

Preface to the French Edition (1998).

The genesis of this book lies in my earlier work on iconoclasm and censorship. When, in 1969, I began writing my Oxford doctoral dissertation on *Iconoclasm and Painting in the Revolt of the Netherlands*¹ it was still possible to ask why, with the exception of Byzantinists, art historians had paid so little attention to a subject which seemed to me to stand at the center of their field. The only general work on iconoclasm was the little-known and rather summary book published by Julius von Végh in Strasburg in 1915. Censorship of the arts had received only sporadic attention. Since then, of course, the situation has changed considerably, and the subject of iconoclasm and violence towards images has come to occupy something of a central position in the work of anthropologically and psychologically inclined art historians.

Throughout the 1970s I continued to publish on both ancient and modern iconoclasm, sometimes seeking more general structures of violence towards images. By the 1980s the subject had gained respectability. The collection of essays edited by Martin Warnke published in Munich in 1973, Horst Bredekamp's inexplicably neglected *Kunst als Medium sozialer Konflikte: Bilderkämpfe von der Spätantike bis zur Hussitenrevolution* of 1975, and Dario Gamboni's short book of 1983 on contemporary iconoclasm represent key stages in this development. During this same period I became ever more concerned with other forms of powerful responses to images that had been neglected by art historians -- if not by anthropologists, folklorists, and historians of popular movements. I thus began to devote my attention to the more dramatic kinds of

1. *Iconoclasm and Painting in the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1566-1609*, Oxford University D.Phil thesis, 1979; reprinted New York: Garland, 1988.

devotional and religious responses to images, as well as to sexual ones. Increasingly I realized that positive and negative responses to images were often two sides of the same coin, and that it was precisely this dialectic of response that merited much closer attention than it had hitherto received. Hence the project that culminated in *The Power of Images* of 1989.

No one, least of all I, could have predicted just how timely two of the most central themes in my work would soon become. From the end of 1989, all over Eastern Europe, the images of the old communist regime began to come down. The result was one of the most intense and widespread iconoclastic movements that Europe had seen since the French Revolution. In the United States, the 1989 removal of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* and the Cincinnati trial involving the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe provoked a huge public debate about censorship of the arts. The censorship crisis in the United States lasted for a good two more years, and has still not entirely abated, producing an unprecedented volume of literature on the subject.

What was a trickle of literature in the 1970s dealing with the topics I discuss in *The Power of Images* grew more substantial towards the end of the 1980s and has since become a flood. Coincidentally enough, Paul Zanker published his *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder* at the end of the decade as well,² a major work dealing with the social context and status of images in Augustan Rome. Of course (as is clear from the notes and bibliography of the present book), medievalists had always been concerned with responses to devotional images; but the work of scholars such as Michael Camille, Jeffrey Hamburger, and Jean Wirth, all appearing very shortly after the publication of the

² Paul Zanker, *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder*, Munich: C.H. Beck, ca. 1988.

Power of Images, has rejuvenated this particular field.³ Work on pilgrimage and pilgrimage images, as well as on phenomena such as votive imagery and holy icons continued unabated. More than most other art historians, Victor Stoichita has made issues in the theology of images directly relevant to the sixteenth and seventeenth century works he discussed, whether in the Netherlands or in Spain.⁴ While Byzantinists had long continued to study the iconoclastic movements of the eighth and ninth centuries, suddenly a number of important case studies of later iconoclastic movements appeared, notably the books and articles by Margaret Aston on England, Olivier Christin on France, and Sergiusz Michalski on Eastern Europe and the Reformation in general.⁵ Michalski and Bob Scribner each edited collections of essays on the same topic of historical iconoclasm.⁶ In Germany Moritz Pickshaus attempted to make a broad survey of violence towards images in his book of 1988, while in 1997, Dario Gamboni published the most thoroughgoing analyses yet of iconoclasm and vandalism since the French

³ Michel Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; and Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Rothschild Canticles: Art and Mysticism in Flanders and the Rhineland circa 1300*, New Haven, Yale University Press, ca. 1990; and Jean Wirth, *L'image médiévale: naissance et développements*, Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1989. and the collection of essays he helped edit entitled *L'image et la production du sacré. Actes du colloque de Strasbourg, 20-21 janvier 1988*, Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1991.

⁴ Victor Stoichita, *L'instauration du tableau: métapeinture à l'aube des temps modernes*, Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1993; and *Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art*, London, Reaktion Books: 1995.

⁵ Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts. I. Laws Against Images*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, and *The King's Bedpost; Reformation and Iconography in a Tudor Group Portrait*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993; Olivier Christin, *Une révolution symbolique. L'iconoclasme hugenot et la reconstruction catholique*, Paris, 1991; and Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe*, London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

⁶ Sergiusz Michalski, ed., *Les iconoclastes. L'art et les révolutions. XXVIIe congrès internationale d'histoire de l'art*, Strasbourg, 1989, IV, Strasbourg, 1992; Bob Scribner, ed., *Bilder und Bildersturm im Spätmittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit* (Wolfenbütteler Forschungen, 46), Wiesbaden, 1990.

Revolution.⁷ In France, a number of works have recently appeared dealing with issues I raise in *The Power of Images*, notably those by Alain Besançon, Pierre-Antoine Fabre, and Daniele Menozzi,⁸ though none make any reference to my own work of the last twenty-five years on the subjects they discuss.

These are only a few of the more important examples of the kind of recent work that has expanded on the subject-base of *The Power of Images*; but the book that comes perhaps closest of all to its concerns is, of course, Hans Belting's massive *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* of 1990.⁹ Belting and I met each other at the about the time we were concluding our respective manuscripts, and have remained in friendly discussion over the issues it raises ever since. The major difference in our approaches to very similar problems is that while his book adheres to a strict historical and chronological framework, my own approach, while attentive to particular histories, is more comparative and anthropological. Nor do I share Belting's sense of the rupture between what he calls the era before art, and the era of art that followed on the Reformation. In short, where he is inclined to see difference and rupture between

⁷ Peter Moritz Pickshaus, *Kunstzerstörer. Fallstudien: Tatmotive und Psychogrammen*, Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1988; and Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art. Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution*, London: Reaktion Books, 1997.

⁸ Alain Besançon, *L'image interdite. Une histoire intellectuelle de l'iconoclasme*, Paris: Fayard, 1994; Pierre-Antoine Fabre, *Ignace de Loyola. Le lieu de l'image. Le problème de la composition de lieu dans les pratiques spirituelles et artistiques jésuites de la seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle*, Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, Vrin (sér. Contextes), 1992; Daniele Menozzi, *L'église et les arts visuelles*, Paris: Cerf, 1991.

⁹ Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, Munich: C.H. Beck, 1990.

attitudes towards images in the two eras he identifies, I tend, while acknowledging the differences, to seek out continuities and similarities.¹⁰

Of all the many criticisms of *The Power of Images* that followed in the wake of its initial publication, one in particular has continued to puzzle and to inspire me. This was the allegation that I had somehow failed to acknowledge the influence of context on response. Aside from the fact that almost every piece of art historical writing I had done prior to *The Power of Images* was devoted quite precisely to the pressures of context on responses to particular images, both the introduction to this book and almost every page thereafter make it perfectly clear that I have not the slightest doubt that context -- social, psychological, or historical, or any combination of such factors -- pressures response in a myriad of different ways. Context conditions response. The whole book is predicated around this fundamental assumption. But this seems so self-evident to me that I thought, as I still do, that what really merited attention was the much deeper and more complex question of how to speak about those relations between images and people *upon which context acts* in one way or another. The analysis of this problem seemed to me a much more difficult and challenging task than the comparatively simple study of the social context of images -- "comparatively simple" because it is achievable by any student with a reasonable supply of the philological and research skills necessary for the retrieval of any one of the innumerable items of context that surrounded particular responses to images.

¹⁰ Though I do not, for one moment, consider "the image to be an ever-present reality to which mankind has responded in ever the same way," as Belting maintains in his foreword to the English edition of his book, entitled *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994. For a lengthier and perhaps too polemical outline of my position vis-à-vis Belting's position, see my "Holy Images and Other Images," in: *The Art of Interpreting (Papers in Art History from the Pennsylvania State University)*, ed. Susan C. Scott, University Park (Pennsylvania): The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996, pp. 68-87.

Related to the contextual complaint was the allegation that I spoke of innate responses that were somehow independent of context. But "innate response" was not a term I used in the book, even once. So why these allegations? I can only suppose that they arose as a result of the fear of precisely the kinds of apparently immediate emotional and behavioural responses discussed in these pages and which often seem uncontrolled by the limits of our culture and learning -- and which we prefer not to acknowledge. Nor, for that matter, did I ever refer to the idea of what one reviewer called "unmediated cognitive responses". What I was suggesting (in a relatively understated way, I think), was that we, as historians and anthropologists, ought to be able to devise a way of speaking about the cognitive patterns that underlie particular responses and that are subject to the pressures of context. I was not suggesting that there were no differences between the ways in which different cultures respond to images, but that we should be capable, in principle at least, of plumbing beneath the surface of response to extract some of the fundamental cognitive patterns that arise from the exchange between figured form and individual beholders.

The Power of Images, then, represents only the first part of a still more ambitious project. In it I only considered the more dramatic and visceral symptoms -- behavioural and emotional -- of the exchange between images and their beholders. I concentrated on the symptoms of response rather than on the analysis of the relationship between how things look and how people respond. This latter task would entail much more complex theoretical work involving philosophical examination of the implications of cognitive psychology and of recent developments -- such as the idea of natural kinds -- in cognitive philosophy. In other words, where *The Power of Images* is avowedly

anthropological in its approach, its sequel will have to be explicitly neurophilosophical. This sequel would hope to offer a critical and theoretical basis for the possibility of establishing correlations between how things look and how people respond. Such a book should, in principle, be able to suggest some of the terms for a theoretical discussion of the mental structures and rules of such correlations, even in the untidy domains of emotion and behaviour.

Ten years or so have elapsed since I originally submitted the manuscript of The Power of Images. In the course of that time I have naturally had the opportunity to consider the ways in which I might have presented matters differently. Amongst the many second thoughts I have inevitably had, three may be of interest to the present reader.

In the first place, I would now be inclined to be more analytical about my notion of repression, and recast it in more strictly Freudian terms. My inclination would be to pursue the tension between repression and culture more explicitly and analytically, since the two seem so clearly at odds in the case of images, particularly in the case of high and canonical images within particular cultures. As I repeatedly declare, we are freer in acknowledging our responses to non-canonical images. I would also try to sketch more fully the importance of Freudian notions of fetishism, and examine the consequences of the frustration that may arise from the fact that the image is always a substitute of one kind or another for a reality that can often not be directly confronted.

In the second place I would perhaps have spelt out more explicitly the ways in which The Power of Images runs against traditional Kantian views of art, such as the detachment of the faculty of desire from feelings of pleasure, and Kant's suffocatingly

negative view of our interest in works of art, in other words, the interest the spectator has in the real existence of the object of representation over and above the representation itself. In practice, as I make clear throughout, I think that the cognitive distinction between sign and signifier collapses very much more frequently than most art historians allow.

Finally, I would be slightly less critical of the practice of formalist criticism and slightly more optimistic about its potential -- at least in principle and in certain domains. Certainly in the sequel to *The Power of Images* I am planning, which will deal with the neurophilosophical aspects of the relations between images and looking, I would hope to reclaim some of the virtues of formalism. It should, however, be pointed out that my argument in the present book was not against formalism *tout court*, but rather against those innumerable cases where formalist analysis proceeds at the expense of the analysis of the effects and powers of images.

I do, of course, have second thoughts about other less crucial matters. I would revise my notion of the Benjaminian view of aura, for example, recasting it in more overtly sociological terms and setting it against my own, rather different view of the persistence of aura. I would also -- to avoid misunderstanding of my overall aim -- be inclined to spell out the difference between the particular concept of response in this book and the kinds of reader-response theory so finely developed by writers such as Hans-Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, amongst many others.

Other, more specific issues and ideas in *The Power of Images* I have developed in the book I wrote with Joseph Kosuth entitled *The Play of the Unmentionable* (New York: The New Press, 1992) and in articles such as "Censorship Revisited" (*Res*, 21, 1992, pp. 5-

11), "Imitation and its Discontents", in *Künstlerischer Austausch/Artistic Exchange. Akten des XVIII. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte, Berlin, 1992*, ed. Thos. W. Gaehtgens, Berlin, 1993, pp. 483-491; and "The Failure of Colour", in *Sight and Insight. Essays on Art and Culture in honour of E.H. Gombrich*, ed. John Onians, London: Phaidon, 1994, pp. 245-262. For a rebuttal of some of the more misguided views of my critics, see my response to John Nash's review of the English edition of *The Power of Images* (in *Art History*, 13, 1990, pp. 566-570) in *Art History*, 15, 1992, pp. 275-278. But I am glad that French readers will now finally have the opportunity to judge the merits of the case for themselves.