Text-Image Parergon

Interfacing
Philosophy

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Interfacing Philosophy

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Executed in a very beautiful small hand, observes the description of a medieval manuscript[1] that became known for a visual representation of Philosophy, considered the first of its kind.[2] The remark refers to a drawing of "Lady Philosophy," the personification of philosophy, which during the Middle Ages commonly appeared on the walls of imperial palaces, in monastic rooms, and later also in schools. For a long time, her representation was supposed to encourage studies of the *artes liberales* (liberal arts); today's academic degrees in the liberal arts ("Bachelor of Arts" and "Master of Arts") still reflect this intention.

Referring to Philosophy as a lady is in itself a methodology for articulating a mediated and gendered set of concepts , with a particular purpose.[3] The following article aims to show that an understanding of this process is relevant also for digital approaches to philosophy, approaches made possible by the digitisation of historical documents and their subsequent accessibility via online and interconnected databases.Those considerations are initially based on a research establishing which visual representations of Philosophy are accessible by internet search engines. This text

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1   "… in a very beautiful small hand," states *The James Catalogue of Western Manuscripts* about the Cambridge manuscript, Trinity College, Ms. 0. 3.7 (1179) [see https://mss-cat.trin.cam.ac.uk/viewpage.php?index=758 (last accessed December 2020)]; I wish to thank Rainer Walter of the Manuscripts Department at Zurich Central Library and Steven Archer, Trinity College Library, for providing useful background information. I am also indebted to Daniel Irrgang, Thomas Jürgasch, and Christian Kiening for their constructive commentaries to this essay.

2   Lucien Braun, *Philosophes et philosophie en représentation: l'iconographie philosophique en question(s)* (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2010), 279: "Prenons la plus ancienne image de la philosophie …" ("Let us take the oldest image of philosophy").

3   As a rule, personified terms in Latin end in the letter "a," the feminine form.

36 invites to speculate on how access to philosophy might be orga-
37 nised in the future and how philosophy may invent itself, now
38 and in the future, when manifold digital means for disseminating,
39 archiving and organising artefacts are available. I argue that equal
40 consideration be given to the modes of access and potential dead-
41 locks, thus, to balance the existing possibilities by speculating
42 about limitations and impassibilities. For this purpose, I suggest
43 pursuing two consecutive approaches: first, to consider an article
44 in the *New York Times* of 20 September 2020, in which the news-
45 paper's designers invited readers to interactively explore Dürer's
46 self-portrait from around 1500. After that, we may let our further
47 considerations be guided by the hand at work in St Augustine's
48 monastery in Canterbury.

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50 **Look at… Look how** On 20 September 2020, the online edition of
51 the *New York Times* carried Jason Farago's article "Seeing Our Own
52 Reflection in the Birth of the Self-Portrait."[4] The renowned critic
53 divided his article into short paragraphs, resembling a set of basic
54 propositions. Like theses or axioms, the passages are designed to
55 initiate action. Farago unmistakably asks his readers to shift their
56 attention from the critic's words to the image of a self-portrait of
57 Albrecht Dürer, a German painter from Renaissance times. When
58 I open Farago's article on my desktop computer, the text takes up
59 one fifth of the screen of my desktop, while four fifths are devoted
60 to images. His text seems reduced, just as if he took a step back,
61 contenting himself with a few poignant assertions.[5] A virtual
62 camera zooms into the digital image. Following the camera, the
63 reader's eyes are guided to the corners of the images, and back to

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4   Jason Farago, "Seeing Our Own Reflection in the Birth of the Self-Portrait," *New York Times*, 20.9.2020 (produced by Alicia DeSantis, Gabriel Gianordoli, Laura O'Neill and Josephine Sedgwick) see [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/09/25/arts/durer-self-portrait.html (last accessed February 2021)].

5   This is also evident quantitatively: while the text comprises 10,832 characters including spaces, 17 times as many characters were needed to organise the image and text on screen in HTML code (184,146 characters including spaces).

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the centre, then continues to the letters next to the artist's face: Dürer's monogram. Changing the medium, from analogue to digital, throws into relief the altered function of writing. [6]

Birth of the Self-Portrait Scrolling up and down the browser window, the viewer is put in charge of the camera's gaze which initially zooms in and out of Dürer's self-portrait before it eventually moves to show works by other artists. The emerging comparison shows that Dürer's self-portrait is based in a tradition of depictions of Jesus Christ. Thus, text and image sequences of Farago's essay build the argument that the Nuremberg artist's self-portrait documents an epochal step: around 1500, an individual, the artist Albrecht Dürer, stages himself as Jesus Christ, and thus as the creator not only of works of art, but as the saviour and preserver of all things. The article's persuasive argument rests on expertise in art history and philosophy, and thus captures the current state of science journalism, which creates a tension between image and text, methodically and argumentatively, and employs this force field to arrest the viewer's attention. It demonstrates how, in interactive digital design, image and text can be used complementarily to convey cultural and historical contents, and hereby strongly guide the viewers' focus. The fact that Dürer based his work on representations of Christ may be said to indicate that philosophical and theological arguments are brought together in his self-portrait.[7] It also indicates that careful and purposeful coordination of the perception of text and image are very much capable to convey a coherent argument.

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6   By comparison, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/browser (last accessed February 2021) shows how the analogue edition of the *New York Times* changed appearance from its first issue to 2002.

7   Werner Beierwaltes, "Visio facialis – Sehen ins Angesicht, Addendum: Cusanus und Dürer," in: ibid., *Fussnoten zu Platon* (Frankfurt/M. 2011, p. 228f.). While Beierwaltes points out a "factual connection between Dürer's self-portrait and Cusanus's philosophical-theological speculation on the correlation of absolute and finite vision," he emphasises that no historical connections have been proven so far (1988/2011).

Anonymity Farago's article also documents another shift: from keeping the designers anonymous to naming them, a change concurrent to the information offered. Dürer represents the shift from anonymous image makers to artistic personalities who also independently publish and market their works, particularly in editions. Iconically, Dürer also represents the revaluation of the artistic image, its creator and its detachment from ecclesiastical and political authorities. We know that Dürer also depicted Lady Philosophy, but his attribution by name is exceptional; other artists who illustrated Boethius' text with a visual personification of Lady Philosophy remained unnamed.

Personification This tradition of personification establishes a link to the iconography of philosophy, i.e., to images that convey philosophical positions and generate philosophical knowledge.[8] To explore this potential further, I propose following the hand at work in the Canterbury monastery; indeed, we may assume the hands of several monks were involved in visually representing Lady Philosophy for the preface of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy (Consolatio)* between 975 and 999. At the time, producing a manuscript like this of the *Consolatio* involved a division of labour resulting in innumerable anonymous figures who collaborated in its transmission by copying the text in monasteries, first in southern Italy and later in the far north, since roughly the year 550, when the first scholarly edition of the text was furnished.[9]

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8   Susanna Berger, *The Art of Philosophy: Visual Thinking in Europe from the Late Renaissance to the Early Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). Discussing the frontispiece of Hobbes's Leviathan and Dürer-Pirckheimer's Triumphal Chariot, Berger observes that "… during this historical moment … thinking was understood as a form of artistic production, the act of generating particular concepts materially or mentally … was valued as a way to analyse those concepts" (173). For the consulted literature, see: Nils Röller, "Image Protocol – Concept and Context," *Cubic 5: Alternative Knowledge – Communities – Creativity – Narrations*, in print.

9   Fabio Troncarelli, "Boethius from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages," in: Thomas Böhm, Thomas Jürgasch and Andreas Kirchner (eds.), *Boethius as a paradigm of late ancient thought* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 224; on England or Ireland, see 226.

141 **Continuity** These hands ensured that the writings of renowned
142 philosophers were preserved and commented on for centuries.
143 They established the material conditions for speculation about
144 God and the world he created. Let's delve into this in a bit more
145 detail: the image and the text by the very beautiful hand go back
146 to the late antique philosopher Boethius. Before his execution by
147 Theodoric, King of the Goths (453–526), Boethius wrote the *Conso-*
148 *latio* (see above) on the estate where he was held captive. The work
149 is conceived as a dialogue between Boethius and Lady Philosophy,
150 a personification of philosophy.

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152 **Texture within the Text** Lady Philosophy, writes Boethius, wears
153 a particular robe: "Her clothing was made of the most delicated
154 threads, and by the most exquisite workmanship; it had — as she
155 afterwards told me — been woven by her own hands into an ever-
156 lasting fabric. Her clothes had been darkened in color somewhat
157 by neglect and the passage of time, as happens to pictures exposed
158 to smoke. At the lower edge of her robe was woven a Greek ∏, at
159 the top the letter , and between them were seen clearly marked
160 stages, like stairs, ascending from the lowest level to the highest.
161 This robe had been torn, however, by the hands of violent men,
162 who had ripped away what they could. In her right hand, the wo-
163 man held certain books; in her left hand, a sceptre."[10] Boethius
164 points to the materiality of the garment (*vestes*). Boethius, the
165 author, has his Boethius character specifically note that Lady
166 Philosophy "afterwards told me" that she woven the robe herself
167 (*suis minibus texuerat*). Thus, Boethius, the author, concludes that
168 philosophy expresses itself by different means: on the one hand
169 orally but also weavingly, through a material that dresses and
170 carries foreign letters.

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172 **Changing Focus** Two alternative focuses present themselves for
173 going into further detail: we could focus on the stylistic device of

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175 10   Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* (translated by Richard Green, Mineola (NY), Dover, 2014), p. 2 (I, pr. 1).

personification; that is, we could consider the garment of *philoso-phia* in material terms (the violence inflicted upon it, the temporal tension created between "everlasting" and "ripped away," between duration and change); or, on the other hand, we could concentrate on the historical Boethius, the Roman politician, poet and philosopher (475–526). He lived in a time of political transition: the collapse of the Roman Empire and, as a result, a succession of foreign rulers. Shifts of power in the empire lead to conflict between Boethius and his sovereign, which subsequently resulted in his captivity and execution. Throughout this, Boethius saw himself as a translator and thus also as a conveyor and preserver of historical and philosophical texts, in particular those dealing with logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. His intention to translate all of Plato's and Aristotle's writings from Greek into Latin is well known.[11] These traditions are evidence that an author who is respected as a unique voice today rose to prominence because he devoted himself to the writings of other eminent authors and vigorously honoured the works of those before him. Yet, this focus on his life also captures Boethius' progressive mind: Boethius organised the methods of other authors such that they could be used in teaching and by this were given a future: as arts belonging to the *artes liberales*, the seven liberal arts.

Tracking Shots For this future to happen required a mediating figure who himself merits attention: Cassiodorus (485–580). Such concentration demands tracking shots. After Boethius's execution, Cassiodorus became the most important Roman official in Theodoric's state administration. He later went into exile in Byzantium, devoting himself to politics, in conversation, but also in writing: he carefully copied the text of Boethius by hand and prefaced it with an image — for political reasons, as Fabio Troncarelli suggested.[12] That image has not survived. But presumably, it

11   Christian Vogel, *Boethius' Übersetzungsprojekt – Philosophische Grundlagen und didaktische Methoden eines spätantiken Wissenstransfers* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2016).

12   Fabio Troncarelli, *Boethiana Aetas – Modelli grafici e fortuna manoscritta della Consolatio*

211 showed a female figure together with the Boethius.

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213 **Politics of the Image** However, according to Troncarelli, the
214 female figure in Cassiodorus's edition differed from Boethius's
215 description. Boethius describes the figure as the personification
216 of Philosophy, whereas Cassiodorus makes her appear as Wisdom
217 (*Sapientia*). Lady Philosophy guides us to the limits of knowledge
218 and argumentation.[13] She leads us from the objects of the world
219 to general concepts and an understanding of creation. Yet, she
220 cannot herself answer the final questions. This, however, is what
221 Wisdom (*Sapientia*) promises. With *Sapientia*, Cassiodorus intro-

222 *philosophiae tra IX e XII secolo* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso 1987) observes that "an initial minia-
223 ture, inspired by Byzantine styles, in which philosophy appears with the features of Sapientia-Sofia"
224 (31).

225 13   I am following John Marenbon's *Boethius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 161ff.
226 Marenbon, in critical contrast to Relihan, argues that the *Consolatio* explores the limitations of
227 philosophy. These are worked out through representations in poetry and prose, i.e. by exploring
228 different forms of linguistic expression. John Marenbon, *Pagans and philosophers: The problem of
229 paganism from Augustine to Leibniz* (Princeton 2015) finds the dialogue between the characters "gen-
230 uine." Using examples from three manuscripts and one print, the research project "Iconography of
231 the Consolatio" examined how illuminators in the period 975–1501 constructed the spatial relations
232 of Lady Philosophy and the figure of Boethius and thus their hierarchy or equal status. One focus lay
233 on the glances exchanged by the figures. On whether they are emphasised by sceptres, writing tools
234 or distract the viewer from possible dialogue, see Vera Kaspar's and Barbara Ellmerer's contributions
235 to this issue [see https://www.iconographyofphilosophy.ch/bildprotokolle/ (last accessed February
236 2021)]. Thomas Jürgasch, "Boethius - The first Christian philosopher in the Latin West?," in: Mark Ed-
237 ward, *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2021) argues that
238 Boethius (the author) adopts logical methods, i.e. rational procedures to theological questions, with
239 the aim to show how far the human *ratio* can eleveate. Jürgasch distinguishes between human *ratio*
240 and divine *intellegentia*. Human understanding is limited and also Lady Philosophy's argumentation
241 is "not indipendent of our limited human perspective" (Jürgasch 2021, 593). In the *Consolatio* both
242 (Boethius the figure and Lady Philosophy) need to invoke assistance of God for their argumentations
243 (594).

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246 duced an image that visually persuaded the court of Byzantium
247 that philosophising with Boethius frames ways to the wisdom of
248 the creator. Thus, a unity of religious and philosophical knowledge
249 exists, and this unity is the central message of the *Consolatio*. Such
250 position, in turn, presupposes that theological and philosophi-
251 cal knowledge are distinct, yet not contradictory. This mattered
252 because at the time, Christianity was internally torn, and after
253 all Boethius had been executed for treason in Ravenna. Divisive
254 tendencies were plainly evident also between religious factions
255 at court and thus dangers abounded for the Christian ruler in
256 Byzantium.

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258 **Copyists** Later, Cassiodorus trained monks to copy manuscripts at
259 his estate, the Vivarium, in southern Italy. He established rules for
260 copying texts. This is relevant in the case of the *Consolatio* as the
261 text requires distinguishing poetry from prose. Troncarelli (1987)
262 has shown that copying texts is not a mechanical process but
263 creates worlds full of signs that take on lives of their own. Signs
264 marking the distances between passages with reduced squiggles
265 are transformed into tendrils, grow into leaves and trees, and
266 once again become abstract signs (e.g., the pilcrow "¶", the sign
267 used in today's digital texts to mark the end of a paragraph). The
268 materiality of the medium plays its part too: the brittleness of the
269 parchment or the pores of the skin onto which writing is commit-
270 ted settle the writer's hand on the surface and guide his utensils.

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272 **Continuity II** Cassiodorus also prescribed where annotations and
273 comments should be positioned on the page. Because of these
274 rules even the copy produced in Canterbury, in a different geo-
275 graphical and cultural habitat some 440 years later, kept different
276 kinds of texts separate and so clearly marking what was added by
277 the copyist's hand and mind, against what came from the text's
278 original author. The "very beautiful hand" is an example of how
279 stable punctuation was preserved in the monasteries of Western
280 Europe while social institutions dissolved and reformed through

281 migrations and changes of power.

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283 **Personification II** Let us return to the *Consolatio*: Boethius the
284 author has Lady Philosophy appear after Boethius the character
285 has written an elegy. Several muses, the *Camenae*, assisted him.[14]
286 Boethius the character "silently" writes this elegy and then in-
287 troduces a second character: "there appeared standing above me
288 a woman of majestic countenance whose flashing eyes seemed
289 beyond the ordinary wisdom of men."[15] Boethius and the woman,
290 who is introduced as Lady Philosophy, begin a conversation that
291 eventually constitutes the entire book. Remarkably, while Lady
292 Philosophy offers consolation and is acting therapeutically, she
293 also answers certain questions in ways that ruin her own argu-
294 ment.[16] Why are righteous people punished whereas wrongdoers
295 go unharmed. Why was a world created in which people suffer?
296 Who is responsible for this world? The ways of this world are in-
297 compatible with faith in a good, true and just God, who could have
298 foreseen and prevented human suffering. Boethius text makes
299 plain that philosophy is a readily comprehensible creation of
300 thought, which can be represented by a drawn figure. It is a work
301 of thought, moreover, that is attained through an orderly appro-
302 ach, similar to a ladder whose rungs are climbed one after another.

303

304 **Foresight** The dialogue between Lady Philosophy and Boethius
305 focuses on the extent to which an absolute creator can grant free-
306 dom, for example, how far he can allow humans to sin and cause
307 suffering to others. *Philosophia* argues that God eludes human

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14   The text remains cautious about the concrete design of the room. Numerous later
illustrations show the figure of Boethius in a kind of cell. The text mentions the absence of a library,
but cites metres and text passages.

15   Boethius, *Consolatio*, 2 (I, pr. 1). In describing this appearance, Boethius presumably used
precepts in Homer, who describes the dialogues between gods and men, in Plato, who has Socrates
talk about a priestess called Diotima, in Cicero and in Martianus Cappella, who has a *Philologia* enter
the scene.

16   Marenbon, *Boethius*, 145.

316 concepts and ideas. While humans ask for causes that produce
317 effects, God cannot be grasped with temporal relations such as
318 later and earlier. The word "foresight" points to a distinction with
319 which *Philosophia* sacrifices its own argumentation within a few
320 lines.[17]

321

322 **Timeless** How God planned and created the world: such formu-
323 lations allege that God is temporal, yet such action does not befit
324 him. He is "timeless," whereas human knowledge is time-de-
325 pendent: what is perfect in the overall view, in the absolute per-
326 spective, appears as a flawed intermediate step. Once more, the
327 terms "overall view" and "absolute perspective" are inaccurate
328 qualifications of God. They suggest that God sees, that is, favours
329 the sense of sight, in his relation to the world. This formulation
330 transposes human perception and knowledge onto God. He there-
331 by becomes human-like. This, however, is but one aspect of God,
332 albeit not a defining one.

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334 **Futures** This reflection on the ways of naming qualities of god
335 captures one aspect of the futures of philosophising: namely,
336 the opportunities that arise from exploring conditionality. By
337 addressing its conditionalities and dependencies philosophising
338 can change and reinvent itself. Renouncing access to absolute
339 knowledge opens up possibilities: of abysses, limits and impasses.

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341 **Naked Truth** "Foresight" (*providentia*) is a metaphor. It activates

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17   John Marenbon distinguishes divine foresight and divine foreknowledge (143–145).

The question of whether God foresees or foreknows all human actions leads to the fundamental

contradiction that, on the one hand, God has determined human actions in advance and, on the

other, he grants humans the freedom to choose actions or not, e.g. to sin. Marenbon distinguishes

two discussions in the text of the *Consolatio*: first, that God foresees everything, meaning everything

is determined in advance; second, that God knows everything in advance, i.e. is prescient. Here,

Boethius the author introduces a principle that points to the different conditions of knowledge. Hu-

mans think in cause-effect relations, i.e. in temporal relations, whereas God is free of such thinking.

Marenbon refers to this conditionality as the "Modes of Cognition Principle" (135).

390 notions of visibility to denominate the unimaginable: the timeless
391 knowledge of a supreme being or deity. Exploring metaphorical
392 speech is on the one hand historically rooted in hermeneutics
393 and rhetoric, while on the other it marks an impulse in twen-
394 tieth-century philosophy, the impulse to examine the cultural
395 and historical contingency of philosophising, also in terms of the
396 history of ideas. This, for instance, includes being conditioned
397 by linguistic images and metaphors, such as the talk of a "naked
398 truth."[18] This establishes a fundamental tension between philo-
399 sophy on the one hand, and art and the natural sciences on the
400 other. This tension has been transformed by the various *turns*
401 (linguistic, iconic, performative, spatial) in the 20th century and
402 has created new approaches to philosophy. Signs of this include
403 chairs of philosophy at art academies, the philosophy of science or
404 an inscrutable spectrum of book titles promising a "philosophi-
405 sing about" something. Yet they have also a changed the forms of
406 philosophising. It is true that philosophy has, ever since the first
407 documents were produced in the ancient Mediterranean world,
408 been co-determined by the question of what distinguishes philo-
409 sophy from techniques (arts), knowledge or faith. What is new in
410 the text of the *Consolatio*, however, is that this question is not only
411 oriented towards objects, but that the methods of philosophising
412 are expanded non-discursively.

413

414 **Computer Interface** Medieval illustrators gave philosophy a face,
415 due to their standards of iconography. The image they depicted
416 usally was placed at the beginning of Boethius' text and prepared
417 the literate or the non-literate recipient for Boethius' argumen-
418 tation. The function of the image invites a reflection of the illus-
419 tration as an interface between recipient and the text. Thus, the
420 question: is the title "Interfacing Philosophy" for this essay well
421 chosen?[19] Well, it rests on the claim that exploring interfaces is

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18   Hans Blumenberg, *Die nackte Wahrheit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019). I am grateful to Ludger
423 Schwarte for sharing his insights into the iconography of this topos.

424 19   I am grateful to the journal *Interface Critique* [see https://interfacecritique.net/] and its

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425 fruitful for philosophical speculation. As Johanna Drucker shows,
426 the history of the computer interface is a history of methods that
427 have been designed to make programmes easier to handle, that is,
428 of software that enables controlling increasingly complex machi-
429 nes. Neoplatonic philosophy offers analogies for this idea. In this
430 tradition, Boethius wrote the *Consolatio.* The *Consolatio* — and its
431 reception history — offers various approaches to this problem.
432 These approaches take shape against Johanna Drucker's reflec-
433 tions on how far a "humanistic" turn makes it possible to control
434 machines. She argues for studying historical graphics to make
435 established human-computer interaction (HCI) more human. Her
436 argument rests on the idea that HCI is impregnated with statisti-
437 cal *dispositifs*, and thus with the management of quantities (i.e.,
438 control). Hence, alternatives to the widespread practices of control
439 and display need to be developed.[20] One such alternative involves
440 generating knowledge by means of graphics, and thus strengt-
441 hening the relevance of images for knowledge acquisition. Not,
442 however, in terms of mapping and imaging, but in terms of cons-
443 tructivity. Drucker emphasises constructivity in the context of her
444 plea for the "humanistic," which she highlights in her critique of
445 the "digital humanities."[21]

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editors Florian Hadler, Daniel Irrgang and Alice Soiné for encouraging me to resume my speculation

448 on "interfaces," initially formulated with Siegfried Zielinski in 2001, see: Nils Röller and Siegfried

449 Zielinski, "On the difficulty to think twofold in one" (2001), in: Siegfried Zielinski, *Variations on Media*

450 *Thinking* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

451 20   Florian Hadler and Daniel Irrgang, "Editorial: Navigating the Human," in: *Interface Critique*

452 2 (2019), 9 [see https://interfacecritique.net/journal/editorial-2/]. The authors point to the scientific

453 literature on ergonomics that emerging in the 1950s. This prompted a change in terminology. In

454 industrial processes, there is no longer mention of "doers," but of "controllers."

455 21   Drucker, "Humanistic Theory," in: Matthew K. Gold (ed.), *Debates in the Digital Humanities*

456 (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press: 2012) [see https://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/read/unti-

457 tled-88c11800-9446-469b-a3be-3fdb36bfbd1e/section/0b495250-97af-4046-91ff-98b6ea9f83c0, (last

458 accessed December 2020)]. Drucker suggest that we "consider how to serve a humanistic agenda by

459 thinking about ways to visualize interpretation."

Constructions Thus, we ought to think of space and time not as stable containers in which things happen, but instead as constructive, that is, they vary depending on specific conditions: "The experience of temporality, like that of space, is already inflected by cultural circumstance." While no experience can be perceived without space and time, how space and time shape perceptions is culturally determined. Or as Drucker puts it: "Both space and time are constructs, not givens. As constructs they come into being in a codependent relation with their discursive or experiential production. If I am anxious, spatial and temporal dimensions are distinctly different than when I am not. When the world was bounded by the Mediterranean it was a different world than the one seen from space."[22] This is transcendental in that Drucker reflects on how experiences are structured in graphic interfaces. It also raises a basic question: does the interface consider that the objects it represents are based on cultural assumptions? Does this perhaps suggest that experience is organised in a specific way? Or that it is postulated as universally valid, yet is constructive, and depends on technical and thus on cultural preconditions? For example, does the reflection with Boethius on "timelessness" change with the technical and material conditions of the book?

Interface Critique This complicates matters inasmuch as the human (and humane) contrasts with statistics and thus with the handling of quantities. Which, in turn, raises the question of the extent to which administration and thus wielding power over quantities is an aspect of humanity.[23] Drucker develops her agenda by reinforcing the oppositions between production and representation, interpretation and determination, opening and closure. She distinguishes the qualitative and the quantitative, to delimit the humanist agenda as the working out of qualities versus the digital humanities as the administration of quantities. This agenda

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22   Drucker, "Humanistic Theory."

23   Alternatively, Röller and Zielinski refer to Brecht's *Organon* to conceptualize the interface as a site for articulating differences; see Röller and Zielinski, "On the difficulty …" 79ff.

becomes understandable as an objection to the digital humanities, that is, to deploying quantitative methods in the humanities. Her book *Graphesis* suggests that these dichotomies are not rigid: in Drucker's view, historical findings based on intercultural comparisons prove that gathering numerical data (e.g., in the production of calendars) is impregnated with religious ideas. This agenda becomes productive if the term humanist is not used to refer to a fixed image of the human being, but rather to a philology of crisis, and thus as a commitment to the scientific, critical edition of suppressed traditions; and secondly, as a plea to valorize material aspects and thus artistic and creative practices.

Consolatio So, what does the *Consolatio* show us? We might understand it as a plea to study the *artes* and thus to develop an expertise in dealing with magnitudes and quantities, both static and moving. Such expertise prepares one to understand creation and, depending on one's reading of the *Consolatio*, also leads to wisdom or to the aporias of rationality. At the same time, it expounds the limits of the *artes* and of philosophising as a form of thought that moves within spatial and temporal references. And yet, reducing the *Consolatio* to a mere description of boundaries and limitations does not do any justice to the text nor to its outstanding reception history. We also need to realise that the text gathers the limits of poetic expression, the rhetorical designing of arguments and drawing logical conclusions so as to produce a faculty: the capacity of human — i.e., cultivated — thought to move beyond the confines imposed by external force. In this way, Boethius the author also confirms a turning away from the Platonic condemnation of poetic and artistic forms of expression.

Liberal Arts In another text (*Institutio arithmetica*), Boethius speaks of the "four ways." This is how he translates a Greek terminology by which four mathematical methods are designated to investigate magnitudes and quantities: geometry, arithmetic, music,

and astronomy.[24] These are four of the seven liberal arts, the *artes liberales*. The other three ways are dialectic, grammar, and rhetoric. Lady Philosophy favours the *artes liberales* over the *Camenae*, the poetic muses, as ways that provide access to knowledge about created physical world. The *Consolatio* can be described as an open dialogue about whether creation (i.e., the programming of the overall event) is rationally feasible. Lady Philosophy's argumentation sets out to reveal rational approaches to creation. Yet her argument does not remain consistent in the course of the dialogue conducted by Boethius the author. This suggests two further answers.

Chasms One answer could be that the cosmos is not well programmed as it allows irregularities and grievances. The other answer may be that wisdom (*sapientia*) enjoys privileged access to the cosmos. An appropriate conduct of life and opinion may lead to wisdom. Interestingly, both answers are compatible with oneanother; also, they both subordinate the *artes* (leading to philosophy) and therefore philosophy to wisdom. Philosophy, after all, is granted the authority to prepare rational approaches to help understand the programming. Chasms, however, loom between its understanding and insight into the true nature of creation.

Space Andreas Kirchner analysed the spatial relations in the *Consolatio.* He shows that considering the "spatial turn" is productive for interpreting Boethius's text. His analysis also reveals that the text plausibly argues how philosophical speculation abolishes spatial boundaries existing for real (e.g., imprisonment in a cell). At the same time, Kirchner's analysis, following the

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24   Ilsetraut Hadot, *Arts Libéraux et Philosophie dans la Pensée Antiques* (Paris: Études Augustiennes, 1984), 69. John Marenbon distinguishes the four arts as follows: "Arithmetic studied multitude (discrete units of quantity) in itself; music studied relative multitude, since its concern was with the arithmetical ratios of harmonics. Geometry studied magnitude (continuous quantity) at rest, and astronomy, in charting the movements of the stars, studied magnitude in motion"; see Marenbon, *Boethius*, 14.

565 Neoplatonic tradition of *Consolatio* interpretations, suggests that
566 human thought reaches methodological limits when it attempts to
567 radically dispense with spatial (and temporal) references. Never-
568 theless, God may be conceived as a supreme being beyond these
569 limits, that is, he "is inconceivable in spatial metaphors."[25]
570
571 **Time** Within the boundaries of time, Boethius's strategy indicates
572 how diversity and quality emerge from within conceptual limits.
573 He wrote the *Consolatio* partly as prose, partly as poetry. The
574 poems are written in different metres, that is, sequences of long
575 and short syllables. The metre varies from poem to poem, as if he
576 sought to design his poetry distinctively, so as to reveal diverse
577 approaches to philosophy. Presumably already his first editor,
578 Cassiodorus, named these different metres, as they subsequently
579 are maintained in most following copies. Scholars have asses-
580 sed the function of Boethius's poems within his overall concept
581 differently: as "accessories," as "teaching aids," as "thought
582 poetry,"[26] as an aspect of philosophising, and as a way of exploring
583 the boundaries of philosophising.[27] For Helga Scheible, the poems
584 serve to structure Boethius's argumentation so as to counteract
585 the "fatigue caused by the difficulty of the material." As such,
586 they function as "incisions in the flow of thought."[28] Thus, Bo-
587 ethius's metric organisation, the rhythms of speech or song, is
588 relevant to approaching philosophy.
589
590 **Communicating** Christian Kiening has shown that medieval texts,
591

25   Andreas Kirchner, "Die Consolatio Philosophiae und das philosophische Denken der

Gegenwart. Was uns die Philosophie heute noch lehren kann," in: Thomas Böhm et al. (eds.),

Boethius as a Paradigm of Late Ancient Thought (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 185.

26   Helga Scheible, *Die Gedichte in der Consolatio Philosophiae des Boethius* (Heidelberg: Carl

Winter, 1972), 10ff.

27   Marenbon, *Boethius*, 146ff and 159ff. especially 162. For a review of the literature until

2006, see Joachim Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius, De Consolatione Philosophiae* (Berlin: De Gruyter,

2006), 18ff.

28   Scheible, *Die Gedichte*, 10.

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600 which also include the various manuscripts and illuminations of
601 the *Consolatio*, oscillate between the "ostentation" and "transcen-
602 dence" of materialities.[29] Between the poles of these categories,
603 manuscripts are not mere carriers or repositories of textual infor-
604 mation, but artefacts that were produced as unique specimens and
605 that served both everyday purposes and transmission, that is, the
606 articulation of power or worship, and thus communication with
607 transcendence. Current research is valorising the materialities
608 of communication, which lead to an interface where words and
609 philosophical conceptualisation reach a limit. Addressing mate-
610 rialities philosophically seeks to capture in words what remains
611 beyond words: what is seen, what is touched and what is heard
612 (the rustling sound of paper). Thus, words are used to register
613 those factors that fix (i.e., give permanent form to) words in texts.
614 This, however, involves factors that elude the text while inviting
615 us to grasp them. This attempt distinguishes philosophising.
616 Historically, it was oriented towards the *ineffability* of transcen-
617 dence. We must now ask whether materialities are relevant to
618 interpreting the text and thus to philosophical argumentation. Do
619 they represent *ineffablity*, for instance, of communicating arti-
620 stically with materials? This is not relevant to an understanding
621 of philosophy that regards the text as information that prompts
622 discursive speculation. It is, however, relevant to an understan-
623 ding of philosophy that seeks to connect with the non-conceptual,
624 the unsayable, yet demonstrable and thus with *aisthesis*, in order
625 to conduct a philological or philo-iconic critique of philosophy.

626

627 **Wax** The notion that organisation may be relevant also concerns
628 the relevance of interface critique for philosophy as it reflects the
629 spatio-temporal organisation and thus the contingency of appro-
630 aching philosophy. In saying this, I would like to focus on the
631 relationship between materiality and philosophy, rather than on
632 how philosophy speculates about matter. By this I follow Boethius'
633 invitation to shift attention towards the weaven clothes, Lady

634 _____

29   Christian Kiening, *Fülle und Mangel – Medialität im Mittelalter (Zürich: Chronos, 2016), 288.*

635 Philosophy wears. Thus, I feek invited to concentrate on the ma-
636 terialities through which philosophy finds expression. Here, the
637 *Consolatio* provides us with some starting points: it was written in
638 an era when wax tablets and styluses were used to produce tem-
639 porary transcriptions. These were transferred onto papyri, which
640 were rolled up. However, this particular practice changed in late
641 antiquity (aka the time of Boethius): as a result of the division of
642 the text into columns, the characters changed from being arranged
643 in parallel to the longer side of the papyrus to being aligned with
644 the shorter side of the medium. This format change facilitated
645 binding together several media, and thus eventually to create book
646 blocks. Like a few other ancient documents, the *Consolatio* re-
647 mained relatively stable during its preservation and transmission
648 despite the enormous changes in media technology: the shift to
649 the codex, the introduction of word division (dissolution of *scriptio*
650 *continua*),[30] printing evolution in its many facets, and eventually
651 digitisation.
652
653 **Parchment** So far, I have considered neither the fact that nor how
654 the hand utilised the material unevenness of parchment to make
655 the drawing of Lady Philosophy appear as a figure that gradually
656 fits together by ascending the page from the wavy lines at the foot
657 of the body. Her contours emerge almost seamlessly from the
658 materiality: the slightly undulating concavely and convexly bent
659 skin of the parchment. The contours of Lady Philosophy seemingly
660 emerge from the materiality, from the slightly concave and convex
661 skin. We would have to travel to Trinity College Library (Wren
662 Library) to have this experience, as it eludes digital replication.
663 This would be a point for interface critique to address. Digitisation

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30   Bruno Reudenbach, *Die Kunst des Mittelalters*, vol. I 800–1200 (München: Beck, 2008), 39: Ancient texts were written in so-called scriptio continua, i.e. uninterrupted running text without any punctuation or spaces. These texts were therefore not only difficult to read, but also cumbersome to handle. It is one of the great achievements of the medieval scriptoria that they developed a rich set of instruments for producing clear writing and methods for the visual structuring of texts. … From about the 7th century onwards, word division became common instead of scriptio continua."

focuses on the flat, two-dimensional nature of the page rather than on its material components, which will usually induce haptic, spatial perception. Is this relevant? Well, it leads me to claim that the representations of *philosophy* in Canterbury are oriented less towards a lost archetype, and thus perhaps towards representations of philosophy with *Sapientia*. And yet, they arise from the material conditions of production, which adhere closely to the text and to figurations that are oriented, for example, towards Pallas Athena and thus to a different repertoire of forms, one that attributes philosophy precisely not to biblical wisdom but to the knowledge of the Greek goddess Athena. The argument that the figure's contours have emerged from the dialogue with the materiality of the medium conveying the drawing coheres with the dialogue that contemporary artistic works also engage with materialities or with the "means of painting."

Sounds The digital copy of the copy produced by the "very beautiful small hand" ensures that we can more easily access the manuscript and see the different colours and signs used by the hand to distinguish Boethius's text from the commentaries. Also visible are the neumes, which indicate how to sing Boethius's poems. Thus, besides reading the text aloud, musical performance was also given consideration in this manuscript. The manuscript thus carried two auditory dimensions: reading aloud and singing aloud. The work thus addressed the eyes, mouth and ears. The manuscript is thus an artefact that organises multi-sensory approaches to the *Consolatio*: it is designed such that the text initiates different forms of interaction. In terms of present-day media,[31] the manuscript presents itself as an analog interface, which shapes how we understand the text of the *Consolatio*. It becomes readable

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31   Kiening, *Fülle und Mangel*, 14 discusses the question of "how to use categories that have a specifically modern index to describe phenomena for which these categories are foreign?". Many thanks to Martina Stercken and Christian Kiening for their insights into the work of the *Centre for Historical Mediology* at the University of Zurich [see https://www.zhm.uzh.ch/de.html (last accessed February 2021)].

705 as an innovation that makes virtuoso use of the established me-
706 thod of personification,[32] and thus displays innovative forms of
707 philosophising. Pierre Courcelle's research[33] helps to explain the
708 visual *agency* of the text, which turned *Philosophia* into a producti-
709 ve figure for communicating philosophy. This process lasted just
710 over half a century, from 975 to around 1500, when also Dürer is
711 known to have depicted *Philosophia*.[34]

712

713 **Digital Consolation** Let me bring together, in a digital context, the
714 trains of thought that I kept separate at the beginning: the work of
715 the presumably beautiful, collaborating hands at Canterbury mo-
716 nastery and the interactively designed article published in the *New
717 York Times*. Both documents are digitally accessible and thus can
718 be juxtaposed on a screen. Zooming in enables comparison and
719 reveals that the *New York Times'* designers direct the viewer's gaze
720 in rigid fashion. Their gaze guidance takes the form of a flush and
721 strictly directed argument. In contrast, the Wren Library's inter-
722 face enables users to view manuscripts in five different sizes and
723 to relatively freely select whatever they wish to view in detail. It
724 does not, however, allow viewing the document in its original size
725 (30.5 x 23.5 cm). The digital possibilities for studying the *Consolatio*
726 vary, and thus also the possibilities for viewing or experiencing
727 the materiality of the artefact.[35] What becomes clear is that digi-

728

729 32   Gruber, *Kommentar*, 33ff.

730 33   Pierre Courcelle, *Histoire littéraire des grandes invasions germaniques* (Paris: Institut
d'Études Augustiniennes, 1964); see especially Pierre Courcelle, *La Consolation de Philosophie dans
731 la tradition littéraire. Antécédents et postérité de Boèce* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1967).

732 34   The monographic studies by Courcelle, Braun and von Berger, as well as Elisa Winkler's
733 *Die Personifikationen der drei bildenden Künste: Funktionalisierungen eines frühneuzeitlichen Bildper-
734 sonals* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018) would need to be discussed elsewhere as regards whether, to what
735 extent, why and where the paradigm of the visual representation of *Philosophia* is dissolved.

736 35   Hanna Wimmer et al., "A heuristic tool for the comparative study of manuscripts from
737 different manuscript Cultures" [see http://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/papers_e.html
738 (published in March 2015; last accessed December 2020) 1]. I am grateful to Michael Friedrich at the
739 *Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures* (CSMS) at the University of Hamburg for references [see

740 tisation flattens the medium, irrespective of the digital interface.
741 Other boundaries shift and contribute to dynamising approaches
742 to philosophy. The presentation in the *New York Times* follows that
743 of later book scrolls: it is oriented towards the vertical axis, with
744 items presented one below the other,[36] whereas the digitisation
745 carried out by research centres in association with libraries also
746 permits horizontal juxtaposition.

Beside, Beneath, After Successiveness takes on a different quality.
749 Clicking enables changing pages in the Wren Library's interfaces.
750 This is different from actually turning the pages of a printed book
751 (which allows us to experience the sound and feel of paper as a
752 medium). It also different from juxtaposing open documents on
753 a screen, which enables us to "slide" glances from one document
754 to another. Clicking makes a document disappear or enlarges
755 and moves it into the centre. The distinction between documents
756 placed one beneath the other, side by side and one after the other
757 leads to a fundamental problem: how are movements organised
758 on the surface that we encounter on the screen interface? Do our
759 eyes jump or glide? Are they guided to noticeable changes on a
760 surface or to changes that happen so smoothly and steadily that
761 they are not perceived? Noticeable changes are unobtrusive and
762 mark distinctions, whereas steady changes suggest a continuum.
763 How and why are changes set or continuums suggested? Are they
764 oriented towards compositions, towards an open-ended kinetics?
765 Do they generate change, that is, a turning away from the famili-
766 ar? Or are they oriented instead towards fixation, towards pattern
767 formation?

Leaps These questions help us to understand that evaluating
770 interruptions, stagnation and hesitation offers an opportunity

https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/ (last accessed February 2021)]. The CSMS uses the term "arte-
fact" for manuscripts and thus enables contextualising manuscript studies in Raymond Williams's
concept of culture.

36   Until the middle of the fifth century, papyrus rolls were mostly rolled horizontally.

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775 for reflection and thus for valorising such instances as relays that
776 enable changes in direction, and thus also in action.[37] The inter-
777 ruption or leap imposed by the graphic arrangement of characters
778 and images on the eye becomes aesthetically relevant against this
779 background: if, for example, the reader's gaze jumps from the
780 left edge of a line to the centre, and back, this reveals a difference
781 between poetry and prose. Poetic texts require the reader's eye to
782 leap and to depart from the perceptual pattern with which we read
783 lines from left to right and from top to bottom. This idea became
784 poignant in postmodernism, at the latest since Charles Olson's
785 essay "Projective Verse." Looking back, this results from rhythmic
786 oral speech, which entails a specific management of time, of being
787 transferred onto the surface and thus to an organisation of spa-
788 tiality. In poetry, the challenge of representing temporality on a
789 surface leads to alternations and leaps, in the case of the *New York*
790 *Times* to an eye that lies closer to the hand than to the mind.

791

792 **"flashing eyes"** Briefly recapitulating gaze guidance is worthwhi-
793 le. As viewers, we are quickly guided to the area around the eyes in
794 Dürer's painting. This creates the impression that we are looking
795 into Dürer's eyes, those of the self-portraying artist. If our recep-
796 tion interrupts the programmed alternation of image and text,
797 then we perceive a line that finely cuts through Dürer's right eye,
798 as if it were split, ambivalent or struck by lightning. In Neoplato-
799 nic understanding the eye was conceived traditionally as a window
800 to the spirit or soul, which is subtly ruptured, pierced. This corre-
801 sponds to another perception occuring after the "camera's gaze"

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37   Judith Butler, "When Gesture becomes Event," in: Anna Street et al. (eds.), *Inter Views in Performance Philosophy* (London: Palgrave, 2017), 171–192, DOI 10.1057/978-1-349-95192-5_15. They can be interpreted as "messianic moments." They give rise to the possibility of understanding the world differently, or of adopting a different attitude. This can be grasped succinctly in Judith Butler's account of Walter Benjamin's reception of Brecht's epic theatre. The context is the accessibility of cultural offerings, namely, those revealing possibilities for action in society, especially for workers at the time. Butler establishes that the interruption of patterns of action is central to Benjamin's thinking. It is also relevant for the construction of gender ideas today. They develop "fragmentarily."

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810 in the *New York Times* contribution has moved across the exposed
811 tableau, and from there to the face, mouth and beard, as well as
812 the fur trimming, and eventually to the hand. This guided gaze
813 suggests that the hand is connected to the heart and the body,[38]
814 and the eyes to the spiritual realm. Werner Beierwaltes discusses
815 Dürer's self-portrait against this background. This reading pre-
816 supposes that we understand the eye as as a window to the soul.
817 Further, it establishes a connection between Neoplatonic philoso-
818 phy and Dürer, and in turn with Boethius.

819

820 **The Colour of the Hand** The eyes don't appear like the window to
821 the soul in the *New York Times.* Its designers direct the viewer's
822 gaze from the eyes to the hand, thus establishing a contrast with
823 the accompanying text. The colour of the eyes aligns with the
824 fleshy hand. The eye, hair, hand and flesh form an assemblage
825 of colours. This is congruent with the valorisation of the body in
826 twentieth-century philosophy. It also encourages us to consider
827 the hand (that organ that organises materialities and colours), and
828 also a bit more: to accept thinking with the hands. This provokes
829 philosophy to contemplate its limits.

830

831 **Interface** Thomas Jürgasch has suggested that Lady Philosophy
832 changes size in Boethius's text: at times, she appears larger,
833 at others smaller. Unlike the prisoner, she can scale her size.[39]
834 And unlike the divine, she can still be grasped in spatial terms.
835 Although she shatters the boundaries of outside and inside, she
836 is bound to space and time as forms of thought. If she were not,

837

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838 38   Farago, "Seeing…," also takes this cue: "It's his left hand — though in the mirror it looks
839 like his right. It's raised over his heart, and he has even highlighted the veins that pump blood from
840 one organ to the other."

840 39   Thomas Jürgasch, "Statura discretionis ambiguae. Eine Betrachtung der wechselnden
841 Grösse der Philosophia in Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae*," in: *Jahrbuch für Religionsphilosophie* 3
842 (2004). I wish to thank Thomas Jürgasch for his expert advice during the research project "Iconogra-
843 phy of the Consolatio" [see http://p3.snf.ch/Project-175989 and https://www.iconographyofphiloso-
844 phy.ch/ (last accessed February 2021)].

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845 she would be transcendent. With this figure, Boethius discreetly
846 devalues philosophy vis-à-vis what can be called God. And yet,
847 this points to a future of philosophising: in turning towards the
848 concrete, for instance, the materialities of the signs, and of the
849 paper, plants and skins on which its texts are taken down, it
850 also experiences its limits and thus what the arts are capable of:
851 communicating with materialities. Philosophising, limited both
852 towards the absolute and the concrete, discovers itself in distin-
853 ction to the arts as a movement in between, as an interface that
854 develops and reinvents itself by recognising itself as "neither nor"
855 and by acknowledging that it has nothing to say about this matter,
856 that its speaking and comprehending is one of impasses and apo-
857 rias. Pointing these out is a way of communicating boundaries and
858 of allowing what lies beyond those boundaries to express itself.[40]

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