

ii[e] The Visual Field

There is a relation between the design and perception of functioning within neo-liberal ideology and visual theories articulated through *Gestalt Psychology* that I would like to discuss in sum, as it relates to both entanglement and intra-action as discussed in my above analysis of *Arrival*.

The homogeneous field neoliberal ideology needs *is* what is visualized by figure-ground, it is a written language that disguises what it means, promising individual freedom but returning none of what it promises to those who do not fit as particles within the whole. A small shift in syntax transforms the object into subject. Refused admittance into the symbolic plane means exclusion from figure-ground. We are both figure and ground, entangled with what is in and around us. *Ganzfeld* is German for the homogeneous visual field or 'whole field' specified by having no consistent internal organization.

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...the dual identity of the people as an *ethnos*, as a community of shared fate, memories, and moral sympathies, on the one hand, and as a *demos*, as a democratically enfranchised totality of all citizens, who may or may not belong to the same *ethnos*, on the other. All liberal democracies that are modern nation-states exhibit these two dimensions. The politics of peoplehood consists in their negotiation.
(Seyla Benhabib)

The notion of *Ganzfeld* returns me to Artis - the zoo. I remember feeling a little taken back, my gaze turning to the elephant experience enclosure and the accompanying text on the display discussing aspects; of the African landscape; habits concerning finding nutrients within the diversity terrain while migrating. However. Not one word dedicated to the prosaic narratives of caged existence -let alone even a guess regarding their percept of everyday life. The non-humans are living their lives parallel to ours in a zoo in Amsterdam. How did they come to be here and to what

purpose? These sentient beings live in a compound *articulated* (created) to fit within our narrative of nature. We have created an isolated, static cultural appropriation, a selected piece of the world within our joint *entanglement*. Generalizing of the symbolic order based on the acumen that we possess apt knowledge required to answer to captive animals' needs. However. We can but offer those affordances we have determined to be fitting. How do baby elephants in captivity learn about their cultural heritage? We have nominated this captive animal: *elephant*. The word elephant derived from the Greek word "elephas" meaning *ivory*. Elephant is our linguistic *interpretation* of what this organism is. A bio-machine that produces ivory, a precious material suited to carve high-value works of art, religious objects, and decorative boxes for costly objects, exclusive cutlery handles, billiard balls, piano keys, bagpipes, buttons, and a wide range of ornamental items. Animal and commodity entangled within the cultural definition: nature. And so, we have also created cities in this fashion. Landscapes crafted of the stone and clay form the base on which they were built. Appropriations of matter translations of need into material. The original city of Amsterdam stands on the majestic *Spruces* shipped in from Canada during the 17th century: *migrant trees* (Proulx). Trees in our own region were neither tall nor strong enough to uphold the weight of thousands of clay-baked bricks and bodies, safe from the murk of the swamp below. No replantation projects conducted - a gesture leading to inevitable deforestation. The analogy with Berger's migrant workers to me is apparent.

Actually, identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language, culture in the process of becoming rather than being; not "who we are" or "where we come from," so much as what we might become, how we might represent ourselves . . . they oblige us to read . . . not the so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms-with our "routes."
(Stuart Hall & Paul Du Guy qtd. in Irigaray)

I worry. For what if the little boy I met so briefly in *Artis* is not an exception, but an example of one of many future victims of a contemporary stance, that proclaims healthy ignorance creates

content?¹ Conflicting parasitic narratives are the loom towards new weavings. I have fond memories of a few *parasites* who helped me to form, who in-*formed* me, but know that there are many whose influence was subconscious. One example is my old Aunt “Tante Mia” from my fathers’ side: petite, silver waved bob, loud mouth, pushy, coarse, single: atheist - queer – autonomous. She presented her dentures on a plate through the letterbox after persistent harassment by disciple seeking Jehovah’s Witnesses. Cursing. Confidant. In temporal league with the devil. She left me the silk-like porcelain figure of a penguin staring into the sky, the one she said reminded her of me. Hopeful. Inquisitive. Mia provided wonderful contrast to my Irish mother: vain, quiet, clean, sweet smelling, smiley, proper: Roman Catholic - inordinate heterosexual - devout wife. Offered apologies when shoved aside by assertive elbows but proving to own vixen qualities once safely home. Cursing. Confidant. Desperate. Behind closed doors. Influenced me to be over-conscious of my acts. Not to smell, be silent, let myself “be” shaped, be modest. Shackled me with her conventions. To blend in. Seamless. Becoming one with the boulders, as the *Women’s Reserve Camouflage Corps*², who created and wore observation suits coloured so as that a person could blend into the sky, snow, or ice. Trimming these influences from the weave will dismiss the quality of its laced texture reducing it to *homogenic* cheesecloth. To cite the milked African proverb: it takes a village to raise a child.³ Addressing,

¹ Willful ignorance has become quite topical among writers because it appears to be in fashion in society. Perhaps the startling accessibility of information makes ignorance of important matters seem more likely willful: How could he not know? But there is little doubt that we are witnessing a wave of reprehensible, willful ignorance among political leaders as well as citizens. All the marks are there: fervent commitment to an ideology, the mantric rehearsal of false knowledge and slogans, resistance to evidence that challenges beliefs, absence of open-minded curiosity, and outright hostility to those who offer different claims, often tending to personal abuse. There are alarming signs that a more radical epistemology is developing in which data, facts, knowledge, and truth itself are discounted in favour of ardent assertion, conformity to a comfortable ideology, and the right to believe whatever one chooses. The masterful and blunt Harry Frankfurt called the effluvia of this rhetorical disinterest in truth “bullshit.” Daniel R. Denicola, *Understanding Ignorance The Surprising Impact of What We Don’t Know*, Mit Press Ltd, 2017

² A forgotten division of the *National League for Women’s Service* made up of 40 female artists (as mentioned earlier) tried to blend into landscapes by disguising themselves as rocks, tufts of grass and sand dunes. They used their creativity and crafting skills to develop designs and patterns that mimicked the landscape to provide WW1 front soldiers with added protection. Parks were used as laboratories to test different camouflage suits, and city streets doubled as studios for them to paint dazzling, distracting designs on battleships. Taken from: Foster, Elene, *New York Tribune*, April 28, 1918

² Benhabib, Seyla, Jeremy Waldron, and Robert Post. *Another Cosmopolitanism*. Oxford u.a.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006, p. 68

³ This proverb is an attribute of African cultures. In 2016, NPR decided to research the origins of the proverb, and concluded. it was unable to pinpoint its origins, though academics said the proverb nevertheless holds the true spirits of some African cultures. (Wikipedia)

unpicking homogenic twine by stimulating circular thinking, helps me to envision how the multiplicity of these compounds might *re-form* into new concerts.⁴

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Spinning possibilities...



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Pity the little man in Artis for craving to mingle with his source on a symbolic level for this will remove him from the salutary dream state, he now resides. Dream state, singing Dreamtime ... to the Indigenous Australians "Dreaming" existed before the life of the individual begins, and continues to exist when the life of the individual ends.

Their paintings only represent the being of the Dream at the source of this order, removing all context and all action.

Represented on a plain background, the totemic being is perfectly motionless, while its skeleton and internal organs are painstakingly depicted.

Its internal anatomy is indeed the model of the social order and the cosmic order.

These images thus show that the timeless totemic organization unfolded from the very body of the being of the Dream.

(Descola)

Both before and after-life, it is believed that this *spirit-child* exists in the Dreaming and is only initiated into life by being born through a mother. The spirit of the child culturally understood to enter the developing foetus during the fifth month of pregnancy. When the mother felt the child move in the womb for the first time, it was thought that this was the work of the spirit of the land in which the mother then stood. Upon birth, the child is considered to be a special custodian of that part

⁴Sanne Bax is a student (Rietveld Academy) who spins yarn made up of a blend of wool and non-traditional fibre in ropes that use fibre-waste from the textile industry: www.rietveldacademie.nl/en/page/6591/sanne-bax

of their country and is taught the stories and song lines of that place (Descola). Within his community, there is no distinction between figure and ground. The child entangled in the whole. Only from the perspective of Australian governance, these children become conspicuous figures.