



Pari Perspectives

"The future has an ancient heart"
CARLO LEVI

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Spirit and Community**

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Consciousness

An Enquiry into the Nature of our Relationship with Reality

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*Ich schreite kaum, Doch wähn' ich mich schon weit,
Du siehst, mein Sohn, Zum Raum wird hier die Zeit.*

Richard Wagner: *Parsifal*

*(I hardly walk, but I think I am already far,
You see, my son, time becomes space here.)*

Introduction

First and foremost I would like to thank wholeheartedly the Pari Center for the opportunity to introduce myself and write about a topic which is so central to my work and life these days.

As of 2016, I am immersed in an investigation into reflection and diffusion by posing the question 'What do we mean by "reality?"' Under the heading of *SpaceTimes* I merge philosophical insights with contemporary art asking how our concepts of 'God' and 'religious experience' are related to what we call reality, seeking to let us consider and contemplate who and what we 'really' are.

Proceeding from a compact body of textual and visual sources from philosophy and photography, the study combines historical, primary source-based research, critical analysis and interpretation, and new works of art. The results are disseminated through public events, exhibitions and publications. Several factors underscore its timeliness: a renewed interest of people in what one could call 'religious experience' or 'God,' the imploding of several societal systems with or without increasing

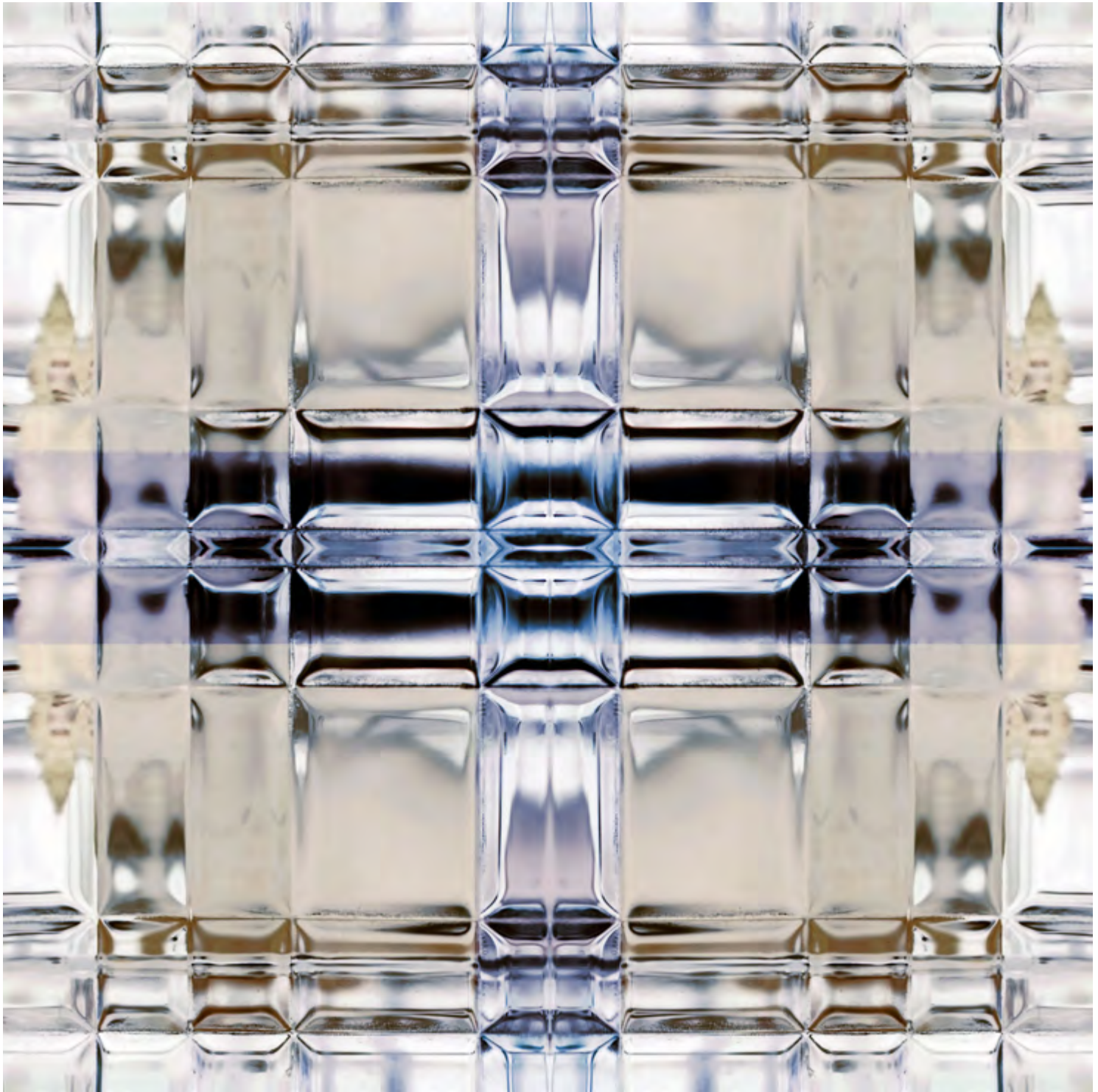
the threat of violence, and the urge for a new humanistic approach.

The first part of the investigation was dedicated to an inquiry into the nature of our relationship with reality from a humanistic and psychological perspective and was completed with the artists' book *Soul Space* in 2019. For the second part, concentrating on the inquiry from a spatial-geometric perspective, a succeeding book with the title *ZERO POINT* is in the making. The findings of the investigations are related to the quest for self-knowledge and subsequently extrapolated to the notion of unknown knowledge.

Self-knowledge

In an everlasting flux we are continuously defined by the universe, the world we live in, ourselves and others. Hence, the moment we want to define or describe ourselves in a conclusive way, we will fail to see the richness and complexity of everything. There will always be something we miss. In this sense, we are conclusively incomplete and subject to a continuous recontextualisation and interpretation. It seems as if our inner world and the outer world we live in influence each other in a reciprocal poetic resonance. If this is true, it raises the question to what extent we actually create our own reality and how much is imposed on us.

The suggestion that we are unable to know ourselves might imply that we are unable to know the world and the universe we are part of, despite all of the discoveries, such as the Higgs boson, quantum mechanics, gravitational



There is no beginning. There are only points of departure embracing the observer in countless concentric layers along unknown laws. Forces that are now foreground then background and that intrinsically take part in everything that lives.

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waves and whatever else there is to come. We assume the findings on the grounds of thorough investigations and research, but do we actually *know* what we have discovered? How much is determined by our biological and psychological restraints? There might be much more and of different qualities ‘out there’ than we could ever imagine. Also, our constructs, for instance of time and space, could very well be mere constructs invented for our own convenience, but actually very limited and in effect even quite ‘unreal.’

Maybe we should call everything beyond our direct reach unknown knowledge: knowledge somewhere ‘within’ or ‘out there’ there is something we cannot seem to grasp or get a hold on, but that we can try to visualise in models of thought, i.e., in art. Not so much taking a point of view as taking the whole of space into account: actual space as well as conceptual space. Not fragmented in the way science works, but associatively holistic in order to get a hold on ‘other’ realities interwoven with our own everyday existence.

Aesthetics has to do with visual perception: with beauty, visual form and art practice. It is perception through the senses. But contemporary art is not about that. Contemporary art is part of knowledge, and the aesthetic element is a necessary byproduct. In my view, art ultimately deals with the big questions, the ones that originate from philosophy and religion, not to be solved but to be experienced, ‘understood,’ inhabited and lived. Questions in search of meaning instead of solutions. In ancient times, people called the fundamental questions ‘mysteries.’ These mysteries connect us with our feelings and emotions and address the conditions of human life. They show our quest for self-knowledge.

The images that are raised by these unanswerable questions disappear into other dimensions and subsequently contribute to our unknown knowledge. Imaginative, creative, visionary, inspired, insightful, inventive, resourceful, ingenious, enterprising, original, innovative, innovatory, individual, unorthodox, unconventional, nonconformist, unusual, out of the ordinary, off-centre, fanciful, whimsical knowledge, which is in some sense hidden, divine, occult, unknown knowledge.

Socrates always listened carefully to this kind of knowledge which he said came from his *Daimonion*: an inner individual travel advisor whose advice he always followed with absolute certainty, since ‘this voice came from the Deity’ as he put it. The hidden unknown travel advisor is understood by him as an inner warning voice, urging him to abstain from doing something at the verge of doing. As such, we could say he got negative travel advice from his guide. Whenever the *Daimonion* kept silent, it was interpreted by Socrates as a confirmation of his behaviour. In this way, the *Daimonion* was for him always a warning voice in times of uncertainty, a mentor in dubious affairs, a guardian in danger and an assistant in need. For Socrates,

the *Daimonion* was the divine revelation of the Deity. A sign of the god being a primarily religious experience coming from the outside as well as a power that was connected with the essence of his own existence. For Socrates there was no distinction between rational investigation and internal vision—between clear thinking and intuition. Knowledge, and this is important to underline, has two sources: reasoning and inspiration or intuition.

Socrates was not the only one with such a (hidden) guide. Goethe, for example, stated in his conversation with Eckermann that the ‘daimonic’ has played an important role in the lives of all important people throughout the centuries. Also in his own life. It cannot be explained through reason or understanding—he had to accept it as the limit of his experience. A ‘necessary’ limitation connected to self-knowledge and because of that with authentic freedom—with insight or what we could call vision.

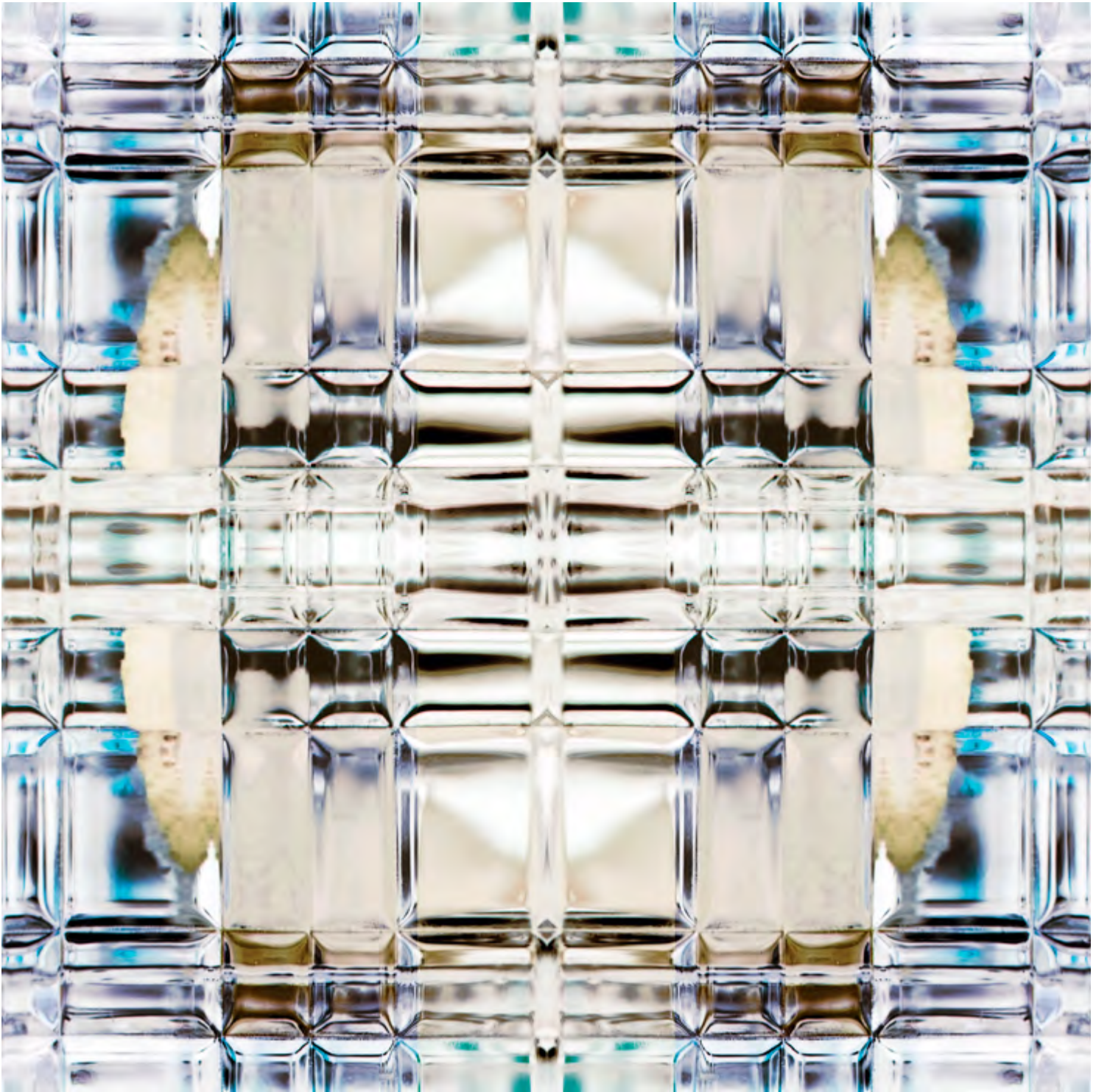
Reality

What do we mean when we speak about ‘reality’? Wilson (1956, p114) categorised some of the answers to this question: it may be something like knowledge of the depths of human nature; humans’ utter nothingness (the cinema sheet); naked existence that paralyses and negates the human mind; glory—the universe’s magnificent indifference, reality as serene and unchanging; ineffable, unliveable; unknowable; Promethean misery; god at one extreme, misery at the other—the universe as an eternal tension between good and bad.

From these descriptions, it seems that what we call reality remains in some sense something occult and unobservable. Nevertheless, we time and again (re)invent the world and her place in the universe according to the patterns of the mind. Not to represent the world as we know her, but to create new realities beyond the ones we know from within.

The quest for reality, then, strongly relates to an investigation into the certainty of our knowledge. *The Inner Writings* by the 4th century BC Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi challenges entrenched beliefs and demonstrates the freedom from fixed conventions. No argument can establish objective truths, it says, because all knowing remains confined to the standpoint of the knower.

Denying the objectivity of common forms of knowledge—‘small knowledge’—Zhuangzi does acknowledge the existence of a greater form of knowledge: illumination. In *The Inner Writings* Zhuangzi speaks of meditation (something also Socrates fiercely practised and recommended) in which all normal perceptions and thoughts are removed from consciousness, and one eventually achieves union with the Way—the ‘Great Pervader.’ Advocating a *flowing*



The shape is not a set of arbitrary images and ideas—it is not that simple. Even if the silhouette would have been divided into an equally mirrored right and left half, thinking with its incompleteness, inconsistency, and ambiguity always filters through; interprets and distorts.

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cognition that adapts spontaneously to the situation—an ‘illuminated’ awareness that exhibits an intuitive knowledge of how to act without even knowing that it is acting. Zhuangzi also calls this: ‘illuminating things with the light of heaven.’ For him, ‘heaven’ stands for the spontaneous and intuitive aspect of our being that emerges when one is grounded in the Empty Way.

The Way is the one and only perspective from which all things are seen just as they are, without bias and without preference. It is this kind of seeing that is the essential defining characteristic of the ‘great knowledge’ or ‘illumination’ of the flowing cognition, developed by those rare sages (for instance Socrates) who can penetrate through ‘fixed cognition’ and who can, as the Way does, ‘pervade and unify’ all things. The flowing cognition does eventually rest on something more profound: it comes to an end in the experience of union with the Way, described in *The Inner Writings* as ‘that of which we do not know what is so.’

Photography

For me, as an artist working with the photographic medium from a conceptual stance, a thought is a function of time—a process of unfoldment—and self-awareness is the awareness of an unfolding context. Thus, it is only through self-knowledge that we can go beyond our reach. From this perspective, the images I prefer to call *pictureworks* are what they speak of, not what is shown. That is to say, subject and object differ from each other while the context determines the conceptual aspect. They are not representations, but rather the energy of an unseen and unknown world in which the camera acts as a concentrated point of consciousness, trying to locate the unknown in a reciprocal poetic resonance between the explicate structures of the ordinary world and the implicate processes of the human soul.

In the dynamics between the explicate and the implicate, just like between thinking and seeing, pictureworks—whether they are presented as single works of art, a choice sequence or an installation—are not a point of view, but a field of perception and cognition that tries to connect us with the deeper levels of life: the big unanswerable questions, the mysteries. From this, then, photography is understood as a reflective and analytic ‘philosophical’ medium. The pictureworks have nothing to do with reports, stories, documentaries, registered events, and the like. Rather, they originate in images, taken from everyday reality and used as raw material, to be transformed into works of art that seek to touch upon the viewer’s infinite number of subtle feelings.

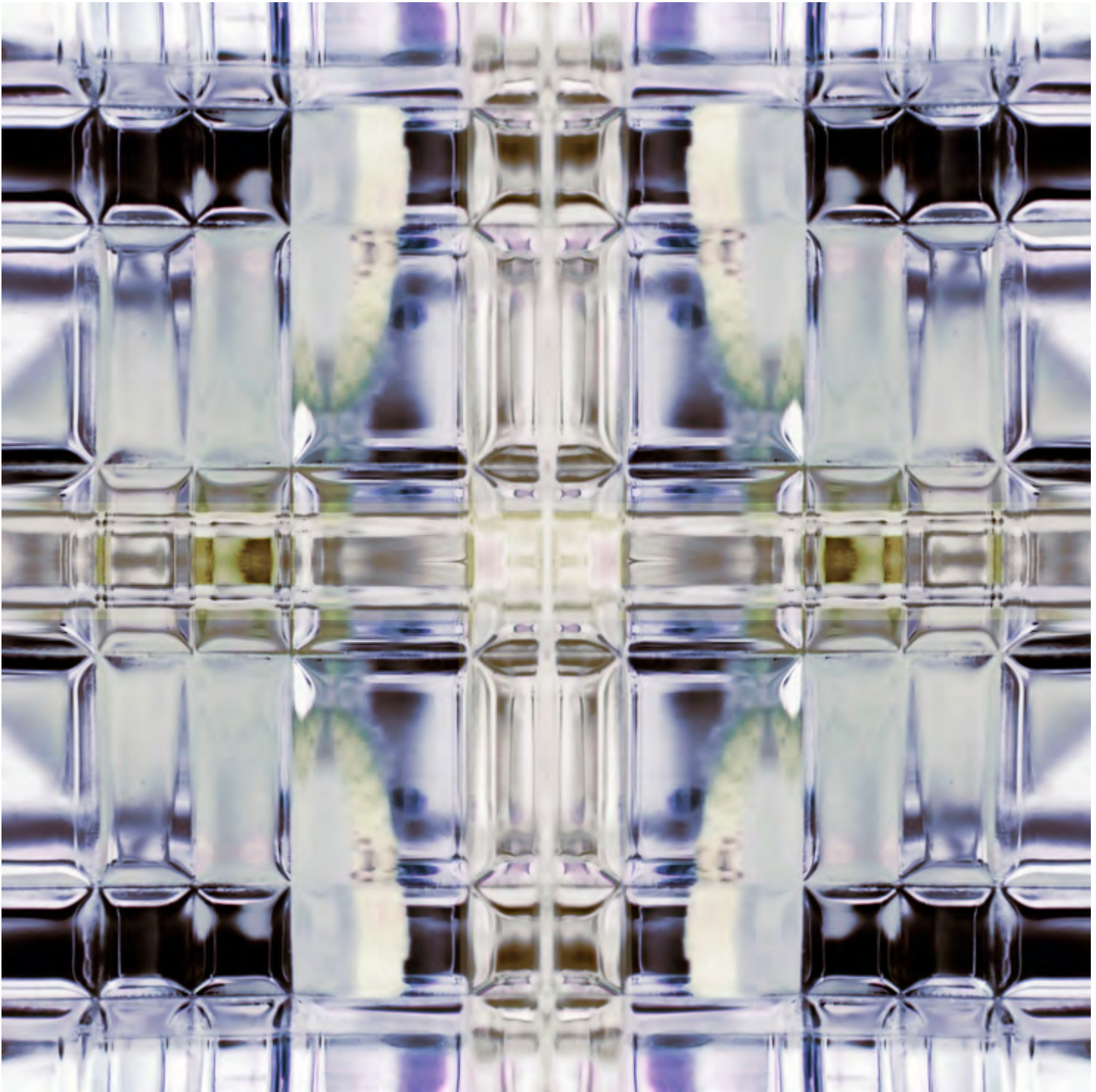
Marcel Duchamp taught us that in a fourth dimension the horizontals and verticals lose their meaning so that

we are no longer able to orientate ourselves in space. The confusion gives rise to a delay which can be understood as an experience in time in which something expected does not occur; a stretched moment that keeps us waiting. The fourth dimension cannot be addressed by our ordinary senses, merely equipped for embracing a three-dimensional world. It shows itself as a depth dimension in the reflection, diffusion and transparency, stressing the ambiguity of space as well as the unrealistic conception of time. I already touched upon these matters through my inquiries into Wittgenstein’s *Remarks on Colour*, in which he teaches us that the context in which things are seen and experienced can be prompted by sentences beginning with ‘Imagine that...’ or ‘Think of...’

Conclusion

The all-encompassing truth about the universe, then, is enclosed in the possibilities and constraints of the human powers of imagination. In the end, even a scientific system is but a free play with symbols according to (logical) arbitrarily given rules of the game—a free convention. ‘[...]thinking without the positing of categories and of concepts in general would be as impossible as breathing in a vacuum,’ as Einstein puts it. Our concepts are tools of which we have to assume they will behave differently in different domains. On the other hand, rule-following constitutes a general framework in which it is possible to compare various (language) games, according to Wittgenstein. Experience and knowledge are interconnected and undivided activities, and, as a result, continuously susceptible to change and adjustments.

Our everyday reality is the world we experience through our senses. It contains everything we can see, hear, smell, touch and feel. It is an explicit order and for us actually present as a direct surface order. Underneath, for humans, there is a deeper, only indirectly knowable or inaccessible order. A multidimensional sea of energy as an implicate order from which particles and spacetime can arise. This underlaying reality and the explicate order as we experience it on a daily basis are intrinsically interwoven, amounting to one non-local, non-analysable breath breathing system, enfolding and unfolding at every moment into a complex, never fully knowable totality as a portrait of God.



What is holy cannot live without space. There is the beginning of a zero point for the countenance outside all time, outside all space, in a light without light. May God lift up its countenance and grant you peace.

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Pictureworks

The pictureworks presented in this essay are part of project *ZERO POINT* and focus on the spatial-geometric perspective of the nature of God. It will depend on the viewers whether the pictureworks, thought of as contemplative visual prayers, will give them a glimpse of God's plot in return.

All images of the pictureworks are printed by courtesy of the artist ©Tine Wilde c/o Pictoright, Amsterdam.



TINE WILDE is a Dutch contemporary conceptual artist and philosopher who studied Fine Art at AKI Academy of Art & Design in Enschede and read philosophy at the University of Amsterdam, where she obtained a PhD for integrating philosophical insights into her works of art in the project *Do Not Erase* and publication *Remodel[li]ng Reality*. She lives and works in Amsterdam

Her multi-layered and interdisciplinary work encompasses site-specific installations, photography, performance and text. For Tine Wilde, art and philosophy are about bringing something to consciousness in such a way that they enable us to gain insight into the interdependency of the individual, society and nature.

Her artistic output has been on view in galleries and institutions both at home and abroad, including ACB Strasbourg, DAAD gallery Berlin, Frauenmuseum Bonn, Arti et Amicitiae Amsterdam, and many others. In addition, she heightened the relation between language and image in performance *Language and her Tightly-whities*; investigated the question what happens to a human being when she is totally isolated from her natural and cultural environment and left to her own resources in a two-week stay at the fallout shelter of Dalfsen; received international recognition for her performance in Cologne where she crossed the Rhine River wrapped in bandages; and put herself up for sale amid 34,000 day-trippers at the Rhine Falls near Schaffhausen. In 2011 she produced the permanent photo installation *Corrido[o]r—Empty Space* for the University of Amsterdam.