

## “Visual Reading” Methods

<b>Structuralism (pre-1960s academic trend)</b>	<b>Post-structuralism (post-1960s academic trend)</b>
Asks: What encoded meanings go into the text, so that we can decode it to pull out the meanings?	Asks: What effects come out of the text?
Concerned with shared/cultural/social meanings of a text	Concerned with different people’s different experiences of a text
Treats images like literary “texts,” in the sense that they contain codes we must decode	Treats images like art, forms of expression, experiences
Takes society/structure that produced the image as its primary object	Takes the image as its primary object
Communication (information, persuasion, messages), Representation	Expression, display, aesthetics
Interested in depth	Interested in surfaces
Interested in determination	Interested in alternatives
Performs analysis, seeking underlying rules and structures (objective)	Performs assessment, according to aesthetic or other values (for whom? - subjective)
Reproduces structure (this is the accusation against it)	Intervenes in structure (reveals complexity and difference within assumed structures)
Closest Disciplines: Communication, Social Science, Political Science, Old-School Literary Theory	Closest Disciplines: Art History, Art Criticism, Cinema/Visual Studies (depending), English Literature
Meaning. (period.)	Contradiction
Stability in meanings over time – the way things stay the same	Fluidity and change in meanings over time – the way things change
Language (including visual language) as a container	Language (including visual language) as always leaky. Post-structuralism is defined by the anxiety that language/art/signs always express things we didn’t intend
Concerned with INFLUENCE of Author’s Intentions (or: Structure, Producer, Origin, Meaning-System) upon Audience	“The Death of the Author” (famous essay by Roland Barthes). Concerned only with the feelings that emerge from the text
Interested in reading into the intention, motivation behind a text	Reads the text’s effects regardless of its intended meaning
Prioritizes author/producer side of things	Prioritizes audience/viewer side of things

**What do Structuralism and Post-structuralism agree upon? (These are shared assumptions among most academics/theorists/philosophers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century:)**

- That language is a system that stands apart from the natural world (i.e. language does not directly/perfectly/completely reflect the world or experience naturally or as it “really is”)
- That rather than reflecting the world, language largely creates the world we experience
- That linguistic systems are different in different social contexts, so no language’s meanings are universal (and therefore, no reality is universal)