

Looking Awry

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Visual Culture Studies or an Anthropologically Oriented *Bildwissenschaft*? On the Directions of the Iconic Turn in the Cultural Sciences

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Not too long ago, philosophers of science debated whether the history of the humanities could be described in a way analogous to the natural sciences. Those, who distinguished the developmental stages of the natural sciences (based on differing criteria), while representing methodological naturalism, invariably placed the humanities on a comparatively lower level of “advancement” – in relation to the theoretical knowledge of the natural sciences. This was the case even when they took into account the specificity of the humanities that came into focus with the rise of the antipositivist tendencies in science. Better times for the humanities came with Kuhn’s theory of scientific paradigms and Paul K. Feyerabend’s so-called epistemological anarchism, not to mention the postmodernist aura, which on the one hand has severely impaired thinking about the humanities in terms of the scientific method, but on the other hand, has “elevated” their standing in a certain way by exposing the culturally mediated and interpretative status of theories in the natural sciences. At the same time, attempts have been made at framing the dynamics of contemporary science from the pragmatic perspective of scientific investigations, a perspective determined by the complex character of tasks which are epistemological

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and practical in nature. The methodological-theoretical discourse has shifted from the heights of philosophical conceptualizations to more down-to-earth practices of contemporary research. Those practices in the natural sciences as well as in the humanities have, until recently, functioned mostly within the confines of disciplines and specializations (and for the most part they still do). The ambition of every discipline of knowledge, at the outset of its stabilization within the academic division of labour, has been to assert its autonomy through delineating its own investigatory field, differentiating its own specificity in relation to other disciplines, and pointing out the prospective uniqueness of its investigative methods. Immanuel Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties* is one of the early, but nonetheless vital, examples of this process. The relations between individual branches of knowledge, which at first mainly occurred at their peripheries, have been evolving under the aegis of interdisciplinarity (also in the form of comparative studies in the humanities). The distinguished German philosopher of science Jürgen Mittelstraß, in his book *Wissen und Grenzen* (2001), remarks that if in the late 1980s the congresses and symposiums of philosophers of science and representatives of other disciplines were still dominated by the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity, then today there is a noticeable dominance of the rhetoric of transdisciplinarity. Transdisciplinarity is, of course, much more than a meagre rhetorical strategy, as it becomes the primary notion upon which investigatory theory and practice are arranged. Consequently, we come to a much clearer realization that the divisions separating disciplines are essentially not of a theoretical but of a historical kind, and as such can be not only surpassed but also relocated, modified and transposed into thresholds that invite multidirectional movement. They not only can be, but – at a certain level of development – must be surpassed; as the changes in this matter are a direct outcome of the growing complexity of the problems set before contemporary scientific pursuits (e.g. the problem of sourcing energy, problems of healthcare and the environment, and in the area of broadly conceived humanities – the problem of images, which is of greatest interest to me, images whose proliferation in contemporary culture has become a serious challenge for educational strategies). If interdisciplinary investigations were characterized by their rather random character, then transdisciplinarity becomes a necessity in the second phase of modernity – a post-industrial modernity “at large” (to borrow Arjun Appadurai’s phrase which explains the prevalence of the prefix “trans” in our language so well). There is no trace of an effort to eliminate disciplinarity as such here. On the contrary, it is its high level of development and evolved specializations that constitute the basic premise of transdisciplinarity. Nevertheless, excellent disciplinary competence is by itself not enough to resolve the tasks defined in terms of transdisciplinarity. Transdisciplinarity “guides

perception and problem-solving, but does not entrench itself in any permanent theoretical models – either professional or disciplinary, as well as any holistic frameworks.”¹ Mittelstraß sees this as an outcome of the previously mentioned weakening of the status of theory, not only in the humanities but also in the natural sciences. Thus, theories are perceived as (mere) interpretations, and the former dream of the unity of knowledge (upheld today by among others Edward O. Wilson or by Humberto Maturana) has transformed into a unity from the “bottom-up,” one that is practical and operational (defined by complex research tasks). In contrast with interdisciplinarity, which does not lead to a redefinition of the investigatory field of involved disciplines, transdisciplinarity – “active” in those cases where there are problems insolvable within the framework of singular disciplines – constitutes a novel investigatory field. The German philosopher illustrates his findings mostly with examples from the area of the natural and technical sciences being developed in new research centres that mainly operate beyond the settings of academic teaching institutions, which are organized according to disciplinary models. Depending on the character of problems being solved, sometimes the humanities are also involved (it is hard to imagine working out the problems of *Umwelt* or public health without them). To what extent they (still) belong to the tradition of interdisciplinary research and to what extent they cross into the sphere of transdisciplinarity – is a question, requiring detailed analysis, that will undoubtedly be asked by future historians of knowledge. Disciplinarity, interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity all have equally influenced the shape of contemporary humanities. In relation to the humanities of the last half-century, the correct assumption seems to state that the most inspiring insights are gained at the crossroads of diverse disciplines, subjects and methodological-theoretical perspectives; and that from previous research traditions we most readily adopt those which until now have existed on the margins due to their subversive nature, and in which disciplinary boundaries have undergone significant deconstruction. To make the titular *Bildwissenschaft* and its philosophical contexts relevant to this insight, it is enough to point out the contemporary popularity of Aby Warburg, whose research ideas were criticized or marginalized by the newly constituted, and proud of its academic standing, discipline of art history; or Walter Benjamin, who during his lifetime was not accepted in any of the German academic communities. Anticipating later considerations, with Mittelstraß’s roughly described concept in mind, I wish to add that the original undertaking of a group of humanists, the *Charter of Transdisciplinarity*, along with the founding of the International Center for

1 Jürgen Mittelstraß, *Wissen und Grenzen. Philosophische Studien* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001), 118.

Transdisciplinary Research and the *Transdisciplinarité* series, can easily be tied to the problematic inherent in the title of this text.²

When we try to put the history of the humanities of the second-half of the twentieth century in order, and at the same time want to embrace its inter- and trans-disciplinary efforts, we inevitably talk of “turns”: the linguistic-semiotic-textual, the performative, the visual; of which the genesis of the last two is two-fold: substantive – accounting for the state of contemporary culture (which on the one hand acquires performative attributes, while on the other, is filled, or rather flooded, with images derived from a multitude of sources) – and methodological – preoccupied with overcoming the limitations of the first turn. There are even some discussions about the emerging outlines of a new visual civilization, which can be considered – for a multitude of reasons – an exaggerated diagnosis that often entangles researchers of culture in renewed versions of an old religious and philosophical dispute between the iconoclasts and iconodulists (which frequently becomes much more heated than it needs to be).

We are aware of at least two – inherently different – formulations of the visual turn. One of them was proclaimed by William J. Thomas Mitchell, a Professor of English and Art History at the University of Chicago, while the other was introduced by a disciple of Max Imdahl and H. G. Gadamer, the art historian – Gottfried Boehm. The first is situated in the field of a new discipline (according to Mitchell’s preliminary investigative remarks), “Visual Studies” or “Visual Culture Studies,” which, while underscoring the undeniably growing importance of images (of various kinds and derived from different sources) in contemporary society, is tasked with investigating this state of affairs in a critical fashion and from multiple points of view. In

2 “As the prefix “trans” indicates, transdisciplinarity concerns that which is at once between the disciplines, across the different disciplines, and beyond all disciplines” wrote Basarab Nicolescu (one of the Center’s founders along with Edgar Morin), he added that “Its goal is the understanding of the present world” (Basarab Nicolescu, *Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity*, trans. Karen-Claire Voss (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 44.) Another theory I will refer to is that of René Berger, as it can elucidate the issue of the anthropology of images, just like the recent research that points out the elective affinities between the theories of Benjamin and Warburg – also in their relation to the ideas of Panofsky. Siegrid Weigel dissected this topic in the article *Bildwissenschaft aus dem “Geiste wahrer Philologie,”* in *Schrift Bilder Denken. Walter Benjamin und die Künste*, ed. D. Schöttker, (Frankfurt a/M 2004), 112-127. The way Weigel utilizes Freud’s theory to interpret Benjamin’s dialectic images in the spirit of “disfigured similitude” (in the book *Entstellte Ähnlichkeit. Walter Benjamins theoretische Schreibweise*, 1997) can be viewed as an undertaking in its intentions not unlike that laid out by Didi-Huberman in *Devant L’image* (which similarly refers to Freud’s concept of interpretation of dreams, and recounts its use for the critical correction of the conception of Renaissance art by Panofsky; see footnote no. 23).

the article-manifesto *The Pictorial Turn*, first published in *Artforum* in 1992, Mitchell, drawing from the work of Richard Rorty and Stanley Cavell, as well as the European tradition, formulated a project of a new research discipline that focuses on “the analysis and critique of visual phenomena.” Mitchell’s line of argument relied on the history of pictorial representation only to the extent required to discuss the work of Erwin Panofsky (read, in an interesting way, alongside Althusser), while postulating a new “critical iconology,” and referenced David Freedberg’s *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (a book considered to be as crucial for the development of the discipline as Belting’s *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*). Questioning the dominance of research strategies utilized within the framework of the linguistic turn, which he accused of a certain kind of iconoclasm, Mitchell defined the visual turn not as a return to naïve *mimesis*, copy or correspondence theories of representation, or a resurrection of the metaphysics of pictorial “presence,” but rather as “a postlinguistic, postsemitic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality.”³ The critique of this and other theories that have rapidly become a part of academic cultural studies, which in turn intermittently attempted to incorporate the history of art into its domain (as well as media studies even though it preceded cultural studies), has taken on many forms. In the community of art historians, there was a growing sense of anxiety over the possible termination of their discipline, and over the trivialization of their workshop by utilizing it – against the intentions of its architects – for imagological practices (in the sense attributed to the term by Milan Kundera in *Immortality*), as well as for building theoretical resources that would enable the effective manipulation of people by means of images. In this context, Rosalind Krauss and others, in the journal *October* from the summer of 1996 devoted to Visual

3 William John Thomas Mitchell, “The Iconic Turn,” in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 16. Mitchell explains the Genesis of the visual turn as an effect of the “paradox of the moment.” On the one hand, he says, it is noticeable that in the era of video, cybernetic technology and electronic reproduction there has been an unprecedented growth of new forms of illusion and visual stimulation. Nevertheless, on the other hand, there is a deep anxiety surrounding the image, a fear that the power of images will ultimately destroy its creators and controllers. The study of this subject led Willibald Sauerländer to notice that the contemporary staging of politics in the media clearly relates to pre-Enlightenment and pre-democratic models, thus they appeal to the “archaic remnants” of the public, which cease to be comprised of citizens (in “Iconic turn? Eine Bitte um Ikonoklasmus,” in *Iconic Turn. Die neue Macht der Bilder*, eds. Christa Maar, Hubert Burda (Köln: DuMont, 2005)). In a similar way Ernst Cassirer described the Weimer Republic in the *Myth of the State* – a book “settling accounts” with modernity that is as important, but unfortunately not so well known, as Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Studies, fervently defended the heritage of the linguistic turn in the study of images, especially those created by the new mass media, which (according to Krauss) deprive the viewers of their objectivity and analytical skills, leading to a loss of a sense of reality. “Only the reading of image as text reveals the conventional nature of the image and thus neutralizes its power” – this is how Jan Verwoert summarizes Krauss’s opinion, adding that from her point of view, “the visual face of the image is a lie. The truth of the image comes to light only when it is read as text” (for example in the spirit of the demythologizing strategies practiced by Roland Barthes or the ideas of Jacques Lacan).⁴ The arguments presented by Krauss and other critics of Visual Studies call to mind the dialectic of myth and enlightenment outlined many years before by Adorno and Horkheimer, here transposed onto the (mythic) image and (enlightened) text; but apart from this, they express fears arising from the marginalisation or complete incorporation of art history into Visual Studies (a fear justified by the fact that in the American cultural tradition, references to autonomous artistic images have a much less solid grounding than in Europe, where the initiative to establish an analogue to Visual Studies came from art historians themselves, and it was not a proposition of creating a new discipline, but an endeavour designed to be transdisciplinary, even if not at first, then at least asserting such a future possibility). What adds to the confusion is that representatives of other disciplines within the humanities that deal with images in various ways and to various extent (such as archaeology) were not very active in the American debate concerning Visual Studies. Tom Holert proved to be a merciless critic of Mitchell’s ideas when he examined the syllabus of the “Theories of Media” classes that accompanied Mitchell’s “Visual Culture” seminar in the 2003/2004 academic year at the University of Chicago.

This course – we read – is devoted to basic problems in the interdisciplinary study of visual culture. What are the cultural (as well as natural) components of visual experience? What is vision? Who is a receiver? What is the difference between visual and verbal representation? In what way do visual media exercise control, arouse desire, how do they create pleasure and construct the boundary between individual and communal experiences within the private and public spheres? How is

4 Jan Verwoert “Double Viewing: Versuch *über* die Bedeutung des »Pictorial Turn« für einen ideologiekritischen Umgang mit visuellen Medien – im Medium Videokunst,” in *Person/Schauplatz*, Hrsg. J. Huber (Wien: Springer, 2003), 227. Verwoert rightly underscores that the weakness of the opinions in question is their disregard for the results of research on the reception of media images.

the construction of visual semiosis affected by politics, gender, sexuality, ethnicity?

Holert leaves no proverbial stone unturned in his critique of the program's structure, pointing out the confusion of philosophical and psychological problems with political ones. Such ambitious aspirations within a single course of lectures can be realized, at best, in an amateurish way that "with the help of an eclectic mix of methods rather muddles the problems of visual culture instead of elucidating them."⁵ For a later argument of mine, another thread is also important: in the syllabus, Visual Culture Studies is described as an "interdisciplinary study," and not – as in the primary account – a new discipline. Incidentally, Mitchell devoted a separate article to interdisciplinarity with "Interdisciplinarity and Visual Culture," published in the *Art Bulletin* in 1995. It is worth underscoring that the literature on the subject is filled with numerous attempts at characterizing the status of the study of visual culture. Nicolas Mirzoeff and Irit Rogoff view them rather as a perceptual-critical tactics independent from other disciplines, while on the other hand, the authors of one of the *Introductions to...* – John Walker and Sarah Chaplin, give such an extensive list of disciplinary and theoretical-methodological inspirations from which Visual Culture Studies draws that it is hard to imagine the possibility of their comprehensive (to some extent, at least) development and application.⁶ Mitchell was attacked by numerous opponents and defended himself by reviewing the ten myths surrounding visual culture and the study of it that most of their detractors share. These myths about visual culture say that visual culture entails the liquidation of art ("as we have known it"); that it accepts without question the view that art is to be defined by its working exclusively through the optical faculties; that it transforms the history of art into a history of images; that it implies that the difference between a literary text and a painting is a non-problem as words and images dissolve into undifferentiated "representation"; that visual culture implies a predilection for the disembodied, dematerialized image; that we live in a predominantly visual era

5 Tom Holert, "Kulturwissenschaft/Visual Culture," in *Bildwissenschaft. Disziplinen, Themen, Methoden*, ed. Klaus Sachs-Hombach (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005), 229.

6 In John A. Walker and Sarah Chaplin, *Visual Culture: An Introduction*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 3. Walker and Chaplin enumerate aesthetics, anthropology, archeology, architectural history/theory, art criticism, art history, black studies, critical theory, cultural studies, deconstruction, design history, feminism, film studies/theory, heritage studies, linguistics, literary criticism, Marxism, media studies, phenomenology, philosophy, photographic studies, political economy, post-colonial studies, post-structuralism, proxemics, psychoanalysis, psychology of perception, queer theory, reception theory, Russian formalism, semiotics, social history, sociology, structuralism.

as modernity entails the hegemony of vision and visual media; that there is a coherent class of things called “visual media;” that visual culture is fundamentally about the social construction of the visual field, and what we see, and the manner in which we come to see it, is not simply part of a natural ability; that it entails an anthropological, and therefore unhistorical, approach to vision; and finally, that it consists of “scopic regimes” and mystifying images to be overthrown by political critique.⁷ Visual Studies or studies of the visual culture are, of course, not limited to Mitchell’s ideas, although he has always been mentioned in any kind of *Introduction to...* or anthologies which proliferated in the 1990s at a breath-taking pace – and the more of them appeared, the harder it was to find some reasonably sufficient set of beliefs that could be the foundation, at least heuristically, of a starting point for transdisciplinary research. Even such key notions as the notion of an image, visuality, visual act or visual culture are not semantically stable. In his analysis of basic textbooks, anthologies and collaborative works within the field of Visual Studies, Konrad Chmielecki, following in Mirzoeff’s footsteps, reconstructed their basic areas of interest: a) researching the visual phenomena created with the aid of visual means and technologies, b) researching the history of images based on the semiotic theory of representation, and c) constructing the social theory and history of visuality or the sociology of visual culture. This allowed him to point out that the idea of the image as a privileged element, or the medium of visual culture, did not receive a satisfactory explanation, one that is relatively stable, even in Mitchell’s and Aumont’s books devoted to this very concept (despite the widespread belief that the study of visual culture is in some way the outcome of the pictorial turn).⁸

The German research tradition displays much greater clarity in this respect. The transdisciplinary research of images was initiated there – not like in the United States – by philosophically-minded art historians and thinkers working in the field aesthetics, some of whom (starting with Warburg), have previously displayed an interest in various forms of non-artistic pictorial representation. There were, and there still are, various reasons behind this interest. Referring, as Mitchell did, to the idea of the linguistic turn (its possibilities as well as limitations) Gottfried Boehm, whom I mentioned earlier, searches for a distinctive “logic of images” different from the “logic of language,” but first he asks the question “What is an image?” calling attention

7 William John Thomas Mitchell “Showing Seeing. A Critique of Visual Culture,” in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London: Routledge, 2002), 86–101.

8 I refer to Konrad Chmielecki’s analysis from his book, which is being prepared for publishing, about the aesthetics of intermediality, based on his doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of Ryszard Kluszczyński.

to the exceptionally broad scope of connotations associated with the notion. In his introduction to a collaborative work, the title of which contains the preceding question, we read about the multiplicity of images “painted, conceived, dreamt up” from one perspective, about “paintings, metaphors, gestures” from another perspective, about “the mirror, echo, mimicry” from another still. Ultimately a problem evidently arises: “What do they all have in common, what can be inferred in each case? Which disciplines neighbour the phenomenon of the image? Are there any disciplines that do not?”⁹ The way Boehm delineates the field of investigation for the *Bildwissenschaft* entails the transgression of disciplines that have traditionally displayed interest in images beyond their own framework and definitions, with the clear intention of bridging the gaps that separate them not only from psychology and psychoanalysis but from the natural sciences as well. In this case it is not simply about an interest in the role and form of images in the history of those latter disciplines (which Horst Bredekamp investigated – as a researcher who has long tried to open the history of art to non-artistic modes of pictorial representation), but about researching the forms, status and functions that images have in such disciplines as geography and law, as well as mathematics, logic, chemistry or medicine, all in close cooperation with their representatives – theorists and practitioners alike.

If archaeology and history of art relaunched their traditions precisely as historic *Bildwissenschaften*, if film theory places the visual aspect of film right next to narrativity, if philosophy celebrates the visual aspect of reflection, and literary theory analyses the bilateral relation between the written word and the image, if history expunged the odium associated with the illustrative aspect of visual documents, if the history of knowledge underscores its inherently visual aspect, and jurisprudence works on an iconology of law, if in the field of mathematics the Bourbaki group counters iconoclasm with the formula *seeing is believing*, if biology, beginning with Darwin, sees the criterion for natural selection in beauty, and if all areas of natural sciences rely upon computer visual analysis, than these are the signs that also within the field of research there occurs a substantial [...] shift that transpires in the whole culture.¹⁰

9 Gottfried Boehm, “Die Wiederkehr der Bilder,” in *Was ist ein Bild?*, ed. Gottfried Boehm, (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1994), 7.

10 Horst Bredekamp, “Drehmomente – Merkmale und Ansprüche des *iconic turn*,” in *Iconic Turn. Die neue Macht der Bilder*, 16–17. In Poland the issue of visualisation in contemporary science has been brought to the attention of researchers in the humanities probably only by Andrzej Gwóźdź. Although it was overlooked by Bredekamp, it is worth remembering about the influ-

This is what Bredekamp says in his article from a collaborative book under the telling title *The Iconic Turn: The New Power of Images*. Another recently published work titled *Bildwissenschaft. Disziplinen, Themen, Methoden*, which is an overview illustrating the extent of *Bildwissenschaft's* field of research, also spans from archaeology and prehistory all the way to the analysis of contemporary images. Tilman Lenssen-Enz, who represents the first two disciplines in that volume, points to the fact that, for example, Egyptology and classical archaeology of Greece and Rome have been examining images from the beginning and have developed the tools and frameworks suited for their interpretation. However, their history is primarily confronted with another, much less contextually developed, pictorial corpus – parietal art – also designated as “painting,” whose interpretations are and will remain far from unanimous (although, as we are all well aware, those interpretations fall somewhere between the magical and the aesthetic perspectives, the latter of which is especially agreeable to art historians and philosophers of art). Much has been achieved in this matter, as we well know, by Leroi-Gourham, who investigated not only parietal art, but also simple “mnemograms” and the so-called portable art; and a further impulse for archaeologists was provided by ethnological studies of indigenous groups in Australia, North America and Africa, which treated (as they do to this day) parietal art mostly as an identity-forming medium (for example as a way of marking previously possessed territory that was lost to the colonizers). This is how anthropology and ethnology have opened up a new interpretational dimension for research on European parietal art, and their continuous search for inspiration in (newer) aesthetics and the theory of artistic practices has led to, if not holistic, then at least “thick” (after Geertz) descriptions of cave paintings in terms of “figures,” “iconic scenes” and “compositions.” Lenssen-Enz convinces us that prehistory and archaeology have been, and still are, developed in close interrelations with other disciplines of knowledge about images (including modern ones), and thus, perforce, they exhibit transdisciplinary proclivities. Their search for sources of inspiration in the studies of contemporary culture is supported by the manifold analogies between the new-media images and the magical-religious images, made by researchers of the modern visual sphere, mostly with the purpose of discrediting it in mind (as in the case of the aforementioned account of Rosalind Krauss). A rare exception to this trend is found in the research, seemingly

ence the pictorial turn has exerted over history. In the new series *Visuelle Geschichtskultur*, edited by Stefan Troebst, the first volume published was the highly interesting *Neue Staaten – neue Bilder? Visuelle Kultur im Dienst staatlicher Selbstdarstellung in Zentral- und Osteuropa seit 1918*, eds. Arnold Bartetzky, Marina Dmitrieva und Stefan Troebst (Köln: Böhlau Köln, 2005). This issue is investigated in detail by Magdalen Jabłkowska in her doctoral dissertation devoted to the imagery of selected cities in the context of memory theory.

unburdened by iconoclastic traits, of René Berger who, in his polemic against Lévi-Strauss's purely cognitivist account of the "mytho-logic," recalls Lévy-Bruhl's concept of "mystical participation" and compares it with the modes of influence exerted by the televised image.¹¹ Nevertheless, such analogies have already been made in the context of film. Joachim Paech points out that even Roland Barthes (a structuralist by all means) "turned his eyes towards the telly," and the "magic of cinema" was analysed by, for example, Edgar Morin.¹² It should be taken into account that if such analogies contain any useful insights, worthy of detailed analysis, then their areas of comparison should become better understood and articulated, at least to some extent, as an endeavour that requires a joint effort with the philosophy of culture, framed not as a mere "cornerstone" of the humanities, but rather as a theory of the civilizing process. I will attend to these matters shortly, but now I would like to take a closer look at the theories of the image that emerged from the German debates that took place at the height of the pictorial turn. I will start with the concept of Gottfried Boehm, who defines the image, akin to the linguistic metaphor, in terms of an "iconic difference." The contrast between the standard and non-standard use of language has its analogue within the iconic sphere in the visual contrast between the completely visible surface of the image and all that it contains; it is precisely this contrast that lies at the source of the fact that images not only "show" something, but that they frequently "tell" something as well, that they possess their own logic, irreducible to a merely discursive one. Although, as Boehm points out, it is hard to judge from the anthropological-historical point of view whether the propensity for depiction and the propensity for speech emerged at the same time in the history of our species, we are still able – by utilizing Hans Jonas's notion of *homo pictor* – to define the iconic difference as a property of man only, who has "[the] ability to reconfigure and embody into a limited and stable visual field [...] the volatile field of everyday perception with its blurry borderlines

11 In relation to this, Berger notices that „We differ much less from the primitive societies, than we might think. Although we have left traditional myths behind, the mythical dimension has survived within us. It is so vital that we do not even notice it. It seamlessly blends with reality, this is how myths work, when they cease being an object of study, and become a part of common practice.” „Restrukturyzacja mitu,” trans. Barbara Kita, in *Pejzaże audiowizualne. Telewizja, wideo, komputer*, ed. Andrzej Gwóźdź (Kraków: Universitas, 1997), 121. It is worth noting that the televisions „proteanism” described by Berger corresponds to some extent with the metamorphic quality of myth, described by Cassirer as a “law,” which together with the solidarity of life “rules” magical thinking.

12 Joachim Paech, “Telewizja jako forma symboliczna,” trans. Krystyna Krzemieniowa, in *Pejzaże audiowizualne*.

and free-flowing responsiveness to external stimuli.”¹³ In this context, the problem of early forms of pictorial representation (in caves), which Meyer Schapiro for example considered incapable of achieving complete stabilization in the visual field, returns, alongside – on the other hand – the problem of contemporary new-media images, the perception of which is subjected to the rhythm of rapid, oftentimes fragmentary, everyday perception. Boehm attempts to mitigate this problem by stressing the gradual nature of the fundamental contrast constituting the image. He speaks of “powerful” images and the use of new techniques which amplify the image by means of building the iconic tension in a manner that is controlled and obvious to the viewer. “The powerful image draws its vitality from this twofold truth: show something, simulate something, and at the same time indicate the criteria and premises of that very experience.”¹⁴ On the other hand, a “weak” image obscures all the differences implied by this fundamental contrast, remaining in accord with the description of contemporary culture in terms of total simulation and the “agony of the real,” to recall Baudrillard’s extreme diagnosis.

Boehm’s theory, modelled clearly upon the “powerful” image (autonomous, artistic), is inspired by both phenomenology and semiotics, placing them within the historically oriented philosophy of culture, whose reach overlaps with that of philosophical anthropology. It could be, as I see it, incorporated (with appropriate reservations and limitations) into Hans Belting’s project of the anthropology of the image. But before I take a closer look at this matter, let me briefly reiterate the theory laid out by Martin Seel in his *Thirteen Statements on the Picture*.¹⁵ By pointing to the “material” image as the object of perception, which presents something on a defined (but not necessarily flat) surface, Seel concurs with Boehm not only in asserting the primacy of an artistic image, but also in their shared intention of overthrowing the opposition, exposed by Lambert Weising, between the semiotic and the phenomenological perspective. Only their integration – says Seel – gives justice to the image and, at the same time, allows one to distinguish it from phenomena of a similar kind. What kind of similar phenomena must be taken into account? Seel is adamant in pointing out that treating cyberspace as a pictorial phenomenon, although it certainly is a visual phenomenon, is a misunderstanding. Wherever space becomes a picture or a picture becomes space, we are no longer dealing with

13 Boehm, *Die Wiederkehr*, 31.

14 Gottfried Boehm, “Jenseits der Sprache? Anmerkungen zur Logik der Bilder,” in *Iconic Turn*, 34. Boehm, of course, addresses here these contemporary artistic practices, which uphold the iconic difference, diminishing in the mass-media.

15 Martin Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, trans. John Farrell, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 159–185.

pictoriality (as the iconic difference disappears), but with a visual phenomenon *sui generis*, accompanied by haptic and acoustic phenomena. Seel also disputes the view, introduced by Weising, on the historical evolution of images from the figurative panel painting, through video clips and computer-aided design, all the way to cyberspace. As Weising's proposals require a separate introduction and discussion, for the purposes of the current argument I will only reiterate the first introductory part of this author's latest work, where he lays out the main directions in contemporary philosophy of the image or rather – to be precise – the critical analysis of the anthropological viewpoint represented by Hans Jonas, Willém Flausser, early Sartre and – recently – by Belting. In its strong version, this analysis asserts that "...the pictorial imagery is not only a precondition of a defined human activity, namely the production of images, but this ability of producing images must be considered a precondition of the possibility of self-awareness and the specifically human way of being."¹⁶ Ascribing the term "image" to both mental imagery and materialized images, and maybe even reducing the latter to the former, which is what Wiesing accuses Belting of, causes the anthropological perspective to become disconnected from the analysis of specific images actualized in material media. Another thing altogether is the fact – this also is a critique of Belting – that images are produced and utilized by people, in various ways and with various objectives in mind, which leads to an unjustifiable preference for distinctly anthropocentric images. Leaving the validity of this critique aside, I would like to underscore that the anthropological viewpoint of the philosophy of image should not be treated as a mere alternative to the semiotic and phenomenological perspectives, but rather as their "frame" that is inscribed into philosophy of culture, which shows a preference for perspectivism in its treatment of various forms of human expression and symbolization rather than for the one-sidedness exhibited by some proponents of the linguistic turn, who deny our forebears from pre-literate cultures the abilities of distancing themselves from their surroundings and the faculty of abstract thinking. The Palaeolithic hunter – Manfred Sommer points out – would then have to believe that he is killing the very same mammoth each and every time, and the gatherer would be convinced that the five slimes he just found are really the same single slime

16 Lambert Wiesing, *Artifizielle Praesenz. Studien zur Philosophie des Bildes* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005), 22. In this book Weising refers to some of his previous concepts from the book: *Die Sichtbarkeit des Bildes. Geschichte und Perspektiven der formalin Ästhetik*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1997. There he introduced the logic of seeing, which encompasses both artistic (classical) and new-media images, referring to the formal aesthetics of Herbart, Zimmermann and Konrad Fiedler that inspired Viennese art history (Riegl and Wölfflin). He expanded the tradition of formal aesthetics by introducing selected elements from phenomenology and semiotics.

or – if he saw them as different from one another – he would not perceive the difference between them and, for example, the nuts he had just collected. “That the ability to utilize notions did not come alongside the rather tardily developed ability of speech – not to mention the even later literacy – but that it is inscribed into specific forms of bodily behaviour and that it can be inferred from them, is an idea that fell victim to the prohibitions on thinking, which we upheld for a long time in the name of the linguistic turn.”¹⁷

In a developed magical-mythical culture, “the force of the image of spirit manifests itself to us in all its richness, with its incalculable diversity and the fullness of its demonstrable expressions,” Ernst Cassirer writes, and adds that for the conscious mind these images possess at first a status analogous to any other object. “The image as such is not known or recognized as a free spiritual creation but is approached as an independent effectiveness; a daemonic compulsion radiates from it, which consciousness masters and then banishes.”¹⁸ It sheds this property in the phase of entry into the religious domain, but only to the extent to which the prohibition of images is interpreted rigorously.

What differentiates the new monotheistic consciousness is that, for it, the animating spiritual force of images [*Bildes*] is, as it were, extinguished; all signification and meaningfulness withdraws into another purely spiritual sphere and, with this, leaves nothing from the being of images other than the empty material substrate. Before the force of heroic abstraction, which prophetic thought possesses and which also determines prophetic religious feeling, the images of myth “become pure nothingness.” And yet, they do not remain closed for long in this sphere of “nothingness” into which prophetic consciousness attempts to force them; rather, they always break out of it again, asserting themselves as an independent power.¹⁹

The emergence of autonomous artistic images, interpreted as second kind (besides the religious) of “disenchantment” of images (sanctioned through the motive of disinterest from Kantian aesthetics), changed the status of previous images both from our tradition as well as those from other cultures, which were incorporated by the institutional practice of museums

17 Manfred Sommer, *Zbieranie. Próba filozoficznego ujęcia*, tłum. Jarosław Merecki (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2003), 334.

18 Ernst Cassirer, *The Warburg Years (1919-1933). Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*, trans. S.G. Lofts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 88-89.

19 *Ibid.*, 89.

and academic art history into the order of European artistic images. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering that, at least due to the limited scope of influence of the modern Institution of Art, the model of reception of images proposed within its boundaries has not expunged the preceding forms of their use. These problems have received an in-depth exploration in Joseph Kosuth's exhibition-installation titled *The Play of the Unmentionable* that was held in the New York Brooklyn Museum in 1990, and which corresponded with the process of deconstructing the idea of "the imaginary museum" being undertaken by art history, newly critical of its own tradition, in an attempt to distance itself from modernist myths. Hans Belting has substantially contributed to this "distancing" process.²⁰ But let us return to Cassirer's analysis. Describing the path that leads "from sensual impression to symbolic expression" (to acknowledge a passage from an essay by Habermas on the legacy of the author of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*), he conceives of mythical images – in the spirit of Usener, Warburg, and also Nietzsche from *The Birth of Tragedy* – as a form of expression of the primordial, ambivalent sensations; "extreme experiences of high importance, which draw the focus of the consciousness that differentiates them onto themselves, can augment into a mythical image, become semanticized and thus retained, inscribed into divine names, which by being invoked once and again allow to attain control over that experience."²¹ It is not a coincidence that Cassirer was interested in physiognomy, which was so popular in nineteenth-century Europe. Nevertheless, he did not interpret it as a kind of "characterology," but rather in the context of the emergence of the early-magical bodily forms of expression – facial and gestural – whose perception (both from the perspective of "I" and "you") preceded the perception of things. "Symbols of expression are for Cassirer the building blocks of culture; their meaning comes down to the emotions which they express," says Krois, who points to the affinity between Cassirer's thought and not only that of Warburg, but also

20 I mention Belting's multidirectional subversion of the framework of contemporary art history in the final part of this article. Here I will only add that it is not by pure coincidence that David Freedberg commented (approbatively, of course) on Kosuth's exhibition-installation. The broad context of this exhibition (delineating the field of influence of the "second disenchantment" of images) is very instructively reconstructed by Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska and Tomasz Majewski in the article "Gra przemieszczonego: „The Play of the Unmentionable” Josepha Kosutha," in *Muzeum sztuki. Od Luwru do Bilbao*, ed. Maria Popczyk (Katowice: Muzeum Śląskie w Katowicach, 2006), 172-18. It is worth mentioning that the scholars researching the status of images often refer to Kosuth's works in their discourse (one such scholar would be Martin Seel who does so in his book mentioned in footnote 15).

21 Jürgen Habermas, *Od wrażenia zmysłowego do symbolicznego wyrazu*, trans. Krystyna Krzemieniowa (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2004), 13.

that found in the post-metaphysical anthropology of Helmuth Plessner.²² Cassirer's framing of the subject holds another insight valuable to contemporary anthropology of the image – the treatment of word and image as “branches of the same tree of symbolic formation,”²³ which frees us not only from the discussion about the primacy of symbolic forms, but also allows us to treat contemporary “turns” (linguistic and visual) as complementary framings of cultural expression. It is worth noting, with Manfred Sommer's aforementioned remarks in mind, that to the extent to which our forebears made use of protopicture-mnemoforms (Leroi-Gourhan's term) or ornaments, it is appropriate to talk about a certain practical distance toward the image which came to be fully realized only much later. For this reason also, a dual “limitation” seems to make sense: on the one hand keeping in check the views of Cassirer (who excessively emphasizes the expressive aspect of the earliest images, refusing their recipients *en bloc* the ability of any, even minimal, detachment), and on the other hand (utilizing Cassirer's thus

22 John Michael Krois, „Cassirer und die Politik der Physiognomik,” in *Der exzentrische Blick. Gespräch über Physiognomik*, ed. Claudia Schmölders (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1996), 223. Krois underscores that according to Cassirer what is important in physiognomy is not only the silent expression forming the Warburgian *Pathosformeln*, but also the vocal expression, from which language developed, and which to this day “defines the human condition” (p. 224). Upon both these forms of expression moral relationships are formed – of mutual acknowledgement and of mutual listening (and only subsequently – also argumentation).

23 In this meaning the latter „disenchanted” images lay somewhere between the spheres of *mythos* and *logos*. This placement was, as is well known, the subject of Warburg's interest, who according to Georges Didi-Huberman was “the greatest anthropologist amongst art historians.” In this context, the French historian of art (frequently mentioned by Belting) posits a thorough examination of the “the negative force within” the image, which “plays” with the world of logic. “There is a work of the negative in the image, a “dark” efficacy that, so to speak, eats away at the visible (the order of represented appearances) and murders the legible (the order of signifying configurations). From a certain point of view, moreover, this work or constraint can be envisaged as a regression, since it brings us, with ever-startling force, toward a this-side-of, toward something that the symbolic elaboration of artworks has covered over or remodelled. There is here a kind of *anadyomene* movement, a movement whereby something that has plunged into the water momentarily re-emerges, is born before quickly plunging in again: it is the *materia informis* when it shows through form, it is the presentation when it shows through representation, it is opacity when it shows through transparency, it is the visual when it shows through the visible.” It is a matter of – the author tells us – “knowing how to remain in the dilemma, between knowing and seeing,” and on the larger scale a matter of a critical reinterpretation of Panofsky's theory, and indirectly – also that of Cassirer. The author opens a possibility of such a reinterpretation by referring to the Freudian distinction between the symptom and the symbol. (Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images. Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans. John Goodman (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 142-143.)

“weakened” theory) limiting the “strong” (in the sense elucidated by Weising) anthropological concept of image and depiction.

In conclusion of this part of my examination, I will only add that the kind of collaboration between Cassirer and the scholars of religious studies, archaeologists, historians of different cultures, linguists and philologists from the Warburg Library circle (foremost with its very founder, who did not describe his own research on the forms of the pictorial presence of antiquity in European culture as history of art, but as the history of the image, and as such the field of his interest included postage stamps and newspaper photography) can not only be described as an early attempt at progressing from inter- to trans-disciplinary studies of culture, but also as an attempt at renegotiating the relation between philosophy and scientific knowledge on different terms from those used previously, which are no longer considered to be “royal.” Cassirer, Habermas says, “understood that philosophy can retain its influence only by sharing in the specialized knowledge of particular disciplines, and that through cooperation on equal terms, that influence can become substantial [...]. He distanced himself from transcendental philosophy, which attempts to provide ultimate answers, and from the conviction that it always predates any empirical knowledge. Cassirer distrusted the imperial key position that great philosophy asserted, which disregards knowledge of the world, and which digs deep on a very narrow field with unprecedented determination,”²⁴ but let us not forget that he did not limit his work to a mere reconstruction of scholarly endeavours or the procedures used in their course. Rather, he participated in the process that was recently described by Jerzy Kmita as a metamorphosis of the philosophical dilemmas into questions set before cultural studies, which can be reconciled with the aforementioned evaluation of Cassirer’s legacy made by Habermas.²⁵

When Belting describes his own proposal as an anthropology of the image which integrates the theoretical and historical efforts of *Bildwissenschaft*, he rather intentionally does not choose between philosophical and cultural

24 Ibid. Roland Kany analyzed the relationship between Cassirer’s and Warburg’s theories and those of Usener in his book *Mnemosyne als Programm. Geschichte, Erinnerung und die Andacht zum Unbedeutenden im Werk von Usener. Warburg und Benjamin*, (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1987). The theme of memory stored within images and activated in memories became one of Belting’s foremost anthropological pursuits.

25 Jerzy Kmita, *Konieczne serio ironisty. O przekształcaniu się problemów filozoficznych w kulturoznawcze*, (Poznań: Wyd. Naukowe UAM, 2007). The aforementioned essay by Habermas can be used in the interpretation of Cassirer’s method as a transformation of philosophical problems for the discipline of cultural studies. Habermas, in an attempt to reveal certain shortcomings in Cassirer’s philosophical argumentation, proposed to read his works as a theory of the civilizing process. I addressed this issue in another article.

anthropology (in an introduction to the book *Bild-Anthropologie. Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft*, “anthropology” is used in the plural). According to Cassirer’s viewpoint, as I would like to see it, this distinction loses its *raison d’être*. That this viewpoint can be associated with Belting’s project is, in my opinion, beyond doubt despite the fact that references to Cassirer within the book are only sporadic and always polemical. An analysis of the merit of this dispute would require a dedicated argumentation, the direction of which I have outlined above, “weakening” Cassirer’s theory. Nevertheless, what puts the question to rest is Belting’s manner of characterizing the image as the “result of a personal or collective symbolization” which is always bodily mediated, although it does not always find a material representation. Anthropology is concerned with humanity which not only produces images, and lives by them, but also – he adds – lives within them. This final realization *de facto* limits (we must agree with Reiz and Weising on this matter) the symbolic dimension of images: “life in pictures” inevitably leads us to the questions of death and (potential) immortality, which are of interest to both philosophical and cultural anthropology. In the book *An Anthropology of Images*, Belting not only masterfully navigates the vast realms of ancient cultures, but also attempts to demonstrate that for each of them the experience of death is the fundamental source of images.

The dead exchange their bodies for an image that remains present. In order to give that image a presence, to make possible the re-presentation of the lost body, a medium becomes essential. We may speak of it as a medium between death and life. For such archetypal images, presence was far more important than likeness to the person represented.²⁶

Regis Debray’s account of his “journey to the heart of the image” was kindred in spirit. “The origins of the image are strongly linked to death. However, the archaic image appears on the tombs as a sign of protest, to refute the nothingness and to prolong life. Visual art is a domesticated terror,”²⁷ the French

26 Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, trans. Thomas Dunlap, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 19.

27 Régis Debray, “Narodziny przez śmierć,” trans. Maryna Ochab, in *Wymiary śmierci*, ed. Stanisław Rosiek (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2002), 243. Advancing his main idea, Debray goes on to write among other things: “The image sculpted at first, then painted, has at first played a part of a medium between the living and the dead, between humans and gods; it connected the community with the cosmos, the society of visible entities with the order of invisible powers, which rule over them. This image was not a goal in itself, but a means of foreseeing divine will, as well as a means of defense, spellcasting, healing and performing initiation rites. It conjoined the «city» with the natural order, the individual with the cosmic hierarchy,

intellectual tells us, in concord with the voices of Warburg and Cassirer. He introduces one more theme that links early images with death, the theme of transposing the pictures from cave walls onto bones, horns and animal hides – “materials that the human being obtains through killing.” Vladimir Toporov also refers to the prehistory of portraiture in his studies on the mythopoetic space and underscores, using just like Debray did as a point of reference the culture of ancient Egypt and the Etruscan-Roman tradition, that “the idea of ‘a portrait’ arises and/or actualizes in the face of death as a reifying force of forgetting (and herein lies the source of pre-portraits’ lasting association with the cult of the dead, burial rites and offerings – human sacrifice, initially).”²⁸

Will the thesis about the historical primacy of the function of images as substitutions or representations of the absent dead stand up to the critique of prehistorians and archaeologists? Does it not seem necessary, in light of the current knowledge about the earliest images, to refrain from treating this thesis as the archetypal framework for all later experiences of the image? Is this experience not a part of the “manufactured presence” of proto-image and image entities, which not only do not represent but also do not substitute anyone or anything? In other words, is it not necessary to agree with Weising when he accuses Belting of a kind of anthropocentric reductionism in his treatment of the problematic of images? The questions that arise at this point do not compromise any of the other conclusions reached by Belting, who attempts (in accord with contemporary tendencies of philosophical, as well as cultural, anthropology) to restore the multifaceted bodily dimension to both the production and the perception of images. The significance that the bodily entanglement of images has for the German scholar is manifested

the «spirit of the universe», «cosmic harmony». In short it truly was a means of prolonging life [...]. An image, an imagined thing – an instrument wielded by people without instruments – has for the longest time been an indispensable commodity” (ibid., 254).

- 28 Władimir Toporow, „Tezy do prehistorii „portretu” jako szczególnej klasy tekstów,” trans. Bogusław Żyłko, *Teksty Drugie* 1/2 (2004):178. From the point of view of prehistory of the portrait (the titular quotation mark indicates that Toporov’s research focus mostly on the mythical and literary portraits) the Russian scholar brings to light two particular traditions of imagery: Egyptian and Etruscan-Roman. The first, as is well known, developed the practice of mummification (according to Debray it was the first instance of treating bodies as artworks), alongside sculptural representations in burial ceremonies, paper and gypsum masks, the second has introduced the fundamental separation of the head (as the most important center of vital force) from the rest of the body. In Louis Marin’s terminology we can speak of the representation as the “regaining of presence,” see Paweł Mościcki, “Louis Marin: porządek przedstawienia i siła obrazu,” *Sztuka i Filozofia* 26 (2005).

in the formula that the human being, the body – to be precise – is (in more than one sense) a “space” of images.

A prerequisite for discussing the space of images is the assumption that our body is a space within the world, a space of production and cognition (as well as recognition) of preceding images, of whose origins and future fate we know nothing, images which we forget and recall, and which hold a personal meaning for us as they are inseparable from our life experiences. That is why they are as fleeting as we ourselves are, and in this respect are unlike the images established in the external world. Those internal images also retain and transfer elements of communal traditions. “The saying that an entire library burns down every time an old man in Africa dies – and one could just as well say an entire archive of images – makes clear that the body plays a crucial role as the locus of collective traditions, guarding them against the loss of vitality that can infect them, for various reasons, in the world outside the body” – says Belting.²⁹ He goes on to add that the transmission and reception of images are like two sides of the same coin. Transfer, as an intentional process concerned with the reorientation and stabilization of cultural patterns (this was the main focus of Panofsky’s research on the Renaissance), is accompanied by their adoption outside or (sometimes) against the main stream of the cultural current (a process of greatest interest – in Renaissance studies – to Warburg and, lately, Didi-Huberman). Both tendencies – contrary to Belting’s intentions – can be “rooted” in Cassirer’s theories, if only one takes into account his interest in physiognomy, and the part it plays not only at the stage of early formation of culture, but also in times when forms of symbolization become fully developed. A peculiar case of the bodily positioning of the image is represented by the painted body or a mask – interpreted here as a symbol of transformation of one’s body into an image. Framing the medium of pictorial representation as bodies or “hosts” for the images, opens up whole new fields of scholarly investigation for those interested in historical as well as contemporary images. Moreover, the problematics of individual and collective images of memory, primarily related to places which we “carry within ourselves” and recollect or sometimes simply endow with material form, harmonizes with broader tendencies of modernity “without borders” (similar to the postulate on the transcultural character of *Bildwissenschaft*), which, following Appadurai’s hypothesis, not only transforms those places that we remember, but also delocalizes and, at the same time, “shifts” the order of the cultural competences associated with them. What is more, it opens the possibility of rethinking the role that psychoanalysis plays within

29 Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 38.

the *Bildwissenschaft*, as previously seen in the case of research on the (im)possibility of visual representation of the Holocaust.

A broad (too broad according to Wiesing) notion of the image allows Belting to relatively easily solve the problem of new-media images, which he frames in terms of an adequately expanded notion of technology and new forms of perception that have for a long time been developed in the laboratories of avant-garde art. When it comes to the question of virtual reality that disconcerts other German scholars, Belting refutes it by pointing out that the specificity of modern times dictates the expansion of the sphere of images in relation to the sphere of everyday life, but also the encroachment of images into the Foucauldian “other spaces” – heterotopias which promise us liberation from references to reality. Nevertheless, they do not give access to some reality beyond images, they only expand the existing universe of images. It is possible to speak of images in a world of virtual reality, but not without recognizing that this world exists precisely (and only) in those images. Actually, participation in fictitious, imaginal worlds, manufactured with the means of new techniques and instruments, stimulates the imaginative faculties of the audience, thereby expanding the existing layers of “immanent image creation.” The conclusion of Belting’s considerations upon the imaginal worlds manufactured by new-media and the (old) longing for an embodiment in an image, which they exhibit, comes down to the realisation that even in the contemporary virtual world, the relationship between the image and the body is still present, and this allows us to uphold the outlines of the idea of a human being as a “space of images.” Belting also discusses the topic of intermediality, so important to research focused on contemporary culture, but for him it is of interest mostly from the point of view of visual media (he analyses, for example, the presence of the painted image within the film image, treating film as a separate, though strictly visual medium). He shares with other aforementioned German scholars the predilection for analysing the image in isolation from other aspects of sensory experience. Could this predilection be a remnant of traditional art history, which was mostly interested in images favoured by the bourgeois protagonist of Aragon’s *Les Voyageurs de l’Impériale* – “serene, controlled, on which nothing changes anymore,” in contrast to the volatile and noisy objects of perception in everyday big-city life? Such allegations cannot be made against American scholars, who concentrate mostly on modern images, whose impact is principally exerted through a multimedia context. In an anthology edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff – another towering figure (aside from Mitchell) of Visual Studies – we find an article by Irit Rogoff, in which we read that – as a matter of fact – these studies focus on the visual world, but it should not be forgotten that “opening up the field of vision as an arena in which cultural meanings get constituted, also simultaneously anchors to it

an entire range of analyses and interpretations of the audio, the spatial, and of the psychic dynamics of spectatorship. Thus visual culture opens up an entire world of intertextuality in which images, sounds and spatial delineations are read on to and through one another...³⁰ The perspective developed by Belting on the one hand undoubtedly limits, but on the other expands the aspirations of modern history of art. Belting developed his theory gradually. In 1983, he posed a provocative question about the end of art history. He repeated this question a decade later in his book *Das Ende der Kunstgeschichte: eine Revision nach zehn Jahren*. Those ten years proved vital, not only due to the explosion of an aura that was postmodernist in character, putting into question almost every achievement of the first phase of modernity. New artistic practices, especially inter-media, which Belting attentively followed, as well as new exhibition trends, visibly expanded the framework of art history. The scholarly work on the topic of cult imagery published in 1990, *Bild und Kult: eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, expanded the field of research by introducing the context of how images are used. Modern art history, focused on researching autonomous artistic images, underestimated – as I have previously mentioned – this context in relation to images of the past. It showed a similar attitude towards images from other cultural backgrounds. While subjecting its “aestheticism” and Eurocentrism to serious critique, Belting found a valuable ally in the person of David Freedberg. In the foreword to the French edition of *The Power of Images* (a book at first considered revolutionary for American art history, but welcomed by scholars from the field of Visual Studies as well) Freedberg – exhibiting solidarity with Belting – writes:

The main difference in the approach to very similar questions comes down to the fact that while Belting's book has a strictly defined chronological and historical range, my approach, although I refer to particular histories, is more comparative and anthropological in its nature. I do not share Belting's strong conviction about the loss of continuity between what he calls the era before art and the era of art, which came after the reformation. In short, where Belting is prone to see difference and the loss of continuity in the approach towards images between the two eras distinguished by him, I myself – taking the difference into account, of course – seek to find continuity and similarity.³¹

30 Irit Rogoff, “Studying Visual Culture,” in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London, New York: Routledge, 1998), 14.

31 David Freedberg, *Potęga wizerunków. Studia z historii i teorii oddziaływania*, trans. Ewa Klekot (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2005), XXXI.

Later Belting not only upheld the statement that the scope of art history's theoretical achievement is limited to autonomous European artistic images, but at the same time – influenced by Freedberg? – opened the already constricted discipline not only to the return of the Warburgian tradition, but also to the anthropological problems of modernity, which were foreign to this tradition, and which *Bildwissenschaft* faces in many research practices. Its postulated transdisciplinary character – I will stress this once more – defines the complex objective of developing adequate educational strategies while facing the transformation of culture that is defined by a single designation label – the visual turn.

My aim has been to give a preliminary account of the outlines of a vast research area that is connected with the iconic turn and to define the focal points of problems contained therein, which require venturing beyond monodisciplinary competences. The title of this sketch contains a question, nonetheless. The course of my argument might suggest that I advocate choosing *Bildwissenschaft*, anchored in the anthropology of the image, over Visual/Culture Studies. Such a statement would be incorrect, along with the impression that my interest is limited to only those two research areas with disregard for the French, Russian or Polish contributions. With the formative process of the local version of transdisciplinary knowledge about the image in mind (and the symptoms of such a process are ever more visible, not to mention the initiatives undertaken by media theorists as well as anthropologists and sociologists of culture),³² I have argued for the use of the German model in the preliminary stages, as one that is better “developed” philosophically and historically, and only later “inscribing” into it the proposals discussed by the

32 The works of Mieczysław Wallis, Mieczysław Porębski, Jan Białostocki must undoubtedly be placed among the classics of Polish knowledge about the image. This subject was later expanded and developed by the scholars of new-media images. Andrzej Gwóźdź, without question, has done more than anyone for the understanding of their status and different configurations (both in his books and the well-planned – predominantly post-conference – collaborative works and anthologies of translations without which we could hardly imagine contemporary academic teaching of the cultural studies. The so-called anthropology and visual sociology (developed by Krzysztof Olechnicki or – lately – Piotr Sztompka) encompasses only a fraction of the problems opened up by the iconic turn – they analyze the role of images in the argumentation proper for their respective fields of knowledge. The latest volumes of “Konteksty” are visible proof of the opening of the field of anthropological interest in the world of images. Summing up I would only want to add that I have undertaken the first, preliminary, “attempt” at confronting the problematic of the iconic turn in a text published in the periodical *Dyskurs* 1 (2006). Although this text develops, improves and corrects the ideas contained therein it still bears, which is hard to ignore in face of the rapidly growing literature of the subject, a mark of a “sketch” or a “survey.” In its shorter form it was previously delivered during the proceedings of the conference organized by Jacek Sójka *Metody, paradygmaty, dyskursy. O swoistości badań kulturoznawczych*. (Poznań, 25-26 Apr. 2006).

representatives of Visual/Culture Studies (who have attained significant success in investigating the problematic of new-media imagery and their contexts). This proposed order comes from the conviction that although transdisciplinary endeavors neither assert nor lead to – as Mittelstraß underlined – a “top-down” unification of the theoretical-methodological perspective, the condition of their effectiveness is the stabilization, even if brief, of the basic semantics of notions and theoretical categories utilized and simultaneously developed for the numerous fields of research, diverse in their subject matter, and focused both on history and modernity. This kind of stabilization, to a much greater extent, I think, can be reached by analyzing the discussions and conclusions of the scholars involved in the creation of the *Bildwissenschaft* (who use – predominantly in an explanatory mode – the ideas from other research areas). In turn the reference to the “framework,” that in the case of the iconic turn is provided by the critical reconstruction of traditions of Cassirer and the Warburg Library circle (only briefly mentioned here in the main text, as well as in some of the footnotes), embeds its problematic very well within the broader context of cultural studies.

Translation: Rafał Pawluk