

When Iconology meets Visual studies (Louvain-la-Neuve, 6 Mar 2009)

Barbara Baert

(march 6th 2009 Louvain-la-Neuve Belgium)

When Iconology meets Visual Studies

March 6th 2009

Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres

Salle du Conseil

1, Place Blaise Pascal

Louvain-la-Neuve

Belgium

Organised by

Barbara Baert (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven)

Agnès Guiderdoni (Université catholique de Louvain)

Ralph Dekoninck (Université catholique de Louvain)

"Visual studies" emerged at the end of the 1980's in the context of a growing awareness of the impact of visual media on society and culture. Visual studies as a discipline are now recognised in academic departments, have their own journals, textbooks and readers, and recent historiographic overviews/reviews. These are as many marks of the growing importance of this discipline in the humanities, marked by what Mitchell termed the "pictorial turn".

Although one can thus document the arrival of visual studies as an independent research field, its nature, scope and methodologies are still contested. As far as its relationship with art history is concerned, it appears highly problematic, and even more so when it comes to its iconological heritage. While some fear that the integrity of art history could be damaged by calling into question the boundary between art and non-art, others on the contrary see visual studies as an opportunity to question the ideological origins of these boundaries. From this latter point of view, the visual studies would open the field to new research avenues or renew the traditional objects and methodologies of iconological studies.

Often limited to the sole decoding of the legible in the visible, iconology could indeed benefit from a new set of questions pertaining to the "period

eye", namely systems of representation and their underlying ideologies. Assuming that vision is not a natural given but a cultural one, the visual studies draw attention to the social construction of the visual and the visual construction of the social. They emphasize the study of the interaction between the beholder and what he/she perceives, rather than studying the object of his/her perception. In doing so, they consider the image as a "complex interchange among visibility, technology, institutions, discourse and the body" (Mitchell).

In order to better grasp the interactions between visual studies and iconology, and also to appreciate their methodological, epistemological and even institutional repercussions, one should first examine how some key notions or ideas of visual studies connect with some of the intuitions of the founders of iconology (a historiographic perspective). One should also pay attention to the application of theoretical prejudices - often conceived in close relationship with our contemporary media ecology - over older periods (a historical perspective). It is also important to question the exclusive attention that has been devoted to vision, to the detriment of other senses which are nonetheless active in the experience of images, and more generally, in the multi-sensory relationship to the world. Even if the focus of visual studies stresses less the objects than the subjects that interact with images and all their mediations, one should still take into account the specificity of media and the materiality of images which have been disembodied, to some extent, in the process of warding off the fetishism of a certain type of history of art.

These are several of the avenues that could be explored on the occasion of this workshop, and do not exhaust the range of issues that might be raised in the confrontation of visual studies and iconology.

<http://www.iconologyresearchgroup.org>
<<http://www.iconologyresearchgroup.org/>>

<http://gemca.fltr.ucl.ac.be/>

Programme

09:30 Welcome and registration

10:00 Barbara Baert (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven) and Agnès Guiderdoni (Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique-FNRS, Université catholique de Louvain)
/Introduction/

President of the Morning session - Thierry Lenain (Université Libre de Bruxelles)

10:30 Ralph Dekoninck (Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique-FNRS, Université catholique de Louvain)

/Iconology and/or Visual Studies. Art History at the risk of the Pictorial Turn./

11:15 Reindert Falkenburg (Universiteit Leiden)

/The creative viewer: imagination versus iconology in early 16th-century landscape painting/

12:00 Lunch

President of the afternoon session - Philippe Bordes (Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art-Paris)

14:00 Rebecca Zorach (University of Chicago)

/Empty spaces, pure painting: on visual culture, iconology and modernism/

14:45 Clemena Antonova (American University Bulgaria)

/Visual Studies and Iconology at RAKhN in the 1920s: Insights from an Unfinished Russian Experiment/

15:30 Break

16:00 Ann-Sophie Lehmann (Universiteit Utrecht)

/The Story of the Teapot - Meaning and Materiality of a Digital Icon /

16:45 Jan Baetens (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven)

/Concluding remarks/

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