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The Anthropological Function of Pictures

1. Context building as an
    anthropological characteristic

The history of philosophy and science supplies many characteristics of what distinguishes the human being. Besides biological peculiarities, which are less relevant in this context, the debate has focused on communication by means of propositional language and the ability to build societies that are rationally (i.e., »politically«) organized. Another aspect often mentioned is that of having »reason«, »mind«, »culture«, »civilization« or »symbols« at one's disposal and encountering the world with »understanding«, attributing »meaning« to it. The ability to use pictures falls into this category as well. This paper is dedicated to discussing the latter aspect.

In the philosophical approach to anthropology, the focus is not on any peculiarities of the biological species »homo sapiens sapiens«, even though only members of this species have been found as examples so far. Interests are rather focused on the fundamental complexity of the repertoire of behavior, which could in principle be found in creatures of a totally different (for instance extra-terrestrial) origin as well. Actually, it is all a matter of the *concept*[1] of corresponding creatures that we should reasonably develop:

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1   A concept refers to an ability to distinguish that is conceived of as inter-individually controlled, as customary in Wittgenstein's philosophy (ROS 1999). Accordingly, empirical research – the practical application of certain abilities to distinguish – plays an indeed complex, nevertheless subordinate role in the critical inspection of concepts.

Those creatures that are capable of highly complex behavior towards the world, their own body, and other creatures of the same kind.

By shifting our focus from certain *objects* of interest *in the world* to the corresponding concept, it is *our habit* to distinguish such phenomena that comes into view – and this includes ourselves, even in two ways: On the one hand, we are – as human beings – simultaneously both observers and the objects of observation. On the other hand, we regard in a critical fashion our own distinguishing abilities, i. e., the concepts inevitably used in each process of observation. One aspect of the philosophical interest in anthropology consists of critically inspecting the range of conceptual criteria suggested. Furthermore, it is of interest to systematize the relationship between such criteria if possible and – ideally – to determine an equivalence class of minimal conditions for being human in the philosophical sense.[2] To H. Plessner, one of the founders of philosophical anthropology, such a minimal condition is the well-known concept of »eccentric positionality«: As a consequence, each creature that can be conceived under that concept ought to be given the same status before one of our courts of justice as is granted to any member of our own species under comparable conditions. It is the ability of a creature to »build a distance« toward itself (especially to its physical as well as to its psychological existence) that Plessner has in mind.

A related criterion of the human being is the faculty of context building, i. e., the capacity to focus on situations that are not currently present.[3] That a creature is able to not only adapt its behavior to its surroundings currently present (its »umwelt« in the sense of Uexküll) but to consider further potential situations of behavior as well is a crucial condition in many activities typically human. Everything linked to past or future situations as well as everything fictional, hypothetical or counterfactual is impossible without context building. Even dealing with abstract things – i. e., something apart from one concrete spatiotemporal situation – seems to be possible only if we imagine an appropriate *metaphorical* »space« to put in the abstract entities considered (see LAKOFF 1990).

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2 That this is not the most important aspect of philosophical anthropology is made clear for instance in the introduction to Lorenz (1990).
3 The connection to Plessner's concept of eccentricity arises as a result of the fact that building distance means observing the current situation as from the outside, thus implying an act of context building.

Let us recall that there has been no need up to now to assume the ability of renouncing the »here and now« as the only point of reference in the behavior of any creatures other than primates. Even in this particular biological order, that skill is fully apparent only in the species of *homo sapiens*. We can identify starting points in the playing of animals, especially young animals, where the dependency of behavior on the actual situation[4] is replaced by one on a posed or simulated situation. But in that case, the distance to the situation of the game so typical for human context building is lacking. Immersed in the game, most behaviors that would be adequate in the actual situation are replaced by behaviors suitable for the fictitious situation of the game. In the case of a puppy playfully chasing a ball as if it was chasing prey, the ball, totally integrated in corresponding behavioral and perceptual schemes, *is* indeed just prey to the animal. At the same time, the playing behavior is strictly bound to the actual situation: The ball perceived as prey is being handled correctly in its own physical appearance. Within the scope of the abilities the playing creature has in handling prey, the ball's shape, its weight and such are correctly being integrated into action. Finally, the game of animals is confined to the young beasts and diminishes in their adult forms.[5]

Let us further recall that the capacity of context building is necessarily an ability to be established socially: We can speak of a creature's »mental« approach to a non-current situation in the strict sense only if that creature repeatedly devotes itself to the situation and not just once. The condition of it being in fact the *same* situation (with the identical, and not only similar, objects) can solely be guaranteed if another individual is able (at least in principle) to control that act of context building: i. e., to assess that the other's act of context building has been properly performed and that a reference to the very same context has been established. Therefore a behavioral situation – an »umwelt« – is only a context in the strict sense if (at least basically) the context can be regarded as inter-individually available. Context building therefore is always performed *communicatively*.

Language is a powerful instrument for context building, if not the most powerful at all. In the sophisticated sense of language, which is usually

4   More accurately put: the actual situation as it is perceived by the playing creature in combination with its actual and current desires and aims.
5   Interestingly, exceptions can most likely be found in domesticated animal species that are in much interaction with humans (esp. dogs and cats).

assumed, the power of speech rests upon the faculty of context building: The differentiation between nomination and predication typical for statements and the consequential speech acts aims ultimately at communicating about non-present situations. Especially the nomination, i.e., the linguistic identification of an object considered as known to the interlocutor while one is trying to convey something (assumingly) new about that object to him, is a sub-activity that can only be carried out in relativity to a given context (TUGENDHAT 1976): Who is meant depends on the situation we are actually talking about if, for instance, »Gesine's father« as a nominatorial part of a statement is used.[6] Correspondingly, our languages are full of opportunities for context building, like explicit information about place and time in sentential adverbs, or implicit clues by means of tense (for example the future tense) or mood of the verb (for example subjunctive mood).

Context building plays a central role in the competencies to handle individuated and persisting objects and to judge similarities between them. These objects are empirically given only as a momentary appearance in the actual behavioral situation. The development of the ability to handle individual objects in a situationally comprehensive way – in short: object constitution – requires the simultaneous association of appearances stemming from different situations into a persisting individual that transcends the current umwelt in its perceptive and effective aspects.

On the other hand, the concept of resemblance – in the demanding way we connect with the concept of representational pictures – avails itself as a comparison of two situations: On one side, there is the actual and real situation with a flat object covered in pigments (the image carrier) and the reactions appropriate in that situation. On the other side, there is the altered situation, now including the things displayed – in particular individual objects – in place of the image carrier, together with the fitting reactions. If the behavior would solely refer to one of those situations instead of the relationship between the two, we could not speak of the behavior towards an image: In the first case, the image carrier is regarded as an object without *image* character. In the second case, we are dealing with a simple deception not realized by the one affected by it. Indeed, the use

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6   It could be about a situation originating in the complex of situations that Uwe Johnson created in his novel »Jahrestage« (»Anniversaries«, 1970 - 1983). If this is the case, the statement »Gesine's father is a carpenter« would be true; it may easily be untrue in another context.

of a representational picture takes effect as an act of context building for the picture user, evoking in one situation the other situation.

Therewith, the framework for this contribution is set. At this point, a core issue of philosophical anthropology arises: How did that crucial ability of context building develop? That question is not to be understood in a (pre)historic sense as a question asking for a chronology to be proven empirically. It rather is about a concept-genetic relation: Upon which rational reconstruction can *we* reach an understanding of the situation of *initial* context building? Initial context building, then, does not take place in some prehistoric time narrowed down empirically with more or less difficulty but it takes place in each case in the here and now: That is, when we, the authors and the respective reader, succeed to agree upon a rational conceptual reconstruction leading from concepts of simpler types of behavior (and the carriers of that behavior) that we already share to concepts of carriers of actions with the faculty of performing context building. The logical structure of initial context building thus disclosed may later serve as a guide for the interpretation of empirical findings.

The anthropological function of pictures lies, according to the thesis of this paper, in conveying initial context building. For that purpose, we first recapitulate the concept of communication with two ways of presentation enclosed therein which are central to language competence and picture competence (2). Thereby a path opens up to define perceptoid media in more detail, through which a transition to initial context building can be suggested (3). However, it becomes clear, too, that the ability to present oneself as a picture user has to be stabilized by further acts of communication. In the end, they also lead to the option of context building *without* a fallback on perceptoid media that we generally call *visual imagination* (4).

2.   Communication, indication, and ostentation

since context building ought to be regarded as an act of communication, it is worthwhile to recapitulate conceptually what is meant by the term »communication«.[7] By acts of communication we understand interactions

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7   In the following, we essentially base our observations on the explanations in Ros (1979: especially chapters 6 through 9) and Ros (2005: especially parts VI. 2.1 and VI. 3.3)

of a certain kind, i.e., complex acts with at least two agents: For each of the two agents, there is at least one sub-activity for which that agent is the actual carrier of activity.[8] Furthermore, those sub-activities include components that are in a very broad sense directed towards the other agent: Communicative acts are »acts of involvement«.[9]

For logic reasons, we should distinguish *communicative*, *direct*, and *object-related* interactions. The simplest kind of interaction is the direct interaction: Its sub-activities directly aim at the body of the other agent. Typical examples are actions where predators catch their prey (as well as the reaction by which immanent body contact is tried to be avoided): the suffocating act of a boa, the grip of a white-tailed sea eagle, the sting of a ladybug larva. In communicative interactions, things are much more complicated: Here it is all about one interaction partner making the other familiar with a situation by his (sub-)activity, in short: He *presents* something to the other. Under closer consideration, there even occur two actualizations of »presenting« in the communicative form.

2.1 »*To present something*« and »*to present oneself as*«

in order to clarify the ambiguity of the act of presenting in communicative interactions, it is prudent to take a look at the difference between communicative and object-related interactions: In case of the latter, one interaction partner acquaints by means of his (sub)activities the other partner with a certain situation as well. However, this act of bringing something to her attention happens without his intention, »behind his back« so to speak: If, for instance, a young animal observes its mother drink at a certain spot, the mother brings unintentionally to its attention that this is a drinking spot.[10] Or if somebody sees another person opening up a chest, this familiarizes the latter person with the information that the chest is not closed.[11]

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8   The concept of action used here presupposes that the activity carrier as a whole and not only one of its subsystems (like a reflex arc) can be made responsible for the behavior.

9   The perception of the first sub-activity can − as (an aspect of) a second sub-activity − already complete an interaction.

10 Attention should be paid to the fact that object-related interactions always are direct interaction, or rather have direct-interactive components, that consist of perceptual acts.

11 In doing so, we here assume that this person does not open the chest with the explicit intention of showing the other person that the chest is open.

Let us consider the behavior in which a creature signals the presence of a dangerous predator to one of its kind: Such behavior is well-documented in apes. A pertinent warning call should not enable the recipient to notice by itself the presence of the enemy; it rather should elicit an appropriate flight or protective reaction (in the sense of an evolutionary purpose), precisely without the recipient's own perception of the situation being required. This works out because the »sender« *presents itself as one who has perceived the predator*: It indicates the presence of the predator by presenting itself as one perceiving the enemy. This exactly is the duplication of presentation typical for communicative interactions. Something similar goes for the example of the person opening the chest mentioned above as soon as the person intends to indicate to the other one that the chest is open. In that case, he does not only open the chest, but presents himself as somebody opening an unlocked chest. For this reason, such an interaction is conceived of as communicative.[12] Obviously, the person must keep in mind that the other person perceives his self-presentation, so that the case of actually opening the chest can clearly be distinguished from the case of opening the chest as an object-related interaction.

Thus, communication only takes place if two acts of presentation are interlaced. The two components »somebody presents (something) to somebody« and »somebody presents himself as someone (to somebody)« are also known as presentations in the sense of *indication* or *ostentation* respectively.[13] The act of ostentation refers to the sender and his corporeality: He shows himself to the other as somebody who (in the broad sense) wants to elicit conclusions about his knowledge and his willing. Self-presentation is thus a necessary sub-activity of communicating. At the same time, an indirect act of presentation in the sense of indication, which is aimed at quite another matter, is being performed through that self-presentation. In contrast with object-related interaction, the aim of the act of indication may lie outside of what the »receiver« can perceive, as is perfectly clear in the example of the warning cries of monkeys mentioned above.

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12 For this classification, the other person need not notice the intention of the first. Only if we consider a chain of interactions with switching roles instead of a single communicative interaction, that becomes a condition.

13 Unfortunately, this terminology is not yet generally accepted: Choosing inversely »indication« for »presenting oneself as« and »ostentation« for »presenting something« could principally be considered as historically plausible, as well.

2.2   *Sign acts and propositional language*

communicative interactions can further be differentiated by means of degrees of complexity: Apart from simple expressional activities, which are used as signals (as in the monkeys' warning cry example), sign acts are particularly relevant here. Only in case of the latter, the communicating persons themselves know about the intentions of their communicative actions.[14]

The conceptual transition from simple communicative interactions to sign acts is characterized by »internalizing« the presentation of behavior that is essential in performing communicative acts (MEAD 1934): More precisely said, those presentation acts can »become separated from the communicative connections in which they are usually embedded [...], and develop into a private ability of bodily presentation to oneself« (ROS 2005: 591). When performed demonstratively under a communicative intention, a behavior is altered so that its corporal aspects are being articulated particularly recognizable to the receiver. In contrast, the internalization of that presentational behavior leads to a reduction of its aspects as far as they are clearly recognizable from the outside: Instead of distinctly visible corporal changes (like the gesture of a wolf baring its teeth, which stems from the first phase of a bite attack), a very weak activation of corresponding nerves leads to almost unnoticeable changes in the related myotonus.[15]

Moreover, the activities of demonstrating something performed by one communication partner – his ostentation – is then systematically linked with the respective reaction of the other communication partner regarding the indication. Conceptually, the role of the interlocutor can be solidly associated with the role of the first agent. Therefore, individuals who are involved in conscious communication can be understood as organized in a dyadic manner. In so doing, communicative actions seen as actions based

14   Signals are those acts automatically used and depend on the situations that are – as innate or acquired abilities – effective for a communication. In comparison, sign acts presuppose an agent's intention to communicate. They are thus not only purposeful for an observer, but they are specifically used by the agent for the purpose of communication.

15   They hardly lead to distinct activities. However, these corporal changes stay effective internally through the body-awareness mediated by proprioception. This awareness is an important element in controlling any corporal behavior that is more complex than simple stimulus-response models.

on rules (as opposed to habits) – and therefore sign acts – are rendered possible in the first place.[16]

Certain sign acts enable those involved to present themselves purposefully to the other not only concerning a *current* issue but regarding a *random* issue or better still: an issue relative to a *random context*. Such a sign act contains a proposition – i.e., a sub-activity in the overall structure of communicative self-presentation expressing the issue with respect to which the sign user presents himself to the others. The proposition mediates the subject-related reference of the overall action, while the interaction-related references and self-related references are mediated through other parts.[17] Those linguistic signs that have been disputed by logic for a long time, namely assertions, can be considered as the prototypical kind of propositional signs.

Again, a proposition consists of several sub-activities that (i) fulfill several functions, (ii) are related to the communication partner, and (iii) cannot be used independently from each other: With the *predication*, a speaker tries to put across which abilities of discriminating or classifying phenomena – which concepts, that is – he wants to make use of in connection with the current over-all sign act. This is the actual informative part of the expression, contributing what is assumed to be new to the communication partner. With the *nomination* or nominations, he tries to put across which individual object (or objects) he wants to refer to: The objects have to be already known to the communication partners – as part of a shared »universe of discourse«.[18] Therefore, assertions necessarily need an act of context building because the nomination can only be performed successfully if the participants understand from which situation the objects meant are chosen for identification (see TUGENDHAT 1976: especially §§ 21ff).

Somebody who states something presents himself – towards himself and towards others – as one that is willing to (rationally) defend the truth of the statement against *any* doubt. At that, the examination of its valid-

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16 Again, stress is laid on the fact that this is about a concept-genetic explanation and not an empirical sequence (see LORENZ 1990: 117f.).

17 Propositions are sub-activities that are »unsaturated« (in the sense of Frege): For conceptual reasons, they occur at all times in combination with further sub-activities completing them until they become a true sign act. Traditionally, relative clauses are used as auxiliary means for presenting propositions in a »pure form«, e.g., »that this phrase consists of 4 words«.

18 The respective universe of discourse is a context shared by all collocutors and in their current focus of attention.

ity can be achieved in two ways: At best (coherence theory of truth), the proposition refers to the situation of utterance (meaning that the nominations can be immediately dissolved), and the predication brings into play a habit of distinction that can (empirically) be decided by perceptual competences. Otherwise it is to be decided if the context in question can be empirically validated or not. In the latter case – like in the case where the habits of distinction cannot readily be applied – the second option (consistency theory of truth) remains and can be put into practice by comparing the new information with the knowledge already available about that context: If the comparison does not lead to logical inconsistencies, the asserted proposition can be considered defended.

2.3   *The twofold problem of founding language*

Hence, we return to the main topic: A huge anthropological issue is the problem of *founding language*. Because of the close alliance between propositional language and context building, the occurrence of language competence is necessarily and conceptually related to initial context building – the acquisition of the ability to inter-individually set a non-present context against the current situation. Ostentatious definitions play a central role in the older mentalist approaches:[19] A community of pre-linguistic individuals baptizes a mutually perceived object with an inter-subjectively usable name. However, deixis does not work beyond the situation of baptizing.[20] Moreover, without any further (linguistic) explanations it remains unclear what exactly is meant by an indicating gesture. In fact, the question raised here is reflected in two different ways in cognitive science and philosophy: as the problem of reference, also known as the *symbol grounding* problem, and as the problem of establishing inter-individual meaning (*triangulatio ex nihilo*).

19   Mentalist approaches understand concepts as strictly mental entities that are totally independent from the ability to speak. In this way, the verbal expression of concepts remains secondary with respect to their function, and the use of concepts (thinking) seems to be possible without the competence of language.
20   The extended forms of indirect deixis (pointing at spots as metaphorical substitutes for non-present objects) are only possible after the introduction of propositional language.

The problem of reference, as is discussed in cognitive science, consists of determining more closely how the relationship between verbal propositions and the associated facts (or the »world«) can be established. From a mentalist point of view, which underlies classical approaches in cognitive science, verbal structures are assigned meaning by means of mental symbols that on their part can be understood as elements of internal information processing. But how can those mental symbols be »grounded« in the world?[21] The problem of »symbol grounding« is not solvable based on the mentalist cognitive science (see WITTGENSTEIN 1922). The approaches of »enactivism«, which are essentially based on phenomenological considerations, seem to serve as an alternative. These approaches consider the problem of reference as a question of »embodiment« (see VARELA 1991; in a contemporary form see WHEELER 2005): Mental problems can be understood as essentially determined by the embeddedness in the body and its integration in the concrete situation. The mental symbols attain meaning in a mutual effort of adaptation between the organism and its environment. In order to avoid the mentalists' problem of solipsism, the inter-subjective nature of any meaning phenomena needs to be borne in mind.

Donald Davidson's attempt to explain how a child not yet »infected by meaning« can acquire the ability to handle meaning during its development seems to offer a solution. Therein the child is exposed to increasingly complex interactions with »meaning infected« (adult) group members (DAVIDSON 2001). The meaning-laden feedback behavior of »adults« is, loosely speaking, internalized by the child and connected by means of practicing with its own behavior towards an object. Internalized feedback forms the basis for the meaning of an object (signifier). Such a »semiotic triangulation« requires an environment with individuals who have mastered language in a sophisticated way. But how can we imagine a »triangulation ex nihilo« that would be required for individuals who initially acquire the competence to use »meaningful speech«?

Likewise, it remains unclear how semiotic triangulation can explain the competence of context building: Like the ostentatious definitions mentioned above, those meaning-constituting behaviors are strictly bound to the current situation. Matthias Vogel's attempt of a semiotic triangulation with respect to a kind of communication more basic than

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21   J. Searle's gedankenexperiment of the »Chinese room« has concisely exemplified this problem.

propositional discourse (or in his own words: non-linguistic thoughts) still falls short in this regard: Even the pre-musical or pre-graphical expressions he considers remain on the one hand entirely bound to the respective context of utterance, and on the other hand they do not acquire meaning apart from themselves (VOGEL 2001). However, his approach leads the way into a direction we shall take below since he can explain how the concept of a competence can be introduced to admittedly contextual but syntactically structured joint behavior with »esthetic« qualities. This can provide a basis for the production side of image-generating activities in the broad sense, which serves as a starting point for their socially coordinated reception.

3.   The role of picture competence

our assumption is that non-linguistic »esthetical« media provide a component in initial context building – and hence for the concept-genetic establishment of propositional language competence – that is indeed inevitable. In order to elaborate those dependencies, it is helpful to recall the specific function of pictures: Their use in context building enables the users of a *common empirical »re-present-ation«* of non-present situations.

3.1   *Pictures as a means of empirical re-presentation*

although pictures have played a role in the lives of humans for several ten thousands of years, their function is not at all as obvious as that we could yet speak of a broad consensus in picture philosophy. In the following, we conceive of their communicative function as being fundamental: »Anybody who presents to others or themselves an object as a picture performs an act of communication«. With this wording, we want to emphasize the idea that objects are not classifiable as pictures merely according to their physical attributes: It is rather their role in a specific situation of use that causes an object to be a picture. This situation of use is a communicative interaction; the role of the object in it is that of a sign carrier.

Moreover, the wording above refers to the fact that such an interaction includes two dyadic agents who can also be perceived as two different

roles played by the same individual (at the same or at a different time).[22]
Furthermore, a central sub-activity in picture use (like in every communication) consists of an act of ostentation, which is the only means of performing an indication – a reference to what the picture designates. The specific relation between what is designated and the picture carrier has often concealed this important aspect of self-presentation by picture users. The picture itself – and this can only mean: the picture carrier – seems to present us with something: a manner of speaking strongly abbreviated at best, behind which all too easily lurks the absurd assumption of the picture carrier being an independent agent.

According to Peirce, pictures – as iconic signs – rest on a perceptual resemblance relation between the picture carrier and what is displayed by means of the picture. We have got a preference for the expression »perceptoid sign« (SACHS-HOMBACH 2003) as it allows us to include the concept of resemblance in the action-theoretical idea of our communication concept: As a starting point for further clarification, we take a simple reaction of confusion. Such a reaction is shown by a creature toward its environment without the creature noticing the confusion – it succumbs to a deception.[23] The occurrence of similarity present in picture uses arises if such a confusion reaction and its corresponding behavioral situation are consciously associated with the situation actually triggering the deception and the behaviors adequate to it. Recognizing a case of resemblance means to connect the actual situation, which includes the »carrier of similarity« and leads to a deception, with another situation in which there is no deception whereas the confused objects are actually present.[24] We can call the spontaneous behaviors in case of a simple confusion reaction the *deceptive* mode, in which the confused creature is caught. The state of recognizing resemblance can be called the *immersive* mode. The latter constitutes the defining characteristic of perceptoid signs (SCHIRRA/SCHOLZ 1998). Thus,

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22   Hence, one may use a picture-like sign in order to communicate (*i*) with oneself at the same time, (*ii*) with oneself but time-delayed (*iii*) with another person (at the same time or time-delayed). The time-delayed communication can be understood by means of two partial communications that take place at different times and involve the respective communication partner in one's imagination only (hence understood as present at the same time). Below, we shall ignore the time-delayed case and concentrate on the simultaneous presence of two agents.

23   The common use of dummies in ethology is based upon such reactions of confusion.

24   Defined in that way, resemblance can be realized as an asymmetrical relation in contrast to N. Goodman's strictly symmetric ontological conception of resemblance (GOODMAN 1968).

the immersive mode is defined by means of the deceptive mode: Recognizing resemblance refers to the corresponding behavioral disposition conceptually »embedded«, which is spontaneously but erroneously activated in the case of confusion. The recognized deception hardly ever leads to reactions that are perceivable from the outside. But it determines whereto the considered part of the current behavioral situation displays resemblance.[25]

Because of this embedding, the »similarity carrier« can be used as a sign carrier in the immersive mode, namely to draw attention to what it resembles. To use a picture carrier as a picture then means to recognize a deception triggered by the picture carrier as a deception and to use it – also towards another person – as a sign to refer to the »deceptive«, i. e., resembling situation.[26]
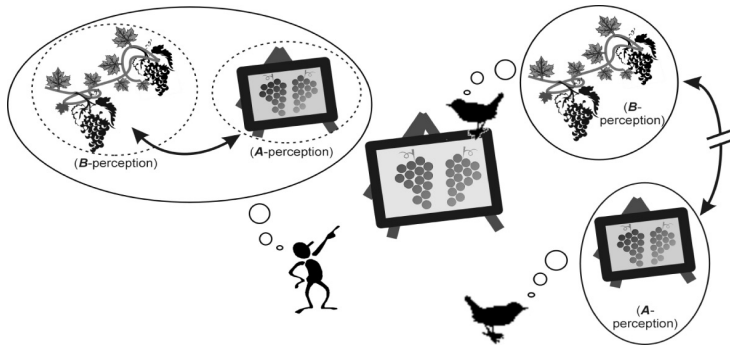

Fig. 1: Recognizing resemblance: the deceptive mode (on the right) and the immersive mode (on the left). (The »thought bubbles« are meant to merely indicate the respective behavioral situations in a graphically-shortened manner.) Source: JRJS.

Of course, the deceptive mode can be resolved; the state of deception can be overcome. But without context building, we then only have access to the actual situation perceived *without* confusion in the absence of any relation to the situation earlier confused and thus without knowledge of a resem-

25 In the case of exhaustion, the embedded spontaneous reactions may break through sometimes. Another such case is given if someone lets oneself in for the deceptive potential, like in exciting movies – recall the involuntary physical fright at cinematically presented attacks of large predators – or in computer games.

26 Due to lack of space, we cannot go into detail on the peculiarities of the resemblance constructions for abstracted or logical pictures or pictures in reflexive use (especially non-presentational pictures). Instead, we refer to the respective elaborations in Sachs-Hombach (2003) und Schirra (2005).

blance present (see Fig. 1). This might have happened to the birds of Zeuxis (PLINY THE ELDER 1855) after they noted that what they thought would be eatable fruits actually turned out to be just a strange flat board. In comparison, for the deceived Zeuxis, the illusion of the curtain covering Parrhasius' picture continues to be something that lets him imagine the situation in which a real curtain covers the fescennine picture he had actually expected.

According to the modal picture theory advocated here, the kind of indication used during the act of communication with perceptoid signs comes very close to the object-related form of interactions. More precisely spoken: The deceptive mode that is embedded in the immersive mode, and which in all probability is elicited in the recipient as well, allows the latter to also comprehend the ostentation of the communicator in a concrete, i. e., corporeal way. The behavioral dispositions associated with the confusion are elicited spontaneously in *both* communication partners. The two of them can »visualize« the actual non-present situation – although in the mode of deception.

Hence, we have reached the following description of the basic sign function of the use of a picture: An ensemble of objects – more precisely: a respective behavioral situation including such objects – is made available inter-individually in such a way that the communication partners can immediately apply in the context of utterance their respective sensory-motor detection procedures for at least some visually testable predications: The use of pictures is fundamentally a form of empirical context building.[27]

As it is not the picture that shows something but the »sender« who presents himself as a creature with certain dispositions (again more precisely said: towards himself or towards another one), we need to inquire a more precise characterization of self-presentation attending the displaying of a picture. We propose to conceive of the ostentation component of the act of picture communication as follows: Using a picture means »to present oneself as somebody who sees something in the current context knowing that it is not really there and who draws attention to it by that self-portrayal towards another person (or towards himself in the role of another one) in order to attract in this way the shared focus of attention to a situation diverging from the current situation«.[28]

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27 This does not exclude the derivation of more specific manners of use (see SACHS-HOMBACH 2003).
28 Attention should be paid to the fact that this »condition of possibility« of pictures nonetheless may be slackened in specific uses of picture (especially reflexive applications). It can even be completely abrogated – in the sense of a negative exemplification. Thus, homogeneously

Consequently, the ostentatious elements of presentation and the indicatory elements form a characteristic connection in communication with perceptoid signs: While the verbal reference to a situation other than the situation of utterance does not really redeem its promise of a contextual reference point for the indication, the self-presentation of the communicating person leads in the case of pictures or other perceptoid signs to a presentation of the intended situation that is perceivable by the communication partner as well. The essential difference between verbal and pictorial context building consists in that the former brings the intended situation to mind only in a *logical* manner, whereas the latter enables an *empirical* re-presentation: By means of pictures, the access to another situation is disclosed in such a manner that the truth of statements about that situation – either interindividually asserted or in a monologue of thought – can immediately be tested empirically (although within some limits).

3.2   *The setting of initial context building*

can we set up with plausibility a thought experiment in which the ability to communicate independently of the situation – i.e., by means of assertions – does not just make use of the contexts mediated by pictures among other (in particular verbal) options of context building, but in which the former is made possible in the first place by the deceptive potential of picture-like precursors? The use of perceptoid signs indeed stays ambiguous. We can face it just in the deceptive mode and do not notice the *other* context being meant. But this deficiency might emerge as an advantage for the conceptual introduction to context building.[29]

For the methodological reconstruction of the concept of creatures able to use context building, we initially imagine creatures that only have access to the ever current behavioral context a and therefore face a (potential) carrier of similarity B at most in the deceptive mode, confusing situation a with situation b. The behavior – like praying behavior towards a dummy – is not necessarily communicative. We can only speak of sign

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white surfaces can be understood as pictures. But such contexts of use still require the »representational« use of pictures as their primary reference point.

29 Without explicit reference to context building, Davidson and Nobel have suggested a similar thought already in 1989 (see NOBLE/DAVIDSON 1996, Chapter 3)

use if the creature presents itself (ostentation) as a creature that reacts or is willing to react to the current context with inadequate behavior, which would be appropriate for another situation (indication). Thereto, it has to (i) demonstrate such behavior to others, (ii) react to its own demonstrative behavior like a recipient because the meaning of the behavior would otherwise stay different for sender and recipient, and (iii) associate the demonstration internally with the respective response reactions (triangulation).
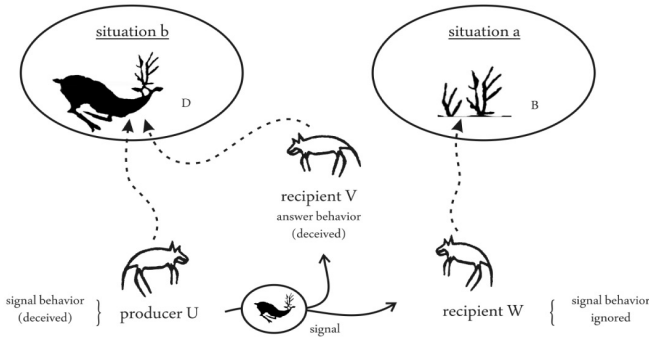

Fig. 2: Diagram illustrating signal communication in a situation of confusion (deer / branches). Source: JRJS.

The peculiarity of the communicatively used deceptive behavior is that the response reaction can turn out to be two-parted, depending on the recipient either succumbing to the deception (context *b*) or not (context *a*). As an example, we can imagine that certain branch formations often give rise to confusion with prey. Groups communicating with each other by signal language could get used to ignore respective signals of a group member in this context. Therewith, a complex of one demonstrative behavior (in the deceptive mode) and *two different* reactions towards this behavior is given: The producer reacts with a signal to the context *b* present to him, towards which the behavior of a recipient reacting normally to the signal is directed, too. Meanwhile, context *a* is the current context for the recipient who ignores the signal in the learned way (Fig. 2). On a conceptual basis, internalizing the signal behavior, which was originally external, in such a potentially deceiving situation can internally induce *both* reaction options in the reflective producer. It so can lay the foundation for the relation between the two contexts involved for creatures of this kind. Two semiotic triangulations take place at once: Between the producer *U*, the recipient

W, and the sign carrier *B* concerning an ostentation (»we react to the sign carrier in a certain manner«) on the one hand; and between the producer *U*, the recipient *V*, and the apparent situation *b* regarding indication (»we react to the present objects in a certain way«) on the other hand.

In the gedankenexperiment, we can therefore assume that creatures falling into such a category present themselves to each other as creatures that perceive something that is not presently there. They further assume that the respective communication partners can present themselves in such a way, too. That behavior indeed remains completely dependent on the real presence of the object *B* in the current context (*a*), i.e., an object that can actually be perceived and that can easily be confused with something else (resemblance to *D*), due to corresponding reactions spontaneously activated.

4.   To present oneself as a picture user

the thought experiment about initial context building has led us to the concept of a creature that succeeds in a prototype of pictorial context building: It has used the picture carrier in the immersive mode, and in doing so, it has connected an act of ostentation with an act of indication to an absent situation. From an outside perspective (in particular from the perspective of the recipient), however, it is just a suspicion that more than a simple confusion – i.e., the pure deceptive mode – has occurred forming the basis of a mere signal delivered inadequately. Likewise, it remains unclear for the sending part whether its opponent has understood the context building or responds to a case of similarity solely in a mode of being deceived. The twofold triangulation only constitutes the logical space for context building so that further communicative safeguards are necessary to, in a way, stabilize the given transgression of the here and now in a joint and therewith mutually controlled and reproducible manner.

4.1   *Communicative stabilization of picture use*

some approach may open up for discerning the immersive mode from the merely deceptive mode in the respective opponent if only we can additionally assume that the communicating partners involved come to an understanding of the fact that their current interaction is not based on a

simple confusion but on an *intentional* use/articulation of resemblance. As such an accentuated manner of using the sign with respect to the carrier of resemblance, the »playful expression« or »play face« common among higher mammals could complement the overall act of communication as an additional »immersion marker«.[30]

Let us consider that in the situation of initial context building, there have indeed been used already *two* signs in combination: the resemblance carrier and the signal, the latter being inappropriate in the current actual situation but being used in order to refer to an alternative situation. We can therefore speak of a pictorial context building (not yet secured) *and* a use of signs referring to the situation evoked. It is indeed this entanglement of *both* sign behaviors that ultimately enables the stabilization of the immersive mode to a pictorial sign behavior on the one *hand* and the detaching of verbal signs from their strict binding to the situation of utterance on the other hand.

We have already used the semiotic triangulation for the conceptual field of creatures with initial context building. Thus, we can without loss of generality assume that the syntactically structured, self-referring, intersubjectively controlled esthetic situations of production and reception elaborated by Vogel (2001, § 4.2.2.3; see above) are given for those creatures. In the sense of a game, creatures that fall into this category have the ability to mutually demonstrate variations of complex behavior, the meaning of which does not yet exceed the social action itself and the given options of variation in it.[31]

Furthermore, we can assume that the subject-referring communicative acts of creatures in the thought experiment can exceed the stage of simple signals. A coordinated reference can be made to several feature dimen-

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30 Similarly, the »all-clear signal« (see thought experiment above) is conceivable as a marker for this component of self-reference. The concept »play face« refers to a signal type common among mammals. Herewith, it is prevented that playful-aggressive behavior of the young animals (for example towards adults) gets out of control. The »play face«, which is connected with the »opening of the face« associated with the human willingness to communicate, indicates a »friendly intention to bite« (EIBL-EIBLSFELD 1997: 190); cf., also Palagi/Mancini (2011) with respect to a certain species of monkeys: »PF: play face, mouth opened with only the lower teeth exposed; FPF: full play face, lower/upper teeth and gums exposed via the actively retraction of the upper lip«.

31 This also implies that one does not have to wait for an existing formation in the environment serving as a resemblance carrier: A formation created during such a sequence of variations may also serve as a trigger for the deceptive mode. The sequence is therefore at the beginning of the emergence of the ability to *create* resemblance carriers by oneself.

sions of current (pre-)objects at once in a subordinated manner, as Arno Ros (1979: 77f.) has explained. Thus, early forms of the differentiation of an utterance in nominatorical and predicative parts can occur in a manner that they nevertheless only refer to the currently perceived (and in the case of deception: to what is only seemingly being perceived):[32] »(Something) round is (here), that is shiny (at the same time)« and »the round something (here), (that has been shiny until now) does not shine (anymore)« may be seen as assertions exemplifying approximately analogous structures.[33] It is, then, obvious to employ the enhanced ability of playful practice of syntactically complex interactions for articulating the increased differentiation of communication options as well.[34]

Transferred to the situation of initial context building, we can definitely assume that not only a monolithic signal is used relative to the resemblance carrier in the sense of the simple classificatory warning cries mentioned above. Rather an already syntactically structured sign is employed that – even though it remains bound to the current situation – features also the precursor of a functional differentiation in nominatorical and predicative aspects. It is essential here that in the situation of initial context building *several* occurrences of the same object falling into the same category (»something round«) with different characteristics of a subordinated dimension of properties (»shiny« vs. »not shiny«) can be communicatively contrasted in two different situations. The collective *identification* in the ways *one* object appears is in fact the other side of the shared *differentiation* in *several* contexts.

Hence, the use of pictures accrues as dependent on a complex and potentially open series of alternating sign acts with indeed *three* components each: (1) the act of ostentation towards the resemblance carrier as pictorial context building; (2) the syntactically already differentiated quasi-predication (as an indication); (3) the immersion marker by means of the playful expression in turns with a varying syntactically differentiated quasi-

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32 Due to the inseparable connection to the respective context of utterance, such syntactically structured signs with subordinated scopes of content remain quasi-predications in the sense of Tugendhat (1976: §§ 13 & 19).

33 The parts of the expression in brackets are only given for a better understanding – on the supposed level of communication, these equivalents are indeed not possible yet.

34 Thus, it is plausible that a syntax that has been set up independently of the communicating behavior for representing parts of the environment, i. e., established in a social game, is later on taken into the service of the communicative function of representation.

predication relative to an actually present object and expressed without an immersion marker. The game of utterances that can be played here by two communication partners – one time signaling this manifestation and one time signaling that manifestation, one time mentioning one subordinated feature together with the immersion marker, the other time mentioning the other subordinated feature without the playful expression – that game makes up the dialogical basis upon which context building and object constitution are communicatively stabilized so that real picture use *and* fully-propositional language are enabled.

4.2 *Context building without perceptoid medium*

one question remains: How can we dispose of the fixation to a *present* resemblance carrier – that has now become a real picture carrier indeed – still necessary for the ability of context building, so that a purely logical form of context building is conceptually reconstructed: In other words, how can we achieve an act of ostentation relative to the locally not adequately feasible indication towards a situation that is not even given deceptively as a surrogate – i. e., without the participation of a perceptoid sign? It is the resemblance carrier factually present that has originally allowed us to conceptually introduce context building as an inter-subjective endeavor.

Could this faculty again be explained by a kind of ostentatious self-deceit? The ostentation of a creature as a creature that presents itself *inadequately* relative to the *actual* situation has already been an essential component in the situation of initial context building. In the case of the strictly logical form of context building, we can think of a double self-portrayal: Presenting oneself as a creature that presents itself as being deceived by the presence of a perceptoid sign in the actual communication situation – with all the ramifications that presentation has on its body including the abilities to perceive and express itself, culminating in empirical context building in a communication dyad. The creature then is, briefly speaking, behaving inadequately in such a way as if it were in a situation of initial context building (compare with Fig. 3).

In this second gedankenexperiment, the mediator – the »resemblance carrier« to which the deception is linked – is nothing less than the creature itself behaving »similar to« a creature that actually *is* in a situation of empirical context building. Whereas before a behavior – originally
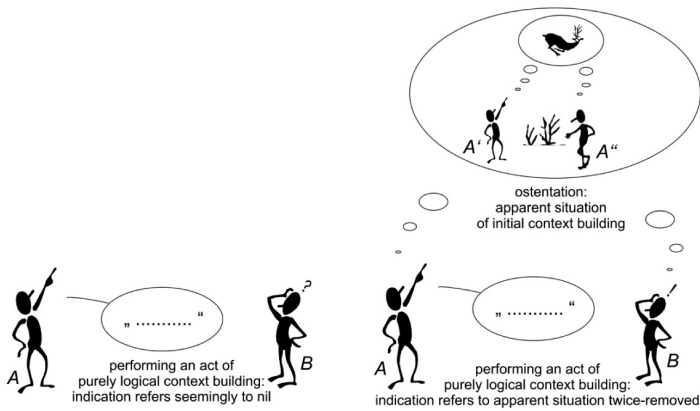
Fig. 3: Indication and ostentation in the case of strictly logical context building – again, the »thought bubbles« should be understood as graphical abbreviations of act-theoretical disposition. Source: JRJS.

used in a signal – triggered by an actually present object is homed in on *another external* reality, in this way the sign behavior is directed towards *another »internal«* reality, elicited by the actually operant self-realization of corporeal and psychological conditions: a reality that can be characterized as a bodily self-presentation of the own conditions for a situation of confusion – the situation of the corresponding initial context building *with* the matching picture carrier.

The second thought experiment in fact provides an explanation for a kind of context building independent of *a* perceptoid sign, i. e., an act of context building that is non-empirical and hence strictly logical. The perceptoid sign needed migrates *into* the context building creature through an internalized act of ostentation. Oversimplifying, one could say: The creature itself turns into an »image«.[35]

In such a communicative act, the communicative counterpart has to deduce from the inadequate but inherently coherent communicative behavior, which is compatible with a situation of initial context building, that

35 Belting's image anthropology (2001) illuminates this momentum even though not in a concept-genetic context.

the communicator wants to carry out an act of context building without a supporting perceptoid sign. By means of essentially retracing a corresponding self-presentation with an apparent (»inner«) act of pictorial context building, he may be able to do so.

4.3   *The ability of imagination*

most interestingly, human beings partaking in acts of strictly verbal context building often mention their imagination as an *explanation* for their communicative behavior. They even speak of using »inner images«, serving as a basis for verbal context building. The linguistic reference to a strictly hypothetical picture – as in »in the picture I see before my inner eye (...this and that is the case...)« – seems to function in a way similar to the secondary verbal context building by means of referring to an (absent) perceptoid sign – e.g., »in Caravaggio's picture ›Bacchus‹ (...this and that is the case...)«.

Obviously, those mental phenomena do not fall under the concept »picture« as explained in the third section. In any case, we can assign no material (or technical) picture carrier, which would be accessible to several picture users in a common sign act, as the crucial issue of inter-individual availability is explicitly excluded. Therefore, we prefer speaking of »visual imagination«, which is less problematic in this regard compared to speaking of »having mental images«.[36]

We get to know that a person is visually imagining something as a result of that person *speaking about it*. The person presents herself or himself – towards us *and* towards themselves – as somebody who perceives something visually and behaves correspondingly although it is not present. The person presents himself, for example, as a person seeing the front of his house, counting the windows, although the front side of the house can currently not be seen. This is similar to the situation in which the person uses an according picture of the house but without a corresponding picture carrier

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36 It is an overly obvious fallacy of reification if we progress from a concept explaining behavioral aspects to an empirical investigation of a kind of object »mental images«, just because the concept might be expressed with the phrase »to have a mental image of something« instead of »to imagine something visually«; this is one of the many bewitchments of our intelligence through certain aspect of our language.

in the current behavioral context. Another example is somebody listening to a live soccer report on the radio and at the same time »visualizing« the sportive events. This person portrays herself – on her own behalf – as somebody perceptively attending the game and not only listening to a verbal report with a merely logical anchoring in the situation (SCHIRRA 1995). Considering just those two examples, one may get the idea that it is the situation of an empirical act of pictorial context building the persons believe themselves to be in when they speak of their imagination.

The ability to vividly imagine something thus delivers a concept by which we can distinguish different aspects of reflexive communication: Somebody portrays himself (or herself) *towards himself (or herself)* as a creature with certain behavioral perspectives. Reference is made to that self-portrayal in order to explain how acts of context building without the presence of a resemblance carrier of first order can be accomplished. So the main concern is not that the apparent picture perception is a primary event with an explanation following contingently. Instead, the simulated portrayal of picture perception occurs only for the purpose of explaining how strictly logical acts of context building work in the first place – towards others and the self. Even here, the reflexive portrayal of the self is derived from the self-portrayal towards a communicative partner.

Somebody vividly imagining something, then, does not only present himself as somebody feinting pictorial context building. His ostentation is rather directed towards the situation of *initial* context building and therewith towards an explanation in the sense of concept formation of how the competence of context building originally comes about. Once the explanatory model is established, it can serve as a point of reference for acts of logical context building in which visual imagination is not used, so that there remains no reflexive act of complex ostentation with simulated initial context building.

The »referential grounding« of logical context building solves the problem of reference mentioned in section 2.3. Whereas mental images in the mentalist cognitive sciences are still conceived of as special intellectual entities that may take the place of absent perceptions to referentially anchor verbal expressions »in the world« in case one talks about things not present in the situation of utterance (e. g., x), the focus of attention shifts with the concept of »having mental images of x« in its action-theoretical and concept-genetic form: With that non-mentalist form, which may actually better be articulated as the concept of »the ability to visually imagine

x«, the recapitulation of the faculty to perform strictly logical acts of context building moves into the focus of attention. Hence the argument is not about an immediate relationship between language and extra-linguistic meaning but rather about the form of the explanation of such a relationship conceived of as an aspect of complex communicative acts.

Still, we then need to clarify what the expression »mental image« exactly refers to. In this context, it refers to the perceptoid sign that was merely set up hypothetically in the explanation of purely logical context building. That »picture« is only defined in its pragmatics: that it is to be used for context building in context *c*. Other determinations cannot be given in principle: That »picture« is neither round nor square because we cannot say anything about a carrier being round or square; nothing is determined about its »materiality«. In short: It is syntactically entirely undefined. More precisely, by means of the expression »inner image« one rather brings forward the absent context *c* as such, and not the sign by which the act of context building is performed and which we otherwise would denote as »picture«. In the same way, we are sometimes misleadingly prone to speak of »an interesting picture« when actually meaning a noticeable landscape – and hence exactly not a picture but a potential picture content. Although mental images cannot be the immediate objects of study in picture philosophy or philosophical anthropology, we have to conclude that the »having of mental images« – or rather: the visual imagination – is strongly associated in both endeavors with the concept-genetic reconstruction of the concept of context building as an anthropological key element.

5.   Résumé

The anthropological function of perceptoid signs – with pictures leading the way – lies in conveying the concept of the ability of context building, as the two thought experiments have suggested. At that, it is not about an empirical determination of the prehistoric events but about the understanding of our own abilities of discrimination. We are dealing here with the requirements for a rational concept of the competence of communicative behavior through which the joint focus of interest can be directed to an absent situation, and with those concepts that already require that concept.

The function of pictures essentially rests upon a special relation between the two kinds of presentation necessary for communication: Like in

object-related interactions, the behavior of the two interaction partners is orientated towards the currently perceived. But that is a perception in the deceptive mode – in a state of confusion. However, when using pictures, that indication, being actually inadequate in the situation, is communicatively utilized for an act of ostentatious self-portrayal of the picture user as a person consciously deceiving himself. Instead of succumbing to an unconscious deception, a case of resemblance is recognized in the immersive mode.

Concept-genetically, a twofold semiotic triangulation lays the ground for a potential inter-subjective act of context building in the immersive mode – or more precisely: the concept of initial context building with the aid of a resemblance carrier. That semiotic triangulation can only follow from the two possible reactions to a signal uttered in the deceptive mode. While using pictures, the behaviors towards the picture carrier have to be interrelated with the behaviors towards the picture content. Yet, the joint access of both communication partners to an absent situation is stabilized only after the embedding of such initial pictorial context building into more complex quasi-propositional sign acts. The way to the faculty of truly propositional communication as well as to handling individuated and persistent (i. e., sortal) objects is opened, too.

The anthropological role of pictures is not restricted to initial context building, i.e., the conceptual introduction to context building in the presence of a resemblance carrier. The faculty of performing strictly logical acts of context building ultimately depends on the concept of pictures as well; because, when attributing to a person (even ourselves) the application of (visual) imagination in order to explain acts of logical context building, we indeed refer to a self-deceiving re-enactment of the situation of initial context building. Thus, we can draw our attention to the concept-genetic reconstruction of the field of concepts of creatures that are able to use context building by means of pictures. In a situation where there is actually no such relation to a non-present situation to be signified, we often speak – in order to explain our behavior – of »having inner images« although there are no pictures involved.

In philosophical consideration, the »birth of context building out of the spirit of the picture« puts at a crucial anthropological turning point the concept »picture« next to the concept of language: Without picture competence, no liberation from the conditions of the here and now as of

the current behavioral situation is possible. The origin of the picture is the origin of humankind.

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