



★ **Image Control: Art, Fascism, and the Right to Resist**

Patrick Nathan

Counterpoint (Aug 17, 2021)

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If a picture is worth a thousand words, what's the exchange rate for social media selfies? Patrick Nathan's provocative, sometimes jarring book *Image Control* explores the destabilization of relationships that results when photographs and other images usurp the authority that belongs to language.

Images devour language in a process that Nathan identifies as "fascism, an ideology that requires a schism with reality ... that will replace reality itself, including the reality of human beings." The book draws on a series of powerful images from media, as of the fence where Mathew Shepard was murdered, and a portrait of "Donald Trump hunched forward in a Louis XV lounge chair, moth-eaten, worn, half in shadow." Each image is described in rich, defamiliarizing language, re-presenting iconic photographs and their contexts, cultural impacts, aesthetic significance, and commercial value. Nathan pierces the axis of images and words and finds, under the surface, a tyranny of images that are manipulated—and that, in turn, manipulate unwitting consumers.

In spite of the serious implications of its arguments, the book is timely, glib, and wry. Breaking a long spell of writer's block, Nathan returns to social media to post about the accomplishment: "conditioned as I am like some horribly abused laboratory gerbil—I logged onto Twitter to celebrate." Humor mitigates the blunt impact of the book's implications, as its four sections pivot from disparate subjects like the Columbine school shooting, Twitter analytics, Syria, and St. Augustine. Pulled quotes throughout the text emphasize certain counterpoints; there are no pictures.

Whether this system of consumption can be avoided or escaped is up for debate, Nathan says; when imagery saturates the cultural landscape, we lose the power to complain. *Image Control* is a whip-smart text—the kind of brain candy that never loses its sweet tanginess.

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