

What do “Bildwissenschaften” want? In the Vicious Circle of Iconic and Pictorial Turns

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Gender studies' aims, perspectives and theoretical debates have contributed extensively to the change in the world of academic disciplines during at least the last twenty five years. Strategically situated both outside and inside the institutions they criticise, gender studies' representatives have to reconsider once in a while the effects the inclusion of their approaches and questions have had in the fields in which they had a chance to be acknowledged, and whether, and how, these fields have reacted, to the effect that the responses have to be re-examined.

At least in the German academic writing community, art history has overall been one of the most resistant disciplines towards challenges raised by gender studies and other cultural studies. Yet some of the questions concerning the basics of structural analysis of possible elements of visual culture(s) – “artwork” just being one of these – are now also being questioned in art history and other disciplinary as well as interdisciplinary discourses that deal with the cultural meaning and power of images/pictures in the age of globalisation and digital image circulation, such as visual studies, film studies, media studies, image or imaging sciences.

Within, and extending, art history a discourse has been developed over the last five to ten years which in German academia today usually runs under the term “Bildwissenschaft” or in the plural form “Bildwissenschaften”, but which does not yet exist in a comparable sense in English, although representatives of “picture or image theory” are sometimes also subsumed under “Bildwissenschaft” by German colleagues, whereas in the Anglo-American academic community they might range under the notion of visual culture studies or

visual studies if their claim is to transgress traditional art history and deal not only with art but also with popular and mass media.¹

Within the discourse of “Bildwissenschaft” interesting questions are being raised that deal with the relation between word and image, between image and gaze and the interrelations of image(s), bodies, subjectivities and culture(s), and, last but not least, with the methodological relations between literature, or language studies (to which the linguistic turn is ascribed), and art histories’ and aesthetics’ legacy. Of course one could claim that in some of the works produced by art historians these questions have already been addressed. This would be worthwhile investigating and discussing and has been already done by some male and female colleagues. Be this as it may, the mentioned topics are especially interesting to gender studies, since it is exactly these issues – relation between word and image, between image and gaze and the interrelations of image(s), bodies, subjectivities and culture(s) – that have been, and still are, at the centre of attention in gender studies, since they are the crucial concepts constructing and repeating, but also holding the potentials of changing a gendered world.

The question is whether a discussion on what “Bildwissenschaft” and its theoretical and methodological proposals are, on how they should be developed and for what purpose, lends itself as a chance for the acknowledgement and integration of the scientific output that gender studies have produced – or whether it presents itself as a new

1 Visual studies or studies in visual culture are terms that have been used mainly in the Anglo-American academia. It is interesting to note that W.T.J. Mitchell, who is often quoted as a representative of visual studies, distances himself from them, for example in “Showing Seeing. A Critique of Visual Culture”: in *What Do Pictures Want? The Loves and Lives of Images*, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005, pp. 336–365 in which he summarizes some of his earlier comments and a lecture which he gave in the context of a conference held at the Clark Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts in 2001. He is asking more or less the same questions about this new “discipline” as I do about “Bildwissenschaft” here. I will not discuss his rather contradictory arguments and the different concepts of visual (culture) studies circulating in the USA in my article. A very interesting summary of methodological approaches can be found in Silke Wenk with Rebecca Krebs, *Analysing the migration of people and images: Perspectives and methods in the field of visual culture*, University of Oldenburg, Germany, 2007, especially the introduction and the chapter “Positionings” pp. 3–13, see URL: www.york.ac.uk/res/researchintegration/Integrative_Research_Methods.htm.

means of exclusion. The hypothesis put forward here is that it in effect (re)produces exclusions anew.

Three main points of critique have been expressed recently from the side of gender studies towards concepts that are published under the term “Bildwissenschaft”: the first includes problematic anthropological definitions, the de-historisation and naturalisation of cultural constructions, the second refers to the problem of demarcating a new discipline in the age of interdisciplinary research, and the third relates to the problematic reading, or even misunderstanding, of semiological analyses within the claim of a pictorial or iconic turn. It is obvious that “Bildwissenschaft” has become aware of these problematic issues itself. So why are there no attempts to link up theoretical analyses from gender studies with those from “Bildwissenschaft” more closely, which in fact could be achieved quite easily?

The profits and dangers of institutionalisation and internationalisation for gender studies

Today, feminist or gender studies in art histories find themselves in a rather ambivalent situation between institutionalising, normalising processes and subversive strategies within the German speaking/writing academic communities – which are, of course, not uniform and act or react variedly, depending on whether one is operating in a German, an Austrian or a Swiss context. Indeed, one of the motivations for organising the conference *Inscriptions/Transgressions* was to point out the differences in acceptance and in the state of the institutionalisation of gender studies in art history between, for example, Swiss, German and French academia.²

2 See the introduction and the contributions by Kornelia Imesch and Séverine Sofio in this volume, and Kornelia Imesch, “Der Geschlechterdiskurs im schweizerischen Kunstsysten”, in: *Das Kunstschaffen in der Schweiz im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Schweizerisches Institut für Kunsthistorische Wissenschaft, Zürich: Benteli, 2006, pp. 361–375. The fact that the journal *FrauenKunstWissenschaft* is edited by an international board of German, Swiss and Austrian women art historians is at least a proof of debating and overcoming these differences in the field of gender studies in art history.

Yet, under the pressure of globalisation and funding institutions' recent politics of internationalisation – especially by the EU – international networking has meanwhile become normal, not only in the business of natural science but also in the humanities; ten or fifteen years ago this was still exceptional. The differences in the methodological and theoretical debates between national communities have become less pronounced. This is true also beyond the borders of German language. The fact that on the international level people are proficient in German and an understandable lack of interest in German art history since the NS-regime – during which the émigrés writing in English were of course acknowledged – have led to a continuity of processes of exclusion in the ongoing international debate since the end of World War II.

German academics are well aware of this handicap and today increasingly publish in English, thereby also using the international highway of communication: the internet, a further motor of internationalisation and a medium in which pictures too are circulating worldwide. But of course internationalisation within the German academic community still concentrates on the extended Europe and the US – but there are exceptions.³

In view of this I assume that the ambivalent situation of feminist or gender studies in various disciplines, and especially in art history, is not only a problem of, and in, German writing academic communities, but an international one. Meanwhile, an originally German-centred debate possibly, and obviously, may be able to influence the debate going on in the Anglo-American communities, and vice versa.

German feminist or gender studies representatives of my generation have greatly profited from international networking. Internationalisation offered the chance to legitimate inter- or transdisciplinary theoretical approaches, questions and research projects which aimed at analysing the structural effects of gender difference on culture, society, modes of communication, bodies, subjects and their modes of representation. So, internationalisation for feminist and gender

3 In this context, the research focuses of the PhD programmes at the University of Trier (Prof. Dr. Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff) *Identität und Differenz: Geschlechterkonstruktion und Interkulturalität (18. bis 21. Jahrhundert)* and at the University of Oldenburg (Prof. Dr. Silke Wenk) *Kulturwissenschaftliche Geschlechterstudien* are worth mentioning.

studies in the German writing academia was a means to escape isolation and to link up with other discourses, leading to differentiation and diversification. It was a means to make minority positions visible and debatable in a rather conservative academic setting and it was helpful in claiming institutional inclusion.⁴

Some of the contributions in this volume deal with the struggles and theoretical problems that grow from contradictions between a substantial critique of the gendered constitution of disciplines involving historical research, deconstruction and analysis of their main concepts and notions – one of art history's being the “artist as genius concept” and its narratives – and the dangers of institutionalisation as a disciplinary trap in which gendered and otherwise differentiated art histories become inscribed into traditional narratives of art history.⁵

Yet this debate has been, and still is, very productive and self-critical, and shows what sincere intellectual work should be doing. And it has led to an a priori of inter- and transdisciplinary work because the boundaries of the disciplines are consciously and unconsciously constructed on the gendered notions of their subjects. The construction of these boundaries itself has become a dominant issue in gender studies in general. At least for Germany one can say that gender studies have been one of the main motors of transdisciplinary research in the humanities, or cultural sciences, over the last twenty five years⁶ – a fact that was rather grudgingly acknowledged by the

4 This is an opportunity to express my gratitude to the English and other colleagues who, with intention, cooperated with and supported the German Gender Studies community. As representatives I would like to name some of the English participants of three symposia that Prof. Dr. Marcia Pointon, Emerita University of Manchester and I organised for the *Anglo-German-Research-Group on Gender and Representation* we had founded: 1992 (London), 1994 (Bremen) and 1999 (Monfort): Kathleen Adler, Shulamith Behr, Rosemary Betterton, Anthea Callen, Deborah Cherry, Tamar Garb, Tag Gronberg, Margaret Iversen, Lynda Nead, Griselda Pollock, Irit Rogoff, Dorothee Rowe, Lindsay Smith, Lisa Tickner. Among the German participants had been Annette Dogerloh, Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat, Linda Hentschel, Kathrin Hoffmann-Curtius, Ines Lindner, Monika Wagner, Silke Wenk and Gabriele Werner.

5 See Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon. Feminist Desire and Writing of Art's Histories*, London/New York: Routledge, 1999.

6 An overview of methodological and theoretical work of gender studies in art history is provided by Sigrid Schade / Silke Wenk, “Inszenierungen des Sehens: Kunst, Geschichte und Geschlechterdifferenz”, in: *Genus. Zur Geschlechterdifferenz in den Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. by Hadumod Bussmann / Renate Hof, Stuttgart: Kröner, 1995, pp. 340–407; and by

mainstream, but which then also began to move towards interdisciplinary approaches in cultural studies (Kulturwissenschaften).⁷

The question is whether an internationalisation of mainstream discourses will contribute to differentiation and diversification (not only where gender studies are concerned but also in research on ethical, social, cultural and medial differences) or whether it will contribute to centralisation, monopolisation and closure, possibly resulting in the exclusion of gender studies on new grounds.⁸ It seems as if the international relationships, especially between representatives of the so-called iconic or pictorial turns – discussed as part of the new paradigm of “Bildwissenschaft” in Germany – are making an attempt to integrate diverse interdisciplinary approaches to questions that have been posed in different subject fields in the course of the last twenty years, while at the same time dismissing the productive role gender studies have played in the process.

One may call it a roll-back that leads to exclusions of all kinds, as is observable in German academia already now. Perhaps Anglo-American academia will soon share the same fate.

The question of inscription into or transgression of, the discipline of art history poses itself differently today than it did ten to twenty years ago.

Gender studies in art history have questioned the discipline of art history and contributed to its development towards a self-critical, inter- and transdisciplinary field of research in visual culture. This is

the extended and revised version: “Strategien des ‚Zu-Sehen-Gebens: Geschlechterpositionen in Kunst und Kunstgeschichte”, in: *Genus. Geschlechterforschung und Gender Studies in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften* ed. by Hadumod Bussmann/ Renate Hof, Stuttgart: Kröner, 2005, pp. 144–184.

- 7 The term “Geisteswissenschaften” was replaced then by “Kulturwissenschaften”, Wolfgang Frühwald et al. (Ed.), *Geisteswissenschaften heute. Eine Denkschrift*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1991.
- 8 International evaluation of research projects is a very important factor in this process. The Swiss National Science Foundation handles evaluations anonymously of course, as all these foundations do. Yet the applicant gets text-fragments of the evaluation. The experience of five years of applying and supervising applications for funding in Switzerland shows that international evaluation doesn’t guarantee professional support for research projects in the field of gender studies, and is evidence of the resistance towards it on international level too. And it proves the lack of international networking for application purposes by the representatives of gender studies.

widely acknowledged in German academia – in spite of a lack of, or at least retardation in, institutionalisation. The so-called iconic or pictorial turns and the new paradigm of “Bildwissenschaft” are debated controversially by many colleagues who are not necessarily familiar with, or sympathetic to, gender studies, and even by the protagonists themselves. Nevertheless, it is in the process of becoming a dominant discourse, even a new discipline, which is partially due to the internationalisation of the debate⁹ and partially due to the extraordinary success in obtaining enormous amounts of institutional funding – which has a monopolising effect and, in turn, would not have been possible without international support.

“Bildwissenschaft” – a new “discipline” and the absence of women

The term “Bildwissenschaft” – or to put it into the plural form “Bildwissenschaften”¹⁰ – has become a dominant and powerful element of a discourse, through which a group of male academics in art history and other disciplines and their (male and female) pupils in the German speaking/writing academic community are trying to gain or regain terrain in a field dealing with *analyses, histories and theories of arts*

- 9 There are problems in translation not only of single terms or notions but the need to translate different intellectual traditions to each other. As a momentary result, I find it interesting that in July 2007, one still can't find the terms “Bildwissenschaft”, Iconic or Pictorial Turn in the English Wikipedia which do exist in the German Wikipedia. In The English Wikipedia one can find some of the protagonists under the notion of visual culture studies, for example W.J.T. Mitchell among others, although he himself doesn't want to be subsumed under this notion (see footnote 1) – and some of the main protagonists mentioned there are women: Laura Mulvey for example.
- 10 Part of the problem is that the plural of the first part of the term “Bild”, “Bilder” (images, pictures) has not yet been used so far (beside by myself) within this notion. See Sigrid Schade, “Scheinalternative Kunst- oder Bildwissenschaft. Ein kulturwissenschaftlicher Kommentar” in: *Visions of a Future. Art and Art History in Changing Contexts*, ed. by Hans-Jörg Heusser/Kornelia Imesch, Swiss Institute of Art Research, Zurich, 2004, pp. 87–100, here 89f.

*and/or visual culture.*¹¹ I mention the leading protagonists representatively. From the side of art history we have Gottfried Boehm¹² and Hans Belting¹³, who see in “Bildwissenschaft” a critical potential for overcoming traditional art history, the former arguing from a specific philosophical background, the latter from the perspective of anthropology. Horst Bredekamp, who occasionally is associated with the term, appears to be rather ambivalent towards the notion and sees “Bildwissenschaft” as the critical potential of art history itself.¹⁴ Inter-

- 11 I deliberately quote the terms here which had been constitutive to the AHRC Centre-Cath (Cultural Analysis, Theory and History) founded by Griselda Pollock at the School of Fine Art, University of Leeds in 2000, which just recently was closed down.
- 12 Professor of German origin at the University of Basle; with his edition of *Was ist ein Bild?* München: Fink 1994 he was the first to claim the notion of “Bildwissenschaft” as something art history should have, but had not done (p. 9). Since 2006, and together with eight colleagues, he runs one of altogether twenty Swiss National Centres of Competence in Research under the title of *Iconic Criticism. The Power and Meaning of Images (Bildkritik. Macht und Bedeutung der Bilder)* in German, – see URL: www.eikones.ch; it is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation with 7, 1 Million CHF, further 5,3 Million CHF coming from the University of Basle and 5,2 Million by participating institutions for the first four years; excluded here are the infrastructural costs for the renovation of a whole building which was also covered by the university. The programme of the centre itself is based on rather traditional concepts of art history.
- 13 Prof. Emeritus of the Hochschule für Gestaltung Karlsruhe where he was head of a PhD-programme *Bild-Körper-Medium* established in 2000, funded by the DFG, the German Research Foundation. From 2003 to 2007 he was director of the IFK (International Research Centre of Cultural Studies) in Vienna. The book usually quoted is *Bild-Anthropologie. Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft*, München: Fink 2001. Some of his arguments have been published in English: “Image, Medium, Body: A new Approach to Iconology”, in: *Critical Inquiry* 31, Winter 2005, pp. 302–319. He edited a volume representing the symposium *Bildwissenschaft? Eine Zwischenbilanz* held at the IFK in Vienna at 2005. It was published in 2007 under the title *Bilderfragen. Die Bildwissenschaften im Aufbruch* (München: Fink, 2007) which compiles texts by colleagues from various disciplines, among others Gottfried Boehm and W.T.J. Mitchell (twenty contributions by men, four by women).
- 14 Professor of Art History at the Humboldt University Berlin; asked how he would describe the aim of “Bildwissenschaft” he answered that to him it could only mean including art history, archaeology and their approaches. He even says that after ten years of experiments “Bildwissenschaft” has failed, in: “Im Königsbett der Kunstgeschichte”, an interview by Jens Jessen and Petra Kipphoff published in: *Die Zeit*, 15, 2005. One of his former PhD students and assistants, Prof. Dr. Oliver Grau, now heads a master curriculum in “Bildwissenschaft”; the *Zentrum für Bildwissenschaft* was installed at the Danube University Krems in Austria, the title translated into English being *Centre for Image Science*, URL: <http://www.donau-uni.ac.at/de/studium/kulturbildung/bildwissenschaft/index.php>.

nationally, the protagonists try to link up with other leading figures of image or picture science such as W. T. J. Mitchell¹⁵ and Georges Didi-Huberman¹⁶. Other advocates are connected with information and imaging sciences, as for example Klaus Sachs-Hombach, who himself comes from a philosophical background¹⁷, or brain specialists such as W. Singer, and others. The discussion around the pictures or images that natural sciences are producing in the present age of digital imaging and neurological research, as well as the question of evidence, also play a major role in the arguments of art historians in which they are subject of historical research.¹⁸ I will neglect the positions of those who argue for “Bildwissenschaft”, in the sense of an imaging science, as a new biological essentialism – something gender studies have battled against from the start – which would create a completely different

- 15 Gaylord Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago. See William T. J. Mitchell, *Iconology. Image, Text, Ideology*, 1987; by the same author: *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago 1994 and: *What do Pictures Want? The Loves and Lives of Image* (see footnote 1); mostly quoted in German contexts: “Der Pictorial Turn”, in: *Privileg Blick. Kritik der visuellen Kultur*, ed. by Christian Kravagna, Berlin: Edition ID-Archiv, 1997, pp. 15–40, originally published in *Artforum*, March 1992. Interestingly enough, in the compilation of Kravagna, Mitchell is one of the rare male authors among a majority of female and feminist authors from the fields of film and media theory and art history: Kaja Silverman, Linda Williams, Teresa de Lauretis, Beatriz Colomina, Abigail Solomon-Godeau a.o.
- 16 He teaches at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales EHESS, Paris. It is interesting to note that his first book on the interrelations between aesthetic, medical and psychiatric discourses, *Invention de l'hystérie. Charcot et l'iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, Paris: Macula 1982, which also dealt with the indexical effects of photography and represents an analysis of male projections of the female, radically opening the field of art history, not without its negative effects on the author's career in France, was first published in German by a Swiss research group as late as 1997 (translated and edited by Silvia Henke, Martin Stingelin, and Hubert Thüring, München: Fink). The first English translation was published by The MIT Press in 2003. Meanwhile, his later books in which he does not continue his research on questions of gendered aesthetic production were often translated within the first year of publication. Compare my review “Wiedergelesen: Georges Didi-Huberman: *Invention de l'hystérie. Charcot et l'iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière [...]*”, in: *Bildwelten des Wissens. Kunsthistorisches Jahrbuch für Bildkritik*, Vol. 2,1, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004, pp. 117f.
- 17 He founded a website called Virtuelles Institut für Bildwissenschaft, URL: www.bildwissenschaft.org/.
- 18 See the programme and the articles of *Bildwelten des Wissens. Kunsthistorisches Jahrbuch für Bildkritik*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, edited by Horst Bredekamp and Gabriele Werner since 2003.

perspective. Instead, I will concentrate on those who stay within the field of cultural studies and the humanities.

Another discourse “Bildwissenschaft” tries to challenge is that of media theory or sciences which has been very efficient over the last twenty years in analysing new phenomena and mediality in the history of technical inventions concerning photography, film, video, TV and digital imaging, not only as a technical means but as instruments that are changing the ways of perception, cultural meaning and subjectivity in the tradition of theorists like Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer or Roland Barthes – phenomena about which art history has had little to say.¹⁹ In fact gender studies and media sciences have a lot in common and, based on the heritage of cultural studies, they have addressed the relations between high and low culture, art and mass media etc. as legitimate research fields. But, in the present article I will focus on the elimination of women and gender studies from the terrain of “Bildwissenschaft”.

Even an initial, superficial and statistical observation provides sufficient evidence for the absence of women from all disciplines in general and from art history in particular; it becomes apparent in the participants’ or authors’ lists of symposia, lectures, meetings, publications, curricula and research programmes that have been organised and established in this field.²⁰ Indeed, the statistics show that the women who were invited and participated are the notorious exceptions. In comparison to the present average percentage of about 13,5% women professors at German universities, which is by no means high²¹,

- 19 Sigrid Schade, “Zur verdrängten Medialität der modernen und zeitgenössischen Kunst”, in Sigrid Schade, Georg Christoph Tholen (ed.), *Konfigurationen. Zwischen Kunst und Medien*, Munich: Fink 1999, pp. 269–291
- 20 Some of the publications, curricula and events have already been mentioned in the footnotes above. See also the lecture series under the title *Iconic Turn – Das neue Bild der Welt* which was funded by the Burda-Stiftung (a major publishing house) and which was held for four semesters at the Ludwig-Maximilian-University in Munich from 2002–2005, URL: www.iconicturn.de. Of altogether thirty-six lectures only two were by women (Annemarie Schimmel, Prof. of Oriental Studies University of Bonn, and Barbara Maria Stafford, Prof. of Art History University of Chicago).
- 21 This figure dates from 2004. The percentage of women of C3/W3-professorships – the highest possible hierarchical level in Germany – still only amounts to 9,2%. See the report and the evaluation “Empfehlungen zur Chancengleichheit von Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftlern” of the Deutscher Wissenschaftsrat, URL:

the percentage of participating women in the world of “Bildwissenschaft” ranges from zero to five %. It is surprising that nobody seems to be astonished that in a field of interdisciplinary research, where otherwise women are represented above average in contrast to disciplinary contexts, women researchers should have nothing to say.²² I agree, it is not a real intellectual challenge to simply add and render figures, and I wouldn’t do it were it not for the fact that the scandalous evidence does not seem to disturb anyone.²³

At this very moment, Swiss and German journals and newspapers keep stressing that in politics and other fields of society, the participation of women, or even gender equality have now been achieved.²⁴ The Swiss National Science Foundation’s criteria for funding include

www.wissenschaftsrat.de/texte/8036-07.pdf, July 2007, pp. 9–19, here p. 12. This report summarizes very interesting comparative data material from Germany, Europe and the USA which relates to the effects of the gender bias in academia, it refers to the research which has analysed the symptoms on structural grounds (p. 20) and offers rather radical advice to stop the so called principle of the “homosoziale Kooptation” pp. 23–38. Altogether this report is a milestone compared to the last one in 1998. Remarkable is the replacement of the term “Frauenförderung (promotion of women)” by “Chancengleichheit (equality of chances)”. Hopefully it will have its effects on the future politics of defining qualitative criteria and hiring procedures in the universities and on the evaluation of applications by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and other funding institutions. In contrast to some expectations, the disciplines which are studied by the highest percentages of women (languages and humanities) are the ones with the lowest percentage in hiring women as professors (pp. 13–16 and 22).

- 22 The edition *Was ist ein Bild?* includes nineteen contributions by seventeen men – none by women, see Boehm 1994 (see footnote 12). Almost as exclusive are the symposia and lecture series which have been organised since last year by the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research *Iconic Criticism*. In the supervisor team of the competence centre are eight men and one woman – the woman, Dr. Theodora Fischer is not from the university but the curator of a cooperating institution, the “Schaulager” in Basel, site of the collection of the Emanuel Hoffmann Stiftung, a sponsor who also funds a junior professorship at the University of Basle.
- 23 Some women still – as we all know – enjoy being *the exception*; this too guarantees them a specific exclusivity.
- 24 In a series on the equality of women see the Title Story “Die Alpha-Mädchen. Wie eine neue Generation von Frauen die Männer überholt”, in: *Der Spiegel*, No. 24, 11th of June 2007, pp. 56–7, and Philipp Gut and Daniela Niederberger, “Der Angriff der Frauen. Wie sie die Schweizer Politik umgekämpft haben: Eine Bilanz”, in: *Die Weltwoche* No. 30, 26th of July 2007, pp. 26f. Young women aiming at still unusual qualifications such as physicists, engineers or mathematicians are quoted, saying that of course they don’t consider themselves to be underprivileged or see themselves as having more difficulties than their male colleagues.

“training and the promotion of women researchers”²⁵ which itself is problematic since in the foundation’s view women researchers still only qualify as (PhD-)students who need training and promotion. Actually, the criteria should include women researchers who already are successful on an international level or are even employed as professors at a Swiss university. Do research applications really fit the above criteria? Who is controlling the facts?

In view of this evidence it comes as no surprise that not only women are considered as having nothing to say in the field of “Bildwissenschaft”, but also that gender studies approaches as such – irrespective of the gender of the researchers – don’t stand a chance.²⁶ The last argument already includes theoretical and methodological exclusions to which I shall come back later.

The conclusion I come to is that with the notion of “Bildwissenschaft” an academic community is trying to establish a new transdisciplinary “discipline” – offering possibilities to include theoretical and methodological approaches that other disciplines have developed and which art history has – so it seems – failed to include. This new “discipline” excludes more or less systematically women and the approaches developed by gender and queer studies.²⁷ This is true even

25 See URL: www.snf.ch/E/targetedresearch/centres/Seiten/default.aspx which is by no means comparable to the advices the report of the German Wissenschaftsrat, (see footnote 19) and its proposals for the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. Female students are accepted as PhD students in the mentioned PhD programmes, yet there is no evidence that Gender Studies approaches or themes are.

26 This is also true for queer studies and easy to prove, since the participants or authors included are easily identifiable as not having gender studies’ issues, approaches or backgrounds, not to speak of research projects or themes. And this can also be shown for the research themes that students were allowed to work on or had been accepted. Compare for example the list of published dissertations coming from the DFG-funded PhD programme *Bild-Körper-Medium* (see footnote 13) – which is in fact particularly scandalous in consideration of the fact that the research on body concepts and images is one of the main subjects of gender studies in the first place –, and the list of modules and projects in the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research *Iconic Criticism* (see footnote 12).

27 As only one, but a very interesting example, I quote here the exchange of letters by Gottfried Boehm “Iconic Turn” and W. J. T. Mitchell “Pictorial Turn” published in Belting’s compilation *Bilderfragen* (see footnote 13) in which they mainly describe to each other their intellectual biography and on which grounds they developed their rather differing concepts over the last twenty or thirty years (pp. 27–46). In both genealogies, not one female art historian, philosopher or theorist is quoted – an absolutely closed male universe. Even if one could argue with historical reasons that there might not have been

for the debate, the critique of the notion and the concepts of “Bildwissenschaft” which have already been published, for example by representatives of gender studies in art history, to which the protagonists of “Bildwissenschaft” have responded in recent publications without even quoting the sources, authors and texts of the debate.

Three main points have been expressed within feminist critique.

The first has to do with the problematic anthropological discourse that Hans Belting introduced as constituting the new “Bildwissenschaft”.²⁸ He promoted a non-reflexive, de-historising and de-socialising anthropology, repeating undifferentiated essential, universal and ontological categories of *the body*, *the man* (mankind, human being) and *the image*, and its ontological, mostly magical, function within the history of human civilization, thus once again mystifying art and the connoisseur and falling back, where anthropology is concerned, beyond the 19th century.²⁹ For gender studies and its tradition of meanwhile more than twenty five years of analysing bodies and the gaze as historical, social, gendered and cultural concepts in which processes of perception, subjectivation and identification reorganise themselves continually, this of course represents an intellectual offence. Linked to this discussion is the critique that states that it is erroneous to talk about the “Bild” in the singular form in both its sense as image and picture. In fact, in my article on the spurious alternatives of art history and “Bildwissenschaft”, I show that most of the protagonists themselves admit in their texts that it is impossible to analyse “das Bild” and its functions, and that it would be more appropriate to talk about “Bilder” and their functions.³⁰

any women working in that field when they were still young (which was not the case), a comparison of Mitchell’s quotations with those of other texts of his (for example “Pictorial Turn”, see footnote 15) shows that he has purified his intellectual biography from women in the context of a volume promoting “Bildwissenschaft” as a new paradigm.

28 Belting 2001 (see footnote 13).

29 The critical points have been analysed, for example, by myself, see Schade 2004 (see footnote 10) and furthermore by Hanne Loreck, “Bild-Andropologie. Kritik einer Theorie des Visuellen” in: *Medien der Kunst. Geschlecht, Metapher, Code*, ed. by Susanne von Falkenhausen et al., Marburg: Jonas, 2004, pp.12–26.

30 For example Gottfried Böhm himself and others in his book *Was ist ein Bild?*, Böhm 1994 (see footnote 12); see my article, Schade 2004 (see footnote 10).

The second point refers to the contradictions which the attempt to retain control over the subjects of a discipline bring about, which, however, are no longer controllable in the way they used to be, and which has been described by Foucault.³¹ Concepts of inter- and transdisciplinarity in the humanities or cultural sciences (Kulturwissenschaften) have produced a discursive space in which non-unifying arguments and processes have to be handled in new ways, requiring comparative, translating and transferring qualifications: quarrel becomes normal, unifying agreement the exception.³² The reactions of art historians to such a development have been either to claim art history itself to be of interdisciplinary origin (which is true, but of course pertains to all disciplines in the humanities)³³, to return to the safe traditions of the discipline itself³⁴ or to claim to have the best theories or methodologies for research on how pictures or images make sense in competition with other disciplines. The last, slightly exaggerated reaction is to define “Bildwissenschaft” as a new transdisciplinary art history which not only has the better theories and methodologies, but is even able to integrate the best theories and methodologies from other fields – namely the media sciences. The energy spent on these reactions proves once more that the academic

- 31 Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir*, Paris: Gallimard, 1969 and *L'ordre du discours. Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France prononcée le 2 décembre 1970*, Paris: Gallimard, 1971. See Sigrid Schade “Kunstgeschichte”, in: *Spielregeln der Kunst*, ed. by Wolfgang Zinggl, Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 2001, pp. 86–99.
- 32 Introduction in: Hartmut Böhme / Klaus R. Scherpe (Ed.), *Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften. Positionen, Theorien, Modelle*, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Enzyklopädie 575, 1996, pp. 7–24.
- 33 Horst Bredekamp, “Einbildung”, in: *kritische berichte*, 28 (2000), No. 1, pp. 31–37.
- 34 “Deskilling” was deliberately introduced and used against cultural and gender studies by Rosalind Krauss’ “Welcome to the cultural revolution”, in: *October* 77, 1996, pp. 83–96, and “Der Tod der Fachkenntnisse und Kunstspezialitäten”, in: *Texte zur Kunst*, 20, 1995, pp. 61–67. This was perceived and promoted in the German speaking art historian community either as a support for mainstream art history which at that time had not even started to think about interdisciplinarity, or as a betrayal and withdrawal from its own tradition of thinking and, at the same time, a treachery towards the minority in German academia that was pleading for an interdisciplinary extension and opening up of art history, which of course was a symptom of disappointment. See Sabeth Buchmann “The Prison-House of Kunstgeschichte”, in: *Texte zur Kunst*, 28, Nov. (1997), pp. 58–62.

field is a battlefield in which curiosity and quest for knowledge are closely linked to the bid for power and the battle for resources.³⁵

The third point of critique is a very troubling discussion on the iconic and pictorial turns as counter-concepts to a linguistic turn which is suspected of having been universally successful as the dominant paradigm of theories and methodologies in the humanities and cultural or visual culture studies.³⁶ This will be the main topic of the next section.

I conclude this passage with evidence for my argument which maintains that even in the debate around the various concepts of “Bildwissenschaft”, in which advocates of gender studies have pointed out critical positions as quoted above, the discussions have been taken up without even mentioning them. For example, in Hans Belting’s new compilation “Bilderfragen”, it is quite obvious that he is referring to the mentioned critique. His strategy is to declare the arguments to be his own. In his introduction³⁷ he rejects the notion of “das Bild” in the singular (as well as of *the text*), and uses the term “Bildpraktiken” (image practices), leading to the questions and answers of “Bildwissenschaften” as a cultural science (Kulturwissenschaft) that aims at an interdisciplinary analysis of images/pictures, to which the former disciplines in the humanities and sciences are able to contribute³⁸ (excluded again are not especially defined media sciences), and admits that speaking of the body is only possible in relation to society (which implies history etc.) – as if this had been his position from the beginning. Yet he comes back to ontological concepts of the gaze, percep-

35 See the summary of these discussions in my article, Schade 2004 (see footnote 10), pp. 90–92.

36 I have tried to summarise and evaluate this debate in Sigrid Schade, “Vom Wunsch der Kunstgeschichte, Leitwissenschaft zu sein. Pirouetten im sogenannten ‚pictorial turn‘”, in: *horizonte. Beiträge zu Kunst und Kunsthistorie*, 50 Jahre Schweizerisches Institut für Kunsthistorie, ed. by Juerg Albrecht / Kornelia Imesch, Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2001, pp. 369–378 (with an English summary), reprinted in: *Die Visualität der Theorie vs. Die Theorie des Visuellen. Eine Anthologie zur Funktion von Bild und Text in der zeitgenössischen Kultur*, ed. by Dorothee Richter / Nina Möntmann, Frankfurt a. M.: Revolver, 2004, pp. 31–44.

37 Hans Belting, “Die Herausforderung der Bilder. Ein Plädoyer und eine Einführung”, in: Belting 2007 (see footnote 13), pp. 11 f.

38 Here he only quotes Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns, Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt a. M.: Rowohlt Enzyklopädie, 2006, pp. 329–375.

tion, image and the body, once again negating the entire tradition of women theorists who wrote extensively on the subjects addressed, such as Mieke Bal, Michael Ann Holly, Laura Mulvey, Griselda Pollock, Jacqueline Rose, Kaja Silverman, Lisa Tickner, etc. to name but a few of the women colleagues from the Anglo-American community; the list could easily be complemented by German female and male colleagues.³⁹

In *Bilderfragen* Hans Belting deals with theoretical and methodological questions that gender studies have been discussing for at least the last twenty five years, while pretending that there were no predecessors in this field.⁴⁰ And he offers as subtitle of the book: *Die Bildwissenschaften im Aufbruch* – although he admits the singular form of “Bild” to be problematic and the invention of a new discipline from a cultural studies point of view to be unnecessary.

Iconic and Pictorial Turns

The theoretical discussions that the advocates of “Bildwissenschaften” subsume under the notion of “Iconic” or “Pictorial Turn” are of course intellectually more stimulating than quoting the number of women participating in the project, or questioning the redefinition of a discipline. Here I come back to the third crucial point of the discussion on “Bildwissenschaft”, to which gender studies protagonists have contributed.

The term “Iconic Turn” can be attributed to Gottfried Boehm⁴¹, the term “Pictorial Turn” to W.T.J. Mitchell⁴². The two concepts are quite different. Yet they are linked by the requirement that research and sciences dealing with images/pictures need a paradigm which

39 I would like to refer here to the dissertation of Linda Hentschel, *Pornotopische Techniken des Betrachters. Raumwahrnehmung und Geschlechterordnung in visuellen Apparaten der Moderne*, Marburg: Jonas 2001 as a very good example.

40 Predecessors for him are Greenberg, Danto and Mitchell; authors who were invited to the symposium and/or whom he includes in his discussions include Bredekamp, Boehm, Didi-Huberman, Tisseron, Nancy, Virilio, Sartre and Vernant.

41 Boehm 1994 (see footnote 12).

42 Mitchell (see footnote 15).

should be appropriate to its subject in order to be analysed, a legitimate demand in itself. But of course, this is a demand that various authors within the field of gender studies and other fields already responded to earlier on.

Yet – in the context of “Bildwissenschaft” this exclusive paradigm for the analysis of images/pictures is conceived as a counter-concept to a “linguistic turn”⁴³ which is suspected of having been universally successful as the dominant paradigm of theories and methodologies in the humanities and in cultural or visual studies during the last thirty or more years.⁴⁴ Whatever the linguistic turn stands for, it seems obviously related and closely connected to the analysis of text and literature. However, the analysis of images/pictures seems to be in need of tools of its own to escape the suspected dominance of the linguistic paradigm – perceived as a language-centred paradigm (language being words to which images would be only illustrations) – which Boehm, for example, links to the logocentrism of Western philosophy and Western writing on art. In both concepts of an iconic as well as a pictorial turn as a search for a new “image/picture science” which appropriately acknowledges the quality, the status and structure of images in human perception and society – in which art would be one possible form of image/picture – the term “Iconology”, which would have the potential to meet the requirements, is rejected because of its association with and definition by Erwin Panofsky. Panofsky’s concept of iconology is blamed – for good reasons – to be dominated itself by a focus on the literary origins or sources of images so that they as subject never relinquish the status of illustrations. Yet my aim here is not to discuss the different attitudes that Boehm and Mitchell express towards Panofsky.⁴⁵

43 The term refers to the book by Richard Rorty (Ed.), *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*, [first edition: 1967], Chicago/London, 1992.

44 It is necessary to explain that the discussions on the “linguistic turn” entered the German literature departments only at the end of the 1970s and that in Art History the idea was not discussed before “Bildwissenschaft” turned up, after which the notion was discussed exclusively in a negating form.

45 For Boehm he remains in the tradition of Neo-Platonism, while Mitchell rethinks Panofsky with Althusser and doesn’t reject the term iconography completely – in fact an interesting perspective. Within art history, Panofsky’s concept of iconology and its neo-platonic heritage was debated extensively by several authors earlier on. This was already a subject

Boehm situates the beginning of the iconic turn in modern philosophy at the end of the 19th century, when a “pictorial” (in the sense of metaphorical) language was developed, which means he situates the iconic turn in philosophy even prior to the linguistic turn. A further meaning of the pictorial/iconic turn that has recently received attention and spread refers to a seemingly new domination of visual communication in Western and, in the meantime, globalised societies, in which the overall presence of moving images on TV and in public relations, digital imaging and the images produced in the sciences represent an age of spectacle (Debord). This view is shared by Belting, Bredekamp and others, yet Mitchell for example recently redefined his earlier analysis of a picture-dominated world in the age of technical possibilities which he had developed in *Pictorial Turn* (1992), now as a new popular experience on the one hand, and as a returning trope of discussion on the other.⁴⁶ I myself have addressed the repetitive nature of this discussion that has accompanied the inventions of new visualisation techniques ever since the 19th and 20th centuries⁴⁷, quoting authors like Roland Barthes⁴⁸ who rejected this thesis since, as a semiological thinker, he did not believe in the radical separation of text and image as propounded by the protagonists of “Bildwissenschaft”.

The main obstacle in the perception and discussion of an iconic or pictorial turn and its ability to be joined to other discourses in cultural and gender studies is in fact the “Bildwissenschaft” protagonists’ assumption that the systems of language and images are structurally strictly separate and/or that they can be analytically separated;

discussed by Ernst H. Gombrich as well as Carlo Ginzburg: *Spuren Sicherungen. Über verborgene Geschichte, Kunst und soziales Gedächtnis*, Berlin: Wagenbach, 1983, especially in his article on “Tizian, Ovid und die erotischen Bilder im Cinquecento”, pp. 173f. (the title is not correctly translated, the Italian original title being: “Tiziano, Ovidio e i codici della figurazione erotica nel Cinquecento”, 1978), compare also my article on “Himmlische und/oder Irdische Liebe. Allegorische Lesarten des weiblichen Aktbildes der Renaissance”, in: *Allegorien und Geschlechterdifferenz*, ed. by Sigrid Schade/Sigrid Weigel/Monika Wagner, Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau, 1994, pp. 95–112.

46 Mitchell “Pictoral Turn, eine Antwort”, in: Belting 2007 (see footnote 13), pp. 40 f.

47 Schade 2001 (see footnote 36), p. 372.

48 Roland Barthes, “Semantik des Objekts”, in: Barthes, *Das semiologische Abenteuer*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1988, p. 187.

in the debates of the past five to ten years this was put forward as the main argument to legitimate a “Bildwissenschaft”⁴⁹.

But this is also due to other assumptions that feed the idea of a dichotomy between text and image, which were introduced as far back as the Renaissance, continued through the 18th century, and still hold today. This includes, for example, the idea of ascribing logos and reason to text and language on the one hand, and emotion, the senses, unconsciousness and a lack in signification abilities to images or pictures on the other. It is easy to list theorists labelled by “Bildwissenschaft” as representatives of the linguistic turn (Barthes, Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Lyotard) who had analysed the assumed logocentrism of language (as constituted by words) themselves deconstructing the unconscious subtexts and imagery that are linked to affect and power and lack in signification abilities which words and images share.⁵⁰ One could say that the discourse of “Bildwissenschaft” re-establishes the neo-platonic separation between the elements constituting a language by falling back beyond the linguistic turn as a discourse which has developed its critical power conceived as semio-logical or cultural enquiry – a concept that was proposed by Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson⁵¹. This is also one of the reasons why the notion of discourse and its relation to reality is misunderstood in the same way as language. At least in German academic art history, Foucault has never played the same role as he has done in the Anglo-American community, so that the term discourse is still very often taken as a purely literary concept without the connotations of practice being taken into account.

In my text on the hope of art history becoming (again) a leading science in the research of images/pictures⁵² I have tried to analyse what the protagonists of “Bildwissenschaft” understand and talk about when they speak of linguistic methods or discourses and how the

49 If one reads recent texts more closely it seems that meanwhile doubt spreads in “Bildwissenschaft” itself whether this is true or possible. See Boehm in Belting 2007 (see footnote 13), pp. 27f.

50 See an overview on this subject in Sigrid Schade, “Die Kunst des Kommentars”, in: *Kunstforum International* (Kunst und Philosophie), 100 (1989), pp. 370–376.

51 Mieke Bal/Norman Bryson, “Semiotics and Art History”, in: *Art Bulletin* 73 (1991), No. 2, pp. 176–208.

52 Schade 2001 (see footnote 36), pp. 374–378

misunderstanding of the linguistic turn is constitutive of their thinking. I too have made the proposition to turn to semiological and cultural analysis, based on the knowledge that neither text nor image alone can build or function as a language, by which I mean a structure where image and term are linked in a way – according to de Saussure – usually one of them being invisible but present through agreement, repetition and memory – so that they can signify, produce meaning and engender specific social practices within a historically, culturally and socially defined environment. Since these are some of the premises of the work which have been done in gender studies and related fields of cultural and visual studies, it is only within such a perspective that it would be possible to link research in “Bildwissenschaft” to gender studies. The task would be to show that it might be worthwhile, on the condition that the protagonists of “Bildwissenschaft” and their sponsors become aware that – at this very moment – they are once again producing institutional exclusions of women in conjunction with the exclusion of gender studies approaches and the insights and knowledge this subject field has produced over the last twenty five years, and realise that they are claiming a monopoly on their questions and subjects which is not legitimate. If they do not want to acknowledge this, the conclusion would be that “Bildwissenschaft” wants to deal with issues in which gender studies (and media sciences) – which means women – have been avant-garde without taking them into account, let alone including them. This doesn’t mean only excluding an already existing corpus of research which of course is also a question of scholarly ethics but it affects the quality of the theories of “Bildwissenschaft” themselves in a way that will situate them as dinosaurs in the histories of the humanities and cultural studies.

What do «Bildwissenschaften» want? In the Vicious Circle of Ironic and Pictorial Turns

Die derzeit im deutschsprachigen Raum konzipierte «Bildwissenschaft» als neue interdisziplinäre Disziplin zur angemessenen Beschreibung und Analyse von Bildern und Bildfunktionen ist derzeit äußerst erfolgreich, was ihre Institutio-

nalisierung und die Generierung von Forschungs-Fördermitteln betrifft. Sie beeinflusst (dadurch) auch internationale Debatten zwischen Kunstgeschichte und Visual (Culture) Studies. Eine eingehende Untersuchung, welche Protagonisten, welche Themen und welche Theoriebildung davon profitieren, zeigt eindeutig, dass die Einführung des Paradigmas «Bildwissenschaft» zum (erneuerten) Ausschluss von Frauen als Wissenschaftlerinnen und von Themen und Theoriebildungen der Gender Studies generell führt. Integriert werden Themen, die in den letzten 25 Jahren erfolgreich von VertreterInnen der Gender Studies erforscht wurden (Verhältnis zwischen Bild und Wort, Bild und Blick, Beziehungen zwischen Bildern, Körpern, Subjektivitäten und Kulturen) – jedoch so, als hätte es diese nicht gegeben. Selbst die von Seiten der gender Studies formulierte Kritik an Konzepten der «Bildwissenschaft» – u. a. die Re-Naturalisierung und Anthropologisierung des Körper- und Bilddiskurses bei Hans Belting, die Problematik der Re-Disziplinierung in Zeiten transdisziplinärer Forschung und das grundsätzliche Missverständnis des «Linguistic Turn» (z. B. bei Gottfried Böhm) als Legitimation einer analytischen Trennung von Bild und Text – werden aufgegriffen, ohne die Autorinnen zu nennen. Offenbar will die Bildwissenschaft einen (neuen) selbstgenügsamen Frauen-freien oder zumindest Gender-freien Raum der Forschung erzeugen.