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## From the Theme Editors...

We are delighted that the Visual Culture issue of Moment Journal has drawn considerable attention beyond our expectations. In this issue, we have included diligent studies regarding different ways of seeing, various channels and media, and, as a result, the ever-changing and expanding perspectives from different disciplines, all of which eventually make up our culture. Working in such a diverse field of study has been a challenging yet enlightening and pleasant journey for us.

And this is because Visual Culture itself is a quite challenging field of study: In fact, it is as if the field stands right in the middle of an interdisciplinary orchestra that expands the limits of social sciences towards philosophy, arts, and even natural sciences. The image is not only seen and watched but also felt. Hence the academic interest has shifted from structured spaces such as movie theatres, television or cinevision screens, and art galleries toward visual practices of everyday life (Mirzoeff, 2002).

In order to grasp this current world where images have taken over linguistic and verbal expression, we need to foresee that images now mean more than what they are and function beyond the limits of visibility. For images grow as forms and contents that expand towards all our senses and penetrate into our intellectual practices. Alpers, for example, considers 17<sup>th</sup>-century Flemish paintings a significant moment for the diversification of ways of seeing. Defining visual culture, Alpers (2009) emphasizes the importance of mentioning image production tools such as microscopes and camera obscura and empirical and visual skills such as mapping besides images themselves, and of questioning what we should make of these images that inspire our culture. However, 12 years later since Alpers' comments, we see that there is a lot more to the field of visual culture today: an unstoppable motion and transformation in visual culture studies and around the world where we witness the visual appearance of culture. The constantly changing technologies and new contents of the media constructing visual culture today have made up an immense research area. Nevertheless, the ever-changing, heterogeneous, and persistent nature of the transformation of the field of visual culture brings along many assumptions and uncertainties as to what this transformation might mean. WJT Mitchell's conceptualization "Pictorial Turn" at the beginning of the 1990s certainly has not only provided us with an initial conceptual framework to grasp the nature of this uncertainty but also opened up a convenient area where we can reflect on the novel forms of image. But it would not be wrong to suggest that today, especially together with the opportunities provided by digital media, the field has constantly broadened its boundaries and created a unique paradigm fed by the concepts and perspectives from various disciplines. Let us try to sum up the discussion on the paradigmatic view:

First of all, whereas visual culture would be defined by a universe of graphics and optic images to a great extent about a hundred years ago, today it is defined via verbal, perceptual, and cognitive images, and, even beyond them, by a universe of virtual images that disconnect from the real world. Images from our computers, smartphones, and televisions keep diversifying and increasing every day while surrounding us, i.e., the audience, even more than ever before. Moreover, considering the static or dynamic virtual images produced by not only professionals but also common people, *this situation becomes even more complicated*. As to Byung Chul Han (2020), it is a kind of violence that our bodies and lives become transparent through the force (or consent) of gaze. But let us not be that pessimistic...

Secondly, social media and social networking services, which emerged twenty years ago, seem to have radically changed the way we produce and consume images today. While the number of users of YouTube, which was established in 2007, was 800 million in 2012, in 2022 as we are writing this, we can observe that half of the world's population watches one billion videos produced by users every day. It is possible to say that we have been consuming contents that previous generations could not reach for years and therefore could not consume, and we can predict that this creates a media economy that we have never known before. The \$28.8 billion revenue and profit-sharing that YouTube generates annually alone defines an economy that has never been experienced before. The changing ways that we use the visual universe with social networks and networking services have become unique with over-the-top media services such as Netflix, which has more than two hundred million users and has enabled us to access quality content apart from movie theaters and terrestrial broadcasts. Along with these wide and multi-network relations, viewing experiences that have never been discussed before, such as binge-watching or hate-watching, are now being discussed through this new type of media. Thus, we as the audience have become quite talkative...

Third, the studies we conduct to understand today's visual culture have different kinds of tendencies from the previous academic approaches which focus on the image when considered along with the media mentioned above. To put it more concretely, until recently (about 30 years ago), art history and aesthetic criteria were used as a way of understanding and comprehending images, whereas today visual culture studies need to be more inclusive. Academically, there are strong, factual reasons to say that we have shifted from a paradigm where we define images that are worth talking about as works of art, to a paradigm that strives to see images in all their diversity, thus ascribing credit to non-art images as well. For example, in terms of today's evaluation criteria of visual culture, there may not be much of a difference between Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* painting and the images of our children photographed at home, in terms of occurrence and value attribution. Therefore, in this new paradigm, *the aesthetic and even ethical criteria of the image are blurred*; culturally, what we want from these images and what we do with them is considered more than the boundary created by the hierarchy established between images by art history. When we say *Mona Lisa*, we are not talking about the aesthetic quality of the painting which shows a Florentine lady at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century, but the function of this painting in the period we call the Renaissance. Just like when we try to analyze the functions of an ordinary family portrait shared on Instagram in the culture we call post-modern today. We do not differentiate between the two images, in fact, we focus on the similarities between the two images in their ways of seeing. Let us recall an example given by Mirzoeff here. Mirzoeff does a kind of archeology while researching the references of "selfie" in our information world. The researcher digs from Snapchat to the paintings by the 18<sup>th</sup>-century portrait painter E. Vigée-Lebrun. He even digs deeper into the 17<sup>th</sup>-century, to the self-image in D. Velazquez's *Bridesmaids* painting (Mirzoeff, 2016).

On the other hand, the paradigmatic update of the visual culture certainly does not sweep away the discipline of art history entirely. Investigations into how the practice of art constructs the world we live in still continue. For example, the effects of the Venus of Willendorf, which was carved twenty-seven thousand years ago, on the society we live in today are discussed not only from the perspective of art history but also on an ever-expanding basis with novel conceptual approaches within a cultural context. The archaeological view evokes itself here in this example as well.

So, to what extent has this issue of Moment Journal touched upon the field of visual culture that is constantly developing and expanding? Of course, we do not claim to have embraced such an extent that we have tried to summarize so far. However, with the articles in this issue, we humbly believe that we have been able to touch upon the issue from different perspectives in line with the fields Turkish literature has been able to expand. We think, albeit to a certain extent, we have been able to question the old and new images that enable us to understand, connect with and perceive the world – or maybe we should say the cosmos. Additionally, we have strived as much as possible to provide a ground for some of the new discussions in the field.

Now, let us continue by providing brief information about the articles in the Visual Culture issue of the *Moment Journal*: The issue consists of thirteen original articles, two book reviews, two interviews, and a memorial for bell hooks who left us in the winter of 2021. Through the original articles, we have tried to trace the old but transforming media such as documentary, photography, and cinema; new ways of seeing brought by the images produced by drones; digital sharing platforms, and the universe of visual arts to which financial applications such as NFTs are directly integrated. In fact, in this issue, you will be reading some articles urging you to direct your attention to discussions such as new digital archives and augmented reality. The word "archive", of course, will summon the term "memory"; indeed, two articles are on image/ry and memory. Macro-scale sociopolitical issues such as immigration, immigrants, and war have made room for themselves as painful topics. Let us talk briefly about the articles:

The first article belongs to Gözde Cöbek. The author takes on how heterosexual individuals use dating applications. In her article which traces selection and elimination strategies on dating sites, Cöbek describes the indicators of beauty and status and invites the interruption or disruption of these mythical scales.

Digital platforms provide new opportunities in terms of daily and artistic practices. And this inevitably brings forward discussions on NFTs. NFT is a quite new topic and not fully understood by most of us. However, we know that with every new communicative paradigm shift, Walter Benjamin needs to be visited. Benjamin is like a lighthouse providing us signals and traces in the search for answers to questions such as where we came from in terms of image, art, and originality. While Esra Bozkanat presents a descriptive frame to understand the functioning of NFTs that come with blockchain technology and create the crypto art, she also refers to "aura", one of Benjamin's key concepts, via the discussions of owners, uniqueness, and the cult value of artistic content. The authors of the second article on NFTs are Özge Cengiz and Can Cengiz. They build their discussion around concepts such as reproducibility, capital and market, and meta value of art. They question the possibility of the freedom and the uniqueness of art, referring to not only Benjamin but also Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer.

While new communication technologies are dragging us to the digital sphere, the world we live in seems to be shrinking. Moreover, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) of different sizes have become a current issue thanks to their qualities that enable them to see the world from a new angle. The use of these devices and the images produced often appear in the field of war and reflect on the screens in our homes. Can Ertuna analyzes the ways the media uses the images produced by armed UAVs in the Second Karabakh War. The author discusses the unmanned nature of these images that function as a party to the war in parallel with the conflict, having a motif of victory. He critically questions the effects of such images, which starts to determine the convention in the visualization of war and establishes the visual regime of war, on the ethical-political principles that define peace journalism.

Naturally, discussions on cinema are also present in the articles we have included in this issue. Zeynep Özarslan and Sanem Peker Dağlı analyze the implicit and explicit orientalist scenes and forms of homoerotic imagery of the East through memorable films such as *Hamam (Steam: The Turkish Bath)*, F. Özpetek, 1997), *Zenne (Zenne Dancer)*, M.C. Alper and M. Binay, 2011) and *Yaşamın Kıyısında (The Edge of Heaven)*, Fatih Akın, 2007). Mehmet Sarı, on the other hand, discusses postmodernism through the film *Kaçık Porno (Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn)*, Radu Jude, 2021) and tries to read today's visual culture within the conceptualization of metamodernism and investigates how the metamodern effect is produced in film analysis. Another article within the theme, which tries to follow the issue of visual culture through cinema, is penned by Duygu Hazal Bezazoğlu. Bezazoğlu's discussion is more than a representation-based reading within cinema; The main focus of the article is on both film and theory, around the question of what happens to the archive in a techno-cybernetic environment. The film *Archive (2020)* serves in the article as a case to see/read the organism that carries the archive on both a spatial and mental scale.

In the age of speed, getting lost in the flow and becoming invisible in the records is often a cause for anxiety. But this time, the anxiety of being invisible is not due to the lack of record, data or evidence, but rather a massification of the records. Perhaps this is why there is a kind of tension around the concept of archive. Relatedly, another focus of academic interest over the last 30 years is memory. Memory is the subject of Merve Kaptan's article in the magazine. In this article, Kaptan, unlike other writers, invites the reader into literature. It establishes a fruitful connection between *the Museum of Innocence* in Çukurcuma, which was opened based on Orhan Pamuk's work of the same name, and Aby Warburg's pictorial work titled "*Bilder Atlas*". The author owes the real adhesive of this melancholic connection to Marcel Proust, known for his voluminous novel *In Search of Lost Time*, and his time, memory, and affects. Another article in this issue linked to the subject of memory is by Gülbin Özdamar Akarçay. But Özdamar Akarçay's desire is not to be buried in the past, but rather to trace time in space. In his article, the author, having an old photograph of Çukurçarşı, Eskişehir in his hand, tries to find the current state of the place where the photograph was taken. Then, he finds the square he is looking for as a result of a great effort and marks it by photographing it again. In doing so, he tells us about a methodological adventure he has researched for a long time with the participation of his students; it takes us through academic curiosity and artistic inspiration, between the traces of the past and the present state of the present, between narratives and memories.

We mentioned that digital affordances affect many forms of representation and art. The documentary genre feeds on the dynamics of this period but also changes its form according to what is current. Sezer Ahmet Kına's article questions the new visual conventions that emerged under the influence of 360-degree video technologies, such as participatory documentary making and the transforming documentary aesthetics. We

have known for a long time that a comprehensive theoretical discussion of digitalization and the medium of photography has been needed. Uğur Çetin's article in the journal aims to fulfill this need. Çetin states that in the recent historical shift from analog to digital, conventional perceptions and practices related to photography, and even theoretical debates around the concepts of truth/reality/authenticity, have begun to transform. However, arguing that it is not correct to read this transformation in the context of technological developments alone, the author argues that the connection between technology, society, and photography should be attended more fully and carefully while trying to grasp the issue.

Can the concept of representation be pushed aside or hastily dismissed if the subject comes up with images?!... Of course not. The article of Gamze Toksoy and Nihan Bozok draws attention to the photographs on the Instagram account of *Yüzümle Mutluyum Derneği* (The Turkish Representative of Face Equality International). By establishing a connection with the disability studies, the article draws attention to the representations of individuals whose faces are differentiated due to traumas such as disability and illness, and to the possibilities that the social media environment brings for these representation regimes, and self-representation methods. The article of Mine Gencil Bek is also guided by photographs. Pursuing the narratives of ten women of Turkish origin living in Germany, the author pays particular attention to conducting her research on these women's imaginations of belonging and identity, along with attaching particular importance to the presence of photographs in family albums, on the refrigerators and walls. Within the layered structure of the narrative, especially guided by photographic imagery, the author tries to understand the construction of identity and belonging, ways of memory, and future projections of the immigrant women.

There are also two interviews in the visual culture issue of the Moment Journal. Gülay Acar Göktepe interviews Ali Metin Büyükkarakaya and Evren Sertalp, the curators of *The Faces of Juliopolis* exhibition. Fascinated by the opportunity created by the exhibition to touch the time through hologram technology, Acar Göktepe believes that she is witnessing the communication of archeology; she introduces a concept called *arheommunication*. As we have mentioned before, archeological inquiry has been around for a while in visual culture studies. We may remember R. Hariman and J. L. Lucaites (2016) mention the archeological quality of photography, and J. Parikka (2012) develops a concept of media archeology through technical materials and hardware. We reckon that there is a new layer suitable for excavation at hand. The second interview in the issue is also important because it points to a vital concern. This time the topic is the Ukrainian War and the current debates on visual representations of war. Ayşe Nevin Yıldız is having an in-depth conversation with *Reuters* reporter Ümit Bektaş about the painful reality of the Ukraine War and its mise-en-scene, its comparison with the images of the Syrian War, and the labor of a war correspondent to produce images.

While we were just getting started with the preparations for this issue, the feminist theorist bell hooks, whom women from all over the world bond with and regard familiar, passed away. Suggesting love as a political force in the struggle for a better world, bell hooks touched our souls by saying that feminism is for everyone. In Visual Culture classes, we got to know and read her conceptualization of the oppositional gaze. The commemoration written by Ayşe Hindioğlu has the quality of confirming the enthusiasm that bell hooks creates in women.

Finally, we would like to mention two recent books brought to your attention in this issue with the theme of Visual Culture. Naz Önen presents the book *Making the Modern Turkish Citizen. Vernacular Photography in The Early Republican Era* by Ö. B. Calafato (2022). Gülay Acar Göktepe discussed the book *Vulnus: Kırılganlık Üzerine* by Gamze Hakverdi (2021), who had worked as an academician at Hacettepe Faculty of Communication until 2016.

As with all previous issues of Moment Journal, this one is the product of a great collective effort. We would like to thank for their efforts to all the reviewers, the editor and associate editors of the journal, the journal secretariat, language editors, and to our authors who contributed with their articles in this issue.

We wish you a pleasant reading.

**Gülsüm DEPELİ SEVİNÇ & Tolga HEPDİNÇLER**

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