Images in Conservative Education

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Conservatism is a perennial human attitude and a constantly present cultural factor. As a consciously held theory it was however not formulated before the eighteenth century, and the expression "conservatism" itself was not in use before the 1830s. In the second section of this paper, under the heading "The Meaning of Conservatism", I will attempt both to convey a general idea of conservatism as well as to give a brief characterization of its three main historical phases: premodern, modern, and postmodern. Especially in its modern and postmodern phases, conservatism is tormented by paradoxes. My ultimate aim in the paper will be to show that these paradoxes dissolve once the dominance of, and the exclusive focus on, verbal communication is supplanted by allotting a proper role to the pictorial – to mental and physical images, and to visual thinking. Setting the stage for my argument, in the first section below I offer some glimpses of the vastly rich literature, extending well back into the nineetenth century, on the visual mind – the visual as accompanying, or even serving as the basis of, the verbal, and as accompanied, or even based on, the motor. In the third section, drawing in particular on the ideas of the liberal-conservative thinker F. A. von Hayek, I will describe the main dimensions of what might be called a conservative concept of knowledge, characterizing knowledge as local, dispersed, and embedded in practice. The implications of such a concept of knowledge for the educational system under modern/postmodern conditions are spelled out in the fourth section. The fifth section, "Images and Conservatism", is divided into three subsections. In the first subsection, I strive to show that the pictorial as such tends to be conservative, basically because it provides a stable and rich representation of reality. The epistemological stance of conservatism is that of common-sense realism; common-sense realism assumes, correctly in my view, that images, in principle, convey what there really is. And it is by displaying what there really is that images, as I attempt to demonstrate in the second subsection, can successfully take over the role of verbally formulated traditions, spurious verbal formulas telling us what there once supposedly was, and telling us unconvincingly that that is how it should always be. In the third, last, subsection I explain why I believe that, from the point of view of postmodern conservatism, the image, namely the moving image, can fulfil a special role. The postmodern condition is one of fundamental uncertainty. Simulations bringing together vast

amounts of data in an easily understandable animation are today our best instruments for dealing with a radically uncertain future.

1. Visual Thinking

In my chapter in the first volume of our VISUAL LEARNING series I already had occasion to quote a central passage by psychologist and art theorist Rudolf Arnheim, from his book *Visual Thinking*: "What makes language so valuable for thinking … cannot be thinking in words. It must be the help that words lend to thinking while it operates in a more appropriate medium, such as visual imagery."[1] Some pages earlier in the same book Arnheim relates images – mental images as well as a type of drawings expressing them – to *gestures*, pointing out that in gestures the visual is intrinsically bound up with motor, with "the kinesthetic experiences of pushing, pulling, advancing, obstructing".[2] Arnheim was a leading later-generation representative of the Gestalt school of psychology, adhering to the founding generation's view that one cannot experience images without experiencing the patterns of forces they embody and convey. He was, also, very much aware of the pioneering role of the German philosopher-psychologist Theodor Lipps here;[3] while on the broader topic of the visual mind he essentially drew on the work of Galton, Ribot, Binet, and Titchener.

Ribot, Galton, Binet, and in no small measure William James, were all impressed by the fact that thought processes obviously occur even in cases where they are paralleled neither by language, nor by conscious imagery.[4] It was the unconscious or half-consious underlying motor dimension Hippolyte Taine alluded to when in 1870 he wrote: "beneath the incomplete image a dull agitation

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1 Cf. Kristóf Nyíri, "Time As a Figure of Thought and As Reality", in András Benedek and Kristóf Nyíri (eds.), *Images in Language: Metaphors and Metamorphoses* (series VISUAL LEARNING, vol. 1), Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011, p. 61. The reference is to Rudolf Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, pp. 231 f.

2 Arnheim, *op. cit*., p. 118.

3 As Arnheim wrote: "Lipps anticipated the Gestalt principle of isomorphism for the relationship between the physical forces in the observed object and the psychical dynamics in the observer" ("The Gestalt Theory of Expression", in Rudolf Arnheim, *Toward a Psychology of Art: Collected Essays*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966, p. 58).

4 For a brief discussion see pp. 142 f. in my chapter "Visualization and the Horizons of Scientific Explanation", in András Benedek and Kristóf Nyíri (eds.), *The Iconic Turn in Education* (series VISUAL LEARNING, vol. 2), Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2012.

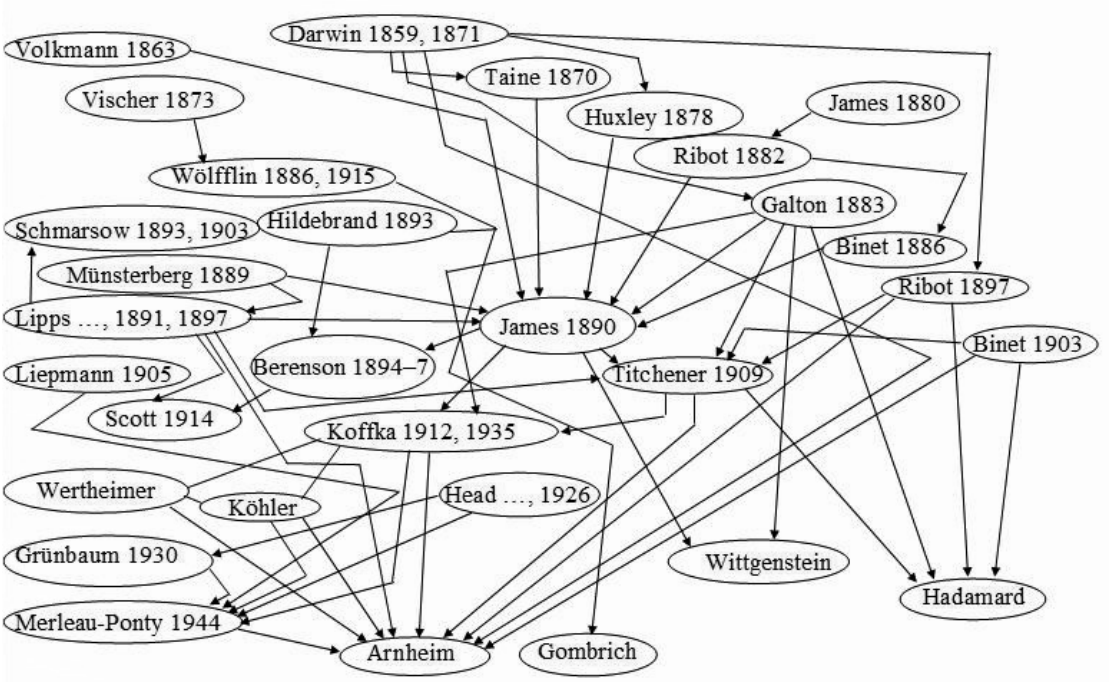

Figure 1: The visual and the motor. A network of influences in intellectual history

is going on, and as it were, a swarm of feeble impulses which usually sum themselves up in an expressive gesture, a metaphor, a visible summary".[5] And Binet, in the concluding passage of his 1903 essay "Imageless Thought", must have referred, again, to the motor level when saying:

> I suppose that the word, like the sensory image, gives precision to the thought which, without these two aids – that of the word and that of the image – would remain very vague. – I even presume that it is the word and the image which contribute the most to making us conscious of our thoughts. Thought is an unconsious act of the mind which, to become fully conscious, necessitates words and images. No matter what difficulty we have in depicting a thought which is imageless – and it is only for this reason that I say thought is unconscious – it nevertheless exists. Thought constitutes, if one wishes to define it by its function, a directing organizing force which I would willingly compare (this is probably only a metaphor) to the vital force which, directing the physical-chemical properties, models the shape of beings and leads to their evolution…[6]

It is clearly impossible in the present brief sketch to give even a rudimentary overview of the intellectual history of the subject, but Figure 1 perhaps captures at least the most essential nodes and links. Coming back to Arnheim and to Ger-

5 Hippolyte Adolphe Taine, *De l'intelligence* (1870), here quoted from the English translation: *On Intelligence*, New York: Henry Holt, 1875, vol. I, p. 89.

6 Alfred Binet, "La pensée sans images", here quoted from the English translation in *The Experimental Psychology of Alfred Binet*, ed. by Robert H. Pollack and Margaret J. Brenner, New York: Springer, 1969, p. 221.

man-language scholarship, let me here make just three more references. First, to Robert Vischer, who first elevated the term "Einfühlung" (subsequently elaborated by Lipps, and rendered as "empathy" by Titchener) into a technical term. "Stimuli in the thought domain", wrote Vischer, "can create sensitive as well as motor stimuli in the lower organs, and also the other way round. … It is the whole body that is involved, the whole human body is seized", *der ganze Leibmensch wird ergriffen*.[7] Certainly the theory of the embodied mind is not a twentieth-century invention. Secondly, to a passage from Adolf Hildebrand's seminal 1893 book: "It is due to our vertical position with respect to the ground, and on the other hand to the horizontal position of our two eyes, that the vertical and the horizontal directions, as fundamental directions underlying all the others, are innate in us."[8] Thirdly, to the neurologist Grünbaum stressing, in 1930, that "'*pure' motoricity already possesses the capacity to elementary sense-giving …, sense-giving as such goes back to motor connections*".[9] This might be, then, one of the contexts of intellectual history in which to see Arnheim when he makes, for instance, the observation: "the cross form as such can symbolize the conjunction of

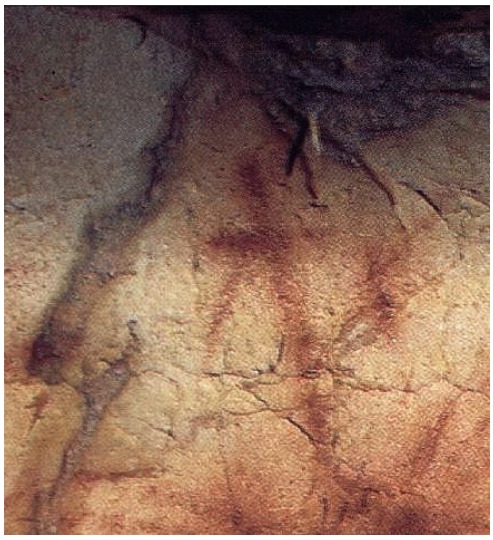

Figure 2: Cross symbol in Chauvet cave. Source: Chauvet et al.

7 Robert Vischer, *Über das optische Formgefühl: Ein Beitrag zur Ästhetik*, Leipzig, Hermann Credner, 1873, sect. 2.

8 Adolf von Hildebrand, *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst* (1893), 3rd., rev. ed., Strassburg: Heitz, 1901, p. 68.

9 A. A. Grünbaum, "Aphasie und Motorik", *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie*, vol. 130, nos. 1–3 (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1930), p. 394, italics in the original.

opposites, the action of centrifugal or centripetal forces, … crossroads, the relation of vertical striving to horizontal stability, and so on."[10] Just like in the case of so many other age-old conventional symbols, stresses Arnheim, the cross as a perceptual pattern is the primary carrier of a broader meaning, while its conventional senses are narrower, and dependent on the former. A telling example, one Arnheim could not have been aware of at the time he wrote this remark, is the cross in Chauvet cave (Figure 2), a painting some 30 000 years old, discovered in 1994.[11] We recognize it as a symbol, and can give it an interpretation, without knowing what it precisely meant to the culture that created it.

2. The Meaning of Conservatism

Although he had a keen sense for the achievements and promises of modern art and architecture, Arnheim was no doubt a conservative. His conservatism was made up of two very different dimensions, an unusual and inspiring one, to which I will return shortly, and the customary backward-harking one, deploring contemporary "social conditions that atomize the human community into a mere aggregate of individuals or small groups", "the chaos of our present way of life", our "individualistic civilization".[12] It is this latter type of conservatism the Austrian novelist and essayist Robert Musil rejected when writing in 1923: "Having freed himself from all the old bonds, man is recommended to subject himself to them anew: faith, … austerity, … sense of national community, a concept of civic duty, and abandonment of capitalist individualism and all its attitudes. … –

10 Rudolf Arnheim, *The Dynamics of Architectural Form* (1977), Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009, p. 209.

11 Jean-Marie Chauvet – Eliette Brunel Deschamps – Christian Hillaire, *Dawn of Art: The Chauvet Cave. The Oldest Known Paintings in the World* (1995). Epilogue by Jean Clottes. Foreword by Paul G. Bahn. Translated from the French by Paul G. Bahn. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

12 *The Dynamics of Architectural Form*, pp. 17 and 67. The passage on p. 17 begins with Arnheim complaining about "the visual, functional, and social chaos of modern life"; on p. 206 he refers, again, to "the prevailing individualism of our civilization". The term "civilization" to Arnheim's German ears clearly suggested something of the opposite of "culture", just as it did, say, to Thomas Mann, Oswald Spengler, or Ludwig Wittgenstein. In English of course the two terms are more often than not used as synonyms, cf. e.g. Franz Rauhut, "Die Herkunft der Worte und Begriffe 'Kultur', 'Civilisation' und 'Bildung'" (1951), *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 34 (1953), pp. 81–91, and especially Wolfgang Schmidt-Hidding et al., *Kultur und Zivilisation* (*Europäische Schlüsselwörter*, vol. III), München: Max Hueber, 1967, see in particular pp. v–vi, 180 ff., 196 and 313 f.

The belief is that a decay has to be cured. – … I can think of hardly any account which conceives of our present condition as a problem, a new sort of problem, and not as a solution that has miscarried."[13]

What Musil here points to is one of the fundamental paradoxes of conservatism as usually conceived. The demand that people should give up their present patterns of life, and return to the ways of some earlier age, is actually a revolutionary one, in need of argument or at least persuasion. If on the other hand conservatism is understood as the teaching that one should strive to preserve whatever norms and social conditions one happens to live under, we are again faced with a paradoxical doctrine indeed, one preaching different values according to different times and places. And yet another set of paradoxes emerges when conservatism is equated, as it almost invariably is, with "traditionalism". Traditions in the strict sense of the term are, as twentieth-century scholarship has exhaustively established, mechanisms for *preserving knowledge* – practices, techniques, as well as verbal knowledge – *in preliterate cultures*.[14] It is simply misleading to speak of traditionalism where conditions of alphabetic literacy obtain. Hence it is misleading, too, to define conservatism, as Karl Mannheim does, as "primarily nothing more than traditionalism become conscious".[15] Mannheim chooses not to regard conservatism as "a phenomenon universal to all mankind".[16] When looking for a designation of the "general psychological attitude" ultimately underlying modern conservatism, he prefers Max Weber's term "traditionalism" to Lord Hugh Cecil's formula "natural conservatism".[17]

By contrast, as I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, one might well try to understand conservatism precisely as a perennial endeavour. I am coming back to Arnheim. In an essay written in 1969 he noted a contrast between, on the one hand, "British empiricist philosophy … proudly asserting the dominion of the individual's views and judgments over the environment", and, on the other hand, the Gestalt view manifesting "respect for the structure of the physical

13 Robert Musil, "Der deutsche Mensch als Symptom" (1923), in Robert Musil, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by Adolf Frisé, vol. 8, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978, p. 1382, here quoted from the English translation in Kristóf [J. C.] Nyíri (ed.), *Austrian Philosophy: Studies and Texts*, München: Philosophia Verlag, 1981, p. 185.

14 For a survey, see my "Introduction: Notes towards a Theory of Traditions", in Kristóf [J. C.] Nyíri (ed.), *Tradition*, Wien: IFK, 1995, pp. 7–32 (accessible online at www.hunfi .hu/nyiri/Notes_towards_a_Theory_of_Traditions.pdf).

15 *From Karl Mannheim*, ed. by Kurt H. Wolff, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1993, p. 288. The quoted passage is from Mannheim's "Conservative Thought", an English translation based on his 1925 Heidelberg dissertation.

16 From Karl Mannheim, p. 280.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 280 f.

world as it impinges upon the nervous system" and "affirming that it [is] man's task to find his own humble place in the world and to take the cues for his conduct and comprehension from the order of that world[,] … demand[ing] of the citizen that he derive his rights and duties from the objectively ascertained functions and needs of society".[18] Humility, one's recognition of one's "humble place in the world" is, I take Arnheim to imply, a defining conservative stance. It is also, one should observe, a posture with a religious tinge.

Another point emerging from what Arnheim in this passage says is that one can in fact identify a constant task conservatism invariably faces. It is to comprehend the world as given, to acquire objective knowledge. Indeed it can be maintained that what conservatism in any historical age first and foremost strives to conserve is actually *knowledge*, specifically the knowledge necessary to protect the life chances of future generations. However, such knowledge varies greatly, depending on the dominant information and communication technology of the age. In a preliterate culture, what society knows is limited to what people remember. Words, in a preliterate culture, are exclusively spoken or heard; knowledge has to be memorized through frequent repetition of texts the truth of which is taken to be indubitable due the fiction that they are passed down unchanged from generation to generation, with an ultimately divine origin. This, then, is the age of traditions, spanning the whole of premodernity, including also the centuries of manuscript culture, still dominantly oral.[19] Premodern conservatism struggles to safeguard the life of future generations by seeking to ensure the survival of the customs and beliefs of former generations. Modern conservatism by contrast, conservatism in the age of the printed press, cannot but recognize that change is inevitable. It attempts to slow it down, reduce its risks, by taking on the role of defending evolutionary social growth against the devastating influence of speculative theories. It emphasizes the knowledge embedded in the institutions and practices of society. This is Burke's line. Now postmodern conservatism, conservatism in the age of online networked communication, faces not only incessant inevitable change, but has to cope with shifts that are rapid and might be entirely unforeseeable. Postmodern conservatism, tormented by the paradox of preparing for what it cannot predict, has the task of continuously mobilizing, and keeping in readiness, the whole array of human knowledge. To be able to manage this, it has to have an adequate notion of what human knowledge really is like.

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18 Rudolf Arnheim, "Wertheimer and Gestalt Psychology" (1969), in Arnheim, *New Essays on the Psychology of Art*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, p. 34.

19 For a more detailed discussion see my volume *Tradition and Individuality*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1992, esp. pp. 75 ff., compare also the prefatory passages on p. ix, *ibid.*

3. The Conservative Concept of Knowledge

Burke's late-eighteenth-century views on knowledge as embedded in the institutions and practices of society were taken up and elaborated by Hayek in the 20th century. What Hayek has shown was that the knowledge necessary for society in order to maintain its economy, even in the case of a large-scale modern economy, emerges from, indeed is essentially upheld by, the practical experience society's individual members have with local conditions. It is knowledge distributed among individual market actors, mediated by the movement of prices, knowledge impossible to centralize. Now what holds for knowledge in the world of production, commerce, and services, appears to hold for knowledge generally, too. John Gray wrote of

> Hayek's … insight that all our theoretical, propositional or explicit knowledge presupposes a vast background of tacit, practical and inarticulate knowledge. Hayek's insight here parallels those of Oakeshott, Ryle, Heidegger, and Polanyi; like them he perceives that the kind of knowledge that can be embodied in theories is not only distinct from, but also at every point dependent upon, another sort of knowledge, embodied in habits and dispositions to act. Some of this practical knowledge is found in rules of action and perception imprinted in the nervous system and transmitted by genetic inheritance. But much of the significant part of the practical knowledge expressed in our dealings with each other is passed on mimetically, in the cultural transmission of traditions or practices…[20]

Let me note that when Gray uses the the word "mimetic", he does not thereby allude to *visual* imitation. The issue of visuality, not to mention the idea of pictoriality, did not play a role in the history of conservative thought from Burke to Hayek. It is of course present in Burke's *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*,[21] but even there visuality is deemed to be of secondary importance in comparison with the verbal. When Burke wrote that "poetry and rhetoric do not succeed in exact description so well as painting does; their business is, to affect rather by sympathy than imitation"[22], his point was not to highlight the power of pictorial representation, but to refute the position that words signify by depending on, or giving rise to, mental im-

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20 John Gray, "Hayek as a Conservative", first published in *Salisbury Review* in 1983, reprinted in John Gray, *Post-liberalism: Studies in Political Thought*, London: Routledge, 1993, the quoted passage on p. 34. To Michael Polanyi's notion of "tacit knowledge" Gray repeatedly refers here. Our "explicit knowledge", he writes, "is only the visible surface of a vast fund of tacit knowing" (*ibid.*).

21 See e.g. the discussion "Why Visual Objects of Great Dimensions Are Sublime", *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, in twelve volumes, vol. 1, London: John C. Nimmo, 1887, pp. 217 f.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 257.

ages.[23] Hayek, who as a young man had contemplated to become a psychologist rather than an economist, in 1952 published the book *The Sensory Order*, expressing views that came close to some of the tenets held by the Gestalt school.[24] However, he did share neither the school's focus on the visual,[25] nor its episte-

23 As he for instance puts it: "the most general effect" of words "does not arise from their forming pictures of the several things they would represent in the imagination" (*ibid.*, pp. 251 f.), and "in the ordinary course of conversation we are sufficiently understood without raising any images of the things concerning which we speak" (*ibid.*, p. 253). I have referred to Burke's theory of imageless thought in my talk "Tradition and Practical Knowledge" (1985), in Kristóf [J. C.] Nyíri and Barry Smith (eds.), *Practical Knowledge: Outines of a Theory of Traditions and Skills*, London: Croom Helm, 1988, pp. 26 f.

24 Thus one of Hayek's starting points is: "We all readily recognize as the same tune two different series of tones, or as the same shape or figure structures of different size and colour. In all these instances groups of stimuli which individually may be altogether different do yet as groups evoke the same sensory quality or are classified by our senses as the same gestalt." (F. A. Hayek, *The Sensory Order: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Theoretical Psychology*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952, p. 13.) Also, Hayek of course accepts the insight that "in perception we do not merely add together given sensory elements", and that "complex perceptions possess attributes which cannot be derived from the discernible attributes of the separate parts" – but cannot resist commenting that this "most general aspect of the problem of gestalt" had been discerned "even before the rise of the gestalt school", and "is by now recognized by practically all schools of psychology", *ibid.*, p. 76. Further, he arrives at the conclusion ("again in agreement with the views of the gestalt school", as he remarks in brackets) "that there is no substantial difference between the acts of 'sensation' and of 'perception' " (*ibid.*, p. 78). Finally, Hayek was strongly attracted, as was also the Gestalt school, to the motor approach to perception. As he puts it: "practically all sensory impulses are evaluated in the light of, or corrected for, simultaneous muscular activities"; there are "motor responses to sensory stimuli which … might almost be described as part of the act of perception" – for example "the classical instance of the kinesthetic sensations connected with the focusing of the eye". Also, Hayek adds, "the "proprioceptive reports of the body postures and movements designed to help perception" serve "as a sort of indispensable background for the proper evaluation of the stimulus" (*ibid.*, pp. 93 and 92).

25 Actually there are very few passages in the book which touch on visuality. Let me single out the one on p. 144, *ibid.*: "some people of the eidetic type appear to be able by recalling vivid images to discover details in them which they had not noticed at the time of the original experience". Hayek here adds the important remark: "But the memory images need not always to be more 'abstract' than current perceptions. … there … exists little justification for any sharp distinction between the 'concrete' picture supplied by sense perception and the 'abstractions' which are derived from the former by the higher mental processes (or between the complete picture of a unique situation built up by the 'senses' from fixed elements, and the abstract features which the 'intellect' singles out from the picture which is supposed to be given prior to any abstraction)."

mological realism.[26] Also, he was apparently quite unaware of the function fulfilled by mental images and pictorial communication[27] in the constitution of knowledge as inherently bound up with practice.

Postmodern conservatism by contrast, committed to understanding the nature of knowledge in the digital networked age, clearly cannot avoid, and of course has access to the technological means, to come to terms with the issue of the pictorial. It has to come to terms, also, with the very issue of knowledge networks. In his recent book on conservatism, Kieron O'Hara notes that the World Wide Web is "a liberal idea – it is designed to allow information to flow easily. Its very structure makes it harder for authoritarian regimes to retain control of those areas of life that have migrated online." However, as O'Hara puts it, the web "has many conservative properties. … it is not laid down by a central authority".[28] Now the point that the workings of the internet can indeed suggest the plausibility of a broadly conservative perspective on knowledge and society has been given a much stronger formulation by the Hungarian-born physicist Albert-László Barabási. The internet is made up of billions of nodes with just a few links, and a relatively small number of "hubs" with a great many links. It is through the hubs that smooth and swift communication is maintained between the rest of the nodes. In the harsh words of Barabási, there is a "*complete* absence of democracy" and of "egalitarian values" on the web. [29] The "vast majority of documents are hardly visible, since a highly popular minority has all the links". We do indeed have free speech on the web, writes Barabási. The chances are, however, that "our voices are too weak to be heard".[30]

4. Conservatism and Education

Educating for a postmodern society from a conservative point of view, then, first of all demands raising a sophisticated awareness for the nature of online net-

26 The perception of Gestalt qualities does not, for Hayek, amount to a direct acquaintance with the structure of reality. His typical term is "approximation": a "gradual evolution of the mental order involves … a gradual approximation to the order which in the external world exists between the stimuli evoking the impulses which 'represent' them in the central nervous system", *ibid.*, p. 107.

27 In a telling passage Hayek speaks of "communication by language proper, as distinguished from communication by gestures, facial expression, etc." (*ibid.*, p. 135).

28 Kieron O'Hara, *Conservatism*, London: Reaktion Books, 2011, p. 268.

29 Albert-László Barabási, *Linked: The New Science of Networks*, Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2002, p. 56.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 174.

works – a respect for their spontaneous growth, but also an ability to harness the possibilities they offer. Sustained success in coping with the net presupposes informal life-long learning. Informal learning is clearly a form of learning that accords with the fact that it is impossible to centralize knowledge. Conservatives should encourage informal learning, but should maintain, or call for, decentralization in the domain of formal learning, too. As O'Hara puts it, "the conservative will be pleased to see the development of a strong autonomous school sector where decision-making about curricula and standards is devolved to the lowest possible level". A "good education system" should not be there "to fill perceived gaps in the workforce". Education, writes O'Hara, "needs to provide knowledge about the world" in the sense of offering "deep knowledge" of the *context*s of problems.[31] Such education cannot but be "challenging and testing", will not "at any cost" avoid putting pressure on children – but, points out O'Hara, "there is no evidence that children thrive educationally in environments that they themselves shape".[32]

An important instance readily coming to mind here is the issue of digital texts vs. hardcopy ones. Young people today will tend to move almost exclusively in the world of digital documents, ever less attracted to the printed book, and thumbing in notes, or punching away on the keyboard when it comes to longer texts, without taking care of printouts. Now while there are a great many wonderful new vistas opening up in the digital world, still, leaving hardcopy documents entirely behind seems in some respects like stepping back into a preliterate culture. The position I summed up some twenty years ago does not appear to have lost its validity:

> Just as speaking, as a rule, is less coherent than writing, a text composed on screen tends to be less coherent than a text composed in handwriting or on the typewriter. The reason for this is obvious. Maintaining coherence is a matter of comparing texts with each other, as well as of comparing one bit of a text with other bits of the same text. On screen such comparisons can be executed to a very limited extent only. Depending on the system used and the kind of display available, one, two, or even more documents can be viewed simultaneously; but of each document only a small segment will be exposed at a time.[33]

Conservative educationists should strive to preserve a level of hardcopy culture amidst the tide of a rising and promising digital culture. And – to come to the main and last point of my paper – they should ecourage exploiting the resources

31 O'Hara, *op. cit*., pp. 139 and 137.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 138.

33 Kristóf [J. C.] Nyíri, "Thinking with a Word Processor", in R. Casati (ed.), *Philosophy and the Cognitive Sciences*, Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1994, pp. 63–74, this passage on p. 70 (paper accessible online at www.hunfi.hu/nyiri/KRB93_TLK.htm).

of the digital medium for the production and dissemination of visual images as the ultimate foundations of conservative practice and theory.

5. Images and Conservatism

5. 1. Images Conservative

Although images can be radically subversive, they have indeed been used, throughout history, as instruments for preserving the status quo. In his book *Augustus and the Power of Images* Paul Zanker provides a fascinating description of the way the penetration of Roman society by Greek art, from the 2nd century BC onward, played a part in dissolving traditional conditions; but he shows, also, how the new visual world that emerged at the time of Octavian's rule contributed to the permanent peace of the empire.[34]

Secondly, images are conservative in the sense that they preserve, in unchanging form, pictorial knowledge. To recall a very early instance: cave paintings served not only the purposes of ritual, religion, or art; they came into being as an answer to the felt need of storing and communicating knowledge. Discussing the tool-making revolution of the Upper Palaeolithic, John Pfeiffer refers to the enormous increase in complexity of the social world, to a veritable information explosion, which rendered inevitable the renewing of the "tribal encyclopedia".[35] And with the advent of the mechanical image – the photograph, the film – even some details became stored the recording of which had not been purposely intended. In fact, thirdly, as I suggested in the introductory passage of the present paper, and again when citing Arnheim's "Wertheimer and Gestalt Psychology" essay,[36] the pictorial as such is conservative in the sense that it tends to show the world as given, the world as it really is. Images can be experienced, also, as expressing what might be called a higher reality – expressing meanings additional to, and beyond, their straightforward pictorial ones, meanings they

34 Paul Zanker, *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder*, München: Beck, 1987.

35 John E. Pfeiffer, *The Creative Explosion: An Inquiry into the Origins of Art and Religion*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982, see esp. pp. 121 ff. and 185 ff. The expression "tribal encyclopedia" was coined by Eric Havelock; Pfeiffer's work, focussing on memory and the visual, in fact complements Havelock's theory of traditions (on Havelock see my "Introduction: Notes towards a Theory of Traditions", cf. note 14 above).

36 Cf. above, pp. 191 and 197.

point to, but do not display.[37] A famous example is Caspar David Friedrich's painting "The Wanderer above the Sea of Fog" (Figure 3). The painting shows a lonely figure confronting nature in what appears to be deep reverence.

Figure 3: Caspar David Friedrich, "The Wanderer above the Sea of Fog" (1818)

Giving expression to reverence by indirect visual means is a topic Arnheim repeatedly returns to in his *The Dynamics of Architectural Form*. A notable passage: "the very nature of religion and its tasks are now so open to question that their external expression is no longer governed by reliable standards. … all the more rewarding [are] those examples of church architecture that succeed in translating dignity and spiritual devotion into twentieth-century idioms". Even the late-modern architect, suggests Arnheim, might achieve a "reinforcing [of] deep-seated spiritual connotations".[38] A piece of architecture Arnheim apparently regarded as a gratifying example is Le Corbusier's Chapel of Notre Dame du Haut (Figure 4).[39] And definitely so a church in Mogno, Switzerland (Figure 5): "In religious architecture", Arnheim wrote, "a good designer such as Mario Botta gave up most of the literal applications of tradition, not to ignore them but to probe once again the deeper core of human feeling and thought".[40]

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37 Compare my paper "Images in Natural Theology", in Russell Re Manning (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, esp. pp. 586 ff.

38 Arnheim, *The Dynamics of Architectural Form*, pp. 206 and 210.

39 Cf, *ibid.*, pp. 106 f.

40 See Rudolf Arnheim, "Notes on Religious Architecture" (1993), in Rudolf Arnheim, *The Split and the Structure: Twenty-eight Essays*, Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1996, p. 61. I am indebted to Arnheim expert Ian Verstegen for drawing my attention to this essay, and for a number of insightful comments.

Figure 4: Le Corbusier's Chapel of Notre Dame du Haut, Ronchamp

Figure 5: Mario Botta's church in Mogno, Switzerland

5. 2. From Traditions to Images

Some thirty or forty years ago I have put together a theory of traditions which I thought was based on the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein.[41] With hindsight, I today realize that it was based, rather, on a one-sided interpretation of that philosophy, an interpretation doubtlessly made possible by the state of Wittgenstein editions as we had them at that time, presenting Wittgenstein straightforwardly as a linguistic philosopher.[42] The argument I was most comfortable with when

41 Suggesting, way back in 1976, not only that "Wittgenstein's so-called later philosophy is the embodiment of a conservative-traditionalist view of history", but also that "this philosophy in fact provides a logical foundation for such a view" (Kristóf [J. C.] Nyíri, "Wittgenstein's New Traditionalism", *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, vol. 28, nos. 1–3, pp. 503–512, this passage on p. 503).

42 Referring to his *Philosophical Investigations* as we then knew it, I felt it was possible to ascribe to Wittgenstein the view: "language-games, i.e. forms of life, have to be accept-

advancing Wittgenstein as a persuasive traditionalist pertained to the domain of elementary mathematics. Believing to speak for Wittgenstein, I wrote:

> Two and two are four, and the only explanation we can give here is that *this is the way we count*. Arithmetical knowledge is based on a conformity in behaviour that is not replaceable by any kind of insight. More generally, traditionalism as here conceived maintains that in the absence of indubitable truths of fact and value there can be no communication, argumentation, or discussion, that society is *held together* by the uniform acceptance of such truths; and that it is education in the family and in the school that has to confer the proper authority upon these truths.[43]

A similar formulation I attempted:

> The concept of … the human subject acting in accordance with the light of his reason, sovereign within his own mental world, reveals itself as absurd in the face of the realization that the meaning of a word is not a mental image, but the use to which the word is put; thinking, believing, expecting, hoping, and so on, are not private mental processes; mathematical insight is grounded in exercise, in drill… [As] Wittgenstein wrote: "Counting (and that means: counting like *this)* is a technique that is employed daily in the most various operations of our lives. And that is why we learn to count as we do: with endless practice, with merciless exactitude; that is why it is inexorably insisted that we shall all say 'two' after 'one', 'three' after 'two', and so on" [Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Part I, § 4]. This conception of mathematical insight and of the ways in which arithmetic is learned, is rooted in the same psychological attitude as Wittgenstein's general conception of education. The latter may be illustrated, for example, by his remark: "When you say NO to a child, you should be like a wall and not like a door".[44]

Clearly, Wittgenstein did see a connection between rote learning and the acquisition of the ability to count. The error I have made was not to realize that he saw a very different kind of connection, too: the one holding between arithmetical truths and their visualizations. The error, indeed the blunder, easy to make at the time, was not to open my eyes to Wittgenstein's philosophy of images. Wittgenstein's manuscripts contain innumerable drawings and diagrams, most

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ed, … they are what is *given*… In any endeavour to criticize a given linguistic tradition, only another linguistic tradition can serve as a standard" ("Wittgenstein's New Traditionalism", p. 509).

43 Kristóf Nyíri, "Szabadpiac és tekintélyelvű társadalom: Angolszász liberális-konzervatív elméletek" [The free market in an authoritarian society: Anglo-Saxon liberal-conservative theories], *Világosság*, August–September 1981, pp. 534–540, the translated passage on p. 540.

44 Quoted from the chapter "Wittgenstein 1929–31: Conservatism and Jewishness", in my volume *Tradition and Individuality* (cf. note 19 above), pp. 15 and 117. The chapter was based on a paper I originally published in German in 1982.

of them in fact illustrating points he made in the domain of the philosophy of mathematics, but only a fraction of them published in the printed volumes edited by his literary executors.[45] A particularly interesting example (Figure 6):

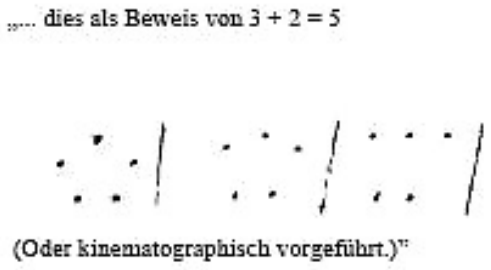

Figure 6: Visual proof of 3 + 2 = 5. From Wittgenstein's MS 118, p. 65r (1937)

Wittgenstein here suggests a way to prove the equation 3 + 2 = 5. The proof would consist in drawing a series of pictures, or in the "cinematographic" presentation of the same series – an *animation*. No wonder this idea did not make it into the printed editions. In mathematics, the first half of the twentieth century was still very much characterized by the visualization Angst that had emerged in the nineteenth.[46] Today this fear is receding. Here, again, Arnheim was well ahead of his time. In his book *Visual Thinking* he stressed that not only "self-evident geometry", but also arithmetics and algebra have a thoroughly perceptual basis, that "[c]ounting is preceded by the perceptual grasp of groups", and that "[n]umbers are perceptual entities, visual and to some extent tactual and auditory".[47] It is not tradition but perceptual grasp that can best teach us the fundamentals of mathematics; and it is not tradition but perception – most importantly visual cognition – that tells us what reality is like.

5. 3. Images and the Unknown Future

The task of postmodern conservatism is to create conditions in which the knowledge necessary to maintain the life of future generations is optimally preserved. However, the postmodern conservative is painfully aware of the fact that the fu-

45 See e.g. my paper "Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Pictures" (2001), in Alois Pichler and Simo Säätelä (eds.), *Wittgenstein: The Philosopher and his Works*, Frankfurt a.M.: ontos verlag, 2006, pp. 322–353 (paper accessible online at http://www.hunfi.hu/nyiri/nyiri_bergen_tlk.htm).

46 See my paper "Visualization and the Horizons of Scientific Explanation" (cf. note 4 above), esp. pp. 146 f.

47 *Visual Thinking* (cf. note 1 above), pp. 221 f., 211 and 213.

ture cannot be predicted. Now both our inner mental imagery and the visible world surrounding us consist of *moving* images – still images being extreme cases of moving ones. The moving image preserves and shows, tells, narrates, but also foreshadows. In an animation the unknown future can, experimentally, be brought to life; an animation built on millions of data can well prove to be a successful simulation. It is the image that solves the paradox of modern conservatism, and it is the moving image that appears to be the most effective cognitive device to alleviate the paradox of postmodern conservatism.