

Images and Imaging: Patterns of Connectedness in Art, Science, and Technology

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Contemporary technologies are making formerly invisible domains, like the workings of our brains, visible to us. One of the most compelling aspects of this extension of our natural vision is that these images of our brain working are only one of the many imaging technologies now changing our lives. A striking aspect of the convergence of new imaging technologies is that they have moved western culture, as a whole, to become a more visual culture than it was a century ago.

The art world has benefited from this visual orientation. Not only have artists found they now share common ground with the scientific community, artists have also transformed their social position. Clearly, many technological innovations of the twentieth century have changed the way individual artists work, the artist's role in society, and even how art enters the popular imagination as artists express themselves in film, video, performance, and virtual reality pieces. From a consciousness perspective, what is perhaps most intriguing is that while artists have pierced through surfaces and created dynamic pictures of the brain working, scientific imaging techniques (e.g., MRIs/fMRIs, CTs, PET, etc.) have generated images that have revolutionized our understanding of our minds.

This paper discusses both the artistic and scientific perspectives, focusing primarily on the relationships between (1) images and imaging, (2) science, art, and technology, (3) seeing and knowing, and (4) nature and culture. Three sections, each exploring a different primary concern, will guide the discussion.

In the first section I will broadly outline the nature of contemporary scientific and artistic imaging. First I will define what images and imaging are and then offer an overview of how technological images have helped us share information about invisible domains.

Section two will show how computers have allowed us to pierce through the once impenetrable barrier of the brain and the body. While art will be incorporated into this section, the main thrust here will be on scientific images of consciousness. Briefly, I will present research that illustrates that our bodies are not automaton and our minds are interactively informed by other people as well as the environment. This portion of the paper directly relates consciousness to imaging research on the brain and explains how new imaging research is eroding the language/logic prototype that has predominated since Plato separated psyche and logos. As a part of this discussion I will detail why many researchers have concluded that neither the Platonic separation of psyche and logos nor the Cartesian mind/body view is comprehensive enough to encompass an emerging, dynamic, and interactive view of consciousness.

Finally, I will use the comparison of scientific research and philosophical theory formulated in the second section to return to art and add some historical perspective to the issues surrounding images and imaging. This entry into history will offer some understanding of how twentieth century imaging technologies in art and science compare and contrast with imaging innovations of earlier eras, especially when portraying consciousness.

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