

Primordial Winds. Cosmogony and Breath*

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The representation, evocation and suggestion of wind in the visual arts touches on fundamental ideas relating to the anthropology of the senses and their descent into the visual medium. Wind is a natural phenomenon that plays on the entire *sensorium* of the body. Wind is tactile. Wind can be heard. Wind carries scents. Wind is a cosmic breath that envelops and penetrates us. Wind nourishes or destroys.

Even our own bodies produce and inhale wind. The wind is related to the breath that exits and enters our bodies, even to the gases our organs emit. Wind is both the lower – the anal eruption – and the higher – the breath we need. But there is also a third “wind” in our body. In the Greek philosophy of Aristotle (384–322 BC), the concept of *pneuma* is central to both breath and spirit. It is the vital energy of life, literally, the “gas” that occupies the brain and is responsible for thought, perception and movement. One receives this vital energy at birth and each human being refreshes this energy continually by drawing breath.

Wild is the wind

The Woniya people of North America consider the air in their community as something ‘dense’ that can be touched like matter. Another Native American people, the Akawaio in Guyana, is central to the case study of Audrey J. Butt, who researched the custom in which the uttering of a wish or a curse is accompanied by blowing.¹ Even over time and distance, the expulsion of air,

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1 Audrey J. Butt, “Ritual Blowing: ‘Taling’, a Causation and Cure of Illness among the Akawaio,” *Man* 56 (1956): 49–55.

projects a particular request or cure for other human beings. Audrey Butt explains this custom by the fact that the Native Americans understand the individual breath as the bearer of spirit or spirits.² Spirits escape from us in a sigh and in ritual contexts this can have a magical impact. The native Navajo people for example, feel the wind as a unique life principle. Wind is an elixir that descends at the very moment of fertilization of the embryo. At the birth of the child, this elixir escapes in the form of breath.³ It is at that critical moment that the surrounding winds of that particular season, environment ‘fill’ the child.⁴ So, to the Navajo, wind is a changing, evolving principle that accompanies the human person at various stages of his/her life, just as the changes in life, relate to the whimsical winds.⁵

One peculiar consequence of this animist anthropology of the wind is that the Navajo can read the specific spirit-winds of a person, from the way our hair falls from the head: straight, or in spirals or into curls. Yes, they even read the windsouls from the whorls of our toe- and finger-prints that are unique to each individual. In other words, how the wind has shaped and influenced an individual person, can be detected from their appearance, especially at the fragile extensions of the body and hence there where the body connects with the world: the growth of hair (wriggling, waving, moving and changing), the intimate and sensory border of skin (the tactile) and the contact of the foot with the earth (such as in dancing and hopping).

In the history of Greek culture there are five terms for wind, including derivatives from “air” and “breath”: *aer*, *aither*, *pneuma*, *phusa* and *anemos*.⁶ *Anemos* is the term for the four winds as a

2 Butt, “Ritual Blowing,” 49.

3 Franc Johnson Newcomb, “A Study of Navajo Symbolism,” *Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology Papers* 32 (1956): *passim*.

4 David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Random House USA, 2007), 223: “Wind is believed by the Diné to be present within a person from the very moment of conception, when two winds, one from the bodily fluids of the father and one from those of the mother, form a single Wind within the embryo. It is the motion of this Wind that produces the movement the growth of the developing fetus. When the baby is born, the Navajo say that the Wind within it ‘unfolds him’. And it is then, when the infant commences breathing, that another surrounding Wind enters into the child.”

5 Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 233.

6 An excellent introduction to the anthropology and symbolism of wind is brought together in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (2007); See: Chris Low and Elisabeth Hsu, “Introduction,” 1–17, and Geoffrey Lloyd, “Pneuma between Body and Soul,” 135–46; Alessandro Nova, *The Book of the Wind. The Representation of the Invisible* (London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011), describes the iconography of the wind from early Medieval up to contemporary art; Thomas Raff, “Die Ikonographie der mittelalterlichen Windpersonifikationen,” *Aachener Kunstblätter* 48 (1978–79): 71–218, is an impressive

whole and refers to the four cardinal directions: Euros (East), Notos (South), Zephyros (West) and Boreas (North) [Fig. 1]. Of these winds it was said that they were endowed with the power of sex and the ability to “impregnate” living beings. *Phusa* (phusao means to blow); it is a term leading to the wind instruments, but also to the crater of a volcano. The term *Pneuma* (breath or air) was extended to spirit, inspiration. *Aither* and *aer* are related to mist and the open air, respectively. The *pneuma* in the body is also *phusa*. The *pneuma* outside the body is *aer* (air). *Pneuma* is thus the genus from which *phusa* splits off for our own bodily breath and the air that surrounds us.

Genesis

Since early Christian times the wind has been depicted as a winged youth, and hence related to the angels [Fig. 2].⁷ They are often seen blowing horns. The representation of the four winds in Christianity is part of its cosmology. The Genesis embroidery of Girona (c. 1050) shows the four winds in its four corners [Fig. 3].⁸ They blow in the direction of the concentrically arranged story of creation. The winds not only accompany creation, they also make creation possible and enable it to perpetuate itself.

In Genesis 1, 1–2 we read: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”

The old Hebrew word for Spirit was *ruach*: meaning and wind, and breath and voice.

Besides seeing in *ruach* a monotheistic variation upon the primal principle of the powerful, roaring and creating wind god(s) found among the Indo-Europeans, Daniel Lys considers *ruach* a typically Semitic interaction between humanity and environment, between individuals in relationship to God.⁹ He indicates that the word for wind, in the Old Arabic root (*raha*: to breathe), carries the idea of enlarging and shrinking, incorporating spatial extension and diminution, just

study of the symbolism of wind in the Middle Ages.

- 7 Kora Neuser, *Anemoi. Studien zur Darstellung der Winde und Windgottheiten in der Antike* (Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider, 1982), 1–25.
- 8 Barbara Baert, “New Observations on the Genesis of Girona (1050–1100). The Iconography of the Legend of the True Cross,” *Gesta. The International Center of Medieval Art* 38, no. 2 (1999): 115–27.
- 9 Daniel Lys, *Rûach. le souffle dans l’ancien testament. Enquête anthropologique à travers l’histoire théologique d’Israël*, *Études d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 56 (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1962). On the philosophical impact of *ruach* on Jewish thought in modern philosophy and anthropology, see James Arthur, “Diamond, Maimonides, Spinoza, and Buber Read the Hebrew Bible: The Hermeneutical Keys of Divine ‘Fire’ and ‘Spirit’ (Ruach),” *The Journal of Religion* 91, no. 3 (2011): 320–43.

as we fill our lungs with air and then let it escape.¹⁰ *Ruach* should therefore be seen from the perspective of rhythm, a principle of life that is not static but always dynamic. *Donner de l'air, c'est à dire de l'espace (d'où intervalle) pour pouvoir respirer (d'où "soulagement") dans une situation critique*, writes Daniel Lys in his *Ruach. Le souffle dans l'ancien testament*.¹¹

In his *The Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram analyses the complex of air, breath, wind and *ruach* in terms of the transition from oral culture to literacy. In principle air is invisible and for an oral cultural system air/wind is the archetype of the secret, of what is unknown but nonetheless is 'there':¹²

Abram shows that oral speech, the word enunciated (and a fortiori the song of the voice) is conceived as 'structured breath', giving air and wind forms a linguistic-semantic potential. The principle of air/wind communicates, and breath structures this in speech, in the communication between humans, between humanity and nature, between humanity and God.¹³

For Abram *ruach* is the medium that enables the person to participate, to enter into relationship with the world and consequently to understand the world in a culture that was transitioning from oral culture to literacy, from polytheism to monotheism. The Hebrew *aleph-beth* comprises twenty-two consonants. As is widely known, in Hebrew, the vowels have to be added by the reader, and the meanings of words can shift depending on the vowels added. What is a vowel but the opening of the mouth to let a sound, a breath, escape? The vowel is therefore the counterpart of the breath of life, a synecdoche of *ruach*. The vowel sound — as the breath of life — is a sacral taboo that may not be shown in the symbol of the letter. It must remain invisible in order to be the bearer of higher laws that link the individual human to their own life force, and to God.

I quote:

The vowels that are to say, are nothing other than sounded breath. And the breath, for the ancient Semites, was the very mystery of life and awareness, a mystery inseparable from the invisible *ruach* – the holy wind or spirit. (...) To make a visible likeness of the divine, it would have been to make a visible representation of a mystery whose very essence was to be invisible

10 Old Arabic distinguishes *rih* (wind) and *ruh* (spirit). Hebrew does not make this distinction; Lys, *Rûach*, 24. In Jewish culture the notion that God had to make himself as small (concise) as he could to make the universe possible is still held; with thanks to Prof. Dr Dror Ze'evi, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel.

11 Lys, *Rûach*, 21.

12 Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 225–60, esp. 226: "the air for oral people is the archetype of all that is ineffable, unknowable, yet undeniably real and efficacious."

13 Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 227.

and hence unknowable – the sacred breath, the holy wind. And thus, it was not done.¹⁴

Thus, a uniquely ‘blind’ alphabet could arise from this semitic monotheistic “iconoclastic” language, that in its core still regarded the wind as a divinely, creative principle, placing the vowel under taboo as though (in relation to the visibility of God) it was both a step too far and a step too close.

In short. A Hebrew text is not a mirror or doubling of the worldview; it is an actively dynamic secret that the reader has to impregnate with breath, with speech. Reading and gaining knowledge means adding vowels, creating with breath in the same way that Adam was given life by God’s breathing into his nostrils (Gen. 2, 7). The position of the Hebrew alphabet at the threshold between orality and literacy is articulated by the absence of written vowels. The reader is required to inspire, to breathe life into the words, for without the reader’s *ruach* the secret cannot be revealed. This, writes Abram, “ensured that Hebrew language and tradition remained open to the power of that which exceeds the strictly human community – it ensured that the Hebraic sensibility would remain rooted, however tenuously, in the animate earth”.¹⁵ The reader, as it were, actively and consciously takes part in God’s living word, which invites him to interpret Him.¹⁶ This active participation is given magical dimensions in Kabbalah, the letters themselves carrying a charge of divine power.¹⁷ Meditation on the letters reveals hidden secrets; the letters are alive; they go away and reappear and interact with the human person and with the environment.

A variation on this magic is the relationship between letters and their numerical values, especially with the famous Tetragrammaton ‘YHWH’.¹⁸ The magical taboo around the Tetragrammaton is that its exact pronunciation has been ‘forgotten’. Kabbalah says that the Y-H has a whispering intake of breath and the W-H a more whispering exhalation, like the rising and the falling of the tides of the sea.¹⁹ This shows just how much the most sacred word (and thus God himself) was, in the Semitic world, still intertwined with the cycles of breathing or the ‘inter-windedness’ of the relationship between humanity and God. Y-H-W-H is a sound so closely tied to breath itself, that it seems as though the very wind entrusted it to humanity, to our

14 Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 241–42.

15 Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 242.

16 Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 243.

17 Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 245.

18 Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 246.

19 Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 250.

planet, to creation. In the human action of one inhalation and one exhalation God is ‘pronounced’. Pronouncing God is a human sigh that reflects the cosmic wind, but also continually replenishes it. And also taking the consonants of *ruach* in one’s mouth, results in a similar emission of breath.

Or as Abram concludes:

The absence of the vowels provided the pores, the openings in the linguistic membrane through which the invisible wind — the living breath — could still flow between the human and the more-than-human worlds. It was only with the plugging of these last pores — with the insertion of visible letters for the vowels themselves — that the perceptual boundary established by the common language was effectively sealed, and what had once been a porous membrane became an impenetrable barrier, a hall of mirrors?²⁰

Annunciation

The other characteristic of wind, humidity, is reflected in uterine fluids, urine, sweat and semen. The wind-breath-spirit complex is often paired with fluidity, as in Christian baptism, in which water and spirit together have a purifying effect. A primitive image of impregnation is the combination of wind and water. The result is steam, which not only lends fertility to the genitals but also to the brain, which is metaphorically represented in the glossolalia of the Greek sibyls at the steam baths. The humid breath from the mouth, with its red tongue functioning as a moisture emitting “rod,” has been compared to the element fire, the fiery tongues of Pentecost being an equivalent of the descending breath/spirit/*pneuma* [Fig. 4]. The wind fans the flames but blowing on holy fire is a taboo. Nevertheless, there is one invisible element that passes noiselessly and easily from water to fire, from fire to air and from air to earth: the scent, the most invisible emanation of the wind archetype.²¹

In *Le Détail* Daniel Arasse (1944–2003) draws our attention to an Annunciation by Filippo Lippi (1406–69), in which a buttonhole without a button has been painted over the Virgin’s navel [Fig. 5].²² This tiny opening is almost invisible to the naked eye. In his book Arasse studies several details that are scarcely visible; as such – according to the author – they must be viewed as the enigmatic and intimate intertwining of the painter and his art. Hence the specific positioning of this

20 Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 257.

21 Ernest Jones, *Essays in Applied Psycho-Analysis*, vol. 2 (New York: Read Books, 1964), 321.

22 Daniel Arasse, *Le détail. Pour une histoire rapprochée de la peinture* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996), 338.

particular lost button must also have some symbolic meaning.²³

Tiny golden rays radiate outward from the scarcely visible hole, echoing the rays of light from the beak of the dove. The golden rays are the impregnating “breath,” the glow of conception. This would mean that Lippi suggests that light from the Word-become-flesh was already escaping from the womb. On the other hand, this double radiation also corresponds to 15th-century notions concerning optics: sight arises from physical radiation from the eye as well as from the object. The scientific law of what sight is (and hence painting) also becomes the law of what conception is (and hence incarnation). The painting of the Renaissance – concerned with the application of *mimesis* and optical correctness, but not therefore averse to symbolic layering in the laws themselves – presents itself as an incarnation and *vice versa*. In this way painting suppresses the sonorous sense in favor of light and sight. The strange consequence is that the opening above the navel, blind and therefore visionary, presents itself as an interior view, endoscopic and uterine. The closed opening that is the navel is the scar of the indefinable: fetal life within the mother.

Filippo Lippi’s detail of the navel may have been a virtuoso refinement of an earlier Tuscan tradition. On the retable (c. 1421–25) of Gentile da Fabriano (c. 1370–1427) a ray of light escapes from the breast of God, entering Mary’s room through the round window above and ending just under her heart, where the six-lobed *oculus* is projected like a transparency across her lower body [Fig. 6]. The “eye” of Mary’s room is repeated like an optical photogram: she bears the divine light of a supernatural impregnation in a way that is thoroughly pictorial. Light has descended into painterly virtuosity: the subtle golden rays, the hidden energy of the dove and the optical echo of the window frame on textile. This also makes Mary’s abdomen into a sort of “receiving eye” of “windness.” Leo Steinberg describes this as a “connection between God and Mary that neutralizes the sensual through the fusion of a specific *sensorium*.”²⁴ A higher synesthesia is thereby created: light that speaks, rays that evoke sound, the voice of God that sees, the womb that receives and at the same time “looks,” while Mary in turn looks up at the *oculus* in her room.²⁵

23 See also Barbara Baert, *Navel. On the Origin of Things* (Ghent: Sint-Joris, 2009).

24 *A bond passing from God to Mary, designed to neutralize sense by confounding pure specialized sensory apparatus*; Leo Steinberg, “‘How shall this be?’ Reflections on Filippo Lippi’s ‘Annunciation,’” *Artibus et Historiae* 8, no.16 (1987): 25–44, esp. 38.

25 Now we can also understand that the Madonna del Parto (c. 1460), in which Mary is presented with a swollen belly under a cloth held up by two angels, by Piero della Francesca (c. 1415–92), is in fact an Annunciation. The fresco was originally on the main altar of Santa Maria di Momentana (formerly Santa Maria in Silvis), a church in the countryside near the hilltop city of Monterchi. Opposite the main altar there was also an *oculus*. What is particular about this arrangement is that in the month of March, in which the Annunciation is celebrated (March 21), the sun is high in the western sky above the hills of Monterchi and causes the fresco

In the Annunciation the wind plays a role outside and inside. On the outside the wind is like the mouth or *arca* of God, like the descent of angels with fluttering garments, like the flying doves, like word and speech from the mouth of Gabriel wound in radiant golden letters. The inside of the wind is the invisible wind: the reverse of *pneuma*. It is the wind that has impregnated, has flowed into the body and is thus able to create new life. The invisibility of conception and incarnation is externalized in motifs that embody deeper affects related to the displacement of air, breathing and impregnation. Painting these “invisible” motifs constitutes a challenge. Hence the breath becomes a bundle of golden rays, the displacement of air a transparent veil, word and speech are epigrams and Mary herself is – in the words of the Bible – overshadowed.²⁶

Pathosformel

The presence of movement in the visual arts is subject to the shifting judgments of taste. The

to light up. This deliberate staging recalls those paintings in which contact with light initiates conception and parthenogenesis. The striking accord between heavenly bodies, the site and the position of the fresco shifts the Annunciation toward the decorum of the Tuscan hills. Here the cyclical laws of nature and the seasons are active, so that the Madonna del Parto expands to become an image of cosmogony. Her belly is the primal force of the creating self. Piero della Francesca has shown this in her dress, which splits apart. The split upon which Mary's hand rests with evident carelessness refers to the “closed opening,” the paradox represented by the virgin conception. The vagina in her dress reflects moreover the curtain opened by the angels, just as the Most High is opened. The pomegranates on the fabric refer to Semitic fertility symbols and draw the Madonna del Parto into the archaic experience of fertility past and present, there, in the hills, where there was once a proud temple of Mythras; Ingeborg Zapperi-Walter, *Piero della Francesca, Madonna del parto: ein Kunstwerk zwischen Politik und Devotion* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1992). In 1992 the fresco was moved to its present location in the museum of Monterchi. Even today the Madonna still holds a particular attraction for pregnant girls, for the museum is closed to the greater public from the moment one of the women of the village requests a “private” conversation with the Madonna. There exists copious literature about this Madonna and the phenomenon of Partos in Tuscany; Brendan Cassidy, “A Relic, Some Pictures and the Mothers of Florence in the Late Fourteenth Century,” *Gesta* 30, no. 2 (1991): 91–99; Ermes Maria Ronchi, Ermes Maria, ed., *La Madonna nell'attesa del Parto: capolavori dal patrimonio italiano del '300 e '400* (Milan, 2001).

- 26 The shadow is a fertility symbol in Semitic cultures. It also stands for the female gender, as opposed to light for the male; Annick de Souzenelle, *Le symbolisme du corps humain* (Paris: Espaces libres, 1991), 38. Until well into the 15th century, this specific indication was not followed in painting. The ear was developed as the favored route for the impregnation. But when painting began to refine its technical capacity to reproduce light and shadow, the motif in the mother text was rediscovered. The medium was technically ripe for receiving the motif; Victor I. Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), *passim*.

degree to which wind is more or less suggested in a composition, in nature and in the fall of the figures' garments, can, according to some authors, be considered as marking off the boundaries between the major stylistic periods. In his *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (1915) Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945) defends the pendulum motion of a constantly shifting formal language that shuttles between tectonic (closed) and a-tectonic (open) forms.²⁷ The latter form is compressed energy, with a great deal of motion along the pictorial axes. In short, there are windless, closed and calm stylistic periods as opposed to stylistic periods that burst at the seams with movement. Within these broad outlines are undoubtedly a variety of aesthetic tastes. Johan Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68), for example, sternly condemned the use of flamboyant drapery in sculpture and defended the beauty of the strict, static fall of folds like the flutes of a Doric column [Fig. 7].²⁸

In the history of art, however, one period – which is in fact limited to one generation – celebrates all the virtuoso aspects of the wind in art in a way that surpasses exuberance: fluttering garments, tossing trees, tresses flying. It is the Quattrocento generation of Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510), Filippo Lippi, Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449–1549) and Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519).²⁹ In his article *Bewegende Bewegungen*, Georges Didi-Huberman explores in more depth Aby Warburg's (1866–1929) 1893 interpretation of Botticelli's *Venus and Primavera* [Fig. 8].³⁰

Aby Warburg is entirely captivated by the “living motion” at the edges of the body. He speaks of an art fascinated by “moving side-effects.”³¹ The moving accessories spread the gaze, and in the

27 Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History. The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*, translated from 7th German Edition (1929) into English by M. D. Hottinger, (New York: MW Books, 1932).

28 Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993). See also: Vlad Ionescu, “Deleuze’s Tensive Notion of Painting in the Light of Riegl, Wölfflin and Worringer,” *Deleuze Studies* 5, no. 1 (2011): 52–62.

29 David Summers, “ARIA II”: The Union of Image and Artist as an Aesthetic Ideal in Renaissance Art,” *Artibus et Historiae* 10, no. 20 (1989):15–31.

30 Aby M. Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. Horst Bredekamp and Manfred Diers (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998): *Sandro Botticellis Geburt der Venus und Frühling. Eine Untersuchung über die Vorstellungen von der Antike in der italienischen Frührenaissance: Deren blasse Blöße, deren schöne Gesichtszüge und deren große Ruhe bewundert hatte, verschob er leicht den Blick: auf das flüssige Auseinanderfallen der Haare im Wind, auf den Zwischenraum der Luft, auf die einladende Wölbung des blumenbestickten Tuchs, das der jungen Göttin dargebracht wird. In eben jenen Bewegungsformeln, in jenen fließenden Gestalten erkannte er, fraglos, das grundsätzliche Pathos des Bildes*; Georges Didi-Huberman, “Bewegende Bewegungen. Die Schleier der Ninfä nach Aby Warburg,” in *Ikonomie des Zwischenraums. Der Schleier als Medium und Metapher*, eds. Johannes Endres, Barbara Wittmann and Gerhard Wolf (Munich: Fink, 2005), 331–60, esp. 331.

31 Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 10: *eingehender Ausmalung des bewegten Beiwerks*.

near-impossible undertaking of consciously trying to follow so much dynamism, so much pleating – yea, so much wind – a capricious “wind vision” arises on the part of the viewer which seems to impregnate the subject anew, to breathe into it.³² An important Renaissance paradigm plays a part in this fertilizing gaze: *ekphrasis*. *Ekphrasis*, or the drive to make virtuoso copies of descriptions in Antique books, is so intense in this generation of painters that it even gives rise to pictorial anomalies. The pleats around the waist of the left Grace in *Primavera* seem to be caused by a belt that has not actually been painted.³³ The answer is to be found in the writings of the Ancients. Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4–64) says that youthful femininity expresses itself in a “sheer unbelted garment” [Fig. 9].³⁴

The *ekphrasis* of Botticelli is linked to contemporary art-theoretical notions of “surface.” A theme, an *historia*, is according to Leon Battista Alberti’s (1404–72) *De pictura* the result of ordering *superficies* until *membra* are created, which in turn become *corpora*.³⁵ In the case of Botticelli these surfaces are like *Sehflüsse*: transparent, painted with un-pigmented varnish directly on the *membra* (for example, on the clasped hands) and the *corpora* (legs, bellies, breasts), creating a formally perfect allegory of the grace of the three Graces.³⁶ For Alberti, planes and bodies are the visible expression of an invisible “Behind.” And what is behind the body according to Alberti are the movements of the soul itself as the essence of painting. They are difficult to paint but form the challenge of falling drapery, among other things.³⁷ The liveliness of the surfaces and movements of the fabric that express the movements of the soul exist thanks to “air” and “wind.” Wind is the medium in painting that introduces beauty and makes possible the soul of painting. Painting contains *pneuma*, the genus of internal and external air, which “animates” the subject.

Cennino Cennini (1370–96?) said that in fresco painting, the fall of drapery is crucial to producing relief and depth. He describes this artistic skill both in the context of textile as in the

32 Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 38.

33 Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 28.

34 Seneca, *De Beneficiis* I–III, 2–4; Lucianus Annaeus Seneca, *Über die Wohltaten*, in *Seneca, Philosophische Schriften*, ed. Manfred Rosenbach, vol. 5 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliches Buchgesellschaft, 1989): 129ff. The absence of a belt is a transcultural motif representing the fertility and “openness” of the young woman; the same holds for loose, unbound hair. Among Berber women, the (un-) belting of girls is related to fertility rituals; Paul Vandenbroeck, *Azetta. Berber vrouwen en hun kunst* (Ghent: Ludion, 2000), 93.

35 Beauty is in the *superficies*: *ergo in hac superficierum compositione maxime gratia et pulchritudo perquirenda est*; Leon Battista Alberti, *Das Standbild. Die Malkunst. Grundlager der Malerei*, ed. Oskar Bätschmann and Christoph Schaublin (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliches Buchgesellschaft, 2000), 257.

36 Didi-Huberman, “Bewegende Bewegungen,” 337.

37 *Motus animi ex motibus corporis cognoscuntur*; Alberti, *Das Standbild*, 269.

context of bodies of water. According to the author the supple qualities of garments can also be seen in the waves of water.³⁸ This entails a particular pictorial fertilization between textile and water.³⁹ The fusion of these two media – fabric and water – leads to the texture of motion.⁴⁰ Wind is the locomotive of the organism in motion; wind reconciles the elements of nature, because wind is invisible as such, and can only be traced through affect. That wind, pictorially speaking, forms the better “moving side-effect” comes as no surprise: wind always purloins its dynamism from the edges, where it teasingly lifts fabrics and the body, sensually and often unintentionally.⁴¹

In short, the wind – and only the wind – makes trans-medial shifts possible between the most divergent materials and materialities: water and textile, air and water, hair and air. Pictorially this gives rise to a fusion of motifs in the liquid of the paint itself. It dazzles the viewer with the idea that the painter can generate air, water and fabric out of one and the same manipulation of fluid and brush. Both the mobile fluidity of Botticelli and the surface of Alberti need the wind as a final pictorial alchemy.⁴² The wind of Botticelli wants to be fluid; the wind of Alberti, the play of waves on water. Transparency, movement and water find each other in a final paradigm: the mirror (water) of Narcissus.

38 Cennino Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte o Trattato della pittura*, ed. Gaetano Milanese (Florence: Felice le Monnier, 1859), 71, 150: *Le dette onde biancheggiale un poco in muro*.

39 Or even between textile, water and air. Tintoretto (1518–94) would use this technique for the “air” in his *Translation of the Body of St Mark* (1562–66), Venice, Accademia; Didi-Huberman, „Bewegende Bewegungen,” 338, note 22.

40 Didi-Huberman, “Bewegende Bewegungen,” 338–39.

41 Here the wind plays about the edge, textile or hem. The hem of the dress is a part of the body that is charged with a particular energy. Vibrating at the textile’s edge is the *influx* and *outflux* of bodily powers, the so-called *dynamis*. In the visual/plastic arts the hem is often quite mobile, represented dynamically as if deliberately to evoke *fluxus*. The wind is an important protagonist in the archetype of the *dynamis*. See: Barbara Baert (with collaboration of Emma Sidgwick), “Touching the Hem. The Thread between Garment and Blood in the Story of the Woman with the Hemorrhage (Mark 5:24b–34parr),” *Textile. Journal of Cloth and Culture* 9, no. 3 (2011): 308–59; Ellen Harlizius-Klück, *Saum & Zeit* (Berlin: Edition Ebersbach, 2005). The exposing aspect of wind and the laying bare of parts of the body that often goes with it (particularly feet) is developed in: Barbara Baert, “The Wood, The Water, and the Foot, or how the Queen of Sheba met up with the True Cross. With emphasis on the Northern European Iconography,” *Mitteilungen für Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte* 16 (2004): 217–78. An iconic moment for the wind as an exposing, flirting motif is the snapshot of Marilyn Monroe (1926–62) with her floating white dress above a subway grate.

42 *The name comes from the classical elements of the ancient Greeks. The aether, a pure “fifth element” (quinta essentia in Latin), was thought to fill the universe beyond earth. This seemed fitting to modern scientists, since quintessence was the fifth known contribution to the overall mass-energy content of the Universe (www).*

Leonardo

The hermeneutics of the wind – between motif and pathos – concerns a natural phenomenon that operates through and from the body, establishing a relationship between human creativity and the creativity of the cosmos. The wind reflects an associative, capricious and, above all, fruitful creative power. The process of creation that is given by wind/breath/air plays upon the entire *sensorium* and demonstrates more than other artistic paradigms the capacity for self-reflection about the pictorial medium. In particular cases, this self-reflection radicalizes into the *pneuma* that “descends” into painting and drawing, as is the case of Leonardo da Vinci.⁴³

Leonardo is an artist who went further than his contemporaries. Where the study of climatological phenomena was concerned, there lived in him a deep need to plumb the ways in which reality could be translated into iconographical space by pictorial means. This modern spirit renders homage to art and science, and he was convinced that wind as an invisible phenomenon could ultimately be tamed into artistic visibility through observation and experiment. It was Da Vinci’s dream to contain the phenomenon of wind artistically, to describe it in its complexity, to translate it graphically and in doing so to change our personal relationship to the world (according to Alessandro Nova).⁴⁴

In 1513 Leonardo wrote a treatise on the wind in which he categorically denied that the winds, as was believed by Medieval minds, originated within the *quaternitas* of the zodiac. Convinced as he was that the wind was strictly a natural phenomenon, he wrote a text on the Deluge two years later with a series of drawings illustrating storm surges and turbulence, *e sua dimostrazione in pictura* (and their demonstration in painting) [Fig. 10]. He notes: “One will see the dark, misty air, tormented by conflicting winds, which cause the uninterrupted rain to pour, mingled with hail and broken branches, with countless leaves. Everywhere one sees uprooted trees, torn to pieces in a furious storm.” The drawings are extremely small in format, minute, complex and incomparable, and only those who look through a magnifying glass will find a landscape and a city behind this apocalyptic drama of flood and tornadoes. Here Leonardo has developed a unique graphic system that connects water and wind in one and the same whirl of lines and flecks/spots/points/dots, making it necessary to exchange his familiar silverpoint for chalk.

43 Mary Pardo, “Memory, Imagination, Figuration. Leonardo da Vinci and the Painter’s Mind,” in *Images of Memory. On remembering and Representation*, ed. Susanne L. Küchler and Walter Melion (Washington: Smithsonian, 1991), 212–24.

44 Nova, *The Book of the Wind*, 75–96, esp. 96: *to grasp the instant of the phenomenon, to describe it in all its complexity, to capture it with graphic means, to transform our relationship with the wind.*

The Deluge is recorded in a technique that was probably the only possibility for converting the wind as natural phenomenon into a drawing. Leonardo's artistic vision of the wind makes optimal use of his *sfumato* technique: the misty smokiness that binds line to "shadowness" and refuses/denies color.⁴⁵ Leonardo's wind supports a drawing process that defines itself excessively as turbulence, as vortex, as whorl. Leonardo's draftsmanship is a "draftsmanship of the wind" and thereby reaches back to the origin of the language of images as such. Unlike Sandro Botticelli, Leonardo depicts the wind not only as a *Pathosformel* that chases after an aesthetic Nymphian ideal, but also as a boundless expression of astonishment at the possibilities open to the creating "I." When Leonardo, like his Florentine contemporaries, falls under the hypnotic spell of the nymph [Fig. 11], his *bewegende Beiwerke* express the imprint of his soul in the roughness of chalk. The whirling and the "neurosis" of the girl announce the birth of visibility: hasty and impenetrable.

The processes of the arts are for Leonardo more than just the scientific study that the métier demands; they contain a fascination with the power of creation – with the *pneuma* of the Artistic itself – bordering on religion and philosophy. In a booklet dedicated to Ludovico il Moro (1452–1508) – the *Libro della pittura* of 1490 – he writes that the pleasure of the painter resides in the fact that the divine inherent in painting brings the spirit of the painter close to the spirit of God. Leonardo's drawing of wind embodies the image that breathes – in the way that God impregnated creation. In this sense, a fragment of a rather unusual manuscript by Leonardo – *Sul volo degli uccelli* (on the flight of birds) – in which he observes the currents of the wind and cyclones in relation to the flight of birds, displays an unheard-of poetry in the way it understands the wind as artistic quintessence. According to Leonardo's notation: *Oiglierà il primo volo il grande uccello sopra del dosso del suo/ magno cecero [cigno] empoendo l'universo di stupore en /piendo di sua fama tutte le scritture e gloria [gloria] eterna al nido/ dove nacque.* "The great bird shall take his first flight on the back of a great swan, which will fill the universe with wonder and fill all texts with his eternal glory, just as he fills the nest where he was born."⁴⁶

In the manuscript in question, Leonardo has sketched several birds in flight in the right margin in order to illustrate his argument [Fig. 12].⁴⁷ In comparison to his sublime chalk studies of wind, they are more doodle than anything else. Still these birds are no less affecting; they fly out of the master's hand, which wrote from right to left – and backwards at that. If we want to read with Leonardo, we are led to the letters of the text by the motion of the birds. Just as Zephyr impregnated

45 Frank Fehrenbach, "Die oszillierende Blick. Sfumato und die Optik des späten Leonardo," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 65 (2002): 522–44.

46 Marianne Schneider, ed., *Leonardo da Vinci. Der Vögel Flug* (Munich: Schirmer, 2000), 95.

47 Arturo Uccelli, *Il libro del volo di Leonardo da Vinci* (Milan: Editore Ulrico Hoepli, 1952).

Flora, so the bird with its displacement of air and scattering beak impregnates the *manu-scriptum* like a nest of wisdom and universal knowledge. And if the wind embodies a hermeneutics of the capricious, like the scent of a hermeneutics of transgression, then these birds accompany us from intuition to logic, from the right brain to the left. The flight of the birds’ “scatters” upon the parchment “something” that existed before the knowledge, experimentation and observation of the Florentine genius. A thought? (Not yet) A scent? (Not yet) A wonder? (Not yet) A supposition? (Almost) A premonition? (Almost) The awakening of an emotion? (Yes)

[Fig. 1] Andronicus of Cyrrhus, *Horologium* (the so-called tower of winds), 2nd century or 50 BC, Athens.

[Fig. 2] The four angels/winds of the earth, *the Commentary on the Apocalypse of Beatus of Liébana*, MS. J.II.1, fols. 38v–39r. the first quarter of 12th century, tempera on parchment, 360 x 275mm, Biblioteca nazionale, Turin.

[Fig. 3] *Genesis embroidery*, c. 1050, embroidery, wool, flax, 358 x 450cm, Cathedral Museum, Girona.

[Fig. 4] The Holy Spirit descending over the apostles (Pentecost), *Maasland lectionary*, MS M. 883, fol. 62v., 2nd half 12th century, tempera on vellum, 165 x 102 cm, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

[Fig. 5] Filippo Lippi, *Annunciation* (detail), c. 1440, egg-tempera on wood, 68.6 x 152.7 cm (whole), the National Gallery, London.

[Fig. 6] Gentile da Fabriano, *Annunciation* (detail), c. 1421–25, tempera with gold on wood, 40.6 x 48.4 cm, Pinacoteca, Vatican.

[Fig. 7] *Charioteer*, 478 BC, bronze, 180 cm high, Archeological Museum, Delphi.

[Fig. 8] Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera*, c. 1482–85, tempera on wood, 203x314 cm, Uffizi, Florence.

[Fig. 9] The Three Graces, detail of Fig. 8 *Primavera*.

[Fig. 10] Leonardo da Vinci, *The Flood*, c. 1517, chalk drawing on paper, 158x210 mm, the Royal Collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Windsor Castle.

[Fig. 11] Leonardo da Vinci, *Nymph*, c. 1512, chalk drawing on paper, 210x135 mm, the Royal Collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Windsor Castle.

[Fig. 12] Leonardo da Vinci, detail of the codex *Sul volo degli uccelli* (on the flight of birds), fol. 8v., c. 1505–7, pen with ink on parchment, Biblioteca Reale, Turin.

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