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*Iconology and Semiotics –
with some Examples from Schapiro and Thürlemann*

Abstract: Debates on the relationship between Iconology and Semiotics resurface constantly, but recent developments in the fields of Visual semiotics and Cognitive semiotics are seldom referred to. Instead, the use of Semiotics in art history is often reduced to the anglophone reception of Structuralist and Post-Structuralist theory in the field. The aim of the present article is to expand the debate and to show that Visual semiotics has long abandoned the dependence on Linguistics and Structuralism that originally limited both its applicability to the study of non-verbal communication, and its validity in terms of historical hermeneutics. This is done by reconsidering a series of scholarly contributions of formative importance for the development of Visual semiotics in the twentieth century: Meyer Schapiro's early studies of Romanesque art, Felix Thürlemann's combination of semiotics and historical methodology, and the Belgian *Groupe µ's* proposal for a unified analytical framework of visual semiotics and rhetoric. Drawing on Göran Sonesson's distinction between iconic signs and iconicity in his interpretation of the semiotic legacy of Peirce, it is shown that the category of secondary iconicity may be operative at all the three levels of meaning defined by Erwin Panofsky: pre-iconographic, iconographic, and iconological. Conceived in these terms, the methodological dialogue between semiotics and art history provides a common ground of inquiry that is very different from the alternative presented by Mieke Bal, Norman Bryson and other art historians more than 30 years ago.

Keywords: Iconology, Semiotics, Iconicity, Secondary iconicity, Mieke Bal, Norman Bryson, Groupe µ, Erwin Panofsky, Meyer Shapero, Göran Sonesson, Felix Thürlemann



Fig. 1. Anonymous Netherlandish master (earlier attributed to Lucas van Leyden, 1494–1533), *Lot and His Daughters During Their Escape After the Destruction of Sodom*, sixteenth century. Oil on wood, 48 x 34 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, acquisition number RF1185 (acquired in 1900). Wikipedia, Public Domain: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lot_and_His_Daughters_\(anonymous\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lot_and_His_Daughters_(anonymous)). See also fig. 5, p. 78.

On Iconology and Semiotics

– with some Examples from Schapiro and Thürlemann

Fred Andersson

It is somewhat disconcerting to know that there are colleagues out there who think that “semiotics appears to be indifferent from moral issues”. This statement can be found in an article by a highly respected scholar and medievalist who in November 2021 was invited by our section for art history in Turku to give a talk on the topic “What is the Difference between Iconography and Semiotics?”¹ The way in which the question was phrased in the talk and later in the title of the related article was meant to invite discussion – the author makes “no claims to be an expert in semiotics” and writes that “[f]urther debate on the topic is welcome”. In a crucial sense, however, the question “What is the Difference between Iconography and Semiotics” has the opposite effect by asserting as a given premiss that there must necessarily be a difference. As I have tried to explain in an earlier article,² I think this is a misunderstanding that can be avoided if we give more attention to how the notions of “sign” and “semiotic” have evolved in Western philosophy.

The author bases most of her argument on a comparison between Erwin Panofsky’s (1892–1968) methodological program for iconology and the largely antagonistic criticism that Mieke Bal (b. 1946) and Norman Bryson (b. 1949) presented in their widely quoted article “Semiotics and art history” from 1991.

The systematic study of how concepts and narrative themes are expressed in visual images is, however, much older than Panofsky's system, and Bal's and Bryson's article is merely an example of how anglophone scholars in the Humanities have emulated the subversive power of a group of highly influential French theorists who selectively adapted certain concepts and notions from linguistics and semiotics to their own "Structuralist" or "Post-Structuralist" agendas.

Semiotics according to Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson

To understand why such accounts as that of Bal and Bryson may appear to be "indifferent from moral issues", the concepts "sender", "receiver", "context" and "intention" are important. Bal and Bryson picture traditional art history writing as being preoccupied with the original context in which artworks were produced and the verification of the intentions of its makers or "senders". They stress how art historians trace influences, build genealogies and visit archives for evidence of what the meaning of the artwork "really" is. Consequently, Bal and Bryson describe the interpretive model of mainstream art history as vertical: below the layers of insensitive restorations and uninformed interpretations that have accumulated during centuries and millennia, the real work and the real intention can be retrieved. For Bal and Bryson, semiotics is an approach that challenges this tradition. They claim that for semiotics, the artwork is not a material artefact but a "sign".³ A sign is a collective phenomenon whose meaning is not determined by the intention of single "senders". Some of the content it carries can be reduced to the cultural norms, texts and narratives shared by a community of "receivers", including the iconographic *types* (image schemes, stories, allegories) studied by iconologists, but this is not its whole content. In a certain sense, each individual receiver "owns" the sign and may add a new interpretation or "reading". The interpretive model of semiotics *chez* Bal and Bryson is not vertical but horizontal – the meaning of artworks and other "texts" augments and spreads in a fashion akin to Jacques Derrida's (1930–2004) principle of "iteration".⁴ The objective of semiotics is to follow these processes and account for "how" meaning is generated in Society.

At the end of their essay, Bal and Bryson explicitly refers to "iconography" as a notion of traditional art history that must not be confused with the semiotic notion of "intertextuality". At a surface level iconography and intertextuality may seem to imply the same thing: a "reuse of earlier forms, patterns,

and figures".⁵ But in three crucial respects this is not true, according to the duo. First, the iconographic approach treats the image schemes of iconographic traditions as a given that the artist passively receives and applies; intertextuality, by contrast, means that earlier texts are reinterpreted in an active and creative way. Second, iconography presupposes a division between the visual artwork and the story or text that the artwork illustrates. The notion of intertextuality erases this artificial division. Exactly because both the source of a story and the depiction of the story according to a certain iconographic scheme are to be regarded as "text", it is not possible that the content of the depiction can disappear if the source disappears or is forgotten. The visual text will retain at least some of its meaning regardless of whether the source is known or not: "the sign taken over, because it is a sign, comes with a meaning".⁶

The third difference is closely related to the second. "Intertext" means a relationship *between* texts, but also that any text already contains the texts it emulates or alludes to. Bal and Bryson somewhat cryptically write that: "By reusing forms taken from earlier works, an artist also takes along the text out of which the borrowed element is broken away, while also constructing a new text with the debris."⁷ This implies that even though a text may be preserved only as a few fragments, the whole text is in a certain sense still there – at least in the mind of the "receiver". Such statements may sound convincing when uttered in a seminar room or in a guest lecture, and for a long time they have. But what happens if we begin to test their validity against actual historical cases?

A fictive example of absurd interpretation

A German art historian and semiotician not mentioned by Bal and Bryson is Felix Thürlemann (b. 1946), and probably the *Semiotische Kunstwissenschaft* practised by him during the last 45 years would be deemed too traditional and sender-oriented by our duo. The main objective of his book *Kandinsky über Kandinsky*, which he wrote for his *habilitation* in the German tenure system, is to scrutinize in detail Wassily Kandinsky's (1866–1944) intentions as a "sender". Among Thürlemann's primary sources are four of Kandinsky's short "self-interpretations", written about some of the artist's own abstract compositions. The semiotic analysis that Thürlemann arrives at is to a large degree guided by the metaphorical verbal expressions found in these self-interpretations. As a supplement to the analysis of the painting *Stabilité animée*

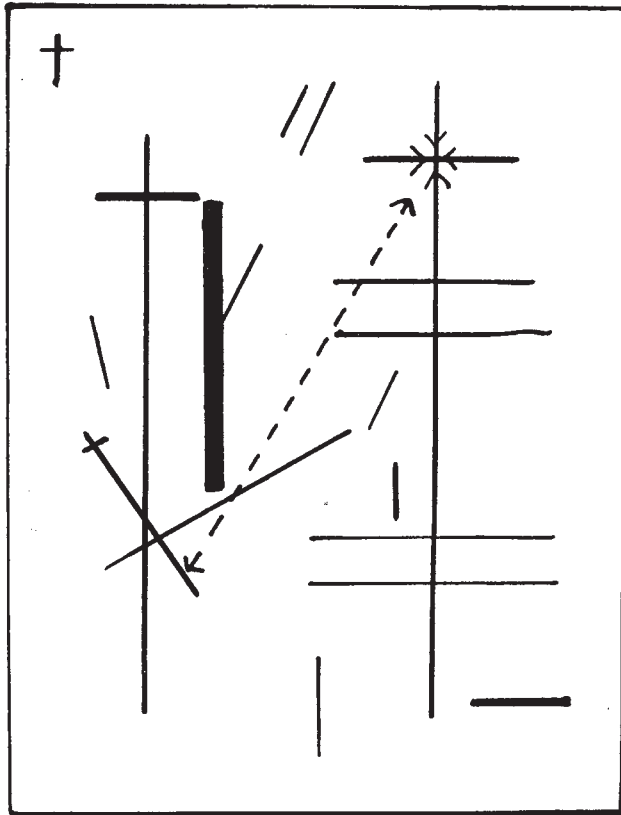


Fig. 2. Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), compositional diagram of the painting *Stabilité Animée*, 1938. Ink and graphite on paper, 18.8 x 11.8 cm. Paris, Collections of Centre Pompidou, acquisition number AM 81-65-545 (acquired from the estate of Nina Kandinsky in 1981). Reproduced from Thürlemann 1986, 243.

from 1937, Thürlemann reproduces the analytical drawing by Kandinsky himself that is shown in fig. 2.

Now suppose that for some reason or another, the artist would have burned the painting before it was ever seen by anyone, and together with it all records that would indicate the real existence of such a painting. Let us suppose, furthermore, that the drawing in fig. 2 was then found by chance and that there is nothing to connect it to Kandinsky. It is a fragment of a “visual text” – the structural skeleton that remains of an abstract painting after all concrete shapes, colours and vaguely figurative elements have been taken away. If interpreted strictly according to the letter, Bal and Bryson’s statements about intertext seem to imply that regardless of the lack of context, the drawing as “sign” still

mysteriously contains the painting *Stabilité animée* in its entirety. This is true only at the simplest level of topology and diagrammatic symbolism. The dotted, diagonal double arrow in the centre of the field indicates the visual tension between a round and “concentric” area at the upper right and an angular and “excentric” area at the lower left. This we understand if we are familiar with the painting and with the diagrammatic language used by Kandinsky in his teaching. To make the problem clearer, I have intentionally chosen not to reproduce the painting here.

Only in a fairytale world would someone without previous knowledge of the painting or of Kandinsky be able to “read” or “sense” a presence of *Stabilité animée* in fig. 2. The absurdity of this idea would be obvious to anyone. But, if we again read Bal and Bryson’s essay at face value, why would an expert interpretation necessarily be superior to the opinion of naïve viewers? After all, the creativity of the act of reception should be cherished by semiotics. Would not the perception of a Golgata scene with crosses or an intricate magical symbolism, akin to some symbols on Sami shaman drums, count as equivalent or even more interesting acts of interpretation? A common definition of “sign”, acceptable for linguists and laymen alike, is that it is something that is repeated *ad infinitum* with the same basic meaning every time, as is the case with ordinary words/lexemes in language. Because of a certain visual vocabulary that developed in abstract art and in educational contexts during the first decades of the twentieth century, the arrangement of lines and arrows in fig. 2 could be said to be a sign that denotes “Modernism” in general – and if there is no essential difference between text and context, as Bal and Bryson insist,⁸ the whole “context” of Modernism could be regarded as represented by this single “text”.

The “moral issues” and the concept of “intention”

I may now be guilty of exaggerating far beyond the limits of how Bal and Bryson want themselves to be read, but their characterization of semiotics often suffers from a lack of stringency that invites such exaggerations. In this ambiguity lies the apparent indifference to moral issues that some seem to wrongly associate with the whole field of semiotics. A lack of research morality or research ethics in the humanities may have incalculable consequences in an era of “post-truths”, but different methodologies must be judged on their own terms. A scholar who performs a sociological discourse analysis or reception study of

how a contemporary or historical phenomenon has been discussed by different groups and in different circumstances may be right in maintaining an agnostic attitude regarding real facts in the matter. The study is not about the facts; it is about conflicting opinions about the facts, and about “how” different versions of “truth” are constructed. This does not necessarily imply an indifference as regards the question of truth in general.

When a scholar studies the work of an individual author or artist whose thoughts and intentions are well documented – as in the case of Thürlemann’s work on Kandinsky – it belongs to the basic and necessary craft of historical science to study all available documents. Negligence in such matters will quite immediately be regarded as a sign of charlatanism. Thürlemann’s work clearly belies the assumption that semiotics is insensitive to these ethics. However, Thürlemann also points out that “intention” is a more complicated concept than what is often assumed, and that artists are not necessarily the best interpreters of their own work. In English “intention” can be used in a much wider sense than that covered by the German word *Absicht*. The sense missing from the German word implies a purpose or function of which the originator of the text is not aware, or one that he/she/they are not able to consciously describe.⁹ As Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) repeats in his *Wahrheit und Methode*, the main objective of hermeneutics has always been to “understand the author better than he has been able to understand himself”.¹⁰

The greater the distance in time between ourselves and the phenomena that we have chosen as our field of specialization, the less likely we are to encounter artistic artefacts that are possible to attribute to a specific, known artist. In the rare cases of named artists, we usually know very little about them. In this situation, the necessity of iconography and iconology becomes obvious. By its own practitioners, iconographic research has probably never been described the way Bal and Bryson describe it. The typical iconologist is hardly one who believes that iconographic schemes and conventions are but empty “forms” that artists passively copy without being aware of their meaning; neither can the belief that all meaning is lost without reference to a textual source be very widespread. The dichotomy that Bal and Bryson construct between a logocentric and “vertical” approach – in search of the holy grail in the form of textual evidence – and a semiotic and “horizontal” approach that stresses receptive polysemy, may very well be a strawman.



Fig. 3. Johan Gottfried Burman Becker (1802–1880), Bas-relief of the baptismal font in Sønder Broby Church, undated. Ink on paper. The drawing is a close reproduction of the decoration of the still extant baptismal font of early Central Funen type (twelfth century) in Sønder Broby Church on Funen. Copenhagen, Royal Library, image collections: Album 65. Image Source: Royal Library, digital collections, non-commercial licence: <http://www5.kb.dk/images/billed/2010/okt/billeder/object568059/da/>

An exchange of diverging opinions

As an example of the problematic consequences of this dichotomy, I will refer to an example very close at hand. It is a presentation given at the 28th Nordic iconographic symposium in Laulasmaa, Estonia. Its main title was, in English translation, “An entangled world”.¹¹ Although at different stages in their academic careers, the presenters were both highly competent medievalists and authors of significant contributions to the field. Their presentation, however, initiated a confused debate. Focusing on Romanesque stone sculpture in Medieval Denmark, the presenters provided examples such as the one depicted by a nineteenth century antiquarian in fig. 3 – a baptismal font from Sønder Broby Church on the island of Funen. Here, it would have been commonplace to associate the head with foliage sprouting from its mouth with the “green men” known from other ecclesiastical contexts in Western Europe during the

eleventh and twelfth centuries; a motif that in art historical speculation has often been connected to the legend of how the tree of the Cross once grew from Adam's corpse and grave. The figure to the right of Christ seems to attack an arboresque palmette with his axe, and is in his turn devoured by a beast – an enemy of the church who here gets his just punishment?

However, the presenters criticised such “lexical” and logocentric interpretations, tacitly but not explicitly addressing some of their senior collaborators in the national antiquarian project *Danmarks kirker* (“Denmark's churches”). Jacobus de Voragine's (ca 1230–1298) *Legenda Aurea* collected legends and hagiographies that countryside priests may likely have communicated to their communities, probably pointing at certain details in paintings and sculptural ornaments. But rather than this more direct and “deictic” possibility, the presenters wanted to situate the legends in a wider theological context of changing conceptions of the relationship between Heaven, Man and Nature in the transition between the “Romanesque” and “Gothic” periods. At the same time, they tended to downplay the question of the real correspondence between Medieval visual experience and the Gregorian dictum that “what writing presents to readers, a picture presents to the unlearned”.¹² What can we really know about common Medieval “receivers”? The picture of the man attacking a vegetal shape with an axe may not have been associated with Christian teaching at all. Maybe people were rather thinking of the harsh punishment for cutting down trees without permission – according to the preserved Medieval legal code of Scania, and as suggested by one of the presenters.

If the title of the presentation promised the description of an “entangled” world of humans, plants and beasts, the speakers also provided a more philosophical theory of entanglement by referring to Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) – a household name in contemporary post-humanism – and his notion of *rhizômes*. Like the rhizomes of actual root systems that pain gardeners, meaning and signs have no fixed origin for Deleuze; it is more a matter of how connections are established between places and concepts, humans and other organisms, in a constantly evolving and unpredictable fashion that parallels the intricate neural networks that today provide the biological model for artificial intelligence. During the discussion, a senior colleague (not the present author) posed the question whether such objects as the baptismal font from Sønder Broby may not after all, at least hypothetically, have been the object of explanations or sermons that

shaped their reception. I remember the answer as strangely dismissive – the presenters didn't seem to think that such discourses could possibly have taken place in Danish countryside churches at the time. Without existing proof of didactic ambitions in such places, they believed the question to be irrelevant. After the session, I even overheard a discussion in which it was claimed that these carved images were always capable of “speaking” for themselves.

I can hardly think of any clearer example of how semiotics is conceived *à la* Bal and Bryson than this joint presentation in Laulasmaa. In opposition to logocentrism, it expressed a strong belief in the capacity of the visual image to communicate without text and commentary – it always “comes with a meaning”. (But in more realistic terms, this statement means that any image always conjures up some idea in the mind of each “receiver”, regardless of whether the idea is collectively shared or merely private.) Regarded as texts, the images were described as already containing within themselves a multitude of intertext. According to Bal and Bryson, it is therefore futile to conceive of “context” as a sum of all various conditions – political, social, religious, biographical, etc. – that converge as genetic links in the singular artwork. Instead, the artwork is more properly treated as a node from which new “readings” and new artworks spread in different directions.¹³ When such horizontal or rhizomatic models are contrasted with practises founded in more straightforward historical source criticism, discussion tends to end in very locked positions. However, a majority of those active in visual semiotics today – and for whom the International Association of Visual Semiotics (AISV–IAVS) has arranged conferences since 1989 – would probably not identify themselves with the legacy of francophone cultural criticism described above. After all, Bal and Bryson wrote their article more than 30 years ago.

Primary and secondary “iconic” meaning

Another possible source of disagreement between art historians turned semioticians and more “traditional” iconologists is the very notion of “sign”. Bal and Bryson never really explain what they mean by “sign” – except for the obvious fact that it can be repeated. How, then, can a visual image or a painting be a sign? In my article in *Iconographisk Post* (nr 1, 2016), I have tried to clarify how the purely linguistic definition of “sign” that was established by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857– 1913) can be compared to the logic of iconographic conven-

tions. It is not necessarily so that *depictions* are signs in Saussure's sense, but the combination of *depicted elements* in accordance with a given iconographic "type" or symbolism is somewhat akin to how distinctive features combine into lexemes.¹⁴ This similarity between iconographic analysis and some structural aspects of semiotics has been lucidly described by the Danish art historian Søren Kaspersen (b. 1944) in his re-evaluation of Panofsky's methodology from an anthropological perspective:

Type history signifies a field where the iconography can, in fact, unfold as a pictorial semiotic science. And although the signifying capacity of a picture remains open-ended when seen in isolation, once a motif is identified to represent a certain stage in the historical development of types, scholars are then able to extrapolate the essential differences and similarities between the individual sign systems – that is, the images, in the developmental chain. This process also allows for recognition of general and specific characteristics of individual pictures, leading to questions about the meaning of these similarities and differences. Type history can also significantly raise an understanding of how narration is staged, of the importance of various elements and their positioning in relation to each other, and of the changes – if not direct breaks – that occur over time.¹⁵

Differently put, iconology gives access to historical inventories of iconographic types and relationships between types. Such inventories can be studied as general sign systems, and if the "images" that belong to a type are distinguished from the "motifs" or "pictures" through which such mental "images" are expressed (a distinction established by Panofsky), then "images" can be regarded as "individual sign systems" that can be discerned in a variety of "individual pictures". However, the unfolding of iconographic traditions over time is not reduced to a passive reproduction of types, as in Bal and Bryson's distorted version of how iconology works. On the contrary, both similarities and differences between different instantiations of a type are attended to. The signifying capacity of a single picture remains "open-ended" or polysemous, because differently from a spoken or written proposition it cannot by itself designate the specific meaning of the combinations of objects and events that it depicts. However, as soon as the picture is no longer treated as merely a depiction of something perceived, but also as an iconographic rendering of the themes and concepts implied by a type, iconologists may proceed to study how prescribed types at the iconographical level are related to choices made at the level that

Panofsky referred to as "pre-iconographic" or "primary". How is a Biblical story "staged" in pictorial space, what is the "importance of various elements and their positioning in relation to each other"?

The "primary" or perceptual level is not an inert matter on top of which the iconographic scheme or interpretation is passively projected – it involves a conscious choice of elements to fit the scheme. Semiotics is based on the notion of "sign" as a collectively shared and repeatable meaning, but it also stresses how meaning is dependent on selective choice and principles of relevance. When a verbal language system is instantiated as a spoken or written "enunciation" (*énonciation*), each segment of the phrase is the result of a choice from a virtual inventory or "paradigm" of options. Each choice contributes to the received meaning of the phrase. I may choose to describe something as "excellent" rather than merely "good", and my choice to deviate from standard Swedish or English in my pronunciation of certain words may affect the receiver's perception of me as a person. Similarly, choices made at the "pre-iconographic" level of image production reflect the purposes of pictorial genres and the norms of iconographic traditions. The study of similarities and differences between how different artists and workshops adapted pictorial space to the demands of iconography, and of "the meaning of these similarities and differences", would clearly benefit from a joint effort of iconologists and semioticians in advancing a "pictorial semiotic science".

At the end of this article, I will return to Søren Kaspersen's important proposal for a re-evaluation of Panofsky's model from the perspective of cultural and visual anthropology, and how Kaspersen more specifically calls for a more nuanced understanding of the interaction between Panofsky's three analytical levels. First, however, it will be necessary to elucidate what the systematic differentiation of "levels" in iconographic or iconological analysis implies from a semiotic perspective. Panofsky famously differentiated between a primary or pre-iconographic level, a secondary or iconographic level that is guided by the "history of types" as a "corrective principle", and a third and seemingly mysterious level that is properly "iconological" and guided by "synthetic intuition". Some semioticians have certainly made a grave error in equating Panofsky's primary level with linguistic denotation and his secondary level with linguistic connotation, because while both a word and an image may "denote" an object, the image lacks the systematic differentiation between semantic levels and dis-

tinctive features that makes up a linguistic denotation, and the iconographic types of Panofsky's secondary level belong to a wholly different sphere than linguistic connotation. If there is something in images that are reminiscent of how linguistic denotation works, it would belong to Panofsky's secondary or conventional level rather than the primary one, as pointed out by Kaspersen in his remark quoted above. Selective choices made at the primary level could then probably be compared to linguistic or stylistic connotation.

Now, one should remember that this whole debate on the applicability of the notions of "denotation" and "connotation" in iconology and pictorial semiotics, thoroughly summarized and evaluated already in 1978 by Christine Hasenmueller, entirely belongs to the tradition or *school* of structural linguistics and semiotics that originates in the work of Saussure. Another dominant tradition is based on the legacy of the American philosopher and scientist Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), who conceived of "semiotics" as the study of logic and scientific reasoning. For Peirce, it was clear that reasoning is based on facts and intuitions that present themselves to the mind by means of many different categories of "signs". Some signs he terms "icons", and they may sometimes be of a visual nature, but not necessarily so. Because Peirce considered "icons" to be based on a relation of similarity between the sign and the object that it signifies, thus having the status of signs that are "motivated" and not based on arbitrary convention, the whole notion of "icons" has often been rejected by representatives of the Saussure tradition who prefer to regard all proper sign systems as non-motivated. If semiotics is approached solely from the standpoint of some hardcore "conventionalists" in the footsteps of Saussure, its relationship with a discipline that refers to itself as "iconology" will indeed be ridden with conflicts and difficulties from the very outset. From a Peircean perspective, however, the primary function that is termed "pre-iconographic" by Panofsky has quite unproblematically been referred to as a function of "iconic signs". Panofsky describes this level as "natural" or "factual", thereby implying that it is non-arbitrary and motivated. But if the simple similarity between a depiction and the depicted object is an "iconic sign", what is then its relationship to the signs that are operative at Panofsky's secondary or "iconographic" level, and that are probably more akin to arbitrary or conventional signs? Can a sign be both iconic and conventional?

The work of Göran Sonesson (1951–2023) has been of benefit for future re-

search in many ways – not the least as regards his clarifications of terminological problems related to the legacy of Peirce and Saussure. For Peirce, before there can be an "icon" there must be an idea of a "firstness" that is "positively what it is", without reference to anything else.¹⁶ We may think of the colour red as an idea of that type. The idea of redness is a *quality*, also called *noema* in phenomenology and cognitive science, that can be a mental object of thought. Already the existence of two red things implies the possibility of "icon" – the redness is a similarity between the two objects. But this does not necessarily mean that one of the objects can function as a sign for the other. If we proceed to more complex instances of similarity, we may discuss the similarity between a portrait and its sitter, a simple stick figure and human bodies in general, a hard sound and the word "bang!", or the similarity between the letter A written in Latin and Gothic script. At a more physiognomic level, we may experience that a colour or a shape embodies a certain similarity with a feeling we have. As Sonesson repeatedly pointed out, it is a misunderstanding to think that Peirce made absolutely no distinction between such likenesses and "iconic signs". Elaborating on Peirce's own terminology, they should more conveniently be called "iconicities" or "iconic grounds".¹⁷

A fundamental difference between post-structuralist debates in art history and the definition of semiotics advanced by Göran Sonesson is that for Sonesson, semiotics was not limited to the study of signs. There are many dimensions of the evolution and experience of meaning that must not be reduced to linguistic or logical definitions of "sign".¹⁸ Sonesson's more open conception of semiotics is now widely accepted in visual semiotics and the expanding field of cognitive semiotics. During the past 30 years, these fields have moved much closer to phenomenology and the empirical findings of perceptual psychology. Cognitive semiotics also draws upon recent advances in prehistoric archaeology and evolutionary theory.¹⁹ This means that for an iconologist who wants to approach the field of semiotics, there are some potential obstacles and causes of disagreement that can now be removed. It is not necessary to refer to depictions as "signs" or "texts". Pictorial composition need not be described as "syntactic" or as a choice between "syntagm" and "paradigm".²⁰ It is evident, however, that narrative pictures *depict* signs, such as gestural language and other bodily signs. Such iconic and indexical functions are at present being intensely studied in cognitive semiotics.²¹

Visible and disguised diagrams

The most productive aspect of Peirce's notion of "icon" in iconology is probably not the straightforward depiction of "objects and events" at Panofsky's pre-iconographic level, but how different kinds of "iconicity" can be operative at all three levels. Again, one of Felix Thürlemann's studies may be instructive. It is an introduction that he wrote together with Steffen Bogen (b. 1967) for an anthology dedicated to the study of the theological diagrams of Joachim de Fiore (ca 1135–1202).²² In Peirce's terminology, diagrams are the second in order of the three possible categories of "hypo-icons", which is how he terms "icons" proper – i.e. "iconic signs" and not mere "iconicities". The other two categories are "images" and "metaphors".²³ The three categories do not necessarily exclude each other – a picture may be shown to have both imagistic, diagrammatic and metaphoric dimensions. The imagistic dimension is the one closest related to the properties we refer to when speaking of figurative depictions of "objects and events". It is based on "simple qualities", such as the colour of an object as compared to its colour in a photograph. Sonesson refers to this dimension as "primary iconicity", to be distinguished from "secondary iconicity" where the relevant similarity is not noticed without the presence of some hint or convention. Much of the conceptual representation pertaining to Panofsky's second and properly "iconographic" level would in semiotics be described as based on secondary iconicity, and Panofsky's distinction between open and disguised symbolism in *Early Netherlandish Painting* has an obvious relevance for such analyses.

In their study, Bogen and Thürlemann consider select examples of diagrammatic visual structures drawn from book illumination, ranging from the sixth to the thirteenth centuries. By definition, a diagram is an iconic sign that is not based on simple qualities, but on an internal relationship between elements of the sign and a corresponding relationship in an object or thought.²⁴ For example, Bogen and Thürlemann demonstrate how illuminators visualised the distribution of hereditary rights according to Roman law as relationships between floors and compartments in a building. However, legal and conceptual changes later necessitated a replacement of such visualizations with arboresque diagrams.²⁵ Bogen and Thürlemann's last example is not an illumination, but a painting at the Louvre – *Lot and his daughters*, anonymous but earlier attributed to Lucas van Leyden (1494–1533). See fig. 1 (p. 62) and fig. 5 (detail, p. 78).

The iconographic symbolism that Bogen and Thürlemann discern here is clearly of the disguised kind. Their analysis follows a principle of the system of generative semantics that Thürlemann's (and Sonesson's) teacher Algirdas Julien Greimas (1917–1992) developed at the EHESS in Paris, and that was applied in the workshop of visual semiotics there. The principle was, however, present already in Aristotelian logic. Among followers of Greimas, it is referred to as the semiotic square. It has been used by cultural anthropologists and narratologists to show how different cultures conceive of the material and spiritual world as structured by forces of polar opposition. Like the logical square of Aristotle's *Organon*, the semiotic square is based on one axis of affirmation and another of negation.²⁶ The axis of affirmation of the semiotic square presents two contrary terms, for example good vs bad. The axis of negation presents the corresponding sub-contrary terms, not-good vs not-bad. Between "good" and "not-good" there is a relationship of contradiction, as between "bad" and "not-bad".

As Bogen and Thürlemann describe the painting *Lot and his daughters*, it presents at the manifest level a view of the incestuous relationship between the main characters in the foreground, after they have escaped from the destruction of Sodom, shown in the background. A moment in time between past and present is represented in middle ground to the right, where father and daughters are still travelling with their donkey, leaving the wife of Lot petrified into a pillar of salt at the extreme right in middle ground (fig. 5). To the

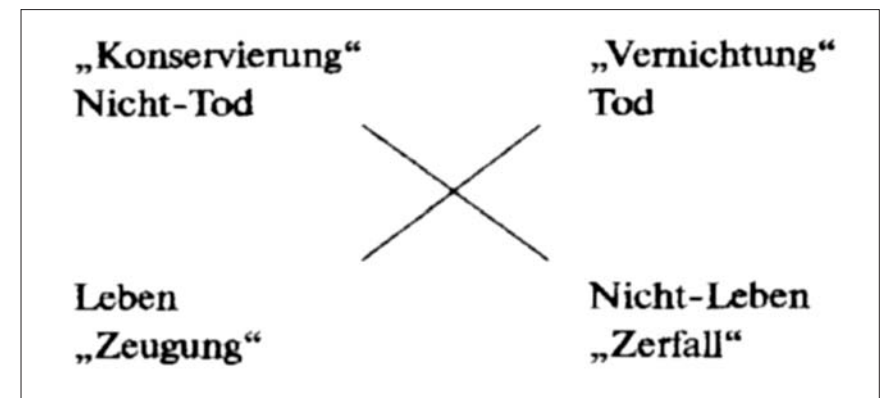


Fig. 4. The semiotic square of *Lot and His Daughters* (fig. 1) according to Steffen Bogen and Felix Thürlemann. Reproduced from Bogen & Thürlemann 2003, 20.



Fig. 5. Detail of figure 1. Image source: *Artifex in opere (L'artiste se cache dans l'oeuvre)*, <https://artifexinopere.com/blog/interpr/peintres/anonyme/loth-et-ses-filles/>

right in the very foreground, closest to the viewer's own position in space and time, we now see the mortal remnants of the consumed donkey. In the distant background, the heavenly fire consuming the sinking cities to the right is contrasted with the mountainous area with still standing buildings to the left. This continuous pictorial narrative is also, according to Bogen and Thürlemann, a diagrammatic sign and a reversed semiotic square.²⁷ Destruction and death in the upper right area is contrary to life and procreation in the lower left area – the incestuous union provides a continuation of Lot's line. Permanence and not-death in the upper left area is contrary to decay and not-life in the lower right area. The relationships of contradiction are the horizontal ones between death and not-death (permanence), life and not-life (decay) – see fig. 4. Bogen and Thürlemann find an equivalent diagram in a fourteenth century commentary in French on Aristotle's *De caelo* by Nicolas Oresme (ca 1320–1382). There,

the chiasmic structure is drawn in a normal and non-reversed order between *avoir fin* (has an end) vs *avoir commencement* (has beginning) and *sans fin* (has no end) vs *sans commencement* (has no beginning). It visualizes a dialectic between mortal and divine existence. See fig. 6.

Regarded as “symbolism” in Panofsky's sense, the diagram of the painting is “disguised” in an image that provides the experience of looking at a scene or a succession of scenes from reality. Both in art historical parlance and in the semiotics of Greimas, this latter experience is referred to as “figurative”. The diagram is an iconic sign, but it is also “secondary and conventional”, both in the sense of “secondary iconicity” and in the sense of being a typical object of “secondary” or properly iconographic analysis according to Panofsky's model. From the identification of the diagram, the analysis may proceed to the third level of “intrinsic meaning”, at which changing visual expressions for such abstract things as legal rules and divine will could be regarded as “cultural symptoms” of a culture or age.²⁸

About dimensions called “primary” or “plastic”

There is no reason, however, why secondary iconicity should not be operative also at Panofsky's primary or “natural” level, at which “objects and events are expressed by forms under varying historical conditions”.²⁹ The “forms” referred to by Panofsky are the basic visual features that are studied by perceptual psychology and regarded by some semioticians as constitutive of a *langage plastique* – a semiotic visual dimension that is not figurative. If we follow the system of visual semiotics proposed by the Belgian group of scholars known as *Groupe µ*, there are at least three respects according to which Panofsky's “forms” may carry their own *sémantisme*, or semantics. Two of these concern relationships within a picture, the third does not.

If the opposition between life and death in *Lot and his daughters* is carried by figurative elements, other oppositions may be constituted by “formal” ones. If associated with corresponding oppositions of semantic content, they manifest according to *Groupe µ* a *sémantisme synnome plastique* – a meaning that is non-figurative and “dependent” (*synnome*) on the opposing terms. The opposition may also be between figurative content and certain aspects of how it is expressed by shapes and colours – a *sémantisme synnome icono-plastique*.³⁰ This “icono-plastic” level is closely related to the notion of “style” in art history.

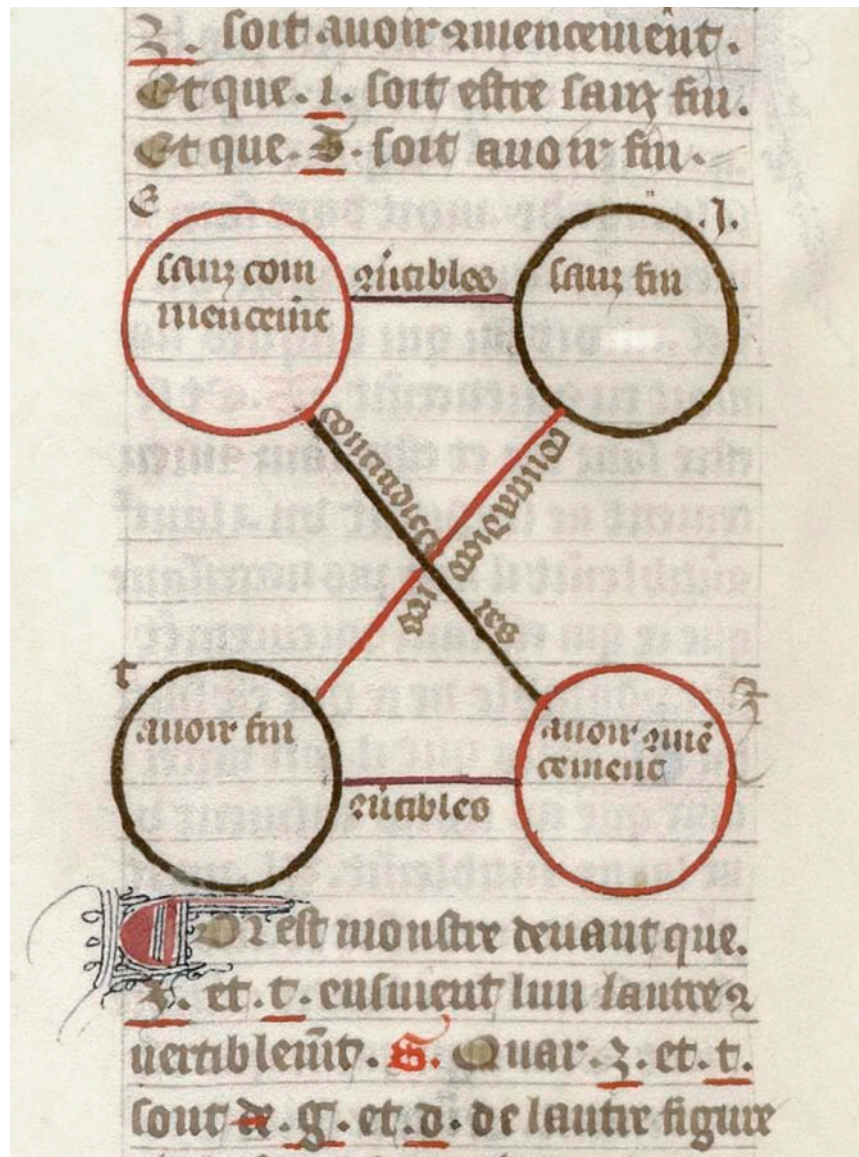


Fig. 6. Nicolas Oresme (ca 1320–1382), logical square from a commentary on Aristotle's *De caelo et mundo*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Department of Manuscripts: French manuscript 1082, fol. 53v (detail). Image Source: Gallica, non-commercial licence: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8447191b>

Finally, there are semantic values of shape and colour that are not based on relationships within the picture or work but on external and non-visual conventions – *sémantisme extra-visuel*.³¹ They belong to the domain of semiotics that Saussure and Louis Hjelmslev (1899–1965) referred to as “symbolic” systems and that they distinguished from proper systems of “signs”.

A game of chess is a typical example of a symbolic system in Saussure's and Hjelmslev's sense; it is not necessary that the “king” of the game looks like a king, because it can be replaced by any object or shape that we agree to represent “king”. The relationship between the object and the meaning “king” is simple and not possible to analyse further. Likewise, the range of colours that signify different periods of the liturgical year is different between different Christian traditions and can only be explained by reference to “extra-visual” decisions. Such systems belong more properly to the second level of Panofsky's model than to the first.

For Panofsky, the first level is not something that can be quickly glossed over when we perceive how “objects and events are expressed by forms”, because the “corrective principle” at this level is the “history of styles”. When studying visual representations from different cultures and ages, we improve our capability to hold in mind both the figurative content and the “forms” by which the content is expressed. We learn to understand how problems of how to represent depth, size, viewing angles, space, time and hierarchy were solved within the possibilities offered by various cognitive regimes, and to avoid the mistakes of mis- and overinterpretation easily made when we uncritically project our own preconceptions on the cultural or historical Other.³² That this reflective learning process amounts to a stylistic and perceptual hermeneutics – with its “moral issues” – was much clearer in Panofsky's earlier texts, which reflect the phenomenological current in German philosophy, than in his later work of the American period. Panofsky was forced to adapt both his thinking and his writing style to the anglophone world. In his essay “Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung von Werken der bildenden Kunst” from 1932, later translated as “On the Problem of Describing and Interpreting Works of the Visual Arts”, the first level of iconological analysis is referred to as “phenomenal meaning”. The “subjective source of interpretation” at the first level is said to be the “vital experience of being”.³³

What formalism is (and what it is not)

The status of primary or “phenomenal” meaning in iconology and semiotics is easily confused with the practise of formalist aestheticism in art history. When both *Groupe µ* and the “school” of Greimas claim that there is an autonomous visual language that is “plastic” and not dependent on figurative content, one may too easily interpret this as a variety of formalism. But like Panofsky’s celebrated study of linear perspective as a “symbolic form”, the systematizations of *Groupe µ* have helped clarify that “form” is not an empty or merely affective residue of figurative representation. A simple example of the *sémantisme synnome plastique* that has been thoroughly studied in empirical cognitive semiotics is the test image “Takete and Maluma” or “Kiki and Bouba”. The image presents a soft and an angular shape; test subjects generally associate the soft shape with the nonsense words “Maluma/Bouba” and the angular shape with “Takete/Kiki”. The same synaesthesia has been confirmed with other combinations of hard and soft speech sounds.³⁴ Later research has shown this effect to be universal between test subjects of different mother tongues and different language groups.³⁵ As Sonesson confirms, the synaesthetic association depends on a secondary iconicity that is transposable between the sense modalities of visual shapes and sounds. As a *sémantisme synnome*, it is dependent (*synnome*) on the adjacent presentation of two shapes or sounds that are opposed, and the relationship between the opposition and its content can be written as a homologation; /bouba/ : /kiki/ :: soft : hard.³⁶

To experience sounds and shapes as soft or hard means that aural and visual elements are cross-modally associated with qualities that they objectively lack – the tactile feeling of softness and hardness against the skin. This is an iconic association that has become a habitual element of language; indeed, we say that both the vowel “o” and certain shapes and volumes are “soft”. Referring to Hjelmslev’s writings on this sensory aspect of phonetics, Thürlemann describes the corresponding dimension of visual semiotics as an “immediate” and “physiognomic” signification (*signification physiognomique*).³⁷ The reason why Wassily Kandinsky’s own descriptions of his artwork were so essential for Thürlemann in his Kandinsky studies is that they already exemplify a cross-modal visual semiotic that is not figurative. By describing certain areas or elements in his works metaphorically or adjectively as “delicate” (*zart*), “rough” (*grob*), “somewhat menacing” (*etwas böse*), Kandinsky could explain

why they were not random accidents but the result of long and deliberate considerations.³⁸ The oppositional relationships between sensory qualities in the paintings is a recurring theme in Kandinsky’s descriptions and Thürlemann’s structural analyses alike.

For Panofsky, the “vital experience of being” that is necessary for primary or pre-iconographic image description merely implies that we naturally relate what we see in images to our “being” in the world. Adopting Panofsky’s own example, we do not see a light shape at the centre of a dark field when we look at the resurrection scene of Matthias Grünewald’s (ca 1470–1528) Isenheimer altarpiece from ca 1516; we see a hovering male figure encircled by a halo of light (factual meaning) who rises his stigmatized hands in a gesture of triumph (expressive meaning). Each viewer sees that which “is familiar to him from his habitual visual experience, his sense of touch, and other sensory perceptions, in short, from his immediate life experience.”³⁹ This meaning must then be related to biblical knowledge at the secondary level, if the viewer is to understand the cultural meaning of this rather unnatural depiction of a *resurrection*. But a “formalist” attempt at a purely objective description without reference to outer phenomena would add nothing of relevance to the analysis; as Panofsky writes, it “would in principle have to be restricted to colours, contrasted with each other in numerous nuances, that can be combined and drawn together to suggest more or less ornamental, or more or less tectonic complexes of form, that are frankly meaningless and constitute spatially ambiguous elements of the composition.” Panofsky’s conclusion is that “it is clear that the common differentiation between a purely formal and a representational description cannot be upheld.”⁴⁰

It is a misunderstanding that the distinction between figurative and plastic meaning in visual semiotics aims at a reintroduction of this formalist differentiation, or that it leads to superfluous formal descriptions. Semiotic analysis isolates only those features that are relevant to the identification of meaning. But the case of Thürlemann and Kandinsky adds a qualification to Panofsky’s words about phenomenal meaning and the vital experience of “being”. It is not necessarily so that the “being” we recognize in a visual representation is always related to outer experiential phenomena – it may also be inner ones. These are the subjective experiences that cognitive science now refers to as physiognomic, synaesthetic or proprioceptive. The common accusation that semiotics “acts



Fig. 7. Anonymous master, the trumeau of the West portal of the Abbey Church Sainte-Marie de Souillac, twelfth century. Wikimedia, CC BY-SA (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portail_de_l%27abbatiale_Sainte-Marie_de_Souillac_Säule.jpg).

like a grid or mesh that can be spread over anything, anywhere and anytime”⁴¹ does not really apply to semiotics but more to formalist art history.

Meyer Schapiro and the trumeau at Souillac

A famous example of formalism is the “younger” Jurgis Baltrušaitis’ (1903–1988) doctoral thesis about the “ornamental style” of Romanesque ecclesiastical sculpture in France: *La Stylistique ornamentale dans la sculpture romane*. It was defended in 1931 and later republished with the new main title *Formations, déformations*. A main objective of Baltrušaitis’ study is to demonstrate what he calls “the law of the frame” (*la loi du cadre*) in Romanesque art; the proportions and positions of depicted figures are supposedly always subordinated to the restricting frame (there is no sense of a pictorial space that is cut off by the frame and extends beyond it), and central scenes are subjected to compositional symmetries that also occur at the micro level of framing ornaments. Baltrušaitis supports his argument with numerous diagrams that he has often drawn without consideration of the iconographic content or “plastic” three-dimensional reality of sculptures and reliefs. One may claim that visual semiotics in art history originated with Meyer Schapiro’s (1904–1996) criticism of Baltrušaitis’ analytic “grids”. His review from 1932 of Baltrušaitis’ thesis and his own study from 1939 of the portal reliefs in the abbey church of Souillac were both later reprinted in the volume *Romanesque Art*.⁴² Schapiro’s celebrated contribution to the theory of visual semiotics in a short article published in the journals *Semiotica* and *Simiolus* contains many implicit references to those earlier studies of Romanesque art.⁴³ The implications of the article cannot be fully understood without knowledge of Schapiro’s research in the nineteen-twenties and thirties.

As a pioneer of what we now know as modern iconology and visual semiotics, Schapiro provided already in his early Romanesque studies a model for how iconologists can attend closely to both secondary content and “form”. Again, this should not be seen as “formalism”. As an example of an aesthetic object that one would have a hard time to reduce to secondary content only, I provide the reader with a picture of the remarkable trumeau that is part of the iconographic program that once adorned the west portal of the abbey church of Souillac, and that is now only preserved in a fragmentary state at the inner west wall of the church – fig. 7. Critical of other attributions, Schapiro dated the portal to

the first half of the twelfth century.⁴⁴ He relates his formal and iconographic description of the trumeau and the preserved tympanum relief (that narrates the legend of Theophilus and the devil) to the social and theological instability of that period:

The very existence of the trumeau implies that sculpture has begun to emerge as an independent spectacle on the margins of religious art, as a wonderful imaginative workmanship addressed to secular fantasy. But this fantasy is governed by the content and material levels of social experience. The trumeau is a passionate *drôlerie*, brutal and realistic in detail, an elaboration of themes of impulsive and overwhelming physical force, corresponding to the role of violence at this point in the history of feudal society.⁴⁵

The photograph of the trumeau in fig. 7 is taken at an oblique angle from the left, and here we see, entangled in a mesh of animal and architectural shapes, the sacrifice of Isaac with the intervention of the angel. Abraham is holding Isaac by his hair at the lower left side of the trumeau. The angel descends, feet up in an almost vertical position, and arrests Abraham's hand (fig. 8). At the other side, not visible in the photograph, three similarly enmeshed representations of two wrestling men are seen in succession from bottom to top. At the top, the weakest wrestler seems to pray for mercy while the other is holding him by the hair. Schapiro rejects interpretations of these figures as Jacob wrestling with the angel and considers them to be *drôleries* – secular parodies of the motif at the opposite side. This conclusion is not unrelated to his more formal analysis of how the whole trumeau plays out contrasts and oppositions that the *Groupe μ* would characterize as “icono-plastic”. The contradictions of the structure are very precisely described by Schapiro.

Colonettes mark the corners of the pillar structure, but they give no impression of structural stability. Instead, they are broken at irregular intervals and intertwined with the *entrelac* of beasts that dominates the front side. The beasts, repeated with griffins to the left and lions to the right, wrap their necks around the colonnettes in a symmetric but opposite fashion, and their heads meet along the central vertical to devour their victims; from bottom to top a sheep, a pig, a bird and a human. With a term borrowed from the *Groupe μ*, the ornamental and architectural structure of the trumeau can be characterized as a “plastic order” (*ordre plastique*), but as Schapiro writes it is an order that is disturbed: “[I]f the colonnettes are conceived as quasi-structural members

Fig. 8. *The Sacrifice of Isaac. Detail of the left side of the trumeau of the West portal of the Abbey Church Sainte-Marie de Souillac. Wikimedia commons CC BY-SA 3.0, PMRMaeyaert (https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=17361086)*



which appear to support the impost above and hence the whole mass carried by the trumeau, we are shown this function in the very process of its disturbance by the action of more powerful, non-architectural forces.”⁴⁶ These “forces” are conceived as a furious struggle going on between beasts, domestic animals and humans. They are inserted into the “plastic order”, but they also upset this order almost to the point of collapse: “Another pull, and the whole structure will topple down into a shapeless heap.”⁴⁷

In its original position at the west portal, this dramatic tension exhibited by the trumeau must have contradicted its architectural function as a supporting element, apparently carrying the whole weight of the tympanum area above. In addition to the figurative and “icono-plastic” meaning, there would also have been a more fundamental “plastic” meaning suggestive of the cultural ambivalence that Schapiro describes. As a meaning carried by an architectural contradiction, it can be homologated with expression and content as /vertical support/ : /diagonal tension/ :: order of culture : chaos of nature. Note that while semioticians have often used the term “plastic” only with reference to planar

structures, this meaning is plastic also in the more art historical sense of sculptural. Schapiro's observation that the *drôlerie* of Souillac shows how sculpture began to "emerge as an independent spectacle on the margins of religious art" is closely related to Michael Camille's (1958–2002) later studies of *marginalia* in both sculpture and manuscripts; marginal figures which seem to mock the content of the text or central image. While Jurgis Baltrušaitis insisted on constructing a symmetrical coherence between frames and their content in Romanesque art, Schapiro regarded the structural "frame" of the trumeau in Souillac as one that invades and deforms its figurative content at the same time as being deformed by it. To regain a vertical shape, the frame would have to be disentangled: "[t]he contorted animals must first be unwound from their frame".⁴⁸

Final discussion

The observations by Schapiro and Thürlemann that I have summarized here would scarcely be obvious at the level of Sonesson's "primary iconicity" and Panofsky's "factual meaning". To draw such deductive conclusions about the meaning of "form" requires close study and knowledge of the history of styles and motifs. We do not automatically appreciate and understand Romanesque sculpture or a Kandinsky painting – we *learn* to do it. A likely candidate for explaining the iconicity involved in "plastic" or physiognomic meaning is the theory of secondary iconicity. For some time, semioticians assumed that very small children and isolated people who have never seen naturalistic images would be unable to decode the motifs of line drawings. This was later shown to be largely false. On the other hand, further experiments have also shown that while small children have no problem recognizing a human face or a dog in an image, it takes much longer for them to understand what an image is and how it is related to objects and actions in three-dimensional reality. Often, the difficulties increase when the surface and material of images are more salient, disturbing picture perception.⁴⁹ This reverses the whole debate about the "conventionality" of images. It really seems that the understanding of "plastic" and material aspects of the image is much less direct and natural than the identification of figurative content. The awareness of form and style as a carrier of meaning presupposes an aesthetic acculturation.

I think that Søren Kaspersen's re-evaluation of Panofsky's model, referred to above, carries similar implications. Kaspersen's objective is to put iconographic

studies into a closer correspondence with anthropological notions of how societal changes impact material and visual culture, and to bridge the division that often exists between iconology and the history of style. Apart from providing pertinent examples, supported by an extensive bibliography, of how Panofsky and his contemporaries still can teach us important lessons, Kaspersen also stresses that Panofsky's entire production is much broader in scope than the elements of it that were popularized in an anglophone context. In Kaspersen's mind, some of the simplifications and reductions that have limited the full appreciation and understanding of Panofsky's work are due to the latter's own reworkings of the three-stage model. As an example, Kaspersen quotes the last version, the introduction to *Meaning in the Visual Arts* published in 1955, in which Panofsky describes how the scholar arrives at the third and last stage of "iconological interpretation" by means of getting hold of certain "basic principles" that constitute, first: "the choice and presentation of *motifs*", second: "the production and interpretation of *images, stories and allegories*", which then "give meaning even to the formal arrangements and technical procedures employed".⁵⁰

This implies that at the third level of interpretation, the scholar will be able to see how both the secondary and the primary level – both the combinations of iconographic types and the variations of formal arrangements – contain elements that are expressive of "essential tendencies of the human mind". However, Kaspersen is dissatisfied with how Panofsky's account of the process retains an idea of linear progression that is not very well adapted to how image production and image interpretation is carried out in actual practise. From Panofsky's description, one tends to get the impression that an artist first finds the *motifs* and learns the principles for how they can be represented; then the artist turns the *motifs* into iconographic *images* in a second procedure with the application of other principles; finally those secondary *images* and principles will give meaning to the formal choices and arrangements employed by the artist when representing the *motifs* in the first place. Kaspersen's objection is that if an artist works in an iconographic tradition, *motifs* and formal arrangements are not chosen at some pristine stage prior to the application of iconographic *images* and types: "the choice of *motifs* derives from the choice of images, stories and *allegories*, and these in turn constitute important characteristics of a civilization."⁵¹ As the history of styles and civilizations abundantly demonstrates,

the manner of how a theme is expressed by a visual motif can be thoroughly determined by the strictures of a specific iconographic tradition, and quite distantly removed from what we would regard as direct or natural visual perception. While Panofsky sometimes described the objective of iconology in terms that tended to obscure the extent to which stylistic change has been determined by iconographic and functional purpose, Kaspersen's account appears to be much closer to how secondary or conventional iconicity is studied in semiotics.

To return to the recent iconographic symposium in Laulasmaa and the joint presentation titled "An entangled world", one could regard its somewhat programmatic post-humanist declarations as signs of frustration with a contemporary iconology that too seldom considers the vernacular and "pre-iconographic" aspects stressed by Schapiro. The trumeau at Souillac is, indeed, one of the most well-researched examples of visual metaphors for the "entanglement" of humankind and nature that the presenters elaborated upon. Schapiro's reluctance to reduce the physiognomic and material entanglement to biblical "lexemes" is an example that the logocentric tradition of iconology is not as monolithic as sometimes assumed. However, an unnuanced critique that generalizes from a few selected aspects of the scholarly or theoretic tradition under scrutiny only risks alienating colleagues. Scholars should also be sensitive to the entanglements and contradictions of academic theory, including theories that have determined the course of such art historical currents as iconology, semiotics and formalism. Unexpected connections can then be retrieved. For example, the materialist, "rhizomatic" ontology of Gilles Deleuze is strongly coloured by his reading of Henri Bergson (1859–1941). Another "bergsonian" thinker was the art historian Henri Focillon (1881–1943), who happened to be the teacher of the formalist Baltrušaitis. On the other hand, Deleuze also emulated ideas from a source much more cherished by Meyer Schapiro; the semiotics and pragmatic philosophy of Peirce.

Notes

- 1 Liepe 2022, 52.
- 2 Andersson 2016.
- 3 Bal and Bryson 1991, 194.
- 4 Ibid, 179 and 192.
- 5 Ibid, 206.
- 6 Ibid, 207.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid, 178.
- 9 Thürlemann 1986, 24–25.
- 10 "[E]inen Autor besser zu verstehen, als er sich selber verstanden hat." Thürlemann 1986, 19–20; Gadamer 1990, 199.
- 11 Bonde, Line M. and Wangsgaard Jürgensen, Martin. "En sammanvævet verden: Plante, Menneske, Dyr: I. Vegetabiliske stemmer. II. Et dyrisk perspektiv." ("An entangled world: Plant, Human, Animal: I. Vegetal voices. II. An animalistic perspective.") Unpublished paper at the 28th Nordic Iconographic Symposium in Laulasmaa, Estonia, 27 August 2024.
- 12 "Nam quod legentibus scriptura, hoc idiotis præstat pictura cernentibus". Gregory, book XI, letter 13.
- 13 Bal and Bryson 1991, 179.
- 14 Andersson 2016, 29–30.
- 15 Kaspersen 2018, 74.
- 16 Peirce 1998, 268.
- 17 Sonesson 1993, 16–21.
- 18 Ibid, 1–8.
- 19 See for example Dunér and Sonesson (ed.) 2016.
- 20 Cfr. Bryson 1981, 20–24. Bryson here uses the terms "syntagm" and "paradigm" to contrast Medieval ecclesiastical art with Dutch still life painting of the seventeenth century. According to Bryson, the iconographic program of a Medieval stained-glass window is ruled by a principle of "paradigm"; every picture element has been ascribed a clear function in the presentation of the theme or story. Conversely, in the Dutch still life the depicted objects have been laid out as a "syntagm" and "no statement is allowed to issue from the objects brought together within the frame" (22). Bryson bases his distinction between art that mostly "speaks" (discursive) and art that mostly "shows" (figurative) on such comparisons. His metaphoric use of the linguistic terms is an odd reading for a linguist, because a verbal statement is necessarily also a syntagm, and every element of the syntagm is a selection from a paradigm of possible words or lexemes. If a picture were a paradigm in that sense, it would scarcely

- be able to narrate a story; it would rather repeat different varieties of the same category of things or actions.
- 21 Zlatev 2016.
 - 22 Bogen and Thürlemann 2003.
 - 23 Peirce 1998, 273–274.
 - 24 Ibid.
 - 25 Bogen and Thürlemann 2003, 12–15.
 - 26 Aristotle 1949, 141–147.
 - 27 Bogen and Thürlemann 2003, 20–21.
 - 28 Panofsky 1993 (1955), 66.
 - 29 Ibid, 61–62.
 - 30 Groupe μ 1992, 194.
 - 31 Ibid, 195.
 - 32 For an account of the relationship between Ego and Alter in models of cultural semiotics, see Dunér and Sonesson 2016, 29–40.
 - 33 Panofsky 2012, 482.
 - 34 Sonesson 2022, 60–61.
 - 35 Čivek et al. 2022.
 - 36 Sonesson 2022, 62.
 - 37 Thürlemann 1985, 665.
 - 38 Ibid, 663; cfr. Thürlemann 1986, 114–147 and 223.
 - 39 Panofsky 2012, 469.
 - 40 Ibid.
 - 41 Liepe 2022, 51.
 - 42 Schapiro 1977, 102–130 and 265–284.
 - 43 Schapiro 1973.
 - 44 Schapiro 1977, 129.
 - 45 Ibid, 123.
 - 46 Ibid, 115–116.
 - 47 Ibid, 116.
 - 48 Ibid; cfr. Schapiro 1973, 12.
 - 49 Lenninger 2012, 140–153 and 182–184.
 - 50 Kaspersen 2018, 77.
 - 51 Ibid.

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