

## ‘WHAT DOES THIS PICTURE SAY?’ READING THE INTERTEXTUALITY OF VISUAL IMAGES

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Our social worlds are visually saturated. A feature of post-modern society is its relentless traffic in images, often borrowed from diverse times and places, and patched together in ever changing ways. This traffic serves commercial purposes, shapes identities, and increasingly stands in for reality itself. As a newspaper columnist noted, “most of us have seen far more images of reality than we have actual landscapes, personalities, or violence. Even an event as unique as September 11 can’t seem to stand on its own. Think of all those who said they felt they were watching a movie.”<sup>1</sup>

Teaching students to read this flow of images is a task shared across all school subjects. For social studies educators, though, the visual is significant because it carries and interprets the social. Pictures frame the events, issues, and values of our collective experience. They show us what to believe and do, and who our heroes and friends are supposed to be. They entertain, inform, comfort, disturb, and cajole. So do the images within social studies textbooks, and understanding how this works is part of learning to interpret the broader social world. A helpful tool is the concept of intertextuality as used within the literature of visual culture where authors theorize the production, circulation, uses, and changing meanings of images across time and place.<sup>2</sup> My purpose is to discuss three questions: What is intertextuality? What forms does it take? What are the implications? Such questions are important for social educators because “human experience is now more visual and visualized than ever before. In many ways, people in industrialized and post-industrial societies now live in visual cultures to an extent that seems to divide the present from the past.”<sup>3</sup> Intertextuality is central to this experience.

### What Is Intertextuality?

Intertextuality operates through the eye of the beholder. It refers to the ways that texts, whether written or visual, are interpreted one in the light of another to produce new meanings.<sup>4</sup> Whenever a pictorial image is read in terms of—or through, against, alongside—another image or a surrounding set of images and words, intertextuality is at work; meanings assigned to the image differ from those that would be drawn if it were interpreted in isolation.

The concept represents a pervasive and mundane phenomenon operating in all areas of visual culture. From newspapers to billboards to school textbooks, viewers interpret what they see in the light of what surrounds or is referenced. There is no pure self-referential image free of context or untainted by other images.<sup>5</sup> Interpretations are influenced by what is both inside and outside of a picture’s frame. This process is similar to a conversation in which participants understand a word’s nuance from the particularities of the ongoing discussion itself, such as who is speaking, about what, in response to whom, and in what tone. Likewise, everyday images take on meanings influenced by the physical and social milieu. An aboriginal mask originally used within a storytelling ritual acquires new meanings when hung alongside other items on a museum wall or in a basement TV room. A small stain-glass window signifies something different when removed from its original worshipful setting and incorporated into a remodeled kitchen. A newspaper’s lead photo speaks from the context of “the text, the title, the caption, the layout, and even the title of the newspaper or publication itself: a photograph can change its meaning as it passes from the page of the conservative to the radical press.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, our visual experiences during the day

are thoroughly intertextual because they “are read on to and through one another, lending ever-accruing layers of meanings and of subjective responses to each encounter we might have with film, TV, advertising, artwork, buildings, or urban environments.... [T]he scrap of an image connects with a sequence of a film and with the corner of a billboard or the window display of a shop we have passed by, to produce a new narrative....”<sup>7</sup> It is nearly impossible to interpret an image “on its own” within visually rich environments. Decades ago an art critic, John Berger, reminded us of the simple principle that “The meaning of an image is changed according to what one sees immediately beside it or what comes immediately after it. Such authority as it retains, is distributed over the whole context in which it appears.”<sup>8</sup> In short, context always enters into interpretations of what is seen; meanings are mediated by the surroundings.

Images in social studies textbooks also signify within a context of surrounding images, words, and layout. Interpretations aren’t fixed within the pictures themselves, but rather depend upon how they are viewed in relation to one another and other text. A typical chapter merges the written text with photographs, paintings, graphs, charts, timelines, and drawings. These little texts may reinforce, supplement, counter, subvert, or play off one another in subtle and sometimes ironic ways, giving rise to layered and even enigmatic meanings. They aren’t seen and interpreted in isolation. In other words, “Analysis of the meanings of pictures cannot be confined to what is within a frame because the ‘inside’ is always contaminated by the ‘outside.’”<sup>9</sup>

Intertextuality is a generative concept because it disturbs notions of interpretation often taken for granted by students. In the children’s game of “Where’s Waldo?” the viewer is either successful or not in finding the elusive Waldo in the crowded picture. But this game isn’t an appropriate metaphor for reading visual images. Interpretation isn’t a search for the singular meaning fixed within a text’s constituent parts, overall composition, or author’s intentions. There is no one Waldo to be found. Rather, meanings arise through the interaction of interpreter and text within the particularities and constraints of context. The ideas and feelings that an individual forms arise in part from the background experiences, knowledge, and interests brought to the image, and also upon the social and physical milieu of that encounter. Meanings are contingent upon all three—image, viewer, and context—and often become multiple and layered as time goes on.

Let’s now identify three forms of intertextuality evident within sixteen social studies textbooks authorized for use in grades eight through eleven in the schools of the Canadian province of British Columbia.<sup>10</sup> These books are similar to those used elsewhere in North America; the visual load of *Canada Revisited* for grade eight is typical, containing forty-one charts and diagrams, eighty-seven maps, 111 paintings, eighty-four photos, and a 184 illustrations integrated with an array of written text.<sup>11</sup> Each book was surveyed for pictorial examples of intertextuality, and by comparing the examples, inductively identified three broad forms of intertextuality: within images; across images; and between image and word. Within each of these three forms, examples were further compared to identify nine conventions used by the textbook authors to encourage intertextual readings. The following discussion draws upon selected examples to illustrate the three forms and nine conventions.

### Intertextuality Within Images

Intertextuality may operate within the frame of a single image. Even though a picture may be simple in design and contain few elements, relationships amongst the parts can evoke interest and rich meanings. A magazine photo shows a young Masai woman in traditional dress sitting on the ground and weaving what appears to be a leather belt.<sup>12</sup> On its own, the image doesn’t attract attention because it presents the artisan in a stereotypical yet respectful manner. However, this is only half of the original picture. To remind viewers how intertextuality within an image may shape meanings, the magazine then showed the composite image that includes camera-laden tourists hovering around and over the woman. The subject who quietly weaves is now an object. This enlarged frame is disquieting as we realize that the contrived act of weaving was part of a cultural theme park set-up for mutual exploitation and objectification—the

woman played the stereotype (for economic gain) so that based in tourists could buy “authentic” images that best fit their expectations. The image’s internal relationship is uncomfortable.

Two conventions encourage this form of intertextuality—binary juxtaposing and visual quoting—although the former was much more common within the textbooks than the latter.

### *Binary Juxtaposing*

A simple device is to bring together two disparate ideas, values, conditions, or events within a single picture, where the effect of the contrast is to provoke and nudge evaluative interpretation. An early documentary photographer who pioneered visual juxtaposition in the 1920s was Martin Chambi, a Peruvian Indian who used understated contrast to disquiet the viewer.<sup>13</sup> Peru’s wealthy classes sought his talent to record special events of their lives, but in these commissions he often included indirect comment on contemporary society. Typical is a portrait of a lavishly dressed bride standing on a grand staircase within an ostentatious room framed by statues, paintings, chandeliers, marble tile, and a vaulted stained-glass ceiling; as part of the composition, though, one can barely see the partial image of an aboriginal servant woman standing in the darkness of a back corner. Subtle contrasts are encouraged through the way the two women echo and invert one another, and meanings arise as a viewer recognizes these oppositions.

Newspapers extensively use this form of juxtaposition for editorial comment. A photo of hundreds of Palestinian men bowed at Friday prayer is quietly foregrounded by a rifle barrel and the partial shadow of an Israeli soldier. Other journalistic contrasts are more in-your-face, as when a young man is seen sitting on a sidewalk beside a paper cup and a pigeon, and immediately behind are a young man and woman sitting at a table with beer glasses. Although the street person and the restaurant patrons could reach out and touch one another if it weren’t for the window separating them, neither notices the other across their very different social worlds.<sup>14</sup> In visual similes such as these, two different things are brought together (i.e., portrayed side-by-side, below/above, foreground/background), thereby implying a likeness in some way.<sup>15</sup> Whether subtle or blatant, the implied likeness is designed to induce discomfort in the viewer and invite judgment, although the nature of the evaluation depends upon what is brought to the image.

In a grade ten book, contrasting histories and futures are suggested in a painting of Britain’s Queen Victoria at her 1897 Jubilee. She stands in regal glory in Westminster Abby before a large crowd of admiring and well-dressed subjects representing those groups in British society who benefited from imperial rule—the judiciary, church, government, military, education, science, and upper classes—whereas trying to get her attention from behind are dejected Irish families who suffered under British rule.<sup>16</sup> The composition raises questions about the binary divisions of Victorian society (e.g., rich and poor, those who benefit and those who don’t, colonizers and colonized) and casts a moral judgment on the celebrations. A similar composition is found in a 1933 photo of five unemployed men sitting on the ground below a huge billboard portraying a well-dressed man dining in an exclusive restaurant; the ad is for a brand of ketchup widely used across “the British Empire.” The photo is remarkable for its many contrasts: above/below, employed/unemployed, smiling/dejected, scarcity/abundance, local/empire, documentary/advertisement, individual/group, glamour/unglamorous, hopeful/hopeless, stylish/unstylish, present/future, etc. On the same page is a visual graph of the business cycle (prosperity, slowdown, depression, recovery) echoing the up/down and rich/poor contrasts shown by the photo.<sup>17</sup> This rich intertextuality attracts the eye and has potential to motivate discussion.

But binary juxtapositions can also lead to undesirable interpretations. A picture of two cows lying across streetcar tracks running up the middle of a busy street in Calcutta has inherent interest for grade eight readers because of the novelty of its internal binaries (traditional/modern, urban/rural) and the ambiguity about what the drivers of the approaching streetcar and the other vehicles will do in this situation. The puzzling caption, however, shifts the photo’s internal tension into a larger one between North and South: “Could this scene take place in your town or city? Explain why or why not.”<sup>18</sup> Unless this question is thoughtfully countered in classrooms, there is a danger for severe “othering” and simplistic stereotyping.

Only in one instance did the books draw explicit attention to the use of binary juxtaposition. A chapter on India contains a photo depicting four villagers filling their water containers from a rough public well, and in the background stands the Taj Mahal. This juxtaposition suggests rich tensions of wealth/poverty, public/private, past/present, crowded/spacious, ruler/ruled, and social class, and the caption further exploits the ambiguous ground between the background and foreground:

Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal as a memorial for his beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal. Many people think the building is the most beautiful and perfect structure in the world. This is a view you don't often see. These Indian villagers are fetching water from a well behind the Taj Mahal. Most Indian villages lack drinking water facilities and depend on public wells such as this one. What does this photograph encourage you to think about? (grade eight)<sup>19</sup>

The concluding question asks readers to recognize the contrast and the larger development issues it speaks to. Herein lie possibilities for intertextuality to evoke interpretation.

### *Visual Quoting*

Sometimes political cartoons, commercial advertisements, and journalistic photos incorporate borrowed themes, symbols, or compositional elements from famous images.<sup>20</sup> For example, the touching of God's and Adam's fingers in Michelangelo's *Creation* painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, or Rosenthal's photo of the flag being raised at Iwo Jima (February 23, 1945), may be paraphrased in novel or ironic ways to create visual metaphors that encourage new or layered meanings. Similarly, the use of referencing in architecture is often blatant, as when a new building incorporates pieces taken from the building it replaces (e.g., decorative fronts and arches, signage and ornaments), or quotes aspects of another building, thereby creating novel forms of aesthetic mimicry.

Although the convention of visual quoting is common within popular culture, its use within textbooks is rare. In a grade eleven text, a photo of a bronze sculpture from World War I titled "Canada's Golgotha" illustrates visual borrowing. According to the caption, the image depicts "the corpse of a Canadian soldier nailed to a barn door as if being crucified. A group of enemy soldiers are mocking the body. In the Christian faith, Golgotha is the place where Jesus Christ was crucified."<sup>21</sup> The sculpture was based on an unverified (and later contested) incident alleged to have happened during the Battle of Ypres in April 1915, and the textbook uses the sculpture as an example of war propaganda. However, the purposes and effects of the sculpture's internal intertextuality are not raised. This is unfortunate because its power to generate controversial meanings is enhanced as viewers recognize compositional features explicitly borrowed from a long tradition of European paintings and sculptures on the crucifixion theme. Viewers more fully appreciate the image as they recognize this allusion and how the metaphor provokes meaning.

Only one of the sixteen books explicitly alerted viewers to the effects of visual quoting. An undated drawing romanticizes a skirmish between a few Viking and aboriginal warriors on a Newfoundland beach. The caption moves grade nine viewers from the foregrounded fight to the two boats in the background, and points out that the larger boat anchored offshore "is an ancient Greek galley, a long, narrow ship propelled by oars. The galley was built for sheltered seas, not crossing an ocean. The Vikings would not have used such a ship." The smaller boat pulled up on the shore "is a fairy-tale craft. It bears little resemblance to a real Viking ship."<sup>22</sup> The caption infers that the artist borrowed the Greek galley and the smaller mythical boat to enhance the status and meaning of the Viking explorers.

But visual quoting is only recognized as students are able to bring relevant cultural capital to the image. Lack of background knowledge is an obvious impediment to seeing what is paraphrased from other sources, and how it is used. Students unaware of allusions to past events, or how visual metaphors work, for example, miss subtleties of political cartoons. When faced with a political cartoon that borrows from Michelangelo's *Creation*, for instance, viewers identify a young person and an old man pointing to each other, but are unable to move beyond this literal level to the cultural (the meanings of "Adam" or "creation") and to the intertextual (what the metaphor draws upon to imply a punch line). Visual metaphors only work as the viewer recognizes the two unlike elements that have been brought together.<sup>23</sup> Even more difficult are cartoons that use both binary juxtaposing and visual quoting at the same time.

Although all textbooks featured political cartoons, readers were never alerted to intertextual devices used in producing the messages.

### Intertextuality Across Images

Galleries and museums place diverse images in the same physical location so that they can be read off of each other. During the summer of 2002, for instance, London's Tate Modern Gallery brought together 200 paintings and sculptures of Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse. By setting the pieces in compare-and-contrast groupings, the curators encouraged viewers to interpret each piece as framed by the others. These juxtapositions allowed for greater nuance in understanding the artists' styles and concerns, and also raised questions about how they borrowed and quoted one another's ideas.<sup>24</sup> The point was to provoke thought.

Intertextuality operates within textbooks when two or more images are in close spatial proximity on the same page or in a chapter. "Before the reader's eye, the interaction and association of images create meaning."<sup>25</sup> When faced with a panel of images, a viewer attends to each against the background of the others, as well as the emerging sense of the entire panel; interpretation of any one piece is influenced by its perceived relationship to others. Meaning cumulates through the back-and-forth comparison of parts and in the light of the whole. Even if a student casually spends but a moment on an image the viewing is framed by surrounding text and motivated by what he or she brings to the reading (i.e., expectations, prior knowledge). The effect can be the enlarging or narrowing of meanings.

Textbooks used four conventions to encourage intertextual readings across images: pairing, sequencing, clustering, and scattering. These are ordered from greatest to least use.

#### *Pairing*

The placement of two images side-by-side or one after another is widely used across billboards, magazines and textbooks, encouraging viewers to notice similarities and differences, and thereby to interpret each image in expanded ways. This intertextual blurring of boundaries between two images encourages a surplus of meanings. In a grade nine text, for instance, paired illustrations of the interiors of Roman Catholic and protestant churches from the sixteenth century point to variations of belief, values, and practice implied by the contrasting architectures, ornamentations, and furniture arrangements.<sup>26</sup> Meanings arise as one notices contrasting details.

Pairing also facilitates mutual reinforcement. An engraving from nineteenth century Sheffield portrays rows of multistory factories, foregrounded by a street on which well-dressed men and women chat, stroll, walk dogs, and enjoy the urban sights; except for the smoke belching from scores of tall stacks, the scene is one of prosperity, social gentility, and leisure. On the following page is an engraving that displays, according to the caption, "The interior view of a typical textile factory."<sup>27</sup> It shows five elaborately dressed and coifed women and a young girl attending to the machines in a roomy, clean, well-lit, and ordered workplace without the presence of authority figures. The two images mutually reinforce a benign view of life in and out of the factory that was healthy, humane, and gentle, even though a very different message about the lives of workers is provided through the surrounding written text. It describes, with the support of quotes from primary documents, the "horrendous working conditions" of child labor in textile factories. Yet, the pair of mutually supportive engravings suggests something different. If recognized, this intertextual reinforcement between images, and their tension with the written text, beg to be explored: Why might the artists have chosen to portray factory life in such positive terms? Why might the textbook editors have selected such images to accompany the written text?

#### *Sequencing*

Sequenced images often imply temporal relationships. The simplest sequence involves two images placed together to invoke a storyline around linear change, progress, fulfillment, or causation. Here are some examples of narrative pairs of photos:

- Anticipation and reflection: An image of a politician in the joy of victory and then in the agony of defeat four years later, adds poignancy to the political issue under discussion.<sup>28</sup>
- Then and now: City streetscapes from the start and end of the twentieth century reinforce the idea of urban change and progress.<sup>29</sup>
- Before and after: The shape of three World War I soldiers waiting to charge the enemy line from their grave-like trench is mirrored in another image by the shape of the Vimy Ridge War Memorial to 12,000 soldiers for whom there is no known grave.<sup>30</sup>
- Antecedent and consequence: A dozen soldiers firing heavy artillery at a distant invisible enemy in the Korean War is followed by a close-up of a soldier examining a wounded child.<sup>31</sup>
- Alternative outcomes: A truck filled with boisterous waving soldiers as they return from Vimy Ridge, May 1917, is followed by a more subdued picture of a wounded soldier in a hospital surgery room.<sup>32</sup>

Only once did a textbook draw critical attention to the use of narrative pairing. Matched with a discussion of residential schools for aboriginal children in the early 1900s is a pair of photos first showing a child in traditional costume before entering school and then in European dress and pose after having been in the school for some time. In this case, the authors subvert the implied story of progress by pointing out its propagandistic purpose: “Before-and-after photographs like these were commonly used to illustrate the supposed benefits of the residential school experience. How do these photographs summarize the purpose of the residential school system?”<sup>33</sup> However, no textbook explicitly encouraged readers to question how the textbook itself paired images to suggest or reinforce storylines.

Sequences also include multiple images arranged in narrative strips. Each chapter of a grade eight text begins with a temporal sequence of nine or ten line drawings that overview the major events and “essential information” to follow; the sequence didactically highlights the key markers in a story of historical progress to be presented by the chapter. The other use of narrative strips in the same book is a photo essay in which sequenced images summarize a theme that has been discussed. A seven-picture sequence presents itself as documentary evidence for “Life in the Northwest Territories” around 1900, and the captions declare what each photo “shows.”<sup>34</sup> But tensions within or among the images are not raised, and the resulting smooth historical representation is left unchallenged.

### *Clustering*

Images closely clustered together produce a montage effect over one or two pages. No temporal sequencing is implied, and each part of the mosaic contributes a point of view or piece of information to the overall implied theme of the grouping. Meanings taken from any one image are influenced by the surrounding visual field, including proximity (close/far, before/after, above/below), size (bigger/smaller), and relative emphasis (coloring, shading); one or more of the images may have a dominant influence within the cluster. Depending upon its location, a picture serves as background context, foreground framing, or contrast for others.

A common use of clustering is to illustrate selective aspects of a historical issue or event. Old photos may serve to define who the main players were in an important legal or political decision, or portray an event from different physical or social vantage points.<sup>35</sup> As an example, a collection of nineteenth-century illustrations showing immigration to the New World depicts crowds trying to get tickets from a shipping agent, boarding crowded ships, and living in squalid conditions within a ship’s hold.<sup>36</sup> To an alert reader who interprets each picture in the light of the others, the montage provides textured and conflicting details that add human interest to the event and imply that one interpretation is always partial and limited.

### *Scattering*

The least explicit convention for encouraging intertextuality is the scattering of similar images throughout a textbook, rather than being placed together as a tableau. The effect of the related images is to

subtly legitimize an idea or emphasize a theme through repetition. Nine photos of contemporary aboriginal Americans are located throughout a grade eleven book, but if these images were brought together in one cluster, their collective emphasis would be very apparent. Eight of the images include aspects of traditional and stereotypical lifestyles (e.g., braids, feathers, fur, leather, beadwork) and seven portray individuals engaged in explicit political activities related to native issues. Even though the images are scattered, their cumulative effect over the course of the book may be a subtle narrowing of perceptions about the diversities of aboriginal lifestyles, occupations, issues, political beliefs, and aspirations.<sup>37</sup>

A student who recognizes the scattering of similar images throughout a textbook is then able to question the theme and its effects. In a grade ten history text, women are de-emphasized visually; only one historical portrait is of a woman, and in just four other images can one even identify a woman within a group (a photo from Dawson City during the Yukon gold rush of 1898, for example, shows twelve men and one woman).<sup>38</sup> The cumulative lack constitutes a subtle null curriculum implying that women were minor players in the historical narrative.<sup>39</sup>

### Intertextuality Between Image and Word

A third form of intertextuality arises when written and visual texts are placed together, thereby providing context for and implying comment upon each other. Educators have for centuries manipulated the placement of image and word to highlight messages, reinforce desired storylines, and control interpretations. A seventeenth-century woodcut used to teach the alphabet in American Pilgrim schools, for example, matched each alphabet letter with an image and a rhyming couplet taken from a Biblical story or injunction.<sup>40</sup> The letter “A” shows Eve picking fruit from a tree in which the serpent sits; the couplet states, “In Adam’s Fall, We Sinned All.” The letter “T” is matched with a rough sketch of the grim reaper holding a scythe and hourglass, and linked with the reminder that “Time cuts down all, Both great and small.” Each of the twenty-six letters, with its matching image and text, prompts readers to infer practical moral insights for daily living. Such a synthesis of word and image gives rise to “composite meanings that exceed what can be achieved with words or images alone.”<sup>41</sup>

The use of word/image intertextuality is no less evident in current social studies textbooks, although not employed for the same strong moral purposes. Two conventions are very popular (anchoring the image, and framing the word), whereas the third is rarely used (prompting viewer reflexivity).

#### *Anchoring the Image*

According to Roland Barthes, the most common intertextual convention is the anchoring of images with captions.<sup>42</sup> This overused device prompted Susan Sontag to wryly complain that “all photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their captions.”<sup>43</sup> Usually the blatant purpose is to control the indeterminacy and multiplicity of meanings, and thereby to encourage a desired reading. The caption tells what the image is about or at least what to notice within it. At times this provides students with a helpful way into a picture by highlighting features that may otherwise be overlooked by the casual viewer, but on the other hand, there can be an impoverishing effect that narrows rather than opens possibilities for meaning. The visual may even be changed into a mere illustration of the caption: “Tell me first what this is and then I will look at it.”<sup>44</sup> Some of the strongest examples of constrained interpretation occur when captions didactically inform readers what is meant, and in such cases it is worth questioning the caption’s authority to present meaning as unitary, unambiguous, stable, and fixed.

A more interesting use of a written anchor is to counter the implied values within an image by putting them into explicit relief. Then the viewer has to resolve the conflict through a new synthesis. In a chapter (grade eight) discussing the Protestant Reformation, an engraving of the elaborate and wealthy interior of a Vatican church is juxtaposed rather starkly with an italicized scriptural quotation in grand Elizabethan English: “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.” Although the contradiction is designed to raise questions about the image, the more conciliatory explanation softens the effect: “Before the Protestant Reformation, the Church maintained its great wealth through the taxes it forced people to pay. Many people of the time felt that the Church was

ignoring Jesus' message that a spiritually perfect life could be gained only by those who gave their money away and not by those who craved money."<sup>45</sup>

There is always a danger that a caption speaks more about its author's point of view than to the image. A magazine editor once printed eight portraits of Fidel Castro, each with a different caption, to demonstrate how easily meanings can be shaped.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, the effects of anchors become evident when students compare how textbooks use the same image, in what context, and with what caption.<sup>47</sup> For example, a line drawing depicts the Battle of Seven Oaks (June 19, 1816) in which a few settlers from the Red River Colony of the Hudson's Bay Company (near the present city of Winnipeg, Manitoba) were killed in a skirmish with a group of Metis aligned with the competing North West Company. In the style of Western comic books, the drawing's internal binary romanticizes the valor of the gentlemen settlers and demonizes the barbarous Metis. This ideologically loaded image is anchored differently in three textbooks:

- "The battle of Seven Oaks. Who is winning?" (grade nine).<sup>48</sup>
- "An artist's interpretation of the Battle of Seven Oaks" (grade ten).<sup>49</sup>
- "This romanticized view of the Battle of Seven Oaks shows Semple and his army of twenty-eight colonists taking a brave stand against the Metis. How does the event shown here compare with the description of the battle on page 146?" (grade ten).<sup>50</sup>

The differences are instructional. The first treats the image as a transparent window on what happened; the second gently reminds the reader that this is a representation, whereas the third questions the representation and asks for further intertextual readings. As students compose alternative captions and discuss the effects, comparisons would illustrate how meanings are highlighted and hidden through image/caption relationships.

### *Framing the Word*

Images can also be used to frame written storylines in at least three ways. First, they provide documentation for the word. Most pictures within newspapers and magazines do much more than lighten the written text: "they also serve to reassure the reader. Reassurance comes from the impression that the camera cannot lie. Any report—be it of a famine or a football game—will look more immediate and convincing if it is supported by photographic evidence," says a magazine editor, "A photograph adds a certain solidity."<sup>51</sup> The strategic placement of visual evidence lends a sense of authenticity, immediacy, compellingness, and legitimacy to what is said. When a grade eleven textbook contrasts the rich and poor worlds of childhood in the early 1900s, the accompanying photos seem to make the stark social class differences empirically obvious and more believable.<sup>52</sup> In another grade eleven book, discussion of urbanization around 1910 makes the claim that "The growing cities were filled with contrasts between the wealthy and the poor. The rich lived in luxury.... Across town, the working class lived in shacks and overcrowded tenements."<sup>53</sup> The implied "proof" lies in the contrasting evidence provided within side-by-side photos, one of a large sitting room adorned with rugs, chandelier, art objects, and ornate furniture (but no people), and the other a small one-room home containing benches, cooking utensils, clotheslines, and seven people. Such framing reinforces a notion of the word's truth-value. Depending upon the reader, though, there is a danger that vivid framing leads to simplistic and stereotypical conclusions about the past. "There is a reciprocal relationship here," rightly warn Walker and Chaplin, "we see certain pictures as realistic portrayals of the world, and pictures can in turn influence the way we perceive reality."<sup>54</sup>

Framing also gives a dispositional tone to a paragraph or chapter. This occurs when images infuse emotion or attitude to the surrounding written text. In an example from grade nine, a feeling for the exciting exploits and grand achievements of heroic explorers and traders is generated through romantic drawings that celebrate the bravery and strength of these larger-than-life characters as they moved from the Hudson Bay to the Pacific.<sup>55</sup> Scattering such images throughout the chapter helps to foreground a consistent ideological viewpoint on westward expansion. A more pedagogical use of framing occurs in two grade eleven books organized around major historical issues; each section is introduced by having

readers interpret the work of a well-known artist, thereby encouraging an interpretive mindset; this open tone is then maintained through each chapter's use of thoughtful questions and interpretive captions.<sup>56</sup>

Engaging images can be used to focus particular attention on issues outlined in the written text. A two-page discussion for grade eleven—on the issue of whether or not foreign aid should be linked to a government's human rights record—is accompanied by a dramatic picture of two unemployed widows and a destitute child relying on alms to survive during the Taliban regime; the caption states that their condition was the result of their government's actions and policies that hurt the economy and discriminated against women.<sup>57</sup> Even though readers are asked to carefully consider the pros and cons of foreign aid, this photo gives a strong sense of moral urgency to the issue and implies that something should be done.

### *Prompting Reflexivity*

An educationally desirable (but rarely used) device counters the apparent ease with which readers take written and visual texts, or their own views, for granted. Dissonance is gently seeded or graphically focused in order to provoke questions and motivate inquiry. In a pictorial essay entitled "Life at the Turn of the Century [1900]," eight contrasting photos deliberately disturb familiar generalizations about what life was like, but the viewer is also asked to question the images: "What do these photographs reveal about Canada at the beginning of the twentieth century? What don't they tell you?"<sup>58</sup> Captions counter the point of view, selectivity or implications of each image; for example, "This photograph shows child labourers at the cotton mill in Marysville, NB. The photo was commissioned by the owner of the cotton mill. Do you think this makes a difference to what you see in the photo? Explain." (grade eleven).<sup>59</sup> Questioning both the photo and one's interpretation is encouraged.

Another way to prompt reflexivity is to sandwich an entire grade eleven textbook between two sets of images that disturb and even imply criticism of what lies between the covers. The introductory and concluding picture galleries—showing social values from the beginning and then the end of the twentieth century—are designed to raise questions about whether changes were for the better, and also about what is neglected in the book's discussion.<sup>60</sup> Another grade eleven text subtly book-ends itself with two visually framed poems by aboriginal authors; the first, entitled "History Lesson," counters the book's forthcoming Eurocentric narrative of unfolding national progress, and the closing poem questions its unitary sense of national identity.<sup>61</sup> If recognized by readers, these devices set a critical mood and encourage reflection on one's own expectations and assumptions.

### What are the Implications?

Intertextuality refers to the ways in which images reference one another, and how viewers interpret them in the light of other visual images or written texts. This article outlined three forms of intertextuality evident within social studies textbooks—within images, across images, and between image and word—and nine conventions used by authors to encourage intertextual readings. When made aware of intertextuality, students are enabled to appreciate and critique its presence and effects within textbooks and everyday life.

Never before have learning materials been so visual, containing such an array of historical paintings, photos, editorial cartoons, and other illustrations that speak to social identities, public issues, and ideas about the past and future. Yet none of the sixteen books examined in this study explicitly alerted readers to the concept—its devices, purposes, and effects—as a tool for understanding this rich visual offering, and in only five instances was there even any oblique reference to it. Nor was any hint ever given that textbooks also deliberately set up intertextual conditions to provoke thought. The finger was pointed elsewhere when one book briefly mentioned the power of newspapers (not textbooks!) to match images with written text in order to shape public attitudes towards issues, events, or personalities. This point was illustrated through a photo of a prominent Canadian politician fumbling a football during an election campaign, and how the media used the image to discredit him. "Like everyone else," students are informed, "reporters and editors have opinions and prejudices" in how they select and match

information.<sup>62</sup> This non-controversial claim about “everyone else” was never extended to show that textbook writers are similar to newspaper editors when selecting and matching material. Students are left to assume that books at the very heart of classroom life, unlike other secondary sources of information such as newspapers, are neutral vehicles for conveying information accurately and in transparent ways. This assumption is strengthened further when the focus is on what is seen (the content of images) while bypassing how we see (interpretive tools). Intertextuality then slips by unnoticed.

Some introduction to the concept counters this instrumental view of interpretation by highlighting the contingency of meaning. Because image and context both influence viewing, students need opportunity to query not only what they see, but how. This can be initiated as teachers raise occasional questions about the effects that one text has on another (i.e., a caption on a picture, an image on surrounding paragraphs, a group of images on each other) thereby reminding students that meaning doesn’t reside ready-made on a page, waiting to be discovered, but arises through the encounter between reader and text, influenced by both the image’s design and placement, and by what viewers bring to it. For example: How might interpretations of this picture be influenced by its surroundings (e.g., caption, paragraphs, side-bar text, another picture, graph, chart)? In what ways does this picture influence how surrounding text and images are read? Why would you delete or add an image, change the location of images, or modify a caption within this chapter? How might the types of images and their placement color the chapter’s storyline? Such questions encourage consideration of how context evokes meanings. Where appropriate, students can also be alerted to the textbook’s use of intertextual conventions and discuss their effectiveness. I am not suggesting that this become the focus of yet another planned lesson. Rather, the concept can be called upon at opportune moments to generate second looks. Some connoisseurship is requisite to being a visual critic.

Students already have much experience with images, and when questioned, would recognize many intertextual conventions. What they may lack is a vocabulary to facilitate critical discussion of how interpretation is shaped by elements within and around an image. As Nicholas Mirzoeff urges, “the gap between the wealth of visual experience in contemporary culture and the ability to analyze that observation marks both the opportunity and the need [for explicit consideration].”<sup>63</sup> Over time, such discussion deepens understanding of how interpretation depends upon reader, text, and context, and how this contingency leads to surplus of meanings. Such opportunity is needed because of student diversities. Every image is a product of a time and place and carries assumptions that may serve to include and exclude viewers based upon social class, ethnocultural, religious, and educational backgrounds. A difficulty, notes historian Peter Bourke, is that sometimes “images are part of a whole culture and cannot be understood without a knowledge of that culture.... To interpret the message it is necessary to be familiar with the cultural codes.”<sup>64</sup> Many students with roots in Western European traditions, for example, would be hard pressed to access images that draw allusions from colonized histories or Islamic cultural traditions. Students don’t bring a common stock of cultural knowledge and experience into the social studies classroom; within large urban school districts, students representing sixty or seventy mother tongues bring dissimilar cultural tools to their textbooks.<sup>65</sup> More than ever before, social educators need to take some time to help students attain generative tools for reading images within their textbooks and elsewhere.

The unsettling implication for some students may be a realization that visual meanings are potentially multiple, unstable over time, and shift across situation. When they confront the question “What is this image saying?” there may be no one correct answer to be found within the image’s design features or the artist’s intentions. Answers depend upon its uses within particular contexts, relationships to other texts within those contexts, and interpreters’ purposes. Conflicting interpretations, suggests Stuart Hall, are then best explored through discussion:

Since there is no law which can guarantee that things will have ‘one, true meaning,’ or that meanings won’t change over time, work in this area is bound to be interpretive—a debate between, not who is ‘right’ and who is ‘wrong,’ but between equally plausible, though sometimes competing and contested, meanings and interpretations. The best way to ‘settle’ such contested readings is to look again at the concrete example and to try to justify one’s reading in detail in relation to the actual practices and forms of signification used, and what meanings they seem to you to be producing.

One soon discovers that meaning is not straightforward or transparent.... It is a slippery customer, changing and shifting with context, usage and historical circumstances. It is therefore never finally fixed. It is always putting off or 'deferring' its rendezvous with Absolute Truth. It is always being negotiated and inflected, to resonate with new situations.<sup>66</sup>

Within the give-and-take of discussion, interpreters have the opportunity to clarify their purposes and provide evidence, and to learn open-mindedness in the light of other interpretations. Meanings are thereby enriched as intertextuality is engaged.

## NOTES

1. Rick Salutin, "We're Overdrawn at the Image Bank," *The Globe and Mail* (January 11, 2002), A15.
2. There are a number of visual culture readers: Chris Jenks, ed., *Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1997); John Walker and Sarah Chaplin, *Visual Culture: An Introduction* (Manchester, Great Britain: Manchester University Press, 1997); Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., *The Visual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Mieke Bal, ed., *The Practice of Cultural Analysis* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999); Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall, eds., *Visual Culture: The Reader* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1999); Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies. Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2000); Liz Wells, ed., *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Liz Wells, ed., *The Photography Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003). To date this literature has had limited application within social education, as for example: Douglas Kellner, "Reading Images Critically: Toward a Postmodern Pedagogy," in Henry Giroux, ed., *Postmodernism, Feminism, and Cultural Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 60-82; Jennifer Pazienza and Gerald Clarke, "Integrating Text and Image: Teaching Art and History," in Ian Wright and Alan Sears, eds., *Trends & Issues in Canadian Social Studies* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Pacific Educational Press, 1997), 175-94; Avner Segall, "'De-transparent-izing' Media Texts in the Social Studies Classroom: Media Education as Historical/Social Inquiry," in Ian Wright and Alan Sears, eds., *Trends & Issues in Canadian Social Studies* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Pacific Educational Press, 1997), 328-49; Walter Werner, "Reading Authorship Into Texts," *Theory & Research in Social Education* 28 (Spring 2000): 193-219; Walter Werner, "Reading Visual Texts," *Theory & Research in Social Education* 30 (Summer 2002): 401-28; Walter Werner, "Reading Visual Rhetoric: Political Cartoons," *International Journal of Social Education* 18 (Spring/Summer 2003): 81-98.
3. Nicolas Mirzoeff, 4.
4. Walker and Chaplin, 142.
5. Evans and Hall, 11.
6. Martin Lister, "Photography in the Age of Electronic Imaging," in Liz Wells, ed., *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 324.
7. Irit Rogoff, "Studying Visual Culture," in Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., *The Visual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 14, 16.
8. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth, Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1972), 29.
9. Walker and Chaplin, 140.
10. Vivien Bowers and Stan Garrod, *Our Land: Building the West* [grade 10] (Toronto, Ontario: Gage, 1987); Desmond Morton, *Canada in a Changing World: History* [grade 11] (Toronto, Ontario: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988); Penney Clark and Roberta McKay, *Canada Revisited* [grade 8] (Edmonton, Alberta: Arnold Publishing, 1992); Diane Eaton and Garfield Newman, *Canada. A Nation Unfolding* [grade 11] (Toronto, Ontario: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1994); Carl Smith, Daniel McDevitt, and Angus Scully, *Canada Today* [grade 11] (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall Canada, 1996); Beverly Armento, Jorge Klor de Alva, Gary Nash, Christopher Salter, Louis Wilson, and Karen Wixson, *Across the Centuries* [grade 8] (Toronto, Ontario: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997); Bradley Cruyton and Douglas Wilson, *Challenge of the West. A Canadian Retrospective From 1815-1914* [grade 10] (Toronto, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 1997); Alyn Mitchner and Joanne Tuffs, *Global Forces of the Twentieth Century* [grade 11] (Edmonton, Alberta: Reidmore Books, 1997); Michael Cranny, *Crossroads. A Meeting of Nations* [grade 9] (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall Ginn Canada, 1998); Michael Cranny, *Pathways. Civilizations Through Time* [grade 8] (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall Ginn Canada, 1998); Daniel Francis, Jennifer Hobson, Gordon Smith, Stan Garrod, and Jeff Smith, *Canadian Issues: A Contemporary Perspective* [grade 11] (Toronto, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 1998); Michael Cranny, Graham Jarvis, Garvin Moles, and Bruce Seney, *Horizons. Canada Moves West* [grade 10] (Toronto, Ontario: Prentice Hall, 1999); Elspeth Deir and John

Fielding, *Canada. The Story of a Developing Nation* [grade 8] (Toronto, Ontario: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 2000); Phyllis Arnold, Penney Clark, and Ken Westerland, *Canada Revisited* [grade 8] (Edmonton, Alberta: Arnold Publishing, 2000); Angelo Bolotta, Charles Hawkes, Fred Jarman, Marc Keirstead, and Jennifer Watt, *Canada. Face of a Nation* [grade 10] (Toronto, Ontario: Gage Educational Publishing, 2000); Michael Cranny and Garvin Moles, *Counterpoint: Exploring Canadian Issues* [grade 11] (Toronto, Ontario: Prentice Hall, 2001).

11. Clark and McKay, *Canada Revisited* (Edmonton, Alberta: Arnold Publishing, 1992).
12. Peter Stalker, "Can I Take Your Picture?" *The New Internationalist* 185 (July 1988): 21.
13. "A Peruvian Pioneer," *The New Internationalist* 185 (July 1988): 23-25.
14. *The Globe and Mail* (January 25, 2001), A13.
15. Walker and Chapman, 120.
16. Cranny, Jarvis, Moles, and Seney, 60.
17. *Ibid.*, 311.
18. Cranny, *Pathways*, 354.
19. *Ibid.*, 361.
20. Walker and Chaplin, 142.
21. Francis et al., 61.
22. Cranny, *Crossroads*, 218.
23. Michael DeSousa and Martin Medhurst, "The Editorial Cartoon as Visual Rhetoric: Rethinking Boss Tweed," *Journal of Visual/Verbal Language* 2 (Fall 1982): 43-52.
24. Karen Burshtein, "Showdown at the Tate Modern," *The Globe and Mail* (July 10, 2002), R9.
25. Robert Boostrom, "Whither Textbooks?" *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 33 (No. 2, 2001), 243.
26. Cranny, *Crossroads*, 4.
27. *Ibid.*, 145-6.
28. Francis et al., 288 [grade eleven].
29. Eaton and Newman, 33 [grade eleven].
30. Smith, McDevitt, and Scully, 362-3 [grade eleven].
31. Cranny and Moles, 142 [grade eleven].
32. *Ibid.*, 32-33.
33. Francis et al., 76 [grade eleven].
34. Clark and McKay, 259-62.
35. *Ibid.*, 268.
36. Cranny, Jarvis, Moles, and Seney, 25.
37. Also scattered throughout the Eaton and Newman textbook are multiple photos of two other topics: police and citizen protests. The historical images of settlers and Indians scattered throughout the Clark and McKay book (grade eight) may lead to romanticized and idealized interpretations.
38. Bowers and Garrod, 217.
39. Elliot Eisner, *The Educational Imagination* (New York: MacMillan, 1994).
40. Robert Bremner, *Children and Youth in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 4.
41. Rick Poynor, "Images Without Anchors," *National Post* (December 4, 1998), B7.
42. Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall, eds., *Visual Culture: The Reader* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1999), 33-40.
43. Susan Sontag, "Looking at War. Photography's View of Devastation and Death," *The New Yorker* (December 9, 2002), 86.
44. Poynor, B7.
45. Cranny, *Pathways*, 276.
46. "Low Fidelity," *The New Internationalist* 185 (July 1988), 10.
47. Only one book suggested that students compare news articles and photographs on the same event from three newspapers, noting similarities and differences (Cranny and Moles, 239). The same activity could be applied to textbooks.
48. Cranny, *Crossroads*, 282.
49. Bowers and Garrod, 138.
50. Cranny, Jarvis, Moles, and Seney, 145.
51. Stalker, 5.
52. Francis et al., 26.
53. Cranny and Moles, 13.

54. Walker and Chapman, 23.
55. Cranny, *Crossroads*, 271-83.
56. Cranny and Moles; Francis et al..
57. Cranny and Moles, 362.
58. Francis et al., 8.
59. Ibid, 9.
60. Ibid, 8-11, 340-43.
61. Eaton and Newman, 6, 423.
62. Francis et al., 284.
63. Mirzoeff, 3.
64. Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), 36.
65. Patricia Duff, "Pop Culture and ESL Students: Intertextuality, Identity, and Participation in Classroom Discussions," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 45 (March 2002): 482-88.
66. Stuart Hall, "Introduction," in Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1997), 9-10.