10. Moved by Rubens: The Double Logic of Image Perception in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (1877–1977)

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Rubens' Trajectory

The Siegen born, Antwerp based and cosmopolitan Baroque painter Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) created an impressive oeuvre, in appearance as well as in quantity and geographical dispersion. His courtly and humanist education took him on semi-diplomatic missions to cities in Italy, Spain, France, England and The United Provinces of the Netherlands. During these missions, Rubens' brush formed his most powerful weapon of negotiation, resulting in an oeuvre distributed over the secular and religious palaces of seventeenth-century Europe. During his travels to Italy, Rubens extensively copied Renaissance masters such as Tintoretto, Michelangelo and Titian. This type of *referential reproducibility*, as Erika Balsom describes it (Balsom 2017, 4), was key to the development of Baroque art in the North and marked a new artistic vision, centered around (e)motion. But the Italian masters were inspirational on another level: Titian's collaborations with the Flemish engraver Cornelis Cort also provided the blueprint for Rubens' well-organized reproduction practice (Luijten 2004, 18–22), initiating a form of *circulatory reproducibility* directed towards multiplication and distribution (Balsom 2017, 5). It is this type of replication, and its impact on the perception of the original artworks, that will be the focus of this chapter. Peter Paul Rubens was one of the first Flemish masters to consciously engage with the reproducibility of his work, not only via multiple painted versions of a single composition, but also via prints produced and disseminated in his studio.

In 1618, the young and ambitious Lucas Vorsterman was the first of many craftsmen to be employed in Rubens' studio who successfully translated the pictorial qualities and subtle tonalities of the painted composition into a purely linear, black and white medium. Rubens consciously observed the impact of the graphic reproduction techniques on the original invention of the work and did not hesitate to change the composition according to the qualities of the printed medium (Hu-

venne 2004, 12). The collaboration between Vorsterman and Rubens ended in conflict in 1622 (Van Hout 2004b, 40–43). This is not surprising, taking into account Rubens' strict control over the end result. Rubens left little to the imagination and the artistic skills of the executor and maintained supervision over the quality of the reproductions by correcting every state of the plate until it reached a final version (Pohlen 1985, 141). Obtaining copyrights in both the Southern and Northern Netherlands as well as in France, Rubens was well aware of the commercial and legal conditions of mechanical reproductions. Through the distribution of his work via prints, he expanded its visibility, albeit changing its materiality and physical appearance thoroughly. The authorized institutions, such as the Catholic church and the Spanish government, quickly understood that the effectiveness of the work's monumentality could be substituted for an expanded visibility on a monumental scale (see Pohlen 1985, 170–173). Ever since, reproductions have operated within a socio-political framework. By the end of his life, Rubens' work was dispersed over the European continent, not only through commissions in the context of diplomatic missions, but also via prints that—besides serving his public relations— increased familiarity with the master's visual language (Van Hout 2004a, 30). Through graphic reproductions, Rubens' vast oeuvre took shape.

What Rubens set in motion with his reproduction practice was a *double logic of image perception*. Echoing Bruno Latour, the engravings after Rubens served as *immutable mobiles*: "objects which have the properties of being *mobile* but also *immutable*, *presentable*, *readable* and *combinable* with one another" (Latour 1986, 7). Through their remediation, reproductions initiate a centrifugal movement that spreads the artwork's image to a broader audience, simultaneously causing a centripetal force that enables us to see and approach these images as part of a comprehensive oeuvre. The double logic of image perception is hence a (western) socio-cultural mechanism that describes a mutual interplay between the trajectory of pictorial media and people. However, it was only by the end of the nineteenth century, with the advent of mechanical reproductions, that this mechanism of image perception became fully operative. Mechanical reproducibility initiated a whole series of technologies, resulting in the accumulation of new optical devices and pictorial media (centrifugal act), which radically shifted our perception of both present and past (centripetal response). In what follows I will examine this double dynamic, by comparing Rubens' 300th and 400th birthday celebrations, in 1877 and 1977 respectively. These two events formed a focal point in the *mobilization* of Rubens' oeuvre—by disseminating representational pictures and by modifying collective mental images—and demonstrate how the reciprocity of image and technology has *moved* people in modern society (Belting 2011, 15).

The Centrifugal Movement

The centrifugal movement is first and foremost a technological movement, involving the accumulation of immutable pictures, which disperses the image of an artwork by remediating it (see Belting 2011; Latour 1986). In 1642, when Rubens' copyrights in France expired, many publishers and engravers already benefited from his fame to set up a lucrative print business (Van Hout 2004a, 38; Depauw and Van de Velde 2004, 8). However, the number of Rubens' reproductions suddenly grew exponentially in the 1870s. The festivities organized for his 300th birthday celebration had a significant impact on the quantitative expansion of reproductions, coinciding with a shift from graphic to photographic reproduction techniques (Fawcett 1986, 200–207). From this point onwards, pictorial media succeeded each other at an unseen pace, all of them resulting from three main technologies: photography, film and television. The impact of these modern technologies is best analyzed through their confrontation with prior modes of reproduction. Instead of focusing on technical innovations or legal requirements that made these technologies apt for reproduction purposes, I will concentrate on what Balsom described as *copy rites*: "extralegal social and historical conventions that shape the possibilities and meanings of image reproduction" (Balsom 2017, 8).

Since the birth of photography, its potential as a reproduction medium was recognized, but it was only around 1870 that the by then mass-produced photographs could successfully capture, without fading, oil paintings in full detail and all color shades (Fawcett 1986, 200–207). Compared to engravings, photographic representations were no more realistic nor objective in this early stage. Moreover, compared to the mechanically made photographs, the labor-intensive craftsmanship that was involved in the graphic process granted the engraving originality (Fawcett 1986, 202). Consequently, photography had to compete against its predecessor with another type of authenticity. By creating a relatively fast and cheap procedure, it exchanged an *auratic* feel for the promise of a *truthful* image. The objectivity granted to the photograph was related to the medium's social function, as Pierre Bourdieu explained:

> Photography did not simply appropriate one of the functions which had, until that point, been specific to engraving, the faithful reproduction of the real; leaving engraving with the task of illustrating fiction, it reinforced the pre-existing requirements of objectivity and realism by realizing them. (Bourdieu 1996, 74, note 1)

In fact, the photographic medium only "supplied the mechanical means for realizing the '*vision of the world*' invented several centuries earlier, with perspective" (Bourdieu 1996, 77, note 6). When both photography and engraving used the same conventions of perspective, the true difference of their impact lay not so much in their ability to consistently represent the original image, but rather in their *mo-*

bility: photography was not only cheaper and faster to produce, both its means of production and the product itself traveled more easily and, especially when its technology became adapted to the printing press, photomechanical pictures generated a visual testimony of cultures and allowed this to blend in with and hence define the inherently hybrid nature of modernity (Latour 1986, 7–10). Unlike the originals, we do not encounter photomechanical reproductions in isolation, separated from everyday life through monumental staircases and blinded windows. Mostly, photomechanical reproductions are offered to us as synoptic representations by print media (centripetal movement), which, as a newly established unity, can be distributed again (Latour 1986, 10). In the public press and in magazines, on postcards and posters, in art books and travel guides, "the meaning of an image is changed according to what one sees immediately beside it or what comes immediately after it" (Berger 2008, 29).

This potential was increased by the advent of the moving camera, which generated visual knowledge not only through the montage of various images, but also by decomposing a single image into close-ups. Through the camera eye, the gaze of the beholder is transformed simulating the contemplative attitude of moving closer and further away from an artwork to explore the surface from detail to detail. Meanwhile, the voice-over commentator could talk to the spectator while the camera led the eye. Consequently, the potential of the cinematic reproduction as a medium for art analysis was soon widely acknowledged among art historians, resulting in the foundation of the *Fédération Internationale du Film sur l'Art*. At its first conference held in Paris in 1948, chief conservator of paintings at the Louvre, René Huyghe, reported enthusiastically about the possibilities of the new medium after making one of the first art films in color, *Rubens et son temps* (1938): "People do not generally know how to look at pictures. The film enables us to hold the spectator's eye and guide it step by step through the descriptive and visual detail of a work of art" ("Summaries" 1948, 8). Also in 1948, art historian Paul Haesaerts and film director Henri Storck made *Rubens*, a film praised and criticized for its radical formalist approach and educational tone. Through its generous use of cinematographic techniques, *Rubens* became one of the main representatives of a new genre, instigating the discussion on whether the art film should be seen as a pure registration of art or if these films could claim artistic qualities themselves (Jacobs 2011, 3–4). Although film copies can be disseminated all over the world, the film medium did not affect the number of people that saw art through reproductions, so much as increasing the number of people that saw it simultaneously. For Walter Benjamin, this collective perception was key to generating an emancipatory, distracted reception of art in an everyday context, in contrast to the contemplation in the traditional experience of art (Benjamin 2008, 32–33). However, the architecture of the movie theater is designed to cut off reality and arouse individually lived experiences, rather than collective ones. In the dark of the movie theater the communal space dissolves into

the mental space of the individual (Belting 2011, 53). Subsequently, the immersive attractiveness of cinematic reproductions lies not so much in their *truthful* representation of the original image, but in the reproduction of a *genuine experience* of that image. Using the same mechanical device as photography, the newly generated pictures mobilize art differently because of their distinct physical appearance. Whereas photomechanical reproductions travel to us as a tactile object, cinematic reproductions are conveyed via projection in a darkened room:[1]

> The film medium does not consist of matter, the film on the reel; in order to become a medium, the film requires technological animation. In the viewer it creates the impression that the fleeting images flowing before his eyes are nothing other than his own images, like the ones he experiences in imagination and in dreams. (Belting 2011, 52)

Not only do cinematic reproductions—in contrast to the original to which they refer—appear as moving and ephemeral, the film medium accumulates images in time, rather than space. A photograph always depicts a crystalized moment that irreversibly belongs to the past. It is only through its mobilization in space that the photograph actualizes itself (Benjamin 2008, 13) and reaffirms its presence. Due to their technical animation, cinematic images, by contrast, seem to only appear in the now, and as projected images unravel, they leave no tactile trace for the viewer to hold on to.

Shown before feature films, short art documentaries became an important tool of the postwar cultural policy to educate and enlighten the people. But for the true massification of reproductions via documentaries, we had to wait for the advent of television in the 1950s and its ability to simultaneously disperse images in time and space. Like the cinematic medium, televised images succeed each other in time; i.e. real time, making them even more elusive than film. On the other hand, however, these images enter the social space of everyday life. They enter our private living rooms, simultaneously forming a segment in the large spatiotemporal continuity that is generated by the flow of images on our television screen, and which we have indicated synoptically as reality, i.e. truth. Especially in the early days of single channel television, the centrifugal movement reached its peak, when people did not watch television because of the items that were programmed, but because of the time at which they were programmed (Drot 1963, 19). By broadcasting art documentaries at a time when museums were closed, people could be reached that would not go to museums in the first place. And by showing them art in between other programs, the masses were familiarized with art during their everyday habits to a much greater extent than photomechanical or cinematic reproductions could previously achieve. Through television, fine art's most enigmatic images became part of a collective memory.

The Centripetal Movement

The centripetal movement, directly related to the quantity and scope of the circulating reproductions, unfolds in two stages: Firstly, by comparing and collecting reproductions, similarities become apparent, converging in the master's unique style, which characterizes his *oeuvre* (cf. infra). Secondly, the conception of the oeuvre, the identification with a certain artist and the positioning of artworks within this oeuvre of that artist—early work, undeniable masterpiece, studio work, etc.—draws the attention back to the singular, *must-see* original.

Following Dean MacCannell's influential *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976), the second stage has only been thoroughly realized through mechanical means and moreover requires certain social conditions that are emerging in a post-industrial society: "advanced urbanization, expanded literacy, generalized health care, rationalized work arrangements, geographical and economic mobility and the emergence of the nation-state as the most important socio-political unit" (MacCannell 1976, 7). These conditions generated a shift from labor to *leisure* as the defining element of social relations in modern society. MacCannell subsequently analyzes the tourist as an archetype of the leisure class and sightseeing as a modern ritual in a godless, instable and inauthentic society (1976, 5–16). It is the subject's lost connection to society that lies at the heart of an institutionalized value system concentrated on authentic experiences that center around the gaze (Balsom 2017, 28). Moderns travel to *sights* (Antwerp Cathedral), looking for *attractions* (Rubens' *The Descent from the Cross*) in search of authentic *experiences* (contemplating the masterpiece). The value of these experiences is directly related to the number of cultural *productions* (advertisement, exhibitions, art books, art documentaries, centennials) that are organized to coordinate the mechanism of sightseeing, by generating counter-images that enhance the authenticity of the attractions. It is clear that the centrifugal and centripetal mobilization of images and people in the age of mechanical reproduction is intensified during cultural productions such as the Rubens centennials. During these festivities, Rubens' legacy is transformed into a tourist attraction (MacCannell 1976, 1–44).

The 1877 celebration was one of the biggest and most influential cultural events of nineteenth-century Antwerp. International examples, such as the Michelangelo celebration in Florence (1875), must have inspired the ambitious plans for Rubens' anniversary. The program was designed as a superlative of the 1840 celebrations and combined folk festivities—which often had little to do with Rubens—with an art program, including a literary and an artistic academic congress, the inauguration of a new bust, the opening of the Plantin-Moretus Museum, an art historical competition to write the history of the Antwerp School, the ceremonial execution of Peter Benoit's pompous Rubens Cantata, and three art exhibitions. For the occasion, the city was decorated with a triumphal column and three arches echoing Rubens'

designs for the *Triumphal Entry of Cardinal Infante Ferdinand* (1635). On top of this, a historical parade marched through the streets of Antwerp, which was only one of the attempts to incorporate an art historical awareness into the Rubens Cult. Nevertheless, the hybrid character of the 1877 celebrations was received rather critically by the estimated 22,000 foreign visitors—most of them from neighboring countries. Especially the folk festivities and the prominent proliferation of Antwerp was reported to distract from the artist's achievements. Tellingly, the largest amount of the total budget of 378,000 francs was spent on the triumphal arches and the historical parade (Prims 1927, 207–214; Herwijn 1984, 249; Van Ruyssevelt 1977, 48–49).

However, the 1877 Rubens celebrations, and especially the *Congrès Artistique* organized by the Antwerp *Cercle Artistique Littéraire et Scientifique,* were significant for embracing the potential of mechanical reproductions (CALSA 1878, 468–469). In its ambitious invitation letter, we read a confidence in modernity as the only way to get to grips with the past:

> In this ardent melee, which marks our time in transition, we should ask ourselves whether it is not appropriate to establish our ties of affiliation with the past and, while claiming the glorious heritage of our ancestors, to let it be extensively permeated by the powerful breath of modern ideas.[2] (CALSA 1877)

It is therefore not surprising that photography played a crucial role in the debates during the three-days congress held in August 1877. Not only did photography invoke the need for copyright legislations, attendees also emphasized the importance of photography for the objective and systematic collection of sources and artworks. These ambitions resulted in the foundation of the *Codex Diplomaticus Rubenianus*, funded by the city of Antwerp and organized by a permanent committee, charged with assembling all publications and primary sources on the master, accompanied by reproduction photographs in case of discussion (CALSA 1878, 437–438). The ambitious plan marked the outset of the scientific study of Rubens (CALSA 1878, 381). From 1877 onwards, the appointed committee under the supervision of Max Rooses also started to systematically collect reproductions (prints and photographs) of Rubens' oeuvre. This collection was displayed for many years at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp and later, on the occasion of Rubens 350th anniversary, at the Royal Academy of Fine arts (Gedenkboek 1928, 18).

Although mechanical reproductions were explicitly present in the scientific part of the centennial, and were used as stand-ins for the originals in some of the exhibitions (cf. infra), the use of mechanical reproductions was not yet explicitly visible in the streets. The rather deficient advertisement of the events was limited to some (mostly imageless) posters and articles in the international press (Herwijn 1984, 248). During the festivities, the masses approached reproduction photographs much in the same way as they approached the originals. In 1877, mechanical reproductions mainly enhanced comprehensiveness in respect to the vastness

of Rubens' oeuvre, which led to a gradual development of the first stage of the centripetal movement. In the course of a hundred years—in which none of the commemorations would equal the efforts of the 1877 celebration—the second stage was elaborated to reach its apex during the 400th birthday celebrations.

The 1977 program again included some popular manifestations and festivities in the context of the Rubens year. These often-sensational events served as markers with which to highlight, by contrast, the "real" cultural attractions (MacCannell 1976, 14). Compared to the previous centennial, however, it was conceived far more as a yearlong art festival scattered around the city: concerts, theater plays, congresses and lectures, signalized walking tours, a sound and light installation, and no less than 17 exhibitions framed Rubens and his time. Among these exhibitions was the most ambitious Rubens exposition so far—and presumably ever—collecting over 160 paintings, oil sketches and drawings by the master in the Antwerp Museum of Fine Arts ("Programma" 1977). The coinciding of this exhibition with an academic colloquium and ten lectures organized by Unesco—that saw its ideal ambassador in the cosmopolitan diplomat (Detiège 1977, 25)—made Antwerp into a unique incentive for the study of Rubens (F.C. 1977). Never had there been so many experts, knowledge and, most importantly, art works assembled so close to the epicenter of Rubens' legacy: the artist's studio. Although Antwerp remained the main sight—with no opportunity left unused to emphasize the master's relation to "his" city—the festivities exceeded the local scale and substantial exhibitions on Rubens were organized in major museums in Paris, London, Vienna, Cologne, Leningrad, Florence, etc. ("Programma" 1977).

The Rubens Year did not only reach further in geographical terms, but also visually, by means of mechanical reproductions. In 1977, Rubens was encontournable. This did not remain unnoticed, as a self-conscious reflex could be distinguished in exhibitions such as *The Fame of Rubens*, investigating the Rubens Cult between 1640 and 1940, and *Rubens Now: A Concept or a Commodity?*, exploring Rubens' influence on contemporary artists and his appropriation within modern culture. Rubens and his work had never been more present in, and been part of, everyday life. Besides short reportages in cultural programs and news items, the Belgian television broadcaster (B.R.T.) made two educational documentaries with corresponding work books for primary and secondary schools. The documentary Rubens' *Life and Art* (12–15 years) was also screened in several exhibitions. Besides, the radio service published a series of 35 mm slides to be used in classrooms. The BBC and other foreign broadcasters followed B.R.T.'s lead, regularly reporting about the Antwerp celebrations and producing art documentaries for the occasion. Worldwide philatelic departments produced stamps with his self-portrait, aligning the *Prince of Flemish Art* with the Royals whom he once loyally served. Traveling exhibitions were organized using photographic reproductions mounted on adaptable panels (cf. infra). Every manifestation got its illustrated poster, and postcards with Rubens' most fa-

mous works from Antwerp were sold in all the souvenir shops, alongside Rubens beer, Rubens pie, Rubens medals, Rubens scarfs, etc. The Rubens celebrations of 1977 are a textbook example of what MacCannell calls the phases of sight sacralization (1976, 44–45): An artwork is labeled—and scientifically proven to be—a genuine Rubens (naming phase) and is therefore isolated through entrance tickets, booklets, captions, protective fences, guards, adapted lightning, etc. in order to enhance its experience, while providing optimal conservation (framing and elevation phase). Subsequently, the site of preservation is marked as an attraction in itself (enshrinement). The most important step in this process however, is the mechanical reproduction of the work:

> It is the mechanical reproduction phase of sacralization that is most responsible for setting the tourist in motion on his journey to find the true object. And he is not disappointed. Alongside the copies of it, it has to be The Real Thing. (MacCannell 1976, 45)

Mechanical reproductions hence serve as markers that—instead of desacralizing art works, as Benjamin suggested—constitute the *aura* of the original, by creating the desire to be as near as possible to the original picture of that reproduction (MacCannell 1976, 47–48). Boris Groys agrees with MacCannell, stating that the aura "emerges precisely at the very moment it is fading" (Groys 2008, 73). In other words, it is only because of its multiplication via copies that an original becomes unique. In an attempt to examine the place of the copy in our culture, Groys understands the difference between original and copy, therefore, as a topological question. The original acquires aura through its "fixed context, a well-defined place in space" whereas "reproduction means dislocation, deterritorialization; it transports artworks to networks of topologically indeterminable circulation" (Groys 2008, 73). The loss of aura that, according to Benjamin, defines the mechanical reproduction is hence the absence of this defined place, where the original is present. Herein lies the explanation for the commodification of mechanical reproductions: we buy mechanical reproductions because they represent the absent authentic experience. It is this absence of the *aura*—of a space (the place where the unique work resides) and time (the genuine moment of experience)—that makes us travel to the originals. Being cheap, mobile and collectable, Rolf Potts' examination of postcards forms an interesting case study to examine this topological dynamic. Bought as a *souvenir* of our authentic experiences, postcards also serve as indicators of what one should see while being on site. By sending postcards to our loved ones at home, we deliver proof of our experiences, as "the picture on the front of the card advertised the act of travel, and the postmark on the back certified it as authentic" (Potts 2018, 56–57). In the act of replication, however, the photomechanical picture does not show us the *lived* image[3] transferred to us in front of the original, but an idealized evenly lit version, which was taken from a neutral perspective. Not only does the postcard

fail to evoke what we have seen, it even comes to define this experience, by showing us how to approach the artwork and what to remember of it (Potts 2018, 56–57).[4] Serving both as markers and as reminiscences of the true originals, mechanical reproductions are the a priori and a posteriori medium of perception by which our authentic experience of the original is colored (cf. infra).

The commodification of mechanical reproductions is nothing but "a means of taking possession of the world and making sense of it" (Belting 2011, 145), or as Benjamin explained: "the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction" (Benjamin 1992, 669). Disregarding the ideological appropriation of this process, Benjamin underestimated the impact of manifestations such as the Rubens celebrations, organized by the governing authorities to structure these attempts at self-legitimation and thereby assure their central position within the modern world. According to Frans Baudouin, conservator of the Antwerp Museums of Fine Arts:

> . . . there are few things as modern as this Year. Now that humanity is discovering space and time, now that for the first time in history, African art and Borobudur can be integrated in our cultural canon, it would be short-sighted to ban our own history from this *musée imaginaire*.[5] (J.V.H. 1977)

Rubens: A Portrait and a Map

Identifying a city with the name of the master, the fifth, *social reproduction* phase of sight sacralization (MacCannell 1976, 45), is one of the most important mechanisms of modern sightseeing and herein lies the political (ideological and economical) interest for cultural productions such as the Rubens centennials. It is to the *Rubens-city* that your reduced train tickets and package tours will take you ("Programma" 1977). It is the Rubens-city that produces all kinds of merchandize to take home as a souvenir (Van Spilbeeck 1877, 156; Bex, Raskin, and Van De Gehuchte 1977, preface). Subsequently, the city of Antwerp undergoes the same double logic of image perception as the artworks on its territory. The tourist gaze monumentalizes the city (Groys 2003, 189–193), which subsequently presents itself as an original—by reproducing its image in maps and skylines—and its inhabitants, *Sinjoren*, as the true ancestors of Rubens. Antwerp places itself in the artistic and intellectual legacy of the artist to legitimate itself as an important capital of art. Consequently, the nineteenth-century lack of evidence that Rubens was born in Antwerp remained a thorn in the flesh. Especially after Reinier C. Bakhuizen van den Brink published compromising evidence[6] in favor of Rubens' birthplace as Siegen rather than Antwerp or Cologne, the topic was the source of fiery debates (Van Ruyssevelt

1977, 47). It was not until 1903 that consensus was reached through Max Rooses' seminal *Rubens' Leven en Werken*, in which he proclaimed that, even though the evidence for Siegen was undeniable, this did not undermine the position of Antwerp as the only Rubens-city (Rooses 1903, 17). Already shortly after his death—spending most of his last years in Elewijt near Brussels—Rubens was framed as an eminent *Pictor Antverpiens* (Depauw and Van de Velde 2004, 8). Visualized through the recurrence of seventeenth-century city maps or Harrewijn's engravings of Rubens' house, the persistence in highlighting Rubens' connection to Antwerp becomes apparent in the Rubens centennials: In 1877, the Belgian photographer Joseph Maes was appointed to publish an album with 150 bound heliotype reproductions after engravings of *Portraits of the Most Prominent Antwerp Painters, Engravers, Sculptors and Architects of the Antwerp School since Quinten Massys* ("Album" 1877). The assignment for the art historical competition held in 1877 read *The History of the Antwerp Painters' School*. In 1977, every speech inaugurating an event still started and ended with a reflection on the connection between artist and city, with which the 738,000 visitors to the Rubens House that year eagerly agreed (F.C. 1977). However, if we consider his international career, both as a painter and as a diplomat, rooting Rubens in Antwerp is an overstatement, knowing that Rubens regarded "the whole world as his country" (Wittkower and Wittkower 1963, 97).

This cosmopolitan spirit of a humanist artist, intellectual, and diplomat thus perfectly suits *the myth of the artist* as cultivated by biographers and art historians since Vasari (Wittkower and Wittkower 1963, 93, 96). Along with the name comes an ideal, a brand, for which Rubens' self-portraits served as a trademark of quality (Bex, Raskin, and Van De Gehuchte 1977, preface). This constructed image of the artist is not only important in the light of the increasing democratization of art throughout the twentieth century, but is key to understanding the ideological recuperation of art and artists, for which cinema and especially television became the preeminent tools. The unbridled pathos displayed in Rubens' work stood in sharp contrast to the noble and unaffected, courteous gentleman he allegedly was during his diplomatic missions. It is especially the latter characteristic of the artist that is appropriated in a discourse on national—and in this case Flemish—identity. Whereas Rubens is internationally renowned for his qualities as a prominent Baroque painter, on a local scale, Rubens is promoted for his ambitious, diplomatic and reliable character. This so-called Flemish nature was also the basis for a costume drama on the artist: *Rubens: Painter and Diplomat* (1977) by Roland Verhavert, ordered by Belgian Television in the context of the 1977 Rubens celebrations. Although the series in five episodes was the first Belgian television production with international exposure, it was received critically in Belgium for its unpreceded production budget, mainly subsidized by the Flemish Ministry of Dutch Culture, and was highly controversial among art historians for its lack of focus on the artist's work. Frans Baudouin explicitly requested to be removed from the credits as an

advisor for the series. Almost none of his recommendations and remarks were considered for the sake of the series' dramatic value and the poetic freedom of screenwriter Hugo Claus (Baudouin, Van Raemdonck, and Vandenbussche, 1977). Although the television series gives us insights into how cinematic reproductions are used as tropes to highlight Rubens' genius and corresponding good manners, it did not succeed in reflecting the vastness and complexity of his oeuvre. This loss seems to be the reverse side of the medal of mechanical reproductions' democratizing power. In a television interview, the conservator of the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage, Roger Marijnissen, expressed his concerns regarding the generalizations and popularizations in the course of the 1977 Rubens celebrations:

> I fear that the majority of the 700,000 visitors have come to look mainly at a symbol, and not so much at the work of one of the most important artists in the entire art history. . . . these are the professional objections that I have to bring against the entire manifestation. I do not know whether these are actually objections, they are only considerations, in order to put into perspective the euphoria surrounding the entire phenomenon. I fear that the cultural impact of such manifestations cannot be measured by the length of the rolls of entrance tickets that have been sold.[7] (Marijnissen 1977, 17'49" –18'49")

Marijnissen admits that the manifestations in 1977—and the many reproductions that circulated in their context—brought Rubens to the people, but he also notes that the *image* that was communicated through these events, postcards, tourist guides, commercials and posters might not always have done justice to the work itself. In fact, the only thing that had been conveyed to a wider audience was the very aura that Benjamin hoped to deconstruct through the use of mechanical reproductions.

It is not surprising that Rubens' self-portrait (ca. 1630) from the collection of the nearby Rubens House was omnipresent during the 1977 celebrations. The trajectory of reproductions—instigated by practical, technological, commercial and ideological considerations—clearly impacts *what* oeuvre is constructed. Shortly after the artist's death, the heart of his oeuvre—the most renowned and widespread images—had already shifted quite significantly from the oeuvre Rubens had compiled himself through the prints produced under his approval. While seventeenth and eighteenth-century prints after Rubens still depicted mainly religious scenes from the New Testament, the Rubens Cult quickly established a lucrative market by publishing reproductions of self-portraits and family scenes: works that covered only a minor part of Rubens' total oeuvre and were conceived in a private context, therefore very unlikely to be reproduced on a large scale by the artist himself (Depauw and Van de Velde 2004, 8–10). In a time span of 400 years, not much had changed in this respect. The images of the master and his family show an intimate, almost voyeuristic insight into the life of this enigmatic artist. At the end of

his life, *Rubens* was already more than the name of a talented painter or a peaceable diplomat. *Rubens* stood for an elusive totality, which let itself be explained only through the two icons that came to represent its aura: the portrait and the map.

Subsequently, Groys' and MacCannells' situation of the conception of the aura in the Modern Age, as a result of mechanical reproducibility, should be somewhat nuanced. Although the aura of the original unquestionably increases as more reproductions of it become available, it remains primarily *the myth of the artist* that produces its undeniable authenticity. Being confronted with a work by Rubens for the first time, a nametag is enough to *experience* the work's aura (and equivalent money value). In that sense, Benjamin does have a point when comparing the aura of an artwork with the unapproachability of a cult image (Benjamin 2008, 16). This is the result of an awareness, dating back to the Renaissance, that the picture not only presents an *absence* (that gains the original its aura) but also the absence of the gaze of its producer (which reinforces the aura). "An image became a record of how X had seen Y" (Berger 2008, 10). The original art work not only testifies to an authentic (as opposed to mechanical and standardized) creation, but also to "the figure of the artist as the 'personal example' of a life authentically lived" (Balsom 2017, 29).

Mapping Rubens' Oeuvre

Until the nineteenth century, and in conjunction with a literary Rubens Cult, the study of Rubens' work remained mainly centered around Rubens' persona (Van Ruyssevelt 1977, 17). More than just a matter of a shift in taste, for a proper Rubens study to emerge, we had to await new visual technologies that allowed the development of Art History as a scientific discipline (Latour 1986, 13). By the end of the nineteenth century, photographic reproductions became a necessary requirement of connoisseurship, in order to compare works, separate them from their surrounding context and analyze them as part of a consistent oeuvre (Bohrer 2005, 247–249). It is in this desire for completeness—and the attractiveness of its impossibility—that the art historical groundwork on Rubens should be understood. Because of the quantity of his works, the international scope of his career and the numerous collaborations with renowned apprentices, collecting Rubens' work in one visual space seems an impossible task. Today, the most ambitious attempt at this is the ongoing project Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard. Initiated in the 1960s, this catalogue aims to collect and analyze all the artist's approximately 10,000 works by 2023.[8] However, in the course of history many more endeavors have been made, for which the 300th birthday celebration in 1877 proved an important catalyst. I have already pointed out the role of the Congrès Artistique, but in the exhibition in the Antwerp Museum of Fine Arts, photography was also used

for the sake of completeness. After some informal meetings with prominent European collections, it became clear that the plan to organize an exhibition assembling a representative part of Rubens' paintings—as already announced in the international press—seemed too ambitious (Herwijn 1984, 241). The plan was put aside, only to be successfully reconsidered for the 1977 celebrations. Instead, the Museum of Fine Arts decided to render a general overview of Rubens' oeuvre by combining drawings with reproductions and documents. *L'oeuvre de P.P. Rubens 1577–1877: Gravures, Photographies, Dessins, Documents, etc.* collected graphic reproductions from collections in Antwerp, Brussels and Haarlem, covering almost all the artist's paintings. The works for which no (satisfactory) print was found were represented by photographs.[9] Reproduction photographs were sent to the museum from numerous European collections, including photographs after Rubens' drawings. Some of the commissioned photographs could be purchased by the public via the concierge of the museum (Dupont 1877, 89). On multiple occasions, two engravings, or an engraving and a photograph, were compared; the differences between the juxtaposed images allowed a better understanding of the oeuvre (*L'œuvre*, viii–xi). This desire to collect artworks regardless of their location, material or size and the added values and meanings created by their comparison is a recurrent ambition that only became possible—so it seemed—in the age of mechanical reproduction.

During the preparations for the 1877 Rubens Year, another unaccomplished proposal expressed a similar confidence in modern media. Following the lead of prominent photo studios such as Adolphe Braun and Franz Hanfstaengl, Belgian photographer and publisher Joseph Maes launched the idea for a four-year reproduction tour throughout Europe to create an *encyclopedia* of Rubens' paintings. The journey would have resulted in a photo-exhibition of one thousand photo-autotypes of 18 to 20 cm width by 25 cm high, mounted on Chinese paper. As venue for this exhibition as part of the 1877 celebrations, Maes had Rubens' former house in mind, "to be acquired by the city, and [in order to] exhibit in his own home, the reproductions of the masterpieces, which his genius mind had dreamed of, which he gave birth to"[10] (Maes n.d.). The proposal was rejected by the central committee of the Rubens celebrations, presumably because of financial and practical objections (De Wael 1877). Not only was the estimated budget for the trip and equipment 12,500 francs, the governing authorities also had to take care of the required permissions (Maes n.d.).

In 1977, a similar yet converse idea for a photo-exhibition was launched. Similar in its attempt to generate a comprehensive overview of Rubens' work and his stylistic development, but whereas in 1877, Maes' intended to travel in order to bring Rubens' oeuvre to Antwerp, the city now organized a traveling photo-exhibition to take Rubens' works from Antwerp collections abroad (Stubbe 1978). The project was initiated in 1974, after contacting the Belgian photography company Agfa-Gevaert, which was conducting innovative research on realistic color technology.[11] The ex-

hibition existed in multiple editions, of full color and life-size reproductions of Rubens' work from public as well as private collections in Antwerp. If the size of the painting did not allow for a one-to-one reproduction, a full-size detail was taken and compared to a comprehensive reproduction in reduced size. Mounted on large panels, the exhibition was adaptable to different settings and could be dispersed to Belgian companies and cultural centers, or to smaller museums abroad. The stipulated aim of the project resonates perfectly with the double logic of image perception: on the one hand, it intended to bring Rubens to those places where his inventions could not be directly perceived (centrifugal movement), and on the other hand, the exhibition wanted to attract people to the *Rubens-city* (centripetal movement). With the help of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Department of International Cultural Relations of the Ministry of Dutch Culture, international interest in the project was aroused. But again, financial considerations made many cities withdraw. As a result, the city of Antwerp bought two sets itself, one for educational purposes and one to exhibit as part of the educational exhibition in the Hessenhuis, which also screened the B.R.T. art documentary *Rubens' Life and Art*. One set circulated in France and a reduced one was ordered by the Ministry of Dutch Culture for circulation in cultural centers in Flanders. Other sets were sold to Belgian companies (DSA6 1977, 5–6).

The photo-exhibitions offer new insights into the mechanism of image perception. Not only do they mobilize a double logic as described above, they demonstrate how mechanical reproductions themselves become originals. According to Boris Groys, "we are not only able to produce a copy out of an original by a technique of reproduction but we also are able to produce an original out of a copy by a technique of topological relocation of this copy—that is, by a technique of installation" (Groys 2008, 73–74). The photo-exhibitions are essentially conceived as installations, *musées imaginaires* that offer genuine (in)sights into Rubens' praxis. Using state-of-the-art technology, Joseph Maes' proposal aimed to assemble a unique collection of high-quality photomechanical reproductions, and the original studio setting in which these pictures would have been shown was meant to confirm their authenticity. Similarly, the 1977 exhibition affirmed the quality of the large full-color pictures. Their materiality and size clearly contrasted with the variety of cheap reproductions disseminated in the context of the Rubens' celebrations. Groys' topological approach to Benjamin's aura-concept helps to clarify this difference: when the masses are moved toward the image, the image becomes authentic; when the image moves towards the masses, it identifies itself as a copy (Groys 2003, 37). In contrast to the disseminated reproductions in the streets, the images in the photo-exhibition were meant to be contemplated as originals. However, the 1977 photo-exhibition, which was conceived as a traveling format, positioned itself somewhere in between authentic installation and emancipatory copy, and this ambiguous status might have been the reason for its limited success.

Moved by Rubens?

The 1877 and 1977 photo-exhibitions reveal yet another impact of mechanical reproductions: over the course of 100 years, not only had their trajectory shifted, the formal and material characteristics of the images had also changed quite significantly, from small-sized black and white reproductions to full color, one-to-one details. Accordingly, the relationship between original and reproduction had altered, not only through evolving social structures and by a repeatedly nourished Rubens Cult, but also through the images' transformed physical presence. Subsequently, the centrifugal movement of mechanical reproductions not only brought us to the authentic originals, now they had become the reference point to approach these originals. A review of the 1977 traveling exhibition in the French newspapers is revealing:

> What is curious is that the works, reduced in their dimensions, appears to me more readable, the eye embracing the whole composition better than while in front of the originals. I remember having admired the works in Antwerp Cathedral, but with a sense of being overwhelmed by their dimensions, which felt like an obstacle to grasping the unity of the composition.[12] (Baudouin 1977, 28)

Apparently by 1977, an intelligible reproduction, in a familiar, modern medium, is favored over the dazzling, monumental comprehensiveness of the original. One could aptly ask, then, are we still truly moved by Rubens? In our search for the true image of Rubens, we all too easily disregard the medium-specific features of the mechanical reproduction through which this image is transmitted. Hans Belting rightfully observes that "we are more familiar with the medium, the means of transmission than we are with the images that are transmitted. In fact in order to believe images, we require that they come to us through familiar, accepted media" (Belting 2011, 20). What we look for in the original and what we remember from this experience is highly influenced by its modern mediation of mechanical reproduction, its technological development as well as its variable functions within different reproduction media (e.g. art book, poster, news item, etc.) that overwhelm us every day. From a technological point of view, the formal characteristics of mechanical reproductions developed not only in relation to the originals, but also in the interplay between different reproduction media.

Throughout the twentieth century, technological developments evolved towards more *realistic*, *accurate* and *truthful* representations, in terms of detail, color and appearance. However, the unavoidable variations in color, surface and scale, the altered physical presence, the absence of the frame as of the surrounding walls, and the different perspective of the beholder affect our perception (Savedoff 2000, 160–165). Moreover, mechanical reproductions are implemented in various reproduction media themselves, each using their own medium-specific visual strategies

(i.e. isolation, succession, juxtaposition), which, often unconsciously, influence our perception. Especially the development of the *Film sur l'Art* genre in the 1940s and 1950s reshaped our perception. Through the artistic gesture of *montage*, a still image was set into motion (Malraux 1947, 111–113). Rubens' motionless representation of movement inspired directors to transpose his work to the cinematic medium. Its compositional clarity proved a conductive guideline for camera movements. By decomposing the image cinematographically into close-ups, tracking and panning shots, filmmakers such as Henri Storck and Charles Dekeukeleire often showed striking comparisons between the everyday, volatile reality and Rubens' vibrant creations. Through this moving, hypermediated frame, Rubens entered the living room in the 1950s. The broadcasted reproductions on television evolved even further away from the original, due to their small size and the relatively low quality of the television screen, which made longer shots of close-ups better suited to the medium (Drot 1963, 8). Subsequently, photographic and photomechanical reproductions, as a reaction to the moving image, increasingly evolved according to this new vision of Rubens' images, of which the 1977 photo-exhibition is exemplary. While claiming a certain transparency and objectivity by offering full-size reproductions, the use of details implies a reframing of the work and hence the loss of its inherent harmony.

Consequently, between 1877 and 1977, mechanical reproductions brought us both closer to and further away from the original perception of Rubens' oeuvre. The centennials converged Rubens' images—both reproductions and originals, even directly combined in the exhibition space—in one city, and at the same time dispersed his *remediated image*—both the oeuvre and persona—on a global scale. This is the double logic of image perception in modern society: a continual reciprocity of images and people, which mobilizes our reception of art.

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Notes

1 Slide shows, which introduced photography to the university lecture halls as from the 1880s (Bohrer 2005, 249–250), should be positioned somewhat in between photomechanical reproductions and cinematic reproductions. While appearing to the beholder in an ephemeral format and succeeding each other in time—without the possibility of the beholder looking back at will—the images remain still and therefore ask for a more active attitude of the beholders' gaze.

2 "Dans cette mêlée ardente qui marque notre époque de transition, nous nous sommes demandé s'il ne convenait pas d'établir nos liens de filiation avec le passé et, tout en revendiquant le glorieux héritage de nos ancêtres, d'y laisser pénétrer largement le souffle puissant des idées modernes." Translated by the author.

3 According to Belting's Anthropology of Images, images travel from objects in the physical world to our bodies and back, merging in our minds with other images, which can be both personal and collective. The image that I see in the original is different from what you see, as we both have a different (biologically determined) sight and different (psychologically and culturally defined) in-sights. Therefore, one could argue that there is no such thing as the image, but rather infinite copies of an image, multiplied by every gaze. It is my observation that by detaching the image from its singular medium (the painting) and incorporating it into a multipliable medium, Benjamin aimed at liberating the image's inherent plurality, which was restricted by its aura. The process of de-auratisation should then be understood as an attempt to shift emphasis from the production of images (the genuine master's hand) to their percep-

tion (the most elementary function of the picture). "Technical reproducibility, which Walter Benjamin once distinguished from museum presence, was merely the first phase in this process. Technological images have shifted the relationship between artifact and imagination in favor of imagination, creating fluid transitions for the free play of the mental images of their beholders, at least in terms of their perception. And perception has changed as well, both in general terms and in the specific sense of the way in which images are experienced" (Belting 2011, 41).

4 It is not surprising, then, that amateur photographs taken by tourists are complimented for their resemblance to postcard photography.

5 ". . . dat weinig dingen zo modern zijn als dit Jaar. Nu de mens bezig is de ruimte en de tijd te veroveren, nu wij voor het eerst in de geschiedenis negerkunst en borobudur in ons kultuurpatroon kunnen integreren, getuigt het van een eng denken het eigen verleden uit dat 'musée imaginaire' te bannen." Translated by the author. In the English translation the denigrating term 'negerkunst' is replaced by the author to 'African art.' Frans Baudouin was involved in the organization of the Rubens' celebrations, and made this remark in a lecture considering the criticism of the Rubens Year.

6 Fearing Alva's reign of terror, Jan Rubens fled to Cologne because of his sympathies for the insurgents during the Eighty Years' War. In Cologne, he met Ann van Saksen, the wife of Willem van Oranje, and became her lawyer, assistant and lover. When the adultery came to light, Jan Rubens was imprisoned and later banned to Siegen, where four years later Peter Paul Rubens was born (Rooses 1903, 2–11).

7 "Ik vrees dat een groot deel van de 700 000 bezoekers vooral naar een symbool komen kijken zijn en niet zozeer naar het werk van één van de belangrijkste kunstenaars uit de hele kunstgeschiedenis. . . . dat zijn samengevat de professionele bezwaren die ik tegen de gehele onderneming in te brengen heb. Ik weet niet of dat eigenlijk bezwaren zijn, het zijn alleen consideraties, waarbij gepoogd wordt de euforie die men aan het gehele fenomeen overgehouden heeft, om dat even te relativeren als dat kan. Ik vrees namelijk dat de culturele impact van dergelijke manifestaties niet af te meten is aan de lengte van de rollen entreebiljetten die men verkocht heeft." Translated by the author.

8 A large number of the published volumes can be consulted digitally via the website: https://www.rubenianum.be/en/content/corpus-rubenianum-ludwig-burchard (accessed 5 May 2020).

9 While books and journals since the turn of the century favored photography over engravings, in general, exhibitions persistently preferred engravings that were believed to be originals in their own right. Herein we can observe the different agencies of both reproduction media, and their corresponding function as an auratic art object or a truthful representation.

10 ". . . à acquérir par la ville, et exhiber dans sa demeure même, les reproductions des chefs-d'œuvre, que son génie y a rêvés, y a enfantés." Translated by the author.

11 Although the technology for color reproductions had been developed already by the turn of the century, it remained a highly subjective and hence expensive procedure of dubious quality. Apart from publishers, such as Phaidon and Skira, who made it their trademark, the common use of color images in art books only slowly took off after the Second World War.

12 "Ce qui est curieux, c'est que les œuvres, réduites dans leurs dimensions, me sont apparues d'une lecture plus facile, l'œil embrasse mieux l'ensemble de la composition qu'en face des originaux. Je me souviens avoir admiré les œuvres de la cathédrale d'Anvers, mais avec le sentiment d'être écrasé par leur dimensions qui étaient un obstacle pour saisir l'unité de la composition." Translated by the author.