

VISUAL MEDIA TEXTS: TEACHING AND ASSESSING THE HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES IN A POST-LITERATE AGE

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Published January 2013 by
The University of Newcastle, Australia

Project funded by the Centre for Teaching and Learning
The University of Newcastle, Australia.

ISBN: 978-0-9871143-9-6

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Abstract

Within our growing knowledge economy, students increasingly encounter disciplines such as history, politics, philosophy, and education through the intersection of new media technologies and popular culture, rather than through the once typical encounter with 'the book'. Visual culture dominates everyday experience and is becoming increasingly important in teaching and learning (Goldfarb, 2002). Recognising that we live at a time when students prefer to engage with visual media rather than written text, Rosenstone (2001) has dubbed the present age 'post-literate', an age where everyone can read but no one will. Prensky (2007) describes the current generation transitioning from schools into the workforce and tertiary education as 'digital natives', for whom graphics precede written text as one of the defining features of their engagement in learning. This project recognises the significant work using visual media texts in teaching and learning occurring across the humanities and social science disciplines of the contemporary academy in areas such as history (Bennett & Beirne, 2011; Sealey, 2008), social work (Downey, Jackson, Puig, & Furman, 2003; Ello, 2007), and philosophy (Falzon, 2007; Mulhall, 2002); and its take up as both pedagogy and curriculum in the field of Education (Anderson & Jefferson, 2009). Through developing a dialogue across the Humanities and Social Science disciplines at the University of Newcastle, this project explores how, for what purpose, and to what effect, visual media (including film, television, still images, vodcasts, animation, social media and imaging technologies) are used by academics in the Humanities and Social Sciences to produce 21st century professionals and enhance the student experience. Through surveys, collection of learning artifacts and focus group interviews, it begins to develop an understanding of the variety of texts, assessment strategies and pedagogical approaches used by academics at the case site. Overall the project found that there is a broad continuum of use of visual media texts in the classrooms of academics that participated in the study. It makes a number of recommendations for facilitating and enhancing the use of visual media in tertiary classrooms.

Visual Media Texts: Teaching and Assessing the Humanities and Social Sciences in a Post-literate Age

Project Report

Introduction

The Visual Media Texts project team conducted scoping research throughout 2011 into the use of visual media texts, and associated pedagogical practices, including assessment, across the Humanities and Social Science disciplines at the University of Newcastle. Aside from an extensive contextual literature review, the three main data-gathering instruments were: an online voluntary anonymous survey of academics; two recorded focus groups undertaken with volunteer academics at both Callaghan and Ourimbah campuses; and collection of best practice models of the use of visual media texts in the tertiary classroom. The research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Newcastle.¹ Overall the project found that there is a broad continuum of use of visual media texts in the Humanities and Social Science classrooms of the academics who kindly participated in the study. Before turning to our conclusions, an analysis of the quantitative survey data, supported by boxed qualitative commentary from the anonymous survey written comments and focus groups' participants, is provided.² This report represents the first foray into the rich data harvested by the project.

Overall, the majority of the twelve academics who self-selected to respond to the survey, and all of the eight people interviewed via recorded focus group, regularly used visual media in their courses. In the survey only two respondents identified that they used visual media possibly once or twice per course, with the remainder using it in some lectures and tutorials (n=3) and each tutorial or lecture (n=7). This could indicate that those academics who already use visual media self-selected to complete the survey and participate in the follow up focus group. Therefore, this survey may not be representative of the use of visual media by other academics across the Humanities and Social Sciences at the case site.³ However the data is instructive of patterns, rationales and modes of use, and led to the development of a framework for the use of visual media in the teaching of the Humanities and Social Sciences

¹ HREC Approval No. H-2011-0187.

² While these quotations from the focus groups have been slightly edited to eliminate the features of spoken text such as repetitions, hesitations (ums and ahs) and exclamations, the actual words and meanings have not been altered.

³ In the reporting of data, some identifying information that was supplied by the respondents that was not requested has been deleted, and this was done prior to the analysis taking place, so that any potential conflict of interest between researcher and participant was avoided. Identifying data included where university qualifications were obtained and names and codes of courses that respondents teach. In the reporting of participant responses, spelling errors and typos made have been corrected. Syntax and other grammatical points have not been corrected, nor have words been replaced.

Artworks

Blackboard

Cartoons

Chalk

Diagrams

DVDs and clips

Film as adjunct

Film as set text

Google

Google moderator

Graphs

Histograms

iMovie

Internet

Maps

Performance

Photographs

Photoshop

PowerPoint

Prezi.

Props

VENN diagrams

YouTube

Web quest

Whiteboard



that we elaborate later in this report. There were no participants excluded from survey analysis, as all provided responses appropriate to the context, and only completed one survey per person (as determined by the 12 unique IP addresses. Each Participant is identified below by the anonymous descriptor P1, P2, P3 and so on).

Why visual media texts are used

The participants responded freely and openly about why they use visual media texts in the course/s they teach. In these open-ended responses, some respondents provided answers that fit within multiple themes. As a result of the open-ended responses, themes that emerged from the data about the use of visual media included: type of course; student engagement; develop student understanding; pedagogy strategy/approach; teaching content or concepts; text-type and link to real-world contexts. What follows is an analysis of the responses, grouped into the themes that emerged.

Type of Course: The type, or requirements, of the course they taught was the leading reason for the use of visual media texts in the Humanities and Social Science classroom. P8 states that using visual media texts is due to the *“course looks at how films illustrate and deal with philosophical issues, both illuminating and being illuminated by the philosophy.”* P1, while identifying that the type of course is an important reason for the use of visual media texts, further explains that it is a combination of the type of course and a pedagogical approach to engage students is the reason for using visual media texts.

Student Engagement: Student engagement in this context is the connecting of visual texts to the life world of the student in sustained way. Using visual texts as the ‘hook’ or ‘shock’ value as an entertaining element in tutorial or lecture is also contained within this category. Student engagement has been identified as being a key motivator for these academics including visual media texts in their teaching. P7 explains that *“to tap into students’ general knowledge and experience of media texts”* and *“for interest and stimulation, for variety and colour”* is why visual media texts are used, clearly indicating that bringing students’ life experiences and interests into the classroom is an important component of planning teaching activities. Engaging students in learning content is also seen as important by P9 and P11, who write (respectively) *“I use film, documentaries, photographs and TV advertisement. I find that visual media is a good way of engaging students in lectures, tutorials and assessment tasks”* and *“As an entry point for engaging in historical discussions and debates; to inspire and engage students; to promote visual text literacy.”* The focus groups revealed similar insights, including *“the feel that this [visual texts as film] is something they know, this is something they can do something with.”*

The use of visual media texts is necessitated by the type of course but I also use them as a pedagogical device to capture and maintain student interest.



I use philosophy as an angle on film, because philosophy can be terribly abstract and difficult to access but when you trace out some of these philosophical ideas being worked out in movie, then you see there’s a kind of connection. But it’s also a good way of looking at the movies; it’s not just kind of exploiting the movies for the sake of the philosophy I hope.



Well the very first topic that we introduce is Australian identities and the way I get them talking about it is just to give me interpretations of Australian identity and I have them call out any kind of key words that they think represent Australian identity, and it nearly always comes down to film. They will start talking about Crocodile Dundee or something like that and I have to put it back to them that, well you’re basically constructing a sense of identity based on ... a visual representation.



To Develop Student Understanding: Developing student understanding was a key reason identified by P2 for using visual media texts, noting *“they provide another way of developing understanding for students.”* Focus groups revealed this is a more succinct manner; *“they don’t read the books”* and *“implementing the visual in pedagogy”* can be a way of building their understanding of course content.

Pedagogy Strategy/Approach: Using visual media texts as a pedagogical strategy was identified by three respondents (P2, P5 and P7), and indicates the importance they place on processes of learning, rather than just content. Variety was identified as an important pedagogical approach by two of the respondents, with P2 stating that multimodal texts such as *“Visual images/film/youtube give the students and teachers some variety in the delivery of the information”* and P7 concurring with this by writing that visual media texts are used *“for ‘varying the voice’ in the classroom”* and *“to hear from other experts.”* The intentional use of visual media texts is emphatically communicated by P5 who writes that they are incorporated for reasons of *“Impact, resonance, relevance...”*.

There also appears to be a limited and piece meal strategic implementation of the use of visual texts. The following comment reveals reflective insights into the potential of visual texts for learning. For example, P5 stated that *“we don’t follow through a lot on the visual material we’re giving them in the first year course which may be our problem”*. It was also reported that students found visual texts and multimodal opportunities for learning were critical for their engagement. As P5 noted *“quite often I’ll have to pick a book that is based on a film that they know, so they have that comfort again in the back of their head, well I have an idea, let’s see if I can find a book that makes it even better”*.

Teaching Content or Concepts: Using visual media text to teach concepts or contents was identified by 4 respondents (P3, P4, P6, P7) as being important. In particular, multimodal texts are used to show students content and concepts. For example, P6 writes, *“Clips can demonstrate important features of a concept you are trying to convey to students”*; while P7 writes that visual media texts are used *“to emphasise a point using a variety of media texts that illustrate it”*. Although P4 states that vodcasts are used, generally for the course P4 teaches, textual sources are also used, and from the other comments that P4 writes, it is clear that *“textual research based”* sources means written text. P4 states that they *“may use some vodcasts from the comparative and international education society, but mostly textual research based”*. It is clear in the case of P4 that, at this point in time, visual media texts are currently used as a peripheral support, rather than as an integral part of the course.

It was really interesting coming to this talk, one of my colleagues pulled me up and said, did you know that there was animation on YouTube by Ken Robinson on creativity? I said absolutely, [that] I used it 1st semester. I put it on my online Masters course because I’m so conscious that when they’re completely distance, you know, just reading articles is not exactly a great way to engage with learning, so I make a particular point of trying to search for at least a YouTube or something that I can put on blackboard so that they can watch something or do something as well I also found just a couple of really good lectures by Freire ...



I just think it’s a way of breaking open ... the walls of the lecture theatre and kind of getting them stepping outside.



I think once last year I did a lecture deliberately without images because it was about censorship, and that’s the only time I’ve ever (LAUGHTER) not used images ... I would say that [also] quite often draw tutorials out on things that I can quickly pull off the internet like YouTube videos and artworks and I also use visuals in

Minority Reports of Data: Two minority reports of data have emerged from the survey responses to this question. Each was identified by only one respondent, and include both text type and link to real-world contexts. From the responses provided by these two academics (P5 and P10) throughout the whole survey, it is clear that they both use visual media texts in a sophisticated manner in their classrooms—beyond content explanations and pedagogical strategies to engage students. The themes that have emerged from their responses are included below. P5 makes the remark *“I do not delineate from other text types.”* This comment demonstrates P5’s sophisticated understanding of various text types and their importance in tertiary teaching. P10 emphasises the link to real-world contexts that visual materials provide in the class because: *“These best represent contemporary communication strategies and the visual digital world. I use video clips to support a predominantly still image production that uses a mix of traditional and new imaging technologies. Even in online learning in more theoretical courses where images are not really required I might use visual material, such animation / blogs.”* This comment demonstrates P10’s understanding of the link between using images in teaching (both traditional and multimodal) regardless of the type of course and outside of education-institution contexts.

In the main, the twelve responders have carefully considered their use of visual media texts in the classroom, and use them intentionally, rather than as illustrative add-ons to course content. This is not always the case with the use of visual media in assessment, an issue that is explored in the assessment section.

Ways visual media is used

Similar themes have emerged to the question “In what ways do you use visual media?” as emerged in response to the question “If you do use visual media texts why?” However, in response to this question, more details were provided by the respondents with clear examples of the *ways in which* visual media texts are incorporated into courses, thus providing a richer set of data to analyse. Themes that have emerged from the analysis of this question include: Teaching Content or Concepts; Student Engagement; Pedagogy Strategy; and Aesthetics.

Teaching Content or Concepts: From the responses analysed to the question “In what ways do you use visual media?” a theme around teaching content or concepts emerged from 11 of the 12 respondents (with P4 being the exception). Therefore, it is clear that incorporating visual media texts into teaching course content and/or key concepts is a significant factor in using these text types. In the main, the visual media texts used are films or film clips designed to teach students content or as a point of entry to explore high order thinking concepts. For

The focus is on the thematic issues and although we do talk about the ways in which the films are constructed, the narrative, methods, techniques of characterisation [and] visualisation, the interest of the course is on the thematic material that’s coming through.



When I had them using the films to get into the other concepts, they actually engage in a way that they don’t in other courses and in fact I see them put in hundreds of hours into my assignments where in other courses they’d be lucky if they did them the night before. So there’s a huge difference that goes on with engagement. In terms of efficacy do they get confident with what they do, I reckon. My observation has been, and they tell me this at the end of the course, that even though they only learnt one technology, they actually now feel confident because I’ve chosen something which is difficult like the film making.



example, P1 identified “Screenings of set films” as well as the selection of specific scenes to demonstrate key points and using film clips to demonstrate film techniques as ways in which visual media is used in the classroom. P12 writes “I use self-made videos, artist videos...” Similarly, P7 extensively uses the screening of films (and also websites) to teach content, and sample comments from P7 include: “Use of the film **A Destiny of Her Own** as a cinematic biographical text regarding the life of 16th C Courtesan, Veronica Franco, to assist students to visualise the embodiment of this person's life, the gravity of the issues that she faced. I also use it to interrogate the cinematic construction of that history in relation to a collection of readings on the same topic. We then discuss the nature of history in different type of texts to refine visual and historical literacies”; and “Use of film clips to illustrate key historical events, for example, using an episode from **When the War Came to Australia** on the heightened sexualisation of the homefront during World War Two.”

While some academics show entire films to their students (and this is generally due to the course being directly about film), other academics show students clips of films, YouTube clips, excerpts from television shows and educational documentaries. P2 describes the way visual media texts are used: “We use videos of young children playing etc for observation and analysis”; and “to reinforce or extend a topic for example when talking about an infant's inborn reflexes, a YouTube clip provided the visuals which explained these reflexes quickly and clearly.” P6 uses clips in a similar educative manner as P2 does, writing about using clips to demonstrate: “...examples of Piaget's stages of cognitive development”; “... examples of Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development”; and “excerpts from Summer Heights High - Jonah as a low SES/male/ethnic minority student who is having trouble at school.”

Many respondents identified using visual media texts to teach content or concepts, without identifying student activities or actions that are associated with it—for example, whether students are more-or-less passive recipients to the visual media texts being used in the classroom, or whether they are more actively involved in the deconstruction and possible reconstruction of texts. P5 is an exception to this. While writing that visual media texts such as, “YouTube clip of movies”; “reference to performances through images both still and moving”; and “reference to performances through images both still and moving”; P5 also indicates that “deconstructing media texts” occurs in the classroom.

P8 links the teaching of film, in particular plot lines found in key films, to more esoteric lines of thinking, aligned with the purposes of the course. For example, P8 writes: “There will be a lecture eg on *The Matrix* discussing the film's content and themes, questions arising in relation to knowledge, and eg Descartes and skeptical arguments.”

I'll teach explicitly about a three act plot structure and I've got my own riff on that, (hook, complications, and payoff) ... So that's like a kind of non visual element of it but then we do a whole lot of stuff about the rule of thirds and ... give them some sense of how the image is composed really and then another important part is film grammar, so the idea that there's establishing shots, action shots, reaction shots and that this function is like a kind of nouns, verbs, adjectives they can pars, [so that] they can effectively pars the film.



Once they've [made] this film we show them publicly so there's a sort of film night where everyone comes along and because they show them publicly, that lifts the expectation of what they've got to produce because they know it's going to be publically shown. They then have this product and they go 'wow I did that' and suddenly they realise they can take on other technologies. So that's why I like using film.



I believe the visual's a way to key into students' visual consciousness that's very engaging and quick.

P11 emphasised the importance of using visual media texts for visual literacy teaching reasons, writing the *“use of a film clip to illustrate an important idea discussed in the class...for visual literacy: to illustrate the visual and auditory techniques employed in a documentary text to construct an argument.”*

Finally, both P9 and P10 indicate that they use a wide variety of visual multimedia to teach students content and/or concepts. This demonstrates a commitment to using visual media texts in ways beyond those required by the course (for example, only showing films in a film-based course). Key statements from P9, that show the variety of text types used, include: *“Using an extract from a film or documentary to illustrate one or more of the key ideas of the lecture”*; *“Students have to visit the website Australian Screen Online, view a TV advertisement from the 1950s and analyse it”*; and *“Getting students to analyse a silent film from the 1900s encourages them to approach historical sources, visual and otherwise, with a critical eye.”* P10 demonstrates the same interest in using visual media texts in various ways, highlighting the importance of students *constructing* and *re-constructing* images (rather than just be recipients of images to comment on or deconstruct), while still maintaining the importance of *engaging* students. Responses to this question from P10 include: *“Still images, animations, film and television are accessed along with blogs etc to communicate concepts and engage the students”*; *“images are both analysed, manipulated and re-produced along with new image production. Appropriation a key concept”*; and *“Performative strategies such as image production are used to engage with learning and new meaning.”*

Student Engagement: Two respondents (P1 and P11) identify student engagement as a way to teach visual media texts, with P1 writing *“use of film clips to generally engage students*, followed on by a comment that also incorporates the theme of pedagogical strategy *“and to give visual learners an additional perspective on the topic.”* P11 noted that using *“a YouTube clip of a song, documentary or website at the beginning of a class to stimulate interest in the topic to be covered”* stimulated student interest.

Pedagogical Strategy: Responses from only three academics fitted within the theme of pedagogical strategy when the raw survey data were analysed. This is interesting as it potentially demonstrates the privileging of content learning over consideration of employing effective pedagogical strategies in tertiary classrooms. P1 and P2 both identify providing visual learners with another way to engage with the course content, as reason for including visual media in their teaching. P1 states: *“to give visual learners an additional perspective on the topic”* and P2 stating that through the use of visual media students are *“provide(ed)...with variety and visual learning as opposed to auditory learning”*. P4 indicates that BlackBoard

I was amazed at the difference just supplying the PowerPoint as a visual thing as you point out, even though it [contain]s text, it needed a visual thing that’s going on in the class. The difference in response from one year to the next, well for a year when I didn’t use it to the year when I did, was just phenomenal. The students felt a lot safer having the material there to write and they felt more engaged, they were looking at me, at the screen, and in discussion with each other, they seemed much more engaged, and that’s been fairly typical. So just the presence of PowerPoint of any sort gives them a level of security, certainly the 1st year students.



I’ve applied that pedagogy myself as a strategy to the film making where I want them to use the visual and I want them to tell me the story ... demonstrating knowledge of the three stage plot structure and the visual grammar and so on ... they’re not allowed to use dialogue, they’re prohibited from using that and that forces them to actually have to think of ways to use the visual to tell what they otherwise would have cheated with a bunch of dialogue.

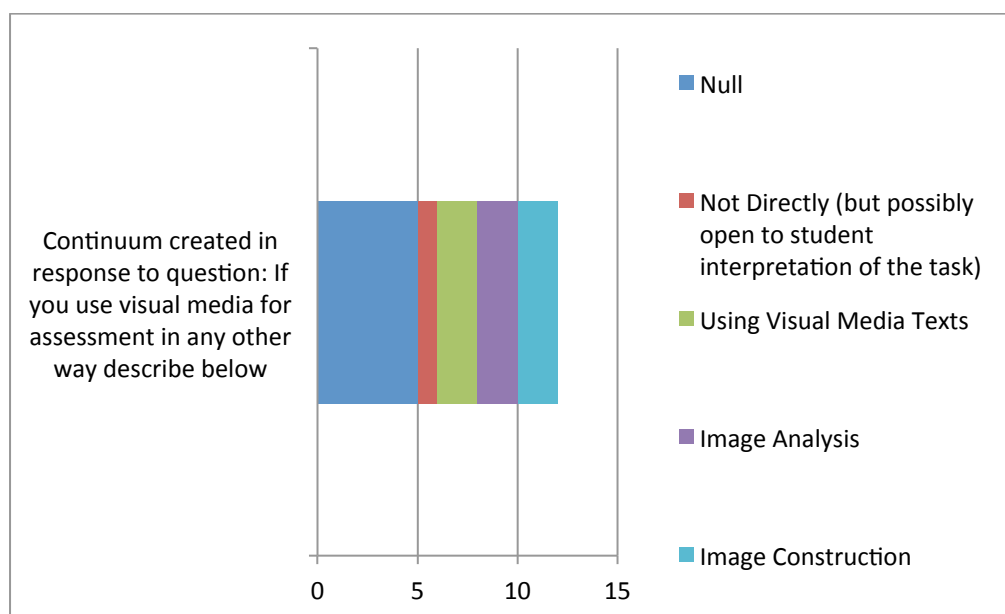


discussion is the pedagogical approach taken when teaching with visual media texts (in the case of P4 this is a vodcast used as an add-on to the core content). Finally, P10 demonstrates a sophisticated knowledge of using visual media texts in tertiary teaching, claiming “*Visual production is a core aspect of teaching and learning.*”

Aesthetics: This is a minority report of data, as only one respondent included information that is categorized as *aesthetics*. This comment demonstrates P7’s understanding of teaching as beyond a content-driven activity—and uses visual media texts not just to engage students, but to provide information “*in a visually stimulating and attractive format.*”

Use of visual media for assessment

The question that informed this category is: *If you use visual media for assessment in any other way describe below.* The open-ended responses to this question have been categorized into a continuum of assessment types, ranging from no visual media texts incorporated into assessment tasks to higher order thinking tasks of image construction. Another participant in the focus groups made clear his use of student-constructed film as an assessment task, that provided opportunities for students to become teachers and critical consumers of visual media through an understanding of media production. The diagram below enables a clear snapshot to be seen of how respondents use assessment in their courses, which will assist with other aspects of this research project.



Null or “No” Responses: A total of five respondents (P1, P2, P3, P4, P6) indicated that they do not use visual media texts for assessment, or the question had no response.

I do teach them the structural language of the visual as a way of beginning to decode or make meaning or sense, whether its interpretive or just structural knowledge about the way images operate. But the thing I do is then they have to perform it, so there’s always a relationship between the decoding and then the tutorial activity means they must operationalise it.



This semester I’ve introduced a web quest as an option for the students to present a representation of a web quest. That means that they need to be showing that they have become familiar with choosing appropriate visual media text, embedding them, put into either PowerPoint or an actual web quest website so I need to be able to see that they’re sort of picking up some of what I’ve been describing.



Not directly, but possibility open to student interpretation of task: P8 does not directly use visual media as a direct requirement or a suggestion for students completing assessment tasks—it is up to students to include images (not ones they construct) if they think to do so. P8 writes, *“I use film for assessment purposes in the sense that the films plus classroom lecture/discussion are the basis for assessment via essay questions. But visual text is not itself part of the assessment, unless students provide film stills in their essays.”*

Using Media Texts/Images: Two of the respondents (P5 and P11) have students use visual media texts in assessment tasks. P5 states that *“Students ...[are] assessed on their usage of media texts.”* P11 admits that visual media texts have only been used consistently in one course, writing *“The assessment is a class presentation on an historical film/documentary of the student’s choice. Students are encouraged to use visual examples to support their argument. Questions/comments are directed to the presenter following their paper and one week is given for reflection on the oral paper before the written version is due. Students are provided in advance with a marking rubric so they can identify criteria on which the oral paper will be assessed.”*

Image analysis: Increasing the sophistication of embedding visual media texts in assessment, two respondents (P9 and P12) indicate that analyzing images is an important part of assessment. P9’s assessment takes the form of an online exercise and describes the task in the following way: *“students were required to complete 10 online exercises worth 10% of their grade. They were required to analyse historical sources (primary source material) which included photographs, silent film and television advertisements.”* P12’s assessment task requires students to analyse images as part of a class presentation.

Image construction: Two respondents (P7 and P10), indicated that construction of image forms an aspect of their assessment tasks, demonstrating a requirement of their students to demonstrate higher order thinking in undertaking assessment. P7 writes *“This semester I am asking students in my biography course to utilise visual materials and online sources to create a Biographical Pamphlet or Museum Exhibition Biographical Notes or a Poster or Website on a life story of an Australian”* and P10 indicates that *“Images as posters and zines are assessed in the two courses.”*

[In] the very 1st year course, 1st semester 1st year course, I give them a model for analysing images ... [it’s] a simple three step process where you look at what is in front of you in the image, then you look at the compositional [aspects] then ... you look at the iconography which is basically how the image operates in its context.



You do not actually understand how images work until you make images. You can babble on and deconstruct images until you’re blue in the face and write about them but the actual process of making images that can communicate succinctly is difficult, so until you do those tasks you don’t get the cognitive work that’s happening and it’s been a long time since you know traditional mainstream valuing of other literacy’s even acknowledges the cognitive work that is done through images.



Barriers to Visual Pedagogies

Technology and Facilities

There is wide spread agreement that the current university tutorial and lecture spaces do not facilitate a smooth integration of visual texts. This is demonstrated in the following focus group comments from Ourimbah: *"not helped by the fact that I had to spend the first five minutes fighting, then giving up on the DVD in the room when it refused to play."*

Towards the new technological learning interface.

Comments were generated around the observations that students are shifting with rapid speed to new technologies and their portability and the slow institutional response to these innovations. Comments by the lecturers highlight the applicability of the visual in multimodal communication. These reflections capture this phenomenon: *"They want everything condensed in a very short palatable little bite sized...and that is the magic of the image...one image can condense"*. In relation to the reading of set texts a lecturer comments: *"The bookshop is full of it but they couldn't read the book because it wasn't available to them electronically."* Referring to the smart phone mobile technology access of most students, a lecturer comments that *"I read my book here [on the iphone]!"*

Discipline Territories

There was a clear indication that lecturers had discreet ways in which they used visual texts and to some extent these aligned with their discipline epistemologies. Some lecturers acknowledge the use of images as illustration, while others implemented a pedagogy that embraced critical text analysis. A major limitation for the use of visual texts was a lack of sufficient knowledge and skills. A majority of lecturers and tutors reported that they had little or no training in the use of the image in teaching and learning. Some lectures used the visual as illustration and graphical organizers, while others implemented critical decoding and encoding competencies. As an English lecturer comments: *"I'm such a word person that its harder for me"*.

Deeper interrogation from the focus groups revealed that some academics felt that there were demarcation lines in relation to which disciplines should work with visual texts. *"What was going on in the other schools was much more disciplinary silos.... They deliberately moved away from the visual because of the film and television major"*. Arising also from the focus group discussions is the idea that visual texts continue to raise problematic issues surrounding academic outcomes. In some instances the lecturers identified that students were resisting deeper analysis of these texts for more personal reasons as *"they expect that if*

There is very few rooms on the campus where you can show a film the students can hear without disrupting everybody in the vicinity and also just being able to screen, nearly every class here has got beautiful natural light which is very frustrating when you cannot see the screen.



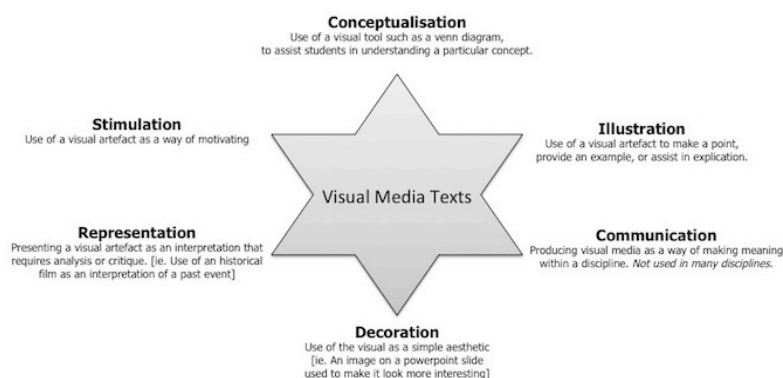
The [students] are time poor and they can watch a film in the film's real time whereas ... reading a book might take them week.

they start to learn how to I guess analyse texts that they're worried that this is meant to be enjoyable and I'm going to lose some of the enjoyment." Another comment was on the reluctance for deep analysis: "It's hard to do serious examination in 140 characters or less."

Discussion and Conclusions

It is clear from the above data analysis and presentation, that visual media texts are used in a range of ways across the Humanities and Social Sciences, and the case site is likely to be reasonably representative in that regard (at least in terms of an institution where on-campus modes of delivery dominant, which accounts for the majority of teaching in the Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Newcastle). Important findings relate to both the use of visual media texts in assessment, as well as their more common deployment pedagogically. While the use of visual media text is still developing in terms of assessment practices, it was clear from engagement with the participants in this project that where visual media texts were used, there was some movement across a spectrum from visual media as stimulus, to visual media analysis, and on rare occasions visual media production. There are some obvious reasons for this. Firstly, faculty may not have the required skills in visual media production themselves to entertain using visual forms of representation as an assessment device. Secondly, it would appear that the academic disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences are still dominated by written forms of representation. In other words, for disciplines such as History, Philosophy, Politics, and Education, the dominant mode of reporting research is still the written text. This undoubtedly shapes the (often tacit) pedagogical decisions academics make, when designing assessment tasks. Although we may be rapidly moving into a 'post-literate' society – where everyone can read but prefers to engage with visual text – the status of the visual media text in most academic disciplines remains inferior to the written word. Thus, while there is now widespread consumption and use of new digital technologies that place the capacity to produce visual texts firmly in the hands of the public, the Humanities and Social Sciences (at least in this case site) have yet to fully embrace the visual as a meaning-making medium for the purposes of assessment. This is an area in which there are clear opportunities to re-evaluate the visual text, particularly in terms of its performative dimensions, and to subsequently reconceptualise assessment practice.

From the above analysis of survey data, focus group interview data, and analysis of the exemplars offered by participants, it becomes possible to outline six approaches to using the visual as a pedagogical device (outlined in the diagram below).



The six approaches may be described as: (1) use of the visual as a simple aesthetic device to make one's powerpoint presentation or handouts more attractive (which we have termed **decoration**); (2) use of the visual as way of motivating participation (**stimulation**); (3) use of the visual to make a point, provide an exemplar, or to assist in explication (**illustration**); (4) use of a visual tool such as a venn diagram, to assist students in thinking through a particular problem or concept (**conceptualization**); (5) use of a visual media artifact as an interpretation that requires analysis or critique to be understood (**representation**); and (6) use of the visual as a meaning-making tool in itself, whereby students become producers of visual media (**communication**). These six pedagogical approaches may form something of a continuum of use of visual media texts, though the project team would like to emphasise that effective use of the visual probably involves multiple approaches, rather than moving exclusively from one approach to another in some perceived hierarchy.

Throughout this project it became apparent to the project team that lots of interesting uses of visual media occur across the Humanities and Social Science disciplines at the University of Newcastle. Although the overall sample size was small, it captured insights from across a range of disciplines including those traditionally dominated by the written text: History, Philosophy, Politics, Art Theory, and others; as well as disciplines that are historically more vocationally oriented such as Education. The study has demonstrated that there is serious scope for further research into the use of visual media as a pedagogical and assessment tool within the Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines in the contemporary Academy, and for using the outcomes of such research to reconceptualise the teaching and learning of these disciplines to enhance student engagement in these post-literate times, and to prepare graduates who are ready for a world in which visual digital communication will play an increasingly significant role.

**APPENDIX 1: FOCUS GROUP PROMPT QUESTIONS AS APPROVED BY THE
UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE (Approval No. H-2011-0187)**

Focus Group Prompt Questions

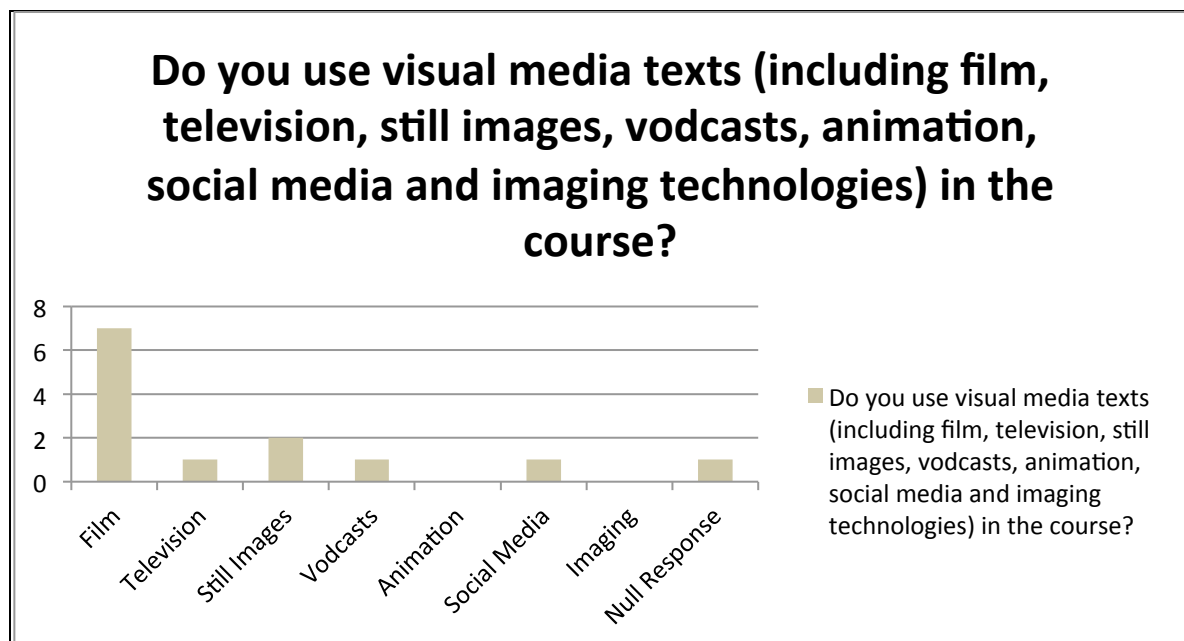
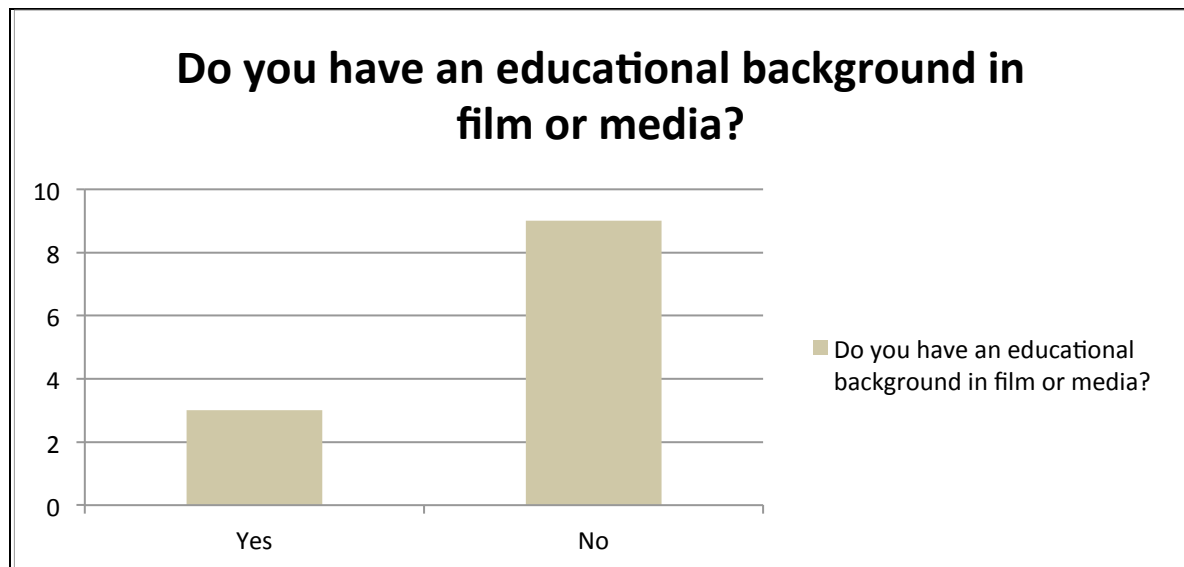
Version 2 25/7/2011

- How do you use Visual Media Texts in your lectures or tutorials?
- What effects do you think utilising Visual Media Texts has on your teaching?
- What effects do you think that utilising Visual Media Texts has on student learning?
- What are some of your best practice exemplars?
- Do you use the production of visual media texts in assessment?
- Have you examples of the ways your colleagues are using Visual Media Texts in their teaching and learning?
- What kinds of innovative practices do you know and use?
- What kinds of limitations exist for you in the use of Visual Media Texts in your teaching and learning?
- What do you think is the future of Visual media texts in the tertiary sector?
- Can you offer any research findings that relate to this area?
- How do you evaluate the use of Visual Media Texts in your courses?

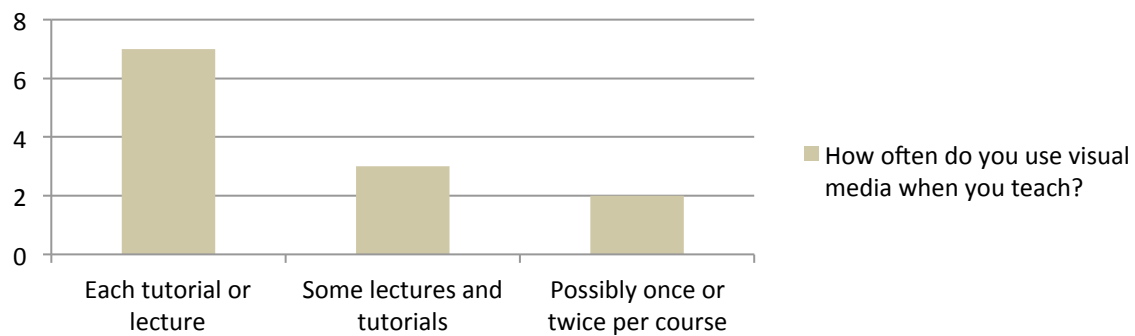
*This project has been approved by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee,
Approval No. H-2011-0187*

APPENDIX 2 GRAPHS OF SURVEY RESULTS, WITH SURVEY QUESTIONS_AS APPROVED BY THE
UNIVERISTY OF NEWCASTLE HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE (Approval No. H-2011-0187)

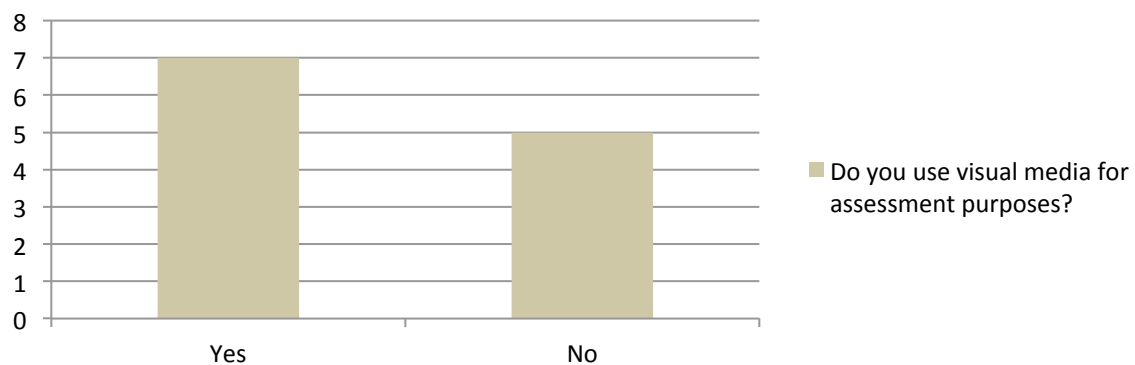
Graphs from survey questions



How often do you use visual media when you teach?



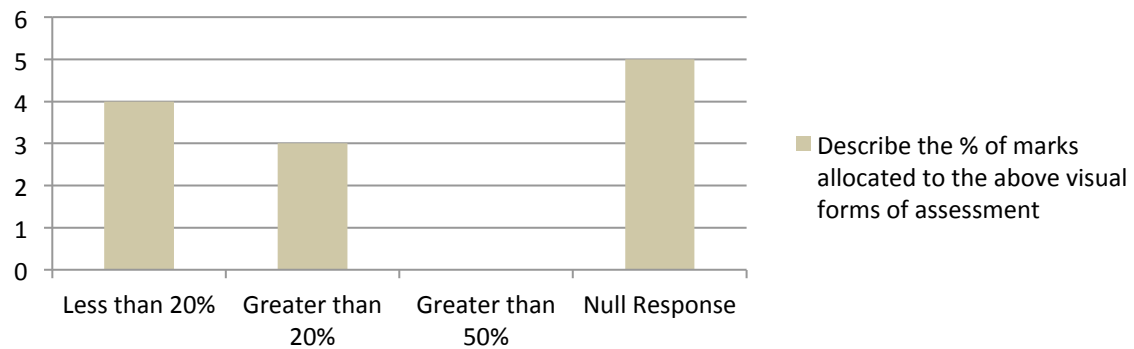
Do you use visual media for assessment purposes?



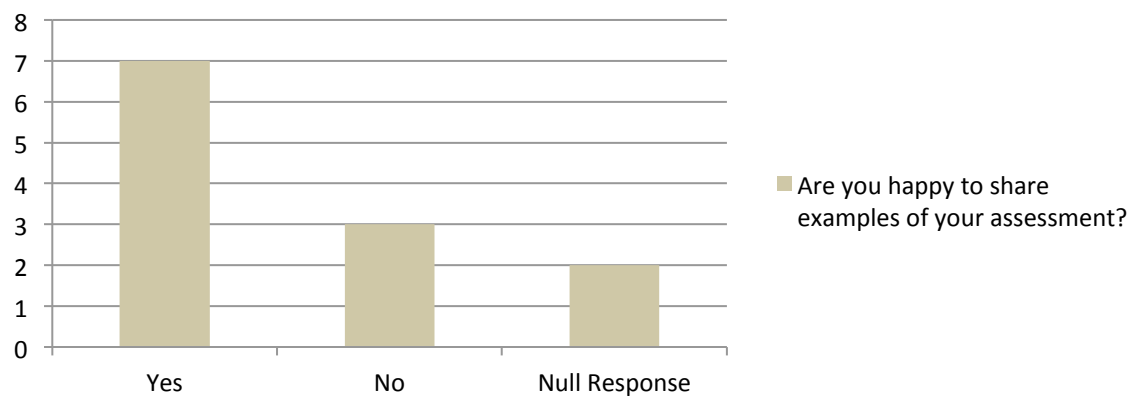
If you use visual media as part of your assessment identify which of the following best describes your use of visual text (you can select more than one)



Describe the % of marks allocated to the above visual forms of assessment



Are you happy to share examples of your assessment?



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ISBN: 978-0-9871143-9-6

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