Introduction

In the early 1990s, the political battles of the 1970s seemed to be over, with class struggle as a driving force supposedly rendered obsolete by the end of the Cold War. Certain aspects of these battles had shifted into the universities, mainly thanks to teachers who themselves had participated in the political movements of the 1970s. I was one of those teachers. As an art historian I found myself within a discipline that I wanted to teach, but that in many ways did not satisfy me. The 1980s had brought feminism into academia, reshaping it into gender studies, a transformation I had tried to be part of. And in Britain and the United States, not only women asserted themselves as new subjects in academic discourse, but also those groups of individuals who were fighting for visibility and a voice as the Other of dominant ethnic, cultural and sexual categories. Visibility became a currency of social recognition, and a political issue. From the late 1980s, it also became an academic issue. And from the early 1990s in Britain and the United States it brought forth a new discipline, visual culture studies, which in turn brought forth a new concept: visuality. This book is about a particular intellectual struggle that originated in the 1970s and continues today. Two disciplinary fields will be in play in my analysis: art history and visual culture studies.

A hotly contested debate in the early 1990s unfolded between art history and visual culture studies over the interpretation of contemporary visual culture, a dispute whose impact can still be felt today. Visual culture studies declared art history incapable of responding to the specific problems resulting from global migration flows, identity politics in the conflict between the global and the local, new media technologies and the media cultures emerging from them. In the view of visual culture studies, art history represented elitist western traditions that manifested themselves in a hierarchical concept of "high" art versus "low" popular culture, in a colonializing view of the art of other cultures, in the mythologization of the (male) artist, in the per-

petuation of a history of styles associated with national traditions, and in an inability to respond to the revolution in media technology that has taken place in recent decades. Where, in art history, were the voices of new, postcolonial subjects? Where was the critique of the western canon? Where was the discussion about the power and consumerist exploitation of the art market? Where was the questioning of the elitist distinction between high and popular art?

Faced with this situation, art history in both the English- and German-speaking worlds was put on the defensive. New political and ethical dimensions had opened up that went beyond attempts by left-wing art historians in the 1970s to add class struggle to the epistemic interests of the discipline. Those wishing to take these new dimensions seriously had to call the existing cognitive fundamentals of the discipline into question.

In Germany since the mid-1980s, it had been feminist art historians (a marginal group within academia) who asked such questions, me among them. With regular conferences and publications, we had tried to shake up the heuristic status quo of the discipline, and we found ourselves obliged to look beyond its boundaries for suitable theoretical tools.[1] We read Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Judith Butler, Teresa de Lauretis and Kaja Silverman. We also read our British feminist colleagues Griselda Pollock, Marcia Pointon and Irit Rogoff, whose academic context was very different to our own, shaped by the intellectual climate of universities like Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds where cultural studies had become established in the 1970s, laying the theoretical basis for visual culture studies.[2] By comparison, the culture of art history in Germany felt confined.

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1 See publications resulting from the conferences of women art historians held from 1984, including: Ilsebill Barta, Zita Breu, Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat, Ulrike Jenny, Irene Nierhaus, Judith Schöbel (eds.): *Frauen. Bilder. Männer. Mythen. Kunsthistorische Beiträge* (Berlin 1987); Ines Lindner, Sigrid Schade, Silke Wenk, Gabriele Werner (eds.): *Blick-Wechsel. Konstruktionen von Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit in Kunst und Kunstgeschichte* (Berlin 1989); Silvia Baumgart, Gotlind Birkle, Mechthild Fend, Bettina Götz, Andrea Klier, Bettina Uppenkamp (eds.): *Denkräume zwischen Kunst und Wissenschaft* (Berlin 1993); Susanne von Falkenhausen, Silke Förschler, Ingeborg Reichle, Bettina Uppenkamp (eds.): *Medien der Kunst. Geschlecht Metapher Code* (Marburg 2004).

2 More on this in Chapter 6, and in Margaret Dikovitskaya, *Visual Culture. The Study of the Visual after the Cultural Turn* (Cambridge, MA 2005).

Some of our American colleagues, too, were clearly unhappy with art history and "defected" to the new field of visual culture studies.[3] In the United States, the culture within art history was different, shaped by a double legacy: on the one hand, the German strain of art history that Erwin Panofsky brought with him to his American exile, a scholarly history of ideas with its method of iconology; and on the other, a heightened formalism that had gained new topicality thanks to America's "high modernist" painters (Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman) and the critics who supported them (Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried). Both of these schools were now attacked by the representatives of visual culture studies – including "defectors" from art history (e.g. Michael Ann Holly) and literary criticism (e.g. Norman Bryson, Mieke Bal) – for being elitist, unpolitical and western-white-male-dominated.

American art history responded with a series of articles in its journal of record, *The Art Bulletin*, running from 1994 to 1997 under the title "A Range of Critical Perspectives", asking leading representatives of the discipline to reflect on the need for new approaches, with topics directly related to these issues: The Object of Art History; The Subject in/of Art History; Aesthetics, Ethnicity, and the History of Art; Rethinking the Canon; Art History and its Theories; Money, Power, and the History of Art.[4] As I remember it, this series went unnoticed by art history in Germany.

In 1996, a counterattack was mounted by *October* magazine in a survey of art historians making a vehement appeal against extending the domain of art history beyond art and in defence of the special position of art within society – an energetic attempt to secure the discipline's status and salvage it as a specialist domain. Interviewed in 1997, the magazine's co-editor Rosalind Krauss clearly stated the motivation for this survey:

> "RK: I hate visual culture.
>
> SR: You hate visual culture?
>
> RK: In fact, *October* magazine, which I coedit and cofounded in 1976, recently

3 More on this in Part Two, 4.

4 *The Art Bulletin*, statements for the series "A Range of Critical Perspectives" in the years 1994 to 1997 under the following titles: 1994: "The Object of Art History", "The Subject in/of Art History"; 1995: "Art> <History", "Inter/disciplinarity", 1996: "Aesthetics, Ethnicity, and the History of Art", "Rethinking the Canon", "Art History and its Theories"; 1997: "Money, Power, and the History of Art".

> did a special issue that was an attack on the visual culture project. Like cultural studies, visual culture is aimed at what we could call pejoratively, abusively, deskilling. Part of that project is to attack the very idea of disciplines which are bound to knowing how to do something, certain skills."[5]

From the mid-1990s onwards, then, hostility reigned between the old-established discipline of art history and the young discipline of visual culture studies. Portrayals of visual culture studies as anti-elitist, multicultural, postcolonial and democratic depended on art history being described in negative terms as elitist, formalist-cum-Hegelian, nationalistic and obsessed with artistic genius. However, the rebuttals of these mutual accusations remained within a close-up view that obstructed critical reflection on each side's own contexts and cognitive objectives.

This became very clear when I read the texts generated by this dispute with my students, reinforcing my wish to overcome the mental and discursive blockades of these increasingly clichéd debates by analysing selected texts by the antagonists in terms of the history of academic discourse, seeking out their inner motivations. In order to get away from the turf wars and border patrols between visual culture studies and art history, and to probe each side's epistemic interests for their theoretical and methodological implications, I developed a research project that was originally titled "Visuality as a Paradigm: Art History and Visual Culture Studies". The plan was to make a comparative study of the concept of visuality in terms of its application and effectiveness.

It soon became clear, however, that visuality would not work as the main term for such a comparison since it did not feature in the methodological vocabulary of art history – even if this hard-to-define concept from visual culture studies certainly can also be related to the context and practice of art history. As a specialized visual practice, art history could become subject matter for visual culture studies with a focus on visuality, but the reverse would not be possible. Using visuality as the key term of comparison would have oriented my readings more strongly towards visual culture studies, thus disturbing the desired balance. I needed to find a term that applied to both art

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5 See the Visual Culture Questionnaire, in: *October* 77 (Summer 1996): 25-70; for the interview see http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1997/5/16/krauss-and-the-art-of-cultural/ (accessed 26 Sept 2016). See also Rosalind Krauss, "Der Tod der Fachkenntnisse und Kunstfertigkeiten" in *Texte zur Kunst* 20 (1995), 61-67 (unpublished in English: "The Death of Skills").

history and visual culture studies, if not in the same way then at least with the same weight. This term is seeing: it structures the visuality of visual culture studies as fundamentally as it does the modus operandi of art history.

Seeing and the concept of visuality

The concept of visuality is, I argue, closely associated with a specific political agenda: visibility as a socio-political resource. The visual, or visuality, has become a political category, and visibility has become a resource in struggles for recognition by marginalized identities. This is the main basis for the arguments used by visual culture studies against art history. But what status does seeing have within this concept and within the resulting practice of visual culture studies as a discipline? Besides the huge implications in terms of method, I began to ask myself whether this basic strategic interest might actually limit the heuristic usefulness of the concept of visuality itself. On the other hand, with its emphasis on relationality, communication and agency, one can also ask whether the approach in which seeing is embedded here might also be rendered productive for art history with its focus on objects.

In the course of my reading, I soon came across differences between art history and visual culture studies which derived from their respective roots in the history of academic disciplines: art history, developed as a discipline devoted to the classification (by period, style, artist, region) of (art) objects, encounters a new player whose agenda is anchored in a single core concept, that of visuality. And in turn, rather than referring to definable objects, this concept of visuality is itself both object and theory of a social, cultural and political field insofar as it manifests itself visually: in objects, but also and above all in practices and technologies of seeing and being seen, of seeing in the sense of an exchange between people on all levels of culture and sociality. Visuality describes events as well as actions, communication and symbolic production; it is a concept that attempts to grasp the visual aspects of the relationality and performativity of human life (or of subjects) in societies and cultures. This is a significant structural difference to the genesis of art history with its focus on objects (however much art history, too, may take the context of its objects into account in its analyses). In a sense, then, we have now named the elements of parallel but also conflicting structures, and thus several key coordinates in the complex relationship between art history and visual culture studies which will guide the close readings in this book:

art history	visual culture studies
art	visuality
focus on objects	focus on performativity/relationality
object/artwork	visual

These elements are not identical with the concepts my readings will explore, such as culture, identity, the gaze, or representation. They offer a structure, albeit binary and simplified, for addressing the basic assumptions of the two disciplines regarding their practices of scholarly seeing. It may seem strange that visibility is not included here. Visibility as a political resource in the struggle for recognition is central to identity politics. As such it is linked to the political agenda of visual culture studies and has no counterpart in art history. Visibility is vital to any understanding of the concept of visuality, but it is not identical with it, being just one of its multiple aspects. Narrowing visuality to this aspect alone would thus seriously impede the methodological possibilities of this concept that I regard as the most important contribution of visual culture studies to the humanities.

Trains of thought – readings

As mentioned above, I wanted to explore the complex relationship between visual culture studies and art history beyond the usual barriers to thought and dialogue, and beyond the increasingly abbreviated debates, by examining exemplary texts from the perspective of the history of discourse and learning/science. This led to a research project and eventually to this book. Above all, then, it is a project based on reading, rather than a synthesizing overview. Large-scale syntheses tend towards distortions and a lack of transparency; however easy they seem to make it for the reader, they can also be condescending. I aim to be transparent, most importantly about the situatedness of my readings, which aim not to be objective but to create and be part of an open debate. The reader should be able to follow my reading closely and grasp it in critical terms. This book, then, is neither an introduction nor a grand narrative, but a kind of archaeology, an excavation of texts that exposes and renders visible their various layers. Of course, the choice of texts

is crucial here: they have influenced and continue to influence debates both within and between disciplines. The texts chosen involve the history of the two disciplines and their discursive links that focus on seeing as a key factor determining their practice.

The book concentrates on the complex relationship between art history and visual culture studies; what it does not deal with is their relationship to the discipline of *Bildwissenschaft* (literally "picture studies") that has emerged in the German-speaking world.[6] Today, *Bildwissenschaft* has developed a diffuseness similar to that of visual culture studies, and some German speakers mix the two terms to the point of indifference or use them as synonyms.[7] This does not foster clarity when attempting to grasp the (not always evident) epistemic interests involved or to reflect on the theoretical and methodological conditions of one's own academic activity, which is why I chose not to broaden my focus here. This also bears on the question of my position as an art historian: I am not interested in expanding the remit of art history; I also remain committed to it as a discipline, since its object, art, is not just one instance of visuality among others. The status of art, as well as the status of individual art objects, is not a given; it is subject to discursive negotiation. Nonetheless, or precisely for this reason, there is a need for skills informed by art history that allow an engagement with the complexity that inheres in a discrete object, the artwork, as the result of a specific differentiated cultural

6 I have commented on this relationship elsewhere: Susanne von Falkenhausen, "Verzwickte Verwandtschaftsverhältnisse: Kunstgeschichte, Visual Culture, Bildwissenschaft", in Philine Helas, Maren Polte, Claudia Rückert, Bettina Uppenkamp (eds.), *Bild/Geschichte. Festschrift für Horst Bredekamp* (Berlin 2007), 3-13.

7 Recent publications: Marius Rimmele, Bernd Stiegler: *Visuelle Kulturen/Visual Culture* (Hamburg 2012) trace a genealogy of visual culture outlining differences and similarities between *Bildwissenschaft* and visual culture studies based on Gottfried Boehm and W.J.T. Mitchell (see p 69ff.). On the current tendency to integrate visual culture studies into *Bildwissenschaft*, see Gustav Frank, Barbara Lange, *Einführung in die Bildwissenschaft* (Darmstadt 2010); Klaus Sachs-Hombach (ed.), *Bildtheorien. Anthropologische und kulturelle Grundlagen des Visualistic Turn* (Frankfurt 2009). By contrast, in their book *Studien zur visuellen Kultur. Einführung in ein transdisziplinäres Forschungsfeld* (Bielefeld 2011), Sigrid Schade and Silke Wenk give a differentiated view of the position of *Bildwissenschaft* in the German academic landscape (see p. 146ff.). In their view, the "research field" of visual culture is founded on semiotics; in this they follow Mieke Bal (see chapter 6). In their portrayal of this research field, they essentially follow the themes of their own art historical practice; consequently, their book differs from my project in its orientation.

practice and discursivity. But the discipline of art history can only retain its vitality by constantly calling its epistemic interests into question and by communicating with other fields and disciplines to keep abreast of their activities. My comparative survey of art history and visual culture studies is thus undertaken from a position of a restless art historian who has been shaped by this discipline but who does not unquestioningly identify with it.

Art history and seeing

Strangely, approaches that address the activity on which art history is based have a hard time in art history today. In descriptions of art historical method and theory, seeing remains underexposed. And the kind of seeing we were encouraged to "practise" when I began studying in Vienna in 1970 struck me as a tenuous affair. No one could tell me what it actually was and how it was supposed to affect art historical practice. The same applied, incidentally, to the "style analysis" that seemed at the time to be the ultimate heuristic exercise. Taken together, these implicit notions of seeing plus style as a hermeneutic benchmark constituted the mystifying and highly imprecise ideology of art history at the time, which still followed the pattern of the post-war decades. Years later, in 1977, Otto Pächt's *The Practice of Art History: Reflections on Method*[8] was published, a collection of texts including the lecture which, unsuspecting and with the beginner's lack of understanding, I had heard in Vienna in 1970 and which, had I read it with the requisite concentration, could have helped me understand better. Only today do I consider myself capable of reading this text.

The status of the image is less fraught than that of seeing in German-language art history. Although seeing has been explained physiologically to a certain degree, it remains hard to "grasp" in thoughts and words. And although something similar applies to images, there is at least a seemingly ineluctable, materially verifiable object for theorists to engage with – ineluctable insofar as it ultimately has no analogue in language, in spite of all the various endeavours of art historical interpretation. This quality seems to be what fuels the abiding fascination of *Bildwissenschaft* with a leading question like: "What is an image?" My scepticism towards such leading questions focuses above

8 Otto Pächt, *Methodisches zur kunsthistorischen Praxis. Ausgewählte Schriften*, Jörg Oberhaidacher, Artur Rosenauer, Gertraut Schikola eds., (1. Edition, München 1977).

all on the desire for definitions that tend to act more as axioms. To quote Gombrich, "there are no axioms, only agreements."[9] Definitions are figures of thought which (at least when they represent an end in themselves) block relational thinking. And thinking about seeing is necessarily relational.

As an art historian, one of the metaphors for which I envy visual culture studies, and which I have appropriated, is that of the "visual field". It covers both the realm within which visuality operates and the realm of its theorization. This opens up potential applications and intellectual spaces for art history that go beyond the simple duality of (art) object and context, rendering this duality multiple and dynamic. So how can this visual field be conceived of in relation to seeing in art history? In the practice of art historians, seeing the object marks the beginning of any cognitive approach. We look at the artwork because we want to analyse it. This seeing is an active kind that opens up a field of relations: between the object, the viewing art historian and the producer/artist. The metaphor of the visual field is very well suited to these relations, making it possible to reflect on one's actions as an art historian in terms of interdependences. Moreover, the visual field can be extended to include the framing of its protagonists: the historical and cultural factors relating to the history of academic discourse that influence viewer, artist and artwork. It configures the acts of seeing of all involved – the viewer, the artist, and the artwork that "looks back". This may sound simple, but it turns out to be a theoretical minefield that art history has to date largely avoided. It is symptomatic of the way art history takes the practice of seeing for granted that this practice itself is barely subjected to theoretical scrutiny, giving the impression that this key cognitive tool exists without presuppositions. Consequently, my reading of texts from art history extrapolate the theoretical and methodological presuppositions for this kind of knowledge-generating seeing.

The texts of art history

Art history does not make it easy to find out about its past and present thinking on the subject of its own acts of seeing. In most cases, it remains an unspoken presupposition of the discipline's practice. To coax it out of this latency

9 Ernst H. Gombrich, "'Wenn's euch Ernst ist, was zu sagen …' – Wandlungen in der Kunstgeschichtsbetrachtung", in Martina Sitt (ed.), *Kunsthistoriker in eigener Sache: 10 autobiographische Skizzen* (Berlin 1990), 87.

into a more open, manifest form, it must be surgically extracted from the methods and objectives of the discipline. As a relatively long-established discipline, art history possesses a differentiated structure of positions, methods and practices – sediments laid down over two centuries. For a comparison with the young discipline of visual culture studies, providing a full overview of this period seemed as unhelpful as including every single historically defined position. My choice of reading matter was guided by two criteria: firstly, the texts should deal explicitly or implicitly with the theme of seeing/looking, and secondly they should be "canonical" texts that have been and continue to be influential in the discipline's internal discussions of objectives and methods. My readings include the reception history of these texts, as this history often displays connections with visual culture studies, highlighting moments of shared background.

One might think there is a contradiction with what I stated above: that art history does not reflect on its own ways of seeing. In different ways, the texts analyse how images are formed by viewing processes: of the painter (Panofsky, Gombrich), of the painter's customer or the general public (Baxandall, Alpers), or of the spectator (Pächt, Kemp). But I found only one text dealing directly with the art historian's own act of seeing: Otto Pächt's *The Practice of Art History: Reflections on Method*. The positions on the activity of seeing underlying art historical interpretation are structured by pairs of opposites: culturally informed versus empirical seeing, interpretative versus scientifically verifying seeing, historically evolving versus biologically/optically fixed seeing. Each of these positions implies a specific relationship between subject and object, between interpreting present and historical alterity, or unfamiliarity, between the object and its context. The questions I address to the texts of art history are as follows: In which discourses are the positions of seeing embedded and which metaphors are used to articulate them? Does seeing have to do, for example, with authenticity or purity? Does it imply a concept of truth? How is the threefold seeing that "surrounds" an artwork (making, viewing, interpreting) dealt with? How is seeing (all three kinds) historicized? How is it (explicitly or implicitly) "constructed" as a presupposition of method and practice? Does the concept of seeing in question bring context into its interpretation, or does it view art in isolation? How is the act of seeing situated within the basic assumptions of scholarly research? Which relationship between subject (artist/viewer) and object do these assumptions imply? The six selected texts are grouped under three headings indicating the motivations that informed their authors' acts of seeing: "Interpreting forms of representation" (Panof-

sky and Gombrich), "Experience and the visual" (Baxandall and Alpers), and "Through the eyes of the spectator" (Pächt and Kemp).

My readings begin with Panofsky's essay on *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (1927). This text, which remains hugely influential, is a good place to begin for several reasons: for one thing, it received renewed attention in the context of the New Art History of the 1990s,[10] thus providing a bridge to the art history immediately involved in debate with visual culture studies;[11] for another, it offers a macro-historical view of models of seeing as visualized in art. The potential links to recent constructivist models of seeing are also clear. Like Panofsky's essay, Ernst Gombrich's *Art and Illusion. A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (1960) has had a long and controversial reception, centred on the question of whether its model of seeing is empirical-scientistic or constructivist-subjectivizing. The texts by Panofsky and Gombrich are not about seeing as practised by those who interpret, but about the forms of representation in which seeing the world appears in art, as a subject of art history. What their reflections on this subject reveal about their own mode of seeing as an instrument of scholarly research has to be inferred from their texts.

Michael Baxandall's *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (1972) is associated with the concept of the "period eye". With his reconstruction of historically unfamiliar modes of seeing, Baxandall links empiricism and constructivism in a way that prompted Clifford Geertz (in 1976) to formulate ideas that became central to cultural anthropology. Here, the focus is neither on exploring the difference between the picture and the reality portrayed (Gombrich), nor on the analytical gaze of the art historian (Pächt), but on reconstructing the experiences of seeing that shaped both the painters and those they painted for, thus also determining what the period expected from artistic forms. For this reconstruction, painting is a historical source. With *The Art of Describing* (1983) by Svetlana Alpers, we come to a position that is often thought to have sparked the concept of visual culture studies. Based on Dutch painting of the 17th century, she reconstructs a culture in which the practice of visual observation was held in high esteem and which she refers to as a visual culture. This clearly forms a bridge between the two disciplines,

10 See Jonathan Harris, *The New Art History. A Critical Introduction* (London, New York 2001).

11 See Christopher S. Wood, "Introduction", in Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, translated and with an introduction by Christopher S. Wood (New York 1991), 7-24.

but one that must be carefully contextualized in order to highlight its distinct position as compared with the subsequent program of visual culture studies.

The final readings from art history are from the German-speaking world: Otto Pächt's *The Practice of Art History: Reflections on Method*,[12] the only text reflecting on the discipline's own modes of seeing, offers in its precision and focus on concrete objects, paired with theoretical restraint, important insights into the problems connected with overcoming the historical remoteness of the object via a hermeneutically empathetic gaze. Unlike Gombrich's book, Pächt's text has been and continues to be little discussed, confirming my impression that art history as a discipline tends to avoid reflecting on its own (seeing) actions. For all its focus on the art historian's practice, Pächt's book has made little concrete impact on the culture of the discipline. With my reading, I therefore also want to strengthen his position within the discipline and examine its current relevance, following its introduction into the Anglo-American debate by Christopher Wood in 1999.

Wolfgang Kemp's *Der Anteil des Betrachters* (The Beholder's Share, 1983) positions seeing within the framework of reception theory. With reference to Diderot's reviews of the Paris Salons and the reader response theory of Iser and Jauss, seeing is conceived of here from a narratological perspective. Kemp sees the viewer prefigured in the picture's internal eye-directing structure. Hence, although his approach has the viewer's response in mind, this response is seen as being determined by the picture and its narrative strategies. The texts by Alpers and Kemp were published the same year. Although Alpers' text could be read as a transitional position to visual culture studies, I discuss Kemp after Alpers – firstly because Alpers' reference to Baxandall's concept of "visual experience" from 1972 strikes me as more important than her status as a conceptual precursor to visual culture studies, and secondly because I see Kemp's narratological approach as more closely related to the methods of visual culture studies (especially Bal) than the descriptive approach taken by Alpers. Moreover, Kemp links his position, among others, with those of Bryson and Bal, who soon after became key figures in visual culture studies.

12 Otto Pächt, *The Practice of Art History: Reflections on Method*, trans. David Britt, with an introduction by Christopher Wood (London 1999).

Seeing in the visual field: visual culture studies

For visual culture studies, unlike for art history, seeing is a point of intense theoretical debate on several levels. Reading the texts of visual culture studies, one gains the impression that any analysis of an object must be preceded by a clarification of the specific concept of seeing being applied. And since the object is more often a starting point for such a positioning than an end point, the object in question is often chosen from the viewpoint of the theoretical model to be underpinned, and not the other way round. For visual culture studies, then, the concept of visuality is not only an analytical tool but also an object of study in its own right. The resulting interplay of (visual) object, viewer and producer is thus entirely different to that found in art history.

The point of departure for the concepts of visuality found in visual culture studies is the kind of seeing discussed in Anglo-American theory, via Sartre and Lacan, as the gaze. It centres on a subject that sees and is seen. As well as constituting the subject, this seeing and being seen also threatens it.[13] Finally, the subject figures here as both the starting and end point of the analytical activity; this has far-reaching consequences for the structure of subject-object relations, and it also represents a crucial difference between visual culture studies and art history.

The texts of visual culture studies

As a young discipline, visual culture studies has yet to pass through a canonization process comparable to that undergone by art history. Looking at its short history, one is confronted with a flood of texts; typically for a young player in the field of academic politics, there is a strong wish to give the discipline a solid theoretical foundation. In addition, a number of diverse disciplines were and still are involved in the emergence and evolution of this discipline (or "indiscipline",[14] as W.J.T. Mitchell has termed it). As a result, a very revealing internal debate is taking place over the key concept of visuality, with direct implications for the theoretical basis, conceptual framework and

13 See chapters 5 and 7.

14 W.J.T. Mitchell, "Interdisciplinarity and Visual Culture" in *Art Bulletin* 77, no. 4 (1995): 541.

stated focus of visual culture studies. Within this debate, there is considerable potential for conflict between the different positions.[15]

The canonization of visual culture studies has, however, progressed far enough for there to be a first history of its introduction into American university teaching.[16] This was preceded by several scholarly introductions featuring American and British authors that offered canons both of methods and of texts and theories.[17] Such books included (and continue to include) names from various different disciplines (sociology, anthropology, communications studies, cultural studies, film studies, design, art history). In 2006, a new (to me) genre appeared: a meta-reader, bringing together introductory texts from a large number of introductions and readers on visual culture studies[18] – offering an overview of the superabundance of different attempts to define and situate the discipline. Unlike in the case of art history, this sprawling diversity prompted me to preface my readings with a brief genealogy of visual culture studies. It is intended to illuminate what I consider to be the two key contexts in the emergence of the discipline[19] (the political and the academic) and outline its key categories (visuality and identity).The questions guiding my reading of the texts of visual culture studies are: How is the field described in which seeing is embedded? What is the relationship between seeing and sociality? To what extent is seeing conceived of as an activity? How important

15 See for example the confrontation between Bal and Mirzoeff over Bal's identification and rejection of "visual essentialism": Mieke Bal, "Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture", in: *Journal of Visual Culture* 2, no. 1 (2003), 5-32, and: "Responses to Mieke Bal's 'Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture', ibid., 229-268.

16 See Dikovitskaya, *Visual Culture*.

17 Lisa Bloom (ed.), *With Other Eyes. Looking at Race and Gender in Visual Culture* (Minneapolis 1999); Fiona Carson, Claire Pajaczkowska (eds.), *Feminist Visual Culture* (London/New York 2001); Jessica Evans, Stuart Hall (eds.), *Visual Culture: The Reader* (London 1999); Chris Jenks (ed.), *Visual Culture* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995); Amelia Jones (ed.), *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (London/New York 2003); Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London/New York 1999); Nicholas Mirzoeff (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader* (London/New York 2002) (first ed. 1998); Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies. An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (London 2001); Marita Sturken, Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking. An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford 2001).

18 Joanne Morra, Marquard Smith (ed.), *Visual Culture. Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, 4 vols. (London/New York 2006).

19 On debate over whether visual culture studies should be called a discipline, see W. J. T. Mitchell, "Showing seeing: a critique of visual culture," in *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, no. 2 (2002), 165-181; and Bal, *Visual Essentialism*.

is the passive side of seeing (i.e. being seen), especially in connection with the identity politics of visibility? What kind of subject-object (and subject-subject) relationship does this imply? What influence does the political agenda of visual culture studies have on its understanding of seeing, and what impact does this have on its interpretative practice?

The texts I have selected stand for the diversity of concepts of visuality within visual culture studies. In spite of this variety, they have one thing on common: they all build (in very different ways) on the above-mentioned theories of the gaze developed by Sartre and Lacan. I have therefore grouped the most influential variants into themed chapters with individual readings: "Visual culture studies' foundational concept: The Gaze - Looking and power" uses two examples (Norman Bryson, Margaret Olin) to analyse reception of the gaze as a regime of power; "Visual culture studies' operational concept: Visuality - Seeing in the cultural field" deals with attempts to define visual culture and visuality that were particularly influential in discussions within the discipline (W.J.T. Mitchell, Nicholas Mirzoeff, Mieke Bal); and "Seeing as a political resource in visual culture studies" presents two extremely contrasting examples of the use of the theory of the gaze in the register of visibility as a political resource (Norman Bryson, bell hooks), plus a case study focussing on the production of evidence on the basis of the model of the gaze (Martin A. Berger). This chapter concludes with an analysis of two texts by Nicholas Mirzoeff, from 1998 and 2011, that propose two models of the gaze as new paradigms for visual culture studies. These models are an attempt to position visual culture studies as a practice of political resistance via definitions of utopian-subversive gazes. With the model of countervisuality, Mirzoeff embeds visual culture studies into a historical construction with an extensive claim to validity, and he insists on the political relevance of the discipline.

Seeing as an ethical question[20]

The final chapter, "Towards an ethics for the act of seeing", draws conclusions that have both a critical and a questioning dimension. The recognition of *alterity*, of that which is unfamiliar, *in the act of seeing* has emerged as a core problem, a mode of seeing that perceives and accepts the otherness of what it sees, be it an object or a subject. Art history and visual culture studies deal very differently with this problem. Art history is mainly confronted with the historical otherness of its objects, visual culture studies with the cultural otherness of objects and subjects. This final chapter discusses the disciplinary "scopic regimes" that shape approaches to the problem of alterity in terms of their methodological impact on interpretative seeing: brief outlines of historical and cultural otherness are followed by a critique of the reception of Lacan's model of the gaze in visual culture studies concerning its impact on interpretative seeing (the narcissistic circle). I then bring approaches to interpretative seeing in art history and visual culture studies together under the headings "Attention and Recognition" and "Narration and Observation", comparing them in terms of an ethics of seeing as an activity of scholarly research that recognizes the otherness of what is seen. This raises an old theoretical problem concerning the relationship between an object and the person interpreting it, as reflected in strategies and concepts like objectification and distance on the one hand and identification and subjectivity on the other. Although at the time of its publication in 1988, Donna Haraway's now somewhat forgotten text on "situated knowledges"[21] was aimed at the natural sciences and their objectivizing hegemonic gaze, it can be referenced today to prompt an approach to this problem that preserves the tension between the

20 Susan Sontag (*On Photography*, first published New York 1977), Ivan Illich ("Guarding the Eye in the Age of Show", in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 28, 1995, 47-61) and Kaja Silverman (*The Threshold of the Visible World*, London, New York 1996) have spoken of ethical implications of looking from very different viewpoints. The issue is also raised in discussions of Georges Didi-Huberman's book *Images In Spite of All* (Chicago 2008, originally published in French in 2003 as *Images malgré tout*) on the photographs from the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, and more generally concerning the representability of violence. I use it here only with reference to the ethical dimension of seeing as a practice of scholarly research.

21 Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (London, New York 1991), 183-201, first published in: *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988), 575-599.

interpreting viewpoint and the otherness of what is being interpreted. Haraway explains her critical model using metaphors of visuality ("self-identity is a bad visual system"), and her aim is to uphold the tension between the object under study and the studying subject (and their respective contexts), between objectivity and subjectivity. Moreover, she clearly rejects a moralization of academic rigor that demands identification with the victim based on a logic of sympathetic concern, as such an approach resolves this tension in a subjectivity based on morals. Where the tension between the interpreting subject and the otherness of the object is preserved, on the other hand, it creates a destabilization that makes a key contribution to a capacity for critique of the structures of power and discourse in which our subject matter has its origins and within which we work.

One last point, dealt with in my concluding remarks, is the rapid technological change often referred to as the digital revolution. While the readings in the book do not deal with this, I conclude with an outline of the prospective consequences of this development, especially for the central notions of visual culture studies (visibility as a political resource in the form of the visual representation of identity) and art history (art as object and subject).