The concept of emergence as a methodological tool for understanding ceiling paintings?

Some remarks on the symposium Emergence - from place to the space of images, Paris, December 2022

Regarding the symposium in Paris in December 2022¹ that focused the theme of emergence and the phenomena of interactions between pictorial space and the viewers space, the question arose whether and to what extent such a concept of emergence could be a useful instrument for understanding painted and sculpted ceiling design. In the following, we will address some of the aspects discussed at the conference in order to relate them to our questions of the project.

Defining the term

Before we present some case studies, it seems indispensable to us, from a methodological point of view, to confirm possible meanings as well as limitations and complications in the use of the term, which was first mentioned in 1874 (fig. 2). The colloquium already was introduced by the problematisation of the term with two contributions in aesthetics, in which Emmanuel Alloa and Dustin Breitenwischer advanced a clarification. A few aspects should be added here.

The fact that the sum is greater than its parts is a phrase that has been used frequently since Aristotle's Synergism, but its conditions and consequences are rarely reflected upon. It is about a third that rises as a totality through the togetherness of all parts and leads to something qualitatively new through the reciprocity of the components. That asks about the substance, the essence of a harmony to be understood as an organism, which as an entity reaches beyond the accidentals and the mere form of its parts and whose formation of matter is more than the relationship of its essential parts to each other. Historically and in relation to our period of investigation, the concept of "emergence" thus approaches another concept that is hardly recognized in the discussion. It echoes the whole as tout ensemble, as it appears prominently, for example, in Roger de Piles, explained in his Cours de Peinture par principes (1708), whose aesthetics declares a general subordination of effects with the intention of an overall effect as decisive for the success of the work. In view of the scientification of the discourse on art, as already announced by de Piles, it may not be surprising if the question of such emergences was particularly forced in the field of natural sciences.

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2 George Henry Lewes, Problems of Life and Mind, Vol. 1, London, Trübner & Co. 1874. Significantly, the publication presents a scientific psychology as a multidisciplinary synthesis of an objective physiology and the subjective studies of consciousness practised in philosophy.


4 Metaphysics VII 17, 1041. The words Aristotle uses to explain mental substance appears in very specific references to spatial structures, for example in the metaphor of the house in book 7 of the Metaphysics. Lectio 17: "Quandoque enim ex multis fit compositio, ita quod totum compositum ex multis est unum quoddam, sicut domus composita ex suis partibus, et mixtum corpus ex elementis. Quandoque vero ex multis fit compositum, ita quod totum compositum non est unum simpliciter, sed solum secundum quid; sicut patet in cumulo vel acervo lapidum, cum partes sunt in actu, cum non sint continuae. Unde simpliciter quidem est multa, sed solum secundum quid unum, prout ista multa associantur sibi in loco". The composite is thus composed of many, so that the whole of the composite is not simply one, but only in what it is.
Reservations

We recall here the dispute of the nominalists - a dispute essentially fuelled at the Sorbonne university starting in 14th century and then emphatically by William of Ockham (do terms denote something real?). In the theorising, rapidly changing discussions of the humanities, this dispute seems to have been almost forgotten what has led to a certain carelessness or confusion of method and findings. To exaggerate: with the term, in this case emergence, we are admittedly "only" dealing with an indicative term, a Kantian synthetic judgement a priori, which describes a phenomenon in dependence on the horizon of the speaker. The vagueness of the term has sometimes been critically addressed, for example by the biologist, ethologist and zoologist Konrad Lorenz, who proposes to replace the descriptor more adequately with *fulgurations* in order to better grasp the suddenness of enlightenment in a short circuit, a more “scientific” term to describe the phenomenon, the causes of which can hardly be reconstructed, and that follows electrophysiology (fig. 3). The reason of the sudden appearance of new properties in a complex system is not immediately apparent to us. The term is a positing whose necessity is derived from experience and a certain deficit of language, which is not able to express what is experienced. This is an epistemological problem, whether as a fruitful thematisation of a phenomenon that is otherwise difficult to describe, or simply as an illusory problem. But apart from all ontological questions about the reality of emergences in a world of Hume's principles of causality, we are far from a definitional clarification. After all, it's finally the old question of the Occident, interwoven with the problem of body and mind. The use of the term implies intentionality and is more convention than definition. These linguistic, epistemological limits make it seem sensible to approach what emergence can mean with concrete examples, whether through the analysis of theories as time-bound constructions or through the works of art themselves. The contributions to the colloquium are to be understood as such descriptions and paraphrases and as observations of the interaction of the spatial and temporal relationships between the components and their viewer. On the other hand, the phenomenon described here is fundamentally based on movements or effects within the "interior" of these constellations. Their complexity itself is the reason why their parts together produce something more than their sum, as emergence.

3 Death of the German physicist Georg Wilhelm Richmann (1711–1753), shocked by lightning during an electrical experiments in Saint Petersburg
The spiritual aspect: metá ta physiká

One’s own experience with images conveys a more or less dark idea of a certain emergent effect. By following the lines, colours, iconographies, their totality, reading books and evaluating historical sources, this brings forth something that Schleiermacher described in the religious terms of the experience of art (Kunsterfahrung). Reading Wolfgang Iser’s Fragment Emergence, published posthumously in Constance in 2013, focuses on the beginnings of any theory as a phenomenon of emergence itself, an analysis that makes the word a kind of borderline term. If we could explain it by discovering causalities, we would no longer need it. This brings the word close to that transubstantiation causing a metamorphosis into another.

So let us consider the concept as a means to the end of approximation. We will follow the properties and functions of space, as architecture or as a shattering of Euclidean perspective (fig. 4), as interpenetration or mirror-image doubling, reflecting on the experiences of optics and the natural sciences, or looking at the so-called emergent order of sociology, which later unfolds in the discussions of systems theory. We will examine the interferences between the visual of the arts and that of theatre, between text and image, virtual and/or imaginary spaces with real or painted bodies, insofar as these are capable of giving rise to that third.

That should bring up an aspect that seems to us specific to the period under study, the early modern time. The discourses on emergence are based on sensualism and experiment, i.e. they are related to reflecting perceptual processes in the Enlightenment and were taken up in the 1920s by what we call "British Emergentism" - with Samuel Alexander’s Space, Time and Deity and Lloyd Morgan’s Emergent Evolution (fig. 5 and 6). The titles already give a hint of the goal that is associated with the use of the term. The latent reference to models in art history, the inscription of the work in the field of tension between tradition and innovation, acquires a self-referentiality that manifests itself in particular in the longue durée of the Enlightenment and its discovery of a historicity.

Temporality will have to be claimed here in a double sense for the reading of ceiling paintings. Beyond the relations to iconographic and formal-aesthetic systems of reference, emergence as experience only comes alive under the condition of the presence of a viewer (or, in the case of descriptions and explanations, a reader). Only the adequate perception set in motion - itself to be questioned again – brings

4 Isaac Newton, Opticks, London 1704

a knowledge gain, a constellation of Kantian ontology in space and time, in which the forms of perception do not exist outside of concretisations. And last but not least, to quote the beginning of Michael


6 Mathematical and scientific roots of emergence according to Jeffrey Goldstein, “Emergence as a Construct: History and Issues”, in: Emergence 1 (1), 1999, p. 55
Heidelberger’s text on the reality of emergent phenomena: "The concept of emergence has something of a foul magic behind which one’s own uncertainty about the natural causes of a phenomenon can hide."\(^6\)

**Examples**

The idea of the colloquium was thus to focus on questions of space and the "in-between", between the artwork and the viewer in order to better understand the processes of perception that produce emergence in the functioning of artworks.

Marlene Schneider (University of Grénoble) analysed the adaptation of the still young genre of the *fête galante* to take on a function in the socially played spaces and contexts; themes and aesthetics of genre painting that unfold, if you will, in the large format. Here the works enter into a form of artistic hybridisation at the Prussian court under Frederick II (fig. 7).

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acting in a social context through festivals and ceremonies that can be understood through the contemporary sources and descriptions. The example of hybridity and the mixture of genres made it clear how little the ceiling design can be understood without the tout-ensemble of the décor, including that off the ceiling. Nicolas Lancret’s paintings duplicate the ephemeral event of the courtly feast, demonstrating to us the (ideal) practice of the room and emphasise - also through the self-evident ignorance of court society towards the artful interior - the relationship of the court members to the parallel world of the painted ceiling, with the fully sculptured and painted allegories of love in the pictures as an instance mediating both form and content (fig. 8). The interweaving of the spheres of dancing and flirt ing courtiers and the dance of the gods presented not only connects heaven and earth through their synchronicity, but also allows nature to break in as a third party. The author relates Lancret’s

Nicolas Lancret, *Fête galante dans un pavillon*, vers 1719-23, Berlin, Château de Charlottenburg
painted snapshots to Germain Boffrand's *Livre d'Architecture* (1745, fig. 9), who describes the combination of the most diverse genres as a prerequisite for good architecture, which must design the décor always in awareness of the use of its space. The extent to which Antoine Pesne, who was responsible for the painted decoration of the Prussian court, was guided by the Parisian models is shown by the decorative designs of Gille Marie Oppenord when it comes to apply the decoration to shape the wall surfaces into a transparent plane facing the natural space (fig. 10).

Pesne's murals for the apartments of Frederick II in Charlottenburg Palace, for example, show the complete dissolution of the wall as a painted reflection of court society, as a duplication of the real court society and as a permanent representation of ephemeral festivities as an image (fig. 11-13). The courtier then confronts his portrait at all times and thus finds himself set in the structure of court society.

This concept of the décor mirroring the actions of the real space, dissolving the wall into the natural space and the ceiling into the sky, is subsequently taken to the extreme...
11 Antoine Pesne (atelier), *Bal masqué*, vers 1743-45, peinture murale, antichambre des appartements de Frédéric II, château de Charlottenburg, détruit en 1943, Fotothek Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, München

12 Antoine Pesne, peinture murale, château de Charlottenburg

with Georg Wenceslaus von Knobelsdorff’s Galerie dorée (fig. 14). With large-format windows on both sides and the mirror decoration of the wall surfaces that remain after the windows have been cut out, the painted decoration becomes obsolete as an illusion. The dissolution of materiality here applies just as much to the ceiling, whose material negation is emphasised by means of gilded stucco ornaments. Here, the designed emptiness leads to the maximum enhancement of the viewer, who is aware of his presence.

The analysis of the exhibition of drawings at the Galerie d’Apollon by J. Cabelle Ahn (Harvard University) is the first public exhibition of drawings in Europe and a foretaste of the concept for presenting drawings in a museum context. The paper sought to analyse the adaptation to space and the symbiotic relationship between exhibition and interior design by Charles Le Brun and Lagrenée. The selection of drawings, accompanied by the publication of a catalogue and the book on Le Brun, the installation of mirrors creates a discursive space by directing the viewer. The theme raises the question of whether the original situation can be better understood by analysing later uses or subsequent interpretations. Only a few years separate the representations, on the one hand of the perspective under the preserved ceiling design of the Galerie d’Apollon (which is indeed particularly highlighted by the publication and the drawing Constant Bourgeois), and on the other hand of the views of the adjoining Grande Galerie (fig. 15). While in the former case we see the wall decoration, which has been completely eliminated
in favour of the exhibited drawings, overlaid by the ceiling decoration that connects everything, the Grand Galerie shows us the total loss of the authentic ceilings. With *Neptune et Amphitrite ou le Réveil des eaux* and *Cybèle ou Le Réveil de la Terre*, the paintings by Le Brun mark the ends of the exhibition space and refer to the topographical position of the gallery and its coordinates between the Seine in the south and Montmartre in the north (fig. 16). One might also perceive the exhibition’s placement
in the topographically and historically speaking context (we are in the immediate vicinity of the rooms of the Académie Royale, the vases refer to the collection of antiquities stored below on the ground floor) as an experience of emergence, as a temporal and spatial in-between that finds itself in the coordinate system of the exhibition visitors, each of whom is affected in a different way. The concept of such an emergence characterises the logic of the combinatorics of space, décor, choice of theme and viewer reception in the context of museology.

Kirsten Dickhaut and Alisa Winkens (University of Stuttgart, "Theatre production and reproduction. On Emergence as a Figure of Thought in Relation to Milière's Psyché") short-circuited in their analysis the text-based messages of the performed play with the conception of the scenography and especially the space of the audience (fig. 16-17). They were able to show how the spatial model of the French theatre leaves the Euclidean model behind and calls for a multi-perspective experience in which the spatial design reacts to the different positions of the viewer in each case. At the same time, we need to ask about an architecture of sound whose décor should be considered not only in terms of its iconic statement but also in terms of its materiality and acoustic design.
Die Salle des Machines (Tuilerienpalast)


Theaterproduktion: Konzeptionelle Rezipientenbezogenheit

Nach Charles Vigarani, Auditorium Salle des Machines ca. 1670 [O13240/29], Document conservé au Centre historique des Archives nationales à Paris 
In Jana Glorius-Ruedi’s discussion of the portraits of the Peintre du Roi de Prusse, Charles Amédé Vanloo (fig. 18), the use of and significance for the image formulated especially via the spatial conception in the creation of illusion become clear. It is a trompe l’oeil of a painted stone frame that is pierced by the portraits operating already in the viewer’s space; an illusion of separate as well as connected spaces as a continuum.

This form of portrait was intended for the private spheres of court life and contrasts with the official portrait, which adheres to traditional practice and respects the distance of power. The allegorical portrait of Louis VX (fig. 19), painted by Van Loo in 1762 as an anamorphosis, is a work that has to be viewed with a polyhedral lens. In order to allow the emergent appearance, the work needs an interaction of its elements to become visible on the one hand, on the other hand this requires a movement of the viewer, the adjustment of his eye, so that he experiences himself for a moment as part of the creative process of art. The examples mentioned ask for the exact reconstruction of such constructions build on the technical optical aid, techniques which became figuratively thematic themselves (camera obscura, prism). Here, the work of art remains incomprehensible without reference to the insights and amazing inventions of optics and geometry of the time.
Domenico Pino's (University College London) contribution dealt with the eight hundred engravings of the Stamperia Reale in Naples on the Antichità di Ercolano as well as the correspondence of Ferdinando Galiani, the Neapolitan ambassador in France, with his minister Bernardo Tanucci. The "emergence" of the objects that rose from the excavations in Southern Italy around the middle of the 18th century (fig. 20) found its way into correspondence and publications finally conveyed a new style that promoted the neoclassicism pronounced throughout Europe with a temporal offset (fig. 21-22). Significantly, and distributed through the representations in publications and engravings, this happened first in France. Without a scientific and scholarly discourse, antiquarianism as well as collecting, the causes of the artistic adaptations on the way to an epochal change in style remain unknown.

19 Amédée Van Loo, Allegorical Portrait of Louis XV, 1762, with polyedric lense, Versailles, Châteaux de Versailles de du Trianon

Neoclassical cabinet in Palazzo Barberini, Rome, c. 1780.

The ceiling of a nearby room in Palazzo Barberini, 16th century.
Sale Pompeiane in the Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli, Palazzo Reale, c. 1835.