

Reading The Landscape: Visual methods and observation

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GG2508: Skills and Techniques in Geoscience

Lecture 5: 9th February 2021

Dr Paula Duffy - Lecture Schedule

- ▶ Introduction to Qualitative Methods and The Interview
 - ▶ Lecture 3: Tuesday 2nd February (live on collaborate)
- ▶ Reading The Landscape: Visual methods and observation
 - ▶ Lecture 5: Tuesday 9th February (live on collaborate)
 - ▶ Include Q&A for Portfolio Task 2
- ▶ Reading The Digital Landscape: Online research and digital methods
 - ▶ Lecture 9: Tuesday 23rd February (Pre-recorded)
- ▶ Introduction to Survey Research Methods
 - ▶ Lecture 10: Thursday 25th February (Pre-recorded)

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Today's lecture

- ▶ Introduce 'The Landscape'
- ▶ Reading the Landscape : Observational methods
- ▶ Reading the Landscape : Visual Methods
- ▶ Visual Analysis
- ▶ Visual Methods - engaging and participatory

Reading Landscapes

What is Landscape?

- **All the visible features of an area of land, often considered in terms of their aesthetic appeal**
 - ‘the soft colours of the Northumbrian landscape’
 - ‘a bleak urban landscape’
- **A picture representing an area of countryside**
 - ‘the collection includes some 17th-century landscapes’
 - [as modifier] ‘a landscape painter’
- **The genre of landscape painting**
 - ‘he found he could not express himself in landscape’
- **The distinctive features of a sphere of activity**
 - ‘the event transformed the **political landscape**’

Source: Oxford English Dictionary [online edition]. Definition of ‘Landscape’. Available online at: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/landscape>. Accessed 27 Jan 2020.



What can be 'read' from a landscape?

(Bunnell, 2013; Cloke, 2013)



What can be 'read' from a landscape?

- A landscape (either as viewed in person or in a pictorial representation) can reveal a large amount of information about:
 - *Natural physical features*: soil types, water features, vegetation, topography, presence of animals, geology, etc.
 - *Built environment features*: dwellings, commercial buildings, roadways, walls & fences, utilities, industry, etc.
 - *Cultural/historical features*: land uses, intensity of development, maintenance of natural and built environment, presence of cultural/historical signifiers, etc.

How can a landscape be read?

- Two primary ways:
 - As representation – generally takes place via analysis of visual images such as photographs and postcards
 - As material space – generally takes place in person (going out in the field)

Observational Methods - Ethnography

Landscape as a material space

Landscape as material space

- What's missing from this image?



Landscape as material space

- What's missing from this image?
 - Context (you only have a snapshot of the view I wished to take from my vantage point with my camera)
 - Sound
 - Smells
 - Activity
 - Observations over time



- When reading a landscape ‘in the field’, it’s important to take good field notes:
 - Descriptive information:
 - Where are you? (A map is very useful here)
 - What day and time of day are you out?
 - What is the weather like?
 - What is the setting? (Urban or rural? Cultivated or natural?)
 - What types of flora are present? Is there evidence of any fauna?
 - What are the physical characteristics of the place? Slope & aspect, topography, features...
 - Reflective information:
 - What is your state of mind?
 - What questions, considerations or concerns are emerging as you view the landscape?
- Visual images are also critical - photographs and sketches can provide good reference points, and serve as research material for further analysis

Landscape as material space: ‘in the field’



For additional pointers, see:

<http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/fieldnotes>

Doing ethnography to read the landscape (1)

- “ethnographic research has developed out of a concern to understand the world-views and ways of life of actual people in the contexts of their everyday lived experiences” (Crang & Cook, 2007, p. 37)
- Built on research questions/themes/aims that are appropriate to use this approach
 - Concern for everyday lived experience
 - How people actually are in the spaces of their lives
 - How people use space(s)

For additional pointers, see: Crang & Cook, 2007, Chapter 4; Cloke *et al.*, 2004, p. 317-323)

Doing ethnography to read the landscape (2)

Approach: describing what you see and who are involved in

- a) locating an ethnographic setting
- b) Describing the physical space of that setting
- c) Describe others' interactions within that setting
- d) Describe your participation in interactions in that setting
- e) Reflect on the research process
- f) Self-reflections

For further detail, see: Crang & Cook, 2007, Chapter 4; Cloke et al., 2004, p. 201-204)

Doing ethnography to read the landscape (3)

not a list “for readers to copy down and go through heading by heading, question by question in their research diaries”. Rather they can be used as a starting point “where the researcher writes down, in advance, what they think they should cover...but a) not necessarily in that order and b) not necessarily keeping only to those questions if other interesting and relevant issues unexpectedly come up. Keep these separate layers...in mind when writing stream-of consciousness notes” (Crang & Cook, 2007, p. 52-53).

For further detail, see: Crang & Cook, 2007, Chapter 4; Cloke et al., 2004, p. 201- 204)

Things to think of researching 'in the field'

- **Research design**
 - Make sure you have clear research aims/themes/questions
- **Access**
 - Are the places open to everyone or private?
 - Do you need to get permission? E.g. shopping centre vs street
- **Participation**
 - If you involve participants or observe specific people/groups are they made aware: ETHICS
- **Practice**
 - Taking field-notes is a skill: TEAMWORK

Please consider... Ethical and legal issues (and safety)

- ▶ Covert and overt approaches to Ethnography
- ▶ Legally one may take photographs in public places outside, however, what is legal is not always ethical.
- ▶ Consent, Invasive aspects of Observation, Safety of participants and researcher



Visual Methods- An introduction

The Landscape as a representation



- ▶ Harper (2002) writes “Images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain’s capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words”(p. 13).

The Gaze

- ▶ Representation is 'the cultural practices and forms by which human societies interpret and portray the world around them and present themselves to others' (Kneale, 2005, 547).
- ▶ Representations may appear to be 'real' but are they just reflections which sustain and bolster our belief systems?

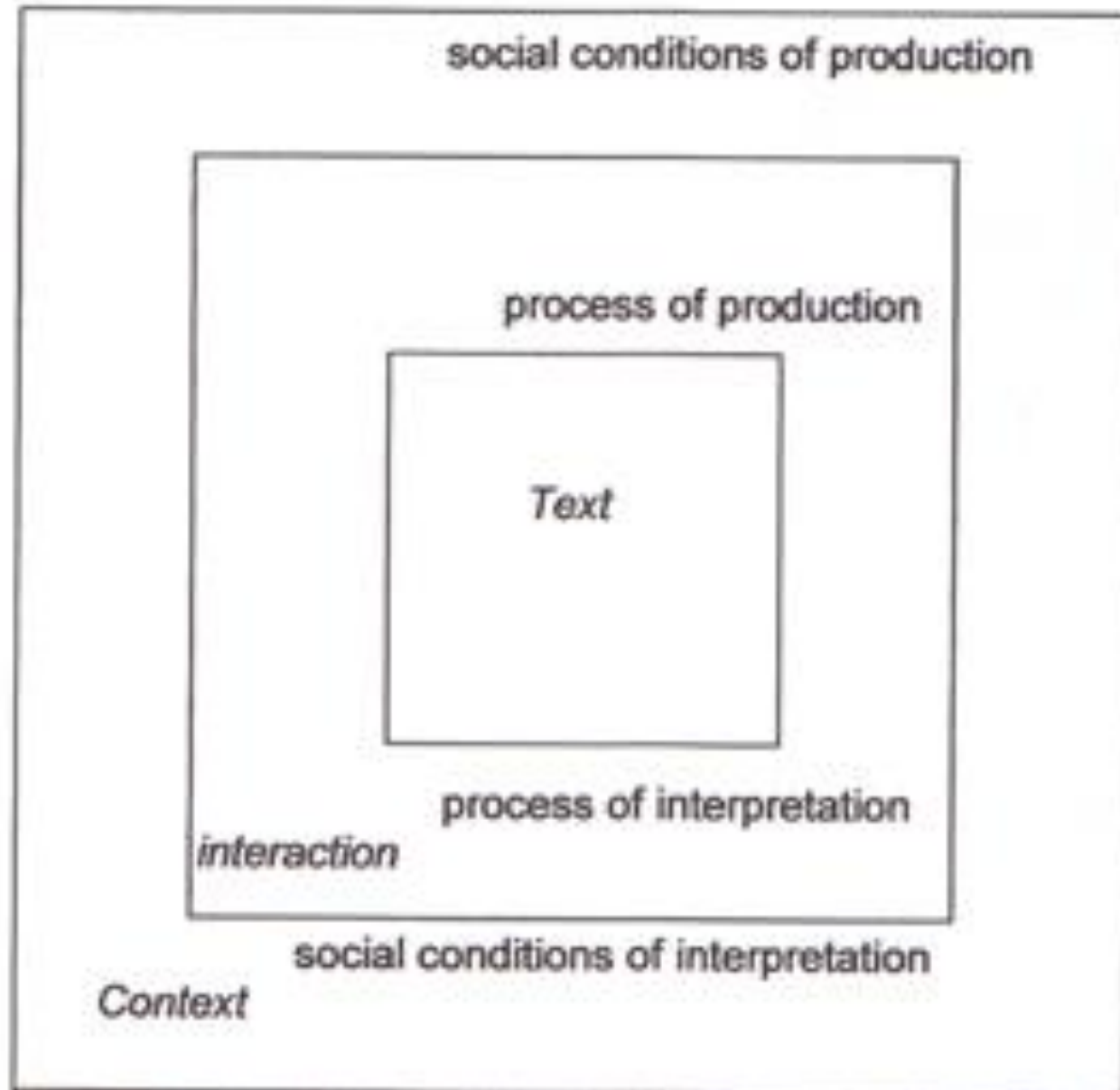




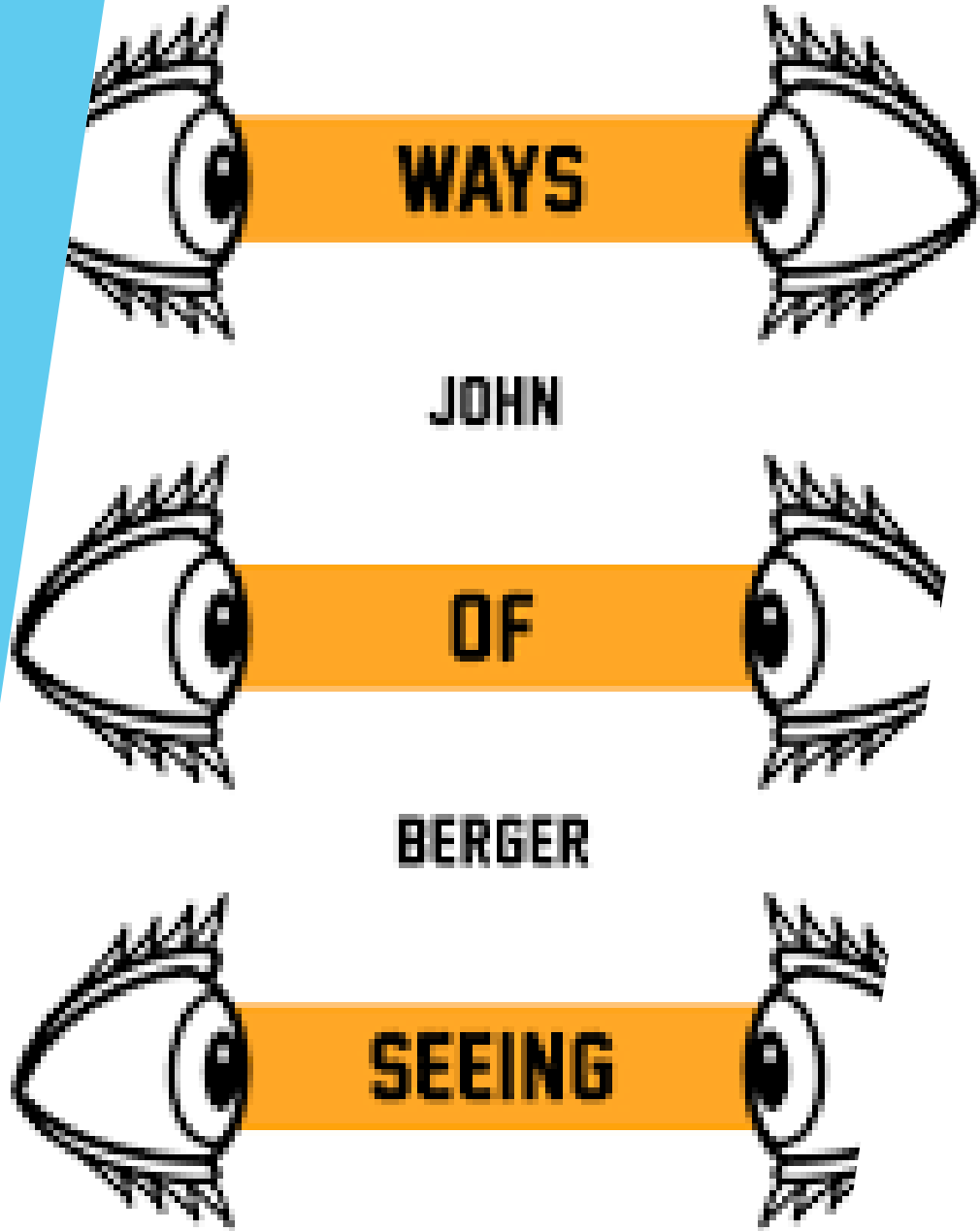
Imaginative Geographies

Imaginations are not just individual, they are social.

'...representations of place, space & landscapes that structure people's understandings of the world, and in turn help to shape their actions' (Driver, 2005, 144).



Fairclough's Model



- ▶ Reflexivity is at the heart of working with the visual
 - ▶ See John Berger (1972) and Susan Sontag's (1977) work
- ▶ Close reading strategies are required
- ▶ Giving participants the capacity to visualize

The Gaze is...

- ▶ Culturally constituted
- ▶ It is a visuality into which we are all born
- ▶ IN SHORT: pay attention to HOW your gaze is being directed (manipulated) by the producers of particular images and HOW it is influenced by YOUR reading

Landscape as representation

- Visual images take a point of view – by what we choose to present (and represent), we assign a value to certain signifiers. We tend to value the unique over the common, and to highlight features that we consider attractive.

“As an image – **a representation – a photograph contains a subjectively mediated content and composition.** The *content* of a photograph, on the one hand, includes the sum total of its appearances; the entire inventory of phenomena that was exposed on film when the picture was taken or altered as in the case of a ‘faked photo.’ The *composition*, on the other hand, involves the way in which the **appearances are structured in relationship to each other.**”
(Albers and James, 1988, p. 139)



Visual representations...

... possess the power to 'mediate' discourses that:

- ▶ translate...
- ▶ prioritise...
- ▶ displace...
- ▶ distort...
- ▶ degrade...
- ▶ destroy...



3 key areas requiring careful, systematic interrogation:

- ❑ Text/Medium
- ❑ Production/Encoding
- ❑ Consumption/Decoding

[Concise reading: L. Roberts, 2016 ,
'Interpreting the visual' in: N. Clifford et al
(eds), *Key Methods in Geography*, Sage,
London, pp.233]

Questions for assessing and recounting the meaning of the image...

- ▶ Its **text**: does it belong to a genre?... like ‘documentary’, ‘advertisement’ or ‘art’?
- ▶ Its **production**: where was it taken and was it ‘snapped’ or ‘staged’? What technologies does its production depend on?
- ▶ Is it **authored**, has it a title and is it dated? Do we know anything about the politics of its production?
- ▶ Semiotics of the image (signs/symbolism)
- ▶ **Reception** - in contrast to production agenda
 - ▶ Context is very important

Visual Analysis

Reading the Landscape as a text

How do we read the visual / landscapes as text

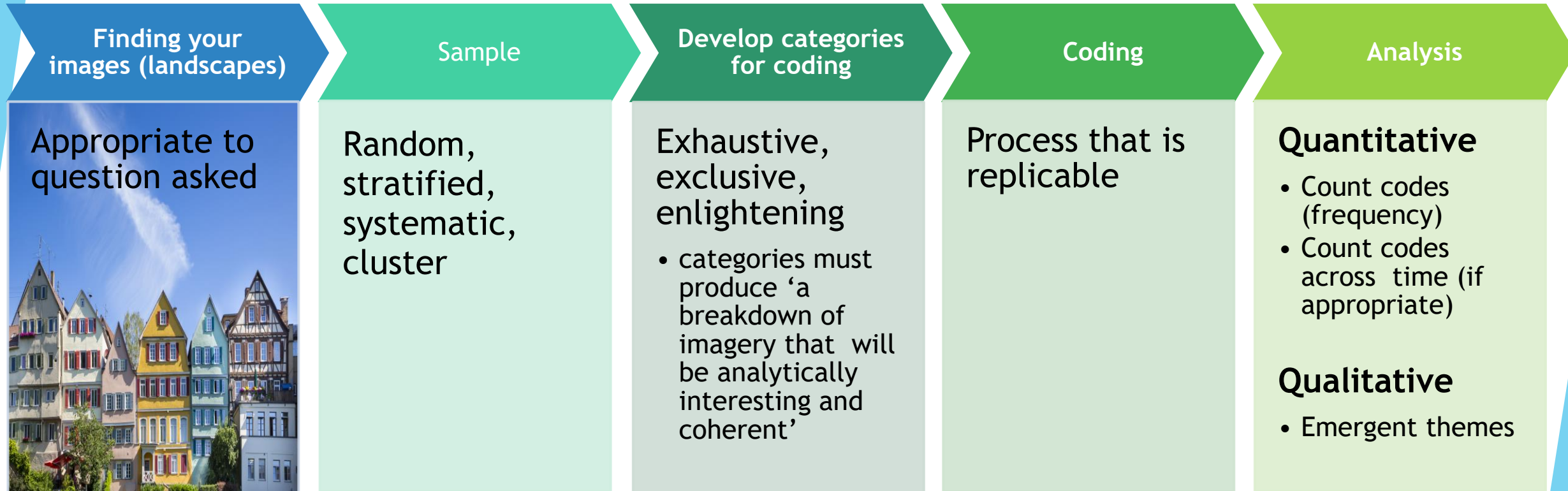
- What is the **purpose** of the image?
- Who/what is **in the landscape** and why?
- Who/what is **not in the landscape** and why?
- Why does the landscape **exist**?
- What does the **landscape reflect**, about certain beliefs about a landscape or a society through its depiction of people, things or places that could be associated with particular groups?
- What other texts are **referenced** in the image?
- What type of **ideologies** or **stereotypes** are reinforced or challenged?

(Adapted from Horton and Kraftl, 2014, p.111; Roberts, 2016, p. 238; see also Rose, 2016)

Visual analysis as ‘reading the landscape’

- Secondary sources (such as landscape paintings or postcards) can provide an interesting take on what others feel are critical points of culture.
- Methodologies of analysis can include:
 - **Content approach:**
 - Has its roots in quantitative analysis
 - Requires the definition of set parameters – heuristic categories
 - Focal themes: kind of subject at the centre of a picture, but also essential identifying properties
 - **Interpretative approach:**
 - Takes a more holistic view of the pictorial narrative – uses models of language analysis
 - Act of translation
 - Interpretation of signs and symbols
 - Includes language/descriptions included with the visual content

Content analysis



Ways of seeing: Interpretative approach

- address the wider social and political **contexts** in which cultural landscapes have been constituted and expressed (Jackson, 1989)
- treat landscapes as ways of shaping the world and its **meanings**
- treat landscapes as sites of **iconography** (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988)
- landscapes are **symbolic** and... have the capacity to mould ideas and our understandings of race, gender, and morality

(Cloke, 2013, p.226)

Landscape is seen as a product of a wide range of social and symbolic processes that can be reconstructed through the traces they leave and the **representations** they inform

(Crang, 1996, p.430)

Landscape as text: 'reading landscapes'

Interpreting landscapes means thinking of an image as 'text'

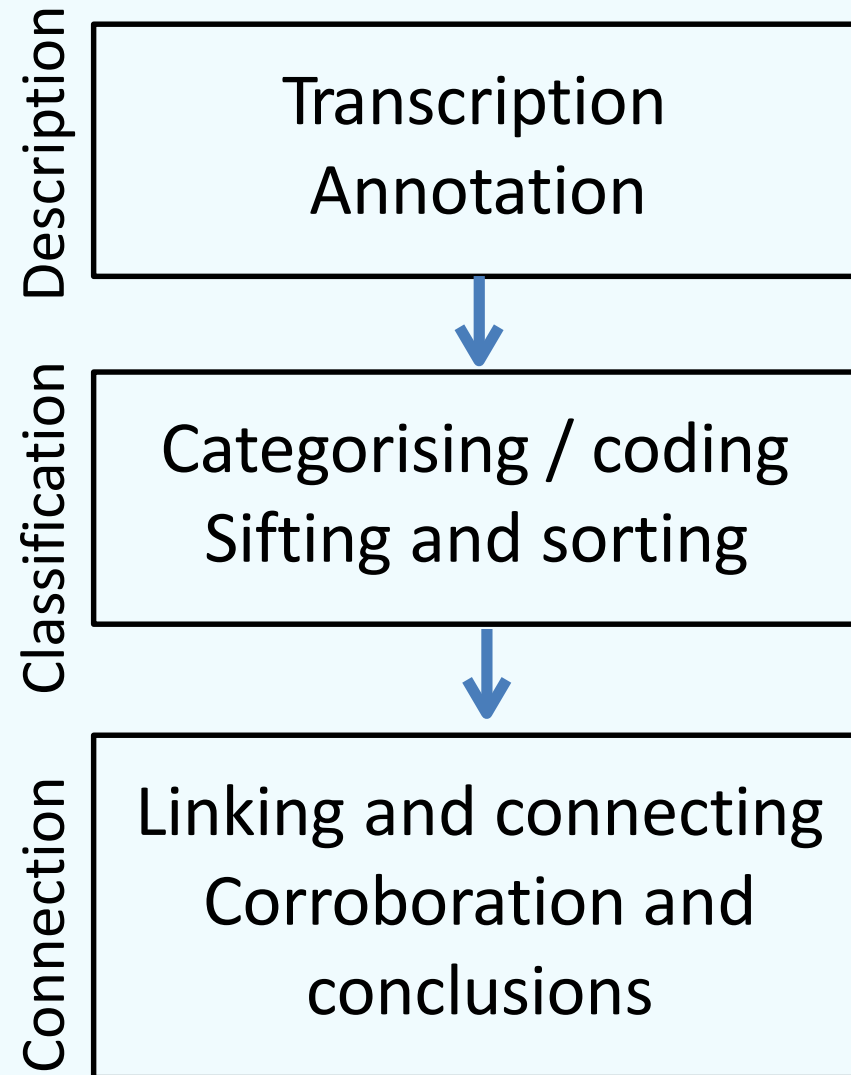
landscapes can be read, decoded through understanding its signs, what they signify and how they relate to other cultural texts.

Geographers are interested in the meaning created in visual images, through its signs and how they relate to other texts.

'Intertextuality': refers to the meanings that visual images reference and recall for the viewer from other cultural texts.

(Roberts, 2016)

Analysing and writing up



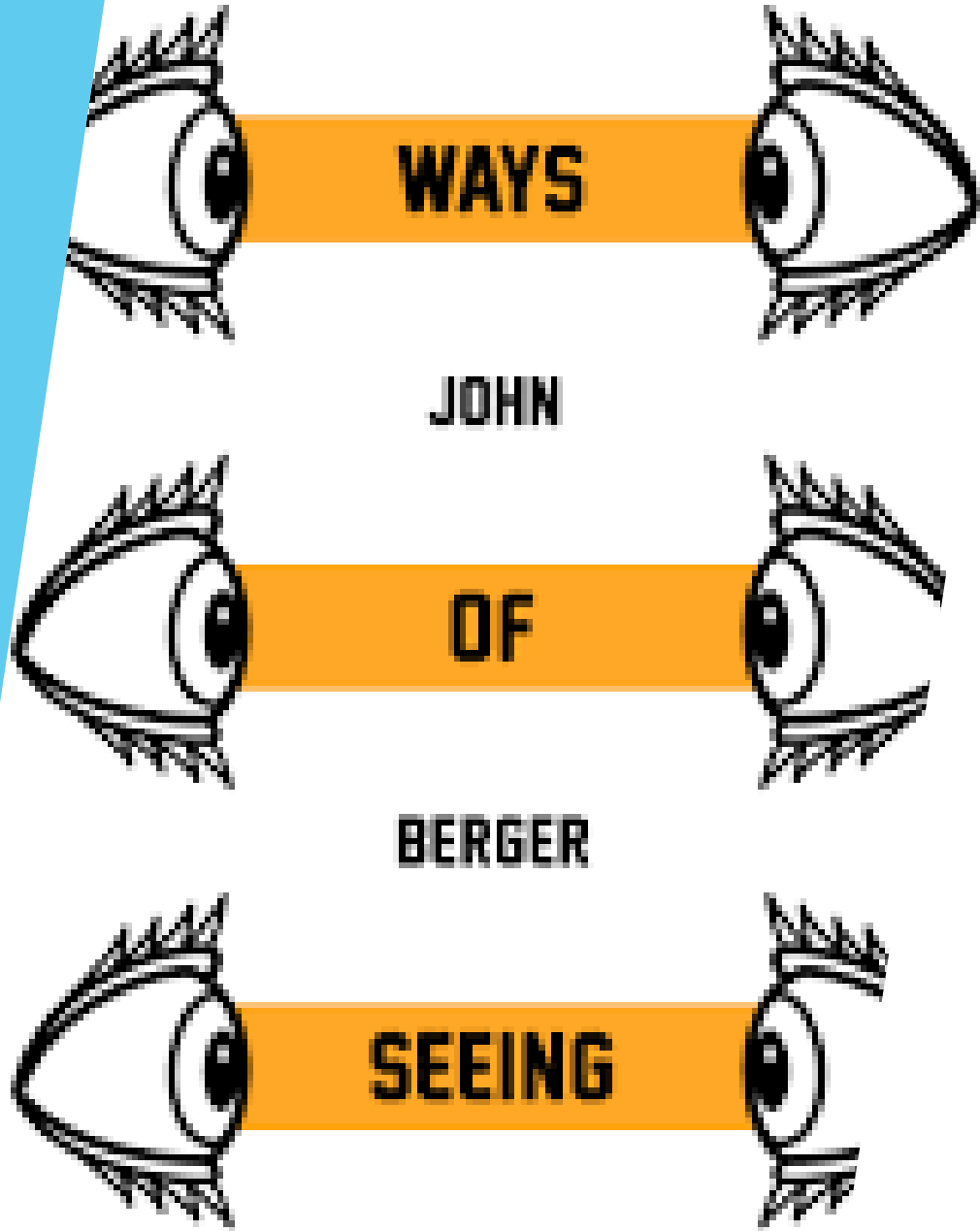
Cloke *et al.*, 2004,
[chapter 7]; Crang and
Cook, 2007, [Section 3]

Questions about visual analysis?

Coding for Portfolio Task 2 ?



Participatory approaches in Visual Methods



- ▶ Reflexivity is at the heart of working with the visual
 - ▶ See John Berger (1972) and Susan Sontag's (1977) work
- ▶ Close reading strategies are required
- ▶ Giving participants the capacity to visualize

Some Examples...

▶ Photo Elicitation

- ▶ The technique involves photos, videos and other forms of visual representation used in an interview, with informants asked to comment on the images.
- ▶ Provided by the interviewer, or the participant
- ▶ Primary or secondary sources

▶ Photo Voice

- ▶ The idea was built on the foundation that images and words together can effectively express communities and individual's needs, problems, and desires.
- ▶ Participants are asked to express their points of view or represent their communities by photographing scenes that highlight research themes

▶ Photo essays

- ▶ A photo-essay is a set or series of photographs. Photo essays range from simply photographic works to photographs with captions or small comments to full text essays illustrated with pictures

Examples of use of “photo elicitation”

- ▶ Longoria and Marini (2006) used photo elicitation in a descriptive mixed methods study using a survey tool and open ended questions in order to explore the perceptions of children's attitudes towards peers with a severe physical disability. **The children were shown photographs of severely handicapped children and asked to comment on them.**
- ▶ In an effort to improve quality of life for older people, Newton, Ormerod, Burton, Mitchell, and Ward-Thompson (2010) used photo elicitation in a **qualitative descriptive study to determine the preferred neighborhood street design by older people.** Older people were individually interviewed and asked to view and discuss environmentally contextualized photographs of various street features.

Examples of the use of “photo- voice”

- ▶ Wang and Pies (2004) used photo-voice, a participatory action research methodology, in an ethnically diverse California community in order to augment previously collected quantitative data. Residents of the community were provided with disposable cameras and asked to take photographs reflecting their views on family, maternal, and child health assets, and concerns in their community. They later participated in group discussions reflecting on the photographs through the use of photo elicitation.
- ▶ Andonian (2010) used photo-voice as an action research methodology in order to research the community participation of mentally ill individuals within an urban setting. The mentally ill participants were given cameras and asked to photograph people, places, and things, that showed their experience of community participation.

Examples of the use of “photo essay”

- ▶ Casey and Dollinger (2007) used photo essay and regression analysis in a quantitative study to provide insight into patterns of alcohol consumption among college students. The students (N=135) took a series of photos of their lives in regard to alcohol consumption in order to determine their “alcohol identity” and predicted risk for alcohol related problem behaviors.
- ▶ Killion (2001) researched the use of photo essay in a successful attempt to promote cultural awareness in nursing students, and to identify multicultural themes in their photographs. The students in the class were each assigned to produce a photo essay depicting cultural aspects of health.

► Ethnography:

- Crang, M., & Cook, I. G. (2007). *Doing Ethnographies*. London: Sage. [Chapter 4]

► Content Analysis:

- Rose, G. (2016). *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to researching with Visual Materials* (4th Edition). London: Sage. [Chapter 5]
- Banks, M., & Zeitlyn, D. (2015). *Visual methods in social research*. Sage.

► Interpretative approach:

- Roberts, L. (2016). Interpreting the Visual. In N. Clifford, M. Cope, T. Gillespie, & S. French (Eds.), *Key Methods in Geography* (Third Edition, pp. 233-247). London: Sage.

► Mixed approach:

- Anderson, L. M., & Schroeder, H. W. (1983). Application of wildlife scenic assessment methods to the urban landscape. *Landscape Planning*, 10(3), 219-237.

Key readings

- ▶ Albers, P.C., & James, W.R. (1988). Travel photography: A methodological approach. *Annals of tourism research*, 15(1), 134-158.
- ▶ Anderson, L.M., and Schroeder, H.W.(1983). Application of wildlife scenic assessment methods to the urban landscape:
▶ *Landscape Planning*, 10(3), 219-237.
- ▶ Andonian, L. (2010). Community participation of people with mental health issues within an urban environment. *Occupational Therapy in Mental Health*, 26(4), 401-417.
- ▶ Berger, J. (1972) *Ways of seeing*. London: British Broadcasting Corporation.
- ▶ Bunnell, T. (2013). Urban Landscapes. In N. C. Johnson, R. H. Schein, & J. Winders (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Cultural Geography* (pp. 278-289). London: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- ▶ Casey, P. F., & Dollinger, S. J. (2007). College students' alcohol-related problems: An autophotographic approach. *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education*, 51(2), 8.
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- ▶ Cloke, P., Cook, I. G., Crang, P., Goodwin, M., Painter, J., & Philo, C. (2004). *Practising Human Geography*. London: Sage.
- ▶ Horton, J., & Kraftl, P. (2014). *Cultural Geographies: An Introduction*. London & New York: Routledge.
- ▶ Killion, C. M. (2001). Understanding cultural aspects of health through photography. *Nursing Outlook*, 49(1), 50-54.
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- ▶ Longoria, L., & Marini, I. (2006). Perceptions of children's attitudes towards peers with a severe physical disability. *Journal of rehabilitation*, 72(3), 19.
- ▶ Newton, R., Ormerod, M., Burton, E., Mitchell, L., & Ward-Thompson, C. (2010). Increasing independence for older people through good street design. *Journal of Integrated Care*.
- ▶ Roberts, L. (2016). Interpreting the Visual. In N. Clifford, M. Cope, T. Gillespie, & S. French (Eds.), *Key Methods in Geography* (Third Edit, pp. 233-247). London: Sage.
- ▶ Rose, G. (2016). *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to researching with Visual Materials* (4th Editio). London: Sage.
- ▶ Sontag, Susan (1977) *Illness as Metaphor*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux,
- ▶ Wang, C. C. (2006). Youth participation in photovoice as a strategy for community change. *Journal of community practice*, 14(1-2), 147-161.

References