

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
1 Vital Signs	3
2 Makers and Making	47
3 Rescaling Reality	97
4 Sounding Forth	127
5 Meaning in Movement	163
6 Past Laughter	195
 <i>Notes</i>	 219
<i>Bibliography</i>	247
<i>Index</i>	269
<i>Illustration Credits</i>	273

I. Vital Signs

On a side street in Los Angeles is a wall that, in decades past, memorialized SKATE (SK8), a graffiti artist who died young (fig. 1.1).¹ Dense with meaning, the mural projects admiration of SKATE, grief at his passing, and hints of pride at its careful copying of details from a pre-Columbian book, the Codex Fejérváry-Mayer from ancient Mexico. But should the painting be there? The person who made it, Posh One, thought so. Civic authorities probably had different ideas. The tussle, then and now, is over who controls visual messaging in this or that place. Permissible marks can appear with illicit ones, in a back-and-forth of what is allowed and what is not. Yet the reality is that most viewers do not care. Not all messaging involves a dialogue between official signage and unsanctioned graffiti; not every mark or tag engages, pleases, or upsets people.² Instead, sprayed texts and images become little more than background clutter, an unnoticed feature of urban life. We can be sure, however, that Posh One cared. For the SKATE mural, he weighed, as do most graffitiists, the overall composition, color, highlighting, fill-ins, and line of attack with an aerosol can. A discerning audience could judge such details; the untutored might miss them. If ambitious, “writers,” as taggers called themselves, could go “all city,” painting across Los Angeles. SKATE left a legacy, but so too did those, like Posh One, who wrote again and again.

How do we understand such marks and their distribution? Reporting on Italy, the epigraphist Armando Petrucci described the sum of visible, public signs as a “graphosphere,” a concept with boundaries of a fuzzy sort.³

Petrucci preferred to look historically, usually at words or texts, in the cities and precincts where crowds might gather. Others have extended his concept to a whole country or a smaller set of people, or looked to writing made on the move, in conditions of haste but involving texts still exposed to view.⁴ A term that loose would seem limited and dismissive of less public, small-scale writing. But at least it allows the analyst to determine their own frame of reference—if a city, kingdom or nation-state, a neighborhood within Los Angeles, so be it. Context is everything, a sense of where these marks are made, by whom, at what time, for what purpose, and for which viewers.

A second example, far from SKATE’s memorial, takes us to another graphosphere, with different effects. This is the array of Chinese texts (*moya*) painted and then carved into stones leading up to places like Mt. Tai (泰山) in Shandong Province, along with other locations (fig. 1.2). As noted by Robert Harrist, the art historian, “visitors do not simply climb Mt. Tai—they *read* it.”⁵ This is a kind of “itinerant perusal,” a kinetic encounter interspersed with pauses. Interruptions during a six-hour ascent allow the visitor to catch their breath and take in distant views. Meanwhile, something else occurs. A Chinese painting, even if on a scroll rather than a rock face, reproduces a destination and enhances its contemplation. Conversely, visiting the *moya* and their setting, on Mt. Tai and elsewhere, transposes a reader and viewer *into* a painting, at least in a sense. A transcendent experience joins the two. An ethereal ideal floats through and around an actual place, a physical site anchors an ideal. Yet not all people will go through the



11 SKATE One, 1997, by Posh One, Los Angeles, California.

same encounter. Some of those looking at *moya* will be of high or low status, possess deep or scant knowledge, be foreigners or Chinese, party cadres or Taoists.⁶ Imagination goes in different directions, responses diverge. So too for SKATE's memorial. It would be seen in a different way by his tagging collective, irate civic opponents of such marks, and, perhaps, gangs seeking to expand their territory. According to the sociologist (and graffitist) Stefano Bloch, these last were said to murder taggers outside their organization. Whatever its scale, a graphosphere is a zone of dispute. There can be, in a seesaw of dominance, quiet debate or fierce rows about who gets to dictate its creation and use.

A second issue concerns communication, whether a graphosphere deals only with words of high legibility.

Remember, that was Petrucci's focus in devising his concept. In SKATE's mural, however, legibility is not the point, nor is that so for much other graffiti in Los Angeles. As one "writer" or graffitist puts it, a "piece should be wild style and complicated . . . a secret language and code that shouldn't be deciphered too easily."⁷ This runs counter to a longstanding belief that words and language are the main target of writing. To the pioneering linguist Ferdinand de Saussure that is, in fact, what it mostly does.⁸ Writing records sound. True, it may not accomplish this task especially well—many nuances of emphasis, tone, or meaning in speech get left by the curb. Maybe, as "writers," SKATE and Posh One would agree with de Saussure in homing in on language. But, intuitively, something is off with this entire perspective, as the LA painters and taggers would

doubtless concede. Being accessed by sight, writing is a pictured thing. (Braille and Inka khipu knots sit to the side as the main exceptions.)⁹ It is processed visually, has material form or shape even if composed of pixels, serves as a vehicle for aesthetics, and addresses the challenges of sequencing graphs. For the nonliterate or hurried, much writing is not really read. It is seen or witnessed, even if massaged, of late, by AI and its nonhuman algorithms.¹⁰ At some point, vision must play a role. As observed in the preface, writing can also work alongside other modes of graphic communication, enveloping the viewer and reader all at once. The result: a semiotic glut, a feast for the eyes in which “the visual and the verbal worked and played together.”¹¹ The page of a medieval illuminated manuscript, with its vegetative frames, frolicsome marginalia, or comments by later readers, was not merely a collection of words. The “lascivious apes, autophagic dragons . . . arse-kissing priests and somersaulting jongleurs” that frolic in such pages demand our attention.¹² They must be there for a reason beside, beyond, and over the words nearby.

A “wild style,” to quote the graffitist, can be the very point. Dense visual information supplements writing. For the fun of it, as puzzles, super-charged graphs make you work. Aside from the initial puzzlement at overwhelming detail, they channel other purposes. The quotations from the Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, the Indigenous book reflected in the SKATE mural, allude to the endless cycle of a sacred calendar, its origins in sacrifice, and its meshing with the directions of the world, where mythic birds perch and sacred mountains soar.¹³ Time, order, regeneration, and eternity seem appropriate to a memorial. Posh One himself is quoted as saying, “The biggest similarity [between graffiti and indigenous glyphs and figures] is the simplicity of the characters yet the complexity of the language. It’s amazing how much information is there, and if you looked at it without knowing what it is, it would say nothing to you, much like a [graffiti] piece does. . . . It’s a language that needs to be learned.”¹⁴ Or the choice may have been less deliberate, as much aesthetic as spiritual, or, in this instance, even a bow to convenience. This image is said to be “the most often reproduced page of all the Mexican codices.”¹⁵ It was available for copying and, in this setting, as a bonus, affirmed Los Angeles’s bonds with

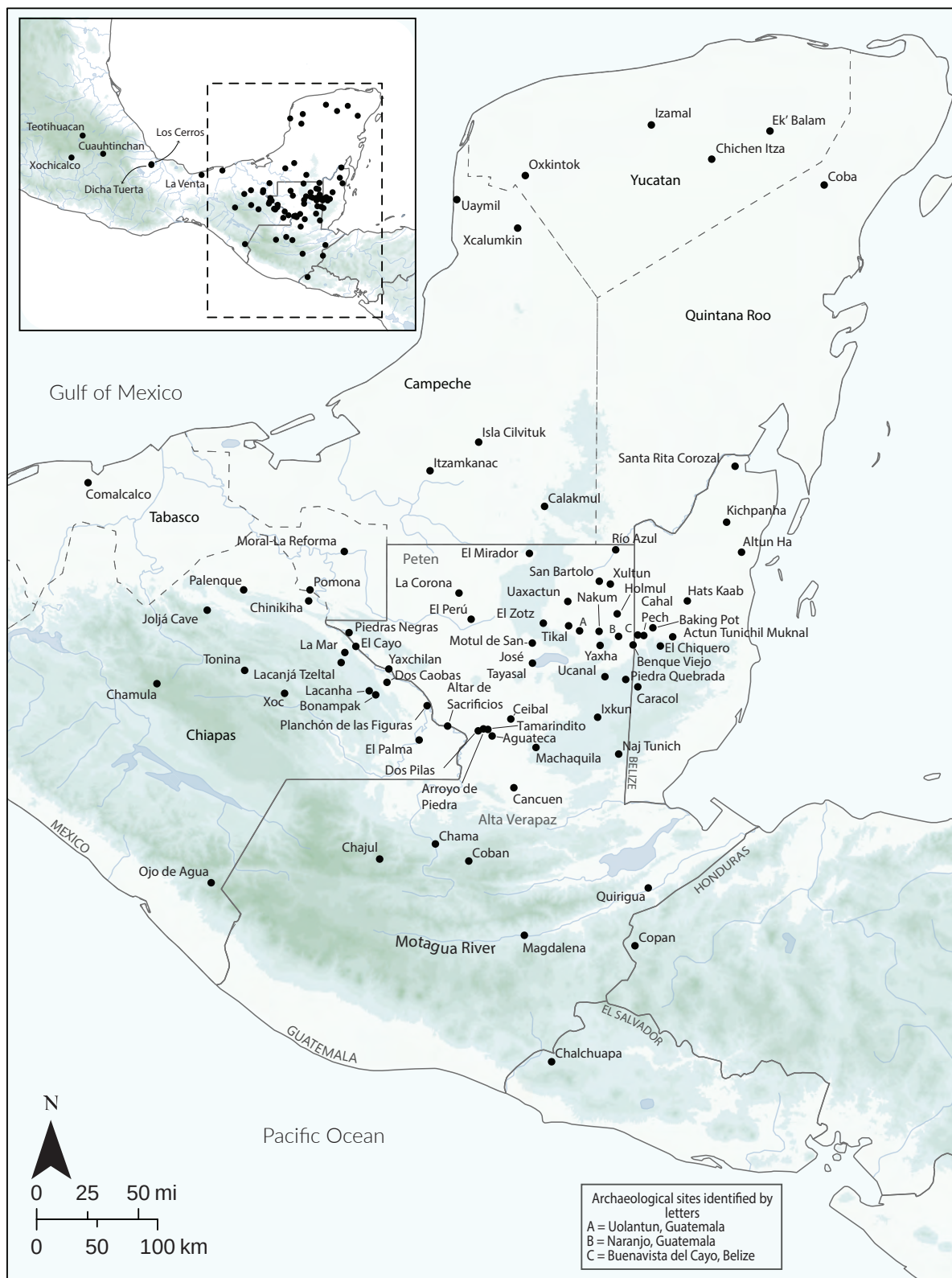


1.2 Painting a *moya*, “Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden,” painting. Ming, sixteenth century? (Artwork No. 00366100000, National Palace Museum, Taipei.)

lands to the south. Plainly, the SKATE mural operates as both text *and* picture. The tension between the two—its “wild style”—conditions our encounters with the painting. But it is an historical experience at this point, a reflection of the contingent and shifting nature of communication. Google Street View, recording over time a section of wall on Fuller Street, just south of Melrose Avenue, shows that SKATE’s memorial has been replaced by no fewer than three other murals in rapid, almost annual succession. SKATE’s name endures, yet each painting embodies a divergent “wild style,” with contrastive coloring from one mural to the next.

Times, Places, Peoples

A place to delve into such tensions is the Maya region, now spread over the nation states of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico, with fainter vestiges in El Salvador (fig. 1.3).



1.3 Map of Maya region, with relevant sites (cartography by Omar Alcover).

There are over six million speakers of Mayan languages, most of which are mutually unintelligible because of their great time depth and diversification in the area.¹⁶ Imagery and texts are more limited in distribution, becoming identifiably Maya in the so-called “Late Preclassic” period of ca. 300 BCE to 200 CE yet finding a crescendo in numbers and variety during the subsequent “Classic” period, from about 200 to 850 CE. That time is divisible into an Early Classic period that lasts until the later sixth century CE, to be replaced by the Late Classic (ca. 600–850 CE), a period far more interpretable because of the relative abundance of inscriptions. Cities of both periods housed hierarchical societies organized into royal courts, at the center of which were sacred kings, the holy (*k’uhul*) lords of particular locations and their consorts; ranks of nobles and other courtiers clustered around them or lived in provincial palaces that allowed more freedom from royal oversight.¹⁷ Numbers of people were, during the height of Classic-era literacy, in the millions, but unevenly distributed across the landscape. Drained and raised fields, terraces, check dams, reservoirs, and aqueducts provided food and water; roads, mostly for use in processions, connected centers and peripheries of certain settlements.¹⁸ A large labor force came in handy. For such infrastructure, cities affected by rains and sun, slump and filling in by sediment, required colossal investments in maintenance. Or, just as likely, Maya centers struggled along in disrepair or neglect, one building still red (the usual pigment), another nearby streaked, its mortar and masonry crumbling. Later rulers often moved on to sponsor works of their own choosing.

The local form of writing, called “glyphs” by scholars, disappeared a few generations after the Spanish conquest, as did most imagery with roots in the pre-Conquest period. Talk of a unitary Maya civilization is both right and wrong. There is no evidence that these peoples saw themselves as one, nor that communities had the same quantity of images and texts, all with the same form or content. Yet, especially among elites during the Classic period, there is evidence of much contact among them, mediated by marriage, service as courtly pages, alliance, embassies, carvers loaned to foreign courts, tribute, trade, population movement, and the give-and-take of conflict—despite their misery, war captives and hostages can also transmit

information and skills elicited under duress. Another impetus was a shared courtly language among the upper rungs of society.¹⁹ Like medieval Latin, it was prestigious, exclusive, and conducive to sharing ideas across political boundaries. As was also true for the later use of Latin, it had variant forms.²⁰ Whatever the impulse to standardize, local Mayan languages filtered into this “high” speech and its written expression.²¹

As a word, “Classic” implies a summit, arising from a murky past and sinking into later decline. No one looking at the Preclassic San Bartolo murals, in Guatemala, of ca. 300 BCE, or the various books coming *after* the Classic period would think so, although we are unlikely to budge from using this label.²² It is too entrenched. Nonetheless, in quantity and quality of information, in the number of cities, carvings, paintings, and portable texts and images, the Classic period remains the focus of study, with its treasury of some 15,000 texts and many more images. No other writing in the early Americas comes close to the same linguistic detail and attention to spoken utterance, or the intricacy of its rounded, packed blocks of word signs and syllabic characters (chapter 6).²³

Many texts are deciphered in part. They record events with temporal precision, sometimes to the time of day, with an emphasis on formulas or repetitious texts. Most inscriptions marked the conclusion of units of time, specifying the main, usually royal, officiant and their parentage, and of what happened in between. From this, scholars manage to extract genealogies for some dynasties and accounts of royal interactions and ritual preoccupations. Yet the level of literacy remains unknown, if with the odds that adept readers and writers could not have been numerous.²⁴ The distribution of surviving texts is limited, and off-the-cuff graffiti, where one might expect texts, are usually figural rather than glyphic outside of a few sites such as Tikal, Guatemala.²⁵ The dearth of glyphs in contexts where they might be made spontaneously, on the sly, argues for restricted literacy and tight controls on their creation. Far more accessible would have been the imagery, which is both inventive and guided by widespread themes, among them royalty, gods, ritual, tribute, and conflict. Those themes would have been recognizable, probably, to more people than could parse a text: a jaguar is a jaguar, a dancing



1.4 Section, Bayeux Tapestry, Official Bayeux Tapestry digital representation, eleventh century, segments 30–32, City of Bayeux, DRAC Normandie, University of Caen Normandie, CNRS, ENSICAEN, 2017—la Fabrique de patrimoines en Normandie.

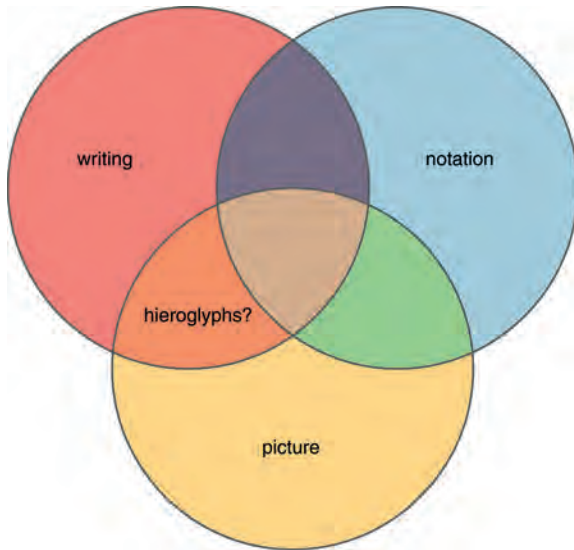
king a king, whatever the ability of the viewer to read the writing nearby. But, most likely, understanding images and glyphs in *unison* was a rare ability.

Text, Picture

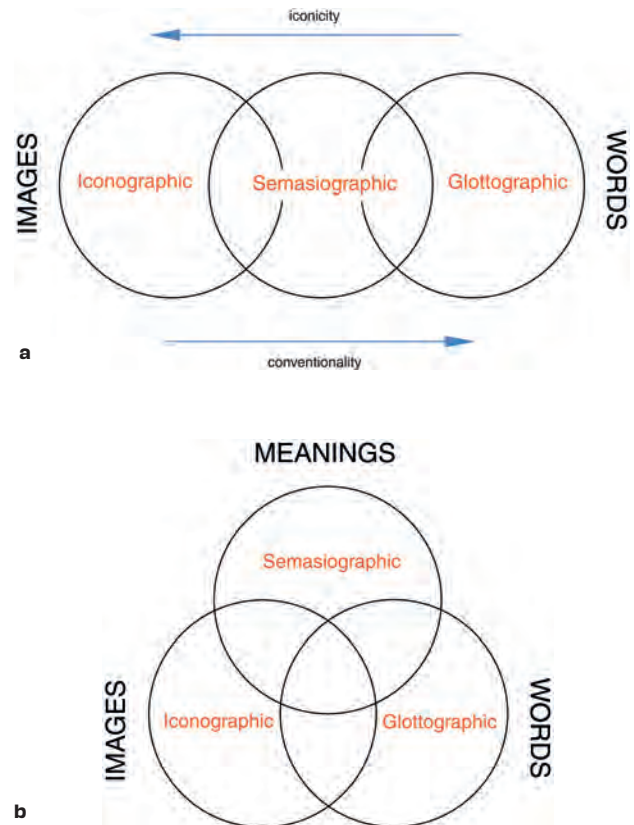
Conceptualizing the tension and affinity between text and picture is the nub of this book. The objective is not to look at the sprawling problem of text-image relations, or, as one author puts it, in a torrent of binaries, “the relation between the seeable and the sayable, display and discourse, showing and telling.”²⁶ The field is vast, the scholarship wide.²⁷ Among such text-image relations are: ekphrasis—the written evocation of images—and sorting out how pictures derive from textual sources, among them Biblical scripture, Homeric narrative, Pliny’s *Natural History*, Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, Buddhist *sūtras*, and so on. Sometimes the story is gone or can only be inferred, as in the oral or written narrative behind the Bayeux “tapestry” in Normandy and its slanted account of

the Norman conquest of England (fig. 1.4).²⁸ When rolled out for public display, this embroidered linen was seen and almost certainly performed as an oral recital. Tales could be told that were not otherwise present in its sparse texts, for words with such objects are not always written. Nonetheless, here, in this book, we look at texts concretely, as visible words, not as ones solely spoken or that float in people’s minds.

W.J.T. Mitchell, a professor of both English and art history, does not believe the relations between text and image are ever smooth.²⁹ An emphasis on language causes an image to wilt and disappear, and a stress on the visual stifles words and makes them inarticulate. Instead, to him, text and image interact back and forth in a “dialectal trope” that never quite finds a synthesis. The art historian James Elkins wonders whether text and picture are all that defined as binaries, a point made also by Mitchell, who feels “there are no ‘purely’ visual or verbal arts, though the impulse to purify media is one of the central gestures of modernism.”³⁰ Any “visual artifact discloses *mixtures* of reading and seeing,” leading Elkins to conceive of these



1.5 (above) Venn diagrams showing overlap of “writing,” “picture,” and “notation,” after Elkins 1999 (rendering by Harper Dine). **1.6** (right) Overlapping domains of pictured (“iconographic”), meaning-based, codified signs (“semasiographic”), and language-based writing (“glottographic”) graphs; (a) from Martin, “On Pre-Columbian Narrative”; and (b) from Stuart, *King and Cosmos*, 2021 (renderings by Harper Dine).



relations more in terms of Venn diagrams, with overlapping domains of “picture,” “writing,” and the systematic marks that might be called “notations” (fig. 1.5).³¹ An area in between defines a place where a graph might nestle. In one fell swoop, it is seen as a picture, interpreted as writing, and encoded as notation. A graph can operate in many ways, relating to language, ideas, and spatial relations within any one image.

Mayanist colleagues have configured the Venn diagrams differently (fig. 1.6a, b).³² Images or pictures—how these are defined can vary, as every five specialists will have six opinions—correspond to “iconography”; records of language are termed “glottographic,” and highly conventional images (recall traffic signs) are “semasiographs,” after terms from the linguist Geoffrey Sampson.³³ According to an insightful study by the epigraphist Simon Martin, images show more “iconicity,” “a notional resemblance to

the world experienced by our senses,” while marks tied to language tend to be more arbitrary or conventional in form (fig. 1.6a).³⁴ Yet resemblance is often in the eye of the beholder, and arbitrary, quite radically varied conventions constrain depiction. To be audacious, one could even omit “semasiographs” and accentuate the overlap between images and encoded language. Perhaps the takeaway, shared by all regardless of the Venn diagrams they favor, is that graphs drench with meaning: they come at us, as noted before, in different “modes.” They can also transport meaningful sound and exist in space, with elements strewn across the image for reasons of narrative or some other purpose. Pictures can complement text, and text pictures. There is a division of labor, as the curator Simon Morley puts it, even though the two are sometimes “scrambled” into a complex graph. Think of an initial in a medieval manuscript or embellished alphabet, both letter



1.7 The letter “D” as an ode to the painter’s necessary diligence. Giuseppe Maria Mitelli, *Alfabeto in sogno*, 1683, British Museum 1857,0613.43.

and so much more, yet still, at its core, when all is said and done, operating as a single letter (fig. 1.7).³⁵ There is a complication of elements but no real fusion of them. A shared space, in effect a cohabitation, does not mean there is a merger of graphic domains.

That there is a gradient of text to picture or a potential, perfect fusion of the two runs counter to the division of labor mentioned by Morley. Graphs of all sorts have a logical affinity, yet, by tagging sound and syntax, explicit records of language always belong to a different category. A “wordless” book by Lynd Ward grapples with the challenges of its genre; a key choice is how much of an

interval to leave between frames, lest the audience lose the thread of the story (fig. 1.8).³⁶ But a running narration of these frames could take place in *any* language. There could be digressions while an image is being explained, shifting emphases depending on the person doing the explaining. Or there would be no spoken narration at all. As the eye shifts from frame to frame, the mind assembles the story.

To offer a Maya contrast, the Komkom Vase, from about 799 CE, found at the Belizean ruin of Baking Pot, has careful design and a visual surfeit from its glyphs (fig. 1.9).³⁷ Those not in the know would be amazed by that profusion and, in my dismayed experience, often skeptical that the text could be read. Visually, the vase has an orange-red band on its base and a now destroyed rim. There are larger glyphs to frame the long text in between, and red colors for signs in the Maya 260-day calendar—a bloody trait evoking, by one theory, the origins of time in sacrifice. But it is a text without any complementary picture. Indeed, it is a text that may reflect or was copied from a Maya book, if making allowances for the curved surface. This process also occurs in painted ceramics tied to the large city of Calakmul, Mexico, with enough editing and reworking from vase-to-vase to suggest evocation of a book rather than direct lifting.³⁸ Another extreme are the texts found on stelae, far from the city core, that defined the central kingdom of Copan, Honduras. Called the “Valley Stelae,” they display not images, only glyphs, a record of spoken words to encircle and look down on the central precincts of the dynasty.³⁹

Then, at the opposite extreme, worthy of Lynd Ward, is the “Vase of the Thirty-one Gods,” dating to the seventh century CE, possibly from the Peten province of northern Guatemala (fig. 1.10).⁴⁰ (The name comes from the scholar who published it; the Maya gave personal names to buildings, but only a few ceramics are so labeled.) Over four rows, a veritable zoo of creatures, bats, bugs, monkeys, cats, vultures, a possible basilisk lizard, and a few deities in human guise talk in small, seated groups. Those that face one another help to define the parties, and a few scenes repeat speakers. As with most mythic animals in the Classic period, all wear clothing or hold human objects; there are some enema syringes to hint at merriment or visionary

inebriation by alcohol absorbed through the rectum. Most likely, the general sequence of view is, as for Maya writing, from top-to-bottom. This establishes narrative flow. There is an open book at the outset, just above the severed head. A vulture scribe to the side, inkwell and brush in hand, hints that such a book recorded or led to the following meetings.

Open mouths and jabbing gestures indicate much chatter, but there is not a single glyph to indicate what is being said or why. That must be supplied by the viewer. In these extremes, the objects have writing, closely encoded sounds, or they do not. Yet even a fully glyphic presentation probably had pictorial input, an arrangement attending to the spatial placement of text. Subtle examples include two texts, Stelae 10 and 46 from Naranjo, Guatemala, both erected on the same day, June 1, 746 CE.⁴¹ Not just a list of events and participants, each inscription places in the center of its main text the same New Year's events involving youths. That centering, a pictorial decision, cannot be fortuitous.

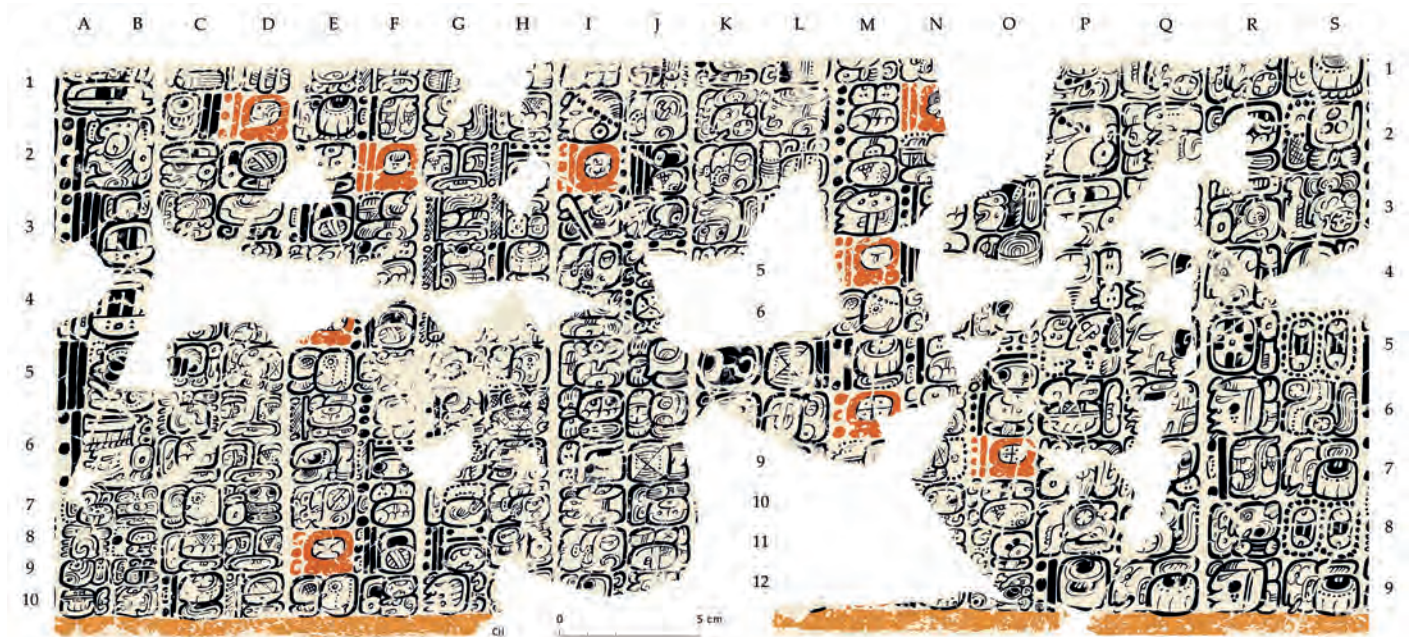
The play between picture and text is what makes the Chinese artist Xu Bing's *Book from the Ground* (地書), an experiment in using emoji-like signs to write a graphic novel, both a delight and, in its own terms, a communicative failure (fig. 1.11).⁴² Xu Bing states that "anyone with experience in contemporary life can read it." Not so: it requires a separate written text to be fully legible. At least the artist acknowledges some temporal restrictions to that legibility, but it had to be harnessed to "the ideal of a single, universally understood language," his graphic version of the world prior to the Tower of Babel. Such an ideal captivated early European views of Chinese language and writing, and, despite his high-minded tone, Xu Bing must be having ironic fun with viewers. More earnest was the philosopher Otto Neurath's creation of icons, termed ISOTYPE (International System of Typographic Picture Education) and devised with input from the designer Gerd Arntz and Neurath's wife Marie.⁴³ These would, in Neurath's reformist vision for twentieth-century Europe, be so transparent as to democratize knowledge. The initial goal was to enhance instructive display in museums but, after his departure from Nazi Europe to England, Neurath's



1.8 Woodcut from *Song without Words*, Lynd Ward, 1936.

team crafted a broader system of graphic design: by intent, transcultural, trans-linguistic, and an arrow to clear-thinking. That these goals were illusory is suggested, in one illustration from a 1930 publication, by the dated and repellent depiction of Asians and East Indians. Yellow men, and men only, wear coolie hats while brown-skinned males don turbans (fig. 1.12); elsewhere, the cars are vintage Fords, the phones immobile and tethered by cords, the women skirted.⁴⁴ These graphs do not operate outside of the conventions, premises, and biases of their time. Yet, somehow, despite the flaws and infamies, bits of meaning filter through.





1.9 Vase from Baking Pot, Belize, ca. 799 CE, side view and rollout (photograph and rendering by Christophe Helmke, rendering courtesy of Jaime Awe and Julie Hoggarth [BVAR Project]).



1.10 Vase of the Thirty-one Gods, provenance unknown, seventh century C.E. (photograph by Justin Kerr, K1386, Justin Kerr photograph collection, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC).

A better argument can be made for looking at analogies from graphic novels and comics. Taking their art seriously, cartoonists like Will Eisner and Scott McCloud privilege images but underscore the role of balloons or labels to expand or ground a story; this is “a medium of expression that is primarily visual” yet dedicated to a single purpose. Although distinct, images and texts must “pledge allegiance to the whole,” a feature seen within Eisner’s cross-sensory vignette from New York City (fig. 1.13).⁴⁵ Eisner and McCloud are eager to explode distinctions between “high” and “low” art and to stress the centrality of storytelling. In the hopes of moral elevation, that urge is also found in institutions like the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art in Los Angeles.⁴⁶ For comics, McCloud acknowledges the variable emphasis on text and picture and suggests modulations in that relationship. “Montage”

embeds text within pictures, or there are “parallel” courses that highlight messages not quite the same. Then there is his “additive” category to which most Maya evidence conforms. These are graphs that “amplify or elaborate” each other or convey similar information.⁴⁷ A simpler set of categories—a Goldilocks porridge ranging, it seems, from too hot, to too cold, to just right—might be, according to another author, “prose primary,” “prose subsumed,” and “fully integrated,” thus describing the relative proportion of text and image within a single frame.⁴⁸

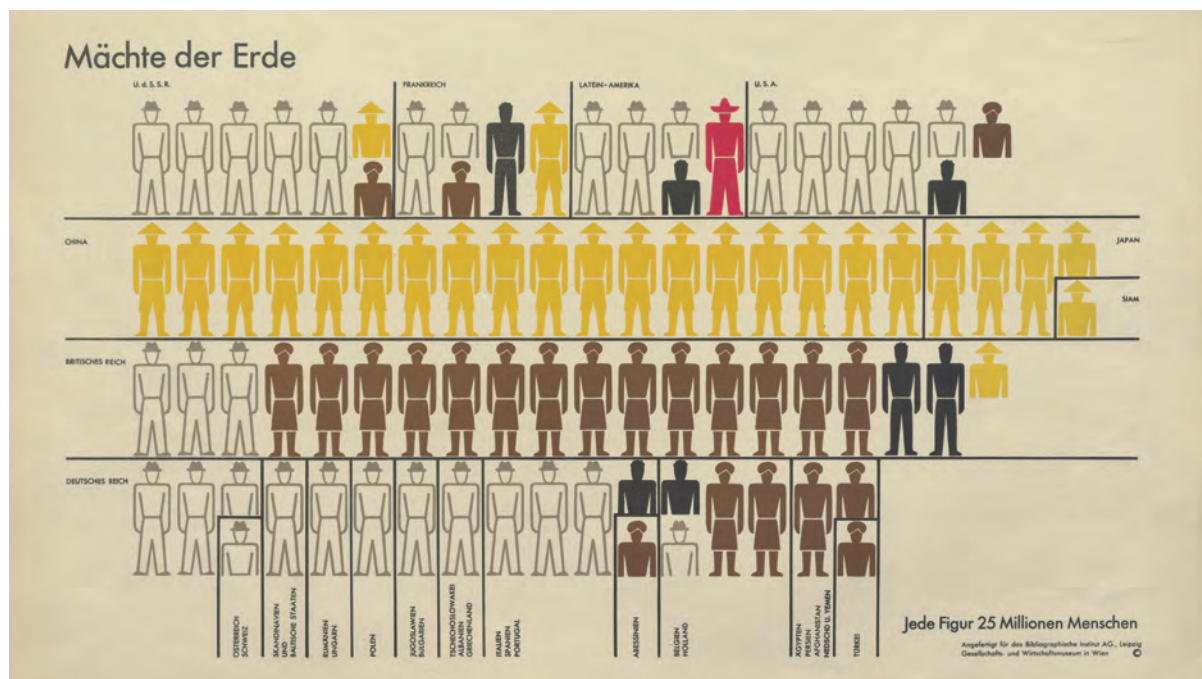
The comics analogy has not escaped Mayanists who refer to something like the divide between Komkom and the vase of the chatty gods. There are contexts with discrete texts, discrete images too, ones where both exist in proximity, and “embedded” examples where the two categories seem to come together.⁴⁹ On pots from the



Classic period, sequentiality, the ordering of scenes one after the other, might come from repeating people in different phases of a story. On one vase, the Maize God is dressed and then paddled in a canoe or nibbled below by a fish craving his doughy flesh, still, as maize *masa*, a form of bait in rural Guatemala (fig. 1.14).⁵⁰ The curving shape of a vase would facilitate this sequence by placing images on different sides. Rotating the pot allows the narrative to be seen.

Yet the rationale for placing text with images can be enigmatic. To look at another vase, a deer, albeit a bipedal one with enema syringe, seems not to need a **chi-ji**, *chij*, “deer” spelling nearby (fig. 1.15). Other animals—all young, to judge from their *ch’ok*, “youth,” labels—reveal their names to the same gratuitous intent: a tapir (**ti-la**, *tihl*), a rabbit (**t’u-lu**, *t’ul*), the tapir even sporting a **ti** syllable on

his forehead to clinch the reading of his name. This could be surplus meaning, an over-specification that shows the painter’s flair with glyphs and images, or perhaps just a compulsion to name, to put words in place. By enriching the surface, it is the precise opposite of graphic economy. Layers of cross-reference inflect this work and many others. Hierarchy intervenes in other cases, so that the placement of glyphs marks a state of honor and dishonor. The more important the person, the fuller and more prominent the text. The more demeaned, often an abject captive, the more likely their name would appear as though scored into the skin, on a body not under personal control.⁵¹ No more complete set of captions exists than in the Bonampak murals of Chiapas, Mexico, from about 800 CE. Yet most people in it do not have labels or, in a head-scratcher, with some courtiers, they pair with blank frames where names





1.11 (opposite top) *Book from the Ground*, Xu Bing: Windows OLE object, p. 4 (by permission of The MIT Press). **1.12** (opposite bottom) Powers of Earth (*Mächte der Erde*), Isotype, 1930, Otto Neurath (Vienna Social and Economic Museum, G&WM Collection, INV-00001-026). **1.13** (above) "Smell," *Will Eisner's New York: Life in the Big City*, 255 (by permission of W. W. Norton & Co).



1.14 (top) Three appearances of the Maize God on a vessel, northern Guatemala, eighth century CE. Dressed by two nude consorts, paddled in a canoe, and nibbled by a fish and disgorged (or consumed) by a water-snake below (photograph by Justin Kerr, K3033, Museo Popol Vuh, MPV0368, Justin Kerr photograph collection, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC). **1.15** (bottom) Animals with glyphic labels, two clutching enema syringes, addressed by a high god to the right, northern Guatemala, eighth century CE (rollout in collection of author, from original images by unknown photographer).

should be. With all such evidence, wide categories are less useful than asking blunt questions of data. What, in Simon Morley's phrase, is the division of labor in any one example? How do the text and picture work there, in that place and time, and why are they absent when their presence would seem helpful? Finally, the most difficult of all: how do these choices play out when, as for the Maya, writing is pictorial, and pictures written? This is the domain of the "hieroglyph," at the unstable zone of overlap in Venn diagrams for graphs.

The Hieroglyph

Many scripts, such as Chinese and early Mesopotamian cuneiform, start in a pictorial vein, showing, say, recognizable elephants, women, trees, and mountains. But after a few centuries they embark on a more stylized, schematic path. The letters of the alphabet you are reading now began their careers as graphs of things, the letter "a," for example, descending many millennia ago from the schematic head of an ox, *'ālep* in early Semitic languages.⁵² In contrast, hieroglyphic writing commits to pictoriality, if, in the case of Egyptian, with parallel, more cursive kinds of writing that enabled greater speed. There are only a few hieroglyphic systems, each with its own explanation. Anatolian hieroglyphs from ruins and cliff faces in present-day Turkey may have expressed local identity, in self-conscious variance from the older but widely used cuneiform systems. Similarly, Rongorongo from Easter Island was possibly a short-lived script derived, at least at first, from intermittent contact with Europeans.⁵³ But the most numerous by far—the sample of Rongorongo can be counted on a few hands—are Egyptian and Maya writing.

As a label, "hieroglyph" derives from Greek *hieros*, "sacred," and *glyphē*, "carving." It entails early theories, developed prior to decipherment, about the sacred and arcane properties of Egyptian signs. In Egypt, to some observers, hieroglyphs allowed a "direct connection to heavenly truths without recourse to the crudities of human speech," or, as one misguided scholar proposed for Maya writing, a journey to the sublime and the mystical, yielding access to

"the inner keep of the Maya soul."⁵⁴ For a time, reactions to these overstated claims led specialists in Maya writing to go in the opposite direction, focusing less on its lively pictoriality than its linguistic payload. With Maya glyphs, the level of visual creativity and scribal virtuosity is intense, resulting in a marked idiosyncrasy. When shown any one glyph, epigraphists, if they know their stuff, can track the sign instantly to a particular text. Each sign is unique yet, in evident paradox, belongs to a broader class of glyphs. For that reason, the few attempts to devise fonts for glyphs crash and burn, so aberrant and unconvincing are their results: they flatten out the many scribal quirks at the heart of this writing.⁵⁵ One comparison may be far-fetched but still helpful. Glyphs echo the division in medieval European philosophy between "quiddity" and "haecceity," that is, what things share in common (quiddity) and what makes them unique or distinct (haecceity)—in ungainly English, their "whatness" versus their "thisness."⁵⁶ The waver between the two may come from the handmade, individually executed nature of Maya glyphs. Made readable by belonging to a general class of sign, their presence in paint or stone only arises from someone grappling with materials in the then-and-there. The "fingerprint" of the scribe is never far from view.

Another crucial trait of hieroglyphic systems is, to dangle another clumsy word, their "thingness."⁵⁷ Unlike stroke- or line-based systems—in other words, most writing around the world—hieroglyphs display shape, edges, bodies, often quite literally so, with torso, arms, legs, hands, heads. They reproduce in conventionalized form the things of the world as seen by the intended writers and readers. They differ fundamentally from the more arbitrary slashes and squiggles of other writing.⁵⁸ This property of being iconic, of having an overt link to the visible world, ensures a link to pictures, not as something imagined and processed in the mind but as visible designs. Being iconic also invites embellishments that offer a generous scope for visual invention. Hieroglyphs harbor a potential for dense cultural meaning, and their information extends far beyond language. The presence of bodies implies another possibility, that a depicted vitality can extend to an actual vigor. A sign could be more than a sign. By mystical belief, through an assertion of spiritual presence, it could

have an ability to act and interact. It could not just look like something in the world but share in its being, a point to be explored later in this chapter.

However, hieroglyphs are neither pure picture nor reductive writing. They wobble back and forth between the two. They operate with the linearity of script, one word after another. Yet, as integral things, inherently discrete from other graphs, they strive against that sequenced flow. Unlike pictures, hieroglyphs are also calibrated into regular sizes, and laid out in an equally regular order, as columns or rows, even if tilted off center. (By chance, this was an essential insight in Otto Neurath's ISOTYPE, which paid particular attention to the relative size of graphs—calibration improved graphic legibility and assisted the overall goal of comparison.) For hieroglyphs, their thingness, their edges and shapes, an inside and an outside, give them an internal coherence that cannot be ignored or subordinated to a winding line of text. Maya glyphs, for example, could be painted quickly by an expert, but not with a cursive that omitted details.⁵⁹ Fast reading and writing were not the main aim. With their visually recognizable elements, hieroglyphs in general promise easy reading and then brusquely deny it with spellings that require literacy.⁶⁰ A box from the tomb of the Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamun shows a chick and other isolable things but, to the knowledgeable reader, it spells out, in ebony and ivory, *twt-ḥm-ḥkz ḥnmw šm'w*, "Tutankhamun" or "the living image of Amun, ruler of the southern Heliopolis [Thebes]" (fig. 1.16).⁶¹ For its part, a text from a plate painted in the Maya kingdom of Naranjo, Guatemala, exhibits a jaguar and a woman's head (fig. 1.17). But it also records a queen's name, *Ix Unen Bahlam Ix Tuub Ajaw Ix 7 Tzuk*. *Unen*, "child," fuses with a jaguar, *bahlam*, squirming on its back like a helpless human baby, not yet toddling (or, for this animal, not yet in quadrupedal motion).⁶² In ways suitable for hierarchical societies—which New Kingdom Egypt and Classic-period Naranjo surely were—such writing at once invites and pushes away. It distinguishes between those who know and those outside that privileged circle. The picture tends to include, the writing often excludes. Literacy rests on the ability to understand both; decipherment does too.

For Maya glyphs—indeed, for any system of writing—what matters are local concepts and principles of design. Broad comparisons expand the range of possibilities, but priority must go to the thoughts of those who made such glyphs and those intended to access them. Thanks to the epigraphist David Stuart, we know the Classic Maya referred to glyphs as *woj* (fig. 1.18). Attested in one extant Mayan language, Yukateko, that word corresponds to a term for "letter" in dictionaries prepared a few decades after the Spanish conquest.⁶³ Yet the term is scarce in the glyphs. Most examples come from the hilly area to the north of the Mexican state of Campeche, where *woj*, with appropriate suffixes, describes an attribute of carvings for a period of a few decades in the Late Classic period. The association with carvings or incisions also occurs in three opaque texts from the Mexican sites of Palenque, Pomona, a river city to the east of Palenque, and the swampy settlement of Comalcalco, a city built of bricks, a necessity in a stone-less area. A third text at Pomona qualifies the sign by describing it as "accompanying" (*yi-ta-ji*) an historical figure. Regrettably, the text breaks off, and it is unclear what comes next.

Rounding out this small sample is the use of *woj* in a molded text from near Coban, Guatemala, on the way to the highlands of that country.⁶⁴ There it is said to be *sak*, "white," "artificial," or linked to the "north," a conventional direction for that color in Maya thought. As far as evidence suggests, Coban was not a center for literacy, but areas to the north were. Perhaps the *sak woj* refers to "northern signs" from which this system of writing came. In much the same way, the Greeks of Athens eventually came to use the "Ionian alphabet," so named after its area of origin in coastal Anatolia.⁶⁵ The other nuances are hard to pin down. Indigenous texts from colonial Yucatan refer to such characters as "written" or "painted" on the hands and body part of a deity, but are likened to words or language (*t'an*) that, with the disappearance of priests and prophets, suppressed by Spaniards, will no longer be said correctly.⁶⁶ There is a further emphasis in the term on bright colors and, revealingly, a way of describing a person subject to shifts of mood (*wohol woh*). Yet, in a disparity that is tough to explain, every instance of *woj* in a



- 1.16** (top) Box from Tutankhamun's tomb, Valley of the Kings, ca. 1330 BCE, spelling in part *tw-t-ḥ-imn*, Tutankhamun, "the living image of Amun".
- 1.17** (bottom) Maya glyphs as image and text, *Ix Unen Bahlam Ix Tuub Ajaw Ix 7 Tzuk*, "Lady Child Jaguar, Royal Lady of Tuub, Lady of the 7 Partitions," Naranjo, Guatemala, ca. 770 CE (drawing by Stephen Houston).



1.18 (top) Kit Pa' on a throne, eighth century CE, Panel 5, South Building, Hieroglyphic Group, Xcalumkin, Mexico. The text reads *k'ahlaj u wojil Kit Pa' sajal*, "raised up is the glyph of Kit Pa', the *sajal* [title high rank]," *woj* appearing in the second sign from the top (photograph by H.E.D. Pollock, Carnegie Institution of Washington; Graham and von Euw, *Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions*, vol. 4, part 3, *Uxmal, Xcalumkin*, 183).

1.19 (bottom) Howler monkey scribes with open book. One holds a stylus and points to a relevant passage; the other places a hand to the shoulder and upper arm in a gesture of subordination, northern Guatemala, ca. 800 CE (photograph by Justin Kerr, K3413, Justin Kerr photograph collection, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC).

glyphic text is carved or incised. There is no link in glyphs between *woj* and the term for painting or "line-making," *ts'ihb* (see chapter 2).

The essence of what glyphs looked like, what their form was thought to consist of, may be inferred from a kind of deception. This is not *trompe l'oeil*, that delicious trickery by which one material is made to mimic another, a wooden column painted to look like pricey stone, or a surface intended to show flies, people, or features of a building where none exist: all to create the illusion of 3D.⁶⁷ Rather, these graphs simulate writing by reducing glyphs to pure pictures. They represent a shape that calls writing to mind but carries no sound or direct meaning. There are two sorts of depictions. The first is an image of writing as an object, as glyphs spied on a half-opened Maya book or as a text on a pot in a palace scene (fig. 1.19).⁶⁸ Their features are notable for what they do not show and who is not implicated. On Maya books—accordion-like screenfolds known as *leporcellos* in Europe—virtually all such glyphs are illegible, mimics of numbers but not of other signs. Then the users: all these books, termed *hu'n* in Classic texts, after a term for "paper," appear with deities and animal scribes such as howler monkeys and trickster rabbits. By contrast, historical or dynastic images are never equipped with books. Often bound in prized jaguar pelt, an attribute of royalty, the screenfolds must have contained sacred knowledge.

Their contents are depicted sparingly if at all. In this they stand out from what the art historian Meyer Schapiro has described for Europe and the Mediterranean, in which the critical question is whether such texts are oriented with respect to an external viewer or to a reader internal to the image (fig. 1.20).⁶⁹ For the Maya, many glyphs on pots are pseudo-writing, graphs that cannot be read but simulate writing; or, as on the murals of Calakmul, Mexico, there is a legible text but incised into the surface after painting (fig. 1.21).⁷⁰ Glyphs shown as though painted on clothing are readable but always through sporadic and incomplete glimpses. Labeling "cloth" or "clothing" (*bu-ku*), a precise tag of material, they nonetheless position folds of cloth to conceal the name of the owner (fig. 1.22). Such texts are highly formulaic, and the proficient reader would soon have noted the omission.

The pseudo-glyphs, all form, no direct meaning, get to the essence of what glyphs were thought to look like. Anciently, pseudo-writing—as opposed to nonsense texts, found in Classical Greece and elsewhere—is not that common in the world. Among the Classic Maya, where they do appear, pseudo-glyphs have an uncertain function.⁷¹ Some graphs could have been produced by nonliterate, eager to adorn a surface with such high-prestige marks; or there were restrictions as to who could produce glyphs and where they could be used. Pseudo-glyphs certainly become common only in the Late Classic period, the time of greatest scribal production. What they do highlight are the rounded outlines of glyphs—most likely an artifact of their basis in calligraphy—a gathering into compact blocks, a divide between larger ones and thinner, more oval signs, a thick line contrasting with internal elements, an ordering into rows and columns, occasionally inserting legible signs into senseless wholes (fig. 1.23). Often repetitive, they appear to be placeholders for actual glyphs, occurring in slots and locations where legible signs would ordinarily appear. That a painter’s literacy is not always at stake is made clear by the appearance of pseudo-text, if with a repeated legible sign, near a readable record of the owner of a drinking vessel for chocolate (*kakaw* in the glyphs) and the name of his mother; both figures are doubtless seated in the scene below (fig. 1.24). Nor are pseudo-glyphs just on portable objects. Several stelae or stone monoliths have them, perhaps in situations where local literacy came and went.⁷²

Examined in a certain way, pseudo-glyphs “parasitize” writing by having a necessary relation to phonic glyphs and word signs. Legible signs come first. Only then can there be pseudo-glyphs. The biological comparison (“parasitize”) can be taken too far, for it is literally inexact. But it does lead to thoughts about how pseudo-writing, the “asemic” graphs that mimic script, exist as a broader category.⁷³ The elimination of sound and meaning must be intentional. Bad handwriting does not qualify, even though others cannot read it. The viewer of pseudo-writing, for there can be no reader, begins by trying to access the script. Then, in an instant, they see the imposture. What the writer or scribbler wanted is seldom the same. Is there some reflection, courtesy of the philosopher Roland Bar-



1.20 Ezra writing, folio 5r, Codex Amiatinus, ca. 700 CE, The Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Amiat.1 f. Vr, Florence; reproduced with permission of MiC, further reproduction by any means is prohibited.

thes, about graphs and their voids of meaning?⁷⁴ Is there a comment on the supposed vacuity of Chinese traditional scholarship, as in Xu Bing’s *Book from the Sky* (天书, 1987–1991), an assembly of nonsensical Chinese characters?⁷⁵ Is someone purporting to channel spirits or Martians, or are we looking at Cy Twombly’s cursive marks, done for more aesthetic reasons, or the stages by which children emulate and then learn writing (fig. 1.25)?⁷⁶ The fact is, an absence of meaning opens the way to other meanings. It needs local explanations for why mimicry took place, as séance, semiotic philosophy or negative reaction to writing, or because of individual development, aesthetic choice, and privileged use.



1.21 Legible glyphs incised on blue-painted atole bowl, Structure Sub 1-4, Calakmul, Mexico, seventh century CE (photograph by Rogelio Valencia Rivera, courtesy of Proyecto Arqueológico Calakmul, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia).



1.22 Texts shown as though painted on cloth, scene of visiting tributaries, Room 1, Captions 5b (first figure to left) and 6b (second figure to left), Bonampak, Mexico, ca. 791 CE (color rendering courtesy of the Bonampak Documentation Project, illustration by Heather Hurst and Leonard Ashby; Infrared video stitch by members of the Bonampak Documentation Project, based on infrared video by Stephen D. Houston and Gene Ware).



1.23 Pseudo-texts on two bowls by a single painter, Burial HOL.T.98.04, Building A, Group II, Holmul, Guatemala, ca. 650 CE (photographs by Alexandre Tokovinine, courtesy of Francisco Estrada-Belli).



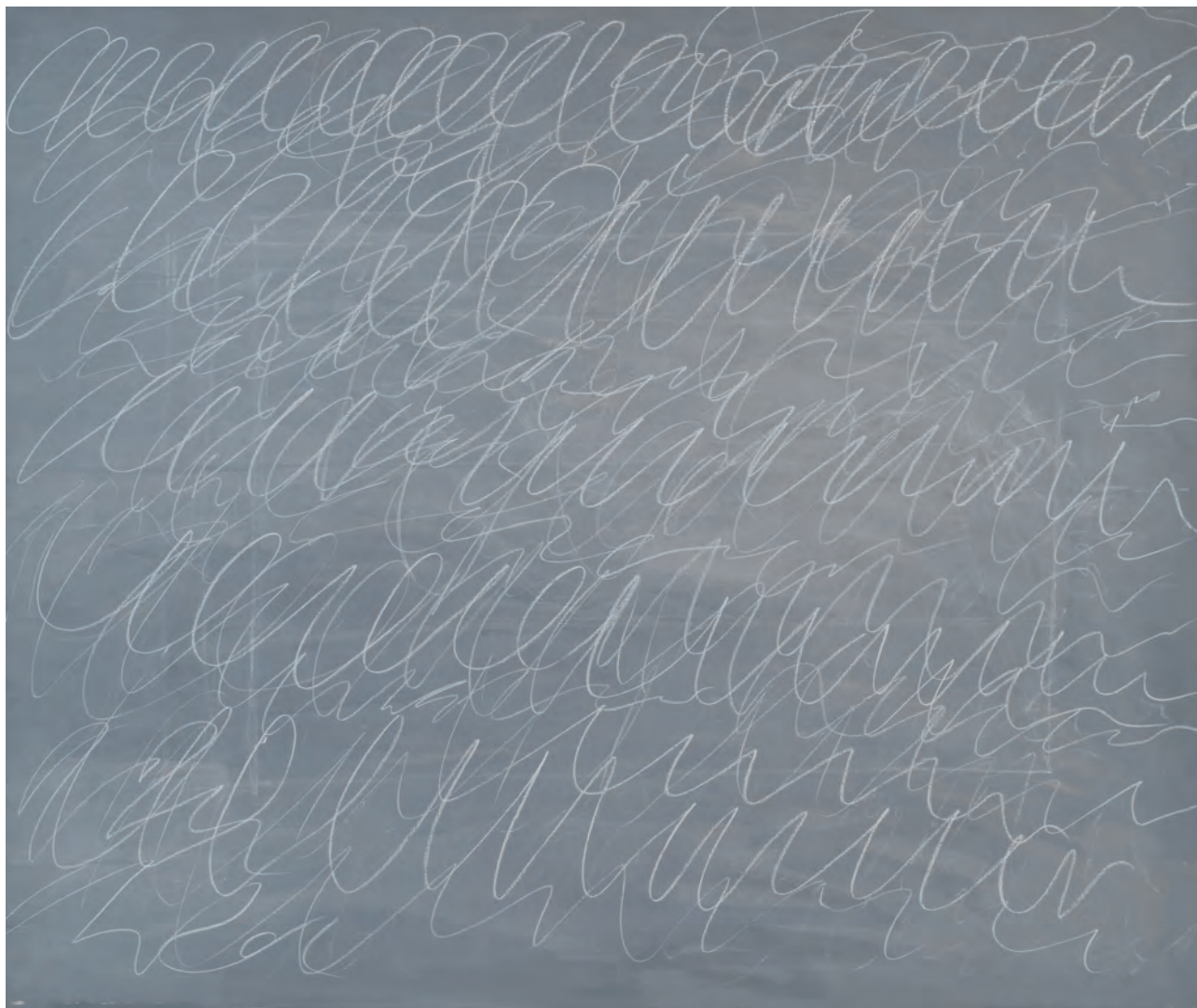
1.24 Image with legible text and a column of pseudo-text, using a repeated glyph that represents a polished hardstone, area of El Zotz, Guatemala, ca. seventh century CE (photograph by Justin Kerr, K679, Justin Kerr photograph collection, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC).

Vitalities

A hieroglyph has an important attribute. To endow an image or a graph with a body is, in some measure, to make it live. Attaching arms, legs, and faces establishes an analogy between an original and its depiction, between a living body and its representation. According to the anthropologist Philippe Descola, what matters most is what that resemblance means.⁷⁷ It could be a form of imitation, a figural mimesis, or about shared essence, what a Christian theologian might call “presence.” Can it be both? What does resemblance even signify if other, more ethereal or less visible properties are being invoked? To Descola (and others, for the list is long of people concerned with likeness and being in imagery), a panoply of masks, carvings, paintings can become “members of a social collective” with humans. Images touch on who belongs in that collective, how they act, how their properties were made visible, and what their very nature might be.⁷⁸

Descola’s categories build on a carefully wrought, if controversial, theory about the essence of different beings. He defines a grid of attributes by their “interiorities” (souls or minds) and “physicalities” (outward form, matter, and behavior).⁷⁹ “Animism,” drawing heavily on his knowledge of Amazonia, consists of humans and other creatures with “similar interiorities” and “dissimilar physicalities.” Jaguars and humans do not look the same, but they have similar thoughts, natures, urges, and ferocious, driving spirits.⁸⁰ In the area that includes the Maya, by contrast, living things possess multiple essences and bodies. For Descola, this is “analogism.” A plurality of souls or energies inhabit quite different beings, but those forces may also extend from one to the other. Their “interiorities” are dissimilar, as are their “physicalities.” A human body, as for the Aztec, might have multiple souls that tendrils out to other beings, other things.

Other schemes are possible that look at how categories of beings relate to society.⁸¹ But what gaps there are:



1.25 Untitled, Cy Twombly, 1969, private collection. Oil-based house paint and wax crayon on canvas, 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ $\times$ 93 $\frac{1}{2}$ in (200 $\times$ 237.5 cm).

Descola absorbs plants into his classification, if lightly so, but he would not seem to entertain the possibility of other sorts of vitality.⁸² For some Maya, sources insist, malignant sewing machines, automobiles, evangelical music, scissors, rainbows, and ravenous outcrops harbor their own energies and willful minds, as, by ancient evidence, did water and whirlwinds.⁸³ In a few of these, “[a]nger churns, along with an unforgiving appetite for vengeance,” and, to a disquieting extent, by ethnographic evidence, there can also be quite varied ideas and underlying rationales within a single community.⁸⁴ In earlier work, since rectified in part by his later attention to figuration and representation, Descola passes over the world of artifice and material culture, the objects and features not thought to be alive in Western thought.⁸⁵ Perhaps the simplest formulation is the most flexible, courtesy of Graham Harvey, a professor of religious studies. Seeing vitalities through an “animistic” lens, he posits that many people “recognize that the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and life is always lived in relationship with others.”⁸⁶ Such complexities of definition will find no resolution here, but we can look at several kinds of liveliness in Maya texts and images, at how they were used and what energies were thought to animate them. These vitalities include utterance, representation, interaction, and claims to being.

Utterance

Every stock character in a Maya figurine, every image of a god, is likely to have triggered a story in someone’s mind, a theme to be studied in the final chapter of this book. The tales could be informal, from a Maya version of *commedia dell’arte* or Punch and Judy, to some recall of an epic—a similar relation to theater and Homer informed many ceramics in Classical Greece.⁸⁷ So for writing. The Classicist Eric Havelock observed that much script, at least in the early Mediterranean world, entwined with oral performance.⁸⁸ Reading was probably not silent, and writing needed a boost from knowledge, memories, and their recitation in speech. As noted, the Bayeux tapestry may exemplify such practices, more than the academic literature seems to admit. The very range of terms in Mayan

languages for “reading” run the gamut of “look at” and “see,” but also “shout,” “call,” “speak with.”⁸⁹ This is a kind of vitality that works externally, needing others to interact with glyphs. Reading becomes more expansive; eyes receive textual content, mouths say it aloud, and, as heard by others, speakers interpolate content not recorded in the glyphs. Text and picture may not exist in silent communion, maddening as it may be to highlight wholly absent and irretrievable information. Yet, by overt evidence, orality was there: in laying claim to making a written text, several identifiable scribes from the Late Classic indicate that they “say it,” *cheheen* (fig. 1.26).⁹⁰ These statements may be at the cusp of transmission from mouth to written surface, as indicated by a pot where a deity speaks to four monkey scribes, while another set of literates, an opossum, vulture, and dog, appears to record these statements (fig. 1.27).⁹¹

Perhaps oral statements were also, as in some legal systems, certified words under penalty of law: not what was solely written but seen and heard, an assurance that texts happened to be true. This is reinforced by a kind of witness clearly valued by the Classic Maya, validation by the act of seeing (*‘ila’*). It is recorded glyphically as a single, lidded eyeball with pupil and lateral optical nerve, and bilateral extrusions to signal a Maya theory of sight. In two lines, possibly to show the range of peripheral vision, sight passes *from* the eye, not into it—the eye is an agent, not just a recipient of optical stimuli (fig. 1.28). Recollect the glowing orbs shown in an illustration from the preface. Applied to visions seen in caves, it was also a means of ratifying acts by deities or ancestors surveying from above, or by royalty in attendance. Then there are



1.26 *Cheheen*, “he says” (*che-he-na*) statement, followed by *‘its’aat*, “wise man,” and name of painter, northern Guatemala, eighth century CE (photograph by Justin Kerr, K1256, Justin Kerr photograph collection, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC).





1.27 A high deity speaks (*cheheen*) to four monkeys (*4 te' chuween*), with dog, opossum, and vulture scribes below, area of Motul de San José, Guatemala, eighth century CE (photograph by BAMW Photography); detail of text by high god (drawing by Stephen Houston).



1.28 “His seeing” (*yilaji*), La Corona Hieroglyphic Stairway 2, block XIII, early eighth century CE. Two affixes, *yi* and *ji*, attach to an eyeball with extruded sight scrolls and, to the back, an optical nerve (The Art Institute of Chicago, purchased with funds provided by the Claire B. Zeisler Foundation, 1970.101).

internal clues to orality, in the form of a few inscriptions that “speak” in first-person pronouns.⁹² The contexts are opaque, but at least one inscription appears to record speech, murmuring eternally within the interior of a temple at Copan, Honduras. Horst Bredekamp, an art historian, cites many miraculous objects in Europe that were said to speak, sing, and refer to themselves, a practice also recorded in Pharaonic Egypt.⁹³ In certain texts of Old and Middle Kingdom Egypt, hieroglyphs depicting potentially harmful creatures had their bodies halved, cut, a tail gone, a wasp its head, on the evident theory that, if complete, these creatures would endanger the deceased interred nearby.⁹⁴ Depiction implies action but also the potential for interaction and sound (see chapter 4). That possibility of inner vitality will be explored near the end of this chapter.

Representation

A dog on a pot, ca. 700 CE, can be imagined to pant, lope, sniff, and bark, the better to guard the lord being carried in his litter.⁹⁵ They are probably on a three-day journey, to judge from the three sequent day names above (fig. 1.29). In another scene, on a carved panel from La Corona, Guatemala, a dog scampers in front of a throne, a serious breach of royal decorum, both baffling and unconventional in Classic Maya imagery (fig. 1.30). Perhaps the dog runs from another image, on an adjacent panel, of someone dancing in front of a brazier, or it rushes to scope out the danger of a person—a woman?—lurking behind the throne. These puzzles could be sorted out by a better-preserved text, unfortunately missing here. Yet, in each case, the pot and the stone panel offer representational vitality. Visual conventions for dogs had to be in place. There had to be a prominent canine, alert tail, and ragged ear, cut by dogfights or nibbled by a skin disease common in the tropics. Having seen such animals, the viewer would supply other attributes of dogs, their calls, relations to humans, all the things that dogs do.

In glyphs, a representational vitality stems from their bodies. This can take two forms, the first being a generic endowment of glyphs with a face or body when those are not central to their reading, possibly a reflection of a tendency, present from infancy, for people to recognize faces.⁹⁶ The *ba* syllable on a carved bone from Copan, Honduras, forms part of a spelling, *u-ba-ki*, *u baak*, “his bone,” a self-reference followed by the name of the owner (fig. 1.31). Its human face appears to have no bearing on its reading. In another example from northern Guatemala, pointed out by the epigraphist David Stuart, the outlines occur as an animal profile perhaps dictated by two glyphs for rodents in the text, *baah*, “pocket gopher,” and a syllable for *ch’o*, “rat,” duly equipped with a sign for night to show when that creature is most active (fig. 1.32).⁹⁷ In a kind of graphic contagion, murine outlines seep from one glyph to another, the outlines of an ear, a snout—less fancifully, one could even call it a “font,” if written by hand rather than printed. The second form of figuration is more specific, a Moon Goddess’s head materializing in a stylized

Index

Note: Figures are indicated by an *f* following the page number.

- absolute (near-absolute) fidelity, 114–16
- acoustic mimicry, 132–38
- aerophones, 147, 152
- alabaster, 65, 66*f*, 189, 189*f*, 214, 215*f*
- aliveness, xi, 29, 40, 165
- altars: human journey depictions, 52; movement and, 166, 174, 184, 189; ritual and, 166, 174; scale and sizes of, 106–7, 107*f*, 110, 114, 123, 123*f*, 125
- ambiguities, 45, 217
- Anatolian hieroglyphs, 19
- androcentric, x
- animal depictions, 15, 22, 37–38, 38*f*
- animistic lens, 29
- Arntz, Gerd, 11
- Auden, W. H., 218
- audioscapes, 145–47. *See also* sounds of glyphs
- baak* spelling, 32, 34*f*
- Bakhtin, Mikhail, 195
- Barthes, Roland, 23
- Bayeux tapestry, 8, 8*f*, 29
- Beard, Mary, 197
- Beauty Revealed* (Goodridge), 102, 102*f*
- being/presence in glyphs, 41–43, 42*f*
- belligerent speech, 145
- birds, 128–29, 136–37
- blindness, xii, 125, 195
- Bloch, Stefano, 4
- Boccioni, Umberto, 164
- Bonampak murals of Chiapas, Mexico, 15, 19, 155
- bone pins, 97, 99*f*, 100, 175
- Book from the Ground* (Xu Bing), 11, 17*f*
- Book from the Sky* (Xu Bing), 23
- braille, 5
- Bricker, Victoria, 198
- Brittenham, Claudia, x
- Burke, Edmund, 101
- cacography, 78
- calibrations, 20, 106, 152
- calligraphy, 23, 47, 57, 61, 63–66, 74, 143, 151, 186, 201, 218
- Cardinal, Roger, 78
- carvings: of animals, 32; being and, 41–43; Chinese texts, 3; embellishments, 34–37, 35*f*; glyphs and, 7, 19–22, 40–41; humor and, 206, 210, 217–18; making of, 53–54, 61–63, 72*f*, 74–76, 80–95; movement and, 164, 167*f*, 168–69, 171–77, 177*f*, 189; named carvers, x, 47, 65–70; as representation, 43; scale of, 97–101, 105, 107, 109–25; sound and, 129, 132, 138, 139*f*, 153; vitalities and, 27, 32
- Ceibal Structure A-3, 168–71, 170*f*
- celestial beings, 85–86, 85*f*, 97, 188, 190*f*
- celestial referents, 168, 173, 184–85
- celestial thrones, 97, 129
- Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (the Center), xii
- ceramics: in Classical Greece, 29, 86; humor and, 200–201, 202*f*, 203*f*, 206*f*, 212; making of, 47, 53, 55, 57, 61–62, 74, 86; movement and, 166, 187; painted, 10, 141*f*, 142; scale of, 103, 104*f*, 125; signatures of painters on, 47–48, 48*f*; sound and, 142, 145; vessels, 187, 200*f*
- chants, 138, 144
- Charles III (King of United Kingdom), 196
- cheehen* statement, 29, 29*f*, 31*f*
- Chinese texts (*moya*), 3–4, 5*f*, 11
- chordophones, 147–48
- Classical Greece, 23, 29, 61
- clay work, 52, 65, 80, 101, 103, 114, 166, 176
- cloth texts, 22
- clowns in glyphs, 202–7, 204*f*, 207*f*
- Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, 3, 5
- codex-style painters, 55*f*, 58*f*, 59*f*, 60*f*, 61–63, 78, 91*f*, 143, 150*f*
- Códice de México, 87
- Coe, Michael, 50, 142
- collective movement, 180
- comics, 14
- conch shell, 57, 65, 105, 105*f*, 142, 149–51, 151*f*, 212, 216–17
- concurrence, x, 43, 132, 138
- Conus spurius* shells, 148*f*
- copying networks, 62
- Cromwell, Thomas, 138
- Cropper, Elizabeth, xii
- cuneiform systems, 19
- David* (Michelangelo), 100
- da Vinci, Leonardo, 100
- death gods, 143
- death masks, 112, 112*f*
- deities: on bone pins, 97, 99*f*; dynastic figures and, 48; effigy carvings, 66; Maize God depictions, 15, 18*f*, 50, 52–53, 93, 97, 108*f*, 125, 138, 160, 169*f*, 191, 201; performances by, 159*f*; rain gods, 40, 70, 102–3, 103*f*, 132, 134*f*, 160, 185; royal women and, 53, 53*f*; scale and size of, 125; scrolls and, 142–43; wind and, 128–32, 129*f*, 130*f*, 131*f*, 132*f*
- Descola, Philippe, 27, 29
- disproportion, 78, 110–11, 207
- Dresden Codex, 180, 185, 210
- drums/drummers, 127, 132, 135*f*, 140*f*, 143–44, 147–60, 149*f*, 150*f*, 151*f*, 184, 204
- Dubuffet, Jean, 78
- ebony, 20
- effigies, 52, 66, 102, 114, 121, 168–69, 184
- Egyptian hieroglyphs, ix, 19, 106
- Eisner, Will, 14
- ekphrasis, 8, 172
- Elizabeth I (Queen of England), 101
- Elkins, James, 8–9
- enlarged scale, 118–25
- epigraphists, 3, 9, 19–20, 32, 55, 80
- eroticism, 52, 85, 101–2, 112–14, 113*f*, 198, 202, 205*f*, 210
- Esparza Olguin, Octavio, 53
- extramissions, xii
- Ezra writing, 23*f*
- Fabergé collection, 101
- face-down stones, 48
- figuration, xii, 29, 32, 34, 118
- fire-drilling, 66, 83, 186, 188
- first-person comedy, 210–17
- flutes, 149, 160
- fourth wall, 37–40, 38*f*, 39*f*, 42*f*, 198
- full-figure glyphs, 34, 35*f*
- full-sized, 100
- gender roles, 52–53, 52*f*
- Gendler, Tamar, 40
- Glass, Robert, 69
- glottographs, 9, 9*f*
- Goodman, Nelson, ix–x, 43
- Goodridge, Sarah, 102, 102*f*
- graffiti, 3–7, 168, 183, 183*f*, 204, 205*f*
- graphic novels, 11, 14, 56, 56*f*
- graphosphere, 3–4, 217
- Greenblatt, Stephen, 163
- haecceity, 19
- Hamilton, Andrew, 100, 110
- Hamilton, Philipp Ferdinand de, 112
- handedness, 70, 72*f*, 74, 76*f*
- Harrist, Robert, 3

- Harvey, Graham, 29
Havelock, Eric, 29
headaddresses, xi, 97, 99*f*, 112, 121, 128, 175, 189, 216
hearing lost sound, 160–61
Henry VIII (King of England), 138
“He of the Chocolate,” monument, 116, 116*f*
hierarchical fidelity, 118
Hieroglyphic Stairway at Copan, 70
hieroglyphs, ix, 19–23, 32, 43, 45, 106–7, 164, 175, 184*f*
hili “rest,” 184
Hilliard, Nicholas, 101
homography, 70, 73*f*
horizontal movement, 184–88
horns, 37, 151
huli “arrive (at),” 185
humanimals, 207–10
humor in glyphs: clowns and, 202–7, 204*f*, 207*f*;
 first-person comedy, 210–17; humanimals,
 207–10; indecorous couples, 201–2; introduc-
 tion to, 195–97; jokes, 43, 195–98, 201, 207,
 212, 217; laugh culture, 197–98; material wit,
 200–201
hu’n books, 22

ichonal interactions, 165–66, 175
iconicity, 9, 62
ideophones, 149, 152
idiophones, 147–48, 160
impersonation, x, 43, 48, 87, 93, 107, 128, 130*f*,
 142, 145, 155, 175–77, 185–86, 216
improvisation, 63, 144, 153
incense/incenser, 40, 52, 83, 105, 110, 140*f*, 165,
 175, 188–89
indecorous couples, 201–2
Inka khipu, 5
instruments, 74, 136, 142, 195; conch shell, 142,
 149–51, 151*f*; flutes, 149, 160; horns, 37, 151;
 lithophones, 152, 155*f*; trumpets/trumpet-
 ers, 127, 148–51, 150*f*, 151*f*, 152*f*, 155, 160–61,
 184, 198; whistles, 127, 132, 144, 145*f*, 149,
 154–55, 168, 173, 197, 202. *See also* music/
 music-making
intent, 11, 15, 23, 45, 100, 148, 153, 163, 198, 212
interaction with viewers, 37–41
intericonicity, 62
interiorities, 27
internal fidelity, 116–18
interpictoriality, 62
Ionian alphabet, 20
Iron Age, 55
ISOTYPE (International System of Typographic
 Picture Education), 11, 20
ivory, 20, 101–2, 102*f*

jade, 41, 82, 101, 114, 127, 147, 153, 171, 184–85
jokes, 43, 195–98, 201, 207, 212, 217
Just, Bryan, 47

Kelly, Elsworth, 217
Kim Jong-un, 196
knapped stones, 152
Komkom Vase, 10

laugh culture, 197–98
Laughlin, Robert, 193
left handedness, 70, 72*f*, 74
legible glyphs, 11, 22–23, 24*f*, 27*f*, 74, 97, 105, 107
Le Noir, Jean, 112, 113*f*
leporellos, 22
Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 101
life-sized, 100, 110, 112, 114, 116–17, 125, 217
listening to glyphs. *See* sounds of glyphs
lithophones, 152, 155*f*
Lorenzo the Magnificent, 101
Louis Philippe I (King of France), 204

Mack, John, 101
macroblades, 152–53, 153*f*, 154*f*
Maize God depictions, 15, 18*f*, 50, 52–53, 93, 97,
 108*f*, 125, 138, 160, 169*f*, 191, 201
makers/making of glyphs: configuring and
 unmaking, 93–95; handedness, 70, 72*f*, 74,
 76*f*; introduction to, xii, 47–50; layouts,
 86–93, 87*f*; material, 50–55, 80–83; named
 carvers, 65–70, 71*f*; named painters, 55–65;
 overview of, 50–55, 80; reverse writing, 74,
 76, 76*f*; surfaces, 83–86; text-image relations,
 76, 78–80, 87
Martin, Simon, 9, 202
Martire, Pietro, ix, x
masonry, 7, 83, 95
material wit, 200–201
Matsumoto, Mallory, 80
Maya glyphs, ix–x, 7, 19–20, 20*f*, 34, 38–39, 74,
 106–7, 118, 142–43, 165
Mayuy, 47–48, 50, 50*f*
McCloud, Scott, 14
meaningful movement, 191–93. *See also* move-
 ment in glyphs
Mellon, Paul, xii
membranophones, 147, 149*f*
memory, 167, 212
merography, 37
Messerschmidt, Franz Xaver, 197
Michelangelo, 100
micro-stelae, 103
Miller, Mary, x, 52, 154
miniatures, 38*f*, 100–105, 104*f*
Mitchell, W. J. T., 8
monkey depictions, 10, 22, 22*f*, 29, 31*f*, 37, 50–52,
 61, 142, 151, 201, 207–10
monoliths, 23, 80, 82, 93, 97
montage, 14
monumentality, 63–65, 80, 97, 100, 147
Moon Goddess, 32, 34, 185, 202, 203*f*

Morley, Simon, 9–10
mortuary panels, 122–23, 122*f*
mosquitoes, 137–38, 137*f*
movement in glyphs: altars and, 166, 174, 184,
 189; centering and, 165–76; collective move-
 ment, 180; deities and, 189–90; horizontal
 movement, 184–88; *huli* movement, 185;
 ichonal interactions, 165–66, 175; introduction
 to, xii, 163–65; meaningful movement, 191–93;
 memory and, 167; orientations and, 165–76;
 showing of, 176–84; *tali* movement, 184–85;
 vertical movement, 189–91; wind in glyphs,
 127–32, 129*f*, 130*f*, 131*f*, 132*f*
Munch, Edvard, 127, 128*f*
music in glyphs, 127–32
music/music-making: aerophones, 147, 152; chor-
 dophones, 147–48; drums/drummers, 127,
 132, 135*f*, 140*f*, 143–44, 147–60, 149*f*, 150*f*, 151*f*,
 184, 204; ideophones, 149, 152; idiophones,
 147–48, 160; membranophones, 147, 149*f*.
 See also instruments

Nabokov, Peter, 186
Naj Tunich, 198
Nelson, Steven, xii
Neurath, Marie, 11
Neurath, Otto, 11, 20

obsidian, 82, 152
onomatopoeia, 136–37, 161
orality, 8, 29–34, 138, 217
Oudry, Jean-Baptiste, 112
outsider art, 78
outside, 100, 109–10, 154, 207

painting/painters: as *baah*, 41; ceramics and, 10,
 141*f*, 142; codex-style painters, 55*f*, 58*f*, 59*f*,
 60*f*, 61–63, 78, 91*f*, 143, 150*f*; configuration
 of, 93; graffiti, 3–7, 168, 183, 183*f*, 204, 203*f*;
 hieroglyphs and, 19–27; humanimals and,
 207–10; humor and, 200–204, 210, 212; layout
 of, 86–87; making of, 47–55, 80; movement
 and, 164, 168–69, 180, 186–87; named, x,
 55–65; as representation, 43; retrograde, 74;
 scale of, 101–2, 125; on scrolls, 143; signa-
 tures of, 47–61, 48*f*, 55*f*, 58*f*, 59*f*, 60*f*, 69–70;
 sound and, 118, 127–28, 138, 151; speech and,
 143–44; *u tz’ihb* (his paint/painting), 55, 56;
 on vessels, 18*f*, 23; vitalities and, 27, 37; wall
 painting, 55, 63, 64*f*, 128, 168
parallel architecture, ix
performances, 29, 37, 55, 106, 132, 144, 147–48,
 151–55, 160–61, 168, 198
Petrucchi, Armando, 3, 4
phonic writing, 23, 56, 137
physicalities, 27
Posh One (graffiti artist), 3–4, 4*f*, 5

- Price, Thomas J., 100
 prose fully integrated, 14
 prose primary, 14
 prose subsumed, 14
 pseudo-glyphs, 23
 pseudo-writing, 22–23, 26*f*, 27*f*, 78, 80–81
 puzzle writing, 138
- quiddity, 19
- rabbit depictions, 15, 22, 50, 52, 185, 201–2, 202*f*, 204*f*, 212–14, 214*f*, 217
 rain gods, 40, 70, 102–3, 103*f*, 132, 134*f*, 160, 185
 representation: contradictions in, 43, 45; Descola on, 29; overview of, 32–37; painting as, 43; of scale and sizing, 106, 110, 112, 117–18, 125
 retrograde glyphs, 76, 77*f*
 retrograde paintings, 74
 retrograde texts, 74, 75*f*
 reverse writing, 74, 76, 76*f*
 right handedness, 70, 74, 76*f*
 Roestraten, Pieter van, 207
 royal women, 53
- sacrality, 37, 186
 Sampson, Geoffrey, 9
 San Bartolo murals, 7
 sarcophagus, 111–12
 Saussure, Ferdinand de, 4
 scale/size of glyphs: absolute (near-absolute) fidelity, 114–16; aims and tactics, 125; of altars, 106–7, 107*f*, 110, 114, 123, 123*f*, 125; commensurate scale, 112–14; disproportion, 78, 110–11, 207; enlarged, 118–25; full-sized, 100; hierarchical fidelity, 118; internal fidelity, 116–18; introduction to, xii, 97–100; life-sized, 100, 110, 112, 114, 116–17, 125, 217; miniatures, 38*f*, 100–105, 104*f*; monumentality, 63–65, 80, 97, 100, 147; outsized, 100, 109–10, 154, 207; reduced scale, 101–2; representation of, 106, 110, 112, 117–18, 125; sizing, 100; small things, 102–5, 104*f*; sumptuary practices and, 120–21; words for small, 102
 Schapiro, Meyer, 22
 Schlieren photography, 127, 128*f*
The Scream (Munch), 127, 128*f*
 scrolls, 3, 32*f*, 137*f*, 138, 140*f*, 142–45, 142*f*
 sculptures, 67, 70, 93, 95*f*, 100, 138, 164, 176.
See also carvings
 semantic superfluity, 136
 semasiographs, 9, 9*f*
 semiotic circle, 106–7
 shells: conch, 57, 65, 105, 105*f*, 142, 149–51, 151*f*, 212, 216–17; *Conus spurius*, 148*f*; named carvers, 66–67, 67*f*; name glyphs on, 114; *Spondylus*, 101, 147, 148*f*; as tribute, 121; turtle shell, 132, 148, 155, 160; wind and, 127–28
 signatures of artists: painters, 47–61, 48*f*, 55*f*, 58*f*, 59*f*, 60*f*, 69–70; sculptors, 48, 50, 50*f*; on vessels, 55*f*, 56
 SKATE (SK8) (graffiti artist), 3, 4, 4*f*, 5
 skeuomorphs, 103
 social hierarchy, 118, 214
 songs, 45, 127, 132, 138, 140–44, 153–54, 164
 sonic stones, 152
 souls, 19, 27, 37, 43, 85–86, 101, 166
 sounds of glyphs (ch4): acoustic mimicry, 132–38; assembling of, 153–60; audioscapes, 145–47; beaded utterances, 143; chants, 138, 144; hearing lost sound, 160–61; instruments and, 74, 132, 136, 142, 144, 147, 151–61, 168, 184, 195; introduction to, xii; knapped stones, 152; making of, 145–53; mosquitoes and, 137–38, 137*f*; music and, 127–32; onomatopoeia, 136–37, 161; semantic superfluity, 136; songs, 45, 127, 132, 138, 140–44, 153–54, 164; sonic stones, 152; speech scrolls, 138, 140*f*, 142–45, 142*f*; vocalization/vocalizing, 36*f*, 138, 144–45, 151, 180, 204; wind and, 127–32, 129*f*, 130*f*, 131*f*, 132*f*; xa, 136, 136*f*. *See also* music/music-making
 speech scrolls, 138, 140*f*, 142–45, 142*f*
Spondylus shell, 101, 147, 148*f*
 stelae: beings on, 41; drilled holes in, 41; erosion on, 80; fourth wall and, 37–40, 38*f*, 39*f*; micro-stelae, 103; movement on, 168–69, 170*f*, 175, 180, 189; names on, 66, 69; pseudo-glyphs on, 23; scale of, 97, 100, 103, 105, 110, 118, 121–22, 121*f*, 125; size and scale of, 97; standing position, 40; text-image on, 82–83, 93; texts found on, 10–11; virtuality depictions, 40
 stilts/stilt dancing, 127, 148, 150*f*, 155, 159*f*, 160
 storytelling, 8, 10, 14–15, 29, 37, 45, 102, 176, 217
 Stroop effect, 37
 Stuart, David, 20, 32, 40, 53, 80, 87, 175, 185
 stucco, 65, 110, 118, 165*f*, 202*f*
 Summers, David, x
 sumptuary practices, 120–21
 Sun God, 48, 93, 168–75, 186, 202
 supernaturals, 43, 48, 52, 74, 97, 102, 107–9, 187–88, 197, 201, 216–17
- tali* “arrive (from),” 184–85
 Taube, Karl, 128, 132, 197, 204
 Teotihuacan-style glyphs, 36*f*, 38, 40, 42*f*, 117–18, 117*f*, 184, 204–6
 text-image relations: ekphrasis in, 8, 172; introduction to, 8–19, 9*f*; making of, 76, 78–80, 87; painting and, 15, 19; on stelae, 82–83, 93; Venn diagrams for, 8–9, 9*f*. *See also* writing/writers
- thingness, 19–20
 thisness, 19
 Tomlinson, Gary, 153–54
 trompe l’oeil, 22, 103
 trumpets/trumpeters, 127, 148–51, 150*f*, 151*f*, 152*f*, 155, 160–61, 184, 198
 turtle shell, 132, 148, 155, 160
 Tutankhamun (pharaoh), 20, 21*f*
 Tuub Ajaw, 47, 48*f*, 50, 55, 57
tz’ihb (paint/painting), 55, 56
- understanding glyphs: being/presence in, 41–43, 42*f*; interaction with viewers, 37–41; introduction to, xii, 3–5; time, places, people, 5–8; utterances, 29–32; vitalities, x–xii, 19, 27–29, 32, 37, 41–45, 48, 132, 161, 212, 218
 underworld, 52*f*, 129, 132, 155, 160, 189–90
- “Vase of the Thirty-one Gods,” 10, 14*f*
 Vernus, Pascal, 106
 vertical movement, 189–91
 vessels: ceramic, 187, 200*f*; miniature/small, 104*f*, 103015; painting on, 18*f*, 23; signatures on, 55*f*, 56; visible manifestations of speech on, 138, 142–43, 145
 viewing glyphs, 5
 vitalities, x–xii, 19, 27–29, 32, 37, 41–45, 48, 132, 161, 212, 218
 Vitruvian Man (da Vinci), 100
 vocalization/vocalizing, 36*f*, 138, 144–45, 151, 180, 204
- wall painting, 55, 63, 64*f*, 128, 168
 Ward, Lynd, 10
 Webster, Daniel, 102
 Western imagery, 37–38
 whatness, 19
 whistles, 127, 132, 144, 145*f*, 149, 154–55, 168, 173, 197, 202
 wild style, 4–5, 34
 Willerslev, Rane, 43
 wind in glyphs, 127–32, 129*f*, 130*f*, 131*f*, 132*f*
woj glyphs, 20–22
 worldmaking, ix–x
 writing/writers: cuneiform systems, 19; Ezra writing, 23*f*; graffiti, 3–7, 168, 183, 183*f*, 204, 205*f*; graphosphere and, 3–4, 217; phonic, 23, 56, 137; pseudo-writing, 22–23, 26*f*, 27*f*, 78, 80–81; puzzle writing, 138; reverse, 74, 76, 76*f*. *See also* text-image relations
- Xu Bing, 11, 23
- yilaji* statement, 32*f*
- Zender, Marc, 212