

# No One Is in Command

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*Ideamorphic Studies — disputatio*

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This research note examines Proposition 25 of ideamorphism, Universal Diffraction, which holds that diffraction is not a technique, not a choice, and not something one does. Starting from a dated case — a couple before an abstract canvas whose chromatic codex had just been disclosed and played at the piano, one seeing a smiling face in it, the other "just shapes" — it sets the proposition against Gombrich, Polanyi and Wittgenstein on one side, and Ingarden, Iser, Goodman, Carroll and Dewey on the other. Three distinctions lift the opposition: the will solicits an aspect without commanding it; concretisation is an intending, not a decided action; what has been learned runs at the moment of reception without being deployed. What arrives can therefore have causes, depend on an activity, have been learned and let itself be changed afterwards, without having been done. The proposition's universality lies not in a shared content but in the absence of a zero case: no reception is without an interval from the emission. The note confines the emitter's sovereignty to the institution of the rule, maintains his responsibility for the conditions, and declares the departure of the ideamorphic usage from diffraction as a critical practice in Haraway. Verdict: Anticipated.



**What arrives is not done — neither by the one who emits nor by the one who receives.**

Arnaud Quercy — *Ideamorphic Studies*

## Sense of the Term

*Diffraction* is understood here as an effect in the receiver, never as a mechanism of transport. I take the word from Haraway, but not all of it. I keep the pattern that records the history of an interaction and that, unlike reflection, does not displace the same elsewhere <sup>[1]</sup>. I do not keep what she calls diffraction in the strong sense: an effort to make a difference in the world, a critical consciousness, a "technology" for making meanings. The proposition examined here is the exact point where my borrowing departs from its source. In Haraway, diffraction is done. Here, it is not.

The word is a metaphor, and I mean it as one. I do not take reception to be a phenomenon of wave optics.

## I. Quaestio

Is what happens in the receiver something he does — an interpretation he conducts — or something that happens to him in the encounter, without either party having it at their disposal?

The question admits two answers, and a whole tradition supports each: one holds reception to be an activity, a labour, a competence; the other holds it to be an event that precedes any decision. I examine both.

## II. Current Statement

Verbatim, from *The 31 Propositions of Ideamorphism* <sup>[2]</sup>, without alteration:

*Proposition 25 — Universal Diffraction. Diffraction is not a technique. It is not a choice. It is not something you do.*

Three negations, no affirmation. The statement says what diffraction is not, and leaves *universal* to the title alone.

## III. What My Practice Says

This proposition came from an observation I hold to be commonplace: before an abstract work, each receiver interprets in his own way, and sees what another does not. It is almost systematic, and one day of exhibition is enough to observe it.

What is less commonplace is the figure this divergence takes. It is not scattered: in what I observe, before a given canvas, receptions tend to fall into two groups. Those who see a figurative relation — a dog, a hat, a face — and those who see nothing. The division follows neither taste nor judgment: one can see nothing and find the work beautiful, just as one can see a figure and walk on by. In those who see a figure, what is drawn upon is not the ideational sense of the work, but their own memory, and the most immediate resource it provides.

And the division does not sort people. The one who sees nothing before this canvas may well see the face, or the horse, before another: this one offers him no figurative solution, that is all. I could not prove it — I have not put the same people in front of several canvases. I state it as I believe it.

**On 20 September 2026, at the gallery at 28 rue du Dragon.** A couple has already chosen *E Minor — Research on Harmony, Variations 7* (AQC0894, acrylic on paper, 15 × 21 cm, 2025, certificate no. 20251123-0106). I disclosed the codex to them: the canvas is in E minor, and I played it at the piano. Only after that does she point to it: "I like that one, I see a face with a smile, it cheers me up." He answers: "Really? I don't see anything. Just shapes — not bad, actually." She insists, she shows him the spot: "But yes, look... there." He concedes without yielding: "No, but okay."

It is an exchange of a few sentences, dated, and I do not present it as proof. But it gathers what I usually observe separately. The canvas contains no figure: rectangular planes, an orange ground, a black vertical. She sees a smiling face in it while knowing what the canvas is — the figure does not fill the absence of a rule, it arrives beside it. The order of what she says: the face first, the affect after. He sees nothing, codex known, canvas played, and he does not get it when she points it out. And he judges all the same. The rule had been given, and heard. It displaced nothing, in either of them.

**The same device in music.** Play a short instrumental fragment, untitled, without words, and ask not what one feels, but what story the music describes. Each goes with his own imagination — all the more so as the fragment is short. But the answer does not come in the register requested: it arrives as emotions. This passage is sad, that one joyful, that one vigorous — rather than "it is the story of X who meets Y". The instruction is given; the answer moves toward affect all the same.

**A reading already on record.** On 17 August 2026, in the gallery's reception log (window IDS-REC0001), a visitor states unprompted, without any rule having been disclosed: "artist — assumed cubism style rather than abstract." An abstract work brought back toward a regime he already knew.

This is where the proposition comes from. I wrote it from the emitter's place, where it meant that I do not produce diffraction. These cases shift it: the receiver does not produce it either.

Two reservations, before any research. I speak of abstraction; that is my ground, and nothing here establishes what would hold before a figurative work or a text. And the pictorial and musical devices are not comparable as they stand: before the canvas I impose no instruction, before the fragment I impose one. What I take for a difference of mode could be a difference of protocol.

## What the Series Has Already Established

P25 comes last in the first block, and part of what it claims was established before it.

My first note established that nothing travels: what persists from one modality to another is a relational content, executable more than once, not a displaced content <sup>[3]</sup>. It is what grounds the sense set at the head — diffraction cannot be a transport, since there is nothing to transport. It already put Ingarden to work, whom this note meets again. The double site it claims under reserve is not taken up here: the division between figure and nothing is not to be confused with it, and I do not use it.

My second note held that the unity of modes is instituted by a rule, not grounded in a common space, and that a mode is a ruled space, individuated by its rules and not by the sensory channel <sup>[4]</sup>. The asymmetry between eye and ear, which my third note holds to be an asymmetry of libraries, rests on that decision. It left standing an objection I meet again below.

My third note held that the receiver always executes a rule, and the least costly one available: the recognisable figure first, then colour, then memory, and failing all that, nothing <sup>[5]</sup>. It described the eye that looks for a face on the abstract canvas. Above all, it established that there is no zero case: no space where emitter and receiver are one without a rule — neither the inner voice, nor thought before its expression — and it reserved for this proposition the graded interval that follows, from living presence to the stranger.

My fourth note affirmed the emitter's sovereignty over the displacement of the idea: what belongs to him is the act of instituting this rule rather than another <sup>[6]</sup>. This note does not reopen it, and must take it into account: what is said below of arrival does not hold for institution.

My fifth note separated the existence of the instituted invariant from its success: the rule exists as soon as it is met, including by whoever renounces it <sup>[7]</sup>. The husband of 20 September met the rule; he did not enter its game.

None of this is re-examined. The question left to P25 is no longer whether something happens to the receiver, but what the status of what happens is.

## IV. Videtur quod — the thesis, sourced

**The figure comes from memory, without being produced.** Gombrich explicitly links the Rorschach inkblots to the ancient intuition of the image in the clouds: what we read into an accidental blot depends on our capacity to recognise in it what our mind holds in store, and to see a butterfly in a blot is to file it with the butterflies one has seen or dreamed of <sup>[8]</sup>. He reports a stronger experiment still: subjects asked to signal the appearance of a very faint light see it appear even when none is projected — their expectation completes on its own what is missing.

**One knows without being able to point.** Polanyi holds that a physiognomy is the meaning of its features, and that one can know it without being able to specify its particulars <sup>[9]</sup>. That is why "look... there" yields nothing: what she sees cannot be located, and pointing at it does not make it seen.

**The face or the strokes.** Wittgenstein describes exactly the division of 20 September: before one drawing, anyone will say "it's a face" and can say whether it smiles; before another, "this is nothing at all, just strokes" — and what at first seems mere strokes sometimes later appears as a face <sup>[10]</sup>. He adds that what is perceived in the dawning of an aspect is not a property of the object, but an internal relation between it and other objects <sup>[11]</sup>.

**The ear does not tell stories of itself.** There is wide agreement that instrumental music represents very little, apart from sounds it imitates, and that one can follow it without knowing what, if anything, it represents; its expressiveness comes first, and narrative derives from it only when a text or a drama is joined to it <sup>[12]</sup>. The narrative instruction is therefore not sovereign: it solicits a regime that the material is not enough to impose. And the affective response is not conducted: listeners automatically decode the acoustic attributes associated with emotion, and the knowledge that makes this possible is acquired involuntarily, through mere exposure <sup>[13]</sup>. Involuntary and acquired at once.

## V. Sed contra — the antithesis, sourced

**The aspect is subject to the will.** This is the hardest objection, and it comes from the most favourable witness. Wittgenstein holds that seeing an aspect, like imagining, is subject to the will: one can order "Now see the figure like this!", one cannot order "Now see this leaf green!" <sup>[11]</sup>. In his lectures he says it more sharply: aspects may change of themselves, but one can always change an aspect voluntarily <sup>[14]</sup>.

**Reception is an act.** Ingarden holds that the work is constituted as an aesthetic object only through acts of consciousness, and that it requires the intentional experience of a reader <sup>[15]</sup>. Iser describes the reader's role both as a textual structure and as a structured act <sup>[16]</sup>. Dewey goes further: to perceive, the beholder must create his own experience, and without an act of recreation the object is not perceived as a work <sup>[17]</sup>.

**The eye is educated.** Goodman: the innocent eye is blind, reception and interpretation do not come apart <sup>[18]</sup>. Prinz: more ignorant eyes are more inept, and without knowledge we systematically misperceive <sup>[19]</sup>. Studies reported by Hsu show that experts take more interest in abstract painting than novices do: what holds the eye shifts with training <sup>[20]</sup>.

**The smile would be in the canvas.** Carroll holds that aesthetic properties are objective, detected rather than projected <sup>[21]</sup>; contour theory holds that expressiveness belongs literally to the music <sup>[12]</sup>; and Wollheim, having granted that projection is at first blind to the features of what it invests, shows that it matures and comes to fit them <sup>[22]</sup>. If so, the woman detected something, and her husband missed it.

**The phenomenon, and its judgment.** Adorno, read by Goehr, describes the slope I call the least costly rule: we make works familiar by fitting them to what we already know — and he judges it regressive <sup>[23]</sup>.

I must record one fact before concluding. None of these witnesses holds reception to be a choice. The true antithesis is not in the library: it is in my own corpus, where diffraction is said to be induced, deliberate, designed, and where the artist's skill is measured by it. I take it up at the end of the answer.

## VI. Respondeo

Each objection rests on an equivocation, and it is by lifting it that the opposition ceases to be a contradiction.

**In one sense, yes: the receiver does something.** He completes, he organises, he draws from memory what the work does not supply. Ingarden said so in 1931: the reader fills the places of indeterminacy with details drawn from previously experienced aspects, and sometimes with determinations that do not agree with what the work fixes <sup>[15]</sup>. A face on rectangular planes is a determination of that kind.

**In another sense, no** — and three distinctions separate the two senses.

The first concerns the will. Wittgenstein's readers specify the scope of what he grants: it always makes sense to try to see an aspect, one does not always succeed, and one often does <sup>[24]</sup>; voluntary switching presupposes that both aspects have already been seen <sup>[25]</sup>. The will therefore solicits the aspect; it does not command it. When it comes, it comes; when it does not, no effort makes it come for certain. On 20 September he tried, she showed him the spot, and nothing came. She knew the codex, she had heard the canvas at the piano, and the face did not leave. The receiver stands before his own aspect as I stand before his reception: he can act on the conditions of the arrival; he does not have it at his disposal.

The second concerns the act. Ingarden's concretisation is an act in the phenomenological sense — an intending — not a decided action. Iser, who speaks of a structured act, also says of meaning that it is not an entity but something that happens <sup>[16]</sup>. The two vocabularies do not exclude each other: the act intends; the arrival is not decided.

The third concerns learning. The default is learned, and it shifts with training — my corpus knew this, naming each receiver's culture, training and history. But what has been learned is not deployed at the moment of reception; it runs. Gombrich grants that knowing corrects a mistake — the paper one took for a bird stops being one <sup>[8]</sup>. My viewer is mistaken about nothing: she does not believe a face was painted. Knowledge corrects an error; it does not extinguish an aspect. And Dewey, who served the antithesis, turns here: no amount of learning makes up for obtuseness in perception <sup>[17]</sup>.

**What arrives is not done.** It can have causes, depend on an activity, have been learned, and let itself be changed afterwards, without having been done. This means neither absence of activity nor absence of causality, but absence of sovereignty over the arrival. The emitter has at his disposal the institution of the rule and its execution; the receiver can solicit an aspect without commanding it. No one has at their disposal what happens in their encounter. The symmetry is local: each meets the same limit before the arrival, and their positions remain asymmetrical. This limit does not abolish responsibility: the emitter always answers for the conditions he institutes.

**What is universal.** Not that all receive the same thing: a couple, before the same canvas, in the same minute, refutes it. Nor that something always happens: that would be trivial, and no instrument could falsify it — my reception log records only diffraction stated, never diffraction that took place. What is universal is the absence of a zero case. It does not mean that a content always appears — the nothing of 20 September is one regime of it. It means that no reception is without an interval from the emission. From self to self already, my violet turns blue within a few days. The interval is graded, from living presence to the stranger, and nowhere is its zero point to be found.

**What the synthesis yields,** which neither thesis nor antithesis contained.

*First, disclosure closes the loop without reopening the first moment.* My third note held that free reception and access through the rule do not compete. 20 September shows more: they coexist after disclosure, not one after the other. The known rule displaced nothing.

*Second, nothing is a regime.* My third note placed nothing at the end of the cascade, where no library answers. The husband sees "just shapes" and judges all the same. It is a complete reception, without figure, arising in the encounter — and not a trait of the person.

*Third, the smile is not in the canvas.* What is perceived in the dawning of an aspect is an internal relation between the object and other objects <sup>[11]</sup>. The smile stands between the canvas and the faces her memory keeps. The objectivist objection looks in the surface for what is a relation.

*Fourth, the proposition governs the event, not the distribution.* What arrives in one receiver, no one commands. But the canvas conditions the proportion of those in whom a figure will arrive — this one offers some no figurative solution. That slope belongs to induced diffraction, and the question of its value to diffractability; I leave them to their propositions. The emitter institutes conditions, and the unmastered enters in what the rule touches, never in the rule <sup>[6]</sup>.

I had done everything — the rule, the codex, the piano. The face came without me.

## VII. Verdict

### Anticipated.

The statement holds, read under the three distinctions; it is not rewritten. Its core lies in Gombrich — the figure comes from what memory holds in store — and in Wittgenstein — the aspect is not a property of the object; that the will solicits it without commanding it, I owe to his readers. My third note adds an earlier internal acquisition — the absence of a zero case — which I record as debt, not as support for the verdict.

The sense of *diffraction* fixed at the head governs the statement: it is no longer read with the meaning the word has in Haraway.

## VIII. Debt

The diffraction pattern as the record of an interaction, opposed to the reflection of the same, is taken from Haraway <sup>[1]</sup> — from whom I explicitly depart, since I withdraw from diffraction the status of effort and practice she gives it. Projection and memory as the source of what is seen in an accidental blot are established by Gombrich <sup>[8]</sup>; the aspect as internal relation, its subjection to the will, and the division between face and mere strokes, by Wittgenstein <sup>[11]</sup> <sup>[10]</sup> <sup>[14]</sup>, with Glock's and Schroeder's clarifications on the scope of that will <sup>[24]</sup> <sup>[25]</sup>; the knowledge of a physiognomy without pointing to its features, by Polanyi <sup>[9]</sup>; concretisation and the filling of places of indeterminacy by Ingarden <sup>[15]</sup>, meaning as event by Iser <sup>[16]</sup>; the inseparability of reception and interpretation by Goodman <sup>[18]</sup>; the representational limits of instrumental music by Davies <sup>[12]</sup>. The absence of a zero case and the graded interval are established in my third note <sup>[5]</sup>.

## IX. What This Note Establishes in Its Own Right

*The will solicits without commanding*, and the receiver stands before his aspect as the emitter before reception: each can act on the conditions of the arrival; neither has it at their disposal.

*Sovereignty divides according to its object*: the emitter has at his disposal institution and execution; no one has the arrival at their disposal; responsibility for the conditions remains. I use this here without making it a vocabulary rule for the series.

*The first moment survives disclosure*: the rule known and heard does not displace what has come.

*Nothing is a complete regime*, and the division between figure and nothing arises in the encounter, not in the person.

*The departure from Haraway*: the series borrows the pattern, not the practice.

## X. Falsification Condition

The statement, taken literally, is not falsifiable: no instrument sees the diffraction that took place, only the one that is stated. The bounded thesis is.

It falls if effort suffices with no possible failure — if one can, on command, produce or abolish an aspect for certain. It falls a second time if disclosure of the rule extinguishes the aspect of the first moment. The degree is conceded: effort often succeeds. What is falsifiable is the threshold.

## XI. Remaining Objections

The contributions proper to this note rest on a single dated case. The reception log, which could have supplied others, does not record what was seen at first glance.

The dimensional relief left standing by my second note has not been examined here: polarised cross-sensory correspondences, which presuppose no common space but could orient what comes <sup>[26]</sup>. If it holds, it does not reach the thesis — a motivated default is no more done than a learned one — but it does reach the third distinction: the default would be not only acquired, but in part motivated. The gap on sound symbolism and motivated pairings, recorded since my third note, still prevents it from being examined at full strength.

The ground is that of abstraction, and eye and ear were questioned under different devices.

The regime of emotion at the first moment is unresolved; it belongs, with the internal storm already introduced, to the propositions on the alterity of reception and the multiplication of creation.

The Rorschach literature was read only through Gombrich; the categories that would bear directly on 20 September — popular responses, card rejection, colour responses — were not examined in their own right.

Threads carried forward. Toward induced diffraction: a canvas conditions the proportion of those in whom a figure arrives without commanding any case, and the emission designed to close reception remains its hardest case. Toward diffractability: only stated diffraction is observable, and its measure does not yet exist. Toward calibration: what holds the eye shifts with training.

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