In its essence, this essay is an effort to comprehend everything and anything related to the concept of visual turn, or sometimes also referred to as pictorial turn. When I was in my first year of elementary school in 1946, there were some pictures hung in front of the class; and under every picture, there were some Latin alphabets comprising a certain word. Those pictures were meant to be a learning device, to help the kids read, including me. The pictures on the wall were quite big, in the hope that the children can easily read the written scripts below them. One of the ones that still left an impression on me is a picture of an old lady; under it, a Javanese word comprised of Latin scripts was written: n i n i (nini), meaning ‘grandmother.’ We learned to spell the word under that picture, and the picture was expected to help us read the word properly. The teacher spelled the scripts one by one and we followed: n i n i (nini) = nini. After the teacher finished spelling, one of us was told to read the spelled word, and right there a loud voice answered: n.i.n.i > simbah. The expression simbah, which has the same meaning like nini, but was more familiar in our daily conversations, came out because we did not actually ‘read’ the scripts; we read the picture of the old lady. Though the origin is unknown, the Dutch East Indies education, which obviously gained influence from Dutch culture, believed that hybridity is the best way to understand and comprehend something. A hybrid is the result of an amalgamation between two different elements, and is considered a new, tougher, stronger, and better species. The word itself is used in biology, which refers to the result of an amalgamation between two animals or plants: the amalgamation of a horse and a donkey results in a mule. Meanwhile the amalgamation of two languages can result in widely-used terminologies in society, like ‘kids zaman now.’ ‘Kids’ comes from the English language, ‘zaman’ is from Arabic, and ‘now’ is also from English: the combination gives birth to a concept that explains and describes the image of kids these days, who have different values and norms compared to the previous generation.

Millions and millions years before this era, our cave-living ancestors seemed to have realized this when they drew a variety of animals and plants on the cave walls. Society anywhere, inside or outside the caves, need communication; that is why they never stop
developing it. The drawings on the cave walls cannot automatically be considered as a hybrid, because it only has one element, the visual. However, we do not know for sure, and may never know for sure, if the drawing on the cave wall stands on its own as a picture, or if it is an element that is part of a ritual(?) that may suggest sound or spoken language. If that were to be the case, then the drawing on the wall was actually part of a hybrid creation that may have emphasized the concept of culture as communication. Culture is communication, communication is culture.

The might of the hybrid as something that surpasses two or more elements which construct it has continued to be developed until today. In music, we mix reggae with *keroncong*, or classic with jazz. The result is a new kind of music, which we may call ‘keroncong reggae’ or ‘classic jazz.’ In contemporary fine arts, which is currently developing in Indonesia, the focus is no longer only on the visuality, but also on the auditory. The fine arts no longer only mean two-dimensional or three-dimensional pictures, but also various kinds of sounds that can ‘explain’ or ‘ease’ the audience’s understanding and comprehension. Moreover, paintings are usually accompanied by certain titles or descriptions, which are expected to help guide us in understanding the intention of the painter. We seem to be even more dependent towards the concept of hybridity, which has made us unsure of what we ‘read’ if it is only a picture, without sounds and without scripts.

The problem that emerges from the concept of hybridity is the tendency to forget that language, in principle, is sound, and that the need to record and eternalize it in visual form motivated our ancestors to create the written scripts. We tend to forget that the written script is actually a picture, which is not that different than the drawings on the cave walls, or on canvases, or on stones. Like the anecdote I presented in the beginning of this essay, there are efforts to explain scripts with pictures, to read scripts with the help of pictures. But what actually happens is that the picture is explained through the picture itself, because the student thinks that the picture of the old lady has to be ‘read,’ so their mind goes straight to the familiar spoken language for them without paying attention to the scripts - *nini* becomes *simbah*. The effort to make a visual turn or a pictorial turn does not happen because in essence there is no turn - the picture and the written scripts under the picture are both visual forms.

The concept that becomes the basis of the belief on visual turn continues to be developed in education, not only in the form of pictures on the wall with written scripts under them, but also in reading books that are decorated in pictures. Reading books during the Dutch East Indies era are great examples to describe this belief. In that era, children
are given lesson books filled with scripts and pictures. The intention goes together with the concept of hybrid in biology - an effort to generate reading skill by combining scripts and pictures. And apparently the appearance of pictures is considered as a kind of turn or culture that dictates us into the belief that the visual is mightier than the auditory. Reading through the lesson books from that time, a simple question can be raised: does the picture explain the scripts or do the scripts explain the picture?

Having said that, if the memory of what happened in the 1940s in my school can be considered, then the picture really is mightier than the scripts. We surely know that ‘scripts’ in the internet age has also emerged as pictures that we recognize as emoticon - which is something that also requires learning to understand and to use them. We apparently have ‘returned’ to the old-fashioned way of communication, which was done by the Egyptians who invented the hieroglyphs, a drawing or a visual object that represents a word, a syllable, or a sound. What we meant by ‘turn’ is actually just a continuation of the belief that what we meant by picture is our effort to communicate - not only through sound but also through picture, which in this understanding actually can be included as script that must be classified as linguistic problem.

Way before the term visual turn becomes popular, the world of education anywhere has implemented hybridity in its lesson books, especially for elementary schools. This tendency does not create problems in subjects like biology; an explanation about the shape of a rose, for example, will surely be more complicated compared to a picture of a rose on the page. It can be said that without verbal explanations, the form of a rose can still be read by students. However, problems arise when we consider story books. In the name of making it easy for students to comprehend what is written on the pages, pictures are attached. The pictures in the books are meant to explain and ease the process of reading the story. The concept of visual turn or pictorial turn becomes fascinating when used to analyze the pages of books filled with written scripts and pictures.

In the pages of those books, what actually explains what, does the picture explain the scripts or do the scripts explain the picture? Do the readers understand the picture after reading the scripts, or vice versa? It is even more important if we observe that the matter contained in the picture is not actually communicated through the scripts. I would say, that is exactly the problem if we follow the idea about “reading” a picture. Lesson books are discourses, and discourses are always ideological; so are those books. The pictures attached to accompany the stories delivered through words contain elements that could perhaps have nothing to do with the words themselves. When observed further, the lesson books from the colonial era contain pictures, which can deconstruct or put
a spotlight on everything and anything that is purposefully hidden or not in the verbal text - this is exactly the principle of pictorial turn. The relationship between characters, especially if it involves the matter of class differentiation, can instantly be read in the picture. So can the social and cultural environment surrounding the characters.

Attitude, clothes, professions, and everything that is related to certain social and cultural classes explain how far the lesson books are utilized by the government or the institution that provides them. The delivery through words is not intended to mean the same thing, but hidden meanings can purposefully or not appear in the visual form. Relationship between brothers, between ethnicities, between nations can be instantly read through the pictures accompanying the text - be it on purpose or not. In the colonial era, the attitude of the colonizer towards the colonized is instantly revealed through the picture, and not from the text. The lesson books provided by the colonizer to educate the colonized are of course a very practical and efficient device used to slip, or force, meanings related to the structure of society during the colonial era. The pictures on those lessons books in the form of stories are important materials to explain the gravity of studying visuality.

What can easily be conveyed through the lesson books from the colonial era is even mightier now that we continuously develop technology. The pictures that were once printed on the books in the past, now easily enter and dominate the media, especially mass communication devices. In its various forms, and it will continue to vary, the pictorial delivery of a message will dominate every form of discourse. And the pictorial cannot be separated from the capital, and the capital cannot be separated from the power, so our world now is turning into every visual direction, into the grasps of those agents or institutions who have the capital to slip, or force, their ideology.

The books, be it the ones we get from a book store or the ones offered online, emphasize more and more on the pictures. Even essay books about political issues are packaged in such a way that gives bigger portion to the picture - making it more important than the verbal text. In its reading, the picture that accompanies the text becomes a mighty device in understanding the content of the text. In this situation, a problem will arise when the picture refers to a world that is not recognized by the readers. Essay on the politics accompanied by the picture of wayang will create a problem for the readers who are not familiar with wayang at all. Essays containing a concept or a word related to culture are of course more complicated precisely when there is a picture. A different development happens in the movement of concrete poetry during the 1950s, which proclaimed that poetry is picture, or that the scripts can be arranged into a picture.
This idea was initially developed in the 19th century in France and England, one of the prominent figures being Guillaume Appolinaire.

Related to this, at least during a certain period in the development of Indonesian comics, some comic artists did not seem to hold much confidence in the power of pictures, by attaching long explanations in verbal text. In such a thing, we encounter contradicting problems in the concept of pictorial turn. The readers do not know how to face it: in such a comic, does the picture explain the scripts or vice versa. The principle that applies in hybridity even loses its power, because the marriage between two different species (the picture and the scripts) does not make the comic clearer or more powerful, it actually weakens it - seen from the visual or the verbal elements. In the most extreme way of thinking, it is as if we read in the same way like a primary school student who just learns how to read.

Facing and dealing with such things makes us come up with the idea of a visual culture study program, which is meant to give guides and comprehension to students in reading pictures, which we have to admit, becomes even more dominant in communication because of technology development - and cultural development. We have to learn to be more careful in dealing with pictures and develop methodologies to read them. We have to be more thorough in reading pictures, because what we consider ‘just’ a picture, even during the cave walls era, is already ideological. Verbal delivery can of course be used to develop propaganda techniques, but the visual seems to only function in easing the reading process. Moreover, like the reading lesson books in elementary school, the institutions producing them have taken advantage of the concept of hybridity which weds the scripts and the picture, two things that are actually both visual. It is just that we have recognized them separately, as verbal language and pictorial language - two different species.