‘Eyewitnessing’? History and Visual Sources

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Abstract

If history has experienced a ‘pictorial’ or visual turn in the past two decades, how widespread is this shift and how deep does it run? What is the relationship of the discipline of history to visual sources? This article assesses the current state of the field by investigating Peter Burke’s book Eyewitnessing. It considers not just the original edition but also its various translations to illuminate aspects of visual sources and the historian’s approach to them.

Introduction

In recent years, the humanities have experienced something of a visual or ‘pictorial turn’.1 Thus, in a sense, art history has been ‘intimately involved in a cultural transformation too vast for it, in any real sense, to control’2 – a cultural transformation that has also affected the discipline of history.3 The ‘visual turn’ in history has not been without precedents. First, there were individuals well before this who considered images in the context of history, from Johan Huizinga (1872–1945) to Michael Baxandall (1933–2008). Second, certain enclaves within the discipline of history were always more open to visual sources than others, precisely because written sources were scarce. Third, so-called pictorial histories abound – at the crossroads of professional and dilettante history.4 The shift to ‘history from below’ may not have included images, but it paved the way for their use. Similarly, visual sources might be seen as an essential part of the equipment of the ‘total historian’ of the Annales school (though Georges Duby was the only Annales historian to pay serious attention to the visual arts and, even then, the arts seemed incidental to his argument).5 Indeed, there is a case for saying that, ‘the making of the twentieth century world’ had ‘a distinctively visual aspect, that modernisation has involved the eye’.6 Nevertheless, before the 1980s, the logocentric foundations of the discipline of history were never shaken; the structure was merely ornamented – at the peripheries.7

The first sign of a ‘visual turn’ in history came with a conference at the Rockefeller Foundation’s Villa Serbolloni (Bellagio, Italy) on ‘the evidence of art’ in 1985, the proceedings of which were published the following year in an issue of the Journal of Interdisciplinary History and subsequently re-issued as a book on ‘Art and History’ (1988). The volume, containing disparate essays ranging from John Hale’s examination of Renaissance portrayals of the soldier to Peter Paret’s discussion of ‘The German Revolution of 1848 and Rethel’s Dance of Death’, gave some indication of the potential of the field.8 Simon Schama, who also contributed an essay to the collection on ‘Royal Family Portraiture, 1500–1850’, has continued to disseminate a view of history – also to the non-specialist – where visual sources are placed at the fore.9 A similar publication from 1991, spawned by the conference of the Getty Center for the History of Art, indicates how far the field progressed in a short space of time. Edited by Freedberg and de Vries, the book is

Thus, an increasing number of significant contributions to the discipline take visual sources into account. Certain areas that are often absent from written sources, such as material culture and everyday life, are common in visual ones; others – the history of memory, of the body, of landscape – are inextricably bound up with the image. Students, belonging to the visual generation and, it seems, finding it ever more difficult to express themselves in writing, embrace visual sources wholeheartedly and to a large extent uncomprehending of why their use should be controversial. But has the discipline kept pace with its students and indeed its wider public? To what degree has history turned visual during the past two decades?

Many, if not most academics would now claim to have been influenced by the visual turn (‘We all do pictures now’), but surely that turn signifies (or should signify) more than the inclusion of some visual material. The publications mentioned above are significant (and the list is not exhaustive), but they represent small islands in a sea that is less than ‘picturesque’. This renders some kind of survey of the literature virtually impossible, or at least, it would entail commenting on a succession of isolated examples – less a ‘body of literature’ than a small bag of body parts (albeit with some choice specimens amongst them). It is symptomatic that a significant proportion of the key contributions are to be found in an interdisciplinary journal (which includes everything from economics to psychology) and in a series devoted to ‘Picturing History’, positive developments in themselves, but hardly ones indicating that visual sources have become an intrinsic part of mainstream history writing. Hence, Rabb’s assessment that the field is ‘approaching maturity’ might be applicable to a few publications (which may be more or less well known to scholars), but surely not to the discipline as a whole. Visual sources are still ignored by the majority of historians – certainly as more than illustrations. A concomitant danger, though also for enthusiasts, is to see the visual as self-evident. It is an approach that carries great popular appeal, as Schama well knows, and the enthusiasm generated must be welcomed, but there are considerable perils in encouraging uncritical direct empathy with images. Amongst historians, though, the danger is primarily in conjunction with written sources. In the words of Francis Haskell: ‘All too often a visual approach, which appears to be spontaneous and immediate, has been adopted merely to supplement what is already known from the written word’.

Not only is it easy to exaggerate the extent of the visual turn in history, then, but some of the publications cited above are by no means unproblematic, indicating just how many questions remain unanswered or even unasked. Does the ‘erratic and potentially misleading’ survival rate of visual evidence jeopardise its use in a different way or to a different degree to that of the written source? Is it possible that visual evidence is so distinctive that completely different pictures of society/individuals/culture(s) emerge – akin to Huizinga’s assertion that as a ‘general phenomenon’ art ‘leaves a brighter image of a period than does the word of the poet or historian’? Given that ‘art began to replace religion in the nineteenth century as a signpost to the meaning of life’, is there a danger of imparting too much significance to images, certainly ones predating this? Perhaps most fundamental of all: is the use of visual sources something quintessentially interdisciplinary?
I The Theory of Eyewitnessing

The extent and nature of the visual turn in history can perhaps best be gauged by examining Peter Burke’s book *Eyewitnessing*. The immense influence of what is in some ways a problematic book warrants its closer scrutiny to highlight both the state of the field and the hazards awaiting anyone working with visual sources. Published in 2001 as part of the series ‘Picturing History’, *Eyewitnessing* is a visual sources primer for historians: as the subtitle explains, it concerns ‘The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence’. It was ‘written both to encourage the use of such evidence and to warn potential users of some of the possible pitfalls’. (9) Burke’s starting point is that most historians do not use or at least make full use of the possibilities of images as historical sources. He proposes that first, ‘[…] art can provide evidence for aspects of social reality […]’; second, ‘[…] representational art is often less realistic than it seems and distorts social reality rather than reflecting it […]’; third, ‘[…] the process of distortion is itself evidence of phenomena that many historians want to study […]’. (30) Towards the end of his book, Burke offers four ‘summaries of problems of interpretation which regularly occur in different contexts […]’ (187–8):

1) ‘Images give access not to the social world directly but rather to contemporary views of that world […]’.

2) Their ‘testimony […] needs to be placed […] in a series of contexts […]’.

3) ‘A series of images offers testimony more reliable than that of individual images […]’.

4) The historian must register ‘the small but significant details – including significant absences […]’ that reveal unconscious information about the producer of the image or his/her starting point(s).

Even if he does not seek to provide a ‘[…] “how-to-do-it” treatise on decoding images […]’ (185), the author certainly offers practical tips.

Whilst some of Burke’s counsel is useful, some is problematic. Should the historian really start from the premise that an image is a distorted picture of reality, for example? As Michael Baxandall commented, ‘[…] it would be more natural to approach the image, less as tellingly flawed evidence of a social reality, than as itself a deposit or bit of social reality […]’.21 Moreover, the entire concept of ‘eyewitnessing’ gives rise to expectations of the artist that should only apply to the ethnographer. The idea of the ‘eye witness’ is valid in a book like Smiles’ of that name, which focuses on, ‘those artistic practices which declared their fidelity to the object as a guarantee of their cognitive utility, recording the visible world with scrupulous fidelity’,22 and, moreover, explicitly addresses the implications of the term and its different degrees of pertinence. Applying such a concept to a drawing made using the camera lucida is a completely different proposition, however, to judging an oil painting of a mythological figure such as Hercules (say) in such terms.23 Indeed, the hierarchy that defined painting for centuries ranked mythological and religious works, which idealised the human form, way above works involving any kind of more empirical observation. Burke’s book ranges widely and applies the principle of ‘eyewitnessing’ – explicitly or implicitly – to images in general. The title of his book might seem by turns innocent or inspired, but it has a long heritage in the exploration and exhortation of the fidelity of the eye as a witness – often a superior one to the ear. Burke gives no context for his ‘way of seeing’, however. The result contains unmistakable echoes of empiricism.
In his treatment of images, the author speaks of ‘documents’, ‘statements’, ‘evidence’ and ‘reliability’. Aesthetic aspects, the ‘art’ in art so to speak, are dealt with at best peripherally, despite being fundamental (rather than adjunctive) to an image and to its historical interpretation. Even factors that may influence the ‘reliability’ of an image, such as the medium, technique and style are not examined in any detail. Burke’s intention is to minimise the difference(s) between ‘images’ and ‘art’. Whilst it is clear that every image, ‘irrespective of its aesthetic quality […] may serve as historical evidence’ (16), this certainly does not mean that the ‘aesthetic quality’ is irrelevant.

The presentation of the methodology in Eyewitnessing is particularly important because the historian cannot be expected to be familiar with the application of theoretical approaches to images. The commonality of the various approaches to history and art history might invite the historian to enter the visual through theory, but Burke capitalises on this only partially. He explains the ordering of his chapters in that the novice should not be confronted initially with too much theory, but rather should engage directly with images as soon as possible. Some theory is necessary though, according to Burke, in order that the uninitiated reader can ‘read’ the images at all. Thus, the chapter on iconographic/iconological analysis comes near the beginning, whilst only from the penultimate chapter are methods ‘Beyond Iconography’ explored (and the title of the chapter is qualified by a question mark, as if the possibility of going ‘beyond iconography’ is in doubt).

Burke regards the psychological approach as ‘necessary’, ‘because people do project their unconscious fantasies onto images’ and at the same time ‘impossible’, ‘because the crucial evidence has been lost’. (171) Whether or not images might be able to supply or substitute precisely this kind of ‘evidence’ is not considered. Art, after all, was seen by Freud as stemming from and therefore providing access to the id – the unconscious – alongside dreams and slips of the tongue. As David Kaufmann notes, Burke’s view of psychoanalysis is ‘an oddly dated and narrow’ one.

In a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the structuralist and poststructuralist approaches, Burke concludes that both are too one-sided – indeed, opposite sides of the same coin, with the former tending to assume ‘that images have ‘a’ meaning’ and the latter, ‘that any meaning attributed to an image is as valid as any other’ (176–7). In fact, the idea of ‘a multiplicity of possible interpretations’ is rather different from an assumption of the ‘equal validity’ of these interpretations. Poststructuralism has been vastly influential on both historical writing and visual analysis, so Burke’s dismissal is surprising – albeit perhaps a natural reaction for an historian of his generation, given Derrida’s ‘deconstruction’ of the past as inaccessible. Poststructuralism’s preoccupation with representation, rather than reality, and the notions of ‘signifiers’ and the ‘signified’ actually might seem more useful than approaching images as ‘telling flawed evidence’ of some kind of ‘reality’.

Similarly, postmodernism’s concern with the image – in its widest possible sense – might seem to lend itself to overlap between history and images. Moreover, as images are ‘by definition multivalent’, a discourse informed by aspects of poststructuralism is hard to avoid. Indeed, Burke’s own writing bears its traces. In view of the fact that the book was published as recently as 2001, albeit as the result of some years of teaching a course on the subject, the almost total absence of gender considerations from Eyewitnessing is significant. Burke not only dismisses the ‘feminist approach’ in two short paragraphs (179–80), but also puts it under the umbrella of the ‘Social Histories of Art’, thereby putting it in its place. Discussing the ‘feminist approach’ in the singular has a similar effect. Partly characteristic of his generation again, Burke seems not only to find little mileage in feminist theory, but unable to connect with it in any way. And if this is true in theory, it is also the case in practice. Some of the artists/
image-makers of the 82 illustrated works are unknown, but of those that are, only two are women: Marianna Davydova’s watercolour – a traditional sphere of female artistic activity – depicts a scene of *Picnicking in the woods near Kamenka* from the 1920s; Dorothea Lange’s photograph of February 1936 highlights the fate of *Destitute pea pickers in California* during the Depression. That is to say there is absolutely no attempt to try to (re)present images by women. This can be seen partly as the result of Burke’s discomfort with the 20th century (see below), at least in terms of ‘art’ (and if History Painting was once a male preserve then film is hardly madly egalitarian, even now), but even within his own parameters the author could have introduced numerous examples of works by women.

The images by Davydova and Lange are placed side-by-side in Chapter VI, ‘Views of Society’, under the subheading of ‘The Real and the Ideal’. It is easy to understand why: Davydova’s painting evokes the lost idyll of the Russian landowning class after the revolution; Lange’s photographs were programmatic and carefully staged to evoke maximum sympathy in the viewer. Yet most of the other images in *Eyewitnessing* also demonstrate the conflict between the ‘real and the ideal’ – for all the problems of this terminology – which is indeed arguably the essence of the visual source (where the ‘ideal’ does not necessarily have positive connotations, but is merely that which is not ‘real’). The other subsections of Chapter VI look at ‘genre’, ‘children’ and ‘women in everyday life’, and although Burke is careful not to follow the section on ‘children’ with one simply on ‘women’, adding the qualifier ‘in everyday life’, the suggestion that women are relegated to playing a subsidiary role in the book is never wholly expunged.

Plenty of women are depicted in *Eyewitnessing* of course: representations of women and men (or both) are far more balanced than those by women and men. The difference here lies not so much in the quantity of works portraying men or women, as in their subject matter. After ‘Photographs and Portraits’ (Ch. I) that are all of men (with the exception of a small reproduction of Gainsborough’s likeness of *Mrs Philip Thicknesse, née Anne Ford* of 1760) – the last three rather imposing men (Lord Heathfield, Louis XVI, and Louis Philippe) – Chapter II on ‘Iconography and Iconology’ presents us with a detail of the Three Graces from Botticelli’s *Primavera* (c. 1482) and Titian’s *Rape of Lucretia* (1571). Of course, Warburgian iconographical analysis primarily focused on Renaissance paintings, of which more than a few depict such non-, if not anti-feminist stories of women, but perhaps this could have been addressed? Nowhere in his critique of the method (40 ff.) does Burke include a consideration of gender, not even in the subsequent subsection on landscape, which he considers primarily in terms of politics. Indeed, Burke is at pains to neutralise the effect of gender, the only passing reference stating: ‘We might say that Nature was nationalized at this time, turned into a symbol of the *mother or fatherland*’. (43; my italics) Might there be a distinction to be made here?31

The whole idea of ‘eyewitnessing’ begs the question of the identity of the eyewitness and indeed their gender. Whose ‘gaze’ is thematised? If the eyewitness is taken to be the artist, as the book implies, then the gaze is unmistakeably male. There are quite simply not enough works by women to claim anything else. If it is the historian who is supposed to be the eyewitness through the medium of visual sources (see below), then the answer is less decisive but still clear – not simply thanks to the choice of images and their discussion, but also the language employed: our eyewitness is male.

In the extent to which other approaches are discussed, the nature of these discussions and in the book’s organisation, *Eyewitnessing* can hardly be seen as an impartial endeavour. All in all, alternatives to iconography are handled very briefly, and ‘with fairness but little enthusiasm’, to cite Michael Wintle.32 Burke’s training – he attended Wind’s lectures and seminars at Oxford – determines the direction from which he approaches images.33 As
Paul Betts remarks, Burke’s text constitutes, ‘in many ways […] a running dialogue with the school of Aby Warburg and his protégés […]’.34

Burke advocates a method which he characterises as a ‘third way’.35 It is typical of him to strive for the equalisation of theories and methods. With the concept of a ‘third way’ in Eyewitnessing, the author tries to conceptualise the use of all of the approaches mentioned according to the particular situation, i.e. the image in question. In this context, he prefers to refer to “‘approaches’” rather than “‘methods’” on the grounds that they represent not so much new procedures of investigation as new interests and new perspectives’. (169) With this terminological differentiation, Burke articulates his position clearly: he attempts to refresh the iconographical method by means of newer ‘approaches’. The most diverse of new approaches are brought together as ‘new perspectives’, thereby neutralising their (often radical) viewpoints. Burke does include a critique of the iconographical method (Ch. II) and he takes into account de facto the historical context and reception of an image; yet he never seriously questions the dominance of the iconographical method. Indeed, he consolidates it by subsuming all other ‘approaches’ to it.

II Global Reach: Translating Eyewitnessing

The book raises interesting questions, yet it is not just the nature of Eyewitnessing – which has been addressed by several reviewers – that is the focus of this article, but also its subsequent history as an increasingly global phenomenon. Examining the various translations of Eyewitnessing (eight to date) and looking at whether its central thesis can be rendered in other languages is pertinent to the whole question of cultural – rather than ‘simply’ linguistic – translation.36 The implications for the book’s reception are far from negligible. Moreover, the book’s ‘reception’ in terms of how it is translated and produced (i.e. its reception and transmission by the translator and the publisher) can provide evidence about a particular culture, as well as about how visual sources are viewed. Thus, to misquote Baxandall, the various editions of the book do not only provide us with evidence of a social reality. They become themselves ‘deposit[s] or bit[s] of social reality’.37 On another level, an investigation of the translations provides significant insight into the nature of visual sources and the way in which they should be approached. Translation is a complex process; in the case of Eyewitnessing, it reveals aspects of working with images of which Burke (and others) may not have been fully aware.

I came across Burke’s book while in Tübingen, so I happened to read the German version first. It was an enjoyable read, demonstrating an impressive range of knowledge. It was when I came to read the original English version that my interest was truly whetted though, for the thrust of the book was really quite different. From the very first sentence, it was clear that the two editions were not saying the same thing. ‘This book is primarily concerned with the use of images as historical evidence’ (9; my italics) is simply not the same as, ‘Dieses Buch beschäftigt sich in erster Linie mit Bildern, die als historische Quellen benutzt werden’ (literally, ‘this book is primarily concerned with pictures/images, which are used as historical sources’). Accordingly, in English, the book is called Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence38 and in German, ‘Augenzeugenschaft: Bilder als historische Quellen’ (‘Images/pictures as historical sources’). Burke’s ‘use’ of images is actually of central importance. My aim here is not to criticise Matthias Wolf’s precise and scholarly translation – or indeed any of the other translations of Eyewitnessing discussed below – but rather to examine the differences between diverse languages (and cultures) and their certain degree of ‘untranslatability’. This is relevant, of course, to our viewing of images,39 for it is germane not just to the verbal, but also to
the visual – and to the disparity of the two. If the danger of ‘a-historicism’ is consciously to be avoided, then the borders between cultures should also not be underestimated – even, or perhaps especially, in our global epoch.40

Burke’s well-earned reputation and an obviously well-organised publisher explain why Eyewitnessing has been translated into so many languages. The list is impressive: Spanish (2001), Italian (2002), Croatian (2003), Greek (2003), German (2003), Portuguese (Brazilian; 2001, rev. edn. 2004), 41 and more recently, Korean (2005) and Chinese (2008), with work on Turkish and Japanese editions in progress. Yet the author is aware that the book fulfilled a purpose – that of introducing first-year history students to the subject at Cambridge – and is somewhat diffident about its success.42

His examination of ‘the use(s) of images as historical evidence’ presents a specific problem from the outset: the title is a made-up term in English, adding the suffix –ing to the word ‘eyewitness’. The Chinese translator, Yang Yu, did not use the characters for ‘muji’, meaning ‘to eyewitness’, in the title, probably because the verb would look rather odd as an isolated utterance, even with the subtitle ‘History of evidence from visual image(s)’ (‘Tuxiang zhengshi’). Instead, he retained the word ‘eyewitnessing’ in English – which is unlikely to mean much to the vast majority of Chinese readers. The German translator, Matthias Wolf, came up with a very neat equivalent: ‘Augenzeugenschaft’ – again a made-up word where an ‘Augenzeuge’ is an ‘eyewitness’, and the common suffix ‘-schaft’ renders the state of being or the practice of doing this. Even here, though, the German carries different nuances. It sounds more precise, more conscious than ‘eyewitnessing’. The Italian translator did not have the option of creating a word to describe the action of an ‘eyewitness’, so we are presented with ‘testimoni oculari’ – ‘eyewitnesses’, in plural. (The Brazilian translator opted for the singular ‘eyewitness’ – Testemunha Ocular.)

The net result in the case of the Italian edition is that the title is a made-up term in English, adding the suffix –ing to the word ‘eyewitness’. The Chinese translator, Yang Yu, did not use the characters for ‘muji’, meaning ‘to eyewitness’, in the title, probably because the verb would look rather odd as an isolated utterance, even with the subtitle ‘History of evidence from visual image(s)’ (‘Tuxiang zhengshi’). Instead, he retained the word ‘eyewitnessing’ in English – which is unlikely to mean much to the vast majority of Chinese readers. The German translator, Matthias Wolf, came up with a very neat equivalent: ‘Augenzeugenschaft’ – again a made-up word where an ‘Augenzeuge’ is an ‘eyewitness’, and the common suffix ‘-schaft’ renders the state of being or the practice of doing this. Even here, though, the German carries different nuances. It sounds more precise, more conscious than ‘eyewitnessing’. The Italian translator did not have the option of creating a word to describe the action of an ‘eyewitness’, so we are presented with ‘testimoni oculari’ – ‘eyewitnesses’, in plural. (The Brazilian translator opted for the singular ‘eyewitness’ – Testemunha Ocular.)

The word ‘eyewitnessing’ (as well as the more traditional ‘eyewitness’) also crops up in the text of the English version and its untranslatability (in all of the languages of translation other than German) proves problematic. The Italian expression ‘testimonianza oculare’ might allude to the act of ‘eyewitnessing’ – because it is impossible without that initial act – but it nonetheless refers to the act of recounting that which has been ‘eyewitnessed’. Thus, in the case of the ‘central theme of this book, that of the cultural practice of self-conscious eyewitnessing’ (Eng. 180), exemplified by John Bargrave in his annotated collection of engravings, the Italian translation produces a significant shift in meaning: ‘Prendiamo un esempio centrale in relazione al tema di questo volume, quello della pratica culturale della testimonianza oculare consapevole’. (It. 209) Rather than conveying...
Bargrave’s act of ‘eyewitnessing’, the Italian ‘testimonianza oculare’ refers to recounting or communicating that which has been ‘eyewitnessed’ – albeit with the implication that he has indeed been an eyewitness. This shift in meaning is difficult for an English-speaker to grasp, because the English word has no such connotations (and translating the Italian back into English would probably result in replicating ‘eyewitnessing’), but it is far from insignificant. Burke introduces the ‘essential proposition’ of his book as being, ‘to support and illustrate [...] that images, like texts and oral testimonies, are an important form of historical evidence. They record acts of eyewitnessing’. (Eng. 14) Since there is no possible equivalent of the second sentence in Italian – the connotations of ‘testimonianza oculare’ would make any attempt tautologous – the translator needed to compromise. The result claims that the ‘tesi essenziale’ of the book is that, ‘le immagini, proprio come i testi e le testimonianze orali, rappresentano un genere di “prova” storica di grande importanza dal momento che costituiscono delle testimonianze oculare’. (It. 16; my italics) That is to say, they represent an important form of historical evidence, ‘since they constitute [the recorded testimony of] eyewitnesses’. In a sense then, somewhat paradoxically perhaps, Brioschi’s Italian translation comes closer to what Burke seems to be saying about images as historical sources – the ‘testimonianza’ itself concerns material ‘evidence’, i.e. an oral or written account – the sense of which might be expanded to include a visual record.

Although it provided a viable solution for the title of the book, the English word for ‘eyewitnessing’ could not be repeated in the body of the text of the Chinese edition, because it would have made any passage all but incomprehensible to the Chinese reader. As a result, other solutions had to be found. In the case of Burke’s introductory ‘essential proposition’ (Eng. 14), Yang Yu opted for the involvement of eyewitness(ies): images do not ‘record acts of eyewitnessing’ (Eng. 14); ‘they record [the/an] act(s) of [the/an] eyewitness(ies)’. (Chin. 9) This is a perfectly acceptable compromise in terms of translation, but of course it does give the ‘essential proposition’ of the book a rather different, more concrete slant. Elsewhere in the book, the word ‘eyewitnessing’ becomes really quite troublesome. Using many words that are not very common in Chinese, Mr Yang bravely turns John Bargrave’s example of the ‘cultural practice of self-conscious eyewitnessing’ (Eng. 180) into: ‘Spectators construct a cultural custom in using their self-consciousness to observe an image’ (‘guanzhong daizhe ziwo yishi qu guancha tuxiang goucheng le yizhong wenhua xisu’; Chin. 260). In an attempt to get to grips with the difficult, foreign concepts of the book, here and elsewhere Yang borrows a fair number terms from Marxist jargon (itself often borrowed from Hegelianism). Part of the constant negotiation of translation, of course, is between sticking closely to the original and making it comprehensible in the language, i.e. culture of translation.

By avoiding ‘eyewitnesses’ and ‘eyewitnessing’ (i.e. retaining the word ‘oˇcˇevid’ rather than reverting to ‘oˇcˇevidac’), the sentence in Croatian works rather well in linguistic terms (‘Images record acts of inspection’ [‘one biljeˇzeˇe čine oˇcˇevida’; Cr. 11] whilst Bargrave exemplifies the ‘cultural practice [...] of inspection’ [kulturna djelatnost [...] oˇcˇevida; Cr. 193]), but the creator of images is given even less artistic license as an inspector. The Croatian title is not far away from the sense of the Greek, but entitling the Greek edition ‘autopsy’ did not mean that the word could substitute ‘eyewitnessing’ in the book itself. Indeed, the title is not explained anywhere in the Greek text. Instead, the ‘central theme’ of the book – the ‘cultural practice of self-conscious eyewitnessing’ (Eng. 180) – is rendered as, ‘the conscious cultural practice of being an eyewitness’ (‘της ενσωστήριης πολιτισμικής πρακτικής του να είσαι αυτόπτης μόρφωσας’, Greek 229). Thus, the self-conscious becomes conscious and refers to the ‘practice’ rather than the ‘eyewitnessing’, and – like the title and/or the text in some of the other translations – ‘eyewitnessing’ reverts to its root and becomes an
The different nuances are stronger still in the explanation of the ‘essential proposition’ of Burke’s book: rather than recording ‘acts of eyewitnessing’ (Eng. 14), images ‘record the facts/events like eye witnesses (my italics; ‘Καταχωρίσουν τα γεγονότα ως αυτόπτες μάθημες’, Greek 17).

As the term seems to encapsulate the entire concept of the book, the challenges associated with ‘eyewitnessing’ concern more than the habitual niceties and wrangles of translation. However, given that the concept is highly problematic, suggesting inappropriate expectations of the artist in relation to her/his subject matter, the manner of execution and indeed the entire nature of aesthetics (see section 1 above), just how significant are these translational dilemmas? What is not clear from Burke’s text – not even in the original English – is that his concept of ‘eyewitnessing’ is ostensibly not meant to describe the process of artistic creation or production, i.e. the relationship of the artist/image-maker to his/her material, but the correct approach for the historian. When I interviewed him in Cambridge in October 2004, Burke maintained that it is the historian who should cross-examine his/her image, not the artist his/her subject. As none of the reviewers or translators received the principle of ‘eyewitnessing’ in this way, either Burke did not express himself clearly or he has modified his view since the book came out.50 Yet, what seemed a problematic title as a portrayal of the artist’s method is no less misleading as a description of the historian’s approach. Would any historian claim to have been a witness to the Peace of Münster, for example, because s/he had studied Terborch’s painting? Indeed, Burke’s explanation is rather flawed, because the eyewitness does not cross-examine, but is ‘cross-examined’, leaving our artist ‘eyewitnessing’ once more. In fact, although the concept seems central to the book, the punchy title of Eyewitnessing was not the original one: the author’s initial idea, ‘traces’, was considered insufficiently compelling by the publishers. In one section of the book, Burke proposes the use of the word ‘traces’ rather than ‘sources’ (Eng. 13), because he considers that this includes the role of the intermediary in the process of reporting about the past. Whilst perhaps lacking punch, the original English title certainly seems more apposite for a description of the relationship between images and their context. Thus, for commercial reasons, students are ‘guided’ by the inaccurate rather than the more appropriate.

Given that first, the title was not Burke’s original choice (the alternative title ‘eyewitnessing’ occurred to him during the process of writing,51 hence his failure to address the term in the introduction) and second and more importantly, that Burke’s use of the concept is not clear in the original English, does it matter that most of the translators were unable to come up with a similar term? There is a case for saying that whilst it matters at the level of translation, it does not in terms of Burke’s concept of ‘eyewitnessing’. Indeed, in light of the dual problem, there might even be a case for considering some of the translations closer to what Burke had in mind than the English original, albeit probably more by accident than by design. Thus, Wolf’s German version may represent the ‘best’ translation, in terms of finding an equivalent for the term ‘eyewitnessing’ – thanks to the possibilities of a language famous for its composite words – but paradoxically not necessarily the best rendering of what Burke was actually trying to say.

The question is not simply whether certain words and ideas can be translated or whether the text is comprehensible in other languages, but whether the entire cultural premise of Burke’s book can be translated into other cultures. The assumption of the validity of cultural translation seems dangerously near a new sort of colonisation in some respects. Despite his undoubted virtuosity in various contexts and his wide-ranging knowledge, Burke’s reading remains recognisably Anglo-centric.52 Moreover, the numerous references to British painters, to works in British collections and to British
personalities form part of a whole that is a quintessential product of Anglo-Saxon scholarship – with all its strengths and weaknesses. And if this is clear in a continental European context (in the Italian edition per se and in the discussion of Italian works, for example), it is put into extraordinary relief in a non-European one. Given that a fair number of the English readers of the text would probably not be familiar with some of the figures mentioned (e.g. Charles James Fox or artists such as Edward Goodall and William Holman Hunt; work/works mentioned but not illustrated) and that the Italian student would often be in the dark, for a Chinese reader, most of the references would be impenetrable. So too would many of the ideas, despite Yang Yu’s efforts to render them intelligible by filtering them through a Marxist lens.

What Burke fails to consider in his book is that ‘eyewitnesses’ use language, and languages tend not to work in the same way – a point demonstrated beautifully by a reading of the translations. Moreover, just as French and German (say) work differently, so do French and German painting. The point is, of course, not just spatial but also temporal (for medieval French is also rather different to the modern language – and medieval French images to contemporary ones) but whereas Burke the historian is in command of the latter, the former seems to get lost. What is more, the language of a particular ‘eyewitness’ might be visual, to stretch a linguistic point, but the visual has to be translated into the verbal if conscious communication is to take place. Particular languages or language groups do not just passively receive or reproduce the interpretation of an image, but actively shape perceptions and possibilities of utterance.53 Today’s Anglo-Saxon students need to be reminded of this more than any previous generation because their linguistic horizons now rarely stretch beyond the English Channel. What Burke fails to point out is that different cultures notice different things, are familiar with different images, and interpret images in different ways – as an examination of the illustrations in Eyewitnessing makes clear.

III Illustrating Eyewitnessing

All of the illustrations are discussed in the text and they set the tone of the book, so it is useful to gain an overview of this material. (There is no list of illustrations, which makes this difficult initially.) In Fig. 1 the illustrations are ordered according to epoch and

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*original painting destroyed 1608, tissue destroyed, +reconstruction (reproduction as woodcut)*

Fig. 1. Eyewitnessing: evaluation of illustrations.
medium/technique. The categories are certainly not without caveats: there are, for example, works that employ more than one technique/medium, different temporal divisions would be perfectly feasible, and dates of works are often imprecise (which makes a difference if at the turn of a century). A classification according to genre or a division between European and non-European works would overlap too much with the categories of Burke’s own chapters though. The illustrated works cover the entire period from the 11th to the 20th century, with the exception of the 13th. In addition, there are three Roman works and a Greek vase. The 19th century is by far the most strongly represented.

The illustrations are spread relatively evenly over the book (Fig. 2). As one would expect, mainly oils and photographs are reproduced in Chapter I on ‘Photographs and Portraits’, and the subsequent chapter on ‘Iconography and Iconology’ also deals primarily with oils. All three images in the Introduction are watercolours, which is no accident, as Burke talks of the different worth of pictures as historical sources: ‘Sketches, for example, drawn directly from life, and freed from the constraints of the “grand style”, are more trustworthy as testimonies than are paintings worked up later in the artist’s studio’. (15–16) Despite this, there are only four watercolours and two drawings in Eyewitnessing, which makes the veritable phalanx of oils all the more noticeable: nearly a third of the illustrations are of oils on canvas. To a certain extent, this is because of the themes of the middle chapters. Nevertheless, it reveals one of the main weaknesses of Burke’s approach: the lack of distinction – whether conscious or unconscious – between the ‘eyewitnessing’ of the artist and that of the observer. Whereas the former is expressed most readily in a sketch, the latter clings to the seeming realism of an oil painting. In this way, the observer Peter Burke himself becomes the subject of the book, without realising or acknowledging it.

Despite the number and variety of images discussed, some of the reviewers of Burke’s book found gaps: Michael Wintle would have liked to see maps; Paul Betts misses amongst other things treatment of television and advertisements. According to Helena Waddy, the book contains, ‘less coverage of the images produced on the local level than I expected’. For me, the complete neglect of the art of the 20th century apart from

Fig. 2. Eyewitnessing: distribution of illustrations.
photography and film presents a serious problem. Although Chapter V on ‘Material Culture through Images’ is the most richly illustrated chapter, only one of these pictures is from the 20th century. Burke’s focus shifts chronologically from oil painting to photography and film. This must be conscious: it is a truism amongst historians that the nearer written sources are to us temporally and spatially, the easier they are to evaluate (with the temporal proximity given more weight than the spatial). This might be apposite in terms of the mass media, but with (other) artworks the picture is very different – which is why Burke fears to tread beyond the 19th century. It begs the question of whether the artistic currents of the 20th century turn the ‘image’ into ‘art’, thereby putting Burke the eyewitness under pressure.

Just as the various editions all read rather differently, they also treat the images differently. The publishers translators responded variously to the problem of the wrong Odalisque: the English edition of Eyewitnessing reproduces Ingres’ La grande Odalisque rather than L’Odalisque à l’Esclave of the title as illustration 66. Several of the editions (Spanish, Croatian, Greek) retained the same picture, i.e. the wrong one, with the ‘wrong’ title, i.e. the title of the work that Burke actually had in mind. Two editions kept the picture and titled it correctly – La grande Odalisque. In the German version, the image was corrected for L’Odalisque à l’Esclave, thanks to the careful eye of the translator Matthias Wolf. In fact, the original edition contained ‘a whole series of mistakes’ according to Wolf, which he conveyed to Burke ‘in case of a possible second edition’. (Interestingly enough, the only other edition to correct the image is the Chinese – probably because Wolf’s corrections were passed on.) To compensate for what he saw as the shortcomings of the images, Wolf suggested 14 additional illustrations in total, of which nine were accepted and a tenth swapped for a thematically similar picture by the publishers. Thus, although the text was not revised by the author, some of the illustrations are not the same as in the English edition. Even if the reader is familiar with the works that are not illustrated, the effect of those that are and their mention in the text is undeniably stronger. The choice of pictures may not have influenced Burke’s text, but it certainly influences its reception. In total, there are six more illustrations in the German edition than in the original. On the other hand, four of the examples of Eyewitnessing are not reproduced in Augenzeugenschaft. The publishers’ condition for Wolf’s additional illustrations was that some of the others should be left out. A few of the illustrations are simply ‘swapped’. No. 68 in the German edition, Eastman Johnson’s 1859 picture of Negro Life at the South – My Old Kentucky Home, replaces the woodcut of a monster from Wu Renchen’s Shanhaijing [the Classic of Mountains and Seas]. William Hogarth’s Gate of Calais (Augenzeugenschaft, ill. 70) substitutes the ‘Nigerian (Benin) bronze plaque showing two 16th-century Portuguese men’. As he was also involved in the conception of the German edition, at the suggestion of the publishers I asked Matthias Wolf whether practical reasons were responsible, e.g. financial considerations, or whether such differences were linked to the expected readership. In the process of translation, Wolf said he found some of the illustrations ‘deficient’. Various reasons determined which pictures he decided to omit: the Statue of Liberty was cut, ‘not just because the object is generally well-known but also because of the poor quality of the image’; given that pictures of witches ‘are relatively well known in German-speaking countries’, Wolf was of the opinion that illustration no. 72 of the English edition could be left out.

There is something typical of German scholarship in the careful precision of this translator, who in the end did a lot more than translate. Indeed, Wolf’s ‘improvements’ have an effect on Burke’s characteristically Anglo-Saxon ‘broad sweep’. In a certain sense, it is not just different ways of working that intersect here, but two different academic...
traditions, which are undoubtedly shaped by their respective languages. The German language is quite simply often more precise, so that the translator, Wolf, tends to pin the author down. To a certain degree, Burke in German is no longer quite Burke. Indeed, his anecdotal style seems to work much better in some languages – the romance languages for example – than others.

Except for the shenanigans about the Ingres picture and the (predictable) omission of the image of the ‘Goddess of Democracy’ built on Tian’anmen Square in 1989 from the Chinese version, none of the other editions of Eyewitnessing change any of the illustrations within the book. However, the cover illustrations are very diverse. The decision of how to illustrate the cover was obviously determined at least in part by the respective publishers. Indeed, the picture on the jacket of the English edition, Fyodor Shurpin’s The Morning of Our Motherland, was chosen by Reaktion rather than the author. (Burke added the passing references to the picture after its selection.) The Stalin portrait belongs to the standard visual repertoire of the historian’s guild, thus announcing the English edition as something far from revolutionary. Apparently, Burke would have preferred a photograph of the Vietnam War, but it would have cost too much. Yet, the photograph of the Vietnam War also represents the sort of image that even the most recalcitrant of historians takes into consideration as an illustration, if not exactly as an additional resource.

Augenzeugenschaft, the German edition, is the only other one to re-produce Shurpin’s image of Stalin on the cover. The Korean edition swaps one dictator for another, bearing Hubert Lanziger’s famous portrait of Hitler in a suit of armour, thus duplicating illustration no. 30. The Brazilian edition displays a montage of details of four of the illustrations from Eyewitnessing on the front cover – all of them rather traditional examples of the visual sources used by historians, with the exception of the ‘wrong’ Odalisque, whose prominence is rather ironic. Another of the illustrations is reproduced on the back cover and there is a tiny Mussolini running across the top of the spine, which Il Duce probably would not have appreciated. The Italian edition displays a section of the Bayeux tapestry – a different part from that reproduced as illustration no. 78 – again one of the standard visual resources of the historian. Burke devotes a short section of the book to the Bayeux tapestry in the chapter on ‘Visual Narratives’, but a second illustration of it seems unnecessary.

All of the other editions sport images that are not only not reproduced in Eyewitnessing, but not even mentioned in the text. The Croatian edition reproduces (without identifying it) a close-up of the young Napoleon from Antoine-Jean Gros’ painting, Le Général Bonaparte au pont d’Arcole, 17 Novembre 1796. In the context of ‘changes in the organization of warfare’ in the ‘Battle-Piece’, Burke does mention Gros’ picture of Napoleon visitant le champ de bataille d’Eylau le 9 Février 1807 (Eng. Ch. 8, 147; see also 150), a detail of which is reproduced in the German edition – one of Wolf’s additions (Ger. Ill. 79: 170). Other images of Napoleon are referred to (73, 78 and 182), and David’s painting of The Emperor Napoleon in His Study in The Tuileries is given a full-page reproduction (Eng. Ill. 27: 70). Gros entered David’s studio as a pupil in 1785 and was drawn into Napoleon’s propaganda machine. Thus on the one hand, Gros’ work can be considered that of an eyewitness and therefore apt for the cover – with the precise dating in the title of the picture raising exactly the sort of problems inherent in the concept of ‘eyewitnessing’; on the other hand, both the figure of Napoleon and this style of picture are already more than covered in the book, rendering the cover illustration eye-catching, but somewhat superfluous, not just to the text, but to the discourse on visual sources within it.
The Greek edition reproduces the shot, supposedly taken from original footage, of children dancing in the ruins of Stalingrad in 1942. The scene was used by Frank Capra in his film *Battle of Russia* (1945), part of the *Why we fight* series made in 1942–5 as propaganda for the U.S. government. There is no mention of Frank Capra, or even Stalingrad in Burke’s text though. The image was used later in Stanley Kubrick’s film *Clockwork Orange* (1971) in Alex’s brainwashing scenes and more recently still in Jean Jacques Annaud’s *Enemy at the Gates* (2001), but neither is mentioned in Eyewitnessing. Thus, the image is plucked from nowhere for the cover. My attempts to correspond with the Greek publisher to find out why it was chosen drew a blank, as the person responsible for the edition has now left Metaixmio. The picture of Stalingrad certainly provides arresting visual material for the historian, and the Chinese cover reproduces a similar image (without identifying it): Yevgeni Khaldei’s controversial photograph of the Soviet flag being hoisted over the Reichstag in Berlin at the end of the Second World War. The tensions between documentary and artistic photography, between art and propaganda make this a particularly interesting choice for the cover of the book, illustrating ‘the use of such evidence’ as well as warning of ‘some of the possible pitfalls’ (Eng. 9). As is now well known, the scene was staged three days after the fall of the Reichstag and Khaldei etched smoke onto the negative to give the effect of battle, as well as editing out the soldier’s multiple wristwatches that would have displayed evidence of looting. Given that Chinese anti-Nazism does not equate with the promotion of Soviet history, the choice of the image might seem surprising, but old ideological quarrels seem to have been subsumed by modern developments in China. The image’s fame probably had as much to do with the choice as anything else. Burke, though, does not mention Khaldei or this photograph anywhere in his book. Likewise, the Spanish edition depicts a close-up of the famous, screaming woman on the Odessa steps, whose wounded face drips blood, from Sergei Eisenstein’s film *Battleship Potemkin*. It is a powerful image and the film based on the dramatic events presaging the Russian uprising of 1905 remains popular, but although Burke mentions Eisenstein’s film *Ivan the Terrible* twice in his text, nowhere does he refer to Potemkin.

At a certain level, the appropriate response to all of this is ‘so what’? Publishers make decisions for all sorts of reasons (financial, aesthetic, historical, personal, etc.). Burke’s perfectly plausible explanation for the choice of the image from *Battleship Potemkin* was that someone at Critica is probably a fan of Eisenstein. However, on another level, the different covers of the various translations do give an indication of how the book is viewed – at least by the publishers – and the intended readership, as well as perhaps the perception of images as historical sources in that cultural milieu. Images and responses to images are culturally conditioned, which is not to claim some kind of cultural homogeneity, but is to highlight cultural difference – something that Burke singularly fails to do. At some level, the cover illustrations certainly represent a response to Burke’s text. The overall picture of the ‘use(s) of images as historical sources’ is a very conventional one: portraits of Stalin, Hitler, Napoleon and Lenin (the last, one of the images on the Brazilian cover), as well as images of Stalingrad and Berlin from World War II, and the Bayeux Tapestry.

**Conclusion: History and Visual Sources**

Although Burke supports the use(s) of images as historical sources, there are several problems with his approach, not least that the images taken into consideration tend to be the conventional ones of history. Thus, there are significant gaps as well as regular indications of an inability or unwillingness to go much beyond the content or subject matter of an
image. Second, the term ‘eyewitnessing’ is at best problematic and at worst involves a fundamental misconception of the nature of the material. This is even before any attempt has been made to translate the concept, the trials and tribulations of which are discussed above. Third, Burke’s aim is to demonstrate that pictures can be ‘read’ by sensitised historians like other sources, whereas differentiation between different sorts of sources as well as between different visual sources (in terms of temporal and spatial provenance, medium, etc.) would surely be more appropriate. In the final analysis, the author considers images subordinate to written documents: they can fill gaps and back-up or supplement textual documents. To re-quote his initial proposition in full: ‘[…] art can provide evidence for aspects of social reality which texts pass over […].’ (Eng. 30; my italics) As Baxandall pointed out, in Burke’s approach, ‘much depends in practice on prior knowledge of the social reality from other sources’. Thus, Burke (and his reader) is in danger of finding in pictures exactly what he is looking for. Indeed, ‘Burke’s arguments do not justify the historian’s use of the visual, but rather reassert the second-class status of images all over again.’

Whilst there have been significant publications in recent years that exemplify and contribute to a visual turn, most scholars remain wedded to the texts that formed the basis of their historical nuptials. Images may be used as illustrations, but little more than that. Burke’s caution underscores this, for if an advocate of the ‘uses of images as historical evidence’ can be so lukewarm, then the stance of the vast majority of the profession can be in little doubt. Comments by reviewers further elucidate the state of the field. Timothy Boon identifies the ‘significant dichotomy […] between works that, like Tagg’s and Baxandall’s, are close studies of particular visual media in particular historical contexts, and the majority of historical work that makes little or no use of images’. Moreover, he doubts whether the book, ‘– for all its interest – would be likely to make many converts in the social history of medicine’. The sceptics are not confined to this branch of history. Perhaps most revealingly of all, Michael Wintle commends Burke’s ‘caution’ and agrees that ‘very seldom will the images do more than add to our impressions from other more standard sources: they are a supplement to rather than a substitute for the archives’.

It is this view of visual sources that has now been made accessible to a Spanish, Italian, Croatian, Greek, German, Portuguese (Brazilian), Korean and Chinese readership. Far from attempting to stem the flow of translations or to deny the many merits of Burke’s book, this article should be taken as a clarion call to other cultural historians to disseminate a different view, or rather, different views, for the ‘visual turn’ in history remains partial and patchy. Through the recognition of their equal validity as sources, images would be able not just to confirm historians’ knowledge, but to lead to genuine new findings and that, surely, is the goal of scholarship – in anyone’s language.

Short Biography

Jessica Horsley’s work is sited at the intersection of history, art history, music and linguistics. Her first book, Der Almanach des Blauen Reiters als Gesamtkunstwerk (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006), analyses what is arguably the most valuable surviving primary source of the modernist period: the Blue Rider almanac (Munich: Piper, 1912). Current research focuses on modernist periodicals published in Munich during the first quarter of the 20th century; she has been commissioned to provide a chapter for the forthcoming third volume in the series Modernist Magazines (Oxford University Press;


3 It is worth bearing in mind that the visual turn in history coincided with the historiographical turn in art history in Britain (see S. Bann, ‘The History of Art History in Britain: a Critical Context for Recent Developments and Debates’, in P. Burke (ed.), *History and Historians in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 211), and an historical turn in art history further afield.

4 Some institutions even acknowledged the link between history and art history: whilst art history at Cambridge was and is aligned with architecture, Oxford coupled it initially with history. Ibid., 209.


6 Fyfe and Law (eds.), *Picturing Power*, 3.


10 Freedberg and de Vries (eds.), *Art in History/History in Art*. The volume is part of the Getty’s series on ‘Issues and Debates’.

11 R. Reichardt and H. Kohle, *Visualizing the Revolution: Politics and Pictorial Arts in Late Eighteenth-Century France* (London: Reaktion, 2008). Books in the series use images to different degrees and in very different ways. For other titles, refer to the bibliography at the end of this article.


13 The substantial and growing body of literature on Visual Culture is not considered here, as it is the discipline of history that is under discussion. For an excellent introduction to the field, see N. Mirzooff (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998) and *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999).

14 In a sense, visual sources are caught between various stools. ‘Cultural history’ still seems to have some way to go before it is accepted alongside political, social, economic and intellectual history as an integral and equal part of the discipline. (See for example S. Berger, H. Feldner and K. Passmore (eds.), *Writing History: Theory and Practice* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2003).) On the other hand, definitions of ‘culture’, and thus cultural history, can be extremely broad, hence perhaps its incapacity to find a separate niche: ‘Whatever their fields, contemporary historians concern themselves increasingly with cultures’. Berger, Feldner and Passmore (eds.), *Introduction*, xiii. Neither the visual sources nor the umbrella of cultural history constitutes or is intrinsically bound up with a particular ‘method’, and therein lies the rub. Given that the various approaches, Marxist, psychoanalytical, poststructuralist and so on are common to history and art history, the potential for work within the nexus of the two sets is considerable. Yet because the use of the visual source is not a theory, any more than cultural history is, the visual is used as an appendage to the discipline of history – to be added on, or indeed left off, at will.


and Rebeca Rocha (Portuguese); Ursel Pintschovius (Spanish).

1998) and eyewitness’ or the ‘acts of eyewitnesses’.

1 The Spanish is more passive: images do not ‘constitute’ (It.) or ‘record acts’ (Eng.), but ‘reflect’ (‘Reflejan un

2 pra´ctica cultural del testimonio ocular consciente. [...].’ (Span. 229) Here and in the next passage I use as an exam-

3 Spanish is similar: ‘testimonio’ refers to the (verbal or written) report of a witness, whereas the person, the

4 witness, rather than the report.

5 ‘Kulturgeschichte’, for example, is not the same thing as Cultural History, hence (presumably) Burke’s descrip-

6 tion as a teacher of art history on the inside back cover of the German edition.

7 As explained in a preliminary editorial note, because of serious errors in the Brazilian translation, the first edition

8 was withdrawn from circulation. A new version, revised by the historian D. A. Reis Filho and corrected by Burke

9 and his Brazilian wife, M. L. Pallares-Burke, was published in 2004. Burke’s attempt to escape the art historical canon is dated. Cf. n. 13.

10 Cf. A. Matthias, ‘Augenzeugenschaft – Von den Tücken eines gut gemeinten Ansatzes’, Kultur-Extra, das Online-


12 php, last accessed on 26 February 2009.

13 The difference between Art and Visual Culture, which the author does not touch upon, remains nebulous as well as fluid. Burke’s attempt to escape the art historical canon is dated. Cf. n. 13.


15 Ibid., 520.


17 Baxandall, Review, 643.

18 Cf. Passmore, ‘Poststructuralism and History’, 120.

19 E. de Jongh, ‘Some Notes on Interpretation’, in Freedberg and de Vries (eds.), Art in History/History in Art, 123.

20 The subsequent chapter (III) presents images of men primarily, as might be expected in ‘sacred’ if not necessarily

21 ‘supernatural’ images; the images of ‘Power and Protest’ (Ch. IV) are predominantly of men. Those of ‘women’

22 represent the personification of an ideal – liberty or democracy – rather than being portraits of actual women.


24 He also exchanged ideas with Gombrich and Baxandall on several occasions ‘over the years’. My thanks to

25 Burke for clarifying both points more recently (2009). Cf. n. 42.


27 The term is not particularly new (cf. A. Giddens, The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy (Malden, Mass.: Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998) and The Third Way and its Critics (Cambridge: Polity, 2000)) and was used by the

28 author himself a decade before the publication of Eyewitnessing in a completely different context. See P. Burke, History and Social Theory (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 130–147, especially from 144.

29 My thanks to the following for invaluable discussions of the various translations of Eyewitnessing: Prof Greg

30 Benton (Chinese); Josip Ploc i ˇkinjic´ (Croatian); Dimitra Fimi (Greek); Elisabetta Lo Sardo (Italian); Roberto Casi

31 and Rebeca Rocha (Portuguese); Ursel Pintschovius (Spanish).

32 Baxandall, Review, 643.

33 My italics. The difference between the plural in the subtitle of the English edition and the singular of the first

34 sentence is noteworthy.


36 ‘Kulturgeschichte’, for example, is not the same thing as Cultural History, hence (presumably) Burke’s descrip-

37 tion as a teacher of art history on the inside back cover of the German edition.

38 As explained in a preliminary editorial note, because of serious errors in the Brazilian translation, the first edition

39 was withdrawn from circulation. A new version, revised by the historian D. A. Reis Filho and corrected by Burke

40 and his Brazilian wife, M. L. Pallares-Burke, was published in 2004.

41 Unless otherwise stated, this and all other references to Peter Burke’s opinions and clarifications derive from a

42 private interview in Emmanuel College, Cambridge two days before his retirement in October 2004. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Prof Burke for his openness, encouragement and collegiality, as well as for sending me copies of some of the translations of Eyewitnessing.

43 In addition to Dimitra Fimi (Cardiff), I would like to thank Brigitte Springmann and her colleagues at the

44 University Library of Basle for reading of the Greek title.

45 The Spanish is similar: ‘testimonio’ refers to the (verbal or written) report of a witness, whereas the person, the

46 witness, would be ‘testigo’. – ‘Pongamos un ejemplo cercano al tema central del presente volumen, a saber, el de la

47 práctica cultural del testimonio ocular consciente. [...]’. (Span. 229) Here and in the next passage I use as an exam-

48 ple (Eng. 14/Span. 17), the words ‘testimonio’ and ‘ocular’ are put together, though the eyes actually belong to the

49 witness, rather than the report.

50 The Spanish is more passive: images do not ‘constitute’ (It.) or ‘record acts’ (Eng.), but ‘reflect’ (‘Reflejan un

51 testimonio ocular’; Span. 17).

52 ‘Tamen jizai le mujizhe de xingdong’ – literally, ‘they record act of eyewitness’. There are no articles, and there is no distinction between singular and plural in Chinese, hence the sentence could refer to ‘the/an act of the/an eyewitness’ or the ‘acts of eyewitnesses’. 
entirely on German theorists. – Bann, ‘The History of Art History in Britain’, in ibid., 210. For differences in the
related to the nature of art history in Britain, and its paucity of philosophy and theory – the latter dependent

Cf. n. 47.

There is also a significant difference in the intended readership: in England, the book was written for students; in

Cf. Burke (ed.), History and Historians, Introduction, 9. Indeed, the Anglo-Saxon response of history to images is
related to the nature of art history in Britain, and its paucity of philosophy and theory – the latter dependent
entirely on German theorists. – Bann, ‘The History of Art History in Britain’, in ibid., 210. For differences in the
social history of art see ibid., 217–24.

This was clarified in more recent correspondence with Burke. Cf. (erratum) J. Horsley, ‘Bilder als historische
Quellen: Gedanken zu Peter Burkes “Eyewitnessing” und zur Problematik der “Augenzeugenschaft”‘, Cardiff
Historical Papers, 2008/4: 10 f.

Cf. Burke (ed.), History and Historians, Introduction, 9. Indeed, the Anglo-Saxon response of history to images is
related to the nature of art history in Britain, and its paucity of philosophy and theory – the latter dependent

References to Stalin and Lenin, and indeed the entire exploration of ‘Power and Protest’ (Ch. 4), which includes
comments on right- and left-wing regimes, might well have been altered in times past, but quibbles about interpre-
tations of Marxism are all but irrelevant in the new commercial China. As only to be expected, however, the sections
on the destroyed ‘Goddess of Democracy’, built on Tian’anmen Square in 1989, were censored (Eng. 63–4, entire paragraph from ‘Echoing the Statue of Liberty’ to ‘American cult of liberty without identifying with it’. [Chin. 84]; Eng. 78, from ‘In China’, on the other hand to ‘only a few days after it had been erected’, including n. 20 [Chin. 100]; Eng. 181, two sentences from ‘The problem’ to ‘by foreigners and by Chinese’ [Chin. 261, para. 3]), as was the illustration no. 21 in the English edition.


‘Eyewitnesses’ – Αὐτοπτεῖς Μάχαιρας – was presumably not used in the title to avoid the duplication of μάχαιρα/μάχαιρα in the subtitle.

Several examples in addition to that of Bargrave support the second possibility: ‘Like novelists, painters represent
social life by choosing individuals and small groups whom they believe to be typical of a larger whole’. – P. Burke, Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence (London: Reaktion, 2001), 122. Burke now says that he never thought of the historian in terms of an eyewitness.

This was clarified in more recent correspondence with Burke. Cf. (erratum) J. Horsley, ‘Bilder als historische
Quellen: Gedanken zu Peter Burkes “Eyewitnessing” und zur Problematik der “Augenzeugenschaft”‘, Cardiff
Historical Papers, 2008/4: 10 f.

Cf. Burke (ed.), History and Historians, Introduction, 9. Indeed, the Anglo-Saxon response of history to images is
related to the nature of art history in Britain, and its paucity of philosophy and theory – the latter dependent
entirely on German theorists. – Bann, ‘The History of Art History in Britain’, in ibid., 210. For differences in the
social history of art see ibid., 217–24.

There is a great deal of literature on this in the field of anthropological linguists. For a useful overview of lin-
guistic relativism and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, see: http://www.formalontology.it/linguistic-relativity.htm,
accessed on 30 January 2009. A refutation of Sapir-Whorf forms part of Steven Pinker’s very readable Language

The great majority of the illustrations are of European works (74%): 23% are French, 18% Italian, 12% from the
Netherlands, 11% German and 10% British. Some of these statistics are unsurprising – a significant percentage of
Italian works for example – as is the predominance of a particular geographical area in a specific period (e.g. Dutch
works in the seventeenth century); others are explained by Burke’s research interests (e.g. France in the 18th and
first half of the 19th century).

Illustration no. 3 is not acknowledged as a watercolour in the English edition, but it is in the German.

A third drawing, John Tenniel’s caricature of ‘Two Forces’ (ill. 71), which was published in Punch on 29 Octo-
ber 1881, can hardly be considered the work of an eyewitness.

Wintle, Review, 430.

Betts, Review, 663.


It is true that ‘techniques for recording the present by means of photography coincided almost precisely with an
increasing readiness to visualise the past through the eyes of painters, sculptors and print-makers’ (Haskell,
History and its Images, 4), but Burke’s analysis is not placed into this context.

J.–A.–D. Ingres, Une odalisque (La grande Odalisque), 1814, oil on canvas, 91 × 162 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

J.–A.–D. Ingres, L’Odalisque à l’Esclave, 1839–40, oil on canvas mounted on panel, 72.07 × 100.33 cm, Fogg Art
Museum, Cambridge, MA.

This and all subsequent explanations from Matthias Wolf come from an email of 7 December 2004; my transla-
tions into English throughout.

Ill. 21: Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi, Statue of Liberty, 1884–6, New York; ill. 68: Woodcut of a monster, from Wu Renchen: Shanhaijing [the Classic of Mountains and Seas], Guangzhou (Canton), 1667; ill. 70: Nigerian (Benin) bronze plaque showing two 16th-century Portuguese men, 16th century, private collection; ill. 71: early 19th-century woodcut showing a witch (no further details).

E. Johnson, Negro Life at the South – My Old Kentucky Home, 1859, oil on canvas, 91.44 × 114.93 cm, Historical
Society, New York.

W. Hogarth, O the Roast Beef of Old England (‘The Gate of Calais’), 1748, oil on canvas, 78.8 × 94.5 cm, Tate
Gallery, London.

There is also a significant difference in the intended readership: in England, the book was written for students; in
Germany, the publishers could hope for a much wider public. It is emblematic that British reviews of Peter Burke’s
book appeared in history and art history periods, whereas German and Swiss ones were published in daily newspapers.

Cf. n. 47.
69 Financial considerations might seem to be a greater obstacle to the use of images as historical sources in the 21st century than the lack of interest of historians. The most expensive image for the publishers of Eyewitnessing was Nick Ut’s photograph of a Napalm attack of 1972 (ill. 77).

70 The other editions found various alternative solutions for the Stalin picture, which is perhaps rather ironic, given that Burke only mentioned it in his text after it had been chosen by the English publisher. The Croatian edition includes an echo of Shurpin’s image as a subsidiary, darkened reproduction in the top left-hand corner of the cover (thus, Napoleon turns away from a shadowy Stalin); the Greek and Brazilian editions include the painting of Stalin as an unnumbered illustration (opposite the first page of the Introduction and on page 90 respectively, the latter with a footnote explaining that the picture appeared on the cover of the original edition); the Spanish and Chinese editions include the image as an additional, numbered illustration (nos 10 and 29 respectively), giving 83 illustrations in total in the former, and 82 in the latter – thanks to the absence of the Tian’anmen Goddess.

71 J.-A.-D. Ingres, Une odalisque (La grande Odalisque), 1814, oil on canvas, 91 × 162 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris (ill. 66); Engraving of the composing room of a printing shop (‘Imprimerie’), from the ‘Recueil des planches’ (1762) of the Encyclopédie, Paris 1751–1765 (ill. 34); J.-L. David, The Emperor Napoleon in His Study in The Tuileries, 1812, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (ill. 27); V. Serov, Peasant Pettitoners Visiting Lenin, 1950, oil on canvas, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow (ill. 29). Burke described the cover of the Portuguese/Brazilian edition as, ‘closer to [his] intentions’ than some of the others in an email to me of November 2004.

72 P. Brueghel the Elder, Peasant Wedding Banquet, c. 1566, oil on canvas, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (ill. 73); Mussolini jogging on the beach at Riccione, 1930s, photograph (ill. 28).

73 A.-J. Gros, Le Général Bonaparte au pont d’Arcole, 17 November 1796, 1801, oil on canvas, 73 × 59 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

74 A.-J. Gros, Napoleon visitant le champ de bataille d’Elyau le 9 Février 1807, 1808, oil on canvas, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

75 J.-L. David, The Emperor Napoleon in His Study in The Tuileries, 1812, oil on canvas, 203.9 × 125.1 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

76 This is one of the images reproduced on the cover of the Brazilian edition. Cf. n. 71.

77 A major retrospective of Khaldei’s photographs was held at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin last year (9 May–28 July 2008), then travelling to Kiev; thus the choice of the image for the cover of the Chinese edition (2008) was a timely one.

78 Baxandall, Review, 643. Cf. 3, n. 15 (in this article; on Haskell).


82 Wintle, Review, 429.

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