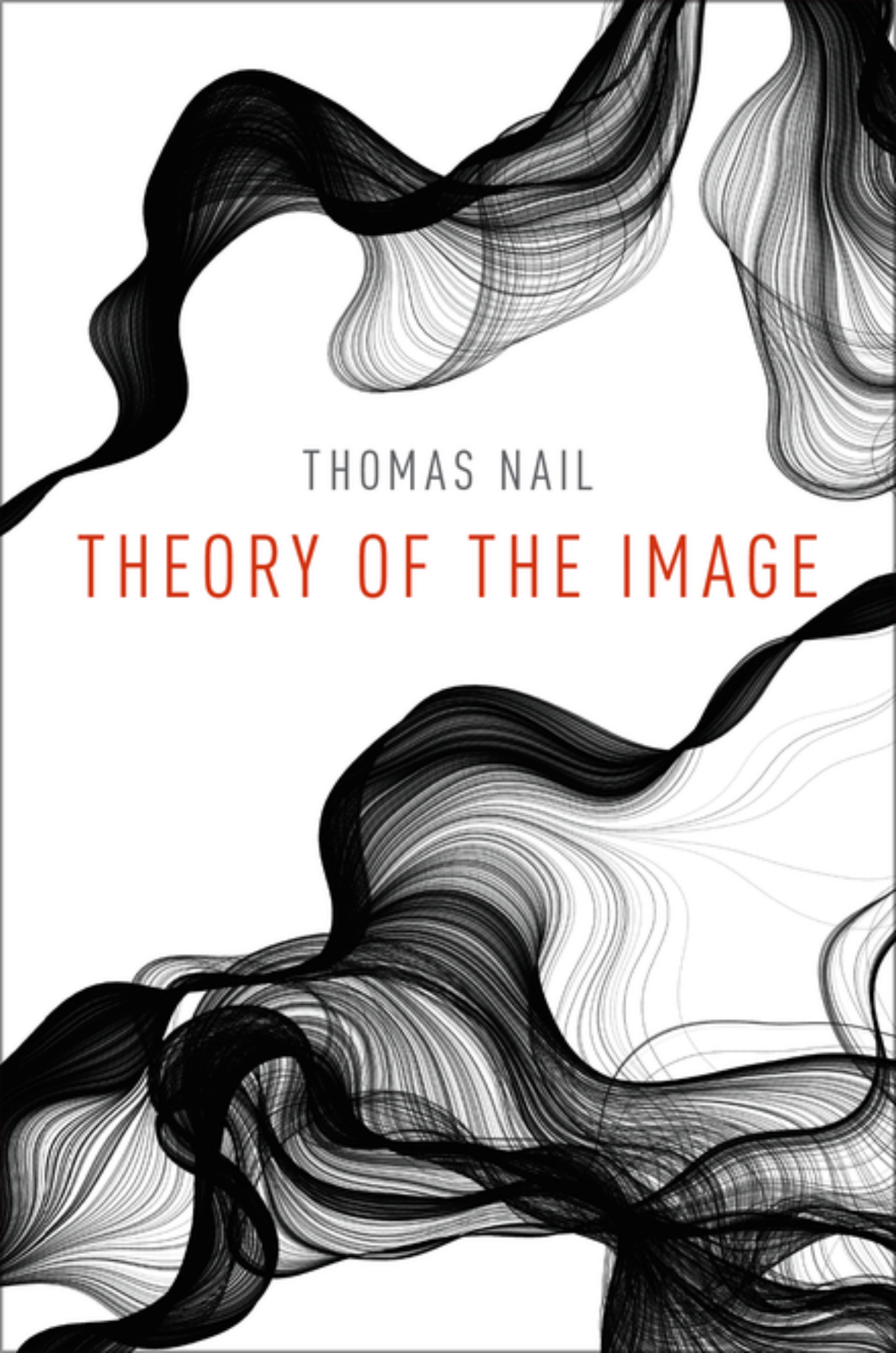
THOMAS NAIL
THEORY OF THE IMAGE

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Thomas Nail

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Introduction

The Age of the Image

We live in the age of the image. Today, there are more images in wider circulation than ever before in human history. This is due in part to the worldwide increase in mechanical reproduction technologies, global transportation methods, and distribution circuits during the latter part of the twentieth century. There are now more written, spoken, and visual images moving around the world faster and farther than anyone could ever have anticipated.

However, perhaps the single greatest source of this massive circulation of images has been the advent of the digital image, which began around the same time. Just before the turn of the twenty-first century, a host of digital-media technologies (computers, internet, video games, mobile devices, and many others) unleashed the largest flow of digitally reproduced words, images, and sounds the world has ever witnessed. No other kind of aesthetic medium or method of mechanical reproduction could possibly compete with what digital media have done to the image in the past twenty years. All that was solid has melted into the electromagnetic field. The digital image thus gave mobility to the image on a scale never before witnessed in human history.

Our world is now saturated with moving images of all kinds, both analog and digital. This sea change in image production and circulation is nothing less than the equivalent of a Copernican revolution in our time. The centrality of the movement and the mobility of the image have never been more dramatic. And just like the Copernican revolution, the aesthetic

revolution of the image has consequences not only for the way we think about the contemporary image but for the way we think about all previous images as well. The contemporary mobility of the image lets us see something new about the nature of all hitherto existing images. Only now are we able to understand that movement and mobility have always been at the heart of the image. The core argument of this book, therefore, is that it is this contemporary insight that makes possible a complete reinterpretation of aesthetics and art history from a new perspective. A specter is haunting the twenty-first century, and it is the specter of the image.

THE RISE OF THE IMAGE

The advent of radio and television in the twentieth century marked the beginning of the image revolution. They gave birth to its earliest electromagnetic and increasingly mobile form. However, they also restricted it to relatively centralized, homogenized, and unidirectional forms of "programming." By contrast, the new interactive and bidirectional nature of digital media has expanded the mobility and mutability of the image in completely new ways. With popularization of the internet and mobile devices—cellphones, smartphones, tablets, and laptops—at the turn of the twenty-first century, the image has become something not only ubiquitous but also increasingly portable. As of 2014, there were more active mobile devices than there were people on the planet. The mobile phone is probably the single, fastest-growing human sensory technology ever made, increasing from zero to 7.2 billion in a mere three decades.[1] What is more, the digital image has incited a huge revolution in publishing, journalism, entertainment, education, commerce, and politics unmatched by that of radio and television. The digital image has both integrated and carried forward analog media, giving rise to new digitalized industries in the process. Industrial factories and workers are increasingly replaced by internet servers and automated checkout software. We have entered a new historical-aesthetic regime: We are now in the age of the image.

Today it is possible for anyone to communicate by voice or text with anyone else, to listen to almost every sound ever recorded, to view almost any image ever made, and to read almost any text ever written from a single device almost anywhere on earth. All this is now available while we're on the move—and is itself in movement in the form of an electrical flow. The image will never be the same. The contemporary mobility of images, made possible by the advent and now dominance of the digital image, is not just a quantitative increase in reproduced images. Digital media and

the digital image have transformed the qualitative structure of the image itself. Anything can now be digitalized, mobilized, and browsed nonlinearly through a single portable device. Anything can now be made responsive and interactive with the viewer through the use of digital software and a continuous flow of electrical current. None of our senses has remained unchanged by the new digital image—even taste and smell can now be synthesized using computer software.[2] Something is always lost in transit, however, as the continuity of the electrical flow is converted into digitally discrete 1s and 0s—but the image moves on regardless, sweeping us all along with it.

PARADIGM SHIFT

In such a world of moving images, aesthetics can no longer be adequately understood by the old paradigm of representation. Recent scholarship in art and aesthetics increasingly attests to this recognition.[3] Images have taken on a growing mobility that shifts back and forth *between* object and subject, copy and model, transforming and modulating them in a continuous feedback loop. Old theoretical frameworks no longer fit the twenty-first–century reality of interactive electrical circulations and continually modulated images. If we continue to think of images as static objects, or even as objects that only interact with distinct human perceivers, we are missing something fundamental about those images: their interactive *movement*. Images have a material and kinetic agency with one another that is not strictly derived from human or social agents. This insight pertains not just to the digital image but to all images. Images have always been in motion, and their movements have always had a collective agency independent of human perception and social constructions. This is not unique to the digital image. Thus, more than ever before, the fact that the image is up in the air and on the move also requires us to seriously rethink the materiality of affect and sensation beyond human limits. New empirical realities require new conceptual frameworks that in turn tell us something new about our past. This is what this book aims to provide: a new aesthetics for our time, *an aesthetics of the moving image*.

In contrast to the prevailing twentieth-century aesthetic paradigms of images that have modeled the agency of the image on the agency of humans and human structures (social, psychological, linguistic, economic, and so on), this book proposes a new theory of the image that starts with the mobility and material agency of the image itself. Beginning the analysis of images with the primacy of their mobility and circulation in this way allows

us to think beyond the traditional anthropocentric frameworks based on subjective, formal, or social structures and to think more about the activity and agency of the *image itself* and what the image *does*—not only what it does *for humans*. The image is not just a passive semblance of something else (another image, an object, or human perception); it has a real and material mobility of its own, which has been vastly understudied in art history and aesthetics.[4] The original contribution of this book, therefore, is that it provides a materialist and nonanthropocentric theory of the image from the perspective of the movement of the image itself. As such, it expands the study of aesthetics and art history beyond questions of representation, signification, linguistic and social constructivisms, and human perception, and toward the study of regimes of material and kinetic circulation.

METHOD

Today's Copernican revolution of the image marks a new period in aesthetic history. It sets the limits of the previous century and outlines a new one, defined, at least in part, by the ever-increasing *mobility of the image*.[5] However, the advent of the present is never limited to the present. Now that our present has emerged, it is possible, in a way it was not before, to inquire into the conditions of its emergence and discover something new about the nature and history of this image. In other words, the present reveals something new about the nature of the image more generally and what it must *at least* be like, so as to be capable of being defined by the primacy of motion and mobility as it is today.

Thus, a central question of this book is: What does the mobility of the image say about the nature of images and aesthetics more broadly? If the image is defined by the primacy of mobility, yet existing theories do not begin with this, then we need a new conceptual framework. *Theory of the Image* aims to provide a conceptual framework based on the primacy of motion, to better understand contemporary structures of sensation and aesthetics, as well as the historical events from which they emerge. In short, the contemporary rise of the image draws our attention not so much to the radical novelty of the digital image as such but rather to *a previously hidden dimension of all previous images* that it is only now possible to glimpse.[6]

The methodology deployed in this book is, therefore, neither a narrow theory of the image that applies strictly to digital media nor to a grand ahistorical theory of the image that applies universally to all images forever and for all time. It is not a naive realism in which the discovery of the contemporary primacy of the moving image gives us pure access to the

unchanging essence of the image *as such*. Instead, it is a realism of the *minimal affective conditions* of the emergence of the present. It is, therefore, a *critical, historical,* or *minimal realism* in the sense in which the image is interpreted only with respect to that aspect of the image that must at least be the case for our present "to have been possible"—that is, actual. *Theory of the Image* is, therefore, not a theory in the traditional sense of an abstract and universal mental representation of the world; rather, it is a "theory" in the etymological sense of the Greek word θεωρία, *theōría*, as a "movement," "sending," or "process." Theory is the process of describing the structure of material-kinetic processes as they emerge—in this case, the contemporary ubiquity of the moving image.[7]

Therefore, the method deployed in this book is neither realist nor constructivist in the traditional senses of those words but rather *minimally* or *critically realist*. This distinguishes the method strikingly from most prevailing theories. The question is not what the conditions of the human structures (mind, language, society, and so on) must be for the present to be what it is but rather what *the image itself* must *at least* be like such that the present has come to be defined by the primacy of mobility. The question is not what the conditions of language, the unconscious, economics, power, and so on must be like for the present to be possible but rather what the reality of the image itself must be like so as to render actual these anthropic structures of sensation in the first place. Without a doubt, contemporary reality is shaped by multiple human structures, but these structures are in turn conditioned by other real, nonanthropic, and affective images. The aim of this method is not to dissolve human agency and perception. Quite the opposite, the aim is to put forward a theory of human agency as one type of image among others.[8] These are the new kinds of images this book will investigate.

The objective of this work is to locate the real and historical conditions for the emergence of the contemporary mobility of the image.[9] When these conditions are elaborated, however, it is always possible for a new present to emerge and in turn reveal yet another previously unseen dimension of the past—and so on, in an additive historical fashion. Thus, this book does not offer any kind of final word or universal theory of the image.[10]

TWO PROBLEMS

The kinetic theory of the image developed in this book hopes to overcome two major problems within hitherto existing theories that have remained relatively *static* and *ahistorical*.

First Problem: Stasis

The image has been traditionally subordinated to something *static*. This subordination has assumed two complementary formulations: an objective one and a subjective one.

Objective Stasis

On the one hand, the image has been subordinated to a static object, or unchanging essence. In other words, the image has been treated as a copy or representation of an original. The difference between the object and the image of the object is interpreted as the degree of movement or change in the image itself with respect to its unchanging original object. This is the classical model/copy relation famously dramatized by Plato in the *Timaeus*. The original or model object remains static and unmoved while subsequent images work like mobile snapshots to accurately represent the original object in all its immobile perfection and essential form.

As Plato writes, "Now the nature of the ideal being was everlasting, but to bestow this attribute in its fullness upon a creature was impossible. Wherefore he resolved to have a moving image of eternity, and when he set in order the heaven, he made this image eternal but moving according to number, while eternity itself rests in unity."[11] There can be no higher exhalation of eternity and denigration of the image than this. For Plato, the image is nothing but illusion, appearance, and likeness organized according to discrete numerical quantities. The object is thus fixed in its essence, and the image is fixed by its discrete number. These discrete numerical images fail to represent the object precisely because of the *mobility of the image*. Motion and mobility thus become the conceptual names for the failure of the image to represent the object. The kinetic image is the degradation of an original object.

All definitions of art as representation are determined by some version or degree of this static model/copy/resemblance relation. Not only is the object immobilized in the model to be copied, but the image of the model itself remains nothing more than a failed numerical attempt to reproduce this same static condition. Between the two stands a gulf of movement and turbulence that ensures their incommensurability. In this way, the only real or true sensation occurs in the object itself: all images of the object are mere appearances or modified snapshots of the original. The obsession with art preservation, authorial authenticity, and connoisseurship are historically linked to this classical idea of stasis and mimesis.

Subjective Stasis

On the other hand, the image has also been subordinated to the relatively static mental states of the subject. In this theory, perceptual images are only given conceptual aesthetic coherence and reality *in the faculties of the perceiver*. Versions of this theory are closer to the more modern aesthetics developed by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790). What remains static, fixed, and universal is not the object being represented but rather the concept of beauty itself found in the mental structure of the subject. Fluctuating images occur in the body of perceiver, but it is only in the *concept* of beauty that they are given fixed and universal form. It is thus human mental and perceptual structures, and not sensual images themselves, that lie at the foundations of truth and beauty.

Again, for Kant, it is the movement of the image in the mobile and affected body that marks the inferiority and subordination of the image. The nature of the object in itself remains unknown *because the body and its perceptual images are moved and mobile*. The senses are thus led to misrepresent reality to the mind. The senses of the body cannot be trusted, whether in knowledge or in beauty. Our experience of beauty, therefore, is not the beauty of nature or even of the beauty of the images but, rather, the beauty of our own idea, experience, or faculty of representing these images to ourselves. Nature is only the prompt for us to discover the beauty of our own aesthetic and phenomenological faculties.[12] This is the inverse of the classical idea of the model/copy relation. Instead of defining the image by its subordination to the static essence of the object, it is defined by its subordination to the static aesthetic structures of judgment in the mind of the experiencing or intentional subject.

This subjective form is most dramatic in Kant and post-Kantian aesthetics, but a similar model is also at work in other anthropic constructivisms as well, including social, anthropological, linguistic, economic, and other nonpsychological versions. All these different constructivisms share the reduction of the image, not to the Kantian ego but to other anthropic structures. In contrast to Kant, some of these anthropic constructivisms can even be transformed to some extent by moving images. However, even in those cases, the movement of the image remains tied to the *relatively static* anthropic structures that produce and consume those images. Since numerous full-length works have recently been devoted to making this argument, including my own, and since this is not the primary focus of this book, I must simply refer the interested reader to those works at this point.[13]

Both the objective and subjective/constructivist theories of the image thus subordinate it to something relatively static. Furthermore, they both treat the movement of images as something discrete, either in number (Plato) or in the body (Kant). In both cases, movement is what makes the image inferior but also what secures the difference between the object and the subject. For Plato, the object remains different from the inferior images of it precisely because the object does not move. For Kant, the same is true of the transcendental subject. For constructivists, images remain extensions, projections, or reflections of more primary human structures. In both cases, the object and subject are separated by a kinetic gulf of fluctuating images.

There are two kinetic paradoxes here. The first is that the movement of the image is both necessary to ensure the *division* between subject and object and necessary to ensure the region of transport that *connects* them *as distinct*. The model transports its image to the senses. The human subject then receives these images on the surface of its sensitive mobile body or anthropic structure. Without this zone of transport between the object and subject, nothing transpires: sensation fails, affect dissolves. Yet precisely because of this mobility, representation is also undermined. The mobility of the image is thus both the condition of *possibility* for the object and subject and the condition of their *impossible* convergence in perfect representation; hence, the related second paradox that the image is treated as necessarily mobile in its transport but fixed and limited by number or in a human body. The image must move but only as a frozen mobility, a snapshot, or particle of sensation—something for a human subject. The mobility of the image is thus described as secondary to the fixed object or subject of human sensation, when it is human sensation itself that is produced as a regional stabilization of the mobile substratum of images.

Therefore, if we want to develop a theory of the image that does not fall into these paradoxes, we need to begin from its most primary and defining feature—its mobility—and not try to deduce this mobility from something else *it is relative to*. This requires a complete theoretical reorientation. In short, the division between the object and the subject of sensation should not be considered a primary ontological determination but, rather, the effect of a more primary kinetic process of moving images themselves. This is the novelty of *Theory of the Image*: to reinterpret the structure and history of the image and its affects from the perspective of its mobility. Objects, subjects, and human structures are products of this more primary process.

Second Problem: History

The kinetic theory of the image aims to overcome the supposedly ahistorical nature of the image. There are three formulations of this ahistorical thesis: objective, subjective, and ontological.

Objective.

First, if the image is subordinated to a static model object, then it can have no history, or at most have a *mere illusion* of history. Since history presupposes the real movement and transformation of matter, and objective essences do not move, this means that objects can have no history, and neither can their images.

Subjective

Second, if the image is subordinated to the static conceptual or constructivist structure of human subjects, then a similar problem occurs. If subjective structures are universal, as Kant and much of post-Kantian phenomenology argue,[14] then they do not change (or change only within a fixed domain) over time; and if subjective structures themselves (not just their contents) do not change over time, then they have no real history. Perceptual images may change *within this structure*, but the aesthetic conditions of making sense of these images and ordering them have always been the same—and thus the image, too, as subordinate to the structure, remains ahistorical. A notable exception to this post-Kantian ahistoricism is the tradition of Marxist aesthetics, including the Frankfurt school.[15]

Ontological

Third, the ontological theory of the image is defined by the autonomous becoming of all affects in general. The affective nature of the image is, therefore, continuous with the whole process of becoming, in which the object and subject both transform and are transformed through their coappearance as images. In this way, the ontology of the affective image aims to liberate the image from its twin subordination.

It does so, however, only at the risk of introducing its own form of universality and ahistoricity. If the affective image is understood as *ontologically* "autonomous"[16] with respect to the objects and subjects

it produces or distributes, then its constant change becomes something relatively changeless: pure becoming. If all images are reduced to their lowest common denominator—affect, becoming, and ontological change—then the particularity of their historical and regional distributions risks being submerged entirely in a pure ontological flux. This ontological rejection of history in favor of becoming has been put forward by a number of recent process and affect theorists.[17]

The process ontology of the affective image treats the image as if it were possible to describe its structure forever and all time, and from no position in particular. In this way the ontology of the affective image is saved from anthropic constructivism, but it also risks making the image something like its own kind of "autonomous force"—adding nothing to the historical description of the image but a generic ontological language applied to everything equally, even if that language is one of pure flux.

In response to the problem of ahistoricity, this book offers not only a theory of the image and aesthetics grounded in a view from the present, but it also offers a history of this present and the material conditions of its emergence. In short, it explicitly does not offer an ontology of the image. It is precisely because the image is mobile and material that it has a history, and therefore that sensation must be theorized historically and not ontologically. Furthermore, because the image has a history, it also has a whole typology of distributions that organize the world of subjective and objective structures. All these structures have to be accounted for, starting from the *historical mobility of the image*, and not from any metaphysical or ontological description of becoming. Therefore, the project of this book is to develop a theory *and* a history of the logic and structure of the moving image.

WHAT IS AN IMAGE?

The image is not a copy or a movement relative to an object or subject; it is not even a copy of a copy without an original.[18] There is no mimesis whatsoever. If we are looking for a new and more fruitful definition of the image, we need look no further than within the same Latin root of the word itself. The word *image*, from the Latin word *imago,* means "reflection," "duplication," or "echo."[19] These definitions imply precisely the opposite of what we typically think of as a copy. A copy must be something other than its model or, by definition, it cannot be a copy *of a model*.

However, *reflection*, from the Latin word *flex*, means "bend" or "curve." A reflection is a curving or bending that folds back over itself. *Duplication*,

from the Latin word *pli*, meaning "fold," makes this meaning quite apparent. The image is not a distinct or separate copy but, rather, the process by which matter curves, bends, folds, and bounces back and forth, or "echoes." The image is, therefore, the mobile process by which matter twists, folds, and reflects itself into various structures of sensation and affection. By this definition, the image is not reducible to a strictly visual kind image alone but, also, is optical, sonic, haptic, olfactory, and gustatory. All sensation is thus bound together in a continuous flow of images.[20]

There are not first static objects and subjects and then later a movement or transfer of images between them. Rather, there is first matter in motion folding itself up through composition and duplication that generates larger sensuous matters like objects and subjects that then further reflect and duplicate the flows of matter between them. A folded image is not a copy because a fold is not something separate from the matter that is folded. The fold is a completely continuous kinetic and topological structure. There is not one part of the fold that is an original and another that is a copy. This is the sense in which Henri Bergson writes that the image is "more than that which the idealist calls a *representation*, but less than that which the realist calls a *thing*—an existence placed halfway between the 'thing' and the 'representation.' "[21] It is more than a representation because it is not a copy of something else, and it is less than a thing because it is already the material of which things are composed and as such is irreducible to any single empirical sensation of it. "Images," to invert Bergson's phrase, are an aggregate of "matters."[22]

In contrast to existing theories of the image as passive phenomena of formal, subjective, or other static, anthropocentric, and ahistorical structures, this book provides a refreshingly different approach: a transformative, affective, and kinetic theory proper to the action and mobility of *the image itself*. The details of this kinetic and materialist theory of the image are further developed in part I.

CONTRIBUTION AND PLAN OF THE BOOK

There are three important consequences that come from overcoming the problems of stasis and ahistoricity posed by current theories of the image. The first consequence of the kinetic theory of the image is a new conceptual framework proper to the *movement* of the image. This is developed at length in part I. The kinetic theory of the image allows us to explain not only how objects and subjects emerge from more primary kinetic structures of images but also the how different kinds of objects and subjects emerge

from different historical structures. Among other things, this includes a new movement-oriented interpretation of experience, emotion, thought, memory, and the image itself. This conceptual framework in turn allows us to put forward a new theory of art and aesthetics no longer based in objective essences or subjective/social experiences but rather in the historical and material kinetic structure of *the work of art itself*.

The second consequence of a kinetic theory of the image is that it makes possible a whole new interpretation of the history of art. Part II thus provides an *analysis of the historical conditions* for the emergence of the dominant distributions of images that we have today. The dominant distributions of the image that we know today in the arts did not come out of nowhere; the image has a history. At different points in history, images were distributed according to at least four dominant aesthetic regimes: functional, formal, relational, and differential. New forms of aesthetic organization mix and rise to dominance through history. When these new techniques emerge historically, they tend to persist, repeat, and combine. Today we find the digital mobile image at the intersection of all four major forms of historical regimes. The methodological primacy of history is in fact what grounds the aesthetic theory. Part I is not a set of arbitrary conceptual categories but simply the result obtained from the more primary historical research contained in part II. This is how Marx described his method for writing *Capital*.

> Of course the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development and to track down their inner connection. Only after this work has been done can the real movement be appropriately presented. If this is done successfully, if the life of the subject-matter is now reflected back in the ideas, then it may appear as if we have before us an a priori construction.[23]

Theory of the Image is, therefore, not putting forward any a priori constructions. Like the owl of Minerva, theoretical practice flies at dusk after the day has done and looks back on its immanent conditions. However, once the owl has seen the practical and historical conditions of its own appearance, it then describes them, not from nowhere but precisely from the very point from which it is at. Theoretical description is thus always backward-looking, like Walter Benjamin's interpretation of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920). The angel of history is propelled forward *practically* with its back to the future while it gazes *theoretically* into the past.

Perhaps some philosophers of aesthetics who read this book will only be interested in the conceptual conclusions found in part I, and perhaps

some art historians will only be interested in the historical interpretations in part II, and others still may only be interested in the case study of digital and generative images in part III. But the book is intended to be and was written as an integrative whole, in which the theory is derived first and foremost from historical study, and the historical interpretations are guided by this theory, both of which only make sense as grounded in the contemporary advent of the digital image. I therefore urge the reader to take this holism seriously as a methodological statement about what it means to think about art and aesthetics.

Accordingly, the third consequence of developing a kinetic theory of image is that it allows us to analyze contemporary art and aesthetics in a much more precise and historically sensitive way. The history of the image is not a linear or progressive sequence of self-confined "ages." Rather, the history of art is one of coexisting and overlapping aesthetic regimes. The same techniques of functional, formal, relational, and differential distribution that have emerged and repeated throughout art history are still at work today in contemporary art. The digital image does not leave these behind but rather carries them forward.

For example, digital media have not replaced analog media. The two coexist and mix, creating new hybrid structures. Thus in order to understand the present, we must also understand the past of which it is composed. In drawing from the past, however, we always do so from the perspective of the present and from the defining historical attributes of the contemporary image: movement and mobility. Therefore, part III of this book draws on the conceptual and historical work of parts I and II in order to offer a new theory of digital media and of generative art in particular.

LIMITATIONS

There are four important limitations to these consequences. First and most broadly, this project is limited historically to the period when humans became the single most aesthetically productive and diversified species on the planet. Aesthetics and the distribution of moving images in general precede and exceed humans, but the history of kinesthetics described here is restricted, for practical and not theoretical reasons, to that of this limited historical period. The skeptical reader might ask, "If this book is so nonanthropocentric, why doesn't it deal with animal, plant, and natural images?" First, it is possible to give a nonanthropocentric theory of humans; there are many out there. Second, a future book is already planned to expand this frame. It just cannot be done in a single book.

The second, and perhaps most important limitation, is that the present work is limited strictly to the study of the *kinetic* structures of aesthetic practice. The theory of the image in this book is not a complete history of art nor of every great artist in the Western tradition. It does not pretend to do biographical, comparative, or encyclopedic justice to Western art or to all digital-media studies. What is unique about *Theory of the Image*, and where its contribution should be evaluated, is its focus on the hidden kinetic structures operating within the history of aesthetics, which reveal a subterranean aesthetics of motion. This limitation is not reductionistic. The argument is not that the mobility of the image is the only or best way to understand it. Rather, the argument here is *historical* and aims simply to add another interpretive dimension to others already out there from the perspective of the early twenty-first century.

Third, and within this second limitation, *Theory of the Image* is limited to the study of only the most dominant historical distributions of the image and its associated fields of motion, *considered separately*. In real history, by contrast, all the regimes and fields coexist and mix to one degree or another. To show all such mixtures and degrees for each historical period is too large a task and must be reserved for future studies. This book, therefore, considers only the dominant distributions of images, and only during the period of their historical rise to prominence. Part II is explicitly meant to be a rereading of the Western art-history tradition. The aim is not to focus on any single work, period, or type of art, or to create a new cannon, but, rather, to trace a broader, more holistic set of patterns over a long period of time in the West. The purpose of choosing well-known works of Western art is thus intentional. This book is meant to unsettle already settled histories by tracing a different history beneath them. Note also that the depth of coverage varies by topic. I have tried to avoid this, but complete and symmetrical historical coverage is not possible in a book of this size, and so I beg the reader's patience with this constraint.

Fourth, the present work is limited geographically to the near-Eastern and Western histories of aesthetic practice. In no way does this suggest that the West has the only or best art. On the contrary, revelation of the primacy of motion at the heart of Western aesthetics is a way of undoing certain prevailing notions of it by showing the secret material kinetic conditions of its static, idealist, anthropocentric, linguistic, and visual-centric theories. This book is restricted to the near-East and West purely owing to the practical limitations of length and the linguistic and cultural limitations of its author—and nothing more.

Limitations withstanding, this remains, I think, an ambitious project worth undertaking.

We begin this project in chapter 1 by introducing the kinetic theory of the image, which provides the theoretical framework for a kinesthetics of the work of art, and eventually the contemporary image.

PART I

Kinesthetics

Part I of this book offers a new theory of the image that begins neither from the objective, nor the subjective, nor even the ontological point of view but rather from the movement and mobility of the image itself. This first part of the book thus puts forward an original kinetic theory of the image, or "kinesthetics," defined by three interrelated aspects of the mobile image: the flow of matter, the fold of affect, and the field of art. The next three chapters provide the conceptual framework that we have extracted from art history and that we will then use as a method or lens through which to reread that history in part II. The method of theoretical presentation thus differs by nature from that of the initial historical inquiry.

CHAPTER 1

The Flow of Matter

Nihil in sensu quod non prius in materia

(There is nothing in the senses that has not first been in matter)[1]

The image is in motion; therefore, the theory of the image is also a theory of the moving image. One cannot be understood without the other. If the image were static, it could never move *between* a subject and an object. Objective and subjective theories of images as representations thus both assume precisely what they set out to explain: the mobility of the image itself. Hitherto existing theories of the image have thus only assumed and subordinated the movement of the image to something else; the point, however, is to look at the transformative movement of the image itself.

We begin our inquiry with the first and most general condition for the production of the image: the flow of matter.

FLOW

Matter flows. This is the first and central thesis from which the entire conceptual framework of kinesthetics follows. In order to understand what the minimal structure of the image is such that it is capable of being in motion, we begin with its most basic aspect: the flow of matter.

The image is nothing other than matter in motion. Without the material flow of photons, for example, there is no vision; without the flow of

molecular pressure, there is no sound; without the flow of saliva, there is no taste; without the flow of air, there is no smell. Most importantly, however, without the flow of all matter, there is no collision, folding, or touch—the foundation of all images. The image occurs first and foremost only because matter is able to encounter itself—to touch itself. And matter is only able to touch itself if it is kinetically differentiated in some way from itself.

Therefore, matter becomes image only through a motion or a flow that allows it to return to itself. All images, therefore, must be in continuous motion—or else nothing, by definition, would ever touch. Without continuous movement (flow), there could be only a world of static, vacuum-sealed entities—and no sensation, affection, or image. The kinetic theory of the image therefore requires first of all a preliminary definition of the matter that defines the flow of images. From this initial definition follow a number of other aspects of the image.

Matter

The image is defined by the primacy of motion, but matter is what is in motion; therefore, matter is the basis of the image. What matter is, however, must remain an open question because motion is by definition a kinetic process. This is why there is no ontological definition of motion but, rather, only a *historical ontological* definition. In other words, the primacy of the moving image entails that matter also be a kinetic *process* and not reducible to empirical or metaphysical definitions.

Empiricism

Kinetic materialism is in contrast to the empiricist definition of matter as some specific or determinately sensed substance. This is because every sensorium, or body of images, is made of flows of matter that the composite images themselves do not represent but simply compose. For example, we do not see our own retinas or touch our own nerves. Our retinas see light, and our nerves transmit haptic signals. This is why the theory of the image begins with empirical sensation but leads us to the insensible or trans-empirical material conditions of the sensorium itself.[2]

Every sensorium or corporeal image with the capacity for sensation is always defined by the relatively insensible flows of matter that compose it. Those flows of matter (retinas, nerves, and so on) are in turn composed of

flows of matter that define the retinal or nervous sensorium, and so on all the way down.

Matter is therefore not reducible to empirical sensations because there are no fundamental particles or substances that define the matter of the image—only material kinetic *processes*.[3] Matter is not reducible to static, discrete, or passive stuff that gets moved around, as in classical materialism.[4] Matter is creative, unstable, and in constant motion. Unlike classical matter, matter (in contemporary physics) is not completely observable, measurable, or predictable. Quantum fields, for example, are not empirical.[5] Quantum fields are also not causal or mechanistic but, rather, pedetic and indeterminate, and move in patterns of constant conjunction. The materialist theory of the image ought to take our historical knowledge of quantum fields seriously and distinguish it from classical, mechanistic, or "crude materialism," as Marx calls it.[6] Matter is not itself merely empirical but is also what the empirical is *made of*. It is, as Bergson writes, something "less than a thing."[7]

Process materialism is different from classical, mechanistic, or crude materialism in at least three ways:

1. Matter, like quantum fields, is not reducible to static, discrete, or passive stuff that gets moved around like billiard balls following universal natural or divine laws. Instead, matter is described as creative, unstable, and in constant motion.
2. Matter, unlike classical materialism, is not completely observable, measurable, or predictable.[8] Matter therefore is not strictly empirical or "actual" in the classical sense.
3. Matter, like quantum fields, is not causal or deterministic but, rather, is pedetic and indeterminate, and moves in unpredictable but emergent patterns of constant conjunction.

These features of matter are *historical features* consistent with but *not reducible to* the descriptions of contemporary quantum science. They clearly distinguish process materialism from classical or mechanistic materialisms.[9]

Metaphysics

Matter is not simply a concept or category of all material things. Matter is not an idealist and immaterial abstraction that exists independently of or transcends various historically determinate matters. Matter is nothing other than all its immanent historical configurations—so far. It can be

nothing more until that something more emerges historically through motion. All universal ideas of matter come from material and historical beings in motion. To assert the contrary is idealism, or what Marx calls, "contemplative materialism."[10]

Thus, there is no single and absolute idea or definition of matter that will always capture its changing content in advance, just as there is no single and final empirical expression of matter for the same reason: matter is an open *process of motion*. The scientific determinations of matter as discrete particles or substance and the conceptual determinations of matter are both fundamentally limited because matter is in flux. In short, matter *is* nothing other than the *process of materialization*. If matter is not a fixed or static thing, then it can receive neither a fixed empirical nor a fixed metaphysical definition. The best way to describe what it is, therefore, is by what it does: move.

Thus, process or kinetic materialism is also distinct from a "vital materialism" in which the motion and activity of matter is explained by recourse to something else: either external forces (as with Isaac Newton) or internal immanent forces (as with Baruch Spinoza, Deleuze, and other neovitalist new materialists).[11] The ontologicalization of vital forces to explain matter's movement merely ontologizes a certain historical product (life) and retroactively projects this animacy onto non-living matter.[12]

Vitalist new materialism treats matter-in-motion as synonymous with mechanistic materialism and therefore sees the injection of *force* as the only pathway to a "new" kind of materialism. The fetishizing of the so-called immanent "life" or "vitality" of inorganic matters is also symptomatic of a more general biopolitical and ideological bias in contemporary politics.[13] Instead of starting with the primacy of matter, vital materialism starts with the primacy of biological life and retroactively attributes such living vitality to inorganic matter—when the historical situation is precisely the opposite.[14] Organic matter emerges from inorganic matter in motion, not the other way around. Therefore, the vital materialist attempt to theorize a post-humanist new materialism succeeds only by introducing a new biocentrism and by resubordinating matter and motion to something else.[15] It is thus ultimately a metaphysical and ahistorical materialism.[16]

Historical Materialism

Matter is what is *in motion*, but matter is also not reducible to motion itself. Motion in itself without a matter in motion is a pure and immobile abstraction. The kinetic theory of matter therefore adopts the name of "matter"

not in an empirical or metaphysical way but in a strictly *historical* way, from the perspective or *kairos* of our present in which motion in the West has been connected to the motion *of matter*.

From Aristotle to G.W.F Hegel, motion has always been the motion *of matter*.[17] Together, the two have suffered the same fate in Western history: They are always subordinated to some other category. In the ancient world, matter and motion were subordinated to eternal forms and unmoved movers. In the medieval world, they were subordinated to the vital forces or *vis inertiae* that directed their motions and formed their matters. In the modern world, they were subordinated to mechanism, rationalism, and natural laws. However, just as the historical subordination of one almost always entailed the subordination of the other, so the historical liberation of one also entails the liberation of the other. If motion is primary, creative, and pedetic, then so is the matter that moves. If matter is, then so is the motion by which it is moved. Without matter, the concept of movement remains a "false" or idealist movement.[18] Without movement, however, matter remains static, discontinuous, and dead.

The theory of the image in this book therefore puts forward a new kinetic materialism. If the image is in motion and all of motion is in the process of materialization, then the image and matter can no longer be adequately defined by empirical or metaphysical methods. Kinetic or process materialism is therefore neither a Copernican revolution, in which it is we who move around the stars, nor a Ptolemaic counterrevolution, in which we are at rest while the stars move, but, rather, a Hubblean revolution in which *everything is in motion*. To become image, matter must be able to flow and, by flowing, return to itself as process of self-differentiating or iterated materialization.

Continuous Movement

The flow of matter, which makes the image, is a continuous movement. Matter flows *if and only if* the twin conditions of *continuity* and *motion* are satisfied.

If matter were *only continuous* (i.e., a continuous substance), it would be a homogeneous totality. It could never touch or sense itself because it would be strictly identical to itself. As Aristotle describes in *De anima*, "If a colored object is placed in immediate contact with the eye, it cannot be seen. . . . [T]he same occurs also with sounds and smells; if the object of either of these senses is in immediate contact with the organ no sensation is produced."[19] If matter were merely continuous, it would be One—a finite

or infinite unity—without the possibility of change or motion outside of itself, since there would be no outside to it. As a minimum condition, therefore, the image requires a differentiation between inside and outside. If all matter were continuous substance, all movement and thus all images, as Zeno and Parmenides once argued, would be an illusion.

The logic of a static or substantial continuum refutes itself. If matter was One totality that contained all matters, the matter that contained all matters would have to be different from the matter that was contained by it. Matter would thus be separate from itself—that is, nontotal. We thus reach the paradox of the One that Gödel and others discovered long ago:[20] that the One cannot be contained in that which *it contains*. Material continuum without motion thus results in a paradoxical conception of totality that cannot include itself in its own totality. Differentiation and thus the image creep back into matter as constitutive dimensions of it.

On the other hand, if matter were *only movement* without continuity, there could paradoxically be no motion and thus no moving image at all. Strictly speaking, a discontinuous movement is not a movement. For example, without continuity the movement of translation between point A and point B cannot be said to be the *same* movement. Without continuity, point A and point B would remain completely different points divided by an infinity of intermediate points, themselves divided by an infinity of intermediate points, and so on ad infinitum. We can say there is a "change" that occurs since an entity is now at point A, now at point B; it changes from point A to point B. However, if there is no continuity between points A and B, then these points are not different aspects of the same movement but, rather, radically different points without any movement between them at all. Movement without continuity is thus not movement at all but merely discontinuous, formal, or logical *change*.[21]

According to the Greek philosopher Zeno, the problem with "discontinuous movement" is that if space is infinitely discontinuous or divisible, we would have to traverse an infinite distance of intervals in order to arrive anywhere else. Movement would therefore be impossible. The same result occurs, according to Zeno, when we understand movement as a series of temporal now-points or instants. If every unit of time is infinitely divisible, it will take an infinity of time to move from one point to any other. In both cases the problem remains the same: movement cannot be divided without destroying it. By thinking that we can divide movement into fixed, immobile stages, we spatialize, temporize, and thus immobilize it. "Discontinuous movement" is simply the *difference* between divisible snapshots of space-time and has nothing to do with movement

at all. Therefore if we want to say that matter and images actually move, then such movement cannot emerge from discontinuity but, rather, must emerge from the twin conditions of continuity and motion: flow.[22]

Continuity and Discontinuity

Motion cannot be derived from stasis, and continuity cannot be derived from discontinuity, but the reverse is not true. Relative stasis and relative discontinuity *can* be derived from movement and continuity. If matter flows (in continuous movement), then discreteness would simply be a relative or regional stability of that flow. For example, the object and the subject would not be fundamentally separate from one another, divided by an infinite series of midway points; they would be regional stabilizations or folds of the continuous line between and through them. In the same way that the spatial points A and B presuppose the continuity of the line AB on which they are points, discrete and static beings presuppose the flow of matter of which they are folds, like the foam of an ocean wave.[23]

Here is the crux of the problem of the movement: either we begin with it or we never get it. This is a fundamental question for aesthetics. Either we begin with discrete and static images frozen in the subjective Apollonian mind or in a model image and have to say that motion is merely relative to something else, or we begin with the flow of matter and are able to explain both movement and stasis as relative or folded forms of images in motion. All the discrete images in the world will never give birth to a single moving image. The static image is nothing more than the "dead and artificial reorganization of movement by the mind," as Bergson writes.[24] Images are more like shimmering gemstones, shells, and sand washed ashore by the turbulent flows of watery Thetis—as Valéry writes in "Naissance de Vénus":

> Out of her mother's depths, still cold and steaming,
> Look, on the belabored sill of storms, the flesh
> Bitterly vomited up by the sea to the sun,
> Delivers itself from the diamonds of turmoil.
>
> Her smile comes to being, and along her white arms,
> (Be-gloomed by the orient of a shoulder's bruise)
> Follows the pure jewels of watery Thetis,
> And her tress blazes a shiver along her flanks.[25]

Movement and stasis, continuity and discreteness are therefore, not opposed. They are two aspects or ways of describing the same *process* or flow of matter. It is thus more appropriate to distinguish between two dimensions or axes of movement: extensive and intensive. Along the first axis, extensive movement is made up of units of space-time *pace* Zeno. It is quantitative, measurable. Extensive movement is movement as change of place, locomotion, or translation. It moves from one discrete point to another by changing places. It is nothing other than the difference or change between points.

Along the second axis, movement is intensive and qualitative. It is a change in the whole, a transformation. In the example of the line AB, it is "already motion that has drawn the line"[26] to which A and B have been added afterward as its endpoints. A and B, subject and object, presuppose the movement and continuity of the line on which they are points. The division into A and B is always a division *of something*, an attempt to impose arbitrary divisions on continuous movement. Intensive movement is already primary, but we imagine it is not in order to explain it later as derived from something else. According to Bergson, however, "It is movement which is anterior to immobility."[27] Thus extensive movement is simply a regional or relative movement within a larger intensive movement. When an extensive movement occurs from A to B, the whole AB undergoes a qualitative or intensive transformation or change, like a wave.[28] An extensive point is nothing other than a stabilization or fold in an intensive flow.

For example, the difference between extensive and intensive motion can be seen, among other places,[29] in cinema. On the one hand, film is nothing other than a series of static freeze-frames moving extensively from point A to point B across a lens and through a beam of light. However, these discrete frames are also nothing other than images on a single vibrating and continuous strip of celluloid. The condition for the extensive movement of a frame is the intensive topological transformation of the whole reel. Furthermore, what seem to be discrete shots of different people and things extensively moving on the screen are also continuous flows of modulated light from the projector. The waves of light are continuously vibrating and changing in order to give the appearance of discrete persons and things on the screen. All perceived division and extensive movement are predicated on the intensive continuum upon which they are the topological regions, like boats bobbing on the ocean.

Bergson wrote that cinema was a bad description of perception, as if we perceive only snapshots of reality plus movement and get continuous

reality. He is correct that this is a bad theory of perception, and it seems to be part of cinema from the perspective of the viewing subject who experiences the "illusion of movement" when people "move around" on the screen. However, from the perspective of the movement of matter itself, this is an inaccurate description of the cinema. The material conditions of cinema presuppose both the continuous intensive change of celluloid and flows of light and, at the same time, the extensive movement of relatively discrete figures on the screen and photos across the lens. They are two aspects or dimensions of the same motion. Films like *La Jetée* (1962) and *San Soleil* (1983) by Chris Marker, for example, demonstrate this explicitly by filming photographs and for extended durations where there is no visible movement on the screen or any characters doing anything. In this case, the viewer sees a seemingly immobile photo whose very conditions of extensive "stasis" are the intensive *motion* of its material body (celluloid and light). By inverting the relationship between perceived extensive and intensive motions in film, the true material-kinetic structure of cinema is revealed directly to the viewing audience.

All movement is therefore revealed as both extensive and intensive at the same time. The two occur as dimensions of the same process, but the former is always derived from the latter and not the other way around. Snapshots, for example, are aspects or dimensions of the material flow of celluloid and light, but continuous celluloid and light can never be the product of discrete snapshots. The two are present together when we watch a film, like the latitude and longitude of a kinesthetic cartography.

Pedesis

So far, we have said that the material conditions of the image flow in continuous motion and that these flows have an extensive and intensive aspect or dimension. However, for these flows to be capable of intersection, composite creation, and thus of producing images, they must also be capable of *curvature*—like the curved smile and long white arms of Venus in Paul Valéry's poem or the twisting appendages of Parmigianino's *Madonna with the Long Neck* (1534–1540).

Pedesis (from the proto-Indo-European [PIE] root **ped-*, meaning "foot") is the motion of autonomous self-transport: the motion of the foot to walk, to run, to leap, to dance unpredictably. Matter never flows in straight lines.[30]

The concept of pedesis is derived from two of the most important kinetic discoveries of twentieth-century physics: Einstein's kinetic theory

of matter (1915) and Heisenberg's quantum uncertainty principle (1927). In the first, Einstein argued that all matter is a product of the stochastic or pedetic motion of innumerable smaller materials—molecules, atoms, and so on. For example, the atoms of *gases* move faster and farther, while those of *fluids* less so, and those of *solids* even less. All matter, Einstein showed, was not only in motion but also *in pedetic* or *Brownian motion*. Each movement is continuous with its previous position, but where it will go after that is indeterminate. The macroscopic conclusion is that the form of matter is fundamentally kinetic or kinomorphic, but also fundamentally and irreducibly pedetic.

However, by showing that all matter was in turbulent or pedetic motion, Einstein introduced a fundamental kinetic uncertainty and unpredictability into the heart of being, initially suggested by Ludwig Boltzmann. Since this discovery, science has been completely unable to produce a successful deterministic theory of turbulent motion beyond minimally probabilistic models. The description of kinetic turbulence goes all the way back to the Roman poet Lucretius, and the precise kinetic structure remains one of the last, and greatest, unsolved problems of classical physics.[31] The unsolved problem of classical turbulence, combined with Einstein's kinetic theory of matter, has had an enormous ontological consequence: that all matter is in motion and that all motion is fundamentally nondeterministic. This, and the related theory of entropy, has given rise to an entire field of chaos theory and nonlinear dynamics.[32] Heisenberg was said to have once remarked that he wanted to ask God two questions.[33] The first was "Why is general relativity so weird?" and the second was "How do you explain turbulence?" He then said that he was certain God would know the answer to the first question.

In the second kinetic theory, Heisenberg showed that there is a fundamental limit to the precision with which the position and momentum of a particle can be known at the same time. The more precise the position of a quantum field, the more it looks like a stable particle and the less we know about its momentum. The less precise the position of a field, the more it looks like a wave and more we know about its momentum through its diffraction pattern or waveform. In other words, motion cannot be reduced to position without destroying its motion, and the trajectory of a position cannot be predicted without the fundamental uncertainty of motion. This fundamental uncertainty about the motion of matter is not just an epistemological effect of observation.[34] It has been experimentally shown that this unpredictable or pedetic effect is inherent in the motion of the matter waves of all quantum objects.[35] The uncertainty principle and indeterminacy are fundamental properties of all quantum systems. Indeterminacy,

however, is not random or even probabilistic because position only occurs in continuous relation to momentum. Heisenberg thus showed that even at the quantum level, matter in motion is both relational and indeterminate; that is, pedetic.

Pedesis may be irregular and unpredictable, but it is not *random*. What is interesting about movement is not simply that it is pedetic but also that it is through pedesis and turbulence that metastable formations and emergent orders are possible. In contrast, the ontology of randomness is quite bleak. In a purely random ontology, all of matter would be moving randomly at all times. Since fluctuations from disorder to order are physically rare, the likelihood that anything like the sun or even our galaxy would just suddenly pop into existence would be unimaginably rare and would likely fall apart immediately owing to further random motion. It would even be statistically possible for a human brain to pop into existence just long enough to think a thought and then disperse.[36] The very idea of a purely random motion presupposes that it was not affected by anything else previously, which presupposes that it was the first thing and before it was nothing, which is a version of the internally contradictory hypothesis of *ex nihilo* creation: something from nothing. The ontology of random motion claims that from pure disorder comes high-level composite order. Given the high level of order and complexity in our present age, randomness is demonstrably not the case.

Pedetic motion, on the other hand, is not random at all but rather emerges from and is influenced by other motions—just not in an absolutely necessary or completely determined way. Unlike randomness, pedetic motion is not unpredictable because it is *not influenced* by any other motions; rather, motion is pedetic *precisely because* it occurs in relation to other motions. It is the interrelation and mutual influence of matter with itself that causes its unpredictable character. Over a long period of time, the pedetic motion of matter combines and stabilizes into certain patterns, synchronies, and relations, giving the appearance of stability and solidity, only to become turbulent again and enter into new conjoined relations. A correlate of this attribute is that if matter is currently in motion, it must have always been in motion. If not, there would have been a time when there was no motion and motion emerged out of something immobile, which is an *ex nihilo* contradiction. If matter was always in motion and all motion is fundamentally pedetic, then it also follows that the motion of matter has always been pedetic.

Unlike randomness, pedesis is not defined strictly by disorder. Turbulence is a disordered motion, but it is a disordered motion that is capable of producing order because it responds to itself and others. Nonrandom disordered motion