

# VISUAL METHODOLOGIES

An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials

4TH EDITION

GILLIAN ROSE



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website



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At SAGE we take sustainability seriously. Most of our products are printed in the UK using FSC papers and boards. When we print overseas we ensure sustainable papers are used as measured by the PREPS grading system. We undertake an annual audit to monitor our sustainability.



Gillian Rose has provided a welcome overview of the state of the field. *Visual Methodologies* succeeds both as an introductory text, certain to be widely adopted in the classroom, and as a sophisticated refresher course for those who have followed the rapid maturation of this remarkable interdisciplinary discourse. Added material on the latest advances in digital technology brings this latest edition to the cutting edge of visual culture studies.

*Martin Jay, Ehrman Professor, University of California, Berkeley*

*Visual Methodologies* is an indispensable resource for anyone working with visual materials. It offers practical guidance and expert theoretical orientation on how to approach, think about, and interpret visual culture, ranging from archival photography and documentary film to websites and social media. An important aspect of this book is the attention paid to audiences and viewing publics, as well as to the ethical demands of visual research. In this new edition, Gillian Rose brings the book fully up to date with contemporary developments in media arts and digital culture, and explores the new possibilities for visual research made possible by developments in software and data analytics. Whether you are new to studying visual culture or a seasoned expert seeking to refine your approach, *Visual Methodologies* has you covered.

*Christoph Lindner, Professor of Media and Culture, University of Amsterdam*

*Visual Methodologies* is an indispensable book for teaching and understanding methods in visual culture. Clear, comprehensive, and lucid, it makes accessible the how, why, and what of different methodological approaches in ways that elucidate paths to better research and argument. The constantly changing terrain of visual culture today makes many demands on scholarly and theoretical approaches, and this fourth edition does not disappoint, with updated concepts and an explanation of digital methods. As an introduction of methods in cultural studies, communication, and visual culture research, this book is unparalleled. It is essential reading for anyone writing an MA thesis or doctoral dissertation.

*Marita Sturken, Professor of Media, Culture and Communication, New York University*

*Visual Methodologies* is an essential book for all students, researchers and academics interested in visual culture. The book has always had an interdisciplinary research, making it an adaptable, meaningful text. With this new edition, the application of *Visual Methodologies* is made even more vital given its coverage of digital technologies and our expanded engagement with the image through complex and nuanced visualization of everything online. This extends not only our daily perception of the visual, but creates new ground through which to understand ourselves and our relationship to others. *Visual Methodologies* treats the emergence of this with passion, providing a theoretical and methodological framework that is accessible, engaging and exciting.

*Adrienne Evans, Principal Lecturer in Media and Communication, Coventry University*

Through its previous editions *Visual Methodologies* has undoubtedly become a profoundly influential text. Through a series of telling and careful revisions it has been significantly updated in response to changing visual cultures. This edition refreshes and reinvigorates what was already a lively, revealing and vital text. Not least, this updated edition responds directly to changes in digital cultures and the new possibilities of visual engagement and communication. It is the ideal guide to teaching and researching with visual methods.

*David Beer, Reader in Sociology, University of York*

Gillian Rose has done it again. This indispensable guide to visual methodologies improves with each edition. Extensively updated and revised, there is a new emphasis here on the circulation of images through varied technologies and the potential for digital methods to reveal patterns in the movements, translations and social value of such images. The reader comes away not only with practical knowledge for designing research questions and methods, but crucially with an enhanced understanding of the theoretical foundations and ethical considerations which underpin the most valuable and insightful visual analyses. This is not simply a 'how to' methods book.

*Katy Parry, Lecturer in Media and Communication, University of Leeds*

For the last 15 years, Rose's *Visual Methodologies* has been an exceptionally influential and invaluable text for those wishing to engage with visual research methods, with each new edition evolving and building upon the strengths of the previous. This fourth edition is no exception. With an expanded coverage of new media, Rose's revised work encompasses a comprehensive and detailed overview of imaginative approaches and engagements with visual materials that are readily accessible for undergraduate and postgraduate researchers. Moreover, this new edition effectively addresses many of those pressing questions often asked by student researchers, not only in terms of the practical aspects of using critical visual methods, but also in relation to the dissemination of research through visual techniques. In short, this fourth edition represents a welcome expansion of an already definitive introductory text on critical visual methods.

*James Robinson, Lecturer in Cultural Geography, Queen's University Belfast*

Gillian Rose's *Visual Methodologies* remains the authoritative introductory text on the methods of visual research. Conveying the richness and excitement of visual culture research, Rose expertly navigates across a range of methodologies, explaining in detail their particular usefulness and limitations through practical examples. For anyone already familiar with *Visual Methodologies*, this fourth edition offers a significant reworking of previous content. This includes a discussion of digital methods for online imagery and expansion of digital media examples, the production and use of images for research dissemination and, most significantly, the inclusion of the cite of circulation within the framework that Rose presents for the analysis of visual culture.

As such, Rose demonstrates the evolving nature of visual research and its methods, and reminds us of the passion involved in its study. It is a must buy for students and scholars alike.

*Julie Doyle, Reader in Media and Communication, University of Brighton*

One and half decades after its first edition, *Visual Methodologies* continues to position itself as key reading for anyone who is looking for a solid, accessible and systematic introduction to the increasingly popular but complex domain of image analysis and visual culture research. Gillian Rose deserves much praise for her sustained and highly successful efforts to keep this core text in critical visual analysis as fresh and relevant as ever. This fourth edition includes discussions about the newest visual and digital technologies and their interrelated practices. But the author has also thoroughly revisited and refined the book's overall structure to better guide the uninitiated reader through this kaleidoscopic and somewhat confused area of study.

*Luc Pauwels, Professor of Visual Research Methods, University of Antwerp*

Clear, comprehensive, theoretically informed, and now fully updated and revised, *Visual Methodologies* is an excellent guide to the rapidly growing field of visual research.

*Theo van Leeuwen, Emeritus Professor, University of Technology, Sydney*

There is simply no better resource or inspiration for conducting, analyzing, and disseminating visual research than Gillian Rose's *Visual Methodologies*. Her theoretical clarity about visual culture and power relations is seamlessly woven into her discussion and evaluation of a wide range of research methods. The breadth, depth, and detail of the exemplary research upon which she draws to elucidate the different approaches increases with each revised volume, and the 4th Edition is no exception. Rose has given us a comprehensive, wise, and rigorous guide for doing visual research that will invigorate the field and its practitioners.

*Wendy Luttrell, Professor of Urban Education, Graduate Center, City University of New York*



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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gillian Rose is Professor of Cultural Geography at The Open University. Her current research interests lie within the field of contemporary visual culture and visual research methodologies. She is interested in ordinary, everyday ways of seeing and the effects of that seeing in domestic as well as urban public spaces. One long-term project has been examining family photos as visual objects that circulate between a range of different practices in the global visual economy – *Doing Family Photography: The Domestic, The Public and The Politics of Sentiment* was published by Ashgate in 2010. Another is her ongoing work on the intersection of digital technologies and the visualisation of cities. The longest project of all, though, has been *Visual Methodologies*.

Gillian blogs at [visualmethodculture.wordpress.com](http://visualmethodculture.wordpress.com) and tweets @ProfGillian. Her Open University webpage is <http://www.open.ac.uk/people/gr334>.

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This book is based on a course I taught at the Graduate School for the Social Sciences, Edinburgh University, in 1996, 1997 and 1998. The first edition benefited from useful and pleasurable discussions in Edinburgh about matters visual and interpretative with Sue Smith, Charlie Withers and, especially, Mark Dorian; this fourth edition is indebted to conversations with many colleagues at The Open University and elsewhere. Richard Rogers generously read a draft of Chapter 11 and suggested some additions. Robert Rojek has been a great editor throughout.



# PREFACE: INTRODUCING THE FOURTH EDITION

This fourth edition of *Visual Methodologies* contains some significant differences from its predecessor.

As with its third edition, several of these changes have been driven by the development of digital technologies. The range of digital media it discusses has expanded to include Twitter and Instagram. The chapter on content analysis now includes a discussion of ‘cultural analytics’, which is a term used to describe the analysis, by software, of huge numbers of online images. There are two new chapters. The first is on ‘digital methods’ in relation to online images; while this chapter is more speculative than substantive, it points to a significant area in which visual methods will develop in the next few years. The second is a chapter on making images as a way of disseminating the results of a research project, and it discusses data visualisations, photo-essays, films and interactive documentaries. The book’s framework for discussing contemporary visual culture and the methods for interpreting has also changed. It is now based on four sites, not three: the site of the production of images, the image itself, its circulation and its audiencing. Adding the site of circulation seemed necessary in order to assess how different methods address the mobility of digital images across many kinds of social media and image-sharing platforms and devices. I hope all these changes will continue to help social researchers both explore and use images in creative ways.

Gillian Rose

Cambridge, July 2015

# AN INTRODUCTION TO VISUAL METHODOLOGIES

The first edition of this book was written mostly during 1999; this fourth edition has been prepared fifteen years later. The need to engage critically with visual culture – both historical and contemporary – seems no less pressing now than it was when the book was first being written, and many scholars continue to make their own significant contributions to the field (Beer, 2013; Casid and D'souza, 2014; Cubitt, 2014; Grace, 2014; Hartley, 2012; Howells and Negreiros, 2012; Jenkins et al., 2013; Joselit, 2012; Manghani, 2013; Manovich, 2013; Rettberg, 2014). The number of guides to possible methods of interpreting visual culture has increased too (Banks and Ruby, 2011; Bates, 2014; Bell, Warren, and Schroeder, 2014; Gaimster, 2011; Hughes, 2012; Jordanova, 2012; Mannay, 2016; Margolis and Pauwels, 2011; Pink, 2012; Reavey, 2011; Tinkler, 2012); there is also now a journal called *Visual Methodologies*. But this book remains unique in the breadth of its attempt to discuss and evaluate systematically a wide range of methods for doing research with visual materials. It is addressed to the undergraduate student who has either found some intriguing visual materials to work with, or who wants to make some to work with, or who is excited by the visual culture literature and wants to do a research project that engages with some of its arguments.

The first chapter of this book remains an overview of different theoretical approaches to understanding visual culture. These theoretical debates are diverse and often complex. They can also be rather abstract. In contrast, a particular concern of mine is to encourage the grounding of interpretations of visual materials in careful empirical research of the social circumstances in which they are embedded (Rose, 2012). This is not because there is some essential truth lurking in each image, awaiting discovery (although we will encounter the latter claim in some of the early chapters of this book). As Stuart Hall says:

It is worth emphasising that there is no single or 'correct' answer to the question, 'What does this image mean?' or 'What is this ad saying?' Since there is no law which can guarantee that things will have 'one, true meaning', or that meanings won't change over time, work in this area is bound to be interpretative – a debate between, not who is 'right' and who is 'wrong', but between equally plausible, though sometimes competing and contesting, meanings and interpretations. The best way to 'settle' such contested readings is to look again at the concrete example and try to justify one's 'reading' in detail in relation to the actual practices and forms of signification used, and what meanings they seem to you to be producing. (Hall, 1997a: 9)

Interpreting images is just that: interpretation. But my own preference – which is itself a theoretical position – is for understanding visual images as embedded in the social world and only comprehensible when that embedding is taken into account. As Hall suggests, though, it is still important to justify your interpretation, whatever theoretical stance you prefer. To do that you will need to have an explicit methodology, and this book will help you develop one.

The book does not offer a neutral account of the different methods available for interpreting visual materials, though. There are significant differences between various theories of the visual. In the first chapter, I agree with those scholars who argue that the interpretation of visual images must address the social effects of images: effects that images can achieve by being both meaningful and affective. That position has certain implications for the way in which I subsequently assess the various methods the book discusses. For example, while quantitative methods can be deployed in relation to these sorts of issues (as Chapter 5 will suggest), nonetheless the emphasis on meaning, significance and affect in Chapter 1's overview suggests that qualitative methods are more appropriate. Indeed, every chapter here except Chapter 5 and Chapter 11 explores qualitative methodologies. More broadly, Chapter 1 also makes some specific suggestions about why it is important to consider visual images carefully, why it is important to be critical about visual images, and why it is important to reflect on that critique. These three issues are developed in Chapter 1 into three criteria for what I term a 'critical visual methodology'. By 'critical' I mean an approach that thinks about the visual in terms of the cultural significance, social practices and power relations in which it is embedded; and this means thinking about the power relations that produce, are articulated through, and can be challenged by ways of seeing and imaging. Those criteria then provide the means by which the various methods in this book are evaluated. Using these criteria, for each method I ask: How useful is it in achieving a critical methodology for visual images? Chapter 2 elaborates a more practical framework for approaching images in this way.

Chapters 4 through to 12 each discuss one method that can be used to interpret visual materials, and the sorts of visual materials each chapter draws on to explore that method is dictated by what best exemplifies the method's procedures, strengths and weaknesses. So while the book covers a wide range of visual materials – listed in Table 3.1 in Chapter 3 – there are also plenty that this book does not discuss. There are no discussions of maps, film posters, arts-based visual methods, graphic novels, medical imaging or diagrams, for example. What the book does do, though, is discuss each method in some depth.

Chapters 4 through to 11 all focus on methods that work with found images; that is, images that already exist, and which you can explore as part of some sort of research project. However, Chapter 12 focuses in more detail on another approach to researching with visual images, which is those methods that involve making visual images as a way of answering a research question. Such visual research methods have exploded in popularity over the past decade, and are now found across a great many disciplines, being put to use to answer a vast range of research questions that very often have



rather little to do with the visual per se. Chapter 12 approaches these methods in relation to some of the debates and discussions that the previous chapters have raised in relation to found images.

Chapter 13 discusses another aspect of visual research methods that is gaining popularity: the dissemination of research results using images. It looks at a variety of ways that this can be done, including infographics, photo-essays, films and interactive documentaries. Digital technologies have made making these sorts of things much easier (and cheaper) than ever before, and online platforms – whether a personal website or a site like Vimeo – make them more accessible to more people than ever before (in theory at least). Some researchers are using these sorts of visual materials to try to reach new audiences in new ways, and Chapter 13 discusses some of the issues that these efforts raise, if they are understood in relation to critical visual methodologies.

Chapter 14 discusses visual ethics. Ethics in research is about the conduct of the researcher. It concerns their own integrity and the sort of relations they have with the objects or people they are researching. In many university systems, anyone wanting to undertake research has to have their research proposal vetted by their university's ethics review board. Chapter 14 discusses some of the ethical issues involved in doing research with visual materials specifically, and argues that many of those issues are important to consider whether you are working with found images or images generated as part of your research project. The concluding chapter then rehearses the main arguments of the book, and considers the usefulness of mixing different methods.

To start using this book, begin with Chapters 1 and 2, which will help you make sense of the other chapters. Chapter 3 explains how the book is organised in more detail, and will also help you to get the most out of the subsequent chapters' discussions of methods.

The book also has a companion website, at <https://study.sagepub.com/rose4e>. There is a section at the end of Chapters 3 through 14 that indicates which part of the website is relevant to that chapter.

My last comment concerns the limits of a book like this. This book offers some guidelines for investigating the meanings and effects of visual images. But the most exciting, startling and perceptive critics of visual images don't, in the end, depend entirely on their sound methodology, I think. They also depend on the pleasure, thrills, fascination, wonder, fear or revulsion of the person looking at the images and then writing about them. Successful interpretation depends on a passionate engagement with what you see. Use your methodology to discipline your passion, not to deaden it.

# ABOUT THE COMPANION WEBSITE



Specially developed for the fourth edition, the *Visual Methodologies* companion website can be found at <https://study.sagepub.com/rose4e>.

Visit the site for:

- an introduction to the fourth edition of this book and its author, including video content;
- a selection of links to the best online resources for finding images for your research project;
- a range of resources relating to the specific chapters in the book, from examples to exercises.

As you read the book, you'll find a short guide to the relevant companion website content located at the end of selected chapters.

# RESEARCHING WITH VISUAL MATERIALS: A BRIEF SURVEY

Choosing a research methodology means developing a research question and the tools to generate evidence for its answer; both of these should be consistent with a theoretical framework. There are, of course, a very large number of philosophical, theoretical and conceptual discussions of visibility and images. This chapter gives a brief survey of some of the key arguments and debates in the past thirty years or so, to help you develop a theoretical framework for your own work. It also introduces the framework that this book will use to assess the usefulness of various methods; this is called a ‘critical visual methodology’. The chapter is divided into three sections:

1. The first section discusses a range of literature that explores the importance of the visual to contemporary Western societies.
2. The second offers a broad analytical framework for understanding how images have social effects.
3. And the third suggests some more specific criteria for a critical approach to visual materials.

## 1.1 An Introductory Survey of ‘The Visual’

This section explores a number of the key concepts which have developed as ways of understanding visibility and images.

### 1.1.1 Culture and representation

Beginning in the 1970s, the social sciences experienced a significant change in their understanding of social life. While this change depended on a number of older traditions of social and cultural analysis – especially the Marxist critique of mass culture offered by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, and the development of ‘cultural studies’



**culture**

by a group of scholars at Birmingham University in England – during the 1980s in particular it gathered force, pace and breadth. The change is often described as the ‘cultural turn’. That is, ‘culture’ became a crucial means by which many social scientists understood social processes, social identities, and social change and conflict. **Culture** is a complex concept, but, in very broad terms, the result of its deployment has been that many social scientists are now very often interested in the ways in which social life is constructed through the ideas and feelings that people have about it, and the practices that flow from those. To quote one of the major contributors to this shift, Stuart Hall:

Culture, it is argued, is not so much a set of things – novels and paintings or TV programmes or comics – as a process, a set of practices. Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and exchange of meanings – the ‘giving and taking of meaning’ – between the members of a society or group ... Thus culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is around them, and ‘making sense’ of the world, in broadly similar ways. (1997a: 2)

**representations**

Those meanings may be explicit or implicit, conscious or unconscious, they may be felt as truth or as fantasy, science or common sense; and they may be conveyed through everyday speech, elaborate rhetoric, high art, TV soap operas, dreams, movies or muzak; and different groups in a society will make sense of the world in different ways. Whatever form they take, these made meanings, or **representations**, structure the way people behave – the way you and I behave – in our everyday lives.

**vision****visuality**

This sort of argument can take very diverse forms. But many writers addressing these issues argued that the visual is central to the cultural construction of social life in contemporary Western societies. We are, of course, almost constantly surrounded by different sorts of visual technologies – photography, film, video, digital graphics, television, acrylics, for example – and the images they show us – TV programmes, advertisements, snapshots, Facebook pages, public sculpture, movies, closed circuit television footage, newspaper pictures, paintings. All these different sorts of technologies and images offer views of the world; they render the world in visual terms. But this rendering, even by photographs, is never innocent. These images are never transparent windows onto the world. They interpret the world; they display it in very particular ways; they represent it. Thus a distinction is sometimes made between vision and **visuality**. **Vision** is what the human eye is physiologically capable of seeing (although it must be noted that ideas about that capability have changed historically and will most likely continue to change: see Crary, 1992). **Visuality**, on the other hand, refers to how vision is



constructed in various ways: ‘how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing and the unseeing therein’ (Foster, 1988: ix). Another phrase with very similar connotations to visuality is **scopic regime** (Metz, 1975). Both terms refer to the ways in which both what is seen and how it is seen are culturally constructed.

**scopic regime**

For some writers, the visual is the most fundamental of all senses. Gordon Fyfe and John Law (1988: 2), for example, claim that ‘depiction, picturing and seeing are ubiquitous features of the process by which most human beings come to know the world as it really is for them’, and John Berger (1972: 7) suggests that this is because ‘seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak’. (Clearly these writers pay little attention to those who are born blind.) Other writers, however, prefer to historicise the importance of the visual, tracing what they see as the increasing saturation of Western societies by visual images. Many claim that this process has reached unprecedented levels, so that Westerners now interact with the world mainly through how we see it. Martin Jay (1993) has used the term **ocularcentrism** to describe the apparent centrality of the visual to contemporary Western life.

**ocularcentrism**

This narrative of the increasing importance of the visual to contemporary Western societies is part of a wider analysis of the shift from premodernity to modernity, and from modernity to postmodernity (for example, see Mirzoeff, 1999: 1–33; Sturken and Cartwright, 2009). It is often suggested – or assumed – that in premodern societies, visual images were not especially important, partly because there were so few of them in circulation. This began to change with the onset of modernity. In particular, it is suggested that modern forms of understanding the world depend on a scopic regime that equates seeing with knowledge. Chris Jenks (1995), for example, makes this case in an essay entitled ‘The Centrality of the Eye in Western Culture’, arguing that ‘looking, seeing and knowing have become perilously intertwined’ so that ‘the modern world is very much a “seen” phenomenon’ (Jenks, 1995: 1, 2).

We daily experience and perpetuate the conflation of the ‘seen’ with the ‘known’ in conversation through the commonplace linguistic appendage of ‘do you see?’ or ‘see what I mean?’ to utterances that seem to require confirmation, or, when seeking opinion, by inquiring after people’s ‘views’. (Jenks, 1995: 3)

Barbara Maria Stafford (1991), a historian of images used in the sciences, has argued that, in a process beginning in the eighteenth century, the construction of scientific knowledges about the world has become more and more based on images rather than on written texts; Jenks (1995) suggests that it is the valorisation of science in Western cultures that has allowed

everyday understandings to make the same connection between seeing and knowing. However, that connection was also made in other fields of modern practice. Richard Rorty (1980), for example, traces the development of this conflation of seeing with knowing to the intersection of several ideas central to eighteenth century philosophy. Judith Adler (1989) examines tourism and argues that between 1600 and 1800 the travel of European elites was defined increasingly as a visual practice, based first on ‘an overarching scientific ideology that cast even the most humble tourists as part of ... the impartial survey of all creation’ (Adler 1989: 24), and later on a particular appreciation of spectacular visual and artistic beauty. John Urry (1990) has sketched the outline of a rather different ‘tourist gaze’, which he argues is typical of the mass tourism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see also Pratt, 1992). Other writers have made other arguments for the importance of the visual to modern societies. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977) Michel Foucault explores the way in which many nineteenth century institutions depended on various forms of surveillance (Chapters 8 and 9 here examine the methodological implications of his work); and in his study of nineteenth century world fairs and exhibitions, Timothy Mitchell (1988) shows how European societies represented the whole world as an exhibition. Deborah Poole (1997) has traced how this modern vision was thoroughly racialised in the same period. In the twentieth century, Guy Debord (1983) claimed that the world has turned into a ‘society of the spectacle’, and Paul Virilio (1994) argues that new visualising technologies have created ‘the vision machine’ in which we are all caught. The use of the term **visual culture** refers to this plethora of ways in which the visual is part of social life.

### visual culture

While it is important to note the argument made by W.J.T. Mitchell (1986, 1994) that images and language are inextricably entangled, it nonetheless has been argued that modernity is ocularcentric. It is argued too that the visual is equally central to postmodernity; Nicholas Mirzoeff (1998: 4), for example, has proclaimed that ‘the postmodern is a visual culture’. However, in postmodernity, it is suggested, the modern relation between seeing and true knowing has been broken. Thus Mirzoeff (1998) suggests that postmodernity is ocularcentric not simply because visual images are more and more common, nor because knowledges about the world are increasingly articulated visually, but because we interact more and more with totally constructed visual experiences. Thus the modern connection between seeing and knowledge is stretched to breaking point in postmodernity:

Seeing is a great deal more than believing these days. You can buy an image of your house taken from an orbiting satellite or have your internal organs magnetically imaged. If that special moment didn’t

come out quite right in your photography, you can digitally manipulate it on your computer. At New York's Empire State Building, the queues are longer for the virtual reality New York Ride than for the lifts to the observation platforms. Alternatively, you could save yourself the trouble by catching the entire New York skyline, rendered in attractive pastel colours, at the New York, New York resort in Las Vegas. This virtual city will shortly be joined by Paris Las Vegas, imitating the already carefully manipulated image of the city of light. (Mirzoeff, 1998: 1)

This is what Jean Baudrillard (1988) some time ago dubbed the simulacrum. Baudrillard argued that in postmodernity it is no longer possible to make a distinction between the real and the unreal; images have become detached from any certain relation to a real world with the result that we now live in a scopic regime dominated by simulations, or **simulacra**.

**simulacra**  
**new media**

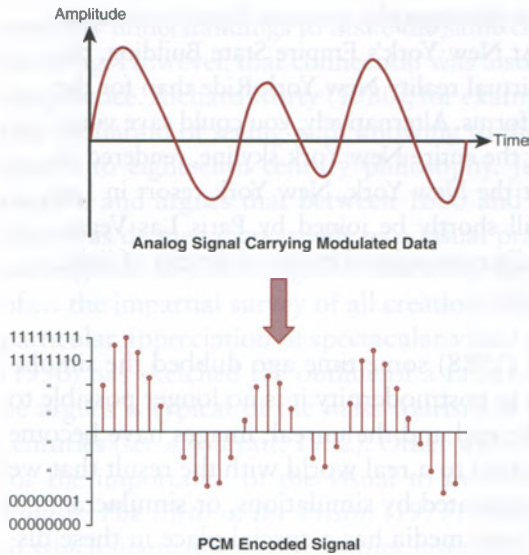
The development of digital **new media** has a special place in these discussions (Gane and Beer, 2008). While computing has a long history – the ‘Analytical Engine’ which Charles Babbage began designing in 1833 has some claim to be the first computer – many commentators argue that the emergence of a wide range of digital production, storage and communication devices over the past twenty years has significantly changed visual culture. They argue not only that these inventions account in large part for the pervasiveness of visual images in Western societies now – because they make images so easy to make and share – but also that the nature of digital images is changing contemporary visualities. This claim is built on the difference between **analogue** images and digital images, and in particular on the difference between the technologies underlying the production of an image (see Figure 1.1). Analogue images are created through technologies that have a one-to-one correspondence to what they are recording. Photography is an obvious example: an analogue photograph is created by light falling onto chemicals which react to that light to produce a visual pattern. Whether we are looking at an image of a leaf made by leaving that leaf on a sheet of light-sensitive paper in the sunshine, or at a famous photograph, like Figure 2.2, taken with a relatively complex single lens reflex camera, they are both analogue photographs because both have a direct, physical relationship to a continuous pattern of light generated by objects.

**analogue**

**Digital** images, on the other hand, have no one-to-one correspondence with what they show. This is so for at least two reasons. First, the images produced with a digital camera are made by sampling patterns of light, because in a digital camera light falls on discrete light-sensitive cells. There is thus ‘a minute gap between samples which the digital recording can never fill’ (Cubitt, 2006). Secondly, that pattern of light is converted

**digital**

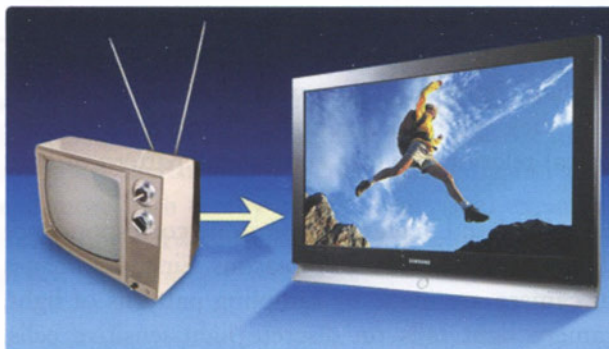




**FIGURE 1.1A**  
Diagram showing  
the difference  
between digital  
and analogue  
signals



**FIGURE 1.1B**  
Image of Barack  
Obama from a  
website protesting  
at his decision to  
extend the cut-off  
date for analogue  
television



**FIGURE 1.1C**  
Image from the  
(now defunct)  
website  
[getdigitaltelevision.com](http://getdigitaltelevision.com)

**FIGURE 1.1** These three images are very different representations of the difference between analogue and digital technologies. They were all found on the web in 2010



into binary digital code by the digital camera's software, and that binary code is then itself converted into different kinds of output. Of course, most cameras use a combination of hardware and software to convert the code back into an image to be viewed on a camera or computer or phone screen, but this is a programmed process rather than an inevitable consequence of using the light-sensitive technology embedded in a digital camera. In fact, since the pattern of light generated by what is being pictured has become computer code, that code can be used to produce all sorts of different things. As Sean Cubitt notes:

from the standpoint of the computer, any input will always appear as mathematical, and any data can be output in any format. Effectively, an audio input can be output as a video image, as text, as a 3D model, as an instruction set for a manufacturing process, or another digital format that can be attached to the computer. (2006: 250)

The same image file can thus be materialised in many different forms, which may well invite different ways of seeing it: as a billboard; on a website; in a smartphone app. Moreover, digital images can also be edited very easily. It is this mutability of the digital image that for many scholars is its defining quality.

For some, the difference between analogue and digital images is profound. David Rodowick (2007), for example, has argued that images made with digital cameras should not be called photographs. For him, the chemical process that creates analogue photographs gives them a unique quality which digital images do not and cannot have, such that 'one feels or intuits in digital images that the qualitative expression of duration found in photography and film is missing or sharply reduced' (2007: 118). In this sense, he argues that analogue photography is a specific medium, with particular visual qualities immanent in its analogue technology.

### 1.1.2 Materiality and affect

Indeed, for some time now in the literature on visual culture, there has been an emphasis on the **materiality** of the media used to make and carry visual images, inspired by a range of theorists, including Bruno Latour and Friedrich Kittler. In this work, the specific effects of a material object – a printed analogue photograph, for example – are understood through ontological claims about its inherent nature (Packer and Crofts Wiley, 2012). There are different inflections to this claim. Sometimes the emphasis is on the way that a specific technology – the analogue camera, say – has a direct effect on the nature of the image it produces. This is the argument made by Rodowick (2007), and has also been argued at length by Kittler (1999).

**materiality**

### affordances

Other authors suggest that the material qualities of technologies offer a limited number of possibilities – or **affordances** – for how they can be used, but that humans can choose between those possibilities. Sean Cubitt's (2014) recent history of visual technologies takes this position, as does Fernando Rubio (2012) in a study of work by the American artist Robert Smithson called *Spiral Jetty* (see Figure 1.2). Rubio suggests that, in fact, it wasn't only Smithson who made *Spiral Jetty*: so too did the rocks and rubble that form *Spiral Jetty*, the water of the lake it extends into, the ground pressure, the dumper trucks that carried the rocks ... the physical properties of all of these were active partners in Smithson's creative process, allowing him to do some of the things he wanted but preventing him from doing others. Rubio thus argues more generally that 'artistic production is a form of practice that emerges and unfolds from a material engagement within the world' (Rubio, 2012: 147; see also Rubio and Silva, 2013).

FIGURE 1.2

Robert  
Smithson's  
*Spiral Jetty*,  
built in 1970  
into the Great  
Salt Lake, Utah

© Estate of  
Robert Smithson/  
DACS, London/  
VAGA, New York  
2015



The last couple of decades have in fact seen extended bodies of work emerge that explore the agency of material objects and the particularities of digital media, and often both at the same time. Both these bodies of work have questioned the utility of the notion of representation. At the end of the twentieth century, and inspired both by the work of philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze and of information theorists such as Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, as well as by the growth in digital media (visual and otherwise), a number of scholars began to argue for a different

understanding, not just of particular types of images like digital photographs, but of contemporary visual culture itself. For Katherine Hayles (1999), the proliferation of digital technologies invites a different way of thinking about how we are human, no less; indeed, she argues we are becoming **posthuman** because of the increasingly intense flows of information occurring now between humans, animals and machines. She sees these flows as 'a co-evolving and densely interconnected complex system' (Hayles, 2006: 165; Thrift, 2008), the scale and intensity of which has been immeasurably enhanced by development of high-speed computers and the Internet. Rodowick (2001) argues that these flows – in the extent and intensity of their dispersal, and in their ability to constantly reform coded information from one output to another – demand a specifically Deleuzian response, and it is this that challenges the usefulness of the concept of representation. This is because, according to Ambrose (2007), Deleuze's

**posthuman**

creative ontology of becoming ceaselessly strives to go beyond mere surface fixities associated with the 'actual' (for example the existing conditions of current culture and society) in the effort to assemble a conceptual discourse capable of conveying pre-individual impersonal forces, energies, fluxes, flows and sensations that actual socio-historical situations occlude, reify and domesticate into rational orders, conceptual systems and clichéd patterns of representation and intelligibility (2007: 118).

These 'pre-individual impersonal forces, energies, fluxes, flows and sensations' are termed **affect** in Deleuzian work, and this approach has had a significant impact on how some scholars theorise visual culture, in relation to both digital and analogue images. While some theorists equally interested in the energies and sensations of digital images draw more on phenomenological philosophies than on Deleuze, this broad concern with the experiential has produced two particularly significant effects for theorising images.

**affect**

First, the affective emphasis on embodiment rejects the distinction between vision and visibility so central to the cultural turn. Vision is as much corporeal as cultural in this work. Mark Hansen's (2004) discussion of digital art, for example, claims that the human body becomes especially important in relation to digital images, and argues for 'the refunctionalization of the body as the processor of information' (Hansen, 2004: 23). Indeed, bodies in this kind of work are understood as highly sensitive, sensorimotor information processors in constant, energetic relation with other human and nonhuman information processors. In affective work there is thus an emphasis on 'a dynamism immanent to bodily matter and matter generally' (Clough, 2008: 1).



Secondly, the posthuman is not a person engaging with the world by interpreting and exchanging meanings (the figure evoked by Stuart Hall at the very beginning of this chapter). Understanding the posthuman in this sort of work does not involve the exploration of meaning, but rather the perceptual, the experiential and the sensory. Indeed, geographer Nigel Thrift (2008) has for some time been describing this sort of theory as ‘addressing the nonrepresentational’. Nonrepresentational work is interested in articulating the perceptual, bodily and sensory experience created in encounters with specific materials (Beugnet and Ezra, 2009). As Laura Marks says, ‘to appreciate the materiality of our media pulls us away from a symbolic understanding and toward a shared physical existence’ (Marks, 2002: xii). Marks (2000, 2002) is a leading exponent of this affective approach to visual imagery. Like Hansen (2004), her arguments draw on both affective and phenomenological philosophical traditions. She describes watching artists’ analogue videos, for example, as ‘an intercorporeal relationship’, suggesting that the video is as much a body as she is (Marks, 2002: xix). Her aim is not to interpret what the videos mean, but to find richness and vitality in the images; hence she says that there is ‘no need to interpret, only to unfold, to increase the surface area of experience’ (Marks, 2002: x).

For all their theoretical differences, however, it could be argued that theories of both representation and affect have one thing in common: a commitment to a close engagement with specific images. Whether carefully unpacking layers of representational references, or sensitively responding to corporeal affects, all the scholars discussed so far take a very attentive stance towards their materials. An important, emerging methodological question, however, is whether such an attentive stance by visual culture scholars is sustainable, at least in relation to the very large numbers of images that are now to be found on various online social media sites and elsewhere. The numbers are mind-boggling, and given current growth trends, always underestimated – in late 2014, 60 million photographs were uploaded to Instagram, 350 million onto Facebook, and 400 million onto Snapchat every day, while a hundred hours of video were uploaded to YouTube every minute; and on a much smaller but still massive scale, museums and galleries around the world are digitising their entire collections and making them available online. This is the visual culture equivalent of the ‘big data’ currently preoccupying much of the social sciences. If visual culture scholars are to grasp what’s going on in these huge image collections, it is now often claimed that close, attentive reading alone is unlikely to be effective. Where would you start, and how would you ever finish? Some scholars – in the digital humanities as well as the social sciences – are therefore arguing that new methods are needed, methods which use software to analyse these huge numbers of images. Such methods might be the digital equivalents of existing methods, and Chapter 5 will discuss a digitised version of content analysis. Others, though, will use the uniquely digital affordances of softwares to create what Richard Rogers (2013) argues are ‘natively digital methods’, as Chapter 11 in this book will discuss.



### 1.1.3 Debates

None of these stories about the increasing extent and changing nature of visual culture in modernity and postmodernity are without their critics, however (see for example the debates in the journal *October* [1996] and the *Journal of Visual Culture* [2001, 2003]).

Two points of debate, for example, are the history and geography of all these accounts of visual culture. Jeffrey Hamburger (1997), to take just one example, argues that visual images were central to certain kinds of premodern, medieval spirituality, and Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1998) have argued forcefully against the Eurocentrism that pervades many discussions of ‘the visual’. These arguments have only gained momentum in recent years. The academic discipline of art history, for example, has been debating ‘art and globalisation’ for some time (Elkins et al., 2010; see also Casid and D’Souza, 2014): wondering if its foundational concepts, grounded as they are in both Western philosophy and Western art practice, can be relevant to artworks created in different visual cultural traditions; devising expanded approaches that claim to encompass all kinds of art production everywhere (Davis, 2011); thinking about how to displace its Eurocentrism with insights from other philosophical and arts traditions; and worrying about erecting an overly-clear distinction between ‘The West’ and elsewhere. On the latter point, as many anthropologists have also pointed out, visual objects (not always seen as proper ‘art’ by Europeans) have been stolen, traded and gifted between places for hundreds of years (indeed, archaeologists would say for thousands of years). Anthropologist Poole (1997) uses the term **visual economy** to refer to the way in which visual objects are made mobile through many different kinds of exchange, sometimes commodified, sometimes not, being given different meanings and having different effects as they move through different places. Artists, photographers, filmmakers and so on have, of course, often also travelled. Boundaries between distinct visual cultures are thus impossible to draw.

**visual economy**

The argument that a shift in visual culture is being driven by the digitalisation of much visual imagery has also been challenged. As Lev Manovich (2001) has pointed out, many forms of digital imagery actually reproduce the visual conventions of other media. A lot of popular digital animation films, for example, still use the visual and narrative structures typical of Hollywood animations made with analogue film. A lot of family photography continues to perform as it always has done, despite the use of digital technologies for taking, displaying and sharing family snaps (Rose, 2010). In their book on visual culture, Richard Howells and Joaquim Negreiros (2012) insist

that digital technologies simply offer new ways of delivering images that leave their content and meaning unchanged.

There are also debates about the social relations within which these visualities are embedded, and particularly about the effects of simulacra. Baudrillard, for example, has often been accused of uncritically celebrating the simulacrum without regard for the often very unequal social relations that can be articulated through it. Deleuze has also been criticised for his inattention to the power relations that define what is representable and what lies beyond representation. In contrast, the work of Donna Haraway (1991) is still taken by many as a salutary reminder of what is at stake in contemporary ocularcentrism (see also Clough, 2008; Lister and Wells, 2001; Sturken and Cartwright, 2009). Like many others, Haraway (1991) notes the contemporary proliferation of visualising technologies in scientific and everyday use, and she characterises the scopic regime associated with these technologies thus:

Vision in this technological feast becomes unregulated gluttony; all perspective gives way to infinitely mobile vision, which no longer seems just mythically about the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere, but to have put the myth into ordinary practice. (1991: 189)

Some scholars of digital media suggest that digital technologies are only enhancing this apparent ability to be everywhere and see everything. Film scholar Thomas Elsaesser, for example, has discussed the resurgence of 3D Hollywood movies as examples of what he describes as the ‘new default value of digital vision’ (2013: 240). This vision is immersive; it is a fluid, three-dimensional space into and through which movement is expected (think of the flying scenes in *Avatar*, or *Maleficent*, or any superhero movie, where the camera swoops and flies in and over huge landscapes) and space is fluid, scaleable and malleable. Rather than offering a fixed viewpoint to its user, this digital vision invites us to enter into spaces by ‘doing away with horizons, suspending vanishing points, seamlessly varying distance, *unchaining* the camera and transporting the observer’ (Elsaesser, 2013: 237; see also Hayles, 2012; Uricchio, 2011; Verhoeff, 2012, see Figure 1.3).

**FIGURE 1.3**

Movie still  
from Robert  
Stromberg’s  
2014 film  
*Maleficent*

© Walt Disney  
Pictures



Films made with analogue technologies also managed to simulate flying, of course, but the argument here is that digital technologies are making immersive spaces both more intensely vivid and also much more pervasive. Manovich (2013) has recently argued that the software packages that are now used to create everything from advertisements, movie special effects to artworks, computer games architectural visualisations all work in a similar way: by combining different animated elements in a virtual three-dimensional space. He suggests that this software structure may be creating ‘the new “global aesthetics”’ (Manovich, 2013: 179) of highly detailed, immersive and intense images that have no frame. Several kinds of visual media have been discussed in these terms, for example the intense ‘wowness’ music videos, which take viewers not through stories but through pathways in an extended and convoluted space (Vernallis, 2013). James Ash (2015) describes in detail some of the techniques used by computer game designers to immerse players into the game environment. Several authors also suggest that we are looking at such immersive images differently. Instead of a printed paper map, say, proffering signs on its surface for attentive reading either by a researcher or someone trying to find their way somewhere, in a Google map we move from map to satellite view, zoom in and scale back, look at a photo of a street and return; instead of reading a painting or a photograph that does not change its form as we do so, in an online archive we scroll, zoom, crop, download, follow links, share. Digital images very often invite not contemplation, but action – navigation into the larger mass of images of which they are a part, ‘keeping an eye out for where to move or what to do next’ (Verhoeff, 2012: 13; Casetti, 2013).

Does this mean that the ‘god-trick’ described by Haraway is becoming even more embedded in everyday visibility? Well, the everyday navigation of digital media is not necessarily empowering, of course (Leszczynski, 2015), and Haraway is concerned to specify the social power relations that are articulated through this particular form of visibility. She argues that contemporary, unregulated visual gluttony is available to only a few people and institutions, in particular those that are part of the ‘history of science tied to militarism, capitalism, colonialism, and male supremacy’ (Haraway, 1991: 188; see also Clough, 2008). She argues that what this visibility does is to produce specific visions of social difference – of hierarchies of class, race, gender, sexuality, and so on – while itself claiming not to be part of that hierarchy and thus to be universal. It is because this ordering of difference depends on a distinction between those who claim to see with universal relevance, and those who are seen and



categorised in particular ways, that Haraway claims it is intimately related to the oppressions and tyrannies of capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy and so on. Given work done since Haraway made this argument, it is now possible to say that these processes of visual categorisation can be both representational – by giving specific meanings to images – and non-representational – by producing particular experiences from images (see, for example, Ash, 2015; Clough and Halley, 2007).

## focus

It is important to think about how power relations are also at play in what is made visible. This becomes particularly evident thinking about the events that have followed the publication in various European magazines of cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad. Most versions of Islam prohibit images of Muhammad. When a Danish magazine printed such cartoons in 2005, there were protests and demonstrations around the world, and in 2015 twelve people died in a violent attack on the offices of a French satirical magazine which had also carried cartoons satirising Islam by picturing Muhammad. Subsequent debates about free speech, secularism and religion were complex, but certainly made it clear that thinking about the social power relations in which images are embedded must now consider what is or is not appropriate to make visible in the first place. After the murders of the French cartoonists in 2015, for example, several commentators suggested that they were able to publish such cartoons because the Muslim population in France is largely poor and excluded from the cultural mainstream, so their religious convictions could be ignored more easily.

For many theorists of both representation and non-representation there is thus a critical imperative to examine in detail how certain institutions mobilise specific forms of visibility to see, and to order, the world (Mirzoeff, 2011). Regardless of whether one dominant visibility denies the validity of other ways of representing social difference, Haraway insists that there are indeed other ways of seeing the world. If one dominant visibility is organising information and visual cognition to create specific flows, then Hayles (2006), for example, argues that other flows are possible. Similarly, Hito Steyerl (2012) suggests that the immersive visibility of many digital images may be the latest incarnation of the god trick; but it may also allow for other, less domineering, more provisional and more situated kinds of seeing. For Haraway, Hayles and Steyerl, as for many other writers, then, the dominant scopic regime of (post)modernity – whether analogue or digital – is neither a historical inevitability, nor is it uncontested. There are different ways of seeing the world, and the critical task



is to differentiate between the social effects of those different visions. All these arguments make clear the necessity of understanding what social relations produce, and are reproduced by, what forms of visibility, and Section 1.2 explores this argument more fully.

### 1.1.5 Visual research methods

Before moving on, though, this chapter needs to pause and remark on one specific example of the increasing ubiquity of visual images in Western culture. In the grand scheme of things, it is a rather small aspect of contemporary visual culture, but it is particularly pertinent to this book's discussion of research methods. It is the increasing use of research methods in the social sciences that use visual materials of some kind, sometimes to explore questions about visibility, but more often as a means of exploring an aspect of social life: attitudes to illness, for example (Frith and Harcourt, 2007), or feelings about living in an informal settlement (Lombard, 2013). The use of images by social scientists has, in fact, a long history. Both anthropology and human geography have used visual images as research tools for as long as they have been established as academic disciplines: mostly photographs, diagrams and film in the case of anthropology (Banks and Ruby, 2011; Pink, 2013), and photos, maps and diagrams in the case of geography. Visual sociology is a more recent development; although the earliest sociological journals carried photographs for a short period before the First World War, it was not until the 1960s that a book by an anthropologist encouraged some sociologists to pick up their cameras again (Collier, 1967). Recent years, however, have seen a proliferation of visual methodologies being used across the social sciences (see for example: Banks, 2008; Bell, Warren, and Schroeder, 2014; Emmison et al., 2012; Gaimster, 2011; Hamilton, 2006; Hughes, 2012; Knowles and Sweetman, 2004a; Margolis and Pauwels, 2011; Pink, 2012, 2013, 2015; Pole, 2004; Prosser, 1998; Reavey, 2011; Spencer, 2011; Stanczak, 2007; Theron et al., 2011; Thomson, 2008; Tinkler, 2012).

These visual research methods can use already-existing images, from the mass media for example; or images can be made by the researcher; or they can be made by the people being researched. Sometimes the images are treated as research data that does not, or should not, be reproduced when research results are written up; sometimes, in contrast, it is argued that images are the only way the results should be conveyed, and there are now social science scholars who

**visual research  
methods**

have films, websites and photo-essays, as well as books and journal articles, as an integral part of their academic work. To date, many of these visual research methods use film and photography; but as digital methods are being developed, software-generated visualisations are also emerging as ways of presenting and interpreting data. Oddly, little of this work engages explicitly with the sorts of debates that this chapter has thus far been summarising, although it is certainly possible to detect parallels between discussions about contemporary visual culture and the various ways in which social scientists have used images (Rose, 2014). Some social scientists approach images as representational, for example, while others focus more on their affective qualities. And many social science researchers working with images are concerned about the sorts of questions raised by Haraway's account of visibility: debates about how images are part of the power relations between researcher and researched are framed as a discussion about research ethics. This book addresses two of the most commonly used types of visual research methods in Chapter 12. Chapter 13 discusses using or making images as a way of disseminating research findings, while the ethics of doing visual research is discussed in Chapter 14.

So far, this chapter has given you an overview of what I see as the key aspects of the literatures currently exploring the visual. What I now want to do is to explain how the structure of this book draws on elements of those literatures to make sense of the proliferation of both images and ways to study them in recent years.

## 1.2 Understanding the Social Effects of Visual Materials

Visual culture critics have concentrated their energies on critically examining the effects of visual images already out there in the world, already part of visual culture, and Chapters 4 to 11 of this book discuss a range of methods for understanding such 'found' images. As I have already suggested, theorists of the cultural turn, with their emphasis on representation, have now been joined by theorists more concerned with the affective (other reviews can be found in Barnard, 2001; Evans and Hall, 1999; Heywood and Sandywell, 2012; Howells and Negreiros, 2012; Manghani, Piper, and Simons, 2006; Manghani, 2013; Mirzoeff, 2009; Rampley, 2005). Each of these bodies of work draws on a range of different theorists and philosophers, and each has its own internal debates and disagreements; moreover, the work of some philosophers and theorists is used to make arguments for both representation and non-representation. This diversity obviously makes generalising about studies of visibility a difficult task. Nevertheless, I am going to suggest that there are five aspects of the recent literature that engage with visual culture which I think are valuable for thinking about the social effects of images.

### 1.2.1 Visualising social difference

The first point I take from the literature on ‘visual culture’ is its concern for the way in which images visualise (or render invisible) social difference. As Fyfe and Law (1988: 1) say, ‘a depiction is never just an illustration ... it is the site for the construction and depiction of social difference.’ One of the central aims of ‘the cultural turn’ in the social sciences was to argue that social categories are not natural but instead are constructed. These constructions can take visual form, a point that has been made most forcefully by feminist and postcolonial writers who have studied the ways femininity and blackness have been visualised. An example would be Tanner Higgin’s (2009) discussion of the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) *World of Warcraft*. Tanner’s topic is the representation of race in *World of Warcraft* and he approaches it by noting not only that the characters in most computer and video games are white, but also that ‘black and brown bodies, although increasingly more visible within the medium, are seemingly inescapably objectified as hypermasculine variations of the gangsta or sports player tropes’ (Higgin, 2009: 3). He then explores various reasons for the ‘commonsense notion that Blacks are not heroes, paladins, or mages’ and what he sees as the consequent lack of black bodies in *World of Warcraft* (Higgin, 2009: 6). He notes that the game itself gives players white avatars by default, and that black skin choices are very limited; he discusses the importance of whiteness to the literary genre of high fantasy that games like *World of Warcraft* are related to; and he suggests that

when one sees a race called ‘human’ within a MMORPG and it is westernized as well as White with different shades of color for diversity (but nothing too Black), a powerful assertion is made. This assertion is that humanity will only be understood within the fantasy world if it is primarily coded White. The player base has affirmed this understanding by choosing largely White human avatars in order to match the discursive framework set up by these racial logics. (Higgin, 2009: 11; see also Nakamura 2002, 2008, 2009, 2014)

Higgin concludes that, ‘because video games both model and shape culture, there is a growing danger and anxiety that some games are functioning as stewards of White masculine hegemony’ (2009: 3).

Hence Fyfe and Law’s general prescription for a critical approach to the ways images can picture social power relations:

To understand a visualisation is thus to enquire into its provenance and into the social work that it does. It is to note its principles of inclusion and exclusion, to detect the roles that it makes available, to understand the way in which they are distributed, and to decode the hierarchies and differences that it naturalises. (Fyfe and Law, 1988: 1)



Looking carefully at images, then, entails, among other things, thinking about how they offer very particular visions of social categories such as class, gender, race, sexuality, able-bodiedness and so on.

### 1.2.2 How images are looked at

Secondly, writers on visual culture, among others, are concerned not only with how images look, but also with how they are looked at. This is a key point made by Maria Sturken and Lisa Cartwright's (2009) book on visual culture, which they title *Practices of Looking*. They argue that what is important about images is not simply the image itself, but how it is seen by particular spectators who look in particular ways. Sturken and Cartwright (2009) take their inspiration on this point in part from an influential book written in 1972 by John Berger, called *Ways of Seeing*. Berger's argument there is important because he makes clear that images of social difference work not simply by what they show but also by the *way of seeing* that they invite. He uses the expression *ways of seeing* to refer to the fact that 'we never look just at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves' (Berger 1972: 9). His best-known example is that of the genre of female nude painting in Western art. He reproduces many examples of that genre (see Figure 1.4), pointing out as he does so the particular ways they represent women: as unclothed, as vain, as passive, as sexually alluring, as a spectacle to be assessed.

Berger insists though on who it is that does the assessing, who this kind of image was meant to allure:

In the average European oil painting of the nude, the principal protagonist is never painted. He is the spectator in front of the painting and he is presumed to be a man. Everything is addressed to him. Everything must appear to be the result of his being there. It is for him that the figures have assumed their nudity. (Berger, 1972: 54)

Thus for Berger, understanding this particular genre of painting means understanding not only its representation of femininity, but its construction of masculinity too. And these representations are in their turn understood as part of a wider cultural construction of gendered difference. To quote Berger again:

One might simplify this by saying: *men act* and *women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between women and men but



also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (Berger, 1972: 47, emphasis in original)

While later critics would want to modify aspects of Berger's argument – most obviously by noting that he assumes heterosexuality in his discussion of masculinity and femininity – many critics would concur with his general understanding of the connection between image and spectator. Images work by producing effects every time they are looked at.

Much of this work in visual culture argues that the particular 'audiences' (this might not always be the appropriate word) of an image will bring their own interpretations to bear on its meaning and effect. Not all audiences will be able or willing to respond to the way of seeing invited by a particular image and its particular practices of display (Chapter 10 will discuss this in more detail). Taking an image seriously, then, also involves thinking about how it positions you, its viewer, in relation to it.

She is not naked as she is.  
She is naked as the spectator sees her.

Often – as with the favourite subject of Susannah and the Elders – this is the actual theme of the picture. We join the Elders to spy on Susannah taking her bath. She looks back at us looking at her.



In another version of the subject by Tintoretto, Susannah is looking at herself in a mirror. Thus she joins the spectators of herself.



The mirror was often used as a symbol of the vanity of woman. The moralizing, however, was mostly hypocritical.



You painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, you put a mirror in her hand and you called the painting *Vanity*, thus morally condemning the woman whose nakedness you had depicted for your own pleasure.

The real function of the mirror was otherwise. It was to make the woman connive in treating herself as, first and foremost, a sight.

The Judgement of Paris was another theme with the same unwritten idea of a man or men looking at naked women.



FIGURE 1.4 Double-page spread from John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (Penguin Books 1972: 50–1)

### 1.2.3 Differentiating visual cultures

Thirdly, there is the emphasis in the very term ‘visual culture’ on the embeddedness of visual images in a wider culture. Now, ‘culture’, as Raymond Williams (1976) famously noted, is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. It has many connotations. Most pertinent to this discussion is the meaning it began to be given in various anthropological books written towards the end of the nineteenth century. In this usage, culture meant something like ‘a whole way of life’, and even from the brief discussion in this chapter so far you can see that some current writers are using the term ‘visual culture’ in just this broad sense. Indeed, one of the first uses of the term ‘visual culture’, by Svetlana Alpers (1983: xxv), was precisely to emphasise the importance of visual images of all kinds to many aspects of seventeenth century Dutch society. In this sort of work, it is argued that a particular, historically specific visuality was central to a particular, ocularcentric culture. In using the notion of culture in this broad sense, however, certain analytical questions may become difficult to ask. In particular, culture as a whole way of life can slip rather easily into a notion of culture as simply a whole, and the issues of differences within that culture – and its connections to other cultures – can become obscured. This is certainly evident in the recent debates generated by cartoons showing the prophet Muhammad, when ‘the West’ and ‘Islam’ were sometimes mistakenly described as separate and monolithic ‘cultures’ or ‘civilisations’.

In order to be able to deal with questions of social difference and the power relations that sustain them, then, a notion of culture is required that can also address questions of social difference, social relations and social power. One means of keeping these sorts of differentiations in the field of visual culture in analytical focus is to think carefully about just who is able to see what and how, where and with what effects. Indeed, W.J.T. Mitchell (1994: 420) argues that this is precisely the question that a concern for representation poses: ‘Who or what represents what to whom with what, and where and why?’ Berger’s (1972) work is in some ways exemplary here. An image will depend on a certain way of seeing for its effects, as he argued in relation to female nude painting. But this effect is always embedded in particular cultural practices that are far more specific than ‘a way of life’. So Berger talks about the ways in which nude paintings were commissioned and then displayed by their owners in his discussion of the way of seeing which they express. Describing a seventeenth century English example of the genre, he writes:

Nominally it might be a Venus and Cupid. In fact it is a portrait of one of the king’s mistresses, Nell Gwynne ... [Her] nakedness is not, however, an expression of her own feelings; it is a sign of her submission to the owner’s feelings or demands. (The owner of both the woman and the painting.) The painting, when the king showed it to others, demonstrated this submission and his guests envied him. (Berger, 1972: 52)

It was through this kind of use, with its specific audience and their established way of interpretation, that this type of painting achieved its effects. The seeing of an image thus always takes place in a particular social context that mediates its impact. It also always takes place in a specific location with its own particular practices. That location may be

a king's chamber, a Hollywood cinema studio, an avant-garde art gallery, an archive, a sitting room, a street. These different locations all have their own economies, their own disciplines, their own rules for how their particular sort of spectator should behave, including whether and how they should look, and all these affect how a particular image is seen (Rose, 2012). These specificities of practice are crucial in understanding how an image has certain effects, particularly when the 'same' image, circulating digitally, can appear in very different kinds of places.

### 1.2.4 The circulation of images

The way in which so many images now circulate online leads to the fourth element which I think can be usefully drawn out of current work on visual culture. Visual objects have always circulated between different places: from the artist's studio to the king's picture gallery; from a child's birthday party to a photo developing lab to a photo frame on a mantelpiece (Rose, 2010); from a makeshift studio in Mumbai to an archive in London. And ever since the invention of technologies of mass reproduction, images of visual objects have also been made and circulated. The German Marxist cultural critic Walter Benjamin wrote about this in the 1930s, exploring what he thought were the effects of photographing art objects so that most people came to 'see' such objects through photos of them rather than through directly experiencing them (Benjamin, 1973). There have therefore always been important questions to ask about how images circulate in the visual economy, why, and with what effects. Those questions remain necessary to pose to the massive numbers of images that are now 'shared' on various social networking sites (Beer, 2013). As Chapters 5 and 11 will discuss in more detail, online sharing is no less complex than any other kind. The processes of circulation are therefore the fourth aspect of work on visual culture that is important to consider when thinking about the social effects of images.

### 1.2.5 The agency of images

Finally, there is an insistence that images themselves have their own agency. In the words of Carol Armstrong (1996: 28), for example, an image is 'at least potentially a site of resistance and recalcitrance, of the irreducibly particular, and of the subversively strange and pleasurable', while Christopher Pinney (2004: 8) suggests that the important question is 'not how images "look", but what they can "do"'. An image has its own materiality, if you like, and in the search for an image's meaning it is therefore important not to claim that it merely reflects meanings made elsewhere – in newspapers, for example, or gallery catalogues. It is certainly true that visual images very often work in conjunction with other kinds of representations. It is very unusual, for example, to encounter a visual image unaccompanied by any text at all, whether spoken or written (Armstrong, 1998; Wollen, 1970: 118); even the most abstract painting in a gallery will have a written label on the wall giving certain information about its making, and in



## image/text

certain sorts of galleries there will be a sheet of paper giving a price too, and these make a difference to how spectators will see that painting. W.J.T. Mitchell (1994) coined the term **image/text** as a way of emphasising the interrelation of images and written texts. So although virtually all visual images are mixed in this way – they always make sense in relation to other things, including written texts and very often other images – they are not reducible to the meanings carried by those other things. The colours of an oil painting, for example, or the visible decay of video tape (Marks, 2002), or the blurriness of a badly made Internet meme, will all carry their own peculiar kinds of visual resistance, recalcitrance, argument, particularity, banality, strangeness or pleasure.

Thus I take five major points from current debates about visual culture as important for understanding how images work: an image may have its own visual effects; these effects, through the ways of seeing mobilised by the image, are crucial in the production and reproduction of visions of social difference; but these effects always intersect with the social context of viewing, with how the image is circulated, and with the visualities spectators bring to their viewing.

### 1.3 Three Criteria for a Critical Visual Methodology

Given this general approach to understanding the importance of images, I can now elaborate on what I think is necessary for a ‘critical approach’ to interpreting found visual images. A critical approach to visual culture:

- *takes images seriously.* I argue here that it is necessary to look very carefully at visual images, and it is necessary to do so because they are not entirely reducible to their context. Visual images have their own effects.
- *thinks about the social conditions and effects of images and their modes of distribution.* The cultural practices that create and circulate images both depend on and produce social inclusions and exclusions, and a critical account needs to address both those practices and their cultural meanings and effects.
- *considers your own way of looking at images.* This is not an explicit concern in many studies of visual culture. However, if, as Section 1.2 just argued, ways of seeing are historically, geographically, culturally and socially specific, and if watching your favourite movie on a DVD for the umpteenth time at home with a group of mates is not the same as studying it for a research project, then – as Mieke Bal (1996, 2003; Bal and Bryson 2001) for one has consistently argued – it is necessary to reflect on how you as a critic of visual images

are looking. As Haraway (1991: 190) says, by thinking carefully about where we see from, ‘we might become answerable for what we learn how to see’. Haraway also comments that this is not a straightforward task (see also Rogoff, 1998; Rose, 1997). Several of the chapters will return to this issue of reflexivity in order to examine what it might entail further, and Chapter 14 will discuss the related issue of the ethics of using images in your research.

The aim of this book is to give you some practical guidance on how to do these things; but I hope it is already clear from this introduction that this is not simply a technical question of method. There are also important analytical debates going on about visualities. In this book, I use these particular criteria for a critical visual methodology to evaluate both theoretical arguments and the methods discussed in all the chapters, including visual research methods.

Having very briefly sketched a critical approach to images that I find useful to work with and which will structure this book’s accounts of various methods, the next chapter starts more explicitly to address the question of methodology.

## Summary

Visual imagery is never innocent; it is always constructed through various practices, technologies and knowledges. A critical approach to visual images is therefore needed: one that thinks about the agency of the image, considers the social practices and effects of its circulation and viewing, and reflects on the specificity of that viewing by various audiences, including the academic critic.

## Further Reading

Stuart Hall, in his essay ‘The Work of Representation’ (1997b), offers a very clear discussion of the debates about culture, representation and power. A collection of some of the key texts that have contributed towards the field of visual culture has been put together by Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall as *Visual Culture: The Reader* (1999). *The Handbook of Visual Culture* is a very useful collection of essays on different aspects of visual culture, with a substantial introduction by its editors (Heywood and Sandywell, 2012). The collection of essays edited by Diarmuid Costello and Jonathan Vickery called *Art: Key Contemporary Thinkers* (2007) contains some very useful essays on a range of philosophers and theorists, including Adorno, Barthes, Baudrillard, Bourdieu, Deleuze, Foucault, Mitchell and Pollock. And for some provocations on the difference that digital technologies may make to cultural analysis, take a look at John Hartley’s book *Digital Futures for Cultural and Media Studies* (2012).

# TOWARDS A CRITICAL VISUAL METHODOLOGY

As should be evident from the previous chapter, the theoretical sources that have produced the recent interest in visual culture and visual research methods are philosophically, theoretically and conceptually diverse. This chapter will try to acknowledge some of that diversity, while also developing a framework for exploring the almost equally diverse range of methods that scholars working with visual materials can use. The framework developed is based on thinking about visual materials in terms of four sites: the site of *production*, which is where an image is made; the site of the *image* itself, which is its visual content; the site(s) of its *circulation*, which is where it travels; and the site where the image encounters its spectators or users, or what this book will call its *audiencing*. This chapter examines those sites in some depth, and explains how they can be used to make sense of theories of visual culture and of the methods used to engage with it. It has five sections:

1. The first discusses the four sites in a little more detail.
2. The second looks at ways of understanding the site of the production of visual materials.
3. The third looks at approaches to the visual materials themselves.
4. The fourth explores ways of understanding how visual materials circulate.
5. And the fifth examines the sites where visual materials are audienced.

## 2.1 Introducing the Four Sites of a Critical Visual Methodology: Production, the Image Itself, its Circulation and its Audiencing

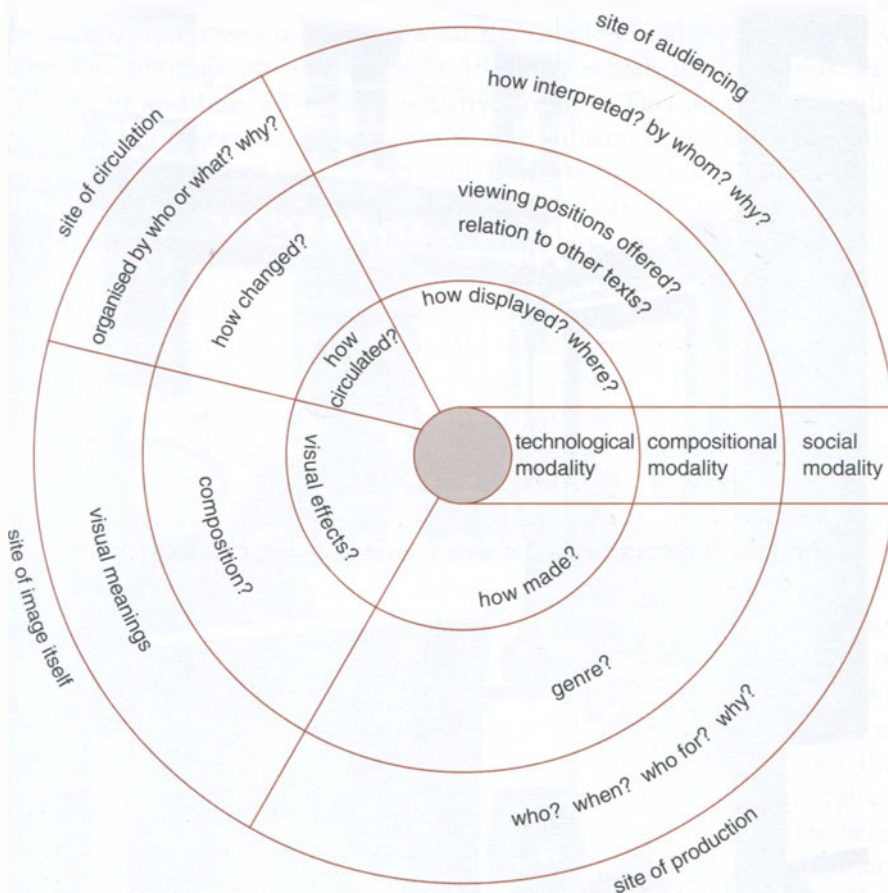
sites  
production  
image  
circulation

Interpretations of visual images broadly concur that there are four sites at which the meanings of an image are made: the site(s) of the **production** of an image, the site of the **image** itself, the site(s) of its **circulation**, and the



site(s) where it is seen by various **audiences**. I also want to suggest that each of these sites has three different aspects. These different aspects I will call **modalities**, and I suggest that there are three of these that can contribute to a critical understanding of images:

- *technological*. Mirzoeff (1999: 1) defines a visual technology as ‘any form of apparatus designed either to be looked at or to enhance natural vision, from oil paintings to television and the Internet’. A visual technology can thus be relevant to how an image is made but also to how it travels and how it is displayed.
- *compositional*. Compositionality refers to the specific material qualities of an image or visual object. When an image is made, it draws on a number of formal strategies: content, colour and spatial organisation, for example. Often, particular forms of these strategies tend to occur

**audiences****modalities****technological****compositional****FIGURE 2.1**

The sites  
and modalities  
for interpreting  
visual materials

together, so that, for example, Berger (1972) can define painting of the nude in the Western art tradition in terms of its specific compositional qualities. Chapter 4 will elaborate the notion of composition in relation to paintings.

- **social.** This is very much a shorthand term. What I mean it to refer to is the range of economic, social and political relations, institutions and practices that surround an image and through which it is seen and used.

Figure 2.1 shows one way of visualising the intersections of sites and modalities. (The fact that all three modalities are found at all four sites, though, does suggest that the distinctions between sites are less clear than my sections and diagram here might imply.)

Many of the theoretical disagreements about visual culture, visualities and visual objects can be understood as disputes over which of these



FIGURE 2.2

Photograph by  
Robert  
Doisneau/  
Rapho Gamma,  
Camera Press  
London

sites and modalities are most important, how and why. The following sections will explore each site and its modalities further, and will examine some of these disagreements in a little detail. To focus the discussion, and to give you a chance to explore how these sites and modalities intersect, I will often refer to the photograph reproduced as Figure 2.2. Take a good look at it now and note down your immediate reactions. Then see how your views of it alter as the following sections discuss its sites and modalities.

## 2.2 The Site of Production

All visual representations are made in one way or another, and the circumstances of their production may contribute towards the effect they have.

Some writers argue this case very strongly. Some, like Friedrich Kittler (1999), for example, would argue that the *technologies* used in the *making* of an image determine its form, meaning and effect. In the case of the photograph in Figure 2.2, it is perhaps important to understand what kind of camera, film and developing process the photographer was using, and what that made visually possible and what impossible. The photograph was made in 1948, by which time cameras were relatively lightweight and film was highly sensitive to light. This meant that, unlike in earlier periods, a photographer did not have to find subjects that would stay still for seconds or even minutes in order to be pictured. By 1948, the photographer could have stumbled on this scene and ‘snapped’ it almost immediately. Thus part of the effect of the photograph – its apparent spontaneity, a snapshot – is enabled by the technology used.

Another aspect of this photograph, and of analogue photographs more generally, is also often attributed to its technology: its apparent truthfulness. Here, though, it must be noted that critical opinion is divided. Some critics (for example Roland Barthes, whose arguments are discussed in Chapter 6) suggest that photographic technology does indeed capture what was really there when the shutter snapped. Others find the notion that ‘the camera never lies’ harder to accept. From its very invention, photography has been understood by some of its practitioners as a technology that simply records the way things really look. But also from the beginning, photographs have been seen as magical and strange (Slater, 1995). This debate has suggested to some critics that claims of ‘truthful’ photographic representation have been constructed. Chapter 9 here will look at some Foucauldian histories of photography which make this case with some vigour, and propose that we see this photograph as a snapshot of real life more because we expect photos to show us snippets of truth than because they actually do. This photo might have been posed: the photographer who took this one certainly posed others, which nevertheless have the same ‘real’ look (Doisneau, 1991). Thus the apparently technological effects on the production of a visual image need careful consideration, because some may not be straightforwardly technological at all. Nonetheless, it is often very useful to understand the technologies used in the making of particular images, and at the end of the book you will find some references that will help you do that.



**genre**

The second modality of an image's production is to do with its *compositionality*. Some writers argue that it is the conditions of an image's production that govern its compositionality. This argument is perhaps most effectively made in relation to the **genre** of images a particular image fits (perhaps rather uneasily) into. Genre is a way of classifying visual images into certain groups. Images that belong to the same genre share certain features. A particular genre will share a specific set of meaningful objects and ways of showing them. Thus, the page of the website selling prints of this Doisneau photograph has an arrangement of images and text that is very typical of many websites now (see Figure 2.3). At the top of the page there are, among other things, a number of links to other parts of the site, including the Login and View Cart links so common to commercial sites, and a Search box. There are also some animated images, again a very common strategy on many websites to make the site visually interesting, and a number of still images/texts that you can click on to lead you to other parts of the site. Finally, at the bottom, there are some more 'practical' links via words, to the 'Contact us' page and the 'Moneyback guarantee' page (other commercial sites often have their terms and conditions down here); and also there is the copyright line that tells you who owns the copyright of the site, as well as a link to the agency who designed it. It helps to make sense of the significance of elements of an individual image if you know that some of them recur repeatedly in other images, so you may need to refer to other images of the same genre in order to explicate aspects of the one you are interested in. Many images play with more than one genre, of course, and a useful term here in relation to new media is **remediation**, coined by Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999) to describe the way in which digital technologies were drawing on the generic conventions of other media but also creating their own genres too. Many books on visual images focus on one particular genre, and some are listed in the bibliographies at the end of this book.

**remediation**

But what sort of genre does the photograph in Figure 2.2 fit into? Well, it fits one genre but has connections to some others, and knowing this allows us to make sense of various aspects of this rich visual document. The genre the photo fits most obviously into, I think, is that of 'street photography'. This is a body of work with connections to another photography genre, that of the documentary (Hamilton, 1997; see also Pryce, 1997, for a discussion of documentary photography). Documentary photography originally tended to picture poor, oppressed or marginalised individuals, often as part of reformist projects to show the horror of their lives and thus inspire change. The aim was to be as objective and accurate as possible in these depictions. However, since the apparent horror was being shown to audiences who had the power

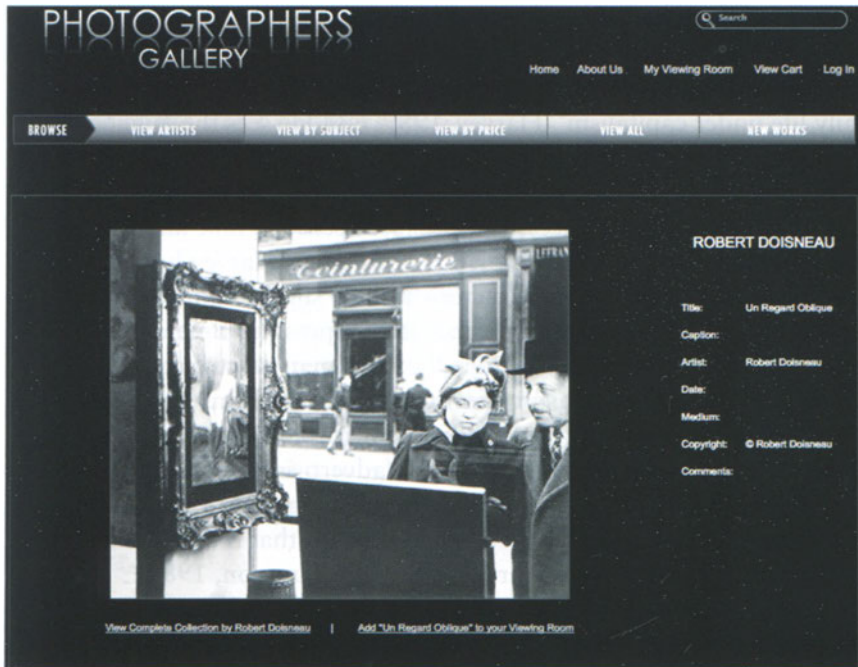


FIGURE 2.3  
Screenshot of  
photographers  
gallery.com

to pressure for change, documentary photography usually pictures the relatively powerless to the relatively powerful. It has thus been accused of voyeurism and worse. Street photography shares with documentary photography the desire to picture life as it apparently is. But street photography does not want its viewers to say 'Oh how terrible' and maybe 'We must do something about that.' Rather, its way of seeing invites a response that is more like 'Oh how extraordinary, isn't life richly marvellous?' This seems to me to be the response that this photograph, and many others taken by the same photographer, asks for. We are meant to smile wryly at a glimpse of a relationship, exposed to us for just a second. This photograph was almost certainly made to sell to a photo-magazine like *Vu* or *Life* or *Picture Post* for publication as a visual joke, funny and not too disturbing for the readers of these magazines. This constraint on its production thus affected its genre.

The third modality of production is what I have called the *social*. Here again, there is a body of work that argues that these are the most important factors in understanding visual images. Some argue that visual imagery is shaped by the economic processes in which cultural production is embedded. One of the most eloquent exponents of this argument is David Harvey. Certain photographs and films play a key role in his 1989 book *The Condition of Postmodernity*. He argues that these visual representations exemplify postmodernity. Like many other commentators,

Harvey defines postmodernity in part through the importance of visual images to post-modern culture, commenting on 'the mobilization of fashion, pop, art, television and other forms of media image, and the variety of urban life styles that have become part and parcel of daily life under capitalism' (Harvey, 1989: 63). He sees the qualities of this mobilisation as ephemeral, fluid, fleeting and superficial: 'there has emerged an attachment to surface rather than roots, to collage rather than in-depth work, to superimposed quoted images rather than worked surfaces, to a collapsed sense of time and space rather than solidly achieved cultural artefact' (Harvey, 1989: 61); and Harvey has an explanation for this which focuses on the latter characteristics. He suggests that contemporary capitalism is organising itself in ways that are indeed compressing time and collapsing space. He argues that capitalism is more and more 'flexible' in its organisation of production techniques, labour markets and consumption niches, and that this has depended on the increased mobility of capital and information; moreover, the importance of consumption niches has generated the increasing importance of advertising, style and spectacle in the selling of goods. In his Marxist account, both these characteristics are reflected in cultural objects – in their superficiality, their ephemerality – so that the latter are nothing but 'the cultural logic of late capitalism' (Harvey, 1989: 63; Jameson, 1984).

To analyse images through this lens you will need to understand contemporary economic processes in a synthetic manner. However, those writers who emphasise the importance of broad systems of production to the meaning of images sometimes deploy methodologies that pay rather little attention to the details of particular images. Harvey (1989), for example, has been accused of misunderstanding the photographs and films he interprets in his book – and of economic determinism (Deutsche, 1991).

Other accounts of the centrality of what I am calling the *social* to the production of images depend on rather more detailed analyses of particular industries that produce visual images, and the political as well as the economic context in which those industries operate. David Morley and Kevin Robins (1995), for example, focus on the audiovisual industries of Europe in their study of how those industries are implicated in contemporary constructions of 'Europeanness'. They point out that the European Union is keen to encourage a Europe-wide audiovisual industry partly on economic grounds, to compete with US and Japanese conglomerates. But they also argue that the EU has a cultural agenda too, which works at 'improving mutual knowledge among European peoples and increasing their consciousness of the life and destiny they have in common' (Morley and Robins, 1995: 3), and thus elides differences within Europe while producing certain kinds of differences between Europe and the rest of the world. Like Harvey, Morley and Robins pay attention to both the economic and the cultural aspects of contemporary cultural practices. Unlike Harvey, however, Morley and Robins do not reduce the latter to the former. This is in part because they rely on a more fine-grained analytical method than Harvey, paying careful attention to particular companies and products, as well as understanding how the industry as a whole works.

Another aspect of the social production of an image is the social and/or political identities that are mobilised in its making. Peter Hamilton's (1997) discussion of the sort of photography of which Figure 2.2 is a part explores its dependence on certain



postwar ideas about the French working class. Here though I will focus on another social identity articulated through this particular photograph. Here is a passage from an introduction to a book on street photography that evokes the ‘crazy, cockeyed’ viewpoint of the street photographer:

It's like going into the sea and letting the waves break over you. You feel the power of the sea. On the street each successive wave brings a whole new cast of characters. You take wave after wave, you bathe in it. There is something exciting about being in the crowd, in all that chance and change. It's tough out there, but if you can keep paying attention something will reveal itself, just a split second, and then there's a crazy cockeyed picture! ... ‘Tough’ meant it was an uncompromising image, something that came from your gut, out of instinct, raw, of the moment, something that couldn't be described in any other way. So it was TOUGH. Tough to like, tough to see, tough to make, tough to understand. The tougher they were the more beautiful they became. It was our language.

(Westerbeck and Meyerowitz, 1994: 2–3)

This rich passage allows us to say a bit more about the importance of a certain kind of identity to the production of the photograph under discussion here. To do street photography, it says, the photographer has to be there, in the street, tough enough to survive, tough enough to overcome the threats posed by the street. There is a kind of macho power being celebrated in that account of street photography, in its reiteration of ‘toughness’. This sort of photography also endows its viewer with a kind of toughness over the image because it allows the viewer to remain in control, positioned as somewhat distant from and superior to what the image shows us. We have more information than the people pictured, and we can therefore smile at them. This particular photograph even places a window between us and its subjects; we peer at them from the same hidden vantage point just like the photographer did. There is a kind of distance established between the photographer/audience and the people photographed, then, reminiscent of the patriarchal way of seeing that has been critiqued by Haraway (1991), among others (see Section 1.1.3). But since this toughness is required only in order to record something that will reveal itself, this passage is also an example of the photograph being seen as a truthful instrument of simple observation, and of the erasure of the specificity of the photographer himself; the photographer is there but only to carry his camera and react quickly when the moment comes, just like our photographer snapping his subject. Again, this erasure of the particularity of a visuality is what Haraway (1991) critiques as, among other things, patriarchal. It is therefore significant that of the many photographers whose work is reproduced in that book on street photography, very few are women. You need to be a man, or at least masculine, to do street photography, apparently. However, this passage's evocation of ‘gut’ and ‘instinct’ is interesting in this respect, since these are qualities of embodiment and non-rationality that are often associated with femininity. Thus, if masculinity might be said to be central to the production of street photography, it is a particular kind of masculinity.

### auteur theory

Finally, it should be noted that there is one element active at the site of production that many social scientists interested in the visual would pay very little attention to: the individual often described as the author (or artist or director or sculptor or so on) of the visual image under consideration. The notion that the most important aspect in understanding a visual image is what its maker intended to show is sometimes called **auteur theory**. However, most of the recent work on visual matters is uninterested in the intentions of an image's maker. There are a number of reasons for this (Hall, 1997b: 25; see also the focus in Section 4.3.6). First, as we have seen, there are those who argue that other modalities of an image's production account for its effects. Secondly, there are those who argue that, since the image is always made and seen in relation to other images, this wider visual context is more significant for what the image means than what the artist thought they were doing. Roland Barthes (1977: 145–6) made this argument when he proclaimed 'the death of the author'. And thirdly, there are those who insist that the most important site at which the meaning of an image is made is not its author, or indeed its production or itself, but its audiences, who bring their own ways of seeing and other knowledges to bear on an image and in the process make their own meanings from it. So I can tell you that the man who took this photograph in 1948 was Robert Doisneau, and this information will allow you, as it allowed me, to find out more information about his life and work. But the literature I am drawing on here would not suggest that an intimate, personal biography of Doisneau is necessary in order to interpret his photographs. Instead, it would read his life, as I did, in order to understand the modalities that shaped the production of his photographs.

## 2.3 The Site of the Image

The second site at which an image's meanings are made is the image itself. Every image has a number of formal components. As the previous section suggested, some of these components will be caused by the *technologies* used to make, reproduce or display the image. For example, the black and white tonalities of the Doisneau photo are a result of his choice of film and processing techniques. Other components of an image will depend on *social* practices. The previous section also noted how the photograph under discussion might look the way it does in part because it was made to be sold to particular magazines. More generally, the economic circumstances under which Doisneau worked were such that all his photographs were affected by them. He began working as a photographer in the publicity department of a pharmacy, and then worked for the car manufacturer

Renault in the 1930s (Doisneau, 1990). Later he worked for *Vogue* and for the Alliance press agency. That is, he very often pictured things in order to get them sold: cars, fashions. And all his life he had to make images to sell; he was a freelance photographer needing to make a living from his photographs. Thus his photography showed commodities and was itself a commodity (see Ramamurthy, 2009, for a discussion of photography and commodity culture). Perhaps this accounts for his fascination with objects, with emotion, and with the emotions objects can arouse. Just like an advertiser, he was investing objects with feelings through his images, and, again like an advertiser, could not afford to offend his potential buyers.

However, as the previous chapter noted, many writers on visual culture argue that an image may have its own effects that exceed the constraints of its production (and reception). Some would argue, for example, that it is the particular qualities of the photographic image that make us understand its technology in particular ways, rather than the reverse; or that it is those qualities that shape the social modality in which it is embedded, rather than the other way round. The modality most important to an image's own effects, however, is often argued to be its *compositionality*.

Pollock's (1988: 85) discussion of the Doisneau photograph is very clear about the way in which aspects of its compositionality contribute towards its way of seeing (she draws on an earlier essay by Mary Ann Doane [1982]). She stresses the spatial organisation of looks in the photograph, and argues that 'the photograph almost uncannily delineates the sexual politics of looking'. These are the politics of looking that Berger explored in his discussion of the Western tradition of female nude painting. 'One might simplify this by saying: *men act* and *women appear*', says Berger (1972: 47). In this photograph, the man looks at an image of a woman, while another woman looks but at nothing, apparently. Moreover, Pollock insists, the viewer of this photograph is pulled into complicity with these looks.

it is [the man's] gaze which defines the problematic of the photograph and it erases that of the woman. She looks at nothing that has any meaning for the spectator. Spatially central, she is negated in the triangulation of looks between the man, the picture of the fetishized woman and the spectator, who is thus enthralled to a masculine viewing position. To get the joke, we must be complicit with his secret discovery of something better to look at. The joke, like all dirty jokes, is at the woman's expense. (Pollock, 1988: 47)

Pollock is discussing the organisation of looks in the photograph and between the photograph and us, its viewers. She argues that this aspect of its formal qualities is the most important for its effect (although she has also mentioned the effect of spontaneity created by the out-of-focus boys playing in the street behind the couple, remember).

Such discussions of the compositional modality of the site of the image can produce persuasive accounts of a photograph's effect on its viewers. It is necessary to pause here, however, and note that there is a significant debate among critics of visual culture about how to theorise an image's effects. Pollock's interpretation of the Doisneau



photograph depends on paying very close attention to its visual and spatial structure and effects. However, hers is only one way to approach the question of an image's effects, and other critics advocate other ways.

As the previous chapter discussed, there are a number of approaches to visual images now which emphasise the importance of the sensory – or affective – experiencing of images. Scholars such as Laura Marks and Mark Hansen emphasise the embodied and the experiential as what lies in excess of representation; hence their insistence on the power of the image itself and for the need to intensify the experiencing of images. Some art historians, like Caroline Van Eck and Edward Winters (2005), argue that the essence of a visual experience lies in its sensory qualities, qualities studiously ignored by Pollock, in her essay on Doisneau at least; Van Eck and Winters (2005: 4) say that 'there is a subjective "feel" that is ineliminable in our seeing something', and that appreciation of this 'feel' should be as much part of understanding images as the interpretation of their meaning, even though they find it impossible to convey fully in words (see also Elkins, 1998; W.J.T. Mitchell, 1996, 2005a). In terms of affect, Richard Rushton (2009) emphasises the implications of Deleuze's arguments about the power of cinematic images in particular:

Deleuze throws down a quite extraordinary and risky challenge: that we lose control of ourselves, undo ourselves, forget ourselves while in front of the cinema screen. Only then will we be able to loosen the shackles of our existing subjectivities and open ourselves up to other ways of experiencing and knowing. (Rushton, 2009: 53)

Thus there are a range of ways in which visual culture theorists have conceptualised the workings of the site of the image itself; subsequent chapters will develop their methodological implications.

## 2.4 The Site of Circulation

It is hard to imagine an image of any kind that does not move away from the place in which it was produced. The distinction being made here between the site of 'production' and the site of 'audiencing' implicitly assumes this: the term 'site' is being used as a conceptual tool but it also suggests that there are actual sites in which the production of images takes place, which are distinct from those in which audiencing takes place.

This is true for many kinds of image. The studio of the artist, or the cutting room of the film editor, is not where a painting or a film is usually viewed by anyone other than those people also involved in the painting's or film's production. The painting or the film moves, once it is finished, to another site, in order to go on display to various kinds of audience: it moves to an art gallery, or a cinema. Thinking about this movement as a site of circulation is to focus on how and where that movement takes place. What technologies are used to make an image move? Does that movement change the

compositional qualities of an image? What social, economic or political processes are shaping that movement?

The various *technologies* that carry an image or visual object from one location to another are diverse, obviously. Some are delivery systems that don't affect the materiality of object being moved, and here we might think of the ships, lorries and planes that carry artworks between exhibitions and galleries. Some kinds of image are designed to be easily portable: the small altarpieces and prayer books that were taken from castle to castle by the European medieval elite, for example.

Other transportation technologies are more imbricated in the materiality of the image. Take a film, for example: 'Any film inevitably acquires a variety of accents and looks as it makes its way through local censorship, print deteriorations, language dubbing or subtitling, colorizing, lexiconing, overscanning, panning and scanning, the PG, 3D and the airline versions, the director's cut and the individual manipulations of contrast, brightness, aspect ratio, and white balance by television set owners' (Geuens, 2013: 50). Digital images in particular are always mediated by a complex range of software and hardware, in their production but also in their circulation (and display). A digital image file – created, say, by a digital video camera at a wedding – will have to travel through various hardware and software before it becomes visible on a computer screen for editing. It may then be exported in a different format, onto a DVD, say, or as a different kind of image file, perhaps compressed, to be shared on YouTube, or it may be zipped to be sent as an email attachment. It then goes through another set of software and hardware to be viewed by the wedding guests: the DVD is played on a TV, the YouTube video is watched on a mobile phone, the zip file is decompressed and watched on a computer screen. All of these conversions and translations, made in order to make the video travel from the wedding to its guests, can alter the image: its resolution, its colours, even its ability to be seen at all, if the zip attachment is too large for the recipient's email inbox or the DVD was made in the wrong format for the TV.

Moreover, it is also important to understand that many of the online platforms through which digital images are shared have their own, internal processes which shape how images can be shared. The huge numbers of images on Facebook, YouTube, Google Images and the rest are sorted by **algorithms**. An algorithm is a set of rules to solve a specific (computing) problem. They can do all sorts of things, but, as an example, they are particularly important in the creation of search results. When you search for an image on a website like Google Images, the search results are not listed randomly or logically, for example by name, or date of upload. Instead, they are listed according to a series of algorithms that order those results. For example, you might see the photos

**algorithms**

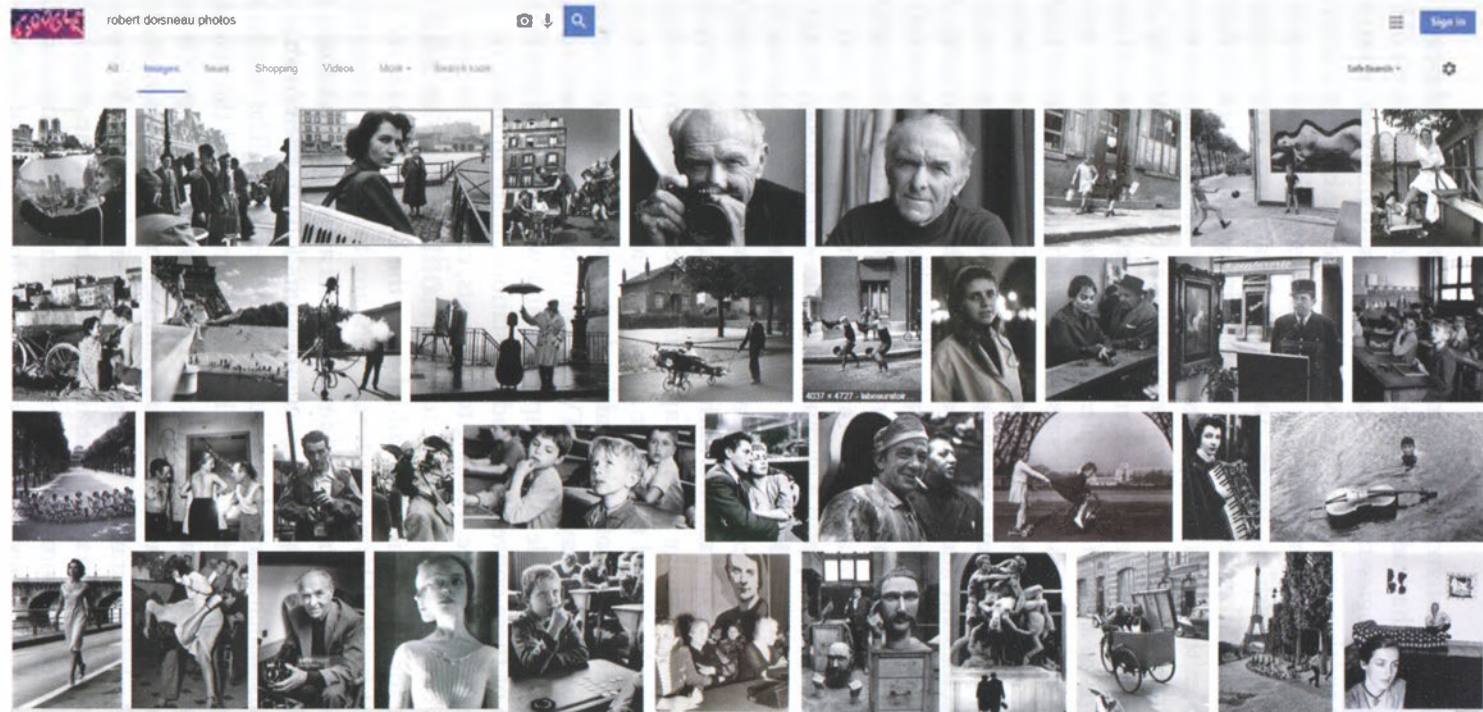


FIGURE 2.4 Screenshot of a Google Images search for 'Robert Doisneau photos'



that correspond to your search terms listed in order of the photos with the most ‘likes’ first, then perhaps those with the most comments, then those that most other people have looked for, and then perhaps those most closely related to your previous searches. That is, algorithms tailor your search results. Algorithms, then, are one example of how the technologies that circulate images can affect that image.

The circulation of an image may also affect its *compositional* quality. A famous example of this argument was made by the Marxist cultural critic Walter Benjamin in the 1930s. He noted that, in an era of mass photography, most people would encounter an artwork not directly in a gallery, say, but through its photograph, in a book or a newspaper that they might be reading at home for leisure. He suggested that this changed the impact of that artwork. Experiencing it as a photograph and not as an original meant that the artwork lost its *aura*, according to Benjamin: it lost its glow of authority, authenticity and unattainability (Benjamin, 1973; see also Hansen, 2008). The Doisneau photograph, as it is reproduced in Figure 2.2, has probably lost some of the impact a larger and sharper version would have, printed up for an exhibition in a gallery, and certainly the power of its precise demonstration of a certain kind of gendered gaze was lessened when I saw all the other photographs Doisneau took through the same window – different men and women looking in different ways at the two canvases in the window – in my Google Image search.

And finally, the circulation of an image is also affected by all sorts of *social*, cultural, political and economic considerations that will influence its movement through the visual economy. As the previous chapter pointed out, it is difficult to imagine a visual object that has never moved at all, and many have moved repeatedly and over long distances. Their movement will have happened as part of many different kinds of social and other processes. To take just three examples: Susan Sontag (1979: 8) points out that family photos have always been ‘a portable kit of images that bears witness to connectedness’ when family members no longer live together; James Ryan (1997) describes the colonial imperatives that framed the photographs taken by British explorers in Africa and brought back to the Royal Geographical Society in London in the late nineteenth century; and I have discussed how the family photographs reprinted by UK newspapers in the aftermath of bomb attacks in London in 2005 encouraged a very particular form of public mourning (Rose, 2010). These examples suggest that photographs moving from place to place can be part of significant social, cultural and political processes – family, Empire, and what Roger Luckhurst (2003) calls ‘traumaculture’. Travelling images can be part of many other such processes, in many different ways. Copyright law, for

example, also affects the circulation of images; the Doisneau photograph, here, is owned by his estate, and the publishers of this book had to pay for the right to reproduce it here.

## 2.5 The Site of Audiencing

### audiencing

Images circulate, then, but they also land in specific places, where they are seen by people: their audiences. John Fiske (1994), for one, suggests that this is the most important site at which an image's meanings are made, because audiences are not always the passive recipients of an image's meaning. He uses the term **audiencing** to refer to the process by which a visual image has its meanings renegotiated, or even rejected, by particular audiences watching in specific circumstances. One of the most significant aspects of digital media now is the way that, once an image file has been uploaded to a server, it can become visible to people in very many different places and contexts, with often unintended results. Once again, I would suggest that there are three aspects to the process of audiencing.

The first is the *compositionality* of the image. Several of the methods that we will encounter in this book assume that the formal arrangement of the elements of a picture will dictate how an image is seen by its audiences. Pollock (1988), too, claims that the Doisneau image is always seen as a joke against the woman, because the organisation of looks by the photograph coincides with, and reiterates, a scopic regime that allows only men to look. It is important, I think, to consider very carefully the organisation of the image, because that does have an effect on the spectator who sees it. There is no doubt, I think, that the Doisneau photograph pulls the viewer into a complicity with the man and his furtive look. But that does not necessarily mean the spectator sympathises with that look. Indeed, many of my students often commented that the photograph shows the man (agreeing with Pollock, then, that the photograph is centred on the man) as a 'lech', a 'dirty old man', a 'voyeur'. That is, they see him as the point of the photograph, but this does not make the photograph an expression of a way of seeing that they approve of. Moreover, that man and his look might not be the only thing that a particular viewer sees in that photograph, as I'll suggest in a moment. Thus audiences make their own interpretations of an image.

Those theories that privilege the *technological* site at which an image's meanings are made similarly often imply that the technology used to make and display an image will control an audience's reaction. Again, this might be an important point to consider. How does seeing a particular movie on a television screen differ from seeing it on a large cinema screen with 3D glasses? What are the differences between

looking at the photograph in Figure 2.2 when it was first published in a magazine, from looking at it framed in an art gallery, to looking at it on a website offering a print of it for sale (Figure 2.3)? This is especially important if you are paying attention to how an image circulates between different places. A digital image file, for example, can be seen – can be materialised – in quite different forms: as a billboard poster, for example, as well as on a company's website for viewing on mobile phones. So there are technological questions concerning the size, contrast and stability, for example, of the image (as Hayles [2004: 74] points out, an image on a digital screen is constantly being refreshed by screen hardware).

Audiencing also involves a number of other important questions about how an image is looked at differently in different contexts. You don't do the same things while you are surfing through a website gallery at home as you do when you are in a gallery looking at framed photographs. While you are looking at a computer screen you can also be listening to music, eating, comparing one site to another, answering the phone; in a gallery there will be no background music, you are expected to remain quiet, not to touch the pictures, not to eat ... again, the audiencing of an image thus appears very important to its meanings.

The *social* is thus perhaps the most important modality for understanding the audiencing of images. In part this is a question of the different social practices that structure the viewing of particular images in particular places. Visual images are always practised in particular ways, and different practices are often associated with different kinds of images in different kinds of spaces. A cinema, a television in a living room and a canvas in a modern art gallery do not invite the same ways of seeing. This is both because, let's say, a Hollywood movie, a TV soap and an abstract expressionist canvas do not have the same compositionality or depend on the same technologies, but also because they are not engaged with in the same way. Popcorn is not sold by or taken into galleries, generally, and usually soaps are not watched in contemplative, reverential isolation. Different ways of relating to visual images define the cinema and the gallery, for example, as different kinds of spaces. You don't applaud a sculpture the way you might do a film, for example, but applauding might depend on the sort of film and the sort of cinema you see it in. This point about the spaces and practices of display is especially important to bear in mind given the increasing mobility of images now; images appear and reappear in all sorts of places, and those places, with their particular ways of spectating, mediate the visual effects of those images.

Thus, to return to our example, you are looking at the Doisneau photograph in a particular way because it is reproduced in this book and is being used here as a pedagogic device; you are looking at it often (I hope – although the work on audiences suggests you may well not be bothering to do that) and looking at it in different ways depending on the issues I am raising. But many of Doisneau's photographs have been reproduced in quite different formats. You would be encountering this photograph very differently if you had been sent it as a postcard. Maybe you would merely have glanced at it before reading the message on its reverse far more avidly; if the card had been sent by a lover, maybe you would see it as some sort of comment on your relationship ... and so on.



There is actually surprisingly little discussion of these sorts of issues in the literature on visual culture, even though ‘audience studies’, which most often explore how people watch television and videos in their homes, has been an important part of cultural studies for some time. There is an important and relevant body of work in anthropology too, which explores what effects images have when they are gifted, traded or sold. Chapter 10 of this book will explore these two approaches to the site of audiencing in more detail. As we will see, these approaches rely on research methods that pay as much attention, if not more, to the various doings of images’ viewers than to the images themselves. This is because many of those concerned with audiences argue that audiences are the most important aspect of an image’s meaning. Thus they can, on occasion, like those studies that privilege the social modality of the site of production of imagery, use methods that don’t address visual imagery directly.

The second and related aspect of the social modality of audiencing images concerns the social identities of those doing the watching. As Chapter 10 will discuss in more detail, there have been many studies which have explored how different audiences interpret the same visual images in very different ways, and these differences have been attributed to the different social identities of the viewers concerned.

In terms of the Doisneau photograph, it seemed to me that as I showed it to students over a number of years, their responses changed in relation to some changes in ways of representing gender and sexuality in the wider visual culture of Britain from the late 1980s to the late 1990s. When I first showed it, students would often agree with Pollock’s interpretation, although sometimes it would be suggested that the man looked rather henpecked and that this somehow justified his harmless fun. It would have been interesting to see if this opinion came significantly more often from male students than female, since the work cited above would assume that the gender of its audiences in particular would make a difference to how this photo was seen. As time went on, though, another response was made more frequently. And that was to wonder what the woman is looking at. For in a way, Pollock’s argument replicates what she criticises: the denial of vision to the woman. Instead, more and more of my students started to speculate on what the woman in the photo is admiring. Women students began quite often to suggest that of course what she is appreciating is a gorgeous semi-naked man, and sometimes they’d say that maybe it’s a gorgeous woman. These later responses depended on three things, I think. One was the increasing representation over those few years of male bodies as objects of desire in advertising (especially, it seemed to me, in perfume adverts); we got more used to seeing men on display as well as women. Another development was what I would very cautiously describe as a highly uneven but sometimes noticeable increase in the popularity of feminism among young women. And a third development might be a greater tolerance of diverse sexualities. Now of course, it would take a serious study (using some of the methods I will explore in this book) to sustain any of these suggestions, but I offer them here, tentatively, as an example of how an image can be read differently by different audiences: in this case, by different genders and sexualities and at two slightly different historical moments.

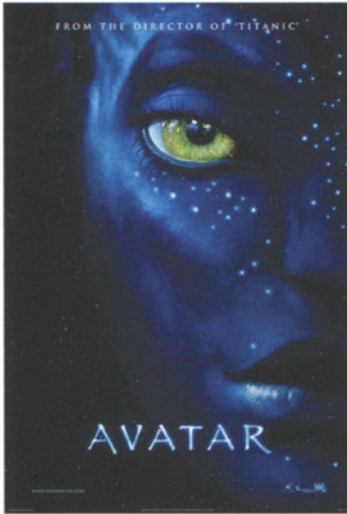
What I have just described is an example of different meanings being made from the same image: I have suggested how Figure 2.2 can be interpreted differently by different people. A further aspect of audiencing involves audiences developing those other meanings by producing their own materials – visual and in other media – from what they see. A good discussion of this phenomenon can be found in Henry Jenkins's (1988, 1992, 2006, 2008) studies of the fans of various cult TV programmes and films in the United States: *American Idol*, *Survivor*, the *Matrix* films, *Star Trek*, among others. He explores the ways in which these fans engage with their favourite TV series or film, to the extent that they actually rework the imagery and narrative of their favourite show, and in so doing create new (or new-ish) visual materials with their own meanings. This could involve simply using a recording to study specific parts of a TV series in order to develop a complex elaboration of the series' storyline; or it could involve putting together a fanzine or fan website, or writing a new script for a TV episode, individually or collectively; or creating something with the same characters and basic scenario but in a different medium, for example as a comic, a cookbook or a Lego animated film (try searching 'Lego' and 'Star Wars' on YouTube).

Now, of course, it is not only fans who put the characters of films and TV series into a range of different media. For some time now, the producers of films and television series have also been doing the same thing: to take just one recent example, the release of the film *Avatar* was accompanied by computer and handheld console games, figurines, an official film website, t-shirts, novels, posters and much more. As a result, those blue Na'vi folk, or approximations of them, could be seen in all sorts of places other than the film during 2009, put there by both 20th Century Fox and fans as well as by various satirists and jokesters (Figure 2.5). For Jenkins (2008), that spread was part of a broader condition of contemporary visual culture that he calls **convergence**. Convergence is not driven by technologies:

**convergence**

Convergence does not depend on any specific delivery system. Rather, convergence represents a paradigm shift – a move from medium-specific content toward content that flows across multiple media channels, toward the increased interdependence of communications systems, toward multiple ways of accessing media content, and toward ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture. (Jenkins, 2008: 254)

Convergence culture, he says, undoes any consistent relation between content and the medium that delivers it, and between producers and audiences. Things like the Na'vi, for example, are no longer confined to films and to the publicity for films, like the poster in Figure 2.5a; they travel well beyond that, and are created in many different situations.



**FIGURE 2.5A** Poster for the film *Avatar*, 2009  
© Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation



**FIGURE 2.5C** Ben Stiller as a Na'vi, presenting the Oscar for Best Makeup in 2010



**FIGURE 2.5B** Image from an online tutorial on how to turn any digital photo of a face into a Na'vi face using the photoediting software *Photoshop*  
Source: SolarShine at webdesign.org



**FIGURE 2.5D** Two protestors at the annual general meeting of a mining company proposing to mine the sacred mountain of the Dongria Kondh tribe in India  
© Marc Cowan/Survival. Survival International supports the right of tribal peoples worldwide, helping to defend their lives, protect their lands and determine their own futures. For more information, films and photographs log onto [www.survivalinternational.org](http://www.survivalinternational.org)

**FIGURE 2.5** A few Na'vis, suggesting some aspects of convergence culture



## discussion

The notion of ‘convergence culture’ was debated in a special issue of the journal *Cultural Studies* in 2011 (Hay and Couldry, 2011); Jenkins (2014) responded in the same journal.

The Doisneau photograph in Figure 2.2 has certainly been caught up in convergence culture. I have already noted that many of his photographs have been made into postcards, posters and cards. Although this has not happened to this particular photograph, as far as I know, it has become part of slide shows uploaded onto two of the largest photo- and video-sharing websites, Flickr and YouTube. Flickr has it on the pages of several individuals and there is also a Flickr group called ‘Hommage à Doisneau’, while on YouTube you can watch a slideshow of Doisneau photographs including this one, accompanied, if you wish, by what to my ears is a rather cheesy soundtrack of accordian music. Sadly, I could not find this particular photograph converted into a Lego scenario, but what is possibly Doisneau’s most famous photograph has been given the Lego treatment (Figure 2.6).



FIGURE 2.6

*Copia d'arte  
Lego –  
Hommage  
Robert  
Doisneau, by  
Marco Pece  
(Udronotto),  
created in  
2008 and  
downloaded  
from Flickr in  
2010 ([www.flickr.  
com/photos/  
udronotto/  
1442352518/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/udronotto/1442352518/))*

© Marco Pece  
(Udronotto)

## discussion

### medium

It is worthwhile pausing here and noting what the concept of convergence means for the notion of a **medium**, because it has implications for understanding the technological modality of both production and audiencing.

For media theorist Marshall McLuhan, writing in the 1960s, a medium is the technology used to transmit messages (McLuhan, 1964). Thus television is a medium, regardless of whether it was showing a soap opera made for TV or a Hollywood movie, and inherent to it were specific effects. For McLuhan, that meant that 'the medium is the message'; for Howells and Negreiros (2012) in contrast, as noted in Chapter 1, it means that the medium is simply how an image is delivered, which is distinct from, and irrelevant to, its meanings. Usage of the term 'new media' can follow the latter logic, since 'new' is often used simply as a synonym for 'digital'. And as Chapter 1 noted, some critics, like Sean Cubitt (2006), suggest that 'new media' in this sense is just too broad a category to be meaningful.

The term 'medium', though, can be used to refer to a combination of a technology and a specific kind of cultural text, such as 'news' or 'soap opera', because in the era of mass media, particular kinds of technologies tended to carry their own sorts of texts. So a medium is also often understood as *both* the technology of transmission *and* the sort of images it carries; hence Jenkins' (2008: 254) reference above to 'medium-specific content'. Roger Silverstone (1994) called this the 'double articulation' of the notion of medium. A medium is both an image and its support: a TV news programme and the television, a canvas and the paint.

W.J.T. Mitchell, however, has developed an even more expansive definition of 'medium'. For him, a medium consists of 'the entire range of practices that make it possible for images to be embodied in the world as pictures' (Mitchell, 2005a: 198). So fine art paintings, for example, are 'not just the canvas and the paint, but the stretcher and the studio, the gallery, the museum, the collector, and the dealer-critic system' (2005a: 198). This definition of medium depends not only on the technology of circulation and the images it carries, but also on the social institutions and practices that keep that alignment of technology and image in place. Gane and Beer (2008) have attempted to recuperate the term 'new media' by defining it in a similarly expanded manner: their argument is that new media should be understood in terms of networks, information, interfaces, archives, interactivity and simulation, which is also an effort to align what is carried, how it is carried, and how people encounter it. This expanded notion of a medium is certainly useful for a critical visual methodology because it focuses on what an image shows, how it is showing it, and to whom – all important questions if the social effect of an image is to be ascertained.

Many relatively longstanding alignments between visual content, mode of transmission and audiencing are robust and persist, so that we can still call television or painting a 'medium' in this expanded sense. However, under the conditions of convergence culture, many other alignments of image, transmission and audience are also proliferating. Images can be transmitted via many different technologies; the same technology can show very different kinds of images; audiences can

watch the same thing via different transmission technologies, or different things on the same technology. So to see a movie, you no longer have to go to a cinema to see it projected onto a screen from film stock; you can also watch it on your TV from a DVD, or on your iPod. To look at a van Gogh painting, you no longer have to go to the art gallery where the original is hung on display; you can also see it on the gallery's website, or indeed on a pencil case, key ring, tea towel or mouse mat; and there are 'Na'vis' in all sorts of places (see Figures 2.5 and 10.4).

If an image is produced – Figure 2.2, say, an analogue photograph most likely intended for publication in a mass circulation magazine – and is then transmitted (via a commercial, web-based photography gallery, for example) then some scholars want to make a distinction between the 'original' medium and an image's subsequent incarnations as it travels. Rodowick, for instance, distinguishes between a medium and its 'mode of transmission' (Rodowick, 2007: 32). For others, though, like Jenkins, convergence makes the notion of an original medium harder to sustain. He is more interested in exploring how something – meaning content of some kind – plays itself out across multiple media – meaning multiple technologies of transmission. Both positions, interestingly, find Mitchell's (2005a) expanded notion of a medium hard to sustain.

There are, then, two aspects of the social modality of audiencing: the social practices of spectating, which include not only looking at images but also creating variations of them; and the social identities of the spectators. Some work, however, has drawn these two aspects of audiencing together to argue that certain sorts of people do certain sorts of images in particular ways. Sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel (1991), for example, have undertaken large-scale surveys of the visitors to art galleries, and have argued that the dominant way of visiting art galleries – walking around quietly from painting to painting, appreciating the particular qualities of each one, contemplating them in quiet awe – is a practice associated with middle-class visitors to galleries. As they say, 'museum visiting increases very strongly with increasing level of education, and is almost exclusively the domain of the cultivated classes' (Bourdieu and Darbel, 1991: 14). They are quite clear that this is not because those who are not middle class are incapable of appreciating art. Bourdieu and Darbel (1991: 39) say that, 'Considered as symbolic goods, works of art only exist for those who have the means of appropriating them, that is, of deciphering them.' To appreciate works of art you need to be able to understand, or to decipher, their style – otherwise they will mean little to you. And it is only the middle classes who have been educated to be competent in that deciphering. Thus they suggest, rather, that those who are not middle class are not taught to appreciate art; that although the curators of galleries and the 'cultivated classes' would deny it, they have learnt what to do in galleries and they are not sharing their lessons with anyone else. Art galleries therefore exclude certain groups of people. Indeed, in other work Bourdieu (1984) goes further and suggests that competence in such techniques of appreciation actually defines an individual as middle class (see also Bennett, 2009).



In order to be properly middle class, one must know how to appreciate art, and how to perform that appreciation appropriately (no popcorn please).

The Doisneau photograph is, again, an interesting example. Many reproductions of his photographs could be bought in Britain from a chain of shops called Athena (which went out of business some time ago). Athena also sold posters of pop stars, of cute animals, of muscle-bound men holding babies, and so on. Students in my classes would be rather divided over whether buying such images from Athena was something they would do or not – whether it showed you had (a certain kind of) taste or not. I find Doisneau's photographs rather sentimental and tricky, rather stereotyped – and I rarely bought anything from Athena to stick on the walls of the rooms I lived in when I was a student. Instead, I preferred postcards of modernist paintings picked up on my summer trips to European art galleries. This was a genuine preference but I also know that I wanted the people who visited my room to see that I was ... well, someone who went to European art galleries. And students tell me that they often think about the images with which they decorate their rooms in the same manner. We know what we like, but we also know that other people will be looking at the images we choose to display. Our use of images, our appreciation of certain kinds of imagery, performs a social function as well as an aesthetic one. It says something about who we are and how we want to be seen.

These issues surrounding the audiencing of images are often researched using methods that are quite common in qualitative social science research: interviews, ethnography and so on. This will be explored in Chapter 10. However, as I have noted above, it is possible and necessary to consider the viewing practices of one spectator without using such techniques, because that spectator is you. It is important to consider how you are looking at a particular image and to write that into your interpretation, or perhaps express it visually. Exactly what this call to reflexivity means is a question that will recur throughout this book, and Chapter 14 discusses some of the ethical issues that arise when working with visual images.

## Summary

As the previous chapter argued, a critical visual methodology must be concerned with the social effects of the visual materials it is studying. This chapter has argued that the social effects of an image or set of images are made at four sites – the sites of production, the site of the image itself, the site of its circulation, and the site of its audiencing – and there are three modalities to each of these sites: technological, compositional and social. Theoretical debates about how to interpret images can be understood as debates over which of these sites and modalities is most important for understanding an image, and why. These debates affect the methodology that is most appropriately brought to bear on particular images; all of the methods

discussed in this book are better at focusing on some sites and modalities than others. Their sites and modalities will structure all the subsequent chapters' discussions of methods.

### Further Reading

Sturken and Cartwright's *Practices of Looking* (2009) is an excellent overview of many approaches to visual culture, and of many of its empirical manifestations in the affluent world today. Although they do not use the terminology of sites and modalities, their discussions could certainly be read in those terms. It is nicely complemented by Sunil Manghani's *Image Studies: Theory and Practice* (2013), which has a clear and helpful account of some of the key theories for understanding visual culture.



















































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































