

Varga, Tünde:

Adventures in Pairs/ Double Adventures

Albert, Ádám: Never Take a Trip Alone.

One of the most significant characteristics of Albert's works is their complexity. This is no pure chance, but due to his profound scientific research based method, and his divergent mode of thinking. Albert's background researches for preparing a work are so much in depth that the critic has hardly any job left for further study in order to review the work. For instance, in a previous work *Hunt the Key: globalization and real estate on the 'most emblematic' (Buda)Pest street* based on the visualization of social networks, he employed his findings of a research related to the experimental typography (typotype) of Neurath and Arntz for presenting a thorough socio-political criticism revealing the network of the Király (King) street estates racket. His research based working method also surfaces in his recent work *Never Take a Trip Alone*. Here he places the query of the history of representation and the history of seeing which the 17th-century perspective box entails with the oeuvre of two influential figures of cultural history Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Alexander von Humbolt in the gallery space by remodelling their work studies—the symbolic monuments and memorials of their real and imaginary adventures—within these boxes.

The complexity of Albert's work however does not derive solely from the integration of these study interiors into the perspective box format: the intricate interpretative network gains another dimension as he juxtaposes the visual experience the baroque device offers with the visualizing method of the latest computer based animation, which literally stages (by simulating the visitor's or the owner's moving around in the room) the darting around of the eye (which is coded into the perspective box) in the rooms. The third piece of Albert's work is the traditional perspectival depiction of the rooms in a copper engraving, while the fourth is also a two-piece coloured drawing, which emphasizes an emblematic object of each room, the ladder and the monocular.¹ The four-piece work made by different visualising techniques, which inhabits (not only in a physical sense) the gallery space thereby creates a well designed installation in which all four pieces reflect (up)on each other. While the inscriptions on the paper based drawings, *pictorial surface* and *representational canon* explicitly refer to the historical scope involved in Albert's work, the traditional perspective design of the engravings

¹ Compare: SZÁZADOS, László: *Albert Ádám*, in: *Contemporary Art in Hungary 2011/2012*, ed. SPENGLER Katalin, Budapest, Absolut Media Kft, 2011, 200-213.

juxtaposed with the viewing position the perspective boxes requires, make up a more sophisticated referential grid to the changing role of the canon, and that of the viewer. With this Albert in a way re-enacts Martin Jay's observation that "the scopic regimes of modernity may be best understood as a contested terrain rather than a harmoniously integrated complex of visual theories and practices".²

From the aspect of representation Albert's work connects (and inserts into the present) two significant eras, with the help of a device whose cultural role has essentially changed, in which artist and scientists (artist-scientists) were pre-occupied with the art and science of vision, in many cases with quite similar problems, yet offering different answers according to the epoch's scientific views. One is the Northern experimental optics and representation, which earned its present significance in the history of art with Svetlana Alpers' groundbreaking book *The Art of Describing* as the mode of representation that is radically different from its Italian counterpart. As it is well known, Alpers claims that the difference of the Northern and the Italian tradition of representation can be conceived as the difference of the descriptive and the narrative painting.³ As Alpers points out, this is the time when besides the camera obscura the microscope appears as the device which by helping human sight opens a window into a new world and shapes the concept of scale. The difference of the two representational and mental approaches derives from the Dutch faith in seeing and in the empirical observation of the images generated by both devices, the microscope and the camera obscura.

In Alpers' view this can be detected in Kepler's works, who, in order to come up with his groundbreaking observations, had to separate the mechanisms of the eye from its bodily determinations. As she notes, Kepler's "strategy was to separate the physical problem of the formation of retinal images (the world seen) from the psychological problems of perception and sensation".⁴ Alpers conceives this separation of the body and the eye as fundamental for the Dutch representational mode. She claims, that the mechanisms of the Dutch perspective box, which plays on the deception of the eye in depicting mostly cathedrals and home interiors is an obvious example for the separation of the eye and the world seen.⁵ At the same

² Martin JAY: Scopic Regimes of Modernity, in: *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal FOSTER, Seattle, Bay Press, 1988, 3-4. He claims, that "beginning with the Renaissance and the scientific revolution, modernity has been normally considered resolutely ocularcentric." Jay, 3. o. *Uo.*, 3.)

³ Svetlana ALPERS: *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art since the Seventeenth Century*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984, (Introduction) xx.

⁴ ALPERS: *I. m.*, 33-36. As she notes Kepler "was led to define vision as the formation of a retinal image, which he significantly called a picture". 34.

⁵ David BOMFORD: *Perspective, Anamorphosis, and Illusion. Seventeenth-Century Dutch Peep Shows*, in: *Vermeer Studies*, ed. Ivan GASKELL and Michiel JONKER, Washington, National Gallery, 1998. 125-134.

time according to the Dutch concept, the painting is the space in which the painted world and the world seen collides. To put it differently, the mode of depiction which experiments with the anamorphosis is an indispensable basis of the perspective box, while in the Northern theory of representation it is “not a moral but an epistemological view: the recognition that there is no escape from representation”.⁶

The other point designated in Albert’s work is Goethe’s time. Goethe’s optical experiments are also a crucial part of Jonathan Crary’s examinations of vision.⁷ In Crary’s view the 19th century brought the socio-economic change which grounds the present culture of visuality. These changes influenced fundamentally the image of the individual subject as it appears in scientific and cultural discourses. In the second half of the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th century a wide range of such sub-artistic visual entertainment appeared which were enthusiastically attended by people but were not highly valued by the educated classes. Most of these phenomena like for example the 18th-century pleasure gardens (like Raleigh, Vauxhall and Kensington in London), exhibition rooms such as the Egyptian Hall or Don Saltero’s business oriented, private coffee house exhibition of exotic paraphernalia (also known as the first public museum of London), or the panorama and diorama paintings aimed at being pure entertainment or creating a “reality effect”.⁸ The problem with these easy stimuli as Peter de Bolla’s examination of the English scene shows was that the newly emergent “middling sorts” opted for verisimilitude (vresamblance) in their commissions. As de Bolla notes: “while the professional and aspiring middling sorts were advocating the commissioning and exchange of likeness, high cultural theory was doing its best to trash what was far and away the predominant form of the day”.⁹ It was the vested interest of the elite to aspire art to the position of cultural education and aesthetic interest. The despised lower forms therefore were made to seem solely the products of economic interest. The reasons amongst others were the proliferation of visual spectacles of the Fairs—which by this time were considered to be vulgar—as well as the renewed power of the art market which the conservative values of the

Bomford’s study is an overview of the few surviving perspective boxes, with the detailed description considering the method of their construction.

⁶ ALPERS: *I. m.*, 34.

⁷ Jonathan CRARY: *The Techniques of the Observer*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 1991.

⁸ Richard ALTICK: *The Shows of London*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1978, 16., Richard Steele devotes quite a long passage to the phenomena in the Tatler. *The Tatler*, 28th June, 1709.; The first public museum in England was the Ashmolean, based on a collection Ashmole inherited from Tradescant and donated to the University of Oxford. Compare: Jeffrey ABT: *The Origins of the Public Museum*, in: Sharon MACDONLAD, ed. *Companion to Museum Studies*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2006, 115-134. or Tony BENNETT: *The Birth of the Museum. History, Theory, Politics*, New York, Routledge, 1995.

⁹ Peter DE BOLLA, *The Education of the Eye. Painting, Landscape, and Architecture in 18th-century Britain*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003, 29. See also: Andrew MCCLELLAN, *Watteau’s Dealer. Gersaint and the Marketing of Art in 18th Century Paris*, in: *Art Bulletin*, 1996, vol. 78 no. 3.

Academy were to counter.¹⁰ From the 19th century on, a whole series of experimental optical devices appeared such as the stereoscope (circa 1830), the kaleidoscope (1815), the thaumatrope (1825), the phenakistoscope (1831), the zootrope (circa 1830), or for that matter, the kaiserpanorama, which is in a way akin to the peepshows.¹¹ Their reception however was not too congenial.

The peep-show was condemned to suffer a similar fate as the wide-ranging 19th-century experimental optical devices: by the 18th century it is discarded from the realm of artistic and scientific intrigue to the gadgets of picture-showmen at fair side-shows as raree-shows, or presumably due to a similar socio-cultural misunderstanding it was degraded to a children's amusement.¹² The perspective box, nevertheless, can also be seen as the precursor to, or an early but forgotten representational mode of the issue, through which Crary structures the 19th-century altered system of perception and the pertinent physiological researches. The three-dimensional image of the perspective box, that is, the illusion of three-dimensionality is based on monocular vision: the peephole is designed for one eye only, because it is impossible to judge scale or depth with one eye. On the other hand, the image stands forth only if the "perspective constructions of the different panels" coincide "at the single point of the peephole".¹³ The image on the panels which are made up of both anamorphic and perspectival distortions appear as a broken image for binocular vision, and can only be viewed from the designated position to see the intended illusion. In Bomford's view, the artist had to design the box so that the vanishing point or the multiple vanishing points had to be placed opposite the peephole.¹⁴

The changes Crary outlines however move to the question of binocular vision and the newly discovered physiological aspects of the body in generating vision. According to Crary,

¹⁰ See for example: The London chapter of William Wordsworth's autobiographical poem *The Prelude* with special respect to the description of the Bartholomew Fair. For a detailed analysis from the aspect of elite and vulgar culture. William WORDSWORTH, *The Prelude, A Northon Critical Edition*, szerk. M. H. Abrams, Stephen Gill, London and New York, Northon and Company, 1979. or see: e. g. Tony BENNETT, *I. m.*, John BARELL, *The Public Prospect and the Private View. The Politics of Taste in 18th-Century Britain*, in: *Reading Landscape. Country—City—Capital*, ed. Simon Pugh, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1990. For the question put in a different light see: Adrien JOHNS: *The Nature of the Book. Print and Knowledge in the Making*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1998, 389.

¹¹ Experiments to achieve the effect of three-dimensionality did not start in the 19th century: the accounts of the camera obscura based experiments with the help of lenses by Christoph Kóhlhans (1677), or William Molyneux (1692) can be mentioned, or that of the zograscope (circa 1740). Erin C. BLAKE: *Zograscopes and the Mapping of Polite Society*, in: *New Media 1740-1915.*, ed. Lisa GITELMAN és Geoffrey PINGREE, Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 2003, 3.

¹² Compare the painting entitled *The Peep Show* (1740); mistakenly attributed to William Hogarth.

¹³ BOMFORD: *I. m.*, 125.

¹⁴ BOMFORD: *I. m.*, 129. Moreover, as he notes, the perspective box is a very complex device, "it is a multiple anamorphosis, in which two or more distorted images, inclined at different angles, must correct themselves in unison and join together", 127.

Goethe's experiments with afterimages can also be seen as the question of physiology. As he points out, the epistemological doubt that vision cannot univocally be accounted for or that it is neither a geometrical nor a physiological invariable can partly be detected in the studies on afterimages. In Crary's opinion this shift can best be shown by the increased interest in stereoscopic vision. The stereoscope played on the effects of binocular disparity: the two disparate images "flashed" upon both observant eyes, were synthesised by the mind into a unified image. This created the sense of depth and distance in the viewer as if it was a three dimensional picture, yet the viewer could not grasp the whole field of vision. For the gain of depth however the price was the loss of the frame. This picture deprived vision from the sense of the traditional perspectival depiction's frame. The viewer was thus immersed in the sight, and could not withdraw to the safe position of the one-eyed, Cartesian view point, that rendered the ruling, but nonetheless delusory unified subject position. The vision thus could not be treated as separate from the observing subjects' physiology. The stereoscopic picture's novelty was that it subverted the traditional function of optical signs: it is a picture that has no unifying order or logic. As Crary notes, while "perspective implied a homogenous and potentially metric space, the stereoscope discloses a fundamentally disunited and aggregate field of disjunct elements".¹⁵

The perspective box—which is not quite understandably ignored by Crary—gives the impression of the loss of the frame, just as it is in the stereoscopic image, despite the fact that the images drafted on the inner sides of the box had to be made by taking perspectival geometry into consideration for producing the complete image. The loss of the frame and the illusion of three-dimensionality implies however an aggregate view which "invites the eye to dart about" instead of the fixed monocular gaze. From this aspect the peep show antedates the stereoscope (and especially that of the hybrid stereoscopic peep show known as the Kaiserpanorama or the world panorama), but the substantive difference is that while the stereoscope creates the illusion of space by the binocular disparity of the two eyes, the perspective box achieves this effect by the disorientation of the one eye.¹⁶ Since the pleasure derives from the loss of control over the sight, unfortunately both devices were shortly appropriated as a visual entertainment, for that matter mass entertainment and in most cases not surprisingly for showing erotic or exotic images to enhance the pleasure effect.

¹⁵ Jonathan CRARY, *The Techniques of the Observer*, London: MIT Press, An October Book, 1991, 125.

¹⁶ Jonathan CRARY: *The Suspension of Perception*. New York, MIT Press, 1999, 135-140., See also: Stephan OETTERMANN: *The Panorama. History of a Mass Medium*, New York, Zone Books, 1997, 229-232., and Walter BENJAMIN: *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, Verso, 1997.

Nonetheless, Hoogstraten's aims must have been more ambitious—as his peep show is remarkably more complex—than merely producing a device for pure delight. His most well known and most intricate work considering both technical as well as theoretical aspects is the *Peepshow with Views of the Interior of a Dutch House*, housed now in the National Gallery, London. Hoogstraten's perspective box presents a complex network of experimental and artistic references, of which Brusati assumes that it was made for the pleasure of a sophisticated and erudite collector. Brusati attributes several functions to the 17th-century experiments with the perspective-box: on the one hand, he sees it as a research tool suitable for scientific examination of nature.¹⁷ On the other hand, it is a device in art which is fit for raising admiration towards the ingenuity and the skill of the artist, or, in the case of Hoogstraaten's perspective box, for the artist's self-representation. The two are also interrelated in a way: the London-box points at the correlation of the knowledge and the representation of nature and therefore implicitly to the unreliability of this knowledge by stating the deception of the eye, which is the uttermost achievement of the painter, feasible only by the science of nature.¹⁸ As for the question of self-representation and painterly eruditeness, Hoogstraten applies the Northern tradition of “kustkammer painting”, which “assert the all-encompassing power of images”, in order to supply his work with the abundance of pictorial references.¹⁹ The walls of the altogether nine rooms opening into each other present several paintings, one is “The Victory of Minerva over Ignorance” on the wall left to the door, which can be seen from the peephole on the left side of the box, and is juxtaposed with the “Contest of Apollo and Pan”, which decorates the second room's wall and is only partly seen from the right peephole. The juxtaposition serves as the allegory of ignorance and insight and makes a claim for the knowledge gained through art, or, to put it differently, “painting presented as the universal science of representation”.²⁰ But there are plenty of further references which state the power of painting or that of the artist: in Brusati's view, Hoogstraten by placing several hints referring to the creator of the painting (as for

¹⁷ Celeste BRUSATI: *Artifice and Illusion. The Art and Writing of Samuel Hoogstraten*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

¹⁸ At the centre of Hoogstraten's painting, the Feigned Cabinet Door, his gold medallion which he won for his artistic virtuosity at the court of Ferdinand III in Vienna., and a receipt reading “Received by Samuel von Hoogstraten the 12th of February 1655 in Vienna”. Compare: Justina SPENCER: *Looking into Samuel van Hoogstraten's Perspective Box*, 2008. unpublished MA thesis. McGill University, Montreal, 67-68.

¹⁹ BRUSATI: *I. m.*, 177-78. As Brusati notes, Hoogstraten associates his imaginary house with the realm of *Pictura* 179.

²⁰ BRUSATI: 178.

example a letter addressed to him or his wife's family arms) emphasises his control over the work.²¹

As it was in common with perspective boxes, Hoogstraten hid the original pyramid form of the perspective box, which is the physical vehicle for the perspectival and anamorphic images into a nicely decorated wooden cube. The anamorphic images, considered as the Other of perspective, had to barrel down toward the vanishing point and thus put into a pyramid like form. Although the process is not entirely known, it is assumed that designing the box relied on trial and error based experiments. Perspective boxes usually had only one peephole and since it was vital to have a source of light in order to see the painting inside the box, the frontal piece was made of a transparent membrane (for example in the case of the Copenhagen box there was a window like slot above the peephole). The light source of Hoogastraten's London box is also the frontal piece, but the difference is that there are two distinct peepholes on each side of the front. Hoogstraten's aim was to provide a view from each hole which does not only convince the viewer of the artist's ingenuity, but as it was the case with peep shows, the eye is pulled into the sight or sucked into the picture plane by the loss of the judgement of scale. According to Brusati, the box creates a unique physical relationship with its viewer: on the one hand, it provides an insight into a world normally not seen, on the other hand, "the viewer's eye is quite literally held captive at the juncture of its own world and that of the artist's crafting".²² The artist replicates the image making activity of the eye, in his words, "Hoogstraten not only produces a replica of visible nature in the form of a picture, but also a counterfeit of the picture-making activity of the eye".²³ The painted image, due to the loss of scale, enhances the illusion of sense perception thus raises the delusion of physical presence and thereby strengthens the pleasure encoded into the activity of peeping. In order to raise this effect Hoogstraten had to build on the technique of anamorphosis.

The precursor is the above mentioned Keplerian model based on experiments with the camera obscura. The image according to the Keplerian view is projected onto the curved surface of the retina, thus the re-enactment of the technique of the anamorphosis is so to say given. In Alpers' view "Hoogstraaten takes the stance toward art's pictures that Kepler had taken toward the pictures on the retina."²⁴ Although Jay conceives anamorphosis as the alternative of the fixed, unblinking, Cyclops-like, single-eye gaze of perspectival vision that

²¹ BRUSATI: *I. m.*, 181.

²² BRUSATI: *I. m.*, 181.

²³ BRUSATI: *I. m.*, 186.

²⁴ ALPERS: *I. m.*, 62.

is, the co-existence of the divergent orders, the perspective box can rather be seen as a matrix in which the productive synergy of the two modes of depicting reflects upon each other. In Grotenboer's view, the peripheral angle which is required by anamorphic depictions, confronts the viewer with the workings of the perspective, and more importantly "with how perspective shapes and controls our visual understanding".²⁵ Although the anamorphosis as technique can be found as early as Leonardo da Vinci's and Albrecht Dürer's works, the theoretical basis for applying perspective on curved surfaces was worked out by Francois Nicéron, with the aim of presenting the Other of perspective.²⁶ In the case of Hoogstraten's box this Northern concept of perspective can be detected in the idea of multiple vanishing points.²⁷ The anamorphic depiction enclosed into the perspective box renders the aggregate images fathomable as the eye darts around.

In Albert's work we can only see the anamorphic depiction deployed by Hoogstraaten to the extent that the perspectival images drafted on the inner plane of the box are seen as a mode of anamorphosis, yet the three-dimensional illusion sands forth with peeping into the hole. Albert's work at the same time openly states the illusion of vision: on the one hand, because unlike in the case of the 17th-century peepshows he does not hide the pyramid form of the box into a cube. On the other hand, because the vision is not only available through the peephole cut under or beside the "window" that serves as the source of light, but the whole frontal piece is made of a transparent plexi-glass, and the hole is cut into the middle, thus it is not the only prescribed position for the visitor, it merely designates the point or position from which the monocular eye sees the unified image of the study rooms. Thus Albert confronts the viewer with the delusion coded into the representational technique of the perspective box in a very sophisticated way and thereby invites the viewer to study the secret, who is not only trapped through his or her eyes or to put it differently, arrested by scopophilic pleasure, but also through his or her mind and body, since the visitor is addressed to wander around the box in the gallery space as it raises his or her "scientific" or if you wish childlike curiosity. The perplexing experience invites to observe the images which seemingly conforms the "life-like" or "real" image of prespectival geometry, but the box summons the eye into the picture plane and forces it to dart around the same way as it was in the case of its 17th-century precursor—

²⁵ Hanneke GROOTENBOER: *The Rhetoric of Perspective. Realism and Illusion in Seventeenth-century Dutch Still-Life Painting*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005. SPENCER, *I. m.*, 4.

²⁶ Jean-Francois NICERON: *La Perspective curieuse ou magie artificielle des effets merveilleux*, Paris, 1638., Leonardo da Vinci, Codex Atlanticus (1478-1519);

²⁷ Compare: SPENCER: *I. m.*

one of the reasons why 17th-century experimenting artists thought to contribute to the science/study of vision.

Since the front discloses the complete box, the viewer is compelled to step back and check the sight with two eyes, thus Albert also counts with binocular disparity and the discontent of the two images seen. The viewer is impelled to move, or, if you like, dance around the box(es) thus producing an amusing choreography in order to be able to observe and check the spectacle: it creates the imperative to move back and forth, to and fro, peep into the hole, then check the box very closely by almost setting on the screen so as to be able to see the interior by two eyes, then circle around the box, if the trick becomes more obvious, and finally return to the peephole again—in a way it is the curious dance of the eye and the conscious mind reflecting on each other. Since neither the pyramid form, nor the inner structure of the box is disguised, Albert's work retells the cultural history of the questions of seeing, representation and perception in such a way that the visitor literally experiences it as he or she plays an active role in construing the story. On the other hand, the (aesthetic) experience works equally well at different levels, for the insider expert who is familiar with the cultural history of the representational canon as well as for those who are only confronted by the void between sense perception and representation.

The story however is not so simple: instead of re-presenting the colours of the oilprint which served as the starting point for Albert's work or the colours of the memorial rooms' furniture or other objects like books, Albert's interior bears a conventional design and monochrome grey finish. Grey is the traditional base from which colours unfold, or onto which colours are applied and by which the spatiality of the depicted image is further enhanced or even created. According to Alpers, colours are a unique question in the theoretical treaties of Dutch artists like that of Hoogstraten's book on painting. The Italian difference of *colore* and *disegno* as it was treated by Vasari does not apply here. Alpers claims, that for Hoogstraten as it is outlined in his book *Inleyding tot de Hooge Schoole der Schilderkonst* (1678) the Dutch term *teykenkunst* incorporates both meaning: the *disegno* and the *colore* and therefore it shows the Dutch emphasis of representation or copying of nature unlike the Italian differentiation of the "ideal" and the "real".²⁸ As Alpers points out, since there was no thorough scientific knowledge about the fracturing of light through lenses, in all attempts to describe the perception of the image it was assumed that the *idola* that is, the idea itself "slips through the eye and therefore to the brain".²⁹ In her words: „as we move between

²⁸ ALPERS: *I. m.*, 38.

²⁹ ALPERS: *I. m.*, 36.

the model of the eye, Dutch images, and Dutch texts about images, we are charting a territory in which the representation of appearance—Kepler’s *ut pictura, ita visio*—not only defines images to the exclusion of distinctions between drawing and painting, but also dominates the artist’s sense of self and invalidates his very mind”.³⁰ The absence of colours in Albert’s work point at the fundamental problems of the history of representation (as Albert notes the representational canon) through the duality of Northern and Italian representation: the descriptive Dutch representation which copies nature by colours and does not stick rigorously to the central perspective on the one hand, and the Italian, which attributes special importance to the ideal rendered by drawing as it starts out from the observer, on the other.

Albert’s grey surfaces thus emphasise that the factual world is never given in representation and render multiple interpretative levels. On the one hand, grey can be conceived as the absence of colour, the colour which precedes the depiction of forms, and from this aspect Albert stages his work as the counterpoint of Hoogstraten’s (or the Dutch) idea of the unity of colour and design of *teykenkunst*. The absence of colour in Albert’s work is a disruptive element to the workings of the perspective box: it does not entirely allow for the mind to get absorbed into the sight with the immersion of the eye.³¹ On the other hand, art historical and theoretical questions related to the dispute of colour and design are re-enacted through an art form which denies both the unified subject (preceding sense perception) and the objectivity of vision (independent of representation). Hoogstraten’s *teykenkunst* does not allow this interpretation which claims the primacy of *disegno* as the representation based on the selection and ordering of phenomena opposed to *colore* based on their appearance. Albert’s box—which can also be seen as Hoogstraten’s counterpoint—however provokes the reevaluation of the question. The revival of this dichotomy (emanating from the *paragone* of Venetian and Florentine painting) manifests in a chapter of the *Querelle* of the French Academy as the duel between the advocates of Poussin and Rubens, and later (with the transmission of e.g. Charles Batteux)³² in Kant’s *Third Critique*, who conceives design as the rightful object of the judgement of taste—as Kant notes “it is what pleases by its form, that is the fundamental prerequisite for taste”—in contrast with colour, which he sees only as what gives “brilliance to the sketch” and only “part of the charm”, therefore raises sensual pleasure

³⁰ ALPERS: *I. m.*, 40.

³¹ For a detailed analysis of the problem of Cartesian in connection with linear, central perspective See: Lyle MASSEY: *Picturing Space, Displacing Bodies. Anamorphosis in Early Modern Theories of Perspective*, Pennsylvania University Press, 2007.

³² See, for example, Roger DE PILES, Dialogue upon Colouring (1673). In *Art in Theory: An Anthology of changing Ideas, 1648-1815*, eds C HARRISON, P WOOD, J GAIGER, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000.185-192.; Charles BATTEUX: *Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe*, 1746.

(thus it has an aim), so it cannot be the object of aesthetic judgement.³³ In Kant's theory the unity and validity of conception is guaranteed by the mind's transcendental viewpoint, and thus the arbitrariness of sense perception is eliminated.³⁴ It is the synthesizing capacity of the mind based on apperception which grounds the validity of universal laws. But then with the question we return to the problem of *disegno*, that is, to the question of the projection of the mind (probably the reminiscent of the Platonic *eidos*)³⁵ as it relates to the position of the observer, the position of the subject thus created and thereby the conditions of (gaining) knowledge.³⁶ Linear perspective on a theoretical level would guarantee the position designated for the single-eye viewer, while design is its mathematical, that is, scientific justification. The observing mind—in a *circulus viciosus*—verifies the appropriateness of its own projection in the representation governed by the laws of mathematics. This however requires the primacy of design as the mind's concept in contrast to the disruptive charms of colour.³⁷ The depiction of even minute details in the 18th and early 19th century means also a problem because of the enchantment or the distraction of the contemplative and (for Crary) the attentive mind.

Albert's work opens up a playing field for the divergent representational forms in a compelling way. The fact that the illusion of unifying vision the peep-show as a representation technique entails (that of the delusion of three-dimensionality) is played off against the absorption of the monocular eye darting around the three-dimensional image of the box confronts the observer that he/she is not in control of the sight, not only because the colours distract him or her, but because the eye can roam around uncontrolled (in Hoogstraten's

³³ [Colours] may no doubt, in their own way, enliven the object for sensation, but make it really worth looking at and beautiful they cannot. Indeed, more often than not the requirements of the beautiful form restrict them to a very narrow compass, and, even where charm is admitted, it is only this form that gives them a place of honour. Immanuel KANT: *The Critique of Judgement* <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/k/kant/immanuel/k16j/> 14. §. Kant's opinion fits into the tradition, although he does not mention the source, he seems to echo Poussin's view on colour from *Of the Charms of Color*: „Colors in painting are a snare to persuade the eye, like the charm of the verse in poetry.” Nicolas POUSSIN: *Observation on Painting* In *Art in Theory: An Anthology of changing Ideas*, 1648-1815, eds. C HARRISON, P WOOD, J GAIGER, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000, 71-75, 75.

³⁴We can find a similar observation related to the transcendence of sense perception in Kittler's book. Compare, Friedrich A. KITTLER: *Optische Medien, Berliner Vorlesung*, 1999. Berlin, Merve Verlag, 2002, 120.

³⁵ Compare, Ervin PANOFSKY: *Idea, Icon*, 1968.

³⁶ Compare, Donna HARAWAY: *The Persistence of Vision*, in: *Visual Culture Reader*. Nicholas MIRZOEFF, ed. New York: Routledge, 1998. 195.

³⁷ The changing nature of terminology can be detected in Addison argument in *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, where he conceives colours as responsible for the greater pleasures of the imagination. Nevertheless, it should be noted that that imagination is not used in the Coleridgean (-Kantian) sense of esemplastic power. „There is a second kind of beauty that we find in several products in art and nature which does not work in the imagination with that warmth and violence as the beauty that appears in the property in our species but it is apt however to raise in us a secret delight and a kind of fondness of the places of objects in which we discover it. This consist either in the gaiety and variety of colour in the symmetry and proportion of parts in the arrangement and disposition of bodies, or in a just mixture and concurrence of all together. Among these several kinds of beauty the eye takes most delight in colours.” 1712 June 23. Joseph ADDISON, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, In *The Spectator*, vol. 2. New York, Samuel Marks, 1826, 134-135.

interior) at its pleasure, and get lost in the proliferation of minute details. The entrapment of the eye thus does not only derive from the illusion, but from the scopophilic pleasure of the eye darting around the details of the room.

The enumeration of non-significant details in a description serves to create the reality effect, in other words the referential illusion (as the technique of realist narrative).³⁸ Namely, the reader is so much absorbed into the proliferant descriptive details that he or she gives in and accepts that the insignificant details indirectly provide the accurateness of description and the illusion of reality. This question reappears in Mieke Bal's and W. J. T. Mitchell's concerns on ekphrasis as the contest of narration and description, that is of *diegesis* and *mimesis*—not unlike the contest of Italian *istoria* and Northern description: the overabundance of descriptive details divert the “observer” as the images of description capture the mind and threaten to thwart the proceeding of the narrative.³⁹ Moreover it thwarts the rational unifying vision encoded into perspective. The peepshow (which furthers this trait of Northern descriptive painting) captures the eye not only by the abundance of colours, but by that of the depicted objects, so much so that it could easily get lost in the spectacle. On the bases of Alpers' Hoogstraten interpretation it could be claimed that the *prospect* falls prey to the *aspects*.⁴⁰

At this point the thematic and representational field opened up by Albert's box seems to merge: in the era which is evoked by the two study rooms such visual diversion of attention were conceived as the disruption of the workings of the mind or even that of imagination. The optical experiments which appear during the 18th and 19th centuries (like the ones with the stereoscope or with afterimages) pointed at the physiological givens of vision, the desintegrating processes of the body, and thus directed the research towards the question of regulating the attention. Although the romantic theory of representation starts from Kantian idealism and from its concept of transcendental unity, the recognition of subjective or partial sense perception point towards a new concept of the subject, in so much as the perception of the subject can no longer be seen as independent from the desintegrating processes of the body and the psyche.⁴¹ As Crary points out, in Kant's theory “all possible perception could

³⁸ Roland BARTHES: *The Reality Effect*, trans. R. CARTER, in: *French Literary Theory Today*. ed. Tzvetan TODOROV, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978. 14-16.

³⁹ William T. MITCHELL: *Picture Theory. Essays on Visual and Verbal Representation*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1994, Mieke BAL, Lecture material on Ekphrasis, Budapest, 2000, ELTE.

⁴⁰ For the question of aspect –prospect differentiation see: ALPERS, *I. m.*, 73-74. o. While seeing in a prospective way implicitly corresponds to perspective picturing, seeing in an aspect way is left as just that—simple seeing with no related kind of picturing”. 49.

⁴¹ In Crary's view “one result of the new physiological optics was to expose the idiosyncrasies of the ‘normal’ eye. Retinal afterimages, peripheral vision, binocular vision, and thresholds of attention all were studied in terms of determining quantifiable norms and parameters”. CRARY: *The Techniques of the Observer*, *i. m.* 16., see also Jonathan CRARY: *Attention and Modernity in the 19th Century*, in: *Picturing Science, Producing Art*, eds.

occur only in terms of an original synthetic unification principle, a self-cause, that stood over and above any empirical sense experiences such as vision”.⁴² Like the colour in Kant’s *Critique*, the overabundance of details was also treated as the alluring instances which thwart the mind to unify or hold the sight together (in the act of reflection) in the treatises of late 18th-, early 19th-century authors.⁴³ The preference of such endless tumult of stimuli is already treated as the characteristic of vulgar taste: for example Wordsworth describes the easy entertainments of the Bartholomew Fair in the London chapter as vulgar, because “the most despotic sense” takes over when the imagination dissolves under the pressure of stimuli. As he also notes in his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, the impulses “blunt the discriminating powers of the mind”.⁴⁴ Similarly, Coleridge does no longer conceive the microscope as the device for opening a new field of knowledge through vision, but as the metaphor for the unlearned eye lost in the vulgar thrill of microscopic details.⁴⁵

The stylized pictures of the rooms enclosed into Albert’s boxes do not only lack the colours of the original rooms but most of the decorating paraphernalia as well. Although looking around inside the box does not negate the implicit pleasure of the eye encoded into peeping, the vision in this case works less along the scenario of seduction than as a metaphor for the reflective intellect. To be more precise, it oscillates between the two: the effect of the real is disrupted by the lack of simulating realness, and thereby it gives way to the intellect. A similar problem can be detected in Wilhelm von Humboldt’s theory of language. In his *Thinking and Speaking* Humboldt sees the nature of thinking in reflecting, that is, as the act of intellect which conceives the object (Gegenstand) as a unity in differentiating himself from it.⁴⁶ This reflection however, as he notes is only possible in the medium of language. This is

Caroline A. JOHNS and Peter GALISON, New York, London, Routledge, 1998. From the aspect of the camera obscura see also: Barbara STAFFORD: *Voyage into Substance. Art, Science, Nature, and the Illusirated Travel Account, 1760—1840*. Cambridge, London, The MIT Press, 1984. with special respect to page 424.

⁴² Jonathan CRARY: *The Suspension of Perception, i. m.*, 14. He elaborates the same question in the essay entitled *Attention and Modernity in the 19th Century*, in: *Picturing Science, Producing Art*, ed. Caroline A. Jones and Peter Galison, Routledge, New York, 1998, 477.

⁴³ For the analysis of the question related the Claude-glass as the metaphor for the unified vision of the mind in romanticism, see: Arnaud MAILLET: *The Claud Glass*, Zone Books, 2004. 143-45.

⁴⁴ William Wordsworth, *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, 128. For Dryden’s complaints about the Fairs see: Peter STALLYBRASS and Allon WHITE: *The Grotesque Body and the Smithfield Muse. Authorship in the 18th Century* in: *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1986. or Reynolds’ lectures, Sir Joshua REYNOLDS: *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. WARK, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1997. William WORDSWORTH: *The Prelude*. in *Poetical Works*. ed. Thomas Hutchinson. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

⁴⁵ Samuel T. COLERIDGE: *On Poesy or Art*, in: *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross, London, Oxford University Press, 1969, 256.

⁴⁶ Humboldt’s views are influenced by Fichte’s argument on the subject. Compare e. g.: Martha B. HELFER: Herder, Fichte and Humboldt’s “Thinking and Speaking”, in: *Herder Today*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1990, 367-381.

why it is curious that he uses pictorial metaphors for illustrating his ideas: “The nature of thinking consists therefore in segmenting (Abschnitten) its own process in the process of thinking, thereby forming whole units out of certain proportions of its activity”, which he forms in the sings of language as unities (Einheiten).⁴⁷ According to Humboldt, the temporally unfolding linguistic sounds of language are necessary for reflecting, because seeing (das Auge) would not be able to differentiate the limits (Grenzen) in itself others than that of colours (Farbe), but not by the contours (Umrisse) between objects.⁴⁸ Although Humboldt subordinates vision (das Auge) operating with the differentiation of colours only to language but by positing that thinking is based on creating segments (Abschnitte), he implies the problem of sight as it is shown in Albert’s work. Although thinking is possible in language unfolding in time with sounds which emanate from the body, this temporality is expressed with the help of another trope (frequent in visual studies as well), that of the *energia*. As he notes, language is not a work (ergon), but an activity (energeia).⁴⁹ The grey forms preceding colours and the linguistic flow of thinking as abstraction thus staged into the perspective box refute Humboldt’s view on the static nature of seeing contrasted with the dynamism of language.

The representation of the rooms evoke further association in cultural history: with looking into the rooms the horizon of tradition opens up. The images provide the illusion of an all-embracing unity, similarly to the teleological narrative of history as it posits a unified perspectival horizon, but the manifest trickery confronts with the delusion of the unified image. While in Hoogstraten’s box it is the painted mirror opposite the peephole which functions as the element of disruption, Albert’s box’s entire construction points toward demystification – it might also be the reason why the mirror in Goethe’s room is blind.⁵⁰

The idealization of the otherwise distorting, selective nature of cultural memory is manifest in the institute of memory rooms. Goethe and Humboldt as the giants standing at the beginning of the nation state, the national cultural heritage and consciousness are also

⁴⁷ Wilhelm von HUMBOLDT: *Über Denken und Sprechen*, In *Wilhelm von Humboldt Werke*, 5. ed Andreas FLITNER and Klaus GIEL, Stuttgart, Cotta 1981, 97-99. or <http://www.blutner.de/philos/Texte/humboldt.html>

⁴⁸ HUMBOLDT: *I. m.*, Das Auge unmittelbar und für sich allein würde keine anderen Grenzen, als zwischen verschiedenen Farben, nicht aber durch ihre Umrisse zwischen verschiedenen Gegenständen bestimmen.

⁴⁹ Compare, *Wilhelm von Humboldts Gesammelte Schriften*, Berlin, Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1903-1936, VII, 45-46. Or, Statement 11: Die schneidendsten unter allen Veränderungen in der Zeit sind diejenigen, welche die Stimme hervorbringen. Sie sind zugleich die kürzesten, und aus dem Menschen selbst mit dem Hauche, der ihn belebt, hervorgehend, und augenblicklich verhallend, bei weitem die lebendigsten und erweckendsten. HUMBOLDT: *Über Denken und Sprechen*, *I. m.*

⁵⁰ In Brusati’s view the mirror opposite the peep hole confronts the viewer with the eroticism of his peeping.

symbols of the autopoietic and self-generating nature of epochs.⁵¹ By looking into these work studies as memorials, we can peep into the crucial (working) spaces of the two thinker-scholar's life that is, into the places where their intellectual scientific journeys were put into words. The pilgrimage to the rooms, that is, the ritual journey accomplished for evoking the spirit of the place, veils the act of penetrating peeping into a quasi-intimate or private space as well as the problem which lies in the act of institutionalizing one's life. And at the same time, the integration of the rooms into a peep-show reflects on the technology by which the 19th-century man of letters, the predecessor of the contemporary public intellectual constructs his (or not so frequently her) own public self and (place of living). These studies in the case of both scholars became the cathedral of their own memories and memorials even during their life.

A further aspect for the interpretation of Albert's work is the hint that appears in the title: like noblemen who were accompanied by artists to depicting the seen ruins, memorials or the landscape, the 18th-, or 19th-century scholar traveller asked professionals to depict the landscape, natural phenomena or historical remains. It is probably well known that Goethe asked Christoph Heinrich Kniep to accompany him, and a number of landscapes are known from their journey to Italy.⁵² In Alexander von Humboldt's case, three painters followed his steps to Latin-America: Johann Moritz Rugendas, Ferdinand Bellermann and Eduard Hildebrandt to record the scenes of his scientific discoveries. By a metaphorical transfer one can claim that as the perspective box's subject position roots in the separation of the eye and the body, the observant eye was the travelling companion in Goethe's case, while in Humboldt's his follower artists meant the picture generating look. Whereas Talbot calls his camera (modelled on the camera obscura) the pencil of nature, because he assumes that the pictures are generated by nature by the help of light, Goethe trusts drawing to the pencil of a professional in the lack of the proper technical appliance.⁵³ Humboldt's *Ansichten der Nature* (1807) was accomplished before the journey of the painters, in this work Humboldt follows the descriptive method of ekphrasis to depict the landscape for which the inspiration came

⁵¹ For the contemporary interest in Alexander von Humboldt's life see the success of Daniel Kehlmann's *Die Vermessung der Welt*, 2005.

⁵² Vö. OETTERMANN: *I. m.*, 7-13. Georg STRIEHL: *Der Zeichner Christoph Heinrich Kniep (1755 - 1825). Landschaftsauffassung und Antikenrezeption*, Olms Verlag, 1998. I would cite a short passage: „Und so verbrachte ich den ganzen Tag, indessen Kniep nicht säumte, uns die genauesten Umrisse zuzueignen. Wie froh war ich, von dieser Seite ganz unbesorgt zu sein und für die Erinnerung so sichere Merkzeichen zu gewinnen.“ Marz 23. Neaple, Johann Wolfgang GOETHE: *Italienische Reise*, <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/3682/37>

⁵³ See also Kittler's reference to Rudolf Arnheim, KITTLER, *I. m.*, 32.

form Goethe.⁵⁴ Drawing or description made by Man however presents the subjectivity of vision as it is not the stamp of nature, but a representation first filtered through the mind and therefore is the depiction based on the primacy of the reflecting mind.

Albert's intertextual references evoke Alexander von Humboldt's *Kozmos*, which is an all-encompassing work based on Kantian ideas of unity of nature⁵⁵, and the influence of his notion on scientific classifications which he developed during his journeys.⁵⁶ According to Nicolas A. Rupke, Humboldt's recent biographer, Humboldt was best known of his two major works the *Kozmos* (1845), and the *Ansichten der Natur*.⁵⁷ The *Kosmos* was written in Berlin, in the room the perspective box depicts. The five volume taxonomical work was intended to present the compendium of the world in which nature appears as an undividable wholeness, and therefore aimed to educate the German people (Volk) through science. The sketches and paintings made during the journey was exhibited in Berlin at the exhibition *Kunst um Humboldt: Reisestudien aus Mittel- und Südamerika* (2009-2010). The pictures were purchased by Frederick William IV of Prussia for the Kupferstichkabinett to Humboldt's advice. While the Kupferstichkabinett evokes the special, usually personal collection of prints and drawings kept by the wealthy and the aristocratic and the collection is organised according to the logic of the pre-scientific classification, the drawings of the artist following Humboldts discoveries show the traits of Humboldtian classification.⁵⁸ It is not accidental that the influence of the Humboldtian scientific classification systems and its critical revision is also a topic of certain forms of research based art: at this place I would only direct attention to Mark Dion's works reflecting on scientific systems and taxonomies, among which Humboldt's theory appears as well. Such work is the *Alexander von Humboldt (Amazon Memorial)* part of the installation exhibited in Cologne *Alexander von Humboldt and Other Sculptures*, which "included books written by and on Humboldt, plants Humboldt described, and in the large aquarium ten live piranhas".⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Claudia MATTOS: *Landscape Painting Between Art and Science*, in: *Alexander von Humboldt. From the Americas to the Cosmos*, Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies, The Graduate Center, New York, 142-143. Goethe has shared his views on landscape which he learnt from Hackert with Humboldt during their encounter in Weimar in 1795. Compare, *I. m.*, 145. For further references to their meetings, see: Goethe: *Italienische Reise, I. m.*

⁵⁵ Alexander von HUMBOLDT: *Kosmos*, London, Hippolyte Bailliere, 1845.

⁵⁶ It would note that Edgar Allan Poe's prose verse, *Eureka* was inspired by Alexander von Humboldt's *Kosmos*.

⁵⁷ Nicolaas A. RUPKE: *Alexander von Humboldt: A Metabiography*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008, 38.

⁵⁸ An interesting example for how the Kupferstichkabinett is kept in the cultural memory is the 2010 exhibition of the White Cube Gallery, the *Kupferstichkabinett: Between Thought and Action*, White Cube, Hoxton Square, 2010, June-July

⁵⁹ *Alexander von Humboldt and other Sculptures*, Galerie Christian Nagel, Köln. 2000, <http://www.galerie-nagel.de/>. See, Adrienne KLEIN, *New Sites and Sounds*, in: *Alexander von Humboldt. From the Americas to the*

In Albert's installation, beside the representation of the perspective boxes, both rooms are presented with an almost one-minute animation. The viewpoint of the animation simulates the movements of a visitor emerging from a chair and walking around the rooms with the help of three-dimensional technique. This time instead of the eye's real movement, the body's virtual movement is presented. The looking around is repeated from both, the aspect of the imaginary visitor and the aspect of the studies' owners, which nevertheless is not possible in its entirety by solely looking into the boxes. According to Kittler, art is about the deception of a sense. As he notes, in painting the natural truth is taken over by a convention, which had to be ignored and which had to be overlooked to be the victim of illusion.⁶⁰ Thus in painting only a kind of illusion or fiction and not simulation is produced, like in the images generated by technical media. In Kittler's view, in contrast with painting in the technical media simulation creates the imaginary by absorbing the real, to which—according to Lacan—the body belongs.⁶¹ The absence of the body contrasted with its virtual presence gives another turn to the questions of representation so far explicated.

Cosmos, i. m., 160.; Dion's installation of scientific systems as fictions are of special interest from the aspect of Albert's scientific and artistic approaches. See also, Mark Dion: *Natural History and Other Fictions*, 1997.

⁶⁰ KITTLER, *I. m.*, 34.

⁶¹ While painterly conventions are transparent, but are supposed to be suspended in favour of the illusion, in the case of the technical media the code is not even sensible. KITTLER, *I. m.*, 38.