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*One does not look at rain, one is in rain. The tangibly detectable effect of rain is more difficult: the wet landscape or the drenched child is not a direct index for 'rain'. To this we must add that rain is far more difficult to depict in technical-visual terms: rain cannot be rendered accurately, as it occurs in nature. One is forced to rely on lines for the effect of a deluge, or on atmospheric watercolours for damp mist. This dichotomy – graphic versus pictorial – makes rain a medium-subject par excellence. In this article, I treat three pivotal moments in the visual history of rain as a medium, namely the medium of moisture in the work of William Turner (1775-1851), Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946), Agnes Martin (1912-2004) and Woody Allen (°1935). "Across natural-cultural times and tales, rain, never still, relates this uncomfortable message clearly distilled: that exposure is our greatest risk and greatest potential at once. To listen to the rain is to hear the stories that rain tells, literary re-marks that reflect the physical marks the rains made on flesh and page, raindrops sprinkled on skin (L. Ducker, For All Waters)."*

One does not look *at* rain, one is *in* rain. There is no rain-on-canvas, and the same paradox holds for wind. But there is even more here. Wind allows itself to be captured pictorially by its impact: trees rustle, hair blows, the seams of clothing waft about. In figurative art, in which ultimate mimesis is not the objective, wind is recognizable through these secondary effects and affects within the pictorial space. The tangibly detectable effect of rain is more difficult: the wet landscape or the drenched child is not a direct index for 'rain'. To this we must add that rain is far more difficult to depict in technical-visual terms: rain cannot be rendered accurately, as it occurs in nature. One is forced to rely on lines for the effect of a deluge, or on atmospheric watercolours for damp mist. This dichotomy – graphic versus pictorial – makes rain a medium-subject *par excellence*<sup>1</sup>. In this article, I treat three pivotal moments in the visual history of rain as a medium, namely the medium of *moisture* in the work of William Turner (1775-1851), Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946), Agnes Martin (1912-2004) and Woody Allen (°1935). Or as Lowell Ducker writes in "For All Waters": «Rain says that we are always-already environmentally enmeshed – always in our element of water – and that there is both distress and delight to be had with a showering world. Across natural-cultural times and tales, rain, never still, relates this uncomfortable message clearly distilled: that exposure is our greatest risk and greatest potential at once. To listen to the rain is to hear the stories that rain tells, literary "re-marks" that reflect the physical marks the rains made on flesh and page, raindrops sprinkled on skin»<sup>2</sup>.

## William Turner

«One word is sufficient to establish what is the greatest difficulty of the painters' art: to produce wavy air, as some call the wind [...] To give that wind he must give the cause as well as the effect [...] with mechanical hints of the strength of nature perpetually trammelled with mechanical shackles» (William Turner in a notebook of about 1808)<sup>3</sup>.

William Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed: The Great Western Railway* was exhibited for the first time at the Royal Academy in 1844 (now London, National Gallery) (fig. 1). Not only is the painting of interest because of its evidence of the early railway years in Britain; the work also interests me when it comes to its innovative imagery: an *emulatio* on the *sfumato*, with an atmospheric obsession for the fluid, for steam and mist<sup>4</sup>. In 1988, Gerald Finly writes about Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed*: «it remains a particularly interesting work, though it is difficult to understand and appreciate»<sup>5</sup>. Jack Lindsay sees how in *Rain, Steam and Speed*, the forward rush of the engine is expressed by making the engine darker in tone and sharper in edge than any other object, so that it shoots out in aerial perspective ahead of its place in linear perspective. «This mingling or superimposition of different moments» gives Turner's painting its disturbing formal character, as Lindsay thinks: «a direction in time as well as a pattern of tensional movements in space»<sup>6</sup>.

What do we see? In the middle, there is a black locomotive that dominates the composition in a threatening manner. On the left, the viewer can discern a bridge shrouded in mist. This creates a contrast between the world of the industrial revolution, blackened by pollution, and the rainy, older world of the aqueduct, which delicately fades away in the steam of the train. The present and the past. Dynamic and stable. Speed and steadfastness. A dangerous black flash in the landscape enshrouded with a veil, of which we are not sure if it will ever lift, or if it is the ill tidings for a world that has now changed irrevocably. Here, the locomotive screeches and tears apart the present and the past<sup>7</sup>.

Instead of the iconographic approach, I would like to use a study by Antonio Somaini to reflect on atmosphere and medium, on mist and canvas, on the impenetrable and the diaphanous, on haze and screen<sup>8</sup>. What is a screen? Is it that which separates in a space: a divider? Or is it an optical device, a definition that gained popularity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>9</sup>? Francesco Casetti writes:

Screens are not only optical devices. Since the 15<sup>th</sup> century the English word *screen*, as well as the French *écran*, the Italian *schermo*, the German *Schirm*, have denoted objects that perform functions other than supporting a projected representation. A screen was a contrivance for warding off the heat of a fire or a draft of air, a partition of wood or stone dividing a room or a building into parts, a wall thrown out in front of a building to mask the façade, a tactical

deployment of soldiers to conceal the movement of an army, an apparatus used in the sifting of grain and coal. It was a filter, a divide, a shelter, a camouflage. These functions underscored not so much the optical qualities of a screen but rather its environmental character—its nature as a prop to be used within and towards a space.<sup>10</sup>

Screens are historical membranes of cultural technical concepts such as filters, grids, and sieves<sup>11</sup>. It refers fundamentally to the principle of τάξις (*táxis*: Greek for order, position, rank) that uses the grid pattern as denotation of (empty) space to be «filled» or «fixated»<sup>12</sup>. Indeed, the grid is a technique or visual format for the paradoxical notion of «presence-absence-space»<sup>13</sup>. «Between the sixteenth and eighteenth century, grid-shaped control becomes the universal practice that constitutes the basis of modern disciplinary societies»<sup>14</sup>. «In other words, it presupposes the ability to write absence, that is, to deal equally efficiently with both occupied and empty spaces. This concept of place is thus inextricably tied to the notion of order. In return, it is impossible to conceive of this modern concept of order without a new understanding of place»<sup>15</sup>. In his *The Marvellous Clouds. Towards a Philosophy of Elemental Media*, John Durham Peters writes: «the concept of media [...] was connected to nature long before it was connected to technology [...]. Medium has always meant an element, an environment, a vehicle in the middle of things»<sup>16</sup>. If we want to understand the spatial, environmental dimension of contemporary media, Peters writes, we need to revisit «the older, environmental meaning of medium» and the «elemental legacy of the media concept»<sup>17</sup>.

I want to reflect on new methodical developments to intimately interweave artistic expression with the perception of the environment, to understand art as a “screen” where the environment leaks through. Can we view Turner with fresh eyes through this analogue approach, especially his rather “steamy” work? Is this new landscape painting style by Turner a *mise en abyme*, a *Metabild* of what the medium plus screen is capable of, in a time where straight iron tracks split through the naturally sloping English countryside?<sup>18</sup>

I will once again quote Somaini:

[...] Turner himself revolutionized the tradition of landscape painting. It is in this period that we find some of the most interesting occurrences of the idea of the medium as a sensible, atmospheric environment, one that is characterized by the presence of natural screening and veiling entities such as clouds, fog, and mist. And it is in this same period, in the late paintings of Turner, that the canvas – rather than being treated as a flat, opaque surface or as an open, transparent window – becomes something different: an *atmospheric screen* capable of capturing and visualizing the turbulent fusion of the atmospheric elements and of leading the spectator right in the midst of it, abolishing any clear-cut separation between seer and seen and becoming itself, one might say, a part of the atmosphere<sup>19</sup>.

In *Rain, Steam and Speed: The Great Western Railway* the figurative fading away dominates the painting, the boundary of abstraction is looming, a fog of paint that is responsible for the ruthlessly rejected contour. Not a crisp line, but the lightness of helium and the stench of ether<sup>20</sup>. The viewer is irrevocably swaddled in these wet silk textiles: «[...] representations not so properly of the objects of nature as of the medium through which they are seen. They are the triumph of the knowledge of the artist, and of the power of the pencil over the barrenness of the subject»<sup>21</sup>. Turner befalls us<sup>22</sup>. This maze of steam which we cannot escape, the locomotive dangerously, screechingly close. Were it not for the train, we could be in Arcadia, in Giorgione's (ca. 1477-1510) *Tempestà* (1506-1508) (fig. 2). Perhaps in paradise, or even further back: that which was there on the seventh day, when God looked upon his work and rested. But the locomotive tears through our desire for the origin. Turner doesn't want a sweet reverie about the bucolic painterly arts in its origin *pur sang*. He wants more, as soft as his colors are, he wants the daring confrontation with the «absorption in the intrinsic character of paint»<sup>23</sup>.

Turner rains appear suddenly; not a single viewer has an umbrella that can hold up to these watercolors. The wet canvas also swells under this liquefaction of looking and apocalyptic fading figures into «nothingness»<sup>24</sup>. Robert Rosenblum talks about the sublime of a *paint-theism*: Turner's belief in the possibility of conveying «supernatural experiences [...] through the medium of paint alone»<sup>25</sup>. «Turner presents nature as a "cosmic force-field", the site of a tragic struggle among elements and forces that manifests itself in a variety of phenomena characterized by a constant «dissolution and creation of forms». With their mutability and fleetingness, waves, rain, smoke, mist, and clouds are signs of the powers of an «eternally changing matter», and the "formative processes" of evaporation and condensation, accumulation and flow reveal «the transitory nature of the natural world»<sup>26</sup>. Turner's cosmic force-field comes close to the philosophical paradigm of the *Gefühlsraum*. With this «feelings space», Hermann Schmitz means the philosophical locus of emotions, as they stretch between the subject and the world, between the artist/ beholder and the painting<sup>27</sup>. In his work *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces*, Tonino Griffero defines this atmospheric space of *Stimmung* as a «faint shiver», a power that surprises, a *mysterium tremendum*, a space that becomes place, a *quasi-cosa*<sup>28</sup>.

With Turner, William Butler Yeats' (1865-1939) *The Second Coming* (1919) applies: «Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold»<sup>29</sup>. The medium is deconstructed along with the canvas, dissolved: there is nothing to hold it anymore, there is simply atmospheric vanity. Who can handle such an ethereal viewing? Who dares to lose themselves in this absolute abyss of the pictorial *Gefühlsraum*<sup>30</sup>?

Francisco de Goya's (1746-1828) dog on the black abyss<sup>31</sup>. There where the primal fear crawls up your throat: the *démon de midi*. Goya, deaf by then, knows this demon, and like Turner, knows where it can be found: in the opaque emptiness. Soon, Pan will appear from the thick, lustful, treachery background. The danger of the *demon de midi* has arrived. The turning point in the cosmic time can be found in the gaping depths of the eyes of Goya's dog and in Turner's locomotive. Nobody barks. This silence, built upon millennia, ever since hands reached up hopefully to the rain gods, now puts down its haze. The dust has settled. And for a moment, there is nothing: no space, not even time. The confounding Acedia of the midday hour warns us to be cautious<sup>32</sup>. Turner just saw her. Dipping his brush in the circles of water, now careful and pulling away at the crucial moment with a lonely, calm stroke of the hand.

It is done. Now we fall out of time. Straight into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Alfred Stieglitz

With a mixture of bitterness and yearning, Alfred Stieglitz wrote to Sherwood Anderson in December 1925 describing the gallery he had just opened in a small room in New York City. The Intimate Gallery, as he called it, was to be devoted to the work of a select group of contemporary American artists. And although it was a mere 20 by 26 feet, he discussed the space as if it were enormous—perhaps limitless: There is no artiness—Just a throbbing pulsating [...] I told a dealer who seemed surprised that I should be making this new «experiment» – I had no choice—that there were things called fish and things called birds. That fish seemed happiest in water, and the birds seemed happy in the air. [...] In this gallery] I have decided to give birds a chance—will create an atmosphere for birds that fly lighter than sparrows [...] for artists who are] free souls<sup>33</sup>.

In this case I will focus on the medium of photography in its earliest form, by Alfred Stieglitz. As the owner of several avant-garde galleries in New York and editor of *Camera Work* (1903-1917), Georgia O'Keeffe's (1887-1986) husband built an innovative oeuvre that medially connected photography to the then emerging abstract painterly arts, which would later become American Abstract Expressionism. «That pursuit of freedom within the photographic frame of subject matter and aesthetics remains Stieglitz's hallmark and his legacy for American art, taking him so far beyond what others had»<sup>34</sup>. The *paragone* between the contemporary painterly arts and the possibilities of the photographic process (Stieglitz worked with gelatin silver prints) was based on the challenge that we have been discussing: clouds and rain, for example in *Songs of the Sky — No. III* (1923) (fig. 3) and in *Rain Drops* (1927) (fig. 4). Judy Annear writes: «Though Stieglitz's signature photographic view of the world was generally straight across, he looked up to photograph clouds and people or trees framed by the skies in a

dynamic relationship. And in 1927 he also looked toward the ground with a print that captured the rain on the grass at Lake George»<sup>35</sup>.

Stieglitz began to fanatically photograph clouds with his 4-by-5-inch camera starting in 1922, often in the Lake George area. Up until 1931, he made over 400 prints. Because up there is where one finds interesting photographic lighting: there, the cosmos sings with all its might. *Songs of the Sky* captures the essence of what photography can do: freeze moments in time. Capture what cannot be captured. Silver wind, chemical light, weightlessness from a small, ergonomic piece of equipment. Clouds made visible there where they become the subject between an iconography from the past and the newest technological possibilities. And with this relatively young medium, Stieglitz will carefully brush up against the first abstract paintings of his era.

There is an undoubted esoteric aspect, quite apart from the bare bones of chance, to each step of the way in Stieglitz's photography of clouds: from which day to go out and photograph, to what kind of weather, what he thought and felt when he developed the negatives and then the prints, and, finally, how he grouped them and how people he showed them to reacted. Stieglitz initially saw his cloud photographs as having a distinct relationship to music. But from 1925 onward he simply called them Equivalents, and they are in certain ways miraculous because they have an unusual intimacy and warmth that unfold generously on close viewing. The limpid blacks, luxurious grays, glossy tones, and intense detail bring one close in order to experience what he understood to be the density and shape of feeling within the frame<sup>36</sup>.

*Rain Drops*, from 1927 is possibly even more sublime. A relatively small print of blades of grass buckling under the weight of their sparkling rain drops. The subtly purified graphics, of lines of light reflected, durable scratches in a plate contrasting the most ephemeral thing possible - rain -, in a medium that only uses shades of grey, makes this photo print, shall we say, this grisaille, a paradigm. Stieglitz himself names this paradigm *Equivalent*: ultimate equality between mimesis and technique, between graphics and shutter speeds, and this all in light of a new «horizonlessness». «The latent capacity inherent in Stieglitz's horizonless cloud photographs to be hung or viewed differently from the way they were first exhibited not only undermines the notion of an "original", stable position, but in so doing, also transforms these pictures from merely static images of clouds into dynamic cloud-images capable of drifting in several directions at once. There is no single "right" way of viewing or relating to these cloud-images, for every possible orientation is haunted by a plurality of other potential perspectives, which do not allow any one position to be privileged above the rest»<sup>37</sup>.

Michael Powers calls this equivalence *Wolkenwandelbarkeit* after Walter Benjamin's (1892-1940) concept of the medium as *Reflexion der Phantasie*, which uses speech and color<sup>38</sup>. Powers points out how much Stieglitz' photographs represent a

break from traditional landscape paintings and photography, where the connection between the earth and the sky through a horizon are dogmatically a part of every composition<sup>39</sup>. This norm of horizons vanishes with Stieglitz. There is nothing to help you calibrate. You could very well hang the photograph upside-down. Second of all, Stieglitz no longer strives for «the effect of transparent immediacy»<sup>40</sup>.

Stieglitz, with this pictorialist picture, makes its artificiality, its constructedness, into part of the image, as the photographic gaze begins to cloud over. The mechanical sharpness of the photographic apparatus, with its promise of transparent perception, is replaced by an aestheticizing gaze. [...] Whereas composite landscape photographers typically aimed to represent accurately what they saw, to portray nature both as it truly is and in the form that it is naturally perceived in (from the perspective of grounded subjects looking out onto external objects), pictorialists began to unsettle the conventions of such perception and representation by bringing the distant clouds so close that they fog over the photographic gaze. Objective reality, pictorialist photographs suggest, is a murky projection of the subject's gaze, a construction filtered through an embodied observer who is anything but transparent<sup>41</sup>.

This brings us back to that other pictorialist: Turner. At least as opaque that it becomes the carrier and overrules the canvas. It is a haze that stretches in front of the camera lens. Stieglitz the photographer, who as painter makes the most dangerous of switches: he who crosses the black river Styx to the land with no more color. Coincidence or not, an early work from 1902 actually features a locomotive that rushes towards the viewer from the depths, titled *The Hand of Man*, uses this Turner-esque *emulatio* (fig. 5). The crossing over started then. The hand of one man and humanity as a whole. Humanity that mastered industry and the progress of technology. But also the hand of the individual photographer, lastly, who challenges the impossible, the *acheiropoietai* – that-which-was-not-made-by-human-hands. The danger during that crossing over is in looking back. Whoever does that will tumble down into the cool colorless mists of the image for eternity. Look out! Stay on the edge. Be like Goya's dog! There, at the furthest point!

Is that Benjamin's aura, at last? «Was ist eigentlich Aura? Ein sonderbares Gespinst von Raum und Zeit: einmalige Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah sie sein mag. An einem Sommermittag ruhend einem Gebirgszug am Horizont oder einem Zweig folgen, der seinen Schatten auf den Betrachter wirft, bis der Augenblick oder die Stunde Teil an ihrer Erscheinung hat—das heißt die Aura dieser Berge, dieses Zweiges atmen. (2.1: 378)»<sup>42</sup>.

*Agnes Martin*

Canadian painter Agnes Martin (Vancouver) studied at different universities in the United States. In 1942, she graduated with a bachelor's degree in teaching



at Columbia University in New York. She became a Master of Arts at the same university in 1950. She would alternate periods of living in New York with her great love of New Mexico (Taos), close to the ancient cloud and rain gods<sup>43</sup>. Her career as a painter reaches an important turning point in 1957, when she gains the support of New York gallery owner Betty Parson (1900-1982). A second turning point takes place in 1973 with a new series of screen-prints, including a series called *On a Clear Day*.

Martin is part of the generation of the Post-War Abstract Expressionism along with the famous Mark Rothko (1903-1970). Martin herself said about her work: «My paintings are not about what is seen. They are about what is known forever in the mind»<sup>44</sup>. Here she suggests that her colorflat paintings, her characteristic pastel stripes (fig. 6) and her fragile “grids” (fig. 7) sought abstraction with an eye on the great archetypal emotions of humanity on the one hand (love, pain, death), and a temporal continuum that is guaranteed within the pictorial space on the other. Each work should delve the deepest out of the psyche and at the same time stretch endlessly. There is no frame.

One of the things that fascinates me about her paintings is the way they leap from the wall. Their tautness and freshness are what life gives us, here bounded by the square. Martin is compelled to make adjustments, so that she can say, «I am trying to break down the power of the square, or I am trying to straighten out the veins of a leaf.» Her need to modify is so great that it leads to an abundance of rich elements and discoveries. The linen itself abounds. Ideas, already suggestive, are energized, and yet there is a calming effect as form is brought to chaos. Her work is original in a number of ways. How a grid of lines can be called Grass. How the emotion is more important than the idea. How the space is real yet genuinely ambiguous and charged. A formal balance is demanded, which separates painting from «just line» in the most honest, egoless manner (Richard Tuttle)<sup>45</sup>.

Agnes Martin also has a large number of paintings in shades of grey that she gave atmospheric titles, such as *This Rain* (1958) (fig. 8) and *Desert Rain* (1957) (fig. 9). How can we understand this work? These subtle color mists against her steel blue grids? The canvas that evaporates? The grid that melts away? Again, we have Yeats: «Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold»<sup>46</sup>.

Martin paints rain in possibly one of the most difficult colors on the painter's palette: gray. Gray is more of a tone than a color; grey is the last thing before the canvas becomes diaphanous. Gray is usually associated with gloom (a gloomy, rainy day). Gray is also the color of the *paragone*: the painterly arts as *grisaille* and this a trap for the third dimension and the black-and-white of photography. According to Georges Didi-Huberman *grisaille*-gray is the medium of the *Zwischenraum*. The embodiment of the threshold that guarantees distance (*Distanzierung*) between the sarcophagus and Dionysus, between death and pleasure.

«Mais on comprend aussi que ces incarnations demeurent toujours à mi-distance de la chair et de l'air, du souffle et de la pierre. [...] c'est dans la teinte des cendres et des sarcophages que l'énergie, que la vie dionysiaques s'expriment le mieux (c'est dans les coloris du deuil que le désir passe le mieux: paradoxe, en effet); c'est dans la distanciation – donc la dénaturalisation – des couleurs que la peinture humaniste accède aux nouvelles formes du naturalisme»<sup>47</sup>.

Gray in all its hardness scales is also Martin's graphite pencil, with which she «draw-paints» the rain. Frances Guerin even dedicated a separate study to Martin's graphite greys<sup>48</sup>.

Graphite is a medium so perfectly suited to the weft and warp of the canvas because it is contradictory: it is both tactile and awaiting erasure. This simultaneous presence and promise of absence, achieved through graphite or lead pencil can be thought of as a repetition —albeit with difference— of the canvas itself, which is, in turn, a material that has the sole purpose of being concealed. The graphite anticipates erasure, the canvas awaits its own invisibility. Martin draws with a pencil as a way of merging the weave of the canvas, the background wash, and the pencil. In grey, the distinction between graphite and paint, canvas and its concealment, is not simply blurred. In grey bands and color fields, paint takes over the role of graphite; the two become merged<sup>49</sup>. As we stand before Martin's paintings, there's no telling what we are looking at: Is it the ground or the color? Is it line or form? [...] They can even be placed in the vast infinity of the New Mexico desert, where she lived an ascetic existence for most of her working life. The correspondence to nature and the inconceivable expanse of its possibility are central to her canvases. [...] For her, this goal is what her own paintings are about<sup>50</sup>.

Within the broad movement of abstract expressionism, Marin managed to keep her own distinct identity through the unique ambiguity between paint, ink, pencil, and canvas on the one hand, and her relevant references to natural and atmospheric environment factors on the other. When it comes to the former: «the determined and unrelenting use of the graphite lines is still the compositional definition of the grey paintings. Or is it that the graphite has been transformed into painted grey bands? If so, line and form are one and the same thing»<sup>51</sup>. And concerning the latter: a central theme in the expanse of her rain fog and deserts is the isolation and desolation<sup>52</sup>. Possibly this references Martin's carefully guarded hermit's life in the mud house in Taos. Possibly, it references a new, and in her work underestimated contribution to conceptual art, and with all her grey tones, she is announcing the end of modernism.

Her work has a continual sense of coming closer without ever arriving<sup>53</sup>.

Agnes Martin's canvases do not wish to be articulated. Like desert sand, they have to quickly escape (the canvas acting like a sieve, like skin-ego). Like rain, they have to reach the closest possible moment right before the transparent, before invisibility. There where the boundary of visual escape is tenderly found

in each stroke and line and color and graphite pencil. Is what remains then contemplation? No, there's too much ratio. What remains is the point where Echo disappears: *vox clamante in deserto*. Martin has to paint a lot, a lot of the same, a lot of repetition, a lot of grey, a lot of silence, a lot of desert, a lot of mud house. Because that much and more is necessary for the male and western dismantling of that one destructive disaster of the arts: the catastrophe named «Narcissus».

### Woody Allen

In this last chapter, I will explore the role of rain in the movies by Woody Allen<sup>54</sup>. It is well known that the director-actor enjoys it: «I like a warm overcast feeling. I like rain». And «He has always loved Paris, especially in the rain»<sup>55</sup> is the opening sentence of *Midnight in Paris* (2011).

In her *Cinema as Weather*, Kristi McKim writes:

Very simply, rain makes characters *do* something, whether ending and opening an umbrella, seeking shelter, or passionately refusing shelter. In many examples, rain manifests otherwise latent desire; the sound and image of rain accelerate the pacing and intensify the sensation of the scene. No matter the degree to which a film “makes” its rain or rejoices in atmospheric serendipity, cinematic rain actively reveals the force of gravity (water, produced by studio or atmosphere, *falls*, after all), the direction of wind, the hint of temperature, the *sound* of falling, and the transparency of water<sup>56</sup>.

«Woody Allen also connects the long tradition of rain symbolism with its connection to the spectrum of fear, association, *paragone*, intimacy, dance and singing, with the cinematographic medium in the spirit of Ingmar Bergman's (1918-2007) disregard for sun»<sup>57</sup>. In this medium, the rain shakes off its static and soundless code, and achieves the ultimate mimesis and also its essence: the sonorous experience.

In an interview with Stig Björkman (°1938, Swedish author and film critic), Woody Allen responds to the question «You have used rain in very significant situations in many of your films. Do you like rain and rainy weather yourself?» with an exclamatory «I love rain!» Echoing Capra's *[infra]* description of rain as an aphrodisiac, Allen claims that rain: «gives [him] a feeling of intimacy. People are confined to their households. They seek shelter. They succour inside their houses.

They run from the outside to the inside to protect themselves. They go inward and move inward». Many of his films feature some kind of haven from the rain<sup>58</sup>.

Frank Capra (1897-1991), one of the most important American directors of the 1930s and 1940s, described his love of rain as such in an interview:

There's always a great deal of *rain* and snow in your big scenes. Why? C: *Rain*, of course, I can tell you, is for me an *aphrodisiac*. I go out in the *rain* and I get icicles. And I love the mood rain brings. Now what do you do in these damn films? You can make them bare, you can take the scenery out, you can make them on a stage where people just stand still and talk to each other. One thing that I always thought was that the weather should be part of the world stage. The winds, the rain, the snow, the cold, the heat. So it's a part of the stage as far as I'm concerned<sup>59</sup>.

In Woody Allen's films, it is often the case that rain, storms, lightning, or other extraordinary weather takes the protagonists by surprise and drives them to seek shelter somewhere that offers interesting scenographic possibilities. The effect of the rain is usually so drastic, that it brings about a tipping point for the characters or the scene. During or right after the rain, a deeper insight is revealed, or a suppressed intuition is materialized. This "lightning bolt" is comparable to an epiphany, an experience *ex gratia* of higher insight.

Even in the present day, the Greek language has a specific term/God for quickly seizing the right moment: *Kairos*<sup>60</sup>. I will take a moment to explain this term, before returning to Woody Allen's cinematographic rain.

The ancient Greeks had a special name for the concept of the joy as well as the sorrow of an occasion that suddenly presents itself, but just as swiftly disappears: *Kairos*. Homer's *Iliad* teaches us that the Greek word *kairós* meant a vulnerable part of the body. In this sense the word is closely related to the Homeric *kairion*: the part of the body that can most effectively be «hit», the spot where «life is in greatest danger (*Iliad* 8.48): the point where Hector's stone hits Teukros: «the collarbone that is the boundary between neck and chest» (*Iliad* 8.326)<sup>61</sup>. *Kairós* is the right place, the «target». Linguistic studies show that this oldest meaning is part of a complex of related words in Greek, including: «*kèr*», death; «*keráizein*», to plunder, to slaughter; «*kèr*», heart; «*kèrainein*», to be worried or frightened; «*keiein*», to cleave; «*keirein*», to cut<sup>62</sup>. All these words contain an inner meaning to separate or divide, an act of splitting in order to kill sacrificially.

*Kairos* makes an opening, an opening that symbolizes «opportunity», like the loophole or the flight forwards. Secondly, we can notice the relationship with the word *kairos* in the terminology of weaving, or the technical term for the shed bar (fig. 10)<sup>63</sup>. In weaving, the shed is the temporary separation between upper and lower warp yarns through which the weft is woven. The shed is created to make it easy to interlace the weft into the warp and thus create woven fabric. The connection between an opening, and thus the opportunity to create, and humankind's fate has remained archetypically connected with the act of weaving<sup>64</sup>.

Thirdly, *kairós*, still following Homer, can refer to a junction in time. An intersection so perfectly balanced, that it provides the only possible «occasion» (fig. 11). The time is "fit" for intervention, the moment is marked; the time is ripe.

In Sophocles' *Electra*, the protagonist, Orestes, returns from Athens to avenge his father's death upon Aegisthus and his own mother Clytemnestra. This is the moment of intersection: time is so condensed that Kairos dictates the pace. Orestes says: «There is no room for a moment's delay. This is the moment (Kairos is here!) and determines my deeds (vs. 75-76)»<sup>65</sup>.

Back to Woody Allen.

In other cases, rain in his films is literally the decor or the sensuous environment of eroticism and sex, like the all-consuming sex-scene in *Matchpoint* (2005) that takes place outdoors between Chris Wilton (Jonathan Rhys Meyers) and Nola Rice (Scarlett Johansson) (fig. 12). (However, if eroticism and sexuality in Allen's films are a central topic, it would be remiss of me to not mention the sexual abuse allegations against him).

This forbidden lust, where overwhelming attraction between the two of them becomes clear, seals their fate. They have grasped their «kairotic» moment, but the path their lives will take from then on is destructive. «Rain, for Allen, fulfills corresponding roles in the world and in cinema, insofar as rain forces people and characters to "go inward and move inward", spatially and emotionally aligning private shelter with subjective interiority»<sup>66</sup>.

In *Husbands and Wives* (1992) Judy (Mia Farrow) and her colleague Michael (Liam Neeson) sit down on a bench to eat lunch together<sup>67</sup>. She recently set Michael up with her divorced, neurotic friend Sally (Judy Davis). Judy and Michael are caught by surprise by the rain and hurry back to the office shaking with laughter (fig. 13). The intimacy of that moment leads to a unique frank conversation. Rain has washed away the decorum; they no longer look very tidy, but embarrassingly rumpled; Judy's make-up is running, etcetera. The "right moment" has arrived for Judy and Michael, but is not reciprocated. Michael only sees Judy as a friend and admits to her, even thanks her, that he has fallen in love with Sally. Judy, in turn, also experienced her own "moment of insight in the rain", that she has been suppressing her love for Michael all this time. The result is a painful humiliation for Judy, which she managed to hide from Michael. But the audience sees how she is shocked and hurt as she hurries away.

In *Manhattan* (1979) there is a similar tipping point in the love life of the characters. Mary (Diane Keaton) and Isaac (Woody Allen), who both just left unhappy relationships, enjoy an afternoon in Central Park, when, all of a sudden, a thunderstorm erupts overhead. They take shelter in the nearby Hayden Planetarium and for the first time see each other in an unflattering state, so in their pure, even "naked" state, you could say (fig. 14)<sup>68</sup>. The camera follows the pair between scenographic planets, which grants the black-and-white film a

flair of magic realism. There, in this planetary surreal world, they leave their masks behind, and once again there is a whispered, open-hearted dialogue about their desires and frustrations in life. Later, Isaac would tell her: «You were so sexy in the rain and I had a mad impulse to throw you down on the lunar surface and commit interstellar perversion with you».

And finally, a very subtle application of the cinematographic rain iconography can be found in *Another Woman* (1988). The recently turned fifty philosophy professor Marion Post (Gena Rowlands) is enjoying her sabbatical and working on a new book project<sup>69</sup>. She retreats to a rental flat, where she learns that isolating herself does not seem to help her write more, but that it does stimulate self-reflection. This will lead to a crisis and eventually to catharsis. Marion realizes that she has been living a life that was possibly too cerebral, and that she accidentally seems heartless to those around her. But even worse, she has hurt two men. First by rejecting the sensitive and gifted Larry Lewis (Gene Hackman) and marrying the cold, unfaithful cardiologist Ken (Ian Holm). And before that, as a brilliant doctoral student, she had a relationship with her supervisor, an older man named Sam (Philip Bosco), who she broke up with when she found out she was pregnant. She then had an abortion to protect her career. Two times, she did not give herself up to passion, but instead chose to listen to reason<sup>70</sup>. The quote «If someone had asked me when I reached my fifties to assess my life, I would have said that I had achieved a decent measure of fulfilment, both personally and professionally. Beyond that, I would say I don't choose to delve», sums up Marion.

The reason for Marion's continuing insight and her descent into the suppressed, more sensitive "self", is the voice of the depressed "other woman" (Mia Farrow) (her metaphoric alter-ego). She hears this voice come through the ventilation shaft in the wall of the adjacent room of her apartment. In the room next door there is a psychiatrist's office. She tries to muffle the voices with pillows, but it does not work. Marion's apartment keeps passing on voices as though in the «psycho-spatial room». This room reflects Marion's internal crisis and search, and she cannot drown out how the "self" speaks to her. Later, Marion will meet the pregnant woman who was the mystery voice by chance – listed as Hope during the credits – and she will have a liberating conversation with her. When they have a drink together in a pub, it is exactly then, with the "voice of Hope", that Marion catches the cardiologist on a date with one of their mutual friends. This is one of the last phases in the unmasking of her own life. The consequences of her actions and decisions are made painfully clear. In that conversation, Marion says the following: «Fifty. I didn't think anything turning thirty. Everybody said I would. Then they said I'd be crushed turning forty, but they were wrong. I didn't give it a

second's thought. Then they said that I'd be traumatized when I hit fifty, and they were right. I'll tell you the truth, I don't think I've ever recovered my balance since turning fifty».

Marion feels a special bond with the pregnant, depressed voice-woman, because she seems to embody her own missed opportunities in life, but is still young enough to make different choices, and change her fate. She could possibly, in my eyes, turn Metanoia, regret, the important *compagnion de route* of Kairos into hope again<sup>71</sup>. Using the Metanoia metaphor, but also through theatre symbolism like the mask and the voice as *monologue interieur*, the real Marion, the self that has been freed from her baggage, finds herself in a book that she had neglected to read all that time, and where she now finds herself again: the novel written by the man whose passion she did not return, Larry Lewis.

And now the rainy moment is featured (fig. 15). The camera is set up in a pedestrian tunnel. In the place of refuge. The point of view from within the cave. The look is waiting for the intimacy that is imminent. There where Marion would not fully consume what did happen in the movie *Io sono l'amore*. Should she, in that blessed rain shower, have seized Kairos' sign, and given herself to Larry Lewis, had she mirrored his desire and passion of their kiss in the rain, then she would not have met Metanoia, the other woman's voice. The movie of her life would have a different twist, and she would have assumed a different self. And then, Marion would never have to hear the most hurtful sentence by Ken for the second time, first said to his ex and later said to her: «I accept your condemnation». There is no more shocking disdain than what can be found in this sentence, no greater expression of indifference and lack of empathy. Marion now understands that she is interchangeable, but in the repeating of that sentence, she finds the strength to leave the heartless cardiologist.

Marion's voice-over – again only a voice besides the many voices in the film – reads from a biographic novella by Larry, and the camera shows us the flashback, the memory.

«We walked around in Central Park», reads Marion, as the camera turns to a familiar lamp-lined pathway, itself walking us spectatorially around Central Park, before resting on Marion and Larry walking from the background along a pond path. In long shot framing, this voice-over recalls Larry's narrator's memory («She spoke enthusiastically about her upcoming marriage, but I thought it was too enthusiastic, as if she were trying to convince herself rather than me»), and the sequence features Marion and Larry walking the park's pond-side paths. A cut to a static camera inside a park underpass momentarily disrupts the continuous camera movement and pauses the voice-over; after several beats of this static shot, looking outward from the dry underpass on the rain falling on a park staircase, the voice-over states that «soon it began to rain», as Marion and Larry hold hands and dash from the shot's right background down the stairs into

the tunnel. All within this long take, Marion's voice-over states, «We ducked into an underpass to avoid the cloudburst; I remember thinking how wonderful she was and how beautiful she looked at that moment, and I wanted to tell her so many things because my feelings were swirling so, and I think she knew everything»<sup>72</sup>.

Cynthia Barnett (°1966) writes in her *Natural and Cultural History of Rain* (2015): «Rain does not give up its mysteries. [...] It is an opening to connect»<sup>73</sup>. Now, Marion comes together with her inner self and for the first time she feels who she is.

### *In conclusion. Rain screens*

One does not look *at* rain, one is *in* rain. There is no rain-on-canvas.

In this essay I developed different cases of how artists interact with the dissolution paradox of the canvas at the very moment when atmosphere, and in particular rain, becomes involved. The impact of moisture, vapor and rain "upon" the screen seems to trigger different reflections regarding the self-aware image and artistic consciousness of the medium.

In Turner's case, brilliantly studied by Antonio Domaini, we learned how painting is «firmly rooted in a tradition that interprets as «medium» those atmospheric substances (such as air, ether, clouds, vapor, smoke) that, taken together, constitute the environment, *milieu*, or *Umwelt* in which sensory experience unfolds»<sup>74</sup>. Stieglitz's lyrical obsession with clouds, secondly, introduced a photographic "brush" that is searching for its atmospheric *emulatio*. The *paragone* that is pulsating underneath Stieglitz' Gelatin silver prints burst into the screen capacities of disorientation. His *Equivalent* paradigm between mimesis and technique, between graphics and shutter speeds, presented the power of the photo as "horizonlessness", and hence launched the screen as the wander-scape, celebrating the freedom of the dwelling gaze.

The metaphor of dwelling reminds me of the words by Timothy Ingold. The anthropologist teaches us that the point of view of the person creating is often enveloping yet distant. There are complex relationships between us and the world. Moreover, there may not be a "relationship" as such (something that evokes a linear association), but instead more of a "textile" intertwining, a fusion with our surroundings. And rain happens to be a particularly apt metaphor for that.

Its effect on the audience is *de facto* contaminating, it seeps through, "enveloping", elusive and dynamic<sup>75</sup>.

The works by Agnes Martin, thirdly, came very close to the medium that seeps through, to the enveloping painting and to the elusive dissolution process on the canvas. Her paintings radicalize the "horizontlessness" by uniting Turner's color



washes with Stieglitz' poetic graphics. Rosalind Krauss wrote the following about Martin:

It is this covert allusion to nature that the category *abstract sublime* has come to imply, with the abstract work always able to be decoded by its romantic double: Rothko read out through Friedrich; Pollock by Turner's storms; Martin by Turner's skies. But again it has consistently been Martin herself who has cautioned against a romantic context for her work. Repeating that she sees herself joined to an ancient tradition of classicists – «Coptic, Egyptian, Greek, Chinese» – she defines this tradition as something that turns its back on nature. «Classicism forsakes the nature pattern,» she writes. «Classicists are people that look out with their back to the world/ It represents something that isn't possible in the world/ More perfection than is possible in the world/ It's as unsubjective as possible...The point—it doesn't exist in the world»<sup>76</sup>.

In this "point" we find Agnes, she who paints rain in graphite pencil and lives in her intimate private *Gefühlsraum* where color becomes line and line becomes rain and vice versa.

Woody Allen, finally, treats rain as an iconographical motif. Allen's rain remains loyal to its archaic symbolism: the rain gods that pour their epiphany upon humankind; the rain gods that intervene with seed and lust. (Danae is never far away in Woody Allen's screenplays). Nevertheless, also the screen becomes articulated in Woody Allen's scripts. Maybe not so much as flatness or wetscape, as it does regarding cinematic time. Of course, movement through time is made possible by technology<sup>77</sup>. However, the cinematic motif of rain adds the splitting power of time. In the cases I discussed, rain is like Kairos' knife – image of the quick occasion and the sharpness of sudden insight. This time-split in narration, moves towards the self-aware film director who, as a rain god, manipulates the occasion, the *momentum* that lifts the cinematic medium towards a dimension we can call together with Noam M. Elcott «time axis manipulation»<sup>78</sup>.

Leuven

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- 12 Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*, cit., pp. 97: « Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* introduces *taxis* as a fundamental cultural technique of the economic domain. *Taxis* refers to an order of things in which each and every object is located in a fixed place where it can be found. Humans however, differ from things. «When you are searching for a person», Xenophon cautions, «you often fail to find him, though he may be searching for you himself». Humans defy the fundamental rules of economy because for them «no place of meeting has been fixe». This modern *taxis* is implemented by means of a new cultural technique which takes into account that something may be missing from its place. In other words, it encompasses the notion of an empty space.» The technique in question is the grid or lattice;” Xenophon, *Memorabilia and Oeconomicus*, trans. by E.C. Marchant, Cambridge, 1938, p. 439.
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- 17 Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds*, cit., pp. 3-4.
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- 25 R. Rosenblum, *The Abstract Sublime*, in «Art News», 59, 10, 1961, pp. 350-359, <<http://www.artnews.com/2015/03/27/beyond-the-infinite-robert-rosenblum-on-sublime-contemporary-art-in-1961/>> (accessed July 2018).
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- 28 T. Griffero, *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces*, Surrey, 2014, p. 74; see also: T. Griffero, *Places, Affordances, Atmospheres: A Pathic Aesthetic*, London-Oxfordshire, 2019.
- 29 From W. B. Yeats, *The Second Coming*, s.l., 1919.
- 30 L. Howard, *Essay on the Modification of Clouds*, London, 3rd edition, 1865.
- 31 V.I. Stoichiță, A.M. Coderch, *Goya. The Last Carnival*, London, 1999.
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Fig. 1: William Turner, *Rain, Steam and Speed: The Great Western Railway*, 1844,  
oil paint on canvas, 91 cm x 122 cm.  
National Gallery, London, United Kingdom, inv. no. NG538.



Fig. 2: Giorgione, *Tempesta*, 1506 – 1508, oil paint on canvas, 83 cm × 73 cm.  
Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice, Italy, inv. no. 915.



Fig. 3: Alfred Stieglitz, *Songs of the Sky — No. III*, 1923, gelatin silver print, 17.1 cm x 23 cm.  
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, United States of America.  
Copyright: Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / ARS. Photo licensed by Viscopy.





Fig. 4: Alfred Stieglitz, *Rain Drops*, 1927, gelatin silver print, 9.2 cm x 11.7 cm.  
Alfred Stieglitz Collection, The Art Institute of Chicago, United States of America.  
Photo: ARS / licensed by Viscopy.



Fig. 5: Alfred Stieglitz, *The hand of Man*, 1902, photogravure, 24.1 cm x 31.8 cm.  
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, United States of America.

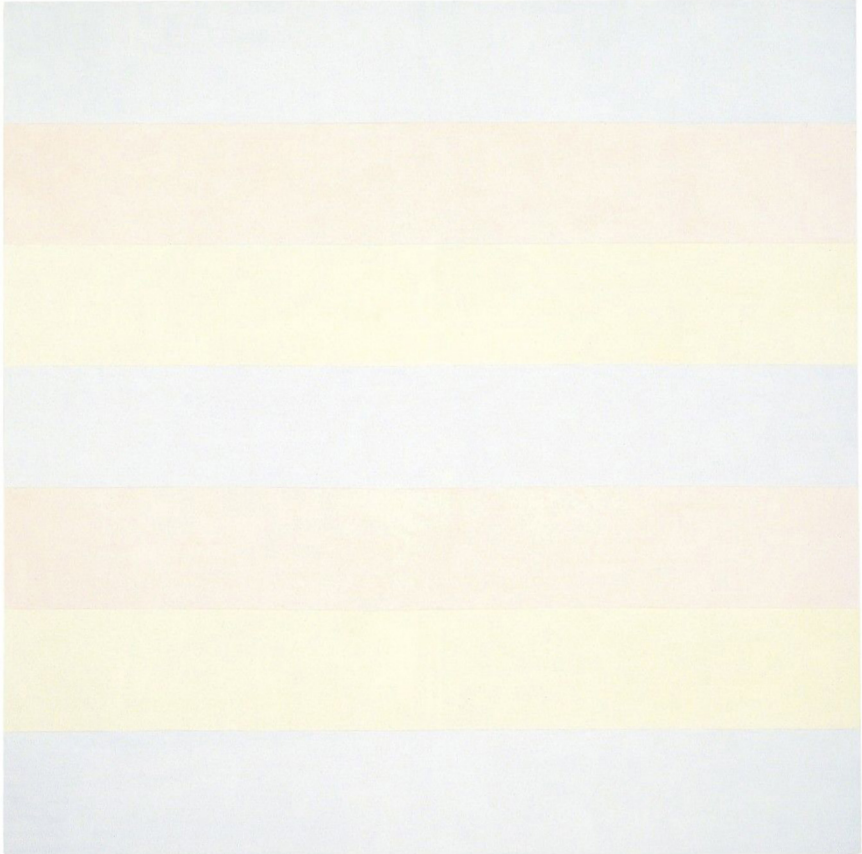


Fig. 6: Agnes Martin, *Untitled 5*, 1998, acrylic and graphite on canvas, 152.4 cm x 152.4 cm.  
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany.  
Photo: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/22/agnes-martin-the-artist-mystic-who-disappeared-into-the-desert> (accessed 11 May 2020).

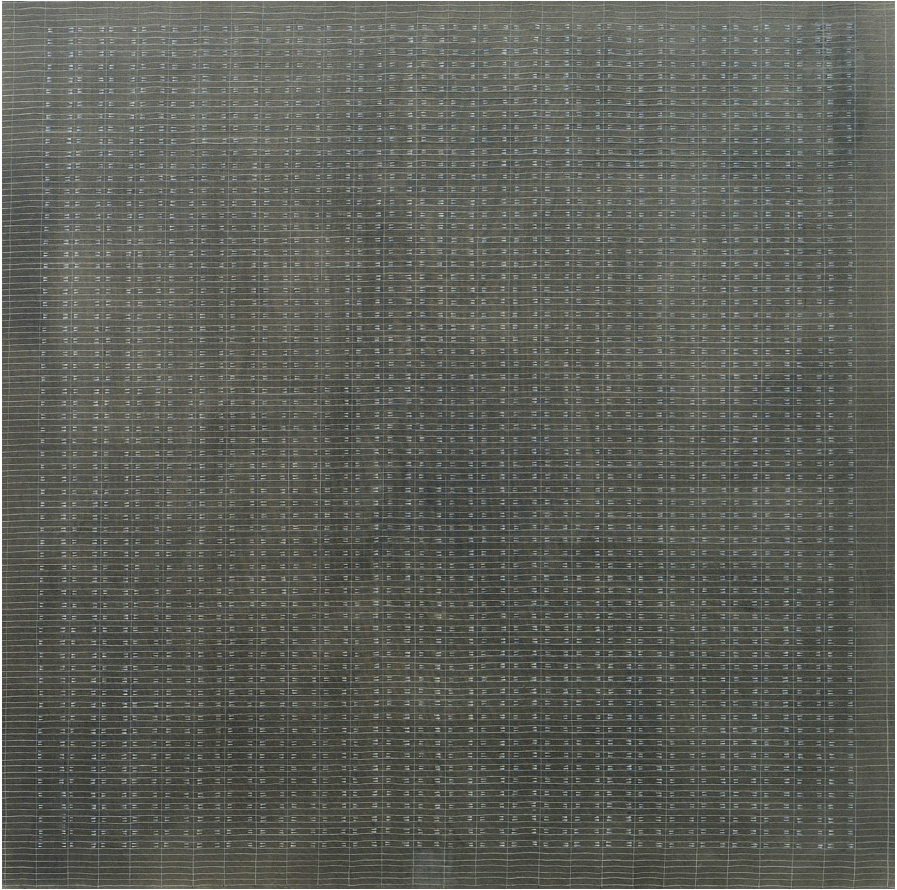


Fig. 7: Agnes Martin, *White Flower*, 1960, oil on canvas, 182.6 cm x 182.9 cm.  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, United States of America.  
Copyright: 2018 Agnes Martin/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

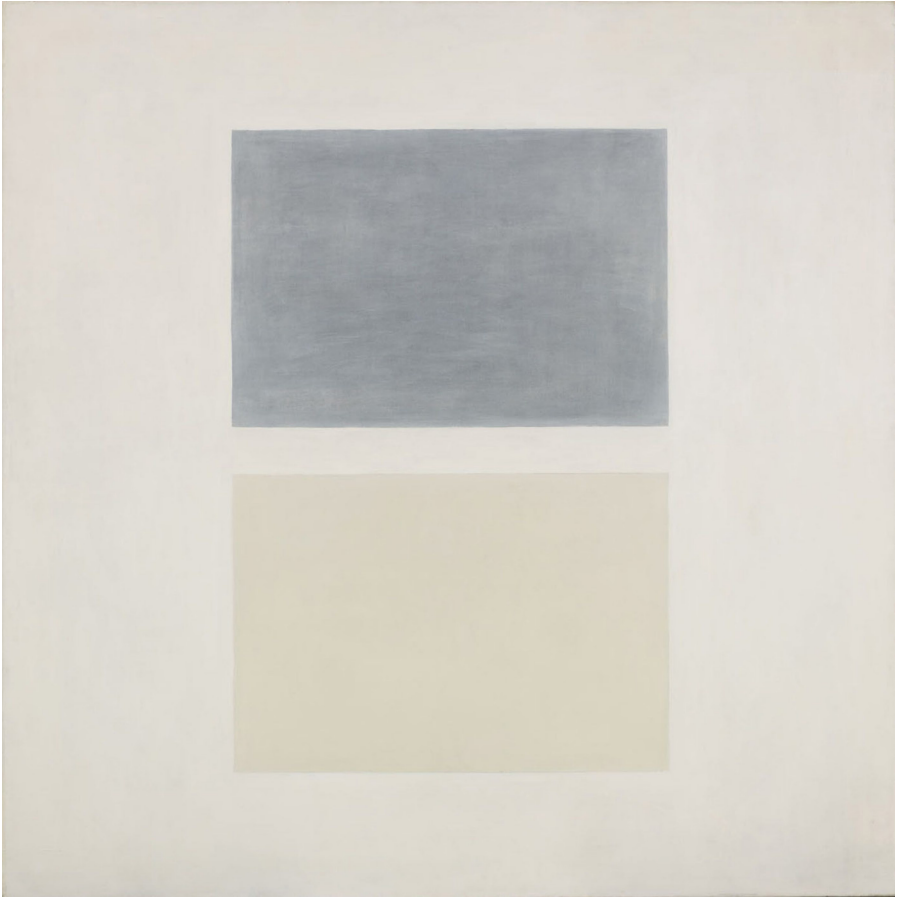


Fig. 8: Agnes Martin, *This Rain*, oil on canvas, 1958, 177.8 cm x 177.8 cm. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, United States of America. Copyright: 2016 Agnes Martin/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

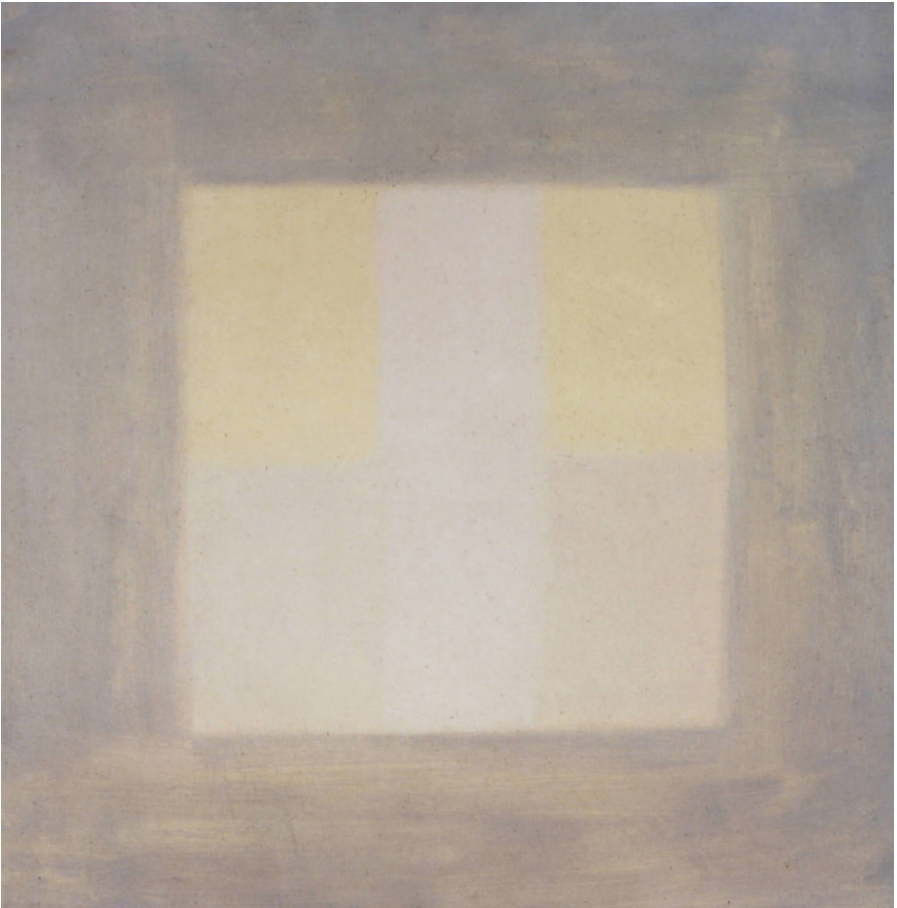


Fig. 9: Agnes Martin, *Desert Rain*, 1957, oil paint on canvas, 63.5 x 63.5 cm.  
Private collection, Sold through: Post-War and Contemporary Art,  
Christies, New York on 12 November 2003.

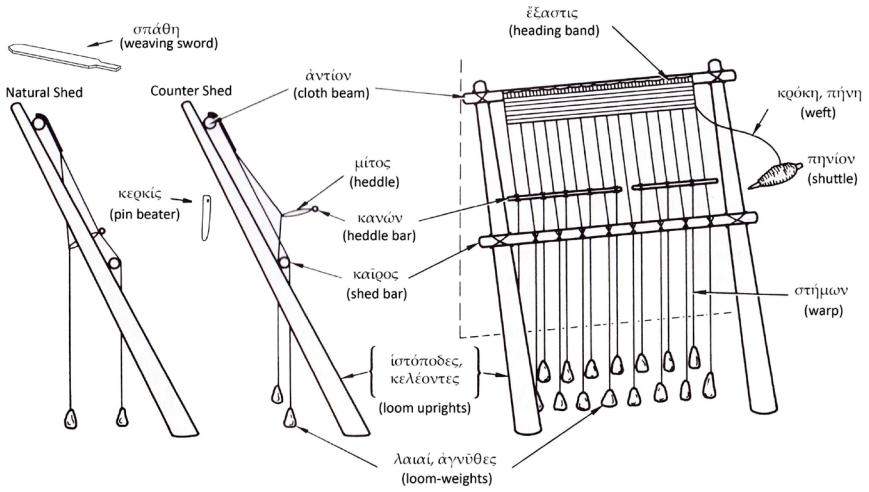


Fig. 10: Drawing of a loom, *Kairos* in weaving terminology, or the technical term for the shed bar. Photo: Ellen Harlizius-Klück, *Weberei als episteme und die Genese der deduktiven Mathematik*, Berlin, 2004, p. 10.



Fig. 11: Medallion from a clavus band, the inscription reading kairos on the right, 5<sup>th</sup> century; Embroidered textile applique, 7.5 cm diameter. Antinopolis, Musée des Antiquités, Rouen.





Fig. 12: Woody Allen, Still from *Match Point*, timestamp: 39:43; 2005, film. United Kingdom, Dreamworks Pictures.



Fig. 13: Woody Allen, Still from *Husbands and Wives*, timestamp: 1:01:12; 1992, Film. United States, Tristar productions.



Fig. 14: Woody Allen, Still from *Manhattan*, timestamp: 35:33;  
1979, Film. United States, United Artists.



Fig. 15: Woody Allen, Still from *Another Woman*, timestamp: 1:17:14; 1988, Film. United States, Orion pictures.