

reading images

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THE GRAMMAR
OF VISUAL DESIGN

SECOND EDITION



LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 1996
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

Second edition published 2006

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2006.

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Kress, Gunther R.

Reading images : the grammar of visual design / Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. – 2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Communication in design. I. Van Leeuwen, Theo, 1947– II. Title.

NK1510.K64 2006

701–dc22

2006002242

ISBN10: 0-415-31914-5 (hbk)

ISBN10: 0-415-31915-3 (pbk)

ISBN10: 0-203-61972-2 (ebk)

ISBN13: 9-78-0-415-31914-0 (hbk)

ISBN13: 9-78-0-415-31915-7 (pbk)

ISBN13: 9-78-0-203-61972-8 (ebk)

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4 Representation and interaction: designing the position of the viewer

In the previous chapter we discussed visual resources for the representation of interactions and conceptual relations between the people, places and things depicted in images. But visual communication also has resources for constituting and maintaining another kind of interaction, the interaction between the producer and the viewer of the image. Another way of saying this is that images (and other kinds of visual) involve two kinds of participants, *represented participants* (the people, the places and things depicted in images) and *interactive participants* (the people who communicate with each other *through* images, the producers and viewers of images), and three kinds of relations: (1) relations between represented participants; (2) relations between interactive and represented participants (the interactive participants' attitudes towards the represented participants); and (3) relations between interactive participants (the things interactive participants do to or for each other through images).

Interactive participants are therefore real people who produce and make sense of images in the context of social institutions which, to different degrees and in different ways, regulate what may be 'said' with images, how it should be said, and how it should be interpreted. In some cases the interaction is direct and immediate. Producer and viewer know each other and are involved in face-to-face interaction, as when we make photographs of each other to keep in wallets or pin on pinboards, or draw maps to give each other directions, or diagrams to explain ideas to each other. But in many cases there is no immediate and direct involvement. The producer is absent for the viewer, and the viewer is absent for the producer. Think of photographs in magazines. Who is the producer? The photographer who took the shot? The assistant who processed and printed it? The agency who selected and distributed it? The picture editor who chose it? The layout artist who cropped it and determined its size and position on the page? Most viewers will not only never meet all these contributors to the production process face to face, but also have only a hazy, and perhaps distorted and glamorized, idea of the production processes behind the image. All they have is the picture itself, as it appears in the magazine. And producers, similarly, can never really know their vast and absent audiences, and must, instead, create a mental image of 'the' viewers and 'the' way viewers make sense of their pictures. In everyday face-to-face communication it is easy enough to distinguish interactive participants from represented participants: there is always an image-producer and a viewer (who, depending on the situation, may swap roles with the producer, add to the scribbled floorplan or diagram, for instance), and then there are the represented participants (for instance, the people on the quick sketch of the dinner table arrangement, or the landmarks on the hand-drawn map), and these may, of course, include the producer and/or the viewer themselves. Producer and viewer are physically present. The participants they represent need not be. But when there is a disjunction between the context of production and the context of reception, the producer is not physically present, and the viewer is alone with the image and

cannot reciprocate – an illuminating exception is the case of the ‘defacement’ of billboard advertisements, when graffiti artists ‘respond’ to the initial ‘turn’ or statement of the image.

Something similar occurs in writing. Writers, too, are not usually physically present when their words are read, and must address their readers in the guise of represented participants, even when they write in the first person. Readers, too, are alone with the written word, and cannot usually become writers in turn. Literary theorists (e.g. Booth, 1961; Chatman, 1978) have addressed this problem by distinguishing between ‘real’ and ‘implied’ authors, and between ‘real’ and ‘implied’ readers. The ‘implied author’ is a disembodied voice, or even ‘a set of implicit norms rather than a speaker or a voice’ (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983: 87): ‘he, or better, it has no voice, no direct means of communicating, but instructs us silently, through the design of the whole, with all the voices, by all the means it has chosen to let us learn’ (Chatman, 1978: 148). The ‘implied reader’, ‘preferred reading position’, etc., similarly, is ‘an image of a certain competence brought to the text and a structuring of such competence within the text’ (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983: 118): the text selects a ‘model reader’ through its ‘choice of a specific linguistic code, a certain literary style’ and by presupposing ‘a specific encyclopedic competence’ on the part of the reader (Eco, 1979: 7). This we can know. Of this we have evidence in the text itself. Real authors and real readers we cannot ultimately know. This bracketing out of real authors and real readers carries the risk of forgetting that texts, literary and artistic texts as much as mass media texts, are produced in the context of real social institutions, in order to play a very real role in social life – in order to do certain things to or for their readers, and in order to communicate attitudes towards aspects of social life and towards people who participate in them, whether authors and readers are consciously aware of this or not. Producers, if they want to see their work disseminated, must work within more or less rigidly defined conventions, and adhere to the more or less rigidly defined values and beliefs of the social institution within which their work is produced and circulated. Readers will at least recognize these communicative intentions and these values and attitudes for what they are, even if they do not ultimately accept them as their own values and beliefs. They can ‘recognize the substance of what is meant while refusing the speaker’s interpretations and assessments’ (Scannell, 1994: 11).

However important and real this disjunction between the context of production and the context of reception, the two do have elements in common: the image itself, and a knowledge of the communicative resources that allow its articulation and understanding, a knowledge of the way social interactions and social relations can be encoded in images. It is often said that the knowledge of the producer and the knowledge of the viewer differ in a fundamental respect: the former is active, allowing the ‘sending’ as well as the ‘receiving’ of ‘messages’; the latter is passive, allowing only the ‘receiving’ of ‘messages’. Producers are able to ‘write’ as well as ‘read’, viewers are able only to ‘read’. Up to a point this is true, at least in the sense that the production of images is still a specialized activity, so that producers ‘write’ more fluently and eloquently, and more frequently, than viewers. But we hope our attempts to make that knowledge explicit will show that the interactive meanings are visually encoded in ways that rest on competencies shared by producers and viewers.

The articulation and understanding of social meanings in images derives from the visual articulation of social meanings in face-to-face interaction, the spatial positions allocated to different kinds of social actors in interaction (whether they are seated or standing, side by side or facing each other frontally, etc.). In this sense the interactive dimension of images is the ‘writing’ of what is usually called ‘non-verbal communication’, a ‘language’ shared by producers and viewers alike.

The disjunction between the context of production and the context of reception has yet another effect: it causes social relations to be *represented rather than enacted*. Because the producers are absent from the place where the actual communicative transaction is completed, from the locus of reception, they cannot say ‘I’ other than through a substitute ‘I’. Even when the viewer receives an image of the ‘real author’ or a contributor to the production process – the presenter in a television programme, the painter in a self-portrait, the owner of the company (or the worker in the centuries-old distillery) in an advertisement – that image is only an image, a double of the ‘real author’, a representation, detached from his or her actual body. And the ‘real authors’ may also speak in the guise of someone else, of a ‘character’, as when, instead of the owner of a company, it is Uncle Sam, or a larger-than-life walking and talking teddy bear, who addresses us in an advertisement. This dimension of representation is another one which has been studied extensively in literary theory (e.g. Genette, 1972). The relation between producer and viewer, too, is represented rather than enacted. In face-to-face communication we must respond to a friendly smile with a friendly smile, to an arrogant stare with a deferential lowering of the eyes, and such obligations cannot easily be avoided without appearing impolite, unfriendly or impudent. When images confront us with friendly smiles or arrogant stares, we are not obliged to respond, even though we do recognize how we are addressed. The relation is only represented. We are *imaginarily* rather than really put in the position of the friend, the customer, the lay person who must defer to the expert. And whether or not we identify with that position will depend other factors – on our real relation to the producer or the institution he or she represents, and on our real relation to the others who form part of the context of reception. All the same, whether or not we identify with the way we are addressed, we do understand how we are addressed, because we do understand the way images represent social interactions and social relations. It is the business of this chapter to try and make those understandings explicit.

THE IMAGE ACT AND THE GAZE

In the previous chapters we showed two pictures of an Antarctic explorer, taken from the Australian primary-school social studies textbook *Our Society and Others* (Oakley *et al.*, 1985). Figure 3.10 was a photograph in which the Australian Antarctic explorer Sir Douglas Mawson looked directly at the viewer. The schematic and ‘generalized’ explorer in figure 2.4, on the other hand, did not look at the viewer. The two images are in fact positioned side by side, the photo on the left page, the drawing on the right. Together, they combine two different communicative functions. The photo seeks above all to bring about

an imaginary relation between the represented explorer and the children for whom the book is written, a relation perhaps of admiration for, and identification with, a national hero. And this means also that the image-producer (the institution of educational publishing) addresses the children in the voice of the national hero and makes that national hero an 'educational' voice. The drawing, on the other hand, seeks, first of all, to be read as a piece of objective, factual information, and in this way aims to set into motion the actual process of learning.

There is, then, a fundamental difference between pictures from which represented participants look directly at the viewer's eyes, and pictures in which this is not the case. When represented participants look at the viewer, vectors, formed by participants' eyelines, connect the participants with the viewer. Contact is established, even if it is only on an imaginary level. In addition there may be a further vector, formed by a gesture in the same direction, as in figure 4.1.

This visual configuration has two related functions. In the first place it creates a visual form of direct address. It acknowledges the viewers explicitly, addressing them with a visual 'you'. In the second place it constitutes an 'image act'. The producer uses the image



Fig 4.1 Recruitment poster (Alfred Leete, 1914) (Imperial War Museum)

to do something to the viewer. It is for this reason that we have called this kind of image a 'demand', following Halliday (1985): the participant's gaze (and the gesture, if present) demands something from the viewer, demands that the viewer enter into some kind of imaginary relation with him or her. Exactly what kind of relation is then signified by other means, for instance by the facial expression of the represented participants. They may smile, in which case the viewer is asked to enter into a relation of social affinity with them; they may stare at the viewer with cold disdain, in which case the viewer is asked to relate to them, perhaps, as an inferior relates to a superior; they may seductively pout at the viewer, in which case the viewer is asked to desire them. The same applies to gestures. A hand can point at the viewer, in a visual 'Hey, you there, I mean you', or invite the viewer to come closer, or hold the viewer at bay with a defensive gesture, as if to say, 'Stay away from me'. In each case the image wants something from the viewers – wants them to do something (come closer, stay at a distance) or to form a pseudo-social bond of a particular kind with the represented participant. And in doing this, images define to some extent who the viewer is (e.g. male, inferior to the represented participant, etc.), and in that way exclude other viewers.

In the history of art, this look was a significant innovation. Although in Italian painting small figures among the bystanders of the Crucifixion and other biblical scenes can be seen to look at the viewer from the fourteenth century onwards, the 'demand' picture comes into its own in the fifteenth century. According to Panofsky (1953: 190), it originated in self-portraits, and Jan van Eyck was the first to use it in *Man in a Red Turban* (1433), which is regarded by most art historians as a self-portrait.

In 1433 Jan van Eyck made one of the great discoveries in portraiture. In the portrait of a 'Man in a Red Turban', completed in October 21 of that year, the glance of the sitter is turned out of the picture and sharply focused on the beholder with an air of skepticism intensified by the expression of the thin mouth with its slightly compressed corners. For the first time the sitter seeks to establish direct contact with the spectator. . . . We feel observed and scrutinized by a wakeful intelligence.

(Panofsky, 1953: 198)

Others trace it back further. According to Belting (1990: 57), 'the suggestion of reciprocity between the viewer and the person depicted in the image' had a devotional purpose. By the thirteenth century, monks in their cells 'had before their eyes images of the Virgin and her crucified son, so that while reading, praying and sleeping, they could look upon them and be *looked upon* with the eyes of compassion' (our italics).

Represented participants who look at the viewer are usually human (or animal), but not always: the headlights of a car can be drawn as eyes looking at the viewer, for instance, and on the screen of one automatic bank teller, a creature whose combined head and body has the box-like shape of a machine, smiles at the viewer, holding out his hand in an inviting gesture, thus 'demanding' a friendly relation between the machine and its user (figure 4.2). The point is, whether they are human or not, by being represented as looking at the viewer, they are represented as human, anthropomorphized to some degree.

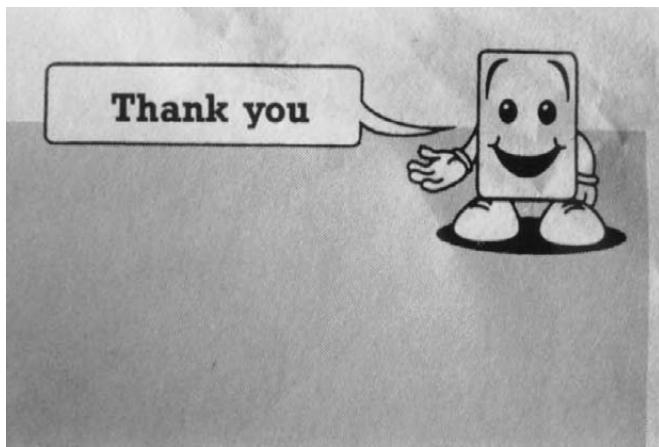


Fig 4.2 ATM screen

Other pictures address us indirectly. Here the viewer is not object, but subject of the look, and the represented participant is the object of the viewer's dispassionate scrutiny. No contact is made. The viewer's role is that of an invisible onlooker. All images which do not contain human or quasi-human participants looking directly at the viewer are of this kind. For this reason we have, again following Halliday (1985), called this kind of image an 'offer' – it 'offers' the represented participants to the viewer as items of information, objects of contemplation, impersonally, as though they were specimens in a display case.

It is always interesting to study which kinds of represented participants are, in a given context, depicted as demanding an imaginary social response of some kind from the viewer, and which are not. In *Our Society and Others* (Oakley *et al.*, 1985), the Australian primary-school textbook from which we drew many of our key examples in the first version of this book, immigrant families smile at the viewer. However, the human participants in pictures from these immigrants' countries of origin do not look at the viewer, not even in close-up portraits, as, for instance, in the portrait of an Italian grandmother who stayed behind. In the chapter on Aborigines, by contrast, hardly any of the Aboriginal participants look at the viewer. The Aboriginal poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal, referred to in the book as 'Kath Walker', and depicted in close-up in the last illustration of that chapter, is the only exception (see figure 4.3 below). Her expression, her make-up, her hairstyle and dress hardly distinguish her from non-Aboriginal women of her age. At most her skin is somewhat darker, but even that is not very pronounced in the black-and-white shot. Other Aboriginal people in the chapter are much more clearly depicted as 'other', and even if they do, occasionally, look directly at the viewer, they do so from a long distance, which greatly diminishes the impact of their look, or are figures in the background, looking blankly and more or less



Fig 4.3 Odgeroo Noonuccal (Oakley et al., 1985)

accidentally in the direction of the camera. Aboriginal people, in this primary-school textbook, are depicted as objects of contemplation, not as subjects for the pupil to enter into an imaginary social relation with. Immigrants, by contrast, at least once they are in Australia, are portrayed as people with whom the pupils should engage more directly, and in a friendly way, as equals.

The choice between 'offer' and 'demand', which must be made whenever people are depicted, is not only used to suggest different relations with different 'others', to make viewers engage with some and remain detached from others; it can also characterize pictorial genres. In some contexts – for instance, television newsreading and the posed magazine photograph – the 'demand' picture is preferred: these contexts require a sense of connection between the viewers and the authority figures, celebrities and role models they depict. In other contexts – for example, feature film and television drama and scientific illustration – the 'offer' is preferred: here a real or imaginary barrier is erected between the represented participants and the viewers, a sense of disengagement, in which the viewer must have the illusion that the represented participants do not know they are being looked at, and in which the represented participants must pretend that they are not being watched. And what in one context is accepted convention may in another be a startling mistake or an innovative experiment. Film theorists (e.g. Allen, 1977; Wollen, 1982) have hailed the look at the camera as a daring, Brechtian, 'self-reflexive'-style figure, but in television newsreading the look at the camera is commonplace and, we would think, not exactly 'self-reflexive' – at least for the presenters: an interviewee who looks at the camera in a television news programme breaks the rules in an unacceptable way. Not everyone may

address the viewer directly. Some may only be looked at, others may themselves be the bearers of the look. There is an issue of communicative power or 'entitlement' (Sacks, 1992) involved in this, not only in pictures, but also in everyday face-to-face communication, for instance in interactions between men and women:

As he answers the girl's last statement he begins talking and reaches the point where normally he would look away, but instead he is still staring at her. This makes her uncomfortable, because she is forced either to lock eyes with him, or to look away from him while he is talking. If he continues to talk and stare while she deflects her eyes, it puts her into the 'shy' category, which she resents. If she boldly locks eyes with him, he has forced her into a 'lover's gaze', which she also resents.

(Morris, 1977: 76)

Diagrams, maps and charts are most often found in contexts that offer a kind of knowledge which, in Western culture, has traditionally been valued highly – objective, dispassionate knowledge, ostensibly free of emotive involvement and subjectivity. Hence the 'demand' has been rare in these visual genres. But there were contexts in which the two forms of address were combined. School textbooks of the kind we used as data when we wrote the first edition of this book, for instance, constructed a progression from 'demand' to 'offer' pictures, and this not only in the course of a chapter, as in the chapter on Antarctic exploration, but also in the course of a whole book or series of books and, indeed, in the course of education as a whole – illustrations that served to involve students emotively in the subject matter then gradually dropped out as higher levels of education were reached. In senior high-school textbooks we found 'demand' pictures at most in the cartoons which, in almost apologetic fashion, sought to alleviate the seriousness of the text from time to time, as in a cartoon in a geography textbook (Bindon and Williams, 1988) where a girl looked despondently at the viewer, with the words 'What does hypothesis mean?' in a dialogue balloon emanating from her mouth. In the context of education, the 'demand' picture played an ambivalent role. On the one hand, it was not a highly valued form, but a form deemed suitable only for beginners, a form one grew out of as one climbed the educational ladder; on the other hand, it played an indispensable role in educational strategy: objective knowledge had to be built, apparently, upon a foundation of emotive involvement, of identification with celebratory mythologies, for instance. This foundation was then, gradually, repressed, for if it was not repressed, the knowledge built on it could not be seen to be objective. Outside the sphere of education, the value of the 'demand' picture depended on the assumed educational level of the reader. When, for instance, the mass media (or automatic teller machines) began to use 'demand' pictures, those educated in the linguistic and visual genres of objective knowledge and impersonal address would have felt patronized, 'addressed below their class'. Those not so educated (or those who contested the value of such an education) would have felt that communication had become more effective (and more fun) than was the case in the era of more formal and impersonal public communication. As we already discussed in the previous chapters, this situation is now changing and, with the gradual disappearance of the semiotic distinction, the class and

age distinctions it supported (and the different values and attitudes that were associated with these distinctions) also began to erode.

It is possible to relate the meanings conveyed by 'demands' and 'offers' to the linguistic system of person. As we have seen, 'demand' pictures address the viewer directly, realizing a visual 'you'. But this is not matched by a visual 'I'. The 'I' is absent in pictures or, rather, objectified, hiding behind a he/she/they. The 'demand' picture therefore reminds more of the language of, for instance, advertisements and instructions, where 'you's' abound but 'I's' are rare, than, say, of the language of personal letters, where 'I's' and 'you's' are likely to be equally common. 'Real producers' cannot refer to themselves directly. They must speak impersonally, as traditionally in bureaucratic and scientific language, where 'I's' were, and in many cases still are, also repressed. The public, on the other hand, is addressed directly. And yet, as we have seen, the distinction between 'offers' and 'demands' derives historically from attempts of Renaissance painters to find ways of saying 'I' in the self-portraits which expressed their new-found self-confidence and status of independent artists rather than humble craftsmen.

But the concepts of 'offer' and 'demand' can also be related to another key concept in linguistics, that of the 'speech act'. As mentioned, we have taken the terms from Halliday's description of four basic speech acts (or 'speech functions' as he calls them in his *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 1985). Each of these speech acts, says Halliday, is part of an interactional dyad, and has its 'expected' and its 'discretionary' (alternative) social response. Thus speech acts can (1) 'offer information', that is, form a statement, in which case the response sought is 'agreement', although the statement may of course also be contradicted; they can (2) 'offer goods-and-services' (e.g. *Would you like a drink?*), in which case the expected response is 'acceptance', although the offer may also be rejected; they can (3) 'demand information', that is, form a question, in which case the expected response is an answer, although the listener may also disclaim the question, for instance by saying *I don't know* or *I can't tell you that*; and (4), they can 'demand goods-and-services', that is, constitute some kind of command, in which case the expected response is for the listener to undertake what he or she has been asked to do, although listeners may of course also refuse to do so.

These speech acts are realized by the linguistic system of 'mood', that is, by syntactic permutations, permutations of the order of the subject and the finite element of the verbal group (i.e. the element of the verbal group that expresses tense and modality). The 'offer of information' (statement), for instance, is realized by the indicative mood, in which the finite element follows the subject, as in this sentence from *Vogue*:

Women (subject) cannot (finite) live by diamonds alone.

'Demanding information', the question, is realized by the interrogative mood, which has the subject following the finite in the case of the 'polar question' (the kind of question to which one can just answer 'yes' or 'no'), and, in the case of a 'WH-question' a WH-subject followed by the finite, or the finite element followed by the subject:

Can (finite) *women* (subject) *live by diamonds alone*?

Who (wh-subject) *could* (finite) *live by diamonds alone*?

What could (finite) *women* (subject) *live by*?

The imperative mood, the ‘command’, has no subject at all and, when the polarity is positive, no finite either:

Don’t (finite) *live by diamonds alone*

Live by diamonds alone

The speech act of ‘offering goods-and-services’, finally, is not realized by a permutation of subject and finite, but by various idioms (e.g. *Here you are*), by questions, in conjunction with specific mental process verbs (e.g. *Do you want a drink?*) or by commands (*Have a drink*) and, indeed, in various other ways.

There are many subtypes of these four basic kinds of speech act. They are realized through specific combinations of additional linguistic features. A ‘prediction’, for example, is an ‘offer of information’ with future tense and either second- or third-person subject, or first-person subject with a ‘non-volitional’ verb (e.g. *You will live by diamonds alone*, or *I will die young*). A ‘promise’ is an ‘offer of information’ with future tense, a first-person subject and a volitional verb (e.g. *I will buy you diamonds*). It would take us too far to discuss these in detail. The point to remember is that in language there are a few ‘core’ types and a very large number of further types which are constructed out of the core types. The same is true in the case of images. A visual ‘invitation’ is a ‘demand’ picture with a beckoning hand and a smiling expression; a visual ‘summons’, a ‘demand’ picture with a beckoning hand and an unsmiling expression; a visual ‘warning’, a ‘demand’ picture with a raised forefinger and a stern expression; and so on.

Despite these broad similarities, it would seem that ‘image acts’ do not work in the same way as speech acts. When images ‘offer’, they primarily offer information. Of course, an image, say an advertising image, may show someone offering something to the viewer, and this offer may in fact be a real offer, which can be obtained by writing to an address specified in the advertisement. But if there is such an ‘offer of goods-and-services’ in images, it must take the *form* of an ‘offer of information’. It must be *represented*. It cannot be enacted directly.

When images ‘demand’, they demand, one could say, the ‘goods-and-services’ that realize a particular social relation. Of course, an image could show a gesture of puzzlement, a ‘silent’ question, but the example is somewhat contrived and would need verbal reinforcement, or reinforcement by a conventional visual sign, for instance, a question mark. There is no image act for every speech act. But this need not be so forever. Although language and image do have their specific affordances, what can be ‘said’ and ‘done’ with images (and with language) does not only depend on the intrinsic and universal characteristics of these modes of communication, but also on historically and culturally specific

social needs. It is quite possible to extend the semantic reach and use of images into domains which formerly were the exclusive province of language, as is already done, on a small scale, in places where people are unlikely to have any given language in common (for example, international airports).

SIZE OF FRAME AND SOCIAL DISTANCE

There is a second dimension to the interactive meanings of images, related to the 'size of frame', to the choice between close-up, medium shot and long shot, and so on. Just as image-producers, in depicting human or quasi-human participants, must choose to make them look at the viewer or not, so they must also, and at the same time, choose to depict them as close to or far away from the viewer – and this applies to the depiction of objects also. And, like the choice between the 'offer' and the 'demand', the choice of distance can suggest different relations between represented participants and viewers. In handbooks about film and television production, size of frame is invariably defined in relation to the human body. Even though distance is, strictly speaking, a continuum, the 'language of film and television' has imposed a set of distinct cut-off points on this continuum, in the same way as languages impose cut-off points on the continuum of vowels we can produce. Thus the close shot (or 'close-up') shows head and shoulders of the subject, and the very close shot ('extreme close-up', 'big close-up') anything less than that. The medium close shot cuts off the subject approximately at the waist, the medium shot approximately at the knees. The medium long shot shows the full figure. In the long shot the human figure occupies about half the height of the frame, and the very long shot is anything 'wider' than that. Stylistic variants are possible, but they are always seen and talked about in terms of this system, as when film and television people talk of 'tight close shots' or 'tight framing', or about the amount of 'headroom' in a picture (i.e. space between the top of the head and the upper frame line).

In everyday interaction, social relations determine the distance (literally and figuratively) we keep from one another. Edward Hall (e.g. 1966: 110–20) has shown that we carry with us a set of invisible boundaries beyond which we allow only certain kinds of people to come. The location of these invisible boundaries is determined by configurations of sensory potentialities – by whether or not a certain distance allows us to smell or touch the other person, for instance, and by how much of the other person we can see with our peripheral (sixty-degree) vision. 'Close personal distance' is the distance at which 'one can hold or grasp the other person' and therefore also the distance between people who have an intimate relation with each other. Non-intimates cannot come this close and, if they do so, it will be experienced as an act of aggression. 'Far personal distance' is the distance that 'extends from a point that is just outside easy touching distance by one person to a point where two people can touch fingers if they both extend their arms', the distance at which 'subjects of personal interests and involvements are discussed'. 'Close social distance' begins just outside this range and is the distance at which 'impersonal business occurs'. 'Far social distance' is 'the distance to which people move when somebody says "Stand

away so I can look at you" ' – 'business and social interaction conducted at this distance has a more formal and impersonal character than in the close phase'. 'Public distance', finally, is anything further than that, 'the distance between people who are and are to remain strangers'. These judgements apply, of course, within a particular culture, and Hall cites many examples of the misunderstandings which can arise from intercultural differences in the interpretation of distance.

With these differences correspond different fields of vision. At intimate distance, says Hall (1964), we see the face or head only. At close personal distance we take in the head and the shoulders. At far personal distance we see the other person from the waist up. At close social distance we see the whole figure. At far social distance we see the whole figure 'with space around it'. And at public distance we can see the torso of at least four or five people. It is clear that these fields of vision correspond closely to the traditional definitions of size of frame in film and television; in other words, that the visual system of size of frame derives from the 'proxemics', as Hall calls it, of everyday face-to-face interaction. Hall is aware of this and in fact acknowledges the influence of the work of Grosser, a portrait painter, on his ideas. According to Grosser (quoted in Hall, 1966: 71–2), at a distance of more than 13 feet (4m), people are seen 'as having little connection with ourselves', and hence 'the painter can look at his model as if he were a tree in a landscape or an apple in a still life'. Four to eight feet (1.25–2.5m), on the other hand, is the 'portrait distance':

the painter is near enough so that his eyes have no trouble in understanding the sitter's solid forms, yet he is far enough away so that the foreshortening of the forms presents no real problem. Here at the normal distance of social intimacy and easy conversation, the sitter's soul begins to appear.... Nearer than three feet [90cm], within touching distance, the soul is far too much in evidence for any sort of disinterested observation.

The distances people keep, then, depend on their social relation – whether this is the more permanent kind of social relation on which Hall mainly concentrates (the distinction between intimates, friends, acquaintances, strangers, etc.) or the kind of social relation that lasts for the duration of a social interaction and is determined by the context (someone in the audience of a speech given by an acquaintance or relative would nevertheless stay at public distance, the distance of the 'stranger'). But these distances also, and at the same time, determine how much of the other person is in our field of vision – just as does the framing of a person in a portrait or film shot.

Like the 'demand' picture, the close-up came to the fore in the Renaissance. Ringbom (1965: 48) argues that it has its origin in devotional pictures, where it served to provide 'the "near-ness" so dear to the God-seeking devout'. In Italian and Dutch paintings of the early sixteenth century it acquired a 'dramatic' function, allowing 'the subtlest of emotional relationships with a minimum of dramatic scenery' (p. 48).

The people we see in images are for the most part strangers. It is true that we see some of them (politicians, film and television stars, sports heroes, etc.) a good deal more than

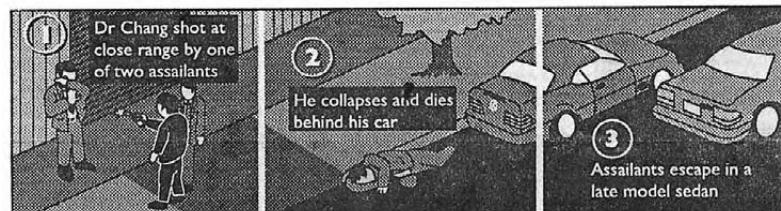
others, but this kind of familiarity does not of itself determine whether they will be shown in close shot or medium shot or long shot. The relation between the human participants represented in images and the viewer is once again an imaginary relation. People are portrayed *as though* they are friends, or *as though* they are strangers. Images allow us to imaginarily come as close to public figures as if they were our friends and neighbours – or to look at people like ourselves as strangers, ‘others’. In the primary-school social studies textbook from which we have quoted several examples, three Aboriginal boys are shown in long shot, occupying only about a quarter of the height of the ‘portrait’ format frame. The caption reads, ‘These people live at Redfern, a suburb of Sydney.’ They are shown impersonally, as strangers with whom we do not need to become acquaintances, as ‘trees in a landscape’. Although they do look at the viewer, they do so from such a distance that it barely affects us. Indeed, they are so small that we can hardly distinguish their facial features. ‘Their soul does not yet begin to appear’, to use Grosser’s words. The caption, significantly, gives them no name; in fact, where the more friendly ‘boys’ could have been, the quite formal ‘people’ has been used.

The portrait of the Aboriginal poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal (figure 4.3), already mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, is a tight close shot. *She* is depicted in a personal way. If this was all we could see of her in reality, we would be close enough to touch her. As mentioned, the section in which the photo occurs concludes a chapter on Aborigines in which no other Aborigine smiles at the viewer in this way. One of her poems is quoted: ‘Dark and white upon common ground! In club and office and social round! Yours the feel of a friendly land! The grip of the hand’ (Oakley *et al.*, 1985: 164). But Noonuccal’s message is not borne out by the way ‘dark and white’ are portrayed in the chapter.

Patterns of distance can become conventional in visual genres. In current affairs television, for example, ‘voices’ of different status are habitually framed differently: the camera ‘moves in for bigger close-ups of subjects who are revealing their feelings, whereas the set-up for the “expert” is usually the same as that for the interviewer – the breast pocket shot’. Both kinds of ‘statused participants’ tend to be ‘nominated’ (their names appear on the screen in superimposed captions) and ‘have their contributions framed and summed up’ (Brunsdon and Morley, 1978: 65). In other words, distance is used to signify respect for authorities of various kinds, on television as in face-to-face interaction.

In diagrams the human figure is almost always shown in medium long or long shot – objectively, ‘as if he were a tree in a landscape’. The pictures in figure 4.4 illustrated a front-page newspaper story about a murder case in Sydney. The diagrams show exactly what happened, from an objectifying and impersonal distance (and from a high angle). The close-up photos accompany testimonies by former patients of the victim, but are represented as also ‘friends’ of we readers of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and therefore as people whose relation with the victim we should identify with. As in the chapter on Antarctic exploration, the personal and the impersonal, the emotive and the detached, are combined.

So far we have discussed social distance in relation to human-represented participants,



HIS PATIENTS

<p>Victor was not only my doctor but my friend. I just can't believe that anyone would want to harm him.</p> <p>Fiona Coote, 21. Heart transplant in 1984 at age 14. Another at 16.</p>	<p>The sense of reassurance Dr Chang was able to give his patients was astonishing.</p> <p>Jim Cameron, 60, former Liberal Speaker of Legislative Assembly. Heart transplant 1986.</p>	<p>Australia has lost one of its greatest. He treated you like a very close friend. There was very little he wouldn't do for you.</p> <p>Geoffrey Monk, 46. Heart surgery 1978. Heart transplant 1984.</p>

▲ Fig 4.4 The murder of Dr Chang (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 July 1991)

but unlike the system of 'offer' and 'demand', the system of social distance can apply also to the representation of objects and of the environment. As size of frame is traditionally defined in terms of specific sections of the human body, beginning students of film and television are often at a loss as to which terms to use for describing shots of objects and landscapes. The scale of seven sizes of frame seems too fine-grained. There are no clear-cut equivalents for the shoulder, the waist, the knees. And objects come in many different shapes and sizes. We would nevertheless suggest that at least three significant distances can be distinguished, and that there are correspondences between these distances and our everyday experience of objects and the environment; in other words, that size of frame can also suggest social relations between the viewer and objects, buildings and landscapes. At close distance, we would suggest, the object is shown as if the viewer is engaged with it as if he or she is using the machine, reading the book or the map, preparing or eating the food. Unless the object is very small, it is shown only in part, and often the picture includes the user's hand, or a tool – for instance, a knife scraping the soft margarine in an advertisement. Film and television 'cutaways' ('overshoulders') of objects, in which the objects shown are integrated into an action through the editing, use this distance. At middle distance, the object is shown in full, but without much space around it. It is represented as

within the viewer's reach, but not as actually used. This type of picture is common in advertising: the advertised product is shown in full, but from a fairly close range, and a steep angle, as if the viewer stands just in front of the table on which it is displayed. At long distance there is an invisible barrier between the viewer and the object. The object is there for our contemplation only, out of reach, as if on display in a shop window or museum exhibit. The screenshot of the European PlayStation website, in figure 4.5, uses both middle distance and close distance, significantly putting the close shot on the right, as the 'New' (see chapter 6).

The same kind of distinctions can be made with respect to representations of buildings and landscapes. We can see a building from the distance of someone about to enter it, in which case we will not see the whole of the building, as is (again) often the case in film shots in which the building is related to some action. We can also see it from the distance of someone who just identified it as his or her destination, and is surveying it for a moment, before moving towards it. In that case the frame will include only the building and leave out the surrounding environment. Or we can see it, so to speak, from behind the gates that keep the public at a respectful distance from the palace, or the fortress, or the nuclear reactor, and in that case the representation will include also the space around the building. Landscapes, too, can be seen from within; from a kind of middle distance, with a foreground object suggesting, perhaps, that the viewer is imaginarily located within the landscape, but stopping for a moment, as if to take stock of what is ahead; or from a long distance, from the air, perhaps, or from a 'lookout' position, a place not itself in the landscape but affording an overview of it, as, for instance, in many of the photographic illustrations in geography textbooks.



Fig 4.5 PlayStation website (http://eu.playstation.com/europe_select.jhtml)

We will end with some brief comments on the very different way in which social distance is realized in the English language mainly through permutations in the formality of style (see Joos, 1967). Intimate language is a kind of personal language, spoken perhaps only by the members of a couple or family, or by a group of school friends. The speakers of such a 'language of intimates' often have special names for each other, names which outsiders do not get to use. And the language itself is minimally articulated: a half-word is enough to understand each other. Facial expressions, eye contact, intonation, voice quality, etc. carry most of the meaning, and people who are in an intimate relation with each other become finely attuned to the reading of meanings conveyed in this way. 'Personal' language is casual, with a good deal of colloquialism and slang. Non-verbal expression still carries much of the meaning but not so much that 'half a word is enough'. 'Social language', though still colloquial, already begins to introduce a hint of formality. And there is, in this kind of situation, less sharing of information and assumptions. The language needs to be more articulate, more verbally explicit, so that non-verbal expression is no longer as important as in intimate and personal style. Public language, finally, is the language used in more or less formal address. Here language becomes monologic: listeners no longer participate as they do in the other styles of speech. Speech is no longer improvised, but thought out in advance, perhaps even fully or partially written out. Intonation and other forms of non-verbal expression become as formal, as much subjected to control as syntax and word usage. Speech must be fully explicit, meanings fully articulated verbally. Colloquialisms are out of place and a more formal vocabulary must be employed. Writers can of course use these styles to address us as friends or even intimates, even when we are not, just as pictures can give us close-ups of people who, in reality, are and will remain strangers to us – think of the colloquial, chummy informality with which we are addressed in many advertisements.

PERSPECTIVE AND THE SUBJECTIVE IMAGE

There is yet another way in which images bring about relations between represented participants and the viewer: perspective. Producing an image involves not only the choice between 'offer' and 'demand' and the selection of a certain size of frame, but also, and at the same time, the selection of an angle, a 'point of view', and this implies the possibility of expressing subjective attitudes towards represented participants, human or otherwise. By saying 'subjective attitudes', we do not mean that these attitudes are always individual and unique. We will see that they are often socially determined attitudes. But they are always encoded as though they were subjective, individual and unique. The system of perspective which realizes 'attitude' was developed in the Renaissance, a period in which individuality and subjectivity became important social values, and it developed precisely to allow images to become informed by subjective points of view. Paradoxically, while these were the meanings encoded, perspective rests on an impersonal, geometric foundation, a construction which is a quasi-mechanical way of 'recording' images of reality. Socially determined viewpoints could, in this way, be naturalized, and presented as 'studies of nature', faithful

copies of empirical reality. Only recently has it become possible again to see that perspective is also 'a daring abstraction' (Hauser, 1962: 69), and to discuss its semiotic effects, for instance, in film theory (e.g. Comolli, 1971).

Pre-Renaissance forms, frescoes on the wall of a church nave, for example, or mosaics in the domed roof of a church, did not have perspective to position the viewer. Viewers of such works were positioned, not by the internal structure of the work, but by the structure of its environments, both the immediate environment of the church, its proximity to the altar, for instance, and the wider social environments. In other words, the syntax of the object depended for its completion, its closure, not on a particular relation with the viewer but on a particular relation with its surroundings, and the point of view was the position the viewer actually took up in relation to the image: 'The world in the picture was experienced as a direct continuation of the observer's own space' (Arnheim, 1974: 274). As a result, the viewer had a certain freedom in relation to the object, a degree of what, today, we would call 'interactive use' of the text, albeit in the context of a highly constrained social order. From the Renaissance onwards, visual composition became dominated by the system of perspective, with its single, centralized viewpoint. The work became an autonomous object, detached from its surroundings, movable, produced for an impersonal market, rather than for specific locations. A frame began to separate the represented world from the physical space in which the image was viewed: at the time perspective was developed, pictures began to be framed precisely to create this division, to mark off the image from its environment, and turn it into a kind of 'window on the world'. At the same time, images became more dependent on the viewer for their completion, their closure, and viewers became more distanced from the concrete social order in which the world had formerly been embedded: they now had to learn to internalize the social order. This yielded greater freedom with respect to the immediate, concrete social context, but diminished freedom in relation to the work. A parallel can be made with the developments which, more or less simultaneously, took place in music (see Shepherd, 1977). In medieval modes, based as they were on the pentatonic, any note of the scale could stand in only intervallic relation to any other note. Hence any note could provide a sense of resolution, of closure. In the new diatonic music a strict hierarchy was established between the fundamentals, so that any melody, whatever the harmonic progressions it traversed, had to return, ultimately, to the same predetermined note, the 'tonic', in the key of which the piece was scripted. The notes in music thus relate to the key centre in the same fixed way in which viewers relate to the perspectival centre of the visual work.

There are, then, since the Renaissance, two kinds of images in Western cultures: subjective and objective images, images *with* (central) perspective (and hence with a 'built-in' point of view) and images *without* (central) perspective (and hence without a 'built-in' point of view). In subjective images the viewer can see what there is to see only from a particular point of view. In objective images, the image reveals everything there is to know (or that the image produced has judged to be so) about the represented participants, even if, to do so, it is necessary to violate the laws of naturalistic depiction or, indeed, the laws of nature. The history of art has many striking examples of this – for example, the sculptures of winged bulls and lions which flanked the doors of Assyrian temples: from the side these

had four moving legs, and from the front two stationary legs, five altogether, so as to provide, from every side, a view from which no essential parts were missing. Modern technical drawings may still show what we know about the participants they represent, what is objectively there, rather than what we would see if we were looking at them in reality, rather than what is subjectively there. If we were, in reality, to see the front of the cube in figure 4.6 the way we know it 'objectively' is (a square), we would not at the same time be able to see the top and the side. It is an impossible picture (or a possible picture of a highly irregular hexahedron, rather than a cube) from the point of view of what we can see in reality. Yet in many contexts (for instance, assembly instructions for a piece of furniture) an 'objective' picture like this is entirely acceptable. Objective images, then, disregard the viewer. They say, as it were, 'I am this way, regardless of who or where or when you are.'

By contrast, the point of view of the subjective, perspectival image has been selected *for* the viewer. As a result there is a kind of symmetry between the way the image-producer relates to the represented participants, and the way the viewer must, willy-nilly, also relate to them. The point of view is imposed not only on the represented participants, but also on the viewer, and the viewer's 'subjectivity' is therefore subjective in the original sense of the word, the sense of 'being subjected to something or someone'. In a short essay on Chinese art, Bertolt Brecht has commented on this:

As we know, the Chinese do not use the art of perspective. They do not like to see everything from a single point of view. Chinese composition thus lacks the compulsion to which we have become altogether accustomed ... and rejects the subjugation of the observer.

(Brecht, 1967: 278–9)

The system of perspective is fundamentally naturalistic. It developed in a period in which the world of nature was no longer seen as manifesting a divine order (which was also, and at the same time, a social order), but as an autonomous and ultimately meaningless order

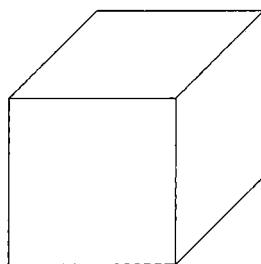


 Fig 4.6 Frontal-isometric cube

whose laws also governed the conduct of people. It was explicitly grounded in the new scientific spirit, legitimized by the authority of scientific observation and the physical laws of nature. The new music, similarly, was constructed as congruent, not with a (divine and) social order, but with the physical laws of sound.

In the late nineteenth century, after centuries of hegemony, both systems came into crisis, in the high arts (Cubism, twelve-tone music) as well as in the popular arts. Film, for example, still uses perspectival images, but, in a near-Cubist fashion, provides multiple and constantly shifting viewpoints in its editing. Modern television, especially in programmes not based on the model of film, such as news programmes, has gone a step further, and challenges perspective also within the image. A newsreader may have, behind him or her, on the left a verbal text, and on the right a chroma-keyed moving picture on the wall (a wall which is in fact a kind of two-dimensional screen on which to project a 'layout', and in front of which to position the newsreader). Modern magazine and website layouts form another category of visual works which are no longer based solely on the compositional principles of perspective. Of course, they still contain many perspectival images but these have been subordinated to a structure that can no longer be said to be perspectival. Two examples may illustrate this.

The picture on the Ford Mondeo website (figure 4.7) is naturalistic. What we observe here could also be observed in reality. There could be a car positioned in this way, in front of this particular couple and this particular building. As a result of the angle and the social distance (a low-angle 'long shot', with the car in the foreground), viewers are then made to relate to the represented participants in a certain way. They are made to 'look up to' them, and they are made to see them as if they notice the car and the stylish couple from across the street, with envy. In the picture on the Ford Fiesta page (figure 4.8), on the other hand, the viewer, rather than being positioned in the natural world, is confronted with a world



Fig 4.7 New-look Ford Mondeo (www.ford.co.uk/ie/mondeo)



Fig 4.8 Ford Fiesta Rock Solid (<http://www.ford.co.uk>)

which openly presents itself as a semiotic construct, mixing perspectival and non-perspectival elements in such a way as to give the appearance of a continuum of forms from the representational to the significational, while the visual as a whole remains non-naturalistic: the car, on this page, cannot be said to be 'behind' the Las Vegas road sign or 'behind' the word 'rock solid' in the way that the couple and the building in figure 4.7 can be said to be behind the Ford Mondeo. 'In front of' and 'behind' lose their ideational dimension, and become textual principles only. The two pages thus exemplify a shift from the dominance of nature to the dominance of signification, and from the dominance of the perceptual to the dominance of the conceptual – in a way very similar to that which we observed in chapter 1 when we compared *Baby's First Book* (figure 1.1) to Dick Bruna's *On My Walk* and *On The Farm* (figure 1.2).

INVOLVEMENT AND THE HORIZONTAL ANGLE

When we prolong the converging parallels formed by the walls of the houses in figure 4.9, they come together in two vanishing points. Both points are located outside the vertical

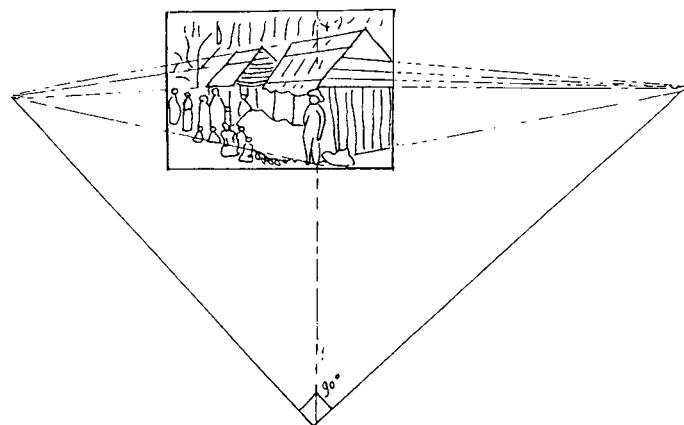


 Fig 4.9 Aborigines (Oakley et al., 1985)

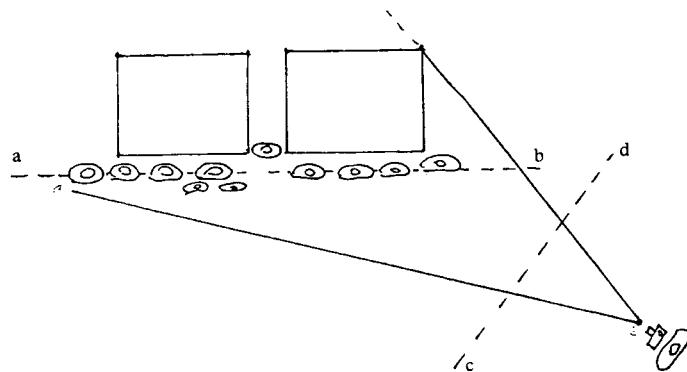
boundaries of the image, as shown in figure 4.10. These vanishing points allow us to reconstruct what we can see even without the aid of geometrical projection: the scene has been photographed from an oblique angle. The photographer has not situated himself or herself in front of the Aborigines, but has photographed them from the side.

Figure 4.10 shows how the position from which the photo was taken can be reconstructed by dropping lines from the vanishing points in such a way that they meet to form a 90° angle on the line drawn through the closest corner of the cottages. Figure 4.11 shows the scene from above. The line (ab) represents the frontal plane of the subject of the photograph: the line formed by the front of the cottages, which, as it happens, is also the line along which the Aborigines are lined up. The line (cd) represents the frontal plane of the photographer (and hence of the viewer). Had these two lines been parallel to one another, the horizontal angle would have been frontal – in other words, the photographer would have been positioned in front of the Aborigines and their cottages, facing them. Instead, the two lines diverge: the angle is oblique. The photographer has not aligned himself or herself with the subject, not faced the Aborigines, but viewed them ‘from the sidelines’.

Horizontal angle, then, is a function of the relation between the frontal plane of the image-producer and the frontal plane of the represented participants. The two can either be parallel, aligned with one another, or form an angle, diverge from one another.



▲ Fig 4.10 Schematic drawing: vanishing points of 'Aborigines' (figure 4.9)



▲ Fig 4.11 Schematic drawing: top view of 'Aborigines' (figure 4.9)

The image can have either a frontal or an oblique point of view. It should be noted that this is not strictly an either/or distinction. There are degrees of obliqueness, and we will, in fact, speak of a frontal angle so long as the vanishing point(s) still fall(s) within the vertical boundaries of the image (they may fall outside the horizontal boundaries).

Figure 4.12 has a frontal angle. As shown in figure 4.13, there is only one major vanishing point, and it lies inside the vertical boundaries of the image. Figure 4.14 shows how the frontal plane of the photographer (line ab) and the frontal plane of the represented participants (line cd) run parallel – that is, *if one only considers one set of represented participants*, the teachers, the blackboard and the reading chart. The frontal plane of the Aboriginal children (line ef) makes an angle of ninety degrees with the frontal plane of the teachers and with the frontal plane of the photographer. The Aboriginal children have been photographed from a very oblique angle.

The difference between the oblique and the frontal angle is the difference between detachment and involvement. The horizontal angle encodes whether the image-producer (and hence, willy-nilly, the viewer) is ‘involved’ with the represented participants or not. The frontal angle says, as it were, ‘What you see here is part of our world, something we are involved with.’ The oblique angle says, ‘What you see here is *not* part of our world; it is *their* world, something we are not involved with.’ The producers of these two photographs have, perhaps unconsciously, aligned themselves with the white teachers and their teaching tools, but *not* with the Aborigines. The teachers are shown as ‘part of our world’, the Aborigines as ‘other’. And as viewers we have no choice but to see these represented

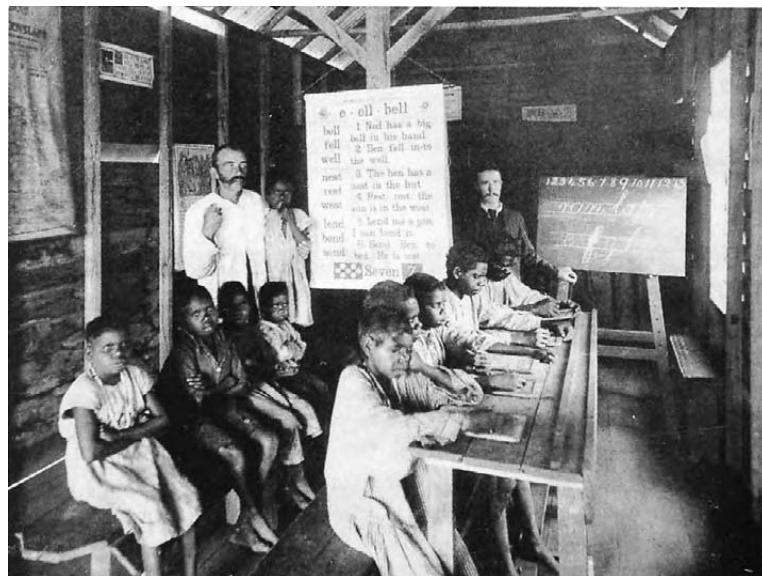


Fig 4.12 Aboriginal children at school (Oakley *et al.*, 1985)

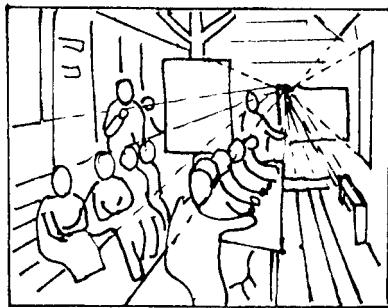


Fig 4.13 Schematic drawing: vanishing point of 'Aboriginal children at school' (figure 4.12)

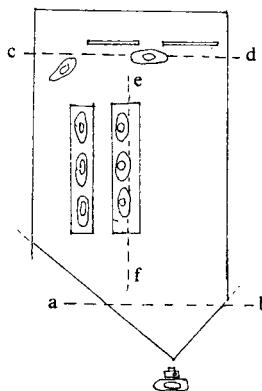


Fig 4.14 Schematic drawing: top view of 'Aboriginal children at school' (figure 4.12)

participants as they have been depicted. We are addressed as viewers for whom 'involvement' takes these particular values. In reality, they might not – we might be Aboriginal viewers, for example. It is one thing for the viewer to be limited by what the photograph shows (and to understand what this means, for example exclusion, in the case of an Aboriginal viewer); it is another thing to actually identify with the viewpoint encoded in the photo. We can accept or reject, but either way we first need to understand what is meant.

The primary-school social studies textbook *Our Society and Others* provides a further

illustration. A shot of the New South Wales Parliament House in Sydney is frontal, and taken from a low angle. A shot of the church is taken from an oblique and somewhat higher angle. The former illustrates a section about Sydney in the chapter 'What is a City?'; the latter, a section about a Maori family in the chapter on immigrants. Religion is depicted as something which, in the context of primary-school social studies, does not belong to 'our society' – the book contains statements like, 'The British believed in one God' (note the past tense) and questions like, 'Do you think a church or a cemetery is like a sacred site?' It fosters a detached, outsider's attitude towards the Christian religion.

In the depiction of humans (and animals), 'involvement' and 'detachment' can interact with 'demand' and 'offer' in complex ways. The body of a represented participant may be angled away from the plane of the viewer, while his or her head and/or gaze may be turned towards it (see e.g. figure 4.24 below) – or vice versa. The result is a double message: 'although I am not part of your world, I nevertheless make contact with you, from my own, different world'; or 'although this person is part of our world, someone like you and me, we nevertheless offer his or her image to you as an object for dispassionate reflection.' The latter is the case, for example, in an illustration from a Dutch junior high-school geography textbook (Bols *et al.*, 1986: 21). In a section entitled 'De Derde Wereld in onze straat' ('The Third World in our Street'), two pictures are shown side by side. On the left we see three older women, their headscarves an emblem of their status as immigrants. They are photographed from an oblique angle, hence as 'not part of our world' and in long shot, hence as 'others', 'strangers'. On the right we see, left in the foreground, a blonde girl, clearly meant to be taken as Dutch, with a black friend, who has his arm around her. The angle is a good deal more frontal than that of the shot of the three women, and the shot is a close-up: she is shown as like 'us', Dutch high-school students, and from 'close personal' distance. But she does not make contact with the viewers. She does not invite the viewers to identify with her, and with her relationship to a black man. Instead, the viewer is invited to contemplate her relationship detachedly, to ponder the fact that some people like 'us' have relationships with black people, but not, it is implicitly suggested, 'we' viewers ourselves. She is a phenomenon to be observed, not a person addressing the viewer.

Equally complex and ambivalent is the back view. One of the authors, at age 21, photographed his parents in a snow-covered park, just outside Brussels (figure 4.15) and, perhaps more importantly, it was this picture he chose to pin on the pinboard of his student room in Amsterdam, rather than one of the other, more frontal pictures he had taken on the same day. At the time, his feelings for his parents were complex. Deep attachment mixed with only half-understood desire to distance himself from the world in which he was brought up. Perhaps the picture crystallized these confused emotions for him. On the one hand, it showed his parents turning their back on him, walking away from him (a reversal, of course, of the actual situation); on the other hand, it showed this gesture of 'turning one's back', in a sense, 'frontally', in a maximally 'confronting' way. But to expose one's back to someone is also to make oneself vulnerable, and this implies a measure of trust, despite the abandonment which the gesture also signifies. Perhaps the picture reminded him of a passage from a Dutch novel he liked at the time:



Fig 4.15 Photograph of author's parents, 1968

Through the window he sees them walk away. 'How much I love that man', he thinks, and how impossible he has made it for me to express that. . . . His mother has linked arms with him. With hesitant steps she walks beside him on the frozen pavement. He keeps looking at them until they turn the corner, near the tall feathered poplars.

(Wolkers, 1965: 61)

How is 'involvement' realized in language? Perhaps the system of possessive pronouns comes closest to realizing the kinds of meanings we have discussed here. But the two systems, the visual system of horizontal angle and the linguistic system of possessive pronouns, differ in many ways. Involvement, as we have seen, is always plural, a matter of 'mine' and 'his/her/its'; a matter of distinguishing between what belongs to 'us' and what to 'them'. And, while in language one cannot easily have *degrees* of 'ourness' and 'theirness', in images such gradation is an intrinsic part of the system of involvement. Finally, there is no 'yours' in the system of horizontal angle. The visual 'you-relation' is, as we have seen, realized by the system of 'offer' and 'demand'. Perspective puts a barrier between the

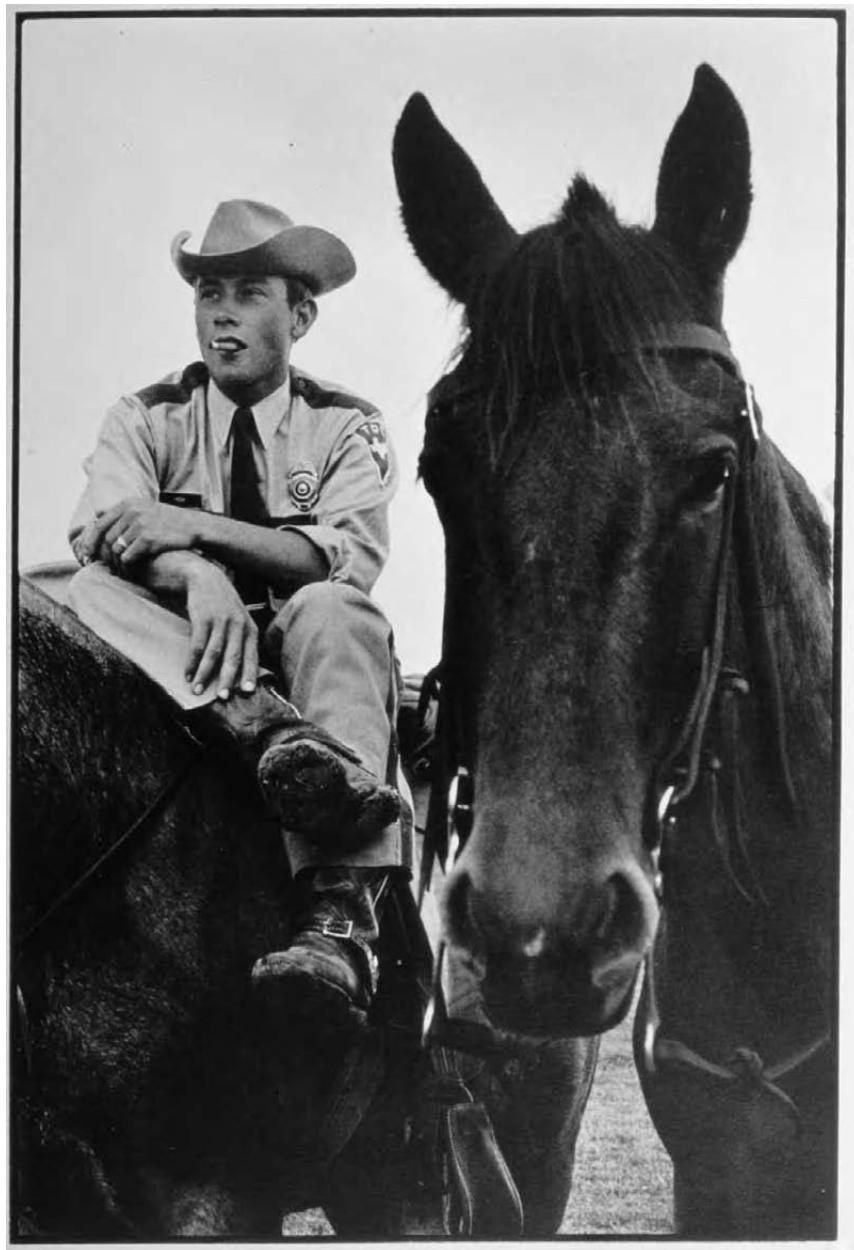
viewer and the represented participants, even in the case of a frontal angle: the viewer looks at the represented participants and has an attitude towards them, but does not imaginarily engage with them.

POWER AND VERTICAL ANGLE

Textbooks of film appreciation never fail to mention camera height as an important means of expression in cinematography. A high angle, it is said, makes the subject look small and insignificant, a low angle makes it look imposing and awesome: 'Low angles generally give an impression of superiority, exaltation and triumph . . . high angles tend to diminish the individual, to flatten him morally by reducing him to ground level, to render him as caught in an insurmountable determinism' (Martin, 1968: 37–8). But this leaves the viewer out of the picture. We would rather say it in a somewhat different way: if a represented participant is seen from a high angle, then the relation between the interactive participants (the producer of the image, and hence also the viewer) and the represented participants is depicted as one in which the interactive participant has power over the represented participant – the represented participant is seen from the point of view of power. If the represented participant is seen from a low angle, then the relation between the interactive and represented participants is depicted as one in which the represented participant has power over the interactive participant. If, finally, the picture is at eye level, then the point of view is one of equality and there is no power difference involved.

This is, again, a matter of degree. A represented participant can tower high above us or look down on us ever so slightly. In many of the illustrations in school textbooks we look down rather steeply on people – workers in the hall; children in a school yard. In such books the social world lies at the feet of the viewer, so to speak: knowledge is power. The models in magazine advertisements and features, and newsworthy people and celebrities in magazine articles, on the other hand, generally look down on the viewer: these models are depicted as exercising symbolic power over us. As shown in figure 4.5, products advertised in the advertisements may be photographed both from a low angle, as having symbolic power over us, and from a high angle, as being within reach and at the command of the viewer. The photograph reproduced in figure 4.16 shows a guard in the 'death row' section of a prison in Texas. The angle is low, to make him look powerful. But what makes this picture extraordinary is that not the guard, but the horse is closest to the viewer, and that it is not the guard, but the horse, whose every movement is commanded by this guard, who is looking at the viewer. What can this horse 'demand' from us? Therein lies the mystery and the force of this picture. Empathy with a fate of being subjugated to the power represented by the guard? Or with a fate of suffering?

How is power realized in language? Here we need, again, to remember the difference between face-to-face communication and mediated communication. In the classroom, for example, power will manifest itself first of all in the relation between teacher and pupil. This, as Cate Poynton has shown (1985: ch. 6), is in the main realized through the *difference* between the linguistic forms that may be used by the teachers and the linguistic



▲ Fig 4.16 Prison guard (Danny Lyon, 1969)

forms that may be used by the pupils; in other words, through a lack of reciprocity between the choices available to each party in the interaction. The teacher may use first names in addressing the pupils; the pupils may not use first names in addressing teachers. The teacher may use imperatives to 'demand goods-and-services'; the pupils would have to use polite forms, for instance, questions. This lack of reciprocity has its effect on every level of language: phonology, grammar, vocabulary, discourse, and on ideational, interpersonal, as well as textual meanings. If there is, in face-to-face communication, any question of power relations between represented participants and the pupils, then this results from the power relation between the teacher and the pupils.

To some extent this is the case in writing also, and not just because in writing – as in mediated communication generally – the absence of the writer causes, from the start, a fundamental lack of reciprocity (you cannot talk back to the writer), but also because the writer and the reader are often unequal in a number of other ways. The reader may be addressed directly, by means of the second-person pronoun *you*, while the writer hides behind impersonal forms. Mental processes may be attributed to the reader while the writer's mental processes are never referred to. Imperatives may be used, as modulated processes predicated of the reader (*you can*, *you should*, *you need*, etc.), while such forms are not used of the writer. Here are some examples of texts in which power is encoded in this way – the first from a Revlon advertisement, the second from *Our Society and Others* (Oakley *et al.*, 1985):

Wrinkles. They don't start where you think they do. They start underneath your skin.
That's why Anti-Aging Daily Moisturizer goes beyond mere surface treatment.

When you study places and people you need to have a way of keeping the information you collect. One way of doing this is to take notes from the books which you read. You cannot write down all the things you read as this would mean writing out the whole book. Notes are a short way of recording the most important information.

In the first text the writer does not directly refer to himself or herself, but writes as an impersonal authority, in terms of relational processes ('They start underneath your skin'). The reader is referred to directly ('you'), and the writer not only knows what the reader thinks ('where you think they do'), but also that the reader's thoughts are misguided: the authority of the writer is firmly based on the reader's ignorance. In the second text, too, the writer does not directly refer to himself or herself, but writes impersonally, in terms of relational processes ('Notes are a short way of recording the most important information'), while the reader is addressed directly ('you'). The processes with which the reader is associated are modulated in various ways ('you need', 'you cannot'). In both cases the lack of reciprocity which realizes power is encoded in the text itself.

But this omniscient knowledge of the reader's mind, this direct postulation of what the reader needs (must do, should think, will feel, and so on) and this lack of reciprocity between the writer and the reader or the speaker and hearer, cannot be realized in the same way in images. In images, the power of an image-producer must, as it were, be transferred

on to one or more represented participants – the power of the advertiser on the model, the power of the producer of the textbook on the ordinary people represented in the textbook. The nearest equivalent in speech would be the use of evaluative adjectives. We might, for example, transcode a picture in which we look down on factory workers or refugees as '*the humble workers*' or '*the downtrodden refugees*'. In the issue of the *Australian Women's Weekly* from which we took many of our original examples, this kind of transcoding occurs a number of times. The magazine contains photographs of a bejewelled Queen Elizabeth, and the actor Michael Douglas – both taken from a low angle. On the cover the relevant articles are announced by the following lines: 'DAZZLING – The Queen's jewels'; 'FASCINATING – Michael Douglas' "Fatal Attraction"'. But there remains a very big difference. What in the image is an attitude towards the represented participants becomes in language a characteristic of the represented participants: it objectifies the attitude.

NARRATIVIZATION OF THE SUBJECTIVE IMAGE

In many cases there is no immediately apparent motivation for point of view (and for size of frame). The angle may be high and frontal, and so convey power over and involvement with the represented participants, but the precise nature of the relation of power and involvement is not given. Thus a high-angle picture of workers in a factory could be said to be taken from the viewpoint of a supervisor in an elevated office, with a window overlooking the factory, but this remains a metaphor. We do not see the office in the picture. Other possibilities might also serve to make concrete the relation of power and involvement. In other cases the (imaginary) viewer intrudes in the picture to a greater or lesser degree. In an advertising campaign that ran at the time we worked on the first version of this book, this was done by including the hands of the imaginary viewer in the foreground of the picture. These could then be male or female, and groomed in different ways – they could wear driving gloves, expensive rings, and so on. In figure 4.17 they created the viewpoint of a couple.

In films the sequencing of images can fulfil this function. The shot of the factory, showing the workers from a high angle, can be preceded by a low-angle shot of the elevated office, with a supervisor behind the window looking down at the workers. In such cases the text narrativizes the point of view and imposes a fictional viewer between the represented and the interactive participants. But even when their origins are not shown, viewpoints can always be related to concrete situations. One can, and perhaps should, always ask, 'Who could see this scene in this way?', 'Where would one have to be to see this scene in this way, and what sort of person would one have to be to occupy that space?'

OBJECTIVE IMAGES

Scientific and technical pictures, such as diagrams, maps and charts, usually encode an objective attitude. This tends to be done in one of two ways: by a directly frontal or



Fig 4.17 Sterling advertisement (*New Idea*, November 1987)

perpendicular top-down angle. Such angles do suggest viewer positions, but special and privileged ones, which neutralize the distortions that usually come with perspective, because they neutralize perspective itself. To illustrate this with a simple example, when a cube is drawn perspectively its sides are not of equal length, and the degree of distortion depends on the angle, on the encoded viewer position. The cube does not look 'as we know it is', with all its sides of equal length, but 'as we see it', from a particular position. But from directly in front the third dimension disappears, and the cube appears flat, with all its sides of equal length. From above, exactly the same effect occurs. Perspective and its attitudinizing effect have been neutralized:

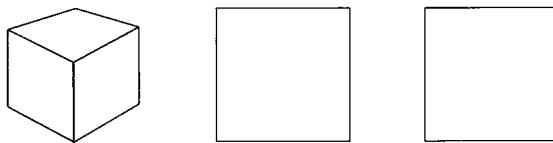


Fig 4.18 Cube seen from an angle, frontally and from above

Frontal and top-down angles, however, are not objective in entirely the same way. The frontal angle is the angle of maximum involvement. It is oriented towards action. The pictures of the Antarctic explorer (figure 2.4) could be transcribed as 'These are the clothes you should wear and this is the way you should wear them if you want to explore the Antarctic.' The frontal angle is the angle of 'this is how it works', 'this is how you use it', 'this is how you do it'. The top-down angle, on the other hand, is the angle of maximum power. It is orientated towards 'theoretical', objective knowledge. It contemplates the world from a god-like point of view, puts it at your feet, rather than within reach of your hands. Abstract diagrams can sometimes be read in both ways. A communication model, for instance (e.g. figure 2.2), can be read as a map ('top-down'), a schema, a 'theory of communication': 'this is what communication looks like, from the point of view of a disinterested observer'), or as a frontal view, a blueprint, a 'practical manual of communication' ('this is what you do when you communicate') – and this is perhaps one of the sources of its social power.

A third objective viewpoint, the cross-section, and the 'X-ray' view, should also be considered: its objectivity derives from the fact that it does not stop at appearances, but probes beyond the surface, to deeper, more hidden levels. In Western culture it is almost exclusively used in diagrams, although one can sometimes also observe experiments with it in children's drawings.

Not all diagrams, maps and charts, however, are completely objective. The vertical angle of the Gulf War map in figure 4.19, is high, but not completely top-down, and its horizontal

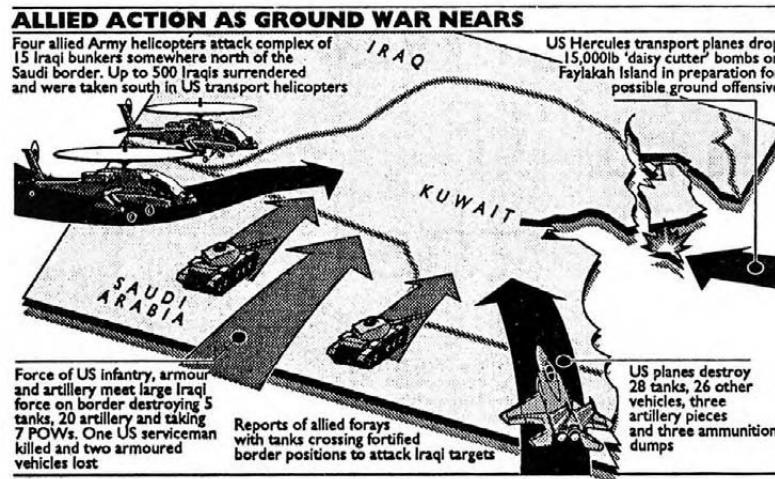


Fig 4.19 Gulf War map (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 January 1991)

angle is oblique, causing us to look at the theatre of war from the sidelines, in a relatively detached way. In books about science for young children we find similar angles (see figure 5.11, for example), their obliqueness perhaps suggesting that they are not (or not yet quite) meant as 'how to do it' pictures.

Elements of perspective may also be added to graphs and cross-sections, to give a sense of reality, of physical existence, to abstract, two-dimensional visuals. Having first been abstracted from the concrete, three-dimensional world of people, places and things, they are now restored to it, but in a transformed way, as new, human-made kinds of things and places. Thus we can see – for instance, in lavishly produced annual company reports – three-dimensional bar graphs, looking like skyscrapers or monoliths, against a background of clean and smooth hills in flat, primary colour. In figure 4.20 graphs become a setting for action: tourists move through the abstractly represented, but nevertheless three-dimensional, world of the international tourist business, just as may also be the case in television news graphics, where a further sense of reality may be given to such pictures by means of animation.

The addition of perspective adds nothing to the representational meaning of these diagrams, maps and charts; but it does add attitudinal meanings. In all these examples the angle is high, *explicitly* attitudinalizing the objective stance of the god-like top-down view, and often narrativizing it as the view from the satellite, that modern tool of the production of visual knowledge and symbol of informational power. The horizontal angle, on the other hand, may vary: with the 'increase in tourism' we are directly involved; the events of the Gulf War (figure 4.19), on the other hand, we watch 'from the sidelines', as bystanders. This process of attitudinalization happens, not so much in the contexts where this new

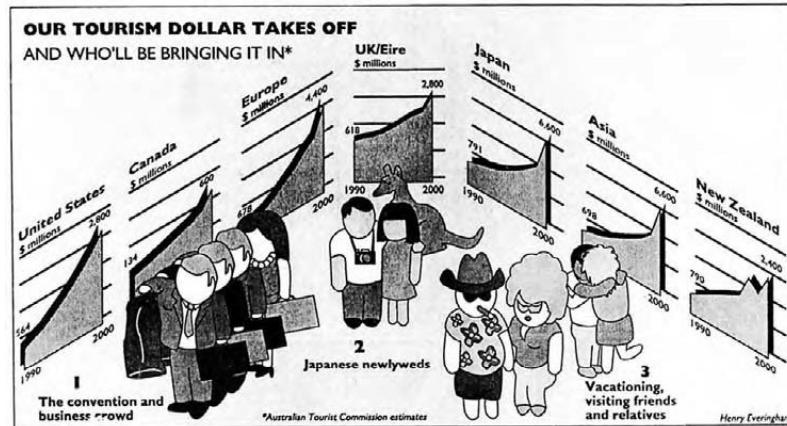


Fig 4.20 An increase in tourism (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 January 1991)

visual knowledge is produced and this new informational power exercised, but in the contexts in which it is disseminated in popularized form, and celebrated: here conceptual and schematic images are dressed up in the clothes of visual reality, and literally and figuratively 'animated'.

To conclude this section we add some notes on different, less 'subjective' kinds of perspective. If, in central perspective, the kind of perspective we have been discussing so far, something is seen from the front and at eye level, the sides, top and bottom will be hidden from view. A cube would appear as in drawing 1 of figure 4.21. If the same cube is seen from an oblique angle, one of the sides will come into view, but the other will remain hidden. If the angle is high, so that we look down on the cube, the top will also come into view, as in drawing 4 of figure 4.21. But in this case the front will no longer be a square. It will be distorted. The horizontal parallels in an image in central perspective converge towards one or more vanishing points – and so do the vertical parallels, although this is often less obvious, as vertical distances are not so great, and as vertical distortion is often 'corrected' in drawings and paintings.

Drawing 2 in figure 4.21, on the other hand, is an example of 'frontal-isometric' perspective. Here the front of the cube is not distorted, yet we can see the side and the top. And the horizontal parallels do not converge towards a vanishing point. Frontal-isometric perspective is based on the 'objective' dimensions of the represented participants, on what we know these dimensions to be, rather than on how they *appear* to us. For this reason frontal-isometric perspective is used in technical drawings, where it is important to be able to measure the dimensions of the represented objects from the drawing. In frontal-isometric perspective, then, there is not, as yet, a choice between involvement and detachment. It is the analogy in visual terms of the 'impersonality' characteristic of scientific language.

The perspective used in drawing 3 of figure 4.21 is called angular-isometric perspective. Here the front is distorted, the square no longer represented as a square. But the horizontal and vertical parallels do not converge. There is no end to space in this kind of perspective – it stretches on indefinitely. Angular-isometric perspective was used, for example, in eighteenth-century Japanese woodcuts – Japanese artists of this period always chose an oblique point of view, as well as a relatively high angle. They looked at the world without a sense of involvement, from a detached point of view, from a meditative distance.

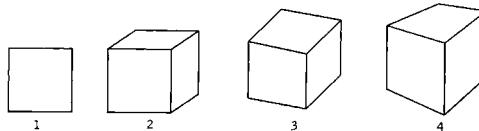


 Fig 4.21 (1) Cube seen from the front; (2) cube in frontal-isometric perspective; (3) cube in angular-isometric perspective; (4) cube seen from an angle in central perspective

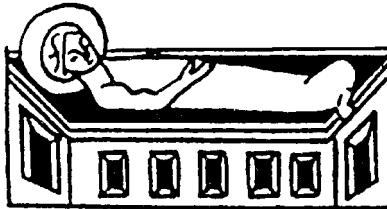


 Fig 4.22 Detail from a fourteenth-century Spanish nativity (from Arnheim, 1974)

This brief survey does not exhaust the possibilities. In medieval art 'inverted perspective' was sometimes used (see figure 4.22). This allows both sides of an object to be seen and causes the perspectival vectors to diverge rather than converge. It can often be found in children's drawings (young children also tend to draw the world as they know it to be, rather than as they see it) and, in recent times, has been taken up by painters such as Picasso and Braque, who looked for more objective ways of representing the world, regarding the simple viewpoint of central perspective as one-sided and restrictive, and viewing reality as multifaceted, a complex whole of often incompatible and mutually clashing viewpoints. In this way, as Arnheim notes (1974: 132), 'they make the contradictions of which Marxists speak visual'.

A SUMMARY

Figure 4.23 summarizes the main kinds of interactive meaning we have discussed in this chapter. It should be remembered that these are 'simultaneous systems' (as indicated by the curly brackets): any image must either be a 'demand' or an 'offer' and select a certain

REALIZATIONS

<i>Demand</i>	gaze at the viewer
<i>Offer</i>	absence of gaze at the viewer
<i>Intimate/personal</i>	close shot
<i>Social</i>	medium shot
<i>Impersonal</i>	long shot
<i>Involvement</i>	frontal angle
<i>Detachment</i>	oblique angle
<i>Viewer power</i>	high angle
<i>Equality</i>	eye-level angle
<i>Represented participant power</i>	low angle

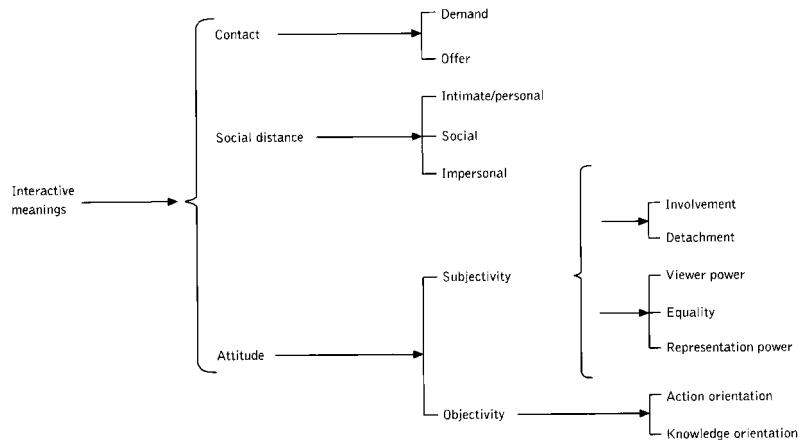


Fig 4.23 Interactive meanings in images

size of frame *and* select a certain attitude. In the next few sections we will discuss some examples at greater length, to show how the systems of 'contact', 'social distance' and 'attitude' interact to create more complex and subtle relations between represented and interactive participants.

TWO PORTRAITS AND TWO CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS

Rembrandt's famous *Self-portrait with Saskia* dates from 1634. John Berger (1972: 111) calls it 'an advertisement of the sitter's good fortune, prestige and wealth' and, he adds, 'like all such advertisements it is heartless'. Yet, from the point of view of the interactive meanings we have discussed in this chapter, the painting is perhaps a little more complex than Berger's remarks suggest. On the one hand, it is a 'demand' picture – Rembrandt and Saskia smile at the viewer, Rembrandt perhaps a little more effusively and invitingly than Saskia: he even raises his glass in a gesture directed at the viewer. On the other hand, he has shown himself and Saskia from behind, and from what Hall would call 'close social' distance, with Saskia a little further away from the viewer than Rembrandt – her head is considerably smaller than Rembrandt's even though she is sitting on his lap and should therefore, strictly speaking, be closer to the viewer than Rembrandt (the angle at which her head is turned to acknowledge the viewer also seems unnatural). Is Rembrandt distancing himself (and Saskia even more) from the viewer, excluding the viewer from involvement and intimacy with his new-found (and Saskia's already established) social status, thus

contradicting the invitation? Perhaps – but the portrait is also a self-portrait. Rembrandt, the miller's son, now married into a wealthy and respectable family and living in grand style, also distances *himself* from his new self (and to some extent from Saskia), as if he cannot feel fully involved and intimate with his new environment. As a self-portrait the picture may be self-congratulatory and smug, 'heartless', but it also betrays a degree of alienation, positioning the represented Rembrandt in a complex and contradictory social class position, between the world of his origins, which is also the point of view of the picture, and the world of Saskia into which he has moved. This, we think, makes it a little less smug, and a little more touching than Berger gave it credit for.

Figure 4.25 shows a later self-portrait, painted in 1661. By this time, Saskia has died, and Rembrandt has gone bankrupt. He now lives with his former housekeeper, Hendrickje, in a more downmarket neighbourhood, and in much reduced circumstances. In this portrait



Fig 4.24 Self-portrait with Saskia (Rembrandt, 1634) (Pinakotek, Dresden)



Fig 4.25 *Self-portrait* (Rembrandt, 1661) (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)

he is able to come face-to-face with himself, to confront himself (and the viewer) squarely and intimately with himself: 'He is an old man now. All has gone, except a sense of the question of existence, of existence as a question' (Berger, 1972: 112).

The picture on the cover of 'My Adventure' (figure 4.26), the story by an eight-year-old boy which we have already featured in the previous chapter, constitutes a 'demand': the little boy is looking at us, and smiling. He seeks our recognition. He wants to be acknowledged. On the other hand, the angle is oblique, and high, and the boy is shown from a great distance. Not only does the writer of this story show himself in the role of being shipwrecked, he also shows himself as 'other' (the oblique angle), as someone over whom the viewer has power (the high angle) and as socially distant, a 'stranger' (the long shot). In

other words, he uses the interactive resources of the subjective image (quite precociously, we feel) to show himself as small, insignificant and alienated, yet demanding recognition from the viewer. At the same time the act of drawing himself like this affords him, as the producer of the image, some power over that image of himself, an outlet for his feelings. In support of this interpretation it can be noted that the boy does not exactly play a heroic role in the story. After creating the raft, and just as the raft 'started to be good fun', everything goes wrong for him: he loses his money and never finds it again, the raft collapses and is lost irretrievably, and the hero has to walk all the way home, wet and cold. It is an unhappy ending for a hero unable to control the unpleasant events that happen to him.

Figure 4.27 is the front cover of a 'story' on sailing boats by a child from the same class as the author of 'My Adventure'. Its subject is similar: people on a boat. But the systems of 'image act', 'social distance' and 'attitude' take on very different values. The characters do not look at us: the picture is an 'offer'. The angle is frontal and eye level, and the two figures in the boat are neither particularly distant, nor particularly close. There is no setting, no texture, no colour, no light and shade. The sailing boat is drawn with geometrical accuracy. But for the two figures – simply drawn, and more or less identical, except for their size (a father and son?) – this could be a technical drawing. As such it suits the

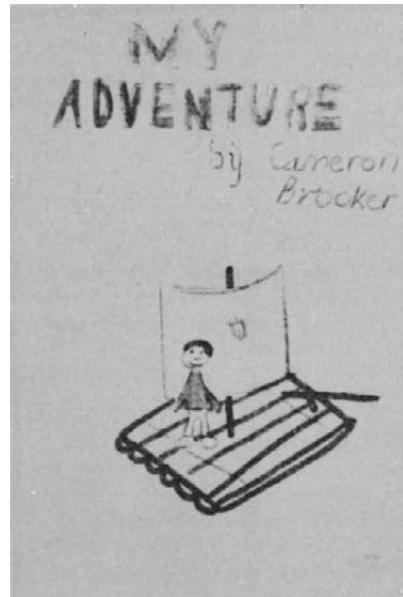


 Fig 4.26 Cover illustration of *My Adventure**

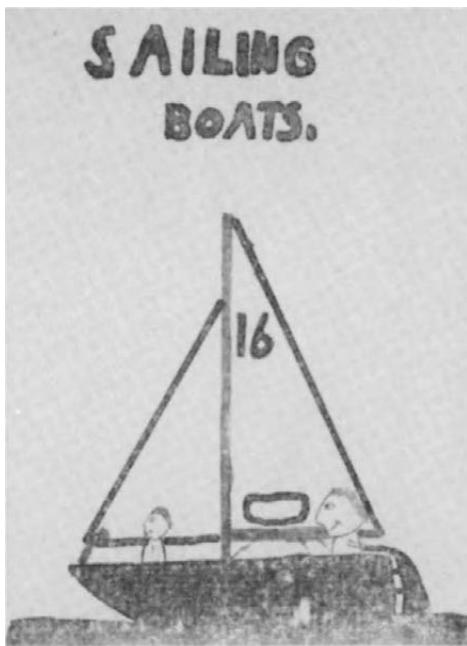


Fig 4.27 Cover illustration of 'Sailing Boats'

objective, generic title, 'Sailing Boats', just as the cover illustration of 'My Adventure' suits that story's subjective, specific title. In most of the illustrations inside the essay, no human figures are seen, as though the child already understands that the 'learning' of technical matters should be preceded by a 'human element' to attract non-initiates to the subject.

Clearly, children actively experiment both with the interactive resources of language and with the interactive resources of visual communication. They are active sign-makers. And the different ways in which these two children represent boats show two very different subjectivities at work.