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most exciting, startling and perceptive critics of visual images don't in the end depend entirely on their sound methodology, I think. They also depend on the pleasure, thrills, fascination, wonder, fear or revulsion of the person looking at the images and then writing about them. Successful interpretation depends on a passionate engagement with what you see. Use your methodology to discipline your passion, not to deaden it.

923 wk 2

1

researching visual materials

towards a critical visual methodology

Choosing a research methodology means developing a research question and the tools to generate evidence for its answer; both of these should be consistent with a theoretical framework. This chapter explores recent debates about the visual to help you develop that framework. To do that, it:

- discusses a range of literature which explores the importance of the visual to contemporary Western societies;
- offers a broad analytical framework for understanding how images have social effects;
- suggests some criteria for a critical approach to visual materials;
- and sets up the approach to discussing methods that the rest of this book relies on.

1 an introductory survey of 'the visual'

Beginning in the 1970s, and over the following three decades, the social sciences experienced a significant change in their understanding of social life. This change is often described as the 'cultural turn'. That is, 'culture' became a crucial means by which many social scientists understood social processes, social identities, and social change and conflict. Culture is a complex concept, but, in very broad terms, the result of its deployment has been that social scientists are now very often interested in the ways in which social life is constructed through the ideas that people have about it, and the practices that flow from those ideas. To quote one of the major contributors to this shift, Stuart Hall:

culture

Culture, it is argued, is not so much a set of things – novels and paintings or TV programmes or comics – as a process, a set of practices. Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and exchange of meanings – the 'giving and taking of meaning' – between the members of a society or group

representations

... Thus culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is around them, and 'making sense' of the world, in broadly similar ways.

(Hall 1997a: 2)

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

This sort of argument can take very diverse forms. But more recently, many writers addressing these issues argued that the visual is central to the cultural construction of social life in contemporary Western societies. We are, of course, surrounded by different sorts of visual technologies – photography, film, video, digital graphics, television, acrylics, for example – and the images they show us – TV programmes, advertisements, snapshots, public sculpture, movies, surveillance video footage, newspaper pictures, paintings. All these different sorts of technologies and images offer views of the world; they render the world in visual terms. But this rendering, even by photographs, is never innocent. These images are never transparent windows onto the world. They interpret the world; they display it in very particular ways. Thus a distinction is sometimes made between vision and visuality. **Vision** is what the human eye is physiologically capable of seeing (although it must be noted that ideas about that capability have changed historically and will most likely continue to change: see Crary 1992). **Visuality**, on the other hand, refers to the way in which vision is constructed in various ways: 'how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing and the unseeing therein' (Foster 1988: ix). Another phrase with very similar connotations to visuality is **scopic regime**. Both terms refer to the ways in which both what is seen and how it is seen are culturally constructed.

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

vision

visuality

scopic regime

ocularcentrism

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

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

Barbara Maria Stafford (1991), a historian of images used in the sciences, has argued that, in a process beginning in the eighteenth century, the construction of scientific knowledges about the world has become more and more based on images rather than on written texts; Jenks (1995) suggests that it is the valorization of science in Western cultures that has allowed everyday understandings to make the same connection between seeing and knowing. However, that connection was also made in other fields of modern practice. Richard Rorty (1980), for example, traces the development of this conflation of seeing with knowing to the intersection of several ideas central to eighteenth century philosophy. Judith Adler (1989) examines tourism and argues that, between 1600 and 1800, the travel of European elites was defined increasingly as a visual practice, based first on 'an overarching scientific ideology that cast even the most humble tourists as part of ... the impartial survey of all creation' (Adler 1989: 24), and later on a particular appreciation of spectacular visual and artistic beauty. John Urry (1990) has sketched the outline of a rather different 'tourist gaze' which he argues is typical of the mass tourism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see also Pratt 1992). Other writers have made other arguments for the importance of the visual to modern societies. The work of Michel Foucault explores the way in which many nineteenth century institutions depended on various forms of surveillance (1977) (Chapters 7 and 8 here examine the methodological implications of his work); and in his study of nineteenth century world fairs and exhibitions, Timothy Mitchell (1988) shows how European societies represented the whole world as an exhibition. Deborah Poole (1997) has traced how visions of that modernity were thoroughly racialized in the same period. In

the twentieth century, Guy Debord (1977) claims that the world has turned into a 'society of the spectacle', and Paul Virilio (1994) argues that new visualizing technologies have created 'the vision machine' in which we are all caught. The use of the term 'visual culture' refers to the plethora of ways in which the visual is part of social life.

Thus it has been argued that modernity is ocularcentric. It is argued too that the visual is equally central to postmodernity; Nicholas Mirzoeff (1998: 4), for example, has proclaimed that 'the postmodern is a visual culture'. However, in postmodernity, it is suggested, the modern relation between seeing and true knowing has been broken. Thus Mirzoeff (1998) suggests that postmodernity is ocularcentric not simply because visual images are more and more common, nor because knowledges about the world are increasingly articulated visually, but because we interact more and more with totally constructed visual experiences. Thus the modern connection between seeing and knowledge is stretched to breaking point in postmodernity:

Seeing is a great deal more than believing these days. You can buy an image of your house taken from an orbiting satellite or have your internal organs magnetically imaged. If that special moment didn't come out quite right in your photography, you can digitally manipulate it on your computer. At New York's Empire State Building, the queues are longer for the virtual reality New York Ride than for the lifts to the observation platforms. Alternatively, you could save yourself the trouble by catching the entire New York skyline, rendered in attractive pastel colours, at the New York, New York resort in Las Vegas. This virtual city will shortly be joined by Paris Las Vegas, imitating the already carefully manipulated image of the city of light. (Mirzoeff 1998: 1)

simulacrum

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

This story about the increasing extent and changing nature of visual culture in modernity and postmodernity is not without its critics, however (see, for example, the debates in the journal *October* [1996] and the *Journal of Visual Culture* [2001; 2003]). Two points of debate, for example, are the history and geography of this account. Jeffrey Hamburger (1997), to take just one example, argues that visual images were central to certain kinds of pre-modern, medieval spirituality, and Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1998) have argued forcefully against the Eurocentrism that pervades many discussions of 'the visual'. The work of Hamburger (1997) and Shohat and Stam (1998), among others, makes it clear that if a narrative of increasing ocularcentrism in the West can be told, it must be much more nuanced, historically and

geographically, than has so far been the case (see also Brennan and Jay 1996; Cheetham et al. 2005; Pinney 2003).

There are also debates about the social relations within which these visualities are embedded, and particularly about the effects of simulacra. Baudrillard, for example, has often been accused of uncritically celebrating the simulacrum without regard for the often very unequal social relations that can be articulated through it, and the work of Donna Haraway (1991) is taken by many as a salutary reminder of what is at stake in contemporary ocularcentrism (see also Sturken and Cartwright 2001; Lister and Wells 2001). Like many others, Haraway (1991) notes the contemporary proliferation of visualizing technologies in scientific and everyday use, and she characterizes the scopic regime associated with these technologies thus: 'vision in this technological feast becomes unregulated gluttony; all perspective gives way to infinitely mobile vision, which no longer seems just mythically about the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere, but to have put the myth into ordinary practice' (Haraway 1991: 189). Haraway is concerned to specify the social power relations that are articulated through this particular form of visuality, however. She argues that contemporary, unregulated visual gluttony is available to only a few people and institutions, in particular those that are part of the 'history of science tied to militarism, capitalism, colonialism, and male supremacy' (Haraway 1991: 188). She argues that what this visuality does is to produce specific visions of social difference – of hierarchies of class, 'race', gender, sexuality and so on – while itself claiming not to be part of that hierarchy and thus to be universal. It is because this ordering of difference depends on a distinction between those who claim to see with universal relevance, and those who are seen and categorized in particular ways, that Haraway claims it is intimately related to the oppressions and tyrannies of capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy and so on. Part of Haraway's critical project, then, is to examine in detail how certain institutions mobilize certain forms of visuality to see, and to order, the world. This dominant visuality denies the validity of other ways of visualizing social difference, but Haraway insists that there are indeed other ways of seeing the world, and she is especially interested in efforts to see social difference in non-hierarchical ways. For Haraway, as for many other writers, then, the dominant scopic regime of (post)modernity is neither a historical inevitability, nor is it uncontested. There are different ways of seeing the world, and the critical task is to differentiate between the social effects of those different visions.

The particular forms of representation produced by specific scopic regimes are important to understand, then, because they are intimately bound into social power relations. Although we will later hear some misgivings about some of the results of this sort of argument (see section 4.2 in this chapter), Haraway's (1991) argument makes clear the necessity of understanding what social relations produce, and are reproduced by, what forms of visuality, and the next section explores this argument more fully.

Before doing so, however, it is important to note that there is a dispersed but persistent body of work in the social sciences that uses various kinds of images as ways of answering research questions (questions which may not be directly concerned with visuality or visual culture), not by examining images but by making them. Both anthropology and human geography have used visual images as research tools for as long as they have been established as academic disciplines, mostly photographs, diagrams and film in the case of anthropology, and photos, maps and diagrams in the case of geography. Visual sociology as a distinct sub-discipline is a more recent development; although the earliest sociological journals carried photographs for a short period before the First World War, it was not until the 1960s that a book by an anthropologist encouraged some sociologists to pick up their cameras again (Collier 1967). Researchers in these fields are taking heart from the current interest in questions of visuality to argue with greater conviction than ever for the analytical power of visual materials produced as part of a research project (see, for example, Banks 2001; Emmison and Smith 2000; Knowles and Sweetman 2004; Pink 2006; Prosser 1998; van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001). However, when social scientists are making their own images, their concern for the power relations in which those images are embedded takes a specific form: it becomes a discussion of research ethics which reflects on the power dynamics between the researcher, the researched and the images. Chapter 11 of this book examines both the arguments for making visual images as a means of answering research questions, and the question of research ethics in relation to that making.

2 ‘visual culture’: the social conditions and effects of visual objects

Making images as a way of answering a research question is relatively rare in studies of visual culture however. Instead, visual culture critics have concentrated their energies on critically examining the effects of visual images already out there in the world, already part of visual culture, and Chapters 3 to 10 of this book discuss a range of methods for understanding such ‘found’ images. This body of work has developed from several different theoretical positions (Barnard 2001; Bird et al. 1996; Evans and Hall 1999). Much of it is concerned to interpret the meaning of visual images, though some focuses more on practices of visuality or on the agency of visual objects; there are many historical studies, although some dispute the possibility of a fully historical account of an image’s effect; some studies are more closely aligned with established academic disciplines like art history or cultural studies than others; some are structuralist and others post-structuralist; most of their methods are qualitative. This diversity obviously makes generalizing about studies of visuality a difficult task.

Nevertheless, I am going to suggest that there are five aspects of the recent literature that engage with visual culture that I think are valuable for thinking about the social effects of images.

The first point I take from the literature on (or against) ‘visual culture’ is its concern for the way in which images visualize (or render invisible) social difference. As Fyfe and Law (1988: 1) say, ‘a depiction is never just an illustration ... it is the site for the construction and depiction of social difference’. One of the central aims of ‘the cultural turn’ in the social sciences was to argue that social categories are not natural but instead are constructed. These constructions can take visual form. This point has been made most forcefully by feminist and postcolonial writers who have studied the ways femininity and blackness have been visualized. An example would be Paul Gilroy’s (1987: 57–9) discussion of a poster used by the Conservative Party in Britain’s 1983 General Election, reproduced in Figure 1.1.

The poster shows a young black man in a suit, with ‘LABOUR SAYS HE’S BLACK. TORIES SAY HE’S BRITISH’ as its headline text. Gilroy’s discussion is detailed but his main point is that the poster offers a choice between being black and being British, not only in its text but also in its image. The fact that the black man is pictured wearing a suit suggests to Gilroy that ‘blacks are being invited to forsake all that marks them out as culturally distinct before real Britishness can be guaranteed’ (Gilroy 1987: 59). Gilroy is thus suggesting that this poster asks its viewers not to see blackness. However, he also points out that the poster depends on other stereotyped images (which it does not show) of young black men, particularly as muggers, to make its point about the acceptability of this besuited man. This poster thus plays in complex ways with both visible and invisible signs of racial difference. Hence Fyfe and Law’s general prescription for a critical approach to the ways images can picture social power relations:

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

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

Secondly, writers on visual culture, among others, are concerned not only with how images look, but how images are looked at. This is a key point made by Maria Sturken and Lisa Cartwright’s (2001) book on visual culture, which they entitle *Practices of Looking*. They argue that what is important about images is not simply the image itself, but how it is seen by particular spectators who look in particular ways. Sturken and Cartwright (2001) take



Figure 1.1
Conservative
Party election
poster, 1983
(Gilroy 1987: 58)

ways of seeing

their inspiration on this point from an influential book written in 1972 by John Berger, called *Ways of Seeing*. Berger's argument there is important because he makes clear that images of social difference work not simply by what they show but also by the kind of seeing that they invite. He uses the expression 'ways of seeing' to refer to the fact that 'we never look just at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves' (Berger 1972: 9). His best-known example is that of the genre of female nude

With the Conservatives, there are no blacks; no whites; just people. Conservatives believe that treating minorities as equals encourages the majority to treat them as equals.

Yet the Labour Party aim to treat you as a 'special case' as a group all on your own.

Is setting you apart from the rest of society a sensible way to overcome racial prejudice and social inequality?

The question is, should we really divide the British people instead of uniting them?

WHOSE PROMISES ARE YOU TO BELIEVE?

When Labour were in government, they promised to repeal Immigration Acts passed in 1962 and 1971. Both promises were broken.

This time, they are promising to throw out the British Nationality Act, which gives full and equal citizenship to everyone permanently settled in Britain.

But how do the Conservatives' promises compare?

We said that we'd abolish the 'SUS' law.

We kept our promise.

We said we'd recruit more coloured policemen; get the police back into the community, and train them for a better understanding of your needs.

We kept our promise.

PUTTING THE ECONOMY BACK ON ITS FEET.

The Conservatives have always said that the only long term answer to our economic problems was to conquer inflation.

Inflation is now lower than it's been for over a decade; keeping all prices stable, with the price of food now hardly rising at all.

Meanwhile, many businesses throughout Britain are recovering, leading to thousands of new jobs.

Firstly, in our traditional industries, but just as importantly in new technology areas such as micro-electronics.

In other words, the medicine is working.

Yet Labour want to change everything, and put us back to square one.

They intend to increase taxation. They intend to increase the National Debt.

They promise import and export controls.

Cast your mind back to the last Labour government. Labour's methods didn't work then. They won't work now.

A BETTER BRITAIN FOR ALL OF US.

The Conservatives believe that everyone wants to work hard and be rewarded for it.

Those rewards will only come about by creating a mood of equal opportunity for everyone in Britain, regardless of their race, creed or colour.

The difference you're voting for is this:

To the Labour Party, you're a black person.

To the Conservatives, you're a British Citizen.

Vote Conservative, and you vote for a more equal, more prosperous Britain.

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

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



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



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



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

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



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

Figure 1.2
a double-page spread from John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (Berger 1972: 50–1)

painting in Western art. He reproduces many examples of that genre (see Figure 1.2), pointing out as he does so the particular ways they represent women: as unclothed, as vain, as passive, as sexually alluring, as a spectacle to be assessed.

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

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

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

One might simplify this by saying: *men act and women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between women and men but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed, female.

Barthes (1982) called the *punctum* of a photograph (see Chapter 5 "kind of visual restance," section 3), will carry their own peculiar argument, particularly strangeness or pleasure.

" Thus I take five major points from current debates about I as Important for understanding how Images work. a " visual culture own visual effects (so it is important to look very carefully at Images, through the ways of seeing them); these production and reproduction of images; the Image, are crucial in the always intersect with the social context of viewing them; spectators bring the Irviewing, and with the visualities

3 towards a critical visual methodology

Given this general approach to understand in the "now elaborate on what I think" "IS necessary," "for ImpOrtance of Images, I can preting found visual images "The Impact of a Critical approach to interpret the produCtion of images as part of a research project" "approac h in relation to ent, as I've already suggested and "like d" "Object are somewhat different approach to visual culture: " "WI e Iscussed III Chapter 11.) A critical

- takes Images selfishly. While they seem rather a paradoxical point of view on the work I have argued that addresses VISUALS to complain, often fight! However, some interpretations of visual objects, art institutions and visual images, argue that SOCIETY does not look at images as they are at SOCIETY. I argue here that it is necessary to pay attention to visual images, and it is necessary to do so carefully at reducible to their context. I think that about the social and visual representations have their own effects. Pollock (1988: 7) says that 'cultural' practices of visual objects. As Gifford suggests significance in the articulation of meanings about how society has major socialization of social conflicts through negotiations like visual representations of social subjects'. Cultural institutions and exclusions are based on and produce social practices and their culture in a conflict account needs to address both these practices and their cultural effects.
 - considers your own ways of seeing images. There are many studies of visual culture that are not explicit ways of seeing are historical, geographical, culturally and socially specific; and if watching your favorite movie on a DVD for the umpteenth time at home with a group of mates is not the same as studying it for a research project; then, as Mieke Bal (1996) has consistently argued (2003, Bal and Bryson 2001) that images are looked at. It is necessary to reflect on how you as a viewer might be affected by what we learn how to see. A viewer from away (1991: 190) says, by thinking carefully about where we might be coming from, we might become answerable for straightforward tasks (see also Rose 1998, Rose 1997). Several of the chapters will return to this issue later in the book. The argument is that it is not a simple matter to examine what it might entail further.

The aim of this book is to give you some practical guidance on how to do these things; but I hope it is already clear from this introduction that this is not simply a technical question of method. There are also important analytical debates going on about visualities. In this book, I use these particular criteria for a critical visual methodology to evaluate both theoretical arguments and the methods discussed in Chapters 3 to 10.

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

4 towards some methodological tools: sites and modalities

As I have already noted, the theoretical sources which have produced the recent interest in visual culture are diverse. This section will try to acknowledge some of that diversity, while also developing a framework for approaching the almost equally diverse range of methods that critics of visual culture have used.

Interpretations of visual images broadly concur that there are three sites at which the meanings of an image are made: the site(s) of the production of an image, the site of the image itself, and the site(s) where it is seen by various audiences" I also want to suggest that each of these sites has three different aspects. These different aspects I will *call* modalities, and I suggest that there are three of these that can contribute to a critical understanding of images:

- technological. Mirzoeff (1998: 1) defines a visual technology as 'any form of apparatus designed either to be looked at or to enhance natural vision, from oil paintings to television and the Internet'.
 - compositional. Compositionality refers to the specific material qualities of an image or visual object. When an image is made, it draws on a number of formal strategies: content, colour and spatial organization, for example. Often, particular forms of these strategies tend to occur together, so that, for example, Berger (1972) can define the Western art tradition painting of the nude in terms of its specific compositional qualities. Chapter 3 will elaborate the notion of composition in relation to paintings.
 - social. This is very much a shorthand term. What I mean it to refer to are the range of economic, social and political relations, institutions and practices that surround an image and through which it is seen and used.

These modalities, since they are found at all three sites, also suggest that the distinctions between sites are less clear than my subsections here might imply.

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

sites
production
image
audiences
modalities

technological

compositional

social











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

These issues surrounding the audiencing of images are often researched using methods that are quite common in qualitative social science research: interviews, ethnography and so on. This will be explored in Chapters 9 and 10. However, as I have noted above, it is possible and necessary to consider the viewing practices of one spectator without using such techniques because that spectator is you. It is important to consider how you are looking at a particular image and to write that into your interpretation, or perhaps express it visually. Exactly what this call to reflexivity means is a question that will recur throughout this book.

5 summary

Visual imagery is never innocent; it is always constructed through various practices, technologies and knowledges. A critical approach to visual images is therefore needed: one that thinks about the agency of the image, considers the social practices and effects of its viewing, and reflects on the specificity of that viewing by various audiences including the academic critic. The meanings of an image or set of images are made at three sites – the sites of production, the image itself and its audiencing – and there are three modalities to each of these sites: technological, compositional and social. Theoretical debates about how to interpret images can be understood as debates over which of these sites and modalities is most important for understanding an image, and why. These debates affect the methodology that is most appropriately brought to bear on particular images; all of the methods discussed in this book are better at focusing on some sites and modalities than others.

With these general points in mind, the next chapter explains some different ways to use this book.

Further reading

Stuart Hall in his essay 'The work of representation' (1997b) offers a very clear discussion of recent debates about culture, representation and power. A useful collection of some of the key texts that have contributed towards the field of visual culture has been put together by Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall as *Visual Culture: The Reader* (1999). Sturken and Cartwright's *Practices of Looking* (2001) is an excellent overview of both theoretical approaches to visual culture, and of many of its empirical manifestations in the affluent world today.