

Chapter 2

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Viewers Make Meaning

- **Viewer:** The text purposely uses the word *viewer* to describe anyone who is looking, because it is a basic term that describes anyone who is looking. It does not have the same connotations as the word *audience*, which can imply listeners or a group of consumers of a particular commodity.
- **Ideology:** “Ideology refers to the conscious and unconscious beliefs, feelings, and values shared in any given social group” (pg. 52)
 - Ex: law of the state, brand culture, religion, politics, and any other cultural institution
- **Interpellation:** A term adapted by political theorist used to describe the way in which ideology functions.
 - To be **interpellated** is to be hailed or called in a way in which you recognize yourself to be the person intended for the call IE. Uncle Sam, selfies of celebrities, personal photos, viral tweets, etc.
 - Political theorist Louis Althusser augured that ideology interpellates individuals from the any given ideological group
 - The concept of interpellation shows how we are shaped as social subjects through immersion in a context of ideologies such as laws and the discourse that surrounds it
 - We use the term interpellate to describe the way that images, sound, text, and visual media not only catch your attention but invite viewers into recognizing themselves as the subject of an address by another within a system of power
- Viewers work by themselves and don’t need to be told to look or listen when held by ideology. People are captivated by things they recognize either from their culture or about themselves.
- Image, text and sound calls upon viewers in an individual way based on their own background, each viewer will have a different interpretation based on their own knowledge
- Paradox= Individual and group enlistment requires that the viewer feels specific to the situation
- Viewers can act counter to what the point of the image is based on their ability to be interpellated by said image, there is no right or wrong way to react to the work.
What does this picture want from me rather than what does it do?
- Looking is a power dynamic in which we negotiate interpretation
- Viewing is a relational and social practice whether one looks in private or in public

Producers' Intended Meanings

- In today's culture we are surrounded by imagery, most people frequently consume social media and browse the internet, which can be easily accessed from our mobile devices.
- We are constantly bombarded by advertisements when we step into the public sphere and consume media in the form of things such as videos games in our homes.
- Because so much imagery is circulating through the internet, it can be hard to determine who the producer is and the producer's intent can become transformed in the process of circulating
- As an individual viewer it is a common and unavoidable aspect of encountering images in media techs even if we are aware of the strategies, even if we dislike the message we still get caught up
- **Producer:** A person or group of people who makes media
 - The term producer is useful because it can refer to a collective of artists that work together, which is common in many industries such as the video games industry
- Roland Barthes, a French theorist that wrote an essay in 1967 titled "Death of the Author". Barthes argued that the meaning of a book extends beyond the author's intended meaning because the reader is interpreting from a cultural context that can differ and the meaning depends on the reader as well
 - This concept helps us to understand how meaning is negotiated. There are dominant meanings in media, but the viewer plays a role in determining meaning
 - Meanings can change depending on context and differing meanings or interpretations can exist alongside the dominant meaning
- French philosopher Michel Foucault, in his 1969 essay "What is the Author" proposed that we think about "**author function**" or what the author brings to the discourse around the work
 - This concept can be applied to how we think about the meaning of the producer in a work. A work can have many producers, for example a musical artist is not involved in every aspect of production, but their name is attributed to the work and their intended meaning is relevant to the discourse
- Ownership is given to creative expression, not to the physical piece, copyright law gives the author rights to the creative expression, based on the premise there is a single entity or producer that made the work
 - The "producer function" concept helps us to understand that "authorship" is afforded to who has the rights to the work, not necessarily the creator

Ex: Apple corporation and the team that creates Apple products, Apple corporation owns the work, not the people who designed the work

- **“Consumers as Producers”** a concept introduced by Alvin Toffler, that was widely used in the 90’s and 00’s and is a reality today
 - In today’s world people who consume or view media (consumers) are also the producers of media itself
 - Consumer’s produce media through social media, consumers can easily take pictures with their smart phones and upload images. Consumers can also download apps to edit the image, as well as add text
- Producer’s have an audience. Even people who would have been just consumers prior to technology can curate an audience through adding “friends” or “followers” on social media. Corporations create focus groups to try to understand their audience and control the message
 - The meaning cannot be controlled because the context cannot be controlled
- Nicholas Mirzoeff, a visual culture scholar created the term **“intervisuality”**- which describes the complex way in which meaning is changed depending on the viewer and place.

Aesthetics and Taste

- **Aesthetics** has moved away from beauty that is held by a particular object or image and is now accepted that it’s a judgment about what we consider naturally beautiful or universally pleasing.
- **Taste** is now a matter of individual perception or interpretation.
 - Traditionally, taste was informed by class, cultural background, education, national framework, and other aspects of identity and social experience.
- Pierre Bourdieu, “taste is social not innate”
 - Our taste is culturally specific, class based and is non-universal. When we say a person has “good taste” we mean that they participate in a class-based notion in which aesthetic value and wealth are conflated.
- Notions of taste provides the basis for the idea of connoisseurship. The traditional image of a connoisseur is a well-bred person who possesses good taste and knows the difference between a good work of art and a bad one and can afford the quality over the reproduction
- The actual person does not need to be a part of that class to be a participant, they can still have absorbed the values associated with good taste. i.e. You don’t have to be wealthy to recognize famous works of art and be knowledgeable about them.

- Taste can be acquired through cultural education or enculturation into a system of values. Taste is acquired not given.
 - Taste requires an education on value (class).
- We display taste by consumption practices that involve rejecting particular meanings that cling to a brand or image either do ironic embrace or outright rejection. i.e. High end brands (Gucci, Luis Vuitton, Versace) in department stores vs. lesser known brands (Faded Glory, George, Terra & Sky) in a store such as Walmart.
- Traditionally good art involved fine art, literature, and classical music but, what counts is good taste is more complex. i.e. See Kitsch- Cheap trinkets, tourist gifts. embossed gift cards, velvet paintings.
- **Kitsch** is made for the consumer, it requires no thought while Avant Garde requires reflection, education and active viewing.
 - Kitsch usually holds sentimental or cultural value to a group of people, commonly middle class.
 - “Kitsch can be in complex in relation to the politics of memory”. They tend to sell prepackaged emotions/sentiment while removing the context of history. Teddy bears, snow globes and other souvenirs address consumers with a limited emotional realm.
 - Kitsch can also be ironic. In the 80s post-modern artists, architects and critics have revived the concept of Kitsch to defy the aesthetics and universalizing values of modern art and architecture.
 - Kitsch has been reclaimed to appreciate the lower class, study class and taste expression and while rejecting Avant Garde (high class) as a form of elitism
 - Embracing Kitsch aesthetics in “bad design” elements of mass culture became a way to define modern tendency towards elite high-quality design. In the meantime, they also gain value because they became symbols of an historical moment in which every day life has some level of *cheesiness* due to many mass manufactures.
- Hierarchies of taste and beauty are not fixed but change according to markets, context and history.
- We cannot understand a culture without analyzing its production and consumption of all forms of culture

- Bourdieu identified different forms of capital in addition to economic capital, including social capital, symbolic capital, and cultural capital that is accumulated through education, privileged family contacts, and long processes of purposeful development. It is learned from the higher class into the lower, not the other way around.
 - We know this not be true because taste fluctuates between the classes, i.e. hoop earrings in the black culture vs. becoming a trendy moment in high fashion.
 - The concepts of high and low culture do not help us to understand the particular patterns of minority, immigrant or countercultural values and distinctions. It in fact removes them (*see cultural appropriation*). Cultural values and tastes may trickle up or may develop differently among members of a politically and culturally minoritized diaspora that move in a variety of directions.
- Taste is also influenced by globalization-media, design, brand markets i.e. manga, youth fashion (US, ASIA)

Value, Collecting, and Institutional Critique

- *"In the art market, the value of a work of art is determined by economic factors, such as the role played by collecting in global capital, and cultural factors, including the valuing of artists through galleries, museums, and auction houses. The collecting of art by wealthy, private collectors and by institutions supported through private philanthropy has long been central to the valuing of art."*
- *"The art market relies on investment strategies, which rely on knowledge and predictions of changes in taste and aesthetic value."*
 - Ex. Painting by David Teniers the Younger, Archduke Leopold Wilhelm in His Picture Gallery in Brussels. This displayed Teniers's class because it demonstrated his ability to purchase a wide variety of paintings while displaying he has good taste.
- *"Ownership is a key factor in establishing art's value and in establishing a nation's political importance as well as an individual's stature."*
 - Ex: The most powerful countries in the world are home to national museums i.e. the Louvre and Smithsonian.
 - Expensive art is a symbol of taste, the authenticity is not relevant. Ex. Wealthy people paying for reproductions of work by the masters
 - "Producer function" comes into play here. Work that is derived from the maker itself is viewed as more authentic, work that is not "authentic" has less value than work that is, however a reproduction of work that has cultural value is also valuable

- We as society give value to the art, the art itself does give its value to us. i.e. we create a painting with an asking price of \$3,000. If society offers no more than \$500, then our painting is worth \$500. The price can of course change based on time and place and its meaning within the culture.
- The Mona Lisa is valued because of its context/location in the Louvre. We value the story behind it, we accept it as being a great work of art/classic. Although some argue this is not necessarily Leonardo's best portrait. Many of us don't know about the artist but, the piece is shrouded in mystery which adds to its value.
- Clifford created the "semiotic square" to map how certain objects are valued as authentic and other objects are seen as cultural artifacts or "not-art", their authorship is unimportant. Non-western art is devalued in the art world because it is designated a "culture" instead of individual works of art and delegated to a completely different location within the museums.
- Artists are aware about the placement but, also note they can still make a profit. i.e. West African carved soldiers.
- Thomas Struth "Hermitage I" - Struth is showing the role of museums in determining the value of art. The viewers assume the work to be valuable simply because it is in a museum.
- Visual culture scholars in the 80s and 90s critiqued museums and their role in maintaining the interest of the ruling class in art.
- Duchamp was a pioneer of the art style of Dadaism which became a movement that poked fun at the conventions of high art and museums. Dada helped inspire art movements that critique the art market system such as political art, gorilla art, performance art and other kinds of art that cannot become modified in the form of valued objects
- Fred Wilson- "Mining the museum" - Maryland Historical Society - Criticizes the curator's role in maintaining the museums conventions- Wilson Juxtaposed "Slave shackles ", that was put in storage alongside, a silver tea set.

Reading Images as Ideological Subjects

- "Most of the time, our dominant ideologies look like common sense to us." Page 74
- The concept of ideology comes from Karl Marx who was a German political philosopher
- He created the concept of Marxism, a method used for the analysis of both the role of economics in historical progress in the ways that capitalism works to produce class relations.

- *“He who owns the means of production also controls the ideas in viewpoints produced and circulated in a society, including its media forms and communication industries”.* Ideology is a false consciousness that dominant power spreads among the masses.
- If we are by default defined as subjects and are interpellated to be who we are, then there is little hope for individuality or social change. Meaning, outside factors such as class, access, education are pre-determined and cannot be changed.
- Marx saw ideology as a social construct and a byproduct of capitalism. Louis Althusser saw ideology as more than that, as a way of relating to the world and experiencing reality
- *"The term hegemony emphasizes that power is not wielded by one class over another; rather, power is negotiated among all classes of people. Unlike domination, which is enacted by rulers through force, hegemony is enacted through the push and pull among all levels of a society. A single class of people may “have” **hegemony** over another, but hegemony is a state or condition that is derived through influence and negotiations over meanings, laws, and social relationships."*
- *"One of the most important aspects of hegemony is that the relationships within its system are constantly changing; dominant ideologies must constantly be reaffirmed in a culture precisely because people can struggle against them. This concept also allows us to see how counter-hegemonic forces, such as political movements or subversive cultural elements, emerge and question the status quo. The concept of hegemony and the related term negotiation allow us to acknowledge how people challenge power structures and effect social change."*

Viewing Strategies

- Stuart Hall believed that most viewers rarely read a text and take it at face value and even less fully reject it in an oppositional way.
- Recall Mitchell’s point that we may think of images as “wanting” something from us. The term “negotiation” in this context means bargaining over meaning among viewer, image, and context. The image is not a stagnant object; it has agency. The viewer’s process of deciphering an image takes place at both the conscious and unconscious levels. It brings into play our own memories, knowledge, and cultural frameworks, as well as the image itself and the dominant meanings that cling to it. Interpretation is thus a mental process of acceptance and rejection of the meanings and associations that adhere to a given image and that make demands upon us through the force of dominant ideologies."

- Michel de Certeau- “textual poaching”- Every viewer gets involved in a text in a different way and they have their own interpretation (inhabiting a place within the text or image).
- Certeau ideas of ideology are in direct conflict with the traditional educational training, that teaches us to search for the author's intended meaning. He believed that everyone should break down, absorb and interpret the text as individuals rather than search for the author’s intended meaning.
- Once an author releases work to the public, it no longer belongs to them, it belongs to the public, the individuals that read the work
 - Ex: Queer readings/interpretation
- Have an *author function* rather than actual authors and function of discourse around which forms a set of expectations beliefs and ideas as well as particular patterns of circulation

Appropriation and Re-Appropriation

- **Bricolage**- "...is another term that can help us to understand the kinds of signifying practices that people use to remake culture” Using items for something other than its intended use. It derives from a French term used by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss to mean “making do,” or creatively making use of whatever materials are at hand, i.e. DIY projects, arts & crafts
- The way we communicate with each other on a daily basis is fluid whether it be through text, social media or conversation and this also applies to other aspects in our lives such as art, science, news media, culture and personal communication.
- We are surrounded by media in various forms such as text, images, advertisement, video games and pop culture that is meant for us to interact with that are produced by a collective of producers rather than a single entity.
- There is no one ultimate authorial meaning or intention and will work for readers to uncover. The notion of the single, individual author is no longer alive in the work of reading cultural text, which is strongly influenced by context. i.e. memes that are shared on the web rarely have a primary source and it’s encouraged to remake them as we see fit without giving credit.

- A given work may have a primary meaning but, the job of the viewer is to figure out the connections on why that meaning is established rather than to point out those connections to others.
- The reader and the author must both be analytic and critical and use interpretive practice grounded in historical and cultural context of a given text or image. It is a myth that the author is the primary producer of the meaning rather the image and text meanings are produced through the viewers interpretation rather than the authors or producers' intent.
- The expression of the idea is owned by an author, artist or corporation and not the physical work itself which could be part of a series like a book.
- Copyright law is based on the premise that ownership of creative expression can be traced to a single entity whether an individual or a company
- The function of an author may be to create a certain experience or vision for the viewer but, that does not guarantee that the viewer will see what their intention was based on that person's own background in different interpretations are a producer function rather than a failure.
- Producer function ideology mixes with struggle over meaning in power, mixes of intention, feeling, and interpretation of any given text and if you were listening or entangled.
- With the 21st-century, escalation of sharing images and media flow of the web has made the *producer function* and complex production of meaning even more pronounced.
- All images are subject to judgments according to standards such as beauty, hipness, and political orientation. The criteria used to interpret and give value to images depends on the current cultural codes- pleasant, unpleasant, hurtful, positive comment, shocking, banal, interesting, boring.
- With the Internet comes online options, stores, and galleries. In this sense the rules of an expert author and amateur are constantly being disrupted and reconfigured in ways that are usually interpreted by referring back to the ideas of Duchamp – in his ready-mades and for culture and his emphasis on institutions, discourse, and power.