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1. *In the last thirty years, images have been a focus of scholarship from many different viewpoints, and they have been pivotal in the many scholarly movements, or "turns", attempting to methodologically reframe the study of art history in general. Can you briefly explain which was your original focus of interest and in which directions your scholarly approach developed over the course of time?*

Originally, I wanted to enroll in an art history program and focus on the study of arts of the Americas, just having returned from travelling through Guatemala and Honduras for a couple of months. However, the last chair position in Germany for then so-called Pre-Columbian art had been abandoned in the 1980s, contrary to the former plan to create a department of world art history at the University of Heidelberg. When continuing instead with medieval art and turning my attention to relics, reliquaries, so-called cult images, and the theory of images and visual culture in the Latin West, I was still inspired by anthropological approaches, which led me to pursue questions such as what has triggered major changes in the veneration of images and in visual culture more generally. I was interested in the powers attributed to and residing in a vessel, not an image, and how its creation generated questions about artistic imagination as well as philosophical discussions regarding the nature of visibility, humanity, and time.

When I changed to the anglophone academic system, my research shifted to concerns about how we can understand and represent the diversity of how the past is inscribed into the present. My attention shifted to different types of archival traditions, to artistic reflections embedded into the works created by pre-modern artists, and, more generally, to new ways of addressing the gaps in what is all too often presented as linear traditions. I started to be interested in overcoming the homogeneity ascribed by institutions and by practices of preserving memory and cultural heritage to a past that never was as pure, as male, nor as religious as it is often still staged. Embarking into Eurasia-Africa lines of orientation, overcoming the language limitations and narratives resulting in them, was and still is my aim.

2. *Please name up to three books that you consider to have played an important role in orienting your research.*

Miguel Ángel Asturias, *Hombres de Maíz*; Mary Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*; Kubler, *Shape of Time*.

3. *What is your assessment of traditional art history, with its emphasis on controversial notions and often rigid distinctions between "style" and "iconography"? What do you see as its hermeneutic limits and advantages? Do you think it should be thoroughly replaced with new approaches, or simply revised and integrated into the present-day art-historical discourse?*

Since these are three different questions, one looking back, one asking for an evaluation of the impact, and one looking forward, I would like to answer the parts separately.

1. The described opposition originates in the relatively defined points of departure, i.e., the "artist" vs. a clearly defined culture or region in a specific period, and in attempts to negotiate their relationship. None of these concepts has survived in their original homogeneity and definition.

2. Since then, art history has broadened the fields and types of objects of study to encompass visual culture, thereby merging high/low artistic cultures, including indigenous cultures and traditions of memory, and beginning to acknowledge the diversity of practices in the conservation of different pasts.

3. We need to understand the impact of the incompleteness and scatteredness of the surviving objects/monuments and related archives and archival traditions. Only after understanding how our past and present approaches have created dominant and even false narratives can we collaboratively invent new future approaches across the thresholds currently dividing us into subfields and more or less privileged academic cultures.

4. *Since the 1990s, our field has experienced many different "turns", each laying emphasis on one of the multiple dynamics in which images are involved. To what extent did your research benefit from such scholarly debates?*

One could say I benefited greatly from the so-called turns such as the Pictorial/Iconic Turn, the Material Turn, The Global Turn, Art & Science, etc. Several protagonists contributing to these turns have definitely inspired me, yet I felt and feel not defined by these turns. I would not subscribe to one of the respective approaches "only." Each turn creates a focus, thus not only opening but also narrowing perspectives, and this is especially the case when such terminology is applied retroactively. Once a turn is labelled as a specific "…. (put in random adjective) turn" and articles and/or monographs describing it are published, this particular turn is usually already over. Furthermore, I often realize that significant scholarship contributing to the rise of such turns has often been published years or even decades earlier. E.g. Edward Bevan's "Holy Images" 1940 has inspired Ilene Forsyth's "Throne of Wisdom", 1972, Hans Belting's "Bild und Kult. Das Bild im Zeitalter vor der Ära der Kunst" / "Likeness and Presence. The image in the era before art", 1990 and Gerhard Wolf's "Salus Populi Romani. Eine Geschichte römischer Kultbilder," 1990, long before the *pictorial* turn described by T. W. Mitchell (1992), or the *iconic turn* proclaimed by Gottfried Boehm (1994). Thinking in "turns" is mostly triggered by attempts to look back, to categorize what has happened before, not what is going on now.

5. *In your opinion, which specific notions have become particularly relevant to our present-day understanding of images, and how have they affected your own approach?*

In a forthcoming collaborative monograph, Finbarr Barry Flood and I try to find terms for our work – terms that do not carry long histories and cultural baggage from a specific, and therefore dominant, culture. The term "flotsam" has proven to be particularly helpful in identifying objects as well as bridges and differences regarding the archival traditions and the archives between the two fields of our expertise (the Latin West and the Islamic World).

In addition to this, we need to understand which images are available to us and why, and to inquire into questions such as these: which images are lost, which are still there, which are published, which have never been published, which are digitally accessible, and, finally, what biases are inscribed into the structures providing us these images? When and how was meta-data produced for now digitally available images? What images have not or will never enter these databases and why is that?

And last, but not least, the reflections about the word "image" itself has always proven to be extremely complicated and productive. As a German-native speaker, the image/picture differentiation in English has constantly affected my approach, stimulating my interest in terminological traditions condensed in terms such as *Bild, imago,* פֶּסֶל (pesel), εἰκών (eikon), تماثيل/صور (sura/timthal), to name just a few. We tried to be transparent about the potential implications of the terms applied to specific objects, about the way in which preferred terms have changed over time, and about the religious attitudes towards them in different moments of time and different regions of the world.

6. *What is your specific understanding of "meaning" in visual objects? How do images manage to convey messages, and what are the implications?*

Meaning is what we construct retrospectively on the basis of the remaining "tesserae", the stones of the mosaic, – the fragmented remainders of the past. But there are three different types of meaning resulting from this reconstruction: 1. Visual objects, in their entirety, can act like a single *tessera* of the larger mosaic. 2. They can also represent the entire mosaic. 3. In our attempts at writing history, we can focus on the reconstruction of such a mosaic, on a methodological and/or theoretical level. Processed-based inquiry, with its premises and assumptions, meta-narratives brought with us as members of a specific culture, ethnic group, and gender, also contributes significantly to the construction of "meaning" in visual objects. In the process of interrogating processes, it is determined the kind of value placed upon particular modes of meaning-making: whether one sees value in the process of reconstruction itself, in the cultures of loss and oblivion, in the visual culture which they evoke, or in the contemporary visual tradition created by these "mosaics of the past".

7. *To what extent is "meaning" determined by factors not immediately associated with the specific visual appearance of images, such as* mise-en-scène *strategies, conditions of visibility, and more generally the experiential dimension of viewers?*

The "meaning" distilled from our attempts to identify historical layers of conveying sense is often a stark reflection of our current conditions. We are actively debating what

defines our present condition: climate change, inequalities in our present societies, returning nationalisms, a lack of access to knowledge and education in specific social groups or in disfavored regions. So, we should always keep the impact of our premises in mind, the current conditions of our thinking guiding our research interests, and our attention for mise-en-scène strategies in a past "we see now".

8. *In your view, are we now better equipped to reconstruct and more deeply understand the complex relationship between the visual appearance of an image and the expectations of its viewers?*

Yes and no – access to extant scholarship and options to publish new knowledge are increasingly limited for many scholars because of rising fees, paywalls, reduced funding for purchasing publications. Each culture, each subfield of our discipline yields different answers to the question how the relationship between visual appearance and its reception has historically changed over the arch of time. Global/World Art history has demonstrated that we have always been global/globally connected. Yet we cannot stop here, and we should not fall back into the study of regional phenomena or national paradigms, and instead learn from each other and expand our knowledge together. Methodologically, the increase in diversity of scholars, regions, methods, is only beginning, and we need more and different forms of collaboration to approach the relationship between visual appearance of an object and the expectation of its viewers in different cultures. Only in dialogue we can learn to acknowledge our cultural premises and try to overcome them via the development of new approaches.

9. *To what extent can images contribute to informing their viewers' understandings of other images and other aspects of reality and experience?*

Images can help us to reveal a past not recorded by written sources. They can help us to write about a past not documented by authorities, clerics, mostly male and white, from privileged parts of societies, and from cultures whose past is continued, institutionally, whose language still exists, whose myths and stories have been recorded. Several cultures are only preserved through excavations, or known from tombs, or they have not written down their myths and histories in form of chronicles, and their archives, institutions, and written documents have been destroyed. We should work together and turn challenges, disparities, and imbalances into the basis for collaborative efforts to develop new methods together, methods to strive for a better understanding of the past revealed by and in visual cultures. Images can tell the other side of the "officially" recorded history; they can provide insight into the everyday lives of people, or into the realities of underrepresented, suppressed, or disenfranchised groups in a society, for example by showing the meaning, the impact, and the contribution of slave labor to the production of works of art. Images, if not studied according to certain established master-narratives, can diversify recorded voices; they are symptoms of the impact of theft, and especially of cultural constructions of "heritage". They make us conscious of the hegemonies embedded in the dominant narratives coining our discipline, our methods, and our thinking and vision of the past.

10. *What is your assessment of the materiality of images?*

Material in the context of making makes me raise questions such as these: what type of ingredients do you need, where do they come from, which trade connections contributed to their semination, what form of knowledge do you need to use the material and to work with it, or to achieve specific effects? What material forms condition the perception of images – reflection, light sources, visual or physical access, barriers like grilles, screens, veils, etc. How do specific materials change over the arch of time; has the color changed, or the surface, its haptic character, its smell or taste? Which material carries which specific meaning in which region and religion? How was this meaning attributed to a material communicated, perceived, defined, and/or disseminated? And, last but not least, how does the materiality of images interact with the spirituality of its recipients? Which beliefs contributed to this relationship, who articulated them, and how did they change over the course of time and in different religions? I am thinking of discourses such as the nature of four elements, or the relationship between macro- and microcosm that can be found in several religions, regions, and periods. Materiality, we might say, is a reciprocal kind of concept; the material through which an artwork or image is rendered takes on its own resonances, which in turn inform the criteria through which material can be perceived in the first place.

11. *In your view, how can we approach the "social life" of images? In what sense can we assume that images interrelate with their viewers and users?*

We can approach the social life of images through the method of reconstruction: a reflection on how the "life-world" (Husserl) or "life-forms" (Wittgenstein) have been recorded, and how we as art historian reconstruct the past. Life-world, a term coined by Edmund Husserl (who uses the German term *Lebenswelt*), may be conceived as a universe of what is self-evident or given within a specific practice, a world that subjects share and experience together. Essential here is the embeddedness of theoretical insights into life-related practical contexts, e.g. geometry originated in the need to remeasure the land after flooding of the Nile, Euphrates or Tigris, and later turned into a practice for measuring everything. For Husserl, this leads to a tension between the scientific/technic aspects of life and ethical/practical questions of life, resulting in a major crisis, in which the relevance of sciences and technology overshadows ethical and practical aspects of life.

As an art historian unearthing embedded and interwoven life-worlds in pre-modernity and in cultures whose intellectual and spiritual heritage is only partially recorded, and of which several social groups are not represented at all, particular challenges are at stake: How do we embark into the historical layers of what has been recorded about the relationship between viewers and users? What kinds of images have survived and what kind of experiences? Can we restore past conceptions of the universe, and which parts of the societies and the people do they represent? Who is excluded? The differentiation of universes being self-evident or given is huge with regard to pre-modern cultures – each made up by different ideas about perception, vision, cognition and especially different religious traditions. Some images were made to be never seen, others were made to be seen in very different ways and charged with different roles in religious practices.

Furthermore, the very same object can change it statute many times throughout history, a cannon can be a military tool, then a display of power as booty, turn into a gift, a work of a craftsperson, a work of art, and last, but not least, a work displayed in a museum or in a virtual exhibition. Each of these changes defines the social life of the object. With each change, the relationship to its "users" and viewers are reset, and redefined, and trigger new types of visual experiences.

12. *Does the experience of images exclusively imply the exercise of sight, or do other senses also play a role? If possible, please cite a relevant case from your research field.*

In my book about the statue of Ste Foy of Conques I have tried to show that the lived experience by people venerating a statue including a relic and the official theological discourses were often very different yet influenced each other mutually. This interest in stark oppositions – the official or theoretical discussions about images, their limits, their roles, and their capacities, and the experience and practice in a religious or even profane world – has continued to coin my research. That the same object is capable of yielding a multitude of very ambivalent insights still intrigues me. It also has led to my research for another of my projects, my forthcoming book about illuminations of Genesis as an archive of implicit articulations and reflections by medieval artists about origins: the beginnings, potentials, and limits of their creativity, their self-reflection of sorts about what an artist is. How was or could "artistic" practice become a subject of self-reflection, providing truth into human and/or divine creation. In another research project about bronze censers, out of which will soon come a volume, of concern is the multisensory nature of incense, smell, and taste, and the problems of the sense that we tend to favor in our work as art historians.

13. *Recent studies have emphasized that "iconicity" (or "visual efficacy") is not an exclusive property of artistic images but can also be regarded as an attribute of non-figurative objects, such as elements of landscape, natural materials, and living beings. To what extent can such objects be included in an art-historical narrative?*

In multiple cultures, the iconicity of structures, such as landscape, or of specific materials, rituals, or of a combination of site, time, and artisans or collaborators play a more important role than "art" or the production of works of "art" conventionally defined according to rather eurocentristic, sinocentric, or dominant narratives in the anglophone art history that have coined the discipline of "art history" since its origins. If we take up the challenge of opening up the canon, of re-equilibrating, re-calibrating, and revisioning the mentioned dominant narratives and structures, we also seriously need to change how the discipline operates logistically, financially, technologically, and so on. Perhaps most important are access to scholarship (OpenAccess and/or the reestablishment of scholar-led publishing) and access to education and training for working in conservation and for institutions preserving cultural heritage. More generally speaking, we need to develop new methods and narratives together across the subfields of our entire discipline, and to learn from scholars working in the global south, especially about the Arts of the Americas, of

Africa, the Oceanic Islands, but also in Korea, Central Asia, and so on. Bridging the divide between scholars working on different periods could help to ease the inclusion of iconicity attributed to non-figurative objects.

14. *Many studies have focused on the dynamics by which images originally meant for a specific viewing context come to be transferred to, appropriated by, and transformed and reshaped in another. Which hermeneutic tools can be useful in our analysis of such phenomena?*

Any fiction of a past, for example the opening of the so-called grottos (Domus Aurea in Rome), or the invention of grotesques in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian or French art and poetry, can lead to productive misunderstandings. These developments have contributed to ideas of Renaissances, and discussions about continuity or rupture within the history of visual cultures.

Furthermore, there are insights to be found in theoretical discussions about how such former contexts transformed into new ones, or the degree to which original context can and should be conveyed in places for which the object was not intended, like the display of the sacred in a museum. How can we bridge the sacred and profane in a secularized world? How to address religious or nationalistic re-inventions of the past?

However, most pressing are questions surrounding how we can recover the cultural heritage of indigenous people after long periods of colonization and suppression? How do we tackle inequalities of accessibility to one's own cultural heritage, for example in the case of the Benin bronzes or works from Afghanistan? These issues pose new challenges, leading us to reconsider what defines cultural heritage, and to define good practices of restitution we only begin to conceive of.

15. *English is more and more the* lingua franca *of global art-historical scholarship. To what extent may we avoid applying to non-European contexts notions drawn from an essentially Western European understanding of images and their materiality and meaning?*

Key to avoiding such transfers and implicit re-colonization of the discipline and its material, especially in an age in which digital publishing should provide more and not less access to scholarship, are the following approaches.

1. Understanding and describing the problems in dominant narratives and lineages of the anglophone world, in which categories developed by white, male thinkers like Hegel, Kant, Riegl or Wölfflin, and subsequently translated into English, are still key references for contemporary discourses; this, to me, is a surprisingly narrow canon and is based on an irritating presumption of continuity if seen from a twenty-first-century perspective outside of the anglophone world.

2. Develop new categories, methods, and terms together with art historians working in different periods or regions of our discipline, ideally from another academic context, writing usually in another language and/or from another part of the world.

3. Respect and understand the alterity of academic writing in different parts of the world. If a piece of writing in English written by a non-native speaker seems to have "no argument" from the perspective of a scholar from the anglophone world, that does not

mean there is none. The inequitable weighing of ideas based often on Anglophone perspectives, conventions, and criteria is just one problem in our discipline that would benefit greatly from a more open transferal of ideas. Equally pressing is the need to accommodate different cultures of academic writing, which in turn might foster wider appreciation for what is perceived to be new or innovative, and thus relevant and deserving of publication. The turn towards publishing in English needs to be combined with new strategies of publishing: new types of journals, new formats, and scholars (not for-profit-presses) designing and running them. OpenAccess should be the norm, not the exception. Non-native publishers in English should not just succumb to the collapsing structures of an anglophone academic world, which has outsourced significant aspects of quality control and selection process to the editorial offices and to scholars working for for-profit publishers.

16. *Finally, what are we still lacking? In which direction should we pursue our studies in the following decades?*

On a most basic level, we should study different pre-modern cultures without surviving texts, thereby focusing on art historical methods and theories for reconstructing the past. We should come up with new forms of collaboration that should receive more, not less credit. We need interdisciplinary collaborations to understand the shared heritage of fields understood in modernity as opposed (e.g. medicine and religion). Furthermore, a collaborative approach is needed for the systematic analysis of how loss is described, reconstructed, and addressed in Art History – with particular regard to the discrepancy between cultures whose monuments and objects are exclusively known through archeological findings versus cultures with continuities in language, institutional and religious practice, especially in regions whose past is told differently in different states, according to modern hegemonies.

Before any strides can be taken in this direction, it is important to note how even the act of envisioning the future of the discipline comes with immense hurdles. One of the central tenets of the aforementioned book project on "flotsam" with Finbarr Barry Flood was to try to write new histories of objects without written archives, and we were constantly faced with the question of whether our own imagined new approaches might also be a product of the Eurocentric perspectives from which we were hoping to depart, with the act of "discovering" gaps in the scholarly imagination not exactly without colonialist underpinnings. As I have sketched elsewhere in this survey, I find collaboration to be one of the most fundamental tools for our discipline today, and I believe that only by collaborating in the present can we begin to act in a direction that hopefully will eventually materialize into one that is forward-thinking.

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