The Routledge Companion to Photography and Visual Culture is a seminal reference source for the ever-changing field of photography. Comprising an impressive range of essays and interviews by experts and scholars from across the globe, this book examines the medium’s history, its central issues and emerging trends, and its much-discussed future. The collected essays and interviews explore the current debates surrounding the photograph as object, art, document, propaganda, truth, selling tool, and universal language; the perception of photography archives as burdens, rather than treasures; the continual technological development reshaping the field; photography as a tool of representation and control, and more.

One of the most comprehensive volumes of its kind, this companion is essential reading for photographers and historians alike.

Moritz Neumüller is a curator, educator and writer in the field of Photography and New Media. He has worked for institutions such as MoMA New York, La Fábrica Madrid and Photoreland Festival in Dublin. He is the academic director of the Photography Department of IED Madrid, and runs a postgraduate course for the IDEP school in Barcelona. He is a regular contributor to European Photography Magazine (Berlin) and Photoresearcher (Vienna), and has curated exhibitions on artists such as Bernd and Hilla Becher, Yamamoto Masao, Cristina de Middel, Stephen Gill, Gabriel Orozco, Martin Parr, Chris Jordan, and Erik Kessels. Since 2010, he has run The Curator Ship, an online resource for visual artists. Recent curatorial projects include the Daegu Biennial 2014 (Korea), the Photobook Week Aarhus (Denmark), and the exhibition Photobook Phenomenon for the CCCB center in Barcelona.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND VISUAL CULTURE

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Moritz Neumüller is a curator, educator and writer in the field of Photography and New Media. He has worked for institutions such as MoMA New York, La Fábrica Madrid and PhotoIreland Festival in Dublin. He is the academic director of the Photography Department of IED Madrid, and runs a postgraduate course for the IDEP school in Barcelona. He is a regular contributor to European Photography Magazine (Berlin) and Photoresearcher (Vienna), and has curated exhibitions on artists such as Bernd and Hilla Becher, Yamamoto Masao, Cristina de Middel, Stephen Gill, Gabriel Orozco, Martin Parr, Chris Jordan, and Erik Kessels. Since 2010, he has run The Curator Ship, an online resource for visual artists. Recent curatorial projects include the Daegu Biennial 2014 (Korea), the Photobook Week Aarhus (Denmark), and the exhibition Photobook Phenomenon for the CCCB center in Barcelona.
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Ines Weizman is a professor of architecture theory at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar where she heads the Centre for Documentary Architecture. In 2014 she published *Architecture and the Paradox of Dissidence* and together with Eyal Weizman authored the book *Before and After: Documenting the Architecture of Disaster.*
Photography is in astonishing flux. This winter, I have two engagements with photography: to read this book and contribute whatever I can by way of a Foreword; and to take photographs of the holiday season, using two cameras. The first is a roll-over scanner, the SVP PS4100, which I pull over any surface to get a high-resolution scan. I plan on using that to take “pictures” of things like people’s shirts, carpets, wallpaper, and china plates: it’s a kind of photography without lenses, and without people—a postmodern way of avoiding having too many relatives in my holiday pictures. The second camera is a Yashica Mat 124G medium-format TLR, which uses old-fashioned 120 format film. I have replaced the focus screen with a brighter one, an operation involving nearly microscopic screws and minuscule metal springs. The focus screens of those old film cameras are magical: they have an intimate, grainy look and a shallow depth of field; and on my camera, the image is reversed right to left. It’s an entirely different world from the brilliant sharp digital screens most photographers now see.

This is by way of saying photography is multiple. It isn’t a medium, like oil paint, and it isn’t just a social practice, a curatorial problem (as in the excellent contributions by Erik Kessels and Alessandra Mauro), a market phenomenon, or a technology. Even in material culture studies, thing theory, and actor-network theory, photography is an enigma. Alison Nordström puts that well when she says “part of the way we have lived with photographs is as things we kiss, things we burn in protest, things we rip up in anger, things we write on, things we fold in half so that they fit into an envelope, things we put in albums, or in frames on a gallery wall.”

Photography’s unmanageable diversity is very well reflected in this Routledge Companion to Photography and Visual Culture. This is a wonderful book, with a really surprising diversity of contents. There’s an essay by Roger Ballen, meditating on his desperate images, and later there’s a sober report about MOOCs at MoMA. There’s an essay on “kick-off images” (photos that get threads and viral streams started), and an unsettling chapter on the current state of image copyright (it turns out forgers
can invoke copyright to avoid having their work analyzed). There’s a wonderful chart of the cameras journalists brought to different wars, and, in another chapter, an overview of Chinese landscape photography, a subject linked to the complex field of Chinese landscape painting, which stretches from the tenth century to the present. It seems there’s no limit to what counts as scholarship on photography, and that’s as it should be.

Given this multiplicity it makes sense that the theory of photography is in spectacular disarray. I became aware of this when I edited the book *Photography Theory*. I expected arguments about Peirce’s index, and I got some; but many of the book’s forty-odd contributors didn’t have a position on photography’s realism, and—what surprised me even more—they didn’t have a reason for not having a position. It’s not surprising that photography doesn’t depend on a single theory, whether it’s Peirce, Flusser, Bourdieu, or Barthes, but it is surprising that many people don’t have any particular theory, and don’t mind that they don’t. In this book, too, theory comes and goes. Sometimes it’s front and center, and other times it’s as if photography needs no special conceptualization. Bernd Stiegler’s opening essay takes theory seriously, but he also theorizes theory’s dispersal (into a “pragmatic-praxeological orientation”), which may be itself more articulate than many practitioners and scholars require.

Along with the historian Erna Fiorentini, I’ve been writing a big textbook on the visual world. Our chapter on photography gave us special trouble, because it seems to us people not only think about photography, but think by means of photography. When we talked about focusing on problems, making sharp analysis, contrasting one thing against another, and framing our topics, we were talking in the languages of photography. This is a variant on an old claim made by Joel Snyder, that vision is something we picture, and the ways we picture the world are informed by photography. These sorts of Klein-bottle conundrums aren’t solvable: they can only be acknowledged and articulated as well as possible.

Out of this nearly unlimited field I’ll just remark on three issues, which submerge and resurface throughout this book. The three have to do with overlaps and new configurations of three fields: art history, visual culture, and art theory.

**Photographs and Language**

Several theorists haunt this text, especially Mitchell, Tagg, and Burgin. In different ways they have insisted on the constructed nature of photographs, on their entanglement in and dependence on language. Several essays show how unsettled people are about that legacy. Indeed, as Peter Smith says, “We may . . . wish to step back from a position of doubt,” and “accept that photographs have a certain resistance . . . to theoretical translation and . . . structures of meaning,” including language. That possibility has long been open in image theory, most notably in the German tradition. A photograph, as an exemplary visual object, might not sit easily with the discourse that purports to present and support it, and that gives rise to what Jean-Luc Nancy nicely calls “a distinct oscillation”: a relation that isn’t captured by formulas like “imagetext” or
“picture theory,” but resonates with concerns voiced by Gumbrecht, Moxey, Boehm, and others. There isn’t a simple answer here: in the book *On Pictures, And the Words That Fail Them*, I wrestled with the hope that images might be visible off to one side of language. Eventually I decided it was more challenging to try to understand how these battles work themselves out in academic discourse (as in the book *What is An Image?*).

One of the highlights of this book for me is the interview with Federica Chiocchetti about words and images. A longstanding fear and mistrust of images persists among writers; Chiocchetti notes Henry James’s mistrust of illustrations, which he felt despite the hundred-year tradition of illustrating novels, which has been documented by Paul Edwards’s *Soleil noir*. And now, despite scholars such as Jan Baetens (who is also a poet), and despite the overwhelming academic approval of Sebald’s project, contemporary novelists either avoid images or use them tentatively (Jonathan Safran Foer, Jesse Ball, and Ben Lerner are among many examples). An enormous amount of work needs to be done by curators, historians, and theorists to elucidate the possibilities of writing that accompanies images. *Writing with Images*, my own ongoing project, is a start; I think it’s important to look precisely and slowly at individual artworks and books. Another option is to create new forms: Maria Fusco did that with the *Happy Hypocrite*, and Tan Lin with his re-launch of *Seven Controlled Vocabularies*. Research into the relation of photographs and words has to include academic writing—most importantly, all of art history and visual culture studies, as in this book.

**Politics**

John Mraz’s interesting study of the political commitment of photographers of the Mexican Revolution suggests the work that still needs to be done about unacknowledged political affiliation among contemporary photojournalists. Lars Blunck’s essay on “staged” photography draws on Rudolf Arnheim’s distinctions between authenticity, correctness, and truth, which is a promising way forward beyond the impoverished discourse of the NPPA Code of Ethics. People who police honesty in photojournalism pay fastidious attention to staging and manipulation, but have nothing to say about the staged nature of photography itself.

On December 13, 2016, for example, the *New York Times* published a color photograph on its front page, showing a room in the Democratic National Committee headquarters. Later the paper had to apologize because the photographer admitted to removing a picture frame from a wall, because, he said, it produced glare. An article in *Petapixel*, December 15, reprinted the photojournalist’s Code of Ethics, and noted that the photographer was correct to apologize. But the Code of Ethics does not capture the political commitment of such a photograph—its dour, grim lighting and largely empty space, connoting gloom over the recent Presidential election. It may be anodine examples like this, in which there is none of the trauma Rita Leistner and Susan Sontag describe in the case of war photojournalism, that best show how the current conversation on objectivity and truth in photography remains ethically inadequate.
Visual Culture and Art History

Visual studies’ interests, such as politics and the expanded field of photography outside of fine art, are sometimes combined with residual art historical and fine art values, such as the question of how “difficult” it is to take a “good or great” photograph (as Michelle Bogre says). One possible subject for photographic education—the subject of the penultimate section of this book—could therefore be the difference between the leveled playing field of visual studies, and art history’s ongoing interest in fine art, media, and historical narratives.

Art history has also long been concerned with its narratives: the Gombrichian *Story of Art*, and, in modernism, the notion that one master narrative leads from Manet or Cézanne through to postmodernism. Gael Newton wrestles with a version of this when she asks about the assumption that there is only one world history of photography, that “nothing originates outside of Euramerica.” She associates that unitary narrative with photographic technology, which developed in a few places and was disseminated throughout the world. That is a temptation in photography studies, but a deeper reason for the assumption is the art historical insistence on a single narrative; and conversely, it hasn’t been so much a “visual culture or regionalist approach” that has counteracted the single narrative, but a series of art historical studies beginning in the 1990s. A visual culture approach to this issue would be to bypass it entirely. The more that scholars become interested in the differences between national histories of photography, the more they enter into a field whose terms are provided by art historical discussions. Essays like Irina Chmyreva’s “Perestroika Photography” or Susumu Shimonishi’s are examples of contributions that would fit well with art historical concerns. The interview with Chris Jordan and Swaantje Güntzel on eco-activism is more a matter of visual culture: it’s about politics and practice, rather than historical reception.

Visual culture’s strength has been the social, experiential, gendered, and political life of ordinary images, like the family photo albums or wedding photos in Mette Sandbye’s excellent contribution. Wolfgang Ulrich’s essay on contemporary trends in copyright in images, Alexander Rotter’s firsthand report of the auction scene, Lisa Richman’s study of the reception of Dorothea Lange’s *Migrant Mother*, or Érika Goyarrola’s informative history and analysis of the photo booth.

This isn’t to say there is some special value in keeping visual studies, art theory, and art history in distinct parts of the academy: it’s to say that without a literature meditating on the intellectual genealogies of those fields, studies of photography can end up as mixtures of partly incompatible values and interpretive strategies, such as the embrace of popular media alongside an investment in fine art, or a curiosity about art theory alongside an interest in pragmatics.

Photography just gets more interesting each year: less coherently framed, more historically and materially diverse, more entangled in politics, social life, democracy, epistemology, artificial intelligence, surveillance, ethics, the market, and our everyday sense of ourselves. It is already complex well beyond what any individual observer can encompass: surely an optimal condition for a thriving intellectual field.

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Why not skip introductions? Especially when it comes to compendiums, exhibition catalogues and other anthologies of seemingly unrelated texts, it might appear more practical and fun to flip through the book, back to front, have a glimpse at the index and then just start with any text of the collection. The shorter ones with promising titles and lots of illustrations are seen as accessible starting points. The next step would be to read the more complicated contributions (recognizable not only by their length, but also by long titles and lack of illustrations). It is only after being immersed in the book for a while that we might consider going back to the beginning, to have a look at the preface and introduction – which makes sense in a way, because the texts were actually written in that order. In case you have arrived at this place in this fashion, please allow me to welcome you and to put into context what you have read so far, before you continue on with your journey.

If you are a more methodical reader and have started the book from page one, you will now find what you were probably looking for: A short background information to what to expect in the following four-hundred odd pages, written by more than forty authors with diverse backgrounds from around the globe: scholars, artists, educators, curators, activists, publishers; people who work in the advertising industry and for photo agencies, auction houses, and archives; museum professionals and independent writers, collectors, bloggers and computer scientists. It really is a quite colorful crowd of individuals who have followed my invitation to contribute to this compendium, with the aim of defining the current state of theory and research in this field, but also to create a foundation for future scholarship and study.

The introductory texts to each of the seven chapters of the book will follow the convention of briefly presenting the authors and the focus of their work. They also feature a sentence or two about why they have been chosen, including, where applicable, an anecdote of how we got to know each other, or why I appreciate their work. This might be a rather unusual and overtly personal gesture, especially in the realms of Academia. However, I believe that this glimpse into the editor’s kitchen will be in the
Introduction

interest of the methodical clarity and transparency of the work, as it helps to understand the motivations behind the selection of authors and themes. Furthermore, these elucidations will allow a better understanding of the essays, case studies, and, especially, the interviews, as they contain allusions to personal relationships and ties within the photographic community. It should also be mentioned that the personal links to some of the authors helped to convince them to spend their valuable time on writing or adapting a piece for this book, as many of them are not full-time researchers and had no motivation to contribute, other than to share their knowledge, and I highly appreciate their generosity.

I also want to thank those colleagues who had to decline my invitation, for various reasons (mostly lack of time, which seems to be the plague of the twenty-first century), but were kind enough to put me in touch with other professionals in the field, to cover a certain research question. One of them was Liz Wells, whose *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (2015) was also one of my main inspirations when conceiving this book, together with Elkins’ *What Photography Is* (2011), and Mirzoeff’s *How to See the World* (2015), to name but a few.

Mostly, I would like to thank the photographers and artists who have released their images so we can use them to illustrate the articles, particularly Chris Jordan, for letting us use a detail of his famous Gyre (2009) as the cover image of the book. It was thanks to Olivia Estalayo (who coordinated the image rights for this book) that we managed to convince them to help us make this publication visually more attractive.

Even if these images have not been expressly created for this book – while the articles and interviews have – the fact that we may use them for a scholarly publication, not a fancy art catalog, is a treasured privilege that has become less common nowadays (see Chapter 5.4). I will use the chapter introductions to speak about these images and their authors briefly, where applicable and/or necessary.

The overall aim of this Companion is to provide a comprehensive survey of photography and visual culture, which addresses the main research questions in the field, such as truth value, materiality, gender, image rights, the art market and many others, but also to map out the emerging critical terrain around *post-photography, tactile photography, social photography* (a confusing term to describe image-making for the social media). Besides introducing the fundamental topics and ideas, this collection of essays, case studies, and interviews also represents the diversity of the research field and the complexity that arises when placing photography in the visual studies context.

In other words, what this book intends to be is a seminal entry point for students and professionals in the field of photography, both theoreticians and practicing artists. Photography, as of today, finds itself in a constant dialogue with a globalized society that feeds on visual input. This does not necessarily mean, of course, that people have become more visually literate – at least, not as much as could have been expected from a society where everybody has become a producer and consumer of vast numbers of images (see Chapter 6.6).

Cultural Studies has shown us ways to analyze the photographic medium in the framework of Visual Culture: Photography as Art, as memory, as a proof of things that have been, the photograph as an object, but also as pure information, data to be mined
and collected and (re)searched and stored by machines, by an Apparatus, in Vilém Flusser’s sense of the word (2000:70). A tool of repression and control, a useful device in the fields of the news, the fashion and advertisement industry, tourism, but also in medicine, psychology, and in the realms of political and ecological activism. The open boundaries of the photographic medium make it unique, powerful and vulnerable. Cameras and mobile phones produce still and moving images alike; they can scan objects to be 3D-printed as photosculptures (see Chapter 4.5); they can be used in installations, projections and performances; and they appear in publications of all kinds, including websites and blogs, newspapers and magazines, pamphlets and posters, books and Apps.

If photography is treated as a material form of (and for) cultural expression, further problems arise: How should photographs be collected, conserved, showcased, marketed, described, valued, and spoken about? Traditional views are contrasted with the new reality of an oversaturated global market, as the current situation of change has produced phenomena such as astronomic auction prices on the one side, and near-to-free stock photography on the other; a declining publishing industry, parallel to a boom of fanzines and self-published books; the digitalization of archives, in order to get rid of the physical materials, while preserving and indexing the content; and many other paradoxical developments.

To summarize, the book you hold in your hand gives an overview on the traditional way of looking at a photograph, in times of accelerated image consumerism; in a world where peripheries have become centers; access to visual information is seen as more important than property; copyleft meets copyright; the truth value of an image has become negotiable or even superfluous. It also sketches out current and future discussions and technological developments that promise to reshape the field of practice and investigation.

In this sense, the Routledge Companion to Photography and Visual Culture gives an overview of the history and future of the medium, the field of debate of photography as art, document, propaganda (including self-propagation in the form of selfies), a pure selling device, or a new universal language, with all its strengths and weaknesses.

References
The Routledge Companion to Photography and Visual Culture is a seminal reference source for the ever-changing field of photography. Comprising an impressive range of essays and interviews by experts and scholars from across the globe, this book examines the medium’s history, its central issues and emerging trends, and its much-discussed future. The collected essays and interviews explore the current debates surrounding the photograph as object, art, document, propaganda, truth, selling tool, and universal language; the perception of photography archives as burdens, rather than treasures; the continual technological development reshaping the field; photography as a tool of representation and control, and more.

One of the most comprehensive volumes of its kind, this companion is essential reading for photographers and historians alike.

Moritz Neumüller is a curator, educator and writer in the field of Photography and New Media. He has worked for institutions such as MoMA New York, La Fábrica Madrid and PhotoIreland Festival in Dublin. He is the academic director of the Photography Department of IED Madrid, and runs a postgraduate course for the IDEP school in Barcelona. He is a regular contributor to European Photography Magazine (Berlin) and Photoresearcher (Vienna), and has curated exhibitions on artists such as Bernd and Hilla Becher, Yamamoto Masao, Cristina de Middel, Stephen Gill, Gabriel Orozco, Martin Parr, Chris Jordan, and Erik Kessels. Since 2010, he has run The Curator Ship, an online resource for visual artists. Recent curatorial projects include the Daegu Biennial 2014 (Korea), the Photobook Week Aarhus (Denmark), and the exhibition Photobook Phenomenon for the CCCB center in Barcelona.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND VISUAL CULTURE