[*Note to readers: these are the Seminars and responses from the book* Farewell to Visual Studies, *edited by James Elkins, Gustav Frank, and Sunil Manghani. For more information see* <u>this page</u>.]

First Introduction: Starting Points

James Elkins

This text is adapted from the introductory lecture, given on July 17, 2011.

Why *Farewell to Visual Studies*? Our title is meant to raise the question of visual studies' successes and failures, and to promote a critical orientation in a field that has, until now, often been content about its accomplishments and its history. The three of us who organized the event and edited this book have very different senses of what needs rethinking, what is promising, and what might be left behind. In this brief introduction I will list some of my own concerns, things that were on my mind when I first named and advertised this event in 2006. Some of them appear in the pages that follow; others don't, and that's how it should be. Each of the thirty people involved in the 2011 event, and the twenty additional writers who have contributed Assessments to this book, have different senses of visual studies. As in the other books in this series, the idea is to give voice to as many perspectives as possible, and not to constrain critical discourse.

I like to think we are now in the third generation of visual studies. The people who founded the first Anglo-American programs of visual studies are in their late fifties, sixties, and seventies: Tom Mitchell, Douglas Crimp, Michael Holly, Keith Moxey, Janet Wolff. Their first students are now well established—people like Lev Manovich and Howard Singerman. I think of all those scholars, and many others I'm not naming, as part of a single generation. I am in the same group, except that I wasn't trained by anyone engaged with visual studies. A second generation, now in their thirties, forties, and early fifties, are the later students of those scholars. In this event, we had Bridget Cooks and Jeanette Roan, both graduates of the Rochester program, and now teaching in Irvine and the California College of the Arts. Sunil Manghani, one of the faculty, would perhaps be part of that group as well, and so would Gustav Frank, even though he was trained in literary history. This kind of schema is of course impossible to sustain, as Wilhelm Pinder discovered (he attempted to write a history of art by generations), but I propose it in order to say that there is a third group, a third generation, people now in their twenties and

early thirties: current graduate students. In my experience, their concerns are nearly disconnected from the concerns that animate our discussions here. I raise that point several times in the Seminars, just to signal that the concerns about history, politics, and visuality are often put in ways that make more sense to the first- and second-generation scholars than the current generation.

This was echoed in an interesting way in a book I was editing when the *Farewell to Visual Studies* event was in progress; it has since been published as *Theorizing Visual Studies: Thinking Through the Discipline* (2012). That book is composed of seventy short chapters, all written by graduate students around the world. My coeditors were also graduate students at the time we assembled the book. The idea was to produce a next-generation reader for visual studies that did not depend on midcareer scholars. My contributions were limited to the introductory material. One introduction was an essay on the history of visual studies, which has a fair amount of detail (including a number of texts and institutions that are not mentioned in this book). I wrote it around the time of the *Farewell to Visual Studies* event, well before we had gathered all seventy chapters for the book. It turned out that overwhelmingly, the graduate student authors were not interested in the deeper history of their discipline. I thought that was striking, and I decided to publish the introduction anyway, with the title "An Introduction to the Visual Studies That Is Not in This Book." The graduate students' interests, their sense of visual studies' history, their favorite theorists, their preferred journals and zines, and their central visual practices, artists, and objects are significantly different from what we talk about in these pages.

<1>Farewells

I have a list of things I'd like to say farewell to, and another list of visual studies' unfulfilled promises. Farewells and absences. Here they are, in no particular order. Most of them are expanded in my *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction.* Even though that book was written in 2002 and published in 2003, I would defend most of its points—I think they still remain unsolved problems for the field.

(1) Visual studies should be harder to do. At one point in the Seminars, Keith Moxey quotes the end of my book, to the effect that I would like visual studies to be

more ambitious, more wide-ranging, more difficult, slower, and less self-assured. I still find the majority of the writing in visual studies to be too easy, by which I mean it is not difficult enough to write an essay that is fit for publication. It would be good, I think, if visual studies interpretations, no matter what their methodologies, purposes, tactics, or strategies—we distinguish those in the Seminars—would stumble over their assumptions, hesitate over their terms, ponder their formal and contextual analyses. I would like interpretations to slow, perhaps not to the extreme of writers like Joseph Koerner, Tim Clark, or Georges Didi-Huberman (their slownesses are products of different disciplinary concerns), but at least to the point where the author's voice can emerge, questioning her own thoughts and the adequacy of her writing. Farewell, then, to essays that are not as challenging as they possibly can be. I prefer my essays to be uncertain, wavering, obdurately difficult, and rewarding on several rereadings.

(2) Visual studies continues to depend on a relatively small, fairly fixed set of theorists. When I wrote this in 2003, I was thinking of Lacan, Foucault, Marx, Benjamin, Butler, and Barthes, and they are still as prominent. Now the list would include Rancière, Badiou, Bourriaud, Muñoz, and Malabou, but the general configuration is similar. I wonder how different visual studies would look if it adopted Hugo Münsterberg or Béla Balázs (both are mentioned in the Seminars), or contemporaries such as Hermann Broch. And why not stray further away? In the book I proposed writing on some subject of topical interest using Ranke, Burckhardt, Mario Praz or Waldemar Deonna, Henri Frankfort, Elias Canetti or Robert Musil, Fernando Pessoa or Ludwig Hohl, Giambattista Vico or Giordano Bruno? Why not take our cues in gender theory from Sor Juana Iñes de la Cruz instead of Butler, Muñoz, or Irigaray? There are everyday reasons why this might not work, and it isn't a good strategy if you don't have a permanent teaching position. But that doesn't mean the field as a whole can't stray beyond Benjamin. Farewell, then, to Benjamin, at least for a while.

(3) Visual studies continues to look mainly at modern and contemporary visualities. This is explored in the Seminars by Michael Holly, Keith Moxey, Whitney Davis, and Gustav Frank. As Michael Holly notes, it appeared at first that visual studies would combine new theories with visual objects from all cultures, and especially from the premodern West. It has not turned out that way. The overwhelming majority of dissertations

that engage visual studies are concerned with art from modernism onward. Visual studies has evolved a more or less predictable canon of interests, which includes popular imagery, kitsch, and camp, mixed with some contemporary art. Its one medium whose history extends back before modernism is photography, for reasons that we explore in the Seminars. Ideally, visual studies would be interested equally in art, and visual practices, from any culture or period. It shouldn't have a flavor or a taste: it should range over the visual without prior aesthetic commitments. So, farewell to the usual subjects. Let's write on something new: the world is filled with objects beyond our current interests.

<1>Absences

This is a wish list: things I'd like to see visual studies become.

(1) Images need to start arguing. If visual studies is to fulfill its promise of thinking of images differently than art history, then the most fundamental challenge is to stop taking images as illustrations of theories, exemplifications of historical arguments, or mnemonics for encounters with the original, and begin employing images to argue. This is an enormous subject, diffusely theorized and hinted in many dozens of publications from Benjamin onward. The introduction to *Theorizing Visual Studies* sets out a theory about how images can argue, how they can theorize, even philosophize; it gathers some crucial texts and consolidates a list of specific ways that images can work alongside, or even against, the arguments in the text. Still, even though that's the principal guiding idea of the book, it has been very difficult getting that to happen. Despite the rhetoric about "image theory," images in visual studies continue to be simply illustrations of the theories they accompany.

(2) Visual studies needs to make more adequate *use* of its images. This sounds similar, but is a different problem, one visual studies has in common with art history. Its images are underutilized, underdescribed. Here is an example of how difficult it is to use images, and how important to keep trying. Two recent books, Tom Mitchell's *Cloning Terror* and Nick Mirzoeff's *Watching Babylon*, are concerned with contemporary images of war, and how they make their way through the world. Both books, I think, read their images very quickly, and in Mirzoeff's case there is a reason for that: he says the images

have been entirely packaged by the military-industrial complex, leaving us little freedom to engage them. Recently I came across a project headed by a man named John Pike, called Public Eye. Pike commissioned surveillance satellites to photograph sensitive sites like Dimona, Israel's nuclear facility. He then got experts to interpret the images, and he posted the analyses. In many cases, he ended up with a relatively small amount of textual information, and the mesmerizing satellite photographs of Dimona, Pyongyang, and other sites remain largely uninterpreted, and ultimately unused. His project shows that even with complete control of the visual material, and even with expert analysis and all the necessary technology, the visual doesn't seem to matter much. I take it this is an endemic problem in visual studies. The nonvisual concerns of visual studies are often enough the majority of what we do, and the visual is underutilized. We need to dwell on the visual, in the visual.

(3) Visual studies needs conversations about its own history. The discipline of art history has a complicated and continuously developing sense of its own historiography. The history and historiography of art history are traditionally taught at graduate level. Visual studies has a shallower history, so it would seem that it could engage that history more readily; but there is not yet any common or shared sense of what that history might be. I am writing these lines after having completed the event in Chicago, and it seems clear to me that no matter what else this book might accomplish, it spends enough time on visual studies' histories (in the plural) so that the historiography of the field—by which I mean discussions about the pertinence of different texts, written in different decades—can more easily be a part of every student's sense of the field. I hope this book might be seen as marking a moment in the history of visual studies in which it becomes more aware of its multiple histories, its deeper historical connections.

(4) Visual studies shouldn't bypass non-art images and scientific images. The Faculty and Fellows in the Seminars include a disproportionate number of scholars who are interested in science studies. Among the Faculty, I have been engaged in these issues, and so have Whitney Davis and Lisa Cartwright. That made the event a good place to raise, once again, the agnosticism of most of visual studies in regard to science. In Seminar 8, an interesting contrast develops between Whitney Davis's interests and Lisa Cartwright's. Whitney would like visual studies scholars to read and engage with the findings

of postwar vision science, and he is interested in neuroaesthetics and the cognitive psychology of vision. Lisa's interests are in the sociology, ethnography, and historical study of the sciences, in fields such as laboratory studies and media studies. From her point of view, it wouldn't necessarily make sense to look at the findings of recent science: what matters, instead, are the contexts in which science has engaged media. My own interests have been in the production and interpretation of scientific images. All three of us, as different as our approaches are, are outliers in relation to the bulk of work in visual studies, which remains almost entirely uninterested in imaging in science, mathematics, and engineering. Especially in the Anglo-American domain, that lack of interest is coupled with an agnosticism about the truth of the claims of science: most younger scholars, I think, wouldn't go anywhere near that question—but it is crucial to orient any work that considers imaging in the sciences.

(5) Visual studies should be engaged with the phenomenology of the making of images: like art history, it has yet to think seriously about what kinds of knowledge can come from the making of art. Few writers in visual studies also make art. Of the participants in this event, several of us—Sunil Manghani, Lisa Cartwright, and myself—have either made art or experimented with making in order to think about writing. This is a long-standing interest of mine, ever since I moved from the MFA to the MA at the University of Chicago, and the department in which I currently teach is constituted as one of the few visual studies programs in which students also make art, and theorize the connections to their practice. By and large, visual studies remains a university discipline, and its spaces are seminar rooms, lecture halls, and libraries, and not studios. Visual studies is often taught to art students, and it is part of the pedagogy in institutions like Goldsmiths in London; but the theorization of the relation of practice to historical and critical writing remains the province of UK-inspired art educators who work in practice-based PhD programs.

(6) Visual studies needs to resolve the unclarities of its politics. Midway through our event, Tom Mitchell sent us his latest essay, "New Rules for Visual Culture." One of the rules is that visual studies scholars should tell him what the politics of visual studies really is. "Someone has to explain to me what the purpose of visual studies is," he writes.

"What are we trying to accomplish? Are we amassing a new knowledge project? Exposing and intervening in false consciousness? Producing an archaeology of power?" Section 7 of the Seminars is a good sampling of the range of ideas regarding the politics in, and of, visual studies. On the one hand, Anglo-American visual studies has been political from its beginning; on the other hand, a great deal of current writing is nonpolitical or apolitical. In Section 7 we consider a spectrum of positions in this respect, from the idea that the most responsible politics of our moment is a practice of writing which might not have any consequences in the world, and which is oblique and ambiguous, to the idea that visual studies is a call to action, requiring scholars to unveil ideological formations and help students understand the visual regimes in which they live. From my point of view there are cogent arguments in support of those and other positions: what concerns me is that there is no debate, in visual studies, on this issue itself.

(7) Visual studies is confused about ideological critique. A concrete example of a problem with a particular political position is the one I have called the Case of the Calvin Klein Suit, and it is pervasive enough to be considered separately from the general problem of politics. It is a thought experiment about a classroom critique of Calvin Klein advertisements. The purpose of the class is to analyze the desire to own the product, by revealing how the advertising seeks to construct its viewers. In various forms that move is a central strategy of visual studies. The thought experiment is a way of noting that the intrinsic logic of the class itself is incomplete, because the teacher demonstrates a strategy of unmasking without saying why it is appropriate to stop after one example. The class exercise posits unveiling as a desirable end, but nothing in the logic of visual studies explains why such analysis would not be universally desirable—why visual studies, in this context, wouldn't be an unmasking with no end other than a change in class consciousness. The Case of the Calvin Klein Suit comes up several times in the Seminars, as a token of the difficulty visual studies has in adjudicating and framing its ideological critiques.

In brief, in sum: at the moment, visual studies is the best place to study visuality and images in general. It blends art history, cultural studies, sociology, visual anthropology, film studies, media studies, postcolonial studies, philosophy of history, the science of vision, and science studies. It promises a new interdisciplinarity (or transdisciplinarity,

or subdisciplinarity, or indisciplinarity, or postdisciplinarity), and it is effectively a laboratory for thinking about relations between fields that address the visual.

But it is not yet a general study of visuality and visual practices: it thinks and works too quickly; it does not reach across the university, or, usually, far back in time; it is undecided about how it engages politics; it doesn't include theories of making; it has a definable canon, including a disproportionate interest in contemporary fine art; it continually returns to the same theorists; it has an unresolved internal logic and purpose; and often its attachment to images is unclear: it uses images too cursorily, as illustrations or information; its images continue to merely illustrate or exemplify theories articulated in the texts, and they do not, so far, live up to the hopes that a number of writers have about them, namely that they contain, provoke, direct, or engender thoughts, theories, and arguments.

Second Introduction:

Affect, Agency, and Aporia

<CST> An Indiscipline with Endemic Ambivalences and a Lack of Pictures

Gustav Frank

In the summer of 2013, an artist, sending me the catalogue of his recent exhibition on nonfigurative paintings that got their inspiration from Goethe's and Stifter's novels, feels the need to add a postscript: I disagree with your farewell to visual studies! What an intricate answer to a complex situation: a painter with a strong commitment to verbal art defends an academic formation that is based on a strong antiword affect and an emphasis on non-art imagery. It is exactly the investment of passion for the visible world, the obsession with neglected sights and insights, and the longing to find answers for questions that remain unanswered, problems that remain unsolved in more usual academic settings, art institutions, or everyday media practices, and that cannot even be brought to the fore of existing disciplines and discourses and within the range of their respective vocabularies—all of which makes up this field of meditations and studies in visual culture. And it represents a high degree of confusion.

But even beyond the anecdotal level, irritations reign in the field and remarkably confuse even books that could be understood as introductions to visual studies (broadly conceived and covering German *Bildwissenschaft*, French *médiologie*, and anglophone visual studies—though *Bildwissenschaft* and *médiologie* are perceived internationally as synonymous with all efforts in the field, whereas in the anglophone world visual studies and visual culture seemingly are reserved for attempts around the *Journal of Visual Culture* since 2002 (for this see Sunil's introductory remarks below). This warrants a brief look at the German situation, in which six introductions to the field have been published since 2005. As we learned during the Chicago event, in close proximity to works of art from all over the world in the Art Institute, a major obstacle to debates in the field is the relatively small number of translations from and into English. Though these introductions are anything but homogeneous and one could argue against many of the assumptions and hypotheses they bring to the fore, I want to draw attention only to highly problematic aspects of two of the volumes. Bisanz's strange book announces a cultural studies approach

to image studies in the subtitle, but astonishingly—even if we take into consideration that *Kulturwissenschaft* is indebted to nineteenth-century hermeneutic and historicist traditions and therefore mostly different from cultural studies—wants by that to "overcome the iconic," as the title promises. In the whole volume there are basically no references to anything published in the field either by the older generation of Warburg, Panofsky, and the like (with the exception of Merleau-Ponty) or by the usual suspects, such as Tom Mitchell, Gottfried Boehm, Georges Didi-Huberman, and Nicholas Mirzoeff.

While Bisanz offers an introduction to a field of objects only, implicitly denying that there is any relevant research and debate going on, Rimmele and Stiegler in their introduction explicitly devoted to visual culture cover a broad variety of initiatives in the field by addressing them through a list of "culturalities" of the eye, reaching from the period eye and the postcolonial eye via the observing and inner eye to the consuming/consumerist eye to the scientific eye. What strikes the reader here is the conclusion the authors draw from their fresh compilation of the literature in the field in their final summary. They find that there is no need for further institutional or even disciplinary consolidation of the field in the German-speaking world because most of the work cited in the volume are or could have been done within the existing academic disciplines and their interdisciplinary openness or boundaries respectively. Clearly understood and beyond any justified critical overview of the results in visual studies, the claim here is that there can be no surplus value to the study of the eye's culturalities reached through visual studies. Thus it appears that ambivalence toward crucial aspects of visuality and imagery is endemic to the field to an extent that implies a farewell itself.

I will come back in more detail to another sort of ambivalence, the one towards the agency of images, in a moment. Both are based in aporiae, that is, they want to reach contradictory goals simultaneously by studying imagery, whereas the Chicago event was dedicated to showing a "way out" by saying welcome to the laboratory (despite Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar) for thinking about the visual and saying farewell to certain interiors and narrow limitations of laboratory space. What we wanted by saying farewell to certain approaches and practices was not to provoke, but to initiate a process of thought and dialogue.

Rimmele and Stiegler's assertion puts the crucial question on display insofar as visual studies has to lay bare its genuine accomplishments that distinguish it from any other theory and method dealing with the same or similar objects of study. That difference cannot be the object, that is, image and vision, but how it is theorized, in which theoretical framework it is conceptualized and studied, and by which methods it is analyzed and interpreted. In regard to the fundamental bias against art history that was a crucial element in founding visual studies, this means that their relation is like that of physics and chemistry toward the atomic world: they share object areas but construct different theories about them. Thus, art history and visual studies share high art artifacts but (must) have to say different things about them as they appear in the framework of "art" in the former case and in the framework of "visual culture" in the latter. Then a conditio sine qua non for the existence of visual studies is findings that construe high art artifacts within a culture visual, for example, within a theory of "interpictoriality" which is interested in outer relations of art to non-art images but inner differentiations and segmentations and emergences of hierarchies of images. Visual studies then can be no longer a "dangerous supplement" of art history, at least epistemologically, because it addresses art differently from art history or is merely redundant, but still not dangerous.

All the people who came to visual studies from the 1980s to the 2000s and still do so came because they were not satisfied with what they practiced, heard, and learned about the visual within settings different from visual studies. The main motor of visual studies was the fundamental deficits felt by scholars interested in imagery, image-making, seeing, observation, and so on. They encountered problems in their usual disciplinary work that proved unsolvable in their usual disciplinary frameworks and also in the usual disciplinary framework of other disciplines they used to join in interdisciplinary projects and programs. Though perhaps the nucleus of visual studies programs has been interdisciplinarity, putting components together and adding tools from disciplines provides necessary prerequisites but not the critical mass for a new way of thinking things visual. It was a consensus about shortcomings, even failures and anxieties, of established attempts (on a disciplinary and even more generally on an epistemological level, that is, the linguistic turn and the hegemony of disciplines in its wake) that led towards innovation

through recombination of their objects, separated otherwise, and through mutual application of their theories and cross-fertilization of their methods.

Whatever visual studies might be called right now, be it an indiscipline, a field, a project, a bunch of competing programs run at various places, it does not have to be something so much as to deliver a unique contribution to the study of the visual—that is, vision *and* visibility *and* visuality *and* the practices and artifacts that appear under that "perspective." Under the pressure of a farewell, visual studies makes no further sense in remaining a special range of objects of cultural studies; it makes no sense if it is just a refurbished art history that enhances its objects and modernizes its methods, such as by opening toward media art practices or relational aesthetics. Uniqueness and inevitability do not mean being completely new and unexpected; a look at the history of physics as a discipline shows that neither its objects nor its methods were new when it began to escape from under the umbrella of philosophy at the end of the eighteenth century. The opposite is true: because neither objects nor methods were new, its autonomy produces immediate and easy accessible findings in the first instance.

Because the problematics of visual studies lie somewhere in studying the visual, this implies a farewell "to matters of geopolitical urgency" since they can't be dealt with properly within visual studies—optimistically put, maybe they can at one point with the help of insights from visual studies. An indicator that there is a high degree of dissatisfaction in the field, beyond the usual controversies, is the persistent quarrel about its very name (visual studies, visual culture, image critique; pictorial, iconic, visualistic turn; etc.). But what are the problematics, then, that could give visual studies an identifiable unique face? I want to briefly sketch out some areas in which visual studies has to sharpen its theoretical profile.

(1) The first area is criticality, which goes beyond the question "how to inhabit the current cultural and political transformations both in terms of academic work and in terms of practice more generally." A polite reminder that visual studies programmed that way is a one-way street is Sunil Manghani's insistence on image critique. Image critique, as I understand Manghani's project, is an appropriate "way out" of the cultural studies ambivalence towards mass formative media by an *image-centered* critique of images and

through images, not a society- or culture-centered criticism of images: "a double procedure of both a critique of images and their critical engagement."

In Whitney Davis's thorough *General Theory*, he pushes criticality to one pole by applying his critical version of analytical philosophy to the language game around vision and culture. Davis does not provide a reconstruction of the uses of its terms but a rigorous investigation into the potential of various new combinations of these terms—a laboratory of thought experiments par excellence. Thus the volume demonstrates how heavily undertheorized or monotheorized visual studies still is. It also allows us to think a new inverted order of the field, especially in its current subordination to the neurosciences, an order in which art history and archaeology inform neuroaesthetics in the area of a natural history of vision.

Nevertheless, missing is an investment in the other pole that also counters halfway criticality, that is, getting rid of the authority of the etymology of the Greek word *krinein* (differentiate). Instead of discriminating the observed object in visual culture from the critical subject of visual studies, maintaining the intellectual gap between the critic and the masses, and so on, visual studies has to expose itself to experiences of (non)vision and (non)visibility and (a)visuality. That is desirable on the side of (art) production, as James Elkins never tires of reminding us when he makes the case for studio experience, but also on the side of (all the ways and contexts of) reception.

(2) Maybe such a criticality radicalized to its poles helps visual studies to clarify theoretically and elaborate methodically Buck-Morss's now commonplace claim to allow "theories that are themselves visual, that show rather than argue." Tom Mitchell launched his critique of visual studies through his famous contortion of the household trope or familiar practice of "show and tell" from American elementary schools. His inversion of a didactical procedure into a methodical device to get insights into seeing and looking inspired the *Journal of Visual Culture* to devote a whole issue to show and tell. The examples given there meet with Manghani's observation that image critique is "not easily explained (more likely best *performed* or put to affect)." Pointing to performance (studies) and affect here uncovers deficits likewise in scholarly language and theory. What once was a characteristics of images, the entire difference of word and image, of seeing and

saying, has now trespassed into methodology. Not that this is rendering scholarly discourse impossible. To the contrary, it is constantly increasing, but it is reluctant to turn its procedures into explicit protocols. Thus no longer only the objects but even the research cannot be spoken about; they just happen.

A way out of this double trap could be obtained from "showing" versus "telling" as technical terms as they are in use in narratology, too, where they organize a multi-layered relation of voice and vision. Borrowing from narratology then allows us to understand Buck-Morss's initiative in an appropriate and more workable way than usually deliberately managed by the critics of visualizing theories, who fear speech completely replaced by pictures in the sense of Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas projects and the like. While telling mainly describes the discourse of an extradiegetic and heterodiegetic narrating voice, showing is reserved for a minimal version of mediation through a narrator; showing means all sorts of unmediated embodiment of the depicted world. Thus showing also covers intradiegetic and homodiegetic voices that stem from forms of participation and experience.

The early theorists of visual culture, however, remained skeptical towards mere showing. There is Brecht's famous remark from his critique of the film industry when he sued for copyright infringement in the case of the movie version of his *Threepenny Opera*: "A photograph of the Krupp factories or the AEG tells [Brecht doesn't use *erzählt,* "tell" but *ergibt,* "reveal"] almost nothing about these institutions." Brecht believes in his *Threepenny* lawsuit that the reification of human relationships in capitalist society has rendered them inexplicit; he avoids saying "invisible." Hence he is looking for strategies of revelation, for "something artificial," as he has it. Benjamin seconds him in a review of New Sobriety photography and opts for captions. Benjamin advocates tearing down "the barrier between script and image": "What we have to require of the photographer is the ability to give his taking the sort of caption that preserves it from fashionable wearout and provides it with revolutionary use value." This political agenda of the 1930s that is suspicious of the image begins to replace a primary version of visual studies of the 1920s and paves the way for an emerging media studies interested in mass formative image usage. By contrast, the earlier version of visual studies, which conceptualizes visual culture as a theoretical term according to Béla Balázs's *Visible Man* or *The Culture*

of Film of 1924, follows a vitalist agenda that conceives especially the cinematic imagery as genuine and irredeemable. Film, according to Balázs, enables unmediated access not to reality but to the eternal "stream of life" which also runs through the subject's unconscious soul. Thus filmic imagery is the source of hope for a wholesale reform of society because it gives utterance to otherwise repressed and overwritten pivotal aspects of man.

This ambivalence toward the image, which can be seen alternately as an irreplaceable means of cultural self-understanding and reform or as a vehicle of false consciousness that needs to be overwritten by analytical captions, still rules debates. While visual studies today remains skeptical toward images without captions and optimistic about the efficacy of its captions, Bildwissenschaft, in the versions, for example, of Gottfried Boehm or Georges Didi-Huberman, insists on the contrary of the "iconic difference" that can never be overtaken by the word. It is the tension of that double heritage, Balázs plus Benjamin, that image critique tries to bear. To find a way out, visual studies may have to replace the culturally overloaded "image" with the less ambitious "picture." Both visual studies and Bildwissenschaft suffer from a plethora of culture-laden images and a dramatic lack of pictures. Pictures then are to be conceptualized as the theoretical objects that neither elude per se any depiction of characteristics and reconstruction of functions nor provide anything that lies inside them beyond the added value of captions. Pictures put pressure on visual studies to elaborate on nonpropositional and irreducibly idiosyncratic aspects.

(3) The exposure to intellectual and sensual experiences (aisthesis) claimed above includes on the one hand restoring "a certain agency to the objects themselves." The basis of that restoration is to question the representational character of images and to focus attention on their presentational character, employing theories about the presence and agency of "pictures." By and large, this ongoing debate still remains grounded in the terrain of word/image studies: "Bored with the 'linguistic turn' and the idea that experience is filtered through the medium of language, many scholars are now convinced that we may sometimes have unmediated access to the world around us" and favor "the idea of 'presence'" instead over "'meaning.'" This focus has overshadowed the abundance of complex relations between, and intersections of, different sorts of images, modes of image production, and forms of visuality. For the sake of theorizing its field, visual studies

has to devote more attention to its margins in terms of sense perception and sensual experience and explore the limits of aural and visual, tactile and optical, olfactory and apparitional.

To put productive pressure on its key terms, and in so doing contribute to refining or even reshaping existing theories about the presence and agency of artworks only, this conversation should be extended to include forms that so far have played a minor role, such as dance. Dance is a presentational form that inherently invokes a sense of immediacy or of presence, and hinges upon actual bodily agency. Indeed, it was precisely the effects of immediacy in this corporeal art, its seeming resistance to cultural semantics or even semiotic meaning at all, that made it so popular among visual artists and writers around the turn of the twentieth century. On the other hand, the dancer is not only a present body but also artistic material that has been at least partly evacuated of agency (even when, as often in that period, the performer is simultaneously the choreographer of the work). The plethora of photographs and films of dancers then mines precisely these tensions between presentation and representation, between live subject and inert material.

Situating this imagery between eighteenth-century concepts of the sublime and a twenty-first century aesthetics of performance could illuminate key moments in the development of what was called "living presence response." Such histories of agency would have to include not only the sublime as a visual experience of overwhelming sensual perception beyond the faculty of reason, but the less popular disgust as well, which provokes immediate and involuntary corporeal effects. Moreover, the nineteenth-century concept of the ugly, predominantly incorporated by pornography, also provides an avenue to understand and theorize presence and immediacy of imagery.

I want to raise some ideas here that I voiced at the closing roundtable of the Chicago event but that didn't make it into the transcript. My hypothesis is that visual studies has trouble dealing with imagery that, to put it metaphorically, is either "too hot," like porn, advertisement, and pictures in periodicals, which have a lot of agency and succeed in creating immediacy, or "too cold," that is, that seemingly miss any agency, be it an ideological or political provocation or be it involuntary corporeal responses, like tables, diagrams, and doodling in thought experiments and sciences. Visual studies seems to be incapable of seeing the pictures that proliferate in the porn and media industries beyond

what is said about the "male gaze" and the "cultural gaze," that is, about their state as images.

While scholars affine with Bildwissenschaft sympathize with concepts of presence and agency as long as they are ascribed to high art images, only visual studies scholars see them as irrational premodern animism and dangerous supplements to the criticality they fancy. Janet Wolff suspects that behind this discourse on the power of images lurks a certain allure. Wolff admits that the actual or implied limits of cultural theory are to some degree responsible for the turn toward a radically different model, one that rejects the relevance of "the social" to varying extents. But the limits may go beyond what Wolff admits—and they may be worth examining more closely, as the claim of agency simply inverts the direction of influence. She is wary of the coalescence of humans and nature and of the displacement of "the rational and the intellectual in human (and social) action; and of the primacy of analytic methods in the social and human sciences." Wolff seems to distrust what one might call "mere experience" as opposed to interpretation—and particularly experience based in the sensual world. The picture then questions Wolff's reassertion of the "fundamentally linguistic" character of humans and society and reminds us of the contingency or the partial nature of interpretation and "caption."

As the invention of aisthesis/aesthetics is based on the Enlightenment project to rehabilitate sense perception of the sensual world (i.e., nature), Wolff's rationalism, while implicitly associating cultural studies with logic or rationality, dismisses the merits of the Enlightenment. By identifying animism with the primitive, nonrationality, and "emotion," she even feminizes the counterposition. Bernhard Waldenfels, less anxious about what he sees as a necessary heuristic thought experiment, terms it "enlightened animism." He distinguishes a spectrum of at least three grades of that heuristic, from Tom Mitchell to Didi-Huberman, with very different results and insights.

It might be more convincing to study corporeal, mental, and emotional effects of visual experiences more broadly and in mutual exchange with affect theory than to work on another phenomenological approach to the arts. Brian Massumi's version of affect theory, which reflects on the fundamental differences from language and radically denies

that affective states can ever be cognized, offers fresh arguments for those Bildwissenschaft scholars who attribute a richness to pictures that is mirrored structurally in the affects they unleash.

(4) The exposure to experiences means, on the other hand, "to address the character of the field between: the magnetism that perpetually binds subjects and objects" or that constantly transforms beholders and the seen into each other. But both aspects, agency of the material object (animism) and "magnetism" between object and beholder, are closely related. Without strong commitment to the object, there is no animism. Above, as a way out of (the aporia of) animism, I proposed affect theory. As a way out of (the aporia of) magnetism, I would draw attention to a cultural history of rhetorics. The figure of energeia or hypotyposis—putting something absent in front of the eyes of the beholder or ears of the listener—has constantly been the point of departure for word-image bypasses. In a marginal remark when dealing with evidentia, Quintilian gives crucial information about the dread or timidity of the ancients about using this rhetoric. Quintilian gives no explanation, but it is obvious why they were shy: because they believed in the magic of the word and were afraid of the dead (i.e., the only relevant past for them) coming back into life. Making the absent in time (or space) present is a sort of playing with life and death and therefore has a religious, cultural aura. Hypotyposis is not only mimesis of the eidola, as Plato and all the representation theories of artifacts have it; it has always been and still is about the (affective) incantation to and evocation of the dead.

All the issues I have mentioned so far are closely related and intersect not only with each other but with their predecessors in history. So finally I want to make a plea for (5) an archaeology of visual studies, a critical history that wants to do more than add hagiography and tell the grand narrative of a continuous ascent of visual studies from Plato's cave or at least from Warburg's stamps and Panofsky's moving pictures. This archaeology is the opposite of canon formation or the construction of an undisputed linear genealogy, since archaeology also researches why cultures decline and in the course of this focuses on endemic contradictions, ambivalences within the cultures themselves, and not only on their hostile environment. Literally, this means archaeology is engaged in identifying self-contradictions and blind spots within the arguments used in the crucial moments of discourse formation (there is a lot about that in Seminars 1 and 5).

If we successfully identify such premises and presuppositions that run unnoticed and therefore remain unquestioned by contemporaries and are implemented in later stages of the project again, we will open up the field for fresh attempts by a new generation of scholars graduating from the numerous visual studies programs worldwide.

Potentially, canonical figures like Benjamin will no longer be read and adored as the founding fathers of all our attempts to study the culture of modernity, be it in media or cultural studies, but will offer illustrative material for shortcomings and a failure to establish a field of research convincingly. Because there is a huge historical gap between the first generation of scholars consciously setting visual culture on the agenda in the 1920s and '30s (roughly from Balázs, who coined the term, and Musil around 1925 to phenomenology's heritage in Merleau-Ponty), an approach which was ousted and replaced by (mass) media studies from the 1940s to '80s, the recent shaping of the study of images and visual culture should be aware of this history of intermissions. That means Visual Studies 2 (James Elkin's first generation of recent scholarship; see his introduction above) should also be aware of the implications of the different heritages (e.g., of vitalism-based film theory of the twenties like Balázs's and Arnheim's and quantifying mass media studies with a political agenda) and the related limitations they carry with them. Among these heritages is the antisemiotic affect of early visual studies, which arose from fin de siècle language and representation criticism by Nietzsche, Mach, et al. The visual studies I am invested in is able instead to model visual culture as a field where intersections with verbal, aural, and notational forms occur and discourse (or viscourse, as Karin Knorr-Cetina has it) can play a role.

Third Introduction:

Visual Studies, or, This is Not a Diagram

Sunil Manghani

I began to write this commentary as I traveled back from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, having attended the final Stone Summer Theory Institute, which carried the controversial title of *Farewell to Visual Studies*. In my opening remarks at the event, I found myself offering an analogy to Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. If we recall, the story begins with Bilbo Baggins addressing his kin at his "Farewell" birthday party. He slips on the fabled Ring (One to Rule Them All) and disappears for the last time. Was this to be the fate of visual studies? Of course, in Tolkien's novel we recognize it as only the beginning of a story, and predictably the Theory Institute event proved to open things up, not close them down. Indeed, like the unfolding adventure of young Frodo Baggins, visual studies offers a wealth of intellectual journeys still to be taken. The route(s) to Mount Doom will undoubtedly involve a great many more twists and turns if we are finally to overcome visual culture as being some kind of "dangerous supplement."

While it is obvious the "farewell" in the title raised eyebrows, it is also worth pointing out that the term "visual studies" is in itself a point of debate. W. J. T. Mitchell offers a pragmatic explanation: "I think it's useful at the outset to distinguish between visual studies and visual culture as, respectively, the field of study and the object or target of study. Visual studies is the study of visual culture." The editor of the *Journal of Visual Culture*, Marquard Smith, agrees in part with Mitchell's account. Yet he is concerned that the word "studies" can take us "too far from the objects of our study, to the point where these very objects are almost ignored, obfuscated, dissolved into the study itself." He also suggests that "visual studies" too often "marks a bureaucratic impulse, an institutional, administrative and recruiting initiative, a funding opportunity, and a publishing program." Nicholas Mirzoeff similarly favors "visual culture" over "visual studies," considering "culture" an important marker of the inherent "political stakes." However, visual studies perhaps needs a little more coverage, and/or might even be usefully rephrased as "image studies"; something I personally lean towards (more of which below).

As James Elkins notes in his introduction to this book, the title *Farewell to Visual Studies* was set some five years in advance of the event actually taking place. Inevitably, the mere mention of a "farewell" ruffled feathers then, as much as now. Yet, arguably, the more important word to train attention upon is "studies." My impression is that in the years immediately following the millennium the terms "visual culture" and "visual studies" were somewhat interchangeable. Just gaining (shared) currency over the field of the visual was a primary objective. And it worked. Publishers today have the phrase keyed into their databases—so much so one leading academic publisher considered itself in "uncharted waters" when I proposed a book on "Image Studies"; they asked that I incorporate "visual culture/studies" somewhere in the subtitle (though subsequently I argued against it).

Five years ago I might have suggested Mitchell's neat formulation of visual culture as the subject of enquiry for visual studies was more than adequate. Since the 1990s, visual culture / visual studies has been avowedly interdisciplinary. And whether it was "culture" or "studies" in the title, a myriad of articles, books, conferences, and events from a range of disciplines (including art history, anthropology, cultural studies, sociology, and media studies) were all seemingly on the same track. In the intervening years, however, we can mark the potential for a significant shift. What emerged more clearly from the cross-disciplinary discussions during the Stone Summer Theory Institute event was not just the particularity of a visual culture–art history perspective, as well as a firmer footing for *Bildwissenschaft* and even perhaps image studies (or Mitchell's iconology), but also crucially a widening distinction between visual *culture* and visual *studies*.

The uptake of poststructuralist theory in art history (bypassing structuralism and arriving late relative to other areas of the humanities) and the tensions evident in the *October* "Visual Culture Questionnaire"—captured in Irit Rogoff's (2002) introduction to the *Visual Culture Reader*—have arguably played an overly dominant role in defining visual studies as visual culture. What emerged at the Stone Summer Theory Institute was something rather more heterogeneous. Participation from Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey—both important figures in the development of visual culture—was able to cast light on the rich transformations of art history via readings of critical theory (see Seminar

2). Yet equally, quite different accounts of visual culture were provided from the consideration of early twentieth-century thinkers such as Hugo Münsterberg, Béla Balázs, and Walter Benjamin (see Seminar 1). In addition, more recent work under the banner of *Bildwissenschaft* and the prolific work of the Swiss, publicly funded Eikones project (under the directorship of Gottfried Boehm at the University of Basel) can be shown to be plotting new pathways. To date much of this work has remained inaccessible to non–German speaking scholars, hence the seminar session held at the *Farewell* event offers a valuable set of insights for the uninitiated (see Seminar 5). Interest in the intersection between science and visual culture has also widened the field of visual studies. Engagement with images and imaging practices across all disciplines, going well beyond the arts, prompts the value of more analytical investigation into what is meant by and what is understood between the terms "vision" and "visuality." Whitney Davis's recent treatise *A General Theory of Visual Culture* offers a very thorough starting point (see Seminar 7). Davis's work reads very differently from that which is typically associated with visual culture studies (as found, for example, in the pages of the *Journal of Visual Culture*); these differences are usefully highlighted in the discussions over science studies in Seminar 9.

Like cultural studies, visual culture can be said in a good number of cases to have worn politics on its sleeve. In an article discussed during Seminar 2, Mieke Bal notes "a political *tone* is less instrumental than analyses that expose politics within the object." But perhaps we need to take this a little further. Visual studies begins to emerge as a much broader, umbrella term. In attending to more abstract and technical concerns it might be thought to bracket out politics, certainly Politics with a capital "P" (it is worth noting that Seminar 8, a dedicated session on "The Political," was dominated by a discussion of neuroaesthetics). But this need not be to say visual studies in its expanded sense eschews the political. Attending more analytically to categories of vision, the visual, and visuality demarcates a "slower" kind of politics, but a politics nonetheless—potentially even the very construct(s) of the political.

Are we at a crossroads? Is visual studies truly different from visual culture? I'm inclined to say both "yes" and "no." Yes, because there do appear to be an ever-widening array of interests and perspectives, pulling in different and potentially opposite directions.

Yet equally no, because whichever way we look there are signs of intersection. If connections are currently failing, it might simply be due to the lack of a shared discourse. Visual studies has yet to reach what I'd call its "diagram moment," when key findings can be quickly disseminated. Building on the ubiquitous diagram of Barthes's second-order signification, cultural studies had its own "diagram moment" with the publication (in various books) of a diagram known as the "circuit of culture." The efficacy of such a diagram for both teaching and research in the field fits with Kress and Van Leeuwen's account of our contemporary "semiotic landscape," in which images now frequently carry the argument. This in mind, and not forgetting the current explosion in infographics, one might ask why the more visually aware field of visual studies has yet to produce its own "diagram moment." Gillian Rose offers one attempt in her book *Visual Methodologies*, but with copious labels, many of them written upside down, the circular diagram does not lend itself sufficiently to being a sharable "tool."

A diagram, however, might be a long time coming, not least due to the specter of the image. It is noteworthy for an event centered upon the subject of visual studies (albeit an alleged sending off) that the most frequently uttered word throughout the week-long set of debates was the deceptively simple word "image." As Mitchell argues in numerous places, "image" (at least in the English language) is very usefully different from "picture," being the intangible to the tangible. Throughout all discussions at the Theory Institute it was necessary to modulate the use of the word "image." Indeed, going by Mitchell's "family of images," there is no such thing as an image in the singular, but rather always its movement, or process of imaging.

I worked with a graphic designer to produce a diagram for an "ecology of images" as a classroom tool; it which now appears in the book *Image Studies*. It is too early yet to say how it will be received, but I am by no means expecting it finally offer our "diagram moment." In truth, I think there already exists such a thing, it's just we hardly know what to do with it. The one diagram to rule them all is surely Magritte's most enigmatic portrayal of a simple pipe, the one we know is equally nothing of the sort. Indeed, it is little wonder that of all Mitchell's examples of the metapicture, *La trahison des images* is *the* metapicture—the one that most eloquently marks out the challenge of the image (as a

plural), and not simply the visual. The painting, with ironic didacticism, reveals where the image is, isn't and many other possibilities besides—all in one instance.

As Mitchell puts it, "Metapictures are all like pipes: they are instruments of reverie, provocations to idle conversation, pipe-dreams, and abstruse speculations." Similarly, this could describe the "dream" of visual studies, which elsewhere Mitchell describes as a form of "indiscipline." "If a discipline is a way of insuring the continuity of a set of collective practices," he writes, "'indiscipline' is a moment of breakage or rupture, when the continuity is broken and the practice comes into question." In the second edition of the *Visual Culture Reader*, Mirzoeff suggests the field of visual culture "is now sufficiently well established and dynamic to sustain a plurality of views without fracturing into warring camps." I would like to agree, but in doing so urge visual *studies* to aim for an ever deeper, richer set of problematics. Doing so will probably prove even more controversial. Indeed, may its "indiscipline" live on . . .

<PT> The Seminars

<Insert panorama of the participants here, across the tops of two facing pages. Ed: please check the formatting and order of these ¶¶ against vol.1.>

The Participants:

The 2010 Stone Summer Theory Institute had seven Faculty, fifteen Fellows, five students from the School of the Art Institute, and four auditors. They are shown on the panorama on the following pages.

The Faculty:

Gustav Frank (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich), Sunil Manghani (Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton), James Elkins (School of the Art Institute of Chicago), Lisa Cartwright (University of California, San Diego), Keith Moxey (Barnard College), Whitney Davis (University of California, Berkeley), and Michael Ann Holly (Clark Art Institute).

The Fellows:

Bridget Cooks (University of California, Irvine), Clemena Antonova (Institute for Human Sciences [IWM], Vienna), Kristine Nielsen (Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities [IPRH], University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), Anna Sigridur Arnar (Minnesota State University Moorhead, Minnesota), María Lumbreras Corujo (Johns Hopkins University), Paul Frosh (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), Takeshi Kadobayashi (Kansai University, Osaka), Elisabeth Friedman (Illinois State University), Joana Cunha Leal (Universidade Nova de Lisboa), Li Xi (Center of Aesthetics and Aesthetic Education, Peking University), Merja Salo (University School of Art and Design, Helsinki), Juliet Bellow (American University, Washington), Jeanette Roan (California College of the Arts), Inge Hinterwaldner (Institute of Art History, University of Basel), and Flora Lysen (University of Amsterdam).

The School of the Art Institute Class:

Josh Rios, Dustin Yager, Abraham Ritchie, Sara Hellen Van de Walle, and Randy Powell.

Auditors:

Elise Goldstein, Dakota Brown, Anna Guasch (University of Barcelona), and Bill Stamets (School of the Art Institute of Chicago).

The panorama was taken by Elise Goldstein. People in the panorama: (left page, at the table) [ ].

The following conversations were recorded during the week of July 17–23, 2011, at the School of the Art Institute, Chicago.

<CN> 1

Histories: *Visuelle Kultur*

The first half of the week was intended to open the question of visual studies' histories. The opening seminar, led by Gustav Frank, proposed a two-part history of visuelle Kultur *(an expression he used to designate several traditions of the cultural study of the visual), as an alternative to existing models of visual studies and* Bildwissenschaft. *For this seminar participants read a range of texts by Walter Benjamin and others; the excerpt here follows on from the discussion of one of the readings, Hugo Münsterberg's* The Photoplay: A Psychological Study. *The general notion was to ask about visual studies' sense of its own past. During the week there were six main models on the table: (1) a generally accepted model in which a predominantly English-language visual studies derives from English cultural studies; (2) a model that augments the first with Scandinavian and Latin American visual studies and their emphasis on visual communication and semiotics, and with German-language Bildwissenschaft*; *(3) a model polemically proposed in* October, *which demonizes Anglo-American visual studies as an ally of anthropology set against art history; (4) one set out by Horst Bredekamp, which traces German Bildwissenschaft to Wölfflin, Warburg, and Riegl; (5) a genealogy for art history proposed by Thomas Puttfarken, which sees Riegl, Wickhoff, Warburg, and others as more central than Vasari and Winckelmann; and (6) the model set out in this seminar, which divides the study of* visuelle Kultur *into two phases, before and after the Second World War.*

Gustav Frank: I would like to gather some ideas about the histories of the field, especially the German background. The fact that we have come together to talk about the history of visual studies indicates that we've reached a certain point in the development of the movement. Visual studies has now begun to write its histories. At the moment this means three things: first, we are looking for the longue durée, the deeper history, and perhaps even Plato and Aristotle as practitioners of visual studies; second, there is a

desire to connect to authoritative discourses both past and present, such as neuroscience; and third, we are invested in unveiling the primal scene, where the discipline constituted itself in a foundational act—ideally, the pregnant moment in which the founding father coined the field's name.

This first session could therefore be used to do some justice to this moment in visual studies and *Bildwissenschaft*, and close the gap between these newcomers and the history of thought by saying, "Visual studies is not that new at all." A lot of people do so. About the founding father there is a wide consensus, with little dissent. Ask Horst Bredekamp, Tom Mitchell, or Georges Didi-Huberman, and you will be told it's Erwin Panofsky or the Aby Warburg of the Mnemosyne project. Both are said to have shown art history's openness to visual culture.

That, in short, is how the story used to be told. I want to discuss another story. Mine follows from three hypotheses. First, that the emergence of visual studies is not centered on art; that visual studies depends on developments in the experimental sciences, the study of perception and the psyche; and that what makes such scientific projects visible in a broader cultural context is experiments in media and perception around 1900. Second, that what I am calling *visuelle Kultur* is a tentative depiction, a first theorization, of a set of phenomena; it intermingles such things as the first photographic reproduction of the shroud of Turin by Secondo Pia, made in 1898, with William Röntgen's first X-rays of his wife's hand, taken in December 1895. In regarding such examples, those who work in visuelle Kultur augment, fragment, appropriate, and otherwise reimagine the scientific traditions I have mentioned along with traditions of philosophical aesthetics from the century of Lessing's *Laocoön* onwards. Third, a broad selection of these phenomena was successfully treated under the umbrella of mass media studies from the 1940s to the 1980s. This period of media studies predominance came to an end that is indicated, for example, by Friedrich Kittler's turn to the hardware devices used in technical media; and in parallel visual studies then re-emerged in the mid-1980s, this time as a solution for a crisis of art history, on the one hand, and for society's self-perception as dominated by visual media, on the

other. We need to be aware that this second attempt is driven by the logic of disciplines that make use of an external, public desire to come to terms with a new media landscape.

So there is a great discontinuity in visual studies. The first attempt failed to constitute a study of visuelle Kultur. It came to an end in the 1940s, with Rudolf Arnheim's "Laocoön," or Panofsky's "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures," or Kracauer's "From Caligari to Hitler" of 1947. Visuelle Kultur in the 1920s had shrunk, by the 1940s, to a monomedia study of film. I am not interested in the primal scenes of visual studies, and I am not advocating that we continue what the "founding fathers" began. But the first effort to establish visuelle Kultur should interest us because it was a failure. Part of my concern, therefore, is to reconstruct the problematic of this first period of visual studies, because it appears that similar problematics have been implemented in contemporary visual studies and Bildwissenschaft. I recommended Münsterberg's essay, first published in 1916, to show that the central, problematic object in the initial phase of visuelle Kultur was film; perhaps we can discuss why film was central then, and photography has become central in visual culture studies after Barthes. Münsterberg was a disciple of Wilhelm Wundt, who founded the first laboratory of experimental psychology at Leipzig University; and Wundt was a student of Johannes Müller and Hermann von Helmholtz, two of the foremost researchers of the physiology of the senses: Münsterberg can be seen as the culmination of the nineteenth-century tradition of philosophical, and then medical, and then physiological, and finally psychological study of sight. It is with this background that Münsterberg created a new place for the psychology of film in aesthetic theory, and so he is an apposite exemplar of what I am calling the initial phase of visuelle Kultur.

Whitney Davis: I find this genealogy deeply attractive and important, not just historiographically, as it pertains to the ways visual studies understands its histories, but on its own terms. The rhetoric, the conceptual apparatus, the political and cultural concerns, of this first phase of visuelle Kultur seem to me to warrant being taken very seriously. Therefore I would like to ask what in it should be described as a failure: what led to its shrinking or weathering away such that we would need to engage in reconstructing it?

Gustav Frank: There are two answers, I think. The easier answer is institutional: since the 1940s, the entire field of visuelle Kultur has been absorbed by media studies—film, advertising, and all the things that interested Benjamin in *One-Way Street*. I am not the sort of researcher who knows exactly how that worked institutionally. Normally you would argue that there was a break in 1933, which resulted in emigration, and so forth. Visuelle Kultur could not survive without an academic basis. Balász and Benjamin, for example, were linked to very special conditions of publication. I would prefer a second and more complicated answer, which is that there was something immanent in visuelle Kultur that was highly problematic: it was too smart, as it were, and it relied on a vitalism.

What strikes me about Bildwissenschaft and visuelle Kultur in the 1980s and 1990s is that they have a semblance of the arguments of Balász and Benjamin, without developing them; but they do not have the organizing ideology, the vitalism, that lay behind Benjamin's and Balázs's positions. So when the arguments pop up in Gottfried Boehm's writing, or Hans Belting's writing, there is a lack of understanding of the pertinent ideological background.

I would like to know: What is the underlying theory of Bildwissenschaft or visual culture, which organizes their arguments? What is the underlying structure now, if the originating vitalism is gone?

Flora Lysen: Gustav, before we pursue that, is there a body of critique on Bildwissenschaft (as proposed by Boehm, Belting, and Bredekamp) in German-speaking countries? I wonder, for example, to what extent discussions of postcolonial studies and gender studies are being taken up by proponents of Bildwissenschaft vis-à-vis visual culture studies. There are, for example, scholars who critique Bildwissenschaft for systematically excluding female scholarship and also the approaches developed by gender and queer studies.

Inge Hinterwaldner: Gustav, for me this question is problematic because it suggests that we are speaking of homogeneous blocs. Even if we ignore all the other approaches in the German-speaking area besides the most prominent ones of Bredekamp, Belting, and Boehm, we are confronted with a huge variety regarding their influences; they

wouldn't even necessarily agree on the notion Bildwissenschaft as a label for what they practice.

Gustav Frank: I guess one could answer Flora by developing Inge's remarks. Diversity is definitely a characteristic of the second and third generation of scholars who graduated from the Karlsruhe program Bild/Körper/Medium: Eine anthropologische Perspektive (which began in 2000), from the Humboldt University program Das technische Bild (which began in 2000), or from Eikones: Bildkritik, Macht und Bedeutung der Bilder in Basel. And the book market has meanwhile adopted the terms *Bild*, *Bildwissenschaft*, and *Bildtheorie* (picture theory), whatever theoretical or methodological orientation the book in question may follow. But if we want to know what the standard references are, the field is not as wide open as recent studies like your book on iconicity in IT-based real-time simulations might suggest. Hence diversity and certain limitations go hand in hand. These projects mostly exclude the majority of the interests of UK visual studies and the gender perspective in Bildwissenschaft's anthropology. No surprise, then, that in 2007 we saw a relaunch of the art history journal *FKW*, founded in 1987, as *Zeitschrift für Geschlechterforschung und visuelle Kultur*.

Michael Holly: Gustav, I remember Georges Didi-Huberman saying that the problem with these thinkers, such as Münsterberg, Benjamin, and Balázs, is that they were killed twice. First they were slain by their enemies; and then the fragments of their thought that reached this country were destroyed by the authors' heirs in American art history and cultural studies. During the 1950s and 1960s, in the Cold War, when their ideas arrived in the United States, their theoretical force went into a deep freeze. In his Anglo-American period, Panofsky became a very different thinker. He had to be.

Gustav Frank: Yes, that is part of the first answer I proposed: an institutional, historical explanation for the failure.

Whitney Davis: What exactly seems to you to have become unsustainable as an immanent feature of the early work? It seems to have something to do with the doctrine of expression: the expressive gesture, the transparency of the *Innenwelt* to visibility and the *Umwelt*, by way of nonverbal or extralinguistic expressivity.

Gustav Frank: Yes, I think so, exactly. There is the hope that pictures allow us a unique immediate access to the essence of life, that they make sense not only in a semantic but in an ontological way.

James Elkins: Gustav, you once mentioned Kracauer as an author who is in some sense missing from our awareness of contemporary visual studies. Who else, aside from the readings we have done for this seminar, would you want to reread?

Gustav Frank: Certainly Rudolf Arnheim; there is also Dolf Sternberger, who writes on the panorama. Also some pre-1900 sources, such as Wilhelm Wundt, who has corporeal arguments on philogenetic language theory; and some literary sources, such as Musil's dissertation, in philosophy, on Ernst Mach (later he worked in the psychological laboratories in Berlin).

Clemena Antonova: I would like to attract attention to a very little-known tradition from the period we are discussing, namely work on visual studies that was done in Russia by thinkers from a variety of disciplinary angles, but especially from the hard sciences. There were, for instance, exciting projects going on at the Russian Academy of Artistic Sciences, an institution co-organized by Kandinsky and in existence between 1921 and 1929. What is of interest is the Russian reception of German authors, like Wundt and Ernst Mach, the huge emphasis on scientific images, as well as the impact of this work on fields as semiotics (the famous Moscow-Tartu School of Semiotics). This Russian tradition belongs, too, to the history of visual studies. More importantly, many of the problems that plagued the Russian projects have resurfaced, in different guises, in more recent work in the West.

Keith Moxey: What is wrong with the sources that are invoked by visual studies in the 1980s and 1990s—Heidegger, Derrida, Merleau-Ponty? What has contemporary visual studies missed by not going back to Balázs and these other authors?

Gustav Frank: It is the other way around: we should reflect on why the earlier generations failed to set up a core, stable, consensual visual studies program, and why their ways of setting arguments did not work after the 1940s. Your construction posits more of a continuity: Benjamin is in the mix, and we also have Heidegger. I would propose that the history is more discontinuous, but the arguments are reused, recycled: we are trying to continue a project that has already failed, for endemic reasons. I would prefer

to understand how they argued, to achieve a sharper criticality in relation to their project.

Keith Moxey: What strikes me is that what intervened was the Second World War, and the related immigration. One of the consequences, in critical theory, was the condemnation of popular culture by Adorno, Horkheimer, and others. For a long time, that account colored how people approached popular culture.

Gustav Frank: It is very useful to bring Adorno into the discussion in this context. Benjamin was too smart for the Marxist project: he introduces the concerns of writers like Balázs, recycled in a more reflective mode. I would like to use Adorno to ask why the visuelle Kultur project failed, because if it failed with people so close to it, then the project was insufficiently animated by the objects Benjamin brought forward.

James Elkins: Gustav, your bipartite history, broken by a "failure," is a very provocative model. I would contrast it with two other revisionist projects: Horst Bredekamp's sketch of the history of Bildwissenschaft, which traces it to Wölfflin, Riegl, and Benjamin; and one of the last essays Thomas Puttfarken wrote, which was intended to criticize the notion that contemporary art history descends from Vasari and Winckelmann as much as it depends on Wickhoff, Riegl, and others.

Both of those accounts, Bredekamp's and Puttfarken's, gloss over the gap at midcentury. The virtue of your account is that it makes it possible to ask about the possibility that visual studies has a discontinuous history rather than a history that is adequately explained as a series of accumulations.

Gustav Frank: The Danish scholar Anders Michelsen also sees this gap, but from a different point of view. And it's true of Bredekamp that he talks away the discontinuity, in a very simplistic manner, developing a model that works by accumulation.

María Lumbreras Corujo: Hans Belting has also spoken of failure, although from a completely different perspective both from yours, Gustav, and Michelsen's. He talks about the "interrupted paths towards a Bildwissenschaft," blaming art history for having put an end to, rather than expanding, Warburg's project of a *Kulturwissenschaft*. What I find interesting and challenging in your proposal is that you see this failure as an endemic one. Belting, as maybe also Georges Didi-Huberman, sees Warburg's project as failing from without, while you see visuelle Kultur failing from within. It is

challenging because the very desire of reconstructing the history of that failure entails a question about where our own limits, today in the present visual studies project, might be. This make me think of Douglas Crimp's words "what history, whose history, history to what purpose." In a way, your genealogy is more self-questioning.

Gustav Frank: Thanks, María, I couldn't have summarized that better myself. I guess that's why we have come forward with our "farewell" and why we're drawing heavily from the field's history. We think the problematic is deeply implemented in the makeup of current studies and in the references they frequently use as authorities.

Michael Holly: Gustav, do you explain Panofsky's uninterrupted history?

Gustav Frank: That depends on how you understand the reception. Is there a lively discussion of the perspective essay, or is it quoted as a classic?

Michael Holly: I think it is different in Germany and in the United States. Willibald Sauerländer was conscripted and went to graduate school in the 1940s; he told me once that he never heard Panofsky's name when he was in graduate school. That is evidence of a dramatic interruption, but I don't think it was the same here in the States.

María Lumbreras Corujo: In Germany, that dramatic interruption also affected other important figures such as Warburg and, to a lesser extent, Benjamin. When you look at the Anglo-American world, you find that both the history of all these early twentieth-century thinkers' reception and the various ways in which it connects with the emergence of visual studies in the nineties differ from what happened in German-speaking countries. So I agree with you, Keith, but I also see a difference. I have the impression that in terms of genealogies, Bildwissenschaft and visual studies might not share a common stem, even if their histories intersect or appear to be parallel at some points.

Paul Frosh: Of the texts you set us, most are concerned with a hermeneutics of redemption, resurrection, or renewal. That has partly to do with the vitalist background, I think: the idea of reviving a gestural language that had been repressed in the Gutenberg era. In Benjamin, for example, there is an argument about messianic time. But there is also a hermeneutics of suspicion, and of unveiling, and that is ultimately about the war.

What's refreshing about that now, I suppose, relates to the brief on the announcement for this event, which refers to the predictability of certain kinds of mass culture critiques. It also reminds me of your example, Jim, of the advertiser—

James Elkins: Calvin Klein.

Paul Frosh: Which is also a hermeneutics of suspicion. For me, Gustav, your history provides an alternative.

Lisa Cartwright: Münsterberg and the other readings on film you assigned us are completely canonical. They were read in the late 1970s and 1980s, so if we are willing to take this study outside of art history proper, and into film studies, and to trace the texts through France and the United States, we will find a different, less discontinuous genealogy.

Flora Lysen: Panofsky's essay on film has been quoted and reprinted throughout the twentieth century, but not so much for its argument (a rather iconographic reading of film), but much more because of the significance that the stature of Panofsky, as an immanent art historian, could lend to the nascent discipline of film studies.

Gustav Frank: Well, Lisa, Balázs is quoted in film studies, but he is quoted for his contribution to film studies. There is a complete ignorance of the fact that he is providing a fuller account of film: it is not a film studies text at all. It is not a monomedia text.

Lisa Cartwright: There are studies that take up Balázs in that sense, for example Thomas Levin, who works on sound, or David Rodowick, whose work has never been situated in film studies per se. So I don't think that it is accurate to say that Balász is not continuous with present interests.

Jeanette Roan: Gustav, I'm interested in the idea that film was the central object of the initial phase of visuelle Kultur. What do you see as the relationship between the history of film/media studies and the history of visuelle Kultur? What happens to film as an object of study? It is almost nonexistent, for example, in the readings we've been assigned for this week, with a few exceptions in your readings and Lisa Cartwright's readings.

Gustav Frank: When visuelle Kultur was shaped in the 1920s, it was one among several attempts to theorize an emerging field of media that were having an enormous impact

on society. Some approaches foregrounded media's ability to organize mass audiences. Some burgeoned along the obviously crucial line between the sayable and the invisible. Hence film was central to both of these emerging pathways of theorizing. For about four decades, the public and political interest in mass media dominated over the interest in the picture. When visual studies and Bildwissenschaft gained shape in the 1990s, they had to mark the older modernist line between the sayable/dead word and visible/vivid picture, as well as the later divide between picture and mass media. And let's not forget about a third academic rival, art history, with its focus on painting as its privileged object. Visual studies has a certain logic in taking photography as its primary object: it's in part to gain theoretical profile.

Bridget Cooks: I wonder if we can address the feeling of loss that I'm getting from this conversation. I'm getting these sense that we've lost something, that something about visual studies has failed. The entire title of our week makes me wonder if we're asking: Are we getting it right? Are we doing something wrong? Are we paying proper homage to our forefathers? I think visual studies is a success.

James Elkins: Actually, if we adopt Gustav's genealogy, we are saying farewell to a farewell, in the sense that obliviousness to a certain history is something we wish to address. We hope to reclaim or rethink something we have lost.

Bridget Cooks: I don't feel loss. I don't mean to sound defensive, but I don't feel there is something in need of correcting.

Michael Holly: Bridget, as an art historian writing on melancholy, I see loss as central. But there is something to be said about visual studies' refusal to see loss. Through loss an opening might be created once again: there is courage involved in bringing certain theorists back in, because they make us see things in a new and brighter light. We juxtapose works with Heidegger, Benjamin, and others in ways that an older art history would never ever allow us to do. I would hope that is still part of the excitement, the reason why we do visual studies.

James Elkins: Certainly for me, one of the "farewells" I'd like to say would be to a kind of visual studies that is content with its received sense of its past. Opening that question will certainly involve a sense of loss, even if it is only loss of euphoria.

Anna Sigrídur Arnar: My understanding of how we are using the term "farewell" does not entail saying "goodbye" to visual studies (that would be a loss!) but that the field can "fare well" by taking time to assess its methods, its assumptions, its gaps. In that sense, it's not a loss but a gain.

Elisabeth Friedman: If there is a sense of loss, it may be for another sort of art history which was interrupted by Nazism and the war, and which congealed in such a way that we find challenging, whether or not we are art historians. Perhaps there is a sense that art history could have been visual studies if some of these traditions that you're talking about, Gustav, could have been sustained.

Whitney Davis: Here is another possible difference between what we might call Visual Studies 1, up to the 1940s, and Visual Studies 2. When Benjamin, Adorno, Kracauer, Balász, Cassirer, Husserl, Heidegger, and other authors were writing, they were responding to what were for them live and credible theories of vision and visuality, which were contemporary to them. Visual Studies 2 seems to have no comparable engagement. If Visual Studies 2 is still referring to Benjamin and others, then it is excluding fifty or sixty years of scientific, psychological, and physiological work on vision and visibility. It is as if that work was of no consequence. Visual Studies 2 would be using a vocabulary that is scientifically defined, but without its context.

Gustav Frank: Visual studies scholars see Benjamin as dealing with visuality and not so much with vision.

James Elkins: I think this is absolutely correct, but it is prone to a misunderstanding. We aren't saying, I take it, that visual studies could discover the optical, cognitive, and neurological work of the last half-century in the way that the earlier practices, "Visual Studies 1," had done. That's because even if recent science were presented to contemporary visual studies, the field is currently predicated on an agnosticism about reality so pervasive that it would prohibit any sense of the pertinence of the science itself. There are strains within art history that aren't constituted this way, and later in the week I think we'll be talking about them in your seminar, Whitney. But visual studies as I see it practiced could not bring itself into a relation to vision science analogous to the relation earlier practices had. Contemporary visual studies can only see science as a social phenomenon, and see its claims as socially contextual.

Keith Moxey: It is actually harder, after the poststructuralist critique of linguistic referentiality and psychoanalytic critique of the autonomous subject, to view "scientific" theory as any more foundational than humanistic theory. We no longer have the same faith in the theoretical models offered us by the sciences.

Gustav Frank: But the problem is the consequences that follow from taking as our point of departure Heidegger, Lacan, and others. I think you're implying we should not trust this scientific stuff because it is culturally and theoretically naïve. But the scientific practitioners have also gone through Bruno Latour, and are aware of the problematics of what they are doing.

Flora Lysen: And from within the "visual turn" scholars are also increasingly aware of this. Martin Jay, for example, has argued (pointing to Latour) we might be overstating the cultural dimension of vision. The "visual turn" seems to have completely dismantled the idea that images could somehow have a universal capacity to communicate, though that critique is based on a simplistic reversal of the modern faith in natural universalism.

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Histories: Anglo-American Visual Studies, 1989–1999

This seminar was led by Michael Holly. The participants read a half-dozen texts by Norman Bryson, Douglas Crimp, and others, along with interviews with scholars active during the decade 1989–1999.

Michael Holly: Today we're going to talk about the early days of visual studies: where the excitement came from, the origins of the programs, the first decade of writing under its rubric. This is my own autobiographical account, to be sure, but it's also institutional history as much as intellectual history. I was there at the first visual culture graduate program in the United States. I didn't know much about European developments.

In the Warburg Institute, in the 1970s, when I was writing my dissertation on the intellectual history of art history, I was absolutely enchanted with the early German writers we talked about in Gustav's seminar. My ultimate dissertation advisor was Michael Podro, and I had come to art history from an undergraduate major in history, where figures like Hayden White were central. When I had first attended graduate school in the United States, however, I was shocked by what seemed to me the moribund discipline of art history, which was preoccupied with the who? what? when? and where? sorts of questioning. After my dissertation was long finished, I was hired as an outside chair at the University of Rochester, which had not had a graduate program in art history for a long time. There was huge resistance from the administration for the new program we gradually developed, first called Comparative Arts—

Lisa Cartwright: Comparative Studies.

Michael Holly: I remember it as Comparative Arts, but in either guise it sounds rather tame. The proposal went to the New York State Regents Board in that form, about the same time, perhaps 1989, that Keith and I conducted several summer institutes on the theory and interpretation of the visual arts. In the accreditation process, the biggest objection was: "You're doing great harm to your graduate students: they won't be able to get jobs with this degree. Do you really know what you're doing?" And in

fact, we didn't know what we were doing! We changed the courses we proposed from year to year. Eventually the Regents Board approved the program, and we accepted our first graduate students, Lev Manovich, Alla Efimova, Walid Ra'ad, and Howard Singerman and others, as I remember.

Lisa Cartwright: And Alla Efimova.

Michael Holly: Yes, we also took on artists who wanted doctorates; they were encouraged to include their artwork as part of their dissertation, but only part.

James Elkins: Michael, it's interesting that you accepted artists, given the subsequent history of visual studies as an academic pursuit.

Michael Holly: I suppose so, but yet many visual artists were genuinely conversant with poststructural theory, so we wanted to secure them a place in the academy other than in ancillary MFA programs. Bridget and Jeanette, when did you two come?

Jeanette Roan: 1993.

Michael Holly: Did you feel safe, coming into the new program?

Jeanette Roan: I came to visit, and I asked Janet Wolff: "What do your graduates go on to do?" and she responded, "Well, we haven't graduated anyone yet."

Michael Holly: Why did you take a chance on us?

Jeanette Roan: I was interested in contemporary art and in critical theory. I had read Mieke Bal's and Norman Bryson's piece on semiotics and art history, and I was familiar with Douglas Crimp's work on postmodernism. I had encountered some of the "new art history" and was just discovering British cultural studies. I was tremendously excited by all of these ideas and scholars, and the Rochester program brought them together. I felt an extraordinary sense of possibility.

Michael Holly: That's a great way of characterizing the 1990s, Jeanette. I don't mean there isn't that sense now, but it's different, less political, I suppose. When I was rereading these "sociological" texts I set for the seminar, I felt that sense of possibility again. Norman Bryson called it "intellectual turbulence." We hired Bryson largely because of the three pages he wrote in the text I required here—especially the lines where he looks at art history and declares, "in art history there has reigned a stagnant peace." Art historians, he wrote, represent "the leisure sector of intellectual life." At least when I was chair, the Department of Visual and Cultural Studies revolved

around three things: it was an embrace of Continental theory (we could read anyone we wanted, think about any issues we wanted); it involved the social aspects of art; and there was an expanded notion of the kinds of visual objects that could be studied.

Lisa Cartwright: I was recalling the moment, and the difference between the name Visual Studies and our department's name, Visual and Cultural Studies. It was important to some of us to include the term "culture," as it has been for the new International Association of Visual Culture, to signal the field's debt to cultural studies, and the importance of studying culture whether or not one is engaged in the cultural studies disciplinary framework.

Michael Holly: At the time there was also the so-called new art history; A. L. Rees and Frances Borzello were looking into the past of art history, to see what had gone wrong, what could be changed. Now, I would be happy to call visual studies "art history"; the stakes aren't the same. One of the most serious issues raised by the discipline of art history is whether its cultural and intellectual foundation can sustain the practices done under the name of visual studies. Ten years ago, when I last taught undergraduates, they would ask, "What is visual studies?" and I would answer, "It isn't a discipline; it isn't a field. It just names a problematic. It shakes up complacency. No objects are excluded. Visual studies names an attitude in relation to visual things, rather than a department."

Clemena Antonova: I think that describing visual studies as an "attitude" rather than a disciplinary field is useful especially when we want to consider the longue durée of visual studies. This view opens visual studies to scholars from fields outside film theory, digital media—that is, to the fields frequently accepted as the appropriate domains of visual studies.

Anna Sigríður Arnar: Regarding Bryson's comment about art history's "leisure problem" and especially the essays in the Rees and Borzello volume, it's worth noting that the critique of art history from the UK perspective is not just a critique about art history's methods but a critique aimed at class and privilege associated with established art historians in the British system. It's no coincidence that many of the contributors to the Rees and Borzello volume were faculty teaching at various polytechnic universities across the UK.

James Elkins: Michael, you named three components of visual studies: freedom to read new theorists, social commitment, and a broader set of objects. Yesterday [in an informal conversation] you were talking about visual studies as the place that creates unexpected juxtapositions of visual objects and methods. That could be thought of as a consequence, and perhaps the principal intended effect, the first and third of those. I that light I wonder about your second point, social commitment: it is different.

Michael Holly: Yes, and it has its own genealogy, going through the Birmingham school and on into the work of, say, Janet Wolff and Nicholas Mirzoeff: he is still very invested in discerning social practices in the making of art that translate into political. That may even be the principal strain of visual studies today. Whitney, you work through the analytic tradition—

Whitney Davis: I have a somewhat different trajectory, coming through a traditional art history department. My transformation, from around 1980 to 1986, involved social art history, including Marxist traditions: but the people involved were art historians. I am not sure they were especially affiliated with what you're calling the "new art history." There was very little influence of analytic philosophy either in social art history or the new art history, and possibly even in visual studies today.

James Elkins: There is an interesting contrast between this genealogy, Michael, and the one Hal Foster presented in last year's event here, called "Beyond the Aesthetic and the Anti-Aesthetic." He was presenting what happened in Manhattan beginning around 1980 as pre-eminently social—the second of your three points. It then helped, sometimes, to bring in your favorite theorists: a very different configuration.

Lisa Cartwright: Hal was briefly at Rochester.

Michael Holly: He and Craig Owens, at one point, were even competing for the same job at Rochester. How lucky we were to have such candidates! What we contributed, at Rochester, was a home for what might seem to be unrelated strands: the work of Mieke Bal, Norman Bryson, Janet Wolff, Kaja Silverman, Lisa Cartwright, Douglas Crimp—

Joana Cunha Leal: Michael, you say you could call visual studies "art history." Do you subscribe to our event's keyword, "farewell"?

Michael Holly: No, not really! [*Laughter*] When I left Rochester, it was for a very different kind of job: it was running a research institute in art history. I realized visual studies has gone a different way than I had ever imagined. I guess that a decade ago it did disappoint me in some ways. The visual past before 1980 completely dropped out of visual studies. It just wasn't there, and as a medieval and Renaissance historian, I thought the salvation of visual studies would come from those earlier periods. I thought: there will be lots of new questions about the past; the past will live again. But it did not happen, perhaps because of the centrality of photography and film.

Clemena Antonova: I really don't see why this should continue being the case. The study of medieval and Renaissance art has posed questions relevant to visual studies no less urgently than photography and film. For instance, the recent revival of interest among medievalists in what has been called "theology through the arts" and "theology through images" touches on many of the fundamental questions of visual studies. The Byzantine iconoclastic controversy in the eighth and ninth centuries has produced interesting work on the specificity of the visual image, which can't be reduced to a textual concept.

Whitney Davis: In the mid-1980s, there was an exciting possibility in some art history, archaeology, and related subjects that those periods would open up: There was my own work on prehistoric and Egyptian art, for example, or Michael Camille's in medieval studies—very influential in his field. And there was fascinating work arriving into art history from anthropology—I think of Nancy Munn and Howard Morphy—and philosophy (I think of students of Nelson Goodman and Richard Wollheim, younger philosophers like Catherine Elgin and Flint Schier, whose analytic work impressed me when I encountered it) and even visual psychology and vision science (here one of the commanding voices was David Marr, whose *Vision* strongly influenced by my doctoral dissertation filed in 1985). But I don't think some of this work was widely read, even noticed, in the discipline—though of course writers "internal" to the field, such as Camille, were read and vigorously discussed and debated (and often criticized). Perhaps we'll be able to come back to this matter when we discuss the relation between visual studies (or history of visual culture) and science studies.

James Elkins: It is important to note that here, in this room, we have a disproportionate number of faculty who engage in visual practices before Warhol or before modernism: you, Whitney, and Keith, Michael, and me. Sunil, Gustav, and I chose the faculty intentionally in order to open conversations like this one about deeper history. Our fifteen Fellows and auditors are much more representative of visual studies: in my count, only two—Clemena Antonova and Li Xi—do work on objects before modernism.

Michael Holly: What irks me most is the art historians who were in the first reactionary wave towards visual studies, who said, "We don't have to know that." That attitude is so benighted: the new intellectual world, I thought, is going to run over them. But in some sense, they won. Art history is still art history: you don't have to read theorists from the beginning of art history until now. You don't have to know the challenges that were once so alive. I have reviewed a number of art history departments in the United States, and there are often one or two faculty who call what they do visual studies—but the jobs and positions are still arranged by period. The graduate students at the institution where I work, the Clark, still mostly identify themselves by periods: they say, "I'm in nineteenth century," or "I study medieval art." I wish one of them would come up to me, as Rochester graduates once did, and name some topic or theorist they were interested in.

I don't want to say "farewell," because things get new lives, but—

James Elkins: You could say farewell to the art history we hoped to cure!

Michael Holly: Right.

Kristine Nielsen: Michael, you mention that art historians in the 1990s often refused to engage in visual studies. So, could today's parallel be visual culture practitioners who refuse to engage in historical eras or canonical texts about the pictorial? Hal Foster's description comes to mind of visual culture as "a passport that can lead to fairly touristic travel from discipline to discipline," because making expertise and nomadism compatible is difficult. So, I wonder how you would have responded to Foster's comment in 1996, or even today, about the problem of expertise and visual studies?

Paul Frosh: This is all very interesting, because I haven't come through art history. I'm going to say this politely: if the visual culture that emerged in the early 1990s was a

potential cure for art history, isn't it also possible that the "cure" is also a poisonous side-effect for any independent project, or for anyone coming in from the outside? At what point can visual studies let go of art history as its founding paradigm, the thing it both models itself upon and defines itself against? For example, what is the status of semiotics as a "transdisciplinary science," which is something visual studies reacted against in art history? I'm especially interested in Tom Mitchell's article "What Do Pictures *Really* Want?," but I suppose that comes into play in a slightly later stage.

María Lumbreras Corujo: I found surprising that in some of the interviews we read for this seminar, visual studies is still defined in opposition to art history. They were written in the first years of the 2000s, and what struck me about these comments was that the comparison is often built on a reductive view of art history that I don't think represents how the discipline was practiced at that moment. Jim already made this point in his *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction*, calling attention to the implications of such a procedure. In this respect, I also think that the idea of visual studies as a "cure" might not always be productive.

Jeanette Roan: Well, Bridget and I imagine ourselves as products of visual studies. To return to Jim's remark about social commitment in visual studies, I think of our required first-year colloquium with Douglas Crimp, who is represented in our readings by the essay on Warhol. I recall, in particular, two essays that we read by Stuart Hall that were critical in helping us to imagine a politically committed practice of visual studies. The social was central to why we chose Rochester, and cultural studies gave us a theoretical and political framework for the study of everyday life, a way to respond to the desire to understand the culture that is all around us. So I think cultural studies was central to how we were thinking of the differences between visual studies and art history.

Clemena Antonova: In this sense, your experience is analogous to that of many scholars in Eastern Europe and Russia, who have come to visual studies from cultural studies. Sofia University, where I did my first degree, is the largest university in Bulgaria, and it doesn't have an art history department. Students who were interested in visuality would pick up topics at the cultural studies department. Of course, I suspect that we

were exposed to a very different tradition of cultural studies. I had never heard of the Birmingham school while a student in Bulgaria.

James Elkins: Jeanette, for me, that description of your interest in everyday life is a perfect formula for the difference between visual studies in its first decade and visual studies now. The next-generation visual studies reader I'm working on which is written by a hundred graduate students from around the world, is definitely presentist; and politics, identity, and the everyday are among its guiding interests. There is relatively little investment in finding exciting new juxtapositions of theorists and objects—by which I mean it happens, but it isn't the authors' guiding concern.

Michael Holly: Richard Meyer and Darby English, for example, both happily teach contemporary art, but they simultaneously worry that most of the graduate students who come to them want to do only contemporary art, thus altering the kinds of things they could say and the questions they could ask. In my generation, no one could do a dissertation on contemporary art. I think it was Richard who did a survey, about five years ago, for his and Darby's colloquium at the Clark called "What Is Contemporary Art History?" that showed that eight out of ten people entering graduate school wanted to study contemporary art.

James Elkins: Joel Snyder, who is currently chair of art history at the University of Chicago, says 60 percent of incoming graduates study modern and contemporary.

Keith Moxey: The College Art Association figures that there are more dissertations in modern and contemporary than in all other fields put together.

James Elkins: In our context, it is important to remember that these are statistics from art history. In contemporary visual studies, the question of premodern interests is so uncommon that it doesn't even come up. The field is constituted differently in relation to history: we're developing an account based on loss, as Bridget says, and affectively that isn't the appropriate way into these issues.

But I'd like to develop the first of your criteria, Michael: the freedom to engage new theorists. It goes to the point of the interdisciplinarity that was a crucial part of visual studies' self-definition in the 1990s.

Michael Holly: I don't want to claim that the 1990s constituted the utopian period of visual studies, and thus we need to articulate our farewell to it. We wouldn't have what

we have now if there hadn't been this thing called the "new art history"—a bankrupt term today, but important then as prophesying a moment of absolute unsettlement in the discipline. I have a chart here that a graduate student gave to me sometime in the 1990s, which asks "What is visual cultural studies?" It is a flow chart, with a litany of topics that comprise visual cultural studies: "Aesthetics, anthropology, archaeology, architectural history, art criticism, art history, black studies, cultural studies, deconstruction, design history, feminism, film studies / theory, heritage studies, linguistics, literary criticism, Marxism, media studies, phenomenology, philosophy, photographic studies, political economy, postcolonial studies, poststructuralism, proxemics [*pause, and laughter*], psychoanalysis, psychology of perception, queer theory, Russian formalism, semiotics, social history, sociology," and "structuralism."

What is proxemics, anyway?

Paul Frosh: The study of spatial relations in personal interactions.

Michael Holly: The list is a bit intimidating, but to think that art history might have something to do with this amazingly bold list was liberating.

Inge Hinterwaldner: I would like to pick out some statements on methods that can be found in the famous *October* "Questionnaire" and the other texts we read. In 1983, Norman Bryson writes that without a "radical re-examination of the methods art history uses" the discipline is not going to free itself from lethargy. Also Brian Goldfarb criticizes art history for applying traditional methods. On the one hand, it seems that art history is at its end because of its poor interest in theory and its outmoded methods. On the other hand, Tom Mitchell says visual studies wants what it lacks, namely a systematic methodology. I guess Michael would agree that there is no methodological canon. Nonetheless, Tom himself prefers a wild or anarchic epistemology. So, when it comes to a comparison with visual studies, part of the argument seems to be based on a stand-off of old art-historical approaches and methods. But at the same time, at least some scholars react to the necessity of renewing the methodology by saying that they do not want to restrict themselves to a set of methods.

Whitney Davis: Michael, I don't want to disagree with that, but regarding discussions of the methodological pluralism of visual studies, from my point of view it wasn't the pluralism, but the cogency of the arguments. Visual culture studies was more right

than wrong about substantive questions of psychology, sociology, history, and the mind. Norman Bryson was more correct in arguments against Gombrich than some others were; Richard Wollheim had a better account of depiction than Arthur Danto, and Goodman had a better account than Wollheim; both of them had a far better account than Tom Mitchell. There were canons of criteria of argument in different subjects, so it is odd for me to hear the situation described as "let a thousand flowers bloom."

Keith Moxey: I would say something along the same lines, namely that there is no positionless position. Anyone who teaches a methodology course is aware of theoretical historicity. I think that goes back to what we called the "new art history": new theories were convincing for contextual reasons; the question is, why did they matter? The answers had to do with the nature of the enterprise, the politics of the cultural situation. There aren't any eternal answers, only arguments of greater and lesser conviction, which serve a purpose and which are then replaced by others.

Joana Cunha Leal: They were important precisely because they weren't eternal answers. As Bryson puts it in the closing paragraph of the essay we read: the stimulating condition of this new art history was that it could no longer lay claim to final or absolute knowledge of its object.

María Lumbreras Corujo: I see the enterprise you're describing, Keith, as part of a general interest in epistemology that was very strong in the early days of visual culture, sort of a basis that has gradually lost its force. Some early texts on visual culture studies convey a strong commitment to a completely new way of producing knowledge. I'm thinking of Mitchell's "What is Visual Culture?" and of some responses to the *October* "Questionnaire." They convey optimism and confidence in the relevance of new theories and methodologies. By contrast, many of the texts written in the next decade show just the opposite: Mieke Bal and Marquard Smith seem very suspicious about all that.

Whitney Davis: The debate between Bryson and Gombrich, ca. 1980–85, was a defining moment. An analogue today might be the dispute between visual studies and emergent neuroasethetics. There may be a deep dispute that could occur within visual studies between a broadly social, cultural model and a broadly biological model.

James Elkins: From my point of view this may well be a discussion that has become visible on the horizon of some—not the majority—of art history, but not, so far, in visual studies.

Whitney Davis: I would expect a genuine theoretical debate about those matters: I would hope for such a debate.

[*The seminar took a twenty-minute break at this point.*]

Michael Holly: Let's consider some of the readings I set for this seminar. The *October* "Questionnaire on Visual Culture" emblematizes an especially important moment. It was unsigned, as if all the *October* aficionados were warning us away. The inquiry assumed many things were wrong with visual studies. Those who were solicited for responses to three leading declarations were only given a short time to respond, and we were not to write more than three hundred words, or some such number.

Keith Moxey: It seemed parochial, as if there were some problem with art history. These powerful figures, associated with the editorial board of *October*, were paradoxically the very ones who had opened the doors to the sorts of theories that animated visual studies. They had introduced Derrida, Foucault—

Michael Holly: Semiotics, psychoanalysis—

Keith Moxey: into the realm of historical interpretation. And yet here they were, turning on people who were using similar theories. I think that moment can be understood as two positions on the left, confronting one another. One position comes out of Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the Enlightenment, and their critique of popular culture in relation to fascism; the other comes out of the Birmingham school in postwar Britain, with people like Dick Hebdige, Stuart Hall, and others who were also inspired by Marxist thought, but were interested in the visual life, the visual culture of ordinary working-class people. (One of their first studies, for example, was about the uses of literacy among members of the British working class.)

So you have an argument between two wings of leftist politics: one has no use for the entertainment industry, and the other thinks popular culture is where it's at.

Joana Cunha Leal: I think the "Questionnaire" was a turning point; it is interesting to see the dissensus in the history of the young discipline, visual studies. As an art historian,

I am sympathetic to the defensive stance of art history (Tom Crow, for example, saying that visual culture "deskills" students), and with the fact that some of the methodologies visual studies now claims as its own were being developed within art history. So what I see here is a strong reaction to the abandonment of the field of art history: what mattered was to make the field stronger, rather than defending it or letting it go.

Michael Holly: Yes, that's a very perceptive thing to say. When you read the "Questionnaire" now, does it seem like a tempest in a teapot? Or does the language still have a purchase on our arguments in the academy today?

Whitney Davis: I think some of these debates are alive and well. There remains, among several of my colleagues at Berkeley, a decisive commitment to the avant-garde, to modernism, and to the possibility of critique. These discussions seem to be still alive and well in some circles.

Jeanette Roan: I agree that many of the issues the "Questionnaire" raises are relevant today. I continue to teach the text as a historical document of the period, as an index of the anxieties that visual studies provoked. What's interesting is how we might see these debates fifteen years later. Were the critics of visual studies right to be concerned? How might we respond to the same questions today, with the benefit of a decade and a half of hindsight?

James Elkins: I'd like to note the term "anthropology" in the "Questionnaire," in order to place it in its historical setting—since I consider that in the time scale of visual studies, 1996 is now a measurable distant point in time. "Anthropology" was famously demonized in the "Questionnaire," but there have been at least three stages in the reception of "anthropology" since then. One would be the sort of inclusive list Michael quoted, which gave some support to a kind of accumulative sense of interdisciplinarity that became important in the following decade (in the texts by Mieke Bal, Tom Mitchell, Marquard Smith, and others, published after 2002, that we'll be reading in the next seminar). Anthropology appears on lists like Michael's in an undemonized form, a neutral form. Second would be Hans Belting's book *Bild-Anthropologie*, also from the next decade, which we'll discuss later this week. Third would be the Anglo-American anthropology and ethnography that currently figure in visual studies. In my experience, younger visual studies scholars see this demonized anthropology and just

don't care. That carelessness, that insouciance, is significant. Part of that is what is meant by presentism, when it is used as a pejorative term against current senses of visual studies.

Anna Sigrídur Arnar: Reading this questionnaire again after many years saddened me, especially since it came from scholars whom I greatly admire. I felt that it represented a missed opportunity to have a genuine conversation about visual studies. The opening questions were poorly framed, the tone disembodied and sanctimonious. This was not was not an invitation for dialogue, but a call before a court of self-appointed judges. I don't disagree with their basic claim that there are problems with some methodological assumptions in visual culture or visual studies, but these issues are still being worked out.

Paul Frosh: I'm concerned about our use of the word "presentism." It can be taken as a term of abuse, especially when we're looking back in time, and particularly in the context of an event called "farewell to visual studies." I prefer Georges Didi-Huberman's formulation, "anachronism": the "Questionnaire" has the potential to be anachronistic in his sense if we reread it now, in a different cultural configuration, and put it to different work. Moreover, in the disputes around the "Questionnaire," and even in our discussions today, a central characteristic of "visual studies" is that it remains resolutely organized around the visual object or image. To use a term from cultural studies which might be confusing in this context, it is overwhelmingly "textualist" in that it focuses almost exclusively on the signifying object and medium (the text or the image), rather than on social and cultural processes of production and reception. Crucially, it rarely moves beyond analytic encounters with distinct visual objects, image-text ensembles or genres. Its limit point is where empirical social science tends to begin, including anthropological research—the relations between these objects and the people and systems that create and consume them. Visual studies recapitulates the gap between literary reception theory, on the one hand, which theorizes an abstract reader from analyses of the text, and the sociology of culture, on the other, which traces the interrelations between texts and actual readers: the gap between, for instance, Barthes's work theorizing the reader, and Janice Radway's account of ro-

mance readers. There seems to be almost no awareness of a possible border zone between the concerns voiced in the "Questionnaire" and visual sociology, the sociology of culture, and visual anthropology.

Gustav Frank: You are right, Paul, the main concern of this first phase of visual studies was to establish images. The plural is crucial here as well, as an object proper, and notably for the first time. Priority was given to vision and even to visuality—to the social, cultural, and anthropological encounters with this object. It's fair enough for you accuse this project of "textuality." But to go back, via reception studies, to the social constructedness of imagery, instead of accepting the visual constructedness of the social, cultural, anthropological sphere, is even worse than this so-called textuality.

Michael Holly: But of course art history has always been text-based. A frequent criticism of Panofsky is that in his work the word always came before the image; the scholar had to locate the textual source to explain why the visual object looked the way it did. I am always surprised that text-based image reception theory, for example in Wolfgang Iser or Hans Robert Jauß, has rarely entered the discussion of what art history is.

Inge Hinterwaldner: Wolfgang Kemp is a representative of an aesthetic of perception; he adapted the account of the "Konstanzer Schule" to art history.

Whitney Davis: In art history, if not in visual studies, a number of people have explored reception theories. Don't you think Joseph Koerner's work is involved in reception history?

Paul Frosh: That's my point, Michael. I was taught by Bryson, and he had us read Iser and Barthes, and then he said, "Okay, they stop at a certain point. So here's Bourdieu." Bourdieu's work, especially *Distinction*, makes the crucial jump from a text-, image-, or object-oriented hermeneutics to a sociology of culture and an engagement with empirical production and reception processes. So when in visual studies we talk about visuality and visual modes, in addition to images, was a similar jump to a more sociological engagement with empirical viewers ever made? Or was it evaded entirely? Is the invocation of scopic regimes, visual modes, viewer positions, etc. in visual studies anything more than a gesture or an idealization, a theoretical construction of abstract viewing possibilities derived from the researcher's own interpretive en-

counters with images? Do visual studies scholars ever conduct research involving actual image makers or image viewers? Obviously in historical scholarship there are some good examples, but in research on contemporary visual culture I think we tend to leave that kind of thing to sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, and communications scholars—in other words, to social scientists—and all too often shy away from engaging with their work.

Michael Holly: It happens in film studies.

Lisa Cartwright: Yes, and there was Griselda Pollock and Jonathan Crary.

Gustav Frank: I agree with Paul's emphasis on the sociological and empirical deficits in visual studies. But I would also claim that it is visual studies' business to keep an eye on the makeup of such studies. For example, if the basis of reception analyses is textual protocols, then that leads to talking about texts again instead of images. In terms of empirical approaches to image use and vision, neuroaesthetics also makes a strong claim, although it should be informed by visual studies from an early stage: otherwise a "farewell" really will be justified.

<CN> 3

Histories: 2000–2010

The discussions transcribed here were led by Sunil Manghani. Participants read texts by Mieke Bal and others, many from the Journal of Visual Culture. *W. J. T. Mitchell partici-pated in part of these conversations, on the subject of his own essay "Metapictures."*

Sunil Manghani: Today we come to the recent history and the present condition of visual studies. Our task is to think about what survived, and what are the key events or texts. The reading I set of Nick Mirzoeff's is from the second edition of the *Reader*, which is different from the text in the first edition. Irit Rogoff's piece stays the same in both editions, so it dates to 1998. So, just some headlines from those pieces: in Mirzoeff's essay, "visuality" is described as "the intersection of power with visual representa-tion"; he talks about visual culture as a "tactic," and it's interesting how "tactic" and "strategy" are related; and he talks about "visual events," which is something he re-tains from the first edition, although he tries to temper it. Both Mirzoeff and Rogoff make an analogy between visual studies and feminism; they don't want to place vis-ual studies, or make a department out of it, but they mean it to intervene, to have something to say. Mirzoeff uses the term "postdisciplinary," and the expression "dwindling discipline," but from my perspective, I find there's a return to traditional subjects.

Whitney Davis: Can you expand on that?

Sunil Manghani: Sure, I can certainly comment from a UK perspective. There has been a lot of energy and excitement about moving disciplines and disciplinary homes, and there is talk of postdisciplinarity. But we also come up against the barrier of admin-istration, student numbers, and marketing departments. All that is very pressing, espe-cially since the new government has put up fees threefold and has basically taken all public funding out of the university system. So the UK university system is desper-ately trying to reinvent the story of why one should study at university, and that has produced a reaction, a return to traditional subjects.

James Elkins: This may be the point to add that we tried to advertise this event in the *Journal of Visual Culture*; Marq Smith, the editor, declined our request. He wrote me a long, impassioned, and convincing e-mail about how it just wasn't the time to give anyone in the administration ammunition that might help them undermine a "postdisciplinary" or interdisciplinary venture like visual culture studies. However, that is one reason—a very grounded reason—why our Fellows this year are exceptionally diverse, internationally, with an apparently low proportion of UK scholars.

Sunil Manghani: So, in regard to Mirzoeff's essay: at the end there is a fantastic line: "If visual culture is a ghost, how do we see it?" I am not sure what he means, but he talks about the anticapitalist movement, and he wants to use technologies that haven't been touched by Bill Gates. It's almost as if there was this panic room of defunct media, and you could rewire it and come out fighting. I find it very strange, and it's repeated in his most recent article, "Right to Look," which is in advance of his book. Here it is pertinent that 9/11 has been written about largely in terms of spectacle, but it can also be seen as a turning point: after 9/11, a number of people who were interested in visual culture as activism or in its political dimensions became interested instead in social media. For a few years following 9/11, there were countless conferences about the visual, and now I see an equally large number of conferences and events around social media.

Whitney Davis: I'm not sure where we are in our trajectory of visual culture: is this decade Visual Culture 2 or 3? At any rate, the trajectory from the later 1990s into the present century is marked by the Gulf War and 9/11. The first editions of the textbooks, from the early 1990s, are in response to the Gulf War; the second editions respond to 9/11. The difference between those two correlations is that the earlier texts are very active in their responses, but the second iteration seems repetitive. So it makes sense that there would be a flooding out of people from visual culture studies to digital and social media. I don't find that surprising.

Sunil Manghani: I agree. I think Mirzoeff and Co. are still working their way out of the earlier version of visual culture.

James Elkins: It's also worth noting that Mirzoeff's *Watching Babylon* is a pessimistic book, but the signs are that *Right to Look*, the forthcoming book, is activist: that is, it is a strong continuation of the earlier position.

I'd like to see if we can continue Gustav's notation: Visual Culture 1 would be the early twentieth century; Visual Culture 2 its reinvention out of cultural studies and poststructuralism. In that case, we're talking about Visual Culture 3 now: a less directly politically inflected set of practices, more engaged with social and digital media, which emerged close on to the beginning of this century, with the emergence of just the first few visual studies textbooks.

Juliet Bellow: I'm not sure I would agree that Visual Culture 3 is less, or less directly, political. There has been a lot of meaningful politically engaged work, both in theory and practice, in the last decade, of the sort that Douglas Crimp called for in "Getting the Warhol We Deserve." Do you see this scholarship as a continuation of what you are calling Visual Culture 2, or is it outside of visual culture entirely?

James Elkins: It's true that political engagement continues, often I think in more attenuated, more sharply focused forms. But the newest work, I find, is often disengaged from activist politics—but we'll be developing that theme, I hope, later in the week.

Regarding the decade we're considering here: it might be useful to review the chronology. The previous decade ended with the first reader, Nick Mirzoeff's *Visual Culture Reader* (1998), and the first anthology, his *Introduction to Visual Culture* (1999). Just two years later, at the beginning of the decade we're considering, there is Lisa Cartwright and Marita Sturken's *Practices of Looking* (2001), the second English-language textbook.

In the first half of the decade we're studying, textbooks proliferated: the second edition of Nick's textbook (2002); my own *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction* (2003); Amelia Jones's *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (2002); Richard Howells's *Visual Culture* (2003), which is important because it is one of the few translated into Chinese; Matthew Rampley's anthology *Exploring Visual Culture* (2005); and, if we want to stretch the years just a little, Sunil's anthology, edited with Jon Simons and Adrian Piper, *Images: A Reader* (2006). So I think it's not an exaggeration to say

that the first half of the 2000s, which is the exact period of the debates about interdisciplinarity in the *Journal of Visual Culture*, was the period of English-language textbooks.

Sunil Manghani: Although perhaps I can just add, the *Images: A Reader* volume was an attempt to redraw the interdisciplinary boundaries once more. In the introduction we suggest visual culture can be subsumed within a broader image studies. Admittedly, it remained very much wedded to English-language texts, indeed the Western canon as a whole. This was a clear limitation we sought to acknowledge. The inevitable barriers remain, and as it was, the book was a difficult enough pitch to the publishers.

Gustav Frank: If we recall last year's debates about postcolonial aesthetics with all our suspicions about the major presses in the U.S. colonizing global academic discourse, and our talk about the activist subversion of the everyday by the youngest generation of critical theorists and practitioners, then it seems likely that the project of visual studies has not fulfilled its promise to gather political energy around the war of pictures. Traditional areas of cultural studies and small-scale projects that promise to combine theory and practice have regained their centrality.

James Elkins: Later in the decade, books proliferated. In my provisional listing, there is Marq Smith's collection of interviews, *Visual Culture Studies* (2008); my own *Visual Literacy* (2008); the second edition of *Practices of Looking* (2009); and *Visual Cultures* (2010), which came from the same conference as *Visual Literacy*. And now, at the beginning of the 2010s, there is the second edition of Mirzoeff's *Introduction to Visual Culture* (2008); Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell's *Handbook of Visual Culture* (to be published in 2012); Sunil's multivolume *Image Studies* anthology; and the anthology I'm editing, written by graduate students from around the world, which is due in 2012. I don't see any clear break in the building of the academic discipline.

Sunil Manghani: *Image Studies: A Practical Approach* was pitched to Routledge as something very different from Mirzoeff's projects: I told them I don't really see myself in the stream of visual culture studies. My proposal knits together small tasks—ways of thinking about making images together with studying them. It's about what it might feel like to be engaged in science imaging, in drawing, and so forth. One of the people at Routledge said, "That's great, but can you maybe put 'visual culture' in the

subtitle?" And I replied, saying something like, "I'd rather not: visual culture will be a chapter in the book." It's an already established field.

James Elkins: And as far as I can see, the graduate student–authored anthology will be entirely different once again, with a radical depoliticization, and an emphasis on the everyday, on gender as understood through Muñoz and Butler, and with different visual materials. So maybe we're marking the start of a new phase: Visual Studies 4!

Paul Frosh: There's another reader, Stuart Hall and Jessica Evans's *Visual Culture: The Reader*, which appeared in 1999. Does anyone use that?

Lisa Cartwright: Yes, and there's also the Stuart Hall text *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*.

Sunil Manghani: Hall and Evans's book is a very good one, and it projects a very different sense of visual culture. It is more contained in a sense, because it brings together existing, canonical text. In retrospect, Nick Mirzoeff's *Visual Culture Reader* really was an attempt to do something entirely new, and in the second edition he consolidates that, and makes a positive point out of diversity. Indeed, he says the "field of visual culture is now sufficiently well established and dynamic to sustain a plurality of views without fracturing into warring camps."

Lisa Cartwright: Some of these differences have to do with individual editors, such as Bill Germano, who played an important role in shaping the growth of the field through his role at Routledge in the 1980s and 1990s, or Ken Wissoker at Duke, who continues to play this role.

Michael Holly: To Sunil's comment about how visual culture is now an established field. I think there's a sense among editors that the expression "such and such and visual culture" is such a flabby notion that if you put it in your title or subtitle, the book will be doomed. Editors of major presses speak sometimes about how they don't encourage the expression in the title unless it's really justified. Everybody wants to jump on the bandwagon.

Lisa Cartwright: Which editors report having this sense of visual culture?

Michael Holly: I don't remember, specifically; we had a major conference at the Clark, including editors from Duke, Minnesota, Chicago, Yale, MIT, and Berkeley.

Whitney Davis: That is a complete inversion of the situation in art history around 1985, when the best way to get a book published was to redescribe it as visual studies.

Lisa Cartwright: I don't think it's helpful to characterize an emergent field as a publishing trend. Certainly there is certainly no longer a sense of newness about the concept, but it does describe a disciplinary context that is now widely recognized internationally. Publishers recognize that shift.

Michael Holly: The executive editors, who were at our conference, were suspicious of the expression because they felt they had to stay ahead of the curve.

James Elkins: Maybe our book should be retitled as just *Farewell To*.

We have been talking about textbooks; let's look at some of the other essays for this seminar, such as Mieke Bal's "Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture" (2003), her "Commitment to Look" (2005), or Marq Smith's "Visual Studies, Or the Ossification of Thought" (2005). It might be interesting to consider how those discussions about interdisciplinarity sound alongside the emergence of textbooks.

Keith Moxey: I think there are two versions of visual studies at work. Marq Smith says that for his generation, "It was something not just to see the results of decades of struggle as the histories, theories, and practices of women, of the postcolonial or subaltern subject, of queer communities came to the fore, but to see these discourses integrate themselves into, embed and structure academic study. It was an interesting historical fact rather than historical reductivism when political impulses, from feminism and Marxism to modernism itself, were all prefixed by a 'post.' And, it was something when it didn't seem that there was anything left to fight for." One sentence points to something, and the next seems to take it away. So one view of visual studies has to do with feminism, postcolonial studies, and queer theory; but Smith also sees all of these as things as "post": postfeminism, post–queer theory, and so on: there's a kind of disappointment that there is nothing left to fight for.

The other view of visual studies comes from Jim's "Envoi" at the end of *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction*. After considering four proposals to expand or revise visual studies, he says visual studies "needs to become more ambitious, more wide-ranging, more difficult." Then he says, "A slower and less self-assured interpretation is also a more reflective interpretation, one whose author is more likely to

doubt her disciplinary contexts and purposes. I hope this short book can work like a weir, slowing the torrent of interpretation. I love visual objects and practices because they are often—by their nature—tremendously difficult to put into words, and so I would like to hobble the interpretation of visuality, making it less smooth and confident."

So one the one hand, you have a series of projects, methods, and political positions; on the other hand, you have the view that it is not at all clear what visual studies is about.

James Elkins: Well, anecdotally, some of the impetus behind that passage was that I was reviewing visual studies essays for different publications, and it struck me that it was easier for authors to publish their work as visual studies than as, say, art history. The rules of adequate interest or competence or success were unformed, and in that sense it was the same as it is with new media like performance or video, when they first started: it was not difficult to produce a work that could be taken as an acceptable instance of its field.

Michael Holly: When I was on the board of the College Art Association, I tried to introduce a new category, visual studies. That proposal caused an enormous difficulty: not because of the issues of interdisciplinarity in Mieke Bal's texts, but because of issues related to Marq Smith's and Nick Mirzoeff's work: you could not be openly political and also be part of art history. Now, ten or twelve years later, the term "visual studies" is in everything; for the hundredth anniversary of the CAA, there was even talk of changing its name to include visual culture or something similar. What is the CAA saying by their interest in the subject now? Are they saying visual studies involves deep philosophical questioning? I don't think so. Are they saying they welcome its politics? No. It's something about the rounding off of the sharp corners of visual studies. What does that rounding off consist of? Where did visual studies lose its revolutionary flavor? Was it done in by politics itself? It has been incorporated into the intellectual mainstream.

Flora Lysen: Perhaps it has something to do with this Calvin Klein argument. I feel we are opting for a slower, more reflective, less self-assured kind of interpretation, something that permits us to question the critique of ideology. Maybe now we're at a point where we're doing weak criticism, philosophically speaking.

And yet, if I take the Case of the Calvin Klein Suit as a metaphor for an overconfident, insufficiently reflective practice, what are we to do now?

Lisa Cartwright: Calvin Klein is something certain students buy secondhand and wear now in order to reference an earlier moment in fashion, but without the irony or the reflexivity implied in the 1980s when appropriation of styles from earlier decades came with an edge of critique. After you understand your symptom, there is no longer the necessity to be critical. Following up on Flora's question about weak criticism, I wonder if we need to consider visual studies in the light of the less certain place that weak theory occupies in the discipline today.

Michael Holly: What does that mean?

Lisa Cartwright: There were many different strands of thought about how to do theory after poststructuralism, after the decline of actually existing socialism, and after the realization that criticism and grand theory narratives might not have the impact on politics that some had hoped. Eve Sedgwick, in the essay "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading" (contained in her book *Touching Feeling*), suggested that criticism all too often works off of affects such as humiliation, generating negative feelings about the things that make us feel bad, and anticipating failures. She used the term "weak theory"—adapted from the concept's use by American experimental psychologist Silvan Tomkins—to describe the kind of phenomenological and theoretical tasks that can be accomplished through local theories and nonce taxonomies, the making and unmaking of categories, so we can grasp complexity and variation so we can anticipate something other than failure when we do the work of criticism.

Gustav Frank: If I think back to the list of disciplines Michael read, it occurs to me that in the best case they could converge on a new kind of theorizing, a weak theory. On the other hand, if we think of it as a random or indefinitely extensible list, then we have to wonder if visual studies has a central coherence.

James Elkins: Although we haven't talked about it, this decade, 2000–2010, is the one that saw the most concerted discussion of visual studies' disciplinary nature. At the moment, there are at least five terms in circulation to describe the position of a project such as visual studies: "interdisciplinary," "postdisciplinary," "indisciplinary," "subdisciplinary," and "transdisciplinary." We have been looking at these in our own department at the School of the Art Institute, and to some extent they have clearly different usages. But the very idea of thinking about this issue came into visual studies during the first half of the decade we're discussing, so it is a distinct part of the history of visual studies' descriptions of itself.

Paul Frosh: There's a lot of work going on in cultural economy that doesn't explicitly call itself "weak theory," but uses concepts of immaterial labor to think about the kinds of agencies, subject positions, aesthetic positions, and pleasures that are being produced. In those studies there is a different sense of labor, one that is not dependent on the unveiling of false consciousness, of the notion that labor is "tricked." What matters instead is the accumulated pedagogical efficacy of an ongoing project. That is perhaps where weak theory is important. We aren't going to stop people from buying Calvin Klein just by showing how capitalistic they are. We might get people to think about how complexes of discourses work and how consumer culture and commodities involves diverse and often conflicting practices.

Sunil Manghani: That's an important point, because critiques like the one in the Case of the Calvin Klein Suit are ubiquitous. When Barthes was putting together his semiotics, that became so popular the marketing director of Renault became his PhD student. And what does Renault do? It took Barthes's methodology and produced it on an industrial level. Now that process has sped up even more, and there is more urgency to find viable alternatives.

James Elkins: We've come to an interesting point here, where most of the textbooks we have been discussing would be very difficult to imagine—except maybe the one Sunil is planning. I'm not yet convinced that "weak theory" is the right name for what we're after, but clearly it is different from the kinds of political unveilings and empowerments that are described in the earlier texts. Perhaps this is the place to begin thinking about the current decade.

<CN> 4

Histories: The Present Decade

Here we discussed developments in Anglo-American visual studies up to the present. Tom Mitchell joined the seminar, and we walked mostly about his essay "Metapictures." He reviewed the history and interpretations of the duck-rabbit illusion, and then showed some images of prohibited images such as Poussin's painting Adoration of the Golden Calf. *He showed a still from the end of* Jurassic Park, *in which a dinosaur has its DNA code projected onto its skin. His presentation ended with some "brand new" metapictures, including a widely disseminated image of Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and others watching an unseen monitor that displayed the killing of Osama bin Laden. The transcript opens with the discussion of metapictures; afterward he wanted to know what we were saying farewell to.*

Michael Holly: In a sense all images are potentially duck-rabbit images, if they incorporate, either metaphorically or actually, the kind of overwriting that is literally present in the *Jurassic Park* raptor. The image becomes the duck, and the critical response to it becomes the rabbit, or vice versa. So is it that only some images, which have the potential to become paradoxical, duck-rabbit images, or metapictures—whatever we want to call them—reflect, initiate, or instigate their own critical reception?

Tom Mitchell: The image, for me, is always an image-text. It has some relation to language. Images are things made by language-using creatures. There are no images before there is at least gesture, or some form of language. The relation between the words you use and the image you encounter or make is an empirical question. There's one relation in the raptor image, which is that the text is the secret inner life that makes this image possible. Here we get to see it: the image makes it possible to see its own generative text. With Poussin's *Adoration of the Golden Calf*, there is a different animal, the calf, coming to life—into dangerous life. I think most of the art-historical discourse around the image has been to reinforce the authority of the law, to side with Moses and say, Yes, the truth of the painting is in the Second Commandment, and in

the tablets. I think that is an absolutely wrong reading of the picture, and I want to contest it. I think Poussin was a great artist, and on the side of Aaron.

One of the things that makes me still feel hopeful about visual culture, even as we say farewell to it, is that it has allowed for an expansion of art history, and in some senses a challenge to art history. In the art-historical reading, the painting just reinforces the story; you don't need to look at the picture very long: you only need to re-read Exodus 32 and the historical discourse, and conclude that Poussin hates the golden calf.

Michael Holly: Can't you say that writing about pictures, whether it is in the context of art history, visual studies, or literary studies, is in some way allegorized by this picture? There is a hidden text here: not the kind iconographers such as Panofsky would find, but one that comes from our constant and incessant desire to write, to speak about something that is of a different order of discourse, our belief that there are words that are the "secret code" to unlock the picture? There is a desire that our writing might manifest itself on top of the image, like the genetic code on the raptor. In that sense potentially all pictures are metapictures.

Tom Mitchell: I'd go along with that, yes.

Joana Cunha Leal: I'd like to recall Louis Marin, who quotes a letter of Poussin's: "lisez l'histoire et le tableau" (read the story and the picture). Poussin is the perfect example of a painter who uses biblical stories and narrative issues, but also has a sense of painting as something else. I think this is very important, because Poussin is the source of much academic pedagogy: the importance of composition, the metalanguages of painting that were inculcated by the academies. So for me, the *Adoration of the Golden Calf* is an example of a painting that thinks the image beyond Panofsky.

Inge Hinterwaldner: I'd like to ask what metapictures want. If the desires of pictures were to be triggered by the features pictures actually exhibit, I would expect there to be a difference between what ordinary pictures want and what metapictures want. However, in "What do Pictures Really Want?" you introduce the deficiency—what they do not have—as the cause of their specific wanting. You write that pictures might not want anything from us. You also say they might want to have power over the beholder; but elsewhere you say that pictures might want to have a clearer figure-

ground relation, and you give several other formulations. Now, when we try to figure out what a single picture is lacking, this list has virtually no end. Could you please give us some hints which kinds of missing features are especially worth looking for, in order to find out what they want? And to return to my first point: as metapictures are additionally defined differently, so why shouldn't they have special desires?

Tom Mitchell: Great question. It's strange that the form of the question "What do pictures want?" has misled people into thinking I know the answer, or that I'm holding something back. But when people asked, "What do pictures mean?" no one expected that the questioner had the answer. If pictures want something, then they are in some sense like living things, and they might have desires—not necessarily human desires, but perhaps animal or vegetable desires, but in any case pictures would have something of an animistic character. There would then be lots of different desires. There is also the question of wanting, and not just in the Lacanian sense of the triad want, desire, need. Do pictures demand something? Or do they lack something? And if it's simply a question of lack, then animism begins to fade as an issue, and I wanted to allow for that.

Gustav Frank: I got the impression there might be different sorts of metapictures. There is a gradual scale of metapicturality. Perhaps the greatest surplus is in images like Poussin's, because each time we return to the image we find more self-reflexivity in it. I am not sure that the Poussin deserves more scholarly devotion than Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit drawing. In light of this, Tom, I wonder if you could give us a clearer distinction between what you mean by images that are able to picture theory and meta-pictures. The latter are self-reflexive: but to what extent are all images able to picture theory?

Tom Mitchell: I have no trouble with the idea that some images deserve more attention than others. Empirically, some get more. But to me it's the quality of the attention more than the quantity. Artistic status doesn't guarantee it, for one thing. Ninety-eight percent of the art produced gets no attention whatsoever. The duck-rabbit has received an inordinate amount of attention. One of the things visual studies recovered, or made possible, was the ability to see images more broadly, and to consider scientific images, the design image, the decorative image—all of them are fair game.

James Elkins: To me, it's clear that our interest in metapictures, illusions, Poussin's *Golden Calf*, Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas un pipe*, and so many others, follows on from what works in academic writing. We're interested in clever, intricate, ambiguous, and self-referential images, in nested narratives, in paratextuality, and we ignore most others in what Sunil calls the ecology of images. I don't think of this as an issue that demarcates visual studies or art history. Dull images, repetitive images, images without much desire, uninventive images, unexceptional images, average images, unintellectual images—those are the things we ignore. Tom, you mention images with no desire, but you study complicated images, with multiple layers of political and historical significance. For me, the category of metapictures is indefinitely expansible because it includes anything that appears to us as self-referential, up to the abstract complexity that Michael mentioned in relation to Poussin.

Lisa Cartwright: I want to come back to Inge's question. In regard to the question "What do pictures really want?" my memory is that a number of people who saw parallels with Freud's and Lacan's question "What do women want?" So given that your essay is a staging of the limitations of ideology critique, I wonder if you can say something about the relation between your essay and those other kinds of critique, both at the time you wrote it, and also later—I am thinking of Žižek's question, fifteen years after your essay: "What does Europe want?"

Tom Mitchell: Well, for sure the whole idea of the essay was to start a conversation about the issue. I first gave the talk in Montreal, in front of the whole *October* board, and Hal Foster informed me it was the wrong question to ask. The Surrealists, he said, had already asked the question and it had failed. But it's true that one of the goals of the question was to shift the conversation around images from ideology critique, which always seemed to treat images as "bad object" that had to be demystified by the superior acuity of the critic. This (like the semiotic ritual of "decoding" images) had become a kind of routine that reinforced the self-importance of the critic by providing easy victories over bad pictures. I wanted to shift attention to questions of desire and emotion, the affective field between an image and an observer.

Lisa Cartwright: It is more the answer, "Nothing," rather than the question, "What do images want?," that was the potentially inflammatory element—

Tom Mitchell: Well, that's only one possible answer—

Lisa Cartwright: You seemed to make that answer in the text—

Tom Mitchell: Yes, but it is not the answer. I tried to go through a number of possible answers, and also to think not so much about Freud's staging of the question, but Chaucer's. He sends his knight out to interview women, to find out what they want. The answer is "maistrye," which is from a Middle English word that equivocates between imposing power and permitting power. Chaucer's answer to the question is that women want power over men, in both senses: they lack it, and they desire it. But they don't want to take it by force; they want men to acknowledge their superior wisdom, and subject themselves willingly. That's the dialectical power in images. Really, I believe that they have no power of their own; they are entirely dependent on us—quite unlike women or black folks, which shows one stark limit to the analogy. Some are constructed so that we wish they did, and yet they fail. Advertising images are an example, but there are other kinds of power: the power of quiet seduction, the power of pretending not to want anything. So the answer "Pictures might not want anything at all" just seemed logically necessary, but the more interesting possibility is Chaucer's.

Clemena Antonova: I find the idea of the image as a living organism very interesting, and especially two questions: Can an image speak? and Can an image die? I have an example of both. Looking at medieval manuscripts, for example, there are instances in which the image is not an illustration of the text; there is no direct connection. Such images add meaning more to the text; they speak in a way analogously to the text.

Here is an example of the question Can an image die? Iconoclastic movements have attempted to kill images. In the 1920s in Russia, the Bolsheviks transferred Andrei Rublev's Holy Trinity icon from the monastery of the Lavra of Saint Sergius of Radonezd to the Tretyakov Gallery. The idea was to turn a ritual object into an aesthetic object, i.e., to destroy the original meaning of the image and impose another one. Interestingly, some visitors to the gallery have been noticed to pray before Rublev's image.

Bridget Cooks: No one has mentioned Tom's use of race in the essay. Tom, you make assertions about how we can understand asking an object questions by analogizing pic-

tures to black people or women. In the same paragraph you suggest that asking pictures what they want would be like asking a ventriloquist's dummy what it wants. These scenarios are each presented as if they are equivalent. In no way is asking a woman or a black person what she wants like asking a picture what it wants. If we want to talk about sloppiness in visual studies and why we need good critical approaches to cultural studies within visual studies, we need to discuss this kind of cavalier and disrespectful understanding of difference as it is discussed in this part of the essay.

Tom: Of course you are right that these scenarios are not equivalent; they are merely analogous, and in a sharply limited way. I can understand why you react this way. In fact, as you might have noticed, I discuss this possible objection in my essay, and try to ponder the impropriety of the question. If I may quote from the third paragraph of "What Do Pictures Want?": "I'm also quite aware that the question may seem like a tasteless appropriation of an inquiry that is properly preserved for other people, particularly those classes of people who have been the objects of discrimination, victimized by prejudicial images." My remark about asking puppets what they want was precisely aimed at raising just the doubt you have expressed: "It is hard to imagine how pictures might do the same, or how any inquiry of this sort could be more than a kind of disingenuous or (at best) unconscious ventriloquism." I don't think it's fair, then, to characterize me as cavalier or disrespectful because I am pursuing the question of desire across the border between human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate objects, persons and things. My essay anticipates exactly the objection and question you have just made. The subaltern model of otherness, whether based in gender or race or species, is simply an inevitable and unavoidable feature of human encounters with images, especially when they take on uncanny properties, as in the phenomena of totemism, fetishism, and idolatry. (Categories of race and gender are, for their part, deeply implicated with images, so the relation of images and others is two-way, and reciprocal, even as they are fundamentally distinct; I never say that images are people or vice versa. The relation is one of analogy, modeling, and metaphor.) The fact is that, as I said in the essay, the question of what pictures want "is a question we

are already asking, that we cannot help but ask, and that therefore deserves analysis." That doesn't strike me as "sloppy" by any reasonable measure.

Li Xi: When it comes to the idea of a living organism, I think it's necessary to mention John Dewey, the first one who came up with the concept "living organism" in his *Art as Experience*. Yes, the image has changed our lives, and here it seems very important to emphasize the image's subjectivity and its own logic. But actually we cannot forget that the change is made by both images and ourselves. As Dewey mentioned, doing and undergoing are continuous processes. We cannot have one logic by peeling it away from the other. The two are connected with each other very closely. So when we discuss metapictures, we should also add the experience of spectator in Dewey's sense.

Tom Mitchell: Clemena, I think it's extremely difficult, and maybe impossible, to kill an image, in the sense of utterly annihilating it, so that it no longer appears in the world. The picture/image distinction is crucial because it is easy to destroy a picture, but not to destroy an image. If I tell you, "Don't think about the image of your mother," you will find that the prohibition has the effect of conjuring up the image. Michael Taussig has lots to say on this subject. "No smoking" signs have the same effect on me. The most extreme statement of this, I think, is that images cannot be destroyed, and maybe they can't be created either. Michael Fried once said to me, "You realize that no one creates images. They are immortal." I don't know about this; I'm just proposing it for discussion.

Whitney Davis: You have been talking about the ontology of metapictoriality. I want to shift the conversation a bit, to the epistemology of metapictoriality. There seems to be a sliding scale of endlessly graduated logical possibilities of nested metapictorialities, including a series of ontologically different metapictorial internal reference, ranging from fairly standard examples, such as pictures of people imaging, to somewhat more subtle and complex things, such as the way the duck-rabbit grapheme draws attention to the ways in which it is a multistable picture. At some level, all pictures, in order to secure themselves as pictorial, must have a metapictorial moment.

Would these possibilities, in your view, be managed historically? Is it your view that part of the study of metapictoriality is to define, identify, solidify, or consolidate

certain types or order of ranges of metapictoriality? To work to exclude, or possibly prohibit other order? To set up, to define certain corridors about what is empirically the case with specifiable communities of human agents? My hunch would be that something like that would have to be the case, but we don't have a systematic study of the relation between such cultures and the logically possible forms of metapictoriality.

Tom Mitchell: In some ways your question answers itself. If you're going to have any sort of interesting empirical or comparative account of a specific image repertoire in a particular culture, you have to have at least a range of logical possibilities. I think we already do: "Metapictures" was intended to think the question of self-reference, and beyond that, so ask the question, What would it mean to elevate pictures to a nonparasitic position in the project of theory? This is related to the argument in *Picture Theory*, in which I want to elevate pictures to the level of strong theoretical objects, things that are good to think with.

Whitney Davis: Would you see the metapictorial work accomplished in pictures in some way resisting or reordering or reorganizing the other regimes of reflexivity or self-reference that might be contemporary with them? It would not be especially interesting, for example, if Poussin's metapictoriality turned out to express or articulate received ideas of self-reflexivity such as Hegel's; but it would be very interesting if it could be shown that Poussin's metapictoriality was a strong and robust pictorial alternative to standard, widely disseminated Hegelian accounts of self-reflection.

Tom Mitchell: Well, another precedent for the metapicture was the modernist work of art; but I am interested in thinking beyond the work of art. I am more interested in social ontology, phenomenological ontology, or to put it plainly, an image's way of "being in the world"—including the world that the image makes visible. The philosopher I would want to help look at Poussin's *Adoration of the Golden Calf* is not Hegel, but the Nietzsche of the preface of the *Twilight of the Idols*, in which he says he wants to sound idols, with a hammer as with a tuning fork. This is a metapicture not just about images in general, but also about idols, and the discourse of idolatry and iconoclasm would be very useful in thinking about this image now.

Whitney Davis: I appreciate that is what you are suggesting: I'm only saying that inter-pretations of what is at stake in this artifact depend on culturally well-secured percep-tions of reflection. So it would be interesting to discover that the picture's metapicto-riality had found some way to opt out of or reorganize those metalanguages.

Tom Mitchell: That's exactly my argument. I think the picture has not been seen; it has only been read. I think the reading has been excessively pious, and dominated by what we think we know about the meaning of a biblical text—that is, "culturally well-secured perceptions." One part of Poussin's brain said, Yes, I know this painting has to have this cast of characters, the Calf, the Israelites, and so on; but Poussin's hand was thinking something as well. I think visual culture helps us engage in a tactical naïveté in relation to overread canonical masterpieces.

Whitney Davis: T. J. Clark would say these images are written to death.

James Elkins: Sorry to play the skeptic here, especially because I entirely agree with both of you that what is at stake for visual studies is the capacity to take images as models and not examples or illustrations. And I also think the awareness of this issue is cru-cial for the last few years and the present moment of visual studies. But I can't resist noting that nothing we have said about Poussin's image actually depends on the fact that it is a painting. All our claims could have been made about a cartoon with the same outlines. We haven't been using it as theory, either in Tom's sense or in Whit-ney's more fundamental sense.

Tom: I'm glad you pointed this out. To me the fact that it is a painting of a sculpture is precisely the critical nexus of its intermediality, and its status as a self-reflexive ob-ject. In this sense, it might be better to call *The Golden Calf* a metaimage rather than a metapicture, or what in *Iconology* I called a "hypericon." That is, it is not a picture of a picture, an image of an image at the moment of its creation, and more precisely, a picture of a statue, and of the moment of unveiling or first exhibition. The migration of the image from sculpture to painting is essential to its force, and explains why Poussin thought he could get away with painting a magnificent idol without commit-ting a sin (it's "only a painting," after all; it is not a carved idol). But the leakage of the image from sculpture to painting explains why a literal-minded iconoclast might

want to slash the part of the painting that shows the calf, which, as we all know, actually happened. I take it the recent vandal wanted to paint over the idolaters, on the other hand. What did Poussin believe about his own representation of this tainted, dangerous object? I think his pious intellect believed one thing, and his eye and hand believed another. His stand-in, therefore, is Aaron, the artist who gestures to the Israelites and to us to behold his miraculous work of art. Aaron is not punished, remember, for making the calf, but some three thousand of his countrymen are slaughtered. This is artistic license with a vengeance!

Keith Moxey: I have a question that comes from a different moment in the history of visual studies. Identity politics, class, and gender figured importantly in the development of visual studies. Doesn't it matter, then, who asks "What do pictures want?" and doesn't it matter whom the pictures address? Is the nature of the subjectivity that responds to images of any interest? How can the responses you discuss, the subjectivities that are implied in your accounts, be reconciled with others?

Tom Mitchell: I think it does matter, more or less, who poses the question, "What do pictures want?" Sometimes it matters less. Some pictures are what I call multistable, and the game they propose has minimal requirements: you just have to be a receiver, a language-using animal, and that is enough. That's on the phenomenological end of the spectrum. But long ago, when I was talking about the duck-rabbit, and saying to the seminar that the received doxa was that you can either see the duck or the rabbit, an African American student raised her hand and said, "Just a minute. I can see both." I said, "What do you mean?" And she said, "Why do I have to explain what I mean? I can see both." I think there was silence for a quarter of an hour while we thought about that. And finally she said, "Okay, I'll tell you what I mean. I'm thinking of the phenomenon of the mulatto. Am I black or white? What is my identity, and how do you name it?" This is a fundamental problem of classification: it starts at a phenomenological level, and moves inexorably to other levels, which may or may not be social. Jim wrote something about this—about how when you move further from the ordinary objects of visual studies, the less the gender of the spectator might matter. He used the example of crystallography. When I read that, I thought, well, maybe so. It

doesn't always matter. How is the duck-rabbit dependent on someone's gender or race? I don't think it particularly does.

James Elkins: I think of metapictures as a city. The tallest buildings are the now-canonical metapictures. Here in Chicago, I'd say the duck-rabbit is the Sears Tower, and maybe the image from *Jurassic Park* is the Trump Tower. I suppose the Poussin painting would be the Art Institute. Anyway, the idea is that the further away from the center you go, the lower the buildings get, until you're out in some far suburb or farming community.

    For me, this allegory raises two possibilities: in one, buildings just get lower, and every picture is a metapicture, as Whitney and Gustav suggested. Some boring, everyday pictures, of the kind that I think we're talking around, would have metapictoriality, but in homeopathic strengths. In the other possibility, the city would be divided, as Chicago actually is, into wards and postal codes and census blocks, and some buildings—some pictures—would really not be metapictures. It just wouldn't be helpful to try to talk about metapictoriality, or even desire, in relation to those images. I wonder if we could muster any interest in such things, or if we're all city dwellers.

Tom Mitchell: If you lived in L.A., there'd be no way to make those divisions!

James Elkins: In my experience, people who cite your idea of metapictures are sometimes attracted to it from great distances. They aren't studying the duck-rabbit; they're studying Byzantine icons, like Clemena, or any number of other things. So the homeopathic model is the default one, and in my reading, it's the one that draws people to your work. But on the other hand, there are the existing accounts of self-reflexivity in other areas, such as the Hegelian models Whitney mentioned, and they are not structured as continua.

    In my experience, looking at the work of people in various parts of the world who are influenced by your work, the attraction of the metapicture, the desires of pictures, and other ideas, is dependent on the permission people give themselves to not notice when there might be boundaries between their work and the images and concepts you develop.

Sunil Manghani: Tom, Jim and I thought it might be interesting if we end this seminar by letting you ask us questions.

Tom Mitchell: Okay, fine. I wonder if I could begin by asking for a show of hands: how many of you believe that visual culture has failed?

James Elkins: You might have to say which visual culture!

Tom Mitchell: No, I don't want to say that. The title of your event this year is *Farewell to Visual Studies*. All in favor of saying farewell to visual studies, and getting on to something else, raise your hands.

[*No one raises their hands; everyone laughs.*]

Sunil Manghani: My feeling is that from the UK perspective, art history departments have said farewell to visual studies, and media and film studies departments have turned away from it. But as a topic, I don't see it failing.

Whitney Davis: I have some deep discontents with visual culture studies, but doing the reading for this event, the diversity and an internal resilience of visual studies on the international stage is becoming forcibly evident. We have heard alternative histories; Gustav began with a fabulous presentation of early twentieth-century visual studies that I knew little about, and we'll be talking about *Bildwissenschaft* and other possibilities as the week goes further along. So it becomes difficult to say farewell to any particular visual studies. That doesn't mean one can't be discontented with visual studies operating in particular situations. So it might be irresponsible to have the show of hands until the very end of the week.

Tom Mitchell: Is there any consensus that there is some form of visual form, whether it is located in England or elsewhere, or a practice that uses a particular methodology, that we want to say goodbye to?

[Everyone: from here on, we were all answering Tom's question. If you'd like to interpolate your own "farewell" in the following pages, please do.]

Gustav Frank: I would put it the other way around, echoing your formulations: there are many ecosystems of visuality and vision that are not yet properly researched and deserve our attention. I think visual culture studies and Bildwissenschaft just fail to address problems in the right way: the task is there and most of us who have come to projects affiliated with visual studies have a similar feeling.

James Elkins: I have been accumulating lists of particular kinds of inquiries I'd like to say farewell to, and a complementary list of visual studies' unfulfilled promises, things I'd like to see visual studies do.

We have talked about one sort of farewell: the question of how easy visual studies is and how it might be made more difficult, slower, and less confident. We've also talked about three unfulfilled promises. One is the problem of making visual images work in visual studies instead of using them as illustrations of theories; another, as Gustav just said, is the idea that visual studies should look at the visual world outside of modern and contemporary visualities. I have others in mind, but at the moment I'll just add a third absence: visual studies has not developed a discourse about its own history, its historiography. No matter what else we accomplish this week, we have already started some lines of thinking about visual studies' histories. That hasn't been done before, and so no matter how the week turns out, the book we produce should mark a moment in the history of visual studies in which it becomes more aware of its multiple histories, its deeper historical connections.

But before we get too far into our conversations, I'd like to ask for another show of hands. Following on from what Sunil said, and from Tom's mention of the UK, I'd like to know: How many of us have read, let's say, two issues of the *Journal of Visual Culture* in, let's say, the last two years? I mean, for whom is this a crucial journal that needs to be watched?

[*Six or seven hands out of thirty-one people.*]

Tom Mitchell: Let me ask: how many have read *Critical Inquiry* in the last two years?

[*At least twenty hands.*]

Michael Holly: And how many of you know that there's going to be a new international visual studies association?

[*All hands up.*]

Michael Holly: Not that I necessarily approve of everything that goes under the rubric of visual studies. The one arena in which I think visual studies has failed is in regarding images older than the last hundred years. When we first conceived of visual studies, it was to consist of contemporary questions, rubbing against old art—Renaissance art, Assyrian art, medieval art. With a few exceptions, that hasn't happened.

Tom Mitchell: You mean like duck-rabbits next to Poussin paintings?

Michael Holly: Yes, sure. I was once so excited about visual studies in its infancy because it promised to shake up the complacency of its parent, traditional art history. But I think the questions of visual studies are no longer being refracted through older art.

James Elkins: I agree. Gustav mentioned that, and it's also on my own list of my unfulfilled promises. I'll add another lack or absence in visual studies: non-art images, scientific images. Again there are exceptions, and again they're at the table here. Michael and Keith are among the most prominent exemplars of writing from something that might be called a visual studies perspective, but about premodern images. And of course Lisa Cartwright and I have written about scientific imaging practices.

Whitney Davis: If you define visual studies as visual culture studies, the question of farewell would have to be played out in a certain way. If you define visual studies as I do, distinguishing visual culture studies from visual studies, so that visual culture studies might be a subset of visual studies, then the prospect is different. Visual studies might include ophthalmologists, psychiatrists, and engineers. The field wouldn't just be the study of images they produce, but of their substantive accounts of vision. That's something that hasn't even been encountered in visual culture studies. The fact that that conversation hasn't happened in visual culture studies would be a reason for me to bid farewell to visual culture studies in that sense, but the farewell would be in the service of that wider-ranging visual studies.

Tom Mitchell: I think it depends on where you put the emphasis when you pronounce these terms. When you say "visual culture studies," I hear "cultural studies with a visual emphasis." There is also the notion that visual studies was just the study of visual culture, that is, of the social constructedness of the visual field, in a manner that was distinct from cultural studies. I'm always wanting to keep the study of visual culture at a little bit of a distance from the default position of cultural studies. It does include ophthalmology, neuroscience, and other fields.

Lisa Cartwright: I find it curious to see ophthalmology and these other technical fields mentioned as things that haven't been addressed. There is a very active field of science studies among people who claim to do visual studies, but don't come out of a

culture studies tradition. These people study knowledge production, ontology, and epistemology, other issues in science. What I'm seeing here is therefore a need for new cross-cultural combinations.

Whitney Davis: I might have been misunderstood, because I'm not saying farewell to that—I'm saying farewell to whatever has prevented the conversation you're discussing from gaining traction.

James Elkins: I wonder if the now-traditional discourse about visual studies' interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, postdisciplinarity, subdisciplinarity, or indisciplinarity doesn't in fact work to obscure the kind of connection Whitney has in mind. Whitney, as I understand it, you're not asking for science studies as much as discourse about the findings of science—the unfulfilled potential expansion of visual studies into a field that would engage and utilize the actual findings of vision and visuality outside the historical disciplines. That kind of encounter is radically outside even the most science-oriented of visual studies projects, including mine. It's a subject we'll be discussing later in the week.

Gustav Frank: In all the varieties of our subject, whether it's Anglo-American visual studies or Bildwissenschaft, there are strong traditions in operation, whether they're art history, cultural studies, or others. Alongside ideas like the metapicture, there has to be image critique that involves the practices that guide the different projects. For Bildwissenschaft, for example, there has to be a strong image critique of the specific forms of art history against which Bildwissenschaft defines itself. This brings us close to what Sunil has proposed, a kind of image critique that involves the historians' own practices.

Elise Goldstein: I haven't heard anyone talk about who visual studies serves. What is the audience of visual studies? As I know it, from my experience in graduate school, it's an audience that's arranged by interest and topic, rather than by discipline, narrative, or methodology.

James Elkins: *Theorizing Visual Studies*—the anthology I'm working on that is written by graduate students—certainly fits that description. One of the things I've been toying with for the introduction, which is the only part of the book I'm writing, is some kind of graphic that would show the discontinuity between all the normative interests

of the field, including its disciplinary affiliations, its methodologies, and its theoretical sources, from the constellation of interests that the graduate students exhibit. That disconnection doesn't necessarily mean that the new work is radical in relation to some field called visual studies. It might have different radicalities, because the students write from different positions of ignorance or insouciance about disciplines, methods, and commonly cited theorists.

Elise Goldstein: I wonder if there's a risk in thinking of visual studies in the way we have been, as a shared geekery. Visual studies might be shared obsessions, rather than shared disciplinary ambitions.

Elisabeth Friedman: Our visual culture MA program is housed in a school of art with large studio and art education graduate programs. Visual culture has been celebrated for its interdiscipinarity or postdisciplinarity, but I find that to be limited in our context, where it is often taken as yet further proof of a theory-practice divide. For example, many of our favorite theoretical sources contain implicit concepts of pedagogy that we don't choose to pursue—what does it mean to teach or learn to make images? Here it seems more important to ask about pedagogy than about the nature of visual culture.

James Elkins: In smaller programs like yours, where art-making is ostensibly integrated with academic subjects like art history and visual studies, it becomes, at least for me, glaringly obvious that visual studies isn't interested in questions of making. Again there are counterexamples: Sunil is interested in making, and I understand Whitney has been visiting MFA students' studios here this week—but those are exceptions. Visual studies isn't much different from art history in its lack of interest in what might be gleaned from studio practice—from actually producing visual images. That's on my list of lacunae: visual studies remains disengaged from the phenomenology and from the empirical data of making images.

Paul Frosh: Tom, to continue answering your question: my model for the interdiscipinarity of visual studies would be hospitable disputation. By that I mean a field of tolerant but passionate disagreement. My preference would therefore be for a visual studies that is informed by "strong" theories and methodologies, rather than a radi-

cally heterogeneous "supermarket" of more modest ideas and methods. Such heterogeneity can be stultifying: there is no need for ardent debate because one can pick any kind of approach without having to justify one's choice. In a suitably hospitable intellectual culture "strong" theories are useful precisely because they produce disagreement, inviting dissent as well as assent, and help give shape to a common core of concerns about which we care—and often differ—passionately, rather than producing an amorphous ensemble of disparate interests which do not connect to one another, however mutually tolerant they may be. For example, I was and remain dissatisfied with the way that the reading list for this seminar has produced a de facto canon of topics and texts for visual studies, a canon that I think imposes an overtly art-historical bias and largely ignores the social sciences, especially communications. As a result, however, I've had to think deeply about what is missing from this list, how it relates to the things we have discussed and read, and to advocate and defend my position in what has been a very hospitable—and also disputatious—environment. I think this is a good model for the field as a whole, especially since canonization and institutionalization are well underway.

Tom Mitchell: If anyone is hardcore visual studies, it's me. I just do it, and occasionally theorize about it. In the mid-1990s, the University of Chicago Art History department had a discussion about whether it should change its name to Art History and Visual Culture. I actually argued against it, because I want to be a blister on the rump of academia. I don't want to have a letterhead, and institutional status. In the 1990s, at least, visual studies was still enjoying its status as a marginal, dangerous field of study, a supplement that wasn't easily swallowed. My fundamental epistemology is anarchist. Paul Feyerabend's *Against Method* is my methodological bible. It shows that scientific discovery (and humanistic knowledge as well) are best fostered by speculative experimentation and rigorous questioning of received ideas and procedures. Methods are, as they say, foolproof, which means any fool can master them—and vice versa. The only reliable method is to be very, very intelligent. So I want to prolong the indisciplinary moment of visual studies as long as possible.

James Elkins: I think that's an appropriate last word: farewell to the incipient institutionalization of visual studies, and its defanging.

<CN> 5

Histories: *Bildwissenschaft*

Here and in the following Section, the subject was the German-language tradition known as Bildwissenschaft. *Readings included a collection of translated tables of contents, which were intended to give the participants a sense of the breadth of the literature. In addition, participants read a number of essays by Horst Bredekamp, Hans Belting, Gottfried Boehm, and others.* Fo*r some of the conversation transcribed here, participants also read texts assigned by Keith Moxey, related to the comparison of Anglo-American and German-language writing. They included essays by Georges Didi-Huberman, Gottfried Boehm, and Tom Mitchell.* T*he transcription is excerpted from seminars led by Gustav Frank, James Elkins, and Keith Moxey. The participants also read Moxey's essay comparing Anglo-American and German-language studies of the visual.*

James Elkins: This is our last seminar on history. It's got a somewhat ridiculous burden, because Gustav and I are going to try to present something resembling a précis of a really enormous literature, the German-language writing that is now usually called *Bildwissenschaft*. It's an impossible task, but it is only part of what Sunil, Gustav, and I wanted to do, because there are actually more visual studies, in the plural, than just Anglo-American and German-language. We don't have the faculty here to address that, but our fifteen Fellows are the most international we've ever had. In my count, we have people at this table who are either from, or working in Switzerland, the Netherlands, Finland, China, Portugal, Denmark, Japan, the UK, Germany, Israel, Spain, the U.S., and Iceland. And the people who write Assessments for the book can, we hope, broaden that. I think there are at least five differentiable strains of visual studies:

1. Anglo-American visual studies, which has been theorized and practiced mainly in the UK and the U.S., but also in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and various countries mainly in the north of Europe, including the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Estonia, and Lithuania.

2. German-language Bildwissenschaft, which is our subject this morning, and is practiced in German-speaking countries and also read, to a lesser degree, in Scandinavia.

3. Latin American visual studies, which in my experience is more affiliated with visual communication and semiotics, and less with identity, gender, and politics. It occurs, sporadically, in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Paraguay, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Mexico.

4. Scandinavian *Bildvetenskap*, which began in the 1970s.

5. The situation is entirely different in China, where a long tradition of art pedagogy has linked art-making to its study. To use the Western terms, "art history," "aesthetics," and "studio art" are mingled. Art historians and people interested in visual studies are commonly also painters. Like art history, the strains of visual studies that happen in China are commonly mixed with aesthetics.

So this session on Bildwissenschaft should ideally be the second in a longer series of seminars.

Gustav Frank: Okay. First, there is a problem of translation both sides: even though people in the Bildwissenschaft area have an acceptable knowledge of English, visual studies tends to be in the first footnote of publications, as if to say, There is a Tom Mitchell out there, and now I have acknowledged that, and I can continue with more pertinent references.

James Elkins: On the other side, I think it needs to be said that English-language scholars very rarely read the German literature, and that means they are also often unaware of its extent. There's a conceit in academia that language competence isn't a barrier, but I think it is.

Gustav Frank: I will begin by naming two general points. First is the difference between *visuelle Kultur*, which is often cited as a precursor of current practices, and both Bildwissenschaft and visual studies. That difference is institutional. Visuelle Kultur originated from people outside academia; some were independent intellectuals in the Weimar Republic. This is quite different from the situation of Bildwissenschaft or visual studies.

A second difference is perspectival. We have been looking at the history of visual studies as seen by insiders: Michael Holly, Lisa Cartwright, Tom Mitchell. Today, Jim and I will be presenting outsiders' perspectives. I am trained, in the German tradition, but not in Bildwissenschaft; Jim is an art historian, but not trained in the German tradition.

Historically, art history has been in the center of developments in Bildwissenschaft. There are conventionally three sorts of practices, identified with three scholars.

Hans Belting followed an art-historical tradition by occupying the chair in art history in Munich in 1983; he was a follower of Heinrich Wölfflin and Hans Sedlmayr. His inaugural lecture was called "The End of Art History." At the time, the art market and media connections were at the point where they seemed to overtake art history; and at the same time, society at large was demanding information about images that aren't art, and art history was not responding. Later, Belting developed his answer into an account of "image anthropology," which has gotten a fierce critique, especially from feminist art historians, because the anthropos in Belting's account is definitely a middle-aged, middle-class white male.

A second practice is associated with Gottfried Boehm, who we will consider later. His phenomenological account is predicated on concepts of iconic difference and the inherent properties of images.

Third, in this conventional listing, is work associated with Horst Bredekamp in Berlin. It is interested in sciences and technical imagery, and it overlaps with subjects in science studies. The Humboldt-Universität has links to the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin, and we have also been asked to read a paper by one of the three current directors there, Lorraine Daston.

There is a specific sense in which Bildwissenschaft is art history, and vice versa, in Germany. If you look at the job postings, you see calls for people doing picture theory (*Bildtheorie*) and for people doing the history of visual media (*Bildmedien*), and at the end of the day it's always art historians who get those jobs, even if they never participated in one of the three practices I just named. As Michael Holly said in relation to the publishing label "visual studies," it's a matter of names: it is accepted

that art history should somehow be Bildwissenschaft. Of course, not every art historian would like to be called a *Bildwissenschaftler*.

Around the principal practices of Bildwissenschaft I would constellate philosophy, media studies, semiotics, and other fields. All of them share what I would call an antisemiotic affect. In relation to semiotics, I'll quote from an interview Horst Bredekamp gave: he says "the *Bild* is put in preventative detention by the word." That's strong language, because it puts the word in the role of the Nazi, and the image in the role of the Jew, or the politically unwelcome leftist. Nevertheless semiotics had, and has, a strong influence on Bildwissenschaft. I was interested in Göran Sonesson's work for a while, but there are issues with semiotics' insistence that every image must be decoded, deciphered, read. Roland Posner's position is interesting: he has a kind of code minimalism. He says deciphering isn't what's interesting: the principles that organize human interaction are of more interest. The theory is about interaction, not code.

In relation to philosophy, there is also a strong antisemiotic interest. Bernhard Waldenfels's books are examples, and so are Lambert Wiesing's. He has a book called *Artifizielle Präsenz*. A person like Klaus Sachs-Hombach, for example, whose work is very much in the analytic tradition, feels that he has to incorporate a certain part of semiotics; at one point he says the image is a sign that is "close to perception."

So much for semiotics and philosophy. A third element in the constellation around Bildwissenschaft is media studies. It appears as a dangerous supplement, or a potential adversary. This is especially true of the media-hardware orientation of Friedrich Kittler, who argues for a technical a priori that supersedes interest in the contents of a text or image. He is interested in structures of agency and perception. Kittler wrote a book in 1981 proposing that there should be an "exorcism" of the spiritual out of the humanities (as in the word *Geisteswissenschaften*, meaning humanities, but literally "spiritual sciences"): that's a claim against the Hegelian tradition, against hermeneutics. Boehm's iconic difference, on the other hand, builds on the hermeneutic tradition, especially as it is developed in his teacher, Hans-Georg Gada-

mer. Kittler's appearance in the 1980s was really shocking, not just for people engaged in what became Bildwissenschaft, but for people in the humanities generally. That's why I would place media studies as an adversary of Bildwissenschaft.

Gustav Frank: We are running short of time, and I want to be sure to say something about the other authors we set as readings. Regarding Hans Belting, I will be brief and, I hope, provocative. Many of the issues that Boehm and Bredekamp raise could be seen in the light of early twentieth-century approaches to what I called visuelle Kultur: the language problem, the body problem, and so forth. When I first read Belting's *Bild-Anthropologie*, I thought, the book doesn't even make use of the language and body problems current in the 1920s: it is deeply concerned with nineteenth-century historicist thought. Especially in the passages where he talks about death: that's how mid-nineteenth-century realism in literature was haunted by what archaeology has unearthed. They were overwhelmed by all the things that history was showing them—the heavy weight of all the dead that historicism revealed. It is a presemiotic way of thinking about the question of replacement, taking the semiotic procedure literally with a lightly animistic undertone. It even opposes Lessing's division of corporeal and arbitrary signs and therefore is pre-Enlightenment thought.

Keith Moxey: It's certainly a good question as to what sort of anthropology this might be, this *Bild-Anthropologie*. You're arguing it's presemiotic. I would argue it's antisemiotic. I think that this is the reaction of someone who has been through the semiotic mill and come out the other side. Semiotics doesn't quite do what Belting thinks semiotics should do. And that's not surprising: he's a student of the middle ages—his book *Bild und Kult* (Likeness and Presence) argues that as religious images begin to lose their magic, as their sanctity leaks out of them, it is replaced by aesthetics and the affirmation of the place of the artist and art. I'm being terribly reductive, of course—

James Elkins: Less than our account of the entirety of Bildwissenschaft!

Keith Moxey: Anyway, according to this account images are more than what they say, they have a kind of magical status. Belting goes back to a presemiotic moment, for antisemiotic purposes.

Gustav Frank: Interestingly, it is also a pre-art interest.

James Elkins: It matters in our context that Hans's book is not anthropology in the Anglo-American sense, with its emphasis on interpretation and witness, on the emic and etic, on thick description, and so forth. It is also not the anthropology of the *October* "Questionnaire on Visual Culture," which was a largely empty label—a demonized anthropology set against art history. Belting's anthropology is Continental: it is one of the human sciences.

   I think of this as one aspect of the general problem of how he positions himself in relation to existing disciplines. In his recent conferences, exhibitions, and books under the title *Global Art Museum*, he considers contemporary worldwide practices of exhibition and curation, partly as a sociologist might, partly as an anthropologist might, but not as an art historian, an art theorist, or an art critic. I am interested in how he proposes to speak outside those and other disciplinary homes: after art history, aside from curation, outside the disciplinary philosophy of art. Where is he when he speaks?

Joana Cunha Leal: I just want to note that there is another tradition in which semiotics and phenomenology are not separate: the French tradition, with Louis Marin and Hubert Damisch, and even Daniel Arasse.

Inge Hinterwaldner: In the German-speaking area we could also mention Felix Thürlemann and Steffen Bogen from the University of Konstanz.

Keith Moxey: Yes. It's a binary opposition, which collapses.

Whitney Davis: Gustav, I thought you were absolutely right to draw attention the to logic of substitution in *Bild-Anthropologie*. I think it also pops up in Bredekamp's book, because much of the typology of *Bildakt* revolves around there being some pictorial acts that are substitutive. In David Summers's *Real Spaces*, there is a long chapter devoted to the meanings of masks and effigies, in terms of the shift from a substitutive functionality to the immediate legibility of their self-referentiality.

   It seems Belting's concern is not unique, but that he is adopting a special or nuanced position within a field that takes that problematic as a general one. After all, Gombrich also begins there, with his ethological account of substitution. It may end up looking like a nineteenth-century epistemology, but it is rooted in engagements that are broadly distributed, in several languages.

Lisa Cartwright: One more question about Belting. He says "recent debates in the journal *Imaging Science* and elsewhere belatedly abandon . . . the belief that scientific images are themselves mimetic in the same way in which we want and need images. In fact, they are specifically organized to address our visual naïveté and thus serve our bodies, as images have done forever." I am skeptical of the idea that mimesis is what gets transposed onto the technology; and it's historically inaccurate that such an abandonment happened in that journal. I wonder if some of us, perhaps you, Jim, who have done work on scientific images could address that.

James Elkins: For me that sort of assertion is a meter stick, indicating the distance from quantitative, scientifically engaged discourse and humanistic discourse. I just take it as a sign of his distance, and so I don't try to critique it directly except where it leads to theories that fail to connect to their scientific audiences—theories that only make sense to readers in the humanities.

Gustav Frank: Lisa, I think you're right about your concerns. The claims are disputable. But I think we have to jump now, to the Bredekamp readings. Sorry! Perhaps Bredekamp's concerns will help elucidate your question, because he is more deeply engaged with scientific imaging.

James Elkins: Bredekamp's research project, Das technische Bild, is the most visible example within Bildwissenschaft to engage with the technical specifics of non-art production, which are significantly absent in Boehm's and Belting's writing. I commissioned the essay we have read, because there was nothing in English. It is a good summary of their research, and it was done with his approval.

For us the question might be how this appears as a research position. The introduction is very succinct: it goes quickly from form, defined in terms of archaeology and morphology, to historicity. I would suggest that such an introduction would not be sufficient, in an Anglo-American context, to justify the particular technical account that follows.

Keith Moxey: I think the essay is an inadequate representation of what Bredekamp thinks he's up to. In a while we will be considering several of Bredekamp's texts, and that will give a better idea.

María Lumbreras Corujo: I especially like a book published in 2007 called *Das Technische Bild: Kompendium zu einer Stilgeschichte wissenschaftlicher Bilder*. It contains a varied ensemble of texts introducing the different facets of the project. An editorial opens the book summarizing its conception, and you also have a couple of texts that explain the theoretical and methodological concerns of the group. But there are also case studies presenting the research of each member, and a long interview with Horst Bredekamp in which he talks about his interest in the description of images. Finally, there are shorter, more didactic texts defining key concepts, methods, and shared themes such as "comparison," "visualization," or "objectivity and evidence." The book is a collection of heterogeneous materials, but I think that, precisely because of that, it gives a sense of the richness of the project. What is particularly interesting about it is its commitment to reflecting on methodologies that allow a precise analysis of the visual.

Gustav Frank: Matthias Bruhn is the author of the second introduction to Bildwissenschaft, called *Das Bild: Theorie, Geschichte, Praxis* (2008); the first was Martin Schulz's *Ordnungen der Bilder* in 2005.

James Elkins: And although it's not our subject at the moment, I have to add that Gustav's book is the third introduction.

Gustav Frank: Bruhn's book was written in connection with Bredekamp, so I think it is a good representation of the Berlin project.

James Elkins: I agree, and we assigned the essay because it is the only accurate account of what the Berlin project was doing with technical images.

Gustav Frank: If we turn to Bredekamp himself, we could begin with the Galileo book, or the small book *Darwins Korallen*.

Keith Moxey: What interests me in *Darwins Korallen* is the methodology. I'll just briefly summarize it because we have only assigned one chapter. Bredekamp says Darwin found the visual metaphors for temporal change that were in use in his lifetime (more often than not an image of a tree) to be inadequate. In Bredekamp's narrative, Darwin was impressed by his discovery of different species of branching corals, where the branching goes in all directions, without a single trunk. What strikes Bredekamp is

that on the top of one page, Darwin has written, "I think," and below it, there is a doodle of a coral, which branches in all directions, unlike a family tree. It is clear that Darwin sees in this visual metaphor a way of avoiding the family tree model of evolution. The coral dies as it grows, and what survives supplants what dies. Bredekamp is especially interested in the fact that Darwin seems to be thinking with or through the diagram: "I think [diagram]." This isn't the same as Boehm's construction: it isn't as if the picture has meaning; it does have meaning, it is how Darwin thinks at that moment.

Whitney Davis: Keith, can you clarify what for you is interesting about Bredekamp's general approach, as opposed to the specific case? If the larger proposition is that a mental image structured later image-making, that doesn't seem at all to be a new thesis.

James Elkins: May I add a question to that one? My interest in Bredekamp's book is in its reception. It's a small book, literally. It's a very concise example of an image as a model, and there would be many other examples. But there is even an English-language review, by Rachael DeLue, so the book is pretty clearly taken to be exemplary and not just an example.

Keith Moxey: What struck me about Bredekamp's book, and also yours, Jim, *Visual Practices Across the University*, was the idea of thinking with images. Trying to find images that capture the invisible, that attempt to codify that which seems to be beyond perception. Using images as if they were languages.

María Lumbreras Corujo: Bredekamp says at some point in the book, "the picture is not a derivative or an illustration, but an active bearer [*Träger*] of the thinking process." I guess he understands the doodle as a medium that guides thought, as something that makes it possible to think in ways words alone can't.

Whitney Davis: In Bredekamp's example, the "I think" followed by the doodle is followed by a very famous and important discursive, algorithmic, and numerical statement by Darwin, which has been the subject of extensive commentary by generations of Darwin scholars. What does Darwin mean by the A, B, C and the 1, 2, 3?—and other examples of explicit codification? So I am not even sure if this is a good example of an image as a model, or image as thinking.

James Elkins: So, back to my interest in the reception: the book's reception might be due to a widespread interest in images as thought, as theory, as models. The idea is in Tom Mitchell's *Picture Theory*, and it's already come up several times this week.

Keith Moxey: Whitney, I don't think he is arguing the image replaces language. But the image is embedded in whatever claims Darwin was making.

Whitney Davis: Okay, so the image is part of the linguistic argument. That is a very different claim than that the image is doing conceptual work *tout court*.

Michael Holly: Why can't it be? Why can't we talk about the thought of the visual model?

Whitney Davis: Kant says human thought requires images. It's one of the deepest propositions of the Kantian system. It may be that we are seeing versions of this brought into the twentieth century through Heideggerian revisions—

Michael Holly: But that's human thought using images, that's not images determining or embodying or calling forth thought.

Gustav Frank: I'd like to make Bredekamp's case against Whitney. I think Bredekamp wants not only to show that science progresses with visual models, but to show the moment when visualizations go beyond anything that was later articulated in science textbooks. So Darwin goes beyond anything he later put forward in his theory. It is the surplus that interests him.

But then I would also like to register a criticism against Bredekamp's approach. I suspect he ends his inquiry too early, as soon as he proves his assumption. In his way of thinking, the scientist is a substitute for the artist. He presents Darwin and Galileo as artists: the books are implicitly about creativity and genius. That is fine, but he should keep going, and ask questions that extract these visualizations from their cultural isolation, which is not, for example, the splendid isolation of a genius. In this case, he might note the tree is a progressive, Enlightenment model and the coral is a nineteenth-century historicist model, with all its underlying dead branches. It entails skepticism about the historical process. I think *Darwins Korallen* needn't have been a small book, with a marginal publisher: it could have been a much bigger book.

Keith Moxey: I'd like to move on, and say something about Georges Didi-Huberman, who we have also read in preparation for this seminar, even though he does not write

in German. For him, there is an unconscious dimension to the work of art, which is something we have hardly touched on. He is often cited for his idea of anachronism, which appears in the essay we read: "we cannot produce a consistent notion of the image," he writes, "without a thinking about time that includes difference and repetition, symptom and anachronism." We have here an author very different from those we have encountered so far, in the sense that time is the vehicle for the recognition of the presentation of the image. Those are brief and inadequate words for a complicated essay.

James Elkins: Here's a thought experiment about Didi-Huberman. Imagine that the only theorist in visual studies was Tom Mitchell, so that we'd be taking all our conceptual and methodological cues from him. I think the world of visual studies, if not Bildwissenschaft, would still be recognizable. Lots would be missing, of course, but I don't want to press that model. I just want to contrast it to what visual studies, Bildwissenschaft, and art history would look like if Georges Didi-Huberman's books were the only ones on our library shelves. Our imaginations would be thronged with images of passion, of violence, of resurgent examples of the *Pathosformel*. Many of the things we have been talking about, such as popular imagery and advertising, would entirely vanish, and representation would be in perpetual crisis. I'm not at all saying this as a way of criticizing him: I'm suggesting that if art historians, in particular, really took him on board, instead of citing him in contained contexts, many of the issues we have been talking about up to now would have to appear fundamentally misguided, poorly formulated, or uninteresting. There is a great distance between his interests and those that can be assigned to disciplines, and perhaps—although now I'll be sounding like Žižek—perhaps that is why some disciplinary art history is so intensely and fitfully attracted to him.

Whitney Davis: I was surprised to see readings by Didi-Huberman in a list of visual studies reading. And I agree, Jim, the consequences of taking Didi-Huberman on board would be to eliminate vast swathes of what we have been reading as possible projects. That doesn't eliminate his work's interest: it is philosophically clear, but I have the sense that he really is an outlier for this particular set of issues.

Michael Holly: Visual studies cannot possibly accommodate someone like Georges Didi-Huberman unless we stretch our concepts beyond recognition. What fascinates me about him, even in translation, is the completely different rhetoric, or style of writing, which puts art history on a different register than it had been before. In that, his work is akin to visual studies. It shocks us into being somewhere else.

Elisabeth Friedman: Didi-Huberman's concept of art as symptom might be a shock to both art history and visual studies because the symptom resists historicity and language, which are central concerns of these fields.

Joana Cunha Leal: Didi-Huberman directed, along with Bernd Stiegler, Trivium's first number precisely on the "Iconic Turn." He presents himself there as feeling "si peu Français en France, si French (donc misunderstood) aux USA et si 'continental' dans une Allemagne intellectuelle beaucoup plus en travail et en dialogue que partout ailleurs" (not very French in France, too much French [therefore misunderstood] in the USA, and too "continental" in an intellectual Germany working and dialoging as nowhere else).

Whitney Davis: Just a footnote. If there is no serious theorist of the visual, visuality, or the image who cannot be included in visual studies, then it seems to me visual studies is in serious trouble. If there aren't the Didi-Hubermans about whom we could say, "This is discernibly different from what we are doing," then—

James Elkins: What about John Onians?

Whitney Davis: There is a group of such people, and I would be willing to include Didi-Huberman in that group.

Keith Moxey: I guess I disagree with you, Whitney, about the marginality of Didi-Huberman's project.

Whitney Davis: I'm not suggesting it is marginal at all. It's just a different kind of project from what we're considering.

Paul Frosh: I'm not an art historian, so I don't understand your comment, Jim. Why is he so out there, so different?

James Elkins: To use Michael's word, he is a shock to the system of art history in many ways. If the doctrine of anachronism were to be programmatically installed, it would

upset many art history departments. Our interest would be drawn to incandescent moments of failed representation, trauma, and subterranean motifs. Like Whitney, I'm not criticizing his work. I have read a lot of it, from *Phasmes* to *L'image survivante*. But visual studies might well receive his work as a different kind of shock than art history, and I think we all hope visual studies is still interested in what Michael has called the exciting early days, when all sorts of new theories rubbed up against old art.

Michael Holly: I liken the shock Didi-Huberman has given all of us to the effect of Warburg, a hundred years before; and Warburg is, of course, his own intellectual hero.

Anna Sigrídur Arnar: He does bring up a number of German and Austrian names; that's how I saw the connection. There's a kind of nostalgia for art history as it was before the Second World War—maybe not nostalgia, but he does look back to those sources and ask, as we did in Gustav's earlier session, "What would art history have become if these people's work hadn't been brutally interrupted?" He invites us to think about that which could have been, an alternate trajectory of art history had history taken a different course.

Keith Moxey: I think that's right, and I think he is central to our interests. He poses a direct challenge to certain well-worn paths into which art history has fallen. Whitney, I still don't see why Didi-Huberman would eliminate "vast swathes" of art history.

Whitney Davis: No. He would eliminate a number of the projects we have been discussing in visual studies: Nick Mirzoeff's work; the *Journal of Visual Culture*; some parts of what is unfolding in Bildwissenschaft. I think his work has a good deal of compatibility with other topics we have discussed, for example the commitment on the part of some art historians to the psychodynamics of the artwork.

Michael Holly: Neither visual studies, as it is constituted now, nor even the history of art, can welcome Didi-Huberman into their clubs. Their loss. His book on Fra Angelico, if anything, goes deeply into the visual, as no other study before it had done. He goes exhaustively into all the theological meanings that are packed into the San Marco frescoes, but then he says: Wait. There is still something left over, so many veils of meaning that no iconographic manual will be able to rend. Where to now?

Flora Lysen: I would say that visual studies should be preeminently equipped to accommodate Didi-Huberman. We need the concept of anachronism as a way to explain the rubbing of new theories or questions against objects from various time periods. Didi-Huberman shows how no one ever bothered to look at Fra Angelico's red splashes of paint in *Madonna of the Shadow*. He shows how our ways of looking and theorizing are "obscuring" parts of the image. He seems to blame Panofsky for clouding our perception of artworks, especially of formal elements such as paint and color, with an iconographical smoke screen. Regardless of who to blame for our blindness in front of certain images, Didi-Huberman's thoughts about our presentist looking at images from the past are absolutely central to visual studies, I would say.

James Elkins: We are running a bit short on time, and I wanted to be sure to include your own essay, Keith, "Visual Studies and the Iconic Turn." It is the only one in English—and, I think, the only one in any language—that tries to make parallels and contrasts between Bildwissenschaft and visual studies. One of your central terms there is presence and the idea of the encounter with the work—its place, the places between the seer and the seen—and I wonder if we might begin to take stock of our observations today by considering those concepts. Certainly all the talk of the "meaning" of images in these pages will have sounded very strange to Anglo-American readers in visual studies, as if it doesn't even belong in this book. We have left identity, gender, and social meanings far behind.

Gustav: This place in between: how is it constituted? Is it simply there? Is it constituted in virtue of the object?

Keith Moxey: We would have to go back to Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. But as you know, it's about the experience of the world, and not the knowledge of the world. Knowledge is built on the subject-object distinction.

James Elkins: Heidegger has an apposite concept, which I think would only deepen your skepticism, Gustav: the *Zwischen*, the place where being is constituted between beings, between things.

Michael Holly: This is all so funny, because when I met you, Keith, all those decades ago, you were a dyed-in-the-wool social historian. Any of this talk would have been

heresy, not to mention fluff. I can just hear your voice, objecting and dismissing. What happened? Have you had a conversion experience?

[*Laughter.*]

Keith Moxey: I think I grew up.

[*Louder laughter.*]

Inge Hinterwaldner: Perhaps we can think of the in-between not so much as a space as as an interaction. In the aesthetics of perception, for example, the idea is that the recipient or beholder is always already foreseen within the artifact. That can be made explicit by several "strategies" like repoussoir figures that direct the viewer's eyes. Taking this act of examination seriously, Boehm says a *Bild* can be conceived as an event or a process which enfolds gradually with the beholder's engagement.

Gustav Frank: But then you are back with the same problem: how do you conceptualize what you understand as the interaction?

Inge Hinterwaldner: We should of course think about what conceptualization of the beholder we imply. But I would characterize the interaction as a reflected process: visually analyzing the picture or image; registering where it leads the gaze; analyzing which elements play a role and what follows from them. If we can't adequately express some impressions at first glance, this is normal and does not at all mean that there is something mystical or even mysterious. The reasons might lie in the fact that we have to develop adequate concepts to grasp the given configuration resulting from the image producer's decisions, which have consequences for the reception process. Please note I am not saying we should try to reconstruct what the image producer might have intended. It seems more promising to extract the operating iconic logic, the way the image functions or show. (And I mean "showing" as the iconic mode of communicating.) Seeing this showing has to be learned and can be taught. In short, the interaction on the most elementary level can be seen as the informed and articulated dialogue between the specific showing of the single image and the tackling of this offer by the beholder.

Gustav Frank: Sure, that's what I was trained in as the classical and also the formalistically sophisticated interpretation and reception theory of the artwork, whether it's fine arts, literature, art house film, or photography. Inge, I could just parrot Jim's remark

that this will sound bewildering to Anglo-American ears in visual studies—bewildering because of its obvious lack of critical awareness regarding the fact that all the entities you take for granted are loaded with a lot of well-known theoretical or ideological assumptions. The beholder, the producer, and the image are neither natural nor empirical or neutral entities; they don't interact in a natural, neutral way. Thus the beholder probably loses sight of the materiality and objecthood that the picture can put on display. On the other side of the spectrum, even the space where the encounter takes place—the marketplace, church, gallery, or museum—is produced by a visible and invisible net of social rules and discourses. In this respect one could call Didi-Huberman's preferred situations of reception a historicist elitism, selecting the socially privileged or affectively most intense positions *devant l'image*.

Can we then solve the paradox that haunted Benjamin by seeing the shortcomings of both the vitalists' adoration of presence and the historicists' mantra of historicization? Can't we come to see that they share their core desires and obsessions?

Sunil Manghani: Inge, the point you make from Boehm, that we might conceive the image, or Bild, as an event that gradually enfolds and unfolds with the beholder's engagement makes me think of Panofsky's lovely vignette of being greeted by an acquaintance across the street—whereby we gradually come to "read" the "scene" in ever more detail. Tom Mitchell of course makes great play of this in *Picture Theory*. In fact he describes it as the "primal scene" of iconology.

James Elkins: As long as you've mentioned Tom, I should say that he has appropriated the word *Bildwissenschaft*. He presented a paper in 2005 at a conference I held in Ireland, on the "Four Fundamental Principles of *Bildwissenschaft*," but when he gave us the text for the book, that was changed to "Image Science." I think he was wanting to respond to Horst Bredekamp's essay, which he had published two years earlier in *Critical Inquiry*. Tom's use of *Bildwissenschaft* is completely adventitious.

María Lumbreras Corujo: Actually, he did publish an essay keeping the German word, in 2008.

Merja Salo: I accept this theory of image as presence, but what are the methods, the analytic tools, that it opens for us?

Inge Hinterwaldner: For me, the word "presence" is markedly different from "representation." In German we can use the word *Darstellung* to emphasize the specifically designed "presentation" rather than the reference. This can suggest a focus on how things are depicted. We can apply a variety of established methodological tools to analyze the mode of depiction. I personally prefer to examine the formal aspects and composition of images or pictures closely, and then to proceed to integrate a wider context and theoretical framework.

Merja Salo: It was 1994 when the pictorial turn happened; it's been fifteen years, so its effects should be visible by now. We should have wonderful results based on the theory of image as presence. As far as I know, in Finland, the projects inspired by the pictorial turn are incomplete.

Keith Moxey: Well, there is the mass of publications that Gustav and Jim have been discussing: thirty books to be published by Eikones.

James Elkins: Two ancillary points, Merja, that bear on the dissemination of this particular concept of presence. *Was ist Ein Bild?*, the book that has Boehm's essay proposing the iconic turn, appeared in 1994, but the essay had been scheduled for another publication in 1991, and he says it was written in the late 1980s. Tom Mitchell's expression "pictorial turn" first appeared in 1994. And then, regarding Eikones: each year, on the site visit, I proposed setting aside some of their considerable funds to produce a book a year in Chinese, Spanish, English, and French. As of this moment, they have one book scheduled to appear in English. It's a real pity, and it has hugely delayed the reception of Boehm's ideas. Belting's work has been translated into Chinese, English, French, and Spanish, but Bredekamp is virtually unknown. Not a single one of his books has even appeared in English.

Michael Holly: This ontological turn, as I would call it, is maybe fifteen years old, but it seems to be garnering greater attention. It is growing from within visual studies, challenging it from the inside. As a reaction to the challenge, we turn around and try to fit it into this recently established category of visual studies when we're talking now about something new, something different. Let's celebrate it and see how far it takes us.

Gustav Frank: In the run-up to this event, I had a look at the major history of German art, which is now eight volumes long. I wondered: after fifteen years of the pictorial and iconic turn, how much visual studies, Bildwissenschaft, new art history, and social history of art have made their way into the heart of the discipline, as it is exemplified by this publication?

Whitney Davis: Including Barbara Lange—

Gustav Frank: Yes, she was my coauthor for our book *Einführung in die Bildwissenschaft*, and she's the author of the final volume, on the twentieth century. I was astonished to find hardly any imprint of the newer work. In Barbara's volume there is gender, identity, class issues, and the subject of the GDR, media but without any visual studies or *bildwissenschaftliche* imprint. Volumes 6 and 7, which I frequently use, aren't even really affected by the social history of art. Is this the same in other countries, as Merja says of Finland?

Keith Moxey: Well, if we're talking about collections that function as handbooks of art history—

James Elkins: Like Oxford Art Online—

Keith Moxey: Then you can count on them to have deep reservations about expanding art history beyond the canon.

Michael Holly: This is also where visual studies has failed, as I keep arguing. Visual studies might not have ossified if it had paid more attention to the premodern practices that art history continues to study.

Whitney Davis: Why would it take less than fifteen or twenty years for these concerns to be expressed? Consider Chris Wood and Alexander Nagel's project to think of an "anachronic Renaissance." I'm not claiming that they are literate in Boehm and Bredekamp at all, but you can see in their project the persistence of pictorial imaging practices through the retemporalization of the Renaissance, that they are taking on board something like echoes of some of the work we are considering. I think it's pretty exciting: no matter how incomplete its theorizations might be, it does suggest that these models can potentially be put into operation in conventional, empirical terms, by art historians who perceive themselves to be archival, archaeological, and forensic.

Joana Cunha Leal: In Portuguese scholarship, the problem of applying visual studies is not the subjects that visual studies considers, but the issue of methodology and theory. I mean, there is a considerable devotion to the study of artifacts without "major art" status (ceramics, furniture, goldsmith's work, or ordinary building typologies), but they are unaware of a theoretical framework, or any problematic recognizable as visual studies.

María Lumbreras Corujo: In Spain, the works of Bredekamp and Boehm haven't had much diffusion because of the language barrier. Belting's *Bild-Anthropologie*, which was translated in 2007, has been widely read, but I don't think that the ideas he develops in this book have had a great impact on the Spanish scholarship so far. Interestingly, though, in the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, the graduate program includes a seminar on Bildwissenschaft taught by Linda Báez Rubí, who was a postdoctoral fellow in the Graduirtenkolleg Bild–Medium–Körper at the Hochschüle für Gestaltung in Karlsruhe. I know that some graduate students in Mexico have been discussing these theoretical models and are trying to integrate them in their own work. Many of them, by the way, work with premodern objects such as early modern religious images, and Linda herself is a specialist in late medieval and early modern visual rhetoric and mnemonics. Also, the Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte in Buenos Aires invited Hans Belting to teach a seminar on image anthropology a couple of years ago. I don't know about other places in Latin America, but it seems that Bildwissenschaft is disseminating through some Spanish-speaking countries.

James Elkins: Keith, it's interesting that your essay comparing visual studies and Bildwissenschaft appeared in 2005, so even though it is still unique, it belongs in the second decade of visual studies, which was our subject in Seminar 3. It was an untimely contribution, and as far as I know it has not been discussed in print until now. In this way we contribute, incrementally, to the accumulation of visual studies' and Bildwissenschaft's awareness of their links.

<CN> 6

Image, Meaning, and Power

Despite the diversity of Bildwissenschaft, *the program called Eikones in Basel plays an immense role in Bildwissenschaft. The conversation transcribed here begins with the role and the major focus of that research group and its degree program. The discussion then turns to the generative terms of that program, including image, meaning, and power, and the ways they are construed in other scholarship.*

James Elkins: We don't have a predetermined order for exploring these materials, so I thought I might begin with Gottfried Boehm. Aside from the usual conferences and so forth, my own engagement with *Bildwissenschaft* is that for the last five years, since its inception, I have been on the site-review panel for a large image-research institute in Basel, directed by Boehm. It is called Eikones, and it is funded by the Swiss government; one of our Fellows, Inge Hinterwaldner, has been involved since the beginning. It is now entering its second phase, and Boehm will be retiring. The Boehm years, if I can call them that, have been especially interesting to me, because Eikones presented him with an opportunity or a forum, on an unprecedented scale, to develop his interests. I've been specially concerned to see how his phenomenological and ontological interests work when he needs to respond to technical and scientific research projects of the sort that first-generation phenomenology excluded.

Eikones is promising about thirty books in three different series—you've read the tables of contents of some, and we've brought along some others, including Inge's— and so in a few years, even if the new director, Ralph Ubl, changes the institute's direction, they will be among the principal publishers in Bildwissenschaft and German-language art history, philosophy, and criticism.

I have the site-review documents here, and I'd like to quote from a few passages that have to do with Eikones's conceptual foundations. Again, this is a drastic compression of a massive project, and all I want to do it telegraph some points that can

orient our discussion. These are official documents, and they are produced in English—that's a requirement of the Swiss National Science Foundation, which funds Eikones—so they are carefully crafted and representative.

First I want to note the title of the enterprise is itself multiple. Eikones is not the only title they use, even on site. There are three other options, which are on the title pages of their documents: they also call themselves NFS Bildkritik ("Swiss National Science Foundation Image Criticism"); "Iconic Criticism," in English; and that English title has a subtitle, also in English, "The Power and Meaning of Images." The multiple titles are pertinent because they attach to Boehm's philosophic claims.

In the first annual report, 2007, the first paragraph says the purpose of Eikones is to investigate "the power and meaning of images." That phrase, "power of images," was in English even in discussions, although the resonance of the English-language phrase wasn't opened for discussion—for example, David Freedberg's expression wasn't usually cited.

Whitney Davis: When it was translated back into German, what word was used?

James Elkins: *Macht*—

María Lumbreras Corujo: That word has been linked to Bildwissenschaft from the beginning. One of the best-known anthologies in the field is *Iconic Turn: Die neue Macht der Bilder*. It also appears in Bredekamp's writings and in Boehm's *Wie Bilder Sinn erzeugen*.

James Elkins: The expression "power and meaning of images" is divided into three parts. The first is called "iconic theology," which includes the study of iconoclasm, iconophilia, and iconophobia; the second is "ornamentation and iconic power"; and the third is "image politics."

The second was dissolved after a time; during the first few years there was a project to fundamentally redefine ornament. Eikones had several of these special groups dedicated to intensive conceptualization. They were sometimes hampered by our site visits, because our panel did not always agree that the theorizations were helpful or well-defined; but there were also inherent limitations posed by Eikones's size. In 2007, Eikones has thirty-four researchers and a graduate college with thirteen scholars. Its modules, clusters, and groups changed over time, but in 2007 there were six

modules: "The power of images / image politics"; "Image, architecture, and word"; "The image and time"; "The image and writing"; "Literary text as iconic criticism"; and "The epistemic image," which was visualization in science and technology. Because thirty-four people had to be distributed across six modules, there wasn't much opportunity to cover the entirety of any given subject, or to consistently work to apply new concepts. Eikones had an enormous ambition to speak about images in a fundamental way, but it wasn't always possible given the number of researchers and the fact that the students had to continue to produce dissertations that would be viable for their future careers. The situation was analogous to the situation of some graduate students in visual studies programs, who need to make sure they're employable.

Michael Holly: Were these visiting scholars, or permanent staff?

Inge Hinterwaldner: Eikones has four-year cycles: research topics—Jim mentioned the ones of the first period—are defined for this time span. The scholars (predocs and postdocs) apply with their research projects and are given four years at Eikones; the graduate college scholars are given three years. We had also some visiting Fellows (usually postdocs and professors); they resided at Eikones for a few weeks or months at a time.

Keith Moxey: Did they accept applications from international scholars?

James Elkins: Yes. One of our briefs on the panel was to monitor the "advancement of women" and issues of diversity. As a North American, I often found myself having to say that race and ethnicity should also be considered, along with the "advancement of women"; and when it came to diversity, the conversation tended to center on the disproportionate representation of German scholars as opposed to Swiss or Austrian scholars. But I don't want to give the wrong impression: they did try to be as international as possible; it just wasn't as diverse as some other institutions, especially in North America or the UK, and that is significant for the overall coherence of the program and its affiliation with Bildwissenschaft.

Well, there is a tremendous amount more that could, and should, be said about Eikones, and I hope that sometime a history will be written that will continue this kind of discussion. I just want to make one more point, related to the third component of

"the meaning and power of images," called "image politics." I also ended up representing Anglo-American visual studies when I had to comment on the relatively few dissertations, modules, clusters, and other units that had to do with the social dimensions of images. Here is how the social life of images is described in the 2008 document: "this cluster turns to an area that could not be sufficiently addressed at the beginning of our project. We will focus on how the image functions in, and participates in, the social field, with an emphasis on 'practice.'" (There was a connection to the local Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst, and a couple of people interested in production, especially in visual communications and design.) "Interestingly, as images are immediately legible in their self-reference, they seem sufficient unto themselves, even as their use and function are embedded in a wide range of practice, including science, technology, art, and economy." I think this sentence begins in a way familiar to Anglo-American readers, but swerves toward the kind of technical analysis of reception that is closer to other strands of Bildwissenschaft, such as Horst Bredekamp's. The following sentence mentions "diagrams, circuits, and photographs." In the five years I've been visiting Eikones, issues like gender, identity, politics, and society have never made more than intermittent and bracketed appearances.

Perhaps we could turn to some of Gottfried Boehm's texts now, to see some of his principal conceptualizations. I'd like to open that discussion by quoting some lines from a text that Gustav and I did not assign, but Gottfried himself assigned when he was here, at the 2008 Stone Art Theory Seminar called *What Is an Image?* I'm not sure if this has been published, either in English or German; I'm going to quote from the text he provided. It's called "Indeterminacy: On the Logic of the Image." It has some of the clearest formulations of his thoughts about the nature of images, and it is significant that he proposes logic, from the beginning, as a category. He writes: "By 'the logic of images' we mean a manner of generating meaning that is particular to the images themselves, and can be derived only from them. We are working from the premise that images add something important to our language, our concepts, and our knowledge, that can only be communicated through images." There are two qualifications. He says he is interested in the "oscillation" or "indeterminacy" of the visual and the linguistic, and he remarks that "this contrast, or oscillation can be described as

iconic difference, whereby it is also stated that the initially only visual relationship can be treated 'as' one that is full of meaning, and thus attains logical status." It is a very unusual claim, and contains the qualification that iconic difference can be treated "as" a relation that has meaning. The claim here is that there is a resemblance to meaning, an analogue to meaning. If it were meaning, pictures would be folded back into language. This is what's meant by "meaning" in the expression "power and meaning of images." It is very far from Anglo-American formulations. These expressions—iconic difference, iconic logic—are parts of a technical lexicon of about a half dozen terms; they are crucial for whatever sense can be made of his project.

Inge Hinterwaldner: From the passages you quoted (and from the rest of Boehm's texts I am familiar with), I do not see the necessity to speak of "as if meaning" in confrontation with images. To relate meaning (and also content, logic, or interpretation) solely to language or semiotics: wouldn't that already be a strong statement presupposing certain premises? The philosophical hermeneutics tradition (Heidegger, Gadamer) shows other options. Therefore, Boehm emphasizes the compatibility of Gadamer's and Plessner's accounts with the study of images or "nonlinguistic expressions."

Keith Moxey: I think this is a serious attempt to do something about the significance of images, other than a semiotic analysis, apart from what Göran Sonesson did, and the French Canadian semiotician—

James Elkins: Fernande Saint-Martin.

Keith Moxey: Boehm's project is an attempt to get around what were seen to be failed attempts. Nelson Goodman was the architect of the idea that images are not like words, that they come at us all at once, that they are not a linear system, not a time-based system. Goodman called this quality of images, which prevents their being taken apart into systems of signs, density. Boehm's work seems to me to be an alternative. How might images make meaning, or suggest meaning? Jim chose his words very carefully, because even if you claim that images make meaning, you treat the image as if it were full of meaning.

James Elkins: I wonder if it might be useful to distinguish between different rejections of semiotics. The rejection on Gottfried Boehm's part is consistent, and has a nameable set of texts against which it poses itself. But then there's the rejection of semiotics in

Anglo-American visual studies, which is structured around the distinctions that have been constructed between Peirce and Saussure. Peircean signs, which are taken to be dynamic and contextual, are preferred to Saussure's systematic structures, despite the fact that his concepts served Lacan and others and informed much of poststructuralism. And then—a third rejection—there is Göran Sonesson's appearance in Tom Mitchell's *Picture Theory*. As I remember that, he thinks of Sonesson as an example of a sort of semiotics that creates a metalanguage that overlays its object at a minimal distance, and is more a formalization than a fruitful interpretation. There is more here, because art history has had at least three revivals and abandonments of semiotics. Especially in regard to Bildwissenschaft, it might be useful to distinguish reasons why people don't want to subscribe to different semiotics.

Juliet Bellow: I wanted to talk about the role of the body. All three of the theorists we read for this seminar use the body, and the earlier writers in *visuelle Kultur* that Gustav assigned also propose their theories of film in relation to the body, specifically in relation to dance. My worry is that they essentialize the body—finding in it a convenient metaphor for, or way of describing, phenomena that seem to be outside of language and culture. I'm not sure that is what Boehm is doing, but that's what I fear when I discover a theory like his. Given that historically the body is so often coded female or associated with "feminine" states and experiences, I see this as a potential problem.

Gustav Frank: So you would say the semiotics you have in mind deals with the body, and Boehm is not taking it into consideration? Boehm would put it the other way around: he would say semiotics is very abstract, and far from any corporeal reality. The Bildwissenschaft he elaborates is very interested in how the body is affected by images. It's very corporeal. In this respect Boehm is close to Georges Didi-Huberman.

Juliet Bellow: Semiotics, in my understanding, is agnostic about corporeal reality; it's concerned with the body's role in particular practices of signification, rather than some underlying, universal substrate. I am glad to see any theory try to grapple with the question of how bodies participate in the processes of making and receiving images, but I am also wary of theories that hinge upon the body rather than a body or

bodies, plural. While I would acknowledge potential problems with semiotic interpretation, to me, semiotics does a better job at making us aware of how bodies produce and internalize meaning at specific moments and in specific contexts than Bildwissenschaft, at least what I know of it so far.

Keith Moxey: Boehm talks a lot about gesture, but not in terms of signs. For him, gestures do not make meaning so much as ask us to make meaning before them. Their capacity to be meaningful has to be understood metaphorically.

James Elkins: It's possible that we may be dealing here with different implementations of phenomenology, or different strains of phenomenology. As Keith says, Boehm's project is metaphorical, because some of his conceptual categories, such as gesture, emerge from phenomenological readings of the body's encounter with images. That is also the case with Bernhard Waldenfels and other followers of Merleau-Ponty. But phenomenology inhabits visual studies differently. It is taken as a starting place for any description of experience, but as soon as you've started, there you are—

Gustav Frank: And it's no longer a problem.

I want to add something about meaning. In Benjamin, meaning and the self are completely different from what he's interested in—the image, language, and bodies. Gottfried Boehm is very concerned with having meaning on board, even if he has to put it in italics or quotation marks. Why is he so concerned? I see similar tendencies in Bredekamp, because he is trying to get theory on board. His recent book is a theory of *Bildakt*, which could be translated as "picture act" or "image act." It is explicitly an analogue of the speech act. Just as the speech act has a person at its origin, so the picture act has an image.

Joana Cunha Leal: It is analogous to Saussure's basic distinction between *parole* and *langue*.

Gustav Frank: Yes. So why are Boehm and Bredekamp maneuvering back to meaning, using locutions such as "as if"—as if semiotics, as if meaning? Why is that so important? I would skip this, and say let the meaning go. The level at which pictures are interesting is the level of affect or anything else not necessarily based on meaning.

James Elkins: Gustav, how closely would you align your critique here with Tom Mitchell's project? Does his project help inform you at this point?

Gustav Frank: I think it is crucial for all projects of visual studies and Bildwissenschaft to be able to say something about affect and the body; those subjects operate beyond anything that can be described by semiotics. I sympathize with Tom's way of saying, let's play with alternative models of how images work in societies; let's pretend we take the metaphorical animism literally. But alongside animism I would prefer also to bring in strong theories in the sense Paul suggested or, Whitney would insist, from social and natural sciences. That's not an exclusion, because ethnology, anthropology, and the neurosciences' concepts of vision can inform the study of the everyday, the contingent, and the serial imagery that you have mentioned as among the central lacunae of visual studies. I do not want to combine "serious" stuff with "serious" theory in order to legitimize the field's existence. I would agree with Boehm and Bredekamp that there is something, as you said, Jim, "that is particular to the images themselves, and can be derived only from them." I doubt that this will amount to great art or big science, but I'll never cease asking Bildwissenschaft what that particular is.

Michael Holly: Boehm even says, in his letter to Tom Mitchell, "the aesthetic realm, which the image had largely been thought to inhabit, was over time"—Panofsky and so on—"broadened to encompass the discursive and the cognitive," and then he asks the very legitimate question, "Was this not a betrayal of art?" So to fight the betrayal, you don't go to the logic that instigated the betrayal in the first place. I'm confused about that.

Gustav Frank: Me too.

Flora Lysen: I wonder if it would help if we brought in a line from the first page of the exchange, where Boehm writes, "For the 'image' is not simply some new topic, but much more relates to a different mode of thinking, one that has shown itself capable of clarifying and availing itself of the long-neglected cognitive possibilities that lie in non-verbal representations." Here he doesn't talk about meaning, but modes of thinking.

María Lumbreras Corujo: Yes, and I think this is crucial. Both Boehm and Bredekamp understand images in that way: as nonverbal modes of thinking, as a means to produce knowledge differently: visually, or pictorially. The difficulty lies in describing how that happens. That's the moment when metaphors such as gesture or meaning

come into play. As I see it, it is also a methodological problem, one that especially worries Horst Bredekamp. He really wants to get into the picture and explain how its epistemic potential is put to work. That's why he's so concerned with the description of images.

James Elkins: Meaning itself is vexed in an interesting way. In the Eikones literature, the concept is everywhere. I remember at one point saying, if you had proposed this in North America, as a research project, you couldn't just say you were interested in meaning. The cognitive is one extreme point of the stretched or stressed concept as it is used in Eikones.

Flora Lysen: If we are interested in getting at meaning, we have to look at what kind of "modes of thinking" images are propagating according to thinkers in Bildwissen-schaft. What kind of knowledge is acquired from these modes of thinking? Boehm speaks, for example, about the way in which certain images (for example models of the world or of heaven) are "heuristic." In these images knowing and doing are closely interacting.

Gustav Frank: I would have preferred that the project went on to describe what the new sort of knowledge might be. That's what I'm so keen on hearing from Bildwissen-schaft. I've been waiting for it for decades now! Keith, you say it's metaphorical. Okay, it's metaphorical, but exactly what kind of metaphor is it?

Inge Hinterwaldner: If we agree that images communicate in specific ways and have their own logic of functioning, isn't it obvious that they provide their own paths of knowledge production? If you ask scientists who deal with enormous amounts of collected or generated data, they all say visualization is indispensable. Nobody looks at lists with billions of numbers, because you can hardly get any evidence out of them. It seems to be comparably difficult to gain knowledge when confronted with the empirical phenomena under study: we need to do "paperwork" and to transform rats into inscriptions, as Bruno Latour puts it. If we think of flight simulators that show the pilots-in-training completely synthetical sensuous worlds, it would be fatal if they were not able to gain a kind of practical knowledge in these settings. However, if your phrase "new sort of knowledge" is pointing to an alternative epistemology, then it's not surprising that we are just at the beginning.

María Lumbreras Corujo: Boehm uses the word *Sinn* instead of *Bedeutung*, for example in the title of his recent book *Wie Bilder Sinn erzeugen*.

Gustav Frank: I worry about this also, because it means both "meaning" and "sense": "how images create meaning," and "how images create sense." The two words have very different philosophical uses.

María Lumbreras Corujo: Yes, it's not *Bedeutung*, which would be the usual word for "meaning"—so the title is not *Wie Bilder Bedeutung erzeugen*. If you think of *Sinn* as "sense," it better conveys the idea of the phenomenological encounter. It seems to me that *Sinn* contributes to empathizing the way in which pictures relate to their viewers and produce something new—what they "add" in a specific *bildlich* way, as Boehm would have it.

This makes me think about the passage from "Indeterminacy" you quoted, Jim, and the fact that Boehm is invested with what counts as the particularities of images, their *Eigenschaften*. By talking about "oscillation," "opacity," or "indeterminacy," he wants to address the special quality that make images images and not something else. "Logic" also serves that purpose. In a different text, he defines it as "the consistent production of meaning [*Sinn*] through genuinely pictorial means." Now, the question for me would not only be why Boehm's main concern is the production of "meaning," but also what does he understand by "genuinely pictorial means"? Of course, both questions are related because his alternative to semiotics is linked to his engagement with the ontology of images. But where does the *Bildlichkeit* of Bilder lie for him? I tend to think—and this is something that Keith mentions in his article—that, in the end, he somehow identifies it with the formal aspects of the picture. Forms, colors, materiality: they are the conditions of possibility for any Sinn to arise.

Whitney Davis: I'd like to go back to Keith's introduction of Goodman into the discussion. Here is a conjecture about Boehm's ontology: wouldn't it be possible to say Boehm has constructed an account which, in Goodman's terms, would be a dense deictics? The different could be that Boehm is interested in the possibility of maximally dense and replete deictics, while Goodman is interested in articulated extensions of natural language.

James Elkins: Possibly, except for the different status accorded to semiotics itself. In the 2008 event, *What Is an Image?*, this topic came up, with Gottfried Boehm and Tom Mitchell at the table. Boehm is, of course, committed to an ontology, and Tom is committed to not being committed to an ontology. But Whitney, a similar thought occurred to me, and I asked Tom if Goodman might not function in some cases as an ontological ground for his sense of images, because Goodman appears in his writing in places where something crucial about images needs to be succinctly conjured. Needless to say, he rejected that notion. Boehm's rejection was just as sure and quick, but it was a rejection of the epistemology of semiotics, not its ontology. The problem, in both cases, would be how to put the analogy to semiotics in such a way that it could appear potentially meaningful or useful.

Lisa Cartwright: I wonder how Boehm would place his work in the context of gesture studies, because there has been a lot of work on that subject, from Birdwhistell's *Kinesics and Context* (1970) and Adam Kendon's classic work to that of art historian Moshe Barash and the visual studies scholar Esther Gabara.

Gustav Frank: I don't think he places himself in that context at all. That is the difference between his work and our project here: we would like to find connections, but that isn't what he does.

Lisa Cartwright: And what tradition of phenomenology is he coming out of? Because gesture studies draw on a strong tradition of phenomenology. [Again, the phenomenologists used in gesture studies would be helpful to Gottfried.]

Gustav Frank: Just Merleau-Ponty; nothing significant after him.

James Elkins: Did you notice the moment in the letters in which Tom Mitchell notes how Gottfried says he worked alone in developing his theories? For Tom, that relative isolation was an issue. The project of looking for links, just to see how they might connect theories, is differently valued in the two traditions we are considering. Lisa, in our group, I think you're the best example of someone for whom communities of scholars have precedence over some other considerations; Gottfried would in some respects be quite different.

<CN> 7

A General Theory of Visual Culture

This seminar was led by Whitney Davis; he assigned portions of his book A General Theory of Visual Culture. *That book proposes a highly conceptualized, abstract account of the ways a study of the visual can be distinguished from, and related to, a study of visuality. Implicitly, the book proposes a deep criticism of visual studies. Davis says that in visual studies, "visuality is simply a cultural interpretation of what is seen," and scholars fail to consider "relevant . . . analogies" to the practices they study; in addition, visual studies assumes "a cultural succession has a social matrix," that visuality can be "simply a sociology of culture that happens to be visible," and that viewers are "cultural servomechanisms" who "automatically adjust visually to visible worlds." The book is principally aimed at disciplinary art history, but in the extracts transcribed here, Davis fields some questions on his project in relation to visual studies.*

Whitney Davis: Rather than rehearse the substantive claims of the readings I've assigned, I would like to say something about the parameters that surround those readings, from an autobiographical point of view, but also in terms of some of the disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and professional and cultural-political things we have been discussing in the seminar up to this point.

So, as a reminder: the main claim of the final chapter, which the book leads up to, is encapsulated in a slogan that the entire book tries to warrant: ontology recapitulates analogy. The echo here is Haeckel's biogenetic law, ontology recapitulates phylogeny, and that is partly intended, and so my motto is in some sense an implicit critique of the biogenetic law. But aside from that, my claim is that the ontology of pictures recapitulates their analogies, and another way to claim that would be that visuality emerges in a network of likenesses (analogies), which are consolidated in a historical form of life, or forms of likeness. The echo of Wittgenstein's concept of "forms of life" is also intended, and my expression "forms of likeness" is also intended as an elaboration and critique of the Wittgensteinian expression.

The argument has some peculiar or counterintuitive results from the point of view of visual culture studies. For example, one of my strongest claims comes down to the notion that what is most important about a visuality is invisible, and does not concern visible phenomena. You will have seen my consistent effort to displace questions of visuality and visual culture from questions of the look of visible things, to invisible likenesses they might have. Because they are invisible doesn't mean they aren't pertinent: they are pertinent precisely in virtue of being para-visible.

The basic theme of this project, as with everything else I have written in the area of art history and visual studies, is the radical openness of vision to the closures—the conditions, constraints, and correlations—that must be introduced in order for us to recognize any world, and anything in it. I believe this theme has a rather distinctive politics, and I will come back to that at the very end, because sometimes people have difficulty making a connection between abstract analytical argumentation about seeing and a moral or political perspective that might be entailed or presumed.

The art-historical genealogy that begins this project is quoted at the beginning: it is Wölfflin's phrase "Das Sehen an sich hat seine Geschichte." It is translated in different ways, depending on what edition you consult, but the translation is usually something like "vision itself has a history," "vision has its own history," or "vision has a history of its own." This claims warrants a great deal of art-historical research, and I think it stands behind a great deal of visual culture research in the later part of the twentieth century. But I want to quote the second part of Wölfflin's famous sentence, because it is what motivated my work: he continues, in one of the early English translations: "and the exposure of these 'optical strata' [*optische Schichten*] must be the elementary activity of art history [*Kunstgeschichte*]."

The basic claim here is a fascinating one, and you can take many different species of art history and see how they deploy, map, or track it. For me, it had immense impact. I had come into art history with an archaeological background, and a term like "stratum" immediately resonated, both methodologically and substantively: it is something that is materially laid down over a previously existing sediment, and this

happens in a forward-looking direction. It is also the object of a retrospective uncovering or exposing. So the possibility that there is a literal archaeology of perception that can be worked out struck me as immensely interesting.

I had another predisciplinary reason to be attracted to Wölfflin's metaphor. In college I was deeply attracted to psychoanalysis—I won't go into all the reasons—and its procedures, protocols, methods, and traditions. There, too, the metaphor of strata that have been laid down in some kind of historical sequence, and that involve retrodictively, or in reverse order, a historical analysis and reconstruction, is at the heart of psychoanalytic procedure, although it is important to remember that Freud thought of his psychodynamic archaeology as something literary archaeology couldn't do.

Now that I have finished this work, I can see that some of these interests have carried through, and are still present for me.

[Whitney: as you can see I basically transcribed from the beginning, and stopped here, more or less arbitrarily. If you'd like to adjust this please do, but please don't increase the overall length of the introduction.]

James Elkins: Since you are offering an autobiographical and disciplinary framework, I wonder about the persistence of psychoanalysis beyond your first book, *Replications: Art History, Archaeology, Psychoanalysis*, and outside of specifically psychoanalytic studies such as the one on Freud's wolf man. I am assuming there would be a use value other than a psychobiographical one for bringing your interest in psychoanalysis into this discussion, and it occurs to me that virtually every temporally inflected point of analysis in the *General Theory of Visual Culture* could be read in psychoanalytic terms. So I wonder if the *General Theory* could be read as a critique of psychoanalysis, because everything that would be inaccessible, temporarily or permanently, is rendered analytically accessible.

Whitney Davis: That is a very helpful remark; I am not sure if I can respond in any complete way. It is certainly the case that psychoanalysis's metapsychological notions— of the thermodynamics of nervous energy, and the role of the contact barrier in processing proprioception into images and recognitions—that metapsychology continues

to be so second nature to my thinking that it continues to be impossible for me to articulate anything that makes anthropological, sociological, or archaeological claims of any sort without having that resonate for me. So I am quite sure that you could read *A General Theory of Visual Culture* as a transcription of some psychological theories into this domain.

James Elkins: I think you could read the *General Theory* as a freestanding allegorical or abstract critique of psychoanalysis.

Lisa Cartwright: If you're interested in providing a model of visuality that could get past the difference problem, then the empirical psychoanalytic work on children done during the first year could provide interesting information. But it's not taken up in contemporary scholarship.

Whitney Davis: I agree a hundred percent in the relevance of that in the second half of the twentieth century. Major figures for me, in thinking through my own relation to psychoanalysis and the possibility that it might be reused in terms of a biocultural account of the ontogenetic emergence of culture in the subject at the level of sensuous knowing, are Melanie Klein and, more recently, the group that crystallized around Nelson Goodman at Project Zero at Harvard, such as Ellen Winner. [Add references here?]

Gustav Frank: Over lunch, I had a disagreement with Tom Mitchell over his nonmethodology, his anarchical approach, as he says. I suggested anarchy could be reconstructed as a method, which he didn't like. I wonder if what you are doing could be reconstructed as a method. At one point you mentioned "counterintuitivity," and I wonder if that could be a robust method of image critique. Also, I wonder if that could bear on what we have been calling the presentism in visual culture. Could our dislikes about presentism be due to our skepticism about the intuitive moments in it—what you have described as visual studies' quick and close reaction to current affairs, visual studies' interest in photography, film, and the Internet, presumably because they are so close?

Whitney Davis: We belong to the aspective horizons of those visualities, because otherwise they would not even be recognizable to us in their pictorial functions.

Gustav Frank: That might be close to my problems with Klaus Sachs-Hombach's work on objects close to our perceptions; he takes intuition as a leading principle. So could counterintuitivity be among the robust methods of your approach?

May I give an example? Although we have not taken photography as a topic of our seminars this week, we have had photographs on the table from the beginning. Here is one of Kittler's arguments about photography. He says: I would be less interested in the year 1839; I would be more interested in the year 1836. Why? Because in that year the brothers Weber developed an algorithm about human movement. They figured out how to extract paradigms from movement, and that work had more impact on society and the future and current affairs than the invention of photography. I think that argument is also counterintuitive, because algorithms are counterintuitive.

In another piece I've written recently, I make the claim that one of art history's and visual culture studies' robust methods should be the counterfactual, and maybe that's a related way of saying the same thing. Situations of perceptible life experience that are so distant from our own as to be unimaginable are the most important to take on board if the purpose is to frame a critique of those that are imaged or imaginable for us. If we didn't have that relation, we couldn't have the condition of critique in the first place.

It's not that the counterfactual needs to be impossibly distant from us in time and space—as in the usual interest, in visual culture studies and art history, in taking on cultural and historical distance. That is trivially true, but it is analytically true that the distance registered by the counterintuitivity of perceptual imaging is on no way dependent on a temporal or spatial distance between our own life and the one we study. But how this is actualized as a method is a tricky and interesting question. I am not sure about the counterintuitive, but the counterfactual is one of the most robust and productive methods in analytic philosophy. So the method of counterintuitivity has something to do with my wish to bring in artifacts that are maximally divorced from the sensuous manifold that we inhabit, from which their so-called presence to us could be the object of recognition and critique. I want to be able to escape that presentism, as I would use that term, denoting the presence to intuition of the perceptual

manifold delivering the object, before any possible further analysis. I find that implausible, for Kantian reasons.

James Elkins: I don't want to lose sight of the potential pertinence of this to readers of the book we'll be producing. Your book *General Theory of Visual Culture* has several passages that contain trenchant critiques of visual studies, but they are set as asides in an argument that might seem, to visual studies scholars, largely abstract. The radical openness of the visual, and the crucial importance, for you, of nonvisual elements in the visual, are conceptualizations that are strongly at odds with business as usual in visual studies: but the challenge, in our context, would be to flesh out those implications for existing modes of visual studies. I wonder if the force of your critique might partly be brought out in context of this discussion about counterintuitivity.

Whitney Davis: I agree that the what you're calling the "force of my critique"—for example, my stress on the radical openness of vision—might not be taken up immediately and readily in visual-cultural studies, as it's often practiced as what I call a "sociology of culture that happens to be visible." And I'm well aware that the "politics" of my theoretical model—a model that puts certain basic operations of vision, visibility, and visuality into fundamental opposition to the historical and essentially political process of the totalization of vision as "visual culture"—is developed in a very different register than the politics (especially the "party politics") of a visual-cultural studies that proceeds as overt critique of culture that happens to be visible, and with which the writer (the analyst of the visual representations and practices in question) disagrees politically and wants socially to resist by rendering their social determinations maximally transparent to analysis. My point is simply that that analysis seems to require a conceptualization of vision as "radically open"—for example in virtue of "radical pictoriality"—that requires theorization. I conceptualize "succession," "recursion," and "resistance" as historical processes inherent in natural vision in the social world, that is, as intrinsically "political." But I do not trace (because I cannot empirically find) a ready path from this constitutive fact to the contingent facts of particular visual cultures that have been totalized in history, and for which a particularized political sociology—such as a "social history of art"—must be developed. In turn this

makes me somewhat skeptical of the form of critique of visual culture that visual-cultural studies sometimes takes—skeptical of its depth and bite. I'm hoping to take up these matters more explicitly—and with fuller attention to the procedures of existing visual-cultural studies in the context of interdisciplinary visual studies from vision science to digital art-making—in future writing. In fact, Sunil and I have a plan to organize an exchange between us that might get at some of them from his and my own different—but I don't think ultimately opposed—points of view.

Inge Hinterwaldner: I wonder if you find any use for what Gottfried Boehm calls schema or medium.

Whitney Davis: One of the claims of neuroaesthetics that we've all been taught to love to hate, or hate to love, is that the brain through which the world becomes visible to us as a world of recognizable forms and processes has its own intrinsic rules and programs. In Gombrich-land, those are the schemas, or in other texts, the scripts or frames or protocols. Usually such concepts are bolted to an ethology coming from Lorenz, Tinbergen, and others, of wired-in templates through which the world becomes schematically available. What interests me is that if there are rules and programs for artifacts, they could have a partly disjunct relationship to the rules and programs of the schemata. Gombrich himself would have to admit that, because he admits some images—pictures—escape recognition, precisely because of their resemblance to the world, as in trompe l'oeil. I think Gombrich is quite mistaken, but about the ways schemata are imprinted, and about which images have greater or less schematicity, but he is on the track to the right problem when he inquires into the nature of schemata that are generated randomly or accidentally, and when he asks what elements are wired in.

I don't know enough about Gottfried Boehm's use of the term "schema," so I am responding indirectly. Gombrich's teacher Emanuel Löwy introduced the term to the historical tradition by way of Ernst Brücke's psychophysiology and the attempt, in that period, to calibrate intuition with concept, to hold on to the Neo-Kantian program that intuition, or the presence of the immediately visible, is one stem of the two stems of the mind—the other bring transcendental aesthetic. Without both together, you'd be talking about animal perception, and not human perception.

Inge Hinterwaldner: Boehm's notion of schema is built upon the Kantian concept. However, he adapts it to image-related rules. These rules underlie the artifacts without determining them fully. They are fleshed out with whatever the image producer wanted to show. In my opinion, one of Boehm's main concerns is to trace these organizing principles in a procedure that we could call a kind of reverse engineering. The paradigmatic and most prominent example of such a set of rules is linear perspective. In analogy to linear perspective, which organizes space, I tried to show that the most general formative level of computer simulations can be described by a systems perspective that organizes time. But there are lots of other schemata.

Keith Moxey: Whitney, I am worried about the generality of your theory, in the sense that it seems to be distant from the disciplines it means to address, art history and visual studies. The parts that intrigue me, and seem to have real promise for both disciplines, are the passages on visuality and pictoriality, namely the ways in which visuality changes through time—its historicization—and the lack of correspondence between what can be visualized and what is visible. But I continue to worry about the level of abstraction, and whether it can intersect with art history, which is interested in cultural and national differences, and with visual studies, which is concerned with differences of other kinds, such as gender and class. I think that the strength of the view from outside may itself work against your project's use for the very disciplines you have in mind. Your dislike of presentism is also a potential problem, because it is so central to visual studies.

Whitney Davis: Okay. When you speak about applicability, you mean the General Theory should be applicable to—

Keith Moxey: The way in which we think about visual studies or the history of art.

Whitney Davis: Who is the "we" there?

Keith Moxey: Practicing visual studies scholars, practicing art historians.

Whitney Davis: Well, lots of practicing scholars are interested in the longue durée, because they are professionally responsible for artifacts that are from remote historical horizons, or cultures that are remote from our present—even though the objects may be contemporary with us, their present is different. Such objects might be sitting right here: after all, how many presents are we in? We have different perceptual horizons

in this present environment. I would take it to be helpful to have a vocabulary in which that could be conceptually parsed out.

As far as application, if we are talking about an art historian who wants an interpretation of the metapictorial interreflexive self-reference of this complex Poussin painting, then I will be pretty agnostic about whether my project speaks to such an interest. I hope that some of the discussion of pictoriality and visuality, for example, might speak to that. (My example in *A General Theory of Visual Culture* is a Dürer engraving.) But I wouldn't be too disappointed if much of this way of writing, these concepts, doesn't pertain to someone working on the visual, cultural, or iconological horizons of a work of art that is within our present. Why? Because if it is within our present then there are lots of other methods, including pictorial analysis and informed iconology, that can aid those projects. It would be interesting when the methods of visual culture studies could deliver a description of something like metapictoriality or cultural difference in horizons that are otherwise inaccessible through these other methods, whether they are iconological or visual-cultural. I am not sure how that would pan out, so I leave the door open to it.

As for abstraction: it's hard to know. What is abstract for some readers will be doggedly descriptive to other readers. Some of my peers in philosophical aesthetics may think this book is not abstract enough: it is too involved with particular sociological, anthropological, critical issues, and they press on the argument, preventing it from achieving the conceptual clarity and generality they value. Some of the writing in the game-theoretical community is, to me, extremely abstract. It's like going through a college course in mathematics all over again to go through some of the very sophisticated writing that is done on questions of algorithms and code. So there is an entire community of readers for whom this book will seem like the work of a plodding art historian, who doesn't achieve even the beginnings of genuine abstraction. Too abstract or not enough?

James Elkins: I am interested in how the book brackets art. As one of the relatively few people who has tried to write a book on images by bracketing out art—*The Domain of Images*—I am aware of the problems of trying to keep art to one side of the argument. The gesture can have unintended consequences. I'd be interested in strategies you use

to bracket out art. The most obvious strategy would be to exclude consideration of aesthetics; if you do that, you omit the nonconceptual, and so forth. But as soon as that is done, you also exclude elements of historical understanding, structures of historiography, and so forth. My book ended up excising much of history in the name, I thought, of simply not paying attention, for a while, to the category of art. If you look at certain artworks as exemplars en route to other sorts of claims, the aesthetic starts leaking back in.

Whitney Davis: It is possible to bracket objects considered in the histories of European aesthetics as artworks. The bracketing, downplaying, or depriveging of those objects is not impossible; and it then becomes possible to consider images like the ones that interest me—Egyptian images, or prehistoric images. Then it may turn out that enables the identification of other visualities, which have equal claim to be considered as valid and interesting objects vis-à-vis objects nominated as art in the visual cultures of the West. This is something that interests a lot of people in global art studies, as you know. There are definitely images in other cultures, made under other visualities, that have been somewhat invisible to us because our sense of art is not just a visuality of art *tout court*, but of our art. So the bracketing of art is to me a bracketing of an art.

James Elkins: Well, for what it's worth, I am not sure it is possible to keep those levees from leaking: at least for me, admitting the odd art example also admits aesthetic viruses, which can work in ways we can hardly detect. The generality that a project like my own book hoped for is tarnished by pervasive aesthetics that I wasn't aware of at the time, for example an interest in formalisms that I now recognize comes from late modernism, or even more specifically from some 1980s academic discourse.

Joana Cunha Leal: I think you have a very clear definition of your understanding of art history. It presents art history as "historical investigation of the interrelations of configuration, style, and depiction in artifacts, regardless of their origin or status as art in the modern Western sense." For me this is a very important definition, because a huge part of art history recognizes itself in this definition.

But I wonder about the status of the image in your project; I find it interesting but problematic. I imagine your project as expanding the Wölfflinian undertaking of an

art history without names, but I also see you as developing an art history without objects.

Whitney Davis: When I started graduate school in the mid-1980s, the "new art history" that we have discussed was prominent. The big subject, as far as art historians were concerned, was the status of the object. The worry was that the new art history was letting go of the art object, and also of the object as a physical thing in our grasp. Somehow the new art history, with its interest in social relations, meant that objects were constructed through cultural differences, and those problematics would occupy more and more of historians' attention relative to the attention they used to pay to objects. That was a big discussion, and still is—

James Elkins: It was one of the common claims made against visual studies in the 1990s and 2000s—

Whitney Davis: These kinds of interests, mine and others', would lead to an art history without the object, that is, the object accessible through looking, through formalist attention to its visual appearance. That doesn't mean there aren't other ways in which objects, in the plural, are discussed. There are ecologies and populations of images—those are ideas Sunil and Tom Mitchell have developed. In my case, art history without names, and where the object is in communication with other, nonvisible objects, including things that might not ever be visible and that cannot be viewed, appears as a good position.

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The Political

This section of the transcript condenses several conversations over the week-long event. Some of what follows took place in a seminar led by Keith Moxey, for which the participants read two essays on the subject of the politics of apparently unpolitical scholarship. In particular, an essay by Alexander Nemerov on Auden and Bruegel's Fall of Icarus *is presupposed in what follows. The participants also drew on several readings with political agendas, such as Mieke Bal's essays from the 2000s and Nicholas Mirzoeff's essay "The Right to Look," which preceded the book of that name.*

James Elkins: I'd like to keep our conversations on this subject open, not only to articulable positions in relation to politics, but also, even more broadly, between (1) the position that politics is front and center in visual studies, woven into it from the beginning, explicitly present as a possible purpose, and (2) the implicit position that politics might be bracketed in certain circumstances, and for certain purposes. Whitney, if I can take your seminar as an example, without proposing to generalize it: you said at the beginning that you'd prefer to start by bracketing politics. That very gesture would be considered inadvisable or unworkable from the point of view of visual studies texts that are committed differently to politics. On the other hand, much of that literature is inexplicit about its politics: it is taken for granted that politics inheres in every critical gesture, so that political positions might themselves be suspect.

This issue is on my list of visual studies' lacunae. There is an untheorized contrast between the historical implication of visual studies in politics—its origin in Marxist cultural studies, for example—and the more or less complete absence of explicit or articulated political positions in other writing. That is a gap that conceptually precedes any difficulties we might have in deciding visual studies' optimal positions in relation to existing political discourses.

Keith Moxey: I hope that one of our ways into the issue of politics is through the assigned readings. Let me begin with some questions. Where does the politics of cultural analysis lie? Does it lie in ideological criticism, and the exposure of political,

racist, classist, and other agendas? In part, yes; but we can then ask what is the value of such criticism. One answer might be Tolstoy's—that no matter how eloquent, committed, and forceful cultural political writing is, the engines of war roll on, and roll over such writing. This is a sweeping generalization, and we can take issue with it, but it questions the hope that some forms of visual studies might have that in pointing out the injustice of a system of values, generations of students might be made aware of the shortcomings of the political circumstances they inhabit.

Must the work of cultural criticism always be explicitly directed at the subject matter, the themes, of the work in question? Is the work of the cultural critic always confined to representation? Isn't the identity of the artist or author implicitly legible in the writing itself? The moment in which it seemed to be necessary for authors to articulate their identities is perhaps over. Might the writer's identity and position not be implicit in the writing?

This possibility coincides with an important Marxist alternative to ideology critique. Theodor Adorno argued that the very creation of the work of art in a capitalist society can escape or counter the values of the culture in which it is located. It may not directly address the issues of the day, but the work of the artist might in itself be a way of responding to the social situation in which the work is made. Walter Benjamin's "Author as Producer" is a model here, with its argument that the author's commitment affects the form of the argument, as well as its content.

Here are two different views of the political position and purpose of the artist, author, or scholar. It is in the second, that in which the author's politics remain implicit rather than explicit, that I would locate the interest of the piece by Alexander Nemerov that you read. The essay asks, on the first page, "What do artists and poets and critics do in the face of catastrophe? How do they register it in their work, or should they even try to do so?" Nemerov points out that even if Auden refused to infuse his poetry with the leftist politics he subscribed to in the years leading up to the Second World War, his poem "Musée des Beaux Arts" offers us what might be described as an apolitical political position. Writing about Bruegel's sixteenth-century painting "The Fall of Icarus" in the Brussels museum, Auden exploits the "dissonance" in the work's facture, the occlusion of its narrative subject, so as to make the

poem a political allegory. Just as Icarus's fall goes unnoticed by the other figures in the picture, so the injustices of war, man's inhumanity to man (which Auden had experienced at first-hand during the Japanese invasion of China), go unpunished. A parallel to such a reading of Auden's poem is offered by Mieke Bal's essay on Doris Salcedo. Here furniture—wooden objects—rather than explicit references to torture plays a decisive role. Like Walid Ra'ad's work on the civil war in Lebanon, which depends on the creation of a fictive urban landscape in which imagined bombings are claimed to have taken place, Bal's argument insists Salcedo's works, which refer obliquely to the violence of the civil strife in Colombia, are effective political art because they make their statements by indirection. This formal dissonance, this political obliqueness, constitutes a political statement that differs radically from straightforward ideology critique.

James Elkins: Just a note about Bal's positions, since Keith mentioned them, and then we can get back to Nemerov and the problematic of indirect political content.

I read her use of Salcedo differently, but I think her position is complicated, and ambiguous, enough so that's easily done. For me, her two essays "Visual Essentialism" and "Commitment to Look" propose different positions. The earlier one, "Visual Essentialism" (2003), has some direct statements regarding political action, such as "visual culture studies must critically analyze the junctures and articulations of visual culture and undermine their naturalized persistence." The later essay, published in 2005, which mentions Salcedo, is a meditation on Adorno's argument about poetry after the Holocaust. Bal says visual studies "too often pays lip-service to politics," and she ponders what kind of relation to politics is optimal. She writes: "To summarize my view of the place of politics in visual studies succinctly: art as 'scream,' as expression, is both legitimate and, as Adorno says, necessary. This expressionist aesthetic serves a political purpose . . . but not by definition an artistic one." Her example is Doris Salcedo, but I think she means that such work might need to serve political, not necessarily artistic, ends. On the other hand, the study of such artistic practices has an unclear status, aside from its "commitment to theory."

Keith Moxey: I don't think Bal wants to draw a distinction between art and the political, for in her opinion Salcedo's work succeeds as both.

Michael Holly: It's not for nothing that Alexander Nemerov is the son of the poet Howard Nemerov. The writing here is so luxurious, so—in an old-fashioned way—aesthetically pleasing, so graceful, so resonant, that it raises other observations, such as how writing about some visual matters solicits a certain poetry not available to others.

Keith Moxey: I think that is quite clearly something he cares about. He is Auden, in a way: he is obliquely reading the great poet's work, reminding us that his apparently apolitical writing, a poem on a painting by Bruegel, has its politics.

James Elkins: This is a great opportunity to discuss writing in visual studies, and more generally in art history and beyond. We have Benjamin's "Author as Producer" on the table, and so writing is an pertinent question in relation to politics. But Michael, I am sorry, I have to disagree. For me there is an enormous difference between Nemerov's writing and the Auden he quotes, and it works to his detriment throughout. I would agree with the words you use to describe Nemerov's writing, but to me they are all pejorative: it's continuous, flowing, seductive, belletristic—all the things that someone like Martin Amis, or Nabokov, or even George Saunders or Lydia Davis or William Vollmann, would run from.

Michael Holly: Alex's writing is a continuation of the work he is talking about.

James Elkins: Well, the fact that we can see this so differently shows how much visual studies and art history need to begin talking about writing. I have not spent time with the Bruegel painting, but for me it is entirely different, even in its imputed oblique politics, from Nemerov's prose. Bruegel is awkward, wayward, surprising, static, and "dissonant." Nemerov is placid, warm, weakly beautiful, flowing, never sharp, always mildly hypnotic, unpleasantly tranquil. If authors are producers in Benjamin's sense, and if their writing produces a politics, as Keith is suggesting, then this is just the kind of escapism that you described as the state of affairs in the old art history.

Paul Frosh: I'd like to develop Keith's theme using the notion of an engaged witnessing. Images can be testimony. Much of photography, for example, is politically and morally engaged in that way. There are all sorts of problems with this, of course, modern equivalents of the farmer in Bruegel's painting. We'll see images and say, Isn't that terrible? and do nothing, or even derive a certain sensuous pleasure from the scene:

these different responses are analyzed variously as "compassion fatigue," "the narcotizing dysfunction," or the "aestheticization of suffering." But the ideal of course is that images, understood as a form of witnessing, will ultimately promote action.

Bridget Cooks: I am intrigued by the conjunction of violence and aesthetics in Nemerov's essay . . . but I'd like to talk about the shift that happens in the end of the essay, when he turns to painting in the 1930s and 1940s. I think of Nemerov's work as an attempt to bring abstraction and politics together, but I felt that the end of the paper kind of fell apart. At the end, I felt it was becoming reductive. There was a fixing of abstraction into narrative that I found reductive.

Keith Moxey: There is something a little facile about reading Motherwell and Pollock as echoing the formal properties of the Bruegel. That is one of the dangers of formalism: like is not always like.

Anna Sigrídur Arnar: There is no clear road map in Nemerov's text like we've seen in some of the other texts we read this week. I share Bridget's surprise at the shift at the end of the essay to violence. I asked myself, How did the essay get to that point? As Michael noted, the essay is beautifully written, and I would add that one is almost seduced by the writing to follow the author down this subtle and unpredictable path. If the essay were written by Mirzoeff, we would not have had that element of surprise or seduction. I wonder how Nemerov's essay would have worked if it had been poorly written. I very much enjoyed the reading experience of this essay, but I can't help but ask how I would use it (if at all) in teaching.

Michael Holly: Keith, there is also an easeful fall back into iconography and the detecting of hidden clues—that body in the background, for example, which makes it seem as if the mystery of the painting has been solved. That sleuthing gives the lie to the force of the essay as a whole.

James Elkins: I wonder if we could also talk about the place of this essay in the present. It was written by someone roughly speaking in our generation, with a certain literature in mind, and a certain politics in the background. But he doesn't talk about that: he talks about the Northern Renaissance and the mid-twentieth century. So there are two questions: What do we want to do with it, perhaps as a model for an "oblique" political engagement for visual studies? But also: Why was it written, in the way it was

written, excluding what it excludes? It has a very strong implicit politics, but it declines to mention its plausible adversary.

Keith Moxey: It was written at Yale, one of the main centers for disciplinary art history, so we might ask about that context.

James Elkins: We could pursue that, but it might take us out of our way. I would be more interested in how this particular oblique politics might appear to younger scholars of visual studies, who are engaged with de Certeau, Bourriaud, Rancière, and others: I imagine it might appear quite coy and patrician, in relation to those mainly French authors who might appear just as detached—and possibly just as pessimistic as Tolstoy about the efficacy of visual studies—but not at all coy.

Jeanette Roan: Our discussion would be very different if we had read Mirzoeff's *Watching Babylon* and Derrida (as an early version of the schedule has it) rather than Nemerov. Perhaps we could think about how these readings stage a politics of visual studies?

James Elkins: This may be a moment to read two passages in one of Nick Mirzoeff's essays, one Keith and I originally thought to set for this seminar. It is a stark contrast with what we've been considering. This is from the introduction to the second edition of the *Visual Culture Reader*: "I continue to think that visual culture—rather than visual studies . . . is the right phrase," because culture reminds us "of the political stakes inherent in what we do. For otherwise it can, and has, been argued that there is no particular need for visual culture as an academic subfield." And then from two pages before that: "visual culture is a tactic for those who do not control the dominant means of visual production to negotiate the hypervisuality of everyday life in a digitalized, global culture."

The Nemerov is the unusual intervention in visual culture. This would be closer to the normative formulation. In Keith's opening classification, Mirzoeff's activism comes before Tolstoy's disillusionment, and certainly before Nemerov's scholarly practice.

Flora Lysen: Somewhere Mirzoeff says this more explicitly: that he always carries with him an account of countervisuality. His activism, I would say, is his insistence on the way visuality and countervisuality generate one another. Nemerov's politics is indeed

less explicit; he says "each transformation—Auden's, Sargent's, and Nash's—modernized the idea of the winged genius." Nemerov's ordering of events becomes the argument, the rhetoric of the text. But I can't find his ideology.

Keith Moxey: Nemerov's essay permits him to be more nuanced. It allows us to think about the different roles an author might play. Is it to be at the barricades, or is it to retire from the fray, as it were, and produce something that does not address the political situation directly? I think there are two models here: Mirzoeff thinks there should be direct engagement; Nemerov explores the possibilities that might lie beyond that.

James Elkins: Another way to put that is that the contrast between political activism and reflection is paralleled by another contrast, between the distinctness of the positions that Mirzoeff occupies and the indistinctness of the positions Nemerov implies.

Juliet Bellow: Carrie Lambert-Beatty's theorization of the parafictional comes to mind here. Parafictional work, as she defines it, mediates between imagination and reality, art and activism, gaining strength from its simultaneous occupation of both spheres. This could potentially constitute a productive model for visual culture's relationship to disciplinary boundaries.

Sunil Manghani: I quite like Mirzoeff on the subject of digital culture, by the way: I just can't understand why he keeps bringing back visuality, which hasn't been well defined, and does a lot of work in his writing, especially in "The Right to Look." And I'm not sure if that's what he is really writing about.

James Elkins: I don't understand: given that visuality is so often an undefined term, how does it stand in the way of Mirzoeff's account more than some other account?

Sunil Manghani: Just because he pitches everything around visual culture, and so it's very clear that is what his writing is meant to be about. But when you get into the details, it seems that some of the really interesting things aren't about the visual.

James Elkins: What, for example?

Sunil Manghani: For instance, his observations about the flow of information, and how the military deals with the flow of computerized information.

James Elkins: For me, the most interesting moments in Nick Mirzoeff's texts are the ones where the text's political purpose comes up against what I think of as an aesthetics of complexity: he's drawn to the most intricate, imbricated moments of self-reference

and self-referentiality in surveillance, for example, and I think of those as a formal or aesthetic interest.

Keith Moxey: I think the readings do dramatize the question of whether visual studies has to have a politics, and that raises the question of the role of theory. So we deconstruct ideologies—of gender, of class, of militarism. Bal, on the other hand, seems to be fed up with ideology critique, and she intends to propose something else. But what? There is a politics of theorization, and the notion that theory itself is a sort of politics. Can theoretical innovation then replace ideological criticism as the fuel on which visual studies runs? The introduction of *Bildwissenschaft* into these discussions suggests that there are many more ways to conceive the study of the visual than merely politics.

Sunil Manghani: One example of that might be the ways Mirzoeff and Rogoff write: they enjoy working with theories, structures of meaning, and so forth. One problem with moving away from ideology critique is that you end up with writing like that. I think Bal tries to define a "method" in this kind of writing when she suggests "objects are active participants in the performance of analysis." The idea here is that the collision of objects and writing enables reflection and speculation, apparently leading to "a theoretical object with philosophical relevance." In the later article we read, she appears to peg this idea to a "commitment to look"—which would seem to be even more vague.

Gustav Frank: I am worried about this whole discussion because it is channeled at once into the traditional patterns of arguments in aesthetics and, as Bal's ambiguity shows, easily trapped in these patterns. Such patterns also organize the difference between most Bildwissenschaft publications and visual studies in the US and the UK. While Anglo-American visual studies is interested in the subversive force of or in art, German-language writing is devoted to the single artwork as outside or beyond political commitments. For English-language scholarship, non-art imagery has to undergo the ideology critique of the capitalist society of mass consumption, or else it risks being completely neglected. If visual studies ends up being centered either around the concept of subversive art or around isolated Art with a capital "A," then farewell! Neither

in-depth connoisseurship nor direct political intervention needs visual studies, as Tom's book *Cloning Terror* proves.

Visuality is political because of the many social and cultural spaces and intricate practices it organizes. All tools, especially of the formalist, iconographical, and iconological tradition, can discover and analyze the variety and the interconnectedness of these spaces and practices.

Subversion then probably becomes visible on an epistemological level, where our perception and modes of communicating perceptions are organized—and that subversion may be neither leftist and engaged nor conservative and refined. There's a lot of optimism in this claim that research and intellectual discourse can do any good.

Li Xi: I think if visual studies follows political and social dimensions, it actually might not reach its original goal, that is, to restore a sense of justice and rationality, which has been blurred and overwhelmed by capitalism, back to the public eye. For example, visual studies has not actually criticized the negative impact of logo culture, a culture that reveals the alienation and materialization of human life and the whole of society: rather, visual culture has emphasized the importance of logo culture.

Elisabeth Friedman: I wonder, in relation to Mirzoeff, if we might consider the things that artists make, such as those Nemerov mentions, as forms of countervisuality. Perhaps the visual objects themselves suggest new ways of seeing the world.

Flora Lysen: Both in the Mirzoeff essay and the paper by Anders Michelsen there are departures from the idea that to see is to differentiate, to put a name on something, to classify. Mirzoeff is explicit that this sort of definition of visuality—as the Foucauldian "nomination of the visible"—is his political conceptual point of departure. Such a differentiating conception of visuality is something I think Whitney is trying to counter with his account of radical pictoriality, in which visuality is characterized by recognizing analogies between different elements, but this differentiation is never the end of the process, but continues indefinitely and is thus endlessly open to change.

James Elkins: In the "Right to Look" essay, the line I think is most characteristic is this. At the end of the essay he defines countervisuality this way: "If counterinsurgency uses neovisuality as a strategy, can we construct a countervisuality to counterinsurgency?" In other words, the visuality is nameable, has a direction, and an opposite.

María Lumbreras Corujo: I like Mirzoeff's idea of countervisuality, its political force compelling us to react against visuality. But the first thing I thought after reading the article is that Mirzoeff doesn't gives us a clue as to how to put countervisuality into practice. This goes back to Jeanette's comment. I'm not sure about what could be counted as forms of countervisuality. Mirzoeff talks about a "new mobility" that should "reclaim, rediscover, and theorize the practices of everyday life," but then he asks, "What is this new everyday?" and leaves the question unanswered.

Gustav Frank: If we take the four names, Adorno, Benjamin, Mirzoeff, and Nemerov, then I think they fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. Adorno's theories entail the impossibility of art in a monopolist, capitalist society. Benjamin's theory in "The Author as Producer" imagines people who move in the apparatus: they are no longer artists, in the traditional sense. The two contemporary readings fit quite well, because the art historian, Nemerov, takes up the historical interval from the emergence of art to the moments it fades out in the twentieth century; and Mirzoeff jumps in and says, I'll take care of the rest, after art. Each author has his position.

Keith Moxey: That's clear in a general sense, but I would take issue with the details. That is, I'm not sure that Adorno claims that art is impossible under capitalism. Rather, I take him to mean that it offers the sole refuge in an otherwise totalizing system.

James Elkins: Let's put a few more texts on the table. Last night Tom Mitchell sent me an e-mail with his latest essay on visual studies, called "New Rules for Visual Culture." The sixth one is appropriate to us here. It's very entertaining to me that two of the seven "rules" are things that we need to tell him, because he's confused about them. The sixth "new rule" might be a good way to open a conversation on his politics. It reads: "Someone has to explain to me what the purpose of visual studies is. What are we trying to accomplish? Are we amassing a new knowledge project? Exposing and intervening in false consciousness? Producing an archaeology of power? Reading the strata of the seeable and sayable? Or is visual culture more like a genealogy, a counter-discourse, and the recovery of what has been silenced by history, and left unseen, unremarked, or unremarkable? Is visual culture a kind of therapy for a certain kind of blindness? What kind?"

Jeanette Roan: What has become apparent to me in the course of our discussions this week is that there are many different practices of visual studies in existence today. What would explaining the purpose of visual studies look like given the multiple genealogies of visual studies? Mitchell may be, as he says, a "patriarchal elder" of a particular strand of visual studies, but there are also traditions of visual studies in which he is not central.

James Elkins: Yes, definitely. I also want to read a brief passage from *Cloning Terror*, Tom's most recent book. It is about what he sees as the most important widely disseminated, political significant images of the period since 9/11. The book's claim is that images and ideas of cloning and terrorism form a hybrid concept. A lot of the conceptual analysis comes out of an interview with Derrida, which turns on the notion that terrorism is an auto-immune dysfunction. Here he is, near the beginning of the book: "It is never enough to simply point out the error in a metaphor, or the lack of reality in an image. It is equally important to trace the process by which the metaphoric becomes literal, and the image becomes actual. This means a renunciation of the most facile and overused weapon in the iconologist's arsenal, the tactic of 'critical iconoclasm,' which wins easy victories by exposing the unreal or metaphoric character of an icon. . . . We need instead a method that recognizes and embraces *both* the unreality of images *and* their operational reality." And just to sample the kinds of conclusions he draws, here is a passage at the end of the book about the Hooded Man photograph from Abu Ghraib prison: "The Hooded Man heightens the contradictions embedded in the theme of state by staging it as an icon that does not remain securely on the positive side of the sacred-secular confusion . . . but forces an *enjambment* of good and evil, God and the devil, Islam and the Judaeo-Christian alliance." In other words, it's a move to make the images complex, and resist simple meanings.

Whitney Davis: What is the principal political or moral critique about an animate, sentient, quasi-human entity? Is there a difference between a critique of a picture or a thing, an artifact, and a critique of a human agent, however opposed to his or her politics one might be? Is there a different ethics of critique at that level that forces a change in the nature of critique?

Keith Moxey: If images are dead, they simply reflect the interests of those who make and use them. If images are alive, they have the potential to do what their makers and original recipients never imagined.

Whitney Davis: Isn't there a risk that this quasi-animism, ontologized in these things, is a cover or an excuse for opting out of critique of the actual intentionalities and agencies that stand behind them?

James Elkins: Whitney, I'd share that concern, except that in my reading, this book does not end up depending on what Tom calls "animism." It's a discussion of the dissemination of images. You could say that posing it this way, through animism, allows him to concentrate on other issues.

For me, the problem of *Cloning Terror* isn't animism, or his position in relation to "critical ideology": it's that it's not clear that this is a book about images. Tom is a good dyed-in-the-wool deconstructionist; he comes out of word-image studies in the 1970s, and he's well aware of the necessity of implicating images in words and vice versa. I think that all of those ideas are so much things of the past, so decathected, so out of his realm of interest, that he allows his political concerns to carry along, as if in a flood, whatever interests him—and some of what floats in the floodwater is images. They feel arbitrary in the sense that they need not have been images.

Whitney Davis: So if the material were jurisprudential texts, one would get the same text?

James Elkins: Yes. And Mirzoeff's book *Watching Babylon* is not that different: it is about images, but it does very little with them, and there are few images in the book.

Paul Frosh: Sunil's book *Image Critique and the Fall of the Berlin Wall* is very different. It is definitely about images. So is Hariman and Lucaites's book *No Caption Needed*, which is precisely about those images at particular historical junctures that seem to invite and concentrate public debate. There is work out there dealing with the problem of the role of images in the public sphere.

James Elkins: Yes, and *Cloning Terror* does that, but intermittently, and almost, as it were, without caring or noticing when its claims need to be about images, when they are incidentally about images, when they're about the idea of images, and when they're about other claims, with images somewhere in the background. I think Tom's

politics—his genuine desire to say something about the world—has floated free of his concern with visual culture.

Gustav Frank: I would mark the difference here very clearly between the historians who discover their canon of images in the collective memory of the twentieth century and a project like Sunil's *Image Critique*.

Lisa Cartwright: I think that at some level, the work Keith is doing on Bruegel is more political, at this particular historical moment, than the kind of work that is being advocated when we're talking about the ways to do visual studies, or discussing whether we should look at these images rather than those images. At bottom, there is a serious methodological issue, which is partly at stake in what Whitney is doing by distinguishing visual studies from visual culture studies. Few people are doing visual studies in the sense of doing analytics—looking at what goes into the period eye, for example—and I think that is sorely missing from what passes as visual culture studies, when we look yet again at the way the Abu Ghraib images were fused with iPod ads. There are these aspects of formalism that we just haven't even scratched, and I imagine art historians going home, and wondering how to proceed, and coming up short after reading these conversations. So I wonder if the kind of work Keith is modeling might move us further at this particular moment.

Paul Frosh: I think what Mirzoeff is doing is tactical. It's not strategic. He is looking at the immediate problem, and trying to firefight.

Lisa Cartwright: I totally agree. I like Nick, and I'm not criticizing him.

Paul Frosh: Neither am I: I think tactics can be a very necessary thing.

Lisa Cartwright: But when you put up a slide of surveillance and say, This is the military-industrial complex, and you have a room full of people who are old Marxists, you really don't need to do that anymore.

Whitney Davis: You're preaching to the choir.

Lisa Cartwright: Yes, and beyond that we need a visual studies that will tell you what goes on in that image. It's not about the Panopticon anymore. We need an analytics that tell us what is going on in those images at a very fine level of grain.

María Lumbreras Corujo: I think that is exactly what Bredekamp and Bruhn were trying to accomplish with the project Das Technische Bild. What is absent in it is a strong

politics like the one you encounter in Mirzoeff's work. I wonder whether these two concerns are completely at odds, or whether they can be reconciled somehow.

Paul Frosh: What I'm getting at here is the idea of the intellectual as seeming to withdraw from the immediate barricade. I understand what Nick is doing, which is something else. He is someone who is saying, I need to respond publicly, and the urgency of the situation means that I need to respond now. Leaving aside whether or not he does it well, it's a different kind of politics to what I think Lisa is describing, which is developing an analytics that has time to think, meditate, reconsider, apply, and reapply itself, and to develop a coherent theoretical and methodological kernel which will have long-term impact on others' work.

James Elkins: The essay of Nick's we read, "Right to Look," was published in *Critical Inquiry*. Tom Mitchell would be the one who has ultimate say over what goes into the journal. It is a product of this year, the same as *Cloning Terror*. After 9/11, Tom felt some of the same urgency, and he wrote a piece even though, as he said at the time, he didn't have much of an idea what to say. Tom's politics—which I think is separable, now, from his visual studies and his theorizing on images—is tactical in the sense you're ascribing to Nick.

Paul Frosh: And there is a value to that, so long as you say it as clearly as you can at the moment. But there is also a value in withdrawal. There is a deep, mystical value in spending time with images, and that is a different kind of politics. It's the kind that lets us make sense of the possibility that Whitney's *General Theory of Visual Culture* might find its readers in fifty or a hundred years.

Lisa Cartwright: I don't agree. I see the two kinds of work as interrelated and crucially connected, at this point in history. You can't do the kind of work you demand from those images if you do it too quickly. The images aren't obvious. If we work tactically, we'll just say the same things about them next week that we say today. It takes time to understand images, and so the strategic and the tactical need to be connected.

Paul Frosh: Ideally, I'd obviously agree with you. And the slow accretion of a strategic, analytical politics over time should mean that what is being said today about images is different to what it was possible to say twenty, fifty, or a hundred years ago. Sometimes, however, the same things need to be said about images because it is politically

urgent that they be reiterated now, and what may appear to some people to be a mere repetition is to others—a new generation—a viewpoint they are hearing for the first time.

Juliet Bellow: I see this problem as connected with the Case of the Calvin Klein Suit. I was thinking of this in relation to Bal's claim in the "Visual Essentialism" essay that the museum is "a privileged object for analysis in visual culture studies" because it has the potential to "disturb the conventional notion of the transparency of the visible" through variations in installation technique and the foregrounding of curatorial choices. I teach a class called "Museums and Society," and I do the kind of ideology critique that we have been considering. Afterward, the veil is lifted, and the students see how the museum is constructed . . . but then comes the problem: What is next?

Keith Moxey: One possible answer might be to note that the museum isn't just a prison house for escaped works of art, but to notice exactly what kinds of architecture are involved, what interiors, what discourses. For the Calvin Klein suit, you can notice the details: the stitching, the fabric. What sort of manipulation of the imagination does this suit consist of? How is elegance being designed?

James Elkins: Or you can pay attention to the ways you are not using the visual. What in the images, or the museum, is not part of your critique? What visual elements are not necessary for your critique? To what extent are the points in your classroom nonvisual? This is the issue I raised in relation to John Pike's project.

Gustav Frank: In systems theory, the idea would be to reenter the situation. Have a class observe your class, and see what you are doing, and then let them be the object of study. In that way you recreate the entire situation in a dialectic.

Juliet Bellow: I think I may have parodied my own class, because I actually have my students do or consider several of those things.

James Elkins: I think we are about out of time. It's interesting how heated, how immediate, this conversation has become, even though it is about two widely different possibilities for politics in visual studies. I just wonder what the graduate students who are working on the reader *Theorizing Visual Studies* will make of this: their political temperature is very low, nearly at absolute zero. For some of them, at least, the political

is distributed so thinly that it wouldn't be possible to even be as engaged as the disengaged Alexander Nemerov.

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Science Studies

The place of non-art images—from science, engineering, statistics, and other fields— came up several times during the week. This transcript excerpts several discussions: the first one on Whitney Davis's essay "Neurovisuality," which surveys possible connections between brain and vision science and art history; and a second conversation led by Lisa Cartwright, for which the participants read three texts on film and science studies, including an essay by Giuliana Bruno on Hugo Münsterberg's laboratory at Harvard; Münsterberg pioneered the quantitative measurement of people's reactions to motion pictures.

Whitney Davis: The topic here is what might be called the neuroaesthetic turn. My essay is one way into this, and we could also talk about John Onians's text.

James Elkins: The community of people who study the science of vision and visual processing from positions more or less in art history is extremely diverse—so much that it's almost incoherent. There's Ladislav Kesner, for example, and Barbara Stafford, and David Freedberg, in addition to Onians, and some barely talk to one another. So in general I think your essay is extremely valuable as a first step toward some more consolidated discussion.

Whitney Davis: Do you think that group is diverse because there is no stable theory of vision that people could feel confident about? A theory that appears sufficiently coordinated or stable so that people could use it, even if they don't necessarily hold to its major claims?

James Elkins: From my point of view, it's that the encounters are not yet between some art history and some specialty such as cognitive psychology or the neurology of vision. Reading is selective and opportunistic, and so is interpretation.

Whitney Davis: When I started graduate school, David Marr's book *Vision* had just been published. I thought that book would be immediately processed into art history and other fields, and be used as a textbook in the humanities. That didn't happen, for all sorts of reasons, and there is a history of that in itself. [Have a reference to add here?]

I made use of the book in my own work, and then I found that one reason the work wasn't communicating well was on account of this predicated vision science that was not particularly interesting to other scientists of vision, or had been discredited by them.

Anna Sigrídur Arnar: I have two questions: first I wonder about the relation between your earlier work, such as *Replications*, and this new work. I gathered from your introductory and autobiographical remarks that in a sense you had been examining similar problems but that you had framed them differently for the later work because you felt that certain questions had not been adequately answered. In that sense, you felt the need to approach the problem from a different perspective. To fully understand the project in *A General Theory of Visual Culture*, I wonder if one needs to be conversant with your earlier books? Second, I ask that since you bring so many disciplines to the table—archaeology, philosophy, psychoanalysis, art history, and theories of vision— do you feel the necessity to bracket some disciplines out, and highlight others? Perhaps that explains some of the reframing of your scholarly projects?

Gustav Frank: Let me add a question, which also concerns the methodological level of your work. Could this work on the "neuroaesthetic turn" be done as a kind of monographic Whitney Davis project? To what degree does this kind of research require collaboration?

Whitney Davis: Bracketing disciplines, works of art, and approaches to objects are strategic moves that ensure communicability, generality, and applicability of results that might otherwise get ghettoized, as it were. Readers might conclude that the books are written only by an art historian, writing within art history, and for art historians.

I have a very different view of the question of method than, say, Tim Clark. For him the test of an art-historical interpretation would be that no one else could write it but this one person who did. That is the sine qua non. Explication has to rise to that minimal degree of inimitability before we're even on the page of rich and significant description. I pretty much see that matter the other way around. The inimitability of the ekphrasis is richly productive of a certain kind of interpretation, but it is a kind that has been done so much, by so many talented writers, who are such great stylists,

that I don't have any claim to be even wanting to reproduce that. And on a methodological level, I have a bit of a moral problem with it. I have an issue with constituting the inimitability of an analysis, in pedagogical terms, in terms of the possibility of collaboration, and in terms of the spirit—not of science, because that sounds risky, but—

Gustav Frank: There is an institutional expectation that the humanities should do big science.

Whitney Davis: Yes. There is a risk in saying that you should develop a general model that has an imitability, so that everyone can deploy it.

So I am well aware of the risks of going too far down that road. One possible outcome for visual studies is that forms of intellectual collaboration and collective evaluation at the level of method, protocol, and research design could shift away from the inimitable spirit of the author in relation to the inimitable specificity of the object. But I'm not sure what the alternative is.

James Elkins: This is a serious issue, and I'm glad it's being raised, because I think it is utterly invisible from within art history and visual studies. I have tried writing about combined art and science issues in such a way that technical detail does not give way to metaphoric description too quickly, or unnecessarily. That way the imitability, in the terms you're using, will be prolonged, but the inimitability of the result is still high. It's a scaled strategy, so maybe it's a way to begin talking about this issue.

Keith Moxey: Whitney, there is something quite radical about your description of Tim Clark's criterion for good interpretation.

Whitney Davis: Well, but if it didn't have an inimitability, it wouldn't have achieved sufficient particularity in its engagement with the object.

Keith Moxey: But couldn't you say that interpretation in the humanities depends on that? Isn't the individual's response the most wonderful contribution that anyone working in the humanities can experience? Isn't work in the humanities centrally about difference? The world is shown filtered through individuals, and somehow an insight occurs in that process, and that's what matters. Art history and visual studies actually depend on responses to objects whose individual characteristics are what count.

Whitney Davis: I would turn the tables slightly on that set of characterizations. Tim Clark's book on Poussin is two hundred and fifty pages on one painting. If all of us were to do our two hundred and fifty pages, meditating from our particular points of view, it would become increasingly more difficult to get at the very axes of difference, commonality, or lack of commonality that might structure our individual and collective version of the painting. Partly that is the sheer quantity of the ekphrasis.

Keith Moxey: We might not produce texts as interesting as Clark's. Someone might come up with a text that all of us would recognize is more interesting than the rest.

Whitney Davis: I don't think that would ever occur. Clark's interpretation is considered interesting because there is an entire social and institutional history behind his writing. I love the book: it taught me a lot about the painting, and about Clark. But I would be very cautious about supposing that that's what we should all be striving for, partly in virtue of the necessary exclusions that his sort of looking would require.

James Elkins: This is an extremely unusual kind of conversation we're having. The furthest interpretation of Clark's writing gets within art history is acknowledgment and praise, even though most of us know we can't, or shouldn't, or won't, emulate it. But our context here is even rarer: we're talking about how visual studies or art history might build bridges to science, and especially the study of vision, by flattening and generalizing its style. I think this is exactly the kind of fundamental issue that needs to be explored before much genuinely collaborative work can be done.

Lisa Cartwright: Whitney, if you could teach a research program in which you could pursue these subjects, what would it look like, and what would your students do?

Whitney Davis: It would look less like a traditional art-historical program, in which students look at screens, object, or books, and try to find ways to describe, and more like a graphic project. Students would go out into the world to observe uses of visual things by people who could be interviewed, recorded, or observed. It might involve a little more use of the protocols of social scientific investigation that tend not to have any status in the humanistic inquiries: questionnaires, interviews, statistics, text aggregate data.

Jeanette Roan: That sounds a lot like what happens in design classes at my institution—students often go out into the world to do fieldwork and conduct ethnographies. But

their purpose is quite contrary to what I understand yours to be. They're usually try-
ing to gather information that will help them design products that people will want to
buy, or to find better ways of marketing products that already exist. On the other
hand, you're interested in gathering data about human vision at a general level, right?

Whitney Davis: The "ethnography of new media" is, as Jeanette says, a major topic—or
perhaps better, a procedure—in the intersection between vision science, visual stud-
ies, media studies, computer science, and so on. While I'm not against it (in principle
it can be deployed under adequate conceptualization and constraint as an element of
an investigation of the historicity of vision and visuality in the sense I'd advocate),
I'm wary of the kind of uses that you describe: helping tech companies, software
writers, app developers, and so on to tailor interfaces and platforms to certain kinds of
experience, consumption, and dissemination, and essentially to massage—if not actu-
ally to produce—visuality in the theoretical sense, and in relation to the intrinsic re-
sistance (the "radical openness" or "radical pictoriality") of vision making worlds vis-
ible. To get at this as a social process in our time and place, we'd have to be doing, I
suppose, some kind of critical-historical ethnography of that "ethnography of new
media" that functions essentially as part of the design process and as market research.
Many scholars of new media, especially those coming at the present-day explosion of
small powerful digital devices from the vantage points of political critique and hu-
manistic historicization, take this to be what they're doing, and rightly so. But I have
the impression that the sciences that are entering into visual studies and art history
will probably have the biggest impact on this level. The classroom unit may begin to
involve itself with computational issues and the ethnography of media. The art history
classroom will begin to look a lot different. Universities across the U.S. are starting
projects with names like "humanities lab"; Stanford has one. One can be cautious and
skeptical, but students are voting with their feet.

James Elkins: I don't doubt that, although I would imagine it happening more in art his-
tory than visual studies. But there are two things about our conversation, and about
the various attempts by Onians and others to read vision science, that bear saying.
First, it is definitely significant that none of us here have wanted to pursue specific

claims made by Semir Zeki, David Marr, or others you cite. We don't seem to be interested in what the vision scientists actually claim, and I think that is symptomatic and entirely typical. And second, I notice your essay has only a few references to more recent scientific material, such as Kulvicki's *On Images*, and no references to primary sources in scientific journals. There is a disparity, still, between the specialized sources we cite when we review our own literature (such as Clark's very complex and decidedly unpopularized book) and the slightly older, popularized or summarized literature that writers including Kesner, Freedberg, and others cite when they look to the sciences. That is another disparity we would need to work on if we're to take science seriously.

Whitney Davis: I take your point. But I'm not sure it's entirely accurate and fair in every respect. Many scholars in visual studies (though maybe not in this room) are indeed deeply interested in what "vision scientists actually claim," whether they are in turn concerned to historicize those claims (there are a number of excellent histories of research in perceptual science and philosophy of perception, not to speak of the history and critique of the domain of visualization—the "practices of looking"—in generating scientific knowledge, our topic today) or interested in finding ways to put them to use analytically in their own investigations of visual culture (as someone like Onians has tried to do, for example, not so much in his "neuroarthistory," which is a substantially historiographical project, as in his "neuroarchaeology," which is substantive neurohistorical explanation of a particular case study). Moreover, I'm not sure whether you mean to draw attention to the "disparity" between how we cite our own literature (say art-historical, sociological, or philosophical) and how we do (or can) approach "recent scientific material" (especially the "primary sources in scientific journals") as a negative or a positive thing. As you imply, there's clearly an issue here about our training, about disciplinary collaborations and divisions of labor; about the availability of transdisciplinary frameworks within which we can not only "keep up to date" with ongoing scientific research but also "update" scientists about our interests and conclusions as historians, anthropologists, artists, and so on. I have no solution to this beyond a vague hope that seminars like this might nudge such conversations into

being where they could be happening but aren't yet, and awareness that they are already going on in all kinds of venues (for example in the frames of some of the Max Planck Institutes in Germany). I'm not especially troubled by your observation about a time lag between the generation of "primary" science (such as published in advanced specialized scientific journals) and the use of "popularized" and late-coming syntheses, whether written by scientists themselves or generated within interdisciplinary visual studies. I've been reading and rereading a lot of Gombrich lately and have been struck by the way in which two waves of primary scientific conceptualization—the rise of ethology in the work of Konrad Lorenz, Niko Tinbergen, and others in the thirties, and the consolidation of a protocognitive perceptual psychology in the work of Jerome Bruner and others in the fifties—washed through his work a decade or more later, and in the form of the most synthetic and general publications emerging from laboratories, and how they continued to vitalize his own theoretical investigations long after "primary" science had generated new technical results and adopted different models. I don't think we have to be up to the minute with every technical publication to be able to learn from "primary science" and indeed to participate and intervene in it at a primary level. For one thing, it's not obvious that primary science sheds its skin—or better, rearticulates its philosophical architecture—so quickly that people engaging in visual studies in nonscientific frames and discourses can't keep up. "Keeping up" isn't perhaps the right issue.

Flora Lysen: Current work that is being done in neuroarthistory or neuraesthetics, such as Onians's *Neuroarthistory* or Barbara Stafford's *Echo Objects*, doesn't seem to employ any of the research methods of the social or natural sciences, as Whitney suggests should be done. Instead, they use concepts from neuroscience research such as neural plasticity or pattern recognition in order to cast a critical look at artworks or art practices and give them a kind of neuro-reconsideration. It seems they can never keep up with the controversies and debates in the natural sciences about these concepts. What they (art historians or visual culture theorists) can do, I think, it to try to see in what way thinking about images—and perhaps artworks in particular—can help us to reconsider the way neuroscientists conceptualize image-making and visuality.

Lisa Cartwright: I'd like to introduce a different set of concerns. My work began in film studies and art practice. My first book was a history of structural film, coming out of structural sculpture. I was interested in the work being done around neurology and physiology, so I moved from there sideways into science and technology studies. I've also been involved in American studies, studying as a graduate student with Alan Trachtenberg and David Rodowick, a Deleuzian scholar, although I didn't follow him into the Deleuzian turn—which was, after Michael Holly left Rochester, a major turn in visual culture studies. In Rochester, my own work on affect studies was organized around André Green, who was a student of Lacan; Green's work was involved with object-relations theory and affect, which were problematic concerns in the view of scholars invested in the Lacanian turn.

I offer that as background. I have the somewhat strange task here of introducing science studies, media studies, and other fields; they might be seen as subfields in relation to visual studies, but the readings I have set are parts of an attempt to disorganize that sense.

Keith Moxey: Lisa, I was fascinated by the Giuliana Bruno reading, because it tied in to so many things we have been talking about: the role of affect in visual studies, the ways in which Münsterberg's laboratory at Harvard set out to measure—using weird and intricate mechanisms—people's response to film. This reminds me of "What Do Pictures Really Want?" or the idea, in *Bildwissenschaft*, that images think. These are all attempts to break down the distinction between the observer and what is being observed.

Inge Hinterwaldner: I guess you do not mean a complete collapse between observer and the observed. Are you referring to ideas like the human being as "host of images" ("Ort der Bilder" as opposed to "Herr der Bilder," as Hans Belting says) or as "iconophor" (as Boehm says)?

Keith Moxey: That's right, the collapse of subject and object is only a useful heuristic tool if it is used metaphorically rather than intended literally.

Lisa Cartwright: So Keith, the analogy, the pattern you're seeing is—

Keith Moxey: The distance between images and ourselves is something we built. We're not entirely sure what the distance between visual objects and our subjectivities might be. These texts and projects are all models, as Gustav would say, of the distance.

Lisa Cartwright: For Bruno, part of the interest was in using the archive to go into the lab itself, rather than trying to find the images that Münsterberg produced there. She wanted, I think, to find the mechanisms by which the images were used to study people; her interest shifts away from the image and toward—

Keith Moxey: Toward the subject who is watching. In other words, the image becomes fused with the reaction. Let's say I am watching a horror film. I'd be a splendid subject for an experiment: I would be clutching the arms of my chair. My palms would be sweating. I'd be a classic subject. I would somehow have managed to internalize the image, to embed it in myself. I vaguely know, in the back of my mind, that it's a creation of the filmmaker, but to me it is intensely real and disconcerting.

Lisa Cartwright: But Bruno is not looking at that. That's not in the lab. The laboratory doesn't suggest to us what spectators felt; it gives us data about a practice that was oriented toward finding out what spectators felt.

Keith Moxey: That's what I'm trying to get at: the Münsterberg lab was trying to understand our responses to film.

Keith Moxey: Well, that's fine . . . but the lab shows that the image is as much subjective as objective.

Bill Stamets: The lab also generated hundreds of pages of research, in English, that were of no interest to Bruno. You can download them, if you want to see the studies they actually did there.

Lisa Cartwright: But within the history of film studies, there is a reason why Giuliana Bruno is not writing about what Münsterberg said about spectators. She is writing about his lab. Those papers have been studied, and spectatorship has been discussed for many years. She is looking at the instruments and practices of film studies, the apparatus. Although there was a lot of interest in the apparatus and the production of film in the 1980s, there has been relatively little work on the history and practice of the actual uses of film, particularly in contexts like the experimental psychology laboratory.

Bill Stamets: But those studies involve other psychophysiological stimuli far, far less so-phisticated than moving images.

Juliet Bellow: To use an art-historical parallel, Bruno's essay is like a study of the painter's studio without the painter or the painting there. It's about the space, the paintbrushes and tubes of paint: the technology, the apparatuses, the things that tend to be invisible to us. Art history and visual studies began with the object; in visual studies we are thinking more about the spectator and reception theory; and now this is a third thing, the rest of the context that we tend to leave out.

Lisa Cartwright: Yes, exactly.

Whitney Davis: To what degree, in an essay like Bruno's, is the laboratory a metaphor for a wider social field? For example, in Foucault's sense, you could say San Francisco is the "laboratory" of sexuality. In the formula, x is the laboratory of y, what-ever y is in some sense made visible by treating the laboratory as a sample, a stratum, or a focalization, but what is at stake is not a bricks-and-mortar laboratory. Her project is a way of reaching toward some wider, deeper, socio-psychic polity that the laboratory stands for . . . I am not quite sure how to express the relationship, but I have a feeling that is what Bruno is getting at.

Lisa Cartwright: I think that is absolutely accurate. The laboratory is a social practice organized around a space that we can analyze using the terms of visual culture. Giuliana is trained as a film scholar, and her work is on architecture and cities; so she is interested in the organization of social space. In laboratory and science studies, there would be a tendency to say that laboratories are certain sorts of social spaces, distinct from other spaces.

Whitney Davis: And how do analogies to other spaces—studios, museums—get sorted out disciplinarily? Is it a source of interesting refertilization? Does it bifurcate the scholarly communities?

Lisa Cartwright: The distribution of methodologies in laboratory studies would be interesting for anyone looking at contemporary practices in visual studies. If you look at the scale of the hand and the pencil and their interaction with your agential machine, you might choose to use an ethnomethodological approach, which would come from

Harold Garfinkel, and you might then move through Michael Lynch. He is an ethno-methodologist who has worked for twenty-five years on images, insisting that we look at the practice, move our focus from the images themselves to a much more intricate field of practice.

James Elkins: I think our conversations here on science studies, the science of vision, and related subjects have been very representative. Non-art images are one of my own interests, and I find they are decisively marginalized in visual studies—even more so than in art history. There is, I think, an enormous distance between Whitney's interest in reading image science along with art history, and Lisa's interest in the current state and future prospects of science and media studies.

One way to think about this might be to think about the different approaches to the value and interest of the technical, as opposed to the affective. In my reading of your work, Lisa, and of the Bruno essay, affectivity is absolutely central. When affective experience drives the work, what appears as technical—and therefore marginal—is the mechanical, the quantitative, the mathematical. I don't think a researcher like Bruno would be well advised to read Münsterberg's texts or activate and use the instruments he used—as you said, Lisa, she is embarked on a different kind of work—but there is affective value in first-person, professional-level interaction with texts and instruments. That affective content does not appear until those texts are studied or the instruments are used. In my own work, for example, I have found it immensely useful to actually learn how to use things like spectrographs and interference microscopes, and I try whenever I can to read contemporary, unpopularized, primary scientific research.

In my experience people give three reasons for resisting that sort of learning: (1) as you've said, there is a feeling that previous science studies have already covered that ground; (2) there's also the entrenched agnosticism within visual studies and the humanities about what science currently thinks about vision; and (3) there is concern that actual science writing is not a humanistic subject, that our interest should be the conditions of its production and reception. I think a deeper reason we avoid the details and reality claims of science is that we would have to produce different kinds of texts. In a formula: we—visual studies scholars, in this case—don't want to write

texts that have equations. I think that is exactly what has to be risked in order to speak across the bridge from the humanities to the sciences, and across the equally wide gulf between scholars who want to read and incorporate actual vision science and those who want to pursue laboratory studies, science studies in general, media studies, the sociology, ethnography, or even the philosophy of science.

<CN> 10

The Place of the Image

This section and the next are transcribed from the closing roundtable, which ended the week. Here the question was about images in the texts and teaching of visual studies. If the expressions "pictorial turn" or "iconic turn" have purchase, and if, in late capitalist culture, people tend to experience the world through or as images, then visual studies might be well positioned to analyze the new visuality. Yet it is an open question whether visual objects work differently in the texts of visual studies than they do, for example, in art history.

James Elkins: We haven't yet discussed a subject that I think is central to visual studies' self-description: the place of images in our texts. Visual studies continues, in various ways, to make a promise: that the visual and visuality will have a different status than in art history and other humanities. In particular, there's the promise that the visual will have the capacity to guide or move arguments, that we argue and think with or through the visual rather than alongside it or over it, that the visual has a certain power or even a desire that can be taken on board, that images propose or embody or instantiate theories rather than just illustrating or exemplifying theories.

In any of these ways, visual studies would probably not be interested in having images function as mnemonics or reminders of absent originals. In much of art history, images function as necessarily inadequate reminders of originals or as placeholders for the observer's own encounter with the work. Visual studies would also not be interested in taking images as examples of ideas, theories, or arguments made in the text. In art history, so this argument might run, images follow along, illustrate, exemplify, or otherwise ornament claims made in the texts.

The promise of visual studies has been that images are more active, that they work to theorize, direct, drive, produce, or orient argument. I want to signal four salient texts.

Barthes's essay "The Photographic Message" has the well-known line "The image no longer illustrates the words: it is the words which are structurally parasitic on the

image." From a contemporary vantage point, I think we might want to distinguish texts that feed on images or are nourished by them—using Barthes's metaphor—and the rarer and more challenging case of texts that permit themselves to be fundamentally altered by images. Barthes himself wrote such a text, I think, in *Camera Lucida*, but it is a far from common occurrence.

A second example, from the German-language tradition, is Horst Bredekamp's *Darwins Korallen* (Darwin's Corals), a little book on a moment in Darwin's work that was, in Bredekamp's account, propelled by a sketch of branching coral. For a moment, Bredekamp argues, Darwin thought with or through that image. The image directed the argument.

Susan Buck-Morss's *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* is my third example, because she has said, both in the book and in an interview, that it was driven by images, that it began as a collection of images and that they suggested its argument. I don't doubt that, but as it stands, the book has a series of arguments that control the meanings of the images.

And a fourth example is Tom Mitchell's book *Picture Theory* and the claim of its title, that images produce theory. Yet in *Picture Theory*, the pictures are mainly illustrations of arguments that are carried on in the text. In my reading, there is no moment in the book in which an image arrests my reading and makes me reconsider what the text is saying.

I mention these three, in telegraphic fashion, just to open the conversation. My feeling is that visual studies has not yet made good on its promise to take images as something other than illustrations, examples, exemplars, mnemonics, ornaments, placeholders, or other accompaniments to the arguments that run around and past them in our texts. There are counterexamples, especially in art history—I think, for example, of how Tim Clark lets images interrupt his thinking—but they are rare.

Sunil Manghani: I've heard Susan Buck-Morss talk about bringing together the text and images of her book *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*. It was interesting listening to how difficult it was in terms of production. She sat down with the designers at MIT Press and worked out layout with them. That was, she suggested, and I think still is, an unusual thing to do. I know, certainly, when I did my *Image Critique* book, it was shock

horror for the publisher that I didn't want captions to any of my images. I said, "It's fine; there will be a list of images, but I don't want captions next to the images." From their point of view, that was a problem, because they had to code up pages and make sure they went to the printer in the correct order. It's strange, because if we think back historically, there is a rich tradition of playing with the book format, and even though we've gotten more and more means, including virtual means, that hasn't exploded into new kinds of printing.

I think this subject is very much to do with risk taking. We may be overly concerned with having the correct argument all the time. I don't know whether it's sometimes useful to fail, to understand things through failure.

James Elkins: Images would then fail in a different way than texts.

Sunil Manghani: Yes, perhaps. When we were talking with Tom Mitchell about the metapicture, it occurred to me that metapictures open things up, rather than closing them down. It can be a struggle to deal with that.

Keith Moxey: I think it might be useful to rehearse the history of visual studies; at least in the English-language tradition, it came out of cultural studies and has been haunted by the word. Images have usually been treated as representations, rather than presentations. The image as, say, a configuration, a presence, a set of formal proposals has infrequently been the subject of visual studies, which has mainly been about content: What is the work of images? What do they do? How do they try to persuade us? What are the ideologies they represent?

We live in a moment where there is a massive turn from that model to something else. No one, however, is entirely sure what that something else might be. There are some very interesting theories. There is Boehm's idea that the figure-ground principle might be the means by which something called visual logic might become apparent, and that even if images cannot be taken apart into semiotic units, they nevertheless have the capacity to make some sort of meaning in a metaphorical sense. There is Bredekamp's notion that the use of visual images in the sciences is actually a form of thinking, that it is an alternative to using language in that context. There is Hans Belting's proposal that images have always been with us, that there is an anthropology of images, that we can't live without them, that every culture has them. And finally, the

most animistic of these approaches is Tom Mitchell's, who argues that images have a life of their own, that they are secondary agents in the lives of humans.

These theories are fascinating. But the idea that images on their own, such as those in the book *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, can amount to anything, can make meaning, is problematic. Sometimes combinations of texts and images work very well: I recall Douglas Crimp's book *On the Museum's Ruins*. He worked with Louise Lawler, who produced a photo-essay. That worked very well, because images and text had nothing to do with one another, and yet they complemented each other very well. If such project is going to work—if you're going to line up images, one after another—then there is going to have to be a principle that animates the sequence. I think Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas, which proposes analogies on the level of form, worked; but it is difficult to line up images in such a way that they actually speak to one another.

James Elkins: Or, in the most fundamental instance, it's difficult to let a single image, in an actual visual studies or art history text, "speak" in the sense that it can disrupt, delay, derail, criticize, undermine, or otherwise alter what the text proposes. I think moments like those are very few and far between, and what actually happens is images follow along and illustrate, exemplify, and—as you say—represent.

Whitney Davis: It seems there's a tension between an interest in argumentation or theorization being rooted exclusively or in large part through images understood as configurations that are visible to us, and what seems to be a consistent philosophic interest of a good deal of contemporary visual culture studies, namely that images are somehow ontologically outside being true or false. We have heard that claim in various forms, but it is worth remembering that in earlier theories of visuality there was a strong sense that images are, ontologically, the sorts of things that can be corrected. For example, there is Gombrich's theory of the schema, which involves a claim, internal to it, that the schemas of human vision, which are then replicated in the schematic construction or constitution of a given picture, are ontologically the sorts of things that are susceptible to being made more naturalistic or realistic: they can be corrected and transformed in light of a confrontation between the visual projection of the hu-

man brain and something else. There has also been a long-standing interest in the possibility that images can be enhanced: they can be made more intersubjectively intelligible; they can be transformed in light of political critique, or moral challenge. There, too, there has to be some criterion by which the image can be interestingly adjusted.

I think one of the issues for contemporary visual studies is to resolve its views on this problem. In visual culture studies, of the sort we are familiar with in the cultural sociology of imaging, there seems to be a claim that the object of visual studies is the critique of images, such that a transformation or correction of visualities can be attained, on some principled basis. (Perhaps a political basis, or some other: but a principled basis.) Yet there persists the opposite claim, that there is no method by which the image can be adjusted in that sort of way. It seems to me we are being called to a foundational question.

James Elkins: Whitney, I think you're absolutely right to point to the need to decide how, and whether, images can be corrected. In practice, the claims and practices run the other way: Tom Mitchell, Horst Bredekamp, the Barthes of that essay, and Susan Buck-Morss all propose ways that images can "correct"—alter or transform—text.

Whitney Davis: [Whitney: I interpolated my comment there, to bring the initial theme back. Add something if you'd like.] It may be premature to try to resolve it philosophically or analytically; this may be a problem in *Bildwissenschaft*. I have been interested to hear, in Lisa's seminar and elsewhere, just how much we are learning about this problem from a very fine-tuned investigation of imaging practices, and for claims about the informational richness of images.

Lisa Cartwright: Whitney, can you provide some examples of practices that provide corrective, interpretive adjustments of the image? And some examples of the other position—

Whitney Davis: The one in which it's taken for granted there couldn't be a principled adjustment, that any adjustment would be arbitrary and constitute just another visual object?

Lisa Cartwright: Yes.

Whitney Davis: Well, there seems to be, in some approaches to new media, the view that the greater distribution of a particular image, and the response to that image coming

in from users, lead in some interesting sense to an image that has greater intersubjective value, for other purposes, such as community building, or socio-subjective psycho-sexual-social exchange, democratization, reconstruction of public culture on the global stage regarding matters of citizenship and polity. That view is predicated on the assumption that the image is being enhanced by the ways it is distributed. But at the same time, there may be a philosophical tendency in visual studies to suppose that such an enhancement of value is constitutively impossible, in the very nature of imaging, and that these kinds of hopes are utopian, and will never be realized ontologically.

James Elkins: One of the most fundamental issues we have encountered this week is one we have been assigning to the German-language and Anglo-American traditions. The texts we've been reading from the German-language tradition are committed to a sense of the image in which it functions as if it had meaning—

Whitney Davis: That phrase is a cipher for the contrast I am drawing attention to. The "as if" allows you to say, It has no meaning, and yet it has meaning.

James Elkins: Yes. I'd like to point to a dis-symmetry in the availability of ways to articulate the two positions. In our 2008 event, *What Is an Image?*, we encountered an interesting impasse. For most of a day, we were mulling over whether or not an image can contradict another image. This is a tremendously difficult puzzle if you subscribe to a certain version of Bildwissenschaft; it is easier if you come at it from the vantage of, say, Leo Steinberg, for whom the answer would be, Yes, of course. (I am thinking of his *Leonardo's Incessant Last Supper*, where copies of Leonardo's painting are taken to be wholly capable of contradicting one another.)

Whitney Davis: In visual culture studies there seems to be a strong view that the very aim of cultural studies in its moment of visual critique is to provide foundations for the constitution of new images that will indeed successfully critique previous images and visualities.

Keith Moxey: Whitney, I hate to disagree with you again, but I suppose it is one of the good consequences of having different philosophical positions on the same panel. The idea that visual studies depends on setting images right just staggers the imagination.

What visual studies has done is to look at the activities that images perform in the service of capitalism, patriarchy, or racial inequality. Not in the hope of setting the images straight: these images are obnoxious and deplorable, but they might not be commented on if it weren't for the work of visual studies. Really what we're talking about here is ideology criticism. The people who are critical of images have a position. They aren't setting images right; they fully acknowledge that there is no right or wrong. It is a contest of positions, of voices.

Whitney Davis: Yes, that may be a fundamental difference between your view and my view. And it may be a correct characterization of some trends in visual studies. But I wouldn't want visual studies to be merely a contest of opinion. I have an instinctive reaction against that view.

Sunil Manghani: I would want to agree with both Keith and Whitney here. In *Image Critique*, I consider ideology explicitly by focusing on the fall of the Berlin Wall—and all that that event sums up. However, I purposely didn't want to simply overturn the dominant readings of the event, particularly, for example, what I refer to as a theme of celebration and its connection to a so-called end of history. For me, one of the key moments in the book is a reference to Margaret Thatcher's response to the news media footage of the event. As the British prime minister at the time, she steps out of Downing Street the morning after and simply urges we watch our televisions. I describe her as having a certain visual shrewdness in this, in letting the images speak for themselves. She says herself, she doesn't need to say anything, but rather just let people "see what freedom means." The problem in the book, then, is how can other ideologies, which were equally part of the situation, be seen to exist? In the face of the joyous scenes of the fall of the Wall, it wasn't good enough to simply explain other ideologies. The question is, how can they be articulated with equal force and emotion—in this case visually? In Barthes' terms, the point is not to simply rely on the work of the mythmaker (e.g., the journalist) or the mythologist (the critic or scholar), but to actually "entertain" what goes on in the reading of the myth. In its moment and its modality. It is the point I try to make in the piece I gave us to read this week on making metapictures political. In the case of the Berlin Wall, there are a few films I have found interesting, though only as offering the very beginnings of a response.

Gustav Frank: I think there is a vicious circle of picture theory, at least in the sense of picturing theory. An analysis of this notion can lead us to a better understanding of the concepts that inform our theorizations and even our depictions of visual and non-visual, of sight and other senses.

There are various possibilities regarding the relation of picture and theory. Whitney, you mentioned schemata. Jim, you mentioned the idea of images leading or affecting argument in visual studies (I would call that a metaphoric relation). Keith, you mentioned the idea of reducing images to merely showing. I think a reflection on the concepts we use to picture picture theory, often unconsciously, would be a productive theme for visual studies. Shouldn't we talk about our different concepts, and see how they overlap, and whether they contradict one another?

James Elkins: I entirely agree, a conversation on picturing picture theory, if we want to put it that way, is crucial. For my part, I wouldn't think of my examples as metaphoric. For me, the general problem is: How seriously can visual studies take the visual? Can we permit the visual to guide, distract, slow, and even undermine our theories and explanations? Probably not, because we're scholars! Even contemporary fiction writers who incorporate images seldom let those images do anything more than illustrate or distract: I'm thinking of Jonathan Safran Foer, Susan Howe, Tan Lin, Orhan Pamuk, Paula Fox, Anne Carson, and most prominently W. G. Sebald. So I think my picturing of the problem might be, in the end, psychological or psychoanalytic: What anxieties prevent us from letting images ruin our texts? That would be an extreme, "postdisciplinary" way of putting it. More domestically, with some faithfulness to the discipline, the question would be: What desires prompt us to keep images under control in our writing?

Michael Holly: Gustav, I would put what you are saying in even plainer language. Jim said that the 2008 Stone Art Theory Seminar discussed whether even images could contradict one another. I would push it to another register, and ask: Can intellectual progenitors contradict one another? But of course. Visual studies was born from two parents, who had been warring about how to raise the children: British cultural studies and Anglo-American art history. One of them, art history, was fairly certain about its truth claims; and the other challenged the idea that one could even locate truth. What

pushed art history into becoming visual studies, in the 1980s and 1990s, was that most of us began to be aware of differing interpretations and methodologies, and, moreover, we began to be aware that images were also teaching us how to see. So we began to ask: How do images make us think? Philosophers of art history such as Hubert Damisch were claiming, "The picture thinks." All of this has evolved into a profound awareness that images might also be active agents, secondary agents, with which to argue. They pose structures, arguments, compositions, and ideologies with which to quarrel. We rub against one another, even in the world of traditional art history. At least in my corner of visual studies, that's where the going gets interesting.

Sunil Manghani: I agree; I don't necessarily see the idea that images operate outside truth and falsity. We can think about more than one thing at once, so it's not necessarily a matter of true or false, but of a complexity of things.

When we start talking about how to put images together, one method comes from artists. Artists seem to get on with asserting things with images quite happily, on their own.

James Elkins: It's a pity, I think, that the conceptualization of the making of art still hasn't made many inroads in visual studies or art history. There, among many other things, we'd find models of the sorts of active images that interest me: images that contradict, assert, and argue, images that carelessly undermine whatever sense their maker (read: their scholar) hoped to make of them; images that are misguided; images that are stupid.

Whitney Davis: I'd be interested in hearing an account of what devolves from the proposition that a viciously racist stereotype of another human being is not, in an important sense, false.

[*Pause, then laughter.*]

Keith Moxey: Well, if there's a ping, there has to be a pong. The pong would go something like this: it's not that the racist image is false; it's all too persuasive, and consonant with the attitudes of many parts of the population. It's that it needs to be contested by another opinion. The other opinion, the one that would call the racist image

into question, would call the image false, just as the racist would call people who disagree with him false, or misguided. Truth and falsity become significant rhetorical games. What we have here is a conflict of opinions, not truth and falsity.

Whitney Davis: So ontologically, in that thesis, there is an interesting philosophy of the image as possessing "truthiness." Remember the objection to George Bush's representations? These claims to the truth of visualizations, both discursive and pictorial, are "truthy" by nature. If that's true, then they must have some "falsiness," a territory over which we can have interesting discussions.

Keith Moxey: We can agree on that level, yes.

[*Laughter.*]

Lisa Cartwright: In teaching racist images, my biggest problem is not saying that an image is true or false. The real job for us is to show the multiplicity of uses to which images are put in any given historical or synchronic setting. The work for me is to bring that to the sociologically old-fashioned idea of the truth or falsity of images. I need to work also with my faculty, who are very focused on ideas of truth—especially sociologists, and those who work on legal questions.

We have done a lot of work in visual culture studies, queer studies, and feminist studies on the question of the subject. We're beyond the point where we think of the subject as unitary or even binary. So we might want to investigate why we ascribe to the image some kind of singularity of subjectivity when we give it agency. If we think of images having agency that aspires to subjectivity, then what is that subjectivity? There is a queerness to it, a multiplicity to it. That has huge implications for visual studies.

James Elkins: Tom Mitchell would like that, I bet. That problematic passage in the essay "What Do Pictures Want?" that ends with the notion that pictures might not want much of anything is certainly pluralist in a compatible way.

I think it is entirely logically appropriate that the initial question about the place of images, and whether visual studies can make good on its promise to show images working, thinking, theorizing, and arguing, has come down to the question of the truth or falsity of images. It is logically appropriate, but I really wonder if it will find an audience in visual studies. In my experience, visual studies is so deeply agnostic

and culturally relativist regarding truth that it cannot have a position on this issue. I even wonder if the sheer distance between Lisa and Whitney, for example, will even be visible.

I hope, in a future iteration of visual studies, we will let images be free to ruin our hard-won disciplinary authority.

<CN>11

Envoi

These last few pages are also transcribed from the closing roundtable, in which the participants pondered what the week had accomplished, and talked about ideas that had, for one reason or another, been omitted. The portions transcribed here are about people who hadn't been mentioned during the week, and whether they might be usefully described as visual studies scholars; and, at the end, about the institutional limits to the growth of visual studies.

Lisa Cartwright: A number of names have been predominant in the course of our conversations this week that aren't the names I would choose. One name that has come up a lot, in mostly negative statements, is Nick Mirzoeff. His work has been strongly identified with a particular characterization of the political. So I wanted to signal this, because if what we've been doing is presented as a history of the field, there are many, many absences. Just off the top of my head, there is Amelia Jones, whose work in feminism and visual studies was not about making feminism a niche area of visual studies, but about acknowledging the fact that feminism has been foundational to visual studies in Europe and the United States. So I think we have to be careful about thinking this week would be adequate as a history of visual studies.

James Elkins: Just speaking for myself, I certainly don't think what we've done is adequate. I just mean that our conversations, especially Gustav's contributions, point to a different sense of what might be done with the historical record. We've been looking back in a different way.

Whitney Davis: Lisa, I wanted to ask if your sense of the pedagogical horizon. Has your work in visual studies directed pedagogic initiatives in a new way for you?

Lisa Cartwright: It's not so much a matter of pedagogic initiatives, as that it's been foundational to my sense of pedagogy, as someone who came out of a visual studies tradition. A few times, when we talked about politics, it's been a question of whether or

not we should be at the barricades, or whether what we say here has no immediate effect in the outside world. I think the classroom is the space where things one says can have an immediate effect. I think about what I want to teach them, and how it informs my scholarly research.

Paul Frosh: I think the question of the alternate histories of visual studies is very important for the future development of the field, especially considering the International Association for Visual Culture Studies. One of the things I wrote in my passionate and slightly whiny letter of application was that I could not understand a visual studies that had very little to say about what is probably the dominant postwar audiovisual medium, television. I was thinking narrowly about what visual studies might be, and coming here I've realized there's a whole list of people I'd want to put in visual studies: Anna McCarthy, Lynn Spigel—

Lisa Cartwright: Yes.

Paul Frosh: William Uricchio, John Ellis, Daniel Dayan, a whole list of people I think are important. My research includes them, and my syllabi. The question is whether they would want to be included.

Lisa Cartwright: Anna McCarthy is literally in a visual studies program!

Paul Frosh: Right, but some of the others might well not want to be put into visual studies. John Caldwell: maybe, maybe not. It's not an unequivocal yes for these people. So the question is: what kinds of conversations could we have that could bring people like these in? That's why the International Association for Visual Culture Studies is very important. On one hand, it's great to be inclusive; on the other hand, if everyone then groups around their subspecialties, as happens for example in communication studies (where health communication, political communication, and language and social interaction people seldom talk to one another), then it's not clear if there is a coherent conversation.

James Elkins: I'd note, in this regard, Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell's new collaboration, *The Handbook of Visual Culture*, which includes television, film, architecture, and a wide range of contributors, including writers as different as Lisa and John Onians. It will be arguably the most heterogeneous compilation under the name of

visual culture. My project, *Theorizing Visual Studies*, will be just as diverse, but in different ways. Perhaps that's a future of the field: ambiguous inclusiveness.

Whitney Davis: Paul, just to add to that, I don't know if there could be a case in which all borders are open. If some are open, others will be closed. In relation to television, which hasn't seen the kind of representation you might have expected: if the focus in visual studies is to expand toward the present day, or modern media, even further than it already has (because some would say that the privileging of modern media, from photography forward, is one of the difficulties of visual studies), then one effect might be to drive people with other interests elsewhere—interests such as premodern cultures, archaeology, and others, which are, for obvious reasons, underrepresented in contemporary media.

Keith Moxey: We may be in a transition to other forms of critique. The kinds of critique that informed people in the first generation of visual studies were ethnicity, gender, and class; but as the field develops, we see new axes of interpretation, including global warming and globalization. The things that give our time an apocalyptic flavor might become the focus of visual studies.

Whitney Davis: For the first time, you and I agree, Keith.

[*Laughter*.]

Keith Moxey: I'm glad that's on the record!

James Elkins: Keith, it's worth noting that Nick Mirzoeff's introduction to the second edition of his *Visual Culture Reader* makes a similar point; he quotes Kobena Mercer saying that the triad "race, gender, and class" is a "mantra," and he says it needs "revision." But it's interesting that his choices of new subjects—at the time, it was the decoding of the new habit of invoking race and gender in disingenuous and knowing ways, and more recently, it's empowered looking in the face of counterinsurgency and other institutionalized forms of visuality—aren't your choices.

Gustav Frank: Paul, to your question regarding conferences and specialties. Do you think we should change our institutional configurations? We have talked a lot this week about methods and theories, but not much of institutions. As Benjamin says, the book is no longer the proper form. So perhaps research that is no longer focusing on monographs or peer-reviewed papers might be in order.

Paul Frosh: There are remedies. We put one in place in my own department . . . it's a difficult problem, because you're dealing with people who are on career paths, who want to publish in particular places, who have tenure pressures.

Whitney Davis: I am deeply attracted to collaborative practices in science and social science communities; I'd love to have students do collaborative PhDs; I admire the lab model, although I'm well aware of the critical work that has been done on laboratory practice. I'm attracted to the idea of teaching that way, in that model; but I am concerned that there may be features of visual studies, as opposed to other cultural studies, that may disable those kinds of collaborations. There may, for example, be a contradiction between the categorical insistence on the primal phenomenology of the presence of the image for a beholder, on the one hand, and an emphasis on intersubjective communicability of experience, and debate about it, on the other. That's more a feeling I have than an argument, in the same way as I have a worry about traditional art history, that its emphasis on the close looking at the art object was, for all its importance, exclusionary, because it was so inimitable and hard to communicate.

Michael Holly: That is a place where real politics is yet to be accomplished. University departments belong to the prehistory of the old "new art history." Little has changed, at least in America, and, I gather, in Europe, now that it is modeling itself on the American system, regarding the kinds of collectivities called departments. You are still judged, if you're in art history, by a kind of scheme that was laid down, in this country, in the 1950s, or maybe even the 1940s. There is room for political action there, I think. I have been associated for some time with an association called RIHA (Research Institutes in Art History) in Europe, and they are very activist-minded because of certain decrees coming down from different cultural ministries about how to evaluate scholars, and how to get funding for waning humanities departments. There is room for politicking there, because if these systems do not change, I don't think visual studies will have much hope to be ecumenical in its possibilities.

James Elkins: For me the most important institutional issue is the relation of visual studies to the making of art. The relation between art history and studio art teaching remains, I think, the single most important unresolved issue in the institutional politics and even the self-understanding of art history. There are a few institutions where art

historians and studio art instructors collaborate, but there are many more where the two are more or less amicably separate. There are no interesting theorizations of the intersection, as far as I am concerned.

The subject continues to be largely unremarked in visual studies. In my own program, here at the School of the Art Institute, we have an MA program in visual studies that involves art practice, and a proposal for a PhD that would be one of the first that encourages, if not requires, students to have a practice; but even in our program, we have been unable to conceptualize the intersection. This subject seems to me to be a really fascinating, undertheorized horizon for visual studies, and it is particularly pertinent since we've been spending a lot of time this week with *Bildwissenschaft*, where the phenomenological encounter—and this is to your point about laboratories, Whitney—has no internal logic that prevents it from engaging the making of visual objects.

Sunil Manghani: Also, it can be a different kind of making, different to what we might associate with a practice-based degree. When I teach, in a media studies program, I'm working with students with very little, if any, background in making. I ask them to create their own contemporary version of Richard Hamilton's well-known piece *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Home So Different, So Appealing?* (1956). In part it is an exercise to get students to using some of the fundamental tools in Photoshop, but also it is presented to them as an intellectual puzzle about the notion of visual culture. Crucially, I'm not looking for complete, polished end results. In fact, given the need to cover in class both theoretical and practical aspects, there simply isn't the time for this over the duration of just a semester. Underneath the making is a visual "reading" and critique. It's an open dialogue. I try to get my students to make something, but I'm not focused on the thing itself, rather the hope that they become more conversant between and with thinking and making.

James Elkins: There are any number of reasons why it might not seem advisable, pertinent, or helpful to practice the making of visual objects, but I find that they are often contingent. What is internal, and unexamined, is the reason why a plurality of practices do not explore making.

Lisa Cartwright: Jim, do you think that the engagement with making might be more widespread? In my department there is a visual studies course for our nine hundred majors.

James Elkins: But do your nine hundred majors make art?

Lisa Cartwright: No, I'm not talking about the practice-based PhDs, I'm talking about visual culture programs that are near practice programs, and there are more in the UK—

James Elkins: Yes, I follow this subject, and I agree there are examples of intersections, or encounters, of practice and scholarship. What's missing is the theorization. It happens in an increasingly constrained educational literature, which is focused on refining and developing ideas of knowledge and research in university-wide contexts. It seems to me a different kind of theorization is needed to make sense of what happens when a visual studies writing practice, for example, encounters a visual practice. When the scholars make art, for example. Or when artists present their work as visual studies scholarship. But that's for the future.

<PT> Assessments

Preface

Sunil Manghani

As with other volumes in this series, it is difficult for a brief introduction such as this to do justice to the many and varied voices, ideas, and critiques that come through in the collection of Assessments that follows. The purpose here is certainly not to assess the Assessments, but simply to offer some guidance; to aid the reader in navigating the entries by highlighting running themes and to identify links or tensions between individual commentaries. As I suggest in my introduction to this book, visual culture/studies can be said to have properly coalesced as a field of study in the mid-1990s, in gaining traction as a keyword for publishers. Yet frequently the field is characterized by its own self-analysis, with the ripples of the *October* questionnaire being felt a good decade (and more) after its publication. *Farewell to Visual Studies* did not seek to reawaken these debates as such, but to assess how far we'd progressed. Framed this way, the Assessments collected here are every bit as revealing as the Seminar sessions.

Akin to the heated debates around the emergence of a term such as "postmodern" and the institutionalization of the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies, visual culture and visual studies has had to put up with perpetual questioning, being asked just what it *is* and how it differs from other subjects and approaches. As Christensen describes in the opening Assessment, the Seminars are "captured" by a discursive field, made up of the headings "Visual Studies," "Visual Culture Studies," "*Bildwissenschaft*," and "Art History," all of which brings about a "high degree of self-awareness in the domain." Reflexivity is a recurring motif, and the outlier of a persistent tension. Respondents each have to grapple with the problem that to say farewell to something requires knowledge of what it is that you're sending off. Yet giving shape to visual studies frequently means to focus on a certain "vitality" that Alloa suggests is drawn from "its transdisciplinary, anti-institutional momentum"; the very same momentum that Tom Mitchell suggests (at the close of Seminar 6) we might do well to hold onto for as long as possible.

The idea of trans- and interdisciplinarity is a vexed one. As a symptom of the problem, the Assessments are almost all written out from an explicit disciplinary position. Andrew's reflections, however, on signing up to graduate study at University of Chicago

in the mid-1990s recall the "thrill of visual studies [that] came less from the antagonism of inserting new objects into traditional disciplines than from the new conversations this allowed." This optimistic view chimes with Nicholas Mirzoeff's writings at the time, which characterized visual culture more as a tactic than an academic discipline. As an "interactive" model of visual culture studies, Mirzoeff's account drew upon concepts of intertextuality and interdisciplinarity (with direct reference to Barthes' seminal article "From Work to Text"). Paraphrasing Barthes, Mirzoeff defined interdisciplinary study as creating a "new object," which belonged to no one single discipline. Arguably, it is this conception of visual culture (as greater than the sum of its parts) that is the "supplement"—the give and the take—that pervades the Seminars and is reflected again in the Assessments.

Similarly, Tom Mitchell's delight in framing visual culture studies as an "indiscipline" is another way of describing a tactic; a means to purposefully foreground and challenge the "turbulence" or "incoherence" that surrounds the boundaries of disciplines. Indiscipline—to remain difficult—is to prevent falling into the halfway, in-betweenness of the "inter-" of interdisciplarity. Yet, we might say, the true difficulty of interdisciplinary work is whether or not we want to come out of our discipline, and if so, we need to ask for how long and whether we plan a return. In this sense, it is perhaps less important to define what interdisciplinarity *is*, but rather consider its processes and temporality. Barthes's formulation in "From Work to Text" is easily misread due it its spatial reference. He writes of "that space where no language has a hold over any other . . . that *social* space which leaves no language safe . . . nor any subject of the enunciation in position as judge." Visual studies has been defiant in wishing to leave no language safe, yet, as these Assessments show, it is not easy to get away from *sites* of exchange. As Berger puts it in his Assessment, "'[e]xplaining' visual studies necessarily entails privileging certain origin narratives over others and declaring a winner amongst the many competing approaches currently in circulation."

The problem of privilege raised by Berger is brought into sharp focus by Zarzycka when she suggests that "[t]he names and references missing [in the Seminars] spoke as loudly about the field as those that were frequently quoted and cited." It is a

problem that echoes through a number of the Assessments. Zarzycka herself seeks to advocate "an expansion of the visual that engages broader issues in sensory perception," while similarly, Gracyk urges a more nuanced understanding of the "aesthetic object," whereupon we "might be ready to examine aesthetic response as reflecting social *and* biological imperatives." The identifying of omissions or the need for greater nuance is understandably often the central focus of the Assessments. Orell argues broadly that if "visual studies is to be taken seriously as a challenge to and beyond the discipline of art history, then the inclusion of even more voices from other disciplinary backgrounds, also from outside film and media studies, may have proven productive." Orell suggests, for example, that science historians, anthropologists, and area studies specialists would have been helpful to extend the frames of reference. Kılınç and Linder, in their respective Assessments, both suggest that architecture has been left out of the discussions; Emmer bemoans the lack of attention to science studies and specifically mathematics; while Holert suggests that conflation is made of "visuality" and "images." In prising these apart, he suggests that "visual studies" might even be named "visibility studies." Weissman argues that "digital humanities or some such as of yet unnamed method or space or program" is necessary for genuine transdisciplinary research, suggesting that more attention be given to the contemporary context of new technologies and data. "[S]tudents and scholars are increasingly asked to produce not only texts," writes Weissman, "but also images, data structures, maps, charts, and other information-based visualizations." While he couches it in a very different narrative, Drucker appears to envisage a future similar to that of Weissman. In marking out a comparison between the "theory-divided departments" that led to the "demise" of traditional art history and the "farewell" to visual studies tracked by the Seminars, Drucker suggests that "[v]isual studies is ahead of us, not behind, but it will be formulated from different sources and with other aspirations than the field whose demise [the Seminars] detailed."

Yet a deeper underlying concern is perhaps the handling and/or the omission of history. Schwartz is sympathetic to a "near chorus of pleas," seemingly voiced in a "void," that raised "concern about the presentism of the field." Her concern is that the history of visual studies, "summoned and simultaneously dismissed," is in the end "too

incoherent and arbitrary to reject or admit." On a specific note relating to how the theories of the Frankfurt school entered the canon of visual culture studies, Stiegler refers to a certain orthodoxy whereby "there are very few texts quoted continually and others missing. Benjamin is the classical example for the repetitive canon, Kracauer for the quite astonishing missing reception." Nonetheless, the opening seminar, led by Gustav Frank, touched a chord with those attending the Seminars precisely because of its nuanced handling of history. It set a precedent for the remaining sessions, seeking out both greater breadth and depth in our understanding of the scope, nature, and histories of visual studies (and/or *visuelle Kultur*). Zahler, Günzel, Dotzler, Van der Meulen, and Haxthausen each pick up and develop threads from this opening session.

Grønstad notes that despite the near-synchronicity of the *Farewell* Seminars and the launch of the International Association for Visual Culture Studies (in 2010), there is quite a distance in tenor and understanding, particularly in articulating the relationship of the visual and the political (Vågnes develops the point in her account of reading the seminar transcript while also attending the second Association conference, *Now! Visual Culture*, in 2012). A common thread in a number of the Assessments relates directly to how visual studies is framed by the political, and vice versa. Reinhardt picks up on two different tensions: "The contradictory pull between rapid and (in the seminar's idiom) 'tactical' engagement with the pressing issues of the moment, on the one hand, and slower, less instrumental, more open-ended and reflective enquiries on the other." He makes the point that the two are too easily and erroneously "aligned with the difference between research that is motivated by or significantly concerned with politics and research that is, or takes itself to be, apolitical." Reinhardt reaches towards a more fluid understanding. In a similar vein, Klonk draws attention to the debates raised around the Eikones project in Basel and Bildwissenschaft more broadly. While preferring to render the term as "visual history" (*Bildgeschichte*), Klonk notes how the "prefix *Bild* does not refer to a two-dimensional picture but rather to anything shaped by the human hand (*gebildet*), thus freeing us to investigate any artefact from any period." Her formulation leads her to range over various histories, and to argue that "political commitment and attention to the specifics of the images and their bearers are not, in principle, mutually exclusive."

The need to understand and develop visual studies within a global context is also an important theme. The Seminars brought together a wide range of scholars of different fields, working in different geographical contexts, including the UK, the United States, northern, central, and southern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Yet inevitably this cannot be said to be fully representative, and, regardless of the range of voices assembled at any one event, there is always an ongoing need to think and speak from multiple perspectives. The Assessments offer some further elaborations in terms of *placing* visual studies. Escande offers useful insights into the development of visual studies in the Chinese context, pointing out the value of adopting Western models of theoretical enquiry, yet equally noting the need for methods to "evolve and take into account the Chinese theoretical and practical tradition too." Similarly, in focusing on visual studies in the context of Latin America, Rubí argues how plurality and diversity are necessary for "new ways of thinking and rediscovering visual studies and Bildwissenschaft which depend on their responsiveness towards the visual and historical heritage of other cultural worlds." Along these lines, Hernández-Navarro offers a point of view specific to Spain, but equally urges us to think globally. He evokes the image of the Möbius strip, which has a single surface (no inside or outside), as a means to think about "different traditions, histories and versions in a world . . . in which spaces and times cross, overlap, and clash." Interestingly, a break in this suggested single surface might be said to occur in France. Schwartz, for example, notes the porosity of French thinkers evoked during the Seminars ("despite the fact Barthes, Foucault, Baudrillard, and Lacan dominated much of the first wave of American university formation of the field in the 1980s"). Decobecq writes specifically of the need for "an account of visual studies that would teach the French audience a thing or two about this multifarious endeavor." Part of the problem, she suggests, is a difficulty in translating the word "politics." As she puts it, "the English word is not only densely textured but also elastic, stretchable to a point that no French equivalent can accommodate. 'Politics,' or even worse, 'cultural politics,' has no perfect match nor satisfactory equivalent in [French]."

Taking account of all these different points of view—the clashes, the comparisons, the hopes, the disappointments, the new avenues, and the multiple histories—there

remains perhaps one simple fact: we just can't seem to let go of visual studies. Not necessarily because we are duty bound to what it purportedly studies, but because we can never truly take the visual out of studying. As Latimer puts it, "Our incapacity to adequately translate the visual into words is both what gives visuality such power and what lends our best efforts to analyze visual events a kind of precarious grace. Farewell to visual studies? I don't think so." Buoyed, then, by visual studies' apparent "grace," we might choose to follow Notaro's advice: "Rather than agonizing further on issues of definition and genealogy, contemporary visual studies would do better to focus on the 'making of images' and 'on the activities that images perform.'" With this in mind, Notaro takes up the understanding of "farewell" as "fare well," which, she suggests, revealed early on in the Seminars "that behind the discussion *always already* existed an aspiration towards affirmation rather than loss."

Captured by the Discourse
Hans Dam Christensen

Under the headings "Visual Studies," "Visual Culture Studies," "*Bildwissenschaft*," and "Art History," a discursive field is framed in the conversations in the *Farewell to Visual Studies* Seminars. As is well known, a discourse mirrors a social order at the same time that it marks or produces one. The ways, objects, phenomena, thoughts, and feelings are made discursive objects; they do not exist in themselves, but relate to existing ways of producing meaning. Correspondingly, the field of visual studies does not exist in itself, but is reproduced and rearranged through the discourse. As a social arena, the conversations thus provide each participant with a spectacular opportunity to demarcate the field through rivalries and alliances with other participants.

As it is, the field circumscribed by the four headings is marked by a productive culture of discursive conflicts. The abundance of readers, introductory books, journals, national and international associations, conferences and study programs as well as other demarcations which reflect on visual studies is a symptom of this culture. In one way or another, these publications and institutional settings pose a paradox for this field that frequently claims to be either interdisciplinary, postdisciplinary, indisciplinary, or transdisciplinary. The conversations add another piece to this disciplinary confusion.

Even if the curriculum and structure do just as much to frame the field as the readers and introductory books, however, the design of the Seminars is different. The typical genres, in particular the peer-reviewed article, which are so important in academia today are supplemented by a transcribed symposium, which is no longer a drinking party but has become a discussion forum between committed and proficient scholars.

From this perspective, it is tempting to look into the blind spots and dilemmas of the discourse, the disciplinary axioms and imperatives—borrowing concepts that point in different philosophical directions, but nevertheless circle about the same action: revealing the (more or less) unsaid. One might argue that "critique of ideology" is a related term, but that would not be forward-looking. Several times during the conversations, it appears that the time to question the "critique of ideology" has come. These recurring negative mentions clearly indicate that this sort of critique does not belong to the avant-garde of

visual studies (and being a social historian is clearly something one grows away from, it also appears).

Do other dilemmas, blind spots, beliefs, presumptions, or even displacements surface in the conversations? Certainly, the "farewell" of the title mirrors the high degree of self-awareness in the domain. One can expect the future emergence of concepts such as "postvisual studies" and "new visual culture studies," if they have not shown up already. This is a positive thing, because as long as battles over the meaning of "visual studies" are going on, no one has gained control of the terms yet—or the terms have not yet become so lifeless that no one cares anymore.

The abovementioned aspects are of course of minor significance in comparison with some of the epistemological paradoxes of the conversations. I can see at least four partly overlapping dilemmas that are touched upon, but are difficult to put into words because they are so embedded in the discourses of the field. They have been addressed several times before, but they seem to flee into other layers of the discourse or be overshadowed by following links of associations almost every time they appear. Space is limited, but briefly, the dilemmas go like this:

Foremost, the relation between artworks and all the images that are not art poses a vital epistemological dilemma. In the conversations James Elkins mentions that [d]ull images, repetitive images, images without much desire, uninventive images, unexceptional images, average images, unintellectual images—those are the things we ignore." He has stated this point before, and even though science images, more or less, are treated as an independent domain of images, and even though some of the participants in the conversations have published important works on non-art images, this research is nevertheless an exception in comparison with the abundance of research on artworks and images that echo the features of artworks (uniqueness, complexity, etc.).

Next, this dilemma is aggravated by the fact that many artworks do not appeal primarily to "visuality" or "vision." Thus, it is most likely due to intellectual idleness and institutional habits that a very large part of the contemporary works of art and art production is still part of the discourses of visual studies. The art-historical discourses are saturated with the notion of an apparently very tight relation between the picture and the art-

ist's perception. For example, Wölfflin's *Sehformen* and *optische Schichten* couple together picture and perception so closely that it indicates a particular visiocentrism in the discourses of art history, which have been inherited by visual studies. This visiocentrism is almost a mirror image of Saussure's phonocentrism, which intrinsically made sounds and speech superior to written language, according to Derrida's notorious reading. For example, Saussure compared the representation of speech by written language with the photographic portrait of a person. The speech and sounds guaranteed authenticity and presence, whereas the representation connoted artificiality and absence. In the same way, vision and perception guarantee authenticity and presence, whereas the representation connotes absence. The longer the distance from the artist's perception, the lesser the pictorial value.

Of course, plenty of analyses and interpretations in visual studies do not refer to this tight relation between picture and perception. Nevertheless, it rules the hierarchy of images. Fascinating images, unique images, desirable images, inventive images, exceptional images, intellectual images—those that we primarily study—originate in this close tie between perception and picture. These are considered closer to the notion of the pure "image" than informative, symbolic, or nonperceptual pictures, which ultimately hint at the written alphabetic signs. This constitutes the third dilemma: if the picture is extricated from the ties of visual perception and put on a continuum with the notions of the "pure" written letter and the "pure" picture at the extremities, then the dichotomies and binaries of word and image, verbality and visuality, saying and showing, reading and seeing, and so on are destabilized.

This destabilization has also been addressed before. However, if pictures in general do not embrace an independent domain, but are merged with, for example, nonaudible and nonmoving signs, then what about the notions of "visual knowledge," "visual knowledge production," and/or ""visual meaning"? This is the fourth dilemma. Often the fear of "verbal knowledge" is close at hand, but in practice this concept is just as meaningless as "visual knowledge." Knowledge is knowledge. Sometimes it is dominated by verbality, other times by visuality or something quite different, but the one or the other never stands alone. Even in Saussure's *Cours de linguistiqe générale* (1916), which as a

posthumous publication became a cornerstone in the development of linguistics, semiotics, and structuralism and thus contributed to the linguistic imperialism of the twentieth century, a wealth of pictorial signs appears. They were termed, for example, *figure schématique*, *schema*, *tableau*, *figure*, *symbole*, *figure visuel*, *signaux*, *séme visual*, and *diagrammes*. Saussure's diagram of the dual structure of the sign is famous, but what about the human profile with Greek and Latin letters positioned in the pharynx indicating "l'appareil vocal," the twofold dissection of a stem visualizing the difference between the synchronic and diachronic approach to linguistics, the three handwritten letter T's illustrating graphical variations of the same letter, the abstract figures signifying the dynamic evolution of language and the relationship between thought and speech, and so on? Basically, *Cours de linguistique générale* is a transcript of students' notes, so it appears that the professor, not unsurprisingly, communicated by way of verbal sounds, written words, and drawn figures on the chalkboard as well as by way of his visual appearance, gesticulations, accentuations, and so on.

The categories of "picture," "visuality," "linguistic," "word," and so on are, inescapably, ways of producing discursive orders. The practices of communication and transformation and production of meaning are, however, far more complex than the power of our discursive orders and institutional settings allows us to see.

Visual Studies: A Surrealist Moment

Emmanuel Alloa

Concerning visual studies, it appears as if a curious inversion of perspectives is suddenly taking place. While some are still busy sketching curricula for the implementation of visual studies within academia, others already practicing this strange discipline, which, before really having started, has already "grown old," to speak like Hegel. However, this need not be a contradiction. Saying farewell implies being able to name that which one departs from, to take it as something identifiable, stable, and closed. The same goes for the inauguration of new curricula in visual studies, as is currently planned in some German and French universities. It is highly unlikely that this institutionalization will revivify a debate which drew its vitality from its transdisciplinary, anti-institutional momentum. Still, this crystallization of the debate yields at least one promise: just as with Hegel's owl of Minerva, which can only take her flight at dusk, when the shadows are longest and the colors have gone pale, looking back on visual studies allows to see the contours of its premises and the morphology of its promises with all the more clarity. In other terms, visual studies needs to be addressed in terms of what a nascent discipline necessarily had to remain blind to: in terms of its own historicity. Today, so it seems— and as the purpose of the Stone Summer Seminar confirms—visual studies survives as the object of a necessary archaeology, as one cannot but agree that "visual studies has not developed a discourse about its own history, its historiography." Such a retrospective gaze is not simply of "antiquarian" interest, as Nietzsche dubbed the embalming attitude of the positivist historian in *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*. It can become "critical" when it accepts its necessary zigzagging mode, that is, that any light shed on the past is shed from the perspective of the present and that thus the light will reflect back on the current situation too.

The feeling about the necessity of an archaeology of visual studies as well as of concepts of the visual was the starting point of an editorial project carried out with my two philosopher colleagues Kathrin Busch and Iris Därmann. While such an overall archaeology is only just starting—the current book being an example—one cannot avoid

noticing that the first diggings concentrated on certain areas, leaving others mostly untouched. A lot has been done in these past years to unearth a certain German tradition of art history which, by enlarging the scope of the image beyond that of the artistic image, could be considered a forerunner of the visual studies predominant in the late twentieth century. Some, like Horst Bredekamp, argue that the premises of what is now known as *Bildwissenschaft* were, thanks to the impetus given by authors like Fiedler, Wölfflin, Warburg, and Riegl, already instituted "around 1900 and continued to be developed until 1933." Hans Belting prefers, for his part, to speak of "interrupted paths" towards a science of the image. In many accounts, the sudden disruption of this German tradition by the advent of Nazism is acknowledged, crediting the exile of German or Austrian Jewish scholars such as Erwin Panofsky to the United States or Ernst H. Gombrich to London as a foundational moment in the constitution of visual studies. On the other hand, film studies and the study of optical media would be unthinkable without two other figures whose biographies are also linked to the seizure of power by the Nazi regime: Béla Balázs and Walter Benjamin, who were both forced into exile. While the reconstruction of those filiations is indispensable today, this purely Germanic genealogy and the narrative of the "interrupted tradition" is somewhat distorting. Let me provide—given the constraints of this assessment format—just one prominent example.

Walter Benjamin's definition of the dialectical image is among the favorite quotations in visual studies. An image, says Benjamin with an evocative formula, "is that in which what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation" (Bild ist dasjenige, worin das Gewesene mit dem Jetzt blitzhaft zu einer Konstellation zusammentritt), comprising the famous "dialectics at a standstill." While a great deal of effort is currently being expended on replacing Benjamin in the context of the German *Kulturwissenschaft* developed between 1880 and 1933 and related to names such as Georg Simmel, Max Weber, and Adolf Bastian, and also of course Aby Warburg, it is worth recalling that Benjamin's thinking did not come to an end in 1933, but that the exile in Paris initiated perhaps the most intense period of this work. The theory of the dialectical image cannot in any way be reduced to an purportedly "German tradition," as it is clearly inspired by the encounter with Surrealism. In 1934, Theodor W. Adorno drew

Benjamin's attention to André Breton, whose text *Les vases communicants* (The Communicating Vessels) "is so closely related to your own thematic concerns that it will probably necessitate a fairly radical revision," a revision "comparable perhaps—what a parallel!—to the significance of Saxl and Panofsky for your book on the Baroque!" Indeed, when Benjamin defines the dialectical image as the flash-like conjunction of what is radically apart, one cannot but hear the immediate echo of the famous Surrealist principle of the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table. In the *First Surrealist Manifesto*, André Breton takes up this suggestive image by Lautréamont and generalizes it: "It is, as it were, from the fortuitous juxtaposition of the two terms that a particular light has sprung, the light of the image, to which we are infinitely sensitive. The value of the image depends upon the beauty of the spark obtained; it is, consequently, a function of the difference of potential between the two conductors." The direct link which runs from Surrealism to the theory of the dialectical image is so obvious that Benjamin himself worked on obliterating it. As he wrote to Gershom Scholem in a letter, Benjamin considered that the "all too ostentatious proximity to the surrealist movement could become fatal" to him.

Critical visual studies, with Walter Benjamin as one of its main inspirational figures, thus certainly has more than just one genealogy, and even the assumed interrupted German tradition is definitely more multifaceted and porous than it seems. French thinking has its fair share of responsibility for allowing the image to be addressed as a major issue in late twentieth century, and in particular its "Surrealist moment," that is, the idea that images pervade every aspect of life, just as the photos contaminate, interrupt, and modify the text narrative of André Breton's novel *Nadja*. And the Surrealists were certainly also among the first to organize the debate about an enlarged concept of the visual. In this perspective, the famous visual studies questionnaire published by *October* in 1996 can be seen as a belated echo of André Breton's questionnaire on magical art published in 1957. Through the questions posed to seventy-five scholars (philosophers, anthropologists, psychologists, poets), including Blanchot, Bataille, Caillois, Klossowski, Lévi-Strauss, Magritte, and Paz, Breton asked what it would mean to widen the strictly Western and modern gaze on images, broadening the scope far beyond classical art history. To allege a general denigration of the visual in twentieth-century French tradition, as Martin

Jay did with his still influential *Downcast Eyes*, appears increasingly problematic today, when it becomes retrospectively evident how much contemporary visual studies is indebted to concepts, methods, and approaches developed in the French context. In our two-volume attempt at a first archaeological survey, some suggestions are made on how the field could possibly be mapped, suggestions that cannot be adequately summarized here. Fortuitously, other archaeological teams have started similar enterprises at roughly the same time, so that one may be optimistic that this will provide new grounds for debate in the near future.

However, the point cannot simply be to reverse Jay's thesis about the French intellectuals and claim for their general and unconditional iconophilia. Addressing the powers of images often goes hand in hand with a certain iconoclastic thrust; what needs to be understood is how a thinker like Gilles Deleuze could simultaneously claim that a true thought would only be possible once "liberated from the image" and outline, in his two cinema books, one of the most ambitious theories of the moving image. Deleuze's cinema books are emblematic of what is possibly another specificity of the French tradition (if that's what one wants to call it): the direct engagement with the artworks and the proximity with the creators.

If the image has been a constant preoccupation for so many thinkers, from Bergson, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Barthes up to Lyotard or Nancy, that might well be linked to the fact that French thinking was so often haunted from its poetical margins. Not only have philosophers often been in charge of exhibiting images, from Ravaisson (who not only shaped a philosophy of habit, but was also in charge of the Louvre collections) to the exhibitions curated by Lyotard, Derrida, and Kristeva in the eighties and nineties; their thinking itself is often inextricably tied to certain images. What would Merleau-Ponty's *Eye and Mind* be without Paul Cézanne's *Montagne Sainte-Victoire*? Lacan's "object (little) a" without Hans Holbein's *Ambassadors*? Foucault's *Order of Things* without Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas*? And Deleuze's intensity of the flesh without Francis Bacon's paintings? Still, this does not turn them into iconodules without further ado. But the task today could be to trace that occult trafficking of the image inside philosophy, locate the involuntary effects of images inside the discursive order, which

quite often is but a response to their provocative force. Probably no one has better summarized this ambivalence than Paul Valéry: "Philosophers have a great appetite for images: there is no trade that requires more of them, although philosophers often hide them under dull-gray words."

"A Culture Medium"

Nell Andrew

I applied to graduate programs in the history of art in the fall of 1996, on the heels of *October*'s "Visual Culture Questionnaire." I was requesting admittance to art history from a background in comparative literature and dance, and I recall littering my applications with references to visual culture, most of which would surely make me blanch today. But in that year and the years of my graduate study at the University of Chicago, visual culture promised the possibility of new intellectual terrain through which I could access the correspondences among the ideas that most interested me in literature, dance, and the fine arts. As Michael Ann Holly put it, visual studies "names a problematic. It shakes up complacency. No objects are excluded." Here was "an *attitude* in relation to visual things, rather than a department." Well, I wanted in, and I wanted in through the door of art history.

At Chicago, the conversation was grounded around W. J. T. Mitchell's course in visual culture, which primed us in theories of vision and perception from philosophy, linguistics, psychoanalysis, optics, and art criticism. But it was the art-historical commitment to close looking that ultimately led me to discover and to investigate what Whitney Davis refers to in Section 7 of the Seminars as the "radical openness" of vision to the nonvisual. Although references to a corporeal turn have more recently emerged, it was quickly apparent that, along with the visual turn, came a revived investigation of embodied perception and the fullness of nonvisual meaning that is carried by the visual. I relied on visual culture studies to develop ways to think across dance, film, and painting of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

This said, I seldom use visual culture to categorize my work now. Section 2 of the transcript recounts many of the reasons for my defection, from the weight of visual studies' focus on contemporary art and culture rather than the historical past—even a nineteenth- and early twentieth-century modernist past—to its gradual forfeiture of the invitation to work interdisciplinarily. Aware of my own inner emigration away from the movement that brought me to art history, I find that in all but the most specialized cases, I ad-

vise my art history students away from visual studies programs in favor of more traditional art history PhDs, believing that their chances of landing a position in a university are stronger and their overall preparedness for teaching more solid with the apparatus of a traditional disciplinary program behind them.

The announcement of the Stone Summer Theory Institute's 2011 theme, *Farewell to Visual Studies*, gave me both a sense of confirmation and deep disappointment. Visual culture studies has been a most vital arena in which art history's boundaries, objects, and methods have been challenged and redefined; and positioning the kind of art history I wish to do in relation to visual studies and visual culture has been among the among the generative forces of my research. Yet, to my delight, the transcripts of the Seminars show the debate still lives vigorously and creatively, and I am gratified that we can be virtually present at those tables.

As the transcripts regularly remind us, the thrill of visual studies came less from the antagonism of inserting new objects into traditional disciplines than from the new conversations this allowed. That we have seen historical periods left behind in recent decades, however, tells us that visual studies has evolved as a new discipline to account for newer and newer media rather than an arena to gather accounts across media that brought it into action. Keith Moxey's point about theoretical historicity speaks to this shift in conversation: "There aren't any eternal answers, only arguments of greater and lesser conviction, which serve a purpose and which are then replaced by others." What is curious is that art history now seems the more inclusive designation; hasn't the definition of "art" sustained debate over millennia? Visual culture studies pried open the doors of art history to new media and methods, but entry is still limited to our definitions of the visual. Calls for image studies are no better, disembodying both the object and the viewer. Despite its inclusive intentions, the notion of visual culture re-encodes the modernist primacy of the optical and formal, when so many of us who are drawn to visual studies showed up because we see visual culture as a meeting place of somatic, cerebral, and socio-cultural information.

In the final seminar or "Envoi," Davis brings attention to "a contradiction between the categorical insistence on the primal phenomenology of the presence of the image for a beholder, on the one hand, and an emphasis on intersubjective communicability

of experience, and debate about it, on the other." In the wake of visual studies, how does art history sustain its archival, *raisonné*-building, and historiographical mandates alongside studies that begin with phenomenology, imagination, and sensation, and explain these through theory? To my mind, the visual denotes a medium; it's the intervening stuff between phenomena and communicable experience. The visual might in fact be better compared to a "culture medium"—if I can borrow a term from bacteriology—that is, a substance that encourages the cultivation of new organisms. As a term and as a metaphor, it fits what visual studies ought to do for us. The visual culture medium would be a dynamic and elastic ether that fuels the growth of associations and correspondences.

In her seminar, Holly reminds us that, for art historians, visual studies initially meant we could read anyone we wanted and argue for virtually any kind of visual object. It helped us to get beyond what Norman Bryson called art history's "stagnant peace" and to get at what objects do, their work, activity, and afterlives. Art history's objects became catalysts for contemporary thought, rather than historical relics of the past. This is the legacy and potential future of visual studies: through the juxtapositions of thinkers with objects, we allow objects to continue to generate new meanings and relevancy in the present, establishing with each combination a potential culture medium.

Don't Explain Visual Studies

Martin A. Berger

In Section 8 on "The Political," James Elkins introduces a series of related questions posed in Tom Mitchell's "New Rules for Visual Culture." Mitchell writes, "Someone has to explain to me what the purpose of visual studies is. What are we trying to accomplish? Are we amassing a new knowledge project? Exposing and intervening in false consciousness? Producing an archaeology of power? Reading the strata of the seeable and sayable? Or is visual culture more like a genealogy, a counter-discourse, and the recovery of what has been silenced by history, and left unseen, unremarked, or unremarkable? Is visual culture a kind of therapy for a certain kind of blindness? What kind?"

The simplest, if somewhat irreverent, answer is "yes." Because visual studies remains under construction, all of the elements listed in Mitchell's list can be found in one or more of its strains today. Mitchell is less interested, of course, in having the purported "answer" provided to him than in trying to shape visual studies along particular lines. It is not that "visual studies" eludes Mitchell's understanding, but that he hopes to winnow down into coherence what is at present a startlingly broad discursive field.

When Jeanette Roan followed up in Section 8 by asking, "What would explaining the purpose of visual studies look like given [its] multiple genealogies," she put her finger on a tension that undergirds many of the seminar conversations. "Explaining" visual studies necessarily entails privileging certain origin narratives over others and declaring a winner amongst the many competing approaches currently in circulation. Roan appreciates that there are intellectual and institutional stakes in offering such an explanation.

History suggests that the debate will eventually be settled by the emergence of an explanation that better supports the status quo. At best, visual studies will lose its radical possibilities, and at worst, it will be subsumed under a preexisting discipline, such as the history of art. My concern is not that overtly progressive inquiries into economic or racial inequality, for example, will find themselves outside of visual studies' discursive borders, though this too is possible. I worry instead that the narrowing of visual studies, which is a necessity of efforts to define it, will result in a more constrained intellectual field in

which to work. The dangers here are twofold: that the process of definition will normalize visual studies, leaving it recognizable in relation to established fields and modes of inquiry; and that any resulting definition will allow scholars less leeway, and fewer tools, to construct new radical critiques. A messy and incoherent visual studies offers more raw material out of which new modes of inquiry and objects of study are likely to arise.

Leaving visual studies undefined does not mean that the work of individual scholars will lack either an object of study or a working method. The at-times withering attacks leveled against visual studies for its lack of a center tend to overlook that most studies exhibit internal coherence, even if the field as a whole does not. While this lack of overarching coherence can devolve into insular and presentist work, as the seminar participants note in Section 2, the relative coherence of the history of art has hardly offered protection against these failings. The pressure to explain visual studies threatens the existence of a vital intellectual (and, increasingly, institutional) space in which work that reimagines the possibilities of academic inquiry can take place.

Visual Studies: Moving Beyond "Visual"

Marta Zarzycka

What I have read is a very thorough and important mapping of the history and ontology of visual studies. I could not help thinking that the reading list for the Seminars has produced a de facto canon of topics and texts.

The names and references missing here, however, spoke as loudly about the field as those that were frequently quoted and cited. What I would like to advocate for, in particular, is an expansion of the visual that engages broader issues in sensory perception. Visual studies have been referred to here as an "attitude," a disciplinary field, an expertise, a paradigm, a methodology, a social commitment, even a set of skills. But the discussion has not openly tackled questions of perception and sensoriality. The "visual turn" seems to have happened in the absence of an idea that the visual studies could go beyond the matter of looking.

Moving beyond vision-oriented hermeneutics opens the possibility of other sorts of engagements. By investigating digital photography, painting, video, film, and multimedia art, we can find a variety of transgressive practices that significantly reconfigure the relationship between vision and other senses, and that disrupt and potentially transform the scopic regime. Many artworks and cultural artifacts today challenge the traditionally inscribed "hierarchy of the senses," in which vision is dominant, which has prevailed in Western thought. These range from Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project* (an installation using humidifiers to create a fine mist in the air), through war documentaries on the Web incorporating still photographs, music, and voiceover, to the Disney World attraction *It's Tough to Be a Bug*, which releases an unpleasant odor to match the species an audience is watching on screen. At the same time, the field of neurology has been giving much emphasis to cross-modal perception, including studies on synaesthesia (a neurological condition in which stimulation of one sensory or cognitive pathway leads to automatic experiences in a second pathway), stressing various forms of overlap between what were once thought to be clearly demarcated sensory stimuli. Following the cognitive and affective dynamics that emerge in the engagement with images, smells, textures,

shapes, and sounds can offer a chance to reformulate some of the paradigms pertaining to the field of the visual studies.

This shift demands a greater focus on the figure of the embodied beholder. In my view, the conceptualization of the beholder implied by the Seminars, readings, and discussions is purely scopic—the gaze seems to be the only function the body performs. The body is discussed very briefly in Section 5 on *Bildwissenschaft*; yet it remains a fixed object rather than a "process-in-practice." Consequently, I miss deeper engagement with the problem of embodied, multisensory awareness, where the viewer is no longer only a viewer, but rather the subject of an encounter involving spatial situating of the body, proprioception, temperature, skin contact, level of comfort, and aural and olfactory impressions. This encounter comes into focus through the lens of interdisciplinary and intersectional approaches considering how various categories of embodied difference such as gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, (dis)ability, geopolitical location, and (non)humanity determine our perception. Feminist scholars and theorists of affect have done important work in this direction, yet it is rarely acknowledged in the field of the visual studies.

Admittedly, there have been postulations for a sensory turn in the field: W. J. T. Mitchell has argued that visual culture compels attention to the tactile, the auditory, the haptic; Irit Rogoff has contended that images, sounds, and spatial delineations should be read onto and through one another; Ella Shohat and Robert Stam have stressed that the visual is simply one point of entry into intertextual dialogism. However, these ideas remain unaddressed here or in the large number of anthologies and readers in visual studies. I believe these research concerns can open up fresh perspectives on artistic and cultural practices and challenge aesthetic apprehension, which has often been reduced to the visual only. Attention to the question of multisensory witnessing of today's image culture contributes to efforts to revise an important terrain of inquiry: namely, which paradigms determine the relationship between images and their audiences?

Aesthetic Objects, Reconsidered

Theodore Gracyk

Discussing loss of meaning in Section 4, Clemena Antonova articulates a common position concerning the aesthetic dimension of visual culture. When cultural relocation "turn[s] a ritual object into an aesthetic object," the change "destroy[s] the original meaning of the image and impose[s] another one." Antonova is contributing to a discussion of W. J. T. Mitchell's "What Do Pictures *Really* Want?," in which Mitchell aligns "aesthetic object" with the "'work of art' proper." In Section 5, Keith Moxey reaffirms roughly the same equation while apologizing that he recognizes he is being overly reductive. Finally, in Section 7, James Elkins explains that to undertake the study of visual culture without focusing on Western fine art, the "most obvious strategy would be to exclude consideration of aesthetics."

As Elkins has said elsewhere, we are operating in the wake of Immanuel Kant and subsequent Romantic philosophies of art. This tradition taught us that the aesthetic response is independent of propositional thought. Non-art images are nonaesthetic, Elkins remarks, "in the original Kantian sense," because they are utilitarian. So long as they are used as intended, as functional artifacts that are not subject to judgments of taste, images fall outside the boundaries that divide art from non-art. However, we can impose art status on objects by aestheticizing them. The passage of time tends to do this for us. But we can speed the process by wrenching artifacts from their time and place of origin and repositioning them within physical and cultural institutions that direct us to regard them aesthetically, as Albert Barnes did when he displayed pieces of wrought iron alongside paintings by Cezanne, Matisse, and Van Gogh—an arrangement preserved today in the Barnes Foundation museum in Philadelphia. Similarly, Antonova's example of the transformation of a ritual object into an aesthetic object is the physical transfer of a Russian icon from a monastery to an art gallery. Antonova finds it noteworthy that some visitors to the gallery pray before the icon, refusing to aestheticize it. One corollary of the above is that artistic postmodernism breaks from this tradition by repudiating beauty and the aesthetic realm.

In keeping with the theme that visual studies is now mature enough to reflect on its own history, I offer a caution against the tendency to think in this way about the aesthetic dimensions of visual culture. Aesthetics has a long intellectual history, and the Kantian-Romantic position is merely one voice in that history. In recent years, academic aestheticians have frequently examined that history, and four significant themes have emerged.

First, there is general recognition that the fine arts are a cultural invention of a particular place and time. The key ingredients did not come together to generate a unified category of "les beaux-arts" until the early eighteenth century. As Thomas Adajian observes, many historically informed aestheticians have concluded that there is no essence of art, because this history proves that "there simply is no stable *definiendum* for a definition of art to capture." Despite the "beaux" of "les beaux-arts," artworks have never been aesthetic objects except by contingent social construction. Aware of this fact, many aestheticians support nonaesthetic, historical definitions of art, according to which art status requires some degree of historical reflexivity. A visual image is a work of art when it nonaccidentally reflects historical precedents within an existing art system. Lacking the proper history, an identical image is not art. Aesthetics only matters in those cases where it matters historically.

Second, many aestheticians support contextualism concerning most aesthetic properties. While it is certainly true that we aestheticize visual images by repositioning them socially and culturally, it is not true that this entrance into the realm of "art" *succeeds* aesthetically by distancing images from their social and cultural origins. In Section 4, Tom Mitchell observes, "Ninety-eight percent of the art produced gets no attention whatsoever." That paints far too rosy a picture—and I do note the aesthetic metaphor I've just employed. Of the art that does qualify as getting attention, most gets *almost no attention*. The most optimistic data that I can locate says that museum visitors spend an average of thirty seconds looking at a work of visual art. However, most studies say that the average length of visual engagement is less than ten seconds. Since aesthetic engagement normally prolongs interaction, this data implies that most people get little or no aesthetic reward from most art. Cultural decontextualization retards, rather than encourages, aesthetic response. Many visual aesthetic properties are accessible only to viewers who

grasp the art-historical context in which an image was created, by *seeing*, for themselves, stylistic continuities and discontinuities with other artifacts. Unless you regard boredom as an aesthetic response, gallery display does not transform images into aesthetic objects any more than Caligula's appointment of his horse to the Roman senate transformed the horse into a politician.

Third, appreciation of the previous two points has generated increased interest in everyday aesthetics, which recognizes that artworks are a minuscule subclass of aesthetic objects. Since as far back as Socrates and Plato, beauty has served as the paradigm example of an aesthetic property and a central focus for aesthetic theory. Some philosophers argue that it should continue to serve as the paradigm case for understanding all positive aesthetic phenomena. However, it has been some time now since J. L. Austin inspired many philosophers with his advice that aesthetics would be better understood "if only we could forget for a while about the beautiful and get down instead to the dainty and the dumpy." When we take Austin's advice and attend to the wide range of aesthetic concepts that we employ in daily discourse, it is clear that aesthetic objects, as objects judged aesthetically, are visible always and everywhere in everyday life. Visual images are but a small subclass of the aesthetic objects found in visual culture. Toasters, file cabinets, and street lamps invite aesthetic evaluation, as do the complex visual environments to which they contribute, and this ongoing evaluation is informed by education in a visual culture.

Fourth, a narrow equation of "aesthetic object" and Kantian-Romantic accounts of aesthetic judgment has directed attention away from functional beauty, shortchanging the more empirical tradition that stems from David Hume and Edmund Burke. The gallery visitor who prays before the Russian icon, approaching it functionally, is not necessarily indifferent to its beauty. On the contrary: this visitor who understands the artifact's function is generally *better* prepared to appreciate its aesthetic dimension than is the visitor who sees an example of "folk art" and who then turns to look at another image after ten seconds.

These four points invite us to rework Mitchell's provocative claim that "[v]isual culture is the visual construction of the social, not just the social construction of vision. The question of visual *nature* is therefore a central and unavoidable issue." It can be sup-

plemented as "visual culture is the visual construction of the aesthetic, not just the aesthetic construction of vision." As we move beyond the inherited stereotype of aesthetic objects as objects viewed disinterestedly, for their beauty, and we grant that visual aesthetic properties are both ubiquitous and culturally emergent, we might be ready to examine aesthetic response as reflecting social *and* biological imperatives. Aesthetics complicates visual studies, but in a good way.

From Image to Visibility

Tom Holert

What struck me in the session on politics was how "visuality" tends to become reduced to "images." Any presumed lack of images or any direct reference to specific images in works such as Mirzoeff's *The Right to Look* or Mitchell's *Cloning Terror* is considered by the majority of the discussants as evidence of a lack of disciplinary rigor, methodological coherence, and true commitment to the cause of visual studies, if there should be any such thing left. As much as I advocate close attention to the necessary substrate of every reflection on visuality, I doubt that direct reference to (and engagement with) specific images alone guarantees a more sustainable mode of visual studies. The study of the individual visual item, the picture (still or moving, single or multiple) should actually be linked to analysis of socio-technological infrastructures and networks of image distribution, replication, repression, transformation, and so on. This way, *visibility*, conceived as "a matter of a positive, material, anonymous body of practice" (John Rajchman on Deleuze on Foucault), would emerge as the both complex and vexed subject of a field of research that might continue to be called "visual studies" or could be renamed "visibility studies."

Visual Studies and/as Art History

Julia Orell

Farewell to what exactly? When I first received the invitation to comment on the discussion of the Seminars, I was excited and curious—yet curiosity soon gave way to confusion and ultimately to an uncomfortable disappointment. Most promising for this discussion—and long overdue—seemed to me the inclusion of a historiographical angle and the attempt to bring Anglo-American and German-language approaches into a dialogue (my interest in the latter relates to my own academic biography, with an MA in art history in Germany followed by a PhD in the U.S. and my current position in Switzerland).

Confusion set in, because of the heterogeneous definitions and historiographical trajectories associated with visual studies, *visuelle Kultur*, and *Bildwissenschaft*, further complemented by the discussion of a number of more recent approaches taken by, mostly, well-established art historians. While this heterogeneity of voices present in the discussion and readings offers many insights and potentially fruitful points of departure, no sustained common ground seemed to emerge. My disappointment grew, because the Seminars appeared to be not so much about visual studies as about art history's self- questioning, navel-gazing in search of relevance and innovation. Art historians and those who can relate to art-historical concerns clearly dominate the discussion, and a strong sense of nostalgia permeates large parts; a nostalgia that has less to do with visual studies than with the "new art history" of the eighties and nineties. This is surprising, because the participants present a much more diverse group. It is telling, for instance, that Paul Frosh repeatedly feels the need to point out that he is not an art historian and tries to steer the discussion, unsuccessfully, into a trans-disciplinary direction.

If visual studies is to be taken seriously as a challenge to and beyond the discipline of art history, then the inclusion of even more voices from other disciplinary backgrounds, as well as from outside film and media studies, might have proven productive. For instance, a perspective from the history and philosophy of science, where many scholars are working on pictures and imaging technologies, could have added to the debate in Section 9 and many other instances where art-historical approaches to scientific

pictures are addressed. The voice of a visual anthropologist in addition to an art historian's *Bild-Anthropologie* (Section 5) and in response to the *October* questionnaire (Section 2) would have been of interest. What about the large number of historians who have turned toward the study of visual and material primary sources in addition and as an alternative to texts? And finally, despite the breadth of nationalities and cultural backgrounds present at the Seminars, there was a distinct lack of voices addressing visuality, both as a cultural concept and as object of study, outside the Western hemisphere. To a historian of Chinese art (and visual culture), it is frustrating when global and transcultural issues are hyped yet at the same time neglected when it comes to theoretical debates about the historiography and current direction of a field.

I would like to end with two (rather art-historical) remarks on the parts of the Seminars that resonated most with me. As mentioned above, I was extremely interested in the discussion of Bildwissenschaft (Sections 5 and 6), though it ultimately reveals how little Bildwissenschaft has in common with Anglo-American visual studies. This results in many instances of talking past instead of with each other (e.g., in the discussion of the term *Sinn* [meaning] in Section 5). I see a danger of conflating different agendas under the header of a German Bildwissenschaft; the approaches taken by Gottfried Boehm and Horst Bredekamp, who figure most prominently in this discussion, are quite distinct. Both tendencies sit rather comfortably within (German) art historical traditions, one more indebted to philosophical aesthetics—mostly hermeneutics and phenomenology—and the other attempting to renew art historical projects in the tradition of Warburg and Panofsky. Thus, while the critique of Bildwissenschaft's apparent failure to address gender, race, or politics (both in its institutional framework and its intellectual impetus) is justified to a certain degree, these issues have simply not been part of these two distinct projects. That does not mean that they are absent from German-language art history in general.

My final point concerns Michael Ann Holly's and James Elkins's repeated critique of visual studies' failure to address historical, pre-twentieth-century materials. I fully agree with this point, and it is probably the main reason why I often choose to keep a distance from many debates that come with the label "visual studies" attached to them. At the same time, the generation of art historians and historians currently in the early stages of their careers produce scholarship in premodern and especially in non-Western

art history that does not necessarily consider itself "visual studies" but is indebted to it and practices it in terms of the breadth of visual materials studied and by carefully (and often quietly) "rubbing" new theories against ancient objects.

Should We Have Known Our Place After All?

Kıvanç Kılınç

I will be responding here to Section 2 of the Seminars, "Histories: Anglo-American Visual Studies, 1989–1999." As an architectural historian specializing in the non-West, whose research interest lies in the buildings left on the margins but still within the parameters of the architectural canon, I am fascinated by the conversation about the ongoing dialogues between art history and visual (culture) studies. Perhaps that makes me an outsider to the conversation I will be responding to, but I believe that at the same time it puts me, and anyone else with such interest, at the very center of it. I am not talking about extending the discussion of whether visual culture studies are a "cure" to art history to rethink its foundations or a threat to its basic existence. But if the larger question is to reimagine the canon to be more inclusive (culturally, geographically, and historically) while making it impossible to grow once more into a thick wall, as it still is today in many ways, the possible answers lie in this dialogue more than anywhere else.

Since art can attach to the beginning and end of virtually everything, from "digital art" to "art of the everyday," I find the debate less urgent if art history as the gatekeeper of the canon can survive under the cannon fire of visual studies. No doubt, by forcing art history to overcome its elitism and go beyond a lengthy catalogue of selected works, visual studies has seriously shaken the art-historical canon. It "encompasses the entire visual spectrum of, well, life," as one student remarked on College Confidential, describing the difference between art history and visual studies majors. Also, as Jennifer Lauwrens argues in her doctoral dissertation, "art is unquestionably affected by visuality, since, by means of technology, art moves seamlessly through visual culture, thereby challenging the ontological foundations of the concept of 'art.'"

Art and architectural history have been under continuous attack from within as much as from without for the last couple of decades, but have also been quite adaptable to new environments. And I do not mean in a negative way. I can speak largely of architecture, although what happened there is not detached from similar developments in art. Remember El-Lissitzky's *Prouns*, for instance, which emancipated the audience from fixed point of views and produced "riddles" rather than "finished" compositions with "no

ground plan, no elevation, no top and no bottom," and most importantly, no happy place in any established tradition. The canon was able to absorb the shockwaves caused by the historical avant-gardes only when the heat of the revolution faded away and then was ruthlessly consumed by authoritarian regimes. By remaining within the geographical limits of modernism, however, neither the historical avant-gardes nor the postmodernist experiments that followed necessarily questioned their own privileged position. This task was taken up by postcolonial criticism of architecture and urbanism, revealing the steady Eurocentric core in mainstream scholarship. Buildings and artworks hitherto considered insignificant ("traditional," "vernacular," "non-Western") have been more widely studied, pushing architectural historians to contest the legitimacy of the canon.

But then, how can we draw lessons from criticism from within and without? In "Should Art Historians Know Their Place?," John Tagg wrote, "*NO:* if it means being marginalized within academic definitions of the discipline; if it means being accommodated in a decently diversified syllabus and peacefully coexisting as an alternative specialism, a more or less tolerated sideline: structuralist art history alongside post-structuralist art history, social art history, feminist art history, psychoanalytical art history and, on another level, Scottish art history alongside Chinese art history, ancient art history alongside modern art history, all of them coexisting without contradicting, yet somehow eclectically reconciled in the larger discipline." Art and architectural historians, therefore, need to forge a dialogue without avoiding inconsistency, disagreement, and revision. Each "specialism" needs to challenge the "repressive pluralism" embedded in such conformism rather than simply being glued to a body of knowledge or a list of great objects, regardless of the scope and size of such list. All parallel or counternarratives could then be explored as sites of encounter where art objects, architectural products, and "vernacular" forms of knowledge pass around the world from one place to another.

It is the only way in which what we teach in art and architectural history could be imagined as a web of interconnected stories, simultaneously emerging but not necessarily developing a fondness for one another. I believe this is where art and architectural historians could learn from visual culture studies: "Art history has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and it is always going somewhere," as Keith Moxey has remarked in an interview, whereas visual studies has always been contemporary. But then, shouldn't "visual culture

practitioners" also more willingly "engage in historical eras or canonical texts about the pictorial" instead of almost completely shunning them? Apparently more "border crossings" are necessary.

Did Someone Say Architecture? Or, Take My Discipline, Please!
Mark Linder

It is no surprise, when two dozen people talk with one another in the same room for a week and the expressed aim of the gathering is to consider the sources, strains, and vitality of a shared intellectual enterprise, that the resulting conversation is intensive and rarely strays from established problems and concerns. It should also be no surprise that these insiders offer intriguing and contentious reflections on the varieties and legacies of visual studies and are eager to probe the field's idiosyncrasies and inadequacies, past and present. Occasionally branching off into questions of political efficacy or cultural relevance, the primary tone is that of a group striving for self-definition. Who are we visual studies folk, how did we get here, what could be different, how must we change, what is our relationship to art history and cultural studies, and what are our differences that need articulation, historicization, and debate? If the primary purpose of the gathering was to define an inclusive "us" (and there are some provocative moments when individuals such as Georges Didi-Huberman are named as outsiders), the symposium was a productive, intriguing, and important event. But then what? While there was much optimism about the future and potential of visual studies, speculative trajectories were rarely sustained and hardly a preoccupation of the participants. Despite numerous denials and several dissenters, the overall group affect betrays a desire for discipline: if there is indeed a farewell implicit in, or perhaps symptomatic of, the discussions, it is that visual studies can no longer easily refuse or defer disciplinary identity.

The question of visual studies' disciplinarity is engaged persistently in the transcript's earlier "histories" sessions, beginning with Michael Holly's recollection that "ten years ago" she would tell undergraduates that visual studies "isn't a discipline; it isn't a field. It just names a problematic [and] an attitude in relation to visual things." Keith Moxey later suggests that "dissensus" has been a positive characteristic of visual studies in the past (though Jacques Rancière goes unmentioned in the transcript). Yet "making expertise and nomadism compatible," as Kristine Nielsen puts it, is difficult, and the possibility that visual studies could embrace "hospitable disputation" is complicated, Paul Frosh argues, by visual studies' "founding" antagonistic relationship with art history, the

discipline that visual studies "models itself upon and defines itself against." The particulars and effects of that family argument make it hard for "anyone coming in from the outside" to launch and sustain "an independent project." Clearly, even a group with a territory as extensive and unsettled as visual studies struggles with boundaries and proprieties.

A key exchange occurs in the first session when María Lumbreras Corujo seizes on Gustav Frank's claim that because "there was something immanent in visuelle Kultur that was highly problematic" the intellectual formation of visual studies has been flawed from the start. She suggests that others (Didi-Huberman among them) see any such failings not as "endemic" but as a matter of unexplored investigations and unrealized potential. Yet Frank insists that faults remain "in the makeup of current studies and in the references they frequently use as authorities," and as a result "there are many ecosystems of visuality and vision that are not yet properly researched and deserve our attention." Quite simply, he remarks in a later session, "visual culture and Bildwissenschaft just fail to address problems in the right way."

But even if the discourse should and could be repaired and reconstructed, the question of the form or model of disciplinarity for visual studies would remain. Jim Elkins offers a list of several alternative disciplinary models that have been embraced by visual studies—interdisciplinarity, postdisciplinarity, indisciplinarity, subdisciplinarity, and transdisciplinarity—but explicit attempts to grapple with questions of discipline fade from the discussions after Tom Mitchell's audacious assertion at the end of his session that the "only reliable method is to be very, very intelligent. So I want to prolong the indisciplinary moment of visual studies as long as possible." Expressed or not, differing disciplinary doubts and desires underlie the positions of the participants and span a broad spectrum of attitudes toward disciplinarity in general and how visual studies should relate to other fields. On the side of a more malleable and permeable discipline are the distinct positions of Whitney Davis, who argues for integrating multiple strong disciplines with visual studies, from philosophy to science, and Tom Mitchell, who would encourage creative, even wild, assemblages of discourses. On the side of a more organized, if complex, discipline are Frank, with his call for critical reconstruction, and Lisa Cartwright, who

imagines a rigorous discipline that can pursue "new cross-cultural combinations," especially with "knowledge production, ontology, epistemology, [and] other issues in science."

The sources and constitution of academic status are at stake in each of these positions. While Davis and Cartwright both see advantages in engaging science, Davis is willing to risk the status of visual studies by endorsing approaches that adopt the "protocols of social scientific investigation that tend not to have any status in the humanistic inquiries," while Cartwright seeks to enhance the status of visual studies by researching the visual culture and cultural implications of science. However different their strategies, it is clear that a relationship with science offers benefits to the status of visual studies. Ironically, though it is perhaps less obvious, similar collaboration across the humanities may be less attractive because of the astonishingly diminished status that images and visual literacy have in the humanities. Perhaps, as Elkins suggests near the end of the transcript, even visual studies needs to treat images differently: "I hope, in a future iteration of visual studies, we will let images be free to ruin our hard-won disciplinary authority."

I tend to believe that not only are refusal, deferral, complication, and difficulty required for the project of visual studies to continue, but so are projects that engage even broader audiences, topics, and problems. One strategy would strive to increase interest in the work of visual studies among other fields, and another would call for a more adventurous application of visual studies to areas of investigation that exploit its versatility. In the first case, the opportunity is for the insights and approaches of visual studies to become useful and intriguing and even necessary to other disciplines and fields that need to expand their understanding of their own image culture and visual habits. The second case is an opportunity for visual studies to test and disturb its insights and approaches by applying them to challenging subjects with rich visual practices and histories.

As an architecture theorist and an outsider to visual studies, I am familiar with those strategies. For the past decade, architecture theory has turned from the critical assessment of its own history, methods, and ideologies that characterized the work of the last quarter of the twentieth century to speculation on potential applications, projects, and transdisciplinary sites of operation or collaboration that would expand our field of operation and engage new constituencies. Architecture is constantly caught between its own

disciplinary and professional concerns and an obligation to be understood by a broader audience. Scrutiny of its representational techniques, its uses of digital media, and its reception as image would potentially reconfigure architectural practice and the reception of its products. This is the sort of project that Elkins seems to desire to counter his observation that it is "glaringly obvious that visual studies isn't interested in questions of making." Or, even if architectural design, representation, and visualization are avoided, there is still the entire designed environment, produced by architecture and other design practices, that could be addressed in visual studies. It is unfortunate that neither architecture's visual practices nor the visuality of the built environment is discussed in the transcript as a potential area of investigation, and that architects seem not to be viewed as an audience that would or should become sophisticated readers and users of visual studies work. The transcript mentions architecture or cities just six times, and only in the most general way. In one instance, when Jim Elkins proposes an analogy between the taxonomy of metapictures and Chicago's urban morphology, Tom Mitchell makes light of it, remarking, "if you lived in L.A., there'd be no way to make those divisions!" But any architect or urbanist would immediately see an opportunity in the formal difference between Los Angeles and Chicago to extend the analogy and launch a discussion of alternate metapicture taxonomies. To me, that is precisely the sort of thinking that I imagine visual studies could do much differently than architects do themselves. In any case, there are many studies, most famous among them Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City*, Denise Scott Brown, Robert Venturi, and Steven Izenour's *Learning from Las Vegas*, Beatriz Colomina's *Privacy and Publicity*, and Sylvia Lavin's *Kissing Architecture*, that should be standards for visual studies. Conversely, architecture would be radically transformed if more of its theorists, historians, and practitioners began to understand its practice as the production of images. So visual studies, take my discipline, please.

Mathematics and the Visual

Michele Emmer

I am a mathematician, a filmmaker, a producer of books based on images. In particular, I have edited two books titled *The Visual Mind: Art and Mathematics*, the first in 1993 and the second in 2004. I have created eighteen films in my series Art and Mathematics. My latest books are *Bolle di sapone: Tra arte e matematica* (Soap bubbles: Between art and mathematics), which includes three hundred images, and *Numeri immaginari: Cinema e matematica* (Imaginary numbers: Cinema and mathematics). So I was attracted by the chance to respond to the *Farewell to Visual Studies* discussions.

First of all, I should note that I was perplexed that in the total of 215 pages I received, only 15 were explicitly dedicated to science studies, to the "place of non-art images—from science, engineering, statistics, and other fields," although it is also said that it "came up several times during the week." In any case, the word "mathematics" is mentioned only once and "mathematical" once. Also, the word "algorithm" appears four times.

What is visual studies? Michael Holly quotes a flow chart once given to her by a student: "Aesthetics, anthropology, archaeology, architectural history, art criticism, art history, black studies, cultural studies, deconstruction, design history, feminism, film studies / theory, heritage studies, linguistics, literary criticism, Marxism, media studies, phenomenology, philosophy, photographic studies, political economy, postcolonial studies, poststructuralism, proxemics, psychoanalysis, psychology of perception, queer theory, Russian formalism, semiotics, social history, sociology," and "structuralism."

So no place for mathematicians! But Holly also says that visual studies "isn't a discipline; it isn't a field. It just names a problematic. It shakes up complacency. No objects are excluded. Visual studies names an attitude to visual things, rather than a department." James Elkins adds that visual studies' "freedom to engage new theorists . . . goes to the point of the interdisciplinarity that was a crucial part of visual studies' self-definition in 1990s," while Gustav Frank says that "the emergence of visual studies is not centered on art" and that "visual studies depends on developments in the experimental sciences."

So my idea is to talk about the role of images in modern mathematics and to discuss a few examples. The first problem is that mathematics is abstract. "As for abstraction," says Whitney Davis,

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it's hard to know. What is abstract for some readers will be doggedly descriptive to other readers. Some of my peers in philosophical aesthetics may think this book is not abstract enough: it is too involved with particular sociological, anthropological, critical issues, and they press on the argument, preventing it from achieving the conceptual clarity and generality they value. Some of the writing in the game-theoretical community is, to me, extremely abstract. It's like going through a *college course in mathematics* all over again to go through some of the very sophisticated writing that is done on questions of *algorithms and code*. So there is an entire community of readers for whom this book will seem like the work of a plodding art historian, who doesn't achieve even the beginnings of genuine abstraction. Too abstract or not enough? (Emphasis mine)

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The second problem is, what kind of role do images have in math? According to James Elkins, "[w]hat is at stake for visual studies is the capacity to take images as models and not examples or illustrations"; and Keith Moxey says that "[w]hat struck me about Bredekamp's book, and also [Elkins's] *Visual Practices Across the University*, was the idea of thinking with images. Trying to find images that capture the invisible, that attempt to codify that which seems to be beyond perception. Using images as if they were languages." Gustav Frank says, "I think Bredekamp wants not only to show that science progresses with visual models, but to show the moment when visualizations go beyond anything that was later articulated in science textbooks." Inge Hinterwaldner suggests, "If we agree that images communicate in specific ways and have their own logic of functioning, isn't it obvious that they provide their own paths of knowledge production? If you ask scientists who deal with enormous amounts of collected or generated data, they all say visualization is indispensable. Nobody looks at lists with billions of numbers, because you can hardly get any evidence out of them. It seems to be comparably difficult to gain

knowledge when confronted with the empirical phenomena under study."

I hope that my examples will go in the direction described by Elkins: "We're talking about how visual studies or art history might build bridges to science"; and by Lisa Cartwright: "If you could teach a research program in which you could pursue these subjects, what would it look like, and what would your students do?"

For the last eight years I have taught a unique course in the university curriculum in Italy on "Space and Form" for second-year graduate students in mathematics, architecture, and design (in the European system, second-year Laurea Magistrale students). The course is almost completely *visual*, using films, computer graphics, images that go from art to architecture, mathematics, and biology. Though sometimes I do use equations.

James Elkins noted at the end of the session on science studies that "visual studies scholars . . . don't want to write texts that have equations. I think that is exactly what has to be risked in order to speak across the bridge from the humanities to the sciences, and across the equally wide gulf between scholars who want to read and incorporate actual vision science and those who want to pursue laboratory studies, science studies in general, media studies, the sociology, ethnography, or even the philosophy of science."

<1> The Role of Images in Modern Math: A Few Examples

I start by quoting Keith Moxey: "There is Bredekamp's notion that the use of visual images in the sciences is actually a form of thinking, that it is an alternative to using language in that context." Many changes have occurred in the field of mathematical visualization in the past several years. In May 1988 a conference took place at the Mathematical Sciences Research Institute (MSRI) at the University of California, Berkeley. The theme was *Differential Geometry, Calculus of Variation, and Computer Graphics.* A large portion of the conference was devoted to images, in particular those obtained by computer graphics techniques, which have made a number of interesting new results possible in mathematics. The year before, the Geometry Supercomputer Project (known as the Geometry Center) started its activity at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. In 1992

a new workshop was organized at the MSRI in Berkeley. The theme was explicitly *Visualization of Geometric Structures*. The same week, by chance, a special issue of *Leonardo*, the journal of the International Society for the Arts, Sciences and Technology, dedicated to visual mathematics was published. The five hundredth anniversary of the death of Piero della Francesca was October 12 of the same year. None of the speakers at the 1992 workshop used merely blackboard and chalk. All presentations were made using computer graphics, showing in real time the various softwares produced to investigate new geometrical problems.

The use of visual computers presents new challenges for mathematicians: not just to find more accurate visualizations of known phenomena but to discover new forms, new shapes, to investigate completely new surfaces. A sort of experimental mathematics. When I was a student in the sixties, only pure mathematics was considered of any interest (see, for example, G. H. Hardy, *A Mathematician's Apology*), but at the end of the nineties the difference between pure and applied math began to disappear, and I can say that today there is no distinction at all.

At the end of the sixties, Benoit B. Mandelbrot, while studying certain kinds of algorithms, discovered fractals. According to his own informal definition, "[f]ractals are geometric shapes that are equally complex in their details as in their overall form. That is, if a piece of a fractal is suitably magnified to become of the same size as the whole, it should look like the whole, either exactly, or perhaps only after a slight limited deformation." In fractal geometry, images are essential, not just illustrations of a phenomenon. The property of self-similarity of fractals makes it possible to have an enormous quantity of information contained in an image, and this is one of the main reasons that computer graphics animation in films uses fractals to create fascinating special effects.

In 1976 Thomas Banchoff and Charles Strauss produced the first animation in color of a four-dimensional cube, the hypercube. Ten years later Banchoff and collaborators produced the first animated film of the hypersphere. It was possible to see the movement of a four-dimensional object (of course in its three-dimensional projection) and discover shapes that were almost impossible to visualize and realize without the animated images. It was really a shock for the scientific community. In 1986, in the section on

Space at the Biennale Internazionale d'arte in Venice, the film was on show like an artwork. While four-dimensional polytopes were known even if nobody had seen them moving in space, by 1986 it was possible to find the solution to an open problem in mathematics using the images produced on a computer screen.

In 1982 the Brazilian mathematician Celso Costa published an example of a surface that was minimal in relation to certain topological properties. David A. Hoffman and William H. Meeks III, by considering the equations obtained by Costa and with the help of the computer graphics expert James T. Hoffman, were able to *see* the new surface on their computer and to discover the properties of the surface using the images. It was the first real cooperation in mathematics of formal proof and visual images of the unknown solution. David Hoffman said, "This collaboration of art and science produced something significant to both fields."

Many artists have realized sculptures of minimal surfaces of these kinds. In the last years in contemporary architecture, in which the importance of mathematical and topological images is becoming more and more important, the building that housed the new Olympic swimming pool in Beijing in 2008 was constructed using a virtual model of a nonphysical minimal structure. Only in November 2011 was it possible to construct a physical model of the structure, based on a conjecture of Lord Kelvin which dated back to 1887.

A new visual mathematics uses images, many created through computer graphics and algorithms, not merely as illustrations or to provide an example, but as an essential element of demonstration and proof of research and analysis. This new field could certainly be of interest to scholars working in visual studies. I would like to conclude by quoting Tom Mitchell: "I want to prolong the interdisciplinary moment of visual studies as long as possible."

Response, *Farewell to Visual Studies*

Terri Weissman

In Section 9, "Science Studies," there is a very brief discussion concerning collaboration between scholars in the humanities and those in the social sciences (and other fields). There is also a quick mention of projects with names like "humanities lab" that work in a transdisciplinary or postdisciplinary manner—such as the Stanford Humanities Lab, which seeks to bring together scholars in the sciences, design, archaeology, history, and so on in order to create interactive digital spaces and foster a new kind of research paradigm in which humanists learn from the project management model used in the sciences. About these sorts of undertakings Whitney Davis says, "One can be cautious and skeptical, but students are voting with their feet." In what is a mostly dismissive conversation, this is the most positive thing said. But this indifference (or scorn?) strikes me as a mistake—a big mistake, especially for scholars interested in visual studies. Certainly there are worrisome aspects of the humanities lab model, and of the related "digital humanities." As someone interested in these spaces, for instance, I worry about the uncritical euphoria and what can feel at times like the blind embrace of all things connected to interactive digital media. I worry too about an emerging, and I think deeply disturbing, connection between business and art that seeks to instrumentalize humanistic research and artistic practice. And finally, perhaps most simply, I worry that humanities labs and similar projects provide a way for digital media enthusiasts to claim academic credibility without the presence of any kind of rigorous intellectual review process. That research will be reduced to bullet points. That style will trump substance.

Yet for all that, I still believe that digital humanities or some such as of yet unnamed method or space or program that creates opportunities for transdisciplinary research provides the most compelling case for the continuation of (not the farewell to!) visual studies. In part this is for the simple reason that "Big Data" no longer belongs to the field of supercomputing alone. That is, the proliferation of digital artifacts has made the amassing of large collections and the creation of new archives available to any curious browser or hoarder. And while recent approaches to and scholarship on documentaries have in some way grappled with this changed image landscape (I am thinking of

artists like Walid Raad or Ursula Biemann, or scholars such as Ariella Azoulay or Robert Hariman and John Lucaites, or even Jacques Rancière), there still needs to be a more fully articulated analysis that offers ways to interpret how the increasingly complex interface between human and machine has changed what and the way we see. We know that technological systems facilitate different kinds of visibility through the application of frames, filters, and algorithmic ordering. But where is the vanguard of methodology in the study of technology and vision by artists and art historians today? And how can scholars and artists make the values embedded in the complex technological systems we use—and often, simultaneously, seek to critique—visible?

These are the types of questions that visual studies scholars should be most apt to address. These are the kinds of questions that, for me, make visual studies more important than ever. The kind of excitement that Michael Ann Holly talked about as existing around the formation of visual studies in its early days—the sense that stakes are high—also exists here, around this emerging field that locates itself at the intersection of science and technology studies (STS), visual studies, and artistic production. To be clear, this is not a field or movement restricted to scholars of contemporary art. Networks of transportation, methods of mapping, systems of building and manufacture, representations of science, and so on—these are not areas of study confined to the modern era or contemporary moment, yet the study of each is affected by new technologies of vision. Thus, as students and scholars are increasingly asked to produce not only texts, but also images, data structures, maps, charts, and other information-based visualizations, the need to investigate the function and politics of vision in technological systems would seem to demand the reinvention of visual studies, not its abandonment nor its farewell.

Responses

Johanna Drucker

The "visual studies" described in these transcripts was a particular intervention in art history that began in the mid-1980s, but it is not the only version of the history or identity of the field. Art history was woefully undertheorized in that era. French philosophy, British cultural studies, and German critical theory had resulted in vigorous and virulent debate in literature and film in their encounters with semiotics, structuralism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, Marxist and feminist theory, as well as the varied philosophies that accompanied them (queer theory, multiculturalism, postcolonialism, and other critical engagements followed soon after). Art history had remained remote from these influences, and the defense against theory came from many different positions. Scholars who saw the supremacy of the object, connoisseurship, and formal analysis threatened were joined by others who felt the legitimacy conferred by their training and credentials under threat from expertise in fields to which they had little access except through difficult and obscure-seeming texts.

Battles over theory divided departments, made and ruined careers, and transformed the discipline of art history. Many visual studies–affiliated art historians turned away from visual analysis to the study of institutional practices. Some managed a synthesis of the formal qualities of works and their social production. Some expanded their discussions to dialogue with anthropology, fashion, media, history, literature, history of science, or other disciplines in which visual representations are produced or circulate. But even now, the entrenched resistance to the study of mass media and broader domains of visual imagery and production is part of the backlash against visual studies in art history (perhaps, more properly, Art History), or, at least, a continuation of the impulse that resisted its influence. The carcass of traditional art history has been pretty well picked dry, even if it continues to be preserved and venerated in some of the citadels and cloisters. But the "visual studies" outlined here is equally exhausted, at the self-confessed "end" outlined in your volume, bidding itself farewell.

Why? Remember, the challenge was not just to reread the canonical works through new lenses, but to bring new objects of study and analysis into view while developing a unique methodological approach. Two things happened along the way. The quest for a methodology specific to visuality failed to materialize from this confluence of theoretical contributions, and the commitment to aesthetics as a specialized mode of knowledge and arena of cultural production evaporated. Exceptions can be cited in individual works, of course, but in broad terms the intellectual inquiry into the historicity of vision, interest in visual epistemology, attention to the specificity of visual means and methods, concern for embodied cognition and systems approaches to the social complex of visual culture, all of which have developed considerably over the last three or four decades, were simply ignored by "visual studies" as conceived here. Meanwhile, the world was changing.

Methodological transformation came at the price of blindness, a peculiar avoidance of attention to visual specificity, as if in compensatory response to the old tenets of a retrogressive-seeming formalism, with its attachment to notions of inherent, essential, and even self-evident value. The method of visual studies, by its own admission throughout this tract, was often practiced at the expense of visuality. Belief in the distinct capacity of images to produce both sense (coherence and legibility) and meaning (referential and replete expression) on terms that are distinct from those of language was sacrificed in favor of ideological critique. In other quarters, discussions of visual epistemology, design, media, and information studies, cognition and vision, and new materialisms were surging into view. These realms were fed in part by systems theory, by cybernetics and digital media studies, but also by the long-standing examination of the specificity of vision. These discourses are not constrained by either attention to or reaction against art history, that tiny hothouse object in the larger culture of visual forms, but are vigorous aspects of many multidisciplinary fields.

Nineteenth-century mass production changed the game in visual arts, with commercial and entertainment images overwhelming those of the fine art arena (giving fine art a newly defined identity). But since the invention of networked digital media, we negotiate most of our daily business through the graphical formats of interface. Visuality plays a dramatically different role in contemporary life than at any other point in human

history, organizing knowledge, information, communication, and the exchanges of power, money, and units of cultural value in unprecedented ways, with unparalleled speed, volume, and effect. The critical tools needed to understand these environments have to come from fields of cognitive studies, design, and interface studies. Their history is not encompassed in the esoteric knowledge domains of poststructuralist theory, however useful it is as an accessory or adjunct. The point is not to jettison what is valuable, but to lift our heads up from the narrow view into which attention has been funneled by academic silos and disciplinary constraints, and revisit the long and rich history of studies of vision, visuality, and epistemology as they have intersected with design.

This version of visual studies is deeply humanistic, highly articulate and self-conscious, with its roots in architecture, graphical forms of knowledge production, printing and the book, page layout and composition, the history and cultural valence of typography, visualization of information and knowledge in graphical and diagrammatic forms, cartography from an array of interpretative and thematic traditions, illustration, fashion, urban planning, industrial design, user interface, artificial vision, and digital design—in short, all of the domains in which visuality is an essential means of production. Design was fine art's dialogue with utopia, certainly in the visions of the late nineteenth-century Arts and Crafts, Secessionist, and then twentieth-century Constructivist and related movements and their legacies. That tradition of visual studies is far from exhausted, and it is the domain in which my work has developed over the same thirty years that I watched the rise and now self-confessed exhaustion of the visual studies within the orbit of art history.

In the mid-1980s, pursuing an interdisciplinary degree that combined film studies, the visual arts, environment design, and the history of writing, I had only a distant sense of the art-historical community's interest in theory, limited to what I gleaned from the work of Norman Bryson and Victor Burgin. I sent out feelers on the Berkeley campus to see if a full-fledged visual studies program might take root. I visited the remains of Gyorgy Kepes's experimental foothold at MIT, went to the Carpenter Center at Harvard to learn from what was left of their Bauhaus legacy, sought out all the then-dying embers of the legacy of Constructivist, De Stijl, and the other design movements whose precepts had been codified in design curricula as well as professional practices. The visionary

work of László Moholy-Nagy, Wassily Kandinsky, Herbert Bayer, Alexander Rod-chenko, Varvara Stepanova, Anni and Josef Albers, and others was shaped by utopian visions of transformation and change. Those aspirations, like all of the socialist agenda, met their tempered fate in various ways, but the crucible of intellectual and creative thought gave rise to a full-fledged engagement with visuality in systematic methodological and practical ways. As a method, this tradition of visual studies has a long history stretching into antiquity, into the use of visual means to produce pattern, idea, form, tools, decoration, communication, and expression. That discourse has never found a place in the "visual studies" that is now declaring itself at an end. Why?

Humanistic as well as scientific and technical fields depend on visual knowledge and its transmission in ways that are newly urgent even if they go back to classical times, such as the creation and display of information in graphical form. Certain disciplines, like architecture, rely on visual methods as the core instruments of their existence—handwriting does not exist except in examples, and the great copybooks and manuals of penmanship and lettering are testimony to the nuances of class, station, and function to which these models were put. The rhetorical structure of argument is outlined in diagrammatic form that is explicitly graphic. The "laws of form" central to formal logic and its ambitious dreams of a totalizing capacity to encode knowledge, the imaginative designs of philosophical languages, the "real" character of John Wilkins, the diagrammatic virtuosity of Robert Fludd—these strains of visual thinking and expression can only be understood using a critical vocabulary informed by reference to specific properties of visual forms. Humbert de Superville, Charles Blanc, John Ruskin, Otto Neurath, Owen Jones, the Gestalt psychologists, theorists of Constructivist production of knowledge (visual and other), Humberto Maturana, Francisco Varela, Stephen Kosslyn—the list could go on an on, establishing a rich historical and theoretical foundation for visual studies from a broad array of contemporary fields highly relevant to pressing concerns in the present. Rarely codified into a curriculum, such a foundation would be useful and practical across many realms of applied and theoretical knowledge and research. Visual studies is ahead of us, not behind, but it will be formulated from different sources and with other aspirations than the field whose demise you have detailed.

Farewell to a History Without the Past

Vanessa R. Schwartz

Reading the transcript of a seminar I did not attend, about readings I did not read, is a form of curious intellectual eavesdropping that I hope has not fallen on my own deaf ears. It is a relief that the Stone Seminar *Farewell to Visual Studies* harbors no delusion of being a singular intellectual origin or trajectory. This would be especially dubious in an interdisciplinary field, which generally develops as an intellectual voluntary association. The Seminars represents a cluster of important approaches: Germans, Anglo-Americans, Swiss academics but very few French thinkers, despite the fact that Barthes, Foucault, Baudrillard, and Lacan dominated much of the first wave of American university formation of the field in the 1980s. Ocularcentrism and its decline in France is also the subject of one of the foundational intellectual histories in the field, Martin Jay's *Downcast Eyes*. But aside from the Gallic exclusion, my greatest concern is that the seminar's organization mimics the field's strangest attribute: its increasing lack of historical depth and an insistent chronological insensitivity. There are five "Histories" sections, including the oxymoronic "Present Decade"; two refer to no particular moment, and there are great gaps from the prewar German period to 1989, followed by decadism, with no key moments or texts defining the transition from one period to another except a calendar. Wouldn't a study such as T. J. Clark's *The Painting of Modern Life*, which, despite itself, gave enormous impetus to the field on its 1985 publication and which preceded the translation of Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* into French, and Susan Buck-Morss's *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (1989), need to find a place in such a discussion? In the transcript the genealogy derives from two sets of German-language writers: those such as Wölfflin, Warburg, and Riegl, fathers of academic art history (when it was visual studies before the fact, as *Bildwissenschaft*) and those such as Kracauer and Benjamin, who developed "media studies" before the fact. Yet, as the coeditor of a volume, *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, that attempted to present a historically driven account of both the field and its objects, I was also struck by the lack of reference to such thinkers as Baudelaire, Marx, Simmel, and Freud, who shed

indispensable light on the categories of "modernity" as a historical formation which in itself can be considered to have produced a culture so saturated in images that it has pushed scholarship into a near frenzy of trying to describe and explain it—despite the fact that image production is an ancient practice and has always been about much more than what we in the Western world have come to define as art.

If image production and reception is the major vein of the field, vision and visuality comprise its other fundamental domain of consideration, thus linking visual studies to the philosophy, theory, and history of perception and the senses. Finally, visual studies can be defined as engaging with new practices of scholarly inscription in images and through visual narration brought to the fore by the digital revolution. I am skeptical of the conflation of artistic practice with visual studies, however. Our work is to offer investigation and analysis in the form of critical discourse, and we are no more artists because we use images than we are poets because we use words.

I was struck by the near chorus of pleas by Michael Ann Holly, Keith Moxey, and to a lesser extent Lisa Cartwright (who was astute enough to mention Jonathan Crary, another poor soul who made his career trapped in working on a century past), who seemed to be speaking into a void, since the subject they raised was never taken up in any sustained way in the Seminars. They voiced concern about the presentism of the field as well as among seminar participants. Symptomatic of this amnesia in the discussion is the attention to Nick Mirzoeff. While everyone mentioned his recent politically motivated work on 9/11 and his *Visual Culture Reader*, no one, for example, recalled his first, excellent book, *Silent Poetry*, which looked at the long genealogy of thought concerning deafness as a condition of potential excessive visuality and in which he mined a rich visual archive of the history of sign language and deaf artists in nineteenth-century France. Even that research has been forgotten—and the book was published in 1997.

Holly and Moxey invoked the importance of work that treated the distant past and its images, its institutions, and remote cultures' organization of visuality. The science of vision has a history too that might serve to temper all the faddishness about neuroscience today. To be fair, all intellectual inquiry that is not antiquarian can be regarded as presentist in the sense that present perspectives and frameworks guide scholars. That, however, is quite different from the field's current condition of being mired in "now-ism," as

Richard Meyer has described it. Increasingly, visual studies has become shorthand for the study of contemporary visual culture. That is a regrettable condition. In the graduate certificate we built in visual studies at USC, our orientation is resolutely historical; we have active participants with expertise in all periods, from antiquity to the present, who work alongside anthropologists, sociologists, and communications and film scholars. Any sense of the past that exists in the scholarship in the field is here telescoped—as if something that happened ten years ago is "in the past." Something that happened ten seconds ago is also past, but for scholarly purposes, a real dedication to experience long past has been the special value of the deep and careful knowledge to which humanities scholars have been dedicated, leaving the present to the social scientists and, I suppose, the future to the scientists, if we need to divide knowledge that way.

Lynn Hunt and I guest-edited a special issue of the *Journal of Visual Culture* to offer work that exemplifies the value of such inquiry. The issue considered the relation of images to temporality and contextualization, from cave paintings to film and photography. We did not aspire to cover all history but rather many periods in history to remind the journal's readers of the importance of contextualization and the real differences that temporally and spatially different cultures produced in regards to the visual. Visual technologies themselves, such as the instant camera, have also fundamentally altered the expectations and experience of time itself; Elizabeth Edwards concerns herself with such issues in *The Camera as Historian*. The late Anne Friedberg practiced a sort of media archaeology in her books *Window Shopping* and *The Virtual Window*. The intersection of science and art has brought the latter's questions about objectivity and epistemology to bear specifically in the visual realm. Daniela Bleichmar's *Visible Empire*, which looks at the eighteenth-century Spanish botanical expeditions, is an exemplary study among the many dedicated to the nexus of visual culture and the history of science. Additionally, there is an important historical literature that considers the problem of visual discernment as central to the process of social democratization in the West in the nineteenth century. More than thirty years ago, Neil Harris identified the operational aesthetic in his study about P. T. Barnum, and more recently Michael Leja has extended that paradigm to later in nineteenth-century America, moving from the realm of popular culture back to such artists as Eakins, Harnett, and Duchamp. In short, the history of visual studies is also a

history of the histories of visual culture already written as much as a set of intellectual histories of methodologies, schools of thought, and movements.

The history of visual studies that is summoned and simultaneously dismissed in the seminar is too incoherent and arbitrary to reject or admit. We need to bid farewell to an idea of history that is a mere web of connections with a shallow and analytically poor chronology that measures time against the calendar rather than in genuine intellectual developments. This results in a sense of history that is more like the eternal present, one that ominously mirrors the worst aspects of the depthlessness of the very modern visual culture that it seeks to interrogate.

Ambivalences

<CST>Visual Culture Studies and the Frankfurt School

Bernd Stiegler

The theories of the Frankfurt school and especially of Walter Benjamin are part of the canon of visual culture studies. Their impact has to do with the particular theoretical setting of visual culture and its history emerging from cultural studies. But in fact the reception is in a way quite orthodox: there are a very few texts quoted continually and others missing. Benjamin is the classical example for the repetitive canon, Kracauer for the quite astonishing missing reception.

<1>Benjamin and the Problem of Shifting Theories

Starting with the repetitive canon, we have to deal with a permanent reinvention of Benjamin and a rewriting of his theories. Benjamin is really a shifting theoretical subject and not a well-defined object. Or to put it in other terms, Benjamin is the ideal author in order to establish a canon which is—deliberately or not—structurally wide open and in permanent transition. If you want to see things in a Marxist perspective, take Benjamin. If you want to switch to metaphysics, take Benjamin. If you want to be close to deconstruction, take Benjamin as well. Sometimes you have to choose other texts, sometimes you just have to change your interpretative optics.

In the context of visual culture studies, Benjamin is a sort of background theory. There are just a handful of canonical texts which can be found in more or less every visual culture book. But there are others missing, and in a quite astonishing way even those dealing with the visual are not part of the canon. In fact, many of Benjamin's texts work—metaphorically and practically—with images, but only those which try to formulate broader historical issues are read and discussed. Benjamin himself is a figure of permanent ambivalences. That is what makes his ideas attractive and even exciting. To understand him precisely you have to go to the core of his images, to the heart of his visual world. You have to read his essays on children's books, to go through his collection of

postcards, to recollect the illustrated books of his critical reviews, just to name a few examples (cf. *Walter Benjamin's Archive*).

One more step: *Visions of Benjamin* could be the title of a book reconsidering the history of visual culture. Benjamin's works are a plurality of their own and offer a huge and often contradictory variety of issues, concepts, ideas, and so on. Their complex and shimmering readings, transformations, and reformulations in the context of visual culture studies reveal a lot about visual culture studies and less about Benjamin.

Kracauer, or the Missing Decades

Kracauer has a particular and very significant position in this context. He is an outstanding example of the early practice of visual culture, especially in his writings on films and his feuilletons collected in the new German edition of his works. There are literally hundreds of journalistic texts dealing with visual phenomena in an analytical sociological perspective—but only a dozen that are quoted in the field of visual culture studies. In fact, only *Das Ornament der Masse*, his essay on photography, and a few others collected in edited volumes remain, together with *From Caligari to Hitler* and *Theory of Film*. Several decades are missing in and due to this choice.

For Kracauer, the visual world is a world that speaks in a particular way and that has to be read in a different way. Throughout his very dense descriptions and "social" readings, Kracauer develops his singular sociological phenomenology not as an explicit and well-defined theory but as a more implicit one. Photography and film are means of social expression and have to be deciphered as media of memory, social interactions, revelations, and even utopian dreams. Most of the central visual culture ideas are to be found in Kracauer's texts of the 1920s and early 1930s. None of them belong to the central or even broader visual culture canon.

In fact, the Shoah marks a real gap in his conception and interpretation of history and its philosophy, his perspective having been completely changed by that caesura in history. The redemption in the subtitle of *Theory of Film*, *The Redemption of Physical Reality*, is a redemption of the mere "physical" world and not of the subject, which is, as

the spectator of the films, neither an identical reference nor a well-defined entity. This idea marks *From Caligari to Hitler* and *Theory of Film*.

If you want to discover Kracauer as a theorist of early visual culture—and he is one of the most brilliant examples—you have to go through this impressive collection of short texts.

The Frankfurt School and Media History: Ambivalences of Criticism

It might be useful to practice a sort of rereading of Adorno, Horkheimer, and other members of the Institute for Social Research in the perspective on their specific use of images and their analysis of the visual. Generally speaking, the institute seems to have been marked by a deep iconophobia. But this impression makes the issue even more attractive and interesting. And in fact Adorno's position is, in my opinion, much more ambivalent than it seems to be (see, for example, Martin Seel's book with essays on Adorno and film), and quite a lot of research projects in the middle of the twentieth century dealt with the visual world. Some of them are related to early empirical sociology (Lazarsfeld and others), while others are extremely detailed analyses of the relationship between mass medias, mass culture, and everyday life—and that's the issue of visual culture studies as well.

The ambivalences of the Frankfurt school and those of visual culture studies are corresponding. That is the lesson we have to take into consideration for our from now on double reading of the classical texts.

Episodes of Failure? Or, Some Remarks on the Institutional History of Photography and
Its Relevance to a Genealogy of *visuelle Kultur*

Lisa Zaher

I am responding to the genealogy of *visuelle Kultur* that Gustav Frank presents in Section 1 of the transcript. I would like to better understand what he deems to be the failure of the critical endeavor of theorists like Balász, Benjamin, and Münsterberg, and the forty-year gap that ensued between roughly 1940 and 1980. I take his point to be that a rereading of Balász, Benjamin, and Münsterberg contributes to a history of visual culture, and not merely a history of film or media studies, in making available a thicker history of attitudes about perception and the production and reception of images. I understand too that the gap he indicates is specific to the institutional narrative within Germany. However, I propose that it would be fruitful to undergo a similar, parallel reevaluation of many of the canonical figures within the history of photography in the United States. I contend that the structures and mechanisms within one institutional narrative might illuminate the other, or, at minimum, provide a concurrent history of visual culture with a set of analogous, and at times overlapping, precedents and terms.

Such a parallel study would first identify the emerging institutional framework for the history of photography in the United States from the late 1910s onward, as a time and place where many of the concerns of the above authors were shared. We find echoes of Balász's call for "interhuman spiritual exchanges" within the writings of one of his contemporaries, and photography's earliest modernist theorists, Paul Strand. Writing in 1922 about the photographs of Alfred Stieglitz, Strand declared, "In thus revealing the spirit of the individual he has documented the world of that individual, which is today." Edward Weston carried forth this tradition in his efforts to communicate the essence of his photographic subjects. Ironically, when reviewing Weston's exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1946, Clement Greenberg argued that in order for photography to be a successful form of modern art, the photographer must "rely more on his explicit subject and . . . express its identity or personality and his feelings about it so much more directly." Ob-

jecting to Weston's cold formalism as an overt conceptualism, Greenberg praised, instead, the work of Walker Evans, for offering a form of modern art photography based on an intuitive and empathic engagement between photographer and subject.

If, as Whitney Davis suggests, what Frank fears has become lost does "have something to do with the doctrine of expression: the expressive gesture, the transparency of the *Innenwelt* to visibility and the *Umwelt*, by way of nonverbal or extralinguistic expressivity" in the contemporary German framework of *Bildwissenschaft*, is it significant to Frank's genealogy that these were the terms through which photographic media were deemed to possess aesthetic value? The "organizing ideology, the vitalism" was an essential factor in judging photographs as works of art. Not only did this "doctrine of expression," to borrow a phrase, serve to value the material objects as art, but integral to that valuation was the idea that these objects were "alive." Their aliveness made them modern art.

The institutional treatment of photographic media in the United States is perhaps helpful for understanding a site for the continuation of the vitalist impulse within the writings of Benjamin and Balász. However, it also generated its own alternative reasonings for why its own contemporary moment may have lost or disassociated itself from that impulse. We can locate one explanation in the impact of Structuralist and Poststructuralist thought on the history of photography as it became incorporated into the larger narrative of art history, which other speakers allude to throughout these Seminars. Strand's photographic theory provides an explanation for the specific failure of his own theoretical project, as it accounts for the impact of photography on visuality from within a modernist perspective. Strand championed the modernist belief that what moves the tradition forward is both knowledge of that tradition and the knowledge and conviction that what one is doing is a contribution to it. He was aware, as Whitney Davis has written, that "[v]isuality and pictoriality are reciprocally and recursively interdetermined and interacting aspects of world-recognition." After encouraging his followers to learn the photographic tradition by looking through the pages of the journal *Camera Work*, Strand advised them accordingly, "As a matter of fact, your photography is a record of your living, for anyone who really sees. You may see and be affected by other people's ways, you may even use them to find your own, but you will have eventually to free yourself of

them. That is what Niet[z]sche meant when he said, 'I have just read Schopenhauer, now I have to get rid of him.' He knew how insidious other people's ways could be, particularly those which have the forcefulness of profound experience, if you let them get between you and your own vision."

The reciprocal and recursive effects of pictoriality and visuality in Strand's photographic theory identified a problem within photographic modernism, as achieving a new "style" photographically involved an act of looking analogous to, and dependent upon, the act of learning the tradition. In 1972, the artist and theorist Hollis Frampton declared that Strand had assigned a new role to the artist, that of epistemologist. Frampton's reading suggests that the conditions necessary to sustain Strand's photographic theory as a modernist project are precisely the conditions that warrant its treatment as a study of visual culture.

Another (too quick) conclusion on the failure of the critical endeavor of such theorists as Benjamin and Balász would be that the institutionalization of photographic media within the United States produced the conditions for this failure. The argument would be that the gradual induction of photography into museums not only suffocated their ideological objectives by turning a mass cultural dynamic into a high art aesthetic, but also transformed the necessary material conditions through the fetishization of the photographic print. However, the actual institutional treatment of photographic media, specifically at the Museum of Modern Art at midcentury under the direction of Edward Steichen, speaks to a contrary view. Steichen's curatorial policy, enacted with such exhibitions as *Road to Victory* (1942) and *The Family of Man* (1955), often involved obtaining negatives from the photographers and printing the photographs by himself in a range of formats that best met the needs of his exhibition layouts. Christopher Phillips has argued that this method deemphasized the authenticity of the single photographic print as well as its autonomy, placing the emphasis on the image rather than the material object. The material form of each image did, however, become a factor of Steichen's exhibition design, crafted to impact its spectators through the dynamics of the display, including large-scale reproductions and overlapping juxtapositions of images in three-dimensional space. Steichen understood photography as a visual language, one communicated, shared, and learned through its unique history of distribution and display. As he stated, "Man's

first language was written in images on the walls of caves. Photography simplifies and enlarges the scope of the image language."

While I can foresee the objection that authors like Paul Strand and Edward Steichen were advocating for a monomedial account rather than an account of visual culture, I would argue that such an objection is based on a limited conception of what "photography" amounts to. Their absence from a larger history of visual culture is a limitation not so much of their theory as of the disciplinary applications of their thought.

Farewell to Visual Studies—Welcome to Phenomenology!
Stephan Günzel

My response to the discussion draws on a remark by Gustav Frank, who draws our attention to the fact that image theory (*Bildtheorie*) has a strong non- or even antisemiotic bias. Indeed, this was Gottfried Boehm's intention in proclaiming an "iconic turn," which represented nothing less than a break with the dominance of linguistic approaches, and in consequence with the "linguistic turn." Boehm even suggested rethinking language in terms of images—and pictures. However, theory (and particularly philosophy) has long lacked a turning away from the linguistic or semiotic paradigm. And as Frank also mentions, even when nonsemiotic approaches are considered, they do not overcome the notion that an image is (and has to be) a sign. Therefore—and this is what the future (at least of Bildtheorie) holds—a "perceptual turn" has to take place. Lambert Wiesing, who is also quoted by Frank, is one of the few theoreticians who have turned away from semiotics. In this he has laid a new foundation for picture semiotics within an image theory, by demonstrating in which ways an image or a picture can be, without necessarily having to be, used as a sign. The recent translations of his writings (especially *Artificial Presence*) are making his approach known to the international community. This will not only stimulate the discussion but provide stagnating image theory with a completely new paradigm. It should also give visual studies the impetus to integrate those phenomenological insights.

Failure? Farewell? Destruction!

<CST> A Short Reflection on Visual Studies, Or Visual Studies Contra *Bildwissenschaft*

Bernhard J. Dotzler

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Diese Aufgabe verstehen wir als die am Leitfaden der Seinsfrage sich vollziehende *Destruktion* des überlieferten Bestandes der antiken Ontologie auf die ursprünglichen Erfahrungen, in denen die ersten und fortan leitenden Bestimmungen des Seins gewonnen wurden.

—Martin Heidegger

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On the question of a "farewell to visual studies," I would like to refer to an aspect which I missed in the discussions among the summer school's participants. It is "acoustic space," once promoted by Marshall McLuhan in opposition to "visual space," which emerged from print. Photography, illuminated advertising, film, TV, and so on have mostly been interpreted as a dramatic increase of the visual, or as an ongoing escalation of the visual culture we believe we live in. According to McLuhan, however, photography and film (photography from Talbot to the decline of Kodak, i.e., *not* digital photography, not digital film, nor video) are mechanical arts just as print is, whereas TV belongs to the electronic media and is acoustic in its essence, that is to say in its effects. A "farewell" to visual studies, I would like to argue, is perhaps not enough. One should think about "destruction" in the sense that Heidegger gave to the word when he wrote of the task of a "Destruktion der Geschichte der Ontologie." Derrida only embellished the challenge by rephrasing the term into "deconstruction." McLuhan instead acknowledged that "Heidegger surf-boards along on the electronic wave as triumphantly as Descartes rode the mechanical wave."

(There is the laughter at "proxemics" in the list of disciplines or topics involved in visual studies. Here, for a moment, acoustic space comes into play. But the matter wasn't followed up. Anyway.)

The distinction between visual space and acoustic space opens an interesting perspective on the division of the history of visual studies into two phases, as suggested in

the first seminar. Although this is not the only way of thinking about the histories of visual studies, there are good reasons for identifying a period from about 1900 to the 1940s and a new onset since the 1980s and '90s. One then has to ask two questions (both of which are thoroughly reflected by the summer school's discussions). First, what is the difference between then and now? Second, why did the previous investigations into visual culture fail? Why did the first period come to an end? What was, or is, the rupture that caused the recent efforts to establish a *Bildwissenschaft* to be a restart rather than a continuation? Visual studies have never been a failure in the richness of what they brought to light, of course. Cultural studies of whatever kind cannot fail. They act as *positioning* agencies with *positive* results that (with the exception of errors in detail, such as, for example, wrong age determinations of this or that artefact) cannot be negated or falsified but only denied or ignored. However, if "failure" also means "disruption" (or vice versa), then there was a failure worth exploring.

With respect to the difference between the visual studies of, let's say, the 1930 and '40s and the new attention that has been paid to visual phenomena since the 1980s and '90s, it can be easily named. Whether pictures were only read or actually seen (as Tom Mitchell put it in the discussion), their "being in the world," that is, their ontology was undoubted when Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, or Erwin Panofsky wrote on photography and film. Not only was what they made visible considered to be true and real, but the pictures themselves were simply material. In contrast, the epistemological status of images radically changed with digital photography. As is generally known, pictures and images have now become a doubted reality, an object of skepticism, misgivings, and disbelief, or in German, *Zweifel*. Visual studies therefore has become, on the one hand, more exigent than before. On the other hand, the "ontological turn" to the image, as which at least Bildwissenschaft has to be seen, might be nothing else than facing the challenge with an act of despair, or *Akt der Verzweiflung*, with *Verzweiflung* understood in a Heideggerian sense as *Ver-Zweiflung*. Even when dealing with technologically informed pictures (e.g., *Das technische Bild*), the pictorial turn, whether that of Tom Mitchell or that of Bildwissenschaft, does not encounter the extinction of (material) images that is the *signum* of today's visual realities. So, instead of continuing as it has, the task of visual studies may be to learn to destroy what they have been, and to become

aware—to learn thinking—not only of the invisible, but of the nonvisual at the ground of all visuality.

What thereby has to be understood is, among other things, what happened in between: what is the difference that makes a difference between the study of *visuelle Kultur* in the 1920s and '30s and today's visual studies? The diversity of *visual* realities then and now is only one aspect. Another one comes to the fore with the question of "failure," or "disruption." The visuelle Kultur period ended with the beginning, that is to say, the impact of TV. As one can observe, for example, in the closing chapter of Rudolf Arnheim's *Radio* (1936), television since then has mostly been seen as an extension of broadcasting from the pure auditorial level, by which radio is defined, to the visual level as well. TV seems to be one of the optical media. If so, however, the study of visuelle Kultur should have been able to go on as it did with photography and film. But it didn't. Why? Even radio was seen (!) as an "imagery [!] of the ear" by Arnheim (and others). It was only McLuhan who suggested thinking it the other way round: TV does not so much convert the radio world into a visual world as the visual world into a radio world. In his famous *Playboy* interview ("A candid conversation with the high priest of popcult and metaphysician of media," 1969) he argues:

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McLuhan: . . . It is television that is primarily responsible for ending the visual supremacy that characterized all mechanical technology, although each of the other electric media have played contributing roles.

Playboy: But isn't television itself a primarily visual medium?

McLuhan: No, it's quite the opposite, although the idea that TV is a visual extension is an understandable mistake. Unlike film or photograph, television is primarily an extension of the sense of touch rather than of sight.

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Thus one might say, in a way, that to continue visual studies they should have turned, or should turn now, into something like what once was called the study of "soundscapes." Or at least thinking along these lines seems to me to be worth considering not only a "farewell to" but an "overcoming of" visual studies.

Image-ability

<CST> Another Reading of *Bildgeschichte*

Sjoukje van der Meulen

One thing that has always surprised me about *Bildgeschichte* is that this German form of art history focuses primarily on the content of the image (its meaning, its message, its composition; in short, its iconography) and seldom on the material and technical (or technological) making or production of that very image. In these *Farewell to Visual Studies* conversations, this omission is also observed by James Elkins in regard to the closely related Anglo-American discipline of visual studies: "It becomes, at least for me, glaringly obvious that visual studies isn't interested in questions of making. . . . That's on my list of lacunae: visual studies remains disengaged from the phenomenology and from the empirical data of making images."

This shared failure of visual studies and Bildgeschichte is particularly disturbing for media studies, which takes for granted that media conditions and the technology employed inform the image and are thus contributive to its meaning and message. In this book on the fate of visual studies, including Bildgeschichte, Gustav Frank holds that media studies is "a potential adversary" of Bildgeschichte, and he singles out Friedrich Kittler in particular: "This [media studies as 'potential adversary'] is especially true of the media-hardware orientation of Friedrich Kittler, who argues for a technical a priori that supersedes interest in the contents of a text or image. . . . Kittler's appearance in the 1980s was really shocking, not just for people engaged in what became Bildwissenschaft, but for people in the humanities generally. That's why I would place media studies as an adversary of Bildwissenschaft." While Frank rightly observes that media studies in Germany since the early 1980s, led by Kittler, has almost developed into a kind of anti-Bildgeschichte, it is a question whether these opposed iconographic and technological traditions necessarily exclude each other. In this commentary, I propose an alternative reading of Bildgeschichte, based on another etymological source of the underlying concept of *Bild*, which might help to transcend the antagonism between these fields.

Many scholars have pointed out that the English term "image" and the German word *Bild* are not the same: where the English language has two words to denote representation—image and picture—in German both types of images fit into the same category of Bild. Still, the basic concept of the image that underlies both visual studies and Bildgeschichte finds its common root in the Latin term *imago*. This illuminates the iconographic orientation and interpretation of Bildgeschichte and visual studies by leading scholars in both disciplines: the term "iconography" comes from the Greek εἰκών (image) and γράφειν (to write), and relates to the study of religious images or icons in the Byzantine and Orthodox Christian tradition.

In his first study on Bildgeschichte, *Bild und Kult* (1990), Hans Belting, for example, defines Bild as imago right in the preface: *"Deshalb sei vorweg gesagt, dass unter einem Bild im folgenden vornehmlich das personale Bildnis, die imago, verstanden ist."* His reading is consistent with the Grimms' German dictionary, the standard etymological dictionary for the German language, which lists the Latin source of imago as well as the anthropological concept of Bild: "bild ist vorzugsweise menschenbild, ein gleichnis des menschen, was seiner gestalt gleich kommt." In *Bild-Anthropologie* (2001), Belting further develops his ideas about the image in an anthropological sense. Belting explains that the human source of Bild goes back to imago in its earliest anthropological forms, such as representations of deceased people in death cults. The premise that he infers from his multifaceted anthropological analysis is that the image and the human body cannot be separated: our whole physiological and mental "apparatus" has a role in the creation of the image. In this second book on Bildgeschichte, which he now baptizes *Bildwissenschaften*, Belting clearly distinguishes this newly invented discipline from both art history and media studies. In "A Neglected Tradition: Art History as *Bildgeschichte*," Horst Bredekamp questions Belting's recreation of Bildgeschichte and his ahistorical assessment of media studies: Bildgeschichte, Bredekamp insists, not only has a history but also includes "a long-established media-historical approach." Nonetheless, Bredekamp's historical excursion into the media-conscious fathers of Bildgeschichte, such as Aby Warburg and Erwin Panofsky, is based on the same understanding of Bild as imago, with which he confirms the iconographic tradition of Bildgeschichte. In *Visual Studies*, W. J. T. Mitchell similarly interprets the concept of the image in terms of imago and explicitly

references Panosky's iconography, even as he revises the art historian's method into ico-nology. In Mitchell's words, "I call these 'essays in iconology' to restore something of the literal sense of this word. This is truly a study of the 'logos' (the words, ideas, dis-course, or 'science') of 'icons' (images, pictures, or likenesses)." And he adds, "In a broader sense, the critical study of the icon begins with the idea that human beings are created 'in the images and likeness' of their creator." The leading scholars in Bildgeschichte and visual studies, in short, base their methods regarding the image on the typical art-historical iconographic traditions of Warburg and Panofsky, complemented in visual studies by the semiological approach of Roland Barthes.

According to media studies, this grounding of Bildgeschichte in iconographic and semiological traditions is not just problematic but also insufficient to understand the com-plexities of the technologically driven *Bildkultur* today. Already in the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility"—without which Belting's *Bild und Kult* would arguably not exist—Walter Benjamin insists that traditional and technical images are tremendously different. The media theorist Vilém Flusser turns Benjamin's insight into a thesis on the ontological difference between these two types of images, which he uses as his starting point for *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie* (*Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, 1983) and *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder* (*Into the Universe of Technical Images*, 1985). Historicizing Jonathan Crary's thesis that perception is prem-ised on technology, and thus also informs the observation and interpretation of the tech-nical image, Kittler writes a whole history of modern optical media, in which he substan-tiates his claim that the humanities, including art history, are shaped by technological de-velopments. It must be noted that *Bildwissenschäftler* such as Belting and Bredekamp have since long opened up to media studies, including the one established by Kittler in the 1980s: Belting includes the concept of "medium" in his theoretical triad of terms of "image, body, medium," and describes medium and image as "two sides of the same coin," while Bredekamp has initiated a research group on Das Technische Bild. All of which just confirms the validity of this critical inquiry as to whether the construction of media studies as anti-Bildgeschichte is still productive.

To further resolve the conflict between the two disciplines, I propose another possible reading of the concept of Bild. The Grimms' German dictionary notes that the earliest concept of Bild derives not from the Latin *imago* but from the Germanic *billen*, a verb which interestingly refers to the making (*Gestaltung*) of the image: "bild war anfänglich, was man sich immer unter billen zu denken habe, ein plastisches kunstwerk, und erst nachher wurde der name auf die flache, nicht vortretende zeichnung, auf das gemälde erstreckt." The dictionary continues: "in bild liegt die vorstellung eines unter der schaffenden, gestaltenden, knetenden, stoszenden, schnitzenden, hauenden, gieszenden hand hervorgegangnen werks." In this reading of Bild as billen, in other words, the image is not so much a passive icon as an active question of giving form. This understanding of Bild—which lies at the core of Piet Mondrian's Neo-Plasticism or *Nieuwe Beelding*—could be related to Benjamin's insight into the altered status of Bild due to technological reproduction techniques, and subsequently to Samuel Weber's reading of Benjamin's work through what the author calls "Benjamin's -abilities." Weber points out that Benjamin's frequent use of active nouns, expressed through the English suffix of "-ability" or the German -*barkeit,* marks his entire oeuvre—the most famous of which, of course, is the term "reproducibility" or *Reproduzierbarkeit.* Now, if you apply Benjamin's "-abilities" to the notion of Bild, then you get the term *Bildbarkeit*, which the Grimms' German dictionary lists as an existing German noun that refers to the potential making of that Bild; or, more precisely, to "Was gebildet werden kann." Possibly this reading of Bild as Bildbarkeit or imageability could contribute to a Bildgeschichte that is nuanced in both an iconographic *and* a technological sense, which in its turn might strengthen the dialogue between Bildgeschichte and the most advanced image theories in media studies, such as Mark Hansen's definition of the digital image as "process" and "embodiment" in his *New Philosophy for New Media* (2004).

Thoughts on *visuelle Kultur*

Charles W. Haxthausen

I am sympathetic to James Elkins's remark (Section 10) that "visual studies has not yet made good on its promise to take images as something other than illustrations, examples, exemplars, mnemonics, ornaments, placeholders, or other accompaniments to the arguments that run around and past them in our texts." A few pages later he elaborates: "For me the general problem is: How seriously can visual studies take the visual? Can we permit the visual to guide, distract, slow, and even undermine our theories and explanations?" For all of the discourse about the agency of images, he seems to suggest, many of those who write on them under the name of visual studies seem to resist that agency in their own practice.

This problematic can already be found in what Gustav Frank, in Section 1, calls the "initial phase" of visual studies, and he makes precisely that point. Borrowing a phrase from the Austro-Hungarian film theorist and critic Béla Balázs, he dubs that phase *visuelle Kultur,* and locates it in German-speaking Europe of the interwar period. Frank wants to "reconstruct the problematic of this first period of visual studies, because it appears that similar problematics have been implemented in contemporary visual studies and Bildwissenschaft." Later he adds, "What strikes me about Bildwissenschaft and *visuelle Kultur* in the 1980s and 1990s is that they have a semblance of the arguments of Balázs and [Walter] Benjamin." He does not get around to developing this point, but his remarks have stimulated a few of my own thoughts on this issue.

I see the problem Elkins identifies exemplified in the fundamental differences between the "arguments of Balázs and Benjamin." To state it simply: Balázs believed that the visual had agency independently of and beyond language; for Benjamin the agency of the image was dependent on the word. This view is already evident in his earliest writings, as well as in the very texts that have made him such an influential figure in visual studies. In the final chapter of *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, in which he sought to rehabilitate allegory from the bad press it had been receiving ever since Lessing, Benjamin asserts that the object is "quite incapable of generating any meaning or significance

on its own; such significance as it has, it acquires from the allegorist," and allegory he defines as "a form of *writing.*" We find the same idea in the "Little History of Photography," where, noting the "literarization of all the conditions of life," Benjamin insists on the necessity of captions for photographs, without which "all photographic construction must remain arrested in the approximate." In his notes for "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," he wrote that "[t]he technological reproducibility of the work of art leads to its literarization." What Benjamin called the "actualization" of the artwork is its allegorization, its instrumentalization by means of the word. At bottom, for all of his astute sensitivity to the radically altered media landscape, Benjamin remained a logocentric thinker, and one could plausibly argue that he exemplified the kind of approach to images that Elkins sees afflicting much of visual studies today. It is noteworthy that the vast majority of readings for Frank's seminar (Section 1) were by Benjamin, and this reflects the fact that of the various Weimar authors he associates with this first phase of visual studies—besides Balázs, the others he mentions are Rudolf Arnheim and Siegfried Kracauer—Benjamin has undoubtedly been the most influential.

The gulf that separates Balázs from Benjamin is already evident in what Balázs meant by *visuelle Kultur.* The phrase comes from his *Visible Man* (*Der sichtbare Mensch*), the first book of film theory published in German. Balázs's immediate focus may be the medium of silent film, but at bottom he is concerned with visuality *tout court*, beyond cinematic images, and in this respect he anticipated contemporary visual studies. Yet Balázs used the term *visuelle Kultur* not in the sense that I understand Frank to be using it, that is, to designate an expanded domain of visual artifacts to be studied, but to mark an epochal shift from a verbal culture, dominated by conceptual, linguistic forms of cognition, communication, and experience, to a visual one—he called this a "neue Wendung zum Visuellen," a new turn to the visual. If the hegemony of verbal culture was a consequence of the printing press, the re-emergence of a visual culture, so Balázs argued, was effected by silent cinema, in which millions of viewers daily experienced "human destinies, characters, feelings, and moods of every kind with their eyes, and without the need for words." Silent cinema was in the process of fundamentally changing human subjectivity and perception. The meaning of the book's title is that man has now become more fully visible to man, through gesture and facial and bodily expression. "It is film

that will have the ability to raise up and make visible once more human beings who are buried under mountains of words and concepts."

Balázs belongs to a long German intellectual tradition that privileged the visual as a cognitive and experiential mode discrete from and beyond linguistic signification. This notion reaches back at least to Schopenhauer and extends forward through Konrad Fiedler, Carl Einstein, and Balázs to Horst Bredekamp and Gottfried Boehm. Whatever their differences, these authors share a position succinctly formulated by Boehm: "Beyond language there exist vast spaces of meaning [*Sinn*], unimagined spaces of visuality, of sound, of gesture, of facial expression, and of movement. They have no need of improvement or of additional justification by the word." For them, visuality offers a version of the world that is not circumscribed by language and concepts, that never merely exemplifies what is articulated in language. Significantly, the crucial texts of most of these authors have not been, or have only recently been, translated into English.

At several points during these Seminars both Gustav Frank and James Elkins speak of the urgent need for visual studies to investigate and reflect on its own histories, to interrogate its own origins. Such an investigation would reveal that the attitudes behind the "iconic turn" or "pictorial turn" are not new; they have a long history, and what Balázs meant by visuelle Kultur is part of it. Visual studies would do well to examine that history.

Farewell to Visual Studies—Comment

Asbjørn Grønstad

I would like to begin by thanking the editors for inviting me to contribute to this project. Ever since the final Stone Summer Theory Institute, with its eminently enticing title, was first announced, I have been curious to learn what this self-consciously provocative farewell would entail. Therefore, I much appreciate the opportunity to read the transcripts. While this particular framing of the seminar seems designed to signal a turning point for the field—begging the question why it would be necessary to abandon something that is still in its youth—my initial reaction after having digested the manuscript was that the *Farewell to Visual Studies* seminar in fact epitomizes a certain tendency that inarguably has been present in the field as a whole since its inception and that has escalated exponentially throughout the last decade. This tendency is of course visual studies' almost insatiable appetite for disciplinary self-examination, for making the theories, methods, and practices that define the field a primary object of study. Not that there is anything dubious about this. I think relentless and continuous meta- and transdisciplinary scholarship is vital for the health of any discipline, and I have practiced and will continue to practice this kind of research myself. What I would like to point out here is merely that not even a conference that at least ostensibly seems eager to sever ties with the past is able to escape the dominant discursive framework in which discussions about visual studies typically take place. There is much that I find useful about the conversations in this book, perhaps in particular in the section lead by Gustav Frank on *visuelle Kultur*, yet I could not help feeling that much of this terrain has been covered before, in articles and debates in journals, in conference talks, and in various visual culture histories and publications such as Routledge's *Critical Concepts*. Despite the many vigorous and stimulating conversations, then, there is a sense in which the debate is going around in circles a little bit.

It is quite impossible to summarize a symposium with so many different voices, and I realize, obviously, that such an endeavor also lies far beyond my brief as a respondent here. What I will do is share a few observations that I find pertinent, or at least noteworthy, in light of the topics and preoccupations of the *Farewell to Visual Studies* semi-

nar. As I am sure many scholars of visual studies noticed, the announcement of the Institute roughly coincided with the first gathering of the International Association for Visual Culture Studies (IAVCS) in London in May 2010. It might be emblematic of the inner turmoil of the field that, within the span of little more than a year, where one major event would proclaim the field as just launched, another would proclaim it to be over. One could perhaps object that these are two different constellations—visual culture studies and visual studies—but they certainly belong within the same disciplinary horizon, their histories and provenances overlap, and there seem to be many scholars who use these designations in a less than consistent way. Not to mention that the visual culture community at large seems to drift effortlessly between these categories or groups. Whether seen as acts of consolidation or acts of dissolution, it is difficult not to view these Seminars (London in 2010 and Chicago in 2011) as manifestations of the still precarious state of the field of visual culture/studies, and possibly also of an ongoing struggle for disciplinary hegemony. My own feeling is that visual culture should embrace its constitutive diversity in the future and that it can ill afford to maintain internal disputes regarding its own identity. That is, one ought to be wary of aggressively promoting one account, or version, of visual culture/studies at the expense of competing accounts. One of the reasons for this is that too much fragmentation might impair the continued presence and authority of the field on an institutional level. From where I am standing, some of visual culture's most immediate neighbors—film studies and (new) media studies/digital culture—appear increasingly powerful and self-sufficient, and if visual culture/studies fails to sustain its impetus and cohesiveness, the already volatile purchase it has on research departments and other scholarly environments might decline. As Sunil Manghani notes in Section 4, art history as well as media and film studies departments in the UK at least have begun to turn away from visual culture.

The second remark I would like to make concerns James Elkins's mention in Section 3 of Visual Culture 3, which he describes as "a less directly politically inflected set of practices" that are "more engaged with social and digital media." Having attended the second biannual convention of the IAVCS, entitled *Now! Visual Culture*, in New York in May–June 2012, I have to say that the notion of a disengagement on part of visual culture from activist politics was not much in evidence there. Few will be surprised to learn that

chief organizer Nicholas Mirzoeff had an "Occupy" sticker on his laptop; maybe slightly more unanticipated was the degree to which a sense of political urgency saturated the event as a whole. I find this tendency commendable, granted that it does not engulf the valuable pluralism—thematic, theoretical, and methodological—that is so much a part of the potency of visual culture.

My third and final comment trails along from this very brief reference to the political to consider, in passing, the subject of theory as it relates both to politics and what one might call the rhetorical and epistemological efficacy of the image. In Section 8, Keith Moxey raises the intriguing question "Can theoretical innovation then replace ideological criticism as the fuel on which visual studies run?" I doubt that the kind of ideology criticism of the 1970s and '80s will return, but that does not mean that contemporary visual culture—and here I intend to refer both to its artistic practices and its academic pursuits—is not headed in the direction of an intensified engagement with social, political, and ethical matters. Where the ideology critique of the past occasionally was too programmatic and inflexible for its own good, the current rejuvenation of politically aware art and scholarship has the great advantage of being more theoretically adventurous, less dogmatic, and, last but not least, more accommodating of what one somewhat portentously could call the irreducibility of the aesthetic. The ability to articulate new theoretical perspectives will surely be key to the future prosperity of visual culture studies, and the ways in which many contemporary practitioners on both sides of the fence incorporate both theory and practice, text and image, artistic ambition and political energies in their various projects should bode well for the production of such reinvigorated theoretical work. The notion that images are capable of generating their own kind of theory, that they themselves produce a way of thinking, has become a widespread one in many quarters of visual culture studies, maybe even to the extent that the idea is now taken for granted. Surely this is a theoretical topic that is in no way exhausted. Yet, in concluding, I want to suggest that the time may be ripe for extending also to language and verbal discourse the same generosity shown toward the visual over the last couple of decades. When Elkins contends in Section 10 that "visual studies has not yet made good on its promise to take images as something other than illustrations," he seems to rehearse an all too familiar complaint vis-à-vis academic language and its investments in the image. Our

visual experiences, whether of aesthetic or other objects, will inevitably seep into our writing in many different and complex ways, and I think we should be careful not to diminish the still active presence of the image within the text. We have had a linguistic turn, later a visual turn; perhaps it is time to entertain the possibility that critical language can interact with the image and the visual world in nonreductive and uncontrolling ways. A formidable task, to be sure, but for us as visual culture scholars it is nevertheless *our* task.

Farewell Versus Now

Øyvind Vågnes

In the first section of the transcript from the 2011 Stone Summer Theory Institute, art historian Bridget Cooks asks her fellow participants whether they can address "the feeling of loss" that she's getting from the ongoing conversation: "I'm getting the sense that we've lost something, that something about visual studies has failed." This remark might have occurred several days into the week-long seminar, or quite early; it's hard to know as a reader who was not present, since the transcript consists of bits and pieces of conversation that have been moved around in the manuscript. Perhaps I was so struck by the remark in part because of the context in which I found myself reading it. I was on a plane crossing the Atlantic, on my way to the second conference organized by the International Association for Visual Culture, hosted by Nick Mirzoeff and New York University, and I had brought the transcript along.

Now! Visual Culture, as the event was called, was nothing if not energetically situated in the present moment, addressing what presenters thought of as the pressing issues of the field. Returning to my hotel room after the sessions every day, I found the transcript lying there on the table, and when I came back to Norway a few days later I had finished it. I have to say that the experience of taking part in the discussions at the conference shaped my reading of the *Farewell* document—and the other way around. The contrast, of course, is already suggested in the gesture of self-description: Farewell vs. Now (exclamation mark).

Several of the reflections offered both in the transcript and in the seminar rooms in New York spoke to each other in very interesting ways. Take Section 8 of the transcript, which kicks off with a discussion of an essay by Alexander Nemerov; after a few pages it is contrasted with Mirzoeff's work. Keith Moxey suggests that the two represent two models: "Mirzoeff thinks there should be direct engagement; Nemerov explores the possibilities that might lie beyond that." Scholars can be at the barricades, or they can keep from addressing the political situation directly. Jim Elkins responds: "Another way to put that is that the contrast between political activism and reflection is paralleled by another contrast, between the distinctness of the positions that Mirzoeff occupies and the

indistinctness of the positions Nemerov implies." Distinctness equals activism. Indistinctness equals reflection.

I came to *Now! Visual Culture* with two manuscripts in my bag—the *Farewell* transcript and my own brief talk for the opening session, a series of "lightning talks" where each presenter had five minutes to respond to the question "What is visual culture now?" It's safe to say that several of the presentations were marked by a form of "direct engagement." But I'd like to think that they also offered reflection.

My own talk consisted of some rather fresh thoughts on the mass killings here in Norway on July 22, 2011, and how I'd felt inclined to think about their aftermath as a scholar of visual culture. That afternoon a car bomb exploded in the executive government quarter in Oslo, killing eight people and injuring more than two hundred. Then, less than two hours later, at the summer camp of the Worker's Youth League held every year at Utøya Island, a gunman dressed in a homemade police uniform killed sixty-nine of the participants there and injured more than a hundred. As soon became evident, the same individual was responsible for what happened in both Oslo and at Utøya.

A steering committee for the national July 22 memorials submitted its report to the Norwegian government in the spring of 2012, arguing for two specific sites of commemoration and describing the reasons for their selections. At every such decision made, I sense a heightened critical awareness in my own response. Will we end up being what Marita Sturken has called "tourists of history"? Certainly, a national television award show proved without a doubt that Norway is not beyond the kitschification of these events. Then there was the extensive circulation of images of the mass murderer on the front pages of national newspapers, leading people to turn them around at newsstands—a senseless proliferation of his image and the ill-fated prohibition that followed. The media coverage of the trial against the mass murderer was strictly regulated, and the media protested the decision that most of it would not be broadcast—instead of live images and audio we saw the massive distribution worldwide of the image of the mass murderer saluting the world with his raised, clenched fists. The first visual art, immediately controversial, was exhibited in April 2012. Numerous documentary films are being made at the time of writing this. Commemoration books that resemble coffee table books in design have already been published.

As I observed in my talk in New York, the attempt to develop a critical vocabulary in the face of contemporary events, and allowing terminology to take shape in response to what seems urgent in the *now*, are in my view testimony to the intellectual vibrancy, not stagnancy, of visual culture studies. It is one of the reasons I have come to hold W. J. T. Mitchell's work in such high regard. In his *Skeptical Introduction*, Elkins warned scholars of visual culture and of the humanities more widely to be cautious that "writing about 9/11 has been a poor decision for many scholars." I have thought about that warning a few times over the last few months. But these events have compelled me to describe and analyze them to the best of my abilities, in spite of any warning that it might be a risky decision. I hope I will be able to engage with them directly, distinctly, and yet be able to offer worthwhile reflections.

"I Don't Know Why You Say Goodbye, I Say Hello" (On Taking Both the Visual and the Political Seriously)

Mark Reinhardt

Before I began reading this book, the title unnerved me. Lacking even a softening question mark, it seemed to announce the end of a conversation I had joined only recently and for which I still harbored considerable hopes. Why this premature call? What could come of it? Goodbyes are often messy, of course, and the one proposed here turns out to be rather complicated, if not a bit of a tease. "We are saying farewell *to* a farewell," Jim Elkins explains early on, "in the sense that obliviousness to a certain history is something we wish to address." Later, when Tom Mitchell forces the issue by asking who favors bidding "farewell to visual studies and getting on to something else," no one signs on. Still, while the chosen title has obvious marketing advantages—*Farewell to Obliviousness* wouldn't pack the same punch—it's not simply a con: as the conversation unfolds, contributors challenge or dismiss assorted facets, currents, habits, and practitioners of visual studies scholarship. Even after the dismissals, however, many visual studies projects survive, for the seminar's participants survey a formidable range of histories and research programs, some of which they present as continuing sources of vitality and promise.

That range is one of the book's great strengths. I found the diversity of inventories and assessments to be at times bewildering—there are six versions of visual studies outlined in the opening paragraph of the first section alone, and the models continue to proliferate as the conversation unfolds—but also exciting and, ultimately, edifying. Among the things I have gained are a greatly expanded and more detailed map of visual studies traditions and practices, and a reading list of intimidating length. Readers closer than I am to the institutional worlds of the seminar's key participants (the majority of whom have ties to art history) may end up with shorter lists, but it is hard to imagine not being both pushed and pulled by this book. The orientation most consistently subverted by the sometimes contentious, sometimes fragmentary conversation is the resentful resistance that Michael Holly encountered first from art historians threatened by the rise of visual studies in the U.S. and then among the more ahistorical of contemporary visual culture schol-

ars: "We don't have to know that." In saying goodbye to know-nothing avoidance of theories, methods, media, objects, and periods, the book really says hello to a host of new challenges, most promisingly but also most dauntingly, I think, the work of engaging seriously with current scientific research on vision and perception.

Despite all that, I can't completely shake the apprehension first prompted by the title. The seminar is suffused by a feeling that I had suspected might fuel the desire for a certain kind of farewell: an anxiety about politics circulates through the discussion. The conversation tends to suggest that the more preoccupied we are with politics, the less we will have to say about what is specifically visual about a picture or practice: many participants seem to fear that political engagement will lead to work that, as Elkins puts it, is "about images, but . . . does very little with them." Though not common to all participants and resisted by some (most explicitly by Lisa Cartwright), that concern shapes the course and tone of the whole seminar, cutting off some potentially fruitful lines of inquiry. The fear is hardly baseless—plenty of work *does* fit Elkins's description—but as it unfolds here it tends to keep the conversation from being either precise or serious enough about politics. I will try to say a bit about how that happens and at what cost, and to reflect on what follows for visual studies from taking politics seriously.

There is a tendency in the discussion, most clearly in the section on politics (Section 8), to conflate two different tensions. The contradictory pull between rapid and (in the seminar's idiom) "tactical" engagement with the pressing issues of the moment, on the one hand, and slower, less instrumental, more open-ended and reflective inquiries, on the other, is too often and too swiftly aligned with the difference between research that is motivated by or significantly concerned with politics and research that is, or takes itself to be, apolitical. Obviously, those who renounce political commitment are not likely to be interested in work that takes the form of tactical interventions, but the two tensions are hardly the same. Conflating them makes it easy to overlook how less instrumental or immediately engaged work might proceed in its investigations of political matters—how, that is, a concern with politics might require or even enable one to move more deeply into visual analysis and "do more" with images. When Cartwright seeks to direct the conversation toward something like that possibility (one that Keith Moxey also seems to have hoped his session might pursue), the invitation is not taken up.

I concede, even emphasize, that taking politics seriously opens lines of research that *do* move beyond what some of the seminar participants portray as properly visual analysis. As Paul Frosh notes, visual studies work on contemporary images often stops just where social science starts, analyzing "distinct visual objects, image-text ensembles or genres" at the expense of "the relations between these objects and the people and systems that create and consume them." Especially (though not only) because politics often involves large numbers and macroprocesses, some of the questions integral to robust investigations of the politics of visual experience and the visual elements of political life cannot be answered by even the most subtle and virtuosic interpretations of form, genre, and medium, or the most ingenious speculations on reception; they instead (or at least also) require ambitious analyses of social practices and institutional structures and detailed empirical investigations of how images are received and used.

But that is only half the story. Ambitious political inquiry doesn't only lead visual studies away from what is specifically visual. When politics involves macrostructures and large aggregates, images and imaging technologies are, as James Johnson argues, crucial to whether and how human agents come to *see* and understand them. If a concern with politics points visual studies toward how the meaning and use of images are affected by political structures and struggles, it also requires us to examine how images and visual practices influence which subjects and objects become politically intelligible and how the boundaries of political life are demarcated. Unfortunately, the example of politicized scholarship that looms largest in the seminar, Nicholas Mirzoeff's "The Right to Look," does not do much to model that kind of examination. Sunil Manghani and others rightly criticize the murkiness of its accounts of visuality and countervisuality, but I think it equally important that the article is not only unclear about where rights come from and how they operate, but also has very little to say about how visual analysis might affect our understanding of those matters.

Yet understanding them *requires* visual analysis. As Sharon Sliwinksi shows in her recent work, the invention of human rights proceeded in no small part through the making and circulation of images over several centuries, as a series of visual skirmishes shaped and reshaped who could lay claim to the status of human, on what terms, with

what entailments. Work such as hers demonstrates that taking politics seriously ultimately necessitates explorations of the mutually constitutive relationship between political life and the visual field. Perhaps emphasizing such explorations would have changed the place and valence of politics in the seminar, for such inquiries require, rather than impede, some of the most compelling projects called for over the course of the conversation—Cartwright's examinations of "what goes into the period eye," Elkins's approach to "images as models" rather than mere "examples or illustrations," even Moxey's pursuit of "the image as . . . a configuration, a presence, a set of formal proposals."

Too often, the Seminars take the political as given rather than a call for inquiry, a topic that—like the visual—confronts us with perplexities and requires reflection upon its variable and contested forms. Such inquiries are the stuff of my own field, political science. Regrettably, this does not make that field the site of a more satisfying approach to politically engaged visual inquiry. Far from it. American academic political science is, as a rule, remarkably uninterested in visual phenomena: although the saturation of politics by visual technologies, media, and images has reached unprecedented levels, it scarcely registers in the discipline's mainstream or even in those areas most in conversation with contemporary developments in the humanities. This seminar has both broadened and deepened my sense of how much, and how desperately, students of politics need to learn from diverse traditions and debates in the study of visual artifacts and practices. But there may be modest scope for a two-way (if perhaps still lopsided) exchange, one most likely to be fruitful if all parties avoid hasty goodbyes.

Response: *Farewell to Visual Studies*

Charlotte Klonk

Farewell to Visual Studies waved goodbye to a preconceived worn-out notion of visual studies and welcomed a whole new set of family members—not always close relations—to the table. It was clearly a lively gathering. Yet can one really compare, discuss, and evaluate the merits of different approaches and methods without getting one's teeth into the particular? Is not the proof of the pudding in the eating? The discussion showed that, yes, it is not only possible but the fruits are many. One being, for example, the chance it gave participants to reflect on the history of a field still in its infancy and in which they themselves have been active from the outset—Michael Ann Holly, for example, at Rochester, or Jim Elkins, who reviewed the progress of the Eikones project in Basel. This allowed for insight into motivations and discussions and helped to shape a sense of the different interests at play in the field.

One would perhaps have liked for other voices to have joined the chorus too: that of Martin Kemp, for instance, founder of the Centre for Visual Studies in Oxford in 1999, who has a particular interest in the productive relationships between art and science and who wholly sidesteps issues of ideology, politics, etc.; or Horst Bredekamp, who, quite in contrast to Eikones founder Gottfried Boehm, began his career as a radical Marxist art historian with an interest in iconoclasms from late antiquity to the early modern period. And how did Georges Didi-Huberman find his unsettling and unique voice in France? I, for one, would be very interested in hearing their takes. But what does self-reflection of this type fulfill? Perhaps it allows us to see that the field is not monolithic and that different agendas and opinions prevail. This will ultimately liberate us to go our own ways. *Farewell to Visual Studies* sets this process in motion.

<1>*Bildgeschichte* not *Bildwissenschaft*

The Institute of Art and Visual History in Berlin was given this title in 2007 when faculty members deliberately reacted to recent discussions and decided against using the term *Bildwissenschaft* or "visual studies." German renders "visual history" as

Bildgeschichte, where the first element, *Bild,* does not refer to a two-dimensional picture but rather to anything shaped by the human hand (*gebildet*), thus freeing us to investigate any artefact from any period. Thanks not least to the in-house research project Das technische Bild, scientific images have formed a particular focus of our study. In and of itself this is still more or less aligned with certain interests of stateside visual studies. Where we perhaps depart from this and also from German Bildwissenschaft is in our radical insistence not only that formed objects are to be studied against the foil of historical developments but also that the past itself is worthy of attention. This, more often than not, involves fruitful alienation rather than incorporation, and is an attempt to avoid the *presentism* that irritated several of the interlocutors in Chicago. At the Institute we play, for example, host to projects dealing with late antiquity and early modernity, as well as others concerning contemporary events. Moreover, while it is true that some forms of Bildwissenschaft firmly evade political engagement, it is not true of our research and teaching. We share Lisa Cartwright's opinion, nonetheless, that there is no use in preaching to a room full of old Marxists. No longer is it "about the Panopticon," but about "what goes on in the image." Today, in order to pull political punches, we must be patient enough to trace cause and effect, to hold back on generalizations, and to avoid providing the old familiar answers that lost their specific political purchase long ago. The starting point is always a specific object.

What does this mean in practice? If we take as a given that the objects we choose to engage with are "active participants in the performance of analysis," an example is in order.

<1>The Civil War in Syria: Images of Violence and Our Responsibility

The civil war in Syria has cost the lives of thousands, and there has been no shortage of disturbing pictures testifying to this tragedy. On August 1, 2012, a German state television station broadcast a video as part of its evening news program in which everything seen to date was surpassed. We were told no more than that the footage showed rebels executing members of a brutal pro-Assad militia acting in Aleppo. No explanation was given as to who was behind the camera, or how and why the film had been released.

A traditional methodological requirement in both art history and visual studies / visual history would now be to investigate the circumstances of the video's making and release (author and provenience). In fact, since news corporations have taken to showing amateur films culled from the Internet, this has become an imperative. In this respect, analysis would not differ from established forms of research. Yet what followed in the news program poses new problems. We were presented with shaky images of partly naked and bloodstained men before a wall. Suddenly the camera panned away, coming to rest on a blind spot; the sound, however, continued. A seemingly never-ending round of shots followed cheers. This raises the question, what is it about images that makes them more unbearable than sound and even more unbearable than words (the reporter recounted the execution in great verbal detail)? Grasping the specific and determining properties of different media has been at the heart of a project initiated by the Berlin scholar Friedrich Kittler, and has also informed some versions of Bildwissenschaft.

Surely, however, it is the broadcaster's duty to release a film in its entirety once the decision has been made to show it in the first place. Is this a cynical game of hide-and-seek aimed solely at raising suspense and thus attention in the highly competitive news market? Or do producers truly care about protecting viewers' sensibilities? Such questions are not new. Editors have been making decisions about the showing of violent events since the emergence of illustrated newspapers in the mid–nineteenth century. When the Russian czar was killed in a terrorist bomb attack in 1881, the *Illustrated London News* printed little more than a rough sketch of the scene of the crime. The French *L'Univers Illustré,* in contrast, printed a fictional recreation of the moment of explosion. The British Empire shuddered before thoughts of regicide, while the Republic was far enough removed from such events to permit a full graphic representation. The lesson is clear: then as now, the closer an event is to home (in every respect), the less likely it is to appear illustrating that country's news. To come to such conclusions as this, to see continuities or, as the case may be, differences, requires attentiveness to the history of particular phenomena. This is typical of visual history as practiced in Berlin. In this we see ourselves as continuing, rather than breaking with, the tradition of art history.

<1>Refusing to Look

Since Susan Sontag's 2003 *Regarding the Pain of Others* and maybe even since her 1977 *Essays on Photography,* it has become standard to consider images of violence from the point of view of the spectator. Yet, as the 2003 book shows, the question of why one needs to see such images always meets with an ambiguous answer. As she argues, they can be dangerous, make cruelty appear harmless, and certainly never lead to political action. Yet they are also important as a reminder of what people inflict on each other. If considering the viewer cannot deliver either firm or useful answers as to the correctness of their showing, what can? Well, I would suggest that we have lost sight of the need to consider the dignity of the victims. While certain circumstances, such as court cases, exist where images of torture and violence provide important evidence, making pictures of torture available violates human dignity in general. And indeed, as the philosopher Michael Rosen has recently argued, this dignity extends to images of those who have also died as a result of torture or violence. It thus falls to us to refuse to look at such images.

Worth remembering is that such images are not secondary to the crime. Torture and killings are often staged solely for the camera and carried out with an eye to their mass circulation—as was almost certainly the case with the aforementioned execution in Syria. Asking the media—under pressure to sell or raise ratings—to self-censor is pointless. Looking to governments is equally futile; sanctions from their side are never far from censorship, therefore highly problematic. Instead, it is our responsibility not to look (I consciously argue this in opposition to Nicholas Mirzoeff's assertion of an out-and-out right, if not duty, to look.) We, the viewers of the German news report, should have hit the off button or switched the channel as soon as it became clear what we were to be presented with. We would have been none the poorer; there were certainly plenty of other news programs running without the video clip.

Where does this leave us? The moral duty not to look at certain images is a conclusion committed to a form of political activism which itself seeks direct results. A critique of the video broadcast, along the lines outlined here, was published in a major German newspaper and provoked several controversial letters to the editor, including a

reaction from the broadcaster concerned. The case study shows, I think, that political commitment and attention to the specifics of the images and their bearers are not, in principle, mutually exclusive, but rather able to be, as María Lumbreras Corujo re-marked, "reconciled."

Chinese Visual Studies

Yolaine Escande

This Assessment will first respond to and develop James Elkins's comments about Chinese visual studies in his classifications of five different types of visual studies in the world. It will then reconsider the fruitfulness of visual studies applied to Chinese images.

The meaning of "visual studies" has to be specified in the Chinese cultural field. Visual studies has existed in recent years in the Chinese cultural area (the end of the 1990s in Taiwan and South Korea, and after 2000 in China) under the name of "cultural visual studies" (*shejue wenhua xue* or *shejue wenhua yanjiu*), in extremely varied departments of universities and colleges (cultural studies, religion, humanities, design, etc.). Visual studies in this cultural area are mainly related to cinema, photography, and contemporary art studies, and under the influence of Western methods (especially Barthes, Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida) and of postmodernism, and, when focused on Chinese objects, are most often concerned with the relation between text and image and with modernity. While we understand Chinese visual studies as studies of Chinese images, then, in the West the expression "visual studies" concerns mainly photography and cinema, and it has recently attracted much attention.

If the question of visual studies and visual culture in China and in the Chinese art field was not posed as such before the twenty-first century, this does not mean that what can be called a specific visual culture does not exist in China. In the West, actually, the well-known part of Chinese visual culture is mainly the literati forms of visual art, on the one hand (traditional painting and calligraphy, as seen in the great museum exhibitions), and the contemporary art forms, on the other, both seemingly having only a formal link. Another part of Chinese visual culture that draws a great deal of study is Chinese gardens and related topics, such as rocks, curios, paintings, and gardening.

Additionally, a large part of Chinese visual culture remains much less known. It concerns both literati and popular forms of artistic practices, such as graphic design, fashion, architecture, interior design, lithography, and opera, but also visual culture not necessarily considered artistic, such as clothing, advertisements, road signs and signposts, street signs and notice boards with written characters, billboards, stamps, and so on.

Thus, Chinese visual culture as commonly known concerns chiefly the ancient period, considered tantamount to a bygone past, which means detached from the present time and accordingly easier to scrutinize. But this kind of approach often misses the specificity of Chinese visual culture, by detaching a form of art (like calligraphy or painting) from its living contemporary cultural dimension. In such circumstances, the advantage of visual studies compared to art history is that it can cross the chronological divisions inherent to art history to connect past to present and study the actual practice of Chinese art practitioners. This point is fundamental in Chinese visual studies; for instance, today calligraphy, whether traditional or contemporary in its practice, is directly related to traditional theories and practices of the art. In this situation, art history is not sufficient, and visual studies are particularly well adapted. In this respect, visual studies should be very useful in forthcoming research.

The second issue discussed here is the legitimacy of "visual studies" in the case of Chinese artistic images. Usually, when Chinese visual culture is mentioned in the West, it is from the viewpoint of art-historical studies, and mainly as scrutinized by Western-trained scholars. In such a methodology, often based on semiology or on a rhetorical approach of images, a large part of Chinese visual culture is left aside or misinterpreted, if not misunderstood, as Li Xi explains in her comments on politics and the importance to the relationship to the image when she says that "visual culture has emphasized the importance of logo culture." In the case of Chinese artistic (and not necessarily aesthetic) images, this relation cannot be considered one-sided, as it involves an interaction between the image and the viewer, as well as between the viewer and the creator of the image.

The "rhetorical" approach to images leads to examining the image as a visual object, bearing a language and self-sufficient in its meaning. Actually, the "visual" issue is not the right one to be raised about Chinese visual culture, since the most important question in Chinese art theory does not concern the visual object, but the relationship between the viewer and the artist or creator. In other words, Chinese aesthetic categories are mainly evaluative and focused on the link between the creator and the receptor, compared to European categories, which are descriptive and aimed at objectivity. Nevertheless, Chinese visual culture, with its own theorization, is now recognized even in the field of neuroaesthetics. In such a process, Chinese visual culture images, such as brushstrokes,

are effectively considered a visible link, a visual testimony of an emotion first felt by the creator and transmitted to the viewers of the image, rather than studied as objects.

Actually, this kind of empirical approach, as claimed by Gustav Frank, is established on a universal basis, which is human emotionality. Thus, the perceived image does not work like a language; it is the embodiment (not the projection) of an emotion, which even a non-Chinese can feel. Through the Chinese brushwork, a work of pictorial art can express emotions in a nonrepresentational way, that is in a non-"rhetorical" way.

In conclusion, visual studies are very useful and should develop in the Chinese artistic and aesthetic field in order to understand the representational background and functioning of Chinese images, whether traditional, modern, or contemporary. But the methods applied to this domain should evolve and take into account the Chinese theoretical and practical tradition too.

The Latin American Divide

Linda Báez Rubí

James Elkins observes that there are more and other visual studies than the Anglo-American and the German-language traditions. He mentions Latin American visual studies as one of the five strains of visual studies, so I feel obliged to address the line of ancestry of the practice in Mexico. I will begin by thanking María Lumbreras Corujo for mentioning the seminars dealing with *Bildwissenschaft* and visual studies which began in Mexico at the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM a couple of years ago. I might add that the exploration continues in the undergraduate and graduate art history department.

As a Latin American scholar graduated from the UNAM and trained in medieval and early modern art history, first at the Warburg Institute and subsequently as a member of Hans Belting's research group Bild-Körper-Medium: Eine anthropologische Perspektive, I realized the importance of establishing a dialogue focused on analogous questions surrounding images from differing situations, namely belonging to European intellectual traditions and Latin American ones. Bildwissenschaft and its debt to Aby Warburg proved to be a fascinating way to explore and contrast them, because when confronted with the circulation of images between two continents (Europe and America) and by other scholars with similar concerns, I found Bildwissenschaft able to comprise picture theory and images that are not necessarily understood as "art."

Eager to find an opportunity for debate, I started working with several Mexican and European colleagues from different disciplines and interested in non-European images. In Germany, Martin Schulz and Beat Wyss shared my concern with Latin American image understanding and worried about how to ascertain and distinguish between that which is held as Mexican and Mexico. At the UNAM, Deborah Dorotinsky, who comes from visual anthropology and art history and currently edits a cybernetic review focused primarily on topics related to visual anthropology, bodily representation, and gender as well as on the circulation of photographic images in Latin American political and social systems, proved to be an energetic interlocutor, as did Emilie Carreón, a scholar interested in pre-Columbian art who trained in fine arts, art history, and anthropology. To-

gether they provided me with a broader and different view of how pre-Columbian and indigenous American peoples conceived and interacted with what Western culture calls "image."

Together we arranged a first encounter between Mexican and young German scholars, members of Belting's group who traveled to Mexico to encounter their Mexican counterparts. It proved to be very rewarding and culminated in a publication in 2010. As the book's many contributions show, specific image theories were not the central part of the debate that took place, although we discussed many other topics once we started to realize how different of our main concerns regarding images were and consequently how the questions we set forth and the ways we asked them differed. I must say that in this encounter I learned more about what and how each of us was working on his or her own topic than about picture theory. Most of all, the experience underlined the importance of language and terminology when discussing texts written in German or English by European and North American scholars in a third language, in this case Spanish. It also made evident the fact that not enough Spanish translations of texts dealing with image topics written by German scholars are available. As María notes, Belting's *Bild-Anthropologie* is one of the few widely read texts, and I might add that he has presented conferences in Mexico City to interested circles of scholars working on Mexican art, ancient to contemporary. Nevertheless, if we quantify and compare this situation with the accessibility of German material translated into English, and consider that in Mexico German Bildwissenschaft has been siphoned through Anglo-American terminology, the fact that not even Gottfried Boehm's 1994 anthology *Was ist ein Bild?* has been translated is disappointing, but not surprising.

Certainly the picture seems dismal, although important efforts made in recent years by Spanish-speaking scholars like María Lumbreras Corujo, Fernando R. de la Flor, and Fernando Zamora must be mentioned, because it is through their writings that we can begin to have a certain, albeit limited, access to the main postulates embraced by Bildwissenschaft. The advances by these scholars bring to mind the question of what role the Spanish language should play in this debate surrounding the image. By Spanish, I mean not only Iberian Spanish, and I am referring to what it implies: an entirely different way

of perceiving, conceiving, and expressing the world which surrounds a specific culture, such as the Spanish-speaking Latin American one.

In this sense, Latin American Spanish-speaking culture, with its heritage of Indian languages, can contribute by enriching and adding new life to the debate surrounding the image and visuality, for the simple reason that historically it is a culture that has dealt with how images function and how they exercise power according to and depending on the different cultural contexts in which they were applied—one could say put in service—when transforming ways of thinking while imposing beliefs and devotions. The encounter with the Muslim and Jewish world influenced the way of evaluating images in the Spanish peninsula, and other historical facts, such as the era of discoveries and the conquest of the Indian cultures in the New World, were just as relevant. Recall the iconic struggle that took place during the Counter-Reformation and the historical consequences it had in the colonized territories: missionaries, theologians, painters, and sculptors followed political and religious aims dictated by the Spanish Crown and consequently tried to define the roles of images when creating new identities within indigenous cultures. This is one important reason why continuing to ignore indigenous languages and their cultural and religious practices toward images is impossible.

The fact becomes particularly evident in certain works presented by Serge Gruzinski concerned with contact-period Amerindian images. While it is true that they have served as precursors in this field of development, the inquiry must not stop there. This is particularly so because it is also true that his works' reception in the European world—mainly the French-speaking world—has overshadowed studies by scholars speaking and writing in Spanish, many of them with a deep knowledge of Amerindian languages, who have contributed to the understanding of image production, veneration, and use throughout the pre-Columbian and colonial periods. Their work remains practically unknown to scholars interested in visual studies and belonging to Bildwissenschaft. Would it not be worth rescuing them? In order to do so, I believe that the first task would be to formulate a historiographical exercise which evidences the ways images have been thought of in the Latin American world. I anticipate that it would make us recognize that, despite the efforts behind the study of pre-Columbian art and of contemporary indigenous

traditions, cultures, and image-making, the traditionally applied methodologies—iconography, iconology, and semiotics—have come to a standstill and new questions must be developed as well as answered from different perspectives, why not those belonging to Bildwissenschaft, with the aid of other disciplines, such as anthropology, ethnology, and archeology, in order to surpass its limits and in order to generate new modes of thinking about non-Western images in the fields of art and visual studies.

Finally, as I mentioned, I wish to stress the importance of Aby Warburg when talking about the history of Bildwissenschaft. I am aware of the complexity of his intellectual heritage among his disciples who emigrated and initiated different ways and methodologies of doing art history. Nevertheless, and despite the revival of some of his ideas during the "Warburg boom" in the nineties, it is still surprising how little we know about his legacy. The richness of his theoretical fragments remains in manuscript form in the archives of the Warburg Institute in London, and I believe the fact they are written in German has hindered their study to a certain degree. This situation must be remedied in order to understand his interests and goals, especially when we are trying to introduce this project to Mexico and seeking to establish how and when Bildwissenschaft was founded and how it was developed by his disciples.

Trying to elucidate what image questions by different scholars stem from Warburg and how they developed them in different ways for different proposals can help us establish a broader understanding of the variety of methods and practices that make up the discipline. Warburgian input is like a vast number of seeds whose potentiality can be cultivated in different ways depending on the "cultural qualities" of the ground. To discover this potentiality is one of the motors of Bildwissenschaft and, in my opinion, part of its future because we can still glean unexplored characteristics of Warburgian thought, which is extremely inspiring. In this sense, I would mention the work of the German art historian Gerhard Wolf, who is a scholar of Warburgian preoccupations interested in Latin American art and culture in the age of discovery, conquest, and colonization of the New World. He has been in touch with researchers from the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, and they have collaborated in projects and expositions dealing with what I feel are canonical Warburgian topics: the way images are transported (using a sin-

gular medium such as feathers) and their circulation and transformation in different cultural and geographical milieus (Europe and America). Gerhard's research is a fine example of how variable and dissimilar the Warburgian intellectual heritage can be, while at the same time it fulfills one Warburgian expectation: it goes beyond the frontiers and crosses the Latin American divide when dealing with other image cultures, *Bildkulturen*. This exercise implies taking into consideration other modes and models of thinking surrounding images and visuality, for example from the Australian and African world. Would it not be a task worth considering? Plurality and diversity can in many ways fill the fissure which is causing the crisis we are discussing: new ways of thinking and rediscovering visual studies and Bildwissenschaft which depend on their responsiveness to the visual and historical heritage of other cultural worlds. This will let us establish a forum of knowledge and reflections about the power and meaning of iconic language in a more multidimensional manner.

Topological Thought

<CST> Anachronism and Discontinuity in Visual Studies

Miguel Á. Hernández-Navarro

This book presents a wide range of fundamental ideas that are absolutely pertinent in a moment such as ours, in which time, space, and positions are being redefined. In this brief commentary, I will focus on a question that has been present in different ways in many of the debates: the different versions and traditions related to visual studies and the need to historize and clearly set boundaries for them both in time and in space. What I will quickly try to show is that such boundary setting is problematic in a global world and that it should be rethought using complex thought models, substituting the habitual static, linear, and structural thought models for other ways of thinking which are more capable of evaluating discontinuity, anachronism, disagreement, and mixed antagonism. My proposal will be to use the Möbius strip as a mental image to substitute the map and grid.

During the seminar, at least five visual studies traditions were mentioned, and three versions especially linked to the Anglo-American tradition were frequently alluded to. This division is undoubtedly useful in establishing reference points, but it should be rendered more complex and put under the spotlight, especially when we refer to a global context in which both spaces—traditions—and times—the histories or states of the field—mix together, infect, and oppose each other, giving rise to mixed versions of both traditions and temporalities.

In Spain, which is the context I know best, visual studies has appeared as a kind of "bypass discipline" faced with the ossification and stagnation of art history, still anchored in an obsolete tradition. The Francoist years left Spanish humanities in a state of absolute desynchronization compared with the development of the disciplines in other contexts. A process of opening and synchronization was only begun following the advent of democracy, from 1977 onwards. That process, however, was never really complete, as if the delay was impossible to eliminate, thus leaving no possibility of adjustment with international traditions.

In such a context, visual studies is useful for bypassing the slow synchronization processes of traditional disciplines, introducing a new scenario—full of problems, methods, and theories—that belongs to a different time-space than that of the traditions that it has not been possible to update. Although it is true that in the eighties in Spain there was already a kind of tradition of visual analysis linked to the developments of Italian semiotics, the version of visual studies that ended up being introduced at the turn of the century has much more to do with the Anglo-American tradition—even if, especially with regard to medievalism, the German tradition is very present.

The relevant thing here is that this introductory process is not well ordered either temporally or spatially. What has happened in contexts like the Spanish one—and I think it is possible to extrapolate this to other places—is that entry was out of step, and this as a result produced a complex field that does not fully adjust either to the traditions or to the versions mentioned during the seminar. The construction of problems, theories, and methods in the field of Spanish visual studies, then, is not continuous but anachronistic and conflictive.

By way of example, the translations of Martin Jay's work are contemporaneous with those of Hans Belting, Nicholas Mirzoeff, and Mieke Bal. These are different traditions, different models, but also different times that, however, end up bringing together a tremendously singular state of the field. We received several "posterior" versions of visual studies before the "first" versions, and we also received problems and methods from different contexts that on coming together in the same place, however, gave birth to relationships that would be unthinkable within the established traditions. What I would like to suggest here is that those discontinuities and new out-of-step debates, far from being considered "illegitimate," should be seen as opportunities for opening up the field and proposing new and unthought-of relationships within it, bringing together—sometimes conflictingly—problems, ideas, and methods that are, a priori, distant in time and space.

To a certain extent, this seminar proposes a static analysis both of problems as well as of authors and concepts. Traditions—spaces—and then histories—times—are talked of. I believe it is useful to introduce mobile thought models to better see the evolution of both the spaces and the times. In this sense, we might allude to Mieke Bal's work on the movement and transformation of concepts between disciplines. A journey which

occurs across space-time, between traditions, fields, problems, and historical preoccupations. This travel metaphor has always reminded me of the magnetic shoes the artist Francis Alÿs wore round Havana during the 1994 biennale. Shoes that dragged reality around and that were modified during the journey, whilst modifying their surroundings. Mieke Bal's idea of traveling is also related to this adherence. Concepts are transformed, modified, and modify their field. And when we talk of a farewell to visual studies, I think reaching out to the sense of movement, of travel (the old sense of "to fare"), is more than productive.

What I would like to do here is add a new image to the temporal metaphor of the journey to think of visual studies in a global world, a thought model capable of evaluating anachronism and discontinuity. That image is the Möbius strip, a nonorientable topological surface, with neither an inside nor an outside, that brings into question the time-space proximity and imminence of Euclidean models.

As is well known, topology was used by Jacques Lacan to describe psychological spatiality and temporality: proximities, relationships, anachronisms, leaps, and condensations that could not be represented topographically. A Möbian space, without an inside or an outside, ruled by another series of correspondences and proximities that are better adjusted to psychological space and time than to the geographical and historical versions. The topological space is a confused space-time where before, now, and after are mixed together and intercede, a space where the outside configures the inside, a space that turns around a blind spot, an absent, unresolved center, a discontinuity around which all of that topological space is organized.

A topological surface like the Möbius strip could help us to think about history and places: a continuous flow, other proximities, relationships between concepts, as well as complex paths with no exit. I think that thought model would be useful for thinking of a movable object, on the edges of existing disciplines like visual studies. As an example, the idea of continuous flow brings into question allusions to the origin and necessity of finding unique primordial scenes. In this way, when we speak of Visual Studies 1, 2, or 3 we are referring to the different twists, turns, and adherences on the Möbius strip. The same happens when we refer to the way in which the discipline is shaped in contexts such

as the one I have mentioned, via different versions and traditions that drag along concepts, problems, and methods.

Throughout the seminar, Bredekamp's little book on Darwin and the image of coral as a thought trigger were sometimes alluded to. Perhaps something similar happens with the Möbius strip in this text. It has at least been useful for me as an image to think about the different traditions, histories, and versions in a world such as ours, in which spaces and times cross, overlap, and clash. Perhaps I sketched it unconsciously in the margin of the seminar notes I printed out.

"I Don't Know Why You Say Goodbye, I Say Hello"
Isabelle Decobecq

Writing this Assessment is both an exciting and a slightly daunting task. There is some irony, too, in being asked to review reviewers of the field, thus mirroring the very process of my own research. I was just beginning my doctoral work when I came across the intriguing *Farewell to Visual Studies* slogan for the first time, long before I was given the opportunity to read the transcripts of this seminar or even heard about it: it was only the tongue-in-cheek title of a conference by James Elkins back then. And while I never got a chance to attend it, its mild provocation instantly worked its effect on me, all the more given my specific subject position: as a semi-outsider to the field, a French student trained in traditional art history whose dissertation relates to the history and epistemology of visual studies . . . therefore thoroughly embracing, or at least aiming to say (an admittedly belated) "hello" to, the field.

Since I am trying to come up with an account of visual studies that would teach the French audience a thing or two about this multifarious endeavor (and, hopefully, help accommodate a version of the field in our own scientific landscape), the prospect of waving an early farewell to it had no particular appeal—except maybe to its many self-professed opponents, happily reveling in what sounds like the expected acknowledgment of an all too predictable failure.

Indeed, despite repeated claims that visual studies has spread across the five continents, French voices are notably missing from this boisterous polyphony. The seminar is no exception, where continental thought is mostly identified with German "image science" and its philosophical intricacies. But there is a very good reason for that: up until now, our country has never really embraced visual studies, but for a few recent editorial and academic initiatives. My own dissertation topic testifies to this growing awareness of something going on outside the borders of "traditional" art history (and indeed, most of our art history remains deeply conservative) and in need of some explanation. For better or worse, we are today, some twenty years later, rehearsing many of the debates and misunderstandings that plagued the first inception/reception of visual studies in the Anglo-American world.

So when reading the transcripts, I was also thinking of my fellow French scholars, many of them unfamiliar with the nuts and bolts of the quasi-field, and I started to ask myself: what image does such an account give of visual studies? To what extent can it become central source material for people wanting to engage in the field with some knowledge of its foundations? What can we learn from the different experiences laid out in those pages?

Pardon My French

Overall, this was tremendously compelling and enlightening reading, though at times quite confusing. Maybe my reading was tainted by my position as a tentative historiographer, twice removed from my object of study: because I'm not *doing* visual studies per se, but trying to map and "explain" what it is, I'm always keen on nailing down clearcut ideas and raw "facts." And if the transcripts are anything to go by, there is still a lot of blurriness going on with regard to the limits, tenets, and overarching problematics of the field. The "who's in, who's out" question is obviously not totally over, as the "ambiguous inclusiveness" suggested by James Elkins in his Envoi attests, starkly contrasting, though, with the apparent dismissal of Georges Didi-Huberman as a member of the club in Section 5. Besides, what always strikes me whenever one speaks of visual studies, including here, is the existence of a seemingly unbridgeable gap between the general and the particular: either one speaks of visual studies *in general*—which already sounds like a contradiction in terms—on a metadiscursive level, as some abstract reality, without resorting to any particular example of an actual publication or specific teaching content; or else one picks a specific study, in which the defining characteristics of the field are supposedly self-evident. But somehow it always seems to me that the two visions don't overlap that much, leading to increasing difficulty in mapping out the field and in knowing exactly what we are talking about.

The Do's and Don't's

"Beginners" like us can learn a number of lessons from this account: to resist the temptation to institutionalize; to lay bare the theoretical underpinnings of our enterprise; to carve out our own niche and specificity, without importing a ready-to-wear version of visual studies that would disregard our cultural, scientific, and local specificities.

But I also found myself pondering the place of rhetorics and language games at play in visual studies: most of the work done under the label is still written in English, and to some extent one may wonder whether the same arguments that pass as visual studies could be expressed in French, for instance, and still retain their relevance. Words are no secondary matter: the translatability of the field is indeed one of the major stakes that our editorial and academic field is facing today.

<1>Politics All the Way Down?

A case in point may be the pervasive yet contentious use of the word "politics" both in the present debates and in visual studies at large. Indeed, the English word is not only densely textured but also elastic, stretchable to a point that no French equivalent can accommodate. "Politics," or even worse, "cultural politics," has no perfect match nor satisfactory equivalent in our language. There is a "fuzziness" and positive ambiguity in the English language that hits hard when one tries to translate both linguistically *and* culturally the terms of the discussion: the sliding from one scientific and cultural context to another may disclose many potential conceptual cracks.

The gap could even be wider than we think, if, as the section devoted to the political claims, the latter is the alpha and omega of the field—at least in its original (read Anglo-American) version. At times, it sounds as if everything—hence nothing—in the cultural world is, and has to be, about *politics.* But where exactly is the *political* in *politics*? What are the real stakes here? Is this taken-for-granted ideological saturation of the cultural field anything more than verbal pyrotechnics?

Another question we should ask ourselves in the French context is whether we can really welcome visual studies on board, considering we hardly ever let cultural studies in the first place. Multiculturalism retains a negative flavor in the academy, the same way that gender issues are looked down upon with a good dose of suspicion if not sheer

hostility. The problem may be a die-hard fantasy of universalism, that of the antique *paideia*, which still pervades a large part of our teaching institutions, making the innate political nature of scholarship—no matter how inexplicit the term may be—a point of contention with regard to a hypothetical French reception.

One last word. With the risk of sounding overly partisan, I was indeed surprised to read in Section 5 that "visual studies cannot possibly accommodate someone like Georges Didi-Huberman unless we stretch our concepts beyond recognition," while there seems to be no agreed-upon definition or clear circumscription of the field. It remains unclear to me why exactly it should be so, but maybe his most recent work and his last book in particular, *Peuples exposés, peuples figurants*, would do something to challenge this appraisal. According to the author, peoples, be they under- or overexposed in the so-called society of the spectacle, are paradoxically exposed to disappear, caught as they are in the irrepressible dialectics of visibility and invisibility. Hence the necessity to visually document this invisible part of the social world, to expose the nameless, making representation itself an inherently social and ethical stake. A good distance away from his studies on anachronism and figurality, *Peuples exposés* clearly leans towards Jacques Rancière's reflection on the distribution of the sensible, thus taking on a strong social and explicitly—dare I say it?—*political* flavor.

Farewell to Visual Studies?

Tirza True Latimer

The title *Farewell to Visual Studies*, haunted by T. J. Clark's formulation, signals pervasive themes of loss and disillusionment. Clark's *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* concerns, on the one hand, the exhaustion of modernism (and with it a set of formal operations devised to negate the bourgeois values that produced it), and, on the other hand, the decline of Marxism as a comprehensive explanatory paradigm. *Farewell to Visual Studies* reverberates, similarly, with disappointment in the once radical discipline's unfulfilled promises—its "failures."

Personally, I cannot reconcile myself with the idea of bidding farewell to a vocation many of us fully intend to keep practicing. When W. J. T. Mitchell polled the scholars and Fellows contributing to this volume—"All in favor of saying farewell to visual studies, and getting on to something else, raise your hands"—no one raised a hand. Granted, the title *Farewell to Visual Studies* has the merit of stimulating thought about the state of the field, but it also frames the conversation in ways I find preemptive. I have a problem, specifically, with any move (however disingenuous) toward relegating visual studies to one of those "post-" positions—along with, say, feminism—that implies the exhaustion or superannuation of a concept whose work may have hardly begun. But I'd like to bracket my objections to the premise in order to focus on the disappointments expressed by several of the field's founders and most lively practitioners. Without endorsing these scholars' positions (or recapitulating them for the sake of producing counterarguments), I would then like to consider what "failure" might promise in relation to the practice of visual studies today.

James Elkins's list of dissatisfactions with visual studies is the longest, proportionate with his tenure in the field. He points to "the problem of making visual images work in visual studies instead of using them as illustrations of theories"; he believes "visual studies should look at the visual world outside of modern and contemporary visualities"; he regrets that "visual studies has not developed a discourse about its own history, its historiography"; "the lack or absence in visual studies of non-art images, scientific im-

ages" disappoints him. Elkins also notes that the development of interdisciplinary exchanges between those who write about art and those who make art has been uneven. "It seems to me a different kind of theorization is needed to make sense of what happens when a visual studies writing practice, for example, encounters a visual practice. When the scholars make art, for example. Or when artists present their work as visual studies scholarship." Michael Ann Holly, like Elkins, regrets that "the visual past before 1980 completely dropped out of visual studies." Keith Moxey echoes a concern raised by Elkins and several others about the subordinate status of images, even at the heart of visual studies. "Images have usually been treated as representations, rather than presentations. The image as, say, a configuration, a presence, a set of formal proposals, has infrequently been the subject of visual studies, which has mainly been about content." Paul Frosh expresses frustration that visual studies has not managed to "let go of art history as its founding paradigm, the thing it both models itself upon and defines itself against." For Whitney Davis, the field fails to offer "substantive accounts of vision" or engage with notions and effects of invisibility. Davis also laments the structural obstacles that continue to inhibit collaborative work in the field of visual studies. Gustav Frank insists that we, the practitioners of visual studies, "are trying to continue a project that has already failed, for endemic reasons." (I take "endemic" to mean so ubiquitous throughout the history of the field as to now be quasistructural.) For María Lumbreras Corujo, "the very desire of reconstructing the history of that failure entails a question about where our own limits, today in the present visual studies project, might be." Visual studies, it would seem, is bound to fail because it is bounded by failure(s). The notion of failure, at the very least, unifies this conversation, and by extension, some very different experiences of and positions within the field.

Only one participant whose remarks are recorded here, Bridget Cooks, outright avowed the opinion that "visual studies is a success." Cooks's comment offered an opportunity to subject the notion of "success"—with its connotations of capitalist productivity—to critical scrutiny. But Cooks's comment fell flat and no analysis of "success"—or, perhaps more importantly, "failure"—ensued.

What (and how) does failure mean here? Is failure (as in "the failure of visual studies") a device that performs critically to reveal areas of potential growth and transformation? If so, failure should not pass untheorized, right? A number of theorists (especially queer theorists) whose work has been useful to visual critics—including Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, José Muñoz, Heather Love, and Judith Halberstam—have acknowledged failure as a perverse form of success. Failure, for one thing, has the capacity to expose default values (what Foucault calls "codes of normalization") that otherwise remain invisible. "What kinds of rewards can failure offer us?" Halberstam asks. "Perhaps most obviously, failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development." Admittedly, failure bears with it an array of negative affects (disappointment, disillusionment, depression, and despair). But these can be used effectively as tools.

Dissatisfaction, rather than enclosing visual studies in a logic of futility, may serve to (further) undiscipline the field. Elkins observes that, at this time, a string of terms describes the vocation's academic situation: "'interdisciplinary,' 'postdisciplinary,' 'indisciplinary,' 'subdisciplinary,' and 'transdisciplinary.'" To Elkins's list I would like to add (and advocate) "antidisciplinary." What better time than now—a time defined by the failure of universities, industries, infrastructures, economic markets, the fourth estate, the public sector, nations, and political regimes—to reexamine internalized models of success and failure? What better time to use failure as a fulcrum for dismantling disciplinary barriers and leveraging new forms of learning (and unlearning), new models of pedagogy?

"Ten years ago," Michael Ann Holly recalls, "when I last taught undergraduates, they would ask, 'What is visual studies?' and I would answer, 'It isn't a discipline; it isn't a field. It just names a problematic. It shakes up complacency. No objects are excluded. Visual studies names an attitude in relation to visual things, rather than a department.'" Have we lost, or tamed, our attitude? No. I think these conversations demonstrate that visual studies remains messy, contentious, indeterminate, unruly, and its many failures have proven exceptionally generative.

Keith Moxey touched on the kinds of failures that have such potential for visual scholars. "I love visual objects and practices because they are often—by their nature—

tremendously difficult to put into words, and so I would like to hobble the interpretation of visuality, making it less smooth and confident." Our incapacity (failure) to adequately translate the visual into words is both what gives visuality such power and what lends our best efforts to analyze visual events a kind of precarious grace. Farewell to visual studies? I don't think so.

"If There's a Ping, There Has To Be a Pong"

Anna Notaro

I am writing this short response to *Farewell to Visual Studies* a few days after my first visit to the dOCUMENTA (13) art show in Kassel, Germany. This sequence of events was not planned; it has more to do with serendipity and my tendency to work close to deadlines. Hence there is a *before* and *after* dOCUMENTA (13) dimension to what follows.

Before: when I finished reading the transcript, prior to traveling to Kassel, I felt rather overwhelmed by the erudition of the participants and the acumen and vitality of the discussion, and, in spite of a sense of personal inadequacy, I wished I was there! A transcript, in its vain effort to accurately replicate the oral, often results in a dry read, deprived as it is of the subtle nuances of verbal communication, and yet my reading experience was not impeded: so many insightful and stimulating observations left me pondering, and some had a personal resonance, like the discussion regarding the ever-shifting disciplinary status of visual studies and its multifaceted histories. Hal Foster's description of visual culture as "a passport that can lead to a fairly touristic travel from discipline to discipline," evoked by Kristine Nielsen, was particularly poignant in that I have used visual culture exactly in such a manner—except that, contrary to the superficial and time-limited experience of the tourist, visual culture has had a deep and long-lasting effect on my professional development as a media theorist.

I share Gustav Frank's doubts about whether visual studies has a "central coherence," and I am uncertain as to which of the five terms identified by James Elkins to define visual studies' disciplinary nature—"interdisciplinary," "postdisciplinary," "indisciplinary," "postdisciplinary," or "transdisciplinary"—is the most appropriate, or whether, following a linear chronology, we are now in the Visual Culture 3 stage. I can't even say if the distinction between visual culture studies and visual studies is just a question of emphasis. What I am rather confident about is that although issues of self-definition are obviously important, not least with regard to the power relationship established with the educational institutions within which visual studies is taught, the emphasis on the "self" dimension leads to a degree of intellectual introspection that loses sight (no pun intended) of what I would define as the more "worldly" aspect of images, their "social ontology,"

as Tom Mitchell puts it. Like Mitchell, I am more interested "in the world that the image makes visible" and, following Elise Goldstein in the same section, in "who visual studies serves," in what is the "audience." Also, a farewell to something so undefined/undefinable begs the question of what exactly one is bidding farewell to, and thus exposes the inherent fragility of the whole conceptual enterprise, unless that was exactly the intention. In this sense, Anna Sigridur Arnar's understanding of the term "farewell" as "fare well" reveals very early on that behind the discussion *always already* existed an aspiration towards affirmation rather than loss.

After: The experience of visiting dOCUMENTA (13) was one of visual/sensorial saturation; the array of paintings, sculptures, drawings, videos, sound installations—from the sublime to the silly—was stimulating, the common thread being the ways in which art reflects and interacts with the world, particularly at times of conflict. It is difficult to pick up one single artist whose practice more pertinently relates to any of the theoretical debates developed in the transcript, and yet the name of Rabih Mroué kept recurring in my mind. For dOCUMENTA (13) Lebanese theater/visual artist Mroué presented the lecture-performance *The Pixelated Revolution* (2012) and a multipart installation about the documentation of death in the Syrian Revolution, made by the victims themselves filming the act of shooting with their mobile phones. Although Mroué has declared that he "is not doing any kind of activism," it is obvious that "the underlying argument . . . is the persistent belief in the power of the image." Crucially, while such footage is necessary and valuable, Mroué admits that "images alone are not enough to achieve any victory—especially when the other side has all the guns." Ultimately, for him "the role of the contemporary artist is not to make more images, of which there are already plenty," but rather "to make images that are already imposing themselves on our daily lives and are keeping us from thinking, and use them as material to [make us] think."

Mroué's simultaneous belief in the power of the image and the awareness of its inadequacy "to achieve any victory" echoed, in my mind, the dilemmas of ideological criticism as discussed in Section 8 of the transcript: the contrast between political activism and reflection, the necessity for a countervisuality, as Mirzoeff would have it, and the fundamental issue, raised by Keith Moxey in relation to Nemerov's and Bal's texts, of

whether the author's politics should remain implicit rather than explicit. Above all, I remain convinced—and Mroué's work has reinforced my conviction—that the question that opens Nemerov's essay—"what do artists and poets and critics do in the face of catastrophe? How do they register it in their work, or should they even try to do so?"—has lost none of its pregnancy since it was first formulated in 2005. Following Paul Frosh, I also would like to use "the notion of an engaged witnessing," in the belief that "images can be testimony" which "will ultimately promote action."

To conclude these few scattered reflections, I would argue that for visual studies / visual culture to survive and thrive in a media-saturated age, it needs to put aside the historical "ideology versus aesthetics" divide in the acknowledgment that, although the study of the visual cannot be conceived merely in terms of politics, yet, as Gustav Frank notes, "[v]isuality *is political* because of the many social and cultural spaces and intricate practices it organizes" (emphasis mine). Rather than agonizing further on issues of definition and genealogy, contemporary visual studies would do better to focus on the "making of images" and "on the activities that images perform," as Keith Moxey puts it. When it comes to images, "if there's a ping, there has to be a pong"; truth and falsity need to be bypassed in favor of a conception of the discipline as a conceptually flexible "connection enabler," capable, that is, of exploiting to the fullest its cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary combination potential. In this light, media studies, among other subjects, will not be regarded anymore as an adversary of Bildwissenschaft, but as one of its most formidable allies.

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