СОЦИАЛЬНАЯ СТРУКТУРА, СОЦИАЛЬНЫЕ ИНСТИТУТЫ И ПРОЦЕССЫ / SOCIAL STRUCTURE, SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES

THE CONCEPT OF AN IMAGE IN AN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY

Research article

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Abstract

The concept of an image is a multifaceted subject that spans numerous disciplines, including art history, literature, philosophy, media studies, science, sociology, cultural studies, and technology. The interdisciplinary study of images delves into their creation, representation, interpretation, and influence across various contexts. Historically, images have played a significant role in religious, cultural, and political narratives, evolving in function and significance over centuries. From medieval religious iconography to contemporary digital media, the study of images encompasses a broad spectrum of forms and practices, each contributing to our understanding of visual representation and perception. In the realm of visual arts, images have been central to painting, sculpture, photography, and other artistic disciplines, serving both aesthetic and communicative purposes. The transition from traditional art forms to modern and conceptual art reflects broader cultural and societal changes, with images often challenging and redefining established norms. The introduction of the "pictorial turn" by theorists like W.J.T. Mitchell underscores a shift from linguistic to visual paradigms, profoundly influencing visual culture studies and leading to the development of new academic fields. Philosophical inquiries into images address their representational and ontological aspects, exploring how images construct, distort, and communicate realities. Theories by scholars like Gottfried Boehm and H. Bredekamp highlight the active role of images in shaping human perception and cognition. In contemporary society, technological advancements have revolutionized the production and dissemination of images. Digital technologies, social media, and data visualization tools have expanded the scope and impact of visual communication, making images an integral part of scientific research, media, and cultural studies. The interdisciplinary approach to studying images recognizes their complex and dynamic nature, emphasizing the importance of understanding images not merely as static representations but as active agents in cultural and intellectual discourse.

Keywords: image, image in visual arts, image in philosophy, image in media studies, image in sociology.

КОНЦЕПЦИЯ ОБРАЗА В МЕЖДИСЦИПЛИНАРНЫХ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯХ

Научная статья

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Аннотация

Концепция образа представляет собой многогранный предмет, который охватывает многочисленные дисциплины, включая историю искусств, литературу, философию, медиа-исследования, социологию, культурологию и технологии. Междисциплинарное исследование углубляется в создание образов, представление, интерпретацию и влияние в различных контекстах. Исторически образы играли важную роль в религиозных, культурных и политических повествованиях, развиваясь по функции и значению на протяжении веков. От средневековой религиозной иконографии до современных цифровых средств массовой информации, изучение образов охватывает широкий спектр форм и практик, каждый из которых способствует нашему пониманию визуального представления и восприятия. В сфере изобразительного искусства образы были центральными для живописи, скульптуры, фотографии и других художественных дисциплин, служа как эстетические, так и коммуникативные цели. Переход от традиционных форм искусства к современному и концептуальному искусству отражает более широкие культурные и социальные изменения, причем образы часто сталкиваются и переопределяют установленные нормы. Введение «графического поворота» теоретиками, такими как W.J.T. Митчелл подчеркивает переход от лингвистических к визуальным парадигмам, глубоко влияя на исследования визуальной культуры и приводит к развитию новых академических областей. Философские расследования в изображениях рассматривают их репрезентативные и онтологические аспекты, исследуя, как изображения строят, искажают и передают реалии. Теории таких ученых, как Готфрид Бём и Х. Бредекамп, подчеркивают активную роль изображений в формировании восприятия и познания человека. В современном обществе технологические достижения революционизировали производство и распространение изображений. Цифровые технологии, социальные сети и инструменты визуализации данных расширили масштаб и влияние визуальной коммуникации, что делает изображения неотъемлемой частью научных исследований, средств массовой информации и культурологии. Междисциплинарный подход к изучению образов признает их сложную и динамическую природу, подчеркивая важность понимания образов не только как статических представлений, но и как активных агентов в культурном и интеллектуальном дискурсе.

Ключевые слова: образ, образ в изобразительном искусстве, образ в философии, образ в медиа-исследованиях, образ в социологии.

Introduction

The study of images has a profound historical lineage that encompasses a multitude of disciplines and epochs. In the traditional view, the function of art was predominantly religious, a position that was particularly prevalent during the medieval period and that continued well into the seventeenth century. During this period, many artists belonged to guilds, and academies were rare outside Italy. The Counter-Reformation was a pivotal moment in this context, as it led to a significant increase in Roman Catholic patronage of the arts. This was driven by the Catholic Church's desire to renew itself in the wake of the Protestant Reformation. The term 'propaganda' has its roots in 1622, when Pope Gregory XV established the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith) in Rome [1]. By the nineteenth century, there were significant shifts in the nature and function of art. Despite the continued dominance of various academies in Europe, the classical ideal began to lose its persuasive power, leading to a breakdown in the established hierarchy of genres. During this period, artworks continued to represent recognisable subjects within a credible, human-centred space. However, compositional effects became increasingly pronounced, and surface handling became more explicit. These changes, though perceived by some contemporaries as indicative of the decline of civilisation, are now regarded as incremental shifts from a modern perspective. In parallel with these developments, the concept of the "pictorial turn", as articulated by theorists such as W. J. T. Mitchell and Gottfried Boehm, emerged during the final two decades of the twentieth century. This "pictorial turn" signified a theoretical and methodological shift from a linguistic paradigm to a visual paradigm, exerting a profound influence on the fields of Visual Culture Studies and Visual Studies. This new paradigm sought to critically examine the increasing role of images in contemporary society, leading to the development of academic disciplines such as American Picture Theory and its German counterpart, Bildwissenschaft (Image Science) [2]. Further contributions to the understanding of images were made by scholars such as Jonathan Crary, whose work, titled "Techniques of the Observer", In his work, "On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century," Crary sought to disassociate the historical construction of vision from the prevailing narrative of art history, which tends to prioritize shifts in representational practices [3]. This historical narrative serves to illustrate the multifaceted and evolving understanding of images, demonstrating how these have been shaped by a convergence of religious, artistic and scientific contexts across centuries.

Image in Philosophy

In the field of philosophy, the concept of the image occupies a prominent position, particularly within the subfield of aesthetics. This exploration frequently examines the relationship between the image and reality, investigating how images may represent, distort, or even create realities. A notable hypothesis in this area is Boehm's "Ikonische Wende" or "iconic turn", which he formulates as part of a broader hermeneutics of the image. Boehm extends H.G. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics to suggest that images possess a "logic of the image" – a non-linguistic, silent logic that operates as a "power of showing" [4]. This concept suggests that images communicate meaning through their intrinsic presence and structural characteristics, exceeding the communicative capabilities of verbal language. Another prominent figure in this field is H. Bredekamp, who posits the theory of the image act, which asserts that images are not merely passive representations but active agents with a life of their own. In contrast to this, Bredekamp's work situates the image within a historical context but ultimately transitions to a philosophical or ontological perspective. He puts forth the notion that images are imbued with *energeia*, a quality he defines as intrinsic power or vitality. Furthermore, the indexicality of the photographic and filmic image represents a significant philosophical concern. C.S. Peirce posited that photographs, due to their optical connection to the objects they depict, serve as evidence that the appearance of the image corresponds to a reality. This indexical nature renders photographs and films particularly significant as objective records, especially in legal and documentary contexts. Furthermore, semiotics is of great consequence in the comprehension of images within the field of philosophy. The structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure and the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce provide fundamental insights. Saussure emphasised that signs derive meaning from their systematic relations to each other rather than from any inherent features or material references [5], [6]. Peirce's semiotic model categorises signs into three principal categories: icons, indices, and symbols. It further dissects the function of images within communication systems. In essence, the philosophical examination of images traverses their logical, historical, and semiotic dimensions, thereby presenting a multifaceted understanding of how images not only represent the world but also engage with and influence human perception and cognition.

Image in Media Studies

In the field of media studies, the concept of an image is understood to extend beyond the mere visual representation of an subject and includes a dynamic and multifaceted role in the transmission of information and cultural narratives. In this context, contemporary types of information and data visualisation, such as media visualisations, have become significant. These visualisations depict visual images in static, animated, or interactive forms and are closely associated with image processing techniques [7]. The objective of media visualisation is to analyse culture by combining statistical data, visual media and computing capacities into a visual production, thereby creating opportunities for semiotics to study these new types of images and their signification models [7]. In addition, the discussion surrounding images in media research incorporates their historical and philosophical aspects. The philosophical inquiry into the nature of images has its roots in antiquity, with figures such as Plato and Aristotle establishing foundational questions that have persisted through Islamic, Christian, and modern intellectual traditions [8]. These questions remain a topic of investigation in contemporary philosophy, cultural studies, and the history of art and ideas [8]. Moreover, the convergence of visual and linguistic media has been a topic of considerable academic interest [4]. W. J. T. Mitchell posits that the notion of linguistic or visual media is a fallacy, suggesting that the pictorial turn in image studies reveals their essential interconnections [4]. Mitchell proposes that image science should not be regarded as a distinct disciplinary field, but rather as a transdisciplinary assemblage of perspectives encompassing the hard

sciences and the history of culture. This approach views images as historical entities with spatial and temporal mobility, reflecting their function in political discourse and wartime propaganda [4]. The advent of digital technology has further transformed the landscape of media studies, facilitating an unprecedented growth in the availability of digital images and other non-textual formats. The advent of the World Wide Web, social media and mobile technology has markedly facilitated the viewing and sharing of images on a global scale, thereby expanding the scope of visual literacy and its application in academic institutions [9]. This digital transformation highlights the necessity of recognising images not merely as fixed representations, but as dynamic entities that interact with cultural and societal dimensions in a multitude of ways [9].

Image in Sociology and Cultural Studies

In the interdisciplinary field of sociology and cultural studies, the concept of an image is understood to extend beyond its visual representation and include its cultural and social implications. This approach is not limited to the conventional domains of art history or visual media, but rather encompasses a diverse array of mediums and their influence on societal structures. For example, visual culture studies examine the relationships between images and their consumers, evaluating their cultural significance in addition to their aesthetic value [12]. At the core of this analysis lies the notion that images are not merely discrete entities but are embedded within an intricate network of contexts, processes, and applications, collectively constituting an 'ecology of images'. This perspective encourages a comprehensive approach to the analysis of images, acknowledging their function in the formation and representation of social realities. In the field of cultural studies, images are regarded as potent instruments for the construction of social narratives pertaining to class, race, and gender. They offer particular insights into the social world and shape the perceptions of those who consume them. Images and visual representations are instrumental in manifesting cultural life and modes of communication, particularly in digital media, where their materiality and politics of representation become crucial areas of study. From a sociological perspective, images also serve an important function in the construction of meaning within a culture. Social actors employ their cultural and representational systems to facilitate communication and to make sense of their world [13]. This is consistent with Saussure's theory of language, which posits that the value of elements in a system is derived from their contextual and relational significance rather than their mere physical existence [14]. The field of visual culture studies frequently intersects with other interdisciplinary areas of study, including performance studies, film studies, psychoanalytic theory, and queer theory. This allows for a comprehensive examination of the ways in which visuality functions as a social phenomenon [12], [15]. This interdisciplinary approach aims to elucidate the processes through which individuals learn to see and understand themselves as viewers, thereby transcending the limitations of traditional disciplinary boundaries [15].

Image and Technology

Digital technology has been particularly instrumental in transforming the processes of image creation and dissemination. The proliferation of the World Wide Web, social media, and mobile technology has facilitated the global viewing and sharing of images. This digital transformation is associated with the increasing significance of images as a means of representing knowledge. Consequently, the role of the image user has evolved from that of a passive viewer to that of an active creator and contributor to visual communication. This shift has significantly altered the manner in which students utilise information resources and present academic work, thereby giving rise to debates concerning the role of images in university education [10]. In the context of scientific fields, the process of visualisation frequently entails the transformation of raw data into images. This is crucial for comprehending phenomena at the nanoscale, where particular imaging techniques and embedded software are employed to register and process raw data into visual formats. It is incumbent upon scientists to select suitable imaging techniques and software that offer tools for colour coding and sharpening images, which are essential for highlighting key aspects of the data and ensuring its intelligibility to both scientific communities and the public [10]. Furthermore, scientific visualisation has become a vital tool for representing numerical spatial data as images. Techniques such as volume rendering in medical imaging, where three-dimensional volumes are created from two-dimensional magnetic resonance imaging or computed tomography scans, and surface rendering of protein molecules are employed to enhance comprehension of the underlying scientific phenomena. The selection of colour maps in these visualisations is of paramount importance for the effective communication of patterns and trends within the data set [6]. It is of the utmost importance to evaluate the images used in research and presentations in order to guarantee their quality, reliability, and appropriateness. The analysis of both the visual elements and the content of an image enables the composition and the message to be understood. In addition, contextual information and technical quality are also taken into account. This rigorous evaluation process guarantees that images serve as effective visual messages and contribute meaningfully to academic and scientific discourse [16].

Conclusion

- The interdisciplinary field of visual culture studies regards images as a central means of representing meaning in the world.

- Despite the proliferation of studies and programmes in visual culture, there is no consensus on its scope, objectives, definitions, or methods.

- In her work, Margaret Dikovitskaya provides an overview of visual culture with the aim of reconciling its diverse theoretical positions and exploring its potential for further research [17], [18]. The field of Visual Culture Studies employs a range of methodologies, including iconography, visual analysis, and ethnography, to analyse visual artefacts. Each of these methodologies offers a unique perspective on the function of images within social and cultural contexts [19].

- The utilisation of visual methodologies is also of paramount importance within the field of interdisciplinary image studies. Gillian Rose's "Visual Methodologies" serves as an invaluable resource for students and academics, offering practical guidance on the design of research projects that employ visual materials. This text emphasises the significance of acquiring an understanding of digital visual media, such as Instagram and TikTok, and provides a comprehensive, step-by-step approach to conducting visual research [20].

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