



After a seven days' march through woodland, the traveler directed toward Baucis cannot see the city and yet he has arrived. The slender stilts that rise from the ground at a great distance from one another and are lost above the clouds support the city. You climb them with ladders. On the ground the inhabitants rarely show themselves: having already everything they need up there, they prefer not to come down. Nothing of the city touches the earth except those long flamingo legs on which it rests and, when the days are sunny, a pierced, angular shadow that falls on the foliage.

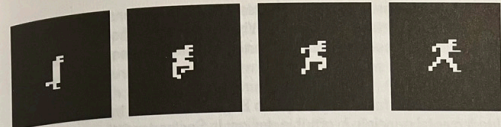
There are three hypotheses about the inhabitants of Baucis: that they hate the earth; that they respect it so much they avoid all contact; that they love it as it was before they existed and with spyglasses and telescopes aimed downward they never tire of examining it, leaf by leaf, stone by stone, ant by ant, contemplating with fascination their own absence.

Digital. The adjective is used everywhere, but it is still poorly felt and understood. One intuits that it has something to do with numbers or fingers, yet something more is always at stake in its distinction from analog things. That something—a remainder, a trace—is my focus here. Several case studies will test our theoretical intuitions against the material realities of digital representation. As always, I advance a materialist, formal, and historically grounded analysis. In this chapter I engage the elemental particulates of two fundamental media conduits: electric ether and liquid crystal. The first is a primary host for telegraphy; the second filters light on-screen.

I am also concerned here with a phenomenological description of human perception. My goal is to disrupt the naturalized congruity between organ and device. The quality of something being digital, I argue, might initially appear to be an intrinsic attribute of the medium. Under closer examination, it reveals itself as a political construct that lays claims on the body, structuring the physical affordances of communication. The change of the medium from paper to pixel entails a series of corresponding changes in the mode of perception. The mode attunes viewers to its message. By "attunement" I mean something analogous to what Marcel Mauss has called the "techniques of the body": the way in which we sit down to read, for example, the position of head and hands, eye movement, and posture.² Attunement structures apprehension. It answers the "how" of perception.

It would be wrong to conflate the medium with the message in this context. At stake in the digital-analog divide is rather a reader's ability to do something with texts. Throughout this chapter I use the word *medium* to narrowly identify the physical conduits of representation.³ Thus the medium of painting is paint and canvas; the medium of books is paper and ink.

A change in medium often implies a corresponding change in the mode of perception. At some level of music production, for example, classical music may involve a family of brass or woodwind instruments, shaped to move and vibrate air. Brass, wood, wind, and air are media through which sound and vibration travel to reach a listener's ear. The mode of music appreciation is listening, which involves a set of conventional cultural techniques: the buying of tickets, dress code, and proper comportment at a concert. These modalities are not rigidly determined. For example, members of the deaf community may use other modes of listening, such as leaning against sound-amplifying speakers or touching an instrument while it is being played.



So, this guy [↑] is running, right? He doesn't have many pixels to do his running, however. He's also composed of only a few discrete frames and each looks remarkably abstract. It's almost unbelievable—in any one frame, it looks more like he's doing a little dance than running. Where is his head? Why does his eight-pixel body turn like that? Anyway, when these remarkably abstract moments are put together, and in this particular order, the brain automatically invents the glue in-between and conveys the distinct, unmistakable sensation of a small figure running.

You've probably heard the phrase "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts." And that would seem to describe what's going on with the running man above. However, according to this tight-knit group of German psychologists that statement is not quite true. They suggest that we perceive the world in organized wholes, not in parts at all. These wholes are our primary sense reports—they are not contingent on, nor comprised of elementary sensations. So, then, the whole isn't greater than the sum of its parts at all, it's simply different from the sum of its parts. With the running man, we perceive him as one figure moving, built up as much from the spaces and timing between the frames as the frames themselves. It's not a sum, even one that adds up to too much, but rather a *new, distinct, dynamic, and inseparable whole.*

WHOLE ≠ PART + PART + PART + PART

Then the whole is a new thing [↑], completely separate from any sum of its parts. In fact, Wertheimer and crew suggested that the new whole doesn't even have parts—it cannot be reduced or atomized into a series of bits. This whole, the running man, is *a thing in itself,* and, importantly, the whole comes before. You perceive the world first as wholes. This idea was a radical break from the dominant scientific rationalism that worked to explain a given reality by analyzing the pieces that construct it: principles were discovered and stacked brick by brick, bean by bean,