

EDITORIAL BOARD

- Ackbar Abbas, *The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong*
Heinz Antor, *Universität Köln, Köln, Germany*
Susan Bassnett, *University of Warwick, Coventry, UK*
Wilhelm Benning, *University of Athens, Athens, Greece*
Roy Boyne, *University of Durham, Durham, UK*
Daniela Carpi, *Università di Verona, Verona, Italy*
Marc Chénétier, *Université de Sorbonne, Paris, France*
Kevin L. Cope, *Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, USA*
René Gallet, *Université de Caen, Caen, France*
Christina Giorcelli, *Università di Roma, Rome, Italy*
Yasmine Gooneratne, *Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia*
Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Stanford University, Stanford, USA*
Ihab Hassan, *University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, USA*
Maria Herrera-Sobek, *University of California, Santa Barbara, USA*
Linda Hutcheon, *University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada*
Christopher Innes, *York University, Toronto, Canada*
Eva-Marie Kroeller, *University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada*
Francisco A. Lomeli, *University of California, Santa Barbara, USA*
M. Mukherjee, *Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India*
Susana Omega, *Universidad de Zaragoza, Zaragoza, Spain*
Andrew Parkin, *Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong*
Clive T. Probyn, *Monash University, Clayton, Australia*
Eric S. Rabkin, *University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, USA*
Frédéric Regard, *Université de Lyon, Lyon, France*
Kiernan Ryan, *Royal Holloway College, London, England*
Ronald Shusterman, *Université Michel de Montaigne, Bordeaux, France*
Barbara Stafford, *University of Chicago, Chicago, USA*
Franz K. Stanzel, *Karl-Franzens-Universität, Graz, Austria*
Stefanos Stefanides, *University of Nicosia, Cyprus*
Toshiyuki Takamiya, *University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan*
Kwok-kan Tam, *Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong*
Qing Sheng Tong, *The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong*
Robert Weimann, *University of California, Irvine, USA*
Richard H. Weisberg, *Yeshiva University, New York, USA*
Walter Chr. Zimmerli, *Private Universität, Witten/Herdecke, Germany*

SYMBOLISM

An International Annual of Critical Aesthetics

Volume 8

Editors

RÜDIGER AHRENS
KLAUS STIERSTORFER

AMS Press, Inc.
New York

a political and ethical function of literature and art that, for Cialente, cannot be obscured.

PICTURA & SCRIPTURA: NEW AND OLD APPROACHES TO IMAGE-WORD RELATIONS

György E. Szönyi

The nature of words and pictures has been vexing humankind since the most ancient times; in this sense it is noteworthy that modern literary and art theory following the principles of structuralism and semiotics had to wrestle with dilemmas that had already been exposed by Plato. Even if it seems that language as a sign system perfectly coincides with our complete knowledge of the world and of existence, sometimes we may feel that our vision rather than our words connect us more firmly to reality. Is it not the case that we often notice something first by the help of our primary sensations (seeing, hearing, touching) and only after that do we start to meditate on it and verbalize it? On the other hand, we also have good reason to be skeptical about the possibility of a neutral, or natural way of seeing. Today, in the midst of the new multimedial revolution, these questions are as pertinent as ever. In the first part of my paper I take a brief look at the history of the question in order to contextualize my discussion of two recent theories concerning word/image relations, that is the picture theory of W. J. T. Mitchell and Umberto Eco's latest approach to iconicity. Looking at the works of those two scholars will also give me the opportunity to revisit some of E. H. Gombrich's widely discussed views on illusionistic and conventional cultural representations.

Our life is spent among pictures and words. Whatever we think, do, or sense, whatever we reflect upon, those experiences we can also formulate in words. It seems that language as a sign system perfectly coincides with our complete knowledge of the world and of existence. In spite of this, sometimes we may feel that our vision rather than our words connect us more firmly to "reality." Is it not often the case that we notice something first by the help of our primary sensations (seeing, hearing, touching) and only after that do we start to meditate on it and verbalize it? On the other hand, we also have good reason to be skeptical about the possibility of a "neutral," or "natural" way of seeing, a sensation that is unbiased by our consciousness, the already existing experiences and concepts – which, of course, can all be verbalized, too.

The nature of words and pictures has been vexing humankind since the most ancient times. Today, in the midst of the new multimedial revolution, these questions are as pertinent as ever. In the first part of my paper I take a brief look at the history of the question, only to contextualize my discussion of two recent theories concerning word/image relations, that is the picture theory of W. J. T. Mitchell and Umberto Eco's latest approach to iconicity. Looking at the works of those two scholars will also give me the opportunity to revisit

some of E. H. Gombrich's widely discussed views on illusionistic and conventional cultural representations.

The intriguing relationship between words and images was first summarized in the classical adage *ut pictura poesis*. The simple statement, originally associated with the names of Horace and Simonides of Ceos, i.e., "as painting, so is poetry," has triggered speculations and debates along various trains of thought throughout the centuries. An aspect, perhaps most important for Renaissance artists, was the question of prestige and superiority. While painters and sculptors – just emerging from the status of artisans and guild members to highly admired creative artists – naturally exploited the classical authority to confirm the equality of the two media of expression and to strengthen their position in the hierarchy of satellite courtiers, poets – enjoying that status practically uninterrupted since the time of Antiquity – did their best to forge theoretical concepts to maintain their privileged position.

As the Renaissance brought about the liberation and the flourishing of the various art forms, the rivalry of prestige became obsolete to give way to more serious theoretical debates about the structural and aesthetical parallels or differences between words and images. This debate had important philosophical and ideological implications, too. They manifested themselves along the divide between pagan and Christian thought as well as among the various Christian denominations. The difference between classical and Judeo-Christian thought resulted mainly from the fact that Greek philosophy looked at the world as a space-continuum in which cyclical processes take place in time. Plato offered a clear visual metaphor to describe this world picture: his cave-image divides existence into two spatial spheres, the "real" (i.e. the metaphysical) and the "shadow" (material) realms. Another idea that again

1 See Horace, *Arts poetica*, 2.361–364; and the reference to Simonides in Plutarch, *De gloria Atheniensium*, 3.347a.

2 The history of the *ut pictura poesis* principle is discussed in a great number of literary and art historical works. Some examples I have found particularly useful: Mieke Bal, "De-disciplining the Eye," *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990): 506–531; Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1968) 217–251; Ernst H. Gombrich, Julian Hochberg, Max Black, *Art, Perception, and Reality* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1972); James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Elphragis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993); Aron Kibédi Varga, "Criteria for Describing Word-and-Image Relations," *Poetics Today* 10.1 (1989): 31–53; Murray Krieger, *Elphragis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992); Rensselaer W. Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (1940) (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967); James S. Malek, *The Arts Compared: An Aspect of Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1974); W. J. Thomas Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994); Mario Praz, *Mnemosyne. The Parallel between Literature and the Visual Arts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1970); Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978); Wendy Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982).

promoted a strong spatial model was Aristotle's concept of transitory and sublunary worlds. The most graphic pictorial imagery of this philosophical approach can be found in Plotinus's theory of emanations, as the famous neoplatonist thinker stated: "It must not be thought that in the Intelligible World the gods and the blessed see propositions; everything expressed there is a beautiful image."

In contrast to this, Jewish – and subsequently Christian – philosophy prioritized the timeline. The Genesis is basically a narrative divided into seven days and Christian history is nothing but a linear eschatological unfolding between Alpha and Omega. Furthermore, while the Greeks represented creation as something similar to plastic arts, Jewish theology described the creation through and by means of words: "Then God said, 'Let the land produce vegetation [...]' And it was so" (Gen. 1,11). It is also the words that dominate the Judeo-Christian Paradise. The angels sing hymns, God converses with his favorite creatures, Adam and Eve, and what is more, Adam is privileged to name all plants and animals of creation.

After the Fall, words remained of utmost importance. Humankind for centuries, and millennia was searching for the lost perfect language, the *lingua adamica*. According to biblical pseudo-epigrapha, it was Enoch whom God exalted and taught him the forgotten language. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance scholars, humanists, and neoplatonist magi desperately tried to restore the divine *lingua adamica*, and many, such as the Englishman John Dee indeed believed they had found it. As Umberto Eco concluded in his book, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, this basically theological question governed linguistic research up to the seventeenth century.

Although Greek philosophy tended to interpret the world as a visual system, concerning the mechanics of interpreting this system we see important differences between the views of the two greatest philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. While the former spoke about the illuminative and intuitive

3 *Ennead*, V.8.[5] Quoted and commented on by Ernst H. Gombrich, *Symbolic Images: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance 2* (London: Phaidon, 1978) 158.

4 It is also true, however, that the word- and letter-centered Jewish theosophy, the cabala, embraces spatial visualizations, too, as can be seen in the diagrams of the ten divine acts, the Sephiroth.

5 Genesis 2,19. See also Alison Coudert, ed., *The Language of Adam / Die Sprache Adams*, *Wolfsbüttelecher Forschungen* 84 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999); Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) 7–10.

6 Genesis 5,18–19; the textology of Enoch's apocalypse is very complicated. For orientation, see the English critical edition: James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Volume 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (New York: Doubleday, 1983).

7 See my *John Dee's Occultism: Magical Exaltation through Powerful Signs* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004).

understanding of pictures (as seen in his doctrine of the four "furors" or madnesses leading to epiphany), Aristotle saw understanding as something time-dependent, a linear process of discursive reasoning which best can be compared to reading as opposed to looking at pictures.

In order to see the complexity of the politics and ideology of words and images one has to account for the divergences of opinion within the Christian camp, too. The archetypal animosities of iconophiles, iconophobes, and iconoclasts were recycled in the time of the Reformation, the Roman Catholics preferring pictures and relying mostly on their eyes as opposed to the Protestants who 'listen' to the truth, trusting their ears first and foremost.

The enthusiasm about word-image relations seemed to come to an end with the eighteenth century. In 1713 the Earl of Shaftesbury criticized the comparisons between poetry and painting in his *Second Characters or the Language of Forms*,⁸ as if anticipating Lessing's famous verdict when in his *Laocoon* (1766) he categorically ruled out any similarity between poetry and painting, arguing that the lack of temporal dimension in painting makes the two media incompatible:

Painting, in its coexistent compositions, can use but a single moment of an action, and must therefore choose the most pregnant one, the one most suggestive of what has gone before and what is to follow. Poetry, in its progressive imitations, can use but a single attribute of bodies, and must choose that one which gives the most vivid picture of the body as exercised in this particular action.

8 On the discussed ideas of Plato and Aristotle, see Ervin Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory* [1924] (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1968), and Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1953).

9 A useful summary of this denominational orientation is Tibor Fabiny, "Catholic Eyes and Protestant Ears: The Conflict of Visuality and Aurality in a Hermeneutical Perspective," in *Iconography in Cultural Studies: Papers from the International Conference 'Iconography East and West, Szeged, 1993'*, ed. Artula Kiss, Papers in English and American Studies 7 (Szeged: Jate Press, 1996) 39–52.

10 Anthony Ashley-Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Second Characters or the Language of Forms* (1713), ed. Benjamin Rand (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1914). See also Rosemary Freeman, *English Emblem Books* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948) 9–14.

11 Cf. Gorthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (New York: Noonday, 1957) 92. As Rensselaer Lee has found, Lessing's criticism was preceded in the seventeenth century by Lafontaine, who wrote as follows: "Les mots et les couleurs ne sont choses pareilles / Ni les yeux ne sont les oreilles" (*Conte du Tableau*; Lee, *Ut pictura poesis*, introduction, note 30). See also Simon Alderson, "Ut pictura poesis and Its Discontents in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-century England and France," *Word & Image* 11.3 (1995): 256–263.

Romanticism became so much engaged with individualism and unique ways of expression that in poetics of the period, we do not find any significant efforts to equivocate words and images. The monumental composite art of William Blake, however, proves that the mutual attraction between poetry and painting would not pass away.¹² By the end of the nineteenth century it also became clear that Lessing's views by no means signaled the end of a long theoretical debate. In artistic practice the interplay of words and images again became attractive; witness to this are many Pre-Raphaelite paintings on which inserted blocs of text and quotations from poems can often be found.¹³ Similar tendencies are manifest in the works of European Art Nouveau.

Symbolism was yet another trend that directed attention toward the interaction of the verbal and the visual. The *fin de siècle* brought about a new cult of Eastern art, and the symbolists and imagists (such as Ezra Pound) rediscovered the strong visuality of Chinese and Japanese poetry as well as the artistic power of composite (i.e., verbal/visual) calligraphy. Another interesting offspring of these tendencies was the revival of picture poetry. A genre that had been very fashionable among Baroque religious poets started a new life in Apollinaire's experiments.¹⁴ This was only one step forward: many trends of the European Avantgarde made a point of completely fusing words and pictures. Picasso, Marinetti, Tzara, Breton, Duchamp, and the Hungarian Kassák utilized the visual effect letters and texts on paintings, and it is a characteristic fact that many of them – Tzara, Breton, Kassák – were also leading poets of their age.

The programs and achievements of modern art had their repercussions in shaping modern theory, too. Today's flourishing sub-disciplines such as

12 A theoretically challenging approach to Blake's hybrid art is W. J. T. Mitchell's *Blake's Composite Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1978). Also by the same author: "Visible Language: Blake's Art of Writing," in Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 111–151.

13 Some recent works dealing with the intermedial nature of Pre-Raphaelite painting: Lynne Pearce, *Women/Image/Text: Readings in Pre-Raphaelite Art and Literature* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1991); Allen Staley, ed., *The Post-Pre-Raphaelite Print: Etching, Illustration, Reproductive Engraving, and Photography in England in and around the 1860s* (New York: Wallach Art Gallery, 1996), and by the same author, *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape* (New Haven, MA: Yale UP, 2001).

14 A compelling and richly illustrated monograph on picture-poetry is unfortunately available in Polish only: Piotr Rypson, *Obraz słowa. Historia poezji wizualnej* (Warsaw: Akademia Ruchu, 1989).

15 On the relationship of image and text in modern art, see Martin Heusser et al., eds., *The Pictured Word: Word & Image Interactions 2* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), and by the same editor, *Text and Visuality: Word & Image Interactions 3* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999); also Jeff Morrison and Florian Kröb, eds., *Text into Image: Image into Text* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000); and many thematic issues of *Poetics Today* and *Word & Image*.

iconology, emblem research and ekphrasis-studies¹⁶ can be connected quite directly to the issues of our increasingly multimedial culture.

It is noteworthy that modern literary and art theory – following the principles of structuralism and semiotics – had to wrestle with such dilemmas that had already been exposed by Plato. I am referring to the iconicity (or iconism) debate of the 1960s and 1970s, the roots of which can be traced back to Plato's *Cratylus*.¹⁷ One of the central questions in the structural comparison of verbal and visual expressions has always been to measure the degree of their being "natural," or "conventional." It is a universally accepted notion by today that language is conventional; however, there has not been such consensus achieved about the nature of pictures. In fact, precisely this was what ignited the iconicity-debate.

Plato in his *Cratylus* examined various aspects of this question. In the dialogue Socrates reasons in his usual manner – meaning it is not easy to distinguish any clear-cut opinion. Rather, we are introduced to a number of seemingly right, then wittily refuted arguments.¹⁸ Two main points are discussed: whether imitation (i.e., natural likeness) or convention (consensual signification) is the more efficient and precise way leading to understanding, and, whether pictures and words are similar to or different from each other in being natural and/or conventional. At one moment Cratylus suggests, "Representation by likeness, Socrates, is infinitely better than representation by any chance sign."¹⁹ This appears a clear stand in favor of imitation but later on

16 For a summary of emblem research, see Peter Daly, "Where Are We Going in Studies of Iconography and Emblematics?" in Atrilia Kiss, ed., *Iconography in Cultural Studies*, 5–29; and Peter Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998), chapter 1; also my summary with answers by Michael Bath and David Graham, "The Emblematic as a Way of Thinking and Seeing in Renaissance Culture," *E-Colloquia* 1.1 (<http://ecolloquia.btk.ppke.hu/issues/200301>; retrieved June 17, 2008). The relevance of ekphrasis-research is indicated by the following monographs and collections of essays: Krieger, *Ekphrasis*; Hefferman, *Museum of Words*; Valerie Robillard and Else Jongeneel, eds., *Pictures into Words: Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis* (Amsterdam: VUUP, 1998); Peter Wagner, ed., *Icons – Texts – Contexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermultimediality* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996); also the thematic issues of *Word & Image* 2.1 (1986); "Poems on Pictures"; and 15.1 (1999): "Ekphrasis."

17 On the debate see Omar Calabrese, *Il linguaggio dell'arte* (Milan: Bompiani, 1985), and Umberto Eco, *Kami and the Playpus* (New York: Harcourt, 2000) 338–44.

18 I first examined *Cratylus* from this particular viewpoint in my "Semiotics and Hermeneutics of Iconographical Systems," in *Bildsprache, Visualisierung, Diagrammatik*, ed. Jeff Bernard et al., *Semiotische Berichte* 19, 1–4 (1995 [1996]): 283–313. On this aspect of *Cratylus*, see also Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 161, and "Image and Code," in his *The Image and the Eye*, 278ff.

19 *Cratylus* 434a, trans. Benjamin Jowett. Quoted from *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Bollingen Series 71 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1963) 468.

Socrates proves to him that custom and convention are still needed, even if names bear a certain likeness to the things signified:

Custom and convention must be supposed to contribute to the indication of our thoughts. [...] I quite agree with you that words should as far as possible resemble things, but I fear that this dragging in of resemblance, as Hermogenes says, is a shabby thing, which has to be supplemented by the mechanical aid of convention with a view to correctness. (435b–c, *Collected Dialogues*, 469)

In addition to this, Socrates also points out that imitative or natural names (= pictures) are no more useful than words since, if pictures could represent perfect likeness, they would be doubles rather than signifiers and "no one would be able to determine which were the names and which were the realities" (432d). With this we are led to the other cluster of arguments: which is superior, likeness or conventional signification? This in fact is an epistemological question, asking if we can know things better by studying their conventional names or by examining the things themselves. The obvious answer should be in favor of the direct study of things, if one could be sure that reality is conveyed faithfully and objectively by the human sensation. (Let us remember, this was the project that haunted Swift's scientists who carried the objects of their conversations on their backs ...) Unfortunately, philosophy has been seriously questioning the objectivity of our perception at least since Swift and Kant, and today's modern and postmodern theory finds important backing already in Socrates' opinion: "How real existence is to be studied or discovered is, I suspect, beyond you and me" (439b).

A few passages later he reinstates his faith in the existence of absolute beauty and absolute good and also claims that these cannot be in the state of changing, they must be eternal. This is a well-known principle of Platonism. However, Socrates' awareness of a skeptical standpoint unnervingly lingers on even in the closing sentences of the dialogue:

Whether there is this eternal nature in things, or whether the truth is what Heraclitus and his followers and many others say, is a question hard to determine. [...] This may be true, Cratylus, but is also very likely to be untrue, and therefore I would not have you be too easily persuaded of it. (440c–d)

Structuralism and poststructuralism increasingly came to question the reality of eternal values and, parallel with this, the concept of fixed, unchanging meaning has also become undermined in favor of local knowledge and local significance. Comprehension and even sensation – as epistemological

processes – are now largely seen as utterly conventional activities. Two of the champions of the conventionalist argument were – or so they seemed – the iconologist-psychologist and art historian E. H. Gombrich and the semiologist Umberto Eco.

Gombrich, wrestling with and trying to further develop Erwin Panofsky's iconology (that postulated a three-step process of *sensation, understanding, and intuition* corrected by systems of cultural conventions) by the 1960s arrived at the complex examination of perception-psychology in combination with the study of the conventions of interpretive communities. His first important statement concerning conventionality appeared already in 1948, in his groundbreaking article, "Icones symbolicae": "Our attitude towards the image is inextricably bound up with our whole idea about the universe."²¹ From then he increasingly pursued wide ranging interdisciplinary research to back the principles of conventionality by the help of cognitive sciences. The results became known as his widely acclaimed *Art and Illusion* (1960), *Art, Perception and Reality* (a book he co-authored with Julian Hochberg and Max Black, 1972), and *Illusion in Nature and Art* (a collection of essays he co-authored and edited with R. L. Gregory, 1973).

It seems today that Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* led to a double misunderstanding: some hailed it as a thorough scientific corroboration of philosophical realism, asserting an ultimate reality and an unambiguous meaning of the seen world, and saw his treatment of "realistic" or "illusionistic" tendencies in European art as the avowal of progress towards an ever more perfect way of representation. Nothing was further from Gombrich's original program than this association; however, representatives of the "other camp," the "conventionalists" or "iconoclasts" were also mistaken when embracing him for his assumed structuralism and semiotics which

20 See Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (London: Oxford UP, 1939) and *Meaning in the Visual Arts* [1955] (London: Penguin, 1993). On the recent (re)interpretations of Panofsky, see Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1984); Silvia Ferretti, *Cassirer, Panofsky, and Warburg: Symbol, Art, and History* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989); Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989); and the first chapter of Mitchell, *Picture Theory*.

21 Ernst H. Gombrich, "Icones symbolicae" (1948) in Gombrich, *Symbolic Images. Studies in the Art of the Renaissance 2* (London: Phaidon, 1978) 125.

22 Ernst H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, Bollingen Series 35.5 (New York: Pantheon, 1960); Gombrich, Julian Hochberg, and Max Black, *Art, Perception, and Reality* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1972); Gombrich and Richard L. Gregory, eds., *Illusion in Nature and Art* (London: Duckworth, 1973); Gombrich, "Image and Code," in *Image and Code*, ed. Wendy Steiner (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1981) 11–42; Gombrich, *The Image and the Eye: Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1982), which includes a reprint of "Image and Code" (278–297).

derived from Gombrich's frequent parallels drawn from linguistics and sign theories.

Among conventionalist art historians it was Nelson Goodman who praised Gombrich the highest as someone providing important inspiration for his own theories of utter relativism. Among the leading authorities of semiotics, Umberto Eco used Gombrich's ideas to support his own 'iconoclast' opinion. In his *Theory of Semiotics* (1976) he emphasized that Gombrich in his *Art and Illusion*²² had laid the foundations for a conventional understanding of imitative codes. (Gombrich's importance for bridging iconology and semiotic research was also acknowledged by Omar Calabrese in the recently published *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*.) In his classic study, Eco made great efforts to describe culture as having a systemic nature based on codes, and devoted an important chapter to the critique of iconism.

From that particular vantage point it may have seemed that the "new humanities," i.e. structuralism and semiotics, scored the ultimate victory over the 'iconists' and the 'essentialists', and while resolving all the burning questions of interpreting culture they could even have among their ranks the widely acknowledged and respected authority, Ernst H. Gombrich. The idyll, however, lasted very short. The great art historian soon sensed that his views had been either misinterpreted or abused by the conventionalists and he made clear in 1978 in a conference lecture²³ that what he had really meant was a middle-of-the-road standpoint. He started his rather innocent, but soon to become infamous paper by recalling *Crazyhus* which prompted the long debate over a seemingly obvious everyday experience: "This common sense distinction between images, which are naturally recognizable because they are imitations, and words, which are based on conventions, has pervaded the discussion of symbols or semiotics ever since Plato."²⁴ In the following, he jokingly pleaded guilty to having undermined this plausible view, since in *Art and Illusion* he had made the point repeatedly that there had been something like a language of pictorial representation. A large part of the lecture is devoted to a polemic against Nelson Goodman's extreme relativist view of realism, and in the end Gombrich concluded:

23 On the philosophical implications and contrarious interpretations of Gombrich's pragmatic approach see Menahem Brinker, "Art and Illusion and *The Image and the Eye*, Philosophical Implications," *Gombrich on Art and Psychology*, ed. Richard Woodfield (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1996) 42–59.

24 Umberto Eco, *Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1976) 204–205, 209.

25 Omar Calabrese, "Iconology," *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994) 1:330–332.

26 "Image and Code," first published in 1981.

27 Quoted from *The Image and the Eye*, 278.

Meaning does not depend on "likeness" [...], but Western art would not have developed the special tricks of naturalism if it had not been found that the incorporation in the image of all the features which serve us in real life for the discovery and testing of meaning enabled the artist to do with fewer and fewer conventions. This, I know, is the traditional view. I believe it to be correct.

Menahem Brinker has emphasized that according to Gombrich's understanding, illusionistic (i.e. naturalistic) representation is not a language, but rather a device that is based on unchanging principles and natural laws, such as perspective, foreshortening, optics, Euclidean geometry, etc. In this sense, "there is no logical room for a plurality of illusionistic traditions."²⁸ This would not mean that there cannot be many ways of creating partial resemblances between objects and their representations, however, the mentioned natural laws mark out the possible limits of convention in creating such displays. The rule of perspective, e.g., forbids the painting of elements that cannot be seen from an imagined perspective. As Gombrich warned many times, you cannot see what is around the corner.

Surprisingly, the arch-conventionalist, Goodman reflected on Gombrich's arguments in a relaxed manner. Having read "Image and Code," he acknowledged in a private letter to its author: "I read [it] with interest. I think it brings our views much nearer together on these matters. [However] I cannot believe that the standard rules of perspective embody the one native and easiest way of achieving and reading a realistic depiction. But does innateness really matter much?"

As opposed to Goodman, others reacted very nervously and attacked Gombrich with a variety of charges, including emotional ones. Murray Krieger complained that "after writing *Art and Illusion* Gombrich distanced himself from those who found a conventionalist argument in the book." For Krieger, it also meant that Gombrich "retreated from the consequences of his own earlier claims."

A more devastating attack was developed by the emerging art historical authority, W. J. T. Mitchell, in his first important and groundbreaking theoretical book, *Iconology*, in 1986. The novelty and great merit of this book was to present a new program for art historical research in general and iconology in particular. He pleaded that iconology should not be interested in

28 Quoted from *The Image and the Eye*, 297.

29 Brinker, "Art and Illusion," 53.

30 Quoted by Gombrich in *The Image and the Eye*, 284.

31 Murray Krieger, "The Ambiguities of Representation and Illusion: An E. H. Gombrich Retrospective," *Critical Inquiry* 11.2 (1984): 181–194, 182.

the reception process, the generation of meaning only. Rather, in an even more pragmatic way, it should concentrate on the intellectual and emotional reactions triggered by those meanings, which form power relations and a general politics of using words and images. Mitchell suggests the following coordinates in mapping and evaluating the politics of images: *iconophobia*, *iconophilia* / *fetishism*, *iconoclasm*, and *idolatry*.

As for the politics of images, Mitchell's initial thesis is that in European culture words and images have always been antagonized. Western thought has basically been "logocentric," and has tried to distinguish between words and images by asserting a fundamental difference, always emphasizing the superiority of the former. In such a context comparisons between the two media or their identification have always been considered subversive, as one can see from the various debates relating to the *ut pictura poesis* principle or the question of ekphrasis. These deliberations considered images the centre of some particular (and dangerous) power that ought to be curbed, controlled, and at the same time exploited. Resulting from this situation, European philosophers, aestheticians and theorists of art and literature have always felt compelled to take sides in these debates and become iconophiles or iconophobes. Positions in these debates also implied power-relations wrapped in value-judgments. Mitchell sees the more or less hidden agenda of this controversy as follows:

The dialectic of word and image seems to be constant in the fabric of signs that a culture weaves around itself. What varies is the precise nature of the weave, the relation of warp and woof. The history of culture is in part the story of a protracted struggle for dominance between pictorial and linguistic signs, each claiming for itself certain proprietary rights on a "nature" to which only it has access. At some moments this struggle seems to

32 A Hungarian scholar, Mónika Medvegy, compares this attitude to "double bind," a term used in psychoanalysis. It is an attraction and aversion at the same time that longs for the beautiful representation of images, but still remains distrustful of them. See M. Medvegy, "Egy festmény narratíváinak módjai és poetológiai dimenziói. E. T. A. Hoffmann: 'Doge és dogressza' [The poetological dimensions and ways of narrating a painting: Hoffmann's 'Doge and Dogressza'] in *Szó és kép. A művészi kifejezés szemiotikája és ikonológiája* [Word and Image. The semiotics and iconography of artistic expression], ed. Artilla Kiss and György E. Szönyi, Ikonológia és műértelmzés 9 (Szeged: Jate Press, 2002): 285–299.

33 See W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986) 42–46. An excellent and complex analysis of the politics of images in the pre-aesthetical (i.e., pre-Renaissance) age is Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1990); English translation: *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994).

settle into a relationship of free exchange along open borders; at other times (as in Lessing's *Laocoon*) the borders are closed and a separate peace is declared. Among the most interesting and complex versions of this struggle is what might be called the relationship of subversion, in which language or imagery looks into its own heart and finds lurking there its opposite number. One version of this relation has haunted the philosophy of language since the rise of empiricism, the suspicion that beneath words, beneath ideas, the ultimate reference in the mind is the image, the impression of outward experience printed, painted, or reflected in the surface of consciousness. It was this subversive image that Wittgenstein sought to expel from language, which the behaviorists sought to purge from psychology, and which contemporary art-theorists have sought to cast out of pictorial representation itself. The modern pictorial image, like the ancient notion of "likeness," is at last revealed to be linguistic in its inner workings. (*Iconology*, 43)

Why is it, Mitchell asks, that the relationship of words and images is experienced in such a tense and politicized way by theorists and artists alike? Each chapter of his second book, *Picture Theory*, examines one aspect of this conflict, the research of which he divides according to the following areas: 1) the study of those aesthetic and critical systems that have been trying to maintain the demarcation line between the branches of art, especially between verbal and visual expression; 2) the study of those artistic practices that, in spite of the above theoretical efforts, subverted and transgressed the artificially created barriers between space and time, eye and ear, natural and conventional, iconic and symbolic (with a special reference to *Gesamtkunstwerke*, such as emblems, cartoons, theater, film, and television); and finally 3) the study of pragmatics, that is the use of images as opposed to the study of meaning or theory of images. He summarizes his polemical program as follows:

One claim of Picture Theory is that the interaction of pictures and texts is constitutive of representation as such: all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous; there are no "purely" visual or verbal arts, though the impulse to purify media is one of the central utopian gestures of modernism. (*Picture Theory*, 5)

Relying on revisionist theory as well as on his own practical observations, Mitchell asserts that the differences between images and language are not merely formal issues; rather, they are linked with fundamental ideological divisions. In practice, "they are linked to things like the difference between the

(speaking) self and the (seen) other; between telling and showing; between 'hearsay' and 'eyewitness' testimony; between words (heard, quoted, inscribed) and objects or actions (seen, depicted, described), etc. He borrows Michel de Certeau's terminology to describe these differences: "a heterology of representation."³⁴ Mitchell's postmodern concerns, of course, are not limited to the examination of modern art and the problems of modernism. He tries to embrace the whole history of iconophobia, iconoclasm and iconophilia, reaching back to the ancient practice of ekphrasis, the Renaissance emblems, or the "multimedial program" of (pre-)Romanticism, as we know from his excellent studies of Blake's composite art.

Without diminishing the importance of Mitchell's agenda and the fresh impetus it gave art historical and cultural studies, today I see his 1986 attack on Gombrich as overpoliticized and, because of this zeal, it misrepresents the views of the Warburgian scholar. Although it is true that Gombrich and the great generation of iconologists regrettably neglected doctrinal as well as emotionally driven attitudes toward images such as iconoclasm and idolatry, Mitchell's summary of Gombrich's inferred inclinations is undoubtedly one-sided:

The "nature" implicit in Gombrich's theory of the image is, it should be clear, far from universal, but is a particular historical formation, an ideology associated with the rise of modern science and the emergence of capitalist economies in Western Europe in the last four hundred years. It is the nature found in Hobbes and Darwin, nature as antagonist, as evolutionary competition for survival, as object for aggression and domination. [Then quite at odds with the above:] The predatory character of Gombrich's image is the figure of production without labor [= something to be easily understood through photographic illusion-making], the unlimited consumption of reality, the fantasy of instantaneous, unmediated appropriation.

If one looks at Gombrich's later works, such as his article in the volume he edited with R. L. Gregory, *Illusion in Nature and in Art*, one can easily find very subtle and carefully researched observations cited by Mitchell in a tendentious New Historicist way, sometimes out of context. When he quotes the sentence that the image is the figure of strategic, predatory perception

34 Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986), quoted in Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 5.

35 His first monograph was devoted to Blake's *Composite Art* (1978), but he has returned to this artist in *Picture Theory*: "Visible Language: Blake's Art of Writing" (111–151).

36 Mitchell, *Iconology*, 90.

itself, the iconic projection of the "program we use to scan the world in search of objects which we must seek or avoid" (*Iconology*, 90), he neglects that this comes from a train of thought dealing mostly with the physical and biological operation of perception. In 1973, looking back at his *Art and Illusion* of 1956/1960, Gombrich still claimed that he never intended to suggest that the main goal of art would be illusion-making, let alone deception.³⁷ He emphasized that in such a context, illusion is always a question of gradation and approximation, never a "take it or leave it" condition. From among the biological aspects, he introduces the question of stimulation (a "realistic" stimulus, for example, was produced by the grapes of Zeuxis which attracted the birds to try them), but he immediately combines it with the mechanisms of conventionality: there were genuine inventions in the history of art, such as the rules of perspectival representation that could create the illusion of three-dimensionality. The vital question, however, is not if nature is really like those representations, Gombrich stresses, but rather if those representations suggest the same explanation as the natural objects they try to represent. And he acknowledges that the effect of representation always depends on the orientation of the viewer which is as strongly shaped by his intellectual and emotional state as his "upbringing." At this point we should not forget some of Gombrich's maxims, which have become much-quoted catchphrases in art history as well as in cognitive psychology: "the beholder's share,"³⁸ "the innocent eye is a myth,"³⁹ "to perceive is to categorize, or classify,"⁴⁰ and so on.

Umberto Eco, in his recent *Kant and the Platypus* (2000), revisits the iconism debate and to a considerable extent revises his own earlier standpoint. As I intend to show, his train of thought interestingly connects to the views of Mitchell and Gombrich outlined above. The *Platypus* is a large and very complex work. I will concentrate only on its last chapter on iconism.

First of all, in this chapter Eco reconsiders the so called iconism debate which stirred up semiotics and the theory of culture in the 1970s and the 1980s. By 1997 Eco considered the whole debate between the *iconists* and *iconoclasts* to be more political than academic, although the questions touched upon had important scholarly implications: whether iconic signs were to be seen as natural or conventional, and, consequently, whether their cognitive interpretation would be motivated or not.⁴¹ The political attitudes created an

37 "Illusion and Art," in *Illusion in Nature and Art*, 193–243.

38 *Art and Illusion*, 181–291.

39 *Art and Illusion*, 248–250.

40 "Image and Code," in *The Image and the Eye*, 286.

41 Eco enlists among the iconoclasts – beside himself – Nelson Goodman, Ernst Gombrich, Algridas Greimas and his followers, and the psychologist R. L. Gregory. He mentions among the iconists the early Barthes, the early Metz, the psychologist J. J. Gibson, the early Wittgenstein, and the semiotician Tomás Maldonado.

atmosphere of "ancients" and "moderns" and the latter considered it a sacred mission to defend the principle of conventionality against the conservatives.

One of the most fruitful areas to study these ambiguous processes is to look at the perception and interpretation of so-called doodles – deceptive or tricky images – such as the notorious duck/rabbit, analyzed by a great number of art historians and psychologists.⁴² They say that it is our expectations that finally make us decide which interpretation to choose, whether we see a duck or a rabbit in the picture. According to Gombrich, it is our "mental set" that does the trick and determines the reading. However, contextual elements can also be decisive (if there is a duck pond beside the picture, we might feel inclined to see the duck immediately). While thinking about these tricky images, Eco points out similar ambiguities in one of the most complex forms of *Gesamtkunst*, i.e., theater. Here, semiosis takes place in two stages: before we interpret the scenic elements and the whole multimodal vision of the performance, we have to perceive the "real" actors and objects of the spectacle. Before we identify Ophelia as a *persona*, we have to realize that there is a woman on the stage.

This example should remind us that semiosis has a lower threshold when we treat the representamen not as a sign but rather as an object, *Ding-an-sich*. One can also parallel this with the concept of "poetical function" by Roman Jakobson, who suggested that we can recognize the structural elements of this function in language through systematic analysis; however, there is no guarantee that those linguistic elements will actually be used as poetry by the interpretive community.

One of the central questions of the iconicity-debate was how do we recognize hypoicons, Peirce's name for signs that bear a physical similarity to their originals. The alternatives are again natural/ unmotivated or conventional/motivated sensation and perception. In the Platypus-book Eco has developed a reconciliatory theory, which presupposes a multi-session procedure. In explanation, he offers a detailed look at a number of intriguing examples. Among them is the case of surrogate stimuli (when somebody mistakes the representation for the original – such as the mentioned birds who took Zeuxis' painted grapes for real). He also revisits the question of the

42 See Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 5ff.; "Visual Discovery Through Art," in Gombrich, *The Image and the Eye*, 36; Gombrich and Gregory, eds., *Illusion in Nature and Art, passim*; also Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 45–54; Edmond Wright, "Art and Illusion: A Philosophical Defense," in Woodfield, *Gombrich on Art and Psychology*, 101ff. (on the "Rubin Vase," also analyzed by Gombrich); Eco on "the Mexican on a bicycle" (*Platypus*, 391).

43 See his "Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (New York, 1960) 350–377.

outline which at the time caused much heated discussion;⁴⁴ he analyzes how Galileo was going through a series of trial and error sessions before managed to draw the moons of Jupiter rather faithfully; he talks about what happens with mirror images (reflections), etc.

All his extended argumentation boils down to a suggestion to differentiate between two modes of sensation/perception. He calls them *Alpha-* and *Beta-modalities*.⁴⁵ By describing these two modes Eco attempted – successfully, in my opinion – a semiotically exact and manageable description of the intertwining processes of recognition and interpretation. According to his view, a kind of proto-semiosis always precedes semiotic interpretation. However, this can happen in two ways, as *Alpha-* or *Beta-mode*.

In *Alpha-mode*, the visual impression is primary. Let us suppose, for example, that we work with a card catalogue in which each topic is represented by different color cards. For an outsider interpreter it will take some time to figure out the logic (grammar) of the color coding, however, for anybody with normal vision it should not be a problem to pick the red cards from the whole.⁴⁶ In this case the order is: perception-interpretation.

The situation is somewhat different with linguistic signs, especially among noisy circumstances. How do we recognize a chain of phonemes among audial disturbances? How do we separate words from background interference? And in writing: if there are letters on a paper hidden among senseless scribbling and we are not prepared to look for writing, how do we separate the written message from the cacography? In this case, interpretation seems to be primary: to be precise, a double session of interpretation seems to occur. As a result of an interpretive act we have to develop an expectation to encounter some sort of a code (phonemes, letters), then we perceive the signs, which in turn we shall have to interpret again for their meaning. As Eco notes:

I do not think we can say that it is the same thing to perceive a photo of a dog as the hypoicon of a dog, and as a consequence to perceive the dog as the token of a perceptual type, and to perceive a scribble on the wall as a token of the word dog. In cases of *trompe l'oeil*, I might even think I am perceiving a real dog directly without realizing that it is a hypoicon; with the written word, I can perceive it as such only after I have decided that it is a sign.

44 See Gombrich, "Mirror and Map," in *The Image and the Eye*, 201; and "Image and Code," in *The Image and the Eye*, 283.

45 *Kant and the Platypus*, 382–393.

46 *Kant and the Platypus*, 380–382.

47 *Kant and the Platypus*, 382. Here Eco remarks: "Cryptographers maintain that every coded message can be decoded, as long as one knows that it is a message" (note 34).

Eco's differentiation between *Alpha-* and *Beta-modes* is based on the dichotomy described above. *Alpha-mode* is when semiosis is based directly on perception. Hypoicons like photographs work in that way. *Beta-mode* is when semiosis takes place through the filters of culture- and convention-based cognitive types in a way that one "must first of all presume that it is an expression of a sign function, deliberately produced with a view to communicating."⁴⁸ In case of *Beta-mode* a precondition of interpretation is to postulate an authorial intention. We shall draw very different conclusions from smoke above a forest if we know that a Native American tribe is camping there.

Let us sum up once again Eco's detailed argumentation, borrowing the terminology of Peirce.

Alpha-mode: perceptum/surrogate stimulus—hypoicon—representamen—Cognitive Type + code—direct object—interpretant.

Beta-mode: expectation/hypothesis + cognitive type + code—perceptum—representamen—direct object—interpretant.

In both cases, one has to perceive the substance of the expression first. However, "in *Alpha-mode* a substance is perceived as form even before this form is recognized as the form of an expression. In *Beta-mode* a form must be interpreted as the form of an expression before it can be identified."

We might conclude from the above that the two modes represent very different paradigms so that Eco has managed to disprove the ancient maxim: *non ut pictura poesis*. The signifying mechanisms of words and pictures are not similar, they follow a different logic. At this point it seems as if Eco would argue entirely against Mirchell, who, as we have seen, passionately testified for the analogous nature of verbal and visual representation. The situation, however, is more complicated. As we read Eco's work, we come to realize that notwithstanding the *Alpha-* and *Beta-modes*, he also thinks that words and pictures are inseparable in human semiosis and communication, the two modes are inherently intertwined. In the long run, Eco's new theory constructs a bridge between the uncompromising conventionalism of Mirchell and Goodman, while also corroborating some of Gombrich's more cautious theories.

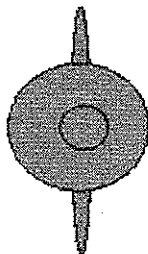
Eco presents numerous examples to prove that even the most perfect conventional and symbolic system, human language, employs primary iconic signs (onomatopoeia) and reminds us that according to Peirce, metaphors and figurative images also belong to the category of hypoicons. On the other hand, naturally, the perception of hypoicons is by no means void of cultural conditioning. But what is more important, the "catastrophe point" between

48 *Kant and the Platypus*, 383.

49 *Kant and the Platypus*, 384.

the two modalities changes from person to person, from one interpretive community to another, according to criteria that cannot be determined *a priori* as objective 'natural' laws. Since the relationship of the two modes depends on actual and changing circumstances, their behavior cannot be described with the help of generative rules – by now an abandoned dream of structuralism. Circumstances are unpredictable, so Eco – with a symbolic gesture – gives up the program of a general theory of semiotic structures and takes a turn in the direction of pragmatics.

He shows the interrelatedness of the two modalities through simple and enlightening examples, such as the doodle, "The Mexican on a bicycle."⁵⁰



This drawing exposes us to perception stimuli, but the resolution of the hypoicon is so low that it tends towards abstraction and without the key (the title of the sketch) we might arrive at a great number of equally plausible interpretations such as

a Mississippi paddle steamer or Cyrano and Pinocchio sitting back to back under a beach umbrella. This is why, during the polemic on iconism, the principle was assumed that from a suitable point of view and in an appropriate context anything can resemble anything else, all the way to the equally famous black square that is to be read "black cat on a moonless night."⁵¹

Finally, inspired by Eco, I would like to illustrate the interaction of the two modes by an example of my own. Let us see the following string of signs:



▼ NY

The first two signs – in spite of the fact that they are stylized – work in Alpha-modality, although not exactly in the same way: in case of the first the

interpreter has to recognize that it is a language-specific code, because only in English are "I" and "eye" phonetic homonyms. As for the second sign, one may debate whether that pictogram could be considered the hypoicon of the human heart at all, this conventional association, however, will surely be more automatic than the association of the heart with love, which is probably even more culture-specific. While the first two signs work from Alpha-modality to Beta-modality, in the case of "N" and "Y" Beta-modality comes first: one has to recognize that these are letters of the Latin alphabet. As a next necessary step, one has to identify these characters as the abbreviation for New York City, this is what Eco would call "iconographical overcoding." Although this act of interpretation seems to use Beta-mode, we should also notice that the sign "NY" by now is so common in visual culture (on T-shirts, posters, mugs and other memorabilia) that its recognition does not necessarily mean linguistic decoding, the very visual shape in Alpha-mode can also automate recognition in the same way as if one was confronted with a picture of the Statue of Liberty.

As I see presently, Eco's approach exposed in *Kant and the Platypus* succeeded in developing a healthy compromise between rigid structuralist semiotics and ruthlessly conventionalist and over-politicized poststructuralism that can serve as a platform for a variety of further research.

By way of conclusion we should note that although Eco cites Gombrich sparingly in his *Platypus*-book, their views converge on more than one point. He seems to have come to appreciate Gombrich's proposition that in seeing – and consequently in visual representation – there is a connecting link to the Peircean Dynamical Object, which cannot be found in the purely conventional sign system, language. Both Gombrich and Eco have grappled with the problem of the limits of interpretation, and Eco's formulation of the problem in the preface to the *Platypus* could have been by Gombrich:

It is precisely the problem of the limits of interpretation that set me to wondering whether those limits are only cultural and textual or something that lies concealed at greater depth. And this explains why the first of these essays deals with Being. As it will be seen, I speak of Being only inasmuch as I feel that what is sets limits on our freedom of speech.

When Eco started dealing with the problems of interpretation in the late 1980s,⁵² he arrived at the same conclusion as the later Gombrich, namely, that

52 *Kant and the Platypus*, 3–4.

53 See his *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990), and Umberto Eco with Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler, and Christine Brooke-Rose, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992).

although the number of correct interpretations of a cultural representation may be practically infinite, it is nevertheless possible to single out wrong interpretations with some certainty.

Coming back to the problems of word-image relations, Eco's concept of the Alpha- and Beta-modes discussed above also converges with Gombrich's proposition that "the difference between signs and images rests in the different *mental sets* [emphasis mine] we have to adopt for their understanding."⁵⁴ As we have seen, from these views it might follow that *non ut pictura poesis*, meaning that different mental sets and different interpretational strategies are needed when using words or pictures. But we have also seen that both scholars have come to accentuate that – in spite of the theoretically feasible differentiation – "in real life" hardly any cultural representation actualizes one or the other modality in its pure form.

And this is where Mitchell comes in. I have already quoted his opinion according to which "all media are mixed media" and "all representations are heterogeneous," consequently the very logic of representation is the inextricable fusion of pictures and texts. The intrinsic interaction of the Alpha- and Beta-modalities was also recognized and attested by Gombrich in many of his writings. One of his memorable examples relates to maps, which consist of largely conventional, non-iconic representations, still, one cannot say that they are entirely arbitrary. Although representing forests with green spots and oceans with blue areas on maps is definitely conventional, reversing this convention would be deeply disturbing for the viewer: not simply because their culture has taught them that way, but because a convention of green waters, and blue forests would work against a fundamental experience of being.

Recent theorizing on word-image relations thus makes us realize that in our heavily multimedial age the old maxim *ut pictura poesis* can still be useful and enlightening, although it reveals quite different conceptual backgrounds than those of previous epochs.

54 "Sign and Images," manuscript of a public lecture at the Warburg Institute, London, in 1994. Quoted by Woodfield, *Gombrich on Art and Psychology*, 12 and note 46. As Woodfield reminds us, the interest in mental sets runs through his work and is to be found in *Art and Illusion* and *The Image and the Eye*, too.

55 Gombrich, "Mirror and Map: Theories of Pictorial Representation," in *The Image and the Eye*, 184ff.

THE VISUAL, THE VERBAL, AND BEYOND: MARCEL DUCHAMP AND THE LARGE GLASS

Silvio Gaggi

This paper will investigate Marcel Duchamp's rejection of the sensuousness of paint and the "retinal" and "olfactory" qualities of his art in favor of a radically conceptual art – which occupied a realm of non-matter and non-mater – as they are enacted in his famous The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass). Such a rejection is achieved at various levels as it is suggested by the simultaneous enactment of various dichotomies both in the field of linguistics (motivated and "arbitrary" signs), of psychoanalysis (the "semiotic" and the symbolic), and of representation (visual and verbal). The Large Glass, both a visual and literary work, will be examined as a parodic psychosexual statement which reveals feelings closely related to Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject. In fact, in a retreat from the "body" (the matter/mater) The Large Glass provides a symbolic control, a safe-haven from the messy, transgressive nature of the tactile, olfactory, and visual world. It will also be demonstrated how abjection is a strategy necessary for distancing and separating and is also associated with the feminine and the maternal. Drawing a parallel between this distancing and the Derridean concept of différance, this paper will analyze the various distancing strategies used by Duchamp to keep himself at a safe remove from the feminine, thus maintaining a protective distance provided by the arbitrary signs of the symbolic, always holding at bay the threat of absorption into an undifferentiated, unarticulated real.

The development of the work of Marcel Duchamp demonstrates an increasing rejection of the sensuousness of paint, its "retinal" and "olfactory" qualities, in favor of a radically conceptual art.¹ Although Duchamp worked through Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and Cubist phases, he increasingly came to be repelled by the sensuousness of paint, its painterly smell, look, and feel, and he moved in the direction of an art that had to be conceptually decoded, an art that occupied a realm of non-matter and non-mater. Duchamp's peculiar, prankish, fascination with the physical, combined with a simultaneous rejection of – or at least a distancing from – the body, is enacted in his famous *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (La mariée mise à nu par ces célibataires, même)*, usually referred to as *The Large Glass (1915–1923)*.

1 Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors, Five Masters of the Avant Garde* (New York: Viking, 1965) 13–14.

SYMBOLISM

Volume 8

Copyright © 2008 by AMS Press, Inc.
All rights reserved

ISSN 1528-3623
Set ISBN-10: 0-404-63560-1
Set ISBN-13: 978-0-404-63560-2
Volume 8 ISBN-10: 0-404-63568-7
Volume 8 ISBN-13: 978-0-404-63568-8

All AMS Books are printed on acid-free paper that meets the guidelines for performance and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources.

AMS PRESS, INC.
Brooklyn Navy Yard, 63 Flushing Avenue-Unit #221
Brooklyn, NY 11205-1073, USA
www.amspressinc.com

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CONTENTS

Foreword from the Editors

ix

SPECIAL FOCUS:

UT PICTURA POESIS: LITERATURE AND PAINTING

Corresponding Editor: Daniela Carpi

Introduction by Daniela Carpi

1

JANE K. BROWN, *University of Washington, USA*
Claude's Allegories and Literary Neoclassicism

17

JACK STEWART, *Univ. of British Columbia (emeritus), Canada*
Still Life in Byatt's *Still Life*

43

DANIELA CARPI, *University of Verona, Italy*
A Leap in the Dark: Füssli Rereading Shakespeare

69

PETER GOODRICH, *Cardozo School of Law, New York, USA*
Megalography

83

LUCIA RE, <i>University of California, Los Angeles, USA</i> Painting, Politics, and Eroticism in Fausta Cialente's Egyptian Narratives	105
GYÖRGY E. SZÖNYI, <i>University of Szeged, Hungary</i> Pictura & Scriptura: New and Old Approaches to Image-Word Relations	141
SILVIO GAGGI, <i>University of South Florida, USA</i> The Visual, the Verbal, and Beyond: Marcel Duchamp and <i>The Large Glass</i>	161
RENATE BROSCHE, <i>University of Stuttgart, Germany</i> Empowering the Spectator: Ekphrasis as a Strategic Response to the Power of Images	179
KIERAN CASHILL, <i>Limerick Institute of Technology, Ireland</i> Repetition of Skulls: Still Life in the Graveyard Scene	197
ERIC S. RABKIN, <i>University of Michigan, USA</i> Time and Rhythm in Literature and Painting	217

GENERAL SECTION

ROSEMARY LLOYD, <i>Indiana University (emeritus), USA</i> Régnier's Workshop	233
JOSHUA LANDY, <i>Stanford University, USA</i> Mallarméan Magic: Retrospective Necessity, Lucid Illusion, and the Re-Enchantment of the World	251
PAUL GOETSCH, <i>University of Freiburg, Germany</i> The English Oak: The Changing Fortunes of a Political Icon	279

REVIEW ARTICLE

BARBARA FOLEY, <i>Rutgers University, USA</i> The Ellison Industry	323
---	-----

BOOK REVIEWS

Bründl, Monika Elisabeth, <i>Lexikalische Dynamik. Kognitiv-linguistische Untersuchungen am englischen Computerwortschatz. Linguistische Arbeiten 443. Tübingen: Niemeyer. xii + 293 pp.</i> — by Ilka Mindt, University of Würzburg, Germany	343
Carpi, Daniela, ed. <i>Property Law in Renaissance Literature [Anglo- Amerikanische Studien, Band 28]. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005. xvi + 226 pp.</i> — by Andrew Parkin, Flinders University, Australia	346