

Visual Literacy in History Education

Textbooks and Beyond

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Abstract • This introductory article presents the contributions to a thematic issue about the visual analysis of history textbooks and other educational media. It provides a brief historical overview of the use of pictures in history textbooks and discusses how developments in visual studies can help move the study of such pictures beyond questions of representation, toward considering the different ways in which they can exercise an agency of their own. It argues that we need to develop complex forms of visual literacy in interacting with textbooks and shows how the distinctions proposed by the issue authors can advance this task. The article ends by suggesting avenues for further research.

Keywords • emotions, images, pedagogy, pictures, visual history, visual studies

Unsurprisingly, textbook analysis has traditionally been an analysis of texts. In the study of history textbooks in particular, scholars have focused primarily on themes, discursive frameworks, and historical narratives. The conceptual apparatus of textbook theory in general is largely borrowed from language-centered disciplines such as linguistics and literary studies, abounding in terms such as “discourse” and “genre.”¹ In contrast, the visual analysis of textbooks is far less developed—an oversight that is lamented more often than it is addressed through innovative research.² In 1994, the journal *Internationale Schulbuchforschung/International Textbook Research*, the precursor to the *Journal of Educational Media, Memory and Society*, first dedicated a special thematic issue to visuals in textbooks across disciplines. Almost three decades later, visuality shapes our lives, our educational experiences, and our relationship with the past even more comprehensively than ever before. The use of images in history education is regularly discussed by teachers and scholars alike.³ And yet there are still hardly any monographs or collective works dedicated specifically to the visual dimension of history textbooks.⁴ When the topic is discussed at all, pictures are still all too often treated as visual “narratives” or forms of visual “representation”—terms that betray the difficulty of viewing them as anything other than merely a different type of text.

That is not to say that our understanding of how visuals have been used in history textbooks has not advanced. Scholars in the fields of history, education, and memory studies have published insightful articles on



the topic across national contexts, studying both individual publications and large cross-period samples⁵ and history textbooks for different grades as well as historical atlases for school use⁶; authors analyzing textbooks in other disciplines have made many relevant contributions; and more generally, the fields of visual studies, visual sociology, and visual history (including the visual history of education) have generated numerous ideas and observations that can help us to better understand the genesis, circulation, uses, and effects of pictures in print publications intended to teach history.

Together, these contributions can help us develop a form of *visual literacy* attuned specifically to textbooks and other media of historical education.⁷ Just like a functionally illiterate person might be impressed by the written word but will be unable to distinguish between different types of texts, important differences between images and between visual contexts are lost on the visually illiterate. The unschooled observer might lack the viewing skills and conceptual apparatus to identify and critically assess the relevance of different visual genres and forms of composition; to distinguish between contemporaneous and retrospective images of an era; to understand the different (narrative, metaphorical, classificational) roles that pictures play; to pay attention to a picture's place on the page and its relationship with the accompanying text; or even to grasp the difference between what is depicted and the medium of representation.

Advancing visual literacy is thus the ultimate objective of the scholarly analysis of visuals in history textbooks. Just as the critical analysis of texts helps scholars, educators, and pupils to distinguish between different kinds of historical narrative, the critical analysis of images should enable us to approach visuals in history education with a more discerning eye and, ultimately, to make better use of them.

Accordingly, this introduction reviews some of the concepts and distinctions proposed by scholars in different contexts, and writing in different languages, that can help us to make better sense of visuals in history textbooks. It embeds them in a discussion of developments in thinking about visuality in general, and specifically its uses in education, focusing in particular on the indispensable though not unproblematic notion of visual literacy itself. Along the way we present the diverse contributions made by the authors of this thematic issue.

However, we would be ill-advised to approach the uses of visuals in history textbooks without first understanding their own history. Thus we start with a brief overview (focusing on the European and North American context due to the limits of our expertise on other countries) of how images made it into history textbooks in the first place. This will allow us to gain a sense of how their uses have changed over the centuries. Yet it will also show how some things have stayed the same, since some debates (focusing on the question whether history textbooks should be illustrated

at all) and relevant distinctions (for example, between decorative and substantive uses of pictures) have proven to be remarkably resilient.

Pictures in History Textbooks: A Historical Overview

In early modern western Europe, the study of history in educational institutions such as Reformed schools, Jesuit colleges, or English public schools revolved around reading classics such as Livy or Tacitus for edification and imitation.⁸ In an educational context shaped by humanist ideas about the centrality of literary culture and the Latin language and destined for a select few, history largely remained an ancillary discipline, a source of stories illustrating universal human nature that were presented in textual form.⁹

Graphic illustrations were by no means absent from early modern textbooks. John Amos Comenius's *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*, published in numerous editions starting in 1653 and in wide use across Europe well into the nineteenth century, was an illustrated compendium of knowledge about the entire cosmos, ranging from God and the skies via worms and fishes to fencing schools, children's games, and Islam. Destined for children of diverse social backgrounds in accordance with Comenius's bold vision for universal school education, it consisted of woodcut drawings with numbered elements accompanied by lists of terms in Latin and (depending on the edition) up to three other languages.¹⁰ However, it did not cover history as a separate subject.

In contrast, the first school history textbooks that appeared in the early eighteenth century reflected history's subaltern status. Even when their visual design reflected innovative teaching methods, setting them apart from earlier chronological tables destined for an erudite audience, they had no use for graphics. Thus, for example, the historical part of Claude Buffier's *Nouveaux élémens d'Histoire et de Geografie* from 1718 was largely a list of figures from the Bible and European dynastic history, complete with a separate margin for keywords and mnemonic verses to help pupils to remember their names.¹¹ The few non-textual elements it contained were purely ornamental. When visual elements other than mere text started appearing in history books destined for educational use, they were genealogical diagrams and maps, as exemplified by the *Abbrégé de l'histoire d'Espagne* from 1761 by another Jesuit priest, Jean-Baptiste Philippoteau Duchesne.¹²

Early experiments in mass primary education in the eighteenth century in countries such as Denmark, Prussia, and Austria focused on basic literacy, numeracy, and catechization. It was only with the rise of the idea of universal education following the French Revolution and the post-Napoleonic reforms that history gradually became a separate subject, and

history textbooks specifically created for schools turned into a recognizable genre. Thus the Prussian school reforms of the 1810s associated with Wilhelm von Humboldt introduced history as a standalone subject in the new three-level education system and made it part of teachers' training.

It took some time for states to regulate the emerging market for history textbooks. In the Swiss canton of Vaud, for example, history entered the curriculum of public schools for boys in 1834, though it would not be taught to girls for another half century. A law passed in 1865 banned the use of history textbooks that were not officially approved, and defined the number of hours to be devoted to the teaching of history.¹³ However, the innovations reflected in the burgeoning textbook production hardly affected their visual components. Nikolai Ustrialov's *Outline of Russian History*, first published in 1839 and used for over two decades as the main history textbook in schools across the Russian Empire, completely dispensed with illustrations except for an appendix with dynastic tables and a map of Russia.

Across Europe, in the early nineteenth century, visuals in history textbooks were very largely included for decorative purposes¹⁴—a type of use which, as we will see, has remained remarkably persistent to this day in spite of all technical progress and reflections on the pedagogical functions of visuality.

The number and variety of pictures in textbooks increased steadily, keeping pace with technological innovations even though older methods were never immediately displaced when new ones appeared. Woodcuts could still be seen in early twentieth century textbooks even though they had seemingly lost out to engravings almost three centuries earlier. The dominance of increasingly colorized engravings in turn lasted almost until the time of the First World War in some categories of textbooks even as methods such as photozincography (from the 1860s), halftone printing (from the 1880s), and photolithography (around 1900) gradually made it easier to reproduce photographs in printed works—though including color illustrations did not become the norm until the 1960s.¹⁵ Yet while schoolbooks for some disciplines, such as geography or foreign languages and cultures, often made ample and enthusiastic use of different kinds of visuals, their adoption in history textbooks was much more unequal. Whereas in the United States, a "Pictorial History" of the country was in classroom use by 1850,¹⁶ Spanish history textbooks almost entirely dispensed with illustrations until the turn of the century.¹⁷ In part this was a question of genre. In Europe, insufficiently artistic pictures were long deemed unsuitable for use in education. Especially on the continent's Catholic and Orthodox periphery, the barrier between mass-produced imagery—from the Russian *lubki* or Portuguese *papéis volantes* to late nineteenth century postcards or newspapers illustrations—and the more highbrow genre of the history textbook remained in place for a long

time, until the spread of mass education turned accessible illustrations into a selling point that publishers could no longer neglect. France led the way, its centralized system of universal education allowing massive print runs: Augustine Fouillée-Tuileries's patriotic education manual *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants* from 1877 and Ernest Lavisse's primary school textbook *Histoire de France* from 1884, both copiously illustrated, remained in print for decades, going through numerous editions produced in millions of copies.

With the onset of mass society following the First World War, authors and publishers across Europe experimented with both the content and visual design of children's books and particularly reading primers, spearheaded by the young Soviet avant-garde.¹⁸ Yet this hardly affected history manuals. First published in 1921, Mikhail Pokrovsky's *Russian History in Its Briefest Outline*, the first Soviet history textbook, went through fifteen editions until 1934, after which it was banned as heretical. Each new edition was more richly illustrated than the last, but the pictures belonged to traditional genres: historical paintings, drawings, or documents grouped together in rectangular ensembles separated by dozens of pages of uninterrupted text. (Conversely, the authors and illustrators of Soviet historical fiction for children were called upon to emancipate themselves from historical documents.¹⁹)

Even after visuals became fixtures of history textbooks, there were several reasons why authors might be reluctant to include them at all. All of these reservations remain relevant to present-day debates. First there was the concern that not all eras could be illustrated with images of equal quality and historical accuracy.²⁰ Then there was historians' traditional mistrust of images as accurate representations of historical events and as pedagogical devices. Wariness of hyper-visualism in history education mirrors longstanding apprehensions about an excessive reliance on visuals in the study of history, perhaps most famously expressed in Johan Huizinga's *The Waning of the Middle Ages* in 1919, itself a classic of visual history, and reactions to this book.²¹ If anything, this wariness only increased with rising technical sophistication: historians, textbook authors, and regulators were not easily duped by photography's claim to objectivity. In the 1920s, the Finnish history "curriculum stated that verbal presentation was preferred given the fact that there was no guarantee that the images were not merely a product of the illustrator's or photographer's imagination."²²

Beyond questions of accuracy, authenticity, and representation, some have also voiced concerns over visuality's effects on acquiring a cohesive historical understanding. In 1986, the Columbia University historian Jacques Barzun lamented that textbooks are "printed in a manner that encourages the habit of hop, skip, and jump: each double spread in quarto size is filled with pictures, maps, charts, and diagrams

in four colors...Picture and caption do all the work."²³ Whether or not one shares Barzun's concerns, there is clearly no going back to a more textually centered presentation. In our digital age, the entire design of history textbooks is now often determined by visual elements present on every page. It is important to note, however, that the intensity of this pictorial turn varies considerably from one country to another. In the former Soviet countries, going by Mischa Gabowitsch's quantitative study of chapters about the Second World War in this issue, history textbooks published in the second decade of the twenty-first century still feature less than one illustration per page on average.

Visual Studies Meet Textbook Research

Even this cursory overview shows that the visual dimension of history textbooks is by no means a new topic. And yet for a long time discussion of it was largely confined to applied contexts. Textbook authors, publishers, illustrators, teachers, and censors or regulators might argue about the uses and selection of specific illustrations for specific purposes, but such debates rarely touched upon the most fundamental questions of visibility.

It was only after visual studies and its various disciplinary varieties (such as visual history or visual sociology) began to emerge as a separate field, and scholars began to proclaim an iconic or pictorial turn, that academic researchers began to take a more sustained interest in the visual aspects of pedagogy, and textbooks in particular.

The new interest in visual aspects of culture (especially Western, Euro-Atlantic culture) can be traced back to early semiological writings, which ranged from the 1950s and 1960s (by Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes in western Europe, and Iurii Lotman in the Soviet Union) to critical studies of the social developed in France in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (by Guy Debord, Michel Foucault, and Jean Baudrillard). Taking their cues from the structuralist revolution in the study of texts but gradually trying to emancipate themselves from this legacy as they moved on to visual sign systems, these efforts ushered in attempts to study "visual semiotics"²⁴ or "visual grammars" that have since been applied to textbook illustrations in order to examine "how the elements within an illustration interact, complement, and support each other."²⁵

The early 1990s saw the proclamation of a "turn" that was variously described as "imagic,"²⁶ "pictorial,"²⁷ "iconic,"²⁸ or even "visualistic."²⁹ This was evidence of the increasing codification of visual studies as a separate field of study distinct from art history, drawing creatively on a variety of predecessors, from psychoanalysis to phenomenology³⁰ and to the Frankfurt School's critique of mass media.

As Nicholas Mirzoeff wrote in 1999 in order to define the scope of study of this new field, “Visual culture does not depend on pictures themselves but the modern tendency to picture or visualize existence.”³¹ It “directs our attention away from structured, formal viewing settings like cinema and art gallery to the centrality of visual experience in everyday life.”³² This fundamental insight is important to several of the contributors to this issue. Indeed, the media contexts in which textbook use is situated in the articles collected here cover a range of different visual contexts and settings. Lourdes Hurtado’s study of a military manual from 1940s Peru for indigenous, often illiterate recruits deals with a situation when textbooks might be the first media in which pupils encounter authoritative pictures. In more recent times, popular media offer rival visual narratives about events discussed and depicted in textbooks. Jessica Fernanda Conejo Muñoz, Daniel Veloza-Franco, and Julieta de Icaza Lizaola, in their article about images of the Pacific War in Japanese and American textbooks, write about an era of ubiquitous films and manga about the same war. They consider the “off-screen space” as the “structural principle” of what is perceived. Thus the images contained in textbooks are considered in relation to the visual environment at large, as one type of agent among others in the network of social, national, and international relations. Horst-Alfred Heinrich and Claudia Azcuy Becquer focus squarely on the larger visual context in their analysis of historical references in the covers of the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* over several decades. Christophe Busch addresses the difficult topic of visuals of the Holocaust. Moving away from the much debated question of the limits of representation of genocides of this scale, he discusses the educational value that Holocaust images, most of them produced by the perpetrators, may have today. He criticizes the widespread use of such images to produce feelings of shock, and instead advocates an approach that would bridge intuitive and affective “looking” and rational and analytical “seeing.” Together, he argues, these two forms of perception can bring about what, following Hannah Arendt, he calls visual “moments of truth” that could be related to other visual and non-visual contexts to create a “pluralized understanding of the Holocaust.”

As these examples show, one important contribution of visual studies to our topic is to make us reflect on how the role of pictures in history textbooks changes in an era when their claim to being a privileged visual pathway to the past has become shaky, as pupils in their daily lives are constantly surrounded by easily produced and manipulated images, many of them purporting to represent the past.

Another contribution is to alert us to the power relations embedded in scopical practices: in the ways pupils are made to look at pictures, but also in the ways pictures look back at them. This is a crucial perspective

that helps us to move away from the analysis of visual “discourse”³³ or “representation”³⁴ embedded in the semiological background of the field.

As W. J. T. Mitchell, perhaps the most forceful advocate of this approach, phrased it: “A poetics of pictures...is a study of ‘the lives of images’....The question to ask pictures from the standpoint of a poetics is not just what they mean or do but what they *want*—what claim they make upon us, and how we are to respond.”³⁵ At the height of the visual turn, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen published their seminal textbook *Reading Images*, which attempts to establish a “grammar of visual design” that goes beyond the narrative functions of visuals to take into account aspects such as the implied position of the viewer, composition, or materiality.

A similar desire to go beyond treating pictures merely as forms of representation informs most of the articles in this issue. Each in their own way, the authors try to consider the visual materials in history textbooks—or other settings of history education—as multidimensional agents that pupils interact with and which shape their experiences of the past and the present.

Christophe Busch discusses the power relations in perpetrator photography of the Holocaust and what they mean for educational uses of such photographs. Mischa Gabowitsch discusses how exposing pupils to pictures of war memorials can be used to establish different types of pre-discursive familiarity—a close emotional connection with a picture that breeds a kind of intimacy that precedes an articulated vision of what the pictures represent. Anna Topolska’s analysis of war photographs in post-1989 Polish high school history textbooks draws on Roland Barthes’s distinction between *studium* (culturally conditioned ways of seeing) and *punctum* (the instinctive, beyond-cultural response to photographs or other pictures—the way they “shoot straight to the gut”³⁶) and adds Michel de Certeau’s notion of *spectrality* (ways in which elements of the past can continue to exercise agency in the present through pictures)—all of which can help us to move beyond thinking of pictures as simple “representations” of the past.

Visual History: From Representations of the Past to the Agency of Pictures

This kind of reflection about how images from the past act in the present points to the contributions of the emerging field of *visual history* to understanding the diverse uses and effects of visuals in the context of history education. Despite a tradition of skepticism, historians have long used visuals as historical sources.³⁷ More recently, however, largely influenced by visual studies, they have started acknowledging visual histories as

independent genres of historical narrative and as agents in social relations able to collapse temporalities and influence social change.

In a pioneering essay that seeks to define visual history, Daniela Bleichmar and Vanessa R. Schwartz propose approaching images not only as media providing an access to the past—a type of historical source—but also as media actively participating in creating views of the past—a type of historical narrative. Moreover, writing about the social functions of images in past eras, they stress that images “also worked as key means through which audiences could create and sustain new social relations, which included new ideas regarding time and space.”³⁸

The concept, according to another definition of visual history,

encompasses all those spheres which appear at the meeting point of history/historiography, photography, film, fine arts, the new media, and every visualization of the past and of historical knowledge. Its purpose, on the one hand, is to point to the role which the (audio)visual presentations play in the creation of historical performances (imagininations about the past) as an alternative to academic historiography. On the other hand, to indicate research methods useful for the analysis of audiovisual presentations of the past, as forms of reflection about the past that are relatively new and equivalent to written history.³⁹

These novel approaches prompt us to go beyond the pragmatic questions often addressed to visuals in history textbooks by education scholars who try to gauge their accuracy as historical sources and their efficacy when conveying complex historical information and developing skills of critical analysis. While such questions retain their importance, the authors in this issue go further by exploring a wider variety of ways in which visuality contributes to the formation of social subjects, their participation in the world, and their engagement with the past.

In other words, what unites the diverse contributions assembled here is an interest in the agency of pictures in the context of history education—in the multifaceted effects they can have on viewers beyond those intended by their creators and those who decide to include them in history textbooks. The ability to recognize and navigate these effects is what we call visual literacy, and the overarching ambition of this issue is to contribute toward understanding the components of and developing visual literacy.

In setting this objective, we are, of course, fully aware of how problematic the notion of visual literacy is, especially when trying to go beyond a text-centered approach to textbooks. In his first contributions to delineating the field of visual studies and announcing the “pictorial turn,” W. J. T. Mitchell questioned the term in order better to distinguish between verbal and visual aspects of culture. He argued against

reducing the perception of images to an act of “reading” them.⁴⁰ However, that influential intervention did not preclude further discussion of the concept. Writing in 2007 about the uses and limitations of the term in a conference volume dedicated to the concept, James Elkins advocated preserving it because “the tropes of reading are unavoidable in talk about images..., and visual literacy has the virtue of not trying to solve that structural problem.”⁴¹ He also pointed approvingly to existing vernacular uses of the term in pedagogy, where it refers, for example, to pupils’ ability to “identify Michelangelo’s David.”⁴² Moreover, Elkins and many of the authors he assembled agreed that competing terms, such as visual competence, visual practices or visual skills, are either too vague or too narrow. W. J. T. Mitchell, in his contribution, departed from his earlier reticence. He proposed treating the term as a metaphor, defining it as a higher level of visual competence. The latter, according to him, is a baseline skill, like the ability to read; visual literacy, by contrast, is “connoisseurship: rich, highly cultivated, and trained experiences and techniques of visual observation.”⁴³

Like the contributors to that volume, we believe the term remains useful to discussions about pedagogy and visuality. A decade and a half later, it has acquired new meanings and urgency. The proliferation of fake news and deep fakes has posed new challenges to education, media, and the law in what has been called the “post-truth society.”⁴⁴ These developments have brought the notion of truth and its ethical implications back to the forefront of public debate after the postmodern era had declared it to be relative. Since so much of what we discuss when talking about truth and fakes belongs to the realm of the visual, visual literacy acquires a new practical significance.⁴⁵

In this context, we believe that a visual analysis of history textbooks may contribute to the understanding of how pupils in various temporal and geographical contexts develop visual literacy, or visual literacies, whether the process is intentional or unintentional.

Toward Visual Literacy: Useful Distinctions when Approaching the Visual Components of History Textbooks

One of the central questions of visual studies in general, one that is also pertinent to visual literacy and specifically the visual analysis of history textbooks, is how to do justice to the specificity of the visual experience, especially when trying to convey our analysis verbally. How do we make sure we can understand and properly express the claims that images make on us? How do we know whether our individual subjective impressions can help others to make sense of an image?

Different authors have answered this question differently. One answer is to accept that there will always be a subjective element to our visual experience, one that can never be fully reduced to culturally conditioned ways of seeing that have been referred to as scopic regimes⁴⁶ or the “period eye.”⁴⁷ That is the main point of the distinction between *studium* and *punctum* in our encounters with photography proposed by Roland Barthes, which Anna Topolska adopts and expands in her contribution to this issue. The advantage of this approach, shared in part by Lourdes Hurtado in her analysis of a single Peruvian textbook, is that it takes into account the subjective impact that a photo, or other picture, can make on the viewer, including the pupil viewer.

Another solution that also attempts to give room to subjective impressions is to look at pictures repeatedly without immediately analyzing them. This was the approach adopted by Beatrice Sarlos in her analysis of nineteenth century schoolbook illustrations of Native Americans in the United States. As a result, she wrote, “slowly, certain features impressed on me.”⁴⁸

A pragmatic approach favored by the social scientists Horst-Alfred Heinrich and Claudia Azcuy Becquer in their contribution to this issue is to rely on intercoder agreement in the way they categorize the meaning and historical references of cover images of the magazine *Der Spiegel*. Their quantitative study also reveals differences in meaning and visual presentation that only become evident through large scale diachronic comparison. This is also the strategy used by Mischa Gabowitsch and, to some extent, Tamara P. Trošt and Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc in their studies of images in (post-)Soviet and post-Yugoslav history textbooks. Moreover, both of these articles draw on the contrasts between the different republics of former multiethnic socialist states in order to discover similarities and differences.

In part, these differences in approach derive from the different types of illustrations studied by each of the authors. Trošt and Mihajlović Trbovc consider the widest array of visual elements, discussing how flags and coats of arms, timelines, photographs, reproductions of artistic works, and especially maps are used for nation-building in textbooks across former Yugoslavia. Their focus is on the dialectic interplay between the visual and the textual in symbolically constructing a nation. The contributions by Busch, by Muñoz, Veloza-Franco, and de Icaza Lizaola, and by Topolska focus primarily on historical photography, the main genre used to represent the twentieth century in history textbooks. The article by Heinrich and Azcuy Becquer looks at cover art—a hybrid genre replete with montages that are typically eschewed in traditional history textbook illustrations. Both drawings and photographs are analyzed in Hurtado’s article about a single Peruvian textbook and in Gabowitsch’s large-scale

study of war memorials in Soviet and post-Soviet history textbooks; both Hurtado and Gabowitsch discuss similarities and mutual influences between the two genres and the ways in which they prompt different forms of identification and familiarity with the nation.

In spite of their differences, these approaches point to the value of learning in order to distinguish between different ways in which we approach the visual layer of history textbooks. Ultimately, visual literacy is precisely the schooled way of looking that is informed by critical engagement with different ways of distinguishing between types of visuals.

One crucial distinction is that between images used as mere illustrations and those included as historical sources. Studying Spanish history textbooks across different eras, Rafael Valls Montés has been particularly forceful in upholding the conviction that visual documents should be provided as historical documents that are explicitly decrypted in the accompanying text, with clear guidance about how pupils can engage with them deeply. When used for purely illustrative purposes, Valls Montés has argued, images play a “decorative and sentimental” role, are prone to anachronism, and remain entirely subordinated to the text instead of adding anything useful in their own right.⁴⁹ Analyzing historical illustrations in Spanish primary school social studies textbooks published in the twenty-first century, Juan Carlos Bel, Juan Carlos Colomer Rubio, and Rafael Valls Montés found that many of the numerous images included are not at all related to the text they accompany.⁵⁰ Thus even in our hypervisual era, illustrations in history textbooks often retain the purely decorative function they typically had in the early modern age and, the authors conclude, do not develop complex skills of critical analysis that constitute the essence of visual literacy.

In contrast, in the early years of the visual studies boom, Theo van Leeuwen argued that the very term “illustration” loses its usefulness once images in textbooks are no longer structurally subordinated to texts. When books are primarily structured by, and mostly contain, visuals, we are faced with truly multimodal products in which words are added to a visual base rather than the other way around.⁵¹

One reason scholars tend to be critical of purely illustrative uses of visuals in history textbooks is that this often means using pictures for their emotional value rather than as heuristic visualization devices that add to our knowledge. Deliberate emotionalization through visuals is often associated with authoritarian or even totalitarian regimes. Valls Montés cites an illustrated Spanish primary school history textbook from the early Franco era whose author wanted children to read about and see “exemplary names and glorious deeds...not necessarily to increase their knowledge. Knowledge is not everything...What is decisive is for the lesson to have a profoundly impressive effect and to cause shudders of emotions!”⁵² Mischa Gabowitsch’s study of pictures of war memorials

in Soviet and post-Soviet textbooks in this issue similarly examines deliberate efforts to instill an emotional connection with a glorious past, the Soviet motherland, and with pupils' local region. Lourdes Hurtado interprets the visuality of the textbook, on the one hand, as a reflection of pupils' everyday experience in the barracks and their associated emotions and, on the other, as a source of a set of shared symbols in relation to which they could identify themselves.

On the surface, democratic societies tend to be warier of encouraging emotions in depictions of the past. In West Germany, the principles of political education codified in 1976 as a compromise between different political tendencies, known as the Beutelsbach Consensus, include a mandate to teach the controversy and a ban on emotionally "overpowering" or indoctrinating pupils.⁵³ However, even in democracies, historical and civic education never completely dispenses with emotions. Historians of emotions have drawn on advances in neuroscience in order to argue for "cognotive" or "cogffective" paradigms that dispense with an ultimately untenable distinction between cognition and emotion,⁵⁴ and the vibrant new field of public history is profoundly aware of the fact that our relationship with the past always carries an emotional component. More specifically, it would be strange to deny that, even outside authoritarian settings, historical pictures are expected to produce emotional effects on a range that differs from, though it may overlap with, that prevalent in authoritarian societies. Whereas patriotism and hatred of enemies may dominate in the latter, indignation at past injustice and empathy with victims are often among the feelings that history education in the former seeks to stir through the use of visuals. Once we accept that emotional effects are an irreducible aspect of visuals, we can evaluate not only the heuristic but also the emotional value and effectiveness of illustrations in textbooks.⁵⁵

This focus on emotions is all the more important if we take into account the fact that history education is not limited to secondary school settings, the focus of most debates about fostering critical thinking. The articles collected here address visuals that pupils encountered at different ages and in different settings. Whereas most focus on history textbooks for teenagers (or other visuals that might be used in secondary level history education), Hurtado analyzes a primer for previously uneducated adults, and Gabowitsch's data set ranges from primary school history primers to textbooks for the final years of secondary schools. While there have been some pioneering studies of visuals in history textbooks used in primary schools,⁵⁶ these two studies point to the particular importance that is attached to emotionally stirring illustrations of national history in authoritarian contexts, especially in textbooks aimed at recent or future army recruits.

Outlook

The articles collected here also indicate important directions for future research. One fundamental question that the authors could barely touch on given the sources at their disposal is how to measure and analyze the impact that visuals in history textbooks have on pupils in actual classroom settings. The grand claims that have sometimes been made by scholars intent on doing justice to the “visual turn” inevitably remain speculative. Thus Beatrice Sarlos asserted that “processing verbal information differs significantly from processing visual data, and the processes take place in different areas of the brain” and stated that she focused “on what pictures were presented to nineteenth century school children, because their memories *likely* remained with them throughout their youth, perhaps even their entire life, influencing their attitudes and prompting their actions long after they had forgotten the texts to which they had been companions” (emphasis added).⁵⁷

Yet somewhat counterintuitively, more recent empirical studies using methods such as eye-tracking suggest that pupils often pay much closer attention to textual elements than to the increasingly ubiquitous pictures.⁵⁸ Pictures appear to attract a more fleeting kind of attention than text, making pictures of, for example, public monuments similar to the monuments themselves, which, in Robert Musil’s famous observation, remain invisible until something makes them stand out. At the same time, there are indications that length of attention is not necessarily correlated with depth of comprehension.⁵⁹

Ideally, we need to develop approaches that go beyond treating text and images as rival elements of (history) textbooks, vying for pupils’ attention and fundamentally different from each other in their cognitive and affective impact. In singling out visuals for analysis in this issue, we are magnifying an aspect of history textbooks and other educational media that has remained in the shadows of traditional discourse-centric analysis. But the ultimate goal, as Theo van Leeuwen and others argued as far back as the early 1990s, should be to develop tools that would do full justice to the multimodal nature of such media. This involves paying attention to the visual aspects of text and textual elements in visuals, and going beyond dichotomies which posit that pictures merely reinforce or illustrate texts, or else text becomes subservient to pictures.

Furthermore, building in particular on the contributions by Conejo Muñoz, Veloza-Franco and de Icaza Lizaola, by Busch, and by Heinrich and Azcuy Becquer in this issue, we need more systematic studies of how visuals in textbooks are shaped by and interact with the wider visual context. This might mean examining how visuals in textbooks and their perception by pupils are shaped by the visual culture that surrounds them in their everyday lives. Yet it could also involve exploring how museums,

memory activists, media producers, and other actors of education and public history interact with the visual canon with which school textbooks familiarize pupils.

In studying this interaction and mutual influence, there is broad scope for collaboration between scholars in the fields of education, museum studies, visual studies, and public history.

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Notes

1. Annekatriin Bock, "Theories and Methods of Textbook Studies," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Textbook Studies*, ed. Eckhardt Fuchs and Annekatriin Bock (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 62.
2. *Ibid.*, 67.
3. In German, Michael Sauer's *Bilder im Geschichtsunterricht: Typen, Interpretationsmethoden, Unterrichtsverfahren* [Images in history education: types, interpretive methods, teaching techniques] (Seelze-Velber: Kallmeyer'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2000) has become the standard reference work and guidebook on the topic and is now in its sixth edition.
4. Carsten Heinze and Eva Matthes, eds., *Das Bild im Schulbuch. Beiträge zur historischen und systematischen Schulbuchforschung* [The image in school

- textbooks: papers on historical and systematic textbook research] (Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt, 2010) perhaps comes closest, as roughly half of the contributions deal with visuals in history textbooks.
5. Rafael Valls, "Bilder in den spanischen Geschichtsbüchern von 1900 bis 1990" [Images in Spanish history textbooks from 1900 to 1990], translated by Verena Radkau García, *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 16, no. 4 (1994): 423–445; Jeannie Bauvois, "Images comparées de la Grande Guerre dans les manuels d'histoire allemands et français de la première moitié du XXème siècle" [A comparison of images of the Great War in German and French history textbooks from the first half of the twentieth century], *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 22, no. 3 (2000): 349–366.
 6. Detlef Mittag, "Schulgeschichtsatlanten – eine Quelle ethnozentrischer Selbstbilder?" [School history atlases—a source of ethnocentric self-images?], *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 21, no. 3 (1999): 217–234.
 7. Here we echo Carsten Heinze, "Das Bild im Schulbuch. Zur Einführung" [Images in school textbooks. Introduction], in *Das Bild im Schulbuch*, ed. Heinze and Matthes, 9–13, here 11.
 8. Raimundo Cuesta Fernández, *Sociogénesis de una disciplina escolar: la historia* [The sociogenesis of a school subject: history] (Barcelona: Pomares-Corredor, 1997), 19.
 9. *Ibid.*, 28–29.
 10. See Adam Fijałkowski, *Orbis Pictus. Świat malowany Jana Amosa Komeńskiego – Orbis Pictus. Die Welt in Bildern des Johann Amos Comenius* [Orbis pictus. John Amos Comenius's world in images] (Warsaw: Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2008); Peter Menck, "Bilder – Bildung – Weltbild" [Images—education—worldview], in *Das Bild im Schulbuch*, ed. Heinze and Matthes, 17–31.
 11. Claude Buffier, *Nouveaux éléments d'Histoire et de Geografie A l'usage des Pensionnaires du Collège de Louis Le Grand* [New elements of history and geography for the use of pupils of the Collège Louis-Le-Grand] (Paris: Marc Bordelet, 1731), digitized version available at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k65442206/f22.item>.
 12. Jean-Baptiste Philippoteau Duchesne, *Abbrégé de l'histoire d'Espagne* [A short history of Spain] (Paris: Chaubert; Lambert & Durant, 1761), digitized version available at <https://books.google.com/books?id=qWFgxEACAAJ>.
 13. Philippe Renaud, "L'enseignement de l'histoire suisse dans le Canton de Vaud, 1848–1941. Analyse de six manuels: programmes, enjeux de pouvoirs et contenus didactiques" [Teaching Swiss history in the canton of Vaud, 1848–1941. An analysis of six textbooks: programs, power struggles, and educational content] (MA thesis, Haute école pédagogique, Lausanne, 2010), 6; <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/20656026.pdf>.
 14. For Spain, for example, see Cuesta Fernández, *Sociogénesis de una disciplina escolar*.
 15. For textbooks on foreign languages and cultures, see the detailed analysis in Marcus Reinfried, "Landeskundliche Abbildungen in Französischlehrbüchern. Eine historische Darstellung" [Images of France in French as a foreign language textbooks. A history], *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 16, no. 4 (1994), 465–503; for nineteenth century US textbooks, see Beatrice

- Sarlos, "Noble Savage to Indian Fairy: An Analysis of 19th Century School-book Illustrations of Native Americans," *ibid.*, 397–422.
16. *Ibid.*, 413.
 17. Valls, "Bilder in den spanischen Geschichtsbüchern," 425.
 18. See Marina Balina and Serguei Alex Oushakine, *The Pedagogy of Images: Depicting Communism for Children* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2021).
 19. Serguei Alex Oushakine, "Introduction," in *The Pedagogy of Images*, Marina Balina and Serguei Alex. Oushakine, 3–49, here 29–30.
 20. Valls, "Bilder in den spanischen Geschichtsbüchern," 434 n. 14.
 21. English translation: Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (London: E. Arnold & Co., 1924). For a detailed analysis of Huizinga's views on art and visibility, see Francis Haskell, *History and its Images. Art and the Interpretation of the Past* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press), 431–495.
 22. Eemeli Hakoköngäs et al., "Remembering War through Images: Visual Narratives of the Finnish Civil War in History Textbooks from the 1920s to the 2010s," *Memory Studies* 14, no. 5 (2021), doi: 10.1177/1750698020959812, 1002–1017, here 1006.
 23. Jacques Barzun, "Teaching and Research in History Today," *The History Teacher* 19, no. 4 (1986), 517–525, here 523.
 24. Groupe µ, *Traité du signe visuel: pour une rhétorique de l'image* [A treatise on the visual sign: for a rhetoric of the image] (Paris: Seuil, 1992).
 25. Beatrice Sarlos, "Noble Savage to Indian Fairy," 401.
 26. Ferdinand Fellmann, *Symbolischer Pragmatismus. Hermeneutik nach Dilthey* [Symbolic pragmatism: hermeneutics after Dilthey] (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1991).
 27. W. J. T. Mitchell, "The Pictorial Turn," *ArtForum* 30, no. 7 (1992), 89–94.
 28. Gottfried Boehm, ed., *Was ist ein Bild?* [What is an image?] (Munich: Fink, 1994).
 29. Klaus Sachs-Hombach, *Das Bild als kommunikatives Medium* [The image as a communicative medium] (Cologne: Herbert von Halem-Verlag, 2003).
 30. Especially Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception, which inspired the concept of the *punctum* that Roland Barthes famously brought to the analysis of photography.
 31. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 5.
 32. *Ibid.*, 7.
 33. Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (London: Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2001).
 34. The most important work here is perhaps Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997). Hall's understanding of culture as a practice of making sense, producing, and exchanging meanings also underpins Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright's *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). A similar understanding of the visual as a kind of language led to the development of the sub-field of visual rhetoric. See Lester C. Olson, Cara A. Finnegan, Diane S. Hope, eds., *Visual Rhetoric. A Reader in Communication and American Culture* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008).

35. W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), xv.
36. Sarlos, "Noble Savage to Indian Fairy," 400.
37. See Haskell, *History and Its Images*.
38. Daniela Bleichmar, Vanessa R. Schwartz, "Visual History: The Past in Pictures," *Representations* 145, no. 1 (2019), 1–31, here 5. doi: 10.1525/rep.2019.145.1.1.
39. Dorota Skotarczak, *Historia wizualna* [Visual History] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, 2013), 4.
40. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 14.
41. James Elkins, "Introduction: The Concept of Visual Literacy, and Its Limitations," in *Visual Literacy*, ed. James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1.
42. Ibid.
43. W. J. T. Mitchell, "Visual Literacy or Literary Visualcy? and Four Fundamental Concepts of Image Science," in *Visual Literacy*, ed. Elkins, 11–30, here 13–14.
44. Alex Grech, ed., *Media, Technology and Education in a Post-Truth Society: From Fake News, Datafication and Mass Surveillance to the Death of Trust* (Bingley: Emerald Publishing, 2021).
45. Ibidem, especially the essays in this collection by Massimiliano Fusari, Górg Mallia, and Anna Topolska, which specifically touch upon the problem of visual literacy.
46. Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), 3–23.
47. Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).
48. Sarlos, "Noble Savage to Indian Fairy," 401.
49. Valls, "Bilder in den spanischen Geschichtsbüchern," 423.
50. Juan Carlos Bel, Juan Carlos Colomer Rubio, and Rafael Valls Montés, "Alfabetización visual y desarrollo del pensamiento histórico: actividades con imágenes en manuales escolares" [Teaching visual literacy skills and the development of historical thinking: activities with images in school textbooks], *Educación XXI* 22, no. 1 (2019): 353–374, here 368. doi: 10.5944/educXXI.20008.
51. Theo van Leeuwen, "The Schoolbook as a Multimodal Text," *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 14, no. 1 (1992), 35–58.
52. A. Serrano de Haro, *Yo soy español. Libro de primer grado de historia* [I am Spanish. First year history textbook] (Madrid: Escuela Española, 1943), 5f., cited in Valls, "Bilder in den spanischen Geschichtsbüchern," 437 n. 20.
53. Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Baden-Württemberg, "Beutelsbacher Konsens" [Beutelsbach Consensus] [1976], www.lpb-bw.de/beutelsbacher-konsens.html. For a critical discussion of this declaration, see Benedikt Widmaier and Peter Zorn, eds., *Brauchen wir den Beutelsbacher Konsens? Eine Debatte der politischen Bildung* [Do we need the Beutelsbach Consensus? A debate in political education] (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2016).
54. Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, translated by Keith Tribe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 246.

55. Sarlos, "Noble Savage to Indian Fairy," 401.
56. Such as Bel, Colomer Rubio, and Valls Montés, "Alfabetización visual."
57. Sarlos, "Noble Savage to Indian Fairy," 401.
58. Although these studies need to be read with caution due to the laboratory setting, the small number and lack of geographical diversity of test subjects, and their higher than average level of education, such as twenty high school and university students from Potsdam in a study focusing on geography textbooks (Yvonne Behnke, "Wie betrachten und bewerten Lernende Geographieschulbuchseiten?" [How do learners observe and assess geography textbook pages?], *Zeitschrift für Geographiedidaktik* 44, no. 3 [2016], 5–34, here 14), and the fact that eye-tracking studies typically present sample textbook pages on a screen rather than as hard copies, thus altering the material, haptic, and visual feel of the page. See also: Wolfgang Schnotz et al., "Focus of Attention and Choice of Text Modality in Multimedia Learning," *European Journal of Psychology of Education* 29, no. 3 (2014), 483–501; Yvonne Behnke, "How Textbook Design May Influence Learning with Geography Textbooks," *Norddidactica – Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education* 6, no. 1 (2016), 38–62.
59. Kirk St. Amant and Lisa Melonçon, "The Attention-Comprehension Gap: A Framework for Rethinking Information Design," *Intercom* 62, no. 2 (2015), 15–17.