

journal of visual culture



Visual Studies, or the Ossification of Thought¹

Marquard Smith

Abstract

This article interferes in the often all-too-smooth emergence of Visual Studies as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry in the British and North American University system. It does so by drawing attention to some of the unacknowledged grey areas between 'doing' visual culture and what has become the 'study' of Visual Studies. Interested in the historical, conceptual, and morphological distinctions between 'doing' and 'studying', it confronts the implications of that difference for inter-, cross-, and in-disciplinary pedagogy, research, writing, and thought. (In so doing, it responds to W.J.T. Mitchell's article 'Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture' published in the *journal of visual culture*, August 2002, by both welcoming Mitchell's text as a necessary starting point for any serious effort to initiate and critically engage with studies of visual culture and Visual Studies, and draws attention to a lacuna in the argument therein.) While in general glad to see in research, writing, and teaching, an ongoing curiosity in and attention to our encounters with visual cultures that marks a sustained commitment to ways of seeing and looking and knowing *as doing*, as practice, this article claims that the accelerated professionalization and bureaucratization of Visual Studies is in danger of bringing about an ossification of thought.

Keywords

community • excellence • interdisciplinarity • visual culture • Visual Studies

This article is a modified version of a paper presented at a conference organized by Martin Jay and Whitney Davis entitled 'The Current State of Visual Culture Studies' that took place at the University of California, Berkeley, in April 2004. This event was prompted in part by the organizers' desire to

stimulate debate around W.J.T. Mitchell's article (2002) 'Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture' published in *journal of visual culture*. For me it was an honour to be at the conference, speaking with individuals many of whom have over the last two to three decades been instrumental in re-defining numerous academic disciplines across the Humanities from History to Art History, Religious Studies, Comparative Literature, and Media Studies. It is no coincidence that these same academics have been integral to establishing the thorny and necessarily elusive field of inquiry, or discipline, inter-discipline, discursive formation, or movement that is variously called Visual Studies, Visual Culture, Visual Cultural Studies, or Visual Culture Studies.² These intellectuals, many of whose work I have been reading and thinking through for years, have had a profound effect on the formation and provocation of my own thought, and it has been a pleasure to have had the chance to work with some of them in my role as Editor-in-Chief of *journal of visual culture*. Because of this role it has become possible to describe them as friends and colleagues, and to become part of fostering an intellectual community that comprised many of us at the conference – as well as readers of this journal – with a commitment to the critical study of visual cultures. It is the kind of community I like best, and I believe it is a community also imagined by and evoked in Mitchell's article 'Showing Seeing': a community that is based not on notions of unity and consensus but rather on a network of intellectual obligations, on the chance to think incomplete thoughts together, in which we can raise the very question of 'being together', and, in so doing, picture the possibility of 'the notion of community otherwise', as Bill Readings (1996) put it in what continues to be his astonishing and ever more prescient book *The University in Ruins*.

'Being together' in Berkeley was an opportunity for me to consider my own thoughts about the current state of Visual Studies five years after the inception of the journal, and while the journal experience has been wholly intellectually stimulating and rewarding, being affiliated with Visual Studies does nonetheless disturb me a little. (There are reasons of course why this is a journal of visual culture, not of Visual Studies.) It disturbs me in particular because of all the attention that has been lavished recently on the field of inquiry in general. Not that there is anything wrong with setting up academic programmes, attaching door-plates to virtual research centres, launching journals or book series, debating the finer points of its interdisciplinary status, its naming and the implications of this, defending it, attacking it, accusing it of sloppiness, of complacency, and so on. I realize that in principle these are all important discussions, especially given the topic of the conference at Berkeley. (W.J.T. Mitchell's article is a wonderful antidote to the dryness of many discussions from within and directed against Visual Studies. It is a way of getting past the zeal of the former and the vitriol of the latter, and I later go on to account for how I think this is so.) But there are times when I wonder how it came to pass that I find myself mulling over these academic and often largely administrative questions rather than doing, practicing, encountering, even just studying visual cultures. Of late there has been little time to 'do' visual culture. I am sympathetic with Lisa Cartwright's (2002) insistence that

the stakes in naming are high when the objects, methods, and orientations of one's work may not be accommodated within the boundaries of the department's title [... and that] disciplinary naming gives shape to research agendas, canon[s], and how we enter into intellectual politics, determining our potential to carry out research in certain methodologies ... and with certain objects of study. (p. 10)

(This is certainly a 'doing'.) At the same time, while I disagree with the dismissive tone of art historian Christopher Wood's (1996) response to the *October* 'Visual Culture Questionnaire' where he states that 'worrying about the name of the discipline is a pastime for bureaucrats' (p. 70), since all are bureaucrats now, it is a lucky academic who doesn't have to worry about such things on quite a regular basis. (While I am committed to the intellectual challenges of curricula development, for instance, what is so problematic about this bureaucracy is the way it often encourages academics to believe, and sometimes we almost come to believe, that such activity is a valuable exercise not because it is a scholarly engagement with the shape and content of students' future programmes of study, but because it is a worthy bureaucratic exercise in and of itself – to say nothing of its rewards financially.)

In this context, this article offers me an opportunity to think about why I don't get to 'do' visual culture – the practice of 'doing' visual culture is something I look to endorse throughout – in the face of an ever-expanding bureaucratic regime. I track this thought by addressing some of the challenges that make up Visual Studies, and how our encounters with visual cultures give us the chance to problematize, to question, and to imagine alternative possibilities. This self-reflection means considering the question of what battles I am meant to be fighting as someone who has faith in studying visual cultures; tackling the uncertainty of what kind of commitment I am meant to have, and to what and whom; and asking why I am asked and why I spend so much time tending to the administrative elements of the field of inquiry instead of the intellectual questions that constitute the study of visual cultures. In the end, I am concerned with the *doing* of visual culture, thinking as doing, research as doing, writing as doing, even if there is uncertainty in doing it. This 'doing' is a commitment to a questioning of the politics of knowledge, and the conditions of the production, circulation, and consumption of visual cultures, to the very things that make up visual cultures, that is, a will to start from encounters with the objects, subjects, media, and environments of visual culture itself.³

Visual Studies and Techno-Bureaucratic Notions of Excellence

Concerned with bureaucracy, and the administering of Visual Studies, and more worryingly of visual culture by way of Visual Studies, I turn to a discussion of what Bill Readings in his book *The University in Ruins* (1996) labels 'techno-bureaucracy' to characterize the workings of the modern University. I do this because it is my feeling that Visual Studies can be understood as emerging as an instance of techno-bureaucracy, or as an example of what

Stephen Melville (Melville and Readings, 1995), in writing on the contemporary American University in general, in the collection entitled *Vision and Textuality* edited with Readings but published after the latter's untimely death, has called 'the intimate embrace of intellectual work and "professional activity"' (p. 4).⁴ It is this idea of techno-bureaucracy that makes it near impossible, I must admit, for me to use the nomenclature 'Visual Studies' without baulking.

As I have already intimated, Readings' *The University in Ruins* proposes and embodies a different notion of community as an urgent response in general to 'the question of [the destiny of a particular Western idea of] the University as an institution of culture' (p. ix). Specifically he does so as a warning to the discipline of Cultural Studies. At the moment of the book's research, writing, and publication in the early to mid-1990s, Cultural Studies as a field of inquiry was perhaps at its most powerful, at least in the academy and the world of publishing. But its power, certainly in the UK, has waned considerably since then, as is testified to by the 'restructuring' (read closure) in 2002 of the Cultural Studies and Sociology Department at Birmingham University, known as the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, the official 'birth-place' of Cultural Studies.⁵ There is much that Readings' discussion of the University's embrace of Cultural Studies can teach Visual Studies, because the historical rise and fall of Cultural Studies is a pertinent, cautionary object lesson for Visual Studies.

In *The University in Ruins* (1996), Readings tracks the changing nature of the role of the modern University. He shows how, since the late 18th century, it has been constituted by three 'divergent and continuous' (p. 14) ideas: the Kantian concept of reason; the Humboldtian edifice of culture; and its organization around what he calls our current techno-bureaucratic notion of excellence. Readings follows this trajectory and traces how, because of these three ideas, the University has gradually been less and less 'linked to the destiny of the nation-state by virtue of its role as producer, protector, and inculcator of an ideal of national culture' (p. 3). As such, he says that to a large extent, 'the notion of culture as the legitimating idea of the modern University has reached the end of its usefulness' (p. 5). This is the case specifically because 'the current shift in the role of the University is, above all, determined by the decline of the national cultural mission that has up to now provided its *raison d'être*' (p. 3). The idea of the University 'founded' on 'its status as a site of critique' (p. 6) as it was imagined by the German Idealists, following Johann Gottlieb Fichte, existing 'not to teach information but to inculcate the exercise of critical judgement' (p. 6) and to encourage knowledge in and of itself, has been lost to one determined by a techno-bureaucratic notion of excellence.

This situation is now well recognizable. Readings refers to a scenario in which the administrator rather than the intellectual, researcher, or teacher – or sometimes the intellectual, researcher, or teacher as administrator – is the central character in the University, and 'figures the University's task in terms of a generalized logic of "accountability" in which the University must pursue

“excellence” in all aspects of its functioning’ (p. 3). At the heart of Readings’ argument is the claim that ‘it would be anachronistic to think of [the process of ‘what exactly gets taught or produced as knowledge’] as an “*ideology* of excellence,” since excellence is precisely non-ideological. What gets taught or researched’, he concludes sardonically, ‘matters less than the fact that it be excellently taught or researched’ (p. 13, emphasis added).⁶ Instances of this discourse of excellence come thick and fast in *The University in Ruins*. The first example I draw on is Readings’ discussion of ‘the corporate bureaucratization that underlies the strong homogenization of the University as an institution in North America’. Here he uses the example of University ‘mission statements, [which] like their publicity brochures, share two distinctive features nowadays. On the one hand, they all claim that theirs is a unique educational institution. On the other hand, they all go on to describe this uniqueness in exactly the same way’ (p. 12). The second example, I quote at length:

Today, all departments of the University can be urged to strive for excellence, since the general applicability of the notion is in direct relation to its emptiness. Thus, for instance, the Office of Research and University Graduate Studies at Indiana University at Bloomington explains that in its Summer Faculty Fellowship program ‘excellence of the proposed scholarship is the major criterion employed in the evaluation procedure.’ This statement is, of course, entirely meaningless, yet the assumption is that the invocation of excellence overcomes the problem of the question of value across disciplines, since excellence is the common denominator of good research in all fields. Even if this were so, it would mean that excellence could not be invoked as a ‘criterion,’ because excellence is not a fixed standard of judgment but a qualifier whose meaning is fixed in relation to something else. An excellent boat is not excellent by the same *criteria* as an excellent plane. So to say that excellence is a criterion is to say absolutely nothing other than that the committee will not reveal the criteria used to judge applications.

Nor is the employment of the term ‘excellence’ limited to academic disciplines within the University. For instance, Jonathan Culler has informed me that the Cornell University Parking Services recently received an award for ‘excellence in parking.’ What this meant was that they achieved a remarkable level of efficiency in *restricting* motor vehicle access. As he pointed out, excellence could just as well have meant making people’s lives easier by increasing the number of parking spaces available to faculty. The issue here is not the merits of either option but the fact that excellence can function equally well as an evaluative criterion on either side of the issue of what constitutes ‘excellence in parking,’ because excellence has no content to call its own. Whether it is a matter of increasing the number of cars on campus (in the interests of employee efficiency – fewer minutes wasted in walking) or decreasing the number of cars (in the interests of the environment) is indifferent; the effects of parking officials can be described in terms of excellence

in both instances. Its very lack of reference allows excellence to function as a principle of translatability between radically different idioms: parking services and research grants can each be excellent, and their excellence is not dependent on any specific qualities or effects that they share. (pp. 23–4)

Readings' examples of how the University embraces such a technobureaucratic notion of excellence are useful in determining the degree to which Visual Studies in its efforts to become a hegemonic institutional project might, much like Readings has said of Cultural Studies before it, present 'a vision of culture that is appropriate for the age of excellence' in which it 'seek[s] to preserve the structure of an argument for redemption through culture, while recognizing the inability of culture to function any longer as such an idea' (p. 17). Here Readings speaks of a process of 'derefentialization' in which terms like 'culture' and 'excellence' 'no longer have specific referents; they no longer refer to a specific set of things or ideas' (p. 17). To clarify, I am not asserting that the word 'excellence' appears with regularity in discourses of Visual Studies in particular. Rather, I am pointing to the a priori rhetorical claims that this field of inquiry, variants of the claims of Cultural Studies, often makes for itself: that in its commitment to (our experiences of) encounters with and interrogations of visual culture it is intrinsically 'interdisciplinary', 'discursive', 'critical', 'self-reflective', 'questioning', 'challenging', that it is 'political' and 'ethical', 'revolutionary', 'radical', 'resistant', and 'transgressive'. Redemptive even. Likewise, its over-valorization in some quarters of 'the contemporary' is also problematic. Janet Wolff (2002) has with suspicion called this its 'new kind of timelessness' (p. 263), and Adrian Rifkin (2002) has characterized it acerbically as its very 'perpetual *nousness*' (p. 326). As though all these markers account in and of themselves for its worth. Much like 'culture' and 'excellence', these terms no longer have a specific content – they have been hollowed out, emptied of meaning, derefentialized.⁷ (The same is true in general of the University's more recent emergent bureaucratic rhetoric, and its generic references to fostering 'creativity', 'innovation', and 'opportunity', and delivering 'quality', as well as 'excellence'.)

In laying bare this process for Cultural Studies, Readings highlights the extent to which an emergent field of inquiry, in my case Visual Studies, needs to take account of certain factors. For instance, as Readings argues, the notion of culture as the legitimating idea of the modern University has reached the end of its usefulness, and the University can no longer function as a site of critique since 'critique' itself has become institutionalized. In addition, Readings brings to the foreground a querying of our over-investment in the administering of programmes like Visual Studies, which takes us away from our students and research in the process, and highlights a reliance on discourses of accounting rather than accountability. This bureaucratization highlights the homogenization of the content of these programmes, which is matched by their non-referential generic 'aims and objectives and outcomes' ('to inquire critically into ...', 'to understand how ...', 'to become competent

in ...', 'to demonstrate that ...'); and how often students are being trained and want to be trained simply to meet these module outcomes. It is also worth pointing out that such administering takes place in England under principles of 'good practice', a phrase appropriate for a University of excellence, and equally as vacuous. These principles are laid down in 'benchmark' documentation produced by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) that coordinates and distributes the funding of teaching and learning, and research across the English higher education system, and who are, as outlined on their website, 'committed to enhancing excellence in learning and teaching ... and research'.⁸

As Readings' *The University in Ruins* testifies, for years such bureaucratic directives have been prevalent across the University system in the UK, North America, and elsewhere. All disciplines, sub-disciplines, and discursive formations are over-bureaucratized, but perhaps it is more so for those fields of inquiry, such as Visual Studies, that are formulated within and emerge from a climate in which the University itself is gripped by a belief in the rhetoric of its own excellence.⁹

Having found Visual Studies emerging within the bureaucratic rhetoric of a commitment to excellence and its related professional activities, one has to wonder about the impact that this climate has had on a field of inquiry that does seem inordinately concerned with turning to definitions, delineations, naming, historiography, methodologies, tropologies, and paradigm shifts as a means of establishing and accounting for itself, and being held accountable by others. For me, it is not surprising that Visual Studies should be so caught up in these epistemological concerns. Especially at a time when, as Readings makes clear, the idea that the University, shaped by the Kantian concept of reason and the Humboldtian edifice of culture, is under scrutiny in what Mark Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (1998: 2) have called our post-epistemological age. It is also worth noting, as Mark Cheetham (1998) reminds us, that even 'the *need* for the grounding' of a discipline or field of study – something I am never sure if Visual Studies is working towards or against – 'is itself a philosophical imperative and that the view that philosophy is the only secure place *for* grounding is a Kantian legacy, one that has done much to shape and place the discipline [of Art History]' (p. 8, original emphases). I would say that this is also the case for Visual Studies, whether we are willing to acknowledge it or not. As Cheetham goes on to say, following Michel Foucault, disciplines

have developed historically as expressions and conduits of power/knowledge; it follows that the particular 'shape' of a discipline at a given time will both reflect and fashion its policies of inclusion and exclusion regarding its legitimized objects of study, its methodologies, and its practitioners. (p. 6)

A Personal Genealogy in a Post-epistemological Age

I have been educated through the study of visual culture, rather than from within the disciplinary habitat of Art History or Media Studies or Film Studies or Cultural Studies or Comparative Literature or elsewhere, and I have thus been schooled by many scholars present at the Berkeley conference, indirectly at any rate. Because of this education, in part because of these people, I have no real disciplinary training or base, no host discipline nor roots, no obvious historical or genealogical trajectory, nowhere to go back to – even if I wanted too. For me there is nothing but visual culture – being in visual culture, thinking through visual culture; imagining research, writing, and teaching by way of visual cultures.

I am interested in the situation in which I find myself. I used to revel in it – there were no constraints. Now it disturbs me a little more often – in part because of the rise of Visual Studies. Like many others educated by those scholars interrogating the grey areas between disciplines, having been part of inter-disciplinary, cross-disciplinary, multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, and taking as a starting point the fascinating epistemological and ontological challenges and possibilities, tropologies and morphologies, provoked by the study of visual cultures, I am comforted to know that I am not the only ‘illegitimate’ child of the study of visual culture. There are many of us who strayed from the path of disciplinary competence; who found ourselves in ‘indisciplined’ programmes, as Mitchell (1995: 541) would put it, whether they articulated this in their documentation and in the classroom or not; who followed unconventional teachers; who were enthused above all by the parts of academic programmes across the Humanities that I am going to have to call ‘theory’ in general and ‘visual theory’ in particular, specifically by the criticality that forms the historical and conceptual backbone for the study of visual cultures.¹⁰

Coming out of the study of visual culture, it strikes me that there *is* a difference between those who came from a disciplinary habitat, who reached out and moved beyond it, and those of us who have from the start been shaped by and brought up through the study of visual cultures. Following in the wake of the former, we were attentive and grateful to be given the chance to take advantage of the intellectual opportunities made available through their thought, writings, teachings, and ongoing battles. We have never known any different. For us connoisseurship, art appreciation, and slide tests are alien, exotic. We may have ‘surrendered a history of art to a history of images’ and, as a result, are casualties of the ensuing ‘de-skilling of interpretation’ of which Tom Crow speaks in his response to the *October* ‘Visual Culture Questionnaire’ (1996: 36). But surrendering one for the other doesn’t necessarily ‘iron out differences’, in fact quite the opposite.¹¹ We never had an unmediated grasp on the idea of value, or taste, or judgement, because they were tempered by, twisted through, understood by way of ‘theory’. Handling the tools of ‘theory’ or ‘visual theories’ are our skills. In fact, sometimes they are our only skills. Because we sought out courses in ‘theories and methods’ or ‘critical and contextual studies’, we know little but feminism, and

Marxism, and historiography, and postcolonial theory, queer theory, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, and semiotics, and what can still just about be called the politics of representation. Because of this we know how to be critical, take things apart, be wary, cynical, how to strangle the pleasure out of things: we know how to question. For some of us, doing just this is the driving impulse, the political and ethical imperative, sometimes, perhaps regrettably, the purpose in and of itself.

Let me be clear, I am not speaking here of those who have had what we might call a professional training in Visual Studies over the last few years, during which time they have been educated in the formation of a field of study, its development, rhetoric, and devices, and how to present such materials. They are more than proficient, and can speak for themselves. I am speaking of those educated in the study of visual culture before Visual Studies had a name, a programme, a department. I am talking of, discerning, a wave or two of students, in higher education between, say, the early 1980s and the mid-1990s. Those students who were too young for punk and should have been too old for rave, their formative years lived with the threat of nuclear war at the forefronts of their nihilistic minds, with sexualities fashioned in a climate gripped by the fear of AIDS, and a political consciousness created wholly within and in opposition to the Thatcher–Reagan nexus, and thus attuned to both the consequences and pointlessness of organized politics. This cohort's experience, I think, was unfamiliar to that of previous and subsequent generations of aspiring academics and intellectuals on the brink of a brave new world of imminent prospects, discoveries, possibilities.

Why was this experience unfamiliar? For an obviously and unavoidably historical and generational reason: the extent to which an idea of History was being reshaped. I do not believe this signals something as grand as a paradigm shift, or an epistemic break, but it was something. Surely, it was something to find out that a certain understanding of History had ended, and that we were in a 'post-epistemological' age, before even knowing what History was. Or to discover the prospect of the dissolution of metanarratives before even knowing what a metanarrative was. It was something when universals such as taste, value, and judgement, but also humanism, liberalism, democracy, and ethics were being discredited. Or, to arrive at the disciplines of Cultural Studies or Media and Film Studies, let alone History or Art History or Philosophy or Aesthetics through the study of visual cultures. It was something when the matter of authority – of patriarchy, of the Law of the Father, of colonialism, of ideal form, of the certainties of the author, of the reader, of the subject itself – had undergone such a critique that it was but a shadow of its former self. It was something not just to see the results of decades of struggle as the histories, theories, and practices of women, of the post-colonial or subaltern subject, of queer communities came to the fore, but to see these discourses integrate themselves into, embed and structure academic study. It was an interesting historical fact rather than historical reductionism when political impulses, from feminism and Marxism to modernism itself, were all prefixed by a 'post'. And, it was something when it didn't seem that there was anything left to fight for.¹²

My concern, then, is with identifying what it means to have been a student, and a prospective scholar, emerging in a climate in which the notion of History was in the process of becoming transformed, and whose understanding of the history, politics and ethics of visibility was being formed pedagogically in this very moment of interpolation. I am interested in how historical, political and ethical imperatives, or their withering, would go on to play an integral part in the establishing of Visual Studies, and how the consequences of an earlier generation of scholars, intellectuals, and academics necessitated the formation of a new field of study, and much else besides. I am keen to know how the passionate hopes of one generation gave way to the dispassionate professional consciousness of a later generation. Somewhere in the midst of all of this, between these two generations, I am hoping to make out the moments when the study of visual cultures taking place in University departments across the Humanities, in institutions of further education, and in art and design colleges, were at their most exploratory, uninhibited by the intellectual disciplinary baggage of the past or the bureaucratic burdens of the future.¹³ Such study was caught up in the enthusiasm that marks the emergence of any new field of inquiry, *as it takes place*, without necessarily being understood or articulated clearly. Perhaps it was a utopian moment, perhaps an ongoing romantic fantasy or mis-recognition on my part, but it nonetheless felt like a time when undergraduate and graduate students across the UK, the US, and elsewhere were 'doing' visual culture, well before they were studying what went on to become Visual Studies.

Unfastening 'Visual Studies' from 'visual culture' and 'visual culture' from 'visual culture'

These are the reasons why I have an ambivalent affiliation with Visual Studies. Because of these, rightly or wrongly I make an involuntary, obligatory distinction between visual culture itself, along with our curiosity in and encounters with the study of the histories, contexts, and workings of the environments and objects of our visual culture, *and* Visual Studies as the professional, academic, bureaucratic, and publishing infrastructure articulating these things as a field of inquiry. Part of my ambivalence is born of the confusion in the field itself surrounding the varying definitions of these things. (It is not that I don't like confusions, sometimes they are very productive, but other times they seem to be less so. This is one of those other times.) Let me, then, offer an instance of such a confusion. This example marks one of the very few occasions where I disagree with Mitchell's article 'Showing Seeing' (2002). It reminds me why it matters that the objects, subjects, media, and environments of visual culture, and their study, are not conflated with the name of a field of inquiry, whether the field is called Visual Studies, or Visual Culture, or Visual Culture Studies, or Visual Cultural Studies.

It is gratifying that Mitchell distinguishes usefully and necessarily between 'Visual Studies' and 'visual culture' as, respectively, 'the field of study and the object or target of study. Visual studies is', he goes on to say, 'the study of visual culture' (p. 166). Simple, and I agree.¹⁴ The reason why Mitchell makes

this distinction is a good one: he does it to 'avoid the ambiguity that plagues subjects like history, in which the field and the things covered by the field bear the same name' (p. 166).¹⁵ But then his argument takes a turn, and the handy distinction is lost:

In practice, of course, we often confuse the two [that is 'Visual Studies' and 'visual culture'], and I prefer to let visual culture stand for both the field and its content, and to let the context clarify the meaning. I also prefer visual culture because it is less neutral than visual studies, and commits one at the outset to a set of hypotheses that need to be tested ...¹⁶

Mitchell is right in the first instance to distinguish between 'Visual Studies' as the name of a field of study and 'visual culture' as its object or target of study so as to avoid the confusion that we find with the word 'history'. So why does he decide to lose the distinction? Not just because the two are often confused, there is no reason in principle why this should happen. And why, having cleared up a confusion, does he introduce another: that 'visual culture' should stand for 'both the field and its content'? As I understand it, the benefits of introducing this second confusion have to do with Mitchell's need to distance the idea of a *critical* 'visual culture' from what he refers to as the more 'neutral' designation 'Visual Studies'. The word 'Studies' does imply a certain neutrality, a lack of self-reflexive practice, and criticality. It also reminds us of 'further' rather than 'higher' education (think General Studies, Foundation Studies, and so on). And it can take us too far from the objects of our study, to the point where these very objects are almost ignored, obfuscated, dissolved into the study itself. Added to this list of criticisms is the concern I have been outlining here, that 'Visual Studies' often marks a bureaucratic impulse, an institutional, administrative and recruiting initiative, a funding opportunity, and a publishing programme. With these concerns in mind, I appreciate the benefits of Mitchell's distinction between 'Visual Studies' and 'visual culture', but I can only see the dangers of letting 'visual culture stand for both the field and its content'. Specifically I suggest that losing the distinction between a term to designate the field of inquiry and the object of study contributes to the field's regular, and often justifiable, criticism.¹⁷ For instance, arguments like those directed by *October's* 'Questionnaire' against Visual Studies accusing it of ahistoricism, of anthropologism, and of a disembodiment of the image, while legitimate, persist only because of such a conflation – a conflation made wilfully by the Editors of *October* responsible for composing the Questionnaire's questions. The accusations hold less water as one disentangles the rhetoric of the Introduction to the 'Questionnaire' and the questions themselves from the responses to them.¹⁸ With this in mind, I offer a few additional instances of how such criticisms might be a consequence of the decision to let the phrase 'visual culture' stand for both 'the field of study and the object or target of study'.

The institution's commitment, and competency: Letting 'visual culture' stand for both the field of study and the object of study is often misleading in light of the intellectual challenges of curricula development which are committed

to establishing a centre, a department, an undergraduate or graduate programme, because it remains unclear whether such initiatives mark an obligation to the academic study of the field of study, or the study of the object, or the object itself. (Although it may of course be a commitment to all three.) It can also be counter-productive for those of us intent on challenging the homogenization of knowledge – whether this homogenization is in the service of a narrowing of the field of vision to make it more manageable or the yearning for universal visual literacy and competency. Take the challenge of crafting curricula: In assembling syllabi and materials for academic programmes, thereby instituting key tropes and a canon of key intellectuals, the horrendous question of a national curriculum comes to the fore.¹⁹ It is largely true, in most institutions at any rate, that the days are gone when students of Art History are taught nothing but connoisseurship, art appreciation, attribution, and a restricted canon. But what does it mean now to ensure that all students in Visual Studies are introduced to an eternally expansive and yet somehow strangely still myopic purview in which they come to know the workings of the cave, the panopticon, the sublime, the spectacle, the mirror stage, the male gaze, surveillance, the politics of representation, visual pleasure, and so on? And in addition that at best they have all been persuaded to read the same texts in order to wield confidently a key phrase or argument from a ‘founding father’ of the field, whether it is Aby Warburg or Sigfried Kracauer or Walter Benjamin or Roland Barthes or Raymond Williams, or W.J.T. Mitchell even? Put more bluntly, what does it mean for Visual Studies as a field of study to agree on, fix, determine, not the purview of visual cultures per se, so much as the very things that constitute it? (Working against a homogenization of knowledge, a universalizing of concepts and tropes, and the ubiquity of key figures, thankfully in the end what should distinguish one Visual Studies programme from another will be the particularity of its locale, its site-specificity and site-responsivity, its resources, and the curiosity of individual staff and students in certain objects, subjects, media, and environments for their studies of visual culture.)

Hegemonic Publishing Imperatives: Letting ‘visual culture’ stand for both the field of study and the object of study can be detrimental to academics and students alike as academic publishers continue to encourage proposals for, publish, and distribute books and collections of essays on ‘visual culture’ whose sole objective is to identify, comprehend, and interrogate the field of study for undergraduate students. It is not that some of these books aren’t excellent teaching tools and much more than that. Rather, the concern is the extent to which publishers continue to pursue, understandably for financial reasons, this line of commissioning in the hope that their book will become the key Visual Studies textbook in a homogenized teaching and learning market. Many academics, including myself to some extent, are of course complicit with this, and I have no axe to grind with this per se. But if scholars are busily writing imminently successful textbooks, that further encourage publishers to become more and more loath to publish anything other than still more textbooks, they are perhaps distracted from ‘doing’ interdisciplinary studies in and of visual culture. These scholars are distracted from the

prospect of new acts of seeing, creating new objects of Visual Studies that belong to no one – as Bal (2003) and Irit Rogoff (1998) following Roland Barthes would have it – and hearing what these objects have to say for themselves. This reminds us that Visual Studies needs to continue to re-make its own methodologies and objects of study, to publish this research and contribute to the ongoing consolidation and questioning of the field as an intellectual field of study.

Against Imminent Applicability: Letting ‘visual culture’ stand for both the field of study and the object of study can be disadvantageous for students (and academics) in the classroom and elsewhere handling ‘theory’. Of course there is nothing wrong with acknowledging that ‘visual culture’ can signal a purely academic and pedagogical exercise that works towards a comprehension of the shaping, definitions, and questions raised by an interdisciplinary field of inquiry and an attention to the historical, conceptual, and material specificity of things. But, if such studies are driven solely by theory, we risk coercing students (and falling back ourselves) into believing that theories learnt are simply applicable to a range of divergent historical and conceptual moments, environments, and things rather than realizing the extent to which these moments, environments, and things often engender their own ways of being, of being understood, and being meaningful, and that they often bend theory out of shape. (It is worth recalling that towards the end of Mitchell’s article ‘Showing Seeing’ he speaks of his students’ performances of ‘Show and Tell’ as a practice-based pedagogical strategy that as an act, an encounter, a showing and a telling, are nothing less, he says, than an ‘invitation to rethink what theorizing is’ [p. 178].) In not taking account of such engendering, there is a risk that intensities, particularities, and differences dissolve into banalities, and the complexity of the interpretive abilities that students already have at their disposal are curtailed.

The WD-40 fallacy: Letting ‘visual culture’ stand for both the field of study and the object of study could be damaging for those of us who do not think Visual Studies can or should be all things to all people: an all-purpose fix to the problems, challenges, and possibilities of each of us. I am keen to get beyond the act of inclusion, of political correctness in the classroom or at a conference where I gesture towards, embrace – which is to say name drop, cite, box tick – my friends, colleagues, and fellow scholars working in what are often characterized as minoritarian discourses like Disability Studies, such as Lennard J. Davis (1995, 1997, 2002), Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum (2000), Georgina Kleege (1999), David Hevey (1992), David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (1997, 2000), Katherine Ott et al. (2002), David Serlin (2004), Henri-Jacques Stiker (1997), Rosemarie Garland Thomson (1997), and let us not forget Nicholas Mirzoeff (1995) whose first book is a noteworthy publication on deafness, nor that W.J.T. Mitchell (2001) himself has been touching on blindness, and deafness, and indeed touching, as well on issues of disability more specifically. Why gesture towards them, embrace them in order to attest both to the generosity of the field of inquiry itself and to my own radical credibility? At the same time, rather than encouraging a desire to make the field of Visual Studies meaningful in this way, by

being inclusive of previously marginalized discourses specifically because they were or are marginalized, I would want to begin by showing and telling how these discourses are always already embedded in studies of visual culture. How, for instance, is it possible to teach a seminar on Winckelmann and ideal form without such a discourse being determined by questions of homosociality and body normalization from the start? Beginning with a foregrounding of the diverse specifics of the rich and complex embeddedness of any given study in visual culture is to note how encounters with the discourses, objects, and acts that take place by way of our visual culture enables a focus, as José Esteban Muñoz (1996) has said, 'on what acts and objects do ... rather that [sic] what they might possibly mean' (p. 12). That is, I want to attend to the making that comes out of doing, what we used to call praxis.

These consequences do not offer anything particularly new per se, but they do identify, albeit briefly, instances in which the institution, the classroom, the academic, publishing, and the canonization of key individuals and key tropes are configured and could suffer from a decision *not* to distinguish between 'visual culture' as a field of study and 'visual culture' as the object of that study. For me, they assist in pinpointing some of the reasons why the field of Visual Studies is often guilty of the accusations directed against it by both supporters and detractors alike. Overall, then, these are the reasons why I am pleased with Mitchell's impulse, in the first instance, to distinguish between 'Visual Studies' and 'visual culture', but why I am less comfortable with the idea that we should 'let visual culture stand for both the field and its content, and let the context clarify the meaning'. In principle, Mitchell is right, the context should be enough to clarify the meaning. But this isn't always the case. So, while I do wish that such a thing were possible, I'm still made uneasy by such a conflation. For as long as the confusion *within* the phrase 'visual culture' persists, and continues to be taken advantage of by both champions and critics alike, accusations necessarily directed against an emerging field of study become, as a consequence, also directed against the objects, subjects, media, and environments of that study.

Towards a Community of Reflective Practice

Acknowledging that an over-bureaucratized academic climate may well be, for good or ill, the only conditions under which something like Visual Studies could possibly emerge is part of the reason to showcase the arguments presented in Readings' *The University in Ruins* (1996). His remarks on Cultural Studies can act as both a warning to Visual Studies and also the beginnings of a way forward. Because, along with being disheartening, the book also offers ways of responding to the University of excellence. This involves *remaking* pedagogy, and the idea of research, writing, and thought as ongoing activities, that are useful to the sometimes-bonding-sometimes-disparate readers of this journal as a community of students, scholars, intellectuals, academics, researchers, writers, curators and practitioners seeking opportunities to encounter, engage with, make and act through visual cultures. To this end, Readings introduces a series of conversations that confirm and are

echoed in Mitchell's long-term concerns with visual cultures as they are spelt out in 'Showing Seeing'. Because of this, both *The University in Ruins* and 'Showing Seeing' speak to one another, charting a certain historical, intellectual and institutional predicament, and offering discursive and hands-on means by which to survive it. These conversations enable us to consider how to nourish new contexts of knowledge for both Visual Studies as a field of inquiry and the objects, subjects, media, and environments of visual culture itself, and the purposes and practices of pedagogy in an age when the Enlightenment narrative of the autonomous subject has passed. They encourage us to ask what an intellectual community might look like that 'can think the notion of community otherwise, without recourse to notions of unity, consensus, and communication', in which Readings (1996) says, '*the question of being together is raised ...*' (p. 20, emphasis in original). And, what such a community might be able to make possible because of this. In similar ways, Mitchell's (2002) article 'Showing Seeing' forces us by necessity to attend to the historical, theoretical and tropological complexities of Visual Studies, our self-reflective studies of visual culture, and our own practices within these visual cultures, and to attend to these things from the beginning. Mitchell's article is about the need for reflective practice, and the implications this has for us. From the start, we can take nothing for granted. This, as I understand it, is his reason for exposing 'the constitutive fallacies or myths' (p. 171) of Visual Studies. This includes the democratic or levelling fallacy, the fallacies of the pictorial turn, of technical modernity, of [the purity of] visual media, and the power fallacy. These fallacies call attention to the fact that the very statements nourishing both the supporters and detractors of Visual Studies alike, that become ever more fixed as they embed themselves in our collective vocabulary, are the opposite of an invitation to rethink what theorizing is. If Mitchell is right about these myths and fallacies, then it is important to take account of these factors when beginning any visual culture study. In addition, Mitchell offers a series of counter-theses 'as problems to explore' (p. 171). He proposes that our era is not uniquely visual; that the question of the nature of visual nature remains central; that we must continue to reflect on differences between art and non-art, on the non-visual, and on everyday practices; that all media are mixed media; that the disembodied and the embodied are in constant dialogue; and that the political task of visual culture is critique.

The crux of the matter is not that we necessarily agree with Mitchell's critique of Visual Studies, nor his counter-theses, but that we realize the consequences for us as students, teachers, researchers, writers, and makers if his counter-theses are to become our new starting points. And I think they need to. This would mean that from the beginning Visual Studies as a field of inquiry is alert to the make-up of things in their historical, conceptual, and material specificity; that as a dialectical field of study it is curious and frictional, dialogical and critical; that it is attentive to our self-reflexive, inter-sensory, encounters with visual culture; that as an 'interdiscipline' it 'construct[s] ... new and distinctive object[s] of research' (Mitchell, 2002: 179); that as an indiscipline (Mitchell, 1995: 541) it is committed to ways of seeing as doing, as practice.²⁰ In doing these things it ushers in a whole new series of

challenges and possibilities. Mitchell's article 'Showing Seeing' makes it possible to imagine these counter-thesis as new starting points for the future of the study of visual cultures.

Notes

1. Many thanks to Martin Jay and Whitney Davis for their kind invitation to speak at 'Show and Tell: The Current State of Visual Culture Studies', the Berkeley conference at which an earlier version of this article was presented; to Fiona Candlin, Raiford Guins, Peg Rawes, Mark Robson and Dominic Willsdon for conversations leading up to the event; and to Charles Altieri, Mieke Bal, Tim Clark, Hal Foster, Tom Mitchell and others for their comments and questions during it. A special thanks in particular to Mark Little, Stephen Melville and Simon Ofield, and, as always, to Joanne Morra.
2. A quick word about definitions: in his article 'Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture', W.J.T. Mitchell claims, at first, that Visual Studies is 'the study of visual culture'. (This has always made me suspect that Mitchell's article should more properly be sub-titled 'a critique of visual studies'.) Following Mitchell to an extent, for me Visual Studies is the field of inquiry that studies visual culture. I will be using the designation 'Visual Studies' to stand in for other terms used to characterize this field of inquiry, such as 'Visual Culture', 'Visual Culture Studies', and 'Visual Cultural Studies' until my discussion of Mitchell's own preference to do otherwise. In general, rather than Visual Studies, I prefer to employ Visual Culture Studies for this purpose, but for the sake of clarity in this article I have used Visual Studies.
3. As Mieke Bal (2003) has remarked recently, 'if the tasks of visual culture studies must be derived from its object, then, in a similar way, the methods most suitable for performing these tasks must be derived from those same tasks, and the derivation made explicit' (p. 23). See also Marquard Smith (2005).
4. Some of the arguments in *The University in Ruins* have in fact been outlined and do appear in specific relation to the concerns of Visual Studies, in particular to the interdisciplinary relationship between Art History and literary studies, in the 'General Introduction' to Melville and Readings (1995). See also Melville's response to the *October* 'Visual Studies Questionnaire' (1996), and Melville (2002).
5. Another warning in a different disciplinary habitat was sounded recently by a forum in November 2004 entitled 'Are We in Crisis? Challenges in Teaching and Research in the New Century', sponsored jointly by the Association of Art Historians (AAH) and the Design History Society (DHS). This event, along with a lead article in *Bulletin*, the AAH's newsletter distributed to members of the Association, raised concern over the closure or threatened closure of numerous degree programmes in art and design history in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the falling number of applicants to such programmes, the re-defining of the role of critical and contextual studies on studio-based courses, and the impact that the directives of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) will have on the future of research in art and design history.
6. As Readings points out, to say it is non-ideological does not mean that it isn't political, since "excellence" is like the cash-nexus in that it has no *content*; it is hence neither true nor false, neither ignorant nor self-conscious' (p. 13).
7. This claim is at odds with the claim by James Elkins (2003) that Visual Studies needs to be made 'harder' or more 'difficult' and will thus be more 'interesting' because of it, and that these efforts will give it more credibility. My point here is

that Visual Studies is already 'hard' and 'difficult', and so is 'doing' visual culture.

8. The Higher Education Funding Council for England website, accessed 24 March 2004.
9. Visual Studies, as a recent academic and intellectual project, must certainly be suspicious of its collusion with bureaucracy. Having said that, it may well be the case that it is best placed to take account of its own practices, its own failings, and to unravel its own mechanisms of articulation.
10. This includes students who have graduated from programmes in UK universities and former polytechnics such as Middlesex and Northumbria and Leeds over at least the last 25 years, and those graduating over the last 15 years from Rochester and elsewhere. I am not speaking about the many, many more who are graduating from new programmes that are springing up all over the place from Irvine and Santa Cruz on the West Coast to NYU on the East Coast, from Goldsmiths College in London to elsewhere in the UK, mainland Europe, and beyond. Many, but by no means all, of them have been documented by James Elkins (2003).
11. Following on from Crow's comments, James Herbert (2003: 462) discusses the problem of deskilling and the ways in which it has the potential to down-play 'the analysis of particularities'.
12. Yet to be written in full is a history of the impact that identity politics in the 1970s and 1980s had on the development of Visual Studies. In the writing of this article there followed a longish discussion of this, as a way of filling in a gap or two in response to Mitchell's suggestion in 'Showing Seeing' that 'much of the interesting work in visual culture has come out of politically motivated scholarship, especially the study of the construction of racial and sexual difference in the field of the gaze' and that the 'heady days when we were first discovering the male gaze or the feminine character of the image are now well behind us, and that most scholars of visual culture who are invested in questions of identity are aware of this' (p. 175). On this topic see for instance 'Introduction', Amelia Jones (ed.) (2003: 1–7) and John A. Walker and Sarah Chaplin (1997).
13. There are of course many recent significant contributions to the development of the study of visual culture. Here I am simply pointing out a regrettable (although by no means complete) homogenization of the histories, theories, and teaching practices of complex and often discontinuous visual cultures in Visual Studies.
14. In keeping it simple Mitchell follows a sound lineage of pithy statements, including Michael Ann Holly's affirmation (1996: 40–1) in her response to the *October* 'Visual Culture Questionnaire': 'What does visual culture study? Not objects but subjects – subjects caught in congeries of cultural meanings', and Douglas Crimp's avowal (1999: 52) that 'visual culture is the object of study in visual studies'.
15. Bal (2003) says that because Visual Culture Studies 'carries over ... the "history" element of art history', it can lead to 'the collapse of object and discipline' (p. 6). It's interesting that for Bal it is 'history', rather than a lack of history, that is responsible for this.
16. The quote continues:
for example, that vision is (as we say) a cultural construction, that it is learned and cultivated, not simply given by nature; that therefore it might have a history related in some yet to be determined way to the history of arts, technologies, media, and social practices of display and spectatorship;

- and (finally) that it is deeply involved with human societies, with the ethics and politics, aesthetics and epistemology of seeing and being seen. (p. 166)
17. To qualify this last statement, I'm not saying that Mitchell's article is responsible for this – both the confusion and the criticism have been in place for years – and in fact his writings are much less guilty than many others of giving critics cause in general to criticize the study of visual culture. Actually my feeling is that 'Showing Seeing' is one of the two or three most important starting points for all those in Visual Studies and elsewhere concerned with the study of visual cultures.
 18. See *October's* 'Visual Culture Questionnaire', and also, in the same issue, Rosalind Krauss (1996). On this matter, there's a very useful chapter in Hal Foster (2002) that helped me finally fully understand why one of the editors of the 'Questionnaire' felt that if 'Visual Culture' organized itself on a model of anthropology it was no longer organized around a model of history as were Art History, Film History, and so on. See also Foster (2004).
 19. This question crops up very differently in the UK and the US, given the largely distinct (albeit still modular) programmes in the UK system (a student of Film Studies and a student of Crystallography will rarely meet) and the 'Plato to Nato' type introductory courses taken by all students across the US system.
 20. On the question of interdisciplinarity, at a conference on Visual Studies in Madrid in March 2004, Mitchell repeated a comment he had made in *The Art Bulletin's* range of critical responses to 'Inter/disciplinarity', by speaking of Visual Studies as an instance of 'safe default interdisciplinarity'. A damning phrase I love, it is an interdisciplinarity that is a little adventurous and transgressive, but ultimately ends up just deflecting anxiety. It doesn't have the 'turbulence' or the 'incoherence' or the 'chaos' or the 'wonder' of what interests him: *indiscipline*, the 'anarchist' moment of 'breakage or rupture' when 'a way of doing things ... compulsively performs a revelation of its own inadequacy' (Mitchell, 1996: 541). This criticism of interdisciplinarity is also made by Stephen Melville and Bill Readings (1995: 6) and Stephen Melville (1996). As Carlo Ginsburg (1995) also reminds us, 'there is nothing intrinsically innovative or subversive in an interdisciplinary approach to knowledge' (p. 51).

References

- Bal, Mieke (2003) 'Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture', *journal of visual culture* 2(1): 5–32.
- Cartwright, Lisa (2002) 'Film and the Digital in Visual Studies: Film Studies in the Era of Convergence', *journal of visual culture*, 1(1): 7–23.
- Cheetham, Mark A. (1998) 'Immanuel Kant and the Bo(a)rders of Art History', in Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (eds) *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives*, pp. 6–23. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cheetham, Mark A., Holly, Michael Ann and Moxey, Keith (eds) (1998) *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crimp, Douglas (1999) 'Getting the Warhol We Deserve', *Social Text* 59(17): 49–66.
- Crow, Thomas (1996) 'Visual Culture Questionnaire', *October*: 77: 34–6.
- Davis, Lennard J. (1995) *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body*. London: Verso.
- Davis, Lennard J. (ed.) (1997) *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.

- Davis, Lennard J. (2002) *Bending Over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism & Other Difficult Positions*. New York: Routledge.
- Deutsch, Helen and Nussbaum, Felicity (eds) (2000) *'Defects': Engendering the Modern Body*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Elkins, James (2003) *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Foster, Hal (2002) *Design and Crime and Other Diatribes*. London: Verso.
- Foster, Hal (2004) 'Polemics, Postmodernism, Immersion, Militarized Space' (in conversation with Marquard Smith), *journal of visual culture* 3(2): 320–35.
- Garland Thomson, Rosemarie (1997) *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Garland Thomson, Rosemarie (1995) 'Vitoes and Compatibilities', *The Art Bulletin* 77(4): 521–3.
- Herbert, James (2003) 'Visual Culture/Visual Studies', in Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (eds) *Critical Terms in Art History*, pp. 452–64. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hevey, David (1992) *The Creatures Time Forgot: Photography and Disability Imagery*. London: Routledge.
- Jones, Amelia (ed.) (2003) *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Kleege, Georgina (1999) *Sight Unseen*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Krauss, Rosalind (1996) 'Welcome to the Cultural Revolution', *October* 77: 83–96.
- Melville, Stephen (1996) 'Visual Culture Questionnaire', *October* 77: 52–4.
- Melville, Stephen (2002) 'Discipline, and Institution', in Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (eds) *Art History, Aesthetics, Visual Studies*, pp. 203–14. Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute.
- Melville, Stephen and Readings, Bill (eds) (1995) *Vision & Textuality*. London: Macmillan.
- Mirzoeff, Nicholas (1995) *Silent Poetry: Deafness, Sign, and Visual Culture in Modern France*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. (1996) 'Interdisciplinarity and Visual Culture', *The Art Bulletin* 77(4): 540–4.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. (2001) 'Seeing Disability', *Public Culture* 13(3).
- Mitchell, W.J.T. (2002) 'Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture', *journal of visual culture* 1(2): 165–81.
- Mitchell, David T. and Snyder, Sharon L. (eds) (1997) *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Mitchell, David T. and Snyder, Sharon L. (2000) *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Muñoz, José Esteban (1996) 'Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts', *Woman and Performance* 8(2).
- Ott, Katherine, Serlin, David and Mihm, Stephen (eds) (2002) *Artificial Parts, Practical Lives: Modern Histories of Prosthetics*. New York: New York University Press.
- Readings, Bill (1996) *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rifkin, Adrian (2002) 'Waiting and Seeing', *journal of visual culture* 2(3): 325–39.
- Rogoff, Irit (1998) 'Studying Visual Culture', in Nicholas Mirzoeff (ed.) *The Visual Culture Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Serlin, David (2004) *Replaceable You: Engineering the Body in Postwar America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Smith, Marquard (2005) 'Visual Culture Studies: History, Theory, Practice', in Amelia Jones (ed.) *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*. Oxford: Blackwell.

- Stiker, Henri-Jacques (1997) *A History of Disability*, trans. William Sayers. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Walker, John A. and Chaplin, Sarah (1997) *Visual Culture: An Introduction*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Wolff, Janet (2002) 'Mixing Metaphors and Talking about Art', in Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (eds) *Art History, Aesthetics, Visual Studies*, pp. 260–68. Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute.
- Wood, Christopher (1996) 'Visual Culture Questionnaire', *October* 77: 68–70.

Marquard Smith is a Founder and the Editor-in-Chief of *journal of visual culture*, and a Founder and former Editor of the cultural theory journal *parallax* (Routledge/Taylor & Francis.) Marq is Director of Postgraduate Studies, Course Convenor of the MA Art History, and Course Convenor of the BA(Hons) Visual and Material Culture in the School of Art and Design History, Kingston University, London. Recent and forthcoming publications include *Stelarc: The Monograph* (edited, The MIT Press, 2005), *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future* (co-edited, The MIT Press, 2005), *Visual Culture: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, 4 volumes, for Routledge's Major Works Research Collection Series (co-edited, 2005), and *Moving Bodies: Perverse Visions of Prosthetic Culture*.

Address: School of Art and Design History, Kingston University, Knights Park, Kingston-upon-Thames, London, KT1 2QJ, UK.
[email: marquard.smith@kingston.ac.uk]