Sunburns

The exhibition as trap-machine: Esther Gatón proposes a new set of concepts to rethink what it means for artists' work to be *offered to view*.

The idea of the *machine* in general, and the *trap* in particular, compel us to consider 'functions', 'uses', and 'mechanisms' in very specific ways. For instance, each machine makes us think of the forms that its users are required to adopt, or the internal forms that guarantee its successive operations, as well as the potential forms that its failure or disuse might take. In the case of the art exhibition, functioning tends to be subjective and hard to predict. It is famously difficult to pin down the 'function' of an art object. What makes traps relevant here as an abstract figure of thought is their operating system: they can be either physical or conceptual, they need to adapt themselves to the circumstances and to the prey that they aim to capture and, in order to operate, they require a difference in energy; they are held in tension between two different situations, or states. Traps also incorporate an inherent limit: every time a trap is successfully used, its tricks and mechanisms are unveiled and deactivated. It needs to be replanned again.

To avoid unwritten assumptions, it's worth mentioning that the parallel of artist/hunter vs. spectator/prey does not operate here. I would rather suggest that artists often tend to play tricks, deceive, and set traps for themselves as part of their creative processes.[1] The exhibition understood as trap-machine is not a system created by the artist for the purpose of capturing visitors, but instead builds a shared environment full of deceptions, frauds, and stunts, which everyone, including its authors, traverses without knowing how to proceed. Traps favour what I consider to be a productive, if fraught, relation between the viewer and the show: they expand our attention and provoke our scepticism. For any prey, what matters is the ability to identify what is trustworthy, solid, and secure, and to recognise distortion, insincerity, and fakes. The objective of trap-making here might be to build an exhibition where all management (i.e., the ability to know what the ideal functioning of the space is) has vanished, and resolution becomes impossible, resulting in a situation where all that is left is the experience of being misled, and reactions to it.

> **The objective of trap-making here might be to build an exhibition where management has vanished and resolution becomes impossible, resulting in a situation where all that is left is the experience of being misled, and reactions to it.**

'Exhibition' is understood here through the roots of the word, paying attention to what 'offer or present to view' can come to mean. The word proceeds from Latin *expositĭo*, *expositionis*, and *exponere*. It's formed from the union of the prefix 'ex-', which means *outside* or *beyond*, and 'ponere', to put. Thus, exposure referred to the action of putting something outside, exposing—but also to abandonment. In Latin, the word had a very specific sense: the abandonment of unwanted new-born babies in the

1. The Basque artist Jorge Oteiza refers to artists practice as 'trap makers', since, as he states, in Basque, the word 'art' means 'trap'. Oteiza suggested that in prehistoric times the art practice was used to hunt animals and spirits.

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street, so that others could collect them.[2] Looking at its roots, the act of exhibiting could be read as a putting outside, making something (often something intimate) available for others—others who one may not even know. However, this act has gone through multiple codifications, and a certain comprehension of what exhibiting is has solidified. I believe this owes largely to the inherited categorisation of the elements that it involves, generally divided into: artworks, display, curatorial text, communication, and means of distribution. Such separations do not pay much attention to the *functioning*, but only to the *medium* of each element, and are thus useless for the machinic approach proposed in this text.

The idea of the trap-machine challenges assumed functionings of the show, suggesting that exhibitions might be experienced in great disorientation, with no one holding control on what's right or wrong; no one deciding what one needs to see/perceive and feel, or how one needs to move/behave, think. The trap-machine creates a set of circumstances where 'the right functioning' is simply not accesible and thus neither achievable. The exhibition as trap-machine cannot be conceived, or spoken about, via traditional identifications such as the ones mentioned before (artworks, curatorial text, display etc.). Instead, it requires approaches and words that are rather *ductile*: c apable of carrying synchronicity, juxtaposition, and deception. In this vein, I have identified the elements that put the trap-machine into motion, categorised as *platforms*, *images*, and *stamps*. In what follows, I will point out clear differences between the three of them, but also acknowledge the fact that their activity may occur in the same object, at the same time, and may even have the same aspect. Platforms, images, and stamps depend upon neither physical features nor authorship, but upon their performativity and ability to make things do things.[3]

2. O. Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (New York: Vintage, 1932).

3. To read more about this ability, see my 2019 text 'Forms, Uses and Commensality. How They Make Things Do Things',

machines made out of machines

Essentially, a machine is a set of parts fitted together: a set of mechanical elements designed to take advantage of, direct, regulate, or transform energy in order to achieve a desired effect. An exhibition might likewise be understood as a set of pieces fitted together towards a specific use, which necessarily would then include some idea of its 'user'. I have chosen to use the word 'machine' because of its industrial and working connotations, along with the intricate subsystems and bonds that the word recalls, such as assemblies, gears, motion, structuring, or joints. These connotations locate it in a radically utilitarian space; a machine is something defined by its *function*; which is not just performed independently (only the simplest and smallest machine does things on its own) but is likely either to be incorporated into larger systems, or to be an integral part of a larger machine, an individual component integrated into larger systems. A machine is always a beginning, it gestures toward vaster formations. Machines express themselves in very simple and very complex ways. Machines made out machines; machines joined together to generate more elaborate actions and forms. Machinery speaks of collaboration, coordination, and substitution.

A machine is always a beginning, it gestures toward vaster formations

Light and body form a type of machine. Ongoing research probes how the circadian clock affects physiological processes in almost all organisms. In humans, the biological activities affected include brain wave patterns, hormone production, and cell regulation. The disruption of these rhythms can result in insomnia, depression, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. Moreover, the shock that bright lights produce has been employed as a weapon in warfare and crime prevention. If a bright light is positioned in front of the combatants at night, they are effectively blind to anything happening behind it. The light disrupts the enemy's night vision so that, when the surprise attack commences, they will be visually impaired. In the North, where the seasonal differences in sunlight are exaggerated to the degree of experiencing midnight sun', the risks associated with an excess of lighting

Nero Magazine, 21 January 2020, < https://www.neroeditions.com/forms-uses-and-commensality/>.
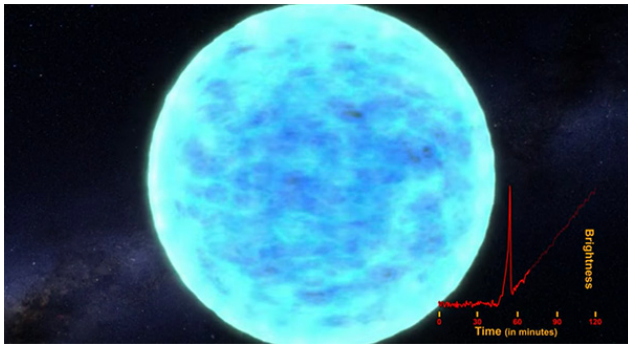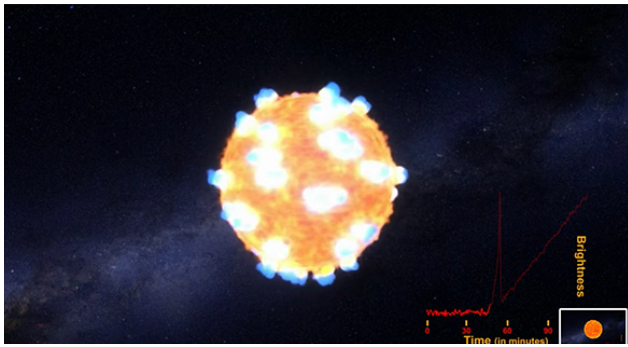
The final explosion of a supernova star, before its death, captured for the first time thanks to NASA's Kepler space telescope. It lasted only about 20 minutes, so controlling the flash of energy was a challenge for astronomers. The deceased star was called KSN 2011a. It was a red giant, almost 500 times the size of our Sun, located in another galaxy about 1200 million light years from Earth. A supernova means death for any planet that orbits the exploding star. Source: <https://www.nasa.gov/feature/ames/Kepler/caught-for-the-first-time-the-early-flash-of-an-exploding-star>.

include sunburns inside the mouth, often incurred while breathing hard heading to the South Pole. Experiences like these were probably what inspired Ángel González to write—in relation to fireworks—that, contrary to popular belief, mystery does not happen in obscurity, but in the excess of light.[4]

The functioning of a machine includes its irregularities, defects, and progressive deterioration towards its end. Our main source of energy and life is about 4.5 billion years old, and has used up about half of its thermonuclear fuel (hydrogen). Around 5 billion years from now, it will

begin to die, and the process will not be epic. For the sun, death is a power outage. As it grows old it will expand, and as the core runs out of hydrogen and then helium it will contract, while the outer layers expand, cool, and become less bright. It will swell into a red giant, whose outer layers will engulf Mercury and Venus, and likely reach the Earth. In *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Gaston Bachelard describes the process as the sun dying after binge eating, 'like a leech'.[5] After its last gigantic gulp, the outer layers of this star will continue to expand, and, as this happens, the core will contract; the helium atoms in the core will fuse together, forming carbon atoms and releasing energy. If it were more massive, the sun would become an exploding supernova, but instead, the outer layers will drift off into space, forming a planetary nebula exposing the core. Most of its mass will be transferred into the nebula. The remaining sun will cool and shrink; it will eventually be only a few thousand miles in diameter. The star will then be known as a white dwarf: a stable star with no nuclear fuel. It will radiate its leftover heat for billions of years. When its heat is all dispersed, it will be a cold, dark black dwarf—essentially a dead star, perhaps replete with diamonds, highly compressed carbon.

Among the many authors who have reflected on the abstract idea of the machine, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's writings on the 'war machine', which they oppose to the 'State apparatus', seem fundamental for this study: 'the two together exhaust the field of the function'.[6] which they oppose to the 'State apparatus', seem fundamental for this study: 'the two together exhaust the field of the function'.[7] Both the

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4. A. González, *Pintar Sin Tener Ni Idea y Otros Ensayos Sobre Arte* (Madrid: Ediciones Asimétricas, 2007).

5. G. Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977).

6. The term 'war machine' may be misleading. It is used because Deleuze and Guattari derive their study from Pierre Clastres's theory of the role of ritualised (often non-lethal) warfare among indigenous groups. Paul Patton has suggested that the war machine would be better called a metamorphosis machine, while others have used the term 'difference engine', a machine of differentiation, and there is a lot of overlap with the idea of autonomous groups or movements in how the war machine is theorised. We should also remember that 'machine' in Deleuze and Guattari simply refers to a combination of forces or elements; it does not have overtones of instrumentalism or of mindless mechanisms—a social group, an ecosystem, and a knight on horseback are all 'machines'. According to Deleuze and Guattari, war is not the aim of the war machine (except when it is captured by the state); rather, war machines tend to end up in a situation of war with states because of the incommensurability of the war machine with the state, and with striated space.

7. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, 'Treatise on Nomadology- The War Machine' chapter 12 of *A Thousand Plateaus*, tr. B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

war machine and the state have existed since primitive times. None precedes, or is more evolved than, the other. ('We are compelled to say that there has always been a State, quite perfect, quite complete.') These functioning systems do not only operate on their own, but often collide with and pass through one another, or merge. Their natures or foundations are so different that their comparison requires a distorted line of analysis, with constant quibbles, clarifications, and switches of thought. While the State is found in the structure of centralized societies, and defined by the perpetuation or conservations of organs of power,[8] war maintains the dispersal and segmentarity of groups: 'the warrior himself is caught in a process of accumulating exploits leading him to solitude and prestigious but powerless death'. Not only is the war machine not contained within the State apparatus, but the inner functioning of the war machine precludes the formation of the State.[9] 'It is not enough to affirm that the war machine is external to the State apparatus. It is necessary to reach the point of conceiving the war machine as itself a pure form of exteriority, whereas the State apparatus constitutes the form of interiority we habitually take as a model, or according to which we are in the habit of thinking.'[10]

The State form has a tendency to reproduce itself, 'remaining identical to itself across its variations and

easily recognizable within the limits of its poles, always seeking public recognition (there is no masked State). But the war machine's form of exteriority is such that it exists only in its own metamorphoses.'[11] Usages of form constitute one of the main differences between these two operational systems: while the State apparatus's form tends to be fixed and can be recognised, the war machine is always diffuse and polymorphous. Such forms are not independent but coexist and compete in a perpetual field of interaction because, even though the State is defined by its interiority, it is a form always in a relation with an outside 'and is unconceivable independent of that relationship. The law of the State is the law of that interior-exterior'. At the same time, war machines are not belligerent by nature, but end up in conflict with states owing to the fact that the two are governed by opposite aims: the former are directed against the coalescence of sovereignty, which the later apparatuses try to maintain. In order to operate, war machines make use of secrecy, velocity, and affects.[12] It could be said that the aim of the war machine is to project its desiring and social production outward, defying the fixed boundaries of the state, and in the process, to create the differences and complexities that desiring implies.

I suggest that the type of functioning that the exhibition sets in motion needs to be directly addressed. We need to understand whether, in the act of offering to view, the exhibition replicates previous approaches and gazes, a familiar relation of power in relation to what's being displayed, an expected sequence of moves, permitted morals, or common uses of tropes. Or if, by contrast, the action of exhibiting smashes the operation itself, if the process somehow impedes a default experience from occurring,

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8. 'State science retains from nomad science only what it can appropriate; it turns the rest into a set of strictly limited formulas without any real scientific status, or else simply represses it and bans it. [...] The State needs to to subordinate hydraulic force to conduits, pipes, embankments, which prevent turbulence, which constrain movement to go from from one point to another, and space itself to be striated and measured, which makes the fluid depend on the solid, and flows proceed by parallel, laminar layers. The hydraulic model of nomad science and the war machine, on the other hand, consists in being distributed by turbulence across a smooth space, in producing a movement that holds space and simultaneously affects all of its points, instead of being held by space and in a local movement from one specified point to another' (ibid., 363).

9. 'Warding off the formation of a State apparatus, making such a formation impossible, would be the objective of a certain number of primitive social mechanisms, even if they are not consciously understood as such. [...] Collective mechanisms of inhibition [...] may be subtle, and function as micromechanisms. [...] [L]eadership is a complex mechanism that does not act to promote the strongest, but rather inhibits the installation of stable powers, in favor of a fabric of immanent relations. [...] [H]igh-society groups are similar to gangs, and operate by the diffusion of prestige.' (ibid., 416).

10. Ibid.

11. 'It exists in an industrial innovation as well as in a technological invention, in a commercial circuit as well as in a religious creation, in all flows and circuits that only secondarily allow themselves to be appropriated by the State.' Ibid., 362.

12. 'The Secret is no longer a content held within a form of interiority; rather, it becomes a form, identified with the form of exteriority that is always external to itself. Similarly, feelings become uprooted from the interior of a "subject", to be projected violently outward into a milieu of pure exteriority that lends them an incredible velocity, a catapulting force: love or hate, there are no longer feelings but affects. [...] Affects transpierce the body like arrows, they are weapons of war. [...] Even dreams [...] are externalized, by a system of relays and plug-ins, extrinsic linkages to the war machine. Broken rings' (Ibid., 356).

If the links between brains-eyes-pictures-space are shattered, vision feels untrustworthy, and the role it is supposed to play becomes uncertain

if the links between brains-eyes-pictures-space are shattered, vision feels untrustworthy, and the role it is supposed to play becomes uncertain. Owing to its historical self-awareness around the position of the viewer, and its deliberate manufacturing of sight, cinema is a useful artefact through which to reflect upon what offering to view may come to mean. I believe Laura Mulvey is referring to the (inherent) political mechanisms that this offering to view implies, when she writes that '[t]he place of the look defines cinema, the possibility of varying and exposing it'.[13] More recently, Metahaven have studied the work of the Soviet film director Andrei Tarkovsky by analysing his method in an expanded disciplinary way: 'He transforms the moving image frame into a painting, not only by composition but by the kind of attachment we are compelled to experience. [...] and it may be experienced quite independently from the film's linear structure'.[14] It may be the case that 'putting into view' combines the two operational systems (state and war machine), making use of both vibrant interior and exterior forms that will merge, collide, and coexist.

trap, human traps

A trap is commonly described as a device or tactic intended to harm, capture, detect, or inconvenience an intruder or prey. Traps can be physical objects, such as clamps, nets, trenches, or ropes, and also metaphorical things, like riddles or conundrums. Being trapped essentially consists in being brought forcibly into a concrete world. Think of how arms trap us in an embrace. Traps are generally understood as mechanisms of aggression, usually employed towards enemies or bodies that the trap-builder (hunter) intends to subjugate. As a contrast to this stable model, I suggest that traps lack any determinate ethics or intention, and can be constructed and used, just for the sake of use. The practice of trapping, and the fact of being trapped.

In her essay 'Three Traps, Deleuze, Oteiza, Steinberg', architect and researcher María Teresa Muñoz describes traps as the most effective mechanism for deterritorialization, since their functioning entails a direct response to the territorial condition that animals live in. 'That's why humans, in their relationships with animals, are forced to locate themselves at the limit, to identify the animal, and almost become animals themselves'.[15] 'The hunter needs to isolate the animal from the herd in which it lives and moves and, for that purpose, the hunter needs to adopt a position in relation to the herd; outside of it, next to it, or at its centre. This generates a situation, a construction, or an architecture.'[16] Traps produce a *limit* which sets prey outside of their physical, emotional, and known territory, and traps them in a concrete time and space (which generally intensifies their sensorial activities). Traps do not necessarily lead to imprisonment, but inevitably produce an alteration. They act as a threshold in between two states, which supposes the creation of a new territory. Hence what defines the existence of a trap is a change of energy; a jump between different situations. The trap is the limit that sets the pace from one territory to another, precluding any reverse movement.[17]

Being trapped essentially consists in being brought forcibly into a concrete world.

The main ingredient of the trap is *deception*; it operates through disguise and deceitfulness which, in turn, when the trap is successfully used, often become disabled. Traps tend to be fleeting—an event—and this *fugacity* gives them particular shapes: the trap and its new forms of deception regularly need to be rethought, again and again. They constitute an extremely site-specific mechanism that not only blends in with the rhythms and shapes of the space in which it acts, but also serves a particular type of

13. L. Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* [1989] (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

14. Metahaven, 'Part II, Horizontal Gravity', in *Digital Tarkovsky* (Moscow: Strelka Institute, 2018).

15. According to Muñoz, this is what happens with hunters ('true hunters'), who have an animalistic relationship with animals.

16. M.T. Muñoz, 'Tres trampas: Deleuze, Oteiza, Steinberg', *CIRCO* 85 (2013).

17. Once the limit has been crossed, there is no way to get back to the previous situation or terrain. In order to illustrate this irreversibility, Muñoz uses the figure of the water dam: 'A water jump, which with its fall produces energy [...] once projected outside the dam, water cannot go back to it.'

creature; depending on the prey's size or strength, for example, trapping may require different types of constructions. The form of the trap—of its limit—can either be recognisable, invisible, or can mimic the creature that it intends to be deceived. It is a form based on behaviour; it needs to know the way this creature will move and what it desires, since all trap systems are based in temptation. Logically, the form also depends on the deficiencies of the prey, like the incapacity of some animals to walk or swim backwards. Strategist Benedict Singleton has delved into the idea that the construction of traps may be the very paradigm of what, today, we call design. Singleton affirms that this connection lies in what the construction of traps reveals about how humans go about making things in general. He refers to the essay 'Vogel's Net', by anthropologist Alfred Gell, to describe how the hunter is 'a *technician of instinct and appetite*, determining the trajectories already at play in the environment and twisting them in new directions. The trap may involve the application of force in both its construction and operation, but it has the characteristic of applying this force with sophistication, which it obtains in the way that this force is highly considered, to leverage environmental tendencies that already exist.'[18]

Describing the cunning that the making of traps requires, Singleton points to their particular condition of reversibility: 'These are just as many instances of escape as they are of setting traps. The two pivot around each other, displaying a curious reversibility. It's a knowledge of traps and how they function that enables one most easily to undo a trap that one is in: a talent for escape is predicated on the same intelligence that goes into entrapment. To outfox is to think more broadly, to find the crack in the scheme, to stick a knife into it, and to lever it open for new use.'[19]

Traps constitute an extremely site-specific mechanism that serves a particular type of creature

Pack of wolves trapping a herd of deer. National Park of Yellowstone, Wyoming USA 2019.

Among the many forms the trap can take, I want to look closer at the exhibition as a space for trapping humans. This includes strategies of coordination and juxtaposition through physical, sensorial, and conceptual elements. Time also becomes a component that can be used, altered, deformed, and projected into the landscape (for instance, through the use of accelerated music, or artificial lighting vs. daylight, that can change our perception of the passage of time).[20] The deception of humans can either occur in a violent instant (like we often do to animals, when they fall into a hole, are crushed with a stone, or gulp down the hook), or can happen gradually and last for an indefinite period of time—to the extent that some human prey even forget that they were once

18. B. Singleton, *The Long Con* (forthcoming). In 'Maximum Jailbreak' (in R. Mackay and A. Avanessian (eds.), *#Accelerate* [Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014]), Singleton considers the earth as a trap, and asserts that the common project of philosophy, economics and design should be the formulation of the means to escape from it.

19. Singleton, 'Maximum Jailbreak'. Freighting the environment with a counter-plot is the best device for escaping the machinations in which one is embroiled: a conversion of constraints into new opportunities for free action, technological development as a kind of Hydean accelerationism.

20. Some commentaries on the lighting inside casinos, which presents certain analogies with that of the disco, call it 'anti-architectural'. Lighting control causes people to become spatially and temporally disoriented, 'Time is limitless, because the light of noon and midnight are exactly the same. Space is limitless, because the artificial light obscures rather than defines its boundaries.' R. Venturi, D.S. Brown and S. Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, revised edition 1988), 49.

trapped, or just do not realise it at all.[21]

In amusement parks, supermarkets, or tourist sites, immersive processes aim to make clients forget that there is an outside; that they have different concerns or appetites from the ones displayed on their faces. We can distinguish two major types: ambiances that have been carefully orchestrated, such as amusement parks; and areas that have appeared randomly and have evolved in uncoordinated ways, such as gambling cities or stag night destinations.[22] The key difference lies in the manner in which they negotiate with reality, and entice their clients with desires. While theme parks construct a controlled fantasy and encourage users to perform as part of it, becoming the protagonist of the attractions or a villain, what is proposed at stag night destinations is not an alternative but the world itself.[23] Metropolitan trap machines such as Las Vegas act on reality, and visitors experience them without an (obvious) given role.

Addiction as a trapping mechanism is produced and maintained by both types. While stag night destinations and casino cities grow without clear planning, amusement parks tend to be extremely controlled.[24] The comparison between the two demonstrates the extent to which a

Interior of Harrods luxury department store, London, 2020.

Golf Simulator, by the enterprise Grupo Osuna.

trap's effectiveness relies not on what motifs appear, but on their excess: on filling every instant with a new gag, sex scene, or fright. In the former, the rises in tone, the absence of complete control over all the views, errors in staging, contradictions, and eruptions of the unexpected, become pleasant, as they are a part of what a real city would be. This confusion, alongside the juxtaposition of the most disparate elements and the abuse of clichés, is part of the lesson that Venturi suggests architects and designers should take with them:[25]

> But the order of the Strip includes; it includes at all levels, from the mixture of seemingly incongruous land uses to the mixture of seemingly incongruous advertising media plus a system of neo-Organic or neo-Wrightian restaurant motifs in Walnut and Formica. It is not an order dominated by the expert

21. At Radio City Music Hall, as early as the 1930s, conventional use of air conditioning (in expensive installations which impressed Le Corbusier) is questioned, and its expansion is considered, in the form of the addition of hallucinogenic gases to the theatre atmosphere. A small amount of gas could put the public in an euphoric state. In fact, for a short time, ozone was injected into the theatre's air conditioning. R. Koolhaas, *Delirious New York* (Rotterdam: Ed. 010, 1994), 210–11

22. I use this term to refer to the type of destinations that are growing internationally, not only as independent cities, but also as areas inside big cities. The type of businesses that predominate in these places are mainly dedicated to affordable tourism, gambling, and nightlife. Such places welcome those who generally want to commit excesses, and indulge in cheap pleasures. Some well-known examples may include Ibiza, Las Vegas, Madeira, and the Soho district in London.

23. J. Baudrillard, *La transparence du mal: Essai sur les phénomènes extrêmes* (Paris: Galilée, 1990).

24. It was this control, not only in design, but also in the design experience that set Disney apart from its predecessors, writes amusement park historian Judith Adams (J. Adams, T*he American Amusement Park Industry: A History of Technology and Thrills* [Woodbridge, CT:Twayne, 1991]). 'Everything about the park, including the behavior of the" guests, "is engineered to promote a spirit of optimism, the belief in progressive improvement toward perfection.' Dunlop also notes that the desire to keep everything under control and preserve visual ammonia and psychological order explains why people are not allowed to enter without shirts or shoes. We also have to point out that the price of admission to be paid helps a lot to control the type of public that enters. (B. Dunlop, *Building a Dream: The Art of Disney Architecture* [New York: Abrams, 1996])

25. 'When in his movie "One from the Heart" Francis Ford Coppola electronically stuffed his actors into a life-size Las Vegas, built at the Zoetrope studios in Hollywood, he surpassed Venturi, no only by demonstrating architectural ambiguities contemporary, but also showing the spectral character of the city and its citizens.' P. Virilio, *The Lost Dimension* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), 26.

and made easy for the eye. The moving eye and the moving body must work to pick out and interpret a variety of changing, juxtaposed orders, like the shifting configurations of a Victor Vasarely painting. It is the unity that 'maintains, but only just maintains, a control over clashing elements, which compose it. Chaos is very near; its nearness, but its avoidance, gives force.'[26]

Likewise, theme parks operate like movies; their landscapes deploy pace and frequent instants of mini-action which hold boredom at bay. Walt Disney took pride in the fact that his parks were never finished.[27]

American Falls at the Niagara River, New York, USA, and the Red Pyramid in the North of Dahshur, Egypt.

circulation (platforms)

This brief analysis of two kinds of environments as trap-machines leads me to reflect on the functioning of the first of the three categories proposed above: platforms. Platforms mainly refer to structures to stand on,[28] but they also imply motion, circulation, and purpose.[29] As a component of a trap-machine, the platform can describe any element or coordination of elements that produces mobility within time and space, thus challenging vision. Regarding roads, for example, María Teresa Muñoz writes of how, from the road, '[t]he perception of any object will now be dynamic, and its image, like that of the landscape itself, always changing.' And in fact, '[t]here are buildings made to be seen from the road. [...] From the road, every piece of architecture is constantly compared.'[30] Platforms can include furniture, signals, or calls, as well as more subtle things (which tend to unconsciously attract and repel) such as sounds, textures, lighting, shifting sands, winds, or smells. They serve as a mere facility, anonymous and repetitive, but eventually become a landscape in themselves. Significantly, the functionality of a platform is not exclusively practical (ensuring the fastest or safest way is taken, for example); platforms also serve to both veil and promote the ideology behind them: certain routes choose to pass through those landscapes or buildings whose image suits their developer, while consciously keeping away from locations where the abusive production conditions that make them possible may become visible. As Octavi Comeron put it in 2007: 'Admittedly, we inhabit the Transparent Factory and we recognise ourselves in it. But transparency can also be a cynical transparency [...] a way of legislating on the visible and the invisible'.[31] The platform is constructed in consideration of the views that will be possible from it.

One of the most extreme examples of platforms based on views are the types of structures built to allow spectators to approach, surround, and admire natural and artificial landmarks that produce

26. Venturi et al., *Learning from Las Vegas*.

27. Dunlop, *Building a Dream*.

28. A platform is defined as a raised level surface, on which people or things can stand, or from which rockets or missiles may be launched. It also means shoes with very thick soles, and the declared policy of a political party or group (as if we could also stand on raised ideas). I am interested in the 'standing out' characteristic of the word, because it brings a traditional sculptural or monumental feeling. The 'raising gesture' feels as if the element had emerged, and been put into clear visibility, for us to observe.

29. Just like pathways, elevators, cranes, heels, or roads.

30. M.T. Muñoz, 'La carretera', in *Escritos Sobre la Invisibilidad. Arquitectura y ocultación* (Madrid: Abada, 2018).

31. O. Comeron, *Arte y Postfordismo. Notas desde la Fábrica Transparente* (Barcelona: Trama, 2007). The 'Transparent Factory' is a concept described by Comeron in 2009. He makes use of the innovative transparent factory that Volkswagen had installed in Dresden (2001) as a metaphor to illustrate the 'prodigious expansion of the cultural'. Comeron writes: 'If the Transparent Factory is now the authentic sovereign power, it would no longer be constituted by the old oppositions between theory and praxis, between ideas and facts, between ideal and reality, between State and people, between freedom and work; but by the creation of a mode of production that was capable of accepting all action and incorporating it into its own circuit.'

awe, such as the interiors of pyramids and caves, the skylines of cities, ruins, or immense waterfalls. This is a type of structure based on optimal 'viewpoints', whose construction responds to the type of photography that the experience is expected to produce, as well as to specific climate conditions and safety norms. It is not by chance that many of these places include restaurants and cafés.
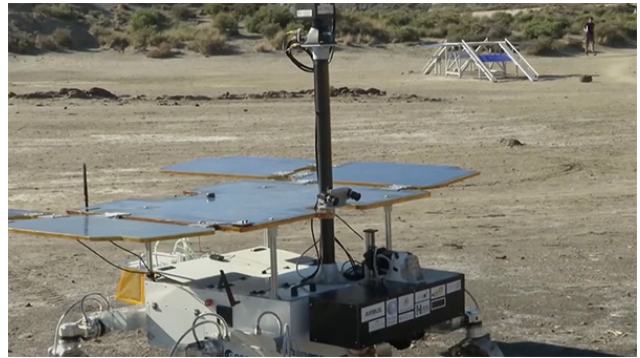
Platforms involve not only viewing, but also bodily behaviour. Materials, steps, rungs, ramps, mechanisation, dimensions, etc. predetermine the postures and speeds that humans may adopt; clear illustrations of this fact can be found in military training facilities, or in escalators within shopping malls. Often these structures not only suggest that we take up certain points of view and adopt specific postures, they also manufacture an ambience appropriate to the promoted idea of the space, with the intention of making it more magical, mysterious, and intense. In prehistoric caves and aquariums alike, the exhibition of scientific research is mingled with and merges into the display of fantasies.[32]

The functionality of a platform is not exclusively practical; platforms also serve to both veil and promote the ideology behind them

images, as opposed to stamps

What I call *stamp*, as opposed to *image*, is precisely what is commonly understood as the image. I will address the concept of the stamp below, but first I would like to speak about images: I consider them elements with nether precise form nor features. What produces an image may or may not have a volume, may be tangible or immaterial, shapeless or specific.

The photograph above presents the filming of *Exodus*, a movie by Ridley Scott, which took place at the desert Las Tabernas, in Almería, Spain in 2013. Below, the second photo was taken in the same desert location. It shows Rover, a vehicle which will visit planet Mars in the mission, while it was doing some scientific trials in 2018.

Fundamentally, images are hard to contain, impossible to fix, hardly visible or even true—given the fact that images are formed in the imagination, they don't need to occur in reality. Images may require a long time to be perceived, or may occur in a microsecond. An image could take place in a painting, a landscape, a dream, an idea, a joke, clouds, a glitch, a hope, an archive. Plans, plants, maps, sounds or texts, among infinite examples, may generate images. Not everything is an image, but everything has images—is able to activate imagination. The apparition of the image does not necessarily imply agency or intention, because images happen in the process of their reception. Antoni Muntadas put it clearly when he wrote 'Warning: Perception Requires Involvement'.[33] By extension, images don't need to be created, but only recognised, and the decision as to whether something is an image or not will inevitably be subjective, depending upon the subject's ability to deal with it: upon their ability do something about their sensory experiences.

32. 'One finds this double face in any area where tourist promotion dominates, not only in Las Vegas and L.A., but even at the monastery of Mont Saint Michel, a home to tourist pilgrimages since the fourteenth century; you buy skull imagery on ashtrays, in plastic no less, hell and redemption for your keychain, so utterly non spiritual that you laugh, until you are reminded that these skull pastiches are simply plastic descendants of pieces of the cross and other relics sold to pilgrims in the late Middle Ages. Hell and redemption in the happiest place on Earth. People come in droves for a bit of fright, some horrifying slapstick that throws a whimsical wrench into the cuteness, adds some life' (Venturi et al., *Learning from Las Vegas*).

33. 'Warning: perception requires involvement' is a conceptual artwork by Catalonian artist Antoni Mundatas. He has displayed this sentence at the entrance of various spaces including: MACBA Barcelona, the Line Station at Vancouver City Centre, and Jeu de Paume Paris.

The usage of stamps involves the recognition of authority; and also refers to notions of repetition, portability, smallness, and cheapness

In the first chapter of his 2006 book *Phalenes*, Georges Didi-Huberman proposes a definition of images based in the impossibility of their being grasped, using butterflies as a metaphor to describe our relationship with them:

> Suddenly, something appears. For example: a door opens, a butterfly passes flapping its wings. This nothing is enough. To begin with, thought is at the risk of making mistakes to believe that it can appropriate what has just appeared, and refraining from considering what comes next; which is nothing but detachment, disappearance.[34]

Huberman's text approaches images on the basis of their functioning: always appearing and disappearing. He insists on this inevitable transitoriness. Just a second, a mere glimpse. Give it a glance. It could be said that images are what govern the art field: what we dedicate our practice to, and what we have always been discussing. This would mean that our rulers are phantoms, to whom we relate through substances and reflections that make them feel closer, as well as through the effects they have upon us. Our work could be described as a modelling of such phantasmagoria, magmas, winds, which appear both inside and outside entities or beings, blurring any boundary between them. It may also be the case that we don't model any of them directly, but merely build the conditions for them to arise.

In contrast to images, *stamps* can be pointed at, measured, weighed, located, pointed out. They are concrete. A stamp is easy to delimit and easy to see. It has boundaries and clear edges. Stamps can be any type of shape (square, circle, triangle etc.). They may be physical or digital but, in any case, stamps happen on a two dimensional surface, with one correct point of view. The stamp then favours the domination of the human eye.

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34. G. Didi-Huberman, *Phalenes. Essais sur l'apparition 2* (Paris: Minuit, 2007).

On that delimited surface, a stamp may contain any type of information and/or representation. Its distinctive feature lies in the fact that such content has been chosen for display. Thus, if anything, stamps contain *intention*. While the image depends on the viewer's imagination (so it may be the case we bump into images no one had conceived), stamps are self-sufficient things which exist here, and nowhere else. Due to their mundanity and lack of mystery or abstraction, I sense that stamps tend to be dismissed. Right in front of us, these surfaces are what we see and, it is common to lose interest in what's being obvious and given straight away. The reason I analyse stamps as an element for machinic operations, is not their poor reputation, but the lack of subjectiveness that accompanies them; their concreteness.

I will address what the word 'stamp' is doing here by reviewing its origin and common significances. As a noun, 'stamp' may refer to an instrument for crushing or making impressions, and also to the print or mark made by such an apparatus or by a different device. The verb describes the action required to create a picture, impressing it with a pattern or mark. It is also employed in cases where stamping tools and their intentions are absent, referring to the gesture alone. Then 'stamp' means to bring down one's foot (or anything) heavily, on the ground. In fact, 'stamp'—which is certainly onomatopoeic—originally alluded to a traditional gathering place for horses or cattle, which stamp down the ground with their hooves. In Spanish Castilian slang, we say 'to stamp someone's face' to describe a rather painful type of slap. In short, 'stamp' refers to the energetic action by which one element collides onto a surface with a clear purpose. It resembles a brief stroke, a precise smash or a focused attack, forcibly brought down.

A stamp is easy to delimit and easy to see. It has boundaries and clear edges. The stamp favours the domination of the human eye.

The origins of the word insist upon these confrontational connotations: 'stamp' appears to be a nasalised form of the Proto Indo European root *stebh-*, which means 'to support, place firmly on'; where

proto-Germanic words, such as *stampfen*, allude to 'stamping with the foot, beating, pounding'. The specific sense of 'striking the foot forcibly downwards' is recorded from mid-fourteenth century, and to 'stamp out' has explicitly referred to 'extinguish a fire, by stamping on it' (attested from the mid-1850s: to end or extinguish something by forceful means). Other usages, including the object print or the die and its impressions, are likely connected with Gutenberg's revolutionary invention of the printing press. Its sense of 'official mark or imprint' (to certify that duty has been paid on what has been printed or written) dates from the 1540s, and this meaning was what led to the small piece of paper stuck on an envelope or parcel to show that costs of posting have been paid. Transformed into tiny credentials, the notion of the stamp still preserves its severity and strength; these are documents that acknowledge institutional power, and enable action or impede it from taking place.

The usage of stamps involves the recognition of authority; and also refers to notions of repetition, portability, smallness, and cheapness, all features which have led to the great popularity of philately, the preferred term to describe the collection, appreciation, and research activities on stamps. The word 'philately' came to replace the French 'timbromanie' (roughly 'stamp mania'), which was a rather unpopular term. These bits of paper have come to constitute one of the world's most popular indoor hobbies,[35] practiced by children, adults, and elderly people alike. When collected, the stamp loses its intended functionality and is reduced to a slight memory whose unstable value depends on (generally, black) market circumstances. Buying, trading, and collecting stamps for recreational reasons could be interpreted either as an act of veneration of the established order, or as its exact opposite; as transforming it into an object of fun.[36] Stamps have become a game, and, like any type of amusement, they have their own rules, which on occasion may be altered, simplified, or subdivided, thus escaping

from promulgated values. Which could also be a good definition of childhood. What I believe to be their greatest potential is precisely this performativity; the fact that stamps give agency to their players, and thus make the picture finally available for us.

How does one offer or present to view that which does not have a fixed form; and how does another's vision pick it up?

The manifest visibility of the stamp allows communities to play with it, discuss it, renew it, and assign it specific functions. Concreteness has to do with *meaning*,[37] and produces a shared language that fosters the creation of recognisable communities around it. While stamps are easily grasped, the subjectiveness of images would logically make them invisible for the same community, dissolving any potential conversation or game. I wonder whether it is also possible to build communities through what is hard to notice. Perhaps—via a somewhat murky process—the availability experienced with stamps could be extracted (abstracted) and embedded (injected) into images. One's imagination would need to be shared, exposed, and partly abandoned for others to collect. The outstanding issue, then, is the following: How does one offer or present to view that which does not have a fixed form; and how does another's vision pick it up? In contrast to stamps, the communities that images are able to cultivate may not be easily identifiable. Their members probably don't share visible similarities, and direct communication between them is likely to be diffuse, produced by instinct rather than by meetings or calls. At this point, it's worth pointing out that stamps and images are appropriated and employed by both cultivated and illiterate individuals, which means that their functionality does not pertain to any specific training, sensitivity, or class. Rather, the potentiality of their uses as community-builders is based not on sophistication, but on aims. If communities built around images exist (and I think they

35. In 2013, *The Wall Street Journal* estimated the global number of stamp collectors was around 60 million. 'Graph: The Wide World of Stamps', WSJ.MONEY. 19 November 2019.

36. The practice of philately reminds us that, ultimately, the bastions of institutional authority are something to be played with, interchanged, reorganised; probably traded without much supervision in a small plaza, or behind the town's old church. (examples of types of public places where philatelists tend to meet).

37. This connection explains why colours, flags, gestures, pets, portraits, taste, slang, style, modes of transport, outfits, and other elements that encode each symbolic sphere, are crucial for the groups who appropriate them, and identify as: criminal gangs, sports fans, religious communities, cool teenagers, scholars, urban tribes, political clusters, gamers, divorcees, little snooties, etc.

do), these communities are not grounded in mutual understanding, high refinement, or matching perceptions, but in constant confusion and trust.

In his essay 'Moving Images, Moving Images', John Kelsey opens the writing talking about the disjointed origins of cinema, how it was born that way: broken and in pieces.

> In the beginning, the audience, the screen and the projector were mobile elements in an open arrangement. There was no rule dictating the number or sequence of reels that made up a film, and sometimes scenes from different pictures were shuffled and combined into one program. So no two screenings of a film were ever the same, and the audience could move about, talk, fight, and arrange the furniture according to their impulses. These events did not take place in proper cinemas, but in pubs, dance halls, or whatever common dives could be made available for the night. There was no 'cinema', no finished version of any film, no distribution system, and no official control over either the business or the presentation of film. There was simply the moving images, the machines that produced them, and the festive, informal gatherings of the first movie-going public.[38]

Following Kelsey, it seems that availability requires a certain spatial layout[39] where mechanisms are present and easy to perceive, and their functioning is neither fixed nor stable, with different possible distributions and no mandatory arrangement. Making images available would require making the instruments that make them happen accessible, at hand, and with no pre-established function: free and ready to do something else. The availability of images would be linked to their disjointed qualities, to their being less, being pieces.

I am not trying to tell the reader how to make an exhibition. These abstract ideas should not be

The grid proposed here aims to chop, or cut away, the practice of putting into view, dismembering it into functions, potentialities, and energies

understood as motifs to be emphasised or consciously used as 'a model for making exhibitions', but rather as a *grid* through which to look at the exhibitions that we make, at the ways we offer things to view in general, and have things offered to us. Grids of words bring concepts to the forefront, making them available for us to reorganise thoughts and priorities in varied ways, and eventually to thread them into some specific sense. New usages of words foster different approaches towards reality, rapidly modifying our relation with it. The grid proposed here aims to chop, or cut away, the practice of *putting into view*, dismembering it into functions, potentialities, and energies.

Viewing is rarely a precise activity, particularly when it deliberately takes account of the multiple bodies that will experience it (as through the use of platforms described above). This grid does not intend to make a formal distinction between 'things that are either images, stamps, or platforms';[40] such words here refer to the faculties and features occurring in and across things. Ideally, this construction will encourage an approach towards exhibition-making that embraces discrepancies, lopsidedness, clumsiness, vagueness, and ambiguity. I am aware that this approach feels chaotic, so one hopes that it could be articulated (and then brought into play) through certain models of thought; which is why I suggest the trap-machine. As explained at the beginning of this text, the words platforms, images, and stamps, are used to articulate a structure (a grid) of thought, able to permeate the amorphous concept of the trap-machine. The functioning of the exhibition as a trap-machine both offers and requires a new constellation of words, along with the relations between them, that aims to challenge ways of what *offering to view* may come to mean. Under this umbrella, viewing becomes part of a strategy of trapping, and being trapped. It involves deception, as well as

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38. J. Kelsey, 'Moving Images, Moving Images', in T. Leighton (ed.), *Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008).

39. I now wonder whether the philatelic utility brings back some openness, festivity, and mobility to our encounters with images and stamps. It's worth pointing out that the word 'encounter' is etymologically close to controversy, controversial, and contrary; so this instant acquires slightly clashing connotations, as if attraction relates to discrepancy or repudiation.

40. Images, stamps and platforms appear everywhere that we can think of: every spot is received with imagination, offers some delimited surface to look at, and affects our movement in space.

a shift that cannot be reversed. 'Large predators indicate our preparedness to coexist with the otherness of the earth, and to recognise ourselves in mutual, ecological terms, as part of the food chain, eaten as well as eater. […] [H]ow misguided we are to view ourselves as masters of a tamed and malleable nature.'[41] In the machinic approach, viewers act as gear units whose behaviour in relation to the exhibition (to the viewed things) will also be unclear, permanently shifting its position: from experiencing ourselves as hunters to being prey.

How we came to see. Proposed in 1692 as a way of explaining anomalous compass readings, Edmund Halley's theory of the 'Hollow Earth' proposes that the planet consists of a series of nested, spherical shells, spinning in different directions, all surrounding a central core. This conception is accompanied by the idea of a small sun that hangs in the very centre, creating a lush, liveable environment; adherents speculate that this void might be accessible through holes in the earth's crust. Interest in this possibility has to do with the suspicion that a wealthier, healthier, wiser, and prettier civilisation lives inside the Earth. It is also believed that the little sun regulates temperature better, creating a far more convenient habitat: in the Hollow Earth, it is always daylight. No wonder explorations have been launched to discover that pristine environment. What is not clear is whether, with those trips, humans are discovering the guts of the planet we live in, or returning to them. According to a Dakota legend, wind exited first. Humans lived deep underground, and at a certain point the wind brought the human crowd to the surface and took care of it. The legend adds that, once on the surface, humans were astonished by the sight of colour. It could be guessed that, rather than tiny separated skeletons with bits of flesh and organs (such as eyeballs), humans from underground were made out of magma, and together composed a hot enormous mass. Surely, this boiling viscous entity fluctuated continuously, making tectonic plates slide apart and, skim and slip under one another, triggering earth-shattering quakes deep into the planet's innards, and consequently spewing

gases up into the atmosphere. Following the aquatic ape hypothesis,[42] it could also be conjectured that the human mass emerged to the surface progressively: firstly in the form of swamps, coagulating afterwards into separate amphibian beasts, some of which remained water-dwelling, and which we refer to as demons or nymphs. For most civilisations, History begins with an assassination; the murder is the form of an enigma which cannot be spoken about, but which explains and gives sense to everything else: '[a]ll regimes and governments in human societies are based on institutionalised violence'.[43] However, the foundational horror stories of every society tend to be unspoken and remain secret.

Mystical, mysterious: these words are still common today and come from the ancient Greek cult, especially from the elusive mysteries. However, the modern use of these words can be misleading. Ritual celebrations were only mysterious to the layman. Initiates were given explanations which, by virtue of a sacred oath, could not reach the outside world.' This is the basic phenomenon highlighted by the Greek word 'consecrate': by means of certain ritual actions a person joins a group gathered to celebrate a cult, the main part of which is precisely that ceremony of consecration. The Romans translated 'mysterios' by *inicia*, and consecration by *initatio*. Esotericism, the occult, reflects the fact that admission depended on individual consecration.

[…] [T]o speak allusively of the mysteries, without transgressing their true secret, became a kind of sport for the rectors, a tendency which culminated in the fictitious speech of Sopatro to the friend of a man who in a dream had experienced the whole initiation. (…) The intensification of secrecy ensured that the power of the mysteries was diminished. Precisely by virtue of this, so to speak, absolute function, no longer relative in its content, the secrecy of the mysteries reveals something essential to their secrecy: what is kept secret does not seem to be so important; the essential thing is that it is not known.

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41. V. Plumwood, 'Being Prey', in R. Sterling (ed.), *The Ultimate Journey: Inspiring Stories of Living and Dying* (San Francisco, CA: Traveler's Tales, 1999). Val Plumwood survived a crocodile attack in February 1985. After a stint as visiting professor of women's studies at North Carolina State University, she returned to Australia and worked as ARC Fellow at the University of Sydney.

42. The aquatic ape hypothesis is the proposal that wading, swimming and diving for food had a large evolutionary effect on the ancestors of humans and is in part responsible for the split between the common ancestors of humans and other great apes. The hypothesis stands in contradiction to the more established hypothesis that the environment of evolutionary adaptiveness for hominids was the savannas of the Rift Valley.

43. W. Burkert, *Homo Necans: Interpretationen altgriechischer Opferriten und Mythen* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997).

The 'inner' circle of connoisseurs stands out from those outside it / there is no closed society without its secret.[44]

Secrecy is very sexy. In his cultural history work *On Piety*,[45] Theophrastus writes that, when men discovered the cultivation and processing of cereals, 'they hid the instruments of work [barley milling] as a secret, and faced them as something sacred'. Although they can never be completely understood, secrets may be perceived and barely seen through specific rituals, which often include all kinds of horrors (similar to the original enigma). Rituals elevate individual lives to a new existence as part of a community that has seen something. For this purpose, fasting has commonly been employed, owing to the fact that it is not so easy to see with a full belly.

Considering the hallucinated, scared, starved, and naive bodies that typically undergo rituals, I suspect that the type of sight that appears during them, probably recalls what our species saw for the first time while emerging toward the surface of the Earth, still in the form of swamps. Back then, seeing was done without organs or apparatuses to calculate distances, so this primal vision would arguably perceive reality as a reflection of itself, as we now do. That is, not a separated moving and static things, but as one whole dense mass. All images were likely to be equated, and their substances transformed into a single, expansive, unsteady one. Every surface would have been seen as merged together into a similar puddle, ghostly apparition, or momentary collapse. Vision mixes, it attenuates. Views are likely to be sticky—very easily transmitted, from one object to another. Often hot and humid, muggy.

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44. Ibid,. 42.

45. Theophrastus, cited in Porphyry's *On Abstinence* 2.6. <https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/porphyry_abstinence_02_book2.htm>.