

Week 4

Visual Analysis and the study of **Visuality**?



Overview

- **A: Visual methods in general**
 - Basic method: compositional analysis
- **B: Visuality, practice and performativity**
 - How to study acts of seeing
 - Group research exercise
- **C: Interview preparation**
 - Interview itself



What visual methods are there, and who uses them?

- *Semiotics* (see last week) - **cultural studies**
- *Compositional analysis* (today) - **art history**
- *Content analysis* - **sociology and communication**
- *Psychoanalytic* and other theoretical readings - film **studies**
- *Discourse analysis* - **cultural studies, sociology and communication (next week)**
- *Ethnography* of social viewing practices - **sociology and communication (2 weeks time)**
- *Making images* - photos, videos, etc: - **sociology and communication, art and design**
- *Visuality* - **visual media and cultural studies (today)**



Basic method: compositional analysis

- **Form of close viewing (developed by art historians) that describes:**
 - Content – what is actually shown
 - Colour and light – effect on realism, on atmosphere, etc.
 - Space: scale, complexity, geometry, perspective
 - Viewer's position – perspective, standpoint
- **Does not say much about meaning, or connotation or context**
- **Focuses on rich description of the visual entity (painting, photograph, filmic scene, billboard, et.c)**



Compositional analysis



Exercise: compositional analysis

In pairs, list some key compositional aspects of the Reuters photograph

- **Content**
- **Colour**
- **Light**
- **Space**
- **Scale**
- **Viewer position**



Part B: Visuality - practices, reflexivity, critique



Ways of approaching images

- Mcs approaches image using methods of textual analysis, **visuality** and discourse analysis (next week)
- the images themselves, sites of production, sites of audiencing/viewing
- Remember: text, *textuality*, the textual environment
 - Couldry: 'the textual environment' – flow of meanings, flow of readers, flow of texts

**New term –
visuality**



Rose on 'the question of method in ... visual culture studies'

- What is 'visual culture studies'?
- Not much discussion of methods in visual culture studies because:
- 'implicit methodology' of **critical connoisseurship** is used
- Focuses on meaning, tends to ignore audiencing or the place of the researcher/critic



Gillian Rose's advice for doing visual cultural studies:

- **Ok to focus on meaning, and contested meanings, with the critic 'finding' the meanings and doing the critique**
- **But also need to take into account**
 - **Visuality** = 'what happens when people look and what emerges from that act'
 - **Practices**: 'fairly consistent ways of doing something, deploying certain objects, knowledges, bodily gestures and emotions' (Rose, 549)
 - Visuality as practice: 'routinization and place-specificity [that makes] certain sorts of things visible in particular ways' 549



Rose's advice for doing visual cultural studies: place + practice

- **Researching visuality focuses on**
 - **Specific places** where people see or look (airport, loungeroom, street, etc.), including related geographies (global, local, digital, etc.)
 - **Performativity** of practice:
 - Do you understand the notion of performativity (Austin/Butler)?
 - Discuss with your neighbour.
 - Practices produce entities that are said to pre-exist the practice;
 - Seeing/looking is a doing that makes something;
 -
 - In both respects (place + performativity), research is closer to everyday life





- e.g. Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and visitors who come to the Louvre to see it – what is the performativity of seeing the Mona Lisa



Rose's advice for doing visual cultural studies 2: reflexivity

- **Researching visuality focuses on**
 - How the researcher is entangled with the object (551)
 - Entangled with the object means:
 - What questions you ask, and what you see depends on who you are and how you relate to what you are seeing
 - e.g. a scientific visualization, a computer game, an instagram image

Reflexivity: 'the critic is required to work through the process of reaching that verdict, demonstrating that it was attained through a series of specific interactions rather than from a series of cumulative revelations' (551)



Rose's advice for doing visual cultural studies 3: critique

- **Researching visuality still focuses on critique (pointing to problems).**
- **But critique is entangled with practices and performances of looking**
 - Not just finding the real meaning but intervening by
 - Highlighting the unnoticed or invisible by attention to details
 - 'witness the world into being' differently 553



Thinking about visuality for your group research design

- **Spend some time collecting 2 contrasting visual objects/images that relate to different places or practices associated with your project; e.g. a magazine article vs a photo someone put on Flickr or Instagram;**
- **Do a basic compositional analysis of the 2 images**
- **Following Roses' advice about practices and places, list some of the different ways in which people in different places might look at these visual entities.**
 - You might examine different ways of talking about them, different ways of making or circulating them, different places in which they are seen, different affective/emotional relations, group or social activities associated with them
 - You will need to describe where you found the object, look at surrounding text, comments, and audiences.
- **Write a post (400-500 words) for the online group blog that compares the results of the compositional analysis and the analysis of visuality**
 - –make sure you include snippets or examples from the different sources



Interview: prepare questions on visual analysis and visuality

- **In your groups, prepare 2 questions that ask Miriam how she studies visuality**
 - The places where urban photographs appear
 - The practices associated with them
- Also ask her something about reflexivity and critique



Next week

- **Visual culture and discourse analysis**
- **Graeme Gilloch**



Gillian Rose's critique of visual cultural studies

- **Exercise: what is Rose's critique of typical visual cultural studies?**



Exercise: methods and textual environment

Take the list of visual methods and say what site/s of the image of the image they focus on (production, image itself, audiencing)

