

Kristóf Nyíri

Images in Natural Theology

Introduction

The key background assumption of my present talk is that human thinking has both a verbal and a perceptual dimension, with the perceptual, primarily the visual, dimension being the primordial one. I will not argue for this assumption here, having done so in a number of earlier papers of mine. Let me just refer to two of these: First, a talk given in 2000, "The Picture Theory of Reason",¹ where I exploited, on the one hand, the results of contemporary cognitive psychology, in particular Allan Paivio's so-called dual coding approach, and, on the other hand, arguments that had been set forth in H. H. Price's *Thinking and Experience*, a rarely mentioned book of that otherwise well-known Oxford philosopher. Second, my 2001 talk "Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Pictures",² in which I argued against the mainstream view that according to the later Wittgenstein, images did not have a meaning unless interpreted verbally. Wittgenstein, I endeavoured to show, held that mental operations involve both words and visual images, that verbal and visual imagery function jointly, and that there are indeed cases where understanding a picture is entirely independent of language use.

Twentieth-century philosophy, under the spell of the linguistic turn, gave short shrift to images, mental or physical. And reflecting on the indispensable role of images in human cognition was of course never a characteristic preoccupation for philosophies of religion in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Still, there have been, and are, notable exceptions. Aquinas embraced, and built on, the Aristotelian dictum that "the soul understands nothing without a phantasm", and I take it that there is a close relationship between Aquinas's notion of phantasmata and our notion of mental images.³ Closer to our age, Cardinal Newman, in his *Grammar of Assent*, first published in 1870, interprets memory images as "reflections of things in a mental mirror", as "facsimiles of facts",⁴ and points out that mental images possess a psychological power that mere concepts do not have. The Angli-

¹ In Berit Brogaard – Barry Smith (eds.), *Rationality and Irrationality*, Wien: öbv-hpt, 2001, pp. 242–266.

² In Alois Pichler and Simo Säätelä (eds.), *Wittgenstein: The Philosopher and his Works*, Working Papers from the Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen, no. 17, 2005, pp. 281–312. Reprinted: A. Pichler and S. Säätelä (eds.), *Wittgenstein: The Philosopher and his Works*, Frankfurt a.M.: ontos verlag 2006, pp. 322–353.

³ As Anthony Kenny puts it in his *Aquinas on Mind*: "Clearly a phantasm is something like a mental image", even if "the two do not seem to be entirely equivalent" (London: Routledge, 1993, p. 37). Or, as Eleonore Stump writes, "phantasms are similitudes of particular things", and thus Aquinas is entitled to say that "'when something appears to us in accordance with phantasia, we are as if we were regarding something in a picture'" (Stump, *Aquinas*, London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 257 and 259).

⁴ John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, London: Burns & Oates, 1881, pp. 23 f.

can theologian and philosopher Austin Farrer, in his 1943 book *Finite and Infinite*, taking up the notion of phantasmata construed the "concrete phantasma" as "a concrete image, but sketchy", underlining however that "there are cases in which the image is as explicit as we could make it".⁵ Romano Guardini, one of the most influential Catholic intellectuals of the twentieth century, in his 1950 essay *Die Sinne und die religiöse Erkenntnis*, "The Senses and Religious Knowledge", stresses the role images play in the depths of our subconscious, ready to enter consciousness whenever appropriate external stimuli reach us. The innermost core of a human being, as Guardini puts it, is in the end essentially dependent on images, "sein inneres Wesen kann im Letzten ... nur aus Bildern leben".⁶ Another leading Catholic thinker, Karl Rahner, in 1983 gave a talk on the theology of images in which, referring back to Aquinas's formula *conversio ad phantasma*, he emphasized that traditional Christian anthropology has always regarded intellectual cognition on the one hand, and sensibility on the other, as forming a unity, so that even for the most sublime knowledge it is sensory experience that provides content.⁷ The Russian Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov, in his 1972 book *The Art of the Icon*, underlined that the "visual is intimately associated with the intelligible; ... the word and the image are closely linked".⁸ On the Lutheran side, Rainer Volp, in his 1980 *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* entry "The Image As a Fundamental Category of Theology" recalled Schleiermacher's view that "in jedem wirklichen Denken Bilder mitgesetzt sind"⁹, *in all genuine thinking images are contained*. A recent work with a Lutheran background is Sigurd Bergmann's volume *In the Beginning Is the Icon*. "[T]heology", Bergmann here maintains, "must learn to understand the uniqueness and autonomy of the visual medium. The image has a unique power vested in its capability of producing inner images with external measures and thus influencing our imaginative abilities and our capability to act in the tension between our internal landscapes and external surroundings."¹⁰ And in a book published some months ago, David Gelernter's *Judaism: A Way of Being*, one encounters the following formulation: "Images are the stuff of thought. ... we spend much of our mental lives ... wrapped up in imagery, beyond the reach of language."¹¹

Now Judaism and Christianity are of course religions of the book. One might reasonably expect that the religious feelings and experiences of a believer brought up in a world of sacred texts are tinged with, and indeed informed by, verbal images; here, visual perceptions and imagery will be necessarily influenced, filtered, and modified by prior textual exposures. By contrast, the primordial religious experience focussed on notably by Wil-

⁵ Austin Farrer, *Finite and Infinite: A Philosophical Essay*, Westminster: Dacre Press, 1943, p. 125.

⁶ Romano Guardini, *Die Sinne und die religiöse Erkenntnis*, Würzburg: Werkbund-Verlag, 1950, p. 65.

⁷ Karl Rahner, "Zur Theologie des Bildes", *Halbjahreshefte der Deutschen Gesellschaft für christliche Kunst* (München), vol. 3, no. 5 (1983), pp. 2–8, this formulation on p. 2; see also the revised version in Karl Rahner, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 30, *Anstöße systematischer Theologie: Beiträge zur Fundamentalontologie und Dogmatik*, Freiburg: Herder, 2009, this formulation on p. 472.

⁸ Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty* (translation of *L'Art de L'icône: Théologie de la Beauté*, Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1972), Redondo Beach, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1990, p. 32.

⁹ Rainer Volp, "Das Bild als Grundkategorie der Theologie", in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 6, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980, p. 558.

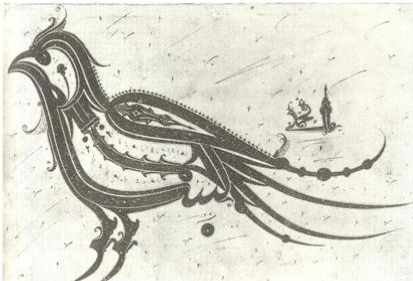
¹⁰ Sigurd Bergmann, *In the Beginning Is the Icon: A Liberative Theology of Images, Visual Arts and Culture*, London: Equinox, 2009, p. 99. The book was first published in Swedish, in 2003.

¹¹ David Hillel Gelernter, *Judaism: A Way of Being*, New Haven: Yale University Press, Nov. 2009, pp. 3 and 20.

liam James,¹² and indeed Calvin's *sensus divinitatis*, "that simple and primitive knowledge, to which the mere course of nature would have conducted us, had Adam stood upright",¹³ should essentially involve mental imagery, specific images of the world surrounding us, and images and statues as artifacts. It is the nature and varieties of such images, and their role at the level of non-revealed religion, that my talk will explore. First, however, let me remain in the domain of revealed religions for another few minutes.

Images in Revealed Religions

The role of images in the religions of the book is a well-researched topic in the case of Judaism, and especially so in the case of Christianity, where the two main issues are how the invisible can be represented by the visible – the basic answer being that in Christ God became flesh¹⁴ – and whether pictures can serve as a *biblia pauperum*, that is, whether they can convey the scriptural narrative to the unlettered.¹⁵ The literature is vast, and I clearly cannot go into great detail here. However, by way of setting the scene for my main argument, I would like at this stage to point to some specific ramifications of the problem.



Basmala in the form of a parrot
(Iran, 1250/1834–35). Source: Freedberg

First, the perhaps minor observation that even within the religions of the book, and even for the scribes and scholars involved in copying and re-creating sacred written texts, the susceptibility to images, the impulse to image, can become overwhelming. As Freedberg, printing examples of Arab calligraphy and of various Jewish manuscripts, puts it: "Even in ... Islam and Judaism ... with ... an apparent emphasizing of word over image, of the written over the figured, the will to image figuratively –

¹² William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (The Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901–1902), London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1902.

¹³ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), transl. by Henry Beveridge, Bk. I, Ch. 2.

¹⁴ There is an "element in the early Christian and Byzantine arguments", writes Freedberg, "that informs all subsequent Christian thought... It revolves round the Incarnation of Christ, and it pertains to religious imagery. The problem, simply put, is this: If God is divine, not material and uncircumscribable, how is it possible – indeed, how can it be legitimate – to represent him in material and circumscribed form? This is the argument used by all those who are hostile to images; but the counterargument depends on the fact that Christ, the image of his Father, was made incarnate as man." (David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, pp. 402 f.)

¹⁵ Freedberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 162 ff., provides an excellent overview of the issue. Let me here quote his rendering of Aquinas's position as set out in the latter's commentaries on the third book of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. In Aquinas's view, writes Freedberg, "there was 'a threefold reason for the institution of images in the Church: first, for the instruction of the unlettered, who might learn from them as if from books; second, so that the mystery of the Incarnation and the examples of the saints might remain more firmly in our memory by being daily represented to our eyes; and third, to excite the emotions which are more effectively aroused by things seen than by things heard'". In an earlier paper of mine I had occasion to cite Freedberg's summary of similar formulations by Saint Bonaventure, cf. Kristóf Nyíri, "Pictorial Meaning and Mobile Communication", in Nyíri (ed.), *Mobile Communication: Essays on Cognition and Community*, Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2003, p. 183.

even anthropomorphically – cannot be suppressed."¹⁶ Secondly, that generally speaking, as Victoria Harrison has recently put it, religious language "tends to be replete with images and metaphors".¹⁷ In particular, both the Old and the New Testament abound in images, not merely in the sense of using a rich metaphoric language – metaphors of course function, ultimately, by evoking mental images – but also by conjuring up, directly, lively visual images.¹⁸ "Judaism", writes Gelernter, "is in fact passionately attached to images; they are its favorite means of expression. – Even a quick glance at the Bible makes it plain that Jewish thought luxuriates in vivid imagery... .. Much of medieval art is a celebration of biblical imagery... The medieval Christian artist translates biblical images directly from words into paint, sculpture, tapestry, glass..."¹⁹ What Gelernter here says is of course not new. It had been demonstrated extensively by the Lutheran German philosopher and theologian Johann Gottfried Herder towards the end of the eighteenth century, and by Austin Farrer in the mid-twentieth century.



Artist's colophon, Kennicott Bible, La Coruña (1476). Source: Freedberg

Herder interprets the Bible – and I will here in part rely on English paraphrases provided by von Balthasar's *The Glory of God: A Theological Aesthetics* – as being written in the "'natural' language of images",²⁰ a text, then, to be reconstructed precisely "as a world of images"²¹. The angel of the Apocalypse, as Herder puts it, "neither speaks nor conceals, but merely points in images", *deutet in Bildern an*, so "[t]he images must, therefore, have had meaning and been intelligible in themselves".²² Farrer, in his 1948 book *The Glass of Vision* – the title is a reference to I Corinthians, xiii, 12 – speaks of to the "tremendous images"²³ in the New Testament, without which, as he writes, "the teaching would not be supernatural revelation, but instruction in piety and morals. It is because the spiritual instruction is related to the great images, that it becomes revealed truth."²⁴ A striking disclosure, the convincing exposure of something previously concealed, I understand Farrer to imply, takes more than mere words, it takes images. When Farrer speaks of images, he

¹⁶ Freedberg, *op. cit.*, p. 55. I am indebted to Miklós Maróth, professor of Arabic Studies at the Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, and to his colleague Abdessamad Belhaj, for explaining to me the precise composition of the parrot-shaped basmala.

¹⁷ Victoria Harrison, *Religion and Modern Thought*, London: SCM Press, 2007, p. 153.

¹⁸ As Evdokimov puts it: "In the Bible, the word and the image are in dialogue, they call to one another and express complementary elements of one and the same Revelation", *The Art of the Icon*, pp. 32 f.

¹⁹ Gelernter, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

²⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of God: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. I: *Seeing the Form*, San Francisco / New York: Ignatius Press / Crossroad Publications, 1982, p. 87.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²³ This phrase of course recalls the passage in Hume: "we find the tremendous images to predominate in all religions" (David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*, ed. by Dorothy Coleman, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007, p. 100).

²⁴ Austin Farrer, *The Glass of Vision*, Westminster: Dacre Press, 1948, pp. 42 f. "That God's mind towards his creatures is one of paternal love", Farrer continues, "is a truth almost of natural religion and was already a commonplace of Judaism. That God's paternal love takes action in the gift of the Kingdom through the death of the Son of Man, this is supernatural revelation."

has, primarily, figurative language in mind; but metaphors and visual images belong, as I indicated a minute ago, to a single continuum, and one can point to a number of instances where Farrer actually alludes to visual mental imagery, for example when he refers to St. John seeing the Son of God as "a Lamb standing as slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes".²⁵ Certainly both Edmond Cherbonnier in 1953 and Ian Barbour in 1976 took Farrer's position to be such as to relate to visual imagery in the strict sense of the term. "Perhaps both philosophers and theologians", writes Barbour, "in concentrating on verbally-stated propositions, have tended to neglect the role of images in human thought."²⁶ Barbour cites Farrer as one of the rare laudable exceptions – also referring, in the same context, to H. H. Price. Cherbonnier, by contrast, is sharply critical of Farrer. Analyzing "Austin Farrer's ... attempt to replace a 'theology of the word' with visual images as the primary medium of Christian truth", Cherbonnier draws this conclusion: "the biblical revelation could be apprehended through images only on one condition – that God had embodied his revelation, not in words, but in a book of pictures. Is the fact that he has not done so only accidental or, on the contrary, is it of the highest significance for the understanding of both man and God that he has in fact revealed himself by his Word?"²⁷ I will come back to Cherbonnier's argument in the next section of my talk. The present section I will conclude with a reference to Newman.

In his book *A Grammar of Assent* Newman contrasts religion in devoutly Catholic populations, to whom "the Supreme Being, our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, Angels and Saints, heaven and hell, are as present as if they were objects of sight"²⁸, with what he calls the English "Bible Religion", consisting "not in rites or creeds, but mainly in having the Bible read in Church, in the family, and in private".²⁹ As Newman puts it, "[r]eading, as we do, the Gospels from our youth up, we are in danger of becoming so familiar with them as to be dead to their force, and to view them as a mere history". Here is where "the practice of meditation on the Sacred Text ... so highly thought of by Catholics", enters.³⁰ Meditation is, essentially, a process by which believers develop mental images to accompany, and make more vivid, their verbal representations of sacred events. In his book

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 48. Also, a telling passage from his 1949 book *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse*: "An image thrown in isolation on the screen means nothing, because it may mean anything... In a long concatenation of images, each fixes the sense of the others, and is itself determined by them. ... we feel the new image emerging out of the hidden mind under the evocation of the images already in place, as St John saw the figure of the Beast come out of the deep when the Dragon's feet touched the sand of the sea." (Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse* [1949], Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006, p. 18.) By contrast, some years later, in the two chapters he contributed to the volume *Faith and Logic: Oxford Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Basil Mitchell, ed., Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), Farrer, while allotting a central role to the concept *parable*, conspicuously avoids using the term "image". Also, in the same volume, I. M. Crombie, in his chapter "The Possibility of Theological Statements", when saying that "we know what the words in the predicates of theological statements mean, and this we know because we take these statements as human images of divine truths", clearly uses the term "image" in the sense of a parable. Thus he can for instance write: "The sense the words bear within the image or parable is drawn from thoughtful experience of human life" (*Faith and Logic*, p. 72).

²⁶ Ian G. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms*, San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1976, ch. 2.

²⁷ Edmond La B. Cherbonnier, "The Theology of the Word of God", *Journal of Religion*, vol. XXXIII, January 1953, no. 1, p. 22.

²⁸ Newman, *op. cit.*, pp. 55 f.

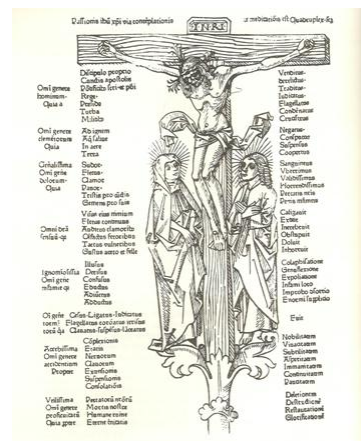
²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

referred to earlier, David Freedberg provides a wonderful summary of how the pattern of Christian meditation from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century relied on an interplay of text, written or recited, and image, both mental and physical – woodcuts, etchings, prints.³¹ For Newman, the presence of mental imagery in religious thought, imagery arising spontaneously or as a result of meditation, was the precondition of real belief – of "real assent", as he termed it.

Images in Natural Religion

Images, then, fulfil an essential role in revealed religions. However, images by themselves clearly cannot convey the message of revelation. To those who are not acquainted with, or do not believe, the narrative of the New Testament, Christ on the cross is just the depiction of a suffering human being. As Hans Belting succinctly put it in his *Bild und Kult*: "The image ... is comprehensible only through being recognized from the Scriptures. It reminds us of what the Scriptures narrate".³² Or, as Rahner explained, images are in need of a verbal interpretation in order to be recognized as explicitly Christian by those who look at it. There is, obviously, no visual reality which by itself would disclose its Christian meaning.³³ In his 1802 classic on natural theology, Paley offers a somewhat related, albeit twisted, argument. Towards the end of the book he comes to say that since the contemplation of divine nature "overwhelms our faculties", we seek "from painful abstraction ... relief in sensible images", and might thereby fall into idolatry, a danger which revelation helps us to avoid: if the authority of the text is observed, "a condescension to the state of our faculties" can be afforded.³⁴ In allotting to images and imagery but an accessory function, Paley is prey to a false philosophy of mind. It is correct to maintain, however, that it is only in the domain of natural religion that images can play a more or less autonomous role. And this is exactly the point Cherbonnier raised in criticizing Farrer. The latter, Cherbonnier wrote, of course conceded that "the object of faith is ... not the images themselves but rather the reality beyond them, to which they point". But then the question can be asked: "Is it possible to say anything about this reality, or must we remain content to apprehend it simply by gazing at the images? ... if the answer is that the reality behind the images can be expressed in words, then ipso facto the spoken word has been reinstated as the basis of revelation, thereby rendering the images unnecessary."³⁵ Out of this impasse, Cherbonnier writes, Farrer attempted to escape by an appeal to natural theology. This



Passionis Jesu Christi via contemplationis et meditationis. Woodcut, ca. 1477.
Source: Freedberg.

³¹ Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, ch. 8: "Invisibilia per visibilia: Meditation and the Uses of Theory".

³² Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 10. This book is a translation of Belting's *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1990.

³³ Rahner, *op. cit.*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 30, p. 481.

³⁴ William Paley, *Natural Theology: Or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity* (1802), 12th edition, London: Printed for J. Faulder, 1809, pp. 442 f.

³⁵ Cherbonnier, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

Cherbonnier calls a desperate step.³⁶ From the vantage point of my present talk, however, Farrer made a felicitous move. Let me just focus on the crucial juncture in his argument.

Images, Farrer maintains, have an essential function in "the natural knowledge of God". As he puts it, and bear with me if I quote at some length here from his *The Glass of Vision*,

neither in revelation nor in rational theology can we point away from the image to that which the image signifies: in both we must be content to refer to the reality by understanding what the image tells us. Nevertheless, rational analogies and revealed images concerning God do not function in the same way: ... the rational analogies are natural images: the revealed figures are not ... natural. – The rational analogies are natural ... in the sense that they may be, and originally are, spontaneous: unless finite things put themselves upon us as symbols of deity we can have no natural knowledge of God. ... The stars may seem to speak of a maker, the moral sense of a law-giver: but there is no pattern of being we simply meet, which speaks of Trinity in the Godhead... Rational analogies are natural in a second sense: the analogy which the natural symbol appears to bear to God is founded on a real relation in which it stands towards God. ... Whereas revealed images are commonly just parables.³⁷

We encounter images, Farrer suggests, images in nature and images of nature, which, by themselves, are capable of impressing us with a sense of a higher reality; furthermore, visual images are natural carriers of meaning, since they mean by resembling, whereas figures of speech mean by convention. "Are those Christian minds really so rare", Farrer asks, "whose nearest gate into the invisible world is a simple awe at natural fact?"³⁸ The text he begins the first chapter of *The Glass of Vision* with is a quote from the Epistle to the Romans: "That which may be known of God is manifest among men, for God hath manifested it unto them. For his invisible attributes since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made..." (I. 19–20). This Scriptural passage, to Farrer, is a guide not to revealed, but to natural theology. "For the moment", he says in the argument I am here concerned with, "we are discounting supernatural revelation, and considering natural religion: by which we are, therefore, bound to understand our own apprehensions of God through nature... ... Natural theology ... provides a canon of interpretation which stands outside the particular matter of revealed truth."³⁹

What I am attempting to do in the present talk, namely to provide a rudimentary overview of the ways in which images function in natural religion, is in a sense a sequel to Farrer's philosophy of sacred images. It is, also, a kind of protest against contemporary work in natural theology, which, as you are no doubt aware, has use neither for images, nor for mental imagery. Aquinas's theory of phantasmata is entirely rejected by Swinburne;⁴⁰ the

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁷ *The Glass of Vision*, pp. 93–95.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 98 and 111.

⁴⁰ Richard Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy* (1992), 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

move from phantasmata to imagery is only half-heartedly made by Kretzmann;⁴¹ and the part played by visual images in religious experience is judged to be insignificant by Alston.⁴² In a more immediate sense, my talk is a reaction to George Pattison's 1991 book *Art, Modernity and Faith: Restoring the Image*. While finding Pattison's general approach to visual theology instructive and stimulating, I feel his summary rejection of natural theology is exaggerated. I think it is unfair to suggest, as Pattison does, that the natural theology of Neo-Thomism has been entirely unable to supply a theological vocabulary and framework for dealing with the problem of faith and visibility,⁴³ and hard to take in, say, his empathetic analysis of Ruskin's work followed by total dismissal. "The overall structure of Ruskin's argument", Pattison writes, "resembles the familiar pattern of natural theology, for its prevailing assumption is that the works of God in creation provide a timeless and universally accessible testimony to their divine origin. The artist is gifted with the ability to see and to represent in his work a truthful image of that testimony and so to be able to direct the less perceptive to see it for themselves."⁴⁴ I believe one might be sceptical when it comes to the idea of a "universally accessible testimony", and still endeavour to develop a phenomenology of spontaneous religious sentiments as arising in response to specific visual experiences. It is the outlines of just such a phenomenology I will now venture to sketch.

Visualizing the Invisible

Discussing Aquinas's views on the possibility of there being images of incorporeal things, Kenny writes that at any rate "the image of a non-bodily thing is not an image of it in virtue of looking like it", adding: "However, there is good reason to believe that what makes an image of X an image of X is *never* its resemblance to X, even if X is bodily."⁴⁵ This latter comment is clearly an echo of Wittgenstein's remark "Anything can be a picture of anything, if we extend the concept of picture sufficiently", printed in the *Nachlaß* volume *Philosophical Grammar*,⁴⁶ the German text of which Kenny translated into English. Certainly the remark does not do full justice to Wittgenstein's views on the issue in *Philosophical Grammar*, and even less to the views that the *Nachlaß* in its entirety suggests.⁴⁷ It is not Nelson Goodman that Wittgenstein paved the way for; Ernst Gombrich, with his emphasis on the role of *resemblance* in pictorial representation,⁴⁸ or Richard Wollheim, with his notions "seeing-as" and "seeing-in"⁴⁹ as explaining our experience of

⁴¹ Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Creation: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles II*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.

⁴² William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (1991), Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993.

⁴³ Cf. e.g. George Pattison, *Art, Modernity and Faith: Restoring the Image* (1991), 2nd enlarged ed., London: SCM Press, 1998, pp. 52 f.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁴⁵ Anthony Kenny, *op. cit.*, pp. 98 f.

⁴⁶ Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974, p. 163.

⁴⁷ See my "Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Pictures", referred to in note 2 above.

⁴⁸ See my essay "Gombrich on Image and Time", in the *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 1, Dec. 2009, esp. p. 3.

⁴⁹ The latter notion supplanting, in the 1980 edition of Wollheim's *Art and Its Objects*, the former one as it was developed, in the wake of Wittgenstein, in the 1968 first edition of the book.

pictorial meaning, can more plausibly be said to be heirs to Wittgenstein. A variety of the notion of "seeing-in" appears already in Husserl's early thinking;⁵⁰ what we "see-in" the picture is what Husserl calls the "image object", and Husserl makes the important point that there is an essential conflict between the "physical image thing" (say the picture as it hangs on the wall) and the "image object", the latter characteristically *pointing away*,⁵¹ as the image thing does not, to the "image subject" – pointing to what the image depicts, represents.

There is another aspect under which the issue of the image pointing away from itself can be seen. In his book *Painting and Reality*, Etienne Gilson makes a distinction between "pictures" and "images" on the one hand, and "paintings" on the other. There is, he says, a "radical difference between a painting, whose meaning is in itself, and a picture, whose function is to point out something else".⁵² The essence of "picturing", as he puts it, "is to represent, or imitate". Gilson concedes, indeed emphasizes, that "[i]mages are among the oldest products of the fabricative activity of man", that they are "inseparable from domestic life", and that "[c]hildren delight in looking at picture books",⁵³ but he makes it clear that in his view images, even religious images, cannot as it were represent anything sublime. By contrast, the "ultimate end" of a *painting* "is to achieve a fitting object of contemplation"; "creative painters ... feel that there is still another reality hidden behind the appearances of nature", and so "[a]ll truly creative art is religious in its own right".⁵⁴ A rather similar approach was formulated by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his *Wahrheit und Methode*. He set *Bild* – picture, image – against *Abbild*, copy. As he wrote, the "essence of a copy is to have no other task but to resemble the original ... pointing, through the similarity, to what is copied" (Gadamer's favourite examples here are the "passport photo or a picture in a sales catalogue"). On the other hand, in the case of the *picture*, it is itself "what is meant... ... one is not simply directed away from the picture to what is represented. Rather, the presentation remains essentially connected with what is represented – indeed, belongs to it." As Gadamer stresses, "the identity and non-differentiation of picture and pictured ... remains essential to all experience of pictures"; and he concludes that it is precisely "the *religious* picture [which] displays the full ontological power of the picture".⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Cf. the translator's introduction in Edmund Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory (1898–1925)*, transl. by John B. Brough, Dordrecht: Springer, 2005, p. xlvi. The German expression Husserl uses is "Hineinschauen". On the whole issue, see esp. the Wittgenstein–Wollheim–Husserl subchapter in Göran Sonesson's *Pictorial Concepts*, Lund: Lund University Press, 1989, pp. 270–276.

⁵¹ Cf. e.g. Husserl, *Phantasy*, pp. 37, 40, 584 f. and 588 f.

⁵² Etienne Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1957, p. 267.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 260–262.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 266, 296 and 294.

⁵⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., London: Continuum, 2004, pp. 133 f. and 137.

The idea of the image pointing away from itself is momentarily formulated by Rahner.⁵⁶ At first it could seem, he wrote, "as if our gaze would not get beyond the immediately viewed and circumscribed object". However, "one cannot experience at all the limits and the characteristic features of the directly viewed, unless one's glance also tends to go beyond this limit, targeting the expanse of the unviewed visible [des ungeschauten Schaubaren]. Looking ... involves a kind of sensory experience of transcendence". And so "even a picture that does not have an immediately religious subject can be in principle a religious picture ..., if its being looked at does, through ... a sensory experience of transcendence, stimulate and take part in constituting the essential religious experience of transcendence".⁵⁷

What we are, then, attempting to describe and to present here, are what one could call *transcending images*. We expect these images to be capable of suggesting extended meanings additionally to, and beyond, their straightforward ones; extended meanings to which they point, but which they do not display. The usual, and of course evident, domain to look for such images is the natural world surrounding us. "All created things of the sensible world", wrote Bonaventure, "lead the mind of the contemplator and wise men to eternal God. ... they are the divinely given signs ... set before our ... sense-oriented minds, so that by the sensible things which they see they might be transferred to the intelligible which they cannot see".⁵⁸ Or recall Aquinas, who in his natural theology upheld that "all created things are, in a sense, images of ... God"⁵⁹, formulating, in *Summa Theologica*, the crucial statement: "Incorporeal things, of which there are no phantasms, are known to us by comparison with sensible bodies of which there are phantasms."⁶⁰ Alister McGrath builds on a venerable tradition when, in his recent book *A New Vision for Natural Theology*, he speaks of "nature as a legitimate, authorized, and limited pointer to the divine".⁶¹

⁵⁶ "Image" for Rahner means, just as it did for his teacher Martin Heidegger, both the image as an artifact, and the picture that presents itself to us when looking at our surroundings. "The expression 'image'", Heidegger wrote in *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, "is to be taken here in its most original sense, according to which we say that the landscape presents a beautiful 'image' (look)"; but the same expression is also used in the sense of *likeness*, e.g. when we speak of a photograph (Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, transl. by Richard Taft, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997, pp. 64 and 66). I am greatly indebted to my friend and colleague István M. Fehér for bringing to my attention crucial aspects of the Heidegger–Rahner connection, cf. his "Karl Rahner szellemi gyökereihez: Heidegger és a XX. századi teológia" / "Zu den geistigen Wurzeln Karl Rahners: Heidegger und die Theologie des 20. Jahrhunderts", in *Karl Rahner emlékülés: Az ige meghallója / Der Hörer des Wortes: Karl Rahner*, ed. by István Boros, Szeged: Logos Kiadó, 1996, pp. 43–91.

⁵⁷ Rahner, *op. cit.*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 30, pp. 479 f.

⁵⁸ Quoted by David Freedberg, *op. cit.*, p. 165. This passage, comments Freedberg, is "an unmystical ... attempt to explain the process of ascent from the visible to the invisible", adding: "Since all created things lead the meditative mind to God, all pictures of them must do so too", *ibid.*, p. 166.

⁵⁹ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III. 19. Vernon J. Bourke transl.

⁶⁰ *Summa Theologica*, I. 84. 7. Benziger Bros. edition, 1947.

⁶¹ Alister E. McGrath, *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008, p. 5.

The most conspicuous natural image of the divine is the image of *light*. In the series of elementary religious conversions William James examines, seeing "a stream of light" or "a bright blaze of light", experiencing "the fullness of the light" or "rays of light and glory", and so forth and so on, are decisive occurrences.⁶² The creation of light stands at the beginning of various ancient cosmogonies, including, of course, the Old Testament. In Herder's interpretation of the latter, too, the image of light takes centre stage. "God's most ancient and most glorious revelation", he wrote, "appears to you each morning as a fact, as God's great work in nature! ... Light is the first thing: his revelation, in which everything else can be seen and understood... ... The light! Light which, as model [als Vorbild], is the most revealing demonstration of God."⁶³ When John Martin's painting "The Celestial City and River of Bliss" was first shown at the Royal Academy in 1841, it was exhibited with the lines from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, "Thee, Author of all being, / Fountain of Light, thy self invisible"⁶⁴. Pattison, in his chapter "Icons of Glory", provides an excellent discussion of the "theology of light", stressing that from the Eastern Orthodox perspective light "is not merely a symbol or image of divinity; it is divinity".⁶⁵ To recall Gadamer's terminology: that what is pointed at as the extended meaning



John Martin, "The Celestial City and River of Bliss", 1941

of the image of light is, here, *non-differentiated* from the image.

The source of light in our physical world is the *sun*. Hume, in his *Natural History of Religion*, sect. 7, refers to the God of the ancient Persians as having "placed the sun as his image in the visible universe". And of course in the history of religions there have been, and in contemporary human culture there still are, innumerable varieties of sun worship. Let me here single out a religion Sigurd Bergmann describes in his book I referred to earlier, *In the Beginning is the Icon*. This is Peru's syncretistic religion, in which, as Bergmann writes, "Christian-Catholic ideas are integrated into the world-views of the native peoples, and the native religious belief systems have in turn brought about a new understanding of Christian ideas".⁶⁶ Bergmann tells about a Catholic congregation in a small town high up in the Andes, where two mission sisters have stimulated the members "to express their faith visually",⁶⁷ that is, to draw and paint. Bergmann prints some of the resulting images. Two of these he specifically associates with "Mother Earth", the "central



Drawing made by Andean/Catholic believer.
Source: Bergmann

press their faith visually",⁶⁷ that is, to draw and paint. Bergmann prints some of the resulting images. Two of these he specifically associates with "Mother Earth", the "central

⁶² William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 68, 215, 22, 245.

⁶³ I am here quoting Herder after Hans Urs von Balthasar, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

⁶⁴ Book 3, line 374. – I am indebted to art historian László Beke for having drawn my attention to this painting.

⁶⁵ Pattison, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

⁶⁶ Bergmann, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

deity in the Andean religion".⁶⁸ What I am struck by is that in both of them the sun, too, figures conspicuously. Mountains, understandably for this region, are present as well. But let me note that, generally too, *the image of the mountain* has a paramount religious significance; I will come back to that significance in a few moments.

Light can be veiled. The image of the *veil* has profound religious connotations: just think of Paul speaking of a "vision

of the Lord's splendour with unveiled face" (2 Cor III.18). I have no time here to pause and analyze this image, and must restrict myself to just mentioning images of two physical phenomena which tend to veil our sight, or veil the light from us: first, *mist* and *fog*, and second, *clouds*. A famous painting having the

first as its topic is Caspar David Friedrich's "The Wanderer above the Mists" (1817-18). The painting shows a lonely figure confronting nature in what appears to be deep reverence. Note that what he sees is not just the mists below, but also the high mountains in the distance. Friedrich's painting figures on the website announcing the 2010 St Andrews Gifford Lectures, titled *The Face of God*, given

by Roger Scruton. I think the organizers chose the right image. Another painting by Friedrich, "Sunrise near Neubrandenburg" (1835) gives a sense of clouds veiling the source of light in a way that suggests that there is something supreme, but invisible, beyond the visible – a suggestion humankind must have experienced since the beginning of time, and artists have conveyed in innumerable images. Such images – paintings, photographs – can be very dramatic indeed, like for instance the one found on the cover of the new edition of Farrer's *The Making of St. John's Apocalypse*.⁶⁹

While clouds can suggest transcendence by veiling our vision, mountains do the same by elevating our gaze to unfathomable heights. McGrath points to "the biblical emphasis upon the importance of mountains in relation to divine revelation", and recalls "the metaphysical poet Henry Vaughan's frequent use of mountain imagery to denote the human longing for 'the world beyond' ".⁷⁰ Pattison quotes John Baggley commenting on Rublev's "Old Testament Trinity" as saying that the mountain is "a symbol of an event of



Painting made by Andean/Catholic believer.
Source: Bergmann



Caspar David Friedrich,
"The Wanderer above the Mists"



Caspar David Friedrich,
"Sunrise near Neubrandenburg"



Farrer, *The Rebirth of Images*.
Cover design of the 2006 edition



Rublev, "Old Testament
Trinity"

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Cf. note 25 above.

⁷⁰ McGrath, *op. cit.*, pp. 61 f.

profound significance".⁷¹ Mountains are certainly not absent from James's collection of deep religious experiences; a characteristic report:

I have on a number of occasions felt that I had enjoyed a period of intimate communion with the divine. These meetings came unasked and unexpected... Once it was when from the summit of a high mountain I looked over a ... landscape extending to a long convex of ocean that ascended to the horizon, and again from the same point when I could see nothing beneath me but a boundless expanse of white cloud... What I felt on these occasions was a temporary loss of my own identity, accompanied by an illumination which revealed to me a deeper significance than I had been wont to attach to life.⁷²

Kenny, in his collection of essays *The Unknown God*, pays tribute to "the greatest of the Victorian mountain writers, John Ruskin". As Kenny writes, "Ruskin's love of mountains knew no bounds: for him, all natural beauty, all moral goodness, was to be judged by its proximity to or distance from the ideal serenity of the high peaks. For him the mountains were the great cathedrals of the earth."⁷³ Kenny notes that "there were links between the Victorian passion for mountains and the Victorian ambivalence about religion. ... Those who gave up belief in the eternal God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were glad to retain a sublime object of awe in the everlasting snows of Mont Blanc, Monte Rosa and the Matterhorn. John Tyndall, the agnostic President of the Royal Society"⁷⁴, Kenny continues, "thus describes the view from the summit of the Weisshorn: 'An influence seemed to proceed from it direct to the soul; the delight and exultation experienced were not those of Reason or Knowledge, but of BEING: I was part of it and it of me, and in the transcendent glory of Nature I entirely forgot myself as man.'"⁷⁵



Albert Bierstadt, "Sunrise on the Matterhorn" (1875)

A painting by Albert Bierstadt, "Sunrise on the Matterhorn" (1875), brings together a number of our themes: light, mist, and mountains. The foreground of the painting is taken up by a group of trees. Although not as grandiose a symbol as that of the mountain, the *image of the tree*, too, has transcending aspects. For Baggley, the tree is a symbol of "life and spiritual growth".⁷⁶ Certainly Caspar David Friedrich's "Oak in the Snow" (1820s) might strike one as such a symbol. On a humbler level, the image of any *plant* is a symbol of growth. Also, it is a symbol of transience,



Caspar David Friedrich, "Oak in the Snow"

⁷¹ Pattison, *op. cit.*, p. 129. The reference is to Baggley's 1987 book *Doors on Perception*.

⁷² James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 69.

⁷³ Anthony Kenny, *The Unknown God: Agnostic Essays*, London: Continuum, 2004, p. 156.

⁷⁴ Actually, Tyndall was President not of the Royal Society, but of the Royal Institute. I am indebted to John Haldane for alerting me to this lapse.

⁷⁵ Kenny, *The Unknown God*, pp. 160 f.

⁷⁶ Cf. Pattison, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

decay, and rebirth. Heinrich Rombach sees in the basic experience of cultivating plants the fundamental possibility of religion.⁷⁷ The two Peruvian images we discussed a moment ago, the images Bergmann associates with "Mother Earth", definitely suggest such a connection.

If plants remind one of decay and rebirth, *flowers*, whether naturalistic or stylized, can create a feeling for the tranquil beauty of the created world. Pattison refers to "Monet's many series of paintings of his Garden at Giverny. ... With each treatment of the subject", Pattison writes, "Monet seems to be moving further and further away from conventional concepts of imitation into the pure play of coloural presences. ... These paintings assure us, in an irreducibly pictorial way, that the world is a good place to be, that it is holy ground, that we may trust ourselves to the particularity of our carnal situatedness".⁷⁸



Claude Monet, "Water lilies" (1916)

We are back at the idea that all genuine art is religious. Earlier in his book, Pattison quoted Tillich: "Expressionism ... has a mystical, religious character, quite apart



Vincent van Gogh, "Shoes" (1887).
After Freedberg

from its choice of subjects. It is not an exaggeration to ascribe more of the quality of sacredness to a still-life by Cézanne or a tree by Van Gogh than to a picture of Jesus by Uhde".⁷⁹ A tree by Van Gogh – or even a *shoe* by him. There is a number of paintings of pairs of shoes by Van Gogh. Freedberg prints one of them; Heidegger discusses them. In turning to this topic, I am leaving the domain of natural beauty, and am nearing the end of my talk. The picture of a pair of empty, unused shoes, Heidegger writes, would tell us very little. Van Gogh's peasant shoes, however, convey a significant message. "From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toil-

⁷⁷ Heinrich Rombach, *Leben des Geistes: Ein Buch der Bilder zur Fundamentalgeschichte der Menschheit*, Freiburg: Herder, 1977, p. 77. – From Rombach's wealth of observations, let me here pick out two further ones: The first relates to the age of cave paintings, and refers to the transcending quality of the cave experience itself. "The cave", writes Rombach, "must have had a deep meaning for early man, indeed the meaning of depth as such. ... what these humans were confronted with was the transition ..., the change ... from the open to the hidden, from the ordinary to the exceptional. The transition was transformation. In the labyrinth of a cave it is impossible not to be touched and transformed." (Rombach, *op. cit.*, pp. 58 f.) The second is a reference to *menhirs*, with the suggestion of a possible parallel between weighty-enormous stones and weighty-enormous feelings (*ibid.*, pp. 99 f.). Freedberg provides a useful historical glimpse of how in antiquity unformed or almost unformed stone and wooden objects elicited feelings of awe (cf. e.g. *The Power of Images*, p. 36, on "the felt relationship between simple and rudimentary form on the one hand and divine inherence on the other"). The *truncated form* so to speak points beyond itself; encountering deficiency can in a sense give rise to an experience of transcendence.

⁷⁸ Pattison, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

some tread of the worker stares forth. ... On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. ... In the shoes vibrate the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain", but they also cannot but suggest, Heidegger adds, a "shivering at the surrounding menace of death".⁸⁰

I take Heidegger to say that the worn empty shoes suggest death because of what they do not show: the person to whom they belong, or ultimately *belonged*. They display, to use a phrase by Rombach, "an image of emptiness", *ein Bild der Leere*.⁸¹ Of course to every image, as we made clear earlier, there belongs the essential tension between what is absent and what is present. And perhaps nowhere



Vincent van Gogh, "Shoes" (1887)



Death mask, limestone,
ca. 7000 B.C. Source: Belting

is that tension more extreme than in the case of one of the most fundamental of images, or even the primordial transcending image: the *death mask* made of stone or clay and placed upon the decaying face of the dead,⁸² pointing away from its unchanging countenance to the beloved person who in this world is no more.



Death mask, stone,
ca. 7000 B.C. Source: Belting

* *
*

The assumption I have put forward at the beginning of this talk was, strictly speaking, a simplifying one. We might indeed maintain that in human cognitive development and activity the visual is more basic than the verbal. However, preceding and underlying both, there is the *motor dimension* – muscular tensions, kinesthetic experiences, bodily movements.⁸³ In my paper "Film, Metaphor, and the Reality of Time"⁸⁴, I had occasion to refer to Rudolf Arnheim's 1954 book *Art and Visual Perception*, and his masterly summary of a substantial earlier research tradition which had demonstrated that to muscular sensa-

⁸⁰ Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art", in Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, transl. and intr. by Albert Hofstadter, New York: Harper & Row, 1971, pp. 32 f.

⁸¹ Rombach, *op. cit.*, p. 73, cf. note 77 above on deficiency and the experience of transcendence.

⁸² Cf. Hans Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft*, München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2001, esp. pp. 17 and 37, and the chapter "Bild und Tod".

⁸³ The definitive exposition here is Jerome Bruner's study "On Cognitive Growth", in Bruner et al., *Studies in Cognitive Growth*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966.

⁸⁴ *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2 (June 2009), pp. 109–118.

tions there correspond schematic inner images, images of the position of the bodily self in relation to its surroundings.⁸⁵ And since the 1980s, conceptual metaphor theory⁸⁶ has invited ever more detailed descriptions of how kinesthetic sensations give rise to so-called image schemas. Those images in our subconscious that Guardini was speaking about are, it appears, created by unconscious motor experiences.

Among unconscious motor experiences, eye movements are of special importance. By way of concluding my talk, let me call attention to a seminal essay by Wallace Chafe, published in 1980,⁸⁷ where the author elaborates a parallel between, on the one hand, vision in general and eye movement in particular, and, on the other hand, verbal processes. As Jana Holšánová, following in the footsteps of Chafe, has recently in a series of studies demonstrated, patterns of eye movements and patterns of thinking mirror each other.⁸⁸ What Bonaventure said about our "sense-oriented minds", namely that "by the sensible things which they see they might be transferred to the intelligible which they cannot see", seems to be entirely borne out by today's cutting-edge cognitive research.

⁸⁵ Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954. Among the forerunners of his position Arnheim here also includes William James, referring to the latter's *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), chapter VI. He could also have referred to chapter XV of the same book, the chapter "The Perception of Time", where James comes to say that it is feelings in the muscles of the eye, the ear, and also muscles in the head, neck, etc., by which we estimate *lengths of time*. As he puts it, "muscular feelings can give us the object 'time' as well as its measure". I find it fascinating to compare these views of James with a passage he formulates in his *The Varieties of Religious Experience*: "There is a state of mind, known to religious men, but to no others", he there writes, "in which the will to assert ourselves and hold our own" has been displaced by a complete surrender to, and trust in, God. "In this state of mind, what we most dreaded has become the habitation of our safety... The time for tension in our soul is over, and that of happy relaxation, of calm deep breathing, of an eternal present, with no discordant future to be anxious about, has arrived" (*op. cit.*, p. 47).

⁸⁶ Paradigmatically formulated in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

⁸⁷ Wallace L. Chafe, "The Deployment of Consciousness in the Production of a Narrative", in Wallace L. Chafe (ed.), *The Pear Stories: Cognitive, Cultural and Linguistic Aspects of Narrative Production*, Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1980.

⁸⁸ See especially Jana Holšánová, *Discourse, Vision, and Cognition*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2008.