

Lecture Sybille Krämer

It is generally assumed that a reference to surfaces marks a reduction and hence a loss for our thinking. But what would it mean to consider the opposite? What if cultural techniques of ‘flattening’ afford a potential without which scientific and artistic inquiry, architectural and technological practices, but also bureaucratic administrations would hardly be possible? Indeed, what cave painting and tattooing share with writing, diagrams, maps, formulas, computer screens, and smartphones is the productive use of illustrated and inscribed surfaces. What is the secret of this success? And what are the changes we are witnessing with the digitalization of artificial flatness?

Sybille Krämer was a professor of philosophy at Free University Berlin; since her retirement she has been a guest professor at the Institute of Cultures and Aesthetics of Digital Media (ICAM) at Leuphana University Lüneburg. She served as member of the German ‘Scientific Council’ (2000–06), the European Research Council (2007–14) as well as of the German Research Foundation (2009–15), and was a Permanent Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin/Institute for Advanced Study (2005–08). In 2016, she received an Honorary Doctorate of Linköping University, Sweden. Her research areas include mathematics and philosophy of the seventeenth century; social epistemology; philosophy of language and writing; performative studies, media and cultural techniques; digitality and history of computation; testimony and witnessing. Her publications in English include: *Media, Messenger, Transmission: An Approach to Media Philosophy* (2015); *Thinking with Diagrams: The Semiotic Basis of Human Cognition* (2016), co-edited with Ch. Ljungberg; and *Testimony/Bearing Witness: Epistemology, Ethics, History, Culture* (2017), co-edited with Sigrid Weigel.

This lecture is part of the ICI Lecture Series ‘Reduction’, which explores the critical potentials of notions and practices of ‘reduction’, within and across different fields and approaches. One of the most devastating charges levelled against theories, analyses, and descriptions is that of being reductive or of amounting to a full-blown reductionism. Conceptual frameworks are scolded for being impoverished and descriptions for being too sparse or flat. And conversely, to call something ‘irreducible’ seems to confer an immediate and indisputable dignity to it. And yet the history of science and knowledge cannot be told without acknowledging the importance of reductionist programmes; reductive paradigms have periodically revitalized the arts. What lies at the root of such different attitudes towards ‘reduction’? Can one embrace forms of reduction that are not in the service of production, allowing for the possibility of a ‘less’ that would no longer have to amount to ‘more’?

Flatness Aesthetics and Epistemology