

THE EVIDENCE OF SIGHT

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ABSTRACT

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault focuses on excavating discursive formations, but he acknowledges that a pre-discursive reality, “the enigmatic treasure of ‘things’ anterior to discourse,” also exists. This divide between the pre-discursive and the discursive is straddled, I argue, by photographs as historians use them. The reason for photography’s dual capacity lies with the complex nature of sight, which is both precognitive (primarily so, as neuroscience demonstrates), and also culturally encoded. Historians most commonly rely on mute sensuality; they place photographs in books with little comment, implying that some form of unmediated recognition is possible. Used in this way, photographs cannot serve as the basis for new analyses but may underscore the affective stance of historians toward their topics. Less commonly, historians interrogate photographs much like texts, locating them within the discourses through which they emerged. This strategy treats the experience of sight, in Joan Scott’s words, as “an interpretation that needs to be interpreted.” Photographs seen as discursive objects may provide understanding of past political and social relations, but we lose any assurance that we can recognize and intuitively understand their subjects. In short, we risk blindness. I explore these two fundamentally different strategies for approaching photographs, using the concepts of recognition and excavation to examine an image made in 1946 by Japanese photographer Hayashi Tadahiko. Photographs, I argue, expose our dual relationship with the past, both visceral and cultural.

Keywords: photography, evidence, postwar Japan, Hayashi Tadahiko, Kimura Ihei, Domon Ken, neuroscience, recognition, discourse, excavation

Photographs flirt. This is why historians love them, and why they drive us crazy. Unlike texts, which we usually approach with delicacy and suspicion, photographs often disarm us. They appear to offer immediate access to past realities, and yet, when we try to embrace vanished worlds through them, we meet with resistance. We are left feeling baffled, even jilted, as photographs coyly withhold the full knowledge we desire. What I will argue here is that we will *always* remain unsatisfied with photography; it will *never* allow us to see the past as we long to see it. Instead, the provokingly unsatisfactory knowledge gained through photographic images reveals, as perhaps textual evidence never could, the duality of our relationship to the past, a relationship that is both visceral and discursive, both instinctual and interpretive, both voluptuous and analytical. In other words, because the evidence of sight is simultaneously sensuous and cognitive, it appears to promise complete satisfaction, but it delivers instead two different, often

incommensurate, types of perception. This essay explores what I see as historians' principal approaches to photographic evidence, using the concepts of "recognition" and "excavation," and a photographic example from postwar Japan.

I. RECOGNITION VERSUS EXCAVATION

A few words are in order about the terms of my analysis. One of the most intriguing aspects of history's "visual turn" is its engagement with the neuroscience of sight as well as with cultural codes of seeing.¹ I have deliberately chosen the terms "recognition" and "excavation" because they resonate in these distinct discourses. "Recognition" suggests not only the conscious act of identifying a photograph as a "likeness" of someone, some place, or some thing, but also the physiology of sight, the brain's processing of light waves so that we and other creatures recognize safety and danger, friends and enemies, before we know it. Indeed, current research suggests that most recognition is precognitive; we see and make determinations about what we are seeing before we are conscious of doing so. As neuroscientist Michael S. Gazzaniga tells us, "By the time your automatic brain gets done with the electrical signals your retina sends out, you have a highly digested and transformed image. When you 'perceive' something, myriad automatic processes have already occurred."² Historians, I will argue, not only share this pre-discursive, non-linguistic mode of perception but, when using photographs as evidence, they often rely on it, at least partly, to convey their sense of the past.

However, historians are not relegated to appropriating photographs only as sensuous, non-linguistic data. Another strategy, what I will call "excavation," uses the tools of discursive analysis familiar to us through the work of Michel Foucault and others to treat sight as an experience located within historically specific regimes of knowledge. In theorist John Tagg's words, the photograph achieves evidentiary status "within certain institutional practices and within particular historical relations. . . ."³ For reasons I will explore, this second, excavatory or archaeological strategy, predominant in interpreting texts, is less common when historians use photographs. When it comes to photographs, we historians tend to rely on recognition, on seeing with our own eyes.

In underscoring the differences between "recognition" and excavation," I want to emphasize three overlapping sets of oppositions. The first opposition is this: while excavation relies on the photograph's embeddedness in a whole network of social arrangements, recognition relies on the non-discursive perception of similarity and difference. It may seem surprising to suggest a role for difference in recognition. When we recognize a photograph as a "likeness"—an old term,

1. History's "visual turn" involves media besides photography, which is my focus here. Some of what I say applies to painting and film, but they provide distinctive challenges of their own when used as historical evidence. See, for instance, Hayden White, "AHR Forum: Historiography and Historiophoty," *American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (December 1988), 1193-1199, and Vanessa R. Schwartz, "Walter Benjamin for Historians," *American Historical Review* 106, no. 5 (December, 2001), 1721-1743.

2. Michael S. Gazzaniga, *The Mind's Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 85.

3. John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 4.

after all, for photographic portraits—we seem to be stressing just similarity. But establishing “likeness” is more problematic than is often acknowledged. Before recognizing, say, a face, our brain unconsciously accounts for all the differences between the current patterns it perceives and previous ones. Changing illumination and angles, added wrinkles, transformed hair, the addition of glasses, the stain of grief must all be processed for the degree of difference they present. If that degree is too great, then the face will be judged unrecognizable. Only if the neurons processing sight suppress the inevitable differences will the friend of yesterday be welcomed once more, recognized as the “same” person. Likeness depends on an evaluation of difference.

The play of difference and similarity occurs in conscious recognition as well. Roland Barthes provides the most famous theoretical embellishment of the difficulties with “likeness” in *Camera Lucida* as he strives to find a true image of his recently deceased mother. For him, this becomes a fool’s errand: “the only one which has given me the splendor of her truth is precisely a lost, remote photograph, one which does not look ‘like’ her, the photograph of a child I never knew.”⁴ “Ultimately,” Barthes tells us, “a photograph looks like anyone except the person it represents” if we knew him or her. The beloved living person, his or her “air,” his or her irreducible individuality, is always at odds with the photograph, but ignorance can sometimes secure similarity. Barthes admits that if he never met the subject of the photographs, he might judge them to be “‘likenesses’ because they conform to what I expect of them” from looking at other photographs.⁵ From this perspective, a photograph of, for instance, Emperor Hirohito looks only like other photographs of Hirohito, not like the man himself. Historians secure recognition only by devaluing or ignoring difference.

Excavation, on the other hand, stresses contiguity—not what the thing was like and unlike, but what it was part of, the discursive and material whole out of which it emerged. In contrast to recognition, approaching photographs as objects to be excavated underscores their material presence rather than their transparency. But it is not materiality itself that is of primary interest. As Foucault argues in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, the goal of the historian is to excavate the systematic regularities and practices that gave objects and enunciations their presence and meaning. Although Foucault acknowledges pre-discursive reality, he seeks “to substitute for the enigmatic treasure of ‘things’ anterior to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse.”⁶ Approached in this way, the photograph becomes a shard from the past. The goal is to uncover the network of connotations, practices, and relations of power—in short, the entire discursive system—through which it emerged as an object. Whereas recognition embraces the image as providing historical evidence through its likeness to something in the past, excavation fingers the edges of the image, seeking to recover the historical matrix out of which it came. This is the first contrast.

4. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, transl. Richard Howard (New York: FSG/Hill and Wang, 1981), 103.

5. *Ibid.*, 102.

6. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, transl. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 47.

The second contrast between recognition and excavation has to do with process. Recognition is an act of substitution, whereas excavation is an act of reconstruction. When we recognize a photograph as a likeness, we treat it as the equivalent of something else. At least for a moment, a chemically treated rectangle of paper can stand in for, say, one's mother. Our ease with this uncanny operation, as many have suggested, is evident in ordinary language. Despite Barthes's qualms, we continue to point to photographs and say "that's my mother." However, the process is more complicated with excavation. When we treat the photograph as an excision from some larger whole, we stress its metonymic presence, treating it as a part broken off from a whole.⁷ We do not ask what it is a likeness of, but rather what it was part of. With a metonym, as when we shorten "the king wearing the crown" to "the crown," we're making a deletion, and not just any deletion, but an "illogical deletion," as Roman Jakobson called it, since it would be clearer, or at least less figurative, to delete "wearing a crown" and shorten the phrase to "the king."⁸ To say that a "king declared" is perfectly sensible, whereas talking headgear—when "the crown declared"—might strike us as bizarre were we not accustomed to this as an ordinary figure of speech. Likewise, with photography, there is no necessary logic as to which moment is captured on film. We can come to understand this odd excision from the past only when we recover the discursive system that produced it. This system, the regularities governing the photograph's emergence as a meaningful object, may exist at some distance from us, an important distance when we look at photographs as historical evidence. Its world may be quite different from ours, and thus require an archaeological effort.

These different interpretive processes lead to the third and final contrast. Recognition supposes a direct connection, an intersection between two different temporal spheres: our present and the past seen in the photograph. The image becomes the point where these different temporalities intersect. With excavation, there is no assumption that our present intersects with their past. The discursive worlds of the past and the present each have their own integrity. They may exist on separate strata, and there is no reason to believe that a particular photograph functions similarly in both or means the same thing.

This essay, then, distinguishes sharply between "recognition" and "excavation" through three related oppositions: first, similarity and difference versus contiguity; second, substitution versus reconstruction; and third, the intersection of past and present versus historical distance. Historians can either recognize images as "likenesses" or we can treat them as fragments from some discursive framework of the past, a visible remnant of a now invisible whole. Each approach provides

7. Recently, Eelco Runia has elevated the concept of "presence" in what he calls a metonymic philosophy of history as opposed to the metaphoric tropes elaborated by Hayden White. He argues that metonymic presence serves memory as opposed to interpretation. Although I too am interested in the relationship between presence and metonymy, I am unwilling to forgo efforts to establish meaning. Eelco Runia, "Presence," *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2006), 1-29. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

8. Literary critic David Lodge discusses the close relationship between metonymy and synecdoche and the contrast between them and metaphor. See David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, Ltd., 1977), 73-81.

a kind of evidence, a particular form of knowledge, but each has severe limitations—as I will show by looking most particularly at a 1946 image of homeless children in Tokyo by the Japanese photographer Hayashi Tadahiko (1918–1990).

II. RECOGNIZING NATIONAL CONDITIONS IN POSTWAR JAPAN

John Dower places a photograph of two dirty boys on page 62 of *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, his richly-detailed, Pulitzer-prize winning study of the aftermath of war (Figure 1). The adjacent text describes the terrible conditions endured by “the war’s youngest victims,” the orphaned or homeless children who haunted the railway stations and ruins of Japan’s fire-bombed cities.⁹ Unaided by the police, who rounded them up like stray dogs, and disdained by Japanese society in general, over 120,000 urchins did whatever they could to survive—picking pockets, shining shoes, begging, prostitution. The text provides a great deal of information about the circumstances surrounding Japanese children displaced by war. However, beyond renaming the photograph, calling it *Street Children near Tokyo’s Ueno Station, 1946*, Dower says nothing about it in particular. Neither the caption nor the text provides the photographer’s name, its Japanese title, or an interpretation of the image.¹⁰

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Embracing Defeat



Street children near Tokyo’s Ueno station, 1946.

as their physical or mental wholeness. Similarly, once sentimental effusions had been dispensed with, the war’s youngest victims were treated abysmally. War orphans and homeless children almost by definition became “improper” children. Forced to scramble for daily survival on the streets, they became treated as incorrigible delinquents. Long after the war ended, the government not only had no effective policy for caring for these children, but scant grasp of the dimensions of the problem. In July 1946, the Ministry of Health and Welfare estimated that there were approximately 4,000 war orphans throughout the country. A February 1948 re-

Figure 1. “Street Children near Tokyo’s Ueno Station, 1946,” from John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company/The New Press, 1999), 62.

9. The fate of a different group of orphaned and abandoned children, those left on the Asian mainland in the wake of Japan’s defeat in 1945 called the *Chūgoku zanryū Nihonjin koji*, is discussed in Robert Eford, “Japan’s ‘War Orphans’: Identification and State Responsibility,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2008). Although both groups were largely ignored by the state and society, the children in Japan grew up as Japanese citizens while most of the offspring left in China were never repatriated.

10. John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company/The New Press, 1999), 61-63.

What then is the relationship between this photograph of two boys and the text's information about conditions in occupied Japan? It could be argued that Dower treats the photograph simply as illustration, as a visual anecdote supporting his broader depiction of postwar reality. Such an approach would be completely within the norms of the profession. Peter Burke describes historians' *modus operandi* in these words: "Relatively few historians work in photographic archives. . . . When they do use images, historians tend to treat them as mere illustrations, reproducing them in their books without comment. In cases in which the images are discussed in the text, this evidence is often used to illustrate conclusions that the author has already reached by other means, rather than to give new answers or to ask new questions."¹¹ Although Dower is in fact one of those rare historians who has worked intensively with images—a pioneer in the history of Japanese photography and deeply sensitive to visual evidence—in *Embracing Defeat* he might be said to exemplify our profession's habitual offhandedness toward photographs.¹² His treatment implies that *Street Children near Tokyo's Ueno Station, 1946* supports his conclusions about dire postwar social conditions and that we can recognize Japan's national situation when looking at these boys. Without need for mediation or elaboration, a glance at these scrawny orphans shows us what occupied Japan was really like.

What goes unremarked is that recognizing postwar reality in this photograph requires us to overlook conspicuous differences between the image and past realities. Obviously, the photograph—a two-dimensional, black and white picture—is not the same as human offspring who are uniformly three-dimensional, colorful, and all the rest of it, let alone the same as an abstraction like "national conditions." An image is not reality, it is a representation; yet historians and their readers typically treat the photograph as a transparency, the inconsequential windowpane that gives the eye access to the real world of years ago.¹³ Consider this difference: with textual evidence, historians insist that words are products of a particular person, place, and time. We are trained to provide an apparatus to locate texts, tracing their production as social artifacts. We give the names of authors, the titles of books, publication venues and dates, and so on when we cite a few words. With images, as treated here, this apparatus disappears. The picture in Dower's book, for instance, appears without supporting documentation. The sole acknowledgment occurs on page 651 with the photographer's name in a list of "photo and illustration credits." Even in this list, there is no indication of where, when, or even whether Hayashi Tadahiko's photograph appeared in print, how it was made, what it was used for, who owns the copyright, or what its Japanese title is. The im-

11. Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 10.

12. Dower wrote the introduction to *A Century of Japanese Photography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), a translation of *Nihon shashinshi: 1840–1945*, ed. Japanese Photographers Association (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1971), and is the driving force behind the website on Japan at <http://visualizing-cultures.mit.edu> (accessed July 29, 2009).

13. For instance, Kendall L. Walton argues that "Photographs are *transparent*. We see the world *through* them" and goes even further, insisting that they convey not only sensation, but also "natural meaning." For this discussion, see Walton, "Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism," *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 2 (December 1984), 246–277.

plication, in short, is that while words come laden with particular perspectives, a photograph is so transparent that its social network of production, its original title, even the photographer's name, are irrelevant to its standing as historical evidence. Unlike art historians who dwell on the representational nature of images by giving identifying information about a print and its creator, we historians imply that we can recognize reality through photographs with immediacy.

My point here is that the differences between photographs and reality are at once obvious yet invisible, blatant yet unremarked. Why do we historians so often ignore them? While Roland Barthes tells us that "likeness leaves me feeling unsatisfied and somehow skeptical," historians rarely voice such sentiments.¹⁴ Is our lack of discomfort or even interest in the systematic differences merely casual? I do not think so. Obscuring these differences serves an urgent purpose for many historians: the purpose of securing the similarity of past and present experience. Our experience today is *like* their experience then. With photographs, what we hope to share across time is visceral, physical, sensual, rather than cognitive.

Giorgio Agamben confesses to enjoying this sense of connection, saying that the "quality [that] fascinates and entrances me in the photographs I love" is "the secret relationship between gesture and photography. . . . A good photographer knows how to grasp the eschatological nature of the gesture—without, however, taking anything away from the historicity or singularity of the photographed event."¹⁵ In capturing this gesture, the photograph refers simultaneously to the eternal and to the particular, to death and to the resurrection of the dead through the image. History, I would argue, makes the same dual references. As we look at these little boys, one of them sucking intently on the end of a cigarette, the other touching his stomach lightly, his knees gracefully bent, we may feel in our bones that our bodies might fold in the same way, that other human bodies fold in this fashion, that the gestures here are both infinitely repeatable even as they were unique to that moment.¹⁶ As we look at these children, we may also imagine that we are seeing them just as Hayashi saw them. Although they are now grown and perhaps dead, we share what Agamben calls "the eternal recapitulation of an existence." Our physicality guarantees knowledge of theirs, both the boys' and the photographer's—a shared species recognition.

Joan Scott calls this sort of evidence the "evidence of experience." As usually understood, the evidence of experience is direct and unmediated. As Scott puts it, "Knowledge is gained through vision; vision is a direct apprehension of a world of transparent objects."¹⁷ The belief in direct apprehension sets aside questions about modes of representation, the social production and role of photographs, the discursive structures surrounding them, and, most importantly—since we are historians—time itself, so that our experience of seeing now, today, is supposedly *like* the photographer's experience of seeing then, in 1946. Every glance at this

14. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 103.

15. Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, transl. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 23-25. Agamben has explored the sensual in other works as well. See, for instance, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

16. The physiological basis for this sensation lies with the brain's "mirror neurons," which mimic the actions observed as the observer watches another.

17. Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Summer 1991), 775.

image—or so the strategy of recognition implies—reaffirms the unity of past, present, and future sight. We can recognize these boys not only with our own eyes in our own time, but always.

Scott argues that the problem with this approach is that it is pre-discursive and ahistorical. How can I assume that my experience or understanding matches Hayashi's or that of the little boys? I merely project my unreliable notions of what street life in bombed-out Tokyo must have been like, and I recognize this image as occupied Tokyo only because of the caption. To put it another way, I recognize this photograph as postwar Japan only because of a string of words, sentimental ignorance, and a desire to see it as such. From the image itself, I learn nothing new, and I allow it to pose no new questions. Thus my understanding will always be limited to what I already know and feel; from this approach I cannot achieve a new, articulated, critical grasp of the meaning of the past. For this reason, Scott and others distrust the claims of experience, the evidence, in this case, of sight.

And yet, neuroscientists insist that the brain interprets much of what we see preconsciously; that we see before we think. As Michael Gazzaniga puts it, “the brain knows before you do.”¹⁸ Similarly, cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that “thought is mostly unconscious.”¹⁹ As such, a case could be made that the “naive” use of photographs as illustration is not retrograde, but instead harnesses the way the brain functions to tap pre-discursive, preconscious modes of recognition. In using an image that registers Japan as non-threatening, Dower directs us to understand *Street Children near Tokyo's Ueno Station, 1946* not as exemplifying his immediate text but as a critique of the very postwar Japanese practices he describes. He *tells* us that children were rounded up by the police like stray dogs, but *shows* us evidence of two boys apprehended with kindness through a camera lens. The boys show no fear of the photographer looming over them, and Dower, before we know it and without telling us in words, conveys that we too should look at them—and, more broadly, postwar Japan—with sympathy. In a book arguing that the Japanese people and American occupation forces were joint agents in the creation of postwar peace, this photograph enables American readers to recognize ourselves in the Japanese people. More than an illustration of the text immediately surrounding it, *Street Children near Tokyo's Ueno Station, 1946* can be seen as a form of visual persuasion relying on our inarticulate powers of recognition. With a glance, we embrace as our own the courage, fortitude, and essential humanity of America's former enemies.

Let me sum up my discussion of what I have been calling the strategy of recognition. Our trust in the photograph's “likeness” is rooted in visceral sympathies, in preconscious functions of the brain. To recognize “likeness” is to have the sensation of connection; it effaces or downplays difference and rests *not* on analytical understanding or on historical investigation of the two-dimensional object in front of us, but on the desire and expectation that we can intuitively embrace past realities through a photograph. Besotted by recognition, we historians lurch at the photograph like sentimental drunks toward a barstool companion. Resistance

18. Gazzaniga, *The Mind's Past*, 63.

19. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 3.

comes less from the image than from our bleary realization that perhaps all we can glimpse in its surface is ourselves. This is not an entirely satisfactory picture.

III. EXCAVATING NATIONAL CONDITIONS

Let us turn, then, to excavation. While recognition pivots on similarity and difference, bringing past and present together in a sloppy, physical embrace, excavation is a far more cerebral approach to the image. It requires greater reserve. There's no sliding off barstools here. Our courtship of the photograph does not rely on precognitive sensations, but on research into the social, political, aesthetic, and economic conditions of a photograph's production and consumption. In fact, for these purposes, the image is best approached as opaque. It may not look *like* anything we ourselves can recognize. It may not be accessible through reference to our own experience. In short, we need enter the discursive system within which it had meaning as though we were blind. As I said in describing metonyms, unless one is versed in a world where kings wear crowns and issue edicts, the phrase "the crown declares" will be gnomic if not sheer nonsense. Likewise, if we wish to understand a photograph's historical reality metonymically, we must struggle to see it as part of its own world. Only then does it become possible for the image to serve as evidence of its time, rather than as testimony of our own "eternal" humanity.

In dealing with photographs, though, historians rarely choose excavation. There are two reasons for this—one ideological that I have already touched on, and one practical. First, ideologically, to radically historicize sight challenges the assumed continuity of direct experience. As Scott argues, many historians refuse to treat experience, an experience such as sight, as "an interpretation that needs to be interpreted" because they want experience to serve as the unquestioned, foundational ground for history.²⁰ The second reason we rarely consider how an image looked to the eyes of the past is that such evidence is extraordinarily difficult to come by. How can we hope to see as others saw if we cannot assume that they saw as we do? If the experience of sight must always be historicized, and if we cannot depend on species recognition, where can we rest our hopes? However, in the particular case of Hayashi Tadahiko's image, we are in luck. We have evidence in the form of a debate in the amateur photography magazine *Camera* showing how some of Hayashi's contemporaries saw his street photography. What we discover from reconstructing this debate and its surrounding social and political conditions is that at least in some eyes Hayashi's image was far from real. According to these contemporaries, we do not see reality, we do not see the real conditions of occupied Japan, when we look at the image they called *Ueno, furōji* [Ueno, vagrant children]. They would tell us that John Dower has been misled by visceral sympathies.

The "unreality" of Hayashi's street photography was asserted in two different ways by his contemporaries. Critic Watanabe Kosho (1914–93) declared the subject matter dubious: "The characteristics of such subjects as beggars and tramps are idleness, sickness, and abnormality. They lack will for hope and self-improvement. They are truly animal-like and primitive. It would be desirable for them to

20. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," 797.

disappear entirely.”²¹ Watanabe admitted that street photographers Domon Ken (1909–90) and Kimura Ihei (1901–74) had managed to treat such subjects appropriately, but he insisted that most images of the down-and-out reify an untruth or present a truth that is so partial as to be essentially untrue. Watanabe accused most “beggar photographers” (*kojiki shashinsha*) of taking “despicable, sentimental vagrant snap shots . . . as self-indulgent as masturbation.”²² From Watanabe’s vantage, the reality of postwar conditions could be found only in photographs of the socially responsible, hard-working majority.

Less dramatically but just as definitively, another critic, Tanaka Masao, also attacked Hayashi’s work. Unlike Watanabe, Tanaka defended the subject matter as real, but he specifically dismissed Hayashi’s work as focusing “on finding the romantic appeal [*romanchikkuna joushu*] of deteriorating postwar social conditions, and thus having no connection to the later beggar photography (*kojiki shashin*) that “captures the reality of ordinary lives in Tokyo.”²³ According to Tanaka, Hayashi’s work idealizes its subject matter.

In short, for these two critics, Hayashi’s work is fantasy: we cannot look at his image and see real street children or the real conditions in Japan at the time. In dismissing Hayashi’s work as prurient curiosity or as overly romantic, Watanabe and Tanaka placed quotation marks around *Ueno, furōji*, insisting that we see it as a *misrepresentation* rather than, as Dower and later historians have done, as a true likeness or *presentation* of postwar reality.

These critiques give us the rare opportunity of seeing through the eyes of the dead, but they are also unsettling. They can make us feel blind. I, for instance, do not, with my own eyes, see that Hayashi’s photograph relishes or masks the boys’ suffering. Neither the masturbatory self-indulgence nor the romantic appeal of this image is apparent to me. However, if my question as a historian is what photography can reveal about the past, what the evidentiary status of a particular image is, then I must take seriously not how *I* might see the photograph but how it was seen during Japan’s postwar recovery. Eschewing recognition, the archaeological approach directs our efforts not *into* the image with the assumption that sight is a universal experience, but *outwards* from the image toward the web of practices, commentary, and institutions surrounding it at a precise historical moment. We treat the photograph as an excision, a random, possibly illogical, deletion, from a complex past that we need to work to recover.

Such excavation is demanding. Any single image serves as a node in many complex networks, and the archival conventions identifying images are lax. Take, for instance, publication history. This is crucial to understanding how a photograph functioned in the past, how it would have been seen, and yet discovering which of the many possible venues presented by *Ueno, furōji* requires time, diligence, and, mostly, luck. Let me give some sense of this task. In the years immediately after

21. Watanabe Kosho, “Kojiki shashin hanbaku: *Camera* gogatsu gō Tanaka shi no ichibun e” [A Refutation of Beggar Photography: In Reference to Mr. Tanaka’s Piece in the May Issue of *Camera*] *Camera* 46, no. 1 (July 1953), 112.

22. *Ibid.*, 112.

23. Tanaka Masao, “Kojiki shashinron: furōji, runpen okii ni torubeshi [On Beggar Photography: The Importance of Taking Pictures of Street Urchins and Beggars] *Camera* 45, no. 5 (May 1953), 73.

the war, there were over eighteen photography hobby magazines such as *Camera*; dozens of cheap sensational rags publishing photographs; many more popular, photographically illustrated magazines and newspapers; thousands of posters and brochures using photographs; impressive numbers of illustrated books; and countless government documents embellished with this medium. Not all of this printed matter has found its way into libraries, and no database details or even catalogs the images used in them. Moreover, an image often changes from publication to publication: it may be cropped, used in a montage, given a different name, printed in alternative ways, and transformed by different kinds of paper; all of this raises the issue of whether it is a single object we are tracing or many. To give one contemporary example of the image's many manifestations, Hayashi's photograph was part of a 2003 American exhibition, *The History of Japanese Photography*, for which Dower was a

consultant, but close inspection shows that this exhibition's version is not the same as the one in *Embracing Defeat* (Figure 2). In *The History of Japanese Photography*'s version, on the right-hand side, another small boy looks up toward the photographer.

It turns out that Hayashi's photograph of these street children first appeared in *Fujin kōron*, a monthly women's magazine, in October, 1946 in the second part of a two-part story called "Wasurerareta kodomo" [Forgotten Children]. Far from being presented as an integral statement in its own right on street children, *Ueno*, *furōji* was part of a collage on the fifth page of the five-page photo essay. Parts of two other Hayashi photographs were placed on top of it, disrupting his composition, and a white block containing text written by the accompanying reporter

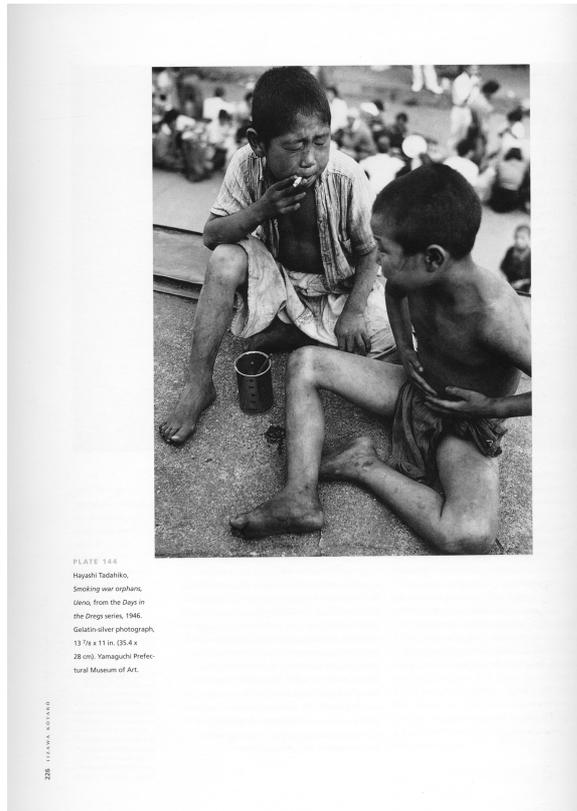


Figure 2. "Hayashi Tadahiko, *Smoking War Orphans, Ueno*, from the *Days of Dregs* series, 1946, Gelatin-silver photograph, 13 7/8 X 11 in. (35.4 x 28 cm.). Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art." From *The History of Japanese Photography*, ed. Anne Wilkes Tucker *et al.* (New Haven: Yale University Press in Association with the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, 2003), [Plate 144] 226.

slices through the head of the boy on the left. The text says that children living on Tokyo's streets seem "attracted to a world without falsity or formality." In contrast to that simplicity, the photograph is subordinated to the magazine's cluttered design and placed next to a story for middle-class mothers on making children's clothes, a story illustrated with hand-drawn sketches of charming, well-dressed little girls. The visual and textual hodgepodge of this original 1946 publication contrasts sharply with the clean legibility of the presentation in *Embracing Defeat*.²⁴ Yet other versions of *Ueno, furōji* may have appeared in other magazines, newspapers, posters, or government documents, either Japanese or those of the Allied Forces, but I have not seen evidence for this and doubt it. Certainly, the photograph was excluded from the few international museum exhibitions and catalogs of the period, such as the National Museum of Modern Art's first photography show in 1953, Edward Steichen's *Family of Man* exhibition that toured Japan in 1956, and later John Szarkowski's exhibition, *New Japanese Photography*, at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1974.²⁵ It may have appeared in small exhibitions, collections, or histories, but as far as I know, *Ueno, furōji* made its real debut to the wider public only in 1980 in a collection of Hayashi's work, *Kasutori jidai* (Days of Dregs).²⁶ In other words, during the occupation and long thereafter, Hayashi's photograph of the smoking orphan and his hungry friend was seen only by those who happened to look at a single issue of an occupation-era women's magazine. Its minor iconic status was achieved only recently, and, even as an icon, its form is inconstant. In *Kasutori jidai*, rough paper and sharp tonal contrasts create a dark image resisting the clarity found in the 2003 catalog and in Dower's *Embracing Defeat*.²⁷

The photograph's publication history accords with the marginal nature of Hayashi's own social matrix. Hayashi, as with other leading photographers of the day, was a professional, but "professional" hardly implied a stable, middle-class existence with steady work, or the life of an artist exhibiting in art museums and selling original prints (such institutions and markets hardly existed in Japan before the late 1980s). Instead, "professional" referred to the men—and a handful of women—who operated portrait studios, worked as photographers for the Japanese war effort (Hayashi was in China), developed film for others including American GIs stationed in Japan after the war, wrote essays, judged contests, went on lecture tours, and sold images to newspapers and magazines on a freelance basis. From these efforts, they made a precarious living, existing close to

24. Hayashi Tadahiko, "Wasurerareta kodomo" [Forgotten Children], *Fujin kōron* (October 1946), no. 352, no page numbers. (The reporter's name is not given; presumably unlike Hayashi, he or she was a member of *Fujin kōron*'s permanent staff.)

25. No work by Hayashi appears in the latter two exhibitions, and only his portrait of movie star Hara Setsuko was chosen for the 1953 show. *Gendai shashin ten: Nihon to Amerika* (Tokyo: Kokuritsu kindai bijutsukan, 1953); Edward Steichen, *The Family of Man* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1955); John Szarkowski, *New Japanese Photography* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1974).

26. Hayashi Tadahiko, *Kasutori jidai*, with an essay by Yoshiyuki Junnosuke (Tokyo: Asahi Sonorama, 1980), 15.

27. It is now included in standard collections. See, for instance, *Nihon shashin zenshū*: vol. 4, *Sensō no kiroku* (The Complete History of Japanese Photography War Photography) (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1987), 109.

the margins of society, to the demi-monde of prostitutes, drunks, and writers and artists who were the subject of some of Hayashi's portraits. From this perspective, reconnecting "*Ueno, furōji*" to its own world metonymically, we can see it as a small, money-making venture by a man who rubbed shoulders with the down-and-out on a daily basis. He made the image not to serve as witness to a national problem, but to gain some income from a magazine for middle-class women with little interest in policy or photography *per se* and great concern for their own domestic challenges. Located in this world, Hayashi had no opportunity to "see" reality for the nation as a whole.

When it comes to seeing for the nation, America—where photography had a large, partly government-funded role in the public sphere—provides a striking contrast to Japan. There was nothing in Japan like the federally funded Farm Security Administration projects of Walker Evans (1903–75) and Dorothea Lange (1895–1965) that sought to bring photography to bear on social welfare policy.²⁸ Nor could Japanese photographers reach the broad audience available to Americans publishing in *Life*, *Fortune*, and *Look* magazines, where print runs reached millions per week.²⁹ Although in November of 1947, Natori Yonosuke founded *Shūkan Sun News*, imitating *Life*'s emphasis on photojournalism, the magazine suffered from low circulation and financial problems and folded about a year later. Nor was there a subculture of organized activist photographers in Japan similar to American groups like the Photo League, centered in New York, which investigated urban poverty and attracted the suspicions of the FBI on the lookout for communists.³⁰ Even though camera clubs were common in postwar Japan—and Hayashi was part of one³¹—these small associations were usually not politically oriented. Given, then, the different configuration of the public sphere inhabited by photography in Japan, we have to understand that Hayashi's image could not document postwar conditions in the same way that Dorothea Lange documented Dust Bowl refugees. Hayashi's image did not stand witness to a national reality, made no policy demands, and failed to raise the red flag of revolution. His work must instead be understood within Tokyo's demi-monde and as a small-time commercial product.

Hayashi seems to have been comfortable with this limited public engagement and his gregarious life of semi-decadence, so perhaps we can begin to see why his politicized critics Watanabe and Tanaka saw his work as unreal, self-indulgent, and romantic. The question then becomes how any photograph, given the restricted public sphere of photography, could succeed in being properly political according to these critics. But recall that both Watanabe (with less enthusiasm) and Tanaka claimed that some "beggar photography" managed to convey the real conditions

28. See, for instance, Cara A. Finnegan, *Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and FSA Photographs* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2003).

29. James L. Baughman, *Henry R. Luce and the Rise of the American News Media* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), and *Looking at Life Magazine*, ed. Erika Doss (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001)

30. Lili Corbus Bezner, *Photography and Politics in America: From the New Deal into the Cold War* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), details government pressure on the Photo League.

31. Hayashi, along with photographer Higuchi Tadao (1916–1992), photographer and editor of *Camera*, Kuwabara Kineo (1913–2007), and others, formed the Ginryusha in October 1947.



Figure 3. Kimura Ihei, *Asakusa Kōen* [Asakusa Park] *Shin Tokyo Album*, No. 1, *Camera* 38, no. 1 (July 1949).

human beings . . . and with society,” conveying, in Tanaka’s words, class conflict “from the workers’ point of view.”³³ Stated differently, both critics wanted images to function metonymically within an overtly political discourse, either bourgeois democratic or social revolutionary. Whereas in their eyes Hayashi fails, Kimura and Domon succeed. But why?

IV. KIMURA IHEI AND METONYMIC MEMORIES

To answer this question, let us look briefly at Kimura’s “success,” his nine-image series called *Shin Tokyo Album*. Kimura’s cheerful attitude must have appealed to Watanabe. In his introduction, Kimura declares, “Lately I find everything that is happening in Tokyo beautiful and entertaining. My series *Shin Tokyo Album* will demonstrate how I deal with this motif.”³⁴ Kimura goes on to say that he hopes

of power. They pointed to two photographic series running from 1949 to 1950 in *Camera* magazine: Kimura Ihei’s *Shin Tokyo Album* and Domon Ken’s *Machi*. Watanabe apparently found some cheer and uplift in these pictures. Tanaka, more enthusiastically, saw these two bodies of work as having “monumental significance” and as ushering in “the era of beggar photography . . . featuring street children, beggars, and prostitutes.”³² To Tanaka’s eyes, Kimura and Domon achieve a deep understanding of brutal social forces and “portray human beings from a new point of view,” not as existing “alone but in connection with other

32. Tanaka, “Kojiki shashinron,” 73.

33. *Ibid.*, 74.

34. Kimura Ihei, *Shin Tokyo Album*, No. 1, 1949, *Camera* 38, no. 1 (July 1949), no pagination. There are nine images but the last two, published in *Camera* 39, no. 3 (March 1950), were assigned number 8, although the first two, published together in *Camera* 38, no. 1 (July 1949) were assigned numbers 1 and 2.

both to record facts and convey his feelings, a condensation of objective information and subjective interpretation that Tanaka advocates. However, as I look at his images, and as I read the critics' commentary, I have the same sense of blindness I initially had with Hayashi's purported self-indulgence and romanticization. To me, Kimura's images are not excisions from a political discourse, but expressions of nostalgia and aesthetic experimentation.

Writing about the first image in the series (Figure 3), Kimura reminisces, saying "Asakusa is my home; I've lived there since I was a kid. . . . People in Asakusa are so gregarious and laid back, that's what I like about them."³⁵ Looking at this photograph, I wonder how it is that Kimura sees gregariousness, and even more

how Tanaka sees worker solidarity, when these exhausted faces stare off in different directions. I would be tempted to say that Hayashi's little boys with the crowd behind them are more socially embedded, and yet again it is not what *I* see but what *they* saw that I am attempting to understand. Kimura's second photograph in this series (Figure 4), created in April 1949, also provokes memories for him, this time not of boyhood but of working as a wartime photojournalist with the Japanese army, although he refers merely to "traveling in north China."³⁶ This scene at the festival for Kannon reminds Kimura of a similar storytelling



Figure 4. Kimura Ihei, *Kannon Matsuri no Tsuji Kōshaku* (Storytelling Performance at the Kannon Festival) *Shin Tokyo Album*, No. 2, *Camera* 38, no. 1 (July 1949).

35. Kimura Ihei, "Asakusa Kōen" [Asakusa Park] *Shin Tokyo Album*, No. 1, 1949, and Kimura Ihei, "Kannon Matsuri no Tsuji Kōshaku" [Tsuji-kōshaku at the Kannon Festival] *Shin Tokyo Album*, No. 1, 1949, *Camera* 38, no. 1 (July 1949), no pagination.

36. Kimura Ihei, *Kannon Matsuri no Tsuji Kōshaku* (Tsuji-kōshaku at the Kannon Festival), *Shin Tokyo Album*, No. 1, 1949, *Camera* 38, no. 1 (July 1949), no pagination. "Kannon" is the Japanese name of the bodhisattva of compassion, and she is the central deity in Asakusa's Sensōji temple. It has been asserted that the brand name "Canon" used to have a slightly different form (before it was formerly registered as a trademark), "Kwanon," and the namesake of this Kwanon is said to be this bodhisattva. The "History of Canon" on the Canon homepage has some stories about this. According to this "History," it was the company founder Yoshida Gorō's idea.

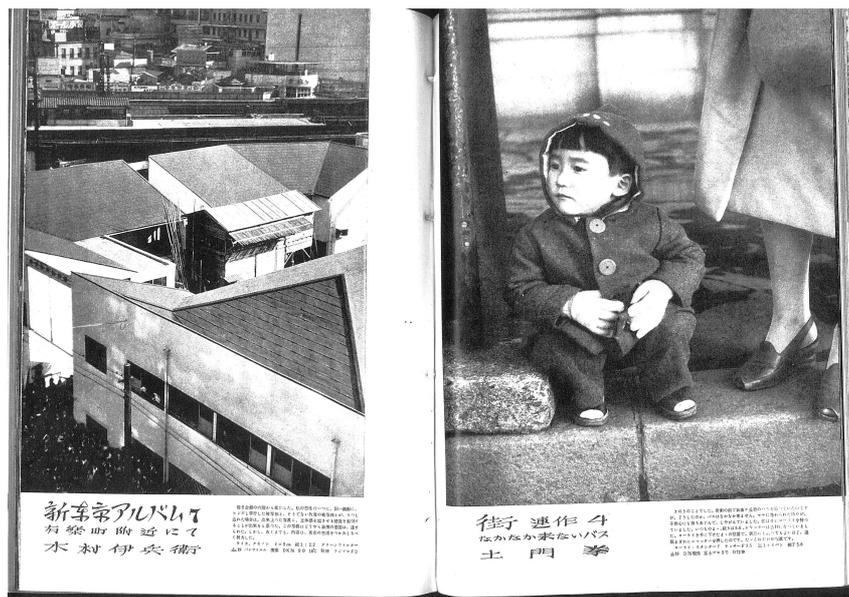


Figure 5. Kimura Ihei, *Yūrakuchō fukin nite* [Near Yūrakuchō] *Shin Tokyo Album, No. 7, Camera 9, no. 2* (February 1950).

performance he saw in Beijing.³⁷ Kimura’s sweet—I might even say “self-indulgent” and “romantic”—reminiscences avoid any mention of the war on the continent or in Tokyo where the March 1945 firebombing flattened the very area he portrays.

Other images in the series raise technical issues. Figure 5, for instance, is a visual experiment. Kimura says, “I thought I could create the illusion of three-dimensionality if I could capture in a single image both a set of objects that are parallel to the lens and another set at a different angle. This photograph seems to have accomplished my goal. But, still,” Kimura writes, “my point is to capture Tokyo’s everyday life.”³⁸ Again, that he sees “everyday life” in this photograph where no human beings appear arrests my attention and makes me ponder how different his sight is from mine.

To my eyes, then, *Shin Tokyo Album* resists the political characterizations of critics Tanaka and Watanabe, as well as the idea of everydayness offered by their creator Kimura. Excavation has not allowed me to recover my sight. However, I can use my blindness. To recognize how difficult it is to see the photographs from this period is to recognize how different that time was from ours. In recovering some of the network of images, commentary, institutions, and practices in which these opaque photographs were embedded, I can interrogate them for what they show about postwar Japan.

The most important question for me, as for John Dower and for the critics and photographers of occupied Japan, is what they show about the social realities

37. This type of performance is called *tsuji-kōshaku*. He uses “Hokuhei” for Beijing.

38. Kimura Ihei, *Yūrakuchō fukin nite* [Near Yūrakuchō] *Shin Tokyo Album, No. 7, 1950, Camera 39, no. 2* (February 1950), no pagination.

and political possibilities emerging in the public sphere after the brutal war. As the foregoing investigation demonstrates, any visualization of this public sphere was strikingly limited in its reach. Any attempt to provide a “national” vision was thwarted by the restricted readership of photographic publications, the social position and mixed motives of the photographers, and the lack of a shared aesthetic vocabulary that could signal critique through different styles. Neither Hayashi Tadahiko’s orphans nor Kimura Ihei’s rooftops spurred political action or became iconic at the time. This failure to create defining photographic images reveals, with startling clarity, the difficulty of establishing consensus on what constituted “reality,” “society,” and “daily life.” Given this lack of consensus on fundamental issues—the lack, in other words, of a shared vocabulary or shared social vision—broad popular discussion of government structures and policies, and the creation of a truly democratic civil society, were thwarted. Perhaps what emerges most clearly through this excavation is a deep understanding of the fragmented nature of the postwar Japanese public and how that fragmentation circumscribed its popular politics. We can understand this by recovering photographs as though they were objects buried in an archaeological stratum, understanding them in that situation without being able to recognize them in the present. Through metonymic strategies, we do not see the orphans themselves. However, we can see how their image was positioned in postwar Japanese society, and through that, we can see that postwar Japanese society had few means for rendering their plight part of democratic practices.

V. CONCLUSION: SENSUOUS MUTENESS VERSUS BLIND DISCOURSE

In his foreword to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *Habitations of Modernity*, Homi Bhabha tells us that “The task of a foreword is to ask, What, my friend, have you risked in this work?”³⁹ Perhaps this is also the task of a conclusion. What has been risked and what, if anything, has been gained by this excursus into the historian’s use of photographs? Much, certainly, has been risked. When we approach photographs as likenesses, we lose our grasp of the historicity of experience, we elide the difference between now and then, we block the possibility of seeing differently and thus seeing new meanings. When, on the other hand, we approach photographs as embedded in their own discursive worlds, we blind ourselves, no longer able to rely on our eyes, to trust our sensual experience to provide evidence. Through recognition, we have the experience of pre-discursive sight, a sensuous muteness without language, which is perhaps why historians often do not discuss the photographs we use as illustrations. Through excavation, we treat each experience as an interpretation that we must interpret; here we must distrust our senses, question their reliability at every turn, and struggle to expose the sightlines of the dead. Often, though not in every case, we are faced with a choice when we approach photographs: we can see mutely or talk blindly.

Philosopher Andy Clark, art historian Barbara Maria Stafford, and historian Philip Ethington, among others, seek to unify the neuroscience of sight and stud-

39. Homi K. Bhabha, Foreword, in Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), x.

ies in visual culture, but my own sense is that much would be lost if we were to map, as Ethington suggests, the world onto the brain.⁴⁰ Although I am convinced that history's "visual turn" necessitates a re-engagement with bodies and environments, this re-engagement does not lead inexorably to a unified theory of visual experience. Sensation and meaning are distinct and sometimes in conflict. Indeed, experiments with the brain have documented radical disjunctions in the way that different parts of it process sight. For instance, a recent study explores two areas of the brain that process visual information, the more primitive part that perceives without our being consciously aware of this perception, and the occipital cortex that processes conscious sight. The independent functioning of these areas was vividly demonstrated when a man blinded by strokes in his occipital cortex was found to be able to navigate around objects he could not consciously see. Although his conscious mind registered no visual sense of the world around him, part of his brain was in fact seeing objects in this path and letting his body know that he should move right or left accordingly.⁴¹ Other research supports the finding that there are discrepancies between conscious and unconscious knowledge of images as well as objects.⁴² In short, we see both precognitively and cognitively, and these perceptions do not always accord with each other. Sensuous muteness and blind discourse are different forms of knowing and provide different forms of historical evidence.

All this shows, I believe, that there is no easy resolution, no middle ground to be found in the charged encounter with a photographic image. And yet, I am unwilling to give up either recognition or excavation. In calling forth simultaneously our sensuous capacities and our analytical abilities, the photograph toys with us. As a piece of evidence, it reminds historians that ours is an impossible—and endlessly beguiling—task. On the one hand, attention to embodiment upends the classic dictum that history ought to concern itself only with conscious thought.⁴³ On the other hand, without the precision of discursive analysis, we lose the tools to interrogate and understand the radical difference of the past. As visual historians try to make form and meaning of the world that was and is both visceral and discursive, we must grapple with the contradictory means of knowing at our disposal.

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40. Andy Clark, *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998); Barbara Maria Stafford, *Echo Objects: The Cognitive Work of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); and Philip J. Ethington, "Sociovisual Perspective: Vision and the Forms of the Human Past," unpublished paper, quoted with permission.

41. Beatrice de Gelder *et al.*, "Intact Navigation Skills after Bilateral Loss of Striate Cortex," *Current Biology* 18, no. 24 (2009), R1128-R1129. This research shows that human beings "can sustain sophisticated visuo-spatial skills in the absence of perceptual awareness . . ." (R1128).

42. For interesting examples, see Roger N. Shepard, *Mind Sights: Original Visual Illusions, Ambiguities, and Other Anomalies, With a Commentary on the Play of Mind in Perception and Art* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1990).

43. R. G. Collingwood states this view succinctly in *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), especially "Epilegomena," 205-234.