

## DGEJ Annual Meeting

### Pictures of Enlightenment / Die Bilder der Aufklärung / Les Images des Lumières

Organisation: Elisabeth Décultot and Daniel Fulda

#### Current State of Research and Research Interest

The history of the Enlightenment cannot be conceived without a history of texts and of textual production. Yet, can its history be written on the basis of pictures? In other words: Which function must be ascribed to pictures in the Enlightenment, in the self-conception of this movement as well as later representations? Indeed, scholars have been increasingly considering the contribution of the eighteenth-century visual arts to the Enlightenment in the past several years, whether it be because the visual arts put themselves at the service of popularising the new sciences, of religious reform, of moral doctrine, or of education (Stafford 1994, Bannasch 2007, Schäfer 2013, Dreyer 2017), whether it be for their role in transforming leader(-ship) ideals (Schieder 2011), or concerning the aesthetic formation of enlightenment precepts (Hofmann 1989, Beck e.g. 1999, Kunst der Aufklärung 2011, Wullen 2012, Hochkirchen 2018). It was J. Starobinski's mid-twentieth-century attempt to create the portrait of the era on the basis of pictures that led the way to such studies (French original 1964). An important subdomain – the frontispiece of philosophical works – has been made accessible by W. Schneiders in 1990 (for a current discussion of the genre of the 'frontispiece', see Jung 2018). The light metaphor that certainly suggests itself on account of its close reference to the programmatic *term* 'Aufklärung/lumières/to enlighten', is the subject of further studies besides Schneiders (Reichardt 1998; Zelle 2002; Outram 2006; Fulda 2017).

The intensive discussions of the relations of, or interferences between, text and image that the cultural studies have recently engaged in, have as yet evaded the semantic and pictorial field of the Enlightenment. The thematic focus of the DGEJ annual conference 2020 responds to this scholarly desideratum. The key question concerns the correlation of the Enlightenment and the picture. We understand *pictures* as material, non-linguistic visual representations. The conference does not aim at conceptualising an art history of the Enlightenment – this would be a far more general topic that would simultaneously entail a limitation, as our approach does not only consider artistic works, but also technical drawings, depictions of everyday objects, tables and diagrams or artisanal book illustrations. It is, hence, the *contribution of pictorial media to the representation of the Enlightenment*, whether intended or effectual, that we would like to move centre stage.

#### Three basic sets of questions

##### 1. Which pictures?

In the first place, the question is whether pictures can be called enlightening or whether they have a specific relationship to the Enlightenment – and, if so, which and why. Are there pictorial forms and motifs or pictorial methods of representation that were perceived as

‘enlightening’ or that are held to be ‘enlightening’? It is essential here to heed the constructed nature of the scholarly enlightenment concept that is by no means present in all the sources to which it is applied today, and whose current usage triggers a wealth of associations.

## 2. *How?*

How do pictures create associations with thoughts, figures, motifs that can be called ‘enlightening’? The semiotically phrased question of modality can also be refocused with an eye to social history. In this case, the Enlightenment is to be regarded as a movement that used particular, e.g. pictorial techniques of reproduction and dissemination of intellectual goods aiming at spreading them among wider circles of society. How did pictures contribute to this approach, complementary to or as distinct from texts? Which role did particular techniques of pictorial reproduction (prints, casts, etc.) play in the dissemination of pictorially communicated ideas of enlightenment? In this sense, the relationship between picture(s) and enlightenment extends to modes of representation as well as the paths of dissemination.

## 3. *Which enlightenment?*

Finally, the conference aims at discussing the question of how considering pictorial material changes our concept of enlightenment, so far primarily based on ideas and texts.

### **Some typical aspects**

#### 1. *Motifs, pictorial methods, genres*

Are there ‘pictures of enlightenment’ and, if so, where do we find them? In Germany, there are some frontispieces (e.g. of Christian Wolff’s *Deutsche Metaphysik* of 1720) and other book illustrations, e.g. Daniel Chodowiecki’s etching “Aufklärung” in the *Göttinger Taschen Calender für das Jahr 1792*, that are conventionally recognised as ‘pictures of enlightenment’. Furthermore, can author portraits or ruler’s portraits, French Revolution pamphlets, history paintings and landscapes, genre scenes, architectural fantasies, stage designs, porcelain miniatures or anatomical drawings also be counted among the ‘pictures of enlightenment’? Which pictorial genres did Enlightenment thinkers use? Which motifs were adopted to express which precepts, claims and promises (but also enemy images) of the Enlightenment – in addition to scenes of enlightenment as suggested by the light metaphor that Enlightenment thinkers employed in almost all European languages? This also means considering whether there are pictorial *methods* that can be called programmatically enlightening.

#### 2. *Techniques and design, media and paths of dissemination*

Which techniques of pictorial production did enlightenment circles rely on? Which role did techniques of copying and reproduction play in particular? How does the choice of such techniques influence the potential meaning of a picture? Within this context, attention should also be given to the question in how far the ‘enlightening’ of the ‘pictures of enlightenment’ is inherent in the modalities of their production and dissemination, much more than in the pictorial content itself.

### *3. Actors and pictorial politics*

Which actors (e.g. painters, sculptors, illustrators, engravers, printers or booksellers) are behind the production, the dissemination and the marketing of the pictures? In how far were these actors part of Enlightenment networks?

### *4. Text and picture*

Which pictures depend upon texts in order to serve as 'pictures of enlightenment', and which achieve this by themselves? How does the picture-text relationship work, whether it be between picture and picture title, between picture and attendant explanation or peritext (e.g. between book illustrations and their textual surroundings, cf. Martin 2005, Haischer 2017)? Did the 'pictures of enlightenment' provoke a "nouvelle épistémologie du regard" (Griener 2010, p. 188) that was expressed e.g. in a new perception of the relationship of text and picture?

16 to 18 September 2020 at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Enlightenment Studies, Halle (Saale)

Conference venue and contact: Interdisziplinäres Zentrum für die Erforschung der Europäischen Aufklärung, Franckeplatz 1, Haus 54, 06110 Halle (Saale), 0345/5521770, [www.izea.uni-halle.de](http://www.izea.uni-halle.de)