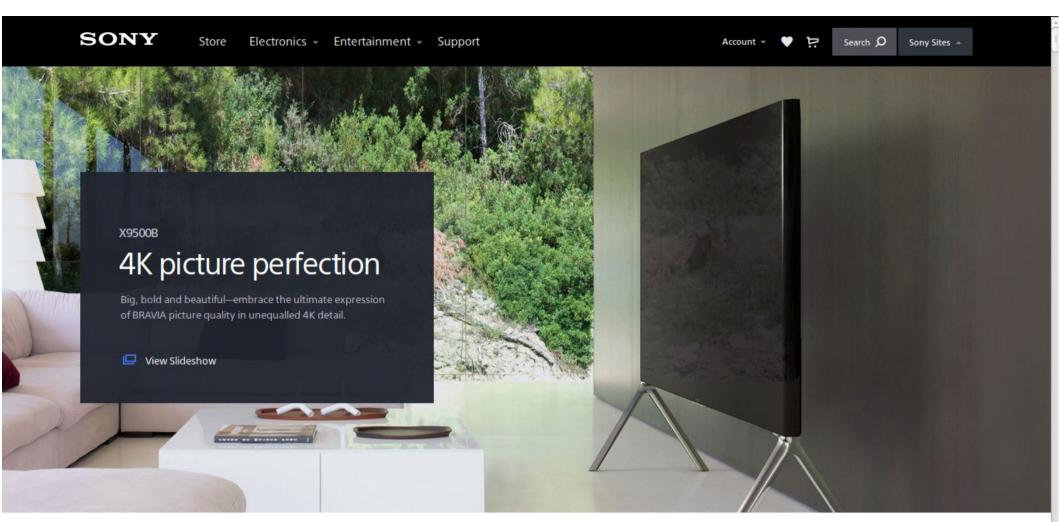# Week 5

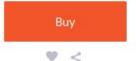Visual analysis II: 'the visual construction of the social'

Overview

- Review of discourse analysis
- "Showing seeing" (Mitchell)
- Discourse analysis and **practices of visibility**
- Group research project exercise
- Interview with Graeme Gilloch

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Reading for this week: W.J.T. Mitchell on the idea of 'visual culture'

Key ideas:
- Myths of a 'visual culture' or the 'pictorial turn'
- All media are mixed (no 'visual media')
- Not so much *social construction of vision* as **visual construction of the social**

I propose what I hope is a more nuanced and balanced approach located in the equivocation between the visual image as instrument and agency, the image as a tool for manipulation, on the one hand, and as an apparently autonomous source of its own purposes and meanings on the other. This approach would treat visual culture and visual images as go-betweens in social transactions, as a repertoire of screen images or templates that structure our encounters with other human beings.

Page 176

Mitchell, 'Showing seeing'

In all of these locations I have found it useful to return to one of the earliest pedagogical rituals in American elementary education, the show and tell exercise. In this case, however, the object of the show and tell performance is the process of seeing itself, and the exercise could be called showing seeing. I ask the students to frame their presentations by assuming that they are ethnographers who come from, and are reporting back to, a society that has no concept of visual culture. They cannot take for granted that their audience has any familiarity with everyday notions such as color, line, eye contact, cosmetics, clothing, facial expressions, mirrors, glasses, or voyeurism, much less with photography, painting, sculpture or other so-called visual media. Visual culture is thus made to seem strange, exotic, and in need of explanation.

The assignment is thoroughly paradoxical, of course. The audience does in fact live in a visible world, and yet has to accept the fiction that it does not, and that everything which seems transparent and self-evident is in need of explanation. I leave it to the students to construct an enabling fiction. Some choose to ask the

Exercise: 'showing seeing'

- Re-read Mitchell on 'showing seeing' (page 176)

- Look at **this screen**

- Describe seeing it for people who have no visual culture

  - You cannot assume that they know anything about eyes, images, pictures, technologies, etc.

- Report back to the group

Review

- Discourse analysis as a key method for textual/media environments (texts, meanings and readers)

- Discourse analysis: **map groups of statements that structure of how things are thought and actions based on that thinking**

- Discourse analysis involves reading/looking at things *and* at actions

'Visualities themselves are practices' (Rose, 550)

Observing 'what happens when people look'

- **Practice**: what is routinely done, and involves **body**, **things**, **thinking**, **place** and **knowledge**

- Practices are fundamental to *performativity* (and hence experience and identity)

- **Exercise**: list examples of practice and say why they are practices

Discourse analysis of actions: **visual practices** and their importance

- Focused on how institutions and subject-positions are **made visible** together:

  – School:students/teacher;

  – Factory:worker;

  – Hospital/clinic: doctor/patient, etc

  – Media: spectator?

- Each is a **regime of visibility**

  – Each may use images but in different ways

Methodology for studying regimes of visibility

- Look at **instititutional apparatuses** (architecture, laws, regulations, policies, theories, rules)

- Look at **technologies** – disparate sets of tools and methods assembled

  - Compare photography as used in fashion magazine and photography as used in passports or forms of ID

- Look at **production, circulation and audiencing of images**

  - e.g. how are photographs used, stored, classified, valued, etc differently in different institutions

Sources for analysis of **institutional apparatuses**

- Images and documents

- Architectures of specific places

- Websites and apps

- What experts, practitioners, professionals and participants say or do

- Wider discourses and institutions (governments, organisations)

Sources for discourse analysis of **technologies**

- Technologies of display, seeing, looking, searching,

- Textual technologies – labels, captions, indexes, print formats (booklet, pamphlet, article, etc.)

- Architectural technologies: entry points, facades, designated paths, thresholds, accessible vs inaccessible spaces

- Specialized spaces: studios, laboratories, control rooms, archives, etc.

Example: 'Blood Swept Lands, Seas of Red', 2014

Group research project exercise

- Write a description of the visual construction of your research topic following the 'showing seeing' guidelines and rules described by W.J.T. Mitchell in this week's reading.

- Document this description using text and images on your group project online site.

Group research project exercise B

- Write a preliminary description of the institutional apparatuses, technologies and practices of audiencing that visually construct your topic of analysis.

- Document this description using text and images on your group project online site.

Preparation for the interview with Graeme Gilloch

- Follow usual practice and prepare 3 three questions in your groups for the visitor.

- The questions **must** relate to methods for studying:

  - Visual/media construction of the social

  - Power relations and visibility

Next week: ethnography and observing people in practice

For your group research blog, choose one image or object (different to last week), and write an analysis of it that uses:

- 1. the implicit methodology of visual culture studies as described by Gillian Rose;

- 2. the practice-based methodology to highlights objects, knowledges, bodily gestures, emotions and places.

- In order to do 2. you might need to describe where you found the object, look at surrounding text, comments, and audiences.