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Chapter introduction

Main lines of inquiry

THE FOLLOWING CHAPTERS inquire into what it is and what it means to know visual art. Each chapter makes its own theoretical and methodological choices and examines its own object of study, ranging from architectural space and video art to situated sculpture, paintings and printed illustrations. Together, the chapters reflect the inclusive character of art history as it is practiced today.

This section offers a consideration of the main lines of inquiry that run through this book. But first, a short recapitulation of the preceding thematic introduction: our mutual commitment is to investigate what happens in the encounter between various analytical tools and the artworks. The tools operate in the cognitive domain of knowledge, and the artworks, with their "visual power and material appeal", appear and have effects in much broader registers of human life and experience. By stating the problem this way, as one that recognizes the difference between scholarly procedures and knowledge claims on the one hand and the effects of the works' visuality and materiality on the other, this book engages with a "surplus" that demands attention, examination and articulation.[1]

Ways of knowing

The first main line of inquiry concerns *ways of knowing* visual art. With the exception of Dan Karlholm's more theoretically oriented contribution, the chapters develop the question of knowing visual art through close encounters with actual works of art. As a reader, one is invited to follow the ways of analysis where historical sitings, pictorial contexts, affects, iconotextual interplays and much more are traced and made eloquent and appear in a to-and-fro movement between the tools, (the experience of) the artworks, contextualizing strategies and other parts

1. "Surplus" as in Mitchell 2005, pp. 76–106.

of the studies. Thus described, the analysis itself turns out as a process, something evolving, through which the works gradually come forth as denser and richer.[2]

The expression "ways of knowing" is intended to resonate with several aspects of this book. Its first part, "ways", implies methods as well as the way somewhere, the evolving path that leads ahead, not to a final point or an end of analysis, but simply to another, and therefore different, stage. "Knowing" emphasizes the ongoing, evolving or processual, character of the way ahead (hence the -ing form), and is further related to two different sets of ideas that are deeply interrelated in our chapters. The first is the cognitive and epistemic sense of knowing something about the artwork or about the experience it engenders. The second is the more open sense of familiarizing or acquainting oneself with the artwork.[3] Our extended encounters with works of visual art have the character of an evolving familiarization.

In particular Dan Karlholm's chapter, which elaborates the question of knowing visual art into a question of acknowledging the truth of the work, pursues an argument that is connected to the second sense of knowing above. Karlholm makes an analogy between the artwork and "a kind of subjectivity or unique individuality", which is claimed to "create a new vision of what artworks are and how we could choose to approach them". This reasoning hinges on a distinction between the knowledge we can have about the artwork and the truth of the work. The former includes, for instance, the past and present meanings attributed to the work and its circumstances of production and reception, or knowledge established through scholarly tools and procedures, whereas the latter concerns the "reality" and "energy" of the artwork, which is to be recognized (i.e. acknowledged) rather than known. At the other end of the spectrum is Sonya Petersson's chapter with its focus on pictorial knowledge in the more epistemic sense. The chapter investigates the knowledge production of a set of 19th-century prints in the margins of art history, introduced as "pictures with which to think". Nevertheless, Petersson's epistemic focus is tied to an analysis of the prints in relation to an idea of experience as simultaneously embodied and historical.

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2. The idea of visual art's "density" is developed by Goodman 1976, pp. 127–221, as part of his analytical aesthetics and theory of denotation.

3. Cf. the entry 'Know, v.' and the examples under I and II for the second sense and the examples under III for the first sense: 'Know, v.', *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), oed.com, accessed 28 March 2023.

These two chapters exemplify the interconnected senses of "knowing" in this book. As a whole, the book has the character of an evolving exploration of the knowledge production *and* ontology of visual art, its meaning *and* materiality, through cognitive *and* experiential ways of knowing the artwork.

Exploring the specificity of visual art

Another shared concern is to explore the *specific* manner in which visual art gives rise to meaning, causes effects and interacts with the world. Margaretha Thomson's discussion of presence as a paradox of time is tied to *painterly* qualities in Rembrandt's *Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem* (1630). The work's "empty" spot of abstraction in the middle of the scene is for Thomson the place where the painterly process reveals itself, in the present, and exposes its past beginnings, just as the present materiality of paint is analysed as coextensive with its condition of ageing. Similarly, Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe builds up *pictorial* contexts around Otto Dix's painting *Neugeborenes auf Händen (Ursus)* (1927) by following its visual references to older, art-historical works and to other works by the artist and his contemporaries. *Visual* references hence form Sjöholm Skrubbe's basis for exploring how the painting is both embedded in and, by its pronounced abstraction and gesture, withdrawing itself from the recognizable social milieus of the Weimar era's political imagery and from the narrative character of traditional Christian iconography.

These aspects of Thomson's and Sjöholm Skrubbe's chapters exemplify this book's engagement with the artworks' materiality and visuality. Throughout the chapters, this line of analysis is coupled with the authors' in-depth attention to what could be described as the *multidimensionality* of the artworks: how their materiality and visuality interrelate to and interact with representational and narrative content and the modalities of movement and time.

One overall contribution of this book is then our recognition and exploration of visual art's multidimensionality. By the same token, it also offers a nuanced perspective on that which is generally circumscribed by the label "visual". As amply shown by art history's neighbouring field visual studies, without further delimitations, "the visual" encompasses everything that enters perception and cognition through the sense of sight.[4]

4. Alternative denominations of this field, which emerged in its present form in the 1980s, are visual culture studies and image studies in the Anglophone world and *Bildwissenschaft* in the German-speaking world (*bildvetenskap* in Swedish). Cf. Elkins *et al.*

It includes the artworks' imagery, pictoriality and materiality,[5] as well as their spaces and places—the exhibition space of the art museum and its arrangement of paintings in Nina Weibull's chapter on Eugène Delacroix's painting *Médée furieuse* (1838), or the patterned Piazza di Campidoglio around the Antique equestrian bronze sculpture in Peter Gillgren's chapter. Here, it is of less importance whether "the visual" is taken as denoting a quality in objects and places or as epitomizing a sensory channel. In both cases, the point is merely that it is encompassing. Against this background, this book approaches "the visual" as *both* differentiated within itself *and* interoperative with other modalities and sensory channels. The former concerns the chapters' recognition of the artworks' imagery, pictoriality, materiality, environments and even writing as included in the visual, but in need of analysis by more precise terminologies. The latter concerns how several authors deal with the visual as cooperative with, for instance, movement. In Mårten Snickare's chapter on Isaac Julien's video work *Western Union: Small Boats* (2007), the choreographed movements of the drowning bodies, the temporal sequence of moving images and the musical rhythm are examined as intermixed with the visual and spatial elements of the work.

Temporalizing the artwork

Whether focusing on siting processes, architectural space or something else, and whether engaging with longer or shorter time spans, nearly all chapters deal with the historical and/or experiential temporality of their examples.[6] Along these lines, Lena Liepe explores the 12th-century crypt of Lund Cathedral as the space of present-day visitors, but without losing sight of how its "historical integrity" becomes manifest through time-honoured liturgic rituals and architectural environments. This power of evoking an awareness of the past is in Liepe's analysis further framed by the art-historical terminology that designates and temporal-

2015. For updated perspectives on "the visual" and "visuality", see the edited volumes by Kristensen *et al.* 2013; 2015.

5. These three are closely related. "Pictoriality" includes imagery in the sense of an image that appears in the materiality of a picture. In its broader sense, "imagery" includes the metaphors and mental images that are discussed in some of the chapters in this book. This distinction between image and picture has been elaborated by Mitchell 2005, pp. 84–86, but should be regarded as a commonplace of both aesthetics and visual studies, cf. Seel 2005, pp. 159–185, and Hans Belting's threefold model of the image (picture, medium, body) in Belting 2014.

6. For an expansive discussion about temporality in relation to art history, see the edited volume by Karlholm & Moxey 2018. See also Nagel & Wood 2010; Moxey 2013.

izes the materials and formal features of the architecture as, for instance, "Romanesque" (or other terms for later additions). Liepe also connects this "macro level" sense of the crypt's historicity to the temporality that is registered on the "micro level" of sense experience, as one moves one's body around its columns and altars. The "macro level" of historical awareness is thus tied to the embodied experience of moving in space, which entails the experience of time.

Gillgren's examination of the siting processes around the equestrian statue of (probably) Marcus Aurelius and its shifting locations likewise exemplifies an approach to the past as layered and in dialogue with its own history and future as well as with our present. Gillgren shows how the antique bronze was neither designed to be viewed as a free-standing statue nor exhibited at the piazza of the Capitoline Hill. Throughout history, it has been the object of various attributions and sitings before 15th-century scholars started to identify it with Marcus Aurelius, and before Michelangelo eventually placed it at the centre of the piazza (reminiscent of former sitings of antique obelisks), where it is now replaced by a replica. (The original is in the Capitoline Museums in Rome.) From its present hindsight position, Gillgren's chapter heightens our sense of the works' pasts and futures in the plural.

The chapters of Liepe and Gillgren are, together with those of Thomson and Sjöholm Skrubbe, the ones that most explicitly thematize the temporalization of their objects—in Sjöholm Skrubbe's case with an emphasis on the historical "alterity" of Dix's painting that aligns to, but is not the same as, Liepe's "integrity". Nevertheless, temporalizing analytical activities recur in all the other chapters as a more or less explicit way of knowing visual art. At minimum, temporalization includes the recognition of one past and one present dimension of the artwork. This is the case when the interpretative implications of Delacroix's *Médée* is explored in relation to the time frame of the Salon of 1838 as juxtaposed to the Louvre's Delacroix exhibition in 2018, or when visual references to past works are studied as effective in the time of the artist at the same time as they are reactivated in the time of the work's ongoing presence.

Border zones

This book was born out of a wish to counter what the thematic introduction describes as "a kind of void around the art object" in some art-historical writings, which primarily focus on the various contexts of visual art. The same ambition seems to have animated much of the work

in the wake of scholars such as David Freedberg, Horst Bredekamp, Hans Belting and W.J.T. Mitchell.[7]

Now, at the end of the journey, do we know more about the actual artworks, or about the process of experiencing the artworks, or about how the works both engage with and slip away from the tools that structure art-historical knowledge? This question has no definitive answer, which would depend on whether it springs from, for instance, phenomenologically or positivistically tinted views on the ways (and possibilities) of knowing the external world. More importantly, our shared endeavours, with their non-programmatic character in the range of methods and theories employed, point beyond such fundamental, i.e. non-heuristic, divisions between object and subject, object and context, meaning and materiality, and so on. Instead, the chapters' explorations of *border zones* between the divisions that order and make the world intelligible turn out as the last main line of inquiry.

What I have in mind is the authors' engagement with the intersections between visual art's tangible materiality and representational capacities; its cognitive and affective responses; its multisensory and multimodal ways of operating in the world; its historical alterity and ongoing presence; its delimitation as an object that activates "outside" contexts. This attention to the border zones where such intersections operate cannot be described in merely additive or inclusive terms. More to the point, it is all about the authors' scrutiny of the ways in which meaning and materiality, time and space, past and present, context and object, and so on, border onto and affect each other (rather than being studied as separate entities that are merely added to each other). This can be followed, for instance, in Thomson's examination of the border zone between the real and the imaginary in the experience of the Rembrandt painting, in Liepe's study of how the historical integrity of architectural space manifests itself in the embodied present, and in Snickare's formulation of his initial problem as one that concerns the interactive relations between Julien's video work, its "affective effects" on the beholder and the cognitive scholarly interpretation of this interaction. We are not faced with three separate ingredients but a study of the border zones where they interfere with each other.

7. See notes 1 and 5, and Freedberg 1989; Bredekamp 2018.

Outline

With diverging focal points, these main lines of inquiry run through all the chapters of our book. Therefore, they do not serve as a blueprint for the outline. The chapters could be read in any order and, taken together, still demonstrate the lines of inquiry presented above. But for the reader who wishes to follow the course of the book, the chapters are arranged in what could be described as an order of variety according to the objects of study, the artworks that are examined in each chapter. The chapters on paintings (Sjöholm Skrubbe, Thomson, Weibull) are followed by chapters on sculpture (Gillgren) or architecture (Liepe) or video art (Snickare), while the latter is followed by the chapter on pictorial prints (Petersson). The thematic introduction (Thomson) and the discussion of the "unknowable truth in art" (Karlholm) stand as two theoretical companion pieces at the beginning and the end of the book.

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