

AN ICONIC TURN IN PHILOSOPHY

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1. Introduction

The term "iconic turn" (*Ikonische Wende*) was introduced in the 90s in a philosophical discourse by Gottfried Boehm. This phrase appeared for the first time in his treatise "Recurrence of Images" (*Wiederkehr der Bilder*), written as an introduction to a collection of essays, entitled *What Is an Image? (Was ist ein Bild)*. This work, particularly the introduction of Boehm, has become in recent years propaedeutic to a discourse which finds resonance not only in the areas of philosophy and art theory, but also in various fields of natural and cultural sciences. The relevance and significance of this discourse has been established mainly through a series of lectures under the theme "Iconic Turn," organized since the winter semester 2001-2002 by the Hubert Burda Foundation at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. The speakers were, apart from renowned art historians like Gottfried Boehm, Willibald Sauerländer, and Martin Kemp, also scholars from other philosophical and scientific disciplines as well as from art, such as Wim Wenders (Film Aesthetics), Alexander Kitler (Media Studies), John Michael Krois (Philosophy of Cultural Anthropology), Bill Viola (Video Artist), Heinz Otto Peitgen (Mathematics), Jan Assman (Egyptology), Wolf Singer (Neurosciences/Philosophy), Lord Norman Foster (Architecture), and others.

2. Silent Logos

In his lecture (*"Jenseits der Sprache: Anmerkungen zur Logik der Bilder"*) Gottfried Boehm attempts to define the iconic turn in terms of a *turn to images (Wende zum Bild)*. Accordingly, Boehm begins his lecture by posing a fundamental question regarding the *logic of images*. I quote his first hypothetical observation: "*Bilder besitzen eine eigene, nur ihnen zugehörige*

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Logik. Unter Logik verstehen wir die konsistente Erzeugung vom Sinn aus genuine bildnerischen Mitteln. Diese Logik ist nicht prädikativ... Diese Logik wird nicht gesprochen, sie wird wahrnehmend realisiert."¹

Boehm postulates a logic of images apparently to establish a logical foundation for the *iconic turn*, and clearly tries to introduce the image problem (*Bildfrage*) in a philosophical discourse.² A pictorial logic is, however, a *silent logic* (*stumme Logos*) and stays in contrast to linguistically-predicative logic. Boehm discusses the image problem, if we closely observe the development of his image theory in the last 30 years (since his dissertation *Studien zur Perspektive*³), predominantly in the framework of ontology. His basic question is: What is an image? The search for a logic of image is premised on it. Here it is not a question of *how* (*Wie-Frage*) but a question of *what* (*Was-Frage*) that has been clearly posed within an ontological context. Boehm attempts to derive the concept of an iconic turn – a rather prognostic point of view – programmatically from his basic philosophical notion of *iconic difference*. This is obviously analogous to the "ontological difference," a basic notion in Heidegger's *fundamental ontology*, as Boehm himself explains in his treatise. A second base of the *iconic turn* is the presumption of a historic deviation from the *linguistic turn*. Boehm conceives the iconic turn in principle as a necessary philosophical break with the linguistic turn. Therefore, he seeks in the discourse on iconic turn the possibility and legitimacy of a logic of images.

Before I explain the manifoldness of this notion and the possible impact of this radical view point in the fields of science, I would, first of all, closely examine its philosophical foundations, particularly the epistemological and ontological *motives* behind its emergence. In the first place, it is to be observed that the discourse on an iconic turn begins with a "*Was-Frage*," i.e., with question about the *being* (*Sein*) of image, and not

¹"Images have their own logic. We understand this logic as consistent production of meaning from genuine visual means. This logic is not predicative... This logic is not spoken, it is perceptively realized" (Author's Translation).

²It is to be noted here that Gottfried Boehm initially studied philosophy in Heidelberg and worked under the renowned philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer in a doctoral research programme. He and Gadamer have had a long association both in academic research and publications – mostly in the field of Hermeneutics. However, over the years, Boehm tended to a *Bildhermeneutik* (Hermeneutics of Images) as compared to the text oriented Hermeneutics practised by most of the students of Gadamer.

³Gottfried Boehm, "*Studien zur Perspektivität*," *Philosophie und Kunst in der frühen Neuzeit*, Heidelberg: Winter 1969.

with a "Wie-Frage," which relates primarily to the *mode* of image. This implies that both the *iconic difference* and its prognostic derivative *iconic turn* form ontological notions. The analogy between an iconic difference and the ontological difference, as undertaken by Boehm in his treatise, shows how the notion of iconic difference is rooted in a Heideggerian fundamental ontology. Boehm, however, distances from a radical stance over *Fundamentalontologie*, he rather draws upon a revised form of Heideggerian ontology as represented in Gadamer's Hermeneutics. Boehm deviates strategically from a text oriented or *logo-centric* Hermeneutics and tends towards a non-linguistic, i.e., *icono-centric* Hermeneutics. In this way, the *iconic turn* is also based on a revision of Gadamerian Hermeneutics as the ontology – as science of being – here is not restricted to logos alone but, in addition, extended to pre-logical and purely aesthetical foundations of perception.

Even as a student of Gadamer, Boehm distanced himself in his image theory – more precisely, in his question about the logic of images – from the conventional hermeneutics. In a well known treatise *Stumme Logos: Elemente einer Bildwissenschaft*,⁴ Boehm observes that the images possess or express a silent logos. In Greek, the word 'logos' means "the spoken word." The silent logo of images is not yet speechless; it has its own language. However, we do not hear what the images speak; we only *see* them. A unique logic underlies the silence of images. Here the notion of silent logos borders on metaphor; the discourse on silent logos is obviously metaphorical. This treatise attempts to translate the basic notion of silent logos, which characterizes the prognostic concept of *iconic turn*, into a philosophy, freeing it thus from its metaphoricity.

Philosophically considered, the iconic turn signals – after the linguistic turn – the resurgence of the long oppressed aesthetics, or rather their gradual triumph over the long reign of logic. The aforementioned treatise of Boehm, which prognoses an iconic turn is titled accordingly as *Die Wiederkehr der Bilder* (The recurrence of images). The notion of an iconic turn – similar to the notion of postmodernism – can primarily be taken as symptomatic. Which philosophical turn is here symptomatically implied? The iconic turn apparently signals in the history of philosophy the resurgence of epistemology after a long time of its suppression by a

⁴Gottfried Boehm, "Der stumme Logos: Elemente einer Bildwissenschaft," *Jahrbuch des Wissenschaftskollegs zu Berlin*, Berlin: Institute for Advanced Study, 2001/2002.

Heideggerian fundamental ontology. It is well known that Heidegger opposed the modern epistemology, especially the epistemological foundations of Kantian transcendental philosophy, by absolutizing the ontology (in a fundamental ontology) and by his radical scepticism about the modern science and technology. Heidegger seems to have ignored the Cartesian foundations of phenomenology in favour of an uncompromising *Seinslehre* (doctrine of being). According to Boehm, the phenomenology of Husserl has been significantly revised by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his seminal work *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty takes an interesting position in his philosophy which essentially deviates from the conventional phenomenology. That is to say that his phenomenology is not caught in a transcendental-subjective-intentionality but crosses over the bounds of subjectivity into the body. This transition can be observed as a strategic return from logic to aesthetics, i.e., to the sensory perceptions within the context of phenomenology. The perception is no longer subordinated to logical thinking; against thinking the perception attains epistemologically its autonomy and legitimacy.

3. The Iconic Difference

The foundation of *Iconic Turn* in phenomenology, in particular in its revision (how Boehm denotes it) by Merleau Ponty, also indicates its epistemological motives. *Iconic difference* can, indeed, be analogized to *ontological difference*, but this notion is based more on an epistemological and barely on an ontological *differentiation*. While the *ontological difference* emphasizes a fundamental distinction between the modes of being, i.e., between Being and being (*Sein und Dasein*), the *iconic difference* seems to imply a rather perceptual differentiation between purely logical and purely aesthetical domains of the subject. In other words, the iconic difference, as compared to the ontological difference, is based on an epistemological differentiation which, however, does not subject to a mere conventional philosophical epistemology but redefines epistemology itself in an indispensable unity with ontology. Iconic difference does not divide the existential modes of being apart: as against this, it isolates or rather frees the image – in general, the aesthetic element – from the dominance of a logic-abstract being (in an ontology). The iconic turn contrasts itself with a logical subject (or, more precisely, with the abstract logification of a subject that cognizes) by presupposing an aesthetically concretizing subjectivity.

The notions of *iconic difference* and *iconic turn* are apparently built on a peculiar contemplation of image, i.e., on an image theory that has ontological implications and, as such, cannot be merely reduced to a theory of perception. *Iconic turn* emphasizes a different mode of being; it implicates the appearance of Being in image. An obvious anti-platonic tendency is indicated where the image is dignified anew against a belittlement in its epistemological and ontological status in the platonic system. The Being seems thereby to regain the lost or suppressed aesthetical, i.e., visual base. Such a resurgence of images as carriers and testimonies of Being marks, however, not only a radical reversal of the *ontological* hierarchy of the spheres of Being (what Plato demonstrates in his sun, line, and cave parables), but also a clear epistemological return from the hegemony of *logos* to the truth of *aistheisis*. The truth of images is thereby dignified against the truth of *logos* that Plato absolutized in his philosophical system.

In platonic hierarchy of the phases of cognition, as represented clearly in line and cave parables, the image, which forms only a mimesis of a real appearance, has the lowest status of Being. The gradation of Being rises as we move from images to their objects, i.e., appearances, and further – in the sphere of visible objects – to axiomatic forms of objects (number, basic geometrical forms, etc.) finally to the ideas that form the realm of *logos*. This platonic hierarchy of Being is reversed in *iconic turn*. The gradation of Being rises if we move from *logos* towards images. Boehm's notion of an iconic turn is clearly based on the philosophy of his teacher, Hans-Georg Gadamer. In his seminal work *Truth and Methods* (*Wahrheit und Methode*), Gadamer speaks of a "valence of Being" (*Seinsvalenz*) that images represent, i.e., how the Being is elevated in an image. Moreover, this reversal has invariably a theological implication. In his dissertation, "Studies on Perspectives" (*Studien zur Perspektive*), Gottfried Boehm emphasizes how the art in the age of Renaissance central perspective became more aesthetically⁵ oriented (*das Ästhetischwerden der Kunst*), indicating thus the symbolic significance of mimesis – imitation of nature – as philosophy of the Renaissance art in contrast to the sacramental art of the Middle Ages. In place of representing biblical motives, scenes from heaven and hell, etc., entered the purely mimetic representation of

⁵Here the term *aesthetics* denotes – true to the original meaning of *aistheisis* – the science of perception, particularly vision, and not the science of art as normally conceived.

nature and culture – or natural and cultural appearances – that are immediately perceived on earth. The leitmotif of aestheticizing art implies clearly an *aesthetic turn* in Renaissance that found its profound expression not only in plastic art but also in different areas of culture – in the development of modern science and technology, particularly in the emergence of applied sciences. The aesthetic turn in Renaissance has also been discussed in a few seminal works of renowned art historians in the 20th century. In his treatise *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, Erwin Panofsky considers this epochal-symbolic development in plastic art and architecture, as represented adequately in the discovery of Renaissance central perspective, as the “end of theocracy” and, subsequently, as the “origin of anthropocracy.”

4. Being as Embodiment

The iconic turn characterizes in principle a return to aisthesis – ontologically and epistemologically – as we have discussed earlier. It seems that the iconic turn is realized ontologically through a regression from Being to body and epistemologically through a regression from logos to image. Since it relates primarily to image, an epistemological regression in relation to an *iconic difference* is to be emphasized. Such an epistemological regression proves hardly to be ahistoric, as the thesis of Boehm holds, but invariably to be historic. Since the image forms first and foremost an object of vision, Boehm, in reference to a historicity of images, asks about the history of seeing. “Has seeing a history” is for Boehm a fundamental question; he deals with the actuality of this question in many of his treatises. Boehm seems even to consider the historicity of vision as a standard measure for the study of art history that covers predominantly the history of plastic art. According to Boehm, seeing does not prove to be ahistoric, but has a history. However, the historicity of vision refers not just to the history of plastic art but primarily to a philosophy of seeing which is premised on the notion of a regression from Logos to aisthesis.

The iconic turn prognoses an ontological and epistemological regression in which, on the one hand, the Being is identified in the very embodiment (and not in an immaterial *abstractum*) and, on the other, the truth and legitimacy of images are epistemologically conceded against the hegemony of logos which characterized from the outset the history of philosophy. Similar to the much acclaimed *linguistic turn*, *avant garde* as well as *postmodernism*, the iconic turn signals a radical break with the

tradition of modernity. Many of the philosophic, literary, and artistic movements in the 20th century were apparently characterized by the fact that they were grown out of a resistance to the modernity and its triumphant moves. A characteristic of this development is that it began to view, i.e., to interpret the tradition differently (an appropriate example would be Derrida's doctrine of *deconstruction* which is not restricted to postmodernism alone but extended, i.e., traced back to the entire tradition of western philosophy). In this regard, the iconic turn does not seem to be a radical break with the tradition or, on the contrary, its continuation, but a remarkable deviation from the long ruling modern subjectivism. Despite all the historically known refutations, confrontations, and major systematic reversals, we still live in the shadow of Plato. A general conviction grows since Nietzsche's radical confrontation with Platonism, that philosophy has once and for all said farewell to the traditional metaphysics or to the love for the *truth* (i.e., that which traditionally characterized philosophy). The more often they propagated *end of metaphysics*, which underlies – in the form of a leitmotif – almost all of the anti-metaphysical traditions of philosophy in our time, has found different expressions in modernism as well as in postmodernism. In an aphorism, "How the true world became a fable" (from *Twilight of Idols*), which apparently attempts to reverse the ontological and epistemological foundations of philosophy, initiated by Plato in the history of philosophy and sustained in the modernity, Nietzsche points to a radical change in our sensibility or rather in our worldview which would emerge as a consequence of this reversal: "... Demolishing the world of 'Schein'." We should differentiate here a revisionist tendency in an attempt of reversal or restructuring from a radical and perfect break (with all its destructive features). A characteristic *turn* or reversal seems to facilitate us to *see* the past and present tradition in a different light, rather than to deny it. The discourse on a turn is, therefore, not a prognosis of a radical break with the past but a subtle pointer to certain differentiating tendencies in which the tradition advances ahead of its present state.

The *iconic turn* can be observed in this aspect as a significant deviation from the tradition but, at the same time, has recourse to it. In the already mentioned tendency to an epistemological return, the *iconic turn* represents a departure from the traditionally progressive epistemology; however, in its regress to the long suppressed aesthetic foundations, it actually points to a historic recourse. However, to what does the iconic

turn resort? Here, I would like to maintain that the iconic turn of our time would, in relation to its philosophic foundations, recourse to the aesthetic turn of early Modern Age. As already mentioned, the art historians has identified an aesthetic turn in the early Modern Age. An aesthetic turn is implied both in Panofsky's observation of a historic transition from theocracy to anthropocracy as well as in Boehm's notion of an aesthetization (*Ästhetischwerden*) of art. However, it is subject not just to art historic consideration but predominantly to philosophic-theological contexts where it relates to the discovery of central perspective in Renaissance. Mimesis, as foundation of plastic art – particularly painting – seemed to have paved way for the aesthetic turn in which the sacramental art of Middle Ages crossed over to purely aesthetic mimesis. With that mimesis – as the perfect imitation of nature in immediate perception – became an important leitmotif of Renaissance which reinvented the antique in modern contexts. The technique of central perspective became the most significant instrument for the pictorial mimesis and, thereby, the pathfinder to the aesthetic turn of art.

However, we identify in modern philosophy a different direction or tendency which is opposed to aesthetics. From the Cartesian subjectivism to the Kantian transcendental philosophy the dominance of a logical subjectivity over the objectivity of the world had been established programmatically. Through his method of doubt, Descartes distinguishes between two irreducible spheres of reality, namely, the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*. Mind whose existence can be ascertained only in the act of thinking, and the body whose existence is proven only in its spatial extension form the two foundational notions of Cartesian philosophy. The methodic doubt or negation, since its introduction by Descartes, has become one of the basic characteristics of modern epistemology. While Descartes used this method to perfectly separate irreducible spheres of reality, mind and body, Locke and Kant employed an epistemological method of negation to distinguish between the primary and secondary qualities of bodies. The perfect distinction between primary and secondary qualities was, in fact, introduced by Descartes himself (refer the second part of his major work, *Principles of Philosophy*, especially with the title *Principles of bodily things*). However, the Cartesian method of doubt aims principally at an ontological differentiation between the modes of existence of mind and body. We could hold that the methodic doubt in the Cartesian system is primarily an undertaking of ontological differentiation between the existentially irreducible spheres of being, mind and body, before this

method got established – also in the Cartesian system – rather as an epistemological tool to distinguish between the primary and secondary qualities. In both Locke's empiricism and in Kant's transcendentalism, the method of negation – in principle, a modification of the (Cartesian) method of doubt – became exclusively an epistemological tool.

In Descartes' system, the perfect distinction between mind and body as different modes of being is apparently a successful undertaking. However, Descartes necessarily fails in the application of this method in the case of the body which seems to *embody* the mind. This has influenced Merleau-Ponty as he revitalized the Cartesianism in a revised phenomenology of *bodily* perceptions. Through the radical method of doubt Descartes reduces the organic body to a mere functioning automation. Here, I would not like to discuss the philosophical implications of such a reduction. The isolation of body, as resulted from the Cartesian method of doubt, inaugurated a tendency in the tradition of modern philosophy to neglect the body or rather to subordinate its reality to the *certainty* of mind. Through his method of doubt Descartes could ontologically differentiate between the irreducible modes of being, mind, and body, but in the Cartesian system these perfectly distinguished entities do not seem to be equally considered or legitimized. In his epistemology, Descartes is obviously inclined to the dominance of mind or subject. Accordingly, the basic principle in the Cartesian epistemology is *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore, I am). The other irreducible mode of existence, namely, the body as *res extensa*, seems only to be a residue in his methodical doubt. Moreover, Descartes hardly distinguishes a purely spatial extension from bodily extension. In other words, Descartes does not observe space and body as essentially separable modes of being. For Descartes space cannot exist without body; spatial extension *is* invariably a bodily extension. Hence, in the Cartesian system, there are only two basic modes of being (or irreducible modes of existence) in the world: the immaterial and non-extended mind and extended (material) bodies.

The notion of identity between space and body, in which Descartes confronts the philosophical doctrine of void, as held in the Greek philosophy by Democritus, is more of a purely physical than a philosophical point of view. *Space in itself*, i.e., the space independent of the body, is here primarily a purely physical, but not a philosophical, i.e., ontological or epistemological impossibility. Although the science of physics is inevitably based on the philosophical epistemology, can

nevertheless a purely physical point of view be barely appropriated to its epistemological basis? Descartes' analogy between human body and a machine is a striking example for the subtle disparity between purely physical and philosophical-epistemological interpretation. The conception of space and body to be two essentially different modes of being is in principle an epistemological accomplishment that, as such, can be traced back to an ontological differentiation between space and bodies. The assumption of such an ontological differentiation between space and body seems to jeopardize the commonly accepted notion of physics, namely the *materiality* of space. How can the space which has no other qualities other than pure extension be an object of physics, as against the bodies that are composed of primary and secondary qualities?

The abstract space as a *space in itself* had always been considered to be a space in the systems of synthetic (Euclidian) as well as analytic (Cartesian) geometry. Only with the advent of applied sciences the space began to be considered as a purely physical entity. We are not discussing further the question about the distinction or the autonomy of space from the body. We deal with space insofar as it – since Descartes – formed the essential existential mode of bodies. The spatial extension of organic and inorganic bodies (including human bodies) can be observed philosophically – rather than physically – as the *limit* of bodily existence. That is to say, space or spatial extension has the main function to impart the bodies their existential bounds. In Cartesian dualism, the material body is *isolated* from the immaterial mind in its spatial extension. While Descartes emphasizes the undoubted existence of mind in the form of thinking alone (from which all the attributed primary and secondary qualities of bodies can be methodically distinguished, i.e., separated), he tends to isolate, on the other hand, the body *in itself* from the mind with regard to its existence *in space*. Here the spatial extension can be considered to be a carrier of all the causations that effectuate qualitative perceptions in mind. For bodies, the state of *being-isolated-in-space* would imply that they draw their existential limits against the subject that perceives them. In the Cartesian separation between mind and matter, the physical extension of bodies attains its isolation and autonomy from mind in their *spatiality* (i.e., spatial existence) alone.

But where is the mind, if not in space or, more precisely, in the spatially extended body? We easily identify that it is ultimately the body where the three already discussed irreducible basic modes of existence, namely, the mind, the matter, and the space come together and,

consequently, become an irresolvable problem in philosophical – ontological and epistemological – interpretations of mental phenomena. In Cartesian subjectivism, the being is conceived to be identical with the thought. The existence, the consciousness "I am" or "I exist," can finally be ascertained only through conscious thinking. The consciousness of existence and the consciousness of being are considered to be identical in a *process* of thinking, namely "I think." However, this existence indicates more than a being of merely thinking subject, *primarily* a bodily being, an embodiment which *is* and *becomes* in space and time. The bounds of this embodiment that imparts the body its existential autonomy, i.e., an existence *in itself*, are defined by the basic existential modes of bodies in space and time, namely, the spatiality and the temporality of embodiment. The fundamental notion in Cartesian system, "I think, therefore, I am," also negates the *necessary* existence of a spatially extended embodiment in which alone the mind can find its domicile.

5. The Aesthetic Turn

The separation between a *knowing subject* and a *known object* is characteristic for the modern philosophical tradition in general. The modal differentiation or rather polarization between the spheres of the subject and the object, which became propaedeutic to the Cartesian dualism and, as such, the foundation of Cartesian epistemology, does not seem to be a philosophically value-free project. A definite strategy of a worldview apparently underlies the Cartesian isolation of subject from the sphere of material objects. In every methodical and philosophic-propaedeutic differentiation between the spheres of being, as represented almost synonymously through the dualism of *subject and object* or *mind and body*, it is presupposed that these differentiated entities are considered equally. However, most of the modern philosophical distinctions between ontological and epistemological spheres or domains – in the form of dualisms – do not demonstrate such equality. One of the spheres of being is always favoured against the other (which remains differentiated and separated from it). Such favouritisms can become strategies of philosophizing.

Philosophizing is, paradoxically, not and never has been an undertaking where the philosophers searched for value-free knowledge based on purely theoretical premises. The project of philosophizing had always been motivated through subtle social and political interests. Philosophy aims primarily at the true knowledge of the nature of human

subjectivity and its functions of cognition and the world of objects that are cognized by the subject; however, the philosophizing proves often in the history to be a strategic undertaking, an undertaking in which not only a characteristic motive to philosophize for the sake of philosophizing, but also a strategy of a *will to philosophize* become evident. A definite strategy of philosophizing can be identified in the platonic reduction of appearances to mere images as against the *true* ideas as well as in his epistemological and ontological hierarchization of the spheres of being and cognition – from deceptive images to true ideas – as clearly represented in his sun, line, and cave parables.

In general, it is claimed that a pure, i.e., value-free pursuit of truth – to interpret the real world, the human cognition, etc. – underlies the desire to philosophize. We have inclined to see that such an ideal aspiration is accompanied by implicit and explicit strategies. Here one could ask whether the defining expression for philosophy, “love for truth,” denotes ultimately a *strategy* for the truth. We owe Nietzsche the emphasis and legitimization of a strategy of philosophizing, as against the traditional and conventional *belief* in a pure value-free “love for truth” as the essence of philosophy. It was unique in the history of philosophy that a philosopher like Nietzsche confronted first and foremost not with the philosophies themselves – in the western as well as in the eastern tradition – but precisely with the strategies of philosophers (to philosophize, i.e., to create philosophical systems). As never before, this philosopher was able to diagnose various strategies of philosophizing – in contrast to a mere conventional acceptance or a rebellious rejection of the traditional foundations of philosophy – and designate them as the necessary propaedeutic to various philosophical systems.

Thus, Nietzsche diagnosed in the Platonic, Medieval-Aristotelian up till the modern tradition of philosophy, not to mention the oriental philosophies such as Buddhism or Brahmanism (especially Sankara’s Advaita Vedanta) which are often discussed or rather criticized, a strategic hostility towards the body. However, we focus more on the philosophical foundations of these strategies (as emphasized by Nietzsche) and refrain from their religious implications. The notion of “back to body” was not a later development in Nietzsche’s philosophy – in the form of a cultural-critical confrontation with the traditional religious and social moral. Already in one of the early works “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense” (*Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne*), Nietzsche

worked out the foundations of philosophical aestheticism in opposition to the platonic and modern traditions of philosophy.

As apparently a prognostic propaedeutic to an *aesthetic turn*, Nietzsche questions the traditionally ascribed legitimacy of language to be the adequate expression of reality and its truth. "Is language the adequate expression of all realities?"⁶ This question makes us to observe how Nietzsche radically opposed the hegemony of the *logo* and, subsequently, all predicative logics in the Western tradition. According to Nietzsche, the language can hardly enable its creator (*Sprachbildner*, in other words, the individual that cognizes in logic-linguistic modes) to express the truth of the reality; language produces only metaphors in the form of representational cognition. Nietzsche regarded linguistically expressed truths as an *army of metaphors*;⁷ he emphasized the metaphoricity of language – in clear contrast to its traditionally and conventionally attributed logicity. The process of language – the emergence of *terms* (*Begriffe*) – is, according to Nietzsche, a metaphoric process, i.e., a process in which one always creates metaphors. The metaphors arise in every phase of this transition process in which the cognizing subject synthesizes the heterogeneous and absolutely different processes of perception and cognition, e.g., a nerve stimulation (caused by the object) being transposed into an image and the image, in turn, imitated by a sound. In rejecting the pretentious claim that language adequately expresses the truth and emphasizing the metaphoricity of language, Nietzsche is inclined philosophically to the notion of an epistemological regression from subjective metaphoric to the *truth* of objects. Nietzsche, thus, attempts to strategically deconstruct the power of language in her claim to be the expression of truth by methodically returning from subjective *terms* to the

⁶Nietzsche, *Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense* (*Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne*), trans. Daniel Breazeale in *Truth and Philosophy: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the 1870s*, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979, 82.

⁷Nietzsche wrote: "What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins." Nietzsche, *Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense*, 84.

primordially or to a pre-predicative *original state* (*Urzustand*) of the objects. In this epistemological regression, Nietzsche tragically stumbles on the Kantian *thing-in-itself*, on the enigmatic and unknown X, that mysteriously affects the subject or produces in it sensations of an object. As a necessary strategy against this insurmountable limit in the Kantian transcendental philosophy, Nietzsche seems to revitalize or fundamentally revise a Cartesian dualism. Nietzsche separates the sphere of the subject radically from the sphere of the object and points between these spheres, as opposed to the entire tradition of western philosophy, no real causal nexus, no correctness and no expression, but “at the most an aesthetic relation”: “... in any case, it seems to me that the correct perception – which would mean the adequate expression of an object in the subject – is a contradictory impossibility. For between two absolutely different spheres, as between subject and object, there is no causality, no correctness, and no expression; there is, at most, an aesthetic relation: I mean, a suggestive transference, a stammering translation into a completely foreign tongue – for which I there is required, in any case, a freely inventive intermediate sphere and mediating force.”⁸ Nietzsche’s aestheticism is not a mere regression to object, i.e., from logical to purely aesthetical or bodily mode of being, but a reciprocal and, as such, playful correlation between the absolutely different spheres of subject and object. Accordingly, in his emphasis on an aesthetic relation which defines the mode of nexus between subject and object, Nietzsche seems to suggest an *aesthetic turn*, to be more precise, an epistemological turn back to the aesthesis. Nowhere is this leitmotif in Nietzsche adequately represented as in one of the fundamental notions he introduces in his first seminal treatise, *Birth of Tragedy*: “*Nur als ästhetisches Phänomen ist das Dasein der Welt ewig gerechtfertigt.*”⁹

6. Conclusion

The iconic turn seems programmatically to be analogous to the historical aesthetic turn, but it differentiates itself from an epistemological accentuation that characterized the aesthetic turn from the outset. The iconic turn prognoses the recurrence of images, in whose manifestation the

⁸Nietzsche, *Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense*, 86.

⁹“Only as an aesthetic phenomenon is the existence of the world eternally justified.” Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy (Geburt der Tragödie)*, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. III, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1967, 43.

Being triumphs. This indicates that the iconic turn principally refers to an *ontological turn* to the autonomy of the image – more precisely, to the autonomy of the image from the perceiving and knowing, i.e., cognizing subject. The iconic difference denotes, therefore, primarily the recurrence of images and furthermore the *seeing* that creates this phenomenon. The iconic difference that exemplarily characterizes the iconic turn is closely related to the ontological difference. Similarly, the silent logic, as represented in the logic of images, does not prove to be a philosophic-historical continuity of the science of logic, but points to a clear break with the tradition of philosophy which finally established the hegemony of logos, of the language. The silent logic of the image occurs obviously in the primordial domain of perception, i.e., in pure vision. In the generation of meaning, images do not correlate with a logical apprehension, but with a pre-logical and purely aesthetical subjectivity. As Boehm captures it, the logic of images "is not predicative (...) it is perceptively realized."¹⁰ A basic notion of Wittgenstein could be reformulated with respect to the aesthetic turn (which underlies the iconic turn): The limits of my perception mean the limits of my world.¹¹

¹⁰See footnote 1.

¹¹Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, London: Routledge Classics, 2001, 5.6.