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can engage with the national narrative on its own terms. ¶

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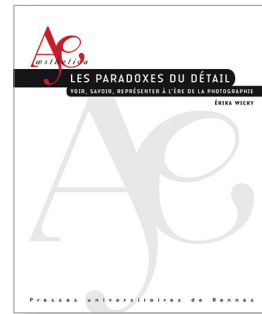
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Érika Wicky  
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*Les Paradoxes du détail* argues provocatively for the importance of "detail" in a variety of mid- to late nineteenth-century French discourses that depend/rely upon the comprehension of visual representations, including those related to aesthetics, history, sociology, and science. This intriguing book contends that the use of detail became a key rhetorical device upon which various representational, and, as a consequence, cultural, and epistemological, debates hinged. Although photography destabilized the connection of vision to knowledge by rendering detail with indifference to human perception, Wicky shows how detail became crucial to maintaining a connection between "seeing" and "knowing": the presence of detail also came to function as a criterion for "truth," navigating the complex relationship between "real" and "representation," and thus as a site upon which truth claims could be made and defended.

This is not the first time scholars have recognized the historical significance of detail. Wicky cites several book-length studies that have set a precedent for exploring visual and textual detail, such as those by Jean-Pierre Mourey, Daniel Arasse, and more recently, Anthony Wall and Marie-Dominique Popelard, as well as an anthology by Maud Hagelstein and Livio Belloi (to which Wicky contributed). Her research adds to these discussions by examining how multidisciplinary engagements with detail—above all, its reception—altered shortly after



the invention and popularization of the daguerreotype. "*La photographie*," Wicky claims, "*a stimulé l'affirmation du détail comme outil théorique pour l'appréhension des images*" (12). Although, as the text argues, this era increasingly relied upon details as a source of knowledge, too much detail flew in the face of time-honoured aesthetic standards based on idealism. Indeed, Wicky notes that while the focus on detail ostensibly conveyed more information about the object perceived, it also distracted the viewer from recognizing the *ensemble*, a concept valorized in the history of aesthetics that refers to seeing the whole or totality of an image.

Of course, the advent of photography transformed the history of image making. Art historians are well aware of how this led critics like Charles Baudelaire to conceive of photography as a mindless collection of individual details, lacking the focus and selectivity of paintings. Wicky notes how the problems with detail exceeded the discussions of photographic media, citing Baudelaire's warning against the "*émeute de détails*" that threatened a painting's compositional harmony. From connoisseur Giovanni Morelli's perspective, however, the impressive range and abundance of visual detail offered by photography warranted further scientific study.

Given the evocative ways photographic detail shaped both aesthetic debates and viewers' interactions with visual culture, it may come as a surprise that Wicky's book is one of the first to deal exclusively with the impact

of photography on conceptions of detail in the mid- to late nineteenth century. She builds upon the work of notable scholars, such as Naomi Schor, and complements recent scholarship on photographic detail, including Jean-Claude Chirollet's *La question du détail et l'art fractal* (2011) and *Ethétique du détail: peinture-photographie* (2016). In addition to its focus on a historically and culturally circumscribed moment, what separates *Les Paradoxes du détail* from its precedents is the way Wicky rewrites a standard art-historical narrative. Beginning with the daguerreotype, she traces how detail entered into loosely connected aesthetic, scientific, and social discussions. She then concludes with the eventual rupture with mimesis, which she suggests was brought on by the prevalence of photography at the end of the nineteenth century. Although Wicky comfortably couches her argument within a well-known history of nineteenth-century art, she introduces new perspectives. She offers a multidisciplinary account of the ways detail operated beyond its manifestation in visual images, citing textual evidence that highlights how it shaped the reception of images and exhibition practices. She explores journalistic debates, literature, panoramas, history paintings, and photo-portraiture to investigate what actually constituted a detail, ultimately determining that its definition was entirely dependent upon a relationship between a part and a whole. In the case of visual representations, this varied according to the size of the object and the viewer's distance from it. According to this logic, detail not only served changing pictorial, textual, and social needs, but it also shaped several new forms of behaviour, including the way one views and "reads" an artwork. The valorization of details, Wicky argues, stemmed from bourgeois cultural values, which increasingly came to dominate the status quo.

To exemplify these points, *Les Paradoxes du détail* covers a diverse set of case studies organized thematically.

Following the introduction, which defines "détail" as a part dependent upon a whole (as distinct from a particularity), Wicky begins her study in 1859 with a petition written by a series of publishers, notably Goupil, to Napoléon III to secure commercial protection against the threat of photography, especially as it concerned the reproduction of paintings for public dissemination. The growing fear that photography would displace printmaking led to a series of debates about the values of each medium, ultimately solidifying the perception that photography captured more detail, while also remaining indifferent to human visual experience and temperament. This quality became a rallying point on either side of the debate. On the one hand, photography was less "expressive" than printmaking, and therefore less capable of meeting aesthetic standards. On the other hand, its higher level of detail granted it a much stronger documentary status.

While the perceived capacity to render detail magically *au coup de baguette* led some engravers to denounce photography's success as a reproductive agent worthy of artistically disseminating paintings for a public audience, the ability to record painterly details was valorized in a distinct context. Wicky's third chapter, "Le détail comme indice," investigates how the observation of visual detail came to be approached systematically by late nineteenth-century connoisseurs as a categorical tool to identify and attribute artwork. Wicky looks in particular at Morelli's method of connoisseurship, in which details unconsciously produced by the artist, such as the mode of representing a figure's ear or hand, allegedly provided connoisseurs with enough evidence to attribute paintings.

Detail not only began to serve as a hallmark of connoisseurial attribution, but also to reflect social class. Chapter IV, "Le détail distinctif," focuses on the role of detail as a marker of social distinction

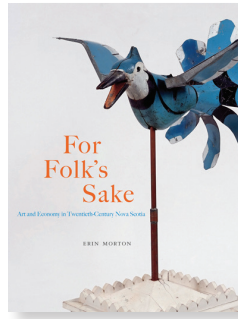
in photo-portraiture, especially in the reception of photo-portraits. Although photographers could not idealize likeness the way painters could, photo-portraiture became accessible to an emergent middle class; within this context, photographers used details to convey individual character based on preconceived notions of social type. Here Wicky also looks to writers such as Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850) to explore how detail confirmed ideas about social class. Balzac's *vestignonomie*, a witticism he deployed to describe the ability to discern character through clothing, evokes the complex reactions to changing class dynamics and social upheaval (and the desire to recognize class) in the nineteenth century.

The inclination to exploit detail as both indicative of truth and as an instrument to categorize individuals according to class was further manifested in the wide acceptance of panoramas and realist literature as ostensibly true to historical fact. Through an exploration of detail in Jean-Charles Langlois's *Panorama de la bataille de Solferino* (1865) and Gustave Flaubert's *Salammô* (1862), Wicky's fifth chapter, "Témoignage et vérité historique," explores how viewers apparently linked detail to seemingly "real" referents (even in the absence of any evidence). To further emphasize the weight given to detail as a source of knowledge, Chapter VI, "Le détail dans le grand 'bazar' de l'histoire," shows how it allowed history painters to assert documentary status for their work. Wicky views this as a response to the growing nineteenth-century desire for images to reference the "real world." She notes, however, that while the proliferation of detail granted some paintings a truth-value, it also led major critics like Baudelaire to denounce the "photographic" style of painters like Ernest Meissonier, who valorized minute details at the expense of a cohesive, harmonic composition.

Chapter VII, "Le détail au plus près ou la fin du détail," finishes the book by examining how detail came to lose

its value. As Wicky writes, “Pour finir, il convient de pousser le détail à son comble et d’examiner comment l’attention portée au détail, souvent appréhendée comme un instrument d’investigation du réel, peut conduire à la perte de toute référence signifiante. Le détail est alors saisi dans ses rapports avec la crise de la mimesis qui a ébranlé le monde des arts visuels au cours de la seconde moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle” (193). The author examines the way artists and writers describing artists and artistic technical procedures reoriented their focus away from the representation of figurative details to an emphasis on materials and “expressive” qualities not necessarily linked to a visual referent (such as the application of colour). She reminds readers how the infatuation with detail depended upon bourgeois cultural values and a desire for control, and concludes by suggesting that similar questions might arise today concerning the pixel.

Throughout the book, Wicky articulates how detail factored into and problematized larger questions about knowledge as a product of sight. She justly points out the connection between the camera’s ability to reveal elements that often fell outside the realm of the noticeable (and it is worth adding that the camera also oftentimes revealed elements outside the range of what was visible in the absence of instrumental registration) and the importance detail gained as a scientific tool, a mark of social distinction, and, more broadly, as a source of knowledge. A further explanation of her choice of case studies would have given this book a stronger basis for the specific arguments regarding detail across disciplines. This would also help a reader who is not a specialist in the area. Because *Les Paradoxes du détail* relies heavily upon a precise definition of “detail” rather than concepts (such as how some photographer-scientists understood mental imagery as synthetic rather than detail oriented), it misses an opportunity to critically engage with recent English-language



Erin Morton  
***For Folk's Sake: Art and Economy in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia***  
Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press/Beaverbrook Canadian Foundation Studies in Art History Series, 2016  
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Elaine C. Paterson

scholarship on nineteenth-century photography’s complicated relationship to seeing and knowing. Josh Ellenbogen’s *Reasoned and Unreasoned Images: The Photography of Bertillon, Galton, and Marey* (2012) and Jordan Bear’s *Disillusioned: Victorian Photography and the Discerning Subject* (2015), for instance, consider how the desire to endow photography with truth claims and knowledge rested on maintaining a perceived connection between seeing and knowing, and how this in turn shaped the production and reception of photographic imagery. Overall, however, *Les Paradoxes du détail* warrants much praise. The analysis of the capacity for detail to evoke the “real” and of its reception is thought provoking and shows how detail elicited new modes of engaging with images, thus setting the stage for future interrogations. Given the weight attached to detail in the history of image reception, for example, scholars could build upon Wicky’s work by asking how an infatuation with it may have shaped the technical history of photography, or how the ability to observe detail relates to concepts at the forefront of modern thought, such as subject formation and conceptualizations of vision as subjective. This evocative study furthers the research on questions of detail, while also stimulating more discussions that transcend disciplinary boundaries. ¶

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*For Folk's Sake: Art and Economy in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* is a richly documented and beautifully illustrated exploration of folk art’s cultural ascendancy in Nova Scotia. Erin Morton draws from an impressive range of research to offer the reader a truly interlinked study of art making, cultural policy history, and economic development in the province during the second half of the twentieth century.

The book is set against the backdrop of the 1950s, a “decade of development in tourism, technology, cheaply manufactured consumer goods, and infrastructure (plumbing, electricity, highway expansion)” (6). It tracks the shift from plentiful government funding of culture in the province around the centennial (1967) to increased private sponsorship in line with broader, transnational restructuring trends in the 1980s. In the face of this change, Morton contends “many visual artists, writers, government bureaucrats, and tourism promoters produced nostalgic renderings of Nova Scotia’s past as its future charged forward” (6). *For Folk's Sake* is set squarely within Nova Scotia’s transition to a neoliberal economy and makes a strong case for the myriad ways this form of late capitalism emerged—in this instance, through the institutionalizing of folk art by the province’s leading cultural agents (8).

Morton explains that folk art in Canada has been implicated frequently “in particular nostalgias that long for a rural, settler-colonial Canadian past that heritage promoters, such as