Mapping visual global politics

Roland Bleiker

We live in a visual age. Images shape international events and our understanding of them. Photographs, cinema and television influence how we view and approach phenomena as diverse as war, humanitarian disasters, protest movements, financial crises and election campaigns. Politicians have been acutely aware of this at least since shocking images of the Vietnam War influenced domestic and international support for US foreign policy (Kennedy 2008). The UN Secretary General regularly urges photojournalists to produce more images, particularly of atrocities that seem to exist in silence and demand urgent action (Pronk 2005; Devereux 2010: 124–34).

The dynamics of visual politics reach in all directions and go well beyond traditional media outlets. The examples are numerous. Digital media, such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, play an increasingly important role across the political spectrum, from terrorist recruitment drives to social justice campaigns. High-profile visual artists, such as Anselm Kiefer and Ai Weiwei, have become influential voices of political dissent. Fashion and videogames are frequently derived from and enact the militarised world we live in. Drones, satellites and surveillance cameras profile terrorist suspects and identify military targets.

We live in a visual age indeed. Images surround everything we do. This omnipresence of images is political and has changed fundamentally how we live and interact in today's world. Scholarly fields such as art history and media, cultural and communication studies have for long examined visual representations. But we still know far too little about the precise role visuality plays in the realm of politics and international relations. And we know even less about the concrete practical implications. Addressing this gap is particularly pertinent since new technologies now allow for the speedy and easy distribution of still and moving images across national boundaries.

Visual Global Politics offers a comprehensive overview of and engagement with the role of visuality in politics and international relations. It is designed as an accessible, one-stop source for anyone interested in understanding the central role that images play in today's world. At the same time, the book pushes our understanding of politics. Although we live in a visual age, knowledge conventions – both in academia and in the wider realm – are still very much focused on texts and textual analysis (see Williams 2003). What would a true political appreciation of the visual look like? What would it mean to communicate and think and act in visual ways? How would the media, books, classrooms and other realms be transformed if we were to treat images not just as illustrations or as representations but as political forces themselves?

To appreciate the wide range and far-reaching consequences of visual politics it is important to look not only at two-dimensional images, as illustrated in the examples

above, but also at three-dimensional visual artefacts and performances (see Callahan, Chapter 9). The latter include influential phenomena, such as border installations, churches, national monuments and parades. Visual images and visual artefacts differ in their nature and function. For one, images have the potential to circulate rapidly while some artefacts are limited by their physical nature and location. But they are also linked in numerous ways and have at least three common dimensions, which will be explored through the book.

First: at a time of globalisation and global communication the boundaries between images and visual artefacts become more and more blurred. Consider the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC, designed by Maya Lin. It is one of the most influential visual artefacts, a monument visited by millions of people who often leave with deeply emotional impressions. But most people around the world have "seen" the monument not as a result of a personal visit, but through images that circulate online, in newspapers, on TV and in movies. The same is the case with almost any influential visual artefact or performance, from flags to military parades and televised presidential election debates: they are always more than localised three-dimensional objects or phenomena. They are artefact–performance constellations that circulate politically through still and moving images.

Second: images and visual artefacts tell us something about the world and, perhaps more importantly, about how we see the world. They are witnesses of our time and

Figure 0.1 US veterans point out a familiar name at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial following a Veterans Day ceremony, 11 November 2006

Source: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Defense.gov_photo_essay_060911-D-7203T-030.jpg/. This image is a work of a US military or Department of Defense employee, taken or made as part of that person's official duties. The appearance of US Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.

of times past. A satellite image provides information about the world's surface. Photographs document wars or diplomatic summits or protest movements. Monuments remind us of past events and their significance for today's political communities. Sometimes images and artefacts entrench political practices. For instance: a variety of seemingly mundane visual performances, from hairstyles to body movements, signal and normalise gendered systems of exclusion. But sometimes images can also uproot political practices. Indigenous photographs – such as the one on the cover of this book by Michael Cook – can challenge stereotypes and the colonial understanding of history associated with them.

Some credit this artistic creativity with the potential to fundamentally reorient our political world. A work of art can lead us to see the world in a new light and help us rethink assumptions we have taken for granted, including those about politics. Or so believes Alex Danchev (2016: 91), who was convinced that "contrary to popular belief, it is given to artists, not politicians, to create a new world order." Look, as an example, at Pablo Picasso's famous painting *Guernica*, which has become one of the most iconic and influential anti-war statements. It seeks to capture not the factual aspects of wars but their traumatic human and emotional dimensions. In so doing *Guernica* has become a constant public and political reminder of the moral dangers of war. Consider how, in February 2003, the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, made a case for war with Iraq to the United Nations in New York. He had to do so outside the Security Council chamber, which features a large tapestry reproduction Guernica. For the occasion of Powell's speech *Guernica* was (in)famously hidden behind a blue cover: its visual-emotional-ethical message was too powerful and subversive to be seen. As Maureen Dowd (2003) put it: "Mr Powell can't very well seduce the world into bombing Iraq surrounded on camera by shrieking and mutilated women, men, children, bulls and horses."

Third, and already illustrated by *Guernica*: images and visual artefacts do things. They are political forces in themselves. They often shape politics as much as they depict it. Early modern cartographic techniques played a key role in legitimising the emergence of territorial states. Hollywood films provide us with well-rehearsed and deeply entrenched models of heroes and villains to the point that they shape societal values. A terrorist suicide bombing is designed to kill people with a maximum visual impact: images of the event are meant to go around the world and spread fear. James Der Derian (Chapter 50) speaks of a "war of images," a situation where visuality is a key strategic part of war, used at all levels and by all actors. In this way images become weapons themselves in a myriad of ways: not just to project fear but to recruit combatants, to sway public opinion, to guide drones and missiles – in short, to wage visual war.

I now map out the broad conceptual contours of visual global politics in an effort to understand the key issues at stake. I neither summarise the chapters – they are designed to defy easy summary – nor do I survey specialised and often narrow academic debates. Instead, I highlight, in accessible language, the key issues that are central to understanding visual global politics. I bring together insights from different disciplines in an attempt to provide a framework though which the political significance of images can be understood and further investigated. I do so in relative detail because there has not yet been a comprehensive attempt to assess the broad field of visual global politics. This is not to say that scholars have not tackled the issues at stake. They have done so in numerous and highly sophisticated manners. But most existing books focus on

a particular aspect of visual politics. There are, just to mention a few examples, books that deal with the conceptual issue of aesthetic theory (Bleiker 2009; Pusca 2009; Rancière 2004), with the role of photography (Azoulay 2008; Hariman and Lucaites 2007; Levi Strauss 2003; Linfield 2010; Perlmutter 1998; Sliwinski 2011), film (Shapiro 1999, 2008; Weber 2005, 2006b, 2011), popular culture (Griffin 2015; Nexon and Neumann 2006; Shepherd 2013; Weldes 2003) and art (Danchev 2009; Danchev and Lisle 2009; Luke 1992, 2002; Martin 2014). There are books that address the more general role of the media (Moeller 1999; Der Derian 2009; Zelizer 2010) and the politics of representation (Campbell 1992; Debrix and Weber 2003; Rabinowitz 1994; Tagg 1988). There are also volumes that take on visual politics in a broad way, but they either deal with specific empirical issues, such as geopolitics (MacDonald, Hughes and Dodds 2010), peace (Möller 2013), democracy (Azoulay 2001), the role of the face (Edkins 2015) or regional conflict (Shim 2014). Finally, there are already several broad surveys, but they focus on visual culture not on visual politics (see Dikovitskaya 2005; Elkins 2003; Jay 2005; Mirzoeff 1998, 1999, 2011; Mitchell 1986, 1994, 2005b; and, for a rare take on the political, Shim 2014: 9–46).

The idea of *Visual Global Politics*, in short, is to open up debates as widely as possible. In this sense, the book is not an academic treatise but more a provocation designed to evoke reflection and discussion: a political engagement with the visual and a visual engagement with the political. While these visual–political links take place in numerous realms, I particularly flag, with Jacques Rancière (2004), how images are political in the most fundamental sense: they delineate what we, as collectives, see and what we don't and thus, by extension, how politics is perceived, sensed, framed, articulated, carried out and legitimised.

The visual turn

When characterising the nature of our world today, W.J.T. Mitchell (Chapter 34; 1986, 1994) speaks of a "visual" or "pictorial" turn, stressing that people often perceive and remember key events more through images than through verbal accounts. He writes of a "new heightened awareness" of the role of visuality, even of how the problem of our time is the "problem of the image."

In the world of politics, the ensuing implications are particularly pronounced. Our understanding of terrorism, for instance, is inevitably intertwined with how images dramatically depict the events in question, how these images circulate worldwide, and how politicians and the public respond to these visual impressions. Take the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. There is no way to understand the origin, nature and impact of the event without understanding the role of images. The attack was designed for visual impact. Images circulated immediately worldwide, giving audiences a sense of how traumatic and how terrible the event was. Many of these emotional images not only shaped subsequent public debates and policy responses, including the War on Terror, but also remain engrained in our collective consciousness.

Images are, of course, not new, nor have they necessarily replaced words as the main means of communication. Images and visual artefacts have been around from the beginning of time. The visual has always been part of life. Images were produced not only to capture key aspects of human existence, but also to communicate these aspects to others. Examples range from prehistoric cave paintings that document hunting practices to Renaissance works of art. Some of these images and cultural

artefacts we still see today and they continue to influence our perception and understanding of the world.

But there are two ways in which the politics of images has changed fundamentally. First is the speed at which images circulate and the reach they have. Not that long ago, during the time of the Vietnam War, it would have taken days if not weeks for a photograph taken in the war zone to reach the front page of, say, the *New York Times*. In today's digital world, a photograph or a video can reach audiences worldwide immediately after it has been taken. Media networks can now make a local event almost instantaneously global, whether it is a terrorist attack, a protest march, an election campaign rally or any other political phenomenon. But it is not just that global media networks now cover news events 24 hours a day. The issue goes well beyond the influential CNN effect (Robinson, Chapter 6; 2002). The circulation of news has changed fundamentally. Even traditional newspapers – from *Le Monde* and *Der Spiegel* to the *Guardian* – are meanwhile multimedia organisations with a substantial internet presence. They cater to an audience that consumes news increasingly through smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices.

Second is what one could call the democratisation of visual politics. It used to be that very few actors – states or global media networks – had access to images and the power to distribute them to a global audience. Today, everyone can take a photograph with a smartphone, upload it on social media and circulate it immediately with a potential worldwide reach. Every two minutes, people upload more photographs than there were in total 150 years ago (Eveleth 2015 in Kaempf, Chapter 12).

Figure 0.2 Film and photojournalists covering an election campaign rally by Kim Dae-Jung, Seoul, South Korea, 1987

Source: Roland Bleiker.

Figure 0.3 People with smartphones documenting an election campaign event by Hillary Clinton in Orlando, Florida, on 21 September 2016. Barbara Kinney

Source: Barbara Kinney, www.flickr.com/photos/hillaryclinton/29845603875

Two photographs that illustrate the changes in visual media coverage are Figures 0.2 and 0.3. The first one is from a 1987 South Korean presidential election campaign rally by Kim Dae-Jung. It is covered by conventional film and photojournalists whose images then circulated via local and global media. The second is from the 2016 US presidential election campaign by Hillary Clinton. It features a crowd with mobile phones more concerned with visualising their own presence than with documenting the event.

The result is an unprecedented visualisation of both our private lives and our political landscape: a global communication dynamic that is fundamentally new and rooted in various networks and webs of relations (Kaempf, Chapter 12; Favero 2014: 66). Look at the Arab Spring uprising that started in Egypt in 2011. One of the most remarkable episodes occurred when a young woman blogger, Aliaa Elmahdy, posted a nude photograph of herself on her blog. She did so to protest gender discrimination in Egypt and called for more personal freedom, including sexual autonomy. Her private-cum-public photographs circulated immediately and widely around the world. They generated extensive public protests in Egypt and a wave of feminist solidarity abroad. Or consider how the terrorist organisation Islamic State is using beheading videos as part of a carefully orchestrated and well organised social media strategy, aiming at numerous audiences simultaneously (Friis 2017).

Any group or individual, no matter what their location or political intent is, can potentially produce and circulate images that, in today's new media language, go viral. Historians would remind us, though, that images have gone viral before the internet era. Engravings of the traumatic earthquake in Lisbon in 1755 rapidly spread across Europe, providing publics eager for news with visual evidence about the disaster (Sliwinski 2011: 37–8). Likewise, a few months after Eugène Delacroix witnessed and painted *Les Massacres de Chios* in Greece in 1823, it was exhibited in Paris and people

flocked to view the artwork. It did, in this sense, go viral and might have played a role in persuading French elites and policy-makers to change their position and support the Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire (Rodogno 2012: 72–3; see also Los Angeles County Museum of Art 2015; Bellamy 2012). The difference between then and today is nevertheless dramatic: more and more people now have the ability to produce and distribute images, and the speed at which they can go viral today is unprecedented and has unprecedented consequences.

What we have here is nothing less than a visual communication revolution that has shaken the foundations and hierarchies of established media networks. We see a dismantling of the division between broadcaster and viewer, producer and consumer. While this emancipatory technology has created an unprecedented proliferation and diversification of images, voices and views, some commentators believe this process is not as democratic as it first appears (see Kaempf, Chapter 12). Various factors – from algorithms to the legacy of old media and the interference of states – structure and mediate the flow of images. Here is one example of many: political events, such as protest marches or terrorist attacks, gain immediate worldwide media attention when they take place in the heart of the Western world, say in Paris or New York or Berlin.

Figure 0.4 Women in the revolution graffiti. Note, this is not the actual photograph that Aliaa Elmahdy posted on her blog. It is a graffiti representation of the photograph and a portrayal of Samira Ibrahim, who launched a lawsuit against the Egyptian army for conducting "virginity checks" on protesters.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Women_in_the_revolution.jpg

When similar events take place in the global South – say in Beirut or Baghdad or Bogotá – they often barely make the news (for terrorism see Hanusch 2015; for protest Bleiker 2002).

The actors themselves, of course, are not necessarily democratic either. Susie Linfield (Chapter 33) says that we live in an age of the democratic image but also in an age of the fascist image. Yes, suppressed minorities now have the chance to "speak up." They have a voice they did not have before, or, at least the potential to circulate this voice and perhaps have it heard. They can now enter diplomatic debates in ways that were not possible before (see Constantinou, Chapter 13). But, at the same time, the new potential of social media also paves the way for violent encounters. Perpetrators of atrocities have for long documented and celebrated their atrocities with photographs (Reinhardt, Chapter 49). The Nazis did so, and so did the Khmer Rouge (see Hughes 2003: 23–44). But today, with the help of social media, perpetrators of all kinds can circulate their videos fast and widely, from suicide bombing of Al-Qaeda to beheadings by the Islamic State. In this instance, then, photographs or films of violence are no longer "forms of witnessing but, rather, forms of war itself." And with that, they reach "unprecedented important and political influence" (Linfield, Chapter 33).

The power of images I: icons

There are few realms where the power of images is more obvious than with icons. Robert Hariman and John Lucaites (Chapter 25; 2007) defined icons as widely known and distributed images that represent "historically significant events, activate strong emotional identification or response, and are reproduced across a range of media, genres, or topics." Some scholars go as far as stressing that iconic images are so effective in recalling political events that they often become "primary markers" themselves (Zelizer 2002: 699). This is to say that over time, an event is recognised publicly not primarily by its political content but by its photographic representation. The representation then becomes content itself.

Consider two well-known examples of iconic photographs that have come to stand for the crises they depict. First is Nick Ut's Pulitzer Prize-winning Vietnam War image of 1972. It depicts nine-year-old Kim Phúc, naked, badly burned and fleeing from her South Vietnam village after it was napalmed. At the time this photograph directed public gaze to the atrocities committed against innocent civilians. It transformed public and political perceptions of the war, so much so that it contributed to further eroding the war's legitimacy (see Hariman and Lucaites, Chapter 25; 2003: 35–66; 2007; Lee-Koo, Chapter 4). In fact, half a century later the image still stands as a metaphorical representation of the Vietnam War and the suffering it brought. The second well known example is another Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph, taken in 1993 in famine-stricken Sudan, by Kevin Carter. Carter's photograph depicts a starving child in an unfathomable manner: kneeling helplessly on the ground, her head in her heads, while a vulture watches over. It was an image that "made the world weep" and stood – as it continues to do – as a powerful marker of the problem of poverty in the developing world.

At a time when we are saturated with information stemming from multiple media sources, iconic photographs remain influential for their ability to capture social and political issues in succinct and mesmerising ways. They serve as "visual quotations" (Sontag 2003: 22). Icons, in this sense, shape public opinion because they are part of the collective fabric through which people and communities make sense of themselves.

Here is an example: a poster that has become an iconic image of US President Barack Obama. Designed by the street artist Shepard Fairey and based on a photograph by Manny Garcia, the poster came in several variations, including "Hope" and "Progress" and "Change." It played a key role during Obama's 2008 presidential election campaign for it became a symbol of support for Obama and the ideas he stood for. The image soon turned into a veritable pop culture phenomena, very quickly spreading virally and being reproduced not only on countless posters but also on T-shirts, buttons, stickers and more (Arnon 2011). On several levels the image has already achieved iconic status, most notably in its widespread appropriation. The Obama poster was followed by countless imitations, from parodies to political re-uses, including Fairey's own adaptation for the Occupy movement. But it might be too early to tell if the image will become a true icon, for it is generally assumed that at least a decade is necessary for this to occur (Hansen 2015: 271, 277; Hariman and Lucaites 2007). Today, when images are produced and circulated with ever greater speed and reach, icons can emerge in a short period. But this very proliferation of images can also lead to a situation where icons are short-lived and soon become superseded by other ones. Only time will tell which images retain their iconic status and which ones disappear from our collective memory.

Icons are powerful and there is an inevitable politics about them. The most prominent critique is that they become detached from their original setting. Once stripped of context, icons can easily be appropriated and, thus, run the risk of feeding into preconceived stereotypical narratives. Individuals depicted in icons become symbols. The ensuing dynamic erases their suffering and "the political causes of what is actually happening to them" (Dauphinee, Chapter 1). This has been particularly the case with visual depictions of "Africa," which are often embedded in undifferentiated and stereotypical media portrayals (Campbell, Chapter 17; Lee-Koo, Chapter 4; Müller, Chapter 3).

The power of images II: emotions

There is clearly something unique about images. They have a special status. They generate excitement and anxieties. "Why is it," Mitchell (2005b: 7) asks, "that people have such strange attitudes towards images?" Why is it that audiences are given a stern warning before they see shocking images of, say, war or terror or bodily mutilation or, as above, impending death? Why, Lene Hansen (2014) asks, do we not get the same warning with verbal depictions? Consider how news outlets that published images of the bombing of the Boston marathon in 2013 felt compelled to add notes that read "Warning: This image may contain graphic or objectionable content" (Haughney 2013). No such warning was given with language-based articles of the same event, even though they described the horror of the attack in equally great detail. What makes images seemingly more dangerous and powerful than words?

Part of what makes images unique is that they often evoke, appeal to and generate emotions. Pictures of traumatic events, such as terrorist attacks, natural catastrophes or airplane crashes, seem able to capture the unimaginable. This is why news coverage of such traumas is frequently accompanied by images, as if they could provide audiences with a type of emotional insight that words cannot convey. Images seem to express the pain and distress of victims better than words do. They are thus central to how audiences worldwide perceive and thus also understand and respond to crises (Dauphinee, Chapter 1; Hutchison, Chapter 47; 2016).

Film and television are visual media that appeal to feelings and emotions in a particularly powerful way. Cinematic depictions of political issues offer the viewer a very visceral experience, in part because they combine narratives, visual images and sound. But such depictions are also powerful because they are based on individual characters and the moral choices they make, offering the viewer not just an abstract depiction of politics but a form of cinematic storytelling that allows them to identify with particular individuals and their situations. As a result, distant and complex political topics become accessible through personal stories (see Plantinga and Smith 1999; Shapiro, Chapter 46). The political effects of these visual-emotional character developments can be diverse. They can give viewers historical or contemporary experiences that they otherwise would never be able to have. Consider how the recent American miniseries *Roots* – a remake of a highly successful 1977 miniseries – retraces the history of slavery through the experience of a family, thus giving viewers a sense of what it might have been like to experience the respective trauma first-hand and personally. But cinematic depictions – as for instance in the form of prevailing spy and adventure movies – can also feed "geopolitical anxieties" and designate some people – such as those of a different skin colour or religious orientation – as more suspicious and dangerous than others (Dodds, Chapter 22; Philpott, Chapter 20; Der Derian 2009: 166).

Images – in moving and still form – can clearly have very powerful emotional and political effects. They can convey the meaning of political events across time or to audiences far away. They shockingly remind us, as John Berger (1991: 42) puts it, "of the reality, the lived reality, behind the abstractions of political theory, casualty statistics or news bulletins." They serve as "an eye we cannot shut."

Allow me to briefly illustrate some of the political issues at stake by focusing on the role of emotions in visual representation of humanitarian and other political crises. An image of a child under attack, for instance, can generate not just emotional reactions by viewers but also political responses (Lee-Koo, Chapter 4). Bob Geldof, in the context of the humanitarian campaign for victims of the 1983–5 famine in Ethiopia, knew exactly that images of destitute victims, particularly close-ups of children, would solicit widespread compassion and generate donations (Müller, Chapter 3).

Key to this dynamic is the visual appearance of the face, for it is through the face that "we are thought to signal our inner feelings and our emotions." This is what marks our individuality and this is how we are being identified (Edkins, Chapter 16; 2015). But the links between images and emotions are complex. There are at least two somewhat opposing scholarly takes on the issue.

First: there is an extensive literature in social psychology that discusses the so-called "identifiable victim effect." Surveys have discovered that close-up portraits of victims are the type of images most likely to evoke compassion in viewers, whereas images of groups create emotional distance between viewers and the subjects being depicted (Jenni and Loewenstein 1997; Kogut and Ritov 2005). The question then is: what happens to those people who are not visualised through the face, such as those "hidden" behind a veil (Callahan, Chapter 9) or those, like many refugees, who are portrayed as arriving in large numbers on boats (Bleiker, Campbell and Hutchison 2014).

Second: there is the literature on compassion fatigue, presented in this volume by the influential work of Susan Moeller. The contention here is that an overexposure to images of suffering eventually renders viewers numb and indifferent. It is not that they do not care, but that the emotional situation becomes too much for them to bear:

they feel that they cannot possibly make a meaningful difference and therefore start turning away emotionally (Moeller, Chapter 8; 1999; see also Sontag 1977, 2003). Other scholars stress that while individuals and societies often block out or even deny images of human suffering, there is ample evidence that the public reacts generously when charity organisations appeal for help (see Cohen 2001; Campbell 2004: 62; 2014b; Johnson 2011: 621–43; Berger 1991: 41–4). From this perspective, the issue may not be one of compassion fatigue so much as one of media fatigue – of global news media moving rapidly from crisis to crisis (see Campbell 2014b).

How to understand the political significance of images and visual artefacts

So far I have provided two brief examples – on icons and on emotions – to illustrate the power of images and the complexity of the political dynamics associated with them. I now would like to step back in order to trace more carefully the nature and implications of visual politics.

Images work at numerous overlapping levels: across national boundaries and between the physical and the mental world. They come in complex and wide varieties: as photographs or films, as comics or videogames. Things get even more complex when we think of three-dimensional visual artefacts, such as architecture, military uniforms or monuments.

No matter how diverse and complex visual images and artefacts are, they all have one thing in common: they work differently from words. That is their very nature. They are of a non-verbal nature but we, as scholars, need words to assess their political significance. Something inevitably gets lost in this process. This is why there is always a certain excess to images, a kind of "surplus value" that escapes our attempts to explain them definitively (Mitchell 2005b: 65–110). Add to this that images often work through emotions and that emotions are notoriously difficult to recognise and understand. They have stereotypically been classified as private and purely individual phenomena. One can never truly understand how another person feels. One can only convey this feeling to others and, here too, something inevitably gets lost in the process. While a large body of literature, meanwhile, highlights the social and political nature of emotions, understanding how they actually work is far from easy (see Hutchison and Bleiker 2014b).

The challenge, then, is to explore the nature of visual politics in a way that does as much justice as possible to its unique emotional and non-verbal status (see Scarry 1994). Doing so inevitably entails scrutinising the crucial links between the visual and verbal. The issues at stake are not clear-cut. Some authors, relying on Horst Bredekamp's influential analysis, argue that images have an "auto-active" nature and thus "a voice of [their] own" (Schlag and Heck 2012: 8, 16). There is, indeed, something universal and non-linguistic about images. All cultures in the world use images – from artworks to flags and from media photos to television. As opposed to language, which requires a particular set of skills to be understood, everyone can see and "read" images, even though we might end up with different interpretations (see Shim 2014: 27). But this does not mean that images work independently of language. Mitchell (Chapter 34; 2005b: 5), for instance, argues that "all media are mixed media," that there is nothing either purely verbal or purely visual. Both elements make sense in conjunction with each other. Mitchell does, indeed, explicitly warn not to fall into the stereotypical

position that "images have replaced words as the dominant mode of expression in our time." This is why – following Roland Barthes – he speaks of "imagetext" (when the two are seamlessly merged), image-text (when they are separate but connected) and image/text (when they stand in conflict or tension). These connections between text and image are particularly pronounced in some realms, such as comics, which revolve around merging visual and textual components (see Choi, Chapter 2; Hansen 2017). But they exist in all aspects of visual politics.

The dilemma then is: images are different than words (even if they are intrinsically linked to them) but we still need words to make sense of them. And we need to understand them in all of their complexity. We need to put images central and, as James Elkins (2013: 59) put it, recognise that "they need to never be fully controlled."

The key is to engage images in a way that defers authority back to them; to grant images their unique and untameable status and provide a set of commentaries that, ultimately, leave the last word with images. Doing so requires a multitude of approaches and perspectives, even if they are, at times, not compatible (see Bleiker 2015). This is precisely why this book revolves around a large number of short chapters, each tackling the world of visual politics from different perspectives. None of these perspectives can claim to offer an authentic and uncontested view. They are inevitably always partial. But taken together, this myriad of perspectives offers us an appreciation of the complexity entailed in visual politics.

In order to frame the pluralist exploration of the chapters that follow I now identify – in a more systematic way – several links between visuality and global politics. For the sake of clarity I return to images – and to photographs in particular. I do so both because photographs lend themselves more easily to analysis. Arguably they also play a particularly important political role because of the ease in which they circulate and enter "our" collective memory. I will later branch out again to the larger dynamics of visual politics, including artefacts and performances.

The politics of images I: the illusion of authenticity

Photographs are useful to illustrate how visual politics work. They deceive. They seem to give us a glimpse of the real. They provide us with the seductive belief that what we see in a photograph is an authentic representation of the world: a slice of life that reveals exactly what was happening at a particular moment (see Tagg 1988; Shim 2014: 26). This is the case because a photograph is, as Roland Barthes (1977: 17) stresses, "a message without a code." As opposed to a linguistic representation, for instance, a photograph is "a perfect analogon." Barbie Zelizer (2005: 29) speaks of a kind of "eyewitness authority."

In the realm of documentary photography, for instance, it was for long commonly assumed that a photographer, observing the world from a distance, is an "objective witness" to political phenomena, providing authentic representations of, say, war or poverty or famine (see Levi Strauss 2003: 45; Perlmutter 1998: 28; Campbell, Chapter 17). Such positions hinge on the belief that a photograph can represent its object in a neutral and value-free way, transferring meaning from one site to another without affecting the object's nature and signification in the process. Debrix (Debrix and Weber 2003: xxiv, xxvii–xxx) stresses that this belief is part of a long Western search for transcendental knowledge, be it of a spiritual or secular nature.

Few, if any, scholars today still believe that photographs objectively represent the world. Representation is meanwhile recognised as an inevitable aspect of politics. Photographs depict the world from a certain angle and are inevitably part of a range of political processes.

But it is precisely the illusion of authenticity that makes photographs such powerful tools to convey the meaning of political events to distant audiences. Jonathan Friday (2000: 365) writes of photographs as generating a near-compulsive draw to view the horror and spectacle of political and humanitarian crisis: a kind of "demonic curiosity." Spectators view and re-view crises through various media sources until the enormity of the event seems graspable. In doing so, photographs shape not only an individual's perception but also larger, collective forms of consciousness.

The illusion of authenticity also masks the political values that such photographic representations embody. The assumption that photographs are neutral, value-free and evidential, is reinforced because photography captures faces and events in memorable ways. For instance, if one looks at a close-up of a victim of a humanitarian crisis one could easily believe that one actually sees that person as he or she was at that moment. Michael Shapiro (1988: 124, 134) writes of a "grammar of face-to-face encounters." And he stresses that the seemingly naturalistic nature of this encounter makes photographic representations particularly vulnerable to being appropriated by discourses professing authentic knowledge and truth. We may succumb to such a "seductiveness of the real" to the point that we forget, as David Perlmutter (1998: 28) warns us, that "the lens is focused by a hand directed by a human eye." Add to this that the public

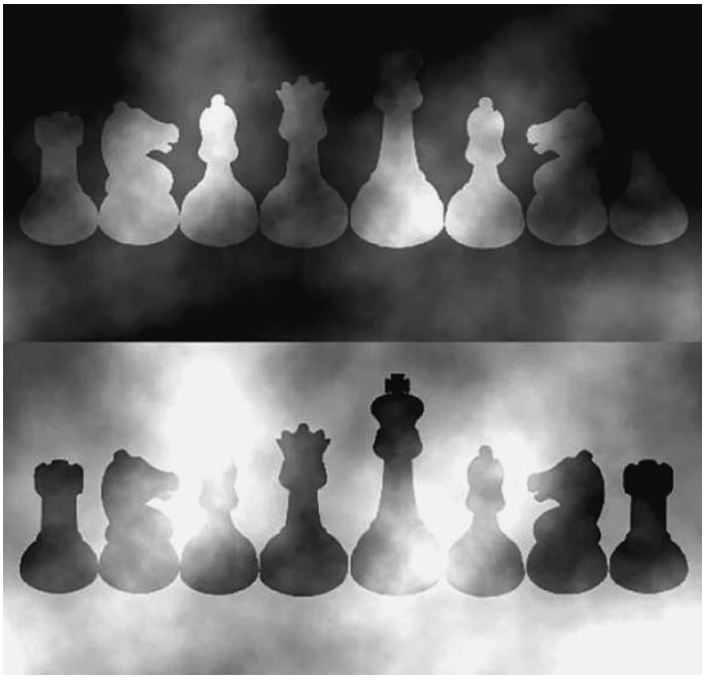

Figure 0.5 Lightness illusion

Source: As discussed in Anderson and Winawer (2005). With permission from the authors.

rarely sees the news media as purveyors of commercially profitable stories and images. Instead, the news is perceived as a reflection of the actual, as a neutral mediator between a subject and, in the case of most international news, an object usually located in another part of the world.

The illusion of authenticity applies across a range of visual fields explored in the chapters that follow. Rune Saugmann (Chapter 44) found that the use of surveillance images, which is ubiquitous around the world, rests on an assumption of factual evidence – all while the images in question are highly partial in a range of ways.

Before I engage the ensuing politics in detail, allow me to flag with one simple example how images can deceive or, at least, how we ought to be wary of trusting them with giving us authentic insight into what they depict.

This image above (Figure 0.5) highlights what Barton Anderson and Jonathan Winawer (2005: 79–83) called "lightness illusion." The two halves of the image illustrate the effect that layered image representations can have on lightness perception. An object's lightness as we perceive it is not as obvious as it might seem because it depends on the background against which it is depicted. Have a close look at Figure 0.5. The chess pieces in the top half seem very different than the ones at the bottom. In the top they appear white and in the bottom they appear black. But the image is deceiving us. Or, rather, our vision does. In reality, all of the chess pieces are exactly the same. The chess pieces only appear differently because they are set against a very different background, which provides the lightness illusion.

The politics of images II: aesthetic choices

Images deceive and not only because they might trick our eyes, or can be manipulated and faked. All images – still and moving ones – always express a particular perspective.

Images reflect certain aesthetic choices. They represent the world from a particular angle. They inevitably exclude as much as they include. A photograph cannot be neutral because it always is an image chosen and composed by a particular person. It is taken from a particular angle, and then produced and reproduced in a certain manner, thereby excluding a range of alternative ways of capturing the object in question (see, for instance, Sontag 2003: 46; Barthes 1977: 19).

Consider the two versions of the historical photograph reproduced below (Figure 0.6). Taken in 1944, the photograph depicts the president of the Croatian Parliament, Marko Došen, and several Catholic Church leaders, including the Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac. Both the original and the cropped version of the photograph produce a simulacrum, showing exactly what the lens and sensor capture. But the two versions show completely different political realities. The cropped version (Figure 0.7) depicts three clergy engaging in what seems a normal and uncontroversial activity. The original version (Figure 0.6) places them next to soldiers and civilians giving Nazi salutes, thus visually documenting their complicity.

The important aspect of this process, for David Levi Strauss (2003: 45), is that there are always relations of power at stake in a photograph, that there is always an attempt to tell a story, and that this story is always told from a particular, politically charged angle. Numerous chapters in this book explore this aspect of visual politics, showing, for instance, how images from satellites and drones offer always a particular and highly political view of the world (Wilcox, Chapter 14; Shim, Chapter 40; see also Tagg 1988).

Figure 0.6 Alojzije Stepinac (far right) with two Catholic priests at the funeral of President of the Croatian Parliament Marko Došen in September 1944

Source: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NDH_-_salute.jpg (in the public domain).

Figure 0.7
Cropped version of Figure 0.6

The politics of images III: the need for interpretation

Images make no sense by themselves. They need to be seen and interpreted. They gain meaning in relation to other images and the personal and societal assumptions and norms that surround us. This is why Barthes (1977: 17–19) stresses that there are always two aspects to a photograph. There is the "denoted message," which is the above-mentioned perfect representation of a visual image. But there is also a "connoted message," which includes how a photograph is read and interpreted, how it fits into existing practices of knowledge and communication. This interpretation contains values that inevitably have as much to do with the position of the interpreter as with the content of the image itself. Some refer to this process more specifically as "secondary image construction," which takes place when photographs are "selected out from their original ordering and narrative context, to be placed alongside textual information and reports in a publication" (Hall 1997: 86). John Berger (1991: 55), for instance, points out that photographs "only preserve instant appearances." When we look at a photograph we never just look at a photograph alone. We actually look at a complex relationship between a photograph and ourselves (Berger 1972: 9).

Our viewing experience is thus intertwined not only with previous experiences, such as our memory of other photographs we have seen in the past, but also with the values and visual traditions that are accepted as common sense by established societal norms. There are inevitably power relationships involved in this nexus between visuality, society and politics. Numerous commentators in this volume highlight the issues at stake. Images, Sally Butler (Chapter 27) says, "are potentially like open-ended sentences that require an imaginative response." The meaning of climate cartoons, Kate Manzo (Chapter 5) reminds us, is like the meaning of climate itself: "it varies across time and space." This is why Lene Hansen (Chapter 41) stresses that interpreting images is not just about outlining the facts they depict. There is far more at stake.

Look at the above image of priests being implicated with fascists in Croatia. To make sense of the image we need to know something about the history of fascism in Europe. We need to know what a Nazi salute is and what it means and stands for. We need to know what kind of ideology and what atrocities are associated with Nazi rule. We also need to know a range of things about religion, from how priests dress to Christianity's presumed embrace of humane values. Without knowing all these issues the image would make no sense or would, at least, have a very different meaning.

Look at how satellite images are often seen as authentic depictions of the earth. David Shim (Chapter 40) points out how they seem to offer a "perfect resemblance of an external reality." But, in fact, they are highly constructed images. In order to make sense they need to be processed and tweaked to correct distortion in the raw data. Cloud formations and snowfall, for instance, obstruct views. The final image is thus compiled from a range of different shots, taken at different times. Such forms of collated images would, in photography, be dismissed as "photoshopped" and fake and, yet, in satellite imagery they are the very essence of how the image is constructed.

Look, in this very context, how the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, argued for the invasion of Iraq at the United Nations' Security Council by displaying satellite and other images that allegedly proved the existence of weapons of mass destruction. Powell (2003) fully recognised that these images are "hard for the average person to interpret" and that doing so requires "experts with years and years of experience, poring for hours and hours over light tables." But once these highly technical and inevitably subjective

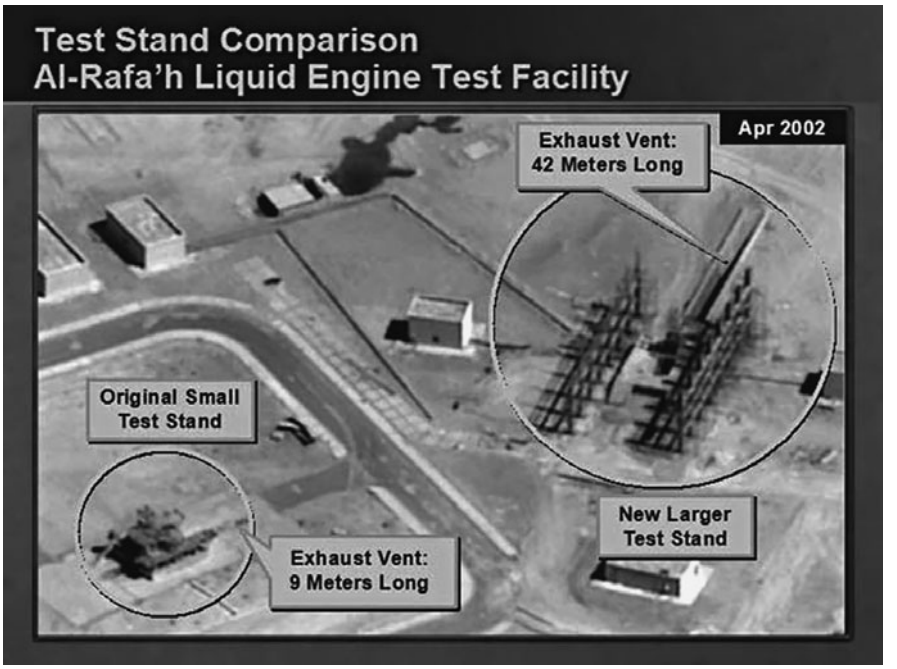

Figure 0.8 "Test stand comparison Al-Rafa'h liquid engine test facility," from Secretary Powell's Remarks to the UN Security Council

Source: Powell 2003.

interpretations are imbued with the legitimacy of political authority they become a form of hard evidence. They form an empirical base for policy choices. And yet, as the world found out later, this allegedly irrefutable visual evidence was mistaken: there were, after all, no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (see also Shim, Chapter 40).

Look at what happened when bombs from a US drone killed twenty civilians in Afghanistan in 2015. A drone's vision system – interpreted with confidence by military sources – identified the target as military. This mistake could happen, Wilcox (Chapter 14) argues, because an interpretation of an image is always dependent on the values of the interpreters. In an environment permeated with fear, as was the case here, "the lack of evidence of weapons becomes evidence of weapons based upon what is felt must be true." This is how, as she puts it, the fear of Afghan insurgents "can stick to any body visible through the camera of the drone."

Look at the torture photos at Abu Ghraib. They do not speak for themselves. Viewers around the world saw and interpreted them differently depending on the views they had of the War on Terror. Some might have seen the photographs as part of a "shock and awe" military strategy. Others saw them as an expression of an increasingly violent American society. Others again saw them as a manifestation of American imperialism (see Dauphinee, Chapter 1; Linfield, Chapter 33).

Look at one of the most iconic images of the past few decades, the "Tiananmen Man" image, depicting a lone protester in front of a series of tanks. This image immediately makes sense for many people around the world, as long as they know about the historic event, the occurrence of the protest movement and its suppression

by the police. But many people inside China, for whom depictions and reportage of the Tiananmen massacre remain censored, do not have the background knowledge necessary to interpret this photograph, let alone recognise it as an icon.

Understanding the impact of images and visual artefacts

So far one thing is clear: images matter. They matter politically. We know that they do or, at least, have a corresponding intuition. But how do we actually know that what we know is accurate? For instance, what is the exact political impact of an image – say a photograph of a tsunami victim on the front page of the *New York Times*? People around the world are inevitably influenced by seeing a humanitarian tragedy depicted through the photograph of a suffering individual. But what is the exact impact of this image and how do we know?

The task of understanding the precise impact of images is not easy. Images work in complex ways, crisscrossing a range of geographical and temporal boundaries – all the more since new technologies, from global media networks to new media sources, now allow for an ever faster and easier circulation of images.

Let me start with two examples where images clearly mattered and had a direct political impact.

First is the debate on the use of torture in the War on Terror. As early as the summer of 2003, it was publicly known – in part through reports from Amnesty International – that US troops were using torture techniques when interrogating prisoners in Iraq.

Figure 0.9 An unidentified Abu Ghraib detainee, seen in a 2003 photo

Source: Public domain; ineligible for copyright. Pictures taken by US military personnel as part of that person's official duties are ineligible for copyright in the United States.

There was, however, little public interest or discussion about the issue. Nobody seemed to care. Domestic and international outrage only emerged in the spring of 2004, in direct response to graphic photographs of US torture at the Abu Ghraib prison facilities. All of a sudden there was a massive public outcry and discussion about whether or not torture is a legitimate way of waging the War on Terror. This shift was not linked to the knowledge of torture, which was always there, but to audiences worldwide witnessing the demeaning nature of torture though graphic and emotional images. While these visual shifts may not have fundamentally altered US foreign policy, they stand for years to come as symbols of America's abuse of power and loss of legitimacy and prestige (Hansen, Chapter 41; 2015: 264–5).

Second is the European refugee crisis of 2015. Key here is a photograph of a three-year-old Syrian refugee, Alan Kurdi, found dead on a beach in Turkey on 2 September 2015. That image circulated immediately around the world, reaching 20 million screens in 12 hours (Vis and Goriunova 2015). People reacted with a level of empathy that was unusual. All of a sudden, public attitudes toward refugees changed across Europe but particularly in Germany, where one witnessed the emergence of what was called a *Willkommenskultur*, a culture of welcoming refugees. There were images of refugees arriving in Munich and being welcomed to cheers by German people. Everywhere, Germans were helping out. This shift directly correlated with the image of Alan Kurdi going viral. An empirical study shows that there was not only a massive spike in social media discussion of the crisis but also, and more importantly, that the positive word "refugee" increased far more than the more pejorative term "migrant" (Vis and Goriunova 2015) This one image of a dead boy clearly played a key role in this shift. Of course, we all empathise with a three-year-old boy. Children are innocent, and to see an innocent victim is something that rallies people. As Katrina Lee-Koo (Chapter 4) puts it, images of children feed into "pre-existing narratives" so much so that they often generate political action. In the case of Alan Kurdi, the image changed both public attitudes and policies: the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, adopted a much more progressive policy toward refugees. She famously declared "wir schaffen das" – "we'll manage that." But the public mood changed after the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015, which killed 130 people, and after a large group of mostly immigrant men assaulted over a thousand women during New Year's Eve celebrations in Cologne. By then, the *Willkommenskultur* had been replaced by an "Abschiebekultur," a culture that favours sending refugees back. But despite this backlash, the image of Alan Kurdi did, at least in the short run, have an impact on public attitudes and policies.

Alan Kurdi and the debate on torture illustrate the power of images to shape political debates and phenomena directly. But in most cases it is much more difficult to ascertain if images have a direct impact.

Only in rare instances do images directly cause political events. In most cases the impact of images is more diffuse. There are, for instance, clear links between the dramatic images of the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, the highly emotional rhetoric of good versus evil that emerged in response, and the ensuing War on Terror. But these links would be very difficult – if not impossible – to assess with cause–effect models. As Jacques Rancière (2004: 63) put it: "Politics has its aesthetics, and aesthetics has its politics. But there is no formula for an appropriate correlation."

Causality is not the right concept to understand the impact of images, at least not if approached in a conventional social scientific manner. But one could perhaps speak of "discursive causality" or "discursive agency" (Hansen 2006: 26, see also 2015: 274–5;

Bleiker 2000: 208). This would retain a notion of impact but acknowledge that images work gradually and across time and space. They transgress numerous borders – spatial, linguistic, psychological and other ones. They work inaudibly but powerfully: by slowly entrenching – or challenging – how we view, think of and thus also how we conduct politics. Images, in this sense, are political because they frame what William Connolly (1991) called "conditions of possibility" within which politics takes place. This is why the thorny issue of how to approach impact is crucial and thus needs further elaboration.

The politics of visibility and invisibility

The most prominent advocate of such an approach to images is Rancière. He speaks of the "distribution of the sensible," that is, of how in any given society and at any given time, there are boundaries between what can be seen and not, felt and not, thought and not, and, as a result, between what is politically possible and not. These boundaries are arbitrary but often accepted self-evidently as common sense (Rancière 2004: 13; see also Rockhill 2009: 199–200).

Images influence the distribution of the sensible. They frame or reframe the political, either by entrenching existing configurations of seeing, sensing and thinking, or by challenging them. The boundaries between what is sensible and not sometimes shift rapidly, as in the case of torture debates, but mostly they evolve gradually as the visual world around us shifts and evolves. Images reveal and conceal. They show and hide, and, as Costas Constantinou (Chapter 13) points out, we often are not aware of what is excluded and what political consequences follow. Take the issue of sexual violence during conflict and war. Much of this violence takes place without being directly documented, visually or otherwise (Azoulay, Chapter 36). Add to this that sexual violence is so pervasive that, as Marysia Zalewski (Chapter 42) argues, "it is increasingly difficult to know what it is that we are seeing and what it is that we keep missing." This is why Elspeth Van Veeren (Chapter 28) believes that "visibility and invisibility are mutually constitutive." Any claim about visual politics contains, in some way or another, a concept of invisibility.

An immediate and normal reaction to a concept of politics as a struggle over visibility is: what happens to people, issues and phenomena that we do not see? What happens when we do not see violence, human rights violations, mass rape during war? Numerous authors explore such issues (for instance Reinhardt, Chapter 49; Azoulay, Chapter 36; Zalewski, Chapter 42). Some stress that the absence of images is "the most significant form of distancing and forgetting" (Robinson, Chapter 6). The genocide in Rwanda, for instance, killed up to a million people in a few months in 1994. Because there were very few images circulating in global media at that time it was possible to dismiss the tragedy as a mere local conflict (Robinson, Chapter 6). Even today, many of the world's most deadly conflicts, particularly in Africa, are not covered by global media because there are no Western geopolitical interests at stake (Kirkpatrick 2016: 91, 97).

Likewise, look how the evolution of warfare has very much been intertwined with what we see and what we don't – from emerging camouflage practices in the nineteenth century to attempt at controlling the spread of images during the Vietnam War (Van Veeren, Chapter 28). But recent conflicts, most notably in Afghanistan and Iraq, have shown that control over the flow of images is almost impossible to retain in the face of social media, which allows any individual or group to take images of the war zone and circulate them immediately (see Dauphinee, Chapter 1).

Figure 0.10 Man in a bear market – losing money in the markets, Jack Moreth

Source: Jack Moreth, www.stockvault.net/photo/193457/man-in-a-bear-market---losing-money-in-the-markets/ Freely available at Stockvault.

A related problem is about what happens to political phenomena that are hard to visualise? How can we "see" finance, Brassett (Chapter 19) asks? We can't. It is always represented by something; a banknote, a cheque, a bank statement. And yet, finance is surrounded by visual metaphors – from bankers in suits to bulls and bears to storms and tsunamis and rising and falling stock indexes – that often give us a misleading sense of what is going on. Religion, likewise, cannot be seen as such. It is visually represented through symbols, such as churches, mosques, clothing, hairstyles, shrines or praying individuals. These visual representations are imbued with preconceived, arbitrary and very political notions of what religion is (Wilson, Chapter 38). Or look at democracy: do we have more transparency today as greater aspects of democracy are made visible through television, film and the internet? Not necessarily so (Chou, Chapter 10). And what about peace? We have numerous visual icons that signify war but is there is not even a concept like peace photography? If peace is seen as the absence of violence, then there is literally an unlimited and meaningless number of images that can depict this (Möller, Chapter 32).

While the relationship between visibility and politics is complex, one can depict a range of historical evolutions as struggles over what is seen and not. Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011: 2) reminds us that the very term "visuality" goes back to the nineteenth century and signifies "the visualisation of history." He goes on to stress that visualised techniques, developed during plantation slavery, paved the way for the type of centralised leadership that lies at the core of contemporary political orders (Mirzoeff 2011: 10, 22–3). One could go back and observe these links between visuality and politics in almost all

Figure 0.11 How to visualise peace? United Nations Buffer Zone in Nicosia, Cyprus, July 2014
Source: Roland Bleiker.

realms. Look at how maps have always portrayed the world in political ways. In the early modern period in Europe, when new cartographic techniques emerged, they also paved the way for a new form of politics. As opposed to showing overlapping forms of governance, as had been previously the case, new maps designed territories in a way that carved out linear divisions of mutually exclusive territories. This technique facilitated the emergence of the nation-state, holding exclusive political authority over a well-defined territory (Branch, Chapter 45). Or consider how human rights and humanitarianism have emerged in tandem with photographic technologies. Sharon Sliwinski (Chapter 24) argues the history of human rights can be told and understood by looking at the circulation of images, how people emotionally reacted to them and what political consequences followed (see also Lee-Koo, Chapter 4; Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015). One could find similar patterns when looking at images in relation to war, or colonialism, or gender relations, or any kind of political subject.

The division between what is seen or not inevitably has far-reaching political consequences. But the respective boundaries are not clear-cut. Making something visible is not necessarily positive. Visibility can also entrench existing political patterns. The above example of visual metaphors for finance and financial crises might be widespread and recognisable, but they do not necessarily provide us with adequate insight into finance. Indeed, these visual metaphors present finance as a technical affair related to stock prices and market movements. They gloss over complexities and mask the politics that underlie them. For instance, they normalise and legitimise neoliberal values and hide from view the human cost associated with economic crises or simply with regular market economics.

Likewise, invisibility is not inevitably always a negative. Indeed, Rune Saugmann Andersen and Frank Möller (2013: 206) stress that the invisible can be just as important if not more than what we actually see. Look at how suppressing photographic evidence of the killing of Osama bin Laden only spurred the public's imagination and generated suspicion and conspiracy theories (see also Mitchell 2011). Saugmann Andersen and Möller (2013: 207) go as far as arguing that invisibility can actually "activate the imagination" because the process of alluding, rather than showing in full, shatters the illusion that images somehow are authentic representations of reality.

Art plays such a powerful role precisely because it neither tries to visually represent the world as it is nor rely on familiar visual patterns. The very power of art lies in stimulating our imagination by creating a distance between itself and the world. The political significance of art is located in its self-conscious engagement with representation – an issue that is ignored by most approaches to politics. Many social scientists, for instance, tend to assume that we can have authentic knowledge of the world as long as we employ the correct methods of inquiry. By contrast, aesthetic approaches speak of the brokenness of political reality, of the fact that there will always be a gap between a particular representation and what it represents (see Ankersmit 1996; Bleiker 2009; Gadamer 1986; 1999: 88). Invisibility here is not a lack, but a way of allowing a reader to understand the complex emotional and political dimensions of reality and its visual appearances. The most extreme form of legitimising invisibility is abstract art, which defies all forms of representability.

Consider the Australian artist David Rankin. Much of his work is both abstract and, at the same time, directly concerned with political issues. His engagement with the Holocaust legacy, for instance, consists of a series of abstract paintings that appeal to the viewer's senses and invite her or him to imagine, reflect and contemplate the deeper meaning of pain, trauma and loss. Because familiar depictions of Nazi atrocities are

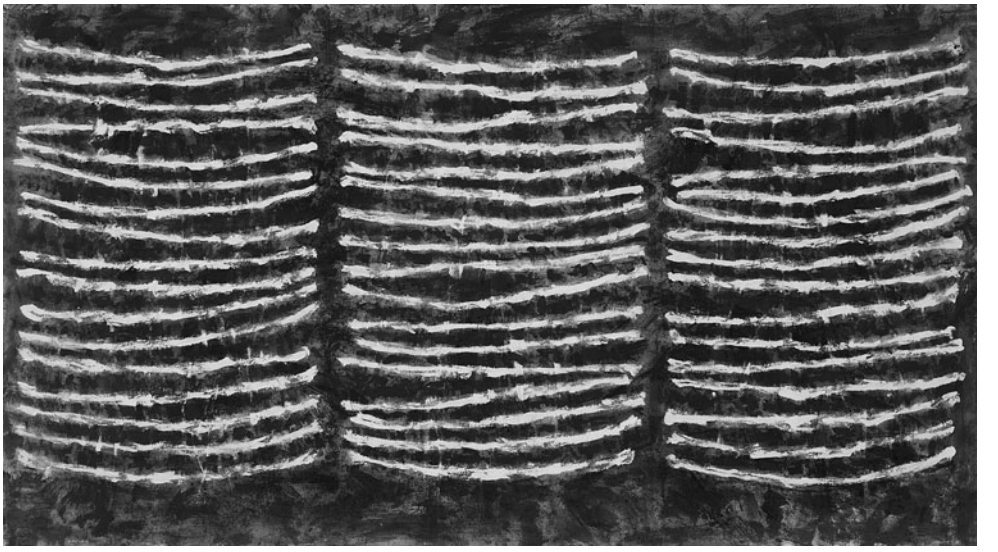

Figure 0.12 Prophecy of Dry Bones – Red Night, David Rankin, 1997

Source: David Rankin, 1997. With permission from the artist.

absent and yet known to everyone at the same time, abstraction is a way of using invisibility to depict the impossible and its political consequences.

What images and visual artefacts do

Reading and interpreting images and visual artefacts is one thing, and an important one. But just as crucial – if not more – is trying to understand what they do. Mark Reinhardt (Chapter 49) stresses that the politics of photography relates, mostly, to how they "are used, and by whom." Nayanika Mookherjee (Chapter 29) speaks of the need to "explore the social life" of images and how they "perform or co-construct a global politics."

Images are not just used and abused for political purposes. They do political things themselves. One of the most striking recent examples here is controversies over cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad. The issue here is not just a matter of how these cartoons are differently interpreted – inconsequential and harmless to some, a form of freedom of expression for others, extremely offensive to yet others. Just as important, if not more, is what these cartoons did, for they themselves became triggers for massive controversies and even violent attacks that killed cartoonists and bystanders in Paris and Copenhagen (Hansen, Chapter 41).

Images and visual artefacts obviously do a lot of things. So let me just focus on one realm as an illustration. It is an important realm: how images and artefacts visually depict and perform and thus politically frame a sense of identity and community. This

Figure 0.13 Mausoleum of Mao Zedong, Beijing, 1987

Source: Roland Bleiker

is why iconic images are important: they shape public opinion and the type of ideas and ideologies that underlie political communities (Hariman and Lucaites, Chapter 25). But it is not just icons that do so.

There are a multitude of images and visual artefacts that together mark identity and community. Flags, parades, religious symbols, monuments and mausoleums are just the most obvious examples. Look at the Mao Mausoleum, located at Tiananmen Square in Beijing. It is a national monument designed to celebrate China's revolutionary spirit and foster a sense of identity, unity and purpose. Even today, when the Chinese government has moved on from the radical and violent revolutionary spirit of Mao, thousands of people still line up and wait for hours to pay their respect to the preserved body of the Chairman.

Iver B. Neumann (Chapter 26) reminds us that identity needs to be represented so that people can identify with it and gain a sense of common purpose, a sense of community. He goes on to stress that these constructions of identity often focus on "others," which is why "it is always worth pondering where they lurk." And they lurk everywhere. Prominent movies, such as James Bond, depict the world as one in which threats lurk permanently and have to be addressed quickly and violently to pre-empt disasters. All this matters not just on the screen, for if these types of images and depictions appear and reappear in films, on television and elsewhere, then they start to be part of societal values and assumptions, constituting some ideas and people as legitimate and others as dangerous or at least deviant (Dodds, Chapter 22).

The notion of communities being constituted in a stark inside/out manner and in relations to a threating other is well accepted (see Walker 1993). But the visual aspects of this dynamic has not yet been sufficiently explored. This is why Klaus Dodds (Chapter 22) wants us to pay attention to how the "reel and the real" interact and co-constitute each other. Take an example from Simon Philpott (Chapter 20). He points out how television coverage of the terrorist attack of 11 September 2011 was very much based on and presented according to the techniques refined in Hollywood disaster movies. This is how the coverage not only made sense to the public but also already framed the parameters of the political response. The prevailing script had already delineated what it meant to stand up in times of crisis; how to rally around the nation and its ideals; and, not least, how to act and retaliate with purpose and determination (see also Der Derian 2001; Hutchison, Chapter 47). The result was the War on Terror which, not surprisingly, entrenched hostile perceptions of others and eventually led to more violence and terrorism. In short, it is impossible, as Cynthia Weber (2006b: 8) put it, to separate "theatres of culture from theatres of war."

Images and visual artefacts perform and frame identity not just in the realm of foreign policy but in all aspects of life. Few domains are more imbued with visual politics than gender norms. Almost all aspects of sex and gender are in one way or another prescribed through visual norms, including how men and women are meant to dress, walk, talk and interact. Linda Åhäll (Chapter 21) examines how gender is performed visually in relation to societal rules and conventions. She stresses that the ensuing practices are "as much about invisibility as about visibility" because there are always bodies left out of and silenced by prevailing forms of gender visualisation. There are countless examples of such practices. Here is just one: veiling. For Callahan (Chapter 9) this visual performance is linked to very black-and-white understandings of gender, race, ethnicity and religion. Significant implications follow because veiling is not just a private issue but a highly political one. Some states enforce a mandatory

practice while others have banned it – using female bodies and their visual appearance as political markers of culture or of secularism respectively.

Visual power: domination and resistance

Images and visual artefacts are neither progressive nor regressive. They can entrench existing power relations or they can uproot them. But they are inevitably linked to power and this power is, as Mitchell (Chapter 34) puts it, "for good and evil." Before I hand over to the contributors of this volume, I want to flag how some of the chapters explore these links between visuality, politics and power.

There are plenty of examples of how visuality entrenched existing political structures, even authoritarian ones. The paradigmatic case here is Leni Riefenstahl. Her stunning films of Nazi rallies, such as *Triumph of the Will* or *Olympia*, helped the Nazi regime turn mere propaganda into a broader mythology that was instrumental in gaining popular support for a racist and militaristic state apparatus: "fascinating fascism," as Susan Sontag called it (Sontag 1975; see also Steele, Chapter 43; Philpott, Chapter 20; Bach 2007). Socialist realist art, likewise, played a key role in glorifying and legitimising authoritarian Communist practices in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. Some also see new fascist trends emerging in current rise of right-wing populism across Europe and the US. They stress how particular visual and rhetorical strategies – electoral theatre – disregard evidence and reasoned argument in an attempt to exploit people rendered vulnerable, anxious and resentful by widespread economic insecurity (Connolly 2016; see also Chou, Bleiker and Premaratna 2016).

A recurring theme is how the global North, influenced by liberal Western values, visually depicts the rest of the world. Television and photographic portrayals of celebrity engagement with famine, for instance, tend to revolve around a patronising view of Africa, depicted as a place of destitution, where innocent and powerless victims are in need of Western help. Tanja Müller (Chapter 3) shows how such visual representations rely on simplistic, black-and-white narratives that distort the everyday lived realities on the ground. Katrina Lee-Koo (Chapter 4), likewise, writes of how, in the context of children involved in violence, images tend to promote simple narratives, based on binary constructions of us versus them. Even when development institutions try to break through these visual patterns, they fall back on other stereotypes. Kalpana Wilson (Chapter 11) examines how ad campaigns recently challenged the problematic tendency of depicting women in the global South as passive victims. But in doing so, they harked back to another stereotype infused with power: the notion of an adolescent girl, working harder and more diligently than her male counterparts, becomes an agent of development and an ideal neoliberal vehicle for investment.

Or consider the seemingly non-political world of fashion. Laura Shepherd (Chapter 30) shows how fashion trends that rely on military attires – from cargo pants to camouflage garments – inadvertently legitimise practices of militarisation in today's Western societies. They generate a "positive public disposition towards militaristic ideas and ideals" and become part of a certain set of societal values – in this case, values linked to the belief that military solutions are both desirable and necessary to tackle some of the world's problems.

But just as images and visual artefacts entrench power relations they can also uproot them. Here too, there are plenty of examples from the global South. Photography was, of course, an integral part of the colonial project, documenting and reinforcing a range

of cultural assumptions that reflected European prejudices of colonial "subjects" (see Lisle, Chapter 48). But photography also turned against colonial rule. Stephen Chan (Chapter 7) points out that during the early struggle against colonialism photography was about documenting who was there. The photographs were very static as a result. With the advent of lighter cameras and the ability to circulate photographs things changed. This is how the struggle against colonialism became news, and the news spread around the world. "Suddenly black faces and their hopes and fears were part of the same monochrome industry."

Or look at images of trauma. They often entrench existing forms of community and power – mostly a nation-state and discourses that juxtapose a safe inside from a threatening outside. But they can also transform, as Hutchison (Chapter 47; 2016) shows, creating new emotions, resonances and solidarity among people, as for instance in the wake of the 2004 Asian tsunami, where the worldwide circulation of trauma images created an unprecedented level of support and donations.

Or look at how visual media, particularly video clips, have been used to counter what Weber (Chapter 18) calls fear-based patriotism in the United States – a kind of orientalist patriotism that marked dark-skinned people wearing certain "Arabic/Muslim" body coverings as suspicious. A new diversity patriotism campaign visually celebrated the integration of people from different backgrounds into the American community – though, as Weber writes, not without subconsciously harking back to the problematic practices they sought to distance themselves from. Visuality works both ways.

Or look, as the final example, at a photograph that came to symbolise the so-called Black Lives Matter movement: an online and street protest movement by African

Figure 0.14 Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge, Jonathan Bachman

Source: https://widerimage.reuters.com/story/taking-a-stand-in-baton-rouge/ Printed with permission from Reuters.

American communities designed to draw attention to the systematic racism towards black people. The photograph in question was taken by Jonathan Bachman in August 2016 during a protest in Baton Rouge. It shows a woman, named Ieshia Evans, confronting two police officers – and many more behind them – clothed in full riot gear. The photograph symbolises a politics of resistance. It shows one unarmed civilian woman confronting a large group of uniformed, armed soldiers, presumably men. The photograph not only captures the tension between civilian and police, dissident and authority, but also harks back to a long history of non-violent protest during the civil rights movement, from Rosa Parks to Martin Luther King. The photograph was picked up by countless news organisations around the world and went viral, so much so that it not only came to symbolise the protest but also took on a political role itself.

Jacques Rancière believes that photography and other art forms play a particularly important role in challenging political narratives and pushing the boundaries of what can be seen, thought and done. He portrays art as the meeting ground between existing configurations of the sensible and attempts to reconfigure our sensory experience of the world (Rancière 2004: 9; Rockhill 2009: 200). Sally Butler (Chapter 27) does, indeed, show how art has for long played an important role in the struggle of Indigenous Australians for rights and self-determination. Michael Cook, whose photograph is featured on the cover of this book, visually reverses how colonial Australia has rendered the Indigenous population invisible. But Indigenous art has not just revealed aspects of Australia's past that were hidden from colonial view, but also served as protest forms that eventually contribute to political and social change (see also Bleiker and Butler 2016).

This is, of course, the very power of art: to make us see the world anew, to make us see a different reality from the one we are used to and the one that is commonly accepted (Whitebrook 1992: 5, 7). Art is thus political in the more basic sense of offering insight into the processes through which we represent – all too often in narrow and highly problematic ways – political facts and challenges. Comic books work by means of exaggeration and distortion and, in doing so, "stretch the boundaries of our imagination" (Choi, Chapter 2). Photographers challenge deeply entrenched stereotypes about Roma people and provide us with views and insights that we would otherwise not be able to get (Pusca, Chapter 39). Artists serve as moral witnesses, Alex Danchev (Chapter 51) stresses. They embark on visual adventures that makes us see the world anew, that "rubs it red raw." They help us re-view, re-feel, and re-think politics in the most fundamental manner. Images, in this sense, make, unmake and remake politics. This is why, as flagged at the beginning of this introduction, Danchev (2016: 91) believed that "contrary to popular belief, it is given to artists, not politicians, to create a new world order."

Style and format of the book

Before we start a few words are in order about the rather unusual format and style of *Visual Global Politics*. It is structured around short chapters written by experts from numerous different disciplines, ranging from international relations, geography and art history to media studies, anthropology and literature. The authors draw on their specialised research but then present the results in an accessible language designed to reach not just specialised academics but a broad range of readers.

A large number of short chapters – a structure inspired by *Theorizing Visual Studies* (James Elkins, Kristi McGuire *et al.* 2013) – is best suited to cover the wide range of issues at stake. Each chapter engages a particular political topic and does so in the context of a particular visual realm. The chapters intersect and intersperse, overlap and criss-cross each other in a way that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980) wrote of rhizomes: constellations that have no beginning or end but, instead, multiple entryways and exits; a middle from where they expand and overspill. Rather than offer a comprehensive survey of a topic, the idea of short chapters is to provoke and to illuminate, to offer a range of views that depict the world from different angles. We follow Nietzsche (1982: 278) here, who wrote in aphorisms and believed that thinking deep thoughts is like taking a cold bath: "quickly in and quickly out again."

Even though all chapters engage with a particular visual realm, they are arranged by political themes. I could have organised the book by visual themes too, and I started off this way. Distinctions could then have been made between, say, old and new media, moving and still images, high art and popular culture. But these divisions are highly arbitrary. Where are the boundaries between these realms? Take photography. Is it an art form or part of popular culture? A documentation practice or a form of journalism? Do photographs take on a different political role when they are printed or digitalised, when they appear in a gallery, a newspaper or on a social media platform? To make these divisions is not only arbitrary but also runs the risk, as John Berger (1991: 45) puts it, of forgetting "the meaning and enigma of visibility itself." Add to this that key political phenomena, from war to diplomacy and from colonialism to sexual violence, cut across these diverse visual fields. Any concept and structure is, of course, always an imposition of a preconceived idea upon a far more complex and messy reality. Nietzsche (1969: 80) already knew that all concepts in some way elude a clear definition, for "only that which has no history can be defined." But define we must. And so I ran with political themes that show how visuality plays a key role in global politics and this across a wide range of different realms. For the same reason, I opted against a linear narrative and against grouping the chapters into thematic and ultimately arbitrary sections. The chapters now float freely or, at least, alphabetically. Readers can engage them in any order they wish.

Finally I would like readers to know that I had originally planned to write a conclusion. In the end I refrained from doing so to leave the last word to the late Alex Danchev, who died a few months before this manuscript was completed and to whom the book is dedicated. His insightful chapter on "Witnessing" offers as fitting a conclusion as is possible: it shows us how the visual both traces our political past and opens up important opportunities for the future. This is the case because the visual – in its various forms – is intrinsically linked to politics and ethics. Art can help us imagine the unimaginable. In doing so it becomes a form of moral consciousness and an expression of political hope because it ruptures and transcends the language of habit that surrounds us and circumvents what is and is not politically visible, thinkable and possible.

Note

I build here on the following sources, which also offer further elaborations on the topics in question: Bleiker (2001, 2009, 2014, 2015); Bleiker, Campbell and Hutchison (2014); Hutchison, Bleiker and Campbell (2014); Bleiker, Campbell, Hutchison and Nicholson (2013); Bleiker and Kay (2007); Hutchison and Bleiker (2014b, 2016); Bleiker and Butler (2016).