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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?*

Since early in my research, I have been defining Jewish art as a special branch of local art, whose peculiar characteristics also shed light on the surrounding visual culture in which it developed. Instead of dealing with questions of influence or acculturation, I speak of a shared visual culture and general cultural arena, in which there was frequent and dynamic interaction between different groups. In this situation, images emerge as loci of identity, interreligious contact, cooperation, and clash between opposing views. Concentrating on book art, the main surviving medium, I adopted a holistic attitude to the manuscript, including, in addition to the contents of images, their visuality and materiality, codicology and palaeography, texts and contexts, issues of making and practice, combining all of this to use as a tool for reconstructing the social life expressed in the images and in the illuminated book as a whole. More recently, I introduced into my research the study of manuscripts as material objects, analysing their effect through their reception in the particular space in which they were viewed and activated.

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

Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1992); Herbert L. Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art*, Rethinking the Middle Ages 1 (NY, Broadview Press, 2004); Éric Palazzo, *L'invention chrétienne des cinq sens dans la liturgie et l'art au Moyen Âge* (Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 2014).

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?*

Iconography and style are the solid foundations of our discipline. While iconography has been greatly transformed during the last decades and adapted to suit present-day dis-

course (usually without mentioning the term), the research of style has been neglected, disappearing from the current art history discourse. Style is still the main tool for dating and locating works of art, which are crucial for the contextualization of images and objects of unknown origin. Beyond the traditional implications, stylistic analysis reveals important aspects of the visibility of the image/object. As such it has the potential to be integrated within the discussions of more updated approaches, seeking to understand aspects of effect, such as materiality and neuro-cognitive reception. Now, when the visibility of different materials used to design images and objects and their role in attracting viewers have been acknowledged, the specific stylistic analysis of different substances in various artefacts can reveal additional, valuable, aspects of their effect on viewers. In order to “free” style from the aspect of formality with which it is identified today, the old rigid parameters of the stylistic analysis should be replaced by flexible ones fitting the present discourse.

*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?*

The emergence of different “turns” has been a continuous source of inspiration. The “material turn” urged me to explore different materials and techniques and analyse the effect of their specific design on the final image and its impact in relevant spaces. The “sensorial” and “spatial” turns opened the way to my recent project “The Ashkenazi Prayer Book and the Liturgical Experience”, in which I consider the sensorial effects of the liturgical codex within the solemn interior of the synagogue. The research is based on a reconstruction of the almost entirely lost aural-visual aspects of the Ashkenazi liturgical prayer halls in which the manuscripts were designed to be used. Archaeological remnants of the original synagogue architecture together with visual data left in prayer books, inscriptions, or instructions written in the margins referring to tunes and other aspects of performance, have been combined into a mosaic of spoken words, voices, and images. This reconstruction enables us to reveal the mutual dynamics between the aural-visual liturgical experience and the liturgical illuminated books: the communal large codex used by the cantor who conducts the ceremony and those private smaller copies used by congregants during service.

*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?*

Among the more relevant notions in our present-day understanding of images are the central role played by objects in medieval culture, and the crucial effect of the immediate setting in which they were displayed and employed, on their reception. In my study of illuminated codices as material objects, I am interested in the differences and dynamics between the two main domains in which they were used: the public prayer hall in the presence of the entire community, and the intimate domestic area. Personal ritual books, which included both public and domestic ceremonial texts and were therefore in use in both domains, are of special interest. The effect of such a ritual codex in a communal

space designated as holy was entirely different than that in the ordinary, profane, space at home. On the other hand, the shared codex used in both settings acted also as a connecting link between them. This connection was especially effective in images depicting motifs which, though clearly identified with the public ritual domain, illustrated texts recited in the home. In the minds of the users, these images may have created a strong bond between the individual ritual at home and the communal experience in the public hall.

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

Meanings of visual objects are flexible, depending on the context in which they appear, as well as their function and location in the public or domestic space in which they are used or displayed. In the case of figural and narrative components, messages are often conveyed in relation to the Scripture and other general or local beliefs and traditions. Potential meanings can be inherent in an image even early on in its production, reflecting the different profiles and outlooks of the producers, patrons and guides, each with his own motivation. This mosaic of people involved in the production was especially crucial in a case of a Christian craftsman designing an image from the Holy Scripture for a Jewish customer, sometimes with the involvement of a Jewish guide dictating the general contents, or requesting more specifically the inclusion of some post-biblical Jewish components. The artist could have followed the general or detailed instructions but, whether unintentionally or on purpose, have also left some traces of his own Christian perception that he was accustomed to. The reception of such multi-voiced images was especially complex and diverse.

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?*

Identical images can have different meanings depending on the setting. For instance, at the beginning of Sephardic *haggadah* manuscripts, an image of Isaac’s sacrifice within a cycle of full-page miniatures of biblical scenes followed by illustrations of contemporary family members performing the *seder* ritual would probably have connected the celebrants with the biblical past. A similar image, appearing in an Ashkenazi prayer book for the New Year, would have been received in terms of Abraham’s obedience to God’s demand to sacrifice his son, as an ancestral merit supporting the worshippers who stood in judgment on that day every year. The same image on a stained-glass window in a church would be perceived through its typological meaning as a prefiguration to the Crucifixion of Christ. Adjustment of the image to various visibility conditions within the spacious sacred interior is seen in thirteenth century stained-glass windows produced to suit different modes of viewing. Those looking from a distance saw the diverse geometrical patterns of series of windows, changing from one to another, creating together a kaleidoscope effect. Only when the viewer stood closely in front of the window was he able to follow the narratives in the small units and decipher the interrelations between different components.

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?*

Although some of the changes in the field were initiated as a result of approaches first developed outside of the discipline, they were adjusted successfully and now broaden immensely the scope of our understanding of image-viewer dynamics. Among the most crucial innovations are the recognition of the significance of the various aspects of the setting in which the image was exhibited or used: the comprehension that the connection with viewers was achieved not only through sight but through a whole range of sensorial stimulations, forming together a multi-dimensional experience that included viewing and the fundamental observation that images communicate with viewers not only through their contents but also their materiality. All these together have suggested a better framework of research, revealing many new aspects of image-viewer interactions that were previously hidden from us.

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

Common images circulated in different media and well-known to viewers may shed light on less familiar images, when allusions to the former are discerned. This can happen also in totally different, even contradictory, contexts. For example, in the Codex Manesse, a female lying in bed with an exposed breast, while a man with clasped hands kneels at the foot of the bed, could have reminded viewers of the contemporary version of the Nativity, in which Mary was depicted lying in bed in a similar position with a breast exposed. Such associations with well-known religious images, often seen in profane art, gave the viewer insight into issues of relations and tensions between carnal and spiritual concepts of love. Images could enrich the understanding of the courtly practice or religious ritual to which they were attached or to which they alluded. An image of a biblical narrative offered the viewer a better understanding of the service of the holiday commemorating the event being celebrated. Integrative images incorporating biblical narratives with contemporary celebrants, such as a kneeling nun or a biblical protagonist wearing a Jewish prayer shawl, would add a further dimension of comprehension and identification with the contents of the celebration.

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

Materials were experienced from a distance through the sense of sight. In the case of objects, the interaction with the user was direct and the sense of touch stimulated an additional dimension. A user could feel the thickness of the parchment while turning the pages. Attracted first by the eye, he/she could also pass his/her fingers over the rough painted areas, and on the voluminous shining gold leaf laid over raised gesso. Materiality of objects was integrated with function as well as with other, perishable materials related to their use. Wine flickering in a sparkling sumptuous cup made of silver used for the

home ritual of the Kiddush added an aroma of sanctity for the master of the house who performed the ritual and passed the cup between the other participants, who, each in his/her turn, experienced the integration of the expensive metal and wine. A couple sharing a precious cup in a courtly banquet had a similar effect with an additional sensual aspect, when one enjoyed the taste of the other's lips on the metal rim. Such a sensual dimension of materiality could also have been a by-product of a religious ritual practiced in a mixed domestic framework.

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?*

The monumental sculptured facades of the Gothic cathedrals were public colored "screens" standing out in the urban everyday reality, attracting the eye not only of those entering the liturgical interior but also of the passers-by. Situated in the commercial center of the city, they were visible to inhabitants of all social strata, interrelating even with Jews, for whom these images were opposed to the foundations of their belief. Jewish spectators shared with their Christian contemporaries neuro-cognitive responses to human figures, faces, dynamic gestures and colors, which aroused in this case an urge to respond to the contents of these images. Jews could not decorate their prayer halls with figures and narratives but they did include them in their communal prayer books, where they manipulated some of the main images typical of the facades, such as the Coronation of the Virgin, or the defeated blinded Synagoga with whom contemporary Jews were identified. Jews responded to these visual forms, using them but in a new variation representing their own, opposed view. Manipulation of well-known images, also discerned in more subtle variations made by Christians in nearby sites, are a clear indication of social interrelationship.

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.*

The sensorial effects of images/objects/codices viewed and used in association with ceremonies were multidimensional. In the case of a Latin or Hebrew liturgical book, the tactile dimension was related to its use as a material object while the aural dimension was aroused by the recitation or chanting of the texts that the book contained. The sensorial response had a special dramatic effect when the image depicted the biblical narrative that was commemorated on the specific holyday, being referred to in the hymn written alongside the image and recited aloud in the service. In some cases, the integration between the visual and aural dimensions was achieved not only in the mind of the users while viewing the images during the performance of the service, but in the actual image, in the form of quotations from the relevant liturgical text written in banderoles, which were incorporated next to the specific biblical protagonist as if he/she were speaking aloud. In images visualizing each of the Ten Commandments in an Ashkenazi prayer book, some of these quotations were verses of Aramaic hymns accompanying the public reading of the Commandments during the Shavuot service.

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?*

A cross-like morphology and any gesture of crossing limbs, which were either designed by artists as a typological commentary on Old Testament narratives or actually seen in everyday life, were considered by Christians to be reliable Christological arguments. Jacob crossing his hands to bless Joseph's sons, the huge bunch of grapes carried by the spies from Canaan, or the gates of Gaza carried away by Samson, were all designed in the shape of the cross as indications of a prefiguration of the crucifixion and related episodes. A person gazing on the typological window of the crucifixion in Chartres, for example, and then walking in the streets, would likely see the shape of the cross in different natural contexts around him. A prominent example is the case of the donkey, the main transportation vehicle in medieval times; the meeting between its spinal column and its shoulders has the shape of the cross, which according to a popular belief was regarded a Christological hint alluding to the fulfilment of Zachariah 9, 9. The cross-like shape of the donkey's back was such a direct and convincing argument in popular debate that scholarly Jewish authorities felt obliged to instruct people on how to cope with it.

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?*

The manipulation of the original item is meaningful in this context. Hebrew manuscripts were often transported from their original location in the wake of forced or voluntary migrations. Additions of notes and images in the new location testified to the new context of reception. More dramatic transitions were those cases in which images made for Jews were appropriated by Christians. In the case of an illuminated *haggadah* that reached the hands of the librarian of the Benedictine monastery in Tegernsee, a Latin introduction explaining the text and images was written by the Dominican friar Erhard von Pappenheim and copied on an additional quire at the beginning of the manuscript. Here, a Jewish ritual codex for domestic use was transformed into an illuminated study book for monks. Different strategies of appropriation can be discerned side by side as exemplified in two adjacent synagogues in Toledo, which were decorated with *mudejar* motifs in stucco and with Hebrew verses of Psalms running along the upper part of the walls. The two were reused as churches; one eliminated the original use by deleting the Hebrew inscriptions; the other left them as an act of Christological interpretation, according to which the Hebrew verses were incarnated in Christ.

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?*

Many of the aspects prevalent in present-day research, such as the materiality, sensorial reception and social life of images, have the ability to be flexible enough to adjust to various visual cultures, as long as one is well aware of the fundamental differences between geo-cultural areas and the potential misinterpretation of non-European cultures as a result of one's western European orientation. Adhering to the images/objects themselves, their visuality and materiality, as well as a comprehensive contextualization (including also relevant local languages), which is always important, would, in such cases, play a significant role in suppressing our "western eye".

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

The present track of materiality and the multi-dimensional experience of reception have the potential to keep occupying our minds in the years to come as well, while also broadening the scope to include more ordinary materials and the domestic domain, which has been less researched. Research may also be further developed beyond the properties and meanings of the materials and their manufacture. In order to further understand the effect of materiality on medieval viewers one should add the visuality of different designs of the same material in various artefacts, namely the various ways materials were artistically manipulated in different cases and how the specific result could have affected the viewer's experience in changing locations. Focusing on the image-viewer dynamics, we may also (re)turn to the producers/designers, not as the "authors" of the image/object but as viewers of other images inspiring their work and as the first viewers of their own artefact.

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