

An Introduction to the Visual as Argument

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One of our principal starting points is the claim that despite its growing complexity and rhetorical sophistication, visual studies remains a field that is mainly engaged with kinds of argument that do not need to make continual, close, concerted, dialogic contact with images. To some degree that is the normal condition of several related fields, including art history and visual anthropology, but visual studies has always had the special brief of extended engagement with the visual world, so its wordiness is significant: the difficulty is in saying what that significance is, and how far its effects reach.

Most of what is in any given book or article is text, and some texts on visual subjects have virtually no illustrations. This is a superficial observation, but also, I think, characteristic. It is probably equally true of art history and visual studies, although that can't be quantified because when the budget permits, art historical texts traditionally include lavishly printed illustrations even if the argument does not require visual detail. In general, an essay or book of visual studies will be mostly text. A quick look through my bookshelves suggests that the ratio of text to image might be around twenty or thirty to one. This is only a statistical observation: it is not at all easy to know what sorts of conclusions could be drawn from it. I am not suggesting, for example, that visual studies should tend toward a state where images predominate in sheer page count, or that there might somehow be a balance between images and writing. On the other hand, it seems there must be something to be said about a book like W. J. T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory*, which is less than ten percent images, even though it is centrally concerned with the proposal that pictures are theory, just as much as exemplifications of theory.¹ I am not exempting any existing practices: my own book, *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction*, is one-quarter images, three-quarters text.² The book you are holding is no exception: here, too, the pages devoted to text outnumber the pages given to images. There isn't a clear conclusion lurking here: the notion is just to start by pointing to the *appearance* of our texts, which must bear some relation to our ongoing interest in the theorization and conceptualization of images, and our concomitant distrust, discomfort, or lack of interest in those kinds of argument might need images to be in continuous dialectical relation with texts—not to mention our aversion to the kinds of arguments that might let images lead the way.

In what follows I will be pursuing these possibilities, which I think are fundamental. The first option—already marginalized in art history and visual studies—would be to write in such a way that our texts require close, continual contact with the specifics of images and other visual material, rather than using images in the instrumental, prag-

1 This is based on 80 half-page illustrations in 425 pages of text, or 9% of the total page count.

2 Based on 56 full-page illustrations in 200 pages of text, not counting the endnotes or several dozen smaller illustrations.

matic, and customary ways I outline in the next few pages. The second option—which is barely on the horizon of either visual studies or art history—would be to let images actually lead, divert, or undermine our arguments, turning truth claims into rhetorical figures, references into tropes, facts into fictions. There are a few models for this second option, beginning principally with Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* and his seminars on the neutral, but there is almost no academic writing that permits itself to be led astray, diverted from its nonfictional purposes or its identity as historical writing—even though that it arguably exactly what Barthes did, and what led writers in the 1970s and 1980s academia to admire his conception of writing.³ Even so, I think it may not be necessary to try experiments like Barthes’s directly, because I think it can be shown that images already do that work of undermining and diverting. All that is needed is to acknowledge how they work against or to the side of our arguments, as well as with them. Most of this Introduction is taken up with brief accounts of the Topics in this book, with the intention of showing how images already work as arguments, resisting, speeding, slowing, affirming, contradicting, and sometimes partly ruining the arguments that surround them. My general argument is that visual studies can, in effect, become richer in its understanding and presentation of the visual if it takes these kinds of effects into account.

A useful way to open this subject is by considering the ways that images are habitually used in art history and in visual studies. I think there are at least three: images are used as mnemonics, as examples, and as illustration. Each is also a way of keeping images in check, keeping them at a distance from the text—of ensuring the text remains in control.

First, visual studies and art history tend to use images as *mnemonics*, reminding readers of images they may not be able to recall with sufficient detail, or that they may have seen but forgotten. In art history, one of the principal purposes of illustrations is to remind readers of artworks that they have, ideally, encountered in the original. For that purpose, it doesn’t matter if the reproductions aren’t the best quality. University presses in particular have adopted laser printing technologies and uncoated paper stock, so that the average grayscale range in contemporary first-world academic publishing is lower than it was at the beginning of the twentieth century. High quality illustrations are associated with the art market, where connoisseurship and formal values matter in a way that they do not in academic discourse. In my experience, the relatively low reproduction quality in academic presses is rarely a subject of conversation in art history: when it’s possible, authors or publishers will find grants that enable some color reproduction, so that at least some of the images in the book are high quality. It’s generally acknowledged that the size of the market for art history books precludes the quality of reproductions that people associate with commercial art publications. Other than that, not much tends to be said about the average quality of black and white illustrations in art history: it’s just taken that the reproductions are adequate—and adequate here means that they only need to remind readers of absent artworks or even just to reassure readers that the author and publisher are not aiming at the commercial art market. Visual studies follows these publishing protocols.

3 My own attempt to take the relation between writing and pictures as seriously as I think Barthes did is *What Photography Is* (New York: Routledge, 2011), a response to *Camera Lucida*. Within art history, there have been a number of recent attempts to rethink writing, not all of which have developed an interest in the capacity of images themselves to do the disrupting. Recent texts include a special issue of *Art History*, “Creative Writing and Art History” (2011); but this literature has tended to valorize writing such as Alexander Nemerov’s, which is taken as a model of good writing in general, even though it is strongly belletristic and in full control of the images it deploys. See the discussion in *Farewell to Visual Studies*, edited by James Elkins, Gustav Frank, and Sunil Manghani, vol. 5 of the Stone Art Theory Institute (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, forthcoming).

Second, visual studies tends to use images as *examples* of concepts developed in the accompanying texts. Thus images of the Twin Towers, of Dolly the cloned sheep (announced in 1997), of the *New Yorker* cover cartoon depicting Barack Obama as a terrorist (2008), and many others are reproduced as reminders. Tom Mitchell's book *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present* (2011) doesn't include reproductions of images such as the hooded man in Abu Ghraib prison, mainly because they are too familiar to need reproducing, but also because his argument seldom requires any details of those images beyond their Gestalt. The detailed content of images is not often at issue in visual studies. There are a number of reasons for this. Visual studies is defined, to some degree, in distinction to certain strains in art history, and one of those strains is connoisseurship, which understands pictures in terms of subtle properties of technique and condition. Another strain of some traditional art history is formal analysis, which in this context can be described as a practice that is enabled by the conviction that an image may be interpreted as a matter of visual properties such as line, color, and space. Visual studies has at times defined itself as the opposite of connoisseurship, formal analysis, and other interpretive methods associated with art history, and that accounts for some of visual studies' reticence to engage visual objects in detail. But there may be other, more important reasons why visual studies doesn't tend to look closely at images. In particular, I think it is crucial that visual studies takes images as examples of political, gender, and other issues. When that happens, cultural and philosophic criticism can take center stage, and images that are presented, at first, as enabling moments in the critique can become merely exemplary. A sign that an image is being used as an example is that the author's points about gender, subjectivity, political identity, or other subjects might be made just as well without the image. This may be particularly true of Anglo-American visual studies, where gender, identity, and related topics can sometimes be the author's principal concern; in contexts like that, images might be interesting or apposite examples of ideas and ideologies. But an example is, logically speaking, unnecessary.

Third, images are used as *illustrations* in both visual studies and art history. There is a distinction, I think, between examples and illustrations in this context: an example provides evidence or veracity to an argument; an illustration is an addition, an ornament, a conventional accompaniment. When an image in an essay or a book is not required, either as an aid to the reader's memory or as a concrete instance of something argued in the text, then its purpose may be illustrative in this sense. A given image might be mnemonic, exemplary, and illustrative all at once, in different respects and for different passages in the text. Alternately, some parts of an image may work as illustrations while other parts function as mnemonics or examples. An art historical study of gesture in Pollock's painting, for instance, might require images because readers wouldn't clearly remember the different canvases; but the colors of the reproductions might be mainly illustrative—that is, color might be ornamental to the argument. Ornament here isn't meant in the pejorative sense of superficial; what works as illustration might be integral to the rhetoric, the persuasiveness, the pleasure, and the interest of the text; illustrations provide variety, break up the monotony of the printed page, and contribute to an engaging reading experience. Illustrations aren't meant to jog reader's memories (as in mnemonic images), or be continuously consulted during reading (as examples are), and they will only be cursorily cited in the text.

These three uses for images are, I think, symptomatic of a traditional practice of art history, and within that they aren't problematic. It isn't a problem in need of solving, for example, that art historical texts include limited grayscale reproductions of paintings, because it is understood that those reproductions stand in for fuller, contextually rich experiences of the artworks. (It's a different question whether art history makes contact

with those more phenomenologically plenary experiences.⁴) But these usages of images should be a problem for visual studies, especially when it proposes itself as a field with a renewed and rethought relation to the visual and to visibility.

It's a common claim in visual studies that images set the terms of the discussion, generating and determining the reader's and viewer's interests and arguments. That promise is often made but seldom practiced. Tom Mitchell's proposal in *Picture Theory* is that there should be a reciprocal attention to pictures in theory and pictures as theory; he calls this "picture theory."⁵ Susan Buck-Morss has written on several occasions about the way she takes images as starting points, and how her arguments develop around images. In an interview she mentions how the images in *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* "were the inspiration for the writing of the text, rather than being illustrations of the text, which would not have been written if the images had not been found."⁶

Despite these efforts there are still almost no texts in which images take on the work of argument. Because this is an unusual complaint, I want to be as clear as possible: I wouldn't say that images don't seem to contain argument, or that they don't have all sorts of surprising features that inspire and guide art historians and visual theorists. Images participate in the work of argument—in the interests we articulate in our texts—in the sense that our arguments are inspired and guided by them, but images do not take on the work of argument, in the sense that whatever it is we have to say is said in the text. I also don't mean that images should, or could, take on *all* the work of argument. The idea

4 In this context an interesting book is Keith Moxey's *Visual Time: The Image in History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

5 In the introduction to Part One of *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), Mitchell notes that "the very notion of a theory of pictures suggests an attempt to master the field of visual representation," but it also suggests a counter-question: why not try to "picture theory"? The essays in Part One do this, he says, in three different ways: by looking at "pictures 'in' theory and at theory itself as a form of picturing"; by looking at pictures "as" theory, "as second-order reflections on the practices of pictorial representation"; and by considering how to move beyond the dichotomy of image and text by thinking of "the figure of the 'imagetext'" (p. 9). This last is similar to what he describes as the purpose of the book as a whole, in the Introduction, where he writes that "the interaction of pictures and texts is constitutive of representation as such: all media are mixed media" (p. 5). These are suggestive ideas, and they have been fruitful for a range of writers on visibility in several fields. (It's another question how often they have been adopted; I return to this below.) Mitchell's formulations here are not quite the same as the claims I am making, that images could determine, create, or guide arguments. But in my reading, Mitchell's positions imply as much, because each of the three formulations he gives in the Introduction to Part One of *Picture Theory* makes use of a sense of pictures in which they create problematic and interesting relations to texts. When he asks "What do pictures want?" in the book of that name, he is interested partly in animism and partly in the interconnected "imagetext" themes in *Picture Theory*; but in the terms I am developing here his question is an acknowledgement of the potential force of pictures on argument. See Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

6 In what follows, Buck-Morss describes the process more the way Mitchell describes his interests in *Picture Theory*. She says "The juxtaposition of images and text is meant to produce a cognitive experience in readers, who can see the theoretical point in a certain way, one that surprises and illuminates. Affect, as much as reason, is mobilized." Shortly after that, she says "In chapter two, for instance, a straightforward story unfolds until a point where the text begins to speak about the shattering of the dreamworld of Modernity . . . At that point the book shatters, the actual presentation changes, so that you get fragments of text and image, rather than sequential text." These formulations are close to Mitchell's in the equation of the meaning of images with affect, and in the interest in the "juxtaposition" of text and images and their interaction; but she is also interested in the possibility that the images, with which her project began, can continue to work in and through the narrative. Buck-Morss, "Globalization, Cosmopolitanism, Politics, and the Citizen," conversation with Laura Mulvey and Marquard Smith, in *Visual Culture Studies*, edited by Smith (London: Sage, 2008), p. 50, talking about her book *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

of image-only publications that might count as visual studies or art history is a special subject, and I will return to it. I am after something more like an after-effect: after we are startled, bemused, entranced, and possibly persuaded by what we find in visual objects, we then write about them, and in our writing those objects become passive: they serve as reminders, examples, and illustrations of things we end up arguing in the texts that surround them. It's that effect that I would like to understand: it's an effect of our writing, rather than our convictions, of our disciplines, rather than our experience.

In *Picture Theory*, for instance, the pictures are mainly examples of arguments that are carried on in the text. In my reading, there is no moment in *Picture Theory* in which an image arrests my reading and makes me reconsider what the text is saying. Pictures are passive. They agree with the text, they support its claims. It may have once been true that Buck-Morss's *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* was a collection of images in search of a text, and it is still true that parts of the text make a reader rethink what is happening with images and texts; but the completed book is a series of strong arguments, with images as evidence, as parallels, as illustration. (I am not exempting myself. It is tremendously difficult to write a book in which images work with the text. Even if images start out, in the author's mind, as wild and suggestive things without determinate meaning, they eventually settle into mnemonics, examples, and illustrations.⁷) If visual studies is to make good on its promise to be the central discipline that considers the visual, then I think it needs to find ways to be guided by pictures, rather than ways of explaining pictures.

In this Introduction I set out a new theorization of how the visual might become a more central part of visual studies. First it may be helpful to distinguish this project from several others that may appear similar.

PARALLEL PROJECTS

Our initiative in this book can be distinguished, first, from the reversal of image–text relations proclaimed by Roland Barthes in “The Photographic Message”: “The image,” he wrote, “no longer illustrates the words; it is now the words which, structurally, are parasitic on the image” (Barthes, 1977, 25). This was meant to reverse the traditional relation in which images illustrated their texts, but there is a difference between texts that elaborate on images, and the much rarer but more challenging case of texts that permit themselves to be fundamentally altered by images. If words are “parasitic on the image,” then they feed on it, and grow by metabolizing the image's material. Parasitism is a tempting metaphor, but it is too close to the common case in which an art work inspires a scholar to write a text, which then becomes an independent focus of interest, relegating the image to a subsidiary role as illustration or exemplar. We are interested in a different sort of relationship. If we keep to biology, the choices aside from parasitism are commensalism (in which one organism benefits, and the other is neutral), mutualism (in which both benefit), and competition (in which both organisms are more or less harmed by their relation). Commensalism would name what Barthes had in mind. Parasitism, if it is taken in its technical sense, would imply that the text actually damages the images: a meaning Barthes did not intend, but a common condition in much of art history and visual studies, where interpretations impoverish images by controlling their meanings.

⁷ *My Six Stories from the End of Representation: Images in Painting, Photography, Microscopy, Astronomy, Particle Physics, and Quantum Mechanics, 1985–2000* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008) began, as Buck-Morss says, with a pile of photographs and printouts. For a long time I had no idea what arguments might go along with those images: but the book has arguments, and the images exemplify them.

Mutualism and competition would be closer to what we hope to develop in this book. The idea is to have the image work with or against the text, but not simply *for* the text.

The project of this book is also distinct from several loosely related accounts that propose images are *like* meaning, or that pictures behave as *if* they were language. Gottfried Boehm's account of images belongs here, with its interest in what he calls "iconic logic" or "iconic difference," which are ways that images make meaning that is parallel to or evocative of linguistic meaning.⁸ Horst Bredekamp's short experimental book *Darwin's Corals* is related, with its claim that Darwin, at one point, thought *with* or *through* a diagram of corals.⁹ Both Boehm and Bredekamp propose that images can express something *like* language, and as indispensable as this is for any full sense of images, it doesn't quite have the clarity of a slightly more restricted class of claims that images actually work *as* theories and not just as *if they were* theories. Most of the authors of this book do not think that images can behave *as if* they had meaning, logic, or theoretical content, but rather that they effectively *do* possess meaning, logic, or theory. This position is implied throughout, and is not explicit in any Topic. It is not as conceptually flexible as Boehm's account or as carefully posed as Bredekamp's: what matters here is that images can effectively possess theory, whether or not that possession—that expression or that structure—can be articulated. (This may, in fact, be a formative difference between Anglo-American visual studies, with its pragmatic focus, and some elements of *Bildwissenschaft*.)

It may also be helpful to separate our interests here from the many recent texts outside of visual studies that use images in unconventional ways. Of these the closest may be Lawrence Weschler's *Everything That Rises*.¹⁰ Weschler is a journalist, inspired by John Berger, and the book is full of unexpectedly similar images that prompt him to meditate, sometimes in a personal and associative way, about the "convergences" of meaning. *Everything That Rises* does allow images to argue, at least at the level of their overall visual organization; but it is not informed by visual studies or, in any consistent way, by area studies or other academic interests that impinge on its subject matter. Berger's early writing is an influence throughout the book, especially in Weschler's tendency to use images as indices of social concerns.

Berger's work could also be added to this list of parallel projects; since the 1960s he has been writing about how images disrupt our accustomed interpretations. Several of his book include passages that are given over largely to images, as if to say that they can produce effects in surplus of their functions in the narrative. But as far as I know, he has not written theoretical accounts of that practice, and his practice is as widely praised as it is seldom emulated.¹¹

For some art historians, the apposite models here, and the closest parallel projects, would be Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* or Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne* project, which took the form of mobile arrangements of photo postcards and clippings on folding screens. Both have generated an enormous literature, but they are, I think, more inspirations and precedents than parallel projects, because with a few exceptions contemporary scholars do not write or practice like either Warburg or Benjamin. Buck-Morss mentions Walter Benjamin as a source for her own experiments in *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*,

8 Most of Boehm's texts are still untranslated. For bibliography and analysis in English, see *What is an Image?* edited by James Elkins and Maja Naef, vol. 2 of the Stone Art Theory Seminars (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2011).

9 This is discussed in *Farewell to Visual Studies*, edited by James Elkins, Sunil Manghani, and Gustav Frank, vol. 5 of the Stone Art Theory Seminars (University Park, PA: Penn State Press), forthcoming.

10 Weschler, *Everything That Rises: A Book of Convergences* (San Francisco: McSweeney's, 2007).

11 This is a point I pursue in *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

but as she says it is impossible to know how images would have figured in the final version of the book now known as *The Arcades Project*. She takes from him an exemplary interest in the generative meanings of images, and a sense of new configurations of texts and images; but the closest she has come to trying to do what Benjamin might have done is in *The Dialectics of Seeing*, her study of Benjamin.¹² The art historian Georges Didi-Huberman has written extensively on *Mnemosyne* and even curated his own exhibition as a response, but his work has much more affinity to disciplinary art history and *Kunstwissenschaft* than to visual studies or *Bildwissenschaft*.¹³

Further afield there is a growing number of poets and fiction writers who have experimented with images: Susan Howe, Paula Fox, Jonathan Safran Foer, Tan Lin, Orhan Pamuk, Anne Carson, and most prominently W. G. Sebald, have all used images in their memoirs and novels. There are emerging tendencies in this literature: on the one hand, toward a certain preciousness in the display of visual material (reproducing scans of old documents, damaged photographs, and so forth); and on the other, toward nostalgia (Sebald preferred older-looking images, and worked to “antique” his photographs by repeatedly Xeroxing them). What matters, in some of those books, is that images appear where they are not expected, particularly in narratives presented as fiction. This book raises different questions: here we are unconcerned about the values of surprise, nostalgia, or the fetishization of the visual artifact. What matters is just how images work with narratives when they are not passive mnemonics, examples, or ornaments.

It is also possible to conceptualize this question of images and texts as a matter of power relations and roles. As Judith Butler might say, following Hegel, the conventional relation between images and texts in visual studies is of a subservient self-consciousness and a master consciousness. The latter presents itself as a discourse: that is, it possesses the power of articulating its relation to images and of articulating the concept of relation itself. Images, in this model, become passive. They are seen, and they are known by their “to-be-looked-at-ness,” to borrow Laura Mulvey’s famous formulation of the role of women in film. It is interesting how closely the Hegelian and feminist critiques of unequal power relations fit the relation between complacently illustrative, passively visible images, on the one hand, and the empowering, discursive, non-visual textual argument, on the other. To rethink this relation, it is not enough just to reverse the relation, as Barthes suggests. It helps to acknowledge that images possess the capacity to develop self-consciousness and agency, to move beyond what Hegel calls “unessential consciousness” (the awareness of being subservient and unnecessary in relation to the master discourse), and to discover what counts for them, as visual objects, as discursive and dialogic power, what Hegel calls “a mind of its own,” a sense of its independent existence.¹⁴

PROPOSALS

What follows are five strategies that permit images to participate in, collaborate with, and possibly even divert or undermine whatever arguments are proposed in their accompanying texts. These are intended to be practical and concrete, as much as possible. It

12 Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

13 Didi-Huberman, *l’Image survivante: l’Image survivante: Histoire de l’art et temps de fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: Munit / Paradoxe, 2002); the exhibition *Atlas: How to Carry the World on One’s Back?* was shown in Karlsruhe, Germany, May 7th–August 7th, 2011. There are a number of videos of Didi-Huberman explaining the exhibition on YouTube and elsewhere.

14 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, §196: “in dem Bilden wird das Für-sich-sein als sein eignes für es, und es kömmt zum Bewußtsein, daß es selbst an und für sich ist.” www.marxists.org, 19 June, 2011.

seems to me that something resembling this list of strategies is the kind of detailed conversation visual studies needs to have if it is to be the field centrally concerned with the visual and visibility. I have taken as many examples as I could from this book, so this set of five proposals is also intended as a kind of accompaniment to reading.

1. Images as Intelligent Theories

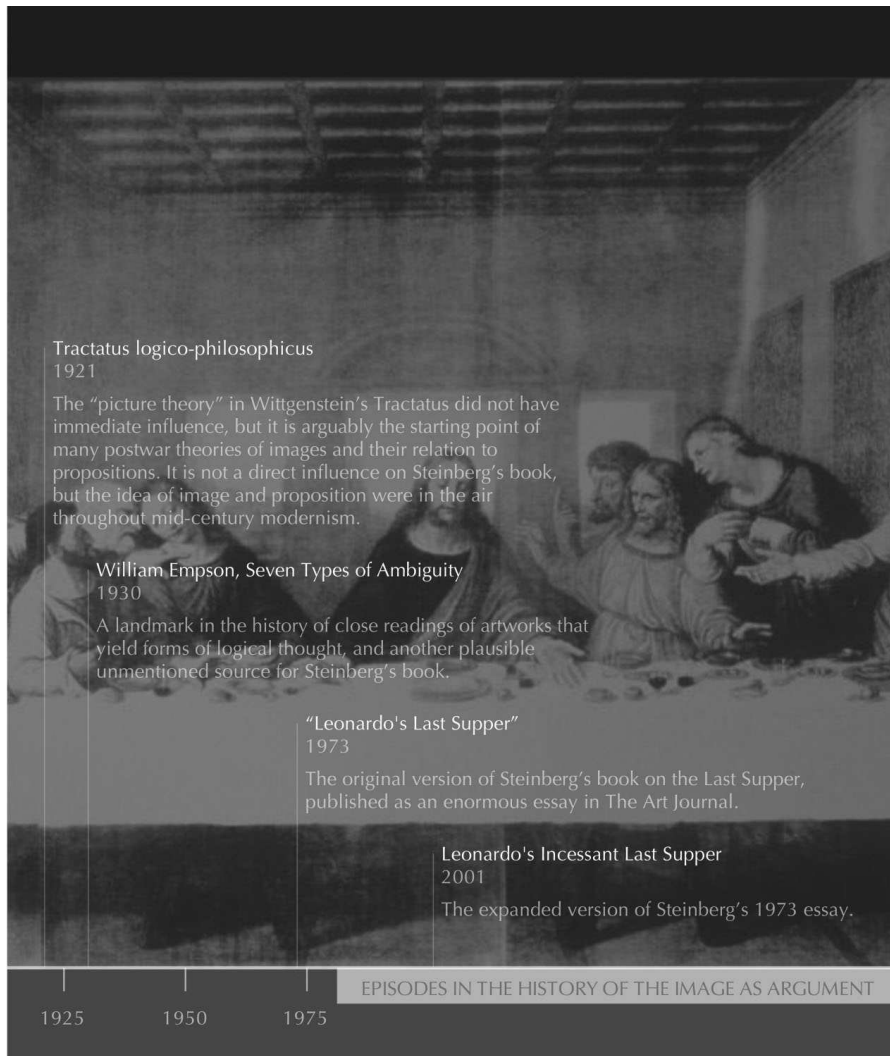
Some images in this book are intended as intelligent commentary on other images and theories. This idea comes from the art historian Leo Steinberg's discussion of Leonardo's *Last Supper*, which surveys engravings, paintings, and other copies of Leonardo's painting and takes them as "intelligent" responses, on a par with critical and historical evaluations. (Steinberg, *Leonardo's Incessant Last Supper*; it's a comment he also makes in "The Philosophical Brothel," *October*, p. 22.)

An image that provides a commentary on another image, and is therefore an intelligent theory in its own right, can be understood in two senses. The image can be presented as an insight into the image that inspired it, or as a further development of that image. Steinberg is only interested in the former possibility. The copies of the *Last Supper* that he reproduces are used as ways of deepening our understanding of Leonardo's painting.

But it is also possible to take the copies Steinberg presents as further developments of ideas that began in the *Last Supper*, and therefore of interest in their own right. In the latter case, images can be participants in an ongoing development of theory or argument. In Steinberg's book, none of the copies are said to be anywhere near the level of the original painting, but images can often be considered as having equal or greater interest than the images to which they respond. In that case, it is the images themselves that are of interest as developments of ideas that apparently originated in earlier images. Steinberg's book is illustrated with engravings, paintings, etchings, and photographs of the *Last Supper*, including a billboard of the painting that he encountered off a highway in New Jersey. For Steinberg the copies are "intelligent" responses, which can help us understand some property of the original. The approach we take here would be open to the possibility that such visual responses are potentially of equal or greater theoretical intelligence—greater interest, cogency, persuasiveness, truth—than the original. We would also generalize Steinberg's strategy so that visual practices could comment on not only previous visual practices but also on texts. The operations could be perfectly symmetric: there could be "intelligent" images that respond to both images and texts, and they could be at once evidence for properties in those earlier texts or images, or else historical developments of interest in their own right.

In this way of thinking, images contain logical content, because they are effectively propositions about their predecessors. There isn't a history of the idea that images can be considered as logical propositions, but if there were, it could come from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, which may well be behind Steinberg's book at several removes. A closer source, also unacknowledged in Steinberg's text, is William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, which contains intensive, nearly microscopic dissections of the multiple meanings of poems. Empson's book was widely influential, and was read by art historians including Michael Baxandall. If books like those are indeed behind Steinberg's project, the genealogy might look like the accompanying image:

Several other lineages would be possible. Claims such as those in Mitchell's or Buck-Morss's texts build on a large and diffuse background of theories that could be used to support the idea that images generate arguments. In the psychoanalytic literature there is, for example, Slavoj Žižek's sense of the Lacanian Imaginary, in which images are



necessarily part of our self-understanding. This is brought out in Jess Park’s analysis of monuments in this book, which draws on Žižek’s exposition of what Park calls the “topological relation between the field of appearances and that of reality.” Needless to say, deeper in history there are many further possibilities for the idea that images are intelligent arguments. Among them Byzantine theories of the icon, mimesis, and truth would probably be especially pertinent.¹⁵ But for our purposes Steinberg’s analysis is particularly important: it is the only one that positions itself within art history or visual studies.

In Steinberg’s book, later copies of *The Last Supper* illuminate the original. Most of the images that argue in this book do their arguing with theories, and not other images. Joel Kuennen, for example, uses his father’s wonderful photographs of unidentified people (presumably Papua New Guineans) to suggest amendments in Marc Augé’s theory

15 Marie-José Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*, translated by Rico Franses (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

of the non-place. The photos were taken in a quintessential non-place: the Hong Kong airport arrivals hall, in 1979. Kuennen notes that his father knew these people were out of place, which “implies that there is a common understanding of what should exist in the non-place.” The images argue with the theory by filling in the vacant concept of the non-place with specific expectations, showing that now, non-place is where “the narrative of a globalized subjectivity is written and protected.”

There are some essays in this book in which images work more like the ones Steinberg reproduces, arguing with other images instead of texts. In Thomas Stubblefield’s essay “Ars Oblivionalis,” for example, Yinka Shonibare’s piece argues with Gainsborough’s painting. The most interesting example may be Jessica Horton’s essay on Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry, in which the Cree artist Kent Monkman’s character, in a performance called *Dance to the Berdashe*, argues with George Caitlin’s watercolor of the same name. Horton doesn’t reproduce Caitlin’s image, but if she had, the difference would be striking: the so-called Berdashe, an ambiguous male or female figure, stands still, hands at his or her sides, head to one side, eyes on the ground or closed. Monkman’s character is campy, showy, aggressive and ebullient. The performance clearly has something to say about Caitlin’s fascination and disgust at the dance he witnessed. The essay is about images that argue, but it doesn’t itself pursue that conversation.

These would be the closest to Steinberg’s use of copies in *Leonardo’s Incessant Last Supper*, but in the reading I am proposing, Steinberg needn’t have focused on images that comment on images; in fact, he is also interested in texts that comment on images, and the images made after those texts. An example in this book of an image that develops ideas in an original text is Meghan Chandler’s analysis of Andrew Huang’s film *Doll Face*. In the film, a robot makes itself up to look like a stereotypical woman. Chandler reads the film against Mary Ann Doane’s theory of female spectatorship in film. In Doane’s account, women spectators are involved with “a certain over-presence of the image,” to the point that a woman viewing an image of a woman “is the image.” For Doane, femininity is a mask, “a decorative layer which conceals a non-identity.” Chandler recounts this and other related positions, and then shows that Huang’s film is more complicated. “Huang’s doll narcissistically renders itself into the object of its own desire,” she writes, collapsing the distance between the spectator and spectacle, until the robot self-destructs in the face of its inability to bridge that collapsed distance. The film *Doll Face* might not have been possible without feminist and film theory, but the film itself is where we should look to see the next ideas in female spectatorship. (Chandler’s analysis could be continued: in the video, which is available online, the robot destroys itself by trying to *follow* the receding image of the ideal face, not by approaching it too closely. The distance is not, and could never, be “collapsed”: the ideal face is an apparition in a stream of random images on a cathode-ray TV; the cyborg robot is a spiderlike machine chained to a jack-in-the-box crate. There is a tension between the inadequate mimicry and the impossibility of merging with the ideal face.)

Another Topic that engages this thematic is Amari Pelioswki’s “Regimes,” which concerns the way Gordon Matta-Clark’s *Office Baroque* conflates Martin Jay’s “scopic regimes.” The image Peliowski chooses is at once perspectival, “baroque,” and to do with “describing,” and those are Jay’s three “regimes”; therefore the image exists ambiguously as a culmination or collage of his historical sequence. The choice matters, and the image could be taken as showing a consequence of Jay’s schema (because the three “regimes” would lead, in melioristic fashion, to a fourth condition in which all are possible), or weakness in the schema (because the three “regimes” are apparently indifferently compatible). It would be possible to develop this as a problem advanced by the image itself.

There are similar nascent challenges to theories in other essays. Iris Laner's essay "Responsivity" opens with a summary of some of the art historian Georges Didi-Huberman's principal positions. Laner reproduces a double photographic portrait by the Austrian photographer Gerd Hasler in order to make the point that in Didi-Huberman's view, what matters is attending to the act of seeing and the conditions of our response—paying attention to our hypnosis, our fascination with the merely visual and the vicissitudes of representation. The double portrait certainly does that. It's a startling, aggressive doubled portrait, and it's hard to look at. Laner then excerpts several criticisms of Didi-Huberman, by Norman Bryson and others, to the effect that Didi-Huberman's approach makes art historical writing problematic or inaccessible by over-emphasizing the personal encounter over historical meanings. She then argues back, in defense of Didi-Huberman, saying that his work reconfigures what counts as history, and how history can enter into encounters with artworks. When she does this, she's finished: she doesn't return to the double portrait. And yet there it is: weird, aggressive, compulsive, claustrophobic, disorienting. It certainly makes contact with Didi-Huberman's interest in images that might live forcibly in our imaginations, and it could be taken as an example of his interest in the *Pathosformel*, the image type or formula that surfaces and resurfaces at different times in history. Even so, Hasler's work can also serve as an intelligent criticism of Didi-Huberman's project. Hasler's other photographs are delicate, empty, even anemic views of mountains, "vistas," the ocean (reminiscent, inevitably, of Sugimoto's), and nearly abstract "waterscapes."¹⁶ They have no people, and no explicit gazes. Those images—the majority of his practice—are the opposites of the compulsive claustrophobic gaze of this double portrait. The landscapes and seascapes are possessed by something more like agorophilia, a characteristically late romantic attraction to sublime distances, voids, and wastelands. For the most part, Hasler's practice is not an optimal place to think about Lacan and "responsivity." It is as freed of intersubjectivity as the artist could make it. That is an implicit critique of Didi-Huberman, because it suggests that he is mainly attracted to a certain relatively small fraction of images in the Western tradition—or, conversely, that Laner had to choose and address her example carefully in order to have it support Didi-Huberman's interests.

Other contributors explicitly use images to criticize theories. In Tenley Bick's essay "Self-Perception," on Lacan's mirror stage, Olaffur Eliasson's work appears as a practice that undermines the Lacanian understanding of subjectivity. In that sense, Bick's essay is in line with other recent attempts, including Hal Foster's, to rewrite Eliasson and other contemporary artists who deal with spectacle. Perhaps the only example in this book in which an image argues directly *against* a theory is Charlotte Grievson's essay "Terror," which uses Baudrillard's account of terrorism to read work by the Guerrilla Girls and Jonathan Horowitz (represented by his upside-down portrait of George R. Bush). Grievson says Horowitz's work "satirizes" and "perverts" the image's original purpose as state propaganda and engages "in a kind of guerrilla tactics in its attack upon the established order and state." In those respects, however, Horowitz's image need not have been an image, because satire and perversion are tactics that also work in print. But she also uses Horowitz's piece to reveal a weakness in Baudrillard's account of terror and terrorism:

Baudrillard argues that the terrorists were successful in communicating their message because the symbols they put into play (both the World Trade Centre itself, a symbol of American power and capitalism, and the images of the collapsing towers that circulated during and following the event, symbols of America's failure and defeat) was faithful to that which it sought to represent

16 Quoting the artist's website, www.gerdhasler.com, accessed May 2, 2012.

(their hatred of America). This is somewhat undone by Horowitz's work, which emphasizes the *failure* and limitations of representation. Quite conversely to Baudrillard's theory, the success of this work relies on a lack of faith in both notions of representation, that of governance and that of images.

There are consequences of such a position: images that doubt representation can doubt it in ways that texts cannot. Grievson does not explore that line of argument, but her contribution shows clearly and succinctly how an image can be deployed to question a theory that it otherwise seems to fit.

This is enough to show the outlines of the ways images can be intelligent theories. It is important to note that there is a difference between this and the possibility that images can *be* arguments. Vera Chiquet offers almost the only example in this book of a visual argument in the essay "Leviathan." She considers the reception history of the famous frontispiece to Hobbes's *Leviathan*, including authors who are critical of Hobbes, and authors who are more interested in Hobbes's science than his political theories. Chiquet focuses on Bruno Latour's take on Hobbes in *We Have Never Been Modern*. But she isn't interested in using Latour's theories, or directly criticizing his reading of Hobbes. She wants instead to supply something Latour probably never thought of: a visual emblem, a frontispiece, to his own book. Yet her contribution is only partly a meditation on the relation between frontispieces and the texts they emblemize, or a contribution to the mixed tradition of visual and theoretical responses to Hobbes. It is also a visual critique of Latour, and a visual intervention in the exclusively textual study of frontispieces and their relation to texts. By extension, her text could be seen as a provocation to the still thriving studies of "word and image" as they appear in the conferences and publications of the Modern Language Association, the Society for Intermedial Studies, and the International Association of Word and Image Studies: none of their texts, to my knowledge, has ever taken the form of a visual response to the problem of the relation of words and images. "Leviathan" should be a challenge to visual studies students and scholars: can you extend your argument by producing a visual object instead of a text? Under what circumstances does the theme of the relation between visual images and texts call for a visual intervention?

I said Chiquet's essay is "almost" the only example of visual argument because in Peter Bengtsen's essay on street art, a photograph serves as both an illustration and an argument. Bengtsen's interest is street art and its documentation. In the photo, a work by Banksy is on the same wall as a work by the Brooklyn collective Faile. Bengtsen notes that while Banksy "purposefully integrates the phenomenological site in his work . . . Faile's use of the street context seems more arbitrary," and the photograph only illustrates the point. But the photograph is also a new kind of mobile art, both documenting and changing the context of the work, and so its own lack of site-specificity comprises an argument against writers on site-specificity such as Miwon Kwon who omit some issues of the representation of site-specificity in order to make conceptual and historical points about the nature and development of site-specificity. Bengsten notes that his subject is actually a photograph, not an installation or a place. "Thus," he concludes, "contrary to Kwon's conviction that a discursive site . . . is 'generated by the work'" photographs like the one in "Site Specificity" "may in fact influence the characteristics of new street artwork."

All these examples may seem restrictive in their affinity with Steinberg's notion of "intelligence." It is closer to the spirit of Anglo-American visual studies to say that images in visual studies might be considered as theoretical objects along with texts. In Tom Mitchell's account, pictures have theory, and so do texts, and the two work together in texts, as equal partners in the project of conceptualization. This is a lovely idea, but I think there are virtually no examples of this in visual studies, including in

Mitchell's own books. A very rare example is Marco Bohr's essay in this book, titled "Metaphors." Bohr's subject is a photograph of a political protest in Japan, taken in 1969, and published in a Japanese photography magazine. The photograph is tilted, grainy, and contrasty. The only way we know anything about it is the caption provided by the magazine. Bohr's essay is a remarkable meditation on metaphors of veracity, objectivity, disturbance, chaos, and earthquake, and he takes those metaphors from the image and—a strange surprise, which remains surprising even on repeated re-readings of Bohr's essay—Marx's *Communist Manifesto*. Bohr does have a guiding theorist, as virtually all the other essays in this book do; in his case it's Benjamin, and his concept of the *Denkbild* ("thought-image"); but the essay's real work is done by the photograph and the passages from Marx, *read together*. It's a meditation on photographic metaphors, using an intelligent text (Marx's) and an intelligent photograph. Bohr concludes that "both the man's suspension and the photograph in itself are a metaphor for the insecurities of modernity so colorfully described in the *Manifesto*," but I am not sure that's the right way to put the essay's point. Bohr is interested in claiming that blurry, grainy photographs give us "our" sense of veracity, but his actual point isn't that: it's the interweaving of metaphors—the metaphoricities—that guide both Marx's text and the photograph. They are both "intelligent theories," and they work together to produce his text. I'm still unsure, even after working with this material for a long time, whether it is best to leave things as they are in Mitchell's texts, with gestures in the direction of the intermingling of images as theories and theories of images, or whether it is better to try to say more exactly when and how images can be intelligent theories. The former is more hopeful and suggestive, but the latter is more analytic and practical.

There is one other essay in this book that has an even more open, even stranger relation between image and text: Simon Ferdinando's "Filiation." The first image he reproduces is as striking as a historical image can get. (Malcolm X, at Oxford, where he went to debate.) We have learned, from the kind of work described in Maureen Burns's essay "White," how to read photographs like the second one Ferdinando reproduces, which shows people reacting to the news of Malcolm X's death. (Burns's essay is partly about the faces of people in photographs of lynchings.) But Ferdinando is not contributing to the study of photographic representations of race or violence. He is more interested in the way that some photographs have of getting under your skin, implicating you, drawing you in and repelling you at the same time. He is as scrupulously confessional about how the photographs make him feel as the art historian Kobena Mercer talking about his encounter, as a black gay man, with Mapplethorpe's photographs; but he is as opaque and impressionistic, in places, as Barthes himself. His essay is interrupted, several times, by quotations from Keats. The comparisons in this essay are odd, to say the least: Niépce's famous "first photograph" is compared to the desolation Keats evokes in "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "little town, thy streets for evermore / Will silent be; and not a soul to tell / Why thou art desolate, can e'er return," and that is compared to the "desolation found at the murder scene" of Malcolm X, and that is compared to a passage in Derrida's memorial text to Barthes, and that is compared to an imaginary scene in which Malcolm X rides a train "through the ancient Thames valley that inspired Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows*, reading the names of stations in the autumn light: Reading, Pangbourne, Goring, and Streatly." In my reading, this is Ferdinando's way of being honest about the ways that these two images push back on his imagination and insinuate themselves into his life. In this essay images and texts don't just argue with one another, they resonate, they reverberate. It's a step beyond what is currently done in visual studies, and quite possibly not of much use as history or criticism: but it is one possible consequence of taking seriously the idea that images might intervene in our arguments.

2. Images as Mistaken Theories

Some images in this book are presented as simplifications or misreadings of theories. The idea that an image might be mistaken is outside Steinberg's working method: in his account, there is no way to know when a given copy of the *Last Supper* is not "intelligent"—and for the same reason, there is no way to tell when an image misunderstands its model. (Some of the images in his book, like the billboard of the *Last Supper* he photographed off a highway in New Jersey, don't seem especially intelligent.) But if images are arguments, then some of them will be mistaken, simpleminded, wrongheaded, or otherwise unhelpful. (Others will be strong misreadings, and therefore "intelligent" from Steinberg's perspective.)

The same two possibilities apply here as in the case of "intelligent" images. An image that responds to a theoretical position (to a previous text) can be presented as a way of understanding the original theoretical position, but such an image can also be understood as simplified or mistaken interpretation of the theoretical position. In the first case, the image is understood as a critical response to the original theory, text, or image on which it depended. The equivalent in Steinberg's book would be a copy that reveals a weakness in the original *Last Supper*. In the second case, the weakness or mistakes in the image are presented as the faults of the person who made the image. The equivalent in Steinberg's book would be a copy that misunderstands the Last Supper, for example by missing its theological symbolism. A contemporary example might be the myriad contemporary photographs of everyday life, from Beat Strueli to commercial companies such as Corbis that offer stock images of everyday life for advertisers to use as backgrounds. Such images can be understood as simplifications or misreadings of theories of the everyday articulated by writers such as Michel du Certeau. In the first possibility, the contemporary photographs would be evidence of weaknesses in du Certeau's position (that it allows itself to be co-opted for capitalist and ostensibly fine art purposes). In the second possibility, photographers such as Streuli necessarily misread writers such as du Certeau for their notions of the everyday.

There are no examples in this book of images that are mistaken or simplified versions of the theories they accompany. That makes sense, since it might not be an especially rewarding thing to spend time studying a simple-minded visual practice. Even so, some of the images that are intended to add new meaning to the theories they accompany—and thereby become intelligent arguments in their own right—end up appearing as candidates for this second category of mistaken theories. This happens, for me, in Faye Gleisser's essay on the concept of *parafiction*. Gleisser follows the concept through Krauss, James Rother, Ihab Hassan, and Carrie Lambert-Beatty's work, and then she discusses work by the pseudonymous artist Donelle Woolford. Although she presents herself as an African-American artist, "Woolford" is actually a white male artist named Scanlan. Gleisser says that once the "parafictional veil" is torn away, the parafiction is revealed; for her, Scanlan's practice expands Lambert-Beatty's argument, but the practice seems rather a simplification of the sorts of undecidable ambiguities of truth and fiction that concern Lambert-Beatty. Unlike the Yes Men, for example, Scanlan's practice is a one-way street, beginning as fiction and ending when the dissimulation is revealed. In this respect, Scanlan's practice is simpler and less interesting than Lambert-Beatty's elaborations of parafiction.

The image in Joel Kuennen's essay "Syntagm," on Bataille, can also be understood as a simplified version of the theory it accompanies. Kuennen's essay is about the play of metaphors and other tropes in *Story of the Eye*. Like its source, the essay does not require actual visual objects—only chains, "syntagms," "paradigms," "memes," and

other structures of meaning. Kuennen illustrates the essay with a low-res image that was made by copying an image of a policeman spraying protestors with pepper spray on the campus of the University of California David campus on November 18, 2011, and pasting it onto a reproduction of Monet's *Luncheon of the Boating Party*, 1881. This composite image is one of dozens, perhaps hundreds, of variations on what was called the "Casually Pepper Spray Everything Cop": his image was pasted onto reproductions of the Sistine Ceiling, Wyeth's *Christina's World*, stills from *Harry Potter* movies, and many others. Kuennen retrieved this image from a website, knowyourmeme.com, which collects "trending" images of all sorts. Kuennen's caption identifies the image as a meme, saying that memes are "online cultural artifacts that gain significance through chains of alterations and republications." I've provided all this explanation because Kuennen doesn't: for him, the link is that "Bataille founded a textual practice that would become the foundation for a common practice," the meme, "in today's visual culture." Personally, I don't find this convincing: memes aren't primarily internet phenomena, and I don't see the parallel between Bataille's enchainéd metaphors and the viral spread of internet images. In contrast to the wildness and strangeness of Bataille's text, and his fascination with eros, death, and transcendence, this "meme" is more like a tic, a symptom of just the kind of free-floating capitalist anxiety that Bataille would have despised. Surely if there is interest in this juxtaposition of image and text, it would be the challenge of accounting for how a complex and unique experiment in writing came to be so drastically reduced.

This situation in which an image can be understood as a mistaken or simpleminded version of the theory it accompanies may seem to be rare in art writing: usually the image is the model. In art history, images are taken to be generative and rich objects that reward concerted study, so it's natural to assume the images are more complex, more "intelligent" in Steinberg's term, than the texts we write about them. But I think that in effect, things are usually the other way around. If we're to be honest it's our theories, our arguments, that usually take center stage. They command the reader's attention more consistently than the visual objects we write about. As you read an art history or visual studies text, your eyes are mainly on the writing, with brief glances at the images. It's the theory, the claims, that are interesting, challenging, and complex, and even though we tacitly assume that the visual practices embody that complexity, in practice most of the time we're admiring or arguing with arguments, not images. Ever since Oscar Wilde—and again since Derrida—the critic's texts have been said to be as rich, or richer, than the artworks they critique. Both visual studies and art history are full of examples of densely intricate expositions of theory, ornamented by visual objects that appear simple by comparison. It may be that we attribute all the complexity we uncover to the objects and practices we study, but our writing works very differently, emphasizing our claims, and leaving the complexity of the visual practices partly aside.

None of this is to say the visual objects actually are simple: it's to say they are customarily, if inexplicitly, presented as simpler than the theory they accompany. There is an adage in art history, which I have heard repeated to graduate students: remember to be humble; Leonardo was far more intelligent than you are. It's an adage that might account for historians' interest in some artistic practices, but on the evidence of our texts it seems no one really believes it. Our writing, in art history and visual studies, is full of engaging, intricate, dense, and compelling theorizing and argumentation, and there isn't much opportunity or reward for acknowledging that the art practices are more engaging, intricate, dense, and compelling than anything we manage to say about them.

All this has to do with writing whose subject is major works—culturally significant or contested practices about which a great deal might already have been written. When

the subject is visibility more generally, as in visual studies, then the contrast is that much more pronounced. It stands to reason that not every artist, or every artistic practice, is “intelligent” in the way Steinberg imagines. It stands to reason that if some pictures are “intelligent” (or complex, or rich, or reflective), then other pictures are stupid. As Tom Mitchell has said, they might not even want anything in particular of us. They may embody misunderstandings of the crucial cultural or artistic ideas and practices of their time. Those misunderstandings might amount, in the end, to mistaken theories. Wouldn’t it be interesting to study image practices as simple, misguided, mistaken, or otherwise susceptible to the same doubts and cavils as theories?

3. Images as Interruptions

Some images make theories more complex by changing the subject, distracting us, interpolating unexpected examples, conjuring apparently unrelated ideas, or juxtaposing irrelevant places, people, shapes, colors, or other visual incidents that are apparently unrelated to whatever argument surrounds the images on the page. I would like to say this is a common condition of images, and even a condition of something appearing as an image: the visual is necessarily, structurally an interruption to argument. The more we can acknowledge that, and make it part of our writing, the more reflective and responsive we will be to the presence of images in our texts.

Some justification for this position can be found in Jean-François Lyotard’s *Discours, figure* (1974) but in a less philosophic sense images are often interruptions: it is a common experience to be momentarily distracted from some train of thought by an image that is presented as pertinent. The *figural*, in Lyotard’s book, is an ill-contained force within discourse, an interruption. Jana Žilová’s text “Intertitles,” on a scene from Murnau’s *Faust*, uses Lyotard to elaborate on the ways that written texts (titles) appear in films: there is the ubiquitous *subtitle*; the *intertitle*, which is the screen of dialogue interposed between scenes in silent films; and the *intratitle*, which is the text put into a scene to represent the characters’ thoughts (as in a cartoon bubble). Žilová introduces two more exotic species of writing in film: Philippe Dubois’s idea of the *ontitle*, which floats in the space of the scene; and her own idea of the *integral title*, which describes the strange apparition of writing in that one scene of Murnau’s *Faust*, in which the figures in the film at first don’t see, and then struggle to see, the writing. All five of these are interruptions, but the first four are interruptions of writing into the visual. The fifth is also visual, so it is a more complex form of interruption, one Lyotard would probably have enjoyed. Either way, and in whatever form, the *figural* disturbs, slows, or halts the even flow of meaning that is so often the norm in discourse, from film to the writing of visual studies. Interruption in this sense isn’t an exotic theoretical concept. It is fundamental, for example, to the functioning of advertising.

For example a billboard by Oliviero Toscani, showing child workers in a brickyard, could be taken as a shocking advertising ploy, juxtaposing child labor with fashion, and that kind of observation was a starting point for visual studies analyses of the Benetton campaigns. (A detail is shown in the accompanying timeline.) But the advertisement also brings in images of battered red bricks, which nominally contribute both to the theme of child labor and the theme of fashion, but also provide a strange distraction, a mass of visual incident and an influx of apparently unrelated visual precedents and associations, which can have a measurable, but unpredictable, effect on conversations about the image and its interpretation. This capacity of adding apparently unrelated visual incident to well-known messages and meanings can be construed as a fundamental property of the visual. In this book images are sometimes presented as



interruptions in otherwise more continuous conversations or discourses, and the challenge is to understand the interruption as both relevant to further analysis, and also as an inescapable, inherent property of the visual, which—as Lyotard would say—can never not be an interruption.

In this book, Claude Cahun's photograph *Que me veux-tu?* interrupts Jules Sturm's argument about looking, simply by looking differently than the sources Sturm cites. Sturm mentions Tom Mitchell's question about the desire of pictures, noting that in Cahun's image, desire is expressed by "the look *of* the image, and the looks *in* the image." But those looks may not be as clear as Sturm's account implies. As Nathanaël Stephens has pointed out, it's not clear that the twinned figures in the photograph are looking at one another, so it's not clear what or who they desire, and whether they desire together, as one, or as several, or what desire is when it is said in relation to an imaged monstrosity. Stephens has written two small books on Cahun's image, bringing out the ways its violence undermines closed accounts of seeing and the gaze (Nathanaël, *Absence Where as (Claude Cahun and the Unopened Book)*, 2009; and Nathanaël, *Vigilous, Reel: Desire a(s) Accusation*, 2010). In Sturm's account, texts like Mitchell's can speak like images: but it is hard to see how this photograph, in particular, can articulate theory. To me, at least, the image works against the text that Sturm presents; I leave it for readers to decide how well the photograph behaves in relation to the theoretical ideas that are brought to bear.

Another form of image interruption, if I can put it that way, is in Thomas Stubblefield's essay on Umberto Eco's theory of *ars oblivionalis*, the art of forgetting, which

Eco elaborated based on the medieval *ars memorativa*, the art of committing long texts to memory. Stubblefield compares Eco's theories to Yinka Shonibare's *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews Without their Heads*, itself a parody of a painting by Thomas Gainsborough. The salient point in Eco's argument is that while the *ars memorativa* is well attested, there can be no *ars oblivionalis*, because semiotics operates by addition: every sign, even one under erasure, leaves a trace. The sum of traces is a "confusion." Shonibare's parody or travesty of Gainsborough's painting does "erase" some of Gainsborough's meaning, especially by decapitating the two figures in his painting. But Shonibare's work also "makes noise," adding signs to one another. In that respect it conforms with Eco's theory. Stubblefield has a subtle argument about how the image escapes Eco's theory: the blank backdrop, he says, "appears immune" to the play of signs in the foreground; it works as "the true mechanism of cultural imperialism," in close relation to "the conditions of representation itself." If this argument is sensible—and I think it would require more work to ensure that it is—then Shonibare's installation does more than instantiate a theory of the "confusion" and "noise" of the accumulation of signs: it also interrupts that theory. This form of interruption would be structural, a property of the image and not the accompanying arguments about memory.

Other examples of images as structural interruptions are the four essays in this book that work with the formatting of the page: Kristi McGuire's "Imaginary Twin"; Arden Stern's "Arial"; this Introduction; and my other contribution to this book, "An Introduction to the Visual Studies That is Not in This Book." What counts as images, in these essays, are not photographs but diagrams, typefaces, and page layout. The essay "An Introduction to the Visual Studies That is Not in This Book" has several ill-behaved graphics, which occupy the place normally held by informational charts, but are incomplete or unreliable as straightforward carriers of information. They work, in other words, more like art is expected to work, as a mixture of facts and expressive values. McGuire's model here is Derrida's *Glas*, a book written in two apparently disconnected columns; but her purpose is not to rethink a philosophic tradition by letting it resonate against another: rather she is interested in mirroring texts that are about mirroring, so that the visual form of the page can produce its own effects, contribute its own affective or expressive voice. McGuire's left-hand column is about the television series *Quantum Leap*, which was about a man who travels in time and space, leaping into "various bodies and circumstances." That column ends with one paragraph on the artist Mark Lombardi, and McGuire reproduces one of his hand-drawn diagrams of the power relations that led to the arming of Iraq from 1979 to 1990. McGuire's right-hand column, meanwhile, tells the story of the psychoanalyst W. R. Bion's paper "The Imaginary Twin," which he developed after talking to victims of post-traumatic stress after World War II. A reader is certainly slowed by the double-column format: it's tempting to switch back and forth, leaving one story for the other, looking for parallels. Clearly the uncertainty about how to read mirrors the themes of uncertainty in the two texts. But to put it that way, to say the one is mirrored by the other, is to give away the central interest of McGuire's strategy: the uncertainty of reading does more than mirror—mirroring, after all, is a straightforward formal relation. The uncertainty of reading *enacts* the uncertainties that are described in both columns, and it almost *produces* another theory of uncertainty all on its own. This is image as interruption, and also image as intelligent theory. At the end, McGuire returns to the usual single-column format, but she makes up for that by adding two new theoretical sources, Bria Massumi and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and proposing, in my count, three more possible meanings for Lombardi's diagram. In my reading these are what used to be called "recuperative gestures": they gesture toward recuperation, toward a single conclusion, but they end up working as further disruptions. It would be

possible to ask a number of questions about McGuire's essay. For example she says that she hasn't decided exactly how Lombardi's diagram might be pertinent, but I am not sure her indecision is itself thematically justified. But in this context there is one question that becomes most pressing: what exactly is the sense of twinning that is enacted by those double columns?

A third form of interruption is the image that supposedly exemplifies a certain theory, but actually interrupts it. The theory must then continue around the image, or through it, and the image functions as a stubbornness or a partial obstruction to the smooth passage of the theory. An example is Manuel Ramos's exposition of Jacques Rancière's theory of the political. Ramos takes Bresson's film *Au Hasard Balhazar* as his example. He describes the images from the opening of the film, where two children ask their father for permission to buy a donkey. The father says no, but in the next scene they have bought the donkey and they are leading it off across a steep hillside. For Rancière, "these images are not a donkey, two children and an adult" but "operations that couple and uncouple the visible and its signification or speech and its effects, which create and frustrate expectations." But just as clearly, Rancière's reading is perversely abstract, because many things happen around the lacuna other than "operations" of "signification." Ramos notes the fact that Rancière "has no time" for the "affective ecology" of the film, even though the scene is suffused with sentiment, sentimentality, empathy, pathos, and bathos. Neither Ramos nor Rancière are interested in Bresson's characteristically unemotional actors, his sometimes disembodied sense of the family, his notions regarding the mental life of animals, or the film's Christian meanings. (See Michelle Lindenblatt's evocative essay "Animals" for some of the things that could be done with the strange abstracted animal gazes in this film.) The still image and the scene it stands for actually get in the way of the theory. Rancière must also know this, and in general he prefers written accounts to illustrated ones. I wonder, too, if this level of abstraction might not account for some of Rancière's vogue in the art world: he proposes an easy fix for artists anxious about the dissociation of aesthetics and politics, but the price is a counter-intuitive relation to existing discourses and visual practices (*Beyond the Aesthetic and the Anti-Aesthetic*, 2012).

Occasionally there is a structural parallel between interruptions within a text and interruptions made by images. Meredith Kooi's "Visible Woman," an essay on representations of the disabled body, is an interesting and original meditation on several different subjects, including portraits of disabled people in relation to theories of portraiture by Derrida and others, and photo therapy projects by Jo Spence and Rosy Martin, in which people re-imagine their own photographs as a way of empowering their bodies and their sense of themselves. Kooi's essay makes an abrupt turn at the end, when she introduces a photograph of a slice through the *Visible Woman*, a body that was frozen at death and sliced for medical study. That fragment of a body is not disabled in any normative sense, but it is "mortified" in a way that Kooi sees as parallel with representations of disabled bodies. It is a striking visual metaphor for disabled bodies, but it is not connected to the preceding arguments about portraiture or photographic re-enactments except in that it is an instance of the "complex problem of visibility and surveillance of bodies." Kooi comments that unlike Spence and Martin's photo therapy projects, where "fragmented selves" are elaborately demonstrated and explored, the fragments of the *Visible Woman* are "unacceptable." The "complex problem" comprehends both theories of photo therapy, photographs of disabilities, and sections of a healthy body. The experimental narrative here produces a striking effect in which unillustrated photographs of disabled bodies resonate with the single slice of a dead body. But consider the effect of not reproducing the *Visible Woman*: Kooi's text could have functioned more or less as I represent it here, and the *Visible Woman* would be a trope for the deformations and "mortifications" of disabled bodies. When the image

is reproduced, it insists on its own health, and, paradoxically, its wholeness: the woman whose body was chosen was healthy and therefore exemplary. The image also asks us to look closely at gross anatomy, bringing an entirely different kind of seeing into play than the one Derrida imagined in the passages Kooi quotes. The photograph interrupts Kooi's argument, which is already structured as a series of interruptions.

For some purposes, images are too distracting, and need to be omitted. Katie Lennard's "Redaction" is an instance of this: she wants to theorize the concept of redaction in such a way that it covers not only the common image of texts that have been partly blacked out, but also Rauschenberg's "Erased De Kooning," and "the absence of subaltern populations in histories." In earlier versions of this essay, Lennard had examples of redaction, which can be formally very interesting. (Jenny Holzer's *Redaction Paintings* are just one example of the use of redacted documents in the art world.) But formal properties would, I suspect, weaken Lennard's purpose, because if a larger sense of redaction is to be in play it is necessary not to think too much about what redaction looks like—or to put it differently, if we had been presented with a redacted page, our habitual strategies of interpretation would come into play and distract us from the wider possibilities. Images are also omitted from Maureen Burns's essay "White," in part because of copyright issues, but also because the issue at hand is more abstract than concrete, and the images Burns is writing about are both concrete and strongly distracting. She is following work by Shawn Michelle Smith on American lynching photographs, and using that work to critique the influential account of whiteness by Richard Dyer. In his account, "whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen." Smith's work on the lynching photographs shows that whiteness was ostentatiously displayed, in what Burns calls "a complex interaction between invisibility and hyper-visibility." In Smith's scholarship, individual faces and figures from the crowds in the lynching photographs are studied in isolation. (Smith does explore the same issue in her photographic practice.) In earlier versions of this essay, Burns did reproduce some of those images. In a way, isolating single figures from the crowds in those images makes them even harder to see—they become quite painful to look at (many are smiling, posing, enjoying themselves). Burns's thesis is complicated and abstract, and it was drowned out by those images. Visual objects can be powerful interruptions, especially if it is important to avoid being specific about the look or the particulars of the visual object in question.

4. Images as Things That Remind Us of Argument

The first three points amount to claiming that images can contain, embody, suggest, or propose arguments in various forms. All three points assume that specifically propositional thought can be extracted from images. When images are said to theorize, or to reciprocally influence theory, as in Tom Mitchell's "picture theory," propositional thought is what is at stake. We recognize the appearance of visual argument as a particular mode of a more general response, in which visual images elicit the feeling of legibility—the sense that they might make sense, without a clear articulation of what that sense might be. The attempt to understand images as objects structured like language or writing is usually exemplified by Roland Barthes's structuralism. Barthes wrote in this vein, for example, about the diagrams in Diderot's *Encyclopédie* ("The Plates of the Encyclopedia," Eng. trans. 1986). In *Culture of Diagram*, Michael Marrinan and John Bender note that Barthes uses terms like paradigmatic and syntagmatic to describe objects like pots and pans depicted in a plate of the *Encyclopédie*, and in doing so, he "effaces their problematic visual fissures"—their apparent weightlessness, the shadows



Oeconomie Rustique,
Mouches à Miel.

they fail to cast, all sorts of odd things about them. Even though we know images aren't writing, the feeling persists.

This more general field is poorly theorized and tremendously varied. There are claims that images are “pensive” (this was explored, for example, by Hanneke Grootenboer, in a pedagogic program called “The Pensive Image”), that they work in society as if we imputed agency to them (Mitchell's question, “What do pictures want?” asks about this possibility), that they entrance us because they conjure time, loss, or memory, without necessarily doing so in an articulated manner (this appears, for example, in Louis Marin's *To Destroy Painting*, English ed. 1995). Gottfried Boehm's ideas about how images entail an iconic form of logos, a parallel or analogue of ordinary logos, is related to several of these positions. Many related ideas have been developed over the last hundred years. These strands converge on the idea that images can elicit a *feeling* of reading, sense, logic, or legibility, and that such a feeling of meaning sets in motion a range of claims about the relation between visual images, language, and logic.

In this book we take an opportunistic or pragmatic approach to these theories, using them to justify taking images as originators of thought, and not just reflections of it. Some images in this book modify theories without actually providing any new propositional content. They put us in mind of arguments, reading, sense, meanings, claims, propositions, and logic, but they do not clearly contribute those things. Contributors to this book sometimes take images as things that are reminiscent of argument, but actually provide something more complex and difficult to articulate.

An example is Andrea Korda's examination of an illustration of an Indian cotton market from an 1870 edition of the *Illustrated London News*. She reads it against Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison's book *Objectivity*, which analyzes the rise of the value of “mechanical objectivity” in 19th century science—that is, the value accorded to scientific illustrations made with the aid of machines, which seemed to assure a relative freedom from “theory and judgment.” Daston and Galison probably wouldn't mind Korda's example, because it is out of their range: it was made by a machine, in the literal sense that it's a print made from a photograph, but the representation itself wasn't controlled by a machine. It was chosen by a photographer, and as Korda says, it's a kind of image that required writers for the *Illustrated London News* to insist on their objectivity, sometimes by ignoring things the images represented. Korda concludes that the picture “represents the power of the image to subvert textual interpellation—if the reader is prepared to look beyond the frame.” The image is beyond the pale of Daston and Galison's argument: it serves different purposes, it harbors different meanings, it requires different justifications. The problems that the *Illustrated London News* had in maintaining their readers' trust are reminiscent of the scientists' anxieties that Daston and Galison describe, but perhaps only reminiscent. The discourse on the illustration of the Indian cotton market is similar to Daston and Galison's argument; it puts me in mind of their argument, but it is not an example of their argument.

A more active and less conceptually settled example of an image that is like argument, but isn't quite argument, occurs in Samantha Topol's very inventive and open-ended essay “Eleventh Prismatic,” about Trisha Donnelly's unclassifiable “demonstrations,” in which she acts, performs, talks, and conjures images, memories, and actions. In one such event, called “Eleventh Prismatic,” Donnelly conjured an experience she had looking at a photograph, in which “the image cracked, and split into a stutter form, and . . . an eleven-sided prism pulsed into formation.” She insisted it wasn't “a mystical experience,” but “a truly metronomed space—a metaphysical suggestion undirected by myself” (whatever that means). Topol follows Donnelly's lead by not classifying Donnelly or her “demonstrations.” There are two visual elements in Topol's essay: a drawing

by Donnelly, which adds to the mystery of the “Eleventh Prismatic,” and a description, by Topol, of a “curious upside down V” that “began hanging around my imagination.” These two—real drawing and imagined one—form a very curious pair. Donnelly’s drawing is an illustration, in the sense that it isn’t needed for Topol’s argument, but it is also a thing that looks like it wants to be an argument. It wants to tell us something about the obfuscations of the artist, but it isn’t likely it will tell us too much. Topol’s written description of her own experience is an example of an imaginative act like Donnelly’s, and it also has a strange similarity to the drawing Topol reproduces. Like the drawing, it wants to tell us something about what a practice like Donnelly’s might be—but it doesn’t want to tell us too much, because like the drawing, it is only a thing that resembles argument, it isn’t an argument. This is a common condition of images in contemporary art, where it can matter that images seem to be about to argue, but actually won’t. If they did speak, they would make sure we couldn’t quite understand, just as Topol is careful not to figure out too much about how classifiable Donnelly might in fact be.

Images can remind us of argument by suggesting that they might participate in argument, even if they don’t say exactly how they might participate, or what they might have to say. In an essay on Jonathan Crary’s *Techniques of the Observer*, Julia Marsh observes that Crary’s readers have often wanted to extend his ideas into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. She illustrates those possibilities with a still from a video by Jung Yeondoo, which plays with what is real and what is projected or simulated. Marsh’s point isn’t that Yeondoo’s video critiques Crary’s position, except that it is yet another example of a practice that can be understood in the terms Crary generally reserves for the nineteenth century. Marsh doesn’t claim that the video argues anything in particular about perception, attention, and mechanisms of vision (Crary’s interests), but that it is so reminiscent of them that it stands, implicitly, as a potential extension of his work and a critique of his disinterest in such extensions. Another example of images that seem to be saying they should be part of the argument is Cara Caddoo’s subtle and interesting essay “Double Consciousness.” As it is, this essay is unillustrated. It originally included film stills, but they had to be omitted for copyright reasons. They were captivating. There was a woman turned to the camera, and then away, and “a silhouette of a foot and an animal appear at the base of a rocking chair.” Those images were so memorable that they seemed they wanted to set up their own arguments, even though Caddoo was not using them that way.

5. Images as Things That Slow Argument

When images are used in certain ways, they can slow the sometimes vertiginous speed of analysis, providing intervals of relatively sparse argumentation. The images of the Iraq war conjured by Nicholas Mirzoeff in the book *Watching Babylon* are an example of images that do not slow argument—rather they provoke argument, speed it along. The book is sparsely illustrated, partly because the images that interest Mirzoeff have such wide currency; they are instances of “weaponized” visual material that is entirely packaged and delivered by the military. As individual images, they exemplify Mirzoeff’s themes in an especially efficient fashion. Their ambiguity (some are taken in classified locations, and there is often limited information about the circumstances in which they were made), and the very uniform and general way they can be taken to be “weaponized” by the military-industrial complex, also work to impel the argument, which seldom needs to pause over any specific image.

A contrasting case is work by the Australian artists Charles Green and Lindell Brown, who were “embedded” artists with the Australian military in Iraq. Their work begins as photographs (one is shown below), and ends with very carefully produced paintings (as



Lyndell Brown and Charles Green, *Framing Conflict*, detail of the installation at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne, 5 Nov. 2008–1 Feb. 2009. Courtesy the artists.



Lyndell Brown and Charles Green, *Twin Towers, US Base, Tallil, Southern Iraq*. 2007–9, 37.4 × 51.7 cm, digital colour photograph, inkjet print on rag paper. Courtesy the artists.

in the installation shot). Their practice, and the viewer's obligation, is to look carefully and long at individual images.

This particular photograph is of Tallil, a U.S. base in southern Iraq; the Babylonian city of Ur was within its security perimeter. This photograph shows a collection of memorials done by soldiers there. It was hard to know, Brown and Green told me, how this kind of "crude memorializing . . . played out since so many of the soldiers were either so smart and self-aware or else so weary and tired."¹⁷ The image is full of particularities, not least of them the strange camouflage patterning in the painting of the Twin Towers. Green and Brown's paintings of such scenes are even more difficult to co-opt into a political narrative, because they are done with a patient and accomplished traditional oil technique. Any argument about war is slowed—but not stopped—by such a practice.

In this book some images appear as sumps of logical, propositional thought: places where thought slows, and argument pauses. Elizabeth Stainforth and David Thom's essay "Metadata" is an odd example. Their concern is with metadata, the information fields that are encoded in digital photographs. They trace the prehistory of metadata from Benjamin to Bernhard Stiegler, for whom photography was "developed for the exteriorization of memory." Strangely, however, they choose an image that does not illustrate these points. It is a piece called *Gold Key*, an inkjet print by Seth Price. For Stainforth and Thom, *Gold Key* is ambiguous; it "evades a point of fixity that the inscription would assign to it." The work highlights "the tension between the semiotic inscription of metadata and the inscription understood as the 'this was' of the photograph." This is odd because the image they choose is digital, so that it does, in fact, have metadata, but they apparently have not found the original or analyzed it to see what metadata it contains. In addition, the image is made by hand in a way that makes it appear not to have been made by hand (Michael Newman, "Seth Price's Operations," 2010), so it might well have multiple layers of metadata. The image of hands exchanging keys is taken instead as an emblem of the *possible* difference between metadata and earlier, Benjaminian, senses of inscription in the real. It's that *possibility* that slows argument. Metadata is actually both precise and limited: it has conventional data fields, which follow a conventional order: Author, By-line, By-line Title, Caption, Caption Writer(s), Category, City, Contact Information, Copyright Notice, and so on—about thirty categories. That, too, would have slowed Stainforth and Thom's argument, but not as drastically as their unanchored, almost irrelevant image.

In a sense all the images in this book slow the argument in which they are set, but in the specific sense I intend here, only a few images contribute to the argument and at the same time slow it down. A good example of this is the five frames from Saul Levine's *Notes After Long Silence* reproduced in Josh Guilford's essay on Baudrillard. Guilford develops some of Baudrillard's concepts of "transparency" and the "obscene," and then he notes that Baudrillard's theories fall short of explaining "the increasingly mobile forms of private experience" and the many new ways of imagining the private and the domestic. Levine's *Notes After Long Silence* is presented as an example of work that engages these issues, but in the final paragraph Guilford makes a complicated list of things the film is *not*: it isn't a return to classical aesthetics; it isn't representational; it isn't an "attempt to reinstate the 'divine'"; it isn't an aestheticizing of the everyday. The work, Guilford says, reveals, conceals, illuminates, obscures, solicits and confounds. Some of these refusals and paradoxes, in my reading, are not entirely necessary, but they go to the larger point that something is missing from Baudrillard's demonization of contemporary visuality, and that some parts of that missing meaning can be found in practices like Levine's. In

17 Personal correspondence, Winter 2012.

Guilford's essay, work like Levine's slows our understanding of what might happen after Baudrillard, but does not stop it entirely.

Images will also slow discourse if they are not quite wholly images. In Bruno Latour's account, objects on social space are "quasi objects" and "quasi subjects" (See Jess Park's essay "Monuments"). The radical possibility here is that the disenfranchised objects themselves might not be whole. Even ripped from their contexts or forced into new contexts, they might be part-images, part-objects, whose function in critical discourse is to slow the customary speed of interpretation by denying it its first point of purchase, which is the object itself, whether or not it has its original context.

These five positions and their three counter-positions amount to a theory of the place of images in critical thought. The five could certainly be rearrange or augmented. They are intended to sharpen talk about what images do in, with, and to our texts. Without these sorts of specific case studies, talk about the ways images work tends to devolve into talk about the "power" or "meaning" or "theory" inherent in images: and that, in turn, allows images to continue to be used as they traditionally have been, as mnemonics, examples, or illustrations. This book is intended as an answer to the text-driven, text-centered corpus of visual studies, and as an accumulation of instances of what we are calling visual argument.

CAN IMAGES ALONE COMPRISE AN ARGUMENT?

It may seem that this list of five positions omits one that is crucial to any account of how images create meaning: the claim that images alone can comprise an argument. I am skeptical about this. Similar things have been claimed, implicitly, by many books that avoid texts. In twentieth-century art history there is Horst Janson's nearly textless *Key Monuments of the History of Art* (1959), a pedagogic tool that is nevertheless intended to embody a standard Western narrative of art history. Outside of art history there is also André Malraux's *Musée Imaginaire* (1947–1950), with its mixture of surrealist and historicist examples intended to produce a meaningful experience. In more recent history there are wordless graphic novels, from the Weimar Republic to artists such as Chris Ware and Yuichi Yokoyama. In the West the tradition of wordless books is centuries-old, and includes such eccentric examples as the early eighteenth-century *Mutus Liber* (ed. Jean Laplace, 1979), a deliberately obscure set of pictorial instructions for alchemical operations. In this long and heterogeneous history there are few examples of sets of images that can be read as possessing clear arguments without accompanying narratives.

A possibility that is still on the margins of visual studies is the notion of visual art projects *as* arguments. Any number of practice-based PhD programs produce art that is considered as propositional: it embodies, or suggests propositional knowledge.¹⁸ But almost all such programs also require dissertations.¹⁹ A fascinating and under-studied example of the claim that images alone can argue comes from Roland Barthes, who in 1979 approved a PhD that consisted only of images.²⁰ The candidate was the photog-

18 In the unmanageably diverse literature, see *The Pleasure of Research*, edited by Henk Slager (Utrecht, 2011); *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, edited by Michael Biggs and enrik Karlsson (London: Routledge, 2010); *Texte zur Kunst* 82 (2011), special issue on art research; my own *Artists with PhDs: On the New Doctoral Degree in Studio Art* (Washington, DC: New Academia, 2009).

19 The only example I am aware of in which a practice-based PhD program did not require a written dissertation is Plymouth University in the U.K., which later decided to reinstate the written component.

20 Wayne Rowe, "The Wordless Doctoral Dissertation: Photography as Scholarship," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 8 (1995): 21–30.

rapher Lucien Clergue, and his dissertation was photographs of beaches in the U.S. and France. Barthes's justification for the PhD, *cum laude*, was a characteristically lovely piece of prose, with a flowing sequence of alternative models for justifying the degree: that the photographs appear "as discourse," that they "bring into play a reproduction code and lend themselves to a secondary level analysis," that they do not possess meaning but are about meaning (that they "bear" meaning in themselves), that they produce "allegory," that they are evidence of the "trace," and that they touch on two levels of photography, which Barthes identifies as "painting" and "magic" (pp. 21, 22). Needless to say this very poetic sequence of ideas would not serve to justify a PhD degree in a contemporary studio-based PhD program, but some of Barthes's ideas, especially regarding meaning and semiotics, are very apposite to the ways images are said to possess, entail, or imply argument.

In the field of visual studies, a number of programs combine art practices and scholarship, and the art is often considered as possessing propositional content. In this book there are several such essays, by Vera Chiquet and Arantxa Echarte. Echarte proposes a new classification of the ways that performance art is documented, and she invents and explains a new kind of documentation, which she calls *the trace of documentation*, which then she illustrates with her own artwork, along with Vito Acconci's and Sophie Calle's. Her own work is proposed as an example of her new category, and so there is necessarily no analytic distance between it and the theory she has invented. Sadly, most visual studies scholarship does not involve the making of images or artworks: if it did, it would be a fundamentally different field.

THE IMAGES IN THIS BOOK THAT DO NOT ARGUE

Many entries in this book do not use images to argue. They use images in the usual way, as illustrations or exemplifications of theoretical positions that are developed in the text. I wouldn't be honest not to acknowledge that, or to omit the fact that the editorial board tried, sometimes repeatedly, to elicit entries that would display images as arguments. Still, the majority of the texts in this book take images as illustrations. That is true of Jess Park, Alicia Chester, Jamie Comstock-Skipp, Pirkko Rathgeber, Julia Marsh, Katrina Kuntz, Josephine Landback, Andrew Salgado, Kristi McGuire's "Anaesthetics," Michelle Lindenblatt, Vivian Li, Horea Avram, Jessica Horton, and Meredith Kooi. It is significant that most of these are about film, video, and augmented reality, media whose representation is necessarily truncated in print: nevertheless, that truncation is conventional in film and media studies, and brings with it opportunities for exploring media representation in relation to the authors' themes. (This isn't a reflection on the texts themselves, considered apart from their relations to images. Alicia Chester's essay "Surfacing," for example, is a beautiful and densely informed survey of salient meanings of *surface* from high modernism to Jameson's postmodernism. Its pictures—Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall*, and an iPhone—don't need to do more than provide visual relief. They are illustrations in the sense of ornaments: inessential to the argument, but integral to the pace and feel of the essay. Likewise Horea Avram's essay "Augmented Reality" is a thoughtful assessment of the difference between Lev Manovich's "augmented space" and other senses of augmented reality.)

In several instances, images used as illustrations could be interpreted as arguing—except that such interpretation is left to the reader. A principal point of Josephine Landback's essay on Peter Greenaway's *Pillow Book* is that the disruption of the narrative progression at the end of the film creates "alternative meanings and significations in and of themselves, without a plot," arguing "for the autonomy of the visual, in this

case the moving image, as a key expression of ephemerality.” The second pillow book in the film is, formally, an “interruption,” moving the viewer “away from the subject-object narrative structure to the immediate and ephemeral sensation.” Given this, the film stills are both contradictions of Landback’s themes—which depend on the value she says Greenaway puts on the temporality of film—and also, strangely, examples of her themes, because they literally interrupt her continuously flowing prose and organically developing argument with stubbornly static, non-narrative, sexualized images. In this way the images she chooses could argue along with her theme, and even provide an interesting structural parallel to it.

Another example is Vivian Li’s essay on Song Dong’s performances. The artist lay face down on the cold pavement in Tiananmen Square, and again on nearby Lake Houbai, and his performances are taken by Li to demonstrate that even the most ephemeral and subtle act can create “temporary democratic public space.” It is an interesting kind of argument: it’s not only that modestly scaled actions like Song Dong’s are potentially more powerful than public demonstrations; it’s that there is a kind of irregular, sometimes asymptotic relation between political meaning and subtlety of action. As the overt-ness, noise, scale, and public exposure of a work is scaled down (imagine the x axis of a graph, public to the right, private to the left), the politics may diminish, or it may become rapidly stronger (imagine a curve, dipping down but never touching zero). There is an interesting formal parallel between that model and Song Dong’s actual performances, where he is almost, but not completely, immobile. Like the curve and the zero value of the y axis, Song Dong is inches away from the surface, and sometimes touching it. *Breathing* comprises a light-box photograph along with an audio track: you can hear him softly breathing as you watch him not breathing. For me, that produces a strange sensation, as if I can almost see him moving as he breathes. The pictures, again, could have articulated the argument by adding spatial metaphors to non-visual analyses of the concept of space.

Elise Haddad’s essay uses a reproduction of a Sherrie Levine reproduction of Walker Evans, but not to undo the economy of reproduction and the simulacra that she traces from Borges: if anything, Haddad’s illustration shows how the same logic that we know through texts from Benjamin and Krauss to Baudrillard and Virilio continues to operate. Katrina Kuntz’s “Monstrative,” on the relations between faces, facial disfiguration, and violence, takes as its single visual example a still from Georges Franju’s film *Les yeux sans visage* [*Eyes Without a Face*]. In that film, a woman whose face is disfigured wears a blank-looking mask that shows only her eyes. Her father, a surgeon, anesthetizes another woman, intending to cut her face off and graft it onto his daughter. Kuntz makes two sets of points about faces and violence: first she quotes Jean-Luc Nancy regarding the intimate connection between faces and violence—that violence “requires” faces in order to demonstrate itself, and that faces imply and admit violence—and then she quotes Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of the “reflective face” (the “social screen”) and the “intensive face” (the “lunar landscape” of the disrupted face, experienced as forms and fragments). (Strangely, Kuntz identifies the mask with the “intensive face,” and leaves the woman’s disfigured face beneath unidentified.) The two sources, Nancy and Deleuze and Guattari, are partly brought together in Nancy’s assertion that violence takes away “form and meaning,” and is linked to the nature of the image. The single film still emblemizes these themes, hinting at the ruined face beneath. But the film, *Les yeux sans visage*, would have to be seen as a critique of both Nancy and Deleuze and Guattari, simply because of the carefully staged *varieties* of faces. There’s a scene in which the disfigured woman, without her mask, approaches the abducted woman, whose face is going to be removed, where she lies on an operating table. We see the disfigured

woman briefly and out of focus, the way the anesthetized woman would see her. Then we see the half-drugged woman sit up, and as she moves, her face goes out of focus. In another scene, we see imaginary stages in the disfigured woman's recovery; in another, the disfigured woman kisses two dogs; in another, we see the abducted woman's face cut free and lifted slightly off her head. All these—done in 1950s-style effects, and therefore stagey in a particular way—show how there is not a single “violence,” a single “disfiguration,” or a simple opposition of “reflective” and “intensive.” As it so often happens, the visual complicates the verbal with particularities and singularities the verbal cannot accommodate.²¹

W. Keith Brown's essay uses two Indian photographs explicitly as a way of arguing against Appadurai's theories of the “indigenization of capitalism and local principles.” In Brown's account, Appadurai's theory “suggests that global capital and Westernization created platforms for borderless communities to share ideas,” but a case can be made that “this sort of global practice on a local level created a tendency for a culture to turn inward.” The two photographs Brown chooses argue for versions of local culture, or culture that turns inward. Yet at the same time, Brown interprets the place of these images with the help of two other theorists' work, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Roland Robertson, who coined the term *glocal*. In relation to Robertson, Brown suggests that both photographs “use glocal culture as their subject”; and in relation to Chakrabarty, Brown implies that both are “inextricably linked to European concepts of society” such as Surrealism. In that way the same images that are used to argue against Appadurai's sense of the imagination and social space come to stand, again, as illustrations of some other theory.

Lara Haworth and Nicole Cormaci's “Decolonial” is a lovely dense essay on the urban and rural imaginary, and the visible and invisible in landscapes. Its text is full of images: a photographic project by the Center for Land Use; Michael Lynch's imaginary city maps; and Guy Debord's maps of *dérives*. But the two images are only used as samples. Couldn't the massive documentation offered by the Center for Land Use's project be used for a much richer metaphoric of surfacing and submerging, especially given all the different supports and configurations of the Alaska Pipeline? Couldn't each bridge, overpass, and tunnel be used to make different metaphoric points about the decolonial project? In Haworth and Cormaci's essay, the visual is itself a natural resource waiting to be explored.

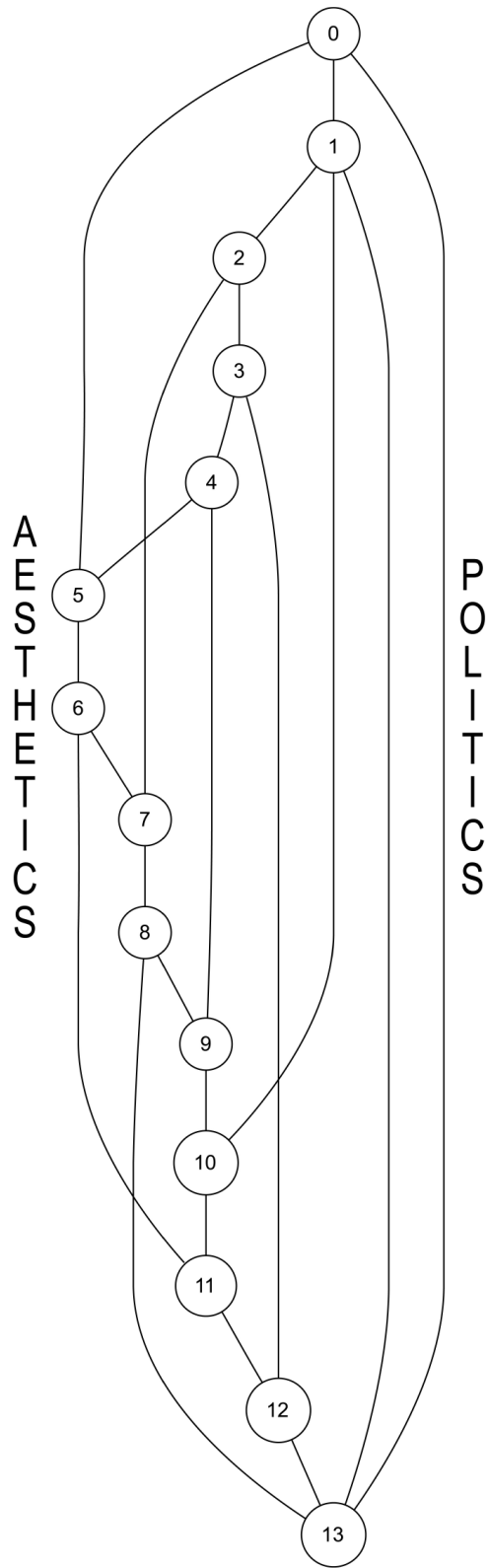
Many of these essays could, in this context, be read as missed opportunities to let images work as argument. Lucian Gomoll's excellent survey of the problem of the display of material fragments as art objects—by chance it's the only museological entry in this book—uses one photograph, an installation shot of an ethnographic display. But it wouldn't have been difficult to play off details of installations with installations of details, parts of displays with displays of parts. The representation of fragments, as well as the presentation of fragments, is part and parcel of the museological puzzle that Gomoll explores.

I would also like to read Nea Ehrlich's essay on the contemporary animated documentary as a missed opportunity to let images argue. Animated documentaries are an especially interesting form, because their apparent lack of realism is actually a strategy

21 Kuntz's essay is part of a contemporary resurgence in interest in faces, faciality, masks, portraits, and heads: as I write this, Hans Belting, Michael Newman, and several others are at work on books on this subject. It will be interesting to see how theorizing can accommodate visual examples, especially when some of that theorizing comes from texts that are centrally about language and not images, such as Nancy's and Levinas's.

for increasing mimetic persuasion. Ehrlich cites Winnicott's theories of object formation to help theorize the epistemological status of animated documentaries, and she suggests that animated documentaries' strength is their combination of "the real and the unreal, the actual and the virtual, the objective and the subjective." She chooses two images from the documentary *Waltz with Bashir*: a "memory of the war as a drug-induced nightmare" (a soldier smoking marijuana while a jet bombs tanks in the desert beyond him), and a soldier's "dream of rescue" (a greenish soldier clinging to an enormous blue woman as if she were a life raft). Ehrlich doesn't say anything more about the images, but they themselves say more. The jet and the row of tanks are done in 1980s video-game style: schematically, almost two-dimensionally, with no atmosphere and no detail. A bomb drops from the jet just like bombs used to drop in 1970s video games, as a block of pixels falling in a line through a monochrome blue sky. It's as if the soldier's imagination, or his experience, was a video game. It's hardly a conventional depiction of a nightmare, a vision, or a hallucination. It's a conventional depiction of an arcade game, and that adds another layer to the strangeness of scene when it's considered as part of an animated documentary. It's also odd, especially given Ehrlich's interest in Winnicott, that the soldier—the source of the narration of the war as hallucination—is depicted in a foreground layer of the same space as the tanks: not like the *repoussoir* figure of European painting, or its descendant, the first-person shooter from video games, but instead like a figure *in* the vision he is supposed to be having. Each of these traits could be used to argue that animation is doing a different work here than Ehrlich describes. An analogous argument about difference could be made about the weird frame Ehrlich chooses as her second illustration. The blimp-like blue woman is a little like a fashion model—it looks as if her face was inspired by a common conventional form for a model, taught to students in design and illustration schools—and a little like a corpse in an old B-movie, with her arms hung up like a zombie. The whole scene is also erotic in the fashion of *fin-de-siècle* decadent art like Franz von Stuck's. What does animation contribute to this? It's hard to say: the scene could also have been done with photographs, in Photoshop, or with oil paint, as von Stuck did. If *Waltz with Bashir* were a conventional documentary, this would have been done with video editing, and with a high enough production budget, the result might have been comparable. Animation, here, is following models other than video games, and it is not clear what force it has: and that unclarity itself is enough to set the image apart from the argument in which it is embedded.

Andrew Wasserman's very carefully balanced essay on Trevor Paglen and "experimental geography" is illustrated with one of Paglen's photographs of a star field and a satellite track. There are several ways this image could provide information: more could be said about the particular military satellite whose track appears in the photo, or more could be said about this image in context of recent images of the sublime by artists like Thomas Ruff or Vija Celmins. Either kind of information—political or aesthetic—could potentially intervene in the balance Paglen negotiates between a visual practice that provides people with new information (for example, about covert government activities, or the positions of spy satellites) and a practice that expands people's ideas about what might be possible, without actually informing them of anything specific. Either kind of information could also upset the balance that Wasserman achieves between talking about how visual practices create us as viewers, how politics exists in images that have no explicit political content, and how the aesthetics of the sublime works against, or complements, political action. Without additional information about either the classified content of the image or its aesthetic pedigree, the image can only serve as a pointer, directing readers to Paglen's work. Either that, or the image comprises an extra layer of disinformation, or of aesthetics, because it ends up functioning as a decoration, or as a



hint that Paglen might, in the end, be creating mainly aesthetic objects. The image *could* argue, and in context of Paglen's positions and Wasserman's own concerns about those conditions, it *has* to argue: and yet in Wasserman's text it doesn't argue. Thinking of Wasserman's essay and Paglen's practice, I made this diagram. It is meant to express my feeling that both move back and forth, along several pathways, between the political and the aesthetic. The single image of the satellite track—it is a very faint line, at the lower right of the image—points, I think, inevitably to the left.

Is it possible that some images cannot argue? Arden Stern's essay on the typeface Arial might present itself as an example. He remarks on "the flattened out diagonal stroke of the Arial R," and the large size "R" in the text certainly illustrates his point, in comparison to the diagonal of the Helvetica R, which begins, logically, mimicking the curve of the closed loop of the R, and then turns downward, imitating the upright backbone of the R. But then it curves outward, at the last moment, in a coy imitation of a serif. In fact the R is the only uppercase letter in Helvetica that does this: even the Q is well-behaved by comparison. (The cross-bar on Arial's Q is coyly curved.) Stern could have used this to pursue his point, which he gets from Flusser, that deception is "inherent to all design practice," and that art and technology are mingled in design. But if these images have only a little argument in them, that's partly because they are structurally simple objects: modernist typefaces, intentionally stripped down to the minimum number of "superfluous" ornaments. The minimal number of nameable traits of the Arial R only makes it more amenable to being understood as argument.

And yet images seldom play along. Marta Jecu's contribution uses a dense set of ideas from Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* to analyze Tadashi Kawabata's wooden constructions. Jecu mentions Deleuze's distinction between "differentiation" and "differentiation," and she develops her own understandings of virtuality and performativity. Against that matrix of concepts, two images of Kawabata's constructions remain resolutely particular: a kind of wobbly tree-house that perches between two small trees, and a little rat's nest of sticks congregating at the top of a concrete pillar. Those two objects are about all sorts of things other than "actualization," performativity, the possible, the differentiable, the virtual: among other things, they are about hiding, playing, and the fun of building things out of sticks. I don't mean that Kawabata's work cannot be profitably understood using Deleuze's theories, but that Jecu's account depends more on the idea of Kawabata's work than any examples of that work.

Similarly, Johannes Bruder discusses Christian Metz's account of film and photography, and develops an account of the fetishistic functions of photography in relation to film. He reproduces a photograph of a sculpture by Anish Kapoor called *Descent into Limbo*, which is a black circle painted on the floor of a gallery so that it looks like a hole. In Bruder's reading, in a photograph "the object of the fetish is chosen consciously and constantly points to the lack, which is why a real and unattended presence can destroy the effect of the fetish." The result can be "disturbing" and "irritating" because "the spectator is certainly not, as Metz argues, the 'master of the look.'" In Bruder's argument, the photograph of Kapoor's sculpture exemplifies these properties of photography that Metz gets wrong: but it is only an example of Metz's mistakes, and a piece of evidence for Bruder's reading. It is not brought into the argument, but exhibited at the end of the argument, as one example in an infinite field that comprehends, in theory, the entirety of photography in opposition to Metz's reading.

In her essay on the collective and publication called *LTTR*, for example, Rebecca Vreeland implies that her illustrations have theoretical pertinence, but chooses to let her text make the arguments. For example, she reproduces an image of Emily Roydson, wearing a mask with David Wojnarowicz's face, and holding a dildo. The image was

the cover of the first issue of the journal *LTTR* that is the subject of Vreeland's text. She comments that the image "makes visible *LTTR*'s blending of feminism and queer/AIDS activism," which is to say it works well as a sign of what's in the journal, and that it "calls into question limited notions of what constitutes a gay, lesbian or feminist identity, suggesting they are intertwined and ambiguous." But does it call those things into question differently *because* it is an image? Or does it do exactly what the texts in *LTTR* do? The issue is unresolved in Vreeland's text, so the image participates in her argument mainly as a parallel to claims made in writing. It's not clear that it matters that Roydson made an image, or that the image was published in *LTTR*.

One essay, Matthew Francis Rarey's exposition of "visualism" in ethnography, provides a critique of our reliance on the visual. Rarey reads a passage in Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Creates Its Object* in order to show anthropology's reliance on the visual. Rarey concludes "anthropology is visual studies, and has been since its inception": a nice inversion of the conventional and dated fear that visual studies is reducible to a form of anthropology, and an opportunity to question "the relations between longstanding visualist practices and sensorial remappings." Rarey's concerns intersect with others who are interested in reconfigurations of the senses in visual studies, such as the artist Joseph Grigely, or the art historian Caroline Jones: but no matter how the senses are reconfigured there remains the problem of how the visual works in our texts. Multisensorial and synesthetic configurations can just as easily be used as illustrations of theories as fine art is used in traditional art history.

WHEN THE SUBJECT AT HAND ISN'T VISUAL

There are also essays in this book that refer to visual material and visibility, but are fundamentally not concerned with particularities of visual objects. An example is W. Ian Bourland's essay "Diaspora" on the concept of diaspora, which uses Allan Sekula's *Polonia and Other Fables* as an example, but has no need to illustrate the work, because the essay is principally engaged with nominally non-visual concepts of diaspora articulated by Irit Rogoff and a dozen other theorists. The essay is a meditation on the end of national cultures, except as "strategic positioning," and the inception of a new discourse of "ruptures, discontinuities, and fluidities." Even though Bourland refer to the dissolution of "unified visual styles," and even though he takes a photographic project as his example, it is entirely characteristic of a certain Anglo-American visual studies that the visual practice might not need to be the central instance of the author's themes. Bourland's interests are geopolitical, and are articulated in political theory, area studies, and theories of identity. The fact that they do not need illustrations—and certainly do not need images as recalcitrant material inserted into the textual argument—is of a piece with the probability that the visual is probably not the indispensable example of such theories. Since 2000 or so, Anglo-American visual studies has increasingly tended in this direction: it pursues non-visual concepts that are crucial for identity, class, gender, nationality, the local, and the global, and it takes visual art as enabling or clarifying examples.

Several essays do perfectly well without any visual material, because their argument takes places at one side of the visual, or before or after the visual. Cecilia Aldarondo's "Ephemeral" doesn't require images of archives or of Rebecca Schneider's work. It is wholly appropriate that Maureen Burns's essay "Invisibility" isn't illustrated, because it is all about the conditions of, and desire for, visibility. Burns has some excellent observations to make that would only be hobbled by actually visible objects, for example when she notes that the "ironic predilection to rely on the invisible to expose the visual has not been fully understood or directly addressed." R. E. H. Gordon's "Frame" is a similar

case: she is interested in the very idea of framing, the “physical, conceptual, and ideological structures that are the condition of possibility for perception.” (It’s not a coincidence that these two essays were among the original ones for this book: at the beginning, the students were intensively reconceptualizing, and the visual sometimes came along later. See Kristi McGuire’s “A Short Introduction to Failure” for more on this.)

Álvaro Luís Lima’s essay on José Esteban Muñoz and queer theory also does a lot of work without requiring images: perhaps its visual work is actually something like the graph of his citations that I reproduced in “An Introduction to the Visual Studies That is Not in This Book.” Perhaps it would be a separate project to reconnect this theorizing to its traditional objects within visual studies or art criticism. Or it may be that essays like Lima’s are the least visual of the essays in this book, because they pursue theorizations that have become increasingly independent of the visual. After all, visual studies, like many of the humanities, has its semi-independent lines of theoretical inquiry and methodological concern. I would be the last person to picture a more or less independent theoretical discourse as a flaw in a discipline, but the absence of an account of whether or not these non-visual inquiries can, should, or shouldn’t be connected to visual practices is itself puzzling.

Texts that don’t include images can still raise interesting things about visuality and its relation to argument. Mike Gibisser’s “Airborne Horses,” a meditation on the Lumière Brothers’ films, on Muybridge and Marey, cinema and photography, time and motion, could easily have employed images. We can recall generic images of the visual material he cites—Lumière Brothers’ films, sequences of galloping horses by Muybridge—so it wouldn’t be necessary to reproduce them just as mnemonics, and there may be structural reasons not to illustrate such images. If “memory allows the conception of space to remain stable over time, but shock—here defined as a space’s rapid reorganization whether by literal or manufactured disturbance—necessitates a re-mapping of the connections between synapse and space,” it may be that illustrations would necessarily fail to instantiate “shock” and “disturbance,” and actually impede the argument, or distract from it. Images would be interruptions. Certainly Bergson’s own diagrams of time, or Muybridge’s familiar sequences, would not induce that sort of “shock.” If what matters is the idea of duration, memory, and space, then it makes sense that the visual forms Gibisser uses to make his points do not need to put in appearances. If the subject is “nothing other than the recognition of the flux at the foundation of any human concept of stability,” then illustrations of any sort would be superfluous. And yet some of the specifics of those visual forms do matter: the train speeding out of the Lumière Brothers’ film, the horses’ hooves in the air in Muybridge’s photographs. What relation do they have to the argument? It’s a relation that is somehow both optional (because the images couldn’t exemplify the themes that interest Gibisser) and indispensable (because the argument regarding “shock” and “disturbance” pivots on the visual, takes the visual as its crucial instance). But the text itself does not address these decisions, and by gesturing to images and filmic sequences that we allegedly know well (But how well do we know them? In what sense can we recall them here? What work do our more-or-less blurred memories do?), Gibisser implies that a gesture is necessary but an actual image might deflect the argument. It is the lack of articulation of that point that makes me wonder what presence the visual has here, and what function it provides. (It is interesting that Gibisser is a filmmaker, so there is a certain point, for him, at which images must meet theories.)

An absence of images is entirely appropriate when the real focus is conceptualization. Even essays that set out well-known ideas, such as Margaret Di Giulio’s essay on “Performativity,” do so with an eye to the critical literature. Di Giulio, for example, is

interested in how Butler's well-known development of J. L. Austin's concept of performativity makes it possible to theorize how performance art can perform performativity, rather than merely instantiate it. Lennard introduces the ordinary to Sianne Ngai's strategically unserious concept of *suplimity* (roughly: awe mingled with boredom). A number of essays take issue with currently fashionable concepts; an exemplary instance is Julia Sonnevend's essay discusses Bruno Latour's notion of "iconoclash," which continues to guide discussions in art history.²²

And finally, for a number of authors in this book, the subject in question may not, in the end, be crucially or even pertinently visual. What is in question may be transiently or contingently attached to the visual, or visuality might be part of it, or visual practices might be examples of it, but the subject itself may not, in the end, require visuality at all. Jessica Horton's essay is an example. She undermines the power dynamic at work in Homi Bhabha's idea of mimicry, arguing that the term does not need to be used to "undermine the colonizer's values," but can support "other forms of agency." Mimicry is originally a visual phenomenon, but the particularities of biological mimicry are not at issue in Bhabha or in Horton's reading; both are interested in the conceptual or linguistic representations of agency and identity. The obligation for visual studies would be to identify the reasons for continuing to link such theories of cultural representation to the visual. (There are many such links: but they aren't at issue in this essay.) Several of the essays that are directed at conceptual, optionally visual themes are mainly concerned with gender issues and identity, and readers interested in those themes can find a tremendous amount here: Tenley Bick's essay on Lacan, which is a concerted critique of the affective value of the mirror stage; Margaret Di Giulio's on "Performativity"; Andrew Salgado's "Sexualized," which considers masculine identity from an unusual viewpoint; Jessica Horton's essay on Homi Bhabha; Katherine Lennard's on "The Ordinary"; Álvaro Luís Lima and Rebecca Vreeland on José Muñoz; Meghan Chandler's "Masquerade," on spectatorship; Jules Sturm on Claude Cahun; Katrina Kuntz on the horror of violence done to faces; Josephine Landback on the violence of tattooing and its relation to collecting; and Rebecca Vreeland on *LTTR*. Only a few of these require visual material. In many different ways, such inquiries raise the question of the place of the visual. Is visual material necessary to understand the subject in question? Is it central? Is it exemplary? Is it optional, or illustrative?

ENVOI

It may seem perverse to have written such a long introduction focusing on just this one problematic. It may also seem inappropriate to write an introduction criticizing some of the content of the book it introduces. And it may seem unhelpful to have presented this theme as an introduction to the current condition of visual studies, when this book itself makes it so abundantly clear that visual studies is going in many different directions. In fact, my own concerns about the field, voiced in *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction* and in the forthcoming *Farewell to Visual Studies*, have only a little to do with what I have written here. Yet I believe that no matter what visual studies turns out to be in the coming decades, it will not really be about the visual until it comes to terms with this most fundamental issue. Images need to be central, and they need to never be fully controlled. They need to be able to suddenly derail or contradict an ongoing argument, or

22 On this phenomenon, see my "Iconoclasm and the Sublime: Two Implicit Religious Discourses in Art History," in *Idol Anxiety*, edited by Josh Ellenbogen and Aaron Tugendhaft (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 133–151.

slow it, or distract it, or even overwhelm it. Will we dare to let images control our arguments? Will we pay enough attention to images to see how seldom they simply exemplify the ideas we hope they illustrate?

A book like this one may not seem to be the best place to introduce new concepts, pursue arguments with the field, or experiment with the place of the visual in visual studies. Those could all be considered prerogatives of advanced texts or experimental monographs aimed only at graduates or colleagues. But visual studies continues to be startlingly diverse, uncertain about its relevant history, mobile in its methods, and experimental in its subjects of study. It could be argued that visual studies, at its best, is the place where assumptions about framing, reliability, voice, institutionalization, identity, and the subject positions of scholars are at their most open. An anthology or reader should not just theorize that flux: it should enact it. We feel it isn't appropriate to assemble the kind of anthology or reader that presents the field's history and sets out its methods with exemplary texts. In the labile atmosphere of contemporary visual studies and *Bildwissenschaft*, even the few texts that have become canonical—Foucault's, Benjamin's—call out for invested, critical readings. We hope this book recreates the flux of the field.