Things Will Come to Our Eyes
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An approximation to artifacts that enable sight

Manuel Fonseca Martínez

Aalto University
School of Arts, Design and Architecture

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Department of Design
Product and Spatial Design

Supervisor
Pentti Kareoja

Advisor
Timo Ripatti

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Abstract

To compose is an action by which one selects, arranges and puts together a series of parts that give sense to a particular object. In space, composition is performed by positioning a set of objects in a way that creates relations of distance between them. As a cornerstone in the construction of space, composition becomes fundamental when it is understood as one that is not only performed on a grammatical level (color, shape and size), but one that is performed also over the meaning of space itself, and when it does, creates new visions of space. But, is it possible to perform this action not only in objects, but through them?

Framed in the methodology of Theory in Practice, this work aims to understand the concept of curation as one that can be performed through artifacts by creating new visual relations in space. This is achieved by exploring the idea that artifacts can become edges of the space where they are located, and this situation enables space to create new ways of seeing.

As a result, a series of artifacts to see with were designed. They act like edges of the space where they are located, creating agency in a continuous compositional process by the one who sees. Consequently, the ultimate intention is not only to understand the relevance of how the perceptual and compositional process of sight occurs —how we see, but to validate the role of the designer, not as author, but as enabler of relations through its work, and of its artifacts, as mediators of our own experience in space.

Keywords:
Sight, Composition, Artifacts, Visual Perception, Edge
Visual Studies, Phenomenology,
Critical Thinking.
**Introduction**

*In Blindness*, a novel written by Literature Nobel Prize winner José Saramago, the story of a city where an epidemic of blindness arrives is narrated. The affliction is described by the book as sudden and white, and it expands exponentially throughout the city, as if it was the case of a virus. One of the first victims is, ironically, an ophthalmologist who is held in quarantine with other people that have likewise gone blind. Isolated from society, and dealing with the most primitive feelings and sensations of the human condition, the story of the characters of this novel turns out to be a metaphor for a modern society that becomes collectively blind, thus controlled by a ‘few eyes’.

\(^1\) According to some authors, these forces of power may resemble the ones of a Panoptic hierarchy, in the sense that there are some eyes looking over you, which you cannot see. ([Esmaili & Zohdi, 2015](#)).

Besides this narrative quest that the author takes, in order to reflect on the political
moment of Portugal, and as a whole, the fears of his time, Saramago also takes the chance to think about the subject of sight, not just as a metaphor, but the implications of the action of seeing. One example of this idea might be sensed through the main character of the novel—the doctors’ wife. She remains sighted, and when her husband is put into custody, she tricks the authorities by telling them that she is also blind, so that she is taken alongside him. After being put in quarantine with the affected population, she reflects on her own state of being, different to the condition of the rest.

In the book, she finds herself looking at her fellow inmates and judging them by how she sees they are acting. At some point, she thinks to herself: “I have no right to look if the other cannot see me” (Saramago, 2005, p. 62) questioning if, indeed, the fact that the others were not able to see her made her also blind. It is in that moment when she realizes that she is the only one with eyes to see, therefore, giving her the duty to account for the reality others were unaware of.

Sight is an action so close to our own existence, that most of the time we are not aware of its necessity, and, much like the experience of the Doctor’s wife, when we become conscious of it and we question what we see and how we see it, our understanding of the world changes. Berger says that “it is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world” (p. 7), therefore, it is possible to acknowledge that it is part of our human condition to experience sight as a way of discovering. In fact, it is of no surprise that Natural Sciences have used it as a tool for understanding how our reality works from an empirical approach since “seeing [...] is the closest we can get to the true nature of reality” (Dondis, p. 2).

Instead, other branches of knowledge, including Philosophy, Cognitive and Behavioral Sciences, Medicine and Linguistics have aimed to understand, not what we see but, how we do it and what happens when we see. When these questions are asked, sight is no longer thought of only through its mechanics, but as an action that produces meaning. It is in this sense that we should try to answer these questions through the creative practices, such as design.

Why? Because we design through seeing and we see what we design. Design is, foremost, the process of understanding, manipulating and giving meaning to visual elements² (color, shape, position and dimension, among others). When these elements are put together and arranged in a certain way, not only are we actively using our sight, but we can potentially give meaning to the objects and the surrounding space. To this activity, we give the name composition. Composition, as a conscious visual activity² is a set of decisions that give shape to things. As Dondis reminds us, “the process of composition is the most crucial step in visual problem solving”. (1973, p. 20).

It seems, though, that sometimes our capacity to make sense of what we perceive is forgotten. In the words of Pallasmaa,
there has been a ‘loss of plasticity’ in the creative practices. According to him, it has become more relevant the mechanisms of vision and visual expression, rather than what they produce (2005, p. 28), which diminishes the importance of enacting our senses. Thus, in a world conquered by images, it is an effort to see beyond, then, finding ways of enhancing our perception results in an exercise for the mind.

So, how do we regain that loss of plasticity? Moreover, how do we design to see? It might be that the answer lies within the action of sight itself. For Arnheim, the question of how we think through sight is a problem of literacy. Visual Perception, he proposes, is not just “a passive recording of stimulus material, but an active concern for the mind” (1969, p. 37). For him, seeing is not only about recognizing why things are perceived in a certain way, but to produce things that make actions happen. When we understand that to be able to compose, we need to be visually literate, then, just like the Doctor’s wife in Saramagos’ novel, we will be able to make sight act through us when we are conscious of it.

Having understood the relevance of sight, this project aims to explore the idea of becoming visually literate through exercising the act of composition, not only on objects or over space, but through the object itself. As such, it is possible to think that objects and spaces would start behaving more like artifacts – tools that make new meanings happen and that create agency for sight to be enacted. Therefore, we will try to find, in the words of Berger, ways of seeing (1972) that interweave with the act of composition, and as a result allow us to see more.

With the mindset presented before, it is relevant to insist on the idea that Design and its production should enable consciousness in the act of seeing, thus, using space and the objects that compose it as action-enablers and place-makers. Consequently, this project wants, initially, to do a reflection around the ideas of sight and composition, and how they intertwine with two tangent concepts: artifacts and edges. Successively, the project aims to explore artifacts as tools of visual composition of space, and how these ones may enable sight.

The transverse axis of this investigation is a phenomenological approach to the questions of sight and cognition of context. By aiming to do so, its pretention is to “return to human experience afresh and to look at the world anew” (Seamon, 1993, p. 35), meaning that the goal is to comprehend the phenomenon of sight, not from the point of view of its mechanics, but more through the light of its possible effects. The investigation then, relies to a large extent, in the verbalization of perceptual content through the recall of experiences shared by all of us, comparing them to theoretical background, and relating that content to the production of design.

This project sits in between object and spatial design,
visual studies, therefore it is relevant to use research methodologies that belong to both fields. Given this, and the fact that the approach should try to conciliate the possibility of having a theoretical background understanding of how through designed objects, is it possible to question the practice of design, it was necessary to walk transversally from elements of Critical Thinking, a methodology borrowed from Visual Studies, to Critical Design practices and Practice-oriented research.

From visual studies, Critical Thinking can be seen more as “as attitude towards visual communication that is grounded in theory and its relation to making” (Noblet & Bestley, p. 24). The position this research takes is that the object(s) produced do not constitute an end in themselves, but are part of a constructive approach towards phenomenology in design, where both the theoretical background and the object designed constitute instruments that allow to comprehend the phenomenon of sight in a deeper level. As Koskinen et al. point out when talking about a field approach towards a constructive research in design, it is an investigation that takes steps on understanding the metaphysics, poetry and aesthetics of everyday, in order to make people reflect on their behavior (Koskinen, Zimmerman, Binder, Redström, & Wensveen, 2011).

Although this investigation refers to a set of literature works as academic background in order to support every section of the discussion, it is worth noting that it has not been conceived as a pure theoretical research. Some of the ideas presented here are developed more profoundly by studies in Sociology, Visual Studies and Psychology among others. As such, there is no intention to develop new theoretical con-

tent in that sense. More so, it has been conceived as an investigation that borrows from all these subjects and put it at the service of generating a discussion though design and its products.

As a critically reflective process, data will come from the procedure of comparing observations from how sight manifests as an everyday phenomenon and producing insights relevant to the subject of investigation. Likewise, some references will be analyzed from the same perspective, which will contribute to enrich the context of the investigation. Finally, and as a research focused on visual exploration, most of the data concerning the design production will be images of the elements, not as a compilation of the material design process, which to this investigation is not relevant, but more as a witness of the thought process.

This document is divided in four main parts. In the first one we will discuss the close relationship between sight and perception through a revision of theoretical body of writing, and how these two ideas are key to comprehend context in a visual level. In the second part we will discuss how composition can catalyze new ways of perceiving the world, and how that can happen not just grammatically, but in a meaningful level. Consequently, we will introduce the concept of artifact, and some examples of how these type of objects can activate our sight and allow us to compose. In the third part, we will encounter a concept that will allow us to make tangible what has been discussed before: the edge. In order to validate it as a tool to focus the sight, we will approach the concept through a visual essay: a series of images that may close the gap between the concepts of composition and artifacts through the idea of edge as a powerful tool to make
sight visible, and question what happens to the process of composition when we introduce this element. The fourth and last part, will introduce the designed artifacts, and discuss though visual content how they work, and therefore why they intertwine with our way of seeing. Here we will discuss how they are artifacts that allow us to see, therefore tools for performing sight in space. As an ending theme, we will open the question to see if the concept of curation could intertwine as well.

Part One.

Sensing, Perceiving, Thinking
We live in a world of perceivers, and as such, it is in our nature to be constantly recognizing and understanding what surrounds us. In that constant discovery, the senses—hearing, tasting, touching, smelling and seeing, become the tools that allow us to scan the particular characteristics of things. Therefore, making the world available to us, and unless one lacks any of the senses, it is possible to gather information about almost anything through them. Sensing is therefore, strongly attached to our own humanity, meaning, our bodily experience, and how the stimulus in our nervous system works to give our brains the necessary information for understanding what happens around us.

Although indispensable, this activity does not constitute the whole process by which we understand what we sense and translate it into thoughts and reactions. In fact, this enactive
approach (Noë, 2004, p. 2) by which we respond to sensorial stimuli requires us to understand that our ability to perceive goes beyond nervous chains, and is linked to thinking processes that happen simultaneously. Nevertheless, it is generally understood that to be able to recognize what is sensed, one has to be able to process it in our brains— to think about it, and vice versa. Yet, there has always been a division between the sensorial activities and the thinking ones. As Arnheim explains, “philosophers have reminded us forcefully that nothing is in the intellect which was not previously in the senses. However, even they considered the gathering of data to be unskilled labor, indispensable but inferior” (1969, p. 2).

This supposed division has made the senses not equivalent to thinking processes, because physical reactions are continuously thought as ‘misleading and untrustworthy’, whereas thinking leads to a more ‘accurate’ understanding of how the world ‘really is’. Is this type of notion the reason why it is of utmost need to start by reclaiming the position that the senses have been removed from. When we talk about thinking, sensing and perceiving, it is relevant to contemplate how to consolidate those three ideas—not one over the other, but as part of each other.

To be able to do this, a separation must be made between sensing and perceiving. Even though they seem to happen simultaneously, the sensorial experience—meaning the physiological connections that take the information to the brain, would not be possible if there was no reaction triggered by the information that arrives, that leads to its understanding. Noë defines perception “not as a process in the brain, but a kind of skillful activity on the part of the animal as a whole” (2004, p. 2). Hence, it is possible to infer that perceptual activity is a series of operations that we enact to make logic out of the sensorial data that arrives to us, not only in our brain, but also our senses and our response to it.

This could wrongly be seen as a passive activity, where the world is given to us “in a sharply focused version of the present world in all its detail” (Noë, 2004, p. 2). If this was true, then vision would simply be a tool that works similarly to a writing machine: when a button is pressed, something appears (in this case, it won’t matter which letter you press, because all of them are going to produce a reaction). On the contrary, only when we activate our attention and understanding of what is affecting us it is possible to talk about visual perception (Arnheim, 1969, pp. 14-15). According to Gregory, “the perception of an object is a hypothesis, suggested and tested by the sensory data” (1977, p. 14). If we accept both of these ideas, then we certainly have to say that perceiving and thinking are contextually active skills that are constantly happening in ourselves and are indivisible one from another because they are codependent.

I would like to ask the reader to make a small exercise: please, visualize a banana (if you wish not to think about a banana, any fruit that you have tasted will do the job) and carefully focus your attention in its color, shape, and size. Now, visualize its texture and weight. Now, the sound it makes when it is being peeled. Now, the scent. Lastly, its taste. Now, try not to think about a banana. By now, it is probable that you have made a complete recall of what a banana is—an image
of it, and that your head, as stubborn as it is, has also not ditched the image.

This exercise helps understanding the visual perception in ourselves. It is clear that in this case, thinking and sensing are indivisible and simultaneous, otherwise, it would be necessary to have the banana first in front of us to be able to recall it. Arnheim says that cognitive operations are not separate from the perceptual processes, but they are part of them. Without one, the other would not be able to exist. (1969, p. 13). Creating an image of a banana can only come from our sensorial experience of it, and this exercise is an active exploration of how we perceive it.

Arnheim explains also that when he refers to ‘cognitive’ he means: “all mental operations involved in the receiving, storing and processing of information: sensory perception, memory thinking, learning” (Visual Thinking, 1969, p. 13).

What we see then, can be more associated to how we explore the world around us, and what we understand of it. It is not only a sensorial exploration, but also thinking through exploration. More so as a ‘skillful exploration’ (Noë, 2004, p. 164) that not only involves exploring things as items extracted from any context, but the world around them, and how the surroundings react to it. Perception, or the understanding of perception as another way of knowing the world is, perhaps, the understanding of human experience from an active and exploratory perspective, that is expressed in both ways of our surrounding. That is the reason why Arnheim points out that “In order to see, we had to think; and we had nothing to think about if we were not looking.” (1980, p. 174)

Taking all things into account, there are two interesting points to highlight about the exercise with the banana. The first one is that it is easy for us to recall sensorial experiences when we recollect them. The images that formed in our head during the exercise are no different than constructions from fragments of thoughts and stored sensations that generate a whole. Pallasmaa characterizes this act of synthesizing complete images of a thing as “the most amazing feature of our mental acts” (Böhme, Borch, Pallasmaa, & Eliasson, 2014, p. 30), because we are able to form a complete image from different parts of our sensations: the banana is not a different one when thought from the sense of smell than from the taste: it's the same banana that is seen from different sensorial contexts.

The second one, is that there was sightedness throughout all the process. This could be seen as just the way thoughts ‘appear’ in us: like pictures of the stimulus that we receive. In reality, this refers to the simultaneity of senses, meaning that, if vision is not the sense we are recalling, we will still transform that sensorial experience into a visual image because in perception, “the sense of sight may incorporate or even reinforce other sense modalities” (Pallasmaa, 2005, p. 26). Therefore, the image of a banana will be not just how it appears to our eyes, but the incorporation of all our sensorial experiences of it.

It is this quality of sight, which introduces a central idea in this discussion: visual perception does not equal to having pictures of what has been seen in your head. As Arnheim reminds us, “Visual perception is visual thinking” (1969, p. 14). This crucial idea allows us to understand perception, not as a separate act or mental operation, but as a system of tools that acknowledges our perceptual activity and broadens the spectrum of how sight is comprehended.
In chapter 2 of his book, Noë (2004) develops how it is a fallacy to understand visual thinking in the same way we experience pictures. According to him, if we were to define visual experience as “snapshots” then it would mean that perceptions are presented as complete detailed images. For her, this definition falls short to explain processes of awareness and detail. He says “we don’t have the detailed world in consciousness all at once” (p. 51). Therefore, it could be said that visual thoughts are more an active construction of an image: a visual experience. He says “we don’t have the detailed world in consciousness all at once” (p. 51). Therefore, it could be said that visual thoughts are more an active construction of an image: a visual experience.

Sight as an act of choice

Having understood that Visual Perception goes beyond the sense of vision, and that it comprehends more than understanding and reacting to what we feel, it is also relevant to recognize that sight, as interlocked as it is with the concept of sensation, does not happen unless we decide that it happens. As Berger explains us, sight is an ‘act of choice’ (1972, p. 8), implying that we have the ability to decide, not only what we see, but how we see it. Observing sight from this perspective allows us to think about the potential of sight, what are the mechanisms for it to happen, and more specifically, why is it an act of choice.

To solve this question, first, it is important to deepen into two main ideas of what our own experience of sight is. Why? Because understanding how sight acts on us determines if there is will in seeing. The first one of those impressions is that, seeing is associated directly and unequivocally with understanding (Seamon, 1993, p. 16): with looking beyond ‘appearances’ to arrive to what is essential, in order to justify that what we see is real. In fact, the word seeing is used in vulgar language as a word for conveying that thought: “you saw it coming” or “seeing beyond the surface” are regularly used sentences that imply seeing something that is not obviously visible. When someone says “I can see what has been happening here”, doesn’t always mean that they have been exactly seeing with their own body all the actions and reactions that have happened on that situation. Instead, they are able to gather cues and traces that lead them to make an image of the events that correspond to a certain outcome of a situation.

The second idea is the notion that sight is an action that delivers factual information: ‘if I can see it and I can feel it, then, it must be true’. Although, as it was discussed before, visual perception does correspond to thinking, it is misleading to fathom sight as an unavoidable action filled with truth: something that just ‘occurs’, as if it was an event detached from any judgment, therefore, out of our reach to control it. If this was true, we would all experience the same perception of all things, but that is not the case, because each one of us looks at things from different places.

If we take a closer look at these two ideas, we can extract items that are intrinsically linked to the definition of sight. From the outset, it could be said that to be able to see means to look beyond ourselves and into the world. In reference to this idea Arnheim writes: “It is not farfetched to relate the ability to sense across distances, to what we call the farsightedness of an intelligent person” (1969, p. 17). It is precisely
the exploratory quality of sight, that allows us to find things to perceive by letting them gain spatial content (Noë, 2004, pp. 87-88) the more we experience them. In this context, it means that when we see, we refer to objects according to our own location, consequently, to see in context is to see in relation to what surrounds us (Arnheim, 1969, p. 54), and the more we see what surrounds us, the more we perceive them.

Likewise, the second idea that is possible to infer is that sight is an activity that comes always with a purpose. Accordingly, it is impossible to see if there is not previously a decision of what is going to be seen. As Arnheim explains: "Perception is purposive and selective". Sight is highly discriminative, because it needs to understand what has changed from the environment, and act accordingly: sight is always looking for a signal for action. (1969, pp. 19-21).

Paradoxically, as selective as it is, it has also the quality of being relational, and this can be defined as active perception. This notion links both ideas together: Sight is exploratory, therefore contextual, as it is purposive, therefore active: "If a visual item is extricated from its context it becomes a different object" (Arnheim, 1969, p. 54). We can then, define active perception as active engagement with our surroundings by deciding what we see, and actively understanding it in order to create relations of meaning with the things we see.

Adding to this, Dondis explains that "all things visual are not just something that happens out there. They are visual events, total occurrences, actions that incorporate the reaction into the

whole" (1973, p. 22). She elucidates on the fact that visuality is primarily a thoughtful event that affects us and what surrounds us, therefore, making it a deliberate act: one that we have the capability to make happen, or not. Consequently, if we consider sight as a thoughtful activity, then we are able to control when it happens and how it happens.

Hence, sight is an act of choice, because, and as Berger reminds us "as a result of this act, what we see is brought within our reach" (Berger, 1972, p. 8), meaning that, it is up to us to decide from everything that is possible to be seen, what do we want to see, and how. When we decide to see, we are accepting that it is possible to produce relations of distance with the things outside us (pp. 8-9), and that it is up to us to shape those relations. Having said that, if sight is an act of choice, then, how do we choose what to see? The answer might be lying in the comprehension of how sight works.

Knowing how to see

It has been discussed up to now how sight is an exploratory act, and visual perception is an active endeavor, both of them simultaneously allowing us to be aware of our reality. As part of our daily lives, these actions are the mechanisms by which we build images of whatever surrounds us. The idea that we are used to being able to use them without much previous acknowledgement, makes sight seem like an innate ability for human beings: we never question it. It is
possible to say that to some extent, we are not constantly conscious before seeing, but, if as Arneheim points out “the world emerging from this perceptual exploration is not immediately given” (1969, p. 14), it is also possible to say that perception is an action that requires the understanding of how to do it. Then, it is possible to say that seeing does not imply directly knowing how to see, therefore, it is necessary to grasp into what are the tools necessary to see, and furthermore, how do we give purpose to what we see.

It could be said that the first step to being able to see is to have the intention: what this means is nothing more than purposefully seeing something – of consciously understanding what is in front of our eyes. Berger observes that “we only see what we look at” (p. 8). This statement might seem at first as redundant, because it would be impossible to see otherwise. But it is precisely in the idea that there has to be an intention backing the action, that we are able to acknowledge that sight goes beyond the physiological act of vision. Why? Because having the intention to see something means simultaneously acknowledging its existence, and being willing to understand it.

Seeing, then, is not a unidirectional action: when we see something, we are not just recognizing its presence in the world, but that what we see becomes a part of us.

On a more profound approach, it could be said that what we look at, also takes place inside of us because it becomes part of the knowledge of our context. Regarding this, Berger affirms the following: “if we accept that we can see that hill over there, we propose that from that hill we can be seen” (1972, p. 9). From this it is possible to understand that the action of seeing goes in two ways: from subject to object and vice versa, which reaffirms the spatial qualities of sight previously discussed. Hence, the relevance of conceiving sight as a tool of exploration of what is remote (Arneheim, 1969, p. 17).

French Art Historian Didi-Huberman says the following “We should, in front of each image, ask ourselves the question of how it gazes (at us), how it thinks (of us) and how it touches (us) at the same time” (2009, p. 39). Even though the preoccupation on this particular text of his relies more on the content of the image itself, it is also valuable to extract the idea that, somehow, what we see speaks to us and leaves something behind – us affecting and being affected by what we see, and that it is in us to question what sight is constituted by. In order to perform the questioning that Didi-Huberman poses, it is important to start by recognizing that things are composed by elements that we can dissect: parts that belong to a whole, that, when interacting, give enough information to understand the intent of what is seen.

To measure how much one knows how to see is to measure how much has it been understood of what composes what is seen. Why? Because if there is a command of the systems by which visual things operate, then, it is possible to see things as a whole, as well as to be able to dissect them: to perceive the complete image, perceive its components and understand why they are sensed in a certain way. Paraphrasing Pallasmâa’s idea about art, every visual thing is indeed a microcosm (2005, p. 32), because they are composed by infinite elements, and it is up to us to choose what we want to focus our attention on.

This text is part of the exhibition catalogue of Filmmaker Harun Farocki. Didi-Huberman, who has explored the subject of image, especially in cinema and photography throughout his writings, (see Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde (1993) The Images in Spite of All (2008)) discusses the intention on the image from some of his work.
To sum up in a sentence: we see things in a certain way because of what we decide to see from them, but this decision is only effective when we have actively explored our surroundings to be informed about how visual things interact. As Noë explains "You enact your perceptual content, through the activity of skillful looking" (2004, p. 73), meaning that, we gain visual knowledge through sensing things, and we sense things when we understand them, thus, only then it is possible to speak about a truly effective action of sight. Consequently, there is no harm on insisting that sight is natural to us, but learning how to use visual perception is not (Dondis, 1973, p. 11), and the way to achieve this knowledge is through exploration processes. Then, it could be said that this way of looking at sight might be able to elucidate the answer to the initial question of how to perform with sight.

Enacting sight

Throughout this first chapter, the intention of the text was to grasp at the questions of sight that entangle our daily life: how do we see and how does it happen, through the overview of some theoretical ideas from visual perception and sensorial cognition. The discussion serves to give the reader an overview of three specific issues about sight: 1. How perceiving is a skillful thinking activity that situates us in the world, 2. How it does not happen automatically, but it is purposeful, therefore an active act, and 3. That learning how to see implies understanding things in their context and in their composition. This framework allows us to continue by asking how can sight be activated, and how to design through sight.

As discussed previously, something that occurs when thinking about the way we interact with things visually is that the act of sight is one that we take for granted because it happens all the time. Hence, stopping for a moment and realizing that it is in our control what is the scope of visual exercising in the understanding our everyday context, implicates accepting that it is possible to project perceptual knowledge in things and modify their meaning. So, how to make this happen? How do we purposefully use sight as a tool that allows the modification of the way we perceive things?
The queries on the previous chapter prompt us to think about the potential of the exploratory act of sight as both a catalyst and a tool for giving meaning to what surrounds us—recognizing our context, and fashioning new ways of seeing. Both prospects are the result of an interest to discuss because through them we can acknowledge the creative potential of sight. What does this mean? It suggests that sight, through visual perception, can be used as a tool for making, meaning that, sight is not just an ‘ordinary’ occurrence from our bodily experience, but it can become tangible, and that is where the phenomenon is capable of being designed relies on: of finding other ways of perceiving. This affirmation underlies the problem solving qualities of visual perception (Arnheim, 1969, p. 37) (Dondis, p. 20), where our perceptual activity is always seeking to convert what it sees into knowledge, therefore, showing that, through learning how
sight and visual perception works, it is possible to not only see things in a different way, but modify them and create new meanings.

So, what should be done to be able to make sight work? For Dondis, the answer relies on becoming visually literate. To her, literacy from a visual perspective, means to be able to understand the logical system—the syntax, behind what is seen, which results in a series of guidelines that help us to communicate: “basic elements that can be learned and understood (...) along with manipulative techniques” (p. 11). From her perspective, these elements compound the realm of the visual, and when learned, it is possible to decode what is seen and build with these elements. This decoding process—the activity of identifying all the elements and relations, shows precisely the configuration of things and helps explaining the activeness of sight. Therefore, the elements that compose things determine how our visual experience is.

This type of analysis comprehends a series of rules and guidelines to purposefully understand and manipulate what is seen. The rules have been explained and developed by several cognitive scientists and philosophers, and belong to a rational attitude towards understanding of the phenomenon of sight. Although it is not the pretension of this text to develop on their content, it is relevant to stress that they showcase the importance of awareness in a visual creative process. Regarding this, Dondis emphasises that understanding how visual elements interact is the basis of a conscious sighting, and that “visual literacy can help to see what we see and know what we know” (p. 19). Thus, it could be said that by finding out the underlying structure of what is seen, it is possible to ask ourselves why things are the way they are, and how does that give meaning to what we see.

This type of logic concerning visual thinking, proposed in order to give sight a space inside visual communication studies from a semantic perspective, sees literacy in an operative level, where the effectiveness of the message is the principal preoccupation (Dondis, p. 8). While these processes and knowledge are fundamental for the understanding of the elements and their manipulation, when referring back to the idea of sight as an exploratory act, it might be pertinent to think about the comprehension of what is seen through sight itself. As Arnheim points out, “vision is the primary medium of thought” (1969, p. 18), then it is likely that there are ways of making with sight that value what is sensed over rational analysis. If it is possible to step back, perhaps it could be said that the possible way to become visually literate—to learn how to see, from a sensorial point of view, is

\[\text{She points out that visual literacy is different from language literacy. Although both rely on a logical system to function, languages are made-up systems constructed by man to encode, store and decode information. Therefore, their structure has a logic that visual literacy is unable to parallel} \quad \text{(Dondis, 1973, p. 12)}\]
just by seeing more. This idea brings back the concept introduced previously by Noë about perceiving being a skillful exploration activity:

“Perceiving how things are is a mode of exploring how things appear. How they appear is, however, an aspect of how they are. To explore appearance is thus to explore the environment, the world. To discover how things are, from how they appear, is to discover an order or pattern in their appearance. The process of perceiving, of finding out how things are, is a process of meeting the world” (2004, p. 164)

What he might be implying is that the process of learning how to see, and consequently acting with sight is more attached to exercising sight through seeing, and taking decisions though intuitive processes—feeling and sensing, rather than rationalizing it into a method or a defined procedure.

As an exploratory act, sight is capable to evolve and understand what is seen. This means that every time we see, we see more, therefore, it could be said that visual literacy is also about engaging with what is seen, questioning its content and producing new visions of the world: in this case, making intelligible sight through design. So, going back to the previous question, how do we enact our sight from a creative point of view? The key to this issue relies on what we make with what we see: the act of composing.

Composing through perceiving

When the idea of composition comes to mind, it refers to the action of putting together things in relation to each other to make a whole: for example, composing a musical piece means, generally speaking, to tie musical notes together by organizing them in time, so that they create a melody; in chemistry, a composition is a mix of different identifiable molecules that form a compound structure. In the same way, it is possible to talk about composing all things visual: to arrange shapes and what surrounds them in space, in order to create a complete image. These notions are not far from understanding the idea that composing implies relating elements in order to become something, what is 'composed'.

Latour explains that composition “underlines that things have to be put together (Latin componere) while retaining their heterogeneity” (2010, pp. 473-474). This constructive approach follows the popular sentence from the Psychology of the Gestalt: in composition, the whole is more than the sum of its parts. When something is composed, it means that its parts form something else: something bigger than themselves, and that is why the whole can be explained, not by the individual elements that conform it, but by how they are linked together and the relations that those elements conform. Then, when the action of composition is performed,
it is engaging directly to what is seen from an exploratory perspective, because it is constantly in a quest to comprehend the relations that exist in order to give sense to what is producing. Dondis explains this when she says that when we compose, we intend meaning (1973, p. 20).

Therefore, composition can be described as the enacting of our perception of the world over what we see. Composition is the action of deciding to project our sensorial perception, so, paraphrasing Pallasmaa when talking about architecture it could be said that the elements of sight “are not visual units or gestalt. They are encounters, confrontations” (Pallasmaa, 2005, p. 63). It is precisely by understanding that the relevance of composition as a creative act relies on its power to create new relations and make things happen – perform, that is possible to reaffirm the active quality of sight.

Ultimately, when we decide how something looks, we are modifying how we perceive it and what it means. Regarding this, Kandinsky gives a definition of composition that entangles these two ideas: he describes it as the “purposful subordination 1. Of the individual elements and 2. Of the build up construction – toward the goal of concrete pictoriality” (1947, p. 37). What could be elucidated from his words, is that every visual decision over the composition affects not only how things look, but also how we perceive them, thus, changing the meaning of things. He refers to subordination of the elements and of the construction, in the sense that they all work together in order to make the image ‘happen’ and the image would only happen because of the elements it has. Linked to the idea before, it is possible to say that the more we see, the more tools we have to compose.

If sight, as we discussed on the first chapter, is a bidirectional action, meaning, that the more we see, the more things acquire content in them and in us, then it is possible to say that composition is the activation of that sight to outside of us. Both actions are linked, because both of them are performative and sensual. Consequently, to affirm that composing is another way of knowing how to see, reaffirms the idea from Noé, that visual perception is a process of meeting the world, and to that extent, composing, is reinventing our context: finding new ways of seeing.

Therefore, there are three relevant ideas important to highlight from this part of the text: 1. To be able to see, it is necessary to become conscious of what surrounds us. 2. To be able to compose it is necessary to see, and 3. Composition propitiates the exercising of sight because it enacts our visual perception. Having understood these relations, it is worth asking when is composition used as a creative tool? From a tangible perspective, it is evident that composition is used as a tool to produce new objects, and those objects are used to compose spaces. Although through different scales, in both situations, the outcome is always the final result of the composition. This allows us to think if there are more ‘flexible’ ways of composing, maybe not in objects, but through them? Can these elements make us perceive what surrounds us in new ways? This approach might see designed things as enablers rather than complete elements and then, perhaps, the answer relies on understanding that objects can also be catalysts of new visual relations, therefore, new compositions, and that those relations affect the way we see.
Composing through objects

Seeing through objects is an action we perform in our daily lives. In essence, we use objects to see because they allow us to reach things that our own eyes cannot. For example, we use prescription eyeglasses to be able to see what the deformations or imperfections in our visual system do not allow us to do. Similarly, we use magnifying glasses of all sorts, such as telescopes, binoculars, prisms and microscopes to bring things from scales different from ours to us, and mirrors, to be able to see ourselves. These objects, that Noé refers to as “technologies of perception” (2004, p. 7), enable to reach the world that is beyond the distances we are capable to grasp through the use of physics and optics in a way that they show us a more detailed version of the world.

These types of objects are interesting from a visual perspective, not only because of what they are in themselves, but because of what they produce – what they make us see. De Certeau, reading Foucault, defines this type of objects as artifacts, ‘dispositifs’ (1988, p. 45), which means that they are object that push actions to happen. They act like intermediaries – enablers of visual relations, so, it is not farfetched to think that, depending on how they are programed to be,

it is possible to perceive sight in a different way. Then, to fashion them in a way that they are capable of stimulating the visual perception, is a way of encouraging composition to happen through them.

As Olafur Eliasson would call them, objects that are capable of enabling sight are viewing machines that work as “a way of bringing attention to the structure of the eye, not just the physical shape of it, but also the role it plays addressing how we see the world, and why we see the world the way we see it” (Studio Olafur Eliasson, 2017). Hence, there is a symbiotic relationship between how they are and what they produce: these artifacts do not have a pre-determined structure or appearance, but their physicality determines and entangles their relations with the environment while allowing us to understand our own visual logics.

Although these ideas could lead to identifying that the relevance of the artifact as a powerful tool relies on its physical properties and how they modify reality from our perception, it would be wrong to assume that they are the most relevant aspect of an object in order to be called artifact. In fact, the physical mechanics by which the artifact operates is not what is in play when talking about making people see, but how do these mechanisms trigger cognitive and experiential processes in us. In that sense, Eliasson suggests that it is how artifacts appear, their machinery, what positions the observer in context. In the same text he adds the following:

“I think the reason you want to show the machine is to remind people that they’re looking. At certain times you can sit in a cinema and become so engaged with the film, that you kind of join the level of representation, but then the next moment you flip back out. [...] My work is very much about positioning the subject”. (Grynsztejn, Birnbaum, & Speaks, 2011, p. 14)
Needless to say, artifacts are meant to be highly contextual machines: to see there, but be present here at the same time. This point follows the critique from Pallasmaa against the idea of a body-less observer that becomes detached of its surroundings (2005, p. 27). Not only this resounds with the idea that visual perception is an action of understanding the distance between things, but also that artifacts are made up of visual relation throughout all our senses, not just vision. Pallasmaa stresses that artifacts are “not [...] isolated and self-sufficient” but they need an active observer to work with/through, and that “the eyes collaborated with the body to strengthen the sense of reality” (pp. 41-42). This quality of being able to relate our body to what we perceive is what ultimately confers the power to artifacts of being reality-makers.

It is here where Eliassons’ work becomes interesting to observe because it focuses, for the most part, on creating artifact to see through. About his work, Pallasmaa comments that “The focus of the artistic experience is no longer an illusory, mediated image or form determined by the artist, but a phenomenon or process that takes place in the viewer’s perceptions and experience” (Eliasson, Pentagonal Landscapes, 2017, p. 45), which refers to the immersive quality of his installations, where the subject is seen an active entity in an ever changing situation. His works is grounded on what he calls “experimental setups” (p. 45) which mean that he privileges the experiential processes happening through the work of art over the object itself.

In Seeing yourself sensing (2001), he installed a series of glass pieces throughout the façade of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, made up of equally-distanced strips of transparent and mirrored surface. This glass façade is the artifact he uses to make the visitor of the museum aware of their sight. At the installation, you either look through or see yourself, but you cannot do both at the same time, creating a relation from the spectator with the outside of the space in a way that “inside and outside merge” (Studio Olafur Eliasson, 2017).

Although designed as a simple modification on the glass, it became a highly effective visual gesture because it sets the observer into a state of self-consciousness, and there is where its power resides to connect the phenomenon to the observers’ experience. Thus, it makes sense that, when referring to his works around sight, he mentions how “the pieces discuss whether it’s possible to be a subject, and whether you’re being forced to see in a certain way” (Grynsztein, Birnbaum, & Speaks, p. 20), which connects to the idea that part of his works of art are called “your...” as an appropriation element, where the power of the work of art resides on highlighting the effect a certain perceptual phenomenon has on the observer.

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The same relation is present in Pentagonal mirror tunnel (2017) where a set of five circular mirrors are disposed in front of each other at the height of the eye, creating a pentagonal space. When the observer stands in front on one of them, the depth of the space is ‘multiplied’ due to the reflections of the mirrors, and as the observer changes of position and walks around, it is possible to be seen changes. Here, the mirrors are not only artifacts that enable sight, but become spaces in themselves where the perceptual activity is enhanced and performed, thus, it could be said that this precise work exemplifies the idea of Pallasmaa that “Eliasson’s art […] focuses on the corporeal experience and the existential contemplation awakened thereby” (Eliasson, 2017, p. 49): it is not just about seeing, but wandering through that created space.

On both works, it is possible to elucidate the phenomenon of what Eliasson calls ‘double perspective’ which is related to what was discussed previously about how objects ‘see us’ back in a way that they become significant. Regarding this, Birnbaum comments: “you’re not only a productive, phenomenologically active subject, you’re also produced by the piece. You become that subject-object, that ambiguous space where, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty would say, everything takes place” (Grynsztejn, Birnbaum, & Speaks, p. 20). The idea that we become a ‘product’ of the phenomena’s catalyzed by artifacts, means, from a creative aspect, that we create in us new perceptual images, therefore, new ways of seeing the world.

So, if it is possible to define what an artifact is, and how it works from Eliassons’ perspective, it would be that they are immersive experiences where the sensorial activity is activated in order to create – to compose new realities. In that sense, artifacts are there “to make us aware of our motions […] in a way that allow us in a way that allows us to perceive what we know and to know what we perceive” (Broeker, Crary, Dawkins, Lütgens, & van Tuyll, 2004, p. 16), supporting the idea that, seeing through artifacts is another way of grasping knowledge about the world.

Composing through artifacts

Having understood what an artifact is, and how it functions, what is the creative outcome of using artifacts to see through? This question is pertinent because perhaps, the previous paragraphs give the impression that the value of these exercises relies solely on the experiential and perceptual gaining of knowledge, and that there is no significant outcome from them more than what happens inside us. This would not be an accurate affirmation because, even if it has been stated that sight and visual perception modify our own understanding of context, it has been also discussed that the outcome of these interactions through artifacts is the creation of space itself. As De Certeau points out, “space is composed of intersection of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within” to add next “space is a practiced place” (1988, p. 117). Hence, it is because we use artifacts to deploy our visual activities and because those artifacts create connections of meaning between us
and what occupies a place, that it is possible to create space.

Using artifacts to see is primarily a creative act, because it links the idea of creating space and composing it. Space is composed because sight is enacted through our own bodies in relation of how we position and see things in context, therefore embodying sight as a highly plastic action. Pallasmaa refers to this idea on the following text, when he speaks about the the task of architecture as an artifact where sensations go through in order to be embodied:

“[...] this is a specific embodied mode of thought that takes place through the senses and the body, and through the specific medium of architecture. Architecture elaborates and communicates thoughts of man’s incarnate confrontation with the world through ‘plastic emotions’. In my view, the task of architecture is ‘to make visible how the world touches us’” (2005, p. 46)

That is the reason why the creative process cannot be reduced to an exercise of bidimensionalizing space, meaning, composing space as if it was a drawing –pictorializing it[6]. When that happens “the spectator becomes a disembodied ‘point of view’ seeing the world as if through a window, that is as a synoptic overview of an objectified space observed from

[6] For the purpose of this research, architecture is seen in a broader context, more as spatial realization.

Pentagonal Mirror Tunnel
(2017)
Olafur Eliasson

Personal Archive
Then, reaching out for the world and composing it through artifacts results in new ways of activating sight, therefore, new ways of creative production. Thus, the challenge from this point on relies on producing an artifact (or a series of them) that can merge, as Eliassons’ work according to Pallasmaa, both “a natural phenomenon and a technical structure(s) at the same time” (Eliasson, 2017). What could be an artifact that activates sight?
Part Three

Edges as Artifacts
At this point of the investigation, it is relevant to go back into the initial research question and guide the following part towards a tangible outcome—something that is able to perform the same way it has been discussed theoretically until now. The general inquiry was; how do we exercise the act of spatial composition through artifacts? As it has been discussed before, the answer relies on designing objects that enhance our perceptual capabilities.

Designing these type of artifacts is interesting, because they are very flexible objects on their appearance. This idea points out to see that the artifact itself is not the final outcome, but rather what it produces. Perhaps, what is relevant from the design process is to notice how formal decisions twine around the objective of finding other ways of perceiving our context. Then, as Pallasmaa says when referring to
buildings, an artifact “[...] is not an end in itself, it frames, articulates, structures, gives significance, relates, separates and unites” (2005, p. 63). So, what could be the unifying concept that guides the tangible and intangible decisions in the artifacts to be designed? It is reasonable to think that the answer could be found through producing an artifact that is explicit in their intention for the one who sees it.

To be able to do this, the premise is that in a determined environment, creating visual segments of spaces that collect, group and enclose part of it, gives room to focus on certain aspects that might not be visible at first. As redundant as it could sound, if we were to create an artifact to see space, it must be one that is a space itself. However, this doesn’t mean to fracture the visual experience, but to be able to abstract from the context and put it back again in order to create position ourselves in the context. A quick example of this would be the gesture so often used by photographers of making a square with their hands in order to compose a picture. The action generates a ‘cutout’ on what is seen, and by doing so it is creating a space of composition that did not exist before.

Thus, this cutout creates a framework for sight to perform, where the space is delimited to indicate that the action will concentrate in determined sector of reality: “that place is where my sight will focus on”. Therefore, the proposal is that this situation can be performed when artifacts become ‘edges’ of what is seen. What does this mean? That artifacts become enclosures of sight: places where visual perception is contained. According to De Certeau “the operation of making boundaries [...] have[s] the function of founding and articulating spaces” (1988, pp. 122-123) which ratifies the space-maker quality of this action.

Edges have the quality of being entities of use and not of contemplation, meaning that, in this context, they serve for the purpose of containing sight – they help acknowledging a visual space, but they are not necessarily what sight is drawn to see, but their content. Arnheim reminds us about this quality in the following paragraph:

“[...] why then are pictures, more often than not, surrounded by frames, which fence them off from their environment? One reason is that the perceived character of visual things is strongly determined by what surrounds them, so that as these surroundings are not defined, any particular thing will be subject to an uncontrollable number of meanings” (1988, p. 55)

So, its worth to ask the question again: can these artifacts enable composing space through them? They do, because they become spaces of composition, by creating a distance between the observer and what is observed. Relating to the idea of the double view (that things look at us when we look at them), the edge then becomes a bridge between the perceptual processes and everything else outside, which is why it could be said that borders make the person question their

18 Different authors use synonyms to refer to this concept: boundary, border, frontier, periphery, limit and edge, among other. The latter will be used for the purpose of this investigation, because it is used more commonly used to refer to artifacts close to the human scale, whereas the terms border, frontier and periphery are often used in political geography contexts, which might not relate fully to the context here.
inner self, as well as their external reality (Gabrielsson, p. 228).

Thereupon, it seems necessary to unravel the relations and modes of working of edges through the exercise of sight itself. Since "[...]there is no spatiality that is not organized by the determination of frontiers" (De Certeau, 1988, p. 123), then it could be assumed that edges are to be found in the environment around us, so, what a better way of understanding the potential of composition of space than through composing images of it. Consequently, the next section of this investigation is the compilation of a series of images in the form of a visual essay, that try to account for a point of view where edges can be understood as formal entities, as well as creative enablers. More than trying to understand the logic behind each image, I invite the reader in the next section to see and feel though the images.
Part Four

Sight Becoming - Becoming Sight
The decision from the last part of the third chapter, of excluding textual content from an explanation of the concept of edge, comes from understanding that writing can only describe perceptual notions, but textual explanations cannot replicate perceptual sensations. The images used in the visual essay are a recollection of images that, from the author's point of view, showcase how sight composes with edges. This exercise might seem, at first, self-reflective, but the purpose is to showcase and communicate other ways of visual thinking that are not necessarily attached to verbal descriptions.

The invitation of the exercise to see and feel through what is perceived, appeals to a notion that has been touched around and developed in this investigation without a particular name, and is the idea of trusting the intuition, which
is another type of knowledge, different from intellectual cognition, that has not been verbalized yet. Intuition is what in vulgar language would be called the knowledge that comes from the gut, because it is one that has not been rationalized in a way that it can be decomposed into steps – it just feels how it feels. For Arnheim, “intuitive thought processes interact within a continuous field” whereas those of intellectual kind are successive and linear (1969, p. 234), then, understanding that composition in itself is a highly simultaneous process, results natural to find that intuition should be valued as process that encourages thinking through feeling.

This is the reason why the development and execution of a series artifacts to see is what this chapter will resolve. The idea of this part of the document is that through presenting the artifacts, the insights and key concepts of the discussion given during this document will be showcased. For this, the research will grasp at the idea of intuitive cognition and foster it in two ways: for one part, the investigation will not try to verbalize every formal decision that was taken, meaning, it will not question or answer why each part of the resulting artifacts is a certain way. If this were to be done, it would undermine the idea that artifacts should be evaluated on what they do, rather than what they are. On the other side, it will become more of an invitation for the reader to explore and evaluate through its own senses the artifacts.

Consequently, this chapter, rather than describing a production process or technical details, pretends to be a visual witness of the artifacts designed. Here, the prototypes have the purpose of becoming part of the conversation, rather than being seen as a final result, or a synopsis of the theoretical work developed until now. Therefore, the aim is that the content of this chapter serves as an aid in the visual quest of finding how these artifacts to see work and look like.

Composing through objects

The way we see the world can change in just a moment: we just need something that breaks our sense of normality – that alerts us of change, to trigger a modification in our sensorial abilities. If this is the premise for grasping into the shape of a structure that would make sense as an enabler of sight, then, why not just play with it? Through exploring the surrounding space with small elements that resembled edges, it was possible to observe how the space is no longer what it was when you look through them.

At first the hand positions the edge to the height of the eyes, and the gaze travels to the other side. Then, it happens that the face frowns and the eye stays for more time in a place because it catches something and blinks to see if it can focus on something else.
Through this exercise, it was manifested that there were three ways an edge could play with sight: through completeness, distortion and direction. The first one happens when the edge manifests itself in a way that it hides or reveals parts of things that were unavailable to see before. The second one, when the space that it contains modifies how the physical attributes of things are perceived. The third one, when the vector of sight changes, allowing us to see, not just what is in front of us, but also ourselves.

If the artefacts are fashioned in a way that those properties are destabilized, then sight would be drawn to and through the artifact. But, how to make this happen? Perhaps using other artifacts to see: mirrors, lenses and light. When these artifacts are translated to the scale of the eye, then the compositional process becomes a playful act.
Open your senses,
See the world
and make it your own
How to define a shape of these edges? Arnheim, referring to Kevin Lynch’s comments on how to orient oneself in space says that it happens by having either "A center to which other places in the environment can be related" or by an enclosure which Lynch calls a district. According to them, both are instruments of order and orientation (Arnheim, The power of the center: A study of composition in the visual arts: the new version, 1988, p. 51).

“To be sure, the edge of a frame is linear, but centers of energy can assume any shape” (Arnheim, 1988, p. 51)

A circle is the archetype of an enclosure. It embraces and holds.
The designed artifacts

In total, six artifacts were designed and prototyped. Each one relates in a particular way to the eye in terms of its scale, proximity and performance. Each one behaves like a self-sufficient entity that creates agency in order to make sight perform. As a group, they are nothing more but a prolongation of the visual essay aforementioned.

Positioning them in space, seeing through and taking the time to compose our surroundings is just one step towards expanding our sensorial experiences.

An Artifact
to see through
to see yourself
to magnify your vision
to blur your sight
to see within
to look up
to look down
to move
Discussion and Conclusions

Things will come to our eyes is an investigation that hopes to be both, a moment of reflection and discussion about the phenomenon of sight, and a stimulus towards thinking design and its production from a phenomenological perspective, where they are seen more as enablers of actions, rather than objects that should be contemplated. Design is a discipline that constantly engages with our sensorial experiences, but more than often, the preoccupation relies in what we sense, and not how we sense, converting the production of design into an end by itself, and not a medium of establishing relations between us and the surrounding world.

Then, the deepest preoccupation throughout this research was to show that, what some may call, a 'simple' action, is a complex phenomenon that ravels around all the under-
standing of our perceptual systems and how they constitute unfailing knowledge from a visual perspective. Sight is a multifaceted, multilayered phenomenon that can be discussed through almost every lens of human knowledge. This research has been an approach from this corner of the design discipline in hopes that it serves as one of many examples where it can demonstrate that design is capable of engaging with the phenomenological understanding of perceptual activity from a critical attitude. Nonetheless, this research did not pretend to develop a new cognitive theory around sight, but it was always the intention to engage with existing and relevant concepts developed already in other fields. By translating it into the task of the designer, it hopes that more and more it will include itself in a conversation that sometimes seems relegated to a secondary place, but where design has an incredible space of play and maneuver.

The artifacts prototyped serve, in this case, as a creative tool of action-enabling and space-making by engaging directly with sight. They take the ideas developed throughout the investigation and make them tangible by translating these phenomena into an action that anyone in front of them can appreciate. When they were designed, the aim was that they were so easy to recognize that they made a ‘click’ in the head of the person in front of them, and that is what composing through intuition is all about. Then, as it was discussed, this type of non-rationalized and simultaneous thinking processes serves as tool to recognize our own sight, but also to question the experience of seeing our context, which leads to believe that creating this new spaces of sight is a challenge to the sensorial experiences we have nowadays, where we are bombarded by images to which we pay no attention. Giving ourselves the time to take a moment and focus our senses into what is beyond a frame, is a testimony to thinking that there are other ways of perceiving reality.

Perhaps, the biggest conclusion from this research relies on understanding the power of sight. Going back to a quote from Arnheim, perception is not “a passive recording of stimulus material, but an active concern for the mind” (1969, p. 37), then to reinforce this mode of thinking, is to understand sight as a dynamic and ever-changing action, that is possible to be trained. As it was possible to elucidate, sight is about causality: what happens when I see? It is also a future-oriented activity: how can it build my own reality? Becoming conscious of our own perceptual activity is, then, of utmost importance for navigating the world.

Thus, to answer the question that guided this research: Can we become visually literate by exercising the act of spatial composition through artifacts? The answer is yes. It is not just a possibility, but a necessity. Every engagement with sight – every moment we take time to see, we are exercising and sharpening our own perceptual abilities, therefore, recognizing what is in front of us, depends upon our own will to make it. In that sense, it is worth noting that the artifacts prototyped in this research are just one of many possibilities of experiencing the same phenomena: they are there to become a point of discussion, rather than to be looked as finished products in themselves.

It is also worth pointing out that, the fact that this investigation has been done through the eyes of design, means that its goal was always to be materialized. Through the developed prototypes, it was interesting to see how an intangible action like sight becomes so powerful when mediated. That
is the reason why, paradoxically, they are presented as contextless objects: they have the potential to be set in so many different situations, that by presenting them without one, it focuses on the phenomenon itself and any interpretation opens more paths to look beyond them: they do not belong to a situation, but are situation enablers. Through this same line of thinking, it is worth noting that a further discussion can be done through contextualizing them and seeing how they perform in different situations where the sharpening of the eye is needed, for example in curatorial spaces.

Lastly, the aim of this project was also to validate the role of the designer as enabler of relations and of meaning. To a greater extent, this means realizing that the design worth making is the one that challenges the way we see the world. In a world conquered by images, it is worth trying to see beyond what is presented to us, but build our own reality, and what better way to do it than through our own perceptual experiences.

On a personal note, I would like to add that to understand how sight and perceptual processes work has changed the way I conceive design. I find myself constantly asking on every project, how every decision will affect the sensorial experience of the people. Then, I have found myself amazed by the times I open my eyes and see what surrounds me. I would not describe these situations as epiphany moments, where a truth has been revealed in front of my eyes, but, it has made me conscious of how much and how deep my sight can go if I allow myself to play with it.
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