

Preface

What is the relationship between modernity and visual culture? How can scholars use visual evidence to better understand the nature of modernity and the particular cultural changes associated with industrial capitalism? From the vantage point of the early twenty-first century, it seems that there is some crucial connection between the rise of visual culture and modernity itself. This volume places the origins of our contemporary visual culture in the nineteenth century. We concentrate on Western Europe during the period of accelerated change from the 1830s onward, which witnessed a tremendous rise in the use of the visual as a mode of mass communication, as increasingly powerful media created a superfluity of images designed to attract, allure, convince, seduce, persuade, enlighten, and teach. The rise of modern science and the Industrial Revolution created the technology that made possible the nineteenth-century inventions of photography and, later, the cinema, and the subsequent twentieth-century phenomena of television, the digital computer, and eventually the internet. (Some recent works of popular history have overtly linked nineteenth-century calculating machines and the telegraph to the modern computer and the internet.¹) The related developments of industrialization, capitalization, urbanization, population growth, and the rise of the public sphere and consumer culture generated mass-market advertising and entertainment through the expansion of visual media. The chapters in this volume, however, also argue that the proliferation of images was not simply the result of new technology or even of new socio-economic factors. Rather, the rise of visual culture both engendered, and was engendered by, the essential fact of modernity, the condition of impermanence.

The chapters explore the anxiety-producing effects of rapid and constant change, and how the visual functioned as the means of expressing and allaying that anxiety through constant efforts to process and integrate the centrifugal experience of industrial capitalism. Together, they show that it was often precisely when writers, scientists, artists, and designers tried to

contain or represent modernity that their work exposed the fractures and fissures in representation and hermeneutics inherent in the modern world. Through a series of multidisciplinary case studies, we see how the visual culture of nineteenth-century Europe developed into forms distinguished by hybridity, the reinvention and transformation of genres, and the creative crossing of traditional boundaries. New media, ideas, anxieties, techniques, styles, and economics produced a startling range, proliferation, and use of images that sought synthesis but often revealed jarring juxtapositions of old and new.

Nineteenth-century Europe struggled with the modern condition of flux; cultural critics from William Blake to Émile Zola showed how industrial capitalism remade all aspects of society, redefining categories as basic as nature and culture, class and politics. More recently, scholars have investigated how these radical changes created continuous crises of representation, compelling European society to explore new possibilities of creative expression. As noted above, the culture put great emphasis on the visual with new forms of mass communication—photography, lithography, newspapers, advertising, and later, cinema—but it also transformed older forms as varied as poetry, the novel, painting, interior decoration, scientific inquiry, and architecture. These chapters show how, in the wake of continuous social and cultural transformation and fragmentation, artists and writers attempted to reconstitute a meaningful new *Weltanschauung* that would allow them and their audiences to gain some sense of order and hope in a constantly changing world. Yet as these studies demonstrate, the resulting images and the use of the images show not seamless integration but hybridity of forms, transformation of genres, transgression of boundaries, and anxiety—not only at the situation of the culture at large but also over the very feasibility of the project. Even as many of the most imaginative and courageous figures embraced the new culture of uncertainty, many betrayed their own doubts within works that sought wholeness and surety, which is some of the most convincing evidence of the nature and extremity of social change in the period.

By examining the role of images and imagery in nineteenth-century representation in a variety of contexts, we seek to delve into both the origins of contemporary visual culture and the ways in which the first moderns struggled with their hopes and fears about their own time and the future to come. In order to examine the nineteenth-century crisis of representation in terms of the visual, the pictorial, and the metaphoric, this volume presents studies of such varied media as photography, painting, interior decoration, scientific instruments, graphic art, and literature, and in such disparate contexts as the museum, the factory, the laboratory, the art studio, and the private home. To explore this topic as broadly as possible, we have gathered scholars from multiple fields: cultural and intellectual history,

architecture, art history and theory, history of science, and literature. It is truly an interdisciplinary study in the best sense of the word, as an effort has been made to find connections in the topics of concern and methodology in the different disciplines in order to delve into this rich and provocative subject in a complementary way. The chapters differ in the scope of their interests; some dealing with broad cultural themes while others perform in-depth analysis and close readings of specific cultural forms and ideas. Yet they all converge around four central themes: the efforts by nineteenth-century European writers, artists, scientists, and philosophers to grapple with modernity through the use of the visual; their attempts to make sense of the fate of humanity in a world changing at a breakneck speed; the apparent sense of anxiety that emerges from even the most hopeful visions of the industrial age; and the resulting hybridity and transformation of traditional forms. Our hope is that this work will make a significant contribution not only to the study of the cultural history of nineteenth-century Europe in the industrial period, but also to the examination of image's dominance in modern culture and, ultimately, to the unending project of representing modernity.

The first group of chapters on "Envisioning the industrial" deals with literary and artistic representation of industrial technology in the nineteenth century and the problems that arose in these early attempts to deal with the dilemma of modern life through image and imagery. Minsoo Kang analyzes the common practice of describing locomotives as living creatures in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writings. He places such depictions in the context of the Industrial Revolution when the powerful steam-driven machinery of the era was envisioned as a new class of being. He also shows how the growing anxiety and ambivalence toward the rapid industrialization of the West was evident in the shift that occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century from the dominant trope of trains as powerful but docile servants of humanity to their reinvention as fearsome monsters of irrational will. Jane Boyd looks at the more specific topic of French engineering drawings that feature trains and transportation structures such as bridges and viaducts. She shows that the creators of those images were concerned not only with rendering those subjects accurately but also with making them blend in harmoniously with the natural environment in an aesthetically satisfactory way. She further demonstrates that this concerted effort to reconcile the natural with the artificial exemplifies the anxiety of living in the modern industrial era, as more overtly (and famously) expressed in the omissions, revisions and extenuations of man-made structures in the works of Impressionists like Monet, Sisley, and Caillebotte. James Rubin analyzes the works of the neglected Impressionist Armand Guillaumin, whose paintings produced in the 1870s focus on scenes of industry and labor. Rubin asserts that Guillaumin's art not only documents the expansion of the French economy and public works, but that also embodies an ideology of industrial

recovery following the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune. Given the timeliness of his effort to represent that historical moment of technological transformation, it is all the more unfortunate that Guillaumin's relative obscurity is due in part to the subsequent reputation of Impressionism as primarily an anti-industrial art of bourgeois leisure.

The next group of chapters on "Photographing the (un)real" looks at the role of that quintessentially modern technology of imaging, the photograph, in the contexts of nineteenth-century science, commercial illustration, and high art. Courtenay Raia-Grean analyzes the puzzling phenomenon of spirit photography in the mid-nineteenth century, or the effort to capture the images of ghosts and other supernatural entities on camera. She demonstrates that the activity was found not just in the realm of 'hoaxers and humbugs' but that it drew the interest of serious scientists and other intellectuals who sought to both ascertain the verity of the images as well as to construct workable theories of their possibility. What emerges is a picture of the mechanistic-materialist world of the modern that is haunted by a longing for a realm beyond what can be glimpsed even through the use of high technology. Gerry Beegan traces the complex application of image making and reproduction technologies in English illustrated periodicals of the 1890s, showing that many pictures featured in those journals were not just simple photographs but amalgams created through various photomechanical techniques that combined the photograph with wood engraving and drawing. By analyzing how and why old and new technologies were used together in the production of those images, Beegan asserts that they offered the readers multiple viewpoints on modernity, a modernity not of clarity and established facts but of destabilization and constant flux. Natasha Ruiz-Gómez looks into the well-known antipathy toward the photographic image professed by the great sculptor Auguste Rodin, a somewhat paradoxical attitude from an artist who believed that truth could be found only through faithfulness to Nature, which is precisely what was at the time the camera's most touted value. She demonstrates that Rodin's resistance to the photograph may have led him to create bodies that contested the medium's "objectivity," which in turn elicited criticism of his partial and pieced-together works as formless and unnatural. As his works seemed to have tapped into contemporary anxiety about industrialization, Ruiz-Gómez further argues that by reacting to the new visual language of science, Rodin created a potent sculptural idiom that is distinctly modern.

The third section, "Framing the environment," investigates the complex relationship between the ideas of Nature, the emergence of new art markets, and the practice of art, architecture and design in the nineteenth century. Again, even as artists, designers, and critics hoped to find a new ability to present the world to an increasingly large audience—whether through narrative art, public art museums, wallpaper, or design manuals—these

attempts at visual synthesis created new hybrid forms that reveal key anxieties. Amy Woodson-Boulton looks at the development of what she calls the “aesthetic ideology” in nineteenth-century England—the ways in which art critics, reformers, and the public understood art’s social function, visual language, and artistic parameters. She argues that, based on Romanticism, natural theology, a growing art market, and the ideas of John Ruskin and his many followers, art was thought of as a universally accessible form of communication that could uniquely link beauty and morality through the representation of nature, broadly defined. This understanding of art led to wide-spread movements to bring art to the people through exhibitions and public art museums. By the end of the century, however, artists increasingly rejected the previous connections between the realistic depiction of the natural world and morality or social purpose, and the earlier hope of art as the “salvation of mankind” faded with the development of the new aesthetic ideology of Modernism. Amy Catania Kulper also explores the tense nineteenth-century relationship between nature and representation, looking at the shift early in the century when the natural ceased to be affiliated with man’s rational mind and came to be equated with his capricious will. Her chapter examines pictorial evidence of the shift from rational to volitional conceptions of the natural through an exploration of the unlikely, yet highly revelatory, example of wallpaper. Kulper shows how designers depicted nature either pictorially or as a systematic pattern, and uses Victor Horta’s abhorrence of wallpaper as a case study of the problems involved with representing volitional nature. Finally, Katherine Hover-Smoot explores how, in three paintings from 1897, Camille Pissarro proposed an imagery that was fundamentally more fragile than the “sunny” and “big” boulevards collectors preferred and Pissarro’s dealer, Durand-Ruel, requested. Rather, the paintings of carnival imagine a moment of pre-modern anxieties, of subversion and transgression that runs counter to the licensed, festive gaiety of fin-de-siècle France. Foregrounding the presence of the crowd, Pissarro’s paintings thus give way to a moment of upheaval and collective desire—a dream image of insurrection. Once again, art here figures as a site where opposition to the commercial and regulated society appears—not in a Bakhtinian moment of release, but in a moment revealing anxiety and doubt even when trying to imagine wholeness, meaning and purpose. Together, the three chapters present the complex ways in which art and design changed, and argue that these transformations reveal significant anxieties about the very idea and role of art and design in an age uncertain about the status of nature, the relationship between artist and market, or the implications of industrial production.

The next group of chapters, “Depicting the scientific,” looks at ways in which modern scientific ideas and worldviews were represented in visual forms, and how this translation into imagery again reveals deep faultlines

and contradictions, even as pictorializations sought a new synthesis. Kevin Lambert begins with an analysis of two stained glass windows dedicated to the British mathematician and logician George Boole after his death in 1864. Lambert asserts that the images memorialize his great contribution to the articulation of universal laws of reason subject to the same divine order as external nature. These representations also point to his effort to find a new and more modern foundation of moral truth in mid-century Britain, a task that was seen as particularly urgent and important in a culture that was undergoing rapid and enormous intellectual and social changes. Gabriel Wolfenstein turns to the popular realm in examining how scientific ideas were presented to a mass audience in late nineteenth century Britain, specifically through the journal *The Strand*, most famous for its publication of the Sherlock Holmes stories. He shows that in an era of tremendous and often intimidating scientific and technological discoveries and innovations, the publication allayed people's anxiety about change through its popularized discussions of new ideas and devices. Wolfenstein argues that publications like *The Strand*, aimed in particular at commuters, sought to create a set of common interests and values in the populace and thus played an important role in the formation of a dominant middle-class culture. By using the whole of the magazine, including both articles and advertisements, he shows that we get a much fuller picture of the evolution of the mass press and the role it played in shaping controversial ideas in science. Hiroko Washizu examines the device of the Orrery, or a mechanical representation of the universe that features revolving heavenly bodies, named after Charles Boyle, the Earl of Orrery to whom the object was dedicated. While it was popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for its entertaining depiction of the new scientific view of the mechanistic cosmos, Washizu shows that it also embodied a serious anxiety-inducing dilemma of the modern worldview. The Orrery demonstrated the absolute certainty of the rational God who set the world in motion according to regular laws, but it also suggested a self-moving system in which the Creator played an insignificant role, perhaps even hinting at a Godless universe run by an impersonal vital force inherent in matter itself—the very image of modernity itself that horrified so many.

The final three chapters, gathered together as “Exposing the modern,” trace a number of disorienting encounters that have defined modern art and literature's attempts to depict modernity, particularly the commercialization of culture, imperialism, and the rise of the working class. Paula Young Lee considers Gustave Caillebotte's disturbing 1883 painting *Veau à l'étal*, arguing that its portrayal of a splayed, skinned veal carcass, decorated with flowers and presented on clean white sheets ready for sale, strips the commercialized body to its animal essentials, and quietly exposes the troubled underbelly of capitalism as something irredeemably bloody as well as hollow. Her chapter positions this painting inside the economic/erotic

compulsions of nineteenth-century Paris, and interprets it in relationship to the gendered representation of flesh as a marketplace commodity. Vulgar to the extreme, the painting consequently offers intriguing insights into the visual codes of the industrial age, and expands historical understanding of the avant-garde challenge to middle-class morality through the exploration of difficult imagery. Haejeong Hazel Hahn investigates another project that tries to expose bourgeois values through a series of encounters, in this case Jean-Jacques Grandville's 1843-44 illustrated book *Un Autre Monde*. Seeing Grandville's work as a series of *mise-en-abymes* or frames within frames, and giving close readings of the relationship between image and text, Hahn shows that the various narratives address the manifold process of the commercialization of culture during the July Monarchy, when advertising was coming into its own with attendant controversy, and the world of publishing and journalism was rapidly changing and expanding. Containing an encyclopedic anatomy of contemporary rhetoric and techniques of advertising, in parodied forms, the book's combination of word and image and its self-referentiality are deliberately disorienting and critical of commodified, mechanized, bourgeois society. Finally, Carla Spivack's chapter discusses how visual images of the colonies and colonized peoples of the British Empire disrupt the text of nineteenth-century novels, specifically, Charles Dickens' *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* and Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone*. She explores how both mysteries turn on the question of identity, and reveal, through their use of visual imagery, that the encounter with the Other of colonialism is a force which undermines its stability. Ultimately, she shows that the disruptive impact of these images helped create modernity as it appears in these novels, and that the destabilizing encounter with the Other—destabilizing partly because it is visual—is at the heart of the detective novel genre these works helped create.

The words "image" and "imagine" come from the same Latin root, "imago." Together, these chapters point to how modern culture has constantly attempted to imagine itself; the studies, in all their variety, point to the extent to which we find the most pressing problems of the modern period—the impact of industrialization, the commercialization of culture, the development of extensive imperial projects, and the transformation of older hierarchies of nature, gender, class, and power—expressed through visual culture. The chapters take us through the fraught portrayal of locomotives and industrial landscape; the uses of photography to depict a variety of realities; the changing relationships among markets, art, and nature; attempts to visualize the scientific worldview; and disorienting encounters that critique modern commercial culture. The collection argues that this translation of modern anxieties into imagery is not accidental; in all of these studies, visual culture proves particularly able to attempt synthesis even while admitting fracture, doubt, and hybridity. Thus we can understand the

proliferation of image and imagery in the modern period not simply as the development of new technologies of reproduction or expanding markets, but as the result of a changing culture, one which constantly demanded new ways of understanding itself and conceptualizing the very experience of constant change. Of course, new technologies have been put to work on this endless project, most obviously cinema, television, and now the vagaries of YouTube. These studies help us understand modernity as a condition of ever-expanding visuality, that attempts to imagine and comprehend, if only for a moment and only partially, a state of constant flux.

Minsoo Kang and Amy Woodson-Boulton

Note

1. See Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet* (New York: Walker and Co., 1998), and Doron Swade, *The Difference Engine: Charles Babbage and the Quest to Build the First Computer* (New York: Viking, 2001).