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Searching for the Roots of Polish Visual History

Poszukiwanie korzeni polskiej historii wizualnej

ABSTRACT

Contemporary humanities, succumbing to fashions, sometimes forget about their past achievements. In Polish historiography, the author seeks reflection on visuality as a subject of research, as a form of presenting the past, as a means of documentation and, lastly, as an epistemological issue, bringing up the sensual nature of historical cognition in Lelewel. It is precisely in Lelewel's works that he still finds references to earlier traditions. Following the works of Mieczysław Porębski, he describes numerous strands of Polish thought devoted to reflection on the significance of images for historiography, from visual arts to photography to film, tracking the manner of thinking about the past which we now call visual, in historians' and sometimes artists' writings.

Key words: visual history, history of historiography, beginnings of Polish visual history

The development and specialization of today's reflection on visuality have consolidated the view that thinking about the importance of the image in culture has a tradition of barely a few dozen years. Such a belief has become commonplace among young scientists and history students[1]. Respected scholars even claim that: 'In our historiographical practices, we are inclined to use visual images as a complement of our written discourse, rather than as the components of a discourse in its own right, by means of which we might be able to say something different from and other than what we can say in verbal form'[2]. A recurrent opinion is that we are all, by tradition, excessively attached to the linguistic discourse and, therefore, treat the visual discourse in a disregardful way[3]. On the other hand, even iconography itself has existed in historiography for a long time and has never been treated as a margin.

It is probably the recognition enjoyed by Hayden White and Robert A. Rosenstone in the humanities of recent decades that has pushed some interesting threads of Polish thought into oblivion. It is worth reminding here that the specificity of pictorial cognition from the point of view of the research on the past has been considered in our science from its very beginning. Today, we can get the impression that visual history is an entirely new sub-discipline[4], pertinently described by Dorota Skotarczak

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[1]   T. Maćkowski, *Źródła niepisane a perspektywy rozwoju historiografii polskiej. Przyczynek do dyskusji*, in: *Gra i konieczność. Zbiór rozpraw z historii historiografii i filozofii historii*, eds. G.A. Dominiak, J. Ostoja-Zagórski, W. Wrzosek, Bydgoszcz 2005; N. Pater-Ejgierd, *Kultura wizualna a edukacja*, Poznań 2010.

[2]   'W praktyce historiograficznej chętniej wykorzystujemy obrazy wizualne jako uzupełnienie dyskursu pisanego niż jako składniki dyskursu autonomicznego'. H. White, *Historiografia i historiofotia*, transl. Ł. Zaremba, in: *Film i historia. Antologia*, ed. I. Kurz, Warszawa 2008, p. 118.

[3]   *Od fotografii do rzeczywistości wirtualnej*, ed. M. Hopfinger, Warszawa 1997; D. Skotarczak, *Obraz społeczeństwa PRL w komedii filmowej*, Poznań 2004, *passim*, especially pp. 5–11.

[4]   'Historię wizualną można by […] zdefiniować jako zorientowaną interdyscyplinarnie subdyscyplinę historii zajmującą się analizą przedstawień wizualnych i audiowizualnych w kontekście historycznym. Swym zasięgiem objęłaby ona wszystkie te sfery, które występują na styku historii/historiografii, fotografii, filmu, sztuk plastycznych, nowych mediów i wszelkich wizualizacji przeszłości i wiedzy historycznej. […] To media audiowizualne kształtują dziś wiedzę człowieka o świecie, w tym też, jak było za czasów jego przodków. Wobec tego należy pomyśleć o pewnej zmianie kierunku rozwoju humanistyki. Dyscypliny […] które zajmują się głównie współczesnością, mają już za sobą stosowną reorientację […] rozwija się już antropologia wizualna i socjologia wizualna' ['Visual history could be […] defined as an interdisciplinary-oriented subdiscipline of history dealing with the analysis of visual and audio-visual representations in a historical context. It would encompass all the spheres of history/historiography, photography, film, fine arts, new media and all visualizations of the past and of historical knowledge. […] It is audio-visual media that shape human knowledge about the world today, including

in her study which is the first Polish academic book in the field[5]. The researcher indicated that the beginning of reflection on visuality was marked by the works of anthropologists of the late 19th century[6]; her list of Polish pioneers began with Bolesław Matuszewski (1856–1943/44). We can find, however, much older achievements in Polish thought.

My first impetus for writing this article was reading Rosenstone's works, especially the following excerpt: 'Among academic historians there is a general, if largely unarticulated, feeling that historical works conveyed through film, particularly dramatized history, can never be as worthwhile or as 'true' as historical works conveyed through the printed page. Such a notion seems to arise from a sense that words are able to provide a serious and complex past reality that film, with its supposed need to entertain people, can never hope to match'[7]. This is not – and has never been – the case in the Polish tradition. The importance of pictorial cognition – film, preceded by photography, and even earlier by visual arts – has long been underlined.

There is no doubt that the digital culture of the excess of images is a new phenomenon and we are still not fully able to assess its civilizational significance. It does not necessarily follow from it, however, that the horizon of the former historical thought did not encompass the importance of pictorial cognition, visual representations of the past, and the creation of documentation and non-file sources. We have, after all, works

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the knowledge of what life was like it was in the times of our ancestors. Therefore, we should think about a certain change in the direction of the development of the humanities. Disciplines […], which deal mainly with the contemporary time, have already undergone an appropriate reorientation […] visual anthropology and visual sociology are already developing']. D. Skotarczak, *Film i media audiowizualne w refleksji polskich historyków*, 'Kultura i Historia' 2012, 22, http://www.kulturaihistoria.umcs.lublin.pl/archives/4298 [accessed on: 17 VII 2018].

[5]   D. Skotarczak, *Historia wizualna*, Poznań 2012; eadem, *Film i historia w doświadczeniach polskich historyków*, in: *Media audiowizualne w warsztacie historyka*, ed. D. Skotarczak, Poznań 2008; eadem, *Projekt historii wizualnej*, 'Slavia Occidentalis' 2011, 68, pp. 175–177; eadem, *Film i media*, http://www.kulturaihistoria.umcs.lublin.pl/archives/4298 [accessed on: 17 VII 2018]; eadem, *Kilka uwag o historii wizualnej*, 'Klio Polska' 2016, 8, pp. 118–120; See also: *Teoria wiedzy o przeszłości na tle współczesnej humanistyki*, ed. E. Domańska, Poznań 2010.

[6]   D. Skotarczak, *Historia*, p. 45.

[7]   'Wśród historyków akademickich istnieje powszechne, choć przeważnie niewyrażane, poczucie, że badania historyczne przedstawione w filmie, zwłaszcza fabularnym, nigdy nie mają takiej wartości czy 'prawdziwości' jak te wydrukowane na stronach książek. U podstaw takiego przekonania leży zapewne wiara, że tylko słowa są w stanie naprawdę wyrazić minioną rzeczywistość w całej jej komplikacji, zaś film, którego celem jest przecież dostarczanie ludziom rozrywki, nie jest w stanie temu sprostać'. R.A. Rosenstone, *'Walker'. The Dramatic Film as (Postmodern) History*, in: *Revisioning History. Film and the Construction of a New Past*, ed. R.A. Rosenstone, Princeton, New Jersey 1995, p. 202.

originating from before the invention of film and even photography. The historical value of those traces of the past which we call visual today has never been underestimated, and usually treated as something obvious; an unambiguous opinion about it can be found as far back as in Joachim Le-lewel's writings.

The Polish reflection on these questions is a material for a voluminous study. The aim of the presented article is an initial exploration of the topic, a reconnaissance of the Polish thought on the importance of images in historiography. I would like to highlight those research directions which have proved to be the most attractive intellectually, especially when they have been rarely – if at all – mentioned until recent[8]. The historical topic, contained in popular old Polish calendars and encyclopedias, as well as in didactics from the Middle Ages onwards, has remained completely omitted from the perspective of the search for the early beginnings of visual history[9].

In the quoted book, Dorota Skotarczak wrote: 'visual history covers all spheres that appear at the meeting point of history and historiography, photography, film, fine arts, new media and all visualization of the past and historical knowledge'[10]. Stories of the past, presented in the form of images, have existed in Western culture since the *Biblia pauperum*. The beginnings of a discussion about their meaning can be found in the literature devoted to disputes over idolatry, i.e. the cult of images. Considerations about the value of depicting biblical scenes apply to history-related representations as well[11]. Let us recall the words of Wacław Potocki (1625–1696): 'There are two kinds of pictures for learning and for adornment, ones in stories, others in persons painted in churches […] And I take here the canvas for equal to paper, writing to painting, books to pictures; Ones match crimson, the others – rough huck;

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[8] That is why – due to the necessary abridgements – I have basically fully omitted here the impressive output of Piotr Witek, Tomasz Pawelec, Wioletta Julkowska, and even Andrzej Wierzbicki. I focused on less known threads, mentioned less often or not at all.

[9] The topic was discussed as a side thread of other considerations. See e.g.: *Przeszłość w kulturze średniowiecznej Polski*, ed. H. Manikowska et al., vol. 1–2, Warszawa 2018; K. Puchowski, *Edukacja historyczna w jezuickich kolegiach Rzeczypospolitej 1565–1773*, Gdańsk 1999; H. Dziechcińska, *Oglądanie i słuchanie w kulturze dawnej Polski*, Warszawa 1987; T. Jakimowicz, *Temat historyczny w sztuce ostatnich Jagiellonów*, Warszawa–Poznań 1985.

[10] 'historia wizualna obejmuje swym zasięgiem wszystkie te sfery, które występują na styku historii i historiografii, fotografii, filmu, sztuk plastycznych, nowych mediów i wszelkiej wizualizacji przeszłości i wiedzy historycznej'. D. Skotarczak, *Historia*, p. 188.

[11] The historical aspects of the discussion of Polish supporters and opponents of the cult of images were highlighted by researchers including: J. Kracik, *Staropolskie spory o kult obrazów*, Kraków 2012; I. Szczukowski, *'Rzućże to oko na zwierciadło ciała Jezusowego'. Wokół kazań 'O piąci zmysłach ciała ludzkiego' Samuela Wysockiego*, 'Literaturoznawstwo' 2017, 11, pp. 9–18.

May a man of letters read, and those who cannot, will grasp what happened by looking at the painting'[12]. Potocki meant the presentation of the past of biblical times, but also historical *exempla*, mainly related to saints. In another work, he wrote: 'Stories and various quarrels of human things, I'd express with living paints on the canvas, and although I myself neither did nor could ever see them, I'd put them before people's eyes: what there was, what there wasn't, hell, gods, old castle structures, fires of great cities, fairy tales, dreams, parables, whatever idea I had, kings, wise men, knights: I'd picture everything with my brush. I'd raise others from the grave […]. It is the painter's, not the painting's, imperative wish: keep in mind that what was, is no longer; what is will not be'[13]. Were it not for the differences in language, the author of these words might seem to be a modern visual theorist, not a Baroque moralist. He emphasizes both the didactic value of visualization, while observing that the images effectively serve as a commemoration.

In my opinion, it is Joachim Lelewel (1786–1861) who should be called the father of Polish scientific visual history.

THE INTEGRAL APPROACH

It was almost two hundred years ago, in 1822, that Joachim Lelewel, classifying sources in his article *Sciences Allowing to Know Historical Sources*[14], distinguished a group conveying content through images. He noted all the unwritten historical sources known at the time (I quote here the terms used by Lelewel): art, numismatics, sphragistics, heraldry, epigraphy and silent monuments, studied also in the context of their fate. It should be reminded here that those fields already had a long tradition at that time. The study of medieval markers as the past of trademarks, analysis

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[12] 'Dwojakie są dla nauki i dla ozdoby obrazy, w historie te, insze w osoby malowane w kościołach /…/ I tuć ja kładę płótno jednako z papierem, tu pismo z malowaniem, z obrazami księgi; Te są dla karmazyna, tamte dla siermięgi; Niechaj czyta literat, kto czytać nie umie, z malowania jako co działo się zrozumie'. W. Potocki, *Obrazy świętych*, in: *Ogród fraszek*, ed. A. Brückner, vol. I, part II, no. 278, Lwów 1907, lines 1–3, 30–36, p. 398.

[13] 'Historyje i różne rzeczy ludzkich kłótnie wyrażałem żywymi farbami na płótnie, I chociażem sam czego swym nie widział okiem, anim mógł widzieć, ludziom stawiałem widokiem: co było i nie było, piekła, bogi, starych zamków struktury, wielkich miast pożogi, bajki, sny, przypowieści, com tylko zamyślił, królów, mędrców, rycerzów – wszytkom pęzlem kryślił. Dźwigałem inszych z grobu […]. Malarz, nie obraz, w pilnym mieć to życzy względzie, że co było, już nie jest; to, co jest, nie będzie'. Idem, *Malarzowi*, in: *Dzieła*, ed. L. Kukulski, vol. 1, Warszawa 1987, lines 1–14, pp. 437–438. On the meaning and specificity of Potocki's thought: K. Obremski, *'Głupi się trochę uczą, a mędrszy głupieją': Wacław Potocki i polski spór o obrazy*, 'Pamiętnik Literacki' 1996, 3, pp. 3–16.

[14] J. Lelewel, *Nauki dające poznawać źródła historyczne*, Wilno 1824.

of the origin of symbols in bestiaries, the science of banners and flags, i.e. vexillology, all date back at least to the 16th century; as does heraldry. Lelewel himself refers, in this respect, to armorials by Bartosz Paprocki (1540–1614), Szymon Okolski (1580–1653)[15] and Kasper Niesiecki (1782–1744). It is as early as in the preface to Paprocki's work *Herby rycerstwa polskiego* [*Polish Knighthood's Coats of Arms*], published in 1584 – that its author stated unequivocally that he treated his catalogue of coats of arms as a *strictly* historical work, appreciating their documentary and identity-creating value[16]. Coats of arms were also a topic of Jan Długosz's works[17].

Thus, Lelewel continued the centuries-old tradition of thinking about history as a study of signs as well as words. He treated the image as an important element of the tale of history. In fact, he considered material sources to be even more reliable than the written ones and used them as a tool helpful in a critical study of written sources. An example of this is the analysis of the relief from Trajan's Column. On its basis, he argued that the Dacians, harassed by the Romans, had left their homeland (the event is dated to the year 106) in order to 'take their freedom, their nationality away'[18] and surrender just empty land, 'a country with no people or livestock' to the enemy[19]. The analysis of gestures, details of clothing and weapons of the communities presented on the column led him to conclusions about their customs. For Lelewel, the information taken from the relief was one of the arguments in favor of the thesis, important in his concept, of the Geto-Dacian origin of the Slavs[20]; he treated the similarities of customs as evidence of kinship between nations[21]. He cited pictorial

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[15] Magdalena Piskała dedicated her research to armorials as educational works in a moral and historical sense see: M. Piskała, *'Orbis Polonus' Szymona Okolskiego jako traktat moralny wobec kaznodziejstwa wieku XVII*, paper read at the conference *Herb and Heraldry in Old Polish Culture*, Warsaw, 12–13 April 2013.

[16] B. Paprocki, *Herby rycerstwa polskiego na pięcioro ksiąg rozdzielone*, Kraków 1584, p. 4, https://archive.org/stream/herbyrycerstwapo00papruoft/herbyrycerstwapo00papruoft_djvu.txt [accessed on: 22 XII 2017].

[17] *Insignia seu Clenodia Regis et Regni Poloniae,* from the Kórnik codex, published by Z. Celichowski, Poznań 1885; A. Kłodziński, *Rękopisy Długosza o herbach polskich*, Biblioteka Ossolineum, vol. 5, Lwów 1843; P. Dymmel, *Problem autorstwa 'Klejnotów' przypisywanych Janowi Długoszowi,* 'Rocznik Polskiego Towarzystwa Heraldycznego' 1993, 1 (12), pp. 60–61.

[18] 'swę wolność, swę narodowość unieść'. J. Lelewel, *Dakowie*, in: *Narody na ziemiach sławiańskich przed powstaniem Polski. Joachima Lelewela w dziejach narodowych polskich postrzeżenia. Tom do Polski wieków średnich wstępny*, Poznań 1853, p. 458.

[19] 'krainę bez ludzi i trzód'. *Ibidem*, p. 459.

[20] J. Lelewel, *Trakowie, Getowie, Iliriane, Galowie*, in: *Narody*, p. 458 and following.

[21] It was already Tadeusz Wojciechowski (1838–1919) who pointed out an error of Lelewel's reasoning, consisting in assuming as certain the inference about the identity of nations on the basis of identity or even only similarity of customs. See: T. Wojciechowski, *Chrobacja. Rozbiór starożytności słowiańskich*, Kraków 1873, p. 51.

examples as historical documents, emphasizing the value of both their ideological message and the details of clothing and customs.

He also thoroughly studied religious images: the symbolism of the 'emblems of deities', i.e. what we call attribution in iconography and, more broadly, 'imaging', understood as the ways of presenting depictions of gods[22].

In 1818, in the work *Jakim ma być historyk* [*What Should a Historian Be Like*], Lelewel wrote about: 'memory [which] faithfully brings to mind the sequence of events, brings it back while **sensual experience** [emphasized by D.B.] encompasses it, prudence digests it, and when attention takes it to pieces, reasoning raises it to general coherence and actual relation'[23]; in other words, he postulated the creation of historical science that examines the past precisely as a sensual experience.

Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz (1757–1841) expressed an understanding of visual representation of history and appreciation of imagery in historical narration similar to Lelewel's. He proved this conviction in his actions as the President of the Society of Friends of Science (1826–1831), initiating the minting of historical medals or unveiling the Copernicus Monument in Warsaw[24]. This means he appreciated the importance of creating a symbolic space through visual means. Even in his memoirs, he noted opinions regarding the importance of visuality. Relating his last trip to England, he wrote[25]: 'The English are not fortunate in terms of the statues they erected; wicked little kings of old times sit on ungainly horses'[26]. Niemcewicz treated the monuments erected in public places as an expression of ideas about history and an element creating national identity.

The awareness of the revolutionary nature of photography emerged at its very beginning. In 1839 – the year the invention of daguerreotype was announced[27] – geodesist Maksymilian Strasz (1804–1870?), fascinated by it,

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[22] J. Lelewel, *Bałwochwalstwo słowiańskie*, in: *Narody*, p. 777 and following.

[23] Idem, *Jakim ma być historyk*, in: *Wybór pism historycznych*, ed. H. Więckowska, Wrocław 1950, p. 32. See also: idem, *Historyka*, in: *Wybór pism*, p. 15.

[24] 11 May 1830.

[25] I owe my interest in Niemcewicz's *Memoirs* to Piotr Kopka and his speech at the postgraduate seminar led by Prof. Katarzyna Błachowska on 27 January 2015.

[26] 'Nie są szczęśliwymi Anglicy w wzniesionych posągach swoich; dawniejsze niegodziwe, maleńkie króliki siedzą na niezgrabnych koniach'. *Pamiętniki J. U. Niemcewicza. Dziennik pobytu za granicą. Od dnia 21 lipca 1831 do 20 maja 1841 r.*, vol. 1, (*1831–32*), Poznań 1876, p. 28.

[27] Daguerreotypy is the oldest photographic process; the effect of the invention was shown publicly in 1839. See: A. Maciesza, *Historia fotografii polskiej w latach 1839–1889*, Płock 1972, p. 22 and following; W. Żdżarski, *Zaczęło się od Daguerre'a. Szkice z dziejów fotografii XIX w.*, Warszawa 1977. I would like to acknowledge Krzysztof Jurecki for bibliographic information on this subject.

wrote that: 'for travelers who do not have enough time to take a free sketch of views from nature, especially those who have not mastered the art of drawing, the daguerreotype, it is an invaluable means of collecting travel souvenirs'[28]. This is a purely practical reflection. The painters understood the value of photography in a similar way. It was even commonly used by those who documented architecture: they treated photography as a sort of sketchbook and as an archive. The new technique was also used by veduta painter and conservator Marcin Zaleski (1796–1877), who employed the art of photography at least back in 1840[29]. Presenting historical and contemporary scenes in painting, and then in photography, was treated both as documentation and narration: a conscious, historical, ideological message.

A few years after the invention of the daguerreotype, the question was taken up by philosopher Karol Libelt (1807–1875), who devoted much of his attention to the relation between the form, representability and image[30]. He wrote down, inter alia, the following sentence: 'Daguerreotype the House of Deputies in Paris, when a great speaker makes an appearance in it, and you will almost see the words that come out of his inspired mouth, because you see the impressions they make on the listeners'[31]. Libelt emphatically underlined the importance of photography for documenting not only the events, but also the reactions of their participants and witness[32]. Libelt also used the term 'daguerreotype' in a meaning of

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[28] 'dla podróżnych, nie mających dosyć czasu do wolnego zdjęcia widoków z natury, z zwłaszcza takich, którzy nie posiadają sztuki rysowania, dagerotyp jest nieocenionym środkiem zebrania pamiątek podróży'. M. Strasz, *Uwagi nad przedstawieniem przedmiotów w daguerrotypie*, 'Wiadomości Handlowe i Przemysłowe' 1839, 347, quoted after: A. Maciesza, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

[29] W. Mossakowska. *Początki fotografii w Warszawie (1839–1863)*, vol. I, Warszawa 1994, p. 29. Zaleski's works, along with paintings by Bernardo Belotto known as Canaletto (1721–1780), were used in the reconstruction of Warsaw's Old Town after World War II.

[30] In Libelt's philosophy, imagination is more important than reason and will, it is 'the power of the spirit that dresses the thought into shape, content into form', as Andrzej Walicki puts it. See e.g. A. Walicki, *Karola Libelta 'filozofia słowiańska'*, in: K. Libelt, *Samowładztwo rozumu i objawy filozofii słowiańskiej*, ed. A. Walicki, Warszawa 2014, p. LVIII; idem, *System umnictwa czyli filozofii umysłowej*, in: idem, *Samowładztwo*, pp. 467–474; idem, *Filozofia i krytyka*, vol. 2, Poznań 1874, p. 278 and following.

[31] 'Zdejm dagerotypem izbę deputowanych w Paryżu, gdy w niej wielki jaki mówca występuje, a dojrzysz prawie słowa, które wychodzą z ust jego natchnionych, bo widzisz wrażenia, jakie na słuchaczach czynią'. K. Libelt, *Filozofia*, p. 138, quoted after: *Filozofia i myśl społeczna w latach 1831–1864*, ed. A. Walicki, Warszawa 1977, p. 352. The first edition of *Filozofia i krytyka* was published in 1845.

[32] On the old-time understanding of photography and image in general see: R. Sulima, *Album 'cieni'. Słowo i fotografia w kulturze ludowej*, in: *Słowo i etos. Szkice o kulturze*, Kraków 1992, p. 120 and following; K. Olechnicki, *Uwagi o kulturze wizualnej w ujęciu socjologiczno-*

a faithful reproduction, non-creative copy[33]. Libelt's reflection on these issues seems to be completely forgotten.

The visual aspect of history was also noted by Marceli Handelsman (1882–1945). In his *Historyka* [*Historical Method*] of 1928, he mentions as historical sources all the preserved traces of human activity in the past, which he calls direct sources. He divides them into monuments, i.e. proper and material remains, and relics, i.e. moral remains. Indirect sources in his classification are documents intended to preserve the memory of the past times[34]. The text reads: 'The material remains which visually represent the activities of people of the past, for instance paintings, tombs, monuments, inscriptions, etc. are called symbolic remains'[35].

After recalling these several attitudes, it seems reasonable to say that our contemporary thinking about visuality (and audiovisuality) should not be contrasted with the old model of understanding culture and communication as logocentric. It is worth emphasizing that – as Maryla Hopfinger puts it in her academic book – 'also the written and printed word had and has a form which is, by all means, visual. Thus, the visual dimension of communication is not new in itself. It is the intense presence of the image that is new'[36]. After all, the culture of print did not lead to any sort of severance between understanding of the world through concepts and experiencing it through images; Grzegorz Dziamski wrote about it as well[37]. In no sense can the content be considered separately from the medium.

Hence, the study of history has never been treated as a study of words and their content, or of the very concepts, without considering what is visible and experienceable through representations[38]. Thus, the humanists

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antropologicznym, 'Dyskurs. Pismo Naukowo-Artystyczne ASP we Wrocławiu' 2013, 16, especially pp. 10–13.

[33] K. Libelt, *System*, p. 478.

[34] M. Handelsman, *Historyka. Zasady metodologji i teorji poznania historycznego. Podręcznik dla szkół wyższych*, ed. P. Węcowski, Warszawa 2010 [reprint of the 1928 edition], p. 45.

[35] 'Pozostałości materialne, które plastycznie przedstawiają działania ludzi czasów ubiegłych, na przykład obrazy, grobowce, pomniki, napisy itp. zwie się pozostałościami symbolicznemi'. *Ibidem*, p. 44.

[36] 'także słowo pisane i drukowane miało i ma postać jak najbardziej wizualną. Tak więc sam wizualny wymiar komunikacji nie jest nowością. Nowa jest intensywna obecność obrazu'. M. Hopfinger, *Czy obraz wypiera słowo?*, in: *Komunikacja wizualna w prasie i mediach elektronicznych*, eds. K. Wolny-Zmorzyński et al., Warszawa 2013, p. 11.

[37] G. Dziamski, *Aspekt antropologiczny w symulowanej rzeczywistości*, in: *Od fotografii do rzeczywistości wirtualnej*, ed. M. Hopfinger, Warszawa 1997, p. 32 and following. Dziamski points out that the very tradition of various types of fear of images, of being depicted, reaches back not only to iconoclasm, but to much earlier times when the world of the Greeks and Romans met the world of Judaism.

[38] On anticipation in science see: B. Skarga, *Granice historyczności*, Warszawa 2005,

I cited above were not pioneers of the domain, allegedly yet unknown at the time, called visual history. They were and remain conscious participants of the world of images, for which the visual aspect and the conceptual aspect are equal parts of comprehending the world, and therefore also of historical sciences which, with all the richness and diversity of specialization, are essentially based on an integral approach.

VISUALITY IN THINKING ABOUT HISTORY VERSUS HISTORY OF ART

It is very seldom that visuality theorists refer to art historians' and theorists' achievements. Natalia Pater-Ejgierd writes about it in her work on visual education[39], subscribing to David Morgan's opinion[40] that art history has limited itself to iconological research and ignores the participation of the image in the social construction of reality. 'The symbolic ambiguity – as Pater-Ejgierd points out at the very beginning – constituting the old works of the masters, has been rejected in favor of the precision of expression set in a specific visual context'[41]. The precision of meanings can vary greatly in various periods in the history of art and, especially, in its various forms. However, nobody questions the uniqueness of representations in the *Biblia pauperum*, for example. Art history does not study only masterpieces. Even if the analysis of popularity of motifs in different places and times always prompted the diagnosis of society, not only symbological and iconological descriptions. The reflection on presenting the past in visual arts is, after all, part of the achievements of the field which has been called visual history.

It should be reminded here that a reading of Stanisław Kostka Potocki's *Winkelman polski* [*The Polish Winkelman*] (1755–1821) clearly indicates that its author considered it obvious that the study of 'monuments and medals' enables us to understand the past and confirm opinions about it (he meant

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especially pp. 54–94. On visibility: M. Tokarz, *Komunikacja niewerbalna*, in: Argumentacja, *perswazja, manipulacja*, Gdańsk 2006; idem, *Komunikacja poza gramatyką*, in: *W świecie znaków. Księga Pamiątkowa ku czci Profesora Jerzego Pelca*, eds. J.J. Jadacki, W. Strawiński, Warszawa 1996, p. 109 and following.

[39] N. Pater-Ejgierd, *op. cit.*, Poznań 2010, p. 13 and following.

[40] *Ibidem*, and: D. Morgan, *Defining Visual Culture*, in: idem, *The Sacred Gaze Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*, Los Angeles 2005. Also: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pnk48 [accessed on: 21 VIII 2017].

[41] 'Symboliczna wieloznaczność – zaznacza na samym początku Pater-Ejgierd – konstytuująca dawne dzieła mistrzów została odrzucona na rzecz precyzji wypowiedzi osadzonej w konkretnym kontekście wizualnym'. N. Pater-Ejgierd, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

mainly the history of clothing, custom, technique and technology)[42].

Mieczysław Porębski (1921–2012) – an outstanding theoretician and historian of art, several years older than White, who applied the name of 'painted history'[43] to the entirety of the rich current of Polish art focused on historical topics (similar trends also existed in the art of other European countries) – had been developing, from the 1950s onwards, the concept of treating historical painting as a visualization of history[44]. He pointed out that 'painted history' constituted frequently a separate story[45].

The work that we can consider the first Polish exposition of history in pictures (and not just a series of illustrations to a text) are the woodcuts in Maciej Miechowita's *Chronica Polonorum*, produced probably before 1519 and referring to the already long tradition of illuminated chronicles. Mention should also be made of the diverse representations of family trees and series of effigies of rulers known as retinues, which are also visualizations of historical ideas, intended to demonstrate the legitimacy of power. Let us recall here the gallery of the Piast dynasty, carved on the gate of the Brzeg castle[46] – produced in the years 1554–1560, under the direction of Italian architect Jacopo (de Pario) Parr (1510–1575) and his sons (probably Franciszek, d. 1580), commissioned by George II the Magnificent (1523–1586) – being an exposition of a certain concept of history as well as dynastic and state relations of the house. An important example of a retinue which presents, besides genealogy, the history of the

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[42] S.K. Potocki, *O sztuce u dawnych czyli Winkelman polski*, eds. J.A. Ostrowski, J. Śliwa, part II, Warszawa–Kraków 1992 *passim*, especially pp. 69, 73, 194–204, 209–214, 220, 249–263.

[43] The term was taken from *The Song of the Wajdelota* from *Konrad Wallenrod* – verse 187. See: A. Mickiewicz, *Konrad Wallenrod*, in: *Powieści poetyckie*, ed. W. Floryan, Warszawa 1979, p. 101.

[44] M. Porębski, *Malowane dzieje*, Warszawa 1961. This is the author's PhD dissertation, written between 1951 and 1958.

[45] Although, of course, there are also examples in which they had a decorative and purely illustrative function – such as numerous illustrations, including those from amateur female admirers, to Niemcewicz's *Śpiewy historyczne*, artworks by Michał Elwiro Andriolli (1836–1893) or popular studies from the 1880s: Władysław Bełza's *Dawni królowie tej ziemi: treść dziejów polskich dla dzieci, ilustrowane portretami królów* (lithographs from Wilhelm Zuckerkandl's plant in Złoczów) and *Wizerunki książąt i królów polskich* by Józef Ignacy Kraszewski with illustrations by Ksawery Pillati.

[46] In the years 1554–1560, a representative three-storey structure of an entrance gate with a triumphal arch and sculptural decorations inspired by Raphael's art was erected. On the attic, three cartouches could be seen, bearing the coats of arms of the Commonwealth (in the middle) as well as those of the Habsburg house and Brandenburg. See: M. Zlat, *Zamek piastowski w Brzegu*, Opole 1988; A. Szymański, *Jerzy II Piast. Mecenas i kolekcjoner. Studium renesansowego mecenatu kulturalnego w Europie Środkowej*, Opole 2007. Also there: an ideological analysis of the portal decoration.

country, is Orzeł Tretera [Treter's Eagle][47] – also a 16th-century work – where portraits of the rulers have been inscribed into the state emblem[48].

Porębski himself began the presentation of visual history in Polish art only from the times of Stanisław August Poniatowski, when painters like Marcello Bacciarelli (1731–1818), Jan Piotr Norblin (1745–1830) and Franciszek Smuglewicz (1745–1807) depicted important contemporary events and historical scenes[49]. Those artists created images of recent (from their perspective) history, also clearly exposing their philosophies of history. Their goal was to shape history-related social perceptions. A little later, Piotr Michałowski (1800–1855) – as Porębski emphasized it[50] – treated historical painting as a civic task; his intentions included 'praising the glory of the Polish army with the paint brush'[51].

In the mid-19th century, a new way of building stories through images emerged. The pioneer of the comic book narration was Jan Nepomucen Lewicki (1795–1871) who, in the years 1850–1853, applied it in illustrating Jan Chryzostom Pasek's *Memoirs*[52]. Lewicki – a master of lithography and photography – also treated them as excellent documentation techniques[53].

Collecting and public exhibitions of Polish monuments were also an expression of the conviction of the great historical value of visual representations. Let us recall the great Exhibition of National Antiquities,

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[47] Tomasz Treter (1547–1610) – draftsman and engraver, also writer, historian and theologian; secretary of Anna Jagiellonka, Stefan Batory and Zygmunt III Waza. See: *Regium Poloniae Icones*, Roma 1591.

[48] Today we know the *Retinue of Polish Kings in 45 medallions* – a copperplate print signed: Mathaeus Merian Basiliensis (1593–1650), made according to the work of Tomasz Treter, and a Parisian print from 1614, made by Jean Le Clerc (ca. 1578–1621) described as *Poczet królów polskich w 44 medalionach*.

[49] Bacciarelli: creator of numerous historical paintings and the retinue of kings; Norblin: produced a large number of historical etchings and was the official illustrator of the 1794 uprising; his student Aleksander Orłowski (1777–1832) left many canvases depicting battles under the command of Kościuszko and Napoleon; Smuglewicz: creator of historical and historical-allegorical scenes, such as *Kościuszko ratujący Polskę przed grobem* (It was quite a popular approach at that time. See e.g. works by Michał Stachowicz (1768–1825), a participant in the Kościuszko Uprising, who later painted numerous scenes from it) and the unfinished series *Obrazy historii polskiej w stu rycinach* (from 1790) a kind of illustration to *Historia narodu polskiego* by Adam Naruszewicz.

[50] 'rozsławiać pędzlem chwałę oręża polskiego'. M. Porębski, *op. cit.*, p. 112 and the following.

[51] [C. Michałowska], *Piotr Michałowski, rys życia zawód artystyczny, działalność w życiu publicznym, z papierów rodzinnych zebrał N.N.*, Kraków 1911, p. 57.

[52] Before leaving for Portugal, Lewicki produced 16 large folio-sized copperplates with illustrations and text. In the famous Lachowicz edition from 1861, the set was reduced, shortened and simplified.

[53] M. Porębski, *op. cit.*, pp. 91–125, 178.

considered to be the first one of its kind, organized by the Krakow Scientific Society at the Lubomirski Palace at 17, Św. Jana Street between 15 August 1858 and 1 February 1859, along with its slightly more modest Warsaw predecessor, opened in 1856 in the Potocki Palace, arranged with a similar passion and faith in its patriotic value[54]. From that time on, and besides various historical collections, treated as treasuries of national relics, public historical museums began to develop and – over time – specialize.

We have no reason to doubt that Władysław Łuszczkiewicz (1828–1900) understood already his organizational, painting, conservation, museum-related and educational activities as creating images of history[55]. It was during his scientific and artistic trips[56] that one of his students – Jan Matejko – started his famous 'Little Treasury', a sketchbook full of drawings of historical architectural elements with interior and costume details.

Porębski devoted most of his attention to Jan Matejko (1838–1893), who interpreted history and expressed an ideological message[57]. Porębski directly called Matejko a painter with 'a strongly accentuated ambition to compete with a historian, to compete not in the field of external description, antiquarian or anecdotal details, nor in the field of vision […], but in the field of knowledge, in the field of causal interpretation of historical facts'[58]. It is in such a context that Matejko is also mentioned by British historian Peter Burke, who mentions *Stańczyk* as an example of 'explanation of history instead of its simple depiction'[59]. Matejko himself was not the only one to treat his activity as a historian's work – a testimony for this can be the number of polemics with his ideas regarding history[60], conducted with

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[54] B. Podczaszyński, *Przegląd historyczny starożytności krajowych*, Warszawa 1857.

[55] See: M. Rzepińska, *Matejko i Łuszczkiewicz*, in: *Sztuka i historia. Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki (Kraków, listopad 1988)*, Warszawa 1992, pp. 95–109; eadem, *Władysław Łuszczkiewicz jako malarz historyczny i portrecista*, 'Folia Historiae Artium' Seria Nowa, 1982, 18, pp. 137–168.

[56] T. Łopatkiewicz, *Między pedagogiką a inwentaryzacją zabytków. Artystyczno-naukowe wycieczki Władysława Łuszczkiewicza z uczniami krakowskiej Szkoły Sztuk Pięknych w latach 1888–1893*, PhD dissertation prepared under Prof. A. Małkiewicz's supervision at the Institute of Art History of the Jagiellonian University, Archiwum Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, ref. no. Dokt. 2006/117.

[57] See: M. Gorzowski, *J. Matejko, epoka lat dalszych do końca życia artysty, z dziennika prowadzonego w ciągu lat siedemnastu*, Kraków 1898; H.M. Słoczyński, *Matejko*, Wrocław 2000.

[58] 'silnie akcentowanej ambicji rywalizowania z historykiem, rywalizowania nie na polu opisu zewnętrznego, antykwarycznych lub anegdotycznych szczegółów, nie na polu wizji […], ale na polu poznania, na polu przyczynowo-skutkowego interpretowania historycznych faktów'. M. Porębski, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

[59] 'wykładni historii zamiast zwyczajnego jej obrazowania'. P. Burke, *Naoczność. Materiały wizualne jako świadectwa historyczne*, transl. J. Hunia, Kraków 2012, p. 184.

[60] Compiled by Jarosław Krawczyk. See: J. Krawczyk, *Matejko i Historia*, Warszawa 1990.

passion resulting from the awareness of the great influence of his painting on history-related social perceptions. It would also be worthwhile to devote a separate article should to reflections of Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (1812–1887), who was also discussing the interpretation of history with Matejko, treating him precisely as a historian[61]. Kraszewski's works – the journalistic current[62] and novels alike – are an example of thinking about art as an integral part of history (that topic was taken up by Jolanta Polanowska)[63].

In the analysis of visual materials, historians can use the rich experience of art history and research on artistic culture, which allow them to develop the methodology of working on a piece of art as a historical source and, on the other hand, they provide useful tools for cultural studies. I will therefore close this part with Grzegorz Dziamski's explanation: 'Let us begin with a distinction as obvious as trite, between art and visual culture. In the past, both of these concepts were identical or almost identical. The visual arts were the driving force of visual culture; an innovative force shaping the language of visual communication. This was how Ernst Gombrich, Arnold Hauser, Erwin Panofsky, Nelson Goodman, and in Poland, Jan Białostocki and his students, treated the visual arts. For them, art was a specific type of language, a pictorial (imaging) language that allowed them to express the symbolic order characteristic of a culture in question, and to valorize its existing ways of life. The birth of new technical means and, later, electronic reproduction (photography, film, television, Internet) and their spread among the masses, their transformation into mass media, have changed the situation radically'[64].

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[61] W. Danek, *Matejko i Kraszewski. Dwie koncepcje dziejów Polski*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1969.

[62] J.I. Kraszewski, *Ikonotheka. Zbiór notat o sztuce i artystach*, Wilno 1858; idem, *Z roku 1866. Rachunki przez B. Bolesławitę*, Poznań 1867, especially pp. 305–306, 310–312. The idea of the journal *Athaeneum* (1841–1851).

[63] J. Polanowska, *Historiografia sztuki polskiej w latach 1832–1863 na ziemiach centralnych i wschodnich dawnej Rzeczypospolitej. F.M. Sobieszczański, J.I. Kraszewski, E. Rastawiecki, A. Przezdziecki*, Warszawa 1995, pp. 46–52, 88–100.

[64] 'Zacznijmy od rozróżnienia tyleż oczywistego, co banalnego, odróżnienia sztuki i kultury wizualnej. Kiedyś oba te pojęcia były tożsame albo prawie tożsame. Sztuki plastyczne były siłą napędową kultury wizualnej; siłą innowacyjną, kształtującą język komunikacji wizualnej. Tak traktowali sztuki plastyczne Ernst Gombrich, Arnold Hauser, Erwin Panofsky, Nelson Goodman, a w Polsce Jan Białostocki i jego uczniowie. Sztuka była dla nich specyficznym rodzajem języka, językiem piktorialnym (obrazowym) pozwalającym wyrażać charakterystyczny dla danej kultury porządek symboliczny, waloryzować istniejące sposoby życia. Narodziny nowych środków technicznej, a później elektronicznej reprodukcji (fotografia, film, telewizja, Internet) oraz ich umasowienie, zamiana w mass media, radykalnie zmieniło sytuację'. G. Dziamski, *Sztuka po końcu sztuki*.

NON-FILE DOCUMENTATION

It is also worth noting that, throughout the 19th century, historians employed specialists creating 'visual' documentation – mainly draftspeople, watercolor painters, and then photographers – who documented archaeological finds, architecture, copied older drawings, which later facilitated their detailed analysis.

The attitude towards the visual aspect of history is greatly influenced by the extraordinary documentary and archiving value of technical inventions, beginning with photography. Besides the already mentioned Maksymilian Strasz, we should also recall Wincenty Smokowski (1797–1876) and Jan Styfi (1839?–1921), who were the first to use photochemical techniques in the Polish territory[65]. The use of ever-cheaper graphic and photographic techniques resulted in the popularization of printed images which performed increasingly important social functions, related to documentation and propaganda.

Among the numerous important examples of the role of popularized photography for the Polish society's identity and historical awareness, I will mention only two that show the specificity of the medium and its ideological possibilities in a particularly accurate manner. Both of them are taken from a book on the history of Polish photography, treated precisely as documentation, written in 1939 by a doctor, anthropologist (and politician), Aleksander Maciesza (1875–1945)[66].

On 25 February 1861, policeman Fyodor Trepov was slapped on a street in Warsaw by an unidentified Pole; on the following day, he went to Karol Beyer's photo atelier[67] and 'had himself photographed with his head swathed, as a victim of riots'[68]. The photograph was reproduced in multiple copies and distributed throughout the city. That, however, led to a reverse result, as a saying spread along with the photograph: 'Near the fountain place, Trepov got smacked in the face'[69].

Sztuka początku XXI wieku, Poznań 2009, pp. 16–17. See also: J. Białostocki, *Wybór pism estetycznych*, Kraków 2008, p. 119.

[65] They popularized the wood engraving (incised on the transverse section) allowing for more precise insculping; being easy to print, it began to be widely used in the press.

[66] A. Maciesza, *op. cit.*

[67] Karol Beyer (1818–1877) was the first professional photographer in Warsaw. See e.g. D. Jackiewicz, *Karol Beyer 1818–1877*, Warszawa 2012.

[68] 'kazał się odfotografować z owiązaną głową jako ofiara rozruchów'. A. Maciesza, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

[69] 'Przy wodotrysku dostał Trepow po pysku'. It appears in different variants, in memoirs as well as in St. Grzesiuk's songs and its street versions. Author unknown. Text quoted after Maciesza. *Ibidem*, p. 47.

When, on 27 February of that same year, Karol Beyer photographed the bodies of the fallen in front of the Castle, 'thousands, hundreds of thousands of photographs of the fallen in various sizes spread around the country, to be bought eagerly and to provoke everywhere, with the sight of uncovered wounds, sorrow, hatred, and a desire to avenge the barbarian who had perpetrated such a crime'[70]. Therefore, we can certainly call 1861 the beginning of the use of photography as a way of disseminating information and ideas in our land. Photographs of the army, the wounded, the dead, the executed quickly became a sort of independence relics, they were taken into exile as the most valuable things[71]. It is worth emphasizing here that they became, besides portraits of relatives and views of homeland, an extremely important material element of memory. The dissemination of accessible, cheap photography dramatically changed that reliquary-like set of commemorative objects of high emotional value. From then on, not only the wealthy could have family and patriotic images of that kind.

Photographs were also used in Vilnius in a particular project called the Muraviev Museum: a collection of photographs of the insurgents of 1863, referred to as terrorists, bandits and subversives. The belief in the value and power of the propaganda impact of the images should be emphasized by the fact that making a photo card (print) presented in it would then cost no less than a good horse[72].

The didactic and propaganda power of photography and graphics influenced the development of the educational and popularizing current in science, related mainly to social issues, history, travel and technology. From the 1880s onwards, it would spread through numerous books, illustrated press and open lectures. Unfortunately, in many areas of the humanities, those achievements of early Polish photography are not considered: for instance, the valuable and valued *Socjologia wizualna* [*Visual Sociology*] by Piotr Sztompka omits them completely[73].

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[70] 'tysiące, setki tysięcy fotografii poległych w najrozmaitszych formatach rozbiegło się po kraju, kupowanych skwapliwie, rozbudzając wszędzie widokiem ran odkrytych, żal nienawiść i chęć pomsty na barbarzyńcy, który takiej zbrodni się dopuścił'. W. Przyborowski, *Historya dwóch lat 1861–62*, part 1, vol. 2, Kraków 1893, p. 108.

[71] See: A. Maciesza, *op. cit.*, pp. 53–57.

[72] The subject – as it seems to me – has not yet been studied in historical terms. My knowledge about the Muraviev Museum comes from the film by Edyta Maksymowicz and Walenty Wojniłło from the series *Koło historii*, episode 1, TVP Historia 2013.

[73] P. Sztompka, *Socjologia wizualna. Fotografia jako metoda badawcza*, Warszawa 2012, p. 24 and following.

CONCLUSION

Reflection on the visual representation of history already existed in our culture long before the formation of scientific historiography. Joachim Lelewel was here not a pioneer, but the first codifier. He applied the traditional way of capturing and presenting history, including its visual aspect. Such thinking goes back to the communication through signs (symbols, emblems, coats of arms) – known from antiquity and the Middle Ages – and attributing them a significant identity-creating meaning. Polish historical science considered the issues of creating historical images by visual arts from the very beginning. On the other hand, the 19th-century technical inventions, enabling and facilitating the reproduction and dissemination of images, extended their social role, starting a revolution in documentation and, at the same time, strengthening the field of propagandistic influence also on the illiterate population. Let us not forget, however, that the awareness of the power of the pictorial influence as a direct one has existed since the *Biblia pauperum* at least.

I have found some important remarks, made during the anthropological reflection, to be of key importance in thinking about visual history. 'The first problem – as Krzysztof Olechnicki puts it – concerns the lack of demarcation of the level of the ontology of visual culture and epistemology of visual culture, i.e. the distinction between situations when we speak of visual culture as a subject of research empirically given, as opposed to the situation where the concept of visual culture becomes an analytical category, an element of the social (or, more narrowly, academic) construction of the world'[74]. The researcher also warns against, inter alia, 'separating visual experience from other dimensions of human experience, which falsifies the essential parameters of the human cultural and social environment, where visual impressions always interact with those provided by the other senses and all of them remain in an active relation to social life'[75].

Perhaps the very alternative of perceiving the world as an image or as a language is associated with too high a risk of simplification. I am

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[74] 'Pierwszy problem – jak to określa Krzysztof Olechnicki – dotyczy braku demarkacji poziomu ontologii kultury wizualnej i epistemologii kultury wizualnej, tzn. rozróżnienia sytuacji, kiedy o kulturze wizualnej mówimy jako o empirycznie danym przedmiocie badań oraz sytuacji, kiedy pojęcie kultury wizualnej staje się kategorią analityczną, elementem społecznego (czy, węziej, akademickiego) konstruowania świata'. K. Olechnicki, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[75] 'oddzielaniem doświadczenia wzrokowego od innych wymiarów ludzkiego doświadczenia, co fałszuje istotne parametry kulturowo-społecznego środowiska człowieka, w którym wrażenia wzrokowe wchodzą zawsze w interakcje z wrażeniami dostarczanymi przez pozostałe zmysły i wszystkie one pozostają w aktywnej relacji wobec życia społecznego'. *Ibidem*, p. 9.

convinced that rejecting other specialities' achievements and creating isolated categories and concepts is not intellectually fertile in the humanities[76]. The achievements of Polish historical thought prove just how scientifically valuable it is to study history with the awareness of human experience as a whole. After all, it is only in theory that we can formulate the distinctiveness of the language of signs and the language of concepts[77]: in culture, they function as one integraded system of meanings.

(translated by LINGUA LAB)

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[77] See: J. Łotman, *Semiotyka filmu*, transl. J. Faryno, T. Miczka, Warszawa 1983, p. 31.

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STRESZCZENIE

Współczesna humanistyka, ulegając modom, zapomina niekiedy o dawniejszym do-
robku. Autor poszukuje w polskiej historiografii refleksji nad wizualnością i to zarówno
jako przedmiotem badań, jako formą przedstawiania przeszłości, dokumentacją, jak i jako
kwestią epistemologiczną, przywołując na początku zmysłowy charakter poznania histo-
rycznego u Lelewela. U Lelewela właśnie znajduje jeszcze odwołania do tradycji dawniej-
szych. Podążając za pracami Mieczysława Porębskiego opisuje w polskiej myśli szerokie
pola refleksji nad znaczeniem obrazów dla historiografii, od sztuk plastycznych przez fo-
tografię po film, tropiąc u historyków, a niekiedy także artystów, myślenie o przeszłości,
które dziś nazywamy wizualnym.

Słowa kluczowe: historia wizualna, historia historiografii, początki polskiej historii
wizualnej

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