

Introduction

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This issue of JoLMA proposes to examine the concepts of unframing and reframing from the interdisciplinary perspective of visual art, performance, and media studies, by following both a theoretical and a practice-based approach. As the contributions here collected demonstrate – starting with the conversation with Mieke Bal, which serves as a methodological framework for the entire issue – the entanglement of theory and practice becomes crucial when an attempt is made to introduce new epistemological standpoints.

Over the last two decades, the notion of the frame has been radically challenged in the visual, performing, and media arts, particularly as a consequence of the introduction of two mutually related concepts: ‘unframing’ and ‘reframing’. While the first refers to the gesture of ideally getting rid of any framing device, the second offers alternative ways to contextualise objects, acts, and images in time and space.

Yet, unframing and reframing should not be understood as opposite gestures but as a single, ongoing interpretative (visual) process which includes the gesture of ‘deframing’ (Ferrari, Pinotti 2018; Conte 2020). It also opens up new possibilities in artistic practice, as well as in aesthetic theory, media, performance and cultural studies, and art history (Bal 2002). This process reactivates and continuously changes the relationship both with the context in which an image, an object, an action, but also an idea or a story, are inserted,

and with time - a time that is no longer linear or hierarchical, as it leaves room for anachronisms and reenactments (Baldacci, Nicastro, Sforzini, 2022; Baldacci, Franco, 2022).

Especially in the contemporary mediascape of augmented, virtual, and mixed realities, as well as in the metaverse or in the context of pictures generated by or through artificial intelligence, the rapid pace of technological advancement has definitely undermined the traditional concept of the image as an artefact disclosing an 'unreal' dimension necessarily isolated from the real world of everyday life by virtue of some sort of framing device. De facto, in augmented reality (AR) and mixed reality (XR) our field of vision is superimposed with digital information so that the boundaries between flesh and blood, reality and the image world are blurred, while in virtual reality (VR) the experiencers find themselves surrounded by 360° visual content and immersed into a multisensorial dimension where the frame - according to most interpreters - would be gone and the two-dimensional limits dissolved (Iñárritu 2017).

As a consequence, 'unframedness' has been exploited as a form of propaganda to celebrate the ability of the most recent digital (un)realities to put ourselves in other people's shoes, encouraging greater empathy between individuals and, thus, inducing pro-social behaviour change (Milk 2015). Debunking the rhetoric underlying this narrative of 'total immersion' is an urgent task. It has already prompted scholars to ask themselves whether the gesture of unframing should be better understood as a new form of reframing rather than a radical act that implies getting rid of all frames.

For Mieke Bal, framing remains the core concept and action, with or without the 'un-' and 're-' prefixes. She is sceptical towards unframing, as she considers it an oppositional interpretative gesture in the context of cultural analysis. "Framing is giving sense and meaning to what we see or read. Unframing is reverting the complex artwork into chaos": This is how she brilliantly sets the tone of the discussion on framing and reframing in "Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice". The conversation provides her with the opportunity to look back at her analytically based art practice and her practice-based theoretical work by taking the operational concept of the frame, as well as the many actions it generates, as the crux of the matter. According to Bal, framing does many important things, among which subverting the traditional, linear, and chronological views of time; that is, bringing into question unilateral thinking. If framing is a first and fundamental act of interpretation, reframing does not mean repeating the same - doing it again - but instead it presupposes doing something differently - anew.

By employing analytical tools pioneered by Mieke Bal, such as the concept of reading and reframing, Margherita Fontana's "Reframing Second-Wave Feminism Through Fashion Industry and Augmented

Reality: Recent Trends in Judy Chicago's Work" focuses on two projects by Judy Chicago (Chicago, 1939), a leading figure in American feminist art. While emerging from the cultural milieu of second-wave feminism, these projects - *The Female Divine* (2020) and *Rainbow AR* (2020) - undergo a process of reframing when confronted with the visual and economic dynamics of the fashion industry on the one hand and new technologies on the other. From this perspective, they should be characterised as reenactments or rather *post-enactments*, this is how Fontana sees it. In this context, the notion of reframing serves as an essential tool for assessing the political significance of Chicago's work in the field of contemporary cultural phenomena.

There is another compelling contribution dedicated to the relationship between framing and new technologies. In "Framing Humans for AI" Gabriella Giannachi starts a conversation with ChatGPT and GPT-4 to investigate how artists have represented human-machine AI entanglements. More specifically, she discusses pioneering artworks (by Lynn Hershman Leeson, Mario Klingemann, Kate Crawford & Trevor Paglen, and Luca Viganò) to illustrate our presumptions about what AI does or even thinks and learns from us. And what happens when our 'self' must be framed to be machine-readable. Humans are both the source and outcome of the AI-human entanglements, and this occurs in a historical moment in which reality and fiction are no longer separable, and consciousness is no longer associated with the 'I' but rather localised outside of us and devolved to machines. By analysing specific artworks, Giannachi gives the reader the possibility to grasp some aspects of these machines, which - as she ironically suggests - were created "to defend us from the unknown". She also provides enthralling arguments to declare the dissolution of any frame between humans and AI.

Stefano Mudu's "Camille Henrot's 'Grosse Fatigue': The Frame as an Ordering Element of Hyper-Enactment", also addresses the complex history of the (co)evolution between humanity, new technologies, and the Universe through the ordering role that the frame plays in *Grosse Fatigue*, a "desktop documentary" presented by French artist Camille Henrot (Paris, 1978) at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013. This work uses words and images to build an accelerated, schizophrenic narrative that asks the viewers to immerse themselves in an emotionally all-encompassing audiovisual montage, with continuous references to mankind's relationship with history and knowledge. Mudu's article aims to demonstrate how the narrative effect is achieved thanks to the programmatic study of composition. The desktop digital frames are the *lieu* where the space of the work and the space of the spectator collide. Henrot manages them chaotically to show how the images of history participate in the process of a non-linear construction and reconstruction-construction causing an 'extreme fatigue' to the viewers, who are troubled when trying to

orient themselves. Mudu interprets *Grosse Fatigue* as an “hyper-enactment” to stress how pre-existing images/objects, which in Henrot’s work are here framed by the desktop, aggregate and produce new narratives precluding any attempt to retrace their references.

From the desktop the discussion moves on – or maybe backwards – to the sheet of paper, namely to printed matter. In “Framing the Unframed: ‘Avalanche’, an Art Magazine”, Tancredi Gusman explores another crucial space for the dissemination of knowledge, and in particular of contemporary art. “Avalanche”, the well-known avant-garde magazine published between 1970 and 1976 in New York, is chosen to discuss the challenging dimensions and idioms of art and its sites of production and dissemination from a historical perspective. Conceptual art has questioned the very possibility of defining the boundaries of an artwork and, therefore, has offered new ways of framing by setting the conditions of its circulation and reception. In other words, Gusman suggests that in the 1970s art and artists’ magazines – among which “Avalanche” had a pivotal role – became a necessary tool for framing and unframing artworks and art practices by expanding them in time and space. “Avalanche” was undoubtedly a site of construction, communication, and (re)mediation for the artworks it presented.

The last two contributions of the issue analyse the concept of framing by focusing on its aesthetic and art historical value.

Michele Di Monte chooses as leitmotif and title for his examination a rhetorical and captivating question. He asks himself and the reader is “The image in a Vat?” In doing so, he argues that by promising completely frameless virtual and fictional worlds, new digital technologies have renewed a classical issue of aesthetics and art history, namely the relationship between frames and artworks or images. With an analytical eye, Di Monte frames both the question of the frame and that of the image threshold, by digging into all possible cognitive, phenomenological, and ontological implications, and by taking the reader on a multi-layered interpretive journey.

Whereas, from another very interesting perspective, in “Differences Between Single and Sequential Pictorial Storytelling”, Hannah Fasnacht poses a distinct but also complementary question: What differentiates narration with sequential images from narration with single images? By confronting still and moving images, her paper examines their common usages in order to better understand the differences between them for visual narration. Her aim is to gain insight into the narration with sequential images as a specific two-dimensional pictorial narration.

As is made evident by the variety of perspectives and interpretations that this introduction only briefly presents, the debate around the complex notions of framing, reframing, and unframing is far from being over. And that is precisely the main purpose of the present is-

sue of JoLMA: to offer a meta-frame to the question of framing procedures, their agency, and the multifarious ways they impact upon the beholder.

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