

On Visuality

Journal of Visual Culture, Nicholas Mirzoeff

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Visuality (1988)

Vision: the physical process of sight; being able to see.

Visuality: the “social aspects of visibility”; the quality or state of being visible; a mental image of what you’re able to see.

Hal Foster (1988): *“Although vision suggests sight as a physical operation, and visibility sight as a social fact, the two are not opposed as nature to culture...”*

Mirzoeff explains: *“These differences [between vision and visibility] are, however, seen as being regulated by each ‘scopic regime’ into ‘one essential vision’.”*

Revolution & Revelation

Thomas Carlyle (1837-1841): predecessor; ‘Idea of the whole’

Visuality is the ability to depict all the chaos of modern life in vivid pictures.

Must open your inner/spiritual eye in order to have a proper visual impression.

“Visuality was, then, the clear picture of history available to the hero as it happens and the historian in retrospect. It was not visible to the ordinary person whose simple observation of events did not constitute visuality.”

“What is required of the ordinary person is not visuality but hero-worship, a proper submission to the quasi-divine authority of the hero. “



Figure 1 J.M.W. Turner, *Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory) – The Morning After the Deluge – Moses Writing the Book of Genesis* (1843). © Tate, London 2005.

“In their extended convolutions, it sometimes seems impossible to ascribe any definitive meaning to the painting at all.”

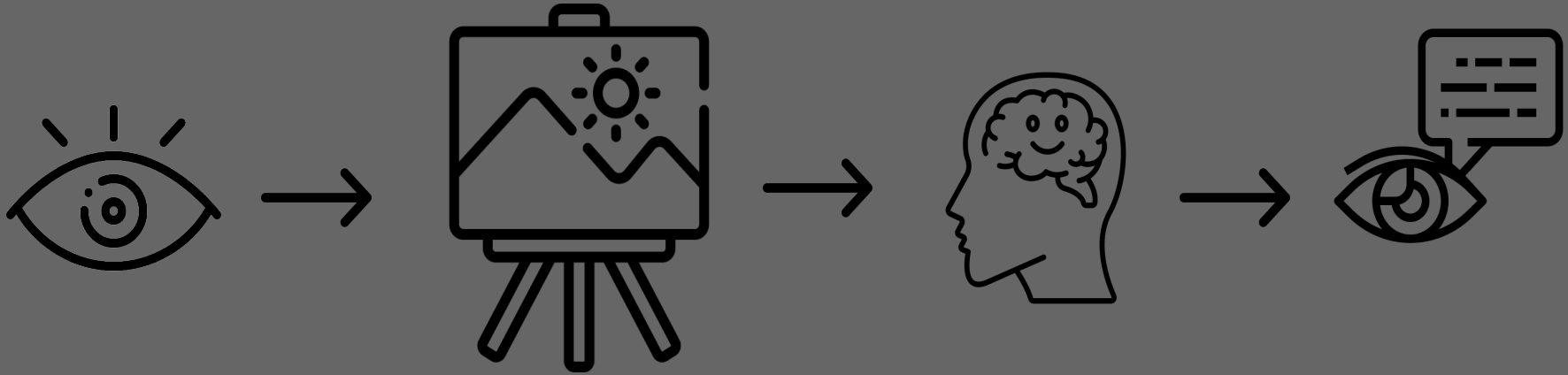


Figure 3 J.M.W. Turner, *The Angel Standing in the Sun* (1846). © Tate, London 2005.

“Everywhere the human soul stands between a hemisphere of light and another of darkness.”

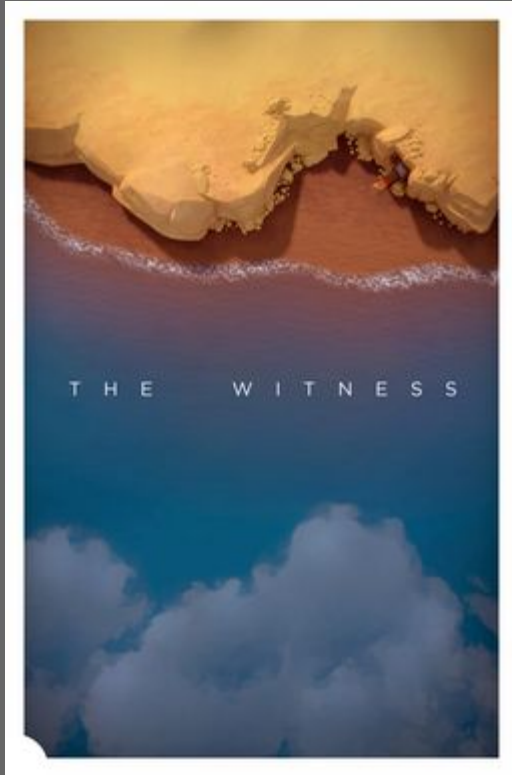
Assessment

1. *Looking at these pictures, at least I have no idea what they mean or symbolize.*
2. *That doesn't detract from their meaning and cultural implications.*
3. *Bottom line: what you see, is not solely what you interpret, and vice versa.*



How does this apply to Video Games?

The Witness: Games & Meta



Main point of The Witness: *perspective*.

- You literally spend the entirety of this game solving iPad puzzles.
- Is there any meaning to this?
- Ex.
 - “*Maybe I just don’t get it...*”
 - “*This changed my whole perspective on video games!*”

Minecraft: Mining and Crafting

Main point of Minecraft:

- Get geared up, and defeat the Ender Dragon?
- Walk around, break blocks, and place blocks...
- There is literally no end to the world.





Tetris: Meaning in Mechanics



- Main mechanic of Tetris: *planning*
 - At face value, you simply place the blocks as they come.
 - But there's *strategy involved*:
 - the meaning of these blocks are ascribed to some value in the player's head (after they've played enough), and they know where to put things, where they should go, how fast they should go.

Visuality in the Game Development Process

Visuality & Game Design Process

1. *Design games with a balance on meaning.*
 - a. *Can enforce meaning through story, mechanics, gameplay, and the player will surely extract their own meaning from the game itself.*
 - b. *Not enforcing meaning leaves room for interpretation by the player. Though, we don't want them to walk away thinking: "what the hell did I just experience?" (unless, that's what you want them to think...)*
2. *In the same vein, player interpretation can be very powerful in creating a community and discussion.*
 - a. *Posing an open-ended question by the end of your game can get people talking about what they think the answers are and even push for more in-depth discussion about topics that you want to be talked about.*
3. *Being careful of current events and how players can infer implicit, unintentional meaning from your games.*

Useful Tips and Takeaways

There is more than what meets the eye.



- When trying out new games, not only should you open your eyes and take in the visuals, but you must simultaneously open your mind to all of the possibilities of what this new world has to offer.
- During game design, keep a mental note of all of the different ways players can interpret each component of the experience. The more possibilities that are included the more lively the experience will be.
- Unrelated to game design, a lot of the meanings that we perceive are heavily influenced by those around us, our culture, and society as a whole.

