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 DOI: 10.35765/pk.2026.5201.24

The Pictorial, Iconic, and Visual Turns in the Humanities and Cultural Studies: From Picture Theory, Image Science and Erwin Panofsky's concept of "critical iconology" to Philosophical Attempts to Answer the Question "What is an Image?"

ABSTRACT

This essay is an attempt to outline the issues of the visual turn which is a mirror reflection of the linguistic turn. In humanistic reflection, the "visual turn" functioning under two names of the pictorial turn by W.J.T. Mitchell and its German equivalent, the iconic turn (*Die ikonische Wende*) by Gottfried Boehm, can be defined as a kind of theoretical-methodological shift from the linguistic to the pictorial and visual paradigms, which falls within the area of Visual Culture Studies or Visual Studies. In the 1980s and the 1990s, the "pictorial turn" and the "iconic turn" led to the development of three scientific disciplines: the semiotics of the image, the American Picture Theory, and its German equivalent of Image Science (*Bildwissenschaft*). These scientific disciplines arose around the same time. American considerations on the pictorial turn were largely conditioned by opposition to the domination of language, mastering the icon by logos, and boiled down to the interpretation of the image and its philosophical connotations. In the case of Boehm's iconic turn, inspiration from an inter- and a transdisciplinary image research takes the initiative, unlike American visual culture studies, from philosophical art historians and aesthetes who (beginning with Aby Warburg and Erwin Panofsky) were interested in various forms of visibility. In the meaning proposed by Mitchell, the pictorial turn goes far beyond the models of "textuality" and "discursiveness" towards Erwin Panofsky's critical iconology. In turn, Boehm in his concept of the iconic turn, similarly like Mitchell, and refers to the concept of the linguistic turn, looking for the logic of an image different from the logic of language but first of all he asks the question "What is an image?" and points to an extremely wide range of its philosophical connotations.

KEYWORDS: the visual turn, the pictorial turn, the iconic turn, the image, the semiotics of the image, Picture Theory, Image Science (*Bildwissenschaft*), Visual Culture Studies, Visual Studies, What is an image?, Erwin Panofsky's critical iconology

Sugerowane cytowanie: Chmielecki, K. (2026). The Pictorial, Iconic, and Visual Turns in the Humanities and Cultural Studies: From Picture Theory, Image Science and Erwin Panofsky's concept of "critical iconology" to Philosophical Attempts to Answer the Question "What is an Image?". © *Perspektywy Kultury*, 1(52), ss. 351–372. DOI: 10.35765/pk.2026.5201.24

STRESZCZENIE

Zwroty obrazowe, ikoniczne i wizualne w humanistyce i studiach kulturowych: Od teorii obrazu, nauki o obrazie i koncepcji „krytycznej ikonologii” Erwina Panofsky’ego po filozoficzne próby odpowiedzi na pytanie „Czym jest obraz?”

Niniejszy esej stanowi próbę nakreślenia zagadnień związanych z zwrotem wizualnym, który jest lustrzanym odbiciem zwrotu językowego. W refleksji humanistycznej „zwrot wizualny”, funkcjonujący pod dwiema nazwami: zwrot obrazowy W.J.T. Mitchella i jego niemiecki odpowiednik, zwrot ikoniczny (*Die ikonische Wende*) Gottfrieda Boehma, można zdefiniować jako rodzaj teoretyczno-metodologicznego przesunięcia z paradygmatu językowego do paradygmatu obrazowego i wizualnego, które mieści się w obszarze studiów nad kulturą wizualną lub studiów wizualnych. W latach 80. i 90. XX w. „zwrot obrazowy” i „zwrot ikoniczny” doprowadziły do rozwoju trzech dyscyplin naukowych: semiotyki obrazu, amerykańskiej teorii obrazu oraz jej niemieckiego odpowiednika, nauki o obrazie (*Bildwissenschaft*). Dyscypliny te powstały mniej więcej w tym samym czasie. Amerykańskie rozważania na temat zwrotu obrazowego były w dużej mierze uwarunkowane sprzeciwem wobec dominacji języka, opanowaniem ikony przez logos i sprowadzały się do interpretacji obrazu i jego filozoficznych konotacji. W przypadku zwrotu ikonograficznego Boehma inspiracją między- i transdyscyplinarnymi badaniami nad obrazem przejmują inicjatywę, w przeciwieństwie do amerykańskich studiów nad kulturą wizualną, od filozoficznych historyków sztuki i estetyków, którzy (począwszy od Aby’ego Warburga i Erwina Panofsky’ego) byli zainteresowani różnymi formami wizualności. W rozumieniu proponowanym przez Mitchella zwrot obrazowy wykracza daleko poza modele „tekstualności” i „dyskursywności” w kierunku krytycznej ikonologii Erwina Panofsky’ego. Z kolei Boehm w swojej koncepcji zwrotu ikonograficznego, podobnie jak Mitchell, odwołuje się do koncepcji zwrotu lingwistycznego, poszukując logiki obrazu odmiennej od logiki języka, ale przede wszystkim zadaje pytanie „Czym jest obraz?” i wskazuje na niezwykle szeroki zakres jego filozoficznych konotacji.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: zwrot wizualny, zwrot obrazowy, zwrot ikoniczny, obraz, semiotyka obrazu, teoria obrazu, nauka o obrazie (*Bildwissenschaft*), studia nad kulturą wizualną, studia wizualne, czym jest obraz?, ikonologia krytyczna Erwina Panofsky’ego

“Bilder haben Konjunktur: seit den Achtzigerjahren sind sie zu einem kulturellen ‘Paradigma’ aufgerückt, dessen Signale auch in einer entfernteren und weiteren Öffentlichkeit bemerkt werden“ (“Pictures are booming: since the 1980s they have been advanced to the rank of a cultural

‘paradigm’, the signals of which are also noticed in a more distant and wider public space” – translated by K.C.) (Boehm, 1994a, p. 325).

“Wer nach dem Bild fragt, fragt nach Bildern, einer unübersehbaren Vielzahl” (“Who asks for the picture, he asks for pictures, for their unmistakable plurality” – translated by K.C.) (Boehm, 1994b, p. 11).

“The picture now has a status somewhere between what Thomas Kuhn called a ‘paradigm’ and an ‘anomaly,’ emerging as a central topic of discussion in the human sciences in the way that language did: that is, as a kind of model or figure for other things (including figuration itself), and as an unsolved problem, perhaps even the object of its own ‘science,’ what Erwin Panofsky called as an ‘iconology’” (Mitchell, 1994, p. 13).

[...] the iconic turn went beyond the analysis of pictures and images as objects and representations, covering the entire spectrum of visual perception and culture” (Bachmann-Medick, 2016, p. 245).

Introduction

In the humanities and cultural studies, the pictorial turn, and its German equivalent – the iconic turn (*Die ikonische Wende*)¹ – constitute mirror reflections of the linguistic turn made in the considerations of Richard Rorty (1992). This tendency already has a long history, measured by attempts to constitute all varieties of Norman Bryson’s semiotics of the image (Bryson, 1991, pp. 174–208), W.J.T. Mitchell’s *Picture Theory* (Mitchell, 1994, pp. 11–34), Gottfried Boehm’s *Image Science (Bildwissenschaft)* (Boehm, 1994b, pp. 11–38), on top of Erwin Panofsky’s concept of “critical iconology” as well as philosophical attempts to answer the question: “What is an image?” These issues are the main theme of this article. In humanistic thought, the “visual turn” can be defined as a kind of theoretical and methodological redirection from the linguistic to the pictorial and visual paradigms, which falls within the area of Visual Culture

1 The literature includes terms that differ slightly in their semantic aspects: the iconic, pictorial, and visual turns. It is worth noting that the concept of the pictorial turn includes at least two trends in its development: those related to the research perspective (in its extreme form – epistemological and objective), as well as in the contemporary culture, which was associated with certain specific phenomena present in the visual sphere (the introduction of the photographic image, the invention of film and central perspective, and a digital image). W.J.T. Mitchell distinguishes several different understandings of the “pictorial turn”, highlighting the accompanying research contexts (Mitchell, 1994, pp. 16–17). For more on the shaping of the iconic turn, see Boehm (2007, pp. 27–36), and for the distinction between the iconic and pictorial turns, see Boehm & Mitchell, (2010, pp. 8–26).

Studies or Visual Studies. Currently, this is the subject of multilateral and critical research on increasing the role of images within society and contemporary culture, which developed mainly in the field of the semiotics of image, Picture Theory, Image Science, Visual Studies, and Visual Culture Studies. The primary research questions herein include philosophical attempts to answer the question “What is an image?”, the meaning of Erwin Panofsky’s concept of “critical iconology,” and how the development of the semiotics of image, Picture Theory, and Image Science contribute to the rise of the pictorial turn.

This entails the following consequences, which should be particularly considered: visual communication, or in the extreme case of the semiotics of image, the use of the “language of the image” becomes equal to linguistic (textual) communication, the function of which has been replaced by visual coding. The pictorial turn is also manifested in the fact that visual communication is rising to become an independent semiotic system, where the “image” plays a role analogous to the “language” which, in the approach proposed by the linguistic turn, had been understood as the foundation for all methods of social and visual communication.² The linguistic turn reinforced the conviction that verbal language is the most perfect semiotic and communicative system that cannot be replaced by any visual equivalent due to the lack of adequacy. However, this thesis is undergoing a revaluation and is often questioned by theoretical systems of social and visual communication.

The “visual turn” has opened new theoretical perspectives for reflecting on images, which so far have been studied mainly in the aesthetic context and from the point of view of art history. They had also been viewed as cognitive and discursive phenomena. Contemporary research, however, has been devoted to images not only in the fields of philosophy, sociology, or anthropology, but also made artworks in the context of art history the subject of its reflection. Moreover, Mitchell, like Boehm, understands the pictorial and the iconic turn as a “turn to images,” “in which image is everything – and nothing – is not strictly the province of sophisticated commentators or cultural critics but the part of an everyday vernacular culture that makes a widely accessible language of advertising possible” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 80). In this sense, the share of the epistemological turn is also significant. It consisted in restoring the image to its role as the medium of cognition, which makes it possible to include contemporary visual communication practices in the process of the perception of images and the image recognition within other visual messages (see Boehm, 1994b,

2 This point of view was presented by W.J.T. Mitchell in the following way: “What makes for the sense of a pictorial turn, then, is not that we have some powerful account of visual representation that is dictating the terms of cultural theory, but that pictures form a point of peculiar friction and discomfort across a broad range of intellectual inquiry” (Mitchell, 1994, p. 13).

pp. 12–16; Boehm, 2004, pp. 36–38; Boehm, 2007, pp. 77–82; Wunenburger, 2001, pp. 61–69).

The Pictorial and Iconic Turns within the Semiotics of the Image, Picture Theory, and Image Science (*Bildwissenschaft*)

In the 1980s and 1990s, the “visual turn” functioned in various theoretical contexts as “the pictorial turn” and “an iconic turn.” This led to the development of three scientific disciplines: the semiotics of the image by Norman Bryson, the American Picture Theory, and its German counterpart, *Bildwissenschaft*, which also has an American synonym – Image Science. The latter was presented in the last book by Mitchell (2015), *Image Science: Iconology, Visual Culture, and Media Aesthetics*. Picture Theory is a scholarly discipline developed mainly by Mitchell (1994) in his *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. However, it must be said that the theoretical and methodological boundaries of this field are blurry. All attempts to consider the perspectives of Picture Theory development that Mitchell undertook have led to what was articulated almost at the very beginning of his book: image theory poses the question of “What is an image?” (Mitchell, 1994, p. 4). However, the humanities have since struggled to formulate a fully satisfactory definition on this subject, mainly due to the lack of an unambiguous answer to the question of that an “image” is. In the overwhelming number of publications, Picture Theory is limited to comparative studies dealing with completely different problems, such as semiotic and philosophical theories of visual representation, or sociological, and anthropological studies on film and mass culture. In *Picture Theory*, Mitchell poses a rhetorical question: does the problem with Picture Theory result from its specificity, or perhaps from the concept of “image/picture” itself? (Mitchell, 1994, p. 9).

The pictorial turn has resulted in the development of the semiotics of the image by Norman Bryson (1991, pp. 174–208). This discipline is presently considered rather as a historical, as it had developed in the 1980s. The main driving force behind this discipline was the transformations of art history, triggered by the linguistic and semiotic turn initiated by the influence of Roland Barthes’ semiology. Mieke Bal and Bryson, in the essay “Semiotics and Art History,” argue that semiotics extends beyond the linguistic turn and leads toward a “transdisciplinary theory,” which “helps to avoid the bias of privileging language that so often accompanies attempts to make disciplines interact.” In this situation, “rather than a linguistic turn, we will propose a semiotic turn for art history” (Bal & Bryson, 1991, p. 175). This turn was intended to awaken

art history from its “dogmatic slumber.” No wonder Mitchell asks the question: “Now that art history is awake, at least to the linguistic turn, what will it do?” (Mitchell, 1994, p. 14). This theoretical perspective gave rise to the way of thinking about visual arts and images as “systems of signs” with their own “discourse” and “textuality,”³ in which Mitchell proposes the use of semiotics.

Bal and Bryson (1991) propose using semiotics as a research perspective to deepen our understanding of image studies, which overcomes the privileged position of language (p. 175). However, this proposal does not convince Mitchell, who expressed it in *Picture Theory*, (see Mitchell, 1994, pp. 83–107), stating that he was “skeptical about the possibility both of transdisciplinary theory and of avoiding ‘bias’ or achieving neutrality in the metalanguage of representation.” Although Mitchell had “great respect for the achievements of semiotics and draw upon it frequently,” he was “convinced that the best terms for describing representations, artistic or otherwise, are to be found in the immanent vernaculars of representational practices themselves. Sometimes, of course, the language of semiotics intersects with these vernaculars (consider the loaded notion of the ‘icon’). These intersections only make it clearer that the technical metalanguages of semiotics do not offer us a scientific, transdisciplinary, or unbiased vocabulary, but only a host of new figures or theoretical pictures that must themselves be interpreted” (Mitchell, 1994, p. 14–15, cf. 10). Semiotics thus disappoints Mitchell, although his theories are sometimes considered in this context, mainly due to the references to Panofsky’s iconology. In this formulation, Mitchell used the concept of “representation practices” rarely used in structuralist works, which are not involved with semiotic contexts. Interestingly, in *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*, Mitchell is no longer as radical with the approach to semiotic methods as he had been in *Picture Theory*. He refers to the findings of Charles S. Peirce (1997) and notes that the animalistic perspective he proposes does not involve dropping the methods of semiotic analysis of the image included in the notions of the “icon” and “sign,” but otherwise including certain accents within his theoretical approaches (Mitchell, 2005, p. 85).

All the above makes it evident that Picture Theory has not yet developed its own “language.” On the contrary, the inter- and transdisciplinary methodology which it openly admits makes it very easy to become dependent on

3 Norman Bryson challenges Ernst H. Gombrich’s concept of perception, which assumes that reality encoded through signs links mimesis with a linguistic category, and that meaning within an image is identified through its reference to reality. According to Gombrich (1994; 2000), the stage of correction following the use of a diagram was intended to make the image correspond to what can be seen. Bryson points out an inconsistency in Gombrich’s argument: if reality is mediated by signs and the artist perceives the world only through a scheme, then a stage of correction independent from that scheme is impossible. Bryson further argues that the sign has no direct relation to an antitypical reality; there is no direct connection between the sign and its referent (see Bryson, 1985, pp. 37–66).

other scientific disciplines. It is advisable that Picture Theory develop its own research tools with the help of inter- and transdisciplinary methodology, which may prove useful in all attempts at theoretical and methodological self-determination. At the same time, it should be emphasized that replacing the name of Visual Culture Studies with Visual Studies, as proposed by Mitchell, (2002, pp. 165–181), cannot be the reason why Picture Theory will be equated with Visual Culture Studies.

The concept of “image/picture” itself as the main subject of research in *Picture Theory*, critical “iconology”, and Image Science, is one of the most ambiguous terms that has appeared in the humanities (art history, cultural studies) and social sciences (philosophy, sociology, or the anthropology). No satisfactory definition of the concept of “image/picture” has been created, and in vain to expect it of us. This aspect was pointed out by Jacques Aumont – the author of one of the most extensive monographs on the subject of the image, who, in the first words of the introduction to his book entitled *L’Image (The Image)*, states that “The image has innumerable potential manifestations, some of which are perceived through the senses, and others are purely intellectual, as when we use metaphors of vision in abstract thought” (Aumont, 1997, p. 1). In a similar context, the problem of the phenomenon of the image is presented by Andrzej Leśniak (2010), who claims that:

The place of the image in the humanistic discourse is not defined. Regardless of the way in which the relationships between different languages and ways of speaking are dealt with, the concept of the image causes problems of interpretation. This is a problematic situation, especially in the contemporary context in which there are many texts where the concept of the image plays a key role. The image, a category that is constantly present in various disciplines of knowledge, sometimes in their very center as a concept that organizes a certain way of speaking, sometimes on the margins or at the intersection of theoretical languages, is something embarrassing, almost incomprehensible, especially when one considers the controversies that arise on any attempts at defining it (p. 9).

Thus, it is difficult to define what a picture is, but even more difficult to describe it in the form of a compact theoretical formula. In such a situation, the use of the term “image” only complicates the matter, often causing us to fall into a tautological trap in which the determining word does not enrich the content of the determined word. Consequently, we still do not know where the limits of the conceptual scope of the term “image” lie.

Trying to answer the question “What is an image?” it is worth referring to several positions of theoreticians of image science and visual culture (Boehm, Belting, Mitchell). One of them is Boehm’s concept, which he presents in the article “Die Biderfrage,” where the German theorist of art history and philosophy asks directly “What is an image?” and tries to distinguish it from

the linguistic medium. In considering this problem, he refers to the Old Testament and the Judeo-Christian tradition (see Boehm, 1994a, pp. 323–343). However, the definitive scope of the concept of an “image/picture” is and will probably remain a moot point. The iconic turn, which – according to Boehm – was to deal with the common and narrow understanding of the image admittedly caused the maximum extension of the scope of this concept which has burdened Image Science (see Boehm, 1994, pp. 12–17). Belting has called this situation the Babylonian confusion of languages, which resulted in a new “dispute of images,”⁴ the struggle of definition monopolies. As a result, not only do we speak about completely different pictures but differently also about pictures of the same type (Belting, 1998, p. 34).

Mitchell has repeatedly tried to construct a definition of an image, most often referring to the Judeo-Christian tradition, in which he assumed that the essence of the image/picture is a matter of spiritual similarity. In this perspective, he considered that if “something” is an image of “something”, it arose in its “likeness” (see Mitchell, 1986, pp. 31–36). The cited definition is agreed with Charles S. Peirce’s (1992) understanding of the iconic sign, who believed that the representative object is related to the represented object, on the same basis. However, Mitchell (1986) does not refer to Peirce but looks for premises to confirm his thesis in the Judeo-Christian tradition, in which man was created in the image and likeness of God (pp. 31–36). Mitchell tries to apply the same principle to biopictures (Mitchell, 2011, p. 70).

Hans Belting (2011) presents theoretical assumptions of Image Science (*Bildwissenschaft*) in his *An Anthropology of Image: Picture, Medium, Body*. According to him: “An ‘image’ is more than a product of perception. It is created as the result of personal or collective knowledge and intention. We live with images, we comprehend the world in images” (Mitchell, 2011, p. 9). However, this is not about adopting the research paradigms of anthropology as a science. Belting claims that in the case of his anthropological concept, talking about anthropology is not associated with any specific scientific discipline of knowledge, but only is meant to be an expression of an open, inter-, and transdisciplinary understanding of an image (Mitchell, 2011, pp. 9–10). First, we position transdisciplinary research as problem-solving within a broader pictorial discourse. Second, we solve the individual theoretical issues that are contained in this transdisciplinary discourse. In this way, we come to a consensus that can be contained in a given theoretical thought.

4 On the subject of the dispute of images, especially the public dispute, which involves as many voices as possible and is one of the rare moments when they are discussed at all, when they become visible, impose or reveal themselves, and different sides of the debate directly or indirectly articulate their attitude towards them (see Bräunlein, 2004, pp. 197–203; Zeidler-Janiszewska, 2015, p. 215).

The Pictorial and Visual Turns within Erwin Panofsky's Concept of the “Critical Iconology”

Currently, at least two different concepts or models of the pictorial turn are known. In 1992, Mitchell, an American literary scholar working at the University of Chicago, announced the pictorial turn. About two years later, the German philosopher and art historian – Gottfried Boehm – a student of Max Imdahl and Hans-Georg Gadamer – in his essay “Die Widerkehr der Bilder” (see Boehm 1994b, pp. 11–38) initiated the “iconic turn.” Staying in this context, Mitchell formulated his objection to the domination of language in his manifesto – “The Pictorial Turn,” first published in *ArtForum* and then reprinted in *Picture Theory*, in which the pictorial turn has already appeared, at this moment, when Richard Rorty announced the linguistic turn. Mitchell suggests that the pictorial turn has a linguistic background, therefore the researcher took a critical position toward the linguistic turn (Mitchell, 1994, pp. 11–13). The presentation of the hypotheses, in this case, is as follows: the history of culture or the history of philosophy can be characterized by a series of turns, among which the last stage was a linguistic turn. As Mitchell argues, “Linguistics, semiotics, rhetoric, and various models of ‘textuality’ have become the lingua franca for critical reflections of the arts, the media, and cultural forms. Society is a text. Nature and its scientific representations are ‘discourses.’ Even the unconscious is structured like a language” (Mitchell, 1994, p. 11). An important aspect is the fact that in the concept of pictorial turn by W.J.T. Mitchell “image” has taken the place of “language,” and it also rises to the rank of an independent sign system, just as the language used to be in the systems of poststructuralist philosophy under the sign of the linguistic turn. It should be noted here that Richard Rorty’s linguistic turn-initiated thinking about “language” as an unsolved problem of the humanities, while in the case of the pictorial turn, the image is understood in this way (Mitchell, 1994, p. 13).

Mitchell’s argument goes back to the past of imaging practices, postulating Erwin Panofsky’s iconology concept (read in the context of Louis Althusser’s suggestion) as a new “critical iconology”. Mitchell invokes *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* by David Freedberg (2005) a book equally important as *Likeness and Presence. History of the Image Before the Era of Art* by Hans Belting (1997), (cf. Zeidler-Janiszewska, 2015, p. 216). In this way, questioning the dominance of the research strategies that emerged as part of the linguistic turn, which was accused by Mitchell of a peculiar iconoclasm, he defined the pictorial turn, not as something which was

a return to naive mimesis, copy or correspondence theories of representation, or a renewed metaphysics of pictorial “presence” (but – note by K.C.) [...] rather a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay

between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality (Mitchell, 1994, p. 16).

In a direct reference to Panofsky's concept of "critical iconology," for Mitchell, the recipient-image relationship turns out to be crucial, as it was transferred to the next two relationships: subject-object and visual "image" – representation "object." The "critical iconology" associated with ideology is based on shifts from "an epistemological 'cognitive' ground (the knowledge of objects and subject) to an ethical, political, and hermeneutic ground (the knowledge of subjects by subjects, perhaps even Subjects by Subjects)" (Mitchell, 1994, p. 33). An icon has resisted language, opposes the treatment as objects, and demands other, equivalent-subjected relationships (Machtyl, 2017, pp. 57–58). One of the solutions proposed by Mitchell "would be to give up the notion of a metalanguage or discourse that could control the understanding of pictures and to explore the way attempt to represent themselves – an 'iconography' in a sense rather different from the traditional one" (Mitchell, 1994, p. 24). However, Mitchell does not provide any solutions to the problem presented. Moreover, adopting this assumption presents problems coming from the source of the root meaning of the term "iconology" itself, which "On the one hand, we are promised a discursive science of images, a mastering of the icon by the logos; on the other hand, [...] certain persistent images and likenesses insinuate themselves into that discourse, leading it into totalizing 'word-pictures' and 'word-views'" (Mitchell, 1994).

According to Mitchell, the varieties of the pictorial turn appear in Anglo-American philosophical reflection: in the semiotics of Peirce (1997) or in the later "languages of art" of Nelson Goodman (1976). In Europe, on the other hand, they could be identified with phenomenological interests in imagination and visual experience, as well as with "Of Grammatology" by Jacques Derrida (2016) that deconstructs the "phonocentric" model of language, directing attention towards visible, material traces of writing in terms of "representation" or "image," the Frankfurt school's taking up the issues of modernity, mass culture, and visual media, Michel Foucault's concept of power/knowledge, pointing to the rift between the discursive and "visible" in the postmodern of "scopic regimes" (Mitchell, 1994, p. 12). To this entire list of theoretical premises of the pictorial turn, Mitchell also adds the reflections of Wittgenstein (2009), coming from *Philosophical Investigations*. A question should be asked: Are these grounds justified? It is very difficult to answer the question posed here in an unambiguous way. On the one hand, the pictorial turn in the logic proposed by Mitchell emerges, as it were, from the linguistic turn. On the other hand, the question is still repeated: Is the thinking proposed by Mitchell not an example of the reductionism of visual problems to linguistic problems? which functions in the model of the image as text and discourse, already present in the semiotics of the image.

In Mitchell's understanding, the pictorial turn goes far beyond the models of "textuality" and is a symptom of the growing interest in Erwin Panofsky, whose iconology may be the theoretical context for the pictorial turn. As Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska (2006) points out, it is worth looking for the philosophical foundations of the pictorial turn not only in Wittgenstein's late works, but also among phenomenologists, and especially by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (p. 151). However, the main questions posed by the pictorial turn concern the picture, which – like in Panofsky's – is understood as a symbol of a complex cultural dimension and the center of multidimensional religious, scientific, and philosophical thought.

However, the central aspect of Mitchell's discussion is the issue of "seeing," which is borrowed from Panofsky who

argued that the Renaissance perspective did not correspond to "actual visual experience" either as it was understood scientifically in the early twentieth century or intuitively in the sixteenth century or antiquity. He calls perspective a "systematic abstraction from the structure of ... psychophysiological space" [...] and suggests a link between "the most modern insights of psychology" into the visual perception and the pictorial experiments of Mondrian and Malevich (Mitchell, 1994, p. 18).

According to Mitchell, the issue of seeing is an "unexplained problem" both in an essay on the central perspective⁵ and the iconological method.⁶ The issue of seeing distinguishes Picture Theory and Visual Culture Studies from "critical" iconology projects. In this regard, according to Mitchell, noteworthy is the book by Jonathan Crary (1992) *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, which addresses the problems of

5 Mitchell refers to an essay by Erwin Panofsky (1991) in which perspective is treated as a strategy for presenting three-dimensional reality in two dimensions (Mitchell, 1994, p. 31). Panofsky deals with the technical aspect of this strategy, its relationship with the psychology of perception, and finally reconstructing the historical process of shaping it: from antiquity – through Byzantine, Romanesque, and Gothic art – to the Renaissance, in which the principles of constructing visual representations in perspective as "symbolic form" (Panofsky, 1991, pp. 27–36).

6 Mitchell (1994, p. 25) refers to the iconological method, which comes from iconology as the science of the symbolism of images and their content. This method is treated as a way of reading the content of an image/artwork by deciphering the meanings of the presented and juxtaposed symbols in the image/artwork. The German art historian Erwin Panofsky, the co-creator of the so-called Hamburg school, published a book entitled *Studies in Iconology* in which he used a method of researching the content of a work of art that he developed. Panofsky's method consists of three parts: pre-iconographic description, iconographic analysis, and iconological analysis, each of which reveals subsequent layers of meaning of the work of art, and at the same time best illustrates the difference between iconography and iconology in the context of the symbolism of an image/artwork (Panofsky, 1972, pp. 5–9; Moxey, 1986, pp. 254–274).

Panofsky's iconology and shows the difficulties of theorizing in terms of spectator/spectatorship (see Mitchell, 1994, pp. 18–21). In this sense, the pictorial turn is an introduction not only to Picture theory, but also to visual culture studies, and possibly visual studies. In this theoretical perspective, these sciences gain common theoretical and methodological premises, but cannot be equated. According to Mitchell, "spectatorship (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of reading (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.) and that visual experience or 'visual literacy' might not be fully explicable on the model of textuality" (Mitchell, 1994, p. 16). However, as Martin Jay (2002, pp. 267–278) states, the pictorial turn can become the successor of the linguistic turn, just as the "reading texts" will be successful in the model of "spectator/spectatorship", "practices of looking" and "visible/visuality." In this context, the concept of figurativeness cannot be classified as what is discursive, and the image requires its own methodology and a unique model of visual analysis in the presented aspects (Jay, 1996, p. 3).

Moreover, the "visual turn" or "hegemony of the visible" which similarly like visual culture is revealed in the form of the domination of visual media and spectacle over "verbal activities of speech, writing, textuality, and reading." In this situation, "the fallacy of the pictorial turn, a development viewed with horror by iconophobes and opponents of mass culture, who see it is as the cause of a decline in literacy, and with delight by iconophiles who see new and higher forms of consciousness emerging from the plethora of visual images and media" (Mitchell, 2002, p. 172). I presented the problem of approximation of the meaning of the term "visual culture," which appears in the pictorial turn, in one of my articles (see Chmielecki, 2015, pp. 93–114) in accordance with findings by Georges Didi-Huberman (2011) presented in the book entitled *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*. Due to the changes in the history of art, visual culture studies are emerging that generate the need to define the term "visual culture."

The terms pictorial and iconic turns come from the early nineties of the twentieth century, but, as Boehm aptly noted, they are only now used (Boehm & Mitchell, 2010, p. 9). On the other hand, the answer to the question: "when does the pictorial turn take place?" Seems to be still debatable. In this context, Mitchell's statement seems particularly interesting, as he believes that "The pictorial or visual turn [...] is not unique to our time. It is a repeated narrative figure, that takes on a very specific form in our time, but which seems to be available in its schematic form in an innumerable variety of circumstances" (Mitchell, 2002, p. 173). Currently, there is a new version of the pictorial turn (biopictorial turn), which is the result of the appearance of bioimages and image cloning (Mitchell, 2011, p. 70). Mitchell argues "that the visual and pictorial turn is a recurrent trope that displaces moral and political panic onto images and so-called visual

media. Images are convenient scapegoats, and the offensive eye is ritually plucked out by ruthless critique” (Mitchell, 2002, p. 170). In this sense, the pictorial turn in cultural history, starting with antiquity, has occurred yet in the past and it has been associated with inventions of the central perspective, sculpting, oil painting, photography, film, the internet, and mimesis.

The “biodigital picture” is an example of a biopicture. Mitchell thinks that its emergence is associated with

A new version of the pictorial turn (which – note by K.C.) has taken place in the last twenty years or so. It is a turn toward the “biopicture,” or (more precisely) the “biodigital picture,” the icon “animated” – that is, given motion and the appearance of life by means of the techno-sciences of biology and information. The twin inventions of computers and genetic engineering have produced a new twist in the ancient trope of the pictorial turn, and especially in that aspect of images that has likened them to life forms – and vice versa (Mitchell, 2011, p. 70).

Currently, the pictorial turn should be considered in the context of the transformation of digital turn, new media, and the Internet. According to Mitchell, the described phenomenon is associated with the concept of iconoclasm, a characteristic of modern times, which is caused by iconophobia. The manifestation of the pictorial turn is not the appearance of a new visual technology, but an iconophobic fear before the advent of a new image (Boehm & Mitchell, 2010, p. 11).

Mitchell claims that: In Panofsky’s concept of “critical iconology,” “the ‘icon’ is thoroughly absorbed by the ‘logos,’ understood as a rhetorical, literary, and even (less convincing) scientific discourse” (Mitchell, 1994, p. 28). In Mitchell’s opinion, the postmodern “critical iconology” supports the functioning of language, not of the image. Therefore, nowadays hybrid forms appear particularly frequently. Mitchell’s proposal boils down to the “critical iconology” concept which directs us towards “hyper-icons” and “metapictures.” However, the relationship between iconology and ideology seems to be a particularly important issue. Mitchell claims that “Iconology recognizes itself as an ideology, that is, as a system of naturalization, a homogeneous discourse that effaces conflict and difference with figures of ‘organic unity’ and ‘synthetic intuition’” (Mitchell, 1994, p. 30). But the associating connects the two sciences is to shift these sciences from epistemological ground to an area of politics, ethics, and hermeneutics (Mitchell, 1994, p. 33). However, Panofsky’s attitude to images is revealed in the figure of the Other placed in the dimension in which the reflection on the pictorial turn moves from the aesthetic to the social context and leads in a straight line to the renewal of iconology as a “new” Image Science. Even though “The pictorial turn is not the answer to everything. It is merely a way of stating the question” (Mitchell, 1994, p. 24), in his rhetoric he seems to be dependent on the linguistic turn and “textual” iconology of Panofsky. In this

regard, Mitchell believes that the origins of the term “iconology” are the source of the troubles and problems because it suggests “a discursive science of images, a mastering of an icon by the logos” (Mitchell, 1994).

The discipline of Visual Studies proclaimed by Mitchell opens the possibility of the emergence of one more turn in addition to the pictorial and the iconic turns. The visual turn shifts the focus from image to performance and directs our interest toward cultural vision and scopic regimes, i.e., the practice of seeing treated as a socio-cultural process. In this dimension, reflection on images can be treated as a social and cultural perspective, which to a large extent relativizes the autonomy of what is visual in a broad context. However, one should be aware that this perspective opens the possibility of discussing subjectivity and visual identity in terms proposed not only by Mitchell but also by other theorists from the field of visual studies (e.g., Keith Moxey and Michael Ann Holly).

According to Moxey, the importance of the pictorial turn proclaimed by Mitchell lies in the fact that its author does not limit images research solely to privileged aesthetic context. Although artworks are guaranteed status in aesthetic values are not the only power that visual objects can be endowed with. Mitchell notes that their attention-grabbing power can manifest in a variety of ways. Therefore, Mitchell’s reflection on the pictorial turn directs its efforts towards many different research areas, seemingly unrelated to each other, falling within the scope of visual culture, visibility, and ways of perceiving the world (Moxey, 2008, pp. 135–136). Mitchell believes that the fallacy of a pictorial turn was to understand it as a claim about the modern age as unique and unprecedented in its obsession with vision and visual representation. In this context, Mitchell claims that his “aim was to acknowledge the perception a turn to the visual or to the image as a commonplace” (Mitchell, 2002, p. 173). In this sense, both visual studies inspired by the pictorial and iconic turn and those that owe their development to the sociological heritage of cultural studies direct our attention to the reception of visual artifacts. In one case, the difference between the subject and the object is abolished, which de facto leads to the fact that images are no longer perceived as things, and in the other case, the differentiating identities of the sender and the reception determine the images which are perceived rather as living organisms (Moxey, 2008, pp. 140–141).

The Iconic Turn within Philosophical Attempts to Answer the Question “What is an Image?”

There is more transparency in terms of the iconic turn in Germany. The inspiration for inter- and transdisciplinary research on image took from the philosophical initiative, unlike in the case of American visual culture studies, coming from art historians and aesthetes who (starting with Aby Warburg and Erwin

Panofsky) were interested in various forms of imaging (Zeidler-Janiszewska, 2015, p. 215). Gottfried Boehm refers to the concept of the hermeneutics of the image in which he writes that there is Picture Theory, as in Martin Heidegger's approach, problematizing the image as an act and result of the action (see Boehm, 1978, pp. 444–471). According to Gottfried Boehm, the iconic turn made it possible to rediscover the history of science as “the history of images,” which has become an integral part of Image Science, which opens the field for discussion between exact sciences and the humanities (Boehm & Mitchell, 2010, p. 12). The creation of this field of mutual dialogue and discussion is the greatest achievement of the iconic turn. On this aspect, both Mitchell and Boehm agree with each other. However, we can talk about two different ways of understanding the concept of the “history of image.” Boehm links this concept with the history of science, the aim of which has always been to “create images,” often understood in different contexts, such as the “image of the world.” This process was not related to the creation of the physical, painting, or photographic “images,” although it happened that science could use visual media, e.g., photography, film, and digital media. The understanding of the concept of “creating images” proposed by Boehm is related to the ambiguity of the word “image.” However, one must be aware that the iconic turn allows one not only to sketch a historical and ideological background but also deal with the common and limited understanding the question: “What is an image?” (see Boehm, 1994a, pp. 325–343).

The boundaries of Image Science are constantly expanding, and its methodological identity is constantly looking for new forms of transformation. The iconic turn did not appear directly in the field of cultural studies, although it was included by Doris Bachmann-Medick (2016, pp. 245–278) as a cultural turn. In the first words, the conclusion presented by Bachmann-Medick (2016) shows that the development of the iconic turn was effectively blocked by the domination of language in the history of art, and now it is developing with the support and alliance of language criticism (p. 245). Bachmann-Medick characterizes this period in the development of art history as follows: “Paradoxically, the iconic turn arose precisely at a time when art historians became involved (albeit somewhat belatedly) in the linguistic turn themselves and began viewing the visual arts as sign systems and textual and discursive phenomena” (Bachmann-Medick, 2016, p. 247).

Boehm referring, like Mitchell, to the concept of the linguistic turn, looks for a specific “logic of images” different from the “logic of language” but first of all asks the question “What is an image?”. Pointing to an extremely wide range of connotations, mainly philosophical, related to this concept of the image. In his introduction to the book, the title of which includes the question “Was ist ein Bild?” (see Boehm, 1994b, pp. 11–38), we read about the multitude of “painted, thought, dreamed” pictures, as well as “paintings, metaphors,

gestures” or “mirror, echo, mimicry.” So, one can ask the question: “what do they have in common, could each of these cases be generalized into the idea of an image?” Boehm’s definition of the research field of Image Science is related to the discipline going beyond the framework of those traditionally interested in images (Zeidler-Janiszewska, 2015, pp. 215–216).

According to Boehm, the iconic turn is the “return of the images” that has taken place on various levels of visual culture, starting since the nineteenth century. In 1994, Boehm, in his essay “Die Widerkehr der Bilder,” declares the arrival of the iconic turn (see Boehm, 1994b, pp. 11–38). Paradoxically, the iconic turn appears when the history of art, influenced by the linguistic turn, begins to discover plastic arts as sign systems, texts, and discourses. This term is an allusion to a linguistic turn that goes hand in hand with an interest in pictures. As in the linguistic turn, all questions of philosophy boiled down to the problem of the language, which rejected arguments about the supreme being, the transcendental self, or the reflexivity of self-knowledge. However, the foundation of the language on which the linguistic turn is based is shaky. In this aspect, Boehm refers to Wittgenstein. His argumentation and the concept of “language games,” which the philosopher developed in *Philosophical Investigations*, are based on the “family similarity” concept (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 52), which are connected to similarity (and not with strict rules of logic coinciding with language). In this situation, it is difficult to meet the requirements of identity and uniqueness. Similarity binds members of one family, clan, and culture, as was the case with the “family of images” (see Mitchell, 1986, pp. 9–14). The concept of “language game” allows for characterizing the combination of regular connections and variable areas of freedom. Similarity (*Ähnlichkeit*) evokes belonging to “one kind,” it appeals more to the eye than to the abstract intellect (Boehm, 1994b, pp. 13–14).

Wittgenstein (2009) uses a rhetorical “language game” to space a concept, thus creating a space for metaphors. The very meaning of the terms “language game” and “family resemblance” is metaphorical. Wittgenstein, like in classical philosophical thought, is guided by the strict requirement of self-justification of thinking. However, the world of concepts cannot be separated from metaphorical/rhetorical approaches because philosophical thinking is “bound by metaphors.” In the history of the iconic turn, Wittgenstein’s theory sets the endpoint, because the research on language revealed the pictorial potential, and the linguistic turn turned into an iconic turn (turn to the image), which is a “figure of self-justification” and already has a history: The Plotinian idea of unity in which the construction is a reference to the prototype (cf. Beierwaltes, 1985), and the conclusion of Wolfgang Wackernagel (1991) on the pictorial thinking of Master Eckhart. Gadamer, for whom “The ontological valence of the picture” in *Truth and Method* takes on extraordinary meaning and derives the power of the image from its reference to the prototype of “aesthetic being”:

(Gadamer, 2006, p. 130–137). The turn to the image finds historical references in modern philosophy which deals with the problem of self-justification with criticism. In this regard, it is worth recalling the role that Immanuel Kant assigns to the imagination. This “game of imagination” gains a key position when it comes to linking sensuality and intellect. In the two critiques of Kant (2015, 2021): *The Critique of Practical Reason* and *The Critique of Pure Reason*, the ability to visualize plays a key role. It is no coincidence that Kant’s later interpreter, Heidegger (1997), focused precisely on the term “image-making ability” (see Boehm, 1994b, pp. 13–17).

To all this, Boehm refers to the speculative Picture Theory of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (2005), in which he deals mainly with the issues of imagination, or the function of an aesthetic view or image in the early philosophical system of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1989, pp. 138–141), which Boehm resigns from discussing, only pointing out that in this way the image acquires the rank of the central organ of philosophy (see Boehm, 1994b, pp. 13–17). In the history of the philosophy of the nineteenth century, images penetrate more and more rapidly into philosophical argumentation, not only in terms of rhetoric. The turn to metaphor also appears in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (1979), whose knowledge of ancient rhetoric is combined with its philosophical application. Especially, the essay “On truth and lie in a nonmoral sense”⁷ can be considered an effective metaphor invasion into the center of philosophical thought, which creatively combines philosophical constructions over logical abysses. The deeper they are, the bolder the metaphors. The “army of metaphors” is based on human cognitive activity, and the existence of a “sense of reality” (*Wirklichkeitssinn*) is accompanied by a “sense of possibility” (*Möglichkeitssinn*) (see Musil, 1996) (Boehm, 1994b, pp. 16–17). It was the creative potential of images that became the main slogan of late nineteenth century art, and even more of abstract, surreal, and cubist art, considered in relation to Nietzsche’s thought, in which the actual achievement of (“historical event”) is the degradation of the reproduction and, at the same time, the discovery of authentic, the creative powers of an image itself.

7 In this essay, Friedrich Nietzsche asks the question: “What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins (Nietzsche, 1979, p. 84). In this sense, Nietzsche’s approach is not relativism but a framework for differentiating between truth and lie.

Conclusions

Boehm's iconic turn has nothing to do with the theory of iconicity of Charles S. Peirce (1992). This term has been borrowed from the art historian Max Imdahl (1979), who defines the concept of iconic meaning in accordance with Erwin Panofsky's findings. As can be seen in the example above, the sources of the iconic and the pictorial synthesizes are common and relate to the iconology of Erwin Panofsky (see Moxey, 1986, pp. 254–274). In this understanding, as noted by Boehm, “Essentially, the name icono-logy would be the comprehensive methodological substitute for what art history is supposed to achieve: the understanding and interpretation of the logos of the image in its historical, perception-oriented, and meaning-saturated determinedness. Panofsky (whose authoritative reformulation of the term retains validity to this day) adopted the ancient concept of iconologia, and in so doing caused this balance to shift to the side of textuality (...)” (Boehm & Mitchell, 2010, p. 12).

Characterizing the iconic turn as a cultural turn, Bachmann-Medick writes that

Yet talk of an iconic turn is not just a reference to the increasing importance of visual phenomena of everyday culture. This turn has led to a new epistemological awareness of images in the study of culture. Linked to a critique of knowledge and language, it seeks to promote a visual literacy that has been poorly developed in Western societies since Plato's hostility toward images and logo-centrist trends in philosophy. The dominance of language in Western cultures has long marginalized the study of visual cultures (Bachmann-Medick, 2016, p. 245).

In this sense, images have been “read” for a long time, as texts, mainly in systems of the semiotics of the image and visual semiotics, seeking in them a hidden meaning and story that could be told (Bachmann-Medick, 2016, p. 245). However, it must be realized that images are not signs that have their own power of influence, but on the contrary are endowed with an integral, peculiar only to them iconic sphere, different from discursive and textual coding schemes. It is this sphere that constitutes the integral power of images in terms of their impact and influence on human beings in the context of cultural aspects of image meaning.

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