# The Power of Iconic Memory

## Iconoclasm as a Mental Marker[1]

KOENRAAD JONCKHEERE

Iconoclasm has a particular effect in that it creates an image that is even more powerful than the image it has destroyed. While many physical images might have disappeared due to the iconoclasm, the mental image of all who witnessed this dramatic moment in history was indelible. This article argues that artists made conscious use of the emotional and cognitive power of such mental images to give their work meaning.

*De kracht van iconisch geheugen. Iconoclasme als een mentale markering*
Iconoclasme heeft het bijzondere effect dat het een beeld creëert dat nog sterker is dan het beeld dat het vernielt. De vele fysieke beelden mogen dan al verdwenen zijn door de Beeldenstorm, het mentale beeld werd een onuitwisbare herinnering aan een ingrijpend moment in de geschiedenis voor iedereen die er getuige van was. In dit artikel wordt beargumenteerd dat kunstenaars bewust gebruik maakten van de emotionele en cognitieve kracht van dit mentale beeld om hun werk betekenis te geven.

To understand the causes and the consequences of the *Beeldenstorm* (Iconoclastic Fury) (1566) in the Low Countries, history and art history have essentially focused on the historical circumstances on the one hand, and the Iconoclasm's theological foundations on the other.[2] Historians have fittingly described the historical contexts, while art historians have delved deeply into the discussion's theological particularities. Largely neglected however, is the fact that the Iconoclasm created an iconic memory, a volatile mental image powerfully reminding citizens of the religious turmoil and the *Bilderfrage* (debate about images). Typically, such iconic memories (a term borrowed from neuropsychology[3]) are lost because they were mental images that existed only in the memories of the beholders. Their life as physical images was brief,

and consisted of the debris that ensued after the Iconoclasm. The rubble was cleared away after the fact to make place for new altars: all traces of the Iconoclasm were swept away.[4] Notwithstanding their material volatility, such iconic memories nevertheless served as powerful markers in the visual culture of the Low Countries for years in the wake of the Iconoclastic Fury. As I will argue, artists and pamphleteers used them quite deliberately to generate emotional and cognitive responses.

Although the emotional impact of Iconoclasm can hardly be reconstructed, let alone measured, there are a number of sources that can help us gain an idea of its powerful mental effect. These testimonies by contemporaries moreover, demonstrate an intriguing awareness of the cognitive and emotional power of images and their destruction. Richard Clough's, Marcus Van Vaernewijck's and Godevaert Van Haecht's – at times emotional – accounts for instance, are a fair indication of the *Beeldenstorm*'s impact on beholders. 'Indeed, those paintings on the walls and the stained glass windows were not saved; they were erased, especially the eyes and the faces, and stones were cast at the windows [...]'[5], the Ghent rhetorician Marcus Van Vaernewijck, lamented. Van Vaernewijck's lengthy text is jam-packed with vivid accounts of the unfortunate events, which he designated as 'a public plague of God, which no one can oppose'.[6] Another famous description is found in a letter the English trader Richard Clough wrote to his employer Thomas Gresham, in which he described the *Beeldenstorm* in the Netherlands. He labelled it 'hell', as if heaven and earth were

1   I would like to thank the reviewers of this article for their valuable and helpful comments.

2   See the introduction to this issue, 3-14 and, for example, Peter J. Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriot* (Ithaca, NY 2008); Alastair Duke, 'De Calvinisten en de "paapse beeldendienst". De denkwereld van de beeldenstormers in 1566', in: Marijke Bruggeman (ed.), *Mensen van de Nieuwe Tijd. Een Liber Amicorum voor A.Th. van Deursen* (Amsterdam 1996) 29-45; Phyllis Mack Crew, *Calvinist Preaching and Iconoclasm in the Netherlands 1544-1569* (Cambridge 1978); David Freedberg, *Iconoclasm and Painting in the Revolt of the Netherlands. 1566-1609: Outstanding Theses in the Fine Arts from British Universities* (New York, London 1988).

3   Marian M. MacCurdy, *The Mind's Eye: Image and Memory in Writing about Trauma* (Amhurst 2007)

21. For the impact of traumatic iconic memories in literature, see: Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, London, 1995).

4   Koenraad Jonckheere, *Antwerp Art after Iconoclasm: Experiments in Decorum 1566-1585* (Brussels etc. 2012).

5   Marcus Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden in die Nederlanden en voornamelijk in Ghendt 1566-1568*, Ferdinand Vanderhaeghen (ed.) (5 vols.; Gent 1872-1881) I, 109-110. 'Ja, die schilderien an mueren ende in glaesveinsters en waren niet vrij, zij werden uutghescrapt bijsonder die ooghen ende aengezichten, ende die glaesveinsters met steenen duerworpen [...]'.

6   Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 99, 'een openbaer plaghe Gods, die niemant resisteren en can.'

perishing.[7] The Antwerp citizen Godevaert Van Haecht, or the anonymous *Antwerpsch Chronykje,* in turn, offer forceful reports of the turbulent days and nights at the end of August 1566.[8] Van Haecht for instance, remembered that 'den 21 dach de kercken overall vol gebroken houts en beelden laghen' (On 21 August the churches were littered with broken bits of wood and sculptures).[9]

     In addition to being straightforward eyewitness accounts, these descriptions give us an idea of what is referred to in neuropsychology as iconic memory. Such iconic memories are triggered by extremely intense experiences and 'are generally stored deep within the brain […], where they are linked to the emotions with which they were encoded', as one scholar explains it.[10] 'The disadvantage of that system is that traumatic experiences are encoded as images and emotions together in the brain and cannot be retrieved independently from each other'.[11] Moreover, they differ from other visual memories in that they tend not to change over time. Thus, while for us these famous descriptions of the Iconoclasm are primarily vivid ekphrases of an iconic moment in history, and are studied as such, to the authors themselves they were indelible mental images of traumatic events enmeshed with intense cognitive and emotional responses. Even years later, any reference to such intense experiences arouses the same thoughts and sentiments. This was also the case in the wake of the Iconoclasm, and did not simply apply to an individual, but to the thousands who had witnessed it, albeit not always with the same force. Their power depends largely on the emotional intensity experienced during the events. Nonetheless, the visual recollection, or iconic memory, of such distressing events is indelibly engraved on the minds of those who have witnessed them. To use an analogy, today the mere image of a man in an orange jumpsuit kneeling in the desert is powerful enough to evoke a plethora of cognitive and emotional responses. Indeed, it can be compared for instance to the image of a tragic car accident or an act of terrorism to us – a traumatic image those who experience it will never forget.[12]

     Historically and art historically speaking however, iconic memory is highly problematic. Its cognitive and emotional impact is barely

7   J. Scheerder, *De Beeldenstorm* (Bussum, Haarlem 1974) 38-40.

8   Godevaert Van Haecht, *De Kroniek van Godevaert Van Haecht over de troebelen van 1565 tot 1574 te Antwerpen en elders*, Robert van Roosbroeck (ed.) (Antwerp 1929-1933); F.G.V., *Antwerpsch Chronykje, in het welk zeer veele […] geschiedenissen, sedert den jare 1500, tot het jaar 1574. […] omstandig zyn beschreeven. / Door F.G.V. en thans, naar deszelfs […] handschrift, voor de eerstemaal in 't licht gebracht*, Frans van Mieris (ed.) (Leiden 1743).

9   Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 99; Van Haecht, *De Kroniek van Godevaert Van Haecht*, I, 100.

10  MacCurdy, *The Mind's Eye*, 21.

11  *Ibid.*

12  Alison Young, 'Images in the Aftermath of Trauma: Responding to September 11th', *Crime Media Culture* 3:1 (2007) 30-48.

measurable. Should one want to study it, one is almost entirely dependent on historical empathy and indeed, analogy. Unlike iconic 'events' today – Charlie Hebdo or the Islamic State iconoclasm, for example – in the past these volatile images were not registered directly. Such events had no lasting physical counterpart in the sixteenth century (photograph or video), and so immediately became a mental image, surviving exclusively in the minds of the contemporary beholders. The iconic memory and the events giving rise to it thus were described only by a handful of chroniclers. Later visual references, such as the well-known Hogenberg print[13] or the Van Delen, and Van Steenwijck paintings, were aestheticised reconstructions made years if not decades later.[14] They do not reflect actual events, but rather a filtered account of them. Moreover, these visual 'recordings' were made primarily for commercial and aesthetic reasons and fit into longstanding pictorial traditions.[15] They were not intended as faithful records of the facts; more than anything else, they are imaginative compositions by successful artists. To study them as the registration of a historical fact would be utterly naive. Moreover, iconic memory actually prevented an unbiased reading of such images by contemporaries. Therefore the concept of iconic memory needs to be taken into account in historical memory studies, which tend to focus on remembrance and commemoration and to ignore its full visual power.[16]

Even though the visual momentum of the *Beeldenstorm* is lost, and there are no visual records besides the artistic interpretations mentioned above, nevertheless it might be possible to reconstruct the artistic use of iconic memories. As a result of the *Beeldenstorm* and other 'traumatic' events in its aftermath, imagery that had been or seemed 'neutral' for centuries, was so no longer. In the blink of an eye minor iconographic references became powerful allegories.[17] Moreover, in the age of Iconoclasm the germ of an understanding of iconic memory was already present in the theology of the image.

Indeed, while iconic memory might seem like a recent scholarly concept, people in the 1560s, 1570s and 1580s were fully aware of the mental power of distressing destructions. 'Vernacular' image theology in the sixteenth century is quite informative with respect to the iconic effect that experiencing the destruction of art could have.[18] Many an author in the 1560s and 1570s tried to explain to a general audience what enkindled the

13 As discussed by Ramon Voges in this issue.

14 For the discussion on the afterlife of the Iconoclasm in visual culture, see: Marianne Eekhout, *Material Memories of the Dutch Revolt* (Unpublished PhD Leiden University 2014).

15 Christi Klinkert, *Nassau in het nieuws. Nieuwsprenten van Maurits van Nassaus militaire ondernemingen uit de periode 1590-1600* (Unpublished PhD VU University Amsterdam 2005).

16 Erika Kuijpers et al. (eds.), *Memory before Modernity: Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden 2013).

17 David Freedberg, *Iconoclasts and Their Motives* (Maarssen 1985) 35-36.

18 Martin Kemp, *Christ to Coke: How Image becomes Icon* (Oxford 2012).

power of images, either defending or demonising it. The arguments raised by both parties are indicative of the growing understanding of the image as a psychological phenomenon, and reveal the mounting knowledge of the ways in which images in general, and religious works of art in particular, could be deployed to various ends.[19]

Desiderius Erasmus took the lead, as he did so often. When he ridiculed popular devotion in his *Laus Stultitia,* he specifically stressed the use of imagery, literally – the practical manipulation of the objects.[20] This most famous of humanists was no lone ranger. Popular devotion was controversial, especially for its physicality, namely the fact that people 'used' images materially and tangibly. Following in Erasmus' footsteps, Protestant and Catholic theologians alike commented extensively on this physical devotion. It was a huge bone of contention. To Protestants, especially Calvinists, the physicality itself confirmed the idolatrous nature of Catholic devotional practice.[21] According to them, the physical veneration of the image substantiates the fact that it is not a plain material object, like a chair or a table, but rather an animated object imbued with something 'divine' and 'intangible' – agency as it would be called today.[22] The example John Calvin gave in his commentary to Ezekiel to illustrate the controversy is telling.

> For if we see a man or an animal painted in a profane place, a religious feeling does not creep into our minds: for all acknowledge it as a painting: nay idols themselves as long as they are in taverns or workshops, are not worshipped. If the painter's workshop is full of pictures, all pass them by, and if they are delighted with the view of them they do not show any sign of reverence to the paintings. But as soon as the picture is carried to another place, its sacredness blinds men and so stupefies them, that they do not remember that they had already seen that picture in a profane dwelling. This therefore is the reason why God did not admit any pictures into his temple, and surely when the place is consecrated, it must happen that the painting will astonish men just as if some secret divinity belonged to it.[23]

Calvin's anecdote neatly summarises what 'religious use' does to an image: it turns a simple, man-made object into something noteworthy, iconic ... or even holy.[24]

19   Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm* (Chicago 2000) 109-164.

20   For example, Erasmus, *Laus Stultitia,* 60.

21   Jonckheere, *Antwerp Art after Iconoclasm,* 168-197.

22   Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford 1998).

23   Jean Calvin and Thomas Myers, *Commentaries on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids 1948) lecture 21 (Ezekiel 8:7-11).

24   Koenraad Jonckheere, 'An Allegory of Artistic Choice in Times of Trouble: Pieter Bruegel's Tower of Babel', *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art / Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 64 (2014) 116-147.

Calvin's comments however, were by no means exceptional. The most important and influential theologians of the 1560s to 1580s – the Catholics Martinus Duncanus, Renatus Benedictus and François Richardot, or the Protestants Anastasius Veluanus and Petrus Bloccius – all discussed the correlation of the physical object with the beholder's affection for it.[25] The Catholic theologian Martinus Duncanus for instance, systematically distinguishes between 'betamelijck ghebruyck' ('appropriate use') and 'misbruyck' ('abuse') of images, while the radical Calvinist writer Petrus Bloccius considers every 'use' to be abuse.[26] Duncanus also distinguishes between the educational and edifying usage, stressing the supremacy of the symbolic power of images ('figuere beteeckenisse') over their material nature.

In point of fact, such debate was not new in the sixteenth century. The intriguing interaction between the actual object and the image pictured in it ('figuere beteeckenisse') had been a source of discord in image theology from early Christianity. Theologians and scholars throughout the ages were well aware of the fact that the impact of both the image and its possible destruction were due to an intriguing mental process.[27]

The late sixteenth-century theologian Johannes A Porta even devoted a chapter to the phenomenon in his well-known *D'net der Beeltstormers*, explaining it with a 'schoon ghelijckenisse' ('a nice comparison').[28] Imagine, A Porta writes, a bride whose groom leaves her to go on a long journey. She, staying behind, will use his picture not only to remember him, he argues, but the object itself will become a precious gem as it embodies his likeness. She will not be able to destroy it, according to A Porta, because the object has become a relic of his presence.[29] For exactly the same reason he challenged the iconoclasts to destroy the images of their own ancestors instead of those of Christ, the Virgin and the saints. They will not be able to do so, he proclaimed, as the 'figuere beteeckenisse' of such objects is too strong. Reflecting on iconoclasm, A Porta knew perfectly well that this phenomenon does not occur

25 Martinus Duncanus, *Een cort onderscheyt tusschen Godlyke ende afgodissche beelden. Authore Martino Duncano Kempensi Delphensium Pastore in D. Hippolyti. Het tweede boecxken van de heyligen in den hemel dwelck Zijn levendige beelden Gods/Eodem Authore* (Antwerp 1567); Renatus Benedictus, *Een catholic tractaet van de beelden ende van het rechte gebruyck dier selfder, genomen wt de Heylighe Schriftuere, ende oude leeraers der kercken [...]* (Antwerp 1567); François Richardot, *Het sermoon vande beelden teghen die Beeldtschenders [...]* (Leuven 1567); Johannes Anastasias Veluanus, *Der leken wechwyser*, in: F. Pijper (ed.), *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica* 4 (The Hague 1906); Petrus Bloccius and Jacob Pieters, *Meer dan tvvee hondert ketteryen, blasphemien en nieuwe leeringen, vvelck vvt de Misse zyn ghecomen / Eerst van Petro Bloccio school-meester te Leyden in Latyn ghemaeckt, daer nae in Duytsch voor slechte menschen ouerghesett [...]* (Wesel 1567) passim.

26 Duncanus, *Een cort onderscheyt*, unpaginated; Bloccius, *Meer dan tvvee hondert ketteryen*, passim.

27 Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*, 147-164.

28 Johannes A Porta, *D'net der Beeltstormers, Verclarende dat wettelijck ghebruyck der kerckelijcker beelden ende d'onrecht bestormen der seluer. In dry tractaten oft stucken ghedeylt* (Antwerp 1591) 21v-24r.

29 *Ibid.,* 29r.

only in visual communication. A few pages later, he compares the love for and veneration of images with love letters, arguing that one kisses and embraces a missive from a loved one even though it is mere paper. It is the 'figuere beteeckenisse' that causes the physical veneration of the object. This is why the destruction of a sacred manuscript is so hard on believers. The content merges with the object.

Living in the twenty-first century and being exposed to an overwhelming amount of images, we systematically delete the bulk of virtual images without hesitation. Yet we still find it difficult to tear up the photographs of our loved ones tucked away in our wallets. The *signifiant* and the *signifié* always interact whereby the material object acquires reliquary value.[30] The psychological preconditions causing this response are food for other sciences, but the phenomenon itself, and the fact that people were well aware of it in the sixteenth century, is vital to understanding the Iconoclasm's visual and emotional impact, and it is especially helpful in understanding the ways in which the Iconoclasm gave rise to such a powerful iconic memory, which in turn created an opportunity for new visual narratives. Thus, to fully fathom the Iconoclasm and its visual and emotional impact, one must understand the correlation between the object and its meaning, and particularly the ways in which its destruction created iconic memories.

A Porta does not use the psychological phenomenon only to defend the religious use of images. He also discerns in it an argument for condemning iconoclasm.[31] In destroying an image, you simultaneously destroy everything it represents, he maintains. The 'figuere beteeckenisse' is wiped out along with the material object. Indeed, this occurrence, whereby the 'figuere beteeckenisse' merges with the materiality of the object and the object attains a reliquary status, is mirrored in iconoclasm. A Porta however, underestimates the power of iconoclasm. The destruction of an image actually validates the fact that the object is more than mere gold, stone, wood, paint or whatever plain material; the need for its destruction stems from the real belief that the material object in fact does hold some 'divine' power due to its 'figuere beteeckenisse'. The deconstruction of the image and the object thus strongly confirms and even emphasises its reliquary value. The image of the debris accentuates the power of the lost original, visually and mentally, albeit with the difference that through Iconoclasm the 'icon' becomes an entirely mental icon, an iconic memory. The strange merging of values between what is depicted and the object depicting it, as occurs when we hold an image of a loved one, is powerfully reinforced when the object is eradicated. The shock generates even greater empathy with the object itself, rather than what it depicts. As such, the Iconoclasm initiated a shift from a focus on what was depicted to the materiality of

30 Hans Belting, *Das Echte Bild. Bildfragen als Glaubensfragen* (Munich 2005) especially 89-93.

31 A Porta, *D'net der Beeltstormers*, 31r-33v.

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IS iconoclasm in Mosul in February 2015
(AP Photo via militant social media account, File).
AP | Associated Press.
Hollandse Hoogte Amsterdam.

the object and its reliquary value precisely because it triggered iconic memories. In this respect the Iconoclasm only aggravated what it was trying to eliminate, namely the contamination of the spiritual and the material world, and consciousness of the power of the senses of sight and touch in religious matter. What was scattered in 1566 was registered by thousands as an iconic memory. It became an image with an enormous visual, cognitive and emotional charge. For us for instance, the mere image of bits of the sculptures shattered during the IS attacks on the Mosul Museum recalls the horrific facts of our own age. Van Vaernewijck's enduring, amusing description of children running through the streets mocking images and shouting 'vive le gues, or we will decapitate you'[32], suddenly becomes an upsetting anecdote again.

## Visual communication and iconic memory

After the destructive events of 1566 and Alba's subsequent reign of terror, the vivid mental images in the memories of the beholders (iconic memory) offered a host of opportunities for artists and pamphleteers. Subtle references were consciously built into the iconographies of a wide range of images in order to provoke strong emotional and cognitive responses. The intensity of these responses, as mentioned above, was immeasurable, but this is not pertinent here. More germane is the fact that references to an iconic memory were known to be a powerful means of communication and were deliberately used in various visual media to stir the emotions.

Possibly the most influential means of communication in Early Modern Europe was the 'newly' discovered medium of satirical prints.[33] They were produced in vast quantities and made quite an impact on the population, as Van Vaernewijck acknowledges. Seeing the 'printed mocking figures with certain texts', he wrote, 'many people laughed, unaware of the evil in which such satire would end'.[34] The liveliest description of such a print in Marcus Van Vaernewijck's account is of one depicting the Iconoclasm. The author was shocked by the rendering of a Lutheran, a 'Hughenoijsen' and a 'gues' destroying *a* church or rather *the* Church.[35] No example of this print seems to have survived, but a Protestant equivalent did. In this 'replica', the Church is being attacked by the 'hispanishe inquisitores', the Duke of Alba, Granvelle and the pope, among others. They are assisted by monks, Turks, and other pagans.[36] Another example of this phenomenon of course would be the Duke

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32  Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 128.

33  On the propaganda prints in the Low Countries in the age of Iconoclasm see: Daniel Horst, *De Opstand in zwart-wit. Propagandaprenten uit de Nederlandse Opstand 1566-1584* (Zutphen 2003).

34  Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 68, 'spottelicke figueren met zeker ghescrifte gheprent'.

35  *Ibid.*, I, 68.

36  Horst, *De Opstand in zwart-wit*, 68-70.

of Alba's statue in the Antwerp Citadel, its destruction and the satirical prints celebrating this.[37]

While these satirical prints are most often read as propagandist illustrations of political and religious events, I argue that they were much more persuasive and distressing than has been assumed thus far because of the explicit references to the iconic memory created by the traumatic events of August 1566, and the subsequent terror. Van Vaernewijck for one was truly scandalised. Moreover, the distinction made between 'objective' and 'subjective' prints in recent studies, such as Horst's comprehensive account of the satirical prints is pure fiction. There is no such thing as an objective print, and one cannot look at the image of an upsetting event neutrally when one has experienced such an occurrence.[38] Sixteenth-century artists and theologians, among others, were fully aware of this. Therefore, these prints should not be understood solely as illustrative or indicative representations of historical events or as propaganda, but rather as deliberately disturbing references to iconic memories.

Prints were not the only medium to make use of the power of iconic memory. In the wake of Iconoclasm, the Habsburg court painter, Michiel Coxcie for instance, availed himself of the visual power of empty niches.[39] In a triptych Coxcie completed in 1567 for the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament in the Saint Michael and St. Gudule Cathedral in Brussels – probably the most important Habsburg chapel in the Netherlands – he used a powerful metaphor with a reference to the iconic memory. Barely one year after the Iconoclasm, Coxcie alluded to a mental image that must have been as familiar to people in the sixteenth century as the attack on the Twin Towers is to us today. Two empty niches at the lower right figure prominently in the sumptuous antique architecture. In combination with the first verses of the Decalogue (written in Hebrew underneath), they doubtless refer to the highly controversial veneration of images, idolatry, and most of all, the Iconoclastic Fury of the previous year. Empty niches were the open wounds of social unrest, a potent reminder of the violent destruction of the churches in the Low Countries. Coxcie was a staunch Catholic and a grandee in the art world in the age of iconoclasm. He too used the metaphor of the iconic memory to trigger a significant cognitive and emotional response.

Now, Coxcie's *Last Supper* is a rare example of an altarpiece in which is embedded a direct reference to the visual impact of the Iconoclasm. Yet Coxcie was by no means the only artist to channel the power of the collective visual memory or the impact of iconic memory in his iconographies. Nor was he alone in including visual references to controversial issues. Even

37  *Ibid.*, 130-136.

38  *Ibid.*, 17-19.

39  On the triptych, see: Koenraad Jonckheere, 'Images of Stone: The Physicality of Art and the Image Debates, Pieter Bruegel's Tower of Babel', *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art/Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 62 (2012): *Meaning in Materials: Netherlandish Art, 1400-1800*, 117-146.

seemingly neutral landscapes were often imbued with covert references to the political and religious turmoil. That is, these allusions are covert to us, but it is doubtful that they were so to contemporary beholders, who were transfixed by the events of the 1560s and 1570s. Admittedly, the iconic memory of these references was not as powerful as that created by the Iconoclasm, yet these more subtle allusions were still strong iconographic markers. Take Gillis Mostaert's work, for instance.[40] A painting by him now in Prague depicts a market scene. The viewer's gaze is directed towards a place at the back where an execution is taking place; a nobleman is about to be decapitated. This detail recalls a common feature in many a print published in the late 1560s and 1570s in which the execution of Counts Egmont and Hoorn was visualised.[41] Their decapitation shocked the majority of the population in the Low Countries and became an 'icon' of Alba's tyranny. Given these historical circumstances, it was hardly possible to exclude such a reading of the panel. However, the sheer banality of the foreground scene contrasts strongly with the highly charged secondary depiction, which at the time still resonated powerfully in the Brabant cities, and for precisely this reason makes a strong case for one of the major issues of the late 1560s, namely the omnipresence of state terror.

Less obvious still, but no less powerful, is yet another painting by Gillis Mostaert, *Landscape with soldiers*, painted in 1574 and a seemingly purely aesthetically appealing landscape.[42] Mostaert, who did not particularly like the Catholics or Spaniards, as we learn in Karel Van Mander's *Schilder-Boeck*[43],

40  Winfried Grimm, 'Het "Ecce Homo" van Gillis Mostaert in Antwerpen. Analyse en Interpretatie', in: Ekkehard Mai (ed.), *Gillis Mostaert (1528-1598). Een tijdgenoot van Bruegel* (Antwerp, Cologne 2005) 96-125.

41  Horst, *De Opstand in zwart-wit*, 79-90.

42  Christine Göttler, 'Wit in Painting, Color in Words: Gillis Mostaert's Depictions of Fires', *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art / Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 64 (2014) 214-247.

43  Karel Van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck* (Haarlem 1604) 261r-261v: 'Gillis was seer constigh en versierlijck van beelden en Historien, wonder vermaecklijck in zijnen praet, datter menigh Mensch geern by was. Hy en was niet so heel religioos, noch ooc niet goet Spaensch, heeft veel bootsen aenghericht: onder ander, hebbende gemaeckt een Mary-beeldt voor eenen Spaengiaert, die hem niet wel wou betalen, gingh het met lijm-wit over strijcken, en maeckte de Maria heel wilt ghehulselt, en lichtveerdigh als een Hoere: hy liet den Spaengiaert boven comen, en hem loochenen t'huys te wesen, den Spaengiaert t'stuck omkeerende, also hy't van buyten kende, oft gheteyckent hadde, siende sulcke Mary-beeldt, werdt heel toornigh, en liep om den Marck-graef. Dit was ten tijde van Ernestus. Gillis hadde t'wijlen t'stuck afghewasschen laten stellen op den Esel wel afgedrooght. Den Marck-graef comende, seyde tot Gillis: Wat hoor ick Gillis? hier is swaricheyt van u, dat my leet is. Wat gaet u over sulcken dinghen te doen? Hy lietse boven comen, en t'stuck sien, doe was alle dinghen wel, en den Spaengiaert wist niet wat seggen. Gillis begon daer op zijn clachten doen over den Spaengiaert, dat hy hem niet wilde voldoen voor zijnen arbeydt, en daerom hem alle moeyt socht aen te doen die hy mocht, op dat hy t'stuck ten lesten mocht hebben voor niet met allen, eyndlijck den

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Crispijn Van den Broeck (1523?-1591?), *Hedge preaching* (c. 1566). Drawing.
Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna.

depicted a group of armed guildsmen en route to a hilltop near a town. They are about to shoot the parrot – *Papegaaischieten* – a typical event organised during religious holidays in the Low Countries. On this occasion, members of the armed guilds shoot at a (fake) parrot on top of a high pole with a bow or crossbow. The one who succeeded first was declared king. Around 1566, the *papegaai* (or pope's jay) became a well-known metaphor ridiculing or questioning the Catholic faith. In a satirical print of 1566, for instance, *papegaaischieten* symbolised the religious disputes, and in his account of the early years of the Revolt Marcus Van Vaernewijck also explicitly mentions the metaphor: 'In Antwerp was for sale a moulting parrot [...] They understood parrot to mean papists or the clergy'.[44] Apparently, this was no trivial matter and it is very unlikely that whoever saw this painting after it was finished in 1574 did not remember the on-going controversies and the associative discourse of *papegaaischieten*. Moreover, it questioned the alliances of the armed guilds which did not necessarily support the pope or the *papen*.

Several of Pieter Brueghel's paintings have likewise been analysed as referential panels, that is as indices of common visual memories.[45] The iconography of his *Saint John the Baptist preaching* for instance, is now commonly accepted as being interrelated to hedge preaching. The awareness of the suggestive power of the iconic memory reinforces the current reading of the panel, as hedge preaching too, was a potent visual marker. Bruegel's *Rest on the flight into Egypt* has been convincingly linked to contemporary image debates[46], and the grisaille of the *Woman taken in adultery* painted on the eve of the *Beeldenstorm* might well be a comment on the appropriateness of iconoclasm, as I have argued elsewhere, for it alludes overtly to materiality and adultery, two key elements in the image debates in the Low Countries in the 1560s.[47] As demonstrated by Hessel Miedema some time ago, the above also applies to Gillis Coignet.[48] After all, Coignet too, built in many references to contemporary social disputes.

Spaengiaert had al t'onghelijck van der Weerelt. Dusdanighe bootsen zijn seer veel van hem te vertellen: van een vechtend Avont-mael, dat hy oock af con wasschen: van een Oordeel, daer hy hem selven, met noch een ander van zijn kennis, had geschildert in de Helle sitten tijcktacken, en meer vreemde boerden van hem gheseyt, hier te lang te verhalen: wantmer wel een eyghen Boeck af soude maken.'

44 Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 68-69. 't'Andtweerpen hijnc men te coope ghefigureert eenen papegaij zittende in een mute [...] Bij den papegaij verstonden zij de papen oft de gheestelicheijt'.

45 David Freedberg, 'Allusion and Topicality in the Work of Pieter Bruegel: The Implications of a Forgotten Polemic', in: David Freedberg (ed.), *The Prints of Pieter Bruegel the Elder* (Bridgestone 1989) 53-65.

46 Stephanie Porras, 'Rural Memory, Pagan Idolatry: Pieter Bruegel's Peasant Shrines', *Art History* 34 (2011) 486-509.

47 Jonckheere, *Antwerp Art after Iconoclasm*, 204-215.

48 Hessel Miedema, 'Dido Rediviva, Of: Liever Turks dan Paaps. Een opstandig schilderij door Gillis Coignet', *Oud Holland* 108 (1994) 79-86; Hessel Miedema, 'Nog een schilderij van Gillis Coignet: Judith toont het hoofd van Holofernes aan de

To summarise, the suggestive power of iconic memory was used in all sorts of ways in contemporary visual culture. The strong visual impact of the *Beeldenstorm* and the subsequent events created opportunities for interesting visual communication. Hardly recognisable to viewers who cannot look with the 'period eye'[49], these iconic memories were strong iconographical markers in an age of conflict. They ceased to exist materially in the blink of an eye, but were used later by painters and printmakers to visually frame the political and religious discourse in the late 1560s.[50]

**Koenraad Jonckheere** (1975) is associate Professor of Renaissance and Baroque art at Ghent University. Recent publications: Koenraad Jonckheere, 'An Allegory of Artistic Choice in Times of Trouble: Pieter Bruegel's Tower of Babel', *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art / Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 64 (2014) 151-177; Koenraad Jonckheere, 'Images of Stone: The Physicality of Art and the Image Debates in the Sixteenth Century', *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art/Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 62 (2012) 116-147 and Koenraad Jonckheere, *Experiments in Decorum: Antwerp Art after Iconoclasm (1566-1585)* (Brussels etc. 2012). Email: koenraad.jonckheere@ugent.be.

Inwoners van Bethulië', *Oud Holland* 109 (1995) 143-151. For more examples, see: Jonckheere, *Antwerp Art after Iconoclasm*.

49  Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in 15th Century Italy* (Oxford 1972).

50  David Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 390-392. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (eds.), *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art* (Karlsruhe, Cambridge, MA 2002) *passim*.