Visual Communication Design Research Methods

Prof Masood Masoodian

Visual Research

Visual Communication Design Research Methods

QUALITATIVE

QUANTITATIVE

APPLIED

VISUAL

What is visual research?

It is the study and interpretation of images, forms and objects

Aim of visual research

…is to examine the effects of images, forms and objects on people

image

1. a reproduction or imitation of the form of a person or thing
2. the optical counterpart of an object produced by an optical device (as a lens or mirror) or an electronic device
3. a visual representation of something: such as
   3a. a likeness of an object produced on a photographic material
   3b. a picture produced on an electronic display

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form

1. the shape and structure of something as **distinguished** from its material
2. the essential nature of a thing as **distinguished** from its matter

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object

1. something material that may be **perceived** by the senses

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culture

1. enlightenment and excellence of taste acquired by intellectual and **aesthetic** training
2. acquaintance with and taste in **fine arts**, humanities, and broad aspects of science as distinguished from vocational and technical skills
3. the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to **succeeding generations**

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culture

1. the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social **group**
2. the characteristic features of everyday existence (as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a **place or time**
3. the set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or **societal** characteristic

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Culture, it is argued, is not so much a set of things – novels and paintings or TV programmes or comics – as process, a set of practices. Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and exchange of meanings – the 'giving and taking of meanings' – between the members of a society or group …This culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is around them, and 'making sense' of the world, in broadly similar ways.

Stuart Hall

arcthemagazine.com

Visual culture

…a tactic for studying the functions of a world addressed through pictures, images, and visualizations, rather than through texts and words.

Nicholas Mirzoeff

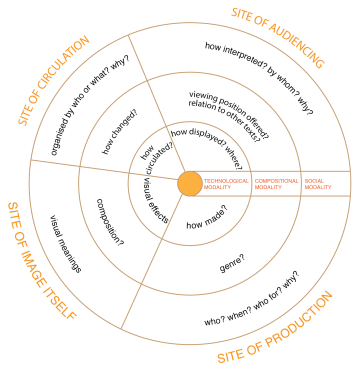
Visual culture

…takes into account issues such as image making, the formal components of the image, and the cultural reception of that image.

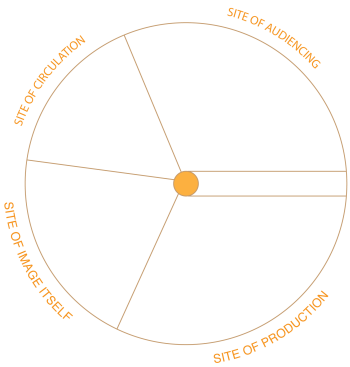
Nicholas Mirzoeff

DESIGN RESEARCH

PROCESS OF DESIGN	DESIGN OUTPUT OR ARTEFACT	IMPACT OF DESIGN
study of people	study of things	study of people
QUALITATIVE	QUALITATIVE	QUALITATIVE
QUANTITATIVE	QUANTITATIVE	QUANTITATIVE
APPLIED	APPLIED	VISUAL
	VISUAL	



Gillian Rose



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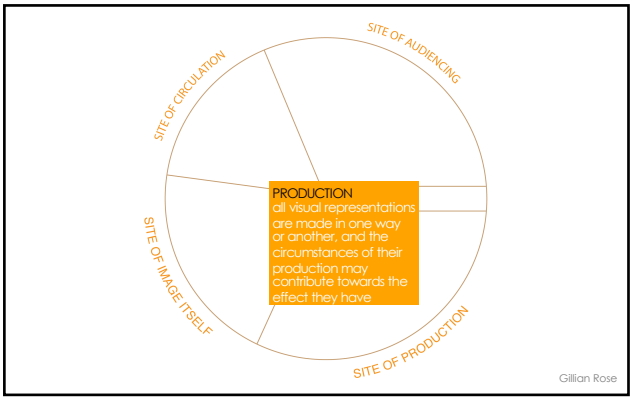
SITE OF AUDIENCING
SITE OF CIRCULATION
SITE OF IMAGE ITSELF
SITE OF PRODUCTION
PRODUCTION
all visual representations are made in one way or another, and the circumstances of their production may contribute towards the effect they have
Gillian Rose

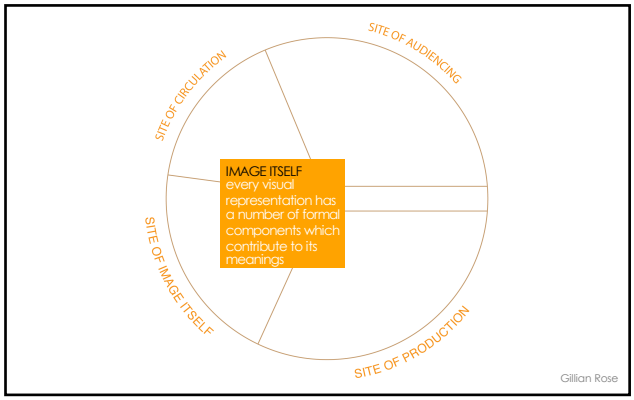
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IMAGE ITSELF
every visual representation has a number of formal components which contribute to its meanings
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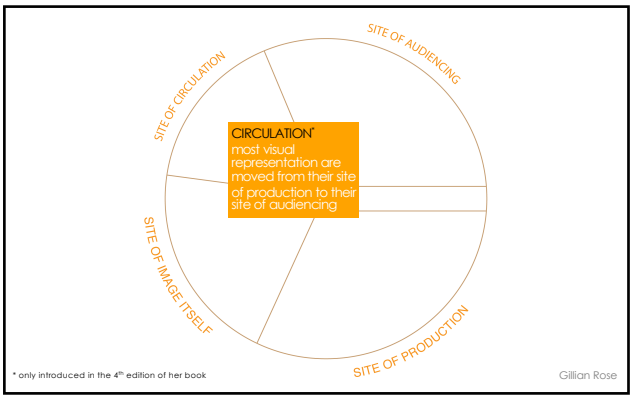
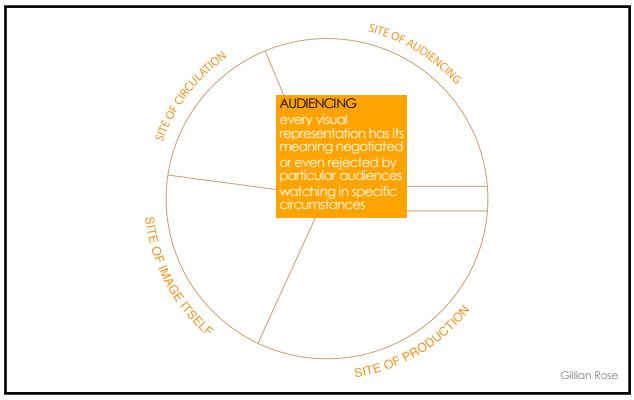

SITE OF AUDIENCING
SITE OF CIRCULATION
SITE OF IMAGE ITSELF
SITE OF PRODUCTION
CIRCULATION*
most visual representation are moved from their site of production to their site of audiencing
* only introduced in the 4th edition of her book
Gillian Rose


SITE OF AUDIENCING
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SITE OF IMAGE ITSELF
SITE OF PRODUCTION
AUDIENCING
every visual representation has its meaning negotiated or even rejected by particular audiences watching in specific circumstances
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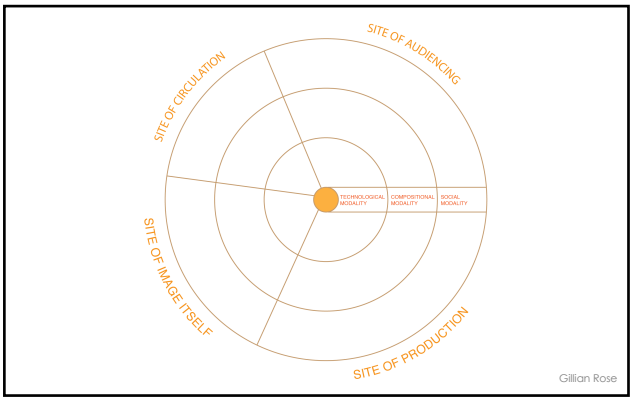
SITE OF AUDIENCING
SITE OF CIRCULATION
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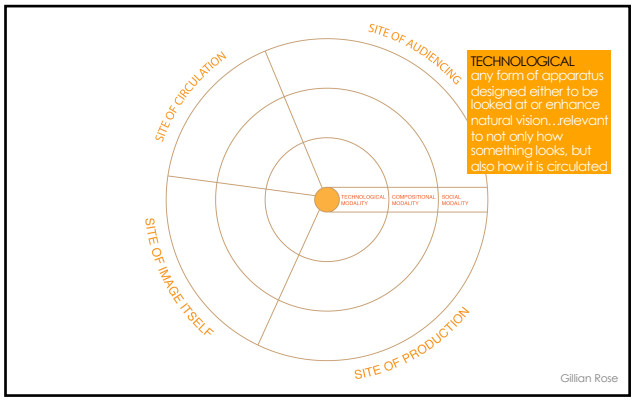
SITE OF PRODUCTION
TECHNOLOGICAL MODALITY
COMPOSITIONAL MODALITY
SOCIAL MODALITY
Gillian Rose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SITE OF IMAGE ITSELF
SITE OF PRODUCTION
TECHNOLOGICAL MODALITY
COMPOSITIONAL MODALITY
SOCIAL MODALITY
TECHNOLOGICAL
any form of apparatus designed either to be looked at or enhance natural vision...relevant to not only how something looks, but also how it is circulated
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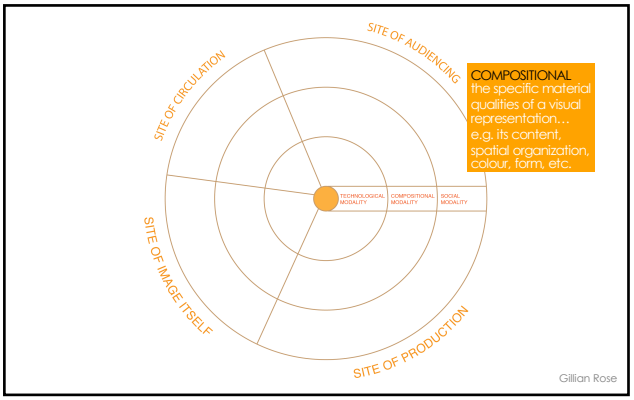
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TECHNOLOGICAL MODALITY
COMPOSITIONAL MODALITY
SOCIAL MODALITY
COMPOSITIONAL
the specific material qualities of a visual representation…
e.g. its content, spatial organization, colour, form, etc.
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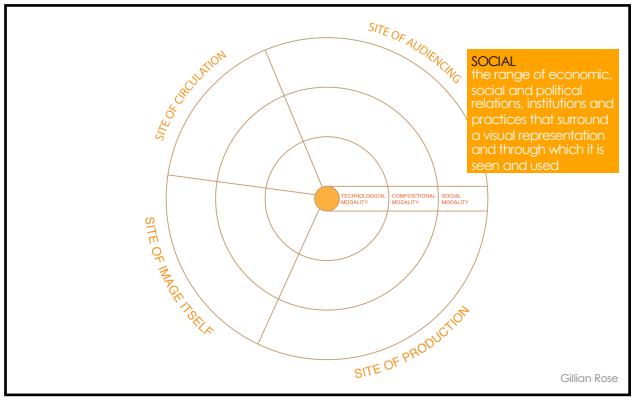
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TECHNOLOGICAL MODALITY
COMPOSITIONAL MODALITY
SOCIAL MODALITY
SOCIAL
the range of economic, social and political relations, institutions and practices that surround a visual representation and through which it is seen and used
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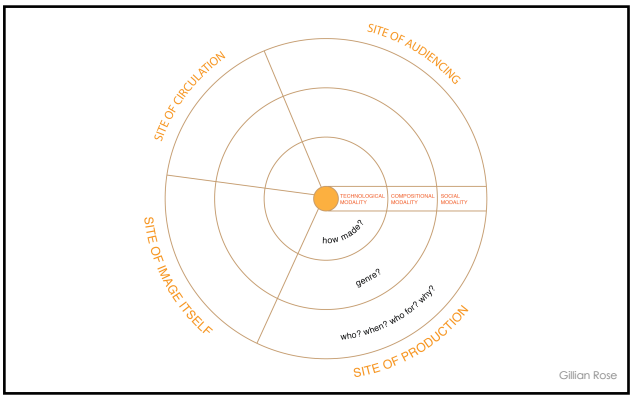
SITE OF AUDIENCING
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SITE OF PRODUCTION
TECHNOLOGICAL MODALITY
COMPOSITIONAL MODALITY
SOCIAL MODALITY
how made?
genre?
who? when? where? why?
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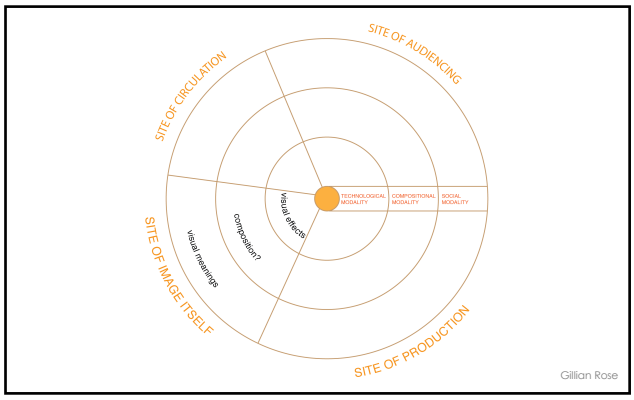
SITE OF AUDIENCING
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SITE OF PRODUCTION
TECHNOLOGICAL MODALITY
COMPOSITIONAL MODALITY
SOCIAL MODALITY
visual effects?
composition?
visual meanings
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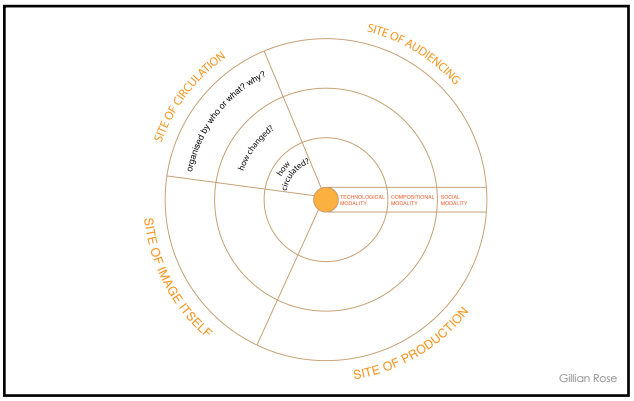
SITE OF AUDIENCING
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SITE OF PRODUCTION
TECHNOLOGICAL MODALITY
COMPOSITIONAL MODALITY
SOCIAL MODALITY
organised by who or what? why?
how changed?
how circulated?
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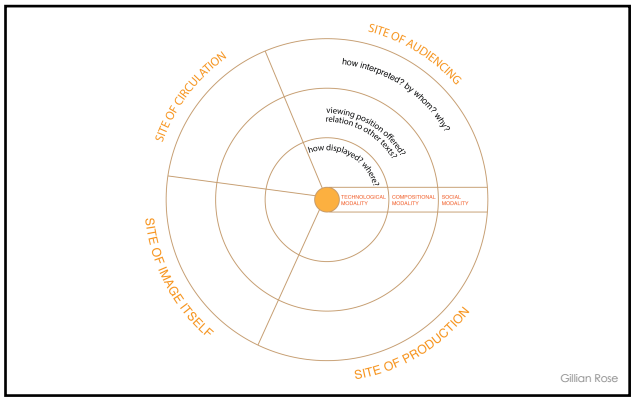
SITE OF AUDIENCING
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SITE OF PRODUCTION
TECHNOLOGICAL MODALITY
COMPOSITIONAL MODALITY
SOCIAL MODALITY
how interpreted? by whom? why?
viewing position offered? relation to other texts?
how displayed? where?
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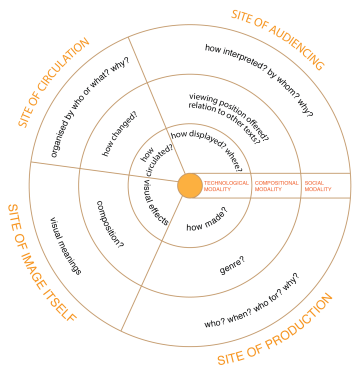

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	TECHNOLOGICAL	COMPOSITIONAL	SOCIAL
PRODUCTION	ethnography	ethnography	ethnography discourse analysis I
IMAGE ITSELF	compositional analysis *(interpretation)*	compositional analysis *(interpretation)* content analysis cultural analytics semiology psychoanalysis	social semiotics discourse analysis II ethnography
CIRCULATION	digital methods	compositional analysis *(interpretation)*	ethnography
AUDIENCING	ethnography	ethnography	ethnography audience studies digital methods

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Visual methods

...can use already-existing images, from the mass media for example; or images can be made by the researcher; or they can be made by the people being researched.

Gillian Rose

Visual methods & visual research methods

Gillian Rose separates

- visual methods: used on already-existing (found) visual material
- visual research methods: used on visual material made by the researcher or participants

METHOD	VISUAL MATERIAL
compositional analysis *(interpretation)*	fine art paintings, video games, films
content analysis cultural analytics	any sort of images in large numbers, newspapers, magazines, selfies
semiology social semiotics	advertising, fine arts, films
psychoanalysis	films and mass media
discourse analysis I	wide range of still images, book illustrations, maps, photographs, paintings, cartoons
discourse analysis II	institutions that display visual images and objects (e.g. museums and art galleries)
ethnography	television audiences
digital methods	digital objects like tweets and Instagram photos
visual research methods	photography, video, collage, maps, drawing

Gillian Rose

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Compositional interpretation

It is crucial to look at image… because the image itself has its own effects.

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Compositional interpretation

This method depends on what is called "the good eye" or visual connoisseurship – a way of looking at images, especially paintings

Connoisseurship involves the acquisition of extensive first-hand experience of works of art with the aim of, first, of attributing works to artists and schools, identifying styles and establishing sources and influences, and second, of judging their quality and hence their place in a cannon.

Eric Fernie

Compositional interpretation

- looks at the site of an image itself to understand its significance
- pays attention to the compositional modality of the image
- looks at "what they are", and a perhaps how they are made
- does not look at their interpretation by their audience
- is more about description than interpretation
- is neither methodologically nor theoretically explicit

Content analysis

…is a method of analysing visual images that was originally developed to interpret written and spoken texts.

Gillian Rose

Content analysis

…is based on a number of rules and procedure that must be rigorously followed for the analysis… to be reliable.

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Content analysis

…concern the selecting, coding and **quantitative** analysis of a large number of images.

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Content analysis

…it's explicit **quantitative** methodology, through which… analysis would be rigorous, reliable and objective.

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Content analysis

There are **four main steps** in content analysis

1. finding images
2. devising categories for coding
3. coding the images
4. analysing the results

Content analysis : finding images

The images chosen must be **appropriate** to the **research question**

- images need to be representative
- selection can be random, systematic, or cluster
- need to decide what size the sample should be
- sample should be large enough, but not overwhelming

Content analysis : categories for coding

Coding means assigning a set of **descriptive labels** to images

- **exhaustive:** every aspect of the image must be covered
- **exclusive:** categories must not overlap
- **enlightening:** must be analytically interesting and coherent

Content analysis : coding images

Coding process must be **replicable** (repeatable)

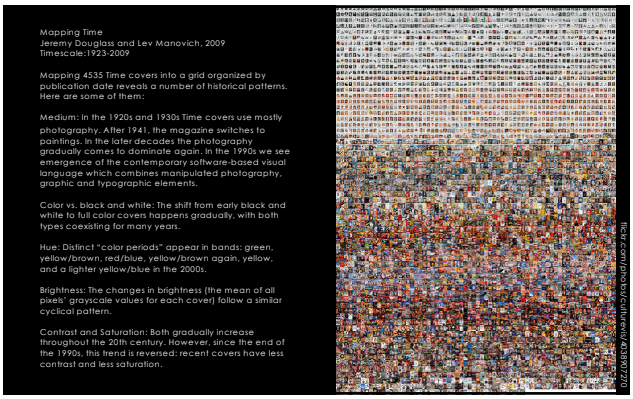
- coding categories must unambiguous
- coding by different people must result in the same codes
- coding must be systematic and careful

Content analysis : analysing the results

Analysis involves producing a **quantitative** account of the content
- producing **frequency** counts (numbers or percentages)
- making **comparisons** (across time, space, etc.)
- finding **relationships** between categories (e.g. correlations)

Cultural analytics

Is similar to content analysis
- but the process of coding and analysis is **automated**
- allows working with very large sets of images
- no need to sample (select) a sub-set of images



Semiotics (semiology)

…is the study of signs and their interpretations.

Gjoko Muratovski

Semiotics

Compositional interpretation is **descriptive**, content analysis is **quantitative**, and semiotics is **interpretive**

Semiotics

…does require a **high level of knowledge** about the topic of your study.

Gjoko Muratovski

Semiotics

…involves describing how images and objects **create meaning** by observing them from **a particular ideological platform.**

Gjoko Muratovski

Semiotics

Semiotics is the **science of signs** and their meanings

- **sign:** the most fundamental unit of semiotics
- **signified:** a concept or an object (e.g. a very young human)
- **signifier:** a sound or image attached to a signified (e.g. 'baby')

What was needed was someone who wasn't cute, but so sexy you'd walk over hot coal just for the chance to play. Someone who wasn't safe and predictable, but fascinating and more than a little dangerous. Someone who wouldn't bend to your will at the drop of a hat, but fight you all the way. Someone who's a very sexy challenge. Just like a good Alfa. So Alfa got Uma Thurman. She may not be Italian but she fits the bill better than any one we can think of.

CarsUk

Semiotics

There are three kinds of relations between a signifier and signified

- **icon:** the signifier represents the signified by apparently having a likeness to it (e.g. photo of a baby)
- **index:** there is an inherent (e.g. cultural) relationship between the signifier and signified (e.g. picture of a diaper)
- **symbol:** there is conventionalised but arbitrary relationship between the signifier and signified (e.g. Uncle Sam)

Social semiotics

In social semiotics the focus [has] changed from the **'sign'** to the way people use semiotics **'resources'** both to produce communicative artefacts and events and to interpret them – which is also a form of **semiotic production** – in the context of specific social situations and practices.

Theo van Leeuwen

Good visual research

It is important to **critically examine** the meaning of visual material and the messages they convey

Aalto University
School of Arts, Design
and Architecture