

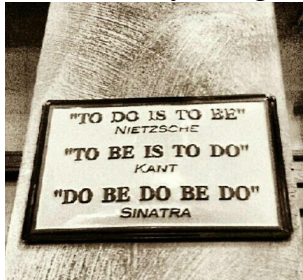
## What can the image do?

If a picture is worth a thousand words, why do we need words to talk about it?

As Walter Ong says in *The Orality of Language*:

*Because a picture is worth a thousand words only under special conditions—which commonly include a context of words in which the picture is set.*

I want to tell you, right now, what the image can do. Let me tell you about it.



Roberto Saviano posted the above on Twitter in 2012<sup>1</sup>, these lines have been referred to since the late 60s, as a graffito that was progressively added to on a wall of an office, a washroom, a wall under a bridge. From conversations and retellings over the years, I had remembered it as:

*To do is to be*— Plato

*To be is to do*— Rene Descartes

*Do be do be do*—Frank Sinatra

To i) make an action invokes that we exist, ii) existing or being is already an action and iii) who-gives-a-fuck. The three lines have been diversely credited to: Socrates, Jean-Paul Sartre, Dale Carnegie, Leo-Tzu, Lao-tse, Albert Camus, J. S. Mill. Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Kurt Vonnegut, Bertrand Russell and Scooby doo.



In 2015 A Constructed World made two paintings<sup>2</sup> called: *Call the eel, drink the Vespéro, eat the cherries, play the guitar*. The works depicted or presented a number of invocations addressed to the viewers or audience to ‘do something’<sup>3</sup>. Call the number on the tablecloth and speak to the robotic eel, play the guitar with editioned plectrums (*no need to be great, stay in groups, the atlas of the unseen and unspoken, seismic semiosis*), drink the beverage from a 17th century recipe the called *Vespéro* (named after the actions VES vesser, to pee, PÉT péter, to fart, RO roter, to burp) and eat the cherries which refers to a text, video, performance about relations to a Chardin painting of a copper bowl of cherries and how the audience will decide whether it is an illusion, an oil painting or the actual thing itself (that we are consuming)<sup>4</sup>. It is a conjecture about what the image can *do* rather than *be*.



In November 2015 ACW interviewed literary theorist Frances Ferguson over two days in New York. Part of the conversation was of course unrecorded and we remember it like this:

*Andrea Dworkin and Catherine McKinnon talk about the image being the same as an action, that if a rape is depicted and consumed as a rape in a pornographic video then it may as well be a rape...it's the same...for me the troubling moral question is if we were to ascertain that someone was actually being raped, in a pornographic video, then this could be highly offensive and dangerous.*

During the rise of Quentin Tarantino's films he was often criticized that his depiction of violence would serve as invocations to violence by those-who-wouldn't-know-the-difference. Yet over time it became clear that these were images of violence and not the action itself, some say to an ad nauseam degree. There is considerable literature concerning this distinction. Yet if 'we already partake in moral activity as a process of normal everyday living' as Hegel posits, is it really possible to be autonomous as a loose cannon or a particularity, or do universal rationalisms create a more worrying picture?

For sure Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò or The 120 Days of Sodom* invokes a collapse between what is depicted and the actual: 'the most terrible acts seem actual yet also staged, constructed, narrated, and unreal, a contrived theater of cruelty at once fact and language, horror and performance, reality and image'<sup>5</sup>. The 'torture and brutal

carnage of the victims in the next to last sequence are also a mere show. They are there to entertain an indifferent and voracious public whose thirst for atrocities is never sated, like that of television audiences today<sup>6</sup>. Yes this familiarity with internet immediacy now, Snapchat, Grindr, Tinder, has offered each of us an even more tyrannical distance to content and to this film that was unwatchable when it first came out in 1975. The film was considered so unwatchable then it was even linked to the director's death which occurred a couple of weeks before it was released.



Another time travel to the 70s can be seen in Rirkrit Tiravanija's 2015 minimalist reconstruction of New York punk club CBGBs ('functioning as an identical replica of the bathroom at CBGBs and industrial food boxes') In *Sans-titre (run like hell)* the action of representation mockingly removes the actual and leaves us with the art alone. Instead of making marble objects into polystyrene, he memorializes objects that already have a use-value by reproducing them in marble, through a kind of privileged contempt, that squeezes unspoken or unrealized aspirations. This 'journey' seems to signal a further overthrow by those who already-had-the-power, by borrowing the ideology of repressed speech, then encouraging the audience to interact, somehow claiming the time inbetween. Yet we are barred from the actuality of use. What is ready-to-hand and when or how does it become distant?

Concerning representational potential or the preparation of an image in fresco Ugo Panziera (died before 1330) refers to the preparation of an image while defining mental actions:

*...the first moment seems written in the mind [scritto]; the second sketched [disegnato]; the third seems like underdrawing and underpainting [disegnato e ombrato]; the fourth coloured and the flesh painted [colorato e incarnato]; the fifth seems incarnate and detected [incarnato e rilevato]*<sup>7</sup>.





(the) ready-to-hand

*..how you can capture actions and make them seem as if they are ready-to-hand now, though they weren't there before. The ready-to-hand is the consciousness or acknowledgement of the context or environment one finds oneself in. And all the things I'm interested in, in education, in aesthetics and pornography, really have to do with ways of squeezing that context so as to produce the possibility of experiences that can themselves be made ready-to-hand. The ready-to-hand is an acknowledgement of your environment, the context you are in<sup>8</sup>.*

can we adjust ourselves to the actual environment we are in, together, the one that produces us and the things we say? How does the image meet the functional requirements of the context.

*It's not that I'm a use-value, the question is, can I show you what my use-value is?*

At a dangerous critical time in history which *present* will we absorb? and which *now* will we consume?

Fabien Vallos points out, during the workshop about the *Ready-to-hand* in Arles, the French word for now *maintenant* is derived from *main-* the hand and *tenir-* to hold, as though the *now* is accessed or achieved through a grasping with the hand.

How does the image prepare itself during time? Counter to us, what does it do? How can we show this actuality of use? And bring back (the quotidian) everyday life? By replacing the actual with an image, it becomes a robot of itself performing an action and the 'robots are alive enough to keep them wanting more'<sup>9</sup>.p87

If the image wants something from us, what is the representational potential of this preparatory phase of its reception?

It does seem the representation of the image can actually precede or provoke the event itself. As reported in a recent BBC article about Periscope, an app which lets you explore the world through-the-eyes-of-somebody-else:

*-a woman [who streamed herself](#) as she drove home while intoxicated*

-a murderer who [broadcast footage of himself](#) from a US jail for several days before officers confiscated his phone  
-teenagers who were arrested after [streaming footage of themselves robbing](#) a van in Utah

In a way, this *use* wrests us back towards that images are a result of what people *do*. Then on the 11 April an email arrived from researcher Lisa Radford in Melbourne:

*...‘iconography of the interval’ - I feel it is this is what images do now, no longer bodies of semiotic behaviour, with punctums and studiums but rather this network thing you were talking about = that even when not cinema, they are cinematic montage, rolling, moving, formatted, arranged, sent, distributed, scaled, pinched, panned, profiled, downloaded, dispersed.*

If we have knowledge of the image its relation with action, this has somehow gone missing or hidden. We have known about global warming since the early 70s and The Club of Rome, we have the image. James Lovelock says since 2004 ‘It’s just too late for it... perhaps if we’d gone along routes like that in 1967, it might have helped’. Jean Baudrillard claimed in a design conference in 1970 that pollution and other environmental concerns were simply smoke screens for real problems of class inequality and capital and wrote that there was ‘nothing better than a touch of ecology and catastrophe to unite the social classes’. No universal rationalism or hysteria has been yet produced.

Noam Chomsky on [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jED4S7G\\_Wm4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jED4S7G_Wm4) recently cited the image of the changing world:

*we are now in a situation where the warming of the planet is proceeding at a level of about maybe a hundred, some claim a thousand times of anything in history...at the temperate latitude where you and I live we are now moving south ten meters a day just by the average effect of global warming and that’s going to accelerate..*

The image moves and speaks but somehow it’s like Ugo Panziera’s score, script, recipe for materialising the body of Christ, we are left celebrating the incompleteness of the action.

Last week we met an oceanographer whose whole research group had been sacked that week by the major scientific body in Australia. The CSIRO will now move from reporting on climate change to helping business adapt to it<sup>10</sup>. Where does the efficacy of the construction, authoring, finding, discovering, stumbling upon the image stand? What can the image do?

i) *to do is to be* says oceanographer Tilla Roy

*we are really bored by climate change, that was solved in the late 60s early 70s everyone agrees. What we want to show now is what we are working which is the absorption of carbon into currents and sediments in the ocean*

ii) *to be is to do* says Barbara Cassin

*... the truth of art (the image) is that nature always comes second to us.  
That our nature endowed as animals is culture.*

iii) *do be do be do* says literary theorist Frances Ferguson<sup>11</sup> considering whether a woman can resemble a man and a child resemble her parent...these connections

*do not so much rely upon the inherent appeal of resemblance, as they  
create resemblance*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://twitter.com/robertosaviano/status/235729083605078016>

<sup>2</sup> *Call the eel, drink the Vespéro, eat the cherries, play the guitar.*  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas 51 x 67 cm 2015

<sup>3</sup> The work is not unfinished in order to encourage the creative act of the viewer: it is unfinished because of the creative act of the viewer. Viewing it as a work of art makes it a signifier, and hence it has failed to represent the subject not as a signifier. From this perspective, simply to designate a work as a work of art makes it unfinished. ( 2002:p121) Darian Leader *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What Art Stops Us From Seeing*

<sup>4</sup> *Truth Play #4* from the performance *Like-I'm-talking-to-you-right-now*  
Salon MAD / Maison Rouge, Paris 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2015

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/512-salo-a-cinema-of-poetry>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/513-salo-the-present-as-hell>

<sup>7</sup> re- written from: Peter Bokody *Images-within-Images in Italian Painting (1250-1350): Reality and Reflexivity* p100

<sup>8</sup> ACW *Atlas of the Unseen and Unspoken* research project 2015-6

<sup>9</sup> Sherry Turkle *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* p87

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/csiro-report>

<sup>11</sup> in a kind of opposition to Panziera's method, from Frances Ferguson, *Pornography, The Theory: What Utilitarianism Did to Action* p93