

Images and pictures are the subjects of an enormous literature, little of which articulates what might make visual objects different from written objects. Few critics, historians, or philosophers develop theories of the visual, or of visual objects; most work empirically, relying on received accounts for foundational conceptualizations of what visual objects are and how they create meaning. As a result, academia and the art world tend to operate pragmatically, assuming that the nature of the visual is well understood. Foundational issues remain unexplored: What are the optimal accounts of what visual objects are, and how they create meaning? What is the effect of deferring work on the nature of images, even as the literature on them builds exponentially? This lecture is a survey of the principal theories and problems and the current state of visual studies.

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What is an Image? – Unsolved Problems