellen Präsenz' is the result of some random activity of animals (p. 60). Wiesing gives the example of Putnam's image of Churchill produced by ants in the sand (p. 59), and concludes that also animals can create objects 'die für Menschen die Eigenschaften von Bildern haben - doch Tiere können weder Darstellungen noch Nachahmungen schaffen. Denn sowohl die Darstellung wie auch die Nachahmung stellen eine Intention voraus' (p. 60). The thesis that 'some imitations are images, but not all images are imitations' has to be completed with 'Es gibt Bilder die Nachahmungen sind, aber nicht alle Bilder sind Nachahmungen' (p. 60) - since many of them are mere resemblances. So that intention is necessary to make 'intentional images' (Darstellungen), but not to make images as such: therefore resemblance is a sufficient condition...

It will not have escaped the attention of the reader that there is something wrong with the opposition of 'Nachahmung durch Darstellung' and 'Nachahmung durch Imitation'. For there is a difference between making an image (which implies mimetic difference) and producing one or more instances of a real thing - duplicates. Duplicates do resemble each other, but not in the sense that they represent one another. The same goes for the products of mother nature, such as twins. Although duplicates are no images, they can be used as images (and as signs), as when one twin poses for the other. It is a mere trick, hence, to assimilate the production of duplicates with imitation as such. The realisation of physical similarity (p. 131) or 'Ein Gegenstand in sein Dasein duplizieren' (p. 132) is not 'imitation' in the mimetic sense, but the production of a duplicate. Imitation in the mimetic sense consists of producing an physical image that is merely a visual duplicate of an otherwise multisensory object. The photo of a Rolex, as well as a real Rolex can function as the 'Darstellung' of a Rolex. Here also, Wiesing is

victim to his assimilation of the image with the two-dimensional visual image, that lures him into the trap of regarding only 'entkörperlichte' images as images.

The derogatory term 'imitation' that is used by Wiesing to denote the similarity of physical image and image object, betrays how much the abandonment of the mimetic theory is inspired by the advent of photography. That is all too apparent from the way in which he conceives of the mirror image - the oldest and most convincing paradigm of the image, and at the same time the paradigm of uncompleted mimesis. The paradigm of the mirror is responsible for the shift of the resemblance of physical image and image object, to the resemblance of image object and physical image. Wiesing unambiguously contends that the mirror image is not an image: 'In einem Spiegel lassen sich ausschliesslich Dinge sehen, die den Gesetzen der Physik unterlegen' (p.28) 'Man sieht in einem Spiegel optisch vermittelte reale Dinge, aber kein Bild einer Sache' (p 28). The question whether there is a causal relation between the model and the image object, or whether the image in the mirror is susceptible to the laws of optics, is irrelevant for its status as an image. What appears in the mirror is unmistakably an image: we only get the visual appearance, not also the tactile. Precisely therefore is it not an 'optisch vermitteltes reales Ding', but no doubt an 'artifizielle Präsenz' in the 'fysikfreie' sense of Wiesing: I can touch the surface of the water or the mirror, but not my mirror image. That makes it also clear that Wiesing somehow confuses image object and physical image (or rather; that he does not discern what we call mimetic medium - the lighting surface on the mirror plane - and the medium support - the mirror itself). The physics of the reflection of light rays on the surface of the mirror account for the causal relation between the visual appearance of the image subject and the distribution of the light on the surface of the mirror - the 'reale Präsenz' of the 'mimetic medium' that is read as a purely visual three-dimensional surface in the virtual space behind the mirror. It is only in that 'reine Sichtbarkeit' that the image object (the corresponding body and soul) appears. Also film and photography depend on such 'causal relation' between image subject and mimetic medium. Which raises the question why Wiesing, otherwise than [Roger Scruton](#), nevertheless does not exclude them from the realm of images.

CONCLUSION

Wiesing rightly rejects the semiotic approach of the image. The image can be used as a sign, but is primarily a phenomenon in its own right. It escapes Wiesing's attention that this theory, despite being a mistaken theory about the relation between the physical image, image object and image subject, is very helpful in understanding the relation between physical image (in case: mimetic medium) and image object. In that Wiesing also rejects the mimetic approach of the image, he cannot understand how a mere visual appearance suffices to suggest the full presence of an image object.

Wiesing unjustifiably contends that the image object is not subject to the laws of physics and that the image object is 'pure visibility'. He overlooks the fact that the image object has a double ontological status: it is partly real, partly 'artificial' - i.e. semiotically implied. Only this double ontological status can account for the 'emergence' of the image object as 'artificial presence', and this emergence is a perfectly understandable semiotic phenomenon, not some mysterious "Geltung".

Phenomenology as well as semiotics deny that resemblance is the key notion to understand the image. They mistake the resemblance between image subject and image object as the mimetic relation (model or denotatum). But, although some image objects resemble objects in the real world, this is not the resemblance that constitutes an image - were it alone for the fact that not all images have an object in the real world as a model or a denotatum. Constitutive of the image is the resemblance between (an aspect of the) medium support (i.e.: the mimetic medium) and the image object. And that resemblance has as a necessary counterpart an equally mimetic difference - that is semiotically made undone.

