Karl Kaser

The Study of Visual Cultures in the Balkans: A Challenge for the 21st Century

We have arrived in the digital age. This arrival has not only significantly impacted on our everyday lives but has changed our lives as scientists and our scientific cultures, be it in the field of medicine or in the social sciences and humanities. Likewise, almost no country in the world has been able to withstand the allure of the visual world. The linguistic turn of the 1970s has lost its comprehensive explanatory power, being complemented by the ongoing visual turn inaugurated in the 1990s.

However, our preoccupation with visual cultures in history and in their transcultural dimensions allegedly constitutes a product of 'Western' scientific development. Likewise, modern visual technologies are considered results of 'Western' technological innovations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. No wonder that theory building in the field of visual culture has been characterised by a Western bias and the almost complete exclusion of other world regions as historical and cultural arenas. This has consequences insofar as the history of non-Western visual cultures has been constructed and widely understood as a history of deficit, with the West the measure of all things.

Indeed, the scientific engagement with visual cultures looks back to sporadic predecessors from the Western hemisphere such as the German art historian and cultural theorist Aby Warburg (1866–1929), German philosopher and essayist Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), French sociologist, philosopher and semiotician Roland Barthes (1915–1980) and the American writer, filmmaker and photography theorist Susan Sontag (1933–2004). The seemingly relentless rise of interest in visual studies was subsequently determined by the proclamation of the 'pictorial turn' by Chicago-based art historian and philosopher W. J. Thomas Mitchell in 1994.

The pictorial turn was not only defined by intrinsic scientific reasons but is embedded in a rapidly changing social environment that can be sketched in brief, and far from completely, by the terms digitalisation, mediatisation, visualisation and globalisation. The 'new media' have changed our life worlds in the last three decades or so more strongly than was the case for our predecessors in the thousands of years before. New

scientific disciplines, such as visual anthropology, visual sociology and visual history, have emerged and explain, using a universalistic approach, visual cultures through Western eyes.

Interdisciplinary research on visual perception and modes of performance or, in other words, on visual cultures in space and time, is still far from being integrated into the generally acknowledged canon of research fields in Caucasian and Balkan studies. More than two decades after the 'proclamation' of the pictorial, iconic or visual turn in the human, cultural and social sciences, the question remains as to whether and in which way this turn may also affect non-Western area studies, such as the study of the Balkans. Will it transgress traditional disciplinary borders? Many questions relating to visual issues will not and cannot focus on the classic set formulated, for example, in art history, which traditionally focuses on the description, analysis and interpretation of pictures, and will not and cannot consider in detail the aesthetics of movies – the essential business of film studies and cinematography. From the perspective of historical anthropology, I am more interested in images and visual content as social and cultural phenomena, and in the analysis of what images do with us, how images change our views on the world, and how subjective, internal images are related to superordinate pictorial cultures and cultures of seeing.

Therefore, decentred theory building in this context and in the sense of not being centred on Western visual cultures as starting points, seems to be more essential than ever. My paper intends to sketch plausible frameworks which may contribute to such an endeavour – decentred theory building – for a region historically located outside the West but increasingly exposed to its visual cultures. We must ask whether the rest of the world has obediently submitted to the visual machinery of the West or has also left its mark on emerging visual cultures. With regard to questions like these, we are still only at the start of the beginning. My remarks, therefore, should be considered as cautiously explorative.

With regard to the term 'visual culture', we must distinguish between a comprehensive and a more specific notion. The comprehensive concept perceives the operations of seeing and being seen as culturally constructed acts; both are neither inherent nor naturally given, but are learned and cultivated. Visual culture, therefore, includes issues related to viewing and representation as well as to the conditions of production and

representation of the visual. Perceived in this way, the visual is not confined to pictures in the broadest sense but includes, for instance, performative processes of every kind.

The more specific notion of visual culture I would like to relate to the epoch in which the mechanically reproducible picture (image print, photograph, movie) began to complement the original (artwork). The former allowed pictures to be brought to people and not vice versa, people to the pictures. The mechanically reproducible picture stimulated a visual culture of modernity around 1900, which developed into a mass phenomenon and in this way into an increasingly powerful force. Meanwhile, we have passed through the age of modern visual culture and have entered the digital age in which pictures not only come to the people, but everybody is able to create and distribute pictures in abundance. We could call this phenomenon 'post-modern', 'hyper-modern' or 'digital' visual culture, constituting not only a target of mass consumption but having become an integrated whole of creation, distribution and consumption.

In the past decade, the institution I am responsible for has conducted research projects dealing with all three stages in the development of visual culture. Thus, my presentation will refer to the most important insights of our research. In pre-secular times, the picture with all its magical, creative and imitable power was strongly controlled by the Abrahamic religions. It was God who created the human being and not vice versa, the human being who created God, other humans and animals by making pictures of them and calling them into existence. This ideology dominated the pre-secular period, which in the Balkans lasted until the second half of the nineteenth century when the photographic image started to become a serious rival of the orthodox icon and a very unwelcome invader of the aniconic Muslim and Jewish religions and social spheres. This will be elaborated in the first section of my presentation.

In the second section, I will direct your attention to the phenomenon of cinema which emerged around 1900 and, together with additional innovations such as the telegraph, telephone, railway, automobile and photography, signalled a broad social, economic and cultural transformation, commonly conceived of as modernity. Cinema must be understood as central component of 'a culture of modern life'.

The third section will address a central issue of digital modernity, namely the conflicting visual representations of femininities and masculinities since the early 1990s. It appears that pictures are no longer only objects of consumption but have even become agents in

gender relations, pushing them in the controversial directions unfolding between secular westernisation and strict religious and cultural moral systems, between 'realia and utopia'.

1) The Pre-secular History of Visual Cultures – Religious Pictorial Confinement

One of the prime challenges for a historical anthropology of the visual with regard to the Balkan and Caucasian countries is to study the amalgamation of visual cultures in the Balkans with those spread by the industrialised West in the second half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, when in the course of secularisation processes western visual modernity became an alternative to the previously religiously charged ways of seeing and viewing.

The emergence of visual culture (in the aforementioned more specific sense) in the region must be located significantly later than in the West. The earliest manifestations of the mechanically reproducible image in the realm of Western Christianity – the printed picture – were the woodcut, the copper engraving and the etching. Techniques to reproduce the picture are even older than the printed text based on mobile letters. The earliest known woodcuts date from the late fourteenth century – half a century before Gutenberg's printing of the Bible. Around the middle of the fifteenth century, etching was introduced and cheap leaflets and broadsides reached the public even in the countryside. Provoked by a wave of laic piety, the interest in prints increased significantly.

Analogous developments were not possible in the Balkans because the Orthodox Church adhered to the canonised painting of icons, which prevented and sometimes even suppressed methods of mechanical reproduction in relation to the holy icon. Only in the eighteenth century did the mechanical reproduction of icons seem to gradually gain acceptance. Similarly, in Islamic art production, mechanical reproduction was banned in the age of the quill and written calligraphy. Judaism, on the other hand, joyfully welcomed the technology of print reproduction but limited printing to the holy texts, since pictures would not contribute to the piety of the devout. These are the main reasons why the first traces of visual culture in the Balkans can be identified only centuries later compared to the West, and coincided with the distribution of

photographic images and the emergence of secularisation processes from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. Photography as an early expression of Western visual modernity met the visual traditions in the Balkans almost unmediated. However, to derive from this fact a chronic backwardness of the region compared to the West would be wrong. Starting with a few bourgeois camera enthusiasts and, to our surprise, with Orthodox monks taking photographs as early mediating actors, the temporal distance between the two areas regarding the reception of film, television and eventually the digital image, became increasingly shorter.

The scepticism of the Abrahamic religions (except Catholicism) regarding the image referred to verses of the Second Commandment of the Old Testament in the second book of Moses (Exodus 20: 4–5):

You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them…

Accordingly, the visual representation of God, human beings and animals – fish included – was prohibited. God's monopoly on the creation of the world was not to be challenged by human artefacts, and man was not allowed to venerate them. Despite the clarity of the Commandment, the intensity of the rejection of the image should be seen against the historical backdrop of the predominance of heathen images and objects; therefore, the Commandment has been interpreted differently over the course of time. Even today, the Second Commandment is still meaningful in Judaism and Islam – and not only for the pious. However, its application has been largely reduced to a ban on the pictorial representation of Allah and Jahveh and of the human body in revealing dress.

During the long pre-secular era, pictorial cultures were religiously charged. Whereas Orthodox Christianity elevated the icon to the status of a sacred image, Judaism remained hostile to images in general and Islam remained at least sceptical of images. Judaism and Islam were very close regarding the rejection of the image on the basis of the Second Commandment, whereas image-affirmative Orthodox Christianity went in the opposite direction. Whereas in Islam and Judaism only the holy scriptures had sacred meaning, in Eastern Christianity holy images and holy scriptures were of equal importance.

However, there were also important similarities with regard to the religious acceptance of images. Just to mention two of them:

1) the rejection of three-dimensionality, except in Catholicism. Its chief danger was seen to lie in the fact that plastic, figurative representation came too close to earthly, human beings. Therefore, the Ottoman-governed lands had no figurative monumental art in the public sphere until the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first public sculpture in Istanbul was commissioned by the Turkish government only in 1928, and created by the Italian artist Pietro Canonica. It was placed on the busy Taksim Square. [Albania's first monumental sculpture in the public space – the equestrian statue of Skanderbeg in downtown Tirana – was constructed much later, only in 1968.]

2) the rejection of the painter's perspective in Orthodox icon painting, Muslim calligraphy and Jewish book painting. From approximately 1300 AD, paintings in the Roman Catholic lands changed perspective: the painter's eye became the central point of reference. In contrast, the icon painting of the Christian East used the central perspective as its guiding principle. This meant that God's perspective on the human being and not vice versa determined the painting's perspective. The question of perspective also divided Arabic-Islamic and Western geometry. Arabic geometry, which also served as an artistic ideal in the Ottoman Empire, had no relation to the human viewpoint; the geometric pattern was considered to exist autonomously. In the West, descriptive geometry with a focus on the technical image, mathematics and the human perspective, dominated from the seventeenth century. Arabic-Islamic geometry considered the human eye to be deceivable; objects were depicted without perspective. Whereas in the West descriptive geometry became all important, in the Islamic world depicted geometry remained the leading principle, except for military purposes.

Against this background, the population of the Balkans was hardly touched by the invention of photography and the first marketable camera (1839) in the subsequent decades – except for the few mentioned intermediating agents and the fact that more and more travellers from Western Europe arrived in the cities, surprising people with their inconvenient exposure apparatuses. The desire to be photographed among the indigenous population was rather limited.

However, the first photographers in the Balkans provoked a process that would connect the Balkan population with Western visual modernity. Whether welcome or not, this

conjunction was established. The traditional, religion-based visual cultures had been relatively autonomous but were no longer so. Cameras not only produced mechanically reproducible pictures but as a rule, secular motifs. A new era had begun – the era of modern visual culture. However, the decisive question as to whether this constituted a pure copy of Western visual culture or emerged as a result of the activities of specific regional agents has remained largely unanswered by research.

2) Cinema and the Culture of Modern Life

Available empirical data indicates that following the introduction of the photo camera, additional Western visual technologies and skills like film and projectors had been imported and integrated by and large by the end of the nineteenth century. Architects, painters, sculptors and theatre and film actors from Western countries were invited to apply their expertise and to train locals in the new technologies. Governments dispatched first generations of students to Western universities and art academies for training and instructed them to pass on their acquired knowledge to the next generation. Modern visual cultures began to develop sporadically in the years before World War I in much of the Ottoman Empire, as well as in the former Ottoman European countries.

We must consider that these pioneering visual technologies did not originally emanate from the needs of the majority population in the Balkans. On the contrary, there was even considerable opposition to the introduction of photography and film. Another factor that needs consideration is that technology could be accepted as it was; however, how and for what purposes was it used? Was it adapted to meet local cultural needs, or did it enforce cultural reorientation in line with Western practices of seeing? Empirical evidence indicates an amalgamation of local traditions with Western modernity in the form of cultural adaptations of Western visual technologies to local needs. This amalgam was not consistently intense, neither in the various media nor over time. In Turkey, for instance, until the 1960s Hollywood films were adapted to the cultural needs of the country's population by cutting out and inserting scenes, and in socialist countries they were even partly banned.

The movie was a product , and at the same time the leading medium, of industrial modernity. For Greek film historian Vrasidas Karalis, the cinema constituted one of the most important arts of capitalistic modernity, which required a radical break with established religious practices regarding aesthetics, perception and articulation.

However, questions arise as to how the Orthodox Churches reacted to innovations arriving from the Catholic and Protestant West, and how the Muslim and Jewish populations came to terms with photography and cinema? And secondly, a question that has been rarely raised: what were the effects of cinema and modern visual mass culture on population groups still immersed in traditional and religious cultures of seeing? How, when and by what means did people learn to see from a secular perspective?

It is not so easy to find answers to these questions. I believe that two theoretical aspects should be considered:

1) It has become common knowledge that the sense of vision (*Sehsinn*) is biologically determined, but *how* we see, *what* we see and which meaning we attach to it, are culturally learned and culturally shaped. The meanings we give to what we see depend on temporal contexts, on our age, sex, profession and religious affiliation, and especially on the traditions of seeing into which we were born.

2) We are embedded in traditions of seeing that are shaped by the relationship between external and internal imageries or, metaphorically speaking, between external and internal 'picture galleries'. Brain research indicates that the internal picture gallery plays a key role in establishing the meaning of externally perceived pictures. Visual cultures emerge only because we collectively agree upon modes of visual performance and visual reception. Based on the internal picture gallery, we decide what is meaningful to us. The challenge of rejection and acceptance emerges as soon as unknown visual impulses appear that are not connectable with our internal visual data storage. Only if external impulses are acceptable do we start a learning process. Research confirms that the picture stores in our internal gallery can be very stable. We are able to adapt this library to new challenges and to harmonise visual impulses from various temporal and cultural sources. This means, for instance, that we can simultaneously venerate holy icons (in the Orthodox tradition) and movie icons (in the Hollywood tradition).

Cinema became the first visual mass medium, and contributed significantly to extend individual and collective internal picture galleries. As the number one visual mass phenomenon, cinema played a key role in the emergence of secular visual cultures. American and Soviet movies transcended ways of seeing shaped by tradition and religion and created emotions related to illusions of a better life. As different as they were ideologically, Socialist and Hollywood cinema fulfilled one and the same function, namely to visualise secular modernities.

In the interwar period and from a global perspective, cinema constituted an almost exclusively American and European phenomenon. In 1927, out of 50,000 cinemas worldwide, 80 percent operated in Europe and the U.S. In the Balkans, however, cinema remained a marginal phenomenon until the 1950s and 1960s when it also became established as a medium of mass entertainment. Strikingly enough, Turkey as the largest country in the region did not have more cinemas than the small Baltic countries of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia (1931). Cinema constituted an almost exclusively urban form of pleasure, and found its way into the interior only very slowly. Towns such as Kayseri or Sivas with populations between 30,000 and 40,000 did not have a single permanent cinema in 1933. Similarly, in Bulgaria the low number of cinemas in 1923 is striking (23 cinemas countrywide). [The distribution of cinemas in the countryside seems to have been scarce. In the second half of 1944, in the region of Gorna Džumaja (Blagoevgrad) in the southwest of the country, there were only nine cinemas; six of them were in urban centres. Only five percent of the rural population had the opportunity to attend film screenings].

In the second half of the 1940s, a turn could be observed in cinema from marginal to mass-produced popular entertainment. This was also the era of emerging international political confrontation between the Soviet Bloc and the so-called 'free world', led by the United States. For both parties, cinema as a cultural 'soft power' began to play an enormous role, since the border between the two blocs passed through Central and Southeast Europe. Cold War tensions created a 'cold war cinema'. The socialist countries put considerable efforts into increasing the number of cinemas. Special attention was paid to the countryside, where the rural population was generally rather sceptical of the new state power. The aim of these efforts was clear: cinema constituted a perfect instrument for political propaganda. On the other side of the iron curtain going up across Europe, the United States was highly interested in increasing the number of

cinemas in Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia and in the mass screening of Hollywood films. The superpower invested a significant number of U.S. dollars in improving the infrastructure and economic capacities of both countries. This included boosting the circulation of U.S. movies.

To conclude, in the 1950s and 1960s cinema became the most popular form of entertainment in the Balkans, too. Over these two decades, the population was massively included into the sphere of visual modernity. It was primarily a young age cohort that was fascinated by the movie. Cinema extended the internal picture galleries of this generation with images that were indissolubly associated with emotions connected to consumption and a better life. The 'religious gaze' lost its former power. However, along the frontlines of the Cold War there was not much space left for amalgamation processes that merged local and imperialist visualities.

3) Realia and Utopia in the Digital Age – Femininities and Masculinities

Around 1970, cinema lost its hegemonic power in terms of broadcasting visual information and entertainment, and was substituted by the emerging state-controlled television stations for approximately two decades. In the 1990s, later than in the United States but simultaneously with the other European countries, the Balkan region was included in the global, commercial production of digital images, their creation and distribution. One of the characteristics of the digital age is that pictures have not only increased their potential to intensify permanent entertainment but also their potential to intensify their own efficacy. They have become actors in the truest sense of the word. Pictures make us turn *realia* into *utopia* and *utopia* into *realia*. What does this mean? In the following paragraphs I will exemplify my thesis by referring to conflicting visual constructions of femininities and masculinities in the Balkans.

The extensive privatisation and liberalisation of the media market has had at least four significant consequences for the creation of new visual *utopia,* primarily in relation to femininities but ultimately also to masculinities:

(1) The transformation of the socialist economic system into free-market capitalism led to a complete reversal of gender ideologies. Women now desired to do away with the repressive imposition of ideologically controlled definitions of femininity, and to become

part of the visual fantasy created in the images of Western-style advertising (Ibroscheva 2013).

(2) The commercialisation of media markets increased the share of foreign leisure TV, introducing new gender stereotypes related specifically to the sexualisation of women's bodies (Pajnik 2012, 108–9).

(3) The commercialisation of the media sphere included the wholesale adoption of Western genres and formats such as reality TV, lifestyle magazines, tabloid newspapers and a variety of soft and hardcore pornographic products. The privatised, commercial media not only overwhelmingly portrayed women in highly sexualised and commodified ways that were unprecedented in socialist times, but in addition, emerging media culture often went beyond simply copying Western media trends and took them to new extremes in their local adaptations (Kaneva and Ibroscheva 2015, 229).

(4) Especially in Turkey, entrepreneurs with conservative religious backgrounds benefitted from these changes in the media landscape. Along with the politicisation of Islam, an Islamic consumer-scape emerged in the 1990s. These entrepreneurs strengthened their position on the market, formed new business associations and began to compete with the established secular elite in almost all economic sectors. For the average citizen, the most visible sign of this change was the increasing number of female students wearing head coverings at Istanbul's university gates. The so-called 'turban problem' was considered by the secular elite as a threat to secularism, and hence rapidly became one of the most disputed problems in the country.

These seemingly conflicting developments in Turkey on the one hand, and in the post-socialist countries on the other, have been driven by the same commercial interests and the same opportunities offered by the digital age to the newly emerging social class of media agents and advertising specialists who are skilled in, among other things, linking *realia* to *utopia* and *utopia* to the *realia* of femininities and masculinities. Among this class are the best analysts of society and its utopian social and cultural desires.

The construction of utopian femininities and masculinities is strongly related to their ideal visual representation on TV, in movies, in popular magazines and all kinds of advertising. Advertising theory asks whether *utopia* is a mirror of a given society or, on the contrary, whether *utopia* moulds a new society. This question is all the more urgent because the onset of post-socialism and post-Kemalism overlapped with the

breakthrough of the digital age that strengthened the utopian component with its seemingly endless possibilities of creating and distributing images. The nature of the relationship between gender-related values in society and gender stereotyping in advertising is the focus of a long-standing debate. According to the 'mirror' argument, advertising reflects values that already prevail in a cultural context. Conversely, the 'mould' argument postulates that advertising shapes and affects the values and views of social reality among its target audience (Nina–Pazarzi and Tsangaris 2008; Kotseva 2014; Zotos and Tsichla 2014). Most likely, the truth lies somewhere in the continuum between the 'mirror' and the 'mould' argument, since advertising as a system of visual representation both reflects and contributes to culture (Zotos and Tsichla 2014).

Coming back to our empirical material, the emerging social class of media agents and advertising specialists in Turkey has identified the interests of those female university students wearing head coverings (mentioned above) as well as the interests of veiled women who have recently been increasing their active involvement in what they perceive as 'modernity-enhancing' pursuits – namely, luxury consumption, fashion, cosmetics, culinary delights, arts, travel, home decoration, fitness and sports. Women's demands are visible in the new forms of Islamic lifestyle and trends that have rapidly emerged in Turkey, including conservative fashion magazines, *tesettür* fashion shows, Islamic soap operas, Muslim haute couture, green pop, Islamic yacht tours and alternative shopping platforms.

Similarly, in the post-socialist world this new class of media agents has been successful in bridging the field of tension that emerged between the intensification of conservative gender ideology in *realia* and the visual representation of emphasised masculine virility and hypersexualised femininity in *utopia*. In the early phase of transition, visual *utopia* was ahead of empirical *realia* in obliterating the socialist past. Typical for the 'wild 1990s' was the construction of what I would like to call 'Goldfinger' masculinity that became synonymous with power and money through its association with bulletproof jeeps, dark sunglasses and thick gold chains worn around the neck. Femininity became synonymous with perfect appearance and exhausting efforts to look beautiful – sometimes including silicone attributes to guarantee perfection – but at all cost with certain clothing brands. This type of beauty shines at receptions and social parties, adorns the man who is proud of her; but when her glamour begins to fade, a new beauty replaces the decorative object (Kirova and Slavova 2012, 77).

It is noteworthy that *realia* and *utopia* in post-socialism are by far not congruent. In *realia,* the hegemonic femininity type is a conservative (pious) wife and mother, housekeeper and submissive spouse, whose sexual behaviour leaves no doubt about her chastity. This femininity type is unsuitable for *utopia* in which the commodification of beauty, sex appeal and eroticism dominates. An analogous commodification of the male body seemed unsuited for the emerging market system in the 'wild 1990s'. Only when enough time went by to replace the crude 'Goldfinger' type with a softer type of masculinity in the 2000s did the commodification of the male body also prove to be a good business concept.

I would argue that after the 'wild 1990s', these local types of utopian femininity and masculinity started to intersect with hegemonic types of femininity and masculinity that have their origins in the West. I have identified three femininity types: 1. housewife and beauty, 2. the displayed body, and 3. strong and beautiful. The hegemonic masculinity type is the 'Marlboro Man': solitary, conquering, dominant, authoritative, rational and outdoor-oriented. This kaleidoscope is completed and contested by masculinity and femininity types that signal piety and Islamic values.

Instead of elaborating on these newly emerging types of femininities and masculinities, I will draw some conclusions. As historians, we are especially proud of one of the central components of our identity: the conviction that the writing of history will never end. Not only because of the dominating linearity of temporality, but also because exactly this linearity includes the idea of progress and the emergence of new ideas, new socioeconomic conditions, new media, theories and methodologies. Therefore, history will never be carved in stone but will be permanently written anew. It has become clear that the increasing power of images forces us to rethink history and to think differently *about* history. The human being has only five senses. The eye and its faculty of sight that allows us to discover at least a few things in the world is one of them. However, the history of the human treatment of the power of vision is contradictory. Many thousands of years ago, early humans started to draw primitive pictures like young children do today. Obviously, they ascribed to them a high degree of power and magic. The emerging Abrahamic religions were intent on establishing control over images or banning them completely, because they were considered heathen heritage and as rivals in the act of creation. The proclamation of an invisible God in the holy scriptures gained absolute significance. Eventually, it was the age of secularisation that re-established an adequate

place for pictures in society. Now, for two or three decades, the image has been striking back. We should not link unnecessary mythology to this re-emergence of the image under fundamentally changed circumstances, nor stress trivial metaphors, but at least we should recognise and admit that this re-emergence cannot, should not and will not leave our scientific disciplines untouched.

Processes like those elaborated in my paper provided the impetus for an application to the European Commission in 2016 for funding of the research and mobility project 'Knowledge Exchange and Academic Cultures in the Humanities: Europe and the Black Sea Region, late 18th – 21st Centuries', involving 50 researchers from twelve countries, eleven of them from the Black Sea Region. From the very beginning, our emphasis was on the exchange and circulation of knowledge and not on the transfer of knowledge from one point to another, which would, as usual, include numerous prejudices. My paper has been unable to completely refute the impression that the West delivers and other regions in the world – such as the Black Sea Region – receive, but perhaps it has been able to diminish, relativise and question ready-made judgments like this.

In my presentation, I have asked whether the rest of the world has obediently submitted to the visual machinery of the West or has also left its own traces on visual cultures. In order to provide profound answers, I have suggested sketching plausible frameworks which could contribute to decentred theory building for a region historically and geographically located outside the West but increasingly exposed to its visual cultures. This ambition is not an isolated one by far because it is rooted, for example, in the tradition of post-colonial theory building. In his book *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference,* the renowned Indian historian Dipesh Chakrabarty has proposed a radical step. His idea is simple: namely not to accept Western Europe as the measure of all things in history. Admittedly, it is nearly impossible to escape this pitfall since the dominating discipline of historiography has been elaborated in the West and we are trained according to its principles. However, what one should and can do is to permanently ask questions from perspectives that Western historians are unaccustomed to. Looking back at previous decades, I am happy to report that I have frequently been confronted with these kinds of voices speaking against the 'westerly wind'. Subsequent discussions have not always been easy, but very helpful, and have shown that where a westerly wind meets an easterly, the sight tends to clear.