

Mapping Visual Studies in Communication

By Kevin G. Barnhurst, Michael Vari, and Ígor Rodríguez

This essay documents the main currents of visual studies in communication. After a brief history of the emergence of the field, we review the record of published research in books and journals during the past 5 years, identifying major strains of theory, key issues, and topical categories. We then apply the strains of thought to classify papers presented at the ICA conferences, noting patterns and shifts across and within ICA divisions and interest groups. Based on these patterns, as well as on informal input from colleagues, we map the discipline formation of visual studies and identify trends in institutional development. We conclude by exploring future directions for the field now that the visual interest group has grown to become the Visual Studies Division of ICA.

Visual studies emerged from its traditional home in the arts during the late 1950s, as the history of photography and film studies enlarged its connections to popular culture. Scholars from many fields began to observe an increasing visuality in culture. Roland Barthes (1957) brought the semiotic structures of imagery to widespread public attention, for example, and anthropologists became sensitive to spatial and nonverbal cues (Hall, 1959). Historian Daniel Boorstin's *The Image* (1962), despite its iconophobia, identified important trends in language and thought. The changes shifted news from events to pseudo-events, introduced publicity and the cult of celebrity, replaced travel with tourism and literature with mass market paperbacks, and substituted the politics of illusion for the politics of ideals. Technical change in the graphic arts, a central element in Boorstin's analysis, also drew attention among media practitioners, as machine-based crafts such as typesetting shifted to photo technologies.

Sol Worth (1981) at the University of Pennsylvania began developing anthropological visual studies along with his students in the mid-1960s. When John Berger's (1972) *Ways of Seeing* television series introduced art theory into the analysis of

At the University of Illinois at Chicago, Kevin G. Barnhurst is interim head of and Michael Vari is a graduate student in the Department of Communication, and Ígor Rodríguez is a student in the Department of Art History. Barnhurst is the author of *The Form of News, A History*, with John Nerone, and of *Seeing the Newspaper*. The authors wish to thank the International Communication Association (ICA) for providing access to conference archives, colleagues who shared their experiences in visual studies, and several readers including Robert L. Craig, Michael Griffin, and Catherine Preston, whose detailed critiques proved especially helpful.

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advertising, visual studies had entered the mass communication scene. By the late 1970s, professional societies formed around visual practices, such as the Visual Communication Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) and the Society for Newspaper Design. Visual concerns drew attention among leading thinkers, such as James Carey, who developed a visual seminar at the University of Illinois. The first 3 decades saw an increasing sophistication in visual studies, led by the journal, *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* (1974–1985), and its successors in sociology and anthropology. General interest journals published special visual issues—including *Communication* (Griffin, 1992), *Journalism Educator* (Barnhurst, 1992), and *Hermès* (Dayan & Veyrat-Masson, 1994)—and a steering committee that included Larry Gross, Kevin Barnhurst, and Michael Griffin, formed during the International Communication Association (ICA) annual conference in Washington, DC, helped found the Visual Communication Interest Group in 1993.

The emerging visual studies in communication had matured enough in 1999 to merit an overview of the field. Outlining the history of lens-based media, Griffin (2001) identified several central issues. Scholars continued to echo the concerns of Barthes and Boorstin about the dangers of a society saturated with pseudo-images, but other matters predominated. A principal question in the 1990s revisited earlier debates over whether images are a reflection or a construction. Do photographers and filmmakers mechanically record or artistically express a vision of things? Studies in the psychology of art and elsewhere emphasized mimesis (the techniques for translating three-dimensional experience onto two-dimensional representation), but anthropology and sociology paid more attention to the conventions for constructing symbolic meaning in images and the social contexts shaping picture use and interpretation. Several scholars (e.g., Barnhurst, 1994) explored the latent meanings of visual artifacts. Paul Messaris (1994) challenged the absolute primacy of convention, showing that humans share some universal perceptual processes. The field appeared poised to take on not only specific structures of images but also the social contexts of visual communication.

Since then, books on visual topics related to communication have emerged from many disciplines. Journals in communication have continuously published articles. Outside of communication, journals in art and design, photography, and film studies have contributed articles. A key example appeared in the *Journal of Visual Literacy* in 2002. Our examination of the literature found several key strains of theory in visual studies. We examine these strains, along with studies that are only nominally visual, in program listings and papers presented at recent ICA conferences. Based on patterns in the research across ICA divisions and interest groups, we then turn attention to aspects of discipline formation to identify trends in the social organization of visual theory. Besides mapping the institutional developments of visual studies, we draw on insights from colleagues who responded to informal email inquiries about their views of the visual field. We conclude with a few implications for the future of visual studies, considering emerging issues, innovative research, and new theories. Our comparisons across key theories, topical categories, and institutional

developments not only uncover current patterns but also pinpoint areas where scholarship will likely expand, suggesting opportunities for research, theory, and discipline building.

Main Currents in the Visual Literature

Despite the growing importance of electronic publishing, print still provides the building blocks of physical libraries and leaves a record of where scholarship has traveled. We turn first to books, providing an overview that, although not comprehensive, suggests the main currents in the field and illustrates them with a few notable works. Journal articles contain a more recent record of thinking, and so we next attend to visual articles in journals from communication, as well as to communication articles from visual disciplines. Because current and ongoing projects turn up first in conference papers, we conclude this section by examining the recent output from annual ICA conferences.

A Visual Bibliography

Publishing of visual books in communication has increased dramatically. Our search of on-line libraries, publishers' catalogs, and websites turned up more than 70 titles that more than 33 publishers issued from 1999 through 2003. A handful of books came out each year at first, but then the pace picked up, averaging 18 yearly during the past 3 years. For scholars in the field, the growing list of publishers makes staying current with visual theory and research a more challenging task. The number of outlets for visual studies expanded from a handful in the first 2 years to a dozen or so, in no predictable pattern. The publishers ranged from distinguished university presses—private and public alike, such as Chicago, Columbia, Cornell, Duke, MIT, Princeton, and Stanford, as well as the university presses of Illinois and North Carolina—to prominent trade presses in New York, Abrams to Verso. Publishers with U.S. and U.K. offices were the most prolific, led by Routledge (three titles a year), followed by Sage (three every two years), several imprints of Macmillan (one a year), and Oxford, which tied Chicago and MIT Press (three titles each). The authors spread across the arts and humanities, as well as science and technology. Monographs outnumber edited collections three to one, and only a few authors published more than one visual book in communication. These details shed light on the formation of visual studies as a field, a topic we explore later.

We divided the books into four broad categories, based on their main topic allied with visual studies: philosophical, sociological, psychological, and technological. Almost a quarter of the books are philosophical, examining a key theory or theorist or considering overarching issues of analysis at the cultural level. Another quarter take a sociological view, considering images in the mass or popular media in relation to society, political economy, and history, often through a feminist lens. A larger share focuses on issues at the psychological level, including perception, literacy, and visualized information, and a smaller group focuses more narrowly on technology and new media. Textbooks comprise another small group,

a majority covering research methods and the rest supplementing or introducing visual studies to general communication courses.

Theory and culture. The philosophical books attempt to define the field as an object of study, a systematic language, a reasoned doctrine, a canon, or a discipline, besides an orientation to culture (see Mirzoeff, 2001). Recurring themes include how images communicate (and how viewers read them), how technologies have changed, and how images have multiplied. Some old controversies also surface, such as those over relations between the visual and the linguistic.

The Image Society (Gierstberg & Oosterbaan, 2002) attempt to define visual culture as a social object. The collection examines its problems and potential from several perspectives: art history, journalism, and philosophy. The essays raise questions about the proliferation of images, the relation of images to texts, the influence of visual culture on historical consciousness and expressive traditions, and the challenges of interdisciplinary work, as well as about digital documentation, reproduction, distribution, and authorship.

The field of visual studies inspires attempts to construct specific visual language theories. *Shaping Information* (Kostelnick & Hassett, 2002) create a practical model of professional communication built around visual convention. In *Mythologies of Vision* (2002), Brazilian scholar Eduardo Neiva argues that convention derives from reductive binaries such as mimesis, which divides the image from what it tries to depict. He counters with a Peircean triadic model, which foregrounds the iconic as the foundation of images. Coming at a later stage, after indexes and icons, convention then falls within the symbolic realm, oriented to society. Through historical interpretations of art, perspective, and photography, the book aims to avoid reducing the image to nature, code, and convention. Images present analogies, not duplications of the world but “creative actions and additions” (p. 3).

Directing the field toward reasoned doctrine, *Interpreting Visual Culture* (Heywood & Sandywell, 1999) undertakes to examine visibility. The anthology responds to the interpretive turn and to Martin Jay’s (1993) commentary on the denigration of vision by linguistic reason. The editors brought together scholars from art history, philosophy, sociology, and cultural studies to engage in a “triangulation of social history of perception, the arts of observation, and technologies of the visual” (p. x). The essays take up three themes: the status of the visual in current theory as a resource for inquiry; the often antvisual and overly reflective discourse of the visual in art; and the ethics of the visual, loosely defined. The book aims to recover vision, sensuality, and perception from disembodied, nihilistic, or rationalizing philosophies.

In the 1990s, textbooks assembled the first collections of readings, lionizing some authors and inviting the deep study that should precede any inclusion into a canon of approved texts. In response to the tendency in the field, *Mapping Benjamin* (Gumbrecht & Marrinan, 2003) undertakes a close study of Walter Benjamin, a member of the Frankfurt School. The collection begins by questioning the relevance to visual scholars of his well-known essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936/1969). Organized around eight tensions in Benjamin’s themes, the essays range across cultural studies but remain mostly

theoretical. The exceptions look closely at visual examples, such as the photo-montage work of artist John Heartfield and the film images in *Schindler's List* and *Shoah*. The collection debates some recurrent issues: whether digital media are revolutionary, how high, low, and mass cultures differ, and what political possibilities visual culture presents.

Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction (2003) aims to prescribe the contours of the field as a discipline. James Elkins, an art historian and critic at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, sees what he calls "a set of overlapping concerns" (p. 17) instead of a defined discipline. He criticized the complacent consensus around a few favorite theorists (e.g., Barthes, Benjamin, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan), visual objects (film, photography, advertising, video, and the internet), and concepts (fetish, gaze, spectacle, simulacrum, the Other, machine eye, and scopic regimes, among others). He writes that visual studies is too easy—"an overconfident activism based on an under-interrogated discourse" (p. 200)—too narrow in its theory and objects of study, and too concerned with social meaning and theory rather than form. The weaknesses limit the field, defining it as a mere niche in the humanities. He calls for a discipline

that is denser with theories and strategies, more reflective about its own history, warier of existing visual theories, more attentive to neighboring and distant disciplines, more vigilant about its own sense of visibility, less predictable about its politics, and less routine in its choice of subjects. (p. 65)

He presents 10 case studies demonstrating how to make visual studies more disciplined. The resulting visual courses would relate widely to the entire student body, crossing into the sciences and making more ties outside academia.

The assumption behind the theory and culture books is that images do exert an influence worth examining. As they attempt to define the field, the books emphasize the persuasive power of the visual, although one exception to the pattern deserves wide attention. Going against the grain of the field, Elkins's book pushes toward the internal logic of the visual, a semantic approach designed to counter the rhetorical approach he considers too predominant.

Mass or popular media. A group of books better known among communication scholars takes a sociological view of images in the media. The historical emphasis of the group contradicts Elkins's charge that visual studies is ahistorical. In their objects of study, the books range from the holistic, examining an entire mass medium (such as newspapers; see Barnhurst & Nerone, 2003), to the particular, focusing on a specific medium such as photography. Studies examined photography through photojournalism (Perlmutter, 1999; Brennen & Hardt, 1999; Newton, 2001) and through black-and-white pictures in recent popular culture and in 19-century archives (Smith, 1999; Grainge, 2002). The research shares a concern with memory, authenticity, and identity (Pfitzer, 2002; Kitch, 2001). Other topics include advertising (Shields & Heineken, 2002), political cartoons (Knieper, 2002), the illustrated book (Pfitzer, 2002), and magazine illustrations (Kitch, 2001). Although the latter two books study illustrations from earlier periods, they also relate them to recent visual issues.

Feminism is an important dimension in the sociological books. The visual helps generate subjectivity (Smith, 1999), mapping the female body and proposing ideals of femininity. Images contain vocabularies of gender as well as of race and class (Kitch, 2001), marking women as the standard-bearers of social change and resistance. The studies parallel many others in their focus on history, but social science work has also measured, for example, how advertising imagery socializes audience members and inculcates notions of gender (Shields & Heinecken, 2002).

Together the sociologies of mass and popular media address several key themes. Besides studying the relationships among visual types, forms, or styles on one hand and society, politics, and culture on the other, the books explore how images act to archive cultural memory. They also reveal how mediated images preserve discourses of national identity, gender, race, and class. Another theme is the status of the visual as documentary evidence. The tensions between image and word in the media receive some attention, and almost all of the books place representation in historical context. They attempt to understand how the visual persuades or narrates, in most cases preferring rhetoric as an approach, rather than the pragmatics of image production and reception.

Perception and literacy. Books that study the visual from the perspective of psychology divide roughly into three subsets: visual perception, visual literacy and intelligence, and visualized knowledge and information. Visual perception books operate at the level of the individual receiver of images, usually based on cognitive psychology. One anthology traces the history of cognitive research on vision (Yantis, 2001). The psychology of vision is a dynamic rather than a passive process—looking, not merely seeing—that goes through several steps: attending, orienting, reading, searching, and capturing scenes (Findlay & Gilchrist, 2003). A psychological theory of representation builds from visual recognition tasks (Edelman, 1999), based on shape identification and categorization, to understand what the brain does when humans see objects. Following earlier work on visual images in political science, Doris Graber (2001) applies related ideas from perception to understand how citizens learn about politics.

Other authors study perception through art. One combines the skills of a designer and a psychologist to compare the decision process of an artist making drawings to the perceptual integration of a viewer deciphering them (Massironi, 2002). The resulting taxonomy defines drawings as tools for communicating and also for investigating how humans structure reality. In *Vision and Art*, Harvard neurobiologist Margaret Livingstone (2002) describes how vision works, using examples from the paintings of Claude Monet, Piët Mondrian, and Andy Warhol. She explains topics ranging from ordinary optical illusions to the connections between learning disabilities and artistic skill. From art history, Elkins (2000) contributes a psychological book that makes a transformative, eclectic, and poetic case (like the work of Berger) that looking carefully at mundane objects—sidewalk cracks, patterns in nature, postage stamps—and at complex things like hieroglyphs and mandalas can uncover unexpected meanings.

The visual perception books share an active theory of vision, although Livingstone takes somewhat more interest in how visual objects affect viewers rather than what viewers do to make sense of objects. The cognitive perspective pays atten-

tion to the semantics or structured relations and grammar of images. These books bridge between visual studies and psychology, and they illustrate the wide range of disciplines that contribute to the field.

Books on visual literacy and intelligence expand from the individual level to the immediate surroundings that create the setting where learning occurs. After psychology, the most closely allied discipline in these books is education. An important contribution, John Waisanen's *Thinking Geometrically* (2002), draws on a body of works about literacy and perception to call for more complex and visually informed knowledge. He advocates a wider view of education that extends art concepts beyond the humanities and into the sciences and engineering. Other works in this subset share his concern for broadening visual studies, while focusing on specific examples such as video games or on specific audiences or settings for learning (Gee, 2003; Arizpe & Styles, 2003). The books propose an expanded sense of literacy, in education and in everyday life, that gives greater attention to the visual. The studies range widely, exploring visual media as modes of communicating, learning, and envisioning. Studies of drawings, games, and visualization lead to a more embodied, integrated understanding of cognition.

The third subset of visual literacy books comes predominantly from science and engineering. The titles are too numerous to list and generally come out of presses focused exclusively on the natural science market. The books center on the practical processes and utility of visualizing scientific information. Two standout examples examine the history of visualization since 19th-century spectrum analysis emerged and the role of visual representations in early modern science (Hentschel, 2002; Lefèvre, Renn & Schoepflin, 2003). Through generations of astronomers, chemists, physicists, and others, scientific recording devices, as well as the technologies of printing, have wielded an influence on public understanding about science, the world, and the cosmos. Elkins (2001) makes an appearance again here. His volume urges art historians to broaden their subject matter to encompass not only fine arts but also the imagery of science and technology, from archaeology to mathematics, medicine, commerce, and music. He proposes a semantic approach (to what he calls *image studies*) that relies on parsing the internal organization of such images, but like other books in this subset, he attends to the pragmatics of visual phenomena. He rejects the approach widely used elsewhere to understand the persuasiveness of imagery and instead accepts visual practices as a central concern.

Books on visual perception and literacy share a microlevel, psychological perspective, but the subsets within the category differ in one important respect. The books dealing with scientific visualization begin from pragmatics, treating the visual as an assemblage of practices. Other books on visual perception and literacy begin from semantics, treating the visual as a logic, grammar, or structure, but here again Elkins provides a crossover example.

Technology and methods. The final two groups of books study visual phenomena through a technical lens, one beginning from the technology of new media and the other from the techniques of visual research. The main issue for the technology books involves new media and paradigm shift. Have digital media caused a radical rupture with the past, or do they represent a continuation of

historical processes? Some scholars see a new paradigm (e.g., Darley, 2000), but others dispute it or take a qualified position. Lev Manovich (2001), a new media artist and professor, tackles the question with the most thoroughness, specifying the differences and continuities of new media without falling into an overheated, everything-has-changed stance. A secondary argument asserts that digital media render all expressions identical, reducible to computation or simulation, creating a state of medialessness (Rodowick, 2001).

The debate pits theorists, who tend to consider the changes a revolution, against practitioner-theorists, who consider the changes a continuation. As a practitioner, Manovich crafts his theory with practical attention to interfaces, hardware, software, and operations. Others merge theory and practice and directly engage specific new media objects to illustrate the merger (Hocks & Kendrick, 2003). They argue against considering the attributes of new media radical. Even books that are more journalistic than scholarly fit the theorist-versus-practitioner pattern (Helfand, 2001). We found only one practitioner-theorist, the new media artist Tom Sherman (2002), who considers the change revolutionary.

In an important theoretical move, these books strongly reject semiotic approaches to images in the wake of technological change. Film theorist D. N. Rodowick (2001) takes issue with the subordination of the visual to linguistic semiology, which he argues is inadequate for studying new media (a position that some extend to all visual objects; see Neiva, 2002). The temporal bias of language permeates hybrid new media, Rodowick writes, breaking down a distinction between the linguistic and the plastic that has held since the early modern era. Others also call for a more nuanced understanding of word-and-image dynamics (Hocks & Kendrick, 2003). These books take a semantic approach, finding the order and logic that spring from the technologies of user interfaces (e.g., Monmonier, 2002).

Textbooks comprise another group, a majority of them covering research methods and the balance introducing and summarizing visual studies or supplementing courses in communication (e.g., Thomas, 2001; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). General textbooks trail behind the field, focusing on well-established thinking. A recent text, for instance, takes a rhetorical approach to teach undergraduates about critical and cultural theory (Fuery & Fuery, 2003). Methods textbooks further establish practices in the field. Although we only mention the textbooks here, they do play a part in discipline formation, a topic we return to later.

The expanded publishing of visual books related to communication over the past 5 years follows three main strains of thinking that spanned the topical areas. The most common approach is rhetorical, especially among books on the popular media and on theory. A second, central strain involves semantics, especially among books on visual perception but also among some on technology. The third strain involves pragmatics, mostly among books on visual perception but also among some on theory and culture. Because of the long delay from conception to the bookshelf, the trends in thought found in book publishing lag behind theory found in other forms of publishing. We next turn to journal articles, which come out faster but have the authority of peer review behind them, before returning to a more detailed discussion of the three approaches identified so far.

Periodical Elements

To identify the high points in recent article publishing, we examined the following communication journals, which are among the best known and most widely circulated: *Journal of Communication*, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *Communication Theory*, *Media, Culture & Society*, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Popular Communication*, *Political Communication*, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, and *Public Opinion Quarterly*. We looked for articles broaching the visual dimension in any way. Visual articles comprised a small proportion of those published in the first four journals, one or none in a typical year. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* had two or three visual articles each year. In its first year, *Popular Communication* published three visual articles. The last four journals published fewer (two, two, one, and none, respectively) in recent years. All but 2 of the 36 visual studies articles we found in these journals take a sociological approach, relating images in popular or mass media (or in public exhibits) to society. The two remaining articles take a philosophical approach to the visual. The articles divide roughly into three subsets focused on representation, cultural memory, and media practice.

Articles on representation study gender, ethnicity, national identity, or social movements. Elizabeth Bird (1999) ranges across popular media, from romance novels and films to television series, to demonstrate how stereotypical imagery and narratives continue to sexualize Native Americans under the White gaze. Gigi Durham (2001) found a similar process in fashion images depicting how White women adopt South Asian femininity. Popular representations of gender form a core of this subset. Studies examine the female stereotypes in the country music industry or Spanish-language television commercials (Andsager & Roe, 1999; Fullerton & Kendrick, 2000), for example, and the competing codes of masculinity—sex object, androgynous male, bad boy, hybrid man—in images of a celebrity actor-singer in Japan (Darling-Wolf, 2003). Market forces may, however, produce more egalitarian (but gendered) patterns of representation through, for instance, codes of heroism in television advertisements portraying Olympic athletes (Goodman, Duke & Sutherland, 2002). Katherine Sender's (1999) study of gay window advertising (publicity targeted to lesbians, gays, and bisexuals without alerting heterosexuals) views sexual identification through the pragmatics of reading strategies.

From the outset, we excluded articles that deal with inherently visual media without paying any attention to the visual dimension, a common occurrence, for example, in the *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*. Despite our best efforts, we still found studies among the articles on representation that appear, from the title and abstract, to focus on the visual but turn out not to give more than passing reference to the visual. We call their approach *nominal* to indicate that they appear to study the visual without studying it. Two examples refer to images of resistance, such as an advertising campaign depicting fictional protesters or the billboards that culture jammers altered (Bishop, 2003; Atkinson, 2003).

Other articles on representation analyze newspaper pictures or political cartoons as symbolic systems central to national image. Researchers compared images of U.S. and non-U.S. violence in front-page photographs from the *New York*

Times during 2 decades, showing a pattern of sanitizing domestic violence but rendering foreign violence more brutal (Fishman & Marvin, 2003). Political cartoons in Arab and Muslim newspapers provide an alternative perspective, employing humor, irony, and satire, that differed sharply in tone from U.S. responses to the events surrounding the 2001 terrorist attacks (Diamond, 2002). Documenting the advance of Americanization, a study of Israeli newspaper ads found American symbols displacing Israeli symbols during the past decade (Avraham & First, 2003).

Another subset of studies explore how images construct, memorialize, and haunt aspects of national cultural memory. Most of these articles approach the study of cultural memory through visual rhetoric (see Foss, 1994; Zelizer, 1998). One method is the close reading of a single image, such as photos of the Marines raising the flag on Iwo Jima during World War II or of the naked girl running from a napalm attack during the Vietnam War (Hariman & Lucaites, 2002, 2003). This work analyzes powerful photographs that embody moments in history and that, through recirculation and reappropriation, continue to animate collective memory. Other authors did similar work by studying public exhibitions, such as a Holocaust museum or an exhibit of Cambodian atrocity photographs (Hoskins, 2003; Hughes, 2003). Public displays invite questions about authenticity and the tendency to memorialize rather than politicize past violence.

Although most of the work on cultural memory document rather than expand the visual rhetoric approach, some studies build theory overtly. Scholars have developed a critical iconology of images to understand post-Cold War nuclear culture (Taylor, 2003) or U.S. presidential campaign ads depicting children (Sherr, 1999), and they employ theories of symbolic convergence to analyze political cartoons of the Clinton-Lewinsky-Starr investigation and impeachment case (Benoit et al., 2001). A recurring theme in rhetorical studies of cultural memory is the discourse surrounding new technologies (e.g., Stein, 2002).

Finally, a smaller subset of articles center on structures in the texts of popular media. These studies take up contradictions: verbal versus visual communication in television news magazines (Stein, 2001), form versus comprehension on websites (Klijn, 2003) or television (Sundar, 2000), and message design features versus target audiences for health campaigns (Morgan et al., 2003). Design decisions about newspaper articles, such as the choice of horizontal or vertical page layout, can influence reader perception of content (Middlestadt & Barnhurst, 1999). Even when the work begins from a media effects tradition, it takes on larger issues, such as what ideological consequences follow or how the political environment or the organizational structure influences form (Lo, Paddon, & Wu, 2000; Lowrey, 2003). One largely philosophical article examines virtual reality to propose alternative visions of technology that challenge media processes and effects (Gunkel, 2000). Most articles approach their subject through semantics, aiming to understand the sense-forming structures of visuals in communication.

Visual articles in mainline communication journals primarily examine popular or mass media, including new media. Most address their objects of study as persuasive or rhetorical. All the articles in the representation and cultural memory subsets consider persuasion central to understanding visual texts. The other subset analyze audiences through practices or pragmatics, to explore how they con-

front visual texts. Another approach, drawing on semantics, usually stands alone, although the occasional study may combine visual semantics and rhetoric or visual semantics and pragmatics (Stein, 2001; Lowrey, 2003). One philosophical article, by Neiva (1999), stands outside the three subsets we identified and instead attempt a redefinition of semiotics. Finally, the journal literature contains studies that are only nominally visual, examining a medium, activity, or phenomenon that is inherently visual without observing its visual aspects with consistency or rigor.

Allied visual journals. Besides the main journals, we turned to visual journals from allied fields such as the social sciences, education, and journalism: *Visual Studies* (formerly *Visual Sociology*), *Visual Anthropology*, *Visual Anthropology Review*, *Journal of Visual Literacy*, and *Visual Communication Quarterly*, as well as a start-up journal, *Visual Communication*. The first four emerged from scholars outside communication and publish only occasional articles about the discipline. The third grew from the practitioner wing of communication, and the last began as a commercial venture allied primarily with other disciplines.

The sociology and anthropology journals concentrate on the camera as a research tool. Few of their articles deal directly with communication, and we found none in the anthropology journals of recent years. The biannual *Visual Studies* includes communication scholars on its board and reflects their interest in its content. An article by Catherine Preston (2001) typifies the sociological view. She found that storage, access, and recirculation of photographs affected the construction of the historical record and national memory. Such articles take on specific contexts, such as questioning the documentary value of photographs and the editorial agendas of newspapers, showing how patterns from the road-movie genre constrain visual representations of the refugee, or aligning film images of white-collar crime with cultural codes that downplay its importance in the public arena (Lackey, 2001; Wright, 2001, 2002). Feminism and gender make appearances in the articles (Kalof & Fitzgerald, 2003), and the persuasive power of imagery comes to the fore. Two studies break from the predominant reliance on rhetoric. One compares responses of Italian and American women to Italian advertisements (Harper & Faccioli, 2000), and another finds that close-ups create a false sense of intimacy in wildlife films (Bouse, 2003).

The *Journal of Visual Literacy* generally publishes very few articles on communication, and these take an applied approach, as exemplified in two studies. One takes stock of how adults recognize and interpret historic news photographs (Seels, Good & Berry, 1999), and the other considers how works of art used in advertisements affect high- and low-culture audiences (Maxwell, 1999). A special issue during the period includes articles on six visual theory topics: phenomenology, semiotics, sociocultural semiotics, rhetoric, critical theory, and perception (Kenney, 2002). The essays asserts a need for visual literacy, especially during what some authors call the most image-saturated period in history. Several of them say that new technologies made imagery more dominant globally, and they challenge previous approaches to the visual. The issue calls for studies that are cross-cultural and multimodal (crossing multiple media and languages). Some of the interplay in the issue rehearse older questions, such as whether language metaphors limit

visual understanding and whether visual communication is culturally bound. The issue continues the emphasis on persuasion and rhetoric but also pushes the field toward semantics, asking whether and how images can make propositions.

The pragmatic focus of *Visual Communication Quarterly* distinguishes it from most of the journals we studied. Circulated as an insert in *News Photographer*, the magazine of the National Press Photographers Association, it primarily runs brief practical reports applied to journalism or advertising, falling into three groups: audience response studies combining a pragmatic approach with either visual semantics or rhetoric (e.g., Huang, 2000), rhetorical studies of photojournalism (e.g., Goodnow, 2003), and a few organizational studies linked to visual news production. The semantics articles we studied examine audience reactions either to formats, such as online news and banner ads or screen sizes, or to visual conventions in the news media, often with a technological focus. Scholars also combine semantics with rhetoric, looking, for example, at audience reactions to advertising or news photography to observe the persuasive outcome. Purely rhetorical studies, like the mass media books and mainline journal articles we examined, consider how major events or photographic histories interact with cultural memory, public myths, and politics.

The new journal, *Visual Communication*, occupies a position between the communication discipline and the arts. The communication journals run primarily studies of popular or mass media, approached through rhetoric, but *Visual Communication* runs mainly studies of new technology, approached through semantics. Although not all concern new media, six of the seven articles published in the journal's first two years fit the pattern. The remaining article takes a pragmatic approach centered on the user, developing a taxonomy of image content to make image-retrieval systems functional (Burford, Briggs & Eakins, 2003).

Articles in the journal usually adhere to the pattern of the technology and methods books described earlier, combining semantics with new media studies (Iedema, 2003; Hodge, 2003). The articles tend to employ semiotics, looking to construct specific visual language theories, as do some philosophical books. Multimodal interactions between the visual and verbal modes in new media inspired authors to develop semiotic analysis. They use semiotics to apply to specific media, such as hypertext, to compare across modes such as graphic signs and pictures, or to revise older models of gender representation (Bell & Milic, 2002; Lemke, 2002; Stötzner, 2003). Broader studies extend a kind of grammar to, for example, color as a culturally produced resource (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2003). Unlike work in communication journals, which tends to reflect the dominance of rhetoric, *Visual Communication* may represent a leading edge of scholars shifting visual studies toward semantics.

We can offer three general observations about the allied visual journals. Those growing out of social science disciplines see the impact of visuals as persuasive, and rhetorical approaches also turn up in all the other allied journals. Two of them grew organically from practical fields, education and journalism, and they retain a pragmatic approach or combine questions of practice with other approaches. *Visual Communication*, which seems most closely allied with the arts and new technology, takes a primary interest in the semantic structures of visuals,

an approach that seems to be finding a hold elsewhere. In sum, no journal exists squarely within communication as a scholarly and theoretical discipline, as opposed to a practical one.

Art and design, photography, and film journals. Beyond the visual journals that intersect with communication at regular intervals, we examined other journals that publish theoretical work in the visual arts, such as art and design, photography, and film studies, to discover articles focused on communication. From art and design, we analyzed several journals, including *Journal of Visual Culture* (another recent start-up from Sage), *Design Issues*, and *Design Studies*.

The *Journal of Visual Culture* publishes articles divided among four topics. The main one is fine art, its aesthetics and performance, and a secondary one tries to define visual studies as a philosophical field. Two minor topics include geographic spaces and popular media. Only some philosophical articles, along with the media articles, are germane here. Philosophical articles tend toward semantics, with scholars either taking issue with the notion that the visual is cultural at heart or considering the effects of digital convergence on visual studies (Jay, 2002; Cartwright, 2002). Media articles divide equally among visual semantics and rhetoric (unlike those from mainline communication journals). Researchers employing semantics focus on the temporal dimension of moving images or look at *metaforms* (media products that place their form at center stage, such as the cable television program, "Pop Up Video") to study how the dispersed media culture disseminates information and how audiences consume the scattered output (Cubitt, 2002; Rutsky, 2002). Rhetorical approaches examine cultural memory through political violence, studying the visual tropes that define how mass media memorialize terrorist attacks, and through nostalgic images, such as Norman Rockwell paintings, invoked as expressions of mourning and of revisionist cultural values (Bird, 2003; Frascina, 2003).

Design Issues ranges across the theory, history, and social consequences of designed objects, products, systems, industries, and urban spaces. Articles include case studies, biographies, and theoretical treatises, underscoring design as a social practice. Most study the visual without paying explicit attention to communication, and some do the opposite. A nonvisual communication article might analyze engineers' use of language in the design process. About one article per issue explores visual communication, making the journal a central outlet for the field. For instance, a history of 19th-century picture magazines argues that photographic technology did not determine how journalists pictured civic life (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2000). About one in three of the visual communication articles is historical, and the others shared current interests in technology or ecology. The dominant approach is through visual semantics.

Other journals from art and design, such as *Design Studies*, tend to address not the products but the practices of design. Communication is then interpersonal, among designers and their clients. Recently *Design Studies* expanded to include a few visual articles on communication, exploring, for instance, how using technology leaves tracks in print designs and what relationship forms between design elements and brand identity (Cleveland, 2004; McCormack, Cagan, & Vogel, 2004). Visual semantics is an emerging area within these design studies.

To round out our exploration of visual articles, we also reviewed several journals from photography and film studies, including *Afterimage*, *Camera Obscura*, *Cineaste*, *Cinema Journal*, *Film Quarterly*, *Moving Image*, and *Velvet Light Trap*. We found that some focal points of the *Journal of Visual Literacy* special issue emerged, such as new media, globalization, multimodality, and visual excess. We looked especially for new theories or aspects of visual studies missing from other venues and found that, amid the widespread attention to digital media, film theorists began exploring the impact of new technology on the indexical quality of film. In this move, the journals overlapped books of the period. Manovich (1999), for example, traces the rise of realism in film. Cinema at first set up an indexical relation between visible signs and their referents, subordinating film to painting in the arts and relegating nonindexical relations to the zones of animation and experimental filmmaking. Digital cinema opened the door for film to escape the hegemony of painting and to place artifice and manual techniques once again at the center. The force of this argument pushed studies toward visual semantics.

Clearly, the patterns in other disciplines diverge somewhat from communication, where rhetorical approaches predominated. Art and design, photography, and film studies have their practical zones, but the leading edge of research and theory approach the visual through semantics. We have used the terms *rhetoric*, *pragmatics*, and *semantics* as descriptive, to capture the general persuasive, practical, and analytical burden scholars assign and approach they take to the visual phenomena they study. We now turn to a closer examination of the terms.

Trends in Visual Theory

Throughout the visual literature related to communication over the past 5 years, several trends in research and theory have emerged. We found three major strains of thought, which we will call *visual rhetoric*, *visual pragmatics*, and *visual semantics*. Based on our review of the literature, we can now define these terms and review some interesting shifts we have identified in scholarship.

Studies that take primarily a rhetorical approach consider images and designs key occasions of persuasion. Some images, such as advertisements, attempt to exert overt influence, and research tries to show how. Most of the literature concerns not blatant incitement but latent enticement, which research attempts to make manifest. Visual rhetoric dominates research on mass media and popular culture, including most feminist studies. It is also the preferred approach within research on visual theory and culture, where it seeks to expose the ideological underpinnings of imagery ranging from television to museum displays. The background assumption of visual rhetoric is that revealing intentional or hegemonic meanings requires a critic, who can intervene between the imagery and the viewer. As the most widely used approach to visual studies in the past 5 years, especially in communication studies, visual rhetoric has recently come under attack. Critics consider its objects of study too narrow, its results too facile, and its politics too predictable.

Studies that take primarily a pragmatic approach consider the visual a practice. (Pragmatics here refers not to the American Progressive-era philosophy but to the

ordinary sense of the term.) Visual practices include the processes of and the qualities emerging from the production of images and designs, as well as the activities of sense making that occur during reception. Visual pragmatics comes largely from sciences and the applied fields of journalism and engineering, where scholars explore how to make knowledge and information visible. Only a scattering of similar work turn up in other topical domains. Some cultural work, for example, examines the pragmatics of workplaces for designers and cartographers. Visual perception and literacy research touches on how children read images, and popular media studies include how women understand the visual. Visual pragmatics remained a minor strain in the literature for several reasons. Except for surveys, ratings, and circulation figures, studies of the audience are always in short supply. Practical studies of journalism and design rarely aspire to build scholarly theory. Scholars consider ethnographic work on the production side a burdensome process, requiring human subjects protections and long hours of interviews, participation, and observation, followed by slow and unpredictable processes of transcription and analysis. The number of studies dwindle further because few ethnographers center their attention on the visual.

Studies that take primarily a semantic approach consider the visual as text in much the way that linguists look at language, concentrating on the internal structures within a design or image to discover the grammar, syntax, or logic that organizes meanings. Visual semantics has long dominated research emerging in visual perception, from the arts and psychology, as well as in visual literacy, although in the past such research often served administrative ends. The recent growth of research on digital media has given new energy to visual semantics. Almost all of the work we examined in the area of technology studies relies on the approach, perhaps because semantics provides a departure point to study any new kind of imagery. The background assumption of visual semantics emphasizes the meaning that resides in the order of things. Internal structure provides the first, and perhaps most important, clues to how visual phenomena hold coherent meanings or make sense. In this work, language metaphors predominate, despite the standing criticism of research subordinating the visual to the verbal. The new work, however, often adopts a critical stance toward the image, which may deploy semantic forms and structures to accomplish ideological ends.

Sorting visual studies from other research is often difficult because all communication has a visual dimension. Television and film are visual media, but so are newspapers and the internet. Even supposedly nonvisual media such as radio invite active visualization on the part of producers and listeners. Interpersonal communication is visual as well in its linguistic imagery and its interactive processes. Areas of study such as politics, advertising, and public relations often rely on visual notions, such as the public image of a candidate, product, or organization. Much of the research in these areas and their related imagery does not pay attention to the visual dimension. The studies mention images and use visual materials but are visual only in a nominal sense. Television research usually does not center on the televisual image but on the texts, production routines, and conditions of reception, and the studies employ methods that rely on language, whether manifest or latent. The researchers rarely cite previous visual studies or

build visual theory in any way, even though the topics, titles, and tasks they undertake demand an understanding of visual research and theory.

Setting aside the nominal studies, these three strains of thought ran through the background of all the published visual research. Visual rhetoric, pragmatics, and semantics can provide a useful lens for examining more recent scholarly output as well.

Current Research Papers

Conference papers represent the leading edge for most research. Several communication meetings include visual research, but one of the key venues has been the ICA annual conference. To identify recent patterns in the field, we examined ICA proceedings for the past 5 years. The 1999 meetings in Acapulco, Mexico, were small, with about a third fewer papers presented, and the 2003 meetings in San Diego, California, were about a third larger than in the intervening years. Through the ups and downs, the volume of visual research appears to have increased slightly. The percentage rose from about 4 in 1999 to more than 5 in 2003, after reaching a high of almost 7 in 2002. The 2002 convention in Seoul, Korea, was a watershed in visual studies.

Although it hosted more visual papers than did any other ICA division, the Visual Communication Interest Group accounts for only slightly more than a third of the visual research presented, a share that may have declined somewhat. Two other divisions, Popular Communication and Mass Communication, play a central role, hosting about one in seven of the visual papers. Although the share presented in Popular Communication sessions has declined each year since 2000, two other groups have increased their visual research: the Feminist Scholarship and the Information Systems divisions each hosted 1 in 12 papers presented, but not consistently every year. The 5-year average disguises a rise for these two divisions from none of the papers in the 1999 program to one in eight of the papers in the 2003 program.

Beyond the core groups, visual studies has spread more widely across other ICA divisions. In 1999 only three other divisions hosted visual papers, perhaps due to the conference size, but in 2003 all but 4 of the 17 existing divisions and interest groups did so. Visual studies has become central to the communication discipline. Only two ICA divisions, Communication Law and Policy and Language and Social Interaction, have not presented visual research, and all but one of the divisions hosting visual research included more than one paper over the period.

It is too early to say which papers or sessions will prove influential in the growth of visual studies, but some patterns have emerged in the three major strains of theory. The lion's share of the ICA research, usually at or near half of the papers, approaches its subject matter through visual rhetoric. Papers suggest that visual imagery influences ideas, ways of living, and pictures of the world regardless of the viewer's gender, ethnicity, and national origin. The main subject matter for visual rhetoric is the marginal, minority, or at-risk population, especially women, but some presenters see a wider impact. Robert L. Craig and Lawrence Soley (2002), for example, found that a mainstream source of images, Astroturf advertising, has implications for populism. Deceptive political issue advertising confuses

audiences and harms the political process and policy. In the past 3 years, the share of rhetorical papers declined by almost a third, to less than a half of all visual papers, suggesting a small but potentially important shift as scholars begin to question its central role. The largest decline occurred within the visual interest group, as one might expect for the leading locus of scholarship, but papers spread across almost a dozen other divisions offset the change somewhat.

The pattern of innovation, moving from the visual group at the core out to other divisions over time, appears to hold for other developments. Overall, papers employing visual semantics have also been declining, from about a quarter of the 1999 papers to about 1 in 10 in the past few years. The scholars arguing for a shift from rhetoric have pointed to semantics as an alternative, and within the visual group, the number of papers employing visual semantics has increased in the past 2 years. The studies take a fine-grained look at a variety of visuals, especially news pictures on television and in periodicals, but also editorial cartoons, women's magazine ads, and ethnic postcards. Michael Griffin's (2002) study comparing pictures of the Gulf, Afghanistan, and Iraq wars, for example, uses content analysis to expose the underlying patterns of news coverage based on the structures of journalistic conventions, government narratives, and arms catalogs. Younger scholars seem to take a special interest in semantic studies, which often tackle current issues, such as terrorism and policing the Texas-Mexico border, without closing off options for critique.

The other area of growth has been visual pragmatics. Although small, the overall share has more than doubled during the past 5 years, but here again the visual interest group seems to hew more closely to trends in the field of visual studies. Pragmatics papers within the interest group have stayed about the same during the period. The growth in research, in ICA as elsewhere, occurred in studies of new technology. In ICA the increase took place in two divisions that focus on practical concerns of that sort, Mass Communication and Information Systems. Scholars working in visual pragmatics included Jacqueline Naismith (2001), who considers design practice, and Matthew Soar (2003), who employs Bourdieu's notion of habitus.

The increases in the visual literature occurred in book publishing and new journals, as well as at ICA conferences, where more divisions hosted papers, although some research was only nominally visual. Rhetoric dominates in books on theory and on mass and popular media, in visual articles from communication journals, and in ICA papers. Visual pragmatics dominates in books from the sciences and engineering and in journal articles on visual literacy. Visual semantics dominates in books and articles on perception and literacy and on new media. These strains of thought are in flux, with rhetoric declining recently in ICA papers. For the smallest group of published research, visual pragmatics, ICA papers have noticeably increased, especially in work on technology. In contrast, visual semantics represents a sizable portion of book and journal research, but ICA papers taking the approach declined sharply. Despite the overall decrease, leading sites of study, such as the ICA visual group or the new *Visual Communication* journal, suggest scholars may be shifting away from visual rhetoric toward semantics.

Discipline Formation

The progress of theory in communication visual studies has grown out of concrete organizations and networks. To assess the trends we found, we examined the institutions supporting visual scholarship in light of the literature of discipline formation. We also approached members of organized visual studies groups to explore their views on the state of the field. This section reports the results of those informal email exchanges, as well as the information gathered from the internet and other public sources about support for visual research.

Most accounts of discipline formation hark back to Thomas Kuhn's (1962/1996) observations about normal science and scientific revolutions. Griffin's (2001) essay on the origins of visual studies makes clear that no paradigm shift occurred. Major theorists emerged out of many fields concerned with lens-based images. The same seems likely for other visual areas in communication, such as typography and design. In email exchanges, visual scholars likewise describes the multiple roots of visual studies, rather than one or more paradigm shifts.

Founding narratives may indicate whether the processes of institutional development follow one of the three models from the sciences (Mulkay, 1975). In *closed* development, researchers pursue new areas of interest from within the original discipline, expanding its parameters. In *open* development, researchers pursue an area from outside of—once considered irrelevant to or in conflict with—the original discipline, and sometimes a new one emerges. In *branching* development, researchers pursue within their discipline an area that requires support from another, and the hybrid fruits may feed the original or yield an interdisciplinary field. Visual studies appears to fit the branching model. The new field does not threaten the larger communication discipline, and the topics of study often cross into other disciplines. Scholars who corresponded with us seem deeply aware of (and even celebrate) the interdisciplinary quality of visual studies.

In the view of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1969), one of the defining qualities of an intellectual field is the specific publics that receive its work. The variety of book publishing outlets described earlier, as well as the myriad journals and the range of ICA divisions hosting visual research, show that visual studies addresses many publics. When we asked colleagues which journal and which publisher of scholarly books leads the field, the prevailing answer was that no specific venue either for books or for articles stands out as the most important outlet for their research. Visual studies disseminates results widely among many academic groupings.

Rather than emphasizing separation and distinctiveness, a branching discipline provides an academic identity (Edge & Mulkay, 1976), which scholars have several motives for adopting. Some do not want to create a fissure from the original home discipline, others see a research area that can expand their home parameters, and still others want to collaborate across those lines without forming a new discipline. These motives found in the physical sciences also turn up in our email exchanges with others in visual studies. Although occasionally a colleague mentions the desire to create a separate discipline, the consensus falls squarely within the branching model, with scholars adopting an academic identity as visual researchers.

Of course, branching can eventually lead to a separation, as occurred when radio astronomers branched off from astronomy. If that is the case for visual studies, then the process is at its earliest stages. The sequence of change for branching sciences has three phases (Edge & Mulkay, 1976). First, new concepts and procedures turn up at the margins of the discipline. Second, scholars form local groups, publish their work, and expand the reach of the new area. Finally, they may develop separate institutional homes. Visual studies in communication appears to be in the second phase, which may or may not lead to the third.

Although discipline formation has emerged as an area of study in the sciences, others have extended the inquiry to the arts and humanities. Scholars in graphic design have published analyses of their developing field (e.g., Cross, 2003), which draws on many of the same theories, methods, and practices as does visual studies in communication. Victor Margolin, an editor of *Design Issues*, has written on the origins of design history. His book, *The Politics of the Artificial*, suggests a way to view visual studies “less as a sectarian discipline and more as a point of departure” (2002, p. 134). He sees his field as a site for interdisciplinary research, rather than for creating a new discipline, but observes that a pluralistic model may result in academic nonexistence.

This brief overview of the literature of discipline formation, as applied to the discussion of visual studies in communication, suggests a final step in examining trends in theory and research. To complete the picture requires a map of institutional structures now in place.

Mapping Institutional Order

The sociology of science has suggested four components that contribute to the institutional grounding of research: a bureaucratic construction, intellectual events, a network of contacts, and a core literature (Chubin, 1976). Visual studies in communication has all of these components.

The field encompasses work from many disciplines, which may overlap each other and contribute distinctive perspectives. As a result, visual studies in communication may not be visible as an academic entity. In informal exchanges, colleagues report low acceptance of and regard for visual work in the academy at large. Within communication, visual studies usually does not form a separate department, which may make the field less visible. Colleagues do not identify leading departments, and very few trained in the same departments. Only one figure prominently in our exchanges: the Annenberg School in Pennsylvania. Perhaps the lack of clear leaders merely reflects the absence of separate departments. Even so, a bureaucratic construction for visual studies has formed within the existing departments. Some schools have a required course, an optional sequence, or even a major. Faculties organize around these curricula in their departments, where colleagues report high regard for their work. The recent curricular changes they report suggest that institutional support has grown.

Beyond academic units, a bureaucratic construction exists in scholarly societies. Three major communication associations, AEJMC, NCA, and ICA, have established visual divisions, and colleagues who joined in informal exchanges about the field belong to one or more of them. The ICA interest group grew sufficiently

by 2004 to reach divisional status at the New Orleans convention. Three other disciplines, anthropology, sociology, and education, have visual groups as affiliates: the Society for Visual Anthropology (SVA), the International Visual Sociology Association (IVSA), and the International Visual Literacy Association (IVLA).

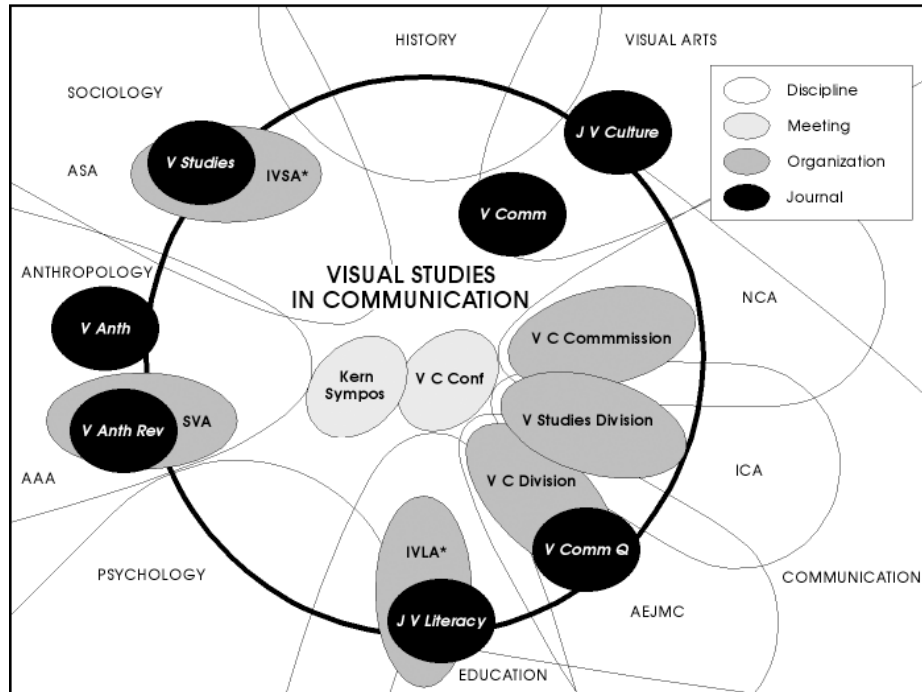
These scholarly societies host regular intellectual events for the field, the second component of institutional support. Besides section meetings, sessions, and panels at the annual meetings, the IVSA and IVLA organize separate symposia or midyear conferences. Two other annual events are the long-standing Visual Communication Conference (sometimes called Rocky Mountain or Alta Visual Communication Conference) and the more recent Kern Communication Symposium at the Rochester Institute of Technology.

Regular meetings also build the third component of institutional support, a communication network to unite the field. Here, once again, visual studies stands on its own. Although not organized into scientific research groups, visual scholars have developed a network of mentors and collaborators. Colleagues report a wide range of connections and cite many mentors, among whom Paul Messaris, of the University of Pennsylvania, and Herbert Zettl, of San Francisco State University, particularly stand out. Among colleagues who mention a different mentor, the universities of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Utah figure prominently. Some colleagues lament their lack of a mentor and wish for a stronger network, but social circles or imaginary groups, as described in the sociology literature (Chubin 1976), do exist in visual studies.

Other connections emerge through published texts. Five years ago, five visual journals were publishing communication research, one independently and the others with sponsorship from AEJMC, IVSA, SVA, and IVLA. An affiliation with a commercial publisher is one measure of a journal's strength. *Visual Anthropology* publishes with Taylor & Francis, and the University of California Press issues the SVA journal. Routledge recently took on the IVSA journal, the AEJMC group reports its magazine will soon have an outside distributor, and two additional journals have emerged from Sage. One of them, *Journal of Visual Culture*, is marginal to communication, a trait shared with recent online publications, such as *(In)visible Culture* (www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/ivchome.html) and *M/C Journal* (www.media-culture.org.au). The other, *Visual Communication*, has been less important than expected in building a network. Despite its name, colleagues say, it does not include many scholars from the communication discipline. Their email correspondence singled out the journal repeatedly as disconnected from their network and from their concerns. At least at the periphery of communication, thriving journals show the growth of visual studies.

The fourth component, a recognized core literature, also exists. Colleagues point to Barthes and Peirce in semiotics, Rudolf Arnheim and Donis Dondis in perceptual studies, Worth in visual ethnography, and Benjamin, Stuart Hall, and W. J. T. Mitchell in critical and cultural studies, among others. They also criticize the field for focusing on a few classic writings. Grousing about the dominance of a few authors reveals the emergence of a traditional canon.

From this overview, we can now map four institutional components supporting visual studies in communication (see Figure 1). At least six disciplines besides



*Also organizes a second, smaller meeting yearly.

Figure 1. Disciplinary structure of visual studies in communication.

communication form a background, and some have penetrated more deeply into the field than others. Two independent meetings take place, and six associations now hold separate meetings, foster interactions, and help form networks among scholars. Finally, four groups sponsor journals, and a publisher has founded two unaffiliated journals, which operate mostly at the periphery of the network of colleagues conducting visual studies in communication.

The formation around visual studies in communication has grown during the past 5 years. The institutional bureaucracy within departments and scholarly societies has advanced, the number of regular intellectual events has increased, and networks of contacts have emerged to critique the core texts. Unlike the sciences, where such a firm institutional groundwork might lead to disciplinary separation, visual studies has not yet split away to form its home discipline.

Conclusions and Prognoses

Visual studies in communication is an expanding field, paralleling another phenomenon that many scholars describe as global: the rise and dominance of imag-

ery. Publishers have expanded the output of visual books and journals, visual scholars presented papers more widely across ICA divisions, and some institutional components supporting research grew. In the process, signs of maturation, such as debates over dominant tendencies, emerged, as did different approaches and objects of study. The growth of the publishing and institutional homes for visual studies seems likely to proceed.

Scholars have continued to debate long-standing issues—how the visual relates to the linguistic, where the image works as documentation or as expression, and whether the visual is universal or culture-specific. We expect the debates to continue and deepen. The visual-verbal divide performs a central role in defining the field, attempting—and always failing—to separate insider from outsider theory. Documentary and expressionist controversies have constantly animated not only the visual but also the literary arts. Those disagreements, along with the universal-cultural debates, link visual studies to larger intellectual tensions among functionalism (which is not dead), pragmatism, existentialism, and materialism. Digital media complicate questions of authenticity and authorship by enabling the automation and translation of imagery across formats and media, collapsing distinctions between sender and receiver and between mediated and personal speech.

Visual scholars also identified new concerns arising out of technological and scientific developments. The portability and accessibility of new media are shifting ratios in research and in user experience toward visual over verbal, production over critique, form over ideology, and practice over theory. Digital imagery and studies of perception have inspired researchers to move in three directions, which we expect to continue. First, the books and articles described here have begun to analyze new forms of interaction, especially multimodality. They trace how semiotics translates from one mode to another, develop schemes to analyze composite meanings in hypermedia, or explore how temporality permeates new media, blurring the verbal-visual distinction (e.g., Waisanen, 2002; Lemke, 2002; Rodowick, 2001). Second, the literature shows new visual language theories developing from technology and science, rather than from linguistics. Here researchers consider the messages, models, hierarchies, and worldviews encoded in new visual forms, interfaces, and operations (e.g., Manovich, 2001; Hodge, 2003). Third, scholars have begun to construct new frameworks of analysis, again drawing on technology and the sciences to offer, for example, alternative visions of representation (e.g., Gunkel, 2000; Iedema, 2003). Visual and perceptual experiences with new media, such as virtual reality or computer simulation, encourage these alternatives. Knowledge visualization in the sciences and information systems may provide new objects of study or yield useful insights that scholars can apply to the traditional objects of communication study.

Researchers moving along these three lines have begun to pull visual studies away from the dominant rhetorical approach. This finding surprised us, as did the new direction: the move toward semantics. The trend in communication has parallels in related areas of visual study, such as design, photography, and film. Psychology has long pursued fine-grained study, and perhaps the next decade will see the rise of institutional support either within the American Psychological Association or in an allied but freestanding society of visual semantics. Psychol-

ogy and technology unite in cognitive neuropsychiatry, neurology of vision, and physiological optics, disciplines that provide insights into visual perception and literacy that may move visual studies closer to semantic approaches and further away from rhetorical and cultural approaches. Unlike older psychological studies, which were positivistic and aimed to serve industrial efficiency, the new visual semantics uses close analysis of images to expose ideological processes and to critique visual culture. We expect the trend toward semantics in conference papers, journal articles, and published books to persist over the next decade, perhaps broadening and revitalizing visual studies in surprising ways within the communication discipline.

Multiple fields continue to influence visual studies: art and aesthetics, anthropology and sociology, communication, and design, photographic, and film studies, as well as science and technology. Visual research that crosses disciplines has low visibility in the academy at large, despite high acceptance within its home departments. These institutional tendencies discourage the establishment of leading centers or outlets of research, suggesting the field will continue to evolve along an interdisciplinary, branching path, without signs of paradigm shift and schism. Visual scholars prefer this fluidity, which allows them to collaborate across boundaries and address many publics, emphasizing expansion over definition. The risks here are apparent, not only in the dangers of invisibility but also in other ways. Nominal work that studies visual phenomena without visual rigor has expanded, and so has research among scholars dispersed across many ICA divisions but lacking much contact with the leading edge of the field. The change suggests the need within ICA for institutional practices that help cross divisional structures and give all scholars access to advances in visual theory. A scholarly (as opposed to practical) journal centered on the discipline clearly would fill a gap in the field, connect visual researchers, and provide a theoretical beacon for others in communication.

Among the disciplines allied with visual studies, history occupies the most unusual place. Outside of communication, visual scholars complain that research pays too little attention to history (e.g., Elkins, 2003), but within communication, history receives near-universal attention in studies that otherwise draw on methods and theories from sociology, cultural studies, and aesthetics, among others. Despite its centrality, history as a discipline has not played host to the sorts of organizations, conferences, and scholarly exchanges that long ago emerged in sociology, anthropology, education, and art. History remains largely unorganized within communication, except in the AEJMC History Division. It would not be surprising for some institutionalization to emerge here, given the heavy emphasis and clear alliance between history and communication, especially in matters visual. In any case, we expect historical study to continue enriching visual studies in communication. History provides a potent counterbalance to studies that approach the visual through semantics, and a combination of historical and semantic approaches may be the cutting edge of visual studies in the next decade.

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