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PICTORIAL TURN / ICONIC TURN

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It. *Svolta iconica*; Fr. *Tournant iconique*; Germ. *Ikonische Wende*; Span. *Giro icónico*. The expression "pictorial turn" is derived from "linguistic turn", and denotes the idea that in contemporary culture images, as well as their media and supports, have acquired a new central place in various fields of study. In contrast with the hypothesis of the linguistic turn, the theorists of the pictorial turn maintain that images are a fundamental instrument of rationality – not only in logical and epistemological terms but also in a communicative and rhetorical sense. Depending on their points of view, some authors identify the pictorial turn with a specific moment in the Western tradition, which coincides with the growing impact of the analogical image in the second half of the 20th century and the subsequent transition to the digital image. Others instead emphasize the transhistorical significance of the expression, and use it to indicate, within whatever culture is under consideration, the importance sometimes assumed by images, and their opposition to logocentric models. Considered as a whole, the discussions concerning the pictorial turn became widespread in the second half of the 1980s and signaled a break with regard to the media studies mainstream, whose extreme views, either apocalyptic or enthusiastic, the theorists of the pictorial turn claim to overcome.

The debates concerning the pictorial turn have two distinct points of origin: the Bildwissenschaften in Germany and the Cultural Studies in the Anglo-American context. By means of different and sometimes competing paths, G. Boehm (1994) and W.J.T. Mitchell (1994) use the notion of "turn" to argue for analyses that are concerned with the image per se. Images establish a group of devices which constitute a code that cannot be reduced to verbal language; this autonomy makes it possible to construct a discipline – or, rather, a series of disciplines – dealing with the visual codes by means of specific principles and methods. This theoretical program has precedents in the modern debate, dating at least as far back as Gestalttheorie and its 20th-century developments (Kanizsa 1979); however, the originality of the pictorial turn lies in its more distinct emphasis on culturological rather than perceptological aspects.

Boehm formulates the hypothesis of an Ikonische Wende within his larger program of a "hermeneutics of the image", that aims to broaden the scope of H.G. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. In what way are images able to make sense (Boehm 2007)? Boehm's answer makes reference to the existence of a "logic of the image": a logic radically mute, non-linguistic, that functions as a "power of showing". This semantic function of the image is also central to authors from disciplines other than philosophy. Such is the case – to remain in Germany – of H. Bredekamp and his theory of the image act (2017). Bredekamp starts from an art historical point of view and locates the issues relating to the image within a long historical framework. But his destination is entirely philosophical, or rather ontological: images have lives of their own, they are not simply representations, but subjectivities endowed with energeia – with powers, to borrow Boehm's term. Modeled on the theory of speech acts, the semantic force of image acts rests on their capacity to act (put in front of the beholder's eyes) and to cause action (produce behaviors). This characteristic has been denied by the Western iconoclastic culture and, most recently, by the Enlightenment. Bredekamp opposes iconoclasm, which has tried to deactivate the force of images, by appealing to an "image-active Enlightenment". But on the philosophical level his analyses concern more generally the status of aesthetics as philosophy of art, along lines previously explored by H. Belting (1987): the Hegelian "end of art" represents the liberation of the image from the constraints of artistic beauty, and the recovery of potentials such as those analyzed by Boehm and Bredekamp. It is a matter of recovery because the reduction of the image to the philosophy of art is a fairly recent occurrence, sanctioned on the theoretical level by the Kantian judgment of taste and, in particular, by beauty as the object of a disinterested, universal and conceptless pleasure. Beyond these constraints, which culminate in Kant and the Enlightenment, spaces open out in which its cognitive and "vital" functions are restored to the image.

The idea that images are in some way "living" subjectivities is common to the other matrix of the pictorial turn, that articulated in the Anglo-American context. W.J.T. Mitchell, its main exponent, describes images as devices endowed with will and power (Mitchell 2005). Even more than Boehm and Bredekamp, Mitchell is concerned with the functioning of images in relation to communication and public discourse. Mitchell supports the idea of a substantial continuity between the linguistic dimension and the visual dimension: whereas others argue for the opposition between the two and the need to upturn their hierarchy, Mitchell talks of "imagetext", that is a mixed medium in which the two functions are on the same level. Mitchell goes further: there is no such thing as either exclusively linguistic or exclusively visual media; the pictorial turn is therefore a turning point in language studies and image studies that reveals their essential interconnections, without subjugating one to the other. Visual studies thus issue in a fully-fledged image science (Mitchell 2015). By this, however, he means not a specific disciplinary field, but a transdisciplinary grouping of perspectives that range from the hard sciences to the history of culture: image science is on the one hand the "empirical study of the conditions of human perception" and on the other hand, treats images as historical objects, endowed with a "spatial and temporal circulation" from one place to another or from one epoch to another. The typical case Mitchell treats is that of the political "discourse", more precisely the continuum of images and words at the service of wartime propaganda. For at least the last twenty years, the wars fought by the West have undergone a process of sterilization and anaesthetization that has rendered them less "scandalous" for the public but, at the same time, has required new tools for

the building of consensus in their favor. With the tools of image science, Mitchell (2011 and 2015) studies several cases relating to the war on terror: a war that does not stop at the production of images, but in public discourse, fights at least as much by means of images as by means of words.

Besides these classic references, the philosophical debate on the pictorial turn today involves other thinkers with various points of view: G. Didi-Huberman (2009-2016), M.-J. Mondzain (2005) and J.-J-Wunenburger (1995) in France; M. Cometa (2012) and F. Vercellone (2017) in Italy; J.L. Brea (2010) in Spain. The geographical range of the discussion has also led to the opening up of new directions in research: a reconsideration of the role of images in Medieval philosophy and theology; the ever closer attention to digital aesthetics, the contextualization of historical and cultural analyses within a neuroaesthetic framework.

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