

Practices of Looking

THIRD EDITION

AN INTRODUCTION TO VISUAL CULTURE

Marita Sturken | Lisa Cartwright



OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Practices of Looking

Practices of Looking

An Introduction to Visual Culture

Third Edition



Marita Sturken

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Lisa Cartwright

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

New York Oxford
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS



Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford. It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press in the UK and certain other countries.

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America.

© 2018, 2009, 2001 by Oxford University Press

For titles covered by Section 112 of the US Higher Education Opportunity Act, please visit
www.oup.com/us/he for the latest information about pricing and alternate formats.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted by law, by license, or under terms agreed with the appropriate reproduction rights organization. Inquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the address above.

You must not circulate this work in any other form
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Sturken, Marita, 1957- author. | Cartwright, Lisa, 1959- author.
Title: Practices of looking : an introduction to visual culture / Marita
Sturken, New York University; Lisa Cartwright, University of California at San Diego.
Description: Third edition. | New York : Oxford University Press, 2017. |
Includes index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016052818 | ISBN 9780190265717
Subjects: LCSH: Art and society. | Culture. | Visual perception. | Visual
communication. | Popular culture. | Communication and culture.
Classification: LCC N72.S6 S78 2017 | DDC 701/.03—dc23
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016052818>

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed by LSC Communications, Inc.

Printed in the United States of America

contents

<i>acknowledgments</i>	ix
<i>introduction</i>	1
chapter 1	Images, Power, and Politics 13
	Representation 18
	Vision and Visuality 22
	The Myth of Photographic Truth 24
	Myth, Connotation, and the Meaning of Images 29
	Semiotics and Signs 32
	Images and Ideology 37
	Image Icons 41
chapter 2	Viewers Make Meaning 51
	Producers' Intended Meanings 55
	Aesthetics and Taste 60
	Value, Collecting, and Institutional Critique 66
	Reading Images as Ideological Subjects 74
	Viewing Strategies 78
	Appropriation and Reappropriation 81
chapter 3	Modernity: Spectatorship, the Gaze, and Power 89
	Modernity 89
	Modernism 97
	The Concept of the Modern Subject 100
	Spectatorship and the Gaze 103

	Power and the Surveillance Gaze	109
	The Other	113
	Gender and the Gaze	120
	Gaming and the Gaze	132
chapter 4	Realism and Perspective: From Renaissance Painting to Digital Media	139
	Types of Realism	142
	Perspective	148
	Perspective and the Body	153
	The Camera Obscura	156
	Challenges to Perspective	158
	Perspective in Digital Media	166
chapter 5	Visual Technologies, Reproduction, and the Copy	179
	Visualization and Technology	179
	Visual Technologies	185
	The Reproduced Image and the Copy	189
	Walter Benjamin and Mechanical Reproduction	191
	The Politics of Reproducibility	195
	Ownership and Copyright	198
	Reproduction and the Digital Image	205
	3D Reproduction and Simulation	212
chapter 6	Media in Everyday Life	219
	The Media, Singular and Plural	219
	Everyday Life	222
	Mass Culture and Mass Media	223
	Critiques of Mass Culture	227
	Media Infrastructures	234
	Media as Nation and Public Sphere	240
	Democracy and Citizen Journalism	243
	Global Media Events	247

chapter 7	Brand Culture: The Images and Spaces of Consumption	257
	Brands as Image, Symbol, and Icon	260
	The Spaces of Modern Consumerism	265
	Brand Ideologies	272
	Commodity Fetishism and the Rise of the Knowing Consumer	278
	Social Awareness and the Selling of Humanitarianism	283
	Social Media, Consumer Data, and the Changing Spaces of Consumption	288
	DIY Culture, the Share Economy, and New Entrepreneurism	293
chapter 8	Postmodernism: Irony, Parody, and Pastiche	301
	Postmodernity/Postmodernism	302
	Simulation and the Politics of Postmodernity	307
	Reflexivity and Distanced Knowing	311
	Jaded Knowing and Irony	316
	Remix and Parody	322
	Pastiche	325
	Postmodern Space, Architecture, and Design	330
chapter 9	Scientific Looking, Looking at Science	337
	Opening Up the Body to the Empirical Medical Gaze	340
	Medicine as Spectacle: The Anatomical and Surgical Theater	343
	Evidence, Classification, and Identification	349
	Bodily Interiors and Biomedical Personhood	357
	The Genetic and Digital Body	364
	Visualizing Pharmaceuticals and Science Activism	370
chapter 10	The Global Flow of Visual Culture	379
	The History of Global Image Reproduction	381
	Concepts of Globalization	386

The World Image	391
Global Television	397
The Global Flow of Film	399
Social Movements, Indigenous Media, and Visual Activism	402
The Global Museum and Contests of Culture	406
Refugees and Borders	415

<i>glossary</i>	<i>425</i>
-----------------	------------

<i>credits</i>	<i>459</i>
----------------	------------

<i>index</i>	<i>475</i>
--------------	------------

acknowledgments

ur heartfelt thanks to the many artists and designers whose work appears in this edition. The book is a tribute to you. We are grateful as well to the many colleagues whose scholarly and critical input has deeply informed this third edition of *Practices of Looking*. Major thanks to those who offered frank advice and suggestions, and especially to the anonymous readers for the press, listed below, who took the time to help us to improve this book based on their experiences teaching with the previous edition. Thanks as well to our own students, who have provided crucial feedback and steered us toward so many urgent and compelling examples, issues, and theories along the way: this book is a tribute to you as well.

We thank Lori Boatright for her continual support and for her sound counsel on intellectual property rights. Dana Polan provided steady support to an extraordinary degree; his intellectual guidance is vastly appreciated. We thank Rosalie Romero, Nilo Goldfarb Cartwright, Inês Da Silva Beleza Barreiros, Daphne Magaro White, Jake Stutz, Stephen Mandiberg, Kelli Moore, and Pawan Singh, all of whom contributed in different ways and at different times to the ideas, choices, and writing style adopted in this edition. Elizabeth Wolfson and Kavita Kulkarni provided very important image research in early stages of this edition. We are very grateful to Cathy Hannabach/Ideas on Fire for expertly editing our prose and helping to shape the book's argument.

At Oxford University Press, we have benefited immensely from the steadfast support of Toni Magyar, Patrick Lynch, Mark Haynes, and other members of the Oxford staff who worked with us during this process. We are especially grateful to Paul Longo, who guided the book and all its details so well, and to Sandy Cook, permissions manager extraordinaire, for her extensive and expert detective work in image research. We learned so much from Sandy. Thanks to Allegra Howard for picking up the book's oversight late in the process, and to Cailen Swain for image research early on. Thanks as well to Richard Johnson, Micheline Frederick, and the copyediting and production team. Michele Laseau did excellent work on the layout and cover design for this third edition. We are grateful to them and to Estudio Teddy Cruz + Forman for granting us permission to use the dynamic graphics that grace this edition's cover.

Jawad Ali	<i>Art Institute of California, Hollywood</i>
Brian Carroll	<i>Berry College</i>
Ross F. Collins	<i>North Dakota State University</i>
Jacob Groshek	<i>Erasmus University, Rotterdam</i>
Danny Hoffman	<i>University of Washington</i>
Whitney Huber	<i>Columbia College, Chicago</i>
Russell L. Kahn	<i>SUNY Institute of Technology</i>
William H. Lawson	<i>University of Maryland, College Park</i>
Kent N. Lowry	<i>Texas Tech University</i>
Julianne Newmark	<i>New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology</i>
Sheryl E. Reiss	<i>University of Southern California</i>
Beth Rhodes	<i>Art Institute of California, Los Angeles</i>
Shane Tilton	<i>Ohio University, Lancaster</i>
Emily E. West	<i>University of Massachusetts Amherst</i>
Richard Yates	<i>University of Minnesota</i>

*h*ow do you look? This question is loaded with possible meanings. How you look is, in one sense, how you appear. This is in part about how you construct yourself for others to see, through practices of the self that involve grooming, fashion, and social media. The selfie is a powerful symbol of this era in which not only images but also imaging practices are used as primary modes of expression and communication in everyday life. These days, you may be as likely to make images as you are to view them. How you look to others, and whether and where you appear, has to do with your access to such things as cameras, personal electronic devices and technologies, and social media. It is also contingent upon your place within larger structures of authority and in conventions of belief. Technical literacy as well as nationality, class, religion, age, gender, and sexual identity may impact your right to appear, as well as your ability to make and use images and imaging technologies. Nobody is free to look as they please, not in any context. We all perform within (and against) the conventions of cultural frameworks that include nation, religion, politics, family, school, work, and health. These frameworks inform our taste and self-fashioning, and they give rise to the conventions that shape how we look and where and how we appear. How you look, even when deeply personal, is also always political.

We can see the politics of looking, erasure, and the conventions of looking in this image. The Bahraini protesters pictured in Figure I.1 hold symbolic coffins with photographs of victims of the government's crackdown on the opposition. Some of the photographs appear to be selfies, others family photographs, and still others official portraits, perhaps workplace photographs. The faces of women are left blank out of respect for religious and cultural prohibitions against representing women in images. We might say that they are erased, but we may also note that they do appear in the form of a generic graphic that signifies them through the presence of the hijab.

How you look can also refer to the practices in which you engage to view, understand, appreciate, and make meaning of the world. To look, in this sense, is to use your visual apparatus, which includes your eyes and hands, and also technologies like your glasses, your camera, your computer, and your phone, to engage the world through sight and image. To look in this sense might be to glance, to peer, to stare, to look up, or to look away. You may give little thought to what you see,



FIG. 1.1

Bahraini protesters carry symbolic coffins with pictures of victims of the government crackdown on opposition protests in the Shiite village of Barbar, May 4, 2012

or you may analyze it deeply. What you see is likely to appear differently to others. Whereas some may see the hijab graphic in the Bahraini protest photograph as a sign of women's erasure, others may see it as honoring women's presence as activists in this political context.

Practices of Looking is devoted to a critical understanding and interpretation of the codes, meanings, rights, and limits that make images and looking practices matter in our encounters in the world. Visual theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff tells us that the right to look is not simply about seeing. He emphasizes that looking is an exchange that can establish solidarity or social dominance and which extends from the connection between self and other. Looking can be restricted and controlled—it can be used to manipulate ideas and beliefs, but it can also be used to affirm one's own subjectivity in the face of a political system that controls and regulates looking. In all of these senses, looking is implicated in the dynamics of power, though never in straightforward or simple ways. This book aims to provide an understanding of the specificity of looking practices as social practices and the place of images in systems of social power. We hope that readers will use this book to approach making images and studying the ways in which the visual is negotiated in art practice, in communication and information systems, in journalism, in activism, and in making, doing, and living in nature and the built

environment. *Practices of Looking* supports the development of critical skills that may inform your negotiation of life in a world where looking, images, and imaging practices make a difference. Whether you are a maker of visual things and visual tools, an interpreter and analyst of the visual world, or just someone who is curious about the roles that looking plays in a world rife with screens, devices, images, and displays, you engage with the visual. This book is designed to invite you to think in critical ways about how that engagement unfolds in a world that is increasingly made, or constituted, through visual mediation. Looking is regarded, throughout this book, as a set of practices informed by a range of social arenas beyond art and media per se. We engage in practices of looking, as consumers and producers, in domains that range from the highly personal to the professional and the public, from advertising, news media, television, movies, and video games to social media and blogs. We negotiate the world through a multitude of ways of seeing, but rarely do we stop and ask how we look.

We live in a world in which images proliferate in daily life. Consider photography. Whereas in the 1970s the home camera was taken out for something special—those precious “Kodak moments” since the introduction of phone cameras in 2000, taking photographs has become, for many, a daily habit. Indeed, many hundreds of billions of photographs are taken each year. Each minute, tens of thousands are uploaded to Instagram, and over 200,000 are posted to Facebook. In one hour, more images are shared than were produced in all of the nineteenth century.

Photographs may be personal, but they are also always potentially public. Through art, news, and social media, photographs can be a crucial force in the visual negotiation of politics, the struggle for social justice, and the creation of celebrity. Increasingly, people are resisting oppression through the use of photographs and videos marshaled as a form of witnessing, commentary, and protest, as we can see in the use of photographs on protest placards.

Consider paintings and drawings. How is it different to see an original work in a museum from viewing it at home, in a print copy that hangs on your wall, or online, in a digital reproduction on your computer screen? How does it feel to be in the presence of an original work you have long appreciated through reproductions but never before seen in its original form? What does it mean to have your culture’s original works destroyed or looted in warfare or as a political act of iconoclasm? Meaning, whether in relationship to culture, politics, data, information, identity, or emotion, is generated overwhelmingly through the circulation and exchange of visual images and icons. The idea of the original still holds sway in an era of rampant reproduction. Meaning is also generated through visibility, which we perform in the socially and historically shaped field of exchange in which we negotiate the world through our senses.

That we live in a world in which seeing and visibility predominate is not a natural or random fact. Visibility defines not only the social conditions of the visible but also the workings of power in modern societies. Think about some of the ways



FIG. 1.2

Ken Gonzales-Day, *Nightfall I*, from *Searching for California Hang Trees*, 2007–12 (Lightjet print on aluminum, 36 × 46")

in which seeing operates in everyday dynamics of power. Take the classroom, a space in which many people look at one person, the instructor, who is assumed to have knowledge and power. Consider government buildings and the ways in which their design features lead you to notice some fea-

tures and restrict your access to others, maintaining national defense and government secrets while promoting a sense of their iconic stature. As a pervasive condition of being, visibility engages us, and we engage it, through practices of looking. These practices are learned and habitual, pervasive and fundamental. We engage in them in ways that go well beyond our encounters with images.

We must understand not only what we see, but also what we cannot see, what is made absent from sight. Take this work, *Nightfall I*, by the artist Ken Gonzales-Day. It is a large-scale print depicting the simple lines of a leafless tree framed against a jet black sky. The work is from the series *Searching for California Hang Trees*, in which Gonzales-Day documents trees throughout the state of California on which individuals, many of them Mexican, were hung by lynch mobs. Gonzales-Day invokes absence on a series of levels: the body that was hung from this tree is no longer evident. Its absence gestures to the larger absence in history books of the fact that over 350 lynchings of young Mexican men took place in California, a history Gonzales-Day chronicles in his book *Lynching in the West: 1850–1935* (Duke 2006). The artist uses the “empty” icon of the extant lynching tree to represent the very conditions of making a fact invisible. Whereas in the first image we showed (the Bahraini protest march) those people erased in political killings are made present through images, in this series the empty trees stand in for the people killed. Visibility is about the conditions of negotiation through which something becomes visible and under which it can be erased. How invisibility is “seen” and made meaningful is an important question for visual studies.

Consider as well the visual dynamics of built environments—the ways in which design, whether by choice or through making do with what is at hand, impacts the meaning and use of a place. Consider the cultural conventions through which looking creates connections and establishes power dynamics among people in a given

place, such as a windowless government building surrounded by walls and protected by guards and surveillance cameras. We might ask who has the right to see and who does not, and who is given the opportunity to exercise that right—when, and under what conditions.

Of course, having the physical capacity to see is not a given. But whether you are sighted, blind, or visually impaired, your social world is likely to be organized around an abundance of visual media and looking practices. Its navigation may require adaptive optical devices, such as glasses, or navigational methods that substitute for sight, such as echolocation. The practices we use to navigate and communicate in this heavily visually constituted world are increasingly important components of the ways in which we know, feel, and live as political and cultural beings. We might say that our world is constituted, or made, through forms of visibility, even as it is co-constituted through sound, touch, and smell along with sight. Visual media are rarely only visual; they are usually engaged through sound, embedded with text, and integrated with the physical experience of objects we touch.

Practices of Looking draws together a range of theories about vision and visibility formulated by scholars in visual culture studies, art history, film and media studies, communication, design, and a range of other fields. These theories help us to rethink the history of the visual and better understand its role after the digital turn. These writers, most of them working in or on the cusp of the era of digital media and the Internet, have produced theories devoted to interpreting and analyzing visual culture.

Defining Culture

The study of visual culture derives many of its primary theoretical approaches from cultural studies, an interdisciplinary field that first emerged in the mid-1960s in Great Britain. One of the aims of cultural studies, at its foundation, was to provide viewers, citizens, and consumers with the tools to gain a better understanding of how we are produced as social subjects through the cultural practices that make up our lives, including those involving everyday visual media such as television and film. A shared premise of cultural studies' focus on everyday culture was that the media do not simply reflect opinion, taste, reality, and so on; rather, the media are among the forms through which we are “made” as human subjects—as citizens, as sexual beings, as political beings, and so on.

Culture was famously characterized by the British scholar Raymond Williams as one of the most complex words in the English language. It is an elaborate concept, the meanings and uses of which have changed over time among the many critical theorists who have used it.¹ Culture, Williams proposed in 1958, is fundamentally ordinary.² To understand why this statement was so important, we must recall that prior to the 1960s, the term *culture* was used to describe the “fine” arts

and learned cultures. A “cultured” person engaged in the contemplation of classic works of art, literature, music, and philosophy. In keeping with this view, the nineteenth-century British poet and social critic Matthew Arnold defined culture as the “best which has been thought and said” in the world.³ Culture, in Arnold’s understanding, includes writing, art, and other forms of expression in instances that conform to particular ideals of perfection. If one uses the term this way, a work by Michelangelo or a composition by Mozart would represent the epitome of culture, not because these are works of monetary value but because they would be believed to embody a timeless ideal of aesthetic perfection that transcends class.

The apparent “perfection” of culture, according to the late twentieth-century French sociological theory of Pierre Bourdieu, is in fact the product of training in what counts as (quality) culture. Taste for particular forms of culture is cultivated in people through exposure to and education about aesthetics.⁴ Bourdieu’s emphasis on culture as something acquired through training (enculturation) involved making distinctions not only between works (masterworks and amateur paintings, for example) but also between high and low forms (painting and television, for example). As we explore in Chapter 2, “high versus low” was the traditional way of framing discussions about aesthetic cultures through the first half of the twentieth century, with high culture widely regarded as quality culture and low culture as its debased counterpart. This division has become obsolete with the complex circulations of contemporary cultural flow.

Williams drew on anthropology to propose that we embrace a broader definition of culture as a “whole way of life of a social group or whole society,” meaning a broad range of activities geared toward classifying and communicating symbolically within a society. Popular music, print media, art, and literature are some of the classificatory systems and symbolic means of expression through which humans organize their lives. People make, view, and reuse these media in different ways and in different places. The same can be said of sports, cooking, driving, relationships, and kinship. Williams’s broader, more anthropological definition of culture leads us to notice everyday and pervasive activities, helping us to better understand mass and popular forms of classification, expression, and communication as legitimate and meaningful aspects of culture and not simply as debased or crude forms of expression.

Following from Williams, cultural studies scholars proposed that culture is not so much a set of things (television shows or paintings, for example) as a set of processes or practices through which individuals and groups produce, consume, and make sense of things, including their own identities. Culture is produced through complex networks of making, watching, talking, gesturing, looking, and acting—networks through which meanings are negotiated among members of a society or group. Objects such as images and media texts come into play in this network of exchange as active agents. They draw us to look and to feel or speak in particular ways. The British cultural theorist Stuart Hall stated: “It is the participants in a culture who give meaning to people, objects, and events. . . . It is by our use of things,

and what we say, think and feel about them—how we represent them—that we give them a meaning.”⁵ Following from Hall, we can say that just as we give meaning to objects, so too do the objects we create, gaze on, and use for communication or simply for pleasure give meaning to us. Things are active agents in the dynamic interaction of social networks.

Our use of the term *culture* throughout this book emphasizes this understanding of culture as a fluid and interactive set of processes and practices. Culture is complex and messy, and not a fixed set of ideals, tastes, practices, or aesthetics. Meanings are produced not in the minds of individuals so much as through a process of negotiation among practices within a particular culture. Visual culture is made between individuals and the artifacts, images, technologies, and texts created by themselves and others. Interpretations of the visual, which vie with one another, shape a culture’s worldview. But visual culture, we emphasize, is grounded in multimodal and multisensory cultural practices, and not solely in images and visibility. We study visual culture and visibility in order to grasp their place in broader, multisensory networks of meaning and experience.

The Study of Visual Culture

Visual culture emerged as a field of study in the 1980s, just as images and visual screens were becoming increasingly prevalent in the production of media and modes of information, communication, entertainment, and aesthetics. The study of visual culture takes as one of its basic premises the idea that images from different social realms are interconnected, with art, advertising, science, news media, and entertainment interrelated and cross-influential. Many scholars no longer find viable the traditional divisions in academia through which images in different realms (such as art history, film studies, and communication) have been studied apart from other categories of the visual. The cross-fertilization of categories is the result of historical shifts, technological developments, and changing viewer practices. Through digital technology, media are now merged in unprecedented ways. We may view art, read news media, receive medical records, shop, and watch television and movies on computers. The different industries and types of practice inherent in each form are no longer as discrete as they once were.

Our title *Practices of Looking* gestures to this expanded social field of the visual, emphasizing that to understand the images and imaging technologies with which we engage every day, we must analyze the ways in which practices of looking inform our ways of being in the world. *Practices of Looking*, in its first edition in 1999, took as its distant inspiration John Berger’s 1972 classic *Ways of Seeing*. The book was a model for the examination of images across such disciplinary boundaries as media studies and art history and it was influential in disparate social realms such as art and advertising. The terrain of images and their trajectories, and the theories we use to interpret them, have become significantly more complex since

Berger wrote his book and since our first edition was published. At that time, the information space known then as “World Wide Web” was a fairly recent innovation, and it was difficult to transmit image files online. Digital reproduction was not very advanced, and transmission speed and volume were prohibitive. Technological and cultural changes in place by 2008, when the second edition of *Practices of Looking* was produced, had introduced new modes of image production and circulation. The mix of styles in postmodernism and the increased mixing of different kinds of images across social domains prompted us to further enhance the interdisciplinary approach at the center of this book. At the same time, the restructuring of the media industry through the rise of digital media had blurred many of the boundaries that had previously existed between forms of media. Media convergence had changed the nature of the movies and transformed television and the experience of the audience. In the first edition we proposed that an interdisciplinary approach encompassing art, film, media, and the experience of looking was merited because these domains did not exist in isolation from one another. By the second edition, those social domains were even more interconnected, and digital technology had created increased connections between academic fields of study.

By this third edition, in 2017, cultural meanings and image practices had undergone significant further transformation. Most significant was the rise of social media as a platform for visual culture. The Internet, screen culture, mobile phones, and digital technology dominate modes of communication, political engagement, and cultural production. Even classical and historical works are impacted as digital technologies are increasingly incorporated in preservation and display strategies. This edition has been updated to address changes in the contemporary visual culture landscape in a host of ways. Images and media now circulate more frequently and more quickly than ever before. This is reflected in the proliferation of prosumer and remix cultures, the ubiquitous presence of smartphones with cameras, the popularity of the selfie, the use of social media images to advance social movements as well as to promote brand culture, and the increased intermixing of categories such as science, education, leisure, and consumerism. Consider this example of science “edutainment”: a Lego model of an MRI machine. Created by Ian Moore, a technical support consultant for Lego in the United Kingdom, the toy was designed to help hospital personnel better explain the procedure to children at Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading. Design innovation, biomedical imaging, popular consumer culture, and science education converge, and the story is circulated globally on social media, promoting the Lego brand’s social contributions across all of these categories of culture.

Ways to Use This Book

Practices of Looking is organized into ten chapters divided into subsections that can be used in a modular fashion. While the first two chapters are the most introductory, there is no “right” order in which to read this book. Each chapter is



FIG. 1.3

Lego MRI suite model built by Ian Moore for the Royal Berkshire hospital in Reading, United Kingdom

designed so that it is comprehensible apart from the whole. Each accommodates different emphases and trajectories depending on the focus in a given area of interest or course focus. *Practices of Looking* was written to work in courses on visual culture, design, communication, media studies, and art history. At the same time, this is not a generalist book. We present multiple theories drawn from critical theory, visual studies, media studies, and other fields of study to offer here a range of concepts through which to arrive at new ways of engaging with the visual in the social worlds in which we interact. *Practices of Looking* does not offer a unified methodology for making art or for empirically studying engagement with the visual. Rather, the book offers a varied set of tools for critical thinking, interpretation, and analysis—tools intended to be tried in different combinations to inform how you think about art, design, and visual culture, how meaning is made, and how you make art, media, and things. The book concludes with an extensive glossary of terms used throughout the book. Each chapter ends with a bibliography for further reading.

Chapter 1, “Images, Power, and Politics,” introduces many of the key themes of the book, defining concepts such as representation, ideology, image icons, and photographic truth. It provides an overall introduction to the basic principles of visual semiotics. In this third edition, we have incorporated some important updates to the discussion of photographic meanings and strategies. We discuss body cameras and their use as evidence in police work and law and, here and in other chapters, we expand upon the use of photography in social media and the rise of citizen journalism.

Chapter 2, “Viewers Make Meaning,” focuses on the ways that viewers produce meaning from images and explores the complex dynamics of appropriation,

incorporation, taste, aesthetics, collecting, and display. Prior to the twenty-first century, visual media was primarily something made in industry studios and watched by consumers on television sets and movie screens. Today, we experience most forms of media on the screens of computers and mobile devices, and the consumer is also a producer of images. In this chapter, we look in depth at the role of the consumer who is also a maker and transmitter of visual images.

Chapter 3, "Modernity: Spectatorship, the Gaze, and Power," examines the foundational aspects of modernity and theories of power and spectatorship. This chapter explores the concepts of the modern subject and the gaze in both psychoanalytic theory and theories of power and "the Other" with enhanced attention to contemporary colonialism and postcolonial theory. We have incorporated in this edition a discussion of modernity that emphasizes more pointedly the human subject's gaze relative to negotiations of politics and power globally and across categories of race, gender, and sexuality. Our discussion of art practice addresses recent works by queer and black women artists, and we have included popular media examples such as the television show *Homeland* that help us to foreground public and global contestation about visual meanings and messages concerning Islam, connecting these texts to nineteenth-century colonial painting, twentieth-century journalism, and contemporary neocolonial themes in advertising in order to demonstrate the historical scope of European and American colonial imaginings of Islam.

Chapter 4, "Realism and Perspective: From Renaissance Painting to Digital Media," explores the history of realism in representation and maps out the history of technologies of seeing, emphasizing instruments and techniques used to render perspective from the Renaissance to the present. In the third edition we have updated our discussion of screen cultures and video games in particular, introducing discussion about the conflicts over the politics of gender and sexuality that have raged in the online gaming community.

Chapter 5, "Visual Technologies, Reproduction, and the Copy," considers the history of reproduction practices and the status of the copy, as well as intellectual property law, emphasizing art copyright and brand trademark. This chapter traces reproduction from mechanical reproduction to digital reproduction and 3D modeling. In this edition we have expanded the discussion about computer screens and perspective in relationship to the history of perspective in classical painting, bringing it up to date with the vital expanding literature on computer game culture and virtual worlds.

Chapter 6, "Media in Everyday Life," examines the history of mass media, considering concepts ranging from media and everyday life, mass culture, and the public sphere to media infrastructures, citizen journalism, and global media liveness. Since 2000, there has been much written about media convergence, a concept that refers to the way computers have become the primary platforms for media forms. The film and television industries now overlap with each other and with the computer industry. Boundaries between independent and corporate media cultures

have become less distinct as access to platforms becomes more ubiquitous and social worlds are more readily visible online. In this edition we look at the strategies used to introduce marginal voices across media industries and practices that are increasingly digital and global in their orientation and scope. We also introduce a discussion of social media as a source of news.

Chapter 7, “Brand Culture: The Images and Spaces of Consumption,” focuses on the integration of brand culture in the shifting terrain of social media marketing and consumption. We explore the spaces of consumerism, from nineteenth-century arcades to online shopping, and note changes in marketing and consumer practices ranging from the advent of print advertising to the rise of social media brand culture and the integration of social cause awareness campaigns into marketing strategies. In this edition we enhance our discussion of humanitarian cause marketing alongside new discussions of such important phenomena as brand culture and the share economy. When the first edition of this book was written, consumption and advertising were targets of critique by cultural studies theorists. Since then, marketing and retail have become sites of alternative practice as people with commitments to environmental sustainability, worker rights, local commerce, and green business strategies have entered the fields of manufacture, retail, and marketing. We have included discussion of this important new direction in consumer and brand cultures.

Chapter 8, “Postmodernism: Irony, Parody, and Pastiche,” looks at the central concepts of postmodern theory, the dominance of irony in popular culture, remix culture, postmodern architecture and strategies of simulation, reflexivity, pastiche, and parody. In this edition we have expanded our discussion of postmodern design and architecture as well as our account of simulation, a concept with enhanced significance in a digital world in which representations (copies of the real) have become less vital than the speculative models and prototypes on which the real is imagined and brought into existence.

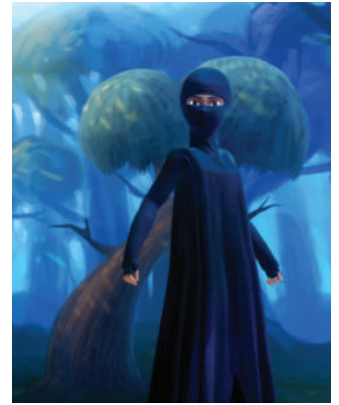
In Chapter 9, “Scientific Looking, Looking at Science,” we consider how the visual and visuality have been deployed in science, and in medicine and forensics in particular. We have expanded our discussion of early representations of the body in medicine to ground updated accounts of biomedical imaging and biometrics in cultures of surveillance.

Chapter 10, “The Global Flow of Visual Culture,” examines the global circulation of all forms of media, concepts of globalization, diasporic and indigenous media, and the globalization of the art world and the museum. As we approach what might be called late postmodernity, this chapter considers theoretical engagements in a postcritical turn that aims to address the economic downturn of 2008; the rise of new global and regional social movements such as the Arab Spring, Occupy, and Black Lives Matter; and the broadening recognition of anthropogenic environmental changes that have altered the face of the planet, global finance, and the world context for art, architecture, television, film, and media cultures.

We encourage you to use this book interactively with other texts and other media in your everyday lives. Go out in the world to museums, political events, and consumer environments and consider the ways that visibility comes into play. Look at how looking practices are enacted around you. Make art and media in ways that are informed by your appropriations of the methods and ideas in this book. Take these ideas and try them out, even in your everyday life. When you go to a clinic for health care, notice how and when looking and visual representation come into play in your treatment. Notice how and when looking is sanctioned, and when it becomes off limits to you. Watch/read the news with full attention to how it is composed, framed, and edited. Watch others watching the news. Try to discern not only what news is shown but also what is *not* shown. Observe who took the pictures posted on news sites, and look at credits to see who owns the rights to them. Studying visual culture is not only about seeing what is put on display. It is also about seeing *how* things are displayed and seeing what we are *not* shown, what we do not see—either because we do not have sight ability, because something is restricted from view, or because we do not have the means for understanding and coming to terms with what is right before our eyes. Consider what is not visible. Use your camera to look at and document the looking practices in which others engage. Use these theories to consider the dynamics of the gaze and the politics of gender and identity, power and authority in the images you take and use, from the selfie to the bystander video to your own artwork. Culture matters, and images matter, in every aspect of our lives. We invite you to see how visual culture and visibility work in relation to your own negotiations of feelings and beliefs, as well as those of others, as we make meanings together in the world today.

Notes

1. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 87; see also Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (New York: Doubleday, 1958).
2. Raymond Williams, "Culture Is Ordinary," in *Resources of Hope* (London: Verso, [1958] 1989), 3–18.
3. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (Oxford: Project Gutenberg, 1869), viii, 7, 15–16, 41, 58, 67, 105, 108–110; see also <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/4212/pg4212-images.html>.
4. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).
5. Stuart Hall, "Introduction," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), 1–11.



Images, Power, and Politics

every day, we engage in social practices of looking to experience the world. Like other practices, looking involves relationships of power. To willfully look at an image, or not to look, is sometimes a choice. More often, though, we respond to the power of the image and its maker to get us to look, or to force us to look away. To be made to look, to be refused the right to look, and to engage in an exchange of looks all entail engagements with power. A person who is blind or has low vision contends with visual experience and communication no less than a sighted person. Looking can be sanctioned or off limits, easy or difficult, pleasurable or unpleasant, harmless or risky. Conscious and unconscious aspects of looking intersect. We don't always know why we look, or how we feel about what we see. We engage in practices of looking to communicate, influence, maneuver through the world, and make sense of our lives. Even when we opt not to look—when we look away, or when we rely on our other senses to feel and know—our activities are invested with visual meanings. In so many ways, our world is organized around practices of looking.

We live in cultures that are increasingly permeated by visual images and technologies. In these contexts, we invest the visual artifacts and images we create and encounter on a daily basis with significant power. For instance, personal photographs may be invested with the power to conjure feelings about an absent person; political images may be invested with the power to incite belief and action. A single image can serve many purposes, appear in an array of contexts, and mean different things to different people. Images increasingly circulate digitally with great speed across cultural and geographical distances. The power of images is derived both from the shared meanings they generate across locations and the particular meanings they hold in a given place or culture.

This image of women and children looking dramatically draws our attention to practices of looking. The photograph, which does not show us what the women and children see, was taken in the early 1940s by Weegee, a self-taught photographer known for his documentation of urban street crime and everyday spectacle. Weegee, whose real name was Ascher (Arthur) Fellig, tracked crimes reported to the police, sometimes arriving on the scene before the authorities—hence his pen name, a play on the occult board game “Ouija.” In the twenty-first century, we are accustomed to seeing events broadcast live over news sites, Twitter, and other social media. In the 1940s, fast-paced reporting was harder to achieve. In the next photograph, we see Weegee composing a news story out of his car trunk, where he has installed a mobile office with a typewriter and camera equipment. People on the street could enjoy the spectacle of Weegee, the proto social-media journalist, cutting corners on production time to generate news stories and photographs as quickly as possible in the predigital era of print media and photography.

“A woman relative cried . . . but neighborhood dead-end kids enjoyed the show when a small-time racketeer was shot and killed,” states the caption for the photograph *The First Murder* in the 1945 book *Naked New York*.¹ On the facing page of that book is displayed a photograph presumably depicting what the children saw:

the bullet-riddled body of a man in a suit sprawled face down on a bloodstained sidewalk. It is the photograph of the women and children looking, however, and not the gruesome image of the dead racketeer, that has become one of the most iconic of

FIG. 1.1

Weegee (Arthur Fellig), *The First Murder*, 1941 (gelatin silver print)



Weegee's photographs. *The First Murder* calls attention to both the charged expressions of people caught in the act of looking at a crime scene and the capacity of the still camera to capture such ephemeral expressions of emotion—feelings that are deeply reactive and private, and are not performed for the camera or the public eye. The children are caught in an unguarded moment of reaction to what was presumably their first encounter with a murder scene. Their expressions of morbid fascination, in which we see thrill mixed with horror, are matched by our own fascinated looks as we scrutinize their raw expressions immortalized in the photograph.

Images of violence and brutality have been used throughout the history of photography—sometimes as forms of violence themselves, and sometimes to expose and protest injustice. An important example of this is the photographic archive that surrounds the murder of Emmett Till and the ensuing trial. In 1955, Till, a fourteen-year-old boy from Chicago, was kidnapped, tortured, and murdered by two white men in a rural Mississippi town where Till was visiting relatives. Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam abducted Till from his uncle's home, beat him, and forced him to carry a seventy-five-pound cotton-gin fan to the banks of the Tallahatchie River, where they bound the fan to the boy's neck with barbed wire before throwing his maimed body into the river. The murderers alleged that Till, who was black, had flirted with a white woman—Bryant's wife, who was also Milam's sister. The local authorities wanted to bury the mutilated body quickly, but Mamie Till Bradley, Emmett's mother, insisted that her son's body be returned to her in Chicago, where she placed it on view in an open-casket funeral so that the public could bear witness. Recognizing the potential of visual evidence to raise public awareness and to prompt demands for justice, Till's mother made the difficult decision to allow her son's maimed corpse to be photographed by the press so that everyone could see the gruesome evidence of violence exacted upon a child. The funeral, which brought 50,000 mourners, was widely publicized. A graphic photograph of Till's brutalized body was published alongside family photos of Till in *Jet*, an American weekly magazine widely read by African Americans, and this graphic evidence of Jim Crow segregation's brutality was picked up broadly by the press.

Jet was titled to reflect the hectic pace of the postwar world, in which there was no longer much time to read. Photography was well matched to this demand for immediate communication. Ironically, Bryant and Milam were acquitted on the



FIG. 1.2

Weegee (Arthur Fellig) typing in the trunk of his 1938 Chevy, 1942, by unidentified photographer



FIG. 1.3

Body of Emmett Till in glass-sealed casket on view to 50,000 mourners at the Roberts Temple Church of God, Chicago, September 1955. Photo: *Chicago Sun-Times*. In 2016, this casket was put on display in the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, D.C.

hard decision to allow her son's appearance to be used to call people to political action. A personal photograph, both a memento of a loved one and a document of a crime, thus circulated as a work of photojournalism and a political statement, serving as a public call to action.

The politics of looking and witnessing has long been linked to photography and journalism, but access to cameras and to looking has not always been easy or widespread. Whereas in the 1900s the public relied on photojournalists to document events, in the 2000s phone cameras have made this kind of image-based witnessing more ubiquitous. When on July 7, 2005, a series of suicide attacks targeted public transportation in London, killing fifty-two people and injuring more than 770 others,

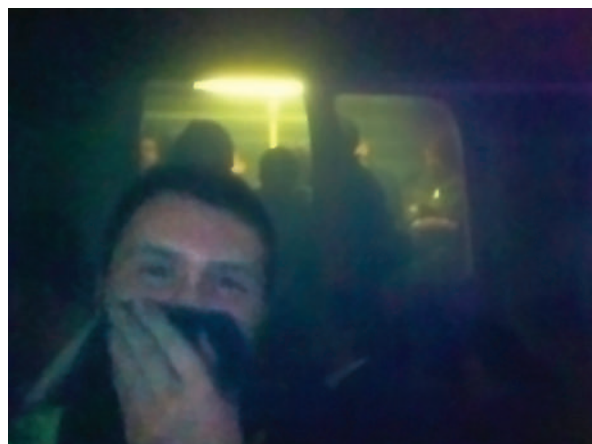
the BBC received 22,000 emails and text messages from people at the scene. Many of those communications included photographs taken at the scene with mobile phone cameras.²

The "Ouija effect" has become ubiquitous, as people find themselves in a position to document and send reports and

images from an ongoing crisis. It is now routine for news outlets to solicit and post this kind of "accidental journalism," "user-generated content," or "citizen journalism" in which the ordinary person assumes the role of author of the latest news. Since 2005, citizen journalism photography has led to a major increase in the number of images published with news stories—a change supported by advances in and availability of image software and mobile technology. The

FIG. 1.4

Eliot Ward, mobile phone image of Adam Stacey taken on Tube train during the July 7, 2005, London bombings



2015 iPhone 6 campaign, with its slogan “shot on iPhone 6,” sells the image quality of mobile phone cameras. This was parodied by a counter-billboard campaign “Also shot on iPhone 6” in San Francisco, reportedly produced by advertising creatives, who wanted to make the point that most images taken on iPhones are pretty banal. The anonymous artists pasted next to the official billboards large-scale posters of over-the-top selfies, photographs more like ones often taken by everyday iPhone users, labeling their parody works “Shot on an iPhone” and branding them with the Apple logo, just like the original ads. The juxtapositions were documented on a Tumblr site that was quickly taken down, presumably because Apple objected on grounds of copyright violation.

Looking in itself can be a form of power. This next mobile-phone photograph, taken on a hilltop outside the Israeli town of Sderot, shows local Israelis who have set up lounge chairs and brought snacks to watch the Israeli military bombard Gaza on the plain below in July of 2014. Allan Sørensen, a Middle East correspondent for a Danish newspaper, uploaded the image to his Twitter account with the ironic caption: “Sderot cinema.” The post was shared more than 10,000 times.³ This image powerfully demonstrates a few of the points introduced here. In it, we see people interpreting the evening ritual of bombing Palestinians as a public spectacle, even as visual entertainment, prior to any use of cameras. The event is treated like a sports match or movie. The documentation of looking is also a means of negotiating power: many people responded to the uploaded photograph with public consternation about the ethics of treating warfare as spectacle sport. It could be argued that Weegee similarly crossed this ethical line by making his reportage public entertainment—rendering his photographs sensational and engaging the public at the crime scene through his performance of “live reporting” as spectacle, which the photograph of his car trunk “office” documents. But whereas Weegee had to develop his photographs and hand them over to the press to circulate on newsprint the next day, Sørensen needed simply to post his image to



FIG. 1.5
“Also shot on iPhone 6”
anonymously produced billboard
ad parody, 2015

FIG. 1.6
Allan Sørensen, Middle East
correspondent at *Berlingske*
newspaper, Denmark, mobile
phone photograph of people
watching bombing of Gaza from
hilltop, posted to Twitter on
July 9, 2014, with line “Sderot
Cinema”



Twitter to achieve mass circulation. We might see the anonymous photograph of Weegee working out of his car trunk as a record of a nascent citizen photojournalism that is now widely practiced. Through photography, readers and consumers of news media now are also producers of news media.

Later in this book we further discuss the idea of the prosumer (the consumer as producer) and the issue of image authorship that this raises. For now, we want to note that the process of representation has become much more pervasive, accessible, and fluid than ever before. We have more images available to us, and we have more means of making images available. More people are taking pictures than ever before, and the boundaries between professional and amateur are becoming blurred. Whereas some would say that photojournalism has become democratized by the pervasive availability of cameras, others would point out that the photojournalism profession has fallen on hard times insofar as journalists must compete with “amateur” mobile-phone photographers who are a volunteer labor force providing free content for the press. Visual representations have become more numerous, more ubiquitous, and easier to make.

It is not always people who take images. The rise of dashboard cameras in the cars of everyday people, the increased use of body-mounted cameras on police, and the proliferation of CCTV (closed circuit television) surveillance cameras in public spaces has led to an increase in “unmanned” camerawork. University of Cincinnati police officer Ray Tensing wore a body camera when he pulled over motorist Samuel DuBose on July 19, 2015, for allegedly driving without a front license plate, and ultimately killed him. The body-cam footage was released simultaneously with a press announcement that Tensing would be indicted on a murder charge. As we discuss further in Chapter 6, the use of dashboard and body cameras has increased the ability of citizens to monitor police activity and assess the accuracy of their statements about how events unfolded. It is difficult to say who is the photographer or producer of these images, which derive their authority and truth value from their status as being taken objectively, without the selective adjustments of a human hand. In the Till and DuBose cases, the camera can be a tool in negotiations of justice and accountability. To understand how images are understood as documenting circumstances requires us to understand how representation works.

Representation

The concept of representation has a specific history and meaning in the study of visual culture, a history that is linked to the production of meaning through symbolic systems. Representation refers to the use of language, marks, and images to create meaning about the world around us. We use words to understand, describe, and define the world as we see it, and we also use markings and symbolism this way. Language systems are structured according to rules and conventions about

how to express and interpret meaning. The representation systems used in painting, drawing, photography, cinema, television, and digital media also involve rules and conventions. These representation systems are in some ways like language systems, which means that they can be analyzed through methods borrowed from linguistics and semiotics that were developed to understand language.

Throughout history, debates about representation have considered whether representations reflect the world as it is, mirroring it back to us through imitation or mimesis, or whether we construct the world and its meaning through representations that are abstract and not mimetic or imitative of physical form. A picture of a cat may share the color of the cat and its general physical shape. The word *cat*, however, bears no physical or visual relationship to the object cat. The combination of letters CAT is somewhat arbitrary in relationship to the object it represents. In this book, we argue that we make meaning of the material world through understanding objects, images, and entities in their specific cultural contexts. This is the case for both abstract and mimetically symbolic systems of demarcation and representation. This process of understanding the meaning of things in context takes place in part through our use of written, gestural, spoken, or visual representations. We “see” the material world only through representations. There is no direct knowledge of the world without representations, whether they are abstract or mimetic. We construct the meaning of things through representing them. Thus, as students of art, visual culture, design, and communication, we need to understand how representation works.

The distinction between representation as a mimetic reflection of the material world and representation as a construction of the material world can be difficult to make. The still life, for instance, has been a favored genre of artists for many centuries. One might surmise that the still life is motivated by the desire to reflect, rather than make meaning of, material objects as they appear in the world. In this still life, painted around 1765 by the French painter Henri-Horace Roland de la Porte, an array of food and drink is carefully painted to reflect what was probably an actual arrangement of these items. De la Porte attended to each minute detail, representing the colors and shapes as they appeared to his eye. The objects, including the fruit, bowl, cup, and wooden tabletop, are rendered with close attention to the ways in which the light hit each object at the time he painted and the ways in which details of each object registered to his eye. The scene seems so lifelike that one imagines one could touch the fruit and eat it. Yet is this image simply a reflection of this particular scene, rendered with skill by the artist as if he had placed a mirror to it? Some of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century still life paintings that we see in museums and collections are straightforwardly representational, while some are deeply symbolic, holding meanings beyond the facts of the scene: fruit on a table. This painting by de la Porte is not merely a mirror image of the display; it also symbolizes peasant life. It invokes a rustic way of living despite the absence of human figures. Elements



FIG. 1.7

Henri-Horace Roland de la Porte,
Still Life, c. 1765 (oil on canvas)

such as food and drink convey philosophical as well as symbolic meanings. The transience of earthly life is one of the possible meanings conveyed by representing simple ripe fruits

and cheeses, which have an ephemeral materiality and were staples of basic, humble meals. The fresh fruits and wildflowers evoke earthy flavors and aromas. Crumbs of cheese and the half-filled carafe conjure the presence of someone who has recently had a simple meal.

We learn the rules and conventions of the systems of representation within a given culture. Many artists have attempted to defy cultural conventions, to push the boundaries or break the rules of various systems of representation. Surrealist artist René Magritte commented on the process of representation in a series of paintings and drawings, famously depicting a picture of a pipe with the line “*Ceci n’est pas une pipe*” (“This is not a pipe”). One could argue, on the one hand, that Magritte is making a joke: of course this is not a real, actual pipe; it is an image of a pipe that he has painted. On the other hand, Magritte’s painting is also pointing reflexively to the relationship among words, images, and things. This is not a pipe itself, the painting suggests, but rather the representation of a pipe in image and word. It contains a label within itself that negates its own function as representation: it is an *image* of a pipe, and therefore representations are never truly consonant with what they profess to be. It is a painting that invites reflection about what representation through word and image is and does.

In this work, *The Two Mysteries* (1966), the famous original 1928 painting is depicted on an easel next to the image of another pipe. Here, we have two pipes—or rather, two paintings of pipes—or a painting of a pipe and a painting of a painting of a pipe, with the same text that reminds us “this is not a pipe.” This might lead us to wonder whether the painted pipe that seems to float in the air is



FIG. 1.8

René Magritte, *Les Deux Mystères* (The Two Mysteries), 1966 (oil on canvas, 65 × 80 cm)

a figment of someone's imagination or a real prop. French philosopher Michel Foucault elaborates on Magritte's ideas by exploring these images' implied commentary about the relationship between words and things and the complex relationship between the drawing, the paintings, their words, and their referent (the pipe). Foucault also raises the question of imagined imagery, insofar as the floating pipe appears like an apparition.⁴ One could not pick up and smoke this pipe; it is a representation, not a material object, and perhaps it is a fantasy. Thus, Magritte points out something so obvious as to render the written message "this is not a pipe" silly, if not absurd. He highlights the act of labeling as something we should think about. He draws our attention to labels and images and their limited ability to represent an object, as well as to the role of fantasy and free association in our representational work. He suggests that this work of representing is also a form of play, insofar as meanings are always pointing toward what is not and are often shifting in their relationship to objects, the real, and fantasy. Magritte asks us to consider how labels and images produce meaning yet cannot fully invoke the experience of the object, which always comes into view in a field of consciousness that includes fantasy and interpretation.

Magritte's painting is famous. Many artists have referred to and played off of it. The cartoon artist Scott McCloud, in his book *Understanding Comics*, uses Magritte's *Treachery of Images* to explain the concept of representation in the vocabulary of comics. McCloud notes that the reproduction of the painting in his book is a printed copy of a drawing of a painting of a pipe and follows this with a hilarious series of pictograms of icons such as the American flag, a stop sign, and a smiley face, all drawn with disclaimers attached (this is not America, this is not law, this is not a face). As McCloud makes clear, we are surrounded by images that



FIG. 1.9

Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, 1993

play with representation, unmasking our initial assumptions and inviting us to experience layers of meanings beyond the obvious and literal.

Vision and Visuality

Visual culture is not simply about images. It is also about practices we engage in relative to seeing, and it is about the ways that the world is visually organized in relationship to power. The capacity to look, to be seen, to see, and to participate in the practices of visual culture involves social contestation. Historically, the idea of vision as an all-seeing, god-like power has carried enormous weight. Contemporary surveillance technology extends this ideal of an all-seeing eye, and the belief that to see is to know, suggesting that if only one could see everything, one could understand all. This is a position that we want to challenge, since to see something is not necessarily to understand it. Whereas the term *vision* refers to the physical capacity to see, the concept of *visuality* refers to the ways that vision is shaped through social context and interaction. The art historian Hal Foster refers to this difference in his discussion of sight as “a social fact.” The difference between vision, as the physical act of seeing, and *visuality* contains, Foster writes, “many differences” among how we see, how we are able, allowed, and made to see, and how we “see this seeing or the unseen therein.”⁵ *Visuality* includes not only social codes about what can be seen and who is able and permitted to look, but also the construction of built environments in relation to these looking practices. Consider the placement of windows and walls, built structures that organize our looking practices. *Visuality* is a term that calls our attention to how the visual is caught up in power relations that involve the structure of the visual field as well as the politics of the image.

Visual culture scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff considers *visuality* in depth. He asks us to consider how power (that of the tyrant, the military leader, the occupying army) is enacted in ways that privilege the visual. He charts the role of *visuality* through the histories of modernity and colonialism, describing the U.S. eighteenth- and nineteenth-century slave plantation as an example of a site where vision was

used to exercise command and control, in this case through the surveillance of the slave by the “overseer,” a figure whose very title shows how vision is tied to the exercise of power. Mirzoeff links this mode of visibility to the contemporary visual command and control systems used in modern warfare.⁶

In an article published in *Harper’s New Monthly* magazine in 1853, we read that a Louisiana plantation overseer watches over slaves harvesting sugar cane from a horse. He is elevated to enhance his ability to keep the workers in view while also symbolically placing him above them.

We see through this example how visibility is in part about the systems of power through which authority is enacted and enforced practically and symbolically. Whereas the overseer looks down

at his charges from above, the slaves must keep their eyes to the ground in deference to his authority and in attentive focus on the labor that they must perform. The whip resting on the carter’s shoulder in the illustration is a threat kept in full view. Any slave who glances up at the overseer will be reminded to put their head down and work harder and faster out of fear.

By examining social structures of visibility as they are documented in an image such as this one, we can see how power is enacted in distributed and complex ways through visual means. We see in the Louisiana sugar plantation scene how the right and power to look can be a privilege granted to those in authority to maintain a status quo. But examination of social structures may also reveal how power can be resisted in visual terms, as we saw in the case of the “Also Shot on iPhone” parody campaign. We can think of this as a “countervisual” practice. Throughout this book, we examine many examples in which images and imaging practices are used to intervene in violence, inequality, and social injustice. According to Mirzoeff, countervisuality is about the struggle for “the right to look,” which is as much about a claim to autonomy as it is about a right to see, look, and challenge the power of visibility.⁷

We can see this relationship of looking and power at work in one of the most visually fraught aspects of the twenty-first-century “war on terror,” specifically the drone wars centered on the Middle East. In this context, the U.S. government has been using drone technology to watch, monitor, and fire missiles at people on the ground from unmanned aerial vehicles, armed drones equipped with live cameras. Operators in distant command centers watch the images taken by drones and make decisions, far from the field of action, about where and whether to kill.



FIG. 1.10

Harvesting the Sugar Cane, 1853,
engraving by J. W. Orr



FIG. 1.11

Saks Afridi, Ali Rez, Akash Goel, Insiya Syed, JR, Assam Khalid, Jamil Akhtar, and Noor Behram, #NotABugSplat, 2014

The distanced and dehumanizing perspective offered by the drone is a key factor in the high rate of civilian drone casualties. Drones have been the target of intense criticism and civilian acts of countervisuality. In one instance, an artist collective printed out an enormous print from a photograph

by Noor Behram, a photojournalist then based in North Waziristan. The photograph is reported to depict the face of a Pakistani child, name and current location unknown, whose family members were killed in a drone strike. The huge blow-up of the child's image was laid out across a field in the Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa region of Pakistan, a location regularly targeted by drones.

Calling their project #notabugsplat, in reference to the crude military slang that refers to those killed by drones as “bug splats,” the collective drew attention to the inhumane visual economy of the drone wars by making the “target” a civilian child whose huge eyes look straight back at the drone camera.⁸ The project was intended to make visible to drone operators the human life they are destroying through remote and indirect means. But the image has also been disseminated on the web and in social media to call attention more widely to the injustice of drone warfare. The child's face has become a graphic, larger-than-life icon of innocence and resistance, an image intended to humanize those hundreds of civilians who have been anonymously killed by drones each year. By using scale to render the child visible, the project also points to the dehumanizing effect of a distanced point of view, a standpoint from which the drone operator sees people as nothing more than dots on a screen.

The Myth of Photographic Truth

Photography plays a very particular role in visual culture, beginning with its inception as an analog medium in the nineteenth century and continuing through its contemporary status as a digital medium that circulates through online networks. Throughout its history, photography has been associated with realism, even though the creation of an image through a camera lens has always involved some degree of subjective choice (about such things as selection of subject, framing, and

lighting, for example). Some types of image recording seem to take place without human intervention, as we have seen in the example of dashboard cameras, CCTV surveillance, and drone videos. In these cases, aesthetic choices such as focus and framing are made to seem chosen by the camera itself, insofar as they are part of the “decision-making” black-boxed into the apparatus. Yet the designers and programmers of these cameras have made decisions about their operation based on social norms and standards. This imputing of human sensibility into the system is no less powerful than the imputing of human sensibility into a personal video or a selfie.

Photography has long been bound up with ideas about objective seeing, and about impartial, unbiased, and factual representational strategies. The camera is a machine, and many people associate machines with objective and nonhuman vision. All cameras and camera-generated images, be they still photographs or video, electronic or digital, bear the cultural legacy of still photography, which historically has been regarded as a more objective, mechanical (machine-based) practice than, say, painting or drawing, which are linked to the more subjective work of the hand.

The traditional form of photography, the technique in which light rays reflecting off objects pass through a lens and register an imprint on a medium such as silver halide film (or, in the case of digital photography, a digital chip), was developed in Europe around 1839, when positivism held sway. Positivism is a philosophical theory that holds verifiable scientific knowledge about natural phenomena to be the authentic source of truths about the world. In positivist thought, the individual actions of the scientist came to be viewed as a liability in the process of performing and reproducing experiments to verify facts, as it was thought that the scientist’s own subjective actions might skew the experiment’s objectivity. In a positivist outlook, machines are regarded as more reliable than unaided human sensory perception or the hand of the artist in the production of empirical evidence about what is real and true. Photography seemed to suit the positivist way of thinking because it is a method of producing representations through a mechanical recording device rather than relying solely on the scientist’s subjective eye and hand (using pencil to sketch a view on paper, for example). In the historical context of positivism, the photographic camera was understood to be a useful scientific tool, an objective mechanical instrument that could register reality more accurately than the fallible human eye and hand.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, there have been many arguments for and against the idea that photographs are objective renderings of the real world, providing unbiased truth. Photographs have been used to prove that someone was alive at a particular time and place in history. For instance, after the Holocaust, some survivors sent photographs to family members from whom they had long been separated as an affirmation that they were alive. When a photograph is introduced as documentary evidence in a courtroom, it is often presented as if it were incontrovertible proof that an event took place in a particular way. As such, it is perceived to speak



FIG. 1.12

Timothy O'Sullivan, *Gettysburg, Pa. Dead Confederate Soldier in the Devil's Den*, July 1863 (print from glass, wet collodion negative)

the truth in a direct way. At the same time, the truth value of photography has been the focus of skepticism and debate in courtrooms as well as in other contexts, as images can be differently interpreted, and may reasonably support different and even contradictory “truths.”

That is why we propose that photographic truth is a myth. The contestation of truth in photographs came into question

with special urgency with the emergence of late twentieth-century digital imaging technology. One of the main debates about photographic realism during the early digital era concerned the question of manipulating images. Programs like Photoshop (released in 1990) allow the everyday consumer to alter images easily, making it possible for most photographer-users to fabricate reality through image manipulation. Yet, this is not just a digital issue. Analog photographs have always been subject to alteration and trickery; from the very early days of photography they have been altered to manipulate truth and history.

A widely cited example of the early “faking” of photographic truth is the case of the alleged documentation of a slain Civil War rebel sharpshooter published in Alexander Gardner’s 1865 *Photographic Sketchbook of the War* (the photograph is attributed to Gardner’s assistant Timothy O’Sullivan). The Civil War was one of the first wars to be documented by the photographic camera. Gardner presented the photograph as a scene he encountered. It was later suspected that in fact the gun at the sharpshooter’s side was Gardner’s own, which he apparently placed there for dramatic effect after dragging the soldier’s corpse into the setting that he labeled “the Devil’s den,” propping up the dead man’s face to make its features visible to the camera. William J. Mitchell and other visual culture scholars extensively analyzed the circumstances of this photograph in the 1990s, when digital imaging and image manipulation software made the question of photographic truth loom large. In journalism, the truth claims surrounding an image can make or break the integrity of a journalist, a news story, or a news outlet. Mitchell discusses a 1989 case in which U.S. Navy fighters shot down two Libyan fighter planes.

Libya denounced the action, calling an emergency session of the United Nations (UN) Security Council. When Libya's UN ambassador held that the downed planes were unarmed, a U.S. official challenged the assertion, noting "we have the pictures to prove they were not unarmed" and adding "the Libyan ambassador to the UN is a liar." United States personnel exhibited blurry images that were said to show missiles, demanding of the Libyan representatives: "Do you think this is a bouquet of roses?" The Libyans responded by accusing the United States of doctoring the photographs, fabricating evidence and creating the story "in the Hollywood manner."⁹

That digital images can be manipulated with great ease confounds the association of photography with the documentation of truth. At the same time, the proliferation of proven-false images in the news media and on social media has produced a much more skeptical viewing public. In 2014, Dutch graphic designer Zilla van den Born explored this tension between the truth value of the image and its capacity for manipulation when as a school project she spent five weeks on a "vacation" in Asia, during which she was in fact at home using Photoshop to create and post vacation photos. Inserting herself into typical tourist scenes, group shots, and beach scenes in photographs she shared on social media, Skyping with fake backgrounds, and sending fake postcards, van den Born created a photographic portfolio of her travel adventures without ever leaving her apartment. Here she poses herself on a beach in a typical tourist scene. After the "trip" was over, van den Born let her family and friends in on the secret, titling her project *Sjezus zeg, Zilla* ("Oh God, Zilla"). "My goal was to prove how common and easy it is to distort reality," she states. "I did this to show people that we filter and manipulate what we show on social media."¹⁰

It is a paradox of photography that although we know that images can be ambiguous and are easily altered (as van den Born's project shows), much of photography's power still lies in the shared belief that photographs are, or should be, truthful records of events. The increasing prevalence of documenting the documenter, which we saw in the Weegee car trunk photograph, reaffirms photography's provenance and truth claims. The interweaving into visual culture of tracking programs that document our travel history and activities on our Facebook pages and in our mobile phone archives also helps to uphold, surveil, and affirm a culture of photographic truth and objectivity. Seeing that someone's Facebook settings have led the program to tag their photograph as having been taken in a given city on a given date lends veracity to the photograph, confirming from a source other than the

FIG. 1.13

Photograph from *Oh God, Zilla*, Zilla van den Born, 2014





FIG. 1.14
Robert Frank, *Trolley—New Orleans*, 1955 (gelatin silver print)

photographer that the circumstances were not faked. Our awareness of the subjective nature of imaging is in constant tension with the legacy of objectivity that clings to the cameras and software that together produce images and data about us and our world.

French theorist Roland Barthes uses the term *studium* to describe this truth function of the photograph. The order of the *studium* also refers to the photograph's ability to invoke a distanced appreciation of what the image holds. Yet photographs are also objects with subjective, emotional value and meaning. They can channel feelings and affect in ways that often seem magical, or at least highly personal and interiorized. Barthes coined the term *punctum*, a Greek word for trauma, to characterize the affective element of those photographs that pierce one's heart with feeling. Photography is thus paradoxical: the same photograph can be an emotional object (conveying its sharp and immediate *punctum*), yet it can also serve as measured documentary evidence of facts (through the more distanced *studium* by which the image invites us to regard what it shows). Photographic meaning derives precisely from this paradoxical combination of magical and objective qualities. Artist and theorist Allan Sekula proposed this back in the predigital 1980s: "photographs achieve semantic status as fetish objects *and* as documents. The photograph has, depending on its context, a power that is primarily affective and a power that is primarily informative. Both powers support the mythical truth-value of the photograph."¹¹ The images created by cameras can be simultaneously informative and expressive.

This 1955 photograph of passengers on a segregated trolley car reflects this paradox. It was taken by Robert Frank in New Orleans while traveling around the United States between 1955 and 1957, funded by two Guggenheim fellowships awarded to him to document American life. Eighty-three photographs selected from 687 rolls of film (more than 20,000 photographs) were published in *The Americans*,

a photographic essay with an introduction by the Beat poet Jack Kerouac.¹² In this photograph, *Trolley—New Orleans*, we see individual passengers: a white man and a white woman are seated near the front, a white boy and girl occupy the middle seat, and a black man and a black woman sit further back in the trolley car. As factual evidence of the past, the image records a particular moment in the racially segregated American South of the 1950s when blacks were required by law to sit in the rear on public transportation, leaving the front seats for white passengers. Yet, at the same time, this photograph does more than document these particular facts about racial hierarchy that are made so clear in what was a mundane, everyday arrangement of people. For some viewers, this image is moving insofar as it captures a fleeting moment in a culture on the precipice of momentous change, evoking powerful emotions about America's racial divide. The picture was taken just as laws, policies, and social mores concerning segregation began to undergo radical changes in response to civil rights activism. In Frank's photograph, the passengers' faces look outward with different expressions, appearing to wait not only for their destination but also for the larger social changes soon to come that would make the organization of people in this trolley no longer fall quite this way. It is as if the trolley itself represents the passage of history, and the expressive faces of each passenger frozen in a fleeting moment of transit foreshadow the ways in which all Americans will confront the history that will ensue. We can thus read the image as a kind of allegory, an instance from this historical moment before dramatic changes in the American racial landscape. This photograph is thus valuable both as an empirical documentary image of what has been and as an expressive, symbolic vehicle conveying social transformation.

Myth, Connotation, and the Meaning of Images

In *Trolley—New Orleans*, as in all images, we can discern multiple levels of meaning. Here, the interpretive analytic system of semiotics can help us to understand how meaning is generated. Barthes uses the terms *denotative* and *connotative* to describe different kinds and levels of meaning produced at the same time and for the same viewer in the same photograph. An image can denote certain apparent truths, providing documentary evidence of objective circumstances. The denotative meaning of the image refers to its literal, explicit meaning. The same photograph may connote more culturally specific associations and meanings. Connotative meanings are informed by the cultural and historical contexts of the image and its viewers' lived, felt knowledge of those circumstances—all that the image means to them personally and socially. As we noted earlier, the Robert Frank photograph denotes a group of passengers on a trolley. Yet, its meaning is broader than this simple description. This image connotes a collective journey of life and race relations in the American South in the 1950s. A viewer's cultural and historical knowledge that 1955 is the same year as the Montgomery bus boycotts and that the photograph was taken shortly after the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregation ruling contributes to the photograph's connotative messages, bringing in

the cultural connotations of the trolley as an emblem of social change. Yet a viewer would have to have specific historical knowledge to recognize the trolley image as connotative of a particular historical journey. The dividing line between what an image denotes and what it connotes can be ambiguous, and connotative meanings can change over time and with shifts in social context. All meanings and messages are culturally informed—there is no such thing as a purely denotative image. The two concepts, denotation and connotation, can be useful, however, because they help us to think about the ways in which images function both narrowly to signify literal, denoted meanings and expansively to connote culturally and contextually specific meanings.

Connotation is a primary means through which images convey values. Barthes uses the term *myth* to refer to the cultural values and beliefs that are expressed through connotation.¹³ In this use of the term, myth refers to how images work ideologically (a concept we discuss in the next section). For Barthes, myth is the hidden set of rules and conventions through which meanings, which are specific to certain groups, are made to seem natural, universal, and given for a whole society. Myth allows the connotative meaning of a particular thing or image to appear as denotative (that is, literal or natural). To demonstrate this concept, Barthes interprets this 1955 cover of *Paris Match*, a popular magazine. At this time, France was fighting to retain its colonial power in Algeria, after having promised to grant its independence.

The cover photograph is a close-up on the face of an African boy in a French military uniform. He is saluting. Its caption reads: “The nights of the army. Little Diouf has come from Ouagadougou [now Burkina Faso] with his comrades, children reared

by the A.O.F. [French West African] army to open the fantastic spectacle that the French Army presents this week at the Palais des Sports.”¹⁴ The image, Barthes proposes, does not simply present a boy saluting. It engages in and amplifies a larger myth

about the universal greatness of French nationalism and colonial imperialism. The boy’s eyes are uplifted, suggesting he is saluting a French flag flying above. This, Barthes notes, is the basic meaning of the picture. But also connoted is the idea “that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors.”¹⁵ This connoted message, Barthes proposes, is targeted at a French reader, in whom the photograph will foster the feeling that French imperialism and paternalism in Africa are natural, given conditions and not the outcomes of contestation and historical power struggles.

FIG. 1.15

Paris Match, no. 326, June 25–July 2, 1955



Image codes change meaning in different contexts. For instance, the representation of smiles has meant many things throughout history. The *Mona Lisa*, for example, is famous in part for Leonardo da Vinci's rendering of the model's smile, which has been widely described as enigmatic, as if the model were hiding a secret. The "smiley face" that emerged in the 1960s has largely been understood as a symbol of happiness. This symbol, which proliferated on buttons and T-shirts in the late twentieth century, also inspired the common emoticon practice that first appeared in the use of punctuation in email to signify a smile :-)) and then became the basis for the smiley face emoticons available as cell phone fonts. 😊 Yet what a smile means depends on context. Is the little boy in *The First Murder* smiling or grimacing? How does the context, which we learn from the related photographs and from the written history of Weegee's practice, help us to determine the meaning of the boy's expression?

Chinese artist Yue Minjun has created paintings evoking "symbolic smiles," making reference to the images and sculptures of laughing Buddha and ironically commenting on the smile as a mask. The smiles in Yue's paintings seem to rise from anxiety, stretched across faces in painful caricature, connoting the irony, folly, and artificial sincerity of everyday life. We can infer these connotations from his painting *Butterfly*, with its exaggerated smiles, distorted faces, horned heads, and strange and naked red bodies, which are all juxtaposed with colorful butterflies, suggesting the famous "butterfly dream" described in a poem about transformation by the Taoist philosopher Zhuang Zhou in which a man's passing dream of being a happy butterfly is confused with reality. We can also learn more about those connotations by finding out about the cultural meanings of the smile in China and about the artist himself, whose work is part of the Chinese art movement of cynical realism, as well as by consulting sources on both modern and traditional China, Chinese painting, and the legacies of the laughing Buddha and Zhuang Zhou's butterfly poem. Whereas the Buddha is laughing in contentment, Yue's figures seem to be smiling in anxiety or even agony. These are very different smiles from the generic smiley-face grin or the enigmatic, barely turned-up lips of the *Mona Lisa*.



FIG. 1.16
Yue Minjun, *Butterfly*, 2007 (oil on canvas, 100 × 80 cm)

FIG. 1.17
Smiling Buddha on rocks with a sack and rosary, eighteenth-century Qing dynasty porcelain figure

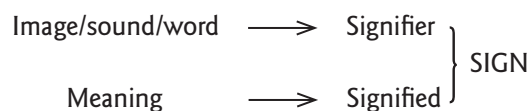


Semiotics and Signs

Our discussion of the layers of meaning in images and the differing meaning of smiles draws from semiotics. Every time we interpret an image (to understand what it signifies), whether consciously or not, we are using the tools of semiotics. The principles of semiotics were formulated by the American scientist and philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce in the late nineteenth century and the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in the early twentieth century. Both proposed important linguistic theories that were adapted in the mid-twentieth century for use in image analysis. Saussure's writing, however, has had the most influence on the theories of structuralism that inform the ways of analyzing visual culture discussed in this book. Language, according to Saussure, is like a game of chess. It depends on conventions and codes for its meanings. At the same time, Saussure argued, the relationship between words (or the sound of words when spoken) and things in the world is arbitrary and relative, not fixed. For example, the words *dog* in English, *chien* in French, and *Hund* in German all refer to the same kind of animal; hence, the relationship between the words and the animal itself is dictated by language conventions rather than by some natural connection. Meanings change according to context and to language rules.

Charles Sanders Peirce (whose name is pronounced “purse”) introduced the idea of a science of signs shortly before Saussure. Peirce believed that language and thought are processes of sign interpretation. For Peirce, meaning resides not in our initial perception of a sign or representation but in our interpretation of the perception and subsequent action based on that perception. For example, we perceive an octagonal red sign with the letters STOP inscribed. The meaning lies in our interpretation of the sign and subsequent action (we stop).

There have been many revisions to semiotics, but it nonetheless remains an important method of visual analysis. We choose in this book to use Barthes's and Saussure's model of semiotics because it offers a clear and direct way to understand the relationship between visual representations and meaning. In Barthes's model, in addition to the earlier-discussed denotative and connotative levels of meaning, there is the *sign*, which is composed of the *signifier*—a sound, written word, or image—and the *signified*, which is the concept evoked by that word or image. In the familiar smiley face icon, the smile is the signifier, and happiness is the signified. In the Yue painting, the smile is the signifier, and anxiety is the signified. The image (or word) and its meaning together (the signifier and signified together) form the sign.



For Saussure, the *signifier* is the entity that represents, and the *sign* is the combination of the signifier and what it means. As we have seen with these two different images of smiles, an image or word can have many meanings and constitute many signs in

Saussure's use of that term. The production of a sign is dependent on social, historical, and cultural context. It is also dependent on the context in which the image is presented (in a museum gallery or a magazine, for instance) and on the viewers who interpret it. We live in a world of signs, and it is our interpretive labor that makes the signifier–signified relationship fluid and active in the production of signs and meaning.

Our interpretation of images depends on historical context and our cultural knowledge—the conventions the images use or play off of, the other images they refer to, and the familiar figures and symbols they include. As conventions, signs can be a kind of shorthand language for viewers, and we are often incited to feel that the relationship between a signifier and signified is natural. For instance, we are so accustomed to identifying a rose with the concept of romantic love and a dove with peace that it is difficult to recognize that their relationship is constructed and culturally specific rather than natural. The very fact that the sign is divided into a signifier and a signified allows us to see that images can convey many different meanings.

Another way to look at this is to see that images' meanings are produced according to social and aesthetic conventions and codes. Conventions are like road signs: we must learn their codes for them to make sense, and the codes we learn become second nature. Company logos operate according to this principle of instant recognition, counting on the fact that the denotative meaning (the swoosh equals Nike) will slide into connotative meanings (the swoosh means quality, coolness) that will enhance the brand's value. We decode images by interpreting clues pointing to intended, unintended, and even merely suggested meanings. These clues may be formal elements such as color, shading, tone, contrast, composition, depth, perspective, and style of address. Even seemingly neutral elements such as tone and color can take on cultural meanings. We also interpret images according to their sociohistorical contexts. For example, we may consider when and where the image was made or the social context in which it is presented. An image appearing as a work of art in a museum takes on quite a different meaning when it is reproduced in an advertisement. We are trained to read for cultural codes signifying gendered, racial, or class-specific meanings.

The creation of meaning in any given image is thus derived from many different factors, both within and in the context of the image. This 2008 ad from the World Wildlife Fund illustrates how an image's meaning is often derived from a

FIG. 1.18

World Wildlife Fund ad, TBWA
Paris, 2008



combination of signs. Here, the image of trees in the shape of a lung constructs a message about deforestation that combines several signs to create a visual impact. The lush, green quality of the meadows and trees signifies aliveness, fertility, and life, and the shape of the trees will be read by most viewers as evoking the shape of the human lungs. The combination of these signs, forest as life and forest as lungs, makes a connection between the trees and the capacity of the planet to breathe. Yet, the message of the image is derived from the disturbingly brown section of the “lung” of trees on the right, which depict deforestation and, as a consequence, a loss of the carbon dioxide–reducing trees that keep the atmosphere at an equilibrium. A disease or cancer of the earth is suggested: the earth will increasingly have trouble breathing. Importantly, the ad does this through visual codes, rather than the use of text. It contains only a short tagline, “Before it’s too late,” but the image itself has already conveyed the sense of time running out, since, by implication, the brown area of the forest lung will overtake the healthy green sections.

Our interpretation of this image as one of interlocking signs uses semiotics to describe an interpretative process that we use every day. We use many tools to interpret images and we often use these tools automatically. As such, semiotics names the kind of image interpretation that we do all the time without thinking too much about it. In images, meaning is often derived through the combination of text and image. This is particularly the case in ads and political posters that direct the viewer’s interpretation to a particular meaning through a double take—the image first looks a certain way and then changes meaning with the addition of the text.

We can see this at work in this anti-smoking ad that plays off the symbols of the Marlboro cigarette ads. Marlboro advertisements are known for their equation of the brand with masculinity: Marlboro (signifier) + masculinity (signified) = Marlboro as masculinity (sign). The cowboy is featured on horseback or just

FIG. 1.19

Anti-smoking ad for the California Health Department, Asher and Partners, 1997



relaxing with a smoke, surrounded by natural beauty evocative of the unspoiled American West. These advertisements connote rugged individualism and life on the American frontier, when men were “real” men. The Marlboro Man embodies a romantic ideal of freedom that contrasts with the more confined lives of most everyday working people. It is testimony to the power of these ads to create the sign of Marlboro as masculinity (and the Marlboro Man as connoting a lost ideal of masculinity) that many contemporary Marlboro ads dispense with the cowboy altogether and simply show the landscape, in which this man exists by implication. This ad campaign also testifies to the ways in which objects become gendered through advertising. It is a little-known fact that Marlboro was initially marketed as a “feminine” cigarette (with lipstick-red-tipped filters) until the 1950s, when the Marlboro Man made his first appearance. Indeed, the Marlboro Man has long been appropriated as a camp icon in gay male culture. In 1999, the Marlboro Man billboard on Hollywood’s Sunset Strip was taken down and replaced by an anti-smoking billboard that mocked this icon of buff masculinity. This anti-smoking ad invokes these meanings of the Marlboro Man to recraft (through its use of text) the sign of Marlboro from one of masculinity and the West to its opposite, Marlboro Man = loss of virility, smoking = disease, or Marlboro = death. Our understanding of the Marlboro ad and its spoof is dependent on our knowledge that cowboys are disappearing from the American landscape, that they are cultural symbols of a particular ideology of American expansionism and the frontier that began to fade with urban industrialization and modernization. We bring to these images cultural knowledge of the changing role of men and the recognition that it indicates a fading stereotype of masculine virility.

Whereas Barthes and Saussure deploy these core concepts of the sign, signifier, and signified, Peirce works with a somewhat different model in which the sign (which for Peirce was the word or image) is distinguished from the meaning (which Peirce called the interpretant, which is equivalent to Barthes’s signified) but also the object itself. Peirce’s work has remained important for looking at the distinctions between different kinds of signs and their relationship to the real. Peirce described three kinds of signs or representations: iconic, indexical, and symbolic. In Peirce’s definition, iconic signs resemble their object in some way. Many paintings and drawings are iconic, as are many comics, photographs, and film and television images.

We can see iconic signs at work in Marjane Satrapi’s 2003 autobiographical graphic novel, *Persepolis*, which was later made into an animated film. *Persepolis* tells the story of Satrapi’s childhood in Iran during the time of the Iranian Revolution. Her personal life is caught up in the violent changes in Iranian society. In this image, she depicts herself as a young girl who, with her classmates, has been obliged to wear a veil to school. The simplicity of Satrapi’s style creates iconic signs of the young women and their veils—we know how to read these images, in Peirce’s terms, because they clearly resemble what they are representing. In stark black and white, the veils command visual attention within the frame. Satrapi uses



FIG. 1.20

Frame from graphic novel
*Persepolis: The Story of a
Childhood*, Marjane Satrapi, 2003

visual repetition and framing to depict the homogenizing visual effect of the girls' veils (they all look the same), as well as to mark herself as an individual (she appears in a separate frame).

These strategies of framing, motif, and the flattening of space (here, the girls are situated against a blank background) are used to depict character and psychology. The girls' hands are all folded in unison, making clear how they must conform in the school environment (and, by implication, in broader society). Yet their facial expressions establish that they are all responding in different ways (annoyance, dejection, compliance).

The veil has also been used in popular media to promote the image of the Muslim woman as a positive and empowered figure, and not simply as an object of oppression. The cartoon television series *Burka Avenger*, produced by Pakistani rock star and activist Aaron Haroon Rashid and first airing in 2013 in Urdu, features Jiya, a burka-wearing teacher in an all-girls' school who is secretly a superheroine. In this depiction, the burka is a symbol of the integrity, strength, and empowerment Jiya embodies as a Muslim woman.

Unlike iconic signs, which typically resemble their objects, symbolic signs, according to Peirce, bear no obvious relationship to their objects. Symbols are created through an arbitrary (one could say "unnatural") alliance of an object and a meaning. For example, languages are symbolic systems that use conventions to establish meaning. There is no natural link between the word *cat* and an actual cat; language conventions derived from Latin, Germanic, and Old English roots give the word its signification. Symbolic signs are inevitably more restricted in their capacity to convey meaning in that they refer to learned systems. Someone who does not speak English, Dutch, or German will probably recognize an image of a cat (an iconic sign), whereas the word *cat* (a symbolic sign) may have no obvious meaning. National symbols, like flags, are also symbolic signs in Peirce's terms, even

FIG. 1.21

Screen shot from *Burka Avenger*, the Urdu language television series launched in 2013



though some flags might have iconic or pictorial elements within them. Our earlier point that meanings are always contextual is well illustrated

by the 2015 U.S. debates about the flying of the Confederate flag, a controversial symbol of southern pride that is regarded by many as a symbol of slavery. It was this argument of the flag's symbolic and indexical reference to slavery that led activist Brittany Ann Byuarim Newsome to climb a South Carolina flagpole and remove the flag in June 2015. The state removed the flag from its statehouse grounds in July 2015 (with the governor stating that it belonged in a museum rather than on a government building), which launched a national debate about the flag's meaning.

Peirce's discussion of images as indexical is useful in the study of visual culture and, in particular, photography. Indexical signs have an "existential" relationship to their objects. This means that they have coexisted in the same place at some time. Some examples of indexical signs include the symptom of a disease, a pointing hand, and a weathervane. Fingerprints are indexical signs of a person, and, importantly, photographs are indexical signs that testify to the moment that the camera was in the presence of its subject. Indeed, although photographs are both iconic and indexical, their cultural meaning is derived in large part from their indexical meaning as a trace of the real. The indexical quality of photographs is a key factor of their cultural value and power. As we noted earlier, the myth of photographic truth is related to this indexical quality. The Robert Frank photograph discussed earlier (Fig. 1.14) carries the weight of history through its indexical quality, the sense that it is a trace of the past. Whereas critics of the display of the Confederate flag argue that its indexical link to slavery is real and alive, proponents of the flag's display argue that these indexical meanings are no longer active or significant.

Images and Ideology

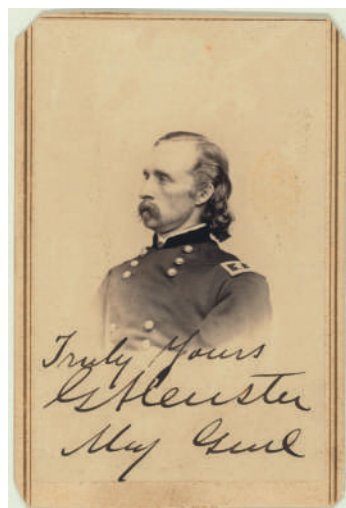
To explore the meaning of images is to recognize that they are produced within dynamics of social power and ideology. Images are an important site through which ideologies, as systems of belief, are produced. When we think of ideology, we may think of propaganda—the crude process of using false representations to lure people into holding beliefs that may compromise their own interests. This understanding of ideology assumes that to act ideologically is to act out of ignorance. In this use, the term *ideology* is pejorative. However, contemporary theorists see ideology as a much more pervasive, mundane process in which we all engage and about which

we are all aware, in some way or other. In this book we define ideologies as the broad but indispensable shared sets of values and beliefs through which individuals live out their complex relations in a range of social networks. Ideologies are widely varied and intersect at all levels of all cultures, from religions to politics to fashion choices. Our ideologies are diverse and ubiquitous; they inform our everyday lives in often subtle and barely noticeable forms. One could say that ideology is the means by which certain values—for example, individual freedom, progress, or the importance of family and home—are made to seem natural. Ideology is manifested in widely shared social assumptions not only about the way things are but also about the way things should be. Images and media representations are some of the forms through which we engage or enlist others to share certain views or not.

Practices of looking are intimately tied to ideology. The image culture in which we live is an arena of diverse and often conflicting ideologies. Images are elements of contemporary advertising and consumer culture through which assumptions about beauty, desire, glamour, and social value are both constructed and lived. Film, television, and video games are media through which we see reinforced ideological constructions such as the value of romantic love, heterosexuality, nationalism, or traditional concepts of good and evil. Contemporary artists often critique dominant ideologies. The most powerful aspect of ideologies is that they appear to be natural or given, rather than part of a belief system that a culture produces to function in a particular way. Ideologies are thus, like Barthes's concept of myth, connotations that appear to be natural. Visual culture is not just representation of ideologies and power relations. It is integral to their production.

FIG. 1.22

Matthew Brady, carte de visite
photograph of U.S. Cavalry Major
General George Armstrong
Custer, 1864



Ideologies permeate the world of entertainment. They also permeate the more mundane realms of life that we do not usually associate with the word *culture*: science, education, medicine, law. All are deeply informed by the ideologies of those social institutions as they intersect with the ideologies of a given culture's religious and cultural realms. Images are used, as we discuss in further chapters, for the identification and classification of people, as evidence of disease in medicine, and as courtroom evidence.

Photography has been a medium through which individual, family, and national values have been affirmed and through which citizens have been categorized and regulated by the state. Shortly after photography was developed in early nineteenth-century Europe, private citizens began hiring photographers to make individual and family portraits. Portraits often

marked important moments such as births, marriages, and deaths (the funerary portrait was a popular convention). One widespread early use of photography was to incorporate the image into a *carte de visite*, or visiting card. These small cards were used by many middle- and upper-class people in European and American societies as calling cards featuring photographic portraits of themselves. In addition, in the late nineteenth century there was a craze of purchasing cartes de visite of famous people, such as the British royal family. This practice signaled the role that photographic images would play in the construction of celebrity throughout the twentieth century. This carte de visite of U.S. General George Custer, which was taken in the 1860s, shows Custer's image and signature, with the salutation "Truly Yours." On the reverse side is the name of the photo studio. Thus, in the nineteenth-century carte de visite, the photographic portrait affirmed individuality and integrated photography into bourgeois life and its values.

Photography's role as a form of social, cultural, and familial preservation was aligned with this affirmation of individuality. Barthes once wrote that photographs always indicate a kind of mortality, evoking death in the moments in which they seem to arrest time, and that they conjure always the past, the "what has been."¹⁶ Photographs are one of the primary means through which we remember events, conjure up the presence of an absent person, and experience longing for someone we have lost or someone we desire but whom we have never seen or met. They are crucial to what we remember, but they can also enable us to forget those things that were not photographed. With digital imaging, photography has lost some of its sense of "what has been" that derives from its indexical quality. But the reason is not that the camera does not need to be in the same place as the object it depicts (it does, unless we are speaking of a simulation). Rather, it is that we have become so used to the possibilities for creative manipulation of location, proximity, and historical period, all of which can be evoked with digital effects.

In the mid-nineteenth century, through the proliferation of photographic studios, photography emerged as a key family practice, as many middle-class people took family portraits and exhibited them on their mantels. Many also took portraits of the dead, in particular of their children who had died. Photography thus quickly became a medium through which family memories could be retained. By the twentieth century, the Kodak company was selling the idea that amateur photography, which Kodak promoted through its consumer cameras and film developing, should be about the family

FIG. 1.23

Eastman Kodak ad, 1920s

