

# Body and Image. Vico, Suzuki, and Nam June Paik Critique of Western logocentrism

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## 1 Legal Iconoclash

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In the introduction to an exhibition catalogue <sup>\* 1</sup>, to clarify the meaning of the concept of Iconoclash, Bruno Latour refers to a video image that portrays hooligan looking man dressed in red with helmets and axes, hitting the glass that splinters in every direction while loud screams of horror at their action are heard from the crowd beneath them that remains unable to stop the looting.

Latour interprets the potential ambiguity of the image as an emblematic figure of the Iconoclash, specifying that it is the work of brave Italian firemen risking their lives a few years ago in the cathedral of Turin to save the precious Shroud from a devastating fire. The heavily reinforced glass has been built around the venerable linen to protect it, not from vandalism but from the mad passion of worshippers and pilgrims: what we face

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<sup>\* 1</sup> Latour, B., 2002, *What is Iconoclash? Or is there a world beyond the image wars?*, Latour, B., Weibel, E., eds., *Iconoclash. Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*, ZKM, Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe; MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. And London, 14.

here is an apparently violent video-act of glass breaking that epitomize the ambiguity of the images in general, namely an Iconoclasm. By Latour's definition:

*Iconoclasm* is when we know what is happening in the act of breaking and what the motivations for what appears as a clear project of destruction are; *iconoclash*, on the other hand, is when one does not know, one hesitates, one is troubled by an action for which there is no way to know, without further inquiry, whether it is destructive or constructive \* 2

In this paper I intend to briefly explore the relationship between perspective and normativity looking at the discipline called legal aesthetics and the tradition of legal emblems \* 3 in the spirit of Latour's *Iconoclash*. 'Written in your heart' is a quotation from an important passage from St. Paul Epistle to the Romans, one of the founding passages of Christian natural law:

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the *law written in their hearts*, their conscience also bearing witness \* 4.

Western theory of interpretation of Christian religious and normative texts descending from Roman law traditionally believes that the spirit could anticipate our understanding of the letter of the text. Peter Goodrich expresses the relevance of the issue for Western legal culture by commenting on a legal emblem of the seventeenth century by Georg Wither representing the sovereign, crowned and with a scepter of office in his left hand, standing upon the globe.

The key to the Wither's picture is the eye in the sovereign's chest, which represents wisdom embodied as the very heart of sovereignty, expressed as an interior eye:

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\* 2 Latour, *What is Iconoclash?*, 14.

\* 3 Alciato, A., 2004, *A Book of Emblems*. The Emblematum Liber in Latin and English, [1531] J. Moffitt ed., Mc Farland, Jefferson, NC.; Goodrich, P., 2014, *Legal Emblems and the Art of Law. Obiter depicta as a Vision of Governance*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; Heritier, P., 2012, *Estetica giuridica*. Giappichelli, Torino.

\* 4 St. Paul, *Letter to Romans*, 2,14-15 (King James version).

The sovereign, like Justice, has no need of bodily eyes or exterior vision. What matters is the unwritten law, the reason of nature that is carried inside and seen by the eye of the spirit as it looks in before it emanates outward. Wisdom precedes vision, and knowledge comes before sight <sup>\* 5</sup> (fig. 1).

Following Kantorowicz's studies on the bodies of the king <sup>\* 6</sup> and Legendre's dogmatic anthropology <sup>\* 7</sup>, Goodrich considers the eye placed in the center of the sovereign's chest the visual representation of the interpretative technique of the spirit before the letter, by reversing the traditional sentence 'the letter before the spirit'. The eye of the spirit has precedence, just as, in common law, it is unwritten law, namely custom, law of nature and of God, that has precedence over written law and legislation: "This is the *political theology of the image* as we inherit it and manipulate it in law" <sup>\* 8</sup>.

The paper's thesis must be understood as an exercise of an Iconoclasm in Latour's sense, at once creative and destructive in the relationship between Western and Eastern cultures and the relationship between art, law, and science. The *political theology of the image* that presides over the theory of Western interpretation can also be identified in the Nam June Paik's representation of the robot in the art and in his reference to the robot in contemporary Japanese culture.

The presumed universal dimension of political theology of the image raises complex problems similar to those of Panofsky's perspective as a symbolic form <sup>\* 9</sup>. Perspective, as a technique of painting which emerged in the studies and works of Leon Battista Alberti, Piero della Francesca and Filippo Brunelleschi, according to Panofsky could be understood as an *a priori* form of artistic representation concerning the various historical periods, precisely as a symbolic form, following Cassirer's philosophy. In the study dedicated to the famous painting by Piero della Francesca *The Flagellation of Christ* (1468-70), Legendre identifies and specifies the normative mechanism of the act of

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\* 5 Goodrich, *Legal Emblems*, 18.

\* 6 Kantorowicz, E., 1981, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

\* 7 Legendre, P., 2009, *Leçons IX. L'Autre Bible de l'Occident: Étude sur l'Architecture Dogmatiques des Sociétés*, Fayard, Paris.

\* 8 Goodrich, *Legal Emblems*, 16.

\* 9 Panofsky, E., 1993, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, Zone Books, New York.

painting: the Alberti's "open window through which to look at the history" \* 10

My thesis is that the political theology of the image does what the Alberti's window realizes for those who look at it: it imposes *a window, a framework, a way of seeing*.

In the book dedicated to the history of visual culture of East and West \* 11, Belting criticizes the presumed universality of the technique of perspective. He analyzes its political significance, noting that Father Matteo Ricci intended to continue the work of evangelization of Propaganda fidei in China, extending it to science and technology. His Jesuit superior in Rome, Father Alessandro Valignano, pressured Chinese artists to learn the technique of perspective and to extend the teaching of perspective to Japan, which however spread only later after the figure and work of Shiba Kokan (1747-1818). According to Belting, the Japanese observer of paintings painted with perspective (*ukie, kubomie*) had the impression that his gaze was floating inside the painting and immersed in a fictitious space.

From the Italian perspective of Renaissance to contemporary Planet Hollywood, art and image have represented the normative imposition of a glance and, through the glance, of a way of thinking by a sort of iconoclasm, a creative and destructive evolution of cultural identities.

The relationship between art and law studied by legal aesthetics opens a field of research in cultural anthropology, following the anthropological theory of images of Belting \* 12 and the studies of Legendre, Goodrich and Sherwin \* 13. The field of visual legal studies can thus open up perspectives for innovative research within anthropological studies. This paper aims to analyse, by starting from this perspective, the pioneering work of Nam June Paik in his reference to the relationship between man and robot for legal aesthetics.

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\* 10 "I trace a square of the size I want, made of right angles, and for me it is an open window through which to cross history" Alberti, L. B., 1435, *De Pictura (On Painting)*. See Legendre, P., 2001, *De la société comme texte. Linéaments d'une anthropologie dogmatique*, Fayard, Paris and Heritier, P., 2014, *Law and Image: Toward a Theory of Nomograms*, in Wagner, A., Sherwin, R.K., eds., *Law, Culture and Visual Studies*, Springer, London New York, 41-44.

\* 11 Belting, H., 2011, *Florence and Baghdad. Renaissance Art and Arab Science*, Belknap Press, Harvard.

\* 12 Belting, H., 2011, *An Anthropology of Images. Picture, Medium, Body*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

\* 13 Sherwin, R., 2011, *Visualizing Law at the Age of Digital Baroque*, Routledge, London and New York.

## 2 The Hobbesian Body

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To the contemporary legal scholar, it may seem nonsensical to describe the law not as an exclusively textual phenomenon but as an iconic one. Modern law would be an exclusively textual phenomenon, composed of interpretable written rules imposed by the State. This concept of law, however, does not appear to be useful in giving a historical explanation of the evolution of Western legal experience. It is limited to explaining the notion of *Systema iuris*, the rational legal system composed of norms, and it does not consider the notion of *Corpus Iuris* (body of law), emerging from the Roman and Canon law tradition (*Corpus Iuris Civilis* and *Corpus Iuris Canonici*) in which the normative and symbolic role of the image appears incorporated in the discourse on the basis of law.

It is sufficient to think of the difference between the term *Corpus*, characteristic of the roman and canonical monuments in which the reference to the image of the 'legal body' is instituted (the Roman Emperor or of the Pope who embodies the law \* <sup>14</sup>) and the modern term *System* (meaning a set of norms gathered in a code, lacking in images). The image of the State as a fictional body (the Leviathan by Hobbes) is a sort of 'third' historical image of the 'fictional body' after the Roman Emperor and the Pope of the Catholic Church \* <sup>15</sup>.

Legendre observes that people in any historical period of history have never been governed without the assistance of a *mise en scène*, without the construction of an aesthetic figure of the foundation of the law, without resorting to music, ceremony, or dance. Law is not a rational *systema iuris* composed only of interpretable written norms, but also and always a *corpus iuris* wrapped in images, symbols and myths, which holds the norm aesthetically and dogmatically anthropologically communicable \* <sup>16</sup>. Hobbes' Leviathan iconically represents the figure of the Sovereign, coinciding with the State as the legal and fictional notion of person:

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\* <sup>14</sup> Kantorowicz, *The King's two Bodies*.

\* <sup>15</sup> Hobbes, T., *Leviathan* [1651] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

\* <sup>16</sup> Legendre, P., 1997, "Hermes and Institutional Structures: an Essay on Dogmatic Communication", in Legendre, P., *Law and the Unconscious. A Legendre Reader*, ed. Goodrich, P., Macmillan, London; New York: St. Martin's Press, New York.

*persona* in Latin signifies the disguise, or outward appearance of a man, counterfeited on the stage and from the stage hath been translated to any representer of speech and action, as well as tribunals and theatres. So that a person is the same that an actor is<sup>\* 17</sup> (fig. 2).

Hobbes interprets the state of nature as a state of war of all against all (*bellum omnium contra omnes*) in which through the *pactum unionis* the right to govern is conferred on a single third 'person', the Sovereign, extraneous to the contract. This third 'person' is represented by the biblical monster of the Leviathan, an artificial man constructed in the human image of a fictional body: "For by art is created that great Leviathan called a Commonwealth, or State (in Latin *civitas*) which is but an artificial man"<sup>\* 18</sup>. The figure of Leviathan is located within the political theology of the image previously identified in this paper through the Wither's image of the Sovereign, of which it represents a variant. In a first representation-symbol from the frontispiece of the Hobbes' book, the Leviathan or artificial state-person is the gigantic Sovereign that hoists above a peaceful city the symbols of political and religious power, a sword and a crosier, accompanied by the biblical motto taken from the Bible's *Book of Job* (41: 33) "There is no power (*potestas*) on earth to be compared to him". (*Non est potestas super terram quae comparetur ei*). The image of the artificial body of the state, literally, is made ('written') of men's bodies.

It would only be Nazism (and also the Marxist versions of the cult of the dictator's body, from Stalin to Mao), and the twentieth-century totalitarianism in general that interpreted the *body of the dictator*, of the *führer*, in continuity with the Western legal aesthetic tradition. The body of the Dictator is the Corpus, real and not fictional, of the *third Reich* monstrously altering the idea of law mythical transcendence of previous *Corpus Iuris Civilis* of the Roman Empire and *Corpus Iuris Canonici* of the Catholic Church.

Legendre's theory shows that every society, in every period till to our contemporary media society, tends to sacralize (the body of) the power and *represents it symbolically in the form of images*.

At the start of the second millennium, till to our digital baroque societies<sup>\* 19</sup>, the myth of the foundation seen as the place of the iconic representation of power became however *malleable, occupiable by different subjects* and forms of knowledge. The State, from

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\* 17 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. XVI, 106.

\* 18 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 7.

\* 19 Sherwin, *Visualizing Law*.

this point of view, is certainly not the last subject to occupy the mythical and third basic place previously held by the Pope and the Roman Emperor's bodies. New protagonists and new emblematic forms of knowledge have appeared in the scene, no longer linked to the religious or legal sphere, but to other areas of the human world. The *divinized Science* (represented symbolically by the Goddess of Reason) in the period of the Enlightenment and later of positivism replaced the body of the State with scientific images; the same logos of contemporary corporation and the bodies of planet Hollywood celebrities or sports champions or the stylized bodies in the rituals of fashion are the *new mythical bodies* of our societies, symbolically occupying the place of the mythical basis of the social.

Within this political theology of the image are located the relations of *iconoclash* at once creative and destructive between religion, science, and art. In this paper, we have ideally added to the iconoclash described by Latour the law, with its political theology of the image. In concluding I'll return to the Belting's reading of the reference to the robot in Nam June Paik's prophetic work, as a new political theology of the image for our digital and robotic contemporary societies.

### 3 Nam June Paik and 'robotto no kokoro'

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Hans Belting wrote two papers in the part of Latour's *Iconoclash* catalogue dedicated to the question "Are there limits to iconoclasm?": "*Invisible Movies in Sugimoto's 'Theaters'*" and "*Beyond Iconoclasm: Nam June Paik, the Zen Gaze and the Escape from Representation*" \* 20.

Sugimoto's *Theater Series* for Belting "strangely resembles the living *camera obscura* which we are" \* 21. Sugimoto's Movie Theaters are built as *theater of illusions*, where the interiors are rethought as metaphors reminding us that our vision is confined to a permanent theater of illusions. The screen which represents the archetypical image is a sort of epiphanic window of the world that

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\* 20 Belting in B. Latour, *Iconoclash*, 423-427, 390-411.

\* 21 Belting, "*Invisible Movies in Sugimoto's 'Theaters'*", in Latour, *Iconoclash*, 423. Concerning the relationship between the Alberti's window, the perspective, and the camera obscura see Pedullà, G., 2012, *In broad daylight. Movies and Spectators after the Cinema*, Verso, London-New York and Okada, A., 2015, *Ut pictura kinesis: teoria della pittura e teoria del cinema*, in Patella, G., and Okada, A., *Eyes and Gazes in Philosophy and Arts*, Universitalia, Roma, 81-92.

... is bathed in a blinding light which seems to enter the dark room from the outside thought, in fact, it is projected from within. But the screen is empty and thus qualifies as either the everything of all possible images or else their nothingness as vehicles of illusion...The light, as it were, represents an invisible film enshrined in a visible interior \* <sup>22</sup> (fig. 3).

With the Sugimoto's theater of illusion are we confronted with a different political theology of the image regarding the western light of the spirit written in our hearts? Or does Sugimoto's photographs constitute an interpretation through an Iconoclasm of the concept of spirit as *camera obscura*? The reference to the Nam June Paik's images of robots could help us to give some kind of answer related to the Zen's gaze. Nam June Paik's 1968 movie *Zen for film* is an hour-long film that has no images (only white screen), very close to John Cage's famous silent piece 4'33" rooted in the teaching by Daisetz Suzuki at the Columbia University and in the criticism of representation.

If the eminent artist of the FLUXUS movement, Wolf Vostell created in 1996 a desecrating image of Christ in which a television take the place of the traditional sacred heart finds place a television (*Jesus mit TV herz*), Nam June Paik ventures with a series of TV Buddha following a similar idea (fig. 4).

The image of the sacred heart of Christ in the Catholic tradition, in fact, symbolizes the resurrection and therefore the salvation of mankind. From the hermeneutical point of view, it means that it is the divine spirit of Christ that interprets the letter of the word of God (the ancient Jewish testament) starting from the idea of resurrection and salvation from mortality. On the legal aesthetic level, the political theology of the image of law 'written in the heart' of the Sovereign, therefore, indicates the religious foundation of natural law, written in the spirit of man and not in the letter of the law (the aforementioned passage from Rom 2:14-15). By replacing the image of the sacred heart with a television, Vostell intends to denounce the falsity of religion, its rites, and its commercial character.

According to Belting's analysis, Nam June Paik TV Buddha series (in which a statue of Buddha contemplates his image reflected in television, in a sort of closed narcissistic circuit between reality and representation) denounces the empty circle of television images as a false representation of reality, as a commercial and narcissistic fictional

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\* <sup>22</sup> Belting, "Invisible Movies in Sugimoto's 'theaters'", 423.

world. The Belting's analysis state that for Nam June Paik "despite the constant flux of video images, which the camera sends to the screen, there is *nothing* to be seen in the sense that there is never anything *new* to be seen" \* 23. The Zen Gaze denounces that "the World is nothing but an image, and we reproduce it as a living mirror...images are tautological" \* 24. Sculpture (in the case the statue of Buddha) and video technology within the narcissistic circuit "both produce nothing but images" \* 25. The tautology created by the mirror situation serves as great metaphor of time in which time-consciousness in terms of Husserl's phenomenology results in a paradox \* 26. In a different performance (*Nam June Paik sitting in TV Chair*, 1968/76), however, Paik represents himself, his body, as an obstruction to the closed circuit between the camera and the object seen. Following Belting's analysis "the body of the artist obstructed the "natural" field of vision, which exists between a mirror and a viewer... The performance helps to explain the fiction in the Buddha's mirror position... the mirror is a metaphor for the viewer and their inner image: it is, in fact, the mental mirror reflecting external sensation that matters" \* 27 (fig. 5-6).

The last performance Belting refers to (*Nam June Paik with Triangle*, 1976) is made by an image in which Nam June Paik presents himself as a sort of 'living Rodin' in the act of reflecting: his face appears between a TV representing of Rodin's famous statue "the Thinker" and a TV representing a statue of Buddha.

If the comparison between the statue of Rodin and that of Buddha refers directly to Suzuki's text *Zen and Japanese Culture* \* 28, for Belting this self-representation of Nam June Paik refers to his ambivalence as an artist representing himself: "He is both Rodin and Buddha, an artist in the West and also a representative of another mentality. Though he produces images, he entertains a certain distance to Western fetishism which trusts images blindly as agents of representation" \* 29.

Nam June Paik later came back to the representation of robots as built by a series of vintage televisions, as in "*Family of robot*" of 1986 \* 30. Here Paik takes up Vostell's idea

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\* 23 Belting, "Beyond Iconoclasm: Nam June Paik, the Zen Gaze and the Escape from Representation", 402.

\* 24 Belting, "Beyond Iconoclasm", 404.

\* 25 Belting, "Beyond Iconoclasm", 405.

\* 26 Belting, "Beyond Iconoclasm", 407.

\* 27 Belting, "Beyond Iconoclasm", 409.

\* 28 Suzuki, D., 1959, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 105.

\* 29 Belting, H. "Beyond iconoclasm", 411.

\* 30 Nam June Paik, *Becoming Robot*, M. Chiu and M. Yun eds., Asia Society Museum, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2014.

of representing the body of the robot made by a series of TV sets – like the Leviathan's fictional body was made by artificial men. Here the entity created in his 'image and likeness' of the man- to use the words with which the book of Genesis attributes to God the creation of man – is the robot (fig. 7).

We can find an aesthetic continuity between the image of Wither's Sovereign, Hobbes' Leviathan and Nam June Paik's robot: the common political theology of the image. The analysis of Suzuki's concept of 'kokoro' and Nam June Paik's image of family of robots made by TV series could help how humanoid robots become sites of affective investment in contemporary Japan. Answering to the question: "*Where to locate the Mind?*" (*Shin/Kokoro*) Suzuki observes that: "the main thesis of Takuan's letter to Yagyū Tajima no kami is almost exhausted in the passages translated more or less literally above... It consists in preserving the absolute fluidity of the mind (*Kokoro*) by keeping it free from intellectual deliberations and affective disturbances of any kind at all that may arise from Ignorance and Delusion" \* 31. Even if we don't have a chance to go into it in more detail the similar ambiguity of representation of images for Paik concerns the concept of shin/kokoro/mind (*honshin/moshin*) for Suzuki. The same ambiguity can, however, be attributed today to man-made robots. For Katsuno, if for English speakers 'heart' is a uniquely human phenomenon, the attribution to 'heart' (*kokoro*) to humanoid robots is pervasive in contemporary Japan \* 32. Sugano Shigeki, a leading scholar in Japanese Humanoid robotics speaks about «heart to heart (*kokoro*) relationship» which enables both the human and the robot to understand each other like human beings. For Katsuno (currently studying the experience of the Kannon temple in Kyoto using a Buddha robot for religious rituals) "the robot in Japan appears to reconcile the tension between the modernity and the postmodern worldview. It promotes a nostalgic return from disembodiment to re-embodiment, and from virtual to physically touchable existence... the robot's heart merges nostalgia, representing both the frontier of technology and reifying a sense that something of our humanity has been lost" \* 33 (fig. 8-10).

The Western political theology of the image and robot technology could maybe help us to understand the creative and destructive nature of the artistic and political iconoclasm that every real body could produce facing his image, in Western and Eastern culture and

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\* 31 Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 110.

\* 32 Katsuno, H., *The Robot's Heart. Tinkering with Humanity and Intimacy in Robot-building*, Japanese Studies 2011, 93-109.

\* 33 Katsuno, *The Robot's Heart*, 108.

religion. Nam June Paik representation of Buddha *robotto no kokoro* could be coming today our fictional reality in which we are immersed.

## 4 Vico's and Suzuki's criticism of logocentrism

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The comparison between Rodin's image and the image of the Zen monk posed by Suzuki and recalled in Nam June Paik's visual works allows us to understand the question of the relationship between legal aesthetics (the normativity of the image) and the evolution of the Western history of the perspective.

Vico's critique of Descartes' rationalism links the history of legal emblems and the normative use of the image of the sovereign's body with the overcoming of ethnocentrism in the Western gaze connected to the conception of perspective as the only 'symbolic form' \*<sup>34</sup>.

We have to identify the difference between the Western rationalist model and the Zen religious tradition. For Suzuki, it is not unconstructive to notice how Rodin's *The Thinker* is differentiated from Sekkaku's Zen master in meditation: "Both are intently engaged in concentrating the mind on a subject of the utmost interest of significance. But Rodin's figure seems to me at least to be on the plane of relativity and intellection, while the Oriental one is somewhere beyond it" \*<sup>35</sup>. The difference to notice is in the posture assumed by each one of the two thinkers. Rodin's Thinker sits on a raised seat while the master Zen squats on the ground. The one is less in contact with the earth than the other. Following Suzuki, the meaning of this difference is philosophical and aesthetic: "The Zen Thinker is rooted in the foundation, as it were, of all things, and every thought he may cherish is directly connected with the source of being from which we of the earth come. To raise oneself from the ground even by one foot means a detachment, a separation, an abstraction, a going away to the realm of analysis and discrimination. The Oriental way of sitting is to strike the roots down to the center of the earth and to be conscious of the great Source where we have our 'Whence' and 'whither'" \*<sup>36</sup> (fig. 11-12).

Vico and Derrida criticize the logocentrism and anthropological ethnocentrism of Western rationality, differently from that of Suzuki.

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\*<sup>34</sup> Belting, *Florence and Baghdad*.

\*<sup>35</sup> Suzuki, D., 1959, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 105.

\*<sup>36</sup> Suzuki, D., 1959, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 106.

About Aristotle's famous theory that spoken words are symbols or signs of affections or impressions of the soul; and written words are the signs of words spoken<sup>\* 37</sup>, Derrida points out that in Aristotle's theory, between being and mind, or things and feelings, there would be a relationship of translation or natural signification. Between mind and words, we could find the origin of conventional symbolization. The French philosophers promotes with its deconstructionism, as is well known, criticism of the logocentrism that follows the Aristotelian theory of the naturalness of voice and sign<sup>\* 38</sup>.

A different criticism of Aristotle's linguistic theory was Vico's fictional theory of institutions and religion. Vico, as Cantelli notes, moves from the recognition of proximity between the soul's affection and the linguistic sign. He radically distinguishes between the object and the affection of the soul<sup>\* 39</sup>. Men, in the feral state, are governed by instinct, they are still beasts expressing emotions without language. The fictional genesis of language is coeval with the appearance of family and society. The man begins to speak through the experience that the mind makes of reality. He establishes a relationship of similarity between the image created in mind, the object, and the sign that represents it. The language that indicates the fictional genesis of the institutions in the poetic and religious narrative is visual and internal to the human mind, i.e., the thunderbolt with which Zeus (Jove, the first God of the Greeks) manifests himself is the natural language of a fictional entity posed by man. Vico thus narrates this founding moment of man's humanity through the recognition of the position of a sign as a passage proper to every civilization:

Thereupon a few giants, who must have been the most robust, and who were dispersed through the forests on the mountain heights where the strongest beasts have their dens, were frightened and astonished by the great effect whose cause they did not know, and raised their eyes and became aware of the sky... they pictured the sky to themselves as a great animated body, which in that aspect they called Jove, the first god of the so-called *gentes maiores*, who by the whistling of his bolts and

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\* 37 Aristotle, 1938, *The Categories, On Interpretation, Prior Analytics*, Harvard University Press, London, Cambridge (Ma).

\* 38 Derrida, J., 1988, *On Grammatology*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London.

\* 39 Cantelli, G., 1986, *Mente corpo linguaggio. Saggio sull'interpretazione vichiana del mito*, Sansoni, Firenze.

the noise of his thunder was attempting to tell them something.<sup>\* 40</sup>

This is the fictional device that presides over the origin of the institution. It opens the third space of what is situated between instinct and reason, between animality and language, represented as an eye. According to Cantelli, Vico states that: "in the language of the first humanity, men, with the acts of their bodies and with their image, did not so much reproduce objects, but rather manifested ideas, the images they had made of objects. It was, therefore, an imitation, not of what it is, but of what was imagined to be"<sup>\* 41</sup>. Lightning is the sign of what man imagines it to be, personifying Zeus, and, whenever it is a question of setting up an institution, the rational man joins the primitive man, attributing the role of the legal person to presupposed, non-existent entities. *Scienza Nuova* opposes the philosophy of the language of Aristotle's *On Interpretation*.

Vico's critique of Descartes thus recalls Suzuki's emphasis on Rodin's position. It inaugurates the possibility of a different vision of the Western legal aesthetic tradition on the one hand, and of the global history of perspective on the other, following the anthropological position expressed by Belting<sup>\* 42</sup>. For the semiotician Trabant, Vico conceives the notion of the human being not as *animal rationale*, but as *animal symbolicum* in Cassirer's terms. We could find at the basis of culture and society, not language and philosophy but the phenomenon of the sign, in a different understanding than Aristotle's and Locke's theory of language. Poetry, myth, and symbols are forms of signs not different from mathematics' or logic's symbols<sup>\* 43</sup>. For Trabant Vico's theory of the sign is not semiotics but a sematology, a forerunner of Peircian and Saussurian semiotics. The Vico's New Science (*Scienza Nuova*) opposes the Cartesian conception of reason. His *Autobiography*<sup>\* 44</sup> is organized along the same lines as the *Discours of Method* but, undoubtedly, the Descartes' narrative is the antitype of Vico's self-portrait. The Vico and Descartes' common problem is the search for the certainty of knowledge.

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\* 40 Vico, G., 1744 (2012). *La scienza nuova. Le tre edizioni del 1725, 1730, e 1744*, a cura di V. Vitiello e M. Sanna, Milano, *The New Science*. Translated from the third edition by T.G. Bergin, M.H. Fisch, Ithaca, N. Y., Cornell University Press, 1968), 117.

\* 41 Cantelli, G., 1986, *Mente corpo linguaggio*, 37.

\* 42 Belting, *An anthropology of Images. Picture, Medium, Body*.

\* 43 Trabant, J., 2004, *Vico's New Science of Ancient Sign*, Routledge, London, 3; Trabant, J., 2019, *Giambattista Vico. Poetische Charaktere*, De Gruyter, Berlin Boston.

\* 44 Vico, G., 1818, (1963), *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico with the continuation by Villarosa*, Translated by T.G. Bergin, M.H. Fisch, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.

Descartes found the answer in the *cogito ergo sum*, and Vico's axiom is that the world of gentile nations was made by man. The fixation on the universal and the ignorance of the empirical and historical data leads to the "conceit of the scholars" (*boria de'dotti*), which we might call, today, logocentrism in the same sense then Derrida. The fixation on particulars and ignorance of universals leads to the "conceit of the nations" (*boria delle nazioni*), which we might call now ethnocentrism.

Descartes, in search of certain and scientific knowledge, marks off civil world, books, and letters, and the realm of customs, as uncertain terrain: for Trabant, the opposition between body (*res extensa*) and mind (*res cogitans*) imply that Descartes' theory of language is a radicalized version of the Aristotelian conception of language. Following Aristotle, the mind creates mental contents that are independent of language. To transmit them to others, we denote them with words (*voces*) that are conventional and arbitrary. This argumentation is precisely the kind of theory that Vico's sematology is directed against:

Vico, unlike Descartes, thinks that the world of culture could be preserved in books and sings as a source of absolute knowledge. Certainty could be derived not from thought but from the civil world, rhetoric, and law. To Descartes' dualism between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, Vico replaces a triad consisting of body, mind, and language: it adds a third substance (*res linguistica*), that mediates between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, recognizing that signifiers (language) and signifieds (ideas) form an indivisible entity in which idea and material signifiers were not separated. For Vico, at the origins of language, the mind at work inside the poets could hardly be differentiated from the body, and the mental power that created the poetic characters was still entirely corporeal. The poetic sign, i.e., the words, was a corporeal-mental entity: it could be even an object, a symbolic representation of the meaning. Only later, semiosis becomes increasingly intellectual and abstract: a process that manifests itself in the progressive separation of the idea from the signifier and of the mind from the body. It was only at the end of this developmental process that the conventional sign emerged \* 45.

This idea of Vico has the same problem that Suzuki's conception of the mind: the Western dualist conception of the mind does not attach importance to the body; the mind cannot be detached from the body. In Suzuki's vision, the relationship with reality is not only mediated by reason, and Vico builds an anthropological theory that moves in a similar direction. Following Suzuki, the conscious mind is *ushin no shin* (original

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\* 45 Trabant, *Vico's New Science*, 29.

mind... primary, real, true, native, natural) contrasting with *mushin no shin* (*the Mind of No-Mind*), *mind* unconscious of itself (delusive mind... as the mind intellectually and affectively burdened). The Japanese often talk about «asking with the abdomen» or «thinking with the abdomen». The head is detachable from the body, but the abdomen, which includes the whole system of the viscera, symbolizes the totality of one's personality<sup>\* 46</sup>.

The idea of *Corpus Iuris* (the symbolic representation of the sovereign's body as the source of law and power) in the Western legal tradition indicates a problem that is certainly different from the concept of Japanese culture influenced by Zen according to Suzuki. Common to the two visions, however, is the questioning of the rationalist conception of the mind and thought of the Western Enlightenment.

The main difference between Vico and Hobbes is that for the Neapolitan philosopher of law arbitrariness and rationality are not related to a fictional body (like the emblem of Leviathan in Hobbes). For Vico in the real body of the *poets we could find the origins of the law, the language, and the sign* at the same moment. Vico discovers *mythos* under the *logos*, the image under the reason: he is the founder of the legal aesthetics conceiving the human thought as an incorporated process of semiosis.

This Vichian approach could be integrated with Pierre Legendre's legal-aesthetic and emblems theory<sup>\* 47</sup>, starting from a political-aesthetic theory in which the construction of the perspective in Alberti's and Piero della Francesca's works could be understood at the same time as the building up of the political institutions. The art historian Arasse, and the jurist Legendre, read Piero della Francesca's painting as a paradigm of the western dogmatic structure, the institution of a way of seeing oriented to the convergence of lines in a point, the vanishing point, the very image of infinity that is sometimes indicated as an eye.<sup>\* 48</sup> The human gaze, language, and law come up from the cross of the mind and the abdomen.

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\* 46 Suzuki, D., 1959, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 109ff.

\* 47 Heritier, P., 2012. *Estetica giuridica. Vol. 2, A partire da Legendre. Il fondamento finzionale del diritto positivo*, Giappichelli. Torino.

\* 48 Legendre, P., 2001, *De la société comme texte. Linéaments d'une anthropologie dogmatique*, Fayard, Paris; Arasse, D., 2009., *L'annunciazione italiana. Una storia della prospettiva*, VoLo Publisher, Firenze.

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## Figures

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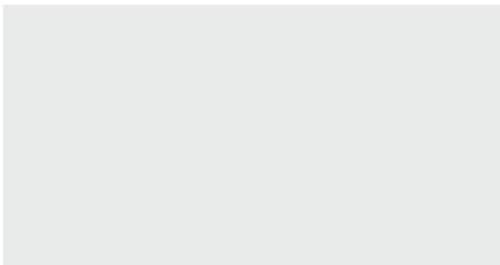


fig. 1  
Georg Wither, *Sapiens dominabitur astris*,  
*Collection of Emblems*, 1635 (Rollenhagen 1611)

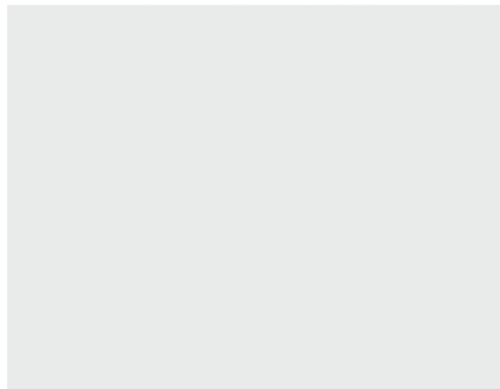


fig. 2  
T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*,  
Frontispiece (1651)

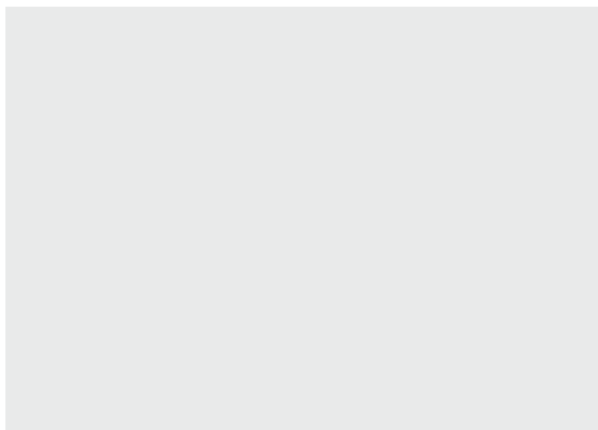


fig. 3  
Hiroshi Sugimoto,  
*Goshen Ohio*, 1980

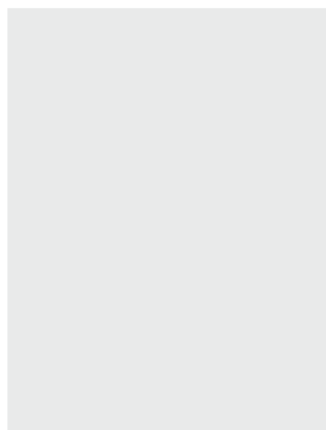


fig.4  
Wolf Vostell,  
Nîmes, Musée Carre, 2008

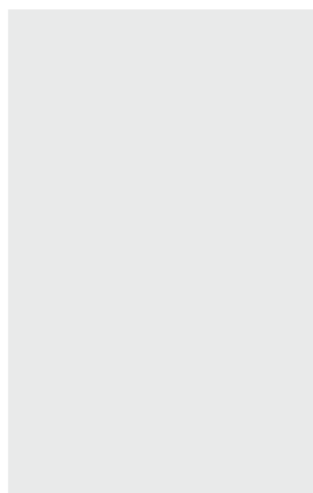


fig. 5  
"Nam June Paik Sitting in TV Chair", 1976,  
Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne

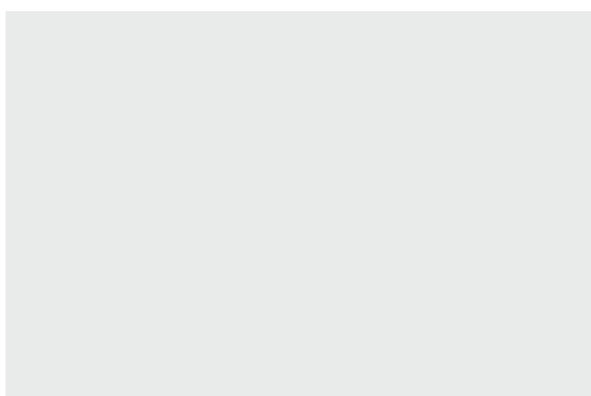


fig. 6  
"Nam June Paik with triangle", 1976,  
Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne

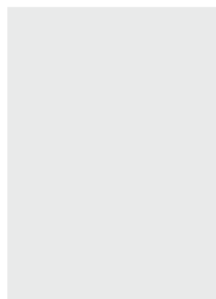
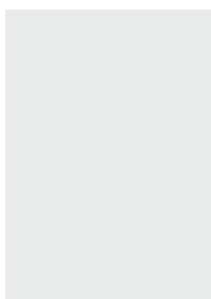
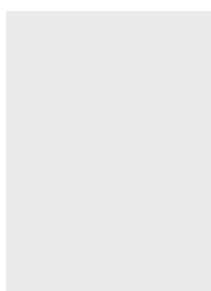


fig. 7  
*Family of Robots*, Chicago International Art Exposition, 1986

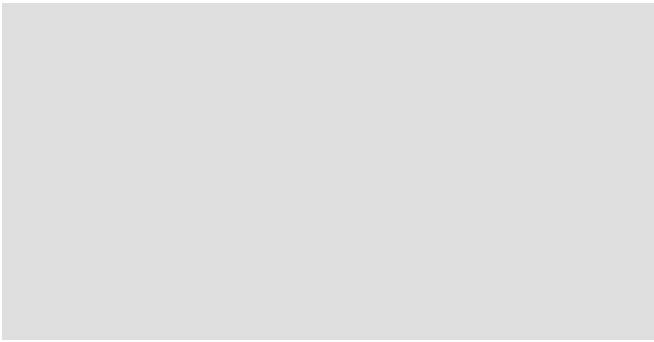


fig. 8  
Shik'o (Sekkaku), *A Zen Master in Meditation*, 10th century, .in Suzuki, cit, ill. 36a

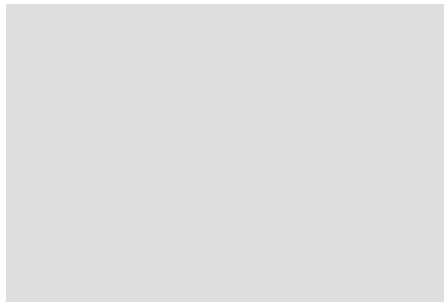


fig. 9  
Katsuno, H., *The Robot's Heart*, 108

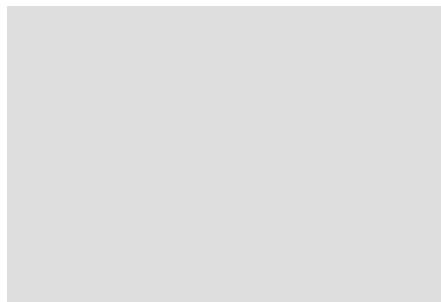


fig. 10  
*Budhha Robot*, Kodaiji Temple, Kyoto, 2019

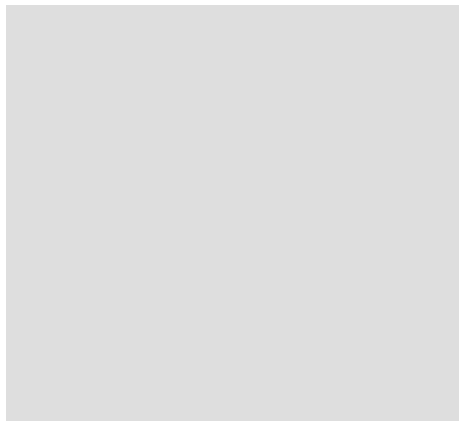


fig. 11  
Nam June Paik, *TV Rodin*,  
Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, 1976

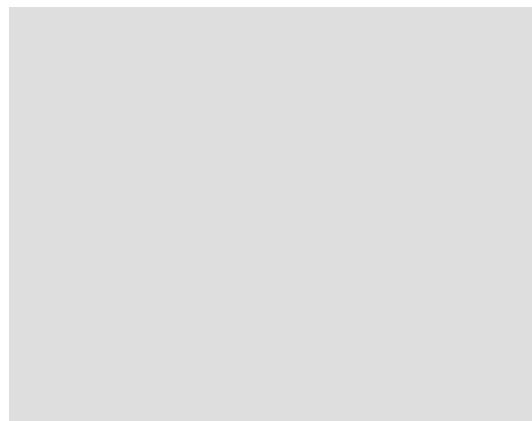


fig. 12  
Nam June Paik, *TV Buddha*,  
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1974

## **Body and Image. Vico, Suzuki, and Nam June Paik Critique of Western Logocentrism**

**Paolo HERITIER**

The paper intends to briefly explore the relationship between perspective and normativity, looking at the discipline called legal aesthetics, based on Roman law, Canon law, and Hobbes' theory of sovereignty.

The presumed universal dimension of political theology of the image raises as well complex problems similar to those of Panofsky's perspective as a symbolic form, as Belting's aesthetics shows.

The paper's thesis can be resumed in two topics. Firstly, Nam June Paik's artistic reading of Suzuki, and his reference to the robot in contemporary Japanese culture, may be interpreted as a critique of the political theology of the image that presides over the theory of Western rationality .

Secondly, like Suzuki, even in a different form, Vico and Derrida criticize the logocentrism and anthropological ethnocentrism of Western rationality.

The two points could be integrated with Pierre Legendre's emblems theory and Belting's anthropology of the images, starting from a political-aesthetic theory in which the construction of the perspective in Alberti's and Piero della Francesca's works could be understood as the building up of the political institutions and a paradigm of the western dogmatic structure.

The human language, art, and law come up from the cross of the mind and the abdomen, in Eastern and Western cultures.