

Visual Historical Methods

Problems, Prospects, Applications

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Western historical scholarship has always been marked by a *logocentric* imperative, using words as preferred source materials and modes of expression.¹ As Charles Tilly (1990) noted, "Written documents constitute the historian's stock in trade, the ability to locate and read relevant documents makes up a significant part of the trade's secrets, and members of the trade recognize the skillful deployment of documents as good craftsmanship" (689). In contradistinction, visual images typically have been either absent from historical research or employed for purely decorative purposes.^{2,3} Images have not been used analytically and critically as source material, data, or evidence. For example, very little work has been conducted on the methodology of the photograph as research material: the deployment of images is not considered a craft worth practicing, studying, or even discussing.⁴

Such a logocentric imbalance seems untenable, however, given the importance of images in history and their possible utility to the historian. There is a case to be made that images can function as active and determining historical forces. The image, often constructed as part of a persuasion or propaganda campaign, can influence the destiny of nations as much as economic fluctuation or climate change.⁵ Moreover, even when no claim can be made that they have influenced historical events, visual images can be useful tools for historical researchers. They allow us to catalogue and order historical persons, objects, and actions, to document what happened during historical periods, to understand how people in the past viewed their world, and to analyze contemporary society by examining how we visualize our history. The visual historian may thus pursue two lines of inquiry: first, to ask what sociohistorical forces influenced the origin, production, dissemination, function, ideology, and survival of visual images; and, second, to ask how visual images themselves may have influenced social and/or historical mindsets, conditions, or events. The visual image is therefore not employed simply as a means to illustrate verbal or written discourse. Historical work is narrow in its focus if it ignores the possibility that visual images may be part of the data worth analyzing.

Fortunately, the craftsmanship of visual history employs practices not unfamiliar to historians. However, visual

images cannot be analyzed exactly in the same way as written texts because of the differences between the ways in which verbal-written and visual messages are constructed, received, and perceived. Here I explore the parameters of these differences and their implications for historical research. At the same time, I will relate some problems encountered in an ongoing study of photographic self-representations of the World War II-era German *Waffen SS* (the armed or fighting wing of the SS). In discussing this study and others, my intention is not to define strict guidelines for incorporating visual images into the historical method. Rather, I consider ways that visual images might broaden the historian's craft.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VISUAL AND WRITTEN TEXTS

Words and images organize information in different ways. Word texts (in alphabetic languages) contain natural units of meaning such as letters, words, sentences, or paragraphs. In addition, words in a written language are usually encountered or read in a strictly predictable, regular, and linear fashion and direction. In contradistinction, the separations between the forms and objects within an image are often defined by subtle gradations (analogically) rather than easily parsed out and discrete units (digitally). Moreover, as Leonardo da Vinci (1956, 35) noted, all the elements of a picture are visible "simultaneously, at one glance, just as things are in nature." The entire visual "document" is available for interpretation by the viewer immediately, and the path of reception is difficult to predict (see Langer 1957, 73).

These conditions have profound implications for the analysis of an image. Modern data-search software has radically simplified the content analysis of word texts; entire sections of literature and documents, from classical to modern times, are now on disk and can be quickly scanned for key words. For example, the biblical scholar's work has been greatly aided by the appearance of Hebrew and Christian holy texts in computerized form, often in multiple editions (e.g., *King James, New International*) or language versions (e.g., Aramaic, Hebrew,

Greek, English). Yet not even digitized photographs can be scanned to retrieve and record every instance of some concrete action or object, let alone some concept or idea. The formal, substantive, and contextual elements that comprise a visual image defy simple categorization into discrete units such as individual words or sentences.

Another critical difference between words and images arises from the traditional conception that images are simple forms of communication, whereas words are complex. The photograph is largely perceived to be convention-, value-, and bias-free and thus an objective recorder of the world.⁶ Being so simple, they are relegated to serving illustrative or decorative purposes: the obvious exceptions are archaeological artifacts or those rare images accorded high value and status as art. This prejudice is encouraged by the ecological context of modern viewing. In an overwhelmingly multifaceted, complex visual world, we are assaulted by legions of images trying to sell us products that—the images imply—will magically transform us into happier, more popular, and more sexually attractive people (Berger 1972; Ewen 1988; Marchand 1985). Such images are meant to flicker and flood over us and are not presented for our leisurely, critical inspection. Even news images are presented as natural windows onto the world; no journalist thinks it important to get both visual sides of a story. In sum, we are encouraged to trust the veridicality and verisimilitude of the image world, not to analyze its components closely.

Moreover, whereas words can state abstract ideas or projections of future actions, images can only show objects, actions, and forms existing in a sort of perpetual present. One can state, for example, “I am a patriot,” but because much of visual meaning is implicit this idea can only be suggested visually through association with observable symbols of patriotism—fluttering flags, for example (Ebong 1989; Messaris 1992, 1994). Also, as the late visual anthropologist Sol Worth put it, “Pictures can’t say ain’t . . . A picture cannot depict [that] ‘This picture is not the case,’ or ‘This picture is not true’” (Worth 1981, 162–84). Further, images cannot lie in the way that words can. The “truth” of an image depends on what we expect it to be representing; a painting of a fantastic scene is not false if it is labeled as such (Gombrich 1969, 65–67). If a picture captioned “Dead Serbs killed by Muslims” is recaptioned “Dead Muslims killed by Serbs,” one or both sets of words may be wholly or partially false. The picture remains the same, however; only the context of interpretation has changed.

Finally, the paradox of the image is that although it can only show narrow particulars in time and space, it can also fix the mind’s attention and suggest or be taken as encapsulating a generalized condition. For example, in current history a single video of police brutality was taken as standing for a nationwide problem; the issue was driven to prominence because of the vivid image, not any verified social trends. Alternately, we are unable to focus on problems that

do not receive the attention of news cameras (the genocide in the Sudan, East Timor, and so forth) or are not in themselves visually compelling (the onset of the Savings and Loan crisis, for example).

Increasingly, vivid images also make local problems in other countries into immediate issues of world concern (Øyen 1990, 3), our ability to do something about them notwithstanding. In short, we seem inclined and primed to leap from the solitary image or the absence of an image to sweeping conclusions about global “reality” (Nelkin 1987, 178). This is not a unique quality of images, but it is an obvious and troubling source of their power. Indeed, taken from the point of view of visual history, the last several centuries mark the increasing commercial and political importance of pictures as tools of communication and persuasion (see Hartley 1992, 6).

THE ELEMENTS OF MEANING IN HISTORICAL IMAGES

It is obvious that different viewers can “receive” different meanings from an image. Visual historical research must begin with *primary historical meanings*, that is, meanings associated with an image by those who created it (see Baxandall 1985, 1988). This allows the discovery of a standard on which to compare any future developments or variations in an image’s meaning (intended or received). The actual types of meaning sought by visual historians, whether primary or relating to subsequent uses or interpretations of images, are similar to types of meaning generated or represented in word texts. However, as suggested previously, meanings are expressed differently by words and images. The following, then, are ways of thinking about the parts or elements of a visual image and the meanings they denote or connote.⁷ Of course, various possible meanings coexist or are perceived to coexist in any one image.

Production Meaning

Pictures are constructed material objects; we may ask the questions: How (by what physical production processes) was this image created? Who (creator and patrons) produced this image? What organizational, normative, or bureaucratic procedures and protocols influenced the production? In addition to establishing an image’s provenance or parentage, knowledge of how it was produced may be helpful in understanding its content. For example, a modern viewer of stilted and posed pictures of objects and people in mid-nineteenth-century photographs might conclude that life in that time was static and placid. This interpretation would be undercut by knowledge that the various photographic processes of the period required at least several minutes for a negative plate to be properly exposed, and the capturing of objects in action was therefore not feasible.

Content Identification Meaning

This meaning subsumes four types of manifest content (what is to be seen rather than what is to be inferred) in the image. All of these may assist the historian in reconstructing past objects, events, and lives: (1) *Object identification* determines what living and material objects are shown in the image. However, the historian also attempts to identify the object's particular visual qualities and its relationship to its historical circumstance. (2) *Spatial identification* asks two questions: where was the image made and where are the contents shown to exist? In the case of paintings, the two sites may be different: an artist living in Texas may paint a scene set in ancient Rome. In the case of photographs, the sites are identical, with the photographer, camera, and subjects in the same location at the time the photo was taken. (3) *Temporal identification* also involves answering two questions: when was the image made and what temporal setting is represented as existing within the image? Again, photographs assume an interconnection between the picture's moment of genesis and the scene depicted. (4) *Narrative identification*: What objects and characters engage in which actions in the images, and how are these events ordered and structured to tell a story, tale, or a sort of visualized anecdote?⁸

Functional Meaning

What function did the image serve in the provenance of its creation? Was its function private (in the home) or public (in a newspaper)? Was it used in a certain way, for a certain end (e.g., in photojournalism or police criminal files, or as pure ornamentation or entertainment)? The identification of function is critical to understanding an image-maker's intentions.

"Expressional" Meaning

A picture may have an affective, evocative, or emotional meaning that comprises two realms. What emotions are represented as being expressed by the subjects within the image? What emotions are meant to be elicited from the viewer?⁹ An example would be a close-up picture of a crying girl that is meant to increase our sympathy for her plight as well as make us feel sad.

Figurative Meaning

Here a host of possible devices are suggested, all analogous to literary tropes. Generally this is what the image's context, content, form, or style suggest about other things, perhaps not even visible in the frame or discussed in the associated words. Common examples include metaphorical meaning (a comparison between two things is implied) and synecdochical meaning (where a part of a person, place, or

object stands for the whole or other wholes). In general, tropes are created by conventions of culture and history. However, it is suggested that there are alliterative meanings that are cross-cultural and transhistorical due to universal human experience. There is a visual convention of photographing a subject from a low angle to imply that the subject has power or strength and is "big," while shooting from a high angle implies that the subject is "small," weak, or powerless (cf. Keplinger 1991; Messaris 1992, 1994; B. Schwartz 1981; Zettl 1990, 216–19). A low angle would be analogous to our looking up at the subject; a high camera angle has us looking down; at eye level, we look upon the subject straight on. Messaris (1994), among others, argues that this effect is linked to a perennial human condition: beginning our lives looking up to big people who have power over us. Indeed, it may be a universal convention (from the iconography of the Pharaohs to Mao's China) that the most important figure in an image is the one represented as being the largest (in measurable surface area) or the highest in the frame.

Rhetorical-Moral Meaning

Such a meaning expresses the persuasive goal of an image that was intended by its author, patron, and/or displayer. The historian attempts to ground his or her interpretation in the political or ideological context of the image's existence, especially in cases of mass-produced imagery in the service of a state or institution. For example, a picture of a dust-bowl family taken by a photographer working for the Farm Security Administration in the United States during the 1930s was not a simple social document. It was intended to persuade the public that poverty in America was a serious enough problem to require direct and massive government assistance. To achieve that goal, the men, women, and children within the image were often photographed to look stoic and hardworking, like good and deserving poor.¹⁰ This may be taken alternatively as the moral lesson the viewer of an image is supposed to learn through the act of perception. The picture may be said to have what the Chinese call *Yi Jing*, that is, the moral, instructional, spiritual, or aesthetic qualities that are meant to be embodied and exemplified by the persons, objects, events, or styles in the image. Political images, especially instructive propaganda posters, typically contain the most explicit intonations of moral lessons. A famous World War II poster showed a drowned body accompanied by the caption, "Loose lips sink ships."

Societal or Period Meaning

What is the meaning of an image in relation to the times and the society in which it was created? Is it an expression of some wider movement or social ferment? The German term *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the time) is often used to denote some dominant stylistic trend, sociability, or taste in forms

of cultural life (e.g., literature, clothing, architecture, or the visual arts) or even politics. Thus one might say that “this artist’s paintings of ruined buildings and wasteland landscapes crystallized the nihilistic age in which he lived,” an assertion bordering on tautology, despite its popularity. In contradistinction, visual culture may react to or ignore, not reflect the times. During the first years of the Great Depression, Hollywood’s product was almost uniformly composed of upbeat and escapist movies; the Busby Berkeley musicals are good examples.

Another useful implication of social meaning for historians is the reconstruction (through relation to identified content) of social structures as revealed in images. In an analysis of many decades of photographs of poor black alley-dwellers in Washington, D.C., James Borchert (1981) found compelling visual evidence—social gatherings, open windows and doors between houses, community elders supervising children’s play—that the community members tried to maintain their family and social values despite cramped quarters.

Comparative Meaning

The principle of *comparison* in visual imagery has been addressed in great detail by Gestalt psychologists (Ellis 1938; Koffka 1935; Köhler 1947). It is a fundamental premise of filmmaking that different meanings can be created by juxtaposing or associating different objects within a frame (*mise en scène*) or between frames (editing). In brief, when we encounter two objects in proximity in a contextual field we inevitably compare their attributes by matching similarities and discerning differences. The image-maker can attempt to reduce the ambiguity of meaning by directing the process of instinctual comparison to carefully framed and selected objects. Thus, a picture of a healthy man and a sickly man standing side by side invites us to note their similarities and differences.

All the above meanings could be perceived as residing within any particular image; whichever meanings the historian seeks out are dependent on the aims of the research.

THE PRACTICAL CONCERNS OF VISUAL HISTORY

Most of the methods and issues (e.g., sampling and comprehensiveness) involved in assessing the previously mentioned meanings from visual texts are similar to those used by historical researchers. However, the unique nature of visual media and of their reception and use in society (the way visual images imply meanings and are taken to represent general conditions, for example) requires researchers to develop innovative methods of analysis. Here I consider some methodological concerns directly related to using images as historical evidence or to asking historical questions about images, connecting each step to my own ongo-

ing study of Waffen SS photography. The intention is to assist the historian in task organization and, most importantly, in deciding whether visual treatment of the research topic is feasible and necessary.

Justify the Need for Visual Analysis

The visual historian must argue that the systematic analysis of visual images—heretofore unappreciated as sources of evidence—will concretely address or assist in addressing the research question. For example, I am interested in how shifts in historiographical thought and judgment take place and in how visual images contribute to the rendering or reversing of the so-called verdict of history. It is self-evident that the politics of the present define our view of the past. How the past is represented in visual images is as much an indication of struggles over conventions and definitions in contemporary society as it is a representation of actual historical facts. Under scrutiny in my study is the debated verdict on Nazi Germany. Nothing the Third Reich constructed institutionally remains. Its legacy is largely ideological (the recrudescence of Fascist parties and thought in Europe and elsewhere) and aesthetic (Nazi architecture, relics, and imagery that appear in fictional and historical texts). I am interested in whether a *revision* of Nazi thought and institutions is taking place and in how visual images contribute to that struggle.¹¹

The Waffen SS may be viewed as point men in the battle to rehabilitate the Third Reich. Since the 1950s, the institution’s veterans have attempted to revise the “verdict of history” and to reestablish the Waffen SS mythos, albeit usually without lauding the regime that created it (cf. Baird 1990; Sydnor 1973, 1977). Their works take the form of unit histories, memoirs, guidebooks to battlefields, biographies, and combat reminiscences all arguing that the organization was linked to the SS in name only, had no role in mass atrocities, and held duties that were purely military—above all, fighting the Russian threat (Hausser 1966; Lehmann 1987; Strassner 1988). The veterans’ voices are swelled by a chorus of modern apologists, picture and regalia book authors, and revisionists who employ the pictorial legacy created by the institution itself. Waffen SS photographs in particular appear in a host of modern works that claim to be neutral pictorial histories.

In sum, I believe that a verdict shift on the role of the Waffen SS in World War II is being attempted and that visual images are main sources of ammunition and, therefore, the focus of my study.¹² The pictures were taken by SS photographers specifically to valorize the exploits of the organization. Above all others, the men of the Waffen SS were lauded and *visually* publicized in a way analogous to today’s sports heroes (including the use of collector’s cards). Shortly before the war ended, many of the photographs and negatives disappeared—either by design or simply by chance. The total figure of existing Waffen SS

photographs probably numbers in the tens of thousands, though no global catalogue has been attempted. Some photographs are scattered in private collections, but the bulk are stored at the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz.¹³ Identification and classification of the images are assisted by the fact that most of them are labeled as showing Waffen SS men or material.¹⁴ In addition, the Waffen SS employed distinctive styles of dress and heraldry, making its members easily identifiable subjects. The historian asks how these images were created, why, for what purpose, and how their original meaning might be related to their modern usage. My rationale for looking at these visual images is simply that the photographs were an integral part of how the Waffen SS "sold" itself.

Establish the Authorship of the Visual Images

When we look at images, the very notion of authorship must be broadened. Certainly, individual authors (e.g., cameramen) are always of interest.¹⁵ However, when examining images that have been created as part of a mass-production effort, such as those of the Third Reich, it is more useful to consider the institutional or social context of production.¹⁶ To achieve the position of an image-maker in a craft or industrial setting is to subsume industrial and aesthetic norms of what an image should look like (see Becker 1982; Crane 1992; Faulkner 1976; Rosenblum 1978; Turow 1992). The mark of a professional is to know what is expected and to produce that expectation in every situation encountered. The Waffen SS photographers are often lost to history and are known only by the initials P.K. (*Propaganda Kompanie*). The SS propaganda machinery was a highly centralized bureaucracy whose standards and intentions were clear to all those working under its banner.

In visual historical studies, researchers must examine creative communities, such as photographers and their sponsors, in terms of their cognitive cohesiveness and the conventions of norm and form that constrain their vision. To describe these agencies of patronage, production, and dissemination (the setters of code, convention, and acceptability), it is useful to employ the sociological term *reference group*: "A set of people whose standards, as perceived by any given individual, are such that the individual regards the standards as particularly relevant to use as a basis for evaluating important aspects of his life . . ." (Holt 1977, 267; see also Hyman 1942; Hyman and Singer 1968; Schmitt 1972). A reference group is not determined by actual physical membership but by projected or even vicarious loyalties. To be in one group is not to be in another, and, indeed, a reference group's self-definitions are often binary: "Who am I? . . . I'm not one of them!"¹⁷ This cognitive binary fixation is doubly useful because, as I will discuss later, it is connected to principles of visual comparison.

In my study, the reference group is the Waffen SS. Evidence of the ideals that cemented the group into a cohesive

unit can be found in its historical circumstance and its legacy of visual images. I believe the organization *embodied* (the anatomical metaphor was and is purposive) the ideals of the Reich. Further, its units were recruited from most countries in Europe. The vicarious or real reference orientation was the European army; the oppositional "other" was the Jewish-Asiatic enemy.

Identify "Problems" Portrayed in the Visual Image

Art historians such as Michael Baxandall (1985, 1988) have made an elegant case that the most useful way to look at images is to reconstruct the role they played in the lives of the people who first created, paid for, displayed, and then used them. Each image-maker is thus confronted with a choice of how to frame, compose, and populate a visual field; images "may be explained by treating them as solutions to problems in situations, and by reconstructing a rational relationship between these three" (Baxandall 1985, 35). This is equally true for images produced and deployed in the interests of mass persuasion. For the Waffen SS's photography apparatus, the situations, problems, and solutions are of direct interest to my study. The Waffen SS was (and wished to be considered) the European Army of the Third Reich and was largely involved in fighting on the Eastern front. Originally a tiny elite force, it was vastly expanded in response to the fantastic losses suffered by German soldiers in the Russian campaign. It eventually comprised units from almost every country in greater Europe; at its peak a million men fought under the SS flag. The problems facing the German overlords of the Waffen SS were familiar: They had to convince young men from Belgium, France, Italy, and many other countries in German-occupied and allied Europe to enlist and then convince the citizenry of those countries that the war in the East deserved their human and material support. The bodily and symbolic solution attempted was to create and project reference group associations ("we are all Europeans") and an agreed-upon common goal ("fight the Eastern enemy").

Of course, all political leaders who engage in foreign wars have to *persuade* the public and the soldiery that their cause is worth the sacrifice of men, funds, and material. The most-often-used strategy of justification makes the case that the enemy poses an imminent threat forcing the use of preemptive actions. Claiming that Poland had attacked first, the Third Reich contended that surprise attacks on Belgium, France, and Russia were purely preemptive in nature. But simple military justification was not enough. The Nazi regime propagated the idea that the Eastern Hordes (or Yellow Peril) might overrun Europe. Indeed, the Nazi's engaged in the *bacillization* of their enemies. Propaganda campaigns created explicit analogies between enemies of the regime, especially Jews, and "bacilli" attacking healthy bodies, "maggots" eating good meat (a metaphor mentioned in *Mein Kampf*), or rats poisoning the land (as visualized in

the film *The Eternal Jew*). Traditional European fear of the “Yellow Hordes of the East” was also exploited. Through comparisons such as these, the Nazi propaganda machine was able to appeal to the Europeans’ “highest ideals” (their own superiority) and to their “lowest instincts” (other people’s inferiority) (Herzstein 1978, 18; cf. Breitman 1991, 177).

Such rich metaphors required visual images to support them, and they are evident in much of Nazi poster art. The applied problem for the SS combat photographer in the field and his many editors was to provide concrete and visually striking comparisons between the “us” and the “other.” Since it comprised detachments from most European countries, the *Waffen SS* served as an effective visual counterpoint to the Eastern enemy. The opposition was clear: Aryan (beautiful, valiant but outnumbered) vs. Asiatic (decrepit, inhuman, vast in number). In sum, the *Waffen SS* contained a variety of individuals, as does any institution, but its institutional goals and ideals as portrayed in photographs can be summarized as follows: We are *soldiers* fighting the Bolshevik/Yellow Peril enemy in the cause of Europe. One of the ongoing goals of my study is to gauge how this concept was visualized.

Practical Concerns in Data Collection and Presentation

It is a great irony of visual studies that the researcher must combat the notion that his or her task is a simple one (and thus does not display Tilly’s conspicuous “craftsmanship”); nonetheless, much visual research is not conducted or done very well because of the practical difficulties of studying images (Borchert 1981; Perlmutter 1994). While the practical problems in visual historical research are numerous, I deal here with problems related to obtaining, manipulating, and presenting visual images as documents.

The difficulties of locating primary texts are familiar, but the problem increases in complexity when we attempt to locate images important to the explication of a historical research question. No matter how obscure, written primary word sources (e.g., those from *The Assyrian Royal Archives*, *English Historical Documents*, or even *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs* [Van der Horst 1991]) are widely available in major library collections. However, there are few comparable sets of raw image databases. Most image compilations that do exist—the *Catalogue raisonne*, for example—list and show “high art” objects, such as all the images of particular artists, and are often oriented toward collectors. More significant is the fact that, even within their archives, images are arranged by content, topic, or chronology instead of by the formal or compositional determinants that need to be considered in visual analysis.

In addition, many sources of written historical information, from statistical databases to primary word sources and from classical to modern times, are now in computer format. There are almost no such sources for images. To cite

one prominent instance, the LEXIS®/NEXIS® database—a goldmine for rapid and comprehensive searching of major newspapers and magazines—contains the captions of news photos but not the images themselves. Most multimedia CD-ROM titles with a historical bent are entertainment oriented or term-paper aids, not serious research tools.

Furthermore, research is useless unless it can be communicated through publication. Most journals will not publish images without a guarantee of copyright permission and a reasonably good print (and even images in dissertations must be copyrighted to be reproduced). Words can be paraphrased within the same medium of their existence. To describe an image (that for some reason cannot be obtained for publication), one must interpret it into a completely different system of communication. Obtaining rights is an art and a science; the determining factor seems to be the degree of pathos in one’s request. In addition, the cost of photoreproduction is astronomical, and some journals expect authors to pay for printing the images. Accordingly, many articles outside art history that deal with images actually show few of them, this present work included.

Finally, visual images do not carry the same meaning after having been physically altered. Yet, if they appear at all, most images in academic publications are highly degraded versions of the original. Poor printing, bad paper, dramatically reduced size, and in many cases the switch from color to black and white make the published image a document different from the raw one; indeed, data are lost. Due to such practical problems, the audience frequently cannot see what the researcher means.

CATEGORIES AND VARIABLES OF VISUAL ANALYSIS¹⁸

Such problems affect both the objectives and the actual conduct of visual historical studies. It is crucial for the researcher to try to reduce the morass of complexity into some elements that can actually be assessed. Let us use my research question—*How are Waffen SS members portrayed?*—to examine four types of variables in visual analysis (context of presentation, content, form, and narrative).¹⁹ Each may be broken down into scales and categories that may suggest meanings.²⁰

Context Variables

Visual research cannot focus solely on information resident within the image itself. It is self-evident that images rarely arrive for inspection without being accompanied by information that affects our reception of the image and our interpretation of its meaning. For example, before we see the original Mona Lisa we have been told that it is a great artwork, and we have seen many copies of it. When we finally get to see the actual painting, it is in the context of visiting the Louvre and encountering an object reverential-

ly sealed in a glass case. In short, the Mona Lisa is framed by contexts of setting and discourse as much as by wood. *Context*, then, may be reduced into two arenas.

Physical context: This is simply the location and setting in which the image is or was encountered within the historical period studied. One asks, How does the setting of the presentation affect the image's interpretation? It is relevant to my study that many of the images of the Waffen SS were published in popular magazines (especially *Signal*) throughout Europe during World War II. In such cases, the visual historian should attempt to distinguish some general pattern between the population of raw images (taken in the field by the photographers) and their later status (publication or burial in the archives). For example, a recent study (Curtis 1989) compared archival photos from the Farm Security Administration archives with those that were actually published.

Verbal context: There are four clusters of word variables that modify the meaning of images. The first is *signage* (words within the frame). These are typically posters, letters, documents, signs, and clothing visible within images and containing readable words or recognizable symbols. Next there is the *caption*, a set of words close to the image and explicitly linked to it. The caption describes or gives the audience information about what is seen in the image and how it might be interpreted. Archival pictures are often captioned either by notes from the original photographer or by the archival staff that collated the images. The accuracy of such forms is often extremely difficult to verify. Third, images are often discussed or referred to in the *body text* of published works. For example, the discussion of Waffen SS photography throughout this article will affect how you judge the images that accompany the text. Last, and most problematic, is the *discourse cluster*, the knowledge and tradition associated with the image. This may comprise known facts or value judgments about the image, the authors, and the era—that is, the information the reader brings to the images. So if in 1943 a European opened the pages of *Signal* and viewed an image of a Waffen SS hero, or a modern reader encountered the same image in a veteran's apologia, each viewer's knowledge of the entire range of thoughts, words, and experiences about the Third Reich, the war, and the medium of photography would influence the reading of the image.

Content Variables

Generally these refer to manifestly observable and nominally classifiable objects (people and things) within the image. The most obvious categorization scheme is one based upon identifying and counting the appearance or the implied presence of certain things or persons in the visual image. In my study, to take a simple example, I code those

subjects within the frame that are Waffen SS personnel as opposed to those that are not.

Note again, a major difference in words and images is that images must be coded for implied presence of an object/subject as well as "full" presence. A picture of a Waffen SS trooper may show his entire body. Most images, however, contain partial forms—a man photographed above the waist, for example; this too would be coded as presence. Alternatively, some feature within the image can imply that an object is present but immediately outside the frame. The most common variation is a shadow of an object or person falling within the frame; we still read it as being attached to the image. The expressions, gaze, or gestures of the characters or their behaviors may signal some thing or person's out-of-frame presence. In my work, this is not problematic. Waffen SS soldiers are visually recognizable through several subcategories including military insignia (the silver-on-black pattern is particularly easy to distinguish in photos) and uniforms (Waffen SS units pioneered the use of multi-patterned camouflage uniforms in the field).

In addition, content can be ordinally ranked by size (surface area on image or perceived size in real life) or some qualitative difference between subjects (rank of soldiers within a military system as indicated by their insignia and heraldry). In my study, I am interested in the category of human body size: to see if the Waffen SS men are represented as being physically larger (as indicated by surface area, height, and perceived mass) than their enemies or others. Such categories of comparison (association, juxtaposition, or opposition) are extremely useful in visual analysis. Other categories of comparison may note the juxtaposition of a unit of content (thing or person) with some formal quality of the image—for example, the content category "presence of Waffen SS trooper" paired with the formal category "camera effect implying dominance."

Formal Variables

There are innumerable ways in which the form of an image can be constructed: framing, angles, composition, lighting, and so on. Moreover, a great deal of what images mean is conveyed by such techniques. It is ironic, then, that historical research on images has focused almost exclusively on content, not form. An obvious reason is the ease of coding the presence of objects and the difficulty and ambiguity of coding camera or stylistic techniques. The content more closely corresponds to nouns in verbal language, while the form can only be coded with extensive and somewhat imprecise explication and extensive understanding of the visual medium of communication.

While many scales of form are of interest in my study, *frame dominance* most easily lends itself to categorization. Four categories of form are used to judge those things or persons that "dominate" (are superior within) the visual image: (1) *height within the frame*: the determination of

which subjects or objects occupy space farther up in the frame; (2) *surface area within the frame*: each object takes up a certain amount of physical space in proportion to the frame—note that this ratio does not change if the image is enlarged or reduced, but it does change if the image is cropped; (3) *mass within the frame*: the inferred three-dimensional bulk or weight of objects in the frame; and (4) *vertical angle of viewing*: from what angle, measured north-south on an imaginary vertical plane, are the persons or things in the frame viewed?

Narrative Variables

The common saying “Every picture tells a story” often influences us to think that the image contains a narrative. The categories constructed to assess narrative meaning may be thought of as genres, tales with certain uniform characteristics that allow them to be grouped together. In film studies, for example, writers routinely refer to the film noir, the Western, the coming-of-age tale, and so forth (cf. Grant 1986). In still pictures, narrative is inferred from the stance, body postures, attitudes, expressions, and implied actions of the subjects in the frame. My study examines the genre of encounter, indicated by the presence of Waffen SS and Non-Waffen SS as subjects engaging in some action. How such subjects interact is suggested by, among other indicators, a scale of *gestures of dominance and subordination*, that is, those body gestures or stances indicating that one person is superior or subordinate to another. The extension of one’s arm, for example, can signify a salute, a gesture of power, a supplication, or a sign of triumph (the V sign or the Hitler salute).

The aforementioned variables demonstrate that, in visual analysis, units must be imposed wholly by the researcher. Besides, visual coding units are not usually exhaustive or mutually exclusive, because fine gradations or subtle differences may occur between items in the same frame or separate frames. The scales used in visual analysis are thus often nominal or ordinal, since precise quantitative differences (e.g., those that would allow us to construct interval or ratio scales) are rarely measurable or meaningful. Finally, even concrete objects manifest in images appear in many variations, depending on a host of technical and formal conditions (e.g., Hitler viewed from the side or from the front). Accordingly, it is imperative that categories should be explicable and showable to coders and readers. One measure, then, of a successful visual history is how accessible and visible the researcher makes the process of data selection and analysis.

To take an obvious example, a researcher may be interested in the use and deployment of certain colors in pictures—the appearance of red and black in Nazi heraldry. The many possible hues of these two colors would probably not be of interest; a nominal scale of categories—*red* (looks reddish) and *black* (looks very dark)—is sufficient. Another

instance is that of the low-angle scale. If we imagine a 180° arc from one pole standing in front of a subject, it would be neither practical nor meaningful to categorize each and every degree in the analysis.²¹

SAMPLE ANALYSIS

These precepts in hand, it is now possible to present a sample of the kind of analysis advocated. Even so, the choice of images for use as examples is in itself a caution for visual historical research. The question of how many cases justify a generalization in history and archaeology is a perennial conundrum (see Aydelotte 1971, 66–100; D.L. Clarke 1978, 17; Finley 1990, 87–101; Fischer 1970, 103–30; Gottschalk 1963). Of particular danger is the clever or riveting example (or occurrence of a variable) that in its brilliance obscures its own rarity. As argued, visual images impress us as particularly meaningful examples, especially if they portray vivid and arresting representations of events. At the same time, images are appreciated uncritically and not analytically by the public, by professionals (e.g., news reporters), and even many logocentric scholars. As a result, the same rules of evidence and representation traditionally applied to word texts have not been applied to visual examples. In short, it seems much easier and more acceptable to leap from a single image to a general conclusion; it is self-evident that the visual historian must guard against this common tendency.

For example, in Charles Bracelen Flood’s (1989) work on Hitler’s early life, the reader is shown a picture that is presented as evidence of a sociological condition (see figure 1). It is a photograph of a section of what appears to be a crowded, floodlit hall. The only indication of place is a few German words on wall banners. Flood’s caption, though worded with appropriate caution, points to the particular as a sign of the general: “Although blurred, this rare photograph of the audience at an early Hitler speech offers evidence of the backing he received from the middle class. Note the number of women supporters” (466 f.).

Indeed, inspecting the image closely we note men in suits and nicely dressed women. Yet, if the photograph is so rare, we might ask how its evidence can be definitive. Critical questions might be: Is this photograph actually rare? How has Flood ascertained this judgment? How do we know this is a Hitler rally? Is it significant (statistically or otherwise) that a few hundred people out of a nation of 70 million attended a Hitler rally? (cf. Childers 1983). How do we know that these people were supporters and not, say, curious onlookers? Is this picture “rare” because of design or chance? Is this picture evidence of a social fact or a propaganda construction? Flood may very well be correct, but the picture is not as natural a sign of the general condition as we might wish.

I do not believe that my research—still only a pilot study—is immune to such tendencies. Like all writers or

FIGURE 1
Audience at an Early Hitler Speech



Source: Flood (1989), *Hitler: The Path to Power* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin).

visualizers, I use examples that typify what I have found most interesting in the texts culled.²² I would argue, however, that the base of inspected images is large enough to conclude that I am not displaying interesting anomalies. What follows is an analysis of two images that highlight the kinds of primary historical meanings and variables of coding an image might reveal. In my examination, I try to approach the photographs not only as documents of events that probably did occur but also as constructed representations meant to persuade the viewer.

The picture shown (as figure 2) is an example of how an image can relate concrete meanings of content while suggesting more elaborate meanings of persuasion; it is also a solution to the problem posed by SS and Nazi racial and military theory. If we were to break down its units of information, the most obvious would be the human—or, as I believe is the intention here, the subhuman as well—subjects. The image contains parts of many human subjects, but only three are prominently visible in the foreground. The shot is at medium camera range and at eye level, allowing us to see all the details of human faces and dress above the waist and also enabling us to compare heights. Considering the size and

weight of objects in the frame, it is obvious that one of the subjects dominates the others by body mass, height, and surface area. The male in the left foreground is physically larger in size, more robust in build, taller in stature, and more racially European in features than are the others. His body cant also signals his dominant position, and he looks down on the other figures with a scowl that might be read as curiosity and/or contempt. He wears the common camouflage uniform pattern of the Waffen SS. The two other figures visible to his screen right are different in almost every respect. They are at least a head shorter than the SS trooper, their clothes are unkempt and ragged, and their countenances dirty. Their hands are raised in the near-universal gesture of supplication and surrender. The male figure at center wears a dirty, colorless military tunic. The female figure, screen right, is dressed in civilian clothes and notably sports a wristwatch and a fountain pen in her top pocket. Finally, the form of the shot is open; body parts and hands of other figures extend into and out of the frame. It is, thus, visually implied—by synecdoche—that one set of figures (the dark enemy) are numerous.

The original German caption tells us that this is an exam-

FIGURE 2
Waffen SS Trooper and Captured Asiatic Soviet Soldiers



Source: Russia, August 1942 (?), Bundesarchiv 77/13827A.

ple of "Germany's war against the Soviet Union." It informs us that the female is a commissar, and these are Asiatic troops of the USSR. Significantly it also comments on the "racial" comparison that is obvious to us, even if we are not Nazis. Without any expression of fear or trepidation, the tall, stalwart, virile, lone hero of pure blood confronts—note how the image sets up directional opposition—the defeated, short, bent, dirty Yellow Horde of subhumans. Through narrative construction and formal composition of compared objects, Nazi racial ideology and the recruiting rationale of the Waffen SS is typified in an image: This is whom we fight, this is why we fight—to conquer the Bolshevik-directed Asiatic hordes. They are many, we are few, but to use a Waffen SS slogan borrowed from the church, *By This Sign You Shall Conquer*.

The provenance of figure 3 is much better known than that of figure 2. In fact, we have an almost unique concurrence of the taking of an image and the thoughts of its main subject. Here, Léon Degrelle is shown with two of his children during a 1944 parade in Brussels celebrating his exploits on the Eastern front with the Wallonian SS Brigade. A complex, charismatic man, Degrelle led the pre-war Christus Rex movement. After the start of the Russian campaign, he volunteered to join the Waffen SS Walloon Legion and worked his way up to commander (*Sturmbannführer SS*). By all accounts, he and his men fought with distinction on the Russian front, and Degrelle was awarded, among other medals, the Knight's Cross. He was also much admired as a model Nazi-European, and Hitler noted that if he had had a son, he would have wanted him to be like Degrelle. After the war, Degrelle escaped to Spain where he avoided extradition at Franco's personal intervention. A Belgian court sentenced him to death in absentia and revoked his citizenship. Degrelle remained active in Spanish fascist politics and published several large volumes defending Hitler and the Third Reich.

Known as a collector of Roman antiquities, in an article by J. Darnton in the *New York Times*, 20 May 1983, Degrelle is quoted as having once declared, "Above all, I live for beauty." He denied any involvement in atrocities during the war and described the purpose of the Waffen SS as saving Europe from Communism (Reuters 1985). In his autobiography, *Campaign in Russia: The Waffen SS on the Eastern Front* (1985)—printed, not coincidentally, by the leading publishing house of Holocaust revisionist literature—Degrelle expressed confidence that the present negative verdict of history on himself and his comrades would subsequently be rewritten.

The moment of this picture's taking and the feelings of one of its subjects is thus well known. After a spectacular escape from encirclement on the Ukrainian front in the spring of 1944, the remains of the Walloon legion were sent home to Belgium to rest and refit. The front soon collapsed. Degrelle (1985) comments in a passage pregnant with familiar visualizations:

The entire Ukraine, the beautiful Ukraine with its immense golden fields, its blue and white villages set in the middle of the harvests like baskets of flowers, the Ukraine overflowing with corn and wheat, endowed with hundreds of new factories in the last two years, that Ukraine was drowned under the snarling wave of Mongols and kalmuks with damp mustaches and steel teeth, carrying heavy submachine guns with flat rotary magazines. . . (228).

Refitted with new volunteers, Degrelle and the Wallonian Brigade paraded through the streets of Brussels in an armored column. His thoughts at the moment matched the image available. Here the identification of content is assisted by discourse of the subject's own making:

We thought of all the heroes who had fought battles in these rich fields in days gone by, like those we had just fought in the Russian mud. That mud was far away, however. Our tanks were laden with flowers. Crowns of oak branches two meters high decorated the armor . . . searching girls with vibrant eyes waited for us at the boundary of Brussels.

The center of the capital was a sea of faces and flags. The Panzers could hardly pass among the tens of thousands of people who had hurried to see and madly cheer our soldiers. The crowd tossed like the sea, shouting and throwing thousands of roses, the first, the sweetest, and the most tender roses, heralding the bright days of spring.

My tank stopped in front of the columns of the Bourse. I lifted all my excited children into the tank. I felt their little hot hands in mine. I watched this wonderful celebration, the communion of my soldiers and this people so sensitive to glory (229).

A symbolic interpretation of this photograph draws upon Waffen SS iconography. The conqueror, laden with garlands and medals, "mans the parapet" of the steel wall of Germany—the armored car marked by the symbol of the German army. At his feet is the future, the children of the new blond Europe. Behind is what he is defending: a typical Old World style apartment. Is it a metaphor for Europe? His arm is extended not in surrender, but in triumph; the extended arm is a near-universal gesture of imploration—this time to victory, not defeat (cf. Feldman 1941, 1959, 270–72).²³

In this situation as well, the photo-makers have, I believe, attempted to reduce ambiguity. Viewers are not meant to puzzle over complex, mysterious meanings; rather, we are meant to be "sensitive to glory" made manifest.

The previously discussed examples are but a few I have come across that constructed the Waffen SS's view of itself and the Third Reich's attempt to build the notion of a European army (of which Léon Degrelle typified the ideal both in thought and action). I am interested in gauging the extent of this program, the effects it had, and to what extent it was undercut by other Nazi doctrines (e.g., the superiority of Germany). To understand the appeal of these images and how they resonated with traditional prejudices in European culture and the precepts of Nazi propaganda, one must understand how the visual images were created, encoded, and disseminated. In short, instead of reflecting a component of Nazi thought, the images themselves are of interest

FIGURE 3
Léon Degrelle and Children



Source: Brussels, April 1944, Bundesarchiv 84/75/3.

as weapons in the struggle for the hearts and minds of occupied Europe, a battle that the Nazis never lost. Such questions have direct relevance to modern events. The revival of fascism throughout Europe demands that its previous means of ascent be reanalyzed. This is especially true since the means of mass-producing visual images have vastly improved and expanded. If Nazism makes a comeback, it is likely to be by visual means.

SYNTHESIS: MAKING SUCCESSFUL VISUAL HISTORIES

To conduct a visual history requires more than the appreciation of images. A successful visual history can be measured by criteria that elucidate and interrogate the intentions and methods of the research project. Each constitutes a reflective check (for the researcher and the reader) on the practicality, utility, and validity of the research. In essence, the visual historian must make the case that visual images were deployed in an appropriate way. Answering the following questions may be helpful in considering this issue. The correctness of the answers depends on the goals of the study.

Are the images used in the research historical artifacts, or are they constructed by others and used as a way to view historical artifacts? It is integral to the historian's task to clarify what constitutes primary data. In the case of paintings, engravings, or the plastic arts we can usually define an *original* work even though its appearance may have changed considerably since the time of its creation.²⁴ The photograph presents a more difficult problem. Is the original document the negative, the prints filed in an archive, or the reproduction that appeared in print?²⁵ For example, Mayer and Wade's study (1969) of the rise of Chicago from settler outpost to metropolis uses photos that were created by photographers throughout the city's history. The images themselves thus constitute historical artifacts. Alternatively the prehistorian or archaeologist may create or employ contemporary images of sites to assess ancient structures or patterns of land use. In one such study, Norman and St. Joseph (1969) use aerial photographs to display and examine the locations, features, "natural backgrounds," and structural remains of early Christian and pre-Christian sites in Ireland.

What is the approach to the evidentiary value of the visual image? Is it analyzed as a displayer of facts or purposeful construction of a particular viewpoint? Some historians have used images to uncover facts, that is, to identify and classify events, persons, and objects in history. The image is a means for reconstructing how things actually happened and for transmitting the knowledge of the *who, what, when, and where* of content identification to an audience. This task is accomplished in four ways. First, as a research tool, images are capable of establishing a clear view of objects, persons, and events. Second, images allow the researcher to

compare objects with others about which similar views exist, either individual small objects or enormous structures comprehensible only from a distance. Third, images may serve as a heuristic that allows the audience to clearly see what the researcher means. Finally, the use of images may, with self-evident limits, serve as a check on the reliability or validity of findings by showing other researchers the subjects of the study without the filter of verbal description.²⁶

The tendency in this type of visual history is to see meaning as something found in the image: content identification. Angolia's *Cloth Insignia of the SS* (1989) serves as an example of one extreme of the reconstructive approach. Such a project is only achievable through the study and employment of images, and it demonstrates the utility of photographs in categorizing complex and varied sets of objects. The SS produced a monumental array of heraldry, medals, and insignias; their exact design and composition changed many times before and during the war.²⁷ Many of the images in Angolia's study are close-ups of the insignia (e.g., an armband); others are World War II-era pictures (mainly portraits) of German and German-allied soldiers wearing such insignias. While he briefly states that such insignia served a propaganda purpose, this is not Angolia's main concern. Essentially, he used images to organize and display facts—to reconstruct and document.

The opposing tendency in visual history is represented by those studies that intend to understand ideological ways of seeing things. The image is taken as a rhetorical device whose production, composition, construction, and subject matter are designed to support an ideology. Thus, meaning is something designed into the image; rhetorical, figurative, and moral meanings are of interest. For example, Malsheimer (1985, 1987) looked at the photographs of native American children who were taken from their reservations and placed at the Indian Industrial Training School (Carlisle School) in Pennsylvania in the late nineteenth century. Malsheimer is concerned with examining these images as constructed devices of persuasion that supported the school's agenda—to "civilize" Indian children. For instance, in a series of comparison images, bent-backed, bedraggled Indian children are transformed into straight-backed, well-groomed, white look-alikes. Malsheimer then tracks the distribution and deployment of the images as part of the school's publicity campaign.

What is the relevant social scope or scale of the images' analysis? The third criterion involves the scope of the analysis. Some studies are community/institutional in their orientation. They examine the images representing limited spatial or institutional settings. Although generalizations may be drawn about the relation of their findings to wider society, the main focus of such studies is on the clearly defined group unit. For example, as cited earlier, Borchert (1980) examined photographs of a spatially restricted subculture, that of black families living in alleys of Washing-

ton, D.C., from 1850 to 1970. Borchert was interested in how a group of people attempted to establish a community and retain family cohesion despite the divisive social and physical influences in urban life, including grinding poverty and persistent racism.

On the other hand, there are studies that investigate images as expressions of wider societal ideas or tendencies or as ways to reconstruct a wide view of how a past society, region, or people looked. Although a narrow range of images may be examined, they are taken as expressing the vision or appearance of an age, country, or people (e.g., the social meaning). Stott's (1973) study, for example, seeks to look at images as expressing—through design, not chance—a spirit or idea that typified an era and the world of their creation. In particular, he examines the work of photographers employed by the Farm Security Administration who sought to document (and propagandize) the state of rural America. Stott's approach is not to document by using documentary images, but rather to try to understand why these particular forms of documentation were chosen. The images, he argues, were persuasive devices that typified, for example, the societal meaning, the period, and the place: "As cultural history this book surveys the documentary expression of the 1930s and early 1940s, and suggests not only that a documentary movement existed then but that recognition of it is essential to an understanding of American life at the time" (ix).

Are the images the main focus of the study, or are they an ancillary tool to investigate a phenomenon that is not primarily related to images? To say that there should be something called visual history is not to claim its primacy or dominance over traditional forms of historical research. A project may employ visuals or study them but not focus upon them. The study of images can be another tool for the historian-craftsman. One recent instance comes from David Hackett Fischer's *Growing Old in America* (1978) in which he cites the evidence of changed positions in family portraits to support his view that family hierarchy shifted from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. The examination is hardly a major component of the research; it takes up a few pages, and Fischer shows no images. In short, the historian seeks to build a case for historical explanation; the image is examined as one part of this case that fits with the others. Alternatively, a study can be iconocentric—it uses images, or their role or functions, as the prime focus of study. For example, Trachtenberg (1989) examines the images, work processes, and reactions to American Civil War photography. Although he weaves the aesthetics and import of the images into a social and political context, the pictures are the primary focus of the work.

Does the researcher assume that the image is a passive reflector of society, historical conditions, or events depicted, or that the image operated as a historical force affect-

ing society, historical conditions, or events? As said, the historian need not claim that an image has an effect. The image may be taken as an indicator of the appearance of objects, the manner of events, the structure of a social world, or the appearance of daily life. This situation is conveyed in Michael Lesy's (1973) poetic photomontage history of turn-of-the-century Wisconsin in which he uses images taken by a local photographer. The author notes that the photos included many portraits and posings taken according to the conventions of the day. Thus, they hardly constitute a candid representation of rural life. However, there is no suggestion that either the photos themselves or the act of taking them affected the material conditions of the subjects.

Alternatively, an image can be seen as a determiner, a historical force in its own right, enacting some effect on material life or events. Again, no claim is made for reductive visual determinism, but images should not be excluded as possible causes of historical events. The most obvious utility for such a force is as part of a persuasion campaign, although the problem of judging the effects of such campaigns are well known to social scientists (McQuail 1981; McLeod, Kosicki, and Pan 1991; Hovland 1971; Lindlof 1987; Lowery and DeFleur 1988; Schramm and Roberts 1971). Judging such effects *ex post facto*, especially in historical cases, is even more difficult. Indeed, I think this is a most promising arena for quantitative historians to bring their skills to bear. Nevertheless, it is sometimes important to make the case that images were used as instruments of persuasion (successful or failed) as much in the past as they are in the present day. Spruill's (1983) incisive investigation of the role of photography in the civil rights movement in America from 1955 to 1968 is a particularly salient example. He carefully documents the movement's conscious strategy to bring about situations that, when captured in a photograph, would highlight the sufferings and persecutions of its members. Spruill argues forcefully that this victory in the battle for control of the image was instrumental in winning the sympathy of the American public and subsequent success for the movement.

FUTURE APPLICATIONS

Images have been part of our way of making sense of the world since the first appearance of anatomically modern humans. It is increasingly clear that visual studies may be a partner of historical research, not an afterthought or appendage. However, my intention here was not to argue that the word is dead and that visual images offer some magical route to historical knowing. Some images may certainly be accorded the status of a historical force affecting human attitudes and behaviors. Even so, the kind of demands made upon images by a researcher may frequently not exceed the identification and categorization of things,

persons, and places in time and space and their revelation to an audience. At minimum, the analysis of images can serve as another tool of historical methods. In any case, visual historical analysis typically involves a great deal of effort beyond that of word text-based research.

Nevertheless, any method, theory, or application of visual history must recognize that images cannot be treated exactly like word documents. There are fundamental differences in the way images and words store data and in the way humans perceive them to convey meaning. Any attempt to build something called visual history should not avoid questions of form and style; these may be more complex to categorize, but they are as dynamic an indicator of visual meaning as are objects in the frame. Further, it is of interest and relevance to attempt to link historical meanings with present political contexts. This involves not just finding a primary historical meaning but also tracking how the image is used and viewed by subsequent publics. In sum, the manipulation, deployment, and analysis of visual images for historical research requires new approaches to craftsmanship. This article should be seen as an invitation to create an interdisciplinary dialogue on the methods of addressing these problems and questions.

NOTES

The author wishes to thank Charles W. Haxthausen, the main influence for the genesis and completion of the article; it is also from him that I drew the concept of *logocentrism* in the academy. In addition, Myron Gutmann, two anonymous reviewers, Michael Griffin, and Paul Messaris directly and indirectly contributed to the ideas expressed here. Special thanks are extended to Anne Jett for persistently responding to the many drafts of the paper.

1. The absence of a means to accurately mass-produce texts before the printing press obviously impeded the dissemination of all knowledge. In particular, ancient writers were unable "to repeat their visual statements wholly and repeatedly" (e.g., a picture of a medicinal plant) (Ivins 1953, 15).

2. Salient work on the processes of image construction, transmission, and reception appear throughout many different disciplines. The problem at hand is to marshal these resources in some coherent and synthetic way to serve the task of historical research. Most examples used in this article are studies that have employed photographs; the medium offers the best, but least used, sources of historical data.

3. For the last two decades, Theodore K. Rabb (1973, 1984) has been a leading advocate for bridging the turf between the study of the arts and the study of history. Some prototypical studies toward this goal may be found in Rotberg and Rabb (1989), but none are concerned with populations of photographs. See also O' Connor (1990).

4. Very little work has been done on the methods for studying historical images (Borchert 1980, 1981, 1982; Bossen 1982; Malmsheimer 1985, 1987; Margolis 1988; Perlmutter 1991, 1992; Peters and Mergen 1977; Roberts 1988; Rundell 1978; Trachtenberg 1989). Among these, Borchert's work is the most thoughtful and specifically methods oriented.

5. For example, it is suggested that the propagation and maintenance of a public-relations image of Adolf Hitler was "a crucial integratory force in the Nazi system of rule" and propelled the German civilian and military population to accept the initiation of World War II, the persecution of domestic enemies, the material and psychological hardships of war, and the need to fight to the bitter end (Kershaw 1987, 1). It is interesting that the role of the visual image in supporting this symbolic persona image has not been adequately investigated, although references have been made to it in general studies of Nazi iconology (e.g., Golomstock 1990; Grosshans 1983; Hinz 1979; Rhodes 1987).

6. A good deal of writing in visual studies has been devoted to critiquing such so-called naive realism—the belief that pictures show objective reality (e.g., Roskill and Carrier 1983; Snyder 1980). However, pictorial codes are not purely arbitrary; many have a basis in human living experience: the fact that objects farther away from the viewer are occluded by closer objects, for example (Messaris 1994, 166).

7. The following section is influenced by previous work by Baxandall (1985, 1988), Gombrich (1969), Mannheim (1970), Panofsky (1955), and Putnam (1981).

8. An image's meaning stems from the perception that it tells a story. The analogy that I have found most useful is to think of the visual image as a time, setting, and frame-specific *anecdote* (Perlmutter 1992).

9. Suggested by the late art historian Erwin Panofsky (1955), this type of meaning is "apprehended not by simple identification, but by 'empathy.' To understand it I need a certain sensitivity, but this sensitivity is still part of my practical experience, that is, of my everyday familiarity with objects and events" (27).

10. All people and groups project a public persona, the "face" demanded to maintain their position, power, prestige, dignity, or basic survival (Diamond 1955; Goffman 1959, 1974; Scott 1990). Visual images are a particularly useful means to sustain and propagate such messages. However, this persona may not be successful, due to its incongruity with material facts. Visual rhetoric can fail as much as any other attempt to persuade. Conversely, the artist may even create an image within the patron's specifications that undermines the original propaganda intentions. For example, "the greatest portraits" may exhibit a "tension between the sitter as subject-matter and the sitter as public" (T. J. Clarke 1973, 15)—for example, the sitter surrounds himself with dazzling symbols of power and prestige; the artist shows his subject's corpulence and vanity.

11. There are many fronts in this battle; the vociferousness of Holocaust revisionism, an attempt to deny basic facts of history, has forced scholars to look closely at exactly how the Holocaust is represented in historical writing (Lipstadt 1993; Vidal-Naquet 1993). Much of the material in the discussion that follows is drawn directly from a previous article by the author (Perlmutter 1991).

12. Ronald Reagan's visit to Bitburg might be seen as the penultimate act in this struggle (Hartman 1986; Levkov 1987). The role of the point man is, we note, to draw enemy fire. Continuing controversy over SS soldiers may be seen as conveniently drawing attention away from the vast complicity of the regular German military and police forces in World War II atrocities.

13. It is problematic for the researcher to point to a few photographs among a population of tens of thousands and claim some are "representative." As is the case here, this is especially true when so many have been lost. The purpose of this analysis is to demonstrate several examples of the close inspection of images within the limited information that historical circumstance (by chance or design) has left us.

14. Russian and American authorities took pictures of the Waffen SS men who were captured during the war or were interned afterward. These are not part of my complete population since I am interested in how the institution portrayed itself and in how those pictures are used today. Simply put, photography was and is an extremely important tool for publicizing the exploits of the soldiers and the ideology for which they fought.

15. For example, Michael Lesy's (1973) photohistory of pioneer Wisconsin draws from thirty thousand glass-plate negatives taken by a single small-town photographer. In this case, it might be useful to consider the psychology and intentions of the individual author of the images.

16. Typically, in the creation of mass-media or artistic material, industrial constraints—including tugs of war or cooperative relationships between many groups and social relationships within the culture of genesis—often define the content of various kinds of media, including professional and artistic photography (Rosenblum 1978) and amateur photography (Schwartz 1986; Schwartz and Griffin 1987).

17. The term is more precise and useful than *culture* or *people* because it forgoes stereotyping the *other* solely by national origin (e.g., "The Chinese believe that . . ."). Within any society, various reference groups produce visual and lexical representations of the worlds around them.

18. A great deal of work has been conducted on the analysis of the contents of communication messages, but most of it has largely ignored the analysis of images and the properties that differentiate them from word texts. The leading resources are Berelson (1952) and Lasswell et al. (1952-53). Other important works include Budd, Thorp, and Donohew 1967; de Sola Pool 1959; de Sola Pool et al. 1970; Holsti 1969; Holsti et al. 1963;

Kaplan 1943; Kline 1982; Kracauer 1952-53; Gerbner 1969; Krippendorff 1980; North et al. 1963; Peterson 1982; Rosengren 1981; Schultz 1952, 1958-59; Stone et al. 1966; Webb et al. 1966.

19. Many works in film and visual studies suggest ways of categorizing elements within images, from the arrangement of concrete objects to lighting effects to editing techniques (e.g., Arnheim 1977, 1988; Borchert 1982; Bordwell and Thompson 1986; Bouleau 1963; G. Collier 1977; De Sausmarez 1988; Dondis 1973; Frank 1991; Gerstner 1986; Gombrich 1966, 1969; Harrington 1973; Kemp 1990; Monaco 1981; Zettl 1990).

20. In most studies of image populations, a nominal scale would suffice for the *who* (the categories Waffen SS Photographer, Non-Waffen SS German Photographer probably exhaust the range of sources). The *when* would of course be delineated by dating; in my study, many of the images are dated approximately (e.g., 1942). The *where* scale is also somewhat nebulous: many Waffen SS pictures are only identified by caption or content as being "somewhere on the Eastern front." The *how* opens more interesting possibilities (besides the obvious answer of "with a camera"). Here a description of what is known about the Waffen SS photographers—their work routines and editing practices—would be extremely useful.

21. In the study of film, an ordinal scale is considered adequate; categories are ranked on the continuum of extreme low, medium low, or slightly low angle. Typically, to take a famous instance, it would even suffice to say that in *Triumph des Willens* (Triumph of the Will) (1935), Hitler is consistently portrayed from a low angle (cf. Barnouw 1983, 101-5; Vogel 1981, 175-80).

22. A full inspection of the Waffen SS images that are still in public archives is possible. Moreover, a sufficient number of Waffen SS raw pictures and published photos survived the war so as to belie any notion that they only represent bizarre occurrences. At this moment, however, the purpose of my sampling strategy is to identify characteristics or traits that may later be analyzed (it is hoped by quantitative methods) in the whole population. To do so, I employed a probability technique, looking at every twentieth picture in the archive files. Of course this may result in my missing trends or occurrences of interest; nonetheless, since the full population will eventually be investigated, such a situation is not especially problematic.

23. In World War II, the extended arm with the V was associated with military or partisan (i.e., violent) victory (Rhodes 1987, 186-89). During the Vietnam War, it increasingly became a sign associated with peace, though not everyone was aware of this shift in meaning (Jury 1986[1971]).

24. The Greek sculptures are a prominent example. Limbs are missing and the original coloring is wholly lost. In addition, original works may be transformed by restoration to the point that what appears to be the original is actually nothing more than a caricature (e.g., the Disneyfied restoration of Michelangelo's frescoes on the Sistine Chapel) (Beck 1993).

25. At no point should archival files be taken as necessarily representative of the field work of photographers. The Farm Security Administration photos, for example, have suffered several refilings, editings, and perhaps purgings. See Trachtenberg (1989) for a discussion of how and why such arrangements were enacted.

26. John Collier Jr. (1987), a leading advocate of the use of photographs in anthropology, noted that he found a certain reluctance in his colleagues to use images to illustrate or demonstrate aspects of their findings. He suggests, "We ask why written field notes are not even more distorted than film. The answer may be that anthropologists can control what gets into their field notes, whereas the film record can be an open, uncontrollable happenstance that may reveal verities anthropologists may wish to omit" (42-43). In short, the meaning of an image cannot be as precisely controlled as the meanings of words, even though the listener is as free to create imaginative interpretations of speech.

27. Many of these are collector's items today; indeed, the publication of Angolia's (1989) lavishly and well-printed book through two editions gives testimony to the market for such information. My own work (Perlmutter 1991) is concerned with this flourishing phenomenon in England and the United States. See also Friedlander (1984) and Sontag (1980) for critiques of the attractiveness of the Nazi aesthetic.

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